

LOVE AND LIBERATION  
SECOND-WAVE FEMINISMS AND THE PROBLEM OF ROMANTIC LOVE

Robin Kay-Marie Payne

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History.

Chapel Hill  
2010

Approved by:

Jacquelyn Dowd Hall (Advisor)

John F. Kasson

Peter Filene

Joanne Hershfield

Jennifer Scanlon

© 2010  
Robin Kay-Marie Payne  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## ABSTRACT

ROBIN K. PAYNE: *Love and Liberation: Second-Wave Feminisms and the Problem of Romantic Love*  
(Under the direction of Jacquelyn Dowd Hall)

“Love and Liberation” examines second-wave feminist responses to the problem of romantic love as an integral component of their search for gender equality. Second-wave feminists fought for political, economic, and social parity; theorized about the creation of gender roles that bolstered patriarchy; pushed for reproductive and sexual freedom; and expanded the realm of possibilities for women. They also argued that the personal was political and searched for the roots of women’s oppression in their personal lives. Politicizing the personal prompted second-wave feminists to consider how matters like sexuality, marriage, and romantic love helped to create and reinforce oppressive gender hierarchies. Turning a critical eye towards such issues, most second-wave feminists saw romantic love as a socially constructed ideal (rather than a universal emotion) that evolved according to contemporary values. Within post-World War II American society and culture, they believed that ideals of romantic love pressured women to seek fulfillment and identity within heterosexual romantic relationships. Romantic love thus rewarded and appeased women for their economic, social, and emotional dependence upon men.

But how could second-wave feminists reform ideals of romantic love? To answer that question, I focus on the intellectual, cultural, and personal efforts of second-wave

feminists to address the problem of romantic love. Because matters of romantic intimacy were so intensely personal, feminists were often bitterly divided over how to understand romantic love and its impact on women's lives. They also experienced inner turmoil when reconciling their expectations of love with their feminist ideals of reciprocity and equality. They voiced their concerns in myriad intellectual and cultural forums, including theoretical and philosophical tracts, feminist manifestos and pamphlets, popular novels and magazines, professional and private correspondence, and personal diaries and journals. Trying to match theory with practice, many feminists experimented with alternatives to prevailing ideals of heterosexual romantic love, ranging from celibacy, to same-sex unions, to more egalitarian relationships with men. A small, vocal minority of feminists vehemently argued that romantic love would cease to exist in an egalitarian society, but most second-wave feminists were committed to creating new ideals of romantic love based in authenticity and equality.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

One of the most satisfying aspects of reaching a milestone is having the opportunity to thank the many people who helped you to reach it. This dissertation has been many years in the making, and with its completion I am entirely indebted to the mentors, colleagues, friends, and family who provided consistent support and encouragement along the way.

My path to the history department at University of North Carolina began at Washington State University, where my undergraduate advisor, Janice Rutherford, gave me the confidence as well as the research and writing know-how to make it in graduate school. When I became a Master's student at WSU, my mentor and advisor, LeRoy Ashby, consistently offered insightful advice, constructive feedback, and guidance, all the while modeling a teaching and research ethic I can only hope to emulate. In more recent years, I have been thankful for his supportive friendship and always look forward to visiting with him and his wife, Mary, when I'm home in the Pacific Northwest.

While completing my graduate studies at UNC, I have been blessed with an especially helpful and knowledgeable dissertation committee, to whom I am eternally grateful. Joanne Hershfield's ability to accessibly teach complex theories of feminism and cultural studies provided a strong foundation for my own research interests. In the early stages of the project, Jan Radway provided crucial feedback and suggestions regarding the intertwined aspects of feminism and romance culture. Jennifer Scanlon's

commentary on my OAH paper in 2008 evolved into a lengthier correspondence, and I am eternally grateful for her many keen insights on the project since then. Peter Filene has offered constant encouragement and scholarly advice over the last few years, and his friendly demeanor has invariably lifted my spirits even during the most stressful times. John Kasson has given me invaluable feedback on this project every step of the way, and I've enjoyed many invigorating conversations with him that pointed me in new directions. Lastly, but most certainly not least, I am forever thankful to Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, my advisor and mentor. Jacquelyn took me in with open arms when I found myself re-evaluating myself as a scholar four years ago. Since then, her constant support, insightful and constructive feedback, and vigilant guidance have helped me to find my voice as an historian. I can truly say that were it not for Jacquelyn, I never would have finished this dissertation.

The development of this dissertation was also made possible by crucial financial support from UNC. As an Aesthetics in Society—Scholars for Tomorrow Fellow in the UNC Graduate School in 2004/2005, I learned the value of interdisciplinary collaboration from my colleagues. With the aid of an Off-Campus Research Fellowship from the UNC Graduate School, as well as summer research fellowships and the Mowry Dissertation Fellowship from the UNC History Department, I was able to complete my archival research in three different states.

Additionally, a generous fellowship from the Margaret Storrs Grierson Scholars-in-Residence program allowed me to delve deeply into the archival collections in the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. The archivists and staff at the Sophia Smith Collection, especially Amy Hague, offered valuable advice

about the collections, helpful suggestions about my findings, and a pleasant atmosphere for the six weeks I spent there. I am also grateful for the very helpful archivists who helped me navigate the collections at their respective institutions at the Schlesinger Library at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, the Special Collections Department at the Alderman Memorial Library at University of Virginia, and the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture in the Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collection Library at Duke University. Within these repositories, I came face-to-face with many of the feminists who inspired this project and whose strength, intelligence, and perseverance I greatly admire. Finally, when reflecting on my research trips, I would be remiss if I did not also thank John and Carol Premack for welcoming me into their home and providing me with a warm bed, good food, and friendly company during my two research trips to Massachusetts.

There are also a number of colleagues and friends who provided indispensable feedback and sustenance along the way. Seth Kotch and Marko Dumančić, early members of my writing group, provided critical (and merciful) responses to some of my earliest and roughest drafts. Meanwhile, Philip McLawhorn offered crucial suggestions and thoughtful discussions about philosophies of love. Over the last year, I have been especially grateful for vigorous conversations with my writing partners, Josh Davis and Kelly Morrow, whose friendships I also value very much. Chats over coffee with Josh about 1970s culture and life in general always offered welcome respite. With Kelly, I've weathered the trials and tribulations of graduate school and life since day one, while bonding over everything from soap operas to feminist ideology. Sharing laughter, ideas, conversation, and friendship with Amy Canfield, Mel Deaile, Rosalie Genova, Pam Lach,

Tim Williams, Maren Wood, and Amanda Van Lanen at various stages in this journey have helped me keep things in perspective and given me many wonderful memories. I am also deeply beholden to Hilary Elmendorf, one of my oldest and dearest friends, for understanding me and helping to keep me grounded during my most neurotic fits; and, to Laura Premack, for inspiring conversations, unwavering friendship, and unconditional support, which have meant more to me than I could ever adequately express in words.

Throughout it all, my family has been a steady source of comfort and strength. Thanks and deep gratitude are due to my “research assistants”—Bolero McLawhorn and Dewie Payne—for keeping me company and making me smile while I wrote; Kay, Randy, Joe, Jason, and Philip for welcoming me into their family with open arms; Judy, Randy, and Jessica, for years of happy memories; my grandmother, Kay Randklev, for her consistent faith in me; my future sister-in-law, Jennifer, for making my brother so happy; and, my brother and friend, Jason, for always being there for me with ready encouragement and shared laughter (I said). My parents, Robert and Vicki Payne, are especially deserving of my appreciation. Though my Dad was not able to see me reach this goal, his memory has kept me motivated and the values he instilled in me have made me always strive to do my best. And, my Mom—thank you for raising me to chase my dreams, always believing in me, keeping my spirits high, and being my closest confidante. I could not have done this without you.

And, finally, Mark McLawhorn. For the past three years, you have kept me grounded while inspiring me to reach for the stars. Because of you, I know that it is possible to have both love and liberation. Words are not enough.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION: “Love is a Word Screaming for Redefinition”:<br>Locating the Historical Roots of Second-Wave Feminist Responses<br>To the Problem of Romantic Love . . . . . | 1  |
| Ideals of Romantic Love and Feminist Thought: A Brief History . . . . .  | 3  |
| A Note on Method and Organization . . . . .  | 21 |

### CHAPTER

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| I.    “LOVE IS A DREAM”:<br>QUESTIONING IDEALS OF ROMANTIC LOVE AND<br>EXPLORING CELIBACY AND SEPARATISM . . . . .                          | 27  |
| Theories of Celibacy and the Argument Against Love:<br>Valerie Solanas, Cell 16, Ti-Grace Atkinson, and The Feminists . . . . .             | 31  |
| Exploring Celibacy and Separatism as Alternatives to Romantic<br>Love in the Works of Marge Piercy and Marilyn French . . . . .             | 54  |
| The Limitations of Celibacy: Shulamith Firestone’s Vision<br>of a More Authentic Love . . . . .   | 65  |
| Conclusion . . . . .  | 75  |
| II.   “REAL LOVE, REAL SOLIDARITY, REAL PRIMACY”:<br>THE THEORIES AND REALITIES OF POLITICAL LESBIANISM<br>AND WOMEN LOVING WOMEN . . . . . | 77  |
| The Emergence of Lesbian Feminism . . . . .   | 81  |
| The Ideology and Limitations of Political Lesbianism . . . . .  | 90  |
| Questions of Authenticity: Becoming, Bisexuality, and<br>Butch/Femme Role-Playing . . . . .   | 103 |
| Kate Millett and Rita Mae Brown: Two Case Studies of Lesbian<br>Feminism in Practice . . . . .  | 118 |

|      |  |     |
|------|--|-----|
|      | Conclusion . . . . .   | 138 |
| III. | “WE STILL NEED AND WANT MEN TO LOVE”:<br>BETTY FRIEDAN’S DEFENSE OF HETEROSEXUAL ROMANCE<br>IN THE FIGHT FOR THE CENTER . . . . .                                    | 140 |
|      | The Journey Towards Feminism: Friedan’s Search for Fulfillment<br>in Love and Work Before <i>The Feminine Mystique</i> , 1921-1963 . . . . .                         | 144 |
|      | The Post- <i>Feminine Mystique</i> Feminist: Navigating Personal<br>Struggles in Love and Liberation . . . . .   | 153 |
|      | Anti-Feminist Sentiment and the Campaign to Cast Feminists<br>as Anti-Love . . . . .   | 160 |
|      | Combating the Anti-Feminist Message: Friedan Fights for the Center . . . . .   | 172 |
|      | Friedan’s On-Going Dialogue About Heterosexual Love<br>Within the Movement . . . . .   | 183 |
|      | Love and Work: The Key Components of <i>The Second Stage</i> . . . . .   | 194 |
|      | Conclusion . . . . .   | 201 |
| IV.  | “NO CONTRADICTION BETWEEN FREEDOM AND LOVE”:<br>HELEN GURLEY BROWN, ERICA JONG, AND THE<br>RECONCILIATION OF LOVE AND LIBERATION . . . . .                           | 202 |
|      | The Quintessential Cosmo Girl: Helen Gurley Brown, <i>Cosmopolitan</i> ,<br>and “Gurley Girl Feminism” . . . . .   | 206 |
|      | Navigating Love and Liberation in the “Mock Memoirs” of<br>Erica Jong . . . . .  | 236 |
|      | Conclusion . . . . .   | 257 |
| V.   | “THERE CANNOT BE LOVE WHERE THERE IS NO EQUALITY”:<br>GLORIA STIENEM AND <i>MS. MAGAZINE</i> TACKLE<br>THE PROBLEM OF ROMANTIC LOVE . . . . .                        | 259 |
|      | Lessons in Love and the Journey Towards Feminism:<br>Gloria Steinem Before <i>Ms.</i> . . . . .  | 264 |
|      | “We Share With Each Other the Exhilaration of Growth and<br>Self-Discovery”: <i>Ms. Magazine</i> ’s Open Forum Responds to the<br>Problem of Romantic Love . . . . . | 279 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| The Struggle for Self-Identification and Liberated Love Carries On:<br>Gloria Steinem Post- <i>Ms.</i> . . . . . | 299 |
| Conclusion . . . . .   | 314 |
| EPILOGUE: “Love is Our Most Powerful, Lasting Form of Activism” . . . . .  | 315 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .   | 331 |

## Introduction

### “‘Love’ is a Word Screaming for Redefinition” Locating the Historical Roots of Second-Wave Feminist Responses to the Problem of Romantic Love

In their 1968 essay calling for a women’s liberation movement, Carol Hanisch and Elizabeth Sutherland wrote, “‘Love’ is a word screaming for redefinition. In sexual relationships, it often means dependency, it’s a weapon for control, it’s someone making an object out of someone else in order to satisfy ego and security needs.”<sup>1</sup> Hanisch and Sutherland’s commentary on romantic love as a “weapon” of male supremacy reflected the emerging preoccupation of second-wave feminists with the ways in which their personal lives reflected the political realities of gender inequality. Second-wave feminists fought for political, economic, and social parity; theorized about the creation of gender roles that bolstered patriarchy; pushed for reproductive and sexual freedom; and expanded the realm of possibilities for women. They also searched for the roots of women’s oppression in their personal lives. By the late 1960s, the redefinition of love that Hanisch and Sutherland called for was a crucial component of the women’s liberation movement. Arguing that romantic love was a socially constructed ideal that rewarded and appeased women for their economic, social, and emotional dependence

---

<sup>1</sup> Carol Hanisch and Elizabeth Sutherland, “Women of the World Unite -- We Have Nothing to Lose But Our Men!,” in *Notes From the First Year*, ed. New York Radical Women (New York: New York Radical Women, 1968), <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/>.

upon men, feminists confronted the meaning of romantic love and its role in creating women's secondary status.<sup>2</sup>

Because matters of romantic intimacy were so intensely personal, feminists were often bitterly divided in their efforts to understand romantic love and its impact on women's lives. They often experienced inner turmoil when reconciling their expectations of love with their feminist ideals of reciprocity and equality. They voiced their concerns and addressed their personal struggles with romance in myriad intellectual and cultural forums, including theoretical and philosophical tracts, mimeographed feminist manifestos and pamphlets, mass-produced popular novels and magazines, professional and private correspondence, and personal diaries and journals. Trying to match theory with practice, many feminists experimented with alternatives to traditional ideals of (heterosexual) romantic love, ranging from celibacy, to same-sex unions, to more egalitarian heterosexual relationships. A small, vocal minority of feminists vehemently argued that romantic love would cease to exist in an egalitarian society and that platonic friendship would emerge as the primary form of emotional intimacy. But the vast majority of second-wave feminists were committed to altering ideals of romantic love so that they meshed with feminist ideals. Though they often disagreed about how to achieve this, they were united by a firm belief that feminism would bring about more authentic forms of love between equals.

An analysis of second-wave feminists' varied responses to the problems and perils of romantic love complicates and expands our understanding of the second wave in

---

<sup>2</sup> Like most of the feminists I examine, as well scholars who have analyzed the history of romantic love, I contend that the broader culture of a given era informs and shapes expected behaviors and expectations of romantic love. In this sense, romantic love becomes more than an emotion—it is an ideal that evolves according to contemporary values.

several ways. First, it illuminates the effort to politicize the personal as a way of achieving gender equality. Scholars have drawn attention to the ways in which this effort affected attitudes toward marriage and sex, but what is less clear is how it shaped expectations and ideals of love and emotional intimacy. A more thorough assessment of feminist responses to romantic love, alongside marriage and sex, illustrates the complexities, ambiguities, and challenges feminists faced in forging more egalitarian personal relationships. Second, an analysis of the diversity of feminists' reactions to romantic love serves as a corrective to popular misconceptions of second-wave feminists. Critics have tried to undermine the movement and its legacy by grossly misrepresenting second-wave feminist as anti-sex, anti-love, man-haters.<sup>3</sup> Some feminists *did* embrace such a perspective, but the vast majority did not. This project thus serves the dual purpose of explaining *why* some feminists mounted a strong critique of romantic love while debunking the myth that this was a universal viewpoint. Finally, by taking the perspective that ideals of romantic love are historically constructed and specific to time and place, this project chronicles an important episode in the longer evolution of romantic love and feminist thought. In this light, we can see how feminists politicized and tried to change an emotional ideal so that they might experience love on their own terms.

### **IDEALS OF ROMANTIC LOVE AND FEMINIST THOUGHT: A BRIEF HISTORY**

Second-wave feminists were certainly not the first (nor the last) thinkers to seriously confront the meaning of love. For centuries, philosophers have sought to

---

<sup>3</sup> For useful overviews of how popular culture often presents conflicting images of feminists and frequently conveys the assumption that feminists are anti-man and against love, see Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1994); and Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991).

understand the purposes of emotional and sexual intimacy. Histories of philosophical examinations of love typically begin with Plato and his examination of Eros (sexual love) as the search for good, beauty, and wisdom. Plato was concerned with love as an avenue to self-realization, but later perceptions of love, especially within the context of the rise of Christianity, focused on love as a means of transcendence and immanence. During the medieval period, courtly and romantic love began to evolve out of those earlier conceptions of love. While the meaning and experience of courtly and romantic love varied considerably over space and time, the general idea was that two people (assumed to be a man and a woman) could find self-realization *and* transcendence through their love of one another. By the late eighteenth century, the rise of Romanticism in art and literature and its idealization of individualism and emotion (rather than reason), helped to crystallize notions of romantic love as a means of self-actualization. “Romantic love” has since typically referred to an intense emotional and sexual connection between two individuals. The ideals associated with it, however, are historically contingent, evolve over time, and are interwoven with any given society’s values.<sup>4</sup>

Second-wave feminists responded to a version of romantic love that was specific to post-World War II American society, but that also had deep historical roots. Romantic love had assumed a heightened level of significance in American culture as a primary justification for marriage as early as the late eighteenth century. Prior to that time, marriage primarily served economic and social purposes. Economic dependence

---

<sup>4</sup> Two philosophers, Robert Wagoner and Irving Singer, have written especially helpful and accessible overviews of philosophies of love as they have evolved over time. Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love: Plato to Luther*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1984); Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love: Courtly and Romantic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love: The Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Irving Singer, *Philosophy of Love: A Partial Summing-Up* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009); Robert E. Wagoner, *The Meaning of Love: An Introduction to Philosophy of Love* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997).

continued to serve as a crucial factor in marriage for women; but, by the Victorian era, romantic love *within* marriage and as a motivating factor *for* marriage assumed central significance. While men could expect to enjoy romantic love in addition to other sources of fulfillment, like work or politics, prevailing ideals deemed that romantic love was one of women's primary (even sole) outlet for seeking identity and meaning in their lives.<sup>5</sup>

While romantic love became intimately intertwined with marriage during the nineteenth century, women also sought out and benefited from "romantic friendships" with other women. During the nineteenth century homosocial bonds between women were crucial to women's emotional fulfillment. Predating modern categories of homosexuality, these romantic friendships were not always sexual in nature; however, there is evidence that such relationships were just as, if not more, important to women than their romantic and sexual relationships with men. In most cases, romantic friendships between women did not substitute for but rather co-existed alongside

---

<sup>5</sup> Scholars such as Ellen Rothman, who has examined courtship from the late eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries, and Karen Lystra, who has studied the loving relationships of Victorian women and men during the mid to late nineteenth century, have illustrated how romantic love increasingly justified and was expected within marriage relationships by the mid-1800s. Lystra's work in particular was pioneering in its challenge to lingering misconceptions that Victorian women were passionless and sexually repressed. On the contrary, her analysis of love letters between married couples revealed intense romantic and sexual bonds. Historian Stephanie Coontz has similarly argued that during the nineteenth century, Americans were increasingly inclined to marry for romantic love. Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, A History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Viking, 2005); Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984). Other important works on the history of romantic love in the nineteenth century include Nicole Eustace, "The Cornerstone of a Copious Work': Love and Power in Eighteenth-Century Courtship," *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 517-546. Richard Wightman Fox, *Trials of Intimacy: Love and Loss in the Beecher-Tilton Scandal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Herman R. Lantz, "Romantic Love in the Pre-Modern Period: A Sociological Commentary," *Journal of Social History* 15, no. 3: 349-370; Steven Seidman, *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830-1980* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Peter N. Stearns and Jan Lewis, ed., *An Emotional History of the United States* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000).



marriage.<sup>6</sup> By the end of the 1800s, sexologists had drawn clear demarcations between heterosexuality and homosexuality, categorizing the latter as deviant. Lesbianism, as well as male homosexuality, was consequently pushed underground, and thriving subcultures emerged and remained intact until the Stonewall Riots of 1969 propelled gay and lesbian liberation to the fore of social justice activism.<sup>7</sup>

Growing out of the abolition movement, a separate women's rights movement emerged in the 1830s and 1840s in tandem with changing patterns in romantic relationships. Along with the demand for women's suffrage, early women's rights advocates were centrally concerned with marriage laws, such as coverture, that rendered women completely dependent upon men in marriage. Early women's rights advocates throughout the nineteenth century generally had to choose either marriage or an unconventional life of work and activism. A few of the notable women's rights activists of the early to mid-nineteenth century tried to blend their activism with marriage, but most women found it impossible to do so. Though women's rights activists were intent upon making marriage more equitable for women, they rarely challenged the idea that women could have marriage *or* fulfilling work, not both. They might have enjoyed fulfilling romantic friendships with other women, but remaining unmarried severely

---

<sup>6</sup> For overviews of romantic friendship, see Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1981); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 1-29; Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> For overviews of gay and lesbian subcultures, see George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); John D. D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); John D. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

limited one's opportunities to experience romantic love in its idealized form. Likewise, acquiescing to pressures to marry meant women's sole source of fulfillment was within the home, making romantic love all the more important.<sup>8</sup>

Sex radicals, who questioned the institution of marriage itself and not just the laws associated with it, more openly challenged ideals of romantic love during the mid-nineteenth century. Radicals who espoused free love wanted to divorce love and sex from marriage. They did not advocate sexual promiscuity, but they did suggest that marriage stifled true expressions of romantic love and sex. While such arguments permeated feminist critiques of romantic love in later generations, free love sex radicals occupied the margins of feminist thought in the nineteenth century and were often dismissed by more moderate thinkers as extremists.<sup>9</sup>

While women's rights advocates united around the campaign for suffrage, a distinctive feminist ideology that focused on gender equality and sexual liberation

---

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for instance, remained married while pursuing women's rights. But, Susan B. Anthony remained famously unmarried so that she could pursue the cause of women's suffrage instead. Others, such as Angelina Grimke, retreated from their activist work after marriage. For overviews of the early women's rights movement, see Ellen DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press); Eleanor Flexner and Ellen F. Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996); Sylvia D Hoffert, *When Hens Crow: The Woman's Rights Movement in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Joelle Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place: Lucy Stone and the Birth of the Woman's Rights Movement* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003); Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press); Christine Stansell, "Woman in Nineteenth-Century America," *Gender and History* 11, no. 3 (November 1999): 419-432.

<sup>9</sup> For overviews of free love advocates and sex radicals, see Gail Bederman, Patricia Cline Cohen, and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, "Misbehaving Women: Sex Radicals and Nonconformists Who Made U.S. History" (presented at the 2010 Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, San Diego, January 7, 2010); Ellen Carol DuBois, "Feminism and Free Love," *H-Women* (April 19, 2001); Lawrence Foster, "Free Love and Feminism: John Humphrey Noyes and the Oneida Community," *Journal of the Early Republic* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 165-183; Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles Over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2002); Joanne Ellen Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 9-47.

emerged. Early women's right activists had argued that women's supposed moral superiority warranted greater access to the public realm so that they could help shepherd their communities along paths of virtue. But by the early twentieth century, a younger generation of self-described feminists began to argue that women and men were inherently the same. They were especially interested in experimenting with new formulations of romantic love and sexual intimacy that would place women on a more equal level to men, but their experiments in romantic and sexual parity were typically thwarted because of economic disadvantages, limited access to contraception, and lingering sexual double standards.<sup>10</sup>

The emergence and transformation of modern feminism in the early twentieth century coincided with developments towards companionate marriage and growing tolerance of sexual experimentation. Traditional courtship was replaced with modern dating that allowed for new degrees of sexual experimentation for unmarried women, epitomized by the 1920s flapper, and new ideals of companionate marriage stressed the importance of equality and mutual sexual desire within marriage. Together, these trends reflected steps towards equality in romantic relationships while simultaneously solidifying the idea that heterosexual romance was a reward that justified inequality elsewhere. Between the waves, then, expectations of romantic love as one of women's

---

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of the rise of feminism in the early twentieth century see Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); and Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000). See also Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press); William Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1980); Snitow, Stansell, and Thompson, *Powers of Desire*, 9-47; Ellen Kay Trimberger, ed., *Intimate Warriors: Portraits of a Modern Marriage, 1899-1944* (New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1991).

most important sources of fulfillment intensified and placed ever greater pressure on women to pursue that ideal.<sup>11</sup>

One key transitional figure between the first and second waves was Simone de Beauvoir. Her pioneering book, *The Second Sex* (1949), offered a powerful contribution to feminist thought and signaled a significant shift in feminist responses to romantic love, both historically and philosophically. Beauvoir was one of the first feminist thinkers to explicitly raise questions about romantic love in and of itself as a source of women's oppression. Earlier generations of feminist thinkers, including free love radicals and first-wave feminists, did not think that romantic love was necessarily problematic in its own accord. Instead, they focused on reciprocity within marriage or they pursued variations of romantic love outside the bonds of marriage. This project would continue to be important to feminists in later generations; however, as social transformations such as growing access to birth control and changing social mores made love outside of marriage an increasingly viable option by the 1960s, a preoccupation with romantic love on its own took shape. Beauvoir anticipated that transition and established a firm basis for further

---

<sup>11</sup> Historian Kathy Peiss's examination of working-class women and commercial culture, for instance, has demonstrated the ways in which women were often agents (rather than victims) of a sexual bartering system of "treating." Middle-class women and girls also experienced changes in romantic interactions with young men as Victorian ideals were replaced by modern sensibilities. Historian Beth Bailey traces this transition from courtship to modern dating around the 1920s. While modern dating favored men by giving them power and control, women also benefited because dating allowed them greater access to the public world and the opportunity for sexual experimentation. Kathy Lee Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985); Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988). See also Rebecca Davis, "Not Marriage At All, But Simple Harlotry": The Companionate Marriage Controversy," *Journal of American History* 94, no. 4 (March 2008): 1137-1163; D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*; Peter G. Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Gender Identities in Modern America*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Rebecca Davis, "Not Marriage At All, But Simple Harlotry": The Companionate Marriage Controversy," *Journal of American History* 94, no. 4 (March 2008): 1137-1163; John C. Spurlock and Cynthia A. Magistro, *New and Improved: The Transformation of American Women's Emotional Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

analysis of romantic love as a socially constructed ideal that stifled women within and outside of marriage.

*The Second Sex* was first translated and published in America by Knopf in 1953. By the early 1960s, *The Second Sex* had been re-issued in paperback. Over the next two decades, *The Second Sex* became a foundational text for second-wave feminists and Simone de Beauvoir became a scrutinized figure of fascination and admiration. Second-wave feminists almost universally pointed to Beauvoir as a figure of theoretical and personal inspiration during the 1960s and 1970s. Though she would not identify herself explicitly as a feminist until 1972, she had outlined a decisively feminist view of women's status in *The Second Sex* that described how women became "Other" and subjective to men. In addition to outlining social constructions of gender in Western cultures, she demonstrated an on-going experiment in balancing independence and romance in private life, especially in her relationship with existentialist Jean Paul Sartre.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> For information on the publication history of *The Second Sex* in America, see Deirdre Baire, introduction to *The Second Sex*, by Simone de Beauvoir, trans. H.M. Parshley (1949; repr. New York: Vintage Books, 1989). Second-wave feminists frequently identified Simone de Beauvoir as one of the most important sources of inspiration for their own theories about feminism and their ideas about romantic love. For instance, Shulamith Firestone dedicated her book, *The Dialectic of Sex*, to Beauvoir as did the Redstockings, who wrote in their anthology, *Feminist Revolution*, that Beauvoir was "the French woman who exposed male supremacy for this era, and gave us our feminism." *The Second Sex* was almost always listed as a foundational text for new feminists to read and quotations from the book and references to Beauvoir's life frequently appeared in second-wave works. Following Beauvoir's declaration of her feminism in 1972, second-wavers also clamored to interview her. The examples of second-wave feminist admiration and acknowledgement of Beauvoir are too many to count, but useful starting points include: Helen Eustis, trans., "The Radicalization of Simone de Beauvoir," *Ms.*, July 1972; Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970); Penny Forster and Imogen Sutton, eds., *Daughters of de Beauvoir* (London: The Women's Press, 1989); Betty Friedan, "A Dialogue with Simone de Beauvoir," in *It Changed My Life: Writings On the Women's Movement* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 391-412; Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement, *Feminist Revolution: An Abridged Edition with Additional Writings* (New York: Random House, 1978).

First and foremost an existentialist philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir argued that one “becomes” a woman as part of her effort to understand authenticity, transcendence, and self-determination. Her overarching argument that gender roles were socially constructed and that Western cultures based in capitalism created patriarchal hierarchies raised important questions about the meaning and functions of gender and power relationships between women and men. According to Beauvoir, the process of becoming a woman began almost immediately after birth. Throughout childhood and adolescence, girls were taught that the only route to achieving wholeness and an identity was through relationship to men. While this process was multifaceted and manifest in all aspects of society, including culture, religion, and family, Beauvoir identified ideals of romantic love as a central component in the Othering of women. In her chapter entitled “The Woman in Love,” Beauvoir argued that romantic love held different meanings for men and women. Men, who were independent and had other outlets for self-expression, saw love as only one aspect of their being. But women, who were largely confined to marriage and motherhood, understood love as all consuming and as the sole purpose of their existence and being. As Beauvoir explained, “to love is to relinquish everything for the benefit of the master.”<sup>13</sup>

For Beauvoir, the central paradox was that women were conditioned to seek a sense of wholeness within romantic relationships and that in doing so they “annihilated” any remnant of autonomy they may have had: “*I am love alone* is the motto of the woman in love; she is nothing but love, and when her love is robbed of its object, she is no longer

---

<sup>13</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley, (1949; repr. New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 642.

anything at all.”<sup>14</sup> Though she saw this type of annihilating love as utterly damaging to women, she enumerated reasons to hope that romantic love would become reciprocal and less consuming as women achieved independence elsewhere. “Genuine love ought to be founded on the mutual recognition of two liberties,” she explained. In relationships between two equally independent beings, “the lovers would then experience themselves both as self and as other: neither would give up transcendence, neither would be mutilated; together they would manifest values and aims in the world.”<sup>15</sup>

Beauvoir pursued this vision of genuine love in her writings and in her own life. In addition to her philosophical contributions, Beauvoir was famous for her relationship with the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. Their personal endeavor to blend ideals of independence with romance foreshadowed the complexities of reconciling love and liberation that beleaguered many second-wave feminists in the 1960s and 1970s. Beauvoir first met Sartre in 1929 when they were both studying philosophy at the Sorbonne. Until Sartre’s death in 1980, the two maintained an intense emotional and intellectual bond while refusing to conform to standards of monogamy. The two never married or even lived together, but maintained a (sometimes uneasy) pact in which their relationship—based on “essential love” tempered with “contingent loves” for others that were peripheral or secondary to their love for one another. Beauvoir readily acknowledged that this arrangement was Sartre’s idea; yet she claimed to embrace it wholeheartedly and saw it as the best way to achieve equality in her relationship with

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 665.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 667. Helpful overviews of Beauvoir’s theorization about romantic love include Stevi Jackson, “Love and Romance as Objects of Feminist Knowledge,” in *Making Connections: Women's Studies, Women's Movements, Women's Lives*, ed. Mary Kennedy, Cathy Lubelska, and Val Walsh (London: Taylor & Francis, 1993), 39-50; Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994); Kathryn Pauly Morgan, “Romantic Love, Altruism, and Self-Respect: an Analysis of Simone de Beauvoir,” *Hypatia* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1986).

Sartre and independence as a writer. Agreeing to be truthful with one another about liaisons outside of their relationship, Beauvoir and Sartre sometimes even shared lovers.<sup>16</sup>

Analyses of the relationship between Beauvoir and Sartre, however, have pointed to contradictions in their arrangement, especially in light of their posthumously published letters, which reveal that their relationship was plagued by jealousy much more frequently than they were willing to acknowledge. Feminist critics especially have raised questions about whether or not Beauvoir's dogged devotion to Sartre—she once said that her greatest success was her relationship with him—undermined her power as a pioneer of feminist thought.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, her struggle to match theory with practice was one that many second-wave feminists would share. Her work and her private search for a viable romantic alternative constituted an important turning point in feminist thought and

---

<sup>16</sup> Over the course of their decades-long relationship, Sartre more frequently took other lovers than did Beauvoir, though she had several long-term, intense affairs with other men—most notably with American writer Nelson Algren, whose comments on racism in America helped inform her analysis of women's secondary status for *The Second Sex*. For biographical information on Simone de Beauvoir, especially her relationship with Sartre, see Lisa Appignanesi, *Simone De Beauvoir* (London: Haus Publishing, 2005); Deirdre Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991); Axel Madsen, *Hearts and Minds: The Common Journey of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: Morrow, 1977); Dorothy Kaufmann McCall, "Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, and Jean-Paul Sartre," *Signs* 5: 209-223; Kate Millett, in *Daughters of de Beauvoir*, ed. Penny Forster and Imogen Sutton (London: The Women's Press, 1989), 17-32; Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Hazel Rowley, *Tête-à-tête: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre* (HarperCollins, 2005). Simone de Beauvoir's letters as well as posthumously published love letters between her and Sartre (as well as Nelson Algren), also contain valuable insight into her life. See Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, trans. James Kirkup (New York: Perennial Library, 1958); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, trans. Peter Green (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1962); Simone de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Putnam, 1965); Simone de Beauvoir, *All Said and Done*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: Putnam, 1974); Simone de Beauvoir, *Letters to Sartre*, ed. Quintin Hoare, (New York: Arcade Pub., 1992); Simone de Beauvoir, Nelson Algren, and Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, *A Transatlantic Love Affair: Letters to Nelson Algren*, ed. Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir (New York: Distributed by W.W. Norton, 1998); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Witness to my Life: The Letters of Jean-Paul Sartre to Simone de Beauvoir, 1926-1939*, ed. Simone de Beauvoir, trans. Lee Fahnestock and Norman MacAfee, 1st ed. (New York: Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1992); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Quiet Moments in a War: The Letters of Jean-Paul Sartre to Simone de Beauvoir, 1940-1963*, ed. Simone de Beauvoir, trans. Lee Fahnestock and Norman MacAfee, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



the identification of romantic love as potentially problematic for women. Second-wave feminists often turned to her for a theoretical framework as well as for a model of liberated love, which Kate Millett called the “Beauvoir-Sartre ideal.”<sup>18</sup>

While Beauvoir wrote her transformative text, America was in the grips of a visceral Cold War paranoia. Women who participated in civil rights and labor activism were subject to suspicion as was anyone else who seemed to challenge the “American way of life.” Lesbians and gay men were especially vulnerable to red-baiting. Although the first gay rights groups were formed in the 1950s, queer subcultures were forced even further underground. Meanwhile, a decisive effort to push women back into the home after they had come out en masse to work for the duration of the war contributed to marriage and baby booms and the suburbanization of America. Within this context, women were expected to embrace marital romantic love and domesticity as the be all and end all of their existence. Despite pervasive popular culture imagery of domestic bliss, growing numbers of women were becoming skeptical that marriage and family could fulfill all of their needs. By the early 1960s, the stage was set for a feminist revival.<sup>19</sup>

As many scholars have demonstrated, second-wave feminism was never monolithic. When it first began to emerge in the early 1960s, there were notable differences between women with different goals, ranging from career opportunities to

---

<sup>18</sup> Kate Millett, *Sita* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 325.

<sup>19</sup> For overviews of women’s experiences in post-World War II America, see Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Women's Oral History* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, Revised. (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Joanne Meyerowitz, “Rewriting Postwar Women's History, 1945-1960,” in *A Companion to American Women's History*, ed. Nancy A. Hewitt (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 382-396, 382-396.

political equality to the elimination of sex roles. Over the course of the 1970s, some differences became more pronounced while others faded away. Though second-wave feminisms were diverse and fluid, two predominant branches of thought characterized the movement. On one hand were liberal feminists, or the equal rights branch, who wanted to bring women into the existing social order on equal footing with men via political and legal change. On the other hand were various radical feminists (including socialist feminists, lesbian feminists, and other groups), or the women's liberation branch, who believed that a comprehensive re-ordering of the social order was the only way to replace patriarchy with egalitarianism.<sup>20</sup>

Whether feminists were drawn towards liberal or radical feminism played a significant role in their responses to the problems and perils of romantic love. Liberal feminists, who pushed for political, social, and economic reform, often argued that it was important to work alongside men in the fight for gender equality and that women were

---

<sup>20</sup> When the second-wave of feminism was first beginning to surface, generational differences played an important role in determining whether women joined the ranks of liberal feminists or radical feminists in the women's liberation wing. Liberal feminists tended to be white, educated, and middle-class and they came of age during the 1930s and 1940s. Radical feminists, in contrast, were usually from the baby boom generation and had acquired knowledge and skills for combating gender oppression via their participation in social justice movements of the 1960s. Historians have charted the activities of feminist individuals and groups belonging to different branches of the movement while considering the diversity and fluidity of thought between different perspectives. Especially useful analyses include Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, "Second-Wave Feminism," in *A Companion to American Women's History*, ed. Nancy A. Hewitt (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 414-432; Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Delta Trade paperbacks, 1999); Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left*, (1979; repr. New York: Vintage Books, 1980); Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: Free Press, 2003); Sara M. Evans, "Beyond Declension: Feminist Radicalism in the 1970s and 1980s," in *The World the Sixties Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America*, ed. Van Gosse (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003); Myra Marx Ferree and Beth B. Hess, *Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement Across Three Decades of Change*, revised edition (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994); Nancy MacLean, "Gender is Powerful: The Long Reach of Feminism," *OAH Magazine of History* (October 2006); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001); Ellen Willis, "Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism," in *No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press), 117-150.

entitled to pursue fulfillment both within and outside of romantic relationships. Radical feminists, in contrast, were more likely to identify traditional ideals of romantic love as a root cause of women's oppression and often experimented with and embraced alternatives to those ideals as a way of putting feminist theories into practice. Often revolving around advocacy of separatism or non-separatism, this view necessitated that feminists think about, reconcile, and justify their ideas about romantic love within the context of their feminist ideals.

Though most second-wave feminists reckoned with the problem of romantic love in some way, radical feminists in the women's liberation branch of the movement were the first to fully acknowledge the magnitude of the issue. Dedicated to combating male supremacy, radical feminists argued that the personal was political and elevated questions about marriage, sex and sexuality, and emotional intimacy to the forefront of theoretical discussion. In order to ferret out the roots of oppression in women's private lives, they implemented the tactic of consciousness-raising. By the early 1970s, the vast majority of self-identified feminists had embraced the usefulness of personal politics and consciousness-raising in their search for equality.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Kathie Sarachild (née Amatniek) coined the term "consciousness-raising" in 1967, though it was not an entirely original concept. During the early 1960s, civil rights workers, drawing on long traditions of social justice activism, had used the discussion of personal problems and daily life as a tactic for raising awareness about racism and racial discrimination. Around the same time, Chinese peasants used a similar practice during their Communist revolution half way around the globe. Considering the fact that many radical feminists had cut their teeth in the civil rights movement and were familiar with leftist ideology, it is not surprising that they borrowed the practice of "telling it like it is" to unearth sources of women's oppression. Evoking the words of Mao Tse-tung, consciousness-raising advocate Carol Hanisch explained that women must "speak pain to recall pain." Histories of second-wave feminism usually describe the process and importance of consciousness-raising. See also Pamela Allen, "The Small Group Process," in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 277-281; June Arnold, "Consciousness-Raising," in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 282-286; Susan Brownmiller, "'Sisterhood is Powerful': A Member of the Women's Liberation Movement Explains What It's All About," *New York Times Magazine*, March 15, 1970; Vivian Gornick, "Consciousness," *New York Times Magazine*, January 10, 1971; New York Radical Feminists, "An Introduction to the New York Radical Feminists,"

Emerging organically within local communities around the nation, consciousness-raising groups usually included about five to fifteen women who would meet for weekly discussions.<sup>22</sup> The hope was that in sharing personal experiences, common patterns about women's oppression would emerge. Pamphlets, instructional guides, and descriptions of consciousness-raising sessions stressed that groups should discuss aspects of their interpersonal relationships, including sex and sexuality, marriage, and romantic love.<sup>23</sup> Discussing matters previously seen as "sacredly private" allowed women to recognize how their personal feelings were wound up in larger systematic conditions.<sup>24</sup>

---

Box 23a, Folder 3, Women's Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass; Lee Walker, "A Quick Rundown on Feminist Consciousness-Raising Groups" (KNOW, Inc., undated), Box 20, Folder 12, Women's Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>22</sup> In addition to the small "rap group" format, second-wave feminists used their writing as a primary means of consciousness-raising. In the late 1960s, radical feminist thinkers produced a deluge of manifestos, pamphlets, and broadsides seeking to explain the aims and necessity of a separate women's movement. Usually self-produced with mimeograph machines, and later alternative presses, this outpouring of literature was circulated within feminist circles around the nation. By the early 1970s, such efforts expanded to include commercial magazines and mass-produced, bestselling feminist novels. Feminist scholars like Lisa Maria Hogeland, whose work focuses on feminist fiction, and historian Amy Farrell, who has written extensively about *Ms.* magazine, have showed how popular print culture broadened the audience for feminist ideas while making them more palatable for general audiences. See Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003); Amy Erdman Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood: Ms. Magazine and the Promise of Popular Feminism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Lisa Maria Hogeland, "Sexuality in the Consciousness-Raising Novel of the 1970s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 4 (April 1995): 601-632; Lisa Maria Hogeland, *Feminism and Its Fictions: The Consciousness-Raising Novel and the Women's Liberation Movement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 31; and Jane Gerhard, *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> For examples of consciousness-raising guides, see Arnold, "Consciousness-Raising"; Vivian Gornick, "Consciousness"; New York Radical Feminists, "An Introduction to the New York Radical Feminists"; New York Radical Women, ed., "Women Rap About Sex," in *Notes From the First Year* (New York: New York Radical Women, 1968), <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/>; Lee Walker, "A Quick Rundown on Feminist Consciousness-Raising Groups"; Ronnie Lichtman, "Sisterhood and the Small Group," undated, Box 20, Folder 12, Women's Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>24</sup> Arnold, "Consciousness-Raising," 284-285.

The questions feminists raised about the meaning and consequences of romantic love were closely related to their skepticism regarding the benefits of the on-going sexual revolution. While some second-wave feminists thought that women were much less restricted sexually by the early 1970s, others felt that the sexual revolution had done little to liberate women from sexual double standards. Despite changing sexual mores, women were still beleaguered by limited access to effective birth control and the absence of safe, legal abortion. Persistent feelings of dependency within romantic relationships also prompted many second-wave feminists to disavow the idea that the sexual revolution had divorced ideals of sex from those of romantic love and marriage. The relationship between physical and emotional intimacy proved to be much more complicated than that. Second-wave feminist thus increasingly stressed the need for mutuality and shared desire in romantic and sexual relationships.<sup>25</sup>

One of the consequences of consciousness-raising, including its explorations of sexual and emotional intimacy, was that it tended to focus on the sameness of women's experiences rather than difference. One of the primary criticisms of second-wave

---

<sup>25</sup> For examples of early second-wave feminist critiques of the sexual revolution, see Dana Densmore, "Independence from the Sexual Revolution," in *Notes From the Third Year: Women's Liberation*, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York: Notes From the Third Year, 1971), 56-61; Shulamith Firestone, "The Women's Rights Movement in the U.S.: A New View," in *Notes From the First Year*, ed. New York Radical Women (New York: The New York Radical Women, 1968), <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/>; Beverly Jones and Judith Brown, "Toward a Female Liberation Movement," in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 17-57; Anne Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," in *Notes From the First Year*, ed. New York Radical Women (New York: New York Radical Women, 1968), <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/>. For historical assessments of the sexual revolution, see David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution, An Unfettered History*, 1st ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 2000); Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight From Commitment* (New York: Anchor Press, 1983); Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess, and Gloria Jacobs, *Re-Making Love: The Feminization of Sex* (New York: Anchor Books, 1986); Jeffrey Escoffier, ed., *Sexual Revolution* (New York: Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2003); Jane Gerhard, *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Snitow, Stansell, and Thompson, *Powers of Desire*.

feminists was that the predominant factions of the movement overlooked diversity of experience because of a preoccupation with the idea that women shared a universal oppression. With their catchphrase “sisterhood is powerful,” some second-wave feminists did suggest that all women, regardless of racial, economic, or other factors, shared a common oppression as women in relationship to men. The works of the most publicly visible feminists (who were predominantly white, middle class, and educated) sometimes drew explicit attention to diversity of experience; however, their goal in doing so was often to underscore the commonality of women’s subordination despite differences. Unsurprisingly, the writings of feminists of color and working-class feminists did a better job of exploring crucial differences.<sup>26</sup>

Feminists of color and working-class feminists especially had distinctive views on the topic of romantic love. Women of color, for instance, often saw their primary struggle as necessarily occurring alongside men in pursuit of racial and ethnic equality. Cognizant of the long history of efforts to emasculate black men and to demonize independent black women, feminists of color were less inclined to join white women in their challenges to men. Working-class women were similarly less likely to challenge romantic ideals. Whereas middle-class women were fighting skewed power dynamics born of economic dependency and the confinement of marriage, working-class women had worked outside of the home all along out of economic necessity and usually in dead-end, unfulfilling

---

<sup>26</sup> For examples of early second-wave feminist efforts to address issues of class and racial difference, see Frances Beal, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Feminist,” in *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings From the Women's Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 382-396; Dana Densmore, “Chivalry--The Iron Hand in the Velvet Glove,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 3 (November 1969): 60-67; Firestone, *Dialectic of Sex*, 95-112; Nancy Myron, “Class Beginnings,” *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1, no. 3 (April 1972): 2-3; Cellestine Ware, “The Relationship of Black Women to the Women's Liberation Movement,” in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 98-112.

jobs. From their perspective, economically privileged women who did not have to work unless they wanted to were anything but oppressed. Moreover, whereas privileged women were casting off romantic ideals as oppressive, many working-class women may have seen them as a means to elevated status that they were otherwise denied. Though not unconcerned with the ramifications of emotional and sexual intimacy, doubly-marginalized women often saw it as a luxury for white middle- and upper-class women, who were not plagued by problems of racism or poverty, to be able to debate matters like romantic love.<sup>27</sup>

As second-wave feminism expanded in the 1970s to more fully incorporate diverse perspectives, the early emphasis on consciousness-raising faded in favor of more focused efforts to bring about decisive change in women's lives. Liberal feminists continued to lobby for legal and political guarantees of equal opportunity. Feminists representing nearly all branches within the movement continued to whittle away at lingering obstacles to accessing more effective forms of birth control and in ensuring that women had access to safe and legal abortions. Other groups took up specific causes, such as women's

---

<sup>27</sup> Scholarship on diversity within feminism has especially helped to deconstruct the myth that all second-wave feminists were white, middle-class, and educated. Important work by scholars such as Winifred Breines, Benita Roth, and Patricia Hill Collins, for instance, has revealed that feminists of color were actively involved with issues of feminism while they continued to agitate for the needs of their racial communities. Likewise, scholarship that examines the relationship between feminism and labor activism, such as recent books by Dorothy Sue Cobble and Dennis Deslippe, illustrates that working-class women were often at the forefront of feminist activism and paved the way for concentrated efforts to narrow wage gaps and improve employment opportunities for women. Another useful study of how social class may have shaped a woman's response to issues of feminism and romantic love is Janice Radway's analysis of romance readers. See Winifred Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009); Dennis A. Deslippe, *'Rights, not Roses': Unions and the Rise of Working-Class Feminism, 1945-1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

health, rape, domestic violence, and pornography. Women making inroads into academia began to establish Women's Studies programs around the nation while ever-greater numbers of women broke into male-dominated professions. Over the course of the decade, feminists also had to contend with anti-feminist opposition that intensified with every feminist victory.<sup>28</sup> All the while, second-wave feminists continued to confront the problems of romantic love as a key component of the pursuit of equality.

#### **A NOTE ON METHOD AND ORGANIZATION**

Situated within this historical milieu, my analysis of second-wave feminist responses to the problems of romantic love complicates the divisions that shaped the movement while illuminating the realities and difficulties feminists faced in trying to alter romantic ideals to better fit the aims of liberation and equality. The debate over romantic love evolved alongside other important developments in the movement without ever fully fading into the background. Though there were notable differences and phases in theorizing about romantic love, the effort to reconcile love and liberation was a constant in the ever-diversifying feminist movement.

My focus is on the intellectual, cultural, and personal efforts of second-wave feminists to address the problem of romantic love. Feminist action initiatives to change marriage laws, ensure reproductive freedom, and prevent sexual violence (such as rape and battery) were crucial to fostering egalitarian relationships between the sexes. But

---

<sup>28</sup> For overviews of anti-feminist opposition as it evolved and strengthened over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, see Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*; Faludi, *Backlash*; Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002); Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Marjorie J. Spruill, "Gender and America's Right Turn," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 71-89.



how could second-wave feminists reform ideals of romantic love? Changing laws and institutions to bolster gender equality was a good start, but reconciling love and liberation also involved individual and cultural solutions. A focus on their ideas, their efforts to intervene in culture in order to shift romantic ideals, and their private experiences with romantic intimacy thus illustrate the intricate and unique complexities that fueled feminist preoccupations with love. Success in reconciling love and liberation is difficult to measure; however, there is much to learn in analyzing feminists' conscious effort to politicize a seemingly natural emotion in order to alter prevailing cultural ideals of romantic love so that they were in line with feminist visions of egalitarianism and equality.

The project of redefining love to fit feminist ideals was complicated, multifaceted, and individualistic. Feminists in the late 1960s and 1970s had drastically different ideas about whether romantic love damaged women, whether it should continue to exist in an egalitarian society, and what it would look like if it persevered. They also had widely divergent experiences with romantic intimacy. In order to ascertain the myriad response of second-wave feminists to the problem of romantic love, I have focused on analyzing their diverse writings and dialogues on the topic. Because they grappled with the problem of romantic love both publicly and privately, I have examined published feminist texts, including theoretical works, memoirs, and cultural interventions (primarily novels and magazines), as well as archival materials, including feminists' diaries, personal correspondence, interviews, and transcripts of consciousness-raising sessions. In particular, I have culled the archival material available in the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Collection at Harvard University,

the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture at Duke University, and the Alderman Memorial Library at University of Virginia. Collections at these repositories illuminate the complexities of public figures as well as lesser-known feminists in the struggle to reconcile love with liberation.

Although feminist responses to the problems of romantic love defy easy categorization, I have organized my analysis around five distinct perspectives symbolized by illuminating cultural moments, textual dialogues, and individual struggles. Many of the figures in this study are familiar ones—Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Kate Millett, and so on. A closer look at how these individuals tried to incorporate their theories about love and liberation into their personal lives, with varying degrees of success, offers a useful starting point for understanding the complexities and dynamics of feminist responses to romantic love. Uniquely situated to shape cultural perceptions of romantic love and to spark dialogue as feminist writers and activists, the key figures in this study offer openings for understanding how feminists around the nation likewise pursued liberated versions of romantic love.

In Chapter One, I consider the perspective of radical second-wave feminists who advocated celibacy and (temporary) separatism as necessary conditions for a feminist revolution. This perspective was embraced by the most militant of radical feminists in the late 1960s. Focusing on the assertions of Valerie Solanas, Cell 16, Ti-Grace Atkinson and *The Feminists*, and Shulamith Firestone, this chapter explores their critiques of romantic love as the first and last pivot of women's oppression and the belief that it was necessary to disavow all forms of romantic and sexual love. As a means of exploring the challenges and purposes of putting celibacy into practice, the chapter also includes an analysis of

two widely read feminist novels—*Small Changes* by Marge Piercy and *The Women's Room* by Marilyn French—that explored that option.

Chapter Two shifts its focus to another variation of separatism—lesbian feminism, which emerged as lesbians began to recognize their alienation within feminist and gay liberation groups. During the early 1970s, many feminists adhered to the ideology of a newly defined “political lesbianism,” which argued that women should sever all ties with men so that they could devote their singular attention and energy to feminist activism. Calling themselves “women-identified women,” political lesbians suggested that one could identify as lesbian without having sex with other women. Many lesbian feminists also argued that lesbianism was desirable for feminist women because it offered the only route to loving relationships based on equality. Efforts to establish love between women as a model of authentic romantic love revolved around questions about bisexuality, butch/femme role-playing, and whether or not one could “become” a lesbian. The chapter concludes with a case study of Kate Millett and Rita Mae Brown, who publicly and privately grappled with putting theories of lesbian feminism into practice.

The remainder of “Love and Liberation” focuses on variations on efforts to reconcile the aims and ideals of women’s liberation with heterosexual romantic intimacy. Chapter Three focuses on Betty Friedan’s effort to establish a version of feminism opposed to that of separatism and lesbian feminism. Throughout the 1970s, Friedan worked to cultivate and maintain her appeal among mainstream audiences by arguing that second-wave feminism did not pose a challenge to heterosexual intimacy but rather offered women the opportunity to seek fulfillment in work *and* in heterosexual love. Though Friedan’s opposition to separatists and lesbian feminists stemmed in part from

homophobia, she also believed that appealing to moderates was politically necessary as anti-feminist rhetoric intensified. All the while, she continued to grapple with her own disappointments in love.

Chapter Four juxtaposes *Cosmopolitan* editor Helen Gurley Brown with feminist novelist Erica Jong as examples of a distinctively pro-heterosexual love feminist sensibility. Representing two generational perspectives of the second wave (Helen Gurley Brown was a contemporary of Betty Friedan and Erica Jong was part of the baby boom generation), Brown and Jong suggested that feminist goals of independence and equality and the desire for heterosexual romance were not mutually exclusive. To extend that message, Brown and Jong created composite characters that closely resembled their own lives—the “Cosmo Girl” as the idealized working, single woman who read *Cosmopolitan* and “Isadora Wing,” the character at the center of Jong’s “mock memoirs,” beginning in her bestselling novel, *Fear of Flying*. Drawing from their own experiences in love and liberation, Brown and Jong justified the pursuit of heterosexual romance as a legitimate endeavor for feminist women.

Finally, chapter five situates Gloria Steinem and *Ms.*, the popular feminist magazine she co-founded and co-edited, as symbolic of a middle ground in feminist debates over the meaning of romantic love. Steinem agreed that the ideals associated with romantic love were problematic while acknowledging that most women (herself included) did not want to give up on loving men. In her own life, Steinem struggled to forge romantic relationships that would not stifle her own need for independence. With *Ms.*, she helped to provide an open forum through which second-wave feminists from a wide-range of perspectives could wrestle with the theories and realities of romantic

intimacy. Over the course of the 1970s, Steinem and *Ms.* extended the argument that feminism could alter the ideals associated with romantic love so that authentic love based in equality would emerge. In her estimation, romantic love was only possible if feminism succeeded.

## Chapter One

### “Love is a Dream”<sup>1</sup>

#### Questioning Ideals of Romantic Love and Exploring Celibacy and Separatism

In her 1968 treatise on celibacy, Dana Densmore asked: “What we’re really after is to be loved for ourselves and if that’s impossible, why should we care about love at all?”<sup>2</sup> Densmore’s query was significant on several levels. For one, she pointed to the belief of many feminists that ideals of romantic love rarely allowed for women to be loved for themselves, but rather for the role they played in hierarchical relationships, which was usually one of service rather than partnership. Increasingly, radical feminists argued that ideals of romantic love required women to identify themselves solely in relationship to their (usually male) romantic partners and, hence, women could not maintain an identity of their own, could not “be [them]selves,” if entangled in a romantic union. Densmore’s suggestion that women ought not “care about love at all” represented the views of a coterie of radical feminists who advocated celibacy and women’s separatism as two purposeful strategies in the feminist’s struggle for freedom and equality.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Feminists, “Dangers in the Pro-Women Line and Consciousness-Raising,” circa 1970, 4, Box 20, Folder 12, Women's Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>2</sup> Dana Densmore, “On Celibacy,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 1 (December 1968).

Dana Densmore was a member of Cell 16, a Boston-area militant radical feminist group that emerged in the late 1960s.<sup>3</sup> Cell 16 and other groups, such as The Feminists, and individuals, such as Valerie Solanas and Ti-Grace Atkinson, belonged to the ranks of feminists who argued women should sever all ties, professional and personal, with men in order to achieve liberation. Most pointedly, they argued that women could not engage with men sexually or romantically without participating in hierarchies that rendered women secondary. Though never a majority perspective in the modern women's liberation movement, separatists who advocated celibacy belonged to a larger and dispersed group of radical feminists who began to distinguish themselves from liberal, or equal rights, feminists in the late 1960s. Typically coming to feminist activism out of the civil rights movement and the new left, radical feminists focused on women as an oppressed class and identified patriarchy and male supremacy as the source of women's oppression. They spoke in terms of liberation, rather than equality, and proposed a vast re-ordering of society that would render sex roles obsolete.

The primary significance of this subset of radical feminists was that they were among the first to offer a pointed critique of romantic love in and of itself as a source of women's oppression. They understood romantic love as an historically-specific cultural construction that rewarded women for accepting their secondary status. Because it was a product of patriarchy, romantic love existed solely to bolster male supremacy and its related gender and sexual hierarchies. While the theories they articulated in the late 1960s laid the groundwork for political lesbianism, early advocates of separatism did not

---

<sup>3</sup> When she became involved with feminism and Cell 16, Dana Densmore was a computer scientist working at MIT. She is currently an independent scholar and runs Green Lion Press, a small publishing company in New Mexico with William Donahue (her husband). See "About Dana Densmore and William H. Donahue," December 17, 2005, <http://www.greenlion.com/dd-whd/html>; "Green Lion Press Homepage," <http://www.greenlion.com/>.

necessarily identify lesbianism as a viable alternative to heterosexuality. Instead they advocated that women must separate from men wholesale—professionally, sexually, and romantically—and disavow romantic love and sexual intimacy of any kind in order to learn how to control their own lives. Within this framework, certain radical separatists saw celibacy as a means of either changing romantic love to make it more authentic and egalitarian or eliminating it in favor of platonic friendship.

Most who advocated celibacy saw it as a temporary alternative. Once feminism had succeeded in eliminating male supremacy, they thought it might be possible for women to participate in intimate relationships with others (same-sex or heterosexual) that were mutual and equal. Others saw celibacy as a more permanent outcome of feminism. If women and men were truly equal, romantic love and the emotional and sexual dependencies it fostered would cease to exist in favor of platonic relationships based on mutuality and friendship. Regardless of duration, this particular subset of separatists thought it imperative that women refrain from sexual or emotional intimacy with men in order to get a better sense of themselves as independent individuals and to cultivate authentic bonds based on equality with other women. Such bonds would provide the emotional fulfillment women were otherwise conditioned to believe they could only find in romantic liaisons with men. Because they advocated complete separation from men as absolutely necessary, separatists' views on romantic love were extremely divisive within and outside of the feminist movement.

Dialogues regarding celibacy as a feminist ideal appeared alongside other analyses of women's oppression in the newsletters, manifestos, and pamphlets of militant radical feminist groups and individuals that emerged in the late 1960s. Militant feminists saw the



liberal feminist goal of bringing women into mainstream society on equal footing with men as insufficient. Male supremacy and patriarchal institutions, they argued, were the root cause of women's secondary status. Bringing women into the mainstream would do nothing to change the basic dynamics of male supremacy and, consequently, radical feminists called for a feminist revolution that would demolish patriarchy in favor of a more egalitarian social order. The most well known militant separatists existed within urban centers. Cell 16 was based in Boston and The Feminists emerged in New York City. Though the urban setting and close proximity to publishing industries of these groups made them highly visible, their writings were circulated within the feminist circles and enclaves popping up around the nation. Though there was no superstructure or overarching organizational thrust for the nascent activities of radical feminists, the mimeographed fliers and newsletters they produced helped to inspire a dialogue with feminist groups spread far and wide. Cell 16 pointed to the intense interest in feminist material in the reprint of the first issue of their journal, *No More Fun and Games*. The first issue sold out almost immediately, demonstrating the great demand and interest among the hundreds of "parallel, but unconnected . . . isolated and enraged" feminist groups emerging around the nation.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter will explore theoretical and literary writings about separatism and celibacy in order to understand why certain feminists believed romantic love would cease to exist in an egalitarian society as well as their rationale for exercising celibate separatism as a method of eradicating patriarchy with special attention to Valerie

---

<sup>4</sup> Cell 16 offered this description of the burgeoning radical feminist movement in the reprint of the first issue of their journal, *No More Fun and Games*. The first issue sold out almost immediately, demonstrating the great demand and interest in the kind of material Cell 16 was producing. See "Note on the Second Printing," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 1 (December 1969).

Solanas, Cell 16, and Ti-Grace Atkinson and The Feminists. An analysis of two popular feminist novels of the 1970s — *Small Changes* by Marge Piercy and *The Women's Room* by Marilyn French — offers a lens for assessing the practicality and realities of living celibate separatism. As explorations into the range of romantic alternatives feminism offered women, the two novels brought sympathetic depictions of separatism to a wider audience and dramatized the challenges separatists faced in matching theory with practice. The chapter concludes with an analysis of radical feminists, most notably Shulamith Firestone, who theoretically agreed that ideals of romantic love damaged women, but also validated the more widely held view that feminism would make romantic love more authentic rather than obliterate its existence.

**THEORIES OF CELIBACY AND THE ARGUMENT AGAINST LOVE: VALERIE SOLANAS, CELL 16, TI-GRACE ATKINSON, AND THE FEMINISTS**

The earliest iteration of a feminist espousal of celibacy and separatism was arguably Valerie Solanas's "SCUM Manifesto: Society for Cutting Up Men" (1967). Most famous for her attempted assassination of pop artist Andy Warhol in 1968, Valerie Solanas was never officially allied with the feminist movement. Nevertheless, many of her contemporaries considered the "SCUM Manifesto" one of the first, and most visceral, statements of radical feminist theory, with its sharp satirical attack on male supremacy. Having written the manifesto in 1967, Solanas shilled self-produced mimeographed copies of it on the streets of New York until her trial brought her national notoriety and fame. Thereafter, the manifesto became standard reading for feminist groups. Though

many radical feminists disagreed with Solanas's unapologetic tirade against men her ideas were foundational for militant groups like Cell 16 and The Feminists.<sup>5</sup>

The "SCUM Manifesto" argued that men were naturally inferior to women and that they were not only responsible for women's oppression, but for all other social ills as well. It was up to independent "SCUM women" to change the social order by challenging not only men, but also women who "[were] not even dimly aware of where they're at in relation to men" and were thus complicit in extending patriarchy.<sup>6</sup> According to Solanas, "women who are aware of the extent of their superiority to and power over men, could acquire complete control over everything within a few weeks, could effect a total submission of males to females."<sup>7</sup> One way for women to exercise their inherent superiority over men, Solanas argued, was to cast aside their sexuality. Sex drive, in Solanas's estimation, was a masculine invention that had little benefit for women: "Sex is not part of a relationship; on the contrary, it is a solitary experience, non-creative, a gross waste of time." Women who could "condition away [their] sex drive," Solanas explained,

---

<sup>5</sup> For discussions of the history of Valerie Solanas and "The SCUM Manifesto" see Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 104-105; Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Outlaw Woman: A Memoir of the War Years, 1960-1975* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2001), 118-120; and B. Ruby Rich, "Manifesto Destiny: Drawing a Bead on Valerie Solanas," *Voice Literary Supplement*, October 1993, 16-17. "The SCUM Manifesto" was also excerpted in *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970) and was more recently included in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary History*. Citations refer to the version in *Radical Feminism*. See Valerie Solanas, "SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) Manifesto," in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 201-222; and Valerie Solanas, "Excerpts from the SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) Manifesto," in *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings From the Women's Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 577-583.

<sup>6</sup> Solanas, "SCUM Manifesto," 217.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

would become “completely cool and cerebral and free to pursue truly worthy relationships and activities.”<sup>8</sup>

Solanas’s argument that celibacy would allow women to “pursue truly worthy relationships” reflected her view that men and male supremacy made true friendship and love impossible: “Love can’t flourish in a society based on money and meaningless work; it requires complete economic as well as personal freedom, leisure time and the opportunity to engage in intensely absorbing, emotionally satisfying activities, which, when shared with those you respect, lead to deep friendship.” And, friendship, according to Solanas, was what love was really about. “Love is not dependency or sex, but friendship,” she explained, “and, therefore, love can’t exist between two males, between a male and a female or between two females, one or both of whom is a mindless, insecure, pandering male; like conversation, love can exist only between two secure, free-wheeling, independent, groovy female females, since friendship is based on respect, not contempt.”<sup>9</sup> In anticipation of lesbian feminism and arguments in favor of the “woman-identified woman,” Solanas thus suggested that only autonomous, liberated women were capable of sharing love with one another and identified the gendered ideals of romantic love as the real problem.

Much of Solanas’s work was off-putting to liberal feminists (who wanted to bring women into the mainstream of society alongside men) and also for many radical feminists who did not agree that celibacy, let alone separating from men sexually and romantically, was a necessary step in defeating patriarchy. Nevertheless, her argument that romantic love was a patriarchal construction with no relevance outside of

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 211.

hierarchical relationships was one that many radical feminists shared. Moreover, even though many radical feminists found her man-hating unsavory, a number of radical feminists shared her sentiments. Radical feminist Joanna Russ, for instance, espoused man-hating as a valid and legitimate feminist prerogative. Pointing out that man-hating was much less pervasive than misogyny (“for every Valerie Solanas, how many rapists, how many male murderers are there?”), Russ argued that women were conditioned “to love our men—uncritically and in fear of the consequences if we don’t.” Misandry thus took “considerable ingenuity, originality, and resilience” and was an appropriate form of self-preservation.<sup>10</sup> Another radical feminist, Pamela Kearon, argued that despite perceptions that women were naturally inclined to love, there was “nothing natural about loving one’s oppressor.” Man-hating was an honorable but “difficult stance because it requires a fidelity to what is real in us and neither innocuous nor attractive to oppressors,” the “part which is really human and cannot submit.”<sup>11</sup> Later in the 1970s, self-described dyke separatists would pick up the banner of man-hating as legitimate and worthy of feminists.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Joanna Russ, “The New Misandry: In Defense of Hating Men” (KNOW, Inc., 1972), Box 23, Folder 4, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>11</sup> Pamela Kearon was a member of Redstockings before defecting from that group to join The Feminists, which was much more geared towards separatism. Pamela Kearon, “Man-Hating,” in *Notes from the Second Year Women’s Liberation: Major Writings of Radical Feminists*, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York: Radical Feminism, 1970), 84 and 86, Box 18, Folder 2, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College Northampton, Mass.

<sup>12</sup> Some lesbian-feminists argued that straight women were much more likely to hate men than lesbians were; however, during the early 1970s, certain lesbian-feminist groups and individuals fully embraced misandry as legitimate and necessary. Lesbian-feminists who argued in favor of man-hating often called themselves “dyke separatists.” For examples, see Jeanne Cordova, “Radical Feminism? Dyke Separatism?,” in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 358-364; Susan Cavin, “Manhaters Know ManHateHers,” *Tribad: A Lesbian Separatist Newsjournal* 1, no. 1 (May 1977): 4, Carton 2, Folder 66, Charlotte Bunch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University; Charoula, “Dyke Separatist Womanifesto,” *Tribad: A Lesbian Separatist Newsjournal* 1, no. 1 (May 1977): 1-4, Carton 2, Folder 66, Charlotte Bunch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University; “Notes On Dyke Separatism,” Box 36, Folder

Among the radical feminists who were not alienated by Solanas's man-hating was Cell 16. Founded in the summer of 1968, Cell 16 reportedly read the "SCUM Manifesto" as their first order of business. Cell 16 agreed with the central tenets of the "SCUM Manifesto" and they found Solanas's view of sexuality, her advocacy of celibacy, and her disavowal of love especially compelling. They frequently included excerpts from "SCUM Manifesto" in their journal, *No More Fun and Games*, quoted from it when speaking at women's liberation meetings and conferences, and even met with Solanas while she was incarcerated and institutionalized following her assassination attempt on Andy Warhol.<sup>13</sup>

Cell 16 was among the first radical feminist groups "to propose that women withdraw from men personally as well as politically."<sup>14</sup> Roxanne Dunbar, who came to women's liberation via her Marxist politics, co-founded Cell 16 and dictated much of its ideology until her departure from the group in 1970. The original group (which included Dana Densmore) saw the liberation of women as central to a larger assault on capitalism, racism, and imperialism.<sup>15</sup> Drawing connections between women's subordination and

---

619, Noel Phyllis Birkby Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass; and Jill Johnston, *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

<sup>13</sup> Cell 16's journal, *No More Fun and Games*, reflected an indebtedness to Solanas with its frequent inclusion of brief excerpts of her works. The fourth issue of the journal included four excerpts from "SCUM Manifesto" and the fifth issue began and ended with excerpts. See *No More Fun and Games*, no. 4 (April 1970), 8, 19, 29, and 57; and *No More Fun and Games*, no. 5 (July 1971), title page and 127. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz also wrote in her memoir, *Outlaw Woman*, about her strong reaction to Valerie Solanas and described how she and members of Cell 16 frequently read excerpts from "SCUM Manifesto" at feminist gatherings. Dunbar-Ortiz, *Outlaw Woman*, 109-224, passim. See also Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 160; Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left*, Reprint. (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 209; and Rich, "Manifesto Destiny: Drawing a Bead on Valerie Solanas," 17.

<sup>14</sup> Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 164.

<sup>15</sup> Dunbar-Ortiz, *Outlaw Woman*, passim.

other forms of oppression, Cell 16's theories focused on how women could cast off the yoke of male supremacy. Frequently, they identified heterosexual intimacy as a pivot of women's oppression and suggested that women should sever ties with men. As Dunbar argued in an essay co-written with fellow member Lisa Leghorn, "Not having the possibility of a relationship of equals with a man, [woman] will choose to have no relationship with a man."<sup>16</sup> Likening relationships between man-woman relationship to that of the master and slave, Roxanne Dunbar later concluded: "If we do not openly admit our contempt for men and their 'needs,' it is not out of love, but out of fear—of losing the precious few privileges we have gained since coming 'up from Slavery.'"<sup>17</sup>

In addition to critiquing heterosexual romantic intimacy, Cell 16 embraced an androgynous style of dress and practiced martial arts as a form of self-defense. They took pride in their militancy and were especially known for their activist theatrics—such as the (in)famous cutting of their hair at the First Congress to Unite Women.<sup>18</sup> Of utmost importance in their effort to cast aside sex-role conditioning, Cell 16 argued that women needed to become aware of their "diffidence and their dependence upon men" and to "[take] off the accumulated emotional and physical flab that kept them enthralled to men."<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Roxanne Dunbar and Lisa Leghorn, "Are Men the Enemy?" Box 23, Folder 2, Women's Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>17</sup> Roxanne Dunbar, "What is to be Done?" *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 1 (October 1968; repr., December 1969).

<sup>18</sup> The development and evolution of Cell 16's thought and action is evident in their journal, *No More Fun and Games*, which had six issues running from October 1968 through May 1973. Historian Alice Echols has also examined the group in detail. See Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 158-166; *No More Fun and Games*, no. 1 (October 1968; repr., December 1969); *No More Fun and Games*, no. 2 (February 1969); *No More Fun and Games*, no. 3 (November 1969); *No More Fun and Games*, no. 4 (April 1970); *No More Fun and Games*, no. 5 (July 1971); and *No More Fun and Games*, no. 6 (May 1973).

<sup>19</sup> Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 160.

The idea that men invariably oppressed women permeated Cell 16's writings and became a basis for their advocacy of celibacy as a useful and legitimate choice. The group's critique of heterosexuality was based on their belief that patriarchy was so systematically pervasive that all men participated in male supremacy, whether consciously or not.<sup>20</sup> As Betsy Warrior explained in one essay, "most men are incapable of having an egalitarian relationship with a woman; they can't even imagine what one would be like because their roles are too internalized and ingrained." Patriarchal conditioning similarly crippled women in romantic relationships making them unable to recognize their own situation. Once women took a step back from relationships and recognized their "degradation and oppression," they would realize that romantic relationships were "worthless, because the price you have to pay is too great in terms of self-respect."<sup>21</sup> As Lisa Leghorn argued, with women giving their all and men not reciprocating, there was "no shame involved with the abstention from these kinds of relationships with men."<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Cell 16 members frequently explored the idea that all men participated in male supremacy in *No More Fun and Games*. For examples, see Donna Allen, "Why Can't Men Listen to Women?," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 4 (April 1970): 86-87; Dana Densmore, "The Plea for Gradualism," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 4 (April 1970): 88-90; Dana Densmore, "Who is Saying Men are the Enemy?," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 4 (April 1970): 4-8; Dana Densmore, "The Dating Fraud," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 5 (July 1971): 4-10; Dana Densmore, "On Communication," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 5 (July 1971): 66-81; Dana Densmore, "The Slave's Stake in the Home," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 2 (February 1969): 14-20; Dana Densmore, "Against Liberals," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 2 (February 1969): 60-63; Hilary Langhorst, "A Final Word," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 3 (November 1969): 114-116; Abby Rockefeller, "Sex: The Basis of Sexism," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 6 (May 1973): 5-37.

<sup>21</sup> Betsy Warrior, "Battle Lines," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 3 (November 1969): 28-29.

<sup>22</sup> Lisa Leghorn, "All or Nothing," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 3 (November 1969): 86.



But if heterosexuality was problematic, so too was lesbianism, which Dunbar and Leghorn said was “no more than a personal ‘solution.’”<sup>23</sup> Later, when lesbian feminist Rita Mae Brown criticized Dunbar for opposing lesbianism, Dunbar declared: “What I want to do is get women out of bed. Women can love each other but they don’t have to sleep together.”<sup>24</sup> Here, Dunbar’s argument that love should be separated from sex echoed Solanas’s definition of friendship. It also indicated that sexual revolution had done little to liberate women from deeply engrained patriarchal customs.<sup>25</sup> Like other feminists at the time, Cell 16 questioned the idea that the sexual revolution freed women and were concerned that arguments to that effect obscured the need for further, more comprehensive, change. As Dana Densmore argued, greater freedom in sexual relationships meant little and only further stifled women without an understanding of how power was created via sex and emotional intimacy. What women really needed was “independence from the sexual revolution” so that they could begin the process of determining their own needs.<sup>26</sup>

Dana Densmore, who was one of the most prolific of Cell 16’s theorists, likewise addressed the issue of lesbianism. Arguing that homosexuality, like heterosexuality, was constructed, Densmore suggested that all forms of sexuality were “oppressive and

---

<sup>23</sup> Roxanne Dunbar and Lisa Leghorn, “Are Men the Enemy?,” and Roxanne Dunbar and Lisa Leghorn, “The Man’s Problem,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 3 (November 1969): 26.

<sup>24</sup> Roxanne Dunbar, quoted in Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 165. Dunbar-Ortiz also addressed this in her memoir and noted that Rita Mae Brown made the attack in *Rat*. Dunbar-Ortiz, *Outlaw Woman*, 235.

<sup>25</sup> See Roxanne Dunbar, “Sexual Liberation’: More of the Same Thing,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 3 (November 1969): 49-56; Lanayre Ligera, “The Orgasm Mystique,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 3 (November 1969): 83-84.

<sup>26</sup> Dana Densmore, “Independence from the Sexual Revolution,” in *Notes From the Third Year: Women’s Liberation*, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York: Notes From the Third Year, 1971), 56-61.

neurotic and degrading” within patriarchy and would “be risen above in the liberated society.” Drawing comparisons between human sex and sex among “healthy animals” (an analogy she admitted was problematic), Densmore questioned the idea that heterosexuality was “natural” in order to argue that homosexuality was “unnatural.” “[H]omosexuality arises because of the unnaturalness of the roles forced on men and women,” she explained. “Women can’t face the degradation imposed by men, so they turn to women. Men can’t respect women so they turn to men they can respect.” Like heterosexual sex, then, same-sex relationships were also based on the “false male-female dichotomy.”<sup>27</sup> If people were confident in themselves independently, sexual encounters of any kind would serve little purpose. Lesbianism was, thus, just as futile as heterosexual romance.

In another essay written around the same time, Densmore continued to draw connections between sex and romantic love, arguing that society conditioned people to see a link between the two. Arguing that sexual need was primarily constructed, rather than natural, Densmore suggested that people confused sexual desire with the need for emotional intimacy and companionship, among other things. According to Densmore, these “needs” were just as likely psychological as they were physical and she suggested that people clung to sexual intimacy because it combated the feelings of isolation that accompanied the era’s obsession with individualism.<sup>28</sup> Whereas women tended to identify affection and companionship as the most important aspects of loving

---

<sup>27</sup> Dana Densmore, “Sexuality,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 1 (October 1968; repr., December 1969).

<sup>28</sup> See Dana Densmore, “Without You and Within You” (KNOW PRESS, Inc., June 1969), 8-9, Box 2, Folder 5, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; and Dana Densmore, “With You and Within You,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 4 (April 1970): 45-57.

relationships, men saw sex as the primary goal, thus rendering “the sexual love relationship a poor place for a woman to seek communication and human understanding.”<sup>29</sup> Avoiding sexual relationships would allow women (and men) to understand that sex was not necessarily the best way to demonstrate or receive love.<sup>30</sup>

In critiquing sexuality, Densmore was making a powerful case for the legitimacy and necessity of celibacy for feminists. In arguing that sex was an inessential component of life, Densmore pointed to the ways in which women were “programmed to crave sex” which was ultimately about power. Society conditioned women to believe that sex “promise[d] a spark of individual self-assertion in a dull and routinized world,” and thus offered them their only means to power in a society that disallowed their self-assertion in any other setting. But at the same time, sex also offered men a means of power over women. Such power dynamics were further complicated because sexual desire, Densmore contended, often masqueraded as the “desire for recognition or love.” Celibacy

---

<sup>29</sup> Densmore, “Within You or Without You,” 10. Densmore made a similar point in her essay “Chivalry,” where she argues that practices of chivalry made it impossible for relationships to be truly mutual because they perpetuated hierarchical power relationships where women’s affection was treated as a commodity. Dana Densmore, “Chivalry--The Iron Hand in the Velvet Glove,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 3 (November 1969): 60-67.

