

The Ideal Marriage: Reactions to Marie Stopes' Married Love, 1918-1935

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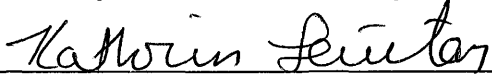
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ABSTRACT PAGE

In spring 1918, a marriage manual was published in Britain entitled *Married Love, A New Contribution to Sex Difficulties*. The writer was Dr. Marie Carmichael Stopes, a well-known plant biologist whose multiple contributions to the field of botany had been well-received by her fellow academics. After Stopes' first, three-year marriage – which she staunchly claimed was never consummated – ended with a divorce in 1914, she turned her writing skills towards a marriage manual that would help others understand how to create a successful marriage and not make the same mistakes she had made in hers'.

This thesis explores the varied reactions to *Married Love* from its publication date in 1918 through the interwar period. It is important to note that the larger context of the interwar period, especially the fluxuating concepts of sexuality, the rising field of sexology and sexual experts, and the changing field of literary scholarship all had a large effect on the popularity and acceptance of *Married Love* by its various audiences.

Married Love was read by doctors, other medical officials, academics, religious conservatives, and the general public. These audience all had various responses to the manual. Many wrote to Stopes with their praise and concerns, wrote letters to various publications, and even published books of their own. Some of these texts, such as Dr. Halliday Sutherland's treatise against Stopes' contraception clinic as well as Neo-Malthusian practices in general, were considered libellous by Stopes and her supporters. Along with Sutherland, Stopes sued multiple authors and newspaper editors because of their writings. These cases, along with the multiple obscenity trials taking place in America, became the basis for her public personality. She was considered a staunch advocate of her philosophies of life and refused to let public criticism affect her career.

Although Stopes had a huge impact on ideas of sexuality and contraception, this thesis makes sure to point out other actors who helped to change the post- World War I sexual environment. These characters include Margaret Sanger, Havelock Ellis, Halliday Sutherland, George Bernard Shaw, and many others. This thesis focuses not only on Stopes' and *Married Loves'* relationship to the general public but their relationship with other activists and leaders. Overall though, it is emphasized that *Married Love* caused a large amount of commotion within multiple groups of people and this commotion led to a number of changed beliefs in regards to sexual intercourse, sexuality, contraception, and women's rights.

Introduction

In spring 1918, a marriage manual was published in Britain entitled *Married Love, A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties*. The writer was Dr. Marie Carmichael Stopes, a well-known plant biologist whose multiple contributions to the field of botany had been well-received by her fellow academics. After Stopes' first marriage – which she staunchly claimed was never consummated – ended with divorce in 1914, she turned her research and writing skills towards a marriage manual in which she proposed to help others create an ideal marriage by cultivating a better knowledge of their sex-lives. According to Stopes, the primary objective of *Married Love* was to “increase the joys of marriage, and to show how much sorrow may be avoided.”¹

Her manual was wildly popular and was reprinted five different times over the next year. Within its pages, Stopes described what she considered proper sexual intercourse, including foreplay, the necessity of sleep, and the requirement of both men's and women's orgasm. She also included a short section on family planning and contraception. Although Stopes was certainly not the first to write a marriage manual, *Married Love* was more comprehensible to the general public than many of the manuals written before it. Through a combination of accessibility and Stopes' fiery personality, *Married Love* quickly became a best-seller, with its sequel, *Wise Parenthood*, published less than a year after its release.

Although Stopes meant for *Married Love* to be a guide for newlyweds, the book's accessibility to the general public and its assertion of a certain equality of gender roles

¹ Marie Carmichael Stopes, *Married Love: A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties*, 6th edition, (London: A. C. Fifield, 1919), xi.

meant that it had a much wider audience and quickly became a controversial text. Its discussion of contraception, as well as Stopes' belief that women's menstrual cycles should help determine the timing of sexual intercourse, were highly debated in medical, academic, religious, and public spheres. The controversy surrounding *Married Love* helped to create Stopes as a public figure in both Britain and the United States. This thesis will work to place *Married Love* within the changing atmosphere of sexual beliefs and ideas, using reactions to it by different sections of Stopes' reading public as a guide to better understand the changing concepts of sexuality which help define the interwar period on both sides of the Atlantic.

