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*Plus Ça Change: Change and Continuity in French and American
Gender Culture, 1952-2007*

by

Benjamin Aldrich Moodie

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Ann Swidler, Chair

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Abstract

Plus Ça Change: Change and Continuity in French and American Gender Culture, 1952-2007

by

Benjamin Aldrich Moodie

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Ann Swidler, Chair

This dissertation traces the transformation of gender cultures in the U.S. and France from the 1950s to the present. Using mainstream as well as avowedly feminist women's magazines as a primary source of evidence, I find deep and lasting cultural contrasts that were crucial for determining both the character and the impact of American and French second-wave feminism. Finding fertile ground in an institutional structure and a cultural ideology that dramatizes universal individual choice and agency, popular feminism in America transformed everyday social norms more thoroughly than the French movement. While France's elitist culture permitted some socially privileged activists to win victories through dramatic advocacy for downtrodden and voiceless ordinary women, French feminists were less able to persuade women to contest sexism in their own daily lives.

American feminism grew out of a milieu of abrasive gender relations. American culture endorsed a more aggressive and emotionally myopic version of masculinity than prevailed in France. It also subjected women to irreconcilable social pressures by dramatizing the self-enhancing experience of employment while cautioning married women against it; by portraying sexuality as both morally hazardous and exciting for young women; and by asking wives to promote the self-confidence and success of loved ones while insisting that each person ultimately controls his or her own fate. The French vision of the cultivated and emotionally empathetic man, by contrast, contributed to the culture's emphasis on the aesthetic and emotional pleasures, rather than the dangers, of relations between the sexes. Although American feminism has delegitimated men's aggression and relieved women of responsibility for the constant maintenance of male egos, the other major patterns of gender culture in both countries have persisted up to the present.

The findings of the dissertation suggest that the deep patterns in gender culture, and thus in gender equality or inequality, involve much more than power, either in the economy or the family, and instead incorporate broader ethical ideals about what is a good person and how to

achieve a fully realized life. It provides a corrective to existing work in the sociology of culture that exclusively stresses the invidious character of aesthetic judgments. And it establishes the pivotal importance of society's deepest cultural meanings to the objectives, opportunities, and outcomes available to social movements.

Dedication

To my late mother, Meredith Aldrich, and my father, T. Dunbar Moodie,
for giving me a lifelong love of people and of ideas.

CONTENTS

List of Figures	iv
List of Tables	v
Note on Translations	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
CHAPTER 1	
Feminism's Cultural Matrices.....	1
The cultural roots of gender	3
Sources	4
Methodological considerations	7
CHAPTER 2	
Passion and Vocation	10
Opportunity and danger: Work for pay.....	12
Home is where the heart is: Domesticity	26
Virile virtues: Ideals of masculinity.....	46
Infidelity: The great drama of the French domestic sphere	80
CHAPTER 3	
Feminism, Le Remake	92
Preface. Winning the everyday: The behavioral traces of American feminism's normative success.....	102
Part I. Culture and rhetoric in second wave feminism's founding texts.....	106
Part II. Democratic elitism: The cultural logic of an abortion manifesto	118
Part III: Popularizing feminism: The advent of mass-circulation feminist magazines....	133
CHAPTER 4	
Sex and Sensibility.....	170
Hot or sublime? Erotica and sex advice compared.....	170
Social class and French ideals of sociability and eroticism	204
Making marriage work and infidelity redux	229
Anti-feminist nightmares	245

CHAPTER 5	
Love’s Deep Codes	247
A review of findings	247
“Hard” and “soft” explanations for culture.....	255
Learning from the Other	265
Figures.....	268
Tables	292
Bibliography: Magazine Articles	303
Bibliography: General Sources	313
METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX	
Using Fiction Sociologically.....	329
The turn away from aesthetic content	332
The hierarchy of fictional meaning	334
Sampling	342
Recovering fiction as a source of sociological evidence	346

FIGURES

- 1.1 French women's magazine readership as a percentage of total adult female population, 1957-2007
- 1.2 U.S. women's magazine circulation, 1952-2007
- 1.3 Educational percentile of average female reader, French women's magazines, 1957-2007
- 1.4 Educational percentile of average female reader, American women's magazines, 1949-2007 (early figures imputed)
- 1.5 Procedure for assigning educational percentile to magazine audiences
- 2.1 Female Civilian Labor Force Participation as a Percentage of All Women (ILO) and of Working-Age Women (BLS), 1900-2012
- 2.2 Women as a Share of the Labor Force in France and the U.S., 1970-2012
- 3.1 Paid work per day, full-time working parents
- 3.2 Domestic (unpaid) work per day, full-time working parents
- 3.3 All work, paid and unpaid, per day, full-time working parents
- 3.4 Gender gap in all work, paid and unpaid, full-time working parents
- 3.5 Sleep per day, full-time working parents
- 3.6 Age of magazine readers (women only)
- 3.7 Marital status of magazine readers (women only)
- 3.8 Employment status of magazine readers (women only)
- 3.9 Parental status of magazine readers (women only) (includes children <15 yrs. old in France, <18 in U.S.)
- 3.10 Proportion of articles containing "sameness" arguments
- 3.11 Proportion of articles recommending personal action to reader
- 3.12 Proportion of articles on foreign countries
- 3.13 Proportion of articles in the first person
- 3.14 *Chouchou de la semaine* character archetypes
- A1 Hierarchy of fictional meaning
- A2 Tradeoff between focus and breadth in comparative sampling of fiction

TABLES

- 1.1 Magazine sample used in dissertation
- 1.2 Mid-century rankings of American magazines' cultural prestige and audience socioeconomic profile
- 4.1 Number of *Cosmo* erotic excerpts applying moralistic vocabulary to evocations of sexual desire
- 4.2 Gendering of children's future occupations in *Chouchou de la semaine* sample
- 4.3 Instances of sexual reluctance in American and French advice columns, by sex of reluctant partner

Note on Translations

In general, translations into English of passages from French primary sources are my own. Where published translations of texts are available in English (e.g., passages from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*), I cite those translations except when I find them lacking. In the latter instances, and in all cases where I translate a loose, colloquial, or untranslatable portion of the original French (e.g., a transition between the formal *vous* and the informal *tu* in a story), I cite enough of the un-translated text in square brackets to enable a reader who has a familiarity with French to understand the tenor of the original.

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CHAPTER 1: Feminism's Cultural Matrices

[W]e French women... have problems that are both similar and different from the ones that you treat in your wonderful book [Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique]... According to my personal experience and to my reading of your book, the young American girl dreams above all of the state of marriage and sees in her future spouse, in a manner very similar to Benjamin Franklin's teachings, a machine that is designed to pay the bills and to provide orgasms... Our young girls, above all those of the common people and of the petite bourgeoisie, but also the others, though they are more demanding, dream of "Prince Charming" and not of the life that he will provide to her; Love is their ideal, their God, [and] man is the uncontested lord of their destiny; they want him adorned with every quality and every virtue and [are] ready to prostrate themselves before him. It is more against this naïveté, encouraged by the entire women's press, that an intellectual of my country must revolt... [T]he most coquettish or the most selfish of girls will perhaps go so far as to prefer a bank account, that is to say luxury and elegance, to what we call "a cottage and a heart;" but even such a girl will have difficulty defending herself against the impulse of putting everything at the feet of the Elect, and what I call the Myth of Prince Charming will push [her], if [she] take[s] a rich and disagreeable husband, to cheat on him with a good-looking and seductive boy who, if he is poor, will benefit from the conjugal fortune. So there you have the temptations and mystifications of the French woman.

—Françoise d'Eaubonne, 1964, letter to Betty Friedan

In 1964, at the dawn of second-wave feminism's stirrings as a mass movement, Françoise d'Eaubonne, a well-published novelist and social critic who counted Simone de Beauvoir and other leading Parisian feminists as friends (Chaperon 2001:paragraphs 21-22), wrote an enthusiastic letter to Betty Friedan about *The Feminine Mystique*. She had read Friedan's bestseller as soon as it was translated into French, and immediately put pen to paper in the hopes of creating a trans-Atlantic correspondence between two feminist intellectuals. Eaubonne enthused that "we are fighting under the same banner" and explained to Friedan that "French women... have problems that are both similar and different from the ones that you treat in your wonderful book" (Eaubonne 1964:1). She concluded her letter with a plea for a personal response.

Unfortunately, there is no trace of a reply from Friedan in the Schlesinger Library's archive of her personal papers where Eaubonne's typewritten letter is stored. One reason¹ may be that Eaubonne's letter, while aiming to flatter and interest Friedan, contains a myriad of unintentional insults. Like an anti-Semite who reads the Old Testament prophets as evidence of

¹ Another possible reason is that the letter is in French. I don't know whether Friedan was able to read French and whether, if not, she had it translated for her.

the incorrigible iniquity of the Jewish people, Eaubonne makes the mistake of agreeing too much with Friedan's insider criticism of America.

For instance, Chapter Seven of Friedan's book, entitled "The Sex-Directed Educators," exposes a trend toward dumbing down women's university education in favor of fluffy courses in "advanced cooking" and the like (Friedan 2001 [1963]:159). Friedan knew that it would not be hard to arouse the outrage of most of her American readers at this development. After all, even Adlai Stevenson's famously condescending 1955 address to graduating seniors at Smith College, a document which is now included in an anthology of primary sources entitled *Antifeminism in America*, tells elite American women that their chief role as housewives is to remind their rather doltish husbands of civilization's cultural achievements (Stevenson 1997 [1955]). Eaubonne, however, takes Friedan all too literally, and laments how much worse things are in America than in France:

[w]ithin the most reactionary generation which is now disappearing [in France], who hold to the idea that a woman must not have a personal life² and must live only for her husband and her children, [people continue to respect] being cultured and having a diploma, simply because the leading lights of this aging generation think that each woman is a future mother and will need to shape the minds and tastes of her children. That goes to show how far we are from the mentality that "women should stick to what they need to know," [*une femme en sait toujours assez*]³ even among the most reactionary members of the bourgeoisie! (Eaubonne 1964:2).

She goes on to agree with Friedan's savaging of Freud's theory of penis envy, writing that the French have always viewed the views of "the good Viennese doctor" with a "certain amount of irony and skepticism" (Eaubonne 1964:2-3):

the French have very critical minds, too critical perhaps, but in this regard I think we are more disposed to fight against the intoxication of a discovery than are our American friends. New facts penetrate more slowly here, but they are better assimilated. Perhaps because we are an old people, a little vain about our past and about our European culture? (Eaubonne 1964:3).

As the put-downs of American society pile up, it is easy to imagine Friedan agreeing with Eaubonne's comment about French vanity.

Eaubonne's most fundamental misinterpretation goes to the heart of Friedan's book. She misunderstands the reason for American women's vulnerability to the "mystique" that promises them paradise in housewifery.

According to my personal experience and to my reading of your book, the young American girl dreams above all of the *state of marriage* and sees in her future

² Eaubonne is being culturally revealing when she implicitly defines a woman's "personal life" as a sphere of intellectual (and affective?) autonomy from her family rather than equating "personal life" with the domestic sphere as contrasted with the "public" world of work, as is the standard usage in American parlance.

³ The phrase that Eaubonne quotes here is from a diatribe against "useless" academic learning by women in Molière's 17th century play *The Learned Ladies* [*Les Femmes Savantes*].

spouse, in a manner very similar to Benjamin Franklin's teachings, a machine that is designed to pay the bills and to provide orgasms (Eaubonne 1964:3).

Eaubonne thinks that the blandishments of the "feminine mystique" are purely materialistic and sensual. Friedan's book focuses on the deceptive cultural messages generated by advertisers and psychologists, and is largely silent on the question of why American women find those messages persuasive, so Eaubonne's misreading of these women's motives is understandable. But American readers would have grasped intuitively that the "feminine mystique" is seductive not—or at least not primarily—because it guarantees endless leisure and material comfort, but because it (falsely) promises a morally fulfilling existence: a complete and worthy vocation for women.

Eaubonne's account of French women's cultural temptations is more trustworthy, since it reflects her own experience in the daily atmosphere of French life:

Our young girls... dream of "Prince Charming" and not of the life that he will provide to her; Love is their ideal, their God, [and] man is the uncontested lord of their destiny; they want him adorned with every quality and every virtue and [are] ready to prostrate themselves before him. It is more against this naïveté, encouraged by the entire women's press, that an intellectual of my country must revolt (Eaubonne 1964:3).

Despite believing that French women's idealization of heterosexual love is one of the major obstacles to feminist progress in France, Eaubonne cannot help sympathizing with it:

[T]he sentimentality of [France's] erotic and matrimonial ideal, however simple-minded it may be, is morally superior to the cold, calculating egoism of the little future "housewife from the great suburbs" of your book (Eaubonne 1964:4).

In Eaubonne's judgment, the naïve romanticism of the typical French woman is at least dignified by an element of selfless devotion to others and to an ideal higher than oneself. Although romantic love is chief among the "temptations and mystifications of the French woman" (Eaubonne 1964:4), at least this susceptibility demonstrates a certain nobility of spirit.

THE CULTURAL ROOTS OF GENDER

This abortive cross-cultural conversation between two early second-wave feminists inadvertently highlights themes that are central to this dissertation. The central question of the dissertation is: how have deep differences in the gender cultures of the U.S. and France remained constant but also transformed over time as the women and men of the two nations have gone from more "traditional," gender-unequal cultural patterns to relatively more equal or egalitarian ones. As we shall see, there are deep differences in the ways love, sex, romance, and marriage are envisioned in the two cultural contexts—differences deep enough to be hidden within the taken-for-granted assumptions even of highly educated and intellectually sophisticated women like Françoise d'Eaubonne and Betty Friedan. These cultural differences were crucial for determining both the character and the impact of American and French second-wave feminism. This exploration will suggest that gender, and thus gender equality or inequality, is about much more than power, either in the economy or the family, but instead incorporates broader ethical ideals about what is a good person and how to achieve a fully realized life. This insight in turn

has profound implications both for the ways we understand the deep texture of gender relations, and for how to conceptualize social movements—the cultural parameters on their range of possible demands, the cultural strengths and weaknesses of their mobilization strategies, and their consequent opportunities to effect lasting change.

The longitudinal design of the dissertation requires a comparison of the French and American cultural setting both “before” and the “after” second wave feminism, as well as an examination of how the feminist movement itself took shape in each cultural context. Consequently, the dissertation is divided into a chapter on the 1950s, the “before” period; a chapter on the peak period of popular feminist mobilization in France and the U.S., in the 1970s; and a final empirical chapter on the most recent decade, the 2000s, the “after” period.

SOURCES

The major primary evidence for this dissertation is drawn from a class-stratified sample of the women’s magazines with the largest circulation in France and America from the 1950s to the present.⁴ These publications have two signal advantages: they are a dense source of materials relating to gender norms and gendered preoccupations, and they have huge circulation numbers. Thus, for instance, a nationally representative survey conducted by the *Centre d’Étude des Supports de Publicité*, a quasi-governmental organization that has generated audience data for French advertisers since 1957, estimated that 17.3% of all French women read or leafed through each issue of *Marie-Claire* in 1957, as had, incidentally, about 8% of French men (CESP 1957:C32b). In the U.S., comparable audience surveys date only from the 1970s. Still, the Simmons Market Research Bureau’s 1979 *Study of Media and Markets* estimated that one in five women in the U.S. had examined the latest issue of *McCall’s* and one in six had looked through *Ladies’ Home Journal* (Simmons Market Research Bureau 1979). All of these numbers should be taken with a grain of salt, since they rely on respondent recall. But they provide at least a rough sense of the reach of these publications.

We can assume that the huge audiences of these publications are heterogeneous compared to those of books, whose readers may be seeking out a more particular point of view in their purchases. Hence, these sources are well suited to a search for messages with the most mainstream cultural appeal.

I use two main criteria in choosing titles from which to sample: I choose 1) the magazines with the widest audiences serving 2) readers from the upper end, middle, and lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum, respectively. Figures 1.1 and 1.2 show estimates of the audience shares (for French magazines) or circulation figures (for American magazines)⁵ for a set of the

⁴ I do not draw on men’s magazines because of their absence in France of the 1950s. A look at Ulrich’s Periodicals Directory shows that “Men’s interest” magazines on the pattern of *Gentlemen’s Quarterly*, *Esquire*, and *Playboy* did not exist in France in the 1950s. (*Lui*, a French imitation of *Playboy*, commenced publication only in November 1963, and a French version of *Playboy* began appearing in 1972.)

⁵ Audience figures, such as those generated by CESP in France and the Simmons Market Research Bureau in the U.S. are calculated on the basis of random surveys among the population at large asking which magazines respondents have read or paged through during its most recent issue’s release period (i.e., over the past week for weeklies and over the past month for monthlies). Circulation figures are sales figures reported by magazines

most prominent women's magazines in France and America during this period. I focus on titles that survived the entire period which I examine. (This excludes, for instance, *McCall's*, which was a roaring success in mid-century but lost sales rapidly in the 1980s and ceased publication at the turn of the 21st century.) In addition, although *Cosmopolitan's* circulation numbers were not particularly large during mid-century, I sample the title because of its historical significance in pioneering a new openness about American women's sexuality during the period covered in this dissertation. In the U.S. sample, I also include *Woman's Day*, a magazine which achieved mass circulation by being sold directly in supermarket checkout aisles rather than with a traditional subscription model.⁶

Previous literature using women's magazines has sometimes sampled articles on a single topic rather than sampling by title (e.g., Kidd 1975; Prusank, Duran, and DeLillo 1993). This approach is impractical for my cross-cultural comparison, however, since there are no electronic archives of magazine articles from previous decades in France, and these exist only for selected titles in the United States. Hence, in order to obtain a comparable cross-national sample, I have sampled by title and by issue. I sample magazines at five-year intervals beginning in 1952, with exceptions in cases where the magazine was not available during a year ending in 2 or 7, in which case I sample the nearest available year.⁷

Table 1.1 shows the sample of titles in the 1950s and 2000s, along with the set of mass-circulation, avowedly feminist magazines that I examine in the dissertation's middle chapter on the feminist movement. The table sorts these magazines by their audience's socioeconomic profile. Figures 1.3 and 1.4 show the French and American magazine titles respectively ranked by their audience's average educational percentile. This measure provides a summary index of the educational attainment of a magazine's audience compared with the wider population.⁸ This percentile calculation is sensitive to the fineness with which educational gradations are measured. In the French graph, for instance, educational categories are subdivided more finely during periods when more of the population falls into that category, artificially spreading or narrowing the distance between different magazines' audience percentiles. But the relative ranking of each magazine during a given year is reliable.

Although French audience data have been collected annually since 1957, the American data do not exist before the 1970s. Luckily, alternative measures of American magazines' prestige and readership at mid-century are available from several sources. Table 1.2 shows how different studies from midcentury ranked these magazines by level of prestige and the methodology they used to generate each ranking. The ranking of the magazines in my sample, despite the diversity of methodologies used, is very consistent, with *Ladies' Home Journal* and

themselves. Audience figures are the basic tool for assessing the socioeconomic and demographic profile of different magazines' readers. Circulation figures provide only a measure of the broad popularity of a magazine.

⁶ Mid-century estimates of the cultural prestige of magazines (see Table 1.2) do not contain supermarket-sold titles, but, based on audience data from 1979, I classify the *Woman's Day* as "middle-brow" during this early period.

⁷ In practice, this means that some of the *Femmes d'Aujourd'hui* and *True Story* issues I sample are from 1951 and 1958, and the earlier *Marie Claire* sample covers the twelve-month period beginning in October 1953, when the title recommenced publication after being shuttered for collaboration with the Nazis.

⁸ Figure 1.5 details and graphically illustrates the procedure for generating this measure.

Good Housekeeping at the upper end of the scale, magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Redbook* in the middle (toward the lower end) and *True Story* ranking at rock bottom. Given the consistency of these rankings, which were employed in sociological research on magazines in 1950 (Albrecht 1956), I have inserted them in Figure 1.4 in their appropriate hierarchical ordering. This makes Figures 1.3 and 1.4 into reliable illustrations of changes in the socioeconomic ranking of the magazine sample over time.

The striking feature of the French sample is the comparative stability of the market. Although the two early middle-brow magazines, *Echo de la Mode* and *Femmes d'Aujourd'hui* went out of business and were replaced in their niche with a single blockbuster title, *Femme Actuelle*, the other magazines have not only stayed in business but also maintained their relative ranking over the entire period. In contrast, the class distinctions among the American magazines have been reshuffled, with *Cosmopolitan* going from a quite low status to enjoying the most educated readership of the sample while the other magazines have converged to a muddled middle ground. *True Story*, the magazine targeted at working-class readers, has gone out of print entirely.

A familiarity with the content of the magazines makes it possible to reconstruct the reshuffling of readership that took place in the U.S. In the 1950s, these American magazines, like their French counterparts, formed a genuine class-based hierarchy. The social class sorting of readers also had a sexual component. *True Story* advertised its stories with lurid headlines about sexual indiscretions and ruined lives and was the only magazine in my sample that regularly described the sensations of kissing and (in atmospheric and entirely non-specific terms) intercourse. Despite *True Story's* relentless moralizing about the mortal hazards of extra-marital sex, its sensational depiction of sexuality earned the magazine a taboo status among “respectable” readers and relegated it to a predominantly working-class readership.⁹ During the 1960s and 70s, however, *Cosmopolitan* magazine pioneered a new sexual explicitness aimed not at “low-class” readers, but at young, single, well-educated women (Landers 2010). This upended the traditional class connotations of sexuality in magazines and left most staid titles like *Ladies' Home Journal* with an older audience. As a consequence, a new demographic division of the market has emerged in America, with titles like *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Woman's Day* catering to older women with children while *Cosmopolitan* and magazines of its ilk like *Glamour* or *Seventeen* target a younger demographic of unmarried women.

The shifts in American magazine audiences, then, are explained partly by normative changes and partly as a re-segmentation of the market. These changes have repercussions for the material in my sample. Whereas all of the American women's magazines in my 1950s sample contained fiction and advice about young adult courtship in addition to material about married

⁹ During a presentation about my research at UC Berkeley, Barrie Thorne, a professor now nearing retirement age, recalled that during her childhood, she and her friends would visit a girl in her neighborhood who had a subscription to *True Story* to get a furtive and thrilling glimpse at “working class sex.”

life, this content has largely disappeared from the more “mature” titles, which now focus more exclusively on married life.

Two other significant shifts in magazine content in both France and the U.S. are, first, a general rise in explicitness about sex. French fashion magazines especially frequently feature photographs of men’s and women’s bare buttocks and topless women in advertisements, articles, and even on magazine covers, something unheard of in the 1950s. American women’s magazines feature less nudity than their French counterparts,¹⁰ but, as I have noted, mainstream U.S. women’s magazines for young, single readers routinely trumpet sex advice on their covers. This shift in the character of my magazines’ content partly changes what aspects of the culture are visible, and my final chapter examines the erotic culture of the U.S. and France more closely than is feasible in the earlier period.

The dissertation’s shift in substantive focus from the 1950s to the 2000s also tracks a substantive cultural shift. In feminism’s wake, some of American wives’ vicarious responsibility for their husband’s careers and overall emotional well-being disappeared. For the same reason, we find a ratcheting down of the excitement and mortal terror surrounding a young woman’s fateful effort to find and attract the right husband without becoming pregnant or losing her reputation. (American mothers’ sense of anxiety about their influence on their children remains.) As American women’s perceived control over their own fate strengthens and becomes more individual in its focus, sex itself must bear more of the burden of generating the cultural excitement needed to sell magazines to young American women. Something parallel happens in the world of French mainstream women’s magazines, though, in keeping with the argument of the dissertation, the transition is less striking.

The other major change in content is a decline in magazine fiction. Formerly present in most women’s magazines,¹¹ fiction declines until the only magazines carrying short stories in my 2000s sample are *Nous Deux* in France and, in some issues, *Good Housekeeping*. (*Cosmopolitan* also features excerpts of sex scenes from full-length romance novels, and these prove quite useful for my analysis.) The simplest explanation for the decline of fiction in women’s magazines is that television and other media have provided enough alternative competing sources of fiction that readers no longer turn to magazines for fiction.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A word or two is necessary about the way I infer from comparisons of magazine content to larger social patterns. First, it is important to note that magazines attempt to select material that will appeal to their target audience, but that they often act as more as conduits than as original producers of content. For instance, when *Ladies’ Home Journal* features Dr. Phil, a popular psychologist who specializes in allegedly straight-talking advice, the magazine is featuring a figure with a major public profile in his own right. In such a case, *Ladies’ Home Journal* is not so much fabricating a distinctive editorial message as it is sampling from the

¹⁰ A careful quantitative study of nudity in different countries’ editions of *Cosmopolitan* documents this pattern (Nelson and Paek 2005).

¹¹ Here, the exception is *True Story*, although the structure of its real-life-based narratives makes their analysis similar to that of true fiction.

larger media environment. This fact should help allay concerns that magazines are actively manufacturing a message that is sharply different from what readers encounter in other formats. In instances where magazine editors are doing this, as in *Cosmo's* effort to provide a "sex-positive" message for young women, or when *Marie Claire's* resident wise-woman, Marcelle Auclair, passes judgment on contemporary cultural trends in the 1950s, this is quite obvious. The broader cultural background against which these editorially crafted messages are projected can also be deduced by a careful reader.

In a methodological appendix to the dissertation, I discuss the special issues involved in making cultural inferences from fiction. The general principles outlined in the appendix also apply to comparisons of non-fiction material. Where possible, I have tried to analyze articles that are matched as closely as possible in terms of genre and format. Sometimes, of course, a magazine in one country contains a feature that is both striking in its content and has no counterpart in the trans-Atlantic comparison sample. In such cases, the asymmetry in article format can itself be evidence of cultural differences. Hence, I do depart on occasion from the procedure of "matched format" comparison. When this happens, however, I draw the reader's attention to the fact.

Although I cite sources other than women's magazines throughout the dissertation, Chapter 3, which compares second-wave feminism in the two countries, strays furthest from these texts as the primary site of analysis. The chapter begins with a comparison of Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan's germinal feminist classics, then considers the fate of an abortion protest manifesto in the two countries before turning to the content of the avowedly feminist, mass-circulation magazines that began publication in the 1970s in each country. Nevertheless, there is more methodological continuity here than first meets the eye. Indeed, the title of this chapter of the dissertation, "Feminism: Le Remake," acknowledges the inspiration of Raymonde Carroll's and Carolyn Durham's analyses of French feature films that underwent culturally telling alterations when they were remade for American audiences. The comparative strategy here is to analyze feminist movement tactics or publications that were debuted in one country and then imitated more or less closely in the other. (In the case of Beauvoir and Friedan's monographs and the abortion manifesto, French feminists were the first movers; the opposite was true for *Ms.* and its French successors.) For each of the "movement tactics" I sample, feminists in one country could consult the work of their trans-Atlantic sisters and draw from it as they saw fit. The points of contrast that then emerge, both in their work's content and in its reception, turn out to be highly culturally revealing. As is the case with my approach to women's magazine content, this method helps to minimize the potentially extraneous influence of formal as opposed to cultural differences.

What is "National Culture?"

The sociological study of cultural differences between nation states has undergone something of a revival since the decline in disciplinary prestige of Talcott Parsons's values-centered framework for cross-national comparison. There is now a large and well-recognized literature comparing cultural differences at the level of the nation-state using a variety of

terminology (e.g., Fourcade 2009; Lamont 1992; Lamont 2000; Lamont and Thévenot 2000; Dobbin 1994; Schalet 2011; Ferree 2003; Ferree 2012; Biernacki 1995). Still, the notion of national culture remains somewhat controversial in contemporary American sociology. To some sociologists, it threatens to obscure differences between sub-national groups divided by ethnicity, class, gender, religion, region, sexual orientation and the like. To others, the concept implies a uniformity of belief or behavior on the part of each individual located “within” such a culture.

My answer to these objections is that, even in a nation as diverse as the United States, there is an ideological and institutional center of gravity which tends to make sub-cultural views into variations on a theme when compared with those of other societies (Fischer and Moodie Forthcoming). As the abortive conversation with which I began this chapter suggests, deep cultural premises about what a good life is and what constitutes full personhood tend to be quite general within these two societies, setting the terrain on which more specific debates are conducted.

In the chapter that concludes this dissertation, I address the historical reasons *why* French and American gender culture differ so lastingly. There, I also explore the broader theoretical questions and implications raised by this finding of dynamic cultural continuity.

CHAPTER 2: Passion and Vocation

In American magazines from the 1950s, I find the same assumptions about career and family that Mary Blair-Loy uncovers in her 2006 study of high-status American women (Blair-Loy 2003). Blair-Loy describes the sense that, as demanding vocations, both paid work and motherhood are all-consuming. She traces this understanding to the norms generated by high-prestige workplaces. Instead, however, I find that the idea of a person's vocation as deeply self-defining and potentially unlimited in its demands is more basic to American culture. I make several further observations about these key vocations of career and family as conceived of by Americans in the 1950s, observations that still hold true through to the present. I am not the first to reach these sorts of conclusions about American culture, but my aim is to provide a parsimonious and convincing explanation of the contrasts that I observe between French and American gender assumptions and to deepen our understanding of the cultural constants that underpin the larger trajectory of gender change in both countries.

First, Americans assume that vocations are freely chosen; no one is obliged to take up duties and obligations that they do not want, and no vocation is *a priori* closed to anyone. In other words, if a woman wants to choose career over family, she should and will be able to do so. Second, Americans assume that success in one's vocation is possible for anyone with sufficient reserves of fortitude and good will. As a logical corollary, people who are not successful must suffer from some moral flaw. Third, success in one's vocation is assumed to be a holistic phenomenon. Americans rarely contemplate the possibility that someone could be a failure in one area of life and a great success in another: good outcomes are clustered together, and one is happy or unhappy as a whole. As a consequence, any moral flaws will tend to compromise the integrity of one's character as a whole. Ann Swidler has suggested to me that this holistic vision of success is linked to the Protestant notion of salvation as an all-or-nothing affair, and I find this idea convincing.

These assumptions have important consequences for American ideas about gender. People are profoundly shaped by their vocation. Since the advent of the "ideology of separate spheres" in the U.S., women have been presumed to be primarily responsible for the vocation of creating a virtuous and happy home. Men have had the primary burden of succeeding in a career. The combined assumptions that success in one's vocation is within reach of anyone and that success is holistic put an immense burden of effort on individuals of both sexes. Men and women need great reserves of moral strength to succeed; that strength requires not only good intentions but also self-confidence. Women are crucial to bolstering the self-confidence that their husbands and children need to succeed. Mothers' and wives' love gives those in their home faith in themselves, which in turn enables others' fulfillment. This also means that women's moral flaws are particularly infectious and damaging to her family.

These basic American assumptions have not changed much, I think, over the last half century. American feminism has fought successfully for society to live up more fully to its promise of a free choice of a career as a vocation for women. But because success is still presumed to be up to the individual and because the right to choice comes with responsibility for the consequences of choice, feminists have won little in the way of governmental support for reconciling joint responsibilities for work and family.

As appears in popular women's magazines, another feature of 1950s American gender culture is the depiction of ideal masculinity. In addition to having the grit to be successful in his career, the ideal American man of this period is large, physically powerful, and athletic. The admirable man is able and willing to use violence when the occasion demands. Finally and most strikingly, during courtship, attractive American men signal their dominance over women. (This is done with women's implicit consent.) Feminism has helped to mute these overt displays of masculine violence and physical dominance of women within depictions of American courtship, but it has done less to alter basic assumptions about what constitutes attractive masculinity.

What is the French counterpart to this set of cultural patterns? The French lack the strong sense of vocation that is characteristic of American culture. Nor do they assume that success in life and happiness are within any person's reach. Work is more of a practical necessity than a means of self-definition. For the lucky, work can indeed become an important source of fulfillment, but that is far from being the case universally. Work for French women is not presumed to be a choice; nor do the French postulate a choice between work and family for women. Many married women must work.

The great aims of life in French culture, then, revolve less around living up to one's vocation than to leading a full and fulfilling personal (and interpersonal) life. French women's magazines of the 1950s thus worry more about how paid work might compete with men's interest in their families than they do about what French wives can do to help their husbands succeed.

Erotic and affective relationships are more highly dramatized in French culture than they are in American culture. The dominant strain of French culture assumes that attracting and retaining the interest of others is a difficult and consuming challenge for both men and women alike. The French make much more of the art of being a seductive man than do Americans. Moreover, the treatment of the topic of infidelity suggests that the necessity of seducing one's partner does not end at the time of marriage. Instead, it remains a perennial concern.

Moreover, French ideals of masculine attractiveness differ markedly from American ones. Attractive French men invest effort in pleasing women through social interaction rather than in demonstrating competitive prowess. They court women with compliments and good conversation rather than with displays of domination. Their character mixes virile decisiveness and vigor with a capacity for gentleness and empathy. Admiration for male violence tends to be repressed in French culture. Indeed, French

masculinity is itself predicated on men's ability to charm women. This is different from the American model in which men are inherently masculine first and attract women as a consequence.

Viewed with an eye to assessing which pre-second-wave-feminist cultural context is more advantageous to women, the record is mixed. Compared to French women, American women seem more burdened during this period by a need to defer to and to support men's sense of self-confidence and masculinity. Ideal American masculine behavior during this period also seems, to put it bluntly, more obnoxious than its French counterpart. From an American perspective, however, French marriage might seem weirdly agonistic and demanding of continual erotic virtuosity. The French cultural dramatization of adultery during this period is also likely, on average, to produce more anxiety among women than among men, since women are more dependent in marriage. On the face of things, American women seem to have less cultural leverage over men than do their French peers during this period. But second-wave feminists would find important assets for their attack on American gender norms in the American emphasis on the supremacy of personal choice, in its respect for the dignity of work as a vocation, and in the linkage between justifications of gender inequities and an ideology of separate spheres.

OPPORTUNITY AND DANGER: WORK FOR PAY

"A man's stature in society depends on success in his field:" American men and paid work.

The magazine articles I have sampled make it abundantly clear that work plays a central role in American men's identity. For a man to have a dignified life, he must make his own way in the world of work. He must 1) discover and develop his talents in his career, 2) win independence from his family of origin,¹ and 3) take the role of chief breadwinner in his family. That these three imperatives go together both logically and practically is never questioned.

In a *Cosmopolitan* edition especially devoted to work, an article entitled "Sweet Success" features an interview with a veteran psychologist and industry consultant on business leadership. The article promises to reveal "What it takes to be a top executive, why some men should turn down a bigger job, what trait young men should develop [and] how an employee should argue with the boss" (James 1957:70). The psychological expert and journalist interviewer both take it for granted that future top-flight career executives are male. The same issue of the magazine also has an article on working wives, so it is not true that the editors assume women will never work for pay; they do take for granted, however, that the typical female reader of the magazine will not pursue

¹ Robert N. Bellah and co-authors note this American cultural theme in *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al. 1996).

a career in the sense of steady work in an occupation that leads over time to increasing compensation and prestige.²

Magazine fiction provides more evidence of how central success at work is to American men's sense of self. The career trajectory of the heroes of American stories is always mentioned. Commonly, story plots hinge upon the challenges men face when establishing themselves in their careers. Even stories which dramatize problems in men's intimate lives usually implicate career anxieties in their personal worries.

For instance, in "Return of the Thief," the young protagonist is charming and skilled, but is also emotionally vulnerable because he was poorly brought up and then orphaned. He hastily fled town at age eighteen after being framed for stealing and has been mistrustful of others and of himself ever since. He recovers his ability to launch a career and start a family only once he goes back to his home town and confronts his past (Chidester 1957). In another story, the hero is a middle-aged man who worries that he is over the hill and feels overshadowed by younger men, whether the charming new next-door neighbor or the young star in his law office. The story ends with his being promoted to partner at his law firm. This resolves his self-doubt and he happily assumes the status of a mature, successful man (Holder 1957).

Men's work also enables them to break with their family of origin and stand on their own two feet. In stories where men work in a family business, this is generally a sign of insufficient self-confidence. In one story from *True Story Magazine*, a man returns from service in World War II and, after being discharged from duty, brings his wife to live with him on the family farm in North Dakota. There, the couple's relationship is a tortured, violent mess. Part of what redeems their troubled marriage is the husband's eventual purchase of an independent farm away from his parents' house ("Guilty wife: Dare I confess my shame?" 1957:129). In *Redbook*, a rare American romance that does not end with reconciliation recounts how a professor's daughter falls in love with a young man named Tony. Among his winning personal qualities, Tony has some worrisome ones, including a tendency to be irresponsible. But what finally convinces the heroine to break off her engagement is that he will not give up an easy job in his father's firm to pursue his dream of starting his own restaurant. Tony explains why he stays in a job he doesn't enjoy:

"Haven't you ever heard the remark that every man sends his sons to college for one of two reasons—either because he went himself or because he didn't go. Well, Dad was one of the ones who didn't go. He came up the hard way, and he's a rich man now who's tickled pink to be able to make things easy for his sons."

She saw what he meant, picturing the big, hearty man with his gruff, but expansive kindness; still she said, "Would it tickle him pink to know

² Rosabeth Moss Kanter documents the continuing presence of this assumption in the American workplace as late as the 1970s in (Kanter 1977).

that the life he's giving you is ruining you, making you miserable?" She was surprised at the bitterness of her tone.

"Those are pretty grim thoughts for a day like this. You'll have indigestion at this rate," he said amiably and swung the wheel to the left... (Beliveau 1957:79)

Tony's unwillingness to pursue his own vocation independent of his father signals that he will never be a good husband because he will never be happy with himself, and the heroine does the right thing by breaking off the engagement, despite the deep pain that this causes her.³

Neither of these stories spells out explicitly that children should not work for their parents' business. It simply never happens that a son is happy or fulfilled unless he is off blazing his own trail in the world of work.

The magazines are quite explicit about the idea that American men need to be able to think of themselves as the main breadwinners in the household, however. In her *Cosmopolitan* article on "Working wives," Harriet La Barre notes that many American men consider their wives' employment as a slur on their self-worth as breadwinners. She clearly disapproves of this attitude:

[M]any husbands still maintain the attitude that if their wives work, it reflects on their earning power. "My wife will never have to work," is a male cry left over from the Dark Ages. (La Barre 1957:52)

Modern men should be less defensive, she argues. Still, La Barre agrees that men are entitled to feel that they are the *primary* earner in the household. She mentions some of the situations that can threaten husbands' sense of economic primacy:

Today some few wives earn higher salaries than their husbands. This too can be a dangerous situation, unless both husband and wife are mature people. But each case is unique. One young couple sensibly solved this problem by putting the wife's extra earnings into a joint account, as savings for the future. Another couple realized that, since the husband made a low salary as a college professor, yet got emotional satisfaction from his work, the wife's salary was simply a bonus that paid for the material things that deepened their enjoyment of life. "Do I resent the fact that we own a convertible and give dinner parties for my colleagues?" says this husband, "Not me!"

A touchy situation can arise, though, when a husband who makes a lower salary than his wife is transferred to another city. Should the wife quit her job? Or should he resign from his? "It's wisdom," says Mr. Scull, "for the wife to sacrifice her salary and go where her husband goes." A

³ Parenthetically, I should note that this story provides a high-cultural-capital variation on the American imperative to be self-made. The fiancé in the story courts his girl by talking about Charles Dickens, and should have gone beyond his father's commercial success to pursue a more aesthetic vocation by starting his dream restaurant that is "low on décor and high on good food" (Beliveau 1957:79).

man's stature in society depends so much on his success in his field—whether it's a high-paying or low-paying field—that the wife who deprives him of it is in for family unhappiness. At this point, it is hardly a question of lack of maturity in a man; if he is emotionally healthy and mature, he has a need to fit in with society. (La Barre 1957:52-53)

Women thus need to recognize that their husbands' careers are important to their self-image to an extent that is not true for women.

"The Exhilaration of Working Can Dwindle in the Face of Worries about Children and Husband." *American Women and Paid Work.*

American cultural assumptions about women and work outside the home during this period can be summarized as follows: 1) Women can choose between a vocation that centers around a career (as is generally true for men) or one that centers on the family (as is typical for women).⁴ This proposition is symmetrical by sex in that women *can* adopt a more typically "masculine" pattern of work if they so desire. It is asymmetrical by sex in the sense that the choice is mutually exclusive for women but is not so for men. Men do not forgo their chance to have a family when they devote themselves to work; in fact, work is a prerequisite for family formation by men. 2) Wives may be able to reconcile paid work with family, but only insofar as their work does not displace either their primary homemaking duties or the primacy of their husbands' careers. Work is a luxury for women but a necessity for men. 3) The world of work is tempting for women because it promises an opportunity to make a visible and publicly valorized contribution to society and to achieve a sense of independence and self-worth, just as it does for men. The rewards of the domestic sphere are less glorious and less obvious, because they are less public. Women need to be reminded of these rewards and their priceless value. 4) The world of work is dangerous for women because they risk continuing to work beyond their marriageable years without ever finding a husband. Such women tend to be incomplete, lonely, and unfulfilled. They have failed in life in a fundamental way, just as men who fail in their careers have. Thus, while Americans recognize that women might legitimately choose career over family, and that in the abstract such a choice would be worthy *as* a choice, there is little public imagery that gives substance to the idea that this could constitute a fulfilling life for a woman.

First among the cultural assumptions I have just outlined is that American women can have a successful career in the world of work if they so choose. Doing so, however, requires them to take their work seriously in a way that is not typical of women in the work world. Consider the way Gloria Andreotta, an observer of U.S. life for Paris's *Elle* magazine, contrasts the work of secretaries and real "businesswomen" in America. In "How they work, how they have fun," [*Comment ils travaillent, comment ils se distraient*], Andreotta writes that American secretaries have it easy in comparison to French ones. They get paid well, do less complicated and varied work than Parisian

⁴ This is Mary Blair-Loy's argument in *Competing Devotions* (Blair-Loy 2003).

secretaries, and are guaranteed to be highly sought-after if they have a pretty speaking voice on the telephone (Andreota 1957:16). Clerical work in the U.S. is untaxing and somewhat unserious, since secretaries' role in the workplace is partly decorative.⁵ In contrast, Gloria Andreota tells *Elle*, women who perform prestigious jobs must take their work with the utmost seriousness:

For a 'businesswoman,' life is not so easy. Clara Porter, one of the first female bankers in America, who recently died, gave the following advice to women who wanted to make a career: "Your work must come first" [*doit passer avant tout*]. And that is more than advice; it is an obligation. The watchword—do the job as well as a man and, if possible, even better. **You can't make a fortune while you're napping:** Hard work and determination are the fate of women who want to "make it"... The majority of businesswomen are unmarried. In practice, it is difficult to reconcile the exhausting work of C.E.O. with the responsibilities of making a home. (Andreota 1957:16)

This description echoes the dilemma facing elite American women nearly fifty years later as Mary Blair-Loy describes it in *Competing Devotions: Career and Family Among Women Executives* (Blair-Loy 2003). Women can plunge fully into the responsibilities of the work world and create a career, but in doing so they must sacrifice domestic fulfillment.

In keeping with this perspective, the second cultural assumption I articulated above holds that American women may be able to reconcile work for pay with homemaking as long as work does not displace their domestic duties or threaten the primacy of their husbands' careers. In La Barre's "Working Wives" article, she writes that masculine sentiments which categorically oppose wives' work, while widespread in 1950s America, are hidebound and doomed to obsolescence:

"My wife," says a forty-year-old insurance man, "works. And I'm glad. Life—it's beautiful!" To most men, this fellow is a renegade and a traitor. But to an increasing number of men, from garage mechanics to top executives with working wives, he is beginning to make a lot of sense. His voice is still drowned out, though, by the complaint, "When a wife works, she deprives her husband of his masculinity"; by the Victorian demur, "It's unfeminine for a wife to want to work"; and by the newest

⁵ A fictional illustration of this comes from a *Redbook* story about a young woman from North Carolina who finds employment as a receptionist at a Manhattan fashion firm. She does horribly in a test of secretarial skills, but is told by her prospective employer that he will hire her for her looks alone. She initially interprets this as a sexual overture and indignantly rejects the offer, but her prospective employer hastily explains that there's a good business reason to exploit her looks: she will help display Kutie Knits's sweaters to great advantage as she receives visitors to the firm's offices. Thus reassured, she happily agrees to be hired, and goes on to find a wonderful husband while at work (Wolfe 1957). The idea that she would be willing to exchange sex for a job is offensive, but the idea that she might fill an essentially decorative role at work is not.

outray yet, “Working mothers cause juvenile delinquency.” Doctors in small communities wince at the thought of their wives' working because, they claim, it lowers their prestige. Accountants figure up their wives' salary, tack on the added cost of transportation, household help, and income tax, and, waving papers covered with figures claim triumphantly, “It doesn't pay for a wife to work.” Capping all these alarms is the familiar old chestnut, “A woman's place is in the home.”

All this pressure makes the wife who works, and the wife who longs to edge her toe into the work world, feel as though she were planting a bomb in the cellar.

She may as well relax. Her desire to work, say experts that range from marriage counselors to economists, usually indicates one of two things: she needs the money, or she has an emotionally healthy attitude about using her creative abilities. (La Barre 1957:43)

La Barre's plea for the legitimacy of wives' work is predicated on an implicit assent to the notion that women must put their domestic duties and their husbands' careers first. In numerous instances, she argues that conflicts between a wife's work and the well-being of her family *can* be circumvented if all parties take a pragmatic and flexible approach. A wife must be able to assure her husband that work is not unduly interfering with her indispensable obligations to keep house and raise the couple's children.

The amount of money a man's wife brings home means far less to him than his peace of mind about his children's welfare. The anxiety of wondering “Whom are they with? Where are they?” can undermine his feeling of security about his home life when he should be concentrating on his own work.

Recognizing all this, many wives have turned to part-time jobs so they will be at hand when their children come home from school. (La Barre 1957:50)

Thus, even working women have primary responsibility for the home front, leaving husbands to prioritize their careers.

Among the men who are willing to let their wives get a job are some who balk at allowing their wives to work in the same field as theirs. No man likes to feel he is competing against his wife. Says Mr. Scull, “If the husband feels a wife's job in the same field is a threat to his masculinity, I have one advice [*sic*] for the wife—stay out of it!”

Home situations are usually most successful when the wife lets the husband call the turn. (La Barre 1957:52)

Again, the entire thrust of La Barre's argument is that wives' work is not *necessarily* incompatible with a woman's recognition that the happiness of her husband and children takes first priority.

Before moving on to the next cultural assumption about women's work that I wish to discuss, however, it is important to note the subversive, discordant note on which La Barre's article ends. The final heading within the article text is "The Will to Work," and it is followed by two short sentences:

Anyway, whether he's for it or against it a husband may as well face up to his wife's working. Because if that's what she wants to do, it doesn't look as though anyone can stop her. (La Barre 1957:53)

This rather remarkable little conclusion to the article flies in the face of the piece's generally conciliatory tone. To a contemporary reader, this throwaway comment seems downright prophetic. It illustrates in a nutshell the subversive potential of the American ideology of choice. Its assumption that people ultimately will do what they desire is quintessentially American. It calls to mind the remarkable fact that Betty Friedan's famous call to arms in *The Feminine Mystique* is entirely directed at women's desires. Friedan argues that housewives have been victimized by a cunning cultural con job which has convinced them to suppress their true desires by endorsing an artificial, inauthentic ideal. By heeding the misleading urgings of the mainstream media, of advertising, psychoanalysts and social science experts, women have repressed their deepest desires for self-realization in the world of work.⁶ They need only open their eyes and pursue their true individual preferences to find happiness and fulfillment.⁷ Friedan's work taps the rhetorical advantages of American assumptions about the power of individual choice and about the important role of vocation in self-definition.

This brings me to my third conjecture about American discourse on women's work for pay during this period: that it recognizes the powerful, even seductive allure of a career for women. Consider the blurb that opens La Barre's article:

Ten million wives have gone to work. Should you? The salary looks good. The emotional satisfaction may be great. But extra job expenses can wipe out that income, and the exhilaration of working can dwindle in the face of worries about children and husband. Here's what a wife should know before going after that job. (La Barre 1957:48)

⁶ As I discuss in Chapter 3, this argument shares superficial similarities with Beauvoir's in *The Second Sex*. But Beauvoir's Sartrean call for individual self-transcendence is not confined to urging women into the world of work; it also involves overcoming women's objectification in sexuality and in all realms of symbolic representation. Furthermore, Beauvoir's existentialist notion of the duty to be free and self-determining has an element of the tragic in it that can be found nowhere in Friedan. Beauvoir never promises that women who stake out an independent existence will be happy and personally fulfilled. For Friedan, by contrast, women have nothing to lose but their childishness and boredom.

⁷ This interpretation of Friedan's work helps to explain the fact that so many of the admiring readers who corresponded with her (particularly the men among them) enthused about the parallels between her arguments and those of Ayn Rand. This pattern, which at first struck me as bizarre when I was consulting Friedan's correspondence at Harvard's Schlesinger Library, makes sense when we consider that both authors portray themselves as anti-conformists who exalt the power of individual volition.

Before pivoting toward a rather ominous tone, this preface creates a crescendo of excitement about the attractions of work for women: the monetary rewards of work look “good.” It may bring “great” emotional satisfaction, even “exhilaration.”

One of the article’s sections highlighting the upside of wives’ work outside the home carries the title “A Hand in the World's Work.” Despite the constant assurance by experts and fiction writers that making a home is the most sacred and most meaningful job of all, this section title gives the game away. The “World’s Work” happens outside the home. This point is also illustrated in a piece of short fiction that argues for women’s place in the home much more unambiguously than does La Barre’s advice article in *Cosmopolitan*. This short story centers on one sweet and capable young wife’s worries about what she will say in a speech on “The Work of the Modern Woman” at an upcoming PTA meeting. When explaining the speech’s theme to her children, Gail Hartley expresses pride that women can be accomplished career women: “some women do wonderful things in this world. Women lawyers and doctors and teachers and—and everything,” (Henderson 1957:74). Her daily routine of housework and childcare seems trivial compared to the global political crises she hears about on the morning radio news broadcast:

Women's work is important. The world's all mixed up, and maybe I don't do much, but—but wipe noses and cook. But maybe I can think of something wise and good to say. For other women. (P. 33)

This heroine’s pride in what women can accomplish in the world of work is ultimately reconciled with the redemptive realization that caring for her family is equally important. But coming to that conclusion requires deep introspection. It is more superficially self-evident to Gail that the challenging and glorious part of the “world’s work” takes place outside the home.

Upon reflection, this is unsurprising, given American culture’s emphasis on the pride and self-worth accessible to men through a successful career. The excitement of the male adventure story is not lost on women. The culture offers women no comparable drama of self-constituting achievement. No wonder, then, that American women are awed and tempted by the world of work.

American women’s magazines do provide a minatory counterweight to the thrilling temptations of work. They frequently portray women who work beyond early adulthood as rather pathetic, lonely, dried-up specimens. In one short story in *Cosmopolitan*, we get this vicious portrait of a middle-aged, unmarried teacher who derives prurient enjoyment from observing the goings on at the municipal park during the evening:

Turning head and shoulders then, alert as a grizzled old herd cow, Miss Cameron peered into the darkness behind her. She had been parked here for an hour, alone. She hadn't had to spend the evening alone; the girls had wanted her to play bridge at Alma's. But at age forty-four, after

evenings and evenings of bridge with the girls, she found it easier, somehow, to be alone. Summers had always been particularly bad, with no papers to grade, not enough money to take a real vacation. But the park had changed all that. Since she had been coming down evenings after supper, Miss Cameron had discovered in herself an enormous capacity for living, though it was at second-hand. (Gavin 1957:84)

Somewhat more sympathetically, another story provides the following sketch of a secretary in a Manhattan talent agency:

Her name was Tess and she was a well-camouflaged forty, give a year, take a year, personable without half trying, for she had long ago concluded that there was little in life worth being strenuous about. Her eyes showed animation only when they looked at Meath [the story's hero], a soft animation; but since he was either too obtuse or too tactful to notice this, they showed resignation as well. (Carroll 1957:79)

Later in the story, she likens herself to a pigeon that has taken up the Sisyphean task of making its nest in the air vent of a nearby building. After the hero falls for another woman, the story ends with the secretary gazing forlornly out the window:

Tess looked down at the air shaft... and the industrious pigeon. A great gust suddenly sent twigs flying skyward, and the pigeon fluttered indignantly about. "I know just how you feel, baby," Tess murmured. (Carroll 1957:83)

The fictional depictions in American magazines of the 1950s remind readers that women who work outside the home beyond the years of peak marriageability usually end up unmated and unhappy. Women may have a theoretical "choice" of pursuing a career, then, but success in this endeavor entails costs that few people would want to bear. *"They try to compensate for this inferiority by earning lots of money." Men and paid work in France.*

The evidence about cultural attitudes toward men's work in France in the 1950s is in some respects less clear-cut than is the American evidence. Unlike American women's magazines, the French publications I sampled tended not to feature stories that hinge on the drama of men's struggles for career success. French men with a rich inheritance or good professional training are obviously more desirable as spouses than those without a single educational qualification or a *sou* to their name. Nevertheless, stories and advice columns tend not to celebrate men's career ambitions. Instead, French women's magazines describe a tension between men's attachment to work and family. This tension has echoes of American worries about *women's* work; there is a danger that work will distract French men from domestic life. Furthermore, there is little evidence in the magazines I sampled that French men are expected to use their careers to assert their independence from their families of origin.

In French stories, women are not unaware of men's occupational qualifications and economic standing. Such traits are generally listed alongside others in the character description of a suitor. One man, for instance, is summarized as "twenty-seven, excellent family, has a future [this is presumably a reference to his career prospects], seductive [*séduisant*], irreproachable morality, brilliant intelligence..." ("J'étais une romanesque" 1957:5). In another story, a worker at a bank makes the following assessment about its young deputy director (this judgment of his worth as a marriage prospect is treated as reliable in the story and is corroborated in the subsequent narrative):

"He's not a bad prospect [*Remarquez que ce n'est pas un mauvais parti*]. He'll be successful [*Il arrivera dans la vie*]. He has a good job and he works hard... and he's nice enough, at bottom..." ("Le mauvais rôle" 1957:5)

What differentiates these sorts of descriptions from American ones is that there is no moral drama to them. French men's career qualifications lack the link to faith in self, to a durable strength of character that must be tested, cultivated, and tried by fire, that is typical in the American fiction I examined.

Several of the advice columns I came across in French magazines mention a fiancée's or her family's worries about the economic future of a young suitor: is he destined to be just an agricultural laborer? Is there training available that would put him on a better footing? A French fiancé's preparedness for the world of work is one element of his personal worth alongside others, albeit one with weighty practical implications. It is not interlinked with all of his other personal qualities, however, as it is with American men.

Two of the stories in the comparatively highbrow *Elle* and *Marie Claire* feature aristocratic heroes; planning for a career is obviously not on those characters' agenda (Davet 1957; Spens 1957). In one of them, "Le Cadet et L'Orpheline," the young hero is a penniless nobleman on foot in search of his fortune. There is no bashfulness in his marriage to the defenseless orphan with a *château* and a fortune; he proves himself sufficiently in defending her against the predations of her wicked cousin and guardian who wishes to marry her off for selfish gain (Spens 1957). These stories point to one reason for this difference in French and American narratives of masculinity: France's aristocratic heritage of inherited status versus the "American dream" of self-propelled upward mobility.

In keeping with this explanation, French stories are less emphatic about the importance of a man's establishing his independence from his family through career achievement. One story is particularly helpful in illustrating this contrast. In this tale, the daughter of a boxing trainer recounts how her father describes her future husband:

"Léo is a brave kid. He's alone on the earth, without a family or fortune, without support. He has only his fists and his will to succeed... He reminds me of my own youth..." ("Le dernier combat" 1957:16)

This has the air of a classic American introduction for a hero: the boy is an independent sort and has pluck and ambition. But any American genre expectations that the reader may bring to the story are rapidly disappointed. The heroine, Gaby, notes that she generally dislikes the men in her father's gym: "I disliked their conceited air, their broken noses [*profil cassé*], their misplaced vanity and appetite for money" ("Le dernier combat" 1957:16). Gaby sees Léo as different, but fears being the wife of a professional boxer. She gives way to her affection for him only after her father discloses his judgment that Leo, while not lacking in talent or technique, does not possess the killer instinct that makes for a real boxing champion. Her father plans to make him an assistant at the gym, and will suggest this to him some day. He will make this proposal "gently, so as not to injure his vain self-image as a fulfiller of dreams" [*pour ne pas froisser son petit amour-propre de faiseur de rêves*]. So the daughter happily

imagine[s] a life with [Léo] in the tranquility of a less glorious occupation, to be sure, but one that was regular and that would not encroach on our intimacy. ("Le dernier combat" 1957:16)

Léo and Gaby get married and find bliss in their early days together. Léo first works happily in his father-in-law's gym and sports equipment shop. Things go awry only when a villainous boxing promoter tempts the young man with dreams of glory. He begins resenting his wife and father-in-law's efforts to confine him to the family business, a sentiment that an American story would find perfectly laudable. After some dramatic plot twists, however, Léo is finally brought to the realization that this was youthful stupidity, a matter of *petit amour-propre*. Having grown up and thrown off his "illusions" ("Le dernier combat" 1957:31) of winning glory and success on his own, he happily settles down to work for the family business. This does not entail a real sacrifice of his dignity because in good time, he himself will lead the business and the family. The dream of masculine "success" here involves a family-less boy achieving successful absorption into a happy and close-knit family. The American-style dream of a man finding career success and staking his independence from his family of origin surfaces here as a sinister illusion; true fulfillment comes to Léo when he recognizes his limitations and takes his place as a member of a happy family, one which he will eventually head by dint of demographic succession rather than competitive prowess.

Gaby's worries that Léo's career might "encroach on their intimacy" is also part of a larger theme in French stories. This is an anxiety that men will allow their work life to encroach on their home life. A guide to good conversation for men entitled "When You Make Your Wife Yawn" [*Quand vous faites bailler Madame*], in *Marie-Claire*, features a cartoon of "The Businessman" who is lecturing his pretty young companion as follows: "...with a deft touch, we could double our sales in the Far East" ("Quand vous faites bailler Madame" 1957). This man epitomizes bourgeois *gaucherie*. In another story, a woman who married the wrong man out of youthful foolishness describes dinner with her antipathetic husband, an industrialist who has successfully built up the family

hosiery factory into a thriving regional business: “As I did every evening, I heard him complain about the cost of raw materials, manufacturing difficulties, and clients who found everything too expensive” (“J’étais une romanesque” 1957:31). Droning on about work troubles when at home is crass and insensitive to a wife’s need for engaging and responsive masculine companionship. Home is not the place for a woman to sympathize with and assuage her husband’s self-doubts and woes at work, as it is in American stories. Rather, French men are expected to erect a firm boundary between the cares of the workplace and their home life.

Additional evidence that too much involvement in work is bad for men can also be found in the medical advice column “Hello, Doctor!” from *Marie-Claire* of March 1957. This piece is entitled “Dangerous to boys: A dominating mother.” When I saw this article, I first assumed that it would be patterned after contemporary (i.e., 1950s) American psychologists’ worries about the scourge of “momism,” the phenomenon of overbearing mothers. In fact, the syndrome described in the article is *not* the fault of mothers *per se*, but rather stems from the simple absence of a father. Boys who have grown up without a paternal example suffer a set of pathologies related to their aberrant involvement in work and family:

If they are identified with their mother, they will marry “strong women” who resemble her. But women who wear the pants in the home cause them to flee. They seek out, in their work, the chance to exercise the authority which they lack at home, to impose themselves, and to have their self-worth recognized. The weaker they feel, the more dominated by their wives, the more they aggrandize themselves at work.

When their feelings of inferiority cause marital difficulties, they try to compensate for this inferiority by earning lots of money. Or else, if they have more children than they would have liked, they flee the hubbub of home at work or in sports. (“Allô Docteur! Danger pour les garçons: Mère dominatrice” 1957:68)

Men’s involvement in work, then, can easily become excessive. Men may begin chasing after money and power at work to compensate for their lack of authority at home. If men feel a burning need to prove themselves at work, this is pathological, not a normal and laudable masculine urge, as it is in America.

In America, the qualities that make a man successful at work and good at home are usually linked; this is not necessarily the case in French depictions. In two of the American stories I sampled, men who are struggling to prove themselves in their careers are also deficient as husbands and fathers; these relational problems evaporate when they manage to get established in their careers and hence regain faith in themselves (“Guilty wife: Dare I confess my shame?” 1957; “Give my man a chance!” 1957). In the French story I cited above about the industrialist who boorishly talks shop at the dinner table, his obsession with work and his tyrannical and stingy tendencies lead to plenty of business

success. By the same token, they make him a real pill at home. In the French vision, home and work are different realms, and the worthy man keeps them that way. Work is a practical means of sustaining oneself and one's family, not a crucible of masculine self-worth, as it is in America.

"An older and less rich country, France must in effect call upon all of its citizens and on the two sexes." Paid work and French women.

French women's magazines take a practical approach to women's work. I encountered no explicit, general discussions in French magazines of whether women *should* work. In the stories I sampled, the wives of affluent men do not work. They do not have to. Less affluent women do work, some happily ("Le dernier combat" 1957) and others not ("Celle qui n'avait pas connu l'amour" 1957). There is no mention of a consequence-laden *choice* of whether or not to work. Nor does one find anything to parallel American magazines' depiction of women's intense ambivalence toward work, i.e., the sense that work is potentially exhilarating and highly tempting on the one hand and, on the other, potentially threatening to a woman's and her family's domestic happiness.

Françoise d'Eaubonne's letter to Betty Friedan about the French translation of *The Feminine Mystique* contains some valuable insights into the contrast we are examining here.⁸ Friedan describes American girls as being harangued by the dominant cultural authorities into a frantic search for early marriage and a life of otiose parasitism of a housewife. Eaubonne reacts in this way to Friedan's description:

According to my personal experience and to my reading of your book, the young American girl dreams above all of the state of marriage and sees in her future spouse, in a manner very similar to Benjamin Franklin's teachings, a machine that is designed to pay the bills and to provide orgasms... The idea of going straight from childhood to motherhood with the help of a precocious marriage, and then of using wonderful household appliances to save time with which she will do nothing, not even work outside the home—yes, that pair of ideas would be unthinkable, absurd, and extravagant to a French woman... An older and less rich country, France must in effect call upon all of its citizens and on the two sexes, and no woman however "privileged" will be able to envisage from the outset marriage as an end in itself. (Eaubonne 1964:3)

In France, women do not have the dubious privilege of assuming that they can avoid work through marriage, Eaubonne writes.

⁸ I came across this letter by chance in Friedan's correspondence, and, despite the Schlesinger library's blacking out of her name and address, was easily able to identify Eaubonne from the books she mentions in the course of the letter. The online French encyclopedia *Encyclopædia Universalis* credits Eaubonne with coining the term eco-feminism and co-founding the *Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire* (FHAR) in 1971 (<http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/francoise-d-ebaubonne>).

The most retrograde conservative of this country would think it foolish to think of marrying off his daughter before she had in her hands a profession or a diploma with which she could substitute herself, in the worst-case scenario, for a failing husband. Even at present, when the age of marriage is dropping and when girls often get married while they are still completing their studies, they do their best not to abandon their course of study. Why? Because in France, the vast majority of women know that they would be imprudent to count on their husband for the rest of their lives, since he could leave her (in our country, unlike in America, alimony is ridiculously paltry) or die, and, in short, that she could find herself being head of the family at any time. (Eaubonne 1964:2)

In other words, the French attitude toward women's involvement in the labor market is pragmatic, according to Eaubonne.

These contrasting American and French attitudes at mid-century reflect the demographic reality that, for the first half of the 20th century, American women were entering the workforce at the same time that the country became more prosperous, whereas French women were responding to greater prosperity by withdrawing to the home (see Figure 2.1).⁹

[Insert Figures 2.1 and 2.2 about here]

This sense on the part of French observers that women's withdrawal from paid work is an economic luxury can also be found in Alexis de Tocqueville's 19th century commentary on family norms in the United States:

You do not see American women directing the external affairs of the family, conducting a business, or indeed entering the political sphere; but neither do you encounter any of them who are obliged to engage in the rough work of plowing or in any painful exertions that require the development of physical force. There are no families so poor as to make an exception to this rule. (Tocqueville 2002 [1840]:574)

⁹ Figure 2.1 is constructed by merging data sources from the International Labor Office (ILO) (*Bureau International du Travail*) and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The ILO data show the percentage of women in the labor force (*femmes actives*) as a proportion of the *total female population* in each country. I have supplemented precise tabular data for the 1930s through 1960s in the ILO report (Bureau International du Travail (ILO) 1963:Table III) with eyeballed estimates (accurate to within a percentage point or two) from graphs in the report showing earlier decades (P. 31-32). The BLS data in the graph show a higher rate of women's labor force participation because the denominator of the ratio used by the BLS includes only women of standard working age (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013:Table 3-5, Labor force participation rates for women; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2005:Table 4, p. 21). Retirement ages are lower in France than in the U.S., making these BLS figures lower for French as opposed to U.S. women. In fact, however, women's share of the French labor force is at present higher than American women's share, as shown in Figure 2.2. These figures (from Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013:Table 3-2, Women's share of the labor force), in turn, somewhat over-represent women's presence in the French economy, since French women have more maternity leave than U.S. women, and are counted as active in the labor force during this period.

Although Tocqueville's statement couched in falsely universal terms—it never applied to slaves, for instance—the basic contrast he describes was real, and evidently left cultural traces well beyond its purely material roots.

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS: DOMESTICITY

American Women's Responsibilities in the Home: As Wife

American women bear the burden of being “successful” in the domestic sphere. By this I mean that every woman, if she has sufficient inner resources, can make a happy home just as surely as a man, if possessed of sufficient willpower and drive, can make a successful career. This promise of happiness is also a burden because it implies that any failure to find domestic happiness is in some way a woman's fault. Failure can take any one of multiple forms: a woman can choose her husband unwisely; she can commit the ultimate womanly sin of adultery or sex outside marriage; she can fail to make a home that is warm enough to keep her husband there; she can fail to provide her husband with the faith in himself that he needs to succeed; she can fail to give her *children* faith in themselves. In the cultural imagery of women's magazines, such failings have a way of compounding themselves: one fault tends to fester and breed another. Something amiss in the relationship of husband and wife will inevitably infect their relationship with their children, and old unexpiated sins will poison the present. In short, the home is a place of great promise and equally profound anxiety for American women.

That American women are presumptively at fault if anything goes awry in the household is illustrated by the diversity of eventualities for which they are held culpable in the stories I sampled. When George, a young purchasing agent for an oil company, has a fling with an old girlfriend, his wife Elizabeth gets wind of the affair. Elizabeth knows she is not perfect: she is “muscular and angular...despis[ing] everything feminine” (Peoples 1957:94) and so lacks the ripe sexiness of her rival Maxine. By fecklessly throwing herself into the building of a rural home, she has obliged her husband to do heavy physical work on the weekends when he might have been resting from the taxing demands of his career. And so, when George returns to their house after spending a tumultuous weekend with his old flame Maxine, Elizabeth does not berate him for his infidelity. Instead, she quietly confronts him with a frank admission of her shortcomings:

“I'm so glad you're back, George,” she said. “When you go away, it seems a light has gone out.” She waited. Then she asked abruptly, “Are you much in love with Maxine?”

As he began what he had to do [i.e., to tell Elizabeth he is leaving her], his voice shook. “I don't know,” he said.

“If you are, it's all right.” Her voice became artificially loud. “I wouldn't blame you. I'm not a good wife. I don't know what I am. A good player at things, I guess. So I don't blame you. You're not happy. This farm's been everything to me, but I've left you out of it, haven't I?”

“I wouldn't say that.”

“Yes. I’ve left you out. What do you want to do?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t decided.”

She turned and walked toward the house, saying, “Whatever you decide is all right. But... would you fix it so I can see my boys?” (Peeples 1957:99)

This heartbreakingly humble and frank surrender is more effective than any rebuke, and reinforces George’s sense of what he would be losing by leaving her. He makes what the reader knows to be the right decision: to stay and keep his family intact. Note that the narrative makes it clear that Elizabeth’s statement is not a rhetorically brilliant ploy. Throughout the story, the author quite transparently contrasts her honesty with the insincerities of Maxine’s privileged milieu. The reader is in no doubt that Elizabeth’s response to her husband’s infidelity is uncalculated. Elizabeth’s merciless self-reproach for her imperfections as a wife helps to underline her fundamental virtues. The rupture of the couple’s accord requires explanation and absolution, and as the primary person responsible for making her husband happy at home, the wife must admit her share of blame.

Another example of women’s nearly unbounded responsibility in the home comes from a suspense story that pivots on a terrifying attack in a public park. In “Romance in the Park,” we get a sketch of what Americans would later label the co-dependent spouse. All the characters in this story instinctively sense that something dreadful is about to happen¹⁰; Jane Conners’s particular premonition involves the realization that she has lost track of her alcoholic husband:

Wildly she glanced up and down the winding park road. Faraway at the entrance she saw the police car turn in. Deke! Deke! In a fierce ecstasy of love she willed him to her as she had done countless times in the past. But he didn’t come, there was no sign of him, and her silent cry sank to a breathless whimper.

Standing there in the road with the police car nearing and the black knot of terror tightening around her heart, Jane Conners felt the weight of all the years of pretense and conniving. The years of talking for Deke and thinking for him and watching him in ways that wouldn’t look like watching. The years of explaining Deke to the neighbors, to his bosses, even to his own kids. ‘Daddy was just kidding around when he hurt your arm, Arliss... Daddy thought it was just your old worn-out doll, Loretta, when he threw it in the trash.’ Years of explaining and moving on to another town and finding Deke another job in another service garage. No trouble there because, in his head, Deke had the natural know-how to take

¹⁰ The conceit is rather implausible, and is a structural flaw in the story. Later horror writers tend to use the opposite plot device, emphasizing characters’ sense of utter normality at a moment which the reader alone knows to be fraught with peril.

a car apart and put it back together right. The trouble was the other things Deke had in his head.

Standing there in the road, Jane Connors prayed. God, if you just see he doesn't get in trouble this time, I'll do it. I'll take him to one of those doctors and whatever the doc says—if Deke's got to be sent away and shut up in one of those places—I'll even do that. If you just keep him out of trouble this time... help me find him..." (Gavin 1957:88)

Summing up the action that occurs at the story's climactic moment, author writes: "So it was that... Jane Connors made a long overdue promise" (Gavin 1957:89).

Jane has erred in compensating too much for her husband Deke's alcoholism. Her very efforts at hyper-responsibility have actually been irresponsible. It is a measure of the extensiveness of a woman's culpability for domestic disorder that the story gives little attention to the drunken husband and instead focuses on the inadequacies of his wife. As long as her family is at risk, Jane Connors must shoulder much of the blame.

This rather exaggerated assessment of women's culpability for domestic ills makes more sense when we consider its more optimistic converse. The love and loyalty of a good woman has a powerfully redemptive influence on a man. Before adducing some examples, we need to consider the mechanism through which love works its miraculous effects according to the assumptions of this period.

The logic of this cultural ideology goes as follows. Insufficient faith or confidence in oneself deprives otherwise good people of the strength they need to be successful and virtuous. It thwarts men's careers by undermining a strong presentation of self and by making them fearful of and vulnerable to setbacks. And it damages girls' and women's resolve to be chaste and wise in their conduct. Part of what women in American magazines offer their husbands and children is a steadfast faith in their capabilities, a faith which their loved ones can draw upon to bolster their own self-confidence.

The heroines of American stories frequently provide their men with the crucial emotional support they need to regain faith in themselves and succeed. In "Return of the thief," Larry is a boy who is brought up poorly and then orphaned. Luckily, he is rescued by some sympathetic community members after his good-for-nothing father dies. Thanks to this loving support, he is on track to be a fine young man. Disaster strikes on the day he is wrongly accused of theft by a rich ne'er-do-well. Larry flees town and is subsequently dogged by a sense of guilt and persecution, being unable to settle down in a job or a relationship despite being talented and charming. When he receives a letter saying that his former guardian has died and left him money, he balks at returning. Jen, a young woman who has fallen in love with him, urges Larry to confront his fears by going back to his hometown:

"I never got a toe hold anywhere, in the Army or in a job, when something didn't happen sooner or later," [Larry] said doggedly.

“You made it happen. You always believed it would. You like being the kid from the mud flats that nobody can expect much from. That lets you off easy. Like the garage, now. You wouldn't take it on for fear all the people you know here would see you make a mess of it.”

“All right, all right,” he said, looking around to see if anyone in the restaurant noticed them. “Don't make a scene, Jen.”

She lowered her voice. “I love you, Larry,” she said.

He shook his head from side to side. He didn't want to hear that.

“Yes, I love you,” she insisted, “but that place is your home, and if you don't go back there once, you'll never get another home. You'll be scared of every town. People talk, and you'll be sure they're slandering you even if they're only talking about the weather. Once you think people are getting close enough to make demands on you, like loyalty or—or love—you run. You say you don't want to hurt them, but it's yourself you're thinking of. Always yourself.”

“That's strong talk,” he said angrily, but very quietly. His whole body was burning in rage.

“You're scared to go back,” she said and walked away, leaving him alone to finger the letter and feel caught in a trap. He should never have told her.

Now he began to feel a strong drag, as though out there, not too far away, a magnet of some kind were pulling him back to the town against his will... (Chidester 1957:93)

Thus goaded by the woman who loves him, Larry returns to his home town and discovers that the lies of the boy who framed him for theft all those years ago were quickly exposed and that the adults who stuck by him during his youth never ceased to respect him. Redeemed, he accepts the money willed to him by his former guardian and returns to marry Jen and to buy his own garage and hotel.

In another story, a rather harassed, middle-aged lawyer gets to the train station and is picked up by his wife, who immediately senses his worry:

The April evening was chilly, and Nancy was waiting for him in the usual parking spot. He got into the car, and it was still a very real pleasure, after all these years, to kiss this lovely woman. This lovely mind reader. For she said, ‘What went wrong today, Phil?’

He looked at her and shook his head. ‘Nothing. Not a thing. Why?’

‘The big frown when you got off the train. Your slight surprise at finding the car where it always is. I've seen the signs before. On a tough one, Phil?’

He said, ‘Yes,’ and it was true...” (Holder 1957:101)

His wife continues to be unfailingly good-tempered and understanding with him throughout the story, chaffing him when he is momentarily dazzled by a buxom young woman at a party. Nancy remarks on the way home that:

“Darling, it’s a proven fact that forty-five-year-old men are highly susceptible to lush twenty-year-old girls. You simply haven’t seen enough Italian movies.”

‘Don’t be ridiculous. If you think for a moment that—’

‘Don’t fight it. It’s healthy, lover.’ (Holder 1957:103)

She manages to poke fun at her husband while simultaneously reassuring him that her fundamental faith in his fidelity is unshaken. Whatever his self-doubts, Phil never has to think twice about the fact that his wife loves him despite all his weaknesses. And when he tells her one day on the ride home from work that he has been promoted to partner of his firm, she reacts as follows:

Nancy... stopped in the middle of Main Street. ‘You mean...?’

‘I mean...’ he said.

She kissed him very soundly while horns honked in a raucous symphony behind them. She cried all the way home. ‘Because I’m so proud,’ she explained. Then she had plans. ‘I’ll call Mrs. Hunick [the babysitter]. Tonight I’m taking you out to dinner.’ (Holder 1957:105)

Nancy’s devotion to her husband is pitch-perfect whether he is anxious or overjoyed. It is always affectionate, lighthearted and absolute. Phil is assured not only of Nancy’s loyalty, but also of the happiness she feels in being his wife.

“Give my man a chance” explores the link between wifely love and a man’s self-confidence more explicitly. In this allegedly “true story,” young Ric returns home from a jail sentence and struggles to readjust to life. He must cope with an unhelpful family of origin, the temptations of friendship with his former associates in crime, and the suspicions of his workmates. His young wife Kate shows him unflagging loyalty. She is disappointed that her love alone cannot seem to dispel his self-doubt. At one point, Ric leaves to live apart from her for a time. When she asks Ric’s parole officer, the avuncular Mr. Barnes, what she should do, he replies: “If you take my advice—nothing. Except make up your mind that everything’s going to work out eventually. But meanwhile, don’t try to call Ric or get in touch with him. Let him come to you” (“Give my man a chance!” 1957:135).

With difficulty, Kate learns to follow this advice, and one day several weeks later, Ric takes her to Coney Island, the site of their courtship. They have lots of fun together. Kate becomes increasingly miserable as the afternoon wears on, however, because Ric seems to be taking no note of the fact that he has a mandatory meeting with his parole officer that evening. When she nervously reminds him of this, he reacts violently:

He flung me away from him so hard I stumbled a step or two. “I’m sick and tired of being told what I can do and what I can’t do, like a dumb

baby! What job I can work at and what I can't, what people I can speak to and what ones I have to pass up like a dirty shirt! I'm tired of living in a fish bowl! Listen, I'm going to be a human being, for once! So he [i.e., the parole officer] can send me back [to jail]—so let him! But first I'm going to live it up!... I'm all done with being good. I'm fed up—you hear me? *Do you hear me?*”

I heard him, all right. And all at once, I knew how he felt—I knew it for true, for real, as though I were inside him. I'd thought about it before, but now I knew, and for a minute I felt his agony.

“It eats me!” he yelled. “It eats me up! It gnaws at me all the time, and I can't take it. I don't care what happens any more. I'll be what I want to be!”

“All right,” I heard myself telling him. “All right, you be what you want to be, and I'll tell you what *I* want to be.”

Somehow, that stopped him. “What's that?” he said. “What do you want to be?”

I closed the space between us, so tired, I was staggering. “Your wife. Your girl—your woman, your—your anything. Okay, okay, so I'm married to a bum, a punk kid who's going to go on being a punk kid till he drops dead of old age. All right, I can't help it. I love you. So let's have fun! No more nagging—no more chewing you out—not from me. You dish it—I'll take it!... Can't you just see us, Ric? Twenty, thirty years from now? You just coming out of jail and me waiting for you? Or you just going back to jail, and me settling down to wait again? But in between we'll have fun, won't we? We'll set the world on fire—a bum of a man and his bum of a wife, whooping it up—.” (“Give my man a chance!” 1957:136)

This retort gets his attention; like his outburst's impact on her, it breaks through his carapace of wounded emotion.

“Shut up!” His hands were big and hard and heavy on my shoulders. “You shut up, Kate!” His fingers dug into me harshly. “Don't call me a punk kid. I'm no bum, and you know it! I've made my own way a whole lot longer than most guys, so don't talk like I'm no good. And don't talk like you're no good, either!”

He stopped then, his hands dropping suddenly away from my shoulders. For a while we stood, Ric staring down into my eyes and I staring up into his, till the storm in each of us abated. (“Give my man a chance!” 1957:137)

Ric then calls his parole officer to say he will arrive late for his appointment, but the fatherly office replies that he should enjoy the evening out with his wife and check in the

following day. Ric and Kate go to a café and for the first time the couple begin calmly talking through their troubles. Kate explains that:

“...waiting for you [to come home from prison...] I—well, you see, I knew I loved you. I thought if I loved you enough, that'd take care of everything. You know, like Pop's always saying. Well, I tried, Ric. But it—it didn't work out.”

He was quiet for a long time. Then he said, very slowly, “Yeah, I know what you mean. Only that's not all there is to it, Kate. His wife's love—that goes a long way toward making a man a man. But when you get right down to it, a man's got to make or break himself.” (“Give my man a chance!” 1957:137)

On the subway ride home, Kate despairingly thinks nothing has changed, but it has. Ric comes home with her that night. The tide has turned in his battle for self-respect, and he never leaves again.

The ostensible lesson of the story is that a wife's love for her husband is necessary but not sufficient to ensure a happy home. The man in the relationship must himself choose responsibility. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to interpret this as evidence against an ideology that exalts women's importance in making a happy marriage. First, the fact that Kate initially believes so steadfastly that her love alone can heal her husband's wounds and make a happy family suggests that this idea is alive and well in the cultural bloodstream. Furthermore, the narrative itself vindicates rather than refuting the idea. Both in terms of Mr. Barnes's advice to Kate and in terms of the narrative itself, it is clear that her behavior is important to his turnaround. Once she has surrendered the initiative to her husband as Mr. Barnes recommends, Ric can begin to establish his sense of masculine independence. The climactic moment of the story takes place at the moment when, for the first time, Kate wholly empathizes with Ric's emotional turmoil. She then responds by declaring her unconditional love and loyalty to him, regardless of whether he is successful. This act of total capitulation to his leadership and initiative proves redemptive, allowing Ric to rebuild his faith in himself and to reunite with her.

These stories, taken together, illustrate some of the painful contradictions inherent in the assumption that virtuous women can make a happy home by dint of their love and effort. To do so, they must offer their husbands unconditional love and support. In the best-case scenario, as we see with the aging lawyer and his spouse in “The Full Years,” this means that a wife will offer her husband light-hearted, empathetic comfort, recognizing his foibles while reassuring him that he is still admired and beloved and celebrating his triumphs with open-hearted joy (Holder 1957). In more difficult cases, a wife must still offer her husband unconditional love and support. This might take the form of committing him to forced rehabilitation for alcoholism (Gavin 1957) or of taking the opposite tack of complete capitulation, of being ready to follow him wherever his

weakness might lead ("Give my man a chance!" 1957). There is no single recipe for how to be the ideal wife. Only when happiness is restored in the household will a woman know for sure that she has taken the right course of action.

In sum, then, American women bear great responsibility for their husbands' emotional well-being. Above all, they must support their husbands' self-regard against the battering it invariably receives from the outside world. A wife's love helps her husband find faith in himself.

American Women's Responsibilities in the Home: As Mother

If a good woman can do much to redeem a good but flawed husband, her moral powers and responsibilities are all the more significant in regard to children, whose selves are more plastic than adults'. In the January 1957 issue of *Woman's Day*, Harold Brodkey¹¹ writes the text to a photo essay about Carolyn Hazelip, a sort of everywoman-cum-model-housewife who has found her own solution to the problems of raising children:

Carolyn Hazelip lives in a six-room house in a new section of Louisville, Kentucky, with her husband and three children. She is twenty-eight (last November), has brown hair and eyes, and an athletic walk. She has a wild, rollicking laugh, she's prone to horseplay at odd moments, and in the course of a day she throws herself with gusto into being the twenty different people her children ("—Mama's a champion everything—") and her husband expect her to be. She used to fret a great deal about child psychology, but it was exhausting and didn't seem to help matters; the children passed through their peaceful and scarifying phases on their own timetable like so many little Jekylls and Hydes. Now she lives from day to day. When she starts to worry about the children, she distracts herself; *she feels there's no sense exploring the terror that all mothers are surrounded by*. She is sure of her love for her husband and his love for her, and she can't help feeling the cheerful atmosphere of love in the house is what really counts. Being twenty different people, rather than the perfect housewife, is what Carolyn Hazelip feels is her real duty, the price she pays for the privilege of being loved as only a wife and mother is loved. She had no idea her life was going to turn out like this, but she seems pleased, if surprised by it. Her children can't walk into the same room with her without their love showing, and though sometimes she feels inadequate or even helpless being so loved and needed, that's her purpose, that's her job in life, that's her contribution to helping the world go round. (Brodkey 1957)

Brodkey suggests that Carolyn's approach to motherhood is novel for its flexibility and informality. Later in the photo essay, he quotes Carolyn's mother as saying that:

¹¹ Brodkey went on to be a celebrated writer of highbrow short stories.

“We were stiffer... we used more *Bible*.” Carolyn’s world is informal and far from strict. People are more important than notions; affections more to be defended than ideas... [A]ll these people require recognition and acceptance, and at the same time they offer support, advice, and admiration. It’s an ocean of people, talking, quarreling, often surprised by how contagious love and hatred are and how kindness seems to spread widening ripples creating odd and entrancing effects. Carolyn occasionally gets bored; sometimes, she feels lost; but on the whole her life is too full of people for her to think much about any ultimate loneliness of the soul... Her religion is tied to what she does every day, working hard, being good-natured, loving and being loved. These are the elements of her code, this is the core of her existence.” (Brodkey 1957:32)

Carolyn Hazelip’s ethic of flexibility and affection is what Robert Bellah et al. would describe as expressive individualism as opposed to the more austere utilitarian individualism of her mother’s generation (Bellah et al. 1996; see also Buchmann and Eisner 1997). For our purposes, however, Carolyn’s devotion to her family illustrates the cultural expectations of women in the 1950s in quite a typical manner. Even granting Brodkey some poetic license, his comment about the “terror that all mothers are surrounded by” (Brodkey 1957:28) bears witness to the constant anxieties involved in successful domesticity. Carolyn Hazelip lays aside the fussy details of child psychology but cannot forget the larger cultural premise that she is primarily responsible for the emotional well-being of her children. Her strenuous cheerfulness and lovingness set the tone for her entire home. This is not easy work, and Carolyn is “often surprised by how contagious love and hatred are and how kindness seems to spread widening ripples” (Brodkey 1957:32). In keeping with the ideology of “separate spheres,” a woman’s moral conduct has consequences which are hard to overestimate.

“The Art of Being a Mother,” a non-fiction piece in the following month’s (February 1957) issue of *Woman’s Day*, testifies again to the anxieties associated with motherhood.

Each of us brings to this business of mothering countless experiences that have made us not only mothers but human beings with dreams, with courage, with limitations, with needs of our own.

If we persist in comparing ourselves with some abstract idea, there will be moments when we feel we are merely playing the role expected of us... The way to discover what a mother should do or be is not to consult some vague ideal, some confused and shadowy notion of what one’s own mother was or what one wished she had been. Instead, let us examine our own capacities and limitations for this as for any other occupation. Let us study our children. What they need we will try to supply. (Burgess 1957:61 & 98)

The article tries to emphasize that there is no failsafe recipe for being a good mother. This is evidently meant to reassure the reader, though it might just as well be a source of further anxiety. The author does go on to say that, at each different phase of a child's growth, his or her needs will vary. A good mother will only know what her children really need only by closely observing them, by providing the right balance of support and independence according to their capabilities. And yet, there is one constant in all children's needs: "All of us need faith in ourselves. A mother accepts her child as he is; she doesn't let him lose faith in himself" (Burgess 1957:98). A mother's key role in supporting her child's self-confidence parallels her duty to support her husband's faith in himself.

Narrative representations of motherhood corroborate this imperative for mothers to protect their children's self-confidence. The "true story" entitled "13's for trouble!" is prefaced in the voice of a contrite mother who nearly failed at this task: "It's a wise mother who knows her own child—especially when her child's thirteen! I shudder at my own cruel lack of wisdom when my precious little daughter needed it the most" ("13's for trouble!" 1957:60). This brief cautionary tale begins with a mother standing in the midst of her teenage daughter's disorderly room: "I was the soul of neatness. It burned me up that my daughter should turn out the extreme opposite." She rails at the sloppiness of her absent daughter, Lydia, and turns on her husband when he, as usual, sticks up for their teenager. Then the mother comes across a pack of cigarettes in Lydia's things and lashes out at husband and daughter both:

"You don't care what happens to her character, just as long as you go on being the ever-loving daddy! I'm not going to stand by while you spoil her! I don't know where she gets her bad streak—not from me—not from my family—but she's got it—"

"Nell, so help me, I'll—"

"If she gets away with smoking, how do you know what she'll try next?" I cried. "Look at all the teenagers drinking—petting—getting pregnant—"

Like a flash Dick was across the room, gripping my shoulders till they hurt.

"Nell, I warn you. If you ever say a thing like that again, I'll take that child and walk out of here." ("13's for trouble!" 1957:60)

This threat quiets the narrator. Unbeknownst to the parents and the reader, Lydia has overheard this conversation, and at this moment pretends to have arrived home. Her father speaks firmly with her about smoking and she shows the necessary contrition. But something has changed in Lydia's demeanor: she is immaculately behaved but cold and unaffectionate with her mother. One evening, when her mother is trying to make amends by ironing Lydia's best dress for the school dance, the story comes to its climax:

Lyddy came upon me in the kitchen, ironing...and for a moment I thought she was going to cry.

Then she said dully, "Don't bother. I'm not going." She reached out and switched off the iron. ("13's for trouble!" 1957:61)

Lydia runs off to her room, sobbing, and her mother follows her, finally gaining admittance to the room:

"Sweetheart, what's wrong?"

"You know," she wailed. "I heard you tell Daddy—I'm bad! I have a bad streak!"... "I won't go near a boy the rest of my life," she cried, her eyes accusing me. "Then I won't have to be—all those terrible things you said!"...

I sat wracked with my little girl's grief. What had I done to her? How do you know, with a sophisticated thirteen-year-old? They put on their sophisticated airs—lipstick—cigarettes—and you forget they're only vulnerable children, easy to wound, quick to be troubled by their own failings!

I reached out and tried to take her in my arms, but she shrugged away into a desolate little heap.

Dick was right! He knew his child; he deserved her love. While I—I had lacked the breadth to be lenient and understanding—to be the kind of mother who never harbored mean, rankling thoughts about her child and so never thoughtlessly blurted them out in anger. Yes, Dick was so right! A mother must always remember that she is just that—Mother. She must remember that her words will be taken to heart, with all their power to affect her child's feelings. She can make her child feel safe and warm—or shaky and defenseless. Let others storm and rage—a cruel word must never cross a mother's lips. Discipline, yes. But never cruelty!

"Honey," I pleaded, "I can't tell you how sorry I am. What I said was partly in temper and partly a mother's natural worry over how her child is going to turn out—because being a parent is a big responsibility. Only I went too far; the cigarette business frightened me. But you aren't ever going to be bad, Lyddy. You're a fine girl—and you'll be a fine woman."

"Are you sure, Mom?" she asked earnestly. "Because if you don't believe in me, how do you expect me to believe in myself?"

"Oh, Lydia," I said, my voice cracking, "believe in yourself—please—please! You're worth it!" Across the rumpled bed I reached again to take her in my arms, and this time she yielded. "How could I not believe in a little girl who can suddenly grow up enough to make such a wise, grown-up remark? You're my wonderful girl—and I love you very much." ("13's for trouble!" 1957:61)

The mother in this story is petrified about the possibility that she has damaged her daughter's faith in herself.

That this is the worst possible injury one can inflict on a child is illustrated in another story entitled "Love on the Sly." This "true story" also dramatizes American assumptions about the way a mother's moral flaws will inevitably infect her family. The tale begins by describing a widow, Irene Richmond, who for several years has courageously supported two daughters on the salary from her department store job. She takes pride in her independence and cherishes the memory of her deceased husband. Then one day she meets a real hunk, Hal Seeley, at a party. She is immediately attracted to him, but learns that he is married and unable to obtain a divorce. He becomes a family friend, charming her daughters and spending a good deal of time with the three of them. One day, while her daughters are at Sunday school, Irene yields to Hal's advances and makes love with him on the living room couch. Their passionate affair continues in secret thereafter. Irene begins spending less time with her daughters and soon notices that they are growing progressively cold and distant. Her youngest child, Debbie, becomes particularly sassy and frequently stays out late without telling her mother where she is going. Irene's motherly dismay deepens when her eldest daughter, Barbara, elopes with her hard-working boyfriend rather than have a family wedding. Finally, one day, Barbara confronts her mother with the news that she and Debbie have known about the affair with Hal all along; in fact, they came home early from Sunday school on the fateful day that began the affair and saw her with Hal *in flagrante delicto* on the couch. Furthermore, everyone in town knows about the affair and the two girls have endured snide comments from schoolmates for years. Barbara also informs Irene that Debbie was particularly devastated by the discovery:

"I was older—I could take it better. But Debbie was at the age when you're either made or broken. Ever since—well, she's never thought she was much good, because she was your daughter. So she's associated with crummy kids like Art Collins." ("Love on the sly" 1957:128)

Irene is stunned by this turn of events, and just a few minutes later realizes that Debbie has run off with Art, a worthless reform-school graduate. Determined to try to save her daughter, Irene tracks the runaway couple to a seedy hotel, then confronts them, addressing her daughter first:

"Don't—don't ruin your life for the sake of revenge, Debbie. Think what you please about me—I deserve it—but don't throw yourself away on this—this punk!"

"What right have you got to criticize Art? Debbie shrieked. She thrust a piece of paper in my face; it was a marriage license. "At least I'm going to get married. That's more than you can say!"

Art swaggered over. "Yeah," he said, "How come you're so particular all of a sudden?" I supposed I deserved it, a remark like that from a

creature like him, but all at once I'd had all the humiliation I could take in one day. I slapped him across the mouth. He knotted up his fist and would have hit me if Debbie hadn't intervened—a Debbie who looked at her would-be husband with shocked eyes.

“Get your things,” I ordered.

“No,” she said—but she looked a little uncertain. “I'm going to marry him.”

“Are you?” I looked the boy over. I'd seen his kind before: boaster, ladies' man, bully—till his bluff was called. “Are you, Debbie? Tell me, Mr. Collins, since when is a parolee allowed to marry?”

Debbie whirled toward him, her jaw dropping. She began to laugh hysterically. “Isn't that funny, Mother? Then I'd really have been my mother's daughter!” (“Love on the sly” 1957:118)

Having pulled her daughter back from the brink of disaster, Irene ends her affair with Hal and struggles to restore Debbie's self-respect:

It took two full years to win her back—years of painful readjustment to my role as a mother. [Debbie] won't throw herself away now, and my reform has enabled her to hold up her head a little more. But she'll never entirely forgive me, and neither will Barbara; they can't—no child can forgive a mother for the kind of shame I brought them...

But I'm fighting my way back. Yesterday, when Barbara was here for a visit with her baby, she gave me a hug and a kiss and said, "I'm proud of my mother."

And just this morning, Debbie flashed me a grin that sent me flying back through the years to when she was thirteen; it's that long since I'd seen it. If I can help the two of them push that one hideous moment into the backs of their minds, then all that I've suffered over Hal will have been worthwhile. (“Love on the sly” 1957:119)

The story illustrates the dramatic damage that a mother's moral flaws can inflict on her children. Characteristically, Debbie's vulnerability appears as deficient self-respect. In just the same way that a man without self-confidence will be unable to maintain a successful career, so a woman without faith in herself will squander her virtue and “throw herself away” on an unworthy man.

Reflecting back on Harold Brodkey's comment that Carolyn Hazelip sees her family and friends as “an ocean of people, talking, quarreling, often surprised by how contagious love and hatred are and how kindness seems to spread widening ripples” (Brodkey 1957:32), we can see that, by virtue of its emotional and moral interconnection, the family is also profoundly vulnerable to moral pollution. This is all the more so when the mother/wife, the very heart of the family, has compromised herself.

Along these lines, the *Redbook* story about an abortive engagement which I cited earlier suggests that unhappy relationships between husband and wife cannot but hurt their children. “I Wish I’d Never Laid Eyes on Tony” ends with the protagonist, Faith, getting consolation from her father about her decision to break the engagement. Falling in love has made her more womanly, her father tells her. And when Faith wonders whether she might have been able to make a happy home despite her husband’s flaws, he answers that she could not ultimately have shielded her children from the repercussions of a troubled marriage to an irresponsible man:

“Do you think I was foolish, Dad? Do you suppose I could have taken care, managed to fall in line and not fret and worry?” she finished.

“I think you probably could have made yourself fall in line,” he said finally, “being the kind of girl you are, but you’d have fretted and worried inside, and that isn’t good. But there’s something else, too. You wouldn’t always be the only one involved. If you still feel the way you always have, there’d be three or four youngsters in an appropriate amount of time.”

Her eyes watered again because she could see them—little stepping stones, all the image of Tony.

“And what of them, Faith? That discontent you spoke of, oozing out in unexpected places. They’d know all about it—kids sense more than you’d ever suspect—and I don’t think you could just stand by and watch it do funny things to them. So I’d say you were very wise, although it probably hurts now,” he added gently. (Beliveau 1957:80)

A woman’s unhappiness with her husband is likely to “ooz[e] out in unexpected places,” and damage a mother’s relationship with her children, Faith’s father suggests. In the interconnected moral universe of the family, unhappiness in one place—particularly in the woman who forms its heart—is bound to leak out and pollute the entire entity.

Margaret Mead and Rhoda Metraux, in their mid-century study of French culture, remark that the French think of the family in terms of a series of dyadic relationships: between father and daughter, mother and daughter, daughter and son, and so on (Métraux and Mead 2001 [1954]). On my first reading of the book, I remember being puzzled by this characterization. Of course a family is composed of dyadic relationships, I thought to myself. Is that not just a mathematical tautology? But behind their assertion, I now realize, is a counterfactual from American culture: the assumption that a mother provides the family’s moral unity. In American magazines during the 1950s, problems in any relationship involving the mother and wife, will tend to compromise the soundness of the whole family.

The nightmarish story “Love on the Sly” illustrates another characteristic cultural assumption that can be found in 1950s American women’s magazines: the sexual sins of women are particularly damning. In “Love on the Sly,” an illicit affair almost destroys a

widow's children. In "Guilty wife: Dare I confess my shame?", a woman named Lissa Jackson is tormented by her extra-marital affair despite the fact that no one discovers it ("Guilty wife: Dare I confess my shame?" 1957). The background to Lissa's troubled marriage is that she has been poorly brought up by her Southern mother, who taught her that pleasing a man is all that matters and that one's moral character does not. Deprived of proper maternal guidance, Lissa lets herself be lured into an affair with a manager at her workplace. She eventually ends the affair and then falls hard for Bob Nalor, marrying him and giving birth to a son. While Bob is away on occupation duty in Germany, his letters home grow sparse, and Lissa becomes lonely and desperate enough to give in to another tryst with her former manager. Bob finally returns and takes Lissa and their son to North Dakota. The move and their marriage are a disaster. It turns out that Bob lied about having a farm of his own when courting her, and the couple must live with Bob's parents on the family farm. Bob is verbally cruel to her, drinks too much, is jealous of their infant son, and even begins hurting his wife physically. After a climactic argument in which she says she is ashamed to be married to him and throws her wedding ring at him, Bob begins beating her furiously. Lissa escapes into the wintry cold and faints just as Bob reaches her. When Lissa awakes in the hospital, Bob is begging for forgiveness. He confesses that he began having an affair with a woman while away on duty in Germany, and hurt her out of his feelings of worthlessness and out of a fear of losing her. Finally, Lissa's hidden shame comes spilling out in sobs:

I began talking, and I told him all about Edward—our affair before our marriage, and our one night after I'd taken my vows. It wasn't easy, but I knew if I didn't confess everything to him now, there could be nothing between us—ever. 'So you see,' I finished bitterly, 'I'm not the lady you thought I was. I'm not even a decent girl! I'm a tramp, Bob.'

My husband's face was drained of color now, his face haggard. 'This is pretty rough to take,' he muttered. 'The very thought of you in another man's arms makes me—sick. But who am I to sit in judgment of you, because you made mistakes? At least, I can look at you now, without wanting to crawl for my own sins.'

'Can't you see *I'm* the one who's crawling?' I flung at him hysterically. 'What you did was nothing compared to the hideous things I did.' I broke off, shaking. ("Guilty wife: Dare I confess my shame?" 1957:129)

The two forgive one another and reconcile, and the story ends happily.

What should we make of Lissa's histrionic claim that her sins were *worse* than her husband's? After all, he has lied to her about his financial fortunes, had an adulterous affair, resented his wife's affection for their own son, let himself slip into alcoholism, and been physically abusive. In contrast, she has had a pre-marital affair and a single lapse after marriage. To some degree, her exaggerated contrition is part of the masochistic

one-upsmanship characteristic of this sort of exchange of confessions. After all, her husband does the same thing by downplaying her wayward acts as “mistakes” while calling his own “sins.” And the narrator does characterize her final eruption of self-reproach “hysterical.”

Yet, I think the implied narrator of this story does see something of an equivalency between the aggregated faults of the two spouses. The first reason for the unequal standard of blame being applied to husband and wife in this story is to be found in the introduction to the story:

The night Bob Nalor proposed to me was the night I should have told him the truth. Maybe not everything I'd done before I'd ever dreamed someone like him would come along—but at least about me, myself—the kind of a girl I really was inside. If I had, maybe all the bad things that happened to us later wouldn't have happened. With everything understood and out in the open in my own mixed-up mind, I might have been strong enough to be a good wife, even when the going was rough. And Bob—he'd have been different, too—because he would have known that the girl he loved was a human being, with faults and weaknesses just like anybody else, not the plaster saint he thought I was—and felt he must live up to. ("Guilty wife: Dare I confess my shame?" 1957:49)

Lissa's early sins prevent her from playing her wifely redemptive role. She is unable to be “strong enough to be a good wife, even when the going [is] rough” in part because she lacks the moral authority to confront her husband for his faults, to get to the bottom of the flaws in their relationship and lovingly to demand better behavior on his part. Her guilty sin makes her unable to exercise true moral strength.

A second reason that Lissa's extramarital affair appears so “hideous” to her is that sexual sin is just more unacceptable in women than in men. Recall that the hero of “Flash From an Old Flame” does not apologize to his wife for his infidelity when he returns to her. He just chooses to stay with her and love her, and that is relief enough both for his wife and for the intended reader of the story (Peeples 1957).

Like “Flash From an Old Flame,” “Every Boy Should Have a Father” also implies that husbands who stray are in part the fault of wives who do too little to accommodate them emotionally. Toward the end of this story, Joe, who divorced Helena ten years previously, returns. Throughout the story, we have seen Helena struggle with the task of restraining their son, who is very like his father in both his charm and his waywardness:

“The Wynant men seldom stay home evenings,” Helena said.

“Maybe,” Joe said sternly, “they need to be housebroken. Maybe they need a pleasant home where nobody nags at them a good deal about things that really don't matter—a friendly home. Maybe they'd learn to stay.”

(St. Johns 1957:110)

Helena realizes that her ex-husband is right, and by the end of the story, it is clear to the reader that the couple, now older and wiser, will reconcile.

In conclusion, American women bear a huge and poorly-bounded burden of responsibility in the domestic sphere. They are accountable in similar ways for their husbands' and children's emotional well-being, in particular by defending their loved ones' all important faith in themselves. The emotional well-being of the home is organic in character; problems and sins spill over from one relationship or person to another.

American men's responsibilities in the home

One implication of this last assumption is that men's relationships with their children depend heavily on their relationships with their wives. Two stories provide examples of husbands who go from being hostile to their children to model fathers after their troubled marital relationship improves ("Guilty wife: Dare I confess my shame?" 1957:129; "Give my man a chance!" 1957:137). American men's role in the family, aside from being a breadwinner, is partly in dispensing discipline, especially to older boys. Helena Wynant in "Every Boy Should Have a Father" is unable to control her teenage son on her own (St. Johns 1957) and the lawyer hero of "The Full Years" is informed by his wife on returning home from work that his adolescent son has been caught smoking cigarettes. He deals ably with the problem by reminding his son that smoking will hurt his athletic performance (Holder 1957:102). In "13's For Trouble," as we have seen, the father reprimands his young teenage daughter for trying cigarettes, but this story should not be taken as indicating a norm, since its entire point is to emphasize how badly the mother/narrator has defaulted on her parenting responsibilities.

In general, it seems that American men's major affective responsibility in the home, beyond the aforementioned ones, is to love and support their wives. Just as a wife must reinforce her husband and children's faith in themselves, a good husband does the same for his wife. Except in rather extraordinary cases of a wife's default on her maternal responsibilities, men often reserve their personal judgments about important matters in the domestic sphere. Thus, in "Gift Beyond Price," Gail Hartley discusses with her husband a speech she must give that night:

"Will you be serious for a minute?" she asked. "Ray, tonight's the night I have to speak."

He bowed slightly in her direction. "Our guest speaker this evening, that world famous emancipator of women, Mrs. Ray Hartley."

"I am not an emancipator of women."

He raised his eyebrows. "But you're going to proclaim the value of women in the modern world. Surely, you're going to free them of housework in your talk and give them higher, nobler aims."

She knew he was laughing at her, but she didn't join in the laughter. "Do you think cooking and cleaning are very important when people are

dying all over the world? Don't you think there are great things for women to do?"

The amusement died out of his face. "Do you?" he said.

"I don't know, but there ought to be something big that women could do, some way to change the world."

He opened his mouth as though he would say something, and then he closed it again. He stood up and came over to her and tilted back her head. "Think about it all day," he said. "You'll know what to say when the time comes. You'll know what women ought to do to change the world."

He was serious, and she knew he was. His kiss on her mouth was warm and sweet. "I love you," he said. How many times had he said it? A thousand times? A million? But it always came like a blessing, like something lovely and forever new.

