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# Origyns: Reclaiming our feminist voices

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MRS. BERNARR MACFADDEN

109

THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE

By Betty Friedan

I23456789012 JAN 12 223 FW132

*How To Raise  
Healthy Children*

*At What Age  
Should A Modern  
Girl Marry ?*

ORIGYNS 2009



## o r i g y n s

Publication Team

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*origyns* is a publication for the voices of feminists—undergraduates, graduate students, alumnae, faculty, staff, and professors emeriti. Originally published in commemoration of Thirty Years of Women at Lehigh University (1971-2001), *origyns* now appears annually.

*origyns* is a collection of original artwork, essays, poetry, articles, and short stories that explore gender and feminism. Some pieces were created specifically for this publication, others for class or personal expression.

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Front cover artwork: "Speechless" by Emily F. Becker

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## Reflections on the Allentown Women's Center

You know those minutes, hours, or days that you never really forget? The ones that may be pushed to the back of your memory for some time, but always find a way to resurface in one way or another. And when they do resurface, they are just as vivid as ever. No details missing, and the memory becomes something so palpable, so tangible, that it feels as if you had never pushed it to the recesses of your mind. Why do those things stick with us? What do they mean? How do they shape us as we continue to live and grow in this dynamic society?

From my personal collection of unforgettable moments, I share the instance of the snowy morning of February 9, 2008. Certainly, dates do not truly matter when it comes to such memories – however, I know that this was the morning of the second Saturday of February. The second Saturday of each month is the date of increased protests at the Allentown Women's Center (AWC). In the Allentown women's health community, it is common knowledge that this is the day that a large church group comes to pray, in addition to the "regulars" at anti-abortion protests.

Perhaps my experience that morning is best described as sensory overload, on all accounts, as my classmates, Dr. Hicks, and I departed from Campus Square. On my way out the door, I made the mistake of eating a handful of Doritos from the crinkly blue bag my roommate had left on the coffee table the night before. Post-brushed teeth and Cool Ranch Doritos – not a good combination. The flavors of Crest and chips, mixed with my naive uncertainty, lingered as we made our way amidst snowflakes to the AWC. I honestly had no idea what to expect at the abortion clinic, as I had never witnessed such protests before. This was the first time that I would go to observe the protests and the interactions between patients, escorts, and protestors, and I soon found myself experiencing, rather than just observing.

Of course, I cannot even begin to imagine the struggle that the women who attend the clinic face; nor can I express how much I admire their strength. But in assuming that we would be sitting in a car, watching the situation unfold, I found

myself surprised to have the opportunity to interact with the escorts and the protestors. The environment was undeniably hostile, but in a different way than I had imagined. The protestors were relentless, verbally and emotionally attacking any woman who entered through the doors of the AWC. The attacks were personal and directed, rather than simple signs or chants that often make anti-abortion views known. After just minutes of observation, I could tell that these protestors were experienced and knew what to say to hurt women the most. I'd even consider them professional abusers as they analyzed each woman as she approached, quickly leafed through their extensive mental repertoire of abuse phrases, and expertly selected the appropriate one. For instance, depending upon the physical characteristics of a patient, one of the protesters might make an anti-abortion comment with a racial implication. To me, the thing that stood out the most about the protesters was their general lack of respect. There is a difference between freedom of speech and blatant verbal attacks.

The protesters were both active and passive. They were men and women of varying ages. However, the most aggressive protesters were older white men, which I found very interesting. There was a memorable elderly woman who told me that she only had one pamphlet and thus she couldn't give it to me. And in addition to these older protesters, there were also two teenage girls who appeared to be out of place. They were holding disturbing signs, yet were definitely not as passionate as some of the other protesters. In speaking with some of the escorts, I learned that these teenage girls were not "regulars," and it was speculated that they were there "to make someone else happy." In my attempt to tune out the repetitive "baby killers!" remarks, I found myself staring at the white McDonald's bag that one of the security guards was holding. Medium coffee in one hand and paper bag in the other, I watched as his Egg McMuffin formed a grease spot on the pure, white bag. It seeped slowly, the diameter of the spot increasing as the guard sipped his coffee - and I couldn't help but think of the greasy, disrespectful protesters' comments seeping against the well-intentioned nature of the AWC.

Stale smoke; Egg McMuffin; exhaust; coffee; and bitter cold: the combination of scents filled my nostrils with each brisk

breath in, and through each cloudy exhalation, I read the protest signs again and again. There was repetition and rhythm to the comments; the protesters' retorts to any challenge were always the same. Single-minded. One-way thinking. There was no apparent ability to process the individuality of each patient or situation – rather, all these women fell into the “baby killer” category. One right answer and one wrong answer. Black and white.

But there was some gray. The ground on which we stood was gray. There was an in-between. There was choice.

It was a world of parking lot asphalt dotted with fluorescent yellow and orange vests. The bright dots against the cracked, gray cement were beacons of comfort and of hope. These were the AWC volunteer escorts. The escorts ranged in age and experience just as their protesting counterparts. There were middle-aged women and men as well as young women and men. I found it interesting that there were more male escorts than female escorts on that particular Saturday. Likewise, there were more male protesters than female protesters. There was a strange relationship between the protesters and the escorts, and justifiably so, as they spend significant hours together each week. I admire the tirelessness of the escorts in dealing with the protesters week after week. The escorts are all motivated by different, personal reasons, and they each have their own unique story. Just as each escort has his or her personal motivation for volunteering, each patient who attends the AWC has her own story. These patients' right to choice is upheld by the brave, committed escorts.

The flurries had picked up by 8:30am, and the parking lot was a full of whirling flakes. Sporadic gusts of wind shot through my body, and the cardboard protest signs began to get soggy and flimsy. I watched the snow fall onto the patients, protesters, and escorts alike, decorating their eyelashes with intricate flakes. Each snowflake that falls is so unique. Each flake tells its own story, just like each woman. Suddenly, I realized that the strength and power of the Allentown Women's Center truly lies in the unity of the escorts and a commitment to choice. After all, as Vesta M. Kelly said, “Snowflakes are one of nature's most fragile things, but just look at what they can do when they stick together.”



Libby Kabachia

Muslim Women: A Collection of Poems

As I Lay Me Down to Sleep

Twenty-two years of war,  
Women raped, then stoned,  
Forced marriages,  
Mothers forced into prostitution.

As I lay me down to sleep, I think back on all my eyes have seen.

Schools bombed,  
The Mujahideen whipping women for not submitting to their will,  
Women denied education,  
America supporting these perpetrators destroying a nation.  
As I lay me down to sleep, I think back on all my eyes have seen.

The Taliban overthrowing the Mujahideen,  
Constant terror,  
People going insane from all the chaos,  
Ceaseless misery.

As I lay me down to sleep, I think back on all this, and I wonder:  
When will it end?

## **In the Name of Allah**

When I was nine, I was cut.  
I was cut and sewn.  
I was sewn to ensure my fidelity.  
In the name of Allah, she said.

A year ago, I was late coming home.  
My husband was angry.  
I was whipped.  
In the name of Allah, he said.

Last month, my sister was executed.  
Executed for her crime.  
She had been raped.  
In the name of Allah, they screamed.

Today, I escape.  
I break away from my prison.  
I flee to a new place. A place where there is freedom.  
Today, I am free.  
In the name of Allah, I cry.

الله أكبر

## Can You Hear Them?

Shhhh, can you hear that?

Be silent and listen.

It is the cry of persecuted millions.

Can you hear it?

They are victims of their cultures and their men.

They are women who don't know their rights as human beings,

Women who are treated like property.

Be still and listen.

They are forced to cover themselves.

They cannot work.

Their daughters are mutilated.

We need to save them.

Night and day, they are persecuted.

Women are whipped by their husbands. Little girls married off to old men.

We can't just sit back and watch them suffer.

We need to help these poor women.

Listen. Hear their cry, and help them.

## Women of Allah

Because we live in the so-called "Third World," you look down on us.

Because some of our men persecute us, you sympathize.

Because we cover, you pity us.

Because we are Muslim, we are despised.

Riding in on your white horses.

Declaring freedom for us.

But, may we ask, freedom from what?

Freedom *to* what?

