THE GOLDEN NOOSE



A Look at Marriage

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The Band of Gold

Marriage has become the central contract in a woman's life. Unfortunately, this fundamental building block for the way in which we've organized our societies has come at a high cost for women. Symbolized by a band of gold, the consequence of marriage as it has evolved has been to asphyxiate women's social, political, and economic freedom. While tremendous gains have been made as a result of the waves of feminism and changes in societal norms and governmental policies, valid questions remain in the twenty-first century. Primarily, how can we establish socially just societies when the status of couples is legitimized by a personal social contract which, it may be argued, remains fundamentally flawed and unjust?



Elizabeth Gilbert, Beyoncé Knowles, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Women and Economics (1st Edition), and Dorothy L. Sayers (see bibliography for photo credits)

To start, let's review the statistical and business context of marriage using information relating to Canada and the United States.

In 2008, Statistics Canada, which has been collecting marriage data since 1921 and divorce data since 1972[1], reported 147,288 marriages for a rate of 4.4 per 1000 people, the lowest rate in a century. The divorce rate has continued to climb and for the same year 70,226 divorces were recorded, or 2.11 per 1000 people. Large numbers of people still get married every year, just under 50% of those marriages will end in divorce, and the market for marriage has been extended to include same-sex couples.

To get married, these social optimists spend a lot of money. Recent estimates put the value of transactions in the wedding industry at $60-86 billion USD per year for the United States and this figure does not include honeymoons and new household items. The average cost per wedding is estimated at $24,066 USD.[2] The societal impulse in support of marriage is now complemented by an industry, one which will strive to protect its interests and its viability as an ongoing concern. This serves to obscure the need to question and examine the core assumptions around this societal ritual which may not be serving the best interests of women. The message in favour of marriage is also enforced through the media -- which to its credit also examines the effects of divorce -- whether on television, in movies, magazines, or the flourishing world of romance fiction where the happy ending is still equated with a woman finding her one and only true love, her life partner.

What Is Marriage?

What exactly do we mean when we talk about marriage? How has the form of marriage evolved to be what it is today?[3]

In 2010, Elizabeth Gilbert released her book Committed, an exploration of marriage, and a #1 New York Times Bestseller.[4] Marriage, Gilbert writes, has become a "delivery device of ultimate bliss", but it hasn't always been this way. It has not always been viewed as sacred, not even in the Christian tradition. Throughout the early history of civilization there have been different types of unions: polygamy and polyandry, for example. Ancient Rome featured unions of two men. Marriages between siblings, or future commitments planned for children or even those in utero, was a technique used to maintain social hierarchies particularly in medieval Europe. In China, in earlier times, female entrepreneurs took full advantage of the concept of ghost marriages to protect their business interests. Marriage with a dead man is one way to focus on business without the distraction of dealing with a husband, children, or the restriction of societal norms dictating appropriate behaviour for a female.

For approximately 10 centuries, marriage was not seen as holy or sanctified. As with so many topics in the development of Western civilization, the nature of marriage began to change with the advent of Christianity. This reflected not only a change in the view of marriage as an institution, but represented an even more fundamental shift in the view of women and the nature of sexual relations.

The apocalyptic vision of early Christianity, in Gilbert's estimation, focused on the afterlife and not on earthly life. With this distinction, things of this life became tainted and were not a central focus for the early Church fathers. St. Jerome's ranking of human holiness gave virgins a score of 100 out of 100, celibate widows and widowers received a mark of 60, while those poor souls who had succumbed to marriage were only given the Saint's blessing of 30 percent. It's the start of a trend equating virginity in women with goodness and marriage with evil. Marriage, in these early days, was seen as an attempt to avoid the sin of fornication since humans were not exhibiting inclinations towards celibacy in any large measure. St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians includes such stirring sentiments as "It is not good for a man to touch a woman" and "But if they cannot contain let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn." A rousing endorsement.

While marriage remained rooted in this world, unions were primarily secular, sworn to in a variety of ways, then registered in village or city documents. Divorce was available in the "surprisingly permissive" early European courts. Ceremonies were often held at home in every day clothes without sentimentality. These unions also proved to be an efficient form of wealth management and maintaining social order. For example, Gilbert discusses the social ramifications of the Black Death which swept through Europe and killed an estimated 75 million people. This chaos was followed by what she describes as a matrimonial gold rush. The decimation of the population suddenly opened up unprecedented avenues for social advancement and court records of the time are filled with cases, which we may be tempted to view with a jaundiced eye, of 20-year old men marrying elderly widows.