"I love you too," she said. (Henderson 1957:74)

The story shows Ray's answer to Gail to be wise. After a day spent caring for her sometimes exasperating but loving children, Gail realizes that her "job" of bringing up children is indeed the most important job in the world. Ray does not need to tell Gail of this; he has full faith that she will perceive this truth on her own. The story closes with Gail beginning her PTA speech:

At last the president introduced her, and Gail stood up with panic churning in her.

She wet her lips, and then she caught Ray's eyes. They were warm and shining, confident and proud...Gail drew a deep breath, because she knew now what she was going to say. Her hands grew still, and she laid the gloves on the desk. She was going to tell them what every woman ought to do, what every woman had to do to bring peace and understanding to a troubled world.

She looked directly at Ray. I love you, she thought.

"A woman should make a home," Gail began and knew a great certainty in her heart. (Henderson 1957:76)

Husbands and wives thus draw strength from each other's faith in them when facing self-doubt in their own sphere of responsibility. Just as wives support husbands' self-confidence as they build a career, so husbands should lend wives the love and support they need to be good mothers.

Another tale, a "true story" about an infertile couple that shelters a pregnant teenage girl and plans to adopt her baby when she gives birth, also illustrates American men's ideal role in the home. Jim has just been moved by his firm, and he worries whether Edie will be comfortable in their new location. She allays his fears by saying:

"It will be perfect," I said aloud, as though making a pledge to Jim.

He pulled my head down to his shoulder. “You make it perfect, Edie. You always have.” There was a fierce reassurance in his lips as they found mine. The forgiveness he’d given so immediately, so wholeheartedly, when I’d first told him why we could never have a child of our own—it was there in that kiss. (“Baby machine: That’s all this pitiful girl meant to me” 1957:67)

She reveals to the narrator that when a sixteen-year-old foster child, she was seduced by a married man who was a friend of her foster family, then lost her fertility in a botched illicit abortion. The story itself gets underway when the couple takes in Marilyn, a teenage girl who got pregnant and was chased out of her home by an unforgiving mother. Marilyn’s sad history recapitulates American understandings of a mother’s critical influence on her daughter. Edie recounts that:

[A]s [Marilyn] talked, the picture that I saw was of a lonely, neglected girl, innocent, troubled, not even knowing how unhappy she’d been or how tragically her mother had failed her.

“I was really glad when she got married again,” she told me in her earnest way one afternoon. “It wasn’t as if I resented Uncle Fred. I kept forgetting to call him Dad, like he wanted, but after a while it came easier because he was good to me. Always giving me something extra besides my allowance, buying me nice things—those suitcases with my initials and the gold bracelet you like so much. But he was never around much. Not to talk to. And Mother—“ I dreaded her mother coming into the conversation. “After she got married again, Mother just disappeared from me. I can’t explain it. She never was there when I wanted anything. She never had time. Not even about important things. She was always talking about Uncle Fred’s job and how that gave her a ‘position.’ I don’t think Uncle Fred cared, but she did. It was more important to her than I was...” (“Baby machine: That’s all this pitiful girl meant to me” 1957:81)

The central moral drama of the story unfolds as Edie prepares for the baby’s birth and for Marilyn’s subsequent departure and tries to resist her growing attachment to Marilyn herself. At one point, she is sitting on the porch, talking with her husband.

Jim touched my hand. “In some ways I think you’ve almost saved that girl’s life, Edie. When I think how she was—and when I look at her now—it’s not the same girl!”

“I was fighting for something important,” I said softly. “To bring that baby out safe and strong.”

Jim glanced at me rather strangely. “Well,” he said after a silence, “whatever it is, she owes you a lot.”

I laughed. “How can she owe me anything when she’s giving *me* a child?” (“Baby machine: That’s all this pitiful girl meant to me” 1957:130)

The reader knows the reason for Jim's strange glance and momentary silence: he is wondering whether she really is as purely self-interested in her treatment of Marilyn as she says she is. He holds his tongue, however.

The story takes a dark turn at this point. Marilyn gives birth to a stillborn baby, and Edie's hopes for a chance at motherhood are crushed. Still, Edie instinctively reaches out to Marilyn in loving sympathy. In the face of Marilyn's self-reproach that "I failed you, too. I couldn't even do it right for you. I brought you misery, too" ("Baby machine: That's all this pitiful girl meant to me" 1957:130), Edie tells her:

"I only care about your getting well, darling... It's you that matters... [I]t will be easier for you this way. You can go back and start clean, without ever being tempted to look back." ("Baby machine: That's all this pitiful girl meant to me" 1957:130)

It is at this moment that Edie finally comprehends Marilyn's greatest fear—that she will have to return to her loveless home. Edie reflects that Marilyn herself is the child she has been longing to love and nurture. Her reflection on the subject is worth quoting as an illustration of the powerful element of retrospective rationalization inherent in American thinking about happiness:

I'd wanted a baby, with a tag on it: *Here is happiness, guaranteed*. But what was the use of suffering, of growing up, if you didn't at least learn that in all that is around you, there is always something that can be seen for the happiness it is, if you look with your heart? ("Baby machine: That's all this pitiful girl meant to me" 1957:131)

So Edie promises Marilyn that she can stay if she wants. Marilyn replies:

"But you wanted a baby—"

"I wanted a family." I put my lips to her forehead, like a seal on a contract. "Ever since you've been here, that's what we've been." I heard Jim's heavy footsteps coming up, and a smile started in my heart and spread a warming glow all through me. *We've been a family....* That night on the porch came back to me. And I wondered if Jim hadn't seen that long before me... if he hadn't felt what the three of us could mean to one another.

Standing in the doorway, I told him in one sentence what had happened, watching the worn grief give way to astonishment and then, slowly, to the same glow that filled my heart... [H]e bent down and kissed her gently and said, "I hoped for this, Marilyn. We'll take good care of you. Don't worry—just get well. And... welcome home." ("Baby machine: That's all this pitiful girl meant to me" 1957:131)

Jim leaves the decision about whether Marilyn should remain with them entirely up to Edie. He clearly has been contemplating it for a while, but was unwilling to bring it up explicitly. We could read this as indicating that Jim defers to his wife to initiate major

domestic decisions, ratifying them and providing her with the emotional support needed to follow through on them *post facto*. On a more cautionary note, this may be an instance where the formal demands of narrative are skewing the evidence: it is much more dramatic to have this crucial decision come as a spontaneous realization late in the story, when it can furnish as a narrative and moral climax. Still, the story is suggestive: it may be that American men are generally expected to leave the initiative for domestic decisions in the hands of their wives.

French men and women in the domestic sphere

French stories tend to indicate less of a stark separation of spheres than seems normative in the American case. As we have seen, French women's magazines regard their men's devotion to their careers with jealousy; they are suspicious that too much involvement with work will distract men from their domestic commitments. Nor are women expected to make a highly consequential and morally charged choice between work and motherhood. This makes French magazine discourse about men's and women's role in the domestic sphere somewhat thin and un-dramatic. There is one major exception to this generalization, however. French magazines are keenly interested in the topic of marital infidelity. So extensive is French discourse on the subject that it deserves its own examination under a separate heading. I postpone this discussion until after my exploration of the traits which are portrayed as attractive and repulsive in men and women in the two contrasting cultural contexts. The reason for this is that the peculiar French preoccupation with infidelity is easier to understand once we have a grasp of their erotic ideals.

VIRILE VIRTUES: IDEALS OF MASCULINITY

Some historical background: mixité and galanterie

English and American travelers in France and French observers comparing their own society to others have long observed that there is something distinctive about the way French men and women—particularly elite men and women—interact with one another. The first observation they have made is that adult men and women continue to converse and socialize intensively in sex-mixed groups, even after marriage. We can call this, in shorthand, *mixité*, though the French term refers more broadly to a purely demographic parity between males and females in a given institutional setting.¹² The second distinctive element of France's gender culture is *galanterie*: an ethic that takes masculine pride in the ability to honor and please women in an inventive way.

Mona Ozouf, a French historian who originally made her name writing about women during the Revolution, describes the tradition of *mixité* in her "Essay on French Singularity" (Ozouf 1997). She cites David Hume's observation during his travels in France that "men and women associated in all circumstances of life" (Ozouf 1997:229). Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Laurence Sterne each commented on the same phenomenon. Voltaire "judg[ed] peoples that confine women unsociable, and [saw] French courtesy as

¹² Thus, *mixité* can serve as a synonym for coeducation.

an unprecedented refinement produced by the reciprocal education of men and women” (Ozouf 1997:235). Alexis de Tocqueville spends four chapters of *Democracy in America* contrasting the mores of American and French women. He remarks upon the great respect accorded by Americans to the institution of marriage and praises the way independent-minded American girls withdraw entirely into the domestic sphere once they are wed. By contrast, he writes, the tradition of family match-making has long sapped the moral authority of marriage in France, and French wives’ continued involvement in social life affords them ample opportunity for extra-marital affairs (Tocqueville 2002 [1840]). Ozouf remarks that Hippolyte Taine made the same observation when contrasting England and France (Ozouf 1997:256). Writing in 1919, novelist Edith Wharton also notes the French pattern of unabated cross-sex sociability even after marriage. In contrast to Tocqueville, however, Wharton sees this as a great advantage for French civilization as a whole (Wharton 1919). In sum, historical testimony suggests that there has been a long tradition of unusually active cross-sex sociability in France as compared to America and Britain.

For more insight into the second distinctive element of French gender culture, *galanterie*, we can turn to Claude Habib’s study, *Galanterie Française* (Habib 2006). Habib dedicates her book on *galanterie* to Mona Ozouf, and in many ways, she is continuing Ozouf’s project of describing the “French singularity” in gender relations. Habib’s account of *galanterie* is quite extraordinarily sophisticated, one of the more sure-footed and nuanced accounts of cultural particularity that I have read. She traces the origins of *galanterie* to the court of Louis XIV. This is how she characterizes the phenomenon:

The ephemeral is [*galanterie*’s] element: compliments are the invention of an instant. Contrary to the author who composes at leisure, the gallant improvises: the street and the staircase have different spirits... In Paris... it is on-the-spot that one must find a way of expressing to a stranger the impression that she has made. But here the art is in getting her to accept the homage: that is to say, to please her in letting her know that she gives pleasure... The only no-no is to displease when the goal is seduction... As with ping-pong, where it is impossible to play well unless you have a good opponent, improvisation depends on mutual understanding and expresses it. This game, ceaselessly interrupted and restarted, develops a good-natured erotic spirit which varies according to the day, the season, and the year. (Habib 2006:19-20)

Habib writes that *galanterie* is inherently competitive, being an effort to best one’s male rivals in the eyes of women (Habib 2006:35). Habib acknowledges the often ambiguous character of *galanterie*: “protests against the cruelty of women is a sort of praise—because to pretend that one is suffering is to pretend that one loves. Inversely, professions of admiration often conceal mockery.” *Galanterie* involves a “flair for

insolence and sweetness” (Habib 2006:45) beneath a steady outward display of deference to women. This may be what Tocqueville is referring to when he comments that:

It has often been remarked that in Europe a certain scorn is disclosed in the very midst of the flatteries that men lavish on women: although the European often makes himself the slave of woman, one sees that he never sincerely believes her his equal. (Tocqueville 2002 [1840]:575)

Galanterie is a subtle and ambiguous phenomenon. On the one hand, it represents a clear victory for women, since under the auspices of a regime of *galanterie*, they are able to demand outwardly deferent and flattering behavior from men and can freely enjoy mixed company. On the other hand, it can disguise underlying inequalities by outwardly palliating them.

Habib clearly harbors an affection for the gentleness and sense of play involved in *galanterie*, but also recognizes that this way of ordering cross-gender interactions is not without costs. Her simultaneously appreciative and critical approach to *galanterie* is atypical of feminist critiques of French gender relations. Many feminists, both Americans and French scholars who have been more profoundly influenced by American feminism, tend to mistrust accounts of “French singularity” in gender relationships. They tend to claim that the alleged *douceur* of male-female interactions in France is little more than a comforting mythology that helps suppress feminist criticism of the status quo (Saguy 2003; Ezekiel 2002; Bard 1999; Louis 1999; Fassin 1999).

What does the magazine evidence suggest? Do we find any trace of different expectations across cultural lines for how men and women should interact? The short answer is yes. Both at the level of explicit advice and argument and at the level of fictional portrayal, we can see different ideals of attractive *masculine* behavior at work in French and American women’s magazines.

French ideals of masculinity in advice columns

Marie-Claire stands out from other women’s magazines of the period in its explicit provision of advice to men. Three of the magazine’s first five issues of 1957 contain advice targeted at men. A January article entitled “When You Make Your Wife Yawn” admonishes husbands to take care that they make engaging conversation with their spouses. “Beware, husbands!” the article begins:

- 1) First, don’t always repeat the same things—gestures, words, manias or hobby-horses—in front of your wife, because they bore her.
- 2) Know that for a psychiatrist, as well as for that witness of every moment who is your wife, each one of the favorite phrases you trot out possesses a hidden meaning. Read the following table; it will help you better understand and correct yourself.” (“Quand vous faites bailler Madame” 1957:85)

The “translation table” is worth reproducing in full for the piquancy and revealing character of its criticisms.

“If you often say:”	“She will think that you are:”
In '40, at the head of my men... My time in military service, those were the good days...	Not active, fearful in the face of action. Egocentric, dominating and indecisive. Nostalgically in love with the past.
In France, there are too many female functionaries in the administration. Women are meant to work at home and not in a ministry.	Utopian, misogynist, a domestic tyrant, without great ambition or particularly broad-minded ideas.
Confidentially, my dear, the U.S.S.R, the U.S.A., etc... The council president was saying to me just yesterday evening...	Wanting to be brilliant, to be taken for a deep thinker. Naïve, or authoritarian, wishing to dominate or vanquish.
Give me a steering-wheel, and I'll go from Paris to Nice in eight hours...	Conscious of your inferiority, a dreamer, imaginative, but without initiative and without physical energy to act and react.
My employees adore me, and yet, I am firm with them!	A sentimental failure, whether you have succeeded in business in the past or whether you are vegetating in your current position.
If I had been in Humez's place, I would have given an uppercut with my right in the third round.	Presumptuous, and perhaps a bit vulgar. But, on the contrary, very good, generous and enthusiastic.
I get an extra 10 kilometers an hour by grinding down my gaskets and by changing the input pipes	Uncaring [<i>indifférent</i>], without imagination or tenderness, and incapable of efforts at comprehension.
I don't know whether I've told you the extraordinary story of what happened to me on the 15 th of April in 1925.	Without originality and a little infantile, since nothing significant has happened to you since that event.

The chart illustrates all the various ways in which a man's conversation, when designed to serve his male vanity, instead backfires and makes him undesirable in the eyes of women. There is an interpretive ambiguity here that is endemic to this sort of material. On one hand, the piece implies that men's wives don't typically tell their husbands exactly what they think of them. Only by reading the magazine piece can a husband learn how his wife sees him. Is this evidence of feminine subjugation, then? Perhaps. (To get a more nuanced grasp on this question, we will need to examine what French

discourse about infidelity has to do with French models of marriage.) But it also suggests that most men feel accountable to an expectation that they should be pleasing and attractive in their interactions with their wives. The incentive giving force to this expectation might simply be a husband's love for his wife and his desire for her approval. It might also involve a fear that she will fall in love with another, more attractive man, though this threat is not made explicit in the article. Most of all, though, we sense from the article's tone of ridicule that the husband's masculine honor, his self-respect as a man who knows how to charm a woman, is at stake.

With the aid of Habib's discussion of *galanterie*, we can see that women have a powerful social resource with which to oppose sexist bullying. Sexist criticisms of women in high government posts are not only ideologically retrograde but also deeply unattractive. Being tyrannical or dominating is one of the recurring negative qualifiers here. Habib tells us in her analysis of Molière's *L'École des Femmes* that this play signaled a crucial move in the 17th century *galant* revision of masculine honor in France. The play replaces mockery of the man who allows his wife enough liberty to risk being cuckolded by mockery of the ridiculous tyrant who is hoist on his own petard, driving his wife to adultery by his own masculine brand of hysteria (Habib 2006:58ff). This formula turned masculine honor on its head, making tyranny over women a symptom of weakness and of insufficient generosity, generosity being a key hallmark of aristocratic honor. Men who dominate their wives may never be told as much to their face, but they must fear that they are secretly despised.

This rein on sexism involves no appeal to women's rights or even, at an explicit level, to the essential equality of men and women. Rather, it appeals to a specific interpretation of masculine honor, a version of masculine honor which requires feminine ratification. Did this understanding of masculinity have any actual purchase with French men during the 1950s? Was it respected beyond a rarified elite? The answer to the second question, as we shall see, is affirmative; we can find traces of *galant* masculinity in the lower-class French women's magazines of the period. The answer to the first question is somewhat harder to answer given my data, but the broader historical evidence suggests that it had considerable force prior to this period, and in general it is hard to believe that such a widespread demand among women for a particular brand of masculinity would be easy for men to ignore—or, for that matter, for women to sustain without substantial masculine complicity.

Proceeding with *Marie-Claire's* explicit advice for men, then, we come to a two-part series by Louise de Vilmorin on the art of pleasing women. The first article is entitled "Pour les hommes (et les femmes aussi) : Messieurs qui voulez plaire," and recounts the author's first "coup de foudre," i.e., the moment when she first was first thunderstruck by a man. She begins by describing a dinner-time conversation with friends about the distinction between seducers and seductive men [*seducteurs et... hommes séduisants*]. This is not a distinction without a difference, she insists:

the difference between them is very large since, if one can caricature a seducer, it is impossible to make fun of one of those charming men who are not acrobats but rather jugglers, often unconscious jugglers of our dreams. (Vilmorin 1957a:48)

Characteristically, we can see the incentive of distinction in the eyes of women and the sanction of ridicule at work in this evaluation of masculine behavior.

Despite Vilmorin's unmistakable preference for the "*homme séduisant*" over the mere "*séducteur*," the latter at least has the virtue of being entertaining to women.

In contrast to a female friend of mine who has only disdain for them, I have always been interested by seducers. She often told me: "How could you spend an evening with that man? He pays court to anyone!" [I replied] "why should he not pay court to me then?" (Vilmorin 1957b:51)

The author is not above being entertained by a man, even if he is rather indiscriminate in his attentions.

When it comes to the true "*homme séduisant*," however, Vilmorin ascends to a much more lyrical plane. She describes in nearly sacred terms the captain who visited her family house near the Spanish border when she was a young woman of seventeen:

Jean de Lattre was a supremely seductive man. His charm did not reside only in his facial features, since traits are not attractions [*les traits ne font pas les attraits*], but in the ensemble of his person and of his manner of being, which never, ever made us ill at ease. (Vilmorin 1957a:48)

She goes on to note diverse details of his self-presentation: his step, his look, his voice, and their perfect accord with his "brown tweed vest, his grey flannel pants and his foulard cravat." Neither his conversation nor his clothes ever seemed affected or copied. Above all, he was the model of self-assurance and ease (Vilmorin 1957a:48). Vilmorin concludes her description of the wonderful Jean de Lattre de Tassigny with the assertion that:

A man who is not a poet can try to come close to poetry by learning to express himself in verse, a man deprived of seductiveness can try to ape a seducer, but the charm of a seductive man is perfectly inimitable and indescribable. (Vilmorin 1957a:49)

This makes the link between the ideal of an "*homme séduisant*" and aristocratic comportment quite clear. An utterly charming man is a kind of rare, almost supernatural being whose perfection of manner can never be "aped" by inferior men. Vilmorin describes some of the details which make up de Lattre's perfection, details of clothing and bearing.¹³ In her second article about how to please women, Vilmorin elaborates on

¹³ Toward the end of the article, Vilmorin also describes spying Maurice Herzog from afar and, though unaware of his celebrity, being captivated by his "willowy" frame, his navy blue suit, white linens and black necktie, and the note of something romantic and pure in his bearing (Vilmorin 1957a:51). Once again, we see the importance of being well dressed, slender and elegant. These qualities, which to an American eye would look rather feminine, are central to what Vilmorin finds attractive in a man.

the importance of detail in a man's dress by telling the story of a friend who fell passionately in love with the head of a bank agency one evening, but fell out of love with him just as quickly when, the following day, he appeared to meet her and her friends with an ugly coat:

Everything is a sign which reveals something: a detail of clothing is one as much as is a word and, just as a word can be fatal to sentiment, so a coat can commit an indiscretion which derails love and legitimates a break-up. (Vilmorin 1957b:51)

Talk about the importance of distinction!

Nevertheless, Vilmorin argues that being *séduisant* is not a matter of snobbery. "Pretension has always terrified me and simplicity has always seduced me. Being simple shows that you are not afraid of yourself" (Vilmorin 1957a:49). A man who is not comfortable with himself risks overcompensating by adopting an air of forced flippancy, which is gauche and insulting to the woman he is accompanying:

The man who is not sure of himself never knows what to do with his hands and so, in order to give himself an air of ease, enters a restaurant with both hands in his pockets. One hand is already not good, but both is frightful; worse than that, it is common, and nothing is less flattering to a woman who attracts glances thanks to the elegance or grace of her allure than appearing with an escort who has a feeble, disdainful, or blasé air. There is something in their way of carrying themselves that is compromising for the woman who accompanies them and their false assurance only illustrates their discomfort and lack of ease. (Vilmorin 1957a:49)

The main purpose of a man's ease of manner is to make a woman comfortable, not to prove the unassailability of his own ego. Elegant manners have nothing to do with affectation or insincerity, stipulates Vilmorin. In this vein, she argues that men should not be ashamed to let fall a tear or two when they feel strong emotion:

I declare that, when I am at the cinema or the theater, when the drama is a moving one, my neighbor reassures and charms me by blowing his nose heartily. I think to myself, "Now, there's a man with a real heart." (Vilmorin 1957a:50)

Vilmorin testifies to the tears shed in her presence by Duff Cooper, the British ambassador in 1945, and on another occasion by Winston Churchill himself. Whether this is a way of affirming that even gentlemen from the land of the "stiff upper lip" know how to express their sincere emotion or if it is just an opportunity to drop names, or both, we can only guess. But it illustrates her point that a real man is not afraid to shed a tear or two.

In summary, being an *homme séduisant* is a difficult, even virtuosic achievement. There is something of a parallel between the strenuous virtues required of American

women and the exigent demands on French men who wish to please women properly. Vilmorin's ideally *séduisant* man is slender, well dressed, emotionally expressive, and unfailingly engaging in conversation. In the American context, these tend to be more characteristically feminine virtues. The *homme séduisant* is neither a "strong, silent type" nor a smoldering volcano of barely-restrained masculine violence. Rather, he is a cultivated individual who radiates a balance of energy and gentleness, who manages to entertain and put women at their ease without visible effort.

Taking a step back from the advice pieces I have cited, it might be objected that Vilmorin is but a single author. The "When You Make Your Wife Yawn" article which I cited is anonymously authored, but appears in the same magazine. Are we not at risk of imputing general cultural significance to the fancies of an aging aristocrat? As my research from the 2000s indicates, the basic orientation of French masculinity toward pleasing women persists up to the present. This suggests that, while some of Vilmorin's more extravagant claims might not be taken seriously by a modern French reader, contemporary women's magazines expect men to be just as eager to please women as their mid-century forbears were.

French and American ideals of masculinity in fiction

Let us consider the fictional portrayal of men in American and French magazines. In a short span of time, short story authors must introduce their characters in a way that is engaging and, if the story has a romantic theme, must show why the hero and heroine are attractive. This makes short fiction a good place to see in distilled form the kinds of traits that are considered attractive in a given culture.

Stories in women's magazines tend to give the reader more information about what makes men attractive to women than vice versa. Since stories are more often than not narrated from the woman's point of view, this is perhaps not too surprising. Still, I confess that I did not fully anticipate this when I began my sample of women's magazines. In part, this is because previous scholars have never used women's magazines to evaluate expectations of masculinity.

This windfall of evidence about norms for male behavior comes with a caveat, of course. The portraits of attractive men which we see in these magazines are framed for female consumption, though they are sometimes authored by men. It is possible that depictions of masculinity for a male audience would differ substantially. Nevertheless, this would not alter the cross-national contrast described here in depictions of normative masculinity as it is perceived by women.

The authors of stories in American and French magazines typically describe their heroes as combining masculine vigor with a certain measure of gentleness (especially toward the heroine). This similarity conceals a great deal of difference, however. The amount of attention and detail devoted to the elaboration of these two desirable traits in American and French stories is starkly different.

French descriptions of men tend to note men's virility briefly and blandly, seldom adducing much evidence for the trait. French heroes' gentleness and sympathy with women tends to be more highly elaborated, often being demonstrated with quite eloquent displays of empathy and respect or even reverence for women. Furthermore, the narrators of French stories are nervous about admiring men's capacity for violence.

American stories go to greater lengths to establish the vigor of their heroes' virility. Romantic heroes are usually described as large, physically imposing men. A quite astonishing proportion of them are football players. American heroes are not expected to be highly articulate in demonstrating their affection for women. Nor are they expected to evince reverence for women. Instead, a man often signals his affection for a woman by playfully belittling her. In a gesture that is almost as much a cliché as the former-football-hero motif in American stories, the leading man will often tip back his lady's chin and look her in the face. This displays the man's physical dominance and his affection for the woman simultaneously. Heroes also manhandle women in other ways; for their part, women find this endearing and even reassuring (provided of course that they are attracted to the man in question). These assertions of male dominance seem built into the courtship process in American stories. They establish and reinforce the attraction between men and women; indeed, they are often sought out by women as signs of men's preference for them. In stories which feature stable married relationships, these sorts of displays of male dominance are rarer, reinforcing the conclusion that they are linked to courtship.

Séduisant or not? French masculinity in fiction

Let us now turn directly to the evidence. My first example of an attractive French man is drawn from *Nous Deux*, a weekly with a massive circulation during this period which publishes romance stories for a largely working-class readership. The meeting between the story's hero and heroine shows how much a romantic version of *galanterie*, once a quintessentially elite phenomenon, has penetrated working class culture by the mid-20th century. The thunderclap of love in "He was absent"¹⁴ comes at a train station. The story opens with Sabine accompanying her brother-in-law, Richard, and her younger sister, Bernadette, to the train station. Sabine is sad because her sister's happiness as a newlywed contrasts so starkly with her own loveless fate. The aunt with whom Sabine lives has often told her that she has a sad and beauty-less face and that she should put more effort into her appearance. But however hard she might try, Sabine is unable to bring off a miraculous transformation, and she is always the one not invited to dance. Despite trying to master herself, she cannot restrain herself from shedding some tears on the platform as she sees off the happy young couple. At the very moment when Sabine's optimistic brother-in-law comforts her by saying that she is sure to meet a man soon, she spies a stranger's face in the neighboring compartment:

¹⁴ This original title, "*Il fut cet absent*" is hard to translate, since we do not talk of "an absent" in English.

He was a brown-haired boy in a soldier's uniform, with very soft and sweet (*doux*) eyes and a virile face. Our glances met, and in that chance moment, destiny spoke (*ce fut le coup de dé du destin*). ("Il fut cet absent" 1957:5)

Sabine momentarily forgets her sister and brother-in-law, and must apologize when hurriedly saying her goodbyes. Then she is left alone:

Alone? But no! A hand brushed my shoulder. I knew that when I turned I would see him close to me, that I would recognize, very close to my own, that face that seemed to rise up as from a dream. And that voice as well, I thought that it would be familiar to me, that soft and deep voice that murmured, in very low tones, for me alone:

"Mademoiselle..."

I had to smile at him through my tears, and I did not find it extraordinary that he took my hand.

"Mademoiselle, my train departs in three minutes. Any reasonable person would condemn me. No, do not withdraw your hand; in a few seconds, it will be too late. I do not know what words to find, to invent, and yet it is so simple: I saw you just now; you were in pain, I don't know why, and I don't ask you why. But I wanted to console you. Then, as now, I would have liked to take you in my arms. (He mimed Richard's arm-around-shoulders embrace of Bernadette.) I have no right to do that, but must one always justify oneself?... I don't even know the sound of your voice, although I know I would love it. Mademoiselle, I am departing for the Legion [i.e., of Honor], because I no longer believed that life was worth its pains, and I saw your blue eyes, and knew that was what I was searching for. If I could, I would abandon my departure and walk out into the evening side by side with you..."

A voice cried over the loudspeaker:

"Passengers for Marseille, all aboard!"

He drew me toward the train and put a foot on the steps up to the car:

"My name is Jérôme Blanc. Tell me yours, quickly, quickly."

My heart was beating wildly, I couldn't find my breath; but still he held my hand and his voice was muffled:

"If you refuse to respond to me, it will be as if death had come between us."

I stammered:

"Sabine..."

"All aboard!" repeated the loudspeaker.

Now both of my hands were held in his.

"Sabine who? Where can I find you?"

Silly prejudices, was I to lose him because of them? No, that would be too stupid, too unjust. Condemn me if you wish, but I cried my name and address, my mouth close to his face.

“Sabine,” he murmured, “I carry your name... I carry our hope.”

His lips brushed my forehead, my eyes, my mouth.” (“Il fut cet absent” 1957:5)

And with that, the train whisks our hero away for Marseille.

The reader knows that Jérôme has a “virile” face and that he is a soldier in the Legion of Honor. But those facts are flatly stated and not embellished. The details that bring him the character to life are, instead, expressions of extreme sympathy and gentleness. When he touches Sabine, he lightly brushes her, and only feigns a more intimate embrace. There is never the slightest hint of coercion on Jérôme’s part. Both he and Sabine recognize that she needs only invoke the most basic and “reasonable” social norms to rebuff his advances. He begins by apologizing for the way his behavior transgresses social boundaries and explains that he has been driven to it by an extremity of feeling. His words back up his claim: despite their haste, they are eloquent to the point of virtuosity.¹⁵

Another *Nous Deux* story reiterates this portrait of an empathetic, eloquent hero. “I was a Romantic” tells the story of a beautiful, quietly sorrowful woman, Marion, who is lovingly tending her garden one day when a young friend, Solange, pays her a visit. Solange is angry that her parents are trying to introduce her to a man. By all accounts, he is attractive, but Solange considers this an outrage to her youthful independence: she wants to find a mate by her own initiative. Marion is momentarily lost in thoughts of the past when she hears this news. Then she sits down with Solange and tells her story, in the hopes that she can persuade the young girl not to repeat her own errors. Marion recalls that her aunt and uncle, her loving guardians in lieu of her deceased parents, one day wanted to introduce her to an eligible young man, André Sauter. She rebelled, saying that she would not have an old-fashioned arranged marriage, and did not even assent to lay eyes on him. Later, while vacationing with a friend, she meets a charming and wealthy young man, Marc Hébrer, who courts her and asks her to marry him. Marion’s traveling companion, her friend Louisa, dislikes Marc. When Marc urges Marion to return to France with him several times, Louisa confronts him: ““Why should we cut short our vacation? You are a real tyrant, my dear fellow! Nothing is more odious to me than jealousy and egoism! I pity the woman who marries you!”” (“J’étais une romanesque” 1957:6). Louisa is quite right to see a menace in Marc’s desire to keep

¹⁵ Jérôme demonstrates the same eloquence in print. He writes to Sabine saying: “My unknown, my just-glimpsed friend and, in my heart, my fiancée... I have mostly been a painter, and that does not bring in enough income to feed a man. But, when we are together, we will organize life for ourselves. With your help, that will be possible, I know. I can only regret my past errors and have faith in you. I recall your small, serious, somewhat sad face. How strange it is: from the first second when I saw you, I wanted to put my lips to your forehead, to clear that look which seemed so darkened by life...” (“Il fut cet absent” 1957:6-7).

Marion constantly by his side. It is a sign of illiberality. Nevertheless, Marion loves Marc and he knows how to be charming when he wants to.

After her marriage, Marion discovers her error. Marc's avarice and controlling character makes him the very caricature of a nightmarish bourgeois:

In the little apartment that we occupied near Buttes-Chaumont, Marc regulated our life to the point of desperate monotony. We did not go out. We had no friends. Because recreation inevitably required us to spend money and returning invitations that we might have been able to receive would also lead to expenses. Everything was ruled by Marc's avarice. I was required to keep a book of accounts that my husband went over with a fine-tooth comb at the end of each week. That was the moment when I hated him most... ("J'étais une romanesque" 1957:7)

Her situation somewhat improves after Marc buys a factory in the countryside. Their new house has a garden and trees that Marion loves dearly:

I must recognize that Marc—considering what he is—went to absolutely debauched extremes of prodigality in order to provide us with a comfortable house. But he had become a fairly important regional industrialist and... *noblesse oblige!* ("J'étais une romanesque" 1957:7)

The only motive stronger than this detestable man's avarice is his vanity.

Having set up this antipathetic foil, the story now introduces its hero. One wintry evening, Marc is late returning home for dinner. A car pulls up bearing her husband, who has had a motorcycle accident in the bad weather. The driver urges Marion to summon a doctor, who duly ensures that Marc is out of physical danger. Marion offers a hot drink to the Good Samaritan driver who found her husband by the roadside and saved his life. She describes him as follows:

He had a virile face crowned with brown hair and intelligent eyes whose gaiety was reflected in the curve of his full lips. From his entire person, he emanated an intense vitality and at the same time something sweet and reassuring ("J'étais une romanesque" 1957:7)

Marion requests that the man provides her his address and name so that Marc can thank him. His name is none other than André Sautier! A few days later, the man comes by the house and finds Marion alone. They speak for a while, and Marion finds that he was indeed the man chosen by her aunt and uncle. Sautier confesses that he heard much about her from her aunt and uncle, saw her photograph, and even glimpsed her once from afar. He fell in love with her, and then heard that she had married another man.

Suppressing her surging emotions, Marion asks André:

‘You recognized me?’

‘Yes, from the very moment when we entered the room the other day. You have not changed a bit.’

‘Oh! But I have... If you knew how much! But don’t regret anything; you would have doubtless been disappointed.’

‘I do not think so; I am even sure that I would not have been,’ he said gravely. ‘You are not happy, please pardon me for saying that to you, and you appear to be pretending that the Marion of those times exists no more. Nevertheless, I feel that for her to be reborn you would need only to...’

‘No... Don’t say so... Nothing can change...’

‘Must we then say goodbye?’

‘It is better that way. My husband wants to write to you to invite you to spend a weekend at the house, but...’

‘You wish that I decline his invitation?’

I half opened my lips. How could I respond? And then I heard Marc’s vow, repeated so often: ‘To find you again, I would go to the ends of the earth and, if you betray me, it would be the other man that I would cut down first...’

‘No,’ I said in despair. ‘No!’

‘Goodbye... Marion...’

‘For an instant, I felt the warmth of his lips on my wrist. Then he went out.’ (Anonymous 1957e:7)

Here again, we get the mix between energy and gentleness that makes a man optimally attractive. Most distinctively, André sees through to Marion’s soul when he looks at her. He recognizes with the most acute empathy that she is unhappy. He is willing to run away with her, but she is trapped in her loveless marriage. More to save him than to save herself, she refuses his offer. Despite his strong feelings for Marion, however, André is never importunate in the slightest; with exquisite courtesy, he defers without hesitation to her wishes.

In “The Youngest Son and the Orphan,” a story in the more highbrow *Marie-Claire*, we again see the hero experience an excruciating spasm of empathy at the moment he falls in love. The reader learns that Gérard de Chavannes is the youngest son in a poor family, and so has resigned himself to seeking his fortune in some regiment:

Already, he was resigned to an obscure existence; if he did not perish in combat somewhere, he would finish with a modest pension, with two hunting dogs and a horse, a fowling piece hanging from a nail over his bed. (Spens 1957:13)

I cite this brief quotation to underline again the contrast between French and American ideas about the proper attitude to one’s career in life. Gérard’s resignation about his likely fortunes is simple, sensible, and noble. As for his appearance and character, Gérard is:

the image of a large blond boy, almost without a beard, with very blue eyes; he seemed to be hardly twenty years old, despite the fact that he had

already attained his majority six months ago. But his taste for arms, which had been cultivated thanks to his friendship with a hunting master, his sea wanderings in fishermen's boats, his long days of hunting in the forest had hardened him, tempering both his body and his character. (Spens 1957:67) Gérard is a winning combination of soft boyishness and manly vigor. *Douceur* and virility are both visible at once in his appearance.

While on the road to Paris, a weary Gérard comes upon a stately home and stops to ask for refreshment. He expects the châtelaine to be an aging spinster, but discovers that she is a lovely girl. The Mademoiselle de Maucorps approaches with an extraordinarily light tread. She is almost as tall as him, and is dressed simply, in a provincial style.

The young girl raised her large eyes to him, her eyebrows extraordinarily arched. Her partly timid, partly willful air gave her face a strange charm, and if she seemed pale to Gérard, that was perhaps because no trace of makeup colored her lips or cheeks. (Spens 1957:67)

The heroine also combines assertiveness and timidity. She welcomes him with movingly generous hospitality, and he sits down to eat with her. The narrator describes their meal together in the following passage:

They were face to face with one another at the table. Mlle de Maucorps ate little and drank only water. Suddenly, Gérard felt disgusted by all food. Each detail of their bearing and of their conversation took on a immense importance in his eyes. Each time silence fell between the young girl and him, he felt a terrible malaise. Furtively, he observed Mlle de Maucorps's face, the delicate curve of her eyebrows, the bluish halo surrounding her eyes, and her somewhat gaunt cheekbones. Mlle de Maucorps no doubt sensed that her guest was observing her, because she raised her eyes to him and [gave him] a smile sadder than tears. (Spens 1957:67)

Gérard is overwhelmed by sympathy for the heroine. He loses his appetite, despite being famished, because she has none. The promptings of the flesh evaporate in an instant under her influence. He desperately cares about every detail of their interaction, and cannot abide a halt to the flow of words between them.

In these stories, the soft, sweet side of men's character responds with passionate tenderness to women's charms. There is nothing repressed or furtive about this masculine *douceur*. It is allied to a spontaneous generosity of feeling that is as noble as bravery or fortitude. Men who cannot empathize deeply and directly with women are fatally flawed, even monstrous, like the egotistical tyrant of a husband in "I was a Romantic." This insistent note in the portrayal of masculinity must be traced to France's tradition of *galanterie*.

“The Youngest Son and the Orphan” also illustrates another theme in fictional portrayals of French masculinity. French stories demonstrate ambivalence toward male violence. Men’s violent acts sometimes make them heroes, but giving way to forthright satisfaction in violence is horrifying. In other words, men can be legitimately violent, but only in cases of extreme necessity, and they must never enjoy doing so. In their mid-century study of French culture, Mead and Metraux document this strong taboo on physical violence (Métraux and Mead 1954:7-8), and Lawrence Wylie notes the tendency of the French children in the village he observes in 1951 to be verbally cutting but not physically aggressive (Wylie 1974 [1957]:49-51). The magazine evidence I adduce here confirms and qualifies such findings.

Gérard’s first great act of chivalry is to defend Mlle. Anne de Maucorps from her evil cousin, who has trumped up a fraudulent claim to the inheritance of the castle. Gérard hides behind a door and listens to the cousin’s imperious mockery of the young woman, then springs from behind the door and slaps him twice. This does the cousin no injury, of course, but is profoundly dishonoring. The enraged cousin draws his sword and they duel, Gérard receiving a nick and delivering an arm wound in return. Gérard has already promised the young lady that he will not kill the cousin, and he exercises restraint at each turn, starting with a slap and only reciprocating with an injurious blow after his blood has been shed first. Later in the story, there is a battle with marauding Indians in the North American wilderness, but there again, Gérard kills no one. Only in the last scene, when Gérard returns to the Maucorps castle to rescue Anne, does he finally take a life. In this final climatic scene, the evil cousin Villemeur and his disgusting friend, the comte d’Aurice, have surrounded Gérard’s comrade Bergeron, and are trying to kill him:

The comte d’Aurice had drawn his sword. Bergeron, whose wound [in the Indian attack] had not yet fully healed, could not defend himself. He backed up to the door of the second room and jumped to one side to avoid the blow which his enemy was aiming at him. The count, who had planned to run him through with his sword, tripped. Gérard had just opened the door; he advanced, sword in hand, in order to defend his friend; M. d’Aurice, as he lost his balance, fell on the young man’s weapon. The point of the sword exited his body between the scapula. (Spens 1957:154)

This slaying, which is actually perfectly justified in the circumstances, turns out to be accidental. The final gory sentence, which has the sword piercing the villainous comte d’Aurice through and through, has a certain vengeful satisfaction to it. But still, the implied author takes an apologetic stance to the killing; he does not want his hero to be sullied by intentional homicide.

This story’s description of the ill-fated comte d’Aurice provides an anti-heroic foil to Gérard de Chavannes’s courageous-but-tender masculinity. The count, we are

told, “was a fat, sanguine man, doubtless better at taking down a stag than at paying a compliment... [H]e should have preferred the company of a master of hounds to that of beautiful ladies” (Spens 1957:150). In other words, D’Aurice is gross and crude. He does not love the company of women and has neither the impulse nor the ability to please them. His heart will never melt with sympathy for a woman’s joy or sorrow.

This aversion to male brutality also comes out in a *Nous Deux* story entitled “The Last Fight.” In this tale, which we have already encountered above, the heroine’s father runs a boxing gym. Despite her father’s occupation, Gaby dislikes most of the men who frequent his gym, who strike her as brutish. One young orphan, Léo, is an exception, and is taken in as a sort of adoptive son by Gaby’s family, as she recounts:

He was a sweet, thoughtful boy, who made an effort to repay our hospitality by a thousand services. Little by little, I began liking him; he was unlike the others. Blond, with handsome grey eyes which combined and alternated between a sort of timidity, a virile energy, and a naïve but boundless admiration for the “boss’s daughter,” he touched me by his discretion and the candor with which he imagined a future which would recompense him for all the sadness of his childhood. (“Le dernier combat” 1957:16)

Once again, we get the combination of virility and reticent sweetness that is key to the ideal masculinity of these women’s magazine stories. His naïve idolization of Gaby is not a sign of immaturity or insufficient masculine self-possession, as it might be in an American story. It is simply endearing.

Gaby’s only misgiving about Léo is that he might be too wedded to the violent and uncertain career of a champion boxer. One day, she asks her father whether Léo has the stuff of a champion boxer. He replies:

“Absolutely not! affirmed the man who had the reputation of being the best trainer. He has excellent reflexes, willingness, a good technique, sufficient leg-work... But it is not his fault if his years of privations have made him a bad ‘closer’ [*encaisseur*]. He’s an intelligent, scientific type. But up against a ‘denting machine’ opponent that all boxers must face one day sooner or later, he surely won’t hold up...” (“Le dernier combat” 1957:16)

This greatly reassures Gaby, and she marries him. Léo is not the real bruiser type. This makes him vulnerable, but also a better romantic hero.

In this story’s climactic scene, Léo finds himself being battered in a brutal fight arranged by his duplicitous boxing promoter, Monk. The reader understands that Léo is finally facing the “denting machine” that Gaby’s father foresaw. In the third round of the fight, however, Léo realizes that Monk has misrepresented himself and undermined both his career and his marriage. (Monk arranged a scene that made Léo think Gaby had cuckolded him.) Léo responds to this realization by boxing like a man possessed,

knocking out his opponent and then turning on the unscrupulous Monk and decking him too. Later, Gaby rushes to congratulate and succor her husband, and he tells her apologetically of his sudden disillusionment:

“it was no longer Doug [his opponent] in front of me, but all at once, Monk, Fred [his lackey], everything that had interposed itself between you and me to undermine our happiness. I let fly like a madman not to win, but to avenge us. Gaby, forgive me... I won't ever make you cry again. You did not want to be the wife of a boxer, and you will not be one. During this match, I have had a chance to measure my capacities... and my illusions. I won't always have such a violent stimulus to assure my victory!” (“Le dernier combat” 1957:31)

And with that, the hero returns to his loving wife, renouncing his hopes for martial glory and settling down to work alongside his father-in-law at the gym.

The story again highlights a note of ambivalence toward male violence. On the one hand, Léo shows that he can best even a formidable opponent in the ring. Surely the reader is intended to feel a certain thrill of satisfaction when the hero goes into a transcendent rage and not only wins the fight but also punches out the story's main villain. On the other hand, the circumstances show that he has no real taste for violence. He is smart and “scientific” about his boxing technique, enjoying the art of it, but lacks the brutality that would make it a formidable weapon.

“My Punishment,” a story about a woman's struggle to forgive her husband's infidelity, begins with the narrator recalling details that will help the reader understand why she so loves her spouse.

I...saw, across the French doors of the living room, our garden in the full radiance of summer. Flowers, each more beautiful than the others, that Hugo had seeded or planted, that he watered, pruned or supported with trellises, like the most perfect, the most competent, and also the most scrupulous of gardeners. This businessman had been seized by a beautiful passion for our little parcel of earth and devoted his leisure time to it. (“Ma punition” 1957:29)

Hugo shows a tender artistry in his gardening which both the narrator and the intended reader find endearing.¹⁶ He is both scrupulous and nurturing. The narrator goes on to recall a conversation she had with her husband during a stroll through the countryside early in their marriage:

“I go where you go!” I said gaily.

“And you are happy with that?” he questioned with a gleam of anxiety in his brown eyes, fringed by eyelashes that many women would envy him for.

¹⁶ In France, gardening is traditionally as much a masculine as a feminine hobby.

“Just as much as I love you,” I replied with the sentiment that nothing else in the world mattered.

He threw back, in a movement that I had already learned to love, a lock of hair which the wind had blown across his forehead.

“Very good, my dear, very good, because you really are a flower of the field, Françoise!” (“Ma punition” 1957:19)

Her husband has beautifully long, feminine eyelashes, is anxious that he make his wife happy and that she love him. He also knows how to deliver a well-timed compliment.

In most of *Nous Deux* stories which I have mentioned, this “soft” masculine attractiveness is portrayed as a personal trait which is uncoupled from a man’s larger social role and is relevant mainly to his romantic partner. Other stories put it more in its social class context. For instance, a story by Louise de Vilmorin, the author who provides tips on seductiveness in the pages of *Marie Claire*, describes her hero (the narrator’s brother) in the following terms:

Henry, who is the hero of this story, was, at age thirty, a very successful man. His natural elegance permitted him not to copy anyone else and to make an advantageous impression simply by being himself. His conversation, thanks to his memory of his experiences, was interesting; the story of his many travels was interesting, and he was liked in all circles because his presence was vivacious, joyous and comforting. He hasn’t really changed since that time: his tall stature is imposing, his facial features are handsome and regular; his spirit and the spirit of adventure shine from his face, but his true charm comes from his heart and, in addition to being strongly inclined to pay court to women, he has numerous friends and knows how to feel durable and serious sentiments. (Vilmorin 1957c:62)

Here, we see that Henri’s charm not only endears him to a particular woman but makes him welcome in multiple social circles. In the story, Henri drives around in his motor car (a significant status symbol in France of 1957) and generally enjoys his ease as an upper-class dandy.

In another story, “The Bad Role,” a lowly clerk, Alexis, envies the easy charm and social graces of the sub-director of the bank for which he works. Alexis is head over heels in love with Fanny Laurat, a beautiful secretary at the bank, but knows that she is carrying on an affair with the attractive sub-director:

I envied and detested this sub-director, this Régis Boulais whose office she entered..., files in her arms. I was jealous of his natural ease, of his handsomely modeled face, of his unlined cheeks, of his brown eyes which burned with a little bronze fire, of the line of his sensual and insolent mouth, the mouth of a boy used to easy conquests, of his well-groomed appearance. Régis Boulais was just as at ease in his clothes as an animal

is in its skin. His movements were supple, sure and bold. He had the nonchalant air furnished by self-assurance and well cut suits. ("Le mauvais rôle" 1957:5)

Boulais's attractiveness is clearly part of a class-linked confidence of demeanor. The lowly clerk glances quickly at a small mirror erected in his cubicle "for the bitter pleasure of discouraging myself." He knows all too well:

my rounded shoulders, my sad air, my poor and lackluster hair which was trying to be red, my bulging forehead and the brown patches that covered my nose and cheeks.

Well dressed, I think that I might not have lacked a certain distinction. I was small, thin, and dry; in another man, this might have passed for natural elegance. But I was too lacking in simplicity and I admired, full of impotence and envy, the young workers at our firm who, with their work clothes and square-jawed faces, whistled joyfully at the girls who passed by their door and blissfully ignored the complexes which slowly ate away at me. ("Le mauvais rôle" 1957:5)

This clerk obviously falls between two contrasting class ideals of masculinity, the *galant*, charming gentleman and the hardy young worker who is at ease with his own unpretentious manhood. Even in *Nous Deux*, a magazine targeted largely at working-class readers, none of the stories in the sample give more than a passing nod to this working-class version of masculinity.

In the end, Alexis does manage to make something heroic of his self-abnegation. He does not do so through a program of self-improvement, which he tries briefly but to no avail:

For weeks, helped by the grey weather of the [autumn] season, I embarked on ferocious resolutions that I was unable to keep for more than a few days. I also forced myself to try body building [*culture physique*], hoping against hope to improve my undersized shoulders, to build a new stature, an imposing bearing that I knew I could never acquire. I rapidly gave up, finding myself too ridiculous. The sole advantage that I gained from this painful period was a navy-blue suit which I ordered from a good tailor.

But could it really transform me? ("Le mauvais rôle" 1957:5)

The narrator leaves this last question unanswered; it is merely rhetorical. In the end, the story asserts, it is "blind chance" that gives Alexis the chance to approach Fanny. One day, Fanny comes up in conversation with a co-worker:

"Well, it's over, her little adventure with Boulais!" this comrade told me.

"Really, it's over?" I asked, making an effort to appear indifferent.

"That's what they say... Did you know, old man, that she wanted to bring him around to marriage? She was all right, that girl. As long as she's going to let herself be courted by Boulais, at least she can do it for

the right motive... It almost came off successfully. You know, he's not a bad guy. He will make it in life. He has a good job and is a hard worker... and he's nice enough, at bottom... Everyone in the firm has been talking about it. And Boulais looked to be pretty well hooked... And then, I don't know what happened, but they probably had a falling-out. She probably was too hasty: he got frightened... I think most of all that he wanted to get a rise out of her. A girl came by to look for him at closing time a few days ago... A beautiful girl, that's for sure, and who came by car... Yesterday, I was at the window of my office when he left under Fanny's nose... You know how it goes: the door slams, a little wave of the hand... Poor Fanny took it really hard! Ah! You should have seen her! I thought she was going to faint..." ("Le mauvais rôle" 1957:5)

Alexis takes heart at this news. He wonders whether this will be the moment when he can console her, perhaps win her heart. Some instinct, perhaps the perspicacity of hidden love, makes him follow her out of the building after work. She does not even notice that she is being followed, and when she descends to the river-bank with the clear intention of killing herself, he is able to spring to her side and take her arm. Fanny at first reacts with shock and surprise, telling him to mind his own business and to leave her in peace. Whereas a *galant* hero would be able to improvise an eloquent speech on the spot, Alexis finds himself close to being tongue-tied, but what he says serves well enough.

"I was hoping to do some good... I saw you looking so lost, so..." (I began to be afraid that I would not be able to come up with the words.)

"You have friends... Friends in whom you can confide..."

"Friends! You still believe in friends, you, my poor Alexis?"

She was talking! I understood that I had won the victory. I felt my heart beat wildly in my chest and tears blurred my vision. I still held Fanny by the arm and the heat of her thin wrist burned my hand. I repeated stupidly:

"I implore you! Don't do it..."

I must have put such a note of despair and prayer in these few words that Fanny looked at me, astonished.

"You are nice, Alexis! But why do you want to stop me from killing myself? What good could that do you?"

"Because... because I know that you are in pain... I can't see you suffer... Take courage a little... Tomorrow you won't think of it..."

"Courage! For whom? For what? I have been in such grief, Alexis... One can see that you don't know what it is to love!"

"Oh! But I do!"

She suddenly broke into sobs. She cried like a child, strangling on her tears, incapable of controlling herself, of getting hold of herself. ("Le mauvais rôle" 1957:5)

Alexis hails a taxi to take her home, and she asks him not to leave her. He accompanies her back to her apartment. He brings her a cup of tea, afraid that he will clumsily let it fall on the ground. When she takes the cup from him, "[a] slight smile passed over her lips. 'You brought a coffee cup... It doesn't matter...'," she tells him ("Le mauvais rôle" 1957:7). Poor Alexis has too little cultural knowledge even to distinguish between a coffee cup and a tea cup. Fanny tells him that:

"your presence does me good. We don't know each other well, but I can tell that you are an intelligent and sensitive boy... I don't know why, but you are one of those friends to whom one can tell everything, without shame... That is rare... I know that you will understand me..."

She looked at me with a tender friendliness, perhaps with a little pity. That pity hurt me, but I did not let that show. I said to myself that she must be involuntarily comparing me to the other man, he who had treated her so badly but whom she could not forget, whom she had no doubt already pardoned. My unfortunate physique had never humiliated me so much. I felt awkward and stupid, sitting on the corner of a blue couch and I regretted not having put on my handsome new suit...

Suddenly, while listening to the confidences that burned me like a red-hot iron, I realized that this evening I had somehow triumphed over my rival. It was a triumph without a future, but I would have to content myself with it. And it was my own pain that I disclosed in my turn, in order to try to console this little girl who had been disappointed in love and who had seen death from so close. I spoke to her of solitude, of passing years, of youth and ambitions which flee us, of the chimeras to which one grows attached, like a shipwreck survivor clutching to a providential floating plank, and of the tenacious hope that nothing can uproot and that we always keep alive, despite everything, at the bottom of our hearts. Suddenly I did not care whether she understood or not that I was telling her of the love I had for her and which throbbed in me like a hidden wound. I felt simply that I had to speak and that I could not heal my heart and my spirit without confiding, in the circumstances which presented themselves, to the single being who should have ignored me. ("Le mauvais rôle" 1957:7)

Alexis gains an intimacy with Fanny that the handsome hunk Régis Boulais has never attained, and probably never will. However lacking in charm Alexis may be, he can offer Fanny the empathy which he has acquired at such great personal cost. In the next passage, we finally hear true eloquence in his own words:

“You won’t always be alone, Fanny... You will love again. You are young. You are beautiful. You have been loved and you will be loved again. Grief will make you more humane and compassionate. You will learn to pardon those who hurt you without perceiving it. One always crushes someone when moving through life, as one crushes grass in a field. Régis Boulais will return to you. You will be happy. Someone will no doubt suffer as a result.”

She listened to me attentively, as if she was trying to grasp a faraway echo that was just out of earshot. Then she put a hand on my arm.

“Thank you, Alexis... You have given me back a bit of my courage. When one suffers, one becomes egotistical; one thinks oneself the only person in the world who is suffering; one forgets the others. I hope that you too will be happy one day. You will meet a woman who will love you as you deserve to be loved. When one understands other people and one can pity them, one can give a great deal of love... You have spoken to me of hope. Don’t ever lose it...” (“Le mauvais rôle” 1957:7)

He leaves and tells her not to come to the office the following morning. He will post an interoffice memo from her the following day which will seem like it was written the previous evening. He asks for permission to return the following evening in order to see how she is doing.

The following day, Alexis is summoned to Régis Boulais’s office. Boulais says that Fanny is out sick. Alexis confronts him:

I will never know what impulse made me suddenly lay before this man who, just yesterday, I had hated, a truth which he could always have ignored. Without me, perhaps he would never have known... Perhaps my whole life would have turned out to be different... But it was too late to go back, I had started to speak...

“Mademoiselle Laurat is not sick, Monsieur Boulais. She is resting. Yesterday, she wanted to throw herself in the Seine. I had the good fortune to happen to be there and to restrain her... She wanted to die because she loves you...”

I saw the sub-director blanch.

“What are you saying? First of all, that doesn’t concern you... By what right...?”

I interrupted:

“It no longer concerns me!... You know that she loves you and I think you love her too. She wanted to kill herself because she felt that you were detaching yourself from her. Do you understand: She wanted to die!”

Boulais had lowered his eyes. At the end of a long silence, he looked at me gravely.

“Is it possible?” (Then he added, softly): “I thank you... I will go to see her. We will clear up the misunderstanding. Thank you again.

Excuse me for what I said just now...” (“Le mauvais rôle” 1957:45)

Boulais does return to her; he reconciles with Fanny, and they marry. Alexis understands that he might have behaved differently, profiting from the situation and pairing up with Fanny. But he never could have made her happy, he reasons, and so it would have been pointless.

He continues his drab and loveless existence, making calculations in his cubicle, and never again speaks to Fanny of what transpired that fateful evening. The story concludes as follows:

And when, on certain sad days, I tell myself that Fanny might be thinking of me and that she might consider me—one never knows!—as the maker of her happiness while murmuring: “That poor Alexis...,” the thought, far from comforting me, humiliates me.

I would prefer, oh! how I would prefer, that she forget me completely... (“Le mauvais rôle” 1957:45)

This story underlines a fundamental symmetry of sentiment between men and women. A man’s life, just as much as a woman’s, can be stunted by being unattractive and unloved. Lovelorn men do occasionally appear in the American stories I examined, but their depiction is entirely different. A Mr. Murdock who lost his wife and child in a car accident and thereafter became an emotional cripple, his “face bec[oming] as unmemorable and sexless as a paper plate” (Gavin 1957:87) goes psychotic and attacks a young woman in “Romance in the Park”. But Mr. Murdock has no psychological depth; his feelings of love and his sufferings never become vivid and comprehensible to the reader, as do Alexis’s. In other American stories, when men feel hurt, they may draw a woman’s pity as if they were a boy: recall the depiction of John Martin, the car salesman, when he discovers that he is boring his date (Furgeson 1957:97). By contrast, however, Alexis’s pain and humiliation are deep, entirely adult emotions that lead him to transcend himself and act with a nobility that commands the reader’s respect.

This story also reveals the gap between American and French assumptions about happiness. Alexis has no real chance of being loved by the woman he pines for. He is simply not attractive enough. No efforts at self-improvement can help him. There is no indication that the reader is expected to reproach Fanny Laurat for failing to love the man who cares for her most deeply and passionately. Nor is the reader expected to conclude that the charming Régis Boulais is an unworthy mate for Fanny because he miscalculates the emotional impact of his rebuff. Alexis’s gossipy workmate reads him correctly: at bottom, he is a good guy, and when he learns of the depths of Fanny’s despair, he goes to her. Despite their spat, Régis and Fanny do love one another and find happiness together.

Galanterie can sometimes imply a kind of obligatory courtesy that does not transcend social formality, a sort of surface charm. But dominant French representations

of masculinity also require that men have the capacity for depth of sentiment that is equal to women's. Alexis's love gives him an eloquence and courage that is superior to *galanterie*, precisely because he lacks the skill to feign true feeling. *Nous Deux* insists that morality, true sacrifice, and empathy inspired by love trump the surface shine of *galanterie*. Men's hearts are just as tender as women's.

This review of a small sample of representations of masculinity should help us comprehend Françoise d'Eaubonne's description of one of the greatest obstacles facing French women. As she writes in her letter to Betty Friedan:

Our young girls, above all those of the common people and of the petite bourgeoisie, but also the others, though they are more demanding, dream of "Prince Charming" and not of the life that he will provide to her; Love is their ideal, the God, man is the uncontested lord of their destiny, they want him adorned with every quality and every virtue and are ready to prostrate themselves before him. It is more against this naïveté, encouraged by the entire women's press, that an intellectual of my country must revolt; the most coquettish or the most selfish of girls will perhaps go so far as to preferring a bank account, that is to say luxury and elegance, to what we call "a cottage and a heart;" but even such a girl will have difficulty defending herself against the impulse of putting everything at the feet of the Elect and what I call the Myth of Prince Charming will push her, if she takes a rich and disagreeable husband, to betray him for a good-looking and seductive boy who, if he is poor, will benefit from the conjugal fortune. So there you have the temptations and mystifications of the French woman. (Eaubonne 1964:3)

Eaubonne's description of the French "feminine mystique" is more comprehensible when we consider the sympathy and charm that women's magazines lead them to expect from men.

Being a hunk: masculinity in American fiction

American stories emphasize a different set of themes when attempting to establish the attractiveness of a particular man in the mind of the reader. As we have seen, some French stories comment on the tallness of their heroes, although they are usually slender of build; as Alexis notes above, a small and delicate man at least has the possibility of looking distinguished. American romantic heroes are almost uniformly described not only as tall, but as physically imposing giants. Athleticism is also important in men.

Here is a sampling of the descriptions of romantic heroes from American stories:

- He was a giant of a man, well over six feet, solid and heavy. He dwarfed the table as if it were a toy... When [his wife] saw George, she left the crowd, as if to say, "I've only been toying with you boys. Look at my husband. There's a man!" (Peeples 1957:90)

- I walked tall in my field boots and I was deep brown from the sun of far corners of the world. I was Hugh MacReedy, with all the quickness and with the bright copper hair of my wiry Irish father who was killed on a bridge job when I was twelve, and with the height and heft of the male relatives of my tiny Polish mother who had died little more than three years after him. I was Hugh MacReedy, construction bum, big dog in a world of puppies, face lightly marked by brawls won and by the Pacific Conference brand of semi-pro college football. (Keasler 1957:125)
- Tall and slim. Half of the description would fit himself, Lovering thought, but certainly not the other. But then he'd never been slim, really. Not even when he'd been playing at Columbia and had made guard on the All-Eastern team. Well, he hadn't been named guard, but he'd had an honorable mention. (Holder 1957:102)
- I don't think I missed one Little Three football game during my four years, and [John Martin, the hero] never missed a Williams game since he was their star half for three years... He's very good-looking in a rugged, self-assured way, and very intense. (Ferguson 1957:40)
- Ric's always been big—taller and stronger-looking than the other boys his age. ("Give my man a chance!" 1957:132)
- Big, blond Craig Selden was the smoothest boy in the whole school... Craig had been my dream-hero ever since I'd started at Lincoln—not because of the convertible, either, or for his athletic honors. I'd just always had a sweet, hopeless yearning for Craig himself—maybe because he was so nice to everybody—his quick smile always ready, even if he hardly knew you. ("Hotel weekend" 1957:70)
- I was laughing with a group in the corner of Janet's living room when Phil Warren brought Hal in. He was in his middle thirties, a dark giant of a man with a calm, easy way of carrying himself. Just looking at him, something in me came alive, something I'd thought long dead. ("Love on the sly" 1957:54)

All of these passages describe large, beefy men. More seldom, men are described simply as tall or as tall and slender.

- Michael is of Irish descent, six feet tall, and red-headed. Some people might not think he's handsome, but I do... It took a lot of bullheadedness on Michael's part, courting me in spite of the cold shoulder [my family] gave him. He'd just smile all the time, and sit down and talk to them when they acted stand-offish. They couldn't help liking Mike, the way he laughed and joked. He came from a nice family, and he gained my parents' respect with his job as a fireman. ("Getting married: Heartwarming story of a big wedding and a bride's tears" 1957:76)
- He was a tall, slim, sandy-haired man with a quick temper and a nervous way of turning his head as though he expected to hear something he could take as an

insult. His manner, however, was very mild, and he had a soft, delightful voice and a slow smile. (Chidester 1957:91)

- And it was on that drive and during that dinner, she decided later, that she fell in love—with the long, thin, mobile face and hazel eyes that clouded without provocation, with the low voice that sounded crisp and almost harsh compared with those she was accustomed to, with the tall, slender body whose looseness indicated either total relaxation or total inertia, she wasn't sure which. (Beliveau 1957:75)

Perhaps it is more than coincidence that the latter two descriptions refer to men who are somewhat flawed as romantic heroes. The hero of the Chidester story must return to his home town in order to dispel his adolescent demons; presumably, after this successful quest for self-assurance, he loses his quickness to take offense. The rather languidly romantic hero of the Beliveau story must ultimately be rejected as a potential husband because he is unwilling to pursue his own career dreams with sufficient vigor.

As the reader of the excerpts I provided will have already sensed, American stories also invoke their heroes' past athletic accomplishments with remarkable frequency. That over a third of the American stories mention their hero's athleticism is all the more striking when we consider that the stories' plots have nothing to do with sporting events. This is partly a marker of physical vigor and, perhaps more importantly, a sign of a man's competitive viability in the broader struggles of life. None of the French stories in the sample, with the exception of the story that culminates in a fateful boxing match, mention anything about their heroes' sporting achievements.

As we have seen, French romantic tales often feature an impassioned, empathetic dialogue between the romantic hero and heroine. A romantic hero is expected to be able to speak eloquently to his beloved. This is less the case in American stories. In some American stories, men capture women's interest while saying almost nothing at all (Beliveau 1957). When they do exchange words, what is said matters less than the intent behind the utterance. For a man to demonstrate his interest in a woman is usually enough. Thus, in "Love on the Sly," Irene Richmond feels the stirrings of passion for Hal because of what he communicates *apart* from his words:

What I didn't expect, what sent a rich excitement running through my veins, was the way he kept looking at me. And his voice! The remarks he made to me couldn't have been more commonplace—but they were said in tones so low, so intimate, they might have been words of love. ("Love on the sly" 1957:54)

Another story's comic conceit is the narrator's parallel between coaxing writing out of the boys in her 10th grade class and eliciting a declaration of love from the man she hopes to marry. "What Makes Johnny Write" is prefaced with the following abstract: "Her system worked on difficult youngsters. Why not on a difficult man?" The heroine, Julie, is a schoolteacher who hits upon the idea of assigning "true experience" essays to her

laconic high school pupils. In response to previous assignments, “[t]here had been so many papers on the principle of the gasoline motor that I could almost count the piston strokes whenever I started my car” (Furgeson 1957:96). The man she loves is just as obsessed with cars. John Martin is a hunky car salesman, and their relationship starts by his trying:

off and on all year to sell me a new car. I might have bought one, but I was afraid once he'd sold me a car, there'd be nothing to keep his interest alive... He's so busy selling a car every five minutes that he hasn't time for romance. He's that type, the hard-to-get-kind, if you know what I mean. (Furgeson 1957:40)

Eventually, Julie has to tell him outright that she's interested not in a new car, but rather in “‘an occasional ride.’ And I almost choked at my boldness. Well, that sort of forced his hand...” (Furgeson 1957:46) and so their dating relationship begins.

Julie asks questions about her students' more outlandish automotive tall tales in order to make conversation with John Martin, and he obliges by explaining in great detail what is and is not technically possible. In a French story, such a penchant for talking shop on dating encounters would introduce a distinctly sour note. Even in this story, John Martin's devotion to his career is excessive but boyishly charming both because it signals no lack of interest in Julie and also because John will clearly be successful and happy in his career. In the end, Julie plays coy with him, declining dates for several evenings in a row as a way of letting him know that he needs to prioritize her a little more. She worries that this is a high risk strategy, but of course it works, and in the end he more or less proposes to her by way of his own “true experience” essay entitled “The Time I Went Riding With A Dream:”

I was working so hard to pay off a \$5,000 mortgage I had to ask for late dates, and when, one night, she told me late dates ruined the evening and that all I talked about was Chevrolets, I knew I'd have to do something about it. I knew she was for me and to heck with the mortgage, which is something that doesn't dissolve the way a dream can. So, I hired a salesman, and he started work yesterday. Last night I wanted to call Julia up, but it was 9 o'clock, so I sat alone in my Bel Air built for two. Suddenly I felt a presence at my side and there was Julia. I told her I'd like to be her Encyclopedia Britannica, if she'd give me a try, and if necessary I'd drive my Bel Air over a six-foot arroyo or dig myself out of twenty feet of muck. [These latter two feats refer to boasts made by Julia's 10th graders in their writing assignments.] She allowed as how she liked intense men, if they were intense about things other than business, and she said for me to come right over and she'd have dinner with me tonight and maybe every night. (Furgeson 1957:100)

This charming appeal, which uses slightly self-deprecating humor rather than empathetic eloquence, delights Julie.

Another striking hallmark of courtship as depicted in American stories from this period is men's tendency to make physical gestures of dominance to signal their affection for women. The women generally find this charming, even thrilling. Unwanted handling is rarely a problem in these stories.

In the tale we have just been examining, there are several occasions on which the hero manhandles the heroine. Once she has hugged his arm and snuggled her face into his shoulder, he seems to take the hint that he can touch her as well. In a moment of pique, he "pull[s her] out of the booth" at the restaurant and rushes her back home. She is hurt by this sudden change in tone:

I was mad I hadn't thought up a good stinging retort by the time he deposited me at my door. I was about to make some inadequate comment... when he grabbed me. He put his mouth on mine hard and squeezed me so close I couldn't have moved if I'd wanted to. And I didn't. (Furgeson 1957:98)

The moment is obviously a significant development in their relationship: Julie calls it "*the night*" and is rather disappointed that, in the course of their subsequent three dates, John has not "repeated his he-man act by the door" (Furgeson 1957:98). She gets a measure of gratification during the next date: "He tipped up my chin and grinned at me" (Furgeson 1957:99).

Chin-tipping is a very common feature in American stories about courtship. Fully a quarter of the sixteen romantic stories that I sampled feature this gesture. It never occurs in French stories. As is the case with "What Makes Johnny Write," the physical forwardness of romantic heroes often goes beyond chin-tipping. For instance, in "I Wish I'd Never Laid Eyes on Tony," the heroine, Faith Andrews, encounters her first love, Tony Daniels, at a party:

Tony came toward her, brandishing a whisky bottle. "Here, bottoms up. Then have a refill and start catching up," he suggested.

She shook her head. "No, thanks, honestly, this is fine." And, glancing from Tony to Paul, she said, "Come on, let's all go inside and join the singers."

But Tony urged, "Let's have a dance first, Faith. Do you mind, Paul, old man?"

As Paul shrugged his shoulders, Tony took her in his arms and, without another word, they danced through a complete record. Then, still without speaking, he delivered her back to Paul and strode off to another part of the room.

Within the next hour or so the party broke up, and as Faith was slipping into her jacket, Tony made his way unsteadily toward her. It was

clear he, at least, had taken several refills. Very deliberately he put down his drink on the hall table, tilted her chin so her eyes were looking directly into his and said thickly, “Good night, Faith Andrews. I like a professor's daughter who isn't afraid to act like one. But loosen up a little, honey, won't you?” He walked off then and joined Dora. (Beliveau 1957:77)

The day after this, Tony asks Faith out and she accepts. He apologizes for being drunk at their first meeting, but it is clear that she found the exchange charming and exciting.

Tony asks Paul whether he minds giving Faith up for a dance, but does not ask her for permission. He does propose dancing verbally at first and takes her silence as assent. She could demur, of course, as she does to his offer of a drink. Indeed, the story opens with Faith cutting short an overture made by a different man:

She could feel him leaning toward her, and to forestall the kiss his mouth was getting ready for, she put out her hand so there was nothing for him to do but shake it.

“Good night, Don,” she said quickly. “Thanks for the movie. I enjoyed it.” Then she pushed open the door and stepped into the house. (Beliveau 1957:23)

Faith can cut short an unwelcome advance if she wants to, and Tony assumes this when he first sweeps her into his arms for an impromptu dance. Part of Tony's charm is that he is so forward with her, that he recognizes her need to “loosen up.” Indeed, the moral of this story is that Tony, despite his unfitness as a husband, has made her into a woman by making her fall in love. When Faith talks over her pain at leaving Tony with her father, he tells her:

“[I]f you don't use your heart, it can shrivel up and die. Tony Daniels, for some reason or other, was the first person to teach you to use yours. And it shows, Faith. Written all over your face and the way you carry yourself is the fact that you're a woman now, that there's passion in you, and a wonderful capacity for giving and receiving love. It's a special sort of glow, a little subdued now, but still there.” (Beliveau 1957:80)

Tony's forceful virility has broken through Faith's brittle, girlish shell. This is the context in which this story's author wants us to understand the effect of Tony's aggressive overtures toward her.

Among the stories I sampled, there is only one occasion on which a woman receives a truly offensive overture. This takes place in “Ask Any Girl,” when the heroine lets her girlfriends dress her for a fictitious New Year's Eve date with the hero. She goes out alone into Manhattan, hoping that wandering around will somehow assuage her disappointment at being without a partner. She ends up in a café, where a muscular young fellow named Vince strikes up a flirtatious conversation. She persuades herself that heading to Times Square, even with a stranger, is better than being by herself.

We were crowded off the sidewalk and pushed right into the middle of Broadway. We were swept along with the growing tide of noisy celebrants.

Vince had to scream to make himself heard. "Like it?"

"I think I'm going to be crushed to death," I shouted back.

"I know a better place," he repeated.

"Where?"

"My place."

I stiffened. "No, thanks," I said.

"I can't hear you."

"I said, no, thanks," I yelled.

Then some big bruiser shoved me right into Vince's arms, and he held me so close that neither one of us had to raise his voice to be heard.

"Let me go," I said.

"Aw, come on," he said. "I didn't think you were that kind."

I knew exactly the kind he thought I was, and if I wanted to be perfectly honest with myself, I couldn't blame him. He *had* picked me up, hadn't he?... dressed to the teeth and out scouting on New Year's Eve?"

(Wolfe 1957:72)

Meg manages to stamp on Vince's foot and wriggle free from his grasp, but she has learned her lesson: "I'd be better off at the hotel reading a good book to improve my mind, instead of wrestling in the middle of Times Square with an ape like Vince. I didn't even know his last name, for goodness's sake!" (Wolfe 1957:72)

Vince's advance is clearly too aggressive, indicating that he is "an ape." But Meg admits that she is equally to blame for the *faux pas*. By letting herself be "picked up," she has implicitly forfeited the more gracious treatment due to "nice" girls. Nor is this the last moment when Meg gets roughly handled by a man. When she returns to her hotel, she finds Ross, her absent boyfriend, sitting in wait for her return:

He was absolutely the last person in the world I had expected to find there.

I managed to sputter, "What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for your date to bring you home! Where is he?"

I said haughtily, "That shouldn't concern you."

Without warning, he grabbed me by the shoulders and shook me roughly for no apparent reason. More people, I thought, had been manhandling me that night [*sic*]. You'd think it was open season on Meg Whelan or something.

"What's the matter with you?" I said, pulling away from him.

"My New Year's resolution," Ross said angrily, "is to get matters straight with you."

"It's about time," I shot back. (Wolfe 1957:72)

Ross's rough treatment, in contrast to Vince's, comes out of his respect for Meg. He thinks she is having an affair with a married man, and says that "she's too nice a girl" for that. In the great tradition of plots based on comic misunderstanding (she has been thinking *he* was married!), they resolve their dispute and more or less agree to marry that very evening.

For our purposes, this story illustrates that for a man to be physically forceful with women is not disqualifyingly taboo in the American context. Heroes themselves sometimes engage in such behavior. "Nice" girls know how to avoid situations in which they are subjected to unwanted attentions of this sort; but, with the right man, a bit of "manhandling" may be exactly what they are looking for. By contrast, in French stories, where the hero courts the heroine, it is always with the utmost gentleness—just brushing her shoulder ("Il fut cet absent" 1957:5) or kissing her hand ("J'étais une romanesque" 1957:77).

American stories from the 1950s also illustrate many instances of men speaking to romantically interesting women in condescending or unflattering terms. Recall that Tony Daniels's first advances toward Faith Andrews are capped with his chin-lifting admonition to her to "loosen up a little, honey" (Beliveau 1957:77). In "Midtown Manner," the story starts with a comic conversation between the hero, Meath, and the counter girl at his favorite café. She is affecting an English accent:

"Beg podden?"

"It's all right: I'm a secret agent. I lead three lives. Care to share one with me?"

"No thank you I'm suah," the girl said coldly.

"Ah, you're only saying that. Your lips tell me Nyet but there's Da Da in your eyes."

"Beg podden?"

Meath stood up ... He left double his usual tip, reasoning that the girl deserved it, said, "Buy yourself some uranium," and went out into the street. (Carroll 1957:79)

Later, Meath meets a new actress whom he is tasked with turning into a star. She is treated with open rudeness by Nestor, the porcine talent executive who works at Meath's firm:

Meath hid his anger at Nestor by a large show of amiability to the girl.

"What do your friends call you?" he asked, leading her to the door.

"Abby."

"Come along, Abby." In the corridor, with the door closed behind them, he said, "If an apology from me on behalf of that yahoo will help any, you have it."

She said, rather tonelessly, "Thank you, but I don't mind really. You see, I need the money."

Meath stared at her. Need the money indeed! he said to himself. The remark had no appropriateness to the occasion, but there was an earnest simplicity about it that somehow touched him.

He stopped outside his office door, moved her chin upward with his finger and searched her plain face. “Abby, what am I going to do with you?”

“I don’t know, but I expect you’ll think of something. I’m very intelligent.”

He laughed uncomfortably, then opened the door and waved her into the office. “Well, don’t let it get around. You’ve got enough handicaps as it is.”

Tess turned and smiled at Abby. “Don’t mind him, dear: he tells that to all the girls. As you’ve met Nestor, you know the worst. Believe it or not, Meath here is about the best.”

“I believe it,” Abby said. She was looking at Meath with an expression that suddenly caught at Tess’s heart. It was an expression she knew; she had seen it often in her own mirror. (Carroll 1957:80)

Meath’s chin-lifting gesture in the middle of the quoted passage is read as affectionate. Between this and his unspoken defense of her while she is meeting Nestor, Abby conceives a real liking for Meath, and by the end of the story, she has arranged for him to accompany her to Los Angeles where she will make her Hollywood debut. The outcome of this story puts into question Meath’s ascendancy in the relationship. Just at the moment when Meath fears Abby will fall defenseless into Hollywood’s maw, she breaks the news that Flannery, the talent firm’s top executive, has plans for Meath:

“Flannery wants [you] on the Coast. He says [you’ve] done such a wonderful job with me that he wants [you] to handle everything until my picture is released.”

Meath sat on top of his desk and put his hands over his face. “You want me to go to the Coast, Abby?”

She went to him and said, with a small laugh, “It was—it was my idea, in a way. I told Flannery I wouldn’t go otherwise, contract or no contract.”

He took his hands away. “You told Flannery that?”

“Yes.” (Carroll 1957:82)

Meath is overjoyed, because he has long since fallen in love with Abby. This turnabout of power follows the story’s patterning after “My Fair Lady,” the modern version of the Pygmalion story. Abby ends up having the upper hand, and using it to keep Meath with her. This is the only such ending in all the stories I sampled, and perhaps it accounts partly for the explicit braggadocio which the author imputes to his hero. Meath is introduced to the reader in the following stereotypically masculine character sketch:

He was feeling rebellious, and that was risky for he might rebel himself out of a job. He had a fluently nasty tongue when he was unwary enough to use it on the wrong people, and it was only the wrong people who invited its use: the windbags and stuffed shirts who sometimes occupied positions of power and influence, in his, as in other, worlds. With anyone else Meath was likely to be gentle of tongue, as he was in most ways a gentle person. But with the mildness, there was something dangerous in him. (Carroll 1957:79)

The rest of the story certainly does not bear out the assertion that there is something “dangerous” in Meath. All in all, this seems like an effort by the author to reassure the reader that Meath, a white-collar Manhattanite, is not a citified “wet.”

American stories also suggest that men have a hard time apologizing to women. Whereas the heroes of the French stories “Last Combat” and “My Punishment” apologize for mistrusting their wife and being unfaithful, respectively, there is only one outright apology in the American stories I reviewed: by a man who has not only been unfaithful to his wife, but also lied to her and beaten her on multiple occasions. In “Flash From An Old Flame,” the hero never expresses regret to his wife for his infidelity; she is just grateful that he has decided to reconcile with her. As we have seen, the “true experience” essay/letter from John Martin, car salesman, to Julie the high-school English teacher is a roundabout way of delivering a semi-apology in the form of a promise to improve his conduct, coupled with a marriage proposal. The hero of “The End of Her Life” uses a somewhat similar non-apology apology when reconciling with the woman whom he abandoned three years earlier. Hugh MacReedy has come to town after reading in a newspaper that the heroine’s brother has been convicted of murder. He hopes somehow to save the brother and also to regain the favor of the woman he now realizes is “the one.” When she first sees him, Vicky leans against him in exhaustion and murmurs his name. Soon, though, she regains her composure and tells him to go. As he foresaw, MacReedy needs to make the most eloquent appeal of his lifetime to win back the woman he loves. His rhetorical strategy would be unthinkable in a French story:

I blew up. I had no rational plan, no careful argumentation. I don't know what I said. I kicked a carton of books out of the way and I paced back and forth, waving my arms, talking too loudly, glaring at her. She had backed to a couch and sat down, looking small, pale and startled. I guess my theme was largely concerned with the implied right of a man to make a mistake, her obligation to try to believe a man could change, and the right any human creature had to expect some kind of understanding. And I know I covered how it felt to be ashamed, deathly ashamed of yourself. I demanded to know what right she had to assume I was the same calloused punk with a line. When I paused for breath the third or fourth time, her face was all screwed up. I stared at her as she began to laugh. Within five

seconds she was in helpless hysteria. I went to her and held her. Her rigid body was vibrating like an overloaded generator. She went from hysteria into tears of hopelessness. She left me. I heard a door bang. I waited there for her. It was fifteen minutes before she returned, white and quiet and exhausted.

She sat beside me and held my hand in both of hers and looked down at it. "I hope you had three years of hell, Hugh," she said in a small voice.

"I did." (Keasler 1957:117)

And that is the long and the short of his apology. Its comic effect comes from our understanding of the hero's typically masculine strategy, hopelessly inappropriate though it may be, of going on offense when capitulation is called for. He manages to confess his guilt and implicitly apologize for it while assuming a ridiculous façade of indignation.

We should note one final contrast between French and American ideas of masculinity as revealed in magazine stories from this period. As we saw, French attitudes toward male violence are generally disapproving, though perhaps with a note of repressed admiration. The two American stories involving serious violence are more frankly approving of it. The mystery story with Hugh MacReedy describes two fights in loving detail—lots of tactical maneuvering, moist-sounding punches, and so on—neither of which is important to the central plot line. Of course, this is a mystery story, a genre in which we might expect a bit of gratuitous violence. More revealing, I think, is the violence featured in "Romance in the Park." In this author's hands, the key fight is briefly and vaguely described. While the violence here is less pornographic than that of the mystery story, its symbolic importance for the main characters is of great analytical interest. "Romance in the Park" culminates in man's psychotic attack on Tanny, a somewhat over-adventurous young girl. Her defender is the "nicest boy in town," Mel, who has disappointed Tanny thus far during their first date because he has not proved to be as gentlemanly as his reputation suggests. In a cinematic manner, the story follows a police car's searchlight which comes to rest on the couple just after Mel has vanquished Tanny's assailant:

In the sudden glare Tanny and Mel were looking at each other in wonder.

Tanny had been kissed, whistled at, ogled, fought over and whispered about. But never before had she been defended and saved from violent attack; she had no illusions about that, having felt the hands at her throat and the mad whisper on her cheek. Tanny was a very knowing and practical girl, even a little hard at times. But now as she stared at her rescuer's face—the terrible, quivering, boy-into-man face with blood seeping down from the split scalp—her heart went *zing* with uncompromising finality.

As for Mel, he had kissed a lot of girls lately, trying to live down that "nicest boy in town" title he'd somehow gotten stuck with. He had

intended to complete his metamorphosis at Tanny's expense. Instead, he had defended her, shed blood for her, maybe even killed for her. Suddenly all doubts about his manhood were gone. And, with them, all confusion as to Tanny's place in his life. *This is my girl*. (Gavin 1957:89)

Mel's violent contest with the madman in the story plays a redemptive, almost miraculous role. It allows Tanny and Mel alike to re-capture the attitudes appropriate to their sexes, to mature emotionally into female and male adulthood in a single moment.

American and French ideals of masculinity, as represented in women's magazines, thus differ quite starkly. American heroes tend to be athletic, tall and beefy. They are capable of meting out unapologetic violence and tend to manhandle women a bit when courting them. They are better at teasing women than at apologizing to them. American heroes make up in solidity and straight-forwardness what they lack in eloquence. French heroes may be tall, but are almost always slender. They are averse to using physical force and are invariably gentle with women. Above all, they are able to empathize with women and to express their feelings beautifully in words. They combine masculine decisiveness and vigor with an almost feminine gentleness and sweetness.

These differences in character traits are linked to the French aristocratic tradition of *galanterie*, which foreign and French observers have seen as culturally distinctive for centuries. To gain a deeper understanding of how this distinctive French vision of masculinity is related to social practices, however, we need to consider the problem of infidelity in French discourse.

INFIDELITY: THE GREAT DRAMA OF THE FRENCH DOMESTIC SPHERE

Perhaps *the* paradigmatic drama of the domestic sphere in France is infidelity. Observers of French culture have long remarked that the practice of eroticized social mixing between the sexes even after marriage multiplies the opportunities for adultery (Tocqueville 2002 [1840]:571-72). The two comparatively elite French magazines in my sample, *Marie-Claire* and *Elle*, feature an implicit debate on the subject of infidelity in early 1957. This provides a rich evidentiary base from which to explore the topic. French discourse about infidelity reveals some of the downsides for women of France's comparatively compassionate ideals of masculinity and of relations between the sexes.

In their January 28, 1957 issue, *Elle* published the results of their reader-response survey, presumably conducted in 1956, in which 270,000 French women listed their most significant joys and worries. The number one concern was having an unfaithful husband. *Elle's* editorialist, Jean Duché, made hay of the finding, publishing columns on the topic in multiple issues. His columns also contained an indirect response to Marcelle Auclair's January 1957 essay on the sexual double standard concerning infidelity in *Elle's* main competitor, *Marie-Claire*. Duché's views on the matter are generally conservative, whereas Auclair puts forward a proto-feminist viewpoint.

Marcelle Auclair: a proto-feminist French perspective

Auclair's article on the subject is titled: "Why Are Women Less Free Than Men?" It contains a curious mix of egalitarian and stereotypical arguments. Auclair complains that social norms and the legal code hold women more culpable than men for marital infidelity, freely admitting that women are just as much party to the double standard as are men (Auclair 1957:66). The Bible speaks against it, she argues, pointing to Jesus' admonition to the crowd which is poised to stone an adulterous woman to death: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" (Auclair 1957:67). Turning to the article of the Napoleonic legal code that makes a wife's infidelity case for divorce but allows a man to keep a mistress as long as she is not lodged in the same house as the wife, Auclair condemns this as an instance of blatant male hypocrisy:

In fact, men have made the laws, in their own interest. They hate being cuckolded, for fear that their children won't necessarily be their own, but they themselves don't fear to cheat, doing so even if it means giving their best friend heirs who are not his own. (Auclair 1957:67)

Having made this very egalitarian argument, Auclair pivots to make a claim about men and women's very different sentimental make-up:

1. Women take their first lover against their husband; 2. Only the first lover counts; 3. The woman gets attached almost always out of passionate possession, while an "adventure" can leave nothing but a vague memory in a man's mind. (Auclair 1957:67-68)

Men don't necessarily love their wives less when they commit adultery, but infidelity is always an emotionally fraught affair for women, claims Auclair. Once a woman's heart is empty—once she has stopped loving her husband—another love must take his place, Auclair claims. Interestingly, a similar argument about women's deeper emotional response to sex is used by a recent American anti-feminist author as an argument that inegalitarian social taboos on female promiscuity are legitimate because they simply ratify biological realities (Lukas 2006:30-32). Auclair draws the opposite conclusion, however: "[W]omen are required to behave like heroines, while men follow only their whims. Let's admit that this is flattering, but it is hardly just" (Auclair 1957:68). For Auclair, there is no logical contradiction between admitting basic sentimental differences between men and women and demanding uniform behavior from them.

Let us pause for a moment and consider why Auclair and Lukas, some fifty years apart and in different countries, draw such different conclusions from similar postulates about women's "nature." The answer is that Lukas is writing from within a classically Liberal perspective. (In fact, at bottom, she is a libertarian.) People should make choices based on their own preferences; they should do what they genuinely desire. Auclair does not share this assumption that people should do whatever they want. She says that "The sexual appetite, like all our other appetites, must be controlled, directed, sometimes dominated, if we don't want to have nothing more of a human being than the name" (Auclair 1957:67). Human beings are human only insofar as they are able to transcend

their animal instincts, to restrain themselves enough to act on the basis of reason.¹⁷ Even if men are promiscuous by nature, this does not give them warrant to behave in that fashion. Whereas most Americans think that society should directly reflect people's natural capacities and desires, the French believe that civilization is a legitimate collective achievement, a source of new and higher ends which people should try to retain and live up to.

Auclair also implies that French women's apparent patience for their husband's infidelity is largely the result of practical constraints. She remarks that some women of independent means have as many affairs as men do. These women usually end up being unhappy, however, particularly once they have lost their youthful beauty and attraction and must, like older men, purchase their lovers with money and prestige. This, Auclair implies, is rather undignified and she is convinced that such women profess their satisfaction with this state of affairs only out of a prideful determination not to admit defeat (Auclair 1957:69).

Women who make an independent living despite being married, Auclair writes, do not tolerate spousal infidelity.

Her mind occupied, she is less visibly jealous than a woman whose horizons stop at the home, but when confronted by a husband's infidelity, she is much less patient. How many times have I heard the reasoning: "Why should I let myself be scoffed at and vexed by him? I make a living. I can even make a living for myself. Let him go to the devil!" (Auclair 1957:69)

Financially independent wives rarely make grand emotional scenes before leaving their adulterous husbands, says Auclair.

I have seen plenty of these husbands who got blindsided [by their wife's demand for a divorce]: "She was always exquisite to me... Of course, I was cheating on her, but she seemed used to it (*sic*), and did not reproach me for it..."

The woman who seems "used to" her husband's infidelities usually has a [male] consoler, and if she has the financial resources to live on her own, she will sooner or later toss her husband overboard. Beware! (Auclair 1957:69)

Auclair makes clear that she is not condoning infidelity by women. Rather, she is arguing, men who assume that they can cheat on their spouses with impunity, because doing so is normal or natural for men and is easily ignored by women, in fact owe the continued stability of their marriage either to their wife's own infidelity or to their financial ascendancy. Either alternative is deeply insulting to a man's sense of honor,

¹⁷ There is an echo in Auclair's argument of Durkheim's views on the relationship between bodily impulses, which are "individual" in the brute sense of being experienced by a single person and the imperatives of the "soul," which is bestowed by society/civilization and which allows the attainment of true spiritual "individuality" (Durkheim 1973).

Auclair knows. A man who is being cuckolded or who maintains his wife's submission only by dint of tyranny cannot pride himself on masculine honor. Ultimately, Auclair argues, adultery undermines one of civilization's greatest achievements:

Sexual abuses... ruin one of the most noble creations of humanity: the couple united by reciprocal love in a harmonious home. This home is the goal to be aimed at. To realize it, one needs a certain faith, an ideal, or at least a little pride. (Auclair 1957:69)

Auclair's appeal has an egalitarian and feminist flavor. Despite the fact that it postulates male and female differences in sentimental make-up, and despite its idealization of a harmonious and loving home, it neither tolerates gender differences in sexual continence nor advocates the confinement of women to the domestic sphere. Moreover, it is sensitive to the impact of differences in economic power on relationships between the sexes, something that American discourse during the period generally omits.

Jean Duché: agonistic love

For an opposing perspective on adultery, we can consult Jean Duché's extensive editorial responses to the *Elle* survey on French women's greatest worries and joys, and then to the spate of mail he received in response to his comments. In his first, delicately mocking overview of the survey results, he writes that:

I take you to be truthful (by the law of large numbers), mathematically truthful... with a veracity that is so human that it even grants hypocrisy its proper place.¹⁸ I am quite certain that you did not coordinate your answers in order to put your husband's infidelity in the first place and in the last place of all [i.e., 20th place] concern for your own reputation... So, if I hear you correctly, a great number of you are women who suffer stoically, virtuously, without dreaming of the slightest reprisals, since your spotless reputation is the last of your worries. Is that really the case? Your husbands should be apprised of this. (Duché 1957a:18)

Duché's first tactic is to pique women about their implicit claim that they themselves are paragons of marital virtue—that they are without sin and in their rights to cast the first stone, so to speak. Ironically, in this instance, he and not the more feminist Auclair is arguing for a parallelism of motivation between men and women. This is the very opposite of a moralistic defense of men. In one of his initial columns, Duché recounts the story of a mutually unfaithful couple as told to him by the unhappy wife. In that column, he relates why the wife said she was unfaithful.¹⁹ In the next column, he adduces a long list of possible reasons for the husband's lapses. Duché writes of the couple:

If we admit that they loved one another madly, sublimely or romantically and that their marriage took the wrong turn, the great void that resulted

¹⁸ This sweetly phrased insult has exactly the flavor of the *galanterie* described by Habib (Habib 2006:45-46).

¹⁹ I do not seem to have photographed this column in my sample.

could have been filled, after all, by a different desire: for example, the desire to go fishing or to collect stamps. That would have been wiser, from a certain point of view. But no, this disappointed man goes straight to another woman. What do you expect, he is a bit of a maniac. (Duché 1957b)

Here, Duché twits men in a way that implicitly flatters women. He is also taking aim at the expectation that men and women will be passionately in love when they get married: such elevated expectations are bound to come down to earth, he implies, and when they do, the husband may look to replicate the intoxicating experience with other women. He continues with his inventory of motives for male inconstancy:

Let us look for some more solid reasons. They do exist...

There is the need to do as everyone else does, together with the desire to make oneself stand out; a strange mix which goes as far as creating unfaithful men who do not cheat on their wife. Rather unbelievable, isn't it? Nevertheless, I have received a letter where I read: "At home, alone with me, he is perfect—gentleness, affection, complete mutual understanding in all domains and he can't express enough how much his wife makes him happy. But at any social get-together he feels the need to flirt with another woman in full view of his wife and of everyone else present, to the extent that disobliging remarks have been made to me. Is this sadism?" One can never be sure that a man has not acted purely out of a desire to inflict pain (and what a pleasure it is, when one is beloved!); in this case, however, I would sooner lay the blame on common vanity, on the need to prove to your esteemed peers that you are not a ridiculous faithful lapdog and that if you wanted to...ah! but *then* you'd see!...

(Duché 1957b)

Parenthetically, we should note that Duché's puzzled correspondent attributes to her husband the characteristics of appealing masculine sweetness which is the female-demanded norm in France. Duché's interpretation of the reasons for this man's behavior also provides support for the proposition that men consider their attractiveness to women to be the best proof of masculinity in the eyes of other men.

Usually, writes Duché, the sort of "conformist" represented by this man—uxorious at home, a Don Juan in public—goes further than simple flirtation if he is unhappy: "a man who is in despair or is bored knows that it is customary to take a mistress; that is always what is done." Is Duché exaggerating the "conventionality" of adultery for effect? Perhaps a little, although there are some indications that infidelity is more common in the most upper-crust French circles (e.g., Wadham 2009:16-19), and it may well have been more common in the 1950s than it is today. In any case, the fact that infidelity figures as *Elle* readers' number one concern suggests that at the very least it looms large in the imagination. Even if a man does not consciously set out to commit

adultery out of the sense that it is the “done thing,” Duché writes, he may simply fall into it by happenstance:

It is just that women, it must be admitted, are sometimes very lovable, which consequently creates the desire to love them in passing; it is very stupid, it isn't moral, and it is all the more complicated than the aforementioned case, in view of the quantity [of opportunities]; a flighty husband, cynical and cultivated, thus finds himself in danger of sighing, in the manner of Lamartine as corrected by Giraudoux: “When you miss one person in particular [i.e., your wife], suddenly the world is repopulated [*Un seul être vous manque et tout est repeuplé*]”... Alas! There is no shortage of women in the world. (Duché 1957b)

And, furthermore, in the *galant* vision of the world, there is nothing to stop men from finding women amiable and from doing their best to charm them. While going the next step and actually starting an affair might be “stupid” and “immoral,” it is not uncommon and is not circumscribed by strong social boundaries prohibiting what could constitute the first steps of a relationship.

Duché cites one final reason for a man's infidelity beyond those he has already cited. This is nothing other than the desire:

to test and to prove one's liberty. Here I solemnly draw the attention of women to what I am about to say: there are few men in whom this philosophical desire does not sleep; be on your guard against awaking it by tugging on his chain. (Duché 1957b)

This full litany of reasons for men's possible infidelity should give the reader a sense of the way French wives in a monogamous relationship could find themselves threatened by a cultural norm of masculinity oriented toward pleasing women. What is endearing when directed at oneself becomes a threat insofar it can be aimed at other women.

Perhaps sensing that this inventory of reasons for male infidelity may overwhelm his readers, leading them to give up any hope of monopolizing their husbands' affections, Duché closes the piece by promising hope.

None of these reasons, however unpleasant it may be, entails irremediable catastrophe, and if you have understood me well, you will already suspect the remedies that I am about to suggest.

The irremediable catastrophe would be if your husband had retained a nostalgia for the mad love you began with, if you have not known how to fill this horrible void, and if one day he left in quest of some other sublime madness. Fear the unfaithful Don Quixote. But, in this sense, it is reassuring to think that a married Don Quixote can easily become Sancho Panza. (Duché 1957b)

Duché is making several suggestions here which demonstrate the gulf between representations of love, infidelity and marriage in French and American magazines. First

is the idea that the reasons for male infidelity are not “irremediabl[y] catastrophic.” Duché is not only suggesting that such reasons can be neutralized with proper prophylaxis, but also that an act of infidelity itself need not doom a marriage. In a subsequent column, he praises the good sense of a correspondent who writes that many worse things can befall a woman than a husband’s casual affair. This woman, like the plurality of *Elle*’s survey respondents, put “a happy home” [*bonheur en ménage*] at the top of her list of joys. She differs from her counterparts, however, in that she didn’t put “an unfaithful husband” at the top of her list of concerns. As she writes,

I wanted to put first on the list things which could most gravely imperil that “happiness in the household” which sums up all the joys of a woman. Would you have guessed that I consider it much more dangerous and serious to have a husband with leukemia (or who drinks too much) or a paralyzed or idiot child, or even an infamous slum as a dwelling—than to have a husband who could have accidentally embraced a secretary in a corner, or even ended up in the wrong hotel room during a business trip...

And I won't ever be persuaded otherwise! (Duché 1957c)

This kind of attitude toward a husband’s infidelity is possible only if one believes that an affair need not signify anything of real moment about the quality of one’s marriage.

This is the truth that is revealed to the protagonist of “My Punishment.” In this story featured in *Nous Deux*, the protagonist, Françoise, hears from a neighbor that her beloved husband has been seen with another woman. When her husband, Hugues, returns home from his fictitious “business trip,” Françoise confronts him. He immediately confesses the entire affair:

“She was free, gay, amusing, and I conducted myself like... yes, like a middle-school kid! (He stood before me, his face pale and contorted): I had a moment of madness... as happens to all of us at some point, I imagine. All that is stupid... But, my dear, I don’t love her! I swear to you that that girl means nothing to me and that I will never see her again.” (“Ma punition” 1957:30)

After this moment, Hugues tries to make amends, but Françoise cannot let go of her hurt and apprehension that he will commence another affair. This goes on for an entire year, and she knows that she is trying his patience, but cannot stop her suspicions from overtaking her. One day, Hugues announces to Françoise that he has just confirmed the booking of a long trip which will serve as a second honeymoon for them. Françoise, seeing the envelope from his travel agent, had suspected that it was a love letter from another woman. He sees the trace of suspicion and surprise on her face, and stalks out of the house, saying that she is the sort of woman who has no forgiveness in her heart. She quickly dresses to go out, and then follows him:

I had to find him, I would look for him without ceasing, even if I had to wait until morning in front of the door to his office. I had to tell him that I

had gotten over that horrible sickness of doubt and that I wanted to make a brand new beginning for our home if he wanted to do that with me. That would be my deserved penitence.

And I knew that he was waiting for that gesture from me. If not, why would he not have waited an entire year and been patient with my fits of moodiness? Why would he have conspired so sweetly to schedule this little trip, “a second honeymoon,” as he had said?

I was the only one to count in his life, he had told me that day; now I would have bet my heart on it... (“Ma punition” 1957:30)

Françoise has been in an agony of doubt for an entire year about whether she is truly her husband’s beloved. Finally, she understands that her husband’s infidelity really was emotionally insignificant, that it really was just a momentary act of madness, of schoolboy immaturity. That this is a difficult thing to grasp for women who feel that they have fallen in love with “Prince Charming,” as Françoise d’Eaubonne puts it in her letter to Betty Friedan, is not terribly surprising. Clearly, this worry torments many of the respondents to *Elle*’s reader-survey as well.

In the American stories about male infidelity that I sampled, it never signifies a momentary and ultimately trivial lapse, however. George in “Flash from an Old Flame” has decided to get divorced and marry Maxine, the dream girl of his youth, at the moment that he has adulterous sex with her. Later, he decides to stay with his wife, but this is part of a momentous decision to which his entire moral being is committed (Peeples 1957). Women who commit adultery may feel the weight of their sin so profoundly that it disastrously pollutes their marriage (Anonymous 1957m).

Both Françoise and Hugues’s experience in “My Punishment” and Jean Duché’s columns make it clear that, while a serious breach, adultery need not be an intensely emotionally significant act for a man. Even Marcelle Auclair, who condemns masculine adultery in much stronger terms, agrees that this is true.

Duché suggests that the truly dangerous and catastrophic potential for infidelity comes from the mythology of love itself. He implies that the raptures of love cannot possibly endure the quotidian realities of marriage. A woman must maneuver carefully to ensure that she can somehow help assuage her husband’s disappointment at the waning of love’s folly. The idea that the transports of romantic love might be a threat to marriage is entirely absent from American stories.

Duché continued: How to re-seduce your husband

With this in mind, we can return to Duché’s recommendations for how a wife can transmute the Don Quixote in their husband to a more manageable Sancho Panza. He devotes two columns to how *not* to respond to men’s infidelity. He cites the letter of one French matron who recommends treating an unfaithful man as one would a child who has stolen money for bon-bons: the wise mother locks the armoire and doles out more bon-

bons than usual. Duché responds that this sort of approach is bound to fail, since no amount of “force” will work on a man of spirit (Duché 1957d).

This refusal of “force” as a basis for social control echoes Claude Habib’s analysis of *galanterie*’s role in the marital hierarchy, though with the sexes reversed. Habib quotes Marivaux’s novel in which he states that law and customary duty provide an insufficient basis for husbands’ ascendancy over their wives. Rather, the husband’s “actions must be soft and wise; he must make it so that his wife finds pleasure in ceding to him, and it is in this way that he must, so to speak, conceal the fact that he is the master” (Habib 2006:26). The French discourse of seduction is so pervasive (for example, I encountered subway advertisements in Paris advising businessmen as to how to “seduce” their clients, with no implication that a cross-sex relationship was under discussion) that we should probably read it as part of a larger cultural dichotomy between methods of making others conform to one’s wishes. “Force” would be one side of this dichotomy, and would be associated with the state and with formal hierarchies. This important ideational pole would be associated with the French fascination for wielding personal power and with an at least equal and opposite revulsion for the abuse of power (Saguy 2003; Lamont 1992). Seduction, very broadly understood, would then stand at the other end of this polarity. This would involve the exercise of charm (and, perhaps, cunning) to induce others to comply with one’s wishes entirely voluntarily. Charming someone requires personal charisma and continually renewed effort to be successful, but is quite magical in that it brings pleasure to both parties. Being the “victim” of an effort to charm might be exquisitely enjoyable even if one realizes what is taking place with part of one’s consciousness.

This context should help us understand Duché’s comment to his correspondent that any reconciliation between an unfaithful man and his wife require that they be “‘attached to one another strongly’ [*fortement*], that is to say, not by force [*non par force*]” (Duché 1957d). Duché’s sense that the affective bond between husband and wife is paramount *despite* the threat or actuality of adultery leads him to condemn several other possible responses to male infidelity. In a column entitled “Reprisals, Submission or Rupture?” Duché comments that some of his correspondents recommend a policy of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” when it comes to male infidelity. If a husband can cheat, so can a wife. Indeed, Duché writes, these proponents of a marital *lex talionis* sometimes go it one better:

sometimes they have taken precautions, for greater surety; they are prepared; foresightful spouses, they have provisioned themselves with marital betrayal along with their kilos of sugar. These vengeful, and indeed rather foolish women challenge me, as a husband, to give them my blessing; but it seems to me that they really don't need it. (Duché 1957e)

I quote the last sentence in this excerpt because it is again so typical of the *galant* put-down: Duché implies both that these women are independent enough that they do not

need his sanction and, by the same token, that they are too far gone in their folly to benefit from his reproof.