You come in, bomb our cities and kill our children.

All in the name of "saving the Muslim women."

If this is your idea of saving, we believe we would rather be in bondage.

Do not despise our faith. Do not mock the Prophet. Do not mock us.

And no matter what we go through, we will still keep the laws of the Prophet.

For Allah is just. He is merciful, and we will receive our reward.

And with our heads held high, we will continue in this holy struggle.

Do not underestimate our power, our ability to endure.

We are strong.

We are determined.

We will fight.

We will prevail.

For we are the Women of Allah.

## Nisa

The literal meaning of the Arabic term "nisa" is woman. An entire chapter of the Quran is dedicated solely to stating and establishing the role and rights of women in Islam. In my baby book, my father wrote a journal about why my parents chose this name for me. Every time I read his words, I feel a surge of pride—the pride that comes from being a woman.

My family's perception of women is, thankfully, vastly removed from that of the Bengali or Arabic culture. Growing up in a family of four strong and independent women has enabled me to find the fundamental flaws in my society's perception of women. Indeed, I grew up in a country characterized by male domination. In general, the man makes all the important family decisions, manages the finances, and dictates over the household. The woman, however, is the one who raises the offspring, tends to household chores, and often manages the agricultural responsibilities. Despite her contributions to society, she is viewed and treated as the inferior gender. In fact, a woman's place is essentially within the walls of her house, and if she succeeds in adhering to these social standards, she embodies "femininity."

The concept of femininity in Bangladesh encompasses certain characteristics. A woman has to fit a mold; if she is obedient, docile, delicate, and a good homemaker, then she is a possession to be proud of. A woman is the responsibility of her father, her brother, her husband, and eventually her son. She does not have the liberty to make her own decisions.

It is this myopic definition of femininity that my parents expect me to overcome. To this end, my parents decided to rebel against society's preconceived notions of the perfect woman; they equipped me and my sisters with all the resources necessary for us to reach our potentials. They bravely sent us to American universities, all the way to the other end of the world, alone, to pursue higher education. This was undoubtedly hard for them to do, virtually impossible for any traditional Bengali family to imagine. Nonetheless, my parents

have consistently made efforts to ingrain in me and my sisters the notion that women are special, strong, and independent. In fact, my father taught us karate as a form of self-defense beginning when I was four, so that we would be physically on par with any man.

Although my parents and I strongly support equal rights and opportunities for both genders, we choose a stance which may astound many feminists. We believe that women should be protected and cherished by men and society. Women deserve credit for creating life, for sustaining that life, for tending to their families, and for raising the generations of tomorrow. Women should have the freedom to make their own life decisions: to be educated, to have careers, aspirations, and dreams. Concurrently, women should be respected and appreciated, cherished and pampered. I am certain that no woman, given the rights and respect due to her, would mind preferential treatment. It seems that there is a general consensus among the women of the world that chivalry is a desirable quality in any gentleman. I, for one, am undeniably delighted when a man holds the door open for me or gives up his seat for me on a bus, especially when my hands are laden with shopping bags.

Another aspect of femininity relates to the role of women in Islam and Middle Eastern countries. Many people in the Western world associate the term "oppression" with women who cover their bodies, hair, and sometimes even faces. Although stories about subservience and repression, narrated by courageous writers like Malika Oufkir, are true accounts of the heart-wrenching tales of women's lives, this is not representative of the teachings of Islam or the overall Islamic culture. In reality, every culture has some facets that promote independence, making some women liberated, and others that enforce oppression, making some women subjugated. Therefore, it is ignorant and narrow-minded of people to assume that Middle Eastern women are always oppressed or dominated.

My view of femininity, then, is multifaceted. Although I strongly promote and stand for the empowerment of woman-kind, I also believe that women have the right to be cherished and loved. Through my life experiences, I have tried to break

free from the shackles of male domination and narrow-mindedness. I have strived to achieve all that my parents expect of me and more. In my opinion, the embodiment of femininity is represented by a woman who is educated and aware of her rights. She is emotionally and financially independent and strong, all the while being respected, nurtured, and appreciated.

## Chivalry is Napping

My mother does not know how to put air in a tire. When I first heard this, I had to stop and recall where I had learned, if not from her. It finally came to me that a girlfriend in college had taken me to the nearest Wawa, pulled out a tire gauge from her glove-box, and instructed me in the ways of pressure maintenance. For my birthday that semester, she bought me my own tire gauge, which has lasted through two vehicles since that first four-cylinder matchbox car.

This background is important because my mother is a highly independent woman, with an independence she retained despite being married for close to thirty years. I remember a weekend during our first few months back stateside (my father still safely sequestered in the desert), when in the course of forty-eight hours, she fixed a leaky faucet, built a cheap plywood armoire from Kmart, and taught her best girlfriend how to pump her own gas. They grew up in New Jersey where it is illegal for customers to pump their own. Her friend had made it to our home in the Poconos on fumes, unable to stop once she crossed the border because she had no idea how to fill her tank. My mother saw fit to remedy this.

I have inherited only a modicum of this grit, so I was amazed to discover that I possessed a learned skill that she did not. I even knew how to jump a dead car battery. My path towards enlightened independence seemed that much closer to journey's end. Thus, I felt nothing but confident nonchalance when, on a chilly early-November evening, I received a phone call from Katrina, one of my many female colleagues. She was in the office parking lot with her Explorer sitting useless in its space. Thanks to a similar situation that past summer, she knew that I carried jumper cables and that I knew how to use them. I gathered my coat and went to rescue her.

A fellow colleague and friend accompanied me out the door. She noted that I was leaving when it was still daylight, not my usual habit. "You're headed out early. You got a hot date?"

"Yeah, right. I'm headed out to jump Katrina."

"...."



"Her car. She left her lights on."

"Oh. Does she have cables?"

"Don't know, but I do."

"And you know what order they go on or whatever?"

"Yes. What, don't you have cables?"

"Yeah, but I don't know how to use them!"

"What if your car dies?"

"Then I call my boyfriend."

"That's ridiculous! If you have the cables, you should at least know how to use them. You can't expect him, or any other man for that matter, to come to your freaking rescue." (Here I pointedly ignored a smirk from a passing male undergrad.) "If I had to call AAA every time my battery died I would have a higher premium and even lower self-esteem."

"What does esteem have to do with it? I find it very nice that men enjoy coming to my aid. And I am happy to let them."

"Well, thanks very much for kicking feminism in its liposuctioned butt. If you'll excuse me, I have a fellow militant to rescue."

Katrina met me at my car. "There's a problem... I'm boxed in on both sides." I peered towards her car.

"Well, luckily you're parked by the street."

"What, are you planning to jump the curb?"

"Precisely."

Oh, the rush in overtaking not only the concrete curb, but rolling into position on the grass directly in front of the Explorer's popped hood. Within minutes, I had my hood open and three of the four cables attached. The fourth cable had us in a quandary. What, pray-tell, is an engine block?

"I thought you'd done this before."

"I have, but I always put it on the dead battery's negative post. However, as you've pointed out, the directions pointedly say not to. Now you have me paranoid."

We tried the negative post anyway, Katrina watching anxiously for sparks: no response. We tried another metal part of the engine, hoping it was the block, also to no avail. The engine didn't even sputter. At this point, our colleague Joan, returning from a meeting off-campus, pulled up to offer an opinion. Alas, she also did not know what the "engine block" entailed.

There we stood: the Gen-X'er, the Baby Boomer, and the

Greatest Generation Ever, huddled over the engine, a single cable in my hand, lost in our confusion. We were so intense in our scrutiny that we almost didn't hear the young man approaching until Katrina looked up and asked without hesitation, "Hey, do you know what an engine block is?"

"I do. Here." In one smooth motion, this knight in shining Armani set down his backpack, adjusted his wire-rimmed glasses, took the cable from my hand, and clipped it to the car's frame. I automatically looked for a wedding band, and just as quickly chided myself for checking. I covered this moment of weakness with incredulity.

"That's it?"

"Yeah, you're good to go."

"But, that's nowhere near the engine!"

"Well, no, you can attach it to any part of the metal frame. The directions don't always say that." And with those sage words, he scooped his bag up from the ground and continued toward the building, no doubt to a class, trailing our profuse thanks in his wake.

