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# Changing Marriage, Learning Marriage: Marriage and Higher Education

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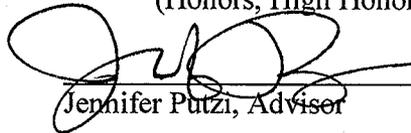
Changing Marriage, Learning Marriage: Marriage and Higher Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Women's Studies from  
The College of William and Mary

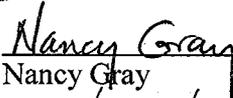
by

Elizabeth Fox Miller

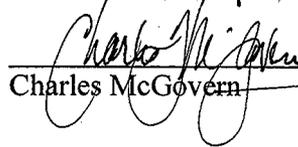
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Changing Marriage, Learning Marriage: Marriage and Higher Education

Elizabeth Miller

Women's Studies Honors Thesis

Advisor Jennifer Putzi

14 April 2011

Eighth grade home economics: my first experience with academic marriage preparation. Our assignment was to plan a wedding so of course we needed a bride and a groom. The most judicious selection process was decided upon—pulling names out of a hat—and out of the hat came Dylan McKay and Kate McKenna. Unfortunately, they quickly had to call off their nuptials because, as our teacher, Ms. Perot, informed us, Dylan was just too short to marry the slightly above average height Kate. So Dylan sulked in the corner while my teacher selected Zach, an appropriately tall male, as the groom. At the time this seemed a trivial moment, but it is also my clearest memory of realizing that there are rules to marriage—rules that need to be learned and therefore rules that need to be taught.

My current count, by the way, is up to three: three engaged college-friends planning weddings. Facebook says I currently have 347 friends, so really that is not even 1/100ths of my friend-pool getting married, but it feels like marriage is everywhere. We are talking about it. We are thinking about it. Some of us are even planning to live it in a few months. Why are we not being prepared for it? This question was the first inspiration for my thesis. There are plenty of topics and institutions on a college campus that are not addressed by our academic community, but marriage is the big deal. As Stephanie Coontz explains in *Marriage, A History*: “Marriage usually determines rights and obligations connected to sexuality, gender roles, relationships with in-laws, and the legitimacy of children. It also gives the participants specific rights and roles within the larger society. It usually defines the mutual duties of husband and wife and often the duties of their respective families toward each other, and it makes those duties enforceable. It also allows for the property and status of the couple or the household head to be passed down to the next generation in an orderly manner.”<sup>1</sup> With marriage making such a difference in the lives

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<sup>1</sup> Stephanie Coontz. *Marriage, a history: how love conquered marriage*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 32

of so many, it surprises me that college, the institution meant to prepare me academically and socially for the ‘real world,’ is not preparing me for this.

Marriage matters both for our individual health and our social stability. All but one recorded society has evidenced some form of marriage, and marriage is valuable for many social reasons including confirming citizenship, creating racial boundaries, managing reproduction, allocating resources, increasing patriotism, and maintaining gender roles.<sup>2</sup> Marriage is a multi-tasking social institution. This thesis, however, is not just about the power of marriage. It is about academics as means of reifying and challenging marital expectations within a social context of concern about changes in marriage perceived to alter social structures. Marriage, both in its practicalities and social consequences, must be learned and that education has historically occurred in part on college campuses.

In attempting to address the relationship between academics and marriage education, it must first be recognized that there is a general lack of existing research on the topic. The scarcity of knowledge has significant implications for marriage education as an academic topic but also for the scope, content, and analysis of my own work. Despite extensive attempts to discover secondary sources which directly address marriage education, my major references became *Marriage, A History: How Love Conquered Marriage* by Stephanie Coontz and *Public Vows: A History of Marriage* by Nancy Cott. Written by marriage historians, neither of these texts covers marriage education, but instead provided a historical and analytical framework I then applied to my original research and primary sources. The limited scholarly articles which do address marriage education do so in the context of evaluating the efficacy of a particular model or textbook rather than presenting a theoretical perspective or larger framework. Without strong

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 24.

secondary source work or theoretical perspectives to guide my research, this thesis engages with multiple methodologies and means of examining the history, meanings, and implications of marriage education.

Based on my original intention of understanding why colleges were not currently providing marriage preparation, I began with a focus on imagining a contemporary form of marriage education and addressing how academia might rationalize offering such an educational experience. It became clear, however, that to achieve this understanding, my work needed to also engage with and explore historical marriage education on college campuses. Despite the logical connection between the historic and contemporary, attempting to integrate means of studying both is challenging, due to the lack of an academic framework and more particularly, the inclusion of original engaged scholarship in the form of “The Marriage Class,” a five week course taught in the Spring of 2011 based on my honors research and to be discussed in more detail in later sections.

To address the historical forms of marriage education, this thesis provides a limited analysis of mid-twentieth century marriage education, with a particular focus on the relationship between marriage education and social concerns regarding gender roles. My historical research centers on the period of the 1940s through the 1960s to focus on the historical context of World War II and post-war America. During this time period colleges offered marriage education courses from a highly interdisciplinary approach, including contributors from anatomy, psychiatry, psychology, economics, public health, biology, gynecology, anthropology, and sociology. Through an analysis of marriage textbook content, magazine and newspaper articles, and other primary sources, the first chapter of my thesis explores historic justifications of these courses as both an academic endeavor and a subject of social significance, particularly in relation

to changing gender norms.

Detailing the history of marriage education is a difficult task, and to be comprehensive would require extensive archival research outside the scope of this thesis. Because marriage education is so broad and often difficult to discover, I decided to focus on the history of marriage education at the College of William and Mary. This selection serves multiple purposes although it is certainly severely limited. First, my main source, undergraduate course catalogues which provide both listings and descriptions, are easily accessible. Even after availing myself of our Special Collections Department and historical societies, however, there was a general lack of material on marriage education at the College. The ability to trace William and Mary's course offerings over time also provides specific evidence of the changing dynamics of the relationship between academics and marriage courses. Finally, a focus on William and Mary provides a relatively stable background for the most significant but also non-traditional component of my thesis, "The Marriage Class."

I will also briefly address changes in the relationship between the academic institution and marriage education from the 1970s onward. Facing significant social changes in marital relationships and adopting a tone much friendlier to accepting new relationship forms rather than imposing previous ideals, academia lost of much of its historical intent with marriage education and thus greatly shifted its role. Other sources, particularly governmental and religious organizations, have continued efforts to provide marriage preparation and utilize such education to affirm their own institutional power and ability to address social stability through marriage.

The last chapter of my thesis is also its beginning. Inspired by the courses taught in the post-war period, which I had learned only briefly about in the course "College Girl in American Historical Culture," my original plan to address the lack of marital preparation provided to the

student body was the creation of a marriage class at William and Mary. During my sophomore year I proposed as my Introduction to Women's Studies Community Action Project the creation of a marriage preparation course. My proposal envisioned this project as a not-for-credit speaker series in which community members would present and then dialogue with college students on various issues related to marriage such as communication, sexuality, and children. That year my proposal was not selected by the class, but I approached Professor Putzi at the end of my junior year with the idea of carrying out "The Marriage Class" as senior research. Through our discussion, however, it became evident that "The Marriage Class" could be more fully explored and enacted within the context of an honor's thesis.

Much fuller than my original intention of a speaker's series, "The Marriage Class" developed into a one-credit course taught at The College of William and Mary in Spring 2011 by Professor Putzi. The course met for five sessions and engaged sixteen students through lecture, discussion, and two panels addressing both historical and contemporary marriage education content. While much of the written thesis is devoted to both recording and analyzing "The Marriage Class," I also recognize the class as a product of my thesis unto itself. The process of planning, creating, and enacting "The Marriage Class" was a unique and productive experience, rather than just a means of gathering data to be analyzed in this written format. Because "The Marriage Class," a unique component of my thesis, is the first time a Women's Studies thesis has included academic activism, the guidelines for representing and integrating the class into the written component are non-existent. I have chosen to address this relationship through multiple means. First, this thesis will to some extent serve as a written record of "The Marriage Class," including a general synopsis of its execution. This is significant because creating a course based on, as well as part of, an honors thesis is uncharted territory and chronicling the course

in the written thesis provides an important historical record. Beyond providing a record of the course, however, “The Marriage Class” also serves to further expand upon and complicate understandings of academia’s role of reifying and challenging marital expectations. The course both exemplifies and intentionally interrogates exactly this role.

#### I. Historical Marriage Education: Recognizing and Responding to Change

In 1933 Ernest Groves published *Marriage* which he claimed was “as far as I am able to discover, the first [marriage textbook] ever written.”<sup>3</sup> The text “attempts...to interpret marriage as a human experience in such a way as to bring to the student insight and a familiarity with the resources that science has given for dealing with marriage problems,” and references a marriage course taught at the University of North Carolina since 1930.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the most recognized marriage education course is that taught by Alfred Kinsey beginning in 1938 at Indiana University.<sup>5</sup> This coincides with the first published research study of marriage which focused on one major research question: “What is fundamentally different about happily and unhappily married couples,” a question critical to marriage education texts.<sup>6</sup> The 1940 text, *Modern Marriage*, which represents itself as “a frank and complete discussion of the major aspects of marriage,” is based on “the course in Modern Marriage offered for the last six years at the State University of Iowa.”<sup>7</sup>

Groves asserts in *Marriage*: “It is apparent that a definite responsibility for the developing of preparation for marriages rest upon the colleges and that the time has come when no

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<sup>3</sup> Ernest Rutherford Groves. *Marriage*. (New York: H. Holt, 1933), vii

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> "The Kinsey Institute - History - Kinsey Bio [About the Institute]." The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction. <http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/about/kinseybio.html> (accessed April 3, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> J. Gottman and C Notarius, "Marital research in the 20th century and a research agenda for the 21st century," *Family Process* 41, no. 2 (2002).

<sup>7</sup> Henry A. Bowman, and Graham B. Spanier. *Modern marriage*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978).

institution of higher learning can fully meet its social obligations without including education for marriage.”<sup>8</sup> Almost twenty years later, in *Anticipating Your Marriage*, Robert Blood presents his own brief history of the developing need and creation of marriage education courses:

Hardly more than a generation ago, the idea of a course to prepare students for marriage was unheard of and would have been greeted with jeers if it had been proposed. This unsympathetic attitude reflected in part the tradition that education should be “academic.” But partly it reflected the condition of marriage in the United States at that time . . . [Prior to World War I] marriages were comparatively stable and life moved in recurring cycle from one generation to the next. Education for marriage was acquired automatically in the home...If anyone had wanted and been given a marriage course at the time, he would have been taught the traditional beliefs...he would have been provided, however, with hardly any factual information because systemic studies of family life had not yet been made. . . [World War I, however], marked the end of an era for American Families. . . New patterns of sexual behavior were only one symptom of the widespread defiance of conventional ideas about courtship and marriage by the ‘flaming youth’ of the 1920s. . . ‘Sexual freedom,’ ‘the emancipation of women,’ ‘easy divorce’—the sheer existence of such phrases indicates that the old answers are not sufficient any more...As a result of these changes, a couple anticipating marriage today can less easily foresee what they are ‘Getting in for’ than could their grandparents.<sup>9</sup>

Multiple factors influencing the creation and development of marriage education are

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<sup>8</sup> Ernest Rutherford Groves. *Marriage*. (New York: H. Holt, 1933), vii.

<sup>9</sup> Robert O. Blood. *Anticipating your marriage*. (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1955), 3-4.

highlighted in Blood's brief historical overview. Public and academic conceptions of what subject matter is appropriate for college coursework had to be altered to recognize and include marriage education within 'the academic,' as well as recognition that purely academic matters should not be the only focus of colleges. This shift of inclusion of non-academic education on college campuses is facilitated, as Blood explains, by a declining ability for home and family education to address the new social and sexual freedom of young adults. As Blood and Grove articulate, marriage education came from a response to changing social standards for which previous forms of preparation were no longer adequate and a belief that higher education might have greater success. Academics as a source of marriage education, however, was itself a change which required response.