Duché also deplores women who go to the opposite extreme, submitting without a peep to their husbands' infidelities. He says that his mail-bag contains letters from: many submissive women, some of whom are too submissive and whom I would willingly incite to revolt. Not at all those who love, who retain the hope of being something different to him and who fear that in revenging themselves on their husbands, they will be the first to be injured; these women are admirable and they are right because they have a chance of winning a victory "at the finish" [*au finish*]. But there are others who write me dismaying letters; they tell me that he has had a mistress for three years, for five years, that she has a child by him, that he declares he is unable to do without her (the mistress) but that he still sticks by her (the spouse); this man has so much love for his wife that he confides in her about his heartbreak in love, and even his joys in love; this husband is completely "committed" [*pris*] and when his wife speaks of divorce, he "loyally" offers her money to go away, but she stays and he is "sulky" with her! These women put up with everything... Because of the children, they say; and sometimes, they say outright: how would I make a living, what would I become alone? (Duché 1957e)

Duché does not subtly taunt these women as he does the *vengeresses*. They are too pathetic to merit clever barbs. But he implies that these women have just as surely given up the game. By abdicating their dignity, they have also surrendered any realistic hope of recapturing their husbands' love.²⁰ Too much self-abasement by women vitiates the mutual regard that erotic love is built upon.

It would be preferable, Duché says, simply to break with one's husband than either to get into a tit-for-tat exchange with him or to abase oneself before him.

To such women who stay with their men out of fear, I would give them Mme. R.'s letter: she, on her own, managed to reconstruct her life, to create a comfortable post for herself as director of a Muslim school in Morocco and to raise three children who seem perfectly happy. Better no father than a bad father; better solitude than a bad husband. To demand equality, you must have that sort of courage. But it is true that that will remain easier for men than for women, whose education has not prepared them for independence. (Duché 1957e)

Duché admits that independence, in practice, is not equally available to men and women. He does not try to explain away the injustice of this situation. Life itself is seldom fair, after all.

²⁰ Compare this with the posture of abjection assumed by the narrator of "Guilty Wife" at the moment she admits her sins to her husband ("Guilty wife: Dare I confess my shame?" 1957).

Nevertheless, he maintains, women need not necessarily lose hope in the face of a wavering spouse. In another column, he recommends a range of strategies which leave open the way for affectionate reconciliation between husband and wife while putting up a stout, astute fight against a man's wayward impulses. Since novelty and a taste for freedom are the two main causes of infidelity, he argues, countermeasures should be directed thence:

Aren't you, perhaps, a bit boring [*ennuyeuse*]? If you know how to laugh or to sigh at the right moment, it is still the case that boredom can be born in a day - or a night - of uniformity. A few efforts (preferably, invisible ones) by way of laughs and games could be of the happiest effect. (Duché 1957f)

As for coping with a husband who dreams of liberty, it is useless for women to make themselves into obstacles in their path, he argues. The wife who does so will only compound the problem by making liberty more appealing and herself less so.

But, Duché says, a clever wife can inspire remorse: rather than extorting it by scenes of tears, she can induce it by dint of "*gentillesse*...Your sweetness can even inspire a sentiment of honor and recognition [*reconnaissance*] on his part." A second expedient is artfully manipulated inconvenience:

Don't come out and say "traitor, I know all!" This will make him think he has no more reason to hide his infidelity. Suppose that his free time is suddenly miraculously encumbered so that he has to invent lies (labor that is so difficult that often he gives up his extramarital affairs in order not to complicate his life) or to choose between "her" and another pleasure. This makes her the annoying one...

One woman will work by provoking remorse, another by inconvenience, a third by jealousy, which is not impermissible if exercised with delicacy at the right moment, the best being when he is nearly sated. Finally, get rid of your inferiority complexes; comparisons are not necessarily to your detriment; if the idea of a certain pleasure has led him away, he can also discover the truth of a greater pleasure with the wife whom he still loves—it is you whom I am talking about, you with whom he has chosen to share his life. Permit me in this regard to draw your attention to a fact that may have escaped you: is not each mistress who is taken and then abandoned an homage rendered to you, in a sense? But not in another sense, of course, I agree; don't tear me to pieces. (Duché 1957f)

These sort of strategies portray marriage as, potentially, a ceaseless seduction contest. There is something a little exhausting-sounding about Duché's comment that "If you know how to laugh or to sigh at the right moment, it is still the case that boredom can be born in a day—or a night—of uniformity." Such a marriage promises little repose and rare opportunities for complete candor with one's partner. In a culture where love means

passion and excitement, however, this model of marriage might promise a continual, lovingly agonistic adventure.

In American stories, the ideal wife is something of a mind reader; but she puts her knowledge of her man's inner emotional life to immediate use reassuring and supporting him. (Think of the emotionally acute lawyer's wife in "The Full Years" (Holder 1957).) Here, Duché is suggesting that a wife should use her intuition to outwit her husband—very lovingly, of course, in service of a happy home, and perhaps with his admiring realization of how deftly he is being manipulated. The price French women pay for a version of masculinity that centers on how well a man can charm open a woman's heart is that this capacity can threaten the stability of marriage. Once a woman has been won, there is no guarantee that the man will not proceed on to other conquests.

Before setting aside Duché, I need to address one other crucial moment in his long skein of arguments and recommendations. At one point, Duché turns directly to the issue of the equality of men and women raised in the very title of Marcelle Auclair's article on the sexual double standard.

All the same, I don't want to shy away from the sempiternal question of the equality of rights. After all, if it irks me, I went looking for it... "Why should women be less free than men, you write, since the sacrament is instituted and the laws are established in parallel for both of them?" The sacrament, yes, but not the laws, perhaps because no "progress," no promotion of woman will eliminate the fact of children; and let's not forget the old ineradicable remains of the moral of possessor and possessed: I wish that a modern women, sighing in her hottest flame "I am yours," were committing a linguistic error, but the fact is that she says it. I admit, however, that a flighty, but civilized, man is obliged to grant the same rights to women; but admit that it requires an unusual courage of him, one that is in any case superior to your own? (Duché 1957e)

Duché rejects purely religious appeals for equity in the obligation of marriage. The law, as he says, still encodes a double standard. He does not appeal to the authority of the law in the abstract, however. It is based on the fact that cuckolded men can be duped into caring for offspring that is not their own, whereas women cannot. A more novel argument, from a contemporary American perspective, is Duché's use of erotic sensations as warrant for the idea of an asymmetry between men and women. Duché's final conclusion is perhaps the most surprising and revealing of all. He admits that, as a matter of generosity and civilization, men are obliged to grant women just as much of a right to extramarital affairs as they claim for themselves, though it is more difficult and courageous for them to do so. In the end, he implies, rights are less relevant than sentiments of generosity and entente between the sexes. Duché's arguments suggest once again the different path taken to relations between the sexes by *galanterie* as opposed to moral duties and natural rights.

CHAPTER 3: Feminism, Le Remake

In this chapter, I assess the influences of cultural and institutional context on the second-wave feminist movements in America and France. I am concerned less with purely intellectual and theoretical developments in the respective movements and more with the way in which feminist demands were represented to and received by interested members of the public at large. I find that America's culture and institutions were generally a better fit for the feminist movement, which was more consistently egalitarian, more populist, and more effective at inspiring women (and men) to transform their assumptions about gender roles than the French movement. French feminists scored fewer clear victories, although their protests did win an institutionally and popularly entrenched liberalization of reproductive public policy.

The ideological power of (classically) liberal egalitarianism in the United States has long been noted by scholar observers (Hartz 1991 [1955]), while France's comparatively interventionist state (Jepperson 2002) and forgiving attitudes toward sexuality (Saguy 1999) have made their way into popular awareness—and popular stereotypes—on both sides of the Atlantic. In a sense, the trajectory of second-wave feminism in both countries represents an extension of those longstanding national differences. Beyond this simple point, a closer and more analytical examination of second-wave feminism's trajectory in both countries can enrich our sociological understanding of the respective role of culture and institutions in promoting social continuity and change. It takes us beyond familiar stereotypes to help us understand how national cultural and institutional configurations make certain insights and practical opportunities more readily available or more difficult to those within the influence of those contexts. Understanding how this is so gives us a better grasp on how we are shaped, for good and for ill, by our social surroundings and how we might collectively and individually think and live differently than we do.

Overview of Argument: Institutional vs. Cultural Explanations of Differences between U.S. and French Second-Wave Feminism

In American comparative sociology, competing explanations of national differences are often separated into competing categories of institutions and culture (Kaufman 2009; Steinmo and Watts 1995). The logic of this division is to contrast the role of formal “rules of the game” that govern processes of cooperation and exchange with the influence of world-views and ethical norms. Though not all American sociologists use the institutions/culture distinction in this way, it keeps re-emerging in disciplinary debates about causality because it reflects deeper theoretical distinctions between interests and values, material and ideal forces, and so on.¹ This dichotomy, with its formal conception of institutions and interests, tends to be drawn somewhat differently in French sociology, which has a more “cultural” definition of institutions, equating them with patterns of judgment and conduct that can powerfully shape individual behavior even if they are

¹ For example, the multi-disciplinary field of “new institutionalism” hosts a set of debates over the most useful conception of institutions (Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth 1992; Powell and DiMaggio 1991).

not codified as organizational or legal rules.² In this chapter, I repeatedly invoke the prevailing American sociological distinction between institutions and culture, in part because it is so prevalent in the discipline and in part because it evokes distinctions which continue to be relevant to all social scientists, regardless of their choice of terms.

Narratives about the self

Many of the differences between the American feminist movement and its French counterpart can be traced to classically “cultural” factors. Differences in dominant American and French cultural narratives of self are especially important. American feminist storytelling about the movement’s ability to transform individual lives echoes a pre-existing American ur-narrative of personal moral transformation that culminates in self-confidence and comfort with one’s personal vocation; an invigorating sense of life’s open-ended possibilities; and greater personal autonomy coupled with the ability to forge more healthy and mutually rewarding relationships with others. As I have argued in previous chapters, this emphasis on moral transformation echoes the Calvinist model for salvation, both in its all-or-nothing character and in its emphasis on inner conviction as a crucial sign of election.

American feminism’s narrative of consciousness-raising also imparted a distinctively individual stamp to its intellectual arguments. The emotional power of consciousness-raising was supposed to come from a woman’s realization that “this is about *me*.” Each woman was expected to discover, for herself and within her own unique personal experience, the traces of ubiquitous societal sexism. This insistence may have religious roots in the Protestant notion that salvation can occur only through a direct and unmediated link between the individual and the divine.

This stipulation also reflects an implicitly egalitarian assumption that individuals’ experience of reality is fundamentally the same. Narratives of consciousness-raising never imply that the narrator is enlightened enough to be able to bypass this discovery of the connections between private experience and movement analysis because she is well-read, had an unusually privileged childhood, or the like. The American consciousness-raising narrative thus implies that any woman *can* undergo the transformative experience of consciousness-raising, and every woman *should* do so.

Conceptions and patterns of collective action

Thus far, I have discussed differences that are ideational in character and are rooted in narratives and visions of the ideal self. Other differences in U.S. and French feminism can be traced to differing concepts and practices of social organization in each country. This takes us to a middle ground between ideas and formal organizations. On the one hand, these formulae presuppose particular understandings of when and how cooperation can be initiated and revised;

² Examples of this approach range from Durkheim’s idea of social facts, which occupy a continuum of concreteness from structural “morphology” to ideational “currents” of thought (Durkheim 1982 [1895]:58, 52) or to Bourdieu’s notion of the various symbolic forms of “capital” whose value is enforced through social “fields” (Bourdieu 1996 [1989]; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). I owe my awareness of this difference to conversations with Marion Fourcade and with sociologists working in France. The greater willingness of French scholars to attribute efficacy (and ontological status) to social practices that are not enshrined in formal rules may itself reflect a commonplace French recognition of unwritten social expectations as real (often all-too-real) constraints on individual conduct (see Carroll 1988 [1987]).

on the other hand, they generate characteristic patterns of practice which can crystallized in formalized organizations. They are the ideational DNA of collective action and can generate institutional structures.

The divergent practices of collective action involve, on the U.S. side, a heritage of covenantal voluntarism (Fischer 2008) which many scholars have identified as being central to American culture and which can be traced both to America's dissident Protestant heritage (Fischer 2008; Fischer and Moodie Forthcoming; Swidler 1992; Varenne 1977; Weber 1958 [1922]) and to the absence of a tutelary role for the American state over society (Jepperson 2002). This allowed the American feminist invention of the "consciousness-raising" group to spread rapidly once it had been devised, since Americans were used to forming committed voluntary groups with common goals, clear boundaries, and consensual procedures for group conduct. As a consequence, popular feminist articles in the U.S. could and did frequently recommend the formation of new voluntary groups for other activist purposes as well with the knowledge that readers and their recruits would be able to follow through. A covenantal or contractualist understanding of groups could also be used by American feminists to suggest how readers might revise their own marriages. Feminists did not need to invent this conduit into readers' most intimate relationships; earlier women's magazines contain quite conventional and mainstream precedents. In contrast, whereas French magazines frequently referred readers to pre-existing organizational services and alerted them to their legal rights, they almost never recommended the creation of new voluntary organizations.

The French case provides a counterfactual illustration of what feminist organizing could look like against the background of different cultural formulae for legitimate collective action. Histories and memoirs of the French feminist movement recount large Parisian gatherings of female students and activists at the *École des Beaux-Arts* known as the *assemblée générale* (Tristan and Pisan 1977; Bernheim 1983; Picq 1993). These meetings were open to all women who wished to attend, had no official leadership, no agenda, and were governed by no rules except an understanding that any woman (or, at least, any woman who could shout loudly enough to make herself heard) could announce times and venues for subsidiary meetings. These meetings provided a recognizable gathering-point for the movement as a whole, and most participants recollected their chaotic and contentious character with pride (Picq 1993:38-41).

These French *assemblées générales* of movement activists provide a salutary reminder that American feminist groups were not actually as "structureless" as they appeared to participants (Freeman 1973). In contrast to the *Beaux-Arts* free-for-all, consciousness-raising groups were relatively orderly affairs which set membership criteria and generated consensual rules for the content and proceedings of meetings without much trouble. Unsurprisingly, the *Beaux-Arts* meetings never resolved upon collective action nor came to consensus over advances in collective thinking. The actual organization of French feminist protests or publications tended to take place through friendship networks or in cooperation with pre-existing, usually male-run, organizations on the radical left.

None of this is to suggest that French feminists were organizationally and rhetorically unable to intervene effectively in public debates. On occasion, they were able to do so more effectively than American feminists. But their actions followed a different pattern. An analysis of the “Manifesto of the 343” on abortion and the Bobigny abortion trial which followed, each of which had an impressive impact on public discourse, shows the way in which elite protest on behalf of ordinary women exploited the tension between ostensibly egalitarian legal norms and a *de facto* cultural aristocracy in France. The Manifesto and the Bobigny trial which followed both played upon longstanding French suspicions of the law as the tool of a tyrannical and hypocritical state which singled out the most powerless and helpless members of society for punishment while turning a blind eye to the foibles of the wealthy, powerful, and famous. Ironically, these protests reinforced the social legitimacy of the elites who initiated them, since it positioned them in their most socially sacred role as voices of conscience who selflessly used their privileges to defend the defenseless. Because these understandings were absent in the United States, however, an effort by American activists and *Ms.* magazine to replicate the Manifesto made little impact on public debate in America.

The cultural importance in France of elites who speak on behalf of otherwise inarticulate members of the populace leads to characteristic patterns of intra-elite contentiousness and jealousy as different factions compete to be legitimate voices for inchoate public demands and as the leaders who are most visible fall under suspicion of self-glorification.

Formal institutions

There are a number of ways in which differences between America and France’s formal institutions influenced the trajectory and impact of second-wave feminism in each country. For instance, although one of the popular feminist magazines in France puts forward egalitarian or “sameness” ideology at a similar rate to *Ms.*, only the American publication reliably combines those resolute ideological attacks on sexism with practical and actionable recommendations of how to change the status quo. This difference can be traced partly to the U.S.’s decentralized institutions of governance. A legal system which invites citizens to bring lawsuits against recalcitrant institutions for the enforcement of the law supports (and, indeed, generates) a sense of individual agency and makes self-interested demands for justice into altruistic acts. Furthermore, American feminists’ portrayal of endemic and near-universal sexism need not discourage its intended audience, since readers can also be exhorted to attack sexism at a widespread and accessible set of institutional sites. Of course, the American tradition of voluntary group formation also helps here, since it makes it easier for individuals to create associations of like-minded others to push their ideological objectives.

Formal institutions cannot carry the entire weight of explaining the different emphases of American and French feminism, however. For instance, the formal rules around marriage and divorce during this period were not very different in the U.S. and France, yet American feminism put much more emphasis on de-gendering domestic work. There were no formal institutions standing in the way of greater emphasis by popular French feminists on transforming the domestic division of labor, yet this demand was relatively muted. Both in terms of the demands

feminists were willing to highlight and in terms of actual changes in behavior over time, American women made much more headway in this regard than did French women.

An additional way in which each country's institutional structure shaped the feminist movement pertains to the respective prominence of state power and market power in France and America. *Ms.* magazine was able to attain a central role in the American feminist movement, making itself synonymous in the popular mind with feminism for most of the 1970s and taking on an unrivaled role in channeling movement ideas and debates into public discourse. This pre-eminence was acutely resented by some feminists, but ultimately they could do little to marginalize the magazine, since its power was not imposed from above but derived from its broad market appeal.

In contrast, French feminism was convulsed by angry recrimination when, in 1979, one faction of the movement patented the name *Mouvement de Liberation des Femmes* and then sued when others who criticized the move and continued to use the name. Previously, movement activists had assiduously shunned any formal organization of the movement, which would have required an application with the central state, an anathema for leftist radicals of the time. Of course, this very informality left the movement vulnerable to an act of usurpation by the first activist who was willing to defect from this understanding and obtain official recognition. Crucially, the effort to centralize the movement by copyrighting its name reached outside the movement itself for enforcement—in Bourdieu's terms, it tried to make the movement heteronomous. This proved both divisive and ultimately futile. By contrast, *Ms.* magazine centralized and extended the reach of the feminist movement's public voice without seriously compromising its autonomy. It did so during the 1970s by harnessing the feminist movement's powerful consciousness-raising narrative and linking it with practical suggestions for how readers could participate in social change. *Ms.*'s rapid attainment of centrality in the American movement also gave it the confidence to entertain searching internal criticisms from within the movement.

Method and Evidence

Throughout the chapter, my method is to compare similar movement tactics, broadly defined, that were deployed in both national cultural contexts. In each case, feminists drew inspiration directly from the efforts of their counterparts on the other side of the Atlantic. But they felt it necessary to modify the tactics they "imported," and, even after tailoring to local conditions, they met with different degrees of success. Both factors—the modifications made and each tactic's differing outcomes—are revealing of the way national cultural and institutional context shaped second-wave feminism in the United States and France.

I preface the substantive research findings of this chapter with an empirical finding that anchors my discussion of the two feminist movements. I examine time use data for French and American parents who worked full-time jobs. These were the men and women who had the greatest motive and opportunity to redistribute the burdens of paid and unpaid work within their marriages along the lines called for by egalitarian feminists. I find that, between 1965 and 1975, American full-time working parents almost entirely erased the gender gap in total work time,

whereas the time gap between their French counterparts actually grew during this period. In subsequent decades, total work time has only gradually equalized between full-time working French fathers and mothers, whereas it has stayed near zero for American couples in the same situation. This provides dramatic evidence that feminism created a major normative shift in the everyday behavior of married couples in the U.S., whereas it failed to do so in France. This finding frames the chapter's empirical puzzle: explaining why second-wave feminism had so much more impact on daily life in the U.S. as opposed to France.

In the Part I of this chapter, I contrast Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1953 [1949]) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (2001 [1963]). Each book occupies an iconic and foundational place in second-wave feminism in its country of publication, and scholars have long complained that Friedan did not sufficiently acknowledge the influences of Beauvoir's work on her own. Here, I analyze both the texts themselves and their cultural impact as revealed in contemporary reviews and subsequent scholarship. Part II of this chapter is devoted to another instance of French inspiration for the American movement, specifically the *Manifeste des 343* against abortion and contraception restrictions that Beauvoir and a group of younger feminist militants organized and published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in the spring of 1971. This initiative was imitated in the United States with a petition published in the preview issue of *Ms.* magazine. But, in contrast to the French *Manifeste*, which was credited with sparking a national debate that ultimately led to the lasting liberalization of French law, the American effort left little trace. Explaining this divergent outcome brings me to a somewhat wider examination of the French movement, one that I explore with the help of participants' memoirs and histories. Part III of this chapter examines an American effort that inspired (less successful) French imitation: the creation of an exciting and widely circulated magazine that brought feminist ideas to a nationwide popular audience and became the foremost voice of the movement in the American mainstream. The differences between the content of *Ms.* magazine and its French counterparts, the "Femmes" section of *Marie-Claire* and *F Magazine*, reveal a great deal about the implicit cultural dynamics that drove differences in feminist ideas as they were presented to mass audiences in each cultural context. As in the previous two sections, my evidence goes somewhat beyond the texts themselves.

Contribution to Sociological Knowledge

This chapter helps to extend sociological work on social movements in several ways. Most significantly, it extends the work of scholars like Schofer and Fourcade (Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001) and Myra Marx Ferree and her collaborators (Ferree et al. 2002; Ferree 2003; Ferree 2012) by illustrating the importance of national institutional and cultural contexts to social movements. This research corroborates Schofer and Fourcade's account of the difficulty "new" social movement organizations face in countries with activist, centralized states. It also corroborates their conjecture, drawing on Ron Jepperson's theorizing (Jepperson 2002; Jepperson 1992), that national institutional configurations exert not only structural but also ideational influences on social movements. In particular, the differing outcomes of similar protest tactics and the different content of popular feminist magazines in each country suggests

that the not only are the state and the idea of sovereignty “conceptual variables” in J. P. Nettl’s memorable formulation (Nettl 1968), but so are the normative roles of ordinary citizens and elites.

This chapter also expands the work of Francesca Polletta and other scholars on the role of narratives in social movements (Polletta 2006; Polletta 2008). The findings here suggest the importance to movement effectiveness of longstanding meta-narratives that incorporate and vivify distinctive ideals of personhood and distinctive ideas about the social world. The familiarity and appeal of different meta-narratives in a given cultural context shapes the rhetorical opportunities available to particular social movements.

Finally, the chapter offers the social movement literature a methodological innovation that could be used in future cross-cultural comparisons of particular movements. In an extension of a technique in some cross-cultural studies of cultural objects (e.g., Carroll 1989; Durham 1998), I have suggested the approach of comparing similar tactics as they are imported into and adapted for new cultural settings. This technique is a potentially useful way of narrowing studies of entire social movements in such a way as to highlight both the cross-national transfer of ideas between movements in different countries and as a way of tracing the influence of cultural context on tactics and their outcomes.

This chapter’s contribution to the sociology of gender is largely continuous with that of my other chapters, since one of its major arguments is that the gender ideals carry within them implicit cultural visions of good personhood that differ along national lines. Conflict over what is the fair, natural, and/or appealing way to “do gender” is waged with cultural weapons (such as the American contractualist vision of marriage) derived from broader cultural conceptions of what good groups and good persons look like.

The chapter also sheds new light on American feminists’ contemporary obsession with the problem of the universality of “sisterhood”—i.e., the issue of how to recognize and incorporate social divisions of religion, class, race and ethnicity between women. I argue that the push toward assertions of universality is distinctively strong in American feminism because of a modern ideology of social egalitarianism that is particularly strong in the American cultural context. As Louis Hartz pointed out, “Locke has a hidden conformitarian germ to begin with, since natural law tells equal people equal things” (Hartz 1991 [1955]:11). This drive toward universalism runs into demands for the recognition of additional axes of oppression, and American feminists are increasingly inclined to accommodate such arguments. In the French context, by contrast, social class rather than race or ethnicity has always been the strongest competing axis of social demands. What is interesting here is that mainstream French feminism, by and large, fully recognizes the burdens of social class, but does not even attempt to address working class women in the same tone that it addresses educated women. There is a powerful strand of elite sympathy for the experience of working class women that appears vividly in many feminist contexts, but the impulse is linked to an effort to alleviate the plight of the working class from above, without attempting to convert working class women to feminism. This is a contemporary instantiation of the long European tradition of noblesse oblige, or elite Toryism,

which has ended up paying powerful practical dividends for Europe's working classes, but which is deeply offensive to American cultural sensibilities (Lipset 1996). This alternative way of "solving" the problem of universalism is worth the consideration of American feminists, since it may remind them of the powerful cultural reasons they have for advocating such a stance in the first place.

One simple implication of this chapter, and of the dissertation as a whole, for the sociology of culture is that national cultures matter. To be more precise, modern nations are loci for distinctive "social facts" in Durkheim's sense—or, social forces, in more straightforward terms—that are embedded in formal institutions, informal cultural recipes for collective action, and dominant narratives about the way selves and society as a whole should be, and are. (As Clifford Geertz has pointed out, "is" and "ought" are deeply intertwined with one another in ethos and world view, those two faces of the cultural coin (Geertz 2000 [1973]).) To be sure, the "social fact" of national culture is not uniformly efficacious across all social space, and it intersects, sometimes at cross-purposes and sometimes in a reinforcing manner, with other (partially) cultural social facts such as gender, ethnicity, social class and the like. But national culture does exist as a social force, and its implications for social life are frequently more powerful than they appear to researchers whose comparative frame of reference remains within a single national society. This basic observation is not new, and has been demonstrated by contemporary sociologists such as Ronald Jepperson (Jepperson 2002; Jepperson 1992), Michèle Lamont (Lamont 1992; Lamont 2000; Lamont and Thévenot 2000), Marion Fourcade (Fourcade 2009), Claude Fischer (Fischer and Moodie Forthcoming; Fischer 2010), Amy Schalet (Schalet 2011), and Jeremy Schulz (Schulz 2010), to name just a few. It was a commonplace of mid-century social science (Hartz 1991 [1955]; Almond and Verba 1963; Parsons 1989). Yet the point is often contested by contemporary sociologists, in part because of the symbolic taint of right-wing nationalist appeals to national culture (for a rejection on political grounds of the notion of distinctive American culture, see Ross 1995). Sophisticated social scientific opponents of the idea of national culture tend to ascribe all differences in social life across modern nations to the influence of formal institutions, dismissing any apparent cross-national differences in beliefs or mentalities as epiphenomena or frivolous irrelevancies (e.g., Saguy 1999; Steinmo and Watts 1995). This intellectual move is perhaps particularly appealing for Americans, whose nation occupies so much of the world's attention and is so influential that it is easy to mistake American culture for human nature (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010). Thus, the simple point that national culture matters is worth noting. It should be banal and uncontroversial in the discipline of sociology, which has more room to recognize the historical and cultural variety of human motivation than does, say, economics. Unfortunately, the point is heavily contested—and may even be a minority position within the American discipline. What is a misfortune for American sociology, however, is a novice scholar's opportunity for academic product differentiation, and so I emphasize the point here.

I do not want to suggest, however, that everything which is characteristic of American culture as compared to French culture hinges on features which are exclusive to American

history. For instance, I agree with other scholars who emphasize the importance of the cultural legacy of Protestantism within America. I argue that many features of the core narratives that American feminists put to use in the phenomenon of consciousness-raising can ultimately be traced to Protestant understandings of salvation. Indeed, this project has convinced me of Robert N. Bellah's observation that "deep cultural codes are the ones most likely to be derived from religion and... are far less malleable than the fads and fashions that inundate us daily. This is because deep cultural codes are so taken for granted, and operate at such a level of generality, that they may be effective even when, perhaps especially when, they are not recognized as such" (Bellah 2006:335). Thus, American culture is at least as much a confluence of influences as it is an autochthonous entity. Again, however, this is not an argument that national culture does not "exist" as a social fact in the Durkheimian sense of a supra-individual phenomenon that exerts a force on individuals.

Bellah's observation about the importance of religion in creating a kind of "deep culture" leads to another—perhaps the most important—contribution that I hope to make to the sociology of culture in this chapter. In *Logics of History*, William Sewell, Jr. eloquently addresses the problem of how to reconcile "structure" with change over time. In Sewell's clear and persuasive chapter on "A Theory of Structure," he identifies the concept of culture with the notion of a "schema," or the "informal and not always conscious [procedures], metaphors, or assumptions" that exist in "virtual" form inside people's brains (and, presumably, are sometimes embedded in their extended nervous system) (Sewell 2005:131). According to Sewell, schemas, when successfully instantiated in the world, create resources, or actual, directly observable realities, like a usable consumer good, a text, a service performed by one person for another as part of a market exchange, or even something as ethereal as a subject's reverence toward a monarch (P. 133-34).³ Schemas which often successfully generate resources which in turn reinforce the comprehensibility and reality (not to mention practical utility) of the schema are worthy of the title "structure" according to Sewell (P. 136-37).

This allows Sewell to account for structures' ability and tendency to reproduce themselves over time, a key virtue of the term to social scientists wishing to account for durable patterns in the social landscape. Sewell then goes on to argue that the notion of a "dual" structure composed of schemas and resources that act upon one another also opens up the possibility of change despite structure's capacity for continuity. He identifies five routes through which change can enter the structural system of mutually sustaining schemas and resources. These can be simplified, I think, into the observation that, in addition to the possibility of outright clashes between competing structures, the transition from schema to resource and back again is not necessarily straightforward and trouble free. Schemas can succeed or fail in new ways—by being

³ Sewell wants to identify most feelings and acts as actual "resources" created by a particular schema. This means that resources straddle the boundary between the material and the mental or the "virtual." Human "resources" such as the example of a subject's gesture of obedience presumably require the activation of a different schema within the person providing that "resource." Schemas would then seem to produce human resources only by activating other schemas, raising the question of where one schema ends and another one begins, and of whether some schemas are successfully instantiated not by producing resources directly, but rather by producing other schemas. Nevertheless, I do not see that this potential point of confusion is crippling for his theory.

“transposed” creatively and fruitfully to new settings, or by ceasing to produce the desired resources, perhaps because material limits of one sort or another are beginning to bite. Resources themselves may change the distribution of power among actors. And resources are open to being experienced or thought about in different ways: they are “polysemic” (Sewell 2005:142-43), and can give rise to multiple different schemas. Thus, Sewell not only accounts for the possibility of change over time, but identifies a series of pathways through which agency is likely to operate.

Of the mechanisms of structural change identified by Sewell perhaps the most exciting and productive in the recent sociology of culture has been the idea of the transposability of schemas. For example, Elizabeth Armstrong provides an fascinating and convincing account of the rise of a new and vibrant identity politics among gays and lesbians that could be described using Sewell’s theory in terms of the successful transposition of cultural schemas from the New Left into the political organization of a previously obscure and stigmatized group. Some of the findings of this chapter could also be described in terms of transposed schemas. For instance, the American women’s movement’s transposed culturally mainstream stories about the effortful fight for self-esteem and autonomy into a powerful narrative of feminist consciousness-raising. American feminists could also be said to have co-opted a pre-existing contractualist understanding of marriage into a mechanism for recasting the sexual division of labor in the household. The hugely successful French abortion manifesto can be seen as a powerful application of a schema in which cultural elites serve as society’s pre-eminent voices of conscience to the domain of reproductive rights.

Thus, Sewell’s dual theory of structure helps us explain in a convincing and interesting manner how culture changes over time. But while this chapter can be seen as an application and a validation of his suggested approach, it also raises an important puzzle for his discussion of the durability and power of different cultural elements. At the end of his chapter on structure, Sewell argues for “two important dimensions along which structures vary: depth, which refers to the schema dimension of structures, and power, which refers to the resource dimension” (Sewell 2005:146). “Deep” structures, by his argument,

are those schemas that can be shown to underlie ordinary or ‘surface’ structures... [D]eep structural schemas are also pervasive in the sense that they are present in a relatively wide range of institutional spheres, practices, and discourses. They also tend to be relatively unconscious, in the sense that they are taken-for-granted mental assumptions or modes of procedure that actors normally apply without being aware that they are applying them. (P. 146)

Furthermore, argues Sewell, the depth of a particular structure—its ability to generate other structures—is a prime determinant of its staying power (P. 149). Sewell’s prime example of a “deep” structure is language itself.

Structural “depth” need not correlate with a structure’s “power,” according to Sewell. Certain structures “commonly generate and utilize large concentrations of power [but] are usually relatively near the surface of social life” (Sewell 2005:148). Sewell’s primary example of a powerful structure is the state. He argues that this need not correlate with durability: many

political structures are quite historically mutable, since their very power attracts a great deal of contention (P. 148).

Sewell's description of structural depth and power is convincing as far as it goes, but creates a puzzle of this chapter's, and the larger dissertation's, finding that certain "schemas," such as the Protestant-derived narrative of struggle for moral clarity and self-assurance in American culture, recur repeatedly in time and social space. This qualifies them as "deep" and predominantly "schematic" structures. Yet they also appear to be "powerful" in the sense of being capable of motivating significant social transformation although they do not command resources in the way a state does. Sewell does identify an instance of a structure that is both powerful and deep: capitalism. In essence, his explanation for how this structure wins on both dimensions is that it "works" in the sense of generating lots of resources (Sewell 2005:149-51). But how, then, does a "deep" structure like the schema of personal moral struggle and maturation which I identified above get to be so powerful and pivotal when it yields so few evident resources? The same question could be asked about persistent and efficacious patterns in French culture, such as the extraordinary esteem accorded to the capacity for aesthetic experience and empathy.

By way of a resolution to this puzzle, I would take Robert Bellah's cue about the "deep" cultural impact of religion to note that many of the most persistent and powerful schemas in American and French culture seem to revolve around visions of what it means to be a good person. Schemas of the admirable self are "deep" in the sense that they are "present in a relatively wide range of institutional spheres, practices, and discourses" (Sewell 2005:146) and in that they command great moral power, eliciting recognition and respect from others and considerable personal sacrifice from the individual who adheres to them. These highly durable and powerful schemas are often nourished by religious conceptions, but they can also be generated by more secular models, as witnessed by the influence of aristocratic ideals of the self in the French cultural context.

In short, the findings of this chapter suggest that cultural ideals of the self provide particularly enduring and powerful anchors of cultural continuity even as they can energize the modification of more "surface" structures such as gender.

PREFACE. WINNING THE EVERYDAY: THE BEHAVIORAL TRACES OF AMERICAN FEMINISM'S NORMATIVE SUCCESS

A natural sociological question in the face of this extended exploration of contrasting feminist rhetoric is whether any of it affected behavior. While a methodologically airtight demonstration of such a causal link is impossible, we do have access to some highly suggestive data on time use in France and the U.S. that spans the decade between 1965 and 1975 and also includes data on the near-contemporary period. These data provide us with the opportunity to assess whether American popular feminism's comparatively intense focus on revising the domestic division of labor corresponds with greater behavioral change as measured by men and women's time spent on different tasks.

Because the gendered division of labor between paid and unpaid work in a modern

economy depends so heavily on variables such as patterns of labor force participation or rates of child bearing, much of what is captured in time use patterns throughout the society as a whole reflects these factors. In order to filter out these demographic influences and to cast relief changes in behavior which can be traced more reliably to the influence of changing attitudes, I have chosen to focus on patterns of time use among full-time employed parents who are married and live with dependent children. These are the men and women who face the most acute tensions between paid and domestic work. Unlike single parents, they *may* also enjoy their spouse's help in coping with the round of tasks that must be done in the home. Full-time, married working mothers who spend large amounts of scarce time on unpaid work in the home do so because they are made to feel especially responsible for these tasks and not just because they happen to be the spouse who is on the spot and has time on her hands. In short, this subset of the population is worth scrutinizing because such individuals are time-constrained but could conceivably turn to a spouse for help.

The data from time-use diaries which I analyze here has been assembled from nation-level datasets and rendered comparable by scholars directing in the Multinational Time Use Study at the Centre for Time Use Research housed at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom.⁴ These data include observations from a representative sample of the U.S. during the years 1965, 1975, 1985, and 2003, and from France in 1965, 1974, and 1998 (Gershuny and Fischer 2003; Gershuny and Fischer 2010).⁵ All graphs discussed here compare the average number of minutes spent per day by French and American married mothers and fathers ages 20 to 59⁶ who work full time while having children at home. The charts exclude low-quality diaries with flaws such as the omission of large stretches of time or unspecific entries and are adjusted with sampling weights that compensate for over-or under-sampling by sex, age, employment status, and the day of the week on which activities were recorded. Because confidence intervals could not be computed in STATA in conjunction with the use of sampling weights, each data point on the chart shows the number of observations or “n” on which each weighted average is based.

The first chart, Figure 3.1, shows the average minutes per day that mothers and fathers in full-time employment in France and the United States spent doing paid work. This measure includes work for pay done outside or inside the home as well as commuting time.

[Figure 3.1 about here]

The graph shows that fathers with full-time employment in both countries spend more time earning money and commuting than do full-time working mothers. In France, this gap narrows slightly from roughly 90 to 70 minutes a day between 1965 and 1998, and in the U.S. it shrinks just a bit more, from over 105 to 70 minutes a day between 1965 and 2003. More strikingly,

⁴ The Centre's website is www.timeuse.org.

⁵ I have excluded U.S. observations from 1994, since that year includes a particularly small sample of full-time, married working parents and since the women in this sample did an extraordinarily high rate of paid work compared with women in the previous and subsequent decade, suggesting that sampling error makes these data unusually unreliable.

⁶ The age restriction reflects sampling constraints built into the initial two French datasets.

between 1965 and 1998, work time shrinks steadily for both sexes in France, by 100 minutes a day for men and 80 minutes a day for women. For American fathers employed full-time, work time falls less over roughly this period, by only 50 minutes, while for American mothers it dips and then rises again, for an overall decline of only 10 minutes. These changes reflect the fact that, in the aggregate, European countries have used the large gains in economic productivity over the course of the post-WWII period to consume more economic output and to enjoy more leisure, whereas Americans have, on the whole, converted their gains in economic productivity largely into higher average incomes (Krugman 2011; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010).

Just as full-time working fathers in France and the U.S. “specialize” in paid work when compared to full-time working mothers, so this specialization of labor is reversed when it comes to unpaid work. In simpler terms, the traditional gender division of labor persists even among full-time workers. In the figure shown below, the diverse category of domestic or unpaid work includes cooking and washing up; housework (i.e., making beds, vacuuming and dusting, tidying, laundering clothes and the like); gardening or lawn-mowing; caring for pets; miscellaneous household tasks like patching clothes, household repairs, paying bills, or caring for disabled or elderly adults; child care; shopping; and non-leisure, non-work-related travel such as driving to stores.

[Figure 3.2 about here]

This graph shows a dramatic drop (almost 45 minutes) in unpaid work by American mothers in full-time employment between 1965 and 1975, during which time their French counterparts actually did increase their unpaid work time (by almost 20 minutes). Over the subsequent decade, American working mothers’ daily allotment of unpaid work rose somewhat before declining modestly by the early 21st century. After 1974, French working mothers’ domestic work time declined, so that by the turn of the century, as in 1965, they were doing about 20 minutes less domestic work than their American counterparts. A more dramatic divergence between working parents’ daily life in the two countries can be seen in the behavior of French as opposed to American employed fathers during this period. American fathers steadily increased their share of domestic labor by about 20 minutes a decade between 1965 and 2003 so that by the end of the period, they were doing 85 minutes a day more unpaid work than had their predecessors. In contrast, French working fathers increased their share of domestic labor only a tenth as fast, or by a paltry 2 minutes more per decade.

From this point of view, the women’s movement seems to have led to quite dramatic American shifts in the gendered division of unpaid labor among full-time working parents. By contrast, the exclusively feminine character of household labor has changed comparatively little in France.

These patterns of change in paid and unpaid work can be aggregated so as to produce an index of how equally distributed all work is between men and women when both sexes bear the double burden of a full-time job and raising a family. Figure 3.3 shows the distribution of all daily work time, paid and unpaid, among fully employed mothers and fathers in the U.S. and France.

[Figure 3.3 about here]

To illustrate these changes more dramatically, the total work gap between each country's working fathers and mothers is shown in Figure 3.4.

[Figure 3.4 about here]

These charts show French and American working wives and mothers starting in more or less the same place, doing an hour and half more work per day than their husbands. After the highly visible agitation of the American women's liberation movement during the decade 1965-1975, however, this gap collapses almost entirely in the U.S. and never recovers substantially, ending at a bit over 15 minutes a day by the early 21st century. In contrast, the gender gap between French men and women in these time-constrained situations has fallen only slightly over the same period, from an hour and half to an hour and a quarter a day. This is a very stark indication of the American women's movement's impact on the everyday norms—and of the French movement's comparatively weak effects on quotidian attitudes and behavior within the family.

I would reconstruct the normative transformation indicated by this figure in the following terms. In 1965, American married women who worked full-time were living non-normative lives. They were expected to shoulder responsibility for what was perceived as a deviant life choice by creating a home life that was as “normal” as possible, i.e., in which they kept up traditionally female tasks. One indication of the unusual levels of stress on these women is that, whereas in samples of the U.S. adult population between 1965 and 2003, women on average sleep more than men (author's calculations), and whereas this the usual pattern in contemporary affluent countries (Fisher and Robinson 2011), American working mothers in 1965 reversed this apparently biologically normative pattern, sleeping less than their male counterparts (see Figure 3.5).

[Figure 3.5 about here]

They also enjoyed almost 100 minutes less leisure time than working fathers in 1965 (author's calculations). Over the next decade, however, the explosion of popular feminism in the U.S. led these women to claim that their work had equal dignity with men's, and that a truly egalitarian marriage required husbands and wives to shoulder equal amounts of work. Although the gendering of many specific household tasks changed relatively slowly (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie 2006), working mothers were able to demand a relatively rapid equalization of total work time. Arlie Hochschild's findings of American men and women competing to spend more time at their jobs so they can avoid the hectic responsibilities of home life makes sense only if men and women both recognize a legitimate trade-off between the two (Hochschild 1997). An equalization of total work time within marriage has been one of the major victories of the American women's movement.

In contrast, French working mothers have made only slow and limited progress equalizing overall work time with working fathers. Figures 3.3 and 3.4 show this striking persistence of inequality between working fathers and mothers in France. Yet, despite this continued gender inequity, which is a striking failure for French second-wave feminism, working French mothers now do less total work in an average day than their American counterparts. This

is because total work time *for both sexes* has declined over time in France. This is as concise a verdict as any on the pragmatic upshot of differences between French and American approaches to social justice in the post-WWII period. French popular feminism insisted less forcefully than American feminism on equal justice for both genders. But the French emphasis on promoting a more humane and livable existence for everyone has paid off for both sexes.

PART I. CULTURE AND RHETORIC IN SECOND WAVE FEMINISM'S FOUNDING TEXTS

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, published in 1949 in France and made available to American readers in Parshley's 1953 translation, and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, published in the U.S. in 1963 and translated into French in 1964, have both been considered foundational for their respective nations' second wave feminist movements. Both books were best-sellers in their own countries and they also sold well among readers across the Atlantic. Despite this cross-border appeal, *The Second Sex* and *The Feminine Mystique* are identifiably products of their own nation, written within and tailored for a particular cultural context. Their claims to authorial legitimacy, the scope of their analysis, and their diagnosis of women's problems, each reflects the cultural context in which second-wave feminism developed and foreshadows the rhetorical styles that would mark the respective movements as they matured.

Biography and Contrasting Cultural Expectations of Intellectuals

Beauvoir and Friedan were both precocious first daughters whose intellectual talents were encouraged by their fathers during childhood.⁷ Beauvoir's father was a downwardly mobile minor aristocrat who did not live up to expectations that he would study law and join the civil service; Georges de Beauvoir and his wife emphasized cultural refinement as a substitute for the worldly success which the family could not attain.⁸ Simone felt shame at the contrast between her shabby dress and the more refined appearance of her richer relatives; her family's poverty probably spoiled her chances for a respectable marriage. Throughout life, Beauvoir suffered from a sense of social awkwardness that contrasted with her intellectual attainments (Appignanesi 1988; Bair 1990). Friedan's family enjoyed greater comfort: her father was a prosperous jewelry shop owner in Peoria, Illinois. But as Jews their inclusion in the community was somewhat precarious, and Betty lacked the "good looks" (she was obviously Jewish) and the social confidence that helped her mother and sister overcome their stigmatized ethnicity and win popularity in Peoria, Illinois (Hennessee 1999; Horowitz 1998). Both Beauvoir and Friedan, then, had early encouragement from their parents in developing their intellect and enough of a sense of social exclusion to sense that academic studies rather than more conventional feminine attainments promised the best route to adult dignity.

Beauvoir and Friedan both earned stellar academic records, but the meaning of their achievement was different because of the U.S. and France's contrasting academic systems. At 21, Beauvoir was the youngest person ever to pass the highly competitive *agrégation* in

⁷ Each had a younger sister but no male siblings.

⁸ Beauvoir's father ultimately expressed dismay about her ever more stellar academic progress, worrying that she would be a "bluestocking" rather than marrying as became a respectable young woman (Appignanesi 1988:19). By then, however, it was too late; Simone had enough ability to depend on academic institutions rather than family to decide her fate.

philosophy (Appignanesi 1988:32), the most prestigious discipline in the French intellectual firmament because of its universal scope and abstraction (Bourdieu 1996 [1989]). She finished second only to Jean-Paul Sartre, her lifelong intellectual companion. As Deirdre Bair notes, the oral component of the *agrégation* exam took place in public and attracted a considerable audience when the examinee was known to be an outstanding figure (Bair 1990:141). Her top marks in the exam put her, with Jean-Paul Sartre, at the pinnacle of academic achievement in all of France.

For her part, Betty Friedan graduated *summa cum laude* from elite, all-female Smith College. After graduation, her senior honors thesis in psychology was co-published under her and her advisor's name in a scholarly journal. A college administrator told her mother that Betty had "the most outstanding record of any student ever matriculated at Smith," and that her honors thesis could have passed muster as a Ph.D. dissertation (Horowitz 1998:85-86), but this distinction was a private confidence. Unlike Beauvoir, Friedan was never called upon to demonstrate her academic prowess in a virtuosic public display, and the United States had (and has) no centralized institution that would rank her achievements in a unitary national hierarchy of academic distinction.

Beauvoir: Philosopher, artist, and humanist intellectual

The trajectories of Beauvoir's and Friedan's promising intellectual careers continued to diverge in the years following their completion of university. Each woman occupied a quite different social niche by the time she penned her feminist classic. Their different critical platforms were shaped partly by the place of intellectuals in French as opposed to American culture and partly by personal circumstance.

By the time Beauvoir published *The Second Sex*, she was an established intellectual figure known primarily as a novelist and philosopher. Her literary debut in 1943 with *L'Invitée* had attracted favorable attention from France's literary lions, and her *Le Sang des Autres*, published in liberated Paris in 1945, was "acclaimed as the great existentialist novel of the Resistance" (Appignanesi 1988:75). Beauvoir's work blended literature and social criticism, a pattern that Priscilla Clark identifies as characteristic of French literary culture (Clark 1987). Beauvoir was also one of the founding editors of a new, major intellectual periodical, *Les Temps Modernes*, and published an important treatise on existentialist ethics in its pages.

Biographers have sometimes depicted Beauvoir as the subordinate partner to Jean-Paul Sartre, and it is true that Beauvoir repeatedly characterized her greatest life achievement as her relationship with Sartre. Sartrean existentialism, with its language of immanence, transcendence, bad faith, and so on, provides the philosophical framework for Beauvoir's analysis of women's situation in *The Second Sex*. For a long time, Beauvoir was long known primarily as Sartre's companion. Journalists gave her the soubriquet "Notre-Dame-de-Sartre" or "La Grande Sartreuse" (Chaperon 1999). Chaperon argues that the critical reaction to Beauvoir's book largely followed critics' lines of allegiance or opposition to Sartre (Chaperon 2000:171).

Being in Sartre's intellectual shadow gave some French intellectuals an excuse to denigrate Beauvoir as his epigone. But being a peer of the most powerful intellectual in post-war

France (see Bourdieu 1996 [1992]:209-13) also made her hard to ignore. Existentialism commanded huge intellectual and popular prestige in post-war France (Appignanesi 1988:76 ff) and throughout the West, since Paris commanded greater global cultural prestige than it does today. On a more personal level, Beauvoir was used to being accepted as an equal among the *crème de la crème* of the French intelligentsia, and this must have accounted for some of her work's intellectual ambition.

Beauvoir's unmarried relationship with Sartre could have discredited her in a different cultural environment. But stories of great unmarried lovers are plentiful in French culture: during the 1950s, one of France's most respectable women's magazines, *Elle*, published regular installments of a historical "Little Dictionary of Great Lovers" that featured admiring portraits of famous married and unmarried couples. For centuries, brilliant French women had carried on passionate love affairs with the major intellectuals and aristocrats of their day (Ozouf 1997; Sarde 1983). That Beauvoir and Sartre never married gave their relationship an air of glamorous transgression but never disqualified them from participation in the public sphere.⁹

In short, Beauvoir's social position facilitated her radical and sweeping critique of woman's position in society. Her main objective must have been to live up to the intellectual credentials she had earned for herself and to ensure that her sex could not be used to trivialize her ideas. Indeed, a more intellectually uninhibited account of women's social status has never been written.

Just as philosophy has been accorded the highest prestige among the humanities in France because its status as the most universal branch of knowledge, France's aristocratic tradition of intellectual generalism (see Clark 1987:164-70) legitimated the ambitious architecture of *The Second Sex*. The book is encyclopedic and iterative, cycling through a number of ways of approaching the status of women. Beauvoir reviews three different theoretical explanations of women's status (biology, psychoanalysis and Marxism); interprets women's place in human history in five chapters; critiques mythology and literature; conducts a stage-by-stage analysis of the female life course; explores several ultimately inadequate responses to the social constraints of femininity (narcissicism, love, and mysticism); and, finally, assesses the position of contemporary women in a section entitled "Toward Liberation." Beauvoir's commitment to an existentialist philosophical approach binds together the various waves of analysis in the book, while much of her evidence about women's inner experience is based on literary depictions. Some of her descriptions of women's responses to their situation may be based on personal experience—indeed, her own fiction has a *roman à clef* element to it—but there is little demarcation between the personal and the purely empathetic in the text. In contrast to Friedan, who explicitly foregrounds her own experience and that of women in her own social sphere, Beauvoir freely describes the inner life of mothers, married women, and women much older than herself without apologizing for her personal distance from these experiences.

⁹ In her memoir of feminist activism during the 1970s, Anne Zelensky discloses that, as a young woman, she idealized Beauvoir's relationship with Sartre (Tristan and Pisan 1987 [1977]:47). Many other independent-minded young French women probably felt the same way.

This reflects the taken-for-granted role of the French intellectual as someone who not only analyzes objective reality but intuits emotional experiences as they are shaped by a variety of physical and social situations. Beauvoir's empathetic ambition is part and parcel of the aesthetic qualifications and social duty of the humanist intellectual. This authorial persona, which might strike American readers as wildly presumptuous, can be glimpsed in the writing of Jean Duché and other writers for 1950s French women's magazines as well as in feminist magazines of the period, as we will see subsequently.

Friedan's authorial persona: Everywoman and serendipitous discoverer

In contrast to Beauvoir, Friedan eschewed the career of a "pure intellectual." Such a path was less conducive to social activism in the U.S. than in France, and it is doubtful whether, had she completed her Ph.D. studies in psychology at the University of California, Berkeley and gone on to an academic career, she would have written a book with *The Feminine Mystique's* broad public impact. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan claimed that she dropped out of graduate school at the behest of a boyfriend who felt threatened by her superior capabilities (Friedan 2001 [1963]:70). Her biographers have questioned this as the sole reason for her decision (Hennessee 1999:36-38; Horowitz 1998:97-101). Horowitz in particular suggests that she missed the activism of her college years and wanted to recapture the chance to "make a difference."

Friedan became a journalist, writing primarily for publications affiliated with organized labor and authoring an influential pamphlet under her maiden name of Goldstein, *UE Fights for Women Workers*. The publication described the radical United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America's struggle against wage discrimination (Horowitz 1998:1). While a journalist, Betty married Carl Friedan. She was laid off during her second pregnancy by UE, which was hemorrhaging members under the McCarthyist onslaught (Horowitz 1998:141).

Once out of the labor movement, Betty Friedan took up free-lancing for various publications, including women's magazines. Her stories appeared in the upbeat, you-can-do-anything-if-you-try idiom that was typical of women's magazines of the period. Daniel Horowitz notes that Friedan published many articles about women who enjoyed careers and engaged in civic activism, an acceptable set of themes for women's magazines of the period, contrary to what she would later imply. But, he notes, her attempts to tackle controversial themes such as a critique of McCarthy's position on women's education or discussions of racial integration went unpublished or were excised by cautious editors (Horowitz 1998:184-93).

During her free-lancing years, Friedan gained experience writing for an audience of middle-class women. She probably internalized a sense for the boundaries of politically and socially acceptable discourse among mainstream readers. In *The Feminine Mystique*, she dramatized, even exaggerated, the limits of what she could write for women's magazines while claiming freedom from those constraints in the composition of her own book. As I shall argue, however, Friedan's book displays great rhetorical caution and dexterity. Daniel Horowitz observes that Friedan carefully edited the biographical details that made their way into *The Feminine Mystique*. She could legitimately claim to have lived the life of a suburban housewife

who sacrificed some career opportunities for the sake of her husband and children. But Friedan maintained a discreet silence about her experiences with Popular Front politics and labor activism. While it seems likely that she deeply felt the emotional pull of the 1950s mythology of happy housewifery, her claims to have been utterly unaware of feminist themes until she stumbled across them in 1957 were false (Horowitz 1998).

Hennessee writes that Friedan understood how her self-portrayal as “a housewife and mother—one of the women she was writing about—who had succumbed to the feminine mystique” would help sell the book (Hennessee 1999:84). It was critical to Friedan’s task that she write from “on a level” with her readers and that she disguise her ideological leanings so that they would not compromise her message with readers who disagreed or distrusted politics in general. This contrasts starkly with Beauvoir’s political commitments, which as a socially prominent intellectual she was expected to have. It is not that Friedan felt the need to disguise her elite educational credentials; the fact that she went to Smith appears on page 1 of *The Feminist Mystique*. Nor does Friedan shy away from a hard-hitting critique of Freudian psychology and other forms of social science expertise, engaging substantively with these ideas rather than dismissing them out of hand as the vanities of pointy-headed intellectuals. But these refutations of (apparent) academic orthodoxy come after Friedan’s initial three chapters, which discuss the impact of the feminine mystique on ordinary women of her own social milieu, including Friedan herself. Friedan does “authenticity work” before moving on to academic critique.

Friedan pointedly confesses to her own participation in the perpetuation of the mystique as a writer for women’s magazines: “I helped create this image. I have watched American women for fifteen years try to conform to it. But I can no longer deny my own knowledge of its terrible implications” (Friedan 2001 [1963]:66). Friedan thus denies that she stands above or outside of the cultural milieu which she is criticizing; indeed, she describes her emergence from it using a confessional mode. She admits to participating in the creation of the feminine mystique’s toxic fictions, and her story of moral awakening invites readers to follow her example. In short, by the time Friedan tackles the most intellectually ambitious parts of her book, she has already established that she is not writing from a standpoint of moral or intellectual superiority to her readers, but has earned her critical *bona fides* over the course of a difficult personal journey. As we will see, the women who authored consciousness-raising narratives in *Ms.* magazine would later take the same rhetorical stance.

Previous Scholarly Comparisons and Friedan’s Rhetorical Challenge

My approach helps to extend and explain observations by previous scholars who have directly compared *The Second Sex* and *The Feminine Mystique*. In her contribution to a volume based on an international colloquium celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of *The Second Sex*, Rupa Mitra perceptively traces the commonalities between the two books. Both authors point out that women are treated as reducible to their reproductive capacities; they deliver a similar critique of Freud; both point to women’s domestic destiny as the explanation for their reluctance to commit themselves fully to educational pursuits; they see bad mothering as the inevitable

outcome of society's insistence that women wholly confine themselves to that role; and they deliver similar critiques of the mindless repetitiousness of housework. Mitra also sees traces of existentialist philosophy in Friedan's insistence that women need to act creatively on the world to be fulfilled. She deems Friedan's insistence on the originality of her ideas in *The Feminine Mystique* to be disingenuous, and considers it a missed opportunity to acknowledge the blurring of individual and collective experience and thinking that is integral to the feminist project (Mitra 2002).

Other commentators have also criticized Friedan's insufficient recognition of her debt to Beauvoir's ideas (e.g., Coontz 2011:143), although as Judith Hennessee aptly notes, "Beauvoir was so comprehensive [that] Betty could hardly have avoided her ideas" (Hennessee 1999:82-83). In the end, however, the debate over intellectual priority obscures the fact that Friedan's pretense of *de novo* discovery was not only a personal indulgence. It served an important rhetorical purpose. When Beauvoir's book emerged on the American scene, reviewers often admired her analysis but questioned its relevance to the U.S. context. For instance, in a review of the newly translated *Second Sex* for the *American Journal of Sociology*, Margaret Park Redfield writes: "To enter the world of Simone de Beauvoir is to come into a world in large degree vanished from the American scene" (Redfield 1953:269). For Friedan to state that she was applying Beauvoir's ideas to American life would have invited immediate incredulity on the part of American readers. It would also have undermined Friedan's effective pretense that her ideas arose directly from authentic personal experience, a rhetorical move that reflects the premise, rooted in Anglo-American liberalism, that legitimate contributions to the public sphere should reflect citizens' personal interests (Jepperson 1992; Eliasoph 1998; Moody and Thévenot 2000). This claim to ground social critique in personal experience would be intensified by the consciousness-raising practices of American second-wave feminists. The slogan "the personal is political" has remained a touchstone of American feminist thought even after its transmutation into academic theory (see, e.g., Smith 1987; Hill Collins 1989).

Like Rupa Mitra, Sandra Dijkstra sees important continuities between *The Second Sex* and *The Feminine Mystique*. Dijkstra goes further in stressing the extent to which Friedan "adapted many of [*The Second Sex*'s] basic premises to make them 'safe' for America, reducing them from radical to reformist solutions, from philosophical to popular jargon, and from European to American references" (Dijkstra 1980:294). Dijkstra argues that Beauvoir put forward a materialist explanation of women's inferior social status which is analytically superior to Friedan's assertion that only a mistaken idea—the feminine mystique—stands in the way of women's fulfillment. The corollary of Friedan's account of the problem with American women is that a change in individual perception can remedy the problem. Dijkstra quite rightly points out that "Friedan's solution to the 'the problem that has no name' is based on the American dream" (Dijkstra 1980:296-97). In America, this ideology claims, anyone can develop their potential and find fulfillment if they take action on their own individual initiative; Friedan is asking nothing else of women, or of society. Dijkstra's criticism echoes Sylvia Fleis Fava's 1963 review of *The Feminine Mystique* in the *American Sociological Review*: "[Friedan] recommends

changes in individual woman... changes in attitude [that] would culminate in ‘a new life plan.’ This neglects the fact that the changed attitudes and plans must be acted upon in the context of the total society. The woman who develops the new life plan will find few institutionalized channels by which it can be put into effect” (Fava 1963:1054).

Such criticisms, while correct as far as they go, leave unexplored the feat of cultural jiu-jitsu that Friedan accomplished in her book. A passage in Redfield’s remarkably conflicted 1953 review of Beauvoir in *American Journal of Sociology* points to the cultural dilemmas faced by any American feminist critique: “many young women in America will assert that, having attained most of that economic and political freedom for which the early feminists struggled, they are now freely choosing to become wives and mothers... [T]hey are marrying earlier and producing larger families than a generation ago. Are they then to be denied the freedom to act in this way?” (Redfield 1953:270). Lucy Freeman’s brief review of *The Feminine Mystique* in *The New York Times* levels a thoroughly individualist retort to Friedan’s book, claiming that “It is superficial to blame the ‘culture’ and its handmaidens, the women’s magazines... To paraphrase a famous line, ‘The fault, dear Mrs. Friedan, is not in our culture, but in ourselves’” (Freeman 1963). This sort of rebuff to feminist claims is always ready at hand in American culture: if women’s position in society is the product of free choice, who can question it? And yet, most American readers did not dismiss Friedan’s book in these terms. Friedan’s individualist solutions to “the problem that has no name” somehow did not pre-empt her discussion of the problem. While paying homage to the ideology of individual choice, Friedan avoids being trapped by it.

History and Progress in Beauvoir and Friedan

Beauvoir and Friedan use history in very different ways. History is one of the main lenses through which Beauvoir approaches the problem of women’s status. Her examination is characteristically comprehensive, beginning with the prehistorical epoch and proceeding up through the present. Beauvoir’s history is no march of steady progress. In fact, she argues that women’s condition is neither tied to more general civilizational or economic advances, nor follows a consistent pattern across all institutional spheres, nor is uniform for all women in a given society.

Thus, for instance, Beauvoir argues that the transition from a “nomadic” phase of hunting and gathering to a more settled existence based on light agriculture improved women’s status as their work took on more material importance and as the community grew more dependent on the feminine mysteries of fecundity (Beauvoir 1953 [1949]:64-74). However, the next economic advance, the development of metallurgy, struck at women’s prestige because it strengthened men’s sense that they could control unpredictable nature (P. 75ff). In later periods, as economic surpluses became heritable and as the state and household separated into distinct entities, the status of women became dependent on the sometimes competing imperatives of these institutions.

In addition, Beauvoir refutes the idea that women in society’s most advanced economic positions also enjoy the greatest equality with men. She asserts that women in more economically advantaged classes pay the price for their comparative comfort in a greater

subordination to men: “from feudal times to our days... [t]he richer the husband, the greater the dependence of the wife; the more powerful he feels socially and economically, the more authoritatively he plays the paterfamilias. On the contrary, a common poverty makes the conjugal tie a reciprocal tie” (P. 101). Ironically, then, women face a tradeoff between economic and sexual privilege.

In sum, Beauvoir’s depiction of women’s condition throughout history is full of paradoxes and contrary motion. It fits no simple narrative of progress, and it relies on no particular social group as a proxy or indicator of women’s social status in society as a whole.

In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan uses a much simpler and more familiar narrative of historical progress. Albert Hirschman notes that progressives have often used rhetoric claiming that “history is on our side,” framing their political objectives within narratives of inevitable, natural and generally desirable social change (Hirschman 1991). Friedan does just that, embedding her story of women’s advance within a larger American (and Western) narrative of progress and liberation. She briefly touches upon an economic rationale for women’s movement into the labor market, claiming that early feminism arose at the moment when “the work that fed life and moved it forward was no longer done at home” (Friedan 2001 [1963]:81). Even more emphatically, Friedan links women’s rising status to broader political progress: “Whenever, wherever in the world there has been an upsurge of human freedom, women have won a share of it for themselves. Sex did not fight the French Revolution, free the slaves in America, overthrow the Russian Czar, drive the British out of India; but when the idea of human freedom moves the minds of men, it also moves the minds of women” (P. 85). She praises early feminists for being the first to grasp the significance of these changes, for “pioneering on the front edge of woman’s evolution” (P. 81). “The feminist revolution had to be fought because women quite simply were stopped at a stage of evolution far short of their capacity” (P. 85). Thus, Friedan identifies women’s liberation as one component of a larger unidirectional evolution of economic and political progress.

Friedan also relies upon her readers’ assumption that the United States should have its place at the vanguard of this movement toward progress. As part of her argument that American educators overemphasize women’s sexuality to the detriment of their other, non-biological capacities, Friedan compares U.S. demographic patterns with the Third World:

The average age of first marriage, in the last fifteen years, has dropped to the youngest in the history of this country, the youngest in any of the countries of the Western world, almost as young as it used to be in the so-called underdeveloped countries. In the new nations of Asia and Africa, with the advent of science and education, the marriage age of women is now rising. Today, thanks in part to the functional sex-direction of women’s education, the annual rate of population increase in the United States is among the highest in the world—nearly three times that of the Western European nations, nearly double Japan’s, and close on the heels of Africa and India. (Friedan 2001 [1963]:163)

The drama of this passage comes from its reversal of the implicit assumption that the U.S. should

be at the forefront of modernization, a process which is unidirectional and monotonic across all indicators of social progress. That the “sex-directed educators,” as the chapter’s title names them, have managed to turn back the clock of evolutionary progress appears as a perverse and frightening achievement.

Friedan has often been taken to task by subsequent feminists who have interpreted her focus on relatively elite, college-educated women in *The Feminine Mystique* as symptomatic of her unconcern for the experiences of minority and working-class women. In fact, her reasons for doing so follow her larger implicit logic. Just as she expects America to lead the way in the global march of progress, being the “most advanced” nation on earth, so she expects the behavior of the most privileged members of American society to foreshadow that of the rest of the nation. Friedan’s primary focus on (implicitly) white, relatively affluent, college-educated American women should not be read as evidence of disregard for all other groups. *The Feminine Mystique* contains plenty of positive references to advances in the status of minorities, working class people, and other oppressed people, often directly analogizing their fate to women’s.¹⁰ Friedan’s focus on well-educated, privileged housewives fits the assumption, probably shared by many of her American readers, that these women were the natural bellwethers of progressive social change. If the best-equipped women decline to take up the pioneering role that is appropriate to them, then forward momentum of social progress as a whole must be in jeopardy.

Friedan’s optimistic faith in the power of progress relieves her of the burden of a comprehensive theory explaining women’s status throughout all of history. But it does demand an explanation for why history has gone off the rails. Indeed, the narrative of progress interrupted provides the framework for and the drama of *The Feminine Mystique*.

Deception and Domination

While Friedan locates the feminine mystique in a larger constellation of atavistic longings brought on by the cataclysms of the Great Depression and the Second World War (Friedan 2001 [1963]:182ff), she points to social scientists, women’s magazine editors and marketers as the proximate fashioners of the new mythology. By criticizing social scientists’ and educators’ emphasis on individual “adjustment” to social “roles” or “functions,” Friedan extends to women the worrying observations made by David Riesman and other “mass society” critics of the period (Horowitz 1998:207). She faults women’s magazines for contemptuously limiting their readers’ horizons on the grounds that they are apathetic and feeble-minded and claims that they push a relentlessly anti-careerist message and exalt only the “Happy Housewife Heroine.”¹¹ And she recounts to telling effect the emotionally manipulative designs of marketers who peddle new products and appliances to housewives by trying to make these women feel creative and

¹⁰ To cite just a couple of examples: “so sex-directed education segregated recent generations of able American women as surely as separate-but-equal education segregated able American Negroes from the opportunity to realize their full abilities in the mainstream of American life” (Friedan 2001 [1963]:180). Commenting on the paradox of career women who write cheerily about comic mishaps in homemaking and who “may or may not overlook the housekeeper or maid who really makes the bed,” Friedan writes that “They are good craftsmen, the best of these Housewife Writers. And some of their work is funny... But there is something about Housewife Writers that isn’t funny—like Uncle Tom, or Amos and Andy” (two blackface comedians) (P. 57).

¹¹ This is the title of the book’s second chapter.

competent, or even professional, while simultaneously doing away with the very work that is supposed to give them their sense of social purpose.

Ultimately, Friedan's account of a feminine mystique manufactured by a class of experts is exaggerated. Social scientists and educators of her period were hardly unanimous in recommending that women confine themselves to the home. Judith Hennessee notes that "In the 1940s, Dr. Jessie Bernard, Ruther Herschberger, and Margaret Mead had each...criticized the arbitrary link between femininity and domesticity" (Hennessee 1999:82). Nor did popular magazines celebrate the "Happy Housewife Heroine" to the exclusion of the working woman. Historian Joanne Meyerowitz examines mass-circulation monthly magazines between 1946 and 1958 and concludes that writers for these magazines "consistently defended wage work for women" (Meyerowitz 1993:1465). Lastly, the household products peddled by the marketers who come across as the sleaziest purveyors of the feminine mystique in Friedan's account ultimately helped reduce the burden of household chores and ease women's passage to work (Cavalcanti and Tavares 2008; Heisig 2011). In 1965, for instance, America's gadget-rich women were doing half an hour less housework a day than their French counterparts.¹²

While Friedan's account of a "feminine mystique" manufactured by commercial and cultural elites is historically and sociologically dubious, it did her readers a hugely important service. By describing the alleged satisfactions of a purely domestic female existence as the fictional construction of a concerted drive to orchestrate women's hopes and desires, Friedan gives herself and her readers the cultural space to dwell on the dissatisfactions and limitations of a housewife's life. It broke the cultural spell of the "choice" of domesticity by arguing that it was not a truly free and authentic choice.

If the overarching theme of Friedan's feminist diagnosis is deception, the major touchstone of Beauvoir's is domination. Her analysis of women's inferior social position shifts throughout the book, but it rests on three major bases: economic dependence, reproduction, and drive to dominate the Other. Beauvoir's most insistent theme is the link between economic dependence and women's subordination:

It is through gainful employment that woman has traversed most of the distance that separated her from the male; and nothing else can guarantee her liberty in practice. Once she ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles; between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator. (Beauvoir 1953 [1949]:679)

As does Friedan, Beauvoir sees work that makes a creative contribution to the world as necessary to a truly fulfilling existence. But Beauvoir also describes women's work as a precondition for equality with men and for freedom from male domination. By contrast, men as husbands enter Friedan's account not as dominating figures but as henpecked specimens who get no peace from wives who are desperately trying to live vicariously through them (Friedan 2001 [1963]:101, 273-74, 325).

In order to explain women's economic subordination to men, Beauvoir points to the

¹² These figures are from the author's calculations from Multinational Time Use Study datasets.

burden that reproduction lays on women. To a certain degree, Beauvoir considers that advances in contraceptive knowledge and in strength-multiplying technology have made the question of inherent bodily difference moot: “Now protected in large part from the slavery of reproduction, [woman] is in a position to assume the economic role that is offered her and will assure her of complete independence” (Beauvoir 1953 [1949]:121). There is a third obstacle in women’s way, however. Against Engels’s argument that women’s subjection to men can be traced back to private property, she asks why the sexual division of labor did not lead simply to “friendly association” (P. 57). Her answer to the question is that domination of the Other is a universal human drive: is that domination of the Other is a universal human drive:

when two human categories are together, each aspires to impose its sovereignty upon the other. If both are able to resist this imposition, there is created between them a reciprocal relation, sometimes in enmity, sometimes in amity, always in a state of tension. If one of the two is in some way privileged, has some advantage, this one prevails over the other and undertakes to keep it in subjection. (P. 61)

This theme recurs in her discussion of marriage: “Marriage incites man to a capricious imperialism: the temptation to dominate is the most truly universal, the most irresistible one there is” (P. 465). Nor are women free of this domineering impulse. In motherhood, a woman “obtains in her child what man seeks in woman: an Other, combining nature and mind, who is to be both prey and *double*” (P. 512).

There is no hint of this inexorable link between difference and domination in Betty Friedan’s book. The drudgery of housework, not marriage to a man, is oppressive. In an epilogue written for the tenth anniversary edition of *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan acknowledges the existence of bad marriages and of pervasive sex discrimination, but vehemently opposes a feminism based on opposition to men: “It seemed to me that men weren’t really the enemy—they were fellow victims, suffering from an outmoded masculine mystique that made them feel unnecessarily inadequate when there were no bears to kill” (Friedan 2001 [1963]:386). She sees a focus on the inherent antagonism between men and women as mistaken—a “pseudo-radical infantilism” (P. 390)—and as politically deadly.

What accounts for this rather stark difference in assumptions about human nature? Is it merely a matter of Friedan’s greater political tact? An alternative explanation is that a concern with power in interpersonal relationships runs through French culture more generally. In her interview study of upper-middle class men in America and France, Michèle Lamont finds that “the French... seem to be more openly interested in power” (Lamont 1992:71). She notes that Americans tend to “go out of their way to explain that they do not think of themselves as innately superior to others, and to dissociate power as an organizational prerequisite from charismatic or personal power, ...see[ing] power less as a means of constraining others than as a resource for assisting others to get the job done” (P. 74-5). While acknowledging the pleasures of personal power more openly than Americans, the French also strongly resent its exercise by others, Lamont finds. They “paradoxically attribute less legitimacy to authority than Americans do” (P. 73-4). She finds the same cross-national pattern of greater French resentment of power in her

later cross-national study of working class men (Lamont 2000). This French attentiveness to the problematic pleasures of power as compared with Americans' tendency to treat power more neutrally as an impersonal and instrumental necessity probably stems from the stronger institutional influence of the state's hierarchy in French society coupled with the more lasting heritage of an aristocratic model of personal conduct in France. Whatever the roots of this general cultural difference between the two countries, however, it helps to explain Beauvoir and Friedan's divergent views of the role of power in relations between the sexes.

Conclusion

Simone de Beauvoir sowed the seeds of second wave feminism in France with a condemnation of women's multifaceted subordination to men. Betty Friedan galvanized the American women's movement by calling for a reformation of women's desires. Beauvoir's radical book was met with a scandalized reaction across the French establishment both on the Left and the Right. Her deprecation of motherhood particularly flouted a consensual elite commitment to pro-natalist policies and the high cultural value French culture placed on "natural" maternal feelings (Chaperon 2000:162-67). Even as she set herself squarely against the mainstream of public opinion, however, Beauvoir was playing a familiar role in French culture, that of the heroic intellectual as radical social critic.

By contrast, Friedan's more cautious, less controversial work of cultural criticism attracted less elite attention. The electronic *Book Review Digest* lists ten reviews of *The Feminine Mystique* in U.S. periodicals, compared with double that number of *American* reviews of the English translation of *The Second Sex*.¹³ Nevertheless, Friedan's book struck a popular nerve. She managed to get the book excerpted in four of the very women's magazines that her book attacked, and it went on to become the number one non-fiction paperback of 1964, selling 1.3 million copies in the first edition (Hennessee 1999:76-78). Friedan's culturally resonant *Feminine Mystique* provided the platform for her public persona and made her a logical leader of the flagship organization of American second wave feminism, the National Organization for Women, when it was formed in 1966.

In this story of successful cultural importation and adaptation, the differences between Beauvoir and Friedan's books also reveal enduring cultural imperatives that would propel the feminist movements of the 1970s along different ideological trajectories. For instance, the epistemological rhetoric used by Betty Friedan persisted in the American movement. Her emphasis on discoveries gleaned from personal experience continued in the powerful "consciousness-raising" procedures used by radical feminists. Friedan's tale of an everywoman's struggle toward moral and behavioral transformation tapped a powerful current of American narrative that would reappear in stories of feminist moral rebirth. And just as the requirements of authenticity led Friedan to rely mostly on interviews with women from her own social milieu, so American second-wave feminists kept their focus "close to home" but thereby opened themselves to criticism (most pointedly from other feminists) that they were naïve about social

¹³ Stephanie Coontz's claim that "Beauvoir... did not get much of a hearing in the mainstream press of 1950s America" (Coontz 2011:143) is false.

differences between women. Friedan's upbeat emphasis on women's individual agency also finds a clear reflection in American popular feminism. Both of these points of continuity between Friedan's work and later feminism probably have less to do with her influence *per se* and more to do with the broader cultural influences at work in American life throughout this period.

Beauvoir's implicit confidence in the power of reasoning and empathetic intuition by an intellectual elite also finds reflection in later French feminism. The distance between her intellectually ambitious analysis and her sparse concrete recommendations for how readers can transform their lives also endured in 1970s French feminism, which had a harder time than its American counterpart proposing links between feminist criticism and remedial action by ordinary women.

PART II. DEMOCRATIC ELITISM: THE CULTURAL LOGIC OF AN ABORTION MANIFESTO

The second-wave French women's movement has been characterized as "Byzantine beyond belief" (Burke 1978:843), theatrical (McBride 1987:62), and marked by "intellectualism, bitter internal struggles and a certain elitism" (Lovenduski 1986:94). All of these charges are justifiable. And yet, the movement scored some significant successes despite its fractiousness. This section of the chapter provides a comparative analysis of the French movement by examining one of its most successful actions: the Manifesto of the 343 in favor of liberalized abortion laws.

While the sociology of culture has made important contributions to the study of social movements (Polletta 2006; Johnston and Klandermans 1995), culture often appears only in its role as a "toolkit" that people can draw from strategically (Swidler 1986). This case study finds numerous examples of people using cultural meanings in a strategic, tool-like way. But it also finds that the actors in the story find themselves enmeshed in cultural codes that they cannot easily escape; it shows that they are inspired and haunted by social meanings and statuses that echo centuries-old cultural patterns.

The case study draws on first-hand and second-hand accounts of the creation and aftermath of the Manifesto. It begins by outlining the narrative of events, then analyzes the cultural logic of the way in which the Manifesto went from idea to reality. It describes the larger political and cultural patterns that made the Manifesto a huge success in France and assesses the less successful effort to replicate the Manifesto in the American context. A final section examines the broader movement dynamics illustrated by this case, arguing that French feminism's inability to unite behind a consensual representation of movement demands was both culturally and institutionally determined, and that American feminism's *de facto* solution to this problem was *Ms.* magazine itself.

Narrative. The Manifesto of the 343: How it Happened

The idea for a public manifesto protesting restrictions on abortion and confessing to having had an illegal abortion came from Jean Moreau, a journalist at *Le Nouvel Observateur*, a left-of-center weekly news magazine. Moreau asked a female coworker and friend of his at the editorial offices of *Le Nouvel Observateur* to contact the young feminist militants who had

begun staging public demonstrations. Christine Delphy and Anne Zelensky agreed to meet with her (Déserts 2006). Zelensky seems to have been somewhat surprised that her interlocutor: “was accompanied by a male colleague: Jean. He was the one who did the talking and who put the idea to us. ‘—We’d like to know what you think of the idea of a sort of women’s manifesto on the issue of abortion. Exactly what form it would take would have to be decided. Some big names for it to work. I think the paper would be ready to cover it, if it was right. You are the only ones who could do it.’” (Tristan and Pisan 1987 [1977]:46).¹⁴ Exactly what Delphy and Zelensky thought of this is unclear: they may have suspected that Jean was the real author of the idea, or perhaps that he was being a typical male-chauvinist by appropriating the idea for himself. But they took the opportunity and brought the idea before a meeting of militants who had decided to concentrate on the issue of abortion. This group, which had no fixed membership, had been announced at one of the free-for-all assemblies of militant women that met fortnightly at the Beaux Arts school in Paris’s Sixth Arrondissement. By Zelensky’s account, the response of the abortion group was unenthusiastic:

“— Fine, but no celebrities. We’ve had quite enough of them.”

“OK, but if there are only unknown women involved, nobody will pay attention.”

“The left-wing papers will cover it. You aren’t suggesting that we collaborate with the bourgeois press?” (Tristan and Pisan 1987 [1977]:47)

Zelensky ignored this off-putting response and convened a handful of willing collaborators to pursue the further action. She had previously met Simone de Beauvoir, and contacted her to propose a meeting. Zelensky’s description of her attitude toward Beauvoir corroborates what I said earlier about her iconic stature:

I had met her the previous autumn, with some other women. It had been a great moment, meeting in the flesh this great woman whose life had always fascinated me. She was in a sense... my ideal. Like her, I would have liked to have achieved something, I would have liked to have had the relationship she had with Sartre. He was one of the people I dreamt about meeting someday. I couldn’t bear people criticizing him, as they did in the papers and elsewhere. In the days of the FMA,¹⁵ I had adopted my most acerbic pen to reply to a stupid book attacking him. On the occasion of that first meeting, [Beauvoir] had said very little, basically listening to what we had to say, something I found remarkable in such a famous person. (P. 47)

Once again, Beauvoir’s respectful and encouraging attitude toward the younger women impressed Zelensky. Beauvoir praised the idea and immediately volunteered to sign the manifesto herself. She also helped work out its wording and committed to requesting signatures from other celebrities (P. 48).

¹⁴ Anne Zelensky, like others in the French women’s movement, wrote under a pseudonym taken from Flora Tristan, a colorful 19th century socialist feminist.

¹⁵ A small feminist group which Zelensky founded with a handful of friends named *Feminine – Masculine – Avenir* [Future].

Even with Beauvoir on board, the manifesto faced further hurdles. Given the skepticism that the effort had faced among women even within the sub-group devoted to the abortion question, it is not surprising that Zelensky's announcement of the idea to the large and heterogeneous crowd of women at the Beaux Arts met with contempt:

As usual, the first problem was to get people to keep quiet. Mafra, who had an amazing voice, began bellowing. It worked. As quickly as I could, I explained what was at issue, mentioning in passing that Simone de Beauvoir had agreed to sign.

— We don't give a shit! [*On n'en a rien à foutre!*] Mama's generation of feminism! [*Féminisme de maman !*]¹⁶ *The Second Sex* is old hat!' I was choked with anger... All the women we had spoken to, celebrities or not, had been keen on the idea of the manifesto, and yet the women of the movement spat on it! (Tristan and Pisan 1987 [1977]:48-49)

Once again, the solution to this rejection was to go forward with a "coalition of the willing," so to speak. Zelensky and the abortion group, of which she was a de-facto leader, ignored the negativism of most of the attendees at the Beaux Arts meeting and carried on collecting signatures. With these gathered, the final hurdle was to negotiate details of publication. As Zelensky describes it,

it was inevitable that differences would emerge between the priorities of a magazine, firmly integrated into a system whose rules we disapproved of, and the priorities of a handful of women who wanted, through their revolt, to break down the barriers of practical considerations. (P. 49)

Although Zelensky passes over the details of these negotiations with the phrase "The ins and outs of our collaboration with *Le Nouvel Observateur* are of little consequence," we have access the magazine editors' version of events, narrated in the present tense for journalistic immediacy:

the girls of the 'Manifesto' aren't yet sure that they want to hand over their war chest to the magazine. They talk about *Le Monde*, about *Politique Hebdo*¹⁷... Simone de Beauvoir contacts Pierre Lazareff, the head of *France Soir*,¹⁸ who declines the offer. They go for "l'Obs" [*Le Nouvel Observateur*], on condition of retaining control. The girls from the MLF don't want [the Manifesto] to be bowdlerized [*se faire caviarder*]. A meeting with the founder of the "Obs" is organized. "I was a little afraid that the girls would make a big scene," Jean Moreau recalls with amusement. As usual, they did their thing: provocation, shouting, getting up on tables, they want the entire magazine to themselves. "I had to confront this mob," remembers Jean Daniel [the magazine's founder and head]. "Some of them were insulting. They saw me as a reactionary in the service of the

¹⁶ French phrases in italics indicate the original text where I have altered the translation published in (Tristan and Pisan 1987 [1977]). The original French text is found at (Tristan and Pisan 1977:68).

¹⁷ Literally, "*Politics Weekly*," a newsmagazine.

¹⁸ A daily newspaper with a wide contemporary circulation in France and the prestige of having been published by the Resistance in occupied Paris during World War II.

masculine capitalist system. I who had always thought that the feminist revolution was the most important of all..." After hours of negotiation, the director of "l'Obs" agrees to publish the first and last names of all of the signatories, and lets the MLF have a page to themselves, which they title: "Our wombs belong to us." (Déserts 2006:9-10)¹⁹

Anne Zelensky notes that, "in the course of this 'collaboration' with the press, I discovered that we were a force to be reckoned with" (Tristan and Pisan 1987 [1977]:49).

And so they were. The manifesto, which was published unexpurgated, read as follows: One million women have abortions each year in France. They have them in dangerous conditions because it is illegal, whereas an abortion carried out under proper medical supervision is a straightforward operation. These millions of women are never mentioned. I declare that I am one of these women. I declare that I have had an abortion. (P. 48)

It was signed by 343 women, from prominent intellectuals and authors like Marguerite Duras, Françoise Sagan, and Beauvoir herself, from glamorous actresses like Catherine Deneuve, Jeanne Moreau, Delphine Seyrig, and Marina Vlady, and from many young activists and other non-celebrity women.

The manifesto, published in issue no. 334 of *Le Nouvel Observateur*, was reprinted with multiple commentaries on the front-page of *Le Monde* on April 5, 1971, and was featured on the evening news that night (Picq 1993:56). The manifesto is widely credited with sparking a vigorous public discussion that culminated in the groundbreaking *loi Veil* of January 17, 1975 (Picq 1993; McBride 1987:62ff; Déserts 2006; Duchen 1986:53). The *loi Veil*, France's equivalent of *Roe vs. Wade*, gave Frenchwomen the option to abort a fetus early in pregnancy. (Unlike *Roe*, it would be broadened rather than narrowed by subsequent legislation.)

Symbolism and Strategy in the Creation of the Manifesto

Jean Moreau's plan for planting his idea in the radical women's movement is telling. He made sure to have a female colleague request the meeting, something that was probably politic given the activists' suspicions of men. Indeed, excluding men from meetings was one of the first painful and culturally groundbreaking acts of the French movement.²⁰ More intriguing still is the question of why Jean Moreau contacted the young women of the nascent movement with his idea of the Manifesto. Was his claim that "You are the only ones who could do it" mere flattery? There is reason to believe that it was not.

After all, Moreau could have approached Beauvoir directly with his idea. He knew that the manifesto, to work, would require some "big names." Beauvoir was a veritable superstar in France, a committed advocate of women's rights, and, in terms of her personal connections, an ideal person to spearhead the campaign, as events would later demonstrate. Furthermore, Moreau was friends with Sartre (Déserts 2006:7) and no doubt could have obtained a personal

¹⁹ English renditions of passages originally published in French aside from those in (Tristan and Pisan 1987 [1977]) are my own.

²⁰ Establishing women-only consciousness-raising groups was also a characteristic of the U.S. movement, but it was probably less precedent-setting than in France, which has a strong tradition of social *mixité*.

introduction to Beauvoir without much difficulty.

Evidently, however, he considered that the idea would be better received if it were proposed by young *militantes*. Why?

The answer is somewhat intuitive once we understand the symbolic positions of the various actors in the drama. Not only were the young female activists the right sex; that was the least of it. There was a sense of generational appropriateness in Zelensky and her friends' being the ones to approach Beauvoir. Beauvoir was a celebrity and something of a leftist establishment figure herself. This gave her great public stature, but opened her to suspicion in the eyes of the younger activists who hoped to make their own mark on history with a new, purer, more scathingly radical version of feminism. (Pierre Bourdieu's *The Rules of Art* describes this dynamic of generational and intellectual rivalry well (Bourdieu 1996 [1992]). It is common in intellectual and artistic spheres, and in general is particularly intense in French public life, thanks to its culturally and politically influential intelligentsia.) That Beauvoir's social status made her seem too established and perhaps passé is evidenced by the "*Féminisme de maman!*" cry that Zelensky recalls in the large meeting of women activists. An initiative that originated with Beauvoir would have been interpreted as a power grab, an effort by a near-establishment figure to co-opt the energy and the glory of the new movement.

To understand this fully, we must attend to the tone of Zelensky's description of Beauvoir in her manifesto. Although worshipful, it also betrays a sense of social distance. Beauvoir's status as an iconic feminist intellectual gave her considerable sway with the younger women, but it also made her an object of suspicion. Zelensky's amazement at Beauvoir's respectful reception of the young activists²¹ shows how conscious she was of the possibility that Beauvoir would grandstand and bask in the homage offered by her youthful acolytes. Acting only after the younger women had taken the initiative was crucial to Beauvoir's maintenance of their good will.

Jean Moreau's careful seeding of the manifesto idea (which itself demonstrates creativity and a good grasp of symbolic strategy) with up-and-coming young *militantes* who could tap the celebrity of more established sympathizers shows considerable social skill. As Neil Fligstein notes in his article on social skill, the existence of cultural norms does not automatically endow people who are aware of them with the ability to comply with them or manage them effectively (Fligstein 2001). The point here is not to heap praise on Moreau personally, but to note how the manifesto's progress reveals the symbolic strictures and opportunities of French society at the period.

Turning back to Simone de Beauvoir, we can ask whether her need to manage her social status was idiosyncratic: was it attributable simply to her unique intellectual status in France? The answer is no. The precarious combination of respect and suspicion surrounding Beauvoir was characteristic of social status dynamics in the French women's movement as a whole.

²¹ At a later occasion recounted in her memoir, Zelensky repeats her amazement with the sense that "Once again... I realized that she was truly one of us. I was truly moved by this: in spite of the years which divided us, we came together in the same battle, she whose book had inspired our struggle, we who were turning her ideas into action" (Tristan and Pisan 1987 [1977]:63).

Indeed, as I have implied, it is also a more general feature of French culture.

Leadership in the nascent women's movement was organized around personal prestige, as Zelensky makes clear in her descriptions of the *assemblées générales* of young female leftists. Ideological differences divided attendees from the start, and speaking time tended to be monopolized by a handful of the most articulate and confident women (Tristan and Pisan 1987 [1977]:37). Early on during the young women's meetings, prestige thus seems to have accrued to those who possessed the most "intellectual capital." Over time, some activists began taking part in demonstrations that caught the public eye, such as trying to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier for his (even more unknown) wife (P. 38-39). These actions provided an alternate source of prestige—and of jealousy and dissension—within the larger group. As Zelensky notes, the demonstration with the wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, an action that led journalists to give the new movement its name, the "*Mouvement de Libération des Femmes*," (MLF) (Duchen 1986:9), was dismissed by one speaker as a "petty bourgeois pantomime" (Tristan and Pisan 1987 [1977]:40). Some actions, however, like the Manifesto of the 343, were so spectacularly successful that even women who had earlier denounced them became fans after the fact.

A Bourdieuan analysis of the competition occurring within the MLF at this time would emphasize the competing forces of intellectual capital and what could be called "activist capital," the prestige accrued by those who had organized or participated in successful protest actions. The actions of women within the movement, conceived of as a field, could then be described as efforts to claim one kind of capital or the other while promoting the overall importance of that variety of capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:94-115). Rightly or wrongly, Bourdieu's theoretical imagery is typically read as one of agents' struggling to increase their personal sum of capital, or prestige, while attempting to maximize the payoffs to the species of capital that they possess in the greatest abundance. Ironically, however, the aura of personal prestige associated with *de facto* leadership in the ostensibly structureless MLF seems to have been acquired quite involuntarily. Zelensky writes that she herself "acquired the label of 'leader' and thus found myself in an awkward and rather ambiguous position: I was listened to whenever I opened my mouth, but people were suspicious of me" (Tristan and Pisan 1987 [1977]:59). Zelensky's co-author, Annie Sugier, describes Zelensky's high status in the Beaux Arts assembly from the point of view of a newcomer. Notably, this description is from the period *before* the Manifesto was published: "Anne is surrounded by a sort of court; she says hello to the left and the right, visibly known by everyone" (Tristan and Pisan 1977:144). Zelensky talks about the hard work she did to organize events, and goes out of her way to deny that she sought or enjoyed the prestige she accrued within the MLF:

There is the respect you gain... That keeps you going for a while. But for my part, a heartfelt belief in what I was doing was the real motivation. I have never been tempted to establish myself permanently in this dearly bought position of power. On principle, and quite crudely because I derived no pleasure whatsoever from it. (Tristan and Pisan 1987 [1977]:60).

Zelensky writes that “in the movement, or at least in the circles I moved in, each woman invested with power avoided abusing it by retiring into the background, ready to re-emerge at a later date” (P. 61). She contrasts this approach to the use of power with that of Gisèle Halimi, the lawyer and organizer of *Choisir* who tried to stage-manage a large MLF rally organized to denounce crimes against women (P. 56-60), or of Antoinette Fouque, the leader of the *Psych et Po* or *Psychologie et Politique* faction in the MLF who ran a rather cult-like circle which she presided over as intellectual leader and (paid) psychoanalyst (Duchen 1986:21; Dhavernas 1981; Ringart 1977).

Zelensky’s narrative echoes the concern with the seductive pleasure of power and domination that appears, as noted earlier, in Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and in Michèle Lamont’s interviews with French men in the 1980s and 1990s. Françoise Picq notes that, in the groundbreaking special issue of the left-wing review, *Partisans*, an issue entitled “*Libération des femmes: années zero*,” which juxtaposed translated texts from American radical feminists and original essays by French activists:

The Americans... sign their name and don’t shrink from being presented as “founder” of “the women’s liberation movement” or of “the radical feminist movement” in New York or San Francisco, though they deny being “the best-informed specialist”... [whereas] The French authors are drowned in the anonymity of an obscure collective such as “a group of women” or “some militants”... [With the exception of Christiane Rochefort,] [t]he others disguise themselves behind a pseudonym..., sign with their initials or their first name only... As Saint-Simonian women had done before them, they seem to be refusing their former identity marked by the name of their father (or husband). But it’s also the case individualism is frowned upon in the MLF and that, discovering themselves in the collective struggle, they do not dare to affirm their uniqueness. (Picq 1993:36)

This especially French preference for anonymity is probably best interpreted as an effort to sidestep the dynamic of personal glory and jealousy that is particularly endemic to the French culture of public activity.²²

Thus, the issue of recognition within the movement and in the larger public eye was a central, if often only implicit, concern within the French movement as a whole. The social distance which set apart Simone de Beauvoir and which required skillful handling on her part, and on everyone else’s, thus appears not as an idiosyncrasy, but as a particularly acute form of a generalized phenomenon. So does the factionalism which accompanied the “awkward and ambiguous” status of charismatic leaders in the MLF. Zelensky repeatedly describes the MLF’s difficulties as a universal characteristics of groups in general: “general hostility... lack of warmth... excessive intellectualism of the discussions, the cliques, in short all the normal

²² In *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, Alexis de Tocqueville traces this tendency to the system of centrally-bestowed symbolic privileges by which French monarchs won over and divided their subjects starting in the medieval period (Tocqueville 1983 [1858]:77-119).

characteristics of *any human group*” (Tristan and Pisan 1987 [1977]:54. My emphasis); “...the realm of ‘petty politics,’ a repugnant but alas indispensable feature of every group, however revolutionary” (P. 60). Of course, Zelensky had no comparative basis for perceiving that the “general hostility” and “excessive intellectualism” that characterized the feminist movement was especially acute in the French context.

We should be careful not to understate the more universal organizational dynamics at work here. To some degree, of course, factionalism and mutual suspicion are natural byproducts of the informally collective action through personal friendship networks that characterizes nominally egalitarian groups. Indeed, American feminist Jo Freeman’s classic essay “The Tyranny of Structurelessness” describes this dynamic in pragmatic but sociologically insightful terms. Alice Echols’s history of American radical feminism has plenty of stories of infighting, confirming the organizational perils of “structurelessness” (Echols 1989). (It is culturally telling that, by Echols’s account, American radical feminists seem to have fought most over the issue of which women belonged to the most oppressed social category and so were more morally virtuous rather than over whose theoretical contribution was most brilliant.)

A traditional solution to this problem in America, which, after all, has both an egalitarian culture of personal interaction and a strong heritage of citizen involvement in voluntary organizations, has been to emphasize the pragmatic goals of groups.²³ Jo Freeman recommends precisely this. She also provides a rigorously instrumental account of the proper delegation of initiative to group leaders that echoes Lamont’s American interviewees’ accounts of legitimate power in the workplace (Freeman 1973; Lamont 1992). The American women’s movement supplemented this sort of solution with the formula of consciousness-raising itself, which gave small groups a practical purpose: supporting each other in an effort to make efforts to change their own lives and attitudes. For several years, I will argue, *Ms.* magazine itself furnished a very effective solution to these characteristic problems of collective action.

The abortion manifesto succeeded in circumventing the French movement’s acute collective action problems in part because it appealed so powerfully to a tradition of elite protest against the state on behalf of non-elites.

The Paradoxical Political Logic of the Manifesto

France’s prestige-conscious and prestige-wary culture is not without its advantages for certain kinds of social movement protest. The history of the *Manifeste des 343* bears this out. A declaration signed by so many prominent intellectuals and artists drew on the enormous symbolic power of these figures in French society (Clark 1987). Signatories of the manifesto were publicly confessing to a prosecutable offense (whether or not they had actually had abortions, which was beside the point²⁴). Indeed, activists subsequently went as far as to urge the

²³ Hervé Varenne contrasts what he sees as an anxious American search for group consensus with a French tendency to “ritually emphasize” intra-group divisions (Varenne 1978:243, fn. 5), and Nina Eliasoph laments the tendency of American voluntary groups to focus on pragmatic tasks while “avoiding politics” and any other topic that might create intra-group dissension (Eliasoph 1998).

²⁴ These signatures were as much a declaration of solidarity as a biographical confession, as Anne Zelensky’s own account makes clear: she signed the manifesto despite never having had an abortion (Tristan and Pisan 1987

judiciary to prosecute them, something that government ministers scrupulously avoided for a time (Picq 1993:147). After the Manifesto's publication, activists began collecting signatures on a weekly basis at the Beaux-Arts school, the meeting place for the "General Assembly" of feminist militants. More women signed to testify that they had had an abortion, as did men confessing to complicity in women's obtaining an abortion (P. 66).

The goal of activists aiming to provoke a prosecution for abortion was not to find a favorable case with which to establish new jurisprudential principles; French law is a code which does not operate through the establishment of precedent. Rather, these activists were acting according to a symbolic and cultural logic: literary and artistic prominence makes certain figures quasi-untouchable by the government—especially when they are acting in their most sacred roles as eloquent voices of conscience. To take action against such figures would immediately cast them as martyrs and state prosecutors as heavy-handed bullies.

The abortion manifesto was not the first instance of famous people using their public renown to shelter others. For instance, after the 1968 uprising, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir became the official editors of several new far-left publications despite the fact that they had nothing to do with the day-to-day running of the paper. A paper could be shuttered only if the government prosecuted its responsible editor-in-chief (Moi 1987:67, fn. 3), and the authorities would have a huge scandal on their hands if they hauled a figure as prominent as Sartre or Beauvoir into court.²⁵

Among Alexis de Tocqueville's arguments, perhaps the hardest for American readers to credit is the notion that an aristocracy *checks* despotism. The success of the Manifesto of the 343, however, is a modern echo of the *ancien régime* dynamic he describes: "those whose social status enabled them to make their voices heard and attract attention" are in a privileged position to resist the state (Tocqueville 1983 [1858]:117).

Nevertheless, it contains a newly egalitarian element, since post-revolutionary France officially respects the norm of equality before the law. The Manifesto uses the *de facto* privileged status of its elite signers not only to flout abortion restrictions, but also, ironically, to accuse the government of hypocrisy. After all, the government cannot single out the manifesto's less well-known signatories for prosecution, since this would violate the formal norm of equality before the law. Furthermore, by not prosecuting the celebrities who have confessed to the crime of abortion, the government sets itself up for charges of favoritism and injustice whenever it tries enforcing the law at a later date.

The Manifesto of the 343 thus set the stage for feminist activists to denounce abortion

[1977]:45). Annie Saugier remarks that she did not sign because she had not had an abortion, only later to discover that neither did many of the actual signatories (Tristan and Pisan 1977:144). Here, feminism's frequent emphasis on acting politically from personal experience clashed with the French habit of distinguishing starkly between the public world, a place for taking political positions and declaring allegiances, and private reality, which others have less business judging (e.g., Wylie 1974 [1957]:115).

²⁵ Indeed, in June 1970, Sartre and Beauvoir were briefly detained along with several students by the French authorities for distributing an illegal Maoist publication to which they had lent their names for political cover; unlike the students, and contrary to Sartre's explicit request, neither Sartre or Beauvoir were charged for a crime, and both were released (Giniger 1970).

laws on the next occasion when the government tried to enforce them. They had an ideal opportunity when four women in the working-class Paris suburb of Bobigny were brought to trial after an indigent seventeen-year-old girl appeared in hospital hemorrhaging from an illegal abortion (McBride 1987:63). Lawyer and Manifesto signer Gisèle Halimi led the defense, calling numerous public figures to the stand including Simone de Beauvoir, film stars, political figures, and Nobel prizewinning physicians and scientists (Association Choisir 1973). This parade of celebrities and the newly open controversy surrounding the topic of abortion helped ensure heavy media coverage of the trial. Predictably, however, Halimi focused on the government's hypocrisy in prosecuting poor women for a "crime" which elites could perpetrate with impunity. In her closing remarks, she flung the following accusation: "It is always the same class that suffers: the class of poor women, economically and socially vulnerable, the class with no money and no contacts" (quoted in Duchen 1986:53-54). This defense seems to have worked inasmuch as the girl and her older accomplices were given light or suspended sentences (McBride 1987:63). Of course, the real success of the trial was to cast abortion restrictions as hypocritical, unjust, and oppressive.

The Manifesto of the 343 and Bobigny trial's success in generating public attention and sympathy for the campaign to legalize abortion ultimately helped to bolster the logic Tocqueville observed of elites challenging state power. This French pattern of protest also illustrates Tocqueville's contrast between "aristocratic" public virtue that emphasizes glorious self-sacrifice as opposed to socially egalitarian societies' habit of cloaking altruistic action in the garb of self-interest (Tocqueville 2002 [1840]:501-02). Tocqueville made these observations with the expectation that France would evolve inexorably toward greater social egalitarianism. He might have been surprised by the way these characteristically "aristocratic" defenses of liberty against the central state could persist and even thrive in a France more formally committed than ever to egalitarian legal norms.

A Disappointing Export: The American version of the Manifesto

The Manifesto of the 343 led to one of the few instances of American feminists adopting a French movement tactic. The preview issue of *Ms.* magazine, which was published at the end of 1971, included a description of the French Manifesto and asked readers to sign a new American equivalent, the "American Women's Petition." The article displays a list of fifty-three "respected women residents of the United States" who had already signed. A statement introducing the petition notes that these fifty-three are "mostly women active in community work, or in the arts," and would have included more but for their fear of damaging their own or their husband's career.²⁶ The petition aims "to repeal archaic and inhuman laws" and "to eliminate [the] stigma" attached to abortion (all quotations are from Diamondstein 1971:34). This wording suggests that the American petition aims more at changing public opinion than did the French, which says simply that "*On fait le silence sur ces millions de femmes*". Among the

²⁶ This was a very real worry. Lorraine Beebe, a Republican state senator from Michigan who is one of the original 53 signers of the *Ms.* petition, revealed in 1969 that she had undergone a therapeutic abortion in two decades earlier. Her family was threatened and her home firebombed, and she lost her seat in the 1970 election.

more prominent signatories of the petition are Judy Collins, Nora Ephron, Lillian Hellman, Billie Jean King, Anaïs Nin, Frances Fox Piven, Anne Sexton, Susan Sontag, Gloria Steinem, and Barbara W. Tuchman—famous women, to be sure, but without the “mainstream” star power of a Catherine Deneuve or Jeanne Moreau. The October 1972 issue of *Ms.* reprinted the petition with four pages of signatures.

From the point of view of gathering signatures, the American Women’s Petition was a success, if not an overwhelming one. But the petition had nowhere near the impact in the U.S. that it did in France. It did not draw attention from other major media outlets: for example, a search of the *New York Times* archive turns up no mention of the petition. And, whereas the Manifesto is mentioned in all histories of French abortion law reform (Picq 1993; McBride 1987; Gouazé 1979; Mossuz-Lavau 2002), the American petition does not appear in major accounts of the history of abortion liberalization in the U.S. (Luker 1984; McBride 2004).

What accounts for the American petition’s failure to capture public attention in the way the French manifesto did? Had the novelty of the original petition blunted its impact? This seems unlikely, since the *New York Times* published only one article on the French Manifesto when it appeared (“Abortion Law Protest in Paris” 1971). Perhaps the American petition’s appearance at a different moment in the public debate might explain its quiet reception. By the time *Ms.* published the petition, abortion upon request had already been legalized in Colorado and New York, and when a campaign to liberalize abortion laws was well underway in other states. To the extent that it is correct, this explanation helps to illustrate the importance of American federalism as a way of multiplying the possible points of entry of issues into public conversation. In France, in contrast, the target for protest—the central state—is much clearer, and the elites who are best equipped to oppose the state are likewise more concentrated in Paris and more likely to be intellectuals or their personal acquaintances and so available for recruitment. This leads us to another possible explanation for the American petition’s lack of public éclat: that the French manifesto simply managed to gather more high-impact names than American petition. Certainly, the American petition had no signatory as celebrated as Simone de Beauvoir in France, nor did it manage to enlist the major film stars such as Catherine Deneuve and Jeanne Moreau. No equivalent to Beauvoir existed in the American context, of course. To imagine American actresses as famous as the latter, we would have to think of the public attention that might have been garnered by the petition if Shirley MacLaine, Jane Fonda, or Audrey Hepburn had signed. Celebrities of this wattage did not sign in the U.S. This may be partly on account of the more tightly networked French elites and the greater respect accorded in France to intellectuals, like Beauvoir, who circulated the petition. It also seems likely that French celebrities had less to fear in the way of loss of reputation after “admitting” an abortion simply because the public and the cultural gatekeepers who mediate public opinion are less concerned with female sexual purity in France than in the U.S. For a Hollywood actress, however popular and iconic she was, to admit an abortion in the early 1970s would probably have been the kiss of death for her career. Tocqueville’s observation that public opinion exerts more power in highly democratic countries like the United States helps to explain the differences between the French and American actions.

