

**“You married for better or worse, didn’t you?”**

**An analysis of changing attitudes to love, marriage and divorce in  
the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*, 1950 and 1980.**

A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Philosophy

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<sup>1</sup> New Zealand Woman’s Weekly, 27 April, 1950, clipping from cover

## ABSTRACT

Any cohabiting couple, married or unmarried, may at some stage find their relationship has deteriorated to such an extent that one or both partners contemplate abandoning it. This study examines the factors around that decision at two points in New Zealand's history: 1950, when the country was settling back into peacetime life after World War II (WWII), and 1980, when romantic relationships and the family itself had been subjected to critique by the liberalising tides of social change in the West of the 1960s and 1970s, and by which time the divorce rate had increased significantly. It examines the agony aunt columns in the widely-read *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* in both years to detect the nature of those changes,<sup>2</sup> on the assumption that these relatively unedited voices from the past, discussing their relationships with the 'expert' – but actually amateur – advisor, the agony aunt, can reveal how troubled individuals thought about these matters and how underlying values and beliefs about love, marriage and divorce may have changed in the thirty years between.

The study revealed that, although references to traditional expectations of love and marriage were more numerous in the 1950 columns than in the 1980 ones, traces of traditional attitudes could be found in the latter and of more liberal and more feminist attitudes in the former. In 1980 a higher standard of behaviour appears to have been expected than in 1950 within both de facto and de jure marriages; in 1950 the agony aunt was more likely to advise the correspondents to remain in unsatisfactory marriages. Where the 1950 columns encouraged women into a stoical acceptance of inequalities in their marriages and advised the use of coquetry and other artful ploys to 'manage' husbands – who were characterised as 'vain' – the 1980 columns encouraged correspondents to practise 'open communication', and in particular not to put up with physical violence – a subject which could now be discussed (deplored) in public as it could not in 1950. Along with this sub-text of attempting to attain more equitable romantic relationships, the 1980 agony aunt could also refer her correspondents to the 'experts' at Marriage Guidance – a network of counselling services which had arisen in the interim.

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<sup>2</sup> For heterosexual couples only, since homosexual activity was still illegal in 1980.

This study has been limited by its time frames and use of a single genre. Research into later data sets (for example, the columns in 2010, a further 30 years into the future) could reveal how attitudes to love, marriage and divorce have continued to change in New Zealand. In addition, the advent in the 1980 columns of letters from older children and teenagers seeking advice about their custody arrangements suggests the need for further research into the historical lived experiences of some children of divorce.

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## **ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction<sup>3</sup>

Walt Whitman, in considering whether worldly success, achievements or ‘carousing’ made him happiest, said none of them compared with the time when:

The one I love most lay sleeping by me under the same cover in the cool night  
In the stillness in the autumn moonbeams his face was inclined toward me,  
And his arm lay lightly around my breast – and that night I was happy. (“When I  
Heard at the Close of the Day”, Whitman, 1994, p.16)

The joy engendered by mutual sexual love is a common human experience, and may be the nearest many people come to the kind of happiness Whitman is describing. For some, the despair, rage and bitterness felt at the end of a loving relationship can be, perhaps proportionately, deeply disturbing. Much has been written, sung and portrayed in films about both states, often in fictional form, but also in the form of advice on many platforms, from websites to self-help books, from “Oprah” to perhaps the oldest form in print: the so-called (and hereafter called) ‘agony aunt’ column. Much of the advice to be found there is in response to letters from individuals telling stories about their troubled romantic relationships, selections of which may be published alongside the advice. The audience is thus given a glimpse into the most private areas of someone else’s life and, like gossip, other people’s life stories give us models to follow or warnings of what to beware of (Brewer, 2009).

This study examines true stories of troubled love as recounted in historical agony aunt columns from two particular years, 1950 and 1980, chosen because they book-end a period when the divorce rate rose and the rate of marriage fell, and also because they encompass the years of my youth. As a child of the 1950s I grew up with my brother and sisters in the world our war-weary and until recently impoverished parents had dreamt of for us. Ours was a nuclear family, isolated by distance from our wider families, but living comfortably in a three-bedroom house on a quarter acre section. It was surrounded by horse paddocks and market gardens and located on the outskirts of a then-rural town south of Auckland.

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<sup>3</sup> I have used here a style more like a preface than a formal introduction because a great deal of the material that might have gone into a conventional introduction is included in Chapter 4, the historical context. All that remained for this introduction was therefore an outline of the topic, my interest in it, and why it might be of interest to others. That allowed for a more personal voice.



Our parents had moved into the professional class as a result of tertiary education. It had been provided by the welfare state for my father in reward for his war service, and for my mother by her elderly father. She had married Dad in 1944 when she was twenty and he twenty-three, and she had one year teaching at a country school before staying home to look after the first of four children. By the time I was three years old, they had become part of the 'drift north': in the 1950s the South Island, along with rural marae around the country, provided workers for the North Island, with its vortex the rapidly growing port metropolis of Auckland.



**Figure 1 The author's family shopping in Queen Street, Auckland, summer, 1957 - 1958. (Dad would have been at work, since shops were only open on weekdays).**

Our parents lived to celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary and I was not a child of divorce. However, my teenage and young adult years were spent during the 1960s and 1970s, and I remember the momentous changes to how 'people like us' thought about love, marriage and divorce, and noted how divorce in particular went from being something that occurred but was not talked about, to something regarded as normal and the best outcome for seriously troubled relationships. I also saw a freeing up of family forms so that it was no

longer considered 'weird' to live in a configuration that differed from the nuclear family of a married couple with children. Along with the rest of my generation, I experienced a revolution in the ways 'people like us' thought about the rigidly prescribed gender roles with which my parents had begun their marriage.

I am now of an age to be able to look back at the world of my youth and ponder on what has changed – to see it as a distinct historical period since which many aspects of life have 'changed utterly'. I can now try to make sense of it as I did not at the time and to reflect on radical transformations brought about not by the traumas of war or revolution, but by that more pervasive and perhaps more long-lasting force – new ideas and ways of seeing the world, imported from overseas by returning travellers and the media and eagerly adopted by those of us critical of the way things were. The impetus for this study, undertaken at a time of my life when I have no need of further qualifications, was therefore to discover more about the nature and origins of those developments and find ways to understand what had happened to me, my family, and our communities caught up in the waves of change which swept over us, and by which we were all affected.

Brought up in a house where well-reviewed books were valued and comics, women's magazines and other popular reading were frowned on, as a teenager I had a particular fascination for the agony aunt columns in the women's magazines available only when I stayed in other people's homes. Engaged at 19, on arriving at my future in-law's home I would collect the latest editions of the English magazine *Woman* and turn to the last page, where the agony aunt column was. I became absorbed in the fragments of real life they revealed, hoping to find there some wisdom about how I was supposed to live my life, even if most of what I found were cautionary tales about perils to avoid. The enduring appeal of this genre, given that it continues in a range of forms and platforms,<sup>4</sup> speaks to its role in the spreading of 'common sense' about the matters most personal to us, and so important and inherently interesting. In my experience, however, reading women's magazines is still considered a trivial pursuit, not least by feminists (Hermes, 1995) and while I might have shared it with my teenage friends to laugh over the, to us, ridiculous behaviour of adults, I

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<sup>4</sup> In 2015 the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* no longer has an agony aunt column, but England's *Guardian* and *Telegraph* newspapers do, so the genre itself is not yet defunct.

also seriously consumed it alone – covertly lest I be considered trivial too. Nevertheless, it is not trivial, because the topics discussed are perhaps the most serious of our lives: our relationships with those close to us: friendships, adolescence, courtship, sexual love, parenthood, grandparenthood, and so on, especially the ways they can go wrong and cause us pain, and what others in our communities consider wisdom in dealing with them.

The *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*<sup>5</sup> was first published in 1932 and dominated the local women's magazine market up until the 1990s, so it was an obvious choice for an analysis of agony aunt columns. The two years I chose for this study, 1950 and 1980, had agony aunt columns for all 104 editions and book-ended a period of rapid growth in the divorce rate and reduction in the rate of marriage. My initial aim was to look at changing attitudes to divorce, on the assumption that one of the ways we can find out how something works is to analyse why it failed. It quickly became clear, however, that conceptions of romantic love also had to be examined, since divorce is fundamentally about a failure of love. I also discovered, perhaps unsurprisingly, that while correspondents in the 1950 columns were all concerned about their marriages, many of those in similar situations in the 1980 columns were not married, but were equally concerned about their de facto relationships. Both cohorts were also concerned about the same sorts of issues. The causes for the rise in de facto relationships help to explain the drop in the marriage rate and are partly covered in this study. However, that rise is not a main focus, as I came to the conclusion that it was a difference in form rather than substance; I wanted to know what went wrong within sexual relationships, whether de jure or de facto, especially when the couple were cohabiting. Whether they had formally married or not was, to some extent, beside the point. I also had to consider whether to include marital issues involving children and decided that, although children have the potential to be points of contention in a relationship, to attempt a complete explanation of that would be beyond the scope of this study.

'Ask Lou Lockheart' was the title of the agony aunt column in 1950, and 'Dear Karen Kay'<sup>6</sup> was the column's title in 1980. Lou Lockheart's *Weekly* was still working with a post-war

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<sup>5</sup> Hereafter called the *Weekly*.

<sup>6</sup> I will use these agony aunt pseudonyms without inverted commas from hereon, for convenience.

paper shortage until the end of May<sup>7</sup>; in the prosperous early 1980s Karen Kay's *Weekly* was much longer and so were the columns, with many more letters. Both, however, responded to letters about a similar range of personal 'problems' – the columns were also colloquially called 'problem pages'. Alongside the letters about difficult relationships that this study examines are requests for advice about such matters as appropriate dress and behaviour, teen girls agonising over boys who may or may not like them, teenagers concerned about their parents, parents concerned about their teenagers and grandparents worrying about both. A proportion of letters in both years were from teenaged girls regretting a sexual experience, including some who were pregnant. Nevertheless, there were some problems which the columns did not have in common: a surprising number of letters to Lou Lockheart were from young men wanting advice about courting - for example "Wondering", who had written her three long letters already (12 October, 1950, p.34). Also excluded from this study, but surely of interest to another researcher, are a group of letters in the 1980 columns from children and young teens in distress over their parents' separation and divorce, their promiscuity, their violence, their alcoholism and incest.

It is said that we cannot know where we are going, if we do not know where we have been. My aim in this study has been to investigate a collection of texts written by New Zealanders about their lives as they were living them in two historical periods, thirty years apart, with a focus on romantic love and what happens when it turns sour. The topic of love is important as how we characterise love determines how we behave with our loved ones. As this is not at all trivial, but fundamental to our happiness, I hope that anyone reading this thesis will find it interesting to understand something of 'where we have been' in our closest and most crucial relationships.

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<sup>7</sup> For example, in response to a letter on 6 July, 1950, Lou Lockheart says "I quoted your letter at length, so I must whittle down my reply" (p.34).

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The marked rise in New Zealand's divorce rate and drop in the rate of marriage over the third quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not happen in isolation. It replicated a remarkable series of changes in family life over the same period in the countries described loosely as the 'West': democratic, religiously liberal, capitalist countries with their predominant cultural origins in Europe (Scruton, 2007), in particular the United Kingdom and the United States. These two countries have provided much of the literature to be discussed in this chapter; their marriage and divorce trends were similar (Phillips, 1981), and so their scholarship around this topic is deemed to be relevant to us. New Zealand's place in this group called 'the West' derives from its dominant European population, most with antecedents from the United Kingdom, and its on-going loyalty, both politically and culturally, to the Commonwealth and the Crown throughout the period and beyond. The relationship of this dominant Euro-centric ethos to the tangata whenua – descendants of the Maori tribes who were the first inhabitants of Aotearoa / New Zealand – is outside the scope of this study, which takes the editions under scrutiny at face value and assumes the voices of the magazine are the voices of 'common sense' about the topic, and so come from the dominant English-heritage / pakeha culture.

Nevertheless, it is an Italian, Antonio Gramsci, whose concept of 'common sense' underpins much of the following discussion. Gramsci's thoughts, produced in his *Prison Notebooks* (1971) while he was a political prisoner of the fascists in the 1930s, pre-date and to some extent anticipate the revolution in ideas about social and political life which was to follow in Europe in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. This revolution is sometimes called 'the linguistic turn' (Canning, 1999) and influenced late-20th century feminist-inspired debates and discussions about public representations of women's experiences in relation to gender identity (Canning, 1999; Evans, 1997). The latter approach is particularly relevant to chapter 8 of this thesis; its title "The Personal is Political" references 1970s feminism as well as issues of gender, power and agency. However, my overall approach is multi-disciplinary and I am attempting to give an account of the many intersecting factors which led to the rise in rates of divorce in New Zealand over the period. In this approach, the "gendered assumptions [...] interwoven into the fabric of our culture" (Evans, 1999, p.3) – assumptions which have been

summarised in the term ‘the patriarchy’ (Walby, 1990) – are implicated, but do not constitute the sole theoretical frame. Lazar (2005) sums up the complexity of using gender as a sole category for analysis:

Gender as a category intersects with, and is shot through by, other categories of social identity such as sexuality, ethnicity, social position and geography. Patriarchy is also an ideological system than interacts in complex ways with say, corporatist and consumerist ideologies. (Lazar, 2005, p.1)

Patriarchal assumptions can be detected in the letters from women and men writing to the *Weekly* for advice in 1950 and 1980, but so too are other assumptions, for example about love, appropriate behaviour when married, and factors such as the economic conditions and divorce laws under which they were living. It is this range of attitudes and contextual factors I am investigating, and Gramsci’s concept of ‘common sense’ allows for a holistic approach to the many factors impinging on the correspondents’ relational woes.

‘Common sense’, according to Gramsci, included those rarely articulated, taken-for-granted understandings about what is ‘normal’ in any given society, as he believed any radical political change had to be founded on these beliefs and attitudes which, although multifarious, contradictory and subject to change, were already deeply embedded in the community (Watkins, 2011). Crehan (2011) points out that in his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci sees ‘common sense’ as something that “both helps reproduce and maintain existing power regimes, but can also carry within it the seeds of transformation” (p.281). Gramsci himself calls ‘common sense’ a philosophy.

It is the ‘folklore’ of philosophy, and, like folklore, it takes countless different forms. Its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is. (Gramsci, 1971, p.419)

The discourses which are the focus of this study, agony aunt columns, have a particular role to play in the dissemination of ‘common sense’. The agony aunt is embedded in the society she belongs to, and since it is her task to provide socially acceptable advice to the lovelorn, then she can be seen as being the voice of ‘common sense’ on the matters presented to her. She is responding to the letters at a particular historical time and location within cultures

which are in transition so within her advice, too, may be detected the 'seeds of transformation' identified by Crehan in Gramsci's useful concept.

Broad trends like a rise in the divorce rate are not necessarily obvious to those taking part in them. Individuals base their behaviour in their sexual relationships, as in all other matters, on beliefs they have derived primarily from their personal histories, experiences, community attitudes and media consumption (Perloff, 2010). Fundamental to any decision to break up a romantic relationship are the beliefs they hold about romantic love, marriage and divorce itself. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, two additional strands of scholarship have been brought together: research into historical and cultural factors which contributed to the changes in divorce and marriage rates, and individual studies which analyse women's magazines to investigate a range of related social and cultural phenomena.

Three main books discuss the history of divorce in New Zealand. Roderick Phillips' *Divorce in New Zealand: A social history* (1981) provided details and analysis used by the two later texts. Pool, Dharmalingam and Sceats' large study, *The New Zealand family from 1840: A demographic history* (2007), refers to it, and Brown has more recently produced a PhD thesis *Loosening the marriage bond: Divorce in New Zealand, c.1890s – c. 1950s* (2011). Each of these provides a picture of the contexts in which divorce rates rose, and explains the wider influences at work in New Zealand over the 20th century, although the Brown study ends where this study begins. Phillips also produced a large study of divorce in the West, *Putting Asunder: A History of Divorce in Western Society* (1988). Of most interest is his original book because it focusses so directly on the issue and includes the period of this study, 1950 to 1980. His conclusion is that "... divorce is a form of social behaviour which is accepted and practised in late twentieth-century New Zealand to an extent which would have been inconceivable a hundred or even fifty years earlier," (p.125). He attributes this in part to legal changes – as divorce became easier to get, it was practised more and community disapproval reduced with familiarity. He assumes, however, that "legal reforms are made by politicians who must be aware of trends in social attitudes," concluding that changes to the law occurred also as a response to changes in attitudes. Among the many factors in the change, Phillips sees the most critical as being "economic and social independence," (p.124).

Phillips (1981) adds that the willingness of husbands and wives to give up on their marriages also came from changed notions of what a good marriage should be like; understandings of what constituted unconscionable behaviour within a marriage were radically different by the end of the twentieth century, a point discussed in detail in chapter 6. Rape within marriage was not criminalised until 1985, for example. Alongside this greater stringency towards behaviour in marriages came greater prosperity which made separation now feasible, if still financially difficult. He notes that middle income couples were disproportionately represented in the divorce statistics over the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and attributes this to what he calls the “expense-respectability squeeze” (p.125). The poorer couples could not afford the expense of a divorce, and the wealthier the social opprobrium it still entailed. Both of these problems had eased by the end point of this study, 1980.

Similar changes in the social phenomenon of divorce have been investigated in the United Kingdom and the United States. An American study by Stevenson and Wolfers (2007) begins with an acknowledgement that “in recent decades, marriage rates have fallen, divorce rates have risen, and the defining characteristics of marriage have changed” (p.27). It accepts this as a given, based on statistics of marriage and divorce rates which resemble those in New Zealand. The United States too experienced a spike in divorces at the end of World War II probably as a result of the disruption to marriages over the period, and a second spike around 1980, which was followed by a gradual decline in both marriage and divorce rates as the popularity of marriage waned. The USA had the highest divorce rate in the world during the 1980s (Davis, 1991) despite many of their laws making divorce catastrophic for women and children because of inequities in property division: “... every year from 1969 to 1978, 100,000 more women with children fell below the poverty line” (p. 286). This demonstrates that, in the United States at least, favourable financial circumstances were less influential in a marriage break-up than other more pressing concerns.

In “Women's Changing Attitudes Towards Divorce, 1974 - 2002: Evidence for an Educational Crossover”, Martin and Parashar (2006) look at changing attitudes towards divorce among young American women between 1974 and 2002 in terms of their level of education. They tracked women with 4-year degrees and find that, whereas they had had the most permissive attitudes at the beginning of the period, by the end they had become increasingly disapproving. In contrast, women with no education beyond high school have



had increasingly permissive attitudes towards divorce. The authors call this an “educational crossover” in their title (p.29) and relate it to economic variables – the more highly educated, wealthy and secure women now have relatively low divorce rates and are more likely to disapprove of divorce than their more economically vulnerable sisters. This depicts a change in the latter part of the period of the current study in a country with a more strongly Christian heartland than New Zealand, and as yet there is no comparable trend of reversal to more conservative attitudes here. It is worthy of note, however, that the Martin and Parashar study (2006) identified how, during the 1980s, women’s weekly magazine readers in America (mostly those on middle and lower incomes) were expressing the same increased tolerance towards divorce as were New Zealand women in the same socio-economic bracket (Phillips, 1981). This confirms a trend in the West as a whole in the middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not just in New Zealand.

Changed conceptions of the nature of marriage have a longer history. ‘Companionate marriage’ is a term dating from the 1920s, when reformists proposed a form of marriage in which there was greater legal and sexual equality between the spouses, made possible in part by the increasing reliability and availability of contraceptives, and easier access to divorce should the central relationship fail. It was set in contrast to marriages where women were reliant on their husband’s financial support, and so bound to obey his wishes in all matters, backed up by the authority of the church – the so-called ‘traditional marriage’ (Davis, 2008). The acceptance of the ‘companionate marriage’ has been resilient to change since then, with adherence to its principles perhaps increasing over time (Coontz, 2005).

This idealisation of a form of marriage based on mutual affection and attraction dominated Western conceptions of marriage over the period of this study, including 1950, despite many wives being dependent on their husbands’ incomes. In Britain, the Lord Chancellor’s Department brought out a report by Reynolds and Mansfield which looked at the effect of these beliefs on marriages themselves. “The Effect of Changing Attitudes to Marriage on its Stability” (1999) begins by tracing the changing meanings associated with marriage during the period, and concurs with Phillips (1981) that the affective quality of the relationship has come to outweigh in importance its social appropriateness and economic advantages or disadvantages. In an increasingly individualistic society, “mainly through conversation, the partners form a new understanding of the world which results in a sharing of future

horizons, thus stabilising for both of them their sense of who they are” (Reynolds and Mansfield, 1999, p.13). This places harmonious relations, companionship and love at the centre of the marriage, replacing in primacy its historical function as a permanent social and economic unit within a collective community, often religiously sanctioned, where the feelings of the couple were secondary. This emphasis on love means that when a relationship is under strain, then the core *raison d’être* of the union is left in doubt and so, paradoxically, it has a higher likelihood of failure.

Reynolds and Mansfield (1999) point out a consensus among scholars from a range of fields that the rise in individualism is the “key, on-going, ideational change of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century” (p.15). Its emphasis on equal opportunity, individual goals, successes and failures and – crucially – rights was central to both a reinforcement of the nuclear family as the norm, and to the rise in rates of divorce. Nevertheless, any straightforward use of the term individualism as a widely held belief which privileges the interests of the individual over the interests of the collective is critiqued by Duncan, Edwards, Reynolds & Alldred (2003) in their investigation of the domestic context – specifically how decisions about child care, house work and paid employment are made by contemporary couples. They use their data to question the validity of simplistic notions such as that women have now become equal partners with men, and that those decisions are shared fairly regardless of sex. One such notion is what they call “individualization in late modernity” (p.309). This says that mothers derive individual value from paid employment, which weakens the complementarity of the father / wage earner and mother / housewife roles, and leads to a greater emphasis on the relationship supplying “mutually satisfying intimacy” (p.324). Duncan et al (2003) demonstrate that women in most social groups they studied still bear the major responsibility for child care and housework, and most mothers also put their children before their jobs. “They were still concerned with meeting their children’s needs and these were usually understood in the dominant sense of care by mothers” (pp.324 – 325) and many “conceived providing for their children through paid work as part of mothering ... [suggesting] ... a connected rather than an individualized identity,” (p.325). To paraphrase, while it may be true that the drive to satisfy individual needs and desires is becoming more prevalent, particularly when traditional social roles are being challenged, most mothers still, on the whole, operate in an altruistic way when it comes to the welfare of their children.

Attention to the needs of the individual had as its corollary, an increasing focus on material goods and the meanings they had for individuals and for families. The Welfare State in New Zealand was constructed on the assumption that every man should be able to earn enough to support his family<sup>9</sup> (May, 1988), but this did not mean he was capable of servicing all his family's aspirations for material goods. Increasingly, wives and mothers also worked for wages. "Family life was changing and the period was characterised by an increasing labour force participation of married women and mothers, and a gradual increase in divorce," (May, 1988, p.77). Reynolds and Mansfield (1999) also highlight an association with consumerism, which "reinforces the ethos of choice in relationship options, and continues to undermine tradition, which is based on an understanding of socially accepted paths and norms" (p.15).

In her PhD thesis, *Post-war women 1945 - 1960 and their daughters 1970 – 1985* (1988)<sup>8</sup> Helen May describes social norms prevailing in post-war New Zealand as profoundly affected by common experiences during the Great Depression of the early 1930s and WWII, which followed so soon afterwards. According to May, those common experiences of deprivation, uncertainty and insecurity produced a culture which was more united than in any time previously, or subsequently. By the early 1950s, the hunger for security and prosperity had been in part satisfied by the 1935 Labour Government's establishment of the welfare state and the desire to maintain that potentially fragile structure (under the widely-publicised threat from world-wide communism) was so strong that any evidence of nonconformity was subject to considerable opprobrium. May (1988) saw contemporary rhetoric, including from the *Weekly* and also Government policy, as "constructed around an ideal of a certain normal family arrangement: that a married woman and her children would be provided with security by her husband" and that "those not matching the ideal had no place within the boundaries of normal family life," (p.77). Emblematic of this order was the seemingly flawless face of the British Royal Family, itself recovering from the shock of the Abdication Crisis in 1936 and the war years that followed. Marriage was celebrated; the

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<sup>8</sup> Later published in book form: *Minding Children: Managing Men: Conflict and Compromise in the Lives of Postwar Pakeha Women*, Bridget Williams, Wellington, 1992.

disruption of marriage a problem in a society where there was a “clear demarcation between acceptable and unacceptable, adjustment and maladjustment” (p.67).

I will now turn to the second major grouping of literature to influence this study, and within which it aims to sit. The role of women’s magazines as a potential influencer of women has been much discussed, notably at the initial stages of the ‘second wave’ of feminism in the 60s and 70s<sup>9</sup>. The seminal text in this discussion was Betty Friedan’s ground-breaking book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) where magazines were framed as propaganda for what came to be called the patriarchy: the social conditions in which men were privileged over women, and women were indoctrinated to accept only a narrow range of roles, most of them within the home. Friedan began her book with a reflection on her own profession as a writer for these magazines:

... all the columns, books and articles by experts ... [were] ...telling women their role was to seek fulfilment as wives and mothers. Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire--no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity ... They were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents. (p.13)

She detailed a ‘problem with no name’ which American women, particularly educated women, suffered from. It was single women’s desperate desire “to get married, and married women’s desperation about being ‘trapped in a squirrel cage’” (p.25). She ridiculed the way contemporary media portrayed it as a problem caused by too much education for women and as something that could be fixed by medication, rather than by wholesale social change.

Evidence of the phenomenon in New Zealand is sparse, but In the 1960s New Zealand had its own champion of oppressed women who popularised the term ‘suburban neurosis’ here. In the same decade as *The Feminine Mystique* appeared, Dr Fraser McDonald, a psychiatrist at Kingseat, one of New Zealand’s large psychiatric hospitals, was concerned about the number of suburban wives with mental illness, particularly depression. Like Friedan, he saw it as symptomatic of wider societal ills. In her autobiography, *Something for the Birds*

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<sup>9</sup> Contemporary Western feminism as an influence on the *Weekly’s* readers will be discussed further in Chapter 4: Context.

(2006) Dr MacDonald's wife, Jacqueline Fahey, describes her husband's interests, and includes one of her own paintings, "Woman at the sink" from a 1959 series called "Suburban Neurosis" (see Chapter 8, page 143). May's doctoral thesis from 1988 (see also above) discussed case studies which described depression in house-bound mothers in the post-war period and also used the *Weekly* to show how popular literature reflected and reinforced contemporary beliefs : "...the N.Z. Woman's Weekly ran articles encouraging women: to work for war and rehabilitation during the 1940s; to stay at home in the 1950's; to work part time in the 1960's; and by the 1970's and 1980's to work full time in the name of equality. These shifts are part of a wider network of political, economic and social relationships which shape the options of individuals," (May, 1988, p.39).

Although these New Zealand sources appear to support Friedan's thesis, and the book itself had a profound effect on particularly educated women in the United States (Coontz, 2011), a thorough critique of her claims was conducted by Meyerowitz in "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946 – 1958" (1993). This study examined the same magazines as Friedan, specifically 489 representative non-fiction articles in a range of mass circulation American women's magazines over the period 1946 – 1958. Meyerowitz concluded that, although the phenomenon of the depressed housewife did exist, the book's argument describing women's magazines as a major propaganda tool was tendentious: the 'happy housewife' message was expressed in only a few extreme examples, and the majority of articles displayed a range of attitudes to gender roles. There were repeated occasions of "domestic ideals co-existing in on-going tension with an ethos of individual achievement that celebrated nondomestic activity, individual striving, public service, and public success," (p.1458). Meyerowitz (1993) depicts the magazines as analogous to society itself – a site where narratives expressed conflicting ideas about what constitutes correct behaviour for women. The extremely conservative articles which Friedan had focussed on she found to be only a small percentage of the articles about women, and liberal, feminist attitudes were also found in a similarly small number of articles. The centre ground was occupied by narratives about successful women with their success being defined as doing important work in the community, in their employment, or overcoming major obstacles or disabilities.

The theme of domesticity and femininity was consistently less striking than the constant reiteration of a work ethic for women. Hard work, especially without complaint, figures most prominently in the recipe for success ... Over one-third of the articles on individual women featured unmarried women, divorced women, or women of unmentioned marital status ( Meyerowitz, p.1461).

She also found that Friedan's narrative, although in many ways misleading, "legitimated open protest against 'the housewife trap' ... [and] ... affirmed the undeniable anger many middle-class women felt as they increasingly tried to pursue both domestic and nondomestic ideals," (p.1482). Other scholars have agreed that, in the middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women's magazines were not as unambiguous as Friedan had suggested. Nancy A. Walker (2000) begins her book on American women's magazines of the 40s and 50s, *Shaping Our Mothers' World: American Women's Magazines* (2000) "... at no time during their histories have women's magazines delivered perfectly consistent, monolithic messages to their readers" (p.vii). The material, styles and range of material covered by women's magazines changed over the decades, with a constant factor being their great popularity. However, she does conclude:

When the magazines' contents are examined in the context of the historical processes in which they participated, they emerge as dynamic elements of American popular culture, responding to and interacting with events and ideologies that had wide cultural currency (p.xi).

*The Feminine Mystique* (1963), is frequently cited in the many studies which have subsequently been produced examining women's magazines for what they reveal about notions of feminine identity, the consumerist culture in which they arose, and for the effect they may be having on their readership (Holmes, 2007). In *Understanding Women's Magazines* (2003), Anna Gough-Yates divides these into three types of approach, the first and most numerous being examinations of the texts themselves, usually with a view to demonstrating how they "contribute to the reinforcement of gender differences and inequalities in contemporary societies ... [and] ...as a key site through which oppressive feminine identities are constructed and disseminated" (p. 7). Since texts do not produce meaning on their own, but in the minds of readers, the second group, audience studies, added an important dimension, as did the third and smallest group, examinations of the contexts in which the magazines were written, produced and sold. Below is a brief account

of some audience studies and one context study as a preliminary to a survey of literature in the first group, discourse analyses, to which this study belongs.

Ground-breaking audience studies have been conducted by Joke Hermes, who admitted to enjoying reading women's magazines herself, seeing texts not as attempts to influence, but as stimulators of meaning which is created by the readers themselves. Her study of women readers' responses to the magazines *Reading Women's Magazines* (1995), concluded that, just as women's magazines provide a variety of ideologies and points of view, so are they read in different ways by diverse readers. She identified their value as not only a trivial, recreational interlude between periods of domestic or other work but also as an opportunity for "emotional learning", for comparisons with the lives of other women and for *Schadenfreude*, guilty pleasure in the pain of others, when the personal lives of celebrities can be mocked (pp.149 – 150). She refers to reception analyses of the 80s and early 90s which emphasised that meanings are actively created in response to the text, not swallowed whole uncritically, and concluded that "... denigration of women's magazines and especially of their readers ... is based on elitist and inaccurate stereotypes that assume readers are not capable of assessing the value of the text and are completely taken in by it," (p.149). More recent audience studies concur. One examines reader responses to articles about the female orgasm and notes that

there is widespread spontaneous reference among the women in this study to women's magazines and, in particular, to the pressure they place on women to achieve orgasm ... [but] ... the emphasis on the importance of the clitoris in *Cosmopolitan*, in particular, does not pervade the women's discourse, and 'vaginal' orgasms are valorized as symbols of womanhood and as producing stronger, deeper sensations. (Lavie-Ajayi & Joffe, 2009, p.105)

This, despite the supposed 'vaginal orgasm' being a myth (Koedt cited in Kedgeley, 1993, p.111) and magazines themselves refuting the claim. Nevertheless the authors also conclude that "women's magazines play an important role in shaping women's perceptions of womanhood and femininity" (p.105).

A rare example of a context study is Brian Moeran's thorough account of international magazine publishing, "Economic and cultural production as structural paradox: the case of international fashion magazine publishing" (2007). Amongst his findings emerges our old

friend, the gender divide: “the editorial side tends to be handled by women, and the publishing side by men” (p.270), with a major conclusion of his study being that “consumer magazines in general are simultaneously both cultural products and commodities” (p.278) which he sees as in paradoxical relation with one another. He cites an earlier context study by Ferguson (1983, cited on p.278) and concurs that editors appear to believe both that the interests of readers are their primary concern, and that the magazine should be a commercial success. He sees these as apparently contradictory concerns, although providing content which is appealing to readers is what attracts advertisers – the job of both fashion and women’s magazines being to provide alluring copy alongside which can be placed advertisements, so the contradiction is more apparent than real. He eventually concludes, “it has sometimes seemed that a publisher’s aim is not to sell a magazine to readers so much as magazine readers to advertisers” (p.278) – but the readers need to be entertained for this to happen.

Of the many scholarly papers which examine women’s magazines by analysing the texts alone, those which examine attitudes towards social issues are most relevant to this study. Odland’s (2010) examination of motherhood and domesticity in the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1946 had the greatest overlap in period and content. This was a crucial year, immediately after World War Two, when contemporary rhetoric discouraged young women from continuing their war time working lives, and encouraged them to turn or return to solely domestic roles. Odland’s analysis agrees with Friedan (and May, 1988, see above) that magazines promoted women’s return to domesticity, while acknowledging that Meyerowitz and other authors had found, unsurprisingly, that the array of cultural influences was more partial and more complex than this simple reading allows. She pointed out that many more women did work for wages than the magazines would suggest. Importantly,

“... the magazine portrayed motherhood as an unassailable ideological position, the feminine ideal. The magazine made clear that before a woman became a mother, participation in paid labor was acceptable – even celebrated in some instances – but once she took on the role of mother, she was expected to abandon her career and return to the home ... [and there was] ... the implicit assumption throughout the magazine’s treatment of motherhood ... that all women would eventually become mothers,” (Odland, 2010, p.78).



She distinguishes between motherhood and housework, saying they have been combined in previous studies such as Meyerowitz's, but in fact are treated differently by the magazines. She notes that magazines like these focussed almost exclusively on middle class white women living in the burgeoning suburbs. Those women were consciously constructed as the family's prime consumers of the growing flood of household commodities coming out of the factories and off the farms, and they were delivered to the advertisers by women's magazines, along with other media.

The next study is closer to the topic of troubled marriages and divorce. In a notable large analysis of depictions of single-parent families in American popular magazines and social science journals, spanning most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Usdansky (2009) proposes that attitudes towards single parent families resulting from divorce did not become more sympathetic over that time, as she had hypothesised, but that normative debate about it declined and virtually disappeared. It was not the same with single-parent families where the parents had never married, which continued to attract opprobrium. The author claims that "the transformation of the single-parent family from a marginalized rarity to an established family form was one of the most dramatic social changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century" (p.209). She notes the powerfully reciprocal relationship between attitudes and behaviour: "not only do changing attitudes shape family behaviour, but family formation behaviour shapes attitudes". If your friendly neighbour, a divorced mother, has told you her story, your opposition to divorce could well be modified. She discusses, as had Reynolds and Mansfield (1999, above) and Phillips (1981), the importance of the "heightening of marital standards and expectations" (p.211) as a partial reason for the rise in the divorce rate. After a large and meticulous study, which looked at 3,967 randomly selected articles between 1900 and 1998, she came to the conclusion that the significant reduction in disapproving references to divorce implies not that divorce was increasingly being approved of, but that attitudes towards it were increasingly ambivalent.

The striking similarities in trends in magazine and journal depictions of single-parent families suggest that the complex forces that shaped popular and scholarly views in these two arenas were national in scope. The depictions themselves tell a story of growing but uneasy acceptance of single-parent families, not as an ideal or a public good but as a widespread, permanent feature of American family life.... To the extent that changing depictions reflect underlying attitudinal change, the results

of this analysis suggest that by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the American stance toward single-parent family formation had become deeply ambivalent.” (Usdansky, 2009, p.223)

The same *Journal of Marriage and Family* included two critiques of Usdansky’s study.

Thornton (2009) uses historical data to question whether the changes she is describing occurred only with the advent of the twentieth century. The seminal ideas that questioned religion and led to its decline, especially the concepts of freedom and individual liberty had their roots as far back as the 1700s. The other response (LaRossa, 2009) questions Usdansky’s inferences. Her conclusion that what the magazines and journals revealed could be indicative of changes in attitudes in society as a whole is seen as a “huge leap of logic”. “Some readers may see ... published depictions are one thing and public attitudes are entirely another”. But even this more positivist approach leads LaRossa to agree that “... a legitimate case can be made that there is an association between what appears in the press and what the public thinks and feels, though it is not always easy to delineate the nature of that association” and “the idea that Americans have ambivalently embraced single-parent families ... has a ring of truth” (p.238).

Some studies and commentaries analyse textual representations of feminine identities, with a view to understanding hegemonic cultural influences. Beetham (2006) sees women’s magazines as offering guides to life: “... becoming the woman you are is a difficult project for which the magazine has characteristically provided recipes, patterns, narratives and models of the self ... [and] ... the magazine has historically offered not only to pattern the reader’s gendered identity but to address her desire,” in particular stimulating her desire for consumer goods. The increasing importance of advertising and the ‘advertorials’ which mimic magazine articles in recent magazines is evidence of her thesis that “... magazines are ... deeply involved in capitalist production and consumption as well as circulating in the cultural economy of collective meanings and constructing an identity for the individual reader as gendered and sexual being”(p.20). According to Beetham, the magazines define women in terms of their gendered roles, and as such are limiting, while still having the potential to challenge the hegemonic forces at their root. This may be drawing a long bow – at no point is there evidence of women’s magazines taking radical or even unconventional positions. My study will not focus on the ideologies of women’s magazines and their function in consumer economies, however their significance in the array of media

promoters of consumerism is well understood. They may have always delivered readers to the advertisers, but to do so they needed to attract readers. And they continue to do so with discussions, information and narratives about matters seen as relevant to women's lives; included among the recipes and fashion tips, are attitudes to romantic relationships, marriage and divorce.

Another historical study, "The Dilemma of Frugality and Consumption in British Women's Magazines 1940 – 1955" (2008), Burridge looked at how inexpensive magazines such as *Woman's Own* and *Woman and Home* represented food and consumption to British women between 1940 and 1955, while rationing was in place. It looks at advertisements only, and identifies "two competing narratives ...one emphasising an ideology of frugality, and an alternative that identifies a drive towards consumption" (p.389). Magazines, both then and now, contain contradictory values apparently comfortably, (Walker, 2000; Moskowitz, 1996). Piatti-Farnell's (2011) unpicking of Sylvia Plath's complex account of the domestic demonstrates how, for a poet, the advertisers' manufactured dream of an ideal motherhood and home is transformable into the nightmare of a Gothic vampire spilling the blood of a housewife become commodity and food. "Plath's desire to portray a surreal, Gothic world of food could be symptomatic of inconsistent feelings concerning commodity culture 'invading' the kitchen," (p.206). It was this disturbing undercurrent, identified also by Friedan and doctors like Fraser McDonald (discussed above), which was the fault, the crack in the otherwise smooth stereotype of the happy, pretty young mother in her kitchen. Women's magazines both promoted that stereotype, especially in their advertisements, and gave accounts of an underlying malaise.

Post war women's magazines paid increasing attention to individuals and their rights to happiness. Moskowitz's examination of the American magazines *Ladies Home Journal*, *McCalls* and *Cosmopolitan* between 1945 and 1965 (1996) shows how the discontent among housewives that Betty Friedan, in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) had called 'the problem with no name' was already being widely discussed in those very magazines.

Women's magazines and the experts who wrote for them ... had already focused mass attention on the psychological difficulties women had in adjusting to domesticity. They publicized the problems women experienced in conforming to domesticity and their difficulty securing

happiness. They also simultaneously emphasized the virtues of domesticity and the value of psychological happiness. While they clearly did not advocate feminist solutions or have feminist intentions, they contributed to a discourse of discontent and a new standard of psychological happiness,” (p.91).

This emphasis on individual happiness and identification of widespread unhappiness within the home was part of the context in which the increasing acceptance of divorce after World War 2 was occurring. It seems a reasonable assumption that at least some of that unhappiness was due to problems within the marital relationship, leaving as it did the housewife vulnerable to men who may have been abusive in any of its forms. The increased availability and acceptance of divorce, as well as the women’s improved earning power, along with heightened expectations of romance, love and happiness, ultimately meant that those women were more able to leave their less than ideal marriages and achieve financial and personal independence.

Other studies of women’s magazines have taken a similar approach in investigations of different material. Marcellus (2006) looked at representations of secretaries in interwar magazines from the United States. Closer to home, New Zealanders Shoebridge and Steed (1999) looked at representations of menopause in print media, and I analysed how the 2006 divorce of Paul McCartney and Heather Mills was represented in three local women’s magazines (Brewer, 2009). Schneider and Davis (2010), in their examination of representations of health food in *The Australian Woman’s Weekly* from 1951 to 2006, describe the ‘historical slice sampling strategy’ (p.287) where samples are taken from periodicals at regular intervals to provide an account of ‘changes and continuities’ in the same publication over time. This study is of two ‘slices’, the years 1950 and 1980, in a similar magazine in New Zealand. Two antipodean studies also have similarities to this one. Sha and Kirkman’s analysis of representations of pregnancy in Australian magazines (2009) looked at a range of titles available in Australia over a single year (2005) and Hine’s 2013 study looked at pregnancy in New Zealand magazines over a broader period from 1970 to 2008. Neither included any discussion of audience reception, and all presented results from comprehensive thematic analyses based on similar premises to this one, with some variations in the method.