<sup>30</sup> The idea that women and men saw love differently was not unique to Densmore. Other feminists who posited a similar argument included Simone de Beauvoir, nearly two decades earlier, and Shulamith Firestone. But many feminists who made such an argument did so in order to draw attention to the ways in which sex role conditioning shaped women’s experiences. The underlying assumption was that feminism would eliminate those differences and, in the process, allow for a more universal, mutually beneficial form of love to emerge. Cell 16, however, represented a particular radical feminist inclination towards separatism from men that was gaining more adherents by the early 1970s. Though continuing to argue that gender differences were social, not biological, radical feminists who endorsed separatism or intimate relationships between women as most conducive to were laying the groundwork for the cultural feminism, which celebrated women’s natural distinctiveness from men rather than inherent sameness, that would replace radical feminism by mid-decade. See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley, (1949; repr. New York: Vintage Books, 1989); Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970). For an overview of the emergence of cultural feminism, see Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America Since 1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 146-147; Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 243-286; and Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 142-158.

was an “honorable alternative” that would allow women to realize that “[l]ove and affection . . . can easily be found in comrades.” Love shared without the pressures and hierarchies of sex, was “a more honest and open love that love you for yourself and not for how docile and cut and sexy and ego-building you are, a love in which you are always subject, never merely object, always active, never merely relative.” Densmore found it was necessary for women to render themselves “sexually repulsive to most men.” “If we are going to be liberated,” Densmore concluded, “we must reject the false image that makes men love us, and this will make men cease to love us.”<sup>31</sup>

In addition to “On Celibacy,” two other essays in the inaugural issue of *No More Fun and Games* identified celibacy as a valid and ideal choice. Cell 16 member Ellen O’Donnell likewise concluded: “In reaching out in physical love there is still the desire to mold the other person’s energy under the guise of togetherness.” Those who chose celibacy, however, seemed better equipped “to preserve the quietness . . . needed for graceful loving.”<sup>32</sup> Roxanne Dunbar concurred that celibacy, or asexuality, offered the best route to wholeness (independently and as a conduit for friendships based on “graceful loving”). Though some people were celibate because of “a damned healthy fear” of sexual involvement, Dunbar argued that the celibate who chose asexuality freely “usually relates to others with more sensitivity and warmth than the ‘sexual’ being.”<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Densmore, “On Celibacy.”

<sup>32</sup> Ellen O’Donnell, “Thoughts on Celibacy,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 1 (December 1968).

<sup>33</sup> Roxanne Dunbar, “Asexuality,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 1 (October 1968; repr., December 1969).

Cell 16 envisioned a world in which asexual, platonic, “graceful” love would replace romantic, sexual love.

Many observers, then and now, assumed that the members of Cell 16 practiced celibacy per their theoretical framework. But, their discussions of celibacy and separatism focused on the theories, rather than practical realities of celibacy. In fact, it seems that few of the members actually practiced celibacy at that time. A few years after the group formed, Roxanne Dunbar wrote an impassioned letter to *Ms.* magazine after an article about the group said members took a “vow of chastity.” Dunbar called the postulation “absurd” and lamented that this was a widely held view of Cell 16. “Three women in the group were happily married,” she wrote, “and most of the rest of us, including myself, lived with and loved our men.” The group never discussed *chastity*, she argued, though they did identify *celibacy* “as a positive reaction to the situation of women who had no positive reaction to the situation of relating to men . . . or who were being exploited sexually.”<sup>34</sup> More recently in her memoir of those years, Dunbar (now Dunbar-Ortiz), explained that during her tenure with Cell 16, she was involved in a serious committed relationship with a fellow male activist, who agreed with her that women’s liberation needed to become the primary focus for leftist activists, during the late 1960s and 1970s. In addition, Dunbar recalled her deep admiration for Dana Densmore’s marriage at the time Cell 16 first formed. “I had not encountered such a healthy model for a heterosexual couple before,” Dunbar recalled. “To me, their marriage seemed more like a partnership and friendship than marriage.”<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Roxanne Dunbar, “Letters to Ms.,” *Ms.*, May 1974, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Dunbar-Ortiz, *Outlaw Woman*, 125 and passim.

The fact that members of Cell 16 did not necessarily practice celibacy does not discredit their theoretical frameworks, but rather points to the complexities and challenges of putting theory into action. Dana Densmore alluded to the difference between advocating and practicing celibacy in her essay, “Independence from the Sexual Revolution,” where she argued that the first priority for feminists must be “the work of rebuilding ourselves.” Periods of celibacy were likely necessary to this endeavor, however, she concluded with a caveat: “If a particular sexual relationship or encounter is convenient, appropriate, and pleasurable, if it is not demeaning or possessive or draining in any way, you might decide to choose to invest some of your precious self in it.”<sup>36</sup>

On two occasions, Cell 16 included two firsthand accounts in *No More Fun and Games* that spoke directly to the motivations and complexities of applying celibacy to a feminist lifestyle: a dialogue between Dana Densmore and celibate feminist Indra Allen and an excerpt from Lisa Leghorn’s diary.<sup>37</sup> In her conversation with Dana Densmore, Indra Allen partly justified her decision to remain celibate by describing how she was better able to channel her energy towards endeavors more positive and productive than sex. Echoing Cell 16’s theory that celibacy allowed for platonic friendships to thrive, Allen relayed her experience that “You can’t be sleeping with somebody, it seems, and having a perfect egalitarian friend relationship because—it’s not as though it should be built in, but for some reason for practical purposes it seems to work out that their relationship is not completely free of the possessive kinds of things that happen, and the

---

<sup>36</sup> Densmore, “Independence from the Sexual Revolution,” 61.

<sup>37</sup> Dana Densmore, “Why I Am Celibate: Conversation with Indra Allen,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 6 (May 1973): 39-46; Lisa Leghorn, “Excerpts from a Personal Journal II,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 5 (July 1971): 120-126.

expectations.” If relationships between individuals were free of sexual expectation, then they were “open . . . human-to-human.” The result was more meaningful platonic, rather than romantic, love relationships and a clearer sense of self.<sup>38</sup>

Lisa Leghorn’s journal excerpt revealed an even more personal glimpse into how some separatist feminists came to terms with celibacy as a viable and even necessary option. The journal captured Leghorn’s thoughts over a period of several days as she grappled with lingering expectations of romantic love. Admitting that she had continued to “hope for a joyous love relationship,” Leghorn came to terms with the fact that her expectations meant that she was “not fundamentally happy with [herself] and [her] interactions with the world.” Though she admired women who had consciously chosen to remain single, Leghorn worried about lingering stigmas attached to singleness in her own life. At the same time, “living relatively independent of others for a while, [she’d] come to romanticize and build up” the idea of a romantic connection. Armed with the rhetoric of radical separatism and the shorn hair of a Cell 16 member, Leghorn was conscious of her changing interactions with men: “I felt incredibly proud that I was more than they were aware of; proud to be what I was rather than what others thought I was.” Thinking that her newfound pride and self-confidence would enable her to enjoy a more egalitarian relationship with a man, Leghorn was disheartened when her effort to do so failed. Noting that as soon as a new relationship became sexual it reverted to traditional sex roles, Leghorn surmised: “It’s a hell of a lot easier to talk female liberation than to live it and really deal with the implications it has for one’s own life.”<sup>39</sup> Her willingness to share

---

<sup>38</sup> Indra Allen, quoted in Densmore, “Why I Am Celibate,” 41 and 43.

<sup>39</sup> Leghorn, “Excerpts from a Personal Journal II,” 120-127.

her tale of private turmoil was an illuminating exercise in personal politics with its recognition of the complexities of putting theory into practice.

Ti-Grace Atkinson of *The Feminists* offered a more dramatic solution to the problem of romantic love: its elimination. By the fall of 1969, Atkinson had grown committed to “being the most radical of all radical feminists.” Just two years earlier, when radical feminism was first emerging, Atkinson had joined the National Organization of Women. Despite her conservative upbringing, the divorced art critic and aspiring political philosophy student had recently grown interested in feminism after having read Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*. Like many of her contemporaries, Atkinson was taken with Beauvoir’s assessment of women’s secondary status and reportedly wrote to her in France in 1965. Beauvoir recommended that Atkinson contact Betty Friedan, which marked the beginning of Atkinson’s political involvement with feminism.<sup>40</sup>

By December of 1967, Atkinson had become the president of the New York chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW), which focused on effecting political and economic change that would give women equal opportunities. Although the New York branch of NOW was known as its most radical offshoot, Atkinson broke ties with

---

<sup>40</sup> *The Feminists*, which Ti-Grace Atkinson founded, said in their manifesto that members were to have a basic knowledge of feminism, which they could get from Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*. See *The Feminists*, “The Feminists: A Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles,” in *Notes from the Second Year Women’s Liberation: Major Writings of Radical Feminists*, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York: Radical Feminism, 1970), 114-118. For information on Atkinson’s early involvement with feminism, see Ti-Grace Atkinson, “Resignation from N.O.W.,” in *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Links Books, 1974), 9-13; Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 96-97; Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 167; Judith Martin, “Ti-Grace, the Church: With Signs Reading 'Heretic',” *Washington Post*, March 12, 1971, sec. B, Box 1, Folder 1, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Jeannette Smyth, “Doctrines of Ti-Grace and Anti-Grace,” *Washington Post*, March 12, 1971, sec. B, Box 1, Folder 1, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; and “Ti-Grace Atkinson: Free-Lancing as a Traveling Storm Center,” *Pennsylvania Gazette* 1971 May: 40, Box 1, Folder 1, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.



the organization in 1968 because she thought the organization was too hierarchical. Along with two other members of the New York chapter, Atkinson started the October 17th Movement (named for the day that she left NOW) with the goal of fighting “unequal power everywhere.”<sup>41</sup> In its initial phase, the October 17th Movement was a solitary effort for Atkinson. The other founding members left shortly after the group was formed, but within the next several months a number of “disaffected Redstockings,” as well as Anne Koedt of the New York Radical Women, joined forces with Atkinson.<sup>42</sup> In June of 1969, the group re-organized and became The Feminists. Within a year the denunciation of women’s intimate association with men stood at the center of their theory and agenda.<sup>43</sup>

Like most newly formed radical groups, The Feminists identified male supremacy as the primary source of women’s oppression; however, they pushed the analysis further than most in their stated goal to “annihilate” the sex role system. According to The Feminists, men oppressed women out of psychological, rather than material, needs and gender roles were socially constructed, rather than biologically determined. The sex role system that emerged out of this, The Feminists argued, “distort[ed] the humanity of the

---

<sup>41</sup> Atkinson, “Resignation from N.O.W.,” 10.

<sup>42</sup> Redstockings and New York Radical Women were two of the earliest radical feminist groups based in New York City during the late 1960s. This was a time of rapid change and transition and there was much fluidity and movement between the different groups. It was not uncommon for instrumental members of one group to become disaffected and defect to another group during this time. For overviews of the fluidity of movement that characterized the early women’s liberation movement, see Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, eds., *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Delta Trade paperbacks, 1999); Davis, *Moving the Mountain*; Echols, *Daring to be Bad*; Evans, *Personal Politics*; Evans, *Tidal Wave*; Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation: A Case Study of an Emerging Social Movement and Its Relation to the Policy Process* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1975); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> See Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 167-170; and The Feminists, “The Feminists: A Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles,” 114-118.

Oppressor and deni[ed] the humanity of the Oppressed.”<sup>44</sup> The goal, as Ti-Grace Atkinson described it, was “a society of individuals.” But in order to achieve this, it was necessary for women to reject contemporary definitions of womanhood in a “hazardous” journey that was tantamount to social suicide.<sup>45</sup> In short, Atkinson and The Feminists thought that radical feminists should abandon all practices traditionally associated with womanhood in order to become self-determined, authentic individuals.

In some ways, then, The Feminists seemed to mirror Cell 16’s view that sexuality was inherently oppressive. As with Cell 16, Valerie Solanas and her “SCUM Manifesto” was a source of inspiration for The Feminists. The two groups also similarly believed that women did not need sexual liberation so much as they needed liberation from sexuality. Like Cell 16, they thought heterosexuality was problematic because it was part of the patriarchal system that allowed men to dominate women. They also thought lesbianism was undesirable because it was based on, and sometimes modeled, differences between women and men and thus did little to abolish the idea of sex roles or rectify women’s inferior status.<sup>46</sup> The Feminists also agreed with Valerie Solanas and Cell 16 in arguing that replacing romantic and sexual love with platonic friendship was a desired outcome of feminist revolution. In a world devoid of sex roles, friendship (which they defined as “a rare relationship that requires the participation of two parties to the mutual satisfaction of

---

<sup>44</sup> The Feminists, “The Feminists: A Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles,” 114.

<sup>45</sup> Ti-Grace Atkinson, “Radical Feminism,” in *Notes from the Second Year Women's Liberation: Major Writings of Radical Feminists*, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York: Radical Feminism, 1970), 32-37. See also Ti-Grace Atkinson, “Radical Feminism,” in *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Links Books, 1974), 47-55.

<sup>46</sup> See Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 172-174; and Rich, “Manifesto Destiny,” 16-17.

both”) would replace romantic love.<sup>47</sup> But within Atkinson’s early writings, which served as the basis for The Feminists’ agenda, we can see a more fully developed theoretical framework for the wholesale rejection of romantic love. In one of her earlier statements on radical feminism, Atkinson argued that romantic love had become the pivot around which institutions like marriage and sex revolved. Arguing that “the most common female escape is the psycho-pathological condition of love,” she declared:

[Love] is a euphoric state of fantasy in which the victim transforms her oppressor into her redeemer: she turns her natural hostility towards the aggressor against the remnants of herself—her Consciousness—and sees her counterpart in contrast to herself as all powerful (as he is by now at her expense). The combination of his power, her self-hatred, and the hope for a life that is self-justifying—the goal of all living creatures—results in a yearning for her stolen life—her Self—that is the delusion and poignancy of love.<sup>48</sup>

Atkinson continued to elaborate on the detriments of romantic love in her 1969 essay, “Radical Feminism and Love.” In that essay, she argued that love was a “psycho-pathological state of fantasy” that led women to identify themselves in relationship to men. Again, Atkinson insists that love was the primary reason women (even most feminists) *allowed* their subordination to men to exist. Indeed, when Atkinson asked women why they deigned to “consort with the enemy,” they most often expressed their desire for love, not sexual fulfillment. For this reason, Atkinson declared the need for a more thorough analysis of love. Philosophies of love, she argued, had not gone far enough in exploring its political ramifications—a shortcoming she aimed to remedy.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> See Ti-Grace Atkinson, “Radical Feminism and Love,” April 12, 1969, 4, Box 18, Folder 6, Women's Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; and The Feminists, “The Feminists: A Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles,” 117.

<sup>48</sup> Atkinson, “Radical Feminism,” 36-37.

<sup>49</sup> Atkinson, “Radical Feminism and Love,” 3.

Atkinson said that romantic love resulted from a magnetic pull between women and men. Noting that “magnetism is caused by friction or conflict,” Atkinson believed that women, who were powerless, were drawn to men because they possessed the power. By uniting with man, “woman was instinctively trying to recoup her definitional and political losses.” Thus, “‘Love’ is the woman’s pitiful deluded attempt to attain the human.” Such an effort to achieve wholeness was futile, however, because “magnetism depends upon inequity: as long as the inequity stands, the fusion may hold.” But, as Atkinson argued, “if the inequity changes, the fusion and the magnetism fall with the inequity.”<sup>50</sup> Love would only exist, she insisted, so long as women’s subordination within patriarchy remained.

In spreading this message, Atkinson asked one Philadelphia audience about the “sacred cow” of love: “What is love but the pay-off for the consent to oppression? What is love but need? What is love but fear? In a just society, would we need love?”<sup>51</sup> For Atkinson, the answer was a resounding “no.” In the absence of inequality, romantic love would no longer exist because women would have other avenues to fulfillment and they would be equal to men. The preconditions for romantic love, inequality and lack of fulfillment outside of romantic love, would thus no longer exist. Moreover, in the egalitarian society radical feminists like Atkinson envisioned, everyone would share power equally and it would no longer be necessary for women to barter for power in romantic relationships with men. In a just society, new configurations of companionship based on equality would replace romantic love.

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>51</sup> Ti-Grace Atkinson, “Untitled Speech in Philadelphia,” April 5, 1968, Box 4, Folder 1, Women's Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

Like Densmore and Solanas, Atkinson suggested that in a post-feminist world, friendship would replace romantic love. “Friendship is a rational relationship” based on “the mutual satisfaction of both parties,” she explained, whereas “love can be felt by only one party” and was “thus rendered contradictory and irrational.”<sup>52</sup> Whereas many radical feminists believed that romantic love would become more egalitarian as society did the same, Atkinson vehemently denied its legitimacy as anything other than a crutch of women’s oppression. Romantic love was the first and last pivot of women’s oppression and in the wake of a feminist revolution it would cease to exist.

Embracing Atkinson’s view of romantic love, The Feminists explicitly rejected romantic love in their 1970 manifesto, which aimed to establish standards of feminist behavior. Of particular concern was the issue of marriage — and feminists who continued to participate in the institution. Indeed, many of the early members of The Feminists had recently defected from the radical feminist group Redstockings, whose dominant faction (called the “pro-woman line”) was inclined to defend marriage as the best choice available to women living within patriarchy. The Feminists thought this advocacy of heterosexual intimacy conveyed the message “that women need men.”<sup>53</sup> To illustrate their vehement disagreement with this view, The Feminists offered the following anecdote:

When women discuss the problems they’re having with their men it is a rare woman cheeky enough to recommend ditching the bastard. Nor will she be thanked for her opinion but will probably be reproached with being cold, unfeeling and most of all: anti-women. The sanctity of the female/male relationship is never seriously challenged by the Pro-Women advocates. When one woman, after breaking up with her husband, ended up running away with another man, a Pro-Women Liner

---

<sup>52</sup> Atkinson, “Radical Feminism and Love” 4n.

<sup>53</sup> The Feminists, “Dangers in the Pro-Women Line,” 2.

blithely explained that it was good she was “finding herself”. No question as to why she did not seek herself in herself, in other women or in the movement itself. Finding oneself through men is the logical extention [sic] of the Pro-Women Line.<sup>54</sup>

On the contrary, The Feminists believed that the movement should serve the purpose of “encourag[ing] all women to begin making themselves independent of men.”<sup>55</sup>

As Vicky Myers of The Feminists explained during a panel discussion on feminism in December 1970, the group thought that the first step towards liberation involved leaving men behind. “We can’t find equal relationships with men,” she told the audience, because “when he stands there before you, he has the whole male sex lined up behind him.”<sup>56</sup> One means of ensuring that women could disentangle themselves from men was to help them achieve economic independence, so that they would not require the financial support of a marital alliance and, consequently, could enjoy greater freedom of choice in romantic partners. But for The Feminists, independence entailed women rejecting heterosexual intimacy wholesale. Because the goal was “female solidarity — women depending not on men but equally and mutually on each other,” The Feminists insisted that it was necessary to give up “the game of heterosexual love.” Romantic love was nothing but a “hoax” of “fairy-tale substance,” they argued: “Love is a dream.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, it was a

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>56</sup> Debby Woodroffe, “Meaning of Feminist Consciousness,” *The Militant*, December 4, 1970, 15, Box 35, Folder 606, Noel Phyllis Birkby Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>57</sup> The Feminists, “Dangers in the Pro-Women Line,” 4.

dream designed to bolster marriage, an institution they saw as especially culpable in women's oppression.<sup>58</sup>

In categorizing not only marriage, but also romantic love as an “institution,” The Feminists identified it as a product of society—specifically a patriarchal society—rather than a real or natural emotion. The Feminists contended: “Love promotes vulnerability, dependence, possessiveness, susceptibility to pain, and prevents the full development of woman's human potential by directing all her energies outward in the interests of others.”<sup>59</sup> This was true of both maternal love as well as romantic love between spouses and other heterosexual couples. They continued:

Love is a self-defense developed by the female to prevent her from seeing her powerless situation; it arises from fear when contact with reality provides no alternative to powerlessness. It is protection from the violence of violations by other men. Heterosexual love is a delusion in yet another sense: it is a means of escape from the role system by way of approval from and identification with the man, who has defined himself as humanity (beyond role)—she desires to be him. The identification of each woman's interests with those of a man prevents her from uniting with other women and seeing herself as a member of the class of women.<sup>60</sup>

As a corrective to such conditions, The Feminists increasingly focused on establishing standards aimed at eliminating love and its related institutions. For instance, in their manifesto (which was drafted by only half of the group) they established strict requirements for membership, including a quota on the number of married women allowed to join the group. The quota reflected the group's opposition to the institution of

---

<sup>58</sup> See Sheila Cronan, “Marriage,” in *Notes From the Third Year: Women's Liberation*, ed. Anne Koedt and Shulamith Firestone (New York: Notes From the Third Year, 1971), 62-65; Barbara Mehrhof and Sheila Cronan, “The Rise of Man: The Origins of Woman's Oppression, One View,” December 1969, Box 18, Folder 6, Women's Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>59</sup> The Feminists, “The Feminists: A Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles,” 117.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

marriage.<sup>61</sup> But many radical feminists (including some of the early members of The Feminists) saw the quota as an “attack on married women rather than the institution of marriage.”<sup>62</sup> Despite such criticism, the members who supported the marriage quota (which evolved into the full exclusion of married women a year later) believed that it was necessary to match theory with practice. In one of their statements, they explained: “In rejecting marriage and fidelity to the male, we are cutting off our retreat from radical feminism and creating the necessity for female unity and trust.”<sup>63</sup>

The quota on, and subsequent exclusion of, married women created hard feelings within the group and deepened already existing fissures that would continue to widen into the 1970s.<sup>64</sup> Members of The Feminists who supported the marriage quota, like Cell 16, helped to lay the foundation for a more theoretically developed lesbian separatism that became a decisive branch of action and thought over the next few years. Members who were less vehemently opposed to romantic love would join the ranks of other feminist groups (some radical and some not) that were more geared towards making love compatible with liberation, rather than rejecting it entirely.

---

<sup>61</sup> See Cronan, “Marriage.”

<sup>62</sup> Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 176. For information regarding the marriage quota see Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 175-179; and The Feminists, “The Feminists: A Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles.”

<sup>63</sup> The Feminists, “Dangers in the Pro-Women Line,” 5.

<sup>64</sup> On a related note, as The Feminists established themselves as an anti-marriage, anti-love group, Ti-Grace Atkinson increasingly became a divisive figure. In the spring of 1970, Atkinson withdrew from The Feminists after they passed a resolution to ensure that the group remained egalitarian and leaderless. Though The Feminists argued that the resolution was not aimed at anyone specifically, the media had increasingly cast Atkinson as The Feminists spokesperson and leader, which fostered resentment within the group. Once separated from The Feminists, Atkinson continued to stir up controversy within the feminist movement over the topic of romantic and sexual intimacy. By the early 1970s, she would firmly align herself with lesbian feminists. Though there is little evidence that she identified as a lesbian sexually (most reports indicate that she remained celibate during most of her involvement in the feminist movement), she eventually cast herself as a political lesbian, arguing that women’s separatism were necessary to the feminist revolution. See Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey*, passim; Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 181-185.



**EXPLORING CELIBACY AND SEPARATISM AS ALTERNATIVES TO ROMANTIC LOVE IN THE WORKS OF MARGE PIERCY AND MARILYN FRENCH**

Most of the early dialogue regarding celibacy and separatism appeared in feminist manifestos and tracts typically self-produced on mimeograph machines and by independent or underground presses. Later in the 1970s, feminist novelists Marilyn French and Marge Piercy helped to translate theoretical debates about separatism and celibacy for a larger popular audience. Marge Piercy's *Small Changes* (1972) and Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* (1977), for example, were important literary interventions in feminist dialogues about women's separatism and lesbianism.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, a number of feminist novels written during the second wave spread the feminist tactic of consciousness-raising to a wider audience that might not have had exposure to feminism otherwise.<sup>66</sup>

Together, *Small Changes* and *The Women's Room* served as explorations into the various alternatives to traditional romantic ideals available to feminist women. Both offered nuanced portrayals of heterosexual feminists who preferred and grappled with heterosexual romantic intimacy, but they suggested that power dynamics in relationships

---

<sup>65</sup> Marilyn French, *The Women's Room: A Novel* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993); and Marge Piercy, *Small Changes* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1972).

<sup>66</sup> A number of scholars have argued that popular fiction served as an important form of consciousness-raising during the 1970s. See Kathryn Thomas Flannery, *Feminist Literacies, 1968-1975* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005); Jane Gerhard, *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988); Lisa Maria Hogeland, "Sexuality in the Consciousness-Raising Novel of the 1970s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 4 (April 1995): 601-632, passim; Lisa Maria Hogeland, *Feminism and Its Fictions: The Consciousness-Raising Novel and the Women's Liberation Movement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Laurie Muchnick, "Emissions and Emotions: Women's Blockbusters Speak Volumes," *Voice Literary Supplement*, October 1993, 21-22; Judi M. Roller, *The Politics of the Feminist Novel* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986); Imelda Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller: From Sex and the Single Girl to Sex and the City* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005); and Bonnie Zimmerman, *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction, 1969-1989* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

between women and men were inevitably skewed in men's favor. In the end, they both portrayed lesbian relationships as the best option for feminists who wanted to pursue committed relationships of a sexual and romantic nature. But, Piercy and French also explored celibacy and separatism as viable choices for feminist women, even if only on a temporary, rather than permanent, basis.

Piercy's *Small Changes* was first published in 1972 at the height of the second wave. The story follows the intertwined lives of two women, Beth and Miriam, as they explore variations of independence and love. In so doing, Piercy adeptly demonstrates growing divisions within the women's movement as some feminists chose to eschew romantic liaisons with men and others refused to sever emotionally intimate bonds with men. The primary focus is on Miriam, who grapples with issues of heterosexual intimacy as an independent woman, but the character of Beth and her decision to abandon heterosexuality in favor of celibacy, life in a women's commune, and, eventually, a loving lesbian relationship demonstrates a powerful argument in favor of separatism as a better option than heterosexuality for feminist women.

Miriam does not directly participate in the feminist movement; however, her character represents the challenges women faced in balancing relationships with independence during the so-called sexual revolution. A mathematical genius, Miriam moves to Boston to pursue graduate work in the newly emerging field of computer science. While much of the story follows her struggles as a woman trying to make it in an overwhelmingly male-dominated field, readers also witness Miriam's adventures in sex and romance. As an avid participant in the sexual revolution, Miriam desires a life geared towards free love. As a result, she finds herself entangled in passionate love affairs with

two men—best friends Phillip and Jackson—whom she dates alternately and sometimes simultaneously. With Phillip, Miriam shares a love rooted in friendship, but with Jackson, her love is all-consuming and passionate. Shortly after their volatile relationship begins, Miriam found herself obsessing over Jackson:

This was what she had always been told would be the true center of her being, the central act of her life. A woman loving a man. Now it had happened. The more she gave herself to her obsession, the more she loved him, the more she felt herself to be in love. The rougher things went, the more pain she felt in her loving, the more obsessive it grew. It was totally new, this sense of being out of control, occupied, taken over. Everything else in her life had been a doing, a deciding, a working, but this was something different. This became the content of living.<sup>67</sup>

The intensity of her feelings for Jackson frightens Miriam, but not necessarily because she fears that her relationship with Jackson obscures her own individuality. Instead, she is more worried that Jackson, who fears commitment, is unable to mutually reciprocate and fulfill her emotional needs. Miriam's fears very much mirrored the kinds of theoretical arguments many radical feminists were making about the inherent inequality that existed within traditional ideals and formulations of romantic love, including the fact that love meant different things for women and for men. For Miriam, a love that was all-consuming was the ideal and she would be willing to concede her professional goals if Jackson felt the same. But, the existing ideals of romantic love made such reciprocity next to impossible.

At one point, Miriam, who has gone back and forth between Jackson and Phillip, proposes that the three of them live together. She loves them both, albeit in varying degrees of intensity and affection, and hopes that her proposed alternative will allow the three to live in a harmonious and loving environment. The three move in together, but

---

<sup>67</sup> Piercy, *Small Changes*, 194-195.

despite her initial desire to live communally with her two lovers and her belief that the lack of a legally binding marriage with either ensures her continued independence, Miriam finds herself torn between the two as they both demand her full attention and refuse to fully recognize her needs for an individual identity within the relationship. She musters the courage to leave them and shortly thereafter becomes involved with and quickly marries her boss, Neil. When Miriam explains her decision to marry Neil to Beth, she declares, “I wanted so badly for some man finally to gamble on me as a woman.” Noting that Jackson (and Phil) had hurt her very badly with their unwillingness to fully commit to her, Miriam indicates that she saw Neil as a “safe” choice who would love her and allow her to love in return “without being charged my soul, without paying in blood.”<sup>68</sup>

But Miriam has misjudged her new husband and the consequences of ideals of romantic love. First damaged by the intense, yet volatile, love of Jackson and Phillip, Miriam’s spirit is squashed further when Neil’s love for her turns out to be controlling and stifling. So that she can better accommodate Neil, Miriam cuts back her hours at a job she loves until she finds herself with no career at all. She bears and cares for his children, cleans his house, and even gives up most of her friendships – all in order to make him happy and ensure his continued love for her. Although she engages in a final act of defiance – helping Beth to run away with her female lover – Miriam, by the end of the novel, has sacrificed everything for a love that proves lackluster and unfulfilling. She has become economically dependent on Neil, fears the impact of a divorce on her

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 332.

children, and “has lost [her] confidence by attrition.”<sup>69</sup> The love meant to reward her for giving up her own identity leads to her undoing.

The final scenes of the novel reveal that Neil is preparing to leave Miriam for a younger, more attractive woman. Beth, on the other hand, seems to be living “happily ever after” in a loving, lesbian relationship. The story actually begins with Beth’s marriage to her high school sweetheart in upstate New York. Before long, Beth, who feels utterly stifled within her marriage, flees from her husband and begins her life anew in Boston. Though she briefly experiments with casual sex, she found sex disentangled from love just as stifling as her marriage had been. Preferring her own company, Beth is swept up in currents of feminist activism.

Most of Beth’s story revolves around her effort to understand who she is an individual, which celibacy enables her to accomplish. She takes pride in her ability to make it on her own and makes an effort to surround herself with positive messages about independence. Pasting affirmative scraps of paper with idioms scrawled on them to the walls of her apartment, Beth begins to explore some of the philosophical and theoretical questions feminists were raising about the implications of romantic love and its consequences for women. In one especially illuminating episode in the book, Miriam takes notice of one of Beth’s notes to herself: “LOVE IS WHAT WOMEN DO INSTEAD OF KNOWING OR FIGHTING OR MAKING OR INVENTING.”<sup>70</sup> While Miriam has trouble understanding Beth’s belief in such a claim, Beth has become

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 516.

<sup>70</sup> French, *The Women’s Room*, 244.

painfully aware of the ways in which ideals of romantic love could muddy women's efforts to express themselves individually.

Beth eventually decides to live in a women's commune and finds that she thrives in a separatist environment. By this point, she has experimented sexually with another woman, but continues to practice celibacy as a means of determining her own needs and interests. Soon after Beth feels secure in who she is as an individual, she meets Wanda — another woman involved in feminism and radical politics. With Wanda, Beth experiences a pure and authentic form of romantic love in which the relationship complements, rather than obscures, her sense of self. Beth's self-imposed and conscious choice of celibacy enables her to know herself well enough so that she can experience a version of same-sex romantic intimacy that was well in-tune with the ideals of liberation. Piercy thus pointed to the value of celibacy and separatism as necessary steps in arriving at viable romantic alternatives to traditional heterosexuality.

Like Piercy's *Small Changes*, Marilyn French's novel *The Women's Room* explored how, amidst the modern women's liberation movement, feminists increasingly sought romantic opportunities outside of the traditional heterosexual romantic ideals.<sup>71</sup> Like Percy, French took care to highlight separatism and lesbianism as viable, albeit sometimes equally problematic, alternatives to heterosexual love. Lesbianism and

---

<sup>71</sup> When *The Women's Room* was republished in the early 1990s, Marilyn French wrote in a new introduction to her "feminist classic" that in the late 1970s, her work had been controversial because she sought to deconstruct many of the literary conventions, which she understood to be "expressions of moral and political laws," that had historically shaped writing by and about women. French confronted two particularly relevant conventions that had shaped the traditional romance plot – 1) that men were central to women's lives, and 2) that women *must* live happily ever after. Often operating hand in hand, these two conventions had persistently shaped women's literature. Even as women increasingly moved into public careers in the twentieth century, writers who told stories about women continued to employ the literary convention that implied "a woman must choose between a career and love-and-marriage." In writing a story about women who pursued lives that defied these social and cultural mores, French sought to move beyond literary tropes that cast women's lives in simplistic terms and towards a portrayal of women that more realistically examined the complexities that shaped their identities. French, *The Women's Room*, ix-x.

separatism are prominently featured in the novel, but the question of whether or not women could be simultaneously independent from and romantically involved with men pervades the story as well. At its very core, *The Women's Room* is the story of Myra—a 1950s suburban housewife who starts life anew as the sexual revolution and modern women's liberation movement erupted in the late 1960s and hopes above all that she will find love with a man who see her as his equal. Myra is the constant in the novel – the story begins with her coming-of-age in the 1940s and follows her through her reluctant decision to marry, her adventures with discontent suburban housewives in the 1950s, and her feminist awakening in the 1960s and 1970s. As a young college student, Myra had resisted the idea of marriage because for women like her (white and middle class), “to choose a husband [was] to choose a life.” She wanted to be the author of her own life, but after an unfortunate incident that tarnishes her reputation, Myra becomes painfully aware of the very limited options available to young women like herself. Upon her reluctant decision to marry at the age of twenty, Myra despaired that “she would live out a half-life, like the rest of women. . . . and wept at her wedding” for the life she had given up.<sup>72</sup>

Although Myra continued to dream that she might one day return to school when her husband, Norm, finished his medical degree, she soon becomes mother to two sons and follows Norm as he climbs the ladder upward to the 1950s American Dream. Although they outwardly conform to the suburban ideal, Myra and her fellow housewife friends are anything but content. Epitomizing “the problem that has no name,” they could have been the very women Betty Friedan wrote about in *The Feminine Mystique*.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>73</sup> In *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan argued that women (white, middle class, suburban women) suffered from “the problem that has no need,” which involved feelings of ennui and lack

Described from Myra's point of view, the other suburban housewives often spent their days in an alcohol-induced haze, frustrated with their husbands' failure to recognize the value of their work as mothers and domestic helpmates. The women, who had thought their sacrifices would be rewarded with love and devotion, found themselves trapped in loveless marriages and the outcomes range from marital infidelity to financial ruin to mental illness.

Eventually, Myra's own marriage falls apart when her husband announces that he is leaving her for another woman. Initially devastated, Myra seizes on the opportunity to reclaim her own life and enrolls in graduate school at Harvard. By this time, the "conformity-driven" 1950s have given way for the radical 1960s, and Myra finds herself drawn into "the movement." Forming bonds with the other women in her graduate program, Myra finds a vocabulary to describe the gender oppression she had experienced throughout her life. Increasingly cognizant of how that oppression had shaped her experience of emotional and sexual intimacy, Myra begins to have new expectations of a romantic partner. For Myra, a pivotal moment occurs in conversation with her new friends Iso, who had long since eschewed heterosexuality in favor of lesbianism, and Val, who was on her way to embracing radical separatism. The women gather to share a meal when they find themselves talking about the meaning of love. Myra, who has just admitted to Val that she often feels lonely and craves the companionship of a man, is surprised to learn that Val is quite skeptical about romantic love when she scoffs, "Love. Being in love. Yuck!" Val believes that love is a waste of time because it is rarely, if ever, lasting. Beyond that, she believes that love was damaging to women because they

---

of fulfillment in domesticity. See chapter three for a more thorough discussion of Friedan's assessment of women's discontent and how it shaped her views on feminism and romantic love. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; repr., New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997).



lost themselves to it. She explains to Myra: “[L]ove is insanity. . . . It is the taking over of a rational and lucid mind by delusion and self-destruction. You lose yourself, you have no power over yourself, you can’t even think straight. That’s the reason I hate it.”<sup>74</sup>

Throughout the first two-thirds of the novel, Val is a free-spirit when it comes to matters of romantic and sexual intimacy. Long-divorced, she and her teenaged daughter had temporarily lived in a commune. Refusing to conform to prevailing ideals of monogamy, Val had grown to prefer casual relationships with men. Though some of her relationships became serious, the men she pursued were typically more emotionally invested than she and she expresses no regrets about abandoning the relationships when they had run their course. In this way, Val represented one of the ways some women sought to utilize ideals of sexual liberation to their advantage in forging more egalitarian heterosexual relationships based on their own needs and desires.

Val becomes increasingly radicalized over the course of the novel, but it is the brutal rape of her teenage daughter that galvanizes her to join the ranks of man-hating separatists. Expressing the views of radical feminist groups, Val grows to believe that all men are irrevocably ensnared in male supremacy. While her friends, like Myra, try to insist that some men are sympathetic to issues of women’s liberation, Val tells them that regardless of individual intent, “the institutions get us all in the end.”<sup>75</sup> Resolved to her new belief that all men were “a bunch of rapists! . . . All men are the enemy,” Val drops out of mainstream society and joins a militant, separatist enclave of feminists in the

---

<sup>74</sup> French, *The Women’s Room*, 242.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

Boston area (a group possibly modeled on Cell 16).<sup>76</sup> Her time with the group is short-lived, however. Soon after Val becomes a militant separatist, she and several of her feminist sisters are massacred by federal agents when they protest against the conviction of a woman who killed her rapist.

Myra, whose story guides the novel, does not become a celibate separatist like Val, but she does re-evaluate her expectations of a romantic partner and begins to see that some of Val's ideas about celibacy and separatism were valid when she faces problems in her relationship with Ben, a fellow scholar ten years her junior. The emotional and sexual desire Myra and Ben share is intense and because he shares her radical political views, Myra believes she has found a partner with whom she can share love without forsaking her own identity. But when Ben is offered a professorship in Africa and assumes that Myra will give up her own career to follow him and have his children, Myra realizes that she is still standing at the same crossroads where she must choose the love of a man or her own career goals. With dismay at Ben's lack of concern for her needs, Myra complains, "you were willing to eradicate me in order to keep me. Ironic. . . . The paradox of what gets called love."<sup>77</sup> When she briefly toys with the possibility of begging Ben to stay with her in Cambridge, Myra hears the ghost of her friend Val scoff, "Hah!"<sup>78</sup> Realizing that Ben would never compromise his own goals in order to maintain their relationship, Myra decides that Ben's love is not worth the cost of her own hopes and dreams. She had been down that path before and her newly forming feminist identity

---

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 426.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 451.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 454.

gave her the strength to hold fast to that identity. Still, Myra is haunted by her decision and wonders whether she made the right choice when she finds herself alone.

As with Miriam in *Small Changes*, Myra's fate in *The Women's Room* did not bode well for feminists who hoped that they could simultaneously have a loving relationship with a man while pursuing their own aspirations and goals. Refusing to give up her academic career in order to follow Ben's career, Myra does reach her goal of becoming a professor. But she walks along the beach by herself every night, painfully aware of her aloneness and despairing that she could not have both Ben's love and her own independence. Though shaped by different generational experiences, both Myra and Miriam found themselves faced with a seemingly impossible decision at the height of the modern women's liberation movement. Myra chose independence and Miriam chose love; however, they both chose one by paying the price with the other. Thus, much like Piercy, French indicated that heterosexual feminists could not have both love and liberation – they had to choose one or the other and often at great expense. When read together, then, these two novels suggest that it might not be possible to reconcile heterosexual love with liberation after all.

In arriving at this conclusion, both Marilyn French and Marge Piercy portray celibacy in a sympathetic light and point to its legitimacy as an alternative to heterosexual intimacy, which was especially significant considering the prevalence of negative caricatures of separatist feminists in popular culture throughout the 1970s.<sup>79</sup> But even

---

<sup>79</sup> Anti-feminist opposition emerged alongside second-wave feminism and intensified with each feminist victory. For overviews of anti-feminism and its relationship to the New Right, see Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002); Marjorie J. Spruill, "Gender and America's Right Turn," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge:

though they both dealt with celibacy and separatism sympathetically, both implied that celibacy was problematic as a permanent solution to the dilemma of romantic intimacy. The celibacy of Piercy's Beth is only useful to the extent that it allows her to understand herself well enough to become open to an intense lesbian relationship. Same-sex love was thus revealed as the most authentic and egalitarian version of sexual and emotional intimacy, whereas celibacy was presented as a helpful stop en route to lesbianism. Meanwhile, French's Val "gets it" that prevailing ideals of romantic love did nothing to benefit women, but her tragic and untimely demise reads as a cautionary tale about the dangers of such extremism. Even if separatism was a legitimate position, mainstream American society was still too intolerant for it to be socially acceptable and safe. In the end, Iso (who is a lesbian) is the only one of French's characters to find happiness in a loving relationship. Both French and Piercy thus cast heterosexual romantic and sexual intimacy within the existing social order as unequivocally at odds with feminist ideals of autonomy and independence. Though lesbian feminism was presented as the most authentic choice, the underlying message was that celibacy and separatism were valid options, especially as transitional phases.

**THE LIMITATIONS OF CELIBACY: SHULAMITH FIRESTONE'S VISION OF A MORE AUTHENTIC LOVE**

In portraying celibacy as an alternative that was most effective as a temporary choice en-route to recognizing same-sex loving relationships as the best way to combine feminist ideals with romance, French and Piercy pointed to limitations of separatism and

---

Harvard University Press, 2008), 71-89; Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant, eds., *Reaction to the Modern Women's Movement*, *Antifeminism in America: A Collection of Readings from the Literature of the Opponents to U.S. Feminism, 1848 to the Present* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997).

celibacy when it came to the realities of most women's lives. The fact of the matter was that most feminists, even if they recognized romantic love as an ideal that helped to bolster patriarchy, still experienced romantic longings and searched for ways to make ideals of love and liberation more compatible. From the beginning, many radical feminists agreed with separatists that romantic love was problematic, but did not believe that it would cease to exist in an egalitarian society. On the contrary, they had argued early on that feminism would help make romantic love more authentic as a form of communication and emotional intimacy shared between equals.

Shulamith Firestone, the founder of several of the earliest radical feminist groups and oft-cited feminist theorist, especially articulated this view. In the fall of 1969, Firestone and Anne Koedt formed New York Radical Feminists with the goal of building a "mass-based radical feminist movement."<sup>80</sup> Both had been involved in the formation of feminist groups earlier: Firestone had participated in the Chicago Westside group before co-founding both the New York Radical Women and Redstockings while Koedt was a member of New York Radical Women and The Feminists. They had also offered important contributions to the growing literature of radical feminist theory, including their co-editorship of *Notes from the Second Year* and *Notes from the Third Year*, which drew together the most influential feminist writings from the formative years of radical feminism. In combining forces to form New York Radical Feminists, Firestone and Koedt hoped to rectify the flaws of other feminist groups, like the Redstockings (Firestone disagreed with the predominant pro-woman line) and The Feminists (Koedt

---

<sup>80</sup> See Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 186.

had left the group because she opposed the quota on married women).<sup>81</sup> They shared separatist's belief that ideals of romantic love were potentially damaging to women. But they disagreed about how feminism would affect those ideals. Unlike the most ardent separatists who thought that feminism would obliterate the need for such ideals, Firestone and Koedt thought that feminism would alter romantic ideals in ways that made them conducive to an egalitarian society.

New York Radical Feminists (like other radical feminist groups) identified male supremacy as the primary source of women's oppression in their manifesto, "Politics of Ego," which Koedt wrote. Using a psychological analysis of male supremacy, Koedt argued that the hierarchical relationship between women and men was political in nature and that it served to bolster men's egos (their "sense of individual self as distinct from others"). Though Koedt described men as responsible for the perpetuation of male supremacy, she also argued that "it is not out of a desire to hurt the woman that he dominates and destroys her, it is out of a need for a sense of power that he necessarily must destroy her ego and make it subservient to his."<sup>82</sup> These dynamics, in which men's ego was boosted at the expense of women's ego, were played out within sexual institutions, including love and marriage. As Koedt explains:

Love, in the context of an oppressive male-female relationship, becomes an emotional cement to justify the dominant-submissive relationship. The man 'loves' the woman who fulfills her submissive ego-boosting role. The woman 'loves' the

---

<sup>81</sup> For an overview of New York Radical Feminists, their structure, and approach to feminism see New York Radical Feminists, "An Introduction to the New York Radical Feminists," Box 23a, Folder 3, Women's Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, passim; Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 111, 310-311; Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 186-189; Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 106-107; Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 201-202.

<sup>82</sup> Anne Koedt, "Politics of the Ego: A Manifesto for N.Y. Radical Feminists," in *Notes from the Second Year Women's Liberation: Major Writings of Radical Feminists*, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York: Radical Feminism, 1970), 125.

man she is submitting to—that is, after all, why she ‘lives for him.’ LOVE, magical and systematically unanalyzed, becomes the emotional rationale for the submission of one ego to the other. And it is deemed every woman’s natural function to love.<sup>83</sup>

This definition of love as the “emotional cement to justify the dominant-submissive relationship” between women and men was not unlike that put forth by Cell 16 and The Feminists. Indeed, Koedt continued to elaborate on her definition of love, noting that radical feminists generally believed that “the popularized version of love has . . . been used politically to cloud and justify an oppressive relationship.” But, whereas Atkinson and The Feminists (and, to some extent, Cell 16) were arguing that romantic love existed *only* as a tool of patriarchy and that it would have no need to exist in a post-feminist world, Koedt expressed a more moderate view of romantic love’s future. In speaking for New York Radical Feminists, she explained “in reality there can be no genuine love until the need to *control* the growth of another is substituted by the love *for* the growth of another.”<sup>84</sup>

Shulamith Firestone elaborated on that middle ground position in her clarion call for a radical feminist revolution, *The Dialectic of Sex*. Firestone was only twenty-five years old when she published *The Dialectic of Sex*. Born in Canada, Firestone eventually moved with her Orthodox Jewish family to St. Louis, Missouri, where she attended Washington University. She transferred to the Art Institute of Chicago and earned a degree in fine arts in 1967. By that time, she was enamored with the emerging women’s liberation movement and became one of the earliest agitators for a separate, feminist movement. Considered a chief architect of radical feminist theory by her contemporaries

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Koedt, “The Politics of Ego,” 125; and New York Radical Feminists, “An Introduction to the New York Radical Feminists.”

and by feminists who succeeded her, Firestone offered one of the clearest assessments of the meaning of romantic love and its relationship to women's oppression.<sup>85</sup>

Amending theories of Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis, Firestone offered her theory on the origins and evolution of the "sex class system" as the basis of all social organization. According to Firestone, "sex class is so deep as to be invisible" and because of its invisibility, earlier feminists had had trouble going beyond identifying sexism in order to correct it. The one exception, she argues, was Simone de Beauvoir, whose "profound work" she deeply admired — so much so that she dedicated her book to "Simone de Beauvoir, who endured." According to Firestone, Beauvoir was the only thinker to have even come close to offering a "definitive analysis" of sex class, though she thought Beauvoir had relied too heavily on existentialism. Like all cultural systems, existentialism was "determined by sex dualism," Firestone argued. Consequently, Firestone countered that rather than linking Otherness to historical circumstances, as Beauvoir had done, "the much simpler and more likely possibility" was "that this fundamental dualism sprang from the sexual division itself."<sup>86</sup>

Thus, Firestone's central argument was that "biology itself — procreation — is at the origin of dualism." In the absence of effective means of birth control throughout much of history, women were beholden to their reproductive capacity. Being at "the

---

<sup>85</sup> For information on Shulamith Firestone's role in the modern women's liberation movement, see "Shulamith Firestone," in *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, <http://www.notablebiographies.com/supp/Supplement-Ca-Fi/Firestone-Shulamith.html>; Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, passim; Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, passim; Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, passim; Alice Echols, "Like a Hurricane: Shulamith Firestone's Wild Ride," *Voice Literary Supplement*, October 1993, 13-14; Evans, *Personal Politics*, passim; Rosen, *The World Split Open*, passim.

<sup>86</sup> Firestone, *Dialectic of Sex*, 3-14, dedication page. On the connection between Firestone and Beauvoir, see also Stevi Jackson, "Love and Romance as Objects of Feminist Knowledge," in *Making Connections: Women's Studies, Women's Movements, Women's Lives*, ed. Mary Kennedy, Cathy Lubelska, and Val Walsh (London: Taylor & Francis, 1993), 39-50.



continual mercy of their biology . . . made them dependent upon males.” With scientific advances and growing access to birth control, the necessary conditions were emerging for an effective feminist revolution. Once technologies of artificial reproduction had truly freed women from the burdens of pregnancy, the work of addressing the deeply engrained social patterns of the sex role system could begin. The revolution would not happen overnight, but within a century Firestone believed a truly egalitarian society would emerge.<sup>87</sup>

Especially central to Firestone’s argument was her assessment of love and romance culture. In her chapter on love, Firestone contended that “love, perhaps even more than childbearing, is the pivot of women’s oppression today.”<sup>88</sup> Like other radical feminists of the era, Firestone insisted that romantic love was about power and that it had profound political implications. She stated: “[I]t is not the process of love itself that is at fault, but its *political*, i.e. unequal *power* context: the who, why, when, and where of it is what makes it now such a holocaust.”<sup>89</sup> Her contention that the circumstances of romantic love, rather than love itself, was the problem was predicated on her belief that “love between two equals would be an enrichment” that combated the isolation individualism

---

<sup>87</sup> Firestone was certainly not alone in arguing that greater access to birth control would help liberate women from expectations of motherhood. Firestone’s emphasis on artificial means of reproduction, however, was off-putting to people both within and outside of the feminist movement and it was that point that is most often cited in analyses of her work. Nevertheless, in arguing that artificial reproduction was a necessary step towards feminist revolution, Firestone offered a sophisticated analysis of patriarchy and the sex roles it fostered while taking into consideration topics like the family, childhood, race, class, and sexuality. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 3-14 and passim.

<sup>88</sup> Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 113. Firestone’s chapter on romantic love also appeared in *Notes From the Second Year*. Shulamith Firestone, “Love,” in *Notes from the Second Year Women’s Liberation: Major Writings of Radical Feminists*, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York: Radical Feminism, 1970), 16-22 and 25-27.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

could generate.<sup>90</sup> But, because of the sex class system and the gender hierarchy it fostered, the “mutual vulnerability” of love between equals was impossible. The result was that “[love] becomes complicated, corrupted, or obstructed by *an unequal balance of power*.”<sup>91</sup>

The idealization of romantic love that served to corrupt the emotion also created different meanings of love for women and for men.<sup>92</sup> Whereas the sex class system led men to fear loss of independence and, hence, made it difficult for them to love, it likewise fostered “clinging” behavior in women. Because of male fear of commitment, women had devised tactics of manipulation, which Firestone said constituted “desperate strategies for survival.”<sup>93</sup> Indeed, because women had to seek their own identity (as well as economic security) in a romantic partner, failure in love threatened her very existence.

Firestone elaborated:

In a male-run society that defines women as an inferior and parasitical class, a woman who does not achieve male approval in some form is doomed. To legitimate her existence, a woman must be *more* than woman, she must continually search for an out from her inferior definition; and men are the only ones in a position to bestow on her this state of grace. But because the woman is rarely allowed to realize herself through activity in the larger (male) society — and when she is, she is seldom granted the recognition she deserves — it becomes easier to try for that recognition of one many than of many; and in fact this is exactly the choice most women make. Thus once more the phenomenon of love, good in itself, is corrupted by its class context: women must have love not only for healthy reasons but actually to validate their existence.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 116-118.

<sup>92</sup> Firestone notes that Beauvoir made a similar argument. See Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, passim.

<sup>93</sup> Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 121-123.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 123-124.

Firestone suggested that emotional security was a valid condition of loving relationships, but that emotional identity and economic security were not. In other words, seeking emotional sustenance was not problematic as long as forging an identity or establishing financial stability were not the sole purposes of romantic love. Women should be able to seek the latter through work and recognition of their own. The problem, then, was that women had no real freedom of choice regarding romantic love.<sup>95</sup>

But Firestone acknowledged the “frightening implications” of the idea that romantic love was so damaging as to warrant its elimination and she hazarded a difficult question: “do we want to get rid of love?”<sup>96</sup> Ti-Grace Atkinson and feminists of her ilk would answer such a question with hearty affirmation, but Firestone was not convinced that radical feminism required the complete abolishment of love. On the contrary, she thought that feminism could help to bring about a more genuine and egalitarian love. Moreover, she thought that women could use their romantic relationships to feminism’s advantage. As she quipped in her book: “a revolutionary in every bedroom cannot fail to shake up the status quo.”<sup>97</sup>

By the late 1960s, Firestone argued, some of the preconditions for free choice were materializing and altering the way romantic love contributed to subordination. Firestone argued that love was becoming much more central in the oppression of women as they gained independence in other ways. Nevertheless, Firestone was adamant in her view that the sexual revolution had done little to truly liberate women and women were still

---

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 36.

severely limited in what they could do professionally.<sup>98</sup> As she argued, “the psychological dependence upon men is created by continuing real economic and social oppression.” But, “in the modern world the economic and social bases of the oppression are no longer *alone* enough to maintain it.”<sup>99</sup> Thus, romanticism (the artifice of love) had become the most powerful tool of women’s oppression, especially in Western cultures where higher rates of industrialization had allowed women some degree of economic autonomy.<sup>100</sup>

Firestone argued that romanticism, or romance culture, along with biological reproduction, was becoming a primary condition that kept women in their place and, thus, warranted elimination. Significantly, Firestone took care to distinguish romance from love. As she explained: “[W]hen we talk about romantic love we mean love corrupted by its power context – the sex class system – into a diseased form of love that then in turn reinforces this sex class system.”<sup>101</sup> Romance culture, then, or ideals of romantic love, was the primary culprit because of its inherent power dynamics. As another feminist expressed it, “the power of love must replace the love of power” in order for romantic

---

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 127-130 and 131-139, 140-152, 153-175. See also Shulamith Firestone, “The Women's Rights Movement in the U.S.: A New View,” in *Notes From the First Year*, ed. New York Radical Women (New York: The New York Radical Women, 1968), <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/>; Shulamith Firestone, “The Jeanette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?,” in *Notes From the First Year*, ed. New York Radical Women (New York: New York Radical Women, 1968), <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/>; Shulamith Firestone, “Women and the Radical Movement,” in *Notes From the First Year*, ed. New York Radical Women (New York: New York Radical Women, 1968), <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/>.

<sup>99</sup> Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 131.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 131-139.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 131.

relationships to become authentic.<sup>102</sup> Such an argument was reminiscent of those made by Cell 16 or *The Feminists*, but Firestone's conclusion was subtly and significantly different in that she did not believe that romantic love would cease to exist in a post-feminist world but rather that it would become more authentic and would include a wider range of choices.

The feminist revolution Firestone envisioned would include economic and cultural change that would enable women (and children) to escape their oppression. Arguing that it was impossible to completely know what post-revolution society would look like, Firestone suggested that traditional marriage and the nuclear family would cease to exist. Once women were freed from the restrictions of motherhood, via artificial reproduction and alternative family structures, they could also enjoy greater freedom of choice in their sexual and intimate relationships. In short, genuine love would replace the artifice of romanticism. Some people might continue to choose long-term, monogamous, and heterosexual relationships while others could freely embrace options ranging from celibacy to polyamory.<sup>103</sup> The idea that feminism would help to liberate love from its association with hierarchical and patriarchal institutions was certainly a centerpiece of Firestone's theory of radical feminism. Indeed, the final thought she left with her readers at the conclusion of *The Dialectic of Sex* was that a radical feminist revolution would "[allow] love to flow unimpeded."<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> Wilma Scott Heide, "Feminism Means that She is Risen to Redefine and Reassign Power for Life," April 2, 1973, Box 2, Folder 6, Women's Liberation Collection, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

<sup>103</sup> Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 202-213.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 216. Several years later, Firestone submitted a grant proposal for a second major book project, *Declaration of Revolutionary Aesthetics*, that would address "the androgynous cosmic consciousness towards which we are now rapidly evolving. She never completed that book and fell off the

## CONCLUSION

The existence of separatists who advocated celibacy and argued that romantic love would cease to exist in a post-feminist world gave credence to anti-feminist arguments that second-wave feminists espoused anti-man rhetoric and values that were against love. To be sure, there *were* feminists who thought that romantic love was nothing but an artificial product of social conditioning that taught women to seek all fulfillment and identity in relationship to men. Self-described militant separatists like Valerie Solanas and Ti-Grace Atkinson as well as groups like Cell 16 and The Feminists thought that romance was a crutch of patriarchy that made women sexually, emotionally, and financially dependent upon men. Because platonic friendship between equals was the truest form of love in their estimation, celibacy and separatism were the best options for feminist women.

But whether or not the theoretical basis for advocating celibacy as a permanent solution to the problem of romantic love could adequately address the realities of most women's lives was less clear. Whether it was a long-term or short-term choice, celibacy and separatism as an expression of personal politics was not a majority perspective. It is difficult to gauge the extent to which advocates of celibacy practiced what they preached, but if we take their public writings at face value, they ostensibly put their theories into practice. But, increasingly in the early 1970s, many of the feminists who had advocated celibacy shifted their focus to political lesbian feminism. While the reasons for this shift

---

radar in terms of feminist and political involvement after 1970. In 1998, she published a collection of short stories but has otherwise remained out of the public eye. Shulamith Firestone, "Declaration of Revolutionary Aesthetics," undated, Box 190, Folder 2, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass; and Shulamith Firestone, *Airless Spaces* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1998).

are many and complex, it seemed that fewer and fewer feminists were willing to concede defeat when it came to matters of the heart. Rather than getting rid of love, the vast majority of second-wave feminists sought viable alternatives to the traditional ideals of romantic love that rendered women secondary in their search for a new kind of romantic love that was egalitarian in its authenticity.

## Chapter Two

### “Real Love, Real Solidarity, Real Primacy”<sup>1</sup> The Theories and Realities of Political Lesbianism and Women Loving Women

In May 1970, seventeen women wearing hand-dyed purple t-shirts with “Lavender Menace” emblazoned across their chests interrupted the Second Congress to Unite Women in New York. The women behind the “Lavender Menace zap action,” as they called it, had reached a breaking point. The year before, Betty Friedan had famously tried to purge the National Organization for Women (NOW) of lesbians out of fear that the association of lesbianism with feminism would damage the quest for gender equality. Rita Mae Brown, a lesbian who edited the New York-NOW newsletter, already felt marginalized within the organization and was prompted by the purge to leave in search of other lesbians involved with women’s liberation and the burgeoning gay liberation movement. Brown found ready cohorts, including Cynthia Funk, Martha Shelley, March Hoffman (Artemis March), and Karla Jay. Together they began a new consciousness-raising group for lesbians. A few months later, journalist Susan Brownmiller tried to humorously dismiss Friedan’s attempted purge by saying that lesbians were more like a “lavender herring” than a menace. The fledgling group of lesbian feminists interpreted her remark as a slight against them rather than Friedan and immediately decided to channel their outrage into decisive action. When they seized control of the Second

---

<sup>1</sup> Radicalesbians, “The Woman-Identified Woman,” in *Notes From the Third Year: Women's Liberation*, ed. Anne Koedt and Shulamith Firestone (New York: Notes From the Third Year, 1971), 82.



Congress, dozens of other women were moved to stand in solidarity with them.

Consciousness-raising sessions about heterosexism and the validity of lesbianism feminism followed.<sup>2</sup>

As part of the zap action, the Radicalesbians (the name the Lavender Menace group adopted) circulated mimeographed copies of their manifesto, “The Woman Identified Woman.” One of the best-known documents of the women’s liberation, the manifesto explained: “A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion.”<sup>3</sup> Pointing to the double oppression of lesbians as women and as people whose sexuality was marginalized, Radicalesbians suggested that lesbians were uniquely situated to cast-off restrictive gender roles. Lesbians were much less likely to have defined themselves in relationship to men and they were consequently more independent by default. For this reason, lesbians were seen as especially threatening to the existing social order and lesbian-baiting was an increasingly popular means of discrediting women who sought equality with men.<sup>4</sup>

As Radicalesbians explained, the primary purpose of “affixing the label lesbian . . . to any situation of real love, real solidarity, real primacy among women” was meant to divide feminists and ensure that they would maintain primary attachments to men and,

---

<sup>2</sup> See Rita Mae Brown, *Rita Will: Memoirs of a Literary Rabble-Rouser* (New York: Bantam Books, 1997), 235-238; Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Delta Trade paperbacks, 1999), 94-100; Susan Brownmiller, “‘Sisterhood is Powerful’: A Member of the Women’s Liberation Movement Explains What It’s All About,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 15, 1970; Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 213-216; Karla Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace: A Memoir of Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 138-144.

<sup>3</sup> Radicalesbians, “The Woman-Identified Woman,” 81.

<sup>4</sup> For useful overviews of lesbian-baiting and the gay/straight split in the movement, see Brownmiller, *In Our Time*; Echols, *Daring to be Bad*; Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century’s End* (New York: Free Press, 2003); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001).

hence, preserve male supremacy.<sup>5</sup> To counter such efforts to undermine feminism, Radicalesbians sought to divorce lesbianism from its primary definition as a sexual act or preference by reframing it as a political identity. Within this framework, women could identify as lesbian without actually becoming sexually intimate with other women. For Radicalesbians, lesbianism was not only a political identity, it was a *necessary* political identity because they believed liberation was only possible if feminists were “available and supportive to one another, give [their] commitment and [their] love, give the emotional support necessary to sustain [the] movement.” “Our energies must flow toward our sisters,” they explained, “not backward toward our oppressors.”<sup>6</sup> Only if women became “woman-identified” rather than “male-identified” could they effectively challenge male supremacy in order to create an egalitarian society.

For some, the Lavender Menace zap action at the Second Congress to Unite Women was unnecessarily divisive. For others it was a cathartic experience that helped release tensions that had been brewing between gay and straight feminists for months. Citing pervasive homophobia and a general preoccupation with man-woman relationships in their consciousness-raising groups, many lesbians began to see the women’s liberation movement as a hostile environment with little concern for their unique oppression as women who loved women. But if they felt that they did not necessarily fit in with feminist groups, they were experiencing a similar kind of isolation within the gay liberation movement that had escalated after the Stonewall Inn riots of summer 1969. Like the women who came to second-wave feminism out of the civil rights movement

---

<sup>5</sup> Radicalesbians, “The Woman-Identified Woman,” 82.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

and the student left, a number of lesbians working within the gay liberation movement felt like secondary citizens within the activist ranks. Increasingly, lesbians participating in one or both movements began to believe it was necessary to create an inclusive space within the boundaries of feminism that was more in tune with the needs and concerns of lesbians. The two liberation movements were on a collision course that would produce a vibrant lesbian feminism that blended the concerns of both movements in the 1970s.

The Radicalesbians' *Lavender Menace* zap and "The Woman Identified Woman" worked together to announce the decisive arrival of lesbian feminism, specifically political lesbianism on the scene. Together, they offer a starting point for understanding the role of lesbian feminism both within the second wave and the gay liberation movement. The idea of political lesbianism was one that a number of individuals and feminist groups embraced during the 1970s. At the same time, while some feminists embraced lesbianism as a political identity, feminism helped validate women who had identified as lesbian all long. Lesbians often described themselves as the vanguard of the movement and recited the lesbian feminist maxim, usually attributed to Ti-Grace Atkinson, that "feminism was the theory, lesbianism was the practice."<sup>7</sup>

An examination of lesbian feminist rhetoric during the 1970s reveals the complicated relationship of lesbianism to feminism. Two primary arguments fueled lesbian feminism: First, the idea that identifying politically as lesbian was a prerequisite for feminists who sought liberation; and, second, the belief that love between women offered feminists the best (perhaps only) opportunity to experience romantic love that was authentic and equal. These two threads were especially apparent in the public and

---

<sup>7</sup> Anne Koedt, "Lesbianism and Feminism," in *Notes From the Third Year: Women's Liberation*, ed. Anne Koedt and Shulamith Firestone (New York: Notes From the Third Year, 1971), 84.

private struggles of two leading feminist figures—Rita Mae Brown and Kate Millett—in forging loving relationships with other women. Case studies of their experiences demonstrate how feminists who pursued loving relationships with other women grappled with the problem of romantic love and the extent to which love between women “solved” the problem of romantic love and liberation.

### **THE EMERGENCE OF LESBIAN FEMINISM**

Prior to 1970, arguments in favor of lesbian feminism were much more muted because an air of homophobia permeated both mainstream American culture and leftist groups involved in social justice activism in the 1960s. Latent homophobia in America was rooted in the drawing of clear demarcations between heterosexuality and homosexuality in the late nineteenth century. Early in the nineteenth century, sexuality and homosocial bonding was much more fluid. But with the creation of a dichotomy between hetero- and homosexuality, gay subcultures began to emerge, especially in urban areas. For women specifically, same-sex desire often flourished under the guise of close “romantic” or “companionate” friendships with one another, especially in the case of women who remained unmarried during the early twentieth century. But, the homophobia of the 1960s and 1970s was shaped by the early Cold War climate of post-World War II American society and culture. Pervasive fear of the Communist menace prompted Cold War crusaders, like Senator Joseph McCarthy, to argue that anything that went against the “American way of life” was symptomatic of Communist infiltration. This mentality and the subsequent fear of blackmail and blacklisting had the double effect of pushing women back into the home (white middle-class women, at least) and pushing gays and

lesbians even further underground during the late 1940s and 1950s. The constant threat of persecution generally forced gay and lesbian Americans to remain closeted, but the existence of thriving (usually urban) subcultures throughout the early Cold War years laid a foundation for gay rights activism in later decades.<sup>8</sup>

When second-wave feminism began to emerge within the broader context of civil rights activism in the early 1960s, undercurrents of homophobia permeated feminist circles. The women who led the charge in liberal feminist efforts to bring women into mainstream society on equal footing with men, such as Betty Friedan and the National Organization of Women, were acutely aware that charges of lesbianism could damage their fledgling movement. In *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), for instance, Friedan wrote about how earlier generations of feminists were cast as man-haters and lesbians to their detriment.<sup>9</sup> Other women participating in early liberal feminist activism had likewise witnessed (and sometimes experienced) the devastating consequences of gay-baiting as part and parcel of early Cold War paranoia.<sup>10</sup> Given this context, it was not surprising that Betty Friedan sought to purge NOW of the Lavender Menace. Like many people of the time, she struggled with homophobia. But, she also recognized the political

---

<sup>8</sup> See John D. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); John D. D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1981); Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 82-102 and passim.

<sup>10</sup> See D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*; D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*; Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*.

expediency of reassuring the general public that feminism and lesbianism were not equivalent.<sup>11</sup>

The underlying homophobia—and fear that suspicion of homosexuality could tarnish the movement—was one thing that liberal feminists of Friedan’s generation shared with the generally younger women who began to articulate theories of radical feminism by the end of the decade. The “free love” spirit that many baby boomers embraced during the 1960s was generally restricted to heterosexual behavior. With its emphasis on greater access to and more effective forms of birth control, the sexual revolution had more to do with removing taboos regarding sex between women and men outside of marriage than with challenging heterosexism more broadly.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the earliest articulations of radical feminism increasingly criticized the sexual revolution as a liberating force for women. With the primary focus on the perseverance of sexual double standards, a more pointed critique of heterosexuality emerged.

One of the earliest statements of radical feminism, “Toward a Female Liberation Movement” by Beverly Jones and Judith Brown, especially illuminated and drew attention to the limitations of heterosexuality and its related institutions—especially marriage. Written in June 1968, the “Florida Paper” (as it was called after its authors’ roots in Gainesville), reflected the growing discontent of radical women working within

---

<sup>11</sup> The role of Betty Friedan’s homophobia in shaping her response to the problem of romantic love is explored in detail in chapter three.

<sup>12</sup> See David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution, An Unfettered History*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 2000); Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Jane Gerhard, *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).

the New Left and made a case for a separate feminist movement committed to eradicating patriarchy. Arguing that individual men (and not just male supremacy) oppressed women, Jones and Brown were among the first feminists to argue that women might need to separate from men both politically and personally in order to become autonomous.<sup>13</sup>

Jones and Brown's argument that women needed to sever all ties with men derived from their belief that marriage was an oppressive institution that taught women to seek all fulfillment and identity in romantic relationship to men. Women needed to reject marriage, they argued, and they also needed to confront problematic notions of romance:

[Women] must stop thinking in terms of 'the grand affair,' of the love which overcomes, or substitutes for, everything else, of the perfect moment, the perfect relationship, the perfect marriage. In other words, they must reject romanticism. Romance, like the rabbit of the dog track, is the illusive, fake, and never-attained reward which for the benefit and amusement of our masters keeps us running and thinking in safe circles.<sup>14</sup>

Women could undo social conditioning to follow prevailing cultural norms regarding marriage, sex, and romance by living in all-female communes and experimenting with celibacy.<sup>15</sup> Brown and Jones were not alone in advocating temporary celibacy and separatism as useful choices for feminists. Some of the other radical feminists agreed that temporarily separating from men could help feminists form the sense of autonomy necessary for egalitarian romantic relationships after the feminist revolution. Some of the most militant groups, like Cell 16 and The Feminists, even suggested that celibacy and separatism might be permanent solutions to the problem of

---

<sup>13</sup> Beverly Jones and Judith Brown, "Toward a Female Liberation Movement," in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 62-65.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-49.

romantic love. If women were truly autonomous there would no longer be any need for romantic love, which justified their dependence on men.<sup>16</sup>

Jones and Brown, however, went a step further by hinting that lesbianism might become a potential strategic choice for women in pursuit of liberation. Other feminists who advocated separatism (temporary or otherwise) in the late 1960s dismissed lesbianism because they thought *all* aspects of sexuality reduced women to sexual objects. As Roxanne Dunbar of Cell 16 put it, the goal was to get women out of bed period.<sup>17</sup> But, Jones and Brown suggested that “political content will not suffice to fill the need every human has for” domestic comforts. Arguing that “it would be equally wrong to turn female communes into anything less than a tentative experiment with a new domestic arrangement,” their unspoken implication was that lesbianism could offer women experience with “non-elitist, non-colonial love.” But within this framework, lesbianism was only portrayed as a temporary alternative that would help feminists achieve the broader goal of “coexistence with men in the future” that was “all the more equal and all the more human.”<sup>18</sup>

By suggesting that lesbianism was a useful, albeit temporary, alternative to heterosexual romance, Brown and Jones fully confronted the existence of widespread homophobia as one reason radical feminists shied away from the notion. As Brown explained, few radicals were thinking about same-sex alternatives when they “clamor[ed] for more meaningful relationships, more self-expression, more affection, and less

---

<sup>16</sup> Feminist ideas regarding celibacy and separatism are analyzed in chapter one.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Outlaw Woman: A Memoir of the War Years, 1960-1975* (San Francisco : City Lights, 2001), 265; Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 165.

<sup>18</sup> Jones and Brown, “Toward a Female Liberation Movement,” 51.



inhibition in our social styles.”<sup>19</sup> Homophobia and the marginalization of same-sex relationships thus had the potential to become a powerful tool with which “the male order can pull [women] back in tow” and that also ensured women’s continued “absolutely loyalty to [men].”<sup>20</sup> Their assessment was spot on. Almost immediately after the national media took notice of the women’s liberation movement, efforts to conflate lesbianism and feminism became a common tactic used to discredit and demonize feminists. Throughout the 1970s, lesbian-baiting was a recurrent theme in attacks against feminism.<sup>21</sup> Having anticipated the potential of this tactic to deter women from fully committing to the women’s liberation movement, Jones and Brown saw the importance of a more inclusive stance on homosexuality as a means of weakening the assault.

By the time Radicalesbians infiltrated the Second Congress to Unite Women, lesbians within the movement were growing acutely aware that many of their straight sisters were excessively worried that people might think they were lesbians. In addition to that fear, a common problem was that many heterosexual women participating in the burgeoning movement simply assumed that everyone else was straight, too. The atmosphere of assumed heteronormativity meant that consciousness-raising sessions often focused almost exclusively on sexual and romantic relationships with men.

Lesbians in feminist groups thus felt alienated, feared the consequences of coming, out

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>21</sup> For overviews of anti-feminist opposition to the women’s liberation movement, including the tactic of lesbian-baiting, see Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant, eds., *Reaction to the Modern Women's Movement*, Antifeminism in America: A Collection of Readings from the Literature of the Opponents to U.S. Feminism, 1848 to the Present (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997); Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991).

and began to wonder if the emergent gay liberation might be more sympathetic to their situation.<sup>22</sup>

During the summer of 1969, the spirit of collective social justice for gays and lesbians had been decisively provoked to action during the police raid and subsequent riots at the Stonewall Inn. Shortly thereafter, cries for “Gay Power!” joined the cacophonous demands for Black Power, Brown Power, Red Power, Gray Power, and Woman Power.<sup>23</sup> Generally understood as a decisive turning point in the struggle for gay rights, Stonewall led a number of existing gay and lesbian groups to take on a more activist stance. The Daughters of Bilitis, the first official lesbian rights group that formed as a social organization in 1955, for example, became more politically oriented. New gay rights groups, most notably the Gay Liberation Front (founded just after the riots), likewise took to the streets. Challenging the pervasive homophobia of the early Cold War era, these groups endeavored to bring gay and lesbian subculture above ground in search of toleration and acceptance.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> See Brown, *Rita Will*, passim; Vivian Gornick, “Lesbians & Women's Lib: 'In Any Terms She Shall Choose,’” *Village Voice*, March 18, 1971, 5 and 8; and Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace*, 66 and passim; Brown, *Rita Will*, passim.

<sup>23</sup> For overviews of social justice activism in the 1960s and 1970s, see Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America From Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Beth Bailey and David Farber, eds., *America in the Seventies* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); Alexander Bloom, ed., *Long Time Gone: Sixties America Then and Now* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Peter N. Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: America in the 1970's* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990); David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994); Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005); Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> See D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*; D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*; Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*.

The movements for gay and women's liberation were kindred spirits in that they both openly confronted patriarchy and its privileging of heterosexual men. Similarly concerned with the consequences of a heterosexist society, lesbians saw gay men as appropriate allies in a number of ways. Martha Shelley articulated the potential for an alliance between gay men and women in the first issue of *Gay Flames Pamphlet*, the underground publication of the Gay Liberation Front. "The really important thing about being gay," Shelley argued, "is that you are forced to notice how much sex-role differentiation is pure artifice." Asking "Is love possible between heterosexuals?" Shelley suggested that same-sex relationships were more likely to be free from oppressive ideals of sex roles and, thus, more mutual.<sup>25</sup>

Such a perspective was not exclusive to women in the gay rights movement. A number of gay men participating in the gay liberation movement likewise pointed to the damage socially constructed sex roles inflicted upon men. One group of gay men, who called themselves "Revolutionary Effeminists," argued in 1973 that men had "a stake in the destruction of patriarchy." Like some of the more militant feminist groups, the Revolutionary Effeminists argued that patriarchal ideals of masculinity were damaging to everyone and they envisioned a new social order with neutral, or androgynous, gender roles.<sup>26</sup> One member of the group, Steve Dansky, had argued earlier in 1970 that male homosexuality was the "first step in the process of 'de-manning,'" and re-defining new

---

<sup>25</sup> Martha Shelley, "Gay is Good," *Gay Flames Pamphlet*, no. 1, Carton 2, Folder 59, Charlotte Bunch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

<sup>26</sup> Steve Dansky, John Knoebel, and Kenneth Pitchford, "Principles of Revolutionary Effeminism" (Templar Press, 1973), Box 36, Folder 623, Noel Phyllis Birkby Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Jeanne Cordova, "Radical Feminism? Dyke Separatism?," in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 359.

ideals of manhood that allowed men fuller access to a range of emotions. According to Dansky, straight men's homophobia and their abuse of women stemmed from their inability to express love for one another.<sup>27</sup>

Lesbians participating in the gay liberation movement increasingly felt marginalized by gay men in activist circles. The irony of this situation was not entirely lost on gay male activists. Steve Dansky, who advocated for the "de-manning" of straight men via homosexual relationships, for instance, bemoaned the fact that many gay men seemed to be mimicking hierarchies of male supremacy in relationship to their lesbian allies. Such behavior, he argued was "counter-revolutionary" and hugely problematic for the gay liberation movement.<sup>28</sup>

Dansky's assessment of the sexist behavior on the part of gay men came on the coattails of the Lavender Menace zap action and it was one that many lesbian feminists shared.<sup>29</sup> Determined to fight their marginalization within both movements, lesbian feminists carved out a decisive space for themselves arguing that there was a clear and necessary connection between women loving women and the goal of liberation. Over the next several years, myriad collectives and individuals grappled with the theory and practice of lesbian feminism, often sharing their ideas and struggles via mimeographed pamphlets and newsletters, official group journals, anthologies, and widely published

---

<sup>27</sup> Steve Dansky, *The Women's Page*, no. 1 (October 1970), Box OS3, Kate Millett Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>29</sup> See "Lesbians Uniting" (Buffalo, New York), Carton 2, Folder 60, Charlotte Bunch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University; Del Martin, "A Kiss on the Mouth," in *Lesbians Speak Out*, ed. Women's Press Collective (San Francisco, 1970), 43-46, Carton 2, Folder 68, Charlotte Bunch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University; Gay Women's Liberation, "Statement of Gay Women's Liberation," in *Lesbians Speak Out*, ed. Women's Press Collective (San Francisco, 1970), 47-48, Carton 2, Folder 68, Charlotte Bunch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University; Brown, *Rita Will*; Brownmiller, *In Our Time*; Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace*.

novels. Like all versions of feminism, there was never a monolithic lesbian feminist stance; however, lesbian feminists public and personal rhetoric on the subject generally adhered to one or both of two principles: lesbianism was politically necessary and loving women was the best route to authentic, mutual love.