Perhaps this connection to wealth management and inheritance may be viewed as the start of slippery slope which sent marriage tumbling down engineering its transformation into a silken cage for women. What was a civil, secular arrangement -- not a religious, moral one -- metamorphosed when the utopian monkish scholars shifted their gaze from the celestial sphere to the world around them and discovered their inner pragmatic, political, wordly selves. Control of European royalty and engineering political alliances was the apple on the tree and to get at it, the new church issued edicts in 1215 CE legitimizing marriage. Spoken vows between two consenting adults would no longer be accepted and divorce was forbidden except for Church-sanctioned annulments.

Marriage became a life sentence for women because the limitations of the new regime were much harder on them than on men who could still look outside marriage for love and sex without incurring horrific social sanctions. This approach was especially restrictive on women of the upper classes because of the wealth and power at stake. This new marriage also introduced a notion of coverture which essentially erased a woman's individual civil existence. A wife was "covered" by her husband and as a result she was held to have no legal rights and no property rights. In effect, this contract doubled the power of a married man by eliminating that of his wife and handing her proportion solidly to him. The legacy of this notion extended well into the twentieth century. Gilbert notes that in 1975 Connecticut, for example, the written permission of a husband was required for a married woman to open a chequing account or to take out a loan. The legal notion of "marital rape exemption" was not overturned in the state of New York until 1984.[5]

Gilbert writes that the movement towards marital freedom started to percolate in the mid-18th century as part of the larger trend towards individual liberty and the fundamental rights of man. While a more equitable approach to women's role in marriage lay much further ahead, the central contract -- still weighed down with the religious and moral overtones attributed to it -- was further complicated by the introduction of what I'll refer to as white weddings. Marriage, on this trajectory, began to move from a notion of a business arrange-

ment to a badge of emotional affection. The institution became conflated with the centre of a woman's "emotional biography" and the purpose of marriage was to create a state of happiness albeit, given the history, on terms acceptable to the power-holders, men. Ironically, this trend is perhaps exemplified by a woman who did not suffer the strictures of marriage, Queen Victoria. Because of her birth, her status, and her role as monarch, she did not have to suffer (with apologies to William Shakespeare) the slings and arrows of misfortune when she married her Albert. And yet, her fashion choice, a white wedding gown, ensured that many women gave up so much once they settled down with their own version of "prince charming".

What about today? What do women do to lure their "soul-mates" to this most venerable institution? In popular culture, the siren-songstress Beyonce sent out her advice to "All the Single Ladies":

> *Cuz if you liked it then you should have put a ring on it*
>
> *If you liked it then you shoulda put a ring on it*
>
> *Don't be mad once you see that he want it*
>
> *If you liked it then you shoulda put a ring on it*
>
> *(See Appendix I for complete lyrics.)*[6]

Marriage it is, but on what terms is this sexually liberated empowered female issuing her invitation? While she may be the party initiating the proposal, she is using her sexuality as the basis of this contract for a personal life merger and acquisition. In this marriage proposal, she is relying on her role as a sexual being and offering that as collateral to ensure her place in society. But this sexual-economic role, one served over the centuries by women denied rights within the framework of the institution of marriage is unjust and inequitable and perpetuates old patterns in the disguise of a modern facade.

The Sex Distinction

This sex distinction according to Charlotte Perkins Gilman[7] is what has destroyed marriage for women and damaged their ability to realize their full worth as human beings functioning in society. Articulate, passionate, and vehement, Gilman's pleas for a new approach to joining humans in pairs, as expounded in her 1898 book Women and Economics[8], have remain unheard. This inequality in marriage for women remains in subtle and nuanced ways despite the gains made in women's rights since the publication date of Gilman's opus.

As a career professional, Gilman devoted herself to women's issues. Her reputation as a fiction writer was established with the publication of her powerful short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" in 1892 about a woman who goes mad given her domestic confinement and humiliation. The story was written, apparently, after a bout of postpartum psychosis. Remarried in 1900, Gilman remained "resolutely independent" and from 1909 to 1916 wrote and edited The Forerunner, a feminist magazine. Her feminist writings were influenced by Edward Bellamy and Charles Darwin. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1932 and committed suicide in 1935. The explanations for her suicide vary, ranging from her determination that it was the only acceptable course of action because her ability to be useful to society was now undermined or, more simply, because she preferred chloroform to cancer.

Recognized as a leading intellectual of the American women's movement during the early twentieth century, Gliman's most influential work is Women and Economics. In this extended essay, she takes a reflective scientific approach reminiscent of Jean-Jacque Rousseau in his second discourse on the origins of inequality and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel's The Communist Manifesto. In her analysis, she considers the role of humans in the context of responses to (1) our environment -- what is done to us, (2) our activity -- what we do, and (3) our social condition particularly as it relates to securing economic necessities for our survival.[9] Applied to women, Gilman concludes that the sex relation is an economic relation, that the over-emphasis on the sex distinction is a disadvantage to our progress as individuals and as a race, and that women cannot support themselves, not because of any inher-

ent disability or lack of human faculty but because their ability to develop economically has been denied.