I still don't know where or what the engine block is. But the frame is large enough that I can surely find a part of it the next time this happens. And perhaps next time I won't be so quick to jump up on my soapbox, but will at least consider being helped up by a gentleman's outstretched hand.

### Circular Reasoning

"A book does not have a head and feet. It does not have a front door. It is written from all over at once, you enter it through a hundred windows. It enters you. A book is just about round. But since to appear it must adjust itself to a rectangular parallelepiped, at a certain moment you cut the sphere, you flatten it, you square it up. You give a plant the form of a tomb. The book has only to await resurrection. (Stigmata 145-6)"

But why wait any longer? Why not start the resurrection now? If words, conveyed with all possible force and passion, could raise Lazarus from the dead, why should they not raise the book, the text, the essay? Step by step, the essay must be returned to its shape. The call for "ROUNDNESS" critiques more than just the superficial way words cross a page and gestures deeper than the obviously flat paper, but every reclamation (every resurrection) must have a starting point. Let words, freed from their rigid body - the body of the text - roam the page and take their own shape. Let them speak, (really speak) with their own individual bodies rather than through the forcibly unified body of the essay. Each

word adopts  
just  $\rightarrow$  <sup>own</sup> <sup>size</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>own</sup> force carrying power because of more than  
can become <sup>S</sup> <sup>S</sup> its masculine meaning. In this way, the signifier  
more than just what it means (the signified);  
the Symbolic will collapse down onto the Semiotic, weaving the  
two together, and will create and return a real meaning to  
the body of the word, (of the essay). Language, then, becomes  
like a form of art: speaking of things without necessarily  
using words. In this case, the communication language  
does is more through the feeling of the words — their  
texture — the way they look, and sound, and taste, and  
more.

But a new syntactic system is more than just a  
negation of old ways, of old flatness. To resurrect itself,  
standard language & presentation must redefine itself, reclaim  
itself, (re)present itself to all those watchful audience  
members. If we plan to reject the rigid body, the linear body,  
the structured body we must introduce in its place one with  
more continuity and connection. One that is, quite literally, round.

It is perfect, curved, and inclusive; it does not pierce or penetrate like the line, like the essay, like the beginning or end... with millions of beginning and end. It is perfect, curved, and inclusive; it does not pierce or penetrate like the line, like the essay, like the beginning or end... with millions of beginning and end. It is perfect, curved, and inclusive; it does not pierce or penetrate like the line, like the essay, like the beginning or end... with millions of beginning and end.

It allows language to be in one sense, and everywhere all at once. It goes nowhere and back onto the page and back onto the page and back onto the page. It allows language to be in one sense, and everywhere all at once. It goes nowhere and back onto the page and back onto the page and back onto the page.

are less foreign to her now and she structure is entirely of her own choosing. This spinning  
 to write her body, her posture, her hand into her words she becomes them, owns them, owns  
 the power to swirl off into the abyss or  
 is forced to abandon the sterile, medicalized world of the computer and printer, is a part of  
 the feminine body because of their curves, but more importantly a direct interaction  
 of the most feminine aspect of it. Circles force, not only the circular  
 potentially incorporate the body through the IDEA of the feminine  
 writing, is the most feminine text and actually use her body to write  
 our before, words are less foreign to her now and she structure is entirely of her own choosing.

or writing on the page. She  
 and breathes and resurrected  
 the page and continually  
 of it and resurrected  
 the page and continually  
 of it and resurrected  
 the page and continually

### Aggravating Academia

Truly writing the feminine into writing creates an amazingly unavoidable conflict of interests between the desire to be consistent (within one's own theory) and the desire to be heard and recognized as *having* a theory at all. Quite expectedly, then, the push by many deconstructivist feminists toward a new mode of writing that seeks to express something innately feminine that has, thus far, been voiceless, has been met with a broad range of reactions, from general confusion to mocking disregard. These reactions stem from the fact that feminist writing, at least as Hélène Cixous sees it, requires a revolution in how we present ideas, disseminate theories, and communicate to one another, and so it challenges dearly held assumptions about what it is to be academic. In the past, no matter how radical the theory, ideas were always communicated using the same standards of essay: paragraph structure, cited sources, and logically progressive language. That was, until the 1970s when the deconstructivists and feminists stole upon the French scene, challenging the academic world to which they belonged, and singing passionately about unconventional theories while using modes of expression that were barely grammatically correct, let alone standard research format.

Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa" is one of the foremost texts dealing with the revolution of feminine writing, theorizing (through both content and form) women's reclamation of language. Cixous calls for women to "return to the body which has been more than confiscated" from us by means of writing for ourselves—but not in a style of writing that has been traditionally accepted and is thus structured for masculine expression (880). In order to write for ourselves, as ourselves, as women, we must:

write through [our] bodies, [we] must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, [we] must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word 'silence', the one that, aiming for

the impossible, stops short before the word 'impossible' and writes it as 'the end.' (886)

But regarding this new style of communication, this distinctly feminine style that "is volcanic" and advocates for the incorporation of the poetic and the body, social reality forces the question of how far intelligibility can be pushed before it stops being heard (888, 880). In the end, Cixous and her theories are read, heard, and they do prompt change. However, for all of Cixous' radical sentence structure and new syntax, she does hold onto one very important aspect of writing: namely, words. Cixous sees abandoning language as giving up the fight against the "deaf male ear, which only hears in language that which speaks in the masculine" (881). She wants to "turn [language] around, and seize it... make it hers" and "invent for herself a language" that she can "get inside of" and master. It is at this point that Cixous' psycho-analytic roots glow through her deconstructive covering—she, like Lacan, wants to be a subject of a language. Believing the Lacanian appropriation of Freud that suggests women's inability to fully transfer out of the Imaginary/pre-Oedipal stage into the Symbolic/Oedipal stage characterized by language, Cixous fights against this verdict by carving out for herself a new type of language that she(s) can be master/subject of (Tong 154). Her theories of a new feminine writing are attempts to locate herself as a subject rather than an object in the world, someone in possession of a voice and the ability to meaningfully self-express and act.

If language is abandoned, however, as innately patriarchal with no hope of recovery or re-appropriation, how is the theorist to be understood—how is s/he to write? Or even if language remains, as it does for Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, and instead, form and structure are critiqued, how will (and does) academia distinguish the babblings of relevance from those of mad-women?

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## ***A Successful Society***

Gisele Bündchen really seems like she has it altogether, doesn't she? She has the perfect job, the perfect boyfriend, not to mention the perfect body. Her very presence evokes beauty, flawlessness, and success. This type of abnormally attractive and overtly successful person is the type that is flashed before our faces every day. As a society, we have a standard to reach toward, an impossible vision of perfection. But where is the reality in it all? Why do men and women feel the need to mirror their vision of success and beauty off the socially accepted magazines, television shows, movies, and books? The unrealistic ideals on which our country bases "perfection" create stereotypes, unhealthy behavior, and a constant feeling of failure. There is absolutely no reason for feeling as if we have failed just because we don't have three cars, two villas, and designer clothes. Celebrities like Gisele are atypical, especially with their perfectly airbrushed legs and cosmetologist-enhanced faces. Social perspective has persuaded us, but it is time we regained our confidence, individuality, and visions of success.

Generally, we claim that our country is a land where uniqueness runs visibly throughout young and old alike. For me, though, I feel that we are all slowly becoming conformists. There is an unspoken requirement to accept yourself and be accepted by others, but by a standard that is astronomically high. We have this idea that success should involve prosperous careers with fat paychecks. But what exactly determines these great careers? Who says that money should be the main determinant of success? And since when is success associated with beauty? Look at the magazines today. The emphasis on physical beauty is everywhere, in adult and teen magazines alike. For women, the pressure to look young, thin, and gorgeous is ever-present. No matter how much people say we are moving toward an acceptance of "real, curvy women," the aspiration to be model-thin lingers in the back of many people's minds. And

this is not just a problem for women; men, too, have to worry about their images. Their self worth is determined by a formula of the proper physical mixture of tough and muscular, yet fashionably good-looking. They need to look put together, but not too put together, for fear of being labeled “gay” or “feminine.” As a society, we have reached a point where we have lost sight of what is really important in life.