### **THE IDEOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS OF POLITICAL LESBIANISM**

In “The Woman-Identified Woman,” Radicalesbians argued that “as long as the label ‘dyke’ can be used to frighten women into a less militant stand,” women would be unable to free themselves from male supremacy. One of their primary goals was to get women to ally themselves politically with other women, regardless of sexual preference, which would help invalidate lesbian-baiting by shifting attention away from the definition of lesbianism as a sexual behavior. Arguing that “lesbianism, like male homosexuality, [was] a category of behavior possible only in a sexist society characterized by rigid sex roles and dominated by male supremacy,” Radicalesbians suggested that in an egalitarian society there would be fluidity, rather than categories, of sexuality.<sup>30</sup> Karla Jay, a founding member of Radicalesbians, would later argue that this effort to “de-sexualize” lesbianism (including the decision to push the term “woman-identified woman” rather than lesbian) was a “tragic error” in that it allowed women to identify politically as lesbian without truly embracing the idea of sexual and romantic love between women.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the idea that women could identify politically as lesbian without actually having sex with or romantically loving women became a popular stance

---

<sup>30</sup> Radicalesbians, “The Woman-Identified Woman,” 82-83.

<sup>31</sup> Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace*, 141.

during the early 1970s. According to the Gay Revolution Party, for instance, “politicalesbians” were women who gave “their full commitment . . . to women and the movement” but “[did] not have sexual relations with their sisters.” Another variety of politicalesbian, they argued, might show interest in having a “Lesbian Experience” or identified as bisexual, but were not fully dedicated to lesbianism.<sup>32</sup> Over the course of the 1970s, tensions between “political” and “authentic” lesbians were important in shaping lesbian feminist thought and experience.

Ti-Grace Atkinson, who had argued that romantic love would cease to exist in an egalitarian society, embraced the idea of political lesbianism during the early 1970s. Atkinson had taken a decisive stance regarding issues of heterosexual intimacy at the helm of *The Feminists* in the late 1960s.<sup>33</sup> Because she believed that romantic love was purely a construction of patriarchal society, Atkinson was not concerned with the potential for women to cultivate romantic relationships with one another. Instead, she envisioned a post-feminist world devoid of romantic (though not platonic) love. But in January 1970, around the same time *Radicalesbians* was forming as a distinctive lesbian feminist group, Atkinson began to see the merits of connecting lesbianism and feminism. When speaking to an all-female audience at Juniata College in Pennsylvania, Atkinson explained that she had been ruminating about the political ramifications of those connections for two years. At that point, Atkinson argued that lesbianism was ultimately a “toss-up” for feminists. While its merit was that “lesbians have the mutual advantages

---

<sup>32</sup> Gay Revolution Party, “Realesbians, Politicalesbians, and the Women's Liberation Movement,” *Ecstasy: Journal of the Gay Revolution Party* (circa 1970): 9-10 and 15-16, Box 36, Folder 619, Noel Phyllis Birkby Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>33</sup> Ti-Grace Atkinson’s role in *The Feminists* is explored in chapter one.

of greater self-love” because they were not entangled in relationships with men, lesbianism did little to dissolve the sex-class system, which was the basis of women’s oppression.<sup>34</sup>

But within less than a year, Atkinson abandoned the middle ground and wholeheartedly embraced the idea of political lesbianism. Following her participation in a December 1970 press conference (held to express solidarity with Kate Millett and lesbians in the movement following *Time* magazine’s public “outing” of Millett’s bisexuality), Atkinson wrote an essay intended for the *New York Times*.<sup>35</sup> Though not published until its inclusion in Atkinson’s anthology, *Amazon Odyssey* in 1973, Atkinson argued that “commitment, by choice, full-time, of one woman to others of her class” was, by definition, lesbianism. While she insisted that women who continued to have sexual relationships with men were excluded from political lesbianism, women who did not have sex with women but remained celibate could be “‘lesbians’ in the political sense.”<sup>36</sup> Atkinson firmly positioned herself within the latter category, sometimes taking care to clarify that she had not engaged in sexual relationships with women (and claimed that she no longer had sex with men, either), but that she identified as lesbian politically nonetheless.<sup>37</sup> As another young woman who practiced celibacy explained: a woman who

---

<sup>34</sup> Ti-Grace Atkinson, “Lesbianism and Feminism: Justice for Women as 'Unnatural',” in *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Links Books, 1974), 87-88.

<sup>35</sup> In *Amazon Odyssey*, Ti-Grace Atkinson notes that the *New York Times* did not publish the essay. Atkinson, “Lesbianism and Feminism,” 131n.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 132. In a presentation during the dedication of the Lesbian Center for the Daughters of Bilitis in NYC, Atkinson presented elaborate schematic charts regarding the strategy and tactics of lesbianism. See Ti-Grace Atkinson, “Strategy and Tactics: A Presentation of Political Lesbianism,” in *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Links Books, 1974), 135-189.

<sup>37</sup> See Judith Martin, “Ti-Grace, the Church: With Signs Reading 'Heretic',” *Washington Post*, March 12, 1971, sec. B, Box 4, Folder 1, Women's Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. “Ti-Grace, the Church,” Atkinson frequently claimed that she would not

was fully committed to feminism was politically lesbian “as long as [they] don’t give [their] energy to the pricks.”<sup>38</sup>

Among the most famous political lesbian feminist groups was The Furies, a Washington D.C. area lesbian collective that formed in 1971 and published an eponymous newsletter from January 1972 through the summer of 1973. The group began in May 1971 with ten women, who initially called themselves “Those Women” and decided to live communally as part of their endeavor to fully dedicate themselves to the project of lesbian feminism. Charlotte Bunch, Joan Biren, and Ginny Berson were among the original members, as well as Rita Mae Brown, who had relocated from New York City shortly after Radicalesbians dissolved, though accounts of her level of involvement vary.<sup>39</sup> Beleaguered from the beginning by class divisions and the challenges of establishing a collective identity between members with big personalities, the group disbanded within a year. Several members kept the newspaper running for a time, but that

---

associate with men; however, a member of The Feminists interviewed for Susan Brownmiller’s *In Our Time*, recalled an instance when Atkinson reportedly bragged about sleeping with a famous man. Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, 68.

<sup>38</sup> Margie Reed, “Celibacy--One Woman's Choice,” *The Lesbian Feminist* (January 1979): 7, Carton 2, Folder 66, Charlotte Bunch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

<sup>39</sup> In Rita Mae Brown’s accounts of The Furies, she describes herself as a founding member of the group and says that she played a central role though she did not remain part of the collective for long. A letter to Charlotte Bunch written during the mid-1970s, however, suggests that Brown had initially tried to distance herself from the group and changed her tune when the group became more famous. Letter to Charlotte Bunch, June 3, 1974, Carton 4, Folder 115, Charlotte Bunch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. See also Rita Mae Brown, “Reflections of a Lavender Menace,” *Ms.*, August 1995; Rita Mae Brown, “Responses to questions from Pat Hansen regarding The Furies,” undated, Box 107, “Folder One, Interviews with RMB, Includes Correspondence 1981-2000, n.d.,” Papers of Rita Mae Brown, Accession #12019, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA; Rita Mae Brown, “Responses for Interview About The Furies for The Washington Blade,” 1995, Box 107, “Folder 2, Interviews with RMB, Includes Correspondence 1981-2000, n.d.,” Papers of Rita Mae Brown, Accession #12019, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA; Rita Mae Brown, interview by Paul Cain, Transcript, October 1995, Box 108, “Interview with RMB Conducted by Paul D. Cain, 1995 Oct,” Papers of Rita Mae Brown, Accession #12019, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.



too expired by the summer of 1973. Though the group was not necessarily representative of lesbian feminism as it was evolving around the nation,<sup>40</sup> The Furies drew much national attention to the ideology of political lesbianism. Arguing that becoming a lesbian was the only way a woman could demonstrate her full commitment to feminism, The Furies pushed the ideology of political lesbianism to its fullest limits.<sup>41</sup>

Drawing on the Radicalesbians and other early iterations of lesbian feminist theory, The Furies made sure that the first issue of their newspaper outlined the potential of homophobia and lesbian-baiting to divide the women's liberation movement. In her essay, "Lesbians in Revolt," Charlotte Bunch explained that fear of lesbianism ran so deep because it "threaten[ed] male supremacy at its core."<sup>42</sup> Borrowing directly from Radicalesbians' manifesto, Bunch argued that lesbians were "woman-identified women" who had no need for men because they relied solely on one another for "political, emotional, physical, and economic support." Becoming (or coming out as) a lesbian was

---

<sup>40</sup> In the first issue of *The Furies*, The Furies drew attention to other lesbian feminist groups forming in the Ohio, Philadelphia, Denver, Boston, San Lorenzo, San Francisco, and Seattle. "What's Going On?," *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1 (January 1972): 15.

<sup>41</sup> The Furies frequently covered the evolution of their collective in the pages of their newspaper. See Ginny Berson, *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1 (January 1972): 1; Nancy Myron, "Emotionalism -- Downward Spiral," *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 2 (February 1972): 11; Ginny Berson, "Only by Association," *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1, no. 5 (July 1972): 5-6; Coletta Reid, "Details . . .," *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1, no. 5 (July 1972): 7; "To Our Readers," *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1, no. 7 (Fall 1972): 2; Lee Schwing and Helaine Harris, "Building Feminist Institutions," *The Furies* Final Issue: 2. See also, Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 228-238; Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch, eds., *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement* (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975), 9-13. In addition, the personal papers of Charlotte Bunch and Rita Mae Brown contain extensive information on The Furies. See Charlotte Bunch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.; and Papers of Rita Mae Brown, Accession #12019, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>42</sup> Charlotte Bunch, "Lesbians in Revolt: Male Supremacy Quakes and Quivers," *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1 (January 1972): 8 (emphasis original). A very similar version of this essay (co-authored by Charlotte Bunch and Rita Mae Brown) appeared later in *Motive's* special issue on lesbianism. The issue, which was also the magazine's final issue, was edited by members of The Furies. See Joan E. Biren et al., "Editorial: Motive Comes Out!," *Motive* (1972): 1; Charlotte Bunch and Rita Mae Brown, "What Every Lesbian Should Know," *Motive* (1972): 4-8.

a political (rather than sexual) choice because *heterosexual* relationships were political in terms of power and domination. In rejecting the skewed power dynamics in heterosexual relationships, lesbians made a political choice that directly defied the system of male supremacy.<sup>43</sup> As Coletta Reid elaborated in a later piece for *The Furies*, the ways in which heterosexuality bolstered an imbalance of power in men's favor made it imperative for lesbian feminists to separate from the straight-dominated women's liberation movement and to convince straight women to abandon heterosexuality in favor of lesbianism.<sup>44</sup> In addition to placing women in subordinate relationship to men, heterosexuality was damaging because it divided women by placing them in direct competition with one another for men's attention and required that women put men first. Only in fully committing themselves to other women could feminists effectively fight against and dismantle male supremacy.<sup>45</sup>

Though *The Furies* advocated full separatism from men, Rita Mae Brown used the newspaper on one occasion to debunk the myth that lesbian separatism was about man-hating. "Hate," Brown wrote, "[was] love turned inside out." Thus, "the wildest man haters [were] heterosexual" because it was straight women, not lesbians, who continued to seek love and fulfillment in relationship to men. Women who were disappointed that men failed to meet their expectations were infinitely more likely to feel animosity towards men than lesbians. Straight women's hatred—"a negative force"—propelled them towards feminism, whereas lesbians were motivated by the "positive force" of

---

<sup>43</sup> Bunch, "Lesbians in Revolt," 8. See also Charlotte Bunch, "Perseverance Furthers: Separatism and Our Future," *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1, no. 7 (Fall 1972): 3-5.

<sup>44</sup> Coletta Reid, "Ideology: Guide to Action," *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1, no. 3 (April 1972): 6.

<sup>45</sup> Bunch, "Lesbians in Revolt," 9.

“loving women.” Within this framework of “supreme irony,” Brown argued that lesbians were the only women actually capable of liking men as people. If straight women wanted to have any real chance at establishing viable relationships—romantic or otherwise—with men, then, it was necessary for them to become lesbians, at least for the duration of the movement.<sup>46</sup>

Brown’s essay on man-hating, as well as a piece by Charlotte Bunch regarding the future and limitations of separatism in the same issue of *The Furies*,<sup>47</sup> prompted criticism from other lesbian separatists who saw the two pieces as an endorsement of lesbians working closely with men. In a letter to *The Furies* that was published in the penultimate March-April 1973 issue, Rosina Richter of Radical Feminists 28 (a lesbian separatist group from Minneapolis) exclaimed that “to consider alliances with men before separatism has even been made a strong political force is crazy.”<sup>48</sup> By this time, The Furies collective was in shambles, and it completely disintegrated soon thereafter. Both Brown and Bunch had left The Furies, though both were still fully committed to the ideals of lesbian feminism. In an editorial that spoke on behalf of the collective, The Furies agreed with Rosina Richter that “both articles made the mistake of considering coalitions with men at this time.”<sup>49</sup> Bunch even wrote a follow-up piece in which she restated and clarified her firm stance that lesbian separatism was a necessary measure in

---

<sup>46</sup> Rita Mae Brown, “Women Who Love Men Hate Them: Male Supremacy versus Sexism,” *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1, no. 7 (Fall 1972): 14-15.

<sup>47</sup> Bunch’s point in the essay was that separatism was still necessary but that it was important for separatists to not alienate potential allies (including sympathetic men). See Bunch, “Perseverance Furthers: Separatism and Our Future.”

<sup>48</sup> Rosina Richter, “Letter to the Furies,” *The Furies* 2, no. 2 (April 1973): 5.

<sup>49</sup> Lee Schwing and Deborah George, “Editorial,” *The Furies* 2, no. 2 (April 1973): 6.

the fight for liberation.<sup>50</sup> Criticism aside, efforts to debunk the “lesbian-as-man-hater” myth certainly fit in with political lesbian efforts to situate lesbianism as a political, rather than sexual, identity.

Arguments in favor of political lesbian were shifting by the mid-1970s. Reflecting the transition from radical feminism, which sought to eliminate sex roles in favor of egalitarianism, to cultural feminism, which celebrated gender essentialism and women’s inherent differences from men, lesbian feminist groups began to have a slightly different agenda in the late 1970s. One lesbian separatist group, which convened at “Fort Dyke” (the “first lesbian separatist space in New York City”)<sup>51</sup> approached the issue of “man-hating” from the perspective of inherent gender difference. Sardonicly insisting that it was insulting to pigs to attach their name to male chauvinists, one member said that the true meaning of “manhater” was “manHateHer, man the killer, killHer.” The underlying implication was that there was an inherent disconnect and animosity between women and men, and lesbian separatists were naturally-inclined to be manhaters who “hate him that hurts her.”<sup>52</sup> Likewise, the group’s “Dyke Separatist Womanifesto” insisted that separatism was “the main source of our female power in our struggle for survival, and the overthrow of patriarchy, the only viable alternative to our elimination and to the constant

---

<sup>50</sup> Charlotte Bunch, “A Letter to the Staff,” *The Furies* Final Issue (June 1973): 10.

<sup>51</sup> *Tribad: A Lesbian Separatist Newsjournal* 1, no. 1 (May 1977): 1, Carton 2, Folder 66, Charlotte Bunch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

<sup>52</sup> Susan Cavin, “Manhaters Know ManHateHers,” *Tribad: A Lesbian Separatist Newsjournal* 1, no. 1 (May 1977): 4, Carton 2, Folder 66, Charlotte Bunch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

everyday threat to our everyday lives.”<sup>53</sup> This version of lesbian, or dyke, separatism was perhaps best encapsulated by Jill Johnston’s espousal of “lesbian chauvinism.”<sup>54</sup>

In addition to offering feminists the best chance at fighting male supremacy, political lesbians increasingly argued that lesbian separatism also served to combat class and racial divisions. As *The Furies* evolved as a collective, for instance, their ideology of lesbian separatism increasingly revolved around a thorough class analysis. Not only was their own collective an experiment in cross-class alliance,<sup>55</sup> but they increasingly believed that lesbians were better equipped than straight women to understand class divisions and biases, especially in relationship to feminism. According to one member of the collective, after devoting herself to lesbian feminism she realized that class was rarely analyzed within the “heterosexual women’s movement” because “we spent all our time dealing with men instead of with each other.”<sup>56</sup> By becoming lesbian separatists, the rationale went, women renounced their heterosexual privilege as well as the class and racial privileges they derived from their relationships with men. As *The Furies*, and other lesbian feminist groups, explained in numerous texts, patriarchal culture necessitated that women derive their identity through relationship to men. This meant that a woman’s status was dependent upon that of the primary man in her life, usually a husband or

---

<sup>53</sup> Charoula, “Dyke Separatist Womanifesto,” *Tribad: A Lesbian Separatist Newsjournal* 1, no. 1 (May 1977): 2, Carton 2, Folder 66, Charlotte Bunch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

<sup>54</sup> Jill Johnston was a dance critic for *Village Voice* during the 1960s. By the early 1970s, she was an outspoken advocate of lesbian feminism and frequently argued in favor of “lesbian chauvinism.” See Jill Johnston, “The Comingest Womanifesto,” in *Amazon Expedition: A Lesbian Feminist Anthology*, ed. Phyllis Birkby et al. (Washington, NJ: Times Change Press, 1973), 89-93; Jill Johnston, *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

<sup>55</sup> See *The Furies* 1, 1; Myron and Bunch, *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement*, 9-13.

<sup>56</sup> Sharon Deevey, “Such a Nice Girl . . .,” *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1 (January 1972): 2.

comparable romantic companion (unless she was a child, in which case it was her father). But women who were lesbians, political or otherwise, were on their own for economic survival.

Women who had lived as lesbians (often closeted) prior to the women's liberation movement were technically more independent, but widespread sex discrimination in the work place made it more difficult for them to achieve economic mobility than men. Likewise, women who were inspired to leave men in order to "become" lesbian found themselves immediately stripped of the privileges and security they had enjoyed by association. Though becoming a lesbian did not completely erase class distinction (indeed, *The Furies* often struggled within their collective over class differences), their independence from men made them more empathetic to class struggle and had more to gain from the abolishment of class distinctions than women who remained attached to men. As Rita Mae Brown explained, "Lesbians of all people, have the greatest stake in destroying class and racial oppression."<sup>57</sup>

Black lesbian feminist groups likewise explored the correlation between sexuality-based oppression and racial and class oppression. Feminist groups who participated in the second-wave from the perspective of marginalized groups often found that the priorities of the dominant factions within the movement rarely reflected their own needs. Women who did not fit the mold of the white, heterosexual, middle class majority that dominated

---

<sup>57</sup> Rita Mae Brown, "Roxanne Dunbar: How a Female Heterosexual Serves the Interests of Male Supremacy," *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1 (January 1972): 6. See also Nancy Myron, "Class Beginnings," *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1, no. 3 (April 1972): 2-3; Ginny Berson, "Slumming It In the Middle Class," *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1, no. 3 (April 1972): 12-13; Jennifer Woodul, "Darers Go First," *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1, no. 5 (July 1972): 2-3; Ginny Berson, "Class Revisited: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," *The Furies* Final Issue: 8-9; and Margaret Small, "Lesbians and the Class Position of Women," in *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement*, ed. Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975), 49-61.

feminist groups and organizations increasingly argued against the concept of “sisterhood” as they worked to diversify the movement.<sup>58</sup>

One point of similarity between lesbian feminists and women of color (lesbian and otherwise) had to do with their unique perspective regarding the issue of reproductive freedom. In the early 1970s when lesbian feminists were carving out their own niche in the broader women’s liberation movement, the on-going battle over abortion rights stood at the center of second-wave feminist activism. Despite differences in strategies and goals, feminists ranging from radical to liberal to mainstream all seemed to have a stake in making abortion a safe and legal procedure for women. It was widely believed that having access to abortion was a key component of ensuring that women had control over their own bodies and would be freer to determine the content of their lives.<sup>59</sup> But for lesbians, women of color, and poor women, feminist preoccupation with abortion was symptomatic of heterosexual and economic privilege within the movement. For them, abortion and related birth-control measures held a different significance. As one member of The Furies argued feminist preoccupation with abortion rights in the 1960s and early 1970s could never really be about women controlling their own bodies so long as women continued to have sex with men. A better way for a woman to exercise full control over her body was to eliminate the middleman (and the need for abortion) by becoming

---

<sup>58</sup> See Winifred Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009); Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>59</sup> The majority of second-wave feminists supported abortion rights as a crucial component of the struggle for gender equality and women’s ability to control their lives. See Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, eds., *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Brownmiller, *In Our Time*; Echols, *Daring to be Bad*; Evans, *Tidal Wave*; Rosen, *The World Split Open*.

lesbian separatists.<sup>60</sup> Women of color and poor women also had different ideas regarding the concept of controlling their own bodies. Having been subject to generations of what black feminist Frances Beal called “surgical genocide” via forced sterilization, reproductive rights were not just about protecting oneself from pregnancy but also about determining pregnancy on one’s own terms.<sup>61</sup>

Women of color who participated in the feminist movement were well aware of their double oppression as women and as African Americans.<sup>62</sup> For women of color who identified as lesbian, oppression was tripled. Like lesbians who felt marginalized within the heterosexual-predominated women’s liberation movement, lesbians of color were aware that white lesbians did not truly understand their differences of experience, despite theoretical assertions to the contrary.<sup>63</sup> One of the clearest articulations regarding the complex interchange between sexuality, race, and class came from the Boston-based Combahee River Collective. Formed in 1973 (by which time The Furies had already disbanded), the Combahee River Collective offered a statement assessing contemporary

---

<sup>60</sup> Barbry, “Taking the Bullshit by the Horns,” *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1, no. 3 (April 1972): 8-9.

<sup>61</sup> Frances Beal, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Feminist,” in *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings From the Women's Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 389-393.

<sup>62</sup> See Beal, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Feminist”; Cellestine Ware, “The Relationship of Black Women to the Women's Liberation Movement,” in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 98-112; Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” in *Modern American Women: A Documentary History*, ed. Susan Ware, 2nd ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 249-257.

<sup>63</sup> See Frances, “The Soul Selects: A New Separate Way,” in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Elandria V. Henderson, “The Black Lesbian,” in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Julie Jenkins, “Have You Ever Asked a Black Lesbian to Dance?,” in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 367-368 ; Margaret Sloan, “Black and Blacklesbian,” in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 327; Anita Cornwell, *Black Lesbian in White America* (Tallahassee: Naiad Press, 1983).



black feminism and their specific beliefs in 1977. The Combahee River Collective's ideas about sexuality—they identified as lesbian and feminist (not lesbian feminist)—especially illuminated the limitations of political lesbianism regarding race. Pointing out that as feminists of color they were “dealing with the implications of race and class as well as sex,” the Combahee River Collective concluded that they simply could not support the ideology of lesbian separatism. Like heterosexual black women who felt conflicted about denouncing black masculinity, the Combahee River Collective explained: “[We] feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand.” They continued: “Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism.”<sup>64</sup>

Like issues of race and class, questions of whether women must participate in sexual and loving relationships with other women in order to identify as lesbian divided political lesbians and other lesbian feminists. There were feminists, such as Ti-Grace Atkinson, who believed disavowing any attachments to men was enough to qualify as a political lesbian. But, increasing numbers of feminists dedicated to political lesbianism argued that lesbianism, by definition, was about loving women. Indeed, Radicalesbians had pointed to the significance of lesbianism to also alter women's experiences with love and sex as part of their argument in favor of woman-identification. As they explained in their pioneering document, “Until women see in each other the possibility of a primal

---

<sup>64</sup> Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” 252-253; Combahee, 252-253. See also Breines, *The Trouble Between Us*, passim.

commitment which includes sexual love, they will be denying themselves the love and value they readily accord to men.”<sup>65</sup>

**QUESTIONS OF AUTHENTICITY: BECOMING, BISEXUALITY, AND BUTCH/FEMME ROLE-PLAYING**

For every definition of lesbianism as a political identity there existed a well-reasoned argument, that combined strategy to embrace political lesbianism as well as genuine belief, that love between women had much greater potential for mutuality and equality than love between women and men. Such arguments were made by women who had long-identified as lesbian as well as women who found that their newfound feminist consciousness awakened a strong sexual and romantic desire for other women. The political implications of lesbianism aside, then, participation in the feminist movement offered myriad openings for women to experiment with lesbianism as an alternative to heterosexual and to assert the validity of love between women. Throughout the 1970s, questions and concerns regarding what authentic love between women would look like shaped lesbian feminist dialogues, which often focused on issues of becoming lesbian, bisexuality, and butch/femme role-playing.

The argument that loving women was more authentic than loving men was often embedded in arguments aimed to deconstruct the idea that heterosexuality was natural. Though second-wave feminists were concerned with ideals of gender specific to post-World War II America, their theories often placed the origins of women’s subordination within the emergence of Western civilization and the division of labor according to sex

---

<sup>65</sup> Radicalesbians, “The Woman-Identified Woman,” 8.

centuries earlier.<sup>66</sup> Sex role conditioning was so deeply engrained as to seem natural. Many lesbian feminists believed that in actuality, women were naturally programmed to find happiness in relationship to one another (more so than with men). According to the lesbian feminist “Parable of the Mothers and Daughters,” men in positions of power had consciously cultivated the idea that love between women was unnatural and that they nefariously “wrote in their books that women must hate, fight and betray each other for the favor of men.” Contemporary homophobia perpetuated the idea that lesbianism was perverse; however, many lesbian feminists believed that women’s liberation would undo this social-conditioning that told women to favor men and allow their inherent proclivities to love other women resurface.<sup>67</sup>

Most lesbian (and radical) feminists believed that humans had the natural capacity to love either sex, and that in a truly egalitarian society, sexuality would be fluid. As one lesbian feminist, Marilyn Murphy, succinctly put it: “Women as independent persons will be free to love men if we choose” but “we will be free also to not love them.” Because feminism offered women this choice—to love or to not love men—it became

---

<sup>66</sup> Many second-wave feminist articulated this view, including Ti-Grace Atkinson, Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millet, and Robin Morgan. See Ti-Grace Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Links Books, 1974); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley, reprint. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970); Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969); Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970).

<sup>67</sup> Florence Rush, “The Parable of the Mothers and Daughters,” in *Amazon Expedition: A Lesbian Feminist Anthology*, ed. Phyllis Birkby et al. (Washington, NJ: Times Change Press, 1973), 5. See also Sidney Abbot and Barbara Love, “Is Women’s Liberation a Lesbian Plot?,” in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Sidney Abbot and Barbara Love, *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman: A Liberated View of Lesbianism* (New York: A Scarborough Book, 1972); “Love Each Other, Love Ourselves: Lesbians Unite!,” Carton 2, Folder 59, Charlotte Bunch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University; “Lesbians Uniting,” Gay Women’s Liberation, “Statement of Gay Women’s Liberation,” M. Altman, “Is Heterosexuality ‘Natural?’” 1969, Box S10, “Women’s Rights Movement, 1968-1969 and n.d.,” Kate Millet Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

exponentially more important for all feminists to see lesbianism as an equally legitimate option. As Murphy explained “without woman-loving as a real and positive alternative, to choose to not love men is to choose a loveless life—not a pleasant prospect for most women to contemplate.” Without that freedom of choice, heterosexual relationships would “continue to incorporate the sexist coerciveness . . . in spite of the sincere efforts of women and men to be free in relationship with each other.”<sup>68</sup>

Most lesbian feminists believed that patriarchy made it impossible for women and men to experience equality in their interpersonal relationships with one another. For one, there could be no equality in loving relationships between women and men until men learned to love women as equals—which they argued few men were willing to acknowledge or undertake since the power dynamic in loving relationships typically worked in their favor. As Ginny Berson of The Furies explained, “few, if any, men raised in this society can rid themselves of the sexism which is reinforced every day by a society which rewards men simply because they are men.”<sup>69</sup> Leading lesbian feminist thinkers Sidney Abbot and Barbara Love concurred, explaining that women were conditioned to “wait, accept, and succumb” to “personal domination in heterosexual love relationships.”<sup>70</sup> They elaborated:

Love between equals provides the most fulfilling relationship. Anything short of equality in a love relationship is destructive, as one person usually gives always and lacks fulfillment. That one is almost invariably the woman. Total love is total vulnerability and unselfishness and should allow both parties to receive maximum pleasure. A mutual giving and taking provides a mutual renewal. If a woman

---

<sup>68</sup> Marilyn Murphy, “Sisterhood is Painful 'Opps' I Mean Powerful or What's All the Fuss About the Lesbian Issue,” 1976, 4-5 and 7, Box 31, Folder 518, Noel Phyllis Birkby Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>69</sup> Ginny Berson, “Reformism: The Politics of Ostriches,” *Motive* (1972): 48.

<sup>70</sup> Abbot and Love, “Is Women's Liberation a Lesbian Plot?,” 322.

always gives emotionally, which is her accepted role—in and out of love-making—her emotions are not replenished.<sup>71</sup>

That it was virtually impossible for women and men to share authentic love within the existing social order was a common refrain in lesbian feminist writings during the 1970s.

Despite a general sense of doom regarding the future of heterosexual intimacy, Abbot and Love suggested that feminists had good reason to hope for something more: “An equal experience is an enrichment shared by two lovers; this can be two women who instinctively know each other’s needs and honor them.”<sup>72</sup> A lesbian feminist from Ann Arbor, Michigan, who explained that women had greater potential for a “true love relationship” with other women because their interactions were not riddled with stifling gender hierarchies, echoed this sentiment. “The possibilities of getting out of that maze,” she argued, was “much greater in homosexual relationships—where the entire framework of relating [was] different.”<sup>73</sup> Another lesbian feminist from the Ann Arbor group pointed out that lesbians were “not half of a heterosexual relationship, we are whole people and can have full relationships.”<sup>74</sup> The choice between heterosexual relationships based on “power, dominance, role play and oppression” versus lesbian relationships based on mutuality, Rita Mae Brown, insisted was “obvious.”<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> *Purple Star: Journal of Radicalesbians*, Spring 1971, 2, Carton 2, Folder 60, Charlotte Bunch Papers, 1950-1988, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

<sup>74</sup> “Up From SDS -- Why We Split,” *Purple Star: Journal of Radicalesbians* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1971): 14, 2, Charlotte Bunch Papers, 1950-1988, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

<sup>75</sup> Rita Mae Brown, “The Shape of Things to Come,” in *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement*, ed. Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975), 70-71.

Partly because of the enticing prospect that lesbian relationships might offer greater romantic and sexual fulfillment than heterosexual relationships, a number of women “became” lesbians by way of their involvement in the women’s liberation movement. On the one hand, feminism created an atmosphere of toleration and acceptance that empowered them to “come out” as lesbians. This included women who had been closeted to varying degrees, such as women who had lived privately as lesbians but kept their sexuality secret for fear of being ostracized or job discrimination and women who had tried to “pass” as straight. This was especially the case for the women who pioneered the lesbian feminist movement upon their growing recognition of their marginalization in both feminist and gay circles. On the other hand, many previously straight women “became” (some temporarily, some permanently) lesbian by way of their participation in the women’s liberation movement. This group of lesbian feminists especially demonstrated the broader fluidity of sexuality and emotional intimacy that characterized the second wave as well as the underlying complications revolving around feminist efforts to confront the problems of romantic love.<sup>76</sup>

It was not coincidental that so many women experimented with becoming lesbian around this time. The Lavender Menace Zap action and the emergence of multiple vocal and visible lesbian feminist enclaves thereafter lent a feeling of authority and legitimacy to the idea of women loving women. That development also occurred as the women’s liberation movement was really gaining momentum. Many women were increasingly

---

<sup>76</sup> Amy Kesselman, who was active in the Chicago Women’s Liberation Movement and is now a historian, recently commented on the fluidity of “coming out” and “becoming” lesbian amidst the second wave. Amy Kesselman, “Coming Out, Coming In, and 'Be-Coming': Lesbians and the Women's Liberation Movement in New Haven, Connecticut” (presented at the 124th Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, San Diego, January 10, 2010).

dedicating more and more time to their feminist work, participating in consciousness-raising sessions, and sometimes living communally with other women. Impassioned by their dedication to the movement and experiencing a heightened awareness of personal politics and gender oppression, it was not surprising that a number of women began to view one another in a new light. Many “becoming” narratives of the second wave, which were circulated in feminist journals and anthologies, ranging from underground mimeographs to more professional publications, focused on how this broader milieu left them open to exploring same-sex love.

A common theme in narratives of becoming lesbian involved overcoming fears of homosexuality. One woman, for instance, focused on how her confidence in political lesbian as a necessary measure clashed with her fear of being “clumsy and ignorant” about lesbian sex. Overcoming her fears, she marveled at the joy she experienced in loving another woman: “I was one individual whole person and she was a different individual whole person and we were loving without trying to obliterate that integrity through possession or control.”<sup>77</sup> Another woman expressed a similar difficulty in connecting her political lesbianism with the actual practice of loving women. Though fully committed to the ideals of lesbian separatism—so much so that the collective she belonged to called her an “honorary lesbian”—Marilyn Murphy feared that she would have to remain loveless after having sworn off of men. Much to her delight, however, she soon found herself “wildly and passionately in love with a woman.” “The lesbian consciousness I’d developed because of the books and articles written by lesbians and

---

<sup>77</sup> Women's Press Collective, ed., “A Letter From Mary,” in *Lesbians Speak Out* (San Francisco, 1970), 51, Carton 2, Folder 68, Charlotte Bunch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

because of my close friendships with lesbians” she explained, “allowed me to experience the joys that accompany loving a woman without any anguished self-questioning or doubts.”<sup>78</sup>

Becoming narratives also appeared in mass-produced feminist novels that reached a much wider audience. Marge Piercy’s *Small Changes* (1972), which offered serious and empathetic depiction of separatism,<sup>79</sup> portrayed lesbian relationships as the least problematic romantic formulation for women. The character of Beth in Piercy’s novel experiences a classic lesbian becoming. After fleeing from a disastrously oppressive marriage, Beth experiments with casual sex with men, dabbles in a same-sex fling, becomes celibate, and lives in a women’s commune all en route to finding mutual, authentic love with another woman.<sup>80</sup>

Feminist writer Alix Kates Shulman likewise memorialized the process of becoming lesbian in her 1978 novel *Burning Questions*. In her own life, Shulman sought equality in heterosexual relationships through her advocacy of marriage contracts that ensured equality. Her novel offered an insider’s perspective on the complex realities of love and liberation on the front lines of feminist activism.<sup>81</sup> Written as a novel within a novel, *Burning Questions* followed the story of Zane as she journeys towards feminism

---

<sup>78</sup> Marilyn Murphy, “Can a Heterosexual Woman Ever be a Dyke?,” 1976, 2, Box 31, Folder 518, Noel Phyllis Birkby Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>79</sup> Marge Piercy’s *Small Changes* is also discussed in relationship to theories regarding celibacy in chapter one.

<sup>80</sup> Marge Piercy, *Small Changes* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1972).

<sup>81</sup> Alix Kates Shulman was a participant in early women’s liberation movement groups and the author of several bestsellers, including *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*. During the 1970s, she frequently advocated that feminists who married make their own marriage contracts and gave the example of her own contract with her husband. Her personal papers at Duke University chronicle the wide range of media outlets and feminist publications that addressed this topic. See Alix Kates Shulman Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.



by way of the Beat generation. Zane's story symbolized the transformation of the discontented and reluctant housewife who realizes her true potential and passion in the women's liberation movement. Singularly dedicated to her feminist collective and sympathetic to the politics of lesbianism, Zane had not contemplated the possibility of a lesbian relationship despite feeling dissatisfied in her marriage and in extramarital affairs with other men. But all of that changed when Zane and her friend Faith found themselves unexpectedly in love with one another. Both were surprised to discover that the experience of loving a woman was different than that of loving men. For Zane, the key difference was that she and Faith started from a position of equality: "Not starting out the same, of course. We had different lives and histories, different weaknesses and strengths. But for all our differences, we still started out equal in a way it was impossible for any man and woman, carrying within themselves all the weighty historical differences of the sexes, ever to be."<sup>82</sup>

Zane's relationship with Faith eventually ended and, as it turned out, her becoming lesbian was not absolute. Though fully open to the possibility of sexual and loving relationships with women, the novel ended with Zane's assertion that feminism had the potential to open possibilities for same-sex love as well as to engender more equitable relationships between women and men. Although she concluded that "love is still a vast mystery," Zane believed that feminism had imbued her with the self-confidence to seek romantic relationship in tune with her own needs — whether heterosexual or lesbian. Zane's story hinted at a persistent point of contention within lesbian feminist circles: that women who did not dedicate themselves singularly to lesbianism, but left open the possibility to love men, were often derided as fence-sitters who could not fully commit

---

<sup>82</sup> Alix Kates Shulman, *Burning Questions* (New York: Thunder Mouth Press, 1990), 281.

one way or the other. Shulman deftly drew attention to this tension in a brief scene towards the end of *Burning Questions*, when one of Zane's friends, Phyllis, confided in her that she had fallen in love with a man. "But, please Zane," Phyllis pleaded, "for god's sake don't tell anyone. I'm afraid it doesn't look good."<sup>83</sup> Phyllis's fear that her return to heterosexuality would elicit the wrath of her feminist sisters spoke to the underlying tensions surrounding any given feminist's level of commitment to lesbianism.

Bisexuality occupied an especially contested space within the framework of lesbian feminism during the 1970s. Women who "became" lesbian seemed problematic to women who were lesbians regardless of their feminism. Raising questions of authenticity, many lesbians feared that straight women were merely experimenting with and masquerading as lesbians for the duration because it seemed fun and exciting. Most political lesbian separatists argued that woman-identification would eliminate sex roles—which would also necessarily eliminate the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality.<sup>84</sup> But as Karla Jay, a founding member of Radicalesbians later explained, "we did not equate this utopian ideal with bisexuality." On the contrary, women who engaged in any form of intimate relationship with men still maintained heterosexual privilege, regardless of whether they identified politically as lesbian or had sex with women.<sup>85</sup> Several years later, a member of The Furies explained that even though bisexuality was "human nature," it thwarted the separatist cause because "the revolution

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>84</sup> Most political lesbian groups offered a variation of this argument, including Radicalesbians, The Furies, and Ti-Grace Atkinson.

<sup>85</sup> See Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace*, 142.

has not happened yet.”<sup>86</sup> After the revolution, bisexuality would become the norm, but until then, “real” political lesbians had to have sex with women or abstain all together.

Lesbians averse to bisexuality were also worried about unwittingly expending their energy on straight women who were only willing to halfway commit to lesbianism. For one thing, many lesbian feminists had been burned by straight women who were merely looking for a “Lesbian Experience” and saw lesbianism as a temporary alternative rather than a permanent solution.<sup>87</sup> As Barbry explained on behalf of The Furies:

Every lesbian knows through personal experience how straight women sell us out. Each of us at some time has been infatuated with a straight woman and we compromised ourselves, grovelled [sic] to be good to her and tried to prove to her that we were better than men, all in hopes that she would love us. Meanwhile she feminized us—kept us passive in intimidation, ashamed of ourselves, pretty, dangling, kissing up to her and very, very vulnerable. Whenever we were hurt she was too busy with the men in her life to help us out. If any man found her out, she told him that we were dirty and disgusting and had done horrible things to her. Then he ‘saved’ her and she paid him back by giving him a lifetime of service and free fucks. She had to betray us, because her interests were hanging on some man’s prick.<sup>88</sup>

Feelings of betrayal aside, political lesbians also dismissed bisexuality by arguing that it tarnished love between women. In the words of a lesbian feminist member of Redstockings, “When one woman is able to have some of her needs filled by a man, the relationship between the two women can never be equal.” The woman unattached to a

---

<sup>86</sup> Loretta Ulmschneider, “Bisexuality,” *The Furies* 2, no. 2 (April 1973): 2. See also Barbry, “Taking the Bullshit by the Horns,” 8-9.

<sup>87</sup> Gay Revolution Party, “Realesbians, Politicalesbians, and the Women's Liberation Movement,” 10.

<sup>88</sup> Barbry, “Taking the Bullshit by the Horns,” 9.

man was always the one who would suffer and as a consequence “both women [lost] the full satisfaction of a really complete relationship.”<sup>89</sup>

But while political lesbians were arguing that bisexuality made love between women less authentic, other feminists (including some lesbians) argued the exact opposite. Indeed, many feminists believed that it was not too early to start practicing the ideals of an egalitarian society in which everyone would be free to choose romantic and sexual partners on their own terms. As one woman who became a lesbian told Anne Koedt during a 1971 interview, the significance of her lesbian relationship was not that she found herself in love with a woman, but rather that she had transcended social conditioning that naturalized heterosexuality. Because of her involvement in the feminist movement, she was able to see women as *people*.<sup>90</sup> Another woman, who identified as bisexual, also argued that her feminist ideals enabled her to see women and men as individuals: “I do not sleep with my oppressors—male or female. I sleep with and love whole human beings . . . . My lovers are different and I am different with each of them. I choose to love both of them joyfully, humanly, freely.”<sup>91</sup> Speaking directly to this issue in her 1971 essay on lesbianism and feminism, Anne Koedt argued that “the crucial point

---

<sup>89</sup> A Redstockings Sister, “I am 23 a Mother and a Lesbian,” in *Lesbians Speak Out*, ed. Women's Press Collective (San Francisco, 1970), 57-60, Carton 2, Folder 68, Charlotte Bunch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

<sup>90</sup> Anne Koedt, “Loving Another Woman,” in *Notes From the Third Year: Women's Liberation*, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York: Notes From the Third Year, 1971), 28.

<sup>91</sup> Jem, “A Bi-sexual Offers Some Thoughts on Fences,” undated, Box S11, “Bisexuality Organizations, 1974-178 and n.d.,” Kate Millett Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

[was] not the sex of your partner but the sex role of your partner.”<sup>92</sup> Choosing to become lesbian did not automatically erase the existence of sex roles.

Many lesbian feminists’ personal experiences in romantic love and sex were shaped by fluidity rather than rigid adherence to one category or the other. In October 1971, a group of lesbian feminists, including Sidney Abbot, Barbara Love, Noel Phyllis Birkby, and Kate Millett, held a consciousness-raising session on the topic of bisexuality that demonstrated the varied experiences of individual women as well as the difficulty of enforcing a rigid definition of political lesbianism when it came to lived experience. Tellingly, the first woman to offer her testimony on the topic, Sidney Abbott, alluded to the psychological impact of political lesbian attacks on bisexuality. Echoing the fear of Zane’s friend that her wavering commitment to lesbian might “look bad” in Alix Kates Shulman’s *Burning Questions*, Abbott admitted that she sometimes felt sexually attracted to men but that it made her feel so guilty that she actively prevented herself from ever following through. When the other members of the group asked her why she felt guilty, Abbott replied: “Because I’m supposed to be a lesbian. It’s the old label shit, you know.”<sup>93</sup> The other members of the group, who all understood her guilt even if they felt it was unwarranted, had almost universally had sexual experiences with both women and men, though most of them identified as lesbian, rather than bisexual, by 1971. Though the discussion grew heated at times and individuals had different stances on what it meant to

---

<sup>92</sup> Koedt, “Lesbianism and Feminism, 86.

<sup>93</sup> Sidney Abbot, in “‘Bisexuality’ Consciousness-Raising Session Transcript,” October 1971, Box 33, Folder 563, Noel Phyllis Birkby Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

have a “lesbian identity,” they generally agreed that the most ardent political separatists went much too far in dismissing bisexuality as a viable option for feminist women.<sup>94</sup>

In the same month, the group addressed another issue that was raising questions about the authenticity and potential of lesbian relationships—butch/femme role-playing. Butch and femme lesbian roles had emerged within the context of post-World War II lesbian subcultures. Primarily linked to the lesbian bar scene, butch and femme identities were especially associated with working-class lesbians. In the simplest of terms, butch lesbians adhered to traditional masculine roles and femme lesbians to female roles, though there were certainly multiple variations on that theme.<sup>95</sup> By the 1970s, many feminists saw the butch/femme system as problematic given lesbian feminist arguments that love between women was more equal than love between women and men. A pressing concern among some radical feminists was that lesbian relationships mimicked the hierarchical gender dynamics of heterosexual relationships, which prompted some groups to advocate alternatives like celibacy, rather than same-sex relationships, for women.

Political lesbians often responded to accusations that butch/femme roles imbued lesbian relationships with oppressive power dynamics by arguing that it was impossible for women to ever fully emulate male sex roles. As Coletta Reid of The Furies explained, butch and femme roles did not mirror the sex roles found in heterosexual relationships, which were designed to create separate spheres and “to give one role power over the other.”<sup>96</sup> Elaborating further, she explained:

---

<sup>94</sup> “‘Bisexuality’ Consciousness-Raising Session Transcript.”

<sup>95</sup> See Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 167-174.

<sup>96</sup> Coletta Reid, “Coming Out in the Women’s Movement,” in *Lesbianism and the Women’s Movement*, ed. Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975), 98.

When two women are involved in a relationship, neither of them has the real social power behind a role to fall back on. Even if there is a 'butch,' she cannot marshal social pressure of family, friends and acquaintances to keep her femme dependent. She can't legally rape her (in marriage there is no rape); she can't leave her with five kids and no job; she has no church, marriage contract, or legal structures on her side. Behind the male role is social power, economic clout and physical strength. There is no such reality behind a butch.<sup>97</sup>

But whether or not butch/femme roles exactly recreated the skewed power dynamics between women and men did not mean issues of control and power were not at stake. In the lesbian feminist consciousness-raising group on butch/femme roles, these themes figured heavily into the discussion. Barbara Love, for instance, explained that even though she did not exclusively identify as butch or femme, instead choosing whichever identity or some variation thereof that seemed most appropriate for any given relationship, she would ultimately identify as butch if made to choose. "[Butch] means . . . the things that I feel good about, like confidence, control. Because being femme is so nebbish and so uncertain." The other women tended to agree that butches were typically more controlling and that femmes were more submissive.<sup>98</sup>

Kate Millett, who saw the "grotesqueries" of "butch and femme as heavy oppression," likewise pointed to issues of control and domination, arguing that her ideal of lesbianism was "two beautiful women in love with each other carrying on wonderfully." "I realize this is all probably quixotic and banal," she said "but the role-playing thing has always destroyed and the whole thing of butches and femmes, it's like I believed in the true faith and then here was heresy on every side, all around me."<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 98-99.

<sup>98</sup> Barbara Love, in "Butch-Femme' Consciousness-Raising Session Transcript," October 1971, Box 33, Folder 564, Noel Phyllis Birkby Papers.

<sup>99</sup> Kate Millett, in "Butch-Femme' Consciousness-Raising Session Transcript."

Another member of the group, who happened to be one of Millett's romantic partners at the time, felt the same, telling the group that she had "the wackiest feeling that extreme role-playing . . . is a total avoidance of homosexuality. You are denying that two people of the same sex can be in love and make love, if you're playing the extreme roles."<sup>100</sup> The consciousness-raising group seemed to agree that feminist ideals could help ameliorate the dilemma of butch/femme role-playing in lesbian relationships if not eliminate it altogether.

A self-described butch lesbian who frequented the lesbian bar subculture scene offered a similar argument in her poignant personal testimony for an anthology of lesbian feminist writing. The woman, who eventually found her way to women's liberation, recalled that before feminism, "I wanted to be a stud—in other words I wanted to please many women, but most of all I wanted one woman to love, support and defend." For this woman, being butch was about domination and possession. But after becoming involved with a woman who was less into the butch/femme dichotomy than she was into women's liberation, the woman began to reconsider her butch identity. She joined a consciousness-raising group and realized she had been "a chauvinist bastard . . . guilty of oppressing the woman I loved." Arguing that feminism allowed her to grow in her relationship, the woman concluded "there is no reason for the butch and fems . . . we are women in love."<sup>101</sup>

The promise of more authentic love devoid of gendered power imbalances between women was powerful stuff. But underscoring debates over the politics and authenticity of

---

<sup>100</sup> Linda Clarke, in "Butch-Femme' Consciousness-Raising Session Transcript."

<sup>101</sup> Women's Press Collective, ed., "Gay Experiences - The Sisters Speak Out," in *Lesbians Speak Out* (San Francisco, 1970), 27-30, Carton 2, Folder 68, Charlotte Bunch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.



lesbianism was the pressing question of whether love between women really did entail fewer dependencies and less skewed power dynamics than did heterosexual relationships. A closer look at the experiences (both public and private) of Rita Mae Brown and Kate Millett, two of the most visible figures associated with lesbian feminism in the 1970s, helps us to understand the challenges of putting lesbian feminism into practice.

**KATE MILLETT AND RITA MAE BROWN: TWO CASE STUDIES OF LESBIAN FEMINISM IN PRACTICE**

Rita Mae Brown and Kate Millett had both arrived on the scene as influential figures in the movement by the end of 1970. During that year Brown helped instigate the Lavender Menace zap action and laid the foundation for political lesbianism through her work with Radicalesbians and The Furies. Meanwhile, Millett's doctoral dissertation, *Sexual Politics* (1969), had been published to great acclaim and controversy. Having reached bestseller status, Millett became a figure of public fascination, which only increased after *Time* magazine "outed" her as bisexual in December 1970. Both women made important contributions to theoretical discussions of lesbianism and feminism and both published noteworthy books (novels for Brown and autobiographical reflections for Millett) later in the 1970s. Both also grappled constantly with the problem of romantic love in their personal lives as they struggled to match theory with practice. Rather than definitively answering the question of whether love between women really was more authentic than heterosexual intimacy, their stories illuminate how the politics and realities of love and liberation varied, often dramatically, on a case-by-case basis.

Those who knew Millett well knew that although she was married to a man, Japanese artist Fumio Yoshimura, she had also had sexual and loving relationships with

other women. But she was not publicly “out” at a time when lesbian feminists were increasingly demanding that lesbians publicly step out of the closet for the greater good of the movement. During the Lavender Menace zap action, Millett was reportedly among the women who spontaneously joined the Radicalesbians in speaking out about their oppression as lesbians to say that she too had lived that oppression. Still, she did not come out publicly to the media, which was cause for censure according to the more militant political lesbians in the movement. On one occasion, Millett was directly attacked at a meeting of the Radicalesbians where an anonymously written statement castigating Millett for her exposure in the movement was circulated. It was, and still is, widely rumored that Rita Mae Brown wrote the statement, though Brown has denied any involvement in the matter. Later in the fall, Millett was speaking at an event when Ann Sanchez of Radicalesbians repeatedly asked her if she was a lesbian. Millett reportedly responded, “You think bisexuality is a cop out, so yes, I’ll say it. I’m a lesbian.”<sup>102</sup>

Several weeks after the incident, *Time* publicized Millett’s admission in an article about negative reactions to *Sexual Politics*. Alongside quotations from critics who saw Millett’s theory that patriarchy was a social and cultural construct that exploited women as hyperbolic at best and bogus at worst, the *Time* article claimed that Millett’s “disclosure [was] bound to discredit her as a spokesperson” for feminism and “[reinforced] the views of those skeptics who routinely [dismissed] all liberationists as lesbians.”<sup>103</sup> But if anything, the outrage Millett’s public outing generated among

---

<sup>102</sup> See Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, 99 and 146-151; Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace*, 232-233; and Kate Millett, “‘Bisexuality’ Consciousness-Raising Session Transcript.”

<sup>103</sup> “Women’s Lib: A Second Look,” *Time*, December 14, 1970, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,944216,00.html>.

feminists led to a heightened effort to express solidarity with lesbians in the movement. Indeed, whereas the actions of groups like the Radicalesbians proved too incendiary and confrontational for some tastes, the effort to discredit Millett within the eyes of mainstream America spurred feminists to action. Shortly after the *Time* article ran, members of the women's liberation movement held a "Kate is Great" press conference. All of the notables—Gloria Steinem, Ti-Grace Atkinson, Susan Brownmiller, and so on—were there, save Betty Friedan, who refused to come. The women wore lavender armbands and read the following statement: "Lesbian is a label used as a psychic weapon to keep women locked into their male-defined 'feminine role.' The essence of that role is that a woman is defined in terms of her relationship to men. A woman is called a lesbian when she functions autonomously. Woman's autonomy is what Women's Liberation is all about."<sup>104</sup>

This incident had the benefit of accelerating second-wave feminists' willingness to acknowledge lesbianism as a valid feminist perspective, but it also caused Millett a great deal of anguish. Bisexuality remained a contentious issue and despite the show of solidarity, Millett continued to feel alienated from political lesbians who saw bisexuality as a failure to commit. Millett spoke to this issue during the October 1971 consciousness-raising session on bisexuality when several members of the group debated whether or not

---

<sup>104</sup> See Judy Klemesrud, "The Lesbian Issue and Women's Lib," *New York Times*, December 18, 1970; "People: Dec. 28, 1970," *Time*, December 28, 1970, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,944258,00.html>; Susan Paynter, "Kate Millett: Celebrating a Revolution," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 4, 1973, Box W4, "Interviews-1973," Kate Millett Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University; John Heilman, "Millett: Lesson in Liberation," *Mountain Moving*, Spring 1976, Box W4, "Interviews-1975-1986 and undated," Kate Millett Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University; Ilene Barth, "Kate Millett: 'Feminists Have Changed the Intellectual Climate,'" *LI: Newsday's Magazine for Long Island*, May 8, 1977, Box W4, "Interviews-1975-1986 and undated," Kate Millett Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University; and Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, 15.

bisexuality was an affront to political lesbianism. Having remained relatively silent, Millett discussed her own journey towards identifying as bisexual, saying she had mostly identified as lesbian until she found herself in love with a man—her husband, Fumio Yoshimura. She explained: “I don’t really see people in categories like bisexual heterosexual homosexual. When I get off my little theoretical horse they’re really just people that I love.”<sup>105</sup> Drawing a distinction between her theories and her actual experience, Millett illuminated the complex realities of the politics and authenticity of loving relationships (same-sex or heterosexual).

Millett’s autobiographical book, *Flying* (1974), chronicled her life in the months leading up to that October 1971 consciousness-raising session. The book was Millett’s effort to address the difficulties of “living the revolution” and she very much saw it as a work of subjective history about “how a movement works, how a person really inside it feels, what a real human being’s life is like, what it’s like to be us now.”<sup>106</sup> Focusing especially on the summer of 1971, *Flying* gave the reader glimpses into Millett’s life during the whirlwind days following the publication of *Sexual Politics*; her rapid ascendance as a “star” of women’s liberation; her trials and tribulations in completing her documentary film, “Three Women’s Lives;” and, perhaps most importantly, her effort to pursue loving relationships that were in tune with her feminist ideals.<sup>107</sup>

By the summer of 1971, Millett had been married to Fumio Yoshimura for six years. Their affection for one another was real, but they often reminded people that the

---

<sup>105</sup> Millett, in “‘Bisexuality’ Consciousness-Raising Session Transcript.”

<sup>106</sup> Barth, “Kate Millett”; Nancy Stockwell, “Kate Millett,” *Plexus*, May 1975, Box W4, “Interviews-1975-1986 and undated,” Kate Millett Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

<sup>107</sup> Kate Millett, *Flying* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

only reason they married was so that Yoshimura, a Japanese citizen, could stay in America. Not only was Millett opposed to the institution of marriage, as many second-wave feminists were, but she also believed in non-monogamy, or polyamory. Opposition to monogamy was a common stance of lesbian feminists. While many feminists forged long-lasting, monogamous relationships, theories of lesbianism in particular often identified monogamy as a bastion of male supremacy because it implied possession. Rita Mae Brown, for example, argued on one occasion that when women were fully committed to one another, “monogamy [could] be cast aside, no one [would] ‘belong’ to another.”<sup>108</sup>

Though Millett typically distanced herself from the militancy of Brown’s political lesbianism, she agreed that lesbian relationships were more likely to move away from the idea that one lover possessed the other. Partly because of her belief in the possibility of non-possessive love as well as her general opposition to monogamy, Millett and Yoshimura had decided to have an open relationship. Yoshimura, who had once told an interviewer that he and Kate were “two individuals” and that “if we start to feel possessive, that’s the end of our relationship,” was one of those rare men whom radical feminists saw as capable of having a relationship based in equality.<sup>109</sup> He was active in the fledgling male liberation movement, initially conceived of as a complement to women’s liberation, and he was fully supportive of Millett’s need to explore loving and

---

<sup>108</sup> Rita Mae Brown, “Living With Other Women,” in *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement*, ed. Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975), 67.

<sup>109</sup> “The Liberation of Kate Millett,” *Time*, August 31, 1970, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,876784,00.html>.

sexual relationships with other people (primarily women) outside of their marriage.<sup>110</sup> Throughout *Flying*, Millett described her on-going effort to juggle relationships with different female lovers, which involved varying levels of intimacy and commitment, while maintaining her relationship with Yoshimura.

Responses to *Flying* were mixed. Some reviewers suggested that Millett's depiction of lesbian relationships reflected a disconnect between theory and practice, prompting one reviewer to ask, "whether women are really less manipulated and oppressed by *other* women than by men" or if sexual politics were "so pervasive that it enters into *all* relationships."<sup>111</sup> Another reviewer asked Millett if her depiction of "power" in sex scenes was hypocritical, considering her critique of writers like Norman Mailer.<sup>112</sup> Yet a third suggested that some readers might think that her continued reliance on Yoshimura skewed the balance of power in her relationships with women, who did not likewise have a man to fall back on.<sup>113</sup>

A reviewer for *Ms.* (following a lengthy excerpt of *Flying* in an earlier issue) took Millett to task for the confessional style of the book, admonishing Millett that "the cure for being exhibited is not to exhibit oneself."<sup>114</sup> In a response to the *Ms.* review, Millett mused that whereas reviewers did not seem to understand what she was trying to do,

---

<sup>110</sup> Fumio Yoshimura was a participant in the men's liberation movement and started several men's consciousness-raising sessions in New York in the early 1970s. See Jurate Kazickas, "Men Who Helped Liberate Their Women," *New York Times*, January 17, 1971.

<sup>111</sup> Caroline Roberts Rosenstone, "Kate Millett: How She Lives It," *City*, 16, Box W4, "Interviews-1975-1986 and undated," Kate Millett Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

<sup>112</sup> Stockwell, "Kate Millett," 6.

<sup>113</sup> Barth, "Kate Millett," 29.

<sup>114</sup> Elinor Langer, "Confessing," *Ms.*, December 1974, 71.

readers did: “The love letters come to me, envelopes from strangers funneled through the publisher, notes of thanks, notes that make one feel one has helped someone to live.”<sup>115</sup>

*Flying* undeniably struck chord in many readers, partly because it was among the first books that openly addressed and depicted sexual relationships between women while honestly confronting the challenges of forging romantic bonds that complemented ideals of the women’s liberation movement.<sup>116</sup>

*Flying* ended without a definitive answer as to whether Millett’s endeavor to find a more authentic version of love via the fluidity of bisexuality and polyamory had been successful. To be sure, the book was filled with episodes of anguish and despair, worries about hurt feelings, and feelings of inadequacy, but at Millett’s stopping point (the end of August 1971) in the story, it seemed that she was fairly happily ensconced in relationships with Yoshimura and “Claire.” The transcript from the October 1971 butch/femme consciousness-raising session further testified that Millett had possibly found a balance. Millett used pseudonyms for the non-famous people in her book, but there is strong evidence that “Claire” was a member of the consciousness-raising group. At the time of the session, their relationship was still going strong. Both women referred

---

<sup>115</sup> Kate Millett, “The Same is Over,” *Ms.*, January 1975, 26. Many of the women who wrote to *Ms.* following the exchange between Langer and Millett expressed their admiration for *Flying* (though some also said they agreed with Langer’s criticism. See “Letters to Ms.” *Ms.* (September 1974), 6 and 8; and “Letters to Ms.” *Ms.* (June 1975), 4 and 10-11. Many people also wrote directly to Millett. Her personal papers, housed at the Sallie Bingham Center for the Study of Women includes dozens of these letters, the majority of which said how much the readers loved *Flying* and identified with the struggles Millett depicted. See Box FL 6, “Flying — Fan Pros and Cons, 1974-1975, 1977 and n.d. (1 of 2) and (2 of 2)”, Kate Millett Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

<sup>116</sup> Millett frequently addressed how her book was pioneering in its depiction of sex between women and suggested that her honesty about lesbian sexuality made it difficult for her to find a publisher. See Kate Millett, “The Story of Flying,” undated, Box FL6, “Speech-The Story of Flying, n.d.,” Kate Millett Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University; Carol Kleiman, “Six Years Later: Kate Millett--One Step Beyond Heterosexuality,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 6, 1975, sec. 5, Box W4, “Interviews-1975-1986 and undated,” Kate Millett Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

to Yoshimura during the session and while the relationship does not seem to have been a threesome, there is a strong suggestion that Millett was actively involved with both and that all three were in harmony with this arrangement.<sup>117</sup>

Millett continued to explore the politics and authenticity of lesbianism in her next autobiographical project, *Sita* (1976), which chronicled the unraveling of Millett's long-term relationship with a woman. Beginning *in medias res*, several years after the conclusion of *Flying*, Millett's relationship with Yoshimura had stalled (they would eventually divorce in 1985) and she had grown to identify as "more lesbian than bisexual."<sup>118</sup> Throughout the book, Millett grapples with feelings of dependency and jealousy, prompting her to question her theories that an authentic, egalitarian form of love was even a possibility. Even at the very beginning of *Sita*, Millett speaks to her sense of impending doom regarding the relationship, citing the emergence of an imbalance of power between Sita and herself (related to their physical location on Sita's home turf, rather than Millett's, as well as Millett's dependence on Sita to help her find a job).

Millett worried:

How she knows me, rules me, masters me, plays me, pleasures me. . . . Knowing all this and against her new indifference, hating it, hating her power, the lever of control, the abuses of domination I am subject to. All becomes vulnerability, the doorway to cruelty, the stairway to contempt. The very passion and adoration is now our undoing, the means of our evil, I in despising myself for loving, she in despising the one she had loved. Love turning back on itself, becoming its opposite.<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> See "Butch/Femme Consciousness-Raising Session Transcript;" and Millett, *Flying*, *passim*.

<sup>118</sup> Barth, "Kate Millett," 29.

<sup>119</sup> Kate Millett, *Sita* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 22.



The primary point of contention in her relationship with Sita revolves around Sita's desire to engage in relationships outside of her primary one with Kate. Of special concern to Millett was that all of Sita's other lovers seemed to be men. Theoretically, Millett conceded she had no problem with such an arrangement. In fact, she was the one pursuing outside liaisons earlier in her relationship with Sita and had negotiated a similar arrangement with Yoshimura before. Using "precisely the rhetoric of the woman's movement," Sita had taunted: "Wasn't [Kate] the great advocate of sexual liberation, where was all [her] nonsense jargon of 'multiple relationships' and so forth now?" Millett conceded: "I don't know. I know only that I feel the most craven fear, insecurity, even jealousy at the prospect of sharing her with [a man]."<sup>120</sup> Millett continued to struggle with her jealousy and feelings of possessiveness, trying to reconcile her ideals with her feelings; however, the weight of "a paralyzing, humiliating dependence" increasingly took its toll. At one point, she realizes: "This is not love. This is sickness."<sup>121</sup>

Despite their effort to foster "one of your modern relationships, self-conscious, slightly hypocritical, built on a good large dose of ideology," Sita and Kate's "open" relationship becomes increasingly stifling. Their belief that "Love is not to be constrained"—meaning that their love for one another should not prevent them from experiencing love with others—was severely tested.<sup>122</sup> They become increasingly aware that their formula for egalitarian love only worked so long as both were monogamous or

---

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 180.

both were polyamorous. With different levels of commitment to one another, there was no chance at reciprocity in the relationship.

*Sita* ended with Millett parting ways with Sita; however, in a later edition of the book, Millett revealed that the two had reunited and were hopeful that they had found a common ground. In an afterword, she explained that in reconciliation they had determined: “What we lacked in domesticity and marital fidelity, daily life and cohabitation, we could improve upon with a lifetime liaison, the friendship ripening out, perfected and serene: we would make up for settled couplehood with a superior longevity. Because we would maintain this passion all our lives. Variations on the Sartre-de Beauvoir ideal.”<sup>123</sup> Like Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre, who described their own relationship as “essential,” Sita and Kate would have “contingent” loves that remained secondary to their devotion to one another.<sup>124</sup> But, alas, Sita committed suicide shortly thereafter. Whether or not their liaison could have met those ideals will never be known.

While Kate Millett was living, writing about, and sharing her own struggles in love and liberation in *Flying* and *Sita*, Rita Mae Brown also grappled with the realities of living one’s theory as her role in the movement began to change. Having participated in

---

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>124</sup> Kate Millett knew Simone de Beauvoir personally and wrote of her great admiration for Beauvoir in *Daughters of de Beauvoir*. Kate Millett, in *Daughters of de Beauvoir*, ed. Penny Forster and Imogen Sutton (London: The Women's Press, 1989), 17-32. For information on the relationship of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre, see Axel Madsen, *Hearts and Minds: The Common Journey of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York : Morrow, 1977); Simone de Beauvoir, *Letters to Sartre*, ed. Quintin Hoare, (New York: Arcade Pub., 1992); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Quiet Moments in a War: The Letters of Jean-Paul Sartre to Simone de Beauvoir, 1940-1963*, ed. Simone de Beauvoir, trans. Lee Fahnestock and Norman MacAfee, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993); Deirdre Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991); Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Hazel Rowley, *Tête-à-tête: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre* (HarperCollins, 2005).

clarion calls for political lesbian as a founding member of Radicalesbians and The Furies, Brown shifted her focus from theory-making to literature in the early 1970s. Years later, Brown argued in her memoir that the “grim political essays and articles in underground newspapers” with which she had made her name as a political lesbian did not truly represent her voice.<sup>125</sup> This would change for Brown when she began to write fiction instead. Like other feminist writers of the era, Brown’s novels participated in the development of feminist thought and helped to illuminate her own evolution as a lesbian feminist. Her first two novels —*Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973) and *In Her Day* (1977)— especially helped translate some of her theoretical ideas for a broader audience.<sup>126</sup>

Rita Mae Brown wrote *Rubyfruit Jungle* immediately after she left The Furies. Originally published by Daughters, Inc., a fledgling feminist publishing house, the book was a bestseller and enhanced Rita Mae Brown’s visibility beyond feminist circles.<sup>127</sup> The story followed the trials and tribulations of Molly Bolt, whose life bore a close resemblance to Brown’s. With a dual emphasis on working-class and sexual oppression, Molly pulls herself up by her bootstraps and determines to make it on her own in New York as a filmmaker. Along the way, she faces multiple obstacles, many regarding her growing refusal to conceal her sexuality as a lesbian. Throughout the story, Molly holds true to her childhood promise to herself to “go [her] own way.” “That’s all I think I ever

---

<sup>125</sup> Brown, *Rita Will*, 275.

<sup>126</sup> Rita Mae Brown, *Rubyfruit Jungle* (New York: Bantam Books, 1977); Rita Mae Brown, *In Her Day* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988).

<sup>127</sup> Daughters, Inc. initially ordered 5,000 copies of *Rubyfruit Jungle*, which almost immediately sold out as did the second printing at 100,000 copies. The publishing house also published Brown’s second novel in 1976, but shortly thereafter sold the rights to Bantam because they could no longer accommodate the demand while publishing other feminist books. See Brown, *Rita Will*, 280-281.

wanted,” Molly explains, “to go my own way and maybe find some love here and there. Love, but not the now and forever kind with chains around your vagina and a short circuit in your brain. I’d rather be alone.”<sup>128</sup> And alone she finds herself at the end of the novel, but with a clear sense of purpose, a healthy dose of self confidence, and having experienced several satisfying sexual relationships.

*In Her Day* played with similar themes regarding the importance of self-fulfillment and was set specifically within the context of the modern women’s liberation movement. With a relationship between Carole Hanratty, an accomplished art professor, and Ilse, a militant feminist twenty years Carole’s junior, *In Her Day* explored generational tensions within the movement and pointed to the difficulties of rallying women with disparate concerns around a common cause. Women’s liberation, and Carole’s lack of interest in the topic, was a central point of contention between the two lovers and, despite their great passion for one another, the two split. After the parting, Ilse realized that “she felt free—not of Carole but of something, that remaining sliver of romanticism that clouds the truth and softens those hard edges of reality that would push us into action.”<sup>129</sup> Involvement in the women’s movement would be her primary focus and allow her to figure out her own identity. Carole, in contrast, already secure in her identity, was reminded that she “never did put much faith in love relationships.”<sup>130</sup> Instead, she understood that her real sense of self came from her work and from her friendships.

---

<sup>128</sup> Brown, *Rubyfruit Jungle*, 88.

<sup>129</sup> Brown, *In Her Day*, 153.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

A prevailing theme of both *Rubyfruit Jungle* and *In Her Day* was that friendship and work were more fulfilling and more constant than romantic and sexual attachments. Aspects of each novel were drawn from Brown's own experiences growing up and in the women's movement, and her heroine's perceptions of love in some ways reflected her own. Her more private writings, especially her diaries from the mid-1970s through the early 1980s, as well as the memoir she wrote in 1997, reveal that by the time Brown had shifted her focus to writing literature rather than theory, her views on love and intimacy were more complicated than those she presented as an advocate of political lesbianism in the early 1970s.

In her memoir, Rita Mae Brown explained that during the early 1970s, "I was a lesbian in name only, too busy to practice what I preached."<sup>131</sup> Recalling her reputation as a "female Don Juan," Brown argued in retrospect that she had not slept with nearly as many women as she was rumored to have been with.<sup>132</sup> Her recollection, however, was slightly out of line with what she said about her sex life at the time. In a 1976 letter to Gloria Steinem (whom she greatly admired and for whom she may have felt unrequited love), Brown discussed her till-then "cavalier manner where 'the ladies' are concerned," and that she had always been more interested in "flings" than relationships." This had begun to change, however, when she entered a period of preoccupation with finding a more lasting relationship.<sup>133</sup> An entry in Brown's journal two years later, which covered

---

<sup>131</sup> Brown, *Rita Will*, 238.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>133</sup> Rita Mae Brown to Gloria Steinem, July 28, 1976, Box 85, Folder 2, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. Brown also discussed her admiration of Steinem in her memoir. Brown, *Rita Will*, 249-250.

the same trajectory, was even more forthcoming in assessing her sexual past and the point at which her “mindless fucking came to an abrupt halt.” The change occurred because “the feminist movement intruded heavily into [her] life” and that “it’s intrusion was deeply destructive because for years [she] was the only visible lesbian.”<sup>134</sup> Withdrawing from the movement thus gave her the opportunity to expend more energy in other areas of her life, such as her fiction writing and relationships.

Whether Brown was truly the “only visible lesbian” is certainly debatable; however, the bigger contradiction that becomes most apparent in her memoir, her diaries, and her personal correspondence was that Brown was actually a practicing bisexual. During her tenure in the Radicalesbians and The Furies, Brown had counted herself among the coterie of political lesbians who saw bisexuality as a cop-out and once wrote: “You can’t have your cake and eat it too. You can’t be tied to male privilege with the right hand while clutching to your sister with the left.” She continued, “Lesbianism is the only road toward removing yourself from male ways and beginning to learn equality.”<sup>135</sup> Perhaps Brown’s views had softened or maybe she counted herself among the few evolved folks who could live the ideal, despite the persistence of male supremacy. Maybe she did not count her own dalliances with men as exercises in heterosexual privilege since she did not have long-term romantic relationships with them. Perhaps she decided she would also like to have her cake and eat it too. Regardless of theoretical justifications (or lack thereof), the fact remained that after the mid-1970s, Brown sometimes engaged in sexual relationships with men. She mentioned at least twice in her diary that she had

---

<sup>134</sup> Rita Mae Brown, “Journal, Volume II, 1978-1979,” January 29, 1978, Box 169, Papers of Rita Mae Brown, Accession #12019, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

<sup>135</sup> Brown, “The Shape of Things to Come,” 74.

the occasional affair with a “kind and bright woman or man,”<sup>136</sup> and on another occasion claimed to “belong to neither camp” of straight women or lesbians “nor the bisexuals.” “I find the entire process of categorization obscene,” she wrote.<sup>137</sup>

Brown’s comment that she belonged to “neither camp” seemed to be a retreat from her earlier espousal of political lesbianism and all it had to offer women. Two decades later, in her memoir, she retreated even further, stating “Why it’s believed that people who physically love a member of their own sex can’t love a member of the opposite sex emotionally or physically amazes me.”<sup>138</sup> To an extent, this echoed arguments she had made in *The Furies*, that lesbians were more likely to like men as people than straight women who had more emotionally invested in them.<sup>139</sup> But, in that case, Brown had merely hinted that lesbian women and men who were sympathetic had the possibility of alliance and friendship. Here, she admitted, “I never minded sleeping with a man. I just minded marrying one.”<sup>140</sup> Interestingly, she had once sought to thwart her prying aunt’s effort to figure out if she was a lesbian by quipping, “I’m not a homosexual. I have a whimsical disregard for gender.”<sup>141</sup> Considering the realities of her sexual experiences, the witty retort was actually more descriptive of her identity than her staunch insistence on lesbianism as a political identity.

---

<sup>136</sup> Brown, “Journal, Volume II, 1978-1979,” January 20, 1978.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, August 8, 1977.

<sup>138</sup> Brown, *Rita Will*, 355-356.

<sup>139</sup> Brown, “Women Who Love Men Hate Them: Male Supremacy versus Sexism.”

<sup>140</sup> Brown, *Rita Will*, 356.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

Despite Brown's later admissions that she sometimes had relationships with men, it was clear that she still very much identified politically as a lesbian feminist. As she wrote in her memoir: "I'm not even a good lesbian. I'm much more bisexual, but if you want to step on my neck and call me a dyke, don't be surprised if I sink my fangs into your ankle. I'm smart enough to know that the reality of who I am is not as important as what people perceive me to be."<sup>142</sup> And, she was smart enough to understand the importance of perception in 1970, when she became a primary spokesperson for political lesbianism. Among the most vocal political lesbians who argued that not only was it expedient, but also necessary, for feminists to identify as lesbian in order to succeed in the feminist revolution, Brown later claimed that she had "hardly wanted all women to be lesbians." On the contrary, she argued, "That would be boring. I only needed a critical mass."<sup>143</sup> Having a critical mass would help ensure that there were enough women devoting themselves exclusively to the cause of feminism and it would also help to counter anti-feminist efforts to lesbian-bait feminists. If enough feminists *were* lesbian, homophobia would lose its effectiveness as a tool of the backlash.

Brown's fervent pursuit of that critical mass may very well have been a primary reason for her dearth of romantic relationships during the early 1970s, since all of her energy went to the movement at that time. But her dedication to the women's movement was also complemented by her undoubtedly feminist political stance regarding romantic love. For the most part, Brown's private writings during the 1970s seemed to match her theoretical and literary works in their portrayal of love as something that should be

---

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 464.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 266.



secondary to other sources of fulfillment, such as work and friendship. Like Molly Bolt in *Rubyfruit Jungle* and Carole Hanratty in *In Her Day*, Brown did not believe in all-consuming or everlasting romantic love. Brown alluded to this on one occasion in her diary (when her relationship with Massachusetts politician Elaine Noble was unraveling in November 1975), writing “Love is never enough.” “Those who believe so are fools indeed,” she wrote. “What ‘saves’ a person is a mixture of love from others and a sudden animal surge of the self to experience deep pleasure. Self love — the only word and the wrong one.”<sup>144</sup> Brown’s diary entries, as well as a letter to Steinem indicated, she partly pursued the relationship with Noble out of a feeling that she wanted and needed to be loved and that it was time to settle down.<sup>145</sup> But, she later recalled that her romance with Noble was short-lived and that she was perfectly fine with the relationship’s demise because she “neither understood romantic love nor wished to understand it.” “It looked like neurosis shared by two,” she wrote.<sup>146</sup>

But if Brown did not believe in all-consuming love, she counted herself among the minority of lesbians in this regard. Indeed, in the summer of 1977, she told her diary, “Nobody can be more mawkishly romantic than lesbians. Imagine my embarrassment at

---

<sup>144</sup> Rita Mae Brown, “Journal, Volume I, 1975-1977,” November 18, 1975, Box 169, Papers of Rita Mae Brown, Accession #12019, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

<sup>145</sup> See Brown, “Journal, Volume I, 1975-1977,” November 18, 1975; Brown, “Journal, Volume I, 1975-1977,” May 16, 1976; Brown, “Journal, Volume II, 1978-1979,” January 29, 1978; and Brown to Steinem, July 28, 1976.

<sup>146</sup> Brown, *Rita Will*, 285.

finding myself in such sentimental company. Well, its one of the few faults of lesbians — but a large one.”<sup>147</sup> Or, as she wrote in her memoir:

Lesbians are beyond sex. Their neurosis dovetails into being women. Some people imagine that lesbians are imitation men. Wrong. They are women to the second power. Love. Everything is about personal love. Sexual attraction has to be love. It can't be an animal attraction. They want to live as magical couples shutting out the world that has so successfully shut them out. No relationship can carry that weight, and many lesbian relationships implode. But once a lesbian matures to the point of realizing she can't escape the world and that her partner isn't Cinderella, she stands a strong chance of building a lifetime relationship, even in the face of unrelenting hostility.<sup>148</sup>

Brown continued that despite her “respect” for lesbians on this point, that she was “not one of them on this issue.” “I am fundamentally a lone wolf,” she insisted. Brown’s concern about her fellow lesbian’s “mawkish” behaviors in romantic relationships—and her insistence that she was different—was partly born out of her own romantic experience with women who were demanding and possessive of her attentions. This was especially the case as the 1970s faded into the 1980s, when Rita Mae Brown replaced one significant relationship (with actress and writer Fannie Flagg) with another (with tennis superstar Martina Navratilova). Brown was still involved with Flagg when she met Navratilova; however, the relationship with Flagg had become problematic for Brown. For one, Flagg was closeted because she feared being ostracized by the entertainment industry. Brown, who had worked overtime to coax women *out* of the closet just a few years earlier was as understanding as possible about Flagg’s situation. But, increasingly, she feared that Flagg suffered from latent homophobia. That, on top of Flagg’s alleged neediness and their different lifestyles made Brown receptive to Navratilova’s advances. Their affair was intense and passionate, but it soon became apparent that Navratilova was

---

<sup>147</sup> Brown, “Journal, Volume I, 1975-1977,” August 8, 1977.