In Gilman's estimation, women are not economically independent according to this definition: "As long as what I get is obtained by what I give, I am economically independent."[10] Rather they are the property of men, obliged to perform service for which they are not paid. Women's work in the household has genuine economic value, but given the nature of the exchange, she is providing service in the same manner as a horse. This is not employment, but functional duty. Women are not paid, they're kept. The whole focus of women's lives becomes the hunt for a provider since

> *We are the only animal species in which the female depends on the male for food, the only animal species in which the sex relation is also an economic relation.*[11]

While love and sex are only part of a man's world, they have been made the sum total of experience for women. Women have been denied the freedom to act, they are regarded as passive consumers rather than active producers, and they are treated as a collective, not as individuals with selfhood.

The evolution of the human race and of society, according to Gilman, has meant that human attributes are male and the field of human of human progress has been designated as male. [12] In a tone of disgust, she writes "no wonder that men turn with loathing from the kind of women they have made."[13] And this raises other questions: what does it mean to be human and why were women denied admission into the club?

Human Identity

This loss of human identity for women seems to start with the effacement and demonization of women by religion or, more accurately, by the practitioners and institutionalizers of religion. For example, when we look at the history of Christianity we see that alternative

visions which may have embraced a more inclusive approach to the female sex and the value of women were shunned. There were the Gnostics, a sect which incorporated a view of Sophia, the Spirit of God, as the feminine creative force. The Cathars respected, even reverenced women, many of whom achieved high places in the Cathar organisation.[14] They were squashed and their ideas scorned, they were destroyed by the early traditional church, the one which evolved into the world religion of the time, Catholicism.

This discriminatory religious view was compounded over time, in theWest, by the development of philosophical ideals and definitions which asserted that "the self is essentially masculine, and the masculine self is essentially good and wise."[15] This implies that everything else is devoid of self and is evil.

In her essays, Are Women Human? and "The Human-Not-Quite Human"[16] Dorothy L. Sayers explores this notion further. [17] "Vir," she explains, "is male and Femina is female; but Home is male and female"[18] . Thus by identifying women solely as female, they have been denied the right to be human. Women are "reckoned" members of a class, not as individuals, and being "classified" makes assumptions about taste and preference. Sayers argues that shape and body function ought to be irrelevant to what we study and do contrary to the popular notions which have confined women historically. With her gaze firmly fixed on Christian religious institutions, she avers that the inequality of women is not due to Jesus, but, as noted above, to his contemporaries, His prophets, & His Church.

It has taken centuries for women to reclaim their identity as humans with the right for full participation in society and this has been accomplished in many ways including the work by a literary lineage of women authors.[19] For example, the works of George Eliot may be interpreted as a way to identify women as creatures of morality and reason: characteristics they are able to manifest of their own volition not simply as extensions of their families or their husbands. Virginia Woolf and Dorothy L. Sayers, who in their own lives exemplified

women's ability to be scholars and career professionals, laid a claim to a woman as individuals with the faculty to study and to think and to work. And, in the work of authors such as Doris Lessing and Angela Carter, we see a move to reclaim the body and sexuality as aspects of the female experience not to mention the works of other notables such as Germaine Greer, Betty Friedan, and Simone de Beauvoir.

Despite the work that's been done and the goals that have been achieved for women, we are still faced by the basic conundrum encapsulated by Gloria Steinem who has said:

> *We've demonstrated that women can do what men do, but not yet that men can do what women do. that's why most women have two jobs -- one inside the home and one outside it -- which is impossible. The truth is that women can't be equal outside the home until men are equal in it.*[20]

The F Word

As writers have played a role in reclaiming different aspects of self to establish an identity for women, the feminist movement has been the means to transform society and to gain recognition of the economic, legal, and political rights of women. Astonishingly, a strange reluctance has emerged around the use of the word feminism or for women to identify themselves as feminists. "The F Word: Who Wants to be a Feminist?"[21] is a television documentary which covers the history of feminism and examines the contemporary status of the movement.

The nineteenth century and early twentieth century provided the context for the first wave of feminism. In the United States, feminism was an extension of the temperance movement -- a response organized by women to the perceived problem of alcohol abuse which was seen as a threat to the social fabric and characterized by violence in the home. The demands of this first wave centred on political and property rights culminating in the right to

vote being granted to women in the United Kingdom and Canada in 1918 and to American women in 1920.

