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"Abortion"
Chapter 3, Right-Wing Women*

Andrea Dworkin

I have never regretted the abortion. I have regretted both my marriage and having children.

A witness on forced motherhood, International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women.** March 1976

Before the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion in the United States, abortion was a crime. Some abortions were medically licensed, but they were a minute percentage of the abortions actually undergone by women. This meant that there were no records of the illegal abortions performed (each abortion was a crime, each abortion was clandestine), no medical histories or records, no statistics. Information on illegal abortions came from these sources: (1) the testimonies of women who had had such abortions and survived; (2) the physical evidence of the botched abortions, evidence that showed up in hospital emergency rooms all over the country every single day—perforated uteruses, infections including gangrene, severe hemorrhaging, incomplete abortions (in which fetal tissue is left in the womb, always fatal if not removed); (3) the physical evidence of the dead bodies (for instance, nearly one half of the maternal deaths in New York State resulted from illegal abortions); (4) the anecdotal reminiscences of doctors who were asked for “help” by desperate women. These sources provide a profile of the average woman who wanted and got an illegal abortion. Indisputably, she was married and had children: “. . . it has been repeatedly demonstrated that most criminal abortions today are obtained by married women with children,” wrote Jerome E. Bates and Edward S. Zawadzki in Criminal Abortion.


published in 1964. An estimated two thirds of the women who got criminal abortions were married.* This means that up to two thirds of the botched abortions were done on married women; up to two thirds of the dead were married women; perhaps two thirds of the survivors are married women. This means that most of the women who risked death or maiming so as not to bear a child were married—perhaps one million married women each year. They were not shameless sluts, unless all women by definition are. They were not immoral in traditional terms—though, even then, they were thought of as promiscuous and single. Nevertheless, they were not women from the streets, but women from homes; they were not daughters in the homes of fathers, but wives in the homes of husbands. They were, quite simply, the good and respectable women of Amerika. The absolute equation of abortion with sexual promiscuity is a bizarre distortion of the real history of women and abortion—too distorted to be acceptable even in the United States, where historical memory reaches back one decade. Abortion has been legalized just under one decade.* The facts should not be obliterated yet. Millions of respectable, God-fearing, married women have had illegal abortions. They thank their God that they survived; and they keep quiet.

Their reasons for keeping quiet are women's reasons. Because they are women, their sexuality or even perceptions of it can discredit or hurt or destroy them—inexplicably shame them; provoke rage, rape, and ridicule in men. Dissociation from other women is always the safest course. They are not sluttish, but other women who have had abortions probably are. They tried not to get pregnant (birth control being illegal in many parts of the country before 1973), but other women who had abortions probably did not. They love their children, but other women who have had abortions may well be the cold mothers, the cruel mothers, the vicious women. They are individuals of worth and good morals who had compelling reasons for aborting, but the other women who had abortions must have done something wrong, were wrong, are somehow

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* Bates and Zawadzki, in their 1964 study of 111 convicted abortionists, place the percentage of married women at 67.6 percent. Other studies range from the conservative 49.6 percent (based on the records of two abortionists in a single year, 1948; arguably, the figure is low compared to other findings and estimates because women lied about marital status when committing the criminal act of getting an abortion) to 75 percent (the sample being composed of women in charity hospitals from botched abortions). Bates and Zawadzki, who discuss both the 49.6 percent figure and the 75 percent figure, conclude that they "could find no authority or piece of research purporting to demonstrate that the majority of women undergoing abortion today are unmarried" (Criminal Abortion, p. 44).

* As this book is published, abortion has been legalized not quite one decade, but never without restrictions permitted by the Supreme Court and imposed by state legislatures and often with unconstitutional restrictions imposed by state or local governments until overturned by federal courts (paternal and parental consent requirements, for instance).
indistinct (not emerged from the primal female slime as individuals), were sex not persons. In keeping the secret they cut themselves off from other women to escape the shame of other women, the shame of being the same as other women, the shame of being female. They are ashamed of having had this bloody experience, of having this female body that gets torn into again and again and bleeds and can die from the tearing and the bleeding, the pain and the mess, of having this body that was violated again, this time by abortion. Admitting to an illegal abortion is like admitting to having been raped: whoever you tell can see you, undress you, spread your legs, see the thing go in, see the blood, watch the pain, almost touch the fear, almost taste the desperation. The woman who admits to having had an illegal abortion allows whoever hears her to picture her—her as an individual in that wretched body—in unbearable vulnerability, as close to being punished purely for being female as anyone ever comes. It is the picture of a woman being tortured for having had sex.

There is the fear of having murdered: not someone, not real murder, but of having done something hauntingly wrong. She has learned (learned is a poor word for what has happened to her) that every life is more valuable than her own; her life gets value through motherhood, a kind of benign contamination. She has been having children in her mind, and getting her value through them, since she herself was a baby. Little girls believe that dolls are real babies. Little girls put dolls to sleep, feed them, bathe them, diaper them, nurse them through illnesses, teach them how to walk and how to talk and how to dress—love them. Abortion turns a woman into a murderer all right: she kills that child pregnant in her since her own childhood; she kills her allegiance to Motherhood First. This is a crime. She is guilty: of not wanting a baby.

There is the fear of having murdered because so many men believe so passionately that she has. To many men, each aborted pregnancy is the killing of a son—and he is the son killed. His mother would have killed him if she had had the choice. These men have a peculiarly retroactive and abstract sense of murder: if she had had a choice, I would not have been born—which is murder. The male ego, which refuses to believe in its own death, now pushes backward, before birth. I was once a fertilized egg; therefore to abort a fertilized egg is to kill me. Women keep abortions secret because they are afraid of the hysteria of men confronted with what they regard as the specter of their own extinction. If you had your way, men say to feminists, my mother would have aborted me. Killed me.

"... I was born out of wedlock (and against the advice that my mother received from her doctor)," Jesse Jackson writes in fervent opposition to abortion, "and therefore abortion is a personal issue for me."

2. Jesse L. Jackson, "How We Respect Life Is Over-Riding Moral Issue," National Right to
woman's responsibility to the fertilized egg is imaginatively and with great conviction construed to be her relation to the adult male. At the very least, she must not murder him; nor should she outrage his existence by an assertion of her separateness from him, her distinctness, her importance as a person independent of him. The adult male's identification with the fertilized egg as being fully himself can even be conceptualized in terms of power: his rightful power over an impersonal female (all females being the same in terms of function). "The power I had as one cell to affect my environment I shall never have again," R.D. Laing laments in an androcentric meditation on prebirth ego. "My environment" is a woman; the adult male, even as a fertilized egg, one cell, has the right of occupation with respect to her—he has the right to be inside her and the rightful power to change her body for his sake. This relation to gestation is specifically male. Women do not think of themselves in utero when they think either of being pregnant or of aborting; men think of pregnancy and abortion primarily in terms of themselves, including what happened or might have happened to them back in the womb when, as one cell, they were themselves.