<sup>148</sup> Brown, *Rita Will*, 333.

a “love junkie” who was utterly dependent upon her lover for validation. After nearly two years of utter devotion, Navratilova abruptly left Rita Mae for another woman. This proved a turning point for Brown, who later explained: “[Martina’s] dependency lured me into thinking I was important to her. I felt loved for my work, my services. I should be loved for myself. It took this relationship for me to know the difference.”<sup>149</sup>

While it may have taken the demise of Brown’s relationship for her to fully understand the ramifications of dependence, she had long understood romantic love as problematic. Indeed, during the summer when she first met Martina, Brown wrote in her diary that she saw the notion that romantic love was “supposed to fulfill you, to complete you” as utterly ridiculous. “That’s impossible,” she said.<sup>150</sup> A few months before that she had similarly ruminated on the topic:

This American insistence on A Relationship poisons the very thing it seeks to proclaim: love. Each of us is a sum of things—heredity, environment, the work we choose, the people we love, the people and animals who love us. When you seek to reduce that to one metaphor for life: A Relationship you cheapen yourself. When people try to find themselves in others they are doomed to failure. Two halves don’t make a whole.<sup>151</sup>

Such a notion was not antithetical to Brown’s theoretical arguments regarding political lesbianism in the early 1970s. Indeed, her public and private efforts to

---

<sup>149</sup> Brown, *Rita Will*, 333 and 359. Brown also extensively discussed the relationship with both women in her diaries. See especially Brown, “Journal, Volume II, 1978-1979”; Brown, “Journal, Volume III, January-June 21, 1980,” Box 169, Papers of Rita Mae Brown, Accession #12019, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA; Rita Mae Brown, “Journal, Volume IV, October 26, 1980-July 30, 1981,” Box 169, Papers of Rita Mae Brown, Accession #12019, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA; Rita Mae Brown, “Journal, Volume V, September 11, 1981-July 1982,” Box 169, Papers of Rita Mae Brown, Accession #12019, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA; Rita Mae Brown, “Journal, Volume VI, November 27, 1982-March 28, 1983,” Box 169, Papers of Rita Mae Brown, Accession #12019, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

<sup>150</sup> Brown, “Journal, Volume II, 1978-1979,” June 19, 1978.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, January 29, 1978.

understand the impact of romantic love led her to conclude that friendship was the truer test of intimacy. In 1978, she wrote in her diary, “Friendship is the finest love. If my friends adore me the lack of so-called romance is barely noticeable.”<sup>152</sup> Nearly two decades later, she echoed that sentiment in her memoir, concluding that “friendship is love made bearable.”<sup>153</sup> In Brown’s experiences with trying to match theory with practice, it was apparent that while romantic love could be exhilarating, platonic love was all the more fulfilling and lasting.

Though their journeys in love and liberation were remarkably different, both in theory and practice, Rita Mae Brown and Kate Millett both came to a similar conclusion in light of their on-going dedication to the women’s and gay liberation movements. In the summer of 1979, Brown wrote in her diary: “I hate having to fight the battle for gay rights/feminism but I swear this on my father’s grave: If love isn’t worth fighting for then nothing is.”<sup>154</sup> Several months later, Millett offered a similar remark during a gay rights march on Washington. In her handwritten notes for her speech, Millett scribbled a reminder to herself: “Talk about love—That’s why we’re here isn’t it?” Though her comments were explicitly focused on the continued illegality of gay marriage and sexual acts between consenting adults of the same sex, Millett’s assertion that “We had guts enuf to love” [sic] and that everyone should be able to love more freely resonated within

---

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Brown, *Rita Will*, 471.

<sup>154</sup> Brown, “Journal, Volume II, 1978-1979,” August 14, 1979.

the context of second-wave feminism.<sup>155</sup> Though the project of matching theories of liberated love with its actual practice was not clearly defined and had mixed results, the bigger point for Brown and Millett was that feminism (and specifically lesbian feminism) gave women greater opportunities to love on their own terms.

### CONCLUSION

Upon publication of *Sita* in 1976, Millett told an interviewer that she felt the story would resonate with people because of the universality of its themes. She said: “People I know who have read it and who are heterosexual find many echoes of their own experience in it—which pleases me very much. Because having loved both men and women, I think the process of breaking up is pretty much the same. I think it’s a sort of universal experience.”<sup>156</sup> Though this may have merely been an offhand remark aimed at boosting the book’s universal appeal and relevance, the sentiment was certainly revealing. Indeed, Millett’s personal struggles in love and liberation with women (as well as those of Rita Mae Brown) entailed the same joys and anguishes of women who exclusively loved men. This does not discredit lesbian feminist arguments that love between women had great potential for authenticity and equality, but it does illuminate the nuances and complexities of reconciling romantic love with liberation. Romantic love in any formula, it would seem, had potential to foster feelings of dependency and possession. But, even if the politics and theories of lesbian feminism did not solve the problem of romantic love, it certainly gave a number of feminists a useful framework for

---

<sup>155</sup> Kate Millett, “Speech Notes for March on Washington,” October 14, 1979, Box W5, “Speeches-March on Washington, October 14, 1979,” Kate Millett Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

<sup>156</sup> Barth, “Kate Millett,” 29.

understanding their expectations of and experiences in emotional intimacy and improving their chances at love that was mutually satisfying.

## Chapter Three

### “We Still Need and Want Men to Love”<sup>1</sup> Betty Friedan’s Defense of Heterosexual Romance in the Fight for the Center

In 1973, Betty Friedan wrote: “I couldn’t define ‘liberation’ for a woman in terms that denied the sexual and human reality of our need to love, and even sometimes to depend upon, a man.” The oft-heralded mother of second-wave feminism wrote these words in an incendiary article in the *New York Times Magazine*, “Up From the Kitchen Floor,” which commemorated the tenth anniversary of the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* and chronicled her involvement in the second wave since then. In the article, Friedan declared that the movement was in jeopardy of fatal fragmentation and CIA infiltration because of the disruptive tactics of the “exhibitionist, down-with-men, down-with-marriage, down-with-childbearing rhetoric and actions” of radical feminists. The militancy of lesbian feminists who advocated separatism as a necessary outcome of feminism especially perturbed Friedan because she thought they alienated most women. Though she admitted to “admir[ing] the flair of the young radicals” when they began to organize in the late 1960s, Friedan believed that the “man-hating sex-class warfare” some of them espoused threatened to “drive out the women who wanted equality, but who also wanted to keep on loving their husbands and children.”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage* (1981; repr. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 110.

<sup>2</sup> Betty Friedan, “Up From the Kitchen Floor,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 4, 1973, 4-6.

Friedan counted herself among the liberal feminists who sought to bring women into the mainstream of American society on equal footing with men. In contrast, radical feminists (an identity typically associated with separatists) believed that mainstream society was inherently patriarchal and, thus, it was impossible for women to achieve equality within its confines. Consequently, they thought and acted in terms of a feminist revolution that would dismantle patriarchy and create a more egalitarian social order where gender roles were not rigidly defined. Friedan did not entirely disagree with the idea of challenging gender roles. Known for pursuing an agenda of social, political, and economic equality for women in her own writing and activism, Friedan insisted that she was not against the idea of “a much larger sex-role revolution.”<sup>3</sup> Arguing that men were fellow victims, not enemies, in the sex role system, Friedan asked, “How could we ever really know or love each other as long as we played those roles that kept us from knowing or being ourselves?”<sup>4</sup> On the surface, Friedan’s query echoed the kinds of questions the radical and lesbian feminists she had grown to despise were also asking, but her views diverged sharply from those who had determined that separatism and lesbian feminism offered the best route to feminist revolution.

The ideas Friedan expressed in “Up From the Kitchen Floor” reflected her changing role within second-wave feminism. Having written *The Feminine Mystique* and co-founded the National Organization for Women, Friedan saw herself as the mother of second-wave feminism. But by 1973, the radical feminists she cast as fringe extremists had captured the public spotlight. They were young, unapologetic, and outspoken—a

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



seductive combination for the mainstream media outlets trying to make sense of the erupting women's liberation movement. Increasingly, young radical women (many of whom *did* advocate lesbian feminism and separatism) graced the covers of magazines and received the most screen time and press as so-called representatives of the movement. Inclined towards intense bouts of jealousy, as biographers and historians have chronicled, Friedan felt that younger feminists had wrongfully usurped the limelight and were pushing an agenda that was at odds with her focus on economic and political equality.<sup>5</sup>

Several years earlier, Friedan had infamously tried to purge the National Organization of Women of "the lavender menace."<sup>6</sup> Convinced that mainstream women would shy away from NOW if lesbian feminists were too visible in leadership positions within the organization, Friedan began to argue that heterosexual romance was not at odds with the aims of feminism. In her effort to make feminism seem attractive to mainstream women who wanted equality, but not separatism, Friedan ultimately exacerbated tensions between feminists who stood at opposite ends of the spectrum regarding love and liberation.

Unsurprisingly, Friedan's article provoked the ire of the radical lesbian feminists she positioned herself against. Already disillusioned with Friedan, radical feminists who

---

<sup>5</sup> "Up from the Kitchen Floor" especially epitomized this belief. Friedan, "Up From the Kitchen Floor." For examples of how others have addressed Betty Friedan's aversion to women's liberationists, especially Gloria Steinem, see Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Delta Trade paperbacks, 1999); Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America Since 1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman: The Life of Gloria Steinem* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995); Judith Hennessee, *Betty Friedan: Her Life* (New York: Random House, 1999); Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> See especially Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, 70-71; Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 262-264; and Hennessee, *Betty Friedan*, 128-134.

were sympathetic to lesbian feminism staged a speak-out in retaliation. The dissenters extended the reach of their audience by also publishing letters-to-the-editor in the *New York Times Magazine*. The speak-out and letters characterized Friedan as “severely myopic, a lesbian-phobe, a dyke baiter.” The dissenters also scoffed that Friedan was a megalomaniac who had skewed the history of the second wave by overlooking the contributions of other women in order to assert her own primacy. Ultimately, they believed that Friedan misrepresented the egalitarian ideals of second-wave feminism and unjustly sullied the idea that same-sex love was a legitimate choice for feminist women.<sup>7</sup>

Friedan was given a chance to respond to the charges of “heterosexual bigotry”<sup>8</sup> and she re-iterated that feminism must not threaten women’s desires for romantic love with men. She believed her perspective was that of “the great majority of American women” and did “not consider sexual preference or lesbianism a major issue” of feminism.<sup>9</sup> To convey her point, Friedan testified to her own struggle in reconciling love with liberation, following a messy and public divorce. She explained that as feminism made her more comfortable with herself, “the more joyous and real I feel loving a man.” Moreover, Friedan said that in sharing her own “personal truth” about love and liberation,

---

<sup>7</sup> The responses were from Robin Morgan, Toni Carabillo (National VP of Public Relations, NOW), Ti-Grace Atkinson, Jill Johnston, Mim Kelber, and Ginny Vida (VP of Gay Activists Alliance) and Jean O’Leary (Chairwoman of the Lesbian Liberation Committee). Lauri Johnson, “Feminists Score Friedan Article Assailing Movement Disrupters,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 15, 1973, Box 4, Folder 2, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. See also Ti-Grace Atkinson, “Betty Friedan, the C.I.A. & Me,” *Majority Report*, April 1973, Box 4, Folder 2, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; and Ruth Simpson, Untitled Statement, March 7, 1973, Box 190, Folder 10, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>8</sup> This specific charge came from Ginny Vida of Gay Activists Alliance and Jean O’Leary of the Lesbian Liberation Committee. Ginny Vida and Jean O’Leary, “Feminists Score Friedan Article,” 16 and 20.

<sup>9</sup> Betty Friedan, “Feminists Score Friedan Article,” 108.

other women were relieved to learn “that the assumption of your own identity, equality and even political power does not mean you stop needing to love, and be loved by, a man.”<sup>10</sup>

Fearful that separatist and lesbian feminists did not represent the needs of most women and that their visibility was damaging to the movement, Friedan actively distanced herself, and second-wave feminism, from radical separatists by arguing that her views represented those of the masses. For Friedan, the expediency of this agenda was intensified by the growing tendency of anti-feminists to cast *all* feminists as anti-man, anti-love, and anti-family. Fearful of the appeal of such arguments to people who did not want to upset the basic dynamics of their personal lives, Friedan actively fought for the center. Placing herself in direct conversation with the mainstream Americans she was eager to win over, Friedan found that her version of family-friendly feminism was widely appealing to many people. The dialogues she fostered consequently offer a window through which we can also see how the mainstream she purported to speak for responded to the problems and perils of love in the wake of feminism. By the end of the decade, her views had crystallized into a multifaceted defense of women’s equal rights and the inherent need of all people for fulfillment in work, family life, and love.

**THE JOURNEY TOWARDS FEMINISM: FRIEDAN’S SEARCH FOR FULFILLMENT IN LOVE AND WORK BEFORE THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE, 1921-1963**

To a large extent, Friedan’s conceptualization of romantic love and work as equally crucial to self-fulfillment were specific to her generational perspective. Born in 1921 (as Bettye Goldstein), long before the post-World War II baby boom that brought forth a

---

<sup>10</sup> Friedan, “Up From the Kitchen Floor,” 9.

generation of politically minded individuals, Friedan came of age during the trying years of the Great Depression and World War II. As part of a generation of women engaged in various forms of proto-feminism,<sup>11</sup> Friedan was educated at Smith College, where she majored in psychology, wrote for the school newspaper, and became involved in radical politics, only to succumb to post-war pressures to conform to ideals of domesticity, which would provide fodder for her assessment of the “problem that has no name” in *The Feminine Mystique*.<sup>12</sup>

Betty Friedan and the women she wrote about in *The Feminine Mystique*, then, came to feminism out of starkly different conditions than the younger generation of women who were primed in student radicalism, social justice activism, and the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Young feminists of the baby generation were comparatively new to sexual and romantic intimacy, whereas women of Friedan’s generation were long married. The coming-of-age experiences of the two generations were shaped within distinctive social contexts. In keeping with the free love spirit of the 1960s, young women were more likely to openly experiment sexually and romantically (with less threat

---

<sup>11</sup> For information on proto-feminism and inter-wave feminism, see Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “Women Writers, the ‘Southern Front,’ and the Dialectical Imagination,” *Journal of Southern History* (February 2003): 3-38; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “Disorderly Women: Gender and Labor Militancy in the Appalachian South,” *Journal of American History* 73 (September 1986): 354-382; Daniel Horowitz, “Betty Friedan and the Origins of Feminism in Cold War America,” in *Women’s America: Refocusing the Past*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., 481-495, ed. Linda Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women’s Rights movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Landon R.Y. Storrs, “Red Scare Politics and the Suppression of Popular Front Feminism: The Loyalty Investigation of Mary Dublin Keyserling,” *Journal of American History* 90, no. 2 (September 2003): 491-524; Mary Helen Washington, “Alice Childress, Lorraine Hansberry, and Claudia Jones: Black Women Write the Popular Front,” in *Left of the Color Line: Race Radicalism, and Twentieth-Century Literature of the United States*, edited by James Smethurst (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003): 183-204;

<sup>12</sup> For information on Friedan’s early life, see Betty Friedan, *Life So Far* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 15-33; Hennessee, *Betty Friedan: Her Life*, 1-18; Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique*, 16-32.

of negative stigma) in order to find the best fit between intimacy and independence. Women of Friedan's age and background, however, had faced even greater dangers of unplanned pregnancy and social taboos in sexual experimentation outside of marriage. They had likely already married and born several children long before the sexual revolution made it easier to control one's reproductivity. Most would have already had to choose between marriage and career more than a decade before the next generation asserted their entitlement to both.

Friedan's generational perspective, in combination with her background in Marxist politics, prompted her to primarily focus on economic and political discrimination against women for most of the 1960s.<sup>13</sup> If women were on equal footing with men in the workplace, equality and greater freedom of choice would trickle into other areas of their lives. While her political activism was focused on effecting political change, Friedan's writing often focused on cultural manifestations of women's status and implied that mainstream popular culture had taught women to seek fulfillment in marriage and family rather than in work. Her early writings did not necessarily advocate romantic alternatives to marriage for women, but she did confront the implications of romantic intimacy for women's lives. An exploration of her personal life and her writings prior to the 1970s reveals that her defense of the importance of heterosexual intimacy was taking shape even before she began to attack the "lavender menace" in the early 1970s.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Historian Daniel Horowitz offers an excellent overview of Friedan's radical political outlook before the 1960s. See Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique*.

<sup>14</sup> Two of the leading biographers of Friedan have extensively assessed her early history and experiences leading up to her emergence as feminist leader in the 1960s. Historian Daniel Horowitz has cogently analyzed Friedan's writings from her years at Smith and throughout the 1940s and 1950s in order to persuasively argue that her feminist ideology was firmly rooted in leftist politics, a connection she consciously tried to minimize in later years. Journalist Judith Hennessee, in contrast, has focused more explicitly on developments in Friedan's private life during those same years in order to understand her

Various depictions of Friedan's life reveal a portrait of an intelligent and ambitious woman who was eager to be loved and self-conscious about romantic intimacy. During her high school and college years, Friedan (Goldstein) excelled academically but was largely unsuccessful with dating despite her best efforts. Though she hoped for a boyfriend, Friedan believed her intelligence made her unattractive to the opposite sex and she spent many of her teenage years feeling ostracized and lonely. She especially felt she did not fit in because her ambition marked her as different than "normal" girls. She had trouble forging close friendships with other girls, her few male friends tended to see her as one of the guys, and she rarely had dates. In her memoir, Friedan recalled the anxiety she would feel while attending the movies with her parents on a Saturday evening because she did not want her peers to know that she was dateless. This was a time when modern dating was becoming a primary feature in teenager's lives. For teenage girls like Friedan, dating was an important form of expression and an exercise in independence.<sup>15</sup> Being without a date was often interpreted as a personal failing and Friedan continued to worry about the negative implications of datelessness decades later. In her 2000 memoir,

---

perspective as a second-wave feminist. Despite their different angles, both biographers illuminate the blending of the political and the personal in Friedan's life leading up to the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan did not believe that any biographers of her life had gotten it "right." Friedan disagreed with Horowitz assessment of her road to feminism, which he addressed in the introduction to his book. Hennessee noted in her introduction that her biography was semi-authorized and that Friedan begrudgingly gave her some interviews. But Friedan eventually decided to write her own memoirs. Her own recollections similarly shed light on the connections between her personal life, especially her romantic experiences, and her political views when it came to feminism. Each depiction of her life has its own bias, but read together they reveal that Friedan's personal ideas about romantic intimacy were unequivocally influential in her version of feminism and her own struggle to live feminist politics in her private life. See Friedan, *Life So Far*, 13-14; and Hennessee, *Betty Friedan: A Life*, xv-xvi; and Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique*, 1-15.

<sup>15</sup> For an overview of the emergence of modern dating in the early 1900s and its relationship to youth culture, see Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

she admitted: “To this day, I feel uncomfortable, depressed if I don’t have a date on Saturday night.”<sup>16</sup>

When she entered Smith College in 1938, Friedan excelled academically and no longer felt like such an outsider. As editor of the school newspaper, she was in her element at the center of student life and politics. But even as she became more self-confident, Friedan “still suffered certain agonies” because she rarely had boyfriends. She continued to feel insecure about romance and had trouble believing it when men found her attractive. When she did go on dates, they were usually less than thrilling and typically ended in disappointment—the result, she later concluded, of her effort to temper feelings of sexual desire in order to remain a virgin.<sup>17</sup> Romantic insecurities continued to plague Friedan following her graduation from Smith and her entrance into graduate school to study psychology at Berkeley in 1942. Ever fearful that her career ambitions would sully her chance at romance, Friedan left Berkeley and gave up a prestigious fellowship because her success made her then-boyfriend uneasy. In later years, Friedan frequently cited her decision as a precursor to her feminism and her fervent hope that women would never have to choose career over love or vice versa.<sup>18</sup>

After leaving Berkeley, Friedan moved to New York where she hoped to become a writer and to find love. It was 1943—at the height of World War II—and Friedan was not alone as a single woman. With so many men away fighting in the war, it was not atypical for a young woman in her early twenties to remain unmarried. Yet, Friedan continued to

---

<sup>16</sup> Friedan, *Life So Far*, 28 and 25-28.

<sup>17</sup> See Friedan, *Life So Far*, 42 and 34-54; Hennessee, *Betty Friedan*, 14 and 30-41; Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique*, 32.

<sup>18</sup> See Friedan, *Life So Far*, 62; Hennessee, *Betty Friedan*, 38; and Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique* 86 and 97-99.

feel anxiety that her career ambitions dissuaded men from wanting to marry her. Having broken ties with the Berkeley boyfriend shortly after giving up her fellowship, Friedan engaged in a series of short-lived “unhappy” affairs.<sup>19</sup>

Then, in 1947, Friedan met Carl Friedan, and within a matter of months married him. Though Betty and Carl felt strong affection for one another in the initial phases of their courtship, it was not a good match and their marriage was fraught with tension from the beginning. Carl, who struggled as a would-be theater extraordinaire, felt that he had settled for Betty, who married Carl partly so she no longer had to be alone. Friedan later defended her relationship with Carl in its early stages, arguing that she loved him and enjoyed sex with him. But, she also admitted that a primary motivation for marrying him was that being with him was “much nicer than . . . alone.”<sup>20</sup> By the 1950s, the idea that marriage and domesticity held the key to all happiness created a social ideal of “togetherness” that the Friedans’ generation actively pursued. Later, Friedan would see this sought-after ideal as problematic because of the premium it placed on women finding all fulfillment within the home.<sup>21</sup>

By the time Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, she had realized that “togetherness” as a source of fulfillment was insufficient on its own and she had grown disappointed in her marriage. Her hopes for an egalitarian relationship that

---

<sup>19</sup> Hennessee, *Betty Friedan*, 41. Both Friedan and Horowitz also chronicle this. See Friedan, *Life So Far*, 62-67; and Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique*, 103.

<sup>20</sup> Friedan, *Life So Far*, 69.

<sup>21</sup> The original title of *The Feminine Mystique* was *The Togetherness Woman*. Hennessee, *Betty Friedan*, 76n. Historians such as Elaine Tyler May have explored how domestic ideals of the 1950s bolstered the idea that women could (and should) seek all fulfillment within family and marital togetherness. See Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, revised edition, (New York: Basic Books, 1999).



would allow her to find fulfillment both in work and in romantic love were dwindling. Though she continued to work as a freelance writer for much of the 1950s, she had not held an official full-time job since the United Electrical Workers fired her upon her second pregnancy in 1952. As a mother living in the suburbs, Friedan often felt isolated. When she realized that she was not alone in her feelings of ennui and dissatisfaction upon the occasion of her fifteenth reunion at Smith, Friedan began the process of identifying and defining the “feminine mystique,” or “the problem that has no name.”

Because of her own marital experiences, it was not surprising that Friedan linked “the problem that has no name” to the institution and customs of marriage. Focusing on how mainstream media—especially women’s magazines—instructed women how to behave, Friedan lamented the fact that women were taught to seek fulfillment solely within the confines of marriage and family.<sup>22</sup> Friedan saw this situation as specific to the post-World War II and early Cold War climate. To illustrate her point, she drew attention to how magazines in the late 1930s had offered a very different kind of message about romance. In assessing stories featured in mass-produced women’s magazines from that era, she explained:

The stories were conventional: girl-meets-boy or girl-gets-boy. But very often this was not the major theme of the story. These heroines were usually marching toward some goal or vision of their own, struggling with some problem of work or the world, when they found their man. And this New Woman, less fluffily feminine, so independent and determined to find a new life of her own, was the heroine of a different kind of love story. She was less aggressive in pursuit of a man. Her passionate involvement with the world, her own sense of herself as an individual, her self-reliance, gave a different flavor to her relationship with men.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, passim. Friedan had received first-hand experience with women’s magazines as a freelance writer in the 1950s. She would later use them as a platform for extending the message of feminism to the masses. See Friedan, *Life So Far*, 86-105

<sup>23</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 38.

For Friedan, such stories from the late 1930s featured the ideal situation for women. Independence and ambition were championed, but so was the pursuit of romance. Friedan clearly believed that independent women could and should actively pursue loving relationships with men, but not at the cost of their own aspirations. That Friedan had grown up reading these kinds of stories in the 1930s must have influenced her own desire to have a romantic relationship that allowed for independence as well. But the paradigm had shifted by the 1950s, and the new dominant cultural message suggested “the dream of independence, the discontent of spirit, and even the feeling of a separate identity . . . [m]ust be exorcised to win or keep the love of husband and child.”<sup>24</sup> At its core, the “problem that has no name” was a problem of identity obscured by marriage and the apparent inability to combine romantic love and work for women who shared Friedan’s background and social standing.<sup>25</sup>

Since Friedan was one of the pioneers of second-wave feminism, she did not find it necessary to critique or defend the ideas of her contemporaries in *The Feminine Mystique*. But she did offer an overview of earlier feminists in American history, taking care to refute claims that they were all “man-eaters.” In reading the works of early feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft, Angelina Grimke, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Margaret Sanger, Friedan was delighted to find that they were “as passionate in their relations with lover and husband, in an age when passion in woman was as forbidden as intelligence, as they were in their battle for women’s chance to grow to full human stature.” She also found that they “fought for a chance for woman to fulfill herself, not in relation to man, but as an individual, it was from a need as real and burning as the need

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 77 and passim.

for love.”<sup>26</sup> In illustrating that early feminists experienced and pursued loving relationships in which they felt equal to men, Friedan lamented that after the victory in the battle for suffrage, a new generation of young women feared that being a feminist meant being loveless, a transition she partially attributed to the ascendancy of Freudian psychoanalysis and its implication that the whole purpose of woman was to love and be loved.<sup>27</sup>

Friedan was clearly aware, then, that there was a long tradition of critics of feminism accusing feminist women of being against love. Thus, Betty Friedan articulated very clearly in *The Feminine Mystique* that the problem was not romantic love itself but rather that women were made to feel they must choose love *or* independence. Perhaps as an effort to preempt a backlash, she never questioned the existence of love (like some feminists who saw it as pure artifice) or its potential benefits for women. Arguing that “the needs of sex and love are undeniably real,” Friedan asked, if “the mystique spelled out a choice—love, home, children, or other goals and purposes in life . . . . Was it any wonder that so many American women chose love as their whole purpose?”<sup>28</sup>

Because romantic love was presented as an either-or choice for women in 1950s culture, its potential to fulfill women was stifled. Citing countless conversations with women like herself—white, middle-class, suburban homemakers—Friedan found that unless women had other avenues of self-fulfillment, they would not be able to “enjoy

---

<sup>26</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 82; and Friedan, *Life So Far*, 116. Historian Christine Stansell offers a similar portrait of first-wave feminists in her book about bohemian radicals in the early 1900s. See Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 82-102, 108-119.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

human sexual love” to its fullest potential within their marriages.<sup>29</sup> Citing Abraham Maslow’s psychological study of human needs (1943), Friedan argued that love shared between “self-actualizing” people was more authentic and more beneficial for women (and men) than love based on relationships where one person was dependent by default.<sup>30</sup> If women had the opportunity for self-actualization in other areas of their lives—most notably in career opportunities and options—love would become something they could enjoy, rather than a prize sullied by its cost.

**THE POST-FEMININE MYSTIQUE FEMINIST: NAVIGATING PERSONAL STRUGGLES IN LOVE AND LIBERATION**

*The Feminine Mystique* was a bestseller, and it catapulted Betty Friedan into the public spotlight.<sup>31</sup> She went on speaking tours and appeared on television and radio to discuss the feminine mystique and its impact on women. Increasingly, she focused on translating talk about women’s status into action aimed at bringing about equality.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 269 and passim.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 324 and passim.

<sup>31</sup> *The Feminine Mystique* was a bestseller with several hundred thousand copies sold in hardback and millions sold in paperback. By the end of the century, it had sold more than three million copies. See Margalit Fox, “Betty Friedan, Who Ignited Cause in 'Feminine Mystique,' Dies at 85,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 2006, sec. National.

<sup>32</sup> With the civil rights movement brewing, concerns about equality and rights were receiving greater attention. The focus was often on racial discrimination and prejudice, but efforts to legally counter inequality were beginning to include discussions about gender. In 1962, for instance, John F. Kennedy had established the Presidential Committee on the Status of Women and by mid-decade there were efforts to ensure that women were included in civil rights legislation. Friedan entered the on-going political dialogue when concern over the enforcement of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and the work of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission came to the fore. In response, Friedan co-founded the National Organization for Women in 1966. Later, she would continue her political work by helping to form the National Women’s Political Caucus. Though often criticized for championing middle class (white) women, she made efforts in her political activism to include working class women and women of color as part of her larger goal of ensuring that women could be brought into the mainstream of American society and economy on equal footing with men. Friedan’s role in second-wave feminism has been well chronicled. See

Often cast as a spokesperson for and model of feminism (by herself as well as the media), Friedan felt pressure to convey an image of domestic happiness despite her growing difficulty in balancing ideals of love and liberation in her own life.

The visibility that came with her success and her role within the burgeoning movement placed a tremendous strain on her already rocky marriage. Problems between Betty and Carl Friedan had begun almost immediately after their marriage in 1947, and tensions intensified when they moved to the suburbs with their family in the 1950s. Biographer Judith Hennessee, drawing on interviews with acquaintances of Betty and Carl as well as the recollections of their children, has argued that the move to the suburbs coincided with the first of Carl's infidelities and Betty's flirtation with a neighbor. One of the Friedan's children later recalled the regular "Friday night fight," where the couple would heatedly argue and throw things at one another. Eventually, the fighting became physical.<sup>33</sup> Though Friedan went to great lengths for many years to hide the abuse, she acknowledged it in her memoir and said that the violence was born out of deeply rooted tensions within the marriage.<sup>34</sup>

Friedan's success after publishing *The Feminine Mystique* further exacerbated tensions with Carl. Having become a household name, Friedan was soon drawing in more

---

Brownmiller, *In Our Time*; Gail Collins, *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009); Davis, *Moving the Mountain*; Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: Free Press, 2003); Marcia Cohen, *The Sisterhood: The Inside Story of the Women's Movement and the Leaders Who Made It Happen* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1988); Hennessee, *Betty Friedan: Her Life*; Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique*; Rosen, *The World Split Open*.

<sup>33</sup> See Hennessee, *Betty Friedan*, 57, 65, and 74.

<sup>34</sup> Though she worked as a writer during the 1950s, Friedan had grown to see herself as a suburban housewife and felt "almost completely dependent on Carl for grown-up companionship and support." Noting that the pressure this created prompted her to nag at Carl over financial matters or his absence from the house, Friedan wrote in her memoir: "I seem to remember a sense of unspeakable horror, fear; I felt numb, until, one night, he hit me." Friedan, *Life So Far*, 87.

money than her husband. Increasingly known as “Mr. Betty Friedan,” Carl resented his wife’s success and often took out his frustration on her. Friedan recalled, for instance, that Carl developed a habit of calling her long-distance when she was on speaking tours to berate her. His infidelity increased and the physical abuse escalated, though reports differ as to the nature of the abuse. By most accounts, heavy drinking was usually involved in outbreaks of domestic violence between Betty and Carl. There is also evidence that Betty was not only on the receiving end of the abuse but that she gave as good as she got. Hennessee, for instance, offered anecdotal evidence in her biography of Friedan that Betty hit Carl as frequently as he hit her. Carl also eventually went on record saying that he was often on the receiving end of the violence. While Friedan did not necessarily admit this in her memoir, she said she felt partially to blame for the violent nature of the marriage. Arguing that she believed Carl would have stopped beating her if she had threatened to truly leave him, Friedan explained, “I think I accepted the abuse because I didn’t have the nerve, somehow, to get out, or make it clear that I would get out.” Beyond that, Friedan wrote that “drinking as much as [they] were drinking then every night” brought the underlying tension regarding her fame, and his jealousy, to the surface: “Guilty of all that, I suppose, I taunted him into finally beating up on me and giving me those black eyes, giving us both something to feel guilty about to make up for that incredible unearned fame (unearned? I *earned* it) that he couldn’t really share.”<sup>35</sup>

Friedan’s inability to confront the realities of her marriage offer powerful evidence of the

---

<sup>35</sup> Friedan, *Life So Far*, 166 and 145-148; Hennessee, *Betty Friedan*, 89-96, Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique*; 224-226; and Myra MacPherson, “The Former Mr. Betty Friedan Has Scars to Prove It,” newspaper clipping, Box 4, Folder 2, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

difficulties many feminists faced in matching their political ideals and their personal lives.

Friedan eventually resolved to divorce Carl in 1969. But why did it take her so long to leave an abusive marriage? Especially after writing *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan had a firm understanding of how emotional dependency within marriage could potentially damage women. She had also gained the kind of financial clout to make it on her own if necessary. Why, then, did she not possess the wherewithal to strike out on her own?

The answer to such a question is not simple. Friedan was simultaneously a battered wife and the ostensible leader of a women's movement that would not fully confront the realities of domestic violence until the next decade. Consequently, she feared publicly acknowledging the reality of her own situation and what it might mean for the nascent feminist movement. Much of her legitimacy as a spokesperson for women's rights—and her critique of the feminine mystique—revolved around her public image as a happily married mother. If the professed leader of feminism revealed that she was not so happily married after all, other women might fear that joining the ranks of the fight for women's equality would similarly doom their own marriages. Throughout the 1960s, then, Friedan took great care to conceal the abuse in her marriage, often canceling speaking engagements and appearances because she was sporting yet another black eye. Expressing the kind of humiliation and self-blame that abused women often suffer, Friedan wrote: “Here I was acting like Joan of Arc while at the same time I was a disgrace, really, to the women's movement by being such a worm at home and accepting, maybe even inviting, abusive treatment. I was finally too embarrassed. How could I

reconcile putting up with being knocked around by my husband while calling on women to rise up against their oppressors?”<sup>36</sup>

But Friedan also hesitated to end her marriage because she still continued to fear being alone.<sup>37</sup> The same fear that had propelled her into marriage compelled her to stay in a marriage that had grown abusive and loveless even while she publicly declared that women should never be entrapped in such a situation. Friedan eventually realized that she needed to confront her fear of aloneness in order to muster the courage to end her marriage. After attending a conference in Zurich, she decided to take herself on a trip to Paris, deciding that if she could survive a three-day holiday on her own, she could survive a divorce. She “passed the test of being alone in Paris and finally acted,” telling Carl to move out of their home in New York. Within a year, their divorce was finalized.<sup>38</sup>

The demise of Friedan’s marriage in the late 1960s coincided with a significant shift in second-wave feminism as young, radical women began to carve out their own space in the movement. Friedan had played an instrumental role in establishing the tone of the first phase of the movement; however, the concerns of young, self-declared radical feminists were different in nature. While liberal feminists like Friedan called for equality of opportunity, radical feminists called for a revolt against male supremacy. Those who were introduced to feminism through their involvement in NOW, such as Ti-Grace Atkinson, Rita Mae Brown, and Kate Millett, had defected by the end of the 1960s in order to work within radical feminist circles. Friedan saw such circles as extremist and

---

<sup>36</sup> See Friedan, *Life So Far*, 166 and 224-229; and Hennessee, *Betty Friedan*, 109-113.

<sup>37</sup> Friedan, *Life So Far*, passim; Hennessee, *Betty Friedan*, 109-113 and passim; and Horowitz; 224-225 and passim.

<sup>38</sup> Friedan, *Life So Far*, 227 and 224-229.



out of touch with the needs of most women. In response, she cast herself as the voice of mainstream women: “Here we were, trying to organize a massive movement that would cross lines of class and race and speak for the majority of women. I didn’t want to exclude anyone, but I wanted the movement to speak to and for and from the mainstream.”<sup>39</sup>

Of particular concern to Friedan was the growing role of lesbian feminists within the movement and media attention they were attracting. To an extent, her opposition to lesbian feminism had to do with her fear that if lesbian and feminism became conflated in the popular imagination, heterosexual women would abandon the cause. Friedan also had a personal aversion to homosexuality, which she had articulated as early as the late 1930s while a student at Smith. According to historian Daniel Horowitz, a short story Friedan wrote drew attention to the role of female friendship in college women’s lives, but “expressed discomfort when women’s physical intimacy became too intense.”<sup>40</sup> *The Feminine Mystique* was also laced with undercurrents of homophobia as Friedan suggested that the sons of overbearing mothers, products of the feminine mystique, were prone to homosexuality.<sup>41</sup> By the end of the 1960s, when lesbian feminism was becoming a pronounced issue within feminist circle and young women were arguing that the personal was political, Friedan insisted that matters of sexuality were private and had nothing to do with the pursuit of equality: “I come from Peoria, Illinois, after all. I was very straitlaced and the whole idea of homosexuality made me profoundly uneasy. . . . So

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>40</sup> Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique*, 74-75.

<sup>41</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 274-276; and Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique*, 203-204.

when people started to tell me this one or that one in the movement was a lesbian, I didn't want to know. I felt it was not my business. I thought all of that should be private."<sup>42</sup>

Friedan was reluctant to acknowledge the politics of sexuality, unlike radical feminists who declared that sexuality was irrevocably political.

At the same time, Friedan, who had always feared being an outsider and felt inadequate in romantic situations with men, worried about being cast as a lesbian herself. While the mainstream media and anti-feminists increasingly attached the label of "man-hater" to feminism, Friedan was under a similar assault from her soon-to-be ex-husband. As she became more involved in the feminist movement, Carl began to accuse her of being a lesbian. In addition to doing so privately as their marriage disintegrated, Carl linked feminism to lesbianism publicly after the divorce. In an interview he gave after becoming remarried (to a young woman who was the complete antithesis of Betty), Carl reported: "Betty? She hates men. . . . Let's face it, they all do—all those activists in the women's lib movement. . . . I'm talking about these gung ho [sic], tobacco-chewing types. Fifty to 60 per cent are lesbians, either overt or otherwise. I've seen 'em traipse through my living room."<sup>43</sup> Friedan took such accusations seriously. Friend and fellow-feminist Dolores Alexander, who sometimes had to console Betty after such taunts, reported to biographer Judith Hennessee, "[Betty] was so terrified of the lesbian taint—it was a weapon against her." That weapon proved so powerful that Friedan would even sever ties with Alexander, who she thought was a participant in a lesbian plot to take over

---

<sup>42</sup> Friedan, *Life So Far*, 221.

<sup>43</sup> MacPherson, "The Former Mr. Betty Friedan Has Scars to Prove It," L1.

NOW and discredit her as its leader. Distancing herself from lesbianism was thus a form of self-defense and self-preservation.<sup>44</sup>

**ANTI-FEMINIST SENTIMENT AND THE CAMPAIGN TO CAST FEMINISTS AS ANTI-LOVE**

Friedan's effort to divorce lesbian separatism from feminism was also a response to anti-feminist attacks on feminism. Though diverse in form and motivation, anti-feminist attacks tended to come from men who felt threatened by the stated goals and strategies of the women's liberation movement and from women who defended traditional gender roles as natural and beneficial to women. Their combined efforts to invalidate feminism often included casting feminists as man-haters who were against love. In addition, anti-feminists argued that women were naturally inclined to seek love as the source of all happiness, which contradicted feminists' claim that women were socially conditioned to do so. Anti-feminists thus frequently equated feminism with lesbianism and hatred of men while arguing that traditional gender roles were natural rather than constructed. Their goal in so doing was to de-legitimize feminism in the eyes of women and men who may have supported the idea of women's equality but did not want to give up heterosexual romance, which likely constituted the vast majority of Americans.

In the spring of 1970, *Playboy* magazine offered an especially illuminating example of how anti-feminism from a male perspective participated in the cultural dialogue that sought to cast feminists as anti-love. A self-declared advocate of the sexual revolution, *Playboy* prided itself on promoting ideals of free love that ostensibly benefited both women and men. Despite supporting feminist measures like reproductive rights, however,

---

<sup>44</sup> Hennessee, *Betty Friedan*, 110-111 and 130-135.

*Playboy*'s projected image did little to challenge or critique prevailing gender norms. By the end of the 1960s, *Playboy* had repeatedly found itself the target of feminist protests against its sexual objectification of women.<sup>45</sup> In response to feminist criticism, Hugh Hefner had commissioned an article on women's liberation from freelance writer Susan Braudy. But Braudy's piece was not the "devastating piece that takes militants apart" that Hefner envisioned.<sup>46</sup>

*Playboy* instead published "Up Against the Wall, Male Chauvinist Pig!" by Morton Hunt, which supported the basic idea of women's equality, but castigated the actions of the most radical feminists. Hunt conceded that feminists had legitimate complaints about discrimination against women and that a more just society would allow greater freedom of choice in work, sex, and family life. He took great care, however, to distinguish the majority of women engaged in "moderate feminism," which he saw as reasonable, from the "handful of neurotics, uglies and dykes."<sup>47</sup> Taking to task separatists and lesbian feminists like Roxanne Dunbar, Ti-Grace Atkinson, Dana Densmore, and Betsy Warrior,

---

<sup>45</sup> During the late 1960s, *Playboy* was a target of feminist protests for its commercialized sexual objectification of women. Criticism was aimed at both the Playboy Clubs (which Gloria Steinem had critiqued in her undercover exposé as early as 1963) and against the magazine itself. Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Tim Hodgdon, "The Chicago Women's Liberation Union: On the Cutting Edge of Protest Against Sexual Objectification," *The CWLU Herstory Website* (2000), [www.cwluherstory.org/CWLUAbout/abd0c5.html](http://www.cwluherstory.org/CWLUAbout/abd0c5.html); Carrie Pitzulo, "The Battle in Every Man's Bed: 'Playboy' and the Fiery Feminists," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17, no. 2 (May 2008): 259-289; Gloria Steinem, "I Was a Playboy Bunny," in *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, 2nd ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 32-75.

<sup>46</sup> Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America*, 177; Pitzulo, "The Battle in Every Man's Bed," 273-276.

<sup>47</sup> Morton Hunt, "Up Against the Wall, Male Chauvinist Pig!," *Playboy*, May 1970, 96.

Hunt insisted that the vast majority of women (and virtually all men) saw the disavowal of heterosexual intimacy as “the worst deprivation ever visited upon mankind.”<sup>48</sup>

Hunt’s defense of heterosexual intimacy reflected his broader view that sexual differences were ultimately natural. As he explained:

Sex differences, as manifested in our looks, our personalities, our behavior toward each other and our division of roles within the home and without, are deeply gratifying to male and female alike. It is complementarity—the fitting together of two beings who serve and complete each other—that makes heterosexual love, both physical and emotional, so necessary and so fulfilling. And it’s the central mechanism at work in heterosexual love, in which it’s made doubly powerful by the complementarity of our sexual parts and biological traits and the psychological differences they produce.<sup>49</sup>

In Hunt’s view, delighting in these “natural” differences was good for people and did not preclude the possibility of gender equality in which women and men “[were] not just two of a kind but a team, equal not in the sense of identical but equal in the sense of equivalent.”<sup>50</sup> That kind of equality, Hunt insisted, would allow women to pursue work *and* love within the context of marriage and family. Hunt took care to acknowledge that society, as it then existed, made it difficult for women to fully pursue both. But in a conclusion reeking of anti-feminist sentiment, Hunt asserted the need for woman to accept “a combination of marriage and career in which she accepts a secondary part in the world of work and achievement in order to have a primary part in the world of love and the home.”<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 209.

Hefner personally thought that Hunt's final point went too far. In memo to his staff, Hefner pointed out that it went against the *Playboy* ethic to suggest women were not fully entitled to pursue alternatives to domesticity; however, he agreed with Hunt that militant feminists went too far in calling for an eradication of sex roles, which he saw as "extremely anti-sexual, unnatural."<sup>52</sup> Hunt's article (and Hefner's point of view) reflected the growing tendency of people to express support for what they saw as legitimate feminist concerns (equal pay for equal work and access to birth control, for example) while decrying feminists' efforts to alter their love lives as extremist and unnecessary. While many feminists were keen on using feminist ideals in order to create more egalitarian and truer forms of romantic love, anti-feminist critics often focused on the most radical demands for celibacy and political lesbianism in order to invalidate feminist ideas about emotional intimacy. Hunt's article in *Playboy* was one of many anti-feminist critiques that belittled feminist responses to the problem of romantic love in this way.

Perhaps most famous among male efforts to cast feminists as anti-man and anti-love was Norman Mailer and his book *The Prisoner of Sex* (1971). Conceived as a response to Kate Millett's critique of his work in *Sexual Politics*, *The Prisoner of Sex* was aimed at the more radical factions of the feminist movement. Mailer projected himself, and was largely seen as, a liberal who was sympathetic to the social justice movements of the era.<sup>53</sup> His work, however, often contained portraits of women that were less than

---

<sup>52</sup> Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America*, 177-178. See also Pitzulo, "The Battle in Every Man's Bed," 273-278.

<sup>53</sup> Norman Mailer was a Pulitzer prize winning novelist and a co-founder of the *Village Voice*. During the early 1960s, he ran for mayor of New York on a secessionist ticket (a ploy that Gloria Steinem actually participated in prior to her involvement in the women's movement). With political views that leaned both left and right, he embraced certain aspects of 1960s liberalism (such as the antiwar movement) while rejecting others, notably women's liberation. In addition to opposing his depiction of women in his writing, feminists were concerned about his opposition to birth control. See Charles McGrath, "Norman

favorable, which was why Millett had included him in her pantheon of misogynistic writers who had helped to create a culture in which women were despised and objectified.<sup>54</sup> Much of *The Prisoner of Sex* focused on refuting Millett's interpretation of Mailer's literary works as well as those of D.H. Lawrence and Henry Miller, although he also wrote more broadly about his views on women's liberation. Though not entirely unsympathetic to the women's movement, Mailer possessed a general disdain for some of the more outspoken and militant feminists. In addition to Millett, Mailer was especially skeptical of feminists like Ti-Grace Atkinson, Dana Densmore, and Valerie Solanis. In trying to discredit such separatists, Mailer remarked that they "[were] still speaking as women obsessed with their relation to men."<sup>55</sup> Mailer's effort to invalidate radical feminists and women's separatists was very similar to Morton Hunt's *Playboy* article in this regard. Most pointedly, both men lamented what they interpreted as feminists' effort to divorce sex from meaning based on gender differences.

Some men's efforts to castigate feminists—especially separatists and lesbian feminists—made practical sense in a way. The effort to alter traditional gender roles not only affected the way women lived, but it affected the way men lived as well. Since men traditionally held power within a patriarchal society, feminism meant a loss of power for men. Moreover, if women were to become entirely autonomous and independent, some

---

Mailer, Towering Writer With Matching Ego, Dies at 84," *The New York Times*, November 10, 2007, sec. Books, [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/10/books/11mailer.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=1&hp](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/10/books/11mailer.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&hp); "Why Norman Mailer Mattered," *Time*, November 10, 2007, <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1682741,00.html>; Sydney Ladenson Stern, *Gloria Steinem: Her Passions, Politics, and Mystique* (Secaucus, N.J.: Carol Publishing Group, 1997), 173-176.

<sup>54</sup> Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 314-335.

<sup>55</sup> Norman Mailer, *The Prisoner of Sex* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 38 and passim.

men feared women would no longer need them for anything, including sex and emotional intimacy. Even men who supported women's liberation noted that prospect of women rejecting them wholesale was frightening.<sup>56</sup> Feminists interpreted these reactions, ranging from conscious efforts to perpetuate existing gender hierarchies to unconscious patriarchal conditioning, as evidence of the strength of male supremacy, which was so deeply engrained in that many people had accepted it as the natural order.

The idea that traditional, domestic roles privileged women with the reward of a man's love occupied a central role in anti-feminist rhetoric throughout the 1970s and was perhaps most famously brandished by anti-feminist crusaders Marabel Morgan and Phyllis Schlafly. In many ways, Morgan and Schlafly were symbolic of the new right that was beginning to make waves in the 1970s. Both hailed from the Midwest, belonged to the white middle class, were married with children, and were devoutly religious. Like many of the feminists they starkly opposed, both women were college-educated; however, they unequivocally advocated the importance of traditional roles for women, emphasizing the importance of motherhood and marriage, which they believed exalted women to a privileged status.<sup>57</sup> In their view, feminist efforts to eradicate patriarchal

---

<sup>56</sup> Men involved in the men's liberation movement (made up of men sympathetic to the women's liberation movement) often noted that they had experienced a reflexive fear that their female romantic partners would leave them when they became involved in consciousness-raising. Part of men's consciousness-raising efforts within the men's liberation movement focused on undoing that kind of conditioning. For coverage of men's consciousness-raising groups, see Alta Maloney, "Male Liberation," *Herald*, December 6, 1970, Box 23, Folder 1, Women's Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Ellen Goodman, "An Effort at Understanding," *Boston Sunday Globe*, May 31, 1970, Box 23, Folder 2, Women's Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Enid Nemy, "Should Women's Lib Work, Will Men Be Free At Last?," *New York Times*, October 23, 1970, sec. Food Fashions Family Furnishings, Box 23, Folder 1, Women's Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Judy Klemesrud, "How Does a Man Tell a Liberated Woman That She's Too Fat?," *New York Times*, March 21, 1970, Box 23, Folder 1, Women's Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>57</sup> Morgan grew up in Ohio before settling in Florida with her husband and Schlafly grew up in Missouri before settling in Illinois. "Marabel Morgan," in *Ohio History Central: An Online Encyclopedia*



gender roles would lower, rather than raise, women's status and threaten their inherent capacity to give and receive romantic love.

In the early 1970s, Marabel Morgan began to champion the "total woman" in a series of workshops and a self-help book by the same name. In the preface to *The Total Woman*, Morgan shared the story of her own personal struggle to maintain a happy marriage. Concerned with the loss of romantic spark when courtship was replaced with marriage, Morgan critiqued herself as a wife, rather than the limitations of marriage as an institution. Ultimately concluding that she had become a "nag," Morgan dedicated herself to happily serving her husband, anticipating his needs, and pursuing spontaneity and adventure in the bedroom. Emboldened by the success of her efforts, Morgan endeavored to help other women keep romance at the center of their marriages by encouraging them to join her in becoming the Total Woman. The Total Woman, according to Morgan, was a woman who recognized that her most important role in life was as wife and mother and enthusiastically embraced traditional gender roles.<sup>58</sup>

Morgan did not overtly attack the feminist movement in *The Total Woman*, which was the first in a longer series of self-help books focused on matters of love and marriage. But, her ideas were directly at odds with feminist ideals. Her program, for instance, was explicitly addressed to women who were already married and she assumed that marriage was the desired condition of all women (a point with which feminists actively disagreed). In an indirect attack on feminist efforts to alter the state of marriage,

---

*of Ohio History*, <http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/entry.php?rec=1767>; "The New Housewife Blues," *Time*, March 14, 1977, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,947281,00.html>; and Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>58</sup> Marabel Morgan, *The Total Woman* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1973), passim.

Morgan explained that by the early 1970s, too many women “rule[d] the roost” in marital relationships. Equally damaging were marriages with “two coequal rulers, whose decisions often clash.” According to Morgan, efforts to make marriage an equal partnership (or worse yet, a hierarchical relationship that favored women) were bad for women because they did nothing to “enhance romance.”<sup>59</sup> Instead, women who embraced traditional gender roles by submitting to their husbands’ authority were much more likely to enjoy love and romance than women who demanded egalitarian marital partnerships. Morgan thus stood in opposition to feminists who argued for any kind of comprehensive change in loving relationships, ranging from lesbian feminists to feminists who wanted true equality within heterosexuality.

Strangely enough, Morgan’s program shared with some radical feminists the idea that love meant different things for women and men. “A woman expresses her love by words and expects words in return,” she argued. But, “a man expresses his love by actions—by sexual intercourse, bringing home the paycheck, or buying his wife a house.”<sup>60</sup> Second-wave feminists argued that these conditions were socially constructed, damaging to women and men, and needed to change, but Morgan saw them as beneficial to women and indicative of a natural order. Characterizing romance as the key to happiness for women, Morgan suggested that traditional, hierarchical gender roles offered women their best chance at love. As she explained, “Women need to be loved; men need to be admired.” Consequently, the Total Woman program was all about pleasing men. Morgan instructed women on the best ways to express gratitude and

---

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 71-72.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 133.

admiration for men [greeting one's husband in the door seductively cloaked in Saran wrap was one popular suggestion] in exchange for romantic rewards.<sup>61</sup>

Phyllis Schlafly similarly argued that traditional gender roles offered women the best chance at romantic happiness. Best known for her successful campaign to block ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment in the early 1980s, Schlafly offered a more pointed attack on feminism than did Morgan, whose celebration of traditional womanhood merely hinted that feminism posed a threat to love and marriage. Proclaiming herself to be “one who loves life as a woman and lives love as a woman,” Schlafly explicitly identified feminism generally, and lesbian feminism specifically, as a danger to women's right to romantic fulfillment and domestic privilege.<sup>62</sup> Schlafly argued in favor of traditional ideals of womanhood, exemplified by what she called the “Positive Woman.” Women were entitled to protection from men and naturally inclined to serve loved ones.<sup>63</sup> Arguing that feminists' efforts to render women independent impeded women's ability to actively love in this way, Schlafly echoed Morgan by insisting that “a woman's chief emotional need is active (i.e., to love)” and that “a man's prime emotional need is passive (i.e., to be appreciated or admired).”<sup>64</sup> Schlafly especially took issue with feminist arguments that women's identities were subsumed in romantic relationships based on traditional gender roles. Arguing that “among the dozens of fallacies of the

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 53 and passim.

<sup>62</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1977), 9-10 and passim.

<sup>63</sup> Schlafly wrote, “A woman naturally seeks to love affirmatively and to show that love in an active way by caring for the object of her affections.” Schlafly, *Positive Woman*, 18.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 54.

women's liberation movement is the cluster of mistaken notions that traditional marriage is based on the wife's submerging her identity in her husband's," Schlafly stated:

It is true (and properly so) that the husband is naturally possessive about his wife's sexual favors, but he is seldom possessive of his wife's mind, time, or talents. A Positive Man is delighted to have his wife pursue her talents and spend her time however she pleases. The more she achieves, the prouder he is—*so long as* he knows that he is Number One in her life, and that she needs him.<sup>65</sup>

In belittling feminist arguments that traditional romantic ideals limited women's sense of self outside of romantic relationships, Schlafly sought to invalidate the idea that women's liberation could make heterosexual relationships better. While she did not deny that women had the right to explore non-traditional options, she firmly believed that for women who "want to love and be loved, marriage offers the best opportunity to achieve [their] goal."<sup>66</sup> Arguing that feminism would thwart women's "natural" proclivities to love (and to serve) men, Schlafly garnered strength for her more broadly based attack against feminism and the Equal Rights Amendment.

Morgan and Schlafly were part of an ascendant New Right that blended fiscal conservatism and evangelical Christianity.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, Christian beliefs stood at the center of Schlafly and Morgan's advocacy of traditional roles for women and their castigation of feminist responses to the problem of love.<sup>68</sup> In their eyes, feminism was the

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 55-56.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>67</sup> See Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*; Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002); Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant, eds., *Reaction to the Modern Women's Movement, Antifeminism in America: A Collection of Readings from the Literature of the Opponents to U.S. Feminism, 1848 to the Present* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997).

<sup>68</sup> Schlafly was Roman Catholic and Morgan was a born-again evangelical Christian.

problem and romantic love was the solution. Chronicling her own religious conversion as a born-again Christian, for instance, Morgan argued that Christianity stressed the importance of self-fulfillment. Citing Jesus' commandment to "love thy neighbour as thyself," Morgan explained that one could not love others unless one loved oneself and, thus, it was important for women to have confidence in themselves as individuals.<sup>69</sup> On the surface, this echoed basic feminist goals of self-identification and self-fulfillment as prerequisites for real emotional intimacy. But, Morgan concluded: "Love in marriage is commitment. Commitment involves a woman's full surrender to her man."<sup>70</sup> Morgan's insistence on women's submission, rather than their equality, within romantic relationships ultimately remained anti-feminist at its core.

Morgan and Schlafly also suggested that women would find the best model for fulfilling love in Christianity. Both justified Christian dictates that woman's role was to obey her husband by arguing that men were required to love and protect their wives. Many feminists took issue with this interpretation of Christianity because they believed it fostered hierarchies of inequality within marriage. Indeed, feminist efforts to alter marriage law and customs, such as vows that required women to "obey" men. But, Morgan and Schlafly argued that women who obeyed were women who were loved. Neoconservative activist Anita Bryant, best known for her opposition to gay rights, echoed this sentiment. Bryant, a self-proclaimed Total Woman and "darling friend and Christian sister" to Marabel Morgan, explained that the submission Christianity required

---

<sup>69</sup> Morgan, *The Total Woman*, 43.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

of wives to husbands represented “a voluntary act of love and trust.”<sup>71</sup> Morgan agreed, arguing further that the traditional roles women and men played in marriage were complimentary by nature: “Because woman came out of man, he was incomplete without her, and she was incomplete without him. Thus they had to merge! This was God’s idea. What a great romantic.”<sup>72</sup>

Anti-feminist sentiment was mounting all along and by the end of the 1970s it had a large and captive audience. The silent majority, emboldened by its growing power, was no longer silent and women like Morgan and Schlafly had large followings. Indeed, by the early 1980s Schlafly had almost single-handedly defeated the Equal Rights Amendment with her STOP-ERA campaign. Morgan, in the meantime, was becoming one of the best-selling authors of the era. Her first book, *The Total Woman*, was the top selling non-fiction book in 1974. Her workshops were extremely popular and she reported receiving as many as one hundred fan letters per day. Other anti-feminists likewise enjoyed large audiences. *Playboy* was at its peak circulation in the 1970s and Morton Hunt reached over seven million readers when he wrote “Up Against the Wall Mall.” Norman Mailer was also a best-selling author, and as an intellectual and prize-winning novelist, he was well received amongst learned audiences. A reviewer for the *New York Times* even declared that *The Prisoner of Sex* was Mailer’s best work.<sup>73</sup> With

---

<sup>71</sup> Anita Bryant, “Lord, Teach Me to Submit,” in *Reaction to the Modern Women's Movement, 1963 to the Present*, ed. Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 455. For references to the friendship between Anita Bryant and Marabel Morgan, see Bryant, “Lord, Teach Me to Submit”; Morgan, *The Total Woman*, 97.

<sup>72</sup> Morgan, *The Total Woman*, 104 and passim. See also Schlafly, *The Power of the Positive Woman*, 49-50 and passim.

<sup>73</sup> See Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*; Daisy Maryles, “The Stakes Rise for Chart Toppers: New Players Outpace Veteran Novelists; The Name's The Game in Nonfiction,” *Publishers Weekly*, March 22, 2004, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/CA405070.html>; “The New

anti-feminists reaching such wide and diverse audiences, it was not surprising that their audiences often accepted at face value their tendency to conflate feminism with anti-man and anti-love rhetoric.

### **COMBATING THE ANTI-FEMINIST MESSAGE: FRIEDAN FIGHTS FOR THE CENTER**

Anti-feminists in the 1970s rarely distinguished one type of feminism from another and they tended to lump all feminists into the same category. Betty Friedan was frequently included in the litany of feminists that anti-feminist commentators labeled as man-haters.<sup>74</sup> The prevalence and apparent appeal of such attacks was a primary reason that Friedan began to argue so vociferously that feminism and heterosexual love were far from mutually exclusive. Fearful that anti-feminist arguments would dissuade the vast majority of women who might support feminism otherwise, Friedan increasingly focused on ensuring people that pursuing equality for women had nothing to do with changing the most basic aspects of their love lives. To this end, Friedan deployed a powerful weapon—she capitalized on her own bestseller status and her own Middle America roots<sup>75</sup> in order to strategically court the same mainstream audience the not-so-silent

---

Housewife Blues”; Joan Acocella, “The Girls Next Door: Life in the Centerfold,” *New Yorker*, March 20, 2006, [http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/03/20/060320crbo\\_books?currentPage=all](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/03/20/060320crbo_books?currentPage=all); Anatole Broyard, “Norman Writes a Dithyramb,” *New York Times*, May 27, 1971; McGrath, “Norman Mailer, Towering Writer With Matching Ego, Dies at 84.”

<sup>74</sup> For examples, see Midge Decter, “The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Feminism,” in *Reaction to the Modern Women's Movement, 1963 to the Present*, ed. Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 151-160; Jean Bethke Elshtain, “Hobbesian Choice: Feminists Against the Family,” in *Reaction to the Modern Women's Movement, 1963 to the Present*, ed. Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 130-134; Jerry Falwell, “The Feminist Movement,” in *Reaction to the Modern Women's Movement, 1963 to the Present*, ed. Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 136-150.

<sup>75</sup> Friedan's leftist politics and her Jewish faith were at direct odds with the Christian conservatism of the New Right; however, like Schlafly and Morgan, Friedan was from the Midwest and knew from firsthand experience what kinds of needs and expectations people in Middle America had. She was thus

majority was after and to counter arguments that feminism was a threat to men and that it was against romantic love.

One of her primary strategies was to share her private struggles with love and liberation. Though she had struggled in her own life with the competing desires of independence and romantic attachment, Friedan had worked hard to keep her personal life private and separate from her role in the women's movement. Her earlier writings, including *The Feminine Mystique*, had certainly raised questions about the potentially negative impact of romantic intimacy within the bonds of marriage. But the critique was somewhat peripheral in that Friedan was not arguing that women's relationships with men should change, but rather that women needed access to other routes to fulfillment *in addition to* romantic intimacy. But, with the ascendance of radical feminism and the public spotlight it occupied in the late 1960s, it became impossible for Friedan to ignore issues of sexual and personal politics. Refusing to budge on her belief that most women shared her desire the love of a man, Friedan made the argument that women were entitled to fulfillment in both work *and* love her central focus.

In order to reach her mainstream audience, Friedan often wrote for and published her pieces in glossy women's magazines, such as *McCall's* and *Redbook*. She had always had a complicated relationship with these kinds of magazines. During the 1950s, when she was a freelance writer, most of her writing appeared in women's magazines. But, in *The Feminine Mystique*, she took those same magazines to task for their role in helping to create and perpetuate the feminine mystique. Her decision to return to those magazines in the 1970s was part of her conscious effort to distinguish herself from radical feminists,

---

well-positioned to challenge many of the claims anti-feminists made about mainstream America's relationship to feminism.



who typically used underground presses, and to reach out to the mainstream audience she craved. Friedan was aware that the women who read glossy women's magazines were not the same women demanding a feminist revolution. She also knew, however, that they were increasingly inclined to agree with the idea that women should have political and economic equality. By catering to this audience, then, she consciously sought to build bridges between the feminist movement and mainstream heterosexual women.<sup>76</sup>

By the time Friedan started to use popular magazines as her primary outlet, she had stepped down as president of the NOW and was actively trying to distance herself from the radical feminists who called for revolution, identified men as the enemy, and attacked marriage and motherhood. According to Friedan, it was important to address feminist issues in popular women's magazines because she "saw the women's movement as a movement of the mainstream of American society—moving women into and thus changing that mainstream." Friedan estimated that popular women's magazines boasted a readership of eight million women—women she hoped to include in the movement for women's equality. From 1970 to 1973, she regularly wrote a column, entitled "Betty Friedan's Notebook," and the occasional feature article for *McCall's*. According to Friedan, writing for *McCall's* offered the perfect outlet "to recruit women to the basic goals of equality—to say 'you don't have to hate men and renounce motherhood to be a liberated woman'—and thus to help build the women's movement in the largest sense." An underlying assumption of the column, according to editors Shana Alexander and Pat

---

<sup>76</sup> Friedan, Betty Friedan, *"It Changed My Life": Writings on the Women's Movement* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 187-189. For information on women's magazines, see Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003); Nancy A. Walker, ed., *Women's Magazines, 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998); Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *A History of Popular Women's Magazines in the United States, 1792-1995* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998).

Carbine, was that “the women’s movement was now part of every woman’s experience in America, and thus that the Middle American readers of *McCall’s* would identify with [her] words.” In trying to create and foster support for a mainstream version of feminism, Friedan hoped to counter “the extremists who were co-opting the image of ‘women’s lib’” with a version of feminism in which equality did not entail upsetting the basic dynamics of emotional heterosexual intimacy.<sup>77</sup>

In a 1972 feature article that foreshadowed her castigation of radical feminist separatists in “Up From the Kitchen Floor” a year later, Friedan argued that it was time to move “beyond women’s liberation.” Arguing that radical feminists who wanted to revolt against male supremacy were creating more fissures than they bridged, Friedan tried to carve out a new space for feminist thought. She charged feminist separatists with “female chauvinism,” co-opting a popular rhetorical phrase of women’s liberation. She also cautioned against the dangers of casting women’s liberation as an oppositional movement, pointing out that placing too much emphasis on men’s culpability in women’s oppression would only serve to alienate men and make them feel defensive. Confronting the idea of sex-class warfare between women and men, Friedan asked, “Does this mean that any woman who admits tenderness or passion for her husband, or any man, has sold out to the enemy?”<sup>78</sup> Friedan did not think so, believing instead that it was time for feminists to actively include men in the aims of women’s liberation so that they too could benefit from altering rigid gender roles.

---

<sup>77</sup> Friedan, *It Changed My Life*, 188-189.

<sup>78</sup> Betty Friedan, “Beyond Women's Liberation,” *McCall's*, August 1972, 83 and passim.

In her subsequent columns, Friedan refined her refrain that women (and men) were entitled to fulfillment at work and in romantic love, a message to which the readers of *McCall's* responded favorably. As in her earlier works, much of Friedan's evidence was culled from interviews and from letters women wrote to her after reading her work in *McCall's*. In a follow-up piece to "Beyond Women's Liberation," Friedan capitalized on reader responses in extending another argument that seemed to directly oppose a basic tenet of second-wave feminism: "We Don't Have To Be That Independent." Drawing from her own experience, as well as that of the *McCall's* readers, Friedan argued that because feminism had made it possible for women to seek identities outside of marriage and motherhood, "[women] can admit our need for love and home, that we can be soft as well as hard with our children and our husbands, that we can admit our dependence on them without giving up our own identity." "We have become independent enough," she argued, "to admit our need to be dependent."<sup>79</sup>

Friedan used the reader responses to bolster her claim that radical separatists and lesbian feminists alienated "mainstream" women from the movement. One woman wrote to tell Friedan that women who forsook their romantic relationships with men experienced nothing more than "a hollow victory." Another, whose lover told her that she could not possibly be a "women's libber" if she showed him affection, "wondered why it was necessary to choose between loving a man and being accepted as an equal by him." A third said that Friedan's article helped her to realize that the message of women's liberation was *not* "Make War—Not Love With Your Men." Sacrificing love, the woman

---

<sup>79</sup> Betty Friedan, "We Don't Have To Be That Independent," *McCall's*, January 1973, 18 and 21.

argued, was too much to expect from women who wanted equality.<sup>80</sup> Responses like these bolstered Friedan's view that there was a need for a feminism that offered the ideal of gender equality without upsetting traditional ideals about romantic love. Concluding that feminism had helped to correct the expectation that marriage and family should be the *only* source of fulfillment for women, Friedan argued that "a very equal liberated woman can and should be able to admit a need for someone to love and comfort [her]." Finding ways to work together with men so that everyone could acknowledge their "need to depend on each other," then, was a crucial component of the next stage of feminism.<sup>81</sup>

Friedan's *McCall's* columns represented the convergence of the personal and the political in her own life. In experimenting with a more personal writing style, it was significant that Friedan wrote these columns in the aftermath of her divorce. Sometimes, she would relate aspects of her personal struggles in love and liberation in the columns. When she argued that it was acceptable for independent women to be somewhat dependent on men for emotional fulfillment, Friedan briefly described how her feminism allowed her "to stop playing unnecessary power games with a man I love."<sup>82</sup> In another, she responded to criticism from women's separatists that depended too much on men by distinguishing the need for romantic love as a source of identity from a desire for romantic love as a means of fulfillment:

I am not dependent on a man now—for economic support, or status, or identity. I move on my own, and worlds are open to me on my own. I like myself and other women better now—and suddenly find I like men better, feel more comfortable with them—even delight in them.

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

I admit I still need and want to love and be loved by a man. Would I settle, finally, after all, for love, one man, and get married again? Or is that remnant of obsolete nostalgia—a dream to be abandoned with our chains? I'm not sure. The part of me that is still passionately involved with the movement is fired into higher gear than ever by the exploding pace of the political. The other part of me is discovering new emotions about men. With apologies to Joan of Arc, *all that I am, I will not deny*.<sup>83</sup>

Friedan's confessional allusion to her discovery of "new emotions about men" had to do with her forays into the world of dating during the early 1970s. Newly freed from her abusive marriage, Friedan made communal living arrangements for herself and her daughter (her two sons were living away from home by that time). By her own admission, the desire to live communally was fueled by her fear of being alone: "I didn't want to start whatever my new life was going to be, all alone," she admitted in her memoir. Instead, she hoped to surround herself with a "chosen family" in an effort to stave off loneliness.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, in convincing her long-time friend Arthur Herzog to partake in the commune experience with her, Friedan reportedly asked, "What's to keep us from making another mistake and getting married again from sheer loneliness?"<sup>85</sup> Friedan experimented with communal living, then, less out of a spirit of radicalism and more as a preventative measure. She was increasingly aware of the importance of family to her own fulfillment, but knew that another traditional marriage would not afford her the independence she required.

Though wishing to avoid re-marrying, Friedan did enjoy a series of love affairs following her divorce. Romantic interaction with a man was something she wanted; but

---

<sup>83</sup> Betty Friedan, "The Need for Love," *McCall's*, June 1972, 26.

<sup>84</sup> The "commune" she organized consisted of a summer rental home that she shared with several friends, including Betty Rollins, and became "an ever-revolving group of 'chosen family'" for Friedan. See Friedan, *Life So Far*, 242-243; and Hennessee, *Betty Friedan*, 144-150.

<sup>85</sup> Hennessee, *Betty Friedan*, 144.

whether she could successfully blend romance with her pursuit of autonomous self-fulfillment was an on-going question. On one level, her very public stature amplified her old fears that men were turned off by her independence and she continued to worry that men would not want to become romantically involved with her. She remembered one man she dated in the early 1970s, for instance, who found her high profile unsettling and was annoyed that she had to address demands on her time other than his. “I wouldn’t have felt diminished. I would have felt thrilled that I’d acquired a man with such great stuff,” she explained. “But as it was, it gave him a headache,” and the relationship did not last.<sup>86</sup> Another affair with a married man, this one more serious and longer lasting, ended when Friedan refused to consider the possibilities of a three-way relationship with her lover and his wife (a willing participant in proposing a non-traditional romantic relationship between the three).<sup>87</sup> Her romantic longings, then, were coupled with lingering insecurities that men would not love her for herself. Despite her accomplishments and feminist ideology, she continued to reflexively link her self-worth to her relationships with men.

Given her own feelings of romantic inadequacy, Friedan’s effort to convince mainstream Americans that men benefited from feminism as much as women takes on special significance. In addition to gaining more widespread support for feminism, Friedan also had something to gain personally if men did not see women like her as a threat. Increasingly, she spoke of a “sex-role revolution” that would free everyone (not just women) from the rigid expectations that made it difficult for them to find fulfillment

---

<sup>86</sup> Friedan, *Life So Far*, 242.

<sup>87</sup> Friedan, *Life So Far*, 272-273; and Hennessee, *Betty Friedan*, 222-226.

in both work and in love. In another of her *McCall's* columns, she explained men's hostility to women's liberation as a natural reaction because they feared that women would no longer need or love them. She wrote:

[M]en are as dependent on love, whatever it means, from women, as women have been dependent for things that often spoiled love from men. Those love-spoilers, which our movement for equality between the sexes would change, have made some men and women renounce the very possibility of love for the other sex. But our need for each other still shapes our lives, despite the problems. Could the sexual reality, the human reality, of the bond between men and women give our revolution a power greater than the retaliating outrage of racial oppression?<sup>88</sup>

Such arguments consciously refuted anti-feminist attacks from men like Norman Mailer and *Playboy's* Morton Hunt. They also sought to convince men that feminism was not only non-threatening, but that it was in their best interest.

A year after her sojourn as a writer for *McCall's* ended, Friedan extended her argument about the importance of women and men working together for gender equality in *True*, a magazine aimed at men. The article, "An Open Letter to TRUE Men," outlined Friedan's plan for a sex-role revolution and it included a questionnaire for readers to fill out and return. If we can interpret her columns in *McCall's* as an effort to build bridges between the feminist movement and mainstream American women, her article in *True* represented a similar effort to recruit by convincing them that feminists were not hostile to men.

Citing polling evidence that indicated most people suggested the ideal of women's equality, if not the women's liberation movement, Friedan again tried to correct the popular misconception that all feminists hated men. On the contrary, Friedan actively

---

<sup>88</sup> Betty Friedan, "Can This Women's Revolution Really Change Society Without Backlash From Men?," *McCall's*, March 1972, 60.

worked to convince men that she was on their side—so much so that she was willing to risk her own role within the feminist movement. She wrote:

[S]ome of my sisters think you are the enemy. They believe it is a waste of time, or dangerous, or treason to venture into enemy territory like this. And some of you are the enemy, or think you are. But I think you don't have to be the enemy of the women's movement. For if this were a class war of women against men, women could never win it, not just because men have too much power—which they do—but because most women wouldn't have the will to fight such a war. Most women wouldn't want to live without men, most want to be able to love men.<sup>89</sup>

In addition to trying to convince the readers of *True* that the vast majority of women drawn to feminism wanted to maintain romantic connections to men, Friedan argued that men could also benefit from feminism, especially in their interpersonal relationships with women. “When women no longer have to depend on husbands first of all as breadwinners, and no longer feel so insecure about themselves that they can't see any good in their husbands, they will be able to love you for yourselves,” she explained. If feminism succeeded, “There would be less nagging, less guilt, less problems, more love from the women whom men can feel at home with.”<sup>90</sup> Ultimately, Friedan argued that feminism would strengthen, rather than destroy, family bonds and that it would make relationships between women and men better.

Part of her agenda in writing for *True* magazine was to foster a dialogue with its male readers. Managing Editor Ellie Kossack wrote to Friedan before her article went to press to explain that they had toned down some of her language so as “not to alienate our

---

<sup>89</sup> Betty Friedan, “An Open Letter to True Men: Point of View,” *True*, January 1974, 59, Carton 29, Folder 978, Betty Friedan Papers (71-62--81-M23), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. The article was later reprinted in *Cosmopolitan* and Friedan's book, *It Changed My Life*. Betty Friedan, “An Open Letter to True Men,” in *It Changed My Life: Writings On the Women's Movement* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 429-439; Betty Friedan, “An Open Letter to True Men,” *Cosmopolitan*, January 1977. Citations refer to the article in *True*.

<sup>90</sup> Friedan, “An Open Letter to TRUE Men,” 64.



chauvinistic reader.” Kossack explained: “Remember, our reader is not an urban sophisticate. He likes plain language but reacts strongly to threatening catchy words.”<sup>91</sup> A similar strategy was employed for the questionnaire Friedan designed to accompany the article, which included fifteen multiple choice questions, demographic inquiries, and room for men to share their thoughts on the meaning and impact of women’s liberation.<sup>92</sup>

Nearly ten months after publication, the editors of *True* magazine sent some of the questionnaire results to Friedan. The magazine editors had tabulated data from 1000 respondents. They also sent 25 original responses, which included the readers’ “personal thoughts” about women’s liberation in addition to their responses on the multiple choice sections. The responses proved two points Friedan was trying to make: that men generally favored equality, but saw separatists as too extreme.<sup>93</sup> The respondents seemed to agree with Friedan’s speculation that men would be interested in feminism if it focused more on its benefits for men in interpersonal relationships with women. More than three-fourths of the respondents said that they would like to have a woman in their lives that they could talk to about anything (748 respondents) and that they wanted “to feel needed

---

<sup>91</sup> Ellie Kossack to Betty Friedan, October 16, 1973, Carton 29, Folder 979, Betty Friedan Papers (71-62--81-M23), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. Friedan’s original draft was longer and more strongly worded, but the basic message remained intact in the published version. See Betty Friedan, “An Open Letter to True Men,” c 1973, Carton 29, Folder 978, Betty Friedan Papers (71-62--81-M23), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

<sup>92</sup> Friedan, “An Open Letter to TRUE Men,” 59-60.

<sup>93</sup> The answers to a question that asked men to gauge how they felt about the women’s movement indicated that slightly more men saw it as “a joke” (111 respondents) than men who agreed with it wholeheartedly (88). Slightly more than half said that they “agreed with a lot of it, but not the extremists” and about one-fifth felt that it would change their lives for the better. In smaller numbers, some of the men equated feminism with “man-hating bra-burners” (71) with a small handful saying that it was “a menace to all men and should be stopped” (28). Only a few of the men expressed discomfort with the idea of women working and many expressed their willingness to “help out” around the house (though not necessarily to share in housework equally). See “TRUE Responses,” Carton 29, Folder 979, Betty Friedan Papers (71-62—81-M23), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

and loved for [themselves] alone” (793 respondents).<sup>94</sup> The idea that men wanted romantic love and saw it as crucial to their self-fulfillment became a fixture of Friedan’s campaign to mainstream feminism throughout the 1970s.

