Scharpf, F. 1997. "Economic Integration, Democracy and the Welfare State." *Journal of European Public Policy* 4 (1): 18–36.
——. 1999. "The Viability of Advanced Welfare States in the International Economy: Vulnerabilities and Options." Working Paper 99/9, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, Cologne.
Scharpf, F., and V. Schmidt, eds. 2000. *Welfare and Work in the Open Economy: Diverse Responses to Common Challenges*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Silva, E., and C. Smart, eds. 1999. *The New Family?* London: Sage.
Smart, C., and B. Neale. 1999. *Family Fragments*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
Smith, A. M. 2007. *Welfare Reform and Sexual Regulation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Strober, M. 1994. "Rethinking Economics Through a Feminist Lens." *American Economic Review* 84 (2): 143–47.
Svallfors, S. 1997. "Worlds of Welfare and Attitudes Towards Redistribution: A Comparison of Eight Western Nations." *European Sociological Review* 13: 283–304.
Taylor-Gooby, P. 2002. "The Silver Age of the Welfare State: Perspectives on Resilience." *Journal of Social Policy* 31 (4): 597–622.
——. 2005. *Ideas and Welfare State Reform in Western Europe*. London: Palgrave.
Taylor-Gooby P., ed. 2004. *New Risks, New Welfare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Taylor-Gooby, P. (1991) "Welfare State Regimes and Welfare Citizenship" *Journal of European Social Policy* 1(2) pp. 93–105.
Van Every, J. 1995. *Heterosexual Women Changing the Family: Refusing to Be a 'Wife'!* London: Taylor & Francis.
Weston, K. 1991. *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gay Men and Kinship*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Williams, F. 1995. "Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Class in Welfare States: A Framework for Comparative Analysis." *Social Politics* 2 (2): 127–59.
Wilson, A. 1994. "Their Justice: Heterosexism in *A Theory of Justice*." In *A Simple Matter of Justice? Theorizing Lesbian & Gay Politics*, ed. A. Wilson. London: Cassell, 146–75.
——. 2007a. "New Labour and Lesbian & Gay 'Friendly' Policy.'" In *Women and New Labour*, eds. C. Annesley, F. Gains, and K. Rummery. Bristol: Policy Press, 193–209.
——. 2007b. "With Friends Like These: The Liberalization of Queer Family Policy." *Critical Social Policy* 27 (1): 50–76.
Wilson, E. 1977. *Women and the Welfare State*. London: Tavistock.
Yeates, N. 2000. "Social Politics and Policy in an Era of Globalization: Critical Reflections." In *New Risks, New Welfare*, ed. N. P. Manning and I. Shaw. London: Blackwell, 36–57.
——. 2002. "Globalization and Social Policy." *Global Social Policy* 2 (1): 69–91.
——. 2005. "A Global Political Economy of Care." *Social Policy and Society* 4 (2): 227–34.

Marriage and Bourgeois Respectability

Lori Jo Marso, Union College

doi:10.1017/S1743923X09990572

Feminist critics of the institution of marriage point to its tendency to reproduce and solidify a gendered division of labor, norms of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X09990572 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dependency and protection, and mandated monogamy. While I support the feminist call for a decoupling of state benefits, such as rights to health care and legal proxy, from the institution of marriage in light of discrimination against same-sex couples who are denied the right to marry, in this essay I draw attention to a separate but related issue. I focus here on what I consider one of the most troubling aspects of marriage for feminists, one highlighted by Simone de Beauvoir in her classic and still timely critique of marriage in *The Second Sex* (1952): the fact that marriage automatically confers bourgeois respectability on its participants. Even as we oppose antigay marriage legislation and recognize that marriage can protect vulnerable parties by guaranteeing health care, equity upon divorce, tax benefits, and so forth, feminists must continue to refuse the bourgeois respectability that is so deeply linked with the institution of marriage. Having the state accord legitimacy to some kinds of intimate relationships and consensual sex, but not others, goes against basic ideas of feminist freedom articulated most convincingly, I argue, by Beauvoir. While arguing this position, however, I will also ask whether only the relatively privileged are able to refuse the bourgeois respectability that marriage promises.

