

“The Sex-Directed Educators?”

Reexamining Betty Friedan’s Critique of Post-War Women’s Educators

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Introduction

Betty Friedan’s 1963 manifesto, *The Feminine Mystique*, breathed life into a century’s old struggle against gender inequality and patriarchy. Though Friedan was neither the first nor the last woman in her generation to call for a feminist revolution, the *Mystique* has been canonized as the primary text that, more than any other, inspired second wave feminism. Friedan argued that popular culture, political propaganda, and educational institutions championed domesticity and thereby suppressed women’s maturation and pursuit of personal fulfillment. By discouraging professional and intellectual ambition beyond the “pursuit of a wedding ring,”¹ she claimed, a woman’s personal development was stunted, and she was left burdened with a sense of frustration and anxiety from an unidentifiable source- a problem she termed the “feminine mystique.”² Friedan portrayed American society as suffocated by the ideology of domesticity, the belief that a woman’s primary social function was that of wife and mother. This diagnosis, a necessary call to arms against the repressive ideologies of the era, also resulted in a skewing of the American historical narrative. Friedan’s exposé targeted the middle-class American ideal of suburban domesticity, thereby imprinting this image in the American historical memory as emblematic of this period in its’ entirety.³ However, historians are now working on a more complex and complete interpretation of post-World War II American culture and values than that offered by Friedan.

Indeed, a number of scholars have questioned the accuracy of Friedan’s characterization of this period in American history as a mindless celebration of domestic bliss. Contemporary American historians have re-evaluated the period between the Second World War and the rise of

¹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: WW Norton Publishers Inc, 1983), 150.

² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 15-16.

³ Joanne Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique,” in Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 230.

the second wave feminist movement in the 1960s. Women’s historian Joanne Meyerowitz, for instance, argues that the era showed elements of progressive change that moved ahead of lagging cultural ideologies and expectations.⁴ In “Beyond the Feminine Mystique,” Meyerowitz challenges Friedan’s portrayal of post-war popular culture. She responds to Friedan’s complaint that,

Over and over again, stories in women’s magazines insist that woman can know fulfillment only at the moment of giving birth to a child... In the feminine mystique, there is no other way for a woman to dream of creation or the future. There is no way she can even dream about herself, except as her children’s mother, her husband’s wife.⁵

According to Friedan, engines of popular culture, such as women’s magazines, perpetuated the domestic ideal that matrimony and motherhood are women’s natural and desired role.

Challenging this argument, Meyerowitz offers convincing evidence to the contrary. She presents a more thorough analysis of a far larger sample of magazines from the era. Meyerowitz highlights the predominance of non-fiction feature stories on women who were acclaimed for successfully pursuing participation in the public sphere while also maintaining a balanced family life in the home.⁶ In opposition to Friedan, Meyerowitz argues that the magazines frequently championed women who pursued their professional ambitions and commended those who sought and found fulfillment within and beyond the domestic ideal.

Historian Susan Hartmann supports Meyerowitz’s critique of Friedan, arguing that more women, particularly married women, were entering the work force than in any other generation

⁴ Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique,” 231.

⁵ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 62.

⁶ Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique,” 233-234.

preceding them.⁷ Though domesticity reigned as a powerful ideology in the post-war period,⁸ it is evident that the struggles and advancement made by earlier generations of women had not been entirely eradicated. More women were working outside the home and pursuing higher levels of education than ever before.⁹

The woman’s college was a primary target of Friedan’s critique. She argued that these educational institutions were agents of the “feminine mystique” due to the misguided efforts of faculty and administrators who championed conformity and adjustment and discouraged intellectual and professional ambition.¹⁰ Friedan developed this harsh critique in the chapter entitled “The Sex-Directed Educators.” The “sex-directed” educators, she explained, seized the historical moment during which American culture was working against the social and political progress made by the suffragists, the 1920s ‘new woman,’ and ‘Rosie the Riveter.’

[I]nstead of opening new horizons and wider worlds to able women, the sex directed educator moved in to teach them adjustment within the world of home and children. Instead of teaching truths to counter the popular prejudices of the past, or critical ways of thinking against which prejudice cannot survive, the sex-directed educator handed girls a sophisticated soup of uncritical prescriptions and presentments...¹¹

According to Friedan, the faculty and administration at American women’s colleges failed to produce the future female leaders of America and instead graduated the future “flawless” housewives of suburbia. She recalled her own experience at Smith College and reminisced that,

⁷ Susan Hartmann, “Women’s Employment and the Domestic Ideal in the Early Cold War Years,” in Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 86.

⁸ Hartmann, “Women’s Employment and the Domestic Ideal,” 84.

⁹ Linda Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 44.

¹⁰ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 157.

¹¹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 157.

“the point of education was to discover the life of the mind, to pursue truth and to take a place in the world. There was a sense, already dulling when I went to college, that we would be the New Women. Our world would be much larger than home.” It is the loss of this sentiment and ambition amongst college women after World War II that Friedan criticized. She cited the increase in dropout rates for collegiate women¹² as well as her interviews with students at Smith as evidence for the charge that career aspirations were waning. The “sex-directed” professors, deans, and college presidents, she asserted, propagated the ideology of domesticity in policy initiatives and in the lecture halls.¹³

Friedan protested that not only did the schools allow these educators to maintain their influence over the female students, but also the few remaining feminist faculty members had been marginalized by the administration. These women, she argued, who themselves broke through the rigid confines of public opinion, should have served as examples and teachers to students beyond the classroom. Yet, Friedan insisted, male professors with a “sex-directed” agenda had replaced these exemplary women.¹⁴

Lynn White, the male president of all female Mills College represents the most extreme of the “sex-directed” approach to education. White asserted that traditional education was inherently masculine and as a result, “a woman tends to be defeminized in proportion as she is educated.”¹⁵ Writing thirteen years before Friedan, White argued that women are of equal intelligence to men, but are not suited for the same type of education:

Women approach the same substance with concerns and points of view so different that it would appear that unconsciously we have produced new academic

¹²Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 63.

¹³Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 157.

¹⁴Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 158.

¹⁵Lynn White, *Educating Out Daughters: A Challenge to the Colleges* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1950), 57.

departments to comprehend them: sociology, anthropology, psychology...They embrace the feminine occupation with conserving and cherishing. It would be difficult to prove that their recent growth is a response to the penetration of women into higher education, but good evidence, in view of the habitual professorial shrinking from women, is the fact that these new disciplines have been slow to gain social acceptance in academic circles. Harvard taught psychology until 1934 in its department of philosophy; anthropology barely has a foot in the door of some of our greatest universities; and sociology is a word despised among the more conservative academicians.¹⁶

White believed that conventional education “masculinized” women while the increased number of female college students “feminized” the curriculum. Friedan condemned this sexist approach to education that she argued permeated the entire curriculum at these colleges and turned the study of the social sciences into a “pseudoscientific” indoctrination of the reigning sexist ideology that permeated popular culture¹⁷ White advocated that the curriculum of women’s colleges should be completely remodeled to prepare students for their duties as wife and mother in a way that still maintained a “respectable” level of intellectualism. He recommended that, “family studies [be] admitted to college curricula on a par with other subjects, that is, as being an extension of high school subjects, but taught with greater intensity and imagination.”¹⁸ White championed the principles of a “sex-directed” educator, aiming to prepare women to fulfill their biological function to the “best” of their ability. He explained that while men receive some

¹⁶ White, *Educating Our Daughters*, 64.

¹⁷ Kent McClelland, 24 June, 2000, “Functionalism,” Grinnell College, <http://web.grinnell.edu/courses/soc/s00/soc111-01/IntroTheories/Functionalism.html>, (accessed February 20, 2007)

¹⁸ White, *Educating Our Daughters*, 79.

exposure to “manual training and horticulture,” to prepare them for family responsibility, women should be the benefactors of the family-oriented education.¹⁹

Friedan recognized that White’s educational philosophies did not characterize the predominant approach to women’s education. Nevertheless, she insisted, any educator advocating a rearrangement of the college curriculum to cater to the needs of future wives and mothers was as guilty as White of promoting the “feminine mystique.”²⁰ How fair is this portrayal of the faculty and administration of these colleges in the post-war era? Not very. Friedan’s assessment of the bleak condition of American women’s education gave a limited, one-dimensional understanding of women’s colleges during this period; the students are not ambitious and the faculty and administration use educational strategies to propagate ideals of domesticity and separate spheres for men and women. However, views regarding the proper education for women in the post-war years were far more complex than Friedan allowed.

In response to Friedan’s critique, Linda Eisenmann proposes a more multi-dimensional view of this history in *Higher Education for Women in Post War America 1945-1965*. Eisenmann contests the claims that women were not pursuing college degrees at the same high rates of the pre-WWII era. She demonstrates that while the proportion of women in college in the 1950s decreased, their actual numbers steadily increased throughout most of the decade. The end of WWII and the advent of the G.I. Bill brought a huge increase in the proportion of male undergraduate students; however, it did not halt the rise in women’s pursuit of higher education.²¹ Eisenmann also illustrates the diversity of approaches taken towards women’s education by the instructors and administrators at coeducational and single-sex institutions.

¹⁹ White, *Educating Out Daughters*, 79.

²⁰ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 159.

²¹ Linda Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 44. Nevertheless, the decline in percentage and the increased drop-out rate during this period is cause for valid concern.

While she affirms Friedan’s claim that there were many who sought to reorganize the curricula to focus on preparation for women’s roles as wives and mothers, she also confirms that other approaches were represented.²² For example, along with those who championed the Lynn White philosophy critiqued by Friedan, a sizeable number of educators understood women as potentially equal to men in their capability to contribute to the American economy.²³ They saw no conflict between marriage, motherhood, and career, and criticized existing social structures and not women themselves for inhibiting female participation in the economy. Other theorists, she explains, sought a compromise between these extremes, and argued that women should be encouraged to pursue careers as well as personal fulfillment in a marital relationship and a family. They argued that a liberal arts education is the best means to prepare their students for this end.²⁴ A liberal arts education would prepare women for the “discontinuities” in their lives that would result from competing biological, social, and individual interests. Friedan overlooked the objectives and agenda’s of these educators. She failed to recognize that social change could be achieved while working within the social system and not only against it. In an analysis of three elite women’s colleges during this period, Barnard, Smith and Vassar, I will demonstrate that though there is truth in Friedan’s argument, she failed to recognize the deep-seated complexities that characterized women’s education in post-war America.

To evaluate the state of women’s higher education, I chose Barnard, Smith, and Vassar, three of the leading elite colleges for women in the post-WWII era. This comparison allows for a more thorough conclusion than offered by Friedan. All three colleges boasted an impressive faculty and administration along with a constituency of privileged, intellectual young female students. However, they differed in location, diversity, and in their educational philosophy.

²² Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women*, 65.

²³ Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women*, 66-68.

²⁴ Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women*, 76.

These differences are important determinants of each school’s approach to the ideology of domesticity through policy, curriculum, and their established objectives. Barnard College, located in New York City, a metropolis unrivalled in its multiculturalism, diversity and professional opportunities, provided for a more diverse student body than most other elite women’s colleges.²⁵ Furthermore, Barnard President, Millicent McIntosh, in contrast to other presidents, combined marriage, family, and a successful career in academia. In addition, unlike Smith and Vassar, Barnard students had access to the resources of its’ affiliate, Columbia University just across the street. Smith, in the small college town of Northampton, Massachusetts, is important for this analysis as well. In addition to the fact that it was Friedan’s alma mater and therefore a focal point in her own critique, it was also the only one of these three institutions to have a male president following World War II. Finally, Vassar stands as a point of contrast to both Barnard and Smith- having a female president and being located outside a metropolis.

In a sweeping indictment that women’s educators had fallen into the “sex-directed” line Friedan simplified a complex situation. She neglected the range of practices and views employed by faculty and administrators at each college. Furthermore, she disregarded the historical context that determined the messages imparted to students, policy initiatives, and curricular changes that occurred during this transitional, complex, and at times, controversial period in American history.

Though the domestic ideal did permeate the educational environment of all three colleges, faculty and administrators at Smith, Barnard, and Vassar encouraged students to strive for professional success and intellectual growth. By analyzing speeches delivered by the

²⁵ Rosalind Rosenberg, *Changing the Subject: How the Women at Columbia Shaped The Way We Think About Sex and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 140 (rise in Jewish students), 142-43 (rise in black students).

presidents of these colleges, the policies pertaining to married students on campus, and the classes taught on the subjects of marriage and family it is evident that faculties and administrations did not unquestionably embrace the “sex-directed” educational philosophy of Lynn White.

Messages from the Top

“ ‘We are not educating women to be scholars; we are educating them to be wives and mothers.’”²⁶

Friedan quoted this slogan from a “famous women college”²⁷ as emblematic of women’s educators’ response to the social pressures of domesticity during the early Cold-War period. In an aggressive challenge to the validity of this approach to education, Friedan argued that the “sex-directed” education was anachronistic and inappropriate. She asserted that this “sex-directed” message was incompatible with the realities of the time period, “Even when it is virtually certain that most women will no longer spend their lives as full time housewives, the sex-directed educators have told them not to plan for a career for fear of hampering their sexual adjustment.”²⁸ While her concerns were valid, she unfairly insisted that the leaders of women’s colleges made no efforts to publicly challenge the social stereotypes that pigeonholed their students in narrowly defined gender roles. This accusation slighted the attempts of women’s educators to counter the ideology of domesticity. In fact, in the years following World War II many faculty members and administrators offered the same challenge to these repressive ideologies that Friedan presented in 1963. Her analysis gave little to no recognition of the diversity of educational philosophies imparted to students by the leaders of these colleges. The presidents of Vassar, Smith, and Barnard employed a variety of approaches to resolving the

²⁶ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 158.

²⁷ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 158.

²⁸ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 167.

debate over women’s social roles. Furthermore, they addressed the role of the educational institution in preparing their female students for all endeavors.

Sarah Gibson Blandings of Vassar, Herbert Davis of Smith, and Millicent McIntosh of Barnard championed women’s right to pursue the educational and professional opportunities available to them. However, this does not imply that all three presidents were free from the pressures of the domestic ideal. Friedan explained that conflicting and vague statements from educators reinforced the strength of this post-war ideology.

the main barrier to such growth in girls is their own rigid preconception of women’s role, which sex-directed educators reinforce, either explicitly or by not facing their own ability, and the responsibility, to break through it,²⁹

In accordance with Friedan’s accusations the messages sent forth by both Blandings and Davis were rife with contradictions that failed to resolve the conflict between social pressures and personal ambition. Blandings overemphasized the primacy of motherhood in women’s lives, thereby reinforcing the socially constructed gender roles inherent in the domestic ideal. On the other hand, Davis neglected the conflict of balancing home and family. He demanded that his students pursue professional and leadership positions in the public sphere, yet he failed to address the reality that most students will eventually face responsibilities in the domestic sphere as well. Nevertheless, both educators maintained a staunch conviction that the liberal arts education and women’s colleges were the most effective means of preparing women for their futures. In addition, both encouraged intellectual growth outside the confines of marriage and family. Therefore, neither accepted the functionalist, “Lynn White,” curriculum that Friedan accredited to the “sex-directed” line.

²⁹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 163.

Millicent McIntosh greatly contradicted Friedan’s claims. She asserted the importance of professional pursuits for all students while also offering guidance on the conflict between career and family. The messages that the top administrators imparted to the student bodies of Vassar, Smith and Barnard were diverse in character and their objectives.

Liberal Arts Education Makes Better Wives and Mothers

In 1946, upon accepting the position as the first female president of America’s first women’s college, Sarah Gibson Blandings remarked, “ ‘The Vassar post is such a challenging job. I’m no feminist, but I’ve always had faith in the capacity of women to do more important things. If I’d turned it down, I’d have been unfair to my sex.’”³⁰ By asserting that she was “no feminist,” Blandings responded defensively to the pressures of the prevailing ideology of domesticity. Friedan addressed this conflict that women’s educators felt it necessary to defend their femininity to critics of women who pursued professions.³¹ Blandings’ remarks demonstrated her feelings that she had to justify her “unfeminine commitment,”³² to tenure in academia and as Vassar’s president between 1946-1964. This same defensive approach to justifying women’s education and professional ambitions was demonstrated in the message she imparted to her students. In analysis of a speech she delivered in May 14, 1959, it is evident that she asserted women’s right to pursue higher education. However, Blandings claimed that the college education, particularly the liberal arts curriculum, was best justified as a means to produce a better wife and mother; the ideal model of femininity.³³ Influenced by the domestic

³⁰ Vassar College Online Encyclopedia, “Sarah Gibson Blandings,” Vassar College, http://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/index.php/Sarah_Gibson_Blanding.

³¹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 158.

³² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 158.

³³ Sarah Gibson Blandings, “Syracuse Speech,” 14 May, 1959 Sarah Gibson Blandings Papers 1936-1978, Folder 3, Schlesinger Library, Radcliff Institute, Boston, MA, 1-2.

ideal promoted by American culture, Blandings consistently employed the word “mother” to define the primary role of women in the American institutional structure. Nevertheless, she insisted that the economic and psychological realities of women’s lives demanded professional training. She encouraged women to continue with their liberal arts education because she believed it to be the best preparation for the future.³⁴ Therefore, although Blandings’ approach to women’s education was influenced by the domestic ideal, she was hardly a “sex-directed” educator.

Sarah Gibson Blandings justified women’s education with a rhetoric recalling 19th century American republican perspective on women and motherhood. She quoted Matthew Vassar, the founder of Vassar College in 1861, “ ‘The mothers of a country mold the character of its citizens, determine its institutions, and shape its identity,’ ”³⁵ arguing that a woman should be educated so that she can raise exemplary male³⁶ citizens.

[C]ertainly the mother ranks first in the life of the young child and it is to her that he looks for interpretation of the natural world, for explanation of the limitations of reality, and his own ability to achieve all that his impulses demand...³⁷

and it is...

imperative for men and women to gather, weigh, and interpret evidence, to think objectively, to draw conclusions impartially, and to exercise mature independence of judgment.³⁸

Her defense of the women’s liberal arts college recalled the Victorian ideology that reigned in the 19th century. The child to which she referred was described as male, “his own ability...his

³⁴ Blandings, “Syracuse Speech,” 12.

³⁵ Blandings, “Syracuse Speech,” 1.

³⁶ Matthew Vassar lived long before women gained suffrage, therefore any citizen would have been male.

³⁷ Blandings, “Syracuse Speech,” 1.

³⁸ Blandings, “Syracuse Speech,” 6.

own impulses,” implying that the educated woman raises the educated son- like the virtuous republican woman raised the virtuous American citizen in the decades following the Revolutionary war.³⁹ Nevertheless, despite this evidence, Blandings did not insist that a women’s only role was in the home. Whereas Friedan argued that “In building the sex-directed curriculum, not everyone went as far as Lynn White...but if you started with the premise that women should no longer be educated like men, but for their role as women, you almost had to end with his curriculum.”⁴⁰ Blandings demonstrated a more multi-dimensional approach to women’s education.

Recognizing the growing certainty that most women will at some point enter into a vocation, Vassar’s president encouraged students to continue with their academic and professional training.

...a mother’s primary commitment for a span of ten to twenty years must be to her children. That does not mean that outside interests, including paid or volunteer part-time work, is excluded. As a matter of fact, many *but not all* women will be better mothers and more interesting wives if they do not devote themselves exclusively to the home.⁴¹

Blandings championed women’s pursuit of activities beyond the role of wife and mother. However, it appears as though she advocated for this training primarily as a reinforcement of the student’s domestic skills. Nevertheless, Blandings continued, explaining that although women may take a hiatus from educational and vocation pursuits, it would be necessary return to them

³⁹ Jan Lewis, “The Republican Wife,” in Sean Wilentz, *Major Problems in the Early Republic: 1787-1848* (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1992), 134.

⁴⁰ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 159.

⁴¹ Blandings, “Syracuse Speech,” 12.- italics added by me

after her children are raised to avoid, “personality ‘rigor-mortis.’”⁴² Unlike the “sex-directed” educators defined by Friedan who inhibited the mental maturation of female students, Blandings explicitly stated that the intellectual development of her students was the primary objective of the liberal arts education.

maturity implies a capacity to think and make decisions independently and act courageously on the basis of enlightened judgment and dependable basic personal values. I suggest that mature values include concern for the welfare of others as well as a source of personal gratification.⁴³

Blandings concluded her speech asserting the college’s responsibility to encourage students to maintain interest in their academic pursuits throughout and beyond their formal academic careers.

While significant evidence points to Blanding’s gender specific educational philosophy, when analyzed in the historical context of the time period, her ideology demonstrated some progressivism. Because she asserted that a woman’s primary role was that of wife and mother, she made herself susceptible to Friedan’s attack. Blandings failed to challenge the dominating socially constructed gender roles that prevailed throughout American history. However, she separated herself from the line of “sex-directed” educators by asserting the values of a liberal arts education. She maintained that Vassar’s curriculum was the best preparation for whatever endeavors her students wish to pursue as it feeds the mind and encourages intellectual growth.

A Male President: Right Sentiment Wrong Rhetoric

The barriers separating the “feminine” domestic sphere from the “masculine” public sphere had been a matter of public debate since the rise of the women’s rights movement in the

⁴² Blandings, “Syracuse Speech,” 12.