### **FRIEDAN’S ON-GOING DIALOGUE ABOUT HETEROSEXUAL LOVE WITHIN THE MOVEMENT**

Friedan’s articles for magazines like *McCall’s* and *True* exemplified her effort to expand the reach of feminism. But, she also continued to work actively within existing circles of feminist activism during the 1970s. She was still committed to pursuing political gender equality and was especially dedicated to the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. She also sought to engage in dialogue with other feminists as part of her broader effort to understand how feminism was affecting women and men in their personal lives. Friedan’s dialogues with other feminists, like her engagements with the mainstream readers of popular magazines, helped her to develop her argument that people needed both emotional and professional fulfillment, which feminism could help to ensure.

One especially illuminating example of Friedan’s dialogues with other feminists about the implications of love appeared in *Viva: The International Magazine for Women*, which was conceived as “a female counterpart to *Penthouse*.”<sup>95</sup> In 1975, Friedan participated in a *Viva* symposium on whether or not women were “naturally masochistic” with five other prominent feminists, including Barbara Seaman and Alix Kates

---

<sup>94</sup> “TRUE Responses,” Carton 29, Folder 979, Betty Friedan Papers (71-62—81-M23), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>95</sup> Michael Martin, “Heroes: Viva Magazine,” *V Magazine*, c 2006, [http://www.vmagazine.com/feature\\_article.php?n=128](http://www.vmagazine.com/feature_article.php?n=128).

Shulman.<sup>96</sup> In a May 1974 letter, editor Betty-Jane Raphael explained that the purpose was to explore why “some of today’s most outwardly successful women seem still to be mired in emotional masochistic interpersonal relationships.”<sup>97</sup> In asking prominent feminists to debate this issue, *Viva* acknowledged a pervasive feminist concern with the power implications of intimate heterosexual relationships.

The symposium began by stating that masochism, or “an abnormal sexual passion characterized by pleasure in being abused by one’s associate,” was typically seen as “a woman’s thing, her trip.” But, with women becoming more successful in fields not associated with traditional ideals of womanhood, *Viva* asked if that assessment was fair. The participants did not reach a consensus regarding whether women were inherently masochistic about romantic love; but they did agree that relationships between women and men were fundamentally about power. Evoking the fairy tale of Cinderella, Alix Kates Shulman argued that women were willing to damage themselves “saying please, I’ll do anything, anything, only just give me some power, only just love me, and thereby share your power with me.”<sup>98</sup> Betty Friedan tentatively agreed with Shulman’s assertion

---

<sup>96</sup> Barbara Seaman was an instrumental figure in the women’s health movement and Alix Kates Shulman was a novelist active in radical feminist circles. Friedan was initially on friendly terms with Seaman, though the two would eventually fall out over a variety of issues—including rumors that Friedan had dinner with Seaman’s ex-husband. Nevertheless, their views on feminism were largely in tune. Shulman, however, participated in radical feminist groups like Redstockings and WITCH, whose ideology Friedan disagreed with. The other participants were editor and writer Karen Durbin, playwright Myrna Lamb, and writer Jill Robinson. See Viva Symposium, “Masochism: The Last Great Power Play as Viewed by Sex Feminist Writers,” *Viva: The International Magazine for Women*, January 1975, Carton 29, Folder 983, Betty Friedan Papers (71-62--81-M23), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. For the unedited transcript of the symposium, see “Viva Symposium on Masochism,” 1975, Carton 29, Folder 982, Betty Friedan Papers (71-62--81-M23), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. For information on Friedan’s friendship with Barbara Seaman, see Hennessee, *Betty Friedan*, passim.

<sup>97</sup> Bette-Jane Raphael to Betty Friedan, May 28, 1974, Carton 29, Folder 982, Betty Friedan Papers (71-62--81-M23), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

<sup>98</sup> Alix Kates Shulman, quoted in “Viva Symposium on Masochism,” 3; Viva Symposium, “Masochism,” 46.

that women were so eager for power that they were masochistic about romantic love, but insisted that things were beginning to change because feminism was making it possible for them to seek power and fulfillment elsewhere. Women could safely risk love and its “pain and suffering as well as pleasure and joy,” so long as they were not entirely dependent upon men for their self worth. “Once you have a healthy self, you are able to love,” she argued. It was only in the absence of autonomous fulfillment, that women’s pursuit of love remained masochistic.<sup>99</sup>

The *Viva* symposium participants testified to their own experiences in love and liberation. In tentatively agreeing that they still felt vulnerable in romantic relationships with men, they suggested that a certain degree of vulnerability was inherent in all romantic relationships—and that feminism leveled the playing field in a way that made that vulnerability more equitable and less potentially damaging. Describing one of her own relationships, feminist writer and editor Karen Durbin explained, “when you’re independent you love better than when you’re in a state of constant hunger.”<sup>100</sup> Women might still feel pain in romantic relationships, but with more control over their own lives and less economic and emotional dependence on men otherwise, heterosexual love was no longer *necessarily* masochistic and masochism was no longer necessarily gendered female. With varying degrees of skepticism, the participants agreed that feminism might make it possible for women to share love with men without suffering for it.

While some of Friedan’s dialogues with other feminists were congenial, like the *VIVA* symposium, others were more confrontational. “Up From the Kitchen Floor” and

---

<sup>99</sup> Betty Friedan, quoted in “Viva Symposium on Masochism,” 3; *Viva Symposium*, “Masochism,” 46.

<sup>100</sup> Karen Durbin, quoted in “Viva Symposium on Masochism,” 3; *Viva Symposium*, “Masochism,” 46.

the fallout it generated was a perfect example of how her interactions with other feminists were sometimes incendiary. Much of this had to do with her persistent effort to distance herself from separatists and lesbian feminists, which led her to cast as man-haters any feminists who detracted from the image of feminism she was trying to cultivate.

Friedan's interview with Simone de Beauvoir, published in *Saturday Review* in 1975, was especially illustrative of her effort to distinguish herself from feminists' who suggested that liberated women should not pursue loving relationships with men. Though heralded as a major inspiration for second-wavers' feminist awakenings, Beauvoir had only recently declared herself a feminist. Friedan set out to interview Beauvoir in Paris, partly hoping to secure Beauvoir's agreement with her vision of feminism in the 1970s. Indeed, since second-wave feminists greatly admired Beauvoir, Friedan likely believed that earning Beauvoir's support publicly would be a decisive victory in her battles with her peers.<sup>101</sup> But what Friedan found was that she and Beauvoir agreed on very few fronts regarding feminism, least of all regarding the perils of love and liberation.

---

<sup>101</sup> Second-wave feminists frequently identified Simone de Beauvoir as one of the most important sources of inspiration for their own theories about feminism and their ideas about romantic love. For instance, Shulamith Firestone dedicated her book, *The Dialectic of Sex*, to Beauvoir as did the Redstockings, who wrote in their anthology, *Feminist Revolution*, that Beauvoir was "the French woman who exposed male supremacy for this era, and gave us our feminism." *The Second Sex* was almost always listed as a foundational text for new feminists to read and quotations from the book and references to Beauvoir's life frequently appeared in second-wave works. Following Beauvoir's declaration of her feminism in 1972, second-wavers also clamored to interview her. The examples of second-wave feminist admiration and acknowledgement of Beauvoir are too many to count, but useful starting points include: Helen Eustis, trans., "The Radicalization of Simone de Beauvoir," *Ms.*, July 1972; Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970); Redstockings of the Women's Liberation movement, *Feminist Revolution: An Abridged Edition with Additional Writings* (New York: Random House, 1978); Penny Forster and Imogen Sutton, eds., *Daughters of de Beauvoir* (London: The Women's Press, 1989); Betty Friedan, "A Dialogue with Simone de Beauvoir," in *It Changed My Life: Writings On the Women's Movement* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 391-412; Helen Eustis, trans., "The Radicalization of Simone de Beauvoir," *Ms.*, July 1972; Simone de Beauvoir, "The Woman I Was to Be," *Ms.*, March 1974; Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement, *Feminist Revolution: An Abridged Edition with Additional Writings* (New York: Random House, 1978).

Beauvoir theoretically agreed with Friedan's assertion that as women became more independent, "the need and the possibility of love and sexual intimacy could be fulfilled;" however, she took care to point out that real sexual equality was still a far-off goal. And, whereas Friedan argued that lingering inequality was not grounds to encourage women to forsake their love for men, Beauvoir tentatively aligned herself with women's separatists, arguing that "a woman can love a man or a woman as she wants in a world of equality" but if "it is not equal, she takes a big risk."<sup>102</sup>

Perhaps out of frustration that Beauvoir did not share her views, Friedan took her to task for failing to match theory with practice. Beauvoir's critics had long argued that her romantic entanglement with Jean Paul Sartre marred her reputation as a spokesperson for liberated women.<sup>103</sup> Though Friedan did not echo the more nefarious claims—that Beauvoir's ideas were not her own, but rather extensions of Sartre's philosophies—she did suggest that Beauvoir's warnings about heterosexual love were hypocritical at best. Explaining that she only had an hour to speak with Beauvoir because Beauvoir was needed at an ill Sartre's bedside, Friedan asked, "when one has lived a whole life in such dependence upon a man as she has—and, by flaunting the absence of legal sanction,

---

<sup>102</sup> Betty Friedan, "Sex, Society, and the Female Dilemma: A Dilemma Between Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan," *Saturday Review*, June 14, 1975, 56. Interestingly, in the unedited transcript of the interview between Friedan and Beauvoir, immediately after making this statement, Beauvoir asked: "May I ask you to ask the main questions now." Her request may have either reflected Friedan had wandered too far off from agreed upon terrain or that she did not see issues of love and sex as "main" issues for feminists to address. Regardless, Friedan chose to eliminate the request from the published interview. See "Dialogue of Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir," c 1975, 23, Carton 29, Folder 984, Betty Friedan Papers (71-62--81-M23), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

<sup>103</sup> For overviews of the relationship of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre, see Deirdre Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991); Axel Madsen, *Hearts and Minds: The Common Journey of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: Morrow, 1977); Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Hazel Rowley, *Tête-à-tête: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre* (HarperCollins, 2005).

made a stronger bond than others do in ordinary marriage—how can she then advocate for other women the renunciation of the very need to love and be loved by a man?”<sup>104</sup>

To be fair, Beauvoir did not fully advocate the renunciation of heterosexual love. But she did warn of its potential to impair a woman’s autonomy and equality. Her own decades-long struggle to navigate the stormy waters of love and liberation was very much shaped her belief that romantic love could be both rewarding and damaging. Friedan’s willingness to reduce Beauvoir’s position to one of hypocrisy, rather than to consider how her experiences shaped her ideology, demonstrated Friedan’s dogged determination to draw clear lines of demarcation between herself and anyone who even hinted at the benefits of women’s separatism.

Friedan even went so far as to brand Gloria Steinem, who often occupied the public spotlight, as a militant man-hater. Steinem did, indeed, vocally ally herself with lesbian feminists during the 1970s as a way to express solidarity with her sisters; however, the vast majority of separatists found Friedan’s effort to lump Steinem with them laughable. Most frequently, Friedan sited a statement Steinem made likening the condition of marriage to that of prostitution as evidence that Steinem was out to demonize married women. In truth, Steinem had a personal aversion to marriage, mostly because of its institutional flaws, but she never suggested that women should not pursue love with men.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, Friedan firmly believed that Steinem’s message contradicted her own and worked hard to cultivate distance. Many observers have suggested that Friedan’s real problem with Steinem was that Steinem had grown more famous than Friedan and

---

<sup>104</sup> Betty Friedan, “No Gods, No Goddesses,” *Saturday Review*, June 14, 1975, 17.

<sup>105</sup> Gloria Steinem and other feminists’ perceptions of her are discussed in chapter five.

held more sway within the movement. Some even suggest that intense jealousy of Steinem's beauty and charm inspired Friedan's ire.<sup>106</sup> Regardless of her motivations, Friedan was convinced that her message differed drastically from Steinem's when in actuality they shared a similar belief that feminism would make relationships between women and men better.

In the mid-1970s, Friedan's antipathy for Steinem led to a strange alliance with the radical feminist group Redstockings, which also targeted Gloria Steinem. In 1969, Shulamith Firestone and Ellen Willis had formed Redstockings as "a 'very militant, very public group'" committed to both action and consciousness-raising.<sup>107</sup> Redstockings focused on abortion rights as its primary action issue, though much of its energy was spent on consciousness-raising, distributing feminist literature, and writing its manifesto (1969).<sup>108</sup> The group disbanded over ideological differences shortly after its formation but re-banded in 1973. The original founders, Firestone and Willis, had moved on, but returning and new members of Redstockings were concerned that the movement had become too focused on individual solutions rather than collective action aimed at dismantling patriarchy. One of their primary goals in 1975 was to invalidate Gloria

---

<sup>106</sup> See especially Brownmiller, *In Our Time*; Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*; Hennessee, *Betty Friedan: Her Life*.

<sup>107</sup> Ellen Willis, quoted in Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 140.

<sup>108</sup> For overviews of the Redstockings, see Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 139-158; Redstockings, "Redstockings Manifesto," in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 223-225; Redstockings of the Women's Liberation movement, *Feminist Revolution: An Abridged Edition with Additional Writings*.



Steinem, and *Ms.* magazine, as a popular voice of feminism. Their chosen tactic was to accuse Steinem of having ties to the CIA.<sup>109</sup>

The Redstockings' charge that the CIA had infiltrated the feminist movement (via Steinem) closely resembled the accusations Friedan leveled against lesbian separatists in "Up From the Kitchen Floor." Ironically perhaps, the Redstockings' accusations came out of their belief that the movement had become too watered down, whereas Friedan feared it was becoming too radical. Regardless of their views on radicalism, they employed the similar tactic of attacking Gloria Steinem. Additionally, the Redstockings offered an argument similar to Friedan's regarding the complimentary aspects of feminism and heterosexual intimacy. Though they disagreed with the kind of liberal feminism Friedan espoused as insufficient institutional reform, they shared a distaste for lesbian separatism.

Like other groups of young, radical feminists that emerged in the late 1960s, Redstockings identified men as the enemy.<sup>110</sup> In highlighting male supremacy as the root of women's oppression, Redstockings argued that women's intimate relationships with men especially facilitated their inequality: "Because we have lived so intimately with our oppressors, in isolation from each other, we have been kept from seeing our personal suffering as a political condition." Through consciousness-raising, Redstockings believed that it would become clear that "every such relationship is a *class* relationship, and the conflicts between individual men and women are *political* conflicts that can only be

---

<sup>109</sup> See Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 265-269; and Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 284-307.

<sup>110</sup> In their manifesto, Redstockings wrote: "We identify the agents of our oppression as men. . . . All men receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male supremacy. All men have oppressed women." Redstockings, "Redstockings Manifesto," 223.

solved collectively.”<sup>111</sup> In rectifying the imbalance of power in heterosexual relationships, Redstockings generally believed that “sex was, in fact, both our undoing and our only possible weapon of self-defense and self-assertion (aggression).”<sup>112</sup> Marriage offered women the most stability in a world that disadvantaged them at work and in politics. It was men who had to change their behavior rather than women, who were already making the best of their situation. And the vantage point of heterosexual relationships gave feminists the best opportunity of urging men to realize their complicity in patriarchy.<sup>113</sup>

Betty Friedan disagreed vehemently with feminists who specifically identified men as the enemy, as the Redstockings did. But the dominant faction within Redstockings, who towed what they called the “pro-woman line,” did not necessarily believe that dismantling intimate relationships between women and men was necessary in challenging male supremacy. Instead, they believed that marriage, even if problematic, was better than other romantic alternatives, such as lesbianism or free love. Carol Hanisch, one of Redstockings’ primary advocates of the pro-woman line, explained the position thusly: “Whether we live with or without a man, communally or in couples or alone, are married or unmarried, live with other women, go for free love, celibacy or lesbianism, or any

---

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ellen Willis, quoted in Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 147.

<sup>113</sup> Redstockings defense of heterosexuality and marriage was part of their “pro-woman line,” which argued that women should not be blamed for their own oppression. See Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 139-158; and Ellen Willis, “Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism,” in *No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press), 117-150.

combination, there are only good and bad things about each bad situation.”<sup>114</sup> In arguing that all alternatives to marriage were “bad alternatives,” Redstockings defended married women, who were increasingly cast as dupes of patriarchy by other radical feminist groups. They also saw their position as more sympathetic to class differences. As one member, Barbara Leon, argued, demanding that women reject marriage demonstrated “a strong class bias in automatically excluding the mass of women who have no other means of support but a husband.”<sup>115</sup> The pro-woman Redstockings’ defense of marriage reflected their view that women could best achieve equality by working within heterosexual relationships and challenging their romantic partners to accept feminism, rather than abandoning them wholesale.<sup>116</sup> Though coming to feminism from vastly different perspectives and with different goals in mind, Friedan and Redstockings were on the same page with the idea that feminism and heterosexual intimacy were not at odds.

In Redstockings’ 1978 anthology, *Feminist Revolution*, several pieces articulated a defense of heterosexual love and echoed Friedan’s efforts to distance feminism from separatist ideology in the 1970s. Redstocking Patricia Mainardi argued, for instance, that the “fashionable women’s movement rhetoric classifies women who lived with men as ‘unliberated’ second-class feminists at best, ‘collaborators with the enemy’ at worst.”<sup>117</sup> Mainardi suggested that anti-marriage attitudes were linked to the sexual revolution, as

---

<sup>114</sup> Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political,” in *Notes from the Second Year Women’s Liberation: Major Writings of Radical Feminists*, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York: Radical Feminism, 1970), 77.

<sup>115</sup> Barbara Leon, quoted in Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 144.

<sup>116</sup> Hanisch, “The Personal is Political,” 77; and Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 144-148.

<sup>117</sup> Patricia Mainardi, “The Marriage Question,” in *Feminist Revolution* (Redstockings, Inc., 1975), 105.

well as to radical feminist thought, and argued that the free love attitude embraced by many radicals was far from freeing for women. Other radical feminists agreed that the sexual revolution was troublesome in its perpetuation of sexual double standards; however, that did not translate into an endorsement of traditional marriage, which they saw as equally damaging. But Mainardi, echoing Hanisch's argument that none of the alternatives to traditional marriage were very attractive, insisted that it was ridiculous to demonize women who wanted to remain married. Her defense of marriage was strongly connected to her deeper argument that women desired and had a right to love: "I believe women — and men — would like love, security, companionship, respect and a long term commitment to each other. Women rarely get much of this, in marriage or out, but we *want it*."<sup>118</sup>

The argument that women *wanted* love and were entitled to experience it became a common refrain in Redstockings statements regarding the impact feminism would have on romantic relationships between women and men. Redstocking Barbara Leon expressed a similar sentiment in her argument in favor of "true monogamy—of shared emotional commitment." Bemoaning the tendency of so-called liberal men to embrace free love (which pro-women Redstockings saw as detrimental to women), Leon contended that the point of feminism was for women to fight for what they wanted. For many women, that amounted to fighting for their right to "monogamy, love and commitment." Rather than giving up on romantic love for the sake of liberation, then,

---

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 107.

women should even more ardently pursue it while demanding that men give them the kind of love they desired.<sup>119</sup>

In Leon's estimation, it was time for men to start sacrificing, instead of women, by giving up traditional male prerogatives in order to participate equally in loving relationships. As Leon concluded, "Giving things up had to be equal for love to be gained."<sup>120</sup> Another pro-woman Redstocking, in an open letter to her errant lover, agreed that relationship dynamics needed to change, but that it was not necessary for women to abandon their desire for emotional intimacy. As she explained: "I still have a real need to love and be loved. And that's what makes me alive."<sup>121</sup> Friedan similarly, and frequently, evoked the idea that loving and being love were real human needs that women were entitled to pursue. This view, coupled with their shared aversion to lesbian-separatism and Gloria Steinem, made strange bedfellows of Friedan and the Redstockings during the 1970s.

### **LOVE AND WORK: THE KEY COMPONENTS OF THE SECOND STAGE**

Over the course of the 1970s, Friedan reached out to mainstream Americans who believed in gender equality, engaged in dialogue with other feminists, and continued to struggle privately in matters of love and liberation. Eventually her tendency to demonize lesbian feminists waned. At the International Women's Year Conference in Houston

---

<sup>119</sup> Barbara Leon, "The Male Supremacist Attack on Monogamy," in *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings (New York: Redstockings, Inc., 1975), 128-129.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>121</sup> Redstockings, ed., "Letter to a Lover When She Left Him," in *Feminist Revolution* (New York: Redstockings, Inc., 1975), 127.

(1977) she even publicly (though somewhat reluctantly) endorsed lesbian and gay rights as an important platform issue.<sup>122</sup> But even though she became more inclusive, reconciling heterosexual intimacy to the aims of feminism (both personally and politically) remained her primary focus. In 1981, a decades' worth of thinking and work culminated in her book, *The Second Stage*, which extended the argument that love and work were the two major cornerstones of self-fulfillment for both women and men.<sup>123</sup>

Friedan's legwork leading up to publication of *The Second Stage* lent strength to her argument that the desire for gender equality within the bounds of heterosexual intimacy was widely shared. Her own experiences aside, Friedan's ideas relied heavily on the experiences other women and men relayed to her over the years. The book was peppered with anecdotal evidence supplied by the thousands of people Friedan talked with throughout the 1970s. In addition to interacting with feminists within the movement, Friedan had capitalized on the responses she received to her articles in popular magazines and speaking engagements.

One especially rich source came on the coattails of Friedan's January 1980 feature article in *Redbook*, which addressed conditions facing women during the dawn of the new decade. The article laid out an abbreviated version of Friedan's vision for the second stage, emphasizing that feminists must shift their attention to "the concrete, practical,

---

<sup>122</sup> Some have argued that Friedan's support of the platform had more to do with political expediency to bolster solidarity for the Equal Rights Amendment than actual support of lesbianism. See Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 139-142; Hennessee, *Betty Friedan: Her Life*, 233-235; Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 291-294; Marjorie J. Spruill, "Gender and America's Right Turn," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 75.

<sup>123</sup> In 1976, Betty Friedan published the first edition of *It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women's Movement* which was primarily an anthology of previously published works. See Friedan, *It Changed My Life*.

everyday problems of really living, working and loving as equal persons with men.”<sup>124</sup>

She also took care to emphasize her point that it was crucial that people have *both* romantic love and work in order to become truly fulfilled. She asked, “How does the self define itself and evolve, except in intimate relationship with others—except *in love and work*, facing problems in the family and world, commitments beyond oneself?”<sup>125</sup> The ability to form bonds with others, professional and personal, with true freedom of choice was the best measure of feminism’s success—as well as its ultimate end goal—for Friedan.

In order to gauge how Americans felt about the women’s movement and its impact on their lives, Friedan and *Redbook* solicited personal essays from the magazine’s readers. Pointing to the need for women and men to have new “role models” for how to live the ideals of equality, they asked that the readers write about their own experiences in order to establish new role models for “the new problems and possibilities” of feminism in its second stage.<sup>126</sup> During the summer of 1980, *Redbook* forwarded 30 essays to Friedan, which help demonstrate how the mainstream audience she so eagerly courted understood feminism. In addition to explaining how feminism had shaped their professional lives and their perceptions of gender roles, many of the essayists shared stories about how feminism had changed (or reaffirmed) their expectations of loving relationships.

---

<sup>124</sup> The article laid out the major arguments Friedan elaborated upon in her book, *The Second Stage*. Betty Friedan, “The Second Stage: The Strongest Challenge to Women Since ‘The Feminine Mystique,’” *Redbook*, January 1980, 46. Friedan made the same statement in her book, as well. See Friedan, *The Second Stage*, 31.

<sup>125</sup> Friedan, “The Second Stage,” 51.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

Though the respondents did not reveal any sort of overwhelming consensus regarding the impact of the women's liberation movement on romantic intimacy, general themes emerged regarding the importance of freedom of choice and lingering obstacles in balancing professional and personal needs. Moreover, though women seemed to constitute the majority of respondents, men wrote in to share their perceptions of feminism as well, helping to corroborate Friedan's assertion that feminism would benefit both women and men.<sup>127</sup> All told, the essays helped to bolster Friedan's argument that mainstream Americans (regardless of gender, age, or other factors) reading glossy mainstream magazines, like *Redbook*, were drawn to a version of feminism that allowed for heterosexual romantic intimacy.

When it came to matters of the heart, a number of essays cohered around a common refrain: because of feminism, romantic relationships were becoming more authentic and equal. One woman who shared her essay with *Redbook*, for instance, insisted that because of feminist ideals of equality, she believed that "a healthy, nurturing equal relationship [was] possible . . . !" Twice divorced, the woman argued that the possibilities of mutual and equal relationships would be realized in the next generation, arguing that equality in heterosexual romance would become possible when men were liberated from the sex-role system as well. Concluding her essay, she wrote: "What do women want? Well, Freud, we want it all—the financial independence that comes with a job, a home, a family, a loving intimate relationship. But we can't have it all without the enlightened male!"<sup>128</sup>

---

<sup>127</sup> Of the essays *Redbook* sent to Friedan, 22 were written by women and eight were written by men. Privacy restrictions request that identifying information not be used. See "Personal Essays for *Redbook*, 1980," Carton 7, Folder 248, Betty Friedan Papers (86-M12--93-M146), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

<sup>128</sup> *Redbook* Essay, "Personal Essays for *Redbook*, 1980."



The writer's assertion that women's ability to achieve fulfillment in both love and work hinged on men becoming "enlightened" was very much in tune with Friedan's insistence that feminism should include and would benefit men, too.

Several of the men who wrote in response to *Redbook*, "enlightened males," focused on how feminism had helped their romantic partners—wives or girlfriends—in becoming more self aware outside of the relationship. While they described how feminism had benefited women in this regard, they also took care to detail the ways in which they had become more actively involved in their romantic and family relationships because the zeitgeist of the women's movement made it acceptable for them to more fully articulate and explore their emotions. One man who wrote an essay entitled "The Woman I Marry," explained how he had grown up with the model of an equitable marriage between his mother and father. Along with his own upbringing, the women's movement of his generation had solidified his desire to connect with independent women. Drawing comparisons between women who were entirely dependent upon him in dating situations and those who were consciously independent, this male feminist argued that a middle ground of sorts was most desirable. Whereas he felt stifled when dating a woman who expected him to perform traditional ideals of masculinity, his overtly independent lover felt that "love . . . was a way that one lost ground." Subsequently, their relationship was an exercise in sharing power—so much so that he grew to believe that "the trappings of independence . . . didn't seem to promote much love." Ultimately concluding that it was important for him to form a romantic attachment to a woman with career ambitions and an identity of her own, the man concluded that: "I want to be loved for who I am and not for how I function; I want the woman I marry to be able to take me or leave me and

decide to take me.”<sup>129</sup> The idea that romantic love should be freely given and received regardless of one’s gender was, in this case, ostensibly linked to the aims of feminism.

In a similar vein, another young woman emphasized how the women’s movement and its ideals of sexual liberation had helped her to understand what she wanted in romantic relationships with men. This respondent began by explaining that although she initially felt averse to feminism because she thought that feminists promoted anti-family and anti-marriage messages, she had grown to realize that this was not the case. In terms of her personal life, she pointed to “a basic conflict” between her desire for both independence and “male companionship.” Having come of age during the late 1960s and 1970s, this young woman pointed to the benefits of sexual liberation, arguing that it was liberating to have experience with sexual freedom in settings like singles bars. But, even though she delighted in aspects of sexual liberation and the ability to have sex for its own sake, she continued to worry about what men thought about her—especially when she had romantic feelings for them. Over time, she argued, the ideals of feminism allowed her to realize that she did not need to “fulfill the needs of every man [she] went out with,” but rather that the most important thing was that relationships “complemented [her] lifestyle.” A final anecdote about a recent conversation she had with a female friend revealed how she thought feminism had shaped romantic expectations by the end of the 1970s. Conceding that even though she did not necessarily see marriage as a desirable goal she still wanted some sort of romantic partnership, the young woman explained that she had grown to realize:

It wasn’t a betrayal to the Women’s Movement to admit that we needed love and needed to give it. Love, a word that for years we had internalized, just couldn’t contain itself anymore. We had developed ourselves to the point where we had to

---

<sup>129</sup> *Redbook* Essay, “Personal Essays for Redbook, 1980.”

come out of that self to be completely free. The love of a man, the love of a child, the need for a meaningful relationship didn't necessarily have to weaken our independence but could indeed strengthen it.<sup>130</sup>

Friedan published her book-length version of the article, *The Second Stage*, a year later as the backlash against feminism intensified within American politics, society, and culture. Ronald Reagan, the presumptive leader of the New Right, had just been elected President of the United States and feminists were fighting an increasingly steep uphill battle to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment.<sup>131</sup> Against this backdrop, *The Second Stage* took stock of where feminism stood after more than a decade of activism and ferment. It also continued Friedan's long effort to convince mainstream America that feminism was not about extremist radicalism.

In *The Second Stage*, Friedan crystallized her argument regarding the human need to seek fulfillment in work, family, and romantic love. As she did in numerous speeches, articles, and dialogues over the course of the 1970s, Friedan continued to insist that radical feminist separatists were too polarizing regarding issues of family. According to Friedan, both women and men were naturally wired to seek fulfillment in family relationships, nuclear or otherwise. Radical feminist disavowals of domesticity had allowed anti-feminists like Phyllis Schlafly and Marabel Morgan to gain loyal followers because of "their accurate recognition of women's deep-rooted feelings about marriage and the family."<sup>132</sup> Despite begrudgingly agreeing with Morgan and Schlafly that love and family were intrinsically important to women, Friedan said that the anti-feminist

---

<sup>130</sup> Redbook Essay, "Personal Essays for Redbook, 1980."

<sup>131</sup> See Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*; Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991); Schulman, *The Seventies*; Schulman and Zelizer, *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*; Spruill, "Gender and America's Right Turn."

<sup>132</sup> Friedan, *The Second Stage*, 43.

position was just as extremist and alienating as that of radical feminists, because it denied women the option of seeking fulfillment *outside* of the family as well. As a corrective, Friedan suggested that her version of feminism, to be deployed in the second stage, would allow both women and men to achieve a more complete sense of personhood. With the elimination of polarizing sex roles, Friedan argued that a “new healthy core of self in women, replacing the conflicts and denigration of the either/or split, will stand firm on the two roots of human identity: love and work.”<sup>133</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Friedan’s views on feminism and heterosexual love resulted from her genuine belief that most women did not want to change the basic tenets of romance as an end goal of feminism and that casting lesbian feminists as a fringe group was politically expedient. All the while, Friedan was coming to terms with her divorce as she began anew her private struggle to find fulfillment in a career as a public advocate for feminism and in loving relationships with men. Together, these converging forces pushed Friedan’s feminism beyond advocacy for political, social, and economic equality for women to more fully confront the personal politics of romantic love as an important feminist concern. The favorable responses she received from her target audience demonstrated a tangible need for the mainstream vision she wanted within the broader movement. As it turned out, many self-identified feminists of the era saw no shame in declaring their desire—even their need—for heterosexual romantic intimacy and they firmly rejected a version of liberation that did not allow for romance between women and men.

---

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 311.

## Chapter Four

“No Contradiction Between Freedom and Love”<sup>1</sup>

Helen Gurley Brown, Erica Jong, and the Reconciliation of Love and Liberation

*She opened her heart even when hearts were out of  
style.  
She saw no contradiction between freedom and love.  
She loved.  
She was loved.  
She was free.<sup>2</sup>*

In a May 1978 “self interview” for *Cosmopolitan*, Erica Jong wrote the above words to describe how she would like history to remember her. Her chosen epitaph drew attention to the perceived problems of love and liberation while illuminating Jong’s firm belief that the two were not mutually exclusive. By the time of the interview, second-wave feminists had been grappling with the complexities of romantic love for more than a decade and the debate had not let up. If anything, it had intensified as self-identified feminists continued to search for versions of love that were compatible with feminism. But for Jong—and her friend, *Cosmopolitan* editor Helen Gurley Brown<sup>3</sup>—the conflict between love and liberation was grossly exaggerated by feminists who thought that

---

<sup>1</sup> Erica Jong, “Erica Jong on Erica Jong,” *Cosmopolitan*, May 1978, 262.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Though Jong’s work was featured in *Cosmopolitan* because she and Brown shared similar visions of feminism, the two women were also reportedly good friends, as outlined in a (somewhat snarky) profile of them in *Vanity Fair*. During a “girl talk” lunch with Michael Musto, Jong and Brown reportedly talked about their own experiences in balancing romance and feminism. Michael Musto, “Out to Lunch with Helen Gurley Brown and Erica Jong: Girl Talk with Michael Musto,” *Vanity Fair*, July 1987, 132.

romance was at odds with independence for women. On the contrary, Jong gave voice to a persistent belief among a certain second-wave feminists that “saw no contradiction between freedom and love.” Though there were complexities at play, feminists could love and be loved without forsaking their own freedom.

The interview appeared in *Cosmopolitan* several months after the publication of Jong’s novel, *How to Save Your Own Life*, which was the second installment in her trilogy of “mock memoirs” featuring the adventures of Isadora Wing. At their core, the Isadora Wing mock memoirs were about the daily travails of navigating romantic love against the backdrop of sexual liberation and second-wave feminism. As Jong explained in the *Cosmopolitan* interview, she aimed to illuminate the contradictions and complexities that shaped many women’s lives in her novels. “[Women] long to be free, but they are not yet truly free,” she argued. “Their heads are in the twenty-first century, but their hearts are in the nineteenth century.”<sup>4</sup> Within that liminal space, Jong believed that women would continue to grapple with ideals of love and sex as they searched for romantic outcomes that worked best for their individual needs.

It was significant that Jong saw her ability to portray the pursuit of love and liberation as complementary endeavors as her greatest contribution in light of on-going dialogues about feminism and romantic love within and outside of the movement. The fact that she used *Cosmopolitan* as a platform to convey this message was also symbolic of that publication’s position in the broader feminist debate over the meaning of romantic love. Widely recognized as the sounding board of reigning editor-in-chief Helen Gurley Brown, *Cosmopolitan* portrayed a version of feminism that placed equal importance on love and independence for women. While some feminists called for variations on

---

<sup>4</sup> Jong, “Erica Jong on Erica Jong,” 261.

separatism, ranging from celibacy to lesbianism, as the only route to liberation, Jong and Brown believed that the reality was that many women were loathe to give up heterosexual romance—and that it was crucial to create a version of feminism that encompassed that reality.

The version of feminism espoused by Brown and Jong at the height of the second wave resembled Betty Friedan's effort to reconcile heterosexual love and liberation in some ways. Like Friedan, Brown and Jong spoke to a large, mainstream audience. *Cosmopolitan* was one of the most widely read women's magazines with a readership in the millions and Jong was one of the best-selling novelists of the 1970s. Her *Fear of Flying*—the first of the Isadora Wing mock memoirs—was one of the top-selling novels of the decade.<sup>5</sup> With such wide visibility and large followings, Erica Jong and Helen Gurley Brown shared Betty Friedan's desire to convince mainstream Americans that feminism and heterosexual love were not at odds with one another. But the defense of heterosexual romance articulated by feminists like Helen Gurley Brown and Erica Jong differed from that of Betty Friedan in significant ways. Friedan's defense of romantic love revolved around her belief that along with work, women were entitled to fulfillment in love within the context of family, which feminism would make possible. Brown and Jong, however, were more focused on defending a woman's right to romantic and sexual fulfillment for its own sake.

Radical feminists sometimes cast Helen Gurley Brown, Erica Jong, and women like them as anti-feminist at worst and un-feminist at best because they seemed to kowtow to

---

<sup>5</sup> *Cosmopolitan* reportedly had a circulation of nearly three million, which steadily rose under Helen Gurley Brown during the 1970s. Likewise, Jong's *Fear of Flying* reportedly sold the same number of copies in its first year of publication. See Erica Jong, afterword to *Fear of Flying*, 437; Jennifer Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere: The Life of Helen Gurley Brown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 166-167 and 219.

men. But Brown and Jong's ideas about love and liberation were undeniably—sometimes profoundly—feminist in a number of ways. Identifying themselves as “non-militant” feminists, Helen Gurley Brown and Erica Jong helped to counter anti-feminist perspectives of women's liberation as anti-love while reassuring their audience that one could be feminist without forsaking romantic love.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter will analyze how Helen Gurley Brown and Erica Jong struggled and understood the problems of love and liberation in their own lives and by proxy in their respective cultural creations, the Cosmo Girl and Isadora Wing. As icons of popular culture in the 1960s and 1970s, both women reveal yet another dimension of feminist responses to the problem of romantic love. Together, they demonstrated how feminist ideas permeated mainstream American culture and the wide-appeal of a version of feminism that allowed the pursuit of romance. Though they acknowledged that romantic love was potentially riddled with conflict and complexity for women who wanted to be independent, they insisted that romantic love was still desirable, intense, and exciting.

---

<sup>6</sup> Both Helen Gurley Brown and Erica Jong explicitly identified themselves as feminists, but often took care to distinguish themselves from “militant” feminists. Helen Gurley Brown frequently identified herself as a “devout” feminist, but also as a “nonmilitant” feminist. See for example, David Friedman, “She Loves Being A Girl!,” *Part II*, April 26, 1990, Box 2, Folder 2, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Glenn Collins, “At 60, Helen Gurley Brown Talks About Life and Love,” *New York Times*, September 19, 1982, sec. Style, Box 2, Folder 2, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Helen Gurley Brown, “Interview for Good Morning America,” interview by Joan Lunden, January 22, 1985, Box 16, Folder 5, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, 1938-2001, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Helen Gurley Brown to Charlotte Veal, c 1990, Box 10, Folder 7, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, 1938-2001, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Micki Moore, “Helen Gurley Brown: Sexual Revolutionary,” *The Toronto Star*, February 2, 1989, Box 2, Folder 2, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; T.K., “Visitors in Town: Helen Gurley Brown -- Editor, Cosmopolitan,” *The Japan Times*, October 28, 1978, Box 2, Folder 2, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Vernon Scott, “Taking Stock of Feminism,” *San Francisco Examiner*, November 6, 1985, Box 39, Folder 21, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; “Feminist Messiah Turns Man-Monger,” *The Star*, March 20, 1984, Box 2, Folder 2, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. For examples of Erica Jong similarly distinguishing her style of feminism from more militant varieties, see Charlotte Templin, *Conversations with Erica Jong*, Literary Conversations Series (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), passim.



Whereas other feminists pointed to these characteristics as pernicious and worthy of confrontation, Brown and Jong saw them in a more positive light. If anything, the inner turmoil and conflict romantic love fostered in liberated women pointed to its longevity and staying power. Independence and autonomy were important to fight for—but so were romance and love.

**THE QUINTESSENTIAL COSMO GIRL: HELEN GURLEY BROWN, COSMOPOLITAN, AND “GURLEY GIRL FEMINISM”**

Historian Jennifer Scanlon’s recent biography of Helen Gurley Brown, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere: The Life of Helen Gurley Brown*, offers the first scholarly and comprehensive account of Brown’s life within the context of second-wave feminism. Persuasively arguing that Brown exemplified a specific aspect of second-wave feminism, Scanlon rightfully identifies Brown as a “feminist trailblazer” within the modern women’s liberation movement whose “Gurley Girl feminism”—or “realism” feminism—appealed to a wide-range of mainstream Americans with its simultaneous emphasis on sex-positivism, independence, and love.<sup>7</sup> These ideals were exemplified by Brown’s “Cosmo Girl” (the idealized *Cosmopolitan* reader) whose values, goals, and aspirations directly reflected her own.

Feminists at the time often identified Helen Gurley Brown as anti- or un-feminist for a variety of reasons, including her refusal to disavow capitalism, beauty culture, and heterosexual romance.<sup>8</sup> One radical feminist periodical even bestowed the title of “Aunt

---

<sup>7</sup> Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*, xi and 183.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, passim.

Tom of the Month” upon Helen Gurley Brown in the late 1960s.<sup>9</sup> Though not necessarily castigating her as many of her contemporaries did, scholars have likewise tended to overlook her contributions to the feminist movement, instead categorizing her solely in terms of sexual liberation.<sup>10</sup> Scanlon’s biography of Brown, however, corrects the tendency to simplify Brown’s role in the second-wave feminist movement by revealing how she exemplified an “untold element of the second wave and a clear antecedent of the third.”<sup>11</sup> An examination of her life and her work leading up to and during the second-wave reveals a clearly articulated and developed feminist sensibility that saw work, love, and sex as the most important aspects of any woman’s (or man’s) life.

Helen Gurley Brown’s personal life, her feminism, and her views on emotional intimacy were irrevocably interwoven with one another. Having grown up in a working-class family in Arkansas during the 1920s and 1930s, Helen Gurley Brown eventually landed in Los Angeles. After high school, she attended secretarial school and graduated in 1941. Throughout most of the 1940s and 1950s, Brown worked as a secretary in a variety of jobs before becoming a copywriter for an advertising firm. Though Brown tended to downplay any ambition she may have had during those years, she took pride in characterizing herself as a self-made woman. Brown’s experiences as a “working girl” in the 1940s were significantly shaped by her decision to remain single, a “radical life

---

<sup>9</sup> New York Radical Women, ed., “R\*O\*Z’S P\*A\*G\*E,” in *Notes From the First Year* (New York: New York Radical Women, 1968), <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/>.

<sup>10</sup> Histories of second-wave feminism rarely mention Helen Gurley Brown. When discussions of her do appear they are usually either peripheral or connected to radical feminist criticism of her association with *Cosmopolitan*.

<sup>11</sup> Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*, xiv.

choice” for women during that era.<sup>12</sup> Partly as a reaction to her mother’s marital hardships and partly as a reflection of her inherent tendency to challenge the status quo, Brown was determined to remain single in her twenties and for most of her thirties. Resisting the tremendous pressure placed on her generation to pursue domestic bliss, Brown instead pursued myriad romantic liaisons, often with married men and sometimes she forayed into “kept” status. But she balked at the idea of becoming too dependent on any man. Though she relished her independence, she also became acutely aware of the inequalities that made it difficult for women—especially working women like herself—to independently succeed. Consequently, she began to recognize negotiation and bartering within romantic relationship to men (especially those with economic clout) as a crucial survival strategy for single women trying to make it on their own. By the early 1960s, as the second wave of feminism began to surface, Brown was already well on her way to articulating a version of feminism that emphasized the importance of economic independence and fulfillment in work, romance, and sex.<sup>13</sup>

When Helen Gurley Brown reached her mid-thirties, she began to seriously contemplate the possibility of marriage. In 1959, a friend told her about David Brown, a Hollywood executive who also had ties to the publishing world. Intrigued by David’s credentials, Helen lobbied actively for an introduction and the two began to date. Thrilled to be in a relationship that she felt was mutual, Helen soon issued an ultimatum to David—either they would marry or she would end the relationship. He acquiesced and

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>13</sup> On Brown’s upbringing, her early jobs, and her experiences as a single woman, see Helen Gurley Brown, *I’m Wild Again: Snippets From My Life and a Few Brazen Thoughts* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 3-25; and Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*, 1-39.

the two began a decades-long experiment in navigating a marriage in which both partners actively sought professional and personal fulfillment within and outside of the marriage. Pointing out that there were few role models for such a marriage at that time, biographer Scanlon points to the significance of their marriage as a case study in the negotiation of new formulas in marital relationships on the eve of sexual and feminist revolution. Ultimately, the two struck a balance in which David wholeheartedly supported Helen in her professional endeavors while she agreed to take care of domestic responsibilities. In some ways, their relationship seemed to contradict many of the dictates about single life she espoused for women. Significantly, for instance, Brown demanded fidelity from her husband, despite her tendency to vilify wives who stifled their husband rather than single women making the most of a situation with extramarital affairs. Regardless, her success in finding a romantic partner who enabled her to fully pursue romantic love and work—the two most important things in a woman’s life, in her estimation—gave her a strong foundation for instructing other women to seek the same.<sup>14</sup>

Shortly after her marriage, Helen Gurley Brown began to establish herself as a spokesperson for sexual liberation and an advocate of the singles’ life with the publication of her book, *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962). The book challenged postwar ideals of domesticity by establishing singleness as a choice equally valid—even superior—to marriage. In addition, Brown put a positive spin on sex for single women,

---

<sup>14</sup> See Brown, *I’m Wild Again*, 25-29 and 165-181; and Helen Gurley Brown, “Speech for the More International Cultural Seminar,” November 1979, Box 15, Folder 6, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, 1938-2001, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. Numerous interviews with and articles about Helen Gurley and David Brown emphasized the strength of their marital partnership. See for example, Andree Brooks, “Batten Down the Hatches!: Here Comes Mr. and Mrs. Jaws,” *New York Times*, October 29, 1978, Box 1, Folder 6, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Chit L. Lijauco, “Helen and David Brown: Cosmo Couple,” *Savvy*, June 2, 1997, Box 1, Folder 6, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; and Micki Moore, “Helen Gurley Brown: Sexual Revolutionary.”

unabashedly acknowledging that women had sexual desires, while stressing the importance of work and economic independence for women. With an explicitly identified audience of working girls, Brown especially emphasized the importance of money management with the goal of helping her working-class readers to become more autonomous so that romantic and sexual relationships were pursued out of desire rather than need.<sup>15</sup>

Though not recognized as an overtly feminist text at the time, *Sex and the Single Girl* illuminated a number of significant social transformations in progress and laid important foundation for the burgeoning movement. Nevertheless, it was Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, published a year later, which received credit as the more legitimate and influential statement of feminist thought.<sup>16</sup> Both books were best sellers, however, and did crucial work in setting crucial aspects of second-wave feminism into motion. In order to understand how their work in the early 1960s informed their feminism (specifically in relationship to their ideas about romantic love), a brief comparison is warranted.

---

<sup>15</sup> See Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl* (Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, Inc., 1962), passim; Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*, 57-93.

<sup>16</sup> Scholarship in recent years has, of course, debunked the long-standing myth that *The Feminine Mystique* single-handedly ushered in the second-wave feminist movement. A more thorough examination of Helen Gurley Brown and her work in the early 1960s contributes to the bigger project of expanding our historical understanding of the emergence and diversity of second-wave feminist thought. For examples, see Winifred Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Delta Trade paperbacks, 1999); Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left*, Reprint. (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); Judith Ezekiel, *Feminism in the Heartland* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002); Jane Gerhard, *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001); Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*.

Both Helen Gurley Brown and Betty Friedan belonged to a generation of Americans who came of age during the Great Depression. Both grew up in the Midwest with a similar connection to the values of Middle America. And, both would later say that having grown up with mothers who were discontent with their lot in life profoundly shaped their own expectations for professional and emotional fulfillment. But beyond the basics of their upbringings, Brown and Friedan followed starkly different paths out of the 1930s. Both advocated love and work as the two key components of self-fulfillment for women, though their vision of what that fulfillment looked like differed markedly in a number of ways.<sup>17</sup>

Whereas Friedan's primary focus was on eliminating systematic barriers that made it difficult for women to seek fulfillment outside of, and in addition to, the family, Helen Gurley Brown was less explicitly concerned with political, economic, or structural change, and instead advocated various forms of self-improvement. Moreover, partly because she had spent the better part of her adult life as a single, working woman, Brown spoke to and for that group, even though she was no longer single. While Friedan became a spokesperson for married, middle class women in the 1960s, Helen Gurley Brown thus allied herself with working-class singletons. Consequently, *Sex and the Single Girl* assumed that young, working women were keen on learning how to successfully embrace the single status and the book was consciously marketed to that audience.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, it was not uncommon for working-class women to feel marginalized by feminists, many of whom were in a better position economically.

---

<sup>17</sup> For a comparison of Betty Friedan and Helen Gurley Brown see Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*, 94-111. Betty Friedan is also discussed in detail in chapter four.

<sup>18</sup> See Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*, 79-93.

This prompted some working-class women, whose primary concerns had to do with economic survival, to conclude that feminism was not about them. Indeed, working-class women worked outside of the home out of economic necessity and often had men in their lives who recognized their contributions to the family livelihood. Those who were single often did not see seeking greater economic stability through a romantic pairing as problematic. Already caught up in the difficult balancing act of meeting the demands of work and family, many working class women did not understand why middle- and upper-class women felt confined in the home or stifled in romantic relationships.<sup>19</sup> From their perspective, only privileged women had time and cause to worry about romantic love as a tool of patriarchy. Though individual experiences were complicated and defied easy categorization, working-class women generally came to issues of love and liberation from a perspective starkly different than that of middle-class women who sought to escape from domestic ideals of traditional womanhood.

Because Helen Gurley Brown counted herself among the ranks of working, single women, her empathy for their unique challenges permeated her writing and very much informed her particular take on issues of work, romantic love, and sex. Brown was intent upon acknowledging and validating women's right to act on sexual desire and to live independently. But, she was also aware of the ways in which lingering sexual double standards and patriarchal work hierarchies made it difficult for single women to succeed

---

<sup>19</sup> Moreover, many working-class women were avid consumers of romance culture, especially romance novels. For them, romance culture provided a form of escapism, and in their personal lives, it had the power to make them feel privileged and special. Janice Radway offers one of the most sophisticated analyses of the relationship between feminism, social class, and romance culture. Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991). For other overviews of social class and its impact on second-wave feminist activism, see Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Dennis A. Deslippe, *'Rights, not Roses': Unions and the Rise of Working-Class Feminism, 1945-1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

on either front. The best way for women to “have it all,” in her estimation, was to learn how to work the system to their advantage rather than challenging the system directly.<sup>20</sup> Some of her proposed methods (including having affairs with married men, embracing beauty culture, and allowing oneself to be “kept”) were off-putting to both conservative and feminist critics alike. Feminists who were critical of capitalism were especially skeptical of Brown’s ideas and thought that she participated in capitalistic sexual exploitation of women by encouraging them to look and act sexy. But, Brown firmly stood by her decision to encourage women to look their best. For one, as a “working girl,” she knew that women could not make it in the male-dominated workplace unless they looked the part. But also—and perhaps more importantly—she thought it was empowering for women to dress and behave sexily. Such a perspective would become a pillar of third-wave feminism a generation later, but in her own time, many feminists cast women like Helen Gurley Brown as dupes of patriarchy.<sup>21</sup>

Capitalizing on her success with *Sex and the Single Girl*, Helen Gurley Brown continued to pursue a number of projects throughout the 1960s that illuminate the development of her “Gurley Girl feminism” and its defense of romantic love and work as equally important for women. Following her first book, Brown made a record, *Lessons in Love* (1962), that aimed to expand her message about the importance of love and work to

---

<sup>20</sup> In 1982, Helen Gurley Brown wrote an aptly titled book instructing women how to “have it all” when it came to love, sex, and money. The message was remarkably similar to the Gurley Girl feminism she had been peddling for two decades as the second-wave began to ebb. See Helen Gurley Brown, *Having it All: Love, Success, Sex, Money . . . Even if You're Starting with Nothing* (New York: Simon and Schuster/Linden Press, 1982).

<sup>21</sup> Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl*, passim; Brown, *Having It All*, passim; and Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*, passim. On especially pointed critique of *Cosmopolitan* (and Helen Gurley Brown) as culpable in the commercialized exploitation of women appeared in Cell 16’s journal, *No More Fun and Games*. See Dana Densmore, “Women’s Magazines and Womanhood, 1969,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 3 (November 1969): 30-39.



men as well; she wrote a syndicated column, “Woman Alone” (1963-1965), aimed at giving advice to women who were single, separated, divorced, abandoned, or widowed; she wrote another self-help book focusing on romantic and sexual interludes in the workplace, *Sex and the Office* (1964); and she developed and proposed a situation comedy for television, *Single Girl Sandra* (circa 1962/1963), which was largely based on her own life. None of these endeavors were as successful as her debut book. *Lessons in Love* and *Sex and the Office* did not sell nearly as well, “Woman Alone” was a short-lived column, and none of the networks picked up *Single Girl Sandra*, which was much racier than other televised depictions of single women at the time. Nevertheless, each successive project demonstrated Brown’s on-going dedication to championing single women and their right to pursue work, romance, and sex on their own terms.<sup>22</sup>

In all of these endeavors, Helen Gurley Brown had the constant support of her husband. With his professional connections in the entertainment and publishing industries, David Brown was his wife’s most dedicated cheerleader (or her “gadfly,” as he once called himself) and worked hard to help manage her career.<sup>23</sup> In some respects,

---

<sup>22</sup> See Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*, 112-142; Helen Gurley Brown, *Lessons in Love: How to Love a Girl & How To Love A Man*, LP Record (Crescendo Records, 1963); Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Office* (New York: B. Geis Associates, 1964); Helen Gurley Brown, *Outrageous Opinions* (New York: B. Geis Associates, 1966); “Woman Alone, Syndicated Column, 1963-1965,” Box 31, Folder 12 and Box 32, Folders 1-5, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>23</sup> Cindy Adams, “He Made Her a Married Woman,” *Pageant*, December 1963, Box 1, Folder 7, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Frank Rasky, “The Cosmo Lady’s Other Half: He Helped Helen Gurley Brown Up the Ladder of Success,” *Toronto Star*, October 27, 1978, Box 1, Folder 7, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; David Brown, “Sex and the Single Girl As Seen By David Brown,” *Cavalier*, April 1964, Box 1, Folder 7, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. For more information on David Brown’s role in Helen Gurley Brown’s professional work, see Brown, *I’m Wild Again*, 171-172; Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*, passim.; Virginia Garrison, “Helen Gurley Brown: Mama Hen to Swinging Chicks,” *Arkansas Democrat*, July 6, 1969, Box 2, Folder 1, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Andree Brooks, “Batten Down the Hatches!”; Chit L. Lijauco, “Helen and David Brown”; David Friedman, “She Loves Being A Girl!”; Helen Gurley Brown, “Speech for the More International Cultural Seminar.”

his role in helping to shape her career (which was sometimes heavy-handed) seemed to discredit her accomplishments in her own right. Nevertheless, we can also interpret Helen Gurley Brown's professional partnership with her husband as part of her own effort to put into practice her theories about working the system. Based on experience, Brown knew well that women's professional opportunities were limited within work settings that favored men and that in order to make it to the top (or at least higher up the ladder), women needed to utilize every advantage available to them. In her view, benefiting from her husband's professional acumen was, simply put, smart and necessary. Though she often sought his advice in professional matters, the work she produced, with signature Helen Gurley Brown charm, was clearly her own.

Helen Gurley and David Brown's professional collaboration reflected their own experiment in forging a marital partnership, the success of which was measured by their love for one another as well as their mutual ability to seek fulfillment in work. With Helen Gurley Brown increasingly captivating public attention in the 1960s, people were interested to know how her career success and her earlier adventures in love and sex as a single girl affected her marriage. In articles and interviews, both Helen and David cited Helen's decision to remain single well into her thirties, her varied experiences with sex and romance, and her professional independence as primary reasons that their marriage remained strong.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Jack Curry, "Two on an Island: David Brown and Helen Gurley Brown," *Daily News*, September 10, 1980, Box 36, Folder 5, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Frank Rasky, "The Cosmo Lady's Other Half"; Cindy Adams, "He Made Her a Married Woman"; David Brown, "Sex and the Single Girl As Seen By David Brown"; David (Mr. Helen Gurley) Brown, "How To Be An Executive's Husband and Like It (Sometimes)," *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, March 27, 1966, Box 36, Folder 17, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. The copy of David Brown's "Sex and the Single Girl As Seen by David Brown" in the Helen Gurley Brown papers has marginal comments scrawled by Helen Gurley Brown throughout, which reveal the affectionate and mutually supportive nature of their relationship.

Helen Gurley and David Brown had established this tone of mutuality in their marriage early in the 1960s, before many second-wave feminists began to seek personal alternatives of their own to traditional, patriarchal marriage norms. As the second wave gained momentum, some of Helen Gurley Brown's contemporaries criticized her for being too submissive to her husband. She often spoke with pride of her habit of cooking breakfast for her husband every morning and she often admitted that she was happy to defer to his judgment in most matters of significance. Such an arrangement reflected both Brown's personal desires as well as her conscious effort to style herself as a "non-militant" feminist—a point that was not lost on her husband, who remarked in one interview: "Although [Helen] is in the vanguard of the women's movement, she has stopped short of becoming a militant at home."<sup>25</sup> Regardless, Helen Gurley Brown had found a balance of love and liberation that worked for her.

Coincidentally, this reflected yet another notable distinction between Helen Gurley Brown and Betty Friedan in terms of their parallel journeys towards feminism. Whereas Betty Friedan's marriage fell apart in the wake of her public stature and feminist politics, Helen Gurley Brown's marriage thrived. The reaction of their respective husbands played no small role in this discrepancy—while Carl Friedan bristled with jealousy at his wife's success, David Brown took great pride in Helen's accomplishments, playfully penning one article as "David (Mr. Helen Gurley) Brown." He frequently quipped that relationships between equals (like his with Helen) were most desirable.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Jack Curry, "Two on an Island," 9.

<sup>26</sup> In some ways, David Brown represented the "liberated man" of the era. There is no evidence that he participated in male consciousness-raising, but the views he shared publicly fit in with arguments that men's liberationists were making that feminism would benefit both women and men when it came to interpersonal romantic relationships—and that men's support was a crucial component of feminist efforts to make love more authentic. See David (Mr. Helen Gurley) Brown, "How To Be An Executive's Husband";

In 1965, Helen Gurley Brown became the editor-in-chief of *Cosmopolitan*, a magazine for women that was faltering after more than eight decades of circulation. Having determined, in conjunction with her husband, that publishing a mainstream women's magazine offered the best next step in her career, Brown was shopping around her proposal for a magazine addressed to "the sexually curious if not sexually experienced young American woman," entitled *Femme: For the Woman on Her Own*.<sup>27</sup> Brown envisioned *Femme* as an "upbeat" magazine that spoke to single women who actively pursued independence and romance. *Femme* would also take seriously issues of concern to the burgeoning feminist movement, such as abortion, rape, and sexual preference.<sup>28</sup> When *Cosmopolitan's* faltering status became known, David Brown (who had worked for the magazine years earlier) persuaded Helen to adapt her *Femme* proposal for *Cosmopolitan*. The ploy succeeded and for the next several decades, Helen Gurley Brown consciously shaped *Cosmopolitan* into a platform for her special blend of feminism, with its celebration of work, romance, and sex for independent, mostly single, women—idealized as the Cosmo Girl.

At the helm of *Cosmopolitan*, Helen Gurley Brown (and the Cosmo Girl she championed) became an increasingly worrisome figure in the eyes of many feminists.

Objections to Helen Gurley Brown and her style of feminism were diverse. Socialist

---

David Brown, "Sex and the Single Girl As Seen By David Brown"; Andree Brooks, "Batten Down the Hatches!"; Chit L. Lijauco, "Helen and David Brown"; Micki Moore, "Helen Gurley Brown: Sexual Revolutionary"; Brown, *I'm Wild Again*, 25-29 and 165-181.

<sup>27</sup> See Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*, 144. Helen Gurley Brown's proposal and notes for *Femme* are included in her personal papers. See Box 37, folders 1-2, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>28</sup> Scanlon, *Bad Girls go Everywhere*, 144-147. Helen Gurley Brown had tried to address such issues—especially abortion and lesbianism—in some of her other 1960s works, but was typically thwarted by publishers who thought her frank discussions of sex were already controversial enough on their own.

feminists who saw capitalism as the pillar of patriarchy disagreed with her willingness to work within that system as the editor of a mainstream publication. Others, who thought that structural and systematic changes were the only way to liberate women from male supremacy, were skeptical of her emphasis on self-improvement and individual change. Separatists thought that Helen Gurley Brown's efforts to explore lesbianism were insufficient and thought that her magazine too narrowly focused on heterosexuality without acknowledging its pitfalls. Feminists concerned with the widespread sexual objectification of women in mainstream cultural outlets disliked Brown's advice that women should celebrate and revel in their femininity and sexiness. Concern regarding commercialized exploitation of women's sexuality prompted many to cast Brown and *Cosmopolitan* as the female equivalents of Hugh Hefner and *Playboy* (a comparison Brown denied despite giving space to Hefner in her magazine). Almost universally, feminists objected to Brown's insistence on calling her readers "Cosmo Girls," finding the terminology belittling to women.<sup>29</sup>

These criticisms were not entirely unwarranted. The magazine did emphasize physical attractiveness, with many features on dieting and exercise; numerous articles—especially those written by "experts"—were penned by men; and the magazine frequently

---

<sup>29</sup> For examples of other feminists' criticism of Helen Gurley Brown, see Dana Densmore, "Sex and the Single Girl," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 2 (February 1969): 74-76; Densmore, "Women's Magazines and Womanhood, 1969"; New York Radical Women, "R\*O\*Z'S P\*A\*G\*E"; Helen Gurley Brown, "In Conversation With . . . Helen Gurley Brown," interview by Gloria Steinem, 1982, Box 102, Folder 13, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. Feminist criticism of Helen Gurley Brown was also well documented in various interviews with and articles about her. See for example Vernon Scott, "Taking Stock of Feminism"; Margy Rochlin, "Bad, Bad Gurley Brown: America's Cosmo Girl Returns to Her L.A. Roots," *LA Weekly*, June 8, 2001; Joyce Gabriel, "Efficient, Feminine -- That's Helen Gurley Brown," *Escort*, January 24, 1971; David Friedman, "She Loves Being A Girl!" For comparisons of Helen Gurley Brown and *Cosmopolitan* to Hugh Hefner and *Playboy*, see Virginia Garrison, "Helen Gurley Brown"; Sharon DeMarko, "Helen Gurley Brown: She's One Sexy Lady," *The Journal*, August 23, 1977; Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 105-133.

instructed women on how to get and keep a man.<sup>30</sup> If one looked only at those isolated articles, rather than the magazine as a whole, there seemed to exist a kinship between *Cosmopolitan* and a certain variety of anti-feminism. In September 1975, for instance, *Cosmopolitan* ran an excerpt of Marabel Morgan's *The Total Woman*, which argued that women were naturally inclined to love and serve men.<sup>31</sup> The excerpt began with an editorial note saying "The Total Woman may not seem at first to be a Cosmo girl (too blatantly man-worshipping)," demonstrating that Helen Gurley Brown (whose hands touched everything that went into *Cosmopolitan*) and the other editors found Morgan's brand of anti-feminism at least a little cloying. Nevertheless, Brown and her staff had decided to feature the "smash nonfiction best seller," exclaiming that "it obviously has something!" "Does the attractive author of The Total Woman, know something you should know?" the magazine asked.<sup>32</sup>

*Cosmopolitan* readers tentatively answered "no." Of the three published letters-to-the-editor in response to the excerpt, one reader enthusiastically agreed with Morgan, writing to say that "her advice was the best in the world and simple to heed" and that it had "confirmed [her] belief that the best way to get a man's attention and love is openly

---

<sup>30</sup> Despite containing feminist content, *Cosmopolitan* also numerous articles about dieting, beauty standards, and how to please a man. A survey of the magazine from the late 1960s through the 1980s, for instance, reveals that regular columns included "Dieters Notebook" and the "Analysts Couch," which featured a male psychologist's responses to women's questions about issues of love and sex. Within the framework of feminism, such features were certainly problematic.

<sup>31</sup> Marabel Morgan and her brand of anti-feminism are explored more fully in chapter four. See Marabel Morgan, *The Total Woman* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1973).

<sup>32</sup> Editorial Note introducing Marabel Morgan, "The Total Woman: Are You One?," *Cosmopolitan*, September 1975, 179. Helen Gurley Brown reflected a similar skepticism of Marabel Morgan and *The Total Woman* in a feature in *US* magazine. When asked if she was on board with the concept, Brown applauded Morgan's encouragement of women to experiment sexually in pleasing their husbands but stopped short of agreeing with Morgan's argument that women should submit entirely to their husbands. See Janet Muchovej, "Speaking Out: Helen Gurley Brown on the Total Woman," *US*, May 3, 1977, 12.

to be his great admirer.” But the other two readers who responded were appalled—even offended—that Morgan’s ideas were featured in *Cosmopolitan*. One wrote, “your author seems to think we women are intellectual cripples with nothing to offer but emotions. I’m *insulted!* . . . If, by some misfortune, *The Total Woman* does become indicative of womankind’s future, heaven help American women.” The other scoffingly asked, “Why didn’t your author title her book *The Total Doormat*, *The Total Parasite*, or *The Total Sap?*”<sup>33</sup> Though based on a minimal sampling of responses, these *Cosmopolitan* readers indicated that Marabel Morgan’s views were not entirely in line with the ideals of its Gurley Girl feminist readers or the touted ideals of the Cosmo Girl.

*Cosmopolitan* also echoed the sentiments of the vaguely anti-feminist Pussycat League, with its celebration of sexual empowerment for women within romantic relationships based on traditional gender roles. Whether or not the Pussycat League was actually anti-feminist is debatable. Two profiles of the group identified them as “anti-lib,” but the most comprehensive overview of the group (written by co-founding member, Jeannie Sakol) said that they reflected “a new breed of feminists who believe in being extremely nice to men.”<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the Pussycat League agreed with certain tenets of feminism—abortion on demand, better childcare options, and equal pay for equal work—but they also worried that politicizing sexual and emotional intimacy went too far. Raising their own rallying cry of “Purr, Baby, Purr,” the Pussycat League insisted that men were not the enemy and that women should pursue sexual and romantic liaisons with

---

<sup>33</sup> See letters from Name Withheld, Beth Colesworthy, and Kathy Lewis, “Dear Cosmopolitan: Is ‘Total Woman’ Hood a Half-Baked Idea?” *Cosmopolitan*, December 1975, 272.

<sup>34</sup> Jeannie Sakol, “The Pussycat League,” *McCall's*, February 1970, 79. See also Betty Rollin, “Backlash Against Women's Lib! 'They're All a Bunch of Frustrated Hags',” *Look*, March 9, 1971; “Purr, Baby, Purr,” *Newsweek*, September 21, 1970.

them. Instead of “man-hating,” they “encourage[d] loving gestures, and try[ing] to change yourself instead of him.”<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, the Pussycat League’s moniker implied a version of feminism very much in line with that of quintessential Cosmo Girl Helen Gurley Brown, with its combination of independence, sex-positivism, and self-improvement. As Pussycat Jeannie Sakol explained in her profile of the group: “Like pussycats, we are essentially domestic animals, intelligent, sophisticated, affectionate, and loyal. Although Pussycats adore adulation, they remain their own woman. They neither grovel nor apologize. They have self-esteem combined with a desire to please.”<sup>36</sup> The “new breed” of feminism espoused by the Pussycat League was a close match to that of “Gurley Girl feminism” as it appeared in *Cosmopolitan*. Moreover, Helen Gurley Brown seemed to agree with “pussycat” rhetoric—she sometimes used the word as a term of endearment and in November 1970, she introduced the *Cosmopolitan* reader to “Lovey, That Cosmopolitan Cat.” Lovey, she explained was the magazine’s new mascot and an image of her would appear at the end of every article in the magazine in place of the more pedestrian end dot. Brown believed Lovey was an appropriate mascot because “[cats] love—are indeed *madly* affectionate—but a cat will never love on demand.” She also added, “Lovey loves men of course . . . . Just as a COSMOPOLITAN cat *would*.”<sup>37</sup> The similarities between

---

<sup>35</sup> Sakol, “Pussycat League,” 79.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Helen Gurley Brown, “Step Into My Parlor,” *Cosmopolitan*, November 1970, 6. For examples of Helen Gurley Brown using “pussycat” as a term of endearment, see Helen Gurley Brown to Debra Scott, December 7, 1988, Box 9, Folder 9, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, 1938-2001, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Helen Gurley Brown to Erica Jong, December 26, 1989, Box 8, Folder 2, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, 1938-2001, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. Brown also reportedly called her husband “pussycat” according to DeMarko, “Helen Gurley Brown:



Helen Gurley Brown's version of feminism and that of the Pussycat League were hardly coincidental—Pussycat Jeannie Sakol was also a Cosmo Girl. She began contributing articles to *Cosmopolitan* as early as 1968, two years before she co-founded the Pussycat League. Though it is unclear whether *Cosmopolitan* ever officially endorsed the group, there was most assuredly a symbiosis between the two.<sup>38</sup>

Women's liberationists who saw *Cosmopolitan* as anti-feminist (or at least unfeminist) often expressed their concerns in direct conversation with Helen Gurley Brown as well as in feminist publications. The most public feminist criticism of Helen Gurley Brown and *Cosmopolitan* occurred in 1970, when a group of feminists led by Kate Millett "invaded" the offices of *Cosmopolitan*. The invasion was part of a larger radical feminist effort to target women's magazines, especially those with men in positions of power, in order to compel them to more seriously address feminist issues. The sit-in at *Ladies Home Journal* was the most famous of these incidents and resulted in that magazine devoting a portion of one issue to the women's liberation movement.<sup>39</sup> When confronted with the protesters' demands to do the same with *Cosmopolitan*, Helen Gurley

---

She's One Sexy Lady," Box 2, Folder 2, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>38</sup> It is possible that the group *was* featured—I have been unable to access issues of *Cosmopolitan* during 1969 so far, although it does not seem to have been featured in 1970 (when Sakol wrote the *Newsweek* article). Jeannie Sakol began writing for *Cosmopolitan* as early as December 1968. See Jeannie Sakol, "39 Ways to be a Great Date," *Cosmopolitan*, December 1968; Jeannie Sakol, "Guide for Party Girls," *Cosmopolitan*, March 1970; Jeannie Sakol, "The Nicey-Nice Girls Who Finish (You) First," *Cosmopolitan*, May 1970; Jeannie Lucianne Goldberg and Jeannie Sakol, "Speakeasy: Flirtility Rights," *Cosmopolitan*, February 1972; Jeannie Sakol, "To Chase or Not to Chase," *Cosmopolitan*, November 1974; Jeannie Sakol, "How to Get a Man Not to Stay Over," *Cosmopolitan*, August 1977.

<sup>39</sup> In response to the protest at their offices, *Ladies Home Journal* included a special section on the women's liberation movement. See "The New Feminism: A Special Section for the Ladies Home Journal by the Women's Liberation Movement," *Ladies Home Journal*, August 1970. The protest is also addressed in numerous histories of the second wave. See especially, Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, 83-93; Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 195-197; Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1994), 166-167; Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 300-301,

Brown agreed to attend a consciousness-raising session and to take seriously the women's liberation movement in the pages of her magazine. But, she also demurred with utter confidence, "We already have a feminist book."<sup>40</sup>

A serious reading of *Cosmopolitan* within the context of second-wave feminism verifies Helen Gurley Brown's claim that the magazine was already unequivocally feminist.<sup>41</sup> Infused with a feminist sensibility geared towards the realities of its readers' lives, *Cosmopolitan* had a readership of approximately three million with circulation steadily rising until the end of the 1970s.<sup>42</sup> The magazine was explicitly targeted at the Cosmo Girl, who was young, single, self-sufficient, and up for adventures in sex and romance. In reality, most of the readers did not fit the mold of that imagined reader. A demographic survey in 1970 revealed, for instance, that fewer than half of *Cosmopolitan's* regular readers were between the ages of 18 and 34. Most reported that

---

<sup>40</sup> Jennifer Scanlon described Helen Gurley Brown's reaction to the protest, noting that Brown agreed to put more feminist content into *Cosmopolitan* but that she would determine the nature of the material and defended the version of feminism she already touted in the magazine. Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*, 180. The radical feminist sit-in at *Cosmopolitan* has also been addressed by Margy Rochlin, "Bad, Bad Gurley Brown," Box 2, Folder 2, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, 1938-2001, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. Brown also responded to the protesters and reported on her experience at the consciousness-raising session, which she likened to group therapy, in "Step into My Parlor." See Helen Gurley Brown, "Step Into My Parlor," *Cosmopolitan*, April 1970, 4; Helen Gurley Brown, "Step Into My Parlor," *Cosmopolitan*, June 1970, 6; Helen Gurley Brown, "Step Into My Parlor," *Cosmopolitan*, November 1970, 6; Helen Gurley Brown, "Step Into My Parlor," *Cosmopolitan*, May 1971, 8.

<sup>41</sup> Despite its widespread popularity, locating copies of the magazine from the 1960s and 1970s has proved somewhat difficult. I have examined as many copies as possible between 1965 and 1980, though there are some notable gaps during the early 1970s. A number of the magazines examined were also damaged with missing pages.

<sup>42</sup> See Scanlon, *Bad Girls go Everywhere*, 155. *Cosmopolitan* was also reportedly the most expensive women's magazine at the price of \$1.50 per issue in 1977. DeMarko, "Helen Gurley Brown: One Sexy Lady." Other articles also placed *Cosmopolitan's* circulation at approximately three million throughout the 1970s. See for example Friedman, "She Loves Being a Girl!;" and "Visitors in Town," *The Japan Times*. Journalist Micki Moore reported that with this rate of circulation, *Cosmopolitan* was one of the five top selling magazines. Another profile mentioned that *Cosmopolitan* sold 87 percent of its newsstand circulation every month. See Moore, "Helen Gurley Brown: Sexual Revolutionary;" and Collins, "At 60, Helen Gurley Brown Talks About Life and Love."

they lived in urban areas, but only half of the respondents were single, half worked for a living, and less than half had graduated from college. All told, the magazine reached a fairly diverse cross section of American women.<sup>43</sup> Readers were undoubtedly drawn to the magazine for myriad reasons, but the fact that the magazine attracted such a widespread audience certainly testified to the relevance of its dual emphasis on love and work as the two necessary pivots of fulfillment. Even Betty Friedan, who found much to criticize in “Gurley Girl feminism,” understood the power of the magazine to reach a mainstream audience sympathetic to aspects of feminism and capitalized on *Cosmopolitan*’s visibility on several occasions in her fight for the center.<sup>44</sup>

Few people denied that *Cosmopolitan* was Helen Gurley Brown’s creation and the tone she established was undoubtedly one reason for the magazine’s widespread appeal. Each issue began with Helen Gurley Brown’s introductory column, “Step Into My Parlor,” which introduced the reader to the featured articles. Like Brown’s earlier writings, “Step Into My Parlor” was written as one confidante to another. The magazine exuded Brown’s conversational charm and made readers feel like they could relate to Brown and *Cosmopolitan* as a personal friend. It was readily apparent in all of her writing that she spoke from personal experience, which reassured readers they were not alone in balancing their independence and their desire for sexual and romantic intimacy. Having lived the life of the Cosmo Girl when it was still an aberration, Helen Gurley Brown worked to ensure that Cosmo Girl ideals were in vogue for a younger generation of

---

<sup>43</sup> See Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*, 159.

<sup>44</sup> Betty Friedan published at least four articles in *Cosmopolitan* during the 1970s. See Betty Friedan, “An Open Letter to True Men,” *Cosmopolitan*, January 1977; Betty Friedan, “Speakeasy: Loving to Cook Again,” *Cosmopolitan*, June 1977; Betty Friedan, “Where Are Women in 1978?,” *Cosmopolitan*, August 1978; Betty Friedan, “And Now . . . The Liberated Man,” *Cosmopolitan*, December 1981.

women. With a warm, sisterly tone, Helen Gurley Brown used *Cosmopolitan* magazine as her platform for showing her readers how to “have it all.”<sup>45</sup>

Helen Gurley Brown had a clear sense of her primary audience and their desires. Indeed, in her inaugural issue (July 1965), Brown explained that she had consciously selected articles that would appeal to the “grown-up girl, interested in whatever can give [her] a richer, more exciting, fun-filled, friend-filled, man-loved kind of life!”<sup>46</sup> With articles about the birth control pill, how to manage difficult men in relationships, advice for “girls who wish to marry into opulence,” psychiatry, witchcraft, divorcees, and short fiction heavily leaning towards romantic themes, that inaugural issue established a precedent the magazine followed well into and beyond the second wave of feminism.<sup>47</sup> Drawing on her own experiences with and observations of powerful, on-going transformations in work patterns, sexual mores, and interpersonal relationships, Brown exemplified the life of the Cosmo Girl. A few years into her editorship of *Cosmopolitan*, Brown offered the following description of the quintessential Cosmo Girl:

A Cosmopolitan girl is different from girls who read other magazines in that she wants some of the power and glory and recognition for herself . . . The kind that comes with achievement, rather than the kind many women are limited to who live

---

<sup>45</sup> In 1989, Helen Gurley Brown wrote the “Cosmo Philosophy,” derived from a reader response survey. She wrote: “Cosmo is “satisfying” like having a good conversation with a friend — somebody who listens. . . . [It] should and does leave you feeling that you have had a good visit with a friend and your life is enriched.” “Cosmo Philosophy About Love,” c 1989, Box 42, Folder 9, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, 1938-2001, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. Brown made similar comments in interviews. See especially Friedman, “She Loves Being a Girl!” Readers responded favorably to Brown’s conversational and confidential writing style, as evident in the letters they wrote to her. Her 1984 book, *Having It All*, especially provoked fan letters from women (and men) who were long-time readers of *Cosmopolitan* who explained that they felt like Helen Gurley Brown was their friend. See “Public Response and Fan Mail,” Box 13, Folders 1-9, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>46</sup> See Helen Gurley Brown, “Step Into My Parlor,” *Cosmopolitan*, July 1965, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, See also Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*, 150.

only through the achievements of husband and children. The Cosmo girl doesn't want to do only "woman's work" — cooking, cleaning, nursemaiding — although she may do some of these. She expects to make a contribution through her work. . . and this may be in a job-world traditionally ruled by men — finance, law, medicine, commerce, science, entertainment. Yes, she is a career girl through and through although she loves men and doesn't feel complete or even alive unless she has one to be in love with. As for her treatment of man, she is totally female . . . Eager to make him happy above all. Some people say That COSMOPOLITAN Girl is a bit scheming with men. Yes, occasionally! But only because a man is the most valuable thing in the world! Nothing is more important than finding one and loving him once you find him so that he will never defect to another woman! Cosmo girls are direct when they talk . . . They say what they mean. They communicate! They love Cosmo because it tells them about life as it is . . . Honestly, forthrightly, lovingly, and understandingly.<sup>48</sup>

Helen Gurley Brown's definition of the Cosmo Girl epitomized her Gurley Girl feminism in which a woman's equal desire for independence in work, passionate romance, and sexual freedom peacefully coexisted. *Cosmopolitan* was filled with that consciously crafted feminist sensibility.