Because Beauvoir's writing on marriage assumes the heterosexual couple, most of her criticism is concentrated on how marriage particularly limits and constrains women. Her chapter on "The Married Woman" begins by noting that "marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society" ([1952] 1989, 425). For girls, marriage is not only expected ("most women are married, or have been, or plan to be, or suffer from not being") but is also the means to integration into the community (p. 425). Unlike the situation for men and boys, the situation for women and girls is that they will perform a service in the marriage — they will satisfy men's sexual needs and take care of the household and children. A woman transforms her entire identity through this service, becoming *wife* and *mother*.

The limits to women's identity, the constraints on women's freedom and sexual satisfaction, and expectations in terms of the gendered division of labor in the household are the main features of Beauvoir's criticism of the institution of marriage. While these strike a familiar chord in feminist criticism of heterosexual marriage, for Beauvoir these criticisms take on added significance as part of the ideology of what she calls "bourgeois optimism." The "bright ideal" held up as promise to the engaged girl is not freedom but happiness, defined by the bourgeois as "peaceful conservation of the past, the maintenance of the status quo"

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X09990572 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(p. 447). The bourgeois ideal of happiness entails "a gilded mediocrity lacking ambition and passion, aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently toward death without questioning its purpose" (p. 447) Central to bourgeois optimism is consumption, particularly in regard to material objects in the home: "[W]ithin its walls the family is established as a discrete cell or unit group and maintains its identity as generations come and go" (p. 448). The "poetry" of "hearth and home" is summed up in these middle-class values: "fidelity to the past, patience, economy, foresight, love of family and of the native soil, and so on" (p. 449). While Beauvoir argues that "today the house has lost its patriarchal splendor," (p. 449) material objects in the house are still sought after as compensation for lack of freedom. Furnishings, knickknacks, shiny stoves, bright copper (and, might we add, kitchen utensils, fine linens, flat screen televisions, and the glossy magazines and chic stores that display these objects of desire) all function to distract one from the stifling atmosphere of the bourgeois home.

Consider the bourgeois values of some of the "newlywed gay" couples featured in a 2008 *New York Times Magazine* cover story (Denizet-Lewis 2008). In the cover photo, two young, handsome, well-dressed, white men serve up some healthy backyard barbeque food with their large McMansion looming in the background. Photos inside the magazine similarly evoke an all-American version of domestic upward mobility. Traditional gender roles are signaled though both partners are male. In one photo, a young, well-dressed white man is lounging with his feet by the fire, the dog at his side relaxing on an expensive Persian rug, as the other handsome, young, well-dressed male partner vacuums the rug while flashing a winning smile at his partner. Another photo is set in an upscale kitchen where a young, white, handsome man shows off the lovely dinner he seems to have just pulled from the oven, while his young, white, handsome well-dressed partner peers over his shoulder in admiration of both the food and the cook. Are the photos meant to be ironic? In the accompanying story, the author interviews newlywed gay couples in Massachusetts to explore how they negotiate the norms of behavior considered appropriate for heterosexual marriage (whether to have a big public wedding, to be or not to be monogamous, how to divide domestic labor, and so forth). While it will come as no surprise that conflicting points of view on these specific issues emerge, the idea of bourgeois respectability and legitimization offered through marriage are incredibly tempting to gay couples who have long suffered from the effects of shame, secrecy, and delegitimization of their intimate

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X09990572 Published online by Cambridge University Press

partnerships. As Denizet-Lewis reports: "Many young gay men don't see themselves as all that different from their heterosexual peers, and many profess to want what they've long seen espoused by mainstream American culture: a long-term relationship and the chance to start a family" (2008).