As I mentioned in my introduction, this thesis came out of my interest in (the lack of) contemporary marriage education. I wondered why marriage, something so many of my classmates were invested and planned to engage in was not something being addressed by the college which seemed so eager to prepare me in and out of the classroom for so many other facets of my life. As I spoke to my classmates about my ideas for a marriage class they were eager for the opportunity to learn about marriage from any sort of credible source. As I spoke to academics and other adults, however, there was more skepticism: why should a college teach marriage? Are the practical skills of marriage something that academia, particularly a liberal arts institution, should devote resources to, and can marriage preparation even be considered academic? These were questions I had myself. These were also questions raised in the mid-twentieth century. In 1965 one academic explained: "Critics of marriage courses have not been silent. Popular writers raise questions about the superficiality of a marriage course that

appears to be a pre-packaged pellet of everything one needs to know about sociology, home management, economics, physiology, psychology, anthropology, religion, and ‘Freudian jargon.’”<sup>10</sup> Unlike today, however, these concerns were met with consistent advocacy for marriage education and a strong belief in its benefits to individuals and society.

In the mid-twentieth century, marriage education was understood as a clear and effective means of addressing the challenges of assuming marital roles and functions. As the 1947 *When You Marry* text states rather directly, “Most couples want their marriages to succeed. But wishing happiness is not enough. Marriages which have been preceded by study and careful mate selection and which are followed by skillful handling of adjustments have high success rates. Without adequate preparation anything can happen!”<sup>11</sup>

Academia became particularly concerned with continuing to teach women to be wives in a time when, as Nancy Cott explains, “The predictability of marriage could not fail to be affected by the enormous consequences of World War II.”<sup>12</sup> To this end, Lynn Townsend White, scholar and President of Mills College from 1943-1958, writes in the 1950 text *Educating our Daughters*:

Such a generalization as “thought has no sex” may become actively dangerous to the interests of women if it is coupled to the usual academic assumption that higher education is solely a matter of intellectual discipline, and therefore neuter. If, on the contrary, education is not merely a matter of the brain but is rather a preparation for the whole process of adult living, then surely the

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<sup>10</sup> E. Duvall Millis, "How Effective Are Marriage Courses?," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 25 (1965): 176-184

<sup>11</sup> E. Duvall Millis, and Reuben Hill, *When you marry*, (New York: Association Press, 1962).

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Cott, *Public vows: a history of marriage and the nation*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press., 2000), 183.

realization of sex differences to education should be more thoroughly examined than it has been.<sup>13</sup>

The belief that intellectualism was a masculine pursuit required that women's education provide a feminine form of knowledge to ensure that higher education did not further the de-feminization feared by critics of women's education. Townsend challenges the assumption that higher education can only provide the perceived masculine form of knowledge and suggests that the system of higher education can be altered to provide for the education of women as women. She explains:

The chief danger in our present system of college education is not that a girl will get too little vocational advice, but that it will be the wrong kind because it is a man's kind. Since men are educated for careers, the implication of our collegiate atmosphere is that a girl who does not plan to start editing *Vogue* the day after graduation is in some way not rising to her responsibilities. If one meets a group of recent women graduates, the girls who have jobs, no matter how grubby, seem to be "doing something." The girl who has married is "just a housewife." The more highly educated a woman is, the less importance a family of her own has in her thinking, because a family has no place or consideration in our present system of higher education.<sup>14</sup>

This quote expresses an understanding of gender roles which are, at least in part, learned. Higher education, Townsend implies, teaches a heightened importance for female careers at the detriment of women performing traditional housewife roles. Townsend's appraisal that educated women in 1950 believe the choice they are meant to make is career over marriage (albeit a very specific career in fashion media rather than industrial labor) runs counter to Cott's historical

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<sup>13</sup> Lynn Townsend White, *Educating our daughters; a challenge to the colleges*, (New York: Harper, 1950), 19

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

evaluation that given the choice between marriage and career, society predicted that the “normal” woman would choose marriage.<sup>15</sup> This discrepancy evidences the influence of education on post-war women’s understandings of proper gender roles. Women exposed to academics, it was feared, were no longer normal because they failed to make the correct decision between career and home and failed to adjust to the appropriate feminine role of wife. The 1943 *Ladies’ Home Journal* provided evidence for this: “Girls who go to college often try to assert their individuality in marriage. Result: their divorce rate is four times higher than that of college men.”<sup>16</sup> To address concerns of academia’s harmful effects on women’s choice and adoption of femininity, marriage education focused itself on teaching women to be women and therefore wives.

Fears that academia was actually a cause of gender role confusion were only fueled by testimonies such as this one from a college graduate in the 1940s: “I have come to realize that I was educated to be a successful man and now must learn by myself how to be a successful woman.”<sup>17</sup> Although this student recognizes gender roles as learned, she does not frame education as a means of expanding women’s roles. Instead, higher education creates an extra burden for women, forced to adapt to male roles in academia and then to teach or re-teach themselves a proper feminine role. Since their entrance into academia, the motivations and consequences of educating women have been questioned, often with a fear that the academic experience would masculinize them, as the above quote suggests. A common reply to these concerns was that women should be educated so that they can be women. An article from 1950, “Schools that Teach Happy Marriage,” asserts: “We have...asked ourselves this question: ‘In what circumstances are women happiest?’ The answer, we believe, is that women—

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<sup>15</sup> Nancy Cott, *Public vows: a history of marriage and the nation*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press., 2000), 182.

<sup>16</sup> "Meet an engaged couple [education for marriage]." *Ladies' Home Journal* 60 (1943): 79-82.

<sup>17</sup> Lynne Townsend White, *Educating our daughters; a challenge to the colleges*, (New York: Harper, 1950), 18

all human beings—are happiest when all their talents for living are developed and utilized in the most compatible environment. For women that environment is happy marriage and family life.”<sup>18</sup> Women held a specific role within marriage and family, and education, particularly marriage education, provided the opportunity to teach women how to best fulfill their feminine position. Marriage education served to reify gender identities and solidify the differences between men and women by directly assigning and teaching each gender particular characters and tasks within the marriage union.

Most importantly, marriage educators asserted that marriage was something women had always wanted. “Every little girl dreams that someday she’ll marry and have a baby of her very own,” begins the 1945 “School for Marriage,” and continues, “Until very recently, however, few bothered much about teaching little or big girls how to take care of babies or husbands. Today things are different.”<sup>19</sup> Women and marriage are inherently linked; only the formality of their education is a new development of the 1940s, according to the media. Slipping this assumption into the rhetoric of marriage education reinforced women’s gender role, while marking marriage education as a mainly feminine pursuit. The college graduate who discovered she had been educated to be a man, looked to marriage education to find her femininity, because marriage was presented as a feminine endeavor.

In some ways, this belief that marriage education was feminine, attempted to increase acknowledgement for women’s work within their gender role.

Women’s education would seem to be more difficult than men’s because the life of an American woman in the twentieth century is more complex than that of man. She must be educated to handle options more fundamental than any which

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<sup>18</sup> R. Evans, "Schools that teach happy marriage [ecoles menageres]," *Coronet* 27 (1950): 70.

<sup>19</sup> L. Lyons, "School for Marriage [Mt. Holyoke College]," *Woman's Home Companion* 72 (1945): 12.

ever confront a man...The pattern of a man's existence is fairly simple. He is born; he is educated partly to be a person and partly to earn a living; he earns a living, gets a wife, begets children and works until he dies. The pattern of a woman's life today is essentially different. After she graduates from college she is faced with her first major choice: family or career.<sup>20</sup>

Marriage education recognized that women's role as wife requires knowledge and skill, but as this quote evidences, it also points to the possibility of choosing a non-normative gender role as a worker. As the 1940s witnessed more women entering the workforce, there were still many concerns that working women would consequently lose their feminine identity. While marriage education recognized the possibility of women's external labor, it was still built upon the premise that "every little girl dreams that someday she'll marry and have a baby of her very own." By providing marriage education, academia reinforced women's appropriate feminine role even in a time of shifting gender expectations.

Preparation for marriage within academic coursework, however, required justification. To advocate for accredited preparation, many proponents of marriage education called on comparisons of marriage to professional work. "In training people for most professions—doctors, teachers, social workers, nurses—we realized that all those who have to do something must have a chance to learn how it is done...Books are not enough; practice is also necessary,"<sup>21</sup> concluded Margaret Mead in 1963. Of the Canadian *écoles ménagères* (housewife schools), one journalist wrote: "Their objective is, quite literally, to raise marriage to the status of a profession; to equip average girls for the career they are most likely to follow; to give them practical training in the techniques of happy marriage, as matter-of-factly as a nurse or

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<sup>20</sup> Lynn Townsend White, *Educating our daughters; a challenge to the colleges*, (New York: Harper, 1950), 19-20.

<sup>21</sup> M. Mead, "Apprenticeship for marriage," *Redbook* 121 (1963): 14.

hairdresser prepares for her occupation.”<sup>22</sup> Professional rhetoric emphasized the appropriateness of academia as an institution capable of preparing students for their future roles.

This vocational framework also exemplifies a historical context in which women’s employment, and professional employment in particular, increased. As Nancy Cott discusses in *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*, “Twelve million men went into war service, and women’s employment--especially the employment of wives and mothers--reached dramatically new highs . . . Women workers made up 35 percent of the civilian labor force by 1944.”<sup>23</sup> During the post-war years in which women were encouraged to focus on domestic skills, this language of the professionalization of marriage acknowledged female experience in the workforce while reinforcing women’s “best job” as wife and mother. Cott explains, “As women stepped partway into men’s shoes and earned man-sized pay, they were constantly reminded to retain their femininity, meaning their appeal to men.”<sup>24</sup> Marriage education presented a rhetoric in which marriage fulfilled new female desires for an occupation and provided a formalized means of reinforcing women’s femininity. In 1950, Lynn Townsend White writes, “The considerable, and apparently increasing, majority of college women will, and should, devote the first two or three decades after graduation to building and maintaining homes and families. This is a more arduous job than most men dream,”<sup>25</sup> exemplifying the ability to justify the need for marriage and family education through the technical challenges of the role while simultaneously reinforcing that this education will further women’s existing role as homemakers.

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<sup>22</sup> R. Evans, "Schools that teach happy marriage [ecoles menageres]," *Coronet* 27 (1950): 70.

<sup>23</sup> Nancy Cott, *Public vows: a history of marriage and the nation*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press., 2000), 185.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>25</sup> Lynn White Townsend, *Educating our daughters; a challenge to the colleges*, (New York: Harper, 1950), 68.

One invaluable source from which to gain fuller understanding of how and why women were being trained in their most arduous job as wife and mother is textbooks for marriage education courses. Published between 1940 and 1960, the textbooks reviewed for this thesis provide the strongest primary source documentation of marriage education's subject matter and motivations. Covering topics including reasons for marriage, the conflict between marriage and career, mate selection, courtship, engagement, the wedding and honeymoon, marital conflict, sex and reproduction, religion, money management, family planning, and divorce, these books evidence the intersections of practical and academic knowledge. The impetus for this education is also made clear. Concluding the first chapter of the 1942 *Marriage for Moderns* with the sub-section, "The Position of Women in Modern America," Henry Bowman writes, "It is not difficult to say that a woman's social position has changed and is still changing."<sup>26</sup> He identifies multiple changes for modern women such as women as wage earners, suffrage, increased female professionalization, the development of modern warfare, but he marks the following as distinct: "Perhaps the most important change that has occurred—the one that in a way epitomizes the others and may well indicate an improvement of status—is increased freedom of choice. Women have more freedom of choice—in educational, social, and vocational matters; in choosing a mate; in getting married; in escaping an unhappy marriage; in bearing children—than they ever had before. They are coming to play a larger part in determining their own destinies."<sup>27</sup> What follows in this text and others, and I believe motivates much of marriage education, is the provision of knowledge meant to educate and ensure that women are making the "right choices" both for themselves and for the social interests invested in marriage and gender relations.