The sad part is, many people spend their time reaching for a reality that is not really there—a reality set by movies and magazines. Not only are these molds unattainable, they cause unhealthy behavior and affect the way we view others. Take, for instance, books written by Nicholas Sparks: incredibly romantic, sappy love stories that supposedly make women go weak at the knees, giggle, and wish that their love lives would play out in similar ways. There is an unfair expectation placed on men to rise to the standards of characters like Landon from *A Walk to Remember* and Noah from *The Notebook*. Now, I am not saying that Nicholas Sparks is the reason people have these false hopes of a successful and dream-like romance. The problem is that society deems these types of situations as the norm. There needs to be a separation between fiction and reality. Again, as is the case with stick-thin celebrities and models in popular magazines, such as *Elle*, *People*, and *Teen Vogue*, the perception of beauty has severely been tainted. Bulimia, anorexia, and low self-confidence among women have largely resulted from these types of magazines. They increase women’s anxiety about looking like models and meeting the socially accepted brand of beauty.

Coming from the perspective of a teenage girl living in the twenty-first century, I know exactly how hard it is to feel confident. The constant push to be perfect, to be the best, is commonplace in our society. From our appearance, to our education, to our moral choices, we are prompted to aim for the highest success. We fight for what we want, all day, every day. The simplicity in life has clearly gone by the wayside. Because of handy technological tools like e-mail and cell phones, we have no excuses to take breaks or remove ourselves from work and stress. We can even get our e-mail on our iPods now. The

millennium generation has really proven that we have adopted and adapted to the necessity of "instant gratification." The stress and pressure to always be on our toes is slowly taking a toll on our generation. We are growing blind to the simple pleasures in life and are constantly on the go. In general, we are applying the old cliché, "Live your life to the fullest!" by becoming a generation of overachievers and psychologically strained men and women. So the question really is: How should we determine success?

Today, standards for success differ for both men and women because of social perspectives and acceptance; but it's time we relinquished society's vision for our lives and created our *own*. Think about it: even at a young age, our brains were programmed to hunger for success in everything we did. Hit a home run. Study so we can get an A on that test. Run the fastest. Master the piano. Be the best. Win, win, win! In high school, we were taught that success was determined by which colleges accepted us, how many awards we had on display at our graduation party, and the number of votes we received for the "Who's Who" in the yearbook. Now, success is decided by which degree we earn and how much money we will eventually make per year. But in the grand scheme, are these things really that important? Is success really determined by *quantity*, or is it established by our *quality* of life?

Yes, money and impressive titles can make life a little more interesting and can lead to more opportunities. But at the same time, all of the money in the world means nothing if we cannot make a positive impact as role models, with good character and true senses of self. Essentially, our character is what determines our success in life. How much money we have or how outwardly beautiful we are is not a clear representation of our success as human beings. It is important to realize that the type of people we choose to become—and the very *process* of becoming—is what defines us as human beings and fulfillers of a greater plan. Albert Einstein once said, "Try not to become a man of success, but rather to become a man of value." This scientist and philosopher truly had a wise perspective on success. Life isn't about how you succeed in regards to how others

view you, but by how you view yourself. Success doesn't have rules or guidelines. Instead, it is denoted by the standards determined according to the individual: a set of values and goals to live by.

Often I wonder, as I think many people do, what it would be like to be someone else, to experience his/her success. If I could create and become the perfect, successful person, what qualities would I desire? Well, I would have Oprah Winfrey's philanthropic attitude and her bank account to go with it. I would make sure I had Rachael Ray's bubbly personality and vibrancy for life. I would be able to channel the lovable rebel image like Colin Farrell. Kate Winslet's curvy physique would be something I would aspire to embrace. I would have the strength of Gwen Stefani, yet the delicateness of Alexis Bledel. My work ethic and commanding leadership ability would resemble Donald Trump's. Diane Sawyer's intelligence and persuasive nature would be something I could only dream of for myself. I would have the creative mind of Johnny Depp and the ever-present kind heart of Bill Gates. I look at all of these characteristics that create the "ideal person" but then realize: *I have only me*. I am who determines my own path and my own successes. I am the one who knows my limits and knows my faults. I possess the strength to overcome all obstacles. I can dream all I want of being what society claims is the perfect person with all of these great qualities; but in the end, I am left with what I have, what I was born with: my own gifts, my own personality, and my own character. Yes, I am stubborn. Yes, I'm a procrastinator. And yes, I take too long to get ready in the morning. But I am aware of these faults, and I realize that they make me *unique*. In a roundabout way, they contribute to my successes. They are what make me Jena Marie Viviano.

So you see, success isn't a new house or a Harvard bumper sticker. It isn't about becoming a Vogue model or showing off your new BMW. It's not about having a movie-like romance or a seven-figure salary. And, it certainly isn't about becoming society's definition of the perfect person. Rather, it is doing the right thing, making someone smile, failing so that you can bounce right back. It is appreciating all of the good in life

and overcoming the bad. A life of success isn't about acquiring money or status, but valuing the importance of relationships, mistakes, and kindness. So why do we care what society thinks of "perfect" success? After all, at the end of the day, success is what *you* make of it.

## Mommy-God

I sat in synagogue and wailed,  
"I want my Mommy."

My mother, pushing ninety,  
is in a nursing home.  
I always called her "Mother,"  
never "Mommy."

Every day I phone my mother  
and we have loving conversations  
carefully tailored to fit  
her cognitive limitations.

"So who is this Mommy?"  
I asked myself that morning.  
"I've always had a Daddy-God,  
never wanted a Mommy-God,  
despite all those years as feminist and scholar.  
Would Mommy-God hold me  
closer and more firmly than Daddy-God,  
let me sag into Her and rest?"  
With Daddy-God you have to watch your step.  
He sustains, but he's dangerous.  
His lightning's apt to fuse your wires.  
Be careful!

## Pornography and Women's Rights

Over the past century, significant advancements have been made in order to gain equal rights for women in a male-dominated society, especially in areas such as suffrage, work, and marriage. Yet, as we approach an era where the treatment of men and women is truly just, the question has been raised: Does pornography have a place in a society that values gender equality? Unlike many other issues, the lack of consensus lies not between feminists and the patriarchal culture, but rather among feminists themselves. While I personally believe that pornography is not inconsistent with the feminist movement, anti-pornography feminists raise important points that need to be considered when discussing this topic.

Not to be confused with the "moral right," anti-pornography feminists are not against sex or nudity. Rather, these feminists oppose the image of "woman" created by the pornography industry. One view of the women in pornography is that they are objects whose sole purpose is to please men. Because pornography places all value on physical appearance, it is easy to see how the sale of pornography can be interpreted as the sale of women's bodies. Pornography teaches men that they are "entitled to frequent, unconditional use of women's bodies" without any emotional attachment or responsibility (Flowers). From this point of view, pornography defines sex as a female service and a male right, which certainly perpetuates gender inequalities (Us). Not only might men feel superior to women, but women might reduce their self-worth to their appearance (Eaton). One of the goals of feminism is to spread the message that women are more than just their bodies—they are humans with thoughts, emotions, and personalities.

Anti-pornography feminists also say that pornography is an inadequate substitute for true intimacy. They believe that the element that makes sex important is understanding between partners (Cleveland). If this is true, then the sex portrayed in pornography does not support a woman's right to explore her sexuality; it merely exploits a woman's body, portraying women as "sexual objects who exist primarily to be manipulated

by men in order to satisfy male desires" (McCabe). Pornography removes the emotional connection attached to sex. According to anti-pornography feminists, this reduces sex to its lowest standard, eliminating all elements of real intimacy and replacing it with a staged re-enactment.

Due to the violent aspects of some adult movies and magazines, pornography can also be seen as "an advertisement for rape" (Flowers). By glamorizing women in pain, pornography might encourage violence (Flowers). Some pornography on the market today shows women in submissive positions or enjoying acts that demean and objectify them (Eaton). Some anti-pornography feminists believe that pornography "systematically [eroticizes] violence against women by producing and marketing images of men humiliating [and] battering...women for sexual pleasure" (Flowers). Some advocates of pornography argue that if the goal is to decrease violence against women, feminists should focus on more mainstream media. However, an industry that earns ten billion dollars annually—revenue levels higher than television networks such as NBC, ABC, and Fox—seems fairly mainstream to me (Cleveland).