While fully cognizant of the conservative values and the bourgeois trappings of marriage, feminists such as R. Claire Snyder-Hall support a same sex couples' choice — and indeed what she argues is their civil right — to be married (Snyder 2006). However, in light of Beauvoir's condemnation of the bourgeois norms that accompany marriage, feminists should continue to interrogate how the politics of marriage as legitimization of kinship relations further entrenches not only consumerist but also (and even more troubling) very conservative sexual, as well as racist and class-based, norms of bourgeois behavior. The United States has a long history of punishing unmarried poor and marginalized persons by withholding state entitlements due simply to lifestyle choices. Marriage and a stable bourgeois family life, as the familiar conservative argument goes, is a viable and relatively simple solution to many social ills. Using insidious and discriminatory logic, many state laws punish the unmarried and reward those who are living their lives in accordance with the norms of bourgeois respectability. And to be respectable is to be heterosexual and not in need of state services (hence, approaching bourgeois status). As feminist historian Linda Gordon reminds us, the federal program for needy single mothers, Aid to Dependent Children, was unique among welfare programs "in its subjugation of applicants to a morals test" (1994, 298). If the presence of a man could be detected in the home of an unwed single mother (casting the pall of "unsuitable" sexual behavior), if there was a birth of an "illegitimate" child, or if there was evidence of a black–white relationship, the home was highly likely to be declared unsuitable. In *Killing the Black Body*, Dorothy Roberts (1997) documents a long history of racism, discrimination, criminalization, and bodily harm to black women by demonizing their behavior as mothers and as women. It has long been argued by conservatives that the lack of a black man in the home is a primary cause of criminal behavior, lack of ambition and success, and the general culture of poverty in black neighborhoods and communities.

Marriage is indelibly coupled with bourgeois respectability in our imagination. To be married is to practice legitimate and appropriate sex, provide a suitable home for children without the obvious help of the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X09990572 Published online by Cambridge University Press

state (receiving tax breaks is legitimate, while receiving welfare benefits is illegitimate in this logic), and participate in the promise of a bright future anchored in secure and stable values. Clearly, some same-sex couples deeply long for the protections the state offers through marriage, as well as the respectability it confers on their behavior. While I noted earlier that the Denizet-Lewis article found that most young gay couples hope for what is promised by mainstream American culture, since there is no entrenched model for how gay marriage should work, these couples find that they have the opportunity to negotiate and decide anew many issues that would be taken for granted in a heterosexual union. Questions about monogamy, division of labor in the home, and whether to have children are all up for grabs. And yet, whether or not they make individual choices that are subversive of the expectations for married couples, not only is the institution of marriage *not* undermined, it is also strengthened by their (even though gay) participation in it. Denizet-Lewis quotes Dan Savage, the sex-advice columnist on the question of respectability:

> Once, our relationships were only respected if we had remained together for a long, long time. Only longevity earned us some modicum of respect. Straight couples could always rush that validity by getting married. Now I just worry that some gay kids, desperate to have their gay love taken seriously, will wield their new marriage licenses and say: "See how real our love is? We've only been together five months, but we're already married. You better respect us now!" (in Denizet-Lewis 2008)

As Michael Warner argues in *The Trouble with Normal* (1999), in spite of the fears from right-wing and conservative quarters that same-sex marriage will demean or trivialize their marriages, same-sex marriage bolsters the institution while discriminating against all those who are not married. As Warner puts it, "if you don't have it, you and your relations are less worthy" (Warner 1992, 82). For Judith Butler, the question comes down to whether gays and lesbians should "desire the state's desire" (2004, 105). Butler argues that when we ask the state to legitimate certain forms of intimate relations, we foreclose the feminist quest for a radical sexual culture and deepen the normalization that bourgeois culture promotes. Even while feminists can applaud that same-sex marriage has become a choice for those residing in certain states, we need to draw attention to how this makes the options outside of marriage become increasingly less respectable, or, as Butler would put it, unthinkable and unintelligible. Consider the legitimate wishes of adults