Pay equity, sexual harassment, abortion rights, workplace rights, and the fight against media stereotyping were central components of the second wave of feminism during the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, women were contending with the myths of dominance which still continued to define their role and their identity – myths such as domesticity, chastity, and passivity. While key successes were secured to advance the issue of equality for women, the progress also led to a push back in the 1980s. Media messages from this time began to emerge which attempted to attribute the unhappiness in women's lives to feminism and the feminist movement. For example, fear-mongering articles were published such as those which proclaimed a college educated woman of 30 was more likely to be killed by a terrorist than to get married. The third wave of feminism which emerged in the 1990s and continues today is manifested on even more global concerns such as race, gender, class, and sexuality.

An even more pernicious attack on women's ability to move forward on some of these key social justice issues has been what Naomi Wolf calls the beauty myth. In her analysis, images of beauty and expectations around fashion and appearance have been manipulated and serve to keep women insecure and distracted, unable to finish the job of being equal. In assessing women's progress on issues of equality, Wolf points to what she identifies as the underlying conditions in society, the three levers of money, politics, and the media.

Money

In numerical terms, 53% of the world's population – women -- own 1% of the wealth. Women still earn approximately 20% less than men and this issue of equal pay is one piece of unfinished business on the agenda of many women advocates as is the prevalence of low paying, temporary jobs which are largely held by women. The largest sector of the economy

is unpaid work which is nearly double for women as it is for men largely due to the difference in home-based responsibilities. Yet GDP doesn't measure unpaid work. As of 2010, the Canadian government has in fact removed data on unpaid work from the census which seems to reflect the government's ideological values of attributing economic productivity to men in the workplace and reinforcing the notion of women doing the work required in the home. Current statistics show that seven out of eight stay-at-home parents in our socially progressive, liberal-leaning society are women. And the market value for a stay-at-home Mom? According to the documentary, and if you factor in the diversity of roles a stay-at-home mother juggles, such as housekeeper, day care worker, cook, computer operator, van driver, psychologist, janitor, laundry worker, her market value would be $117,867.

Power and Politics

In Canada, women occupy a measly 11% of seats on corporate boards and only 22% of the parliamentary seats (68 of 308). These are the paltry results in the years that have intervened since Henrietta Muir Edwards, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, Emily Murphy, and Irene Parlby lobbied successfully and were rewarded with the enactment of the Persons Act in Canada in 1929. Today, women are 50% less likely to seriously consider running for office. According to another contributor to "The F Word", Amy Richards, women are paralyzed by the fear of raising money (essential for success in our electoral systems) and fear of exposing themselves, their families, and their personal lives to the merciless scrutiny and vagaries of politics.

In the Scandinavian nations, female representation in politics is approaching 50% and has resulted in real fundamental change to allow family life and work. To achieve this equilibrium, quota systems were implemented. Perhaps such measures will be necessary to ensure lasting change in Canada because as Naomi Wolf points out in "The F Word", you change a system by putting your hands on the levers of power. Women need to affiliate with other women to effect change; no one has given power away voluntarily.

The efforts of women to succeed in this arena, and adjunct areas of authority such as the judiciary, are hampered by the government. Not only is the Government of Canada on a mission to defund the women's movement, a recent article in The Globe & Mail carried the headline "Appointments of female judges slump under Harper's Tories".[22] In 2011, the federal government appointed eight women to the bench and 41 men. In total, there are now 356 female judges among total of 1,117 federally appointed judges on the bench although parity had been within sight prior to 2006 and the ascendancy of the reformed Conservative Party of Canada under the leadership of Stephen Harper.

An even greater challenge to achieving systematic change has been the emergence (and subsequent eclipse) of certain political stars such as Sarah Palin whom Amy Richards calls an anti-democratic anti-feminist. Rather than serve as a role model for women in politics, she served as an empty shell of duplicity and conceit, appearing to be a powerful woman in control and meanwhile promoting a message of denial. If you can't succeed in this country, in Richards' interpretation of Palin's stance, it's your problem: you're not working hard enough. A message obscuring the underlying conditions which still perpetuate inequality for women.

Media

"You've come a long way, baby" was the slogan used by Virginia Slims to market cigarettes to women. They served as an early example of the attempt by marketers and advertisers to co-opt feminism to sell commercial products. Since then, the media mavens have had a lot more practice and since the 1990s, we've seen the rise of what can only be labelled faux feminism which perhaps can be traced or pinpointed to the emergence of the manufactured pop music band, the Spice Girls. What they liked to promote "grrl power", or female empowerment, was in fact a thinly veiled boom in "grrl profit".