The French manifesto was a challenge to the central state with the public in the role of interested bystanders; the American petition is more of a challenge by one sector of the public to the public at large. The symbolic landscape exploited by the *Manifeste des 343* was simply not as advantageous in the United States.

Elite Competition for Symbolic Leadership: Elle's États Généraux de la Femme

In a cultural context in which elite actions on behalf of the people as a whole are a regular and important part of political theater, there are inevitable disputes over which elite groups can legitimately call themselves the champions of the oppressed. This helps to explain the intense jockeying for symbolic leadership that is common *among* elites in France. *Elle*, a mass-circulation women's magazine with a particularly well-educated readership (Centre de L'Étude des Supports de Publicité (CESP) 1972), started publication in the post-World War II period as the voice of the "uniquely modern" French woman (Weiner 1999:395), and tried to stay at the fore of the newly stirring women's liberation movement by hosting an *États Généraux de la Femme* in Versailles in November 1970. As reported in *Elle's* December 7, 1970 issue, this event, a self-conscious echo of the meeting of the Estates General that led to the French Revolution, consisted of "325 women chosen to be a representative sample of the nation" and was addressed by *personnalités* including "government ministers, politicians, union leaders, CEOs, technical experts, sociologists and physicians" (*États Généraux de la Femme* 1970:i). The magazine hailed its convocation as:

historic... from now on, in our country, the emancipation of women's lives is a reality in action. A whole mass of aspirations, be they confused, uncoordinated, disparate, sometimes contradictory, often even unconscious, over the course of three days has become a coherent source of pressure that is well structured, concisely expressed, and sure of its force. This is a social phenomenon which will not be silenced: the press, radio, television, cinema, all of the media have grasped that what has occurred here is an event of capital importance. (*États Généraux de la Femme* 1970:i)

It is hard to know what is more pretentious here: the magazine editors' peculiar way of invoking the nation's sacred revolutionary heritage that cast themselves simultaneously as royal convener of the Estates and prophets of the Revolution; the claim that three days of meetings sufficed for the hosts to shape women's inchoate experience into well-articulated claims; or the sweepingly conclusive title given by the magazine to its *précis* of the proceedings: "What Women Demand."

The meeting's resolutions on the topics of "love, couple, and marriage" are necessarily anticlimactic after these stylings, but their content should not be dismissed out of hand. For instance, attendees resolve: "That all children and adults have the right to information and education about sex. That this should be provided both by parents and by schools at all levels" (*États Généraux de la Femme* 1970:vi). The resolution also demands that minors be able to access contraceptives directly from medical personnel.²⁷ With regard to abortion, the meeting's

²⁷ These recommendations, which still seem remarkably "permissive" about sexuality in view of today's American norms, were ultimately implemented without much social opposition.

conclusions are more circumspect, but still considerably ahead of the legal status-quo:

Perfectly conscious of the real drama that abortion represents and the insufficiencies of legislation with regard to this problem, we note: That a third of women have come out against abortion, a third wish to expand therapeutic abortion, and a third are for legal abortion. We hope that the upcoming debate in Parliament will take account of this fact and will ensure that women participate in the design of the necessary reforms.” (États Généraux de la Femme 1970:vii)

In short, the conference’s position, while less overtly radical than those of the MLF activists precisely because it deferred to the full range of popular opinion, is clearly in favor of liberalizing abortion.

We should take careful note of the rhetorical stance taken by *Elle*’s editors here. They are not mounting a campaign to change public opinion, but instead are claiming to help articulate it. This is a concession by elites to democratic ideals. To the extent that this rhetorical approach prevails, it implies a surprisingly *laissez-faire* approach to people’s existing priorities. This dynamic is worth watching; it recurs in the implicit approach adopted by the editors of “Femmes” and, especially, *F Magazine*. This elite rhetorical stance explains why “mainstream” French feminists take a more tentative, plebiscitary approach to changes in women’s lives, presenting them as suggestions rather than as ethical imperatives, as American feminists do.

It is against a background of competing elite efforts to articulate women’s emerging demands that the young French feminists’ protests of *Elle*’s *Etats Généraux* should be viewed. Indeed, these protests were some of the first mounted by radical French feminists. Anne Zelensky considered the event an advertisement for *Elle*, a magazine she considered to be “over-the-top feminine” [*féminin trop féminin*]. She seems to have objected particularly to the frequency with which male organizers and experts spoke about, and for women (Tristan and Pisan 1977:60-63). To the organizers’ credit, they seem to have received the protestors politely, letting them grab the microphone when they burst in on events and permitting them to address conference participants and distribute literature in the building where the conference was held (Tristan and Pisan 1977:60-63).

More fundamentally, however, the editors of *Elle* and the activists of the MLF were competing to articulate the demands of ordinary women. On substantive policy grounds, the *Elle* conference and the young militants who disrupted it were close to being on the same page. By a purely utilitarian logic, the two groupings might have been natural allies. What divided them, however, was their competing claim to be speaking for the unjustly silenced mass of French women to a government that was heedless of their needs. The question of *who* had the symbolic credentials to make demands was key.²⁸

American equivalents to the protests at the États Généraux de la Femme?

Perhaps the American action which is the closest equivalent to this protest at *Elle*’s *États*

²⁸ A similar dynamic could be seen when *Le Nouvel Observateur* convened a meeting of experts to call for the liberalization of abortion about a month after publishing the Manifesto of the 343. Militants from the MLF hijacked the meeting, denouncing it (again) as a publicity operation and calling ordinary women to the microphone to testify about their personal experiences with abortion (Picq 1993: 68-69).

Généraux de la Femme is the March 18, 1970 sit-in at the *Ladies' Home Journal* editorial offices by radical feminists (Echols 1989:195-97; Hunter 1990). New York activists targeted the *Ladies' Home Journal* because of its respectability and high circulation numbers. But the *Journal* had never attempted to referee a gathering aimed at comprehensively summing up the demands of contemporary women. And, in contrast with the French protesters at *Elle's* gathering, American protesters issued concrete demands aimed at ousting the magazine's editor and transforming its content (Echols 1989:196); ultimately, they settled for the chance to run a set of well-remunerated articles in a special section of the magazine. Their aim was not to delegitimize a publication's pretensions to leadership, but to transform it into a vehicle for feminist messages. Again, the distinction is between a contestation over who has the symbolic right to speak as women's representative as opposed to the more pragmatic issue of which arguments should be communicated through mainstream media channels to the public.

Contestation for Leadership of the Feminist Movement

The issue of who could speak on behalf of the entire women's movement was fraught in both France and the U.S. As we have noted, the French women's movement was characterized by extreme amorphousness and norms of anonymity. Hence, the movement was vulnerable to legal sleight of hand by one faction, *Psychanalyse et Politique (Psych et Po)*, which legally incorporated itself as the *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes* in October 1979. *Psych et Po* had already earned the dislike of other activists for its ideologically closed and hierarchical structure built around the leadership of Antoinette Fouque (Tristan and Pisan 1977). Thanks to its access to one wealthy member's inheritance, the group had set up a publishing house in 1973 and, starting in 1974, published a series of glossy periodicals touting the *Psych et Po* line (Duchen 1986:32-39). Antoinette Fouque's seizure of the name *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes*—MLF, however involved a direct betrayal of the notion that the movement belonged to all the women who participated in it. She did not hesitate to bring legal action for unfair business practices against competing activists who continued to use what was now a trademarked name (Dhavernas 1981; Kaufmann-McCall 1983:287-88; Moses 1998:251).²⁹ This controversy divided and preoccupied the movement, and provoked anxieties among anti-*Psych et Po* activists that younger women and foreign observers of the movement would naively accept the "trademarked" MLF as representative of French feminism as whole (Moses 1998). Dorothy Kauffman-McCall writes that the *Psych et Po* coup would have been impossible in the United States:

Given the extreme political centralization of French life and what has been called the cultural terrorism of Paris, *Psych et po's* takeover of the name for the women's movement had an effectiveness that cannot be translated into American terms. In the United States, both geographical space and the regional dispersion of movements and media would make it impossible for one group, let alone one person, to achieve such a monopoly. (Kaufmann-McCall 1983:288)

²⁹ The anti-*Psych et Po* pamphlet *Chroniques d'une Imposture* solicited an endorsement and preface from Simone de Beauvoir in order to protect its authors from further legal action (Kaufmann-McCall 1983:289). This is another instance of Beauvoir's exalted status.

There may be some truth to this geographical explanation, but the more straightforward explanation is cultural and legal. France's 1901 law on civil society organizations under which Antoinette Fouque registered the MLF recognizes associational bodies via their formal registration with the central state. Refusing to register with the state had been an important symbolic act of independence from the state by radical feminists, but it left the movement vulnerable to rogue actors.

The rise of *Ms.* magazine represents a comparable move toward centralization of the women's movement in the U.S., and thus provides some instructive parallels and contrasts to the MLF's trademarking controversy in France. Like the publishing house and bookstore established by *Psych et Po*, *Ms.* was intended to be a commercial enterprise whose profits could be plowed back into the movement (Farrell 1998:26). As Amy Farrell notes, "*Ms.* almost immediately became the popular icon of the women's movement, synonymous, for many Americans, with the women's movement itself" (P. 1). Naturally, many radical feminists felt threatened by this new, mass-market, avowedly commercial interloper which was suddenly positioned as the dominant voice of American feminism (P. 41, 47-8). Later, the New York radical feminist group Redstockings attacked *Ms.* as a tool of the status quo and even (falsely) accused Gloria Steinem of collaboration with the CIA (P. 81-83). Ultimately however, such attacks did little to undermine *Ms.*'s central role in the movement. In part, this is because *Ms.* worked hard to be inclusive of various points of view. More fundamentally, however, *Ms.* magazine's centrality to American feminism was won through a decentralized market logic. Unlike the trademarking of the MLF, *Ms.* magazine was not a naked power grab defended by invoking the power of the state to silence critics. Instead, it won the loyalty of millions of women who were making an uncoerced choice in a competitive market. *Ms.* needed to be inclusive in order to maintain readers' sense that the magazine provided them with access to a thriving movement that was tackling new issues and refining its thinking through an ongoing internal dialogue. Ultimately, this made the magazine's centrality to the U.S. women's movement harder to combat by those whom it overshadowed.

Conclusion

The American women's movement's more populist, less intellectual flavor when compared to the French movement was reinforced by these organizational factors. As in the case of comparatively powerful impact of the French abortion manifesto, the larger features of each country's social structure and historical patterns of political action powerfully influence the strengths and weaknesses of each movement. In instances where they could clearly juxtapose themselves to central state power and draw upon the leadership of dramatically self-sacrificing elite dissenters, the French movement scored important rhetorical and substantive victories. Such strategies fared less well when transposed into the American social and cultural context. In contrast, the American movement developed a powerful populist voice that prompted millions of ordinary women to examine and criticize inegalitarian sex roles in their own lives: *Ms.* magazine played a pivotal role in this achievement.

Just as Americans had tried to imitate the *Manifeste des 343* with limited results, French

feminists attempted to replicate *Ms.*'s success. In 1976, an avowedly feminist rubric entitled "Femmes" appeared inside *Marie Claire* magazine, a mainstream women's magazine with an educated, rather trendy audience, and in 1978, *F Magazine*, a large-circulation women's magazine devoted exclusively to feminist concerns, appeared under the editorial direction of Claude Servan-Schreiber, who had served as *Ms.* magazine's first foreign correspondent. Together, these magazines provided the most popularly accessible but concentrated articulation of feminist ideas available to the French public at large during the 1970s. In the next section of this chapter, I compare the content of these magazines with that of *Ms.* as a way of assessing the content of mainstream feminism in both countries at the height of second-wave feminism in both countries.

Part III: Popularizing Feminism: The Advent of Mass-Circulation Feminist Magazines

This portion of the chapter compares mass-circulation, avowedly feminist magazines that appeared at the height of second-wave feminism in the 1970s in the U.S. and France. There is a two-fold rationale for this analytical approach. The first simply extends the methodology of examining mainstream large-circulation women's magazines that I employ throughout the rest of this study. The idea here is to examine the assumptions and arguments employed by magazine authors when they target large and diverse audiences. To be successful with its audience, the content of widely marketed magazine content must reach beyond a narrow niche to appeal to the largest possible set of readers. This is somewhat less the case for avowedly feminist magazines than it is for mainstream publications, but these pressures are more significant than they are in the case of the newsletters distributed among radical feminists, for instance. As Amy Erdman Farrell puts it, a magazine like *Ms.* was trying to sell "popular feminism" (Farrell 1998). Such a magazine could afford less than a radical feminist pamphlet to appeal to choir: it had to present feminist arguments in a way that would seem compelling and reasonable to sympathetic but un-doctrinaire readers. As such, these mass-circulation feminist magazines promise insights into how distinctively feminist messages were tailored in an effort to be broadly culturally palatable in the American and French environments.

The second reason for comparing these magazines follows from the comparative approach that is specific to this chapter. Feminist mass-circulation magazines are themselves an example of a social movement tactic that was pioneered on one side of the Atlantic and then imitated on the other. Comparing tactics that are similar by design allows us to explore the ways in which they had of necessity to be adapted to a new cultural and institutional environment and allows us to assess their outcomes against a real-life counterfactual example.

The comparison of mass-circulation feminist magazines across national lines is a novel research strategy. I sketch the publication histories of each magazine and examine data about their audiences, then turn to an examination of their content.

A Brief History of Ms., "Femmes," and F Magazine

Radical feminist groups within the U.S. and France both published a large number of small periodicals which reached an audience of hundreds or a few thousand (Mather 1974; Kandel 1979). The largest of these publications, like *Off our backs* in the U.S. and *des femmes en*

mouvements in France, had five-digit circulation figures at their peak. But none of these publications were able (and few aspired) to reach a broad audience alongside other “mainstream” women’s magazines (Mather 1974; Kandel 1979).

U.S. feminism found its mass-media mouthpiece at the end of 1971, when a preview issue of *Ms.* was published as part of a special double issue of *New York* magazine. Although the preview issue had been dated Spring 1972 so as to give it a lengthy shelf life, the 300,000 copies of this issue sold out within eight days (Thom 1997:18). Volume 1, Number 1 of *Ms.* magazine appeared in July 1972, and by late 1976, the magazine had a circulation base of a half a million. It continues to be published to this day, although with a smaller circulation and with a less central role in the women’s movement than it commanded during the 1970s.

Large-circulation, avowedly feminist magazines appeared only later in the decade in France. In January 1976, *Marie Claire* began featuring a special section (*rubrique*) entitled “*Femmes*” (“Women”) of a dozen or more pages. In an interview with me, H  l  ne Mathieu, who directed the section, cited *Ms.* as an important precedent for “*Femmes*” (interview with author, March 20, 2007). The section was billed a response to “the increasing number of women’s movements in which women are collectively becoming conscious [*prennent ensemble conscience*] of their problems.” The section was “conceived of, written, and produced for women, by women” (“Janvier 1976 [Editorial introduction to “*Femmes*” section of *Marie-Claire* magazine]” 1976). “*Femmes*” was a special section of *Marie Claire* for the rest of decade and throughout the 1980s.

In January 1978, a second avowedly feminist, mass-circulation publication appeared in France. *F Magazine* was founded by Claude Servan-Schreiber, an experienced reporter who had married into a family of famous and powerful journalists and was able to draw on her family connections to assist with the financing of the new venture. Servan-Schreiber’s editorial introduction of the magazine notes that:

Most media still consider “women’s interest” topics to be limited to women’s most traditional daily responsibilities. For our part, we are speaking to all women who, like us, recognize on a daily basis that women’s aspirations, interests, preoccupations, and hopes go far beyond the domains to which they have been confined for too long. (Servan-Schreiber 1978)

Like the team of “*Femmes*,” *F Magazine* was staffed exclusively by women. Indeed, the new magazine poached several of the writers who had earlier written for “*Femmes*.” The most visible of these was Beno  te Groult, a journalist, novelist, and author of *Ainsi soit-elle* [*The Way She Is*], a best-selling, sarcasm-laced introduction to feminism (Groult 1975). In the subscription advertisement that appeared in the first issue *F Magazine*, Groult is described as a co-founder of the magazine, and her witty column concludes each issue.

Claude Servan-Schreiber is listed as European Correspondent on the masthead of early issues of *Ms.* and was later named a Contributing Editor. She drew inspiration from *Ms.* and consulted personally with Gloria Steinem for tips on establishing a feminist magazine in France (interviews with author, March 1 and 13, 2007). *F Magazine* directly imitated some of *Ms.*’s

specific innovations such as highlighting sexist advertisements drawn from other periodicals under the title *Sans Commentaire* (“No Comment”). *F Magazine* encountered many of the same financial problems as *Ms.*, particularly since it, like *Ms.*, vetted advertisements for sexist content. In an interview, Claude Servan-Schreiber told me that the editors’ decision to turn down a series of sexist ads from a major perfume manufacturer compromised the magazine’s reputation in the business community. This helped ensure that the magazine folded after two years of publication. Starting in 1980, editorial control of the magazine passed out of Servan-Schreiber’s hands, and its feminist mission was abandoned. After several more years and two changes of title, the magazine, which now lacked a distinctive identity, was discontinued.

The audiences of popular feminist magazines

Some data gathered for marketing purposes give a sense for the size and character of these magazines’ audiences. Unfortunately, the first audience data available in the University of California libraries for *Ms.* magazine come from 1979, and data for *F Magazine* were gathered only in 1980, the year after its feminist editors were ousted. Nevertheless, both sets of numbers are better than nothing and give a flavor for the kinds of women who read these magazines.

The Simmons Market Research Bureau estimated that *Ms.* had 1.2 million adult female readers in 1979, or 1.5 percent of the U.S. adult female population (Simmons Market Research Bureau 1979:M-1, 0004). In 1980, the French market research institute estimated the *F Magazine* was read by 958,000 women, or 4.7 percent of the French adult female population (Centre de L’Étude des Supports de Publicité (CESP) 1980:389). And the CESP estimated that in 1977, *Marie Claire* reached 3.1 million female readers, or 15.7% of the adult female population of France (Centre de L’Étude des Supports de Publicité (CESP) 1977:248). The high audience figure for *Marie Claire* overestimates the number of readers who perused the “Femmes” section of the magazine, since some readers would have been interested only in other content. Still, the “Femmes” section was given prominent billing on the cover and in the magazine’s table of contents, so it probably reached a larger swath of the public than either *Ms.* or *F Magazine*.

The most powerful single metric of the social status of these magazines’ readership is their educational attainment level relative to the population as a whole. Figures 1.3 and 1.4 show the educational percentiles of each feminist magazine’s readership alongside those of mainstream women’s magazines included in this study’s larger sample. Both figures show that audiences for *Ms.* and *F Magazine* were, on average, even more educated than the readers of the more upscale mainstream women’s magazines in the sample.

The age profile of *Ms.* and *F Magazine* is also considerably younger than that of each magazine’s mainstream counterparts. For both, over 65% of readers are younger than 35 years old (see Figure 3.6).

[Figure 3.6 about here]

The age profile of these magazines is most closely matched by *Cosmopolitan*, which under Helen Gurley Brown had remade itself as the voice of sophisticated, fun-loving, sexually uninhibited young women. In a similar pattern, readers of *Ms.*, *F Magazine*, and *Cosmopolitan* were particularly likely to be independent of men. They have the highest proportion of single

women in the sample (see Figure 3.7)³⁰ and the highest proportion of readers earning their own salary (see Figure 3.8).³¹ The only major difference between the way *F Magazine*'s and *Ms.*'s readers compare to mainstream women's magazine readership demographics is that the French feminist magazine has a relatively large proportion of readers with children, whereas *Ms.*'s readers are more childless than any of the mainstream American women's magazine readers (see Figure 3.9).

[Figures 3.7, 3.8 & 3.9 about here]

In short, *F Magazine* and *Ms.* had generally similar reader profiles, with comparatively large proportions of young, single, and economically independent women among their readers. *Marie Claire* had a relatively up-market but otherwise demographically mainstream audience. The feminist "Femmes" section likely appealed to a younger and hipper subset of its larger readership, although evidently it was not radical enough to recast the magazine's overall audience demographics.

An Overview of Differences in Feminist Magazines' Content

Several simple and broad comparisons help to situate the content of the different magazines. As a basic gauge of the ideological orientation of each magazine, I coded the proportion of articles in each magazine's first issue(s)³² which endorsed "sameness" feminist arguments, those that decry the different treatment of men and women and/or emphasize the fundamental similarities between men and women (Tong 2009:27; MacKinnon 1987). Such arguments are the basic staple of liberal feminism, and are key to second-wave feminism's demands for equal rights and opportunities for women. Figure 3.10 shows the proportion of non-fiction articles in each magazine which endorse such "sameness" perspectives.

[Figure 3.10 about here]

As the figure shows, the great majority of articles in *Ms.* and "Femmes" contain such classically egalitarian arguments, whereas only 38% of *F Magazine*'s articles do. A Fisher exact test shows that while the difference between *Ms.* and "Femmes" frequencies is statistically insignificant, the differences between each of these magazines and *F Magazine* is highly statistically significant ($p < .0001$). The ubiquity of sameness arguments in *Ms.* is what we would expect given the predominance of classical liberalism in American feminism (Ferree 2003; Ferree 1987) and in American culture generally (Hartz 1991 [1955]). The split between "Femmes" and *F Magazine* is mirrored in the magazines' inaugural editorial statements. In their introduction to the debut of the "Femmes" section, its editors answer the question "What do women want?" by adapting the French Revolution's most famous motto: "*liberté, égalité, sororité.*" Of these three, they elaborate most fully on *égalité*:

Equality of opportunity beginning in childhood, the chance to pursue any field of study, to work without being exploited, to participate in political decisions, to

³⁰ Regrettably, I do not currently have data on the marital status of readers of contemporary French magazines other than *F Magazine*.

³¹ The lower French employment figures overall reflect France's lower female employment figures during this period, when they lagged American rates by the largest margin of any time during the 20th century.

³² I coded the first three issues of the smaller "Femmes" rubric.

share with men household tasks (without any sniggering) and childrearing (without any gritting of teeth). ("Janvier 1976 [Editorial introduction to "Femmes" section of *Marie-Claire* magazine]" 1976)

In contrast, *F Magazine*'s editorial introduction is more vague and ideologically non-committal: Today, women are questioning themselves. They have diversified their roles, they participate in social, political, and cultural life. Why are they always depicted as creatures who are born to seduce, cook, and consume? Can a woman be reduced to that? Of course not. (Servan-Schreiber 1978)

This argues for an expansion of women's horizons, but without explicitly accenting their similarity to men. Indeed, the Servan-Schreiber's introduction goes on to argue that:

At work, in public life, in intimate relationships, everywhere, women's experience is different and entirely new [*inédite*]. To say that we experience, with all their joys and difficulties, situations that are specific to our sex is stating the obvious.

This observation isn't intended to accent what separates women from men, to play down conflicts where they exist, or to create them where they are absent. Rather, we want to discern what in women's lives is worth describing, retelling, and sharing...

What are women up to, whether in France or abroad, as they work, struggle, think, and create?... It is to these questions that *F Magazine*'s articles are trying to respond, free of all ideology, of all intellectual cliques, and of every particular interest which is not the interest of women in general [*de tout intérêt particulier qui ne serait pas celui des femmes*]. (Servan-Schreiber 1978)

This statement of purpose has hints of "sameness" and "difference" feminism alike, but does not definitively privilege either approach. A second basic indicator of article content provides more insight into *F Magazine*'s distinctive orientation. Figure 3.11 shows the percentage of articles in each magazine that suggest specific actions to the reader.

[Figure 3.11 about here]

By this measure of activism, *F Magazine* appears in an intermediate position between *Ms.*'s high and "Femmes's" low proportions of exhortatory articles. (The differences between *F Magazine* and each of the other two magazines are near the $p < .05$ threshold of statistical significance by a two-sided Fisher's exact test, and the difference between *Ms.* and "Femmes" is significant at a $p < .01$ level.) Hence, whereas *Ms.* and "Femmes" put forward a basically similar ideological critique of gender inequality, *Ms.* is packed with actionable suggestions for the reader, whereas "Femmes" takes a less overtly activist stance. *F Magazine*, despite its noncommittal ideological stance, provides a good deal of advice to readers.

A final basic difference between these popular feminist magazines concerns their degree of attention to developments in foreign countries. As Figure 3.12 shows, between a fifth and a quarter of the articles in *F Magazine* and "Femmes" primarily concern foreign happenings, but none of the articles in the preview issue of *Ms.* focus primarily on foreign events.

[Figure 3.12 about here]

Subsequent issues of *Ms.* include more attention to events abroad, but never nearly as much as is routine for *Ms.*'s French counterparts. This parallels the findings of other sociological observers of feminism in a cross-national context (Benson and Saguy 2005; Saguy 2003). U.S. feminism's relative obliviousness to events abroad is attributable partly to the movement's earlier start (Klein 1987). It is also worth noting that *Ms.*'s sparse attention to events abroad is of a piece with its activist approach to the reader. Few foreign developments contain "news you can use," and the one article in *Ms.*'s preview issue with a substantial mention of events abroad is the exception that proves this rule: it discusses the famous French "I have had an abortion" petition with the intent of replicating it in the U.S. context.

In short, a brief and summary look at the content of these popular feminist magazines point to both cross-national and intra-national differences in emphasis. *Ms.*, however, stands at a particular distance from the French magazines given its outstanding combination of egalitarianism and incitement to personal initiative. A full appreciation of its unusual features requires a closer look at what gives *Ms.* its distinctively agentic rhetoric.

The Consciousness-Raising Template in Ms.

Scholarly comparisons of the French and U.S. second-wave feminist movements frequently cite consciousness-raising groups as a major difference between the two. While prominent in the U.S. movement, consciousness-raising groups were largely absent in the French movement (Moses 1998:248; Marks and De Courtivron 1981:ix). All-women groups were indeed commonplace among radical French feminists (Picq 1993; Duchen 1986), but no standardized script for consciousness raising was articulated in France, and small groups aimed at mutual feminist education seem not to have become "a major organizational unit of the whole movement" (Freeman 1972:205) as they did in the U.S.

It stands to reason that this significant difference between the American and French feminist movements would be reflected in the mass-market magazines that attempted to give them voice. Indeed, the first regular issue of the magazine contains an article instructing readers how to start their own consciousness-raising group. But the cultural phenomenon of consciousness-raising pervades the early issues of *Ms.* in a much more thorough way. It could be said that the spirit of consciousness-raising vividly inhabits the early issues of *Ms.* The magazine demonstrates that consciousness-raising is not just an organizational technique and an educational goal, but also an epistemology, a dramatic narrative, and a ritual.

The role of consciousness-raising in American second-wave feminism bears a close resemblance to the practice of "coming out" in the gay and lesbian liberation movement. Much in the way that "coming out" provides a scripted ritual of personal liberation for gays and lesbians and also implies a series of ethical imperatives about what it means to be a good gay or lesbian person (Armstrong 2002:67-75), the consciousness-raising narrative provided nascent feminists with a new sense of self and of community (Mansbridge 1995:29).³³ As Amy Farrell notes, the editors of *Ms.* saw the magazine as a vehicle for feminist consciousness-raising

³³ Indeed, as Armstrong notes, the resemblance is not accidental, since "coming out" borrowed from the consciousness-raising practices and ideas pioneered by the women's movement (Armstrong 2002:71-72).

(Farrell 1998:65). To grasp how thoroughly this commitment affected the magazine, it is helpful to distinguish between several different aspects of consciousness-raising as it is represented and enacted in the pages of the magazine:

- Epistemology: Conclusions about the way society subordinates women to men should arise out of reflection on everyday personal experience.
- Community: Consciousness-raising pools the insights of like-minded women sharing and reflecting on their individual experiences as part of a mutually-supportive group.
- Moral awakening: The experience of consciousness-raising widens and deepens the individual's personal freedom and responsibility even as she perceives the social forces impinging upon her more clearly.
- Universality: Any woman can and every woman should go through the experience of consciousness-raising.

Each one of these elements of the idea and practice of consciousness-raising distinguishes *Ms.* from its French counterparts.

Epistemology: The centrality of personal experience

The guide to starting a consciousness-raising group that appears in the first regular issue of *Ms.* emphasizes the importance of considering one's own personal experience as a path to larger feminist insights:

It's important that we speak personally, subjectively, and specifically.

Generalizing, theorizing, or talking in abstractions is bound to misrepresent or alienate some member of the group to whom those generalizations don't apply.

This personal mode of speaking is called 'giving testimony,' a phrase that may sound legalistic or religious at first, but has come to describe the first-person rule that is the heart of consciousness-raising. ("Woman's Body/Woman's Mind: A Guide to Consciousness-Raising" 1972:22)

Women's first-person "testimony" is given a special, protected status: group members are forbidden to question or criticize it:

This rule of never challenging another woman's experience may be the hardest one to stick to, but it is also one of the most important. What a sister says may seem inaccurate to you, but it is true for her at that moment. If it is wrong, she must come to realize it herself, not be forced into a defensive position. (P. 22)

Consciousness-raising is designed to harness the emotional energy attached to personal experience—the way it *feels* true—to larger ideological conclusions, but this linkage cannot be coerced. Ideological discoveries will have the emotional power of self-discovery (both in the sense of something that one discovers oneself and in the sense that one is working toward a new sense of self) only if they happen voluntarily. Hence the particular insistence on not second-guessing women's interpretations of their own experience.

In keeping with "the first-person rule that is the heart of consciousness-raising" ("Woman's Body/Woman's Mind: A Guide to Consciousness-Raising" 1972:22), *Ms.* has a large number of feature articles that recount the author's personal experience. Of the 21 feature articles

in the preview issue of *Ms.*, 11, or 52.4%, provide first-person accounts. By contrast, 10, or 9.6% of the 104 feature articles in the first issue of *F Magazine* and the first three “Femmes” sections are centered upon first-person experience.³⁴ These differences are displayed in Figure 3.13. The difference between *Ms.* and both French magazines respectively in this regard is highly statistically significant ($p < .0001$).

[Figure 3.13]

One consequence of this difference is that, whereas the French magazines read like conventional reporting, *Ms.*'s articles, even when written by professional journalists like Gloria Steinem and Letty Pogrebin, frequently have a flavor of personal exploration. The personal narratives in *Ms.* often evoke a keen sense of intellectual excitement as women learn to recognize particular life experiences as manifestations of a larger pattern of women's subordination. Of the 11 predominantly first-person articles in *Ms.*, nine recount one or more moments of discovering wider truths through personal experience. Gloria Steinem's article “Sisterhood” in the preview issue of *Ms.* articulates this sense of intellectual discovery vividly:

...the ideas of this great sea-change in women's view of ourselves are contagious and irresistible. They hit women like a revelation, as if we had left a small dark room and walked into the sun. At first my discoveries seemed complex and personal. In fact, they were the same ones so many millions of women have made and are making... (Steinem 1971:48)

Steinem goes on to emphasize that a purely intellectual communication of feminist insights to men often fails since they benefit from current inequalities and must empathize with the experience of sexual subordination rather than simply identifying it in their own personal experience. Later, Steinem again celebrates the excitement of the feminist awakening and the way it brings women together:

[W]e share with each other the exhilaration of growth and self-discovery, the sensation of having the scales fall from our eyes. Whether we are giving other women this new knowledge or receiving it from them, the pleasure for all concerned is enormous. And very moving. (P. 48)

This describes quite accurately the spirit of pleasurable and empowering discovery that animates the preview issue of *Ms.* itself.

Epistemology (cont'd): The significance of the “insignificant”

Jane O'Reilly's “The Housewife's Moment of Truth” (1971) evinces the same intoxicating intellectual excitement with feminist insights that turn an incident of everyday life into a larger breakthrough in world-view. The piece contains a wealth of anecdotes from O'Reilly's and her friends' lives, each of which ends with:

the click! of recognition, that parenthesis of truth around a little thing that completes the puzzle of reality in women's minds—the moment that brings a

³⁴ For coding purposes, letters and fiction were excluded from the definition of a “feature.” Two of the French articles which are coded as being in the first person consist of extensive quotations of persons other than the author, but are categorized as first-person since the effect is the same.

gleam to our eyes and means the revolution has begun. (P. 54)

O'Reilly's "clicks" of recognition frequently arise out of humdrum contexts—a guest's presumption, a husband's snicker or reproach, or a wife's pang of guilt when she declines to provide an expected domestic service. This is a second important feature of the consciousness-raising epistemology: the personal experiences that unexpectedly reveal the burden of gender norms are often ordinarily viewed as insignificant. Indeed, that they seem so inconsequential is symptomatic of the way sexism demeans women's activities in everyday life:

They tell us we are being petty. The future improvement of civilization could not depend on who washes the dishes could it? Yes. The liberated society—with men, women and children living as whole human beings, not halves divided by sex roles—depends on the steadfast search for new solutions to just such apparently trivial problems. (P. 57)

Hence, the consciousness-raising epistemology on display in *Ms.* is doubly egalitarian: it valorizes the intellectual significance of each woman's experience and elevates the importance of events and emotions within her experience that are ordinarily considered trifling.

Community: Personal discovery in the company of supportive, like-minded others.

As is clear from the descriptions of the process of consciousness-raising cited previously, women's personal experiences are supposed to share essential similarities with those of other women: "[M]y discoveries seemed complex and personal [but in] fact... were the same ones so many millions of women have made and are making..." (Steinem 1971:48). Ideally, the similarities between individual women's experiences emerge spontaneously, according to depictions of the consciousness-raising process. As Steinem puts it, "We may share experiences, make jokes, paint pictures, and describe humiliations that mean nothing to men, but *women understand*" (P. 48). The do-it-yourself article on consciousness-raising in the first regular issue of *Ms.* says that "rap groups" are themselves a "version of the often repeated statement, 'You feel like that? My God; I thought only I felt like that'" ("Woman's Body/Woman's Mind: A Guide to Consciousness-Raising" 1972:18). Despite the assumption that women will spontaneously realize commonalities in their experiences, this is in fact not left to chance. *Ms.*'s guide to consciousness-raising explicitly builds a search for similarity across individual experience into its guidelines: "After each woman has given her testimony, the whole group should discuss the common elements in our experiences, and how that commonality relates to the role of women as a group" (P. 23). In C. Wright Mills's terms, the consciousness-raising group is supposed to aid collectively in building the "sociological imagination" (Mills 2000 [1959]) needed to link each woman's personal milieu to larger social forces.

Since the purpose of the consciousness-raising group is to discover similarities across women's experiences, they are primed to find them from the moment they agree to join the group. As the *Ms.* consciousness-raising guide puts it, "[t]he important requirement for a rap group is that the members be serious about their desire for life changes, and that they respect that need in each other" ("Woman's Body/Woman's Mind: A Guide to Consciousness-Raising" 1972:18). Other scholars have noted that American culture is characterized by a pattern

“covenantal voluntarism” in which like-minded individuals form voluntary groups which then exert a powerfully homogenizing effect on their members precisely because they are freely chosen: “Implicitly, each member has made a “contract”: he or she is free to join, stay, or leave, but while belonging he or she owes fealty to the group” (Fischer 2008:368).

It is commonplace for contemporary academic feminists to criticize American second-wave feminism on the grounds that this vision of universal sisterhood among women is naïve—or at least deeply problematic. Amy Erdman Farrell’s academic study of *Ms.* magazine makes this argument about the magazine (Farrell 1998:77-79). American commentators typically focus on differences of class, ethnicity and race—especially race—as sources of dissimilarity and division between women (Mansbridge 1995:32; Crenshaw 1991; McCall 2005). Indeed, this concern is not particularly new to the American feminist scene. The women who wrote the preview issue of *Ms.* were acutely aware of the way racial and ethnic divides could cross-cut “sisterhood.” Steinem tackles the issue head-on in her piece in the preview issue by disavowing arguments she used to make such as:

“Black families were forced into matriarchy, so I see why black women have to step back and let their men get ahead.” Or: “I know we’re helping Chicano groups that are tough on women, but that’s their culture.” (Steinem 1971:46)

Steinem later invokes a black feminist’s refutation of the “black matriarchy” argument (P. 49) and remarks that the “personal connections of women... often ignore barriers of age, economics, worldly experience, race, culture” (P. 48), following up with a story about cross-racial solidarity at a women’s meeting in the South (P. 49). Two of the articles in the preview issue are written by black women. In one of these, Cellestine Ware’s interview with Eleanor Holmes Norton, these two black women have several pointed exchanges about racism and the distinctive problems facing the black community in the struggle for gender equality. The *Ms.* “Guide to Consciousness-Raising” states that:

Groups that are not [socially] homogeneous take longer to break through differences of style, but have the advantage of showing dramatically how women’s problems tend to survive the boundaries of age, economic status, and ethnic background. (“Woman’s Body/Woman’s Mind: A Guide to Consciousness-Raising” 1972:18)

In short, the feminists who authored the early issues of *Ms.* were vividly aware of divisions that could hold women back from a sense of universal sisterhood, but they hoped that feminist arguments could overcome them.

Community (cont’d): Emotional solidarity in the face of a hostile world

Ms.’s portrait of the consciousness-raising process depicts the community of sisterhood as necessary not only for widening women’s analysis of their individual experience into a full-blown feminist consciousness, but also for emotional solidarity. Women’s recognition of their own experience in that of others during the process of consciousness-raising is itself portrayed as a source of comfort. This accounts for the sense of relief in the statement which is said to epitomize consciousness-raising: ‘*You* feel like that? My God; I thought only *I* felt like that’

("Woman's Body/Woman's Mind: A Guide to Consciousness-Raising" 1972:18). Women can also look to one another for support as they face inner doubts about their new feminist insights and resistance from the less liberated in the wider world. As Gloria Steinem puts it:

Any woman who chooses to behave like a full human being should be warned that the armies of the status quo will treat her as something of a dirty joke; that's their natural and first weapon. She will *need* sisterhood. (Steinem 1971:49)

As Amy Farrell observes, *Ms.* was helping to create the discursively generated community—partly real and partly imagined—that according to Jane Mansbridge (1995) constitutes the women's movement by whom individual feminists are inspired and to whom they feel accountable (Farrell 1998:4).

Moral awakening: Consciousness-raising as self-transformation

As depicted in *Ms.*, consciousness-raising is a process of profound personal growth. The imagery is one of personal moral reform that then ripples outward to affect a person's self-conception, her behavior, relationships with others, and her capacity for acting efficaciously and rightly in the world. In this regard, it is a variant of the narrative of effortful personal transformation that provides the dramatic core of so many American stories described in this study.

This basic narrative promises such fundamental moral goods as maturity, self-knowledge, authenticity, self-esteem, honest and mutually beneficial relationships with others, and the open-ended opportunity to construct a valuable and meaningful life. The *Ms.* "Guide to Consciousness-Raising" ends with the following promise: "After the group has grown and changed together, the individual will have grown and changed, too. We will never be quite the same again. And neither will the world" ("Woman's Body/Woman's Mind: A Guide to Consciousness-Raising" 1972:23). An article in the July 1977 issue by "Sally Arnold" tells a chastening story about the less exalted aspects of consciousness-raising groups. She recounts stories of emotional manipulateness, small-mindedness masquerading as high principle, and resentment between group members. "But," she says, "I grew up in the group..." (Arnold 1977:108). Her closing to this largely critical assessment of consciousness-raising still echoes the themes of maturation and self-discovery that appear in the first issue's more upbeat "Guide":

The group, like a family, forced each of us to declare—to ourselves—our values.

The group was the whole process of growing up and growing out into the world speeded up so much that it hurt. We all used the group to grow up—and to grow into ourselves. When that happened, we out-grew one another; we parted. (P. 108)

Gloria Steinem's "Sisterhood" also sounds the maturation theme. She concludes with the confession "I am beginning, just beginning, to find out who I am" (Steinem 1971:49). Steinem characterizes her fundamental problem prior to consciousness-raising as "a lack of esteem for women—black women, Chicana women, white women—and for myself" (P. 49). Before discovering feminism, Steinem observes, women chronically strive to live down their femaleness and conform to men's expectations:

The pain of looking back at wasted, imitative years is enormous. Trying to write like men. Valuing myself and other women according to the degree of our acceptance by men—socially, in politics, and in our professions. It's as painful as it is now to hear two grown-up female human beings competing with each other on the basis of their husbands' status, like servants whose identity rests on the wealth or accomplishments of their employers. And this lack of esteem that makes us put each other down is still the major enemy of sisterhood. (P. 49)

Insufficiency of self-esteem is thus tied to alienation from one's authentic self. After having her consciousness raised, Steinem writes,

I no longer think that I do not exist, which was my version of that lack of self-esteem afflicting many women. (If male standards weren't natural to me, and they were the only standards, how could I exist?). (P. 49)

As in the maturation stories of teenage girls in *True Story* of the 1950s, Steinem's newfound self-confidence allows her to make better decisions, brushing aside efforts at emotional manipulation like: "If you don't like me, you're not a Real Woman"—said by a man who is Coming On." She handles her emotions with a newfound appropriateness: "I can now admit anger, and use it constructively, where once I would have submerged it and let it fester into guilt or collect for some destructive explosion." She is comfortable without the validating presence of a man: "I no longer feel strange by myself, or with a group of women in public. I feel just fine." And her relationships with others have improved: she no longer distances herself from other women in an effort to "identify up, not down," and she interacts more easily with men: "I can sometimes deal with men as equals and therefore can afford to like them for the first time" (all p. 49).

The woman interviewed by Anne Koedt in "Can Women Love Women" experiences a similar flowering of personal efficacy after starting a lesbian relationship:

my old sense of limits is changing. For example, for the first time in my life I'm beginning to feel that I don't have a weak body, that my body isn't some kind of passive baggage. I other day I gritted my teeth and slid down a fireman's pole at a park playground. It may sound ordinary, but it was something I had never dared before, and I felt a very private victory. (Koedt 1971:118)

This small, "private victory" is emblematic of the larger expansion of self and capacity for action that results from the moral odyssey of feminist consciousness-raising. In a reprise of the self-transformation advocated by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*, Jane O'Reilly describes the "blinding click—a moment of truth" that leads formerly docile housewives (as Friedan and O'Reilly describe themselves) to become authors of their own lives once again:

She will remember that she once had other interests, vague hopes, great plans. She will decide that the work in the house is less important than reordering that work so she can consider her own life. (O'Reilly 1971:57)

In short, consciousness-raising follows the pattern laid down the moral-transformation narrative so familiar and prized in American culture. It is nothing less than the realization of a highly pervasive, highly potent cultural ideal of the self. This ideal self has the self-respect and self-

possession to choose her own destiny and thus do justice to her potential; this also allows her to establish honest, mutually supportive relationships with others. This is cultural Holy Grail of “agency” which American sociologists, in their own argot which obscures its commonality with the aspirations of ordinary Americans, worry over and wish for.

Universality: The humility and accessibility of the consciousness-raising experience

A crucial element in the consciousness-raising narrative, like those of other American tales of moral self-transformation, is that it is available to all. It is not the province of a select few aristocrats of the soul, but can be realized by anyone with sufficient good will. Because the authors writing for *Ms.* are describing an as-yet exceptional experience, they need to assure uninitiated reader that they are morally fallible, ordinary women. Gloria Steinem accomplishes this by beginning her personal narrative with a confession of her earlier internalization of and collaboration with sexist social norms:

A very, very long time ago (about three or four years), I took a certain secure and righteous pleasure in saying the things that women are supposed to say. I remember with pain— (Steinem 1971:46)

And she reels off a whole series of excuses for sexism, then summarizes her litany with a backhanded compliment to her own cleverness: “I... learned to Uncle Tom with subtlety, logic, and humor. Sometimes, I even believed it myself” (P. 46). One of Steinem’s rare criticisms of other women, her “pain” at seeing “two grown-up female human beings competing with each other on the basis of their husbands’ status” that I quoted earlier comes only after a lament about her own shortcomings. And the closing of her article sounds a note of unmistakable modesty, situating her not as a famous and pioneering feminist leader, but as a fellow striver and equal of her implied reader: “I am continually moved to discover I have sisters. I am beginning, just beginning, to find out who I am” (P. 49).

Steinem’s humility seems partly to be a personality trait—the accounts of her that I have read make her sound quite saintly (and unpretentiously so)—we should not underestimate the importance of her editorial influence on the entire magazine’s tone. But there are wider cultural influences at work here as well. Recall that in *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan, who in personal interactions was far from self-abnegating, confesses (to a biographically implausible degree) to have been under the spell of the “feminine mystique” and to have helped perpetuate it as a writer for women’s magazines. In the preview issue of *Ms.*, Jane O’Reilly admits to feelings of guilt that sometimes overwhelm her as she tries to forgo traditionally female household tasks (O’Reilly 1971:58-59), and ends her piece with an admission that undercuts any possible suspicion that she might be striking a pose of moral superiority in her feminist resolve:

I had never realized how seductive the role of master is until the other day. I was watering a plant, and the water began to run on the floor. I stood where I was and moaned about the puddle until the live-in babysitter dropped what she was doing and brought me the rag it would have been easier for me to get. She, at least, was not saying, “Don’t worry darling, let me take care of it.” But my excuse was... I have more important things to think about than housework. (P. 59)

O'Reilly is admitting that she is no more immune to the temptations of power and status than any other person; her feminist ideals, and not an innately superior moral constitution, remind her to behave justly.

In "We are the Crazy Lady and Other Feisty Feminist Tales," author Cynthia Ozick takes a wittier and less emphatically self-deprecating tack. But she too confesses her timidity as a student in Lionel Trilling's literature seminar (Ozick 1971:40-41); her complete effacement of ordinary human feeling from her first novel's narrator in the (vain) hopes of having the book reviewed as something other than an evocation of feminine sensibility (P. 44); and her denigration of other female novelists during the period when she was "broiling in the envy of the unpublished, which is like no envy on earth" (P. 43). In "Why Women Fear Success," Vivian Gornick gives her interview subject, young Harvard psychologist Matina Horner, a respectful hearing of her ideas, and coaxes her out of her initial reticence. "Dr. Horner spoke slowly, in a soft voice; as she warmed to both her subject and her visitor she became more animated" (Gornick 1971:50). After discussing the tendency of college students, men and women alike, to predict a miserable, violent or lonely fate for bright female students as they complete open-ended stories, Horner voluntarily discloses her own experience of being terrified by the prospect of success:

"Look, when I was up for my prelims, I went into a state of anxiety like nothing I'd ever known before. I carried on so I frightened my husband... I had designed my own prelim, I knew everything I was responsible for. There wasn't the remotest possibility of failure; and yet, I was shaking, throwing up, screaming I was stupid and now they'd all know I was stupid." (P. 53)

The lesson here for the reader is that every woman—even a promising Harvard professor—is compromised by the sexist assumptions she has internalized. To join the women who describe their awakenings to feminist insights in *Ms.*, a reader need not possess extraordinary intelligence or fortitude. After all, by their own accounts, the women whose consciousness has been raised are quite ordinary and fallible human beings.

In sum, an implicit but powerful message of *Ms.*'s first-person articles is that any woman can and every woman must engage in consciousness-raising. Even the exemplars of raised consciousness are ordinary people who face the same basic moral struggles encountered by all women in a pervasively sexist society.

The French Counterfactual (1): First-Person Accounts without the Consciousness-Raising Framework

As I noted earlier, there are ten first-person articles from the early issues of *F Magazine* and "Femmes" that are couched in the first person. Although this quantity of first-person articles is statistically significantly lower than that of the articles in *Ms.*, these articles are worth examining in somewhat more detail to determine how similar they actually are in content to those in *Ms.* If anything in these two popular French feminist magazine titles resembles the approach taken in *Ms.*, we would expect to find it here. Three of the articles quote female leaders in political parties and trade union confederations ("Femmes politiques: On lui criait Huguette va

faire ta soupe!" 1976; "La Politique avec une Femme" 1976; "Le Mari, la Femme, et le Syndicat" 1976). Given the power of these institutions in French society, this choice of first-person voices is understandable. These articles are concerned with fostering greater activism by women in these sorts of powerful institutions, and they all emphasize the importance of husbands who share domestic work as a precondition for wives' participation in public roles. This contrasts with *Ms.*'s focus on more everyday institutions and interaction and its demand that men sharing domestic labor in all families for the sake of gender equity. A closer look at one of the articles reveals characteristic differences of tone as well.

An interview with Edith Cresson, who went on to become the first and to date only female Prime Minister of France between 1991 and 1992 but at the time of the interview was just a member of the national secretariat of the Socialist Party, recounts the hurdles facing woman political activists in *Marie Claire*'s first "Femmes" section ("La Politique avec une Femme" 1976). She remarks that the Socialist Party has trouble filling its modest 10% quota of women in leadership positions since women tend not to get involved and often don't know how to "play the game" when they do. Women's domestic responsibilities make them leave the office in a hurry at the end of the day, whereas men have the leisure to socialize and read supplementary campaign literature. When asked what a woman needs to get engaged in politics, Cresson replies:

a family [*entourage*] that is understanding and helps with household tasks.

Excellent health, enthusiasm, and a sense of humor. Firmness of mind [*être convaincu*] and ability to debate without losing one's cool. ("La Politique avec une Femme" 1976)

When asked about her salary, she says she makes 1,300 FF a month (equivalent to a \$11,200 annual salary in 2012 U.S. dollars³⁵) and remarks that she is well-to-do (*une privilégiée*) whose husband earns a good salary. Cresson comments that the Socialist Party is not free from sexism: for instance, she must speak with exceptional clarity, whereas men are given leave to repeat themselves, drone on, and use esoteric language. She expresses support for feminist demands, and argues that government action is necessary but not sufficient in the struggle against discrimination.

Cresson thus encourages feminist action both inside and outside politics, but makes clear that, even in her chosen political party, not just any woman can hope to "make a difference." The cultural skills required for effective participation are rare and even fewer women can count on having a family that is both supportive and rich enough to tolerate a party activist's meager income. It is characteristic of the unabashed self-presentation of French elites that there is no note of apology in Cresson's tone when she identifies herself as being unusually privileged and unusually skilled. She is merely stating a neutral fact, a reality about the way the world works and her particular place in it. Cresson's portrait of the difficulties facing women in politics is frank—and frankly discouraging to ordinary readers who might consider emulating her.

Two of these first-person articles narrate the counter-stereotypical accomplishments of

³⁵ Author's calculation from Insee data (<http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/calcul-pouvoir-achat.asp>) and OECD purchasing power parity equivalencies (<http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=PPPGDP>).

unusual women: one is an American cinematographer living in Paris who, inspired by a women's film festival in the United States, starts a women's film center in her adoptive city ("Pour un Cinéma au Féminin" 1976). Since film-making is not a commonplace pursuit, the reader is left to admire this woman's pluck at somewhat of a distance. A second article recounts how an indigent mother of five took up plumbing and now makes decent money working without a license for customers who have heard of her through word of mouth ("Comment Devenir Plombière" 1976). The article begins with an explanation by "Elise H." as to why she learned plumbing:

When you have five children, little money, a husband who hates fixing things around the house [*qui déteste bricoler*], and when you're trying to move into a house without running water, you have to do something. ("Comment Devenir Plombière" 1976)

Elise's adventure in a counter-stereotypical occupation thus begins with her husband's failure to live up to the typical male responsibility for adequate breadwinning and being handy around the house. Her self-sufficient spirit leads her to consult "how-to" books; she also receives assistance from sympathetic (presumably male) plumbing equipment salesmen who tell her what parts she needs and sketch diagrams indicating how to install her purchases ("Comment Devenir Plombière" 1976). Alongside Elise's story, "Femmes" prints its own diagram and instructions on how to fix a leaky faucet and unclog a drain. This brief and simple do-it-yourself lesson parallels, and is likely inspired by, the "Populist Mechanics" section in *Ms.* that, starting in its first regular issue of July 1972, provided instruction on tasks such as diagnosing car trouble, fixing bicycles, hanging pictures, or buying a house. The "Femmes" piece thus involves a fairly direct appropriation of an idea from *Ms.*, and its essential message that women can appropriate traditionally male practical expertise for themselves, is similar.

While it is important to recognize this overlap in content, which is testimony to the willingness of popular French feminist publications to adapt successful American formulae to their home context, it would be misleading to overlook the contrasts in the presentation of similar material. "Elise" begins her foray into traditionally masculine territory not out of some general project of feminist self-sufficiency, but only because her husband has defaulted on his normatively masculine responsibilities. Although Elise's achievement is meant to be a potential model for other women, since the magazine prints "how-to" instructions alongside her story, it is not part of a comprehensive effort to alter traditional sex roles. Elise operates without a license, and her story is not a model for the comprehensive sex integration of the occupation.

Another feature from the early issues of "Femmes" showcases excerpts from books of interviews with women from widely different social backgrounds. In the first interview excerpt, from which the feature's title, "She said to 'hide your sin,'" is taken, a rural Frenchwoman describes the sexually repressive atmosphere in the village where she has lived all her life ("Elle Nous Disait, Cache le Péché" 1976). The admonition quoted in the title is what the narrator's mother said when washing her children's bodies. This interview elicits sympathy for women living in such a backward milieu, but offers opprobrium for such hidebound Puritanism rather than any concrete solution to the problem. The second excerpt, taken from a book of interviews

by two French women who went “to explore the lives of American women,” has an American woman describe how her decision to start her own school gave her a sense of fulfillment and self-discovery despite provoking her separation with a husband who resents her newly independent identity (“Elle Nous Disait, Cache le Pêché” 1976). This American story could help to inspire a French reader or distance her from the woman’s story, or perhaps a bit of both.

The article that perhaps comes closest to the rhetorical feel of a *Ms.* magazine piece is Catherine Quiblier’s piece on weight-loss quackery in *F Magazine*. She discusses how her satisfaction with her own body shape disintegrated after visiting weight-loss clinics on behalf of the magazine, despite her recognition that the two “experts” she consults are essentially fraudulent. Her emotional reaction testifies to the power of social norms which decree that, as the article’s blurb puts it, “A woman is never thin enough” (Quiblier 1978:53). This kind of social realization through an “everywoman’s” personal experience closely echoes the consciousness-raising narrative.

Two of the first-person articles in *F Magazine* feature famous women. One excerpts personal reminiscences by Virginia Woolf. Another is an interview with Marina Vlady as she approaches her fortieth birthday. Vlady had significant feminist credentials, having signed the anti-abortion “Manifesto of the 343” of April 1971, and in the piece she talks about women’s difficulty finding good film roles, their smaller salaries as compared with male actors, and women’s tendency to be cast based on their looks. In addition, as the wife of the Soviet folk singer Vladimir Vysotsky, she decries the absence of a genuine feminist movement in the U.S.S.R. Many of the questions she answers, however, have to do with the advantages and difficulties of aging. When she discusses her husbands, past and present, and her three sons, most of her observations concern the wisdom gained from experience with life’s inevitable paradoxes.

I think that you learn to be a good parent only after twenty years of apprenticeship and hard knocks, since unclouded happiness doesn’t teach you anything. I have the impression that you don’t really understand the craft of being a parent until your kids don’t need you anymore. Until too late, that is. (Sinclair 1978:13)

These parts of the interview with Vlady put her on a level with the ordinary reader and make her sympathetic. But they do not point to any way in which readers could build upon her experience: parents’ shortcomings are universal and basically unavoidable—a kind of practical joke played by life. Furthermore, much in the way that “Elise H.” recapitulates standard expectations of sex roles even as she defies them, Vlady comments that: I don’t think that it’s good for boys to be raised by solely by a woman. That’s why I’ve preferred to have my sons go live with their father, who is certainly more of use to them than a mother who is not around much of the time (P. 11). Framed differently, this decision has not been presented as a counter-stereotypical plan to hand over childrearing responsibilities to men, but instead as a matter of providing sons with an indispensable male role model, a concern that is particularly prominent in mainstream French women’s magazines, as we have seen. Toward the end of the interview, Vlady evinces somewhat more ambivalence about her motherly role. When asked if she harbors any regrets, Vlady spontaneously brings up the problem of caring for children while maintaining a career:

Everyone makes blunders [*Il y a toujours des bavures*]. A woman who devotes herself solely to her children is annihilated forever when they leave home. But a woman who refuses to be involved with them [*qui refuse de s'en occuper*] is monstrous in my eyes. Why bring them into the world? As far as I'm concerned, I really wanted my three children... I took care of them as much as I could [*Je m'en suis occupée dans la mesure de mes moyens*]... I don't regret continuing my career and remaining an independent woman. I have to say that, in that regard, I was helped much more by my mother than by the fathers of my children! (P. 15)

This comment fits somewhat uncomfortably with Vlady's earlier statement that she pragmatically sent her sons to live with their fathers for their own sake. In short, Vlady's behavior upends traditional parental roles, but she cannot bring herself to repudiate them as a matter of general principle. Vlady's admissions of error are different than those of Gloria Steinem, Jane O'Reilly, or Betty Friedan. These women admit their complicity with a corrupt social order which is being left behind; this shows any woman heeding their story that she need not doubt her own ability to transform her own life and society for the better. Vlady, in contrast, implies that no woman is likely to be able to square an independent career with ideal motherhood. She recognizes that most women will not have the kind of highly demanding career she does, and because life's paradoxical truths are won through inevitable mistakes and suffering, she does not hold her own experience out as a template for others. In the pattern we have seen repeatedly in French magazines, Vlady offers herself (and, implicitly, other women) forgiveness for her (and their) unavoidably human shortcomings, but neither proposes nor agrees with any readily imitable formula for a better life.

A final French first-person feature is Benoîte Groult's column entitled "We don't care!" [*On s'en fiche*]. The article, which opens with a general denunciation of sexist remarks as pathetically passé, pivots on Groult's encounter with an old journalistic acquaintance. This man reacts to the news that she is writing for "Femmes" by remarking that he is not feminist and that his mind has not been changed by the Year of the Woman (1975). Groult describes her reaction as follows:

I was about to start a discussion, to defend myself, to try to persuade or charm him as I have each time, each of the innumerable times, when I have heard a man announce to me paternally that he was not feminist; but then—surprise—the response sprang out of me, self-evident and luminous—"But we don't give a damn, go figure! Whether you are feminist or not isn't of the slightest importance. It is who we [women] are that matters." (Groult 1976)

Groult admits that, in the past, she would have responded to her old acquaintance's skepticism with an effort at persuasion, including, perhaps, with that most stereotypically feminine of rhetorical weapons, charm. This time, however, she changes her tune. Her interlocutor is taken aback and apologetic; he offers to go to lunch with her and hear her out, but Groult says she suddenly doesn't care what he thinks. She concludes:

For twelve months, the poor diehard misogynists [*misogynes de service*], who still

believe that they are glorious warriors, [*foudres de guerre*] have proffered so many pompous inanities passing for spiritual insights that they can't frighten anyone any more, not even a fly. We just don't give a damn. The Year of Woman has brought us that gift, at least. (Groult 1976)

Groult thus recommends a retort to male reactionaries that other women could readily adopt as well: just tell them that their opinions don't matter. In the commentary that surrounds her account of the episode, Groult also models the use of ridicule, a longstanding rhetorical weapon available to French women against men who are supposed to make themselves attractive to women.³⁶

On the other hand, Groult is not quite posing as an everywoman. She is a member of a professional elite and is recognized as such by her interlocutor. In addition, although the article's closing sentence portrays her insight as a "gift" from the Year of the Woman and so as something available to all women, she narrates it as a sudden unexpected insight ("surprise—the response sprang out of me, self-evident and luminous"). In fact, then, hers is not a hard-won idea that has emerged out of women's collective experience, but rather a moment of brilliant and idiosyncratic inspiration that flashes upon her in conversation.

In short, the comparatively rare first-person articles that appear in French feminist magazines follow a rhetorical pattern that usually differs in crucial respects from the way in which *Ms.* uses personal reminiscences. They are less likely to depict women to whom ordinary readers can personally relate. And when these first-person accounts of lived experience seem most universal and sympathetic, they rarely offer readers an approach which could be adopted in the interest of changing their own lives.

The French Counterfactual (2): Self-Help Advice without the Consciousness-Raising Framework

Claude Servan-Schreiber made the decision to organize *F Magazine* into several topical sections (interview with author on March 1, 2007). Two recurring sections of the magazine, "*Faire Face*", which could be translated "Facing Up" or "Coping," and "*Psychologie*" contain the lion's share of the magazine's articles that directly advise readers. Some of these articles provide help in building skills in domains of expertise that are not traditionally feminine, like how to quit a job in a professional and prudent manner or how to use an electric drill. Others, however, offer suggestions in dealing with "typically female" problems like finding child care, dealing with a sick child's education, or dealing with children's behavioral problems. What sets these articles apart from those in *Ms.*, however, is that they rarely link practical advice to a larger, explicitly articulated feminist world-view. In addition, these articles are couched as a way for individual women to solve their particular problems rather than as a way for women to participate in a larger project of social change. From within the "consciousness-raising" framework, indeed, these articles do not have a particularly "feminist" feel at all. Juxtaposing two pairs of articles with advice on similar topics respectively helps to illustrate this contrast

³⁶ See "How Not to Make Ladies Yawn" in *Marie Claire* of 1957 ("Quand vous faites bailler Madame" 1957), or, on the role of ridicule in French culture as a whole, Lawrence Wylie's comments on "verbal aggressiveness" among French children and adults (Wylie 1974 [1957]:50-51).

between *F Magazine* and *Ms.*

Child care

In “Caution: Babysitters on the Black Market” [*Attention: Nourrices au Noir*], *F Magazine* advises readers who have been unable to place their child in a scarce day-care center or to employ an officially certified babysitter through their town hall. The author questions [*interroge*] a concierge, “Solange D.,” who babysits “three children and an enormous German shepherd in her 15 m² room.” The transcript of the woman’s answers conveys the author’s skepticism:

“But the children are just fine here: they can play safely in the courtyard... I think they like me just fine. I also like them. And then, it helps make ends meet at the end of the month... Get registered [*Me faire agréer*]? What’s that? I’d have to pay more taxes... Me, I’m here to provide a service: the parents who bring me their kids tell me they’ve never been able to find anyone through the town hall... What I would do in case of accident? Why do you want them to have an accident? I look out for them just fine. I brought up fourteen kids in all and I never had a problem...” (Siellez 1978)

One can detect a distinct note of class condescension in the narration here. The author tacitly disapproves of the woman’s ignorance of official norms, of her juxtaposition of professed affection for her charges and urgent pecuniary need, and of her defensive response to the hypothetical question about an accident. In the French context, even to her track record of bringing up fourteen children might evoke the image of an ignorant baby-machine of a woman.

The article goes on to list the things that parents should inspect before entrusting their children to an unofficial child minder. This thorough checklist includes items as diverse as insurance for the children, the woman’s (the article’s presumption is that the *nourrice* is female) philosophy of child-rearing, and whether she relies too much on television, which “attracts children like a magnet but tires them out enormously.” The article concludes with the following warning:

Know that, in any case, you have no recourse against a “black market” babysitter, and that by confiding your children to her, you are acting illegally. Hence, the greatest prudence is required. (Siellez 1978)

Despite the advice provided in the article, it makes clear that the reader proceeds at her own risk and is ultimately on her own in the search for child care.

Contrast this with the article by Linda Francke and Dorothy Pitman Hughes in the preview issue of *Ms.* “Child Care Centers: Who, How, and Where” opens in the first-person:

We almost got a Child Development Bill. Fought through the Senate and the House, hacked up, watered down, kicked around in Committee, it still *almost* became the first comprehensive attempt to deal intelligently with the needs of our children. (Francke and Hughes 1971:102)

Nixon’s veto of this legislation is depicted as a setback, but not a final one. Instead, “Now, more than ever, parents must go ahead on their own” (*ibid.*). Francke and Hughes suggest multiple

ways to surmount the obstacles that parents will face on the way to establishing a child care center in their own community. For instance, while advising parents to “[c]heck into rules and procedures for day care licensing in the state and municipality in which you live,” the authors point out that these regulations “should be challenged and improved upon, rather than taken as gospel,” and that “[i]n many cases the rulings are so antiquated that they are waived as a matter of routine” (*ibid.*).

Continuing this theme of undaunted persistence, the article’s authors tell readers to be creative in their search for “free or low-rent space,” canvassing:

[c]hurches, temples, civic centers, meeting rooms in housing projects, public schools and hospitals [or from] local industries and factories... If a benefactor doesn’t materialize, turn to local real estate agents and contractors to save time. Failing that, you’ll have to patrol the area block-by-block looking for storefronts, unused garages, vacant buildings, and the like. There’s no such thing as defeat. Neighborhood living rooms will do until the center outgrows them. (*ibid.*)

The can-do tone continues in the discussion of financing, which mentions multiple sources of government finding, charitable contributions in cash and in kind from local businesses, professionals, and civic institutions, and in the fees to be charged of parents. Francke and Hughes suggest a sliding scale of fees that will make the center available to families with all ranges of incomes, something that is in keeping with their emphasis on encouraging the widest possible participation in the project.

Indeed, from the first stages of canvassing for parental interest, Francke and Hughes recommend ways to reach “beyond your own circle of friends” in the interest of “attract[ing] children who reflect the diversity of your community’s racial, ethnic and economic groups” (Francke and Hughes 1971). Throughout the planning process, readers are urged:

Keep parents fully involved in the planning stages. Avoid elitist structure, “executive councils” or closed meetings. The most committed, hardworking parent is the one with a stake in the action and a voice in the policy-making.” (*ibid.*)

The emphasis on inclusion and diversity continues in the discussion of hiring staff:

[D]on’t get hung up on degrees and credentials. Look at the applicant’s human qualities and be sure that she or he shares your goals and values for your children. If possible hire as many men as women; hire old people, young people, whites, blacks and other minorities to offer the children a wide range of cultural, intellectual and emotional viewpoints. With careful staffing, your child care center can be the “extended family” that most modern children have been denied. (*ibid.*)

Ultimately, Francke and Hughes argue, the experience of creating a child care center in the community is valuable in and of itself. “When people work together in their mutual interest, social barriers break down and a sense of true community develops” (*ibid.*). Such cooperation serves the goal of a more inclusive and egalitarian society and also builds political clout: “In

coalition you become an interest group, a force to reckon with on all issues affecting children, families, and the community at large” (*ibid.*).

Thus, the article describes a seamless fit between individual problem-solving and the service of wider social goals. Whereas Martine Sieliez shows the search for a black-market babysitter to be a lonely venture which permits readers, at best, to minimize the risks of exposing their children to the dubious ministrations of ignorant and rather alien women, Francke and Hughes suggest that there are real practical gains to be won for children and adults alike from cooperating across social divides. Francke and Hughes want their readers to build a more egalitarian and integrated society at the same time that they are solving their mundane child care difficulties. As is typical in early *Ms.* articles, the magazine promises readers that they can obtain not only a practical individual payoff, but can, in the company of diverse but like-minded others, also become more broad-minded and empowered people *en route* to a better society.

It is relatively unimportant at present which of these depictions is more realistic. The point, rather, is to unearth the implicit assumptions about social and individual action that lie behind these contrasting articles.

Facing discrimination in the labor market

F Magazine's advice to women about paid work forms another revealing contrast with *Ms.* The “Facing Up” or “Coping” [*Faire Face*] section of the magazine’s first issue contains two articles with advice on navigating the professional world. One of these, on composing a curriculum vitae, includes tips on avoiding sex discrimination by employers:

Knowing that in many cases employers prefer to hire men, you know that [editing your CV] will be twice as difficult for you... Here are several tricks [*astuces*] revealed by heads of HR departments. You can trust them. They are women.

(Lenoir 1978)

The article advises women not to reveal their marital status and to minimize the amount of information they reveal about their children. Applicants are advised against making explicit reference to sex discrimination: “A defensive tone along the lines of ‘Don’t throw out my letter because I’m a woman’ doesn’t seem to be appreciated” (*ibid.*). Instead, the article provides sensible, basic advice about putting one’s best foot forward. It concludes:

Bit by bit [*tout doucement*], some employers are beginning to recognize that women’s work is a serious business [*reconnaître le grand sérieux du travail des femmes*]. One of them, somewhere, may need you. (*ibid.*)

The tone of the piece is cautious and practical. Its goal is to help individual women take advantage of a white-collar and professional labor market that is gradually granting more equality of opportunity to women. There is no suggestion here that a well-crafted CV will help end hiring discrimination against women, only that it will improve an individual reader’s odds of getting ahead given the existing status quo.

Ms. magazine’s inaugural article on employment discrimination, in contrast, tightly couples “self-help” advice with a sense of women’s collective struggle for equality. The blurb that introduces “Heaven Won’t Protect the Working Girl” conveys the article’s mood: “There is

no job safe from the perils and humiliations of sex discrimination... pick your weapon and join the battle” (Bernikow 1971). The author, Louise Bernikow, comments that “almost every working woman” faces “exploitation and discrimination,” and outlines the armamentarium of Federal laws and executive orders that outlaw discrimination. Bernikow assesses the circumstances in which each law has proven most useful and tells readers how to initiate legal or administrative enforcement.

She mentions some subtle forms of sex discrimination that have been declared illegal, such as unequal toilet facilities or separate classified ad listings by sex, among others (P. 124). Making the point that even the law is just one tool for social change among many, the article discusses other ways to pressure employers, including blacklisting discriminatory recruiters at colleges, strikes, demonstrations at executives’ homes, and caucusing in unions and professional groups. These recommendations imply that a broader moral imperative exists in parallel with the law, and can be enforced by public shaming.

In the last several paragraphs, Bernikow includes a “deeper” structural analysis of women’s place in the labor force and of people’s dissatisfaction with alienating work in general. This serves as an acknowledgement of a broader and more radical set of ultimate goals. Nevertheless, she underlines the social significance of whatever blows individual women can strike against workplace discrimination in the here and now:

Every woman joining her sisters to complain, file suit or strike against her employer is rejecting two thousand years of pressure and conditioning. She is seizing upon what Germaine Greer calls “the key strategy of liberation.” She is telling the truth about her own life. (Bernikow 1971:125)

Individual steps toward women’s liberation are a personal moral victory which somehow redounds to the benefit of all women.

The insistent implication of *Ms.*’s articles is that each individual woman’s action redounds to her sisters’ benefit. In the case of the fight for equality at the workplace, this assertion is not merely rhetorical. One woman’s success in using any of the anti-discriminatory weapons mentioned by Bernikow would likely have spillover effects for other women, be it a precedent-setting lawsuit or an attention-getting university protest. Popular histories or movies about the American women’s movement frequently tell the story of an ordinary woman whose initiation of a class-action lawsuit changed jurisprudence or standard corporate practice in a major industry (e.g., Caro 2005:88-94; Collins 2009). The decentralized structure of legal enforcement in the U.S. and the role of precedent in the legal system help to ensure that individual women’s pursuit of their rights is simultaneously an act of altruism for other women in similar circumstances. The pro-social consequences of individual agency have thus been institutionalized in the American structure of governance through the law.

In contrast, when *F Magazine* prompts individual readers to pursue their own personal interests in a prudent and rational manner, the benefits of this action are depicted as accruing to the individual alone. This deprives *F Magazine*’s advice of the moral urgency and excitement that one can sense in *Ms.*’s exhortations.

Psychological self-help in F Magazine

This pattern can be seen in *F Magazine*'s psychological advice, some of which is imported directly from America. Despite the typically American features of this psychological advice, it lacks a connection to larger social transformations and so feels somewhat bloodless compared to the methodology of feminist self-building advocated in *Ms*. It is also refracted to a degree by characteristic French cultural emphases.

Cathy Bernheim, who herself was an important figure in the early activity of the *mouvement de libération des femmes* and in 1983 published an important memoir about her experience in the French women's movement, authored *F Magazine*'s early advice articles on boosting self-esteem. Bernheim begins by describing scenarios in which women are often trapped: being too polite to cut short an inconvenient phone call or to challenge a shortchanging shopkeeper. Rather than going to the opposite extreme of making a scene, however, which can be emotionally costly and often counterproductive, she recommends the technique of "assertive therapy" (written in English) being developed by American specialists (Bernheim 1978a). Bernheim's depiction of a sort of golden mean of "assertiveness" between passivity or outright aggression will likely be familiar to readers of mainstream American psychologists on topics such as conflict resolution, parenting, and the like. She notes that:

In the United States, there is an entire literature attempting to provide useful advice and proven techniques for regaining one's self-confidence and maintaining the greatest possible autonomy of speech, of thought, and even of movement. These books, often marked by an entirely American pragmatism, review a range of schematic behaviors and situations which can be negotiated with a bit of good sense. A bit of good sense and a certain savvy [« *savoir-être* »]. (Bernheim 1978a:87)

Because women tend to describe themselves in relation to others, Bernheim writes, "*l'assertiveness training* (training in self-affirmation) [*entraînement à l'auto-affirmation*]" is needed to help them rediscover the "me" in whom they want to be confident. The exercises she prescribes are classic techniques for exerting greater rational and conscious control over the self: committing to paper a self-description, then a set of long-term objectives, and, third, an exact description of one's actual hour-by-hour time use over the course of a week. The reader is then to reflect upon how she will need to restructure her use of time in order to pursue her ultimate goals. Bernheim offers sample formulae for the kinds of "assertive" demands the reader will need to keep at bay others' demands upon them:

you could let your husband know that you are pressed for time: "I've been on the run the entire week and haven't had a minute to myself. Could you take these clothes to the cleaners on the way home from work? That would give me a breather." (Bernheim 1978a:88)

This rather polite request for spousal help with traditionally female duties is a rather piecemeal affair compared with, for example, Jane O'Reilly or Susan Edmiston's insistence on an across-the-board reallocation of household tasks.

Another article by Bernheim takes a somewhat stronger line on the need for other family members to share the domestic load. In “The Fatigue That Sleep Can’t Cure,” she decries what later American feminists would call the “superwoman” complex:

Who is able to take on eight hours of work a day, shopping, dishes, household cleaning, and children?... When a woman works outside the home, it is normal, healthy, and indeed indispensable for her entire family to do their part of the domestic work. We aren’t talking about a “help me please,” but a spontaneous collaboration which shouldn’t merit extraordinary recognition... (Bernheim 1978b:90)

This formulation is more forceful, but, notably, it applies only to working women, whereas Jane O’Reilly’s call for housewives’ liberation is not contingent on women’s paid employment. Bernheim’s conclusion to this article invokes “realism,” a commonplace of French rhetoric concerning the self which involves calling for a recognition of natural limits, in life and in ordinary human capacity. Women need

to respect their physical limits with the greatest possible realism... The trick is classifying the tasks to be accomplished, not letting yourself be beaten down by the ones you can’t finish, and daring to ask your family circle to help out. (Bernheim 1978b:90)

These recommendations are necessarily different in substance from those made by O’Reilly. But their depiction as a matter of simple physical necessity precludes the tone of moral drama that electrifies O’Reilly’s piece. The sharing of housework is depicted not as a new frontier of justice, but as a concession to practical personal limits. Bernheim’s articles also lack the sense of a larger imagined community of feminists who are working together and providing mutual emotional support as part of a full-scale social transformation.

The closest Bernheim comes to evoking the possibility of emotional community among women who want to change their lives is the following recommendation, at the end of the article on self-esteem building:

Speak to those around you about your hopes and your difficulties: some women have certainly had similar experiences, or would be tempted to give them a try. Others have said or will say, as the song goes: “I am what I am [*Je suis comme je suis*], I was made this way.” From the day when you decide to “be this way” no longer, you will begin to notice changes. You will discover the courage and the pleasure of giving your point of view without changing it when you find it being contradicted by others. You will know how to say “no” without feeling guilty. You will rediscover the right to be wrong, to be your own judge, to change your opinion, not to have any idea, to have a whole crowd of ideas, not to give reasons when it doesn’t seem necessary to you; in brief, to live your own life. It’s a first step toward liberty, but it’s the most important one. And when you’ve acquired a taste for it... (Bernheim 1978a:89)

In the absence of a cultural recipe for forming consciousness-raising groups, Bernheim

recommends a more haphazard, less formalized approach to sharing experiences with other women. It is also a passing suggestion and is not integral to the highly individualistic, rationalized approach to self-transformation that she is recommending.

This passage is also interesting in its emphasis on individual intellectual freedom. This echoes Michèle Lamont's finding that the French men she interviews put an especially heavy emphasis on intellectual integrity and independence from others (Lamont 1992). Bernstein's remark that being one's own intellectual judge is *the* key "first step toward liberty" is corroborated in a sidebar article (likely authored by her as well) on "Constructing a Brazen Personality in Eight Steps" ("Se construire une personnalité d'airain en 8 points" 1978). This is fundamentally different from the consciousness-raising approach, which involves the application of a set of collectively-derived ideas to one's own experience to the point that they seem to emerge spontaneously from one's lived reality.

In sum, Cathy Bernheim's articles thus vividly illustrate the way in which even direct appropriations of Anglo-American ideas, be they Virginia Woolf's call for "A Room of One's Own" or a more contemporary import of American psychological self-help techniques that involve building self-esteem and rational self-control, take on indigenous cultural emphases. An American emphasis on pragmatic, real world measures becomes tinged with "realism" in the face of one's inevitable personal limits, and the communal character of feminist consciousness-raising loses out to an insistent emphasis on individual autonomy when it comes to ideas and personality traits. Even the most direct Anglo-American imports of ideas are refracted by French cultural life's distinct gravitational centers.

Social Class in French Feminist Magazines

A commonplace academic criticism of mainstream American feminism is that, in emphasizing that all women are subject to similar social constraints, it fails to recognize women's diversity. Judging by the content of *Ms.*, this is not entirely fair, since many of its articles recognize working class women as a group that faces distinctive economic challenges (Steinem 1971:48-49; Pogrebin 1971:26). Nevertheless, it is true that *Ms.* contains no articles about working class women exclusively and that it refers less frequently to the constraints of working class life than do "Femmes" and *F Magazine*. The way in which working-class women are featured on the pages of these French magazines would probably not satisfy American academic critics, however. *Why* they would not is culturally telling.

Consider "A Meter Maid's Day" [*La Journée d'une Aubergine*] in "Femmes" a piece which sketches the hassles of a meter maid's work day. It recalls petty but demoralizing slights; one person asks for directions, then drives off before an answer can be found. The reader learns about the small pleasures of swapping menu ideas with co-workers or commiserating about an ailing infant or a tired truck-driver husband. A fleeting (and evidently unrealistic) daydream about "one day perhaps being in the Rolls-Royce that you've just ticketed" gets a mention ("La Journée d'une Aubergine" 1976).

In some women, a small voice continues to cry out with a desire to lead a different sort of life [*une voix continue de crier le désir de vivre autrement*].

Others are very happy, delighted even, taking time to confront a law-breaker, an adversary, the enemy. To buck up their courage, all of them adjust their uniform, take out their notebook and scribble away with their Bic pen. (*ibid.*)

In short, the reader receives a sympathetic portrait of women persevering in a routine occupation where the only way to combat low status is to lose oneself in fantasies or to assert one's official powers aggressively. The article closes by advertising a one-woman show being performed by an actress who worked as a meter maid for six months (*ibid.*).

F Magazine paints an even more pathetic portrait of the work lives of telephone operators. Christine Cottin's article urges readers to reconsider stereotypes of operators, who, like meter maids, are all female, as lazy and frivolous. Ninety percent of the operators in the capital city's five information centers come from the provinces, where female unemployment is rife. The young women who come to Paris for the job are often away from their families for the first time and face loneliness in their small hotel rooms with makeshift cooking facilities, writes Cottin. On the job, operators search microfiches for phone numbers:

After five minutes of this... your eyes begin to blur. On the screen, numbers and letters run in every which direction before stabilizing on the line you're looking for. Soon, you see only a grey surface on which hundreds of white butterflies dance. This vision is a painful one thanks to the effort needed to see letters rather than butterflies... Visual fatigue, myopia, headaches and dizzy spells are common. (Cottin 1978)

Operators cannot enjoy the comradeship of their peers, since each of them is wired to headsets and driven to search incessantly for numbers. Under pain of sanctions, they must adhere to rigid verbal formulae:

"It's very simple," one of them summarizes, "anything human is forbidden." Responding to a kind word from the caller is forbidden. Helping a caller whose request is insufficiently precise is forbidden. Those who help the caller by providing more than an address and a telephone number are taking a big risk: points deducted from the score used to determine promotion or a transfer refused." (*ibid.*)

Despite being heartily sick of the job, Cottin writes, these women are afraid of joining a union for fear of retaliation, and hope only for a transfer back to their home region. The article offers no particular solutions to these women's plight. It simply urges the reader to feel sympathy for them. As the blurb that introduces the article states,

"Information, hello." If they take a long time to respond, don't hold it against them. The reality behind the anonymous voices who answer when you dial 12 should be better known. (*ibid.*)

For a reader used to the activist and ameliorative vigor of *Ms.*, this article seems distressingly passive. What, after all, is the point of the article if the reader has no sense of what to *do* about the problem it presents? This clash of expectations is at the heart of an important cultural contrast. For the editors of *F Magazine*, encouraging sympathy is an end in and of itself. The

point is to understand a fellow human being's suffering. This puts one in a position to offer the solace of sympathy and makes one a better person by widening one's circle of empathy.

The Persistence of Sex Stereotypes in French Feminist Magazines

Both "Femmes" and *F Magazine* include articles about secretaries, another heavily sex-segregated occupation and the single biggest source of paid employment for women at the time. The title of the *F Magazine* piece emphasizes the economic importance of secretaries, calling them "The most discreet of the strike forces" [*La plus discrete des forces de frappe*]. The phrase "force de frappe" was coined by de Gaulle when advocating an independent French nuclear capability, and it is sometimes used in corporate jargon to suggest a "crack team" of employees. Thus, *F Magazine's* title appears to be an effort to boost the esteem in which this "auxiliary" function is held. The article presents an encyclopedic overview of the occupation, emphasizing the diversity of work responsibilities and salaries among secretaries at different companies and levels of the corporate hierarchy. The article adheres closely to what secretaries themselves say about the job and their bosses, quoting one secretary who describes her occupational profile as follows: "Decorative if possible, cleaning ladies on occasion, necessarily efficacious but rarely with real authority [*rarement responsables*], that's what we are" (Kespi-Backmann 1978). As the author notes, the only a very few secretaries manage to use the job as a stepping stone to a managerial position. Nevertheless, she writes at the conclusion of the article:

Many others who don't enjoy such a rare stroke of luck don't like their job any less as a consequence. Feeling indispensable creates constraints but also satisfactions. The members of the French economy's most invaluable crack forces [*forces de frappe*] are not complaining about their fate. They demand only, and it is the least that they can ask, to be treated with consideration. (Kespi-Backmann 1978:60)

Aside from this general call for respect and recognition and the sense that the author is staunchly on the side of the secretaries, it is hard to discern a consistent feminist message in the article. At one point, Kespi-Backmann cites a journal article published by the Ministry of Education that considers "the secretarial profession to be particularly adapted to women, who find [in it] employment for their natural gifts of order, precision, perceptiveness [*finesse*], and devotion" (P. 57-58).

Kespi-Backmann does not attack this stereotype as such, but instead warns against glamorizing the job. In addition to requiring all of these feminine virtues, she writes, being a secretary requires plenty of stamina: "Under an envelope of sweetness, the gentle secretary often harbors... the energy of a horse! And she certainly needs it" (P. 58). The article thus tries to retain women's claims on stereotypical traits where they are valued and to appropriate other positive traits where possible.

Two of the side articles that accompany this large piece of reporting on secretaries find a mix of humor and contempt in the somewhat ridiculous dependencies that can intertwine secretaries and the men they serve. One of them, "Always ready!", decries the persistence of archetypes such as the "daytime wife" [*secrtaire-femme du jour*]: "At home, the spouse: stable,

efficient, self-effacing, indispensable; at the office, the secretary, indispensable, self-effacing, efficient, stable” or the “jewel of the harem,” the “secretary-confidante, who must be ready to do anything to camouflage the weaknesses of her big child, capable of juggling meetings with girlfriends and sending flowers on each anniversary” (P. 58). The end of this short piece recounts a successful effort to push back at such extra-professional tasks: in one large Parisian company, secretaries demanded the installation of a coffee machine with a sign reading “You’re never better served than when serving yourself!”

The second side article, entitled “Men too...”, spotlights the male secretary of a major stage actor. He is the male version of the “secretary-confidante” who transcribes correspondence, takes clothes to the cleaner, whispers a correction in his boss’s ear during an interview, bows and scrapes, but also “seduces the women whom his boss, a star of the stage, attracts and... desires” (P. 59). At the end of the interview, the author of the piece asks him privately whether he doesn’t find his job “too much work for too little money... He hesitates, then speaks of power. He is the one with the real power. No doubt about that.” But, as the journalist leaves, he asks her to describe him as an “assistant” rather than a “secretary” (P. 59). The entire piece savors of the author’s disgust with this unctuous man. The effect is a curious one: the piece seems to make the point that power and the mutual dependencies that go with it are deeply corrupting of master and servant alike, but the import of the piece for gender norms is unclear. The article’s tone of contempt could be read as supporting an ideal of dominant masculinity that treats any form of subordination as anathema.

“Femmes” also contains an article on male secretaries with a rather ambiguous message about gender stereotypes. Entitled “Hiring: Male Secretaries,” its sub-heading highlights developments in America with a tone of admiration and amusement: “While American women are vying with men to be truck drivers, men for their part are grabbing the abandoned typewriters” (“On Embauche: Hommes-Dactylos” 1976). An illustration accompanying the article depicts a man at a typing desk adorned with traditionally feminine decorations. A Mickey Mouse figurine sits on the hood of the desk lamp next to a vase of tulips, a glossy magazine is stuffed in the desk drawer, and the man is admiring himself, lips pursed appreciatively, in a mirror while tweaking his moustache between thumb and forefinger, his other digits held aloft in a feminine flourish. His legs are also crossed above the knee in the stereotypically womanly fashion.

The text of the article cites a *New York Times* report on the rising number of male secretaries, many of whom have come to the job after failing to find other work in the tight labor market. Men in the U.S. are used to typing their own school compositions, the article explains, which equips them with the basic skills of the job. (This line also suggests that typing was a heavily sex-stereotyped activity in France in this period.) Despite noting that male secretaries earn almost 50% more than women, the piece dwells on the exotic reverse-discrimination encountered by male secretaries, quoting one Mr. Dowling:

“The women who work in HR mistrust men, and I was rejected eight times before finding a job. It’s difficult being a man in an occupation that’s dominated by

women, and they expect you (as they do of women in a masculine career) to be better than average. Female secretaries are always trying to find out whether I'm an effective worker." In contrast to many women, Mr. Dowling willingly agrees to serve his boss coffee or do errands for him. "It's part of the job," he says. (*ibid*)

This sort of article shows the limitations of the simple classification scheme I have used to characterize the overall content of these magazines. On the one hand, it falls within the framework of "sameness" feminism, since it reports favorably on a counter-stereotypical development in the labor market. On the other hand, the egalitarian ideological message is watered down by its illustration's humorous invocation of sex stereotypes, the implied reader's social distance from the exotic and foreign American context, and the quotation from Mr. Dowling that undercuts women secretaries' efforts to mitigate the more symbolically subordinate aspects of the job. The article thus provides a subtle but telling illustration of contrast between *Ms.* magazine's emotionally and ideologically focused attack on gender stereotypes and the more ambivalent, lighter messages contained in the French magazines.

Sympathy and the Blunting of Egalitarian Messages in French Magazines

This article's generous portion of sympathy for a man encountering reverse discrimination—about a third of the main text involves quotations from Mr. Dowling— might also strike an American feminist reader as being somewhat beside the point, given the larger landscape of labor market discrimination against women and given the generous average salary of male secretaries. But this pattern of "unexpectedly" placed sympathy shows up elsewhere in French feminist magazines, and is of a piece with the broader cultural commitment that appears frequently in all French magazines of empathy for emotional distress wherever it occurs.

Indeed, the next (February 1976) issue of "Femmes" contains an article on the plight of unemployed men. The sub-heading reads as follows:

In a society that, for lack of better deities, exalts work, unemployment is a dishonor and the unemployed man a pariah. The dishonor is even greater when the unemployed man's wife is working: the poor man then stays at home alone and sometimes busies himself, to his great shame, with household tasks and children. Before the unexpected difficulty of work for which he has no training and which he thinks threatens his "virility," he usually gives up in the end... ("Ce nouvel homme au foyer: le chômeur" 1976:8-9)

An accompanying illustration shows a man wearing a frilly maid's outfit over a shirt and tie, clutching his forehead while a pot boils over on the stove and a seated baby bawls indignantly (P. 9). The text of the article highlights the cost of unemployment to a man's morale whether he tries to take care of household tasks so as not to feel useless or whether he lapses helplessly into complete passivity, not even lending his working wife a hand in making dinner despite her obvious fatigue (P. 8). A man who is in an egalitarian marriage in which he normally takes part with pleasure in all household tasks says that "When I'm unemployed, even if I keep doing the essentials, it becomes monstrously difficult" (P. 9). One man's wife comments that:

I don't know whether Pierre or I suffer more from his unemployment, but it certainly affects the entire family. He broods. I understand that it's not fun for a man to stay home all day. But, when I get home, I am dead tired, on edge, and I have trouble putting up with his complaining. I would prefer that we be in the inverse situation. It's not the same for a woman, since she is used to keeping house and it weighs less heavily on her. (P. 8)

This comment is reported at face value and not countered in the article. While the author laments the heavier psychological burden of men's unemployment, it does not blame men for the attitudes they have internalized. Doing so would be inappropriate, the reader is made to feel; it would simply add insult to injury.

The author suggests only "one solution, perhaps" at the end of the article: "if all of the unemployed united among themselves, this shame and this absurd sense of dishonor linked to isolation would diminish." An "Official Newspaper of the Unemployed" has been created and calls for the participation of all unemployed people (P. 9). Calls for solidarity are a staple of French working-class discourse, of course, but it is notable that this strategy displaces any more distinctively feminist approach to what the author admits to being a highly gendered problem.

Thus, despite the predominance of "sameness" arguments in "Femmes" and its editorial introduction's inclusion of equal sharing of household tasks among core feminist goals, sympathy for the plight of the unemployed trumps demands for gender equality in this article. Since the article is one of few in the magazine to address domestic work concretely, its attitude of sympathy rather than impatience with unemployed men's seeming inability to take on the burden of domestic work blunts the consistency of the magazine's message on this topic.

An article in *F Magazine* by the famous feminist author Michèle Perrein exemplifies even more dramatically the power of sympathy to trump feminist demands for justice in France's popular feminist magazines. Under the heading "Justice," the article "As Long as There Are Rapists" [*Tant qu'il y aura des violeurs...*] seems ready at first glance to deliver a decisive condemnation of the threat of rape. A photograph at the top of the article shows a woman walking alone amongst parked cars. Her arms are hugged defensively across her chest, and she glances nervously over her shoulder at a shadowy figure several paces behind her. The caption reads: "In a Parisian parking garage: 'They'll all get laid.' [*« Elles passeront toutes à la casserole. »*]. Another photo accompanying the article is captioned "A demonstration against rape," and shows a woman carrying a large sign saying "Women in public are prey" [*Dans la rue, les femmes sont du gibier*] (Perrein 1978:64). Nevertheless, the sub-heading to the article hints that Perrein will take a nuanced perspective in the body of the article:

Patrick Boubé, rapist of twenty women, has just been condemned to prison for twelve years by the Paris criminal court. Justice is done. But with a blunt instrument [*Mais avec le tranchant du glaive*]. (P. 64)

Perrein begins by describing Boubé's crimes and their effects on his victims, who testify to "their fear, now overwhelming, of elevators, of parking lots, of the dark, of solitude, and, for the youngest, their terror of men. Not a single one expressed hate or desire for vengeance from the

witness stand. They all came [to offer testimony] like injured guinea pigs asking ‘for it to stop’” (P. 64). This aspect of the trial Perrein approves of, and she makes clear her desire not to minimize the suffering of Boubé’s victims, nor the suffering of women who become “an outlet for masculine aggression” (P. 64) But, she notes that

the criminal court is a place where, as in the case of physical assault, as in the case of rape, a relation of force rules. The [judicial] apparatus, police, judges, juries, red robes, black robes, rites, solemnity, sentences for life, sometimes to death. (P. 64)

Perrein’s analogy between Boubé’s crimes and his own treatment at the hands of the judicial system becomes explicit in the next paragraph:

It’s not a question here of defending a rapist, but of pointing out the untenable position of women, victims of assault yesterday or tomorrow, and so [positioned as] judges who are hostile to the accused, but also [as] people who are aware of aggression against a human being, the former child whom one denatures progressively before their eyes. Rape can come in different guises. (P. 64)

The real villains of Perrein’s account are the various legal authorities who speak for the status quo during the course of the trial. Directly after the preceding remark, Perrein quotes the presiding judge:

“Your father was hard working, but you were lazy. Your father was realistic, but you lived in your imagination. Your father was not afraid to get his hands dirty, but you were,” Patrick was told by President Giresse, who never dirtied his own hands. Boubé’s father, physically the opposite of his son [who is slight of build], was invoked by the defense, was magisterially manipulated, both by the presiding judge who is supposed to be impartial, and by the prosecution. He served as a foil to his son. The justice system had its good, submissive proletarian who worked hard, was unsubtle, and trained Patrick “the old-fashioned way,” perhaps with plenty of good will, but certainly with plenty of the rod [*peut-être avec un bon gros amour mais surtout un bon gros bâton*], with which “he hit him, hit him, hit him” (by his own account, he would have ended up killing him); and thanks to which he managed to make a “little journeyman” locksmith of him, one who dreamed of other worlds. Of well-dressed women who open the doors of clean and rich buildings which he would have liked to enter properly, that’s to say properly, [*justement*] without breaking in, with their own keys. Of those buildings where children are allowed to have their little friends over to play without being afraid of waking the neighbor.

“Your father was right, Boubé, not to allow visitors; he was teaching you respect for others!” affirmed Attorney General Dorwling-Carter. (P. 64-65)

Perrein describes the law’s spokesmen as implying that Boubé’s original crime was failing to accept the drudgery and limited horizons of his working class origins, an attitude they praise as “realistic.” She recounts the attorney general’s rage when a court psychiatrist points out that one

of Patrick Boubé's problems was "to have had an IQ of 135, making him capable of a university education which was impossible for someone of his milieu to imagine," and that his "aggression must have issued from this primary and fundamental contradiction" (P. 65). The attorney general, a self-proclaimed "Cartesian," is unable to comprehend Boubé's own insight that "By humiliating women, I was humiliating myself too" (P. 65). The reader is left to infer that this may explain some of Boubé's behavior as a rapist, namely that he "was most savage with those who were virgins... humiliating them more than the others" (P. 64).

By Perrein's description, the judicial authorities show numerous traces of exploitative attitudes toward women. For instance,

President Gresse [expressed] astonishment that Patrick Boubé physically spared one of his victims who was an airline stewardess ("But isn't an airline stewardess tempting?")... [T]he state's civil lawyers [fulminate to the jury] that the raped women could be "your spouse, your sister, your daughter, or *even* your mother." What does that *even* mean? Women are not raped as men's patrimonial possessions [*en tant que patrimoine*], they aren't theirs, they are raped in the flesh by Patrick, and are raped anew in the criminal court along with Patrick the child as the men in red robes [i.e., the judges] tell the young man to confine his attentions to prostitutes [*renvoient le jeune homme aux prostituées*]. They can be raped *even* if they are prostitutes. (P. 65)

Perrein summarizes by saying that women will be safe only when men stop being jealous of women as creators of life. Only when they stop scapegoating the Patrick Boubés of the world for their own impulses, she argues, will his kind cease to exist (P. 65).

Perrein inculpates society's taken-for-granted inequalities of power for Boubé's rapes. She rails against the tyranny of social class, against uncomprehending judicial power, against brutal childrearing practices, and against men's possessive and hierarchical views of women. She takes a Rousseauian attitude toward Boubé the serial rapist, seeing him as an innocent and thoughtful child who has been distorted into monstrous behavior by an unequal society that is ignorantly self-righteous about its own brutality.

The article is unquestionably feminist in outlook, but it does not make gender inequality its only, or even its primary, explanatory axis. It argues for a comprehensive and radical account of the source of social injustice, and for the need for profound and intelligent empathy for marginal others—indeed, for an individual whom feminists might ostensibly have the greatest impulse to vilify—in order to achieve truly humanitarian social and psychological insight. Perrein's article illustrates the complicating impact of an awareness of class inequalities on French feminism, as well as the influence in the French context of a strand of merciful empathy that can dilute the incisiveness of the feminist message.

Implicit Cultural Visions of the Social Order and Feminist Problem-Solving

We can think of *Ms.* and its French counterparts as painting a portrait, as they outline various problems faced by women and suggest ways to remedy them, of the way the subordination of women is institutionalized in society and how it might be attacked. In general,

Ms. portrays sexism as ubiquitous and institutionally decentralized, as something which can be encountered at every turn in everyday life. It might seem that this would make the sexism seem universal and ineradicable. *Ms.*, however, responds by suggesting that this makes sexism vulnerable to attack in a multiplicity of small, manageable ways. If the problem is too huge for any single individual, *Ms.* implies, every person *can* contribute to the solution by taking action to counteract local manifestations of the problem.³⁷ In short, there is a symbiosis between the institutional portrait of sexism that *Ms.* implicitly draws and the magazine's relentless emphasis on individual agency.

The French feminist magazines, as we have seen, are more apt to separate descriptions of women's subordination from solutions which could be accessible to ordinary individuals. Since these magazines do not generally portray the institutions which host problematic or sexist practices as amenable to the action of ordinary individuals with whom readers could readily identify, the consequence is that the reader is offered a more passive role, one of (albeit emotionally invested) bystander to decisive social changes.

Voluntarism and Popular Feminist Critiques of Marriage in America

The French and American feminist magazines reflect larger contrasts in cultural visions of the way social institutions are created and sustained. Following Hervé Varenne, Alexis de Tocqueville and other commentators on American society, Ann Swidler and Claude Fischer have argued that Americans implicitly use a "covenantal voluntarism" model when thinking about legitimate social groups: group membership and its terms are binding if and only if individuals have assented to them (Fischer 2008). This cultural ideology implies that individuals are not accountable simply to traditional group norms, but are entitled to renegotiate the terms of social groups. This is particularly salient in the case of dyadic relationships like marriage, in which such a renegotiation is practical.

This is not to deny that the romantic ideal of marriage as a "happily ever after" union of two people who are in love is not salient in the American context. It is, and, indeed, there is an element of novelty in American magazines' proposals that partners focus on the contractual character of the institution of wedlock. At some point, each author who favors use of the analogy is required to address its seemingly unromantic formality. But when the institution is under stress, American authors repeatedly return to contractualism as a way of reaffirming and strengthening marriage. The argument is that an explicit reminder of each party's individual interests (or "needs") and of the concrete terms of and rationale for their mutual benefits and sacrifices will ultimately serve to redouble their commitment to marriage. There is a sense, in these articles, of a return to the hidden bedrock logic of the institution, a logic that, if tapped, can renew marriage as it is actually practiced.

The preview issue of *Ms.* magazine repeatedly uses the analogy between marriage and a negotiated contract, most prominently in "How to Write Your Own Marriage Contract" by Susan

³⁷ This approach is reminiscent of the environmental movement's "think globally, act locally" slogan, although feminist actions are more likely to involve interaction with others and so are less likely to be purely individual and material in nature than environmentally protective measures.

Edmiston (Edmiston 1971).³⁸ This piece begins from the premise that most people who get married are insufficiently aware of the contractual nature of their bond. It is particularly problematic, in Edmiston's view, that the terms of the marriage contract are laid down in law and so are not consciously chosen by the partners. While a custom-written contract might not hold up in a court of law, the process of hammering out an agreement itself is beneficial to marriage, she argues. A highlighted comment by Barbara Koltuv, a psychologist who designed her own marriage contract, sums up this view:

Part of the reason for thinking out a contract is to find out what your problems are; it forces you to take charge of your life. Once you have the contract, you don't have to refer back to it. The process is what's important. (Edmiston 1971:72)

The notion that negotiating an explicit contract can lead to a fairer and more stable relationship between people is harnessed for feminist ends in this article, but it does not originate with feminism.

An earlier instance of this basic cultural logic can be found in a November 1956 *Cosmopolitan* article. Entitled "The Marriage Contract," the article explores Los Angeles Conciliation Court Judge Louis Burke's unusual track record of reconciling couples. The judge is reported to have come up with the idea of composing a written contract for disputatious couples after discovering that verbal agreements arrived at in the court room proved evanescent:

"Over and over again," he says, "we'd get a couple to talk out their differences and agree on a solution. But by the time they got home, they'd be arguing about what it was they had agreed on."

Judge Burke turned this problem over in his mind – and came up with an astonishingly successful solution.

"It's amazing the psychological effect this has," he says. "People give more thought to their obligations when they are spelled out in an actual contract. They are not so likely to make a loose promise that they don't intend to keep." (Phelan 1956:65)

Eventually, writes author James Phelan, Burke came up with a standard contract to use as a template for fractious couples. The model contract, which accounts for the bulk of the magazine article, has sections covering work responsibilities inside and outside the home; the disposal of earnings; budgeting and expenses; sexual intercourse and "lovemaking," a euphemism for foreplay; personal appearance; privacy; mutual friends; the upbringing of children; stepchildren; drinking; religion; flirtation, and a host of other topics. The general impression is one of thoroughness in anticipating every possible source of marital friction. The section of Judge Burke's contract devoted to men and women's work responsibilities within marriage reproduces the standard gender assumptions of the 1950s:

³⁸ Notably, the article's lead image of a well-dressed, white couple roped together was the image that the editor of *New York Magazine* originally wanted for the preview issue's cover. This image was rejected by Gloria Steinem and her collaborators in favor of the less anxious—and less class- and race-coded—image of the blue, multi-armed housewife (Thom 1997:16).

It will always be true in marriage that the greatest giving will be required on the part of the wife. Through pregnancy and child-raising she loses the independence which the man continues to retain. A woman who is reluctant to face the loss of such independence does not trust the man to be loving, confident and considerate, particularly at the times when she must, of necessity, depend solely upon him. (P. 65)

Despite the utterly conventional portrayal of marital roles in this passage, it also describes women's loss of the capacity for financial independence in marriage and childrearing as an important sacrifice, a risky foreclosure of normal adult status. The passage goes on to state that, although women are "generally speaking" responsible for keeping house and men with earning income, "[w]hen the wife works on the outside, the husband must share to a larger extent the work in the home" (P. 66). Built into this contract, then, is both the sense that the gendered division of labor is at least partly revisable according to circumstances, and that it is subject to the individual assent of each party to the marriage. A contractualist view of marriage clearly pre-existed second-wave feminism in the U.S., and was available for use by the new movement.

Ms.'s guide to writing a comprehensive and individually tailored marriage contract is thus an extension of rather than a departure from traditional patterns within American culture. The contractual conception of marriage creates several distinct opportunities for feminists. The first is that it legitimizes utilitarian cost-benefit assessments of marriage that feminists can use to criticize inequalities within the institution. Judy Syfers's famous "I Want a Wife" piece in the preview issue of *Ms.* satirizes the implicit marriage contract as envisioned by an archetypal left-wing intellectual who clothes his blithely sexist narcissism in the language of 1960s-style expressive individualism:

I would like to go back to school so that I can become economically independent, support myself, and if need be, support those dependent upon me. I want a wife who will work and send me to school... I want a wife who will not bother me with rambling complaints about a wife's duties. But I want a wife who will listen to me when I feel the need to explain a rather difficult point I have come across in my course of studies. And I want a wife who will type my papers for me when I have written them... I want a wife who will remain sexually faithful to me so that I do not have to clutter up my intellectual life with jealousies. And I want a wife who understands that my sexual needs may entail more than strict adherence to monogamy. I must, after all, be able to relate to people as fully as possible. (Syfers 1971:56)

"My God," Syfers concludes, in light of such a lopsided bargain, "who wouldn't want a wife?"