Women keep quiet about abortions they have had, illegal abortions, because they are humiliated by the memory of those abortions; they are humiliated by the memory of their desperation, the panic, finding the money, finding the abortionist, the dirt, the danger, the secrecy. Women are humiliated when they remember asking for help, begging for help, when they remember those who turned away, left them out in the cold. Women are humiliated by the memory of the fear. Women are humiliated by the memory of the physical intrusion, the penetration, the pain, the violation; countless women were sexually assaulted by the abortionist before or after the abortion; they hate remembering. Women are humiliated because they hated themselves, their sex, their female bodies, they hated being female. Women hate remembering illegal abortions because they almost died, they could have died, they wanted to die, they hoped they would not die, they made promises to God begging him not to let them die, they were afraid of dying before and during and after; they have never again been so afraid of death or so alone; they had never before been so afraid of death or so alone. And women hate remembering illegal abortions because their husbands experienced none of this: which no woman forgives.

Women also keep quiet about illegal abortions precisely because they had married sex: their husbands mounted them, fucked them, impregnated them; their husbands determined the time and the place and the act; desire, pleasure, or orgasm were not necessarily experienced by


the women, yet the women ended up on the butcher’s block. The abortionist finished the job the husband had started. No one wants to remember this.

Women also keep quiet about abortions they have had because they wanted the child, but the man did not; because they wanted other children and could not have them; because they never regretted the abortion and did regret subsequent children; because they had more than one abortion, which, like more than one rape, fixes the woman’s guilt. Women keep quiet about abortions because abortion inside marriage is selfish, ruthless, marks the woman as heartless, loveless—yet she did it anyway. Women also keep quiet about abortions they have had, illegal abortions, because the woman who has had one, or tried to induce one in herself, is never really trusted again: if she will do that to herself—hurt herself, tear up her own insides rather than have a child—she must be the frenzied female, the female gone mad, the lunatic female, the female in rebellion against her own body and therefore against man and God, the female who is most feared and abhorred, the Medea underneath the devoted wife and mother, the wild woman, the woman enraged with the sorrow between her legs, the woman grief-stricken by the way men use her uterus, the woman who has finally refused to be forced and so she must be punished by the pain and the blood, the tearing and the terror.

The law gives a married woman to her husband to be fucked at will, his will; the law forced the woman to bear any child that might result. Illegal abortion was a desperate, dangerous, last-ditch, secret, awful way of saying no. It is no wonder that so many respectable, married, God-fearing women hate abortion.

An estimated 20 million illegal abortions are performed in the world each year and are a leading cause of death among women of child-bearing age, a study issued today said.

The report by the Population Crisis Committee also said that another 20 million abortions were self-induced annually and that the number was growing.

*The New York Times, April 30, 1979*

Women cannot be responsible for pregnancy, in the sense of acting to prevent it, because women do not control when, where, how, and on what terms they have intercourse. Intercourse is forced on women, both as a normal part of marriage and as the primary sex act in virtually any sexual encounter with a man. No woman needs intercourse; few women escape it.

In marriage a man has the sexual right to his wife: he can fuck her at will by right of law. The law articulates and defends this right. The state
articulates and defends this right. This means that the state defines the intimate uses of a woman's body in marriage; so that a man acts with the protection of the state when he fucks his wife, regardless of the degree of force surrounding or intrinsic to the act. In the United States only five states have entirely abrogated the so-called marital rape exemption*—the legal proviso that a man cannot be criminally charged for raping his wife because rape by definition cannot exist in the context of marriage, since marriage licenses the use of a woman's body by her husband against her will. Nearly three times that many states have extended the husband's right to forced intercourse to cohabiting men or, in some cases, even to so-called voluntary social companions. But even where marital rape is illegal, the husband has at his disposal the ordinary means of sexual coercion, including threat of physical violence, punitive economic measures, sexual or verbal humiliation in private or in public, violence against inanimate objects, and threats against children. In other words, eliminating the legal sanctioning of rape does not in itself eliminate sexual coercion in marriage; but the continued legal sanctioning of rape underlines the coercive character and purpose of marriage. Marriage law is irrefutable proof that women are not equal to men. No person can enter into an agreement in which her body is given to another and remain or become or act as or effectually be his equal.

The law takes the form it does with divine sanction: civil law reiterates religious dogma. The law enforces a relationship between men and women that has its origins in so-called divine law; the law enforces the divinely ordained subordination of women through its regulation of sex in marriage. The law is an instrument of religion, and it is precisely as an instrument of religion that law regulating marriage gets its special character: laws against assault and battery pale in importance when compared with the divine law giving a man authority over his wife's body. The man's authority over his wife's body is willed by God—even if the same relationship outside of marriage and without reference to gender would be described as slavery or torture. The laws of God are upheld by the laws of this republic, this proud secular democracy. The marriage laws fundamentally violate the civil rights of women as a class by forcing all married women to conform to a religious view of women's sexual

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* As the Journal goes to press, a sixth state has joined those in which the marital rape exemption has been "entirely abrogated." See Woods, Book Review, infra (reviewing D. Russell, Rape in Marriage (1982)). Marital rape exemptions, and successive approaches to their elimination, arise in a variety of legal postures. (See Joanne Shulman, Russell, Rape in Marriage, App. II, Macmillan, 375-81.) Dworkin and Woods do not consider that a state has entirely abrogated a marital rape exemption if a woman can bring a rape charge against her husband only if they were not living together at the time. Cohabitant exceptions are considered to perpetuate the view which formal marriage only institutionalizes: that a man has an automatic right of sexual access to a woman with whom he lives.
function. These same laws violate the civil rights of women by compelling women to serve their husbands sexually whether they will it or not and by defining women as a class in terms of a sexual function that must be fulfilled.*

Women feel the pressure to submit in a myriad of ways, none of which have to do with marital law as such. The woman is likely to encounter marital law when she has been abused and seeks to act in her own behalf as if she had a right to the disposition of her own body. The point is that the law sets the standard for the disposition of her body: it belongs to her husband, not to her.

The good wife submits; the bad wife can be forced to submit. All women are supposed to submit.

One of the consequences of submission, whether conforming or forced, is pregnancy.

Women are required to submit to intercourse, and women may then be required to submit to the pregnancy.

Women are required to submit to the man, and women may then be required to submit to the fetus.

Since the law sets the standard for the control, use of, function of, purpose of, the wife's body, and since the law supports the right of the man to use force against his wife in order to have sex, women live in a context of forced sex. This is true outside the realm of subjective interpretation. If it were not true, the law would not be formulated to sanction the husband's forced penetration of his wife. Marriage is the common state of adult women; women live in a system in which sex is forced on them; and the sex is intercourse. Women, it is said, have a bad attitude toward sex. Women, it is not said often enough, have a long-lived resentment against forced sex and a longing for freedom, which is often expressed as an aversion to sex. It is a fact for women that they must come to terms with forced sex over and over in the course of a normal life.