Again, drawing from "The F Word" documentary interviews, another noted feminist Susan Faludi summarizes this trend as a message that feminism is not about work or equality, but about using your sexual power. "Relentless sexualization," she says, "can't help but be damaging for young women." Make-up and high heels are not the path to equality, she notes, or else men would be wearing Manolo Blahniks[23] and in the opinion of Naomi Wolf, these media images are getting worse.

The Women's Media Center in New York has a campaign it calls "Name It, Change It" which encourages members of the television view public to identify issues in media portrayals of women. Their scale is called the "Pyramid of Egregiousness" and it ranges from a low of plain sexist, to really damn sexist, to severe misogyny and there are many examples that have been reported at all three levels. The hatred for female perspectives has hit the cyber world, too, and an article in the British newspaper, *The Guardian*, recently reported that misogyny in blog comments have women columnists pulling back, checking out.[24] These sorts of "irrelevant personal attacks" against women opinion-makers are common. In the eighteenth century, noted early women's rights advocate Mary Wollstonecraft was called "a hyena in petticoats". The modus operandi for the attacks today, disturbingly, focus around the "rape" threat.

When assessed from the point of view not only of on-line participants, but from the business aspect of computerization, rather than liberating, the cyber-world may serve to bolster myths of dominance. As Germaine Greer said in a 1999 BBC radio program, "Women don't own cyberspace", "technology is an unequalizer rather than an equalizer".[25]

Moving Backwards

Just over a decade into the twenty-first century, when we look at the issue of women's rights are we in fact moving backwards, particularly in the Canadian context? The World Eco-

nomic Forum issues a report on what's termed the global gender gap. The results are based on such criteria such as employment equity, health care, and political representation. In 2005, Sweden was ranked first in its treatment of its female population and Canada was ranked seventh. Five years later, in 2010, Iceland had taken over the top spot while Canada fell more than ten positions to occupy the twentieth spot. Not only has the country's ranking declined precipitously, it lagged behind the United States for the first time ever.

The work that has to be done is evident particularly with regard to access to abortion, pay equity, and violence against women. In British Columbia, for example, "1,000 women a week report assaults. Over half of all B.C. women - one million people - report having experienced physical or sexual assault. Most of it was never reported."[26]

Which leads us to central paradox of women's rights in our time:

> *... the past century has seen a transformation in women's legal rights, with countries in every region expanding the scope of women's legal entitlements. Nevertheless for most of the world's women, the laws that exist on paper do not translate to equality and justice.*[27]

Around the world, women perform 66% of the work, produce 50% of the food, earn 10% of the income and own 1% of the property.[28] In some regions, women provide 70% agricultural labour, produce more than 90% of the food, and yet are not represented in budget deliberations. It is estimated that if women's paid employment rates increased to the same level as men's, GDP in the United States would increase 9%, would grow by 13% in the Euro Zone, and expand by 16% in Japan.

Here are other indicators of the challenges women face around the world:

- 127 countries do not explicitly criminalize rape within marriage
- 61 countries severely restrict women's rights to abortion

- 53 percent of women work in vulnerable employment
- 50 countries have a lower legal age of marriage for women than for men
- 10-30 percent is the average pay gap between women &men

The social and economic implications of women's inequality reverberate in other ways as well. In Asia for example, the cultural preference for males has led to shortages in the number of females at the same time that women are showing a stronger disinclination to marry and to accept traditional roles.[29] If nature's rate is 104 to 106 boys to 100 girls, India is currently recording 112 boys born for every 100 girls and in China, as one unintended consequence perhaps of their one-child policy, the rate is recorded as 120 boys to 100 girls. This imbalance has contributed to crude trafficking throughout the region in women as foreign brides to such an extent that Cambodia, in response to concerns, has embargoed international marriages of its citizens to South Koreans.

Poverty in Canada

Marriage resonates with particular meaning for women in terms of their economic standing, their legal rights, their emotional life, and their ability to participate in society. Many of these same issues apply to women who are also marginalized by economic circumstances and who in addition to caring for their families must contend with the challenges of poverty. According to the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund[30] there are three causes of women's poverty: (1) caregiving responsibilities, (2) pay inequity, and (3) inadequate government support. In Canada, 12% of all Canadian women and 11% of all Canadian men live in poverty. Of those living in poverty, 53% are women.

Certain groups of women disproportionately affected:

- 51.6% of lone parent families headed by women

- 41.5% of single, widowed or divorced women over 65
- 35% of women on their own under 65
- 44% of Aboriginal women off reserve, 47% on reserve
- New immigrant women, 25-44 with university degrees working full-time, earn <$14,000 less than Canadian-born women

There are innovative ways to tackle this challenge and to ensure a better life for women and children. *Women Moving Forward* in Toronto's Jane/Finch Area is an inventive poverty reduction program based in part on research done by Gina Browne of McMaster University.[31] The program helps women whose lives have been dramatically disrupted in high school by pregnancy and child birth as well as those who are witnesses or victims of violence either in the home or social environment. It asks: what do you really need to move your life forward permanently? The objective is to make participants psychologically healthier in order to set them on a career path. Twice a year, 15 women are accepted as participants and they are required to attend classes four days a week. An integrated program has been structured to help them become better parents, engaged citizens, critical thinkers, effective money managers, and literate.