In addition to facilitating a clear-eyed view of its costs and benefits, a contractual conception of marriage can be used to revise and refine spousal responsibilities in a continuous, iterative process. Ironically enough, the same Barbara Koltuv whom Edmiston quotes above as saying that "Once you have the contract, you don't have to refer back to it" discusses how a

spousal agreement can be periodically revisited and reversed in order to be sure that both spouses are happy with their portion of divvied tasks:

“We agreed in the beginning that since I didn’t care a bit about the house, he would do a lot of cleaning and I would do a lot of cooking,” says Barbara. “He does a lot of the shopping, too, because he likes to buy things and I don’t. Whenever either of us feels ‘I’m doing all the drudge work and you’re not doing anything,’ we switch jobs. Gradually we’ve eliminated a lot of stuff neither of us wanted to do.” (Edmiston 1971:67)

Edmiston further reports that “When the Koltuvs’ child was born, they reopened negotiations” (P. 67). What might seem a heartlessly transactional affair is, typically for the American context, presented as having important moral payoffs. After Barbara Koltuv and her husband divide responsibility for their child’s care, she reports comprehending the difficulty of “being willing to give up control” over a traditionally female sphere. By her account, the entire family gained a greater appreciation for the virtues of personal diversity and autonomy:

“When I was really able to recognize that my husband’s relationship with Hannah is his and mine is mine, everything was all right. He’s going to do it differently but he’s going to do it all right. We’ve been teaching her all along that different people are different.” (P. 67)

The clear divisions of responsibility that accompany a contractual clarification of marriage are thus credited with promoting each person’s autonomy and distinctiveness, a clear advantage given the standard American cultural assumptions.

Of course, as the feminist authors of *Ms.* recognize, the ease of revising roles that comes with a contractual approach to marriage does not always redound to the immediate interests of the woman in the couple. As Jane O’Reilly confesses in “A Housewife’s Moment of Truth,”

The slightest mischance in my life makes me want to fling myself into the protection of someone else’s bank account... Occasionally, men become liberated and it is a dreadful shock... Why not? Women who say, “I like my freedom—I have my day organized and I can do what I like with my time,” forget that men are entitled to some of that freedom. They are also prisoners of the rigid structure of their roles and jobs. (O’Reilly 1971:59)

Despite the possibility that a revision of sexual roles within marriage can backfire on women (Ehrenreich 1983), it is at the heart of the second-wave feminism. The analogy between the custom-composed contract and marriage may account in large measure for American popular feminism’s more direct and efficacious approach to revising the division of household labor.

Chapter 4: Sex and Sensibility

By the first decade of the 21st century, women's magazines on both sides of the Atlantic agreed that the feminist mobilizations of the 1970s had transformed daily life, and that, by and large, life for women was better as a consequence. How much had really changed in France and America's respective cultural approaches to gender, however? The magazine evidence suggests that, in the domain of love and sexuality in particular, important shifts concealed profound cultural continuities in America and France.

One clear cultural shift in both countries since the 1950s is the overall increase in at least some women's magazines' explicitness about sex. French fashion magazines especially frequently feature photographs of men's and women's bare buttocks and topless women in advertisements, articles, and even on magazine covers, something unheard of in the 1950s. As anyone who has glanced at the magazines in American supermarket checkout aisles knows, mainstream U.S. women's magazines that target young, single readers routinely trumpet sex advice on their covers. Indeed, the verbal, if not the visual, explicitness of their headlines is frequently more emphatic than their French counterparts.

In some ways, the revolution in sexual explicitness in American women's magazines is even more striking than in French magazines. The reason is that the pre-women's movement association between descriptions of sex and a "low class" readership has been reversed. In the 1950s, *True Story's* lurid headlines and flowery descriptions of the raptures of kissing and intercourse earned it a taboo status amongst "respectable" readers and ensured it a predominantly working-class readership. Nor could the magazine's relentless emphasis on the mortal hazards of extra-marital sex neutralize its raunchy reputation. During the 1960s and 70s, however, *Cosmopolitan* magazine pioneered a new sexual explicitness aimed not at "low-class" readers, but at young, single, well-educated women (Landers 2010). By the 2000s, *Cosmopolitan* had left behind its socially undistinguished reader profile at midcentury (see Albrecht 1956) and enjoyed the most educated readership of any of the mainstream American magazines in my sample. Although the magazine's sexual preoccupations give it a frivolous reputation, the socioeconomic profile of its typical reader is distinctly above-average. *Cosmopolitan's* readership is now distinguished from that of its more venerable sisters, *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping*, less by social class than by age and marital status. Explicit discussions of sex no longer mark American magazines as "low class." They simply make them seem youthful.

This shift in the content of women's magazines provides an evidentiary opportunity to examine French and American discourse about sexuality more closely than was previously possible. In this chapter, I take advantage of this change and focus on this element of the cross-national contrast, although I ultimately conclude that a full understanding of the differences on display must examine evidence beyond accounts of courtship and sex alone.

HOT OR SUBLIME? EROTICA AND SEX ADVICE COMPARED

Throughout the 2000s, *Cosmopolitan* regularly excerpted seduction scenes from mass-market paperbacks. Between 2002 and 2008, *Cosmo* printed a total of 31 excerpts. These can be

fruitfully compared to a set of 28 narratives of seduction published in *Elle* and *Marie-Claire* in 2002, 2006 and 2007. The bulk of these are from a feature in *Elle* entitled “This Is My Story” [*C’est Mon Histoire*], including two 4-by-6-inch paperback supplements appended to the main magazine that group several of these narratives into a sultry summer collection about “Love, Sex, and Passion.” In contrast to the *Cosmo* excerpts, these are not mass-market fiction but rather edited versions of readers’ accounts of real-life experiences that have been submitted to the magazine for publication. From my interview with Jean-Jacques Greif, who edits the “I, Reader” rubric in *Marie Claire*, an exact parallel to *Elle*’s “This is My Story,” I am confident that the pieces come from actual readers. How authentic the stories are and how much they have been embellished by editors, however, is another matter. In any case, what we have in both national contexts are seduction stories which are intended to give readers vicarious erotic pleasure.

A degree of caution is necessary when comparing these stories: *Cosmo*’s are pure fiction, whereas *Elle* and *Marie-Claire*’s are first-person narratives based on (or designed to resemble) real life. A comparison of identical genres is not available from within the magazine evidence. Nevertheless, there is good reason to believe that the contrasts reveal underlying cultural differences and not just genre differences. Evidence taken from French translations of Anglophone romance novels reveals differences that generally parallel those evident in the looser comparison being undertaken here. In particular, when American or Australian romance novels are translated for French audiences, French editors routinely rewrite the sex scenes because they consider them too explicit and insufficiently “erotic” to appeal to French readers (Weber 2000:137. See also footnote 4 below). Such alterations are costly and thus are likely to reflect a genuine attempt by editors to improve the appeal of the product. The differences between the “Red Hot Reads” featured in *Cosmo* and *Elle*’s “This Is My Story” thus allow us to explore these contrasting erotic sensibilities when they are allowed freer creative rein. Furthermore, as I point out later, the contrasts that emerge here are corroborated in other evidence from the magazines and in secondary sources.

The Cultural Logic of American Erotica

Cosmo’s “hot reads” are sex scenes excerpted from “steamy” romance fiction. These stories vary in the particular plot circumstances that bring the characters together, but overall, the narratives are more highly standardized than the French ones.

Men’s physique

The heroes in *Cosmo*’s excerpts conform to a standard physical type. They are powerfully built, with large biceps, chiseled abdominal muscles, broad shoulders, and sculpted chests. Many stories note that the hero’s clothes glorious musculature cannot be concealed beneath his clothes. Depending on how fastidiously we code, between 84 and 94 percent of stories make explicit mention of the hero’s well-developed muscles. (The more generous coding includes one “tight butt;” it also counts two “smoking” or “hot” bodies, shorthand which readers familiar with typical descriptions would likely interpret as a reference to an athletic build.) The hero’s body is unmistakably masculine and is invariably coveted by the heroine (and by the implied reader whom the story is designed to please).

Along with a muscular body, the heroes of *Cosmo*'s "Red Hot Reads" tend to be exceptionally well-endowed. Over 70 percent of stories (22 of 31) make some mention of the girth, size, hardness, or overall impressiveness of the hero's erect penis. By contrast, only three of the twenty-seven French erotic narratives featuring male characters mention the hero's penis, and never to emphasize its unusual qualities.

These American stories imply that masculinity is indexed in a straightforward way by men's bodies, and that the more male the man is (i.e., the bigger his muscles and penis), the more he will arouse women's sexual interest. Of course, bulging muscles and ample endowment is not *sufficient* to make a hero: he must also be attracted to the heroine, protective of her, and so on. But, in a romance story where fantasy is allowed full rein, the logic seems to be: Why not endow the hero with ideal physical traits, or make him the "perfect male specimen" (Kane 2007) as one story baldly puts it?

In French narratives, attractive male bodies come in a greater variety of forms. Only 16 percent (4 of 25) narratives with a genuine hero mention his musculature or (generically attractive) physique. (This contrast with American stories is highly statistically significant: $p < 0.001$.) It is not that French readers are expected to be insensitive to the charms of a well-muscled physique, but rather that it is only one possible sort of masculine attractiveness, and a rather conventional one at that. For instance, the narrator of "My summer flirt thinks I'm The One" describes the chiseled young man she meets on a Croatian beach as "almost a caricature" (Pouzol 2007a:180). She is flattered that he singles her out for seduction: "What can I say in my defense? My ego exploded!" During this delightfully diverting little summer romance, however, the narrator runs into a moral conundrum when the man, who is 13 years her junior and from a less privileged background, becomes besotted with her. She has trouble telling him that she does not reciprocate his feelings.

French erotic narratives also rhapsodize about less stereotypical physical features in men. Two stories have chubby [*embonpoint*] heroes. One woman describes her husband in the following terms: "His slight chubbiness gave him the appearance of a little boy, which I found endearing, but at the same time, I found him terribly virile. When his heavy body was on top of me and I was pressed into the folds of his very soft skin, I felt protected" (Kressman 2006:5-6). Other heroes are tall, thin, and elegantly dressed (Silber 2007b:80; Tena 2002:156) or have "fine" features (Pouzol 2006b:54; Villovitch 2006b:35). One heroine must wait almost halfway through her story to meet the pianist she hears playing so soulfully through her apartment wall:

"He was a good-looking as I had imagined, but more fragile... I had before me a boy of scarcely 20 years old, his hair all spiky as if he had just woken up, and with an innocent, angelic, vulnerable appearance... I could have thrown myself on him, he was so sexy" (Villovitch 2006a:27).

Yet another protagonist attracts the heroine for the opposite reason—because he seems to have so much life experience. He is "the sort of man who looks like he has undergone great suffering... His handsome but deeply lined face made me think of a Polanski, an Elie Wiesel, or a Mandela" (Silber 2007e:56).

In short, there is a host of ways that men can be appealing to women in French erotic narratives. As with the chubby and boyish but “terribly virile” husband of the story, it is possible for men to evince different and even conflicting kinds of attractiveness simultaneously. Other stories present diversely appealing men in parallel. One account entitled “My heart is poised between the three of them!” discusses the narrator’s sexual involvement with three different men simultaneously: her husband, who is handsome, passionate and excessively possessive, though lately he has been working hard on improving their relationship; Simon, a colleague at work who is short, skinny and balding, but has a marvelous emotional rapport with her and with whom sex is “serene, relaxing, agreeable,” even “[e]nriching;” as well as Arnaud, a blond, green-eyed Adonis whose sexual magnetism she finds irresistible (Silber 2007a:208). The narrator of this story is loath to give up any of these three men because they each satisfy her in a different way. For this narrative to be fully successful, the reader must experience it as an emotionally conceivable conundrum—as opposed, say, to the maunderings of a depraved nymphomaniac—and must sympathize with the appeal of each of these ties. Indeed, the very diversity of the men makes it easier for the reader to sympathize with the narrator’s emotional ambivalence. Compared with the relatively monotonic American heroes of the *Cosmo* excerpts, then, these portrayals suggest a broader and more diverse spectrum of ways in which men can be erotically attractive to women.

Manly occupations

Like their physical endowments, the occupations of American erotic heroes point unambiguously to their conventional masculinity. A majority of heroes whose occupation is specified (as it is in 24 of 31, or 74 percent of stories), employ violence in their professional capacity as military men, FBI agents, bodyguards, private investigators, and the like (42 percent), or use their physical skills to make a living as, respectively, an athlete, a scuba diver, and a handyman (13 percent). A third of heroes with specified occupations demonstrate entrepreneurial and competitive prowess by being business or political leaders. Most of these men are what *Cosmo*’s editorial introductions call a “high-dollar hottie” (Donovan 2006:300; Showalter 2006:278)—i.e., a millionaire, billionaire, or tycoon—but even the most humble of them, like the former professional hockey player who has opened his own sports store (Gibson 2005), is his own boss. The exceptions to these patterns—a professor, a student and an accountant—are comparatively uncommon (three of 24, or 13 percent, of heroes with identifiable occupations). Indeed, the *Cosmo* excerpt featuring the “surprisingly yummy accountant,” is drawn from a novel whose very title alerts readers to its reversal of expectations: *The Nerd Who Loved Me*.

None of the thirty heroes in the twenty-five French erotic narratives in my sample are employed in protective industries, and none does manual labor. Half of the 27 percent who are businessmen are described as entrepreneurs or executives in French stories, in contrast with all of them in the American ones. A slightly higher percentage (20 percent) than in the American stories work in professional or intellectual occupations. Only two of thirty are lowly restaurant waiters, though of these, one is a young aspiring musician whom the admiring narrator is sure

will be well-known one day and the other is the hapless Croatian boy toy mentioned earlier. In contrast with the American stories, where only a quarter of heroes have no designated occupation, this is true of 43 percent of the men in French narratives. (This difference is marginally statistically significant, at a $p < 0.05$ level.) In sum, *Cosmo's* erotic fantasies have a taste for working-class masculinity, with its emphasis on brawn and physical protectiveness (Lamont 2000:31-33), that is largely absent in *Elle's* narratives. *Cosmo's* tendency to flag the career success of their hero lovers also harkens back to the preoccupation with heroes' competitive prowess that we saw in 1950s courtship stories. In contrast, *Elle's* erotic narratives do not use a man's occupation to signal his masculinity. This continues a contrast between American and French stories that reaches back before second wave feminism.

Sexual scripts

The way in which American and French stories portray sexual and erotic pleasure itself is, if anything, even more strikingly different than the physical and social characteristics which distinguish their heroes. The sexuality represented in American *Cosmo's* erotic excerpts shows more of feminism's influence, but, like the bodies of the stories' heroes, it is remarkably uniform.

Twenty of the thirty-one excerpts feature a sequence that begins with a kiss, has the man then touch the woman's breasts, followed by oral or digital stimulation of her clitoris and culminating in genital penetration. All but one of the stories has the woman's orgasm prior to or simultaneously with the man. (In the one exception, the orgasms happen "off stage," being implied but not depicted in the text.) In addition, after June 2006, the excerpts always feature the use of a condom (20 of 31 stories in total), and usually it is the man who has it and puts it on. Such a striking degree of uniformity in the use of condoms is likely to be a conscious editorial decision either on the part of the magazine or the romance publishers themselves. In *Cosmo's* contemporary erotica, then, the heroes reliably take responsibility for making sex safe and satisfying for their female partner.

In many ways, the reliable orgasms and responsible contraceptive use portrayed in these excerpts fulfill American second wave feminism's stated aims for female sexuality. If we use as our yardstick Anselma Dell'Olio's article criticizing the Sexual Revolution in the groundbreaking preview issue of *Ms.*, the fantastical (in both senses of the word) pleasure that women derive from sex in these *Cosmo* excerpts entirely lives up to feminist expectations (Dell'Olio 1971).

French erotic narratives follow much less of a standard script when describing exciting amorous encounters. Of the 28 narratives sampled, 26 celebrate the amorous encounter(s) they describe, even if it ultimately ends badly.¹ Of these 26 stories which convey pleasurable erotic encounters, over a quarter (7 of 26, or 27 percent)² do not even involve coitus.³ For example,

¹ The two exceptions include one story about a threesome that ensues after the narrator's fiancé discovers her cheating on him—the encounter is outwardly beautiful but grief-filled (Pouzol 2006a)—and an narrative entitled "I slept with him because he was rich" (Fontanel 2007a), in which the sex is unfeeling.

² Because all of the American stories are the same on this attribute, it is impossible to conduct a binomial test of whether the French stories differ.

one French story recounts the narrator's progressive infatuation with a man she sees on a flight between Paris and New York. Though they never touch one another, the narrator remembers him much more vividly and fondly than most of the men she has slept with (Fontanel 2006:21).

This element of restraint in French narratives' descriptions of the sexual act has often been misunderstood by American observers. It is true that French publishers of American and other English-language romances routinely rewrite Anglo-authored sex scenes because they consider them too "mechanical" to appeal to French readers.⁴ Some American commentators interpret this as an indication that French culture takes a less "frank" approach to sex than Anglo-American culture (Selinger 2007:318).

This description of the cultural contrast at hand is incomplete and lends itself to confusion. We confront the paradox of abundant nudity in French magazines juxtaposed with alleged prudery with regard to the description of sexual acts. Measuring French erotic culture on an axis that runs between "Promiscuity and Puritanism," as the title of Abigail Saguy's article put it (Saguy 1999) leads to a baffling contradiction. In fact, this way of measuring attitudes toward sexuality makes more sense in the American context than in the French one. The crucial distinction that hegemonic French culture tries to impose on perceptions of sexuality instead distinguishes between an emotionally and aesthetically rich experience of sexuality and a stripped-down, brutalized, mechanical experience of sex that demeans and dehumanizes it. The French publisher of American romance novels interviewed by Daniel Weber expresses this distinction when she claims that "American readers seem to go for a very mechanical rendition of lovemaking, such as 'he touched me here and that made me...' French readers expect more sensuality" (Weber 2000:137). This dominant distinction pushed by French women's magazines is not between too much sex and too little, but between "mechanical" sex and truly "erotic" sexuality. The difference is fundamentally a qualitative rather than a quantitative one.

This helps to explain why we find, alongside *Elle*'s several erotic stories where the amorous protagonists never even undress, a description of fellatio more explicit than that in any of *Cosmo*'s "Red Hot Reads:"

I had not imagined how good it is to take a man's sex into your mouth. He taught me how to caress it there, and not only did it not disgust me, but I adored it.

I felt his penis growing, thickening, invading and submerging me, and [I felt] him abandoning himself completely. (Silber 2007c:91-92)

In a sense, this passage is emotionally intimate than the magnificent, steely erections and triumphant simultaneous orgasms of the *Cosmo* excerpts. Within France's dominant cultural

³ One of these narratives involves lesbian sex, which technically does not constitute coitus, but is every bit as physically intimate, and so is counted as such.

⁴ See (Weber 2000:137). Juliet Flesch finds similar patterns of French redaction when Australian romance novels are translated and marketed (Flesch 2004:263-74). Annik Houel's study of Harlequin romances in France finds evidence in the form of systematically collected reader feedback that publishers' alterations of Anglo-American sex scenes is a response to consumer demand rather than a gratuitous exercise in editorial high-handedness (Houel 1997:140).

perspective, the graphic character of this passage has a legitimate purpose because it describes the narrator's new aesthetic and emotional approach to sex.

Learning New Moves: Sex Advice in Cosmo

The detail and physical literalness of the romances excerpted in *Cosmo* is not a peculiarity of fiction. *Cosmo*'s prominently promoted sex advice shares the blow-by-blow style that causes mainstream French critics to complain of "mechanical" sex. In 2002 and 2007, the magazine touted a total of 48 sex advice pieces on its covers for an average of two stories a month. These articles tend to provide highly specific advice, including what wording to use when proposing a sexual technique to one's partner, errors of execution to avoid, and the like. The advice gives the impression of being exhaustively detailed to the point that many readers must wish they could bring the magazine to bed for *in situ* consultation. It is easy to imagine that *Cosmo*'s advice could be most successfully applied in small, easily imagined and remembered units of movement. And, indeed, most of *Cosmo*'s prominent sex advice articles (71 percent) use the term sexual "move" or "moves" as a noun, like dance moves or moves in a game.⁵ Two of the articles on women whose sexual prowess leaves men with indelible memories recommend that the reader perfect a "signature move" (Benjamin 2007; Nersesian 2007).

This kind of sex advice portrays sexuality as a repertoire or tool-box of specific maneuvers or manipulations. It atomizes sex into particular physical components. There is something of a pragmatic and egalitarian logic to this way of presenting advice: since every person comes with more or less similar sexual "equipment," sufficiently specific pointers should allow anyone to replicate, or at least experiment with, state-of-the-art sexual techniques. A mechanical approach to sexuality follows from a commitment to individual agency—i.e., to the individual's ability to manipulate and optimize her body and her environment.

This dynamic, however, is not confined to the genre of sexual advice. Indeed, the link between a normative commitment to individual agency and an empirical vision of the universe as atomistic and hence amenable to targeted manipulation pervade the larger cultural contexts under comparison here. Recall that *Cosmo*'s fictional excerpts, like Anglo-American romance novels more generally, exhibit the same corporeal literalism that its sex advice does. There may be a deeper cultural logic at work here. In her fine book *Culture and Medicine*, journalist Lynn Payer entitles the chapter on American medicine "The Virus in the Machine" (Payer 1996). She notes that Americans frequently analogize the human body and psyche to a machine, a metaphor that dovetails with exceptional faith in the powers of "aggressive" and technically skilled medical interventions to restore its optimal functioning (Payer 1996:148-52). By contrast, French doctors tend to concern themselves more with strengthening the health of the entire organism, which is seen as a finely balanced field, or *terrain*, of countervailing forces (Payer 1996:61-73).

Is this parallel between sex advice and tendencies within medical science a coincidence? Recent research in cultural psychology points to a series of cognitive and behavioral differences that cluster together around contrasting polarities in cultural ideas about the self. Roughly

⁵ I code uses of the word "move" when it appears as a noun and in a sexual context. Uses of the word as a verb are not counted.

speaking, people in cultural contexts that cultivate an “independent” model of the ideal self tend to prize individual choice and control; emphasize subjective and internal explanations for action; and even focus their gaze on objects in isolation from one another. By contrast, more “interdependent” cultures stress the desirability of harmony between the self and group, emphasize contextual explanations for action, and perceive objects in their visual context at the expense of their individual characteristics. In general, comparative psychological experiments tend to show Americans, and particularly the most highly educated and youngest Americans, at the “independent” extreme of this continuum, with Continental Europeans nearer to the highly “interdependent” cultures of East Asia (Kitayama et al. 2009).⁶

French Rejections of Pornography as “Mechanical” Sex

In my magazine sample, French observers reprise this rejection of excessively “mechanical” and soulless sexuality in their discussions of pornography, whose influence on sexual behavior they deplore. For instance, in one of *Elle*’s first-person narratives about a personally significant erotic experience, “Paul” attributes his ignorance of how to enjoy true sexual pleasure to the influence of pornography:

You grow up and sometimes see porno films which show men with sexual equipment that is so impressive that you feel like you have a fig in place of a penis. You also see men who grunt away for hours in acrobatic positions and women who come from start to finish. That’s what we’re shown. You grow up with these idiotic clichés. How do I know all of this? Well, because, like a lot of guys, I watch porn films from time to time (Rosnay 2007a:202).

In the narrative, which I analyze at greater depth later in this chapter, Paul’s understanding of sex is subsequently transformed by a lesbian who shows him the languorous emotional and physical approach that characterizes what he now grasps to be authentic feminine (and truly satisfying) sexuality.

By these lights, pornography is not only unrealistic and hence misleading about good sexual technique. It is also aesthetically and emotionally off-key. In another of *Elle*’s personal accounts, watching pornography as a couple is a sign of the relationship’s decay:

I had finished with the acrobatics, with that stressful search for exceptionally original—and drably unsatisfying—sexual positions[... w]ith those sinister porn films on a Saturday evening that Philippe and I sometimes watched in order to revive our sexual desire. [Thanks to a subsequent relationship,] I had learned to love. I had understood that, in a couple, it’s not desire that disappears over time, but love itself (Silber 2007c:93).

Once again, this narrator portrays the problem with pornography as is its focus on the mechanical aspects of the sex act to the neglect of its affective core.

In a panel discussion of sexually active men in “Orgasm as Men See It” in the January 2007 edition of *Marie Claire*, a question about whether certain women’s orgasms are bothersome

⁶ For a comprehensive review of the cross-cultural psychological literature, see (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010).

turns into a general condemnation of pornography's influence on sexual styles. Hervé, a 54 year old divorcé, opens up the topic by commenting that "What irritates me is too much screaming. I have the impression of acting in a bad porn movie, and, at that point, frankly, I wonder what the hell I'm doing there." Julien, who is in his late forties, generalizes from Hervé's point: "I'm struck today by how often the way women act or speak, the sexual positions they assume, the underwear of some women, particularly the younger ones, is directly inspired by porn films." Marc, a married man some ten years younger, follows up that "It's a strange fad that is supposedly predicated on the masculine [sexual] imagination, but that is actually the ultimate erection-killer. I've never seen anything on the screen that resembles an orgasm." Alex, who at 25 is the youngest man on the panel, returns the discussion to the original question, remarking that what really turns him off is a woman who bites or scratches him while coming: "I have the impression of being negated, forgotten. She is having her pleasure, but I am turned into an object..." (Treglia 2007:74). Though Alex's complaint about being objectified is not ostensibly related to the influence of pornography, it is of a piece with the other men's criticism of pornography as something that hollows out the emotional authenticity of sex by objectifying bodies to the detriment of genuine interpersonal communion.

These comments about pornography are doubly significant. For one thing, they suggest that pornography has had a real impact on sexuality in France in recent years. At the same time, they suggest strong cultural resistance from men and women alike to this influence as a violation of norms about the aesthetic and emotional qualities of desirable sexuality. While *Cosmo* magazine's sex advice and the racy romance novels it excerpts are not intended to promote "soulless," "mechanical," or "objectifying" sex, French perceptions that might cast them in this light reflect a dominant set of cultural priorities shaping French attitudes toward sex and gender. *The Relational Consequences of Different Approaches to Sexual "Performance"*

American erotica's insistence that heroes provide the perfect sexual experience can go so far as to take on a harsh edge. In one story, the heroine, Xandra Farrel is "owner and designer for the sex-toy company Wild Women, Inc." (Raye 2004). She is a fully sexually liberated woman, enjoying nothing better than putting her sex toys to the test with a willing man. In this story, the author creates an element of tension between the heroine and the hero by giving them a problematic sexual history together:

She'd wanted to sleep with Beau from the moment she discovered he was back in their hometown, despite the fact that Beau had lost control while doing the deed years ago, lasting all of five minutes. Xandra was convinced that this time would be different.

She strips naked and confronts the hero, Beau. He is almost swept away by desire, except that his mobile phone rings, "br[inging] him back to reality" and reminding him of his apprehensions: "could he make up for their one-night flop and finally satisfy her?" He beats a hasty retreat in his pickup truck. After driving for a mile or two, however, he decides to risk another failure in bed and does a U-turn with the intention of taking Xandra up on her offer. She is surprised to see him again, having written him off as a "frustrating, indecisive man:"

“This is the same guy who just left,” she reminded herself. She wasn't sure if he deserved a second chance. Xandra stared at Beau's defined biceps bulging against his tee shirt. God, she was attracted to him. “Fine,” she said. “But just remember that this is it. If you walk away again, you can forget about me.”

Luckily, Beau's mastery of sexual technique has improved. He puts her through the standard stimulation sequence, and afterwards the heroine whispers:

“That was incredible”...

Beau smiled and lightly stroked her arm. “I know,” he said. “And it was a hell of a lot different than our last time.”

“Well, whatever you've been doing all these years, keep it up,” Xandra said, “because it sure is working” (all Raye 2004).

The excerpt ends there. Beau's virtuoso sexual performance demonstrates that he did indeed deserve his “second chance.”

The anxiety with which Beau recalls his earlier sexual “failure” is a literary exaggeration. It is only in a fantasy world that which strapping young hunks are abjectly apologetic at being able to hold off ejaculation for *only* five minutes. This ideal vision does indeed involve a certain female empowerment. But it is a rather cruel one. In this hypothetical world, men know they must put in perfect sexual performances or accept that they are abject losers. In a sense, this vision simply stands the power dynamics of 1950s American gender relations on their head.

The story also makes sex into a kind of athletic performance. As in so many American narratives, the protagonist takes a gutsy risk, digging into his reserves of courage and willpower to come through with a win that proves his worth, restores his self-confidence, and qualifies him for mature and mutually fulfilling relations with others. In this story, the emotional rapprochement between Beau and Xandra is the consequence of, rather than the prelude to, the sexual act. What is interesting in Xandra's story is the hostility implicit in the fantasy of being able to command peak performance from a man with the threat of humiliating dismissal if he fails the test.

For this reason, it presents an instructive contrast with a personal narrative in *Elle's* summer supplement on “Love, Sex and Passion” that also features male sexual inadequacy. This story, too, is a sort of fantasy, though it is based on lived experience. “One evening, in Brittany, in a small hotel” tells the story of a distraught Parisian divorcée who crosses paths with a white-haired man in his fifties in the dining room of a small Breton inn. He is the man mentioned above whose deeply lined face reminds the narrator of Elie Wiesel or Nelson Mandela. These two people eye one another during the meal, and, at its conclusion, the hero ventures a comment on the book the narrator is reading:

[H]e said in an unexpectedly gentle voice [*d'une douceur inattendue*]:

“It's good to like Julien Gracq.”

I had expected anything but that.

“Oh yes, why?”

“Because he is profound. And sad. You seem sad, too. What is it that is making you so sad?” (Silber 2007e:57)

His expression of sympathy brings tears “slowly running down my cheeks” (Silber 2007e:57). He comes over to her table and takes her hand in his. She spends over an hour unburdening her soul to him. He reciprocates with his own unhappy tale, and the two talk until two in the morning, when he tells her:

“I would like us to sleep together... In the same bed. I would like to fall asleep next to you [*vous*].”

And he added:

“You [*vous*] shouldn’t anticipate anything happening, actually. [*Vous ne craignez pas grand-chose, en fait.*] I haven’t made love in four years. And I have the disagreeable impression that I wouldn’t even be able to now.”

All of a sudden, I thought he seemed extremely sad. I got up, and it was I who took his hand and led him upstairs (Silber 2007e:61-62).

Like Beau, the hero of this narrative suffers from performance anxiety. But, in contrast to Beau, the man in this story is not put to a sort of test. Rather, the couple’s emotions of mutual sympathy, developed over hours of conversation, have brought about a gradual increase in intimacy between them.

We went to bed and immediately put our arms tight around one another; it was almost a question of survival. Thirty seconds later, we were asleep.

In the night, I felt him move. His mouth moved closer to mine.

“Do you [*tu*] want to?” he asked me.

“Yes,” I responded.

He began to caress me, his hand brushing my knee, then rising higher, very gently. He caressed me like this for a very, very long time, and I had the sensation of beginning to revive, of gathering strength, as if after a long sickness.

When he entered me, it was warm. It was good. It was full of love. It was as if love were returning to me (Silber 2007e:62).

Like Xandra and Beau’s story, a section of which is entitled “Randy Redemption,” this is also a narrative of redemption. But here, the sense of redemption is mutual. The woman feels her capacity for love and for being loveable reawaken under the man’s caresses, and he is reassured of the same things, as well as of his potency. The following morning, he tells her that “I was very happy. For the first time in a long while...” (Silber 2007e:63).

In the American story, the man’s sexual performance is above all a feat of physical prowess measured by the number of orgasms he delivers and the duration of penetration he is able to sustain. In the French story, love-making is not a feat of physical virtuosity but the culmination of an emotional rapprochement between two people. The narrator’s metaphor of recovering from illness highlights the emotionally nourishing qualities of sexual pleasure.

Sinfully Delicious or Sacred Erotic?

The comparison between *Cosmo*'s and *Elle*'s erotic narratives highlights another crucial contrast between the sexual cultures they illustrate. *Cosmo*'s very explicitly sexual texts are shot through with references to a dichotomy between “good” and “bad,” “naughty” and “nice” that exploits the whiff of immorality associated with sex to heighten its allure.

The pervasiveness of this trope of delicious transgression can be crudely indexed by counting the number of *Cosmo* excerpts which use moralistic vocabulary with relation to sexual desire. Table 4.1 tallies the number of stories which refer to sexual desire and behavior using dichotomies such as “good girl”/“bad girl” or “good guy”/“bad boy” and “naughty” or “nice.” It also counts the following morally loaded words: “tempting” or “temptation;” “sin” or “sinful;” “forbidden” acts; “rules” that are broken, bent, or disregarded⁷; and taking “risks” or being “risky.” The term “risk,” strictly speaking, has prudential rather than moral connotations, but in these stories, it is clearly of a piece with the other moralistic pseudo-injunctions against sex. The following usage is illustrative:

She no longer cared that they were breaking rules or *taking risks*. Noelle had done everything in her power to resist him, and none of it had worked. At last, she surrendered completely to the moment (Butcher 2007 emphasis added).

[Insert Table 4.1 about here]

The table also records whether moralistic language is used mainly in reference to a male character, a female character, or whether the precise character to whom it refers is unclear, typically when the vocabulary occurs in a story's title, such as “A Taste of Forbidden Passion” (Krentz 2002), “Sometimes Naughty, Sometimes Nice” (Raye 2004), or “Breaking All the Rules” (Alden 2007).

The lion's share of *Cosmo* excerpts—fully 84 percent of them—employ this sort of morally loaded language. It is hard for the reader to miss. It shows up in the titles of the novels or excerpts, in summaries or story teasers added by *Cosmo* editors, and throughout the stories themselves.

The fact that terms like “temptation,” taking “risks” and breaking “rules” apply largely to female characters suggests a trace of the traditional sexual double standard, as does the fact that there are more “bad boys” than “bad girls” and more “good girls” than “good guys.” As Amy Schalet notes in her superb comparison of American and Dutch approaches to adolescent sexuality:

One reason the category of the slut remains so salient is that American peer and popular cultures remain profoundly ambivalent about girls' sexual desire and pleasure, alternately denying girls' desires and viewing them, akin to boys' desires, as indiscriminate (Schalet 2011:162).

Many *Cosmo* readers are young enough to be close to their high school years when the practice of “slut shaming” is at its most intense (Tanenbaum 1999; Tolman 2002), which may help to

⁷ In this coding for “moralistic” language, only implicitly anti-sexual “rules” are counted. For instance, I exclude an instance in which the story's hero devises “rules” for the heroine to follow as he is seducing her, since the “rules” here prescribe consent to sex rather than proscribing it.

explain the gender skew of some of the transgressive language here. More generally, the target *Cosmo* reader is still unmarried and so has not definitely settled on a single sexual partner, so sex outside a stable relationship is a more realistic possibility for her.⁸

The term “good girl” in *Cosmo* excerpts is a set-up for the moment when the heroine decides to shuck off her prim and prudent ways, as in: “Hannah was a good girl who never released her inhibitions. But maybe this was the time, she thought” (Ridgway 2007), or “When good girl Charity Prewitt's date reveals a shocking secret, she must decide between returning to her ho-hum life and taking a chance on lust” (Rice 2008). In other words, although there is more cultural pressure on a “girl” than a “boy” to be “good” at least some of the time, having a “bad” side is what makes one a “fun, fearless female.” As Wolfenstein and Leites observed in their cross-national analysis of films from the 1940s, a central problem in Western—and particularly in American—romances is that “bad” women are sexually attractive, while “[a] good girl is the sort that a man should marry, but she has the disadvantage of not being sexually stimulating” (Wolfenstein and Leites 1970 [1950]:26). This same basic cultural conundrum remains at the heart of *Cosmo*'s erotic discourse.

In a broader sense, however, the implicit dichotomy between “good” (non-sexual) and “bad” (uninhibitedly sexual) applies to both sexes. After all, “bad boys” are still depicted in *Cosmo*'s discourse as being especially sexually attractive, precisely because of their “badness.”⁹

Might this moralistic vocabulary be merely a semantic surface with little relevance to the more deeply evoked emotions that drive these fictional excerpts? A more in-depth assessment of the way sexual attraction is portrayed in these stories shows that it is not. In these stories, there is always (i.e., in 31 of 31 stories) a reason for either the heroine and/or the hero to resist initiating a sexual relationship. Typically, it is the woman in the pair who feels the most hesitant to have sex. Ninety percent of stories (28 of 31) have heroines with misgivings. But a substantial proportion of heroes (9 of 31, or 29 percent) also begin with inner reservations about having sex. (The numbers for heroes *and* heroines sum to more than 100 percent because in six of the stories, both feel the need to resist a sexual impulse.)

The excerpts put forward a variety of reasons for resisting the urge to have sex. Sex violates norms of professionalism (in 8 of 31, or 26 percent of stories) or compromises a hero or heroine's rational capacities at a time when they are particularly needed (in 6 of 31, or 19 percent of stories). It can threaten to reproduce the pain of past amorous disappointment with other people (8 of 31, or 26 percent of stories), or with the same person (4 of 31, or 13 percent of stories). A heroine may be wary of a prospective lover's reputation for “bad boy” behavior, i.e., promiscuity (5 of 31, or 16 percent of stories). Or she may be restrained by her own “good girl”

⁸ A comparative study of American and French sexual behavior shows that American individuals who are not cohabiting in a couple are more likely to have multiple partners than French individuals in the same situation, who tend toward monogamy if they have any sexual partners (Gagnon et al. 2001). Hence, *Cosmo*'s readers are more likely than even unmarried French magazine readers to be in this position of relatively fluid sexual partnering.

⁹ At the end of an excerpt entitled “Seduced by a Bad Boy” in the August 2008 edition of *Cosmo* (Andre 2008), the magazine's editors included the following comment: “Wanna Dish? Have you ever been seduced by a bad boy? Log on to cosmopolitan.com/badboys to share your story with other *Cosmo* readers.”

habits of self-restraint (3 of 31, or 10 percent of stories). Heroes and heroines may think it imprudent or unseemly to have sex with a person they don't know well (5 of 31, or 16 percent). Worse still, they may be in a relationship already (3 of 31, or 10 percent of stories), although in two of these three cases, the heroine is let of the hook morally when she finds her partner cheating. The *Cosmo* excerpts contain a smattering of other miscellaneous reasons for avoiding sex (see Appendix 3.1 for full details of all coding on resistance to sex). Ultimately, the crucial point of these barriers is to ensure that at least one character feels as if a sexual liaison is against his or her better judgment.

The payoff for all this resistance is that allows authors to exploit an implicit equation between the intensity of sensual pleasure and its transgressiveness. At these climactic moments when a character's resistance to the impulse to have sex is overcome, these stories employ metaphors of ceding control over the self. The following lines describe the moment when the heroine gives herself over to sexual impulse:

She felt overpowered, overwhelmed (Bagshawe 2002).

She couldn't hold back anymore (Kwitney 2002).

Jess was tired of ignoring her lustful urges (Skye 2004).

...she realizes she can't resist any longer (Roberts 2005).

Lust pumped through her veins, and she gave in to the impulse... (Gibson 2005)

Camille couldn't hold back (Stanhope 2005).

Even though she vowed to control herself, Sam couldn't help... (Donovan 2006).

Noelle had done everything in her power to resist him, and none of it had worked (Butcher 2007).

I wasn't sure I could let go completely... I submitted at last (Kleypas 2007).

His touch made her want to surrender to her lustful urges (Kane 2007).

A voice inside my head was telling me to kick him out, but... [h]e'd just found my breaking point (Lee 2007).

...suddenly, she wanted to give in to desire... (Skye 2007)

She let out a sigh and grabbed John's shoulders, no longer able to control herself (Harper 2008).

She considered pushing him aside but then, impulsively, she turned and kissed him (Jackson 2008).

She couldn't deny her feelings for him... as she spoke, she knew it was useless to resist... "Okay," Julie told him at last, surrendering to the moment (Andre 2008).

She shivered, overcome with longing as her resistance started to fade away (Bradley 2008).

She'd always reveled in the idea that she'd cut him off in a cold manner. But that was impossible, considering the lust she felt (McCray 2008).

The language of irresistible urges overcoming self-control is the same for men:

Harry lost all control and surrendered (Thompson 2004).

Rob felt the heavy pull of desire take over... Rob couldn't resist her (Gibson 2005).

He knew he should stop, but he couldn't help himself... he knew that it was useless to resist (Brennan 2006).

... he wanted to give in to the lust they had once felt... his resistance faded (Webb 2007).

A minority of stories use a different sort of language, emphasizing the heroine's rational calmness and resolve once she has decided to bed the hero:

Her final decision made, Lainie left the bed, quickly took off her clothes, unhooked her bra, and tossed it aside. Then there would be no awkward undressing scene, no chance for second thoughts (Thompson 2004).

I'll never know if I don't try, she thought as she pulled into the driveway and stepped out of her car... She was going to have Joe once and for all. Trish walked up the front steps and rang the bell without hesitation (Blake 2007).

Julie was surprisingly calm, considering the circumstances... Filled with a sudden sense of freedom, she walked down the stairs to Chris's room. She hesitated only briefly before knocking (Alden 2007).

But suddenly, I felt ready. A surge of courage filled me. It was now or never. I stripped off my dress and let him take in my body... (Estep 2007)

This minority of stories cuts against the dominant metaphor of sexuality as a loss of self-command. Still, it keeps the reader's attention focused on the individual's inner locus of self-control, whether sexual desire leads to its pleasurable abandonment or its consolidation. *Cosmo* magazine itself can be seen as a way of allowing young women to extend the personal control they exert over their sexual lives,¹⁰ even if that involves the cultivating and manipulating the sense of moral rule-breaking that pervades the dominant culture's approach to the pleasures of sex.

This is most obvious in *Cosmo*'s sexual advice pieces, which follows its fiction excerpts' use of transgressive vocabulary. Fourteen of the 49 sex advice cover stories (29 percent) sampled in 2002 and 2007 use call sex "naughty." Twelve percent use the "bad/good girl/boy" dichotomy, and 18 percent employ terms like "sinful," "taboo," "temptation," and "forbidden." Twelve percent also equate "animal(istic)" sex with exciting sex. "Cosmo's Guide to Sinful Sex," from the June 2002 issue, contains archetypal language. The subhead to the article announces that: "Being the slightest bit naughtier in the bedroom can reap red-hot rewards. Here are a few bad-girl moves for your randy repertoire—no whips or chains required" (Crain 2002:216-17). The article begins with an exploration of why "sinful" sex is so exciting:

Maybe it's because early-stage sex has a way of bringing you back to your *first* first time, when you were a virgin-on-the-verge consumed by how wicked, how wanton, how "God, if they only knew!" sinful you felt about actually doing the

¹⁰ This, in essence, is the empirical finding of one psychological study of young women's attitudinal changes after reading *Cosmo* (Kim and Ward 2012).

deed. And when it comes to hot sex, sin is in—because the notion of naughtiness in your mind heightens the physical sensations flowing through your body (Crain 2002:217)

To whom does this this breathless “if they only knew” refer? “They” could be parents, other adult authority figures, or the community of peers before whom a girl maintains her “good girl” facade. Amy Schalet finds that teenage “girls who have had sex or imagine doing so say that such sex, if acknowledged, threatens their parents’ image of them as good daughters” (Schalet 2011:114). The passage dramatizes an additional facet to the painful conflict Schalet uncovers between American girls’ “role as good daughters and their sexual selves” (Schalet 2011:112). That conflict, while emotionally wrenching, is also a source of culturally stylized and intensified pleasure. The *Cosmo* piece “Guide to Sinful Sex” promises its readers that “It’s easy to recapture that rebellious feeling any time you want. Ahead, six ways to do it” (Crain 2002:217). This promise sums up a good deal of the commercial premise of *Cosmo* magazine as a whole, a premise that could not exist independently of America’s dominant culture of unmarried sexuality.

How do we explain this powerful nexus between sex and sin in the U.S.?
Anthropologists and sociologists studying American adolescence have often noted the atmosphere of cultural drama surrounding adolescent self-assertion from parental/societal authority. For instance, in her article "'Burned Like a Tattoo': High School Social Categories and 'American Culture'," Sherry Ortner claims that, throughout the twentieth century, adolescents in American high schools have organized their social worlds using a dichotomy she calls “wild” vs. “tame” personalities. “Wildness” and “tameness,” she argues, signify stances toward authority (rebellious or compliant) and sexuality (uninhibited or repressed) (Ortner 2002: 136). Ortner argues “that their underlying logic is nothing other than the logic of hegemonic ‘American culture’ as a whole” (Ortner 2002: 115). (Ortner’s other organizing dichotomy is between “high” and “low” capital.) As she is at pains to point out, the “wild/tame” symbolic schema is not endorsed by everyone in a typical school, nor is it necessarily accurate in its characterization of classified individuals’ actual personal traits. But it is a widely recognized schema that no one can ignore entirely (Ortner 2002: 137), and that many feel utterly oppressed by (Ortner 2002: 120-21). In her book on adolescent sexuality in the U.S. and Holland, Amy Schalet argues that every American teenager faces an implicit cultural expectation to be *both* wild and tame:

On the one hand, strong impulses and drives are looked upon favorably, as potential passions that will propel teenagers away from the parental home and into the outer world. Indeed, although the parents do not explicitly say so, one gets the sense that they would be troubled when teenagers *lack* “raging hormones,” for such a lack might signal the absence of essential life energy and the drive to grow up and move on. On the other hand, they worry about that drive getting out of control and taking their children to places where they make bad and life-altering choices. The key is not to squash or even necessarily to diminish the impulses but to channel them in the right way (Schalet 2011:183).

This sense that energetic risk-taking is both dangerous and essential to independence and success in the competitive fray of adult life is crucial in the American cultural context.

Strong inner impulses are most legitimate in American culture when they can be rationalized as a means to greater individual success and self-determination, as when children learn to stand on their own two feet through rebellion against their parents or as when a person takes a courageous risk that pays off in achievement. Within the context of marriage, sexuality at least can be portrayed as something that helps strengthen an important commitment. As we will see, in America, this is still the predominant way in which sex is discussed in magazines targeted at married women. Outside the context of marriage, however, it threatens to be a purposeless and even dangerous indulgence, and so is particularly suspect.

Cosmo's language of “bad boys” and “good girls,” and of sexual “naughtiness” is curiously juvenile. In English, in all contexts aside from the sexual, being “naughty” is something associated with children. The term “girl” as a reference to young women has been rather dated by feminism; *Cosmo's* archetype of the “fun, fearless female” avoids the term. Yet it persists in the vocabulary of the “good/bad girl” alongside the even rarer term, “boy,” which elsewhere in *Cosmo* has mostly given way to the more adult, if still youthful-sounding, term “guy.” This persistently juvenile vocabulary, I believe, is an indicator that extramarital sexuality, though it is no longer the moral disaster it was seen to be in the 1950s, is still not fully, legitimately adult in the American cultural context.¹¹ The childish language may also be a way of neutralizing some of the fear of extramarital sexuality that haunts a culture so demanding of self-control. After all, sexual “naughtiness” is better than sexual “perversion” or “addiction,” since it puts sexuality in its proper place, a juvenile frivolity that can be set aside when the pressing demands of the adult world demand attention.

This underlying sensibility informs the whole of *Cosmo*. Between its slightly campy exaggerations about “mind-blowing” sex, its insta-polls on whether this or that revenge prank on a rival or an ex-boyfriend is “justified” or “unforgiveable,” and its tongue-in-cheek *Cosmo* Commandments, the magazine is quite conscious of its frivolity, and indeed embraces it. It does sometimes attempt to give practical advice, e.g., in its “career” feature or in the maternal wisdom provided by the Agony Aunt, Irma Kurtz. But the overall tone of the magazine is light and comic. “Fun, fearless females” do not take things seriously. It is frivolous precisely because sexuality itself—particularly the extramarital sexuality which is *Cosmo's* specialty—is ultimately frivolous and juvenile. At best, it is a stage of life that girls can navigate skillfully—while having “fun” and even gaining prestige within their peer group—before they move on to the properly adult domain of marriage and family formation.

This approach is deeply alien to the French cultural sensibility which sees the right kind (i.e., sufficiently aesthetically developed and emotionally intense) of sexuality as among the most elevated, most fully adult human experiences possible.

¹¹ This fits with Amy Schalet's finding that American adults and adolescents themselves tend to doubt that adolescents are actually capable of “love” because they are incapable of the lifetime commitment that the word implies within American culture (Schalet 2011:164).

Redemptive Sensuality and Complex Emotion: Erotic in French Women's Magazines.

One tempting interpretation of the *Cosmo* excerpts' linkage of transgression and sexual pleasure is that this is simply a universal feature of love stories. Pamela Regis describes the "barrier" between hero and heroine as an "essential element" of romance stories as a genre (Regis 2003:32-33). So is the resistance that the characters in American erotic stories evince toward sex merely a literary device?

This question is answered definitively by a comparison with French stories, which manage to develop emotionally engaging narratives without highlighting the element of inner moral resistance to sexuality. The vocabulary of "good" vs. "bad" or "nice" vs. "naughty" behavior with regard to sexuality is almost entirely absent from French erotic stories. As we will see, they tend to build their plots around the process through which characters get to know one another and steadily cultivate an attraction to one another, or they describe a set of wrenching dilemmas, often remaining unresolved, that arise in the course of a love affair.

One common category of French narratives that forms a striking contrast with the American cultural trope of sex as a risky and forbidden pleasure could be termed the "pleasure as redemptive" story. The basic pattern of these stories is that the protagonist comes to a profound new realization about what love and pleasure really involve. This discovery of pleasure is not a discovery by a "good girl" that she has a "naughty side," but rather a qualitatively new experience that is ennobling, even redemptive, in character.

The experience recounted in "In India, in a Train, at Night..." illustrates this contrast extremely vividly. The tale begins with the narrator describing herself as follows:

I was 21 years old. I had lost my virginity at least four years earlier, and I spent my life losing myself in encounters that were each more daring than the last. My life came down to a disordered sexual quest which provided no prospect for a happy future.

I never fell in love. I was like any other lost little punk ready to do anything to dull her senses. I really couldn't go on like this, and so, one day, I decided to put a stop to all of this and travel to India (Silber 2007d:15).

She arranges to work as a charitable volunteer giving hope to street children. Despite being warned by a clairvoyant that she will face multiple dangers and will cross paths with "a strange man with 'something on his head and bizarre hands'..." (Silber 2007d:16), she arrives in India and instantly falls in love with the place:

I had already been won over by the people, the perfumes, the odors. By the way the Indians spoke to me, with sincere kindness and warmth.

I arrived at Madurai where I met the people I would be working with. The way people treated me [*le contact*] there was also very good. It was hot. Each evening, on the roofs where I had staked out a little corner to sleep in, children came to join me. When I was tired they would massage my back, my feet, and we all slept together on our mats.

I loved the lack of privacy [*promiscuité*] and the tenderness that passed between us. I loved it when we awoke at dawn, our skin covered with dew. I felt love around me. I was free and strong. And already changed” (Silber 2007d:17). The narrator has rediscovered human warmth and affection in India. She is wrapped in it as if in a cocoon, and her starved soul begins to recover.

The story goes on to recount her affectionate (and sexual) relationship with a sweet boy, Satyajit who works at the charitable establishment with her. She enjoys spending time with him, and he takes her to meet his parents in their village. One day, he proposes marriage, which for a moment she finds tempting. “But I quickly came back to earth; he was just a boyfriend” (Silber 2007d:18). She decides to travel around the country for a while. During one of her trips in a Fourth Class carriage on the night train she has an experience that brings the narrative to a head. In a dark, hot and stuffy carriage where it is impossible to make out the features of the person sitting opposite, she feels a man’s foot on her own:

I was barefoot and so was he; it’s strange, but there was nothing abnormal about that. You have to know that in India, people touch you all the time: to see what fabric your clothes are made from, or whether you have soft skin. His foot began to stroke me, to slide across mine, a bit as if he was giving me a massage. That was less normal. And, when I felt his other foot touching me, well, that was no longer normal at all.

When the tips of his toes began caressing mine, interlacing themselves with mine, I didn’t ask myself any more questions: it was so agreeable that I had no desire to resist. And I let him continue (Silber 2007d:19-20).

She begins to respond by moving her own feet as well, entering into a “sensual conversation” with him. She is very curious about whether the man is also excited, but has no way of knowing, since she cannot discern any of his features in the dark. What she does know is that he is extremely skilled with his toes:

Neither Satyajit nor any other boy before him had ever seemed to me to be genuine experts in caresses. This man was a master. He caressed me scientifically, moving up, moving back down, gently, tenderly. He scratched me lightly with the nails on his toes. And I wanted more. I began to breathe more loudly. The old lady [sleeping on my shoulder] moved.

He leaned toward me and took my knees in his hands, and, suddenly, my whole body began to vibrate in a sort of tectonic shock. My vagina contracted; I felt spasms; I went rigid. I felt my extremities grow numb, and my head tipped back. I must have put my fist in my mouth to stop from crying out: bent like a bow, my feet outstretched towards him, an incredible pleasure washed over me, plunging me into total well-being (Silber 2007d:20-21).

The narrator wants to throw herself into the unknown stranger’s arms, but he has already stood up to disembark at the next station. A small sliver of light illuminates the man as he leaves the train: “He was very tall and wore an orange turban; he had deep, brilliant eyes. And he was

looking right at me... He moved his lips as if to say something to me” (Silber 2007d:22). As this stranger waves goodbye, the narrator sees that he has two thumbs on his right hand.

This encounter makes a profound impression on the narrator. She so wishes that she had been able to thank the stranger:

My travels in India took place twelve years ago. Today, I know what happened between us that day in the dark in the train from Bangalore to Agra: I learned what pleasure was. I know what I owe him, perhaps nothing less than my happiness now. This changed my life, and made me who I am today.

I am now 34 years old, have a husband whom I love and two superb children. I often think about him. And I wonder what became of him, that handsome Indian with an orange turban and two thumbs on his right hand... And who was a bit of a magician” (Silber 2007d:22-23).

This story is indeed rather extraordinary, both in the events it narrates, and in the narrator’s judgment about the impact of this one episode in the train on her life. But it expresses more general cultural themes that recur frequently in discussions of pleasure and sexuality in mainstream French magazines.

The narrator of this story finds a genuinely moral redemption in her sexual encounter on the train. Her former, unredeemed self was disordered not so much because she was a “bad girl” who had a lot of sex and enjoyed herself too much. Rather, it was the joyless, affectionless character of her sexuality that made it debilitating. Sex that does not forge a genuine emotional connection with others is the real sin here. In addition, this story’s implication that there is something morally significant about sexual pleasure itself recurs in multiple French erotic stories and articles. The cultural assumption is so distant from the dominant American cultural context that articulating it is challenging for an interpreter whose primary context is American. There seems to be an irreplaceable element of self-respect, perhaps particularly for women, which comes from experiencing genuine sexual pleasure. Once this narrator has experienced it, she believes herself better equipped to order her life priorities, as the redemptive conclusion indicates.

Some of *Cosmo*’s excerpts do feature heroines who discover their first orgasm or their first really satisfying sex with the hero (e.g., Bagshawe 2002; Kleypas 2007; Kwitney 2002). But these stories tend to emphasize the purely physical intensity of the heroine’s newfound pleasure, and often record the woman’s satisfaction as she unleashes her “naughty” side—her hidden reserves of animalistic lust. And in none of them does an orgasm have the morally transformative role that it does in the “In India...” narrative.

The sophisticated academic reader of this story will detect an element of Orientalism in the narration, with its boundlessly friendly natives and its turbaned, hexadactyl “magician” of a hero (Said 1979). But this should not stand in the way of taking the story as evidence of cultural patterns. I would add that the narrator’s embrace of the cultural exoticism is, from one point of view, quite remarkable and admirable. What mainstream American magazine would carry a story in which a young woman allows herself to be stroked to orgasm by the toes and toenails of

a barefoot, unseen man—let alone a story that celebrates this event as an act of redemptive generosity rather than as a kinky thrill?

The affection that other strangers show to the narrator in India is also critical to the narrator's inner transformation. Her reception of ordinary Indians' kindness toward her acknowledges her thirst for emotional warmth in a way that is reminiscent of *Nous Deux's* personality profiles of infants in the 2000s (see below). The fantasy that strangers might actually harbor spontaneous sympathy also has earlier echoes. It recalls the belated discovery by the heroine of the short story "Quitte ou Double" (Boulle 1957) that the game show audience is rooting not against her but *for* her as she tries to win a nerve-wracking contest so as to be able to afford a new pair of orthotic shoes, or the schoolboy protagonist's realization in "Dix-Neuf Sur Vingt" (Baudouy 1957) that his classmates actually wish him well when he is put on the spot by a teacher. This fantasy of the sympathetic stranger reaches back at least as far as Rousseau's depiction of the state of nature as peopled by individuals who naturally feel distress at the suffering of a being like themselves.

Like the back massages the narrator receives on the roofs of Madurai, the orgasm-inducing caresses she receives from the hero are completely gratuitous. This is as important as their skillfulness. They are a pure gift of pure pleasure. The "lost little punk" who left France for India would have had a hard time believing that this degree of generosity in erotic love was possible. And this new understanding is basic to her moral recovery, enabling her to embark on a happy and successful marriage once she returns to France.

This little narrative that is so different in emotional tone from *Cosmo's* erotica also follows a very different sexual script. It is hard to imagine a more stark contrast between, on the one hand, the rippling muscles, bulging phalluses, and standardized repertoire of sexual "moves" that characterize the heroes of our American erotica sample and, on the other hand, the mostly unseen "magician" who brings the heroine to orgasm through such subtle and unexpected touch. As we will see, this celebration of unexpected difference and diversity also sets apart *Elle's* erotic narratives from their counterparts in *Cosmo*.

Another example of an unconventional, fleeting, but redemptive erotic encounter can be found in "That was the most beautiful night of my life" (Pouzol 2006b). It narrates a transformative experience in the life of a young woman who has been single for two years after a painful breakup. "I wasn't meeting anyone and, worse yet, I had the impression of being totally invisible in the eyes of other people in general, and of men in particular" (Pouzol 2006b:52). This distressing sense of being invisible because one is sexually uninteresting is almost never mentioned in American romantic stories, unless this is highlighted as an explicit departure from, and satire on, genre conventions (see the reference to Catherine Anderson's 1994 *Shotgun Bride* in Goade 2007:221-22). It is a fairly frequent complaint in French magazines, however (Elise 2002a; Fontanel 2007b).

At a friend's insistence, the narrator joins a group going to a dance to benefit firefighters. She arrives in unimpressive clothes and has no prior acquaintances in the group apart from her one friend. Consequently, she has low expectations of the evening. Despite this—or perhaps

precisely because of it—a highly attractive young man in their party, Matthias, ends up chatting with her. The narrator’s friend has described him as “the most handsome man on earth,” (Pouzol 2006b:54) a judgment she at first thinks wildly exaggerated. But his occasional “quirky reflections” at dinner make her begin:

looking at him more closely. Green eyes, long, slender hands, a smile... he was very handsome, you couldn’t really deny it. But above all he had a sort of ineffable and entirely hypnotic style of carrying himself, speaking, and modulating his voice (Pouzol 2006b:54)

Later, when an evidently jealous young woman in the group makes a catty remark about them, Matthias responds by kissing her passionately.

At first, the narrator is acutely aware of the eyes on them in the public venue, but finally “lets go,” giving in to the kiss, and loses awareness of everything but Matthias’s embrace. This echoes the vocabulary of “giving in” to sexual desire that marks the *Cosmo* excerpts so strongly. But here, the barrier is less any internalized sense of moral transgression but rather the gaze of third parties and the jealousies and norms of public decorum that they represent. Ignoring stares from the group of friends, Matthias leads the narrator away from the gathering:

We walked along Saint Paul [Street], King of Sicily Street, and the arcades of Rivoli Street as far as the Tuileries. I don’t know where we went next. We stopped every thirty meters to kiss. In doorways, against walls, in bus shelters. We couldn’t stop... I had never felt such an erotic charge... He kept repeating that I was beautiful, sweet [*douce*], bewitching. He looked at me with such intensity that every word he said went straight to my heart, as if it were a proposal of marriage. I had tears in the corners of my eyes; I plunged myself into his scent; and I didn’t think of anything else. (Pouzol 2006b:56-57).

They walk around Paris in this state of amorous intoxication all night. At 7 o’clock in the morning, they part. Later that morning, Matthias sends her a text message saying simply “You know, that was the most beautiful night of my life” (Pouzol 2006b:58).

That is the end of their relationship. The narrator knows that Matthias is engaged to be married to an ex-model who has taken up photography, and evidently she does not expect anything more from him. She is wonderfully happy, however. Since this magical night, she says, she is not quite the same person. She uses religious imagery for the transformation the episode has wrought on her psyche:

It was like a divine sign when it happened, exactly at the moment when I needed it most; and it ended like a mystery, with a sort of dignity without pain... There was no sex, no promises, no game of seduction. Just grace. (Pouzol 2006b:52)

The reader is left with the impression that her loveless funk has been conclusively vanquished.

As with the “In India...” story, this amorous episode involves no coitus. But it is emotional dynamite nonetheless. Like the “In India...” story, this one features a hero whose sensual prowess is experienced as an act of personal generosity. It is not a response to the implicit challenge of the heroine’s resistance, nor an imperious expression of appetite on the

hero's part, nor even the start of a relationship that promises an indefinite future of sexual fireworks, as American sex scenes tend to be. Instead, both stories are just about a kind of erotic "grace," as this narrator puts it.

The narrative entitled "My most beautiful love affair was with a homosexual"¹² [*Ma plus belle histoire d'amour était avec un homosexuel*] also recounts an improbable relationship that never culminates in sexual intercourse but still proves redemptive. The narrator, Laure, is trying to leave a man, Thierry, who has taken a mistress but wants to stay with her, and who is "torturing everyone with his perversions" (Fontanel 2007c:65). She goes away on a ski trip with a group of people she hardly knows. Among them is a gay man, Andréa, whose lighthearted approach to life is a breath of fresh air after Thierry's oppressive machismo (Fontanel 2007c:66). In a ski lift, she confesses her traumatic story to him. He responds by telling her: "But Laure, why are you putting up with such a madman? If you want tenderness, I can give it to you... Lean on me [*Prends appui sur moi*] if you want" (Fontanel 2007c:66-67).

Andréa is as good as his word. He reassures her that she is beautiful and sexy; he tenderly tucks her hair behind her ears; he hugs her and slow-dances with her, sometimes evincing physical arousal: everything but kissing on the mouth or sexual contact. He recognizes her to the rest of the group as someone who has "come into his life" (Fontanel 2007c:68). When Thierry, in a macho rage over his displacement by another man—and a gay one, to boot—gets wind of their relationship and reaches Andréa on the telephone, the latter responds: "She can love me as much as she wants, because I love her back" (Fontanel 2007c:69).

When Laure returns to Paris, she cuts all ties with Thierry and derives a new youthful vivacity from her relationship with Andréa. Eventually, however, he thwarts her increasing desire for a sexual relationship by ostentatiously disappearing with another man at a gay nightclub, and Laure breaks with him. She finds this less painful than she had imagined:

Curiously, I didn't suffer all that much. Andréa had made me into a woman who was more sure of herself, who dared to say what she thought, and who dared to live life on her own terms [*vivre à sa façon*]. And I was quite astonished myself that I had avoided the terrible pains of a break-up. I even met someone else (Fontanel 2007c:71).

When, two years later, she runs into Andréa by chance, he stops her and, full of emotion, explains himself. He knew she was in love with him, and returned that love, but also knew himself well enough to anticipate that "even with a woman like you, I would one day want to sleep with a man" (Fontanel 2007c:72). So he left her at the nightclub with another man, planning to make her hate him. That way, "she will be able to do what I didn't have courage to do. She will make the decision to end our relationship. And she will fare better. And I will have done something for her life" (Fontanel 2007c:72).

¹² The term "homosexual" is more common in France than in the U.S. In the U.S., the term "gay" has gained ground to the point where "homosexual" is somewhat unexpected and carries a distinct note of sexually conservative disapprobation.

Since her trajectory has already confirmed the wisdom of this decision, Laure reconciles with Andréa, and they become “great friends.” Now, “[w]hen I introduce him to my friends, I say that we were lovers, and he nods his head. Because, at bottom, it’s true” (Fontanel 2007c:73).

This variation on the Pygmalion story again elevates the emotional significance of a relationship over its baldly sexual component. Andréa genuinely cares for Laure and helps her re-establish her self-confidence, which, as so often in the French context, is defined in relational and erotic terms. The story contains some feminism-inspired swipes at Thierry’s “reactionary macho” (Fontanel 2007c:69) attitudes, but Laure’s emotional rebirth comes from a man’s love for her, something that cuts against the grain of self-help feminism. Andréa’s homosexuality provides the narrative with its provocative title, but in the end, it serves only to emphasize the generosity of the transformative love he offers Laure.

Other stories in *Elle* of women’s emotional redemption through the care of others feature more conventional sexual relationships. “Comment j’ai découvert le plaisir. Le vrai” (Silber 2007c) begins with a résumé of the narrator’s unsatisfactory history of perfunctory, coercive, or simply boring lovers. The story’s real action begins when the narrator, Clara, meets Emmanuel, a divorcé 12 years her elder, in a Paris café. They strike up a conversation, and Clara finds him unusually emotionally open about himself: “It was the first time I had met a man who was not afraid to express himself [*de se confier*] and to speak so fairly about himself, his relationships with other men, love, and women” (Silber 2007c:90). Together with Thierry’s attitudes in Laure’s story, this statement illustrates the fact that emotionally impaired masculinity is not unknown in the French cultural context. It is, however, set off against a strong ideal of empathetic and emotionally intelligent masculinity; and this is the model that Emmanuel embodies in this narrative.

They begin a relationship that is physically restrained but emotionally intense. For six months, they do not sleep together, but when “[h]e touched my thigh, I shivered. He kissed my neck, and I felt like I was melting” (Silber 2007c:90). Clara is impatient for a consummation of their relationship, but he tells her “to everything its own time... You have to get to know one another in order to love another” (Silber 2007c:90-91). When they eventually begin actually having sex, it is “a revelation” for her:

He made each action and each of his caresses meaningful, as he did for each of his words and each of his looks.

I learned to pay more attention. I wanted him to desire me, and I did everything to bring that about... In fact, with him, it was always so intense and full of emotion that I had the impression of having never made love before... (Silber 2007c:91-92)

A similar message about the crucial connection between sex and love can be found in “I had my first orgasm at age 34” (Pouzol 2007b). The narrator, Mathilde, has two children and has been divorced for six years and together with a new lover, Vincent, for six months. Her first

orgasm comes as a complete shock, leaving her uncomprehending and in tears. Vincent takes her in his arms and murmurs:

“Mathilde, is everything all right?”

I thought he was ashamed of me and of my reaction, of my ignorance [about what had happened to me], but, in reality, he knew. He had known from the first time we ended up in bed together that something wasn't going right (Silber 2007c:27).

In the past, she assumed that her experience of sex as modestly pleasurable was normal, and never felt the desire to masturbate. Mathilde reproaches her former lovers for taking at face value her assurances that she was satisfied with their lovemaking. “They took without giving. They didn't love me...” (Pouzol 2007b:32). By contrast, Vincent has taught her to take sex seriously. “He has shown me that making love is research, a collaboration, hard work [*un boulot*]!” When her attention wanders during sex, he laughingly reminds her: ““Are you there, or am I here all by myself? Because, if you want to, we could have a game of chess...”” (Pouzol 2007b:33). Mathilde concludes by hoping that all her readers will meet “their Vincent,” whatever their age, because “you never run out of surprises” (Pouzol 2007b:33).

Between its upbeat final message of universal opportunity and its analogies between sex and “a job” or “hard work” [*un boulot*], this particular narrative has at times an almost American-sounding tone. It lends credence to Raymonde Carroll's suggestion that sexual attractiveness and fulfillment in French culture may play a somewhat parallel role to money and “success” in American culture in terms of the universal admiration accorded to it and its mythical accessibility to anyone from any walk of life (Carroll 1988 [1987]:131-33). Of course, a fundamental difference between the way these two domains are considered in the two cultural contexts is that, for Americans, “success” is ultimately an achievement of the individual will, whereas erotic fulfillment is thought of by the French as an interpersonal gift.

It may have struck the reader by this point that men in these stories are typically the initiators of the redemptive gift of sensual pleasure. In rare instances, however, this equation is reversed. For instance, “It's a homo[sexual woman] who taught me to make love” is an unusual story narrated by a man in the genre of the unexpected erotic gift. The blurb to the piece reads “Paul, 29 years old, was sure he was a gifted lover. Up until the day that Marie demonstrates to him that he doesn't know women as well as he thinks he does” (Rosnay 2007a:220). Paul, the narrator, registers some complaints about gender norms that will strike U.S. readers as familiar:

You know, we men get lots of really different messages when we are growing up. We are told we must be virile and strong, that we must not cry; and then we are told that, no, we must know how to cry in the right way and that we must know how to show our weaknesses (Rosnay 2007a:220).

In the face of this imperative to be masculine in just the right way at the right time, he says, men can lose touch with the importance of mutual attunement in love-making.

The narrative takes place at a friend's house on the Normandy coast where Paul is trying to forget a failed five-year relationship. The house is full of people, including Marie, a lesbian

with a “caustic, even scathing sense of humor.” “She attracted me, but not in the way a girl usually attracts me. She was not playing the role of seductress. I liked that. Also, her favorite author, like mine, was Edgar [Allan] Poe” (Rosnay 2007a:220). The two strike up a conversation after dinner:

She listened to me. I really liked the way she listened to me, with her lucid gaze on me, with her simplicity. She managed to get me to say things that I never said to anyone. Why did I not want to make a commitment to Sophie [his ex]?

Because, at bottom, I was scared to death. Yes, I was afraid of forming a real couple, of having children, of living the real life of a man (Rosnay 2007a:220).

When Marie’s partner, an elegant woman named Anna, arrives at the house, the three of them continue the conversation in Marie’s room over a bottle of rosé.

As their talk of men, women, and love turns to sex, Paul lets drop “this completely idiotic remark: ‘No woman has ever had reason to complain of me in bed, except that, sometimes, I am too hurried and too greedy.’” The two [women] looked at me without replying, and then burst out laughing” (Rosnay 2007a:220). Marie reveals that she has had lengthy relationships with men in the past, but has never found sex with men to be satisfying, since they are always trying to prove their virility. In the face of Paul’s incomprehension and incredulity, Marie begins making love to Anna:

And then, as if to prove the truth of what she was saying, she begins to kiss Anna. It is a slow kiss, of incredible sensuality. In porn films, there are often women making love to each other. But you get the impression that they are an act for guys to watch—it’s fake, a put-on. The kiss continues, and Anna’s hands begin to caress Marie. I feel very small. Marie’s gaze seems to say to me with a smile, “Look at us, you who are too hurried and too greedy. We are going to show you how to make love to a woman. We are going to give you your first great lesson in sensuality and pleasure.”

There’s no acting as there is in films; instead, I have two lovers who are passionately in love with one another. Their gestures are incredibly slow; they seem to be in a trance, as if drugged by love. Marie looks at me from time to time, not saying anything, but it is as if she were telling me: “Observe well. Do it like this, as I am doing” (Rosnay 2007a:220-21).

Marie eventually invites Paul to join them, and he notes the generosity of her attitude toward him: “She guides me gently, cleverly, without ever making me feel like I am a nullity, that I know nothing. On the contrary, she wants to make me discover; she wants to teach me” (Rosnay 2007a:221). This lesson in love-making transforms the way Paul experiences sex and sexual pleasure.

At the close of the narrative, Paul observes that “When I recount my experience to men, they often look at me with big eyes: ‘But didn’t you feel humiliated?’ Absolutely not. Not for a minute. On the contrary, I feel marvelously privileged” (Rosnay 2007a:221). It is interesting that other men’s reactions to Paul’s story (and his own reactions in the course of the narration) focus

on the episode's threat to his pride rather than on the prurient spectacle of lesbians making love to each other, or, better yet, of including him in a threesome, which is what I would assume the socially expected reactions of American men to be. The worry about injured vanity that preoccupies Paul and his male interlocutors makes sense within a framework in which the emphasis of French masculinity is on actually providing sexual gratification to women, whereas in the American case, masculine pride is linked more to objective indices of sexual prowess such as getting and maintaining an erection on demand and accomplishing a large number of sex acts with different women. (In the American masculine imagination, these achievements are generally presumed to indicate an ability to please women.)

Emotional Complexity in French Erotic Narratives

In other stories, the aftermath of an exciting erotic encounter is less clear-cut. Part of the pleasure of the narrative is figuring out in retrospect what really transpired emotionally during a particular encounter. For instance, "On Patmos, an irresistible crescendo of desire" details the amorous experience of a married woman vacationing alone in the Mediterranean after the friend who was supposed to have accompanied her backs out. The story's opening paragraph shows that the moralistic language of "temptation" is not completely foreign to the French cultural context:

Ricardo was too handsome. And the night on Patmos was too tempting. I told myself that I would end up succumbing to his charms, just as I had succumbed to the beauty and the harmony of this island which was different from the others. (Rosnay 2007b:35).

The remainder of the story, however, follows a much more typical French narrative trajectory, emphasizing a lengthy and atmospheric increase of intimacy between the two rather than tension that builds until it snaps suddenly.

On the mule track to Chora, the village which overlooks the island, [Ricardo] ended up at my side, almost naturally. We walked together toward the monastery. And talked. And laughed.

We didn't know each other, but everything was so simple.

Was it the wind which blew in from the sea? The procession that we encountered at the entry of the village? Was it the intoxicating odor of incense which floated in the air? I felt free, suddenly different.

"Your eyes are sparkling," he said to me.

"It is because you are looking at me," I heard myself reply. (Rosnay 2007b:36-37)

These sorts of direct mutual compliments are fairly uncommon in American erotic stories. If they are not entirely displaced by either a half-angry, half-erotic confrontation between the two parties or by a daring protective act on the part of the hero, the compliments in American stories are often muttered half-willingly, in comic resentment of the attraction each person feels toward the other. Here, however, the typical French pattern is on display, a steady and relaxed increase

in intimacy. When the narrator and her Columbian suitor stop to admire the view from a particularly beautiful spot:

Ricardo took my hand in his own. I didn't retract it. He leaned in to kiss me. I pushed him back, gently. He broke into a peal of laughter.

It was his laugh, I think, that made me give in. He didn't let go of my hand again. He had incredibly tender gestures. A way of speaking... Of smiling at me...

For hours, we wended our way through the narrow streets in the village's labyrinth of whitewashed houses, in the shadow of the monastery's high walls. He began telling me about Barranquilla, that city near Cartagena where he had been born. And about America which he was about to conquer with his start-up company. He was slender [*fin*] and funny. And, above all, brilliant (Rosnay 2007b:38).

Their courtship builds toward a climax when they return to the boat. The narrator is at the threshold of his door, "clinging to him" and "panting." She can already imagine making love with him. At the last moment, however, she pulls away.

Was it my head? Was it my body which pulled away? I was not ashamed of betraying Olivier [her husband]. No, it wasn't that. I wasn't ready, I didn't want to ruin those unforgettable moments.

We had spent a magical day together, something infinitely more torrid than we could have experienced together that night. I wanted that to be the thing that endured: that embrace on the threshold; the memory of his legs grasping my feet under the table; the first kiss in the chapel, with its heady odor of incense and the melodious voice of bearded Orthodox priests; the short voyage in the *caïque* boat. And those bewitching caresses which, throughout the whole length of that sainted day, increased my desire to a level I had never known before. I didn't want to sleep with Ricardo because I didn't want to spoil Patmos. (Rosnay 2007b:40-41)

In short, the lengthy prelude to love-making has been so satisfying and perfect that the narrator doesn't want to risk disrupting it with an actual consummation.

The following morning, at breakfast, the narrator and Ricardo hold hands and chat, laugh, and discuss South American literature. He does not hold it against her that they did not make love the previous night: "On the contrary, I saw it plainly in his eyes: he had had a powerful experience as well. He knew, as I did, that we had perhaps lived through the most erotic moment of our lives" (Rosnay 2007b:42). For both partners, then, the emotional resonance of their heady day together is more significant than any mere sexual encounter they could have had. This conclusion is a world away from the *Cosmo* excerpts' preoccupation with the sex act as a virtuoso physical performance.

In fairness, it should be pointed out that there is another undercurrent of meaning present at the end of this interlude on Patmos. The narrator recounts their moment of parting as follows:

The last memory that I have of him is at the quay at Priaeus. Ricardo, surrounded by suitcases. Ricardo, a little lost.

“Above all, don’t give me your address or your telephone number. Nor your e-mail...,” I told him with a smile. We embraced for a long time. And, afterward, I can still see him in my mind’s eye, following me with his eyes, searching for me, as I pull away in my taxi (Rosnay 2007b:42).

In a coda to her story, the narrator seems to admit the possibility that the emotional aftermath of their encounter was not as sweet for Ricardo as it was for her. She says that three years have now elapsed since their meeting, and she has reflected a great deal on what happened. “But I don’t regret anything,” she concludes:

In the end, I wanted something other than a brief fling in his cabin on that cruise ship that would leave me, and him, no memory. I didn’t want to be just another amorous conquest for him. I wanted to remain that supremely desirable—and eternally desired—woman.

The unobtainable Léa whom he met, for the space of several hours, on that island of dreams. She whom he will remember his whole life: the Léa of Patmos. (Rosnay 2007b:42-43)

The uncharitable reading of this conclusion is that Léa gets the better of the encounter. She gets to play the role of the supremely desirable goddess, while Ricardo is left on the quay, “a little lost” and broken hearted, while she returns to her comfortable Parisian married life. At worst, we could accuse Léa of staging an elegant drama that is equal parts aesthetic finesse and tribute to her self-image as archetypal Venus, while Ricardo shrinks to a mere prop in her self-glorifying pageant.

The French tendency to valorize highly emotional and aestheticized eroticism lends itself to egotistical abuse by attractive persons in instances that are in fact clearer than this one. In the present case, however, it should be pointed out that Léa’s story is susceptible to a more forgiving, and an equally culturally plausible, interpretation. In this reading, there is more emotional symmetry between Léa and Ricardo. Just as Léa reveled in the role of desirable woman, so Ricardo could fully inhabit and prize his part in making her bloom. He is left knowing that his conversation and caresses made this elegant Parisian woman forget herself for one glorious day. And if he genuinely fell in love with her, is it not also true that she was truly besotted with him during the hours they spent together? Again, the question hinges in part on whether we judge their time together by its sexual “conclusion,” or lack thereof, or whether we treat the emotions that precede this as having an integrity in their own right. The American style of storytelling about love and sex predisposes us toward the former conclusion, the French style toward the latter.

However we choose between these competing interpretations, they point toward two further considerations. The first is that, in either case, they position us to think of men’s response to sex and love as being as emotionally freighted as women’s. It is not that French narratives never invoke the possibility of a “notches in the bedpost” approach to sex by men.

Indeed, one of Léa's justifications for not sleeping with Ricardo is precisely that she does not want to be remembered merely as one more amorous conquest for him. Rather, it is that French stories give a fuller sense of how men's emotional involvement evolves over the course of a seduction, just as women's does.

This leads directly to another observation that arises out of the interpretive challenge we face with Léa's Patmos story. French stories often acknowledge the complexity of sexuality's emotional significance. For one thing, an erotic experience can be an admixture of pleasure and regret. Its precise emotional significance can be weighed, considered, and savored in retrospect. The emotional complexity of erotic experience also reinforces its aesthetic dimension. Nevertheless, as we will see, the high valuation placed on mutually exalting erotic experience does not guarantee that it will be used fairly by those with access to it.

For instance, Véronique, the narrator of "It Happened in the Lyon-Valence" describes her husband as "super." Vincent heads his own successful business, "has a very reassuring teddy-bear side to him," is an attentive husband, proves his love amply in bed, and lives with Véronique and their two young sons (age 3 and 6) in a comfortable rural villa. Véronique also reveals to the reader that "when I was 19 years old and was working as a secretary in his business Vincent turned his back on his entire family in order to conquer me. He left his wife to marry me" (Tena 2002:156).

Véronique thus won her husband at an early age in the teeth of his existing marriage and his family's opposition. So what could be her complaint? After ten years together, Vincent no longer makes her dreamy. "His affectionate-stuffed-animal demeanor tires me" (Tena 2002:156) she says, and she is a bit bored by her rural surroundings. Rescue arrives in the form of a tall, slender, impeccably dressed man named whom she meets on the train to Lyon, where she is continuing her studies in business management.

Their courtship proceeds at a snail's pace. Their first exchange involves the man simply holding the door of the railroad car open for her. At that point, she is pregnant with her second child and blossoming [*épanouie*], and the man leaves her "with a huge smile in his eyes while looking at my large belly, [saying] 'I have never seen a woman as radiant as you'" (Tena 2002:156). After she has had the baby and recommenced her studies, she sees him again on the train and learns that his name is Paul-Alain. He works for the Regional Directorate of the Patrimony¹³ and is impressively cultured; he, like Véronique, is married. A months-long acquaintance ensues, polite and hesitant on both sides but more and more erotically loaded. The pivotal moment at which he openly declares his desire for her is worth citing because it illustrates so many culturally characteristic facets of the story:

Exactly like in *A Brief Encounter*, that old English black-and-white film that I have seen so many times on television, he took me by the arm and led me to the station buffet where we drank a Coca-Cola. I was really content to have his erudition, his frivolity, and his wolf's eyes in my busy life as a mother and a belated student. We saw each other the next day in the high-speed train [*TGV*].

¹³ An arm of the state devoted to preserving France's cultural heritage.

That day I wore a red dress with a plunging neckline that he kept looking at. He then told me that he had desired me from the first day. He complimented my peach complexion and my red hair. He told me that he couldn't help thinking of me night and day, and asked me not to run away from him anymore. He brought me a novel by Philippe Djian, his favorite writer.¹⁴ I leafed through the book while stealing glances at him, and the more he talked, the more I was moved. I had only one desire: that he take me in his arms (Tena 2002:156-57).

Though she does not say so, Véronique's decision to wear the revealing red dress seems like a clear signal to Paul-Alain that he may proceed with his seduction, and he is savvy enough to take the hint. As is characteristic of the normative French seduction script, the initiative to push the courtship further must be initiated by the man, but the woman can make taking the next step irresistible (Wadham 2009:43-44). In addition, this moment of the courtship is soaked in literary references. The black-and-white film written by Noël Coward and the novel by Philippe Djian provide shorthand evocations of a particular emotional mood. Véronique doesn't actually read the novel she has been given, but basks in what Paul-Alain says about it. Though this is not spelled out, he presumably evokes its artistic qualities and links the heroine's attractions to the world created by the novel. This evinces the erotic power of cultural capital, whose elevated importance in the French context has so frequently been noted by scholars (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]; Lamont 1992b; Lamont and Thévenot 2000).

One question the reader must answer for herself or himself is whether Véronique's story is a tale of beautiful, slowly developing, emotionally genuine passion or the silly self-indulgence of a bored young woman who is an effective seductress but also rather shallow, not very well educated, and easily impressed by a veneer of pseudo-profundity. I happen to have seen *Betty Blue*, a movie based on a Philippe Djian novel that won an Oscar for best foreign film, which struck me as pretentious and clichéd.¹⁵ This colors my evaluation of the entire narrative, since it somewhat discredits the hero's aesthetic taste and hence much of his erotic appeal. This in turn calls into question Véronique's judgment as she embarks on the affair. This is, of course, part of the dynamic by which invocations of aesthetic taste in this kind of personal narrative invite the reader to judge the larger narrative in part on the basis of the tastes being invoked.

In any event, after some exciting literary discussion, a sultrier period of courtship ensues. Paul-Alain predicts to Véronique that she will have an erotic dream featuring them together that night, though they have not yet even kissed. She thinks this a boastful remark, but then is overwhelmed when his prediction is borne out, demonstrating how deeply he has penetrated into

¹⁴ Djian is the author of multiple short stories, novels, and screenplays including the script for *Betty Blue*, which won an Oscar nomination in 1986 for Best Foreign Language Film.

¹⁵ The heroine for whom the film is named combines a huge sexual appetite with an unstable personality, and discovers the hero's hidden literary talent before succumbing to madness. In the movie's most offensive moment, the hero decides/realizes that the heroine has been made into a vegetable by the mental hospital when he feels her breasts and gets no response. He euthanizes her with a pillow, freeing her spirit to serve as his muse as he finally pursues his literary calling.

her unconscious mind.¹⁶ As Véronique notes, “Nothing carnal had actually yet happened between us, but I was more aroused [*troublée*] than I had ever been before” (Tena 2002:157).

Véronique and Paul-Alain do end up consummating their affair, which has been developing for three years. As we have grown accustomed to expect, the narrative doesn’t dwell on the blow-by-blow details of their first sex together, but rather describes its emotional impact on the heroine:

This all happened a month ago. Since then, not a day or an hour goes by without my thinking of him. In fact, I have the impression of having woken up from a long sleep. For the first time, a man absolutely bowled me over [*m’a fait chavirer*] and I am experiencing all sorts of new sensations. My life has begun to sparkle again, my body is coming back to life, and I am having erotic dreams.

But what should I do now? (Tena 2002:157)

Paul-Alain has told Véronique that he is ready to “take the big leap” with her, and although she wants to, she wonders “whether she can and should let herself be carried away and sacrifice everything that, up till now, has been my reason for living?” (Tena 2002:157). Paul-Alain’s travel times have changed because of work, and he can no longer take the same train as her. This isn’t so bad, however, since he uses the opportunity to inundate her mobile phone with messages professing his love, and it gives her time to think.

This is where the narrative ends, and the reader is left to reflect on what she would do if she were in Véronique’s place. The advice of Elise, *Nous Deux*’s agony aunt, would no doubt be to stay in her marriage and figure out a way to use her new erotic energy to provoke her husband out of his “affectionate stuffed animal” persona. Given the ending of stories like Léa’s of Patmos, and given that Paul-Alain’s alleged change of hours of work might actually be a way of slowing down the affair, despite his delicious phone messages, one senses that Véronique will ultimately make the sensible choice not to explode her family life for another union that cannot fail to be anticlimactic after its magical start.

Does the reader feel sympathy for the cuckolded husband? After all, he risked all of his closest existing relationships—marriage and family of origin—to marry young Véronique, and his only failing with regard to her is to be too much of a “teddy bear.” On the other hand, he should have known that marrying a highly seductive (and seducible) young wife after an extramarital affair entailed the risk of a repeat with a different man. Nor, of course, had he himself scrupled at casting aside his first wife when a more exciting prospect appeared. Although the reader may have some sympathy for the too-affectionate cuckold, she will not be able to feel unreservedly sorry for him unless she overlooks some of the story’s pertinent details.

The set of considerations that the reader is implicitly invited to contemplate when reflecting on Véronique’s story is also characteristic of the dominant culture’s attitudes toward infidelity. A reader would have to do real violence to the intent of the narrative to view the affair

¹⁶ This particular detail forms an instructive contrast with the Cosmo excerpts, four of which (13 percent) have the hero promise the heroine mind-blowing sex before he makes good on his promise (Kane 2007; Kleypas 2007; Kwitney 2002; Lee 2007). The French version of this erotic gambit emphasizes the extent to which hero’s erotic prowess transcends the purely physical.

from entirely within the perspective that adultery is always unforgiveable and tawdry. After all, the courtship stretches over three whole years and could not be called brutish or unrestrained. The affair is selfish and a little silly in its literary pretensions, but Véronique and Paul-Alain's erotic bond seems genuine, and her thoroughgoing delight in the affair's (apparently one-off) sexual consummation is obviously unfeigned. Although the two lovers' prior marital obligations are far from being morally irrelevant—indeed, they will probably prevail in the end—but they are also not the only consideration in view.

Lâcher Prise and the Durability of Cultural Models of Love

The cultural logic that places mutual sympathy at the center of the most heartfelt human relationships is not unchallenged in contemporary French culture. But it provides a powerful underlying pull on romantic relationships between men and women. We can see this logic triumphant in “Vanessa’s” “This is My Story: I Wasn’t Wearing Makeup That Day...” in *Elle*. The blurb for the piece reads: “She had always wanted to be the most beautiful, the most feminine, the most brilliant [woman or person]. But, one day, Frédéric surprised her when she was totally weak, fragile, and unattractive. And something happened between them.”¹⁷

Vanessa, who is 41, describes herself as being what a sort of social and erotic “overachiever.” She highly prizes her independence, always tries to outshine everyone else, is always looking for a more perfect man, and tends to go to bed with men and then dump them quickly. At age 20, she realizes that she needs to be less uptight in her relationships with others, and purchases a self-help book entitled *The Secrets of Letting Go* [*Les Secrets du lâcher-prise*]. The book evidently also provides advice on how to be “natural” and relaxed in social situations, which accords with the emphasis on the paradoxical combination of social polish and “natural,” or sincere emotional openness that French articles from the 1950s emphasize so tirelessly. But Vanessa says the book merely deepened her efforts at managing every detail of her self-presentation:

I thought it was working, but I didn’t see the extent to which it was all artificial and was just another way of protecting myself. The wall of my intellect was always there, vigilant, even when I was so proud because, on a date, I had succeeded in being “natural.” Natural, you say... it was just one more edifice. In reality, I was an impenetrable fortress. I could make love with a man without really being there. I took my pleasure and, once I had done so, the man was a stranger to be dumped as soon as possible. A gay friend told me: “You react like a man.” Another friend said: “It’s because you go out with men who aren’t in your league.” Ah, so many friends were in the know about my [love] life... I have the impression that, for years, I made my friends witnesses of my intimate life. In order not to be alone with myself (Fontanel 2007b:162).

Vanessa’s gay friend’s reaction to her emotionally distant approach to the opposite sex reminds us that the stereotype of men who use women for sex without really committing themselves

¹⁷ The blurb actually misrepresents the events told in the narrative: “Vanessa” is actually dressed up and made up when she meets Frédéric. But the blurb is true to the spirit of the narrative, as evident below.

emotionally is present in French cultural context. Just as the rise of pornography is having an evident influence on French people's sexual expectations, women's appropriation of this model of predatory sexuality seems to be a relatively novel and surprising possibility in the French cultural context.¹⁸ Just as was the case with pornography, however, this possibility is portrayed as deeply undesirable. Characteristically, when Vanessa describes her approach to sex, she focuses not on the mechanics of the act itself, but on its emotional dimensions. During this emotionally arid period of her sexual life, she was far from being an "impenetrable fortress" in a literal, bodily sense. Rather, she was *emotionally* impenetrable and invulnerable, and hence inaccessible to the deepest aspects of erotic life as conceived within hegemonic French culture.

Vanessa's ability to distance herself emotionally from the opposite sex falters when she comes down with mono and doesn't have the energy to keep up her front. Feeling totally drained, she goes out in public without makeup or stylish clothes. To her great surprise, she finds that men seem to be paying her more attention than ever before! She says:

It was simultaneously delicious and disquieting. I had always mistrusted men's penchant for fragile women. Unsurprisingly, I despised the idea that you have to be a weak woman in order to please men. This seemed to me to be the beginning of men's domination over women... (Fontanel 2007b:162).

After her experience of illness and men's solicitude, however, "on my own, humbly, I realized that usually it was I who tried to dominate men."

Vanessa's prior emphasis on being "strong" and retaining her independence sounds feminist. But her efforts at brilliance are focused on social display, especially before men, and position her as a competitor with other women: she wants to be "the most beautiful, the most feminine." Vanessa's stance toward the world is in fact never viably feminist, since it never envisages a domain of personal achievement outside of her appeal to men.

Two months after she has started work again, Vanessa goes to a party thrown by friends. She is dressed up and wearing makeup, and thinks she is back to her old ways. But, in fact, she is not. At the party, she meets Frédéric, who approaches her with the same benevolent look she has been getting from so many people recently. They have a lengthy chat punctuated by pauses that in the past she would have rushed to fill so as to avoid "an awkward silence. Now, I understood that, at bottom, the goal was to let that thing which is so wonderfully awkward into the conversation..." (Fontanel 2007b:163). Vanessa ends up saying good night to Frédéric in her car:

One thing led to another, or, rather, as if by magic, he was holding me to him. At one point, he said, "And?" It was clearly a way of asking what we would do next. I said "I don't have the strength..." Where did a statement like that come from inside me? Looking at me, he said: "I don't either..." We laughed. We laughed, and, at that moment, I felt like I was going to begin to cry, and, right then, my face, although calm and relaxed, was wet with tears. I was crying because I was

¹⁸ Recall that this development also surfaces in "My summer flirt takes me for the woman of his life!" (Pouzol 2007a).

relaxing. It was as shameful as peeing on yourself. I had never shown anyone such weakness. Clearly, it was not a hysterical crying fit; on the contrary, it was very peaceful. Frédéric stayed like that, next to me in the car. He didn't run off in alarm. I said "I'm really exhausted..." Very gently, he said, "Are you sad?" And I responded, "No, it's just..." He waited, so patient, so tolerant. You would have said he was ready to wait there all night in the car. With a sort of kindness, yes, there's really no other word for it, which hung in the air between us. "It's...", I tried again. Could I bring myself to reveal my childlike side, my naïveté? And, through my tears, I don't know how, but I was able to put my finger on it: "You know, it's just a sweet softness [*c'est de la douceur*]." Admitting this left me feeling so defenseless... and so dumbfounded. How could I have thought, as I did before, that it was possible to have a relationship with someone without that sort of nakedness? (Fontanel 2007b:163)

Vanessa describes a sort of re-awakening to a kind of cultural wisdom that she has temporarily forgotten. It was lying there, behind her rebarbative façade of erotic aggression and independence, waiting to awaken men's sympathy, which itself has been dormant, waiting to be activated, all along.

Vanessa's narrative will strike most American readers with feminist sympathies, I believe, as simultaneously appealing and disquieting. The gentleness of relations between the sexes that it promises is charming. But it also seems to endorse an emotional dependency on men that will set off alarm bells among these readers, just as Vanessa herself earlier rejected such a template for romance between men and women. In a way, this story demonstrates the distinct challenges for feminism posed by the resiliency of gentle and humane eroticism in the French context. It is the very attractiveness of that ideal that makes it such a powerful distraction from demands for gender equality.

SOCIAL CLASS AND FRENCH IDEALS OF SOCIABILITY AND EROTICISM

Throughout the decade of the 2000s, *Nous Deux* ran a regular feature entitled "Baby of the Week," then "Bundle of Joy [*Chouchou/te*] of the Week," showing a photo of a reader's baby boy or girl—none older than two years of age—together with a description of the baby's personal qualities.¹⁹ Each character sketch is both flattering and fanciful, conjuring up an imaginary future of amorous conquests and career choices. The feature inevitably puts a certain amount of emphasis on juvenile traits, for example, using of the adjective "cute" [*mignon*] and discussing bright blue eyes more often than we would expect from a description of adults. But most of each profile focuses on putative qualities that are unambiguously adult, such as wit in conversation, choosiness in selecting an erotic partner, or a good head for numbers. Hence the feature can be read as a projection of the sorts of qualities that *Nous Deux*'s editors believe their largely working-class readers hope for in their children and grand-children. The very

¹⁹ In 2002, the feature used the fiction of profiling the personality traits of all children with a given name, for example "Girls named Louise are beautiful and sociable," but this device gave way by 2006 to a characterization of the particular child.

fancifulness of each character sketch requires that it be an extrapolation of cultural ideals without interference from the idiosyncrasies of real individuals.

I sampled 50 baby profiles, half boys, half girls, from the 2000s. Twelve are from the magazine's 2002 editions, two are from 2006, and the remaining 36 are from 2007.²⁰ The feature employs a standard format but adds enough variation to lend each profile a sense of individuality. By 2006, the feature has settled on a template that opens with a description of the child's general personality traits, describes his or her future love life—always heterosexual, of course—and closes by mentioning a few occupations that would best fit his or her personality.

In contradistinction to most of my other cross-national magazine comparisons, this genre is unique to the French magazines in my sample. Unfortunately, this rules out direct cross-context comparison. Still, the feature is vivid and suggestive enough to merit inclusion in the analysis.

Loving Futures: French Working Class Ideals of Personality and Eroticism

To an American reader, one striking feature of the *Chouchou* feature is the sheer exuberance with which it celebrates pleasure given to others through social interaction. A propensity frequently mentioned in the character sketches is that of spreading good cheer through a sunny disposition and a sense of humor. Arsène is described as follows: "Always up for a good laugh, he's a real clown who has no equal for amusing his family and friends" ("Le chouchou de la semaine: Arsène" 2007). Or, "Having Titouan at your sides assures you of never being sad. This little boy whirls around those whom he loves without ever tiring" ("Le chouchou de la semaine: Titouan" 2007). Girls are equally celebrated as bringers of good cheer, as in: "Talkative and always ready to take part in any conversation, Sarah can cheer up the grumpiest of grumpy people" ("La chouchoute de la semaine: Sarah" 2007). (Cheering up "even the grumpiest people" is a recurrent motif in these portraits.)

Roughly a third of all boys' (9 of 25) and girls' (8 of 25) profiles mention the good cheer they bring to parents, friends, loved ones, and/or the people around them.²¹ If we add in the three profiles that feature children's sunny dispositions without explicitly mentioning those who benefit from them, fully 40% of girls' and boys' portraits fit into the "cheery" or "good humored" category. Several children are said to make a goal of bringing happiness to everyone around them, as in: "Merlin is cheerful, smiling, sociable, and full of mischief. Merlins are idealists: they want everyone around them to be happy" ("Le bébé de la semaine: Merlin" 2002) or "Maelys has made it her mission to make the people she loves happy, and she spreads her good humor wherever she goes" ("La chouchoute de la semaine: Maelys" 2007). There a hint of vocation here, but one that is very different from the Calvinist-derived sense of vocation that is so central to American notions of the self. This mission is other-oriented and is achieved through interaction. Cheering others is also a momentary achievement: it is the product of a unique and evanescent interaction, and must be constantly renewed. One can easily imagine that

²⁰ The disproportionate 2007 sample is due to the generosity of the magazine's editorial offices, which gave me as many duplicate issues as they could from their archives for that year.

²¹ Appendix A to this chapter provides details on the coding criteria for each category and excerpts each passage (in the original French and with my English translation) that led to a particular profile's inclusion in that category.

this imperative of making others happy through interaction could be anxiety-provoking, since it is never assured or complete. Indeed, this anxiety is antithetical to the ease and spontaneity that is so indispensable to pleasurable social interchange. One profile tacitly acknowledges this tension as follows: “Louise always needs to give pleasure to others, but doesn’t have to exert herself to do so” (“Le bébé de la semaine: Louise” 2002). This, of course, is the ideal solution to the problem. Other profiles emphasize the untiring quality of children’s efforts: “Having Titouan at your sides assures you of never being sad. This little boy whirls around those whom he loves without ever tiring” (“Le chouchou de la semaine: Titouan” 2007). Speaking of the “idealistic” Merlins who always “want everyone around them to be happy,” another profile claims that “[t]hey have very charming [*séduisantes*] personalities, but, in order to preserve this vivacity, they must have a way of recharging their batteries [*ils doivent faire le plein d’énergie*]. For that, they need to feel loved” (“Le bébé de la semaine: Merlin” 2002). An American reading of the latter passage might occasion a sense of alarm: are “Merlins” dangerously co-dependent on others? But this worry would be out of place; it is not followed up with a compensatory phrase as happens when a sense of tension arises in other profiles. Furthermore, two other profiles, one male and one female, mention a need for reassurance about the love of others without any trace of disapproval (“Le bébé de la semaine: Louise” 2002; “Le bébé de la semaine: Merlin” 2002; “Le chouchou de la semaine: Robinson” 2007). Instead, the need to feel loved simply encourages participation in the endless cycle of generating emotional warmth through social interactions with others.

A cheery disposition is not the only other-oriented trait praised in the “Chouchou” profiles. The feature also celebrates gentler social traits such as kindness, sweetness, tenderness, generosity, thoughtfulness, and concern for others. Nine of 25 profiles (36%) of boys feature such qualifiers, as do six of 25 (24%) of the girls’ descriptions—eight of 25 (32%) if we stretch the category to include children who are said to delight those around them without specifying precisely why. Like the cheery soul archetype, then, the tender-hearted altruist profile is equally distributed across both sexes. Thus, of Emeline, we learn that “Not only is she graceful, but she also has simplicity, generosity, and kindness going for her” (“La chouchoute de la semaine: Emeline” 2007), while Merlin is “tender and sweet” (“Le bébé de la semaine: Merlin” 2002) and Gaston is “perceptive and considerate” (“Le bébé de la semaine: Gaston” 2002). Baptiste (a boy) manages to combine cheeriness with kindness: “So it has been one year [his age] that he has been making those around him happy, since he is simultaneously kind and cuddly, funny and teasing, sensitive and sweet” (“Le chouchou de la semaine: Baptiste” 2007). These profiles give readers no reason to think that men are less tenderhearted than women.

In the two cases where a boy is depicted as having an exaggeratedly masculine demeanor, this is described as a façade concealing a soft interior: “underneath his tough-guy exterior, Lucas hides an infinite tenderness, and his parents and friends know it. The woman of his life will know it too. Not a day will go by without his giving her a little mark of attention or a tender gesture” (“Le chouchou de la semaine: Lucas” 2007). Another boy, Théo, “can appear authoritarian from time to time, but this is to hide the timidity he sometimes feels.” In fact, he

will be “tender and understanding with his friends and the woman of his life, who will be able to confide in him in complete confidence” (“Le chouchou de la semaine: Théo” 2006). In the world of *Chouchou de la Semaine*, where every personality is a gem, even the gruffest men hide sweet, sensitive souls.

The two categories discussed so far—the live wires and the sweethearts—account for approximately two thirds (64%) of both the boys’ and girls’ profiles.²² This symmetry by sex does not hold, however, for two other recurrent but less common personality archetypes. The first, predominantly masculine, type could be dubbed the “rationalist with a human side.” Seven of 25 boys (28%) but only one girl (4%) falls into this category. Some of these portraits place particular emphasis on their subject’s emotional composure, as with Josselin’s “unshakeable calm and insouciance” (“Le chouchou de la semaine: Josselin” 2007) or with the profile that opens: “Serene: you can sum up Lenny in this one word” (“Le bébé de la semaine: Lenny” 2002). Other profiles in this category dwell more on analytical prowess, for example, Thomas’ “calm and clear-sighted” ability “to analyze the situation before acting” (“Le chouchou de la semaine: Thomas” 2007) or Adrien’s “objectivity and rigor” (“Le bébé de la semaine: Adrien” 2002). In all cases, however, the reader gets reassurance that being even-keeled and logical does not preclude emotional ties to others. So, for instance, “Marie is decisive, rigorous, and overflowing with tenderness and love” (“Le bébé de la semaine: Marie” 2002) and Adrien, despite his “objectivity and rigor” has an “enormous” “sense of friendship: friends and family are sacred” (“Le bébé de la semaine: Adrien” 2002). Sometimes, we are told that our little rationalist will throw logic to the winds when he falls in love. For example, Josselin

keeps smiling and manages every situation with remarkable serenity. The only time in his life when Josselin will lose his head is the day when he will be flooded by the power of love. In front of the woman of his dreams, his self-possession will suddenly desert him, and perhaps it is this awkwardness and timidity which will win her heart (“Le chouchou de la semaine: Josselin” 2007).

Anton, who is said to be “[i]rreproachably responsible, unfailingly meticulous and with a pronounced taste for figures and for science” will reward “the woman who sets his heart aflame... with tender marks of attention every day: sweet, passionate kisses, flowers, and a thousand small, simple pleasures” (“Le chouchou de la semaine: Anton” 2007). One profile cites more pragmatic evidence of a clear-headed boy’s concern for others: “You can count on him because he is overflowing with ideas and often uses them to help others” (“Le bébé de la semaine: Mathieu” 2002). In another case, the richness of a boy’s emotional life will take an artistic form:

Writing will soon become a means for expressing his profound thoughts and his sentiments. Professionally, he will pursue what appeals to his heart, relegating financial considerations to the back burner. And it’s no surprise that he will choose a career entirely oriented toward art (“Le bébé de la semaine: Lenny” 2002).

²² Overlaps between the two categories make their respective percentages non-additive when taken together.

In sum, this 28% of boys' profiles forms a (predominantly) masculine archetype emphasizing rationality and composure which, while useful and reassuring to others, do not come at the price of a rich, even passionate, emotional life.

This masculine personality profile has a feminine counterpart, what could be called the “dreamer.” Three of 25 girls' character sketches—four of 25 (16%) if we count a somewhat borderline case—emphasize the vivid imagination that allows a girl to escape from reality. One girl is sketched as follows:

“I'm not sleeping, I'm dreaming,” read Marylou's pyjamas. And it is true that this adorable little girl is an incorrigible dreamer. Her head is full of turquoise seas, rainbows, and beautiful cottony clouds on which she would willingly stretch out if she could. In love, there again, Marylou will let herself be carried away by a little girl's dreams. This beautiful princess will patiently await the prince charming who will come on his handsome white horse to spirit her away to a fairytale life of love (“La chouchoute de la semaine: Marylou” 2007).