Violence against women is a very serious problem, but some feminists question if pornography is the cause. Pornography may be the scapegoat a rapist uses to rationalize his violent behavior, much like a plea of temporary insanity induced by watching pornography. In fact, statistics suggest that the amount of violence against women is inversely proportional to the amount of pornography in a region. In areas like Saudi Arabia and Iran, where pornography levels are extremely low, domestic violence is high. Also, the culture in these areas largely focuses on male dominance. However, in countries like Germany and Denmark, where pornography is readily accessible, violence is at a minimum and gender equality is exceptionally high (Gever). While there are many other influences on these statistics, if pornography were the main cause of violence, we would expect the numbers to be reversed. Also, studies have shown that only approximately 5% of the images in men's magazines and adult videos are actually violent. "There is far more violence in Saturday morning cartoons than in 95% of all sexually explicit media" (Dority).



Another goal of feminism is to break down the stereotype of the perfect woman and replace it with the idea that beauty comes in all different forms. Restricting attractiveness to one definition harms the women's movement. It is a problem when women focus on their appearance to raise their value in the eyes of men, rather than on other more important characteristics. Anti-pornography feminists say that pornography helps create an impossible standard of beauty. However, after closer examination, other feminists have questioned whether pornography is actually the origin of this standard. In fact, it is possible that pornography may help end the stereotype. Rather than defining beauty, pornography offers more diversity than other media in our culture. For example, consider mainstream models and actresses: these women are usually portrayed as tall and thin with flawless skin and impeccable features. Contrary to this idea of perfection, there is a wide variety of women in pornography, which "offers a more realistic view of women's diversity—and desirability—than in any other genre" (Carol). The fact that different people find different features attractive causes the pornography industry to be less likely to stereotype women into one general representation of beauty.

While pornography by definition is clearly sexual, it is not necessarily sexist. Rather than showing women as objects, pornography can portray women as "sexual beings" and provide a means for experimentation by removing "the emotional confusion that so often surrounds real world sex" (McElroy). Pornography helps eliminate the shame associated with sex by showing women that "[they] are not alone in [their] fantasies" (McElroy). By enforcing the idea that women are passive and can only be manipulated into having sex, we restrict the opportunity that women can use pornography to discover other sexual possibilities (Carol). Pornography has the potential to be a celebration of the movement against the image of the repressed woman from Victorian times—an image that all feminists try to erase.

Some pornography is part of a progressive force that aims to remove the stigma of the pristine and sexually repressed woman. However, as women continue to make strides toward greater gender equality, it is important to ask if pornography will continue to play this role. Does pornography merely

stereotype women as sexual objects, or is it a liberating influence that encourages women to be free in their sexual choices?

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## The Essay That Made Me Question

### Part I

In 1911, "the most dangerous woman in America," Emma Goldman, wrote about her opposition to marriage in an essay curiously entitled "Marriage and Love." The essay, however, was not about marriage and love in conjunction with one another, but rather, marriage and love in disjunction. In the world that Goldman envisioned and lived for, marriage would be universally accepted as useless, for it would not aid in creating free-thinking men and women who contributed to beauty.

Goldman valued love above almost everything and she saw that marriage did not necessarily create or foster love: love was independent of marriage. To her, the beauty and intoxicating effect of real love could not and should not be equated with simply getting used to a spouse. In the reality of her time, marriage equated more appropriately with an economic agreement in which women draw the shorter straw. She explains just why women end up short-changed:

Moreover, the marriage insurance condemns her to life-long dependency, to parasitism, to complete uselessness, individual as well as social. Man, too, pays his toll, but as his sphere is wider, marriage does not limit him as much as woman. (228)

Marriage was not only an economic agreement, but often an unsuccessful one at that. Goldman gives one explanation for why one in twelve marriages ended in divorce as the fact that men and women are raised too differently to overcome living like strangers. Marriage, she hypothesizes, only works when a woman submits to her husband's superiority. If she questions herself and this order, she threatens the delicate (and unfair) balance of the marriage. Therefore, concluded Goldman, a woman must suppress her soul if her union is to avoid splintering.

It was distasteful to Goldman that the suppression of

spirit began at a very young age, when girls were trained to picture marriage as their highest goal, yet were kept in the dark about their bodies and sex. Women repressed their most basic human desires or faced losing their eligibility for marriage, which threatened their financial security. Goldman fleshes out the ugly alternative:

If however, woman is free and big enough to learn the mystery of sex without the sanction of State or Church, she will stand condemned as utterly unfit to become the wife of a "good" man, his goodness consisting of an empty head and plenty of money. (231)

This type of training and regulation of what was acceptable restrained individuality, broke passion, and differentiated marriage from love—all of which Goldman feared. The lack of intimacy between couples before marriage was commonplace because love was not the basis for these marriages. Goldman despised the emphasis on the financial aspect of marriage (the total dependence of a woman on her husband for money), rather than any intimate bond that might flow between a married couple. She found that unions based on money left the soul bankrupt.

Even marriages based on love undermined the general freedom of the people. Any marriage affirmed the control of those in power: "The State and the Church approve of no other ideal, simply because it is the one that necessitates the State and Church control of men and women" (232). For example, women who worked only did so temporarily; for they expected to quit once they found husbands. Because of this, women were reluctant to join unions, which in turn weakened the power of workers to protect themselves and move themselves out of poverty. As a result, some married women were forced to continue working if a couple wanted to keep food on the table. This was a pleasing result for the church and state because less unionized workers meant more control retained by factory and company owners—the cronies of powerful religious and governmental officials.

So, Goldman questioned, "[W]hat remains of the protection and glory of the home?" (233). The home protects a

woman as long the husband makes enough money. If not, she must work. And if she need not work, it is still his home and she must make it her only affair. Goldman was not shocked by the effect of this on a woman's character: "Small wonder if she becomes a nag, petty, quarrelsome, gossipy, unbearable, thus driving the man from the house" (234). Women move about in this restrictive sphere and it is in this environment that children are raised.

According to Goldman, marriage protected neither wives nor children. "The sham, the hypocrisy of it!" she exclaimed with outrage, "Marriage protecting the child, yet thousands of children destitute and homeless" (234). Rather than protecting anyone, marriage more readily served as an institution of parasitism which promised protection but rarely delivered.

As an alternative, Goldman advocated free motherhood with love as the only term that binds two people together. "Love needs no protection; it is its own protection" (237). Those who fall in love and decide to bring new life into the world end up offering more devotion and care for their children because they *freely chose* to become parents instead of being compelled to through the economic agreement known as marriage. For Goldman, refusing to marry becomes a conscious objection to producing non-thinking beings who can only contribute to the power of the church and state by blindly following the status quo. She elucidates: "Woman no longer wants to be a party to the production of a race of sickly, feeble, decrepit, wretched human beings, who have neither the strength nor moral courage to throw off the yoke of poverty and slavery" (237).

Goldman argues that "true manhood and womanhood" is fostered by free love: "love in freedom is the only condition of a beautiful life" (238). She envisions a world in which people can "bask in the golden rays of love," where they can achieve "companionship and oneness," not where they are swept up in the "slimy woof of our social fabric" (238-239). Goldman's world, she believes, can only flourish with the relinquishment of marriage.

## Part II: My Thoughts on Goldman: Should I Marry?

My understanding of marriage is shaped primarily by the beautiful twenty-seven-years-and-still-strong marriage of my parents. Each still says that the other is his/her best friend, but their overall marital bliss is contrasted with my awareness that their success is not the norm. Half of the marriages I'll ever know will fail. I've always dreamed of my wedding—the dress, the cake, the altar, even the ring—but when Goldman's essay threatened my vision in white, I knew that there must be modern relevance in what she said. Why else would it threaten me?