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X09990572 Published online by Cambridge University Press

who choose not to marry, who are divorced, who remain single, who choose to live with their sibling(s), who desire to live with two or three others, or who wish to cohabit (and practice sexual relations) in a variety of ways outside the boundaries of the married couple. Not only should these kinds of consensual relationships be considered legitimate lifestyle choices by all, but the state should not also be linking our benefits and rights as citizens to our sexual and intimate choices. The worry for feminists is that by arguing for marriage for same-sex couples, we are replicating the state's logic, rather than fighting against it.

Beauvoir did not analyze the state and its racist, classist, heterosexist role as legitimating some relationships to the detriment of others. As an existentialist, she had her focus more finely tuned on individual choices one makes that reveal us as seizing or refusing the possibility of freedom. Turning again to *The Second Sex*, I am inspired by Beauvoir's emphasis on the importance of freedom as a feminist and existentialist good, whereas happiness is reserved for the bourgeois and the conservative. As she remarks in the Introduction: "It is not too clear just what the word *happy* really means and still less what true values it may mask" ([1952] 1989, xxxiv). As I noted, she later links the concept of happiness with bourgeois optimism, arguing that happiness masks an investment in the status quo. Freedom, in contrast, involves taking risks, engaging in the world beyond the private, avoiding repetitive projects and ways of living, continual discovery and reevaluation, working with others, rejecting available justifications for living in order to discover meaning for one's self, and, as Beauvoir specifically puts it, "a continual reaching out towards other liberties" (p. xxxiv) Freedom is never at rest and never complacent. Freedom is also quite difficult to seize, and always easier to reject. Discussing why women may be invested in being the Other for men, she notes that in accepting her status as Other, a woman "can evade at once both economic risk and the metaphysical risk of a liberty in which ends and aims must be contrived without assistance" (p. xxvii).

What does the commitment to a Beauvoir-inspired notion of freedom signify politically in the context of same-sex marriage debates, especially in light of the role played by the state in these questions? For Beauvoir, freedom in her own personal life implied an outright rejection of bourgeois and petit bourgeois values. In fact, she regarded all bourgeois claims to respectability as a masquerade. In *The Prime of Life* (1962), she recalls a game that she and Jean Paul Sartre would play that mimicked the behaviors of a married couple:

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X09990572 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> When we met again in Paris we found a name for our relationship before we had decided just what that relationship was to be. "It's a morganatic marriage," we said.[1] As a couple we possessed a dual identity. In the ordinary way we were Monsieur and Madame M. Organatique, unambitious, easily satisfied, not very well off, the husband a civil servant. But sometimes I dressed up, and we would go to a cinema on the Champs Elysées, or dancing at La Coupole, and then we were an American millionaire and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Morgan Hattick. This was not a hysterical joke designed to make us feel that, for a few hours, we were enjoying the pleasures of the idle rich; it was, rather, a parody, which confirmed us in our contempt for high society. . . . That penurious pair of *petit bourgeois* whom we called Monsieur and Madame M. Organatique had no real identity with us: by wriggling into their skins for a joke we emphasized the difference. (Beauvoir 1962, 19–20).

This memory of Beauvoir's should both inspire and trouble us. On the one hand, Beauvoir and Sartre boldly reject the trappings of marriage and the respectability associated with it. But on the other hand, it should be obvious to us that they can afford this behavior only because of their class, race, and educational privilege. Beauvoir understands this, too. As she writes her autobiography in 1960, recalling her own and Sartre's attitudes in early adulthood, she is clearly aware that their indifference to money was a "luxury they could afford" because there was no real threat of actual poverty, and that their "open-mindedness" was made possible by their cultural background and education. She notes that later, once their thinking had matured, they came to understand themselves as conditioned by social class and situated by their bodies and material conditions.