Another profile takes what seems to be an even more indulgent attitude toward its subject's fantasy life:

Between truth and small white lies, between dream and reality, this little girl [Alicia] loves to imagine how her life could be [otherwise] when it disappoints her. This is not to say that she leads a doleful existence, but she likes to make things even more beautiful, greater, and more marvelous, both for her and for others (“La chouchoute de la semaine: Alicia” 2007).

This passage implicitly approves of “white lies” and strengthens the rationale for Alicia's escapism by noting that she uses it for altruistic ends, as a way to make life more pleasant “both for her and for others.” Another profile of a sensitive and imaginative girl reassures the reader (not without an element of paradox) that, although Camille is “reserved and secretive and tends to put a certain distance between herself and others, this doesn't make her less sociable” (“La chouchoute de la semaine: Camille” 2007). The author of the profiles is aware that a dreamy personality, just like an analytical one, might make a person emotionally detached from others, and hastens to reassure the reader that this will not be so.

In short, the “dreamer” archetype is coded feminine, an inverse of the predominantly masculine, analytical rationalist. Nevertheless, the “Chouchou” profile makes clear that neither personality type comes at the expense of all-important affective ties to others. This similarity transcends the dispositional divide between the genders.

Nous Deux is not a disinterested party in its implicit praise for these girls' escapism; it is the magazine's main *raison d'être*, after all. As I noted earlier, there is a powerful current of elite disapproval of *Nous Deux* in France precisely on the grounds that it fosters unrealistic illusions and sets women up for disappointment. For instance, Françoise Cavé's interviews with female working-class readers of *Nous Deux* in the late 1970s elicit confessions that reading the magazine leaves these women even more depressed about their lot in life when they awaken from the brief bouts of fantasy they obtain from the magazine (Cavé 1981). I am inclined to read

those admissions as culturally scripted—as evidence that these readers have internalized the culturally dominant critique of their reading pleasures.

The differences between these and similar American attitudes of disapproval about romance reading are worth noting. As Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* documents, American popular disapproval tends to dwell on the allegedly “pornographic” character of fantasy fiction, a reaction that stems from a sense of the shamefulness of sexual pleasure, and particularly women's sexual pleasure (Radway 1991 [1984]:54, 104). American scholars and feminists like Radway tend also to worry that romance stories will ideologically co-opt women into an acceptance of patriarchy. The dominant replies to these criticisms in the American cultural context are twofold. One is to appeal to the ideology of individual choice: everyone deserves to enjoy leisure as he or she sees fit, and *de gustibus non est disputandum*. The Smithsonian readers and Radway herself make this case (Radway 1991 [1984]:54, 86-118, passim). Another response is to demonstrate that romance reading is actually agency-enhancing for women, because readers can themselves become authors or critics (Radway 1991 [1984]:68-69, 112), because it broadens their historical or geographical knowledge (Radway 1991 [1984]:107-12) or because it leads them to be more demanding of their husbands (Radway 1991 [1984]:101-02). French elite criticisms of fiction are less likely to emphasize the issue of agency, which working class people are generally assumed to lack through no particular fault of their own. Instead, they tend worry that women will ruin their lives through foolishness or become demoralized by the distance between their dreams and reality.

Nous Deux's implicit counterargument in favor of dreamy romanticism seems to be that this attitude can enhance the quality of romantic relationships by making people try even harder to charm and delight their beloved. For instance, Jade's profile reads: “When in love, Jade would happily see herself on a desert island alone with the man of her dreams, so as to have him all to herself! But since she knows that that's just a sweet dream, she will make her house into a real love-nest where her heart's elect will hasten for respite every evening” (“La chouchoute de la semaine: Jade” 2007).

The four partly overlapping character archetypes just discussed, the cheery soul, the tender-hearted altruist, the rationalist with a human side, and the dreamer, cover 90% of the “Chouchou” profiles. A visual summary of the gender breakdown of each is shown in Figure 4.1.

The “Chouchou” profiles discuss each child's future love life with increasing frequency in later years of the decade. Whereas only a third of the boys' and girls' profiles in the 2002 section of the sample devote attention to a child's amorous future, every sampled profile in 2007 contains this element. Since the lion's share of the sample comes from 2007, this means that fully 84% of both boys and girls in the available sample receive commentary on their love life.

Several of the profiles relish the ease with which members of the opposite sex will fall in love with the featured boy or girl. For an American reader, two aspects of these discussions are striking. The first is that boys are slightly more likely (29% of boys'

profiles with a “love life” discussion) to have their superior powers of seduction celebrated than are girls (19%). The second is that the qualities that make a boy or man an agreeable social companion for others in general overlap extensively with the qualities that make them seductive to women in particular. For instance, of one boy named Robinson it is said that:

he is so adorable that everyone loves him. What is true with his friends in general will be so even more with women. Robinson’s generosity, kindness, and sweetness will make more than one of them melt (“Le chouchou de la semaine: Robinson” 2007).

And another boy, Léo:

has a trump card to play: his overflowing kindness allied to his astounding smile. And if those two arms permit him to win over anyone, later on, they will be simply devastating among the fair sex. Indeed, there will be few girls who will be able to turn away their gaze from this very charming boy (“Le chouchou de la semaine: Léo” 2007).

Journalist Elaine Sciolino notes that the French verb *séduire* and the noun or adjective *séducteur* have less exclusively sexual connotations and lack the predatory edge of the English word “seduce” (Sciolino 2011:5). My evidence confirms this observation. For instance, one boy’s profile uses the word to designate both his ability to delight and charm all people around him and his erotic attractions to girls. The parallel vocabulary must be disguised in English translation if it is not to sound strange to our ears: Nino “has more than one trick up his sleeve when it comes to winning over [*séduire*] the people around him. Charming in everyday life, Nino will become downright seductive [*deviendra carrément séducteur*] with women” (“Le chouchou de la semaine: Nino” 2007).

As Sciolino observes, the wide use of the vocabulary of “seduction” in France extends to all sorts of social interactions. For instance, she finds that businesses regularly talk about “seducing” their customers and business partners, and I myself have seen this wording on advertisements in the Paris subway. Just as significantly, however, the *Chouchou* profiles illustrate how this blurring of the boundaries of erotic language also serves to emphasize the element of emotional warmth in sexuality. It emphasizes the way affection and a comfortable social ease are intrinsic to sexual appeal. Moreover, the linkage between sexual attraction and general emotional warmth is absolutely central to the way men’s erotic appeal to women is culturally dramatized. In the American case, this element of men’s erotic appeal is not entirely absent, but it is less dominant and is frequently overshadowed by the rather opportunistic and even predatory characterization of male sexuality that figures so heavily in American culture (Schalet 2011).

The link between general social and explicitly erotic charm is present in only one of the four girls’ profiles which celebrate success in seduction, as opposed to four of the six similarly classified boys’ profiles. It would be a mistake to give too much weight to these sex ratios, since they are based on a numerically small cluster of cases. But they do provide some

evidence—evidence that is reinforced elsewhere, as we shall see—that men are rhetorically highly eroticized in French discourse. Deploying classically second-wave feminist vocabulary, we could say that French men seem as likely as women to be made into “sexual objects” for the delectation of the opposite sex. This would be mistaken, however. Men appear more as “erotic subjects” than as “sexual objects.” That is, men’s attractiveness is actively produced in empathetic interaction with others rather than being projected onto them by others. It is also celebrated as an honorable achievement rather than being used to belittle them.

The “love life” portions of the *Chouchou* profiles regularly celebrate their subjects’ indefatigable romanticism. For example, three girls’ and six boys’ love profiles (or 14% and 29%, respectively) emphasize their subject’s assiduous devotion to their partner. Sometimes this is a description of the courtship itself, as with Loïc, who “will be ready to do anything to win his chosen one. He will move to the ends of the earth for his sweetheart, or will take the moon down from the heavens if she wishes” (“Le chouchou de la semaine: Loïc” 2007). More frequently, however, profiles of devotion in love emphasize the quotidian efforts which the person will make to please his or her beloved. Thus, “[t]he woman who sets [Anton’s] heart aflame will be covered with tender marks of attention every day: sweet, passionate kisses, flowers, and a thousand small, simple pleasures” (“Le chouchou de la semaine: Anton” 2007). Similarly, “A romantic soul, [Amaury] will look for ways to amaze his sweetheart, to surprise and seduce her, as if he continually wanted to reconquer her” (“Le chouchou de la semaine: Amaury” 2007). The female equivalent to this is represented by Alicia, who “won’t rest without making each day that passes a delight for her better half. A little attention here, a surprise kiss there, anything will be fair game in order to prevent things from becoming routine” (“La chouchoute de la semaine: Alicia” 2007). This emphasis on continually “reconquering” one’s spouse, of ensuring above all that routine does not set in, is reminiscent of Raymonde Carroll’s ethnographic observation about a widespread French dread of falling into a routine or “boring” relationship with one’s spouse (Carroll 1988 [1987]:64, 68). This emphasis on constantly renewing the erotic charge in a relationship by assiduous effort fits with the more general dynamic of needing constantly to renew pleasurable social interactions with others, a dynamic discussed earlier in this section. The fact that boys’ profiles are twice as likely as girls’ to mention this sort of assiduity in love reinforces the sense that, at least in the ideal, men are just as driven to maintain the vitality of couples’ relationships if anything more assiduously than women.

The anxieties that sometimes emerge in the *Chouchou* profiles suggest further continuities in the French complex of attitudes toward men that we have traced from the 1950s forward. For instance, a substantial minority of love profiles provide some comment on the personal qualities of the boy or girl’s future partner (10% of boys’ and 38% of girls’ love profiles). Most of the discussions of female partners focus on the way the profile’s subject will view them—e.g., whether he will care about her physical appearance. But commentary on the male partners is more specific about their qualities. The girls’ requirements of their prince charming include charm, humor, sweetness, eloquence in declarations of love, and one demanding girl’s “romantic and strong, handsome and intelligent, funny and sensitive...in a

word, perfect!” (“La chouchoute de la semaine: Daphné” 2007). The trait with a plurality of mentions, however—in three of eight profiles—is his fidelity. For instance, to please Clara, “a man will have to evince irreproachable fidelity and honesty” (“La chouchoute de la semaine: Clara” 2007), Evie expects “unfailing, wholehearted, and unconditional” love from a man (“La chouchoute de la semaine: Evie” 2007), and “fickle boys won’t have any chance of attracting [Maelys’s] attention” (“La chouchoute de la semaine: Maelys” 2007). As we saw in French women’s magazines’ fiction, advice, and reader surveys from the 1950s, the threat of infidelity is a chronic worry in a culture which so prominently celebrates erotic attraction.

Boys’ profiles also show evidence of the same characteristic anxiety about men’s excessive devotion to work at the expense of relationships that we saw in 1950s French magazines. For instance, a 2002 profile remarks that “Théo is ambitious at work, but this doesn’t prevent him from being tender and understanding with his friends and the woman of his life” (“Le chouchou de la semaine: Théo” 2006). This lone mention of ambition for advancement at work comes with a caveat suggesting how threatening such a quality might be to the social sympathies that are indispensable for appealing personhood. Other boys’ profiles reassure the reader that they are not overly concerned with money. We are told that Gaston “will love to surround himself with beautiful things, with valuable objects... But don’t see an excessive attachment to money in this; it is above all the aesthetic side which will matter to him” (“Le bébé de la semaine: Gaston” 2002). Of another boy, Lenny, we read, “Professionally, he will follow his heart above all, relegating the financial aspect to the back burner” (“Le bébé de la semaine: Lenny” 2002). The denial of a desire to make money is a frequent, indeed practically unanimous, finding in comparative studies of France, particularly those that take the United States as a foil (Carroll 1988 [1987]; Lamont 1992a; Lamont 2000; Lamont and Thévenot 2000; Tocqueville 2002 [1840]). In this context, it is notable that the most explicit rejections of this possibility come in boys’ profiles, suggesting that men may be seen as particularly vulnerable to this sort of vice, perhaps because they are assumed to be more vulnerable to the blandishments of the work world.

Since each child’s profile ends with a series of suggestions about suitable occupations, the *Chouchou* feature permits us to tally the gendering of career aspirations absent any practical constraints. Table 4.2 shows predominantly female, predominantly male, and sex-mixed occupations in the *Chouchou* sample. To be classified as predominantly male or predominantly female, I require that the occupation be attributed to one sex by at least a 75% (3 to 1) rate.

[Table 4.2 about here]

As the table shows, female-typed occupations include the caring occupations and the decorative arts. Male-typed occupations include those centered on manipulation of the physical world or of technology: artisans, athletes, firefighters, soldiers, and computer experts. Hyper-rational engineers and chess champions are also typed male, as are professions involving the law and justice. The strong symbolic identification between men and the law can also be seen in other publications, like Elisabeth Weissman’s February 12, 2007 childrearing advice article in *Elle* entitled “Can mothers incarnate the law?” Weissman’s article answers the question

affirmatively, but the very fact that such a question would be posed in the most elite French magazine as late as 2007 seems very gender-retrograde from an American standpoint. And, indeed, the sole *Chouchou* profile to feature a future female judge goes to great lengths to emphasize the way she will not let legal authority compromise her femininity:

An iron fist in a velvet glove, Daphné is made for professions with responsibility in which you must make yourself respected while staying sweet and diplomatic. She will be a judge who keeps order in her courtroom without ever raising her voice, or a firm but just CEO ("La chouchoute de la semaine: Daphné" 2007).

Nevertheless, the *Nous Deux* feature does not stereotype leadership in general as a male domain: two of the three future politicians in the sample are girls, as are the two CEO candidates (including Daphné). The feature gives commercial activities in general a female tinge, though the 5:2 sex ratio does not quite make my designated cutoff for a predominantly female occupation. Academics, teachers, journalists, and most creative occupations such as writers, performing artists, and those involving "the Arts" with a capital A, have no sex valence in this sample. For no reason that I can fathom, however, visual artists in particular are predominantly male in this sample.

In sum, plenty of the traditional gender role stereotypes persist in this sample of ideal occupations for girls and boys, for example the distinction between caring and disciplinary occupations, and the reservation of physically demanding and intensely rational/technical occupations for men. In contrast, artistic sensitivity and creativity is *not* gendered female: instead the gender distinction seems to be between decorative (largely female) and the more aesthetically exalted, "art for art's sake" facets of creativity (more male). In addition, the *Chouchou* feature does not stereotype leadership as a masculine trait. Perhaps this is a trace of the French campaign for *Parité*, or equal male and female representation in politics, which became law in 2000, even if it was never put into practice in a rigorous way.

This persistence of gender segregation in the realm of ideal occupations contrasts sharply with the broad emotional and affective similarities between men and women (particularly in the domain of romantic love) that the *Nous Deux* feature posits. Indeed, as we have seen, the *Chouchou* feature goes out of its way to soften stereotypically male (in France) personality patterns such as the meticulous rationalist with assurances of the emotional tenderness hiding beneath the masculine façade. This pattern again echoes the larger findings of the dissertation: sex stereotyping is pervasive throughout French life, but this coexists with a gender-egalitarian conception of men's and women's most intimate, most self-constitutive emotional life.

High-brow Erotic Virtuosi

Like the closely-related working-class ideals of sociability and seductiveness on display in the *Chouchou de la semaine* profiles, magazine representations of more high-brow French presentations of self similarly emphasize the importance of the person's ability to create and derive pleasure from interactions with others. The emphasis of these highbrow presentations of self, however, is less on the person's ability to boost others' morale and more on their extraordinary quality of their aesthetic and emotional experience.

Celebrity profiles are one means of comparing presentations of self in French and American women's magazines. For instance, in 2007, *Marie Claire* had a recurring feature entitled "Talk to me about love" [*Parlez-moi d'amour*] highlighting celebrities' personal experience and philosophy of love. American magazines never ask celebrities to hold forth on love in the abstract, unless they are therapeutic professionals, like "Dr. Phil" McGraw.

French magazine articles which solicit men's opinions about love or sex sometimes note explicitly that the men in question are strongly interested in women. For instance, "Orgasm as Men See It" features a panel of men whose "sole commonalities are: an unfeigned greed for all things related to love, together with a passionate curiosity about women" (Treglia 2007:72). The profile of actor-director Yvan Attal opens with the following sentence: "Having just turned forty, Yvan Attal still refers to women as "girls," and you get the sense that they interest him" (Manceaux 2007b:59). To an American reader, the insistence that men are "interested in women" seems redundant, since the men's sexual orientation is not in doubt. The designation makes sense only as a way of implicitly distinguishing these men from other heterosexual men who are not particularly interested by the opposite sex. The American reader is likely to assume that all straight men are of course interested in sex with women, since the sex drive is natural, innate, and universal. What the French magazine articles are trying to indicate, however, is something different. They are not talking about a brute desire for the sexual act, but about a larger erotic susceptibility to women, a highly developed aesthetic taste for femininity that is also an emotional fascination with them. This sort of erotic interest in women cannot necessarily be taken for granted, the French magazines imply. And, indeed, dominant French culture distinguishes itself from American culture in encouraging men to demonstrate the extraordinary degree to which they feel and manifest this erotic susceptibility. This is the implicit task set before celebrities by Michèle Manceaux's interview.

Manceaux's interview quickly establishes that Yvan Attal is "cheeky and tender," "often depressed," "seductive and complex." His latest film role casts him as a man with a "sensitive heart," and notes that it "suits him as if he were not acting" (Manceaux 2007b:59). The first question Manceaux asks Attal is "What quality do you most admire in your mate, Charlotte Gainsbourg?" Attal's answer honors his partner with the ultimate flattery:

All of them. I'm in the process of putting together several small films for the promotion of her second album; I look at her all day on the storyboard, and I see how much I love everything about her (Manceaux 2007b:59).

When Manceaux asks him in two different ways why his desire for Charlotte has endured despite the fifteen years they have been together, Attal responds by praising her uniqueness and her endless novelty: "I always find her unique; she's unlike any other girl. She really has a grace, a personality, a way of seeing the world and seeing life that please me" (Manceaux 2007b:59), and:

There are moments where I feel like I am rediscovering Charlotte and am, once again, as in love as I was at the beginning. Afterwards, the flow of feeling is different [*le courant passe autrement*], and then it comes back with different

intensities. It's exciting to have an evolving relationship. Charlotte has become my best friend, but she is also my lover" (Manceaux 2007b:60).

Here, Attal both offers high praise to his companion and, more subtly, demonstrates his own extraordinariness inasmuch as he is able to appreciate her unusual array of personal qualities. The more complex and profound the qualities of the person who is being appreciated, the greater the demands on the emotional and aesthetic intelligence of the person who would appreciate her.

The actor Daniel Auteuil, another of Manceaux's interviewees, pays tribute to highbrow French culture's admiration for erotic virtuosity in a different way. He remarks that:

What's great with love is that you feel you're a new person every time... When I am not in love, I feel like I'm missing something. Love is like a motor for me, a fuel that's necessary for existence. Quite often, you invent the feeling out of necessity. You don't think about the long term. I've never regretted being in love (Manceaux 2007a:43).

When asked whether he has suffered because of love, he replies: "Enormously! And I have asked myself if that wasn't what I liked the most about it" (Manceaux 2007a:43). Auteuil's presentation of self in the interview hinges on his openness in admitting the emotional artifice that is behind love. Curiously, this does not diminish the importance he attributes to the emotion. Using the distinction between erotic and companionable love that is well understood in both France and America, Auteuil comments that:

Being in love [*amoureux*] involves the imagination to a great extent. Loving [*Aimer*] someone is more concrete and deeper... For a long time, I loved being in love [*J'ai longtemps aimé l'amour*], and then I met women whom I loved. In the end, I confess, I adored being in love most of all. I couldn't live without that sentiment; it what gave me the energy to act in films—the sense of exaltation carried me along (Manceaux 2007a:44).

Auteuil's account of being in love is curiously self-centered. He admits loving the emotion more than the person who provokes it on any particular occasion.²³ In this sense, his description is almost diametrically opposite to Yvan Attal's encomium to the unique attributes of his partner.

In other senses, however, the two men's statements share important similarities. Both men provide vivid testimony about the importance that erotic attraction to women plays in their lives. Sexual attraction is obviously central to the excitement they describe, but reducing it to a quest for "hot sex" would also do an injustice to the broader emotional infatuation they say they feel. They claim that love has special powers of renewal for them, and Auteuil actually attributes his impressive professional productivity to the emotion. Both men also implicitly attest that their personal experience of love is extraordinarily intense, whether they do so with praise for the singular and multifaceted charms of the woman they love, as does Yvan Attal, or by making erotic passion their central psychic drive, as Auteuil does.

²³ Unsurprisingly, Auteuil has a somewhat hard time explaining convincingly why he has recently decided to get married.

Elite French discussions about women in love similarly emphasize the importance of originality and emotional power. In the February 11, 2002 issue of *Elle*, Olivia de Lamberterie reviews Jérôme Clément's compilation of 16 interviews with famous women on the topic of love (Lamberterie 2002). Clément, a graduate of ÉNA, the super-prestigious *grand école* for public administration, is a former minister of culture and the head of a Franco-German cultural television station. His qualifications in conducting the interviews, then, are rooted less in social scientific expertise than in his social background. His qualifications in conducting the interviews, which were first broadcast on France Culture in the summer of 2001, and, indeed, the design of the book itself, would be improbable in the U.S. context.

The reviewer provides a sense of what readers are expected to look for in such a book. Lamberterie demands expects originality and wit from the interviews, which do not always deliver. They can be

“[b]anal when these ladies fall into generalities—women live only for passion whereas men always keep an eye on their attaché case—and irritating when they sink into an academic lecture—the disappointing Irène Frain—[but] the book takes off when the interviewees reveal themselves” (Lamberterie 2002).

The particular cliché that Lamberterie repudiates here is that women are ultimately more susceptible to love than men because the latter always have their work to interest them. This idea will be familiar to American readers, and provides a reminder that the West's major cultural stereotypes about gender can be found on both sides of the Atlantic. As I have argued before, what is distinctive in the French context is the energy expended within the culture in order to ensure that this eventuality does not materialize, both via praise of men who are passionate about women and through condemnation of men who are too absorbed in work as deeply flawed.

The women interviewed by Jérôme Clément agree that “feelings of being in love and carnal intercourse seem better matched with one another since the appearance of contraception and the legalization of abortion,” but they also mention “the degree to which social life is not favorable to amorous sentiment” (Lamberterie 2002). Feminism has won more breathing room for sexuality, then, but larger social trends continue to imperil the opportunities to find love and dwell on it. This sense that *eros* is a vital cultural priority in peril is one we have seen before in the French context. This provides a different context for the point made by Lamberterie that is ostensibly familiar from American discourse about marriage (Swidler 2001): “you have to keep an eye out, work at it, make an effort... ‘It’s hard work loving and being loved’” [*Un travail que aimer et être aimé*] (Lamberterie 2002). In contrast with the American case, however, the advice is not aimed only at married couples. It is aimed at erotic love more globally. Erotic love, the argument goes, is transcendentally important for its own sake, and must be actively sought out. “Does love make you happy? These ladies aren’t sure about that, even when love is reciprocated. But is it really happiness that we are aspiring to?” (Lamberterie 2002). Clearly, the search for love is more than a utilitarian pursuit of pleasure: it is a commitment to living on a higher, more exalted plane of existence.

This conclusion is reinforced by Yann Moix's review of a collection of love-letters between the great singer Édith Piaf and her boxer-lover, Marcel Cerdan. Moix's rhetorical difficulty is that, despite the outsized reputation of the lovers and of their relationship, the love letters are full of clichés. He circumvents this embarrassing fact by arguing that their love-affair must have been extraordinary anyway:

That's where love resides, in clichés which aren't really clichés, in silly remarks that aren't really silly. Love is a license to say everything and its opposite. Love hates words; it tolerates only bodies, sweat, and just the right amount of mortality... Your love letters are inadmissible: they concern only you; whereas we are tempted to turn away from your sentiments, your excesses, toward our miniscule lives in which we are content with so little, which oscillate rather than vibrate, which trickle away rather than flow in a torrent (Moix 2002).

Moix's encomium to Piaf and Cerdan articulates an important implicit assumption of elite French cultural thought: that certain people experience life with unusual sensitivity and intensity. This fusion of aristocratic and Romantic cultural traditions is at the root of the high ethical significance accorded to erotic love and passion in the French cultural context. In this context, the search for intense erotic communion is less a symptom of hedonism than of striving for nobility. This endows pleasure with an ethical importance which it largely lacks in the American context.

Discovering Femininity

The heady atmosphere of French eroticism extends to gender identity itself. Seemingly ordinary women invest great significance in their subjective experience of femininity.

Features that recount couples' experiences with marriage counseling in *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Femme Actuelle* provide a useful source of evidence because they are arranged in a similar format: each partner's perspective on the couple's problems is described before the marriage counselor concludes with an expert analysis and resolution of the situation. These features inevitably contain an account of the couple's courtship. In the French version of feature, entitled "We've Come To See You," [*On Vient Vous Voir*], four out of ten of these courtship stories involve the man offers the woman fulfillment by recognizing her femininity. For example, "Diane" in one relationship is described as follows:

Diane is a dynamic woman. As a child, she wanted to be an airplane pilot. She resembles her father, who raised her like a boy. She was proud of this. But also unhappy, because her father preferred her sister, who was more feminine. Meeting Eric, Diane thought: finally, here is a man who will see me as a woman! (Kruse 2006b:47).

In another couple, Agnès, a competent psychiatric nurse whose mother simultaneously neglected and overfed her before having custody of her daughter revoked by the public authorities, finds comfort with Marc, who grew up as the plaything of an all-female household. Thanks to his upbringing, Marc knows how to be charming with women but has little personal initiative.

At first, the couple brought each partner exactly what he or she was looking for. Marc's brilliance valorized Agnès, who was proud of being loved by a guy who was the center of attention of all the girls. She lost weight and began to tame her body. For his part, Marc leaned on Agnès's intellectual solidity: if she was so demanding of him, it meant that perhaps he was worth the effort (Kruse 2007b:39).

More rarely (in one out of ten cases), the woman in the couple reinforces the man's sense of his virility (Kruse 2007a).

By contrast, the language of "feeling like a woman" is never used in the 24 American couples advice pieces, which are entitled "Can This Marriage Be Saved?"²⁴ One American wife whose husband is stricken with impotence does complain that she feels unattractive (Rosen 2002d), which is the closest we come to a woman's admission that her sense of femininity is at stake. In none of the "Can This Marriage Be Saved" features, however, does the woman state that she has been granted a sense of femininity by the man.

A set of articles in the October 21, 2002 issue of *Elle* explicitly addresses this "problem with feminine identity" [*la trouble identité féminine*] in an article entitled "Do we need a man to feel like a woman?" [*A-t-on besoin d'un homme pour se sentir femme?*] Catherine Roig's introductory essay draws on the intellectual authority of Simone de Beauvoir in a manner that could have the iconic feminist spinning in her grave:

More than 50 years after *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, women confirm that, beyond biology, femininity is a construction which comes about through long self-reflection, and sometimes through a lengthy struggle [*parfois au prix d'un long travail*] (Roig 2002b).

Roig blithely replaces Beauvoir's account of the socially imposed straitjacket of womanhood with femininity as a triumphant individual achievement. By upending Beauvoir's arguments, Roig enlists the great feminist as a spokeswoman for a view that is entirely commonplace among the women she interviewed for her article.

Of the approximately ten women interviewed, only Marina, age 32 and a stylist, integrates the taste for power and ambition with femininity. "Because that belongs to us as much as to men now," she points out. The others evoke first and foremost seduction, beauty, and their artifices. This is logical, since the great majority of them admit that men's gaze is what makes them feel like women (Roig 2002b)

Roig cites multiple interviewees whose personal stories closely resemble the tales of erotic self-discovery that people the erotica in *Elle*'s summer reading inserts. One woman, a 28-year-old who works in a local community center for youth, describes her liberating discovery of orgasm, which turns sex from something she has done to please men into "a key, a source of power"

²⁴ It is characteristic that the American advice feature is explicitly focused on married couples, whereas the marital status of many couples in the French piece is left unstated. The fact of living together and having or contemplating children makes them equivalent.

(Roig 2002b). A 50-year-old bookseller sees it as self-evident that “amorous passion shared with a man releases the sensation of femininity.” This woman tells Roig that:

“The extreme pleasure [*jouissance*] to which he introduced me gave me the sensation of completeness, of a total femininity, which irradiated my entire being, made me happy and opened me up to the world” (Roig 2002b).

This story is just one of the many that describes a sort of spiritual odyssey—a decisive discovery of self and of well-being that enables a person to act confidently and to create worthwhile relationships with other people. Characteristically, in French magazines, this transformation (especially for women) typically comes about through an erotic encounter with another person, whereas in American magazines it almost always occurs through an individual’s confrontation with moral uncertainty or weakness.

As is evident from the previously cited quotation from “Marina” about the links between femininity and ambition or the taste for power, a counter-current of thought in this series of articles holds that women can have a feminine identity independent of men. These arguments are worth examining both because they represent a more typically Anglo-American skein of thought with some ideological influence in the French context, and because of this point of view is evidently subordinate.

One of Roig’s interviewees, a 40-year-old musician named Ludmilla, avows that her husband has made her the woman she is, making her a mother, pushing her professionally, and desiring her. Ludmilla, however, remarks that her experience should not be taken as evidence against the possibility that a woman who achieve a great success in life [*qui réussit quelque chose de fort dans sa vie*] might thereby realize her own sense of femininity [*y trouver sa part de féminité*]. This comment and Marina’s claim that ambition and desire for power can be feminine both confirm the sense, implicit in the article’s title, “Do we need a man to feel like a woman?” that there is at least some ideological pressure in the ambient cultural context to acknowledge a capacity for autonomous female fulfillment that most American women, especially in the aftermath of feminism, would take for granted. But these assertions of independent femininity are tellingly flimsy. Ludmilla’s is entirely theoretical in nature: she admits that in her own case, “her husband has made her the woman she is” (Roig 2002b).

Later in the same set of articles, one of *Elle*’s younger writers champions the position that “Even without [men], I am myself.” She begins by humorously affirming her desire for men’s erotic attention: “Need a man’s gaze? No. Want a man’s gaze, yes! Oh, yes! I really want it. Enough to sling my bra over my shoulder while finding everything this man says to be wonderful” [*Envie à m’en mettre le soutif en bandoulière en trouvant bien tout ce que cet homme dit.*]. Thereafter, however, she is more assertive about her independence. In a tone that mocks the frequent narratives of erotic redemption at a man’s hands, she writes:

- That said: one look from a man and, right away, I’m laughing like a fool, caterwauling while crawling toward the bed and, when I smile, I drool. Now that’s not going to be possible every day of the week.

- Let me add: if I needed a man's gaze in order to feel like a woman, that would mean that, sometimes, when I'm on my own, I'm not a woman. And I don't think that.
- An example: John Wayne, alone between two cacti, that's a man. And me, alone between two sand dunes, I am a woman. That's all (Fontanel 2002).

This reduction of gender identity to brute biological differences is more consistent with typical American cultural understandings. In addition, it should be said, since this reduction is characteristic of modern Western cultures in general (Helliwell 2000; Laqueur 1990; Moodie and Ndatshe 1994:119-58), it is available for rhetorical use in the French context quite apart from any American cultural influences.

Fontanel's next pair of remarks makes a fairly stark feminist criticism of sex stereotyping, then humorously undercuts it by stereotyping herself:

- Here's what a need: the gaze of someone who takes me as I am, apart from any stereotypes. If a man can do that, yes to his gaze!
- Here's what I don't need: the gaze of a man if it culminates in the man saying: "Don't tell me you went out shopping again?" (Fontanel 2002).

She concludes by reverting to a stronger tone:

- Also: some men's looks have made me rather regret being a woman. And some women's looks have made me regret not preferring women. That teaches you to put things in perspective.
- And, importantly: I don't "need" a man's gaze because I no longer need my papa's regard. Eat your heart out, Oedipus! [*Œdipe résorbé, les amis!*]
- Conclusion: A man's gaze ON TOP OF EVERYTHING ELSE, when I don't absolutely NEED IT, that's what's good (for me)! Thank you for reading to the end.

Fontanel's qualifier that her opinions apply only to her are something of a sign of nervous consciousness that her claims won't receive universal validation, and her deferential sign-off confirms the impression. Some of this, of course, is attributable to the need to maintain a light and comic tone.

Counterposed to Fontanel's column is the admission by the middle-aged, married Alix Girod de l'Ain that "Without him, I am nothing." Girod de l'Ain herself is somewhat apologetic about her position, writing at the outset that "admitting such a thing marks you as more of a "Christine Boutin²⁵/mass, family and traditions" woman than a "Janis Joplin/rock'n'roll, modernity and emancipation" free thinker (Girod de l'Ain 2002b). She says, "I never feel as much like a woman as when:..." and then lists a series of circumstances. These include moments of her womanly toilette which excite her husband's wonderment; instances when he confidently gloats about his erotic prowess ("He looks at me when I wake up and says: 'You

²⁵ Boutin gained notoriety in 1998 as an opponent of the PACS law granting secular civil unions to gay and straight people alike. Since 2009, she has been president of the Christian Democratic Party (PCD) (Wikipedia (French) 2013).

seem all relaxed. You must have dreamt about me again”), gives her a compliment on how good she looks with nothing on or gives her a lubricious wink when she is lounging in the bath; celebrates her domestic skills (“He looks at me, stopwatch in hand, change a diaper in less than 45 seconds and then says “Yes!” while flexing his arms in triumph”), or sardonically reminds her that he needs her domestic services without openly presuming that she owes them to him:

- He looks at me, concerned, because it is already 20:08 and he hates to bother me but, if I had planned to give him something to eat, it would be just as well not to do it too late, seeing that he’s been suffering from hypoglycemia since 14:45 (Girod de l’Ain 2002b).

Girod de l’Ain concludes with a series of circumstances that sum up her sense of warm gratitude for the erotic tribute rendered to her by her husband’s attention:

- He looks at me to see if I’m looking at another man.
- He looks at me to see if I’m looking at him.
- He looks at me all the time.
- He looks at me, period [tout court] (Girod de l’Ain 2002b).

Despite the apologetic beginning to her entry in the comic point-and-counterpoint with Fontanel, Girod de l’Ain’s account of her delight in her husband’s attentions is not defensive. She expects it to charm her readers. In its subtle way, this exchange is quite telling about the balance of persuasiveness enjoyed by these two perspectives in the larger cultural environment.

It seems likely that younger French women on average probably espouse a more independent view of self both for life-cycle reasons and perhaps even on a generational basis. Still, the view that women’s sense of self depends fundamentally on interactions with men seems to be the dominant one in this 2002 article in *Elle*, which has the most highly educated audience of all the French women’s magazines in our sample. Most importantly, the perspective that celebrates the deep fulfillment occasioned by men’s erotic attentions seems to have the lion’s share of the really absorbing personal narratives in French women’s magazines. Since so much of our visceral understanding of cultural values is narrative in form—it is the way in which we absorb the experiences of others that we cannot directly witness ourselves—this gives eroticism a powerful trump card in the French context.

If Fontanel and Girod de l’Ain deliver the light-hearted version of the answer to the question “Do women need a man in order to feel like a woman?” the rather pompous expert answer to the question comes in an interview by Elisabeth Weissman, *Elle*’s major reporter on psychology. She speaks with psychoanalyst Alberto Eiguer, who has recently published a book entitled *The Awakening of Feminine Consciousness* [*L’Éveil de la conscience féminine*].²⁶ Eiguer manages to deliver a rather politically deft account of female consciousness—one that

²⁶ This choice of expert would be unusual in the American post-feminist context, both because psychoanalysis is no longer taken seriously by most educated Americans, and because it seems presumptuous in the American context for any man, no matter how well-trained, to proclaim himself an expert on women’s consciousness. In France, by contrast, psychoanalysis still commands popular respect, and the Cartesian spirit is strong enough that speculation about the human condition can be grounded in universal reason (as well as in empathy) rather than simply in personal experience.

makes it theoretically possible for women to arrive at femininity without a man, while still exalting women's erotic experience and flattering them with a vision of its power and spiritual importance.

Eiguer argues that women come to grips with their femininity through “the sum of bodily experiences which are tied to her female destiny: menstruation, puberty, maternity, amorous encounters [*rencontres sentimentales*]” (Weissman 2002:143). Eiguer's inclusion of menstruation in the list of empowering female experiences leads the interviewer, Élisabeth Weissman, to a momentary questioning of his judgment as a male expert on women's experience: “But wouldn't that be a typically masculine kind of discourse? In what way would the start of menses lead to the ecstasy [*jouissance*] of being a woman?” Eiguer responds by citing “clinical experience” for support:

We know, through our clinical experiences, that menstruation permits a woman to understand that she has a vagina, an interior that bleeds. This recognition is very important. It is a sign. Every corporeal experience that leads to recognition marks her body with an exciting, sensual, moving imprint. These are the essential elements that will permit a woman to recognize herself as such. It is in this sense that you can talk about a sort of ecstasy (Weissman 2002:143).

Eiguer's point is that the individual woman must come to grips with the emotional and symbolic significance of the bare biological facts presented to her by her body. This is quite different from American popular discussions of biological differences between the sexes, which tend to proceed by analogy with non-human animals and to focus on innate differences in cognitive abilities or drives as opposed to this more characteristically French focus on the way bodily sensation shapes human experience. Eiguer is appealing to an unstated cultural assumption that he intuitively knows his readers are likely to share: that human beings make their “animal,” corporeal experiences characteristically *human* by making symbolic, emotional, and aesthetic sense (all three terms blur together in this understanding) of them.

Eiguer shares a second assumption with his readers. He presumes that being female is an intrinsically “exciting, sensual [and] moving,” a condition that provides access to some of the most pleasurable and powerful elements of human experience. This in part reflects the esteem granted to erotic, emotional and procreative experience within French culture. It also reflects a more gender-specific halo of spiritual, sacralized respect that surrounds female sexual pleasure in the French context. In her memoir *The Secret Life of France*, Lucy Wadham, an Englishwoman who married an affluent Frenchman at age 20, argues that:

in France, the somewhat archaic idea that women are endlessly mysterious and fascinating creatures whose role is to sexually intoxicate men still holds sway... An English journalist, who went to a *club échangiste* [swingers' club] in order to write about it for his broadsheet, described the experience of walking into one of the elegant back rooms where a naked woman was tied, blindfolded, to silken manacles on the wall: “It was like walking into a chapel. A few men and women

were pleasuring her while the rest were watching in what can only be described as total awe” (Wadham 2009:32).

Wadham is no doubt correct that the goal “to sexually intoxicate men” is indispensable to the dominant cultural understanding of sex in the French context, but there is also a larger sense in which women’s sexuality is particularly sacred and fascinating, even to other women. After all, some of the fascinated spectators in this “chapel” of sensuality are other women.

The aura of excitement and reverence that surrounds women’s erotic powers helps to explain these articles’ unstated assumption that “femininity” is an indispensably important goal to be obtained. In the United States, feminism has at least made femininity a goal of questionable value; by and large, this seems not to have occurred in the French context. For instances, Élisabeth Weissman asks Alberto Eiguer

What is the link between femininity and power? Some hostile voices [*De mauvaises langues*] actually assert that women must lose their femininity to the degree that they gain power... As if the fact of stepping onto men’s turf obliged them to efface their femininity!

Neither Weissman or Eiguer reply to this sort of assertion by commenting that powerful women have every right to be just as assertive as male executives are, social expectations about appropriately feminine behavior notwithstanding. Instead, Eiguer says:

[Y]ou are talking about the excesses of phallic women [*femmes phalliques*]! It really isn’t necessary to be arrogant or to behave like Attila in order to lead others... There are, in a manner similar to a man’s initiative-taking, feminine modalities for the exercise of power which men, moreover, would be wise to heed: for example, listening to others, admitting one’s emotions... (Weissman 2002:145)

Eiguer agrees that for women to act in a masculine way, even in the workplace, would be inappropriate. Instead, women should put a characteristically feminine spin on the exercise of power, and men would do well to imitate them. In a sense, this vision implies a certain convergence between the behavior of men and women, but on more “feminine” terms than is assumed in a vision of sexual integration that prioritizes women’s right to behave like men.

Eiguer is implicitly following the logic of “difference feminism,” as can be seen in the exchange which concludes his interview with Weissman:

Weissman: ...how would you define the feminine in women today?

Eiguer: It’s a certain attunement to [*écoute*] and recognition of the other; it’s empathy, it’s the capacity to welcome another person’s cares without either imposing on him [*l’accabler*] or making him ashamed.

Weissman: But that’s just being humane [*Mais c’est tout bonnement de l’humanité*]!

Eiguer: Of course!

Eiguer, like difference feminists, is arguing that women have distinctive and valuable ways of behaving. To ignore these distinctly feminine characteristics in the name of equality with men

would be a mistake. Instead, women should promote their incorporation into universal, sex-independent standards of human behavior.

Contemporary Anglo-American feminist critics tend to equate difference feminism with essentialism, the argument that sex differences are “hard wired,” to tap the predominant American metaphor. A close look at Eiguer’s arguments points to the strengths *and* blindneses of this objection. Eiguer does, after all, argue that pleasure in being female arises out of women’s distinctive bodily experience—having a vagina, being able to give birth, etc. In another exchange with Weissman, Eiguer implies that this bodily experience ultimately gives rise to the interpersonal attitudes that he perceives as characteristically feminine:

Weissman: How would you characterize the difference between being female and femininity [*entre le féminin et la féminité*]?

Eiguer: Femaleness [*Le féminin*] is the unconscious lived experience of being a woman [*vécu inconscient d’être femme*]. Femininity is the expression of this lived experience in relationships with others. Put another way, it is the manifestation in relations with others of this deep femaleness [*mise en réalisation de ce féminin profond dans la relation*], ultimately in order to please others as well as oneself [*pour plaire et se plaire*]. It is in this way that femininity can be expressed outside of active sexuality (Weissman 2002:145).

As is characteristic of popular psychology in France, Weissman is keen to emphasize the symbolic effects of bodily realities. In this latter passage, “femaleness” [*le féminin*] has already been sublimated into a mental attitude, having been integrated into the unconscious. It then modulates an individual’s relationship with others, somehow resulting in a disposition to generate pleasure in oneself and others. (Note, too, that Eiguer explicitly stipulates that this pleasure, while it obviously includes sex, goes beyond it to being more broadly emotional in character.) Quite how we jump from having a female body to being oriented toward the giving and receiving of pleasure is both essentialist and obscure. Evidently, this equation is intuitively plausible to Eiguer and Weissman, since the neither explains nor questions it. My guess is that the link here is partly one of gender stereotyping about female other-orientation that one can readily find in both the American and French contexts, but that, particularly in the emphasis on pleasure, it also draws strength from the distinctively French (or Latin) sacralization of female eroticism.

Despite this undeniable element of essentialism in the difference feminist arguments being put forward by Alberto Eiguer, it is important to note that the personality characteristics he emphasizes: other-orientation, empathy, and a delight in creating pleasure in others, are more universal preoccupations of French culture, as evidenced, for instance, in *Nous Deux*’s fanciful profiles of infant personality in the “Bundle of Joy of the Week” [*Chouchou/Chouchotte de la semaine*] series. In this sense, the cultural context which Eiguer is addressing has *already* placed a high value on the expression, by individual of both sexes, of the sorts of traits he is designating as distinctively feminine. Because these allegedly “feminine” traits are already appreciated in men and women alike, French culture itself contains a sort of antidote to the essentialism which

is obviously taken for granted within that same cultural context. When Eiguer cheerfully assents to Weissman's observation that his definition of femininity overlaps with humaneness more generally, he is not merely expressing a hollow ideological piety, but is acknowledging the sense in which the objectives of difference feminism are already built into the larger culture.

From an egalitarian feminist point of view (to which both sameness and difference feminist perspectives can contribute), the sort of ideas put forward in Eiguer's interview furnish rhetorical advantages *and* disadvantages alike. On the upside, the French cultural context easily recognizes and values an empathetic and caring orientation toward others as well as an ethic of pleasure that avoids crass self-indulgence by emphasizing aesthetic refinement and the preeminent joys of emotional sharing with others. By associating these preoccupations with femininity but recognizing their advantages and attractions in people of either sex, the culture makes women their principal advocates and exemplars as they "perform" their gender on a daily basis (West and Zimmerman 1987). At the same time, the more universal valuation of these traits in the broader culture avoids walling them off as the exclusive province of women. On the downside, this association makes gender essentialism more attractive to women themselves, thereby blunting the force of sameness feminist arguments which have been so useful in the drive for greater equality between men and women. It also augments the legitimacy of rhetoric enforcing women's accountability to these ideals.

Within the magazines in my sample, the most vivid illustration of this way in which this association between femininity and pleasurable other-orientedness can act as a powerfully repressive instrument comes in another article by Catherine Roig, this one entitled "Women who know how to make themselves loved" (Roig 2002a). This positive-sounding title in fact conceals a damning indictment of women who accommodate themselves insufficiently to men's desires. This becomes clear in the sub-head blurb that introduces the piece:

Some women are "happy in love," while others go from failure to failure. But this fate is not inevitable. You can learn at any age. Learn to know yourself better so that you can better seduce the other person. Learn to understand the man you love, who, in return, will make you happy (Roig 2002a:59).

Despite these rather extravagant promises, this article is in fact unusually fraught with contradictions. For example, one of the couples therapists cited in the piece, Annie de Butler, recommends that women "not refuse sexuality" and "give themselves completely" to their man, but also adds that this does not mean giving way to any and all male desires or fantasies (Roig 2002a:68). The article counsels women to avoid the "compromises that poison many couples" (Roig 2002a:62 & 64) but later praises the ability to "give oneself," which requires "great maturity, since it requires some self-sacrifice" [*car il comporte une part d'abnégation*] (Roig 2002a:64). Similarly, the reader is told to "try to be all women to the man you love... his wife, the mother of his children, his mistress, but also, more crudely, his whore," (Roig 2002a:60), but later learns to avoid "trying to satisfy or anticipate your husband's every desire" since this "inevitably" leads you "to dilute your own personality" (Roig 2002a:64).

The contradictory messages keep piling up. One of the “loveable” women interviewed in the article recalls that she got to know her partner very early in life:

Jean and I got to know each other when we were very young, and we grew up together and went through a lot together. Together, we became conscious of our failings, of our childhood injuries, we spoke about them for entire evenings, which helped us understand each other and have made us grow even closer. That taught me a lot about myself! (Roig 2002a:60).

On the other hand, another woman who spent six years in “total symbiosis” with a man declares that this is a “grave mistake... We suffocated one another mutually and ended up separating” (Roig 2002a:60). So close, intimate sharing with one’s partner leads either to happiness—or to disaster. This morass of contradictory advice and experience could leave the reader quite mystified about what she should do in order to become a love-magnet.

Nevertheless, some of the article’s themes are relatively clear. One is the importance of having confidence in one’s own ability to be loved. One of the psychologists quoted in the article remarks that

Family histories often make people think that they don’t have the right to make themselves loved... [S]ome women... are literally blocked by a deep “interdiction.” For instance, the woman whose mother or grandmother was forbidden from living with the man she loved is often persuaded that happiness in love isn’t for her (Roig 2002a:62).

Here, family interference with the marital choices of an individual exerts a repressive influence at the remove of a generation or two. While this may strike the American reader as bizarre and incredible, the theme of inter-generational conflict over marital choice occurs frequently in French fiction with a contemporary setting in 1950s magazines, and even in 2007, one of Elise’s correspondents complains that she doesn’t love the well-off alcoholic with whom her parents have pressured her to live (Elise 2007d).

Whatever the causal roots of women’s insecurity about how loveable they are—an insecurity to which the entire article attests—the French magazines suggest that this is indeed a chronic preoccupation, especially for women. Julien, age 25 and one of the younger men asked by *Elle* to describe what sort of women he loves, responds: “She doesn’t constantly tell me that she is rubbish, is ugly and fat, and she doesn’t ask me every five minutes whether I love her” (Roig 2002a:68). The women quoted in the article also admit that insecurity about being sufficiently loveable can be debilitating in a relationship. For example, “Vanessa” says that

“...At the beginning of our relationship, I desperately tried to make myself loved while being convinced that I didn’t deserve it. My anxiety crises could have capsized the whole thing. But [her partner Fabrice] didn’t play along with me, so that I ended up face-to-face with myself. Little by little, [with therapy], I got calmer and stopped using Fabrice as a barrier between myself and the world. I realized that, until then, I had loved him not for who he was, but egotistically, in

order to protect myself. Eventually, I learned how to love.” Ten years later, Vanessa has two children and a flourishing relationship [*vie de couple épanouie*] (Roig 2002a:62).

Another 44-year-old woman, “Claire” has a similar epiphany after years of misery chasing married men. She recalls recognizing the need to change when her 18-month-old daughter, the product of a liaison with a married man, cried whenever being picked up from her nanny. A psychologist told her that the child “simply didn’t want to return to a home where her mother lived alone and unhappy. He was right.” Psychological therapy helps ensure that she is ready when, six months later, she meets her husband-to-be:

Everything happened very quickly. I didn’t question myself incessantly, and, at 35, for the first time in my life, a man asked me to live with him. I had stopped believing that no one could be in love with me and that love consisted of one experience of suffering after another. All of a sudden, I wasn’t addicted in the sense that I was no longer pressuring him out of fear of losing him. We have been together for ten years; there are ups and downs, but I sense that I am loved for who I am, and I’m not searching for reassurance all the time, which is very profound. There is a generosity between us that I never knew before. I was so concerned with appropriating men that I wasn’t interested in their lives. In the final analysis, I was the only one who mattered. Analysis has made me calmer, and so more available, more open, and less possessive. When you are more comfortable with yourself [*mieux dans sa peau*], you are more “loveable.” But you can’t get there just by waving a magic wand! [*Mais ce n’est pas du tout-cuit.*] (Roig 2002a:62)

Vanessa’s experience follows the same narrative arc of redemptive confidence-building that is so ubiquitous in the American context: without sufficient confidence in one’s abilities, it is difficult to take necessary risks and persist in one’s efforts, and so vocational success is elusive. Once one has discovered self-confidence, however, success comes naturally and confirms one’s positive self-assessment. In the French context, this narrative of self-confidence gets applied less to one’s vocational choices and talents than to erotic relationships.

In the same way that self-confidence about one’s ability to succeed in one’s vocation is almost an ethical obligation imposed by American culture,²⁷ the self-confidence to keep up the search for erotic fulfillment is praiseworthy as a fundamental sign of self-respect in the French context. Consider the letter from “Anita” to *Nous Deux*’s advice columnist Elise. She explains that she has put on a lot of weight because of medicines that she takes to manage a chronic condition and that her love life is entirely becalmed as a result:

²⁷ This theme persists in stories in the 2000s, with women bolstering their own and each other’s self-confidence where they used to do this largely for the men in their lives. For instance, the conceit of the short story “Rewriting My Life” is that a young woman struggling with a new teaching job pretends that she is a rather old-fashioned, supremely confident and competent teacher who is a character in a story she is writing. Gratifyingly, this act becomes reality and the protagonist both masters her classroom and attracts the admiration of a male teacher in her school, whom she marries and launches a glamorous career as a novelist and author of writing guides based on the homespun wisdom she discovered in the classroom (Lewis 2000).

I distance myself from any romantic life [*vie affective*], and the worst thing about it is that I'm getting used to it! Some very dear friends have warned me, despite my condition, against the mistake of forgetting to live. What do you think? I am 34 years old (Elise 2002a).

Elise expresses warm assent to the wisdom of Anita's friends. She expresses sympathy for the woman's situation, but reminds her that "it's your appearance, not the woman inside you, who has changed" (Elise 2002a). Isolating herself is the worst thing she can do to herself. Elise recommends buying new clothes that flatter her figure and ends with the following words intended to buck up Anita's romantic self-confidence:

Love yourself and tell yourself that life is very accommodating of curves [*rondeurs*]... As men are, in fact. Especially when they sense that the woman with the curves experiences them not as a misfortune, but as a reflection of her appetite for life (Elise 2002a).

By the consensus of Elise, Anita's friends, and Anita herself, a healthy romantic life is very much a "second-order desire" as philosophers call desires whose existence is itself desirable (Bailey 2011:315-16). She owes it to herself to pursue sexual fulfillment and, with considerable wisdom, Elise judges that men will find her appealing if she can become more comfortable with her body and give its amplexity a sexy interpretation.

One advantage of this cultural commitment to erotic life is that facilitates a sympathetic but broadly encouraging approach to sexual initiation. As Amy Schalet's interview study documents, the standard American approach to the onset of sexuality during adolescence is to turn the entire process into anxious drama pitting parents against children, girls against boys, and pleasure against prohibition, an approach that, as we have seen, leaves traces in the way American magazines discuss sex outside of marriage. Some sense of mainstream French attitudes toward this process can be gleaned from a letter to "Elise," the "agony aunt" columnist for *Nous Deux* magazine. In the February 5, 2002 issue of the magazine, Elise answers a letter from an adolescent girl who writes about a boy she liked who wanted to go further sexually than she was willing to go. Because he wasn't willing to be understanding, she left him. When she saw him again, however, he wanted to go out with her again. Though she still likes him, she is worried that he will still be impatient for sex, and she is still not sure that she is ready. Elise begins by reassuring her that she is right to trust her instinct in this matter, and that she is the only one who can know whether or not to go "further" with a boy. Furthermore, Elise reads her doubts about whether she can "hold out" if she goes out with the boy again as evidence that she is still not ready. What comes next in Elise's response is more surprising to an American reader used to the mainstream American cultural suspicion that boys are sexually opportunistic, if not downright predatory (Schalet 2011:60, *passim*). She writes that "Your friend's impatience is as real and sincere as your doubts. And, the day when you no longer feel this fear, you will be able to take the next step, without torment, and discover other facets of love" (Elise 2002e:81). Elise declines to condemn the boy for trying to rush the girl, and makes no mention of the idea that boys respect only those girls who refuse them sex. Indeed, she encourages the girl to look

forward to the moment of maturity when she will no longer fear sex, a far cry from the American pattern of fearing adolescent sexuality and regarding adolescents as chronically economically and emotionally unprepared for it (Schalet 2011:59-63).

MAKING MARRIAGE WORK AND INFIDELITY REDUX

Marriage advice provides some important evidence about conceptions of love and gender in the French and American contexts. *Ladies' Home Journal's* "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" is touted as "the most enduring women's magazine feature in the world." The feature stages a very effective drama by immersing the reader first in the wife's perspective, then in the husband's, often shifting the reader's sympathies first to the one and then the other. By the time the reader arrives at the therapist's perspective, she is impressed by the hopeless rancor that has gripped the couple. Like the resolution of a mystery novel, the therapist's diagnosis of the couple's underlying problem and of its remedy brings the story to a satisfying resolution.

While this trademarked feature has no perfect parallel in French women's magazines, it is most similar to "We've Come to See You" [*On vient vous voir*], a short-lived feature that appeared in just ten issues of *Femme Actuelle*, France's most widely read contemporary women's magazine, between September 2006 and June 2008. The feature is about 1,000 words long as compared to an average of roughly 2,400 for "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" *On Vient Vous Voir* does not divide the voices of the man and woman in the couple and the therapist from one another as cleanly as "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" It also follows the fiction that the therapist is reporting only on the couple's first session, which means that therapist's recommendations are couched in the future tense, slightly undercutting the satisfying sense of narrative completion that the reader enjoys in the American feature. Like "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" however, *On Vient Vous Voir* tells the story of how the couple came together, what each partner's family of origin was like, how each partner views the conflict within the couple, and the therapists insights into the source and resolution of their problems. These close parallels make the two features particularly fruitful objects of comparison.

Each portrait of a couple in distress contains a courtship story explaining why the two people were attracted to one another. In American stories, this narrative often involves the discovery of similarities between the man and woman. The precise idiom of "having a lot in common" occurs in five of the 24 (21 percent) "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" articles but in none of their French counterparts. In seven of the American features, the partners note a shared ethnic, religious, social class or geographical background, and this is done implicitly by the narrator in two more (38 percent in total). Again, similarities of this sort are omitted from the French accounts. Thirteen of 24 of the American advice features (54 percent) mention that the couple enjoys shared leisure activities, but only one of the 10 French features does this (10 percent).²⁸ In short, American courtship stories tend to focus on the similarities in values and interests shared by the two individuals who form the couple, an emphasis that is lacking in French courtship stories. Michel Bozon's *Formation du couple* piece makes it into something of a scandal that the *coup de foudre*, the "love at first sight" moment, is not a random event, but

²⁸ This is statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

follows laws of homophily (Bozon and Héran 2006). Bozon characterizes this as a counterintuitive finding, which could be partly scholarly rhetoric, but given the overall strength of romantic mythology in France is not likely to be entirely so. The basic observation that homophily is crucial to couples, however, seems entirely commonsensical in the U.S. context.

American spouses also tend to call attention to their spouses' physical and personality traits when explaining their initial attraction to one another. Thus, for instance, 38 percent (9 of 24) of the men in *Can This Marriage Be Saved* are described by their wife as physically attractive, as are fully half of the American wives by their husbands' accounts. One American wife and three American husbands go so far as to describe their spouse as "the handsomest man" or "the most beautiful woman" they had ever met. In contrast, no French wives and only one French husband (10 percent) mention their partner's looks. One Frenchwoman's partner's popularity with other women appeals to her, since it heightens the significance of his choice of her in particular (Kruse 2007b). But in this latter case, the man's appeal takes place at second hand, as it were.

The courtship stories that appear in French couples advice features, by contrast, follow a different pattern. In five of the 10 features, romantic attraction grows out of a sympathetic response to emotional vulnerability—the recognition of need that one can fulfill. For example:

Sophie had everything except affection. Mathieu felt unwanted and superfluous. At the beginning, then, they were perfect for one another. This woman, who was so good at her job, needed a man to protect her like she was a small child. Mathieu felt at ease in this role that valorized him. He treated her as he would have liked to be treated as a child... When [Sophie] was sick or depressed, no one took notice of her. When Mathieu met her, he immediately felt capable of loving her and showed it in every possible way (Kruse 2006a).

Describing the future reconciliation of another couple, Caroline Kruse notes that "Eric will remember what he saw behind his wife's strong façade: a lot of fragility. That's also why he loved her" (Kruse 2006b). Both of these men see the opportunity to nurture a woman they have met, and this is a large part of their love for her.

In other instances, it is the man's vulnerabilities that attract the woman. In one such couple, "Simone right away saw that [Pierre] had a depressive and anxious side, and was able to give him structure [*un cadre*], and also an endless source of vitality" (Kruse 2008a). Another woman named Katia "liked Mario's inexperience, his passive side, his weakness... She wanted a husband made to measure, faithful as her father had not been" (Kruse 2007a).

Kruse does not imply that this sort of attraction to the weaknesses of others is always a sound basis for a relationship. Indeed, Mario, the made-to-measure husband, ends up resenting his own dependence on his wife and retaliates by having an affair with another woman. But such unhappy outcomes are not inevitable, since, more of than not, when one partner recalls the other's vulnerability, this serves to re-cement the relationship. One elderly couple stops interacting after their children leave home because the husband, Paul, feels inadequate to his wife's demands. He has "forgotten that Lise first and foremost needed a husband who would

take care of her, who would find her pretty, who would see her as a woman, who would continue to desire her” (Kruse 2007c). When he “remembers” his wife’s emotional vulnerabilities, the couple tenderly reconciles.

Gender Roles in Marriage

In keeping with the broader patterns we have seen, gender stereotypes about marital roles are more commonplace in French as compared with American couples advice features, while at the same time, French articles refer more freely to men’s “feminine” characteristics and to women’s “masculine” ones. French couples appear willing to call one another to account openly to gender role expectations. For instance, in *Femme Actuelle*’s inaugural couples counseling feature, the wife complains that her husband “doesn’t stop mothering the kids. He lets them do anything.” When he complains that she is too hard on the children, she remarks: “Someone has to be the father, since you are incapable of it” (Kruse 2006b). The counselor challenges not the verbal gender division of roles but their rigid assignment to one or the other partner:

In the past, when a mother tried to make herself obeyed, she would invoke paternal authority: “If you aren’t good, I will speak to your father!” The father dictated the law, and the mother dissolved in tears. Today, it’s often the reverse. But these functions can be swapped back and forth between the parents. The important thing is not to get trapped in them (Kruse 2006b).

Marie Claire’s January 2007 issue contains an article on the “new” phenomenon of fathers who do routine parenting tasks (Mairesse 2007). The piece’s nervous framing is plain in its title “Are the new fathers going too far?” Although the article quotes one expert who thinks women should stop worrying about men’s usurpation of traditional maternal roles, this point of view is not a taken-for-granted sentiment. Nor does this recommended approach seem as easy to adopt as the quoted expert makes it out to be, since the “new fathers” quoted in the article often reproach their companions for lacking concern and tenderness for their children. Whatever the underlying reasons for these men’s criticism of their wives, it is significant that they see traditional gender expectations as a goad that can be used to good rhetorical effect in spousal disputes.

In contrast, in American advice features, spouses tend not to enforce traditional gender roles openly on one another. The couple featured in the October 2002 *Can This Marriage Be Saved?* is weathering the collapse of the husband’s catering business, and the unemployed husband keeps house while his wife works as manager of a bed-and-bath store. The wife admits to being jealous of her husband’s time with their twin toddlers, since he is the one who plays with them and whom they turn to when they are upset. The husband in turn blames himself for failing to play the breadwinner role. The counselor notes that “On some level, even women with good jobs often like to know their husbands can support them, and feel abandoned when they can’t; in turn, many men feel inadequate if they’re not bringing in a paycheck” (Rosen 2002c). Notably, however, this conventional gender expectation is not wielded explicitly during the couple’s fights. In the November 2007 installment of *Can This Marriage Be Saved?* the husband heatedly denies that he resents his wife’s more successful career, but his wife and the counselor know better, and his carping at his wife dies down only once the couple’s therapist helps him

improve his earnings as a free-lance musician (Hanson 2007b). Once again here, gender role expectations influence people's judgments, but cannot be admitted to openly, since they are ideologically illegitimate.

Thus, in American magazine pieces, the psychological power of traditional gender expectations tends to be repressed and denied. Prompting sublimated resentment or silent self-reproach, stereotypical gender roles form an underground current of feeling that a good counselor coaxes to the surface, where it can be acknowledged and neutralized.²⁹

The comparatively uninhibited use of gender stereotypes in everyday French language has a flip side. More ubiquitous, gender categories are also more flexibly applied, particularly the erotic sphere. For instance, one of the couples that appears in Caroline Kruse's advice feature in *Femme Actuelle* is described in the following terms:

In appearance, [Sonia] seemed the total opposite of Dan. While he seemed almost feminine, nonchalant, and light, Sonia, big boned and tall, had from her youth taken on the appearance of a serious, responsible girl who knew how to get along on her own (Kruse 2008b:41).

That the man in this relationship is "almost feminine, nonchalant, and light" neither disqualifies him from being sexually attractive, since one the couple's strengths is that they are "physically... very compatible," nor does it make his recognition of her as a woman any less gratifying to Sonia.

Another of Caroline Kruse's cases also reverses the standard gender qualifiers. For this middle-aged couple, "[t]heir differences attracted them to one another, Lise's virile side, and Paul's feminine side... Lise had the air of a boy manqué, Paul an exaggerated sensitivity. He liked long walks in solitudes, she, passionate discussions" (Kruse 2007c). Lise suffers from her "virile side," even as it makes her attractive to her retiring husband. She harbors a deep desire to be recognized as a woman; Paul, despite his "exaggerated sensitivity," is able to fulfill this need.

On the one hand, then, there is a distinct flexibility in the way Caroline Kruse describes men and women using opposite-gender adjectives. This is in keeping with the way French magazines have long noted shades of femininity in attractive men. On the other hand, she describes a sense of loss among women who undertake a comparatively "virile" presentation of

²⁹ The final installment of *On Vient Vous Voir*, in the June 9, 2008 issue of *Femme Actuelle*, addresses couples with conflicts over money, "which get worse when the traditional sex roles are reversed" (Kruse 2008b) provides an "exception that proves the rule" in the original meaning of the phrase, in which "prove" meant "put to the test" rather than "demonstrate." The man in the featured couple is an unemployed guitarist who reproaches his breadwinner wife for being too intent on earning money. His own sense of inadequacy is at fault, of course, which fits the pattern of sublimated gender expectations that I have attributed to post-feminist American columns. In this case, however, the woman in the relationship has gone to elaborate lengths to head off this potential problem: "Instead of making Dan take on a minimum of responsibilities, she let herself do everything in his stead, giving him pocket money and paying his debts when he accrued them." This is better characterized as a case of unsuccessful overcompensation rather than unconscious resentment. It is also significant that, whereas the counselor notes that both partners have unavoidably internalized traditional gender roles, as do American therapists, she emphasizes the ways that people outside the couple reinforce traditional expectations, through pitying looks at the wife, who is seen to be enduring a "bad marriage," and through disdain that the husband notices despite pretending not to. This emphasis on external social sanctions may partly reflect a different set of realities in French culture, but is just as likely to reflect greater cultural recognition of the power of customary social sanctions in France.

self. They are haunted by a desire for recognition *as a woman*. In other words, they feel deeply incomplete until their femininity, and hence their sexual attractiveness, is recognized by a man. *The Virtues of the Mundane in American Marriage*

American magazines aggressively advertise the virtues of a mundane marital relationship. In a January 2002 article entitled “Real Intimacy,” Joanne Kaufman, who writes regularly about psychology and relationships for *Good Housekeeping*, recounts a conversation with a friend whose marriage recently ended. Kaufman credits the divorcé for speaking with “remarkable and admirable candor,” but indicts his expectations of romance for the marriage’s failure. In response to his statement that “I want real intimacy and romance in my next relationship... I don’t want it to be about trips to the hardware store,” Kaufman says he has his priorities backwards:

Funny, I told him, trips to the hardware store were exactly what I wanted it to be about. I like roses and lingerie and homemade poetry and intense sharing of classified emotional information and all-night sex as much as the next girl. Let the record also show that I find nothing inherently soul stirring about watching my husband fondle No. 2 nails and vinyl siding. It’s just that accompanying him to Home Depot or Ace and consulting with the helpful hardware man about the bulge in the linoleum or the leak in the sink makes me feel married in a way that roses and round-trip tickets to Paris never could (Kaufman 2002).

For Kaufman, romantic dreams of “roses and round-trip tickets to Paris” are frivolous. She may “like” the trappings of erotic rapture “as much as the next girl,” but she does not “love” them or take them seriously. By contrast, “trips to the hardware store” are more lastingly meaningful: they make her “feel married” in the sense of having a truly adult relationship with a man. Kaufman enlists the clinical experience of “Arlene Kagle, a psychologist in private practice in Dutchess County, New York” as evidence that those who “talk about wanting a soul mate and passion partner” in marriage are barking up the wrong tree. Kagle believes that such people “don’t get it. It’s not the gigantic orgasm. It’s sharing life’s little joys and absurdities. People who understand that rarely show up in my office” (Kaufman 2002). The wise—those who manage to stay married—value the mundane in marriage.

Keeping marital expectations low-key has the advantage of putting husband and wife at ease. Kaufman writes that “with my husband, I feel no particular pressure to be as perky and precious as a starlet making her first appearance with Leno or Letterman. I can relax” (Kaufman 2002). In a truly solid marriage, a person does not need to put on a social performance for his or her spouse. In the humorous closing to her “Real Intimacy” essay, Kaufman expresses satisfaction that:

I can even be like the husband of my friend Lynn, who, as the two of them headed out for dinner one night, warned her that he was going to be very boring for the whole evening. Lynn said that was just swell with her; she wouldn’t be listening (Kaufman 2002).

This aggressive defense of being “boring” in marriage is an exaggeration for humorous effect, of course. But the underlying point is that being comfortable together is the best measure of a relationship’s health.

Dr. Phil McGraw, a hugely popular relationship guru of the 2000s, makes the same point in an October 2002 interview. Married life, he explains, is less emotionally spectacular than “that period of falling in love” (Bilyeau 2002:225). But it has its own compensations: “the predictability can be good. Or maybe stability is a better word. Just knowing she's going to be there every night. Her knowing I'm going to come home every night” (Bilyeau 2002:225).

Gender and Sexual Desire in Marriage

This atmosphere of comfort with one another makes sense in light of the sudden legitimacy and sober, adult purpose that marriage bestows on sexual relationships in the American cultural context. Both American and French women’s magazines voice the view that frequent, pleasurable sex is an expected component of a thriving romantic relationship. But couples advice columns evince a distinct divide in expectations about gendered sexual desire. Comparing only the French and American couples advice features with the most similar format and choice of subjects, “*On Vient Vous Voir*” and “Can This Marriage Be Saved?”, we find, respectively, 3 of 10 couples and 16 of 24 couples in which a lack of sexual activity is flagged as a problem. The relatively high incidents of complaints about sex in the American as opposed to the French couples may not be particularly significant, since the American pieces are longer and thus each feature has more space to enumerate the full spectrum of the couple’s problems. What is more significant, however, is the contrast that emerges when we tally the gender of the partner who seems most responsible for the sexual bottleneck. (Sometimes this determination can be made very directly, when one partner complains openly that the other partner is avoiding sex or declares him- or herself unwilling or unable to make love. On other occasions, one partner simply remarks that the couple has not had sex in a long time; here, I interpret the person speaking as implicitly holding the other responsible for the situation, although this judgment stands on somewhat weaker ground than the former, clearer-cut cases.)

Amongst these couples where too little sex is a problem, the most typical French scenario (in 2 of 3 cases) is a woman complaining that her partner does not have intercourse with her often enough. This is reversed in American columns, where 75 percent (12 of 16) of cases attribute infrequent sex to the wife rather than the husband. If we widen the sample to include *Nous Deux*’s column of general relationship advice entitled “Elise Responds to You” and *Cosmopolitan*’s relationship and sex “Agony” column by Dr. Irma Kurtz, we add nine French cases of sexual frustration (for a total of 12) and three cases of American sexual frustration (for a total of 19). With this expanded “n,” the contrast between French complaints, 75 percent of which blame the man for too little sex, and American complaints, only 32 percent of which blame the man, becomes formally statistically significant at a 99 percent confidence level. Table 4.3 displays the textual evidence on which each of these judgments is based.³⁰

³⁰ Since one or the other partner can be identified as the sexual “bottleneck” in each of these cases, these numbers also imply that three of 12 (25 percent) of French women and 12 of 18 (67 percent) of American women are

[Table 4.3 about here]

This basic finding is corroborated by an assortment of other magazine articles touching on the issue in the broader sample. For instance, the entire purpose of “Not Tonight, Honey” in *Good Housekeeping*’s February 2007 is to persuade the married reader that she should refuse her husband sex less often. The article begins: “Be honest. How many times have you turned down sex this month?” (Mahoney 2007:133) It urges empathy for sex-hungry husbands, but also adduces a range of metaphors and arguments to give wives extrinsic reasons for saying yes to sex more often: agreeing to sex is like making a deposit in a bank account; it promotes health by releasing mood-enhancing hormones and improving immune system response; it is an implied clause in the marriage contract (all 133); it enhances physical energy and provides relaxation (134); and, of course, it increases emotional intimacy (169). Men presumably do not need such additional inducements to agree to sex.

Another *Good Housekeeping* article entitled “Sex, Lies, and TV” draws a series of “lessons learned” from classic and current sitcoms about married life. In it, author Kathleen Renda jokingly remarks that “Everybody Loves Raymond” is “[s]o true to life, it’s practically a documentary” (Renda 2007:139). In her notes on “What We Learned” from the show, Renda writes: “Husbands have to beg for sex. A lot” (Renda 2007:139).³¹ We need not necessarily believe that the show is actually representative of modal American marriages in order to see the show’s joking recognition of this “fact of life” about typical marriages as a signal that wives’ lesser appetite for sex is a widely accepted image about everyday life in the U.S.

One typical pattern in American accounts of a sexually underpowered relationship is that unresolved anger in the relationship leads the woman to avoid intercourse. The man complains that “she’s *never* in the mood for sex anymore” (Rosen 2002a:38) while the woman retorts that she gets attention from him only “when he wants to have sex, which hardly puts me in the mood” (Rosen 2002a:34). Sometimes, the wife states openly that denying her husband sex is a deliberate way to express her displeasure (Hanson 2007a:54; Hanson 2007c:60-61). Weight gain also seems to jeopardize women’s libido, whether she is adding unwanted pounds herself

identified as the sexually reluctant partner in these advice pieces. This expansion of the sample is not unproblematic, since *Cosmo*’s “Agony” and *Nous Deux*’s “Elise” advice columns are both dominated by female correspondents, in contrast to the couples counseling features. This likely oversamples complaints about men’s sexual performance and undersamples male gripes about sexual reluctance among women. And including these columns expands the “n” of sexually inhibited couples more in the French case than in the American case. In addition, there are important differences by age and marital status between “Agony’s” correspondents, who are almost all unmarried women in sexual relationships with boyfriends, and the correspondents with “Elise,” are more likely to be married women complaining either about a spouse or a lover. On the other hand, this latter fact makes “Elise’s” correspondents more similar demographically to the couples in “*On Vient Vous Voir*” and “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” At the very least, the additional number of examples of sexually frustrated couples that we gain by adding “Elise” does not contradict the basic pattern on display in Caroline Kruse’s group of three sexually troubled couples.

³¹ The March 2002 cover story of *Ladies’ Home Journal* profiles the author and lead actor of the “Everybody Loves Raymond” show and also emphasizes the show’s verisimilitude: “The mundane fare that is everyday life in the Romano household—and in millions of others across the U.S.—more often than not gets written into the hilarious scripts of television’s hottest comedy” (Brosseau 2002:76).

(Forsyth 2007a:50; Rosen 2002e:38) or watching with disgust as hubby gets chubby (Hanson 2007d:60). In short, these columns portray American women's sexual desire as inherently more fragile than men's. This helps to explain why these columns frequently point to a wife's initiation of sex as a particularly propitious sign of a restored relationship (Forsyth 2007b:64; Hanson 2007e:60; Rosen 2002b:44; Rosen 2002e:38), something that is never mentioned in French advice pieces.

In Caroline Kruse's advice column, it is more often the woman who mourns the decline of sexuality than the man. Kruse describes one couple's situation in the following quietly poignant manner:

"It is also she who reassured him of his virility. It is true that, since then, tenderness has taken priority over sensuality. If they always fall asleep holding hands, well, sexual desire is not what it once was... (Kruse 2007a:55)."

In another, older couple, Kruse depicts a harder edge to the wife's resentment: "Lise often goes a long while without a tender gesture or a kind word [from Paul], and sex is even rarer [*sans même parler de sexualité*]" (Kruse 2007c:55). Two elements of this complaint are characteristic of the French pattern. First, women expect sex to be part of a broader set of emotional attentions shown to them by their men. And, second, men bear an implicit responsibility for initiating this sort of tenderness. These basic elements can be found in wives' complaints to "Elise" in the pages of *Nous Deux* as well. For instance, one woman confesses that her sixteen-year-long marriage has not always been easy, but:

Three years ago, we decided to start [our marriage] again from a clean slate. The problem is that my husband stayed just the same. He doesn't make any effort at all. One kiss in the morning, the same in the evening, and good night... Never tender gestures or sexual relations (Elise 2007b:4).

Several of Elise's correspondents complain that insufficient sexual attention from their husband has driven them to infidelity (Elise 2002c; Elise 2002d; Elise 2007a). Even those who have not are aware that infidelity is a common expedient in such cases and credit themselves for their forbearance (Elise 2002f). Another woman complains that she wants to make love to her husband more than once or twice a week. Her husband parries her complaints with a wry sense of humor, and she is left worrying whether his reluctance stems from age (he is older than she), distraction, or even insufficient love for her, although she notes that he tells her he loves her, and she believes him. In each one of these cases, Elise's reply is sympathetic. Although she may suggest that a lovelorn woman try to rekindle the spark in her marriage rather than looking for love with others, she never questions a correspondent's expectation of full sexual satisfaction. In her reply to the last letter mentioned, she encourages the wife to speak up forthrightly for sex more often than twice a week.

The theme of wives who want sex more often than their husbands also arises outside the sample of serious advice columns I coded. For instance, *Elle's* senior editor and humorist Alix Girod de l'Ain has a tongue-in-cheek piece under the heading "Men: Ten Ways to be Firm with Him" [*Hommes: Dix Principes Fermeté*] and the title "Dear, You're Letting Yourself Go!"

[*Chéri, Tu Te Laissez Aller!*]. Girod de l'Ain describes the problem of the husband who falls asleep at 10:25 p.m. (i.e., unacceptably early), concluding her "Rigorous situation assessment" [*Le strict état des lieux*] with the observation that "He who is sleeping isn't fucking, if you know what I mean (read below)." As promised, Girod de l'Ain takes on the problem of the libidinally underpowered husband in the very next section of her article, entitled "He's Not in the Mood Anymore" [*Il n'a plus la tête à ça*]: "Is there anything uglier than the expression 'conjugal duty?' Is there anything sadder than a formerly spirited husband who proves to you once a week (at best) that he is man with a sense of duty?" (Girod de l'Ain 2002a:174). The idea that sexual pleasure is a "duty" owed by a husband to his wife is not contemplated, even jokingly, in any of the American magazines in my sample.³²

Men's obligation to attend to women's emotional and sexual needs is also evident in the replies given by *Nous Deux's* advice columnist, Elise, to men who write to her complaining of their wives' faithlessness. "Grégoire" writes to complain that his wife has left him:

for a reason that I still don't understand... For twenty-three years, I've put up with lies, infidelities, and wildly fluctuating moods. I don't want to reconcile with my ex-wife, but loneliness frightens me. A sincere and honest woman living in Pas-de-Calais might be willing to meet me (my divorce has been finalized) because life isn't over, isn't that right, Elise? (Elise 2002j).

Elise, who is typically sympathetic to her correspondents' disappointments in love, replies with some astringency:

Because your wife left you, you pretend not to understand anything! But, Grégoire, do you think that a wife will indefinitely put up with seeing her husband be indifferent to her lies, her moods, and her infidelity? Who or what stopped you from speaking to her about your resentment and from trying to understand her attitude? Was it calmness, fear, or cowardice? The point is not at all to excuse your wife, but to tell you that burying your head in the sand for 23 years doesn't make you faultless... Now, if you come across a sincere and honest woman, give some thought to the fact that she will also want to exist in your eyes... And not to be treated like just another piece of furniture! (Elise 2002j).

In Elise's eyes, Grégoire's cardinal mistake has been to ignore his wife's misbehavior rather than treating it as a plea for greater attention and emotional connection.

Another correspondent who complains that his wife of over two decades has demanded a divorce "out of the blue," receives a similar response from Elise. There must have been warning signs that something was wrong in the relationship, she writes; he must stop playing the oblivious innocent and demand explanations, even if it might be too late (Elise 2002b). Any man who claims to be entirely surprised by his wife's behavior is probably dissembling, and is certainly at fault for not having bothered to understand her.

³² The only instance in American popular culture that I can call to mind in which a wife regularly importunes her husband for sex is in the sitcom "Married with Children." The show's sense of humor is grotesque rather than witty (like "Seinfeld") or fueled by laughter at "all-too-real" situations (like "Everybody Loves Raymond"). Its characters are not just comically exaggerated but contemptible.

There are two larger points reinforced by these examples. The first is that the French ideal of masculinity centers upon an emotionally intelligent desire and ability to understand and please women, something rooted in empathy and combining, in its optimal form, erotic, intellectual, aesthetic, ludic, sociable and emotional components. Naturally, this is not something that every man can live up to, but it is an ideal that is available to both sexes and that men can be held accountable to, as Elise's replies illustrate. The second point is that the quotidian realities of marriage can easily come into tension with the ideal of erotic relationships based on male-initiated seduction. Since men are expected to be more proactive in maintaining the quality of the marital relationship, there is reason to be more anxious about the possibility that their interest will wane. In the American case, by contrast, the assumption that men have a stronger sex drive than women and the lower cultural expectations for men's qualitative contribution to the relationship both help to alleviate anxieties about men's behavior in marriage.

Infidelity Redux: Problem or Solution for French Marriage?

Infidelity continues to loom large in contemporary French women's magazines. In an interview with me, journalist Jean-Jacques Greif told me that his boss during the 1970s at *Marie Claire*, Jacques Garai, had a rule of thumb: a cover story about infidelity would double the circulation of any given issue of a magazine. A closer examination of discussions of infidelity in the American and French magazines suggests that the topic continues to fascinate to French readers.

A comparison of the relationship advice columns in *Nous Deux* and *Cosmopolitan* show women getting advice about infidelity³³ in 13 of 60 (22%) as opposed to 6 of 59 (10%) letters respectively.³⁴ More revealing than these raw numbers, however, is the way infidelity figures in these discussions. Five of the six cases discussed by Irma Kurtz, *Cosmo's* "Agony Aunt," describe unwanted adulterous advances by men or young women's suspicions about a boyfriend's suspected infidelity. Only one comes from a woman who is the cheater, and she describes her own behavior as somewhat compulsive:

My boyfriend and I have been together for eight years. I love him and we have a very healthy sex life, but once or twice a year, I have a one-night stand. I know this isn't fair, but these trysts satisfy my naughty streak and keep me excited.

Should I tell him or are some things better left unsaid? (Kurtz 2002).

(Kurtz sensibly responds that the letter-writer needs to come to grips with what her behavior reveals about her primary relationship.) In these letters, then, infidelity appears largely as a strange and unwelcome intrusion into women's lives.

Infidelity appears in a quite different light in Elise's correspondence. In eight of the thirteen letters to Elise about infidelity, the letter-writer is a woman who wants an adulterous relationship. One correspondent, who says she has been a faithful spouse for eleven years, sends a letter to a married man with three children declaring her love for him. She is vexed when the

³³ For coding purposes, I treat "infidelity" being at issue in cases of actual, suspected, or desired sex with someone other than one's spouse or girlfriend/boyfriend.

³⁴ This contrast is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level (binomial confidence interval).

man pretends as if the letter had never been sent, and asks Elise for possible explanations (Elise 2002g). Two of Elise's correspondents are women who were disappointed when their seducer proves impotent and begins avoiding them. They want to know if there is a way to salvage the relationship (Elise 2002c; Elise 2002d). Some letter-writers want to know whether to pursue a potential affair (Elise 2002f; Elise 2002h) or how to cope with the disappointment of a liaison that has ended too soon (Elise 2007c). To these women, adultery represents an opportunity to discover the tenderness or delirium of love.

Elise's replies typically represent the voice of reason. For instance, "Carine" writes to say:

Mother of two little ones, I have been living with my partner for seven years.³⁵ I would be entirely happy if I weren't irrepressibly attracted to another man. I have already crossed his path twice, and I don't think it happened by chance. I know that he is free and that he is not indifferent toward me. What do you think?

Elise attempts to bring the letter-writer down to earth:

[D]on't you think that attributing such importance to a very brief encounter is a little hasty given the happiness you admit to experiencing now? Your emotions have been aroused, fine and good [*Vous êtes troublée, d'accord*]. And, supposing that this man (whom, mysteriously, you know to be free) felt the same way; what consequence are you planning on drawing from that premise? Confessing your emotion to him? Letting him get to know you? Becoming his mistress? Leaving your partner? You'd be better off considering what is happening to you as evidence that you have been seduced [*comme signe évident de séduction*]. He's not indifferent to you either, and that's all for the better. Nevertheless, that's not a good reason to contemplate upending your life [*changer de vie*] every time you leave the house! (Elise 2002i)

By Elise's lights, her Carine's mistake is not to have felt a surge of erotic excitement from a stranger. This is just one of the ways "everyday life" "jostles" a person [*petites bousculades du quotidien*]. Carine should be pleased that she can attract the erotic interest of a stranger, but this is no reason to jeopardize her happy household.

Elise's response to Maryse, a 53-year-old woman who writes that she is "suffocating" in her marriage of three decades, is similarly pragmatic as opposed to moralizing in tone. Maryse has received a "tender" response to a personals ad, but she is tied in knots of anxiety over whether the affair will be entirely discreet and whether the man will be to her taste. Elise notes that "In certain cases, wanting an extramarital adventure is neither unthinkable nor terrifying," but that it is bound to be somewhat risky. Maryse operates a restaurant with her husband, which, Elise points out, will complicate the logistics of an affair. Elise says to Maryse "you say nothing about [your husband], and that is your right [*c'est votre droit*]. But if there were someone, somewhere feeling as forlorn as you [*autant en manque que vous*], that would be him, wouldn't

³⁵ The term the letter-writer uses is "*concubinage*," which means living together though unmarried, often with children. The term *concubin(e)* is entirely practical, and lacks the shameful implications it has in English.

it?” (Elise 2002h). In short, Elise avoids pronouncing categorical prohibitions on extramarital affairs. But, as in this reader’s case, she typically counsels against them.

In one instance in my sample, however, Elise tells a correspondent to go ahead with an affair. The exchange, entitled “The right to happiness,” is instructive. Elise’s correspondent, who coincidentally also has the name (or pseudonym) Maryse, writes that:

I am 57 and have been married for thirty years. After an operation, my husband became impotent. It’s not so much the sex that I miss, but rather the rarity of his sweet words and the little notes he used to write me. I have stayed faithful, forgoing sex with another man. But during a trip abroad, I met a married man who isn’t getting along with his wife anymore and wants to leave her for me. I am unhappy, because he is 17 years younger than me and, if I get divorced, I won’t have any means of subsistence aside from the pension I’ll eventually get via my spouse. Don’t I have the right to a bit of happiness? (Elise 2002f)

Elise’s response would be well-nigh unthinkable in a mainstream American magazine. She takes Maryse to task for putting too high a priority on fidelity for its own sake:

Yes, you have the right to happiness. At it looks as if a little bit of happiness has come knocking on your door. The only problem is that, well, up until now, you were frustrated. Unconsciously, you developed a taste for putting yourself in the role of a victim, complaining, and constantly hoping for something better. Now, suddenly, another man has plans for you which might be able to make you happy. But the idea of accepting a relationship with him jeopardizes your true desire: remaining unshakeably faithful! Nevertheless, no one, not even your husband, can doubt that your situation is very difficult to live with. Because you need to be loved and cuddled. So don’t mix everything up. If a man wants to give you tenderness, affection and pleasure, take them, without feeling guilty. And you aren’t obliged for all that to get remarried and move to a different house or to experience your age difference as a nightmare. Finally, whatever you do, don’t get involved in the discord of his marriage. That’s his problem, not yours (Elise 2002f).

Elise considers Maryse’s scruples about fidelity to be contrived; they are a sort of psychological defense mechanism that interferes with her ability to claim the opportunity for erotic fulfillment that is her right, given the circumstances. It is unclear whether Elise’s judgment would be different if Maryse’s husband continued to be affectionate and sexually inventive with her despite his impotence, but she clearly considers loving attentions to be a wife’s just due. By defaulting on his obligations, Maryse’s husband has created a situation that, Elise thinks, even he would have to admit is intolerable and, by implication, likely to lead Maryse to a justifiable search for love outside her marriage. Elise sees no difficulty or surprise in the age gap between Maryse and her suitor. Especially for the purposes of an affair, in which the ability to produce children and the partners’ longer-term attraction to one another is not at issue, there is little

reason to worry about her lover's youth. Elise's attitude toward the marital difficulties of the would-be lover is also striking: those should not be Maryse's concern.

Elise also takes a very pragmatic attitude toward Maryse's existing, loveless marriage. She is financially dependent on her husband, but this does not make Maryse more morally obligated to him. We can presume that both partners are enjoying practical benefits from their marriage and co-residence: Maryse probably does most of the domestic work and her husband pays the bills. Both partners benefit from the household's familiar routines. None of this need be altered by a discreet extramarital affair.

Can the threat of infidelity be good for a marriage?

One frequent suggestion in French conversations about infidelity is that, as a possibility, it may stimulate the partners in a marriage to keep their relationship erotically fresh and exciting. Michèle Manceaux frames her interview with actor-director Yvan Attal as an inquiry into how he and his partner, actress Charlotte Gainsbourg, have defied the marital volatility of the profession and social circle so as to maintain a relationship for over fifteen years. Their conversation rapidly comes around to the topic of infidelity. When Manceaux asks him whether he is tempted by "adventures," Attal responds:

That's not the right word; you can really be touched by someone else. Then you think that you are passing up other people who are beautiful and interesting. It's impossible to live with your eyes and ears shut. So you can be seduced. You have to admit it. If you close off every point of access to the world [*Si l'on se ferme toutes les portes*], you'll implode. So, it's difficult to manage; I don't know how to respond to you (Manceaux 2007b:59-60)

The way Attal admits he is at a loss about how to manage one's emotions is somewhat disarming, particularly in a cultural context in which elite men often feign perfect fluency with words and reasoning. It is all the more so because he actually has a good track record of maintaining his relationship with Gainsbourg. Without necessarily intending to, he manages to flatter women in general about their irresistible attractiveness while managing to be admirably faithful in every way that really counts.

After Attal grinds to a halt with his admission of how hard it is to resist all the interesting and desirable women in the world, Manceaux lends him a helping hand in the form of the proposition that "You have to allow [*admettre*] to the other person what you allow to yourself..." Attal gratefully takes the proffered assistance:

Of course. This is an obvious fact that boys arrive at a little late. Myself, I don't see any difference between men and women. Everything that happens to me I imagine happens in the same way to Charlotte: those hazards of life, those moments, not necessarily of weakness, but when, perhaps, you need to feel sexy [*séduisant*] in someone else's eyes. All that happens to me and probably happens to her too (Manceaux 2007b:60).

The temptations of infidelity are symmetrical for men and women, says Attal, because, when it comes to erotic love, men and women are essentially similar. This commonplace assertion in the

French context assumes greater stature than it would in the American context because of the dignity and importance of erotic life. Nevertheless, this assertion of essential emotional equality *is* backed by a flourishing and frequently eloquent public discourse about men's vivid emotional experience of eroticism, one that French women's magazines help to elicit and display in their pages.

Attal ends up agreeing that the very precariousness of marriage in the shadow of possible infidelity makes it stronger. Again, Michèle Manceaux suggests the key line of argument to him, and he fleshes it out with reference to his experience:

M. M.: Would the secret of a durable couple be to grant the other person liberty?

Y.A.: That's absolutely true, but one's conception of the other person is subjective [*mais l'idée de l'autre est subjective*]. Myself, I have never stopped Charlotte from working with very seductive directors and actors. I know men who can't put up with that. Sometimes, it's disquieting, but I love Charlotte so much that she merits going to work with talented people. I don't feel like I have the right to stop her. And then, if we lived less dangerously, perhaps we would fall into a routine that would be just as deadly (Manceaux 2007b:60).³⁶

Attal is arguing that the very precariousness of his relationship with Charlotte is a strength, because neither partner can afford to let it become routine and boring. His comment that "Statistically, Charlotte and I don't have much time left" (Manceaux 2007b:59) is hard to imagine coming from an American celebrity. In the American context, his remark would sound insulting, like an expression of lack of confidence in the quality and future of the relationship. In part, cheeky³⁷ and idiosyncratic remarks are more tolerated and expected from prominent men in France as opposed to America. But, in another sense, Attal is complimenting his spouse with this remark by showing that he does not take her for granted. "I could lose Charlotte tomorrow," he says, "All the more reason to take advantage of what we have today" (Manceaux 2007b:60). Attal is promising, in effect, not to slacken in his efforts to seduce Charlotte daily, to find new ways to surprise her, intrigue her, and convince her of his love. Indeed, Manceaux ends the interview transcript with Attal saying "Yes, that would be love: war and peace. Suddenly, peace." Here, the agonistic metaphor refers less to a contest of contrasting interests, as it might in the U.S. context, but to a tireless mutual conquest, an erotic siege punctuated by moments of shared repose and bliss.

This contrasts vividly with the emphasis on stability, comfort, and confidence in one another's loyalty that we see emphasized in American women's magazine commentary on marriage. The contrast echoes the description of cross-cultural differences provided by Raymonde Carroll, an anthropologist born in France but married to an American and resident in

³⁶ It is worth noting that Attal's comment strays into an implication that he has the power to decide whom Charlotte may work with. He soon corrects himself by renouncing any such right. Still, the pattern of renouncing masculine privileges out of generosity is reminiscent of Jean Duché's arguments in the 1950s that men's infidelity is less severe than women's prior to his magnanimous surrender to sexually egalitarian standards of judgment. In the French context, the rhetoric of generous male supremacy is not out of reach even of an individual with as much apparent (or at least well-practiced) humility as Attal.

³⁷ Manceaux explicitly calls him *gouaillieur*, or cheeky (Manceaux 2007b).

the U.S. Carroll remarks that the dominant American cultural template for committed couples interprets “all threat of conflict or suggestion of conflict [as] a bad sign: the couple has ‘problems’ and probably will not last” (Carroll 1988 [1987]:65). In contrast, taking the position of a typically French observer of couples, Carroll writes:

I would go so far as to say that one would probably be wary of a couple who always seemed to be in perfect agreement; people would probably begin to worry and to suspect that there was “something wrong,” that “something was fishy.” And in the end one might be even somewhat sickened at their being (or having become) “rather boring” (Carroll 1988 [1987]:64).

Carroll’s language, which invokes the strong emotion of disgust as a reaction to the “rather boring” character of *another* couple’s relationship, let alone one’s own, is likely to strike the American reader as exaggerated to the point of being bizarre. After all, Joanne Kaufman’s humorous essay in *Good Housekeeping* on “Real Intimacy” in married life closes by approvingly citing her friend Lynn’s husband’s joke “as the two of them headed out for dinner one night ... that he was going to be very boring for the whole evening. Lynn said that was just swell with her; she wouldn’t be listening” (Kaufman 2002). The couple is joking, of course, which signals that being “boring” to one’s spouse is not quite a virtue in the American context. But the joke “works,” eliciting a warm and knowing chuckle, only if it expresses a kernel of truth: that a couple which is sufficiently relaxed and comfortable together to be “boring” has a fundamentally strong relationship.

Once we accept that conflict within a relationship might be considered much less dangerous, or, perhaps more accurately, much less discreditable than dullness, Yvan Attal’s open talk about the precariousness of his relationship with Charlotte becomes more comprehensible. This puts the entire issue of infidelity in a new light. The possibility of infidelity can become a spur to redoubled efforts to capture and retain one’s partner’s attention *within* the couple. In her memoir *The Secret Life of France*, Lucy Wadham writes that she began by fearing and resenting Aurélie, one of her French husband’s former lovers and a paragon of “high octane sexuality” (Wadham 2009:7) but ended up with a more charitable view of her. A French woman whom she befriends explains to her that:

women like Aurélie fulfill a useful role in society. They are erotic catalysts... The idea is that in the presence of this type of predatory woman, wives and girlfriends feel at risk and this sense of risk reboots the libido” (Wadham 2009:44-45).

Infidelity, and especially the possibility of infidelity hinted at but not realized, can reinforce marriage. Since a degree of familiarity and complacency in a relationship is a well-nigh inevitable consequence of monogamy, the possibility of infidelity can reawaken one’s sense of one’s spouse as an exciting and challenging conquest. Indeed, Wadham recalls that when she confessed to her husband that the aristocratic subject of an article she was researching on literary salons had attempted to seduce her during the train journey to his chateau, “he was highly

amused and admitted to feeling aroused by the picture of me having my fingers kissed on a train” (Wadham 2009:24).

One of the personal narratives in *Elle*’s summer erotica insert from August 7, 2006 provides an extreme illustration of infidelity’s marriage-renewing potential. In “And he loved my body again,” a woman describes her chagrin when motherhood disrupts the “completely hermetic little world for two people” that characterized her marriage at its inception. At the beginning,

he was my man and my baby at the same time; I adored that ambivalence...

During love-making, we had our codes, our little games for two people. It was a little violent, sometimes brutal, but, in the end, we always fell into one another’s arms, swimming in perspiration and fulfilled (Kressman 2006:6)

By her account, the newborn infant who interrupted this erotic idyll was a love-gift to him, since she had wanted to delay having their first child. Her impulse to put off childbearing turns out to be all too well-considered, since the birth of their daughter thoroughly compromises her husband’s view of her as an erotic object: “When he touched me, I felt like a little doll made of sugar, too fragile to be taken like a real woman” (Kressman 2006:7). When all her efforts to revive his sexual appetite fail, she finds herself ogling other men on the street and compulsively reading authors like the Marquis de Sade. Eventually, she hatches the idea of trying out a swinger club. A good deal of the narrative concerns the artful way in which she plants this idea in her husband’s head without giving the impression that she wants it herself. As she succeeds in drawing her husband into the swinger scene, it becomes clear that her entire purpose is to revive her *husband’s* libido. She feels a pang seeing her Lionel making love to other women, but it is worth it, since “I finally found him again as the man I knew and loved, as a man who knew how to give pleasure to women” (Kressman 2006:11). The narrative has a happy ending of sorts:

You can’t imagine the extent to which this experience has strengthened our relationship [*ressoudé notre couple*] and rekindled our desire... [T]he last time [we went to a swinger’s evening], we returned home at 3 a.m. I pressed myself against Lionel in the car and told myself that I was the happiest woman in the world. We weren’t too exhausted. And when we arrived back at home, we made love again. Just the two of us” (Kressman 2006:12).

The reader may wonder whether this conclusion is more bitter than sweet. But the story surely suggests that the raw incidence of sex acts outside marriage pales in importance when compared to a spouse’s deeper emotional fidelity to an erotic relationship. This narrative is best seen as a particularly extreme illustration of the way in which, in the French context, infidelity can be symbiotic with a healthy (i.e., erotically vibrant) marriage. The almost heartbreaking lengths to which narrator goes in her efforts to rekindle her husband’s sexual drive places puts tamer, merely verbal flirtations with adultery in a new light. After reading this personal narrative, we can understand Yvan Attal’s display of anxiety about the erotic temptations of others as a benign and even reassuring sign of his attachment to Charlotte Gainsbourg.

ANTI-FEMINIST NIGHTMARES

Contemporary anti-feminists in the United States and France diagnose the dangers of feminism to love and sex quite differently, in ways that by now are likely quite predictable to the reader. In brief, American anti-feminists tend to worry that feminism leads to too much sexuality, whereas French anti-feminists see feminism as a threat to sexuality.

In *The Politically Incorrect Guide™ to Women, Sex and Feminism*, Carrie Lukas of the Independent Women's Forum, a conservative think-tank specializing in gender issues, writes that “[f]eminists cheered the sexual revolution that made casual sex more acceptable” (Lukas 2006:19).³⁸ The reality, Lukas warns, is that “Women are still more vulnerable than men, and while many women have embraced a casual sexual ethic, they often express regret after engaging in casual sex and lament their inability to separate sex from love” (Lukas 2006:19). The problem, says Lukas, is that women have a “biological aversion to casual sex... Sex with men unwilling to invest in the woman or any offspring almost certainly endangered a woman's chances for survival” (Lukas 2006:30). In fact, this is not quite right; reproductive strategy would dictate that women should be quite keen on pursuing adulterous liaisons with attractive and uncommitted men as long as they can deceive the man they are with into raising a bastard. Perhaps with this possibility in mind, Lukas lowers the boom on frivolous sexuality by adducing evolutionary roots for slut shaming:

men's attraction to chaste women may also have evolutionary roots. Men often prize promiscuous sex in the short term, but they want faithful wives... If a man finds a woman hard to get, he will sense that she is more likely to be faithful after marriage (Lukas 2006:31-32).

The way in which these allegedly inexorable biological tendencies overlap with pre-feminist American cultural norms is fairly obvious.³⁹ What may be less clear is the reason why the American cultural context inclines Americans to look to animal behavior for guides to human conduct. Behind this turn to animal models is the implicit notion that human behavior is driven by individual desires and preferences which are, in general, fixed and well defined. This assumption is the product of a vision of a society rooted in liberal political thought, which takes individual interests as its starting point and which rapidly runs into incoherence if individual interests are too malleable. This strain of thought naturally tries to track down the “fundamental,” pre-social roots of behavior, and these are thought to be visible in the animal kingdom.

French anti-feminists have access to a different set of strongly held cultural assumptions. Most fundamentally, much of the French cultural context affirms that erotic desire is the product of assiduous cultivation. Sexuality, in this assumption, if it is to be a recognizably human phenomenon, requires people to create symbolic meanings out of brute physical differences. Erotic life requires an aesthetic sensibility. Michel Schneider, author of an anti-feminist tract

³⁸ This would have come as a surprise to Anselma Dell'Olio, who wrote “The Sexual Revolution Wasn't Our War” for the preview issue of *Ms.*

³⁹ In fact, given the Darwinian rationale for clandestine adultery by women, *purdah*, not the mores of 1950s America, would be the most logical norm to impose on women.

entitled “The confusion of the sexes” (Schneider 2007), is a graduate of the *École Nationale d’Administration* and bills himself as “psychoanalyst, top-level civil servant [*haut fonctionnaire*], musicologist and writer.”⁴⁰ He writes:

we can observe a tendency to put an end to sexuality, its disturbance, its passion, its aspect of suffering and its flip side of death. Sociologists and psychoanalysts are making the double observation of an effacement of the difference between men and women and the loss of sex’s appeal for younger generations. But no one is connecting these two developments.

The thesis of this book? Indifference toward sex is the consequence of indifference between the sexes (Schneider 2007:9).

Schneider’s anxiety reflects a longstanding tradition of pro-natalist French politics as well as a more symbolic anxiety that *the* great drama of human life will lose its luster.

It is symptomatic of the deep-seated contrasts between French and American culture that the mortal enemies of “sameness” feminism in both contexts fear completely opposite outcomes: in the U.S., promiscuity that permits men to exercise their conscienceless sexual appetites on women, and, in France, the taming and ultimate extinction of sexual desire. In the conclusion, I explore the theoretical and normative import of these sometimes similar, often diametrically contrasting cultures of love and sexuality.

⁴⁰ Schneider’s double status as an elite civil servant and respected amateur intellectual is not atypical in France. For instance, Marion Fourcade finds that many of France’s most influential economists had this profile (Fourcade 2009).

CHAPTER 5: Love's Deep Codes

The longitudinal design of this dissertation allows for an assessment of feminism's cultural roots in America and France, and of its track record in achieving cultural change in both national settings. After a review of the study's main findings, I turn to the question of what explanations can do justice to the lasting differences between both cultural settings. I find that, despite the social scientific attractiveness of explanations that tether culture to powerful social institutions, there is an unmistakable tendency for cultural patterns to take on a momentum of their own. This lends a frustratingly open-ended character to the sociology of culture, but it also suggests that there is an irreducible and lasting social diversity to modern life that makes culture worth thinking about and fighting over. I conclude with some normative reflections on the cultural contrast between gender culture in the U.S. and France of the present day.

A REVIEW OF FINDINGS

The 1950s: Work and Family

Françoise d'Eaubonne's observation that "the young American girl dreams above all of the state of marriage" (Eaubonne 1964: 3) is amply confirmed by the content of American magazines from the 1950s. Much American magazine fiction dwells on the drama of a woman's search for a good husband, and jokes or cartoons about women fishing for husbands can make them appear greedy and predatory in the manner that so shocked Eaubonne. As I have argued, however, this is a distortion of a cultural ideal.

To understand why the culture is so focused on women's success in finding a husband during this period, one must grasp that a parallel cultural anxiety haunts men; their challenge is to find "success" in the world of work. Success is most easily measured in competitive terms, and observers of both sexes closely scrutinize a man's self-confidence and drive in any competitive arena for clues to his future triumph or failure. Ultimately, what is crucial is that a man must "make himself" in the sense of finding a worthy, publicly recognized contribution to society that does justice to his potential. But American men and women both see life as a struggle in which one's individual virtues, of talent and moral character, will determine one's destiny.

American magazines recognize that some women may opt for a career, the more typically masculine path to social fulfillment. In the 1950s, however, there is a powerful presumption that this will preclude a normal family life. Consequently, American women's magazines of the period portray the goal of "making a good marriage" and "making a home" as the normal female equivalent of men's quest for "success." It combines the opportunity to find a husband's and family's love, to attain mature adulthood, and, in general, to become a fulfilled human being. No wonder, then, that women in the 1950s sometimes seem hell-bent on "landing a man."