In the brief forward of *She's Off to Marriage*, another text from 1942, the authors

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<sup>26</sup> Henry Bowman, and Graham B. Spanier, *Modern marriage*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 23.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

conclude: “[This book] is essentially a modern book for modern girls and presupposes the girl’s intelligent and active interest in choosing, from all the opportunities offered to her, the path most conducive to continuing romantic love in the home and increasing participation in the life of the community.”<sup>28</sup> This notion of the modern woman choosing marriage recognizes a greater freedom while still asserting the assumption that the choice she will and should make (with the guidance of this education) will be marriage and family. *She’s Off to Marriage* is actually one of a series including *She’s Off to College* and *She’s Off to Work*, reflecting the reality of women having multiple roles for which they may need to be prepared. As Nancy Cott explains, however, “the presence of wives in the work force. . .barely dented the mass conviction that a woman was free to choose *either* marriage and family *or* vocational ambition--and she was predicted to choose the first, if she was ‘normal.’”<sup>29</sup> Recognition of change does not require total acceptance. Originating from a belief that new social standards required formalized preparation to provide for social stability, marriage education has always addressed change. The classes of the mid-twentieth century, however, focused mainly on assuaging fears of change by providing standardized course work to ensure continuity.

The language in marriage education texts also points to a historical distortion often perpetuated in contemporary texts and popular perspective of the past. Contemporary narratives of marriage represent marital gender roles of post-war America as stable and unquestioned. For example, the 1999 textbook *Diversity in Families* asserts in its chapter “Contemporary Marriages” that “couples have always faced adjustments, but the problems inherent in marriage are now compounded by a critical difference—the changing societal definitions of roles for

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<sup>28</sup> Gulielma Fell Alsop, and Mary Frances McBride, *She's off to marriage, a guide to success and happiness in married life*, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1942), Preface.

<sup>29</sup> Nancy Cott, *Public vows: a history of marriage and the nation*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press., 2000), 182

men and women. In the past, women and men entered into the marriage relationship with an unquestioned set of roles and responsibilities that each would fulfill . . . But contemporary U.S. society is undergoing a profound shift in the role expectations of men and women.”<sup>30</sup> While I do not mean to diminish the differences between post-war America and contemporary society or dismiss the significant social movements, particularly the second wave of feminism, which greatly affected American gender roles, the dichotomy presented in *Diversity in Families* is thoroughly challenged by the evidence of marriage education. The marriage education of post-war America is in many ways predicated on concerns about and recognition of changing gender roles.

*Diversity in Families* continues: “Whereas before each partner once knew with certainty what behaviors were expected, now there is ambiguity. . . Most couples now enter marriage without a blueprint or any sure answers to these questions.”<sup>31</sup> Gender roles were more rigidly defined in post-war America, but they were not, as this contemporary text suggests, static and hegemonic. Bowman writes in 1942’s *Marriage for Moderns*: “We have reached a period of national development when the old is no longer adequate and the new has not yet been established. There tends to be confusion, transition, lack of clear-cut definition. Standards are ill-defined. Young people must rely on their own judgments, their own conclusions, their own self-control, more than before.”<sup>32</sup> Of marriage in particular he writes: “Marriage is changing; it is going through a period of transition.”<sup>33</sup> These assertions of Bowman contradict the image of *Diversity in Families* that gender roles and marital expectations were fixed, understood, and accepted by individuals of the time period. Instead, Bowman emphasizes that the 1940s are

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<sup>30</sup> Maxine B. Zinn, and D. Stanley Eitzen, *Diversity in families*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 255.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Henry Bowman., and Graham B. Spanier, *Modern marriage*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 203.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

marked by a shifting of gender roles and an uncertainty as to how to be a successful marriage partner for either a male or female.

The content of the historical marriage textbooks is testament to a belief that there is a possibility individuals won't know how to perform their gender roles or might, without the proper education, choose to perform them otherwise. The young people relying on their own judgments can be guided by marriage education but this emphasizes that standards and expectations of the time period are unsettled. Again, the relative choice and flexibility between the 1940s and the 2010s is significantly different, however, both time periods assert a narrative of changing gender roles, and the 1940s responds to that narrative by providing a comprehensive marriage education system which attempted to enforce gender roles society believed to be unstable.

## II. History of Marriage Education at The College of William and Mary: Change Over Time

Discovering and tracking the history of marriage education at The College of William and Mary is a tricky task. Any historical inquiry is limited to the records created, kept, and then found, which is particularly true for this research. Unfortunately, there is no box in Special Collections labeled Marriage Education, but the College does keep all undergraduate course catalogs. These catalogs provide only a superficial understanding of what marriage education truly was (and perhaps continues to be), but they do record its existence and development over time. This timeline begins in 1939-1940 to place it in the context of the Second World War and the historical analysis presented in the previous chapter.

From the 1939-1940 academic year until 1942-43 under the Marshall Wythe School of Government and Citizenship, the Sociology Department offered SOC 408 "Marriage and The Family." The course was described as: "Origin and forms of the family and marriage;

industrialism and the family; emancipation of women in the family; the child and family of the future.”<sup>34</sup> The reference to the “emancipation of women in the family” recognizes a changing role and new opportunities for women. What exactly is meant by emancipation is unclear, but within the historical context it is reasonable to assume a reference not only to women spending more time out of the family (that is in paid labor) but also a decreased social control over women's familial choices, including selection of marriage partners and even of marriage and family building itself. Rather than directly transferring from the control of parents to a structured life as wife and mother, women's emancipation in the family implies choice of family and freedom within the context as well. This emancipation also fits within the wider social changes which provided women greater freedom and choice and broadly supported the development of marriage education. Women’s greater labor participation in an increasing range of occupations and the simple recognition that women might choose a career both reflect facets of women’s emancipation nationally and was likely discussed in this marriage education course.

This recognition is furthered by the College's course Home Economics 101R, “Problems in Social Adjustment,” first offered in 1940 and described as such: “Designed to help freshmen women adjust themselves to college life; introduction to Home Economics; opportunities open to college women, her responsibilities in home and community life. Open to all students of the College and required of all students concentrating in Home Economics.”<sup>35</sup> Women began attending The College of William and Mary in 1918.<sup>36</sup> That the College felt it worthwhile to offer a course facilitating women's collegiate adjustment twenty years after this initial transition points to continued or perhaps new anxieties about women’s roles and the college's impact on

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<sup>34</sup> “Undergraduate Course Catalogue” Bulletin of the College of William and Mary. (Williamsburg VA, 1942-43).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

these roles. The emphasis particularly on the 'responsibilities of home and community life' for women evidences that the college conceived of women as possibly uncertain of their responsibilities and therefore requiring preparation. This exemplifies understandings expressed in marriage education textbooks that women have freedom of choice (and therefore the ability to choose improperly), complements the discussion of the 'emancipation of women with the "Marriage and Family" course, and aligns with national recognition of and concern about women's changing social roles. Furthering William and Mary's place within the broader marriage education movement and its motivating concerns is Home Economics 311R, "Family Relationships," which addresses "the effect of changing social and economic conditions on home life; factors involved in the development of modern family life; values in home living which contribute to desirable growth of individual family members; facilities within the community upon which the family may draw in achieving its goals."<sup>37</sup> Both the sociology course and those offered in Home Economics evidence the college's provision of classes which address the knowledge and skills of marriage in an academic context. Their descriptions illustrate the college's recognition of the changing roles of women and the need to address those changes and exemplify William and Mary's place within the national marriage education movement.

It is in 1952-53 that the intention of the course and the explicit history of William and Mary's marriage education becomes clear. "Marriage and Family," still listed as Sociology 408, gains this description: "A social-psychological approach to dating, courtship, marriage, and family relationships. The aim of this course is to provide both a preparation for marriage and a mature understanding of the social relationships in marriage and family living."<sup>38</sup> Course descriptions are certainly not in-depth records of the intent or content of a course but they are very intentional

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., (1952-53).

texts. This brief sentence cannot tell us the means or extent of preparing students for marriage that occurred from 1952 to 1955 in the classroom of Sociology 408, but is clear evidence that the college provided traditional marriage education. Within two years (1955-56), the course description is altered slightly and the listing drops to Sociology 308: “A social-psychological approach to dating, courtship, marriage, and family relationships. The aim of the course is to provide a mature understanding of the social relationships in courtship, marriage, and family living. It may not be counted as part of the concentration program in sociology.”<sup>39</sup> What content changes this represents are unknown, but preparation is no longer an explicit goal of the course. The reality of an explicitly preparatory marriage course at William and Mary during the early 1950s fits within the national concerns of teaching appropriate gender and marital roles to college students by providing an education on multiple stages of heterosexual romantic relationships.

In 1960-61 “Marriage and Family” (now SOC 332) gains this new description: “Analysis of the social relationships among people in courtship, marriage and family situations, interrelations of family institutions and other parts of social structures. Intensive study of American family structure and relevant examples drawn from other cultures, with the aim of developing mature understanding of, and perspective on, the family.”<sup>40</sup> This “aim of developing mature understanding of, and perspective on, the family,” implies that this course develops students’ knowledge and advances them toward more adult understandings of its content, a central goal of marriage education. The means of providing for this development, however, is clearly shifting away from practical preparation as provided in traditional marriage education courses, reflecting the beginnings of national de-emphasis on prescriptive education. Also, the addition of a study

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., (1955-56).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., (1960-61)

which includes examples from other cultures reflects a shift away from the nationalistic rhetoric of earlier marriage education which in a post-war context, warned against the perils of foreign brides and focused on producing American marriages. This course description evidences a changing and widening understanding of marriage education adapting to new national standards.

From 1969 onward, the Sociology course description shifts focus from “preparation” and “understanding” to “study” and “analysis.” In 1969-1970 the listing is shortened to: “Analysis of the social relationships among people in courtship, marriage and family situations, interrelations of family institutions and other parts of social structures. Intensive study of American family structure and relevant examples drawn from other cultures.”<sup>41</sup> This shift also coincides with the end of Home Economics at the College of William and Mary. Together these two changes at the opening of the 1970s seem to exemplify the transition away from marriage preparation in the face of new academic perspectives, analyzed further in the next chapter of this research.

Taught by a new professor in 1988-89, “Marriage and the Family” adopts a significant shift in description with the following: “An examination of the structural and interactional dimensions of interpersonal relationships in premarital, marital and postmarital situations. Topics covered include dating and mate selection, sex before marriage, family structures, marital satisfaction, parenting, divorce and remarriage, and alternative lifestyles.”<sup>42</sup> That this new description identifies three contexts for interpersonal relationships—premarital, marital, and postmarital—speaks to a shift of experience and understandings, particularly with the addition of post-marital. Addressing a post-marital context, including divorce and remarriage, in the topics covered evidences an expanded understanding of marriage and family within the time period. This

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., (1969-1970).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., (1988-89).

addition reflects a change in divorce laws which greatly increased access to and occurrence of divorce. “California first adopted “no-fault” divorce in 1969 and within four years at least thirty-six states had made it an option. By 1985 every state had fallen into step, not always under the rubric of “no-fault” but offering essentially the same thing, that a couple who had proven incompatible could end their marriage,” records Cott in *Public Vows*.<sup>43</sup> Including 'post-marital' and divorce in the new description illustrates an acknowledgment that students should not expect life to end at marriage and should be prepared to understand the workings of divorce and even remarriage. The course description also recognizes that for many, sex does not begin at marriage and actively addresses changing sexual standards which allow, at the very least, for a greater public acknowledgement of this change and its relationship to marriage education. The inclusion of alternative lifestyles is another example of a broadening subject matter and continued shift from standardized measures in marriage education. All three of these subjects reflect more broadly, that the course and marriage education generally is adapting to new social standards and no longer focusing on addressing change by attempting to institute consistency.