Stopes' Writing of *Married Love*

Stopes' contribution to these changing ideologies associated with sexuality started long before she set out to write *Married Love*. In 1904 she obtained her Ph. D. from the University of Munich, since British universities at the time did not allow women to obtain Ph.Ds. It was there that she met Kenjori Fujii, a fellow botanist, with whom she developed a romantic relationship. Her affair with Fujii ended badly in late 1907, after he agreed to marry her and then decided against it. She then travelled to Canada to do more work in her field, where she met and married Reginald Gates, a Canadian geneticist. She was deeply unhappy during the course of her short marriage, and was eventually granted an annulment on the grounds that they had never consummated their marriage.² It was after this second romantic disaster that Stopes began to research sexual

² Stopes' marriage with Reginald Gates was certainly not a happy one. Described as "controlling" and "possessive" by scholars, Gates felt socially out of place among Stopes' circle of literary friends, and, as June Rose stated in her description of Gates and Stopes' relationship, "He resented her for not being content to be a working botanist and a wife, and tried to assert himself." For more information on the

intercourse and wrote the first drafts of *Married Love*, which was, as one biographer points out, just as much “an attack on marriage as it was a guide to what it could become.”³ In her own words, Stopes “paid such a terrible cost for sex- ignorance that I feel that knowledge gained at such a cost should be placed at the service of humanity.”⁴

To this end, Stopes began the book with a peculiar definition of the idea of love, quoted from George Meredith’s novel, *Diana of the Crossways*, which was published in 1885. In the novel, Diana is portrayed as an intelligent and headstrong woman confined in an unhappy marriage very similar to Stopes’ own marriage. Along these lines, the quotation with which Stopes chose to start her book defined love as “a happy prospect for the sons and daughters of Earth...the speeding of us...between the aesthetic rocks and the sensual whirlpools, to the creation of certain nobler races, now very dimly imagined.”⁵

Following the quotation, Stopes began *Married Love*:

“Every heart desires a mate. For some reason beyond our comprehension, nature has so created us that we are incomplete in ourselves; neither man nor woman singly can know the joy of the performance of all human functions; neither man nor woman singly can create another human being.”⁶

Stopes’ emphasis on procreation, both through her quotation of Meredith and through her own words, presented the first of three major aims detailed within *Married Love*: proper reproduction. At multiple points throughout her manual, Stopes paused from her discussion of loftier ideals like love and marital happiness to discuss the principle result

complicated relationship between Gates and Stopes, see June Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1992), 72-82.

³ Marie Stopes, *Married Love*, Oxford World Classics Edition, ed. Ross McKibbin, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), x-xi.

⁴ *Married Love*, 6th edition, xiii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

of coitus: the conception of children. Throughout the first three-quarters of her manual, Stopes alluded to the fact that marital coitus, although certainly pleasurable, was meant principally for the conception of children. Only in her ninth chapter, appropriately entitled “Children,” did Stopes begin to detail her theories on how to select “the most favourable moment possible for the conception of the first...germinal cells to be endowed with the supreme privilege of creating a new life.”⁷ Stopes did not promote abstinence as a way to plan pregnancy, feeling that it forced couples to waste too much energy on restraint, which caused “valuable work, and intellectual power and poise...[to] suffer.”⁸ Instead, she suggested both contraception and appropriately timing sexual intercourse as ways to achieve pregnancy at only those moments which were most suitable to the couple. The remainder of the chapter detailed the “many reasons...why the potential parents should take the wise precaution of delay” and wait until the perfect moment to bear children.⁹ Of these reasons, the most discussed by the general public, especially by working class mothers, was her theory that after the birth of a child, parents should not work towards conceiving another until that child was at least a year old, and preferably closer to two years old. Labeling this theory “spacing,” Stopes emphasized family planning in helping to rejuvenate the mother’s health after each consecutive birth, stating that,

“Save where the woman is exceptional, each child following so rapidly on its predecessor, saps and divides the vital strength which is available for the making of the offspring. This generally lowers the vitality of each succeeding child, and surely, even if slowly, may murder the woman who bears them.”¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., 78.

⁸ Ibid., 43.

⁹ Ibid., 80.

¹⁰ Stopes, *Married Love*, 6th Edition, 89.