⁴³ Blandings, “Syracuse Speech,” 9.

19th century.⁴⁴ Friedan’s 1963 social critique was a part of this ongoing debate over the injustice and sexism that governed this gendered division of American society. Claiming that the discussion was silenced in the years following World War II, Friedan argued that the sex-directed educators tried to strengthen these barriers and commit women to their roles as wives and mothers. Smith College President Herbert Davis’ 1949 article, “What Type of Woman Smith College Should Produce,” suggests that he was much more ambitious for his students than Friedan implied. Davis verbalized his resentment of the revival of a conservative Victorianism. He saw it as a hindrance to the progress achieved by American progressives over the past several decades. Disappointed with the inadequate number of women in the professions or active in the public sphere, he urged his students to seek intellectual growth and “professional training,” because, “it may be that Smith College in the next 25 years will have to make a rather larger contribution [to the professional and intellectual communities] than it has hitherto done.”⁴⁵ He beseeched his students to commit themselves to the advancement and improvement of American society by developing their own vocational and intellectual capabilities. However, while Davis’s address employed revolutionary feminist thought, he also used a rhetoric that defined women’s characters as different from that of men’s, attributing women’s gentility as the proper counter to men’s overt brutality. At points in his article he argued that these differences granted women the right and responsibility to pursue careers and positions in American leadership. His outspoken demand that women pursue professions contradicts Friedan’s indictment of women’s educators. However, his rhetoric exemplified the complexity of the debate over women’s education while also demonstrating that the post-war era was indeed a time of transition for women’s changing social roles in American society.

⁴⁴ Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 18.

⁴⁵ Herbert Davis, “What Type of Woman Smith College Should Produce,” *Smith Alumnae Quarterly*, May 1949, Smith College Archives, Northampton, MA, 132.

Davis’ article was divided into two sections: first he commented on Smith’s failure to graduate a significant number of professional and intellectual women leaders to guide America in its development as a world superpower. As he continued, he pledged that Smith College educators and administrators would serve as exemplars, and work to mold the ideal, ambitious Smith graduate. Demonstrating what many at his time would identify as a revolutionary perspective of women, he wrote, “I emphasized then that I was a little alarmed to find how far the 18th century view still prevailed and had its influence on women’s education even now.”⁴⁶ He continued to define his objectives for the upcoming decades; to entice Smith College graduates to pursue the increasing opportunities available to women in “public life.”⁴⁷ He argued further that Smith must actively recruit young women “with unusual abilities and particular talents,”⁴⁸ in order to foster a reputation of excellence for the College. Davis’ faith in the intellectual and professional capabilities of American women coupled with his critique of American culture demonstrates that the administration of Smith College championed gender equality and looked unfavorably on any celebration of domesticity. In contrast to Friedan’s portrayal of women’s educators as promoters of an atmosphere of apathy toward intellectualism, Davis demanded that Smith cultivate an environment in which the talented student “can best grow” in order to, “take their places by the side of those already gone out from Smith College, in the profession and in the public life of America today.”⁴⁹

President Davis praised the potential of Smith students and encouraged his colleagues to establish an intellectual environment that would foster the full development of this potential. In his demand for gender equality, he called upon his students to leave the kitchen and enter into the

⁴⁶ Davis, “What Type of Woman,” 132.

⁴⁷ Davis, “What Type of Woman,” 132.

⁴⁸ Davis, “What Type of Woman,” 132.

⁴⁹ Davis, “What Type of Woman,” 132.

public sphere traditionally reserved for men. He commended successful Smith alumnae, but insisted “it would do no harm if there were more with ambitions to prepare themselves to become expert in their professions, equipped and ready for positions of the utmost responsibility in public life.”⁵⁰ Davis asserted the right of his students to join men in the public sphere, demonstrating the inaccuracy in Friedan’s accusations that these colleges acquiesced to the mood of popular culture. Though the ideology of domesticity and disinterest in intellectualism and professionalism may have permeated the dorm rooms, it evidently did not reign in the lecture halls. However, despite his anti-domesticity sentiments, this first part of Davis’ speech neglected the issue of the possible conflict of combining family life and professional aspirations.

Davis mentioned “public life” three times in his short address without ever referencing success in the private arena. This left his young audience without guidance as to how they might balance marriage, family, and career aspirations. Thus, while his sentiments and goals are progressive, he remained susceptible to Friedan’s criticism that educators did not encourage students to think that they can “do it all.”⁵¹ His failure to guide students supports Friedan’s claim that insufficient guidance from educators left students afraid of the future, “just as girls begin to feel the conflicts of the growing pains of identity, they stop growing.”⁵² By failing to help students navigate these conflicts, Friedan insisted that the sex-directed educator inadvertently drove them to early marriage and away from scholarship. The opening of Davis’s article permitted Friedan’s interpretation.

The second section of Davis’ address discussed what type of personal qualities Smith should aim to foster in its student body. Appealing to the rapidly rising sense of insecurity and patriotism in the wake of the Cold War, Davis advised that Smith produce

⁵⁰ Davis, “What Type of Woman,” 132.

⁵¹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 170.

⁵² Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*, 176.

[W]omen of critical intelligence, women having something of the scientist’s ability to observe carefully, to suspend judgment until evidence is certain, to wait quietly until truth can be separated from error. We need also women of *sensitivity* and *delicacy* of insight into the intricate problems of human relations...⁵³

Using words such as “sensitivity,” “delicacy,” and later in the article, “tolerance, kindness, and the spirit of understanding and sympathy,”⁵⁴ Davis revived a rhetoric once employed by suffragists as well as women’s activists in the 1920s. Many feminists at the turn of the century championed women’s moral superiority to men as the justification for equal rights and citizenship. This language is in conflict with his assertions that Smith College graduates pursue professional positions alongside their male counterparts. By asserting that Smith College produce women with qualities associated with femininity and passivity he faced the same risks identified by the National Women’s party in the 1920s when they criticized reformers for emphasizing women’s moral superiority in order to gain political and social equality.⁵⁵ After dedicating the first part of his address to the alarmingly low numbers of women in the public sphere, he wrote in the second half that women must save the “situation in the world which is tending to produce an atmosphere of insecurity and suspicion and where the humaner and kindlier virtues have to struggle to survive.”⁵⁶ This implied that men, who do not possess “kindlier virtues” have misdirected America, and Smith women, who should exemplify virtues of “sensitivity and delicacy,” can rectify this because their disposition differs from the current male leaders. By espousing the difference in attributes possessed by women over men he left room for the interpretation that women are unequal to men. However, it must be noted that the debate

⁵³ Davis, “What Type of Woman,” 132. Italics added by me

⁵⁴ Davis, “What Type of Woman,” 132.

⁵⁵ Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 120.

⁵⁶ Davis, “What Type of Woman,” 132.

over sameness and difference exists today, and neither strategy has secured complete equality for women in the United States.

Smith’s President imparted a male-centric perspective of feminism to his students. He encouraged his Smith women to aspire to reach their greatest potential intellectually and professionally. However, Davis faced this same conflict in the feminist debate between sameness and difference. He failed to appreciate the specific challenges women faced in balancing pursuits in the public sphere with responsibilities in the private sphere. Consequently, he left the young Smith College student to determine for herself which path to follow without inspiring confidence and understanding that she need not sacrifice one for the other. Yet, by emphasizing difference between the male and female character, Davis’ allowed for the perpetuation of the principles that sustain gender inequality. It is these gendered stereotypes that had, throughout American history, strengthened the principles that support separate gendered social spheres.⁵⁷

A President Speaks Out: Millicent McIntosh Represents the Ideal

Millicent McIntosh embodied the ideal women that Friedan wanted students to emulate. However, to Friedan’s dismay, she argued that students were encouraged to think that such women were exceptions to the rule and in effect shamed by their refusal to conform.⁵⁸ McIntosh was a wife, a mother of several children, and a successful career woman who rose to the top of the administration of an elite women’s college. She successfully conquered both the private and public spheres and yet, more than any other college administrator, fell victim to explicitly harsh criticism from Friedan. In “The Sex-Directed Educators,” Friedan described a “guilty woman

⁵⁷ Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), xv.

⁵⁸ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*. 171.

president” who introduced a functional curriculum to a “famous woman’s college,”- a woman suspiciously similar to Mrs. McIntosh.

...guilty personally of being a college president, besides having a large number of children [*Dean McIntosh had 5 children*⁵⁹] and a successful husband; guilty of also having been an ardent feminist in her time and of having advanced in a good way in her career before she married. [*McIntosh did not marry until age 34, two years after becoming headmistress of the Brearley School for girls*⁶⁰]... introduced a functional course in marriage and the family, compulsory of all sophomores. [*This may conflict with the assumption Friedan is referencing Barnard because “Modern Living” was required for freshman and seniors, not sophomores.*⁶¹] The circumstances which led to the college’s decision, two years later, to *drop* that functional course are shrouded in secrecy... (*“Modern Living” was dropped in 1954, 6 years after its implementation and replaced by “Man in the Modern World” for 2 years and then replaced with a sociology course “Marriage and the Family” which Friedan explains in the following paragraph in her book, “At the college in question, ‘Marriage and the Family,’ is taught once again as a course in sociology”*)⁶²

Friedan’s assessment and criticism of the administration at Barnard, particularly Millicent McIntosh distorts the facts. She insists that a “sex-directed education finally infiltrated” the College while neglecting the recurrent messages delivered by President McIntosh throughout her tenure at Barnard.

⁵⁹ Rosenberg, *Changing the Subject*, 189.

⁶⁰ Rosenberg, *Changing the Subject*, 189.

⁶¹ Mirra Komarovsky, et. all, “Report of the Subcommittee on Women’s Education.” 1948, Barnard College Archives, New York, NY, 12.

⁶² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*. 167- Italicized comments in parentheses added by me

On January 24, 1948, Dean McIntosh published an article in the *Barnard Magazine* entitled “Has Education Failed American Women?” Her comments on the goals of education, the social role of women, as well as on current public opinion would be repeated and reinforced throughout her career.⁶³ This article was McIntosh’s response to the “many college graduates [who] are critical of their education, and believe that it has been unrealistic from the point of view for preparing them for living.”⁶⁴ Her first suggestion as how to remedy these perceived deficiencies in colleges such as Barnard is the implementation of functional classes that will prepare students for “the kinds of lives women will actually be leading when they graduate, marry, and begin to raise a family.”⁶⁵ She conceded that past courses on the topics of family and other social institutions have over-emphasized the theoretical; “Courses have been keyed too universally on a pre-professional basis; professors and administrators have been reluctant to face the kind of lives women will actually be leading when they graduate, marry, and begin to raise a family.”⁶⁶ This statement appears to compliment Friedan’s critique that women’s colleges abandoned scientific curriculums for functional classes unsuitable for an intellectual environment. Furthermore, this curricular change at Barnard points to the accuracy in Friedan’s characterization of McIntosh as a “sex-directed educator.” However, this accusation is first called into question in light of McIntosh’s insistence in this speech that this type of education, geared towards life preparation, is as much a necessity in all-male colleges as it is in women’s institutions.⁶⁷ The sex-directed educator was one who advocated gender-specific curricula, an

⁶³ Rosalind Rosenberg. *Changing the Subject*. 215-216.