The feminism of Helen Gurley Brown and *Cosmopolitan* was especially profound in that it simply assumed feminism as a given. Almost immediately after radical feminists confronted Brown in the offices of *Cosmopolitan*, Brown addressed the women's liberation movement in "Step Into My Parlor," stressing that the Cosmo Girl epitomized ideals of equality and independence even if she did not embrace the idea of separatism. She also reprinted Vivian Gornick's article on the movement from *Village Voice* to illustrate that the women's liberation movement was something the Cosmo Girl should know about.<sup>49</sup> A matter of months after the confrontation, the magazine even featured an excerpt of *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett (who had led the initial charge against Brown).

---

<sup>48</sup> Helen Gurley Brown, "Untitled Article Written for the *Los Angeles Times*," October 28, 1969, Box 36, Folder 6, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass (emphasis original).

<sup>49</sup> Helen Gurley Brown, "Step Into My Parlor," *Cosmopolitan*, April 1970, 6 (emphasis original); and Vivian Gornick, "The Women's Liberation Movement!" *Cosmopolitan*, April 1970, 140-144.

In that issue's "Step Into My Parlor," Brown exclaimed, "It's hard for me to understand how *any* self-loving, man-loving woman could really be *against* what the movement is *for*: the realization of woman's full potential as an achiever and the end of the patriarchal system whereby men have most of the power." While taking care to distinguish her version of feminism from that of the "radical, man-hating factions" (or "hostile nutburgers" as she called them on another occasion) who opposed *Cosmopolitan* for "telling women how to be sexy" (a charge to which Brown responded, "Guilty!"), Brown pointed out "we also tell women to use their brains and *achieve* and never live *through*" men.<sup>50</sup> Incidentally, Helen Gurley Brown introduced the readers to Lovey the *Cosmopolitan* Cat in the very same column. The fact that Brown testified to the validity of Kate Millett and Lovey in the same breath neatly encapsulated her Gurley Girl feminism and its assumption that feminism need not preclude the joys of romance.

Over the next year, Helen Gurley Brown took care to include several features in *Cosmopolitan* that illustrated how Cosmo Girls embraced a unique version of feminism that agreed with goals of equality but rejected the idea that feminism required a realignment of romantic ideals. One feature that explored how society conditioned women to pursue certain feminine ideals concluded that the Cosmo Girl maintained traditional ideals of femininity with feminist goals of equality and independence. The writer concluded: "I want to be pretty, sweet, and *romantically* dependent on a man. But I want to be smart and independent professionally and competent (extremely!) at what I do.

---

<sup>50</sup> Helen Gurley Brown, "Step Into My Parlor," *Cosmopolitan*, November 1970, 6. The excerpt from *Sexual Politics* included Millett's critique of Freudian psychoanalysis. Kate Millett, "Sexual Politics," *Cosmopolitan*, November 1970, 84-102 and 105+. Brown offered a similar description of her feminism in "Step Into My Parlor" immediately following the feminist invasion of her offices, arguing that the Cosmo Girl was all for equality but parted ways with separatists when it came to the desire for romance with men. Helen Gurley Brown, "Step Into My Parlor" *Cosmopolitan*, June 1970, 8 (emphasis original).

In short, I want to use the old patterns in new ways . . . to be sexy *and* successful!”<sup>51</sup>

Another article similarly extolled the virtues of “feminine feminists” in a profile of two “staunch feminists not about to give up men!”<sup>52</sup> Such work indicated that the Cosmo Girl was keen on a version of feminism that allowed her to embrace more traditional ideals of romance and femininity.

During the 1970s, *Cosmopolitan* continued to feature numerous articles that lent clear support to political and economic aspects of the feminist movement. In addition to profiling feminists like Kate Millett, Helen Gurley Brown gave space to public feminist figures like Bella Abzug, Shirley Chisholm, Betty Friedan, Margaret Mead, and Marilyn French. Articles by and about vocal feminists were typically presented at face value rather than with a grain of salt, as was the case with anti-feminist writer Marabel Morgan.<sup>53</sup> *Cosmopolitan* also advocated passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, addressed the realities of sexual violence, and supported reproductive freedom with numerous informative articles on abortion and birth control.<sup>54</sup> In addition, *Cosmopolitan*

---

<sup>51</sup> Carol Klein, “On Being Female,” *Cosmopolitan*, February 1971, 98 (emphasis original).

<sup>52</sup> Cynthia Swift, “Two Feminine Feminists,” *Cosmopolitan*, November 1971, 130.

<sup>53</sup> See Harvey Aronson, “Bella Abzug Goes to Washington!,” *Cosmopolitan*, April 1972; Tom Burke, “Margaret Mead: Portrait of an American Original,” *Cosmopolitan*, September 1977; Jimmy Breslin, “How Women Are Taking Over Politics,” *Cosmopolitan*, November 1972; Shirley Chisholm, “Unbought and Unbossed,” *Cosmopolitan*, February 1971; Julia Davis, “The Scandaous Victoria Woodhull,” *Cosmopolitan*, July 1978; Marilyn French, “The Women's Room,” *Cosmopolitan*, May 1978. The magazine also addressed issues of feminism and politics in some of its monthly quizzes, such as Ernest Dichter, “Quiz: Could You be the President?,” *Cosmopolitan*, April 1972; “Quiz: How Well Do You Know Your Famous Sisters?,” *Cosmopolitan*, August 1974.

<sup>54</sup> For examples of how *Cosmopolitan* dealt with feminist issues such as the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion reform, birth control, and sexual violence, see Ann Borowik, “Speakeasy: The Pill,” *Cosmopolitan*, May 1968; “Living with the Pill,” *Cosmopolitan*, November 1968; Shana Alexander, “Women's Legal Rights, 1975: A Report,” *Cosmopolitan*, October 1975; Linda Wolfe, “ERA & You,” *Cosmopolitan*, July 1976; Janet Spencer King, “Post-Abortion Blues,” *Cosmopolitan*, July 1977; Ruth Miller, “A Quiet Rape in a Quiet Town,” *Cosmopolitan*, October 1977; Julius Segal, “Violent Men--Embattled Women,” *Cosmopolitan*, May 1976; Mary Grayson, “I Had an Abortion, as Told to Mary Grayson,” *Cosmopolitan*, March 1978; Ann Rulten, “Cosmo's Update on the Pill,” *Cosmopolitan*, July

took great care to feature women as workers, often including profiles of women who were making headway in male-dominated fields.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, ever mindful that many of its readers were among the working-class, *Cosmopolitan* also dealt empathetically with women working in pink-collar jobs, especially secretaries. Considering the divisiveness of class issues within second-wave feminism, *Cosmopolitan's* effort to defend and take seriously women who worked in traditionally female-dominated professions indicated the inclusivity of Gurley Girl feminism.<sup>56</sup>

For Helen Gurley Brown feminism was also implicitly sex-positive, and articles exploring and celebrating aspects of sexuality permeated *Cosmopolitan*. The magazine's unquestioning acceptance of sexual liberation was problematic for feminists who thought that the sexual revolution did little to benefit women. But Helen Gurley Brown believed that women were much freer from sexual double standards and restrictions than before. Exuding an "anything goes" attitude, *Cosmopolitan* suggested that the Cosmo Girl

---

1978; Catherine Houck, "Speakeasy: Bring Back the Condom," *Cosmopolitan*, August 1978; Ruth Bader Ginsberg, "All About the ERA," *Cosmopolitan*, November 1979; Selg Neubardt, "All You Need to Know About Pregnancy and Abortion," *Cosmopolitan*, November 1970; Crescent Dragonwagon, "Women and Pornography," *Cosmopolitan*, May 1977; William Murray, "Women in Prison," *Cosmopolitan*, February 1972.

<sup>55</sup> For examples of articles in *Cosmopolitan* about women in different careers, see Marshall Smith, "Women in the Army," *Cosmopolitan*, July 1976; Eliza G.C. Collins, "Handbook for the New Woman Executive," *Cosmopolitan*, June 1977; David Sheber, "FBI Women: Restless Agents in Peace and War," *Cosmopolitan*, September 1977; Margaret Henning and Anne Jordan, "The Managerial Woman," *Cosmopolitan*, December 1977; Michael Konda, "Success! Getting There for Women," *Cosmopolitan*, April 1978; David Martindale, "She Flies Through the Air--With Great Expertise," *Cosmopolitan*, September 1978; Barbara Kevles, "Notes of a West Point Woman, as Told to Barbara Kevles," *Cosmopolitan*, December 1978; Mary McHugh, "Women in Science," *Cosmopolitan*, January 1979; Brenda Caragher, "Women Reporters: They've Come a Long Way Since Brenda Starr!," *Cosmopolitan*, February 1979; Clarke Taylor, "Women Psychiatrists," *Cosmopolitan*, March 1979; Don Rosen, "The Women of Big-Time Public Relations," *Cosmopolitan*, April 1979; Stephen Steiner, "Women in the Air Force," *Cosmopolitan*, May 1979; Craig Waters, "Women Who Make Millions," *Cosmopolitan*, June 1979; Sondra Forsyth Enos, "Cosmo's Handbook for the Working Mother?," *Cosmopolitan*, October 1979; "Woman Doctor: Her Day and Night," *Cosmopolitan*, July 1978.

<sup>56</sup> See Jane Walters, "Speakeasy: The Poor Little Secretary Myth," *Cosmopolitan*, April 1974; Karen Levine, "Secretaries: Don't Type Them," *Cosmopolitan*, August 1979.



pursued a wide range of sexual relationships, including variations on emotional and sexual monogamy, casual sex encounters, and extramarital affairs.<sup>57</sup> Though the implicit assumption was that the Cosmo Girl was single and likely to postpone marriage, the magazine also addressed the realities facing women who were already married or who were becoming divorced.<sup>58</sup> And, despite criticism from separatists and lesbian feminists

---

<sup>57</sup> For examples of how *Cosmopolitan* addressed non-traditional sexual and emotional relationships see Alma Birk, "The Sexual Drive in Women: (Greater, Equal, or Inferior to Men's?)," *Cosmopolitan*, February 1968; Marjorie Palmer, "Love, Leases, and the Law," *Cosmopolitan*, September 1968; Peter Hellman, "The Living Together Thing," *Cosmopolitan*, February 1972; Claudia Dreifus, "Bedroom Politics: Five Women Rap," *Cosmopolitan*, April 1972; Norman Sheresky and Marya Mannes, "Uncoupling," *Cosmopolitan*, November 1972; Irma Kurtz, "Creative Infidelity," *Cosmopolitan*, July 1973; Sandra Harmon, "Never Be Faithful to a Married Man!," *Cosmopolitan*, August 1973; Barbara Condos, "I Was Kept as Told to Barbara Condos," *Cosmopolitan*, May 1974; "Married Men and Other Women," *Cosmopolitan*, August 1974; Alice Huntley, "Speakeasy: I'd Rather Live Alone," *Cosmopolitan*, October 1974; Nancy Mayer, "Will Your Married Lover Ever Leave His Wife?," *Cosmopolitan*, October 1974; Dale Burg, "Speakeasy: What About Unmeaningful Relationships?," *Cosmopolitan*, March 1975; Jacqueline Brandwynne, "The Naked Truth About the Morning After," *Cosmopolitan*, July 1975; David Viscott, "How to Live With Another Person," *Cosmopolitan*, September 1975; Linda Wolfe, "Playing Around the Long Term Affair," *Cosmopolitan*, October 1975; "To Bed or Not to Bed (That's Not the Question!)," *Cosmopolitan*, November 1975; Marcia Kamien, "Should You Give Up Your Husband for a Lover," *Cosmopolitan*, February 1976; Irma Kurtz, "What's Promiscuous Now?," *Cosmopolitan*, April 1976; Elizabeth Block, "How to Survive (and Enjoy! Singles Bars," *Cosmopolitan*, July 1976; Nancy Benson, "Living Single in the Seventies," *Cosmopolitan*, July 1976; Judith Krantz, "Living Together is a Rotten Idea," *Cosmopolitan*, October 1976; Lawrence Edwards, "Lover: Confessions of a One-Night Stand," *Cosmopolitan*, January 1977; Anne Roiphe, "The Joys of Sweet Solitude," *Cosmopolitan*, February 1977; Regina Tinker, "Kept Women," *Cosmopolitan*, June 1977; Alice Kosner, "Sexual Exclusivity," *Cosmopolitan*, August 1977; Barbara Condos, "The Slightly Subsidized Life," *Cosmopolitan*, September 1977; "J", "Successful Lifetime Loving," *Cosmopolitan*, September 1977; Maxine Daley and Barbara Lochner, "Your New Rival--The Older Woman," *Cosmopolitan*, October 1977; Leslie Gourse, "The Brief Fling," *Cosmopolitan*, February 1978; Heidi O'Shaughnessy, "The Affair is Over--Now for What Comes After," *Cosmopolitan*, March 1978; Uta West, "Pillow Friendship," *Cosmopolitan*, June 1978; Laurel Leff, "You, Living Together, and the Law," *Cosmopolitan*, December 1978; Paul Solomon, "The New Chastity," *Cosmopolitan*, February 1979; Kamien, "Should You Give Up Your Husband for a Lover"; Richard C. Robertiello, "Be Your Own True Love," *Cosmopolitan*, June 1979; Bruce Pollock, "Supporting Him in the 70s," *Cosmopolitan*, September 1979.

<sup>58</sup> For examples of how *Cosmopolitan* addressed issues of marriage and divorce (which were often closely related to and overlapped with descriptions of non-traditional alternatives) see Nora Johnson, "The Part-Time Marriage," *Cosmopolitan*, May 1968; Pamela Mason, "Is There Life After Marriage? (Part 1)," *Cosmopolitan*, September 1968; Pamela Mason, "Is There Love After Marriage? (Part IV)--That Old Devil Sex," *Cosmopolitan*, December 1968; Nancy Mayer, "Why Marry Again?," *Cosmopolitan*, September 1973; Nora Johnson, "How to be Happy Though Married," *Cosmopolitan*, January 1974; Diane Baroni, "The New Divorcees," *Cosmopolitan*, March 1974; Mimi Randolph Edmonds, "When Choosing a Husband . . . Ask the Vital Five," *Cosmopolitan*, August 1974; W.M. Manville, "Good Divorces, Bad Divorces," *Cosmopolitan*, October 1974; Lynne Caine, "You'll Get Married Again--A Chapter from the Poignant New Bestseller Widow," *Cosmopolitan*, November 1974; David Reuben, "How to Make Your Marriage Last," *Cosmopolitan*, December 1974; Mel Krantzler and Barry Schwenkmeyer, "Trial Separation: Cop-Out or Marriage Saver?," *Cosmopolitan*, February 1975; Nora Johnson, "Return to the Land of the Loving--

that the magazine was too heteronormative, *Cosmopolitan* frequently explored topics like lesbianism, bisexuality, and the gay liberation movement as issues of interest to the Cosmo Girl.<sup>59</sup>

Generally speaking, however, Helen Gurley Brown did assume that the Cosmo Girl was heterosexual. But for her, the more important point was that the Cosmo Girl was free to make choices that would best enable her to excel at work and in romantic love. Both in print and behind the scenes, Helen Gurley Brown and the writers of *Cosmopolitan* aimed to make that message clear while doing justice to the complicated balancing act of love and liberation. In her editorial memorandum on a proposed article entitled “When He Says Jump, I Jump!” Helen Gurley Brown pointed out that the magazine’s principal message was “find yourself, be true to yourself, forsake all others toward being YOU!”

---

Journey of a Divorcee,” *Cosmopolitan*, April 1975; Jane Allerton, “Why Should a Nice Girl Like You Get Married,” *Cosmopolitan*, June 1975; Nancy Mayer, “The Ingenious Sex Lives of Divorced Mothers,” *Cosmopolitan*, January 1976; Wayne M. Rothberg, “Your Ceremony or Mine,” *Cosmopolitan*, February 1976; Nancy Greenwald, “The Case for Marrying Late,” *Cosmopolitan*, June 1976; Mel Kranzler, “Learning to Love Again,” *Cosmopolitan*, August 1976; Bernard Carragher, “Long Distance Marriages,” *Cosmopolitan*, September 1976; Anne Elliott, “First Romance After the Divorce,” *Cosmopolitan*, September 1976; John Sulton, “The Eternal Triangle No Longer Sings Eternal: Or These Days a Marriage Can Be a Love Affair, Too,” *Cosmopolitan*, March 1977; Irma Kurtz, “Marriage Fantasies,” *Cosmopolitan*, April 1977; Sylvia Auerbach, “And So They Were Divorced,” *Cosmopolitan*, May 1977; Catherine Napolitane, “Sex and the Formerly Married Woman,” *Cosmopolitan*, June 1977; Kathie Gordon, “Do-It-Yourself-Divorce,” *Cosmopolitan*, October 1977; Nora Johnson, “Fear & Loathing in the Marital Corral,” *Cosmopolitan*, April 1978; Herbert Gold, “What Can You Expect From Marriage?,” *Cosmopolitan*, December 1978; Mel Krantzler, “Learning to Love Again,” *Cosmopolitan*, July 1978; Nina Robbins, “The Horrible Year After My Divorce,” *Cosmopolitan*, February 1979; Georgia Dulles, “Sex and the Single Parent,” *Cosmopolitan*, April 1979; Phyllis Raphael, “Life After Divorce: Out of the Frying Pan Into the Freezer,” *Cosmopolitan*, May 1979; Kenneth R. Mitchell, “Secret Marriage Contracts,” *Cosmopolitan*, August 1979; Nora Johnson, “People Should Marry More Than Once,” *Cosmopolitan*, November 1979.

<sup>59</sup> Helen Gurley Brown likely would have made the magazine even more inclusive on such topics, but had to work within the confines of a magazine aimed at the mainstream. That *Cosmopolitan* included what it did on this front indicated the extent to which alternatives to heterosexuality were becoming more tolerated, if not wholeheartedly embraced, within mainstream culture. See W.H. Manville, “The Lesbian Experience: One Man’s Report From No-Man’s-Land,” *Cosmopolitan*, August 1968; Laura Cunningham, “Up Front with Gay Liberation,” *Cosmopolitan*, April 1972; David Reuben, “The Dilemma of Homosexuality,” *Cosmopolitan*, April 1974; Jane Margold, “Bisexuality: The Newest Sex-Style,” *Cosmopolitan*, June 1974; Jennifer Scott, “My Affair with a Lesbian as Told to Jennifer Scott,” *Cosmopolitan*, April 1975; C. Robert Jennings, “Women Who Dare to Become Men,” *Cosmopolitan*; Vicki Lindner, “What Straight Women See in Gay Men,” *Cosmopolitan*, October 1975.

Nevertheless, she pointed to the “subtle and complicated” fact that many women experienced pleasure in submitting to someone they loved while making it clear that in *Cosmopolitan* such a message could not appear in terms of “redbook, goodhousekeeping [sic] kind of stuff where the little woman knuckles under to the dear, dear needs of her [man].” Though that formula was problematic, Brown also thought that being completely “FREE is pretty one-dimensional . . . It’s LONELY.” According to Brown, independence coupled with romance was more exciting and fulfilling than one or the other on its own. If anything, “the more successful you are the more FUN [romance] is,” Brown explained.<sup>60</sup> To illustrate her point, Brown described herself as “a total jumper” in her own marriage:

David I totally jump for — really because it’s FUN, not because I have to. Let me reiterate. I believe the more secure you are with a loved one the more fun you can have jumping. You do it out of appreciation, fun and love rather than because you’re totally being commanded. If somebody were commanding you probably wouldn’t do it. This jumping business — the FUN kind — is because you are successful enough to enjoy doing it.<sup>61</sup>

From this perspective, Helen Gurley Brown resolutely insisted that successful women were happiest if they continued to embrace romantic ideals that would suggest hierarchy in the absence of independence. If a woman was not independent in her own right, “jumping” for a man was futile and not worthwhile. But equally problematic was the independent woman who kept her feet planted firmly on the ground. To illustrate her point, Helen Gurley Brown pointed briefly to feminists like Gloria Steinem, who were “NOT ‘jumpers’” and consequently seemed “much more dour and unhappy . . .

---

<sup>60</sup> Helen Gurley Brown, “When He Says Jump, I Jump!,” October 10, 1972, Box 42, Folder 1, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, 1938-2001, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>61</sup> I have left the original grammar and wording intact aside from the capitalization of pronouns and the beginnings of sentences. See “When He Says Jump, I Jump!”

untrusting.”<sup>62</sup> Romance might involve lingering hierarchies, but that did not make it verboten within the parameters of Gurley Girl feminism.

In another memorandum, Helen Gurley Brown similarly indicated that romance was inherently unequal—and that there was nothing wrong with that. Regarding a proposed article entitled “The Lover and the Beloved,” Brown revealed it was her “personal opinion . . . that there is no such thing as ‘equality’ of caring in a marriage or in a love affair.” She continued: “Not that both aren’t hooked. Not that both are not faithful. Not that either one has to be a masochist or a sadist. . . . We’re not talking about EXTREMES. . . . But there usually is a very slight edge of dependency.” The dependent party in the relationship—the lover—was typically more invested and had more to lose than the beloved.<sup>63</sup> Brown’s assertion that romantic relationships required one person’s dependence upon another was actually in line with that of radical separatists, like Ti-Grace Atkinson. Atkinson also believed that romantic relationships were not possible between equals. But, Atkinson thought the inherent inequality of romantic love proved that it was a superficial social construction created to bolster patriarchy and that it would cease to exist in a post-feminist world.<sup>64</sup> Helen Gurley Brown, in contrast, did not see any contradictions between this formulation of romantic love and feminism, largely because she did not think that the dependent party was necessarily female. Indeed, Helen Gurley

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> The memo was directed to W. M. “Bill” Manville (a frequent contributor to *Cosmopolitan* who believed it was important to give the magazine’s young readers the impression that marriage was not their only option). Helen Gurley Brown, “The Lover and the Beloved,” circa early 1970s, Box 42, Folder 4 Helen Gurley Brown Papers, 1938-2001, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. The published version of the article was “The Victim and the Darling: A Study in Power,” *Cosmopolitan*, January 1971, 78-81 and 72.

<sup>64</sup> See Ti-Grace Atkinson, “Radical Feminism and Love,” April 12, 1969, 3-4, Box 18, Folder 6, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. Ti-Grace Atkinson’s views are explored more fully in chapters one and two.

Brown's feminism was based on her perception of women and men as inherently equal and the same. Brown believed that men, just like women, saw love and work as the two most important aspects of life, which *Cosmopolitan* frequently acknowledged.<sup>65</sup> Nor did she think that emotional dependency overshadowed one's independence otherwise. Even though the beloved/lover formula was inherently unequal, she did not see the hierarchy in terms of a "master/slave" extremism. The "lover," though beholden to the "beloved," had a special power of their own: "You are fully alive. You practically live for love, even if you're a man. There is no feeling on earth like it! It is what life is all about."<sup>66</sup>

In championing women's rights to independence as complementary to their desires for love, Helen Gurley Brown believed that she spoke to the realities of women's lives. As she told Gloria Steinem in a 1982 interview, "There's such a thing as being complete and there is such a thing as romance. It's a very big deal, it still is. Somebody to have romance with, somebody that you can be in love with. I think that's what women want more than they . . ."<sup>67</sup> Steinem interrupted Brown before she could finish her thought;

---

<sup>65</sup> See Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*, 168-191. In one article, Helen Gurley Brown wrote "I think the two sexes are more alike emotionally than they are different." See Helen Gurley Brown, ". . . What Makes Women Women," *Printer's Ink*, April 22, 1966, Box 36, Folder 6, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, 1938-2001, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. Similarly, Brown once explained that "[Man] needs to understand that she wants the same things he does. Women are not a separate breed. We may be a different sex, but we sure belong to the human race. Tell a man to ask himself what he wants out of life; a woman wants the same thing." See "Good Relationships Depend on Romance," *USA Today*, July 20, 1984, sec. Inquiry, Box 2, Folder 6, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, 1938-2001, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>66</sup> Brown included a long list of examples of "Lover/Beloved" couples. Mostly the "beloved" was a man, but there were a number of cases where the roles are reversed. Helen Gurley Brown, "The Lover and the Beloved."

<sup>67</sup> The interview was for Gloria Steinem's short-lived television show, "In Conversation With . . ." The two women were not in complete agreement, but did share some similar views about love and liberation. The interview transcript is in both the Gloria Steinem Papers and the Helen Gurley Brown Papers in the Sophia Smith Collection. See Helen Gurley Brown, "In Conversation with . . . Helen Gurley Brown," interview by Gloria Steinem, 1982, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, 1938-2001, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Helen Gurley Brown, "In Conversation With . . . Helen

however, it is easy to suppose how Brown would have completed the sentence.

Undoubtedly, she would have said something along the lines of most women wanting romance more than they wanted independence. To deny that desire was dismissive of women's realities and it was imperative that feminism included those desires.

Helen Gurley Brown's 1982 book, *Having it All: Love, Success, Sex, Money . . . Even if You're Starting With Nothing*, neatly encapsulated her argument that women needed to have love and work in order to lead a fulfilling life.<sup>68</sup> As she had told one interviewer upon the book's publication: "Love and work are the Big Two."<sup>69</sup> The book was well received by Helen Gurley Brown's loyal base of Cosmo Girls. Her personal papers include dozens of the letters women (and also men) wrote to express their appreciation for Brown's encouragement that they could "have it all" with a little persistent work, too.<sup>70</sup> Though there were still feminists who thought Helen Gurley Brown pandered too much to men, she clearly enjoyed widespread support for her Gurley Girl feminism. When she appeared on *Good Morning America* several years later, Helen Gurley Brown was able to say with confidence: "We were telling women to go out there and be charming and wonderful to men and I think [feminists] really have come around

---

Gurley Brown," Box 102, Folder 13, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>68</sup> Brown, *Having it All*.

<sup>69</sup> Philippa Toomey, "Love, Work, and Helen Gurley Brown," *New York Times*, February 24, 1982, Box 2, Folder 2, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, 1938-2001, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>70</sup> See "Public Response and Fan Mail," Box 12, Folders 1-9, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

to the idea that you can love men; you can be charming and attractive and yet you can also be a strong feminist and you can want your rights and you can go for your rights.”<sup>71</sup>

**NAVIGATING LOVE AND LIBERATION IN THE “MOCK MEMOIRS” OF ERICA JONG**

While Helen Gurley Brown used the image of the Cosmo Girl to cultivate her version of feminism, Erica Jong likewise shared her views on love and liberation via a literary character that closely resembled her own experiences. Like Brown, Erica Jong existed somewhat on the periphery of second-wave feminism during its height. Though her contemporaries were more likely to count her among the ranks of feminists than they were Helen Gurley Brown, Erica Jong was more typically seen as an advocate of the sexual revolution rather than as a feminist activist. A poet and novelist, Erica Jong was best known in the 1970s and early 1980s for her popular “Isadora Wing trilogy” – *Fear of Flying* (1973), *How to Save Your Own Life* (1977), and *Parachutes and Kisses* (1984) – which she called her “mock memoirs.” When read within the context of second-wave feminist critiques of romantic love, Jong’s mock memoirs illuminate the ways in which heterosexual feminists grappled with the contradictions of embracing love as liberated women. Questions about Jong’s work revolved around her portrayal of sexual freedom and whether it was too graphic in its unabashed depictions of women’s sexual desire. But Jong’s work, while explicitly focused on sexuality, more broadly focused on intimate relationships between women and men. A close reading of her work reveals that Jong was just as concerned with the problem of romantic love, perhaps even more so, as she was with issues of sex and sexuality. Throughout the trilogy, Jong’s heroine, Isadora

---

<sup>71</sup> Helen Gurley Brown, “Interview for Good Morning America.”

Wing, struggled to reconcile her fervent longing for independence and sexual freedom with an equally burning desire for romantic love.

Considering *Cosmopolitan's* defense of the liberated woman's right to enjoy romance for its own sake, it was not surprising that Erica Jong and her works were prominently featured in the magazine.<sup>72</sup> Her 1978 self-interview for the magazine especially demonstrated the symbiosis between her views and those of the Cosmo Girl regarding matters of love and liberation. Several years earlier, Jong had offered a similarly strong statement regarding the compatibility of love and liberation during an interview for *Playboy*. When *Playboy's* senior editor, Gretchen McNeese asked Jong how she might react to "an unnamed male observer" who said that, "[a] feminist who admits to liking men is comparable to a Nazi leader who says he loves Jews," Jong replied: "I *hate* it when people polarize us like that. I don't see why being a feminist should be inconsistent with loving men. I suppose the trouble is that a lot of women, in order to love a man, feel they have to submerge their own identities. So if they want to be themselves, they have to give up loving men."<sup>73</sup> Through her writing, she wrestled with the daunting task of deconstructing that myth.

At the time of the *Playboy* interview, Jong's first novel, *Fear of Flying* (1973) had skyrocketed to the top of the bestseller list.<sup>74</sup> Because of her meteoric rise into the public

---

<sup>72</sup> *Cosmopolitan* reviewed *Fear of Flying* and featured an excerpt from *How to Save Your Own Life*. See Mary Ellin Barrett, "Cosmo Reads New Books," *Cosmopolitan*, January 1974, 14; and Erica Jong, "How to Save Your Own Life," *Cosmopolitan*, June 1977, 228+.

<sup>73</sup> Gretchen McNeese, "Playboy Interview," in *Conversations with Erica Jong*, ed. Charlotte Templin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 50-51.

<sup>74</sup> Erica Jong explained in the "Afterword" to the 2003 reprint edition of *Fear of Flying* that the novel was initially marketed as "a literary first novel by a poet" with an "arty cover." A year later, however, the book was reprinted in paperback and marketed to a mass audience under the guidance of feminist publisher Elaine Koster. Praise from writers such as John Updike and Henry Miller also garnered



spotlight, many readers and critics began to view Jong as a spokesperson for the sexual revolution and the modern women's liberation movement.<sup>75</sup> Although she was (and is) a self-identified feminist, Jong was never fully comfortable as a role model for "the movement." She was not an active participant in feminist organizations nor did she necessarily subscribe to some of the more radical feminist ideologies, which was one reason why many feminists of the era did not see her as one of their own despite the tendency of the media and her readers to cast her as one of their spokespeople. Like Helen Gurley Brown, Jong often felt the weight of radical feminists' disapproval. As she told one interviewer years later, "The radical feminists used to get after me because I slept with men and wore lipstick and high heels, and I was not a good PC lesbian in overalls, which somehow I am supposed to be."<sup>76</sup>

---

attention for *Fear of Flying* and by 1975 it had sold three million copies in the United States alone. Eventually, that number more than doubled in domestic sales and *Fear of Flying* became one of the top ten best-selling books of the 1970s. For overviews of the book's commercial success see Erica Jong, "Afterword: Happy Thirtieth Birthday, *Fear of Flying*," in *Fear of Flying*, reprint (1973; repr., New York: New American Library, 2003), 436-437; John Kern, "Erica: Being the True History of the Adventures of Isadora Wing, Fanny Hackabout-Jones, and Erica Jong," in *Conversations with Erica Jong*, ed. Charlotte Templin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 121; Charlotte Templin, introduction to *Conversations with Erica Jong*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002); ix; and, Charlotte Templin, "Interview with Erica Jong," in *Conversations with Erica Jong*, ed. Charlotte Templin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 158-160.

<sup>75</sup> Numerous scholars and reviewers have identified Erica Jong as a spokesperson for the modern women's liberation movement. John Kern, for instance, called *Fear of Flying* "the bible of the burgeoning women's movement," and Charlotte Templin has demonstrated how Jong "was made to stand in for the great successes feminism was achieving in the '70s" and how she "became in effect feminism's whipping boy (or girl)." See Kern, "Erica," 121; and Charlotte Templin, "Mass Culture, Gender, and Cultural Authority: The Reception of Erica Jong's *How to Save Your Own Life*," *Centennial Review* 38, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 98.

<sup>76</sup> Templin, "Interview with Erica Jong," 164. In a 1977 interview, Jong offered a similar statement to feminist critics Rozsik Parker and Eleanor Stephens: "Well, I never got a lot of nourishment from the movement. I've always been a person who loved other women and had women as friends, but the first time I ever came intellectually to blows with another woman was after the movement began. There was such incredible pressure and there was this awful feeling that if you wanted to do your own work, if you said, 'I'm sorry I can't come to the benefit/poetry reading on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday nights, because I'm writing a novel,' you were selfish, not contributing enough, too interested in your own career. You had to be out there stuffing envelopes, you had to be doing this and doing that, and what you were best at—writing—was the thing that got lost, there was no time for that. I

Even more troubling to Jong than criticism from radical separatists, however, was being overlooked by *Ms.* magazine, which was founded and became a primary outlet for popular feminism in 1972.<sup>77</sup> In 1980, *Ms.* published a bibliography of the most influential feminist books of the 1970s. While one of Jong's early books of poetry was included, *Fear of Flying*, (which was not only a top-selling feminist book, but a top-selling book period) was not. In a letter to Gloria Steinem about this oversight, Jong said that although she had written for *Ms.* during its infancy, she had "felt an unmistakably chilly breeze" ever since she had become a best-selling novelist. Noting that *Ms.* had also failed to review her novels, Jong continued: "I find it incredibly painful and discouraging to be attacked by male critics on the one hand for being too feminist and shunned by my supposed sisters for not being feminist enough. Are popular women artists only acceptable when they are foreign-born, or on the verge of death, or militantly lesbian? Must one toe a party line in order to be seen as sincere in one's desire to depict the truth of women's lives?"<sup>78</sup> For Jong, it was more important to explore the complex realities of feminist issues, such as love and liberation, than to push a specific ideology.

---

made a very conscious decision that I had more to give by writing novels." See Parker Rozsik and Eleanor Stephens, "Erica Jong," in *Conversations with Erica Jong*, ed. Charlotte Templin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 81.

<sup>77</sup> *Ms.* is discussed in detail in chapter five. For overviews of the magazine and its role in the feminist movement, see Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003); Amy Erdman Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood: Ms. Magazine and the Promise of Popular Feminism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Mary Thom, *Inside Ms.: 25 Years of the Magazine and the Feminist Movement* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997).

<sup>78</sup> Erica Jong to Gloria Steinem, Suzanne Levine, and Harriet Lyons, undated, Box 88, Folder 4, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. Erica Jong to Gloria Steinem, no date. Gloria Steinem replied to Jong in order to explain that *Ms.* had only included one book per author and that they had selected the book of poetry because it was equally important, but less well-known. Gloria Steinem to Erica Jong, February 29, 1980. Aside from this brief altercation, Erica Jong and Gloria Steinem shared much more in common in their responses to love than did Jong with radical separatists. A decade later, the two women even appeared on a panel discussion together entitled "Any Woman's Blues: A Conversation on Love Addiction." See Jane Beirn to Gloria Steinem, December 29,

Jong firmly believed in gender equality and sought liberation in her day-to-day experiences. It was perhaps because of this that so many of Jong's readers identified with the struggles she depicted in her writing and subsequently identified her as their feminist role model. Indeed, it was not until feminist publisher Elaine Koster read *Fear of Flying* and proclaimed it to be "the story of [her] life," that *Fear of Flying* received the press recognition that rendered it an overnight bestseller.<sup>79</sup> Within a year, Jong had enamored millions of readers, many of whom wrote to tell her that like Koster, they also fully identified with Isadora Wing and her struggles as similar to their own. Erica Jong told interviewer John Kern, for instance, that she "received all kinds of grateful letters from women who said that I had freed their sexuality and made them feel less lonely." Moreover, "Many men even wrote that [she] had helped them to better understand women."<sup>80</sup>

Jong's novels especially illustrate how feminists politicized the personal. As historian Lisa Maria Hogeland has persuasively argued, novels like *Fear of Flying* functioned as tools of consciousness-raising that helped readers identify the political consequences of their personal lives.<sup>81</sup> Although Jong found it irksome when readers and

---

1989, Box 88, Folder 4, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass; and "Any Woman's Blues: A Conversation on Love Addiction" (News from Harper & Row, January 31, 1990), Box 88, Folder 4, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>79</sup> For a detailed overview of Elaine Koster's role in promoting *Fear of Flying* see Templin, "Interview with Erica Jong," 158-160.

<sup>80</sup> Kern, "Erica," 125. Erica Jong's papers have been recently donated to Columbia University. While I have not yet had the opportunity to consult those papers, the archivist has confirmed my hunch that the papers include numerous fan letters. Susan Hamson to Robin Payne, "Your Query re: Erica Jong Papers," February 9, 2009.

<sup>81</sup> Scholars have demonstrated that feminist novels did important work towards consciousness-raising. See Lisa Maria Hogeland, "Sexuality in the Consciousness-Raising Novel of the 1970s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 4 (April 1995): 601-632, passim; Lisa Maria Hogeland, *Feminism and Its*

critics entirely conflated her life with Isadora's, she did concede that she crafted the Isadora Wing novels as "autobiographical projections," or "mock memoirs,"<sup>82</sup> that illustrated her own explorations in personal politics. According to Jong, "Isadora is an alter ego" who is "more critical . . . more audacious, more outrageous" than Jong herself.<sup>83</sup>

Isadora (like Jong) is a self-identified feminist and writer whose star is on the rise. In addition, the two women, real and imagined, shared remarkable similarities in their romantic liaisons. In identifying her own struggles as similar to those of Isadora, Jong explained: "My life has been a constant struggle of self-stunting stereotypes, of falling in love with men who were very sadistic, and then having to escape various cages of my own making. . . . I've had a great struggle towards freedom and a lot of women identify with *Isadora* because she is struggling. She is in conflict, as most of us are."<sup>84</sup> Jong understood her mock memoirs as political, not in the "narrow sense" of identifying with a particular ideology, but in the personal sense, with politics being "expressed through individual experience."<sup>85</sup>

Thus, Erica Jong and her heroine, Isadora Wing, offer an especially apropos lens for understanding how questions about romantic love served to blur distinctions between

---

*Fictions: The Consciousness-Raising Novel and the Women's Liberation Movement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), ix and xi; Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 31; and Jane Gerhard, *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>82</sup> Diana Cooper-Clark, "Erica Jong," in *Conversations with Erica Jong*, ed. Charlotte Templin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 89.

<sup>83</sup> Barbara Bannon, "Erica Jong," in *Conversations with Erica Jong*, ed. Charlotte Templin, Literary Conversations Series (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 71.

<sup>84</sup> Cooper-Clark, "Erica Jong," 94.

<sup>85</sup> Wendy Martin, "Erica Jong," in *Conversations with Erica Jong*, ed. Charlotte Templin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 145.

the personal and the political for second-wave feminists. Jong's mock memoirs (as well as her own romantic experiences) begged the questions: "Was it un-feminist for a woman to want love and did sharing love with a man necessarily foretell her dependence upon him?" In *Fear of Flying* Jong's heroine, Isadora Wing, struggles with these very questions as she tries to reconcile her fervent longing for independence and sexual freedom with an equally burning desire for romantic love. Mirroring Jong's musings in the *Playboy* interview, Isadora worries that she needs the love of a man in order to see herself as a complete person and works to reconcile her desire for physical and emotional intimacy with her pursuit of liberation. Demonstrating the lack of a clear and simple solution to this dilemma, Jong continued Isadora's saga in two more books, *How to Save Your Own Life* (1977) and *Parachutes and Kisses* (1984).<sup>86</sup>

In *Fear of Flying*, Isadora is torn between her desire to pursue love and her overwhelming need to feel liberated from traditional, patriarchal expectations of womanhood. Trapped in what she fears is a loveless marriage, she flirts with adultery and sexual experimentation as possible avenues of escape. As Isadora tries to decide whether or not she should stay with her husband, Bennett, a dependable, but cold psychologist, the alternative she confronts is not the possibility of being alone, but rather it is finding solace in the arms of British psychoanalyst, Adrian Goodlove. Although his name may seem appropriate, it turns out to be more than a misnomer, as he refuses to share with her the "good love" she so desperately craves. As Isadora journeys with him throughout

---

<sup>86</sup> And the struggle lives on: Erica Jong is presently writing a fourth Isadora Wing novel, which will chronicle Isadora's adventures in love and liberation as a woman past the age of 60. Time will tell if Jong and Isadora have finally resolved the tensions between the two. See Erica Jong, "On Being a Car Wreck: for National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, April 26, 2006," in *Seducing the Demon: Writing For My Life* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2007), 282.

Europe, she begins to confront more openly her dependence on heterosexual love. In trying to choose between Adrian and her husband, Bennett, Isadora points out to Adrian that he does not love her the way that Bennett does. In response, Adrian quips, “Don’t bring love into it and muck everything up. That’s a copout if I ever heard one. What does love have to do with it?” “Everything,” Isadora declares. “Bullshit,” Adrian responds, “You say love—but you mean security. . . . Is it all a question of who gives you more? Is it all a question, ultimately, of money?”<sup>87</sup>

Adrian’s quip articulates the view of many radical feminists that economic dependence, disguised by romantic love, continued to bolster women’s oppression. Nevertheless, Isadora is not motivated by economic necessity to form romantic attachments to men. As a successful and self-sufficient writer, Isadora’s apparent need for heterosexual romance is more complicated than Adrian suggests. Erica Jong spoke to this issue in her 1975 *Playboy* interview with Gretchen McNeese. When asked about her thoughts on changing relations between men and women in the 1970s, Jong declared: “I do see certain definite trends: one of them is that women are becoming increasingly independent economically. So they are in a position to choose men not only out of a desperate need for a social rudder or an economic supporter but out of their own desire for companionship, for friendship, for love, for sex.” To be sure, Jong acknowledges that economic independence was the reality for only some women and that real change would only occur when the majority of women enjoyed this freedom of choice.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying* (1973; repr. New York: New American Library, 2003), 194-95.

<sup>88</sup> McNeese, "Playboy Interview," 42.

Isadora wants desperately to enjoy independence and sexual freedom, but she finds herself at odds as to how to meld those desires with her desire for romantic love. As she explains to Adrian, she yearns for autonomy, but she still wants to “feel *close* to someone, united with someone, whole for once.” Isadora fears that unless she is half of a couple, she will never feel like a complete person. Adrian, mirroring the sentiment of many radical feminists suggests that she “stop looking for love and try to live [her] own life.” Isadora acknowledges that she has a lot to live for regardless of whether or not she’s in a relationship, but she still blanches at the thought of being alone. A life without love, for Isadora, seems “drab, drab, drab.”<sup>89</sup>

Because of her adherence to feminist ideals, Isadora eventually confronts aloneness as a viable alternative to romantic intimacy. Once she has recognized that “[m]otivating everything was the terror of being alone,” Isadora begins to play devil’s advocates to her own internal demons. Grappling with her dread that “if no man loves [her she] has no identity,” Isadora grows to believe that it was possible to define herself independently of romantic liaisons with men. It is only when she recognizes that she was willingly to give up her independence, “sell [her] soul, [her] principles, [her] beliefs, just for a man who’d really love [her],” that Isadora resolves to fight against this crippling need for self-defining love. But even despite her resolve, she still cannot entirely separate her desire for both liberation from and romantic intimacy with men and she admits that she does not know “which side will win.”<sup>90</sup> The lingering question, then, was “Can these two desires peacefully co-exist or must one prevail over the other?”

---

<sup>89</sup> Jong, *Fear of Flying*, 344-355.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 381-383.

Erica Jong toyed with different endings for *Isadora*, trying to determine which choice would enable her to be the most liberated. One possibility was that *Isadora* could end up alone, living entirely independently of men, because as some feminists saw it, “Splitting is liberation . . . Divorce is liberation.” Jong also considered having *Isadora* choose to focus exclusively on work. “Work: no men,” Jong explained, “identity will not be defined by men.” But ultimately, Jong decided to have her heroine return to her husband. For Jong, the issue was not whether *Isadora* found solace in a romantic relationship, but rather that “she had come to depend on herself, and she knew no man was ever going to be everything to her, whether it was Adrian or Bennett.”<sup>91</sup>

Neither *Isadora*, nor Jong, saw *Isadora*’s choice as her acquiescence to oppressive ideals. Instead, *Isadora* had decided to embrace both her feminist ideals of independence and her desire for romantic companionship with a man. When she has made her decision, *Isadora* admits that, at first, self-definition through love was what she sought: “That was what I had originally wanted. A man to complete me. . . . But perhaps that was the most delusional of all my delusions. People don’t complete us. We complete ourselves. If we haven’t the power to complete ourselves, the search for love becomes a search for self-annihilation; and then we try to convince ourselves that self-annihilation is love.”<sup>92</sup> Her assertion that “un-liberated” love leads to “self-annihilation” echoed radical feminist Shulamith Firestone’s castigation of romantic love as a “holocaust.”<sup>93</sup> But, for *Isadora*,

---

<sup>91</sup> Elaine Showalter and Carol Smith, “An Interview with Erica Jong,” in *Conversations with Erica Jong*, ed. Charlotte Temple (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 26.

<sup>92</sup> Jong, *Fear of Flying*, 412.

<sup>93</sup> Shulamith Firestone argued that even more so than motherhood, which both culturally and biologically limited women’s freedom, romantic love as a cultural force operated as the root cause of women’s oppression. Noting the skewed balance of power that existed within heterosexual romantic relationships, Firestone argued, “(male) culture is parasitical, feeding on the emotional strength of women



feminist ideals allow her to escape that self-defeating prophesy and she begins to see herself as a complete person on her own, while leaving herself open to loving men for love's own sake.

Isadora decides to resuscitate her relationship with Bennett, although whether the marriage thrives on Isadora's terms remains to be seen. Several years later, readers had the chance to find out if Isadora was still in a loving relationship based on choice and mutual understanding or if she had again succumbed to the self-annihilating love she had disavowed. Continuing the story of Isadora's quest for sexual freedom, emotional intimacy, and independence, *How to Save Your Own Life* (1977) finds Isadora at the same crossroads. Isadora Wing, like Erica Jong, has written a best-selling novel (whose plot mirrors that of *Fear of Flying*) and she's been catapulted into the public spotlight. Now struggling with the impact of her fame on her personal identity and with the pressure of being perceived as a spokesperson for feminism and the sexual revolution, Isadora is once again on the cusp of leaving Bennett. As in *Fear of Flying*, Isadora still fears that her marriage is loveless and when she learns that Bennett had a long-term affair that was not only sexual, but emotionally invested as well, she reaches a breaking point.

Isadora is furious at Bennett's betrayal and she begins to re-question her apparent need for love. Although she comes to the conclusion at the end of *Fear of Flying* that she alone is capable of making herself complete, the next major chapter in her life reveals that she is still at odds with how to best reconcile love and liberation. As Isadora embarks upon a journey of self-discovery, she grows to realize that she has stayed married to

---

*without reciprocity.*" Such conditions corrupted the nature of romantic love and, thus, "it [was] not the process of love itself that [was] at fault, but its *political*, i.e. unequal *power* context: the who, why, when and where of it [was] what [made romantic love] such a holocaust." Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970), 114 and 119 (emphasis original). Shulamith Firestone is discussed in detail in chapter one.

Bennett for the sole reason that she is afraid to be alone. Terrified that she would end up alone if she left Bennett, Isadora realizes that “[p]anic was the glue” that held her relationship together, not love.<sup>94</sup> Isadora reflected further:

I had tried to leave Bennett so many times, and each time I had come back. Each time I’d come back, things changed for the better. The marriage had become freer, more open, less restraining. It was so free by now that if I didn’t come home at night, he simply went to sleep. Yet that wasn’t what I wanted either. It was as if we were two strangers living in the same house. We really weren’t free—just indifferent. Loving someone is a loss of freedom—but one doesn’t think of it as a loss because one gains so much else.<sup>95</sup>

Isadora’s realization here was important. She has fought to have freedom within her marriage—freedom to experiment with various sexual partners, freedom to have her own work, and freedom to have her own friends. In many ways, Isadora’s marriage to Bennett resembled the kind of union many feminists sought and, yet, she would have preferred to lose some of her independence if it meant she possessed the reciprocal love of a man. Though she was unfulfilled in her “liberated” marriage, she stayed with it because the prospect of aloneness seems even *more* unfulfilling.

In coming to terms with this realization, Isadora pursues numerous sexual relationships with other men, participates in an orgy, and has an affair with a woman. Isadora’s dalliance with lesbianism in the novel was born of curiosity and the fact that “it was stylish to have a lesbian affair that year.” Thinking that it felt “liberating” to do “something forbidden,” Isadora wonders, “if men were the question, perhaps women were the answer.” Her brief experimentation with Rosanna (a student in her writing

---

<sup>94</sup> Erica Jong, *How to Save Your Own Life*, reprint (1977; repr. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2006), 85.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

seminar) makes Isadora feel safe: “Men were lethal; this was *safe*.”<sup>96</sup> But ultimately, Isadora decides that lesbianism is not for her and instead prefers sex and romance with men despite resultant complications.

In her self-interview with *Cosmopolitan*, Jong responded to criticism she received regarding her depiction of lesbianism. Lesbian feminists and separatists in particular felt that Isadora had too easily dismissed lesbianism as a viable alternative to heterosexual relationships and saw the episode in the book as disparaging to Rosanna as a representative for lesbian feminism. Of particular concern was the fact that Rosanna becomes a villainess in the story when she tries to thwart Isadora’s chance at love with a man later on. Jong argued, however, that *How to Save Your Own Life* was not her “definitive statement on lesbians or how [she felt] about lesbianism or even on whether or not [she liked], hate[d], or [felt] wholly indifferent to being intimate with a woman.” On the contrary, Isadora’s brush with lesbianism was meant as “the broadest parody—a humorous takeoff on that whole period in the women’s movement when everyone [she] knew felt *compelled* to have an affair with a woman because it was chic.” Her critics saw such a view as dismissive and worried that it would reify popular misconceptions of separatism and lesbianism. But, in Jong’s view, the situation she parodied was not lesbianism but “faddishness.” In her opinion, requiring women to embrace lesbianism as a prerequisite for feminism diminished the authenticity of “real” same-sex relationships and alienated self-identified feminists who did not want separatism.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-150.

<sup>97</sup> Jong, “Erica Jong on Erica Jong,” 260 (emphasis original). Jong expressed a similar sentiment in Bannon, “Erica Jong,” 72; Parker and Stephens, “Erica Jong,” 80; Templin, “Interview with Erica Jong,” 164-165; Woo, “Erica Jong’s Fear of Forgetting,” 1350136. In later novels, Jong dealt more seriously with lesbianism. See Erica Jong, *Sappho’s Leap: A Novel*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003).

Ultimately, the final push Isadora needs to sever her ties with Bennett comes when she meets a younger man, aspiring writer Josh Ace.<sup>98</sup> It is love at first sight and Isadora finds herself tumbling head over heels while trying to make sense of her newfound love. Her eight-year marriage to Bennett and its bitter demise had left her cynical and she is surprised to learn she still has the capacity to love another man so completely. Her emotional connection with Josh allows Isadora to finally diagnose what had subconsciously plagued her about her so-called liberated relationship with Bennett. In a letter to Josh, she writes,:

I think that somewhere along the line, I must have made a pact with myself that I would give up love, if I could have literature. Men are allowed to have both. Women almost always have to choose. And if I had to choose, I would choose writing. At least that was less likely to disappoint than love. So I lived with someone I had practically no communication with. And my rationalization for this was: *he lets me write.*<sup>99</sup>

Having realized the blatant double standard to which she'd subjected herself in her marriage, Isadora walks out on Bennett and the novel concludes with her safely ensconced in Josh's arms, with his promise to love her in her individuality. Unsurprisingly, this seeming "happily-ever-after" ending incensed many feminist reviewers and readers. Indeed, many feminist critics thought the novel reaffirmed heterosexual normativity and left readers with the message that all they needed was the

---

<sup>98</sup> In one interview, Jong argued that the decision to pair Isadora was actually more threatening than if Isadora had chosen to stay in the lesbian relationship with Rosanna. She explained, "many men are outraged by *How to Save Your Own Life* because it is an instance of a woman actually changing her life, and doing this awful thing of finding a younger man--a man with no money and a beard. This is practically worse than being a lesbian; men can sort of dig lesbianism, it's a turn on, they think it's very cute and really want to get in bed with the two of you. But they can't deal with the idea that you might want another, younger man--that's really upsetting." Bannon, "Erica Jong," 77-78.

<sup>99</sup> Jong, *How to Save Your Own Life*, 240.

right man.<sup>100</sup> In fact, Isadora herself worries about the implications of her love for Josh. At the end of the novel, she laments, “It was no good. All her feminism, all her independence, all her fame had come to this, this helplessness, this need. She needed him. She needed this man.”<sup>101</sup>

Isadora’s needful love was certainly (and rightfully) alarming to some feminist reviewers. Their fear that readers might take such a message to heart was not entirely unfounded either. By the mid-1970s it was not uncommon for some feminists to justify their relationships with men by arguing that they had snagged one of the “right men” who tolerated their liberation.<sup>102</sup> While it is impossible to refute the claims of all “liberated couples,” many separatists were incredulous.

But Jong was quick to tell one interviewer that her message was *not* “that women can all find true love and happiness, and that if they are unhappy it’s because they haven’t found the right man.”<sup>103</sup> Aligning herself with feminists like Helen Gurley Brown, who believed women should not pursue separatism but rather ought to work alongside men in solving the problems of gender inequity, Jong believed that it was not her prerogative as a feminist writer to offer a doctrinaire solution for what women *should* do about the difficulties love posed for liberation, but rather that she should speak truth to

---

<sup>100</sup> Temple, *Conversations with Erica Jong*, xiv; Parker and Stephens, “Erica Jong,” 78-81.

<sup>101</sup> Jong, *How to Save Your Own Life*, 284.

<sup>102</sup> One way to gauge how self-identified feminists felt about love are the letters they wrote to public figures in the feminist movement. Indeed, in numerous interviews Jong noted that her readers often wrote to tell her that their concerns about their own relationships matched those of Isadora. Similarly, hundreds of women wrote to Gloria Steinem and *Ms.* in order to describe their own romantic ordeals or to assert that they had found one of the “right” men that made reconciling love with liberation a real possibility. See Temple, *Conversations with Erica Jong*, passim. See also Boxes 55-63, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., and Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980, MC 331, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>103</sup> Parker and Stephens, “Erica Jong,” 74.

an issue that conflicted many self-identified feminists. When reflecting on *Fear of Flying* in particular, Jong argued that although reviewers had emphasized its boldness in dealing with female sexuality, she saw its true “chutzpah” in the “fearlessness of a woman absolutely putting down the contents of her brain.” What she saw as fearless in her work was in her “telling the truth about men.”<sup>104</sup> Arguing that the constant theme that ran through all of her work is that of ‘the quest for self-knowledge,’<sup>105</sup> Jong explains that the heroines in her books were “always looking for wholeness and integration in a society where women are not allowed to be bodies and brains both. Certainly that was Isadora,” she said, “and it’s true of me.”<sup>106</sup> In this regard, Jong’s feminist style was geared towards the realities of women’s lives, much like Helen Gurley Brown’s “Gurley Girl feminism.”

For Jong, the search for “wholeness” included the desire for love; nevertheless, she did not see this desire as antithetical to her feminist ideals. Instead, sharing love with someone was only one aspect of wholeness out of many that she and her heroine sought. Whereas some feminist critics thought that Jong rendered the message that “going from one man to another” was the solution, Jong refused to “put down love . . . because [she] really [thought] it [was] very soul expanding to love another person, whether you call it romantic love or whatever.” She stated: “I don’t think human beings were meant to live without other people, although there may be times in one’s life when one should quite happily live alone.”<sup>107</sup> As she explained to *Playboy* editor Gretchen McNeese, while she

---

<sup>104</sup> Jean W. Ross, “Contemporary Authors Interview,” in *Conversations with Erica Jong*, ed. Charlotte Templin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 151

<sup>105</sup> Kern, “Erica,” 132-133.

<sup>106</sup> Ross, “Contemporary Authors Interview,” 148.

<sup>107</sup> Parker and Stephens, “Erica Jong,” 77.

did not believe she needed validation from men she could not deny that “[her] sense of joy and being one with the world comes from having love in [her] life.” “I can live without it,” she said, “but I really don’t want to.”<sup>108</sup>

In this regard, Jong’s assertion –that she didn’t *need* love to feel complete, but that she *wanted* it – very much resonated with Isadora’s reaction to her newfound love with Josh. Acknowledging that she “mistrusted [her] feelings for Josh,” Isadora concedes that “It was too good, too happy.” Skeptical about love everlasting, Isadora worries: “It had to be ephemeral. It had to wear off in a month—or two. But so what? What was the alternative? To go back to Bennett and write still another cynical book proving that love is an illusion?”<sup>109</sup> For Isadora, the answer is no. Instead, she chooses to accept Josh’s love on its own terms and is determined to enjoy it for however long it might last. Thus, rather than coming to depend on yet another man, she has really continued to depend on herself, while allowing herself to enjoy emotional intimacy as only one aspect of her being.

In using the “mock memoir” format to politicize the personal, Jong reassured feminists like her that they were not alone in their struggle. Many women in the movement had left unhappy marriages as feminism illuminated their oppression within the institution and navigating divorce was a common concern. The situation was no different for Erica Jong. Like Isadora, Jong went through a bitter divorce following the publication of *Fear of Flying* and had recently settled down with aspiring writer, Jonathon Fast.<sup>110</sup> Explaining to one interviewer that their marriage was the kind of

---

<sup>108</sup> McNeese, “Playboy Interview,” 62.

<sup>109</sup> Jong, *How to Save Your Own Life*, 234.

<sup>110</sup> Barbara Bannon, “Erica Jong,” in *Conversations with Erica Jong*, ed. Charlotte Templin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 71.

equitable partnership feminists had envisioned for women who wished to marry,<sup>111</sup> Jong found hope that men and women could share romantic love as true companions in her relationship with Fast. On having met Fast, Jong explained that it was like “living with [her] other half.” Having previously believed “men and women were sort of adversaries in a relationship,” Jong found it was finally possible to have a relationship “without . . . plea bargaining and competitive strife.”<sup>112</sup> Isadora finds something similar with Josh, but Jong forewarned that the ending for Isadora and Josh might not play out so happily after all. Telling one interviewer that she was neither “subtle” nor “dumb,” Jong pointed to a budding “dark side.” Elaborating further, Jong explained, “There’s love, there’s a romantic readiness, there’s an opening but there’s also kind of a rivalry developing. Even in this relationship which is so close there’s the snake in the garden, discontent.”<sup>113</sup> Jong’s thinly veiled warning suggested that trouble was already brewing for Isadora and Josh (and for herself in her ill-fated marriage to Jonathon Fast).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, the third and final Isadora Wing novel, *Parachutes and Kisses* (1984) returns to Isadora and Josh when that snake of discontent has reared its ugly head. Picking up seven years later, after Isadora and Josh have married and had a child together, *Parachutes and Kisses* chronicles their bitter separation and divorce.<sup>114</sup> As

---

<sup>111</sup> Kern, “Erica,” 131.

<sup>112</sup> McNeese, “Playboy Interview,” 65.

<sup>113</sup> Parker and Stephens, “Erica Jong,” 74.

<sup>114</sup> In 1981, Jong told interviewer Elaine Woo that she and Fast were separated. While she fails to elaborate further in that interview, she later indicated in the afterword to *How to Save Your Own Life* that her own relationship with Fast followed a similar trajectory as that of Isadora and Josh. After conceding that Isadora Wing is her own doppelganger, Jong writes of Josh and Isadora “Their marriage was the triumph of hope and their divorce the beginning of cynicism. They loved, had a child, then part acrimoniously, then eventually became friends.” Likewise, an article in *People* about a children’s book Jong wrote, *Molly’s Book of Divorce* (published the same year as *Parachutes and Kisses*, the third “mock memoir”), chronicles the bitter divorce of Jong and Fast. Moreover, the *People* article describes Jong’s new



it turns out, the needful love Josh and Isadora shared was not as amenable to her liberation as she had hoped. Despite Josh's re-assurances to Isadora that he was undaunted by her career, living in her literary shadow proved too great a burden. As a less successful writer, Josh grows increasingly bitter about Isadora's success and his jealousy corrupts their love.

The realization that Josh could not unconditionally love her again shakes Isadora's faith that it was not possible to have romance if she was independent otherwise. At the most fundamental level, Isadora believes that "women want work and love just like everyone else." Her experiences, however, haunt her with the growing belief that "having one always leads to banishing the other."<sup>115</sup> Realizing that "personal happiness is the forfeiture [women] have to pay" after they have "worked so hard for professional glory," Isadora cynically concludes: "All our accomplishments buy us in the love department is threatened men, soft cocks, abandonment."<sup>116</sup>

For more than a decade, Isadora and feminists like her had struggled to free themselves from gender oppression. Working towards economic equality and social freedom, liberated women had also hoped to find parity within romantic relationships. But, by the time *Parachutes and Kisses* was published in 1984, a political and cultural backlash against feminism had firmly taken hold and was reifying many of the cultural

---

lover, a twenty-six year old actor, Chip Sweet, who must have served as the model for "Bean" in her third "mock memoir." See Elaine Woo, "Fear of Forfeiting Feminism's Gains," in *Conversations with Erica Jong*, ed. Charlotte Templin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 135; Erica Jong, "Afterword: Rereading *How to Save Your Own Life*" in *How to Save Your Own Life*, reprint (1977, repr. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2006), 313; and Toby Kahn, "Mommy and Daddy Are Fighting Again Since Erica Jong Used Her Daughter's Name in a Children's Guide to Divorce," *People Weekly*, 2 April 1984, 51-52.

<sup>115</sup> Erica Jong, *Parachutes and Kisses*, reprint (1984; repr. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2006), 18.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

assumptions feminists had endeavored to demystify. Consequently, as Isadora and others were finding out, “the dream of the ‘new sensitive male’ of the seventies had given way to the old insensitive male of the eighties.”<sup>117</sup> Bitter and disillusioned, Isadora wonders, “Is *this* where liberation leads?”<sup>118</sup>

As Isadora grapples with her disappointments in love, she worries that her three-year-old daughter, Mandy, will face similar struggles later in life. In one especially poignant scene, Isadora reads *Sleeping Beauty* to Mandy. Mandy is enchanted by the fairy tale, but has the foresight to ask, “Mama—what if the Prince *doesn't* come?” When Isadora reassures her, “Well then, darling, she just kisses herself and wakes *herself* up.” Mandy “seems astonished, but she believes.”<sup>119</sup> Although Isadora is still not sure whether *she* can wake herself up, Mandy’s belief revives Isadora’s hope that when Mandy comes of age, gender expectations will have changed enough that “[Mandy] would never have to choose between a man she loved and work she loved, that she would never have to stunt herself, battle with herself, waste hours in dialogue with self and soul.”<sup>120</sup>

Isadora’s hopes for Mandy in many ways resonated with the belief of many feminists that *real* change would only come in future generations. Some wondered whether or not it would become possible to reconcile love and liberation in their own lifetimes, but they hoped that in imparting feminist values upon their children, love that was based on companionship and equality would become the rule, rather than the exception. Taking into consideration the importance of generational change, it is perhaps

---

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 350.

unsurprising that when Isadora finally meets the man (Berkeley “Bean” Sproul, III) who revives her faith in love this time around, he turns out to be nearly fifteen years her junior. Having come of age emotionally and sexually during the height of the feminist movement, Bean believes that “If they are really together . . . really partners, a man and a woman make the most invincible force in the universe.”<sup>121</sup> Isadora, jaded by her experiences with men who cannot handle her independence, is less convinced. Nevertheless, she allows herself to gradually fall in love with Bean, hoping that he believes what he says.

The novel ends much like *Fear of Flying* and *How to Save Your Own Life*. In each successive novel, Isadora grows to accept aloneness as a viable alternative to heterosexual romance and in the process opens herself up to finding love. Towards the end of *Parachutes and Kisses* Isadora reaches a new level of understanding in her quest when she has the epiphany “that loving and being loved were the most important things on earth.” She concludes: “Sometimes it struck her as ironic that after having fought so hard for feminism, she had come to this—the humbling acceptance of love as the only-life giver. Not that she expected it to last. She expected her child and her work to last and this love to go the way of all loves. And yet she knew that without this renewal nothing was worthwhile.”<sup>122</sup>

The glass-half-empty reading of the novel’s resolution might be that Isadora has once again identified herself in opposition to a man, in the name of love, rather than as a liberated individual. If history is doomed to repeat itself, Isadora’s love for Bean will

---

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 353.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 358.

eventually grow “needful” and, like Bennett and Josh, Bean will become wary of her independence, and their love will falter. I argue, however, that for Erica Jong (and Isadora Wing), the glass is half full. In her relationship with Josh, Isadora had determined that romantic love would not serve as a source of identification, but she grows to feel an overwhelming need to see him as her anchor. In her relationship with Bean, however, Isadora has taken one step further in distinguishing her *need* for love from her *desire* for love. As she states quite plainly—she expects her love for Bean (and his for her) to end and she knows that, regardless, her place in the world will be defined not by the love of a man, but by her work, by her role as a mother, and by her own self-worth. The key difference is that whereas Isadora *needed* Josh because he *completed* her, she *wants* Bean’s love because he *complements* her individuality. In short, Isadora has grown to exemplify Jong’s simple definition of a feminist as “a woman who has taken control of herself.”<sup>123</sup> That self control enables Isadora to remove overwhelming need from the equation, making it possible to finally reconcile her desire for love with her own liberation.

### CONCLUSION

Erica Jong and Helen Gurley Brown argued that it was in the process of liberation and self-realization that women were empowered to make romantic decisions that truly benefited their lives. For many self-identified feminists—perhaps for most—forsaking the love of male partners was not a viable alternative in the pursuit of liberation and they found much to identify with in Erica Jong by proxy of Isadora Wing and Helen Gurley

---

<sup>123</sup> Viveka Vogel, “Flying Without Fear: Erica Jong’s Feminist Fire is Still Cracking,” in *Conversations with Erica Jong*, ed. Charlotte Templin, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 192.

Brown as the quintessential Cosmo Girl. As vocal segments of the movement increasingly questioned the viability of romantic love between liberated women and men, many feminists must have taken solace in the fact that others struggled so arduously to find a balance between heterosexual romance and feminism. While there was no definitive solution to the dilemma, Brown and Jong demonstrated that liberation, at its best, allowed women to find parity in their romantic relationships with men without forsaking their independence. And, at the very least, liberation allowed feminists to examine the contradictions of their romantic desires. Perhaps what is more important than a solution, then, was that Helen Gurley Brown and Erica Jong were cognizant of the struggle many feminists experienced, and in giving voice to those struggles, they validated the desire to reconcile love with liberation as a legitimate feminist endeavor.

## Chapter Five

### “There Cannot Be Love Where There Is No Equality”<sup>1</sup> Gloria Steinem and *Ms.* Tackle the Problem of Romantic Love

In February 1978, the cover of *Ms.* magazine featured a red, heart-shaped box surrounded by chocolate-covered question marks. Emblazoned across the top of the heart-shaped box was the question, “Is There Love After Liberation?”<sup>2</sup> With this tongue-in-cheek nod to the commercialized holiday of Valentine’s Day, *Ms.* drew attention to a serious issue for second-wave feminists. Inside, the editors of *Ms.* re-posed the question, elaborating: “We used to think love was being dependent, giddy, possessed, and the only way of finding ourselves. Now we know it isn’t. But do our hearts agree?”<sup>3</sup> In trying to answer that question, the symposium that followed wove together illuminating quotations about romantic love from feminists past and present (including Simone de Beauvoir, Anne Koedt, Robin Morgan, and Shulamith Firestone) with personal statements from *Ms.* contributors. In addition, the symposium included an inset proclaiming “Look Who Was In Love” that excerpted the love letters of famous feminists past.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Gloria Steinem consistently stated in interviews, speeches, and writing that love was only possible when shared between equals. This specific quotation comes from “Ms. – Today and Tomorrow” *Civil Rights Digest* (Spring 1973), 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Ms.* (February 1978), cover page.

<sup>3</sup> “Is There Love After Liberation,” *Ms.* (February 1978), 39.

<sup>4</sup> The feature included the love letters of Mary Wollstonecraft, George Sand, Angelina Grimke, Susan B. Anthony, Rosa Luxemburg, Isadora Duncan, and Emma Goldman. See “Look Who Was In Love,” *Ms.* (February 1978), 42-43 and 86.

By 1978, *Ms.* magazine was six years old and the women's liberation movement had been building for more than a decade as feminists interrogated gender inequality from different angles. Over the course of those years, feminists had grappled with the problem of romantic love alongside efforts to bring about social, political, and economic equality for women; to confront issues of women's health, sexual violence, and reproductive freedom; to theorize about and challenge bastions of male, racial, and class-based oppression; and to raise women's consciousness about their secondary status. With the fluidity of thought and action that characterized the second wave in general, feminists had confronted issues of love from different perspectives and with varying degrees of intensity. The *Ms.* query about post-liberation love spoke directly to two questions that had underscored feminist responses to romantic love all along: Would romantic love continue to exist in an egalitarian society and, if so, what would it look like?

One participant, *Ms.* writer Judith Thurman, reported that in rousing her anger against men, feminism had led to "Perspective. Enlightenment. (Both historical.) And a certain personal liberation . . . . But no radical change—change at the roots—in my closest relations with men." The roots were so deeply planted, she argued, that she still felt an inexplicable need to seek identity in a man. Though feminism *had* "challenged [her] expectations of love, a lover, and of [herself]," Furman concluded that "love after feminism has had its traps." In her estimation, it would take much longer for real change to take place.<sup>5</sup> Another contributor, Michele Wallace, addressed the "trouble with the 'new man.'" According to Wallace, men who claimed to be sympathetic to feminism still struggled with relinquishing their power in favor of equality. It was going to take more

---

<sup>5</sup> Judith Thurman, "Is There Love After Liberation," 39-40.

pushing to get men to recognize the “lunacy of sexism” in order for male-female sexual tensions to become exciting rather than “anxiety and terror” inducing.<sup>6</sup>

Other contributors raised questions about the meaning of love within the context of liberation. As *Ms.* writer Carol Tavris argued, “I find that in this decade of the self, many people confuse liberation with narcissism.” “It’s an understandable attitude for the many women for whom, for so long, love did require squelched ambitions,” she continued. In her estimation, “liberation means that I am confident enough of my self that I can give it to another, and love means that I am confident enough about that other that I can trust him with my gift.”<sup>7</sup> Another participant, Blynn Garnett, said that the answer to the question was “patently obvious . . . unless there [was] the usual confusion between love and subservience.” According to her, feminism made romantic love less recognizable to the casual observer by replacing its association with subservience with relationships that were free and autonomous.<sup>8</sup>

The lengthiest symposium testimony came from Gloria Steinem—one of the founding editors of *Ms.* and the popular media’s favorite feminist spokesperson. Recalling her own experiences in love, Steinem said that before feminism, in preadolescence, she had experienced love that “was really love, and not a means to something else, to an interesting life or an identity [she] couldn’t (or thought [she] couldn’t) achieve on [her] own.” But in adolescence, like all other young girls, she had been conditioned to seek fulfillment and identity in romantic relationship to men.

---

<sup>6</sup> Michele Wallace, “The Trouble with the ‘New Man,’” 40.

<sup>7</sup> Carol Tavris, “Liberation of Narcissism?” 40.

<sup>8</sup> Blynn Garnett, “Never Having to Say Thank You for Clean Socks,” 86.



Arguing that this formula was a “sure way to strangle a friendship,” Steinem explained her serial pattern of ending relationships because she “knew no other way to end the lopsidedness and loss.” “If women can’t be whole and together with men,” she explained, “then eventually we will pull apart from men in order to be whole.” Steinem went on to explain that she continued to struggle with maintaining her own identity while in relationships with men but that feminism had helped to make the process less painful. There was still work to be done, she believed, but “the instant gratification of being ‘chosen’ (as opposed to the effort of personal accomplishment), the flash of power at causing someone to ‘fall in love’ (as opposed to the enduring power of developing [one’s] own strength), and the social forces that make women feel odd or crazy if [they] are not addenda to men” were beginning to diminish as she became more confident in herself as an individual. As a result, she found herself able to form friendships with men that were based in equality and opened up possibilities for authentic love.<sup>9</sup>

By the time *Ms.* featured the “Is There Love After Liberation?” symposium, the magazine, with Gloria Steinem at its helm, had established itself as the predominant voice of what historian Amy Farrell has called “popular feminism,” which was “widespread, common to many,” and had emerged “from the realm of popular culture.”<sup>10</sup> Conceived as an open forum for feminist readers and writers, *Ms.* brought together disparate voices of the women’s liberation movement and acted as a microcosm of the various dialogues and debates regarding feminism. Moreover, with its effort to cultivate a version of feminism that was inclusive and pluralistic, it especially emphasized liberal

---

<sup>9</sup> Gloria Steinem, “A Flash of Power,” 87-88

<sup>10</sup> Amy Erdman Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood: Ms. Magazine and the Promise of Popular Feminism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 5.

feminist concerns, which increasingly included a focus on individualism and self-improvement in addition to equal rights.<sup>11</sup> This was especially the case with the problem of romantic love, as demonstrated by the February 1978 symposium debating its future. The magazine frequently addressed issues of emotional and sexual intimacy to which the readers responded with enthusiasm. The open forum format expanded the on-going dialogue and the deluge of letters *Ms.* received on a monthly basis revealed how the debate over romantic love continued into the 1970s with a growing emphasis on diversity and individualistic responses to the problems it posed.<sup>12</sup>

*Ms.* and Gloria Steinem stood at the nexus of divergent branches of feminist responses to the problem of romantic love in the 1970s. Simultaneously criticized by militant feminists for being not radical enough and more “mainstream” feminists for being too radical, Steinem and *Ms.* bridged the more extremist views along the spectrum of feminist reactions to the problem of romantic love. Like radical theorists who focused on patriarchy in the late 1960s, *Ms.* and Steinem were interested in how ideals of romantic love oppressed women. But, at the same time, they readily acknowledged that romantic intimacy was something most feminists were not willing to forsake in pursuit of liberation. Blending those sometimes-contradictory concerns, Steinem, often using *Ms.* as

---

<sup>11</sup> Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 199.

<sup>12</sup> Approximately half of thousands of readers’ letters to *Ms.* (excluding the more than 20,000 letters written in response the preview issue) are preserved in the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University. Because of privacy restrictions, citations regarding letters from this collection do not include any identifying information. Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980, MC 331, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. Some of the letters from this collection have been published in Mary Thom, ed., *Letters to Ms., 1972-1987* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1987). Two histories of *Ms.* magazine also deal extensively with the letters as an integral component of the magazine. See Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood*; Mary Thom, *Inside Ms.: 25 Years of the Magazine and the Feminist Movement* (New York: H. Holt, 1997).

a platform, argued throughout the 1970s that love could not exist between people who were unequal.

**LESSONS IN LOVE AND THE JOURNEY TOWARDS FEMINISM: GLORIA STEINEM BEFORE MS.**

Gloria Steinem's belief that women could only find fulfillment in romantic relationships with men if they had a clear sense of their own identity grew out of her own experiences while growing up and in early adulthood. Born in 1934, Gloria Steinem straddled the divide between the generation of pioneering second-wave feminists, like Betty Friedan and Helen Gurley Brown, and that of baby-boomer women who came-of-age during the 1960s and filled the ranks of the more militant feminist groups. During her often-troubled childhood in Toledo, Ohio, Steinem cared for her ailing mother with little help from her largely absent father and was forced to become independent early on. Determined to escape the fate of young women in her town (which was typically marriage and motherhood straight out of high school), Steinem made it to Smith College on scholarship. At Smith, she began to set the stage for her professional career as a writer and she set the tone for her pattern in romantic relationships, all of which put her on the path towards feminism.<sup>13</sup> The challenges she faced in striking a balance between career-goals and romantic interests would prove transformative.

---

<sup>13</sup> I rely primarily on two biographies of Gloria Steinem for relevant background information: Carolyn Heilbrun's *The Education of a Woman: The Life of Gloria Steinem* (1995) and Sydney Ladenson Stern's *Gloria Steinem: Her Passions, Politics, and Mystique* (1997). Steinem once told an interviewer that "I would have preferred to write my own biography, or buy the legal rights to my life, or write Carolyn Heilbrun's. But I decided to cooperate with someone I respected—which is Carolyn. Submitting my life to her laser eye is like volunteering for a medical trial. It might or might not help me, but it will certainly help other women. We can only learn from each other's lives, mistakes and all." Quoted in Gloria Steinem to Carolyn Heilbrun, December 9, 1994, Box 1, Folder 7, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. While Heilbrun was busy writing Steinem's biography, Stern set out to do the same. Steinem agreed to help with the biography and allowed Stern to extensively interview her, but

Like many other women of her time, Steinem was determined not to compromise on either her personal aspirations or her desire for emotional and sexual intimacy, despite cultural pressure to choose one or the other. But balancing those dual desires was easier said than done. Steinem later realized that she fell in line with her peer-group by choosing men who had the life that she wanted to lead for herself, but feared was off-limits to women. Because she wanted to be a writer, she dated male writers. Because she wanted to be involved in civil rights issues, she dated like-minded activists. In other words, she fell into what she would later see as the trap of “male-identification.”<sup>14</sup> Though the men she dated in college and immediately thereafter “were always kind and supportive,” encouraging her to do her own work and pursue her own interests, Steinem still felt that her first role was that of supporting actress to the male lead. As she later realized “I did it to myself. I felt I *had* to help them, help with their stories, their research, their lives.” For Steinem, this led to an on-going pattern in which she “got resentful and . . . left.” “I would think you had to break off the relationship in order to be free,” she recalled.<sup>15</sup>

---

only after Heilbrun’s biography was finished. See Carolyn Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman: The Life of Gloria Steinem* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995); and Sydney Ladenson Stern, *Gloria Steinem: Her Passions, Politics, and Mystique* (Secaucus, N.J.: Carol Publishing Group, 1997). For autobiographical reflections, a good starting point is Steinem’s book of collected essays, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, which includes an essay about her troubled childhood, “Ruth’s Song,” and her self-help book, *Revolution From Within* (1992). Gloria Steinem, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, 2d ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995); and Gloria Steinem, *Revolution From Within: A Book of Self-Esteem* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> “Male-Identification” was a term second-wave feminists used to describe certain aspects of women’s secondary status. In short, feminists worried that because of patriarchal social customs, especially those surrounding marriage, women had no identity of their own outside of their attachments to men. A woman’s status was entirely derived from that of her husband (father, son, male employer, and so on). To a large extent, the feminist debate over the meaning of romantic love as it evolved during the long 1970s revolved around feminist efforts to disavow male-identification and establish ways for women to forge an identity of their own.