In order to support her theory of spacing, Stopes quoted a number of medical professionals, especially gynecologists, who had done research into the matter. One doctor in particular had found that in London, while the death rate of the first-born child was about 220 children in every 1000, the death-rate of the twelfth-born was 597 in every 1000 births.¹¹

At this point, it should be noted that it was not only in her discussion of spacing that Stopes borrowed from medical experts. In fact, most, if not all of Stopes' theories on procreation were not new to the late 1910s. Throughout her chapter on children, Stopes quoted leading medical experts in sexuality and gynecology. One of the doctors she quoted the most frequently was Dr. Alice Stockham. Internationally known for her writings on sexuality, medicine, and women's health, Stockham was an American social purity reformer of the late nineteenth century. Quoting Stockham's *Tokology* for much of her medical knowledge about pregnancy and childbirth, Stopes solidified the place of her book as a medical manual.¹² By paraphrasing other doctors' theories on pregnancy and women's health, Stopes was able to create a place for herself as an expert in the field of sexology.

The second major topic of *Married Love* was proper sexual intercourse.

Throughout her manual, Stopes upheld the idea that women and men were equal partners

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹² Dr. Alice Stockham's manual, *Tokology*, was published in 1883. It described women's health using uncomplicated language and medical terminology. Besides its detailed discussion of Stockham's theories on pregnancy, which Stopes quoted extensively, *Tokology* is noted for Stockham's then-radical theories on sexual politics. Condemning the double-standard that sexual intercourse was a necessity for men and not for women, Stockham argued that both men and women should be raised to a single high moral standard of sexuality. For more information on Dr. Alice Stockham, see Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement: 1875- 1920*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1999), 134-138 and Marsha Silberman, "The Perfect Storm: Late Nineteenth-Century Chicago Sex Radicals: Moses Harman, Ida Craddock, Alice Stockham, and the Comstock Obscenity Laws," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 102, (2009): 324-367.

in marriage. She made it clear that it was women who should dictate the timing of sexual intercourse and even stated that “it is a *rape* for the husband to insist on his “marital rights.”¹³ By denying that men had the right to force sexual relations on their wives, Stopes again borrowed from the general consensus among contemporary medical experts. Over the first two decades of the twentieth century, dozens of works had condemned the idea of “conjugal rights.”¹⁴ In fact, Havelock Ellis, a British physician and psychologist who studied human sexuality and was a loud proponent of equality between the genders, became a close friend of Stopes during the time that she was writing *Married Love* and even wrote many letters aiding her in her writing.¹⁵ It was actually he who originally proposed the theory of cyclical desire in women, which Stopes chose to adapt and use as a major discussion point within *Married Love*.

Stopes advocated gender equality to an even higher degree than other experts, however. Instead of just condemning the idea of “conjugal rights,” Stopes pointed out “it should be realised that a man does not woo and win a woman once for all when he marries her; *he must woo her before every separate act of coitus...*”¹⁶ Later in the manual, Stopes directed her argument towards women as well, stating that “[woman] has been so thoroughly “domesticated” by man that she feels too readily that after marriage she is all his.”¹⁷ Feeling that both husband and wife should actively participate in the sexual aspects of marriage, she admonished women for tending to “remain passively in

¹³ *Married Love*, 6th edition, 22.

¹⁴ Lucy Burke, “In Pursuit of an Erogamic Life: Marie Stopes and the Culture of *Married Love*,” *Women’s Experience of Modernity, 1875-1945*, ed. by Ann L. Ardis and Leslie W. Lewis, (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 255-269.

¹⁵ Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, 112, *Married Love*, 6th edition, 52; 85, and “November 9, 1919, City of London Hospital: Dr. George Jones to MCS,” *Dear Dr. Stopes: Sex in the 1920s*, ed. by Ruth N. Hall, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1978), 90.

¹⁶ *Married Love*, 6th edition, 48. [original italics]

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

the man's companionship.”¹⁸ According to scholars, her insistence on women's as well as men's pleasure during sexual intercourse, along with her later arguments about contraception, helped to place her in the international spotlight.¹⁹ Instead of simply demanding that men must include foreplay and be thoughtful of women's pleasure, Stopes believed that both individuals should be responsible for creating an enjoyable sexual experience, and therefore create a unique and equitable partnership.