This study then attempts to complement these accounts of 20<sup>th</sup> century women's experiences using a widely-read women's magazine, specifically the words of both women and men in 1950 and 1980 about their sexual relationships, mediated by the voice and editing of the agony aunt herself. Discourses about divorce express contemporary notions of what marriages ought to be, and what constitutes reasonable justification for marriage breakup. What all the mostly American studies show is that post-war magazines reflected, reinforced and sometimes challenged contemporary notions of the role of marriage in society, the role of women within those marriages and the importance of individual rights to happiness. That a married woman's peace of mind was dependent on the success or otherwise of her relationship with her husband was not questioned, and her individual right to terminate an unhappy marriage was increasingly accepted. The central question which arises out of these studies was whether, within the context of New Zealand, a similar movement of increasing sympathy for the right to marital happiness and for divorce as a natural outcome in unhappy marriages was apparent in the most widely read women's magazine, the *Weekly*, over the period preceding and including the steep rise in rates of divorce, and drop in the incidences of marriage.

## Chapter 3: Methodology and Method

“... the analysis of media texts is central to understanding the ways in which meanings are organised and circulated in society” (Toynbee & Gillespie, 2006, p.187)

This study is designed to investigate changing attitudes to love within cohabiting relationships in New Zealand, with a focus on reasons for the rise in rates of divorce in the third quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Specifically, it seeks to provide some insight into the ways attitudes to love, marriage, marital disharmony and divorce were constructed by the New Zealanders who wrote the agony aunt columns in the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* at the beginning and at the end of the period 1950 to 1980, on the assumption that they are at least partly representative of attitudes more generally held.

The research is designed to answer the following questions:

1. How did the correspondents and the agony aunts conceive of romantic love? What was the nature of ‘true love’ in their eyes?
2. How did they view the rights and duties of marriage in 1950, and all cohabiting relationships in 1980? What made for a ‘good’ relationship in each year?
3. Which causes for disharmony were considered to be remediable, and which were ‘deal breakers’ and justified separation?
4. How did they view divorce? How normative was it?
5. In what ways were 1950 attitudes different from those in 1980?

In order to answer these questions a mixed methodology was selected. The primary approach is thematic analysis, but it is synthesised with discourse analysis and includes some content analysis to indicate the frequency of significant items. In addition, it refers to interdisciplinary critical perspectives, particularly in sociology, history and psychology, where they add insight into the analyses of particular texts. This mixed approach allows for a multi-faceted analysis, placing the texts in their contexts, and for the fine details of the data to be interpreted from different angles.

## Methodology

“ ... qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them ... [and] ... involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials ... that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives.” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998)

The ‘meanings people bring’ to phenomena such as divorce are socially constructed, tending to reflect those of the community they inhabit. To identify those meanings and how they change over time, we can arrange them into themes, so the primary approach in this study is thematic analysis. It is an aspect of qualitative research widely used in studies such as this one, being “a broad theoretical framework concerning the nature of discourse and its role in social life” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). It has as its controlling idea that meaning is constructed through discourse, and so the study of texts is able to uncover patterns of meaning (or themes) and to identify significant broader issues (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This can be true of contemporary texts, such as transcriptions of recently held interviews, as well as historical ones, such as in this study. It is a phenomenological technique, where “it is the participants’ perceptions, feelings, and lived experiences that are paramount and that are the object of study” (Guest et al, 2012, p.13). It is possible to use this approach to determine how correspondents to historical agony aunt columns and the agony aunts themselves conceived of the proper conduct of intimate relationships and valid reasons for them to end.

Thematic analysis is very flexible, suitable for a range of purposes and techniques, and its use is widespread. Nevertheless, it has been criticised from a positivist point of view as lacking in rigour and repeatability. Social science has traditionally used research methods which mimic those used in the natural sciences, but its subject matter is also suited to the more humanistic approach of phenomenology. Thematic analysis does not pretend to be completely objective – the researcher is attempting to discover answers to general questions, such as those above, guided by a systematic method for investigating the text, but also by their own judgement in the selection of what is relevant in the study and what is not, and what conclusions can be drawn from the material and what cannot. This of course leaves it open to different conclusions being drawn from the same texts by different

researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Nevertheless, the researcher who makes clear her position in relation to the material, as I have indicated in Chapter 1, and who uses a transparent and systematic method, is able to discover local and detailed information about how the authors of her texts conceived of matters such as divorce in the form of themes or codes (Boyatzis, 1998). To sum up, my position is determined by my own identity as a scholar whose parents raised me and my siblings in the immediate post-war period, who married in the early 1970s, and who was raising her own children in the 1980s. It is a period I remember, and I am particularly interested in the impact on women and families of changing attitudes during that 30 year period.

Braun and Clark (2006) consider that thematic analysis is not merely an umbrella term which covers a range of methods, as suggested by Boyatzis (1998), but is a method in its own right, with a range of valid strategies based around the use of coding. Although they are discussing the method with reference to research in psychology, this overall justification also suits analysis of agony aunt columns. In both fields the data is made up of accounts of personal experiences from multiple participants, and in both fields those accounts contain within them socially derived assumptions about the meaning of those experiences. These 'common sense' assumptions are capable of being made explicit in the process of analysis and in this study are the themes I am investigating. The themes arise from examination of the texts in light of the research questions, and were not pre-determined. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend the method because "through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data" (p.78). Thematic analysis has the potential to produce a rich account of the complex of attitudes our parents and grandparents held towards their sexual relationships.

It was also important to locate the agony aunt columns within the socio-economic conditions in which they were produced, and within the history of ideas about family roles and marriage (as in Piatti-Farnell, 2011). Chapter 4 comprises a relatively detailed account of the social and historical context within which the agony aunt columns were produced, with a focus on changing ideas about love, marriage, and disharmony between partners in long-term sexual relationships.(VanDijk,2009). The period is well-served in New Zealand by Jock Phillips' excellent *A Man's Country?* (1996), and by Pool, Dharmalingam and Sceats'



thorough text *The New Zealand Family from 1840*, published in 2007, as well as the New Zealand Government online resource *Te Ara – Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. An invaluable text which provided the impetus for this study was Roderick Phillips' *Divorce in New Zealand: a Social History*, 1981<sup>10</sup>. As the increasing divorce rate was not only happening in New Zealand, I have also made use of social histories from the United States and Britain and many individual studies from a range of countries, mostly in the West. Stephanie Coontz's histories of marriage and the family (2000, 2005, 2006, and 2011) have been particularly useful, as have the history of post-war women's magazines by Walker (2000) and audience studies by Hermes (1995 and 2005).

Subsequent chapters also include material from the disciplines of sociology and psychology. Of particular importance are the concepts of 'common sense' and 'hegemony' from the *Prison Notebooks* of Gramsci (1971), Goffman's concepts of 'performance' in everyday life (1959) and 'framing' (1974), and to a lesser extent Giddens on the 'pure relationship' within his description of 'modernity' (1991). Social psychology studies have also provided insights into marital behaviour, notably by Derek Layder (2004 and 2009), Dominian (1995) and Lewis, Amini and Lannon (2001). In addition, references have been made to contemporary popular culture, to elucidate similar attitudes within other media

such as contemporary popular films. This referencing of material from a range of fields of study will add to the 'rich description' by making links to further scholarship as well as to other voices being heard at the time.

In a thesis examining women's magazines, it is perhaps unexpected that I have not placed more emphasis on feminist theory. Contested ideas related to femininity and masculinity, particularly where they concern an unequal division of power, are interrogated in Chapter 8, entitled "The Personal is Political", with reference to Walby's concept of 'patriarchy' (1990) and Connell's of 'hegemonic masculinity' (1987; 2005) but the earlier chapters attempt to explain the many factors involved in this particular social change with a broader brush. Key elements in a feminist approach concern an individual's 'agency' and 'identity' (Canning, 1999) and it was considered appropriate to address them in that chapter and to use

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<sup>10</sup> My second-hand copy is inscribed "For Nina with love Rod 22 xii 81".

throughout the wider lens of Gramsci and, to a lesser extent, Goffman and the psychologists, to interrogate the themes less related to an explicit power differential.

Thematic analysis, combined with this interdisciplinary material, was synthesised with material discovered using discourse analysis. Fairclough (1992) saw discourses as composed of three overlapping dimensions. At the centre is the text, in this case a column with the agony aunt controlling in part how the correspondents' letters should be read, and providing a conclusion about what should be done about each problem. The text itself is embedded within the second dimension, the discourse practice, which in this case is the traditions of the agony aunt genre itself, and the third what Fairclough called the sociocultural practice, which means the text occurring in a society where it was normal to seek advice about personal matters from people seen to be expert. This approach to textual analysis is a fundamental understanding for this study, as it focusses on the 'text-in-context' for both years, and so attempts to describe changes that occurred between 1950 and 1980 using the columns as symptoms of wider social change. In addition, it provided strategies for analysing texts at the lexical level, specifically the use of euphemisms and metaphors for matters considered too delicate to discuss directly, and an underlying interest in assumptions about the power differentials implicit in texts, addressed most directly in Chapter 8.

The final method that I added to the 'mix' was a simple form of quantitative content analysis in which items can be aggregated and percentages applied (Altheide, 1996). The primary approach remains qualitative and discursive, but this additional method enabled some phenomena to be revealed, such as the ratio of letters which mention violence in each year, or of letters from men, for the purpose of comparison between the years.

## Method

I selected 1950 as the year to start the study as it is well before the remarkable rise in divorce rates in the third quarter of the century yet five years on from the end of World War Two. It is a period when attitudes to romance, marriage and divorce had settled down from the disruptions caused by war-time separations and hardship, and the ideology of the nuclear family was as yet unchallenged. It therefore acts as a baseline. It is from this point that the changes I am interested in occurred, and those changes were to some extent in

reaction to the conformity and restrictions of 'traditional' marriage as accepted in 1950. The passing of the Family Proceedings Act in 1980 provided a natural endpoint of the study, with its rejection of the 'fault' divorce and, in combination with the Domestic Purposes Benefit (1973), its provision of a legal and welfare environment which made leaving a marriage significantly easier for unemployed women in particular.

The collection of a whole year of agony aunt columns allowed for a significant sample of letters which dealt with disharmony within cohabiting relationships. The 52 editions in both years all had agony aunt columns, and all included problems within relationships where the couple were cohabiting. I had originally decided to include only married couples, but the 1980 letters were predominantly about de facto relationships, so I extended the category to include these, including permanent separation from those relationships as equivalent to divorce. Although the legal environment was not yet the same for both categories, the nature of the relationship is so similar it would have been unreasonable to exclude them as my focus was on the relationship itself rather than the details of what would happen after separation.

All letters concerned heterosexual relationships as apparently no letters were published from same-sex couples. This can be explained by the fact that homosexual activity was illegal until the Homosexual Law Reform Act was passed in 1986. It is of course possible that a letter could have been written as if about a heterosexual relationship, although really about a homosexual one, but there was no way to detect this. I collected the 34 letters about troubled marriages / de facto relationships out of a total of 231 items in 1950, and 70 out of over 570 in 1980<sup>11</sup>, giving a total sample of 103 responses from the agony aunts, some of which were published with extracts from the original letters (see Appendices for full transcriptions of these).

The columns also provided advice about subjects which were excluded from the study. These predominantly included letters from parents having problems with teenaged children<sup>12</sup> and from teenagers having problems with their parents; problems with friends

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<sup>11</sup> The number of letters in 1980 was more than double that of 1950. However, the 1950 magazine was still under post-war paper restrictions until June so I have resisted drawing any conclusions about this discrepancy.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Lou Lockheart advises a parent "Too loose a rein is not advocated by good parents – rather, by lazy ones" (27 April, 1050, p.31).

and the wider family, and problems in courtship where the couple were not cohabiting. Other types of advice were also provided on practical matters, particularly in 1950 – whether dinner suits were appropriate for evening weddings, for example (27 April, 1950, p.31) or from teenage girls self-conscious about their figures<sup>13</sup>. A disturbing number of letters in the 1980 year were from girls who had suffered sexual abuse from family or people known to the family. This is a subject that did not appear in 1950 at all, and its appearance in 1980 is discussed in general terms in Chapter 8, although those letters themselves were eventually excluded from the study as not immediately relevant to the couple relationships.

I coded for recurring themes in order to make a comparison of different ways in which they were interpreted between the two years (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This produced material on major themes, with subcategories, as described in the table below.

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<sup>13</sup> “Big Bust” is advised that her ‘bust’ may get smaller over time, and if she loses weight (4 May. 1950, p.30).

The agony aunts	Concealed identity			
	Voice	Authority to reframe		
		Common sense		
	Advice	1950	Self control and dignity	
			'managing' the husband by deploying 'feminine wiles'	
		1980	Counselling by Marriage Guidance	
			communication	
			Give up / separate	
Don't 'hanker for the might-have-been'				
'real love'	1950 "being happy, though married" 21/9	Typologies of love: passionate / reasonable / attached		
		duty		
		Marriage vows		
		happiness		
		companionship		
		Passion / 'mythic love'/romance		
	1980	Love as a transaction		
		"being loved beyond doubt"		
		Selfishness / unselfishness		
		Consulting the experts at Marriage Guidance		
		Staying at home / being free		
		the double standard		
		Feminised love	'open communication'	
			Absolute trust	
	Emotion 'work'			
imperfect love "I love him but ..."	Infidelity			
	In-laws			
	Outside interests			
	1950: saving face / keeping it secret			
	1980 : the 'sexual revolution'			
	Pining for the 'ex'			
	Power (both years)	Violence		
		Verbal abuse		
		Finding refuge		

**Figure 2 Table of themes**

After studying each category, I selected representative letters which were typical of major themes to analyse in detail, to illustrate their underlying 'common sense' assumptions, and also collected together extracts from groups which had common themes.

To further interrogate the material I focussed on the use of language. I dealt with the two years separately, scanning each first for the linguistic features of euphemisms and

metaphors. Both of these are ways we can talk about distressing, private or sensitive matters indirectly, or, in Pinker's words, ways speakers "slip [ ... ] their real intentions into covert layers of meaning" (2007, p.245) and I was interested to see the differences between usage in the two years of study, as well as the evidence they provided to support major themes, such as family violence. Pinker defines euphemisms as "terms for concepts in emotionally charged spheres of life such as sex, excretion, aging and disease ..." (p.319) and Murphy (1996) engagingly compares the euphemism with white blood cells "an elevated count might well be a sign of mild or serious pathology – but it's also a sign that a natural defence mechanism has kicked in ... [by training] ... a spotlight on the truth" (p.18). I also scanned both years for evidence of values, but found that did not produce any new information, so eventually excluded it from the study.

To sum up, this study uses a mixed methodology in which thematic analysis is synthesised with discourse analysis, content analysis, and references to broader theoretical constructs and contemporary histories (Boyatzis, 1998). Discourse analysis allowed for examination of the texts at the lexical level, with a focus on metaphors and euphemisms as the main linguistic ways we express potentially taboo topics. Content analysis described the frequency of topics within the two sets of texts, and contemporary histories provided an overview of broader forces at work on the lives of individual couples. Theoretical constructs, particularly the idea of 'common sense' derived from Gramsci (1971), provided essential points of view from which to explain the functions of agony aunt advice columns within the cultures they were a part of, and contemporary popular culture texts provided support for the view that the attitudes identified in the columns were also being expressed in other public media.

## Chapter 4: Context

Major historical changes have complex origins rooted in the distant as well as the recent past, and as such cannot be traced to an absolute beginning. Nevertheless, the roots of pakeha New Zealand's changing attitudes to love, relationship disharmony and divorce can be detected within the history of ideas and events which we have shared with the West in general. Before examining the attitudes expressed in the agony aunt letters of the *Weekly*, it is important to situate them as a part of on-going changes to the beliefs generally held in the West about love and marriage, and to the local socio-political and socio-economic conditions of the years in which they were written. Teun Van Dijk (2009) outlines how a fuller understanding of any text can be found in the examination of its position in the situation where it was produced. He also describes how our subjective, selective, cognitive constructs provide mental models against which we place the text and from which we derive its meaning. In linguistics terms, these models are largely shared with our language community and, as shared understandings, change over time. It is important to place the agony aunt columns in the context of the history of changing beliefs and norms which have been shared by the West as a whole. In Chapter 2 I outlined how a text can reveal much about its context. Similarly, knowledge about our shared history – its context – can reveal much about the significance of the text itself.

### Two over-arching factors

This chapter will begin with a brief acknowledgement of two overarching factors which produced long-term, profound changes in family-related beliefs and values in the two centuries prior to the period of this study. Both 1950 and 1980 can be classed as 'modern', as they were far removed from the kinds of village communities which existed in Europe and the United States prior to the industrial revolution. These changed little from year, and everyday life was largely determined by a restricted and enduring range of beliefs and practices (Coontz, 2005; Holmes, 2009). Giddens (1991) describes modern societies as, by contrast, permeated by choice, in which an individual is at liberty to select from a sometimes bewildering array of alternative lifestyles. The two factors I will discuss are the idea that all human beings have 'rights', and changes in how the West viewed romantic love and marriage.

The general belief that each individual has certain fundamental rights (commonly called 'human rights') first showed its power in explosive revolutions in the United States (1775 – 1783) and in France (1789). Although at first this belief was largely concerned with a 'right to liberty' of middle-class, white males (particularly in the United States), it later came to be applied to both slaves and that other marginalised group, women, many of whom also worked only for their keep and were bound to obey their husband-masters. The ideal of individual human rights is therefore integral to the normalisation of feminist beliefs in the 20th century focusing, as they do, on extending all rights to all women, and granting them equal opportunities to the full range of endeavours previously seen as exclusive to men (Eisenstein, 1984).

The so-called 'first wave' of feminism arose when American women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who worked for the abolition of slavery, turned to the laws restricting women, including the fact that they did not have the right to vote. Like-minded middle-class women in the United Kingdom and New Zealand campaigned for women's suffrage and in 1893 New Zealand was the first nation to grant the right to vote to women (Atkinson, 2012). Radical but vigorously contested changes in how women behaved (and dressed) were to follow; various special interest organisations were formed, and feminist ideas became well-known, if not universally approved, in the 1920s and 1930s (Cook, 2012). Many of these organisations, such as the New Zealand Federation of University Women (founded in 1921), and the Family Planning Association (1939) have been on-going, but the decade following WWII saw a temporary return to more traditional ideologies (discussed further below). A revival of enthusiasm for feminist ideas occurred in the so-called 'second wave' of feminism, which was nascent in the 1960s, but gained a strong public voice in the 1970s. This period will be discussed further below, but the beliefs include, of course, that women should be able to earn enough to keep themselves and their children, and should be free to leave marriages which are unhappy (examples of key feminist texts include de Beauvoir, 2011; Millett, 1970; Friedan, 1963; Greer, 1971; Walby, 1990). This revival of feminism had much to say about illiberal relationships within the home, and as an ideology had a significant impact on attitudes to divorce.

Of particular interest to this study is also the 'right to happiness', which itself was famously included in the American Declaration of Independence. Indeed, happiness was only third in



line after safety and freedom in the rights sought by these rebels against tyrannical forms of government.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,  
that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,  
that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness 1776)  
(Declaration of Independence, 1776)

From Aristotle in ancient Greece (as described in Engstrom and Whiting, 1996) to Seligman in the United States (2002) philosophers and psychologists have concerned themselves with happiness as a state universally aspired to. Different cultures may define it in contrasting ways (Diener, Oishi and Lucas, 2009), and individuals may have their capacity to experience it affected by their early treatment (Seligman, 2002). A capacity for happiness may be irreparably harmed by traumatic life events, and may even reside in our genes (Diener, Oishi and Lucas, 2009). Nevertheless, we want to be happy and, despite it being, at least in part, a result of our own evaluations of situations and events (one person may regard an unexpected pregnancy as a joy, another as a disaster), many if not most people would say that their aim in life is to be happy. Romantic love as an ideal is intimately bound up with the value of happiness (Seligman, 2002).

The second overarching long-term profound change relevant to this study was to ideas of what constituted happiness in romantic relationships. The growth in importance of the idea of romantic love and, later, a belief in its central role in married happiness, has become one of those 'common sense' ideas that Gramsci identified as being fundamental to social life (Gramsci, 1971). Although it is now considered the only valid reason to get married, the history of marriage practices in the West shows that for most of European and North American history, marriages were contracted primarily for convenience rather than love. That pragmatic view of marriage allowed for close relationships, including friendships, outside the marriage, and was more tolerant of infidelity than a marriage based on romantic love.

Social historian Stephanie Coontz, in her exhaustive book *Marriage, a History: How love conquered marriage* (2005) shows how the ideology of romantic love, promoted particularly through fiction (see also Radway, 1991; Kipnis, 1998), came to permeate expectations of marriage. For example, in previous centuries, weddings of the wealthy were organised mostly by the couple's parents to cement strategic alliances, with the family's wealth,

honour, and optimum conditions for the raising of their grandchildren in mind. Only in recent centuries has romantic love been seen as an absolute requirement for marriage, and with this have come two by-products: raised expectations of the marriage – that it would not only provide respectability and security, but also happiness and emotional fulfilment for the couple – and the dilemma about what to do should the love wear out and die before they did (Coontz, 2005).

Countless stories, both invented and from life, describe the meetings of lovers and their subsequent declarations of love. A genre of novels in English focusing on romantic love dates back to the 18th century (Radway, 1991) and novels like Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) became very popular, particularly among women readers. Grodal (2004) dates romantic love itself back to "the savannahs of East Africa", and defines it as "an emotion that motivates an individual to establish and maintain an exclusive and mutual emotional relationship ... with another person" (p.28). There is some transposition of 20th century idealism in this description, as love has not always been associated with formal and enduring relationships, as we have seen. The earliest depictions of romantic love in Europe date from the 12th and 13th centuries, and describe secret love affairs between aristocratic married women and their lover-knights (Coontz, 2005).

Nevertheless, despite changing economic conditions, across all habitable landscapes and cultures, young and old – but especially the young – continue to experience an exhilarating, heightened emotion when in love, and in many cases are inspired by it to form households together, sometimes in the teeth of parental opposition, often solemnised by marriage and expanded by the birth of children into the household (Patino, 2010). Whether or not their love is enduring, either one or both partners begin their connection with the elation that comes with physical attraction and the possibility that this delightful feeling of being in love has the potential to change their lives for the better. How this emotion is constructed and performed may vary from culture to culture (Patino, 2010), and in Western cultures, mutual disclosures are likely to increase the sense of intimacy (Layder, 2009). However many studies (and our own experience, of course) show that the nature of the connection will change over time as a result of the couple's on-going interactions as well as the external forces the relationship subsequently experiences (Lewis et al., 2000). There are perhaps

countless narratives worldwide about not only the joys but also the disappointments of love.

Paradoxically, therefore, the increasing willingness of 20<sup>th</sup> century husbands and wives to give up on their marriages came from heightened notions of what a good marriage should be like, in particular how intimate, affectionate and romantic it should be. As a corollary, understandings of what constituted unconscionable behaviour within a marriage were also significantly changed by the end of the 20th century, with the bar set much higher (Phillips, 1981; Reynolds & Mansfield, 1999; Coontz, 2005).<sup>14</sup> I will be discussing these in more detail in later chapters. Giddens (1991) dubs post-urbanisation relationships as ‘pure’, by which he means undertaken for their own sake, for the satisfactions they give the couple, and not bounded by other responsibilities to a community or even the wider family. Such a relationship he sees as more vulnerable to rupture, and as able to continue “... only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it” (Giddens, 1994, p. 246).

## Factors affecting New Zealand marriages in 1950

Historical accounts of the 30s and 40s make it clear that women in the West were heavily influenced by feminist ideas (Walker, 2000; Phillips, 1988), and also had firm beliefs in the prevailing ideal of heterosexual, romantic love (Coontz, 2005). Their relative reluctance to divorce, compared with their daughters, can be explained by contemporary ‘common sense’ ideas about family roles and functions, and by the economic conditions prevailing at the end of WWII. Some of the most salient ‘common sense’ ideas coalesce around the ideology of the ‘nuclear family’.

In 1950, the consequences of WWII were still very much in evidence. While adult women, no matter what their family ties, were widely employed during the war, often filling jobs vacated by servicemen, the men’s return saw many women, willingly or unwillingly, revert to domestic occupation and the raising of children (Pool et al, 2007). The nuclear family model that had stalwart husbands in paid employment providing the wherewithal to run the home and house-bound wives as nurturing mothers and expert housekeepers was still a “powerful ideological prescription” (Phillips, 1988, p.498), particularly in conservative and

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<sup>14</sup> For example, in New Zealand rape within marriage was only criminalised in 1985.

Christian communities, and had been since well before WWII, of course. With WWII itself and the economic depression which preceded it still very recent memories, the ideal of the comfortable, permanent home based on the traditional European model appears to have gained even more support for the safety and stability it promised (May, 1988).

The post-war hunger for security and prosperity had already been in part satisfied by the 1935 Labour Government's establishment of the welfare state, and the desire to maintain that potentially fragile structure - under the widely-publicised threat from world-wide communism - was so strong that any evidence of nonconformity was subject to considerable opprobrium (May, 1988). Emblematic of this order was the seemingly flawless face of the British Royal Family, George VI, Queen Elizabeth, and the two young princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret, and later the family of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip.

Image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

**Figure 3 The Royal Family as a nuclear family: Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip with Prince Charles and Princess Anne in 1951. ([www.history.com](http://www.history.com))**

The images of that time show them living a relatively middle class family life, and they became household figures in New Zealand popular publications such as the *Weekly*. "You should hear Prince Philip on the drawing-room floor when Charles and Anne have decided he is a big, angry bear! He is just like any other boisterous, happy young father of the type so easily twisted around the little finger of a small son or daughter!" (*Weekly*, 18 November, 1954, p.15). Marriage and family were celebrated; the disruption of marriage a problem in a society where there was a "clear demarcation between acceptable and unacceptable, adjustment and maladjustment" (May, 1988, p.67).

Although, as we have seen, post-war women were very interested in marrying for love and living in a happy family, there were other forces which meant their actual experience of that life did not necessarily live up to their dreams. One of these was a very deep divide between the expectations of men and of women. As Jock Phillips persuasively argues in *A Man's Country?* (1996) the domestic ideal of the nuclear family did not go uncontested for men. Alongside it existed nostalgia for the male friendships – commonly called ‘mateship’ – forged outside the confines of the woman-dominated realm of the family home in goldfields, gum-fields, battlefields and sports-fields. It expressed itself in literature of the time, in particular John Mulgan's novel *Man Alone* (1939), and in misogynistic humour which stereotyped women as devoted mothers, innocent girls, lusty wenches, nagging wives, or terrifying mothers-in-law, and men as likeable larrikins, light-heartedly trying to evade the tyranny of petticoats. Phillips (1996) describes Pakeha New Zealand in the mid-twentieth century as divided along gender lines into two cultures. “At its most benign the conflict between these two cultures was resolved in humour; more likely it produced resentment among men and resignation among women. At its worst it led to violence,” (p.259).

A community may subscribe to strict notions of family roles, but individuals still provided the same variety they always had. How did this ideal nuclear family picture suit those who didn't fit the mould? As Coontz points out in *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (2000), in the 1950s, “thousands of women [were driven to] therapists, tranquilizers, or alcohol when they actually tried to live up to it” (Coontz, 2000, p.9). The twin factors of a desire for more ‘real love’ or romance in their marriages, and feminist beliefs that they had a right to more liberty in their lives contributed to their frustrations, as did, perhaps, the pressure they felt to vacate paid employment they may have had during WWII in favour of returning servicemen (Coontz, 2000). New Zealand authors Pool, Dharmalingam & Sceats, 2007, detect similar phenomena among the women of post-war New Zealand.

The ubiquitous ideology of the nuclear family also marginalised lesbian, gay and transgender individuals, as well as the naturally celibate, the infertile, those who would have preferred not to have children, those focussed on their work, their sport or their art – in fact the many and varied individuals who did not suit a heterosexually conceived, child-filled house in the

suburbs. In Peter Wells' memoir *Long Loop Home* (2001), he describes classmates at his Auckland School in the 1950s, who pointed out his homosexuality with "such assiduity, such disbelief, such ribaldry, such sharp and vindictive humour" (p.11), he was to feel completely excluded. Adult prejudices are replicated in sharp relief in school playgrounds, of course.

This study does not address the social changes occurring within Maoridom, as outside its scope, but to leave the tangata whenua out of this passage would be to leave the impression they lived some kind of parallel existence, or were completely assimilated into the Pakeha way, neither of which would be true. After WWII, many from rural marae moved to the growing cities in search of work, and to accommodation in new state-funded housing estates in city-fringe suburbs. These houses were designed with the nuclear family in mind, and although luxurious compared with some rural dwellings, did not necessarily cater well for communal living (King, 1983). Some prospered, but the dislocation from extended family, from traditional ways of life, and fluctuating economic conditions which led to periods of unemployment, all had a significant impact on urban Maori, many of whom were, or became, impoverished. In response to this, political action by organisations such as the Maori Women's Welfare League and the kingitanga movement, as well as leadership by scholars, poets, writers and activists, drew attention to gross historical injustices, particularly over land appropriation by Europeans in the previous century. All of this makes for a complex interplay of forces which are beyond my scope, but one of those forces in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century for Maori too will have been the prevailing ideology of the nuclear family, and the conformist, consumerist pressures of post-war communities in general.

May (1988) saw contemporary rhetoric, including from popular publications such as the *Weekly* and Government policy, as "constructed around an ideal of a certain normal family arrangement: that a married woman and her children would be provided with security by her husband" and that "those not matching the ideal had no place within the boundaries of normal family life" (p.77). Many of them were persuaded to try it anyway, and so to set themselves - and their families - on a path to misery rather than to the happiness the ideal of the nuclear family had promised.

Luckily, there appeared to be help at hand. Ehrenreich and English (2005) trace popular advice to women back 200 years, and focus particularly on the psycho-medical advice that proliferated in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when science and the scientific method

appeared to have the capacity to provide answers to many of life's ills. Giddens (1991) sees 20<sup>th</sup> century individuals as ostensibly free, but surrounded by expert advice on all aspects of their lives, from their vehicles and gadgets to their financial affairs, to their food, clothing and health and also, of course, their intimate relationships. "Expert systems ... extend to social relations themselves and to the intimacies of the self. The doctor, counsellor and therapist are as central to the expert systems of modernity as the scientist, technician or engineer" (Giddens, 1991, p.18). He sees these systems as based on trust – we trust the expert to give the advice we require to function effectively, in the terms our culture dictates.

Celello (2009) points out, however, that so-called 'experts' in marital relations may not necessarily have the kinds of qualifications which deserve our trust. She says "what defines their expertise is not the extent of their education but the authoritative way in which they present their views, particularly in the popular media" (p.6). Of interest to this study is her information that one of the American 'marriage experts' cited by the *Weekly* in 1950, Dr Paul Popenoe, was in fact a horticulturalist, trained to nurture plants, not marriages. He authored a series in the magazine entitled "Your Family and You" and is described as "a noted American authority on everyday family problems" (6 April edition, p. 39). After describing the increasing scholarly interest in psychology in the early 20th century, Celello identifies mass acceptance in the United States of marital advice with concerns about 'war marriages' – committed to in haste and perhaps repented after the heady urgency of wartime threats had dissipated.

By identifying the WWII marriage phenomenon as a problem of national significance and by broadcasting their desire and ability to mitigate it, marriage counsellors successfully made their skills known to broad audiences beyond the narrow confines of their expert community (Celello, 2009, p.59).

Just as the readers of the *Weekly* could trust the experts in engineering and medicine to provide them with the drugs, surgery and technology to radically improve their standards of living and longevity, so too, by analogy, there must be experts in human relationships who could help them if their marriages did not prove to be 'happily ever after' and their families less than the perfect havens of peace and love that the nuclear family promised. In the optimism generated by recent, startling advances in science and technology, it must have

seemed simply logical that there would be a science of marriage as well, and experts who could advise on how to make their own live up to the current ideal.

Above all, it was women who were the targets of this advice, and who were held to be responsible for fixing any problems in their relationships and marriages.

Experts assumed that women needed marriage more than men, for both financial and emotional reasons. This assumption led them to direct much of their advice to women and to hold them accountable for their marital successes and failures ... [and] ... many women, in turn, proved to be willing consumers of what the experts had to say” (Celello, 2009, p.8).

Women’s primary responsibilities were still seen to be in the home, and they were deemed to be responsible for the health and welfare of everything within it, including their marriages<sup>15</sup>. May (1988) reports how the post-war New Zealand mothers she interviewed worked to maintain the appearance of the ideal nuclear family, hiding problems such as poverty, miscarriages, errant husbands and recalcitrant children. Despite the safety net of the welfare state (discussed below), the code of silence, and the reluctance of the wider family and community to ‘interfere’ led the women in May’s study to remember those years as desperate and unhappy. They were expected to ‘manage’, largely alone, and the lack of help or advice from their own circle makes it unsurprising<sup>16</sup> that some of them found an outlet in writing anonymously to the agony aunt column in the *Weekly*.

In marked contrast to the first half of the century, by 1950 not only was there peace and stability in New Zealand, there was also rapidly increasing prosperity for many, full employment, and a thirst for the domestic consumer products which were fast emerging from factories now released from producing war-time essentials (May, 1988). The focus on what is now called consumerism was spurred on by a chronic housing shortage that, despite a massive programme to build State houses since 1935, in 1949 was still a major concern.

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<sup>15</sup> Of course, not all women thought such advice would be helpful. In 1980, ‘Aries’ writes to Karen Kay “I suppose you will suggest marriage guidance but I don’t think this marriage is worth saving. I just want to get out of it” (*New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*, 15 September, 1980, p.76). This includes perhaps a reference to the *American Ladies Home Journal* column “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” which has been running since 1953, and which was partly instigated by Paul Popenoe (see above). ‘Aries’ is dismissing the usefulness of such counselling.

<sup>16</sup> It is possible that the isolation was increased by mothers and mothers-in-law, who might have provided help and advice, withdrawing because vilified by jokes and innuendo as interfering and domineering.



To obtain permanent tenancy in a State-built house, or to own a house of your own, and to fill it with consumer products, became increasingly possible as a result of the massive building programme, and family aspirations rose to meet the new opportunities. In Christchurch, 1978, the 100,000<sup>th</sup> State house was completed (Schrader, 2005), and buying your own home, being a rate-payer not a tenant, became a rite of passage for many young New Zealanders, made easier by the Family Benefit, a Government-funded stipend for each child, introduced in 1945 and paid directly to mothers (the Family Benefit, 2015).

Unemployment was low, living standards were high and state housing was relatively generous. Home-ownership rates were high compared to European countries, assisted by the 1958 and 1964 Family Benefits (Home Ownership) acts, which allowed family benefits to be capitalised and paid in advance to parents as deposits on homes. Low-income families could also access subsidised mortgages at 3% interest. In the 1950s the International Labor Organization labelled New Zealand a model welfare state. <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/family-welfare/page-4>

Advertisements proclaimed the benefits of household products and labour-saving devices, cars, clothes and patent medicines. But, despite the expectations that husbands and fathers would provide such for their families, not every man earned enough to service his wife and family's increasing aspirations for material goods to fill the new homes. May (1988) attributes the increasing employment of wives and mothers in the second half of the century to this increase in consumerism, as they worked to make up the shortfall.

Like Giddens (1991), Reynolds and Mansfield (1999) see consumerism as having an analogous influence on attitudes to personal relationships, in that it "reinforces the ethos of choice in relationship options, and continues to undermine tradition, which is based on an understanding of socially accepted paths and norms" (p.15). They point out a consensus among scholars from a range of fields, that the increase in individualism was the "key, on-going, ideational change of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century" (p.15). Its emphasis on individual goals, successes and failures (Rutherford, 2007), and on equal opportunity, was central to rises both in the ideology of the nuclear family, distancing it from wider family networks, and the ideals of feminism. Ehrenreich and English (2005) concur, highlighting in exaggerated style the apparent disposability of modern relationships, and relating it to an individualistic materialism:

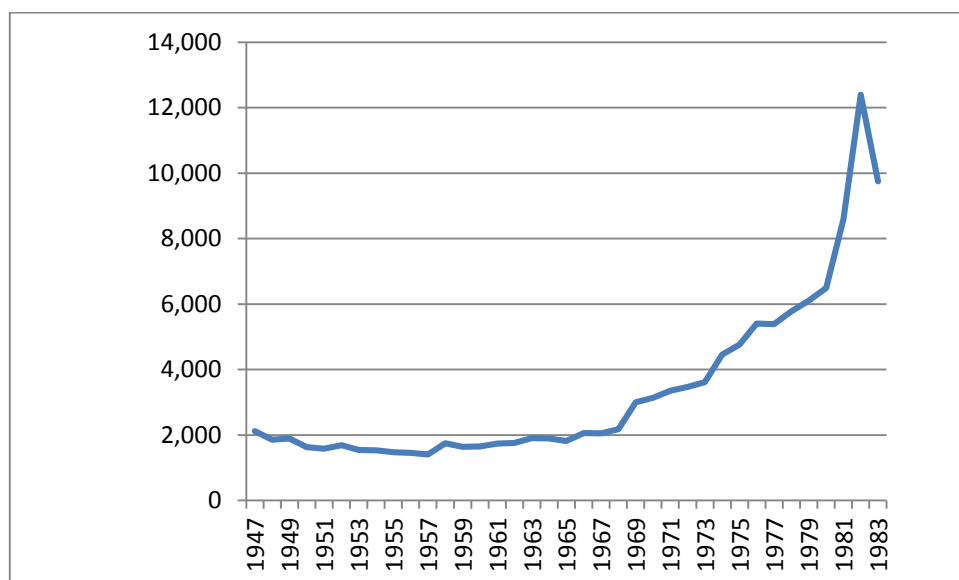
The primary assumption is that each person in a relationship has a set of emotional, sexual, or other 'needs' which he or she wants met. If they are

no longer being satisfied by a friend or sexual partner, then that bond may be broken as reasonably as a buyer would take his business away from a seller if he found a better price. (Ehrenreich & English, 2005, p.332)

The unprecedented economic growth and concomitant consumerism had an additional side-effect which may well have had greater long-term consequences. For a wife and mother to earn her own money was to render her potentially capable of supporting herself and her children alone (Phillips, 1981) should her marriage itself have become intolerable.

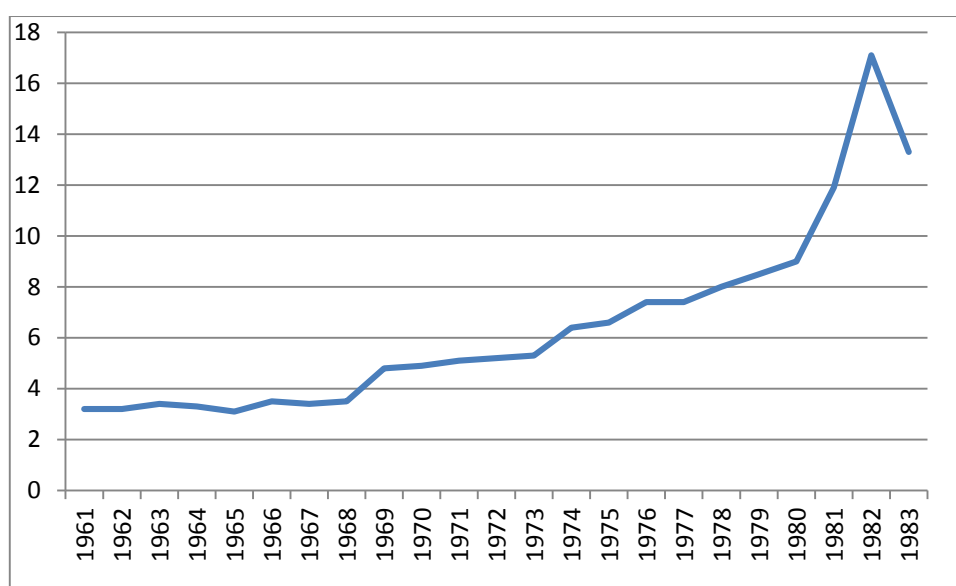
### The rise in divorce rates in New Zealand

In the middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as we have seen, the shared model most New Zealanders had about marriage was that it was an inevitable part of any normal person's life. At its peak in 1971, the marriage rate for single New Zealanders over 16 years of age was 45.5 per thousand, giving a total of 27,199 weddings in a year when the population was only 66% of what it reached in 2010. Even by 1980 the rate had dropped to a mere 29.35 weddings per thousand, signalling the dramatic changes that had taken place in New Zealanders' attitudes towards marriage in the interim (Statistics New Zealand, 2001; "Kiwi marriage and divorce numbers ...", 2012). Over the second half of the century as a whole, attitudes towards divorce appear to have made an equally dramatic shift; the annual numbers of divorces had increased significantly (see figure 1, below).



**Figure 4 Total Divorces in New Zealand from 1947 to 1983 (Statistics New Zealand, 2012)**

Figure 2 (below) shows the divorce rates in terms of the number of divorces per 1000 marriages, from 1961, a few years prior to the beginning of the increase. This is a more accurate way of analysing the data, since it compares it with the number of marriages, however the rate of divorces per thousand marriages was only calculated from 1961, so misses the first decade of this study, 1950 to 1960. An additional factor is the series of law changes which made a divorce progressively easier to obtain, and the spike in 1980 can be explained by the introduction of the 'no-fault' divorce, discussed below. Nevertheless, we can see an inexorable rise in the divorce rate over the period.



**Figure 5 New Zealand Divorce Rates per 1000 Marriages 1961 to 1983 (Statistics New Zealand, 2012)**

This was not only happening in New Zealand, of course. In Western countries in general there was a steady rise in divorce rates, and reduction in the rates of marriage in the post war period.<sup>17</sup> An American study by Stevenson and Wolfers (2007) begins with an acknowledgement that “in recent decades, marriage rates have fallen, divorce rates have risen, and the defining characteristics of marriage have changed” (p.27). It accepts this as a given, based on statistics of marriage and divorce rates which largely resemble those in New Zealand.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Like New Zealand, the United States experienced a spike in divorces at the end of World War Two probably as a result of the disruption to marriages over the period. It had the highest divorce rate in the world from 1950 to 1985 (Phillips, 1988).