⁶⁴ Millicent McIntosh. “Has Education Failed American Women,” 24 January, 1948. Barnard College Archives, New York, NY, 1. As I will discuss in the next chapter, McIntosh introduced a functional class called “Modern Living” to Barnard’s required curriculum. This speech was both a justification for this plan and a rebuttal to alumnae accusations against Barnard.

⁶⁵ McIntosh. “Has Education Failed American Women,” 1.

⁶⁶ McIntosh. “Has Education Failed American Women,” 1.

⁶⁷ McIntosh. “Has Education Failed American Women,” 1.

educational philosophy not advanced by McIntosh. She ended this first proposal for change with a proclamation that women must also be prepared to pursue professions.⁶⁸

In her second proposal McIntosh criticized women’s educators for the same weaknesses addressed by Friedan. She lamented the college’s inability to “inculcate a sense of idealism in their students.”⁶⁹ The leader of Barnard’s faculty and administration urged a spirited revival of Barnard’s original mission; to *inspire* students to pursue leadership roles in American society, professional success, as well as promote scientific and cultural advancement, “So I suggest first that women’s colleges need to drop complacency and to examine their purposes, recognizing the need to prepare women for living as well as for professions.”⁷⁰ Yet, McIntosh does not justify these principles solely on the basis of psychological reasoning of Friedan that women need careers in order to be complete and fulfilled persons. McIntosh adds a “pragmatic point of view; you consider other people, because it pays, and you enter a profession to obtain self-fulfillment...break down under the strains of modern living, leaving the student confused, unhappy, and thwarted.”⁷¹ She tried to offset the development of the “feminine mystique,” insisting that it is not only for the self that women must pursue a career, but that it is necessary for reasons of practicality.⁷² This approach had the potential to be effective in sparking ambition among students who hadn’t appreciated the likelihood that she would be working at some point or throughout her life. McIntosh sought to infuse her students with a sense of responsibility to humanity and the individual in order to motivate the privileged and exceptional students that fill Barnard classrooms.

⁶⁸ McIntosh. “Has Education Failed American Women,” 1.

⁶⁹ McIntosh. “Has Education Failed American Women,” 2.

⁷⁰ McIntosh. “Has Education Failed American Women,” 1.

⁷¹ McIntosh. “Has Education Failed American Women,” 2.

⁷² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*. 167.

Similar rhetoric was found in *Coronet* magazine in 1948. Joanne Meyerowitz contends that the ideology of domesticity was at odds with the Cold War tensions that permeated American culture. She cites an article in the magazine that exemplifies support for women’s work outside the home because “ ‘Her desire to be useful beyond the home keep[s] her active and vital...[in] building of democracy in religious, political, and charitable movements.’”⁷³ According to Meyerowitz, this type of rhetoric demonstrates how popular culture in the early Cold War period embraced the right of women to participate in the American economy and political structure.⁷⁴ Therefore, when analyzed within the historical context, Dean McIntosh’s rhetoric, though differing from Friedan’s psychological language,⁷⁵ cannot be viewed as an uncritical acquiescence to the ideal of domesticity. She called on teachers and administrators to serve as models of leadership, responsibility and competence in order to cultivate an atmosphere of scholarship and critical thinking on the Barnard campus. McIntosh concluded the article with a criticism of women for their complacency and acquiescence to the values of popular culture that confine them to the home. She closed with an appeal to “colleges and college graduates- [that there] comes the need to *meet squarely the problems of our time*, and to summon the intelligence, courage, and idealism to solve them.”⁷⁶ This plea for action from students, colleagues, and graduates to pursue social change does not recall the Friedan’s description of the “ex-feminist woman president, who was perhaps beginning to suffer slight guilt at the thought of all those women educated like men.” Though it is true that McIntosh did acquiesce to the atmosphere of the period in taking into account the grievances of recent graduates, she

⁷³ Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique,” 242.

⁷⁴ Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique,” 242.

⁷⁵ Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique,” 229.- Meyerowitz wrote that “Friedan did not choose a typical liberal feminist language of rights, equality, or even justice. Influenced by the new human potential psychology, she argued instead that full-time domesticity stunted women and denied their ‘basic human need to grow.’”

⁷⁶ McIntosh. “Has Education Failed American Women,” 3. Italics added by me

continuously reassured her supporters as well as her critics that women not only have the right, but also must shoulder the responsibility to pursue success beyond the home. However, McIntosh’s insistence that Barnard students strive to realize their fullest potentials and capabilities is somewhat undermined by the fact that she did not explain how this can be done. Like President Davis of Smith, McIntosh failed to guide her students to understand how motherhood and vocation can be combined. However, in April 1948, only three months after this speech, McIntosh addressed these conflicts and offered suggestions on how this balance can be reached.

In accordance with her previous speech, McIntosh recognized that women face great obstacles in combining marriage, family, and vocation. In her article for *Parents* magazine, “A Double Life For Women,” she provided several suggestions for young women who want to pursue a career, yet fear that this ambition may interfere with desires to marry and raise a family. In the opening paragraphs, McIntosh explained that if a woman is “given adequate help in the first years, a woman can have both family and career, and neglect the family not at all.”⁷⁷ This assumed that only women with the economic means to provide stable supplementary care for her children are eligible candidates for working mothers. However, McIntosh addressed this problem later in the article.

[W]ether a woman can make arrangements necessary for her to carry on a career is a question to be determined by the circumstance of each case...She is apt to see her ambitions blocked, her life taken over by household duties, not because she has lost interest, but because she *cannot afford* domestic help.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Millicent McIntosh, “Double Life for Women,” *Parents Magazine* published April 1948, Barnard College Archives, New York, NY, 2.

⁷⁸ McIntosh, “Double Life for Women,” 3.

Recognizing that not all women are as fortunate as she, McIntosh offered several suggestions to address this problem, such as recruiting help from relatives or establishing an arrangement with another mother in the neighborhood.⁷⁹ McIntosh continued, reassuring the reader that even if these arrangements cannot be made, the mother can and should resume her professional training and aspirations once the child enters nursery school and with more rigor once the child begins elementary school.⁸⁰ This differentiates her from Blandings who insisted that 10-20 years be devoted to the home, a much longer hiatus from non-domestic interests than McIntosh believed necessary. During this interim period, McIntosh, like Blandings, advised the young mother to “think in terms of postponement rather than surrender... The important thing is to keep her intellectual life alive.”⁸¹ Thus, as a result of this article, McIntosh established her stance as an advocate for women’s scholarship and professionalism. Yet, she recognized the obstacles faced by these ambitious women and offered realistic suggestions for how young mothers can seek to realize their fullest potential both in and beyond the home. Friedan’s indictment of McIntosh as a “self-directed educator” is misconstrued. The incorporation of functionalism, as will be discussed further in the next chapter, reflects her philosophy that a professional career and motherhood are not necessarily mutually exclusive paths.

The Function of Functionalism

As college administrators tackled the domestic ideal from the podium and in magazines, Smith, Vassar, and Barnard’s professors confronted post-war thought in the classrooms. Friedan observed that the curricula of these colleges had been reformulated throughout the decade to

⁷⁹ McIntosh, “Double Life for Women,” 4.

⁸⁰ McIntosh, “Double Life for Women,” 4.

⁸¹ McIntosh, “Double Life for Women,” 6.

serve as a “functional indoctrination on ‘how to play the role of woman.’”⁸² An examination of courses offered by Smith’s sociology department between 1946-59, Barnard’s “Modern Living” course launched in 1949, and Vassar’s “Child Development” since 1927 suggests that Friedan’s criticisms were not misguided. She attacked courses with a “functionalist” bend that aimed to prepare women for their proper roles in society.

Conformity is built into life-adjustment education in many ways. There is little or no intellectual challenge or discipline in merely, learning to adjust. The marriage course is the easiest course on almost every campus, no matter how anxiously professors try to toughen it by assigning heavy reading and weekly reports... This is not to say that the study of a social science, as such, produces conformity in a woman or man. This is hardly the effect when it is studied critically and motivated by the *usual aims of intellectual discipline*...But for girls forbidden both professional and intellectual commitment by the new mystique, the study of sociology, anthropology, psychology is merely ‘functional.’⁸³

Friedan assumed that because the “sex-directed” philosophy had infiltrated the schools propagators of the “mystique” had seized the curriculum. The message published by Vassar in 1946, “[m]any courses are being developed which in material and emphasis shed special light on the problems of personal and community adjustment so important to the college woman.”⁸⁴ However, this generalized portrayal neglects the efforts of the non-“sex-directed” educators at

⁸² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 156.

⁸³ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*. 171. *Italics added by me*

⁸⁴ “From Vassar” Packet, published June 1946, Box 10, File 22, Vassar College Libraries, Special Collections, Poughkeepsie, NY.

elite women’s schools. Friedan’s perception of functionalism as inherently conservative,⁸⁵ disregarded the historical context in which many of these curricular changes were enacted.

Evolution and Change in Social Science

A curious change occurred between 1946 and 1956 in the description of Smith sociology course 35a, “The Modern Family,” taught annually by professor Charles Hunt Page. The change in the stated course objectives initially promises a “Friedanian” critique. In the 1946-49 Course Catalogue, the description of the class reads, “Standards of living and child welfare; changing laws and attitudes; shifting permanent values.”⁸⁶ By 1952-53 the same course description has been slightly altered, leaving out the economic discussion of “child welfare;” “Study of the modern family; changing laws and attitudes; shifting and permanent values.”⁸⁷ Yet, in 1956-57 the same lecture, taught by the same male professor, appears to have been completely reconfigured along the lines of a “sex-directed educator.” The course is described as an “Analysis of courtship, marriage, and family life with relation to changing and persistent values and attitudes; emphasis on women’s roles.”⁸⁸ The stated course objectives suggest a “how to” instruction on courtship, marriage, and family under the guise of a sociological study. This is evidenced by the abandonment of what would be deemed as respectable topics, or as quoted above, “the usual aims of intellectual discipline,” such as economic and statistics.⁸⁹ However, in considering the trends of sociology and other social sciences after World War II, it is evident that

⁸⁵ Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*, 171.

⁸⁶ “Sociology,” in *The Smith College Course Catalogue* 1946-49 edition.. Smith College Libraries, Special Collections, Northampton, MA, 143.