An additional goad to marriage for women in the American context is the fraught character of courtship. Particularly in magazines aimed at readers lower on the socioeconomic spectrum, stories frequently warn that boys will try to take advantage of girls sexually. Young women must guard their reputations and anticipate boys' opportunism. On the other hand, a

certain amount of sexual insouciance by girls attracts boys' interest and wards off the opposite problem of seeming uptight. Furthermore, although American magazines depict young women as valuing kindness and friendliness in men, a certain amount of forceful handling by a man can be exciting, since it signals his romantic interest and reminds a woman of the man's physical prowess. In short, for women, dating is a challenging enterprise. The beginning of sexuality pits boys and girls against one another and divides girls against themselves in a difficult calculus of how adventuresome to be.

Marriage is a relief inasmuch as it promises a resolution of this sexual standoff. On the downside, Betty Friedan depicts the typical wife as suffering a boring, somewhat purposeless existence. Although hints of this predicament can be found in women's magazines, a woman's anxious responsibility for her family's emotional wellbeing can offset—albeit in an uncomfortable manner—the boredom of being a housewife. In a manner that parallels men's preoccupation with “success” in their worldly vocation, American women frequently hear that a woman of adequate wisdom will be able to ensure the happiness of her entire family. Of course, women's alleged ability to create a happy home by force of will carries the downside of responsibility for whatever emotional troubles afflict their husbands and children.

Women's role in supporting the self-confidence of their husbands and children is heavily stressed by 1950s women's magazines. In American magazine fiction, a woman's solicitude about a man's self-esteem is a telltale harbinger of a potential romantic relationship, and the ideal wife is exquisitely sensitive to the smallest hints of anxiety in her husband. In the broadest terms, self-confidence is portrayed as being critical to any person's ability to take worthwhile risks and maintain moral integrity, and mothers have a special responsibility to give their daughters the self-esteem necessary to navigate the dangerous waters of courtship and budding sexuality.

In the cultural landscape of 1950s America, then, women occupy an especially fraught position. Assuming they can enter a good marriage, the most precious gift their love can bring others is to foster the closely intertwined virtues of self-confidence and moral judgment. This moral role in ensuring their loved ones' success in life must somehow take place at second hand. In a culture that valorizes the individual's internal locus of control, women must paradoxically find a way of fostering this capacity in others.

Absent a cross-national comparative framework, these cultural patterns might seem an inevitable consequence of the basic demographic and institutional realities of an affluent society with nuclear families and a male breadwinner. But an examination of French women's magazines from the same period shows that these preoccupations do not follow so simply from the society's basic institutional imperatives.

French magazines, indeed, reflect a strikingly different set of cultural concerns. French depictions of pre-marital relationships are less shot through with anxieties about men's sexual aggression and focus more on the emotional transformations wrought by love. Pre-marital sex and pregnancy appear as embarrassing possibilities, but are not portrayed as being absolutely fatal to a women's social identity and marital prospects, particularly among the humbler classes.

And French culture's greater attention to the possibility of infidelity makes the *married* couple's erotic relationship more anxious and drama-filled.

In addition, the French portrayal of ideal masculinity during this period differs sharply from the American one. French cultural discourse lacks the American emphasis on career ambition as a vitally self-defining characteristic of men. This is not to say that magazines depict French women as oblivious to their potential mates' earning potential. It is just that this is seen as a relatively fixed characteristic, not something that depends crucially on the individual man's competitive drive and self-confidence. French magazines care more about men's cultural refinement, eloquence, and personal style and less about men's capacity for competitive violence. Furthermore, the masculine characteristic that French magazines highlight as much as American magazines do men's competitive confidence is men's willingness and ability to empathize with and please women. Whereas in American stories, women are the ones whose emotional intelligence is most prized—a certain degree of social ineptitude on American men's part being quite forgivable and even charming provided that they demonstrate basically benign intentions—French magazines prize the emotional intelligence of men. In French fiction, romance between a man and a woman frequently begins with a man's surge of empathy for a woman. He may, for instance, perceive her emotional vulnerability and suddenly want nothing more than to comfort her. In the French context, masculine honor is predicated heavily on men's interest in and ability to charm women, whereas American accounts assume that men are inherently masculine quite apart from their behavior with women, and that this intrinsic masculinity attracts women.

The cultural importance in France of men's investment in being attractive and charming to women leads to anxiety over whether these efforts will continue after marriage. In a striking inverse image of American women's concern with supporting men's self-confidence and career success, French magazines emphasize the dangers of men's excessive emotional involvement with work. Sometimes in articles that are directly addressed to the reader's husband, the magazines insist that men must maintain a paternal presence in the home and keep the concerns of the work world at bay in favor of continued courtship of their wives. Thus, the cultural patterns of the 1950s that we see in America are doubly reversed in the French context: whereas American sources assume that women are naturally more emotionally intelligent and should specialize in the "emotional work" (Hochschild 1983) in couples, French sources emphasize the importance and attractiveness of emotional intelligence on the part of men, and are concerned that they keep doing the emotional work of heading the family and, especially, seducing their wives. In addition, in the French context, marriage is not the welcome respite from the hazardous and conflict-ridden terrain of pre-marital sexuality that one finds in American texts; rather, it provides social stability but also the threat of loss in the form of slackening seductive attentions by men.

A symptom of (and, to some degree, a response to) these latter fears can be found in the prominence of talk about infidelity in 1950s French magazines. In comparison to American magazines, in which infidelity guarantees harsh public opprobrium for men and women alike, it

is more openly recognized and even tolerated in French magazines. For instance, during the 1950s, *Elle*, an eminently respectable women's magazine, contained a serialized "Little Dictionary of Great Lovers" which admirably detailed the love lives of French couples, married and not, throughout the centuries. Nevertheless, this qualified public tolerance for adultery in France only increases women's anxiety about their own marriages. With a clarity never granted in the dominant American cultural framework, French discourse distinguishes between the pragmatic benefits and constraints of marriage on the one hand and erotic fulfillment on the other. For instance, while one prominent French commentator condemns the financial need that keeps many wronged women in marriage against their will, noting the way this humiliates women and turns men into unloved domestic tyrants, another prominent commentator urges the wife of a straying husband to use her socially recognized position to plot the re-conquest of her husband's affections. In an ideal world, then, the conventional roles and responsibilities of marriage would go together seamlessly with romantic infatuation, but this cannot at all be taken for granted. Indeed, the single most prominent cultural anxiety during this period in French magazines is how to reconcile love and marriage.

Lost in Transit? Importing and Exporting Second-Wave Feminism

The point of departure for Chapter 3 on feminism is a stark finding that the American feminist movement rapidly shifted everyday norms about the division of labor in the family, whereas the French movement had no comparable success in this area. In an analysis of time use data for married American and French fathers and mothers who hold down full-time jobs, I trace the impact of popular feminist demands for a more equal division of work and leisure among individuals with the greatest "motive and opportunity" for taking action on those demands. I find that, in 1965, American and French mothers with full-time jobs did considerably more total work, paid and unpaid, than their male counterparts, but that, by 1975, this gender gap almost entirely evaporated in the U.S. and never returned in subsequent years. By contrast, in France, it actually slightly widened by the mid-1970s, and has declined only slowly since.

As a methodological strategy, I compare feminist movement texts and tactics in France and the U.S. that were as similar as possible in intent and format; indeed, I examine texts or tactics were each pioneered first in France or America and then imitated in the other country. My three major comparisons are: 1) Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1953 [1949]) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (2001 [1963]); 2) the abortion-rights "Manifesto of the 343" in France in 1971 and its American counterpart first published later that year in the preview edition of *Ms.* magazine; and 3) *Ms.* magazine itself, America's first avowedly feminist mass-market magazine, together with its two French imitators, the "Femmes" section of *Marie Claire* and *F Magazine*.

My argument in this section of the dissertation extends theoretical work by Ronald Jepperson on the cultural differences between statist and non-statist polities (2002). This framework has been fruitfully applied to a cross-national empirical analysis of social movements by Evan Schofer and Marion Fourcade (Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001). They find, in keeping with Jepperson's predictions, that the institutional structures and political cultures of

non-statist nations like the United States are conducive to “new” social movements such as feminism which organize around issues other than social class, whereas statist societies like France provide inhospitable environments for “new” social movements. Schofer and Fourcade, however, study membership in types of social movement organizations rather than comparing demands and outcomes across countries (though see Ferree 2012). In addition, their analysis cannot distinguish the impact of formal institutional structures and cultural understandings of personal agency. My research confirms that both are important, and that ideational factors are indispensable to understanding feminism’s greater success in the American context.

In particular, the contrast between Beauvoir and Friedan’s germinal books as well as the differences in content and style separating *Ms.* from its French equivalents illustrate how American feminists coupled a radical social critique with an insistence that any ordinary woman can and should develop these ideas pragmatically within her own personal experience. *Ms.* combines incisive egalitarian feminist arguments with pragmatic prescriptions for individual action promoting social change, whereas these elements never come together in the French feminist magazines. The “Femmes” rubric publishes many egalitarian critiques of the status quo but little advice about how to change one’s own life, whereas *F Magazine* contains a good deal of practical advice but decouples it from a clear egalitarian feminist critique.

Comparing popular feminist magazines also reveals the contribution of formal institutions to the women’s movement’s vigor in the U.S. For instance, since individual lawsuits are required to enforce and extend anti-discrimination statutes in the U.S., *Ms.* can plausibly urge individual women to fight sex discrimination in their own lives with the knowledge that they will thereby benefit their sisters as well. In France, where legal remedies are less common and do not play a role in setting precedent, *F Magazine* recommends tactics for evading discrimination by employers rather than confronting it head on. While few of *Ms.* magazine’s readers would have filed an anti-discrimination lawsuit of their own, they would have felt themselves part of a community of brave women who are committed to opposing sexism vocally and vigorously. With these stories of intrepid activism as a backdrop, *Ms.*’s message that each woman can help usher in a more egalitarian society by questioning the division of labor in her own home seems natural.

Just as significantly, *Ms.* magazine’s ubiquitous accounts of consciousness-raising draw upon a narrative of moral redemption with deep roots in American culture (McAdams 2006). These first-person stories dramatize the exhilarating experience of everyday women who discover feminist insights and use them to transform their selves and their lives, and, in the process, society at large. These narratives bear a striking resemblance to the sort of redemptive maturation stories that abound in American fiction from the 1950s magazines in my sample. In contrast, the most emotionally vivid writing in the French magazines tends to evoke sympathy for socially distant people who are trapped in circumstances beyond their control. Each variety of narrative enacts a politically progressive version of the prototypical political agent of Liberal or statist societies, respectively. The agent of the American narrative pursues her enlightened self-interest and becomes increasingly autonomous, thereby helping others like herself. The

agent of the French account demonstrates sympathy for (socially dissimilar) oppressed others who are unable to help themselves, an attitude that elites in a statist society must assume if they are to promote a better society.

The story of second-wave feminism is not all success in America and failure in France. The case of the highly visible abortion-rights “Manifesto of the 343” in *Le Nouvel Observateur* shows that, in some instances, elite-led protest can be a formidable tactic in forcing concessions from the centralized state. This is particularly the case when, as in this instance, dissident elites assume their most socially sacrosanct role as scourges of elite hypocrisy and advocates of the oppressed and voiceless masses. This sort of protest has comparatively little purchase in the United States, where protesters typically “speak for themselves” and address themselves directly to public opinion rather than to an autonomous state authority (see Eliasoph 1998 for a brilliant illustration of this cultural approach to political voice, one that emphasizes its shortcomings).

In sum, America’s liberal institutions and Protestant narratives of individual redemption through effortful moral self-transformation helped feminist messages penetrate deeply into everyday life in the United States. By contrast, France’s statist, elite-centric approach to political agency meant that feminism made a comparatively shallow impact on everyday life. It is also possible that French culture’s preoccupation with the joys of love, contrasted with the prototypical American cultural adventure of individual self-realization, muted women’s enthusiasm for feminist liberation in France.

Giving Sex Meaning: The Contemporary Period

Some of the changes that have swept the cultural landscape in France and America since the 1950s are immediately palpable in women’s magazines. The most obvious of these is the treatment of sexuality, which has become much more open and explicit. This shift affords us new evidence about love and sexuality in contemporary American and French culture.

French culture’s high esteem for aesthetic distinction and American culture’s skepticism of it have profound consequences for the visions of sexuality articulated in women’s magazines. Now that magazines in both countries discuss sex more openly, the sheer literalness of American depictions of sex is striking when contrasted with France’s aestheticized eroticism. In American erotic fiction, the narrator isolates particular parts of the man’s body which are attractive to women. Sex scenes in these stories follow a standard script of explicitly-described bodily manipulations. *Cosmo’s* sex advice to the reader is likewise broken down into particular “moves.”

Traces of this very literal approach to sexuality can be found in French magazines. French sources sometimes recognize “stereotypically” attractive bodily traits, discuss “clichés” like men’s preference for sex over emotional connection, and acknowledge the influence of highly explicit, “mechanical” pornography on contemporary sexual styles. Significantly, however, the men and women quoted in French magazines usually denounce these sorts of patterns as banal, soulless, and unsatisfying. Even more importantly, French magazines present a vivid alternative that revels in the aesthetic and emotional meanings of sex and sexual attraction. In *Elle’s* erotica, a diversity of male body types appeals to women, and erotic

excitement emerges from widely different encounters, from intense, somewhat kinky intercourse to no physical contact at all. In short, the dominant strain of French culture aestheticizes sex and emphasizes its emotional dimensions.

The aura of acute anxiety that pervaded any mention of extramarital sex in America's magazines at mid-century has outwardly disappeared, but persists in a sublimated form. In my sample, *Cosmopolitan* now specializes in the depiction of young adult courtship. (The theme has been dropped in magazines like *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies' Home Journal* that are now targeted at married women.) In a reflection of cultural shifts that the magazine itself helped to promote, *Cosmo* celebrates unmarried sex by young women with the slogan "fun, fearless female." Gone is the sense so frequently projected by 1950s magazines that sex outside of marriage will sully a girl's reputation and ruin her life. Nor does *Cosmo* or any other mainstream magazine that I sampled suggest, as was frequently the case in the 1950s, that unmarried women must keep a careful distance from men if they do not want to suffer sexual violence for which they will be at least partly responsible. Excerpts from sexually explicit romance novels in *Cosmo* of the 2000s fantasize about lovers with just the right balance of forcefulness and consideration, lovers who are also responsible and courteous enough to put on a condom during even the most spontaneous encounter. To this extent, at least, feminism has put its stamp on contemporary American sexual ideals. And yet, even the word "fearless" in the *Cosmo* magazine's slogan betrays a trace of anxiety: why should anyone be afraid in the playground of "fun" sexuality?

Scholars and journalists have documented the still-commonplace practice of "slut shaming" among American teenagers (Schalet 2011: 162-64; Tanenbaum 1999; Tolman 2002). *Cosmo*, to its credit, never joins in such characterizations. Nevertheless, both *Cosmo's* sex advice and its sexually explicit excerpts from romance novels rely heavily on emotions of transgression in order to generate erotic tension. Within *Cosmo's* symbolic universe, "bad" is still sexy. Indeed, some of the *Cosmo's* erotic stories employ taboos reinforced by American feminism, such as the idea that professional life should be kept free of sexuality, to heighten the aura of transgression that fuels erotic excitement. In short, rather than dispensing with the longstanding cultural equation between being "bad" and being sexually exciting (see Wolfenstein and Leites 1970 [1950]), *Cosmopolitan* exploits and perpetuates it.

A drawback of this cultural equation between sin and pleasure is that a sexual relationship which has gained social legitimacy quickly loses its transgressive allure. In American magazines targeted at married women with families, sexuality is sometimes portrayed as an afterthought or even a chore for women. These magazines remind married women how pleasurable sex can be and urge them to keep up an appetite for sex for the sake of a healthy marriage.

French women's magazines do not need to resort to extrinsic arguments for sex's value to women. Whereas in American magazines, men are typically the ones complaining about too little sex, in French magazines, it is women who are more likely to grouse about infrequent sex. Both letter writers and advice columnists freely use the legal language of a woman's "right"

[*droit*] to sexual pleasure from a man, although many columns remind women that they must invest effort in understanding their partner and arousing his desire.

As in the 1950s, infidelity continues to be a fascination for French women's magazines, both as a source of worry *and* of temptation for women. Contemporary French magazines warn wives against infidelity on pragmatic rather than moralistic terms: is the risk of discovery by one's spouse and the hassle of an affair's logistics really worth it? Social-scientific surveys indicate that, despite the fact that the French are more morally tolerant of infidelity, they are no more adulterous than Americans in actual practice.¹ The magazine evidence suggests that part of the fascination of infidelity in the French context may be that it spurs seductive effort within marriage, ironically helping to counteract the disconnect between marriage and erotic love that haunts the French cultural imagination.

The larger moralistic equation of bad/good with sexual/un-sexual that marks even enthusiastic American discussions of sex is reversed in the French context. French narratives about sex tend to sacralize erotic experiences. The narrators of these erotic stories have extraordinary and intensely significant erotic encounters that leave them feeling transformed and elevated, newly aware of life's richness. These stories do not necessarily celebrate a new monogamous relationship, as the "hot sex" in American erotica usually does. Indeed, in the French stories, the moment of erotic contact is often a one-off event. The sense in this version of the narrative is that there is something ennobling about the pure generosity involved in granting someone a new appreciation of life through an encounter with erotic bliss.

Because these erotic redemption stories pivot on moments of transformative personal significance—in Arlie Hochschild's term, they recount "magnified moments" (Hochschild 1994)—there is a parallel between them and American narratives of intense inner struggle yielding moral and competitive self-knowledge and self-confidence. The narratives differ in a very sociologically significant way, however: the French narrative makes the moment of redemptive erotic breakthrough the gift of another person, whereas the American version makes it something won through individual risk-taking, even if others have helped along the way. This is one respect in which French culture is less individualistic than American culture.

These French tales of contact with sacred eros (sacred in the Durkheimian sense) praise men who are empathetic and generous lovers. Just as in the 1950s, French magazines often depict men falling in love at the moment they sense a woman's emotional vulnerability. The narrator of one autobiographical piece confesses that she previously avoided this dynamic on the grounds that it subordinates women to men; this indicates that a feminist critique of women's emotional dependence on men is culturally available and conflicts with this longstanding script for erotic rapprochement. In this instance, however, men are so responsive to this woman once

¹ One possibility not addressed by cross-national comparative studies is that infidelity is more common in upper-class circles in France. This is the implication of Lucy Wadham's recent memoir (Wadham 2009). It may be more evenly distributed, or more common lower on the socioeconomic spectrum, in the U.S. This would certainly conform to the sociological maxim that the behavior of those with high social status gets more media representation and has more influence on public mores than that of ordinary folk.

she shows her vulnerability (Fontanel 2007a) that the narrative feels like a sort of nostalgic homecoming to neglected cultural truths.

This emphasis on the transcendent importance of erotic fulfillment to a well-lived life also works against the precepts of Liberal “sameness” feminism by elevating the cultural status of femininity in the French context. Women’s magazines celebrate the subjective sense of being feminine as a crucial achievement. Even worse from the perspective of a feminism that prizes women’s autonomy, the women quoted in French magazines lavish gratitude on the men who are able to make them feel “truly” feminine.

The idea that men should empathize deeply with women and spend time and energy appreciating them erotically has continued in French magazines with little apparent change since the 1950s. In high-brow women’s magazines, men regularly talk about their experiences of love and sex. Some of these interviews elicit remarkable performances by male celebrities intent on demonstrating the unusual depth and power of their erotic appreciation of women. Magazines for a working-class audience also praise men’s romanticism and emotional susceptibility to women, although they put less emphasis on men’s ability to give originality of expression to these sentiments.

Given these findings, it is unsurprising that contemporary anti-feminists in the American context tend to worry that feminism will lead women into emotionally devastating promiscuity (Lukas 2006), whereas opponents of feminism in France fret that it will drain away society’s erotic charge, leading to a drab, joyless life and even to depopulation (Schneider 2007; Zemmour 2006).

In sum, I argue that many of the most fundamental cultural assumptions lying behind notions of marriage, gender, heterosexual sex, and love in the United States and France have survived the upheaval of second-wave feminism. Françoise d’Eaubonne’s description of the distinctive “mystifications” afflicting (and, one might say, often delighting) French women could have been written today. And in the United States, where feminism has had a deeper cultural impact, many widespread assumptions about love, sexuality, and the conflicting interests of the sexes survive in the present.

“HARD” AND “SOFT” EXPLANATIONS FOR CULTURE

Ann Swidler has noted that theories of culture’s influence differ along a spectrum of how thoroughly they claim people internalize culture. Theories which hold that people soak up culture, letting it shape their mentality and drive their behavior, argue that culture works “from the inside out;” theories that see culture as an external constraint that people bump up against constantly and must respond to even if it does nothing to condition their inner desires see culture as working “from the outside in” (Swidler 1995; Swidler 2001). A related distinction is whether cultural constraints are enforced by formal institutions and material constraints or by tacitly understood, more purely symbolic customs and categories.² We could call these two polarities

² This is related to Durkheim’s distinction between “morphology” and “collective representations” (Durkheim 1982 [1895]) and to William Sewell’s dimension of the “power” of social structures—the degree to which they can powerfully mobilize material resources (Sewell 2005).

“hard” or “soft” accounts of culture. “Hard” accounts of culture propose a world in which people’s tacit understandings of the world are closely associated with powerful institutions that determine people’s fates and script their lives. In these theories, institutional shifts can rapidly transform cultural understandings. “Soft” accounts of culture see people’s shared ideas about the world as being more lasting and less tightly lashed to social structure.

The work of anthropologist Jane Collier argues powerfully for a “hard” account of culture. In *From Duty to Desire*, she tracks the cultural consequences of one Spanish village’s shift from a social hierarchy based on inherited wealth to one rooted in a labor market. People stop attributing wealth and social status to the ability to preserve property and hand it on intact to descendants. They begin associating people’s life chances with their ability to cultivate their own skills and actively pursue economic opportunity. Within the course of two decades, people shift from seeing conformity to social custom (“duty”) as the chief source of reliable behavior, to believing that personal choice based on one’s own wishes (“desire”) can be the only viable basis for reliable behavior. This transformation, Collier finds, affects people’s behavior in mourning, courtship, marriage, childrearing, elder care, as well as their conception of regional tradition. Indeed, the cultural shift is so complete that, tragically, elderly parents and adult children from different generations find it difficult to communicate with one another:

[Y]oung people’s efforts to convince their elders that they intended to care for them in old age appeared to have the opposite effect of exacerbating elders’ fears that their children might abandon them... [C]hildren’s protestations of love, which were the strongest assurance that children could provide, had the unintended consequence of confirm elders’ fears that their children were putting personal desires above duty to family (Collier 1997:194).

This evidence that institutional change can produce such a substantial cultural shift over the course of a single generation, thoroughly recasting people’s tacit assumptions about virtue, speaks powerfully for a “hard,” institutionally dependent vision of culture.

Powerful evidence for a “softer” or less concretely institutionally rooted account of cultural difference comes from research on the contrast between “independent” cultures like the United States and “interdependent” cultures like Japan. The crux of this rich literature is that “independent” cultures conceive of selves as relatively comprised of stable internal qualities that drive action regardless of social context, whereas “interdependent” cultures see selves as inherently adaptive to social context (Markus and Kitayama 1991). The strength of this perspective is its ability to explain a myriad of ethnographic and experimental findings. For instance, experiments show that, compared to the Japanese, North Americans have a greater propensity to: ascribe context-independent personal qualities to themselves; esteem (and, indeed, overrate) their own abilities; and emphasize their differences from others (see Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010: for these findings and many others). Americans also have a more focused, less holistic approach to perceiving and categorizing objects than Japanese people (Nisbett 2003). Japanese culture emphasizes the virtues of empathy and anticipating the needs of others, whereas Americans tend to encourage communicating one’s own desires and allowing

others choices (Doi 1981). These differences show up across the entire range of social institutions in the two societies, from preschools to business settings (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 1993; Tobin, Wu, and Davidson 1989).

Obviously, these contrasting patterns can occur in affluent, fully industrialized societies with institutions such as a labor market, a state, public education, and so on. This would seem to rule out any “hard” explanation of them. Instead, it would seem that these contrasting cultural models of the relationship between self and others transcend and infiltrate even the largest and most powerful formal institutions of modern life.

Which sort of explanation works best in explaining the patterns of cultural continuity and change that I have documented in this dissertation? The answer is a mix of both. In keeping with Ron Jepperson’s basically “hard” typology of Western nation states, I find that many of the patterns I have examined can be traced back to institutional differences. Still, there is a subtle but ineradicable element of “soft” cultural differences stemming from less formally institutionalized ideals and mores. As an example of this overlap in explanations, I briefly consider Tocqueville’s account of contrasting French and American attitudes toward the institution of marriage.

A Tocquevillian Puzzle

In aristocratic peoples, birth and fortune often make man and woman such different beings that they can never come to be united to one another. Passions bring them together, but the social state and the ideas it suggests prevent them from bonding in a permanent and open manner... One does not see this same thing when equality of conditions has brought down all the imaginary or real barriers that separate man from woman. Then there is no girl who does not believe she can become the wife of the man who prefers her, which makes disorder in mores before marriage very difficult. For whatever the credulity of passions may be, there is scarcely a means by which a woman may be persuaded that you love her when you are perfectly free to marry her and do not do it... The rigor of the Americans arises in part from that. They consider marriage as an often onerous contract of which one is nonetheless strictly held to execute all the clauses because [the parties] were able to know them all in advance and because they enjoyed the complete freedom of not obligating themselves to anything.

— Alexis de Tocqueville, 1840, *Democracy in America*

In the mid-nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville provided an institutional explanation for why French marital mores were so much looser than American ones. The importance of inherited wealth among the French elite made marriage into a business proposition, so that amorous impulses typically worked at cross-purposes to the strictures of marriage. In this social context, adulterous passion was an understandable, even personally noble, protest against an oppressive social order. By contrast, the economic equality of American life made marriage a matter of free individual choice—and hence made freely-assumed marital commitments all the more morally binding (Tocqueville 2002 [1840]: 568-69).

Tocqueville's explanation of French and American marital mores has all the attractions of functionalist explanations of culture with none of the drawbacks. With this "hard" cultural explanation, he roots the diaphanous world of moral sentiments in the stern realities of institutional imperatives and social rank. He also shows how each culture's approach to marriage has a self-reinforcing quality. American marriage wields both a carrot (voluntary mutual selection based on compatibility) and a stick (the sense that no one but oneself is to blame for a poor marital choice). On the French side, Tocqueville points out that what contemporary sociologists would term "selection effects" reinforce the apparent reasonableness of arranged marriages: if marrying across lines of wealth and social rank requires uncommon courage, it is likely to be undertaken by only the most impulsive personalities, who will be unlikely to be able to maintain a lasting union in the teeth of family censure (Tocqueville 2002 [1840]: 570). Unsurprisingly, then, such a social environment will make erotic love appear as lawless, irrational, often hopeless, but also noble.

At the same time, Tocqueville's account avoids the defects of vulgar functionalism. It does not require us to believe that people are "oversocialized" cultural dupes who blindly enact their social programming (Wrong 1961). French men and women, for instance, do not simply accept the imperatives of "reasonable" marriages for money and status and cast aside their personal erotic impulses. Instead, they assert their individuality against society's demands by pursuing affairs out of wedlock. To a degree, indeed, society is compelled to excuse their behavior. Similarly, although many Americans will inevitably make imperfect marital choices and be tempted by adulterous desires even after marriage, they will know that such impulses command little communal sympathy; consequently, they will tend to police and pre-empt their own emotions.

Thus far, we have an exemplary "hard" explanation of a cultural outcome. But there are some problems lurking in the wings. For one thing, Tocqueville's account should potentially apply in *any* culture with arranged marriages undertaken to further family interests. In fact, however, if the social distance between amorous partners is too great, higher-ranking men are likely to undertake no seduction effort at all: they will turn away in disgust or simply rape the lower-ranking woman they desire.³ It is also easy to imagine a society with arranged marriage where the taboos on inappropriate unions are so high that there is no public sympathy for adultery. In short, Tocqueville's description of the French mores of his time actually depends on a set of symbolic preconditions including substantial public respect for the dignity of erotic love. Without these hidden "soft" elements, Tocqueville's "hard" explanation of conflicting mores would not work.

Furthermore, Tocqueville's account of marital mores in America and France in a sense works better than it should at the present day. Elite French families have long since stopped forcing arranged marriages on their sons and daughters. Indeed, in purely economic terms,

³ This is likely to have been the pattern in starkly caste-stratified Southern Indian locales such as Kerala where some groups were not only untouchable but "unseeable," not being allowed even to look at higher-caste persons (Varshney 2002:145-46).

France today enjoys considerably more “equality of condition,” measured in strict material terms, than does the U.S. If Tocqueville’s account were universally correct, contemporary French mores and ideas about love and marriage should by now have become entirely “American.” But while public opinion has been trending toward less tolerance of adultery in both the U.S. and France, the French retain significantly more permissive attitudes than Americans.⁴ These survey data also fit the magazine evidence discussed in this dissertation. In short, French attitudes have outlasted the socioeconomic explanation provided by Tocqueville. Cultural patterns that may have had “hard” origins have become rooted in “soft” social mores, perpetuated through their integration into the stories people tell and in the expectations they have of themselves and one another.

With these thoughts in mind about the ways the “hard” and “soft” sources of culture can bleed into one another, I now turn to a pair of explanations for some of the most lasting differences between American and French culture that I have described in this dissertation. The first, a “hard” explanation, traces the strength of aesthetic judgments in France to its centralized, state-dominated system of social stratification and locates the American preoccupation with judgments of moral character to its market-centric regime of social stratification. The second, a “softer” explanation, draws on a contrast akin to the “independent” vs. “interdependent self” distinction.

Aesthetic Cultivation and Moral Fortitude

Many of the cultural contrasts I have described throughout this dissertation can be accounted for by pointing to the contrast between French society’s esteem for cultural refinement and American culture’s emphasis on moral fortitude and competitive achievement. For instance, the distinctive features of French culture that we can explain in this way include: a model of masculinity that prizes emotional sensitivity and eloquence; fear that men’s emotional investment in their career will make them forget their role as tireless suitors to their wives; French feminists’ mutual jealousy over questions of intellectual prestige; a preoccupation with the emotional and aesthetic qualities of sexual desire; and the redemptive powers attributed to erotic experience. For its part, the American premium on moral willpower helps to explain a vision of masculinity that emphasizes forcefulness and competitive success; the pivotal role granted to “self-confidence” in American folk psychology; a preoccupation with girls’ chastity and with transgression as a key ingredient of sexual excitement; and American feminism’s reliance on a narrative of personal discovery and self-determination.

This interpretation of my findings fits well with Michèle Lamont’s and Pierre Bourdieu’s contributions to the sociology of culture. Bourdieu interprets French aestheticism as a way for France’s educational elite to justify their high social status and to compete with economic elites (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]; Bourdieu 1996 [1989]). Lamont extends Bourdieu’s analysis to the more American milieu, adding morality to the armamentarium of distinctions that the privileged

⁴ The World Value Survey question on whether adultery can ever be justifiable has respondents choose a number between 1 (adultery is never justifiable) and 10 (adultery is always justifiable). The mean value chosen by French respondents was 4.0 in 1981 and 3.7 in 1990. The means for American respondents were 2.2 in 1982 and 1.9 in 1990 (author's online data analysis of World Values Survey Association 2009).

use to justify their social ascendancy and compete with rival elites, and noting that Americans express great respect for money-making as a sign of a person's worth and social usefulness (Lamont 1992).

The finding that social stratification drives seemingly personal value judgments has thrown such judgments into sociological disrepute. Bourdieu argues that the very people who experience their own judgments of taste as most "disinterested," in keeping with Immanuel Kant's definition of aestheticism (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]:5), actually reap the greatest social profits from their tastes (P. 239-56). Aesthetic judgments appear to be inescapably invidious and self-promoting. Michèle Lamont's work underscores the divisiveness of "boundary drawing" judgments, showing that even an ostensibly pro-social ethic like respect for hard work can fuel racism (Lamont 2003; Lamont 2000).⁵

Aesthetic distinctions are in particularly bad odor among American sociologists, whose professional criticisms of social stratification are reinforced by a broader culture that has shifted away from traditional hierarchies of cultural taste (Bryson 1996; Peterson and Kern 1996). This dissertation, by contrast, shows that aesthetic judgments can play a more constructive role in social life. Aesthetic distinctions allow French men and women to be more imaginative and demanding about the emotional dimensions of sexuality. In the United States, second-wave feminists have won some cultural victories in their demands for greater tolerance of female sexuality and less tolerance of sexual violence. Nevertheless, mainstream American feminists have had a hard time asking for more emotionally *meaningful* sex. The remarkable early issues of *Ms.* magazine do show glimmers of possibility in this regard: Anne Koedt's interview with a lesbian in the preview issue of *Ms.* eloquently depicts her discovery of new emotional dimensions in sexuality, and she explicitly rejects using sexual orientation as a political statement, insisting that feminism requires people first and foremost to treat each other "as human beings," i.e., as ends in themselves (Koedt 1971). This level of emotional depth in the discussion of sexuality remains exceptional in the American context, however.⁶ Among contemporary American women's magazines, even a very "sex-positive" contemporary title like *Cosmo* relies on very literal descriptions of sex acts in its erotica. Despite outwardly flaunting old-fashioned prudishness, *Cosmo*'s also uses a pre-feminist cultural equation of sex with moral transgression in order to goose sexual excitement. The magazine has no other cultural vocabulary available for investing sex with emotional electricity.

None of this is to deny Bourdieu's point that the prestige of aesthetic sensibility in France lends itself to aesthetic self-promotion. *Elle* magazine's interviews with Yvan Attal and Daniel Auteuil about their experiences with erotic love are a case in point. They are public performances in which both interviewer and interviewee are acutely aware that the implicit

⁵ Lamont does recognize the links between strong "social boundaries," as she terms the value judgments about "kinds of people" that she studies, and social solidarity, which can reinforce subordinate groups' sense of dignity (Hall and Lamont 2009:11-12; Lamont 2000). But her research mostly documents the socially divisive character of value judgments.

⁶ Even savvy American feminists like Barbara Ehrenreich can struggle to go beyond a purely libertarian definition of sexual enjoyment, as Ann Swidler notes in her review of Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess and Gloria Jacobs's 1986 book, *Re-Making Love: The Feminization of Sex* (Swidler 1988).

challenge for these men is to be as eloquent about their feelings as possible. Indeed, this basic dynamic is inescapable whenever society values *any*⁷ personal trait.⁸

Social values like aestheticism thus invest certain aspects of personal experience with significance for the sort of person one knows oneself to be. For this reason, they magnify the attention that people pay to those elements of experience. They provide a reason to remember certain features of experience, lead people to expect that others will also be attentive to those aspects of experience, and make it more likely that people will talk and think aloud about them. This intensifies personal awareness of the relevant experience and enhances the possibility for reflexivity—i.e., for personal and/or social awareness of and control over experience. Perhaps the most significant shortcoming of Bourdieu and Lamont’s work is that it overlooks these consequences of social categorization and evaluation. The same processes of social attention that allow for self-promotion also enhance the subjective appreciation of experience and inter-subjective cooperation with regard to it.

Orientation to People vs. Orientation to Tasks

Thus far, I have argued that an important explanation for the differences between French and American gender culture that I have traced over the course of this dissertation involve the greater prestige accorded to aesthetic refinement in French culture. Another indispensable ingredient in this cultural contrast concerns the relative prominence accorded to purely social emotions in French culture. This preoccupation contrasts with American culture’s focus on vocation or individual accomplishment.

Explaining the contrasts between American and French approaches to sexuality and love by citing aestheticism alone cannot do full justice to the emotional aspects of French eroticism. There is an emphasis on generosity in giving pleasure that shines through in many French erotic narratives, for instance, in the recurrent figure of the benevolent stranger who bestows undreamt-of pleasure on the narrator before disappearing, or the figure of the erotic partner who truly listens to and understands the narrator for the first time. The *galant* flirtations between strangers that observers often describe as a characteristic of French life (Habib 2006) also share this element of gratuitous pleasure-giving.⁹ This same emphasis on sheer generosity in human interaction can be found in the fanciful character sketches of French toddlers found in *Nous Deux*, a magazine with a largely working-class audience. These profiles tend to celebrate the child’s (and future adult’s) ability to cheer and generally delight others in the course of social interaction. (Both girls and boys are said to be able to do this, so this does not seem to be a

⁷ T. S. Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral* depicts a series of temptations to Thomas Becket, the last and most insidious of which is to choose martyrdom for the sake of personal glory (Eliot 1965 [1935]). Even self-sacrifice can be self-serving, provided that it is socially valued.

⁸ In general, this is likely a major mechanism by which cultural features with “hard” origins gain a momentum of their own.

⁹ This is not to say that this sort of flirtation always has the intended effect. In her memoir, Lucy Wadham, a young Oxonian who married a *haute bourgeois* Frenchman in her late teens, characterizes the “constant flirtation” she encounters in France as “often heavy-handed and irritating but sometimes subtle and uplifting” (Wadham 2009:45).

particularly gendered ideal.) Any motives aside from the simple enjoyment of bringing cheer and happiness to others are explicitly denied in these profiles.¹⁰

Furthermore, the same qualities that enable a person to bring cheer to those around him or her are often said to foreshadow easy romantic conquests. This is important because it suggests that there is an overlap in the emotions of erotic and of purely social pleasure. In the ideal, they both involve a gift of emotional warmth to others that is generous, not selfish. Unlike the sense of aesthetic distinction, this emphasis on the special, unsullied delight of gratuitous social interactions with others seems to be just as much a product of working-class French culture as of elite culture, casting further doubt on an explanation that refers only to cultural capital.

There is evidence in the sociological tradition itself that corroborates this French cultural sensitivity to people's preoccupation with social emotions. Consider, for instance, Durkheim's familiar theory about the sources of the sacred in social life. His famous passage about collective effervescence (Durkheim 1995:Book 2, Chapter 7, Section 3) roots all of the extraordinary energies that power society in the sheer excitement of human beings interacting with one another. It is a quite extraordinary claim: what fuels the social world is not self-interest in one of its many guises, but rather the instinctive and irresistible emotional excitement of social contact with other people. The claim is hard to credit if we fixate too much on Durkheim's portrait of Aboriginal orgiastic gatherings, which seem very distant from most of contemporary life. Durkheim's argument is much more broadly supported, however, since he posits that the positive feedback of simultaneously experienced and recognized emotions can be awakened any time "society" is present in the form of human beings interacting with one another. For instance, in *Suicide*, Durkheim labels marriage a species of "society," calling it "domestic society" (e.g., Durkheim 1952:198) even though it consists of only two people. Even the social warmth of interaction with one other human being is enough to help keep the heart's light afire. Too little of this fundamental emotional energy, however, and human beings wither, taking their own lives.

In text after text, Durkheim insists on that emotional feedback loops are ubiquitous in social existence:

There is, in short, in a cohesive and animated society a constant interchange of ideas and feeling from all to each and each to all, something like a mutual moral support, which instead of throwing the individual on his own resources, leads him to share in the collective energy and supports his own when exhausted (Durkheim 1952:210).

If we combine two of the fanciful profiles in *Nous Deux's* "*Chouchou de la semaine*" feature, we get an echo, albeit in highly sentimental terms, of this key passage in Durkheim:

Having Titouan at your side assures you of never being sad. This little boy whirls around those whom he loves without ever tiring. In his wake blows a breeze of

¹⁰ This same spirit is illustrated in Michèle Lamont's interviews with French working-class men who emphasize the pleasures of socializing with workmates and the necessity of a friendship/solidarity with others that entirely excludes ulterior self-interest (Lamont 2000:160, 66-67). "In contrast," writes Lamont, "American workers appear to lead more isolated lives and to take less pleasure in the time they spend together in their workplace" (Lamont 2000:167).

happiness and love that drives away the clouds to let the sun shine frankly and joyfully... ("Le chouchou de la semaine: Titouan" 2007). Merlin¹¹ is idealistic; he would like everyone around him to be happy. He has a very charming [*séduisantes*] personality, but in order to conserve this vivacity, he needs to recharge his batteries [*ils doivent faire le plein d'énergie*]. For that, he needs to feel loved ("Le bébé de la semaine: Merlin" 2002).

In these profiles, *Nous Deux* is describing exemplary versions of the emotional dynamics that power Durkheim's social universe. The same cultural context gives rise to these remarkably similar social visions, separated as they are by more than a century and a huge gulf in intellectual prestige.

An important exposition of this same basic social vision can be found in the parable of early human settlement contained in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*:

The practice of living together gave rise to the sweetest feelings known to man: conjugal love and paternal love. Each family became a small society¹¹, all the more united as its only bonds were mutual affection and freedom ... People became accustomed to gathering in front of huts or around a big tree. Singing and dancing, the true offspring of love and leisure, became the amusement, or rather the occupation, of idle men and women who gathered together (Rousseau 2013:55-57)

Thus far, this idyll is animated by the same joy in one another's company that we find in Durkheim's sociology and in the sweet-hearted boys and girls of *Nous Deux*.¹² At this point, however, Rousseau introduces an element of strife—one that arises out of the very same interactions that produce "the sweetest feelings known to man:"

Everyone began looking at other people and wishing to be looked at, and public esteem came to be prized. The person who sang or danced the best, the one who was best-looking, strongest, most skillful, or most eloquent, was now the most highly regarded. This was the first step toward inequality, and also toward vice. From these first preferences arose vanity and scorn on the one hand, and shame and envy on the other; and the fermentation caused by these new leavenings ended up producing compounds fatal to innocence and happiness (Rousseau 2013:57).

Within the pure-hearted celebration of the company of others is born the poison of social distinction. If the French cultural context seems to make people highly sensitive to the pleasures

¹¹ I have rendered the "Merlin" sketch into the singular to eliminate a distracting feature of the original French. In the original text, the feature's pretext (later dropped) that it is providing a character sketch for all children with the same first name leads it to be couched in the plural, i.e., "Merlins" do such-and-such.

¹² In her memoir, English-born author Lucy Wadham recounts her distinct discomfort during her first encounter with the *Fête de la Musique*, a popular musical celebration during which talentless amateur musicians bring their motley instruments onto the streets and create a "keen cacophony" to which "everybody—young and old—dance[s] together." Over time, she ends up being "infected by this French gift for innocent ebullience" and regretting that it would be impossible in Britain, where people would demand better music and require alcohol to loosen up and have "fun" (Wadham 2009:87-88).

of pure sociability, it also seems to incline them to recognize the power of envy as a motive in human conduct.¹³

If Durkheim's sociology can be said to be centered upon the positive pole of the social emotions described by Rousseau, Bourdieu's could be said to revolve around its negative twin. In Bourdieu's sociology, every positive personal quality that is unequally distributed can potentially "ferment" into a species of capital with its own field of relentless mutual competition, of "vanity and scorn on the one hand, and shame and envy on the other," to use Rousseau's language. The pleasure of sociality can easily curdle into a sense of oppression by others, as ethnographer Laurence Wylie has noted (Wylie 1974 [1957]). Both Bourdieu and Durkheim, however, retain the fundamental insight of the French cultural context that the powerful emotions generated by mutual recognition in the *social* sphere provide society's most fundamental energies—not, say, individuals' desire for salvation, competitive achievement, or material gain.

To provide a "hard" explanation for this cultural emphasis on the motivating power of social relationships in and of themselves—the way the pleasures and resentments provoked by social contact command people's attention and shape their conduct—we could point to the social influence in France of an aristocratic elite preoccupied with social honor, something that can be awarded only by others. The relative weakness of a pragmatic and acquisitive middle class would have disadvantaged a mentality more focused on material accumulation and other tangible extrinsic achievements.

A competing cultural aspiration of American life, one that drains some of the culture's energy from this preoccupation with social interaction, is an aspiration to score extrinsic successes. These could include universally recognized competitive achievements like career milestones, dollars earned, or, in a more prototypically female aspiration, by bringing up children who are happy and successful in their own right. Naturally, both of these sorts of desires are present in the lives of Americans and French people alike. But their relative weight in each culture differs.

What Determines Which Elements of Culture Last?

From a social scientific point of view, "hard" explanations of culture are attractive in part because they allow for relatively precise predictions about when cultures change. If culture is

¹³ A tiny illustration of this can be found in anthropologist Raymonde Carroll's careful comparison of the original French film *Trois Hommes et un Couffin* (1985) and its American remake, *Three Men and a Cradle* (1987). In the French original, one scene shows a woman who is having a one night stand with one of the movie's "three men" discover her lover cooing to a baby in the next room. In a fit of jealous pique, she storms out of the apartment. The producers of the American remake evidently thought this reaction too bizarre to show to American audiences. In the remake, women are inevitably charmed by men's affection toward the baby and would not dream of regarding an infant as an emotional competitor (Carroll 1989). Lest we think that the French scene is an invidious slur on women's emotional maturity, it is worth noting one 28-year-old whose semi-joking portrait of his ideal woman for *Elle* says "She tells me that she desires me, that I make love to her like a king, that she loves me body and soul! She wants a child from me, and she swears to me that she'll never ignore me when the kid is around..." (Roig 2002:64-68). Again, the sense that an infant could compete for a loved one's attention is invoked jokingly here, but it is recognized nonetheless. This sort of an admission would be too weird to make even jokingly in the American context. The French context evidently makes it easier to acknowledge that people most deeply crave one another's attention, making jealousy possible in even seemingly unlikely circumstances.

strongly linked to powerful social structures, then they will last for as long as the underlying social structure provides support. Once it no longer does, culture will atrophy. To the extent that it does not, however, we are left with a more open-ended situation.

LEARNING FROM THE OTHER

Comparing American and French institutions and culture is one of the most venerable social scientific pursuits. Although contemporary scholars can build on some of the finest sociology ever written, like Tocqueville's twin masterpieces, the progress of cultural globalization has introduced new anxieties. Are national cultural differences a nostalgic illusion serving mainly reactionary elites in a relentlessly homogenized transnational modern culture? On the other hand, if one simply writes off apparent cultural differences, is this not an even crueler form of hegemony? Reading a letter like Eaubonne's to Friedan reminds us how unnoticed differences in implicit understanding can undermine even enthusiastic attempts at cross-cultural conversation. Furthermore, in the domain I am analyzing, cultural differences intersect with disputes about feminist principle that divide different people within each national context, and even pit individuals against themselves.

Any normative assessment of the cultural contrast between America and France is inevitably intertwined with feminism. So this is where I start this brief assessment of the ethical upshot of the dissertation's research findings. It is hard not to sympathize with feminists who feel frustrated by the way that calls for greater gender egalitarianism are so easily shouted down in France using anti-American rhetoric (Benson and Saguy 2005; Ezekiel 2002; Fassin 1999). Like all cultural systems involving an interpersonal conception of the self, France's tradition of *douceur* between the sexes depends on each party's disposition to anticipate the needs of the other. This also makes it vulnerable to abuse. As Lucy Wadham observes, playful flirtation between men and women might be delightful or an obnoxious imposition depending on the skill, subtlety and good will of one's interlocutor. This sort of annoyance might be minor as long as one has the opportunity for an easy exit from an interaction or as long as a retreat into icy formality is enough to make a man back off. But what if the pattern takes place at work and is persistent and annoying? More consequentially, even, it is easy to see how this pattern of interaction might undercut French women's ability to negotiate greater equality in household tasks. A man might genuinely feel profoundly emotionally solicitous toward a woman during courtship, but there is little glamour in pragmatically applying this sentiment to, say, doing the dishes day after day.

The amount of pleasure that dominant French culture associates with gender may also make women less inclined to reach for "sameness" feminist arguments that can be so effective at promoting gender equality. Profound gratitude to a man for making one flush with the delicious sensation of femininity might well take the edge off the desire to have him fold the laundry, a tradeoff warmly recommended in the pages of *Elle* (Roig 2002). Indeed, something like this dynamic might be present within the United States, where the frequency of sex in married

couples correlates with a traditional gender division of labor (Kornrich, Brines, and Leupp 2013).¹⁴

If one's only concern is an egalitarian division of labor, it is hard to argue that the mainstream French approach to love and marriage has much to recommend it over contemporary American patterns (see Figure 5d): the gap between total work done by men and women is considerably larger in France than in the U.S. But justice is not the only value worth pursuing. It is also hard to look at the dominant French ideal of erotic life between men and women and not find it something deeply appealing in it as compared to mainstream American ideals. The spirit of emotional generosity at the heart of French eroticism seems particularly attractive. When French elites rail against the encroachment of American cultural patterns into French life, they seem to be doing more than *only* rejecting egalitarian advances. French erotic culture does indeed have distinctive aspects that are worth protecting.

This raises an important question for American feminism, I believe. American feminism has an admirable track record of fighting for, and obtaining, greater equality between men and women in different aspects of life. It has also challenged sexual violence and championed American women's right to sexual desire. It has been less successful in banishing the shadow cast by fear of moral transgression on sexual desire in the American imagination. Perhaps this is because the second-wave feminism in America never spent much time imagining what delicious, emotionally fulfilling heterosexual sex might look like. In France, second-wave feminists did, in fact, do quite a bit of writing about reimagining love and desire (see, e.g., Duchen 1986:Chapter 5, "The concept of the feminine"; Sullerot 1979), although most of this writing was largely academic, and even aggressively abstruse, in character. In a sense, however, France began with a much richer discourse about erotic pleasure; indeed, many of the more accessible French feminists writing about women's desire, like Sullerot, took the tack of unearthing historical writing by French women rather than of reimagining sexuality from scratch.

"Third-wave" feminists in America have paid more attention to these issues, but discussions of heterosexuality can carry the stigma of heteronormativity, or compulsory heterosexuality, and much of the conversation centers on questions of whether this or that source of women's sexual arousal passes muster before feminism (e.g., Johnson 2002). The effect is both to individualize desire and to place sexual pleasure within the characteristic framework of transgression. One of the delightful features of contemporary French discourse as represented in women's magazines is that it encourages an imaginative conversation *between* women and men about what they most enjoy about one another.¹⁵ Men are encouraged to articulate and elaborate on their desire for women. (Indeed, it is characteristic that French feminists have often

¹⁴ Interestingly, the authors of this study are testing the argument that more housework by husbands earns them, so to speak, more sex with wives. The implicit assumption behind the argument (and behind media discussion of the article) is that wives are responsible for the sexual bottleneck in a marriage, an assumption not necessarily shared by French observers.

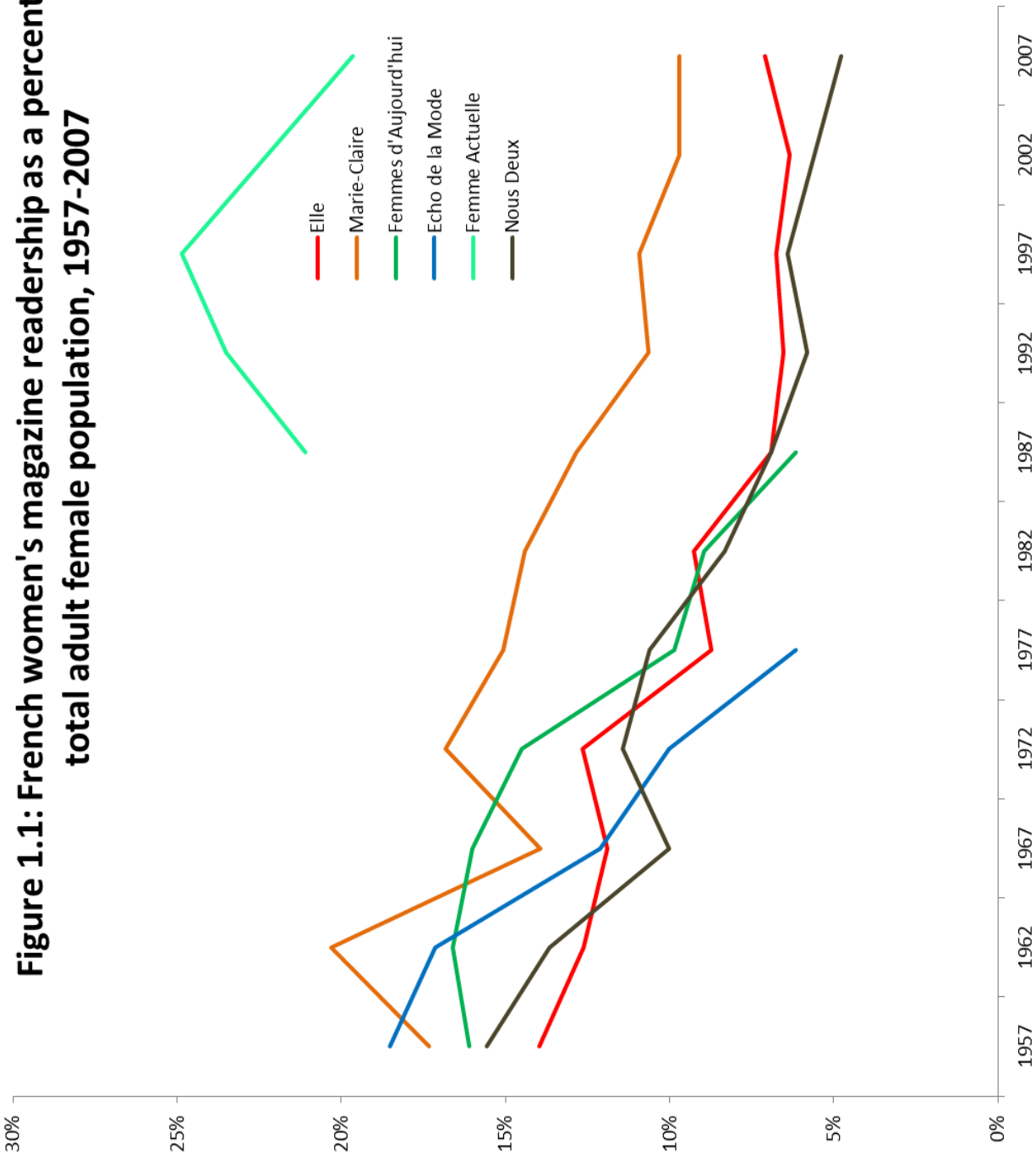
¹⁵ Nor does this seem to pose an especial danger of heteronormativity. Indeed, in entirely French magazines, men and women often learn erotic secrets from gays or lesbians (Fontanel 2007b; Rosnay 2007), though, admittedly, they go on to apply those lessons with heterosexual partners. This is more than can be said for the American women's magazines in my sample, however, none of which mention homosexuality at all.

complained that men monopolize discourse about what love is like! No reader of English literature, for instance, could complain about that, since the great English novels about love are written and narrated by women.) In the wake of feminism, American men often seem discursively trapped between defiant misogyny and apologetic silence.

In her comparison of American and Dutch approaches to teenage sexuality, Amy Schalet notes that many of the American boys she talks to are desperate for a positive and respectful way of framing their desire for girls, and opt for (what they believe to be idiosyncratic) fantasies of heroically giving up everything for their love (Schalet 2011:22, 167). American women's magazines, when they do consult men about their sexual desires, almost always find that men are enthusiastic about women who express sexual desire and initiate sex. One way to interpret this, of course, is that men want to have sex more often than women, and so men are simply looking to increase their opportunities for coitus. Another way to interpret it is that American men are used to thinking of their sexuality as an imposition on women, and are hungry for signs that their mate finds sex emotionally gratifying.

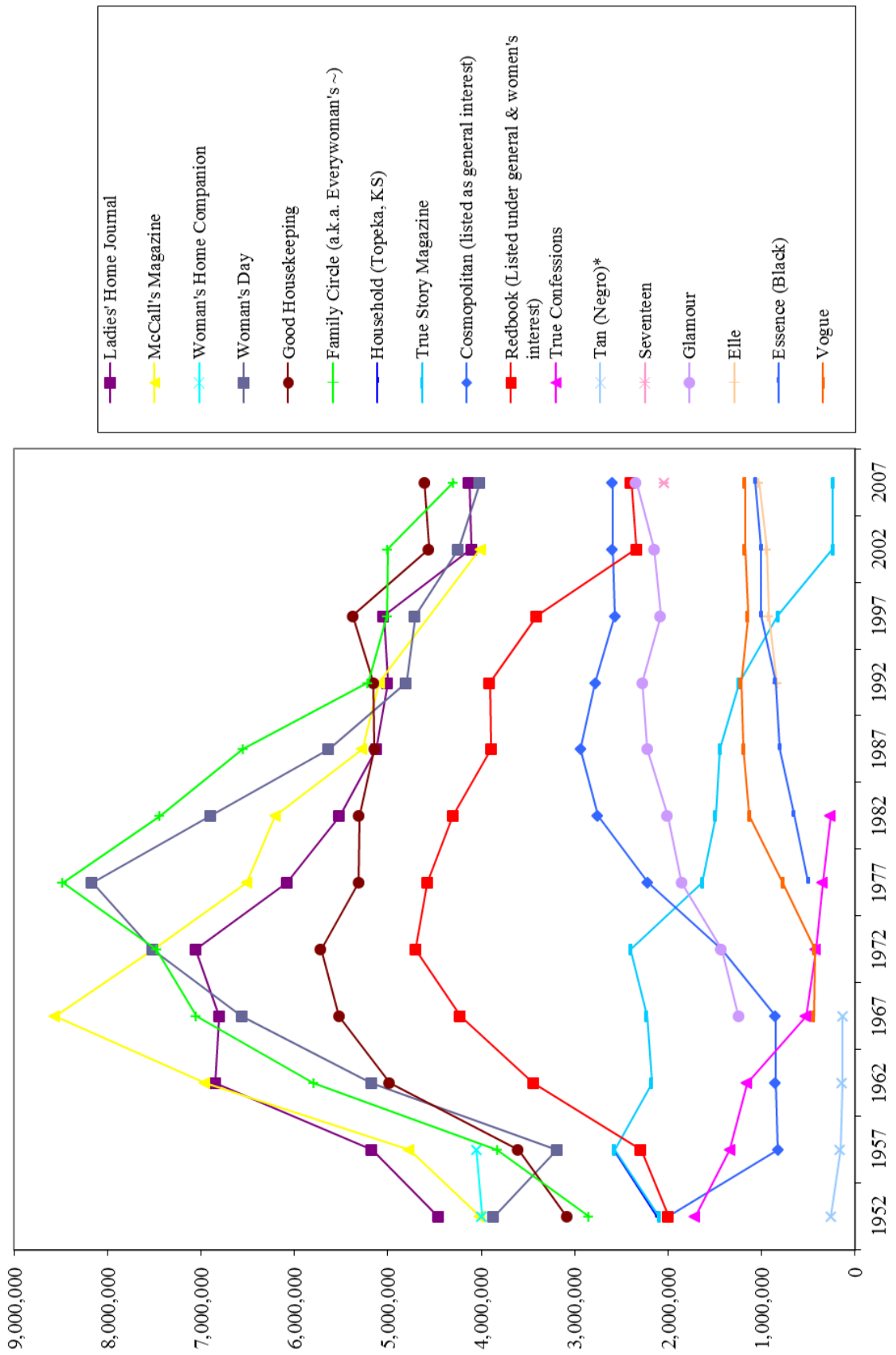
The French cultural context helped to give rise to Durkheim's insight that what all human beings crave most of all is emotional contact with one another. Perhaps that same cultural context can help remind Americans that erotic life can be more wildly generous than we give it credit for. And perhaps, from the American context, French men will learn that doing housework can rank with the noblest forms of *galanterie*.

Figure 1.1: French women's magazine readership as a percentage of total adult female population, 1957-2007



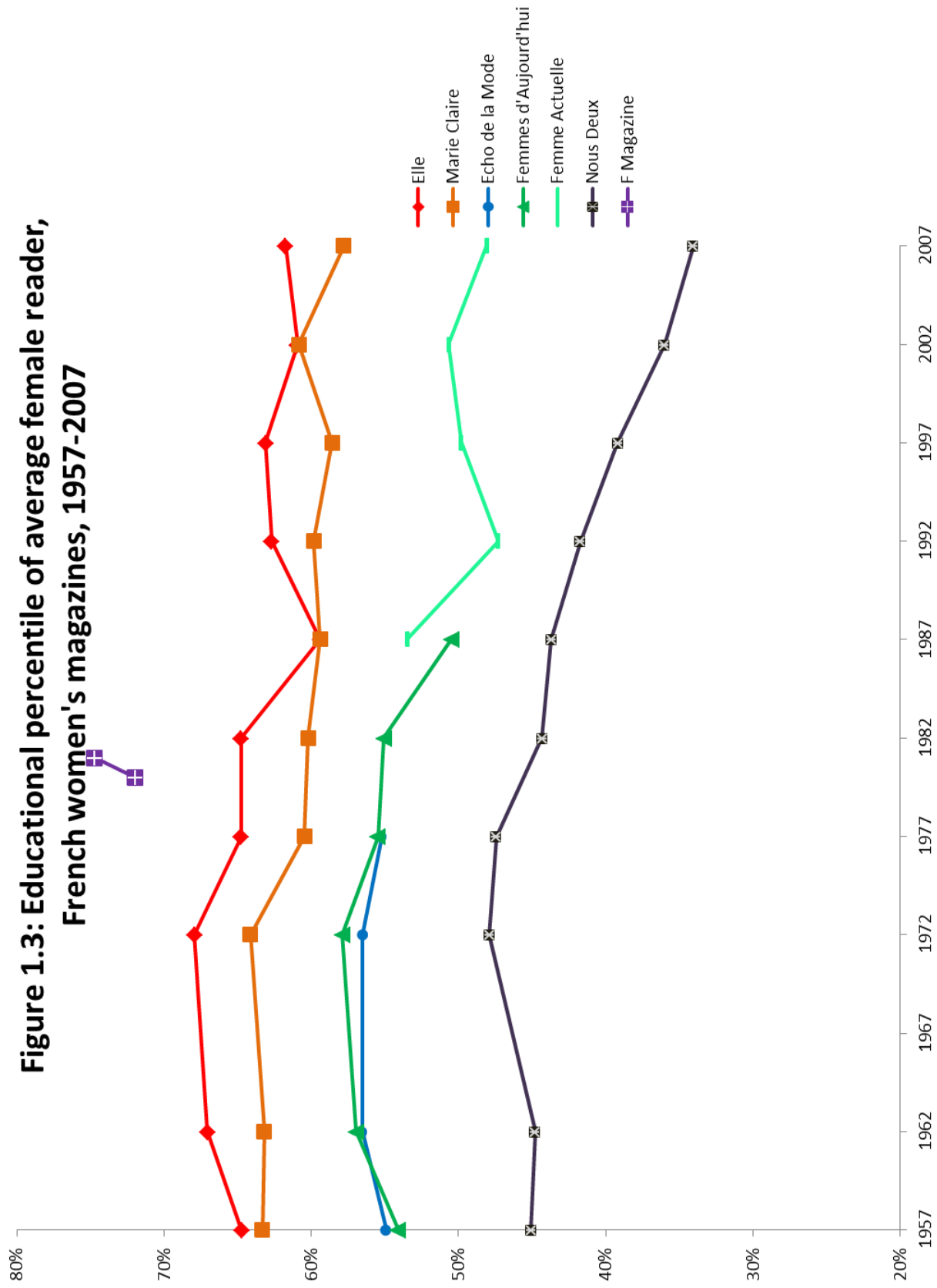
Source: CESP and AEPM surveys

Figure 1.2 U.S. Women's Magazine Circulation, 1952-2007



Sources: Ayer's Directory of Newspapers & Periodicals; Gale directory

Figure 1.3: Educational percentile of average female reader, French women's magazines, 1957-2007



Source: Author's calculations from CESP and AEPM surveys

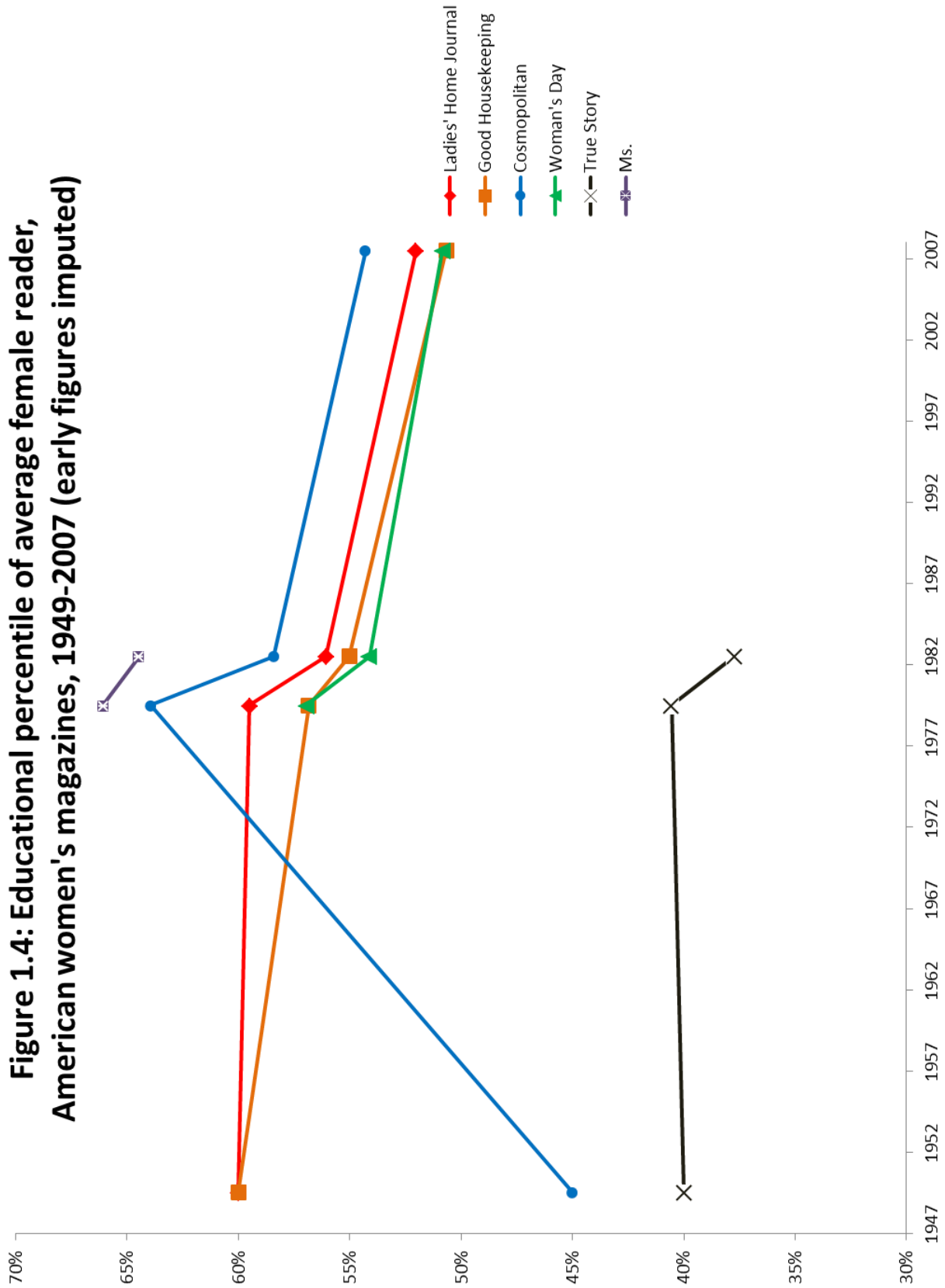


Figure 1.4: Educational percentile of average female reader, American women's magazines, 1949-2007 (early figures imputed)

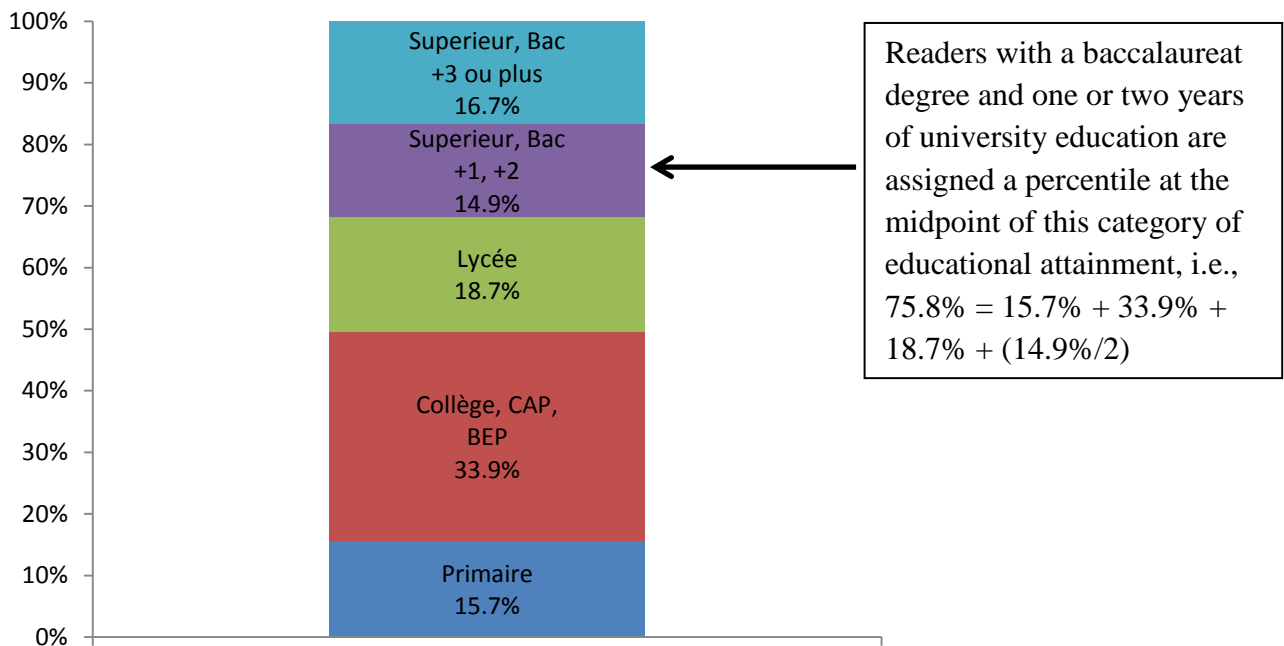
Source: Author's calculations from Simmons (1979 & 1982) and Mediemark (1998 & 2007) surveys; 1949 estimates are imputed by author from Kass (1949)

Figure 1.5. Procedure for assigning educational percentiles to magazine audiences

Step 1

The distribution of the target population surveyed by audience researchers is ranked by level of educational attainment and assigned a percentile value at the midpoint of each category.

For instance, the A.E.P.M. survey of French magazine readers in 2007 calculated that women among its target population of residents of France age 15 and up had the following distribution of educational attainment.



This yields the following percentiles for female readers with the following levels of educational attainment in France in 2007:

Level of educational attainment:	Primaire	Collège, CAP, BEP	Lycée	Supérieur, Bac +1, +2	Supérieur, Bac +3 ou plus
Educational percentile:	7.8%	32.7%	59.0%	75.8%	91.6%

Step 2

Of course, no magazine has a readership with a perfectly representative distribution of educational attainment. Some magazines, like *Elle*, have readers who are on average more educated than the population as a whole, whereas others, like *Nous Deux*, have readers who are on average less educated than the population as a whole. The educational achievement levels

among *Elle* and *Nous Deux*'s female readers in 2007 are shown below in comparison with the levels of educational attainment in the target survey population as a whole:

Level of educational attainment:	Primaire	Collège, CAP, BEP	Lycée	Superieur, Bac +1, +2	Superieur, Bac +3 ou plus
Survey population	15.7%	33.9%	18.7%	14.9%	16.7%
Elle readers	6.3%	25.2%	19.8%	20.7%	28.0%
Nous Deux readers	28.3%	47.8%	13.2%	8.7%	2.0%

To obtain the average percentile score for the readers of each magazine, we take the sum of the percentage of readers in each educational category multiplied by the achievement percentile associated with that educational category in the survey population as a whole. (For the latter, see the calculations in Step 1.) Hence,

Elle's average reader educational percentile = 61.7%, from:

$$(6.3\% \times 7.8\%) + (25.2\% \times 32.7\%) + (19.8\% \times 59.0\%) + (20.7\% \times 75.8\%) + (28.0\% \times 91.6\%)$$

and

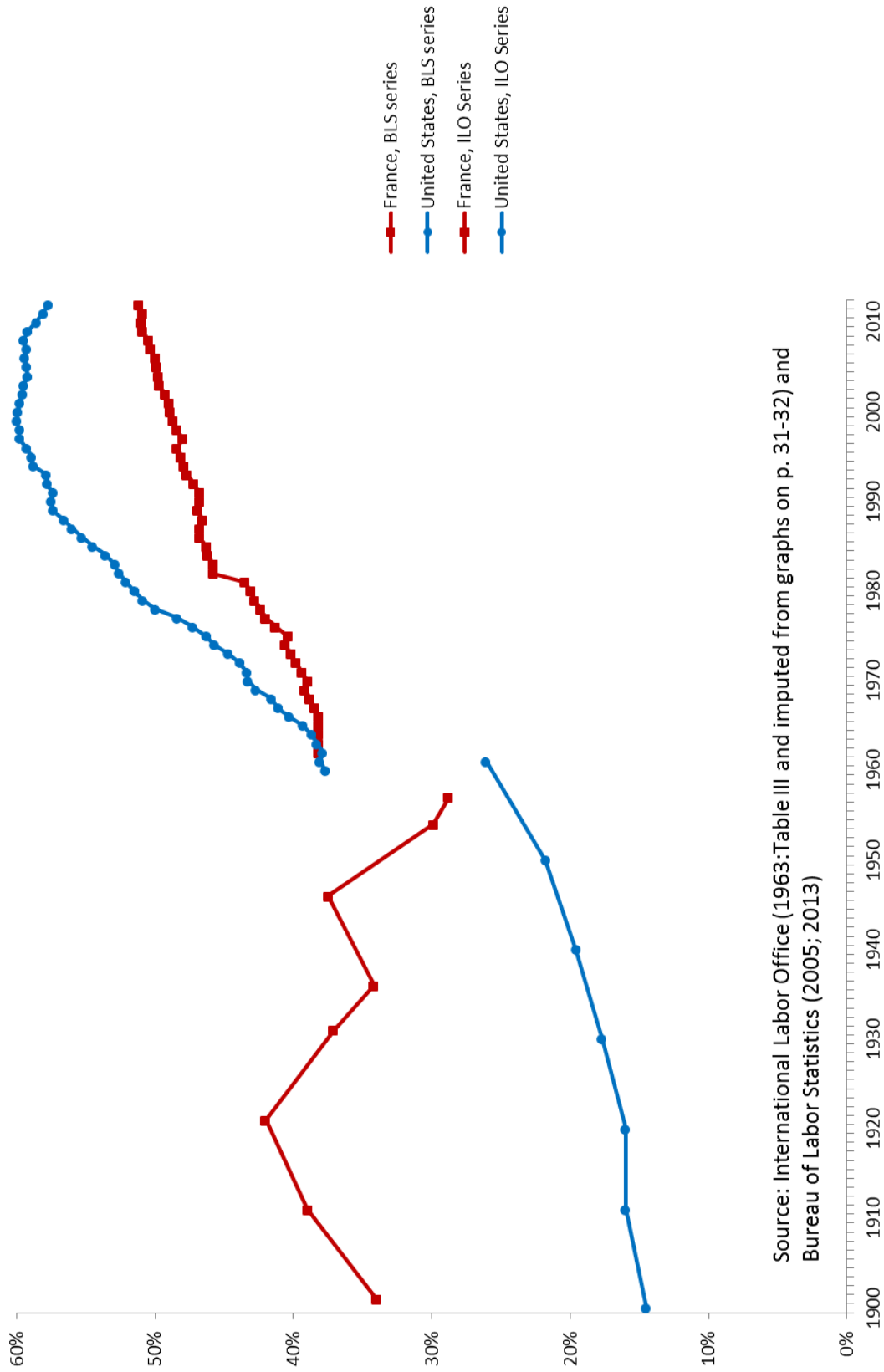
Nous Deux's average reader educational percentile = 34.1%, from:

$$(28.3\% \times 7.8\%) + (47.8\% \times 32.7\%) + (13.2\% \times 59.0\%) + (8.7\% \times 75.8\%) + (2.0\% \times 91.6\%)$$

The average educational percentile of a publication whose audience perfectly represented the educational distribution of the entire French female population over age 15 would be exactly 50.0%, from:

$$(15.7\% \times 7.8\%) + (33.9\% \times 32.7\%) + (18.7\% \times 59.0\%) + (14.9\% \times 75.8\%) + (16.7\% \times 91.6\%)$$

Figure 2.1: Female Civilian Labor Force Participation as a Percentage of All Women (ILO) and of Working-Age Women (BLS), 1900-2012



Source: International Labor Office (1963:Table III and imputed from graphs on p. 31-32) and Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005; 2013)

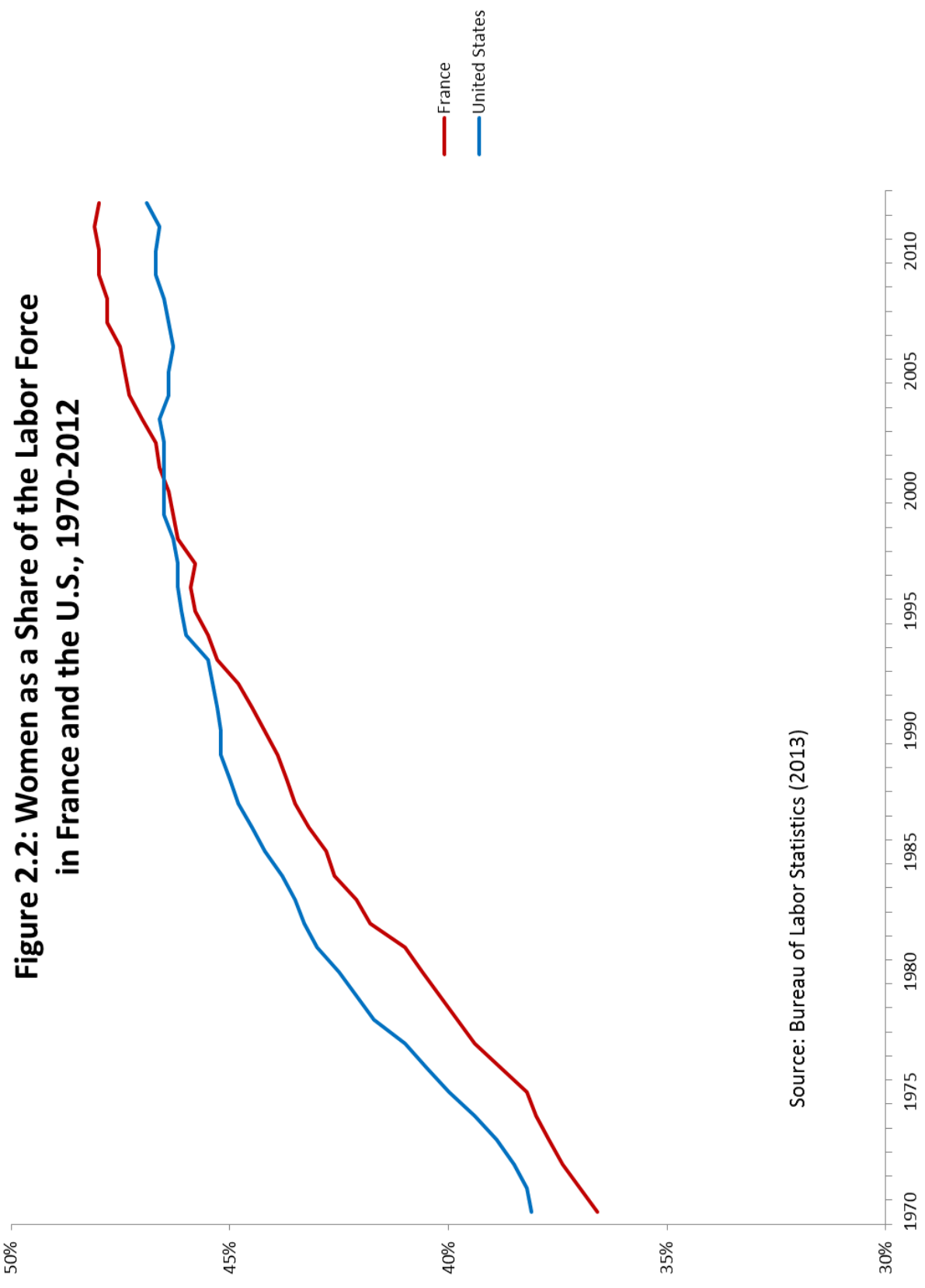


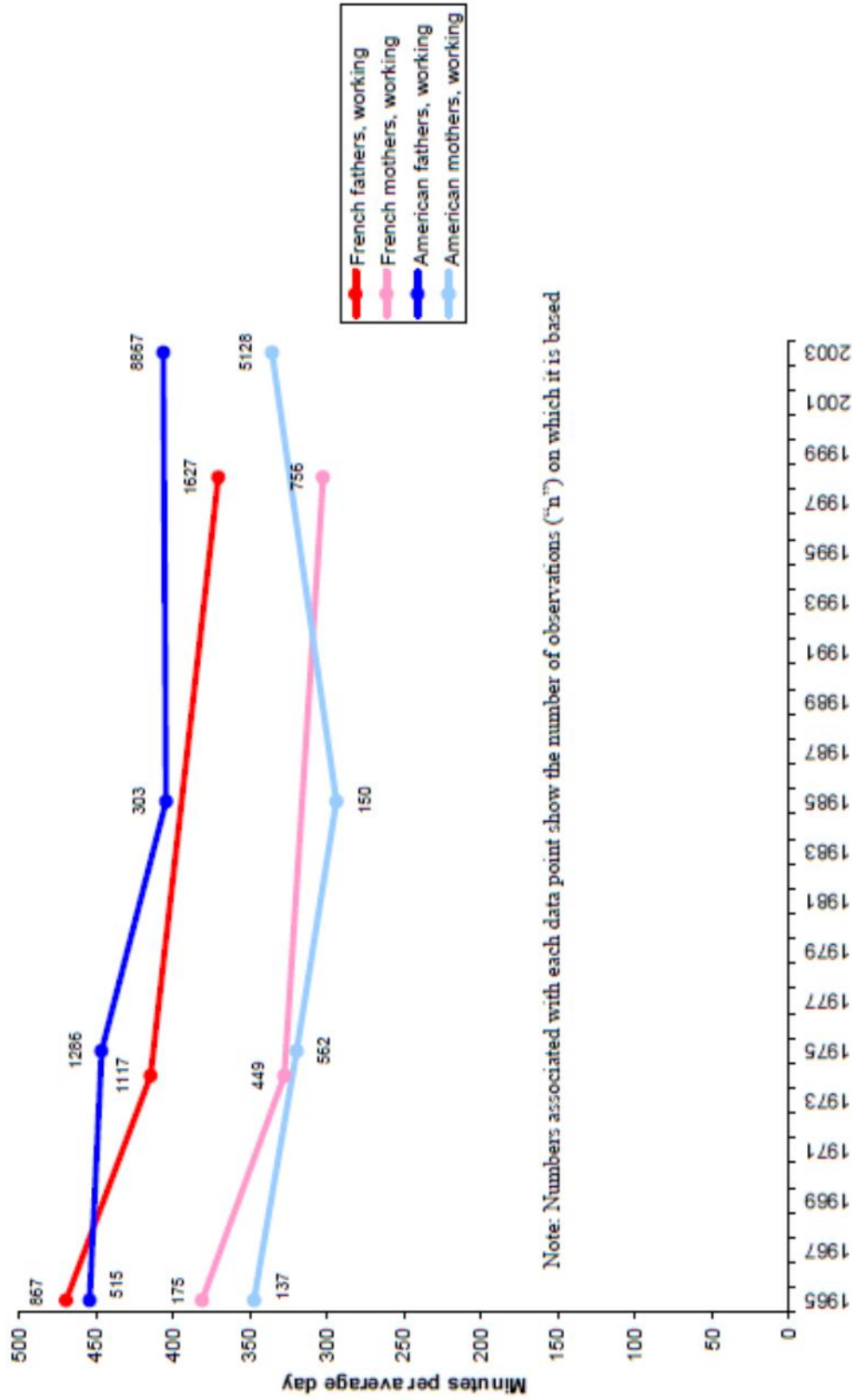
Figure 2.2: Women as a Share of the Labor Force in France and the U.S., 1970-2012

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013)

— France
— United States

Figure 3.1

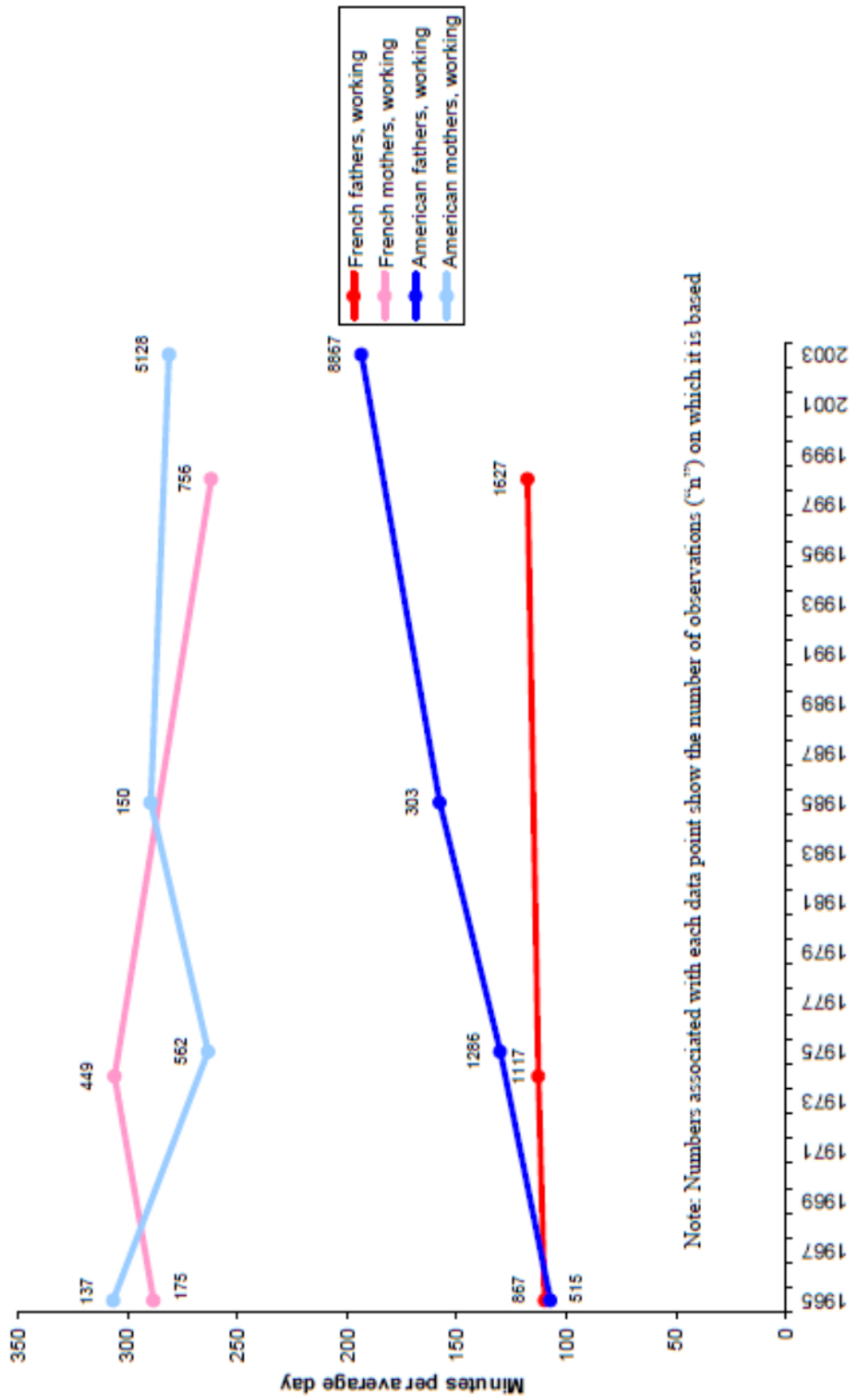
Paid work per day, full-time working parents



Source: Author's tabulations from Multinational Time Use Study databases versions World 6.0 and World 5

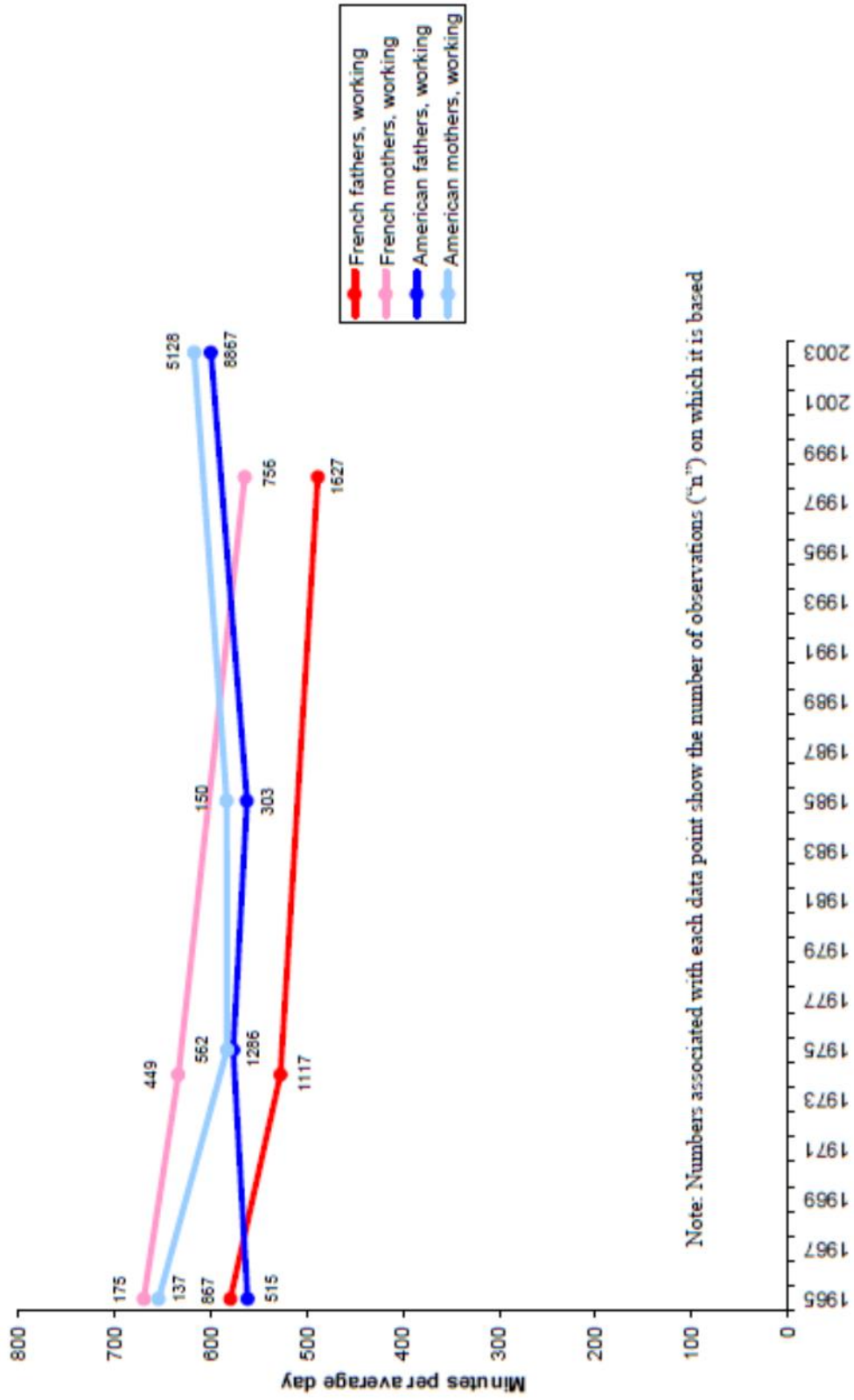
Figure 3.2

Domestic work per day, full-time working parents



Source: Author's tabulations from Multinational Time Use Study databases versions World 6.0 and World 5

Figure 3.3 All work, paid and unpaid, per day, full-time working parents

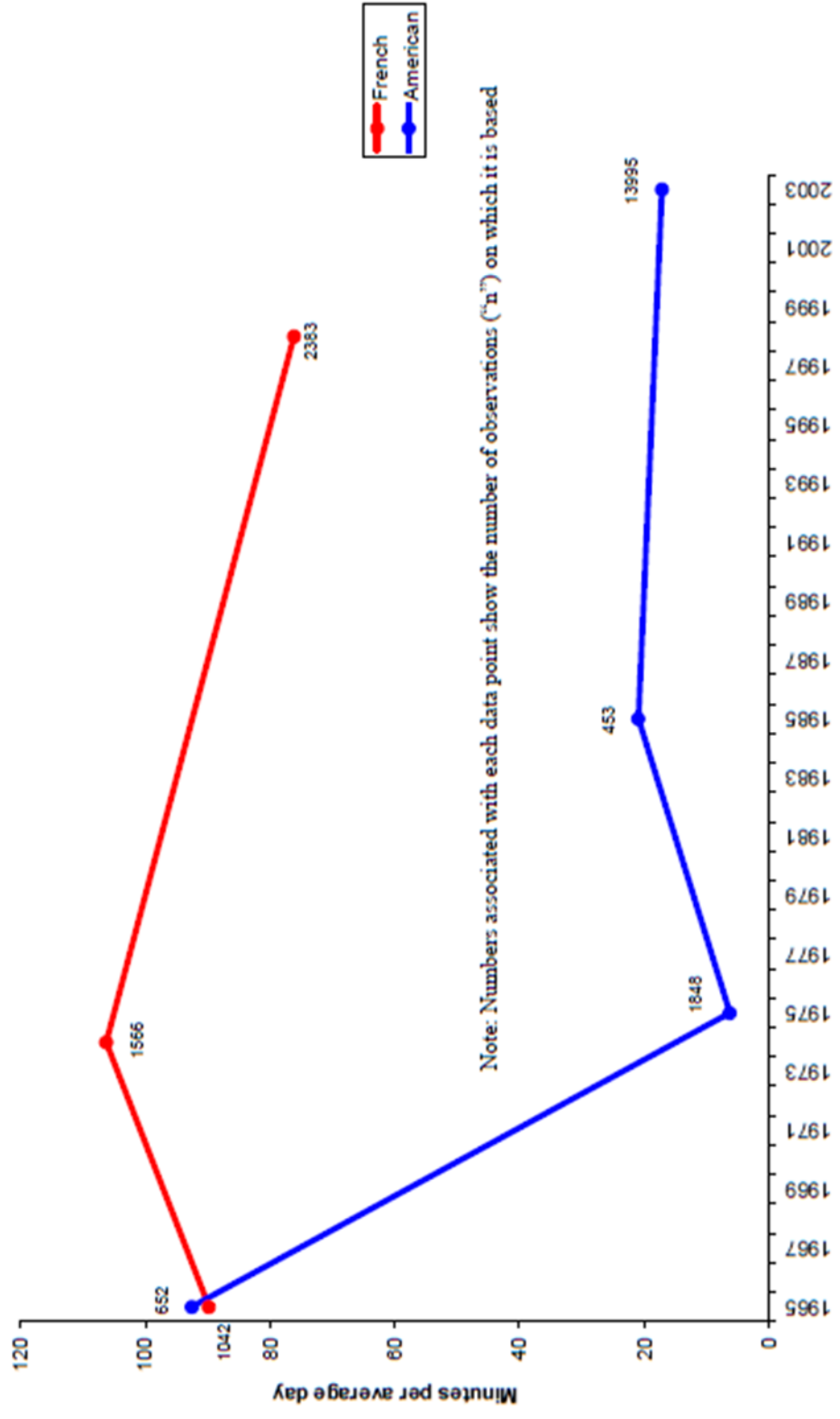


Note: Numbers associated with each data point show the number of observations ("n") on which it is based

Source: Author's tabulations from Multinational Time Use Study databases versions World 6.0 and World 5

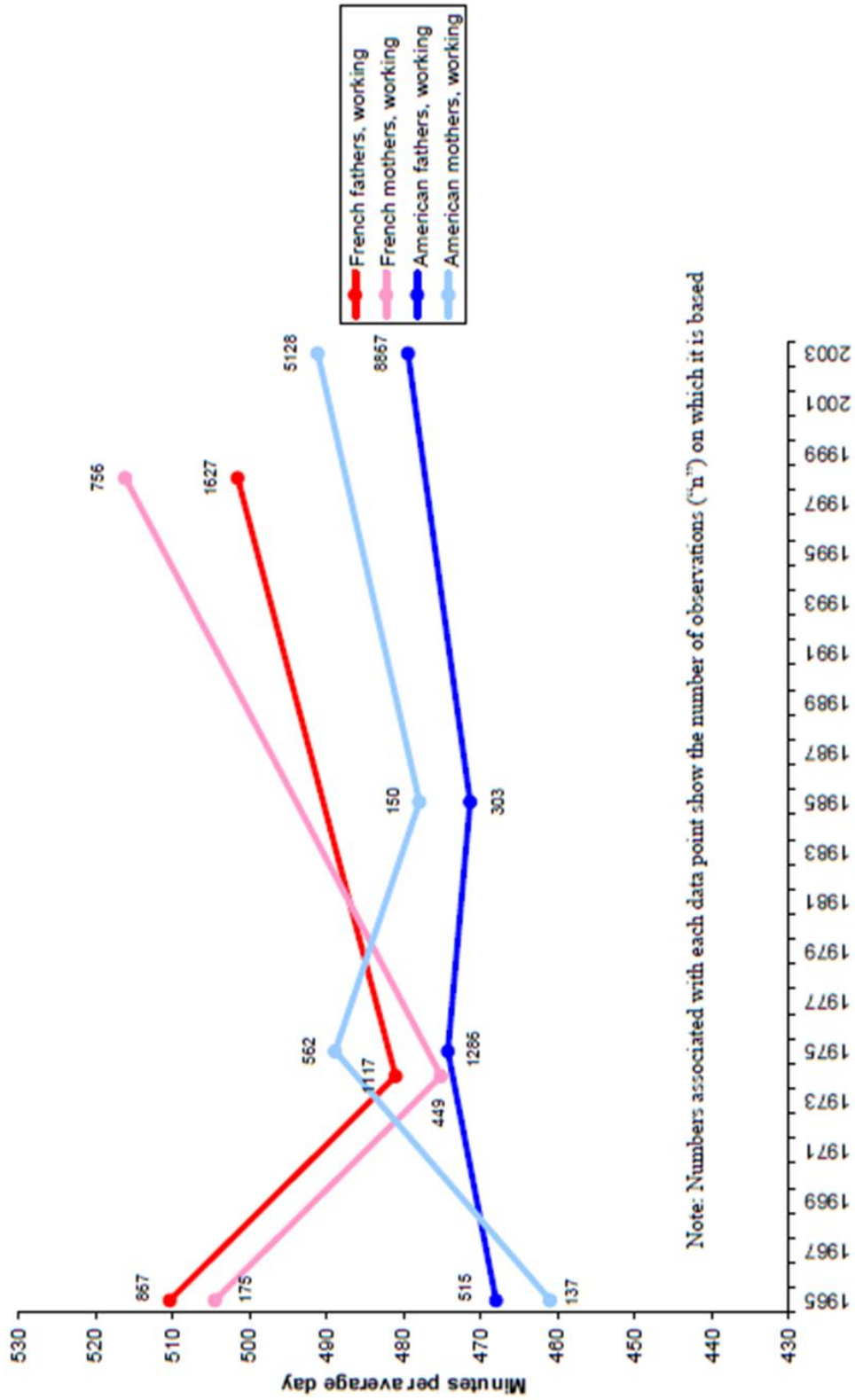
Figure 3.4

Gender gap in all work, paid and unpaid, full-time working parents
 (Full-time mothers' work minus full-time fathers' work)



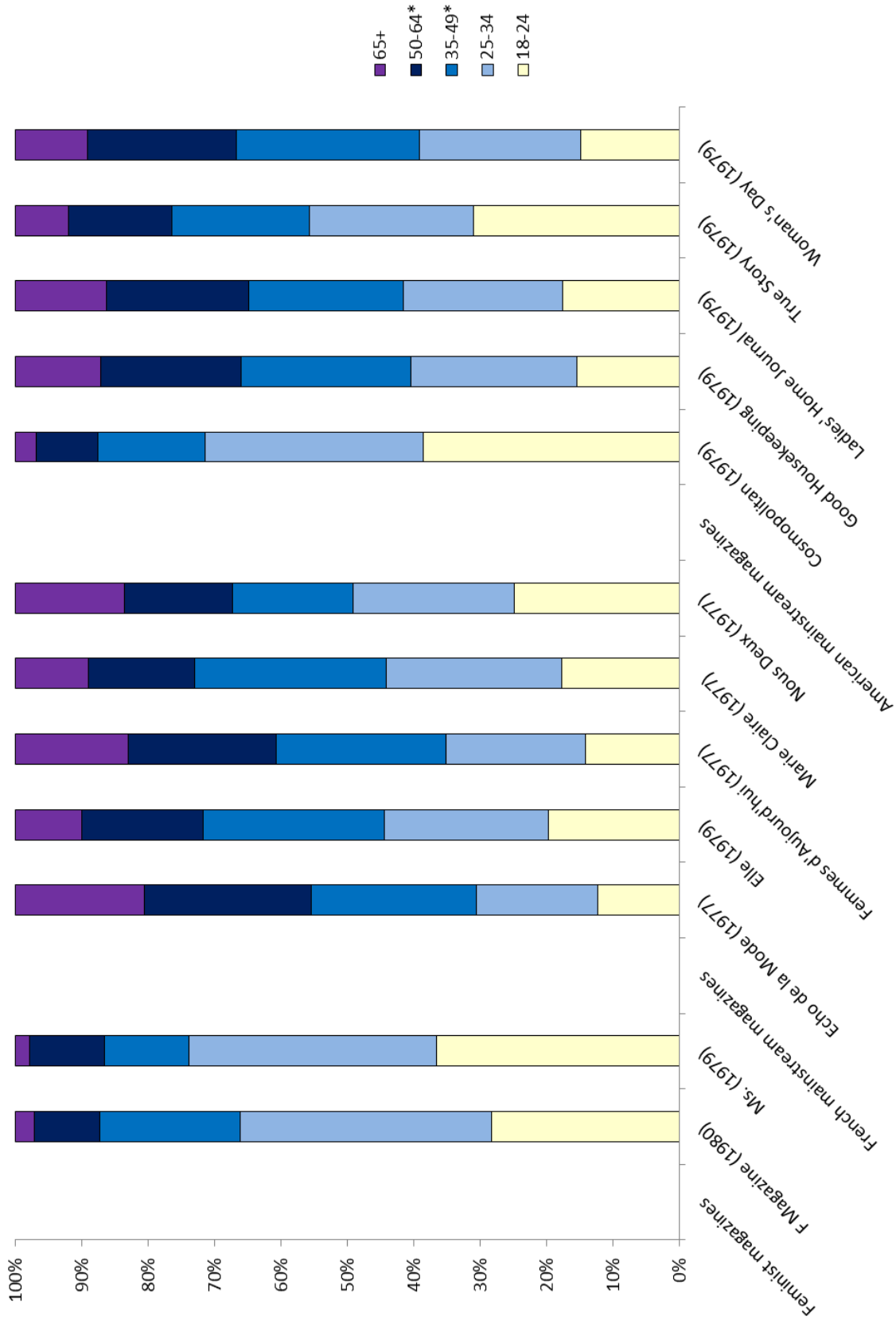
Source: Author's tabulations from Multinational Time Use Study databases versions World 6.0 and World 5

Figure 3.5 Sleep per day, full-time working parents



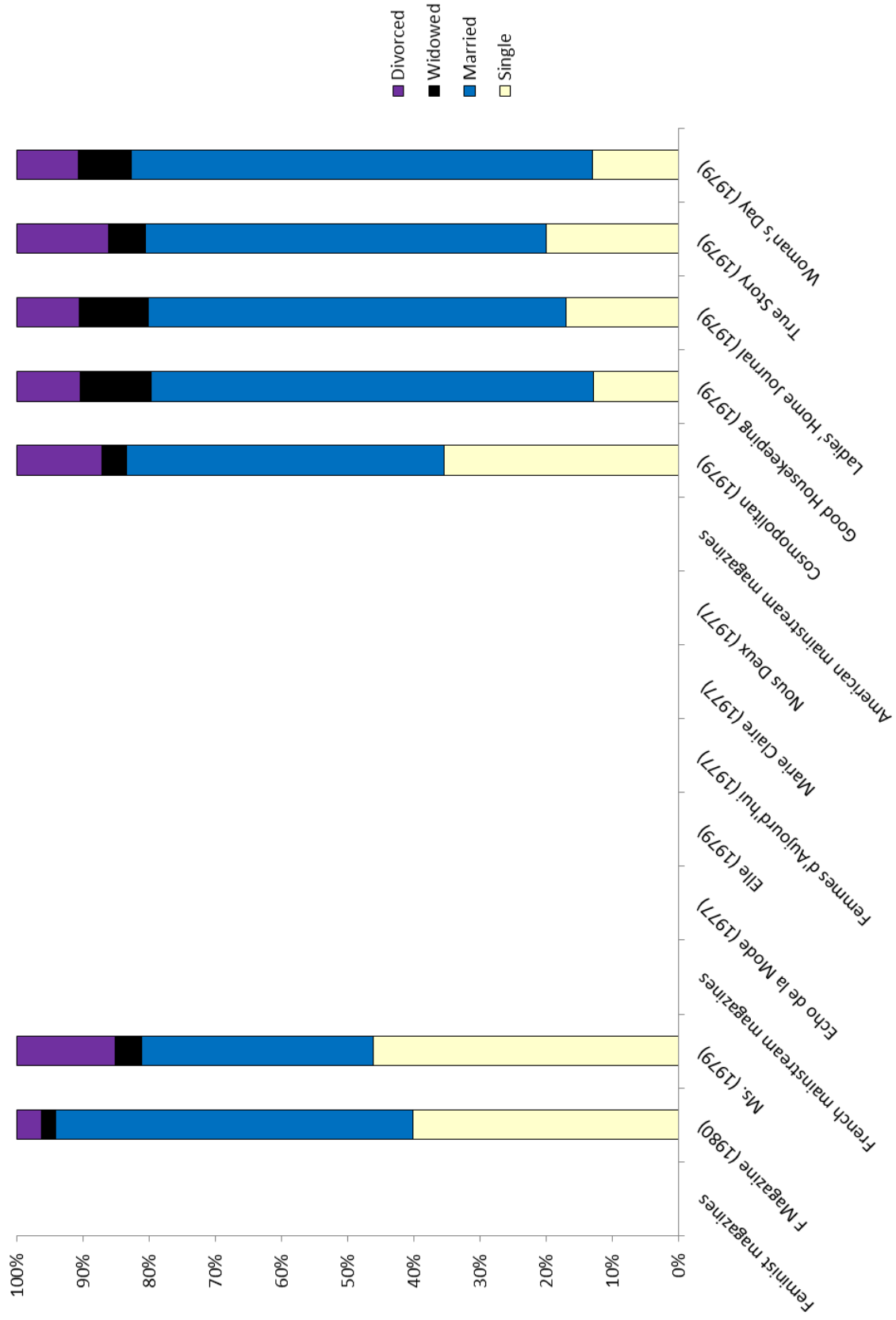
Source: Author's tabulations from Multinational Time Use Study databases versions World 6.0 and World 5

Figure 3.6: Age of magazine readers (women only)



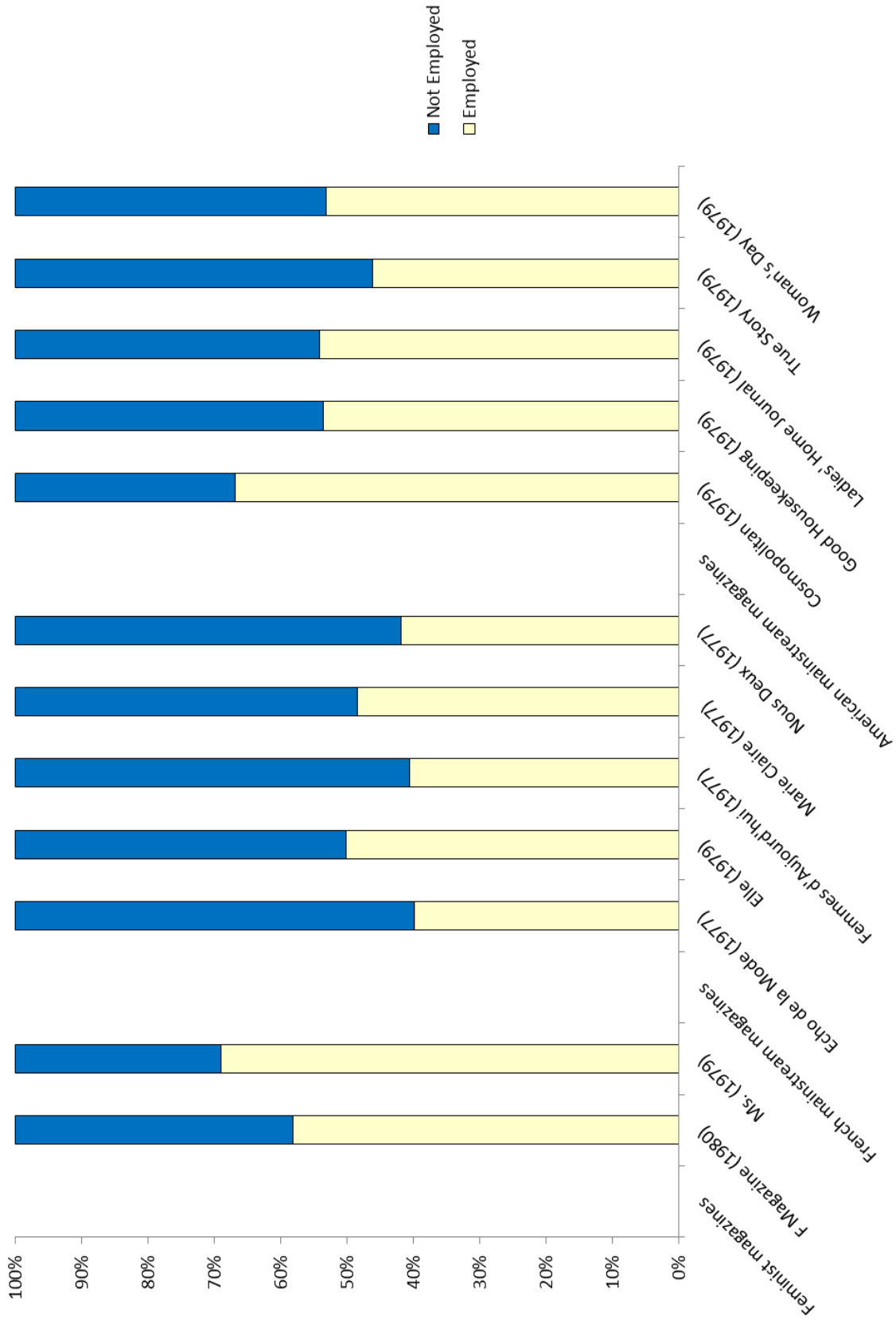
Source: CESP and Simmons surveys

Figure 3.7: Marital status of magazine readers (women only)



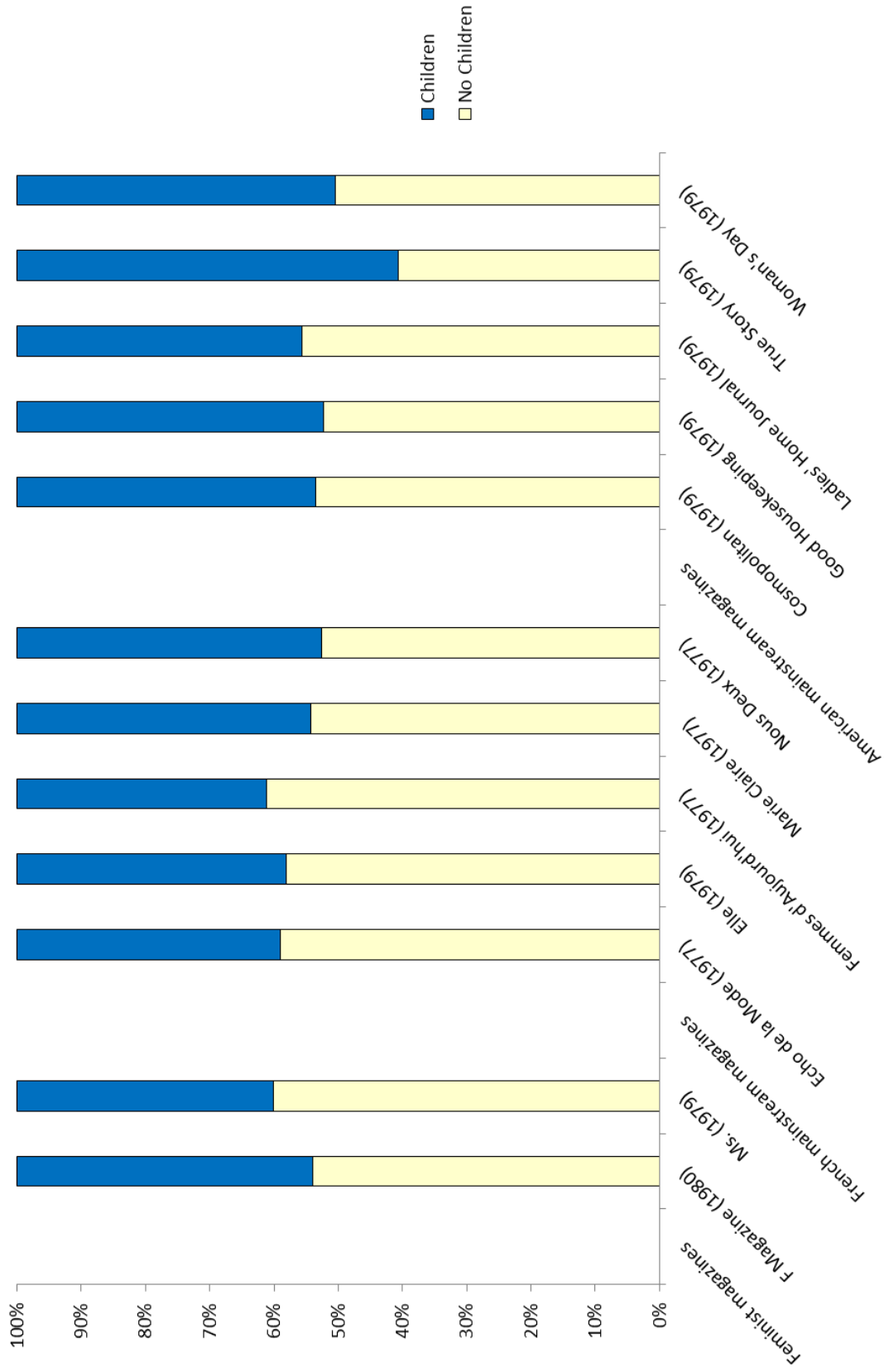
Source: CESP and Simmons surveys

Figure 3.8: Employment status of magazine readers (women only)



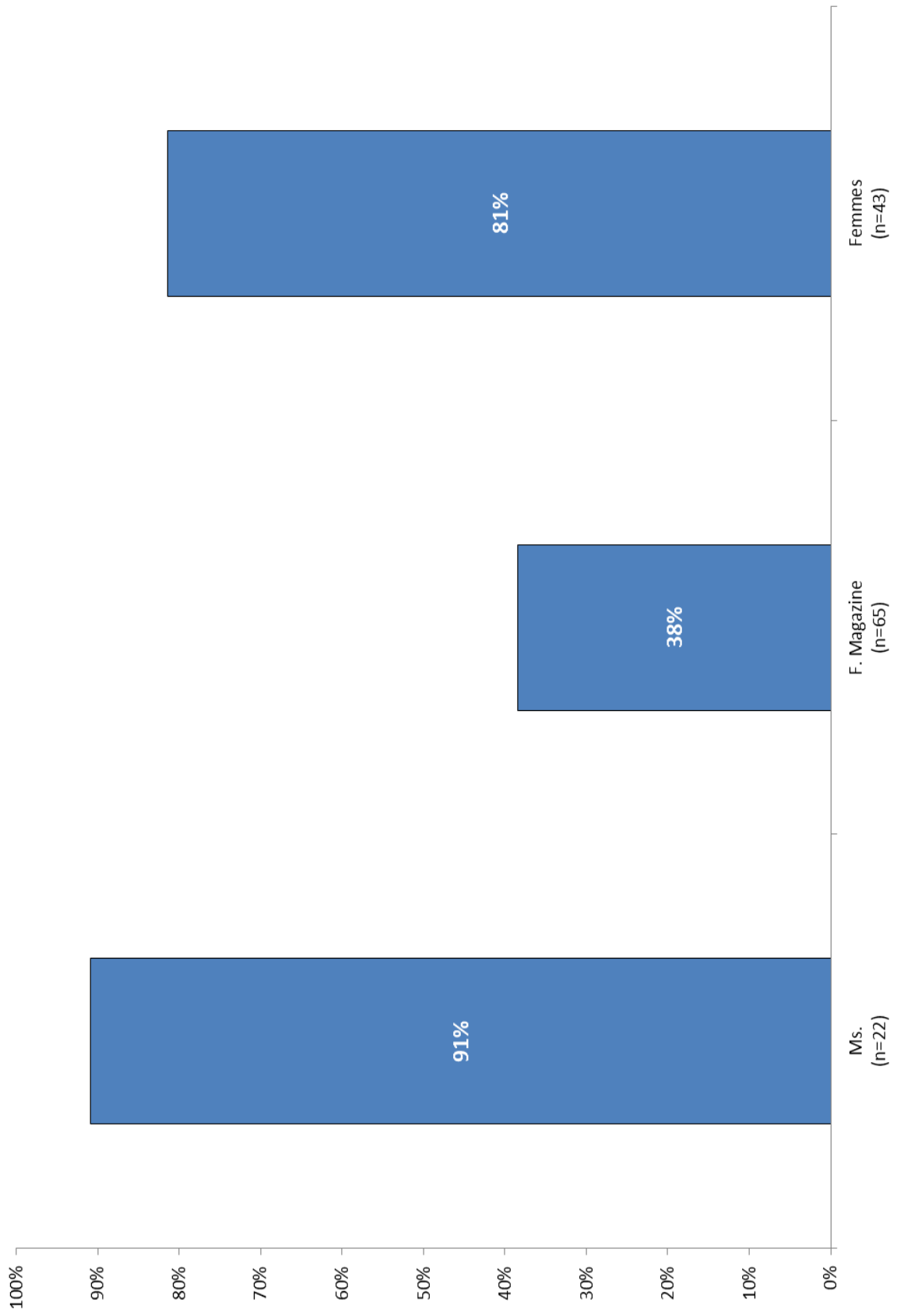
Source: CESP and Simmons surveys

Figure 3.9: Parental status of magazine readers (women only) (includes children <15 yrs. old in France, <18 in U.S.)