The union of Mandy and Telly Zachariades can not be described by any use of the word "parasite." Although my father is the only breadwinner, I remember my parents recounting to me that his money is *their* money. He has told me that he wouldn't be able to have a beautiful home to relax in with his companion if she didn't tend to it so lovingly. He wouldn't have the strength to work countless hours a week if she didn't work equally hard to care for him. He may provide money and she comfort, but together they make a home that needs both to be possible. He wouldn't have children he adored if she hadn't spent the early years, knees-on-the-floor playing with us, engaging our imaginations. This does not support Goldman's argument that marriage condemns a wife to uselessness, but perhaps only in that my father is a man who recognizes the hardships that come with being a housewife. I've heard him say more than once, in awe of his wife, "I couldn't do what Mom does," meaning, it is harder than his comparatively glamorous office job.

My parents' marriage helped me understand that a union is not about ownership or superiority over another. Respect and understanding are key. I believe I have met someone who I will love for the rest of my life. The story of our relationship undermines Goldman's assertion that a woman must suppress both her personality and her sexuality for a mate to find her suitable. We became friends the first week of freshman year and from then on considered ourselves to be "best friends."

When we fell in love, our knowledge of each other's previous relationships had no bearing on our eligibility as a couple. Previous sexual experience or knowledge only served to create two more expressive and mature individuals. We are not too different; we don't live as strangers. We were best friends and nothing changed when we entered into a relationship. I didn't suddenly keep my mouth shut and my eyes lowered to please him. We are a modern couple who understand that both men and women have a right to communicate and get what they want out of relationships. Part of the joy is the chemistry of personalities, not the submission of one to the other.

That being said, Goldman's point about sex before marriage is not completely outdated. I know one young man who has slept with multiple women but who swears he will only marry a virgin. He does not want his future wife to have experimented with her sexuality, although he has. He sees himself as a "good man;" he believes that he merits a woman who has sheltered herself from sex. He has not yet outgrown the ideal that women should be chaste and pure and that what a man does with his body previous to matrimony is irrelevant. This type of double standard supports Goldman's observation that women are often obliged to be a mere shell of themselves (by suppressing what is natural within them) in order to be considered for marriage. The support for her argument, though, comes only when a man subscribes to traditional views of marriage.

What protection will this man offer his wife if he can't respect that she, just like himself, may have wanted to discover the natural and beautiful mystery of sex? A marriage without respect will be like the marriages Goldman describes in her essay. The situation of my neighbors, George and Kelly, supports Goldman's argument that the home does not guarantee protection to wife and children. Kelly is a bright, college-educated woman who gave up working to raise their three children. These days, George disrespects her in public; he will put her down sharply, for no reason. One can see the shame and embarrassment creep across her face. She once asked my mother for advice on her redecorating, admitting, "George *never* likes

what I do," in a way that revealed the pain of disapproval for far more than just her wallpaper choices.

Because George doesn't respect his wife's unpaid housework and devotion to their children, because he acts as though his opinion trumps all, she is made to feel useless. Unlike my father and many other men, George fails to notice that he couldn't have the family as well as the job if it weren't for Kelly's contribution. Their marriage becomes the seat of misery that Goldman was so against: Kelly has no (self) respect and their home is a haven for neither her nor their children. When I talk to her, I can see the sadness in her face. The children, no doubt, have noticed that their mother is unhappy. What kind of good is it doing their children to grow up in a loveless household? Although their situation is a miserable one, it doesn't matter that they are married. Either way, George would not appreciate Kelly's contribution and their love would fail to endure. The only difference is that if they were not married, they could have left one another *more easily* once the love ran dry. With women's rights the way they are today, there is little stopping Kelly and George from leading separate lives if they wanted to. There has been massive social change since 1911 when Emma Goldman was writing.

Her essay threatened me because it made me think that the minute I married someone, regardless of who he was, I would lose my spirit, be obliged to stay at home, and resent my husband for my inferior position as homemaker. What I've noticed in these anecdotes, however, is that the *people* involved in the relationship, rather than their status as a married couple, are what determine the type of relationship that Goldman sought. As women are taught more about sex, it becomes more acceptable for them to experiment with their bodies; and as more women find jobs outside of the home, the relevancy of the focus of Goldman's argument goes through a metamorphosis.

Goldman advocates love without marriage because she wants people to join together because they love and respect each other, not because they feel that they are supposed to marry. She wants them to choose to be together regardless of money, and she wants women to break free from the home. She



wants a couple to decide when and if it is right for them to have children. Today, all these things are possible with marriage if the people that join together honor equality. Women in the workforce, the feminist movement, and birth control allow women to enter into marriage and motherhood by choice, not by necessity. I believe that if people forgot marriage and made a home for themselves just with love, the same situations would make their home lives miserable if one partner didn't appreciate or respect the other.

It all boils down to respect. The examples of positive relationships I see are ones in which each partner respects the other's independence and hard work (no matter where that work occurs). The negative ones are those in which the man, in particular, stills views a relationship or marriage as a place where he holds superiority over his partner. My parents and my partner and I are basking in the "golden rays of love," and experiencing "companionship and oneness," as Goldman put it. I've decided that, today, it doesn't matter whether we are married or not.

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## Queering Marriage

*"[U]nder its institutional pseudonyms such as Inheritance, Marriage, Dynasty, Family, Domesticity, and Population, heterosexuality has been permitted to masquerade so fully as History itself—when it has not presented itself as the totality of Romance."<sup>1</sup>*

*"Love, the strongest and deepest element in all life, the harbinger of hope, of joy, of ecstasy; love, the defier of all laws, of all conventions; love, the freest, the most powerful moulder of human destiny; how can such an all-compelling force be synonymous with that poor little State and Church-begotten weed, marriage?"<sup>2</sup>*

### Duty, Right, or \_\_\_\_\_?

In the United States of America, marriage is a social, legal and religious institution for heterosexual couples. For those outside the norms, marriage is an alienating force. In this essay, I argue that traditional marriage perpetuates a culture of impossible and undesirable standards while privileging those in positions of power, such as heterosexuals. I then argue for the redefinition of marriage to include same-sex couples. Finally, I explain a feminist critique of marriage and discuss alternative unions. Deconstructing marriage to undermine its restrictive conventions will allow a diversity of practices—traditional and queer—to replace the monolith. In this way, our culture will change from one of compulsory heterosexual marriage to one where varying expressions of love are accepted.

For the purposes of this investigation, I define "queer" as an intentionally broad term used to subvert norms.<sup>3</sup> Vital to an understanding of queer studies is the acknowledgement that gender<sup>4</sup> is a non-essential characteristic of personhood. Identifying as queer "implies a self-conscious deconstruction of heteronormativity and a breaking down of arbitrary boundaries based on sex, gender, and sexual orientation."<sup>5</sup> Queer theorists recog-

nize the differences between biological sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation, and often place each on a continuum.<sup>6</sup> These expressions are non-essential and fluid; assuming that all people fit into the category of either “man” or “woman” is unrealistic and incomplete.

The definition of marriage proposed by traditional marriage advocates relies on an essential understanding of gender, which prevents those who do not identify with the paradigmatic patriarchal definition of “man” or “woman” from engaging in the validating social practice of marriage. Despite copious evidence that masculinity and femininity are not biological characteristics of humans, traditional marriage advocates continue to enforce the cross-gender requirement of marriage. Any marriage law based on the genders of its participants cannot apply universally. When the definition of marriage depends on an incomplete picture of human identity, it violates basic human rights to self-expression. The existing marriage laws in the United States appeal to outdated religious conceptions of identity and invalidate the love shared in non-normative relationships. Queering marriage, then, is deconstructing the rigid definitions of institutionalized marriage in order to allow for multiple interpretations and expressions.

### **A Straight Situation**

Marriage is a regulated, pervasive cultural characteristic of American history. Patriarchal norms, which place the man at the head of the heteronormative family, flourished mostly unquestioned in the United States until the women’s suffrage movement in the late nineteenth century. Emma Goldman provides an account of traditional marriage in her 1911 essay, “Marriage and Love.”<sup>7</sup> She argues that marriage, while it parades as an expression and result of love, is really an unhealthy power structure that places women far below men, keeps married couples under the control of the state and church, and supports exploitative economic practices. Since 1911, marriage has expanded its liberties for women: American women can vote, they are no longer bartered for like property, and they have a much larger stake in family decisions. However, these achievements are underdeveloped. The most prevalent image of the family is still one man and one woman married with children in

the same household, where men are the primary decision makers and financial supporters and women are homemakers and child raisers. Contemporary wives now have the choice to work outside the home, as long as they continue to raise children and take care of the home, while their spouses' roles remain the same. These women face sexism in the workplace and make less money than their male counterparts. Although there have been some important movements to personalize weddings and redefine marriages in the past decade, reformers remain in the minority.