⁸⁷ “Sociology,” in *The Smith College Course Catalogue* 1952-53 edition, Smith College Libraries Special Collections, Northampton, MA, 125.

⁸⁸ “Sociology,” in *The Smith College Course Catalogue* 1956-57 edition, Smith College Libraries, Special Collections, Northampton, MA, 135.

⁸⁹ Howard Brick, “Talcott Parsons’s ‘Shift Away from Economics, 1937-1946,’” *The Journal of American History*, 87 (2000): 510.

an analysis of the “functional” education was far more complex than Friedan allowed. Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons, leading mid-century sociological theorists, shifted emphasis from economic and market trends to the study of cultural institutions and organizations.⁹⁰ Thus, it is necessary to consider the curricular changes at Smith and Barnard⁹¹ in light of the evolution of the discipline.

The trends in sociological study confirm that Friedan’s assessment neglected progress within the historical context. Sociology as an academic discourse evolved through several phases in its definition, methodology, and placement within academia. Not until after World War II did sociology become a prominent and respected field independent of anthropology and economics.⁹² Talcott Parsons of Harvard prompted these developments, spearheading the advancement of the “functionalist” method of studying the social sciences.⁹³ He abandoned the Marxian approach to the study of civil society that stressed the role of the market and economy. Parsons worked to re-direct sociological study, emphasizing a non-economic based analytical method. This implied a greater emphasis on social institutions such as the family.⁹⁴ According to contemporary sociologist, Howard Brick, this shift in emphasis contributed to the maturation of sociology as an independent field, “as it differentiated it from economics.”⁹⁵ Furthermore, it fitted the discourse within the conservative social context of the early Cold-War era. He explains that the post-war maturation of the discourse worked to restrict a socialist critique of the capitalist, corporatist American society by refocusing emphasis from economy and politics to

⁹⁰ Jonathan H. Turner, “Sociology in the U.S: It’s Growth and Contemporary Profile,” in Nikolai Genov, ed., *National Traditions in Sociology*, (London: SAGE Publication, Ltd.), 223-224.

⁹¹ Vassar did not add any new courses on the family during this period, and the sociology course “The Family,” remained consistent throughout the era.

⁹² Turner, “Sociology in the U.S.,” 221. Vassar continued to list these three subjects together in their course catalogue throughout the period being examined in this thesis.

⁹³ Turner, “Sociology in the US,” 230.

⁹⁴ Brick, “Talcott Parsons’s ‘Shift Away from Economics,’” 492.

⁹⁵ Brick, “Talcott Parsons’s ‘Shift Away from Economics,’” 492.

cultural institutions. In turn, this shift allowed for a scholarly critique of society beyond the economic system, such as that offered by sociologist Mirra Komarovsky (discussed below) and Friedan.⁹⁶ Both women presented critiques of the cultural, psychological, and sociological pressures that inhibited the American woman’s cognitive development and personal fulfillment. Friedan perceived the trends in post-war sociological study as conservative and a trivialization of the discipline. However, this transition was what enabled Friedan’s own social critique of American institutional and social structures in the 1960s.⁹⁷ This suggests that the change in emphasis from “child welfare, laws and attitudes” to “an analysis of “courtship, marriage, and family life” is not only a reflection of the maturation of an academic discipline, but is also demonstrative of a new, more analytical approach to the study of society beyond economic theories and trends. This attributes to contemporary historical research that portrays the post-war era as one of transition, not only in women’s lives but also in academia.

The texts chosen for the “Modern Family” course in 1957 were, with the exception of two, written after 1951.⁹⁸ That same year Parsons published his work on functionalism, recognized as a significant turning point in the evolution of sociological thought, *The Social System*.⁹⁹ Samples of the texts chosen for this class, including Mirra Komarovsky’s progressive feminist work, *Women in the Modern World*, challenge Friedan’s assertion that functionalism was “pseudoscientific.”¹⁰⁰

Affirming Friedan’s critique, the Clifford Kirkpatrick text chosen for the class, *The Family as Process and Institution*, put forth the point of view of the “sex-directed” line. The

⁹⁶ Brick. “Talcott Parsons’s ‘Shift Away from Economics,” 492.

⁹⁷ Brick. “Talcott Parsons’s ‘Shift Away from Economics,” 511.

⁹⁸ Charles Hunt Page, “The Modern Family, Sociology Syllabus: A Note on Bibliography and Assignments.” Fall 1957, in Sociology Department Syllabi, Box 52, Smith College Archives, Northampton, MA, 1.

⁹⁹ Brick., “Talcott Parsons’s ‘Shift Away from Economics,” 498.

¹⁰⁰ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 169.

study advanced the argument that a woman’s biological/reproductive function must be fulfilled for the sake of emotional and psychological gratification or “[p]ersonality maladjustment may be the fate of the woman choosing the exclusive career path. There are profound personal consequences of failure to marry, involving every aspect of maladjustment... a lack of full social approval from those who count.”¹⁰¹ Alluding to the author’s ignorance of the cultural pressures that contain women within narrowly defined gender roles, Kirkpatrick asserted that, “it is a highly significant fact that relatively few women have a general career interest...”¹⁰² The text appears to have failed to address public opinion, prejudices, and discrimination that left many women discouraged from choosing certain career paths. However, a more in depth investigation of *The Family* shows that Kirkpatrick measured and analyzed statistical data and offered a scholarly discussion of the historic evolution the family institution. A closer reading of this sociology textbook suggests that Friedan’s indictment neglected evidence that courses were in fact geared towards deconstructing the conservative ideology of the period.

Kirkpatrick provided social scientific evidence to support his final conclusion that women cannot reach full emotional and cognitive development if they are restricted to the home.¹⁰³ The chapters “The Changing Status of Women,” and “Location of the Marriage-Career Problem,” put forth a relatively progressive understanding of challenges women experienced in the face of American post-war cultural values. Kirkpatrick addressed the incongruence of American cultural attitudes with biological and psychological theories. He stated that women have both a *reproductive* function and a *work* function that they share equally with men.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, he claimed, it is an unhealthy denial of the work function if a woman dedicated

¹⁰¹ Clifford Kirkpatrick, *The Family as a Process and Institution* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1955), 408.

¹⁰² Kirkpatrick, *The Family as a Process and Institution*, 403.

¹⁰³ Kirkpatrick, *The Family as a Process and Institution*, 166.

¹⁰⁴ Kirkpatrick, *The Family as a Process and Institution*, 166.

herself solely to the domestic sphere while neglecting her role in the public sphere, especially educated women who “feel that they are ‘wasted women’ with respect to capacity and training.”¹⁰⁵ He buttressed these claims with statistical analysis that, contrary to what Friedan predicted, supported her diagnosis of the roots of the “feminine mystique.” Kirkpatrick also addressed the rewards and drawbacks of all types of lifestyle choices available to women. While stating that the ideal situation is that which allows women to dedicate themselves fully to both the home and professional pursuits, he recognized that the political and cultural structures are not yet in place.¹⁰⁶ He offered his own prescriptions for social change that would help women more easily combine career and family, “It would aid to abolish discriminations against women because of the fact that they may drop out to have children...Arrangements might be made in the professions and in industry whereby women could come back into employment without undue handicaps...”¹⁰⁷ The professor’s selection of this text indicates that Smith instructors aimed to counter the pressures of popular culture that drove women into the home upon receiving their diplomas. By engaging his students in a sociological analysis of the family and how society shapes that institution, Professor Hunt-Page opened the classroom for a constructive discussion of the relationship between social stigma and psychological realities. Echoed in the 1958 Vassar article on the goals of “Child Study,” women’s educators asserted that these types of courses were not meant to uncritically put forth “a set of prescriptions and techniques, no matter how well founded.”¹⁰⁸ Texts such as these offered students a pragmatic perspective of socially constructed gender roles while encouraging them to assess their own cognitive and vocational talents outside the confines of marriage and the family.

¹⁰⁵ Kirkpatrick, *The Family as a Process and Institution*. 166.

¹⁰⁶ Kirkpatrick, *The Family as a Process and Institution*, 403-404.

¹⁰⁷ Kirkpatrick, *The Family as a Process and Institution*, 421.

¹⁰⁸ Vassar Child Study Department Members, “Child Study at Vassar,” *Vassar Alumnae Magazine*, published Feb 1958, Box 10, File 22, Vassar College Libraries, Special Collections, Poughkeepsie, NY, 2.

Professor Hunt-Page assigned a list of twelve sociological textbooks accompanied with a second list of nine volumes from an “ ‘education for marriage’ or ‘marriage problems’ viewpoint.”¹⁰⁹ Titles include, *Anticipating Your Marriage*, by R.O. Blood and *Education for Marriage*, by J.A. Peterson. Again, the reading list suggests the accuracy of Friedan’s illustration of post-war women’s education. However, this analysis disregards the fact that the professor designated the selection of marriage “guidebooks,” as primary sources for analysis and not as textbooks.¹¹⁰ Sociological study requires in depth analysis of contemporary cultural artifacts in order to assess social phenomena. Friedan herself used this same technique in her celebrated work, in which she included an analysis of contemporary women’s magazines to launch a critique of the patriarchy and sexism that permeates America culture.

The development of Talcott Parsons’ functionalism was neglected in Friedan’s critique of the “sex-directed education.” The texts chosen by Charles Hunt Page imply that professor’s at women’s colleges did not simply present to a students a, “a sophisticated soup of uncritical prescriptions and presentments...”¹¹¹ The example of Kirkpatrick’s study suggests that there were indeed post-war sociology courses engaged in a constructive and analytical discussion of social structures and institutions. As I will demonstrate in the following section, this curricular change was not necessarily a gender specific approach to education.

Mirra Komarovsky and a Non-Sex Directed Functionalism

In 1948 Barnard launched a “functionalist”/life-adjustment class entitled, “Modern Living.” The implementation of the course was a response to alumnae criticism of the liberal arts curriculum as abstract and irrelevant. Earlier that year, a questionnaire was sent out to 4300

¹⁰⁹ Page, “The Modern Family, Sociology Syllabus,” 1.

¹¹⁰ Page, “The Modern Family, Sociology Syllabus,” 1.

¹¹¹ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 157.