## What had changed by 1980?

The 1960s and 1970s saw widespread social changes in the West, produced by a range of intersecting factors. The most salient for this study relate to increased female employment outside the home (Watters, 2014), 'second-wave' feminism, improved contraception, a relaxing of the divorce laws, and the waning influence of organised religion, all contributing to changing perceptions of marriage and, especially, of divorce.

An increasing stringency about acceptable standards of behaviour within marriages – and later de facto relationships – was on-going throughout the 20th century. The decision to divorce became easier as disapproval of staying in unhappy relationships – particularly when they involved abuse<sup>19</sup> – began to be publicly expressed. Discontented couples in 1950 might continue living together and so present a respectable front to the world, as in James K. Baxter's poem "Ballad of Calvary Street" ...

And so these two old fools are left,  
A rosy pair in evening light,  
To question Heaven's dubious gift,  
To hag and grumble, growl and fight:  
The love they kill won't let them rest,  
Two birds that peck in one fouled nest.<sup>20</sup>

... but by the end of the 1970s, the "two old fools" are likely to have climbed down from the cross and gone their separate ways, hoping for something better.

The idea that divorce would release a couple from mutual misery was already well established at the close of World War Two, but the temporary post-war drivers towards settled domestic life in nuclear families described above meant that many were reluctant to take that step, and divorce was much less acceptable than it subsequently became. One of May's (1988) interviewees describes 1950s attitudes to divorce:

I remember that word failure of marriage. It was a terrible thing for your marriage to fail. That is why women stayed in appalling situations rather than admit it had failed. I saw divorce as a modern evil and as a result of people's selfishness. (May, 1988, p.145)

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<sup>19</sup> For further discussion of this, see Chapter 8.

<sup>20</sup> "Ballad of Calvary Street" was first published in *Collected Poems of James K Baxter*, edited by JE Weir, published by Oxford University Press (1980). Baxter died in 1972 so this satire of unhappy marriages was itself an example of pro-divorce public discourse in the 1960s and 1970s. Retrieved from the online journal *Lead Action News* Volume1 Number 2 1993, [www.lead.org.au](http://www.lead.org.au).

By 1980, however, the combination of much higher expectations of marriage (and the sustained belief that love was the main justification for its continuation), with the idea that every individual has a right to happiness, and the increasing economic independence of women, had rendered the decision to separate or divorce not only desirable, but increasingly socially sanctioned.

Jock Phillips (1996) noted of the 1980s in New Zealand that “the growing number of married women working was both a cause and an effect of the feminist movement” (p.273).<sup>21</sup> Among the many factors in the change, Phillips sees the most critical as being economic and social independence. He concluded that many women became more ‘feminist’ in their ideas as they worked, and were more inclined to support mothers working as they became more convinced of feminist ideals. Roderick Phillips, in his earlier history of divorce in New Zealand (1981), concurs, concluding that prior to the 1970s, many women are likely to have been prevented from ending miserable or violent marriages by their dependence on their husbands’ incomes, and hostile divorce laws (discussed below). To this we might add the social sanctions described by May’s interviewee. When those forms of constraint eased, women (and men, of course) sought to end their marriages in increasing numbers, despite the difficulties that still entailed

As elsewhere in the West, by 1970 the so-called ‘second wave’ of feminism (colloquially dubbed ‘women’s lib’) was speaking powerfully to the women of New Zealand: older women, Maori women, lesbian and heterosexual women, trade unionists, women in churches – in fact the breadth of its initial reach was startling. Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* was widely read here as it was in the United States (Coontz, 2011). I have two copies, (the second bought when I thought I had lost the first), and a defining moment was the 1972 visit to New Zealand of the Australian academic, Germaine Greer, during which she was arrested for using the word ‘bullshit’ in public. Her book *The Female Eunuch* sold an unprecedented 8000 copies in the three months that followed (Kedgley & Varnham, 1993).

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<sup>21</sup> “In 1951 only 9.7percent of married women were in the full-time labour force. Forty years later the figure was 45.8 percent, and many more had some paid work” (Phillips, 1996, p.273).

The first of a series of National Women's Conventions was held in 1973 at the YWCA in Auckland. It brought together women with a wide range of backgrounds and interests and the conference anthem, enthusiastically sung, was Helen Reddy's "I Am Woman".

Image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

**Figure 6 A "feeling of what can only be described as exhilaration and 'sisterhood' [ ... ] burgeoned as the day wore on" *United Women's Convention: 1973 Report* (p.7).**

For a heady moment representatives from conservative women's organisations and nascent radicals sang in harmony, before ideological differences, perhaps inevitably, drove them in different directions, particularly over the issue of abortion.

From its first edition in July 1972, the feminist magazine *Broadsheet* produced passionate and committed calls to liberate women in the workplace, the media, government, the medical establishment and education – all the public spheres historically dominated by men. They also, importantly for this study, vigorously questioned women's roles in the family and the assumptions on which they were based. In an early editorial entitled "wed-locked", the author questions not only inequalities within the home, but the future of marriage itself, making an impassioned call founded on the ideology of individual rights:

The Women's Liberation ethic stresses that it is the birthright [sic] of all human beings to decide the course of their lives, but ...the confinement of women in homes and their subordination in work severely limits their human potential. Prolonged child care ceases to be a basis for female subordination when birth control, spaced births, smaller families, patent feeding, modern gadgets and communal nurseries allow it to be shared by men. The sexual division of labour need not and should not survive in our industrial society. ... There is no one satisfactory alternative to present-day marriage. People are examining a number of alternatives such as communal living arrangements, child-less marriages, solo parenthood, or simply never getting married ... individuals are refusing to bow down to the pressures of society and are searching for an arrangement which is right for them as individuals. (*Broadsheet*, November 1972, pp 2-3)

Although active feminists were certainly not in the majority nation-wide, and some issues, particularly abortion, were fiercely contested by other women's groups, many of the ideas and values of the 1970s feminists had become widely accepted by 1980, and were being passed on to the next generation. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the children of 'second wave' feminists and their sisters regard the notion of female equality as 'common sense' to an extent that their grandparents did not, even if, in practice, many of the old inequalities, such as the 'double standard' (discussed in Chapters 5 and 7), can still be discerned in their attitudes and behaviours. Despite sustained and periodic backlashes, particularly from masculinist groups such as those contributing to the website [menz.org.nz](http://menz.org.nz), this 'common sense' acceptance of women having equal rights to men has endured beyond the 1970s<sup>22</sup> and constitutes a significant strand in the web of influences which brought about the increased social acceptance of divorce in New Zealand. Many women were now able to survive economically on their own, and feminist beliefs and values gave them the rationale to withdraw from marriages which were not only unhappy, but also inequitable and unjust. By the early 60s, changes other than nascent feminism and widespread working motherhood were also in the air. Women who grew to maturity in the 1960s commonly quote the wholesale adoption of the new, safe and reliable contraceptive pill in the 60s, as a key factor in changing attitudes to love, sex and marriage<sup>23</sup>. 'The Pill' certainly did provide

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<sup>22</sup> Including the *Weekly* itself. Although catering to middle New Zealand women, its content and tone use an increasingly feminist frame throughout the 1970s, while remaining moderate.

<sup>23</sup> This is from my own experience, as a member of that cohort. When friends and acquaintances find out about this study, they often cite 'the Pill' as a key liberating factor in their own lives, possibly because United States conservative forces, particularly the Catholic church (Kavanagh, 1954), exaggerated its importance by framing it as pernicious at the time.

women with unprecedented full control over their own fertility. Condom use was already widespread, but required the cooperation of the man, and so were a range of female devices such as the diaphragm, but the Pill provided additional privacy, reliability and convenience, and by the end of the decade, doctors became increasingly willing to prescribe it, even to the unmarried (Pool, Dharmalingam & Sceats, 2007). This, coupled with increasing debate about whether sex outside marriage was indeed sinful, laid the groundwork for much more liberal attitudes to heterosexual sex<sup>24</sup>, and eventually to all forms of sexuality. Pleck (2012) also refers to a “popularised Freudianism [which claimed that] sexual repression was unhealthy” (p.10), a strand of thought that was influential throughout the period of this study. None of this occurred without resistance, especially from parents of young adults. One New Zealand mother, ‘Marie’, reflects on her own changing attitudes to her daughter’s relationship with her boyfriend <sup>25</sup>:

When they came back [from an overseas trip] she said that she and Peter were going to live together. Well, that was the first real ruction in our house and I cannot for the life of me imagine why it was, because now I don’t even think about it. (Gray, 1992, p.26)

The final clause is particularly telling – social norms had changed so much in the previous two decades, that the same mother who had tried to prevent her daughter having sex with her boyfriend in the 1970s had completely changed her attitude to extra-marital sex by the 1990s.

Nevertheless, in her study of *Cleo* magazine in 1970s Australia, Masurier (2007) notes that “despite the growing accessibility of the Pill and the 1960s ‘sexual revolution’, the statistics remind us that for many younger ... women sexual respectability and marriage remained powerful aspirations” (p. 199). As we have already seen, 1971 was and remains the year with the highest marriage rate in New Zealand, but the groundwork was being laid for

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<sup>24</sup> Letter to Karen Kay 24 March 1980 p.48, ‘Why do you give such negative advice all the time about how unpleasant, frightening, and BAD sex is? I urge all young girls considering sex activity not to hesitate – ‘it’s marvellous! I don’t think it’s right that people should be subjected to your entirely negative comments and opinion all the time and in all cases ...’ Karen Kay replies that ‘Sex Supporter’ had misread the column and points out that she received another letter on the same day complaining that her attitudes to sex were too liberal.

<sup>25</sup> This event is not dated, but the source, *Mothers and Daughters* (1992), is individual accounts of mothers who grew up during WWII, and their post-war children, so it can be roughly dated to the late 60s or early 70s.



increasing acceptance of the termination of those marriages if they did not live up to their wedding day promise, and for increasing tolerance of sex outside marriage.

Laws around separation and divorce became less stringent and more favourable to women over the period 1950 to 1980. The following is a summary of Phillips' (1981) extensive discussion of the changes. The Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Amendment Bill (1920) was the primary legislation in 1950, which was still in force in 1980, though in modified form. It was originally based on the assumption that marriages should only be dissolved when one or other of the spouses had failed in some way – also called the 'fault' divorce – but underwent several modifications before it was abandoned in 1981<sup>26</sup>. In general terms, divorces were granted on the grounds of desertion, adultery, mental illness (if the person was an inmate of an asylum), injuring the petitioner or their child, and drunkenness if accompanied by failure to perform the duties expected of a husband or wife. Sexual crimes were included, as was the now apparently absurd 'fault' of denying 'conjugal rights' – refusing sex. Phillips (1981) comments "clearly divorce was popularly viewed as a punitive measure, primarily to punish a matrimonial offence, rather than as a remedy for marriage breakdown" (p.43).

There were modifications to the Bill, including one in 1953, near the beginning of our period, which added the provision of divorce after seven years of separation if the couple were unlikely to reconcile, and which loosened some of the other 'faults'. These changes were minor, but do suggest that public opinion, as reflected in the actions of the lawyers and law-makers who wrote and voted for these changes, was moving in the direction of making divorce easier to get, and so expressing more tolerant attitudes towards it. A more significant revision was made in the Matrimonial Proceedings Act (1963), which added new 'faults' (including sexual molestation of a child in the family) and provided a total of 24 grounds for divorce which recognised both what Phillips calls "matrimonial offences" (p.46) and acknowledgement of irretrievable breakdown of a relationship when no actual offence had been committed. It also allowed for the 'guilty' spouse (the adulterer, for example) to successfully petition for divorce, something previously resisted. Again, the assumption that divorce was an exception to the normal state of marriage, and something which should only

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<sup>26</sup> The 1980 "Family Proceedings Act", was not in force until 1981, the year after this study ends.

be dissolved if one of the parties committed an offence, was being increasingly mitigated by a recognition that a marriage may simply no longer be tolerable to either party, neither of whom is guilty of any particular sin.

In England, divorces had until 1857 been under the jurisdiction of church rather than civil courts, and this 1963 Act, with its tolerance of mutually agreed separation, shows a further loosening of religious influence. Conservative groups such as the Catholic Women's League continued to oppose the changes, and prominent Labour Party politician, Arnold Nordmeyer, fulminated about attacks on the "sanctity of marriage" (quoted in Phillips, 1981, p.47), but their attitudes were losing ground in the general community. The words of the Minister of Justice at the time, Ralph Hanan, are particularly apt for this study:

The concept of divorce as a remedy for breakdown of marriage rather than for an often arbitrarily assigned offence by one party is far more in accordance with common sense (quoted in Phillips, 1981, p.46).

'Common sense' – assumptions held by most individuals in a community about what is appropriate – had changed over time, and New Zealanders were coming to accept that the value of a stable and harmonious family life was not achieved by forcing couples to stay together in a condition of mutual hostility or worse.

The 1980 Family Proceedings Act was two years in preparation, and the subject of 1,200 submissions by individuals and organisations. The matter of family money for the maintenance of children and a home was and remains highly significant for the individuals involved in a divorce. With all cases now transferred to the new Family Court, associated legislation included provisions for the financial maintenance of women and children rendered vulnerable by divorce. This complemented the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB), introduced in 1973 (Families Commission, 2008). The provisions of the Act were based on the assumption that financial support for the truncated family, whether from the DPB or the non-resident parent, would be temporary until the children were adults (Cook, 2012). Provisions for the custody of children remain similarly contentious, and are given priority at the point of formal separation. To sum up, after the Family Proceedings Act came into force in 1981 couples were finally in a position to leave unhappy marriages, and in all cases except the most acrimonious, to cooperate with their ex-partners in care of the children and over issues of financial support.

Was this happening elsewhere? New Zealand's changes to family law look compassionate in contrast to those in the United States, which had the highest divorce rate in the world during the 1980s (Davis, 1991) despite that fact that many of their laws made divorce catastrophic for women and children because of inequities in property division: "... every year from 1969 to 1978, 100,000 more women with children fell below the poverty line" (p. 286). It would seem that the widespread changes in attitudes towards family matters in the West were extremely influential, even when the laws militated against a 'common sense' solution to the practical issues they threw up.

All through the decades when the rate of divorce had been rising, the rate of marriage had been declining. Comparisons are startling. Statistics New Zealand gives an overview:

There were 21,085 marriages registered during the December 1999 year, an increase of 950 or 4.7 percent over 1998. This is the largest annual increase in marriages recorded since 1982. Despite increases in the number of marriages in the last two years, the latest figure is still 22 percent lower than the post-war peak of 27,199 in 1971, and it is lower than the number of marriages recorded in any year between 1965 and 1991. (Statistics New Zealand, 2001, p.7)

That is not to say that young people (and older ones) had not been falling in love and setting up house together just as they always did, but fewer were solemnising their unions with what my friends and I had called 'just a bit of paper' – the solemn sacrament of marriage if you were Christian, or the legal contract of marriage if you were not. As it became more socially acceptable, rates of unmarried cohabitation rose, especially amongst the young. In the United Kingdom, Reynolds and Mansfield (1999) link this to the same forces which were driving other forms of social change: "the social pressure to confine sexual activity, domestic partnership, and childbearing within legal marriage [had] diminished dramatically, and rates of cohabitation and extramarital childbearing [had] risen accordingly" (Reynolds & Mansfield, 1999, p.12).

David Swain's vigorous critique of social policy in New Zealand (1987) discussed contemporary legislation and policies concerning "the family". After summarising the range of living arrangements within the country he concluded that

Notwithstanding its non-existence, until quite recently a variety of social policies and services have been designed on the assumption that the

conventional nuclear family is the predominant family form. It is not.  
(Swain, 1987, pp. 180 – 181)

He noted that there had been a growth in the number of de facto marriages, according to the 1981 census, with 4% to 5% of households described thus. The trend was to continue. The online 2001 article by Statistics New Zealand entitled “Marriage and Divorce in New Zealand” notes that by 1996,

... de facto unions [were] more common than marriage among younger New Zealanders. Among women aged 20 to 24 years, 62 percent of those who were in partnerships at the 1996 Census were in a de facto union. For men, the corresponding figure was 73 percent. (Statistics New Zealand, 2001, p.9)

The normalising of unmarried cohabitation was rapid (for example in the case of Marie and her daughter, above). Tables in Pool, Dharmalinam and Skeats (2007) show sharp drops in the marriage rates and sharp rises in the cohabitation rate between mid-1930s and 1970, with the differentials ranging from 20% to 50% (p.227). They conclude that “entry into unions ... was not declining, but the form they were taking was” (p.226).

Despite the size of the change from marriage to cohabitation being very significant, and being coincident with this study, for my purposes it can be considered a change in form rather than substance. Social attitudes were increasingly accepting of divorce, as they were increasingly accepting of the replacement of de jure marriage with de facto marriage, and for the same reasons, but changing attitudes to happiness and unhappiness in sexual partnerships were affecting both forms. De facto couples were separating for the same reasons as married couples, and the writers to the 1980 women’s magazine agony aunts were making the same sorts of complaint, whether formally married or not.

The mainstream churches had strong views on marriage and divorce throughout this period, but their influence was waning. Ward (n.d.) records a steady decline in church attendance, for example in 1960 approximately 20% of the population attended church weekly, but this had dropped to 13% in 1990. The 1950 Year Book reports that nearly 70% of clergy who were accredited to perform marriages were from the four main denominations (Roman Catholic, Church of England, Presbyterian and Methodist) but there were 38 named denominations, and a category called ‘other’ indicating a surprising number of small congregations of break-away churches, including the Four Square Gospel Mission, and the

Revival Fire Mission. Some, such as the Church of Te Kooti Rikirangi, were largely for Maori populations.

Given the dispersed nature of the Christian churches, and relatively low attendance even as early as 1960, we can assume that for most of the period 1950 to 1980 a relatively large proportion of the population were only marginally influenced by specific Christian beliefs about how they should conduct their romantic lives and their marriages. The Roman Catholic Church, particularly until the mid-1960s, was perhaps the most insistent, having a history of resistance to 'mixed' marriages outside its own fold (van der Krogt, 2011), but even before World War Two, "between one quarter and one half of the weddings celebrated in Catholic churches were mixed " (van der Krogt, 2011, p.152). It also had an absolute ban on both contraception and divorce throughout the period of this study. The significance of this seems to be that while church publications (such as the Catholic newspaper *Zealandia*, published between 1934 and 1989) gave voice to clerics from the main denominations, in practice large sections of the population were not reading them, or were attending fringe churches, or were disobeying their edicts. The momentum of the movement which saw marriage rates drop and divorce rates rise is coincident with declining church attendance. The voice of the churches which proclaimed the sanctity of marriage and deplored divorce was increasingly falling on deaf ears.

This too was part of a general liberalising trend in Western countries. In the United States, for example, although church attenders still supported:

... traditional beliefs about premarital sex ... between 1972 and 1993 support for such beliefs declined significantly among mainline Protestants and Catholics at all levels of church attendance and among conservatives who were infrequent attenders. (Petersen & Donnenwerth, 1997 p.1071)

The general loosening of prohibitions on sexual behaviour outside marriage was accompanying an increasing tolerance of the dissolutions of marriages themselves, if they were unhappy.

### The *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* (1932 - )

One source of love stories based on experience rather than fiction is agony aunt columns in women's magazines, which have a long history. In a *Guardian* article, Hughes notes that in the first edition of the first woman's magazine, produced in 1693, "... the *Ladies' Mercury*

promised to answer any questions relating to "Love etc" with 'the Zeal and Softness becoming to the Sex'" (Hughes, 2008). Advice-giving to the love-lorn undoubtedly has a longer provenance, if we can assume that actual 'aunts' in long-ago village communities were consulted when relationships ran into trouble, and today has proliferated, notably on the internet and social media (Boynton, 2009), but also, still in women's magazines.

The *Weekly* has been published without a break since 1932 and its popularity continues today, with its owner until July 2014, APN, calling it "a publishing national treasure" and giving January to June 2011 readership figures of 783,000 per week and average weekly sales over the same period of 82,040, only outsold by the New Zealand edition of the Australian magazine, *Woman's Day* (Soldon APN, 2012).<sup>27</sup> Despite hard-copy magazine sales being hit by changing technologies and high internet use, sales of the *Weekly* remain strong, particularly among New Zealand women over 30.<sup>28</sup> I could not find any breakdown of its readership based on ethnicity, but although both the 1950 and 1980 editions included features on influential Maori women such as Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, the main target audience appears to be middle-income European New Zealand families, wives and mothers in particular. From this group come the heroines of its fiction in 1950, and the subjects of its features in 1980. The magazine's long history and on-going popularity make it an interesting source of material on how its producers represented a range of matters over the last 80 years, particularly those such as divorce which have an impact on the daily lives of New Zealand women.

It has never been aimed at an intellectual elite, which perhaps explains its characterisation in the following extract from the 'Library Notes' in a 1952 Epsom Girls Grammar School (EGGS) publication:

The pictorial magazines are easily the most popular in the reading room and it is a sad fact that many excellent magazines are rarely opened. When the Library is extended the former magazines, requiring no concentration, will be placed at one end of the reading room and the more intellectual at the other. (quoted in *75th Jubilee book of memories Epsom Girls Grammar School, 1917 – 1992*, p.92)

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<sup>27</sup> These details have disappeared from the APN website, since the *Weekly's* July 2014 sale to the Bauer Media Group, which also owns its biggest competitor, *Woman's Day* (*New Zealand Herald*, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> The *Weekly's* circulation dropped by nearly half from 2002 to 2014, and the *Woman's Day's* by a third. Their 2014 circulations were *Weekly* 55,539, and *Woman's Day* 92,057 (ABC Audit History, 2015).

Undoubtedly, the EGGs librarian in 1952 would have included the *Weekly* among the magazines banished to the end of the reading room along with others “requiring no concentration” (and so appealing to feckless Auckland school girls).

Discourses about divorce express contemporary notions of what marriages ought to be and what might justify divorce, and the widely consumed *Weekly*, is likely to have charted those changes because of, rather than despite, its popularity. The magazine was affordable for almost everyone (in 1971 it cost 15 cents) and, at least until a major shift towards tabloid-style gossip in the 90s, was a commonplace in thousands of New Zealand households, a source of information about domestic matters, fashion, health and beauty, local events, and famous people both at home and abroad. In it the women and their families of middle New Zealand found entertainment and, crucially for this study, affirmation of the values of the community around them.

The three main histories of the magazine were all published on significant anniversaries, and are all light-hearted and nostalgic in tone.<sup>29</sup> The first is an edited collection of articles and advertisements to celebrate the magazine’s 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, 1992, and is ordered chronologically, which gives an impression of contemporary concerns. For example, an article from 2 January 1936 is entitled “Twenty Secrets of Happy Marriage” and is by ‘A Very Happy Man’. Although many of these ‘secrets’ read as sexist to our eyes, number 12 notes that “men, in particular, must remember that women have as many rights as men, and are determined to make use of those rights” (p.12). An article from 1942 is entitled “THEY ALSO FIGHT ...” and celebrates the young women working on farms as herd testers: “the spearhead of the women’s land army and pioneers in a new field which like strategic battlefields must be held at all costs” (p.32). At the beginning of the period of this study, a page is devoted to an 85-year-old woman who is building her own house (22 November, 1951, p.41). The photos show her on the roof, hammering nails into the framework and laying bricks while dressed in a battered black hat, coat, dress and stockings (p.41). I select these to show that although the predominant tone from the first three decades of the magazine is light, playful, reverential (especially of royal and vice-regal personages), and

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<sup>29</sup> ‘*The New Zealand Woman’s Weekly: The First 60 Years*, 1992, edited by Janet Blackwell; ‘*The New Zealand Woman’s Weekly 70 Years: From Pavlovas to Prime Ministers*, 2002, by Jenny Lynch and ‘*The New Zealand Woman: 80 glorious years of fashion, food and friendship from the pages of ‘the New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*’, 2012 by Bee Dawson.

focuses on handy hints around the home, there is a consistent theme in many articles which celebrates women's endurance and successes. The selections for the late 70s and 1980 are predominantly about celebrities with local connections, for example Judy Bailey, a local broadcaster, the novelist Ngaio Marsh, and Naomi James, the first woman to sail solo around the world via Cape Horn. Again, a theme is individual achievement, particularly by women, women who might potentially be role models for readers.

Jenny Lynch's *Weekly: 70 Years from Pavlovas to Prime Ministers* (2002), has a foreword by another editor, Rowan Dixon, who puts the ethos of the magazine like this: "It was the magazine that taught generations of how to cook, how to raise our families, how to sew, and how to keep house" (p.5). Divided into themes rather than chronologically, Lynch's book (2002) is in the breezy, colloquial style of the magazine itself, but includes sections reflective of the changing roles of New Zealand women in the middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Early chapters entitled "Earning Money and Raising Eyebrows" (pp.36 – 51) and "What Did You do in World War II, Mum?" (pp. 52 – 67) look at representations of women as workers and as domestic contributors to WWII effort, producing meals and clothes in times of shortage and deprivation. In "The Deadly Sins of Love and Marriage" (pp. 138 – 149), Lynch looks at the *Weekly's* depiction of successful and unsuccessful marriages, using royalty and other celebrities as exemplars. Most of each page is taken up with extracts from the magazines, and the text puts them in context. For example she attributes the increase in the divorce rate in part to financial support available through the Domestic Purposes Benefit (1973) and sums up earlier attitudes by paraphrasing the first long-standing editor, Hedda Dyson's view.

In 1948 the Editress was in no doubt: the ideal union was a partnership based on equality and common interests. She also claimed that women who devoted their lives to bringing up a family ought to have a degree of economic independence and that both men and women should forget the notion that procreation is the principal marital purpose. It would pay to be more open-minded about sexual taboos, she said, and proper sex education ought to be available to all. (Lynch, 2002, p.146)

These opinions sound relatively modern to our ears, and very unlike the confining back-to-the-home rhetoric later attributed to women's magazines of the time and pilloried by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), discussed in Chapter 2.



Bee Dawson's beautifully produced 2012 overview of the history of the magazine similarly takes themes as its principle of organisation, including Chapter 3 "Family Matters: the Husband and the Babies" and especially Chapter 4 "What Should I Do? Etiquette and the Agony Aunts". A brief introduction giving an overview of the theme is followed by a range of interesting and often amusing clippings. Dawson's introduction to Chapter 4 outlines the kinds of issues which readers' letters covered:

At the end of the war some women were reunited with husbands who were virtual strangers, often crippled in mind or body. Matters were exacerbated by an acute shortage of housing and jobs and many men drank away what little money there was. The subsequent decades have seen letters about unfaithful husbands, tricky mothers-in-law, badly behaved children ... Lou [Lockheart] and successors such as Mary Miller [and] Karen Kay ... had answers for everything [and continued] to dispense the wisdom that readers have relied on for the past 80 years. (Dawson, 2012, p.76)

The *Weekly* had a single editor from 1952 to 1984. Jean Wishart had been a staff writer, and took the magazine to its highest circulation of a quarter of a million copies in 1982 (Lynch, 2002); her influence was therefore paramount over the whole period of this study. She is cited as saying of covers: "I think if something interested me it will probably interest others" (Kitchen, 2007), and the influence of reader responses on editorial decisions is clear from both Lynch (2002) and Kitchen (2007). As a commercial product, the magazine was, of course, necessarily sensitive to the tastes of its readership although it had little serious competition until the Australian magazines *New Idea* and *Woman's Day* entered the market (Kitchen, 2007), which was still in the future in 1980. The *Weekly* dominated the women's magazine market in New Zealand over the period 1950 to 1980 with a circulation of 100,000 in the 1950s, and a peak of 250,000 in the early 1980s. Despite its origins in the very different world of the 1930s, and its various transformations under different editors, its core readership of middle and lower income adult women has remained constant.

In 1950s New Zealand, the majority of troops had returned from postings overseas, they were marrying in great numbers, divorce was rare and still discouraged, and the 'baby boom' was in full swing. Labour Government policies since the mid-1930s were soon to make quality housing within the reach of most, there was close to full employment and increasing prosperity. These conditions were particularly conducive to the successful rearing of families, and they render 1950 a suitable point to begin this study. An

appropriate end point was also obvious. In 1980, the Family Proceedings Act allowed for the first time the 'no fault' divorce. From then onwards, divorcing couples did not need to apportion blame in order to convince a court that they should part: two years of living separately and the consent of both parties was enough. By implication, divorce became an option, instead of an extreme solution to an extreme situation. It was becoming increasingly normalised. This significant re-framing of the basis of divorce law makes 1980 an appropriate end-point for this investigation of changes in social attitudes towards divorce.

Nevertheless, the divorce law change was a relatively minor factor in the tide of changes in beliefs about family matters which occurred over the 60s and 70s. Prominent among these were rapid changes in attitudes towards what was then called 'extra-marital' sex (to be discussed further in Chapter 7), a term which itself expresses the norm that sex should only occur within marriage. Widespread acceptance among mostly younger women of the ideals of the second wave of feminism, and the liberalising of attitudes towards extra-marital sex, decreasing church affiliations, increasing prosperity and high employment in the post-war period meant that many women were able to gain the economic independence that employment brings, and so the means to leave unhappy marriages and to take their children with them, and many men were also freed from responsibilities and to make independent choices outside of the traditional confines of married life.

## Chapter 5: The voice of common sense frames the problem

The role of the agony aunt is to give advice to readers whose letters are sent in anonymously. In the *Weekly* columns for 1950 and 1980 the aunts are also anonymous and some of the apparent dialogue is aimed at the silent observers, the ‘lurking’ readers, who are also, of course, anonymous. This triple anonymity allows for some freedom – sensitive matters may be discussed in public without any personal consequences for the agony aunt, the correspondent or the reader. This chapter examines the role of the agony aunt in both 1950 and 1980, including the kinds of advice they gave, with the aim of inferring the kinds of attitudes which all three participants, the readers, the correspondents, and the agony aunt herself, may have held, and which social norms were being emphasised and supported. It also considers the agony aunts’ expressed intentions, and examines representative letters to demonstrate how they used re-framing to provide solutions to the readers’ problems.

Typically, agony aunts responded to troubles in ways designed to provide help or sometimes reassurance, but the columns were also edited to attract the magazine’s readers. Headings in magazines and newspapers generally include enough information to give a general idea of the topic, but also include something “inherently ambiguous or puzzling” (Emmison & Smith, 2006, p.79) to entice the reader to find out more. The 1950 headings were frequently ambiguous enough to spark some interest (for example “to tell or not to tell” (2 March, 1950, p.30) but pale beside the blatant teasers in the 1980 column, often as if spoken by the correspondent themselves, for example “I don’t know how to tell my parents” and “Dad takes it out on my young sister” (17 November, 1980, p.101). Lou Lockheart’s view of her role remains implicit, but in Karen Kay’s response to “Bruce” (who wants her to “hit out at” sexually exploitative young men) she defines how she sees her role:

Through this column it is possible only to give factual information and, hopefully objective advice which may be of some immediate and practical help ... jumping up and down about the failings of society, or attacking problems at their origins is beyond my scope. (3 March, 1980, p.54)

This description could also be applied to Lou Lockheart’s general approach as both agony aunts represent themselves as providing unbiased, non-partisan advice which gives concrete plans of action for the reader to follow, and may assume this objectivity earns them

credibility. Complete objectivity, however, may be more of an aspiration than a realistic goal – as Karen Kay suggests by appending ‘hopefully’ to her claim – since we can only see a problem from where we are standing and a writer must, of necessity, have a point of view (Perloff, 2010). It is this point of view, these sets of attitudes derived from the culture in which the agony aunts were immersed, which makes the agony aunts themselves, not just the correspondents, of interest to this study. Nevertheless, objectivity appears to have been their aim and while Lou Lockheart occasionally berates her correspondents – especially young girls for lack of prudence and silly romantic notions – she is calm and factual when the situation is more serious, for example when responding to two young single, pregnant women (one in a boarding school)<sup>30</sup>. Karen Kay’s tone is even more compassionate and is less judgmental than Lou Lockheart’s – for example in an aside to “Lee”, 14 January 1980: “And – as you’ve discovered – sex, pot, booze or whatever are only temporary distractions: there’s no short answer to your problem – it needs the healing powers of time” p.38. She is, however, sometimes justifiably impatient with what could be crank letters, probably from teenagers, for example from the 14 January edition “If your letter is genuine (which I doubt) I can’t see how I can help. All you need is willpower” (p.38). Both are conscious of the ignorance of their younger correspondents, and recommend they access books, particularly about sexual matters. Karen Kay also refers them to voluntary organisations such as Pregnancy Help and Family Planning Clinics, which were not available in 1950.

It is possible to argue that the agony aunts’ commentaries and advice express Antonio Gramsci’s notion of ‘common sense’, as described in Chapter 2. To paraphrase his words, they are based on what could be termed a ‘folk philosophy’ (Gramsci, 1971) – in this case a complex of understandings and opinions about how marriages and other matters of the heart ought to be conducted that is widely accepted in a particular community. It may be “fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential” (Gramsci, 1971, p.419), and be contested, but its themes and assumptions recur in everyday interactions. One way of approaching the letters is to say each correspondent is searching for an opinion on their situation, and advice

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<sup>30</sup> In both cases, they have made a suggestion in an unpublished part of the letter, presumably about abortion, which she nevertheless responds to by reminding them that “life is sacred” (27 July 1950, p.34) and that what they suggest is “not only illegal but a coarsening and cowardly way out” (28 September, p.28).

on how to proceed, which most people in their community would approve of, and about which the agony aunt is an authority.

Psychologists such as Albert Bandura (1971) describe how we learn and acquire social information by observing and imitating those around us. We incorporate new experiences into a cognitive architecture made up from our previous experiences (Vaughan & Hogg, 2005). When we meet a married couple for the first time, for example, we will assume that they live together and are committed to one another, although neither of those assumptions may be correct. We are likely to make other assumptions based on gender, race, class, age and so on and will have latent positive or negative attitudes to 'couples like them'. Some or all of these assumptions will affect how we interact with them. In the mid-70s, Erving Goffman (1974) described this phenomenon of selective attention and applying assumptions to a situation as framing. According to Entman (1993),

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (Entman, 1993, p.52)

He summarises framing as having three functions: to diagnose, evaluate and prescribe. Agony aunts are doing precisely this: they are presented with a problem, diagnose its causes, evaluate its significance, pass judgement on it, and propose a solution that the correspondent can act on. They frame the problem, and its resolution is determined by a logical deduction from the frame. In this way, the published advice of the agony aunt becomes part of the community's wider discourse on personal matters. To sample the advice of historical agony aunts is therefore to dip into the pool of that discourse, and examine what was being said about how the correspondents perceived their relationships and marriages to be, and how they and the agony aunts thought they should be.

### 'Ask Lou Lockheart' (1950)

The 1950 agony aunt column was probably written by a single author, following the conventions of advice columns, but his or her identity was not revealed and the sketches which accompanied each column changed from week to week (see figure 1).

Image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

### **Figure 7 The many faces of 'Lou Lockheart' (1950)**

Despite the variation, there are commonalities. Whether coyly glancing up, thoughtful, dreamy, or openly frank and smiling, the woman is always approachable and pretty, with perfectly groomed hair and plenty of lipstick. The two representations at the bottom of figure 1 seem particularly young. The second to last one is a lass mooning over the photograph of her beau and the stylised final image is merely a cartoon-like suggestion, without even the conventional comic semi-realism of the others. These images, possibly by different artists, suggest, perhaps deliberately, a range of interpretations. The variety suggests they are not meant to represent Lou Lockheart herself, but perhaps a lovely friend and confidante who will take the correspondent's side, or even a pretty version of the reader herself. The casualness of this variety of images and their lack of coherence, suggest that what follows concerns matters of the heart, in particular as they concern women, rather than representing an actual woman. The graphic may be designed to attract the reader of love comics (see below), but is of minor significance, merely a deictic indicator or signpost for the accompanying letters.

In 1950, the name 'Lou Lockheart'<sup>31</sup> appears to be just as much a fabrication as the image: the first name was currently in use (an abbreviation of Louise or Louisa, so casual, informal,

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<sup>31</sup> There was no list of contributors in the 1950 editions; many of the articles had a named author, but some of the names are clearly pen-names (for example 'Paterfamilias' (12 January, 1950, p.11).

modern, approachable) and the surname carried the double meaning of actual name – so normal (although usually spelled ‘Lockhart’) – and signifying protection in matters of the heart. The agony aunt was probably a local person but she, like the correspondents, remains both invisible and anonymous. I call the author ‘she’ because that is conventional, but it is possible that ‘she’ was in fact a man. This anonymity of the actual author, who is then represented by both name and images as a potentially wise female friend or counsellor, allows ‘common sense’ generalisations about appropriate behaviour and attitudes to be expressed without consequence for the individuals involved or the reader. Arguably, it places these columns among the clearest, least equivocal sources of attitudes held in a previous historical period.

The images at the heads of the columns are similar in style to depictions of heroines in the ‘love comics’, enjoying much success at the time. The previous year, 20 to 25 per cent of comic book sales in the USA had been of these A5 newsprint, magazine-length love stories told in comic book form (Gardner, 2013). They were particularly popular with teenage girls and young wives, and covered such themes as the frustrations of postponing sex until marriage, the risks to a girl’s reputation if she didn’t (and the risk of being seen as ‘fair game’ by other men),<sup>32</sup> and the sheer boredom of being a newly-wed, expected to be happy with only housework to occupy her. “At their best, romance comics acknowledged the difficulties and fears of characters going through anxiety-provoking romantic situations even as they reiterated traditional gender roles” (Gardner, 2013, p.20). In addition, Gardner’s analysis of the comics of the period demonstrates they had a concern for the fidelity of the stories, with some titles including letters from readers commenting on the stories, including how realistic they found them. To some extent, therefore, the audience and concerns of love comics were the audience and concerns of the readers of agony aunt columns. It is possible that the images at the beginning of each Lou Lockheart column were designed to attract the attention of these readers. Although this study is concerned with marriage, and so with potentially all ages of readers, many of the letters not covered are from young

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<sup>32</sup> I heard the following story from a man who was a teenager in the early 60s. His father’s instructions about sex included the advice that there were two types of girls, good girls and bad girls, and that the problem with bad girls was that there weren’t enough of them to go around.

readers, both male and female, concerned with matters of the heart prior to marriage, including many of the themes found in love comics of the period.

Image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

**Figure 8 Cover of a love comic from the 1940s. (“Love Book” cover, accessed 13 June 2013)**

The actual author is disguised by both her name and her image, but both would have seemed familiar and unthreatening to contemporary readers. She sees herself as modern, keeping up with changing conventions, and the world as becoming increasingly informal. She is explicit about this: “Yes, your wedding dress plans are quite correct. In any case, strict convention has gone, probably for good” (23 November, 1950, p.34); “... this is an informal age when we don’t bother much with titles, and we are all Tom, Dick and Harry to each other” (7 December, p.34)). Nevertheless, for the most part, Lou Lockheart, supports the patriarchal nuclear family and traditional gender roles (“personally, I do not much care for domesticated men ... but I think a man should do heavier chores such as wood cutting, moving anything heavy, fixing fuses, and so on” (25 May, 1950, p.30), and, in describing the “informal age” where “we don’t bother much with titles” suggests an underlying unease with what she sees as a high rate of social change away from tradition and formality. All this immediately problematizes our mythical imagined ‘50s’ (Coontz, 2000). Where from a distance we may think we see stability, up close the harbingers of major social change were not going unnoticed by commentators like Lou Lockheart.

Lou Lockheart’s is a confident voice of authority: “... now, ‘Jenny’, you are drifting into a state of grievance that will become a habit if you do not shake it off at once” (7 September



1950, p.34), but not necessarily an unsympathetic one. To a woman whose husband “like many husbands, long ago became indifferent” and who is in distress over the loss of her 18 year old daughter to marriage, she says “I think 18 usually too young, but too strenuous opposition may spoil your relations with your daughter” (30 March, 1950, p.30). It assumes the right to reprimand, particularly the young: “so many young girls like you seem to flounder around like infants who fall into a pond and have not been taught to swim” (21 December, 1950, p.34), but acknowledges that emotions such as jealousy, though to be suppressed because undignified, are natural. “Personally, I always think (though we doubtless all feel jealous at times) that displaying the emotion of jealousy is narrow and ill-bred” (8 June, p. 30). There is a suggestion here, particularly in the use of “ill-bred”, of the then authoritative English ‘middle class’ accent. She is frequently blunt: “I think you had better wake up, ‘Sleepy Eyes’. He is not in love with you. He has no intention of getting a divorce ... make your motto ‘No poaching’” (23 November p.34). There is no doubt or hesitation in that firm but reasonable voice. I also find her turn of phrase at times humorous (“like infants who fall into a pond”), which may have appealed to her readers too. To sum up, her voice is that of a witty and wise mature woman, willing to talk about most subjects, but clearly judgmental about some – so someone worth consulting when a reader is unsure about what the ‘common sense’ is on sensitive matters. The main strategy she uses to provide solutions, as does Karen Kay after her, is to re-frame the presenting problem.