Gina Browne's research shows that poverty is not an indication of future success. It is a vortex of dysfunction which may be created by violence, erratic parenting, and unattended health issues. For example, in her work she has found that 45% of moms on social assistance suffer from major depression compared to only 10% of poor moms not on social assistance. The children of people without emotional disorders who are equally poor do fine. The challenge is to defeat the culture of learned helplessness - learning healthy boundaries and one's own value as a woman, as a person.

This holistic approach and integrated service model has shown to have an economic benefit, too, for those providing assistance.[32] In other work which Browne has done which included a model of proactive intervention, the number of parents requiring social assistance was decreased by 10% and a savings of $300,000 for every 100 parents. In a separate study, the provision of proactive subsidized recreation services, annual costs were reduced by $200,000 for children in every 100 families.

The Marriage Benefit Imbalance

This look at the circumstances of women around the world and the status of the women's movement in North America shows that the issues of women's rights does relate back to social, economic, and political rights for all. And, if marriage is the central feature of a woman's life and an ideal arrangement for a civil society, how do we adjust the terms to overcome what Elizabeth Gilbert identifies as "The Marriage Benefit Imbalance" in her book Committed. This imbalance, borne out by research, shows that men benefit by marriage and women benefit by remaining single as shown in this brief summary:

Married Men	Single Women
• Live longer	• Live longer
• Accumulate more wealth	• Accumulate more wealth
• Excel at careers	• Thrive in careers
• Less likely to die violently	• Are less likely to die violently
• Report themselves happier	• Are healthier
• Suffer less from alcoholism, drug addiction, & depression	• Less likely to suffer from depression

In Gilbert's view,

> *... mothers become selfless to the point of near invisibility in order to construct ... exemplary environments for their families ... [we need] a larger conversation about how we might work together as a society to construct a world where healthy children can be*

raised and healthy families can prosper without women having to scrape bare the walls of their own souls to do it.[33]

She also puts forward the argument that "if you honestly want to have a society in which people choose their own partners on the basis of personal affection, then you must prepare yourself for the inevitable."[34] By that she means divorce. So how do we as society maintain stability, maintain marriage, but provide the necessary supports for the inevitable failures? Marriage has proven malleable in the past with the inclusion of interracial and same sex unions so with social justice in mind as a goal, particularly with respect to women, what will be the next iteration? Is it, as proposed by Lizbeth Rosas Montero, an elected political official in Mexico City, a marriage contract with a minimum duration of two years followed by ratification or dissolution?[35]

And in the Distance ...

Marriage is a contract and it remains, perhaps, the most viable way to organize our immediate families. But the terms have not been equitable and until they are renegotiated to ensure that one does not lose one's rights by becoming a spouse, then it may be viewed as perpetuating a socially unjust model of society. The negotiations around the terms of the contract are complicated by factors such as love, our identification of marriage as a vehicle for personal happiness, and monogamy -- actually, infidelity. Perhaps these components can be addressed. Perhaps the challenge, from a woman's perspective, is not so much marriage. Perhaps the core challenge is actually reproduction. Having babies. Women may be the natural vehicle for conceiving and giving birth, but control of that right is often subsumed by their husbands, their cultures, and societal expectations.

Reproductive rights may be the stumbling block, the ultimate obstacle to true equality for women. Who has control over how we have babies, when we have babies, and how do we

take care of the babies on an individual, social, and global level particularly those vulnerable children born into circumstances of violence or poverty. Unless we figure out a system by which a women's freedom is not compromised by her choice to have children or what those children represent, we may never solve the conundrum. This is not only a challenge from a personal perspective. It is a fundamental challenge to the human race: how do we establish full equality for women and not compromise their rights and freedoms while ensuring the survival of the species (until such time as there is not a world to be born into), ensuring the well-being of children, and safeguarding civil society.

The danger, when one starts addressing reproductive rights, is the possible intrusion of business, science and technology into the natural process just as it was the intrusion of religion which fundamentally changed the nature of marriage. If ultimately the only way to guarantee full equality is to remove reproduction from the exclusive purview of the female, we could find ourselves in the dystopian vision of Aldous Huxley's Brave New World: where babies are grown in bottles, where children are hatched and conditioned, where loyalty is to the state, mother has become a dirty word, and family a forgotten concept.