Forced sex, usually intercourse, is a central issue in any woman's life. She must like it or control it or manipulate it or resist it or avoid it; she

* The American Civil Liberties Union has a handbook on women's rights. In that handbook, laws against prostitution are discussed in terms of the right of women to have sex: "the central focus of all these laws is to punish sexual activity" (The Rights of Women, Susan C. Ross, Avon. 1973, p. 176); equal right to sexual activity is seen to be the civil liberties issue of paramount importance and laws against prostitution are simply a cover for denying women the right to sexual activity. This is not a narrow discussion of laws on prostitution and their sex-discriminatory language or enforcement. It is a position on what rights are for women, what freedom is. There is no mention of marital rape or of the marital rape exemption as violations of civil liberties and no discussion whatsoever of sexual coercion in marriage sanctioned by law in letter and in practice as a violation of civil liberties. The discussion of rape also makes no reference to marital rape or the role of law in upholding it.
must develop a relationship to it, to the male insistence on intercourse, to the male insistence on her sexual function in relation to him. She will be measured and judged by the nature and quality of her relationship to intercourse. Her character will be assessed in terms of her relationship to intercourse, as men evaluate that relationship. All the possibilities of her body will be reduced to expressing her relationship to intercourse. Every sign on her body, every symbol—clothes, posture, hair, ornament—will have to signal her acceptance of his sex act and the nature of her relationship to it. His sex act, intercourse, explicitly announces his power over her: his possession of her interior, his right to violate her boundaries. His state promotes and protects his sex act. If she were not a woman, this intrusion by the state would be recognized as state coercion, or force. The act itself and the state that protects it call on force to exercise illegitimate power; and intercourse cannot be analyzed outside this system of force. But the force is hidden and denied by a barrage of propaganda, from pornography to so-called women’s magazines, that seek to persuade that accommodation is pleasure, or that accommodation is femininity, or that accommodation is freedom, or that accommodation is a strategic means to some degree of self-determination.

The propaganda for femininity (femininity being the apparent acceptance of sex on male terms with goodwill and demonstrable good faith, in the form of ritualized obsequiousness) is produced according to the felt need of men to have intercourse. In a time of feminist resistance, such propaganda increases in bulk geometrically. The propaganda stresses that intercourse can give a woman pleasure if she does it right: especially if she has the right attitude toward it and toward the man. The right attitude is to want it. The right attitude is to desire men because they engage in phallic penetration. The right attitude is to want intercourse because men want it. The right attitude is not to be selfish: especially about orgasm. This prohibits a sexuality for women outside the boundaries of male dominance. This makes any woman-centered sexuality impossible. What it does make possible is a woman’s continued existence within a system in which men control the valuation of her existence as an individual. This valuation is based on her sexual conformity within a sexual system based on his right to possess her. Women are brought up to conform: all the rules of femininity—dress, behavior, attitude—essentially break the spirit. Women are trained to need men, not sexually but metaphysically. Women are brought up to be the void that needs filling, the absence that needs presence. Women are brought up to fear men and to know that they must please men and to understand that they cannot survive without the help of men richer and stronger than they can be themselves, on their own. Women are brought up to submit to intercourse—and here the strategy is shrewd—by being kept ignorant of it. The rules are taught, but the act is hidden. Girls are taught “love,” not
“fuck.” Little girls look between their legs to see if “the hole” is there, get scared thinking about what “the hole” is for; no one tells them either. Women use their bodies to attract men; and most women, like the little girls they were, are astonished by the brutality of the fuck. The importance of this ignorance about sexual intercourse cannot be overstated: it is as if no girl would grow up, or accept the hundred million lessons on how to be a girl, or want boys to like her, if she knew what she was for. The propaganda for femininity assumes that the girl still lives inside the woman; that the lessons of femininity must be taught and retaught without letup; that the woman left to herself would repudiate the male use of her body, simply not accept it. The propaganda for femininity teaches women over and over, endlessly, that they must like intercourse; and the lesson must be taught over and over, endlessly, because intercourse does not express their own sexuality in general and the male use of women rarely has anything to do with the woman as an individual. The sexuality they are supposed to like does not recognize, let alone honor, their individuality in any meaningful way. The sexuality they must learn to like is not concerned with desire toward them as distinct personalities—at best they are “types”; nor is it concerned with their own desire toward others.

Despite the propaganda, the mountains of it, intercourse requires force; force is still essential to make women have intercourse—at least in a systematic, sustained way. Despite every single platitude about love, women and men, passion, femininity, intercourse as health or pleasure or biological necessity, it is forced sex that keeps intercourse central and it is forced sex that keeps women in sexual relation to men. If the force were not essential, the force would not be endemic. If the force were not essential, the law would not sanction it. If the force were not essential, the force itself would not be defined as intrinsically “sexy,” as if in practicing force sex itself is perpetuated.

The first kind of force is physical violence: endemic in rape, battery, assault.

The second kind of force is the power differential between male and female that intrinsically makes any sex act an act of force: for instance, the sexual abuse of girls in families.

The third kind of force is economic: keeping women poor to keep women sexually accessible and sexually compliant.

The fourth kind of force is cultural on a broad scale: woman-hating propaganda that makes women legitimate and desirable sexual targets; woman-hating laws that either sanction or in their actual application permit sexual abuse of women; woman-hating practices of verbal harassment backed by the threat of physical violence on the streets or in the workplace; woman-hating textbooks used to teach doctors, lawyers, and other professionals misogyny as a central element of the practice of
their profession; woman-hating art that romanticizes sexual assault, stylizes and celebrates sexual violence; woman-hating entertainment that makes women as a class ridiculous, stupid, despicable, and the sexual property of all men.

Because women are exploited as a sex class for sex, it is impossible to talk about women’s sexuality outside the context of forced sex or, at the least, without reference to forced sex; and yet, to keep forced sex going and invisible simultaneously, it is discussed every other way, all the time.

The force itself is intrinsically “sexy,” romanticized, described as a measure of the desire of an individual man for an individual woman. Force, duress, subterfuge, threat—all add “sex” to the sex act by intensifying the femininity of the woman, her status as a creature of forced sex.

It is through intercourse in particular that men express and maintain their power and dominance over women. The right of men to women’s bodies for the purpose of intercourse remains the heart, soul, and balls of male supremacy: this is true whatever style of advocacy is used, Right or Left, to justify coital access.