Lou Lockheart’s re-framing of problems (Goffman, 1974) lend themselves to relatively simple solutions. One strategy is to summarise letters rather than printing them in full – necessary at that time of paper shortages, but still a process of selection retaining some details at the expense of others. Sometimes she includes nothing at all of the letter, only her response, leaving the reader to guess at what the original letter was about. This gives her considerable control over how it will be framed. For example, a 13 July entry says simply “‘Other Woman’ – It is difficult to stand off and view ourselves objectively. You know it can happen to others. Now the affair is closed, forget it. A change away from your husband might help” (13 July, 1950, p.13). There is little detail for the reader to judge the situation for themselves, simply the message that ‘affairs’ should be ‘forgotten’ once over. If she is the voice of ‘common sense’ about married relationships then it is a voice that remains closed to debate, or to alternative ways to tell the story which might lead the reader to

different conclusions. Paraphrasing and editing are followed by more explicit framing in the agony aunt's advice. In the letter headed "Loans", Lou Lockheart advises an older man with an eye on his probable motives, re-frames his problem in terms of a romance rather than a commercial transaction, and her advice reinforces for the readers some conventional romantic themes. Here is the letter in full:

I met a widow who seemed quite well off. She had a house and wanted to buy a section next to her land to keep another cow. She half-promised to marry me but said she was afraid of being married for money. I am a builder doing quite well. To show I had no ulterior motive I contributed to the section and bought the cow. She had me working about the place, taking spare milk to the cheese factory, as she hadn't enough for them to call, and feeling like I belonged there. I was away on a job for three months. On returning I found she had sold the whole place and plans to move to a city. My work is here. She refuses to return the money as she says she will invest everything in another home and that I can share it."  
(17 August, 1950, p.34)

He calls himself "Mug", and so himself frames the situation as one where he has been taken advantage of by the widow he has been courting. Nevertheless, he is writing to the agony aunt to check whether his attribution of mercenary motives to the widow is likely to be correct. It is possible to infer that by writing the letter, he is hoping to be contradicted. Lou Lockheart obliges:

Of course, she may have had "nefarious schemes afore-thought", but again, as a woman of some means who would still be owning the lion's share of a new home, she may be testing the quality of your affection for her. If you love your local job better than you love her you are well out of marriage. It takes more than a roof over your heads (whoever owns the roof) to make marriage happy and lasting. (17 August, 1950, p.34)

By attributing different motives to the widow (that she is testing the correspondent's affection) she is diagnosing his fear as mistaken, evaluating the situation as not as serious as he had thought, and prescribing some self-reflection in which he is to consider whether he loves the widow enough to shift towns. There are other possible interpretations / frames which would be less flattering to the widow: she could have interpreted his three month absence as a cooling of his ardour, and have bought the new house without consulting him in order to force both his commitment and his compliance. Another potential frame is that the builder is attracted by the widow's relative wealth, and has his own 'nefarious' motives.

Framing this as an episode in a romance is one way of avoiding what may be fundamentally pragmatic reasons on both sides for the couple to get together, giving the situation a gloss which is more flattering than the prosaic reality. It may have been this man's hope that it would be so framed which led him to write the women's magazine, rather than consulting his friends at the pub. Lou Lockheart has picked the frame which fitted with what he probably wanted to hear. As an aside, this is another example of where the partner with most money appears to get more say in what happens – except in this case, it is the woman. It is also a rare example of where she recommends using the frame of romantic love, rather than trying to steer readers away from it. This may be to his advantage, if the widow is open to being courted in the 'Boyer' style (see Chapter 6).

The next section focusses on Lou Lockheart's advice to her correspondents. As discussed above, the advice ranges from the dismissive to the blunt, with some understanding shown in very distressing cases, and a focus on largely pragmatic, 'common sense' advice. The actual advice she gives can be grouped into two main categories: how to manage a stubborn husband, and how to retain some dignity by reminding yourself of the marriage vows.

In a number of letters, she encourages the wives to behave towards their husbands in ways that can be characterised as what used to be called 'using your feminine wiles'. To the wife whose husband is rejecting of her child from a previous relationship, she advises "... build up the child to look forward to seeing 'daddy'. Men are 90% vanity and that would go a long way to making him take to the child" (9 March, 1950, p.30). To the woman bored with her husband's devotion to reading Westerns, and reluctance to fix things around the home, she recommends various indirect strategies to change his mind, from paying a tradesman to do the jobs, to asking him questions about his work, even if she's not interested. "It takes two to make a conversation on stage or off. It looks as though you will have to act stooge pro tem" (13 April, 1950 p.30)<sup>33</sup>. To the young wife who misses her husband's courting behaviours, she repeats: "Men are vain. Without laying it on too thick, you might admire the way he carves the joint, fixed the dripping tap, a fuse and so on. You might also buy him

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<sup>33</sup> This letter, headed "Armchair Heroics", and the following one from 27 April headed "Don't Get Married", contain a number of themes, and are explored in more detail in chapters 6 and 8.

a flashy bow tie now and then and pat his pretty chin when he has had a shave” (27 April, 1950 p.30). Should they directly confront their husbands, Lou Lockheart appears to believe that women will not only lose the argument, but that they will come out of the argument having also lost their own self-respect, and perhaps his respect as well. She sees men as fallible creatures who can nevertheless be managed intelligently, and who can often be wooed into compliance with the wife’s wishes, but never argued into it. In short, she says they can be manipulated. She does not refer to it directly, but it would not be drawing too long a bow to infer that she is suggesting the wives use the giving and withholding of sex as an additional ploy.

Hawley et al (2009) describe this kind of manipulative behaviour as typical of individuals who are poorly attached, and who regard resources as more important than social esteem. That may be true, but it is also traditional advice to young women which goes back much further than Lou Lockheart. Mary Wollstonecraft, in her monograph *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), a touchstone for subsequent feminists, deplores it on her first page:

Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of a man ... (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p.9)

The issue of unequal power will be discussed further in chapter 8, so it is enough here to note that when one person has in his (or her) hands the ability to affect the financial support and standard of living of another, the less powerful person may need to resort to indirect means to get their needs met and their desires satisfied. Lou Lockheart again was being pragmatic, much as it would have grated the ears of Mary Wollstonecraft and more recent feminists. If one spouse cannot risk a direct confrontation, there are other ways to manage the more powerful spouse without them being aware of it, including manipulative flirting.

The agony aunt takes a more sober tone when she recommends another resource. In responses to five different letters she refers to the vows couples make and the contract they

sign during the marriage ceremony.<sup>34</sup> If the romance – and even the happiness – has gone out of the marriage, the wife must remember the promises she made on entering it. The 5 January letter is from a wife whose husband was ‘seeing’ a 16 year old girl, leading her to lose all trust in him, which she fears can never be recovered. Lou Lockheart reminds her “you married ‘for better or worse,’ didn’t you? You’re having a spot of ‘worse’”. She asserts that there are more serious risks to a marriage than infidelity, and exhorts her to “abide by (her) contract” (p.50). The 30 March letter is from a wife who says she does not love her husband, and only stays in the marriage because she can’t support their children on her own. To this, Lou Lockheart responds with the advice that she “respect (her) marriage vows” and “do (her) duty”. This duty is not only – and perhaps not primarily – towards her husband, but also to her community. Even to a husband<sup>35</sup> she says “You have a duty to each other and society to make marriage work, if possible” (11 May, p.30).

In this we can see the older conception of marriage, the traditional marriage which is a social contract and a convenient alliance for the sake of social stability and mutual support, asserting itself even in the middle of a magazine and a genre which espouses the idea of romantic love within marriage and from an agony aunt who describes herself as ‘modern’. If marriage is assumed to be one of the main ways that a society remains stable, then marriage breakdowns can easily be seen as a threat to the community as a whole, not just the family involved. It may be to this wider social responsibility that Lou Lockheart is referring. She seems to be saying that if your marriage is no longer happy, then you may take comfort from the fact that, by making the best of it and keeping your dignity, you are fulfilling your responsibilities to the community and presumably also to your children and wider family. It is also possible that the agony aunt herself was a practising Christian, and references to vows, and to duty, as well as her admonition to a pregnant schoolgirl that “life is sacred” (27 July, 1950, page 34), referred to above, came from her personal religious beliefs.

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<sup>34</sup> For further discussion of these vows and the 1950 column’s take on them, see Chapter 6.

<sup>35</sup> 23 / 235 or 10.2% of letters in the 52 columns from 1950 were written by men or teenage boys. This demonstrates that the magazine was read not only by women, and not only women were concerned about matters of the heart.

To sum up – if things are going badly in her marriage, and the wife has not been able to cajole her husband into cooperation, she is advised to keep a calm demeanour, remain empathetic to others, and endure the problems with dignity. She should continue to work hard and make sure her own behaviour is above reproach, even if her husband's isn't, and remind herself that she is keeping her wedding day vows. This suggests that a primary difficulty is public humiliation – if other people know her troubles, for example that her husband is serially unfaithful, then this is how she should behave to retain her dignity and self-respect. One of May's (1988) correspondents from this generation talked about the shamefulness of divorce, which Lou Lockheart seems to be referring to here. She may still suffer within the walls of her home, but at least she will not suffer the shame of humiliating public disapproval – or sympathy. This is in tune with Walker's (2000) description of the marital advice in American magazines of the same period, which also, like Lou Lockheart, emphasised that women should give up “unrealistic expectations” (p.165) of marriage.

Lou Lockheart's advice frames the problems in terms of common values held by respectable post-war New Zealand, in particular the pragmatism and stoicism which enabled hardships to be endured with dignity. Alongside this, as May (1988) describes, went a norm of secrecy. Financial hardships might be kept secret, but so also were sins and crimes occurring within the family. This 'disguising' is emblematic of that same secrecy which seems to have cloaked discussions of the kinds of personal and intra-familial matters discussed in the column, and indeed is apparent in the name and image of the agony aunt, as we have seen. Outsiders may have known what was going on within other families – no doubt hints and gossip did their usual work – but the prevailing climate of secrecy meant that getting help and support must have been very difficult. Perhaps the column provided some comfort to others suffering silently from similar betrayals and ill-treatment – it was not happening to them alone. While listening to 'secret' problems, the voice of the agony aunt reinforced the value of keeping one's dignity by doing one's duty and, by implication, not complaining to anyone else, except in the most extreme circumstances. A terrible potential consequence of this 'privacy' – that bullying within the home could thereby go unchecked and uncensored – is discussed in chapter 8.

### **‘Dear Karen Kay’ (1980)**

The agony aunt in 1980, Karen Kay, had a significantly different world to advise on. The thirty years between 1950 and 1980 had seen unprecedented changes in ideologies about marriage and the family. As discussed in Chapter 4, rates of de jure marriage dropped and of de facto marriage soared, as New Zealanders from most walks of life responded to increasing prosperity and employment, safe and reliable contraception (Pool et al, 2007), influences from British and American media, the revival of feminism in the form of the ‘women’s movement’ (Kedgeley, 1993), and the advent of the ‘sexual revolution’ alongside a vibrant youth culture (Pleck, 2012). In an environment where not only marriage, but the family itself was under scrutiny, Gramsci’s ‘common sense’ (1971) about how adults in the West should behave within marriage, or a marriage-like living arrangement, was undergoing a revolution, and the agony aunt’s role of dispensing advice was arguably more difficult because there were fewer certainties, while remaining in some fundamental ways the same.

Like Lou Lockheart, the name Karen Kay is likely to have been a pseudonym, and it is probable that the photograph at the top of each column was sourced from stock images, as there is no caption with it and both name and photograph are provided without explanation.

Image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.
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### **Figure 9 Image at the head of ‘Dear Karen Kay’ column, 1980**

Unlike “Ask Lou Lockheart”, the image remained constant through subsequent editions, and it is a photograph rather than a cartoon. The photo is tightly cropped, with the top and

sides of the hair cut out, which encourages the reader's gaze to focus on the woman's face, particularly her eyes. She is looking directly at the camera and is smiling warmly, almost intimately or flirtatiously, as if at a private joke she is sharing with the reader. Her appearance is youthful, but also ambiguous: the unassertive hair style classes her with an older, more conservative generation and she is wearing standard makeup on her lips and eyes, under carefully plucked eyebrows. Her face is unlined and her smile dimpled. She is neither up with the latest trends for young people (think Farrah Fawcett's big hair), nor forbiddingly old-fashioned. Her dark hair and dark eyes may suggest Maori or Polynesian heritage. Together, these qualities lend the image a universality or ambiguity into which the reader may read what they want to see. To an older woman or to a young girl she looks approachable, and mature enough to invite confidences and provide some wisdom in return. She is not, of course, the author of the column, although a naïve reader may assume she is, and that the name is real. 'Karen', was a common name in the generation of New Zealand women who were young in the 1970s, as 'Lou' was in the 1940s, and 'Kay' may simply have been chosen because of the alliterative 'K', or because it too was a common first name, though serving here as a surname. The impression to readers at the time may therefore have been of someone knowable or approachable, someone who was a normal New Zealand woman, not too formal, nor extraordinary in any way. Someone, in other words, whom it was safe to confide in, and who could be trusted to keep the correspondents' identities a secret. The image and the name together are likely to have helped to encourage readers to write to the magazine. In this it was successful, as Karen Kay occasionally comments on the number of letters she gets, and how there are too many to answer them individually.

Like Lou Lockheart, Karen Kay re-frames the correspondents' problems in order to provide solutions (Goffman, 1974). A letter headed from "Traveller" describes difficulties a woman is having deciding whether or not to return her family to Australia.

My husband and I recently returned to New Zealand from Australia, where we had been living for the past two years with our two children. Although we were very happy there and my husband had a really good job, I wanted to come back because my widowed mother lives here and I really missed her. Now things are not so good here, and my husband is keen to go back to Australia, where he has been offered his old job back. He is not happy



with the job he has here and is earning less and paying more tax, plus generally we are finding things more of a financial struggle.

I hesitate to leave Mum, though, as I feel she should be seeing her grandchildren at this stage. She says we should only consider our own position and should do what we think best. She is in good health and is working (she's 55) and has other family here, but I wonder if she really wants us to go. My husband gets annoyed with me, but says it's up to me to make the decision. What do you think? (29 September 1980, p.83)

The late 1970s and early 1980s were a period of high inflation in New Zealand, and many young New Zealanders responded by emigrating, attracted by Australia's better opportunities and standard of living (Walrond, 2014, p.4). "Traveller" is characterising herself as a concerned daughter, unselfishly wanting to do the best by her New Zealand mother, but with a husband who wants to return to the prosperity he has already experienced in Australia and who is "annoyed" at her resistance to the proposal. She places less importance on two factors which the agony aunt picks up on and emphasises: that her mother is not pressuring her to remain, and that she is married. Karen Kay focusses on a traditional belief – that once a woman marries, her first duty is to her husband – and interprets the mother's refusal to express an opinion as agreement with the husband:

Your mother is right, and your first loyalty lies with your husband. She sounds a sensible and independent lady. ... (Are you sure that your mother is your only concern? If you were formerly homesick, or preferred the New Zealand lifestyle, you should be honest with your husband, as making a martyr of yourself isn't a good thing). (29 September, pp 83 & 85)

Karen Kay's re-framing of the situation radically changes the narrative by attributing motives to "Traveller" which are the exact opposite to those she claimed. What she saw as unselfishness, Karen Kay terms "making a martyr of yourself" (p.85) and care for her mother's welfare has been replaced by "homesickness" or "preferring the New Zealand lifestyle". Both of these are arguably examples of selfishness rather than selflessness - "Traveller" may think she is being altruistic, but the agony aunt says it is the opposite. In addition, the portrait of "Traveller"'s mother as selflessly hiding her real desire for the family to stay has been re-drawn as a still-young grandmother, "sensible and independent" who will enjoy trips to Australia to holiday with them. In the re-framing, a solution is clear, the only way for "Traveller" to be truly unselfish is for her to do her duty, obey the

husband's wishes – which are now also attributed to the grandmother – and return to Australia. It is interesting that in both 'frames', the letter and the response, the primary role for "Traveller" is to be the selfless mother and daughter, putting others' needs and desires before her own. This suggests that the feminist rhetoric which was available at the time, and which focussed on the need for individual women to have access to the same opportunities as men, still had to compete with older more collectivist notions of a woman sacrificing her own interests for those of her family, in the view of not only her husband and mother, but also the agony aunt from whom she seeks help.

There also appears to be a power issue at the heart of this problem: the wife's first duty may be to her husband and his wishes – but he has said that she must make the decision (as he had moved the family back to New Zealand because she wanted it). Neither "Traveller" nor Karen Kay pay much attention to this, and it is not possible to know why he did so, but it does suggest a more egalitarian relationship than those we saw in 1950. He had the power of the male wage-earner, but chose to give it up so that his wife could make a choice that would make her happy – even if it did not suit him. His "getting annoyed" (p.83) may have been an indirect way of emphasising his point, though. An alternative way of framing the situation might therefore have been to congratulate "Traveller" on the equal relationship she must have with her husband, and encourage her to consider her own needs as well as those of her family. It would appear that even in 1980, in the midst of a vigorous and well-publicised revival of feminist ideas and the promotion of women's rights, both the agony aunt and the correspondent reverted to more traditional ideas about a wife's role in order to produce a solution. It was 'common sense' that her husband and her mother could act out of self-interest, but not their wife / daughter.

"Traveller"'s was not a situation which seemed to require the advice of someone more professional than Karen Kay, but in many of the responses she points the correspondents towards ostensibly more qualified advice than her own. Her advice can be divided into three broad categories: advice to consult Marriage Guidance, to leave the relationship, and, for a group of young women already separated, to give up their on-going attachment to their 'ex' and 'move on'.

As discussed in chapter 4, the relationship advice industry grew out of post-war concerns about the fragility of troubled marriages. In New Zealand, concern about the failure of 'war marriages' and, later, the results of the 1954 government Mazengarb Report – which had triggered a moral panic about youth offending and blamed it on 'broken marriages' (Pool et al, 2007) – led to the establishment of voluntary marriage counselling groups whose aim was a strengthening of nuclear families. A coordination of these groups, the Marriage Guidance Council had been established in 1949, and it trained volunteer counsellors (Penny et al, 2008). It was in its infancy in 1950, but by 1980 had developed into a nation-wide organisation with many branches. Counsellors were trained by psychotherapists and psychologists, initially based on Carl Rogers' theories of personality and communication which focussed on non-directive therapy (Penny et al, 2008). Some of its philosophy can be detected in a poster advertising its services (see figure 3, below).

Image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

**Figure 10 Poster advertising the Marriage Guidance service (Tennant, 2012, p.5)**

The poster suggests that behind the masks of a happily married couple are two worried individuals, full of doubts and fears about each other and about their marriage. The text uses the colloquialism 'to get on better', making the message appear unthreatening,

personal and concerned. The text and the image do not blame either party, but seem to be attributing their worry to a lack of skills (probably communication skills) which can be taught by “MG” – that shorthand being also accessibly colloquial. The non-judgmental, empathetic nature of Carl Rogers ‘person-centred’ therapy is reflected in the image and the text.

Karen Kay appears to have had faith in the efficacy of such counselling. In over 37% of replies to letters about troubled relationships, she refers the correspondent to the organisation itself, sometimes with contact details, or in general terms to ‘marriage guidance’. To “Shattered” she recommends:

Before you make any decisions you should see a marriage guidance counsellor. Neither your priest nor doctor had necessarily the specialized background needed to give you objective help and advice. Discussion with a trained counsellor will help you sort out your feelings and inform you of the options open to you”. (3 March, 1980, p.53)

Where Lou Lockheart’s advice was in itself seen as credible, at least by the people who wrote to her, Karen Kay could try re-framing the situation, but could also pass the responsibility on to ‘objective’, ‘trained’ experts with the ‘specialised background’ to help the couple ‘sort out their feelings’. Even traditional counsellors – priests and doctors - were no longer ‘objective’ enough.

In his book *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991), Anthony Giddens places the role of the expert at the centre of modern individuals’ “... reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives” (Giddens, 1991, p.5). In order to maintain a coherent sense of identity in a culture where we have unprecedented freedom to choose from a range of possible life-styles, and the risks attendant on that, we place our trust in expert systems, including advice on our personal lives: “the doctor, counsellor and therapist are as central to the expert systems of modernity as the scientist, technician or engineer” (Giddens, 1991, p.18). Giddens’ text was produced shortly after the end of the 80s, and demonstrates not only the widespread use of counselling services – such as Marriage Guidance in New Zealand – but also explains how that was a response to the uncertainties of the time. Certainly, when Karen Kay is uncertain how to respond to a letter, she relies on the ‘expert’ back-up she has available. In a period of what Giddens calls a “post-traditional order” (Giddens, 1991, p.20) informed advice may

itself modify beliefs about the taken-for-granted, or revise views of what is current 'common sense'.

On 28 July, "Unhappy Wife" a woman in her mid-twenties with two small children, has written a long letter expressing despair over her marriage. Her previously sociable husband now wants to stay at home, and this is "just not enough for me" (p.91).

We've talked it out and he just says that that's the way he wants it, and if I don't like it I can leave. ... I have been very unhappy for a long time and have put up with things for the sake of the children, but know I can't do this forever. I [p.92] can't see any hope for the future, and I would like to hear your opinion. (28 July, 1980, pp 91-92)

This young woman's restlessness is reminiscent of Friedan's "problem with no name" (1963), and, despite being a stay-at-home mother, she may be young enough to still feel the pull of the 'rock 'n roll' lifestyle<sup>36</sup>. Karen Kay's reply asks a series of questions which haven't been addressed in the letter, including characterising the husband's behaviour as "uncommunicative and curt" (p.92), and, interestingly, expresses uncertainty about her own ability to counsel effectively:

You have only touched the surface of your marriage problems and it would be impossible for me, though this column, to advise you adequately. I think you would be vastly helped by face-to-face counselling from a marriage guidance expert, and I suggest you take steps to get this counselling by ringing Ak. 370-025. (28 July, 1980, p.92)

Marriage Guidance does not even have to be formally named, since it dominates the counselling landscape in 1980, and the phone number alone identifies it. Confirming Giddens' (1991) characterisation of modernity in personal life, Karen Kay believes "MG" will provide 'expert' guidance which in this case is "the right sort of help" (p.92). It is possible the counsellors might ask the nature of the things "Unhappy Wife" has "put up with", and they may be more worrying than Karen Kay's description of mere "misunderstandings" (p.92) might imply – but she does not need to delve into this, since she can refer "Unhappy Wife" on to trained professionals with more authority than she has. Perhaps merely having

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<sup>36</sup> This letter and 'problem' are discussed further in chapter 8.

an 'expert' organisation to refer correspondents to makes the agony aunt less confident in her judgements than was Lou Lockheart, 30 years earlier.

A very significant further development since 1950 is the agony aunt recommending the correspondent give up on the relationship. Here is direct evidence that couples not only did separate more readily than in the past, but that they were advised to, with the blessing of no less an authority than the agony aunt. In 11 out of the 53 letters (20%) Karen Kay recommends the correspondent separate from their cohabiting partner<sup>37</sup>. This is a major difference between the 1980 and the 1950 columns. Lou Lockheart's focus was on how to make the best of a bad situation and only in the case of extreme violence ("Brutal Husband" 15 June, 1950, p.34) does she recommend separation.

Part of each column is dedicated to "Replies in Brief" in which nothing of the correspondent's letter is published, only the agony aunt's reply. The following 'reply' has been chosen because it is on the same topic as one in a 1950 column, and allows a further comparison to reveal changes in social attitudes between the two years. Both correspondents have come to their current relationship after previous sexual experience, and are concerned about their partners' reactions to this knowledge. Lou Lockheart advised "Last Thought" (2 March, 1950) against telling her husband about it at all, because "whatever your husband's past may have been, and however he may say he can call quits, there'll doubtless come a day he will 'take it out of your hide'" (2 March, 1950, p.30)<sup>38</sup>. In the 1980 case<sup>39</sup>, the woman has already told her partner - which could be an example of the contemporary ideal of 'open communication' between romantic partners (discussed in chapter 6). He did not welcome the confidence, however. He may not have assaulted her, but neither, it appears, can he let it go. Karen Kay advises "Lost in Love": "As your boyfriend is determined to hold your past against you, you would be wise to give him up as this will always cause problems between you" (24 March, 1980, p.49). A young man's

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<sup>37</sup> In five of these cases the correspondent reports physical assault (discussed in more detail in chapter 8).

<sup>38</sup> For further discussion of this letter, see chapter 8.

<sup>39</sup> "I told him and now he won't trust me" is a similar story with similar advice. In this case the boy was 19 and a virgin when they got together, and he assumed she was too as she was only 17. She at first lied about her past, and now she has been "completely open" and confessed it to him, he doesn't trust her to be faithful. Karen Kay attributes his attitudes to being "young and inexperienced" but also concedes the possibility that "he will never get used to the idea that while you were once promiscuous you are now a completely changed person" (18 August, 1980, p.66).

concern about an aspect of his partner's past is apparently enough reason to give up on the relationship altogether.

Neither agony aunt shows any disapproval of a woman having previous sexual experience before 'settling down' into a relationship. Nevertheless both are very sure that the new man will remain upset by the knowledge and allow it to damage the relationship. The so-called 'double standard', where sexual adventures are condoned in men but despised in women, has a long history, at least in the United Kingdom. Keith Thomas's engaging historical essay from 1959 predicts the feminist argument ten years later. It gives an account of the double standard's persistence since the Middle Ages at least, and its particular emphasis after the industrial revolution. He debunks the Freudian explanation (that because of the Oedipus complex, men learn not to be sexually attracted to the women they love): "Freud held many of what we would now regard as characteristically Victorian prejudices and his attitude to women embodied many of the patriarchal assumptions of his time" (Thomas, 1959, p.208). Instead he concludes that the emphasis on female chastity and tolerance of male promiscuity inherent in the double standard is grounded in the view of women as the property of their fathers and then husbands. From the eighteenth century:

Slowly there emerged two quite different standards of what constitutes propriety for either sex. And the origin of these standards can be seen quite clearly in the male desire to build a protective fence round male property - female chastity. (Thomas 1959, p.215)

Both Lou Lockheart and Karen Kay reject the double standard, but acknowledge that at least some men still adhere to it – and can't be changed. The difference between Karen Kay and Lou Lockheart is telling, however: where Lou Lockheart predicts that any man would resent it, and advises against 'open communication' (keep it to yourself, even if that is difficult), Karen Kay advises separation because this particular man 'lacks understanding' and she is predicting he will always hold it against her. In a mocking tone, Lou Lockheart assumes the husband will apply the 'double standard', implying that men can be ridiculous like that. Karen Kay's response is less of a generalisation – it is possible that some men may be unphased by their female partner having had previous lovers, but in this particular case, his 'determination' is unlikely to waver. To sum up, together these letters suggest that if the intervening sexual revolution and women's movement had encouraged women to be

sexually liberated and to experiment with different partners, in 1980 there were still some men who maintained the traditional view – that sexual experience in men is to be accepted – even admired - but in the women they might marry is to be deplored. In Thomas's terms (1959), some men still regarded their lovers' chastity as their property. This letter is an indication that in 1980 a proportion of men still held to traditional views about masculine prerogatives and the division of women into (chaste) wives, mothers and daughters and (unchaste) women of ill repute, with men having right of access to both. First it is necessary to address complementary examples, which are apparent in the next group of letters.

These letters from unhappily separated individuals are particularly poignant, and Karen Kay's advice to them tends to be less likely to defer to expert authorities, and more likely to be empathetic. Attachments sometimes endure beyond separation, and this group of eleven letters ( $11/53 = 20.75\%$  of all letters in this category) concern situations where at least one of the parties is having emotional difficulties, pining for their lost lover. Two (16 June and 11 August) are from other parties about the person who wants to reconcile, so they will be omitted because the agony aunt's advice is to them. I will focus on only five, as two from older women with unfaithful husbands (3 March and 17 March) are discussed in chapter 7. Two more are from men, one from a husband separated for a year and concerned not only that his ex-wife is living in their joint home, but that her lover is making "structural alterations" to the house. This last one too is discussed more fully in chapter 7. The other is from a man who had helped set up his mistress in a house while continuing his marriage, and is now upset that the mistress has returned to her husband (21 April, p.72). He has "sent her letters, cards and a birthday present but she has acknowledged none of these. I waited to see her one night when I knew where she was, and I was accused of spying" (p.72). This behaviour could be labelled stalking or harassment, and Karen Kay wisely advises him to "accept the situation and keep away" (p.72).

The five I will focus on are all from young women, three of whom are pining after the father of their young child. "Keep Remembering" on 8 September is perhaps the least concerning of these three. She is a 24 year old who is married, but her 6 year old was fathered by another man who then abandoned them and went to Australia. She has a 3 year old son by her husband, and has heard that the first man has returned to New Zealand. She wonders if she should renew contact but it is not just for her daughter's sake: "I think about him when



my marriage is going through a down, and wonder if I met him again these thoughts would be dispelled" (8 September, 1980, p.68). Karen Kay warns her not to romanticise the past: "in my opinion it would be extremely foolish for you to further your fantasies by contacting him". She frames the 'downs' as "the inevitable despondent patches any marriage strikes" (p.68). Nevertheless, "Keep Remembering" still has a functioning marriage, despite her keeping her feelings secret from her husband.

The two more poignant letters are also from young mothers, now coping on their own and pining for the departed fathers of their infants. "Can't Understand" (14 January) broke up from her boyfriend seven months ago, but he has recently visited them and her feelings for him were revived: "I still love him in a very strange way – I feel sometimes I never want to see him again because it upsets me so much, yet I know deep down I couldn't bear it if he never came near me" (14 January, 1980, p.38). Similarly, "Crying Eyes" (24 November), who has been separated from the father of her child for two years, still yearns for him: "I often cry myself to sleep at night, or when something sad comes on TV. I have never told anyone I still love my husband: you are the only one I can turn to" (24 November, 1980, p.93).

Both women are still young, and potentially could find other partners, but this does not necessarily solve the problem. "Can't Understand" had seen other men: she "just went from one guy to another, and I also started smoking pot, which didn't help" and "Crying Eyes" had had "a couple of boyfriends" since they separated, but this was not the solution they undoubtedly hoped it would be. In a much more liberal sexual environment, their attachment to one man stubbornly persists; despite it not being in their best interests and other men being on offer, they still love the fathers of their children. And for "Crying Eyes" her on-going attachment is something to be kept private – "you are the only one I can turn to" – and so is perhaps shameful in an environment where her peers may have ridiculed her inability to 'move on'. Both deeply attached, neither "Crying Eyes" nor "Can't Understand" can simply get over the loss of their lover and both are experiencing a type of grief – made more poignant because the beloved is still alive, and loving someone else. Both need the agony aunt to give them 'common sense' advice about how they can get over their distress.

Karen Kay is sympathetic. To "Keep Remembering" she says: "it isn't really strange to have these mixed feelings. You are talking about the father of your child, with whom you shared

a close and (I gather) fairly long-lasting relationship” but nevertheless advises her to resist her feelings and try to make a new life – including getting a job – elsewhere:

... as your differences made it impossible for you to stay together it’s unlikely you will ever get back together, even though there’s still a spark of affection on his part, and loneliness makes you hanker for the might-have-been. (14 January, 1980, p.38)

“Crying Eyes”, too is advised to keep away: “your loneliness has led you into forgetting the unhappy times that led to your marriage break-up, and you are dwelling too much on the make-believe of what-might-have-been” (24 November, 1980, p.94). The agony aunt seems to take it as read that once a couple have separated, a successful reconciliation is very unlikely because their original problems will eventually re-surface and lead to more unhappiness. Again, in an environment where it was relatively easy for a young person to shift houses and towns, get employment, and survive financially even if supporting a young child alone, the agony aunt’s advice to ‘give up and move on’ is unsurprising. If Karen Kay can be considered the mouthpiece of normative New Zealand attitudes in situations like these, there is no longer any sense that the young woman has a ‘duty’ to society, nor that the young man did anything wrong by abandoning her and their child. The relationship is disposable, and can be relatively easily replaced. Nevertheless, despite knowing this, both young mothers are left with a grief which is not so easily assuaged.

There appears to be remarkably little literature on marital reconciliation that is not related to Christian ministries or focussed primarily on the impact of separation on children. Among the exceptions is a large quantitative American study<sup>40</sup> in which Doherty et al (2011) concluded that:

... in about 45% of couples, one or both partners reported holding hopes for the marriage and a possible interest in reconciliation help. These findings were consistent across most demographic (age, education) and marital factors. (Doherty et al, 2011, p.319)

Their article attributes the reason for the professional neglect of this group to a proposition that “divorce professionals may have given up on marital reconciliation prematurely in the 1970s” (Doherty et al, 2011, p.320). Abusers, manipulators and other beneficiaries of a

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<sup>40</sup> 2,484 individuals taking required parenting classes as part of their divorce (Doherty et al, 2011)

power imbalance in the relationship are likely to be included in that group who wanted to reconcile. To have full explanatory power this study would need to have a complementary qualitative component analysing why they wanted to reconcile (and why, in some cases, their partners wanted to divorce). Nevertheless, it is interesting that the authors date the tendency to consider separation as indicating an irretrievable breakdown of the relationship to the 1970s. In advising these would-be reconcilers that looking for solutions to their loneliness and keeping their distance from their 'ex' is more likely to benefit them in the long run, Karen Kay is being the voice of 'common sense' at the time she was writing, the end of that same period.

In his essay "Men, Women and Romantic Love" (1994) Giddens notes the role romance narratives have in an era of greater sexual freedom. Citing a study of 150 American teenagers from the late 80s, he describes how girls' stories of sexual experimentation were closely associated with romance. For those girls, "romance gears sexuality into an anticipated future in which sexual encounters are seen as detours on the way to an eventual love relationship" (Giddens, 1994, p.241), but they were "anxiety-ridden" because they were involved with boys whose "male attitudes ... still carry more than an echo of the past" (p.242). Boys in the study saw losing their virginity as actually a gain, as a victory on the road to adulthood which had very little to do with their female partner, but the girls still saw losing theirs as a true loss, particularly if the relationship didn't last.

It seems likely that "Keep Remembering", "Crying Eyes" and "Can't Understand" have attached themselves to young men who did not buy into the romance narrative in nearly the same way they did, and, perhaps in their naivety, produced children into a relationship which did not last. Nevertheless, their attachment persists, and even the agony aunt is telling them something that they don't really want to hear – that 'real love' may not be forever. This is not a new problem for young women – those in the 1950 letters too were pining after 'real love'<sup>41</sup> – but the much more liberal sexual environment in 1980 has meant that the consequences are arguably more devastating.

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<sup>41</sup> To be discussed further in the next chapter.

Karen Kay does not always advise giving up, however. In response to one of the remaining letters she says there may be some point in contacting the young man and letting him know how the correspondent feels. "I Wish We Were Back" explains:

My ex-boyfriend and I broke up three months ago, a decision we both agreed on in a friendly way. The reason was that we seemed never able to spend much time together because of our different commitments. We parted the best of friends. (25 February, 1980, p.40)

But now she is missing him and wants to try again; she is uncertain about whether this is wise. In consulting Karen Kay she appears to be asking if seeking reconciliation is normal and acceptable – is it 'common sense' (Gramsci, 1971)? True to form, the agony aunt provides a normalising re-framing: "You need to think hard about this, and be completely honest with yourself. What sorts of commitments were more important than your relationship? If they were rather one-sided (on your boyfriend's part), maybe the break was the result of the way he saw his priorities" (25 February, 1980, p.40).

Karen Kay seems to be working on the belief that couples that are warmly attached will not break up because of other 'commitments' – which are presumably able to be modified. If the relationship was important, it should have taken priority. She is reading between the lines – if "I Wish We Were Back" is now regretting the breakup, she is likely to have been attached to her boyfriend all along, and the 'parting best of friends' for supposedly rational or practical reasons something she was duped into concurring with. In a climate where casual and temporary sexual liaisons were being normalised, particularly among the young, the young woman may have accepted the 'frame' (Goffman, 1974) the young man put on their relationship, over-riding her real feelings. If this is correct, she may have written to the *Weekly* seeking a more traditional viewpoint and some encouragement to return to the young man with an alternative 'frame' – that what they felt is 'real love'. This reading still does not give much hope to "I Wish We Were Back", since the young man has given no indication that he is feeling any real attachment to her. Nevertheless, Karen Kay says she can try if she wants to, although she may be risking an embarrassing rejection.

On 8 September the last of this group of rejected lovers wanting reconciliation wrote to the column under the sobriquet "Now I hear he is back with his 'ex'". She describes her strong feelings for a "really nice guy" of 22, who has twice come to her for comfort and sex when

he has had “a row” with a woman with whom he has subsequently reconciled, and whom the correspondent calls his “ex-girlfriend”. The descriptor may be optimistic, since his behaviour suggests the correspondent is being used by him only when he is at odds with his actual girlfriend. Karen Kay is kind:

I’m afraid he only came to you on the rebound, looking for sympathy and affection. He has taken advantage of your soft heart and obvious weakness for him. Maybe he [p.69] even meant some of what he said at the time he was saying it – but it’s obvious the flame in his heart burns most brightly for the girl he keeps going back to. There’s no future for you in standing around waiting to patch him up between lovers’ quarrels, and if he should turn to you again, tell him so. (8 September, 1980, pp.68-69)

Collectively, these five letters represent the pain of young women suffering an on-going attachment to men who have been their lovers, and who have then left, sometimes with their temporary concurrence. All men appear to have ‘moved on’, at least three to subsequent relationships (14 January, 8 September, 21 November). In a sexually liberal environment, these letters appear particularly plaintive – the correspondents believe in ‘real love’ and have formed attachments to men they had sex with (something very familiar to Lou Lockheart’s correspondents, 30 years earlier), but their men have felt free to ‘move on’ unfettered by the old constraints of having to marry and being expected to stick to the marriage and fulfil their duties as husbands. Of the two models of masculine behaviour, the old one of the ‘head of the house’, and the new one of the free-wheeling individual, these men appear to have adopted the new.

In contrast, just as the more traditional men previously discussed appear to have retained the 1950s attitudes towards the double standard, so these young women appear to wish for a return to the old certainties of married fidelity. Nevertheless, the agony aunt is dragging them back into the present day. Her advice seems to imply both that men are unreasonable to want to retain the double standard and other masculine prerogatives, and that women are unreasonable to long for the security of a husband, when the one they chose was clearly not committed. She seems to be telling them they have to leave behind traditional ideas of marriage for life, and face up to the fluidity of contemporary relationships, at least until they meet a man who is similarly committed to a long-term future together.

“Am I getting too serious?” (29 September, 1980, p.85)

A final letter rounds out the picture of young women torn between the old certainties of romance and marriage, and the new, more libertine environment, and an agony aunt trying to give them ‘objective advice’. “Tear Drops” (29 September) is an 18 year old who has been cohabiting with her boyfriend for a year– something that wouldn’t have been financially possible in 1950 (nor really in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) because of the high cost of living and the low wages such young and unqualified people could earn. The couple are living adult lives when still not out of their teens, nevertheless their relative immaturity is something the agony aunt is very aware of.

“Tear Drops”’s is not a trivial problem. She is suffering the recriminations of a jealous, dominating partner who has assaulted her. She is uncertain how to think about this:

Sometimes I don’t understand my own feelings, and cry myself to sleep. Is this natural in girls? Am I getting too serious about him? I don’t feel that I expect too much from him, but I can’t understand why he sometimes gets so nasty and spiteful towards me. We are quite mature young adults. (29 September, 1980, p.85)

In this period of flux, where the old certainties such as no sex before marriage and marrying young or living with parents have been relegated to the past, along with the protections they might have afforded, and anything seems acceptable, is it still normal to feel upset when your partner treats you unfairly? Should you be expecting less from him than your mother expected of your father? What are the rules? “Tear Drops” may have anticipated a romance, and can’t understand why her partner is not behaving like a romantic lover. Should she be taking this relationship less ‘seriously’? Taking the relationship seriously may be a bit old-fashioned. She has begun to doubt the romantic frame, but what to put in its place? A kind of freedom that allows him to do as he pleases with her? This letter, with its implicit questions and uncertainty, its traces of traditional (stay with your man) and modern (that relationships, though sexual, should not be taken ‘too seriously’) attitudes, goes to the heart of the tensions within relationships in 1980. These young people had possibly grown up in ‘traditional’ homes, but are living through a period where new ‘common sense’ is much less certain.

Karen Kay provides some certainty, but can't answer all of these questions. She frames the situation as one where the young couple are too young to be able to handle their emotions properly but nevertheless reassures the girl that her distress itself is normal.

Mature you may be physically, but emotionally you're both babes in the woods. It's expecting a bit much for teenagers to have learnt to understand their emotional reactions and to come to terms with them, a process which takes many years for most of us. (29 September, 1980, p.85)

Then she advises them to go to Marriage Guidance. In a time of social upheaval, when youth culture and the sexual revolution have combined with good wages and cheap living to give the young unprecedented freedom, even the agony aunt can feel some relief at not having to answer all of the questions raised by "Tear Drops", and being able to pass her off to the 'real experts'.

This chapter began with a claim that the agony aunts in 1950 and 1980 had some things in common, even though Karen Kay was dealing with correspondents in a culture which had diverged in some significant ways from Lou Lockheart's world of 1950. It is clear that both strive for objectivity, and are prepared to reprimand, particularly the young, while also showing compassion where the situation requires it. Nevertheless, while Lou Lockheart seems at some points to be referring her correspondents back to more conservative, perhaps religious values (particularly in her reminders to remember their duties and vows), Karen Kay, in times where the old certainties were up for question, could only refer hers on to the trained professionals, or advise them to give up on their relationships, perhaps with a hope that their next relationship will be closer to the romantic ideal.

## Chapter 6: Romantic love

In order to understand the rise in the New Zealand divorce rate between 1950 and 1980 community attitudes to divorce need to be examined, and in order to understand those, changing attitudes to romantic love must also be understood on the assumption that it is the reason most couples set up house together in the first place, either with or without a wedding, and so may contain information about expectations of marital-like relationships. This chapter will examine ‘common sense’ understandings of romantic love in 1950 and 1980 as revealed in the agony aunt columns of the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* in order to understand whether changes in them might have contributed to the rising rate of divorce over the period.

### Three views on the ‘modern’ love relationship

Both the 1950s and the 1970s in New Zealand can be considered part of the long-term trajectory of social change which followed from European and American urbanisation and the rise in individualism from the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Holmes, 2009). As discussed in chapter 4, sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991) is including both years when he describes modern relationships as ‘pure’, by which he means not bounded by many social conditions or proscriptions, but freely entered into for the pleasure they give. We would therefore expect that discourses in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century agony aunt columns would be based on the assumptions that individuals in sexual relationships may have high expectations of them, and can freely choose to leave them to pursue some other lifestyle without community disapproval.