In 2000, understanding the changing character of marriage education and particularly “Marriage and Family,” still listed with the same course description as 1989, becomes easier because the Sociology Department of William and Mary has copies of the course syllabus for 2000, 2001, 2003, and 2006 on file. The syllabi of Professor Beckhouse from 2000-2003 are quite brief, but do provide a general outline and readings. Of particular note is the inclusion of the text *Peer Marriage* by Pepper Schwartz. The book is described as “a how-to book for couples seeking satisfying relationships based upon fairness, collaboration, and intense

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<sup>43</sup> Nancy Cott, *Public vows: a history of marriage and the nation*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press., 2000), 205.

companionship”<sup>44</sup> and “because of its clear presentation and potentially wide audience, this is recommended for public and college libraries.”<sup>45</sup> While the 2000 version of *Marriage and Family* could not be placed in the same category as the 1953 class which expressly focused on marriage preparation, the inclusion of a how-to text illustrates that the course continues to include practical and applicable knowledge regarding marriage relationships, including prescriptive content for students attempting to achieve successful relationships. By 2003, *Peer Marriage* was replaced by an updated edition titled *Love Between Equals: How Peer Marriage Really Works*, recommended to “any couple contemplating marriage or reevaluating an existing one [who] will find powerful information and encouragement here for a true marriage of minds.”<sup>46</sup>

In 2006 the syllabus for SOC332, taught by Professor Mowry, states: “By the end of this semester you should be able to place your own personal experiences of family in a larger social context and be able to analyze contemporary family issues sociologically. You should also have knowledge of the diversity of family forms in the United States, as well as the major trends and explanations of family change in the U.S.”<sup>47</sup> This goal portrays students' personal experiences as holding appreciable weight in the course. While those personal experiences are to be placed in social context, the course still begins by identifying and evaluating the students' own understandings of family and marriage. While the more recent versions of “Marriage and Family” provide much different information than what can be assumed was presented in earlier decades and there is a significant decrease in practical focus, the texts and content of more recent courses are not necessarily at odds with the concept of marriage education. Instead they provide

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<sup>44</sup> S. Johnson, "Peer Marriage Editorial Review," *Library Journal* (1994).

<sup>45</sup> Pepper Schwartz, *Peer marriage: how love between equals really works*, (New York: Free Press, 1994).

<sup>46</sup> Pepper Schwartz, , *Love Between Equals How Peer Marriage Really Works*, (Touchstone Books, 1996).

<sup>47</sup> C. Mowry, “Marriage and Families Syllabus,” Unpublished. College of William and Mary. Retrieved from Sociology Department, (2006).

a different type of education. For example, the 2006 syllabus includes the 2004 article “The Deinstitutionalization of Marriage” by Andrew Cherlin. In “The Deinstitutionalization of Marriage,” Cherlin argues that marriage has undergone a process of deinstitutionalization which he describes as the “weakening of the social norms that define people’s behavior”<sup>48</sup> in marriage. Cherlin discusses changing social norms such as increased rates of cohabitation and the growing acceptance of same-sex marriage to exemplify the changing role of marriage in the social order. Marriage continues according to Cherlin, however, due to its ability to create enforceable trust through community recognition and its continued symbolic significance, most exemplified in large wedding ceremonies, having “evolved from a marker of conformity to a marker of prestige.”<sup>49</sup> Cherlin's piece does not provide advice on how to successfully marry or remain happy in one's relationship, but the provision of knowledge regarding the content of marriage relationships and their place in the social order impacts on a much larger scale what makes a marriage deemed successful.

Not until 2007-2008 does the course, still SOC 332, change its title to “Families and Kinship,” and though a printing error provides the wrong description that year, by the 2008-2009 catalog “Families and Kinship” is listed thus: “This course grapples with the complex issues of contemporary family life by analyzing historical and current variations in family forms and practices. We pay particular attention to how family experiences are shaped by gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and socio-economic status.”<sup>50</sup> This title and description have remained.

To expect marriage education to look the same across history when addressing a dynamic institution perpetuated by ever changing individuals is unrealistic. Tracing the history of

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<sup>48</sup> A. Cherlin, “Deinstitutionalization of Marriage,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (2004): 848.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 855.

<sup>50</sup> “Undergraduate Course Catalogue” Bulletin of the College of William and Mary. (Williamsburg VA, 2007-2008).

marriage education, even only at The College of William and Mary, exemplifies that as marriage and its relationship to social understanding shifted, the course most directly tied to preparing and educating students about marriage shifted as well. Across decades, however, elements of marriage education and continued strains of practical knowledge were sustained. These elements became integrated into new means of studying and presenting marriage which reflects changes in both marriage and the place of academics in preparing students for a personal and public institution.

### III. The Dissolution of Academic Marriage Education: The Challenge of Change

The history of marriage education evidences the College's changing relationship with marriage preparation and education. As was recognized even in the 1940s, changes in the meanings and experiences of marriage required alterations in the education meant to prepare individuals for the institution. Why and how exactly traditional marriage education classes are almost completely phased out of college curriculums is unclear, but changes in marital realities, as well as the involvement of other social institutions, particularly religion and government, provide some framework for understanding the shifting role of academia.

The weakened relationship between marriage education and higher education is explained at least in part by new realities and reactions to changing marital standards. In the 1972 *Marriage: For and Against*, a collection of academic essays on the subject, Harold Hart explains, "According to the *New York Times* of December 1, 1971, federal statisticians report that marriage as an institution is more popular today than it ever has been in the history of the United States. . . .Against this background, it may seem paradoxical that marriage as an institution has never been under more serious attack than it is today."<sup>51</sup> One of the most serious

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<sup>51</sup> Harold Hart, *Marriage: for & against*. (New York: Hart Pub. Co., 1972), 6.

attacks on marriage, as identified by Hart, are new alternatives to marriage which radically challenge traditional understandings of the institution. He writes,

There has been a plethora of articles in magazines decrying the restrictions of marriage. . . Over and above this verbal tirade, an appreciable number of people have taken up life styles that are at considerable variance with the concept of marriage as we have known it for centuries. . . structured along lines which scorn our time-honored concepts of the relationship between man and wife; and many people are deliberately experimenting with new relationships which would have been considered so outrageous a decade ago that even notice of such arrangements would have been unlikely to come into the public prints. One of the striking things about this book is that a large number of well-respected thinkers and sociologists are now considering these new marriage forms so seriously. . . This fact in itself seems to indicate in our generation we have reached a new level of willingness to examine radical social ideas openly, seriously, critically.<sup>52</sup>

Hart's words do more than confirm the existence and recognition of these lifestyles; they also exemplify the seemingly extreme and deliberate diversion these lifestyles take from the 'time-honored' traditions of marriage. Furthermore, Hart focuses on the growing acceptance of these lifestyles, particularly within academic spaces. His assertion that these 'arrangements would have been unlikely to come into the public prints' in years past, points to the lag between cultural changes and public or academic recognition. This is certainly true for marriage education, which is historically based on attempting a generational transfer of marital expectations while

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 7.

struggling to address the changing realities and choices regarding marriage. The tone and balance of this struggle may have shifted from the 1970s onward because, as Hart explains, this generation has a new willingness to critically engage with change. While marriage education of the past decades focused on reifying standards, particularly gender norms, in a context of fears about changing social standards, by the 1970s academics adopted an attitude which allowed for and even accepted challenges to previous marriage expectations making it no longer a conducive institution for traditional marriage education.

The growing acceptance of multiple marital and family forms and de-emphasis on providing for strict gender norms in both marriage education and academics broadly is certainly in part due to the rise and successes of the second wave feminist movement. While the relationship between academia and feminism is not analyzed by this research or explicitly addressed in source work regarding marriage education, its influence must at least be recognized. Having challenged national understandings of women's gender roles and pushed for an even more advanced form of women's emancipation, the feminist movement critically altered the social context in which marriage education operated in ways which were no longer compatible with traditional marriage education.

Despite these shifts and the phasing out of marriage courses, advocates continue to speak to the need for a relationship between colleges and marriage education. In a 1980 editorial from *America* magazine, William Byron, writing as the President of University of Scranton, asserts that "colleges and universities are falling down on the job. They are failing at least in their portion of the large, long, and complicated job of preparing the young for the responsibilities of marriage and the family."<sup>53</sup> He continues to link higher education with marriage by stating

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<sup>53</sup> W. Byron, "Liberal Learning and the Future of Families," *America* (1980): 499.

that “colleges and universities educate the young for careers. Learning centers that stand in the liberal arts tradition speak of education for life as well as work. Few schools have much to say formally or explicitly about educating their students for married life, although the vast majority of those students are headed directly for marriage...The schools, of course, cannot do it all. But more can be done in the classroom, in research and in extracurricular campus life to assist the young prepare for marriage.”<sup>54</sup> In many ways, the language of Byron is a 1980s echo of the rhetoric of the post war period in which scholars like Margaret Mead were calling for marriage preparation, parallel to professional preparation, as an aim of the education system.

While Byron’s demands do illustrate a general retreat of academia from marriage preparation, marriage education does not completely disappear from colleges and universities. As I explored in the history of “Marriage and Family” at the College of William and Mary, to some extent marriage preparation courses do not end. Instead they shift their character and content. In 1980 Byron suggests a course titled “The Project of Marriage” that “would simply trust the competent and interested professor to develop the content along any one of an infinite variety of creative lines.”<sup>55</sup> Byron’s hopes were answered in part in 2001 when Northwestern University began offering a marriage preparation course titled “Marriage 101.” “Marriage 101” usually enrolls 50 students per semester, and aims “to be simultaneously a rigorous academic course and a state-of-the art marriage preparation program.”<sup>56</sup> Arthur Nielsen, a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, as well a professor of the course and author of “Marriage 101: An Integrated Academic and Experiential Undergraduate Marriage Education Course,” is clear that “little work has targeted college students...Most college-level courses concerning marriage and intimate

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 501.

<sup>56</sup> A. Nielson., W. Pinsof, C. Rampage, Solomon, A. & S. Goldstein, *Family Relations* 53 (2004): 485

relationships are purely academic and lack ‘marriage preparation’ goals.”<sup>57</sup> According to the syllabus from Winter 2006,

Marriage 101 combines traditional academic methods (lectures, class discussions, readings) with experiential and self-discovery assignments coordinated with the subject matter. Each week’s experience consists of a lecture and class discussion, assigned readings, and an elaboration of the week’s topic through experiential tasks and discussion in small groups. Each week students will also respond to relevant self-inquiry questions in a private, ungraded journal. Equivalent to “labs” in other courses, students do three outside class experiential assignments and interview two real couples—a married couple from the community and their own parents.<sup>58</sup>

Addressing such issues as sexuality, cohabitation, problem-solving, infidelity, communication, children, and evaluating marital happiness, “students felt that the course was both academically challenging and practically useful.”<sup>59</sup> Original reservations by Northwestern to sponsor the course were countered by the professors with the following response: “(a) empirical research in the fields of marriage and personal relationships puts us on par with other academic disciplines, (b) colleges are not merely trade schools with career-orientated aims, (c) labs and practica are commonplace in academic subjects, and (d) health and safety are legitimate university concerns.”<sup>60</sup> Overall, the professors of “Marriage101” conclude that “college students were eager to learn about marriage and

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> A. Nielsen, „*Marriage 101: Building Loving and Lasting Relationships*. (2006) Retrieved from [http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/docs/HDPS\\_351\\_SyllabusW05.pdf](http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/docs/HDPS_351_SyllabusW05.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> A. Nielson., W. Pinsof, C. Rampage, Solomon, A. & S. Goldstein, *Family Relations* 53 (2004): 491.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

believed that the course helped them do so.”<sup>61</sup> This course exemplifies academia’s ability to create a modern marriage education course which satisfies both the academic and practical aims of marriage education, but academia as whole remains reticent to provide such an education.

While academia struggles to address the changing social context and its implications for marriage education, other social institutions have welcomed this role, and continued an emphasis on marriage as critical for a successful society. The rhetoric and goals of marriage preparation provided by both government and religious institutions serve as a valuable source of comparison with both post-war and contemporary academic marriage courses. The intersection between government and religious marriage preparation also evidences their attempts to assert authority through the regulation of marital standards.