Barnard graduates from 1930 onwards. In response to the 700 surveys returned to researchers at the school, President McIntosh established a Sub-Committee on Women’s Education within the existing Committee of Instruction. Sociology Professor, Barnard Graduate, and Columbia PhD.-Mirra Komarovsky- headed both the Committee and Sub-Committee. While 11 percent of the survey respondents praised Barnard’s liberal arts tradition, “ ‘[d]on’t alter the liberal arts character of Barnard by introducing practical courses,’” an alarming 83 percent insisted that Barnard needed to improve upon curriculum and better prepare students for the life’s realities. Of this 83 percent, 40 percent-recommended greater counseling in preparation for “family life,” while 27 percent insisted that greater attention be given to preparation for a vocation.¹¹² The committee responded to these grievances with a recommendation for a course entitled, “Modern Living” intended to “be useful in a more immediate sense [than a liberal arts education], i.e. to increase her effectiveness as a whole person in meeting practical situations in the major areas of life in relation to her own physical and mental health, her parental family, her job, her marriage and family, her community.”¹¹³

The introduction of “functionalism” to the liberal arts curriculum at Barnard was alluded to by Friedan in the indictment of Millicent McIntosh cited in the first chapter of this thesis, “Messages from the Top.” Friedan, frustrated by what she viewed as an acquiescence to the public mood of post-war America, criticized “a famous woman’s college,”¹¹⁴ “which had been proud in the past of its large share of graduates who went on to play leading roles in education, law and medicine, the arts and sciences, government and social welfare.”¹¹⁵ Barnard’s embrace

¹¹² Komarovsky, “Report of the Sub-Committee on Women’s Education,” 4.

¹¹³ Komarovsky, “Report of the Sub-Committee on Women’s Education,” 12 –parenthesis added by me

¹¹⁴ This is taken from the same excerpt indicting president McIntosh quoted in “Messages from the Top” ‘Millicent McIntosh Represents the Ideal’- therefore, as discussed in the chapter “Messages from the Top”- we can infer that she is once again referring to Barnard.

¹¹⁵ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 167.

of functionalism, however, was not a “sex-directed” maneuver. Rather, the college’s educators worked to modernize the liberal arts curriculum so as to better prepare students for the challenges and decisions of post-collegiate life. Faculty and administrators steadfastly asserted the merits of the liberal arts education. The introduction of a “functional” course in “modern living,” was not an attempt to subvert the liberal arts as the primary means of intellectual and personality development. The course was an experimental effort to encourage this development and prepare students to tackle life thoughtfully and critically.

To complement the addition of “Modern Living” to Barnard’s educational requirements, Komarovsky’s committee also recommended that greater vocational guidance be offered to students and graduates and that field-work experience be integrated into the general curriculum.¹¹⁶ Again, Vassar also participated in a growing movement within education to combine theoretical research with empirical observation.¹¹⁷ This adjustment in the schools’ educational structure suggests that the school’s functional approach was directed towards “life adjustment.” However, in opposition to Friedan’s sweeping indictment of these “adjustment” courses, Barnard did not encourage conformity to socially prescribed gender roles. Rather, these educators aligned the objectives of “functionalism” with those of the liberal arts as “it trains the student in precisely those methods of learning upon which her continuous growth will probably depend. To be able to observe intelligently and to extract meaning from the raw materials of experience is a skill which requires training on its own level.”¹¹⁸ Friedan overlooked these objectives that sought to reinvigorate women’s education during this transitional moment in the narrative of American history and the lives of American women.

¹¹⁶ Komarovsky, Report of the Sub-Committee on Women’s Education” 18.

¹¹⁷ Members of Child Study Department, “Child Study at Vassar,” 2.

¹¹⁸ Komarovsky, Report of the Sub-Committee on Women’s Education,” 12.

With the growing number of women attending college and entering the workforce after World War II, educators faced the pressing problem of making the liberal arts experience more applicable to women’s (and men’s) lives.¹¹⁹ The reigning ideology of domesticity frustrated the efforts of faculty and administrators who sought to prepare women for their changing roles in society while countering gender stereotypes. In response, Komarovsky and her colleagues utilized the theories of the burgeoning social sciences and addressed the discontinuities of the time period and the challenges students faced in “adjusting” to these social changes.

The proposal for these curricular amendments was the basis of Mirra Komarovsky’s *Women in the Modern World*. Her sociological critique of American society adhered to the functionalist trends dominating her field during this era. Yet, unlike her contemporaries, Komarovsky highlighted “dysfunction, discordance, and change,” within the social fabric of American society.¹²⁰ A decade before Friedan established herself as the leading theorist of second wave feminism; Komarovsky presented a critique of American culture and an educational philosophy that is reflected in *The Feminine Mystique*. However, Komarovsky differentiated herself from Friedan in that she did not perceive functionalism as inherently conservative. She argued, “we can reject the anti-feminist program without having to embrace the old-fashioned feminism with its militant hostility towards men and its disparagement of the homemaker.”¹²¹ Her role as head of the Sub-Committee on Women’s Education at Barnard in 1948, and the fact that syllabus for the Smith sociology class “The Modern Family” urged students to purchase

¹¹⁹ “From Vassar,” 3- note Vassar distributed this pamphlet regarding Vassar’s child study course and in it explained that while 4/5 alumnae married, only 15% were full time housewives, ¼ continued with the jobs they held before marriage and childbearing. This is why educators in the post-war era faced ever greater challenge in preparing women for the dual roles they would likely be taking on-despite the popularity of the domestic ideal

¹²⁰ Rosenberg, *Changing the Subject*, 205.

¹²¹ Mirra Komarovsky, *Women in the Modern World*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953), viii

Komarovsky’s book¹²² is in itself evident that elite women’s colleges employed a critical approach to women’s education in the early Cold-War era.

Komarovsky presented a critical interpretation of post-War American society and how it pertained to the development of women’s education. A great majority of her claims are echoed in Friedan’s manifesto. Komarovsky appreciated the effects of societal expectations upon women as a group. Furthermore, she addressed the conflict between external societal expectations and the demands of higher education that had become a common right of passage for American women in the preceding decades.¹²³ This clash, she argued, pushed women to conform to the domestic ideal and deny their own development, resulting in the frustration that Friedan would later term, “the feminine mystique.” Yet, she also addressed the conflict created by these pressures, as they made outcasts of those who chose professional careers or higher education. In her discussion of the socially constructed ideal of the American woman, Komarovsky cited the mixed messages young women received; be smart, but not too smart. Pursue training for professional futures, but not at the expense of having a family.¹²⁴ In a movement towards a solution to this problem, Komarovsky offered a curriculum that would prepare young women for a healthy balance of work, family, and personal fulfillment. She concluded that a curriculum that recognized the likelihood that most students would become wives and mothers,¹²⁵ only be implemented if it provided a critical and intellectual analysis of human relationships within the framework of the family. In the chapter, “Can College Educate for Marriage?” she explained,

¹²² Page, “The Modern Family, Sociology Syllabus,” 1.

¹²³ Komarovsky, *Women in the Modern World*, 10.

¹²⁴ Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women*, 80.

¹²⁵ Gene Levine and Dale Ordes, “A Census of Barnard College Alumnae; Table 11- Marital Status of Barnard Alumnae” Published November 1962., Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University, Barnard College Archives, New York, NY.

the advocates of education for family living have a strong case when they declare that there exists today a total body of knowledge concerning the family which ought to be put to service of young people...

She recognized the legitimacy in the functionalist argument that was condemned by Friedan as anti-intellectual.¹²⁶ Sympathizing with Friedan, Komarovsky warned against the educational philosophy set forth by Lynn White.¹²⁷ She asserted that that the purely functionalist approach to education denied theoretical interpretation and consequently no longer adhered to the principles of functionalism as a sociological method. For example, Komarovsky cautioned against a curriculum that focused primarily on contemporary family life.

The price of concentration on present day family is frequently the sacrifice of historical and comparative materials. The resulting limited view of the family is inappropriate in an era of change and cultural conflicts. It is only by lifting the student's sights to wider social dimensions of personal problems that one can hope to equip him for modern living...¹²⁸

Stripping historical and statistical analysis from the curriculum would be “un-functional,” as it denied the student the ability to exercise critical analysis. As a result, educators at Barnard would treat family as a social institution to be analyzed scientifically and philosophically. Barnard faculty's intentions were primarily concentrated on the intellectual maturation of Barnard students. Komarovsky paired the functional education with vocational training and guidance, whether the student utilized this training immediately following commencement or after her children begin school. No matter the path a student chose to follow, Barnard faculty and

¹²⁶ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 171.

¹²⁷ Komarovsky, “Report From the Sub-Committee,” 2

¹²⁸ Komarovsky, *Women in the Modern World*, 213.

administrators sought to open all options to Barnard women by introducing a modified liberal arts education that could apply to all.

Komarovsky had fully developed this social/psychological approach to women’s education by 1953 with the publishing of her book, *Women in the Modern World*, preceding Friedan by a decade. Furthermore, both Friedan and Komarovsky (who unlike Friedan had direct involvement in both the faculty and administration of a prominent women’s college), stressed that men too should receive training for family life while in college; “the demand for a more practical education, incidentally, possesses at least the merit of consistency when it is extended also to men’s colleges if the present liberal arts curriculum is irrelevant for the homemakers, it is equally so for the business man.”¹²⁹ This demonstrates that Komarovsky was neither a “sex-directed educator” nor an advocate of the “Lynn White” functionalism. Her justification for the implementation of a “functional” course at Barnard is reflective of her educational philosophy and indicative of the aforementioned trends in sociology championed by Talcott Parsons and her other academic contemporaries. She asserted “important as it is that college opinion be favorable to family life, it must also endorse the fullest development of the intellectual, artistic, and professional aspirations of women.”¹³⁰ This attitude expressed by the woman who led the committee that developed “Modern Living,” illustrates the “non-sex-directed” educational philosophy at Barnard. While the course appeared to have been a submission to the ideology of domesticity and the educational theory espoused at Mills College, the intentions of the Barnard faculty and administration was to amend and experiment with the liberal arts education¹³¹, not an

¹²⁹ Komarovsky, *Women in the Modern World*, 265.

¹³⁰ Komarovsky, *Women in the Modern World*, 288.

¹³¹ Millicent McIntosh, “Modern Living,” 11 May, 1950, Barnard Bulletin, Barnard College Archives, New York, NY.

“indoctrination of students’ opinions and values through manipulation of the students emotions.”¹³²

Matrimony and Matriculation: The College’s Respond to Marriage on Campus

Betty Friedan condemned the trend toward early marriage in the early Cold-War period. In her view, early marriage hindered the development of individual identity. She asserted that along with cultivating an environment suitable for intellectual and personal growth, women’s educators should have also aimed to counteract the un-feminist trend of early marriage. Unfortunately to Friedan, the faculty and administrations at women’s colleges failed.