Every woman—no matter what her sexual orientation, personal sexual likes or dislikes, personal history, political ideology—lives inside this system of forced sex. This is true even if she has never personally experienced any sexual coercion, or if she personally likes intercourse as a form of intimacy, or if she as an individual has experiences of intercourse that transcend, in her opinion, the dicta of gender and the institutions of force. This is true even if—for her—the force is eroticized, essential, central, sacred, meaningful, sublime. This is true even if—for her—she repudiates intercourse and forbids it: if she subjectively lives outside the laws of gravity, obviously the laws of gravity will intrude. Every woman is surrounded by this system of forced sex and is encapsulated by it. It acts on her, shapes her, defines her boundaries and her possibilities, tames her, domesticates her, determines the quality and nature of her privacy: it modifies her. She functions within it and with constant reference to it. This same system that she is inside is inside her—metaphorically and literally delivered into her by intercourse, especially forced intercourse, especially deep thrusting. Intercourse violates the boundaries of her body, which is why intercourse is so often referred to as violation. Intercourse as a sex act does not correlate with anything but male power: its frequency and centrality have nothing to do with reproduction, which does not require that intercourse be the central sexual act either in society at large or in any given sexual relationship or encounter; its frequency and centrality have nothing to do with sexual pleasure for the female or the male, in that pleasure does not prohibit intercourse but neither does pleasure demand it. Intercourse is synonymous with sex because intercourse is the most systematic expression of male power over
women's bodies, both concrete and emblematic, and as such it is upheld as a male right by law (divine and secular), custom, practice, culture, and force. Because intercourse so consistently expresses illegitimate power, unjust power, wrongful power, it is intrinsically an expression of the female's subordinate status, sometimes a celebration of that status. The shame that women feel on being fucked and simultaneously experiencing pleasure in being possessed is the shame of having acknowledged, physically and emotionally, the extent to which one has internalized and eroticized the subordination. It is a shame that has in it the kernel of resistance. The woman who says no to her husband, whatever her reasons, also says no to the state, no to God, no to the power of men over her, that power being both personal and institutional. Intercourse is forced on the woman by a man, his state, his God, and through intercourse an individual is made into a woman: a woman is made. Whether a woman likes or does not like, desires or does not desire, to be made a woman does not change the meaning of the act. "There are many scarcely nubile girls," wrote Colette, "who dream of becoming the show, the plaything, the licentious masterpiece of some middle-aged man. It is an ugly dream that is punished by its fulfilment, a morbid thing, akin to the neuroses of puberty, the habit of eating chalk and coal, of drinking mouthwash, of reading dirty books and sticking pins into the palm of the hand."

Forced intercourse in marriage—that is, the right to intercourse supported by the state in behalf of the husband—provides the context for both rape as commonly understood and incestuous rape. Marital sex and rape are opposite and opposing forms of sexual expression only when women are viewed as sexual property: when rape is seen as the theft of one man's property by another man. As soon as the woman as a human being becomes the central figure in a rape, that is, as soon as she is recognized as a human victim of an inhumane act, forced sex must be recognized as such, whatever the relation of the man to his victim. But if forced sex is sanctioned and protected in marriage, and indeed provides an empirical definition of what women are for, how then does one distinguish so-called consensual, normal sex (intercourse) from rape? There is no context that is both normal and protected in which the will of the woman is recognized as the essential precondition for sex. It has been the business of the state to regulate male use of sexual force against women, not to prohibit it. The state may allow a man to force his wife but not his daughter, or his wife but not his neighbor's wife. Rather than prohibiting the use of force against women per se, a male-supremacist state establishes a relationship between sexual force and normalcy: in marriage, a woman has no right to refuse her husband intercourse. Limits to the force men can use have been

negotiated by men with one another in their own interests—and are renegotiated in every rape or incest case in which the man is held blameless because force is seen as intrinsically and properly sexual (that is, normal) when used to effect female sexual compliance. The society’s opposition to rape is fake because the society’s commitment to forced sex is real: marriage defines the normal uses to which women should be put, and marriage institutionalizes forced intercourse. Consent then logically becomes mere passive acquiescence; and passive compliance does become the standard of female participation in intercourse. Because passive acquiescence is the standard in normal intercourse, it becomes proof of consent in rape. Because force is sanctioned to effect intercourse in marriage, it becomes common sexual practice, so that its use in sex does not signify, prove, or even—especially to men—suggest rape. Forced intercourse in marriage, being both normal and state-sanctioned, provides the basis for the wider practice of forced sex, tacitly accepted most of the time. Forced intercourse in marriage as the norm sanctioned by the state makes it virtually impossible to identify (male) force or (female) consent; to say what they are so as to be able to recognize them in discrete instances. The state can and does make distinctions by category—for instance, sex with little girls is off limits—but no finer kind of distinction can be made because that would require a repudiation of force as a part of normal sex. Since the nearly, universal acceptance of forced intercourse in marriage is a kind of universal callousness—an agreement as to the disposition of married women’s bodies, thereby annihilating any conception of their civil or sexual rights or any sensitivity to force in sex as a violation of those women’s rights—it is easy to extend the callous acceptance of men’s civilly guaranteed right to use force to get sex to broader categories of women, also to girls, and this has happened. There is the belief that men use force because they are men. There is the belief that women like force and respond to it sexually. There is the belief that force is intrinsically sexy. There is the conceit that the married woman is the most protected of all women: if force is right with her, with whom can it be wrong? if a man does to another woman what he does to his wife, it may be adultery but how can it be rape when in fact it is simply—from his point of view—plain old sex? There is the definition of when a girl becomes a woman: a girl may be considered adult because she has menstruated (at the age of ten, for instance) or because she has a so-called provocative quality, which means that a man wants to fuck her and that therefore she is presumed to be a woman and to have adult knowledge of what sex is and what a woman is. There is the definition of the female in terms of her function, which is to be fucked; so it may be unfortunate that she is fucked too early, but once fucked she has fulfilled a preordained function as a woman and therefore is a woman and therefore can legitimately be fucked.
With respect to pregnancy, if a woman can be forced to bear a child conceived by force in marriage, there is no logic in differentiating pregnancy as a result of rape or incestuous rape. Force is the norm; pregnancy is the result; the woman has no claim to a respected identity not predicated on forced intercourse—that is, at best her dignity inheres in being a wife, subject to forced intercourse and therefore to forced pregnancy; why would any woman's body be entitled to more respect than the married woman's? Rape, rarely credited as such by men unless the display of force has been brutal almost beyond imagining, is in fact an exaggerated expression of a fully accepted sexual relation between men and women; and incestuous rape adds a new element of exaggeration, but the essential sexual relation—the relation of force to female—remains the same. Therefore, men—especially men responsible for maintaining the right and role of sexual force in marriage (lawmakers and theologians)—cannot consider pregnancy resulting from rape or incestuous rape as significantly different from pregnancy that results from the normal use of a married woman; and in their frame of reference regarding intercourse, it is not. The woman's function is to be fucked—and if she is pregnant, then she was fucked, no matter what the circumstance or the means. Being fucked did not violate her integrity as a woman because being fucked is her integrity as a woman. Force is intrinsic to fucking, and the state cannot allow women to determine when they have been raped (forced), because rape (force) in marriage is supported by the state. The willingness to consider rape or incestuous rape exceptions at all comes from the male recognition that a man might not want to accept the offspring of another man's rape as his own; a father may not want to be both father and grandfather to the daughter of his daughter. These exceptions, to the extent that they are or will be honored in legislation forbidding abortion, exist to protect men. Henry Hyde, author of the Hyde Amendment forbidding Medicaid money to poor women for abortions and opponent of all abortion under all circumstances without exception for rape, was asked by a television interviewer if he would insist that his daughter carry a pregnancy to term if she were pregnant as the result of rape. Yes, he answered solemnly. But the question he should have been asked was this one: suppose his wife were pregnant as the result of rape? This would impinge not on his sentimentality, but on his day-to-day right of sexual possession; he would have to live with the rape and with the carnal reality of the rape and with the pregnancy resulting from the rape and with the offspring or the damaged woman who would have to bear it and then give it up. Regardless of his answer to the hypothetical question, only the male sense of what is at stake for him in actually having to accept a pregnancy caused by rape or incestuous rape in his own life as a husband to the woman or girl involved could make the rape or the woman raped real. Abortion can protect men, and can be tolerated when it demonstrably
does. In terms of the woman used, herself alone, she is her function; she has been used in accordance with her function; there is no reason to let her off the hook just because she was forced by a man not her husband.