<sup>15</sup> David Behrens, “Gloria Steinem at 45...Talks About Love, Marriage, Politics and Her Career,” *Part II*, March 6, 1979, 6, Box 2, Folder 2, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

Steinem set this pattern shortly after graduating from Smith in 1956, when she became engaged to her first serious boyfriend, Blair Chotzinoff. Chotzinoff, according to Steinem biographer Carolyn Heilbrun, was an ideal romantic partner by 1950s standards: “He was well connected, attractive, and willing to play the role movies had made familiar, that of the resourceful pursuer.”<sup>16</sup> Steinem, who called off the engagement within a matter of months, later told an interviewer that she had agreed to marry him because “I was in love with someone and didn’t know what to do about it except get engaged. . . . I knew marriage terrified me, but I didn’t want to stop seeing him.” For Steinem, marriage increasingly came to symbolize an end to her own independence. She feared that if she married, “I wouldn’t be able to do *anything* on my own. If you think that way, marriage means the end of *all* change.”<sup>17</sup> Her broken engagement with Chotzinoff was the first of many tentative steps towards her decision to remain legally unwed—a decision that set her apart from her peers at Smith.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 62. See also Stern, *Gloria Steinem*, 80-95.

<sup>17</sup> Steinem made similar assertions whenever asked about her broken engagement with Chotzinoff. This particular quotation comes from Behrens, *Part II*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Though her Smith classmates may have shared her anxieties about a loss of independence in marriage, it seemed that few acted on those fears by avoiding marriage as Steinem did. One indication that Steinem’s classmates were less inclined to avoid the socially-circumscribed path from which she diverged came ten years after her graduation from Smith when she helped to conduct a questionnaire of her class for their upcoming reunion. From the 300 responses, Steinem and fellow Smith alumnus Nancy Boden Pearsall imagined a composite, “mythical classmate” named Lydia Glutz, an “ecstatically content” wife and homemaker. Steinem and Pearsall were quick to point out that Lydia was merely a profile and that many of the Smith alums differed from that profile as individuals. Indeed, 35 percent of the women worked outside of the home, but only seven percent remained unmarried. Thus, while Steinem was not alone in living as a single career woman in the 1960s, she was certainly in the minority amongst her former peers. Of the women who reported they were married, 35 percent felt ecstatic, 46 percent felt content, and one percent felt grim. Among the single women, 72 percent were happy they had not married yet but planned to marry eventually, 6 percent were happily unmarried and planned to remain as such, and 22 percent were unhappy that they were unmarried. The questionnaire also contains extensive data regarding employment, residence, family, memories of Smith, and social, political, and religious views. Gloria Steinem and Nancy Boden Pearsall, “Smith College: 1956 10<sup>th</sup> Reunion Questionnaire,” Box 32, Folder 7, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

Though she did not want to marry, Steinem certainly did not shy away from romantic liaisons with men. After breaking her engagement to Chotzinoff in the late 1950s, Steinem was rarely, if ever, without a man in her life. For most of her adult life, she was involved in a series of long-term, often overlapping relationships. As one romance faded, another quickly took its place. This pattern would later prompt some critics to question her claims of independence. Such criticism was not entirely unwarranted; however, Steinem's relationship experiences had a profound impact on her development as a feminist, her evolving ideas about the nature of love, and her emergence as a role model of liberated love for self-identified feminists.

An examination of the dynamics of some of her early relationships offers powerful evidence for why Steinem grew to believe that romantic love was only beneficial to women when it was shared between two equals. Following Chotzinoff, for instance, Steinem had another brush with the prospect of marriage in 1960 during her relationship with Walter "Nick" Friedenberg, a foreign correspondent whom Steinem met through friends when she was in India on fellowship after graduating from Smith.<sup>19</sup> Friedenberg, like Chotzinoff, was keen to marry Steinem and despite his claims to support her career aspirations, he clearly envisioned a traditional marriage, in which Steinem would cater to his needs. In one letter, he wrote: "I wish, wish, wish you were here, darling, to bustle around, hold fort, hold hand, accompany dinner, throw party,

---

<sup>19</sup> Though Friedenberg is mentioned only in passing (if at all) in various chronicles of Steinem's life, they were involved for several years and her papers include a file of letters he wrote to her during their relationship that indicate a serious commitment. Friedenberg seems to have written most of the letters in the first months of 1960, at which point he was on assignment in India and Steinem was in Cambridge, Massachusetts working for the International Research Services. Stern is one of the few Steinem biographers who mentions Friedenberg and she does so only briefly in noting that Steinem became romantically involved with him in India and that their liaison continued for a few years thereafter. Stern, *Gloria Steinem*, 98.

listen me, read copy, manage laundry, rub back, feed stomach. In exchange for which would (and will, soon) love, honor, and cherish.”<sup>20</sup> Not only did Friedenberg fail to mention Steinem’s independent needs and interests, but by offering this bargain—her undivided attention as helpmate in exchange for his love—he suggested that his love was reward enough for placing his needs before her own.<sup>21</sup> This was not an enticing offer for Steinem and Friedenberg’s letters to her tellingly tapered off after that missive.<sup>22</sup> Though Steinem’s responses to Friedenberg are absent from the record it was likely that she ended the relationship because of her growing determination to avoid marriage.

In contrast to the lessons Steinem seemed to have learned in her relationships with Chotzinoff and Friedenberg—namely to avoid marriage at all costs for the time being—Steinem learned a more helpful lesson about the benefits of love based on mutual needs in her next significant relationship with Robert Benton, who was the art director of *Esquire* and an aspiring screenwriter when Steinem met him around 1960. At a time when Steinem was beginning to carve out a niche for herself as a journalist in New York, Steinem and Benton enjoyed a romantic relationship that lasted about a year and a half and ended in an enduring friendship. Both aspiring writers, Steinem and Benton found

---

<sup>20</sup> Friedenberg to Steinem, 4 February 1960, Box 86, Folder 41, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>21</sup> During the late 1960s and early 1970s a number of radical feminists (notably Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millett, Ti-Grace Atkinson, and Germaine Greer) theorized the meaning of romantic love, focusing on its consequences for women. Though their theoretical approaches differed, most radical feminist theorists agreed that romantic love was a social construction and that romantic ideals had developed in ways that rendered women subordinate to men. These theories are discussed in detail in chapter one. See, for instance, Ti-Grace Atkinson, *Amazon Odyssey* (New York: Links Books, 1974); Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970); and Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969).

<sup>22</sup> Friedenberg’s letters were filled with pleas for betrothal, but they seemed to stop after April 1960, with one last missive—a desperate love poem—that came in September. The letters from Walter “Nick” Friedenberg to Gloria Steinem can be found in Box 86, Folder 41, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

much to identify with in one another. By all accounts, their relationship was as enriching for their professional lives as it was emotionally fulfilling.<sup>23</sup> Steinem's relationship with Robert Benton, more than any other during this time in her life seemed to have been particularly formative regarding her expectations of loving relationships. It was true that Steinem pursued Benton during her phase of choosing men who possessed an identity (writer) she wanted for herself. But the mutuality upon which their relationship seemed to have been based was important in her emerging belief in the possibility of romantic love between equals.

There were other significant relationships in the 1960s. After Benton, Steinem was involved with a series of high-profile men, including Viking Press publisher Tom Guinzberg, screenwriter Herb Sargent, and director Mike Nichols (her one and only notoriously ugly break-up). Those relationships played no small role in her growing realization that while she enjoyed the romantic companionship of men, she wished to maintain an identity separate from her lovers. But, the issue of marriage continued to hang heavily over Steinem, especially during her relationship with Mike Nichols. Mutual friends persistently encouraged Steinem to marry Nichols, but despite enjoying his company, the more significant quality about their relationship in her eyes was always "feeling she had no identity, while he had so definite a one. . . . [S]he did not want to live

---

<sup>23</sup> Though never officially engaged, Steinem and Benton did file for a wedding license that would expire before they made use of it. Even after they parted ways, Steinem held Benton in high regard and they maintained a friendship akin to family. In 1984, after Benton wrote to congratulate her on the publication of her book, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, Steinem replied with an apology for having "behaved badly." She explained, "I've always felt something unfinished in the past . . . because I thought I never said to you that only you made me feel that being unlike what women were supposed to be was okay." Benton, who would likewise credit Steinem with "[giving him] for the first time a sense of [him]self," went on to write the acclaimed screenplay for *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), which featured "an unusually equal pair of lovers." See Steinem to Robert Benton, 17 March 1984, Box 84, Folder 18, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Heilbrun, *Education of a Woman*, 94; and Stern, *Gloria Steinem*, 123-127.



a husband's life instead of her own."<sup>24</sup> Though she had yet to join the ranks of the fledgling feminist movement and was not equipped with the language of gender politics, Steinem was increasingly and painfully aware of the sacrifices that seemed to come along with romantic commitment to men. Over the course of the decade, Steinem's relationships with men and her continued hesitancy about marriage loomed large as she determined, consciously or not, how much of herself she was willing to give up for the sake of loving a man.

While Steinem moved from relationship to relationship in the 1960s, she was increasingly drawn to issues of civil rights. Steinem's interest in social justice movements had been piqued when she spent a year traveling in India following her graduation from Smith in 1958. Upon returning to the United States, she had worked with the Independent Research Service and the International Communist Youth Festivals (an association that would bring sharp and libelous criticism from the Redstockings in 1975).<sup>25</sup> By the end of the 1960s, Steinem was deeply involved in political matters. In 1968, she covered the presidential campaign of Richard Nixon for *New York* magazine and became a staunch supporter of Senator George McGovern. Increasingly involved in electoral politics, Steinem supported the anti-Vietnam War movement, the civil rights movement, and the

---

<sup>24</sup> Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 119-120.

<sup>25</sup> Though Steinem did not know it at the time, the work she did with the Independent Research Service was funded by the CIA as part of an anti-Communist initiative. In 1975, the Redstockings (led by Kathie Sarachild) charged that not only did Steinem know about that CIA connection, but that she had continued to have ties with the CIA as a leader of the feminist movement. During a time when suspicion of CIA and FBI infiltrations of social justice movements were heightened, the charges were meant to question Steinem's legitimacy as a feminist leader and undermine her commitment to feminism. Steinem was deeply hurt by the allegations and initially chose to ignore them, which only served to escalate the Redstockings charges against her. The Redstockings attack coincided with criticisms of Steinem from other branches of the movement, notably from Betty Friedan. The attacks were symptomatic of divisions within the movement and the emergence of "trashing" as described by Jo Freeman. See Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 284-307; and Stern, *Gloria Steinem*, 291-306.

farm workers rights movement.<sup>26</sup> The grassroots work Steinem did for social justice movements of the 1960s left her well prepared, as it did many other women, for the wave of feminist activism beginning to swell on the horizon.<sup>27</sup>

All the while, Steinem continued to cultivate her career as a writer and increasingly devoted her journalistic energy to social justice causes. During the early 1960s, two of Steinem's articles signaled her career-to-come as a feminist journalist: "The Moral Disarmament of Betty Coed" for *Esquire* (September 1962), which examined the impact of the birth control pill on college women, and her now famous exposé of New York's *Playboy* Club, "A Bunny's Tale" for *Show* (a two part series in 1963). In critiquing the sexual double standards in her articles, Steinem was a participant in the emergence of second-wave feminist sensibilities. Coincidentally, these two articles coincided exactly with Helen Gurley Brown's *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Moreover, her personal life bore a striking resemblance to the dichotomy between Brown's "single girl" version of feminism and that of Friedan's discontented housewife. In steering clear of marriage, she had effectively avoided the feminine mystique while making it on her own as a single woman.

In February of 1969, Steinem's political interests and journalistic career fatefully and decisively merged when she covered the Redstockings abortion speak-out for *New*

---

<sup>26</sup> She was especially an instrumental organizer and fundraiser during the grape boycott of 1968. See Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 132-160; and Stern, *Gloria Steinem*, 157-166.

<sup>27</sup> See Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

*York* magazine.<sup>28</sup> For Steinem, who had an illegal abortion in England during the summer between her graduation from Smith and her trip to India, the abortion speak-out struck a very personal and transformative chord. Though she chose to remain silent during the speak-out, she admired the courage of the women who shared their stories.<sup>29</sup> Steinem later claimed that the speak-out instantaneously converted her to feminism and gave her a vocabulary for articulating and identifying problems that had troubled her throughout the decade.<sup>30</sup> As she explained to a researcher for a *Newsweek* article about her two years later:

That meeting made me understand that women are oppressed together and so have to act together. There is always anger and humiliation in us. I'd always understood what made me angry about the Playboy Club or the double standard or not being able to do political writing or being sent out for coffee. That all made me angry. But I didn't realize it was a group problem. Before that Redstockings meeting, I had thought that my person problems and experiences were my own and not part of a larger political problem.<sup>31</sup>

After the Redstockings abortion speak-out, Steinem began to devote her attention to the issue of women's liberation exclusively, at least professionally if not personally.

---

<sup>28</sup> Gloria Steinem was a political columnist for *New York*, which she had helped to launch with her friend and fellow journalist Clay Felker in 1966. See Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 103-138; and Stern, *Gloria Steinem*, 158-162.

<sup>29</sup> For descriptions of Steinem's pregnancy and subsequent illegal abortion see Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 67-69; Gloria Steinem, "Life Between the Lines," in *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, 2nd ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 21-23; and Stern, *Gloria Steinem*, 93-95.

<sup>30</sup> Many women experienced an instantaneous conversion to feminism during this time period. Many would explain that they had always felt they were alone in the frustrations they experienced because of gender discrimination. As consciousness-raising and other aspects of feminism began to reach a broader audience, however, many women grew to realize they were not alone after all and that their problems were part of a shared oppression as women. The sudden moment of realization, like that of Steinem's at the abortion speak-out, was famously described as the "click!" by Jane O'Reilly in the preview issue of *Ms.* in 1971. See Jane O'Reilly, "The Housewife's Moment of Truth," *New York* (December 29, 1971), 54-55, 57-59.

<sup>31</sup> Steinem, quoted in research notes for *Newsweek*. Memo to Leisure and Boeth from Peer on 3 August 1971, Box 4, Folder 3, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

Unlike some of the militant radical feminists, who were advocating for a complete disavowal of their pre-feminist lives in favor new relationships and patterns, Steinem maintained most of her social habits and continued to conduct herself similarly in relationships and other matters of everyday life after her conversion to feminism.<sup>32</sup> Still, she now had a theoretical framework within which she could more clearly articulate and justify her personal decisions. The clarity that framework brought, along with her abilities as a journalist, primed Steinem for the task of bringing the message of feminism to other women.

As Steinem's writing about the women's movement intensified, she also began to speak publicly about the movement, despite her deeply rooted and lasting fear of public speaking. Beginning in 1970, she went on the first of many speaking tours with an African American woman by her side. Her first speaking partner was Dorothy Pitman, an African American childcare advocate she had met while writing a "City Politic" column for *New York*. Despite their different backgrounds (Steinem blended the sensibilities of the Mid-West white working-class with that of the Northeastern educated middle class while Pitman was a product of the segregated South) the two saw similarities in the challenges they faced and identified a common oppression as women.<sup>33</sup>

Speaking to large audiences of women (and men), who may have had little contact with the burgeoning movement otherwise, yet were eager to learn about

---

<sup>32</sup> Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 173-174.

<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, Pitman did not necessarily align herself with the feminist movement, taking care to point out that she was "not a member of any women's liberation group." But, as she told one audience during a speaking engagement with Steinem, "I can align myself with a white woman, as long as both of us have the yokes around our necks. Women are the largest oppressed group." Dorothy Pitman Hughes, quoted in Charlene Post, "2 Feminist Movement Leaders Say Men Need Liberating, Too," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 22, 1970, 3B, Box 1, Folder 11, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. See also Heilbrun, *Education of a Woman*, 180-183.

feminism, Steinem and Pitman drew connections between racial, class, and gender oppression.<sup>34</sup> Later, when Pitman decided to stop touring to care for her new infant, Steinem continued making public appearances with Florynce Kennedy, an African American lawyer and radical feminist, and African American writer and activist, Margaret Sloan. The appearance of a white woman alongside an African American woman at a wide range of venues across the nation served as powerful visual imagery for connections between the civil rights movement and the women's liberation movement as well as the commonalities of women, despite apparent differences.<sup>35</sup> Though many critics were challenging second-wave feminists for their apparent white (and middle class) exclusivity by that time, Steinem's speaking tours with African American women indicated that efforts at cross-racial and cross-class alliances certainly did exist.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the sight of Steinem speaking alongside Pitman, Kennedy, and Sloan was what many

---

<sup>34</sup> The Gloria Steinem Papers in the Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. include hundreds of newspaper clippings that describe Steinem's speaking tours during the long 1970s. Examples that focus on her speaking events with Dorothy Pitman Hughes, Florynce Kennedy, and Margaret Sloan include Margie Fisher, "Women's Liberation Star is Smash at Hollins," *World News*, October 13, 1971, Box 1, Folder 12; Odilia Mendez, "Steinem, Kennedy Sound Out," *The Daily Lass-O*, February 3, 1972, Box 1, Folder 13; Melda Lynn, "Women's Lib Greets Toledo 'Friends, Sisters,'" *Toledo Blade*, October 17, 1970, Box 1, Folder 11; Gayle Little, "Gloria Steinem Bares Sex Myths," *Toledo Times*, October 7, 1970, Box 1, Folder 11; Rone Tempest, "'Male Myths' Condemned in OU Talk," *The Oklahoma Journal*, September 19, 1970, Box 1, Folder 11; and Cynthia McCluskey, "Women's Lib Leader Talks to Full House," publication and date unknown, Box 2, Folder 2.

<sup>35</sup> See Heilbrun, *Education of a Woman*, 180-183, 192-193, 204-205; and Stern, *Gloria Steinem*, 202-212.

<sup>36</sup> A common misconception of second-wave feminism was that only white, middle-class women participated. Scholars have recently begun to demonstrate how women of color and working-class women participated in feminist activism from the beginning of the second-wave, sometimes in alliances with white women, but usually in their own organizations with dual focus on issues of racism or poverty. Florynce Kennedy, one of Steinem's speaking partners, was one of the exceptions to this rule and worked closely with NOW and other white feminist groups. See Winifred Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009); Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

people would have envisioned when they heard the popular second-wave feminist slogan, “sisterhood is powerful.”

Steinem also spoke alone, participated in various panel discussions on the women’s movement, and appeared on television (she was a frequent guest on the popular *Phil Donahue Show*) and in high profile national magazines, like *Newsweek* and *McCall’s*. Steinem had the power to reach a wide, national audience because of her growing “star” appeal. She was already well known in certain social circles and media outlets because of relationships with high-profile men in the 1960s and her good looks, charm, and journalistic acumen made her a media favorite. This ability to reach a widespread audience enabled Steinem to spread ideas about feminism to women who might otherwise have remained isolated from the movement both geographically and philosophically while simultaneously debunking the myth that feminism did not belong exclusively to highly educated women concentrated in urban centers of the northeast.

Steinem was not as inclined to talk about love when she gave speeches as she was in interviews and in her own writing; nevertheless, an examination of her ideas as articulated in speeches, media profiles, and interviews, reveals that Steinem saw romantic love as a significant feminist issue. Influenced by her earlier social activism and the work of her contemporaries who were already swept up in the zeitgeist of women’s liberation, Steinem believed that the personal was political and that interpersonal relationships were political as a result.<sup>37</sup> When it came to relationships between women and men, Steinem

---

<sup>37</sup> In an address to the Magazine Publisher’s Association in 1973, Steinem explained: “Politics is any power relationship in our daily lives, any time one group of people is consistently powerful over another group, or one individual over another individual, based on group of birth rather than individual ability.” Gloria Steinem (presented at the “America’s Need to Know” Symposium, Magazine Publisher’s Association, Carnegie Hall, NYC, September 18, 1973, Box 100, Folder 4, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

argued that power was skewed in men's favor as evident in social customs, like the sex division of labor, the assumption that a man's last name was the family name, and women's economic, social, and emotional dependence on men.<sup>38</sup>

Of primary concern to Steinem was the problem of "male-identification." Male-identification was a problem most feminists sought to remedy. Though separatists and lesbians typically took the route of "woman-identification," Steinem advocated "self-identification." The two approaches were similar in that they encouraged women to identify themselves outside of their relationships with men; however, Steinem's emphasis on self-identification bore two striking differences from woman-identification. For one, self-identification left open the possibility for women to maintain relationships with men. Second, the emphasis on self-identification reflected a broader shift towards individual, rather than collective, approaches to combating gender inequality. By the early 1970s, sometimes called the "Me" decade, many people were increasingly drawn to therapeutic self-improvement and self-help measures. The version of feminism Steinem embraced especially reflected the blending of that sensibility with on-going interest in collective action and identity politics that continued to shape feminist activism throughout the 1970s.

Early in the 1970s, Steinem coined a special term to convey the pernicious nature of male-identification: "man-junky." By using the term "junky" to describe male-identification, Steinem asserted that the condition was not only addictive and harmful, but also that it was something that a woman could overcome with proper rehabilitation. Man-junkies, according to Steinem, sought identity in men because of social pressures and

---

<sup>38</sup> Gloria Steinem, "Gloria Steinem at Webster College, St. Louis, Missouri," Speech, reprinted in book (St. Louis, Missouri, March 1973), 308, Box 100, Folder 9, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

expectations. As she explained to one audience while speaking with Flo Kennedy, such women “feel they can’t function without man’s support.”<sup>39</sup> The declaration that women were made “to feel we are nothing without a man” became a common refrain for Steinem during the 1970s. Using words like “appendage,” “barnacle,” and “parasitical,” Steinem argued again and again that male-identification robbed women of autonomy and highly-prized individualism.<sup>40</sup> To convey how male-identification rendered women “half of a person,” Steinem often argued that society conditioned women to “Uncle Tom” to men for romantic attention. Evoking the language of black power activists, who used “Uncle Tom” as a metaphor to describe African Americans who pandered to whites, Steinem again drew connections between the two liberation movements. In a speech to the League of Women Voters in 1972, Steinem used especially powerful language to describe how romantic Uncle Tomming operated in heterosexual relationships:

It means a lot of this is pretense, and a lot of double standards, a lot of giggling and laughing and pretending everything is all right; a lot of material guilt, because somehow we are made to feel guilty about us expressing the best in us as people. We pretend we are not supposed to judge our husbands, that we are supposed to regard them as a child regards a parent, and who loves them in an unjudgmental way. That means that in an extreme form . . . when a man comes home with his

---

<sup>39</sup> Gloria Steinem quoted in Odilia Mendez, “Steinem, Kennedy Sound Out,” *The Daily Lass-O*, February 3, 1972, 2, Box 1, Folder 13, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>40</sup> Numerous speech transcripts, interviews with Steinem, and articles about Steinem included iterations of Steinem’s assertion that a man-junky was a woman who felt she had no identity without a man. Examples, housed in the Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., include: Margaret Sloan and Gloria Steinem, “Ms.--Today and Tomorrow,” *Civil Rights Digest* (Spring 1973): 35-42, Box 100, Folder 3; Gloria Steinem, “New Life Styles” (Speech presented at the Conference on the American Woman, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, August 2, 1973), Box 100, Folder 4; Eva Smith, “Unite, Help Each Other’ Feminist Leader Gloria Steinem Tells State Audience,” April 10, 1975, 6, Box 100, Folder 6; Gloria Steinem, “Untitled Speech” (Speech Transcript presented at the American Society of Corporate Secretaries National Conference, Puerto Rico, June 1974), Box 100, Folder 6; Gloria Steinem, “Women, the Law, and the Economy” (Speech, unknown location, no date), Box 101, Folder 5; Nalini Singh, “Feminism is a Fight to Humanise [sic] both Woman and Man,” *Femina*, March 12, 1976, 15, Box 1, Folder 17; and Laurie A. Harker, “Steinem Speaks on Need for Social Change, Equality,” *Iowa State Daily*, October 10, 1984, 1, Box 2, Folder 9.



white sheet on, women are still supposed to have dinner ready when he gets there.<sup>41</sup>

In that same speech, Steinem linked romantic Uncle Tomming and male-identification to the institution of marriage, which she then likened to prostitution to the great dismay of the League. While arguing that the work women did in the home was of economic value for which they should receive pay, Steinem blundered when she said that in seeking the “best investment” in marriage, women engaged in “part-time prostitution.” “In the grand American tradition,” Steinem said, “we sold our virginity to the highest bidder.”<sup>42</sup> Though her language was strong, Steinem’s intention was to remind women that contemporary marriage customs did not offer them the best route to forming mutually loving relationships with their husbands. As she explained, “The best investment does not necessarily mean getting the individual one loves, and who loves his wife in return.” Because feminism would even the playing field in marriage and elsewhere, Steinem argued that self-identification could replace male-identification, thus “mak[ing] love possible for the very first time.”<sup>43</sup>

Steinem increasingly advocated for legal change, such as the Equal Rights Amendment, as a means of making marriage more equitable for women. But she also continued to advocate for women to become self-identified so that they would have greater freedom of choice in establishing romantic relationships outside of the institution of marriage, including extramarital cohabitation, same-sex relationships, communal

---

<sup>41</sup> Gloria Steinem, “Speech to the League of Women Voters,” 1972, Box 100, Folder 3, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

living, and remaining alone. In 1972, *Ms.* magazine became her primary outlet for extending those ideas to a mass audience.

**“WE SHARE WITH EACH OTHER THE EXHILARATION OF GROWTH AND SELF-DISCOVERY”: MS. MAGAZINE’S OPEN FORUM RESPONDS TO THE PROBLEM OF ROMANTIC LOVE**

In the December 1971 preview issue of *Ms.* magazine, Gloria Steinem said that in the first stage of “sisterhood,” “we share with each other the exhilaration of growth and self-discovery.”<sup>44</sup> Her emphasis on sharing experiences as an avenue towards self-discovery echoed the rationale behind consciousness-raising while drawing attention to the importance of collectivity, on the one hand, and individualism, on the other. While she was writing about feminism in general, Steinem’s statement also spoke to a vision of the magazine as an open forum where feminist writers and readers could share their individual experiences with one another in the spirit of sisterhood and self-determination. With its official launch in spring 1972, *Ms.* combined all of these elements and epitomized the growing emphasis on individualism and self-improvement in liberal feminist circles. As the only commercial magazine exclusively devoted to feminist issues, *Ms.* became the voice of a popular feminism that reached a mass audience.<sup>45</sup>

*Ms.* was co-founded by Gloria Steinem, Elizabeth Forsling Harris, and Patricia Carbine. Other feminist writers such as Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Suzanne Levine, Mary

---

<sup>44</sup> Gloria Steinem, “Sisterhood,” *New York*, December 1971, 48.

<sup>45</sup> For overviews of *Ms.* magazine and its version of popular feminism and liberal feminism, see Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood*, 1-14, 15-48, and 49-99; Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 143-193; Mary Thom, *Inside Ms.*, 44-64.

Thom, Jane O'Reilly, and JoAnne Edgar quickly joined the original triumvirate.<sup>46</sup> Gloria Steinem, however, was generally recognized as the driving power behind the magazine's vision and success. Her emphasis on self-identification and individualism were infused throughout the magazine, to be sure, but a collaborative spirit among its editors, writers, and even its readers, who were energized by the magazine's "open forum" format, also characterized the magazine. In cultivating a version of feminism that was pluralistic in its recognition of the diverse concerns of a mass audience, *Ms.* also emphasized the importance of personal experience and individual growth.

Readers responded hungrily to this format and wrote to the magazine regularly and voluminously throughout the decade. They sent more than 20,000 letters in response to the preview issue alone (whose 300,000 copies sold out almost immediately) and continued to send approximately 200 letters a day thereafter.<sup>47</sup> These missives varied widely, including responses (both favorable and negative) to features, testimony about personal experiences and concerns as feminists, and responses to published letters from other readers. *Ms.* encouraged this letter writing by publishing at least several pages worth of letters-to-the-editor in every issue and sometimes including special features on the letters.<sup>48</sup> One reader wrote, "thank you for having a letter section. It's just that it is

---

<sup>46</sup> See Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism*, 171-176; and Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood*, 26-36.

<sup>47</sup> See "A Personal Report," *Ms.* (January 1973), 96; Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood*, 45; and Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980, MC 331, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>48</sup> See "A Personal Report," *Ms.* (January 1973), 96-97, 114-115; "Dear Sisters," *Ms.* (December 1973), 76-79, 89-90; "What It's Like to be Me: Young Women Speak for Themselves" *Ms.* (June 1974), 45-49, 80-82; and "Special 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue," *Ms.* (July 1977), 47. See also Farrel, *Yours in Sisterhood*, 151-178; and Thom, *Letters to Ms.*

usually worth more than most other magazines total content.”<sup>49</sup> All told, the letters revealed that *Ms.* readers took an active role in engaging with the magazine and shaping its portrayal of feminist issues.

The magazine devoted considerable space to exploring the pitfalls of heterosexual institutions, like marriage, while exploring options such as lesbianism, celibacy, being alone, and variations on more egalitarian forms of heterosexuality (including ways to make marriage more equitable). The topic of emotional and sexual intimacy thus fueled an on-going dialogue between the writers and readers of *Ms.* The conversation surrounding three specific features—“Is Romance Dead?” by Barbara Grizzuti Harrison; the 1975 Special Issue on Men; and the 1978 “Is There Love After Liberation?” symposium—especially illuminate how disparate voices came together in exploring the problems of romantic love. In short, *Ms.* magazine served as a microcosm of the larger debate over romantic love as it evolved during the 1970s.

In her July 1974 article, Barbara Grizzuti Harrison posed a question that weighed heavily on the minds of many feminists: “Is Romance Dead?” Recalling her experiences with consciousness-raising in the early 1970s, Harrison suggested that second-wave feminists had indeed pronounced romance dead because it fostered women’s dependency on men and that they were the pallbearers in laying it to rest. “One of the first casualties of consciousness-raising was idolatrous love; nobody mourned its passing,” she argued. “Recoiling from past crazies and abdications, we believed that *all* our romantic dreams

---

<sup>49</sup> Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980; letter, September 29, 1975, MC 331, folder 60, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

and fantasies had been sour jokes.”<sup>50</sup> Focusing on her own experience in this process,

Harrison recalled:

Two years ago, when I was trying desperately to harden my heart against romantic love, I wasn't alone. Two years ago, many of the women I know were issuing declarations of independence; and it was very heady. We laughed at ourselves as we used to be (when we weren't crying); and many of us, having newly discovered who we were, were damned if we were going to endanger our tentative self-awareness and newly found strength by “falling in love.” We disparaged the whole idea of falling in love—it was a “cultural con,” a male-designed rip-off, a form of self-destructive lunacy, a taking leave of one's senses. Who wanted all that hype and pain? It always ended badly; surely that was one of the lessons of consciousness-raising. Now *we* were in charge, and we wouldn't let it happen to us again, no sir.”<sup>51</sup>

At that stage of feminist consciousness, Harrison had seen the prospect of falling in love as akin to “a tidal wave hitting New York.” When a woman in her consciousness-raising group eventually “told [them]—it took some courage—that she had fallen in love with a man,” the others were incredulous: “It was like listening to somebody who's seen a flying saucer.”<sup>52</sup> But Harrison later decided that she and the group had too quickly dismissed the prospect of romance as they began to realize “that [they] *did* need intimacy, affirmation, and a way out of painful solitude, [they] needed a felicitous exchange of passion and delight.” “What a zonker it was to get out of consciousness-raising,” she exclaimed, “and find those needs had survived intact.”<sup>53</sup> The new challenge, then, lay in exploring the possibility of romance without succumbing to the old formulas of dependency they had struggled to overcome. The realization that there might be the

---

<sup>50</sup> Barbara Grizutti Harrison, “Is Romance Dead?” *Ms.* (July 1974), 40.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

opportunity of a new kind of romance based on equality, Harrison concluded, was “a titillating, scary, and terrific possibility.”<sup>54</sup>

Like many of the features in *Ms.* “Is Romance Dead?” was presented as a personal, individual testimony and, true to form, some readers responded with gusto and others with dismay. One reader from Wisconsin, for instance, wrote to say that she read Harrison’s piece “with delight and spasms of raucous laughter.” Agreeing with Harrison’s conclusion that consciousness-raising may not have killed romantic love after all, the woman wrote: “We have indeed recognized our strength and independence! We should not, however, allow our determination to ‘stay tough’ become our prison. We must acknowledge our need for meaningful relationships with other human beings, even men.”<sup>55</sup> Another reader, from New York, was a bit more skeptical, noting that “too many people equate love and romance.” While she did not reject the possibility of *love*, she was much less certain that *romance* was an option: “By definition, romance is a product of the imagination—an exaggerated account of truth.” “Why depend so desperately on flimsy ideals?” she asked.<sup>56</sup>

Other readers thought that Harrison relied too heavily on assumptions of heterosexuality. A reader from Missouri asked, “How can we feel we have ‘challenged all our stereotyped responses’ when we continue to ignore our potential to love women in ways previously reserved to men only?”<sup>57</sup> Or, as a reader from Iowa, exclaimed, “Barbara Harrison seems to assume that heterosexual love must inevitably be some kind

---

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 43 (emphasis original).

<sup>55</sup> Kathleen Kelly to *Ms.*, “Letters-to-the-Editor,” *Ms.* (November 1974), 4.

<sup>56</sup> Jennifer Gunn to *Ms.*, “Letters-to-the-Editor,” *Ms.* (November 1974), 4.

<sup>57</sup> Paula Neilson to *Ms.*, “Letters-to-the-Editor,” *Ms.* (November 1974), 4.

of magical mystery tour . . . What a depressing thought!” The reader conceded that it was not necessary to rule out the possibility of loving men “without annihilating oneself,” but as she pointed out that it was equally important to consider other options, like being alone, same-sex love, or polyamory.<sup>58</sup> Finally, a reader from California, dismissed Harrison’s piece as ridiculous and frivolous:

Instead of “Is Romance Dead?” how about “Is the Women’s Movement Dead?” Now that we’ve all been in C-R groups and we all know we can take care of ourselves, is our next step to trip out on a dose of ‘romantic love? Will this help us all become better, more groovy lovers? Shall we all forget about our poor sisters in the slums, on welfare, on drugs, and in prisons, and spin the web of escape fantasies into a romantic cocoon?

Romance is the opiate of oppressed women.<sup>59</sup>

Harrison was so incensed by that last comment that she was compelled to address it in a letter of her own to *Ms.* In particular, Harrison was irritated by the implication that a feminist could not worry about romance without losing perspective on the many other serious issues facing feminists. “To love a man is not to blot out of one’s consciousness the suffering of the oppressed,” she replied. “Damn it, it ought to be possible to hold two things in your head at the same time—does it really require such a juggling act to love a man and love your sisters too?” Not so, Harrison concluded, and furthermore, she pointed out, “It is silly and *vulgar* to deny the truth of one’s experience.”<sup>60</sup> Harrison’s impassioned retort, as well as the initial responses to her article, reflected both the range of views on issues of love among the ranks of *Ms.* readers as well as the individualized responses feminists had to the dilemma of romantic love.

---

<sup>58</sup> Linda Koenig to *Ms.*, “Letters-to-the-Editor,” *Ms.* (November 1974), 4 and 7.

<sup>59</sup> Laura McKinley to *Ms.*, “Letters-to-the-Editor,” *Ms.* (November 1974), 7.

<sup>60</sup> Barbara Grizutti Harrison to *Ms.*, “Letters-to-the-Editor,” *Ms.* (March 1975), 7, (emphasis original).

A year and a half later, *Ms.* provoked another flurry of responses with its “Special Issue on Men” (October 1975). According to the editors, the issue was intended partly to counter tendencies to “wrongly [translate] feminism into simplistic man-hating.”<sup>61</sup> Again focusing on personal testimonies, the issue included a woman’s thoughts on the demise of her marriage, a piece on the politics of working with men, an exposition on raising sons, a man’s endorsement of the Equal Rights Amendment, and a humorous piece by Alan Alda entitled “Testosterone Poisoning,” among others.<sup>62</sup> Against this backdrop, two features especially drew attention to contentious issues in the on-going debate over the problem of romantic love: “Unsung Heroes,” which offered testimony from women who applauded the supportive men in their lives, and “Living Without Them,” which told the stories of three women who chose not to associate romantically with men.<sup>63</sup>

“Unsung Heroes” included a handful of the fifty responses *Ms.* had received after running a classified advertisement soliciting “profiles of men who are supportive of women and the Women’s Movement.” The vast majority of readers who responded wrote to tell *Ms.* about their husbands. Indeed, of the six profiles featured, five sang the praise of supportive husbands (the sixth was about a work partner). Across the board, the women painted portraits of husbands who were sympathetic to issues of the women’s liberation movement and who unconditionally supported their wives in their search for

---

<sup>61</sup> “Special Issue on Men,” *Ms.* (October 1975), 47.

<sup>62</sup> Alan Alda, “Testosterone Poisoning: What Every Woman Should Know About Men,” *Ms.* (October 1975), 15-16; Letty Cottin Pogrebin, “8 Hours a Day, 5 Days a Week, 50 Weeks a Year: The Intimate Politics of Working With Men” *Ms.* (October 1975), 48-51, 96, 105-196; Lindsey Van Gelder and Carrie Carmichale, “But What About Our Sons,” *Ms.* (October 1975), 52-56, 94-95; Sara Davidson, “What Am I Doing Here?” *Ms.* (October 1975), 57-59, 114-115; Howard Cosell, “Why I Support the ERA,” *Ms.* (October 1975), 78-79; Judith Wilson, “Can I Be My Brother’s Sister?” *Ms.* (October 1975), 64-67, 116; and Harold Brodkey, “Manipulations,” *Ms.* (October 1975), 74-77, 92-93, 116.

<sup>63</sup> Elaine Booth Selig, Sandy Boucher, and Ziva Kwitney, “Living Without Them,” *Ms.* (October 1975), 68-71; and “Unsung Heroes,” *Ms.* (October 1975), 72-73.



independency and autonomy within marriage. The unsung heroes included a “househusband,” a captain in the Army Judge Advocate General’s Corps (a rank that was shared with his wife), a supportive stepfather, a minister, and a Southern civil rights activist.<sup>64</sup>

In running the feature, *Ms.* declared that “nominations are still open . . .” and they poured in over the next few months. One woman wrote in to describe how her “egalitarian marriage” that had been “avante garde in the middle fifties” was a natural fit with the ideals of women’s liberation.<sup>65</sup> Another wrote to say that her unsung hero was actually her ex-husband. Unlike the majority of women who derived strength from supportive spouses, this woman said that it was not until her husband left her that she was “forced to back up, examine [her] own feelings and [her] own goals.” Ironically, her husband had tried to “[program her] to be ‘liberated’” by having her “join NOW, . . . reject monogamy, look with disdain on homemakers,” and so on. But for her, liberation did not come until she had the space to “undergo the painful process of learning to be free and to understand [herself].” “By his departure,” she explained, “I have been presented with not only a challenge, but also an overwhelmingly exciting opportunity.”<sup>66</sup>

The call for “Unsung Heroes” was likely inspired by the deluge of letters *Ms.* received on a regular basis from readers who wanted to express their belief that heterosexual relationships, especially marriage, could be egalitarian. Often giving

---

<sup>64</sup> “Unsung Heroes,” 72-73.

<sup>65</sup> Lynn Bloom to *Ms.*, “Letters to the Editor,” *Ms.* (February 1976), 4.

<sup>66</sup> Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980; letter, no date, MC 331, folder 63, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. The Letters to *Ms.* Collection includes dozens of other letters nominating unsung heroes. See especially Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980, MC 331, folders 60, 63, and 65, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

detailed accounts of personal success in establishing romantic relationships with men that were in line with feminist ideals of individualism and autonomy, the readers sometimes assumed a defensive tone because they felt marginalized by more militant feminist stances, especially separatism. But the feelings of marginalization were mutual. For every letter *Ms.* received defending the possibility of egalitarian relationships between women and men the magazine heard from readers who felt that *Ms.* did not adequately address alternatives to heterosexuality, such as lesbianism, celibacy, and variations on being alone.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, the Special Issue on Men took care to include perspectives from women who actively chose to separate from men in their personal lives.

“Living Without Them” offered personal testimony from three women whose lives excluded romantic and sexual attachments to men. One of the women, Elaine Booth Selig, described her experiences with aloneness as a single mother after becoming widowed at the age of 30. In her late thirties by 1975, Selig wrote about how she had grown in her independent lifestyle only to wind up feeling stifled when she tried to enter into a new relationship with a man. “I have come too far in my aloneness to settle for the fifty-fifty arrangement that is the ideal for so many couples. Why should I, when functioning alone I already have the whole hundred?” she asked. For her, remaining alone was a better fit for her “ideals and convictions.”<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> The Letters to *Ms.* Collection contains numerous letters regarding women’s thoughts about the magazine’s success in addressing the ramifications of emotional and sexual intimacy. Many women wrote to *Ms.* to describe their own efforts in blending their feminist ideals into their romantic relationships with men, others defended their desire for romantic love with men, and others focused on *Ms.*’s depiction of alternative to heterosexuality. The high volume of letters addressing issues of sexuality in relationship to romantic love demonstrates that this was a pressing matter for many self-identified feminists. See Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980, MC 331, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>68</sup> Elaine Booth Selig, “Living Without Them,” 65-66.

The other two women likewise pointed to what they saw as the contradictory nature of heterosexual intimacy in their respective testimonies about lesbianism and celibacy. Sandy Boucher, for instance, described how her involvement with feminism was a definitive factor in her decision to become a lesbian. Echoing arguments made by lesbian feminists about the expediency of directing all energy to other women and the authenticity of love between women, Boucher reported: “My relationships with men have kept me off balance and out of touch with myself, have required me to be *less* than I am.” In contrast, loving a woman left her with feelings of “magnificent ease and rightness” because her political and emotional needs were in harmony with one another.<sup>69</sup> Ziva Kwitney likewise addressed the challenges of achieving a sense of independence in relationship to men; however, in her experience, romantic and sexual involvement of any kind (with women *or* men) was potentially problematic. Consequently, she had decided to become celibate for a while, which allowed her to feel “more centered.” The relationships she forged in the aftermath of her celibacy, she reported, were much less stifling and she was convinced of the importance of periodic celibacy because “there is some work on the self that can only be done alone, independent of relationships.”<sup>70</sup>

Like “Unsung Heroes,” “Living Without Them” provoked a flurry of responses from *Ms.* readers. In particular, a number of women especially responded favorably to Ziva Kwitney’s piece on aloneness and celibacy. Myrna Solganick from Wisconsin said, for instance, that she especially identified with Kwitney’s testimony regarding celibacy as means to self-affirmation. Having experienced a painful break-up, Solganick said that she

---

<sup>69</sup> Sandy Boucher, “Living Without Them,” 70.

<sup>70</sup> Ziva Kwitney, “Living Without Them,” 71.

was fearful of men's "power to hurt [her]." Hearing about another woman's similar struggle was comforting for her while she underwent her own experiment in celibacy and aloneness.<sup>71</sup> Two other women likewise wrote in to say that they identified with Kvitney's struggle because of similar experiences. One explained that it was only during a nine-month period of being solitary and celibate that she found herself "gradually gaining the sense of quiet self-confidence, self-trust and autonomy I was seeking."<sup>72</sup> Echoing that sentiment, the other woman wrote that while practicing celibacy she had more "love of self and the ability to organize and execute the priorities" than she did at any other time.<sup>73</sup> Here, the double implication was that women could only achieve self-identification if they separated themselves from romantic and sexual attachments and that they could never forge mutually beneficial relationships until they had succeeded in that endeavor.

The October 1975 Special Issue on Men also illustrated mixed feelings about the role of men in the feminist movement as well as the nature of the men's liberation movement. On one hand, the issue reflected the magazine's on-going effort to consider the ways in which women's liberation was also about men's liberation. From the beginning of her involvement in the feminist movement, Gloria Steinem had repeatedly argued that patriarchy was just as damaging to men as it was to women. As she told Liz Smith for a 1972 *Redbook* profile: "Women's Liberation is for men the way the Black movement is for whites. As labor leader Cesar Chavez says, 'We have to free the victim

---

<sup>71</sup> Myrna Solganick to *Ms.*, "Letters to the Editor," *Ms.* (February 1976), 4.

<sup>72</sup> Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980, letter, September 17, 1975, MC 331, folder 63, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>73</sup> Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980, letter, November 25, 1975, MC 331, folder 63, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

from being the victim and the executioner from being the executioner.’ Too many men are restricted and dehumanized by foolish ideas of masculinity.”<sup>74</sup> “Their prison may be lighter and airier,” she explained on another occasion, “but it’s a prison just the same.”<sup>75</sup>

A number of men were arriving at a similar conclusion. Having allied themselves with the women’s liberation movement, often by association with the women in their lives, men began to form consciousness-raising groups of their own and fomented a men’s liberation movement. Hoping to free men from stifling expectations of masculinity, advocates of men’s liberation shared with many feminists the hope that interpersonal emotional and sexual relationships could become more egalitarian and more authentic.<sup>76</sup> From the beginning, *Ms.* took care to recognize elements of men’s liberation,

---

<sup>74</sup> Liz Smith, “Gloria Steinem, Writer and Social Critic, Talks About Sex, Politics and Marriage,” *Redbook*, January 1972, 73, Box 1, Folder 13, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. For other instances of Steinem’s assertion that feminism would lead to humanism, see Eva Smith, “Unite, Help Each Other’ Feminist Leader Gloria Steinem Tells State Audience,” 6, Box 1, Folder 16, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Dordre Carmody, “Feminists Rebut Friedan Charge: Say ‘Female Chauvinism’ Attack was Unfortunate,” *New York Times*, July 20, 1972, Box 1, Folder 13, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>75</sup> Smith, “Unite, Help Each Other,” 6.

<sup>76</sup> For information on the men’s liberation movement, see Andy Hawley, “A Man’s View,” *Motive*, April 1969. Reprinted by KNOW, Inc. Box 23, Folder 2, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Jack Sawyer, “The Male Liberation Movement” (speech presented at the Women’s Liberation Teach-In, Northwestern University, March 8, 1970), Box 23, Folder 2, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Alta Maloney, “Male Liberation,” *Herald*, December 6, 1970, Box 23, Folder 1, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Ellen Goodman, “An Effort at Understanding,” *Boston Sunday Globe*, May 31, 1970, Box 23, Folder 2, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Ellen Goodman, “Men’s Lib: Phase Two or Phase Out?,” *Boston Sunday Globe*, March 12, 1972, Box 23, Folder 1, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Enid Nemy, “Should Women’s Lib Work, Will Men Be Free At Last?,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1970, sec. Food Fashions Family Furnishings, Box 23, Folder 1, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Judy Klemesrud, “How Does a Man Tell a Liberated Woman That She’s Too Fat?,” *New York Times*, March 21, 1970, Box 23, Folder 1, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Jurate Kazickas, “How Husbands View Women’s Lib Crusaders,” *Sunday Advertiser*, January 24, 1971, sec. Pullout Section 2, Box 23, Folder 1, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Jurate Kazickas, “Men Who Helped Liberated Their Women,” *New York Times*, January 17, 1971, Box 23, Folder 1, Women’s Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; and Nicholas von Hoffman,

with a regular column on men and their involvement in women's and men's liberation as well as feature articles on topics like masculinity and male sexuality.<sup>77</sup>

Several men seized the opportunity to comment on the Special Issue on Men and to express their gratitude. As one man said, he found that *Ms.* was helping him to “broaden his horizons” as he searched for alternatives to “the ‘aggressive, macho he-man’ role which has been cast on [him] by society.”<sup>78</sup> Another male reader, who happened upon the issue, explained that it had helped him to feel less apprehensive about women's liberation. Nevertheless, he still seemed fearful at the prospect that some liberated women would choose to leave men. In response to the article “Living Without Men,” for instance he responded with panic: “PLEASE DON’T. We need you and want you with us, alongside of us, whatever.” From his perspective, women's liberation seemed powerful because it offered the opportunity for more satisfactory heterosexual relationships. He even asked for advice as to where he might meet a liberated woman in a postscript to his letter.<sup>79</sup>

---

“Liberation of Men: A Commentary,” *Washington Post*, August 26, 1970, sec. Comment, Box 23, Folder 1, Women's Liberation Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>77</sup> For example, see Marc Fasteau, “Why Aren't We Talking,” *Ms.* (July 1972), 16; Bertrand Pogrebin, “How Does it Feel” *Ms.* (September 1972), 26; Warren Farrell, “Guidelines for Consciousness-Raising” *Ms.* (February 1973), 12-13, 15-17; Stan Levine, “One Man's Experience,” *Ms.* (February 1973), 14; Robert Christgau, “Are You Ready for Men's Liberation?” *Ms.* (February 1974), 12-13, 16; Peter Filene, “Manhood in the Twenties: Was it so Great to be Gatsby?” *Ms.* (June 1974), 12-18; Michael Wolff, “The Making of a Vassar Man,” *Ms.* (September 1974), 45-47; Perry Dean Young, “She Said: ‘He's a Fag, You Know,’” *Ms.* (July 1976), 37-38; Brian Vachon, “Secrets of a Monogamist,” *Ms.* (November 1976), 29; John Leonard, “The Case for Remarriage,” *Ms.* (August 1977), 26-27; Carol Kleiman, “Secrets of the New Male Sexuality: ‘Goodbye John Wayne?’” *Ms.* (April 1978), 45-47, 77; Phyllis Chesler, “Patriarchs, Warriors, and Lovers: A Psychologist Takes on Male Mythology,” *Ms.* (April 1978), 50, 79-80; and Carol Tavris, “Is This ‘The Year of the Man?’” *Ms.* (April 1978), 51, 78.

<sup>78</sup> Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980; letter, September 27, 1975, MC 331, folder 60, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>79</sup> Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980; letter, September 28, MC 331, folder 60, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

Women also applauded *Ms.*'s effort to incorporate a focused perspective on men. This was especially true of heterosexual feminists who felt marginalized by branches of the movement that demanded separatism or criticized women who involved themselves with men. One woman wrote to say that she had felt encouraged by the issue because it helped her to "realize that there are an increasing number of men in our society with whom a feminist could desire to relate." Having ended a relationship with a "feminist man (due to nonsexist conflicts)," she had worried that there was "a lack of other men with whom [she] (as a feminist) could achieve intimacy." The special issue on men served to reassure that the future was not so "terrifyingly bleak" after all.<sup>80</sup> Another self-described "conservative feminist" said that the issue—the "least chauvinistic" one in awhile—revived her interest in reading *Ms.* "You seem to be back in tune with a world where half the population is composed of persons who are not women," she wrote.<sup>81</sup>

Reflecting the broader diversity of thought within the *Ms.* community, other readers took issue with the depiction of men and men's liberation in the special issue. One male reader expressed his disappointment in the issue, saying that its focus on "women's reactions to men" rather than men's issues themselves was misleading. In addition to wishing the issue had offered more serious consideration of the ways in which patriarchy damaged men, he also felt uncomfortable about the "Unsung Heroes" profiles. He elaborated:

It takes a lot of time, effort, and self examination to re-humanize and feminize myself. I have to work at it constantly, and I don't always succeed. But the terrors and labors of men's liberation were neglected completely. I'm not asking for a pat

---

<sup>80</sup> Susan Rose to *Ms.*, "Letters to the Editor," *Ms.* (February 1976), 6.

<sup>81</sup> Holly Ulmer York to *Ms.*, "Letters to the Editor," *Ms.* (February 1976), 6.

on the back—which is what the article ‘Unsung Heroes’ tried to do—I’m no hero. I’m asking for recognition, advice, and help—not applause.<sup>82</sup>

A group of men’s liberationists from Portland, Oregon similarly wrote to admonish the magazine for misconstruing the aims of men’s liberation. Like the reader above, they worried that the self-congratulatory tone of the “unsung heroes” profiles obscured the stark realities of male supremacy. Arguing that *Ms.* too often gave a platform to men “who support the antifeminist fallacy that men are simply fellow victims of sex-role conditioning,” the group insisted: “All men have power over women.” “By supporting the notion that certain men and women can be equal and liberated now,” they argued, “*Ms.* does a disservice to women and men struggling for a truly nonsexist society.”<sup>83</sup>

The special issue disappointed other *Ms.* readers because they felt the focus on men detracted from women’s issues and alienated non-heterosexual women. One woman was outraged that *Ms.*, a feminist magazine, would devote so much attention to men. Convinced that commercial motivations were at stake, she wrote that it must be “good business for *Ms.* to attract the majority of women in this country, to assure them that, after all, women are still women and therefore dedicated to thanking men for their support and their orgasms.” Requesting that her subscription be cancelled, she signed off with disgust: “I don’t believe you *Ms. Magazine!*”<sup>84</sup> Another woman, a lesbian feminist who decried the focus on man-woman relationships, said that her magazine went straight

---

<sup>82</sup> Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980; letter, September 18, 1975, MC 331, folder 60, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>83</sup> Jamie Bevson, Brian Cummings, Don Anderson, Denys Howard of the Willamette Learning Center to *Ms.*, “Letters to the Editor,” *Ms.* (February 1976), 8.

<sup>84</sup> Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980; letter, undated, MC 331, folder 60, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.



“into the fireplace.” “I’ll tell you it’s been a long time since your rag has provided me with any warmth,” she retorted. “With that Special Issue on Men you have become as irrelevant to me as prophylactics.”<sup>85</sup>

In calling out the Special Issue on Men as irrelevant to women who did not consort with men, the woman pointed to a specific concern of many *Ms.* readers regarding material—or lack thereof—on lesbianism and other non-heterosexual alternatives. One group of lesbian feminists even wrote to *Ms.* after the Special Issue on Men in order to call for a boycott, pointing to what they saw as the hypocrisy and betrayal of devoting an entire issue to men, but not to lesbians.<sup>86</sup> The Special Issue on Men did not outrage all lesbian feminist readers, but whether *Ms.* adequately represented lesbian feminism in its pages was an on-going issue since the magazine’s inception.

To a certain extent, the magazine had always taken care to include features by and about lesbian feminists. The spring preview issue, for instance, included a reprint of Anne Koedt’s interview with a woman who became lesbian, “Women Loving Women.”<sup>87</sup> Other notable features included an article by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, long-time lesbian partners and co-founders of the lesbian rights group Daughters of Bilitis, entitled “Lesbian Love & Sexuality,” and a profile of Rita Mae Brown and her espousal of political lesbianism.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, letters citing insufficient material on lesbianism

---

<sup>85</sup> Joanne Regensburger to *Ms.*, “Letters to the Editor,” *Ms.* (February 1976), 6.

<sup>86</sup> Nancy Even Honeytree, Janet Elizabeth, Pictoire La Belle, Ida Swearingen, Butch P. Gibson (Louise) to *Ms.*, “Letters to the Editor,” *Ms.* (March 1976), 12.

<sup>87</sup> I have not been able to locate the spring 1972 issue, but Amy Farrell reports that Koedt’s piece was included. Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood*, 34.

<sup>88</sup> Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, “Lesbian Love & Sexuality,” *Ms.* (July 1972), 74-77, 123; Dolores Alexander, “Rita Mae Brown: ‘The Issue for the Future is Power’,” *Ms.* (September 1974), 110-113.

consistently poured into the offices of *Ms.* As early as September 1973, the *Ms.* editors responded to the criticism, saying that they saw the criticism as somewhat unwarranted since they frequently reviewed books and journals by and about lesbians, but that they could do more and declared their commitment to doing a better job.<sup>89</sup>

*Ms.* seemed to have especially stepped up efforts to be more inclusive of lesbian feminist perspectives after the Special Issue on Men provoked considerable criticism from non-heterosexual women (and heterosexual women sympathetic to their lesbian sisters). After 1976, there was a notable increase in material on lesbianism, including an article on lesbian separatism by Charlotte Bunch, a personal story of coming out by Joan Larkin, as well as articles on bisexuality. *Ms.* also tried to incorporate information and resources on lesbian feminism into the Gazette section, which drew attention to feminist news and activities around the nation.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, the issue of lesbian feminism was a double-edged sword for *Ms.* When the magazine was more inclusive of non-heterosexual lifestyles, eliciting appreciation from lesbian feminists, it faced the scorn of straight women who wanted nothing to do with lesbianism. Regardless of these complaints that *Ms.*, the bulk of material related to emotional and sexual relationships reflected a

---

<sup>89</sup> Editor's Note, *Ms.* (September 1973), 12. *Ms.* did, indeed, frequently review books by and about lesbian feminism. See Charlotte Bunch, "The Theoretical Ti-Grace," *Ms.* (May 1974), 33-36; Chris Chase, "jilljohnstonjilljohnstonjilljohnstonjilljohnston," *Ms.* (October 1972), 117-127; Susan Braudy, "The Johnston Papers," *Ms.* (October 1974), 36-38; Veronica Geng, "Lesbianism: Myths and Information," *Ms.* (December 1974), 45, 80-81; Jill Johnston, "Are Lesbians 'Gay'?" *Ms.* (June 1975), 85-86; Bertha Harris, "Rescued from Moral Smugness," *Ms.* (September 1976), 106, 110; and Reg Kahney, "Do Lesbians Have More Fun?" *Ms.* (February 1978), 34-37.

<sup>90</sup> See Joan Larkin, "Coming Out," *Ms.* (March 1976), 72-74, 84-86; Charlotte bunch, "Learning From Lesbian Separatism," *Ms.* (November 1976), 60-61, 99-102; Sarah Malcolm, "I am a Second-Generation Lesbian," *Ms.* (October 1977), 13-16; Susan Braudy, "Stalking the Wild Jill Johnston: In Which the Subject Lies Down on a Garbage Can and the Author Learns to Dance," *Ms.* (November 1975), 80-82, 122, 126; Pepper Schwartz and Philip Blumstein, "Bisexuals: Where Love Speaks Louder than Labels," *Ms.* (November 1976); Orlando, "Bisexuality: A Choice Not an Echo?" *Gazette*, "Lavender Pages: A Guide to Lesbian Resources," *Ms.* (March 1976), 99-102; *Gazette*, "Lesbianism from the Bible On," *Ms.* (July 1976), 21; and *Gazette*, "Loophole Links in Lesbians in Legal Marriage," *Ms.* (November 1975), 19.

heterosexual bias with a persistent emphasis on marriage, sex, celibacy, and aloneness from the perspective of straight women.<sup>91</sup>

When *Ms.* posed the question, “Is There Love After Liberation?” to its writers in 1978, the *Ms.* community had been debating the complexities of love and liberation for more than half a decade. Keeping with the spirit of pluralism and open dialogue, *Ms.* readers eagerly wrote to offer their own answers to the question. Unsurprisingly, their responses reflected diversity of thought and experiences. Read together, they help to illuminate the on-going challenges of reconciling love with liberation as the decade drew to a close. Though the symposium and responses to it reflect an underlying consensus regarding the importance of self-identification and individualism, there were notable disagreements over the relevance of the question, the oppressive nature of love, and its future in a post-feminist world.

Some readers felt that the focus on romantic love was utterly frivolous. One reader, for instance, deplored the emphasis on personal testimony and scoffed that the “articles read like letters to the editor and letters like diary excerpts.” While some may have seen this as a strength of the magazine, this reader saw it as evidence of “triviality previously held only by the housekeeping magazines.”<sup>92</sup> Another reader echoed that sentiment, sarcastically asking, “Is *Ms.* going to turn into another silly ‘women’s magazine’ with the ultimate emphasis on romantic love?”<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> In the years covered in the Letters to *Ms.* collection (1972 to 1980) there are hundreds of letters regarding lesbianism, heterosexuality, bisexuality, and celibacy within the context of feminist debates over the meaning and possibilities of romantic love. See Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980, MC 331, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>92</sup> Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980; letter, no date, MC 331, folder 154, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>93</sup> Sharon Diehl to *Ms.*, “Letters to the Editor,” *Ms.* (June 1978), 6.

The majority of the readers who responded, however, seemed to think that the issue was relevant within the context of personal politics, even if it was highly individualistic. Most frequently, *Ms.* readers presented variations on Gloria Steinem's assertion that feminism made friendship between women and men possible and thus offered openings for authentic and egalitarian love to emerge. Likewise, they emphasized their own personal struggle in balancing romantic intimacy with individual needs, further demonstrating the myriad and nuanced ways in which feminists understood and responded to the problem of romantic love. Underscoring their musings were questions about the meaning of romance, love, and liberation.

One reader wrote, for instance, to say that preoccupation with romantic love obscured the real problem in relationships—emotional and psychological dependency. Beginning with her concern that the question implied that women still had to choose love *or* liberation, the reader argued: “Our genuine needs for strong, loving, lasting relationships with people should not be overlooked as impossible to attain just because we want to develop ourselves as women with separate identities.” It was her fear that the women's liberation movement had “dehumanized love” with talk of “bargains, deals, and contracts.” What feminists ought to focus on, she argued, was the relationship of dependency to love:

Dependency cannot be separated out of love, for when you love someone they matter very much to you and your life, and therefore your well-being is determined by them as well. But perhaps the kind of dependency that is unhealthy is the inability to find the resources within oneself to cope with life and to expect to find in another person what is truly missing in ourselves. I wish we could differentiate between the two, and not destroy love in the process.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> Letters to *Ms.*, 1972-1980, letter, no date, MC 331, folder 154, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. An abbreviated version of this letter was published in *Ms.* (July 1978), 6.

Another writer arrived at a similar conclusion, reporting that when looking at “the ‘love’ of acquaintances who are not ‘liberated,’” she saw “dominance and submission, or manipulation, or competition, or dependence, or deceit.” “If that’s love,” she quipped, “I’ll take liberation.” But, she went further, taking care to clarify that she did not mean that she sought liberation from romantic love, but rather from the stultifying sex roles that made love look like dependency and submission. With liberation from rigidly defined sex roles, people would be “free to share, enjoy, and love each other’s uniqueness, respect each other’s individuality, and join together without merging into one.” This was what people could look forward to after feminism succeeded, she concluded.<sup>95</sup> Another reader responded in kind, saying that feminism helped her to re-evaluate the expectations of romance that she had gleaned from reading “romance comics, romantic novels, and searching for the fireworks of meeting the right man” while growing up. She no longer wanted “the all-encompassing, totally fulfilling love affair”—the kind, she revealed, that had “destroyed” her grandmother—but that she instead wanted “affection, passion, fun, and . . . independence.”<sup>96</sup>

The symposium and the dialogue it provoked illustrated the complexities of reconciling love and liberation while speaking to a general consensus that there *was* romantic love after liberation and that post-liberation love would be better and more authentic. This view was not unanimous. There were certainly feminists who saw the issue as peripheral to more pressing concerns. Nevertheless, the more common response

---

<sup>95</sup> Letters to Ms., 1972-1980, letter, January 30, 1978, MC 331, folder 154, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>96</sup> Letters to Ms., 1972-1980, letter, January 19, 1978, MC 331, folder 154, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. An abbreviated version of this letter was published in *Ms.* (July 1978), 6.

seemed to be that love and liberation *were* related and of significance to the vast majority of self-identified feminists (including women and men). What liberated love would look like, how feminists might get there, and how they could integrate it into their struggle for equality otherwise was less clearly defined and varied greatly on a case-by-case basis. In this regard, a closer look at Gloria Steinem's public and personal struggles with matters of the heart offers an appropriate lens for understanding one feminist's use of self-identification as a tool for reconciling love and liberation.

**THE STRUGGLE FOR SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND LIBERATED LOVE CARRIES ON: GLORIA STEINEM POST-MS.**

At the helm of *Ms.*, with its popular feminism and dual focus on pluralistic sisterhood and individual self-identification, Steinem was increasingly identified as the leader of the feminist movement. It also did not hurt that she was feminine, glamorous, and non-threatening in comparison to the other women speaking out against gender oppression. According to Carolyn Heilbrun, media fixation with Steinem generated a great deal of resentment from feminists who thought that Steinem was “a late arrival to the scene.”<sup>97</sup> Such criticism was not entirely unwarranted. The movement had been gaining momentum for the better part of a decade before Steinem became an outspoken convert. The political work of Betty Friedan and NOW was well underway as was the sexual revolution (in part spearheaded by non-militant feminist Helen Gurley Brown and other women activists who were fighting for access to birth control and abortion). Moreover, women had been forming consciousness-raising groups, writing complex

---

<sup>97</sup> Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 187.

feminist theory, and calling for women's liberation long before Steinem and *Ms.* arrived on the scene.

That Steinem would be the one the media picked up on as the feminist *du jour*, then, was certainly irksome to those who might have sought media attention of a different sort.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, second-wave feminism was a diverse, grassroots movement that defied easy categorization and singular leadership. Because of her high public profile, people unfamiliar with the movement undoubtedly understood Steinem's brand of feminism as monolithic, failing to realize that Steinem represented only certain elements of a highly fluid and multifaceted movement. As a result, Steinem sometimes found herself the target of fierce criticism from other feminists, who often cited her love life as cause for concern. Their charges ran the full gamut, with some decrying her as a man-hater and others belittling her for being man-crazy.

In 1972, Betty Friedan most famously, and notoriously, expressed the view that Gloria Steinem was a man-hater of the worst kind who would alienate moderate women from the feminist movement. Ironically, Friedan had praised Steinem to the women who conducted research for a profile of Steinem in *Newsweek* just one year earlier, calling her a "role model" for women who craved independence.<sup>99</sup> As Steinem's prestige and clout grew, Friedan began to view her in a different light and became jealous that Steinem's prominence rivaled her own.<sup>100</sup> In response to Steinem's public excoriations of marriage,

---

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 187-188.

<sup>99</sup> Betty Friedan, quoted in memorandum from Ann Ray Martin to Dick Boeth, Blocker, and Peer, re: Gloria Steinem Cover, August 3, 1971, Box 4, Folder 3, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>100</sup> Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 240-244. Betty Friedan's jealousy of Gloria Steinem is examined in other sources as well. For example, see Judith Hennessee, *Betty Friedan: Her Life* (New York: Random House, 1999), *passim*.

Friedan charged that Steinem represented a kind of “female chauvinism that makes a woman apologize for loving her husband.”<sup>101</sup> Of course, a close look at Steinem’s life and work demonstrates that she was anything but anti-love. But Friedan, for an array of reasons, believed that Steinem’s wariness about marriage translated into an opposition to love and she counted Steinem amongst feminists who wanted to deny women the right to love men.<sup>102</sup> In this way, the “mother” of the second wave tragically and ironically seemed to ally herself more with *anti-feminists* than with her fellow feminist activists.

Most feminists, whether they leaned towards radicalism or moderation, recognized the absurdity of Friedan’s claims that Steinem was an anti-man militant intent upon destroying romantic love. Radical feminist Robin Morgan, for instance, especially found Friedan’s charge amusing. According to Morgan, Steinem (who conceded that she at least had an aversion to sexist and racist men, if not men in general) was not “a raging feminist, man-hating broom rider but rather . . . a whimpy [sic] moderate.”<sup>103</sup> Even feminists who might have agreed with Friedan that militant radicals were too hard on women who loved men understood that Steinem hoped feminism would render romantic love between men and women more mutually beneficial. Erica Jong, for instance, whose writing was sometimes featured in *Ms.*, shared Steinem’s belief that women’s romantic relationships would benefit from feminism. Though Jong was not an overt activist and sometimes felt isolated from the movement, her Isadora Wing mock-memoirs undeniably

---

<sup>101</sup> See, for instance, Elsa Goss, “Lessons in Liberation” December 10, 1972, Box 190, Folder 10, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>102</sup> See, for instance, Rhoda Amon, “The Lib Movement is in Danger” *Newsday*, April 4, 1976, Box 190, Folder 10, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>103</sup> Derrde Carmody, “Feminists Rebut Friedan Charge: Say 'Female Chauvinism' Attack was Unfortunate.”



featured a woman struggling towards self-identification while trying to balance a feminist identity with loving men. In this way, Jong's message very much resonated with Steinem's ideas.<sup>104</sup> The two women even appeared on a panel discussion together about the problem of "love addiction" for women later on in 1990.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, Helen Gurley Brown, the original Cosmo Girl whose favorite refrain was that every woman had the right to work and to love, found much to identify with in Steinem's ideas about love and liberation. In a revealing interview between the two women during Steinem's short-lived *In Conversation With . . .* television show in the early 1980s, Brown and Steinem spent much time discussing the meaning of romantic love and its importance to women. Though they may have disagreed about how far women should go for the sake of love, they both believed that underlying power dynamics were of significant consequence and that the best relationships were those between equals.<sup>106</sup>

In contrast, other feminists found Friedan's claim that Steinem was a man-hater laughable because they believed the exact opposite—that she was man-crazy. In the wake of a falling out with Steinem, for instance, *Ms.* co-founder Betty Harris's charged that Steinem was a "man-izer" with "a remarkable ability to manipulate men, to get them to do what she wants them to do."<sup>107</sup> In addition, criticism from separatists that Steinem was man-crazy stemmed from their belief that Steinem's relationships were too

---

<sup>104</sup> Erica Jong and her Isadora Wing mock memoirs are discussed in detail in chapter four.

<sup>105</sup> Jane Beirn to Gloria Steinem, 29 December 1989, with attached list of questions for "Any Woman's Blues: A Conversation on Love Addiction," Box 88, Folder 4, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>106</sup> Helen Gurley Brown, "In Conversation With . . . Helen Gurley Brown," interview by Gloria Steinem, 1982, Box 102, Folder 13, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>107</sup> Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 306.

heteronormative. Though Steinem took measures to conceal her love life from public view, at least initially, it was a well-known fact that she was heterosexual. Since the “woman-identified women” branch of the movement (namely separatists and lesbian feminists) believed that feminists must associate primarily—even exclusively—with other women in order to achieve liberation, Steinem’s heterosexuality was especially problematic, despite her public and private displays of solidarity with lesbian feminists like Kate Millett and Rita Mae Brown (who apparently carried a torch for the unwaveringly heterosexual feminist during the 1970s).<sup>108</sup>

Steinem actually agreed that her exclusive romantic and sexual preference for men was somewhat problematic, telling one interviewer that it was a remnant of social conditioning she had yet to conquer.<sup>109</sup> One reason Steinem was reluctant to address questions about her romantic friendships was that she feared public acknowledgement of her heterosexuality would isolate feminists who preferred same-sex relationships. Because Steinem clearly understood that lesbianism in the movement was both a matter of personal preference and political identity, she vociferously defended lesbianism as a

---

<sup>108</sup> Steinem stood in solidarity with Kate Millett, holding her hand, following *Time*’s public outing of her in 1970 and Millett’s work was given due space in *Ms.* Rita Mae Brown was also given a platform to discuss her views in *Ms.* and letters she wrote to Steinem (as well as her diary and memoir) reflect a deep admiration—even an unrequited love—for Steinem. Rita Mae Brown’s letters to Steinem are in Box 85, Folders 1-3, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. Brown also discussed her admiration of Steinem in her memoir. Rita Mae Brown, *Rita Will: Memoirs of a Literary Rabble-Rouser* (New York: Bantam Books, 1997), 249-250. For overviews of the “Kate is Great” press conference, where Gloria Steinem stood in solidarity with lesbian feminists, see Judy Klemesrud, “The Lesbian issue and Women’s Lib,” *New York Times*, December 18, 1970; “People: Dec. 28, 1970,” *Time*, December 28, 1970, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,944258,00.html>; Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Delta Trade paperbacks, 1999), 15; Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 164-165.

<sup>109</sup> In her biography of Steinem, Sydney Ladenson Stern quotes Steinem as having told an interviewer: “I’ve never had a sexual relationship with a woman. I’m the last non-lesbian, non-bi-sexual person in the Western world, I think. Monosexual. It sounds so boring. I don’t know how to explain it except I’m sure it’s socialisation. I really believe that we are all bi-sexual and probably we’re socialised one way or the other. It’s wonderful now to see young women and some young men too who really do fall in love with the person, not the sex.” Stern, *Gloria Steinem*, 220.

valid feminist choice.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, when opposition to lesbians took on especially vicious tones, Steinem would counter attacks on lesbian feminists as man-haters, arguing that “it wasn’t Lesbians who hated men.” Indeed, as she averred: “it was women who lived with men who hated men. Lesbians can take or leave it alone and they get along rather well with men. It is the women who are dependent and therefore vulnerable to men who have the problem.”<sup>111</sup>

It was not just other feminists who were intent on examining whether Steinem put her theories about love and liberation into practice. Much to her chagrin, inquiring minds were often fixated on her love life, perhaps in search of evidence that feminists were (or were not) man-haters. The level of public fascination with Steinem prompted the media (and admirers) to see her more as a Hollywood celebrity than as a political figure because of her beauty, her charm, and her reported romantic liaisons with famous men. The result was that even as Steinem fought against male-identification, the media constantly identified and defined her within the context of her romantic relationships.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> For examples of Steinem’s defense of lesbianism and her expressed solidarity with lesbian feminists see “Gloria Steinem: Beauty, Brains and a Mission;” Marcia Pally, “Pleasure & Pain: Gloria Steinem’s Routine Rebellions,” *New York Native*, December 21, 1983, 32, Box 4, Folder 17, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass; Gloria Steinem, “The State of the Feminist Movement” (Speech Transcript presented at the Women Unlimited Conference, University of Utah, October 16, 1975) Gloria Steinem (presented at the Unidentified Women’s Conference, University of Southern California, May 1979), Box 100, Folder 10, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass; and David Behrens, “Gloria Steinem at 45...,” 5.

<sup>111</sup> Gloria Steinem, “New Life Styles,” 6.

<sup>112</sup> One especially revealing – and especially upsetting – instance of the public fixation with Steinem’s love life came in the fall of 1971, when Leonard Levitt’s scathing profile of Steinem, “She: The Awesome Power of Gloria Steinem,” appeared in *Esquire*. The article focused almost exclusively on Steinem’s professional and romantic relationships with men, her physical attractiveness, and her alleged manipulative charm. The portrait he painted of Steinem was anything but complimentary and served to diminish Steinem’s accomplishments and political clout by suggesting that she owed her success to the powerful men she knew. A much more favorable profile of Steinem that appeared in *McCall’s* the next year cited Steinem’s distress, as well as that of her misquoted friends, following the publication of “She.” According to the article, “Gloria could not bring herself to read it until it was off the stands. When she finally faced it, she was angry not only because she felt it was a personal attack, but because she saw it as a

A critical examination of Steinem's relationships was not unwarranted. For a feminist who argued women must learn to "stand alone" before they could be in relationships with men, Steinem had spent surprisingly little time without the romantic companionship of a man during her adult life. Her relationships, which often lasted several years at a time, often overlapped. Though one need not be single to form a sense of self outside of a relationship, her perpetual attachment to men raised questions for some about whether she had ever truly stood alone.

Fiercely protective of her privacy (as well as that of her loved ones), Steinem was usually reluctant to discuss her romantic affairs publicly. Unsurprisingly, she was less reticent about discussing her personal life when it served the purpose of illustrating how feminist politics could positively affect one's personal life, as in the case of her testimony in the *Ms.* "Is There Love After Liberation?" symposium. By opening up about her own experiences, Steinem sought to "prove" that she "practiced what she preached" and to reassure other feminists who were struggling towards self-identification that they were not alone. In addition, because she was a mediator of sorts between the more extreme perspectives on love (that it was purely detrimental or purely beneficial), Steinem projected a version of feminism that was both palatable and accessible to feminists who wanted meaningful change in their romantic relationships. This point was not lost on the hundreds of feminists who wrote to Steinem during the 1970s and beyond to tell her that

---

particularly gross example of machismo journalism." See Leonard Levitt, "She: The Awesome Power of Gloria Steinem," *Esquire*, October 1971, 87. Gloria Steinem Papers, Box 1, Folder 12, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.; Marilyn Mercer, "Gloria: The Unhidden Persuader," *McCall's*, January 1972, 125; Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 189-191; and Stern, *Gloria Steinem*, 230-233.

they identified with her politics and her honesty about the difficulties of reconciling love and liberation.<sup>113</sup>

For Steinem, the best alternative to seeking romantic union in the male-identified institution of marriage involved a series of long-term relationships with men, which she called “mini-marriages.” Certainly some of her relationships from the 1960s—Robert Benton, Herb Sargent, Mike Nichols—fell into this category; however, it was Steinem’s relationships with Frank Thomas and Stanley Pottinger in the 1970s, which coincided with her role in cultivating popular feminism, that represented Steinem’s best effort to blend self-identification with romantic love.<sup>114</sup>

Steinem met Franklin Thomas, the director of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Development Corporation who would later become the long-serving president of the Ford Foundation, just after becoming a fully committed feminist in 1969. In part because of his high profile, Steinem took care never to identify him by name until much later. Their relationship, which lasted until 1975, was transformative for Steinem. According to Carolyn Heilbrun, one reason Thomas was such a significant force in Steinem’s life was

---

<sup>113</sup> In addition to writing to *Ms.*, many people wrote directly to Gloria Steinem in reference to her ideas about love and liberation. The letters she received were diverse in content, including letters from people who admired her example of pursuing relationships that fit her own needs for independence and equality, criticism that she was anti-man and anti-love, and stories about self-identified feminists’ own struggles in love and liberation. Letters to Steinem were especially voluminous following her public speaking tours and her appearances on television, especially the *Phil Donahue Show*. Many of the letters to Steinem are included in her personal papers. See especially Boxes 32-42 and 55-63, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>114</sup> Though these were two of Steinem’s most notable mini-marriages, her biographer, Carolyn Heilbrun, argued that they resembled marriage, “mini or maxi,” very little. “If marriage . . . may be defined as an association in which the other partner must always be taken into account, must always be considered in all major decisions, hers were not marriages at all,” Heilbrun argues. Of Steinem’s relationships, Heilbrun states: “They were passionate associations between lovers who were not partners in any legal sense, sharing neither ownership of property nor dependents nor finances. Steinem was committed only as long as she and her lover chose; most often, it was she who ended the love relationship, prepared to welcome friendship, which for the most part was readily and enduringly offered.” Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, xx.

because he understood oppression much in the same way Steinem did. Steinem, who had forged her first romantic connection with an African American man (track star Rafer Johnson) in the late 1960s, “believed that sympathetic black men had special insight into the problems of women of all races because, unlike white men, they understood on a visceral level what being treated like a stereotype was.” Moreover, Thomas had a long history of professional solidarity with women and the two shared common social and political views. If anything, Steinem and Thomas were too similar. Their belief that they could both benefit from having relationships with someone a bit *less* like themselves, along with Steinem’s then-affirmed resolve that marriage was not for her, prompted a transition from romantic to platonic friendship.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, Steinem would later describe her relationship with Thomas as the epitome of liberated romantic love in her self-help book, *Revolution From Within* (1992).