Layder (2009) has a more nuanced understanding of the modern love relationship, especially with its concomitant dynamics of interpersonal power:

Mutually satisfying intimacy is not a pure, continuous or relatively stable ‘state of affairs’; it involves a labile and potentially volatile set of processes. The interpersonal dynamics of power and control mean that mutually satisfying intimacy has a fluctuating, ever-emergent nature. The potential for disruption or dissatisfaction in such relationships means that they are always moving in and out of a balance of power, influence and control. (Layder, 2009, pp. 165 – 166)



Although Giddens' (1991) 'purity' of free choice suggests smooth sailing of equal relationships – even in 1950 – Layder's (2009) analysis of the dynamics of intimate relationships problematizes this and prepares us to anticipate that the reefs upon which the barque of love may founder are made up of a less lovely interest in getting our own way. Together, Giddens and Layder present us with a picture of love that is freely chosen, but vulnerable to changes in the two individuals and the couple as a unit, especially if the power dynamics tend towards disruption rather than harmony.

In contrast, psychologists Lewis et al (2000) summarise what is known about the functions of the brain with a view to understanding love and conclude that more primitive factors are at play. The same forces which render us attached to our primary care-givers as babies and children are at work when we form a romantic partnership. Where Giddens sees a perhaps bewildering array of freely available choices, Lewis et al see a tendency to unwittingly gravitate towards potentially permanent unions with partners who will replicate our childhood experiences of love, be they benign or malignant. To them, choosing a mate is not the innocent product of happy chance, but the result of unconscious and potentially darker forces unlocked by the natural lusts of youth:

A child tunes in to the emotional patterns of parents and stores them. In later life, if he spots a close match, the key slides in the psychobiological lock, the tumblers fall home, and he falls *in love* ... *In love*<sup>42</sup> twists together three high-tensile strands: a potent feeling that the other fits in a way that no one has before or will again, an irresistible desire for skin-to-skin proximity, and a delirious urge to disregard all else. (Lewis et al, 2001, p.206)

These sociologists and psychologists are therefore suggesting that 'modern' attitudes to love – and to the breakup of relationships – are likely to have been similar in 1950 and 1980, and that the social changes that happened within those 30 years were minor stages in a much longer process. Lewis et al (2001) describe a process and emotion that is hard-wired into our humanity and so has a much longer history, suggesting that there will be common patterns of attachment and desire whatever the historical period's construction of romantic love, and indeed in any culture. The following discussion will nevertheless examine 'common sense', socially constructed understandings of love in the 1950 and 1980 editions

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<sup>42</sup> Italics in the original.

of the *Weekly*, because it is those understandings which were common currency in those years, and it was deficiencies in these idealised views of love which were considered valid reasons for dissolving a union.

## Types of love

Lou Lockheart, Karen Kay, and the 87 worried letter-writers they responded to about problems in their relationships present characterisations of love as it was understood in 1950 and 1980. It is in comparing them that we can see whether attitudes towards love did indeed change over the years between. To begin with, I will consider the type of love which both sets of letters regard as superior to all others. This I will call, along with “Depressed” from 1950, ‘real love’ (30 March, 1950, p.31). First, how did the ‘real love’ of 1950 differ from the ‘real love’ of 1980, according to these columns?

### ‘Real love’ in 1950

Correspondents to the agony aunt column in 1950 had a range of views about ‘real love’. A young man is contemplating returning to his wife after a period of separation: “Lately I have been seeing my wife and feel I am in love with her. She is a strange, self-contained woman and has behaved well and agreeably”. Perhaps taking on what he perceives as a woman’s view of men, he wonders “Do you think I can trust this feeling or is it male perversity?” (11 May, 1950, p.30). Another young man says that he has “... a pretty wife and ... [I] ...love her dearly; nice baby, a comfortable home, everything all right” (7 December, 1950, p.34). A well-behaved, agreeable wife who is pretty and provides a baby and a nice home: this seems very pragmatic but has little to do with romance or passionate emotion. These two young men, at least, seem to have very modest expectations of ‘real love’.

There is evidence that the women correspondents want more. One berates herself for not loving a husband who appears irreproachable in the way the young men above describe: “... he is kindly to the children and in his manners, and the smaller ones love him” (22 June, 1950, p.34). That adds kindness (at least to children) to the list of the qualities of a good husband, but even that is not enough for this woman. Letters from other women too are full of complaints about husbands who don’t meet their standards not just as good companions but as passionate lovers. Two young wives are most interested in the latter - their letters

will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, but in the meantime a sketch of their dissatisfaction gives an indication of how husbands could fall short in the matter of 'real love'. "'Had It'" has a husband who never notices her, pays her a compliment, or says he loves her" (27 April, 1950, p. 30); "Jack's Wife" complains that Jack rarely talks to her or does repairs around the house, preferring to read Westerns. A third, "Elizabeth 2<sup>nd</sup>", explains "We get along very well and are lonely if apart. We both read and discuss many things but kisses leave me cold and we are both disappointed that love-making does not mean more to us" (4 May, 1950, p. 30). So, to sum up, a good marriage, for many of these correspondents, particularly the men, is a kind of loving companionship. It is one where both are well-behaved and agreeable, they get along well, there is kindness to children and good manners, and preferably good 'love-making'. It is a reasonable love rather than a grand passion. Nevertheless, for these wives, at least, that is not enough, and marriage is a disappointment.

A letter from "Depressed" (30 March 1950), representative of attitudes in the other letters, gives us an indication of what the idea of 'real love' might have meant to a young woman dissatisfied with her husband. "Depressed" saw herself in the unfortunate position of being married to the wrong man, having been unable to get the man she 'really' loved to marry her:

"Depressed" writes that she is very fed up with marriage ... "I'd go away but for my two lovely children. I could not work and support them both. The trouble is, my husband is good to me, protests that he loves me and was most respectful before we married. I have known real love but the other young man, though we were intimate together, never said he loved me, and though the subject of marriage came up, I knew he was not really interested. I feel that my husband deserves someone to love him and that life is not much for me, feeling as I do. Is it wrong to stay, fair to either of us? I get so depressed (30 March, 1950, pp.31-2).

While she is allowed her own voice, the young woman is describing two types of love she has experienced, although the details she provides suggest a third. Placed first is the love of the good husband, which appears to fit the pallid 1950 conception described above. He expresses affection, he is 'good to her' and presumably he is faithful. Nonetheless, it is a love which he "protests". She is not sure he means what he says. Indeed, if real love must be mutual, as she suggests, then his love must be nullified by the fact that she doesn't love

him back. Thus not only is he an inferior place-holder for the 'real' lover, he may be counterfeiting – merely acting the role of the good husband.

Erving Goffman distinguishes between fictional roles played by an actor, and the roles which we play in our everyday lives and which we often incorporate into our identities. In describing this he is bringing together his thoughts on everyday behaviour as a performance, analogous to a stage performance by an actor – “When an actor takes on an established social role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it” (Goffman, 1959, p.27) – and the schemata we have about roles (such as the role of a good husband) which construct both how we behave in that role, and how our behaviour is interpreted by our audience. Of interest to “Depressed” is the role of the ‘good husband’ which she perceives her husband to be playing. Reminiscent of Goffman, she appears to be questioning the extent to which the performance of the role indicates genuineness – whether he is sincere when he says he loves her.

The husband was also – perhaps crucially – “most respectful” before marriage, which I take to be a euphemism for ‘did not pressure me for sex’. With another euphemism (perhaps to perform the role of ‘good woman’ by obeying rules about taboo subjects), she discloses she had been “intimate” with a previous ‘real’ lover and this too puts into question the nature of the good husband’s professed love. If he didn’t pressure her during their courtship, was he really in love with her? She is equating ‘real love’ with the barely controllable sexual passion depicted in popular romantic films like David Selznick’s *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and Frank Capra’s *It Happened One Night* (1934) with their masculine, brooding heroes (in both cases played by Clark Gable) irresistibly attracted to articulate, wilful heroines (Mortimer, 2010). Janice Radway’s analysis of readers’ responses to romance fiction (1991), describes their attraction to the ideal hero who is so overwhelmed with his passion for the heroine that he forces her to have sex. “I suspect their willingness to see male force interpreted as passion is also the product of a wish to be seen as so desirable to the ‘right’ man that he will not take ‘no’ for an answer” (p.76).

“Depressed”’s previous ‘real’ lover was passionate, but would not say he loved her, and had sex with her without being interested in marriage. This is the third type of love, which she unwittingly reveals. Despite the possibility that she was simply a source of sex for the man,

this is the love “Depressed” is calling ‘real’, because passionate. Lewis et al (2000) might interpret this as a situation where the young woman had experienced loveless parenting, which she then unwittingly seeks to replicate by falling in love with an unloving partner.

Lou Lockheart is dismissive of “Depressed”’s complaints and immediately takes control by trivialising the situation, saying the young woman is merely in a temporary state of exasperation. She picks up on the delusion that the previous lover was her ‘real love’, but does not address the sexual component directly. Instead, in a light-hearted tone, she assumes “Depressed” is missing a list of other assumed pleasures: most can be categorised as either womanly arts (“hat lore”) or flirtation.

You are, like many women with “good husbands”, robbed of a woman’s most entertaining pastime – the exercise of charm and wit, of arts and crafts, house lore, and hat lore – and the triumphs when you score hard-won applause. (30 March, 1950, pp. 30-31)

She makes some assumptions: “he likes you all the time. He does not rouse your jealousy. So you are bored”, and re-frames the ‘real’ lover as a faithless Lothario: “you think of the charmer who loved and rode away – who conquered so easily that he did not have to say it with flowers, confetti and church bells”. She reminds “Depressed” of her wedding: “... you must have had some love for your husband to marry him?” and introduced the threat of other women, who might find her ‘boring’ husband more attractive than she does:

Supposing that you heard – as so many women who were sure of their husbands have eventually heard – that he is enamoured of another ... I suggest that his stock would go up (...) Competition is stimulating in any enterprise. If you go on showing your boredom you may have some to enliven things. And if you respect your marriage vows and you meanwhile do your duty, “Two lovely children” are no small compensation, surely, for the tedium of having a faithful husband, devotion, and security. (30 March, 1950, pp. 30-31)

In this way the voice of authority strikes a line through the young woman’s characterisation of ‘real love’, and reframes it as not only silly and trivial but wrong, replacing it with a view of love that borrows from another metaphor – the market place. She frames marriage as a fair transaction in which the scarce, and so valuable, commodity is a husband, the currency sex, which should be made difficult to attain prior to marriage to increase its value, but be available (assuming this is the meaning of “do your duty”) afterwards in return for food,

shelter and decent treatment. The commercial metaphor continues when the agony aunt characterises “Depressed”’s competitors as “crowds of younger, lovelier women” (30 March, 1950, pp. 30-31) who might offer him a better deal.

As discussed in chapter 4, by 1950 the post-war economies of the West were in the early stages of a boom. In New Zealand, welfare policies had provided a safety net for the poor, and for the next quarter century jobs would be plentiful and opportunities for acquiring the household luxuries (soon to be considered necessities) increased every day (Pool et al, 2007). On the same page as the ‘Ask Lou Lockheart’ column are advertisements for cosmetics: “Sharlands Lotions (which) bring you the complexion that invites Romance” (April 6, 1950, p.30) and “the new ammonium ion tooth powder that helps reduce tooth decay” (April 27, 1950, p.31). Advertisements for hats, clothing and underwear jostle with those for patent medicines and domestic appliances, including the “Parkinson Quick Recovery Gas Water Heater” which guarantees “up to 10 gallons of really hot water per hour” ( 22 June, 1950, p.34). The inspiration to employ a commercial frame to romantic relationships was ever at hand and material felicities previously available only to the wealthy were increasingly affordable for families in middle New Zealand. Lou Lockheart is implying that the way for a woman to acquire them – and so arguably be happy – was to have a “faithful husband” who could supply her both with “security” and, to make an inference from the commercial metaphor, the money to buy them. Thus a primary purpose of the magazine, to increase consumption, subtly shows itself.

The tropes of fictional romance recur in other 1950 letters, notably in the 27 April edition, when a young wife complains that her husband seems “to think a wife exists merely to put the dinner on the table”, and in the next sentence says that “the film idea of a new hairdo etc. wouldn’t work” to return him to his pre-wedding courting behaviours. Lou Lockheart picks up on the reference to films, suggesting “Had It” not expect her husband to “act Le Boyer” (a reference to the French actor Charles Boyer, type cast for his romantic and courtly bearing towards ladies) and not to keep reminding him “he is not the gay blade he used to be when he came a-courting” (p.30). The agony aunt notes resignedly to “Elizabeth 2<sup>nd</sup>” that “a spice of danger does something to the feminine heart” and diagnoses that she too is pining after a previous – more exciting – lover who nevertheless “kissed and rode away” (4 May, 1950, p.30). “Depressed” was not alone in being disappointed that she didn’t get a

Clark Gable or Charles Boyer for a husband, but both are put right by the agony aunt, who reminds them to appreciate their 'boring' husbands for the very qualities which make them boring – fidelity, reliability and an income. Another possible interpretation of these conversations is that the women themselves are disgruntled at their post-wedding transition from the role of heroine in a romantic comedy to that of housekeeper and drudge, and so blame their husbands for not maintaining the illusion that what they have is a grand romance.

Contemporary women's magazines in the United States were similarly concerned with giving advice aimed at keeping marriages together and avoiding divorce (Walker, 2000; Celello, 2009; Ehrenreich & English, 2005). Like Lou Lockheart, they focussed on telling women how to adjust their expectations if they were feeling disappointed, and how to change themselves to fit their husbands and the role. Although this sounds grossly inequitable to modern ears, there is a way in which the advice was sensible – it was pragmatic. In 1950, some measure of economic independence from her husband, which many wives had no way of acquiring, was still essential for a woman to leave her marriage and it would be another quarter century before a woman in her position could leave her husband and claim government support if he refused to maintain her and her children (Phillips, 1981). If her marriage was unhappy and she was not able to leave it, then suggestions about how she could 'adjust' to it might in some cases have been helpful. Lou Lockheart is being pragmatic in both the philosophical and the idiomatic senses when she advises that playing the role of the good wife might still produce a good outcome – a happy marriage. In the first letter, "Depressed"'s husband is playing his role, so she must play hers. She must learn not to expect courtship in return, but be grateful she still possesses the 'asset' of a reliable husband who continues to want to support her and her "two lovely children", despite the "tedium" that may involve. In this Lou Lockheart seems to be agreeing with the male correspondents that if there is a peaceful home and the husband will provide for his wife and children, that is sufficient for happiness.

The agony aunt then appears to turn from an up-to-the-minute, commercial metaphor to an appeal to ideas of marriage which are much older. As we saw in the previous chapter, a recurring piece of advice to unhappy or restless wives is to remember their marriage vows. In the 30 March column she advises "Depressed" to "... respect your marriage vows and ...

meanwhile do your duty” (pp. 30-31). In the first part of her statement, the agony aunt is referring to the promises made during the marriage ceremony. Most widely used were probably the marriage vows from the *Anglican Book of Common Prayer* (1946), in which the man was asked:

WILT thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together according to God’s law in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour and keep her, in sickness and in health and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?

After he has answered “I will”, the woman was asked:

WILT thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together according to God’s law in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love him, comfort him, honour and keep him, in sickness and in health and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?

<sup>43</sup> (1946)

She follows with: “and meanwhile do your duty” – an admonition as indeterminate as the vows themselves<sup>44</sup>. Clearly she had in mind particular obligations that went with being a wife and perhaps they were so much ‘common sense’ that she did not need to be specific. Certainly they would have included taking care of children and a house, but whether she was also implying “Depressed” should always be available for sex with her husband is less sure. Cancian (1987) dates the idea of duty in marriage back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “The Family Duty blueprint was the first solution to the problem of maintaining family bonds in an increasingly individualistic society” (p.31) however there is no talk of duty in the many articles about marriage in the *Weekly* editions of 1950. These instead referenced marriage guidance ‘experts’ such as Dr Paul Popenoe out of the United States, discussed in chapter 4. Lou Lockheart is calling on a value which was already out of date in 1950, arguably placing her at the conservative end of the spectrum of attitudes to divorce.

Other letters in the 1950 editions of the NZWW reveal further information about what might have been considered ‘real love’ at the time. The agony aunt opines: “It takes two to keep love and friendship in lively condition” (30 March, 1950, p. 30) and the secret of a

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<sup>43</sup> ‘Wilt thou obey him and serve him’ had been removed from the wife’s vow by 1946, when this edition was published.

<sup>44</sup> Other letters where Lou Lockheart admonishes correspondents to remember their marriage vows occur in these editions: 5 January; 16 March; 30 March; 11 May and 26 October.



happy marriage is clear: “In short - marry for love and stay loving! It sounds simple, doesn’t it?” (21 September, 1950, p.34). She is saying that the loving relationship is based on friendship, and requires both people to maintain it, and that loving behaviour – showing the beloved that you love them – is at the heart of happiness. She is also implying a belief shared by later studies based on social exchange theory, that love requires conscious maintenance – especially by the wife – if it is to survive (for example, Stafford & Canary, 1991).

If an important part of analysing texts is to identify the gaps – the apparently salient material which is not discussed – then married love as a strong emotion, as a paralysing attachment, as a source of exhilarating pleasure or crippling pain – is one. The correspondents discussed above are associating passionate love with men outside the marriage – husbands are a much duller breed altogether. In 1950, public discussion of powerful emotions within marriage appears to be inappropriate, even if expressed anonymously and with euphemisms, but permissible in fictional form in romantic films like *It Happened One Night* (1934), perhaps, when they depict courtship culminating in marriage. By 1980, the second set of agony aunt columns in this study, that gap has been thoroughly filled. The letters to be discussed next resonate with the pains of failing relationships, of obsessive and rejected love. What in 1950 might have been kept private, or referred to indirectly, was now able to be openly expressed.

### ‘Real love’ in 1980

This section considers conceptions of love in 1980. The assumption it is based on agrees with the correspondents and the agony aunt that love is an emotional attachment between two individuals which can be expressed – or ‘performed’, in Goffman’s terms (1959) – in correct or incorrect ways. A lover will believe in an idealised ‘real’ love to which they aspire, and describe their own experiences with reference to how they and their partner do or do not measure up to the ideal.

By 1980, letters to the agony aunt, Karen Kay, were much less restrained than in 1950 and the overall picture is of openly expressed emotional turmoil. If there were ‘common sense’ beliefs about ‘real love’, then they must be discovered by implication from what these writers see as lacking from their current relationships. In her response to one of the young

women pining after her 'ex' ("Tear Drops", see chapter 4) Karen Kay attempts to do just that:

Most people yearn secretly for some form of absolute emotional security, to know without question that they are loved beyond doubt and form the centre of their loved one's world (29 September, 1980, p. 85).

The overwhelming sexual desire in "Depressed"'s vision of 'real love' is nowhere to be seen, and neither is the pragmatic love of good companions preferred by Lou Lockheart. Instead, the emphasis is on a profound form of attachment, with strong overtones of parental love. Like Lewis et al (2000), Nordlund (2005) describes the Freudian view, that "adult romantic attachments (are) more or less (...) outgrowths of the mother-infant interaction in infancy..." and combines it with his own view that both forms of attachment are "individual outgrowths of the same functional system, stemming from the same limbic blueprint" (p.112). Certainly, this description of 'real love' by Karen Kay seems much closer to attachment theory than to ideas of either marriage as companionship or as the culmination of a grand passion. Furthermore, she says to "Worried Mind", who wonders whether to believe her husband when he says he did not father the child of his ex-girlfriend, there is one essential ingredient to 'real love': "Trust is a very important part of a loving relationship and if you can't trust your boyfriend you will never be happy with him, or he with you, as continued questioning or nagging will drive a rift between you" (1 December. 1980, p. 111).

Karen Kay was summarising what she saw as readers' opinions about this form of 'real love', and the readers' letters confirm her view. A young man called "Hopelessly Devoted" (presumably referencing the popular song "Hopelessly devoted to you" from the Randal Kleiser musical *Grease*, released two year before, in 1978) fears that he has lost the love of his fiancée:

I am 21 and engaged to the most wonderful girl, who is 19 ... My problem is that she wants to break it off as her love for me is dying. I guess I have taken her too much for granted; she has always put me first but I have been thinking only of myself. We are still seeing each other but I fear it could end any time ... Communication is a problem as I have never been much of a talker. It would break my heart to lose her. What can I do? ... Do you think she should give me another chance? (14 January, 1980, p.38)

He believes that, to be a good lover, he should have made her the primary focus of his existence, and is explicit that this is an essential part of real love: “It is only now I realize what love is and how strong my feelings for her are, and how much I need her” (p.38). In Goffman’s terms, he has performed love incorrectly by failing to make her the centre of his world, and the prospect of losing her tips him into anticipatory grief: “It would break my heart to lose her” (p. 38). He appears to be assuming that ‘real love’ should fit Karen Kay’s definition, above, and that, as a man, one of his weaknesses is that he is “never been much of a talker” (14 January, 1980, p.38).

Communication in general, particularly ‘open communication’ – meaning keeping no secrets and holding nothing back – is another factor in the conception of ‘real love’ which has appeared since 1950 (Cancian, 1987; Dominian, 1995). Celello (2009), in her study of changing marital advice, notes of the 1970s, “... increasing use of the catchword ‘communication’” (p.119). In a similar fashion, Dominian’s 1995 book sub-titled “the Definitive Guide to What Makes a Marriage Work” devotes a whole section to it, despite a 1991 study which found that ‘openness’ was not necessarily strongly associated with relationship satisfaction, particularly after marriage (Stafford & Canary, 1991). Even though ‘open communication’ could potentially trigger disharmony – especially if what is disclosed is not to the lover’s liking (for example details of previous lovers, as described in chapter 5) – it is nevertheless also presumed to be the solution to it, something “Hopelessly Devoted” has clearly learned.

Karen Kay’s response to him reveals another aspect of ‘real love’ in 1980: that once killed off, it is dead for good:

What I think isn’t likely to influence your fiancée if she really feels she doesn’t love you anymore. I can understand and sympathize with the desperation you’re going through, but you can’t coax, cajole, beg or bully a person into an emotion she’s incapable of.

You should let go ... she has simply outgrown you<sup>45</sup>... so don't make it any harder for her by making her feel guilty about something she really can't help. (14 January, pp 48-49)

Far from recommending open communication as a remedy to the relationship as "Hopelessly Devoted" expected, Karen Kay has reframed the young man's hint that he could persuade his fiancée to remain with him by talking to her (with Karen Kay's help) into an attempt to 'coax, cajole, beg or bully' her, and she says that anyway, it would not work. Indeed, Karen Kay tells him he should not "make it any harder for her by making her feel guilty about something she really can't help" (14 January, 1980, p. 49). She is asking him to have empathy for his fiancée because she might find it difficult to break off the relationship with him, which would be a particularly saintly approach.

Young men in general are at a disadvantage, perhaps, because they aren't able to perform love correctly, and, despite expressing her understanding and sympathy with him, Karen Kay is much less lenient with this male correspondent than Lou Lockheart tended to be with hers. A notable development is this agony aunt's assumption that any attempt to persuade his fiancée to change her mind would be an attempt to bully her. It appears "Hopelessly Devoted" is indeed in a hopeless situation, with his one potential remedy already stigmatised, and that 'real love' in 1980 may be something young men will have difficulty living up to.

Cancian proposed in 1987 that contemporary ideals of love emphasise qualities which are essentially feminine – such as disclosure of private information and feelings.

A study of gender roles in 1968 found that warmth, expressiveness, and talkativeness were seen as appropriate for females, and not males ... the desirable qualities for men and not women included being very independent, unemotional, and interested in sex. Thus sexuality is the only 'masculine' component in popular definitions of love. Both scholars and the general public continue to use a feminized definition of love. (Cancian, 1987, p.71)

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<sup>45</sup> Lou Lockheart's advice on this was similar. To another young man she says 5/10/50 "On the other hand she may be tired of you. If so, it is not likely you can revive interest. So accept your lesson" (5 October, 1950, p.34).

Other men are characterised similarly as inferior at performing this 1980s version of 'real love'. Apparently they are deficient when it comes to expressing and dealing with their emotions in the correct (gendered female) manner. To another woman correspondent she says: "... your husband is not unusual in his unwillingness to acknowledge that showing emotions is natural and healthy" (21 January 1980, p. 38) and another young woman she consoles with the news that "...few young men find it easy to demonstrate sentiment openly" (29 September, p.85).

As we saw in Chapter 4, the image of the emotionally inarticulate man was well-entrenched in New Zealand culture. In *A Man's Country?* (1996), Jock Phillips describes a stereotype of masculinity which was fostered during pioneering days, when men outnumbered women, so many never married, and 'mateship' and physical prowess were at a premium. It reached its apogee in the inter-war years, existing uncomfortably alongside a sentimental ideal of nuclear family life, and was still in evidence in the eighties, although rendered problematic by increasing numbers of women in the workforce and joining the vocal feminist movement, and by the increasing proportion of the population now doing white collar work in the growing cities. He describes it as "the sheer ideological hegemony of the male mythology" (p.284), and includes among its attributes a reluctance to discuss romantic relationships, except in a joking and derogatory manner to other men, and a dismissal of emotion as feminine ('wussie'), and so inferior<sup>46</sup>.

The post-war years, with their growing focus on consumerism, and movement of employment towards towns and cities, had produced a variant on approved masculinity. The successful New Zealand man changed from a bush singlet into a smart suit, and his masculine values of rationality, leadership and courage moved from the farm to the board room, but he remained in charge of the women in his orbit, his wife, his secretary, and perhaps his mistress (Andrewes, 1999). However, by 1980, even he was having his entitlement to this interpersonal power and privilege brought into question by the tide of feminist ideas which flowed ever strongly through the 1970s.

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<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, he interprets poet ARD Fairburn's notorious diatribe against women writers, 'The Woman Problem' (1967) as extreme defensiveness in a society which regarded as unmanly such high-culture pursuits as Fairburn's own – writing poetry.

Phillips' (1996) critique of New Zealand masculinity also sheds light on Karen Kay's framing of "Hopelessly Devoted"'s attempt at communication as bullying. He notes how "By the 1990s ... there was a suspicion that men brought all their emotions home, and within those sacred walls let it all hang out by abusing the people who were closest and most vulnerable" (p.274). The emergence of the women's refuge movement, which has been providing safe haven for women and children in physical danger from their menfolk since 1973 ('About Us' page on Women's Refuge website, n.d.) was part of an increasingly public exposure of physical and sexual violence within the New Zealand homes which is still evident today<sup>47</sup>, the worst of it perpetrated by husbands, boyfriends, stepfathers and fathers, including especially the recently separated. Karen Kay's readiness to ascribe bullying motives to this male correspondent can be explained by a relatively recent public sensitisation to the issue.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, there is a contradiction. The 'real love' she describes seems altogether too delicate for the rough handling of the stereotypical male, and the definition of 'real love' she gives above is so resoundingly feminised in its emphasis on love 'beyond doubt', where the lover 'forms the centre of their loved one's world', that male lovers such as "Hopelessly Devoted" were pulled between the antagonistic forces of masculine strength and silence, which defined itself in opposition to the feminine, and the 'female' domains of emotion and devotion. Indeed, the few men who wrote to the agony aunt column in a woman's magazine may have been acting outside social norms in doing so. That "Hopelessly Devoted" was trying to perform a feminised type of love makes him exceptional, perhaps.

Connell's (1987) conception of 'emphasised femininity' may also have been at work in the Karen Kay's response to "Hopelessly Devoted", in odd conjunction with her apparently feminist consciousness of what Connell calls 'hegemonic masculinity'. Connell characterises 'emphasised femininity' as "... emphasizing compliance, nurturance and empathy" (p.188) and other authors have included in the definition a responsibility for the 'emotion work' in family relationships (Fishman, 1978; Hoschchild, 1979; Langford, 1994). This work of managing the emotions of themselves and other family members by "an appreciation of

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<sup>47</sup> "All told, 30 percent of women had experienced in their lifetime one offence or more committed by a partner, compared to 21 percent of men" (Family Violence Statistics Report, 2009).

<sup>48</sup> For further discussion of domestic abuse, see chapter 8.

display rules, feeling rules, and a capacity for deep acting” (Hochschild, 1979, p.570) is done “to ensure that the relationship runs smoothly” (Langford, 1994 p.108). Karen Kay is apparently emphasising that work on the romantic relationship should be woman’s work (by expressing antagonism to “Totally Devoted”’s attempt to do some of that work himself). She is also characterising his efforts as an expression of male dominance. He is trespassing on a domain where women have the expertise (the managing of emotional relationships), and in doing so he is exerting the power that is his inheritance in a society that assumes male superiority. Her only advice to “Hopelessly Devoted” is then that he should ‘let her go’ because it’s obvious that she has ‘outgrown’ him. She seems to be sensing that behind his own picture of a lover on his knees, begging his beloved for forgiveness, is a man harassing a woman because she won’t feel as he wants her to feel.

In this letter, and its response by Karen Kay, we can detect a much heightened awareness of the culture’s ideologies around gender, coupled with a definition of ‘real love’ that is much more stringent than it appeared in 1950. ‘Real love’ must now be as devoted, unconditional and emotionally unselfish as a mother’s love for a child, and men in general are seen to be deficient in this area. Indeed, in this discourse, they are positioned as, consciously or unconsciously, utilising their advantages in a patriarchal culture, sometimes to the extent of bullying and intimidation.

If there is a second type of love encoded within the 1980 letters, it leaves only a trace – it is the love performed by the men who are being complained about by their female partners, the shadow partners who do not get a voice. We do not hear them, and can only go on reports of their behaviour. They leave the mother of their child and move in with another woman (7 January, 14 January, 11 August, 6 October, 24 November), or they are jealous and controlling (7 April; 12 May; 4 August; 30 September; 15 December). They are reluctant to commit to marriage (29 September; 6 October) or are boring stay-at-homes who don’t want to go out any more (4 February; 24 March; 28 July). Many are in their late teens and early twenties – very young – but earning enough to live independently and to support a family. The controlling and jealous ones may be trying to live more ‘traditional’ marriages like their parents, and to be taking on the responsibilities that entails, as well as the gendered male privileges. Others – both men and women – may be more seduced by youth culture, with its focus on having a good time, and postponing adult responsibilities. This group may be

wanting their partners to enjoy their youth alongside them, and so become dissatisfied when their partner wants a stable family life for her children instead. It may be drawing too long a bow to suggest a second type of love from this last group – a love which is carefree, without commitments, and focused on pleasure – but then again it may not. Nevertheless, is certainly feasible that non-monogamous, child-free sexual relationships may have been on the minds of some in an era when marriage itself was under question, and versions of ‘free love’ – as practised in some communes such as Centrepunkt in Auckland – a possible option. Whether this would fit anyone’s definition of ‘real love’, however, is open to question.

#### A fourth view: ‘mythic’ and ‘realistic’ love

As we have seen, correspondents in both years appear to believe in some form of idealised love to which they aspire, and describe their own experiences with reference to how they and their partner do or do not measure up to the ideal. “Depressed”’s ideal was passionately sexual, exciting and overwhelming, Lou Lockheart’s (and her male correspondents’) a much more tepid, cooperative companionship. “Hopelessly Devoted” and Karen Kay agree that the ideal love is one of total openness and trust, a quasi-familial bond combined with sexual intimacy, and the 1980s hedonists perhaps a love which is primarily focussed on individual pleasure. Sociologists like Ann Swidler (2001) however, see all those ideals not as universal and for all time, but as social constructions that people within a culture hold in common, and so present us with another view of the differences we see between 1950 and 1980. They see any characterisation of love as a way our cultural learning has programmed us to understand it, and leave out the possibility that there are any universal components in the attachments couples form.

Ann Swidler and her team interviewed 88 middle-class Californians about their experience of love as part of a wider analysis of how cultural understandings in general operate within a society, and how they drive behaviour. In *Talk of Love* (2001), she describes two contradictory sets of beliefs about love which the participants experience and practice. Instead of making a distinction between ‘real’ and ‘imperfect’ love as the agony aunts and correspondents do, she looks at an individual’s beliefs about their relationships and within those sees a clear contradiction. She finds her participants hold two distinct conceptions of



love, the first as it is depicted in romantic fiction (and closest, perhaps to “Depressed”’s idea of an all-consuming passion), which she calls ‘mythic love’, and the second a belief that love is a fragile relationship which needs to be worked at and maintained if it is to survive. She calls this second conception ‘realistic’ love.

Among my interviewees, those who were married used the prevalence of divorce as a cautionary lesson. Rather than assuming that they themselves would divorce, they talked about what they must do to avoid it: work on their relationships, keep growing together, or share a commitment to Christ – and, of course, “communicate”. (Swidler, 2001, p.124)

Although married, and so no longer requiring the kind of ‘heroic’ action needed to make that commitment, her correspondents nevertheless felt that the romantic attachment only existed as a result of the efforts they were making to keep it alive. She comments “... evidently people can live quite nicely with multiple, conflicting ideas about the world and with huge gaps between beliefs and experience” (Swidler, 2001, p.129).

Lou Lockheart’s pragmatic view of ‘real love’ in 1950 is as ‘realistic’, moderate and reasonable as that of Swidler’s interviewees, 50 years later. She too, thought it achievable through ‘work’, although that work required discarding ‘mythic’ romantic notions altogether. Karen Kay’s 1980 conception, which sits chronologically between the two, differs from either in its assumption that the ‘real love’ her correspondents desired (and were entitled to) was different in nature from either ‘realistic’ or ‘mythic’ love - being unconditional, completely open, and highly attached like other familial ties. It would require analysis of post-2000 texts to get a sense of where this trajectory was heading, and whether the 1980 conception was an anomaly, or later melded in with the ‘realistic’ and ‘mythic’ characterisations of ‘real love’ which occurred both before and after that period.

Karen Kay instructs ‘Hopelessly Devoted’ to give up on his project to revive love in his fiancée, but in other cases recommends what Swidler’s couples pride themselves on doing – ‘working at the relationship’. If ‘real love’, in whatever form it might take, was only achievable through working at the relationship, whose responsibility was this? Clearly, the majority of correspondents to the *Weekly* agony aunt columns were women, and assumed

that it was mostly up to them to repair or medicate any ills the relationship may have.

Referring to the post-war period, Celello (2009) notes:

... marriage experts told working wives that they remained responsible for guaranteeing marital success and that under no circumstances should they let their careers hinder this goal. (Celello, 2009, p.83)

It was considered an important part of a housewife's role as a matter of course. Just as women were primarily responsible for the health and welfare of their children, the women's magazines provided them with advice on taking care of the physical and emotional needs of their husbands (Celello, 2009).

Cancian (1987) dates this back to at least Victorian times, with its idealization of the home as a safe haven from the buffeting of public life, presided over by a domestic saint (Chapter 2), whose responsibility it was to provide a little bit of heaven. It was part of the ideology of 'separate spheres' for men and women, supposedly founded on masculine strengths in public life and suitability for the role of family guide and protector, and the feminine strengths of nurturing and maintaining emotional wellbeing within the home (Coontz, 2005). While other notions related to this ideology were to be fiercely challenged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the female role of responsibility for the family's health and wellbeing seems to have remained intact, as has their responsibility for the happiness of the marriage. "Unless you do something to make peace between you, your marriage will almost certainly grow even unhappier" Karen Kay replies to a young woman on 22 September 1980, and further on "Someone has to make the first move, or you'll remain deadlocked in your present misery" (p.83). That 'someone', clearly, was the wife.

In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it seems possible that responsibility for maintaining happy relationships may be moving away from being solely a woman's role. The rise of 'men's magazines' in the latter part of the century brought with it, among other things, relationship advice targeting men too, along with a broader definition of masculinity (Jackson et al, 2001), and educated young men now seem less sure of any masculine entitlement. However, this phenomenon had not yet occurred in 1980, the end of my analysis.

## Increased expectations

It would seem that, along with changes in the divorce rate between 1950 and 1980, did indeed come changes in 'common sense' about romantic love. Riessman (1990) describes the pervasiveness of the ideology of a companionate marriage, and how frequently it recurs in divorced interviewees' explanations about why they left their marriages. All accounted for the separation by identifying a deficit in some aspect of the companionate marriage, which she summarises as promising "emotional intimacy, primacy and companionship, and sexual fulfilment" (Riessman, p.24). As New Zealanders' expectations of what a good marriage should be like rose, so did the divorce rate. It was no longer good enough to bear up with dignity when a spouse was disloyal, cruel or indifferent – individuals had a right to more happiness than that.

Again, New Zealanders' experiences reflected changes which were happening elsewhere in the West. Stephanie Coontz's *Marriage, a History* (2005) resists the temptation to simplify an account of social change by limiting it to the relatively narrow period of the late 60s to the 80s - the period of anti-war protests, calls for racial equality, and for greater freedom for women - and correctly points out that the seeds of those changes were complex, and planted long before. Nevertheless, she does entitle her chapter on the period "The Perfect Storm: The Transformation of Marriage at the End of the Twentieth Century" (p.263), and notes of the period that "the more people hoped to achieve personal happiness within marriage, the more critical they became of 'empty' or unsatisfying relationships" (p.250).

To conclude this chapter, in 1950, Lou Lockheart's responses appear to show preference for 'real love' as companionship and mutual support within the context of clearly prescribed and conventional gender roles. She is scathing about evidence in some letters that wives are pining after a marriage that is much more passionate than that. By 1980, critiques of those gender roles and of romantic relationships in general have replaced the old binary certainties, and are spoken by a predominantly female voice which is demanding a 'real love' which is both much more equal, and much more intimate. Making do with a less than happy marriage, while maintaining your self-respect and dignity might have served when times were tough during the Depression of the 30s and World War II, but increasing prosperity and a stable post-war peace meant expectations could rise and hope revive for

something better in terms not only of material comfort, but also of personal happiness and fulfilment.

## Chapter 7: “I love him, but ...”<sup>49</sup>

If a couple begin their relationship or their marriage under the impression that what they feel for one another is ‘real love’, the exigencies of daily life and their own facets and flaws have the potential to put this into question. This chapter and the next will deal with the problems that can arise within marriages, de facto or legitimised and, in a few examples, within relationships where the couple live apart, with a view to discovering attitudes to key causes of conflict and what were considered ‘deal breakers’ – problems the community regarded as just causes for a couple to break up their relationship. A discussion of the letters about infidelity, the most frequent cause for concern in both 1950 and 1970, will be followed by an account of other relationship issues which were causing distress to the correspondents, with the exception of domestic abuse, the most serious exercise of interpersonal power, which will be dealt with separately in chapter 8.

### That “perpetual hazard” infidelity

According to Fisher (1992), most cultures and belief systems allow divorce and in some it is widely practised, with overt adultery the most commonly cited cause worldwide<sup>50</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, sexual infidelity is a recurring theme through the agony aunt columns in both 1950 and 1980. Nine of the 34 letters to Lou Lockheart concerned infidelity, and they constituted the largest number of letters on a single issue (26%). The next largest number of letters is problems with in-laws, with only four – less than half the number. To compare, nine out of the 53 letters in 1980 involved infidelity (only 17%). It is tempting to conclude that ‘adultery’ was a more significant problem in 1950, when it was more difficult both socially and financially to leave a marriage than in 1980, but the small numbers make this speculative. What is clear is that in both years, and probably today, the discovery of a secret affair challenges any illusions the ‘cuckold’ or ‘cuckoldess’, as Kipnis (1998) engagingly calls her, may have had that their marriage was a stage on which their idea of ‘real love’, as described in chapter 6, was being enacted. ‘Soul mates’ are not

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<sup>49</sup> 7 January, 1980, p.47.

<sup>50</sup> The Roman Catholic Church is among a small number of exceptions to this general tolerance of divorce.

supposed to be interested in sexual contact with anyone else, of course as Karen Kay says: “A woman in love doesn’t have a yen for another man” (8 September, 1980, p.68).

The ‘Kinsey reports’ – ground-breaking surveys of male (1948) and female (1953) sexual behaviour in the United States by Alfred Kinsey and his associates – reported that during the late 1940s and early 1950s period “approximately 33% of men and 26% of women” reported being adulterous (cited in Tsapelas et al, 2010, p.176). This is at the beginning of our period. A quarter of a century later, in 1974, Hunt reported that 41% of American men and 25% of women reported they had been sexually unfaithful to their partners (also cited in Tsepelas et al, 2011). Together these reports appear to show that American men were more likely to stray in 1980 than in 1950, but that the incidence of women being unfaithful had not risen, despite the intervening ‘sexual revolution’, when old taboos about extramarital sex were thrown into question. However, it would be drawing a rather long bow to read any such significance into this, as self-reported sexual activity is not necessarily reliable. According to Kipnis (1998) “men seem to over-report and women to under-report sexual activity” (p.293), and in their meta-analysis of many studies, Tsepelas et al (2011) themselves note an overall consistency of rates of infidelity across time and geographical distance. Of more interest to this study is the terminology. What in the early 50s was ‘adultery’ – with its overtones of religion and sin – had become by 1970s ‘infidelity’ – a word less laden with moral judgement and so reflective of the easing of proscriptions on what had earlier been more pejoratively considered ‘immoral’ behaviour. With the high percentage of letters on this topic in both 1950 and 1980, it is arguable that the problem was potentially as prevalent in New Zealand as in the United States.

In both the 1950 and the 1980 editions of the *Weekly*, there were a number of letters about sexual jealousy. Infidelity and jealousy could be discussed together in the sense that both are disorders of trust, and jealousy would be a natural response to infidelity. They do not inevitably come together, however: one partner may be having an affair which they manage to keep secret; another may be jealous without cause. In this section I have focussed on infidelity alone, as in some letters sexual jealousy is associated with an abusive relationship, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Suffice it to note that the incidence of jealousy is similar in both years (9 – 10% of letters), suggesting perhaps that the emotion was experienced similarly in both periods.

Conventional romantic beliefs assume sexual fidelity and so an affair, however brief, can undermine the very foundation of a relationship. Dominian (1995) describes how, after an infidelity is revealed:

The spouse feels shattered, betrayed, helpless, is afraid of being abandoned and is likely to become jealous. There is a general and specific loss of trust, which is hard to rebuild, and ... the sense of hurt often remains. (Dominian, 1995, pp.166-167)

Another description of the emotions of the wronged spouse by Kipnis (1998) is equally poignant: “Realizing that people are talking; that friends knew and you didn’t; that someone has been poaching in your pasture, stealing what is, by law, yours is a special kind of shame” (p.300).