Let's not go there.

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Appendix 1 -
(http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/b/beyonce/single_ladies.html)

All the Single Ladies - sung by Beyoncé Knowles

Now put your hands up
Up in the club(club)
Just broke up(up)
Doing my own little thing
You decided to dip (dip)
And now you wanna trip (trip)
Cuz another brother noticed me
I'm up on him (him), he up on me (me)
Don't pay him any attention
Done cried my tears (tears), for three good years(years)
Ya can't be mad at me

Cuz if you liked it then you should have put a ring on it
If you liked it then you shoulda put a ring on it
Don't be mad once you see that he want it
If you liked it then you shoulda put a ring on it

Uh oh oh Uh oh oh oh oh oh Uh oh oh
Uh oh oh Uh oh oh oh oh oh Uh oh oh

If you liked it then you should have put a ring on it
If you liked it then you shoulda put a ring on it
Don't be mad once you see that he want it
If you liked it then you shoulda put a ring on it

I got gloss on my lips (lips), a man on my hips(hips)
Hold me tighter than my Dereon jeans
Acting up (up), drink in my cup (cup)
I can care less what you think
I need no permission, did I mention
Don't pay him any attention
Cuz you've had your turn (turn)
And now you gone learn
What it really feels like to miss me

Cuz if you liked it then you should have put a ring on it
If you liked it then you shoulda put a ring on it
Don't be mad once you see that he want it
If you liked it then you shoulda put a ring on it

Uh oh oh Uh oh oh oh oh oh Uh oh oh
Uh oh oh Uh oh oh oh oh oh Uh oh oh

If you liked it then you should have put a ring on it
If you liked it then you shoulda put a ring on it
Don't be mad once you see that he want it
If you liked it then you shoulda put a ring on it

Uh oh oh Uh oh oh oh oh oh Uh oh oh
Uh oh oh Uh oh oh oh oh oh Uh oh oh

Don't treat me to the things of the world
I'm not that kind of girl
Your love is what I prefer, what I deserve
Is a man that makes me, then takes me
And delivers me to a destiny, to infinity and beyond
Pull me into your arms
Say I'm the one you own
If you don't, you'll be alone
And like a ghost, I'll be gone

All the single ladies (7x)
Now put your hands up(up)

Uh oh oh Uh oh oh oh oh oh Uh oh oh
Uh oh oh Uh oh oh oh oh oh Uh oh oh

Cuz if you liked it then you should have put a ring on it
If you liked it then you shoulda put a ring on it
Don't be mad once you see that he want it
If you liked it then you shoulda put a ring on it

Whu oh oh

Cuz if you liked it then you should have put a ring on it
If you liked it then you shoulda put a ring on it
Don't be mad once you see that he want it
If you liked it then you shoulda put a ring on it

Whu oh oh

Released October 12, 2008

ENDNOTES

[1] Statistics Canada will no longer collect data on annual marriage and divorce rates as of July 2011. As per this Globe and Mail article, this lack of data will make it harder to determine how policies impact families and how families impact social and economic data. Policies which have a significant impact on women and children including impact of divorce on child poverty, housing, education, and health care. This may be construed as an attack on women's issues and an ideological concern with focusing on a traditional view of marriage with women in the home.

[2] http://afwpi.com/wedstats.html and http://www.theweddingreport.com/

[3] This section relies on the information and research included in Elizabeth Gilbert's book, Committed: A Skeptic Makes Peace with Marriage. (New York: Viking Penguin, 2010)

[4] Elizabeth Gilbert, born in 1969, is an author and journalist best known for her memoir, Eat, Pray, Love which was published in 2006. Eat, Pray, Love has been translated into over 30 languages, 10 million copies have been sold around the world, and made into a movie starring Julia Roberts. In 2008, Gilbert was named one of the 100 most influential people in the world by Time Magazine.

[5] Gilbert also points to the way in which racism was enforced through marriage laws. Historically, slaves weren't allowed to marry and interracial marriage was not legally permitted until a 1967 US Supreme Court ruling. Even then, the provision was opposed by 70% of Americans according to public opinion polls.

[6] http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/b/beyonce/single_ladies.html

[7] Gilman was born in 1860 in Harford, Connecticut and was descended from a prominent American family of activists through her father who was the grandson of Lyman Beecher, nephew of Henry Ward Beecher, social reformer and abolitionist (and known for a scandalous adultery trial), and his sister Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of Uncle Tom's Cabin. The family was abandoned by the father shortly after her birth, and they moved frequently in search of work and financial help from relatives. Gilman was married in 1884, divorced in 1894, and had one daughter, Katharine. In 1885, as a result of the burden of domestic life, she suffered a breakdown. After separating from her husband, she moved with her daughter to California, recuperated, and launched her career.