Norman Mailer remarked during the sixties that the problem with the sexual revolution was that it had gotten into the hands of the wrong people. He was right. It was in the hands of men.

The pop idea was that fucking was good, so good that the more there was of it, the better. The pop idea was that people should fuck whom they wanted: translated for the girls, this meant that girls should want to be fucked—as close to all the time as was humanly possible. For women, alas, all the time is humanly possible with enough changes of partners. Men envision frequency with reference to their own patterns of erection and ejaculation. Women got fucked a lot more than men fucked.

Sexual-revolution philosophy predates the sixties. It shows up in Left ideologies and movements with regularity—in most countries, in many different periods, manifest in various leftist “tendencies.” The sixties in the United States, repeated with different tonalities throughout Western Europe, had a particularly democratic character. One did not have to read Wilhelm Reich, though some did. It was simple. A bunch of nasty bastards who hated making love were making war. A bunch of boys who liked flowers were making love and refusing to make war. These boys were wonderful and beautiful. They wanted peace. They talked love, love, love, not romantic love but love of mankind (translated by women: humankind). They grew their hair long and painted their faces and wore colorful clothes and risked being treated like girls. In resisting going to war, they were cowardly and sissies and weak, like girls. No wonder the girls of the sixties thought that these boys were their special friends, their special allies, lovers each and every one.

The girls were real idealists. They hated the Viet Nam War and, unlike the boys, their own lives were not at stake. They hated the racial and sexual bigotry visited on blacks, in particular on black men who were the figures in visible jeopardy. The girls were not all white, but still the black man was the figure of empathy, the figure whom they wanted to protect from racist pogroms. Rape was seen as a racist ploy: not something real in itself used in a racist context to isolate and destroy black men in specific and strategic ways, but a fabrication, a figment of the racist imagination. The girls were idealistic because, unlike the boys, many of them had been raped; their lives were at stake. The girls were idealists especially because they believed in peace and freedom so much that they even thought it was intended for them too. They knew that their mothers were not free—they saw the small, constrained, female lives—and they
did not want to be their mothers. They accepted the boys’ definition of sexual freedom because it, more than any other idea or practice, made them different from their mothers. While their mothers kept sex secret and private, with so much fear and shame, the girls proclaimed sex their right, their pleasure, their freedom. They decried the stupidity of their mothers and allied themselves on overt sexual terms with the long-haired boys who wanted peace, freedom, and fucking everywhere. This was a world vision that took girls out of the homes in which their mothers were dull captives or automatons and at the same time turned the whole world, potentially, into the best possible home. In other words, the girls did not leave home in order to find sexual adventure in a sexual jungle; they left home to find a warmer, kinder, larger, more embracing home.

Sexual radicalism was defined in classically male terms: number of partners, frequency of sex, varieties of sex (for instance, group sex), eagerness to engage in sex. It was all supposed to be essentially the same for boys and girls: two, three, or however many long-haired persons communing. It was especially the lessening of gender polarity that kept the girls entranced, even after the fuck had revealed the boys to be men after all. Forced sex occurred—it occurred often; but the dream lived on. Lesbianism was never accepted as lovemaking on its own terms but rather as a kinky occasion for male voyeurism and the eventual fucking of two wet women; still, the dream lived on. Male homosexuality was toyed with, vaguely tolerated, but largely despised and feared because heterosexual men however bedecked with flowers could not bear to be fucked “like women”; but the dream lived on. And the dream for the girls at base was a dream of a sexual and social empathy that negated the strictures of gender, a dream of sexual equality based on what men and women had in common, what the adults tried to kill in you as they made you grow up. It was a desire for a sexual community more like childhood—before girls were crushed under and segregated. It was a dream of sexual transcendence: transcending the absolutely dichotomized male-female world of the adults who made war not love. It was—for the girls—a dream of being less female in a world less male; an eroticization of sibling equality, not the traditional male dominance.

Wishing did not make it so. Acting as if it were so did not make it so. Proposing it in commune after commune, to man after man, did not make it so. Baking bread and demonstrating against the war together did not make it so. The girls of the sixties lived in what Marxists call, but in this instance do not recognize as, a “contradiction.” Precisely in trying to erode the boundaries of gender through an apparent single standard of sexual-liberation practice, they participated more and more in the most gender-reifying act: fucking. The men grew more manly; the world of the counterculture became more aggressively male-dominated. The girls became women—found themselves possessed by a man or a man and his
buddies (in the parlance of the counterculture, his brothers and hers too)—traded, gang-fucked, collected, collectivized, objectified, turned into the hot stuff of pornography, and socially resegregated into traditionally female roles. Empirically speaking, sexual liberation was practiced by women on a wide scale in the sixties and it did not work: that is, it did not free women. Its purpose—it turned out—was to free men to use women without bourgeois constraints, and in that it was successful. One consequence for the women was an intensification of the experience of being sexually female—the precise opposite of what those idealistic girls had envisioned for themselves. In experiencing a wide variety of men in a wide variety of circumstances, women who were not prostitutes discovered the impersonal, class-determined nature of their sexual function. They discovered the utter irrelevance of their own individual, aesthetic, ethical, or political sensitivities (whether those sensitivities were characterized by men as female or bourgeois or puritanical) in sex as men practiced it. The sexual standard was the male-to-female fuck, and women served it—it did not serve women.

In the sexual-liberation movement of the sixties, its ideology and practice, neither force nor the subordinate status of women was an issue. It was assumed that—unrepressed—everyone wanted intercourse all the time (men, of course, had other important things to do; women had no legitimate reason not to want to be fucked); and it was assumed that in women an aversion to intercourse, or not climaxing from intercourse, or not wanting intercourse at a particular time or with a particular man, or wanting fewer partners than were available, or getting tired, or being cross, were all signs of and proof of sexual repression. Fucking per se was freedom per se. When rape—obvious, clear, brutal rape—occurred, it was ignored, often for political reasons if the rapist was black and the woman white. Interestingly, in a racially constructed rape, the rape was likely to be credited as such, even when ultimately ignored. When a white man raped a white woman, there was no vocabulary to describe it. It was an event that occurred outside the political discourse of the generation in question and therefore it did not exist. When a black woman was raped by a white man, the degree of recognition depended on the state of alliances between black and white men in the social territory involved: whether, at any given time, they were sharing women or fighting territorially over them. A black woman raped by a black man had the special burden of not jeopardizing her own race, endangered especially by charges of rape, by calling attention to any such brutality committed against her. Beatings and forced intercourse were commonplace in the counterculture. Even more widespread was the social and economic coercion of women to engage in sex with men. Yet no antagonism was seen to exist between sexual force and sexual freedom: one did not preclude the other. Implicit was the conviction that force would not be necessary if women were not
repressed; women would want to fuck and would not have to be forced to
fuck; so that it was repression, not force, that stood in the way of
freedom.