The types of emotion experienced by the betrayed spouse appear not to have changed between 1950 and 1980 – in both years they have had their faith seriously undermined by a sexual liaison undertaken by their lover and they express humiliation, anger and disillusionment. The agony aunts, however, have contrasting attitudes to the situation. While Karen Kay and Lou Lockheart both advise the correspondents to overlook the breach of trust if they can, and think it is not necessarily unforgiveable, Lou Lockheart’s advice is much more direct and uncompromising. Analysis of selected letters can give a picture of both the correspondents’ emotions and the agony aunts’ responses, including a discussion of a gender factor in the letters.

A New Year letter of the 1950 columns will be analysed in detail, as representative of others about infidelity in the 1950 columns. It is from a young married woman whose husband is unfaithful. Few of her own words get through because most of her letter has been paraphrased by the agony aunt:

“Unhappy Wife” has discovered that her husband (25) has been seeing a girl (16). She is 22. “I’m wondering whether to make the break now? I could not go through all this heartbreak again. I love him and trusted him, but it can never be the same. He says I am silly, etc ...” (5 January, 1950, p.50)

Assuming, as Lou Lockheart appears to, that “seeing” means “Unhappy Wife” has proof of an affair, it is clear that she has no legal impediment to leaving her unfaithful husband: the

Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1928, which was still in force, had infidelity as its first reason for granting a divorce (*New Zealand Official Yearbook, 1950*). She does not appear to be at that point yet – she uses the past tense for “trusted”, but the present for “love” – but is very distressed by his betrayal and, despite her husband minimising her concerns as “silly”, she believes that “it can never be the same”. “It” seems to mean the romantic love she thought they shared. She may, however, be writing to get an outsider’s opinion: is it ‘silly’ or normal to be so disillusioned by his behaviour? She’s unsure whether her distress is an appropriate reaction. Impatient, Lou Lockheart cuts her off with a dismissive “etc ...”, and continues:

... you married “for better or worse,” didn’t you? You are having a spot of ‘worse’. That hardly justifies tossing everything overboard. Other things – ill-health, loss of a child, work, even sanity – have spoilt marriage for some time or forever. Yet the married will weather such and go completely berserk over the perpetual hazard of infidelity. When you show a marriage partner that you mean to abide by your contract you may be surprised to find how well the other will do the same. So more marriage and fewer childish revolts! (5 January, 1950, p.50)

Lou Lockheart appears to agree with “Unhappy Wife”’s husband, that she is being ‘silly’ to object to him having an affair. According to Celello (2009), the main advice given by marriage experts like American Paul Popenoe<sup>51</sup> to the wives of unfaithful husbands in the post-war United States was to look to themselves and what they had or had not done, to ‘drive’ him to stray. For example, they were asked if they had been willing to have sex when he wanted, or if they had failed to keep their appearance attractive. Although other articles on marriage in the *Weekly* of 1950 quoted Popenoe, this is not exactly the angle that Lou Lockheart is taking – her advice refers instead to the Church and the law. She reminds “Unhappy Wife” of the vows she made when she married in church, where she promised to bear the “worse” along with enjoying the “better”, and that she signed a “contract” at the time which was binding in law. In using terms such as “childish revolts”, “going completely berserk” and “tossing everything overboard” and herself minimising infidelity as a “perpetual hazard” she is heaping ridicule on hapless “Unhappy Wife”. This expression of

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<sup>51</sup> A dominant figure in the new post-war United States marital advice industry – for further information, see chapter 4.



emotion by the agony aunt may suggest tension around the topic<sup>52</sup>, and that she is ‘pulling “Unhappy Wife” back into line’ – enforcing ‘common sense’ on a wayward member of the community by using these sarcastic terms. This exemplifies Gramsci’s (1971) insight that ‘common sense’ is one of the ways inequities which privilege the powerful can end up being taken for granted by the less powerful. Lou Lockhart’s tone is designed to reprove and perhaps humiliate, and her message arguably makes infidelity that much easier for already privileged husbands because it scolds their wives into accepting it without complaint.

For the 1950 readers, there appear to be at least three competing voices about the meaning of infidelity within marriage: “Unhappy Wife” has an ideal of marriage that includes trust and fidelity, and is contemplating ending her marriage because these have been lost. Many Christian denominations condemn infidelity in the harshest terms, but the Roman Catholic Church at the same time disallows divorce as it claims marriage is “an indissoluble union ... that makes for the sustained happiness of husband and wife, in spite of occasional ups-and-downs” (Kavanagh, 1955, p.32). It would seem that infidelity is still no justification for dissolving the union, and is also just one of multiple potential ‘downs’ which married folk must put up with. The third voice, Lou Lockheart’s, appears to agree with Kavanagh – so she can be called not ‘modern’ as she claims, but conservative. She ridicules the young wife’s unhappiness and exhorts her to set a good example to her husband by ‘abiding by her contract’. Her scornful tone suggests an underlying disbelief in the ideal of romantic love. As in other columns (discussed in chapter 6) she is impatient with naïve correspondents swept away by the romantic ideal of married love as a grand passion. If that is the case, then in this instance Lou Lockheart’s position is located somewhere between the Roman Catholic one, and that of other self-styled ‘experts’ such as Popenoe, in making it the wife’s responsibility to deal with her husband’s infidelity and keep the marriage intact. Other letters in the 1950 editions show a similar reluctance by Lou Lockheart to consider infidelity a reason to abandon a marriage, although she does advise one young man, too

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<sup>52</sup> The husband may be a returned serviceman from WWII, one of those whose wives were instructed to be tolerant of infidelities committed when they were serving in the war (“When Your Soldier Comes Home”, Walker, 1998, pp 56-62). It is possible the general tolerance shown to these men, some of whom were traumatised, was extended to forgiving even post-war transgressions of this nature. It is also possible this is what is meant by “complexities not revealed in one letter”.

poor to marry, that “... a ‘creative sex life’ means a controlled sex life, the spiritual shaping the physical relations” (6 July, 1950, p.34).

To “Distressed”, (29 June, 1950) whose husband has been having affairs with multiple women, she warns against leaving him while he is “in a wobbly state of emotional tension”. The first sentence in her response is telling: “I’m afraid there is very little you can do” because by leaving him she might “hand him over to one of his new loves”. Indeed, she says that his having multiple lovers is a good thing – “less alarming than if he were serious”. She recommends instead that “Distressed” should tell him that she is “not going to be shared”, which I take to be a euphemism that she will no longer have sex with him herself, but that she will stay in the home so that she and the children “can be provided for”. In the meantime she is to “make the best of it” and to take up outside interests, such as jewellery-making which might earn some money, until the children are old enough to look after themselves. And waiting it out might mean he returns to fidelity: “He is older – an age for philandering – and may come to his senses quite soon if he sees you know what to do and mean to do it ... and he is almost sure to recover in a few years”. She advises that “Distressed” should hide her distress from him “so that his vanity won’t flourish in your sorrowful airs” (p.34). Her choice of “sorrowful airs” is reminiscent of the idea that we narrate our lives as a form of drama (opera, perhaps), and perform our roles in accordance with conventional ‘scripts’ (Goffman, 1959; Vaughan & Hogg, 2005), which leaves open the implication that the emotions “Distressed” is expressing are not that deeply felt, and so can be easily changed with a bit of straight talking from the agony aunt and a switch to the more optimistic major key.

The disincentives to divorce in 1950, particularly women’s financial vulnerability in traditional marriages, make this advice sadly pragmatic. In the less than perfect marriage, where the fidelity rule (from religion and the law, as well as romantic fiction and conventional notions of a loving relationship) has been broken by the husband, this wife must give up ideas of romantic love, and become her husband’s housekeeper only. Lou Lockheart’s consolation is that in this way the wife can maintain the façade of ‘real love’, hide the rupture from the children (who must be protected from “unnecessary disillusion”), and so retain her dignity in public, no matter what private humiliation she may feel. She acknowledges the woman’s distress, but advises her not to let “pride confuse the issue”, to

minimise her distress to herself, and holds out the hope that, if he doesn't see the error of his ways eventually, then she can leave when the children are older and "find a fresh life" for herself" as she is still "quite young and can do this" (5 January, 1950, p.50).

This letter and the previous one from "Unhappy Wife", appear to be from women who based their marriages on the idea of 'real love', and so were rendered miserable and disillusioned by infidelity. Despite this, and the encouragements delivered by books, films, songs and love comics they may have consumed to look on marriage as the culmination of a great romance, the bitter truth is that their community says, in the words of the agony aunt, that they must not only stay in their marriages and put up with the betrayal, but also they must keep their 'dignity' by keeping it a secret. Not all did, however, and some support was available from the communities of women also spending their youths in the suburbs raising children. In Helen May's study of post-war New Zealand women, (1992) "Brenda" describes how keeping the couple together was 'common sense' within the community as a whole, and informal strategies were used to help them:

It was for the sake of the children that we must keep married at any costs. We would take each other's children when marriages were rocky. Lots of times I would have kids stay here a week – someone whose husband was having an affair. We would let them go for a holiday. ("Brenda" quoted in May, 1992, p.103)

The *Weekly* also provided marital advice in other columns. An article in the 21 September, 1950 edition entitled "Danger Points Are Money and 'In-Laws'" is one of a series on "Marriage and Morals ..." by Ernest Jones "the most distinguished of all living psychoanalysts (sic)" (p.10)<sup>53</sup>. Its Freudian approach (sub-headings include 'Sex Confusion' and "'Soft' Men') attributes "general unhappiness" in marriage to "lack of gratification", and infidelity in men to having a wife who "wears the trousers" (p.62) since the husband is emasculated by a dominating wife. Its illustration (see figure 2 below) poses a couple<sup>54</sup> being married in front of a preacher and standing on top of a document entitled "Final Divorce Decree" reminding the reader that if marriage isn't performed correctly (with the wife being appropriately womanly, the man being manly, and the 'gratification' being

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<sup>53</sup> He was indeed very "distinguished", being Freud's main interpreter to the English-speaking world, the author of an early biography (Jones, 1953), and a long-standing colleague of Freud's.

<sup>54</sup> The bride is dressed formally but not in bridal clothes, suggesting a wedding during wartime shortages.

terrific) then the unthinkable might happen. It is therefore a warning, and an encouragement to heed the advice of what were the leading psychological experts of the day. In the same year that Lou Lockheart advises withholding sex from a straying husband, the 'professional' expert, in the form of a prestigious psychologist, suggests the answer is for the wife to always do what her husband says and to offer him more and better sex<sup>55</sup>. In both cases, it is up to the woman to save the marriage.

Image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

**Figure 11 Image from “Danger Points Are Money and ‘In-laws’” from the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*, 21 September 1950, one of a series of articles entitled “Marriage and Morals”.**

Lou Lockheart and her readers may have supported the availability of divorce. It is clear there were situations, infidelity being one of them, which were considered just causes for a woman to leave a marriage. However, it seems to have been a last resort, even when the

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<sup>55</sup> Such contradictory advice demonstrates how overly simple Friedan’s (1963) critique of women’s magazines was – magazines are written by many authors, so are not univocal, and competing positions may be expressed, even within the same edition.

husband was unfaithful, in a situation where the woman was unable to support herself and their children without access to his income, and feels she still loves him. The practical solution was to stay in the marriage as long as necessary and to act as if nothing was wrong. This advice fits with the ideology of the day, to keep matters which might be negatively judged by the community within the family, and if the community did indeed know about philandering husbands (or indeed husbands who assaulted their wives and children), they too would keep up the pretence that nothing was wrong as a way of saving the faces of the individuals involved (May, 1988).

Saving face was also the motivation behind the many so-called 'shot-gun' weddings in New Zealand (Swain, 1979); although brides throughout history have walked to the altar already pregnant with their first child it was still something to hide from the neighbours<sup>56</sup>. Deborah Cohen's account of secrets within families – and the concept of family privacy – (2013) includes Edmond Leach's famous 1967 description of the nuclear family "with its narrow privacy and tawdry secrets", and May (1992) notes that for New Zealand women "... there were many aspects of marriage that were shrouded in silence" (p.95). She includes amongst them unwanted pregnancies and criminal abortions, which she attributes to ignorance about contraception – itself another consequence of the secrecy surrounding sexual matters, even within marriage (May, 1992).

If errant husbands in 1950 were left largely free to carry on affairs with other women while keeping their families intact under a veneer of respectability, the same tolerance was not applied to the 'other' women involved. Two teenaged girls whose letters were responded to in the 7 December issue were given a ticking off that would strip paint. Their letters are not printed, only Lou Lockheart's response, but the implication is that they have both been involved in sexual liaisons with men. To "A. and B." Lou Lockheart shrills "Both of you acted in an amazingly impulsive, if not absurdly supine manner. You have not been taught to behave properly and your parents must try and mend your lives for you"(p.34), and another 16 year old in the 21 December issue, she calls "helplessly, hopelessly lacking in moral

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<sup>56</sup> Here is another personal memory which demonstrates the active nature of community moral judgments and how gossip operated in a small town. In the summer of 1968/9 I was approached in the supermarket by a matron who knew me, and knew that I had attended the wedding of my brother's friend. She asked me the date of the wedding, because she had just seen the bride obviously pregnant, or as she gloatingly phrased it "ready to pop" and she needed it to work out whether conception had occurred prior to marriage.

training, youthful gaiety, innocence, dignity, and all the attributes which protect young females of even more primitive civilisations” (p.34). The implicit racism of this comment aside, her assumption is that the three teenage girls themselves are morally reprehensible, and also their parents, whose lack of proper training has allowed the young women to behave outrageously. The responsibility of the men involved is not discussed – it is up to the girls and their parents to avoid the dangers of sexually rampant men, not for the men themselves to refrain from exploiting young girls, as it is up to the betrayed wives to cover up their husbands’ adultery when it occurs.

In such multifarious ways did ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (to be discussed in detail in the next chapter) reveal itself. Husbands in these marriages had a financial advantage over their wives as their wage was essential to the family, but they also benefited from a belief system which allowed them to abuse their wives’ trust without significant consequence to themselves. Not all men abused that trust, of course. My own parents had a relatively equal relationship, and I remember my mother’s disgust at a local farmer who ‘allowed’ his wife five dollars of pocket money a week, much less than a wage, excluding her from any benefit from the finances of the farm on which she worked. Indignation such as Mum’s would not have been unusual, and it is likely that the two ways of looking at marriage – as a tradition where men were ‘head of the household’ or as a loving partnership – were being as vigorously contested at that time in the 1960s as they would be a decade later – at least in private.

It is possible that the actual incidence of marital infidelity may not have changed much between the 1920s and the 1970s. Neville and O’Neill (1979) cite Winch (1971) whose research in the United States indicated that rates of sexual behaviour in the 1960s there remained the same as in the 1920s. However, by 1980, negative attitudes towards discussing family problems such as infidelity in public had undergone a transformation. The distress and anger felt by betrayed spouses are just as clear in the 1980 as in the 1950 letters, but the burden of the agony aunt’s advice has moved away from the maintenance of a façade of respectability. The years of prosperity in between and the liberalising tide of ideas throughout the West affected ‘common sense’ about infidelity too.

Two letters from 1980 demonstrate both the pain of betrayal, and the correspondents' desire to somehow mend their relationships. In March 1980 two long-married women wrote to the Karen Kay column asking for help dealing with unfaithful husbands. "Shattered" confided on 3 March that "after almost 30 years of a warm, happy marriage" she discovered her husband had been 'having' another woman for several years. Her anger is apparent in the details. She says he is wrong: "he says firmly (and incorrectly) that divorce is impossible ...", he was rude to the doctor who asked to see them both, and he ignored the priest they also consulted. Nevertheless, "I still love him and although we have discussed divorce I don't really want us to part". This is despite the fact that, with grown children who have left home, she doesn't see herself as financially dependent on him: "I don't have any money, but could always get a job if I had to" (p.53). And he doesn't want a separation either: his solution is that both his marriage and his affair should continue.

He insists he has the right to freedom, independence and privacy and says I will have to learn to cope or he will leave me. The other woman left her husband and family to be near my husband and my husband says she has threatened to take her own life if he doesn't give me up. (3 March, 1980, p.53)

This husband's sense that he has a 'right' to sexual freedom while married is not something that appears in the 1950 letters.

Karen Kay recommends to "Shattered" that they consult a marriage guidance counsellor. As discussed in chapter 5, she dismisses both the doctor and the priest as not having the "specialized background" necessary in such a case and suggests that a counsellor will be able to point out to her where she has gone wrong herself in a marriage where "the lack of communication ... (means) ... you were so out of tune with your husband's feelings as to be unaware he was having a passionate affair with someone else" (p.53). Clearly Karen Kay believes, as did the Freudian psychologists in the 50s<sup>57</sup>, that "Shattered" must be at least partly responsible for the situation. Nowhere does the agony aunt suggest that the husband is culpable, or query his quoted assertion that he has a "right" to continue both relationships. Nor does she point out the mendacity of mentioning his lover's suicide threat as a way of convincing his wife to accept what essentially would be a plural marriage, or the

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<sup>57</sup> For example Ernest Jones, discussed above.

cruelty of continuing with both when it makes both women so unhappy. This behaviour and his assertions of his “rights” are likely to have come from a new form of ‘common sense’ – about sex.

As we saw in chapter 4, the so-called ‘sexual revolution’ had emerged as a phenomenon in the late 50s and 60s, and been enthusiastically adopted by the economically independent young (Hawkes, 1996), but it was not restricted to the young. Despite this couple having been married as long before as 1950, the “Shattered” letter represents a husband in his 50s who has adopted its tenets in a way that suits himself. Hawkes (1996) cites Giddens in attributing increasingly liberal sexual behaviour to a social climate in which consumer-focussed media (such as women’s magazines indeed) promote freedom of choice not only in what we buy, but in the lifestyle choices we make. This and its concomitant loosening of censorship of sexual material is also noted by Sides (2006) in his study of San Francisco’s sex districts: “by the late 1970s, there were thirty-nine adult movie theaters, fourteen ‘encounter studios’ ... and dozens of peep shows and strip clubs” (p.356). New Zealand too had developed businesses based on pornography and erotic live performance. The first strip club to open was “The Pink Pussycat”, which became part of the ‘red light’ district in central Auckland from the 1960s (Yska, 2013, p.5). In the West, including New Zealand in 1980, traditional notions of marital fidelity could be framed as open to question, even out of date, and libertinism just another form of personal preference to which a person had ‘rights’, although this is likely to have been very much a minority view. Nevertheless, as Dominian (1995) points out, “even in these days when sexual liberality has emerged” (p.167) the pain felt by the betrayed partner is intense and may endure, and “Shattered” is not alone in feeling irate at what her husband has done, and what he is asking of her.

Two competing forces are here at play. On the one hand, women are being encouraged to explore their own sexuality, and pressured to have more and better sex. On the other, many women were privately uncomfortable about this, perhaps especially because the forms of female sexuality portrayed in the increasingly pornographic media were controlled by male sexual fantasies rather than women’s own experience of sex.

The availability of contraception and the relaxation of sexual mores ... did not free women to a world of sexual autonomy. The changes simply made



women more sexually available and more vulnerable to exploitation in the name of (male defined) sexual freedom. (Hawkes, 1996, p.111)

Early feminists like Germaine Greer supported women exploring their heterosexuality in an uninhibited manner, recommending that they “hold out not just for orgasm but for ecstasy” (Greer, 1970, p.44), but not all women were at ease with men’s heightened expectations. Varnham (1993) quotes one of her interviewees:

It was male fantasy run wild, everything men had always wanted. All these women available for sex and we were brainwashed into thinking we were supposed to want to have sex all the time, with no real intimacy. (Varnham, 1993, p.105)

Similarly, New Zealand artist Jacqueline Fahey recalls her youth in the 50s with nostalgia: “I could keep on playing the field so long as I could carry it off with confidence ...” but what came later with distaste:

... [but] ... the sexual revolution fucked all that up, and I don’t use that word ‘fucked’ idly. It became as if it was making unfair judgements if you didn’t do it on demand. I mean, he could say, ‘What’s wrong with you? It’s no big deal, don’t you like me? ... in the early fifties at least I had plenty of time to decide just how to dispense with my virginity. (Fahey, p.148)

Both Varnham and Fahey express the tensions between the two views for women – were they to be sexually liberated and say ‘yes’ to men’s heightened expectations, or follow their own inclinations to hold out for ‘real love’? It would seem that for “Shattered”, as for “Tear Drops” mourning her lost lover (discussed in chapter 5), their attachment to a single man means they suffer more when that man, whose desire for sex they have acceded to, does not experience the same attachment.

The ideal of romantic love had endured. Women (and some men, as we saw in chapter 6) were still reading romances, and seeing movies such as “Grease” (1978) which represented ‘real love’ as both passionate and monogamous. “Shattered” is asking the agony aunt what she can do to counter her husband’s position. “Should I force the issue by leaving home for a while, or would this just play into their hands?” Karen Kay’s response does not address the pain, nor directly answer the question, instead immediately telling her to seek help from Marriage Guidance and framing the situation as an individual choice “Shattered” has to make “... whether you can stand going on in your present situation, or not”. She warns her

not to leave the house herself, however, as this would not be to her advantage in a divorce settlement and seems to have sought legal advice as she concludes “I am told you would almost certainly be entitled to half your husband’s assets” (3 March, 1980, p.53). It would appear that the assets are still deemed to be the husband’s, but the wife can claim half, unlike in 1950 when she would have had to pursue him through the courts for anything. Pragmatism, 1980s-style, is not how to struggle on in the relationship, but how to end it well.

The second March letter is from “Capricorn” (17 March, 1980), married 15 years, whose husband had left her for another woman a year before. He has since been sexually active with further women but he “still doesn’t want me to go out with other men, or take any legal steps to end the marriage, and keeps telling me he still loves me” (p.73). He continues to “help with money ... we see each other frequently and he has stayed with me occasionally (between girlfriends and flats)” (p.73). Again, Karen Kay withholds any criticism of the husband’s behaviour or the double standard involved, instead she attributes the situation to “your ill health combined with bereavement and the pressures of coping with teenagers” which “may have made home life very trying” for him, since “your sex life at that time was non-existent” (p.74). She is not suggesting that any of this is anybody’s fault, and again seems to be tacitly accepting that repeated infidelity is not incompatible with a continuing marriage, and that it is understandable for a man to look for sex outside the marriage if there is none on offer at home.

Tsepelas et al, 2010, summarise various theoretical positions on infidelity, one being the “deficit model”. They cite Thompson (1983) and define it as:

... negatively associated with several aspects of relationship satisfaction, including the degree to which the relationship was generally satisfying, whether personal needs were being fulfilled, the degree of love felt for the primary partner, the frequency and quality of sex with the primary partner, and the length of the marriage. (Tsepelas et al, 2010, p.177)

In her response, Karen Kay seems to be calling on this model, with its focus on flaws in the existing marriage, and it is significant that Thompson’s study was just three years later, suggesting that it potentially was the view current at the time. It is consistent to some extent with the Freudian view, discussed above, in that it also suggested infidelity doesn’t

happen if the marriage is happy. Nevertheless, further models of infidelity suggest that more than a perceived 'deficit' in the relationship may be at play. Tsapelas, Fisher and Aron (2010) cite Glass and Wright (1985): "among individuals engaging in infidelity, 56% of men and 34% of women rate their marriage as 'happy' or 'very happy'" (p.184). Evolutionary theory and gene research also support the idea that there is an innate tendency towards infidelity in some individuals within a largely monogamous population (Fisher and Aron, 2010). A model from psychology suggests that patterns of attachment learned in childhood might predispose some individuals more than others to be unfaithful partners, and a further transactional model suggests that "the degree of investment in a primary partnership and perceived quality of alternatives" (Tsapelas, 2010, p.178) may also be operating. Is the husband of "Capricorn" predisposed to infidelity from his childhood, cold-bloodedly making use of his greater desirability in the sexual marketplace, or simply making up in other relationships for the lack, particularly of sex, which he experiences at home? It is impossible to tell, of course, but the 'deficit' model selected by the agony aunt is the one which is both most under the control of "Capricorn" – she can do something about it – and also the one for which she can be blamed. She is both guilty of not providing her husband with what he needed in the past, and responsible in the present for putting the situation to rights and bringing him back home.

Having framed the infidelity as a result of the husband's deprivations in the marriage, Karen Kay encourages the woman to consult the experts at Marriage Guidance. "It's possible that in spite of the other women he, too, is emotionally confused and unhappy, but unwilling to return to a life style that had become depressing and demanding" (p.74). It is apparently forgivable that a husband should leave a sick, bereaved woman in charge of a houseful of teenagers because it was "depressing", to pursue sexual interests elsewhere while intermittently returning home when in need of succour, and admirable of him to "help" with the support of his family. Despite the great liberalising movements in the 1960s and 1970s – including a resurgence of feminism – in 1980, as in 1950, the woman must take responsibility for returning the errant man to the home and he escapes not only the consequences of his behaviour, but even responsibility for it. 'Common sense' about privileged masculine behaviour like this, bolstered perhaps by the New Zealand stereotype of men as lovable larrikins who keep trying to evade feminine control (Phillips, 1996),

appears little changed from the 1950s in this response by the agony aunt. It is worth pointing out another explanation, however. Karen Kay may be simply providing “Capricorn” with actions she can take and suppressing criticism of the man’s behaviour on the basis that this is the most pragmatic way to achieve the reconciliation she appears to want. Nevertheless, readers may be left with the impression that the man ‘gets off scot free’, just as he did in 1950.

Both “Shattered” and “Capricorn” are asking the agony aunt for advice, and in both cases she refers them on to the ‘experts’ at Marriage Guidance, and expresses no judgment on what appears now to be very unconventional behaviour by their husbands. Both women were aware they had choices (unlike “Distressed” in 1950), but neither wanted to give up on her marriage, despite on-going infidelity in one case, and repeated infidelity in the other. Here we can see a view of marriage, and in particular about what constitute socially acceptable grounds for giving up on it, on which all appear to agree: the woman, her husband, and the agony aunt. Despite still being grounds for divorce, as in 1950<sup>58</sup>, infidelity was clearly still not sufficient grounds, perhaps particularly in a climate of very liberal attitudes towards sex outside marriage.

In addition, it would appear from this that unfaithful husbands were, at least in these two cases, in a position to enjoy other sexual partners with even less social opprobrium than existed in 1950. In both these letters they had the advantage of on-going access to wives who still believed in ‘real love’ and marital fidelity. Did this mean that, despite the growth of feminism, husbands in general were still in a more privileged position than their wives? The situation does appear inequitable in these two cases, and to favour the man, since all three players: the unfaithful husband, the betrayed wife, and the agony aunt, accept the man’s infidelity and assume the woman’s on-going fidelity, despite her distress.

To discover whether gender privilege was involved – a ‘common sense’ idea that it was more forgivable for husbands to stray than wives – I now turn to the opposite situation, where it is the wife who is unfaithful, and the husband writing to the agony aunt for advice. Tsepelas et al (2010) summarise research which suggests that in general women’s

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<sup>58</sup> The 1980 Family Proceedings Act (1980), which removed all grounds except mutual agreement after three years apart, did not come into force until 1981.

experience of infidelity is different from men's, and that they are more likely to be unfaithful in response to an unsatisfactory primary relationship than are men – the 'deficit' model. Women in the cited studies were also more likely to be romantically attached to their lovers than men were to theirs. Indeed, Karen Kay concurs with this view in response to another letter when she says that "a woman in love doesn't have a yen for another man" (8 September, 1980, p. 68). It might be anticipated that these factors will reveal themselves in the men's letters.

Only three letters (0.5%) of all 1980 letters were from men, compared with 10.2% of letters to Lou Lockheart)<sup>59</sup> and two of them concerned the contrasting situation of the wife's infidelity – an situation not covered in the 1950 letters. On 22 December "Harassed Husband" describes how he had left the family home after discovering his wife was having an affair. She "asked me not to divorce her because, she said, if things did not work out she would come back to me". He later discovered that her lover was spending "several nights a week in my (my emphasis) house", but nevertheless he retained hope that they would reconcile. He was only driven to apply for a divorce when he "discovered also that [the lover] had made structural alterations to the house with my wife's approval but with no consultation with me". Perhaps in response to his divorce application, his wife is now "talking of reconciliation" despite her lover continuing to sleep at the house, and "Harassed Husband" wonders whether Karen Kay regards this as "treating me with contempt" (22 December, 1980, p.46). The word "contempt" speaks to his sense that his wife has gained unjustified advantage in the situation because of his desire to reconcile and that this angers him. He is clear that she is at fault – so believes in monogamy, and by implication the romantic attachment model of marriage – and may be writing to a women's magazine because he assumes that the agony aunt and mostly women readers will sympathise with this. Receiving a sympathetic response from the agony aunt would, perhaps, give further ammunition to the arsenal of accusations he could level at his wife.

This letter appears on the surface to mirror that of "Shattered" discussed above. The betrayed spouse wants reconciliation but the unfaithful one is asking too high a price for it,

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<sup>59</sup> The discrepancy may indicate that the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* was regarded as more of a family magazine in 1950, but as largely exclusive to women in 1980.

while continuing in the new relationship. Nevertheless, there is a difference in tone and detail. The male correspondent calls himself “Harassed” – his wife is causing his distress – and the woman “Shattered” – distress is something she is experiencing, without attributing it to her husband. He calls it “my house”, although it is possible that even if his wife’s name is not on the title, she has a claim on it, and he is tipped into applying for the divorce by the lover’s interference with what he regards as his property. He sees himself as the proprietor of both house and wife. “Shattered” ends her letter with a plea to the agony aunt: “Please can you give me some advice. I’d be most grateful because I am so desperate and confused” (3 March, 19980, p.53). He ends his with “as she insists on him remaining in the house she is treating me with contempt. What do you think?” (22 December, p.46). He is wanting corroboration of his point of view, she is seeking advice – and comfort, perhaps.

Karen Kay’s immediate tone is outraged: “I think your wife wants to have it all ways, with you carrying the can”. Her assessment of the situation is to suggest that he has been extraordinarily tolerant, since “you appear to be supporting wife and family and also subsidizing the new man in her life”, and to advise him to ask a lawyer whether resumed cohabitation would jeopardise the divorce. She does say, however, that “the instinct that tells you she doesn’t really intend ending the affair is probably correct” (22 December, 1980, p.46). The agony aunt is advising the man to give up on his marriage, in contrast to her advice to the wives above to persevere in similar circumstances, and although she is critical of the wife’s exploitation of her husband’s hopes for reconciliation, she may be assuming that, if a woman has a lover, she is no longer in love with her husband – that women in general will operate under the rubric of romantic love, rather than sexual libertinism.

There is another fundamental difference between the two cases: in both, the man is supplying funds for the upkeep of the wife. Just as Lou Lockheart was outraged at “Joanna” (16 March, 1950, p.30) for suggesting her estranged husband should continue to pay her maintenance while she tried out living with another man, so Karen Kay regards it as insupportable for “Harassed Husband” to continue to fund his wife (and children) while her lover is there. Both appear to be based on the assumption that a woman should be supported by the man she is living with. If the wife of “Harassed Husband” had been living in the house with just the children and the new man living elsewhere, it is possible that Karen Kay’s advice would have been different.

Fisher (1992) identifies some of the complex ways a couple's means of support intersects with the happiness of their marriage. Particularly if they are unhappy, she concludes that, in a wide range of cultures "where men and women are not dependent on each other to survive, bad marriages can end – and often do" (p.103). In the marriages of "Shattered" and "Harassed Husband" the wife continues to require the husband's funds for her own and her children's support. It appears to be important for both parties – perhaps both men are reluctant to completely desert wives who are still ultimately dependent on them, and both wives are reluctant to give up their husbands for the same reason. It is possible that Karen Kay is encouraging "Harassed Husband" to give up on his marriage because his wife has found another man to presumably support her, and is discouraging "Shattered" from ending her marriage because she has not.

The second letter from a cuckolded husband (29 December, 1980), concerns another older couple with adult children. "Quandary"'s wife has "had previous entanglements" and for the last year has been having a secret affair with the husband of one of her friends. He wonders if he should inform the other man's wife and asks "if I decide to remain with my wife, would I be neglecting my duty if I did not inform his wife of her husband's conduct?" (p.54). The use of the word 'duty' is almost anachronistic in this context, until we remember that this marriage too was probably contracted in the 50s, when Lou Lockheart employed it in her armoury of values to counsel frivolous wives. Here he appears to be asking whether other people ('common sense') would say he should inform the other man's wife, as a matter of conscience. Unlike her response to the first cuckolded husband, Karen Kay's advice here parallels her advice to the betrayed wives, referring to the 'deficit' model of infidelity. She concludes "it seems your relationship must surely have deteriorated into something fairly meaningless if she looks elsewhere for her physical relationships and you don't appear to care too much about this" (p.54) before again recommending Marriage Guidance.

In her response to "Quandary" Karen Kay is assuming that in cases of sexual infidelity both spouses are at fault – for being too tolerant, in the case of the husbands who wrote to her, and for driving their husbands into the arms of other women, in the cases of the wives. There is no mention of a lack of sex in the men's marriages, which might have caused their wives to look elsewhere and neither of the women are criticised for being too tolerant,

indeed they are encouraged to be more tolerant. She also criticises the “Quandary’s” straying wife who “obviously places a low value on loyalties to both friends and husband”, while advising against telling her lover’s wife about the affair, as she “may not be as long-suffering as you are” (p.54). This is a criticism of the straying spouse that she avoided in her responses to the women whose husbands were unfaithful.

It appears from this analysis that there is a gendered attitude towards infidelity that is operating in the ‘common sense’ of the agony aunt’s responses. In the cases of “Capricorn” and “Shattered”, financially dependent women are criticised for failing to cater to their husbands’ needs, and so driving them into the arms of other women. The wife of “Quandary” is also criticised for betraying both her husband and her friend. Both cuckolded men are advised that they have been too tolerant with their straying wives, but the straying husbands are not criticised at all. It is clear that Karen Kay – and so perhaps many other New Zealanders at the time – thinks that infidelity is wrong, just as it was in 1950. And, just as in 1950, it appears to be the wife’s work and responsibility, not the husband’s, to make things right, in part because he supports her. “Capricorn” and “Shattered” must seek Marriage Guidance, and implicitly should have been more welcoming of their husbands into their beds<sup>60</sup>. The wife of “Quandary” has behaved so badly she deserves to be divorced, and the wife of “Harassed Husband” would have to give up either her handyman lover or her stipend from her husband to make things right. “Harassed Husband” is not referred to Marriage Guidance at all and “Quandary” is advised to consult them only “if there is any affection surviving between you, and you are both reluctant for various reasons to end your marriage” (p.54). He is, however, advised in her last sentence to “think about what’s causing this”, the first suggestion that the man may have to bear some responsibility for the state of his marriage.

Extra-marital sexual behaviour may be more open in the more liberal environment of 1980, but when it comes to actual cases, it is still the woman’s responsibility to be faithful and to keep her husband faithful by attending to his needs, and particularly so if he supports her, perhaps. The betrayed wives’ beliefs about romantic love are not questioned or addressed, as they were by Lou Lockheart in 1950, but this silence may mean not that they were

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<sup>60</sup> An old saw was told me in my youth by an older woman: “A man never leaves a warm bed for a cold one”.



unimportant, but that they were even more taken for granted and so were unchallengeable. Men may be reminded to think about their part in their wives' infidelity, but also should not be duped into continuing to support a straying wife, particularly if also indirectly subsidising her lover. Nevertheless it appears that in 1980, as in 1950, it was still the wife's responsibility to return the marriage to its proper form – faithful and loving – and so to avoid a divorce. The standards for a 'good marriage' may have been even higher in 1980 than they were in 1950, and so the justifications for divorce more numerous and ready to hand. Nevertheless it was still women's work to tend to the marriage, a task for which, despite their own reflections on how they had contributed to the breakdown, they may not be skilled enough and will need to consult the 'experts' at Marriage Guidance.

### Overview of other problems discussed

Most of the letters about relationship problems in both 1950 and 1980 express or imply on-going love for the partner, and, as we have seen, the largest group about a single issue concern infidelity. If, according to the 'deficit' model, one partner is spurred into being unfaithful because of problems in the marriage already, then a range of other differences may be significant triggering factors and also causing friction. Fisher's *Anatomy of Love: the Natural History of Monogamy, Adultery and Divorce* (1992) gives an overview of the issues which are 'deal breakers' in a range of cultures:

... there are some common circumstances under which people around the globe choose to abandon a relationship. Overt adultery heads the list. In a study of 160 societies, anthropologist Laura Betzig established that blatant philandering ... is the most commonly offered rationale for seeking to dissolve a marriage. Sterility and barrenness come next. Cruelty, particularly by the husband, ranks third among worldwide reasons for divorce. Then come an array of charges about a spouse's personality and conduct. Bad temper, jealousy, talkativeness, nagging, disrespect, laziness by the wife, non-support by the husband, sexual neglect, quarrelsomeness, absence, and running off with a lover are among the many explanations. (Fisher, 1992, p.102)

Although no letters from the 1950 or 1980 columns mention infertility, a list of other reasons for relationship problems in both years tend to reflect this description, and suggest that whatever the cultural differences or the historical period, the same kinds of issues occur between married couples and some of them are 'deal breakers' – serious enough to

justify a separation. Infidelity tops the list world-wide, as it does with these letters, and 'cruelty' will be discussed in the next chapter. Failure to fulfil what is expected of husbands ("non-support") and wives ("laziness") were included as 'faults' in the New Zealand divorce law which was in place throughout this period, but rarely feature in the letters, even those in 1950. In broad terms, New Zealanders with problems in their marriages appear more similar to those in other parts of the world than different, arguably supporting the view that some characteristics of sexual relationships are innate and universal.

One cause for disharmony which is not included in Fisher's list may be more of a problem in societies where the nuclear, rather than the extended family is the norm. It comes up more than once in both years, but is much more frequent in 1950 than in 1980. 13.7% of 1950 correspondents were worried about problems with their in-laws, but only 4.6% of the 1980 letters were. This drop can be explained, at least in part, by the necessity for many young couples to live with their parents in 1950 because of the housing shortage, close proximity providing many opportunities for conflict. A concerned relative writes about a young woman who complains repeatedly about her mother-in-law with whom they live (16 March 1950, p. 30), and a young wife writes on 28 December about having to live with her father-in-law, described by Lou Lockheart as "a dirty, drunken person" (p.34). By 1980, housing in New Zealand was readily available and cheap, allowing couples to live together away from their parents. For example "Tear Drops" (29 September) says "My boyfriend and I, who are both 18, have been living together for over a year" (p.85). The ability for 17 year olds to earn enough to live alone, independently from their parents and from flatmates, allowed them to avoid conflict with family, hence perhaps the reduction in complaints about their partners' families.

Aside from infidelity and in-laws, the other problems were many and ranged from the relatively trivial (my husband lent money to our son without consulting me: 28 January, 1980) to the more serious (he insists we socialise with his family, despite their incivility to me: 3 April, 1980, p.68), but in most of them, the spouse or partner or love object or is not behaving as the writer wants them to, and they feel they do not have the power to change

it.<sup>61</sup> Difficulties with third parties such as children, non-existent or unsatisfactory sex, inattention and loneliness are all matters which the correspondents want their partners to change, and which they won't.

Two remaining causes of conflict can be summarised relatively briefly, as I cannot detect any marked difference in attitudes between the years. Older mothers with empty nests are encouraged to take up employment or other activities, and to refresh their relationships with their husbands in both years (for example "Just Mum", above, from 1980, and "Alone" from 30 March, 1950, p.30). Young women are chided for indulging in romantic fantasies about unavailable men (for example "Sleepy Eyes", 23 November, 1950, p.34 and "Grieving" 26 May, 1980, p.74).

Whatever the presenting problem, the correspondents imagine that the agony aunt will know what its solution is. The agony aunt responses may provide practical advice, or may refer the correspondents to other agencies. They also sometimes intuit deeper issues which underlie the presenting problem, identifying where there is something about their own characters the correspondents can rectify. The woman who objected to her husband lending money to their son for a car is instructed to think about why her husband might do such a thing, and whether he was avoiding "an explosion" as she does "seem to come to the boil rather quickly" (28 January, 1980, p.52). "Just Mum", who complains that her husband spends too much time with their adult son, is asked why the son is still living at home, implying that "Just Mum" is too indulgent, and encouraged to reduce some of his home comforts "a little subtle indifference might pay dividends" (24 November, 1980, p.91) with the aim of encouraging him to leave.

Underlying these 'sundry' causes appear to be common themes, however, whether in 1950 or 1980. All correspondents want their partner to change in some way or object to something their partner has done, and the partner is proving resistant or unrepentant. And the consequence of this lack of cooperation puts their love in doubt. As discussed in the last chapter, heightened post-war expectations of an emotionally close, 'companionate'

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<sup>61</sup> Approximately 14% of the letters concerning relationship problems in both the 1950 (5/34) and the 1980 letters (10/70) explicitly express continuing love for the partner, and want to rescue the relationship. Of course, writing a letter asking for help suggests all the correspondents still had hope.

marriage progressively raised the bar. More was expected from marriage (de facto as well as de jure) than ever before.