[8] Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. Women and Economics. A Study of the Economic Relation Between Women and Men. (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1994) Originally published: Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1898

[9] Gilman - General Background and Analysis, Dr. Anne-Marie Feenberg-Dibon, HUM 101W Lectures, October 31 & November 7, 2011

[10] Gilman, op.cit., p. 11

[11] Ibid., p. 5

[12] Among the losses to society, in Gilman's views are contributions by women to the arts and sciences. She mentions two in the book: Harriet Martineau and Mary Somerville.

Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) was an English social theorist and has been regarded as the first female sociologist. She wrote more than 50 books and brought attention to issues such as marriage, children, domestic and religious life, and race relations. Gilman (p. 53) writes that Martineau "must conceal her writing under sewing when callers came, because 'to sew' was a feminine verb, and 'to write' a masculine one." Martineau also wrote on Political Economy to popularise and illustrate principles of laissez-faire capitalism while her Society in America set out sociological methods. She also translated the works of Auguste Comte.

Mary Somerville (1780-1872) was a Scottish science writer and studied math as well as astronomy. She translated and popularized the work of Laplace who was known as "the Newton of France". Her endeavours gained her a spot as a member of the Royal Astronomical Society, one of the first two women to gain that honour (the other being Caroline Herschel) Somerville, says Gilman (p. 53), "must struggle to hide her work from even relatives, because mathematics was a 'masculine' pursuit." Somerville's other works include "On the Connexion of the Physical Sciences", "Physical Geography" and "Molecular and Microscopic Science".

[13] Gilman, op.cit., p. 98

[14] Cathars - Background - http://www.sfu.ca/~poitras/cathars.pdf; Gnostics - Background - http://www.sfu.ca/~poitras/LS812.htm

[15] Meyers, Diana. "Feminist Perspectives on the Self". The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2010 Edition), Edward N. Zalta(ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/feminism-self/>

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[17] Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957) was a noted author, playwright, advertising copywriter, and popular crime fiction author. She's the renowned creator of Lord Peter Wimsey, a character much-beloved among crime fiction enthusiasts. In her later career, she devoted herself to theological writings and to translating the work of Dante. A scholar, Sayers attended Oxford on a scholarship she won to Somerville College, aptly named for Mary Somerville whose brief biography is provide above in endnote #12.

[18] Sayers, "The Human-Not-Quite-Human", p. 37

[19] The central topic in my essay "In Search of Identity: Woman, The Novel, and Voice", submitted to Professor June Sturrock for GLS 829, August 14, 2011.

[20] Fralic, Shelley. "The evolution of the revolution", The Vancouver Sun, August 13, 2011, E2. (Gloria Steinem)

[21] The analysis on the history of feminism and the challenge of where women stand in society today is drawn from the television documentary "The F Word: Who Wants to be a Feminist?" Directed by Michael McNamara Written and produced by Judy Holm and Michael McNamara
http://www.cbc.ca/documentaries/doczone/2011/fword/

[22] http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/appointments-of-female-judges-slump-under-harpers-tories/article2234285/

[23] "With a career spanning over 30 years, Manolo Blahnik has become one of the world's most influential footwear designers." http://www.manoloblahnik.com/

[24] http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/05/women-bloggers-hateful-trolling?newsfeed=true

[25] BBC. "In Our Time: Feminism". Host: Melvyn Bragg, Panelists: Dr. Helena Cronin and Dr. Germaine Greer. (London: January 7, 1999)
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[26] Bramham, Daphne. "Civil society eludes us when abuse tolerated", The Vancouver Sun, August 1, 2011, A3

[27] http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/facts_figures.php

[28] http://progress.unwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/EN-Summary-Progress-of-the-Worlds-Women1.pdf

[29] Manthorpe, Jonathan. "Asia's shortage of brides stirs social upheaval around region", The Vancouver Sun, October 31, 2011, C3

[30] http://www.leaf.ca/education/documents/EdHO_Women_Poverty.pdf

[31] Gina Browne is a Professor in the School of Nursing, and Assoc. Member of the Dept. of Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, and Founder & Director of the Health & Social Service Utilization Research Unit at McMaster University.

[32] http://www.kpmg.com/Global/en/IssuesAndInsights/ArticlesPublications/Documents/A-better-pill-to-swallow.pdf

[33] Gilbert, op.cit., p. 185

[34] Ibid., p. 83

[35] Agence France-Presse. "Legislator proposes minimum two-year marriage contracts", The Vancouver Sun, October 9, 2011, B8

Another Road to Serfdom?

By

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For Dr. Geoff Poitras
GLS 812