In effect, the sex-directed education led to a lack of identity in women most easily solved by early marriage. And a premature commitment to any role- marriage or vocation-closes off experiences, the testing, the failures and successes in various spheres of activity that are necessary for a person to achieve full maturity, individual identity.¹³³

Friedan argued that instead of encouraging students to pursue academic and professional training while in college, students were told that professional success was incompatible with matrimonial bliss. Therefore, because of external pressures to get married reinforced with the “sex-directed” educational philosophy, students sought a husband with greater rigor than intellectual stimulation. Friedan remarked that educators portrayed the married career woman as an exception to the rule instead of a reachable goal, and “ [s]omehow, the student gets the point that she does not want to be the exceptional woman.”¹³⁴

¹³² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 170.

¹³³ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 180.

¹³⁴ Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*. 171.

Friedan got it wrong. The fault was not in pushing students into early marriage as Friedan insisted, but rather it was their refusal to adjust to contemporary social trends. Women who chose to marry did not have to forgo their rights to education, however, too many faced challenges from restrictive policies and unwelcoming campuses.

Even a woman who was motivated to continue her education after her marriage encountered a discouraging array of obstacles. If she followed her husband to a new university, she found that her academic credits were not transferable...the institutions were unwilling to make the allowances necessary to help them continue.¹³⁵

Vassar and Smith developed policies in the years following World War II in reaction to the increased numbers of married undergraduates. Though these administrative acts were likely intended to inhibit the trend of early marriage on their campuses, they had the reverse effect of restricting the married students' right to education. This may have attributed to the aforementioned high drop out rates among collegiate women cited by Friedan. The fact that approximately 40.5 percent of American women in the 1950s were or had been married by age 24,¹³⁶ should have prompted Smith and Vassar administrators to offer guidance and accommodate students who did marry. Instead, the colleges put forth policies that suggested the mutual exclusivity of marriage, family and career.

The 1956 Mellon Vassar study, cited by Friedan, found that “virtually all such students with professional ambitions plan to marry, but marriage is for them an activity in which they will voluntarily choose to participate rather than something that is necessary for any sense of personal

¹³⁵ Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Women's Oral History* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 51.

¹³⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, “Marital Status of the Population: 14 years old and over by Age and Sex: April 1940 and 1952,” *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, published September, 1953, Washington, D.C., <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/statcomp/documents/1953-01.pdf>, 51.

identity.”¹³⁷ College educated women intended to marry, however, Friedan argued, if they married in college it was a “quick but regressive means for relieving the stress”¹³⁸ of college life and professional training. Challenging this perspective on post-war marriage trends, historian Beth Bailey’s *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in 20th Century America*, explained the era’s drastic drop in the average marriage age in the early Cold-War period as a testament to the interpretation of this time period as one of transition. The trend of early marriage, she argued, was a stage in the sexual revolution launched in earlier decades rather than a by-product of the post-WWII glorification of the domestic ideal. Young women compromised the social rejection of pre-marital sex by sanctioning earlier sexual behavior with earlier marriage, and in turn, early marriage became the convention.¹³⁹ Thus, as I will argue, because Smith and Vassar regulated the academic decisions of married students both schools are guilty of propagating the feminine mystique by inhibiting the intellectual maturation of its students. Yet, in opposition to Friedan’s understanding of the trend of early marriage, Barnard proved the exception. Barnard’s rules regarding marriage students, welcoming them without restriction, demonstrated the flaw in Friedan’s critique.

Favoring Friedan: The Marriage Policies of Smith and Vassar

In December of 1956 the College Administrative Board of Smith College formulated a policy in attempt to, “safeguard the married students from taking on more responsibility than she can handle.”¹⁴⁰ Two years later, Vassar adopted a similar approach in its policies regarding

¹³⁷ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 177.

¹³⁸ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 176.

¹³⁹ Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in 20th Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 47.

¹⁴⁰ “The Marriage Policy.” *Smith Alumnae Quarterly*, Vol. 48-49, November, 1957, Smith College Archives, Northampton, MA, 5.

married students, abandoning the lenient attitude of years past. Acknowledging the challenge of balancing schoolwork with marriage, college administrators established guidelines that they believed would mitigate this conflict.

Three years before Betty Friedan returned to her alma mater in search of the root of the “problem with no name,” the College launched a marriage policy that would validate claims published later in *The Feminine Mystique*. The policy was divided into four parts; no freshman or sophomore could marry if she intended to remain a student at the College, each married student (Juniors and Seniors only) had to have an academic program with classes distributed throughout the week, married students had to live within a 30-mile radius of the Smith campus, and in the event of a pregnancy the student was forced to withdraw.¹⁴¹ At first consideration, this policy appears to be a refutation of the *Mystique*’s claim, seeming to assert the primacy of education over the realization of the “June Cleaver,” ideal. However, in giving the students a puzzling ultimatum, be a devoted student OR a devoted wife, the administration of Smith College was guilty of Friedan’s accusation that women’s educators failed to challenge the social pressures of the domestic ideal. However, not in the way that Friedan understood it.

Smith’s marriage policy contributed to the development of “the problem with no name” as described by Friedan. She explained that the “feminine mystique” was a consequence of the fact that women were discouraged from pursuing individual goals at the expense of family obligations.¹⁴² The Smith administration, in demanding that students give full attention to their careers as students in their first two years, encouraged students to seek personal fulfillment and pursue a variety of goals outside the confines of marriage and family. However, by forbidding Smith students to marry in their first two years, and issuing restrictive guidelines for older

¹⁴¹ “The Marriage Policy.” *Smith Alumnae Quarterly*, 5 and 11.

¹⁴² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*. 157.

married students, the policy suggested that marriage and education couldn't accommodate each other. If the student found herself struggling to balance the two she was forced to choose the former. Friedan was therefore accurate in her accusation that the schools drove students away from academic and professional pursuits. However it wasn't because they failed to provide strong educational standards or insist upon the importance of receiving an education. Rather, these policies failed to work with the social developments of the time that, though they appeared regressive, were in fact a consequence of the changing status of women in society. Smith educators failed to offer guidance to students who chose to marry early. In place of championing the individual right to personal choice and neglecting to address ways in which these students could balance family and career, the administration complied with the conservative propaganda of the domestic ideal.

In light of Beth Bailey's analysis, the most effective solution to the post-War problem of the “feminine mystique” was not to try and inhibit early marriage but rather, to continue to assert the importance of education and professional training in women's lives regardless of marital status. The foundation of Smith's policy perpetuated the belief that a woman's destiny is her reproductive function, and because of social standards governing motherhood, also a wife.

Though Smith encouraged women to continue to pursue their academic career, it discouraged them from doing so if their attentions are taken too far away from the family. In defending the rule that a student must have a balanced course-load throughout the week, Dean of Students, Helen Russell explained that,

Although the College is concerned with the personal welfare of the individual student, its ultimate responsibility is to see that the academic potential of each student is realized and the educational standard expressed by its degree is maintained.... The responsibility of an

academic program crowded into three days combined with the responsibilities of marriage when location of a couple’s residence necessitates travel may result in neither responsibility being fulfilled.¹⁴³

The administration of Smith College delivered a mixed message to the young minds of their students. They defied cultural pressures that encouraged women to believe their only source of fulfillment was rooted in their natural roles of wife and mother. Yet, Smith simultaneously reinforced the domestic ideal by discouraging the student from trying to establish a workable balance between family and career.

Between 1944 and 1958 Vassar maintained a lenient and welcoming policy towards married students that would allow them to seek this balance instead of abandoning their school-work. The administration required that all marriages be reported to the Dean or Warden, however, married students were permitted to remain in residence.¹⁴⁴ It makes no other reference to rules regarding married students. This policy implies that Vassar, unlike Smith and Barnard (as I will discuss below), had the resources to provide housing for married students. However, a sudden change in policy in 1958 suggests that despite their resources Vassar would no longer accommodate married students on campus. The new policy stated

The college requires any student who plans to be married during her undergraduate career to confer with the Warden *in advance* to secure approval of her plans unless she is willing to *withdraw* from the college at once. In general, students are allowed to *finish the work*

¹⁴³ “The Marriage Policy.” *Smith Alumnae Quarterly*, 11.

¹⁴⁴ “Miscellaneous Regulations,” *The Student Handbook*, Vassar, 1944-45 edition through to 1952-53 edition, Vassarina Collection 378.7V M2 , Vassar College Libraries, Special Collections, Poughkeepsie NY, 13

*of the semester in which the marriage takes place. Continuance beyond the semester requires special permission.*¹⁴⁵

Employing an even more restrictive approach than Smith, Vassar demanded withdrawal of all married students. As cited above, this policy pushed students to a “premature commitment,” to the role of marriage without offering the opportunity to explore other paths.

Within the historical context, these regulations demonstrate social regression instead of progression, thereby perpetuating the “mystique.” In the years surrounding these policy changes the percentage of American women married between ages 20-24 jumped to approximately 69 percent.¹⁴⁶ This may account for the change in policy at Vassar in that it is likely that the campus could no longer accommodate married students with housing as it had six years earlier.

Nevertheless, increased hostility towards married students confirms Friedan’s argument that women’s educators contributed to the development of the “mystique,” even if her criticisms are directed at the wrong problem. As Barnard sociologist, Mirra Komarovsky argued, social institutions are constantly changing.¹⁴⁷ Smith and Vassar failed to appreciate this “discontinuity,” and therefore denied its students uninhibited access to education. Their marriage policies lend credence to a “Friedanian” historical narrative. However, as I will demonstrate below, Barnard’s example attests that there were institutions and educators who did not fall under the definition of “sex-directed.”

¹⁴⁵ *The Student Handbook*, Vassar, 1958-59 edition, Vassarina Collection 378.7V M2, Vassar College Libraries, Special Collections, Poughkeepsie, NY, 20. - Italics added by me

¹⁴⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, “Marital Status of the Population: 14 years old and over,” *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, published June, 1959, Washington, D.C., http://www2.census.gov/prod2/statcomp/documents/1958_01.pdf, 40.

¹⁴⁷ Komarovsky, *Women in the Modern World*, viii.

A Lot More Accommodating: Barnard College Welcomes Married Women.

Barnard administrators agreed by the mid-1950s that the regulation of marriage was not a legitimate purpose for an institution of higher learning. Multiple factors contributed to Barnard’s flexible policy towards married students; the inevitable housing shortages of a New York City campus and the staunch insistence of prominent faculty and administrators that academics/career and family did not necessitate the rejection of one for the other. In keeping its classrooms open to young married women, Barnard attracted students who aspired to higher education but had been forced to leave other schools, such as Smith and Vassar, because of restrictive marriage policies.

As demonstrated by Smith and Vassar, the regulation of student marriage by the college administration risked the inadvertent perpetuation of the “feminine mystique.” Barnard’s success, turning out a significant proportion of America’s leading professional women in the later 20th century, was partially due to the fact that it did not restrict married women’s access to a college education. For example, the 1962 Levine and Ordes Census of Barnard College Alumnae reports that 11.2 percent of recent graduates were in “Art, Advertising, Journalism, Publishing,” a jump from the 10.9 percent of past graduates in these fields. A greater increase is shown in the rise from 6.8 percent of past and present alumnae involved in business to the 10.6 percent of recent and present alumnae in the same occupations. However, it is also interesting that the number of Barnard graduates in non-professional positions rose from 9.3 percent of past and present alumnae to 15 percent of recent alumnae.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the percentage of Barnard graduates who classified themselves as housewives plummeted from 14.1 percent to 1.7 percent.