### What's love got to do with it?

It would appear that in both 1950 and 1980, despite New Zealand 'deal breakers' being similar to the rest of humanity's just causes for divorce, the loss of romantic love (or romantic attachment), or its being put into question, was fundamental to many problems described in the letters. Some assumptions about 'real love' appear to be at work: that couples in love do not seek out other sexual partners, that couples in love have their primary loyalty to one another, that they fulfil their prescribed gender roles within the home, that they are not cruel, disdainful or disrespectful. This is not just about courting behaviours: gifts, compliments, dates, it is a fundamental belief system about what is appropriate to the state of 'real love'. If your spouse, whether de jure or de facto, is unfaithful, sides with their parents over you, is jealous without cause, is distracted by other interests and neglects you, criticises or beats you (a summary of the problems in 1950), then these are all behaviours which break the 'rules' of 'real love' and can make the correspondent feel that their love is not reciprocated and to wonder if they should leave. Similarly, in 1980, if your spouse will not commit to marriage, if they stay at home when you want to go out (or the other way around), if they hold a grudge about your sexual history, insist you visit their hateful family or put a child's interest before yours, and especially if they are unfaithful, abusive or violent, then they have broken the 'common sense' rules of 'real love' and put their love for you in question. Nevertheless, particularly in 1980, the correspondent may continue to feel attached to their partner, despite these disappointments, and has written to the agony aunt hoping for advice which will help to repair the relationship and avoid divorce or separation. Most are likely to have also considered what could come after separation: whether they could manage financially, whether there is a risk of even worse violence, and whether they would still be accepted in their wider family and community.

### Community attitudes to divorce

The state of being abnormal within a relatively homogeneous society is never comfortable, and negative social attitudes to divorce are likely in themselves to be a disincentive to giving

up on even the unhappiest marriage. Three letters from 1950 are problems with community disapproval of divorce. "Lonely Heart" is a 23 year old divorced man who, in Lou Lockheart's words, "finds that girls hold it (his divorced status) against him" (16 November, 1950, p.34). The following week a divorced young woman has been "hearing that his people will object to the marriage" (23 November 1950, p.34) and a divorced woman is told "if you were the 'victim' in your divorce you may find a clergyman who'll marry you in church. Best to see them personally" (13 July, 1950, p. 34). Clearly, many clergy will refuse to conduct a religious ceremony for a divorced person, but some might soften if told a sad story. These are evidence that in 1950, to be divorced involved not only personal shame, but also public disapproval, particularly from established churches (for further discussion of the attitude of churches, see chapter 4).

This problem is not mentioned in any of the 1980 letters, though many more of them are from or about individuals who have had previous failed relationships. The only one which comes near to it was published on 16 June, 1980. "Twice Confused" is desperate to get her divorce so she can marry her new lover, and although "my parents treat my boyfriend as one of the family" his mother "is not taking kindly to the idea at all". She herself doesn't attribute the coolness to her marital situation, though, instead taking it personally "... why can't she accept me for what I am?" (p.87). It is not possible to determine which was the cause of the potential mother-in-law's disapproval, the fact that she's still married, or something about her character. Karen Kay suggests a third alternative "she would hardly be thinking seriously of you as her son's fiancée, when you haven't even started divorce proceedings" (p.87). Clearly, it is important to clear one marriage out of the way before embarking on another, and to demonstrate commitment, but there is no suggestion that either "Twice Confused" or Karen Kay believes the cause of any disapproval is that the woman will be a divorcée when the marriage eventually takes place.

In addition, the stereotype of the divorced woman in both 1950 and 1980 may have been a disincentive. In their investigation into stereotypes of mothers, Ganong and Coleman (1995) conclude that the divorced mother was seen by their American participants as "lonely, unhappy, and stressed, perhaps because they are also viewed as financially poor women who face bleak futures ... (and) ... as failures in marriage but anxious for a relationship with a man" (p.508). May's New Zealand participants (1992) too had seen divorce as a personal

failure at least in the 1950s (see above) and the correspondents to the *Weekly* are likely to have wanted to avoid not only the shame of divorce, but being identified with this very negative picture of the divorced woman.

### What exactly had changed?

In the years between 1950 and 1980 it would appear that the liberalisation of attitudes towards sex, and changing norms about women and families in New Zealand had affected correspondents' framing of the problems they brought to the agony aunts, and had informed the 1980 agony aunt's responses. Increased social acceptance of divorce and of single parent families had made surviving divorce easier, even for women not employed outside the home; the safety net of the Domestic Purposes Benefit was now available to mothers of young children if needed, and high employment meant women had better opportunities to support themselves by getting a job. In addition, the ideology of romantic love was not contested by either correspondents or even the agony aunt (as Lou Lockheart had in 1950) so that the romantic model of a good relationship may have been even more accepted, and its high standards more easily breached in a milieu of more carefree love and fluid relationships. These factors, when combined with women being freer to pursue careers, meant the environment was arguably more conducive for relationships to break down in 1980 than it had been in 1950, and the consequences less dire.

Nevertheless, the 1980 agony aunt, Karen Kay, did not take relationship breakdowns lightly, and encouraged the correspondents, particularly if they were women, to repair the relationships if possible. In addition, some types of advice were consistent across both years. Both agony aunts considered infidelity to have the potential to break up a relationship, but both also thought the wives, by changing their behaviour, might restore it to happiness, and tended to downplay husbands' misbehaviour. This both empowered the female correspondent – it was something under her control – and placed the burden of responsibility on her. Both were less forgiving of women involved in adultery than of men, perhaps because of the expectation that women are more likely to be unfaithful if in love with the other man, putting their marriages and families more surely at risk.

The reasons for divorce remained consistent: infidelity topped the list, and problems with the wider family were a significant proportion of cases in both years, although more

frequent in 1950 than 1980. A new grouping emerged from the 1980 letters, however. Young mothers pining after the departed fathers of their children may have been more likely to write to the agony aunt than in 1950, or may have emerged as a separate group over the intervening years. With the greater sexual freedom, the lure of a carefree youth culture, and perhaps also the increase in de facto relationships at the expense of de jure marriages, it is possible that this was indeed a new group, and a newly disadvantaged group. Despite improved contraception, unplanned pregnancies to parents unready for marriage still occurred, and were less likely to end in abortions, adoptions or shotgun weddings than in 1950, and so young mothers were more at risk of being left to raise a child alone.

One of the research questions in this study was whether attitudes to divorce had changed between 1950 and 1980. This discussion supports the conclusion that they had; open expression of disapproval of divorced persons appears to have reduced or disappeared – at least in their hearing, even though a reluctance to take on that role, with its negative connotations, may potentially have survived. The so-called sexual revolution had had mixed consequences, in some respects freeing women but also placing more pressure on them to be sexual – and the sexual double standard, while somewhat modified, had not disappeared altogether – rather the line between respectable and disreputable female sexuality had become blurred. Many women appeared to be seeking more equitable heterosexual relationships, but the ability of men to commit and their strategies for avoiding it remained. Many women, it seems, continued to search for ‘real love’ and some continued to be disappointed by the form of it men offered (Jackson in Merck & Sandford, 2010, p.129).

## Chapter 8: 'The personal is political'<sup>62</sup>

This chapter takes as its focus the exercise of power within relationships and also wider contemporary ideologies about power which have the potential to influence the outcome of any power struggle. It will focus primarily on letters from women who are experiencing power plays from men, because this is the nature of the cohort: correspondents are writing to a women's magazine, and by 1980 the genre was well-known for providing advice to women about their relationships. It is therefore skewed towards situations where men are attempting to gain or maintain power over their female partners, or where power is contested, although a few letters from men subject to power plays from women are included, as we have seen. It does not discuss the power dynamics of happier and/or more equitable couples and families, who were no doubt in the majority.

Cultural beliefs about masculinity and femininity have been well researched in the years since 1980, particularly in relation to an imbalance of power. Earlier feminist scholarship – notably by Sylvia Walby (1990; 1997) – focussed on the idea of patriarchy: that men's interests were privileged over women's in six domains, including alongside the public domains of culture, work and the state, the private ones of the household and sexuality. The sixth domain is violence, and can occur in either sphere. Walby's later book, *Gender Transformations* (1997), acknowledges that studies in the intervening years had "led theorists to abandon attempts at overarching theories of gender relations" but she still does not think that "it is necessary to give up on causal explanations in order to take seriously the intersection between different forms of gender, ethnicity and class" (p.5). Certainly, the exercise of culturally assumed privileges derived from these is sensitive to the many other contextual factors that are at play in any interaction, and these go beyond ethnicity and class to include personal history, values and attitudes derived from the natal family, previous events in the relationship and so on. Mac An Ghaill (1996) in his introduction to a collection of chapters by different authors on the subject of masculinities (plural) proposes that:

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<sup>62</sup> A rallying cry for students and feminists dating from the later 1960s, and used as the title of an essay by feminist Carol Hanisch in 1969 (in Crow, 2000).



... we need to move away from categorical theories that emphasize that gender/sexual relations are shaped by a single overarching factor. Rather ... these relations are multidimensional and differentially experienced and responded to within specific historical contexts and social locations (Mac An Ghaill, 1996, p.1).

Nevertheless, other authors too have not given up on the possibility of identifying gendered elements in troubled interpersonal interactions. R W Connell, whose *Gender and Power* (1987) established the term 'hegemonic masculinity'<sup>63</sup>, "the global dominance of men over women" (Connell, 1987, p.183) later refined the concept to take account of the many forms masculinity can take in different situations and contexts (Connell, 2005) but still maintained that different masculinities may have in common the assumption of superior authority, specifically in interactions with women, but also in competition with other groups of men.<sup>64</sup> She says that to recognise the different masculinities is not enough, "we must also recognize the relations between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination" (Connell, 2005, p.37).

What does not seem to be questioned, either in Walby's discussions of 'patriarchy' or in Connell's of 'hegemonic masculinity'<sup>65</sup> (discussed further below) is that, at least within the West, there has long been a valuing of men's interests and voices over women's. This attitude which, following Walby, could be called patriarchal, has the potential to play itself out both within the home and within the wide range of relationships that men who identify themselves as masculine engage in. This study acknowledges that femininity and masculinity may both be produced and/or reinforced in the process of interaction, and that this may include the playing of assumed roles and scripts based on gender (Goffman, 1959), but also that when there is a contest of wills between heterosexual partners, one or both may assume the patriarchal attitude that simply being a man connotes an authority not available to women. When they do not agree, that authority is contested.

Social psychologists look at power in a similar way, but from the point of view of the receiver of any attempt to influence. They distinguish between compliance – which means

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<sup>63</sup> Discussed in detail below

<sup>64</sup> An engaging account of how masculine ideologies in the West became privileged, in the sense that any alternatives were denigrated, can be found in Edley & Wetherell, 1996, pp106-110.

<sup>65</sup> Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' is discussed below.

obedience to a power play, whether willing or not – and conformity, which means voluntarily obeying a social norm (Vaughan & Hogg, 2005). Both of these are relevant to warring couples, as they may be trying to force compliance on one another, but are doing so within a context of social norms about which partner should win such battles and how they should be conducted. Of particular significance are social norms about gender, so this chapter considers whether, if husbands were routinely considered ‘heads of the household’<sup>66</sup> in 1950, the following decades had eroded that privilege.

Attempts by one spouse to influence the other and issues about who should have the ‘final say’ in any dispute can be detected in most of the 1950 letters. “Woman’s Rights” is the heading of the 26 October letter which most overtly expresses these, and which was disturbing enough to cause Lou Lockheart to lose her customary Olympian calm. Her paraphrase of the letter and her response to it are quoted here in full:

“Mary” asks me not to quote her letter. She pleads for her “rights.” Her home is her fortress, but her husband refuses to be her slave.

Yes, of course, Mary, you have a right to choose your own friends – but his, too? A house-keeper and a nurse’s salary? If you demand them you put yourself in the position of an employee. When a woman demands “rights” she forfeits privileges. (26 October, 1950, p.34)

Although a short piece, this goes to the heart of the 1950 columns’ representation of the rights and duties of marriage, and its ideologies about the roles of wives and husbands. It demonstrates both the restricted gender roles of the period, and, as we can already see at first glance, “Mary”’s nascent resistance to them, using the rhetoric of human rights.

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<sup>66</sup> The term ‘Head of the Household’ has in the past been used generically to address letters where the recipient is unknown, usually for advertising purposes. If a married couple own the house, the ‘Head’ has been assumed to be the husband, but the term is little used now when other forms of advertising have tended to replace mail.

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**Figure 12 “Woman at the sink” Jacqueline Fahey, 1959, from her “Suburban Neurosis” series (Daley, 2013)**

The original letter has been paraphrased, apparently at “Mary”’s request. It is possible she feared that her situation and language might be recognised, and her complaint might earn her a personal backlash of some kind. Certainly Lou Lockheart, at least, does object in the strongest terms to what “Mary” has written. “Mary” is making two assertions: that she should be able to ban her husband’s objectionable friends from the house, and that her labour should have a monetary value, since she is doing for free work that another person (a housekeeper or nurse) would be paid for. This radical suggestion is an assertion of power framed in terms of “rights”, the only word that survives of her original letter. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights had been published only two years before, in 1948, and had been spearheaded by a woman, Eleanor Roosevelt. In that context, it was not a huge leap for a woman to claim absolute gender equality in 1950, and to be battling for it on the home front, despite strong cultural norms which made wives and mothers exceptions to the ‘universal’, an exception which Lou Lockheart goes on to make clear.

The agony aunt’s paraphrase and response to this letter is telling in the vitriol of her disapproval: she characterises a husband who accedes to these ‘demands’ as a ‘slave’ and

such a home as a 'fortress' in which all is controlled by the mistress, "Mary". She is framing the situation as an attempt by "Mary" to seize control of the household from the husband, and the proposition appears to violate her fundamental, 'common sense' beliefs about the proper distribution of power within a home. The metaphor "her home is her fortress" references the old saying 'a man's home is his castle'<sup>67</sup> and reinforces the gender divide – a man should be lord in his own castle, and his wife should be subservient to him. She should not be commanding a fortress of her own and reducing her husband to a 'slave'. To extend the implications of the saying, a castle is not only a fortress, but also a place for civilised comfort and courtly love. Romantic love can only occur in a castle, not in a fortress, which is only used for warfare and imprisonment. She is reframing the situation: in a potentially hostile (public) world, it is a wife's privilege to live in the safety of the castle / private life. It is not her right to demand money for the services she contributes to the household; she should be grateful for the security being married brings, and give her labour freely in return. Household labour, and sharing his earned income, are characterised as an exchange of gifts or as obligations, rather than as paid employment. "If you demand them (payments) you put yourself in the position of an employee". Payment fundamentally changes the role, and gives him the power to withhold / control sustenance, perhaps. Lou Lockheart is reframing what "Mary" saw as 'rights' as 'privileges' and showing contempt for "Mary"'s presumptuous claims. Lou Lockheart does not pretend that there is gender equality, but is expressing the reverse – that it is normal for husbands to be privileged within the household.

Antonio Gramsci (1971) described taken-for-granted inequalities in social life: a system of commonly held assumptions he called 'hegemonic', since it privileged the more powerful by convincing their subordinates that this privilege was 'common sense' – an unquestionable fact of life (Gramsci, 1971). In *Gender and Power* (1987), Connell applies the concept more thoroughly to assumptions about gender. She details how femininity is traditionally subordinated to masculinity in a broad range of situations, including within the family.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Derived from Coke's judgment on Semayne's case, 1604.

<sup>68</sup> By contrast, Anthony Giddens' (1994) concept of 'pure relationship', (freed from the demands of relatives and the risks of reproduction and so undertaken for its own delights alone) assumes fundamental equality between the sexes, only disturbed by questions of gender identity, since once equality has been achieved (which he sees as the focus of feminism), the question remains of what gender identity should be in the

According to Connell, 'hegemonic masculinity' refers to the gender inequalities which privilege men and masculinities and are fundamental to the cultures within which marriages operate. This concept does not preclude female agency on an individual level (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), however. It is clear from Lou Lockheart's paraphrase and response to this particular letter that she is acting as an authoritative mouthpiece and apologist for the male privilege that "Mary" is railing against. She is instructing not only Mary, but all readers of the column, in the normality of 'hegemonic masculinity'.

Gramsci applied the concept of 'hegemony' to the public sphere, describing how populations can assume the inequities and domination they suffer from a ruling class (such as the fascists in Italy, who had imprisoned him) are natural and unable to be avoided. His *Prison Notebooks* (1971) contain few direct references to the relative powerlessness of women in relation to men, but when he is considering what form a more ideal society should take, he does comment that

... until women can attain not only a genuine independence in relation to men but also a new way of conceiving themselves and their role in sexual relations, the sexual question will remain full of unhealthy characteristics and caution must be exercised in proposals for new legislation. (Gramsci, 1971, p.296).

In this he seems to be saying that gender inequalities are 'unhealthy', but both women and men need to change their attitudes to achieve greater equality. He refers to "Anglo-Saxon countries" (p.297) as having legislation which is more favourable to women (than in his native Italy), but expresses reservations about its efficacy when attitudes remain patriarchal. We may dispute whether legislation should lead social change or simply reflect it post hoc, but by "unhealthy characteristics" he appears to be acknowledging the negative results of an imbalance of power between men and women in Europe at the time of writing (the 1930s).

Not only is "Mary" subject to the masculine bias in her wider culture, she is experiencing it first hand in her own home. She cannot stop objectionable 'friends' from entering it, nor has she the 'right' to claim any household money as her own. Sociologist Derek Layder (2009)

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future.— a condition of unease typical of 'modernity'. Although this may have been the ideal in 1980, the letters themselves also speak to on-going gender inequality.

says that for true happiness, we need a sense that we can influence our partner, and they need a sense they can influence us, so that both of us have at least some of our needs and desires met. He sees partners who can work out their differences in cooperation with one another as exercising 'benign' power. "Since intimacy requires psychological and physical closeness, mutual benign forms of power and control are most relevant to its success" (p.4). This is not happening in "Mary"'s home, so she and others like her could only grumble and unhappily submit to whatever their husbands decided. Wives who did have the happiness of successful collaboration with their husbands only did so because those husbands decided to share their power – it was not the wives' as of 'right'.

In *Intimacy and Power* (2009) Layder distinguishes between structural/systemic power, to which we 'conform', and subjective power, with which we may 'comply', and

... which are continually shaped and modified during the course of situated activities (interpersonal encounters). Because structural power is likely to be entrenched, it is often resistant and slow to change. (Layder, 2009, p.171)

In contrast, subjective power may be negotiated with the individual who is your spouse. Layder describes any interaction as occurring within a number of overlapping contexts, which he calls 'social domains', from the wider cultural context (with its taken-for-granted beliefs about, in this case, gender roles) to the particular social setting (determining what is appropriate behaviour), to the past history of the relationship itself, and the particular 'psycho-biographies' of each individual. He describes each as being influenced by and influencing the others, although the wider context, as he says above, is 'resistant and slow to change'. It is possible to identify the signs of this social dynamic in this letter. "Mary" is unfortunate in having a husband who is exerting subjective power within the household, with the full support of widely accepted male privilege in the surrounding culture to back him up.

Given that the period 1950 to 1980 did see significant changes to the West's beliefs and attitudes about heterosexual relationships, and also saw a dramatic reduction in the rate of marriage and rise in the rate of divorce, Layder's description of 'subjective power' – that there was always the possibility for it to be negotiated, even if affected by the wider sexism of the community – is helpful. In this emphasis on individual variation, it agrees with

Connell's revised, more nuanced definition of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Layder acknowledges that

... people are not ciphers, hollow puppets or plastic creations of such influences ... (and) ... selectively draw from cultural ideas ... rather than (becoming) helplessly entrapped within their boundaries. (Layder, 2009, p.171)

"Mary"'s attempt to gain equal power with her husband, seen in light of this, becomes not a blatant attempt to seize power, as Lou Lockheart had assumed, nor a fruitless rage against implacable forces, but a legitimate attempt to gain more autonomy and equality within her marriage, based on her selection of the 'cultural ideals' within human rights discourse, rather than the 'hegemonic masculinity' she was experiencing day to day<sup>69</sup>.

As discussed in the previous chapter, in the 1950 letters this phenomenon can be seen not only in arenas such as housework, or battles over who can be invited home, but also in conflicts over sexual fidelity, jealousy, withholding of affection, in-laws, and other matters which might seem minor to an outsider, such as a male correspondent who "hated the small town atmosphere" where he and his wife lived (11 May, 1950, p.30). Underlying this range of contentious issues is whether or not the spouse can be influenced to modify their behaviour or their position. As the "Woman's Rights" letter shows us, in 1950 'common sense' beliefs about gender roles gave husbands power based on their provision of funds, and in their role of what was still called 'Head of the Household' (May, 1988), but in other letters, this 'systemic' power, as Layder calls it, or in Connell's words, 'hegemonic masculinity', was so buried in the everyday and exercised so indirectly that the less powerful partner (often the one writing the letter) was largely unaware of it.

Another paraphrased letter which considers the power relationships between husband and wife in terms of housework is from 25 May and is entitled "Self-Esteem". In contrast, this correspondent gets the agony aunt's unqualified approval. "Elizabeth" is concerned that her friends criticise her for not getting her husband to help with "the chores usually considered a woman's work" but Lou Lockheart praises her for her "competence and

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<sup>69</sup> As an interesting parallel, Arendell (1992) interviewed divorced men and concluded that a group of them too used the "rhetoric of rights" (p.154) to justify their abrogation of power within their marriages, and also to justify such post-divorce actions as using their greater resources to go to court and wrest custody of their children from their relatively impoverished ex-wives.

generosity”, describing the friends as “incompetent drones” (p.30). This is a rather startling exchange, in the context of other letters and the conventions of the genre, not for what it says directly (which strongly reinforces that housework is women’s work) but for what it reveals indirectly. If there has been a discussion between women friends that one of their number should be getting her husband to help with the housework, the status quo was being challenged. And even Lou Lockheart uses the words “usually considered woman’s work”, which implies that a minority of people do not consider it the sole preserve of women, and do think men should participate. It suggests it is normal for women to do housework, but that some women had latent objections, or a cynical attitude to it, perhaps in women-only contexts. Here, buried in the implications of a text expressing ‘common sense’ on this issue, are the ‘seeds of change’ Gramsci included in his concept (Crehan, 2011). Taken-for-granted cultural assumptions evolve in a dialogic fashion and although they may seem fixed at a particular point in history, they are subject to modification in conversation with the multiple other factors at play, particularly economic factors. In these women’s discussions, it is clear that “Mary” was not alone in contesting the ‘hegemonic masculinity’ she was experiencing in her own home, and perhaps contributing to a proto-feminist discourse that ultimately led to radically changed notions of what was possible for women.

The *Weekly* published occasional lead articles offering expert advice on marriage. A few months before “Woman’s Rights” was published, the *Weekly* printed an article entitled “Will This Marriage Last?” with a subheading “Studies of good and bad marriages show the factors that make happiness most likely. How does yours rate?” The heading appears to reference a contemporary, long-running column from the American *Ladies Home Journal* called “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” sponsored by Paul Popenoe<sup>70</sup>, the American ‘expert’ on marriage who was frequently quoted as an authority at the time. Like the American column, this one uses a ‘scientific’ approach to analysing problem marriages. Professor Spurgeon English is quoted summarising the results of study which found the common factors in happy marriages. Here they are, in a clipping from page 10 of the *Weekly* of 27 April, 1950:

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<sup>70</sup> See chapter 4.



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**Figure 13 Clipping from *Weekly* article “Will This Marriage Last?” 27 April, 1950, page 10.**

Intended as a recipe for happy marriages in 1950, it is a strong affirmation of traditional marriages, in that it regards “acceptance of the conventional patterns of life” as psychologically “well-adjusted”, “mature” and demonstrating “emotional stability”. It stigmatises those whose marriages are unhappy as not only emotionally unstable, poorly adjusted and immature, but also potentially “mavericks, lone wolves, dissenters ... (and) ... iconoclasts”. The idea recalls what Giddens (1991) describes as the expert, scientific voice framed as absolutely trustworthy in the mutable communities of the modern West<sup>71</sup>. Nevertheless, as we have seen, in private, women were not all swallowing whole this apparently credible advice. It promotes a view of marriage which, despite aligning with Lou Lockheart’s, was to be fundamentally destabilised in the decades to follow, proving the ‘dissenting’ voices to be more indicative of the changes that were to come than the ‘well-adjusted’ ones.

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<sup>71</sup> See also chapter 5.

## Gender roles in 1950

'Common sense' assumptions about appropriate behaviour for husband and wife are plentiful in both sets of letters, but particularly in 1950. The 1950 wife is expected to keep the house clean and tidy, the family fed, to be frugal with money, and her husband to supply the funds for the household, and to do what "Jack's Wife" (13 April, 1950) calls "those little jobs a man usually does about the place" (p.30), including the garden. Many complaints are not about general inequity in the marriage, but about spouses like Jack who do not fulfil their prescribed roles. His wife's complaint is that Jack has taken up reading instead. She appears indignant that, even there, although he started off with suitably masculine reading: "Westerns and adventure stories", he now "will read almost anything". There is a sense of outrage that Jack is not fulfilling his role, even in his reading habits. If she is being the typical wife, he should also be being a typical husband. Lou Lockheart tacitly agrees with her, and suggests strategies to get Jack to comply, including a suggestion that she "attempt to make a book-shelf or something the superior male would doubtless think he could make a better job of" (p.30) and so manipulate him into taking over. The implication is that once he got started, he would soon realise it was a more 'natural' occupation for a man than reading "almost anything". She then advises "Jack's Wife" to take up a suitably feminine leisure occupation herself: "some sort of handwork at home might create a new interest" (p.30). Lou Lockheart is assuming that if only both would play their role correctly, peace will be restored.

There may, however, be a wider discontent in evidence in this and other letters. The letter from "Jack's Wife"<sup>72</sup> (13 April, 1950) also complains that "the evenings are just one long bore" (p.30). Another young woman, "Had It" (27 April, 1950, p.30) complains that her husband no longer woos her, and is "like many husbands, seeming to think a wife exists merely to put the dinner on the table". She tells Lou Lockheart to "warn girls – don't get married" (p.30). These are complaints also about the limited opportunities these women had to expand their horizons – or just to have fun. Lou Lockheart responds by warning the restless – in these two cases possibly very young – wives to get what they want by coaxing

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<sup>72</sup> This very representative letter is also discussed in chapters 5 and 6 where it provides examples of other themes.

their husbands into life with flattery, since “men are 90% vanity” (9 March, p.30)<sup>73</sup> and so blind to such tactics.

While she appears to think that playing the wifely role properly will solve this discontent, another reading of this advice is that when she patronises the husbands in this way, Lou Lockheart herself is expressing frustration at restrictions based on traditional gender roles. Her repeated advice to avoid confrontations but to manipulate the men by playing on their weaknesses suggests rancour in her acceptance of the ‘naturalness’ of an imbalance of power. Husbands may have more power than wives, but nothing can be done about it and it is useless for wives to try and confront it head on. Instead, they should play on men’s foolishness. In this she is expressing a type of cynicism which could result from having to silently accept unjust restrictions based on something arbitrary – in this case, gender.

As anticipated, a power imbalance in the relationship appears to be behind many of the complaints the 1950 women have against their husbands. The act of withholding what is expected is described by Layder (2009) as one of the ‘energy-draining’ games played by an insecure person to gain control over their partner. Decisions about household income and spending may be a particularly contentious issue, of course (Dew, Britt & Huston, 2012). A letter on 22 June describes a man who is spending his wages on gambling, leaving his large young family short of funds.<sup>74</sup> A letter on 29 June expresses the frustration of the wife of a habitually unfaithful husband, who cannot afford to leave him – again, having the financial power means he is free to follow his own desires without destroying his marriage. In each of these letters, the wife is frustrated because her husband refuses to fulfil his conventional role of provider and loyal lover.

In other letters, it is the gendered social norms which are at issue, not just an uncompliant husband. A letter on 3 August is from “Alone”, a 50 year old woman whose children are married, and whose husband is occupied with work and his outside interests. She is “not very keen on doing more than necessary in the home – don’t knit etc.”, (p.34) but is

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<sup>73</sup> See chapter 5 for more examples of this kind of advice.

<sup>74</sup> Lou Lockheart suggests getting him to ask his employer to give her his pay packet directly and for her to control the money – but this would only work if the husband agreed to it. I recall talk in the 60s of ‘good husbands’ who handed their pay packets over to their wives on payday, keeping a little back for their own pocket money, but leaving the bulk of it to her to manage the household spending. By implication, other husbands were not so ‘good’ and exercised their financial power more overtly.

apparently trapped there, lonely and bored, because the wider culture prescribes that she not look for employment outside the home herself. It would appear that the only form of productive activity that she sees open to her is contained in domestic chores and handcrafts. She has internalised conventional gender roles, and sees no way around her situation, despite the distress it causes her.

A trio of *New Zealand Women's Weekly* articles in May and June of 1950 elaborate on the powerlessness of the housewife and serve as background for the power struggles within marriages in the post-war period. "... and Woman Struggles On" by Penny Wise (surely another pseudonym) begins in high dudgeon:

The only unpaid workers in this so civilised State, are the mothers. Unions clamour for fantastic wages and working conditions. In this enlightened age man runs inside out of the rain, carries a rather heavy article and demands extra wages, unloads dusty cargoes and cries for dirty (sic) money, ... And woman struggles on ... What do mothers want? In the first place, they want to be mothers. At present that's the last thing they are. They are washerwomen, cleaners (dirt money, please?), gardeners (dirt money, please?), cooks, polishers, nurses, teachers, moralists, dressmakers, etc". (4 May, 1950 p.10)

The article goes on to draw a picture of over-worked and harassed mothers, particularly of young children, spending their days on housework, rather than motherhood (which it valorises), or indeed employment. It continues

... much money has been spent on educating many of these women for specialised jobs. Many of them have high intelligence, yet they spend their years till their dying day cleaning and scrubbing and snatching what freedom they can from menial tasks. (4 May, 1950, p.11)

Clear to make an exception for mothering, particularly of young children (but noting the tension / guilt produced by the powerful voices of the 'child specialists'), 'Penny Wise' goes on to suggest someone (perhaps the state – this was the heyday of the welfare state in New Zealand) set up a professional house-cleaning service to free up women for more productive work, including volunteering in their communities. Although this article does not openly criticise maternal unemployment, it is possible that some of the frustration is from women who were employed in interesting and / or well-paid work during the recent war, but now have to exist in the drudgery and isolation of unpaid housework. The frustration and

restlessness of educated women reduced to this relentless, powerless role is clear, and stimulated a detailed response. On 15 June the magazine published a reader response from “Penny Wise” under the heading “Is This the Answer?”, commenting “the writer of this article agrees that there is something about house-keeping and children-rearing under present day conditions that drains one’s energy and dulls one’s intellect. She also offers a solution”. This pseudonymous author agrees that housework is soul-destroying for the housewife and an inefficient use of labour, and proposes collectives, where women could band together and roster themselves to cook large meals for a number of families, and similarly share the ‘laundrying’, which in those days was much more labour intensive (no mention of washing machines, although it does say some coppers were electric). This would leave other mothers free to “take up some interesting and useful occupation” (15 June, 1950, p.13). New Zealand women, particularly if relatively well educated, were clearly suffering ‘suburban neurosis’ at their imprisonment within the narrow role of wife and mother, and particularly objected to the dirt and drudgery of housework, well before the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963).

Another item is inset into the same page, and appears to have been written in the United States but by its placement suggests a further alternative to occupy the frustrated talents of domestic drudges. It is entitled “Businessman’s Chef” and includes a photograph of a smiling, well-groomed woman serving a meal to a man at his work desk. She is Mrs Gilma Blauvelt-Moss, who “started out to be a doctor, but instead married one” (p.13), and now runs a business called “The Silent Butler” with 20 employees making personalised ‘dinners’ which are delivered to executives within a 100-mile radius of Boston. This ingenious enterprise clearly keeps the men longer at their desks (no need for a lunch break), and keeps restless, intelligent women occupied in work – suitably domestic work, of course. It hardly needs pointing out that the discussion regards Gilma’s sacrifice of a medical career for one in catering as ‘natural’ for a married woman.

The three items together raise a number of points relevant to the issue of marital disharmony, particularly in 1950. It is clear that there is a significant amount of dissatisfaction, at least among some wives, which is recognised and addressed by the magazine. It concerns particularly the drudgery of housework, but also the demands of childcare. Betty Friedan (1963) was right, but so were Meyerowitz (1993) and Moskowitz

(1996) – not only was there a ‘problem that has no name’ of desperately unhappy housewives well before Friedan’s book described it, but the main women’s magazine in New Zealand, the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*, was addressing it, not ignoring it. It was true here, just as it was in the United States. Layder’s (2009) ‘systemic power’ that is internalised by individuals, and his ‘subjective power’ exercised by them were both at work. Married women were positioned into the relatively powerless role of mother/ housekeeper by the patriarchal assumptions of the culture – both their supposed fitness for the ‘private sphere’ of the home (and cooking, in the case of Gilma), and their relative unfitness for the ‘public sphere’ of work (with the exception of Gilma, perhaps). Nevertheless, they (at least the more confident and articulate readers) were using their ‘subjective power’ to complain about it in the media they had available – in this case the local women’s magazine.

It may be a step too far to take this discontent as particularly feminist. At no point in the three articles is there a consciousness that unequal patriarchal forces are at work, or any suggestion that their husbands should be taking a share of the household chores, or even childcare. These seem to be assumed as the wife’s responsibility (at least in this public forum), and therefore her problem, and so it was up to her to try and find a solution for it. The solutions proposed involved collective action by women (as in “Is this the Answer”), commercial enterprise (by implication from the example of the would-be-doctor in Boston) or the welfare state. Nevertheless, the articles provide a context for the 1950 letters which were venturing to suggest that ‘women’s work’ was undervalued not just by social norms, but by husbands themselves, and the women were feeling powerless to change their situations without help, or at least advice.

There remains one manifestation of marital disharmony to be addressed. In 1950, as today, it had as its worst expressions ugly fights, rage, rape and murder. Verbal bullying is discussed below, and only mentioned once in the 1950 letters. When a teenager complains to Lou Lockheart that her older boyfriend “sulks or is very sarcastic”, the agony aunt replies that “it is bad manners to act thus ... see a little less of him. Keep your dignity” (20 July, 1950, p.34). Of more concern at the time was domestic violence, but even that was largely elided. Coontz notes of the 1950s in the United States, that “Wife battering was not even considered a ‘real’ crime by most people” (Coontz, 2000, p.35) with psychiatry regarding the phenomenon as caused by the wife’s masochism. Domestic violence today appears to be

increasingly reported to the police and treated as criminal (at least for sexual assault, Newbold, 2011), but in 1950 all but the worst was kept secret, and if the neighbours or relatives knew it was taking place, they rarely interfered. Despite my assumption that it occurred and was to some extent normalised in 1950<sup>75</sup>, only four out of the 34 1950 letters referred to it even indirectly (11.7% of the total), compared with 33% of the 1980 letters referring to it directly. Two contradictory forces appear to have brought this about. It was publicly shameful to have a beating take place within your marriage (there had been social prohibitions against it since the ‘first wave’ of feminism at beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), but many people still privately considered it acceptable for a husband to beat his wife, as it had been for most of Western history. “The fact is that in virtually every society ... proverbs, jokes and laws indicate strong cultural acceptance and even approval of the beating of women by their husbands” (Buzawa & Buzawa, 2003 p.61). Nevertheless, even to refer to it in the agony aunt column of 1950 was a matter requiring discretion: there are a number of occasions where Lou Lockheart seems to be covertly ‘training a spotlight on the truth’ by hinting at the potential for husbands to physically attack their wives should they challenge his power too directly. In only one letter is violence openly discussed (see below ‘A Brutal Husband’), but in several others turns of phrase suggest it was not the only example.

A letter from “Last Thought” (2 March, p.30) is paraphrased by Lou Lockheart as a “lass with a past who wonders does her married happiness hinge on candour or secrecy” (p.30). Apparently, extra-marital sexual activity is so taboo it needs to be referred to with euphemisms (to have a ‘past’), but is also something not necessarily to be condemned. After all, to be called a ‘lass’ is much kinder than to be called promiscuous. It is in Lou Lockheart’s advice not to tell the husband about her previous sexual experience that the euphemisms become menacing:

Men can be cussed enough without handing them a supply of rods and bending the repentant spine for chastisement ... [because] ... whatever your husband’s past may have been, and however he may say he can call it

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<sup>75</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHAIRIm7piw&index=5&list=PLC9BB09DEF0FEBD57>

This clip from the movie *It Happened One Night* (Capra, 1934) has Claudette Colbert and Clarke Gable role playing / satirising a ‘typical’ married couple fighting, including jealousy, threats, and a raised fist. As one of the original ‘romcoms’ to come out of Hollywood it is a good source of stereotypical attitudes to gender roles in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. For further discussion of the film as representative of attitudes to romantic love, see Chapter 6.

quits, there'll doubtless come a day when he'll "take it out of your hide" (2 March, 1950, p.30).

The use of "bending the repentant spine" and "take it out of your hide" may be there as a metaphor, but it is a particularly violent one. The terms suggest 'tanning', as in the expression 'I will tan your hide', meaning caning or strapping, which is a ritual punishment from a person in power – as a teacher might cane a recalcitrant school child, or a parent strap their offspring. Whether 'tanning' is meant to represent physical or verbal assault is left ambiguous. Either way, the agony aunt is using the metaphor and the euphemisms not to obfuscate, but to make clear that the 'double standard' in sexual matters<sup>76</sup> is more than likely to come into play, and that the husband has the power to punish what is seen as allowable sexual experience in men but a misdemeanour punishable by assault in women. It would also appear that it was paradoxically both unacceptable and normal for husbands to physically assault their wives, and thus force her compliance.

On 9 March "Between" is a woman threatening to leave her husband and get a job as a housekeeper "to bring him to his senses", but Lou Lockheart warns her that "all housekeepers jobs are not safe for rebellious wives" (p.30). The man she keeps house for will not be her husband, and may use the privacy of his home to assault her – which would be worse than her real husband's intransigence in her current home. It may also suggest that the husband might hurt her if she leaves. In this way, fear of harm, based on perceived risk, rules out a potential source of escape for a penniless woman with a child.

"Joanna" on 16 March is separated from her husband because he was "cruel and unnatural, and never made [her] his real wife" (p.30). It's not clear whether his cruelty was physical, verbal, or simply his refusal to have sex (I have wondered if she means that he was homosexual). She is asking whether she can still accept his maintenance payments, while going to live with her new boyfriend 400 miles away. It is again the agony aunt's advice which contains the real threat. She warns "Joanna" that the new man would be justifiably outraged if he learned about her previous marriage, and that "when the first tiff came ... something might be hurtled towards your optimistic head" (p.30). Is this an exaggeration (and so a euphemism for any more benign expression of anger) or something more direct and literal? Either way, the possibility of violence is treated as normal, and the woman's

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<sup>76</sup> This letter is also used to discuss the 'double standard' in chapter 5.



desire to keep some measure of financial independence (albeit by cheating her current husband) is roundly scorned. Misdemeanours such as dishonestly passing yourself off as single when you are married risk a violent response from the deceived man.

Secrecy about sexual matters has already been discussed in chapter 7 and was not the only subject that was supposed to be kept 'within the family'. Cohen (2013) describes unorthodox psychiatrist R.D. Laing's critique of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century family inside which there was no privacy, and where shameful practices were kept secret from outsiders. She is more forgiving than Laing, suggesting that "well into the twentieth century, secrecy forged bonds of trust" (p.4) within the family, but does not deny that a conspiracy of silence existed within the family about matters which outside it might be criminal, such as assault<sup>77</sup>.

Nevertheless, there were some circumstances, even in 1950, where domestic violence was definitely considered intolerable, and where outsiders to the family were able to intervene. One letter from the 1950 columns stands out for the life-threatening nature of the assaults, and so for the directness of Lou Lockheart's advice.

An item entitled "Brutal Husband" describes particularly vicious assaults on "Nearly Mad" and in this case Lou Lockheart, despite an initial rather patronising critique of the correspondent's style of language, calls for direct, unequivocal action on her behalf. She clearly views this as one situation where separation is normal, and divorce the best possible outcome.

"Nearly Mad", only 23, has been married since her early years to a brutal husband. She has had two children born dead, and the husband blames her about the condition of a baby just over a year – though, from his big weight he is well-conditioned and cared for... The husband, who is 44, pesters this young wife in the most gross and unseemly manner. He also threatens to take the baby away from her, though he displays no affection for it. "Nearly Mad" suffers from pains, is often "punched", and wonders could she obtain a divorce or legal separation and if so, would she be able to keep the child.

You should certainly see a lawyer – or call the police if your husband ill-treats you physically. You ask will there be publicity to legal proceedings.

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<sup>77</sup> In an English example of family 'privacy', Fred and Rosemary West, notorious for multiple rapes and murders committed at their own house in the 1970s and 1980s, raised many children in that house and those children went to school in a small community without anyone suspecting the horrors they were being subjected to at home (Harrington, 2011).

Very little, if any ... I am sure you have grounds for divorce, with the custody of your child, and maintenance for both of you. Now, do something soon, and I feel the greatest sympathy for you. (15 June, p.34)

The description of the young woman's ill-treatment by her much older husband is particularly chilling, and demonstrates the ugly extremes<sup>78</sup> to which 'hegemonic masculinity' could be enacted within the walls of a house. Because of their isolation, farm women may have been at particular risk of brutal treatment, with no neighbours nearby to hear the shouts and screams, the shame of exposure in small, tight-knit communities, and the difficulties of leaving when employment, transport and funds were all tied up with the farm and therefore the relationship.

The psychology of what is called 'battering' has since been much investigated. "Men who abuse care for only one thing – their own comfort ... nothing is negotiable or discussable for them, they either have their own way or, as they often say, they give in to their partner's or children's demands" (Jukes, 1999, p.63). Violence is therefore an enforcement of the man's will and a punishment for any challenge to him. Poor "Nearly Mad" is also showing some of the signs now associated with the controversial 'Battered Women's Syndrome' (Walker, 2006) including taking responsibility for the battering on herself, and believing her husband's claims (about the baby's health), despite evidence to the contrary.