After Thomas, Steinem entered into a romantic friendship with J. Stanley Pottinger that would last throughout the rest of the 1970s. Steinem met Pottinger, the head of the civil rights division of the Justice Department, when he asked to meet with her to form “a task force . . . to change the government’s attitude toward women” in 1974. Pottinger came into Steinem’s life at a time of extreme stress. Frustrated with financial difficulties at *Ms.*, under intensive public scrutiny, and undergoing a vicious attack from the Redstockings for an alleged association with the CIA, Steinem was at a low point. Pottinger’s support proved crucial during those trying times.<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> See Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 145-146, 244-245; and Stern, *Gloria Steinem*, 319-322.

<sup>116</sup> See Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 275-283; and Stern, *Gloria Steinem*, 322-328.

Steinem and Pottinger's relationship, in many ways, typified Steinem's assertion that women's liberation would also bring about men's liberation as well as the possibility of love between equals. In 1977, they even went on a speaking tour together in order to address the significance of feminism for men. Steinem's remarks, which were typical of her speeches during the era, were complimented by Pottinger's assertion that "the women's movement is creating a new consciousness about men staying in touch with their children, being loving, affectionate, nurturing."<sup>117</sup> Moreover, Steinem and Pottinger were in agreement that marriage would be detrimental to their relationship. Pottinger, who had been married before, told one interviewer that although he thought some things about marriage were "wonderful," the institution itself remained problematic. "I think that both of us value our independence to a large extent and that no matter how much two people think that they can write a unique marriage contract that will give each spouse a sense of independence and individuality and not have the institution of marriage swallow them," he explained. "The fact is, the institution is still a big one, and even if the two married people think that they have a special relationship, rather than a stereotypical one, the world at large does not."<sup>118</sup>

Steinem certainly believed that romantic love was not only possible, but also beneficial when it was mutual and equal. The problem feminism would solve, then, was that of disproportionate power in loving relationships. As Steinem often quipped:

"Women are the only group expected to love those who think we are inferior. Blacks

---

<sup>117</sup> Joanne Williams, "Steinem Observed," *Pacific Sun*, October 7, 1977, Box 1, Folder 18, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>118</sup> J. Stanley Pottinger, interview by Joy Billington Doty, Transcript, January 5, 1984, Box 4, Folder 8, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass, Northampton, Mass. See also, Joy Billington, "Happy and Gloria," *Sunday Times*, February 26, 1984, Box 2, Folder 8, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

don't love racists. Jews don't love anti-semites."<sup>119</sup> Add to that the expectation that women would derive their identity and were rendered dependent upon those very oppressors: "When you have a woman whose total identity comes from the man, or substantially from the man, she may be dependent, extremely dependent," Steinem would explain. "And dependency looks like love from a little distance, but it sure doesn't feel like love; resentment grows, and twenty years later people are saying, 'If I hadn't married you I could have been a star.'"<sup>120</sup> Evening the playing field with feminist gains such as more equitable marriage laws, access to birth control, equal pay for equal work, would trickle over into women's romantic connections with men, allowing them to love a *partner*, rather than an *oppressor*.<sup>121</sup>

In the early 1980s, Steinem entered into a relationship with Mort Zuckimer, a powerful real estate mogul, that revealed the lingering hurdles she still faced in forging romantic relationships that were compatible with her own needs. Initially drawn to his

---

<sup>119</sup> Ann Feeney, "An Evening with Gloria Steinem," *Independent*, June 20, 1984, Box 2, Folder 9, Gloria Steinem Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>120</sup> Sondra Gair, "Gloria Steinem: Marriage," *N & W*, February 1984, 36-37. For other variations of Steinem's comments on feminism and the possibility of love based on equality, see the following in the Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.: Joan Barthel, "The Glorious Triumph of Gloria Steinem," *Cosmopolitan*, March 1984, 270-271; Gloria Steinem, "Interview with Gloria Steinem on Thames TV," interview by Llew Gardner, Transcript, April 19, 1976, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. Cynthia McCluskey, "Women's Lib Leader Talks to Full House," *unknown*; Gloria Steinem, "Untitled Speech" (Speech presented at the International women's Year, Houston, Texas, 1977), Box 101, Folder 5; Jan Silverman, "'I'm Not Tough,' says Gloria Steinem," *Oakland Tribune*, November 29, 1977, sec. People Margaret Sloan and Gloria Steinem, "Ms.--Today and Tomorrow," 39, Box 100, Folder 3; Gloria Steinem to Alison D. Gnerre, 17 November 1978, Box 35, Folder 7; unknown, "Gloria Steinem: Beauty, Brains and a Mission." Ghita Levine, "Ridding the Emphasis on Good Looks," *The Sunday Sun*, November 21, 1976 Box 1, Folder 17; Wanda Cook, "Gloria Steinem is Still Pushing for Progress," *The Blade*, October 9, 1983, sec. E, "Living Today" Box 2, Folder 7; Irene Kubota Neves, "Gloria Steinem: The Politics of Love and Marriage," *Woman's Day/Woman's World*, September 17, 1980, Box 2, Folder 3; and Irene Kubota Neves, "Gloria Steinem Examines the Women's Decade: Wins, Losses and Changes in Her Life," *People*, June 23, 1980.

<sup>121</sup> David Behrens, "Gloria Steinem at 45...." 4; and Betsy Carter, "Liberation's Next Wave, According to Gloria Steinem," *Cosmopolitan*, June 1984, 205, Box 2, Folder 9, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.



charm, Steinem's attraction to Zuckimer diverged from the romantic patterns she had established en route to liberation. Having set precedents for forming romantic relationships with men who shared similar politics and social concerns, Steinem later recognized that she and Zuckimer had little in common. Instead, she was attracted to him because he led a fun and exciting lifestyle. By 1984, Steinem had spent more than a decade devoting herself to the women's liberation movement, sometimes speaking as many as fifteen times a month, and struggling to keep *Ms.* magazine afloat. She was about to turn fifty years old. She did not regret her level of commitment to feminism, but she was exhausted. Zuckerman offered respite and escape.<sup>122</sup>

It took Steinem nearly two years to realize that she had reverted to her pre-feminist social conditioning. Though she did not identify herself solely in terms of the relationship, Steinem lacked the kind of companionship and mutuality with Zuckimer that she had been arguing were required of romantic love between equals. When the relationship finally ended, Steinem realized that her independence had not necessarily translated into high self-esteem. Her book, *Revolution From Within* (1992), grew out of that experience and prompted her to incorporate self-esteem building into her on-going advocacy of feminism and self-identification. Written in the spirit of feminism, Steinem told one reviewer of the book that the book "is a form of consciousness-raising" and "the point is for people to empower themselves."<sup>123</sup>

One chapter of the book, "Romance versus Love," powerfully testified to Steinem's ongoing struggle towards self-identification and romantic love based on

---

<sup>122</sup> See Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 355-369; and Stern, *Gloria Steinem*, 348-358.

<sup>123</sup> Joelle Attinger, "Steinem: Tying Politics to the Personal," *Time*, March 9, 1992, 55, Box 3, Folder 6, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

equality. Serving as the culmination of more than two decades worth of theorization and transformation, the chapter constituted Steinem's most definitive statement to date on the meaning of love and its relationship liberation. Taking her cue from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Steinem illustrated how romance differed quite remarkably from love. Romance, as epitomized by the dramatic and tragic relationship of Catherine and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, "is two incomplete people looking for the rest of themselves in someone else, and thereby unable to recognize who the real other person is."<sup>124</sup> Women, Steinem argued, were drawn to romance because a lack of self-esteem prompted them to seek what they thought was missing in themselves in someone else. Though both women and men were susceptible to becoming ensnared in romance, Steinem argued that women were much more likely to feel inferior because of social conditioning. Thus, notions of romance continued to have the most deleterious effects for women. Harkening back to her old lexicon, Steinem evoked the concept of "man junkies," arguing that "romance can become an addiction, and this cycle [of obsessive devotion] can repeat itself again and again."<sup>125</sup> In stark contrast to romance, love (as exemplified by *Jane Eyre*'s dogged individualism as it meshed with her abiding affection for Mr. Rochester) was "two whole people, or two people at least striving to be whole, so each can allow the other person to be who they really are."<sup>126</sup>

---

<sup>124</sup> This is how Steinem described her definition of "romance" to one reviewer of her book. "Ms. Steinem," *New World Journal*, Spring 1993, 68, Box 3, Folder 6, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. For a more detailed discussion of Steinem's definition of romance, see Steinem, *Revolution From Within*, 251-268.

<sup>125</sup> Steinem, *Revolution From Within*, 251-268.

<sup>126</sup> This was Steinem's concise definition of "love" as told to a reviewer of her book for *New World Journal*. For a more complete, nuanced discussion, see Steinem, *Revolution From Within*, 269-284.

Keeping true to her claim that *Revolution From Within* was a tool of consciousness-raising and reflecting the second-wave feminist belief that women could find political meaning in their shared personal experiences, Steinem offered two stories of her own to help the reader distinguish between romance and love.<sup>127</sup> To illustrate “romance,” Steinem recalled her relationship with Mort Zuckimer. She began by describing her pre-feminist cyclical pattern of falling in love with men who possessed aspects of an identity she wished to have for herself, followed by her eventual realization that she had to make herself happy on her own. When it came to Zuckimer, Steinem explained that she was at a difficult place in her life and that she was drawn to his energy, his efficiency, and his charm. Ultimately, Zuckimer offered Steinem a chance to escape from other pressures. Suffering from “burnout and an erosion of self,” Steinem “reverted to a primordial skill that [she] hadn’t used since feminism had helped [her] to make [her] own life: getting a man to fall in love with me.”<sup>128</sup>

Steinem had spoken directly to this issue in her contribution to the *Ms.* “Is There Love After Liberation” symposium in 1978. Having argued that getting men to fall in love was one of the few powers available to women, Steinem explained that this generated a fundamental problem: “having got this man to fall in love with an inauthentic [self], [she] had to *keep on* not being [herself].”<sup>129</sup> Though a seasoned feminist who

---

<sup>127</sup> Steinem did not name the men she chose to write about; however, it was clear that she was writing about Mort Zuckimer and Frank Thomas. Much to Steinem’s chagrin, however, reviewers seemed much more intent upon uncovering more details about the failed romance with Zuckimer than they did with discussing Steinem’s more successfully love friendship with Thomas. Not only does this keep in line with some of the more gossipy efforts to uncover Steinem’s love life, but it also, as Heilbrun argues, reflected the backlash effort to “prove” that “feminists can’t have good relationships and are treated badly by men.” See Heilbrun, *The Education of a Woman*, 362-363.

<sup>128</sup> Steinem, *Revolution From Within*, 264-265.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

“should have known better,” Steinem explained that her failure to recognize growing needs of her own led her to “choose an opposite as a dramatic example of what I missed in myself.”<sup>130</sup>

Romance was about a struggle for power between two incomplete people in search of “a means to the end of self-completion.” But “love [was] not about power,” Steinem explained. It “[was] an end in itself.”<sup>131</sup> Acknowledging the difficulties of generalizing about a highly individualized emotion like love, Steinem contended that love, unlike romance, was something that two “authentic” individuals share with one another and that is entirely based on free choice. To demonstrate the potential for romantic friendships based on equality to thrive, Steinem offered as evidence her relationship with Frank Thomas, which developed in tandem with her early involvement in women’s liberation. Steinem describes an intense union between Thomas and herself: “It felt as if we had always known each other, yet also as if we were just exploring and exploding into a new part of ourselves. . . . Somehow, we felt complete on our own.”<sup>132</sup> The romantic connection born of a sense of shared experiences eventually faded to a strong, family-like friendship, and Steinem concludes: “Perhaps what characterizes romance is its separateness from other deep feelings – for a friend or a child, for the ocean or a sheltering tree. What marks love: It’s all the same.”<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 275-276.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 282.

## CONCLUSION

Steinem's articulation of the difference between romance and love demonstrated a clarity of thought steeped in feminist ideology and years of personal struggle. The fact that Steinem continued to grapple with this issue well after the second wave was beginning to ebb demonstrates the timelessness of the questions of love and liberation that participants in the modern women's liberation movement addressed. At the same time, the struggles Steinem and other women (such as the writers and readers of *Ms.*) like her faced in reconciling love with liberation, as well as the solutions they posed, were historically specific to an era obsessed with the power of the individual. Pursuing self-identification was one way liberated women in the 1970s could merge feminism with individualism and autonomy with companionship. Steinem and the *Ms.* community continued struggling to strike that balance as the second wave yielded to a swelling third wave, which would borrow certain ideas about feminism and love while engendering new approaches unique to its own generation.

## Epilogue

### “Love is Our Most Powerful, Lasting Form of Activism”<sup>1</sup>

In 2007, feminist writer Courtney Martin argued, “love is our most powerful, lasting form of activism.” She continued: “A generation of women insisted that the personal was the political, that they would only be in a relationship with those who respected their full humanity, and we—their daughters and sons—are engaged in far more fair partnerships as a result.” When “we critically and consciously choose how to shape our love,” she argued, we inch closer to “more inclusive, more authentic, more liberating relationship[s].”<sup>2</sup> Martin’s commentary suggests that questions about romantic love in relationship to feminism continue to fuel on-going quests for gender equality while pointing to the important legacy of second-wave feminism in laying the foundation for contemporary understandings of romantic love and liberation.

There was no clear endpoint for the second wave of feminism. As the women’s movement gained momentum over the course of the 1970s, anti-feminist opposition grew alongside it as part of the New Right, with its blend of social and fiscal conservatism. With the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 and the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1982, the New Right’s ascendance into decisive political power was solidified. Much of the New Right’s agenda was consciously aimed at dismantling

---

<sup>1</sup> Courtney E. Martin, “Why Love Is Our Most Powerful, Lasting Form of Activism,” *AlterNet*, February 14, 2007, <http://www.alternet.org/sex/47779/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

feminist gains of the 1970s. Because most Americans generally agreed with basic feminist tenets, like equal pay for equal work, neoconservative attacks on feminism were usually couched in terms of family values.<sup>3</sup> Feminist writer Susan Faludi outlined these developments in her bestseller, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991). According to Faludi, popular culture and mainstream media in the 1980s was filled with messages that warned women that “superwomen” who had it all were actually unloved and unhappy—and that they had feminism to blame for that condition. Arguing that lingering inequality was what really beleaguered women in the 1980s, Faludi demonstrated how the pernicious backlash against feminism permeated American politics and culture.<sup>4</sup>

While the backlash altered the visibility and momentum of feminist work, it did not dampen it entirely. Instead, feminism and anti-feminism continued to work in tandem with one another as they had throughout the 1970s with anti-feminist sentiment increasingly assuming a position of strength. As Susan Faludi put it, the “reactive nature of [the] backlash” was dependent upon feminist response. The two opposing forces were “entangled” and in “locked embrace.”<sup>5</sup> From the 1980s on, feminists thus battled for

---

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Schulman and Julian Zelizer situate the emergence of the New Right in the 1970s in their edited volume *Rightward Bound*, which includes an essay by Marjorie Spruill about International Women's Year Conference in 1977 as symbolic of the intertwined nature of feminism and anti-feminism. See Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Marjorie J. Spruill, “Gender and America's Right Turn,” in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 71-89. See also Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1994); Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: Free Press, 2003); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001); Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

women's equality by working against conservative efforts to whittle away hard won rights of the 1970s (reproductive rights especially), continuing to raise awareness about sexual assault and violence, and trying to narrow wage gaps while confronting lingering forms of discrimination in the workplace, such as sexual harassment.

With growing numbers of women working outside of the home, some people believed that women had achieved the primary goals of feminism. But growing access to the public realm did not necessarily change the basic dynamics of marriage or family life for many women. As sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild's study *The Second Shift* (1989) illustrated, the "dual career household" was increasingly acceptable (even expected), but women still performed the bulk of domestic work and child rearing. Men had picked up the slack in some regards, but the goal of egalitarian family and marital arrangements was not yet realized.<sup>6</sup> Feminists still faced a difficult balancing act while juggling emotional, sexual, and professional desires.

It is difficult to measure the results of second-wave feminist efforts to shift ideals of romantic love to better reflect feminist goals of equality and independence. With other aspects of the movement, we can look to tangible results as a way to gauge feminist successes. The passage of laws, for example, help us to understand both victories and lingering obstacles to reproductive freedom or educational and employment opportunities. The existence of rape crisis centers, women's health centers, and shelters for abused women around the nation likewise testify to feminist successes in making matters of women's health and safety a public concern. At the same time, the persistent need for such institutions offers strong evidence that there is still much work to be done

---

<sup>6</sup> Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (New York: Viking, 1989).



in achieving an egalitarian society. Statistical data about women in the professions and politics also helps to identify some notable gains while drawing attention to still-existing wage gaps and glass ceilings.<sup>7</sup>

But in matters of the heart, results are less tangible and more difficult to trace. Statistics on changing patterns in marriage and divorce offer one opening for measuring the effect of second-wave feminist responses to the problems of romantic love. In 1975, when the second wave of feminism was arguably at its height, the U.S. Census Bureau reported rising rates of divorce—as many as one in three among recent marriages—which matches anecdotal evidence from the era. The U.S. Census Bureau also found that women were increasingly likely to delay marriage, though the median age at first marriage still hovered at 20 years of age for women.<sup>8</sup>

Both trends (rising divorce rates and delayed marriage for women) continued over the next several decades. Studies today show that approximately half of marriages end in divorce and that the median age at first marriage for women is about 26 years of age (and closer to 30 for men). The number of people living in family arrangements outside of marriage has also increased exponentially. Cohabitation (before marriage and as an

---

<sup>7</sup> Though women outnumber men in higher education and constitute nearly half of the paid workforce, they still occupy fields traditionally dominated by women (such as nursing, administrative work, or education) in high numbers and have made limited inroads into male dominated fields. Despite gains in certain professional fields, there is still a wide wage gap, with women making approximately 77 cents per each dollar a man makes. Finally, although there are more women in political office than ever, they are still vastly outnumbered by men in all levels of government. In the 111th Congress, there are 17 women in the Senate and 74 women in the House of Representatives. There are currently eight women serving as Governor of their state. See CAWP Election Watch, “Record Number of Women to Serve in Senate and House” (Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, November 10, 2008); DPE Research Department, “Fact Sheet 2006: Professional Women: Vital Statistics” (Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO, 2006); U.S. Census Bureau, “Facts for Features: Women’s History Month: March 2009” (U.S. Census Bureau News, U.S. Department of Commerce, January 5, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> U.S. bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 297, “Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces in the United States: June 1975.” U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1976.

alternative to marriage) is increasingly becoming the norm.<sup>9</sup> Conservative groups argue that such trends mark the decline of the family and traditional values. But viewed through a feminist lens, changing patterns in marriage and divorce indicates greater diversity of options and the growing ability of women (and men) to actively pursue romantic arrangements that fit their individual needs. As Gloria Steinem has frequently remarked, the reason for divorce is not feminism but rather bad marriages. Feminism merely facilitated women's ability to leave those bad marriages by challenging laws, shifting cultural expectations of marriage and romantic intimacy, and opening economic and educational opportunities to women so that they could support themselves.<sup>10</sup>

Changing patterns in sexual behavior might likewise indicate that expectations of loving and sexual relationships have changed. The HIV/AIDS crisis shifted discussions of sexual liberation to focus more fully on issues of sexual health and safety in the 1980s. Some have argued that the crisis served to dampen "free love." But, the more telling consequence in the search for authenticity in intimate relationships may be that sexual partners increasingly recognized the importance of open and honest communication in sexual relationships. During the 1990s, popular culture was filled with images of young people having open discussions about their sexual histories and behaviors as a basis for

---

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, P23-180, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the 1900's, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1992; Bramlett MD and Mosher WD. Cohabitation, Divorce, and Remarriage in the United States. National Center for Health Statistics. Vital Health Stat 23(22). 2002; Rose M. Kreider, "Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces: 2001," Current Population Reports, P70-97. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, February 2005.

<sup>10</sup> For examples, see Irene Kubota Neves, "Gloria Steinem Examines the Women's Decade: Wins, Losses and Changes in Her Life," *People*, June 23, 1980; Sandra Mathers, "Gloria," *Sentinal Star Magazine*, May 16, 1976; Sondra Gair, "Gloria Steinem: Marriage," *N & W*, February 1984; Wanda Cook, "Gloria Steinem is Still Pushing for Progress," *The Blade*, October 9, 1983, sec. E, "Living Today" Box 2, Folder 7, Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

having safer and more honest relationships with one another (committed or otherwise).<sup>11</sup>

The lack of comprehensive sex education today has done a disservice to the activists who worked to establish those patterns earlier on and raises new questions about how people can form truly egalitarian relationships in the absence of full access to information about contraception and sexual health. At the same time, the rise of “hook-up culture” points to the emergence of new patterns for young people born in the mid-1980s and beyond.

While hooking-up may have little to do with authentic love and intimacy, it might suggest a growing tendency towards divorcing sex from ideals of romantic love completely, at least under certain circumstances and within a particular age bracket.<sup>12</sup>

But perhaps most revealing are second-wave feminists’ experiences in their on-going journey towards reconciling love and liberation. For some of the central figures in this study, the topic faded from public discourse as they shifted their activist energies to other issues. Roxanne Dunbar (now Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz) of Cell 16 has continued to work as a scholar and activist, shifting her focus primarily towards the struggles of indigenous people in the United States and Central America.<sup>13</sup> Her Cell 16 co-founder, Dana Densmore is an independent scholar and runs a publishing company with her husband in New Mexico.<sup>14</sup> Rita Mae Brown, who is now more famous for the mystery

---

<sup>11</sup> See Jennifer Brier, *Infectious Ideas: U.S. Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Deborah B. Gould (Deborah Bejosa), *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> “Hook-up culture” refers to the growing tendency to favor casual sexual encounters (“hooking-up”) over formal dating among young people. See Kathleen A. Bogle, *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> “About Roxanne,” *Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz: Feminist, Revolutionary, Historian*, <http://www.reddirtsite.com/about.htm>; Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Outlaw Woman: A Memoir of the War Years, 1960-1975* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> “About Dana Densmore and William H. Donahue,” December 17, 2005, <http://www.greenlion.com/dd-whd/html>; “Green Lion Press Homepage,” <http://www.greenlion.com/>.

novels she “co-writes” with her cat, Sneaky Pie Brown, than for her activism, is currently single and continues to see monogamy as an ideal at odds with human nature.<sup>15</sup> Kate Millett focuses primarily on her artistic endeavors today and leads workshops at the Women’s Art Colony at Millett Farm in New York. She divorced her husband, Fumio Yoshimura, in 1985, though I have not been able to determine her current relationship status.<sup>16</sup>

Other figures have been even more difficult to trace. Ti-Grace Atkinson has continued to teach in philosophy departments (most recently at Tufts University, it seems) and recently spoke at an event commemorating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1968 student protests at Columbia University. From what I can deduce, she has remained unmarried, but whether she continues to identify politically as lesbian is unknown.<sup>17</sup> Most elusive of all is Shulamith Firestone, who left the women’s movement almost immediately following the publication of *The Dialectic of Sex* in 1970. Aside from the publication of her collection of short stories, *Airless Spaces* (1998), and the discovery of

---

<sup>15</sup> See Rita Mae Brown, “Rita Mae Brown: A Rebel With Plenty of Cause,” *EDGE*, April 23, 2009, [www.edgechicago.com](http://www.edgechicago.com); Steven Foster, “Rita Mae Goes to the Dogs,” *OutSmartMagazine.com*, November 2009; “About Rita Mae,” *Rita Mae Brown*, <http://www.ritamaebrown.com/content/about.asp>.

<sup>16</sup> See “Fumio Yoshimura, 76, Sculptor of Everyday,” *The New York Times*, August 10, 2002, sec. Arts, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/10/arts/fumio-yoshimura-76-sculptor-of-everyday.html?pagewanted=1>; “An Art Colony for Women: Millett Farm,” <http://www.katemillett.com/>; “Biographical Note,” Inventory of the Kate Millett Papers, 1912-2002 and undated, bulk 1951-2001; Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, <http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/rbmscl/millett/inv/>.

<sup>17</sup> See John Leo, “Columbia’s Rebel Reunion,” *City*, April 10, 2008, <http://www.city-journal.org/2008/eon0410jl.html>; Katie Gradowski, “Feminist Legacies of Columbia ’68,” *Feminist News* 26 (August 2008): 2 and 12-13; “Feminist Legacies of Columbia ’68: A Moderated Discussion With Women Who were at Barnard and Columbia in 1968 and Played Important Roles in the Rise of the Feminist Movement,” April 25, 2008, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/irwag/ance/femleg.html>; “March People Notes,” *Tufts Journal*, March 2003, <http://tuftsjournal.tufts.edu/archive/2003/march/people/notes.shtml>.

a documentary film about her as an art student in the late 1960s, which filmmaker Elisabeth Subrin re-made in 1997, she has remained out of public sight.<sup>18</sup>

Other second-wave feminists have remained much more visible in their on-going efforts to reconcile feminism with expectations of romantic love. Betty Friedan, who never remarried, continued to pursue various love affairs throughout the 1980s and 1990s while trying to stave off fears of being alone. Until her death in 2006, she continued to act as a spokesperson for her version of feminism with its emphasis on professional and emotional fulfillment for women.<sup>19</sup> Helen Gurley Brown continued to edit *Cosmopolitan* until 1997, at which point she became editor of *Cosmopolitan International*. In a farewell letter to her fans, she continued to insist that romance and feminism were not at odds: “Loving work is almost as important as loving a man, maybe as. The two loves needn’t conflict.”<sup>20</sup> She continued to live that reality in her marriage to David Brown until his recent death in February 2010.<sup>21</sup> Erica Jong is presently married to attorney Ken Burrows, her fourth husband. She recently published a volume of poetry entitled *Love*

---

<sup>18</sup> Both Susan Brownmiller and Karla Jay outline Shulamith Firestone’s virtual disappearance from the movement after the publication of *The Dialectic of Sex*. See Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Delta Trade paperbacks, 1999); Karla Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace: A Memoir of Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, 1999). See also “Shulamith Firestone,” in *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, <http://www.notablebiographies.com/supp/Supplement-Ca-Fi/Firestone-Shulamith.html>; Shulamith Firestone, *Airless Spaces* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1998).

<sup>19</sup> See Betty Friedan, *Life So Far* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); Margalit Fox, “Betty Friedan, Who Ignited Cause in 'Feminine Mystique,' Dies at 85,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 2006, sec. National, [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/05/national/05friedan.html?\\_r=1&scp=1&sq=betty%20friedan%20obituary&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/05/national/05friedan.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=betty%20friedan%20obituary&st=cse).

<sup>20</sup> Lisa Lee Freeman, “Editor Helen Gurley Brown: Love, Work are the Answer for Cosmo's Living Legend,” *Investor's Business Daily*, February 5, 1997, Volume 13, No. 211 edition, sec. Leaders & Success, A3, Box 2, Folder 2, Helen Gurley Brown Papers, 1938-2001, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>21</sup> Jennifer Scanlon, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere: The Life of Helen Gurley Brown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 192-225; Bruce Weber, “David Brown, Film and Stage Producer, Dies at 93,” *The New York Times*, February 2, 2010, sec. Arts, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/02/arts/02brown.html>.

*Comes First*, in which she explores “love in all its facets—the heights of elation, the depths of sorrow, and the longing of desire.” She is currently writing a fourth volume in her Isadora Wing series, which will presumably continue in the mock memoir format. When published, that book along with Jong’s private papers (recently donated to Columbia University) will help shed light on how Jong’s thoughts on love and liberation have evolved beyond the second-wave.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, Gloria Steinem has continued to discuss and personally grapple with the possibilities of romantic love based on equality. Her 1984 book, *Revolution From Within*, which included her perceptive analysis of romance versus love, especially reflected the evolution of her thinking on the topic in the wake of the second wave. But, perhaps most famously, her decision to finally marry in 2000 (and the strong reactions her decision provoked) indicated that there were still many unresolved tensions in reconciling romantic love and liberation. Some critics thought Steinem was a sell-out for getting married, whereas others saw her betrothal as evidence that all feminists ever needed was a good man. Steinem, however, continued to occupy a middle ground. In explaining her somewhat spontaneous decision to an interviewer in 2007, Steinem said that her primary motivation for marrying her (now deceased) husband, David Bale, was to help protect him against pending troubles with his visa. Moreover, marriage laws had finally changed enough that the institution no longer legally crippled women, at least in the absence of children. Feminists “had been working for 30 years to change the laws,” she explained,

---

<sup>22</sup> See Katie Gradowski, “Fear of Flying: Can a Feminist Classic be a Classic?,” *Feminist News* 26 (August 2008): 4-5; Erica Jong, *Love Comes First: A Collection of Poems* (New York : Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2009), front cover flap; “Erica Jong’s Papers Acquired by Columbia University’s Rare Book Manuscript Library,” *Columbia University Libraries News Information* (June 15, 2007), [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/news/libraries/2007/2007-06-15.rbml\\_jong.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/news/libraries/2007/2007-06-15.rbml_jong.html); “About Erica Jong,” *Erica Jong: Bestselling Author of Fear of Flying and Seducing the Demon*, <http://www.ericajong.com/aboutericah.htm>; Susan Hamson to Robin Payne, “Your Query re: Erica Jong Papers,” February 9, 2009.

“so no longer did I have to give up my name, my credit rating, my legal domicile, all those civil rights that marriage would have made—did make—women sacrifice.”<sup>23</sup>

As second-wavers continued to grapple with the problems of love and liberation in their own lives, two closely-related developments were shaping the views of the soon-to-swell third wave: the diversification of feminist thought via important works by feminists of color and the proliferation of Women’s Studies courses at colleges and universities around the nation. Some of the most intriguing and thought-provoking feminist writings in the 1980s were from feminists of color. Though women of color had been involved in feminist activism throughout second wave, they were often marginalized and torn by feelings of loyalty to the men in their racial and ethnic communities. For them, the struggle for gender equality was occurring alongside that of racial equality, which decisively shaped their approach to interpersonal romantic relationships.<sup>24</sup>

In the early 1980s, several influential texts by feminists of color began to shift the dialogue to better account for differences of women’s experiences. *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, was an especially influential indication of this transition with its melding of writings from African American, Latina, Asian American, and Native American women. Their writings, including scholarly analysis, personal testimony, and prose, forged important ground in pointing to intersections of race, class, sexuality, and age in understanding women’s

---

<sup>23</sup> Gloria Steinem, interview by Evelyn C. White, Transcript of Video Recording, September 28, 2007, Voices of Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>24</sup> See Winifred Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009); Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

experiences.<sup>25</sup> Black feminist thinkers such as Audre Lorde and bell hooks also pointed to diversity of experience and challenged the idea of sisterhood as an inadequate counter to women's oppression. In shifting the focus to inequality based solely on sex, Lorde, hooks, and other feminists of color helped pave the way for increasingly sophisticated analyses of romantic intimacy and its impact on women's lives.<sup>26</sup> bell hooks has continued this work, pointing to the importance of combating a "culture of loveless" in the pursuit of a world free of sexism, racism, and classism in her trilogy of works, *All About Love* (2000), *Salvation* (2001), and *Communion* (2002). "Love," she argues, "is our hope and our salvation."<sup>27</sup>

During the 1970s, the establishment of Women's Studies curricula was an important element in challenging rigid hierarchies within the ivory towers. The work of feminists of color was pivotal in shaping the course of these programs and constituted an important aspect of the initial feminist scholarship coming out of academia, alongside works of history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and philosophy aimed at excavating women's experiences. These efforts included some of the first serious examinations of romance culture and its role in shaping women's experiences over space and time. Two especially influential works examining the relationship between feminism, romance, and female consumers were Tania Modelski's *Loving With a Vengeance* (1994)

---

<sup>25</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, Mass. : Persephone Press,, 1981).

<sup>26</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000); Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007); Audre Lorde, *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde*, ed. Rudolph P Byrd, Johnnetta B Cole, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York : Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> bell hooks, *Salvation: Black People and Love* (New York : William Morrow, 2001), xxiv. See also bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: William Morrow, 2000); bell hooks, *Communion: The Female Search for Love* (New York : W. Morrow, 2002).



and Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1991). Modleski demonstrated how literary forms, like Harlequin romances, gothic novels, and soap operas, conveyed mainstream ideals about romantic love while addressing real social problems. She understood the romance genre as a form of escapism that allowed women consumers to cope with male domination. Her primary argument was that romance entertainments did not *create* women's oppression, but rather that they existed *because of* women's oppression. Radway also endeavored to understand why women read romance novels by offering an ethnographic case study of a group of avid romance readers. According to Radway, romance reading both confirmed and covertly countered the patriarchal context in which romance novels and their readers were situated. Readers explained to her that they engaged in the act of reading because it offered education, self-enhancement, pleasure, escape from daily routines, and participation in a larger female community. Thus, romance reading was not necessarily about acquiescing to oppressive ideals but rather it was a form of resistance to oppression. Such work moved beyond earlier feminist interpretations of romance culture as purely oppressive by considering the potential for women's agency as consumers (and producers) of that culture.<sup>28</sup>

The important work of feminist academics in the 1980s furthered efforts to understand the meanings and consequences of romantic love while laying a foundation for new feminist analyses of oppression for a new generation in the early 1990s. The women who grew up during the 1970s and 1980s—the daughters of the second wave—were direct beneficiaries of this work. While some would argue that it is too early to

---

<sup>28</sup> See specifically Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); and Tania Modleski, *Loving With A Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (London: Routledge, 1994).

determine whether or not their actions truly constituted a third wave of feminism, their ideas marked some notable transitions from the previous generation. For one, third-wave feminists were determined to not repeat what they saw as the earlier generation's mistake of favoring similarity rather than difference in battling sex discrimination. Raising the banners of intersectionality and diversity, rather than sisterhood, they were intent upon recognizing the wide range of women's experiences and their subjective realities, especially in terms of racial, class, and sexual identities. Similarly, they worried that second-wave feminists had fostered a culture of victimization in their analyses of oppression. Consequently, younger feminists in the 1990s often spoke in terms of empowerment and agency. In the process, they continued the tradition of assessing and challenging cultural conceptions of womanhood.<sup>29</sup>

Whether we are currently in the third wave of feminism, the fourth wave, or something else, is debatable. Regardless, feminism today continues to emphasize early 1990s feminist thought, such as the importance of intersectionality, diversity of experience (locally, nationally, and globally), and individualism. Feminists of all generations continue to fight for gender equality surrounding issues like equal pay for equal work, reproductive freedom, greater representation in politics, and the ability of women to make free choices about how they will live their lives. Meanwhile, the argument that the personal is political continues to play an important role, especially in light of efforts to legislate and regulate sexuality, especially within the current battle over

---

<sup>29</sup> See Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000); Myra Marx Ferree and Beth B. Hess, *Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement Across Three Decades of Change*, Revised. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994); Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood is Forever: The Women's Anthology for a New Millennium* (New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 2003); Jo Reger, ed., *Different Wavelengths: Studies of the Contemporary Women's Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Deborah Siegel, *Sisterhood, Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrls Gone Wild* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

marriage equality. With lingering and persistent political, social, and economic inequalities, pursuing a proper balance that takes into account *all* of our needs (including emotional needs and desires) remains a crucial component of the continuing struggle for gender equality.

Today, the most vibrant dialogues regarding issues of love and liberation are occurring in the feminist blogosphere, which is rich with personal testimony and theoretical discussions about contemporary feminism. Whereas the mimeograph machine was the main tool of early second-wave feminists aiming to share their ideas, contemporary feminists armed with an internet connection and the wherewithal to blog have ready access to wide-ranging and diverse networks of feminist thinkers and activists. As with the second-wave, the contemporary feminist blogosphere is sometimes beleaguered by concern over visibility and privilege. Feminists who write for blogs with high readership and advertising revenue, such as *Feministe* and *Feministing*, are often the targets of critics who think they inadequately address the issues of marginalized groups.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> In February 2009, the feminist blogosphere erupted in intense dialogue over issues of privilege. Courtney Martin, blogging for *Feministing.com*, first provoked criticism after writing a post about a day in her life as a writer. The debate that emerged primarily revolved around Mandy Van Deven and Brittany Shoot's piece "What if the Feminist Blogosphere is a Form of Digital Colonialism?" Van Deven and Shoot's original piece has since been removed, but responses and reactions abound. The debate produced divergent responses and prompted *Feministe* (one of the most widely read feminist blogs) to write a three-part series about how issues of privilege shape feminist blogging. For a sampling of the debate, see Courtney E. Martin, "Day in the Life of a Feminist Writer/Activist," *Feministing.com*, February 5, 2009, <http://www.feministing.com/archives/013568.html>; Lauren Bruce, "Um," *fauxreal*, February 7, 2009, <http://fauxrealtho.com/2009/02/07/um/>; Lauren Bruce, "The Story of a Blog," *Feministe*, February 19, 2009, <http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2009/02/19/the-story-of-blog/>; Shark-Fu, "Well, Allow Me To Retort," *AngryBlackBitch*, February 19, 2009, <http://angryblackbitch.blogspot.com/2009/02/well-allow-me-to-retort.html>; problemchylde, "On Digital Clusterfuck Feminism," *Problem Chylde: Learning & Writing*, February 20, 2009, <http://problemchylde.wordpress.com/2009/02/20/on-digital-clusterfuck-feminism/>; "What is a Feminist Issue," *Womanist Musings*, February 20, 2009, <http://www.womanist-musings.com/2009/02/what-is-feminist-issue.html>; Belledame222, "Deep Fucking Thinky Thoughts on Recent Online Events," *Fetch Me My Axe*, February 23, 2009, <http://fetchmemyaxe.blogspot.com/2009/02/deep-fucking-thinky-thoughts-on-recent.html>; Mandy & Brittany, "The Things I Should Have Known Better\*," *An Apology From Brittany and Mandy*, February 24, 2009, [://digitalcolonialism.blogspot.com/2009/02/things-i-should-have-known-better.html](http://digitalcolonialism.blogspot.com/2009/02/things-i-should-have-known-better.html); uppitybrownwoman, "When Do Women of Colour Get to be Angry?," *Uppity Brown Woman*, February 24, 2009, <http://uppitybrownwoman.wordpress.com/2009/02/24/when-do>

The conversations arising out of such concerns, however, foster intense dialogue that furthers the visibility of multiple perspectives, including those related to romantic love and interpersonal relationships. On a daily basis, feminist bloggers and their commenters raise questions about what a feminist relationship looks like, theorize about the meaning of love, and discuss their own relationship experiences within the context of their feminist commitments and ideas.<sup>31</sup>

Christina Nehring's recent book, *A Vindication of Love* (2009), though not the definitive statement on contemporary feminist views of romantic love, especially draws attention to the longer, interwoven history of feminism and ideals of romantic love. Arguing that it is time for us to stop over-analyzing romantic love, Nehring suggests that we have gone too far in our push for reciprocity in loving relationships to the point that the fun and passion of romance has all but died. According to Nehring, "romantic love needs to be reinvented for our time." In her view, the reinvention of romantic love will not entail the undoing of feminist gains: "We need not trash feminism's flowers to dispose of the rotting fruit in its cellar." On the contrary, like feminists now and in the

---

women-of-colour-get-to-be-angry/; Holly, "Who Gets To Say What (Part I: Tokenism)," *Feministe*, February 28, 2009, <http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2009/02/28/who-gets-to-say-what-part-i-tokenism/#more-11862>; Holly, "Who Gets to Say What, Part II (Blog Hierarchies)," *Feministe*, March 2, 2009, <http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2009/03/02/who-gets-to-say-what-part-ii-blog-hierarchies/>; Holly, "Who Gets to Say What, Part 3: Whiteness, Leetness," *Feministe*, March 3, 2009, <http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2009/03/03/who-gets-to-say-what-part-3-whiteness-leetness/>.

<sup>31</sup> In addition to blogging about politics, work, reproductive freedom, sexuality, and other feminist issues, many feminist bloggers also continue to politicize the personal. Some discuss their personal experiences with romantic and sexual intimacy, while others discuss matters like love in more abstract terms. For three especially illuminating dialogues between *Feministe* bloggers and commenters about feminism and romantic love, see Jill Filipovic, "Feministe Feedback: What Does a Feminist Relationship Look Like?," *Feministe*, April 3, 2008, <http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2008/04/03/feministe-feedback-what-does-a-feminist-relationship-look-like/>; Ashley, "Love," *Feministe*, August 11, 2009, <http://www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2009/08/11/love-3/>; frau sally benz, "Nonmonogamy and Feminism: A Happy Couple," *Feministe*, August 14, 2009. Similar discussions frequently appear elsewhere in the feminist blogosphere. For a starting point, see The New Agenda, "Top 30 Sites in the Feminist Blogosphere," *The New Agenda: A Voice for All Women*, February 3, 2009, <http://thenewagenda.net/2009/02/03/top-30-sites-in-the-feminist-blogosphere/>.

past, she believes that “Romantic love is better between partners with equal rights.” But, many feminists had erred in overanalyzing love to the extent that love “has been defused and discredited.”<sup>32</sup> Whether contemporary feminists agree or disagree with Nehring’s assessment of romantic love, her underlying premise that feminism and love have a long, complicated history together cannot be disputed.

Nehring believes that “*love can be a form of feminism.*”<sup>33</sup> Predictably, her book is already provoking heated debate over the veracity and legitimacy of her claims among feminists and other critics. Contemporary sensibilities and concerns will shape that debate as it continues to evolve; however, the legacy of second-wave feminist responses to the problems and perils of romantic love in their own time laid a strong foundation from which today’s feminists can rise to the challenge. Second-wave feminists had no definitive solutions to the problems of romantic love, but their pursuit of equality within romantic relationships and their effort to shift the social and cultural ideals associated with romantic love so that they matched feminist goals constituted an important episode in the longer history of love and liberation. Regardless of their individual perspectives, they believed almost universally that feminism would bring about more authentic and egalitarian forms of love, romantic or otherwise. Today’s feminists continue the slow but steady journey towards the lofty vision of liberated love.

---

<sup>32</sup> Cristina Nehring, *A Vindication of Love: Reclaiming Romance for the Twenty-First Century* (New York : Harper, 2009), 7, 10, 15, and passim.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 (emphasis original).

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources—Archival

Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

Charlotte Bunch Papers  
Betty Friedan Papers, 1933-1980 (71-62—81-M23)  
Betty Friedan Papers, 1952-1993 (86-M12—93-M146)  
Ms. Letters-to-the-Editor Collection

Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

Noel Phyllis Birkby Papers  
Helen Gurley Brown Papers  
Gloria Steinem Papers  
Voices of Feminism Oral History Project  
Women's Liberation Collection

Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA

Papers of Rita Mae Brown, Accession #12019

Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC

Kate Millett Papers  
Robin Morgan Papers  
Alix Kates Shulman Papers

### Primary Sources—Published

#### *Journals, Magazines, and Periodicals\**

*Cosmopolitan*, 1965-1979  
*Ms.*, 1972-1979  
*No More Fun and Games*, 1968-1973  
*Off Our Backs*, 1970-1980  
*The Furies*, 1972-1973

---

\* I consulted as many issues as possible during the years designated for each journal, magazine, or periodical. Articles and essays discussed at length in the dissertation are included under "Primary Sources—Published, Articles and Books."

Articles and Books

Abbot, Sidney, and Barbara Love. "Is Women's Liberation a Lesbian Plot?." In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Barbara A. Crow. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Sappho Was a Right-On Woman: A Liberated View of Lesbianism*. New York: A Scarborough Book, 1972.

Allen, Pamela. "The Small Group Process." In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Barbara A. Crow, 277-281. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

Anzaldúa, Gloria, and Cherrie Moraga, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Watertown, Mass.: Persephone Press, 1981.

Arnold, June. "Consciousness-Raising." In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Barbara A. Crow, 282-286. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

Atkinson, Ti-Grace. *Amazon Odyssey*. New York: Links Books, 1974.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Lesbianism and Feminism." In *Amazon Odyssey*, 83-88. New York: Links Books, 1974.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Lesbianism and Feminism: Justice for Women as 'Unnatural'." In *Amazon Odyssey*, 131-134. New York: Links Books, 1974.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Radical Feminism." In *Amazon Odyssey*, 47-55. New York: Links Books, 1974.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Radical Feminism and Love." In *Amazon Odyssey*, 41-45. New York: Links Books, 1974.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Resignation from N.O.W." In *Amazon Odyssey*, 9-13. New York: Links Books, 1974.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Strategy and Tactics: A Presentation of Political Lesbianism." In *Amazon Odyssey*, 135-189. New York: Links Books, 1974.

Barbry. "Taking the Bullshit by the Horns." *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1, no. 3 (April 1972): 8-9.

- Beal, Frances. "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Feminist." In *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings From the Women's Movement*, edited by Robin Morgan, 382-396. New York: Vintage Books, 1970.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *All Said and Done*. Translated by Patrick O'Brian. New York : Putnam,, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Force of Circumstance*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Putnam, 1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Letters to Sartre*. Edited by Quintin Hoare. 1st ed. New York : Arcade Pub.,, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*. Translated by James Kirkup. New York: Perrenial Library, 1958.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Prime of Life*. Translated by Peter Green. Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1962.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Second Sex*. Translated by H.M. Parshley. Reprint. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- Beauvoir, Simone de, and Nelson Algren. *Beloved Chicago Man: letters to Nelson Algren, 1947-64*. Edited by Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir. London: Gollancz, 1998.
- Beauvoir, Simone de, Nelson Algren, and Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir. *A Transatlantic Love Affair: Letters to Nelson Algren*. Edited by Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir. New York : Distributed by W.W. Norton, 1998.
- Birkby, Phyllis, Bertha Harris, Jill Johnston, Esther Newton, and Jane O'Wyatt, eds. *Amazon Expedition: A Lesbian Feminist Anthology*. Washington, NJ: Times Change Press, 1973.
- Bradley, Mike, Lonnie Danchik, Marty Fager, and Tom Wodetzki. *Unbecoming Men: A Men's Consciousness-Raising Group Writes on Oppression and Themselves*. Albion, CA: Times Change Press, 1971.
- Brown, Helen Gurley. *Having it All: Love, Success, Sex, Money . . . Even if You're Starting with Nothing*. New York: Simon and Schuster/Linden Press, 1982.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *I'm Wild Again: Snippets From My Life and a Few Brazen Thoughts*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.



- \_\_\_\_\_. *Lessons in Love: How to Love a Girl & How To Love A Man*. LP Record. Crescendo Records, 1963.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Outrageous Opinions*. New York : B. Geis Associates, 1966.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Sex and the Office*. New York: B. Geis Associates, 1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Sex and the Single Girl*. Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, Inc., 1962.
- Brown, Rita Mae. *In Her Day*. New York: Bantam Books, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Living With Other Women." In *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement*, edited by Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch, 63-67. Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Out of the Sea of Discontent." *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1, no. 5 (July 1972): 14-16.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Rita Will: Memoirs of a Literary Rabble-Rouser*. New York: Bantam Books, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Rubyfruit Jungle*. New York: Bantam Books, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Shape of Things to Come." In *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement*, edited by Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch, 69-77. Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Women Who Love Men Hate Them: Male Supremacy versus Sexism." *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1, no. 7 (Fall 1972): 14-15.
- Broyard, Anatole. "Norman Writes a Dithyramb." *New York Times*, May 27, 1971.
- Bryant, Anita. "Lord, Teach Me to Submit." In *Reaction to the Modern Women's Movement, 1963 to the Present*, edited by Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant, 72-80. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997.
- Bunch, Charlotte. "Lesbians in Revolt: Male Supremacy Quakes and Quivers." *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1 (January 1972): 8-9.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Perseverance Furthers: Separatism and Our Future." *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* 1, no. 7 (Fall 1972): 3-5.
- Combahee River Collective. "A Black Feminist Statement." In *Modern American Women: A Documentary History*, edited by Susan Ware, 249-257. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002.

- Cordova, Jeanne. "Radical Feminism? Dyke Separatism?." In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Barbara A. Crow, 358-364. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Cronan, Sheila. "Marriage." In *Notes From the Third Year: Women's Liberation*, edited by Anne Koedt and Shulamith Firestone, 62-65. New York: Notes From the Third Year, 1971.
- Decter, Midge. "The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Feminism." In *Reaction to the Modern Women's Movement, 1963 to the Present*, edited by Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant, 151-160. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997.
- Densmore, Dana. "Chivalry--The Iron Hand in the Velvet Glove." *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 3 (November 1969): 60-67.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Independence from the Sexual Revolution." In *Notes From the Third Year: Women's Liberation*, edited by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, 56-61. New York: Notes From the Third Year, 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "On Celibacy." *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 1 (December 1968).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Who is Saying Men are the Enemy?." *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 4 (April 1970): 4-8.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Why I Am Celibate: Conversation with Indra Allen." *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 6 (May 1973): 39-46.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "With You and Within You." *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 4 (April 1970): 45-57.
- Dixon, Marlene. "Why Women's Liberation?." In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Barbara A. Crow, 71-81. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Dunbar, Roxanne. "Asexuality." *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 1 (December 1968).
- Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne. *Outlaw Woman: A Memoir of the War Years, 1960-1975*. San Francisco : City Lights, 2001.
- Farrell, Warren. *The Liberated Man: Beyond Masculinity: Freeing Men and Their Relationships with Women*. New York: Random House, 1974.

- Firestone, Shulamith. *Airless Spaces*. New York: Semiotext(e), 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Love." In *Notes from the Second Year Women's Liberation: Major Writings of Radical Feminists*, edited by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, 16-22 and 25-27. New York: Radical Feminism, 1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Women's Rights Movement in the U.S.: A New View." In *Notes From the First Year*, edited by New York Radical Women. New York: The New York Radical Women, 1968. <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Women and the Radical Movement." In *Notes From the First Year*, edited by New York Radical Women. New York: New York Radical Women, 1968. <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/>.
- Firestone, Shulamith, and Anne Koedt, eds. *Notes from the Second Year Women's Liberation: Major Writings of Radical Feminists*. New York: Radical Feminism, 1970.
- Firestone, Shulamith, and Anne Koedt, eds. *Notes From the Third Year: Women's Liberation*. New York: Notes From the Third Year, 1971.
- French, Marilyn. *The Women's Room: A Novel*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993.
- Friedan, Betty. *"It Changed My Life": Writings on the Women's Movement*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Dialogue with Simone de Beauvoir." In *It Changed My Life: Writings On the Women's Movement*, 391-412. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "An Open Letter to True Men." In *It Changed My Life: Writings On the Women's Movement*, 429-439. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Life So Far*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Second Stage*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Up From the Kitchen Floor." *New York Times Magazine*, March 4, 1973.

Gornick, Vivian. "Consciousness." In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Barbara A. Crow, 287-300. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Lesbians & Women's Lib: 'In Any Terms She Shall Choose'." *Village Voice*, March 18, 1971.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Women's Liberation Movement!." *Cosmopolitan*, April 1970.

Hanisch, Carol. "The Personal is Political." In *Notes from the Second Year Women's Liberation: Major Writings of Radical Feminists*, edited by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, 76-78. New York: Radical Feminism, 1970.

Hanisch, Carol, and Elizabeth Sutherland. "Women of the World Unite -- We Have Nothing to Lost But Our Men!." In *Notes From the First Year*, edited by New York Radical Women. New York: New York Radical Women, 1968.  
<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/>.

Harrison, Barbara Grizzuti. "Is Romance Dead?." *Ms.*, July 1974.

Henderson, Elandria V. "The Black Lesbian." In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Barbara A. Crow. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

Hobbs, Lisa. *Love and Liberation: [Up Front with the Feminists]*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book and Company, 1970.

hooks, bell. *All About Love: New Visions*. New York : William Morrow, 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Communion: The Female Search for Love*. New York : W. Morrow, 2002.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: South End Press, 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Salvation: Black People and Love*. New York: William Morrow, 2001.

"Is There Love After Liberation?." *Ms.*, February 1979.

Jay, Karla. *Tales of the Lavender Menace: A Memoir of Liberation*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

Jenkins, Julie. "Have You Ever Asked a Black Lesbian to Dance?." In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Barbara A. Crow, 367-368. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

- Johnston, Jill. *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Comingest Womanifesto." In *Amazon Expedition: A Lesbian Feminist Anthology*, edited by Phyllis Birkby, Bertha Harris, Jill Johnston, Esther Newton, and Jane O'Wyatt, 89-93. Washington, NJ: Times Change Press, 1973.
- Jones, Beverly, and Judith Brown. "Toward a Female Liberation Movement." In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Barbara A. Crow, 17-57. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Jong, Erica. "Erica Jong on Erica Jong." *Cosmopolitan*, May 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Fear of Flying*. New York: American Library, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *How to Save Your Own Life*. Reprint. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Love Comes First: A Collection of Poems*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Parachutes and Kisses*. Reprint. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Seducing the Demon: Writing for My Life*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2006.
- Kearon, Pamela. "Man-Hating." In *Notes from the Second Year Women's Liberation: Major Writings of Radical Feminists*, edited by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, 83-86. New York: Radical Feminism, 1970.
- Klein, Carol. "On Being Female." *Cosmopolitan*, February 1971.
- Koedt, Anne. "Lesbianism and Feminism." In *Notes From the Third Year: Women's Liberation*, edited by Anne Koedt and Shulamith Firestone, 84-89. New York: Notes From the Third Year, 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Loving Another Woman." In *Notes From the Third Year: Women's Liberation*, edited by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, 25-30. New York: Notes From the Third Year, 1971.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Politics of the Ego: A Manifesto for N.Y. Radical Feminists." In *Notes from the Second Year Women's Liberation: Major Writings of Radical Feminists*, edited by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, 124-126. New York: Radical Feminism, 1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm." In *Notes From the First Year*, edited by New York Radical Women. New York: New York Radical Women, 1968.  
<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/> .
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Women and the Radical Movement." In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Barbara A. Crow, 64-66. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Leghorn, Lisa. "Excerpts from a Personal Journal II." *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 5 (July 1971): 120-126.
- Leon, Barbara. "The Male Supremacist Attack on Monogamy." In *Feminist Revolution*, edited by Redstockings, 128-129. New York: Redstockings, Inc., 1975.
- Lorde, Audre. *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde*. Edited by Rudolph P Byrd, Johnnetta B Cole, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007.
- Mailer, Norman. *The Prisoner of Sex*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971.
- Martin, Courtney E. "Why Love Is Our Most Powerful, Lasting Form of Activism." *AlterNet*, February 14, 2007.
- Millett, Kate. *Flying*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Sexual Politics*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Sita*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Morgan, Marabel. *The Total Woman*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1973.
- Morgan, Robin, ed. *Sisterhood is Forever: The Women's Anthology for a New Millennium*. New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 2003.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*. New York: Vintage Books, 1970.
- Myron, Nancy, and Charlotte Bunch, eds. *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement*. Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975.
- Nehring, Cristina. *A Vindication of Love: Reclaiming Romance for the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Harper, 2009.
- New York Radical Women, ed. *Notes from the First Year*. New York: New York Radical Women, 1968. <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/>.
- New York Radical Women, ed. "Women Rap About Sex." In *Notes From the First Year*. New York: New York Radical Women, 1968. <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/>.
- O'Connor, Lynn. "Male Supremacy." In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, 171-182. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- O'Donnell, Ellen. "Thoughts on Celibacy." *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation*, no. 1 (December 1968).
- Piercy, Marge. *Small Changes*. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1972.
- "Purr, Baby, Purr." *Newsweek*, September 21, 1970.
- Radicalesbians. "The Woman-Identified Woman." In *Notes From the Third Year: Women's Liberation*, edited by Anne Koedt and Shulamith Firestone, 81-84. New York: Notes From the Third Year, 1971.
- Redstockings, ed. "Letter to a Lover When She Left Him." In *Feminist Revolution*, 125-127. New York: Redstockings, Inc., 1975.
- Redstockings. "Redstockings Manifesto." In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Barbara A. Crow, 223-225. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement. *Feminist Revolution: An Abridged Edition with Additional Writings*. New York: Random House, 1978.
- Reid, Coletta. "Coming Out in the Women's Movement." In *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement*, edited by Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch, 91-103. Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975.

- Rollin, Betty. "Backlash Against Women's Lib! 'They're All a Bunch of Frustrated Hags'." *Look*, March 9, 1971.
- Rush, Florence. "The Parable of the Mothers and Daughters." In *Amazon Expedition: A Lesbian Feminist Anthology*, edited by Phyllis Birkby, Bertha Harris, Jill Johnston, Esther Newton, and Jane O'Wyatt, 4-10. Washington, NJ: Times Change Press, 1973.
- Sakol, Jeannie. "The Pussycat League." *McCall's*, February 1970.
- Sarachild, Kathie. "A Program for Feminist 'Consciousness Raising'." In *Notes from the Second Year Women's Liberation: Major Writings of Radical Feminists*, edited by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, 78-80. New York: Radical Feminism, 1970.
- Schlafly, Phyllis. *The Power of the Positive Woman*. New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1977.
- Selig, Elaine Booth, Sandy Boucher, and Ziva Kwitney. "Living Without Them." *Ms.*, October 1975.
- Shelley, Martha. "Lesbianism and the Women's Liberation Movement." In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Barbara A. Crow, 305-309. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Shulman, Alix Kates. *Burning Questions*. New York: Thunder Mouth Press, 1990.
- Sloan, Margaret. "Black and Blacklesbian." In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Barbara A. Crow, 327. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Small, Margaret. "Lesbians and the Class Position of Women." In *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement*, edited by Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch, 49-61. Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975.
- Solanas, Valerie. "SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) Manifesto." In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Barbara A. Crow, 201-222. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Steinem, Gloria. "I Was a Playboy Bunny." In *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, 32-75. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Henry Holt and Company.



\_\_\_\_\_. *Revolution From Within: A Book of Self-Esteem*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992.

Swift, Cynthia. "Two Feminine Feminists." *Cosmopolitan*, November 1971.

The Feminists. "The Feminists: A Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles." In *Notes from the Second Year Women's Liberation: Major Writings of Radical Feminists*, edited by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, 114-118. New York: Radical Feminism, 1970.

"The Liberation of Kate Millett." *Time*, August 31, 1970.

Ulmschneider, Loretta. "Bisexuality." *The Furies* 2, no. 2 (April 1973): 2.

"Unsung Heroes." *Ms.*, October 1975.

Ware, Cellestine. "The Relationship of Black Women to the Women's Liberation Movement." In *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Barbara A. Crow, 98-112. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

"Women's Lib: A Second Look." *Time*, December 14, 1970.

## **Secondary Sources**

### Articles and Books

Acocella, Joan. "The Girls Next Door: Life in the Centerfold." *New Yorker*, March 20, 2006.

Allyn, David. *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution, An Unfettered History*. Boston: Little, Brown, 2000.

Anderson, Terry H. *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America From Greensboro to Wounded Knee*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Appignanesi, Lisa. *Simone De Beauvoir*. London: Haus Publishing, 2005.

Bailey, Beth. *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Sex in the Heartland*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "She 'Can Bring Home the Bacon'." In *America in the Seventies*, edited by Beth Bailey and David Farber, 107-128. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004.
- Bailey, Beth, and David Farber, eds. *America in the Seventies*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004.
- Bair, Deirdre. *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991.
- Baumgardner, Jennifer, and Amy Richards. *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*. New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.
- Baxandall, Rosalyn, and Linda Gordon, eds. *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement*. New York: Basic Books, 2000.
- Baxandall, Rosalyn, and Linda Gordon. "Second-Wave Feminism." In *A Companion to American Women's History*, edited by Nancy A. Hewitt, 414-432. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002.
- Beggan, James K., and Scott T. Allison. "Viva Viva? Women's Meanings Associated With Male Nudity in a 1970s "For Women" Magazine." *Journal of Sex Research* 46, no. 5 (October 2009): 446-459.
- Bloom, Alexander, ed. *Long Time Gone: Sixties America Then and Now*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Bogle, Kathleen A. *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus*. New York: New York University Press, 2008.
- Bradley, Patricia. *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003.
- Breines, Wini. *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Brier, Jennifer. *Infectious Ideas: U.S. Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Brown, Rita Mae. "Rita Mae Brown: A Rebel With Plenty of Cause." *EDGE*, April 23, 2009.

- Brownmiller, Susan. *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution*. New York: Delta Trade paperbacks, 1999.
- Carroll, Peter N. *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: America in the 1970's*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990.
- Chafe, William H. *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.
- Cohen, Marcia. *The Sisterhood: The Inside Story of the Women's Movement and the Leaders Who Made It Happen*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1988.
- Collins, Gail. *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Coontz, Stephanie. *Marriage, A History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage*. New York: Viking, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: Basic Books, 1992.
- Cott, Nancy. *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987.
- Cranny-Francis, Anne. *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- Critchlow, Donald T. *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

- Crow, Barbara A., ed. *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- D'Emilio, John D. "Placing Gay in the Sixties." In *Long Time Gone: Sixties America Then and Now*, edited by Alexander Bloom, 209-229. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- D'Emilio, John D., and Estelle B. Freedman. *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.
- Davis, Flora. *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America Since 1960*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991.
- Davis, Rebecca. "Not Marriage At All, But Simple Harlotry': The Companionate Marriage Controversy." *Journal of American History* 94, no. 4 (March 2008): 1137-1163.
- Delegard, Kirsten. "Women's Movements, 1880-1920s." In *A Companion to American Women's History*, edited by Nancy A. Hewitt. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002.
- Deslippe, Dennis A. *'Rights, not Roses': Unions and the Rise of Working-Class Feminism, 1945-1980*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Douglas, Carol Anne. *Love and Politics: Radical Feminist and Lesbian Theories*. San Francisco: ism press, inc., 1990.
- Douglas, Susan J. *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*. New York: Times Books, 1994.
- DuBois, Ellen. *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Feminism and Free Love." *H-Women* (April 19, 2001).
- Echols, Alice. *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight From Commitment*. New York: Anchor Press, 1983.

- Ehrenreich, Barbara, Elizabeth Hess, and Gloria Jacobs. *Re-Making Love: The Feminization of Sex*. New York: Anchor Books, 1986.
- Enke, Anne. *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Escoffier, Jeffrey, ed. *Sexual Revolution*. New York: Distributed by Publishers Group West,, 2003.
- Eustace, Nicole. "The Cornerstone of a Copious Work': Love and Power in Eighteenth-Century Courtship." *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 517-546.
- Evans, Sara M. *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left*. Reprint. New York: Vintage Books, 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "American Women in the Twentieth Century." In *Perspectives on Modern America: Making Sense of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Harvard Sitkoff, 162-176. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Beyond Declension: Feminist Radicalism in the 1970s and 1980s." In *The World the Sixties Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America*, edited by Van Gosse. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Sources of the Second Wave: The Rebirth of Feminism." In *Long Time Gone: Sixties America Then and Now*, edited by Alexander Bloom, 189-208. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End*. New York: Free Press, 2003.
- Ezekiel, Judith. *Feminism in the Heartland*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002.
- Faderman, Lillian. *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1981.
- Faludi, Susan. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. New York: Anchor Books, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Stuffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*. New York: Perennial, 1999.

- Farber, David. *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1994.
- Farrell, Amy Erdman. *Yours in Sisterhood: Ms. Magazine and the Promise of Popular Feminism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Ferree, Myra Marx, and Beth B. Hess. *Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement Across Three Decades of Change*. Revised. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994.
- Filene, Peter G. *Him/Her/Self: Gender Identities in Modern America*. 3rd ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
- Flannery, Kathryn Thoms. *Feminist Literacies, 1968-1975*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005.
- Flexner, Eleanor, and Ellen F. Fitzpatrick. *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Forster, Penny, and Imogen Sutton, eds. *Daughters of de Beauvoir*. London: The Women's Press, 1989.
- Foster, Lawrence. "Free Love and Feminism: John Humphrey Noyes and the Oneida Community." *Journal of the Early Republic* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 165-183.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- Fowler, Bridge. *The Alienated Reader: Women and Popular Romantic Literature in the Twentieth Century*. Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.
- Fox, Margalit. "Betty Friedan, Who Ignited Cause in 'Feminine Mystique,' Dies at 85." *The New York Times*, February 5, 2006, sec. National.
- Fox, Richard Wightman. *Trials of Intimacy: Love and Loss in the Beecher-Tilton Scandal*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Fraterrigo, Elizabeth. *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Freedman, Estelle B. *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2002.

- Freeman, Jo. *The Politics of Women's Liberation: A Case Study of an Emerging Social Movement and Its Relation to the Policy Process*. New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1975.
- Fullbrook, Edward, and Kate Fullbrook. *Sex and Philosophy: Rethinking de Beauvoir and Sartre*. New York: Continuum, 2008.
- Gerhard, Jane. *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- Gilligan, Carol. *The Birth of Pleasure*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002.
- Gilmore, Stephanie. "The Dynamics of Second-Wave Feminist Activism in Memphis, 1971-1982: Rethinking the Liberal/Radical Divide." *NWSA Journal* 15 (Spring 2003): 94-117.
- Gitlin, Todd. *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. Revised. New York: Bantam Books, 1993.
- Gosse, Van. "A Movement of Movements: The Definition and Periodization of the New Left." In *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, edited by Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig, 277-302. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.
- Gould, Deborah B. (Deborah Bejosa). *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- Gradowski, Katie. "Fear of Flying: Can a Feminist Classic be a Classic?" *Feminist News* 26 (August 2008): 4-5.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Feminist Legacies of Columbia '68." *Feminist News* 26 (August 2008): 2 and 12-13.
- Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. "Disorderly Women: Gender and Labor Militancy in the Appalachian South." *Journal of American History* 73 (September 1986): 354-382.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past." *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Women Writers, the 'Southern Front,' and the Dialectical Imagination." *Journal of Southern History* (February 2003): 3-38.
- Hartmann, Susan. *From Margin to Mainstream: American Women and Politics Since 1960*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989.
- Harvey, Brett. *The Fifties: A Women's Oral History*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993.
- Heilbrun, Carolyn G. *The Education of a Woman: The Life of Gloria Steinem*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Writing a Woman's Life*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2002.
- Hennessee, Judith. *Betty Friedan: Her Life*. New York: Random House, 1999.
- Hewitt, Nancy A. *A Companion to American Women's History*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Women's Activism and Social Change*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. New York: Viking, 1989.
- Hoffert, Sylvia D. *When Hens Crow: The Woman's Rights Movement in Antebellum America*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Hogeland, Lisa Maria. *Feminism and Its Fictions: The Consciousness-Raising Novel and the Women's Liberation Movement*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Sexuality in the Consciousness-Raising Novel of the 1970s." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 4 (April 1995): 601-632.
- Hollows, Joanne. *Feminism, Femininity, and Popular Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.
- Horowitz, Daniel. *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000.



- \_\_\_\_\_. "Betty Friedan and the Origins of Feminism in Cold War America." In *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*. 6<sup>th</sup> edition. 481-495. Edited by Linda Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Horowitz, Helen Lefkowitz. *Rereading Sex: Battles Over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2002.
- Howard, Angela, and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant, eds. *Reaction to the Modern Women's Movement*. Antifeminism in America: A Collection of Readings from the Literature of the Opponents to U.S. Feminism, 1848 to the Present. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997.
- Jackson, Stevi. "Love and Romance as Objects of Feminist Knowledge." In *Making Connections: Women's Studies, Women's Movements, Women's Lives*, edited by Mary Kennedy, Cathy Lubelska, and Val Walsh, 39-50. London: Taylor & Francis, 1993.
- Jellison, Katherine. *It's Our Day: America's Love Affair with the White Wedding, 1945-2005*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008.
- Kissack, Terence. "Freaking Fag Revolutionaries: New York's Gay Liberation Front." *Radical History Review* 62 (1995): 104-134.
- Lantz, Herman R. "Romantic Love in the Pre-Modern Period: A Sociological Commentary." *Journal of Social History* 15, no. 3: 349-370.
- Leach, William. *True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society*. New York: Basic Books, 1980.
- Lerner, Gerda. *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Levine, Judith. *My Enemy, My Love: Man-Hating and Ambivalence in Women's Lives*. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- Linden-Ward, Blanche, and Carol Hurd Green. *American Women in the 1960s: Changing the Future*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993.
- Loudermilk, Kim A. *Fictional Feminism: How American Bestsellers Affect the Movement for Women's Equality*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Lystra, Karen. *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

- Mack-Canty, Colleen. "Third-Wave Feminism and the Need to Reweave the Nature/Culture Duality." *NWSA Journal* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 2004): 154-179.
- MacLean, Nancy. "Gender is Powerful: The Long Reach of Feminism." *OAH Magazine of History* (October 2006).
- Madsen, Axel. *Hearts and Minds: The Common Journey of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre*. New York: Morrow, 1977.
- Matthews, Jean V. *Women's Struggle for Equality: The First Phase, 1828-1876*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997.
- May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. Revised. New York: Basic Books, 1999.
- McCall, Dorothy Kaufmann. "Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, and Jean-Paul Sartre." *Signs* 5: 209-223.
- McCracken, Ellen. *Decoding Women's Magazines: From Mademoiselle to Ms*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- Meyerowitz, Joanne, ed. *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.
- Meyerowitz, Joanne. "Rewriting Postwar Women's History, 1945-1960." In *A Companion to American Women's History*, edited by Nancy A. Hewitt, 382-396. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002.
- Millett, Kate. In *Daughters of de Beauvoir*, edited by Penny Forster and Imogen Sutton, 17-32. London: The Women's Press, 1989.
- Million, Joelle. *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place: Lucy Stone and the Birth of the Woman's Rights Movement*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003.
- Modleski, Tania. *Loving With a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Moi, Toril. *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Morgan, Kathryn Pauly. "Romantic Love, Altruism, and Self-Respect: An Analysis of Simone de Beauvoir." *Hypatia* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1986).

- Muchnick, Laurie. "Emissions and Emotions: Women's Blockbusters Speak Volumes." *Voice Literary Supplement*, October 1993.
- Passet, Joanne Ellen. *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality*. Urbana : University of Illinois Press,, 2003.
- Peiss, Kathy Lee. *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920*. Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 1985.
- Pitzulo, Carrie. "The Battle in Every Man's Bed: "Playboy" and the Fiery Feminists." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17, no. 2 (May 2008): 259-289.
- Radway, Janice A. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.
- Reger, Jo, ed. *Different Wavelengths: Studies of the Contemporary Women's Movement*. New York : Routledge, 2005.
- Roller, Judi M. *The Politics of the Feminist Novel*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.
- Rosen, Ruth. *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*. New York: Penguin Books, 2001.
- Roth, Benita. *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Rothman, Ellen K. *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984.
- Rougemont, Denis de. *Love in the Western World*. Translated by Montgomery Belgion. Revised and Augmented. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Rowley, Hazel. *Tête-à-tête: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre*. New York: Harper Collins, 2005.
- Ryan, Mary P. *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Scanlon, Jennifer. *Bad Girls Go Everywhere: The Life of Helen Gurley Brown*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

- Schneir, Miriam, ed. *The Vintage Book of Feminism: The Essential Writings of the Contemporary Women's Movement*. New York: Vintage, 1994.
- Schulman, Bruce J. *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*. New York: Da Capo Press, 2002.
- Schulman, Bruce J., and Julian E. Zelizer, eds. *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Sears, Hal D. *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America*. Lawrence : Regents Press of Kansas, 1977.
- Seidman, Steven. *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830-1980*. New York : Routledge, 1991.
- Siegel, Carol. *New Millennial Sexstyles*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Siegel, Deborah. *Sisterhood, Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrls Gone Wild*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Singer, Irving. *Philosophy of Love: A Partial Summing-Up*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Nature of Love: Courty and Romantic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Nature of Love: Plato to Luther*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Nature of Love: The Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America." *Signs* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 1-29.
- Snitow, Ann, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds. *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983.
- Spruill, Marjorie J. "Gender and America's Right Turn." In *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, 71-89. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

- Spurlock, John C., and Cynthia A. Magistro. *New and Improved: The Transformation of American Women's Emotional Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Stansell, Christine. *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Woman in Nineteenth-Century America." *Gender and History* 11, no. 3 (November 1999): 419-432.
- Stern, Sydney Ladensohn. *Gloria Steinem: Her Passions, Politics, and Mystique*. Secaucus, N.J.: Carol Publishing Group, 1997.
- Templin, Charlotte. "Mass Culture, Gender, and Cultural Authority: The Reception of Erica Jong's *How to Save Your Own Life*." *The Centennial Review* 38, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 95-110.
- Thom, Mary. *Inside Ms.: 25 Years of the Magazine and the Feminist Movement*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997.
- Thom, Mary, ed. *Letters to Ms., 1972-1987*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1987.
- Trimberger, Ellen Kay, ed. *Intimate Warriors: Portraits of a Modern Marriage, 1899-1944*. New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1991.
- Vicinus, Martha. *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Wagoner, Robert E. *The Meaning of Love: An Introduction to Philosophy of Love*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997.
- Walker, Nancy A., ed. *Women's Magazines, 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998.
- Wandersee, Winifred D. *On the Move: American Women in the 1970s*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988.
- Whelehan, Imelda. *The Feminist Bestseller: From Sex and the Single Girl to Sex and the City*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.
- White, Deborah Gray. *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998.

Willis, Ellen. "Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism." In *No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays*, 117-150. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press.

Zimmerman, Bonnie. *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction, 1969-1989*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990.

Zuckerman, Mary Ellen. *A History of Popular Women's Magazines in the United States, 1792-1995*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998.

### Demographic Studies

Bramlett MD and Mosher WD. Cohabitation, Divorce, and Remarriage in the United States. National Center for Health Statistics. Vital Health Stat 23(22). 2002.

CAWP Election Watch. "Record Number of Women to Serve in Senate and House." Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, November 10, 2008.

DPE Research Department. "Fact Sheet 2006: Professional Women: Vital Statistics." Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO, 2006.

Kreider, Rose M., 2005. *Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces: 2001*. Current Population Reports, P70-97. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, P23-180, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the 1900's, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1992.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 297 "Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces in the United States: June 1975." U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1976.

U.S. Census Bureau. "Facts for Features: Women's History Month: March 2009." U.S. Census Bureau News, U.S. Department of Commerce, January 5, 2009.

### Internet Sources

"About Dana Densmore and William H. Donahue," December 17, 2005.  
<http://www.greenlion.com/dd-whd/html>.

"About Erica Jong." *Erica Jong: Bestselling Author of Fear of Flying and Seducing the Demon*. <http://www.ericajong.com/aboutERICA.htm>.

"About Rita Mae." *Rita Mae Brown*. <http://www.ritamaebrown.com/content/about.asp>.

- “About Roxanne.” *Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz: Feminist, Revolutionary, Historian*.  
<http://www.reddirtsite.com/about.htm>.
- “An Art Colony for Women: Millett Farm.” <http://www.katemillett.com/>.
- “Biographical Note.” *Inventory of the Kate Millett Papers, 1912-2002 and undated, bulk 1951-2001; Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University*. <http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/rbmscl/millett/inv/>.
- “Erica Jong's Papers Acquired by Columbia University's Rare Book Manuscript Library.” *Columbia University Libraries News Information* (June 15, 2007).  
[http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/news/libraries/2007/2007-06-15.rbml\\_jong.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/news/libraries/2007/2007-06-15.rbml_jong.html).
- Foster, Steven. “Rita Mae Goes to the Dogs.” *OutSmartMagazine.com*, November 2009.
- Hodgdon, Tim. “The Chicago Women's Liberation Union: On the Cutting Edge of Protest Against Sexual Objectification.” *The CWLU Herstory Website* (2000).  
[www.cwluherstory.org/CWLUAbout/abdoc5.html](http://www.cwluherstory.org/CWLUAbout/abdoc5.html).
- “Marabel Morgan.” In *Ohio History Central: An Online Encyclopedia of Ohio History*.  
<http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/entry.php?rec=1767>.
- “March People Notes.” *Tufts Journal*, March 2003. <http://tuftsjournal.tufts.edu/archive/2003/march/people/notes.shtml>.
- Martin, Michael. “Heroes: Viva Magazine.” *V Magazine*, c 2006. [http://www.vmagazine.com/feature\\_article.php?n=128](http://www.vmagazine.com/feature_article.php?n=128).
- “Shulamith Firestone.” In *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. <http://www.notablebiographies.com/supp/Supplement-Ca-Fi/Firestone-Shulamith.html>.
- The New Agenda. “Top 30 Sites in the Feminist Blogosphere.” *The New Agenda: A Voice for All Women*, February 3, 2009. <http://thenewagenda.net/2009/02/03/top-30-sites-in-the-feminist-blogosphere/>.

### Presentations

- Bederman, Gail, Patricia Cline Cohen, and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz. “Misbehaving Women: Sex Radicals and Nonconformists Who Made U.S. History” presented at the 2010 Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, San Diego, January 7, 2010.

Kesselman, Amy. "Coming Out, Coming In, and 'Be-Coming': Lesbians and the Women's Liberation Movement in New Haven, Connecticut" presented at the 2010 Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, San Diego, January 10, 2010.