Sexual-liberation ideology, whether pop or traditionally leftist intel-
lectual, did not criticize, analyze, or repudiate forced sex, nor did it
demand an end to the sexual and social subordination of women to men:
neither reality was recognized. Instead, it posited that freedom for women
existed in being fucked more often by more men, a sort of lateral mobility
in the same inferior sphere. No persons were held responsible for forced
sex acts, beatings of women, unless the women themselves were
blamed—usually for not complying in the first place. These were in the
main women who wanted to comply—who wanted the promised land of
sexual freedom—and still they had limits, preferences, tastes, desires for
intimacy with some men and not others, moods not necessarily related to
menstruation or the phases of the moon, days on which they would rather
work or read; and they were punished for all these puritanical repres-
sions, these petit bourgeois lapses, these tiny exercises of tinier wills not in
conformity with the wills of their brother-lovers: force was frequently
used against them, or they were threatened or humiliated or thrown out.
No diminution of flower power, peace, freedom, political correctness, or
justice was seen to be implicit in the use of coercion in any form to get
sexual compliance.

In the garden of earthly delights known as the sixties counter-
culture, pregnancy did intrude, almost always rudely; and even then and
there it was one of the real obstacles to female fucking on male demand. It
made women ambivalent, reluctant, concerned, cross, preoccupied; it
even led women to say no. Throughout the sixties, the birth control pill
was not easy to get, and nothing else was sure. Unmarried women had an
especially hard time getting access to contraceptive devices, including the
diaphragm, and abortion was illegal and dangerous. Fear of pregnancy
provided a reason for saying no: not just an excuse but a concrete reason
not easily seduced or persuaded away, even by the most astute or dazzling
argument in behalf of sexual freedom. Especially difficult to sway were
the women who had had illegal abortions already. Whatever they thought
of fucking, however they experienced it, however much they loved or
tolerated it, they knew that for them it had consequences in blood and pain
and they knew that it cost the men nothing, except sometimes money.
Pregnancy was a material reality, and it could not be argued away. One
tactic used to counterbalance the high anxiety caused by the possibility of
pregnancy was the esteem in which “natural” women were held—women
who were “natural” in all respects, who wanted organic fucking (no birth
control, whatever children resulted) and organic vegetables too. Another
tactic was to stress the communal raising of children, to promise it.
Women were not punished in the conventional ways for bearing the
children—they were not labeled “bad” or shunned—but they were frequently abandoned. A woman and her child—poor and relatively outcast—wandering within the counterculture changed the quality of the hedonism in the communities in which they intruded: the mother-and-child pair embodied a different strain of reality, not a welcome one for the most part. There were lone women struggling to raise children “freely” and they got in the way of the males who saw freedom as the fuck—and the fuck ended for the males when the fuck ended. These women with children made the other women a little somber, a little concerned, a little careful. Pregnancy, the fact of it, was antiaphrodisiacal. Pregnancy, the burden of it, made it harder for the flower boys to fuck the flower girls, who did not want to have to claw out their own insides or pay someone else to do it; they also did not want to die.

It was the brake that pregnancy put on fucking that made abortion a high-priority political issue for men in the 1960s—not only for young men, but also for the older leftist men who were skimming sex off the top of the counterculture and even for more traditional men who dipped into the pool of hippie girls now and then. The decriminalization of abortion—for that was the political goal—was seen as the final fillip: it would make women absolutely accessible, absolutely “free.” The sexual revolution, in order to work, required that abortion be available to women on demand. If it were not, fucking would not be available to men on demand. Getting laid was at stake. Not just getting laid, but getting laid the way great numbers of boys and men had always wanted—lots of girls who wanted it all the time outside marriage, free, giving it away. The male-dominated Left agitated for and fought for and argued for and even organized for and even provided political and economic resources for abortion rights for women. The Left was militant on the issue.

Then, at the very end of the sixties, women who had been radical in counterculture terms—women who had been both politically and sexually active—became radical in new terms: they became feminists. They were not Betty Friedan’s housewives. They had fought out on the streets against the Viet Nam War; some of them were old enough to have fought in the South for black civil rights, and all had come into adulthood on the back of that struggle; and lord knows, they had been fucked. As Marge Piercy wrote in a 1969 exposé of sex and politics in the counterculture.

Fucking a staff into existence is only the extreme form of what passes for common practice in many places. A man can bring a woman into an organization by sleeping with her and remove her by ceasing to do so. A man can purge a woman for no other reason than that he has tired of her, knocked her up, or is after someone else: and that purge is accepted without a ripple. There are cases of a woman excluded from a group for no other reason than that one of its leaders
proved impotent with her. If a macher enters a room full of machers, accompanied by a woman and does not introduce her, it is rare indeed than anyone will bother to ask her name or acknowledge her presence. The etiquette that governs is one of master-servant.

Or, as Robin Morgan wrote in 1970: "We have met the enemy and he's our friend. And dangerous." Acknowledging the forced sex so pervasive in the counterculture in the language of the counterculture, Morgan wrote: "It hurts to understand that at Woodstock or Altamont a woman could be declared upright or a poor sport if she didn't want to be raped." These were the beginnings: recognizing that the brother-lovers were sexual exploiters as cynical as any other exploiters—they ruled and demeaned and discarded women, they used women to get and consolidate power, they used women for sex and for menial labor, they used women up; recognizing that rape was a matter of utter indifference to these brother-lovers—they took it any way they could get it; and recognizing that all the work for justice had been done on the backs of sexually exploited women within the movement. "But surely," wrote Robin Morgan in 1968, "even a male reactionary on this issue can realize that it is really mind-blowing to hear some young male 'revolutionary'—supposedly dedicated to building a new, free social order to replace this vicious one under which we live—turn around and absent-mindedly order his 'chick' to shut up and make supper or wash his socks—he's talking now. We're used to such attitudes from the average American clod, but from this brave new radical?"

It was the raw, terrible realization that sex was not brother-sister but master-servant—that this brave new radical wanted to be not only master in his own home but pasha in his own harem—that proved explosive. The women ignited with the realization that they had been sexually used. Going beyond the male agenda on sexual liberation, these women discussed sex and politics with one another—something not done even when they had shared the same bed with the same man—and discovered that their experiences had been staggeringly the same, ranging from forced sex to sexual humiliation to abandonment to cynical manipulation as both menials and pieces of ass. And the men were entrenched in sex as power: they wanted the women for fucking, not revolution: the two were revealed to be different after all. The men refused to change but even more important they hated the women for refusing to service them any-

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7. Robin Morgan, "Goodbye to All That," p. 128.
more on the old terms—there it was, revealed for what it was. The women left the men—in droves. The women formed an autonomous women's movement, a militant feminist movement, to fight against the sexual cruelty they had experienced and to fight for the sexual justice they had been denied.