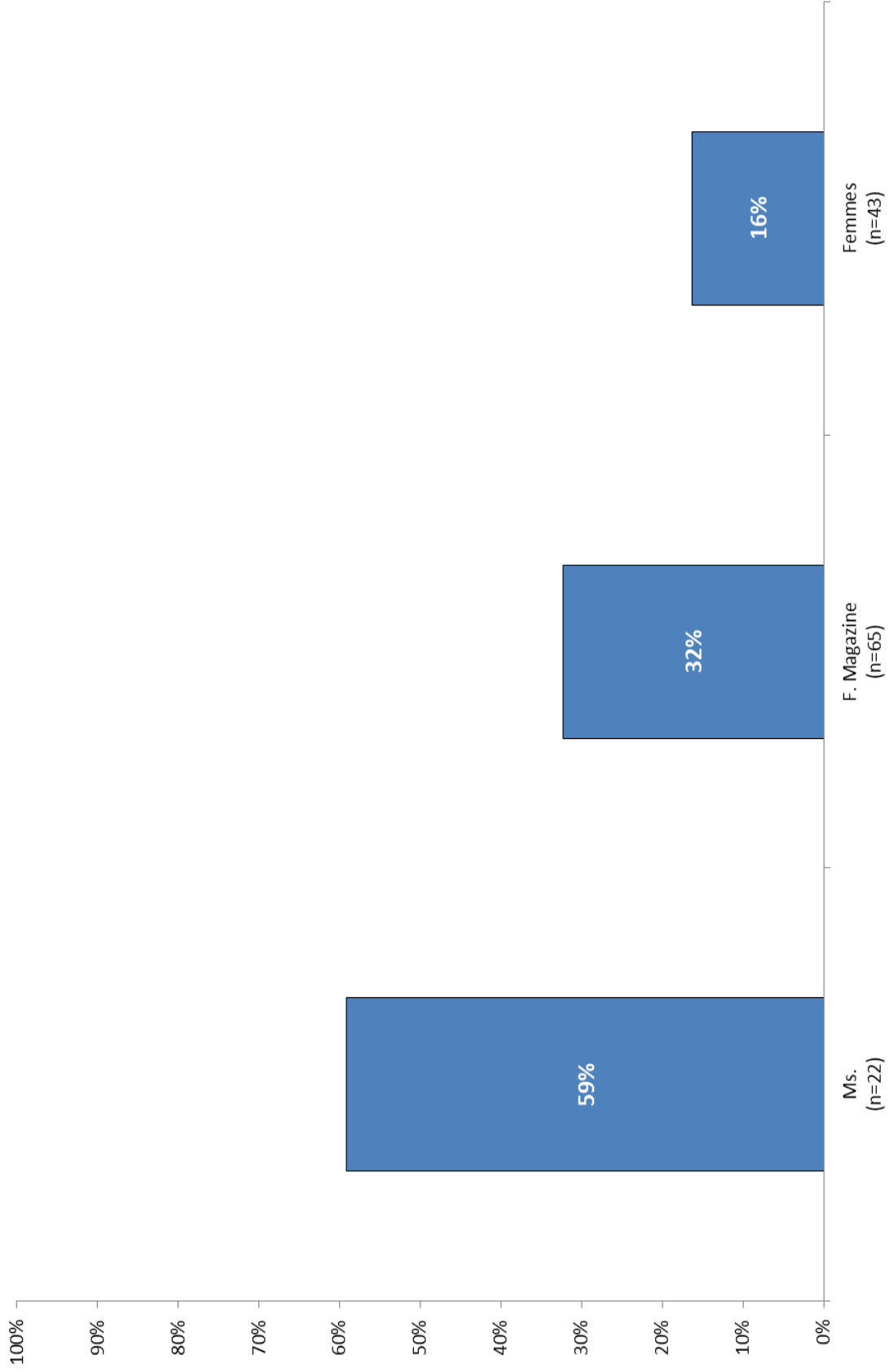
Source: CESP and Simmons surveys

Figure 3.10: Proportion of articles containing "sameness" arguments



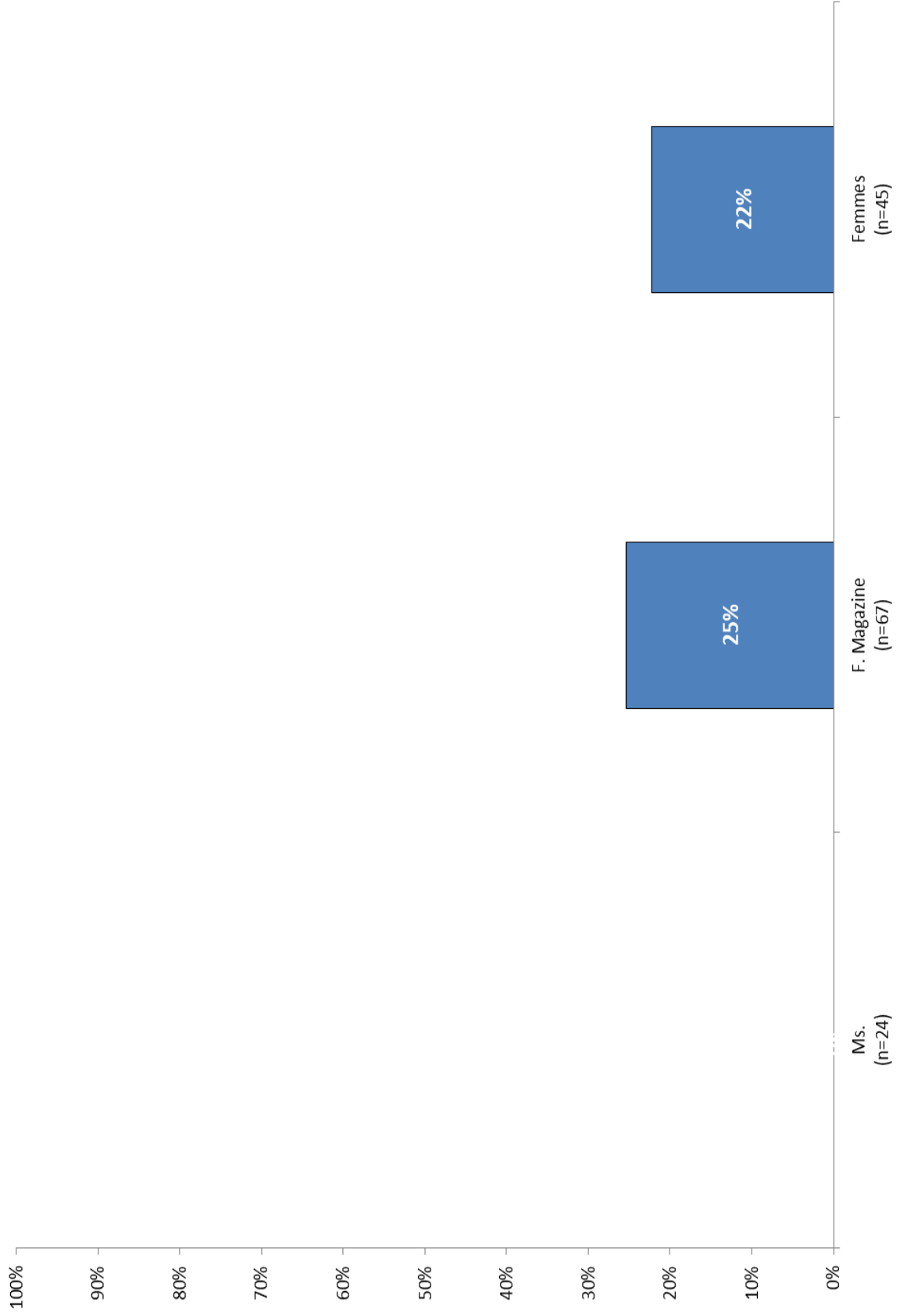
Source: Author's coding of articles from *Ms.*, 1971, *F Magazine*, 1978, and "Femmes" in *Marie Claire*, 1976

Figure 3.11: Proportion of articles recommending personal action to the reader



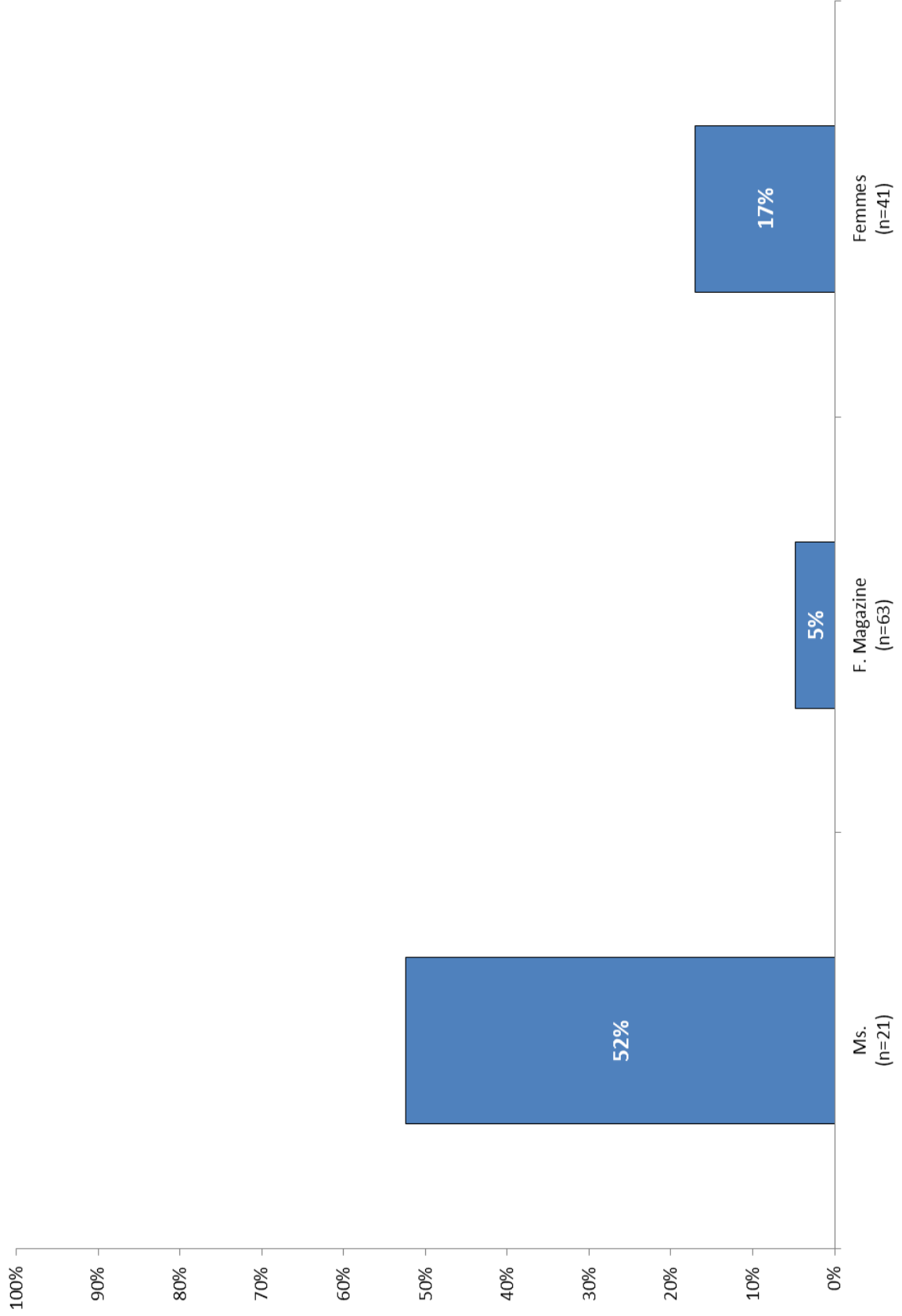
Source: Author's coding of articles from *Ms.*, 1971, *F Magazine*, 1978, and "Femmes" in *Marie Claire*, 1976

Figure 3.12: Proportion of articles on foreign countries



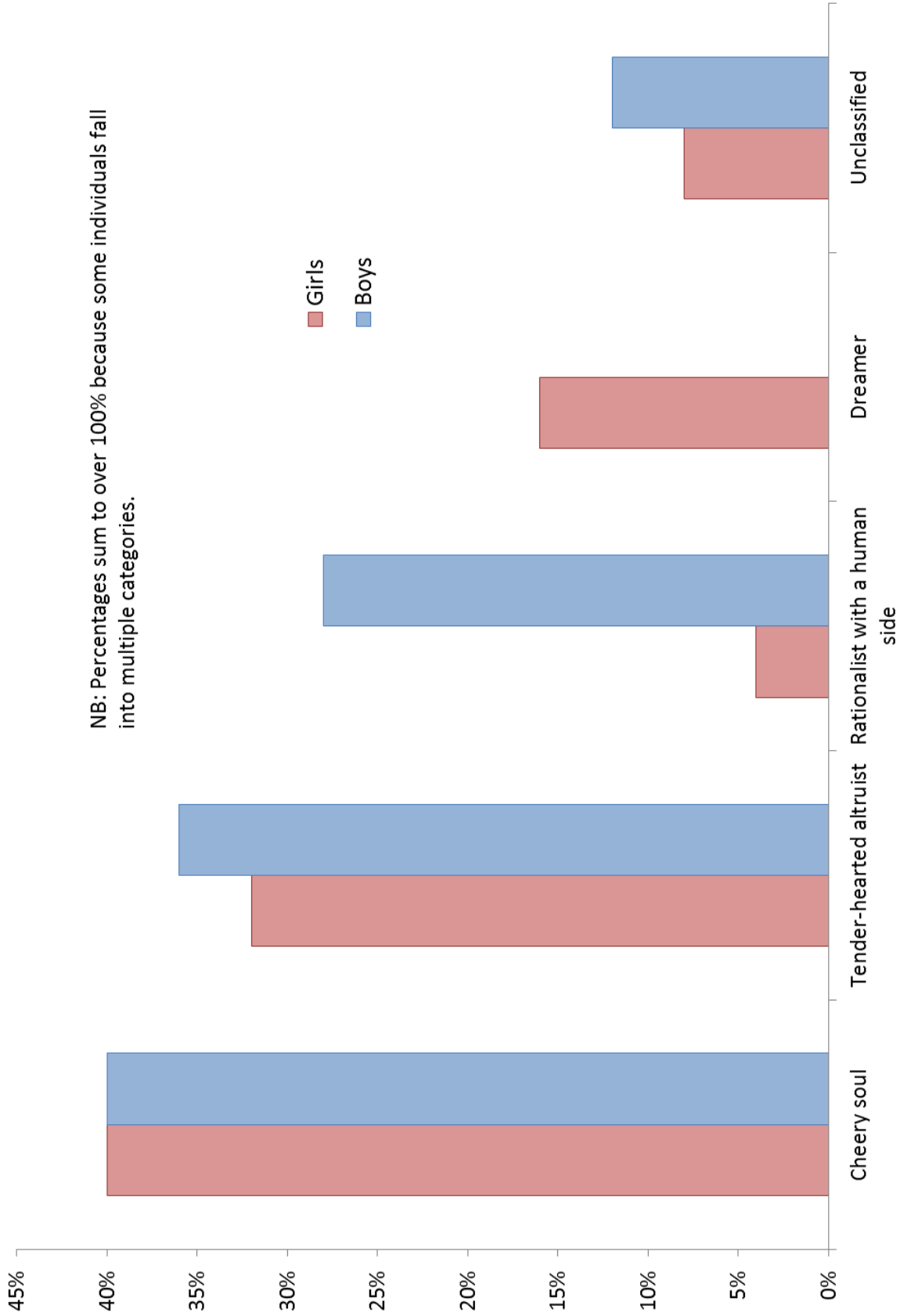
Source: Author's coding of articles from *Ms.*, 1971, *F Magazine*, 1978, and "Femmes" in *Marie Claire*, 1976

Figure 3.13: Proportion of articles in the first person



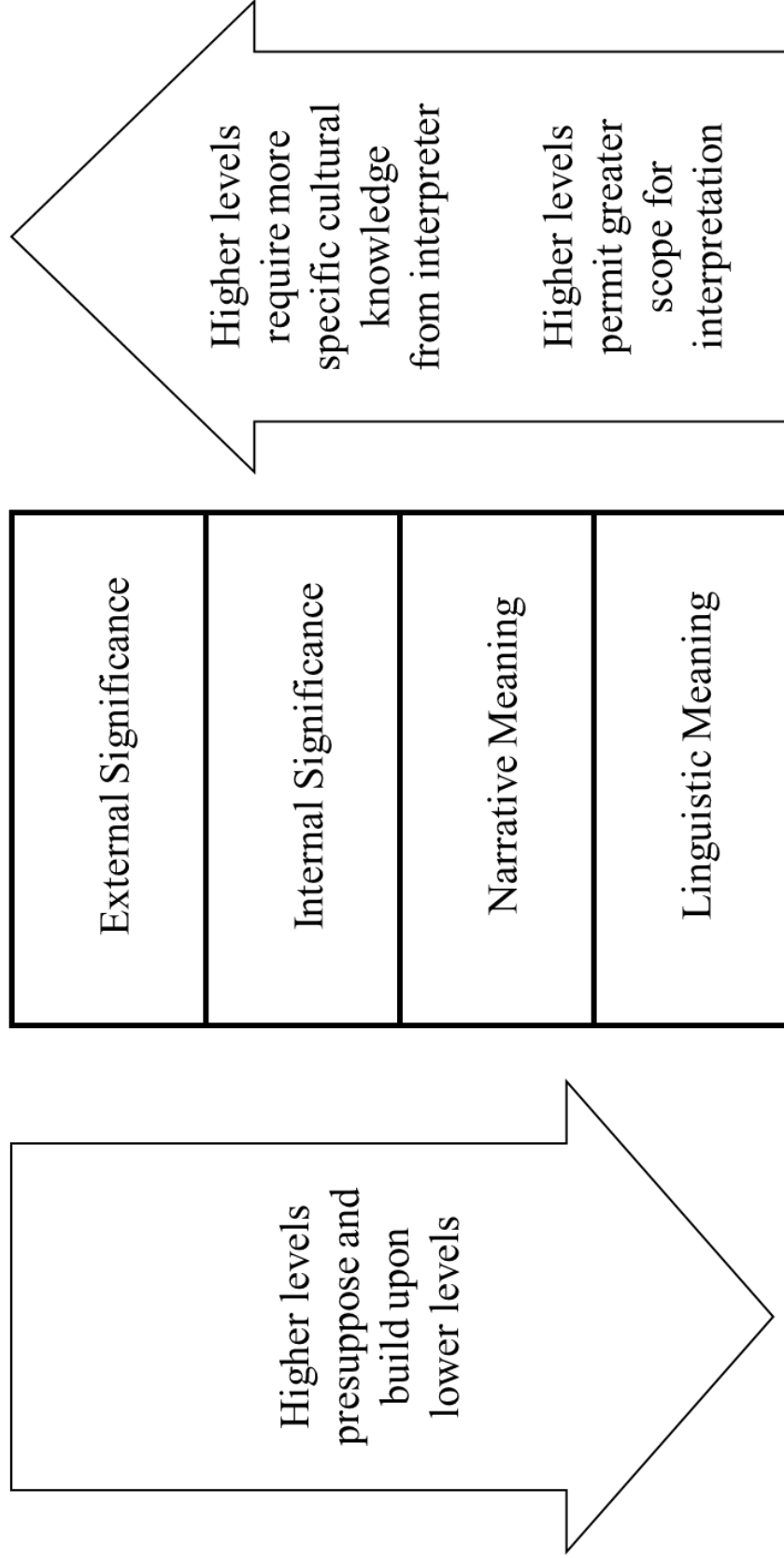
Source: Author's coding of articles from *Ms.*, 1971, *F Magazine*, 1978, and "Femmes" in *Marie Claire*, 1976

Figure 4.1: Chouchou de la semaine character archetypes



Source: Author's coding of articles from *Nous Deux*, 2002, 2006 & 2007

Figure A1: Hierarchy of Fictional Meaning



The production of meaning at all levels involves an interaction between text and reader

Figure A2: Trade-off between focus and breadth in comparative sampling of fiction

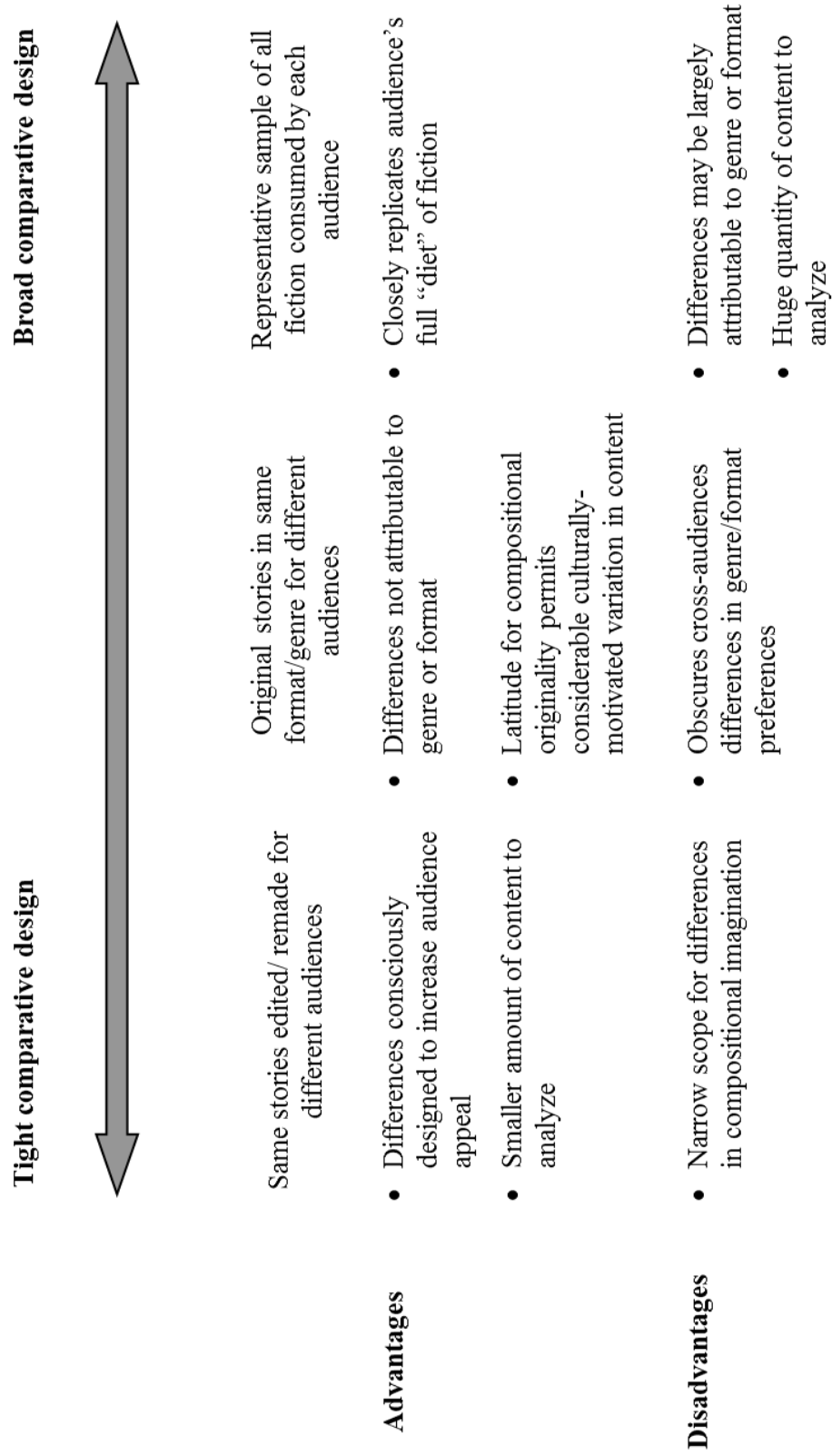


Table 1.1: Magazine sample used in dissertation

1950s – General women’s magazines

	France	United States
High-brow audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elle • Marie Claire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ladies’ Home Journal • Good Housekeeping
Middle-brow audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Femmes d’Aujourd’hui • (Petit) Echo de la Mode 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woman’s Day • Cosmopolitan • (Redbook)
Low-brow audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nous Deux 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • True Story

1970s – Avowedly feminist magazines

France	United States
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Femmes” rubric in Marie Claire • F Magazine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms.

2000s – General women’s magazines

	France		United States
High-brow audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elle • Marie Claire 	Married (older) women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ladies’ Home Journal • Good Housekeeping • Woman’s Day
Middle-brow audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Femme Actuelle 	Unmarried (younger) women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cosmopolitan
Low-brow audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nous Deux 		

Table 1.2: Mid-century rankings of American magazines’ cultural prestige and audience socioeconomic profile

Summary of audience studies on magazine readership

Authors	Date	Method
Morgan and Leahy	1934	Numerical ratings (1 to 10) of “culture content” of magazines by librarians
Kerr and Remmers	1941	Numerical “cultural” ratings (1 to 5) magazines by 44 expert judges
Warner and Lunt	1941	Magazine subscription and newsstand purchase data by people in six ranked social class categories in a small New England town
Kass	1949	Index of overlapping reading among respondents to Iowa Radio Audience study

Rankings of American women’s magazines

from most to least prestigious (titles in dissertation sample are in **bold** typeface)

Morgan and Leahy	Kerr and Remmers	Warner and Lunt ¹	Kass
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • House Beautiful • House and Garden • Better Homes & Gardens • Good Housekeeping • Vogue • Ladies’ Home Journal • Woman’s Home Companion • Colliers • McCall’s • Redbook • Cosmopolitan • Love Story Magazine • True Story • True Confessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better Homes & Gardens • Vogue • House Beautiful • House & Garden • American Home • Good Housekeeping • Ladies’ Home Journal • McCall’s • Cosmopolitan • Woman’s Home Companion • Redbook • Collier’s • True Story • True Romances • True Confessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • House Beautiful • Vogue • American Home • Ladies’ Home Journal • Better Homes & Gardens • McCall’s • Woman’s Home Companion • Collier’s • Cosmopolitan • Redbook • True Story • True Romances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Home • Better Homes and Gardens • Ladies’ Home Journal • Good Housekeeping • McCall’s • Woman’s Home Companion • Cosmopolitan • Redbook • True Story

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Warner, W. Lloyd, and Paul S. Lunt. 1941. *The social life of a modern community*. New Haven: Yale university press. Table 38 on pp. 390-97.

Kerr, Willard A., and Hermann H. Remmers. 1941. "Cultural Value of 100 Representative Magazines." *School and Society* 54(1404):476-80. Table 1 on p. 478.

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¹ Ranking calculated by author based on percentile technique explained in Figure 1.3. The class demography of the community studied is provided in the figure on p. 88 of the book cited above.

Table 4.1: Number of Cosmo erotic excerpts applying moralistic vocabulary to evocations of sexual desire

Vocabulary	Count	Percent	Reference to Male/Female/Unspecified
Bad or Good girl or guy	9	29%	
Bad	5	16%	4 Male / 1 Female
Good	6	19%	2 Male / 5 Female
Naughty or Nice	10	32%	
Naughty	10	32%	4 Male / 4 Female / 3 Unspecified
Nice	2	6%	1 Female / 1 Unspecified
Tempt(ation)	10	32%	1 Male / 6 Female / 3 Unspecified
Sin(ful)	2	6%	2 Unspecified
Risk(y)	4	13%	1 Male / 3 Female
Rules (breaking/bending/ditching)	5	16%	4 Female / 1 Unspecified
Forbid(den)	6	19%	1 Male / 1 Female / 4 Unspecified
All of the above	26	84%	

Table 4.2. Gendering of children’s future occupations in *Chouchou de la semaine* sample

Predominantly female occupations (at least ¾ female)	Mixed occupations	Predominantly male occupations (at least ¾ male)
<p>Child care worker (2F/0M)</p> <p>Decorative arts/fashion worker (e.g., designer, stylist, esthetician, model) (7F/1M)</p> <p>Health care professional (6F/2M)</p> <p>Social sector professional (e.g., non-profit employee, social worker, humanitarian worker) (3F/1M)</p>	<p>Academic/researcher/scientist (4F/4M)</p> <p>Businessperson, general (e.g., banker, CEO, real estate agent, advertiser) (5F/2M)</p> <p>Creative worker in “the arts” (2F/2M)</p> <p>Food workers (e.g., chef, pastry cook, food critic) (1F/1M)</p> <p>Journalist (3F/3M)</p> <p>Leisure industry worker (e.g., travel agent, airline hostess) (2F/2M)</p> <p>Performing artist (e.g., singer, magician, actor/actress) (4F/3M)</p> <p>Politician (2F/1M)</p> <p>Teacher (5F/3M)</p> <p>Transportation worker/explorer (e.g., sailor, navigator, astronaut, explorer) (2F/4M)</p> <p>Writer (3F/4M)</p>	<p>Artisan (0F/2M)</p> <p>Athlete (1F/4M)</p> <p>Chess champion (0F/1M)</p> <p>Legal professional (e.g., lawyer, judge, prosecutor, detective) (1F/5M)</p> <p>Technical expert (e.g., engineer, computer expert, accountant) (0F/5M)</p> <p>Visual artist (e.g., painter, cartoonist, film director) (1F/4M)</p> <p>Worker in dangerous occupation (e.g., firefighter, stuntman, soldier) (0F/4M)</p>

Table 4.3: Instances of sexual reluctance in American and French advice columns, by sex of reluctant partner

Magazine Nationality	Feature Title	Issue Date	Sex of speaker	Quotation	Sex of reluctant partner
American	Can This Marriage Be Saved?	Mar 2002	M	...I've been feeling so separated from her. We hardly ever have sex, and I don't get the sense that she loves me the way she once did (41).	F
American	Can This Marriage Be Saved?	Apr 2002	F, then M	The only time he takes any real interest in me is when he wants to have sex, which hardly puts me in the mood (34). I'm not saying we have to make love every day, but she's <i>never</i> in the mood anymore (38).	F
American	Can This Marriage Be Saved?	May 2002	F	For a long time, I thought Drew might be dismissing me because I wasn't loving or sexy enough. So I'd cook a special dinner, and he would wolf it down and then go pack for his next trip. I'd cuddle next to him on the sofa, and he'd move away (36).	M
American	Can This Marriage Be Saved?	June 2002	Neither: counsel- or only	Katie and Bob hadn't been making love very often, either because they'd had to abstain during part of the IVF cycle or because the medication and Katie's weight gain had caused her desire to ebb (38)	F
American	Can This Marriage Be Saved?	Aug 2002	F	[M]y husband doesn't make me feel desirable anymore. It's been eight months since Lane and I last made love... Also, I'm the only one who initiates sex these days... He's gone from every woman's dream to a candidate for Viagra (26).	M
American	Can This Marriage Be Saved?	Sep 2002	F	I can't remember the last time we made love (36).	M

Magazine Nationality	Feature Title	Issue Date	Sex of speaker	Quotation	Sex of reluctant partner
American	Can This Marriage Be Saved?	Nov 2002	F	Sometimes, I'm too exhausted from working and taking care of the kids to be romantic. But the few times I've told him I'm not in the mood, he's pestered me and pouted until I gave in. It upsets me that I can't say no to my husband. But I'm also angry at his pressure tactics (38).	F
American	Can This Marriage Be Saved?	Dec 2002	F	After our fights, I try to make up, but Steve pushes me away. Sometimes he won't make love or even talk to me for days (35).	M
American	Can This Marriage Be Saved?	Feb 2007	M	I'm young and healthy and have a normal sex drive. The fact that my wife would rather sleep than make love is a huge issue for me (53).	F
American	Can This Marriage Be Saved?	Apr 2007	M	We haven't made love in a year, and believe me, it's not for my lack of trying. She just pushes me away... I know I shouldn't crack jokes about our sex life in front of friends, but I'm so frustrated I can't help myself (62).	F
American	Can This Marriage Be Saved?	May 2007	M	I miss the fun we once had as a couple, including our active sex life... Unfortunately, the more women stare, the more Kim doubts my fidelity, rejects me sexually and criticizes me for working too much (58).	F
American	Can This Marriage Be Saved?	Jun 2007	M	Melissa actually told me that she wants a break from sex. Is it me? I'm in pretty good shape, if I do say so myself, and she certainly had no complaints during the early years (62).	F
American	Can This Marriage Be Saved?	Jul 2007	F	I've also lost interest in sex, mostly because he's gained 25 pounds and I no longer find him attractive (60).	F

Magazine Nationality	Feature Title	Issue Date	Sex of speaker	Quotation	Sex of reluctant partner
American	Can This Marriage Be Saved?	Oct 2007	F	About four months ago I hit rock bottom and stopped having sex with Carlos. Since our sex life had always been great, I thought this would motivate him to change... Carlos complains but he's not upset enough to stop watching sports (60-1)	F
American	Can This Marriage Be Saved?	Nov 2007	M	I want an active sex life, with more variety. I also want her to initiate sex, which she has never done (58).	F
American	Can This Marriage Be Saved?	Dec 2007	F	We've stopped going to the movies, watching TV together and having sex—all my choices, because I'm just so mad (54)	F
Count of sex of reluctant spouse for "Can This Marriage Be Saved?"					4 M, 12 F
French	On Vient Vous Voir	19 Feb 2007	F, then M	Lise often goes a long while without a tender gesture or a kind word [from Paul], and sex is even rarer [<i>sans meme parler de sexualité</i>]!... If [Paul] is commanded to perform better, including in bed, there is no better way to make him wall himself off (55).	M
French	On Vient Vous Voir	26 Mar 2007	F	It is also she who reassured him of his virility. It is true that, since then, tenderness has taken priority over sensuality. If they always fall asleep holding hands, well, sexual desire is not what it once was... (55)	M

Magazine Nationality	Feature Title	Issue Date	Sex of speaker	Quotation	Sex of reluctant partner
French	On Vient Vous Voir	30 Apr 2007	F	[T]hey have every ingredient for success: they love each other and they are getting married soon... But Sara no longer feels desire for her fiancé... Sara has no reason to find fault with her fiancé's qualities as a lover: he is sweet, patient, and attentive to his partner. If she's not able to, if she has a mental block, she is sure that only she is at fault (51)... [Sara] "I reproach myself for putting you through this..." [Léo] "The essential thing is that I don't hold it against you!"	F
Count of sex of reluctant spouse for "On Vient Vous Voir"					2 M, 1 F
French	Elise vous répond: La découverte de l'amour	5 Feb 2002	F	More than six months ago, I went out with a boy who, after fifteen days, asked me to go further with him. Since I didn't feel ready, I refused. And since he didn't want to be understanding, I left him. I saw him again, and he tried going out with me again. I like him a lot, and I think I still love him. I don't know if I did the right thing by leaving him. I acted on impulse. But I'm afraid that, if I start going out with him again, he'll still be impatient, since I'm not sure I'm ready. What should I do?	F
French	Elise vous répond: Il faut lui redonner confiance	19 Mar 2002	F	My [male] friend had a serious car accident several years ago. He went through rehabilitation. Today, he is doing a lot better, since he is able to drive again. The problem is that he can't make love anymore and doesn't dare consult a doctor. He is becoming bitter, and I don't know what to do anymore. He is 67.	M

Magazine Nationality	Feature Title	Issue Date	Sex of speaker	Quotation	Sex of reluctant partner
French	Elise vous répond: Notre vie sexuelle ne me satisfait pas	18 Jun 2002	F	I would be entirely happy with my partner if our sex life were richer. We make love once or twice a week, and that's not enough for me. Nevertheless, he knows that I need him because we talk about it with humor. He says he loves me, and I believe him. So why is he like this? Is it because he's older than me or because he is preoccupied? Help me see the situation clearly.	M
French	Elise vous répond: L'homme blessé	8 Oct 2002	F	I met him at the dance hall. He is single and I am married, but often neglected. I resisted his advances three times, and then I gave in. His presence makes me feel alive again. But, wouldn't you know, I soon understood that he has sexual problems. At the moment of love, he always fled, and I was shocked...	M
French	Elise vous répond: Je ne sais que faire	12 Nov 2002	F	My marriage [<i>ménage</i>] was on the rocks, and so I accepted the advances of a colleague. But when we got together at his place, he wasn't able to do anything, and he was horribly embarrassed. I have tried several times to talk to him about it, but he always runs away. Do you think I should write to him? I want to see him again.	M

Magazine Nationality	Feature Title	Issue Date	Sex of speaker	Quotation	Sex of reluctant partner
French	Elise vous répond: Le droit de bonheur	24 Dec 2002	F	I am 57 years old and have been married for thirty years. After an operation, my husband became impotent. It isn't so much the sex I miss, but instead the rarity of kind words from him and of the little notes he would write me. I have remained faithful to him, not having sex with another man. But during a trip abroad, I met a married man who doesn't get on with his wife anymore and wants to leave her for me. I am unhappy, because he is 17 years younger than me and, if I get divorced, I won't have any means of subsistence aside from the pension I'll eventually get through my husband. Don't I have the right to some happiness?	M
French	Elise vous répond: Il est bien plus jeune que moi	30 Jan 2007	F	I went on vacation in Tunisia with my husband and my two daughters. I met a tour guide [<i>animateur</i>] and we hit it off. He is 25 and I am 46. That summer, there were just smiles and hand-holding. I returned to his country, we made love, and he asked me for money. I gave it to him, and then returned to France. A month ago, he asked me for 1000 euros. If I don't give it to him, he says I will have to forget him. But I can't, because I love him. I also love my husband. We have been married for eleven years, but don't have sex any more. I'm afraid of leaving everything for a man who is younger than me.	M

Magazine Nationality	Feature Title	Issue Date	Sex of speaker	Quotation	Sex of reluctant partner
French	Elise vous répond: J'en ai marre des excuses de mon mari	3 Jul 2007	F	Three years ago, we decided to start [our marriage] again from a clean slate. The problem is that my husband stayed just the same. He doesn't make any effort at all. One kiss in the morning, the same in the evening, and good night... Never tender gestures or sexual relations.	M
Count of sex of reluctant spouse for "Elise Vous Répond"					7 M, 1 F

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METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX: Using Fiction Sociologically

This appendix puts forward a systematic argument that fiction, if properly sampled and analyzed, can indeed provide a useful source of sociological evidence about broader cultural conceptions. To give the reader a more concrete sense of this approach's promise, however, I preface the argument with a brief account of how my own interest in this question has developed and provide an example from my own research.

When embarking on a project investigating the dominant gender ideologies in France and the United States before and after second-wave feminism, I turned to a variety of standard sociological sources. Demographic and time use data provided some concrete and basic information about behavior, but could reveal little about how people think about their circumstances. Survey data furnished some insight into American and French attitudes toward egalitarian and traditional norms, but unavoidably decontextualized those opinions, making it difficult to discern the deeper cultural assumptions that gave rise to them. In-depth interviews and ethnography, sociologists' standard methods for investigating meaning in context, cannot reliably capture the everyday cultural assumptions of a half-century ago.

Somewhat hesitantly, I sampled popular short stories for clues about everyday gender culture in pre-feminist France and America. To my surprise, fiction illuminated the texture of each cultural context much more vividly than standard sorts of sociological evidence could. The short stories I read invited—indeed, I realized, if they were to “work” as fiction, they *required*—the reader to empathize with culturally inflected emotions and evaluations. Fiction enabled the analyst to experience cultural judgments implicit within, and supported by, a flow of virtual experience.

An example from my research illustrates these dynamics. Many short stories in America's most widely-circulated women's magazines of the 1950s, even comparatively high-brow publications like *Good Housekeeping*, feature physical fights between men which ratify the hero's masculinity and fortify his self-confidence (e.g., Balling 1952; Brownell 1952; Gavin 1957). Indeed, these fight stories form a subset of a larger genre of stories about successful struggle that leads to renewed self-assurance and pro-social behavior on the part of the protagonist, male or female. If one looked only at American stories, however, there would be no way of knowing whether this archetypical plot of successful struggle leading to moral consolidation was peculiarly American or was simply a universally appealing way to generate good stories.

Turning to short fiction in the largest-circulation French women's magazines of the same period, the reader encounters plenty of important personal epiphanies, but almost none that center on a protagonist's renewal of self-confidence through successful competitive struggle. One French story in the working-class magazine *Nous Deux*, however, is entitled “The Last Fight” [*Le Dernier Combat*], and opens in a fashion that seems poised to replicate the American fight story pattern.

“The Last Fight” is narrated by the daughter of a boxing trainer who runs his own gym. A young orphan happens into the facility one day and quickly wins the father’s affection:

“Léo is a brave kid. He's alone on the earth, without a family or fortune, without support. He has only his fists and his will to succeed... He reminds me of my own youth...” (“Le dernier combat” 1957:16)

This has the air of a classic American introduction for a hero: the boy is an independent sort with pluck and ambition. But the blurb that advertises the story hints that standard American genre expectations may be out of place: “What would he choose? The love of his wife or the uncertainties of his career?” (16). Indeed, the heroine, Gaby, dislikes most of the boxers at the gym for their brutish broken noses [*profil cassé*], their vainglory and appetite for money [*leur appétit de gloriole et d'argent*], and she appreciates Léo’s refreshingly uncalculating character. Gaby gives way to her affection for Léo only after her father discloses his judgment that the young orphan will never become a real boxing champion. Despite scrupulous technique and an “intelligent scientist”[s] [*scientifique intelligent*] approach to the sport, Léo *lacks* the physical hardiness necessary to be a top-tier fighter. Gaby’s father plans to make Léo an assistant at the gym. He will introduce this proposal —gently, so as not to injure the petty vanity he derives from building castles in air [*en douceur, pour ne pas froisser son petit amour-propre de faiseur de rêves*]. This plan satisfies Gaby, who happily “imagine[s] a life with [Léo] in the tranquility of a less glorious occupation, to be sure, but one that was regular and that would not encroach on our intimacy” (16).

In due course, Léo and Gaby get married and find bliss in their early days together. Léo works happily in his father-in-law’s gym and sports equipment shop. Things go awry only when a villainous boxing promoter, Monk, tempts the young man with dreams of glory. Léo begins resenting his wife and father-in-law’s efforts to confine him to the family business, a sentiment that a typical American story would see not as naïveté, but as an indispensable spur to eventual personal fulfillment. Monk takes advantage of Léo’s discontent, puffing up his reputation and self-confidence by pitting him against has-beens and weaklings. The last fight that Monk arranges, however, sets Léo opposite an unknown opponent who is the sort of “denting machine” that Gaby’s father predicted would one day get the better of Léo. Monk secretly bets all his money against Léo in this contest and, on the eve of the fight, arranges for him to suspect Gaby of being unfaithful. Rattled, Léo spends a sleepless night alone and fares terribly in his first two rounds in the ring. Then it dawns upon him that Monk has deceived him. Léo boxes like a man possessed, knocking out his opponent and then turning on the villainous Monk to deck him too. After the fight, Léo takes Gaby in his arms, saying:

“it was no longer Doug [his opponent] in front of me, but all at once... everything that had interposed itself between you and me to undermine our happiness. I let fly like a madman not to win, but to avenge us. Gaby, forgive me... You did not want to be the wife of a boxer, and you will not be one. During this match, I have had a chance to measure my capacities... and my

illusions. I won't always have such a violent stimulus to assure my victory!" ("Le dernier combat" 1957)

Léo goes on to say that he will rejoin the family business and one day take over from Gaby's father as director of the gymnasium.

In one sense, this French story is not entirely dissimilar to its American counterparts: after all, the hero wins the fight and gets the girl. This superficial plot similarity conceals a very different set of implicit cultural judgments, however. Competitive grit is not what enables the hero to win. Rather, he is carried to victory by a burst of "mad" passion that combines outraged pride and a flood of pent-up love for the heroine. Furthermore, the emotional transformation marked by the fight is not the typically American consolidation of self-confidence that will enable a man to pursue his dreams of independent enterprise. Indeed, American-style ambition figures here as a dangerous illusion. True fulfillment comes to Léo when he recognizes his limitations and takes his place as a member of a happy family, one which he will eventually head by demographic succession rather than competitive achievement.

The contrasts between this French story and its American counterparts provide numerous clues to cultural differences that have been corroborated elsewhere in my research using non-fiction sources like advice and feature articles. These include, for example, a prominent French concern with protecting the family from men's competing career commitments, and the culturally dominant American belief in morally efficacious links between success and self-confidence.

Given the power of fiction to encode and enact implicit cultural assumptions, what made me hesitate even to consider using this sort of evidence? As I argue later, my acute sense of methodological inhibition was not idiosyncratic, but reflects broader developments within the sociology of culture. Indeed, during the very period when sociologists of culture were strengthening their influence across the discipline as a whole, they were simultaneously turning away from analyzing the content of aesthetic objects.

The body of this appendix begins by reconsidering the research that has led sociologists to assume that the meanings of artistic creations¹ are so fluid that they cannot be used as a source of evidence about the larger cultural contexts in which they are created and received. It then describes a hierarchy of different layers of fictional meaning that affords greater precision when discussing fictional content and how it is interpreted. The appendix next argues that fiction encodes implicit ethical-cum-emotional judgments in ways that parallel people's real-life experiences of cultural norms and categories. The remainder of the appendix addresses methods of sampling and analysis that can take advantage of the cultural content of fiction while avoiding the inferential pitfalls to which recent scholarship has drawn attention.²

¹ Throughout this appendix, as will become clear from context, I do not intend the terms "artistic" or "aesthetic" creations or objects to have any high-culture connotation.

² The approach which I suggest here draws inspiration from Wendy Griswold's 1987 article in *Sociological Methodology*, which is still the single best guide to reconstructing the meaning of any given cultural artifact for a particular audience (Griswold 1987b). Unfortunately, Griswold's contribution was swallowed up in the sociology of art's increasing emphasis on hermeneutic subjectivity, and it has seldom been invoked in subsequent research. In

THE TURN AWAY FROM AESTHETIC CONTENT

Since the mid-1980s, the sociology of culture has brought a renewed appreciation for the role of ideas and meanings in a wide array of sociological phenomena, from social movements (Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Polletta 2006), to historical transformations (Sewell 2005), to politics and civil society (Alexander and Smith 1993). Yet it has suffered a surprising defeat on its own turf. Sociologists of culture have lost confidence that aesthetic creations themselves can be reliably interpreted in order to gain insights into broader cultural meanings. This hermeneutic pessimism is the consequence of research into audiences' interpretations of artistic objects that has made the meanings of those objects seem so fluid as to be inscrutable (Binder 1993; Bryson 1996; Griswold 1987a; Liebes and Katz 1990; Shively 1992; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991).

In the mid-twentieth century, by contrast, eminent sociologists had few inhibitions about making strong claims for the meaning and social significance of literary content. For instance, in *Literature and the Image of Man*, Leo Lowenthal justifies sociological attention to the works of great authors on the grounds that they portray "what is more real than reality itself... [I]t is often only after [the artist's] creative tasks have been performed that society recognizes its predicaments" (Lowenthal 1957:1-2). Lowenthal's student Will Wright extended this argument to popular Western films, arguing that they provided a mythological dramatization of the modern economy's demands on the individual (Wright 1977). Other prominent social thinkers worried that the shoddy crowd-pleasers served up by the entertainment industry rendered the masses incapable of critical thought (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002 [1947]; Marcuse 1964). All such arguments presupposed that cultural products transmit coherent and powerful meanings.

Since the "cultural turn" of the 1980s, however, sociological research has focused less on the meanings embedded in cultural objects themselves, and more on the social processes by which meanings are imputed to cultural objects. The most creative work in this vein, beginning with Wendy Griswold's classic article on the critical reception of George Lamming's novels (Griswold 1987a), tends to emphasize how different audiences' pre-existing preferences and preoccupations shape their interpretation of the same cultural object. This observation has been made with a wide variety of cultural objects, including cowboy films (Shively 1992); novels (DeVault 1990; Griswold 1987a); the internationally distributed television series *Dallas* (Liebes and Katz 1990); American television soap operas and sitcoms (Press 1991); the Vietnam War Memorial (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991) and musical genres (Binder 1993; Bryson 1996). While these studies typically concede that the "internal" content of a cultural object plays some role in the meaning attributed to it (e.g., DeVault 1990:915; Griswold 1987a:1106; Liebes and Katz 1990:140-49; Shively 1992:728), their research design of holding a particular cultural object constant and varying its audience inevitably highlights the extent to which meaning is in the eye of the beholder.

addition, Griswold's framework is intended to facilitate the analysis of any given cultural object, whereas my approach emphasizes narrative fiction exclusively and recommends a systematic approach to sampling along with guidelines for linking fictional content with cultural preoccupations.

Earlier studies which examined a single audience's reception of a spectrum of different artistic creations had been better positioned to detect "content effects."¹ Thus, the small group of romance readers studied by Janice Radway took great pleasure in their favorite romances and read them repeatedly, but found other novels disappointing or even repulsive. Radway was able to trace clear differences in plotting and characterization that made romance novels more or less gratifying to the "Smithton readers" whom she studied (Radway 1991 [1984]). Similarly, Will Wright found that particular features of Western films predicted their American box office success quite apart from whether they featured well-known stars or were heavily promoted by movie studios (Wright 1977:13-14). These studies provided a fairer test of the proposition that audiences are sensitive to differences in the intrinsic content of aesthetic objects; they found that content matters.

In the wake of Griswold's 1987 article, however, reception studies tended to downplay these findings. In the 1993 *Annual Review of Sociology*, Griswold characterized the "most significant new direction taken by work in the sociology of literature" as a new emphasis on readers' agency in construing meaning from texts (Griswold 1993:457). Ten years later, Victoria Alexander encapsulated the findings of "reception approaches" as follows: "*audiences are the key to understanding art, because the meanings created from art and the ways it is used depend on its consumers, not its creators*" (Alexander 2003:181, emphasis in original).³

Ironically, a conclusion this extreme ends up undermining the rationale for reception studies themselves. After all, if all artistic objects are a kind of mirror in which audiences see only reflections of their prior commitments, researchers might as well bypass art works and speak exclusively to individuals, who by default become the only reliable sources of meaning.⁴ Thus, despite its optimistic title, Andrea Press's review essay from 1994, "The Sociology of Cultural Reception: Notes Toward an Emerging Paradigm," admitted to anguished doubt about the future of reception studies. Press concluded by predicting that scholars may "divorc[e] cultural study almost completely from its focus on particular products to a preoccupation with culture in a much broader sense" (Press 1994:243). Reception studies were in danger of becoming self-cancelling.

While some sociologists continue to extrapolate from the content of aesthetic objects to wider social concerns, such efforts seldom use systematic sampling methods for ensuring the representativeness of their findings (see, e.g., Bergesen 2006; an unusual exception in this regard is Griswold 2000). Most work along these lines now takes place in the field of cultural studies, which is based mostly in humanities departments and interdisciplinary programs, not at the center of the sociological discipline.

³ In fact, the literary theorists who inspired this conclusion had originally argued that readers should strive to impose their own interpretations on texts as a way of undermining authority and enhancing their freedom and agency (Barthes 1974 [1970]; Derrida 1978 [1967]). After making its way from France to the U.S. and from literary studies to the social sciences, however, this normative project got transmuted into an empirical claim.

⁴ This insistence on each individual's subjective determination of the meanings he or she perceives in the surrounding world is also consonant with contemporary American culture's unusually strong emphasis on personal uniqueness and an internal locus of control (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010).

Prominent contemporary research in the sociology of art frequently sidesteps the problem of interpretation by treating aesthetic products as tools of social inclusion and exclusion. Following the strategy mapped out by Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]), this highly fruitful work has investigated the way people use cultural objects to draw symbolic boundaries against groups they disapprove of (Bryson 1996; Lamont 1992; Lamont and Fournier 1992), or to form social linkages with those who share common tastes (Erickson 1996; Lizardo 2006). While the Bourdieuan perspective on culture contributes importantly to the study of stratification, it emphasizes the instrumental functions of aesthetic taste and confirms the discipline's move away from engagement with the content of art objects.⁵

THE HIERARCHY OF FICTIONAL MEANING

One reason for the seemingly boundless polysemy of fictional content is researchers' largely undifferentiated conception of meaning. Hence, an important step toward rehabilitating fiction as a source of sociological evidence is to distinguish between several hierarchical layers of fictional meaning. Because the word "hierarchy" is potentially loaded, it should be emphasized that the word is intended to have *no* normative connotations in this context. Instead, it refers to layers of complexity. For instance, physics, chemistry, bio-chemistry and biology each focus on different objects and causal dynamics operating at different levels of complexity. Although atomic physics describes the component parts and forces which underpin chemistry, and chemistry in turn forms a substrate for biology, none of these sciences is closer to "reality" than the other.⁶ In an analogous manner, each of the four levels of fictional meaning I discuss below form a hierarchy in the sense that each depends, and builds, upon the previous one. As is often the case with complex systems, each hierarchical layer has its own *gestalt*, a coherence of its own that can be observed and analyzed. At the same time, however, doubts that arise over meaning at one layer can often be usefully adjudicated by referencing evidence drawn from more elementary levels of meaning.

A distinctive feature of this semiotic hierarchy is that each level of meaning arises out of an interaction between what the author has encoded in the text and knowledge possessed by the reader that allows him or her to interpret the information available in the text. As we move up the hierarchy of meaning, the knowledge mobilized by the reader is more complex and culturally specific and the scope for interpretation afforded by the text widens as well. These features of the hierarchy of fictional meaning are summarized in Figure A1.

[Figure A1 about here]

Linguistic Meaning

⁵ Bourdieu does, of course, explain broad patterns in the aesthetic preferences of different social classes, arguing that working class people, driven by necessity, see art in substantive terms, while the privileged can afford the "aesthetic gaze" with its attention to form. But this analysis does not use art objects to probe deeper, more complex cultural meanings.

⁶ For example, an event as biologically significant as an organism's death may be a non-event at the level of the quarks that compose the creature's constituent atoms; this does not make quarks more "real" than organisms. Sociologists will be familiar with this sort of anti-reductionist argument as it applies to social life from the foundational works of Emile Durkheim (Durkheim 1982 [1895]; Durkheim and Parsons 1974 [1953]).

“Linguistic meaning,” the meaning of particular words and syntax, is the most basic level of fictional meaning. Characters cannot “do” anything in a story without comprehensible strings of words conjuring them into existence. Of course, the existence of a linguistically meaningful text is not a sufficient cause for its comprehension.⁷ Any textual communication requires an author, a linguistic medium, and a reader who is both literate in that language and willing to decode the text. Rather than being read, a novel can always be used in ways that have nothing to do with its textual content—e.g., to prop up the short leg of a wobbly table, or to fuel a fire. To capture the necessary but not sufficient causal power of texts, Wayne Booth usefully suggests that we think of them as containing a kind of “potential energy” (Booth 1988:85ff). Following that analogy, simple linguistic comprehension of a text is the most basic way of unlocking its potential energy.⁸ Words and sentences provide the bedrock upon which the more general meanings of fiction are built.

Narrative Meaning

Fiction is more than just any meaningful sequence of words. Unlike, say, an instruction manual, it is made up of imaginative narrative. “Narrative meaning,” or the sense a reader gets from fiction that something is happening to someone, emerges out of a story’s words and sentences. Since fiction is a subspecies of narrative, it is useful to consider the latter as a more general phenomenon. Psychologist Jerome Bruner describes narrative as an entire mode of thought, one that “deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course” (Bruner 1990:13). Narrative is human beings’ way of bringing experiences that are distant in space and time into the present moment. This is what occurs in a statement as mundane as: “I bumped into your friend Maria on the way to work this morning.” The narrative representation of “human or human-like” experience is ubiquitous in everyday social interactions. It is also the medium through which individuals reflect upon their own behavior and that of others, and play out possible courses of action when fantasizing about or planning the future.

Fiction simply extends the narrative representation of human motivation and its consequences to events that have not actually happened. A reader’s ability to follow a flow of events and the motivations of characters in a story is thus no more surprising than a person’s capacity to comprehend an interlocutor’s verbal account of something that happened to him or her.⁸ Empirical studies unanimously confirm that, despite post-modern critiques of “transparent” or “mimetic” approaches to texts (e.g., Barthes 1974 [1970]), ordinary readers experience fiction

⁷ The search for a single definitive source of meaning underpins the hermeneutic quest that led Stanley Fish first to develop reader response theory and then to displace the locus of meaning to an “interpretive community” writ large (Fish 1980). While Fish’s reasoning influenced sociological reception studies (e.g., Long 1986), a better solution to the problem of meaning is to drop the search for a monocausal theory of meaning, accepting its fundamentally interactive character.

⁸ Indeed, young children could be said to “reverse engineer” this process, using stories as a means to hone their understanding of human motivations and their consequences (Paley 2004). Adults may also value fiction for the same reason, though in a more complex way; part of what fiction “does” for readers is to tell stories that make sense of others (and of one’s self through the experience of others). Herbert Fingarette has argued that psychotherapy involves the search for a story that will make sense of the self (Fingarette 1963).

as a representation of characters undergoing experiences, whatever the higher-order interpretations they make of those characters and experiences (Allbritton and Gerrig 1991; Derné 2000; DeVault 1990; Halász, Short, and Varga 2002; Jose and Brewer 1984; Lembo 2000; Liebes and Katz 1990; Long 1986; Miall 1990; Press 1991; Radway 1991 [1984]; Reed, Alexander, and Eliasoph 2007; Rossen-Knill 1994; Shively 1992). Audience reactions ranging from rapt absorption to disgust with a story for its racist or sexist portrayal of characters, or even to simple boredom at a humdrum plot, are secondary judgments that depend on a basic comprehension of fictional narrative (Booth 1988:138-42).

Since fictional narrative usually describes motivations enmeshed in social expectations and interactions, it requires more extensive cultural knowledge on the part of a reader than a bare, linguistically accurate understanding of a text. For example, readers may be able to recall instances from their own childhood when they read a puzzling fictional narrative whose individual sentences they could decipher but which required a better comprehension of motives and interactions in the adult world than they possessed at the time.

Internal Significance: Evaluations of Characters and Events

Beyond simple comprehension of what is transpiring in a narrative, fiction elicits an emotional response from the reader to the events and characters depicted. At their most basic, these sorts of evaluations involve distinctions between “bad guys” and “good guys” and between sad and happy endings. More subtly, readers may recognize excessive zeal in a hero’s virtue or roguish charm in the character of a villain; similarly, a tragic ending may be compensated by a sense of human nobility or a happy ending may feel unearned or gratuitous.

While these kinds of evaluations usually unfold simultaneously with a reader’s comprehension of a narrative, they belong on an analytically “higher” level of meaning. This is because they draw upon basic narrative comprehension, require an even more extensive application of the reader’s cultural knowledge, and afford a wider range of possible interpretations. For instance, in their cross-cultural audience reception study of the TV serial *Dallas*, Liebes and Katz found that some American viewers expressed a measure of admiration for the character J.R. Ewing, whereas Israeli Arab viewers unambiguously condemned him. Both groups of viewers, however, agreed upon the basic facts of the narrative—that J.R. deceives and bullies other characters and womanizes a great deal (Liebes and Katz 1990:93 and passim).

Serial stories with open-ended plots, like *Dallas*, are particularly prone to relatively open-ended evaluations, since they seldom depict action with irreversible consequences and even modify characters’ personalities for the sake of new plot lines. Indeed, many of Liebes and Katz’s respondents ultimately found this aspect of *Dallas* tiresome and unsatisfying (Liebes and Katz 1990:122-23).⁹ In contrast, many stories, particularly the most accessible and popular of

⁹ Another instance in which viewers were able to enjoy a piece of fiction while rooting for entirely different characters is reported by Neil Vidmar and Milton Rokeach. They found that racially prejudiced viewers of the TV show *All in the Family* thought that the show was intended to endorse Archie Bunker’s racial parochialism rather than satirize it, as the show’s authors had intended (Vidmar and Rokeach 1974). This “misinterpretation” of the show is likely abetted by the consequence-free plotting of a sitcom and its tendency to make fun of all characters for

them, load the dice heavily in terms of the evaluations they invite from readers. It is easy to overstate the range of emotional responses to characters and events that most fiction comfortably permits.

Of course, nothing obliges audiences to assent to the emotional and ethical¹⁰ conclusions being afforded by a story; often, readers who resist the evaluative alignments being presented in a story sense all too clearly what they are “supposed to think” about characters and events. The usual response by readers in such a case is simply to dislike the story. On the other hand, when readers do accept the emotional and ethical conclusions being offered by a story, the result can be profoundly satisfying. This outcome is particularly useful to social scientists, since it links the content of fiction with “real-world” cultural presuppositions. To anticipate, I argue that this third level of meaning, which I have termed “internal significance,” is particularly valuable to sociologists analyzing fictional texts for clues to broader cultural meanings.

External Significance: Generalizations about Groups, Ideologies and Historical events

Fiction can be experienced as being about the fates of characters who embody particular sorts of personal traits—this is what I discuss above as internal significance. But fiction can also be read as generalizing about groups, ideologies and historical happenings. If a story depicts a sexually promiscuous, irrational and manipulative female character who harms other characters before coming to a bad end herself, is it offering an implicit condemnation of a particular character’s traits or putting forward a misogynist stereotype? The former answer assesses fiction at the level of internal significance, while the latter offers an interpretation about the story’s “external significance” by construing a particular character’s traits as a generalization about a social group.

Some literature has such an obvious ideological agenda that sociologists writing about it almost forget the reception literature’s admonitions about the extreme fluidity of meaning (Isaac 2008; Isaac 2009). (Given the way those arguments have been overstated, this “oversight” is often entirely pardonable.) Much recent literary criticism instructs readers to make this move “up” from the third to the fourth level of interpretive meaning in instances when they might not consciously have done so if unprompted. By doing so, feminist and anti-racist literary critics have made important changes in the way educated readers understand the fictional portrayal of women and minorities. Significantly, however, the assertion that a fictional work is sexist, racist or otherwise unfair to a particular social group implies clarity of meaning at the level of the work’s internal significance. After all, a story cannot possibly cast aspersions on a larger social group unless the characters or events which are taken to represent that group are in fact negatively portrayed.

Resolving Ambiguities in Reception Research

comic effect, so that almost no views expressed on the show are exempt from light-hearted mockery. See (Swidler, Rapp, and Soysal 1986) for more on the impact of the format of television serials on their content.

¹⁰ Throughout this article, I use the term “ethical” to denote judgments about what is felt to be important to a good human life (Nussbaum 1987) or, differently phrased, people’s “strong evaluations” that are “stand independent of [our own desires, inclinations, or choices] and offer standards by which they can be judged” (Taylor 1989:4). Thus, “ethics” encompasses strongly felt moral *and* aesthetic judgments, a usage which is also in keeping with Geertz’s description of a cultural “ethos” (Geertz 2000 [1973]) (see discussion below).

Distinguishing between internal and external significance helps to clarify the conclusions of much audience response research. Frequently, these studies focus on divergent interpretations of the external significance of fiction and then conclude that fictional meaning is largely in the eye of the beholder. Such inferences, however, inadvertently obscure these same studies' findings of greater consensus about a work's content at lower levels in the hierarchy of meaning. For example, in a prominent contribution to the audience reception literature, JoEllen Shively investigates American Indian and Anglo-American reactions to *The Searchers*, a classic John Wayne Western that depicts Native Americans in a "distorted, negative" light (Shively 1992:727). Shively comments that the "most striking finding" of her research is "an overall similarity in the ways Indians and Anglos experienced *The Searchers*" (Shively:727). Rural "Indians and Anglos both root for and identify with the good guys" (Shively:733). In the terms I have proposed here, viewers from both ethnic groups experienced the film's internal significance similarly but differed strikingly in their understandings of the film's external significance—i.e., its implications for real-world events and groups. Anglo audiences viewed it as an accurate representation of their ancestors' noble efforts to settle the land in the face of harassment from American Indians (Shively:729). In contrast, it never even occurred to rural Indian viewers to identify themselves with the villainous Indians depicted in the film. When this suggestion was made by the researcher, they rejected it, either by remarking that Indians come in lots of different varieties, both bad and good, or by claiming that "Indians today are the cowboys'... in the sense that it is Indians who preserve some commitment to an autonomous way of life that is not fully tied to modern industrial society" (Shively:730). The relatively consistent way in which both audiences perceive the internal as opposed to the external significance of the film is consistent with the proposition that lower levels on the hierarchy of meaning are comparatively stable.

This conclusion also fits another of Shively's findings. In a pilot study, Shively showed *The Searchers* to fifteen university-educated Native American students, who took offense at the cartoonish portrayal of the Indian villains in the film. Having been sensitized to an ethnicity-focused reading of the external significance of Westerns, the students told Shively that they identified most with the Indians in the movie. Nevertheless, they were not able simply to invert the character evaluations suggested by the film and enjoy it as a story about noble Indians fighting villainous cowboys. The film is too insistent in its negative depiction of the characters with whom the Native American students wanted to sympathize (Shively 1992:732). In the terms I have been suggesting, the relatively inflexible internal significance of the film created a moral dissonance that destroyed these viewers' pleasure in it.

Other audience reception studies come to similar conclusions. Wendy Griswold's seminal article on the critical reception of George Lamming's novels finds that West Indian critics read Lamming as being "about" a search for national identity, whereas American critics think that his work's central preoccupation is race (Griswold 1987a). In other words, Griswold

reports disagreement about the external significance of Lamming's works, the level of meaning which I have been arguing is the most subject to divergent interpretation.¹¹

In a similar manner, the findings of Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz's article on the Vietnam War Memorial can be explained using an extension of the hierarchy of fictional meaning that I am offering here. A stone monument is not nearly as richly referential as a piece of fiction, but we can extend the distinction between internal and external significance to its symbolic meaning. Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz found that almost all visitors to the Vietnam War Memorial saw it as paying somber tribute to the sacrifice of the soldiers whose names are engraved on its surface and as implicitly recognizing that the Vietnam War did not have the triumphant outcome celebrated in most U.S. war monuments (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991). Nevertheless, Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz also found that the monument accommodated larger disagreements about the conduct and implications of the war—roughly speaking, the monument's external significance. Whereas left-leaning observers saw the monument as vivid testimony to the idea that the Vietnam War necessitated a tempering of American nationalism, more conventionally patriotic visitors left flags and patriotic messages that were consistent with a right-wing understanding of America's military defeat in Vietnam as a failure of political will (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991:404-07). Again, a hierarchically differentiated view of meaning helps make sense of the mix of consensus and disagreement that Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz find in audience reactions to the Vietnam War Memorial: internal significance is typically more stable than external significance.

The Nexus between the Internal Significance of Fiction and Readers' Cultural Assumptions

Of the four levels of meaning I have differentiated above, internal significance, or the implicit judgments about characters and events conveyed in fiction, is the currently the most underexploited by social scientists who wish to use fiction as a window into the often frustratingly implicit judgments that comprise a cultural ethos. Internal significance is something of a "sweet spot" in the hierarchy of meaning in fiction: it is high enough to mobilize readers' ethical judgments, but it is low enough that textual meanings are relatively stable and easy for an analyst to discern even in the absence of specific data on audience interpretations. Furthermore, fictional narratives animate ethical and emotional judgments in ways that parallel the forms those judgments take in real life. In other words, there are profound affinities between fiction and cultural ethos. I discuss both of these points before turning to the methodological nuts and bolts of sampling fiction for sociological analysis.

Internal significance as the intertwining of ethical judgment and emotion

Although audience reception researchers can be criticized for having arrived at extreme and self-undermining conclusions, their basic point is a valid one: simply understanding the (internal) significance of a text is not enough to permit conclusions about what its readers think. Without some sense of audience reactions to a text, sociologists have no way of linking textual

¹¹ This finding is all the less surprising in light of the obscure style of many of Lamming's non-realist works (Griswold 1987a:1087), many of which make the story's basic narrative hard to follow. I am indebted to Ann Swidler for pointing out the "difficult" style of Lamming's works.

content to cultural concerns beyond those of the author. That said, the most important thing to know about an audience's response to a particular work of fiction is also the simplest: whether they enjoy or dislike it. If readers do enjoy a work of fiction, the analyst can be confident that the reader has assented to the major implicit judgments put forward in the work. If readers do not, it may be harder to discern why without asking readers for their explicit interpretations or comparing failed works of a similar genre with successful ones. In short, finding works that readers enjoy is a key step in using fiction to illuminate readers' implicit cultural assumptions.

To be successful, fiction must not only give readers access to the experience of the characters depicted in it, but it must make that experience engaging and meaningful. The most basic judgment that successful fiction must elicit from the reader is the sense that something significant—something emotionally engaging enough to be worth paying attention to—is taking place in the story. For this reason, Arlie Hochschild's observation about the "magnified moments" contained in nonfiction advice books applies to fiction as well:

Stories contain magnified moments, episodes of heightened importance, either epiphanies, moments of intense glee or unusual insight, or moments in which things go intensely but meaningfully wrong. In either case, the moment stands out; it is metaphorically rich [and] unusually elaborate (Hochschild 1994:4).

Indeed, fiction cannot promise readers the instrumental rewards of explicit expert advice as do the advice books discussed by Hochschild in this passage. As such, it relies even more heavily than advice literature on tacit assumptions about what is important and meaningful in lived experience.

For example, a story which relies upon suspense to interest the reader must induce fear. The feeling of fear in turn involves a recognition that something important (e.g., one's own life) is at risk. A thriller can create a sense of suspense only if a reader appreciates the threat that its villain poses to the protagonist and/or to the larger moral order. Sad or tragic stories prompt the reader to feel grief, which depends on a sense that someone or something worthwhile is being lost. A romantic novel must generate erotic longing; this requires appealing protagonists whom the reader will recognize as desirable and will want to see paired with one another. Similar observations could be made about any sort of fiction. The upshot is that fiction must, if it is to be successful, appeal to readers' implicit evaluations of what is important and significant in life.

An important resemblance between the evaluations offered up in a fictional narrative and the ethical evaluations embedded within everyday life is that both involve an emotional reaction to experience. In recent scholarship, sociologists and psychologists have begun pointing out that well-internalized cultural categories and moral norms typically operate on an implicit and often emotional level. It is often difficult for people to justify their gut-level reactions in explicit, rule-like terms (Bourdieu 1990 [1980]; Haidt 2001; Vaisey 2009) and whatever explicit rationales they are able to verbalize when pressed to do so may be only loosely coupled with their actual unconscious evaluative reactions (Vaisey 2009:1690). As social scientists have been emphasizing the way in which morality draws upon emotional responses, philosophers and neuroscientists have been working on the same problem from the opposite direction,

rediscovering Aristotle's observation that emotion involves a cognitive engagement with the world (Aristotle 2002; Damasio 1994; Frijda 1986; Nussbaum 2001). This new work, social scientific and philosophical alike, underscores the extent to which many crucial cultural judgments appear in the form of implicit and emotional responses. Fiction provides an important way to exploit this fact, since it elicits emotional/ethical responses from readers in the form of gut reactions to characters and narrative events. At the same time, these emotions/evaluations are embedded in a flow of virtual experience in a manner that reproduces many of the features of everyday experience.¹² Furthermore, social scientists can examine these encodings of emotions and evaluations at a distance in time and place, allowing them access to aspects of culture which might otherwise be inaccessible to empirical research.

World-view and ethos, plot and character

Despite being a student of Talcott Parsons, who championed the position that culture fundamentally consists of values (Parsons 1951), anthropologist Clifford Geertz argued forcefully that human cultures do not simply assert the worth of different ultimate ends. Rather, Geertz observes that human culture always combines factual and evaluative assumptions in a mutually reinforcing way. He calls a culture's moral and aesthetic style its "ethos" and terms its characteristic ontological and causal assumptions its "world-view" (Geertz 2000 [1973]).¹³ To take a familiar example of what Geertz is talking about, there is an affinity between the factual assumption that "anyone can make it" in America if they have sufficient dedication and willpower and the commonplace American presumption that poor people exhibit dubious moral character (Lamont 2000). Similarly, in the French story cited at the beginning of the appendix, "Gaby" looks down on the vanity and greed of the men who come to her father's gym, giving a negative valuation to motives that an American story might cast as praiseworthy ambition. Gaby's judgments are reinforced by the story's plot, which depicts how her husband's flirtation with this sort of ambition makes him an easy mark for manipulation by others and nearly destroys their happiness as a couple.

Thus, fiction is well-suited to representing the interlocking of world-view and ethos that gives cultural assumptions their profoundly "realistic" feel to those who are under their influence. Fiction can reinforce the link between good character traits and good outcomes to a degree and with a clarity that is seldom possible in the noise and chaos of real life. In this sense, then, the same traits that make stories unrealistic as portrayals of reality can make them superior at representing cultural convictions.¹⁴ With a degree of vividness and certainty that is unusual in real life, fiction is able to depict 1) the motives behind a character's action, 2) the practical consequences of action, and 3) the way a character's acts reveal and reflexively transform his or

¹² This is particularly true of realist narratives that emphasize verisimilitude, like the modern novel (Watt 1957).

¹³ Geertz's claim has a substantial pedigree. Clyde Kluckhohn earlier acknowledged that, in all societies, "existential propositions also supply the clues for major values" (Kluckhohn 1951:392). And Max Weber himself argued that religious ideas have their greatest impact on behavior not by purely normative assertion but by fashioning "world images" which shape the ethical landscape (Weber 1958 [1946]:280).

¹⁴ This is one important reason why anthropologists, evolutionary psychologists and sociologists find narrative, or "myth," to be crucially important in constituting cultural beliefs (Bellah 2006; Bellah 2011; Donald 1991:258; Malinowski 1954 [1948]:83-84).

her self. As it happens, each of these aspects of action is emphasized respectively by three major philosophical accounts of ethical life: Kantian deontology, utilitarian consequentialism, and Aristotelian virtue theory. Whereas each of these lines of philosophical argument prioritizes one aspect of ethical action, most people implicitly accept that all three considerations are salient to ethical evaluations. In addition to including these three types of “ethical data,” fiction embeds them in a representation of personal experience as it unfolds, making these considerations all the more vivid and immediate.¹⁵ Fiction is thus powerfully equipped to represent a culture’s ethical “truths.”

Avoiding the pitfalls of naïve reflection theory

The similarities and symbiosis between fiction and cultural beliefs makes fiction a rich potential source of insights into culture writ large. Nevertheless, I am not at all recommending that researchers begin picking up works of fiction haphazardly in order to proclaim their cultural significance. For instance, prior research shows that the genre and format of fiction affects its content (Cawelti 1976; Swidler et al. 1986), that the menu of fiction available to readers can be skewed by censorship or asymmetrical markets (Durham 1998), that some works are rejected by their intended audience (Radway 1991 [1984]:157-85), and so on. In other words, some methodological care is necessary when selecting and analyzing the content of fiction for its larger cultural significance. With this in mind, I suggest guidelines for sampling fiction with an eye to analyzing its cultural significance.

SAMPLING

A successful sociological strategy for sampling fiction must fulfill three criteria: knowledge of audience appeal, topical relevance, and comparative leverage. I first discuss these three requirements in turn, then address the special problems and opportunities entailed in sampling high-brow fiction.

Measuring Audience Appeal

The inference that audiences accept the implicit evaluations that drive a piece of fiction depends on the knowledge that an audience accepts and enjoys it. This sets sociological analysts the double challenge of ascertaining who is “receiving” a particular piece of fiction and whether it is being enjoyed. Researchers use two main methods for doing this: direct testimony from audiences, and sales or audience figures. I discuss each in turn.

Janice Radway’s pathbreaking study of the reception of fiction came from first-hand reports about which romance novels particularly appealed to the circle of working-class, mostly married women whom she was studying (Radway 1991 [1984]). Other reception studies have similarly used ethnographic observation, focus groups or written reviews to ascertain which works of fiction are appealing (Ang 1985; Derné 2000; DeVault 1990; Liebes and Katz 1990; Long 1986; Reed 2002; Shively 1992). As is characteristic of qualitative methods more generally, this approach has the advantage of being able to assess audience reactions “up close”

¹⁵ This helps to explain philosopher Martha Nussbaum’s observation that fiction is a subtle and rich source of ethical insights (Nussbaum 1990). Nussbaum attributes this to fiction’s stylistic resources without spelling out exactly what those resources are. In a sense, the account of fiction that I provide above is an effort to do just that.

and the drawback of providing less thorough evidence about the representativeness of the tastes being observed.

Sales figures provide less detailed but more systematic evidence about a work's appeal (e.g., Corse 1997; Uzzi and Spiro 2005; Wright 1977). The assumption behind this measure of audience appeal is that the number of people who seek out a particular work, sacrificing money and/or time to "consume" it, indicates both the breadth and intensity of a work's appeal. This way of measuring fiction's "success" is most reliable when there is a substantial menu of similar—and similarly priced—offerings for consumers to choose from. Major asymmetries in pricing (Durham 1998; Griswold 1981), promotion, or availability (Katz and Wedell 1977) make it more difficult to correlate sales or audience figures with the intrinsic appeal of different artistic content. For instance, Liebes and Katz note that, from the point of view of their argument about Dallas's broad cross-cultural appeal,

[i]t is a sobering thought that if Israel had its own soap opera, and if it were aired at the same time as Dallas, the local program would almost certainly win out. We know this, in fact, from other nations whose indigenous soap operas are more popular, or certainly no less popular, than the much more elaborate imported ones (Liebes and Katz 1990:131).

If the menu of fictional offerings is severely constrained, it is harder to be confident about the extent to which readers or audiences fully enjoy the story's content. For example, this problem complicates the conclusions we can draw from mid-century lesbians' purchases of lesbian pulp novels. Lesbians of the 1950s sought out these novels, avidly in some cases, precisely because they were the only public representations of lesbian life available to them at the time (Keller 2005:385). According to the anecdotal reports that are available, mid-century lesbians often felt lacerated by the unhappy endings and homophobic editorializing included in these works in order to avoid censorship and appeal to heterosexual male readers (Keller 2005:passim), and probably would have preferred the unambiguous affirmation of their sexuality available in today's well-developed, uncensored market in lesbian erotica.

The case for an audience's thorough satisfaction with a piece of fiction is most powerfully made when scholars can differentiate between competing works of the same genre that failed or succeeded with that audience. Thus, Will Wright considerably strengthens his contention that the blockbuster Westerns he analyzes owe their box-office success to their intrinsic appeal to American audiences when he points out that some of these unusually successful films were low-budget productions that beat out competitors with star casts and expensive marketing campaigns (Wright 1977:13-14).

An important caveat about high sales figures is that they can be compatible with intense niche appeal. There is nothing wrong with this, of course, so long as the analyst is aware of and interested in these specialized audiences. Scholars can exploit this fact, as some have with Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins's *Left Behind* bestsellers, which appeal especially to millenarian Christians (Forbes and Kilde 2004; Frykholm 2004). Of course, a sample of sufficient size will include fiction appealing to all of the largest audience segments within a particular population.

Another sampling strategy to maximize the “mainstream-ness” of a sample is to choose fiction that has been selected by knowledgeable editors for its breadth of appeal. For instance, by sampling fiction published in magazines with a very large circulation, the strategy I have used in my own research, a scholar can sacrifice some precision about the intensity of each individual work’s appeal in exchange for assurance that magazine editors have pre-screened stories for their broad appeal.

In short, the first principle of sampling fiction with a view to what it reveals about its audience’s cultural suppositions must be to find works that appeal strongly to the audience which interests the analyst.

Topical Relevance

This is the most straightforward of the three sampling criteria. Sociologists wishing to investigate a specific cultural theme must ensure that the fiction they sample engages intensively with that theme. Thus, for instance, Janice Radway’s classic work uses romance novels to illuminate readers’ gender aspirations (Radway 1991 [1984]). Griswold’s comparison of detective fiction in Nigeria and the modern West uncovers contrasting assumptions about what causes crime and how (or whether) moral order can be restored (Griswold 2000:238-54). And John Levi Martin examines Richard Scarry’s *What Do People Do All Day?*, a children’s book that portrays animal characters working in different occupations, to study the naturalization of the division of labor (Martin 2000).

Assessing the topical relevance of a particular kind of fiction requires some prior knowledge of genre. While it is fairly obvious that romance novels feature erotic attraction, for instance, it requires a closer acquaintance with the genre of science fiction to discern the themes about which it could be revealing beyond assessing audiences’ feelings about spectacular technological advances. Different sorts of science fiction could be used to provide insight into the ethical implications of the boundaries of humanness or to explore counterfactual imaginings of radically different models of social order, among other possible meanings.

Sampling Comparatively

With few exceptions (e.g., Martin 2000), the most revealing sociological analyses of the content of fiction employ a comparative design. The simplest procedure is to hold fictional genre and format constant while varying the cultural context in which fiction was produced and received. Holding genre and format constant helps ensure that thematic differences in a sample of stories are not attributable to fundamentally different storytelling tasks (see Swidler et al. 1986). Stories which deal with similar plot devices, like short stories that culminate in a fight, can be especially revealing of cultural contrasts. In studies designed to illuminate the influence of national culture on fictional content, some analysts have further tightened the comparison by examining the edits made to a story as it is modified to appeal to a new audience. For example, some scholars have examined the alterations made to French films when they are remade for American audiences (Carroll 1989; Durham 1998). Similarly, scholars could get a glimpse of French and American women’s differing erotic ideals by examining the edits that French publishers make to sex scenes when translating American-authored romance novels for a

domestic audience (Weber 2000:137). When tailoring an existing story to a new audience, editors have economic reasons to minimize the changes they make to stories, and so focus on points in the narrative where incompatibilities between different audiences' cultural sensibilities are most striking and easiest to repair by limited emendations. This tightly-focused approach has the advantage of highlighting material that producers or editors deem most salient to culturally different audiences. At the same time, of course, it obscures the culturally-revealing thematic differences that can arise when authors have the latitude to compose entirely original fiction for audiences within their "home" cultural context. Figure A2 highlights these basic trade-offs of comparative design.

[Insert Figure A2 about here]

Though the focus of my own research has led me to focus primarily on a cross-national comparison of fiction, scholars can of course compare similar fiction with audiences that span any division of sociological interest, be it class (e.g., Gecas 1972), religion (e.g., Clawson 2005), historical period (e.g., Griswold 1986; Lantz, Schultz, and O'Hara 1977; Taviss 1969), or something else. As previously noted, comparisons between same-genre fiction that fails and fiction that succeeds with a single audience is particularly powerful at illuminating what makes a particular sort of fiction appealing to that audience (Liebes and Katz 1990:130-39; Radway 1991 [1984]:157-85). In all of these cases, within-genre comparisons help the analyst cut through the welter of implied evaluations in any piece of fiction to focus on salient thematic patterns. Sociologists are used to thinking about comparison as a tool for establishing causality, but it can be just as useful in clarifying the subtle thematic *description* required for the analysis of cultural themes.

Sampling High-Culture Fiction

My argument thus far suggests that researchers who wish to use fiction to make broadly representative claims about culture should sample popular fiction. Popular genres are enjoyed by a wider swath of the population, making them more representative of broad cultural forces, and their simpler appeals to audience sympathies make their "internal significance" more transparent to the analyst. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the distinct advantages and drawbacks of sampling high-culture fiction.

One reason to sample high-culture literature is to investigate the societal self-image cultivated by intellectual elites. After examining canonical novels assigned in American and Canadian university syllabi, Sarah Corse concludes that these works deliberately champion culturally distinctive ideals during periods of elite-sponsored national self-definition (Corse 1997). To the extent that elites can enforce literary canons by making them required reading, this loosens the link between audience size and reader enjoyment (Csicsila 2004; Duell 2000).

Another reason to study high-brow literature is precisely because it tends to explore controversial topics. This tendency to dwell upon internal cultural contradictions makes highbrow literature a potential source of insight into processes of endogenous cultural change. For example, Milton Albrecht's study of fiction in American magazines in 1950 compared codings of short stories with a list of ten independently formulated "moral ideas or values of the

American family” (Albrecht 1956:723). He found that 95 percent of stories written in low-brow or middle-brow magazines endorsed a list of mainstream norms independently identified by sociologists of the American family, whereas only 75 percent of stories in high-brow publications did (724). Albrecht concluded that high-brow fiction tends to “express freedom in dealing with subjects that are socially taboo—a freedom that is often interpreted as license” (729) by critics.¹⁶ The counter-normative themes that Albrecht found in the high-brow stories in his 1950 sample included greater tolerance for extra-marital sex, divorce, and even homosexuality (Albrecht 1956: 726-8). This list of non-normative family values looks prescient from our contemporary perspective. Of course, high-brow literature cannot be mined mechanically for predictions about future ethical developments,¹⁷ but it can furnish insight into endogenous tensions that contribute to cultural change (Collins 1998; Taylor 1989).

Some scholars have argued that highbrow fiction’s stylistic acumen is itself an advantage to sociological analysts. Lewis Coser’s *Sociology Through Literature* excerpts classic literary texts on the grounds that “[t]here is an intensity of perception in the first-rate novelist when he [sic] describes a locale, a sequence of action, or a clash of characters which can hardly be matched by those observers on whom sociologists are usually wont to rely” (Coser 1972 [1963]:xvi). Coser thus sees realism as high-brow literature’s primary advantage.¹⁸ Against Coser, it should be noted that fictional distortion can be at least as culturally revealing as unusually faithful descriptions of experience (e.g., Wylie 1974 [1957]: 265-7).

In sum, the advantages and drawbacks of using high-culture texts are opposite sides of the same coin. The ethically pioneering character of high-brow fiction can reveal important cultural contradictions and trends, but may be misleading if read as representative of mainstream cultural convictions.

RECOVERING FICTION AS A SOURCE OF SOCIOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The aim of this appendix has been to rehabilitate and refine the sociological analysis of fiction. In the wake of a spate of reception studies that emphasized the polysemy of artistic objects, high-profile scholarship in the sociology of culture has largely abandoned the analysis of

¹⁶ This pattern of ethically adventuresome high-brow literature is over-determined by audiences and artists alike. In part, it is demand-driven, since, in recent times, elites have tended to be more ethically tolerant than the rest of the populace. Claude Fischer and Michael Hout’s study of U.S. survey data gathered over the course of the 20th century shows that new currents of (recently socially liberal) opinion are often adopted first by the most educated and cosmopolitan groups within society (Fischer and Hout 2006:212-39). Other studies find that upper-middle-class childrearing emphasizes communication with people outside one’s home community (Bernstein 1971; Lareau 2003); as adults, well-educated individuals tend to be more comfortable contemplating the lives of people unlike themselves (Houtman 2001; Reed 2002). More cynically, Pierre Bourdieu argues that audiences with high cultural capital consume ethically adventuresome art in a (largely unconscious) effort to demonstrate their superiority to economic elites and to the unenlightened masses (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]). On the supply side, pushing the ethical envelope has been seen as a duty among high-brow artists in the modern West since the dawn of Romanticism (Bourdieu 1996 [1992]; Lowenthal 1957).

¹⁷ For instance, Albrecht also found that highbrow fiction endorsed social status considerations in marriage more frequently than did middle-and low-brow stories (Albrecht 1956:727). I am aware of no evidence that such unromantic considerations have gained legitimacy in mainstream American culture over the 60 years since Albrecht’s study.

¹⁸ For a more recent example of a prominent sociologist using literature in this way, see Bourdieu’s reading of Virginia Woolf as part of his discussion of masculine honor (Bourdieu 2001 [1998]:69ff).

the content of aesthetic works. Sociologists of culture are increasingly wary of analyzing the content of art objects for clues to wider cultural meanings. As a consequence, the sociology of culture has divided into two sub-fields: the sociology of art, which is concerned with the production of art objects and with what in former decades would have been called their social functions; and the sociology of culture in its more anthropological mode, i.e., the study of culture as a semiotic framework for everyday thought and behavior.

In an effort to bridge this gap, this appendix has recommended a revised approach to the sociological analysis of fiction. Fiction's ability to represent experience vividly makes it a logical starting point in a re-examination of the links between artistic content and cultural emotions, evaluations and beliefs. As narrative, fiction represents human experience in both its interior, or psychic, and exterior, or event-filled, manifestations. To be appealing to audiences, fiction must selectively represent experiences that are dramatic and therefore emotionally compelling. In addition, to appreciate fiction, audiences must assent to the evaluation of events implied in a particular story. This forms the crucial link between the emotional content of fiction and audiences' cultural predispositions. I have argued that fiction is at liberty to represent the mix of world-view and ethos that makes cultural truths so powerfully persuasive to those who have internalized them. By depicting a flow of events and characters' reactions and participation in them, authors of fiction are able to reveal the three aspects of human action that are most relevant to moral judgments, namely the motivations for action, the practical consequences of action, and the way in which action reflexively marks or transforms the self of the actor. In a sense, then, fiction is equipped to make powerful (implicit) arguments on behalf of the ethical presuppositions of a particular culture.¹⁹

In sum, fiction is particularly well equipped to illustrate the mix of psychological presuppositions, visceral evaluations, and emotional sympathies and antipathies that characterize distinctive cultural outlooks. By exploiting the representational power of fiction, sociologists of culture can give themselves a richer, more multi-faceted picture of how different cultural contexts shape people's evaluative and emotional imagination. It might be objected that these facets of culture tell us little about people's actual behavior. But aspirations and normative standards not only provide people with a template for their own behavior; if they are widely held, they furnish a set of expectations about how one's behavior will be evaluated and interpreted by others, regardless of how fully people internalize them (Swidler 1995).

Extending this effort to the sociological analysis of other kinds of artistic content is outside the scope of this appendix. Nevertheless, fruitful attempts to do so will likely benefit from following a similar set of steps: first, developing an account of how each aesthetic medium "works" psychologically; then establishing principles for how to sample and compare works that appeal to populations of interest; and, finally, describing how to analyze content so as to exploit

¹⁹ Naturally, it also has the capacity to argue against dominant cultural outlooks. The role of fiction in transforming culture by extending and manipulating people's imagination about the experience of others has been suggestively explored by historians seeking to explain the emergence of nationalism (Anderson 1983) and international humanitarianism (Hunt 2007). This is another field of research that is ripe for exploration by sociologists of culture if they are willing to reconsider the power of the content of cultural objects.

each artistic medium's particular communicative powers. Such efforts promise to expand sociology's analytical repertoire and its understanding of human culture.