The fact that 70 percent of alumnae reported being married exemplifies how Barnard women

¹⁴⁸ Levine and Ordes, “A Census of Barnard College Alumnae, Table 1, Past or Present Professions or Principle Occupations of Barnard Alumnae,” and “Table 3, Present or Most Recent Paid Positions, Including Self Employment of Barnard Alumnae.”

were able to combine professional or vocational ambitions with family.¹⁴⁹ Barnard gave students the opportunity to prepare for balancing work and family. The school allowed students to determine for themselves whether to continue with their academic career after marriage. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous chapters, the faculty and administration encouraged students to believe that it was possible to achieve this balance. This policy, while a consequence of limited housing, is also an extension of the faculty and administration’s unrelenting commitment to women’s social and professional advancement.

Limited housing in New York City was as much a concern in the mid-20th century as it is today. Barnard’s insufficient residential facilities, having just three residence halls accommodate only 400 students,¹⁵⁰ mandated that the school be flexible about off-campus living arrangements. It is for this reason that any semblance of an official marriage policy at Barnard is listed as part of the residential regulations formulated by the college. Yet, at the peak of the conservative Eisenhower era in the mid 1950s, Barnard positively reformulated its attitude towards married students. In the 1952-1953 *Announcements*, Barnard’s residential policy mandated that,

All students not residing with their parents are required to live in Brooks Hall or Hewitt Hall unless for reasons of weight they receive special permission to live off-campus. Approval of their living arrangements must be obtained from the Class Advisor and the College Physician. Applications for permission, *accompanied by letters of authorization from parents or guardians*, should be made...¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Levine and Ordes, “A Census of Barnard College Alumnae, Table 1, Past or Present Professions or Principle Occupations of Barnard Alumnae,” and “Table 3, Present or Most Recent Paid Positions, Including Self Employment of Barnard Alumnae.”

¹⁵⁰ “General Regulations; Residence” *Announcements*, 1952-1953 edition, Barnard College, Barnard College Archives, New York, NY, 28-29.

¹⁵¹ “General Regulations; Residence” *Announcements*, 1952-1953 edition, 28-29

This rule made no reference to the circumstances of married students. In mandating that only “for reasons of weight they receive special permission to live off-campus,” it is initially unclear whether or not the school deemed marriage as a reason of weight that required special permission. Requiring signed permission from the college advisor, physician and parents, suggests that in the early 1950s Barnard interfered in the private decisions of its students, hindering their right to individual choice. However, the shift in the policy by the middle of the decade demonstrated the influence of the attitudes of McIntosh and Komarovsky in Barnard’s administrative policy that, “Important as it is that the college opinion be favorable to family life, it must also endorse the fullest development of the intellectual, artistic, and professional aspirations of women. It is the job of the college to provide the soil for the fullest fruition of intellectual gifts.”¹⁵²

By 1956-57 the Residence Policy at Barnard explicitly allowed for married students to live off campus, placing them in the same category as students living with parents.

Since Barnard has residence space available only for one-third of the student body, and since the aim of the overall housing policy is to have as many resident students as possible from different parts of the world, it is impossible to assign rooms to those who are able to commute to the college, or who are carrying a program of less than eleven points. Ordinarily all students not residing with their *parents or husbands* are required to live in Brooks, Hewitt, or Johnson Halls, unless they receive special permission to live off campus. Approval of their living arrangements must be obtained each year from the Director of College Activities.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Mirra Komarovsky, *Women in the Modern World*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953), 288

¹⁵³ “General Regulations; Residence” *Announcements*, 1956-1957 edition, Barnard College, Barnard College Archives, New York, NY, 170.- Italics added

Once again, Barnard cited limited housing space as reason for lenient commuting policies.

However, unlike Smith and Vassar, Barnard allowed its students to marry and live off campus with their husbands without interference. The vague explanation of what constitutes “reasons of weight” for living off-Campus in 1952-53 is clarified by this re-evaluated policy by equating living with one’s husband as in the same categorization of living with one’s parents.

Furthermore, the administration no longer required that students retain permission regarding their housing needs from the Director of College Activities or the College Physician. This policy was maintained into the 1960s. As a result, Barnard’s flexible policies of residential living and married students attracted young married women who had been forced to leave their previous schools.¹⁵⁴

Welcoming married students to Barnard without question or criticism provided the “soil for the fullest fruition of intellectual gifts.” The College gave indiscriminate opportunity to women seeking intellectual development and professional preparation. Smith too claimed limited space, stating that it did not have the resources to provide residential accommodations for married students.¹⁵⁵ Yet, while Smith gave an ultimatum and set restrictive guidelines for how far married students could live from the campus, Barnard’s administrative policies allowed students to continue on with their education regardless of private circumstances. The fact that Barnard’s administration amended itself to accommodate these changes proves a testament to the College’s maintenance of an unrelenting commitment to women’s education and professional achievement, despite the challenging trends of the era.

The failure of Smith and Vassar to adapt to the historical “discontinuities” of the period by adopting restrictive marriage policies affirms accusations that women’s educators fell in line

¹⁵⁴ Rosenberg, *Changing the Subject*, 207.

¹⁵⁵ “The Marriage Policy.” *Smith Alumnae Quarterly*, 5.

with the “sex-directed” philosophy, propagating the “feminine mystique.” However, these administrators did not err in the way that Friedan described. Their failure was not the result of an inadequate education that forced girls to marry young. As demonstrated in the previous two chapters, all three college presidents encouraged intellectual and/or professional ambition among students while professors tackled the curricula in order to amend to the trends and needs of the period. Nevertheless, Smith and Vassar refused to adjust policies to social trends thereby discouraging married students from continuing in their formal education. Barnard’s lenient and unintrusive policy demonstrated that though Friedan is justified in her wariness towards women’s educators, it is evident that that not all colleges were agents of domesticity propaganda.

Conclusion

The Feminine Mystique is arguably one of the most significant social critiques of the 20th century. However, Friedan’s sweeping indictment against women’s educators in the years following World War II painted a false picture by suggesting that faculty and administrators were agents in the propagation of the “problem that has no name.” While it is evident that the influence of the problematic ideology of domesticity did permeate these three elite colleges, Friedan ignored the range of educational practices and views employed by the very schools she was talking about. Her accusations neglected the complexity of the period as a time of transition within the American historical narrative, especially in the evolution of American women’s social roles.

The evidence suggests that Friedan was not without grounds for her accusations that American women’s colleges did at times conform to the ideology of domesticity. Vassar’s President, Sarah Gibson Blandings succumbed to the pressures of popular culture, defending

women’s education as the best preparation for her role as wife and mother. Herbert Davis reinforced the frustrations that result in the “feminine mystique,” by failing to offer guidance and assurance that women’s domestic responsibilities need not deny them the opportunity to pursue ambitions beyond the private sphere. The marriage policies reflect these aspects of the messages that these administrative leaders imparted to their students. Though both schools acknowledged the burgeoning trend of undergraduate marriage, neither worked to acclimate the college environment to those students who followed in the example of their peers and chose to marry young.

The marriage policies set forth by these college administrations illuminate Friedan’s disregard of the historical context that would have buttressed her own argument. Early marriage was not the fault of women’s educators, as it was a trend that bolstered its own growth. As a result, Vassar and Smith hindered the intellectual growth and professional ambition of its students because they worked against this trend instead of with it; pushing married students to leave school as opposed to encouraging them to continue after marriage. Nevertheless, Barnard welcomed married students into its’ classrooms, thereby asserting a commitment to women’s education and participation in the public sphere. This evidence suggests that Friedan ignored the non-“sex-directed” approaches that existed at the most elite levels of women’s education.

Millicent McIntosh suffered an unfair critique by Friedan. She not only encouraged her students to pursue careers and develop their intellectual capabilities, but she also reassured students that academic and professional success was not a hindrance to success in the domestic sphere as well. Understanding that her students would likely marry during or soon after college, McIntosh offered guidance on how to accomplish the achievements that she herself had realized as an academic, an administrative professional, and as a wife and mother. Though she was

criticized for failing to recognize the importance of her wealth in allowing her to pursue all these endeavors, McIntosh offered suggestions and encouragement to those she knew did not share her financial privileges.

Barnard was not the only College that put forth a challenge to the dominant conservatism of the period and to Friedan’s indictment of the “sex-directed educators.” Though Davis and Blandings did fall victim to the influence of contemporary ideologies, both asserted the importance of women’s higher education in the liberal arts and the need for professional ambition among students. In opposition to Friedan’s claims, Davis demanded that his students pursue successful careers and leadership positions in American political and social institutions. Blandings maintained steadfast support for the liberal arts curriculum. She recognized that each student would follow a different path after commencement, and that this educational system was the primary means for cultivating intellectual stimulation and developing the capacity for critical thought.

The integration of functionalism into the liberal arts curriculum at these schools was not intended as an indoctrination of existing social values on “how to play the role of woman.” Rather, the sociology professors at Smith and Mirra Komarovsky at Barnard integrated “functionalism’ into the curriculum in an effort to improve upon the objectives of liberal arts scholarship. In accordance with the changes in sociology prompted by Talcott Parsons, Smith and Barnard faculty worked to improve upon students’ abilities to critically analyze the society in which they lived. This experiment within the general curriculum of these colleges was indeed a movement towards helping young women adapt, as Friedan claimed. However, this was not an adaptation to the prevailing, anti-feminism of post-war America but to the real changes that characterized women’s lives during this period. More women than ever before were enrolling in

institutions of higher education, and more of these students would go on to pursue vocations along with marriage and family. Komarovsky and her colleagues were faced with the task of re-directing women’s education in America in accordance with the social realities of this period of transition in American life.

Recent historians have demonstrated the limits of Friedan’s portrayal of post-war American society. This thesis is a contribution to this dialogue as an examination of women’s higher education at elite women’s colleges. The analysis of presidential speeches, curricular changes and marriage policies at each school suggest that Friedan failed to acknowledge the diversity of perspectives on women’s roles and education at the very schools she criticized. However, these schools represent only a sub-set of the educational institutions at which American women sought education and professional training. Further research on the experiences of women at co-educational colleges and universities, students from different socio-economic positions, as well as the experiences of women from different backgrounds and cultures, is warranted for a continued discussion of the post-war era and the effects of education on the position of women within early Cold-War American society.

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