From their own experience—especially being coerced and in being exchanged—the women found a first premise for their political movement: that freedom for a woman was predicated on, and could not exist without, her own absolute control of her own body in sex and in reproduction. This included not only the right to terminate a pregnancy but also the right to not have sex, to say no, to not be fucked. For women, this led to many areas of sexual discovery about the nature and politics of their own sexual desire, but for men it was a dead end—most of them never recognized feminism except in terms of their own sexual deprivation; feminists were taking away the easy fuck. They did everything they could to break the back of the feminist movement—and in fact they have not stopped yet. Especially significant has been their change of heart and politics on abortion. The right to abortion defined as an intrinsic part of the sexual revolution was essential to them: who could bear the horror and cruelty and stupidity of illegal abortion? The right to abortion defined as an intrinsic part of a woman's right to control her own body, in sex too, was a matter of supreme indifference.

Material resources dried up. Feminists fought the battle for decriminalized abortion—no laws governing abortion—on the streets and in the courts with severely diminished male support. In 1973, the Supreme Court gave women legalized abortion: abortion regulated by the state. If before the Supreme Court decision in 1973 leftist men expressed a fierce indifference to abortion rights on feminist terms, after 1973 indifference changed to overt hostility: feminists had the right to abortion and were still saying no—no to sex on male terms and no to politics dominated by these same men. Legalized abortion did not make these women more available for sex; on the contrary, the women's movement was growing in size and importance and male sexual privilege was being challenged with more intensity, more commitment, more ambition. The leftist men turned from political activism: without the easy lay, they were not prepared to engage in radical politics. In therapy they discovered that they had had personalities in the womb, that they had suffered traumas in the womb. Fetal psychology—tracing a grown man's life back into the womb, where, as a fetus, he had a whole human self and psychology—developed on the therapeutic Left (the residue of the male counterculture Left) before any right-wing minister or lawmaker ever thought to make a political stand on the right of fertilized eggs as persons to the protection of the Fourteenth Amendment, which is in fact the goal of anti-abortion
activists.* The argument that abortion was a form of genocide directed particularly at blacks gained political currency, even though feminists from the first based part of the feminist case on the real facts and figures—black and Hispanic women died and were hurt disproportionately in illegal abortions. As early as 1970, these figures were available in Sisterhood is Powerful: "4.7 times as many Puerto Rican women, and 8 times as many black women die of the consequences of illegal abortions as do white women... In New York City, 80 percent of the women who die from abortions are black and brown." And on the nonviolent Left, abortion was increasingly considered murder—murder in the most grandiose terms. "Abortion is the domestic side of the nuclear arms race," wrote one male pacifist in a 1980 tract not at all singular in the scale and tone of its denunciation. Without the easy fuck, things sure had changed on the Left.

The Democratic Party, establishment home of many Left groups, especially since the end of the 1960s ferment, had conceded abortion rights as early as 1972, when George McGovern ran against Richard Nixon and refused to take a stand for abortion so that he could fight against the Viet Nam War and for the presidency without distraction. When the Hyde Amendment cutting off Medicaid funding for abortions was passed in 1976,* it had Jesse Jackson's support: he had sent telegrams to all members of Congress supporting the cutoff of funds. Court challenges delayed the implementation of the Hyde Amendment, but Jimmy Carter, elected with the help of feminist and leftist groups in the

* The Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868, has five sections, the first of which is crucial here, the second of which is interesting. Section 1: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." The second section guarantees the vote to all males. It was purposely written to exclude women. Even though women have subsequently been given the vote, laws in the United States routinely abridge the privileges and immunities of women and deprive women of liberty and property (there are still states in which married women cannot own property on their own)—and women do not have equal protection of the laws. The fetus, once legally a "person," would have all the protections guaranteed by this amendment but not in practice extended to women. The Equal Rights Amendment was in large part an effort to extend the protections of the Fourteenth Amendment to women.


* Except when the mother's life is at stake in the original version (Hyde's version): as amended in the Senate, also in cases of rape and incest.
Democratic Party, had his man, Joseph A. Califano, Jr., head of the then Department of Health, Education and Welfare, halt federal funding of abortion by administrative order. By 1977 the first documented death of a poor woman (Hispanic) from an illegal abortion had occurred: illegal abortion and death were again realities for women in the United States. In the face of the so-called human-life amendment and human-life statute—respectively a constitutional amendment and a bill of law defining a fertilized egg as a human being—the male Left has simply played dead.

The male Left abandoned abortion rights for genuinely awful reasons: the boys were not getting laid; there was bitterness and anger against feminists for ending a movement (by withdrawing from it) that was both power and sex for the men; there was also the familiar callous indifference of the sexual exploiter—if he couldn’t screw her she wasn’t real.

The hope of the male Left is that the loss of abortion rights will drive women back into the ranks—even fear of losing might do that; and the male Left has done what it can to assure the loss. The Left has created a vacuum that the Right has expanded to fill—this the Left did by abandoning a just cause, by its decade of quietism, by its decade of sulking. But the Left has not just been an absence; it has been a presence, outraged at women’s controlling their own bodies, outraged at women’s organizing against sexual exploitation, which by definition means women also organizing against the sexual values of the Left. When feminist women have lost legal abortion altogether, leftist men expect them back—begging for help, properly chastened, ready to make a deal, ready to spread their legs again. On the Left, women will have abortion on male terms, as part of sexual liberation, or women will not have abortion except at risk of death.

And the boys of the sixties did grow up too. They actually grew older. They are now men in life, not just in the fuck. They want babies. Compulsory pregnancy is about the only way they are sure to get them.

* 

Every mother is a judge who sentences the children for the sins of the father.