The concerns that a changing society is threatening marital and social stability expressed by post-war marriage education classes are echoed in the language of contemporary religious marriage educators. In the 2003 article, *Strengthening Marriages in a Skeptical Culture: Issues and Opportunities*, Scott Stanley, Co-Director of the center for Marital and Family Studies at University of Denver, agrees that the dangers to the institution of marriage are “cohabitation, increased religious heterogeneity, dual career issues, modern mobility, increase in the length of life, and others,”<sup>62</sup> and advocates a response through religious marriage education. He writes that church-based premarital education is “one key area where the church is in the best possible position to do solid prevention work because so many couples seek faith institutions at the point they seek to become married. With its institutional base, moral perspective, and contact with couples and families at critical times, the church can play a major role in any revival of a culture

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 492.

<sup>62</sup> S. Stanley, "Strengthening marriages in a skeptical culture," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 31 (2003): 224

that broadly supports marriages of quality and stability.”<sup>63</sup> For Stanley, churches have both the opportunity and means of effectively providing marriage education and restoring social stability, just as advocates of marriage education in post-war America believed academia did. What Stanley envisions in a ‘culture that broadly supports marriages of quality and stability’ is unclear, but suggests a relative uniformity, and his use of revival implies a return to previous marriage standards, which, as discussed in the first chapter, are often represented as rigidly defined and without the challenges of choice.

Addressing clergy and faith communities, the authors of “The Marriage Movement, A Statement of Principles,” a 2000 document created and signed by a diverse group supporting a grassroots movement to strengthen marriage, demand:

Recover your historic role as custodians of the marriage covenant or sacrament. Deepen your own and your congregation’s understanding of the importance of marriage as a sign and symbol of divine love. Create or improve faith-based marriage preparation programs, incorporating the latest skills research without subordinating the religious dimension of marriage. New research is showing that trained clergy and lay leaders can be even more effective marriage educators than the best-trained professional counselors and therapists. Marriage skills help committed couples negotiate their way to more satisfying relationships. But they cannot tell couples as persuasively why marriage matters. Clergy are thus often in a unique position to offer struggling couples new hope and new reasons to resolve their marital problems.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>64</sup> Coalition for Marriage. "The marriage movement: a statement of principles." *Institute for American Values* (2000): 21.

This call highlights many critical issues of religious marriage education. First is the differentiation of marriage as a sacrament. This religious conception of marriage defines it not as a ‘historically contingent institution’ but rather as transcendent and timeless.<sup>65</sup> When marriage is understood as a bond between humans and God, its divine nature separates it from a historical context and provides for much greater symbolic power. The ‘divine love’ evidenced in marriage requires a preparation distinct from that which focuses on developing and managing inter-personal relationships and therefore demands a specifically religious preparation. Both contemporary religious marriage education and post-war marriage education envisioned solidifying marriage standards against historical social changes, albeit for different purposes and through different means. Whereas academic marriage preparation slowly withdrew in response to changing historical circumstances, religious marriage advocates call for a reemphasis on the timeless nature of marriage.

The demand of “The Marriage Movement” also speaks to a particular content for religious marriage education. They call for incorporating the “latest skills research without subordinating the religious dimension of marriage.” The prioritizing of religious knowledge in marriage education is emphasized by Stanley as well, who, when discussing marital research, concludes: “I think the pre-eminent source of truth is revelation not research, so research should be carefully examined in the light of revealed truth.”<sup>66</sup> Any research, particularly new findings, can therefore only be added to religious marriage education if they align with the existing revealed truth, increasing the consistency of religious marriage education over time. Overall, religious education

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<sup>65</sup> S. Raitt, Community Panel for “The Marriage Class,” College of William and Mary, February, 15, 2011.

<sup>66</sup> S. Stanley, "Strengthening marriages in a skeptical culture," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 31 (2003): 227

focuses less on the skills of marriage preparation and more on educating couples as to “why marriage matters,” which returns to marriage as a transcendent covenant between the husband, wife, and God and the promotion of traditional marriage.

The religious model of marriage also has great influence on another major arbiter of marriage, the government. Creating its own forms of education, preparation, and public policy, the American government has always been invested in the marriage institution and the concepts of marriage which are perpetuated and challenged in marriage education. Nancy Cott explains in the Introduction of *Public Vows* the government’s investment in specific understandings of marriage and the Christian influence on this investment:

From the founding of the United States to the present day, assumptions about the importance of marriage and its appropriate forms have been deeply implanted in public policy . . . Political authorities expected monogamy on a Christian model to prevail—and it did, not only because of widespread Christian faith and foregoing social practice, but also because of positive and punitive laws and government policy choices. Political and legal authorities endorsed and aimed to perpetuate nationally a *particular* marriage model: lifelong, faithful monogamy, formed by the mutual consent of a man and a woman, bearing the impress of the Christian religion...Consent was basic to both marriage and government.<sup>67</sup>

The creation and continuation of particular models of marriage holds great significance to the government, motivating policy which recognizes and promotes the marital vision of the government. The monogamous Christian marriage based on the consent of spouses aligned with American values and provided support for the relationship between

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<sup>67</sup> Nancy, Cott, *Public vows: a history of marriage and the nation*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press., 2000), 2-3.

state and citizen as well. Because of these benefits, public policy, including marriage education, focused mainly on maintaining and strengthening a traditional conception of marriage. Government marriage policy, in both its secular and religiously affiliated forms and including marriage education, has often advocated marriages of a particular, often Christian, morality. By advocating for these particular marriages, the government encourages the development of relationships in which individuals subscribe to a morality which supports both Christian ideals and consent to be governed. While the history of marriage education evidences that the social understanding of marriage is not fully static or traditional and sweeping changes to marriage laws and policies have occurred over time, the government's investment in marriage and maintaining its status as regulator of the institution remains strong.

From the perspective of the government, marriage holds significance not only for its moral value, but also as a means of addressing economic and social stability of families. As such, policy presents marriage promotion as a government policy. This is perhaps most clearly evidenced in the language of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act which “zeroed in on marriage as a solution to the ballooning welfare caseload . . . The bill opened with the normative claims ‘(1) Marriage is the foundation of a successful society. (2) Marriage is an essential institution of successful society which promotes the interest of children.’ Similarly, ‘as part of [TANF] reauthorization proposal [in 2002], the Bush administration put forward a plan to allocate funds specifically for the purpose of promoting marriage,’”<sup>68</sup> and the administration created the Healthy Marriage Initiative with the goal to: “help couples who choose marriage for themselves develop the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 221-222.

healthy marriages.”<sup>69</sup>

For both the government and religion, and sometimes in tandem, marriage is an American institution of great importance. As a central commitment of many individuals’ lives, accessing and regulating marriage provides an opportunity to shape personal and political matters and promote particular ways of perceiving one’s place in a greater system. A religious presentation of marriage as a transcendental divine covenant affirms the need for religious marriage education which teaches a particular skills and values of marriage and preferences divine knowledge. The government’s investment in marriage as means to regulate the population as citizens consenting to governance, subjects requiring moral guidance, and economic actors, encourages policy promoting specific marital forms. Government and religious institutions both have high long-term investments in marriage and often see their best interests served by focusing on traditional marital values as a response to social changes. These characteristics have in part allowed for a continued role for government and religion in marriage education while academia generally diminished its relationship.

#### VI. "The Marriage Class:" A New Approach

The most recent addition to marriage education history at the College of William and Mary, “The Marriage Class,” was a five week class in the spring of 2011 taught by Professor Jennifer Putzi. The course content drew heavily from my honors research, including many sources and perspectives included in this thesis, and I collaborated with Professor Putzi on the course syllabus and format. The “Marriage Class” was listed with the following description:

“The Marriage Class” is a one-credit, pass/fail course which will meet for the first five weeks of the spring semester. We will explore historical forms of

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<sup>69</sup> K.S. Seefeldt & P.J. Smock, “Marriage on the public policy agenda: what do policy makers need to know from research?,” *National Poverty Center University of Michigan*. (2004): 12

marriage education, focusing especially on its peak in the early to mid-twentieth century, as well as the dissolution of the formal relationship between marriage education and higher education in the 1970s. We will ask what academia has to offer students today in terms of preparation for and education about marriage, and will address the multiple forms of and debates about contemporary long-term partnerships in the United States. Students will discuss their own opinions about such controversies as well as their own marriage preparation ideas and plans. This course is based on the Women's Studies honors thesis research of William and Mary senior Elizabeth Miller. Enrollment indicates willingness to participate in Elizabeth's research. To be considered for enrollment, please submit a 250-word statement to Professor Jennifer Putzi (jlputz@wm.ed) expressing your reasons for interest in "The Marriage Class" and what perspective you bring to the discussion. Include your year in school and major(s).

While this description provides some insight into the course and the syllabus (Appendix A) lists topics and readings, I will present a synopsis analysis of the course. First, however, I will outline the general demographics of the course. As the description mentions, enrollment required students to self-select and apply through a brief personal statement. Sixteen students enrolled ranging from sophomores to seniors and representing majors including: Psychology, Theater, Sociology, Literary and Cultural Studies, Government, English, History, and Women's Studies. While four males applied for the course, only one eventually enrolled, evidencing that marriage education remains mainly an interest and concern primarily of females. In their application statements, students revealed a variety of family and relationship histories, including one student who is currently married. Interest in the course often generally stemmed from either

past academic coursework or more often from a desire to explore personal understandings of marriage.

Because this written thesis serves as both a record and analysis of ‘The Marriage Class’ I am including abbreviated synopses of each class meeting as well as some of the most significant implications of these meetings. These come from my direct observation and participation in “The Marriage Class” as well as careful reviews of the response papers required of students each week. The course served to provide students with the knowledge and understanding to critically evaluate marriage education and to consider their own marriage preparation ideas, and more broadly, the course explored a new intentional relationship between higher education and marriage education and evidences the results of this relationship. With only five 80 minute sessions, “The Marriage Class” packed a lot into a brief educational experience.

The first class began with a general introduction by both Professor Putzi and me in which I explained my honors thesis and its relationship to this course. I articulated that while “The Marriage Class” was a source of knowledge to be integrated into my written thesis, I also viewed it as a distinct experience and a product in its own right, meaning the purpose of the course was not just to gain material for me to later analyze. In line with regulations from the Protection of Human Subjects Committee, I explained the requirements and risks of participation and each student signed a consent form. After our own brief synopses of our interest in marriage education, Professor Putzi and I asked students to share their reasons for joining the course and interest in the subject matter. While students varied greatly in their past experiences, current relationship statuses, and even intentions regarding future relationships, many spoke both to the influence of their parents and family on their marital ideas and knowing college friends who either were or were soon to be engaged. After a brief discussion of the Introduction to

*Public Vows*, discussion shifted to the readings from the historical marriage preparation text books with “opinions expressed about these readings [ranging] from annoyance to amusement, [with] one of the primary reactions involve[ing] disgust with these ideas of the past.”<sup>70</sup> Students were particularly interested in the pre-marital medical examinations detailed in the text. One student shared that her grandparents had undergone a medical exam and discovered they could not conceive prompting them to adopt in a time-period when adoption was unpopular. This admission surprised all of us, particularly by setting a tone in which students were quickly connecting personal experiences to the academic texts. The historical text’s portrayal of “foreign brides” as dangerous to social stability at the close of World War also received special attention from the class, and opened into a broader discussion in which students recognized that marriage is often used to emphasize national identity and citizenship rights. The first class exposed students to the knowledge provided in mid-twentieth century marriage education text while also establishing “The Marriage Class” as encouraging and addressing a wide range of perspectives.