Throughout their lives, Beauvoir and Sartre continued to hold freedom as the highest good, while keeping in mind that only a situated freedom can be grasped and attained. They maintained a lifelong commitment to each other outside of marriage, free to experiment with other partners, living together domestically only when on holiday, and yet each was the most important person, both intellectually and personally, in the other's life, and each regarded the other with respect and freedom.[2] Are we to conclude that it is a luxury to seize the freedom to reject bourgeois

1. Saying they had a "morganatic marriage" demonstrates the parody of claiming any legal married status, as a morganatic marriage ensures inequality in the relationship by disallowing the property of the husband to ever be transferred to the wife or any dependent children.

2. The terms of the Beauvoir/Sartre relationship have proven to be controversial for feminists. For an interpretation that emphasizes the risks and benefits of their relationship in terms of feminist commitments see Marso 2006.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X09990572 Published online by Cambridge University Press

values? When we consider the tragic case of Kathryn Kutil and Cheryl Hess, whose foster baby girl was removed from their home once they were discovered as lesbians, it seems cruel to deny their desire for the kind of bourgeois respectability that marriage would cast on their home (Paul 2009). Even as feminists work to transform the norms of bourgeois respectability, we have to consider that they have a special appeal to underprivileged and vulnerable people. We must be sensitive to the situation of Hess and Kutil, and to the many thousands of others like theirs, as we address how to work against bourgeois norms while also addressing the desires and concerns of those least privileged in the current political system. Otherwise, we risk simply celebrating a kind of freedom that is actually just an upper-class, heterosexual, and white privilege to opt out of the married norm.

In sum, I have argued that supporting marriage as a civil right risks reinforcing standards of bourgeois respectability that reinforce racist and class-based norms and go against a feminist commitment to freedom of sexual expression and ability to have autonomy over one's intimate life without fear of punishment from the state. While it may seem that supporting marriage as a civil right merely affords more people the rights and protections of the state, the reinforcement of marriage as the institution that confers legitimacy on this "choice" of relationship makes all other "choices" suspect. At the same time, feminists should not minimize the pernicious, homophobic, and hate-based rhetoric behind "defense of marriage" legislation, and the very important benefits that marriage confers on couples who have long been outside the boundaries of legitimacy. By returning to the work of Beauvoir, one of the most compelling critics of bourgeois respectability, I hope to have reaffirmed the necessity for feminists to maintain a critical and transformative relationship to the norms of bourgeois respectability and the mandates of the state, even as we tirelessly work against antigay marriage proposals.

REFERENCES

Beauvoir, Simone de. [1952] 1989. *The Second Sex*. Trans. H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage.

——. 1962. *The Prime of Life*. Trans. Peter Green. New York: Penguin.

Butler, Judith. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.

Denizet-Lewis, Benoit. 2008. "Young Gay Rites." http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/27/magazine/27young-t.html?scp=1&sq=Denizet-Lewis%20Young%20Gay%20Rites&st=cse (Accessed April 27, 2008).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X09990572 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Gordon, Linda. 1994. *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Marso, Lori Jo. 2006. *Feminist Thinkers and the Demands of Femininity: The Lives and Work of Intellectual Women*. New York: Routledge.
Paul, Pamela. 2009. "Why Can a Lesbian Couple Be Foster Parent to Older Kids but Have to Fight to Adopt a Newborn? The Battle over a Baby." http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/26/magazine/26lesbian-t.html?scp=1&sq=Pamela%20Paul%20Why%20Can%20a%20Lesbian%20couple&st=cse (Accessed July 26, 2009).
Roberts, Dorothy. 1997. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Vintage.
Snyder, R. Claire [now Snyder-Hall]. 2006. *Gay Marriage and Democracy: Equality for All*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
Warner, Michael. 1999. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X09990572 Published online by Cambridge University Press