Traditional weddings are emblematic of the various pressures and expectations of marriage. Young girls are still raised to dream of fantasy weddings and marriages to ideal masculine men. Goldman adds, "From infancy, almost, the average girl is told that marriage is her ultimate goal; therefore her training and education must be directed towards that end." These desires are reinforced by the media and are encouraged by the commodification of weddings. Commercialized images of couples show models of masculinity and femininity. Images focus on the wedding day, indicating that this single day will determine the success of the marriage. Wedding traditions in the United States vary, but most include conventions that symbolize outdated patriarchal ideas, such as a white dress that signifies the bride's pre-marital purity, and the father of the bride giving her away, which indicates a passing of ownership of the woman from one man to another. These traditions do not always signify the start of an unhealthy marriage, but, they reinforce underlying, exclusionary norms.

Socially, marriage is still obligatory, complete with a set of religious and political expectations that reinforce gender inequalities. Staying single or unmarried<sup>8</sup> is perceived as a social failure that comes with legal disadvantages. "Laws that treat married persons in a different manner than they treat single persons permeate nearly every field of social regulation in this country—taxation, torts, evidence, social welfare, inheritance, adoption, and on and on."<sup>9</sup> Even with ever-increasing divorce rates, single parent families and general acceptance of the unmarried cohabitation,<sup>10</sup> marriage is surprisingly still the paradigmatic life goal of the American person. Modern marriage, although constantly evolving, is still problematic. While it repre-

sents the choice to live a committed, loving life with another person, the conventions that guide it are entrenched in patriarchy and sexism.

### Guardians of Tradition

The traditional family is composed of a heterosexual, married couple that intends to procreate and live in the same household. This definition invalidates the already-existing, sanctified marriages of infertile couples, couples who decide to marry beyond the ages of fertility, couples "living apart together" (LATs),<sup>11</sup> those in commuter or long distance marriages, and same-sex partnerships and alternative relationships. These relationships challenge the traditional family in unique ways, yet queer relationships are cited as the main threat to marriage. Robert Knight, a strong voice in conservative journalism, finds a variety of excuses in order to accommodate these marriages:

Even childless marriages are a social anchor for children, who observe adults as role models. Besides, childless couples can be "surprised" by an unexpected pregnancy, and they can adopt, giving a child a mother-and-father-based family. Single parents can eventually marry. And marriage is a stabilizing force for all. Even when a couple is past the age of reproduction, the marital commitment may keep an older man from fathering a child with a younger woman outside wedlock.<sup>12</sup>

Knight does not provide an equally arbitrary argument for including the queer community, implying that queers cannot adopt or provide a healthy family. The increasingly narrow definition of marriage proposed by traditionalists specifically excludes same-sex relationships. Same-sex marriages are seen as a gateway to normalizing queer people, which presumably will lead to the crumbling of the foundation of society as we know it.<sup>13</sup>

The strongest critiques of queer marriage come from conservative Christians.<sup>14</sup> Many cite the Bible as evidence that homosexuality is unnatural and immoral, and they expect the American government to enforce those beliefs. In his first public address of 2008, the Catholic Pope Benedict XVI defined family as strictly between a man and a woman, then cited the nuclear family as "the primary place of 'humanization' for the person and society," and a 'cradle of life and love.'<sup>15</sup> Anything else

“constitutes an objective obstacle on the road to peace.”<sup>16</sup> Neither the Pope nor the Catholic Church explains why cross-sex parents are best for society. However, the Catholic Church has sanctioned the exclusion of queers from families and has dictated the continued legal and social battle to prevent same-sex marriage and other non-heteronormative lifestyles from gaining equal standing in the United States.

In an interview for [www.protectmarriage.com](http://www.protectmarriage.com),<sup>17</sup> Massachusetts citizens Robb and Robin Wirthlin worried that, after gay marriage was legalized,<sup>18</sup> “rights would be infringed, particularly if you disagreed with gay marriage.” Neither individual commented on historical denial of queer citizens’ basic rights to education, jobs, or housing. The couple found it “shocking” that their son was taught about gay marriage as an acceptable lifestyle and felt that their religious freedom was violated. The Wirthlins took their case to court, hoping to either stop public schools from teaching children about non-heteronormative lifestyles or force them to contact children’s parents when any formal or informal conversation about homosexuality took place. They lost their case on the grounds that public schools are allowed to discuss diversity issues as long as they do not target the beliefs of a particular religion or force students to agree with the ideas.<sup>19</sup>

According to the Wirthlins, homosexuality is an “adult issue.” Eve Sedgwick, a prominent feminist and queer theorist, critiques this viewpoint, writing “[Q]ueer teenagers are two to three times likelier to attempt suicide, and to accomplish it, than others” and “up to 30 percent of teen suicides are likely to be gay or lesbian.”<sup>20</sup> Preventing educators from mentioning queer lifestyles is another way of reinforcing narrow norms and could cause damage to queer adolescents. According to Sedgwick, “The complicity of parents, of teachers, of clergy, even of the mental health professions in invalidating and hounding kids who show gender dissonant tastes, behavior, body language” is appalling.<sup>21</sup> Those who wish to “protect” their children from an education that includes knowledge of the existence of queers are denying their children basic truths about our world and human history.

Each of these examples—targeting queers as the only group for which the definition of marriage has no flexibility, cit-

ing hypocritical religious reasons for excluding queers from our world family, and preventing the education of children about the basic existence of queers—follows a similar logic: “Marriage is a critical social institution. Stable families depend on it. Society depends on stable families...Gay marriage will break that connection.”<sup>22</sup> This argument is based on an essential picture of human sexuality that ignores multiple expressions of identity. The restrictive values of one group of people should not rule the lives of others. Same-sex marriage will not prevent, invalidate, or break apart traditional marriage. Extending the benefits of marriage to committed parties of all kinds will correct some of the institutionalized discrimination in America.

### **A Myriad of Mergers: Queered Marriage**

Some feminists and queer theorists bring a different perspective to the debate. According to Ann Ferguson, “The issue of gay marriage thus highlights a contradiction in American national identity: if gay marriage is supported, the normative status of the heterosexual nuclear family is undermined,<sup>23</sup> while if gay marriage is disallowed, then the individual freedom and the civil rights of homosexuals are undermined.” Either way, some Americans would end up unhappy. Traditional marriage, as discussed, supports a heteronormative picture of humanity, and thus denies queers equal footing as citizens. From a civil rights perspective, extending marriage to same-sex couples is a matter of granting entitlements. But will this legal change result in a cultural shift toward a more accepting society?

Paula Ettelbrick believes that legalizing same-sex marriage will not further the goals of the queer movement. Instead, “it will constrain us, make us more invisible, force our assimilation into the mainstream, and undermine the goals of gay liberation.”<sup>24</sup> These problems are at the core of the same-sex marriage movement. Ettelbrick recognizes that legalizing same-sex marriage is a step in the right direction, but hopes to deinstitutionalize marriage altogether. The role of the state is not to protect one group’s religious freedom by constraining the rights of others. Our government’s role is to provide protection for its people, including those who have been denied rights for centuries. She calls for an American culture that “respects and encourages choice of relationships and family diversity.” This is

the culture that queered marriage encourages.