The second session of “The Marriage Class” was intended to focus mainly on non-academic sources of marital instruction, mainly government policy and religious institutions. The discussion, however, began with students eager to amend their judgments of the historical marriage education texts. Having now read a chapter on marriage in a 1999 textbook, *Diversity in Families*, students spoke to the practical, instructive value of the older texts and, when provided with tables of contents, were surprised to learn that even in the post-war period, these texts provided information on sex and other intimate matters. Both the *Newsweek* article “I Don't,”<sup>71</sup> which argues that marriage is no longer worthwhile or able to provide many benefits

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<sup>70</sup> All quotes from students and panelists are drawn from their response papers or class participation in “The Marriage Class” as approved by the Protection of Human of Subjects Committee. I acted as a participant-observer in “The Marriage Class,” attending each session. Student papers are to remain confidential and are therefore not reproducible research.

<sup>71</sup> J. Bennette, and J. Ellison, “I Don’t: The Case Against Marriage,” *Newsweek*, June, 11, 2010.

not available to non-married individuals, and Professor Putzi's question of "why marriage?" instead of other forms of long-term partnership inspired extended conversation, particularly on the subject of weddings. While students critiqued the *Newsweek* piece for addressing weddings rather than marriage, many continued to identify the wedding itself as a reason to marry. This discussion supports quite clearly the position of Andrew Cherlin in "The Deinstitutionalization of Marriage" that marriage's main purpose in modern society is as a symbolic demonstration of commitment and achievement evidenced mainly in the wedding ceremony: "The couples in our study wanted to make a statement through their weddings, a statement both to themselves and to their friends and family that they had passed a milestone in the development of their self-identities."<sup>72</sup> Students also desired to be married for the titles involved, again a symbolic recognition, and for the community investment. My attempts to push discussion toward the issue of government intervention, as the students had read about in "Marriage on the Public Policy Agenda" garnered little response. Instead of addressing the relationship between government, economics, and marriage, students continued to focus on weddings. The conversation shifted in content and tone, however, when one student asserted that the government was particularly invested in creating homogenous marriages which recreate the current system. This assertion faced quick rebuke and a demand for evidence of this marital purpose. The first student quickly retorted: "I live in America, I see it everywhere." The conversation developed into a brief but relatively heated exchange between two students over the government's authority and rationale for investing in the morality of its citizens and the place of marriage within such interventions. The second session exemplified the challenge of marriage education to provide practical comprehensive information even in a context of questioning the marriage institution. Student

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<sup>72</sup> A. Cherlin, "Deinstitutionalization of Marriage," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (2004): 857.

discussion also illustrated the tension surrounding the relationship between the government, religion, and marriage, and a lack of uniform opinions about this relationship. Overall, students were reluctant to discuss the relationships between marriages and government oversight. While they were willing to vaguely acknowledge this relationship in terms of welfare reform and lower-income couples, they continued to articulate a belief that their own marriages would be based on their personal desires and that the major recognition of their unions would come from their communities rather than the government. This class evidenced, to some extent, the struggle of connecting the personal and political.

The third and fourth sessions were the academic and community panel respectively. The academic panel included Professor Pilkington from Psychology, Professor Coleman from Chemistry, Professor Meyer from American Studies and History, and Professor Raitt from English. Each panelist received an email invitation to participate based on their research or knowledge in an area related to marriage or relationships. Almost all panelists expressed some trepidation about participating, unsure of what their contribution might be and what the nature of the course was. I even personally visited Professor Coleman in order to address his concerns and convince him to participate. After providing brief introductions, the academic panel began smoothly and both panelists and students quickly began interacting with each other. Professor Coleman provided both his own experience from his marriage as well as a scientific assertion that “I can prove to you that you are insane when madly in love,” which prompted him to suggest a long engagement and reject the belief that you can change your partner. Similarly, Professor Pilkington offered a formula for predicting whether an individual will stay in a relationship based on factors such as satisfaction, expectations, comparison level to other possible relationships, and investment. Later in the discussion and in contrast to the scientific perspectives discussed,

Professor Meyer presented marriage as a social construct and provided a brief history of the same-sex marriage movement's origin. Students were surprised by this history and asked for multiple clarifications. Then, focusing on the relationship between marriage and religion, Professor Raitt offered that “marriage is a historically contingent institution” making nothing a given, but the religious ideology of marriage represents it as a sacrament that is transcendent and timeless. The discussion addressed expectations and marital satisfaction with panelists and students offering a variety of means to measure and promote both. Professor Coleman's assertion that the current generation lacked focus and commitment and held a higher degree of selfishness in their relationships garnered perhaps the most animated response from students who both agreed and disagreed. Of Professor Coleman's evaluation of the current generation, one student wrote: “I hate generational nostalgia. I hate the idea that the current generation is somehow less moral, less disciplined, or less successful than the generation before.” This panel evidenced that current academic knowledge can be provided in a marriage education context, but that knowledge lacks uniformity and often challenges the marriage institution.

The community panel of the following week adopted a different tone and subject matter. When selecting panelists for this discussion, Professor Putzi and I attempted to address both a range of sources outside academia as well as the interests of students. The panel included Vernon Hurte, Director of Center for Student Diversity, Margaret Sequiera of the Unitarian Universalist Church, Father John David Ramsey from Catholic Campus Ministries, and Alex Dryden from the William and Mary Counseling Center. Unlike the academic panelists, these participants were quick to accept and offered no significant concerns as to what their contributions might be. The panel began with each participant offering some of their personal background and relationship history, with two panelists sharing that they are in long-term same-sex relationships.

Panelists also provided their ideas about what is necessary to create a successful long-term relationship. As many students commented on in their responses, the panelists offered very similar core concepts on which to center a relationship, including communication, compromise, friendship, and shared values. When asked how they might structure a collegiate marriage education class or if they thought that coursework would be effective, however, each panelist provided distinct perspectives. Father Ramsey offered that from a Catholic perspective, a non-religious course from a secular institution would not be effective because only a strongly religious and denominational perspective with a focus on morality would successfully prepare an individual for marriage. Rather than morality, Sequiera's concept of a marriage education course focused on illustrating the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships as well as challenging hegemonic understandings. She also offered approval for the panel-format of "The Marriage Class." Hurte suggested that a course ought to focus on self-development and practice of interpersonal skills. Based on his personal experience at Virginia Commonwealth University which offers a marriage preparation course he found beneficial, Dryden supported some form of marriage education, but then added that even knowing the basics of a relationship, that information "goes out the window" when you actually enter into one. He focused on course work which allowed for dialogue and discussing the factors of good partnership. The discussion also included panelists' perspectives on dating, including multiple panelists advocating for more time spent in pre-marital relationships as a means of knowing one's self and relationship habits better, rather than only experiencing casual relationships before marriage. The panelists generally agreed that there is no correct time-line for getting married, although many emphasized that marriage need not come directly after college. Overall, this second panel put more focus on the panelists with less interaction with students or between participants. Many students greatly

appreciated this panel, with one concluding, “I thought this panel represented the marriage classes of the past the best . . . [and] I enjoyed the focus on preparation before marriage.”

Utilizing a numbering system to allow each student to share their own thoughts and perspective on the content of the course overall as well as raise any questions regarding readings or larger issues of marriage education, the final class provided each student the opportunity to participate. Each was randomly assigned a number and then, in order, given the opportunity to speak, rotating through the list twice. Generally, students expressed their preference for one panel or the other, their frustration that so many questions regarding how to create a successful relationship were left unanswered, and attempts to integrate readings and personal experiences. Students brought up particular quotes from readings and panels either to exemplify their own understandings or as content to critique, with multiple students particularly frustrated by the ideas of “The Marriage Movement: A Statement of Principles.” While each student provided original thoughts, they also quickly began to respond and often agree with the sentiments of their classmates. By the end of the last class it was clear that students still had a lot to say, and one student wrote in her final response, “I will begin by saying that I miss taking The Marriage Class already.” The session concluded with everyone, including Professor Putzi and me, sharing their goodbyes and appreciation for the experience.

#### A. A Space for Discussion

Byron encourages liberal arts colleges to provide marriage education because “Marriage is a project, [and] students should have the opportunity to regard it as such in the delightful detachment of the classroom experience.”<sup>73</sup> “The Marriage Class” attempted to provide such a space of exploration. Rather than imparting a standardized knowledge, the class focused in large

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<sup>73</sup> W. Byron, “Liberal Learning and the Future of Families,” *America* (1980): 501.

part on providing a space for students to identify understandings of marriage, both personal and institutional. Student enthusiasm for the course, evidenced in attendance, participation, and written reviews, speaks to the success of this course in providing a space for knowledge and dialogue that is otherwise left unexplored.

As one student explained, “I watched the Vagina Monologues for the first time a couple of weeks ago. The narrator of the film said that the women she interviewed were hesitant to discuss their vaginas at first, but once they got talking they couldn't stop. I imagine that a similar phenomenon occurred in our class: marriage, like vaginas, has existed for all our lives—and yet nobody has ever asked us our opinions of marriage. Once we got talking, we couldn't stop.” While participation varied across students, during the first and last session when each student was specifically provided an opportunity to share their thoughts, each of them eagerly shared. The opportunity to hear and discuss the personal histories and perspectives of other students became a central benefit of the course. From the first class in which each student shared their background and reasons for enrollment, students already began to recognize the value of sharing perspectives: “I was completely blown away by the mini-bios that each of the students enrolled in the course had to offer. . .listening to everyone's various background stories made me reexamine my own.” While some students voiced frustration with “certain people who were just more aggressive in their conversation styles and dominated the class discussions,” overall students expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to present their own ideas about marriage and then hear others as well.

In her first response, however, one student quickly articulated her own frustration with class discussion: “ I was actually quite startled by how class discussion began. . .I was met. . .with general atmosphere of dislike toward marriage or an attitude of incomprehension

as to why anyone would partake in the institution. . . Instead of asking the big whys of both sides and engaging in a rationally progressive dialogue, the remainder of the class discussion turned toward a support group atmosphere with people taking comfort in discovering others with similar ideas.” Her observation that students generally were hostile toward marriage is an understandable, although I believe an inaccurate reading. Overall there were few students who in their first discussion voiced an absolute decision to marry. Even fewer students, however, than those certain of their desire to marry, voiced a direct rejection of marriage as an institution. A middle ground instead held the majority, with many students expressing their own trepidation to engage in the institution which was met with support by others of similar perspectives. These middle ground students were quick to support others who spoke to uncertainties about marriage, but I believe this came not out of their own internal rejection of marriage, but from experiencing a new context in which not assuming a marital future might be acceptable. As one student wrote in her application, she was astounded that a friend once said “If I marry” rather than “When I marry.” The first discussion of “The Marriage Class” certainly set a tone of “if” not “when” among the majority of the students, which I believe allowed many to find validity in their own perspectives.

That this discussion even occurred is a departure from many academic conversations, but as Professor Putzi articulated at the opening of class, “The Marriage Class” embraced the feminist charge that “the personal is political” and intentionally provided space for personal experience to be integrated into an academic environment. From the opening session, “The Marriage Class” allowed for and encouraged students to engage with a topic no academic setting has addressed before. By pulling students’ personal perspectives into the conversation, students critically engaged with their own personal experiences, gained exposure to alternative

perspectives, and then placed their understanding into a larger context. This is certainly not a traditional marriage preparation goal, yet the experience allowed students to consider why they wanted to prepare for marriage, embracing personal choice rather than attempting to control for it. While the marriage education of the mid-twentieth century focused on providing a standardized marriage preparation which would decrease individuals' uncertainty regarding the expectations and realities of marriage, "The Marriage Class" utilized a much different approach.