Rebecca West, The Judge

The girls of the sixties had mothers who predicted, insisted, argued that those girls would be hurt; but they would not say how or why. In the main, the mothers appeared to be sexual conservatives: they upheld the marriage system as a social ideal and were silent about the sex in it. Sex was a duty inside marriage; a wife’s attitude toward it was irrelevant unless she made trouble, went crazy, fucked around. Mothers had to teach their daughters to like men as a class—be responsive to men as men, warm to men as
men—and at the same time to not have sex. Since males mostly wanted
the girls for sex, it was hard for the girls to understand how to like boys and
men without also liking the sex boys and men wanted. The girls were told
nice things about human sexuality and also told that it would cost them
their lives—one way or another. The mothers walked a tough line: give the
girls a good attitude, but discourage them. The cruelty of the ambivalence
communicated itself, but the kindness in the intention did not: mothers
tried to protect their daughters from many men by directing them toward
one; mothers tried to protect their daughters by getting them to do what
was necessary inside the male system without ever explaining why. They
had no vocabulary for the why—why sex inside marriage was good but
outside marriage was bad, why more than one man turned a girl from a
loving woman into a whore, why leprosy or paralysis were states
preferable to pregnancy outside marriage. They had epithets to hurl, but
no other discourse. Silence about sex in marriage was also the only way to
avoid revelations bound to terrify—revelations about the quality of the
mothers' own lives. Sexual compliance or submission was presented as
the wife's natural function and also her natural response to her sexual
circumstance. That compliance was never seen or presented as the result
of actual force, threatened force, possible force, or a sexual and social cul
desac. It has always been essential to keep women riveted on the details of
submission so as to divert women from thinking about the nature of
force—especially the sexual force that necessitates sexual submission.
The mothers could not ward off the enthusiasm of sexual liberation—its
energy, its hope, its bright promise of sexual equality—because they
could not or would not tell what they knew about the nature and quality of
male sexuality as they had experienced it, as practiced on them in
marriage. They knew the simple logic of promiscuity, which the girls did
not: that what one man could do, ten men could do ten times over. The
girls did not understand that logic because the girls did not know fully
what one man could do. And the mothers failed to convince also because
the only life they offered was a repeat version of their own: and the girls
were close enough to feel the inconsolable sadness and the dead tiredness
of those lives, even if they did not know how or why mother had gotten the
way she was. The girls, having been taught well
by
their mothers to like
men because they were men, picked flower-children boys over their
mothers: they did not look for husbands (fathers) as dictated
by
convention but for brothers (lovers) as dictated by rebellion. The
daughters saw the strained silence of their mothers on sex as a repudiation
of the pleasure of sex, not as an honest though inarticulate assessment of it.
The disdain, disapproval, repugnance for sex was not credited as having
any objective component. What their mothers would not tell them they
could not know. They repudiated the putative sexual conservatism of their
mothers for so-called sexual radicalism: more men, more sex, more freedom.

The girls of the counterculture Left were wrong: not about civil rights or the Viet Nam War or imperial Amerika, but about sex and men. It is fair to say that the silence of the mothers hid a real, tough, unsentimental knowledge of men and intercourse, and that the noisy sexuality of the daughters hid romantic ignorance.

Times have changed. The silence has been shattered—or parts of it have been shattered. Right-wing women defending the traditional family are public; they are loud and they are many. Especially they are loud about legal abortion, which they abhor; and what they have to say about legal abortion is connected to what they know about sex. They know some terrible things. Right-wing women consistently denounce abortion because they see it as inextricably linked to the sexual degradation of women. The sixties did not simply pass them by. They learned from what they saw. They saw the cynical male use of abortion to make women easier fucks—first the political use of the issue and then, after legalization, the actual use of the medical procedure. When abortion was legal, they saw a massive social move to secure sexual access to all women on male terms—the glut of pornography; and indeed, they link the two issues, and not for reasons of hysteria. Abortion, they say, flourishes in a pornographic society; pornography, they say, flourishes in what they call an abortion society. What they mean is that both reduce women to the fuck. They have seen that the Left only champions women on its own sexual terms—as fucks; they find the right-wing offer a tad more generous. They are not dazzled by the promise of abortion as choice, as sexual self-determination, as woman's control of her own body, because they know that the promise is crap: as long as men have power over women, men will not allow abortion or anything else on those terms.

Right-wing women see in promiscuity, which legal abortion makes easier, the generalizing of force. They see force in marriage as essentially containable—contained within the marriage, limited to one man at a time. They try to “handle” him. They see that limitation—one man at a time—as necessary protection from the many men who would do the same and to whom they would be available on sexual-liberation terms—terms fortified and made genuinely possible by abortion rights. With all their new public talk, they continue the traditional silence of women in that they are silent about forced sex in marriage: but all they do is predicated on a knowledge of it, and they do not see how more force is better than less force—and more men means more force to them.

Right-wing women accuse feminists of hypocrisy and cruelty in advocating legal abortion because, as they see it, legal abortion makes them accessible fucks without consequence to men. In their view, pregnancy is the only consequence of sex that makes men accountable to
women for what men do to women. Deprived of pregnancy as an inevitability, a woman is deprived of her strongest reason not to have intercourse. Opposition to birth control is based on this same principle.

Right-wing women saw the cynicism of the Left in using abortion to make women sexually available, and they also saw the male Left abandon women who said no. They know that men do not have principles or political agendas not congruent with the sex they want. They know that abortion on strictly self-actualizing terms for women is an abomination to men—left-wing men and right-wing men and gray men and green men. They know that every woman has to make the best deal she can. They face reality and what they see is that women get fucked whether they want it or not; right-wing women get fucked by fewer men; abortion in the open takes away pregnancy as a social and sexual control over men; once a woman can terminate a pregnancy easily and openly and without risk of death, she is bereft of her best way of saying no—of refusing the intercourse the male wants to force her to accept. The consequences of pregnancy to him may stop him, as the consequences of pregnancy to her never will. The right-wing woman makes what she considers the best deal. Her deal promises that she has to be fucked only by him, not by all his buddies too; that he will pay for the kids; that she can live in his house on his wages; and she smiles and says she wants to be a mommy and play house. If in order to keep pregnancy as a weapon of survival she has to accept illegal abortion and risk death, she will do it—alone, in silence, isolated, the only reproach for her rebellion against actual pregnancy being death or maiming. In this mess of illegal abortion, she will have confirmed what she has been taught about her own nature as a woman and about all women. She deserves punishment; illegal abortion is punishment for sex. She feels shame: she may consider it the shame of sex but it is in part the shame that any human in captivity feels in being used—women being used in sex feel shame inseparable from sex. The shame will confirm that she deserves suffering; suffering in sex and birth and aborted birth is the curse of her sex; illegal abortion is deserved suffering. But illegal abortion also serves her because it puts abortion out of sight. No one has to be confronted with another woman making a choice, choosing not to be a mother. No one must face women openly with priorities other than marriage and conformity. No one must face a woman refusing to be bound by pregnancy. The women who rebel against their function must do it secretly, not causing grief, embarrassment, or confusion to other women isolated in their own reproductive quagmires, each on her own, each alone, each being a woman for all women in silence and in suffering and in solitude. With illegal abortion life or death is up to God: each time, one submits to the divine hand, divine finger on divine revolver pointed at the already bloody flesh of a woman, divine Russian roulette. It is a final, humiliated submission to the will of a superior Male who judges abso-
lutely. Death is a judgment and so is life. Illegal abortion is an individual hell; one suffers, does penance: God decides; life is forgiveness. And no one need face it until it happens to her—until she is the one caught. This is the way in which women are moral idiots in this system: ignoring whatever has to do with other women, all women, until or unless it happens to oneself. Right-wing women also believe that a woman who refuses to bear a child deserves to die. Right-wing women are prepared to accept that judgment against themselves; and when they survive, they are guilty and prepared to pay—to martyr themselves for an act of will to which they had no right as women. There is no better measure of what forced sex does to women—how it destroys self-respect and the will to survive as a self-determining human being—than the opposition of right-wing women to legal abortion: to what they need to save themselves from being butchered. The training of a girl to accept her place in sex in marriage and the use of a woman in sex in marriage means the annihilating of any will toward self-determination or freedom: her personhood is so demeaned that it becomes easier to risk death or maiming than to say no to a man who will fuck you anyway, with the blessings of God and state, 'til death do you part.