Of interest to this study, however, is that Lou Lockheart makes it clear the situation should not be tolerated, and that the justice system, in the form of a responsible policeman or lawyer, needs to be called on to intervene on behalf of the woman and her child. In 1950 there may have been a return to more conservative family patterns as a response to the privations of war and depression, but women were still less vulnerable to private tortures like this than they would have been at most times in the more distant past (Buzawa & Buzawa, 2003). If Lou Lockheart was the spokesperson of middle New Zealand cultural values in 1950, she is clearly expressing that in the 1950s there were limits to how far 'hegemonic masculinity' could go.

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<sup>78</sup> Note the euphemism "pesters", which refers to unwanted sexual actions, perhaps a euphemism for rape.

## Gender roles in 1980

Although assumptions about traditional gender roles underlie many of the letters to Karen Kay in 1980, the picture they describe is not nearly as clear-cut as those in 1950. It was now socially acceptable for women in cohabiting relationships to work (Castells, 2010), and so potentially mitigate a power imbalance by bringing in their own income, particularly if they did not have young children. However employment remained optional for mothers, and not all of them wanted to work. Recently separated “Can’t Understand” has a young baby, but nevertheless “got a job to keep my mind occupied” (14 January, 1980, p. 38) as she was missing her ex-boyfriend. In contrast, on 24 March “Worried Wife” is married and working, but doesn’t like her job, and wonders if having a baby (and so relying on her husband’s financial support) might resolve her discontent.

Housework remains an issue, but not a significant one in these letters: “Worried Sick” has a husband who “says I am not a good housekeeper and can’t cook etc...” (4 August, 1980, p.72). In an echo of “Had It” from 1950, “Aries” says “I’m sick of being treated like a doormat ... [by her partner] ... with no love and affection ...” (15 September, 1980 p.76). Huston’s large and longitudinal study of courtship, marriage and divorce (2009) concluded that the allocation of housework chores was a touchstone topic for cohabiting couples. If both shared the same opinion (for example, traditional ideas that most indoor tasks were women’s work) then there was little conflict. However if they differed, often the women were left disenchanted with their mates’ refusal to do more. In most of Huston’s participant couples, the women were doing the lion’s share of the tasks gendered female, whether or not they thought that was just. His study began in 1981, and explains how this inequality, which the 1950 women correspondents and columnists appeared to resent but not question, was being openly questioned by at least some of the wives of the early 1980s. However, it is not a major preoccupation in 1980 letters to the agony aunt.

Assumptions about the female partners doing the housework (and their resentment of it) may have endured until 1980, but other issues show a marked dissimilarity when compared with the 1950 letters. Infidelity is conducted much more openly, as we saw in the previous chapter, and the young in particular, are being pulled in another, much more exciting direction. Young 1950s housewives like “Jack’s Wife” (13 April, 1950, p.30) or “Had It” (27

April, 1950, p.30) may have struggled with boredom once the honeymoon was over, but post-war economic restrictions and social constraints on married couples meant they were unlikely to be able to stray into a wilder social life and still keep their respectability. By 1980, the marriage rates were still high in comparison to later decades, but youth culture was burgeoning (Kutulas, 2010), with Joan Jett's cover of "I Love Rock 'N Roll" (1975) and Queen's "We Will Rock You" (1977) putting to thrilling music the 'anti-establishment' mood of the time. Kutulas's (2010) analysis of women song-writers during that period, particularly Carly Simon, demonstrates changed representations of romantic love, with the expectation now being not 'wedding bells', but impermanence, and the male partner in particular feeling trapped by marriage. The sexual revolution was in full swing, and a powerfully seductive alternative to the domestic life of the stay-at-home spouse, cleaning up after babies and weeding the garden, especially to those who had married young. When one partner wanted to enjoy a more 'rock 'n roll' lifestyle, and the other did not, then a power struggle could ensue.

In addition, marriage and the family itself were increasingly under attack from intellectuals, and in the years leading up to 1980 it seemed possible that alternatives such as communes, group marriage and 'open' marriages might replace monogamy and the nuclear family. A contemporary sociologist, Hans Peter Dreitzel asserted in 1972 that most couples secretly find children a burden and, as early as 1967, in a Reith lecture on BBC Radio Four, social anthropologist, Edmond Leach said:

Psychologists, doctors, schoolmasters and clergymen put over so much soppy propaganda about the virtue of a united family life that most of you probably have the idea that 'the family', in our English sense, is a universal institution, the very foundation of organised society. This isn't so. Human beings, at one time or another, have managed to invent all sorts of different styles of domestic living and we shall have to invent still more in the future.

**Transcription from website [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) (Edmond Leach, 1967)**

A series of 1980 letters describe relationships in which one partner seems to be disillusioned with monogamy and sees home life as a prison with real life happening beyond its bars. In Chapter 6 the 30 year old divorced father was described as not wanting any children with his new wife, the correspondent, because "they spoil your fun" (6 October,

p.83), and there are also three letters from restless young women. “Unsure” is living with her boyfriend and he wants to get married, but “he prefers home life, and would rather stay home and read a book or watch TV than go out anywhere” (4 February, 1980, p.52).

“Worried Wife” (24 March, 1980), who thought a baby would solve her problems “got married in the end because everyone seemed to expect it. Now I am so bored. I miss my freedom. We never go out, and I feel deprived” (p.48). Neither couple has children living with them, but even “Unhappy Wife”, with three young children and an unobjectionable husband is restless and yearning for a more exciting social life (28 July, 1980, p.91).

Opportunities were opening up, particularly for the young, and alternative ways of living and making families were being experimented with and discussed, perhaps unsettling those who had already ‘settled down’. As never before, the traditional family and the gendered roles within it were being questioned.

In 1950, as we have seen, domestic violence was seen as a shameful but largely private matter, except in extreme cases, where the police might be called. Violent men were seen as deviant and violence itself was not condoned, but neither was it seen as something people or organisations outside the family had any right or ability to ‘interfere’ with (Loseke & Cahill, 2005). This perception changed in the 70s when the issue was taken up by the women’s movement. In many Western countries, including New Zealand, feminist activists exposed the extent of the suffering in violent families and initiated practical solutions, notably the women’s refuge movement. A United States national survey conducted in the same year, 1980, is discussed by Cancian (1987) and leads her to conclude that violence between spouses is estimated to occur in approximately one-third of all marriages. She describes how incidents of bullying were not exceptional, but an everyday occurrence in many households.

Locally, pro-women activists also spearheaded moves to change relevant laws, and in particular the way police responded to ‘just a domestic’, eventually leading to a change in police policy. From 1987 New Zealand police officers attending a domestic callout were instructed to arrest anyone where there was evidence of an offence. Previously, they had used a mediation approach, which routinely benefited the perpetrators at the expense of the victims (Taylor, 1999), as the bullying continued once they had left the house.

Internationally, research into domestic violence led to a broadening of the definition to include other forms of bullying. By the 1990s, literature on partner abuse had expanded its definition beyond sexual and physical assault to include other less obvious forms of bullying, including verbal assaults (summarised in O’Leary, 1999). Interviews with ‘abuse survivors’ revealed that verbal emotional or psychological abuse was experienced as worse than beatings, and was reported to have a more profound and long-lasting effect (Jukes, 1999; O’Leary, 1999). Insults, contempt, humiliation, verbal harassment, stalking, threats, even sulking and silence constitute that particular kind of unhappiness that a ‘dysfunctional’ couple suffers. For numbers of the correspondents in both 1950 and 1980, the verbal assaults on their character by their partner were troubling enough to write to the agony aunt about.

In the 1980 letters, where the accounts are much more numerous, verbal and physical aggression come together in the recurring metaphor of the battle or fight. Correspondents are “badly cut up” (11 August, p.83), with wounds that are suffered “in the thick of family rows” (3 April, p.68) and need to be “patched up” (8 September, p.69 and 29 December, p.54) or need the “healing powers of time” (14 January, p.38). They withhold sex, which “triggers off” their husband’s defection (17 March, p.74), and they need to make a “last-ditch stand” (22 December, p.46) to save the relationship. Nearly a third of the 1980 letters refer to some form of physical attack from the male partner to the female correspondent. Four letters complain that the man “gets violent”<sup>79</sup>, two that he “knocks [the victim] around” (3 March, p.52; 26 May, p.76). Others complain that he gives her “hidings” (7 January; 1980, p.47), or “bashes ... [her] ... around” (12 May, 1980, p.68).

The high incidence of letters discussing domestic violence and verbal aggression within New Zealand homes corroborates Phillips’ 1996 analysis of the role of violence within conceptions of masculinity at the time, and by the revelations of scholarly work. In 1979, Mary Hancock’s B.Ed (Hons) thesis *Battered Women: An analysis of women and domestic violence, and the development of women’s refuges* was published by the four-year-old Committee on Women, and a more extensive study out of the Department of Justice, looking at the causes of domestic violence – *Hitting Home: Men speak about abuse of*

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<sup>79</sup> 18 February, 1980, p.38; 24 March, 1980, p.48; 12 May, 1980, p.68; 26 May, 1980, p.76.

*women partners* by Julie Leibrich, Judy Paulin and Robin Ransom came out in 1995. These government publications are evidence of the influence of feminist outcries about the previously private and shame-filled assaults; by 1980 the miseries produced by violence and verbal assaults within the home were beginning to become discussable, and were part of a climate where hitherto private matters were able to be revealed in public, and so to public scrutiny and condemnation.

In situations of conflict, and particularly in unstable relationships, there is always the potential for abuse, whether verbal (also called psychological or emotional), physical or sexual. In most cases a husband or boyfriend, whether in 1950 or 1980, will have superior physical strength and the woman may feel financially vulnerable, particularly if she has no income of her own and young children to care for. She may, however, participate herself in both verbal and physical assaults, though is more likely to suffer injuries in the exchange than her male partner and to use violence in self-defence (Breckenridge & Laing, 1999). This is the expression of power at its most brutal: men are generally more physically powerful than women and can use that to force or intimidate her into compliance. Decent men do not and never have, of course.

Four letters from the 1980 columns describe incidents of violent assault the women writers have suffered at the hands of their husbands and boyfriends. Under the heading "Hit me badly then said he was sorry," the correspondent has been spurred to write the letter because of a film.

My ... boyfriend has been living with me for almost a year and during this time he has hit me twice, very badly. He is sorry afterwards and is at most times a gentle person; when these violent tempers occur it is almost as though it is another person. I love him but fear that if we eventually get married these hidings might become worse ... What makes me write this is a film on TV a few weeks ago, called *Battered* which in some ways resembles our life style. (7 January, 1980, p. 47)

Film-makers were not slow to see the drama in stories about the newly discussable subject. *Battered* was a made for television movie from 1978 which depicted three couples from different backgrounds, demonstrating that intimate partner violence is not restricted to one class or cultural group. The most famous film example was probably *The Burning Bed* (1984) from the United States. Farrah Fawcett played real-life Francine Hughes, who eventually

gave up trying to get effective help from the police, and set alight to her violent husband's bed while he was sleeping, killing him. The aims of such films were partly to raise the very awareness that has stirred this correspondent to write to the magazine. The two assaults "Very confused and in need of advice"<sup>80</sup> had experienced (and perhaps excused) as isolated incidents were now framed by the film as potentially part of a pattern of on-going abuse, and able to be categorised within the new, wider discourses about domestic violence. They were thus rendered both more dramatic – she could add her story to the public catalogue of case studies by writing to the *Weekly* – and more personally worrying.

Karen Kay's responses reveal a distinction between physical assaults and other forms of attack, which would now be called emotional abuse. Under the heading "'Mr Right' has changed", a correspondent complains about verbal put-downs and humiliating public arguments with her boyfriend.

... although he still says he loves me and our baby and wants us to get married this year, he is sometimes so nasty to me I get deeply hurt. He is always putting me and my parents down, especially in front of his parents and our friends. (7 April, 1980, p. 50)

The agony aunt recommends getting advice from Marriage Guidance, but interprets these hurtful verbal attacks as "young" and "immature" behaviour that can be quite easily stopped. She picks up on the fact "Touch and Go" has been confiding in her friends, and advises that "mutual loyalty" is a "basic need" in relationships, equating these confidences with the young man's public put-downs and implying that both are equally at fault and should be keeping their disputes private. She is reassuring: "... don't despair; you're not the first couple to find each other less than perfect. You need to weigh up all the pros and cons when you're not feeling emotionally disturbed, as I suspect you were when you wrote to me". She recommends "talking things over together" when they are calm, and trying to understand her boyfriend's "doubts and confusion", speculating that he may have "the same need to be reassured that you love him and think highly of him" (p.50). This appears to show that the agony aunt does not take verbal aggression as seriously as the research would later suggest it should be, and certainly not as seriously as she takes physical assault. Remnants of previous attitudes remain in her encouragement of 'privacy' – not discussing

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<sup>80</sup> The correspondent's rather unwieldy pseudonym.



his behaviour outside the relationship – which, as we have seen, is a strategy which has the potential to enable the abuse to continue. The transitions between older and newer attitudes are never clear-cut – even when the new (in this case the public disapproval of abuse) is well established, traces of the old (in this case the ‘keep it private’ attitude) remain. While the media and perhaps predominantly the young – ‘early adopters’ as they tend to be – may deride the old tacit condoning of domestic violence, still it continues to be a matter of private shame in many families, including those of their peers.

This is part of a pattern with other letters where Karen Kay advises the woman to leave her relationship when the abuse is physical and seems to be severe (for example, 26 May, 1980, when she says “you can do without him you know” p. 76), but when the writer plays down the violence, and particularly if she reports only verbal abuse, the agony aunt tends to see the relationship as salvageable. This despite correspondents (all women) being concerned that he “swears” (18 February, 1980, p.76), makes “personal remarks that are hurtful” (3 April, 1980, p.68), “gives me lectures about all the bad things he thinks I’ve done” (16 June, 1980, p.89), “seems to hate me and picks on me all the time” (4 August, 1980, p.72), “criticises my friends” (18 August, p.63) is “very short-tempered” and has “bad moods” (22 September, 1980, p.83), is “nasty and spiteful” (29 September, 1980, p.85), has a tendency to “going berserk” (24 March, p.48) and has “tantrums” (15 December, 1980, p.p.109). With hindsight, and in light of the research into the effects of verbal abuse which has been conducted since 1980, we might consider at least some of these descriptions to be worrying, particularly when they are combined with accounts of physical assaults (24 March; 16 June; 29 September) and suggest a more wholesale pattern of victimisation than terms like ‘bickering’ (15 December) indicate. In 1980, however, it is clear that the old adage ‘sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me’, was ‘common sense’ and still had currency in the authoritative view of the agony aunt, if not with the correspondents themselves.

To sum up, Gramsci (1971) saw the potential of ‘common sense’ ideas like male privilege (here within romantic relationships) to reinforce the hegemonic interests of the powerful over the relatively powerless, and this ‘structural’ power, as Layder (2009) describes it, does seem to be operating in both sets of letters. The power differential between men and women in conventional gender roles was accepted as ‘common sense’ by Lou Lockheart in

1950. Neither Lou Lockheart nor “Jack’s Wife” (see above) openly challenged Jack’s right to do as he pleased in his own ‘castle’ – but it was a problem for his wife, nonetheless. Karen Kay’s correspondents in 1980 had more opportunities for employment, and ideals about family life, previously held sacred, were now opened up to question. Nevertheless, they too were struggling in their everyday interactions to gain both more autonomy, and the ability to choose whether or not to comply with their partners’ wishes and to get their own needs met without destructive consequences. Despite this more liberal environment, however, most of them were writing to the agony aunt trying to find ways to repair the relationship, not discard it.

What had changed was the public re-framing of marriage, gender relations within relationships, and particularly of the enforcement of male privilege, to remove it from something private and to be solved within the family, to a matter for public discussion and greater police protection. It appears that while physical abuse could now be made public, verbal or emotional assaults were not yet taken as seriously. This major change was the harbinger of 21<sup>st</sup> century public service campaigns to encourage family, neighbours and friends to ‘interfere’ and to call the police, called the “It’s Not Ok” campaign, later expanded to “But it is OK to ask for help”, including the abuser in its reach, and portraying him as lost, confused and secretly ashamed. Nevertheless, despite all these efforts, on the day I write this a man on the North Shore of Auckland is in jail for yesterday murdering his estranged wife and seriously injuring her daughter and her daughter’s boyfriend who tried to protect her (Kidd, 2014). New Zealand’s rate of domestic violence remains very high. A 2011 United Nations Women report had New Zealand ranked 11<sup>th</sup> out of the 12 OECD countries who responded to that question, with approximately one third of women having experienced physical violence from a partner<sup>81</sup>. Two decades before, Jock Phillips (1996) had reported that “by the 1990s ... there was a suspicion that men brought all their emotions home, and within those sacred walls let it all hang out by abusing the people who were closest and most vulnerable” (p.274). Despite earnest attempts since the mid-70s to combat the attitudes which underlie these assaults, including continuing assumptions by a proportion of

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<sup>81</sup> Cited in Stuff.co.nz article “New Zealand worst for domestic violence – UN report”, 24 July, 2011.

men that they should be controlling their wives, this manifestation of 'hegemonic masculinity' is still far from being resolved.

This answers in part the question with which this chapter began – if in 1987 Connell detailed the same inequalities that Gramsci had seen 50 years earlier, then they definitely still existed at the end of this study, 1980. And although the 34 years since 1980 are outside the reach of this study, they appear to be ongoing. Some men (but of course a minority), still see themselves as 'head of the household' and are prepared to enforce that view on their families, including their wives and partners.

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

This study examines the factors around the decision to end a cohabiting romantic relationship at two points in New Zealand's history: 1950, when the country was settling back into peacetime life after WWII, and 1980, when the family itself had been subjected to critique by the liberalising tides of social change in the West of the 1960s and 1970s. It examines agony aunt columns in the widely-read *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* to detect the local nature of those changes,<sup>82</sup> on the assumption that these relatively unedited voices from the past, discussing their relationships with the 'expert' – but actually amateur – advisor, the agony aunt, can reveal how troubled individuals thought about these matters, and how underlying values and beliefs about love, marriage and divorce may have changed in the thirty years between.

### The role of the agony aunt and the rights and duties of marriage

Both Lou Lockheart (1950) and Karen Kay (1980) saw their role as providing objective advice, or 'common sense' in Gramsci's use of the term (1971). From this advice we can get an indication of contemporary constructions of what was considered acceptable in matters of the heart and within marriages at the time. Both employed similar strategies which involved using information from a letter to re-frame its situation (Goffman, 1974), and deriving a solution based on that new frame. For example, Lou Lockheart reframed a mature man's suspicion that the widow he had been courting had duped him out of some money – that he had been a "Mug" (17 August, 1950) – from a crime to a romance, producing the advice that if he really loved the widow, he would follow her to her new life in the city. Lou Lockheart's encouragement of "Mug" to follow the widow uses the notion of romance to subvert conventional gender roles – it is traditional for the woman to follow the man in his travels, not the man to follow the woman – although elsewhere she promotes a kind of resigned acceptance of male prerogative, combined with advice about how wives could manipulate their men. She implies this is quite easy because men are 'vain'. She also expresses considerable cynicism about romance, although does not express it to this male

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<sup>82</sup> For heterosexual couples only, since homosexual activity was still illegal in 1980.

correspondent. That manipulative tactics such as flattery and flirtation should be advised speaks to the relative powerlessness of particularly stay-at-home wives and mothers at the time, especially when the 'head of the household' would not take their needs and wishes into account.

Similarly, in 1980 Karen Kay takes a young mother's dilemma about whether she should return her family to Australia as her husband wishes, leaving behind her own mother in New Zealand, and re-frames it as selfishly giving in to "home-sickness". The agony aunt advises the woman to leave her mother behind and return to Australia because the 55 year old will be pleased to holiday with them there – far from being lonely and vulnerable, she is actually "sensible and independent". Karen Kay emphasises that the correspondent's "first loyalty is to (her) husband" (29 September, 1980, p.85). The agony aunt's 1980 advice to the homesick mother provides a more traditional frame – that she should subsume her own desires to her husband's – although elsewhere Karen Kay is supportive of women correspondents' desire for closer relationships with their men, and if that ideal can't be met, even when professional counselling has been sought through the Marriage Guidance service, to separate rather than put up with less.

It can be seen from these examples that although the 1950 and the 1980 advice largely mirrors 'common sense' about gender roles within relationships at the time, it is not consistent, and more traditional or more modern attitudes can co-exist within the same set of discourses. There may have been a dominant ideology about the rights and duties of marriage, and gendered roles within it, but traces of past beliefs, and harbingers of future beliefs can be traced in both sets of letters, demonstrating that 'common sense' was not fixed but contested, and changes did not happen without warning.

### How did the agony aunts and correspondents conceive of 'real love'?

In the West, since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century at least, love has become the dominant rationale and justification for marriage. If being in love is the normal state of the newly married, or of couples when they first 'move in together', it was important to examine first whether social constructions of love itself had changed. The nature of 'real love', as the correspondents and the agony aunt conceived of it, was important since it was against that ideal that they measured the extent to which the relationship under question was deficient. This was no

small matter, as the concept of 'real love' is closely linked to happiness and, according to Rokeach (Littlejohn, 1996), happiness is a core terminal value for many people.

Unsurprisingly, in both years it is clear that ideas of what 'real love' might be were being contested, although in 1980 there appear to have been more versions of it in the arena than in 1950.

Approximately ten percent of the letters to the 1950 column were from men, and they tended to confirm the view of the agony aunt, Lou Lockheart, that 'real love' could be considered present if the couple limited their expectations. "Disappointed Ned" describes himself as "... a young married man; have a pretty wife and love her dearly; nice baby, a comfortable home, everything all right" – except for problems with his mother-in-law. "In Again" is contemplating reconciling with his wife after a separation, since despite being "strange" and "self-contained" she has "behaved well and agreeably. She takes an interest in my welfare and her people have not shown any ill-feeling" (11 May, 1950, p.30). Lou Lockheart agrees that not too much should be expected of marriage. Her recipe is more focussed on love, though. She summarises "Happily Married"'s paeon to marriage<sup>83</sup> with the exhortation to "... marry for love and stay loving! It sounds simple, doesn't it?" (21 September, 1950, p.34) and appears to focus on an individual enacting loving behaviours themselves – something they have control over – rather than having too-high expectations of their partner. 'Real love' in her sense is therefore a function of action, a product of consideration and affection, not an inspiration for those behaviours.

The burden of her messages about love, however, are attempts to dissuade women correspondents from holding onto a much more romantic view of what 'real love' should be like. She tells one correspondent that she can't expect her husband to act "le Boyer" (27 April, 1950, p.30) all the time, referring to Charles Boyer, a debonair French actor in Hollywood romantic comedies. To "Elizabeth 2<sup>nd</sup>" she quotes George Bernard Shaw: "Nobody would fall in love if so much had not been told about it" (4 May, 1950, p.30). "Elizabeth 2<sup>nd</sup>" had had a lover prior to her marriage who was more romantic and exciting than her present husband, but he never proposed marriage, and for the agony aunt it is the

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<sup>83</sup> "The secret of being happy, though married, has, in our case, been one objective – one for the other in all things, and pulling together through times of economy or worry" ("Happily Married" 21 September, p.34).

“spiritual joys of wedlock” she enjoys with her husband, which constitute the true nature of ‘real love’. For “Elizabeth 2<sup>nd</sup>”, though, marriage can be empty if sexually cold, and Lou Lockheart’s framing of her position as silly yearning after trivial “spice” is an assertion of the dominant paradigm for ‘reasonable’ marriage, and a reprimand designed to pull her into line with conventional opinion. In these columns, the ‘reasonable’ and the ‘passionate / romantic’ versions of ‘real love’ were thus competing paradigms, with the agony aunt and these male correspondents proposing the former, and the possibly younger wives fruitlessly pining after husbands who could be passionate lovers, like Clarke Gable perhaps, rather than the more prosaic, affectless fellows who were, nevertheless, prepared to marry and support them.

With memories of the privations of the Great Depression and WWII still fresh, caution, carefulness and conservatism in its original sense, may have still seemed the safest approach to many things, including marriage, with sexual satisfaction further down the list than more urgent priorities, such as having a husband who is willing to support his wife. This historical context may also help to explain the narrowness of many New Zealanders’ views of life and the importance, for the middle class at least, of social conformity. Fear of community disapproval was central to the nuclear family, with its “tawdry secrets” (Leach in Cohen, 2013; May, 1988) where anything criminal such as abortion, incest, rape or assault, or even unconventional such as infidelity or homosexuality, was kept as far away from public scrutiny as possible. Neither Lou Lockheart nor “Elizabeth 2<sup>nd</sup>” were to know that the hopeful signs in the reviving post-war economy and in New Zealand’s position in the world (especially its ANZUS alliance with Australia and the all-powerful United States, to be signed in 1951) meant that peace and, for most, relative prosperity were to endure for the rest of their lives. In hindsight the young, like “Elizabeth 2<sup>nd</sup>” perhaps, could realistically hope for more, and enjoy the liberty that an improved standard of living (and increased female participation in the paid workforce) could bring, including the ability to withdraw from dangerous, miserable and / or loveless marriages.

By 1980, thirty years later, a much more demanding set of criteria for ‘real love’ was being reflected by the agony aunt, Karen Kay. She summarises the kind of love desired by her readers as “absolute emotional security”, where they “know without question that they are loved beyond doubt and form the centre of their loved one’s world” (29 September, 1980,

p.85). This definition suggests a much more familial bond, analogous to that between a parent and child, where there is absolute trust and closeness. In its romantic form, it is characterised as based on 'open' or 'good' communication, but also as fragile and needing to be worked on because once impaired in any way, for example by loss of trust, it may be gone for good (Cancian, 1987). "Hopelessly Devoted" is a young man who does not measure up to this standard, as he himself admits: "Communication is a problem as I have never been much of a talker". His conception of 'real love' is also that it is selfless: "I guess I have taken her too much for granted; she has always put me first but I have been thinking only of myself" (14 January, 1980, p.38). Later comments by Karen Kay suggest that it is a type of love that men, in particular, find difficult to achieve because of this lack of ability to talk about their feelings. This new characterisation of 'real love' is therefore still dependent on gender differentiation – it is 'feminised', according to Cancian (1987) – and to succeed in this sort of love, a man must behave more like a woman by being open, selfless, and communicating his emotions.

This 'feminised' love had developed in opposition to a more traditional 'real love' which, nevertheless, was still apparent in many, perhaps most, New Zealand homes. Jock Phillips' *Man's Country?* (1996) describes the provenance of a brand of masculinity typical of early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century New Zealand. This model was of the masculine man, head of the household, good provider, good mate to his friends but modest about his achievements, likes a beer, keen on 'footy', and reticent about matters seen as feminine, such as expressions of romantic love, with his commitment to family life living in uneasy coexistence with his fear of marriage being a prison and his wife the chief gaoler. This 'traditional' husband may be taciturn and undemonstrative at home, and most unlikely to have 'open communication' with his wife. However, he was also a reliable provider. As a configuration of New Zealand masculinity it was undergoing challenges by 1980, but remained a model in the culture the young men in the cohort had been raised in. The 'real love' within marriages which expressed these values was therefore of a radically different hue from the one described by Karen Kay. There was a greater focus on traditional breadwinner / home-maker roles, and in this context, the Lou Lockheart recipe of loyalty and endurance, with low expectations of anything more openly loving or romantic, was more likely to have been at play.



A third type of 'real love' detected in the 1980 columns was neither a throw-back to the past, nor the intimate closeness described by Karen Kay, but what seemed at the time to be possibly a way of the future, and it can be derived only by implication. The letters of younger women hint at the pull of youth culture, and the call to sexual liberation, rule-breaking and hedonism voiced by rock music in particular. There is a trace of it in letters from women who are bored with their stay-at-home husbands and want more excitement out of life, and from others who want to stay at home, often with young children, complaining about partners who want to party, and may be unfaithful or have deserted them. One of these men was reported to say he didn't want more children with his new partner because "they spoil your fun" (6 October, 1980, p.83). The kind of 'real love' this might connote could be a so-called 'open' marriage, with few rules (even eschewing monogamy) – a kind of partnership in a hedonist lifestyle.

Of note is the position in 1980 of husbands and male partners in de facto relationships. For the most part they had been raised with traditional 'heads of the household' fathers as their role models, and then observed their female contemporaries, swept up in feminism's 'second wave', attempt to re-write the nature of heterosexual relationships to make them more equal. They had to make sense of this and somehow, for most of them, make marriages and families of their own within a disturbingly changed environment where 'common sense' may have seemed to be in flux. They had three potential responses: to behave as their fathers had and take over the responsibilities, expectations and 'rights' of the traditional husband – whether their wives or partners liked it or not; to attempt to perform 'feminised' love, as "Hopelessly Devoted" is doing – in New Zealand men like this were quickly derided by other men as emasculated 'SNAGS', Sensitive New Age Guys (Phillips, 1996) – or to escape the dilemma altogether, and join the sexual revolution, moving from woman to woman with limited participation in the lives of any children they might father. Over the duration of their adulthood, many are likely to have moved in and out of these pathways, or attempted compromises between them. Anti-feminist backlashes, including the masculinist movement, with its emphasis on father's 'rights' (see the website [menz.org.nz](http://menz.org.nz), or the 'Promise Keepers' phenomenon) appear to have grown out of this dilemma.

By 1980 relative prosperity and a wider range of opportunities – such as much more affordable overseas travel – along with the array of new approaches to relationships generated by the sexual revolution and feminism, had put ideas of 1950s style traditional marriage into question. For a time, it appeared that even marriage and monogamy might become obsolete, although that wilder conception of ‘real love’ as ‘free love’ did not last, and it appears the young are now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, converting a selection of these older ideas into their own versions of what it means for them. With women’s raised expectations of marriage, both from their enduring pleasure in romantic fiction and from feminism’s inspiration to expect equality with their men rather than subservience, and with men’s confused responses to these changes, it is not surprising that relationship breakdowns became more frequent, the rates of marriage dropped, and of divorce soared in the years between 1950 and 1980. This process was also enabled by socio-economic conditions and law changes: women were more able to support themselves and their children as many more mothers were employed in 1980 than in 1950, and law changes made divorce progressively easier to obtain over the period.

### ‘Deal Breakers’

This overall reading of the letters is not intended to elide the differences in detail and situation described by the correspondents and responded to by the agony aunts. There were still triggering events or long-running sores which might bring any individual couple to the brink of separation. Despite all the changes in intervening years, the letters from both 1950 and 1980 concerned a similar range of problems – for example, the most common cause of distress in both years was the infidelity of a spouse or partner. Although changing ‘common sense’ attitudes to such problems can be deduced from the letters, it is in the agony aunt where their clearest expression can be seen. Karen Kay was more likely to recommend separation than Lou Lockheart, but was also supportive of remaining in the relationship if the correspondent appeared to want that, even in cases of infidelity or on-going verbal abuse. Lou Lockheart mostly recommended sticking it out – reminding women of their ‘duty’ and the marriage vows they had made – but did advise a woman whose violent husband was threatening her life to get help from the law to leave him. It may not be drawing too long a bow to suggest that couples were experiencing similar problems in both years, and that it was not day to day behaviour, but ‘common sense’ attitudes about

how to respond to those problems which had changed in the thirty years between. So-called 'deal breakers' – matters which justify separation – had multiplied as standards for appropriate behaviour in relationships had risen.

At the heart of many of the letters, in both 1950 and 1980, is the correspondents' perceived inability to get their partner to change in the way they want them to. Interpersonal power and agency – the ability to effectively influence one's partner – is a significant theme, and underlies many of the situations described. This study employed Layder's (2009) conceptions of 'structural' and 'subjective' power to pick apart these dilemmas. 'Subjective' power is employed interpersonally, and may be either 'benign' (justified and respectful of the other person) or not. 'Structural' power refers to broader cultural conceptions of where power 'should' reside – which types of individuals or groups are entitled to more power than others. An associated concept was R W Connell's 'hegemonic masculinity' (2007) which explained that, across an array of different versions of masculinity, an assumption of men's entitlement and privilege over women's may remain assumed and unquestioned. It follows that beliefs about masculine privilege over women is at the core of the 'structural' power in contexts of marital discord. The analysis of these letters unsurprisingly reveals contests over 'subjective' power within the distressed couples, as well as signs that most of them accepted an assumption that the husband should be 'head of the household', and have the final say in contentious matters, especially the 1950 letters.

Alongside these conclusions must ride the understanding that there are multiple factors which contribute to any particular troubled relationship in any historical period, not just issues of gender, or ideals about what 'real love' should be like. These would include the individuals' prior histories, personalities, class and ethnicity, and factors from the context in which they live, including their living conditions, employment and income, children, religious affiliations and values, beliefs and attitudes in general. These, and the meanings which each individual ascribes to them, determine the outcomes of any particular struggle.

Nevertheless, despite this complexity of factors, there are clear indications that 'hegemonic masculinity' was operating to a greater extent in 1950 than in 1980, but that it was still very much in evidence in the more recent columns.

An illustration can be drawn from a topic which arose in both 1950 and 1980. If she has a previous sexual history, a woman in love must decide if and when to reveal it to the man she loves and wants to stay with for life. The 1950 woman, “Last Thought”, has kept the secret, and is asking Lou Lockheart whether she should reveal it to her husband. The 1980 woman, “Lost in Love”, has told her boyfriend – in a display of ‘open communication’ perhaps – but he has taken it badly. In neither case does the man’s own sexual history appear to have been at issue, or even mentioned, and both are clearly cases of the venerable ‘double standard’ – Thomas (1959) dates it back to the Middle Ages — where for men, precursor sexual adventures of this sort are taken as a sign of adulthood, as a gain, whereas women are expected to remain chaste until marriage, or at least until ‘Mr Right’ comes along, and when they first have sex, their virginity is seen as a loss (Giddens, 1994). What is significant is that the double standard was still in place in 1980, at least for this young man<sup>84</sup>, despite the intervening movements to liberate sexual mores and throw out inequitable restrictions on the behaviour of women.

Neither of the agony aunts shows any disapproval of the women for not being virgins and both are rather dismissive of the men’s point of view. Nevertheless, Lou Lockheart warns “Last Thought” in brutal terms that she should never tell her husband, or “there’ll doubtless come a day he will ‘take it out of your hide’” (2 March, 1950, p.20), and Karen Kay advises “Lost in Love” to abandon that love, because “... this will always cause problems between you” (4 March, 1980, p.49). Both agony aunts are certain that the double standard has a strong and indelible influence on these men, and they can never be brought to see reason on the matter of their partners’ chastity, past or present. Lou Lockheart’s answer appears to refer to all men (since this individual’s actual reaction to the news cannot be known), whereas Karen Kay’s only refers to this young man, however she does predict he will never let his resentment go, which also suggests a generalisation about the whole company of male partners.

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<sup>84</sup> And also for the boyfriend of “Eskimo” on 18 August 1980: “At first I lied to my boyfriend about it, but just recently I felt I should be completely open with him, and that feeling as we did about each other, we should have no secrets. He was terribly hurt and now the trouble is he doesn’t feel he can trust me to stay faithful to him” (p.66).

This detail gives an indication of the enduring nature of Connell's 'hegemonic masculinity' (2007), the continuing assumption amongst many men, and some women perhaps, that despite the feminist claim for equal rights and equal treatment – much more vigorously and publicly promoted in 1980 than 1950 – many men retained beliefs in the form of masculinity Phillips (1996) so powerfully describes. If they still felt justified in being upset by the absence of historical chastity in their women, even though she was chaste within their relationship, they still felt somehow diminished by her 'past', most likely in the eyes of other men, and so were not feminist in their attitudes, at least on that subject.

### The new / old matter of domestic abuse

Literature on domestic abuse from the last decade of the 20th century divides it into categories, with physical violence the most obvious manifestation of dysfunctional power dynamics within a relationship, but with emotional / psychological abuse reported by victims as doing the most long-term damage (Jukes, 1999). Other categories include financial abuse – with usually the male partner having absolute control over the woman's access to money – and isolation, where he obstructs her access to potentially supportive relationships outside the marriage (O'Leary, 1999). All these strategies are designed to give the more aggressive partner – again, usually the man – absolute control over his partner to ensure obedience to his will and to avoid the, to him, intolerable state of being 'subservient' (compliant) to a woman should he accede to her 'demands' (wishes). Deeply rooted in traditional notions of masculinity, with its competitive 'win-lose' dichotomy, possibly combined with inadequacies in his sense of self resulting from treatment in childhood, the irrational behaviour of the abusive husband or partner is a key justification for the breakup of relationships. It is the ultimate expression of Layder's (2009) 'malign' power expressing the man's sense of his 'right' to 'structural' power, based on his masculinity (making it 'hegemonic' – Connell, 1987) and expressing it by enforcing his power 'subjectively' within the home<sup>85</sup>.

Feminist-inspired activists in the 1970s heightened public awareness of physical violence within marriage, and reframed it as a crime to be exposed, rather than a shameful matter to be hidden from sight by the family and politely ignored by outside witnesses to save the

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<sup>85</sup> For the rationale behind this focus on male rather than female bullying, see Chapter 8.

family's face (Loseke & Spencer, 2005). This discretion explains why only one letter in the 1950 columns (on 15 June) referred directly to incidents of abuse. Elsewhere in the 1950 letters there appear to be indirect references to it. In particular, the agony aunt hints to correspondents through euphemisms and metaphor that the course of action they are considering could trigger an assault from a current or future partner. It seems safe to assume the 15 June case was not isolated, but indicative of an on-going pattern of community tolerance of the enforcement of male privilege (Buzawa & Buzawa, 2003). That Lou Lockheart advised the correspondent to seek outside help is an indicator of how seriously she took that particular situation – it was worrying enough to warrant discarding the 'do not interfere' norm.

Thirty years later, in 1980, physical violence in family homes was coming to be publicly deplored rather than ignored; it had become 'discussable'. That does not mean that it therefore stopped, in fact it has been remarkably resistant to public disapproval. Violent adults are often (but not always) the products of violent childhood homes, where assault by the dominant adult as a way to enforce compliance appears to become normalised (Jukes, 1999). Further discussion is beyond the scope of this study, but it is clear from the 1980 columns that abuse of all kinds was occurring in that year, and that although verbal assaults and other forms of controlling behaviour were not taken as seriously as they later would be, it was now possible to reveal violent crimes within the family that had previously been hidden.

It is clear from this study that community attitudes towards divorce, at least as expressed by the agony aunts and the correspondents in these columns, became more tolerant between 1950 and 1980. The breakup of a serious relationship remained something to be avoided if at all possible, but the kinds of behaviours which couples, particularly women, may have been encouraged to put up with in 1950, by 1980 had become good reason to separate, so the bar for a 'good relationship' had been set higher. In 1980, correspondents were encouraged by the normalising voice of the agony aunt to give up on relationships where it seemed the love had died or where the man was violent, but they were still encouraged to try again in cases of infidelity, which in neither year was considered always a 'deal breaker', and when the partner was 'only' verbally cruel.

Nevertheless, it appears different qualities were expected of 1980 relationships than of 1950 ones, particularly by women. 1950 references to 'real love' as depicted in Hollywood films had disappeared from the 1980 letters, which instead expressed a desire for a 'real love' that was a tender attachment, where the lover was "loved beyond doubt" and formed "the centre of their loved one's world" (29 September, 1980, p.85). These ideals are contrasted in both years with a more pragmatic view, where much less in terms of expressed emotion should be expected of the lover, and instead loyalty, tolerance and gratitude for the security of a relationship should form the basis of 'real love'.

This study has attempted to give an account of the many external forces which contributed to these changes, including rapidly increasing security and prosperity in the post-war years, and the questioning of conventional values in the West in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly by feminism and the sexual revolution. New Zealanders were heavily influenced by these movements occurring at the same time throughout the West, and the 'traditional' nuclear family would never again be unquestionably the only right way for adults to organise their lives. The changes that occurred over those two decades were startling and rapid, and continue to influence community life well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The complete archive of the *Weekly*, stretching as it does back to 1932, holds the promise of revealing a wide range of New Zealand social attitudes over 80 years of considerable change in the position of women, and in family life. Further research topics could include changing attitudes to social class, consumerism, child care, sex education, and working mothers, but there are potentially many more. The agony aunt columns alone have further topics which could be explored, including the phenomenon of the 'empty nest', changes in courtship behaviour and attitudes (there are many letters on this), and the relationships between parents and teenagers – who also wrote to the agony aunt in both years. As far as this study is concerned, another 'slice' of letters from 2010, another 30 years on, would be particularly interesting for what it might reveal of further changes in attitudes to love and romantic relationships since 1980.

This study is also limited by relying solely on one genre of publicly available printed texts. It could have been complemented by interviews with survivors of 1950s marriages, and with both the divorced and the still-married of the 1980 cohort, and with research into other

documentary sources such as the *Truth* newspaper, which loved a scandal. If available, documentary evidence from the divorce court, similar to the research done by Hayley Brown (2011) could also have been included – alas, her historical period largely precedes mine, although it has contributed to my understanding of attitudes in the 1950 period. This study could also have significantly broadened its scope to include consideration of the experiences of the individuals most affected by marital disharmony – the children, some of whom wrote to the 1980 column.

According to New Zealand sociologist, David Swain, in 1979, “Divorce is important. It is a legal event fraught with human and social significance” (p.114). As this study hopes to show, a focus on divorce, and relationship difficulties which might lead to divorce, provides an insight into social attitudes in previous historical periods, not only about relationship breakdown, but also about romantic love itself and the nature of our expectations of it. These matters are central to our experiences of happiness in our adult lives, and have an impact on the homes in which we raise our children. Agony aunt columns provide narratives recounted by the real-life protagonists – placing themselves in the central role – which then might be challenged by the agony aunt, producing two interpretations of what is causing problems in this core relationship of the correspondent’s life. As readers we consume these multiple narratives, and the attitudes we discern in them may reinforce or challenge attitudes we ourselves hold about our own relationships. Divorce is important to all of us, not just the divorced or the children of divorce, because it reveals information about the central relationships in our lives which determine our own happiness.



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## APPENDIX 1: 1950 “Ask Lou Lockheart” columns – transcript of selected letters

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## APPENDIX 2: 1980 “Dear Karen Kay” columns – transcript of selected letters

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