#### B. Marriage Perceptions and Plans

Defining "The Marriage Class" as a form of marriage education which allows for a variety of marital plans and expectations, including questioning the validity of marriage itself, it is important to address the impact of the class on the students' perceptions of marriage both personally and structurally. "I believe it goes without saying that this class is going to change my views on marriage," wrote one student to open her first response paper for the course. She explained that she wants to marry and this is "a topic I'm not easily swayed on" but quickly added, "I find myself wondering already if my attitude toward marriage is one of girlish naivety, and I wish to hone my opinions through-open minded discussion." In her final response, this same student wrote, "I can't say that my conception of marriage has *changed* over the course of this five-week course, but I certainly feel like I've been educated well about different perspectives. . . I feel confident that my choice [to marry] will not be the wrong one *for me*. However, I do feel confident saying that after this class I can see both the pros and cons of marriage and if for some reason my partner did not want to get married I would be open to his perspective." Another student wrote, "After taking the marriage class and hearing the opinions outside my typical group discussion, I still revert to the same refusal to get married. I have a greater appreciation for why people choose to get married, but I still separate relationships from

this life plan.” Both students were consistent with their personal plans regarding marriage but also recognized that the experience of the course, particularly exposure to diverse perspectives, altered their understandings of marriage and willingness to acknowledge other choices.

One personal marriage decision which garnered attention was a student's assertion in the last session that over the course of “The Marriage Class” she had decided she wants a church wedding for the benefit of community recognition and support. Two students expressed their surprise at this decision in their final response papers with one writing, “I couldn't believe that was what they learned in this course . . . I don't mean to pass judgment on what other people have taken from this class, but I was disappointed by this. In fact I wanted to flip over a chair. After examining all of the issues and problems with marriage, I was astonished that someone could have come to so different a conclusion than me after taking the same class.” She quickly follows this up with an assertion that the differences in background and conclusions are “part of the beauty of the class.” The lack of prescriptive knowledge in the class allowed students to express their personal opinions, but this also allowed students to come to very different conclusions. While I believe that marriage education must allow for and address the range of long-term relationships, this also provides a framework open to the difficulties of contradiction and conflict.

#### C. Panels and an Attempt at Integration

As the original format for my proposed marriage class from sophomore year, including panels in “The Marriage Class” was always my intention. Panels provide the unique experience of being able to view and question the source of knowledge which I find particularly pertinent for a course meant to examine the knowledge of marriage education. The panels also allowed for a representation and juxtaposition of the perspectives on marriage education, as well as

tensions between multiple sources. In a simplified way, the first panel of professors represented academic knowledge while the community panel represented practical non-academic knowledge, although these labels are problematic and ignore many of the overlaps between those two categories and types of knowledge. As became clear in both the positions of the panelists and the responses of the students, these two perspectives are perceived to be in conflict.

The tension between the knowledge presented in the two panels and students' processing of this exemplify the complications of marriage education which attempts to address both the power to affirm and challenge marriage expectations. Students noticed a major distinction between the two panels quite clearly. "While the [academic] panel dissented more, I found that [the community] panel pretty much agreed on everything," wrote one student. The academic panel certainly provided greater diversity in opinions and spent much of its time discussing multiple conceptions of and challenges to the institution of marriage. In contrast, the community panel mainly provided a "consistency of advices on how to maintain a strong relationship." Based on these perceived divisions, students provided a range of responses to the panel. One student concluded: "This past week's panel discussion was by far my favorite class. The advice was pertinent, well-delivered, and concise," and another: "Of our course...meetings, none have captivated my attention, or provoked my thoughts, quite as strongly as the ... panel of last session." The first student, however, was addressing the community panel, while the second wrote about the academic panel. Most students firmly voiced their preference for one panel over the other and expressed frustration that not all students aligned with their preference. This often stemmed from their willingness to classify the panels as in total conflict with one another in tone, content, and implications.

Students spoke clearly that "The Marriage Class" must to some extent 'choose sides'

on marriage. A student who preferred the academic panel exclaimed: “This [community] panel seemed to buy into the concept of marriage which greatly disappointed my hopes of stimulating discussion.” In contrast, but with as much conviction, another student wrote, “What was so refreshing about this week was that the people speaking didn’t bash marriage once. It was nice to see such a diverse group of people who all believed in the ‘forever aspect of the institution.’” Students generally viewed marriage as an institution that one is either for or against and believed the panels to reflect this choice. The students’ division, however, does not fully align with the content of the two panels. While the academic panel provided a critical analysis of marriage and discussed alternatives to the marriage institutions, none of the professors advocated directly for an abolishment of marriage. The issues they raised, such as varying levels of chemical infatuation and the changing definitions of family were perceived by students as obstacles meant to prevent or dissuade from marriage, while the issues of developing communication and learning to compromise were viewed as helpful skills to learn. Both sets of knowledge present marriage as an institution requiring understanding and effort, yet students saw the two knowledge sets as conflicting and working toward differing ends. The students’ conclusions on these difference were perhaps motivated by the differences in tone and format between the two panels as well as their personal beliefs that religious members would support marriage while academia would not.

I believe with the right preparation and framework, a contemporary marriage education class can to some extent provide knowledge which both affirms and challenges marriage, and beyond this can even provide a context in which those two perspectives may conflict but are not necessarily adversarial. There is a value to an academic approach to practical knowledge and providing practicality to academic research. After the community panel, one student,

often critical of others' lack of academic perspective recounted, "Classmates continued to ask questions regarding the best age to get married at, seeking advice from our panelist that could be retrieved from most popular female-targeted magazines." I recognize and understand her frustration, but I also think it represents ignorance of academia's benefits in addressing the personal. Certainly students could gain practical information from other sources, but academia is a unique institution which provides a distinct background and authority to its knowledge. That is not to say that one must get all information from academics or that all practical knowledge should be academically screened, but marriage, as a constantly changing and powerful institution, benefits from an academic lens, even on the personal level.

#### D. More Marriage Education?

"The Marriage Class" was an attempt at a unique kind of marriage education. Based on my belief that my peers desired a space to discuss marriage and understand marriage on a personal and institutional level and also recognizing the historical precedent and intentions of marriage preparation courses, the class attempted to address historical formats and contemporary realities. Having completed the five sessions, most students of "The Marriage Class" believed in the course's value, and many advocated for its continuation: "After taking this course on marriage education, I think that it is definitely something that should be offered every year, and at every university. . . I loved this class and think it should be taught in future semesters, and possibly even expanded to a full class!" As a student and researcher attempting to create engaged academics it is affirming to read these opinions. What is more intriguing, however, is how these students would imagine the continuance of marriage education.

Their most consistent suggestion for marriage education, and one which has been brought up by almost all I have discussed my thesis with, as well as considered by both my advisor and

myself, is the need for a new title. Writes one student: “If a ‘Marriage Class’ were to appear in any curriculum in the future, it would benefit from a name change. The term “marriage” is so gilded with a certain image/stereotype/tradition/etc that it comes off as a negative term to those “free spirits” or people uninterested in matrimony.” Another insists, “I don't agree with the name of this course: Marriage 101. Why marriage? Aren't the issues discussed in this class important to any kinds of relationships? Maybe it should be called Relationships 101.” Students suggested multiple alternative titles for the course, many replacing 'Marriage' with 'Relationship' but as one student opined, all names have issues: “Renaming ‘The Marriage Class’ something like “Life Skills for Young Couples” would allow similar subject matter to be explored without focusing on the negative connotation of “marriage.” However, this might also be too vague. . . (wow, naming is harder than I thought!).” Titling this course has been an issue since I first imagined it sophomore year. Inspired by the marriage classes I had learned of in my women's history course, I titled the course “The Marriage\* Class” in the Community Action Proposal, enlarging the asterisk and placing at the bottom a disclaimer that all forms of relationships would be recognized and included in the project. I carried this concept into the flier for this marriage class, and throughout the course Professor Putzi and I made clear that traditional marriage was not the only relationship we would address. I held to the term marriage, however, for multiple reasons.

First is its continued reference to the historical coursework and even continued classes like “Marriage 101” at Northwestern. Practically, the word marriage is more powerful and recognizable than the “vague” concept connoted by relationship. This also moves toward the most significant reason I kept the word marriage—marriage is different than a relationship, or more precisely, it is a very particular and distinct relationship. What marriage means

and therefore denotes in a course title is complicated. One student wrote: “A marriage is a partnership, the combining of two lives. Whether two people have stood up in front of their friends and family, a religious official or justice [of] the peace, or absolutely no one at all, if they are living two lives as one and sharing the things that make their lives seem worthwhile then they are married in my mind.” This student’s personal definition varies greatly from most other conceptions of marriage as it includes requirements fulfilled by many forms of relationship (including parent and child) and generally de-politicizes the institution, yet in class and other responses this student often emphasized the importance of retaining the institution of marriage. Throughout my research I have catalogued many definitions of marriage. While they vary, all speak to the weight and significance of the term. The significance of marriage as something distinct from other relationships is confirmed in the rhetoric of legislation, church teachings, media, and public discourse. What is particularly distinctive about marriage is of course hard to determine with so many definitions of marriage available, but the lack of definitive answers served as motivation for multiple fruitful discussions within “The Marriage Class.”

By selecting “marriage” for this course, I meant to intentionally draw attention to this word and its meaning's embedded power in society. Throughout the course students recognized that marriage meant very different things among their own perceptions and even among social institutions, and based on this recognition students were able to begin a critical examination of these meanings and marriage as a whole. Because of these factors, and even because of the critical thinking it inspires in students, I would continue to utilize “The Marriage Class” title.

Beyond the discursive issues regarding the title “The Marriage Class,” students’ criticism of the title also addressed their ideas about course content and emphasized their continued distinctions between academic and practical knowledge. One student suggested: “A marriage

class should be created simply as a relationship course. We all need to know how we live with each other.” Another wrote: “Life partnership education should help prepare students to maintain lasting, positive relationships with their significant others . . . [It] should cover as many facets of marriage as possible, and give as realistic a picture of future coupled life as it can. It should not only warn the students of the challenges ahead, it should give them the tools to deal with them.” In her proposed syllabus, one student outlined a course which covered economics, biology, psychology, communication, sociology, home economics, and religion, with a relatively practical and skills based focus. Many students advocated for a more practically based class, reiterating the distinctions they made between the value and implications of the two panels and arguing that “academic detachment can only go so far in an area that deeply and personally affects two individual's lives.” My intention for the panels and class as a whole was in part to provide for the possibility of integration between the two perspectives. From the students’ perspective this integration was not achieved and could not be because the perspectives are too distinct.

If “The Marriage Class” were to exist again, I would propose a few changes to address this discrepancy between my intentions and students’ experiences in regards to this integration. While participants and panelists were provided with similar preparatory questions regarding the knowledge they believed would be valuable to a marriage education class, I would also include a question directly addressing the integration of academic and practical knowledge for both panels. Altering the community panel to include fewer religious leaders (Vernon Hurte is also a minister) and perhaps adding a married college student would also reduce emphasis on a particularly distinct form of marriage and perhaps foster greater variation within the community discussion. Because of the brevity of class, the panels also received only brief attention in the

following and final session, which prohibited a discussion that might have facilitated students thinking through both similarities and differences. Beyond the panel, addressing the relationship between academics and practical knowledge in a modern context requires a framework that was not fully provided to students, mainly due to time constraints. As Professor Putzi and I often reiterated, “The Marriage Class,” was not meant to teach marriage skills. While the practical knowledge has its practical value, I would add a direct discussion that the modern practical knowledge should be analyzed as critically as the practical content of the post-war material.

Even with their preference for a practical approach to marriage education, students were quick to separate types of practical knowledge and specify distinctions. A student asserted that “It is important to teach people how to function for themselves. We need to learn how to do our taxes, balance check books, and how to save money when grocery shopping, but those skills don't need to be taught in conjunction with a marriage class.” This particular student included in her first response that she had learned from family many of the domestic skills included in historical marriage education; in her final response, however, she concluded, “I am proud of the skills [taught by my family] that will make me a skilled wife and mother one day, but I realized that I use the same skills now . . . I am still proud of the skills, but they don't have all that much to do with the relationship that marriage brings.” This recognition that domestic or even 'life' skills are not necessarily linked to marriage is a new development. These skills are useful to the student outside of marriage, but she only has the ability to recognize this because she is living a relatively independent life and is not married. This was not a conceivable option for women in the post-war period. Another student wrote: “This education is not the same as home economics, nor should it be lumped with it . . . Some form of domestic living class would also be useful, because the skills learned from it are indeed valuable—I just do not think it need be inexorably

associated with marriage.” A separation between domestic life and married life is a reasonable one in a contemporary society, but it points directly to the changing meanings and experiences of marriage.