Eve Sedgwick asks, "What if instead [of a monolith] there were a practice of valuing the ways in which meanings and institutions can be at loose ends with each other?" In our case, a queered view of marriage, inclusive of plural traditions, participants, and beliefs, can lead to this practice. If we define marriage by its diversity and inclusiveness rather than its selectivity, marriage will become an obsolete distinction. In this new framework, traditional marriage will need to integrate with new conceptions of marriage. This is a culture I want to live in. I leave you with Emma Goldman's prediction: "If the world is ever to give birth to true companionship and oneness, not marriage, but love will be the parent."<sup>25</sup>

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sedgwick, Eve. *Tendencies*. Duke University Press: Durham, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Goldman, Emma. "Marriage and Love" in *Anarchism and Other Essays*. Mother Earth Publishing: New York, 1911. Pg. 233-245. [http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist\\_Archives/goldman/aando/marriageandlove.html](http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/goldman/aando/marriageandlove.html)

<sup>3</sup> The non-offensive use of *queer* began in the early 1990s after Queer Nation, an anti-queer violence group, reclaimed the term. An anonymous pamphlet distributed at a gay pride parade in 1990 describes many of their beliefs. Here's a link: <http://web.archive.org/web/19970606011427/www.rfsl.se/texter/queersreadthis.html>

<sup>4</sup> Gender accounts for the masculine and feminine traits that are socially learned. Sex is the biological chromosomal characteristics of a person. Sex does not inherently determine gender; social interpretations of sex determine gender.

<sup>5</sup> Bernstein, Mary and Renate Reimann. "Queer Families and the Politics of Visibility" in *Queer Families, Queer Politics*. Columbia University Press: New York; 2001. Pg 3.

<sup>6</sup> For a graphic representation of these continuums, refer to <http://www.trishagirl.com/ContinuumModel.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Goldman, Emma. "Marriage and Love" in *Anarchism and Other Essays*. Mother Earth Publishing: New York, 1911. Pg. 233-245: [http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist\\_Archives/goldman/aando/marriageandlove.html](http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/goldman/aando/marriageandlove.html)



<sup>8</sup> These two groups, singles and unmarrieds, are not quite the same. Unmarrieds include those in relationships. For further distinctions and discussion, refer to: Macklin, Eleanor D. and Roger H. Rubin. *Contemporary Families and Alternative Lifestyles*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1983.

<sup>9</sup> Chamer, David L. "What If? The Legal Consequences of Marriage and the Legal Needs of Lesbian and Gay Male Couples" in *Queer Families, Queer Politics*. Columbia University Press: New York, 2001. Pg. 306

<sup>10</sup> Popenoe, David. "The Future of Marriage in America" part of *The State of Our Unions: The Social Health of Marriage in America*. Rutgers University, New Brunswick: 2007: <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/Publications/SOOU/TEXTSOOU2007.htm>

<sup>11</sup> LATs are couples that are in a long-term relationship who live in separate dwellings. Couples may or may not be married or have children.

<sup>12</sup> Knight, Robert H. "Talking Points on Marriage": <http://www.nogaymarriage.com/talkingpoints.html>

<sup>13</sup> In case you're think our society is founded on corrupt, narrow principles and could do with a fresh start, see: Knight, Robert H.

<sup>14</sup> Not all Christians, just some.

<sup>15</sup> Internal quotes are attributed to Pope John Paul II. Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 40: AAS 81 (1989), 469.

<sup>16</sup> "The Human Family, A Community of Peace" Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace 1 January 2008: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20071208\\_xli-world-day-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20071208_xli-world-day-peace_en.html)

<sup>17</sup> "Robb and Robin Wirthlin's Story": <http://www.protectmarriage.com/video/view/6>

<sup>18</sup> Gay marriage is legal in Massachusetts; over 10,000 same-sex couples have wed since 2004. Feyerick, Deborah and Sheila Steffen. "Same-sex marriage in Massachusetts, 4 years later". CNN: 16 June 2008: <http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/06/16/feyerick.samesex.marriage/index.html>

<sup>19</sup> Morris A. Thurston. "Parker v. Hurley Examined". *Mormons for Marriage*, 9 October 2008: <http://mormonsformarriage.com/?p=44>

<sup>20</sup> Sedgwick, Eve. *Tendencies*. Pg 1

<sup>21</sup> Sedgwick, Eve. *Tendencies*. Pg 2.

<sup>22</sup> Kurtz, Stanley. "Beyond Gay Marriage" in *The Weekly Standard*. 8:45; August 2003: <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/002/938xpsxy.asp>

<sup>23</sup> Ferguson, Ann. "Gay Marriage: An American and Feminist Dilemma." *Hypatia* 22.1 (2007): pg 40

<sup>24</sup> Ettelbrick, Paula. "Since When Is Marriage a Path to Liberation?" in *The Columbia Reader on Lesbians and Gay Men in Media, Society, and Politics* pg 637

<sup>25</sup> Goldman, Emma. Pg. 245

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## About the Contributors

Emily F. Becker is a junior pre-med student majoring in Graphic Design. Originally from Chicago, she enjoys drawing, playing piano, listening to music, and watching *The Office*. "Speechless" was originally designed during her Graphic Design II class as a book cover idea for Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*.

Libby Kabachia is pursuing a double major in Behavioral Neuroscience and Chinese and is a part of the South Mountain College community. For her final project in her South Mountain College seminar last semester, she chose to look at the view and treatment of Muslim Women, both by their counterparts and by outsiders. There is a somewhat misconstrued view of them as powerless and in need of saving by the Western world, yet they are women with a force—a force that is sometimes silent, but a force nonetheless. As an outlet for all of these different views, Libby chose to use poetry.

Carolyn Laubender is a sophomore majoring in Gendered Theory in Literature and minoring in Philosophy and Religion Studies. She's an active member of both South Mountain College and TRAC's Writing Fellowship, and she devotes whatever additional free time she has to working and reading (and falling asleep) at the Humanities Center. Off campus, she works as a riding trainer at an equestrian barn and, at every given opportunity, manages her stress by doing some dressage riding of her own. Her submission—part of an assignment for a Feminist Theory class—is a reaction to and embodiment of the ideas put forth in Hélène Cixous' essay "The Laugh of Medusa."

**Alexis J. Leon** has a degree in Communications from Marywood University, and currently works in the Jacocca Institute as the Program Coordinator for Professional Education. She enjoys experimenting with the written word and performance art. She wrote "Chivalry is Napping" after a true-life encounter with her colleague, Katrina, and her Ford Explorer because she enjoys making her colleagues laugh.

**Kristen Merlo** is a senior, currently pursuing her BA in Biology, BA in English, and a minor in Health, Medicine, and Society. She is a member of the Lehigh Women's Rowing team and enjoys walking, running, and being outside. Kristen wrote "Reflections on the Allentown Women's Center" as part of a project for Dr. Karen Hicks' Women and Healthcare class during the Spring of 2008.

**Julia Merz** is a freshman in the College of Arts and Sciences. Her piece, "Pornography and Women's Rights," was written for her freshman seminar, Argument as an Art of Peace. She plays the piccolo and is the Publicity Manager for the Marching 97 and is also a member of Symphonic Band, Kappa Kappa Psi, and Spectrum. Julia is interested in writing, environmental concerns, travel, theater, and collecting antique keys.

**Nisa Qais** is an international student from Bangladesh, currently pursuing an undergraduate degree at Lehigh's College of Arts and Sciences. She enjoys meeting and learning about people, their interests, and cultures. She is passionate about learning and chooses to make the most of every opportunity, be happy, and spread happiness to the people around her. Her piece, "Nisa," expresses her views on femininity—what it means in her culture, what the common misconceptions are, and how she strives to break away from the stereotypical image of a woman.

**Deborah Strehle** is in her third year as a philosophy major at Lehigh. She enjoys fierce debates followed by copious amounts of dark chocolate. She can be found in the spirit of South Mountain College, in support of Break the Silence, and traveling the world as a Global Citizenship Program participant.

**Jena Viviano** is a freshman, working toward attaining a double major in Marketing and Management. She is involved in the Lehigh University Choir, Dolce, University Productions, Alpha Gamma Delta, and Colleges Against Cancer. Her purpose for writing the essay was to bring women's tainted perspectives of themselves and the male gender to the forefront.

**Chava Weissler** is the Berman Professor of Jewish Civilization in the Religion Studies Department at Lehigh. She teaches courses on gender and Judaism, and has been active in the Jewish feminist movement since the 1970s.

**Zoë Zachariades** is a senior English and French double major. She wrote this piece during Seth Moglen's "Modernism and the Problem of War" class in the Fall of 2008. Zoë is glad she was introduced to the revolutionary ideas of Emma Goldman, and she secretly wants to grow up to be an enemy of the state just like Goldman.

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