#### E. Evaluating “The Marriage Class”

I have come across many poignant and hilarious quotes while researching marriage education, but the words which close the 1972 text *Marriage For and Against* have proven most striking to me: “Marriage, like cockroaches and crabgrass, has been around a long time; and I’m betting on its being around a still longer time.”<sup>74</sup> The universal character and longevity of marriage defines the institution as one with immense power and necessary of social attention. Selecting academia as a means of addressing the institution is only one approach, but I believe a marriage education class that can address change over time and include the diversity of long term relationships is a possible and productive endeavor. Personal and structural issues are both relevant to understanding marriage and therefore both ought to be considered and included in marriage education. These were some of the main goals of “The Marriage Class” at the College of William and Mary. The class proposed that students deserve a space to discuss and examine marriage which will allow for both a critical analysis of the institution and the development of a mature understanding of the impact of marriage on a personal level.

“The Marriage Class” certainly did not achieve all of these aspirations, and as the students often voiced, this approach led most often to conflicting views without integration. Imagining a future for this course, I believe there are some broad changes which would bring the course closer to its goals and address some of the tensions which arose. First, I would advocate, as some students did, for the course running an entire semester. One of the greatest challenges of

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<sup>74</sup> C. Broderick, *Marriage: for and against*. ed. Hart, H., (New York: Hart, 1972), 263.

the five-week course was the inability to engage in deep analysis and integrate content from various weeks because each session focused so heavily on providing as much content and discussion as possible on that week's topic. Extending the class for a full semester would provide time for developing students' critical analysis skills within a marriage education framework, the inclusion of both more historical background and contemporary issues such as a direct focus on other forms of long-term relationship, the media's role in marriage education and expectations, and the implications of modern marriage education. More sessions would also allow students more opportunities to participate and explore the relationship between their personal beliefs and the academic content. I would not, however, advocate for the personal and psychological focus of Northwestern's "Marriage 101" because I believe its rather clinical and therapeutic approach, while valuable, is not appropriate for the academic setting of William and Mary. Beyond expanding class sessions and content, I would also reconsider the demographics of the class. I would certainly attempt to enroll more male students which I believe would drastically shift the discussions by providing new perspectives and challenging the conception that marriage education is women's work. While the class does focus on integrating practical and academic knowledge and does not include any prerequisites or particular majors, in reviewing applications, I would focus more on a student's willingness to engage with both the personal and the political and make that process clearer in the first session. Overall, even without these proposed changes, I believe the "The Marriage Class" successfully exemplified that marriage education in a contemporary academic setting is possible and valuable to both students and the academic canon.

## V. The Big Picture of Marriage Education

As the wedding dates of my engaged friends draw near, I contemplate sending them

copies of *She's Off to Marriage* or one of the other post-war textbooks. Like Kate McKenna from my eighth-grade home-economics class, they all plan to marry grooms of an appropriate height, although I doubt they learned that lesson in the same manner I did. Creating this Honors Thesis has not made me an expert on creating successful marriages or even the best means of educating others to do so, but it has affirmed my belief that social understandings of marriage are taught, often with a deliberate agenda, by other institutions.

Developed in the mid-twentieth century mainly in response to uncertainties regarding changing social conditions and gender roles, academic marriage education provided a means of responding to change by teaching continuity. The rhetoric of the time period speaks to attempts to allow for women's education in ways which would affirm traditional gender roles while incorporating new female realities of increased educational and vocational pursuits. Framing marriage education as both a way to teach women to be women and to professionalize their traditional roles, advocates of marriage preparation coursework addressed both social needs and social concerns through academia.

Despite a historical narrative which often represents marriages of the post-war period as structured and standardized, the marriage education materials of the post-war era reveals significant concerns that young people were no longer adequately prepared for the many choices available to them, and the previous system of family education was not sufficient. Academia stepped in to provide a comprehensive and relatively standardized knowledge base which ensured that each individual, particularly females, made the right choice, but in doing so, a relationship between marriage and academia was formed which affirmed that choice was an option. Thus, from its beginning, marriage education served to both reify and change marital standards.

This relationship and its development over time is illustrated in the history of marriage education at the College of William and Mary from 1940 to present day. The coursework offered at the College generally aligns with national patterns of marriage education. First addressing concerns about women's adjustment and role in both an academic setting and society at large, marriage education courses focused on teaching feminine roles and expectations. By 1952, the College offered an explicitly preparatory marriage education course, although it lasted only a few years. Reflecting a national shift in academic rhetoric, course content began to focus less on preparation and more on development and analysis. By the 1980s marriage education at the college adopted a tone of analysis, but as the course syllabi of the early 2000s reveal, some elements of personal preparation and understanding remain. Overall, academia retreated from its role in marriage education but never disappeared.

While the relationship between academia and marriage is central to my thesis, understanding the relationship between the government, religion, and marriage also exemplifies how the marriage institution has been utilized to promote particular agendas and social standards. Recognizing that marriage serves many purposes, including creating a covenant with God and one's government, these other institutions continue to exert their control over marriage and attempt to regulate marriage in a way which affirms traditional standards and therefore their traditional authority.

Reviewing and analyzing the relationship between various institutions and marriage provides valuable academic knowledge, but does little to address contemporary realities and my original desire to understand how academia might prepare students for marriage today. To address these issues, this thesis includes an engaged scholarship component, "The Marriage Class." A unique product in its own right, "The Marriage Class," provided a means to

intentionally explore the relationship between academics and marriage today and attempt to integrate practical and academic knowledge for the benefit of research and the enrolled students. As the first attempt at engaged scholarship within a Women's Studies Honors Thesis, the course provided many successful outcomes but also held much room for improvement. Acting as a space for discussion and analysis of students' personal understandings of marriage along with institutional perspectives, I believe the course was valuable to the students and the academic establishment. Particularly through the inclusion of an academic and community panel, the course illustrated tensions between academic and practical knowledge in the contemporary collegiate environment, and exemplified that affirming and challenging marriage together is a difficult task. Although I know it is unlikely to ever be the case, I believe "The Marriage Class," or some other course which addresses the marriage institution through the lens of marriage education, holds significant merit in its ability to address student interest, the power of marriage, and the long-standing relationship between marriage and education.

Through this thesis, I have attempted to create a recognition and understanding of the significance of marriage education at both an institutional and personal level. Challenged by a lack of secondary sources and theoretical frameworks to draw on, I have addressed marriage education through a range of sources, perspectives, and experiences to create a broad picture of the role of academia in teaching marriage and thereby affirming and challenging marital expectations. Stemming from my original intent to create a course which would answer the student body's interest in marriage, creating and executing "The Marriage Class," is certainly the most personally satisfying element of my thesis, but I also believe it was a valuable academic experience which provided new knowledge to the history and understanding of marriage education. Academia has and continues to play a significant role in shaping social conceptions,

and when this force is applied to the powerful institution of marriage which in its own right affects almost every aspect of social living, the relationship developed is worthy of attention and analysis.

Appendix A.

**Women's Studies 290-02: "The Marriage Class"**  
**Professor Jennifer Putzi**  
**Spring 2011/Thursday 3:30-4:50 Morton 239**

Office: 313 Tyler Hall  
jlputz@wm.edu

Office Hours: M 3:30-4:30/W 10:00-11:00

Email:

Phone: 221-3908

"The Marriage Class" is a one-credit, pass/fail course which will meet for the first five weeks of the spring semester. We will explore historical forms of marriage education, focusing especially on its peak in the early to mid-twentieth century, as well as the dissolution of the formal relationship between marriage education and higher education in the 1970s. We will ask what academia has to offer students today in terms of preparation for and education about marriage, and will address the multiple forms of and debates about contemporary long-term partnerships in the United States. Students will discuss their own opinions about such controversies as well as their own marriage preparation ideas and plans.

This course is based on the Women's Studies honor's thesis research of William and Mary senior Elizabeth Miller. Enrollment indicates willingness to participate in Elizabeth's research. Elizabeth will be participating in class, but if you wish to talk to her about her project or your participation therein, please contact her at [efmiller@email.wm.edu](mailto:efmiller@email.wm.edu).

**Reading:**

All reading assignments will be available on our course Blackboard site. You are required to print these readings out and bring them to class with you OR bring your laptop to class with you so you can access them. You should always have your reading materials with you in class!

## **Course Requirements:**

**Attendance:** This is a five-week course, so it is important that you are present for every class session. If you miss even one class session without having your absence approved by me ahead of time, you will fail the course.

**Participation:** Active participation in this course is essential. By active participation, I mean, above all, frequent and substantial contributions to class discussions. I also define participation as being prepared for class, listening attentively (to me and to your classmates), performing in-class tasks with enthusiasm, and being willing to share your written work when asked or required to do so. Please remember, simply showing up for class is not the same as actively participating!

**Brief Written Responses:** After each class session, you will write a short response (about 500 words) to the readings and/or the class discussion, focusing on whatever you found most interesting, confusing, frustrating, etc. You should also use these responses as an opportunity to ask questions that didn't get addressed or to let me know what you would like to do in future class sessions. Responses are due the week following the class period about which you are writing. (For example, your response to the January 27<sup>th</sup> class is due on February 3<sup>rd</sup>.) You must turn in all five responses in order to pass the class!

## **Course Policies:**

**Email:** Email is a good way to communicate information like the fact that you have to miss class or to set up appointments, but it is not a good place for productive discussions about the course materials or grades. For this reason, I will set up a time to meet or at least talk over the phone if you have something substantial to discuss. I will not discuss grades over email.

**Written Work:** In order to pass this course, you must complete ALL the assigned work. All of the work that you turn in for this class must be turned in for this class only; in other words, you may not use, without advance permission from both instructors, the same essay in two classes. If you need an extension for an assignment, you must talk to me at least twenty-four hours before the assignment is due. If you do not speak to me ahead of time, I will not accept the assignment.

**Plagiarism and the Honor Code:** Plagiarism is the worst of academic crimes and the starkest violation of the College's Honor Code. Many college administrators and professors believe that in the era of the internet, plagiarism is becoming easier and more common. Please do not be tempted: besides hindering your learning experience, plagiarism is the best way to fail a class or get kicked out of school. Talk to me if you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism and/or how to use or cite a source.

## **Course Schedule:**

### **Thursday, January 27: History of Marriage and Marriage Education**

- Cott, "Introduction," *Public Vows* (2000)
- Duvall "Who Gets Married to Whom," *When You Marry* (1945)
- Bowman, "Choosing a Mate," *Marriage for Moderns* (1942)
- Mead, "Apprenticeship for Marriage" (1963)

### **Thursday, February 3: Contemporary Forms of Marriage Education**

- Seefeldt & Smock, "Marriage on the Public Policy Agenda" (2004)
- Newsweek, "The Case Against Marriage" (2010)
- Zinn, "Contemporary Marriage," *Diversity in Families* (1999)

- Stanley “Strengthening Marriages in A Skeptical Culture: Issues and Opportunities” (2003)

**Thursday, February 10: Academic Panel**

- No assigned reading

**Thursday, February 17: Community Panel**

- No assigned reading

**Thursday, February 24: Marriage in Crisis: Does Education Make a Difference?**

- “The Marriage Movement: A Statement of Principles” (2000)
- Cherlin, “Deinstitutionalization of Marriage” (2004)
- Duggan, “Beyond Same-Sex Marriage” & “Beyond Same Sex Marriage: A New Strategic Vision” (2008)
- Byron, “Liberal Learning and the Future of Families” (1980)
- Nielsen, “Marriage 101” (2004)
- Alternatives to Marriage Project (unmarried.org)

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