Stopes also advocated women's independence outside of the bedroom, believing that women should have the freedom to create their own friendships and cultivate pursuits outside of married life. It is clear that this small section was inspired by her own failed marriage, and she makes a point to describe the ways in which the good intentions of men can lead to unhappiness between a husband and wife. In order to demonstrate the ways in which men could become possessive outside the bedroom, Stopes detailed her relationship with Gates, describing him as simply a man she had known:

“I have known a romantic man of this type, apparently unaware that he was encroaching upon his wife's personality, who yet endeavored not only to choose her books and her friends for her, but "prohibited" her from buying the daily newspaper to which she had been accustomed for years before her marriage, saying that one newspaper was enough for them both, and blandly ignoring the fact that he took it with him out of the house before she had an opportunity of reading it. This man posed to himself more successfully than to others, not only as a romantic man, but as a model husband; and he reproached his wife for jeopardizing their perfect unity whenever she accepted an invitation in which he was not included.”²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid., 70.

¹⁹ Stephen Garton, *Histories of Sexuality: Antiquity to Sexual Revolution*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 191-192. and Lesley A. Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain Since 1880*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 100-101. and Ellen Holtzman, “The Pursuit of Married Love: Women's Attitudes toward Sexuality and Marriage in Great Britain, 1918-1939,” *Journal of Social History*, 16, n. 2, (Winter 1982), 39-51.

²⁰ *Married Love*, 6th edition, 94. Scholars have noted that this description is almost identical to Stopes' earlier descriptions of her marriage. From this, scholars have placed Stopes' theories on married women's independence as beginning to form during her own period as a married woman. For more information, see

After describing the possessive way in which many husbands took over their wives' lives, Stopes called for all men to reflect upon their actions and change them accordingly.

Stopes ended *Married Love* with a discussion of the physiological effects that resulted when a husband or wife truly cared about the well-being of their spouse, stating that their hormones "sense they are *together* are a single unit."²¹ Although the very romantic language of her last chapter was not considered scientific enough for many of the medical experts who read her book, the general public was able to look past the metaphors and understand her major argument: True, ideal marriage could only be created through respect for each other, gender equality, and a full understanding of procreation and childbirth.

Before *Married Love*: The Victorians and World War I

As Alexander C. T. Geppert has noted, many scholars try to assess Stopes' role in changing the sexual norms of the interwar years by examining her personality in relation to her agenda as a pioneer of birth control. By using her publications and her correspondents' letters in order to explain contemporary sexual practices, scholars are able to understand the multitude of viewpoints that constituted Stopes' audience. Geppert suggests though, that scholars must look at a wider framework, including the context in which *Married Love* was written, in order to better understand this spectrum of viewpoints completely.²² This wider framework, which includes Stopes' personality,

Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, 73-74 and *Married Love*, Oxford World Classics Edition, xi- xiv.

²¹ *Married Love*, 6th edition, 108.

²² Geppert, "Divine Sex, Happy Marriage, Regenerated Nation," 392-393.

actions, and publications, must also include to society in which *Married Love* and other books by Stopes were published. In order to understand various reactions to Stopes, it is necessary to also understand the world within which Stopes functioned.

To that end, it is worth noting that Stopes was certainly not the first advocate for sexual reform in Britain. Reformers had been writing and publishing texts for decades before *Married Love* was released. Believing in “frankness in sexual matters” and a “tolerance of a diverse range of sexual practices,” these reformers challenged moralist views of sex as a threat to society’s order.²³ These reformers portrayed the majority of Victorians as sexually repressed, and later historians trusted these descriptions as fact. As historians, our sense of the nineteenth century has since changed, thanks to revisionist historians of the late 1970s, who have worked hard to break apart this simplistic theory. For Michel Foucault, this theory, which was built around repression and frigidity became the point from which to delve into a discourse of nineteenth century sexualities. He stated that “it is a ruse to make prohibition into the basic and constitutive element from which one would be able to write the history of what has been said concerning sex starting from the modern epoch.”²⁴ His conclusions were certainly not that Victorians considered sex, especially public sex, completely immoral. Instead, Foucault felt that Victorians discussed sexuality as a way to define others, and propagated sexual knowledge in numerous ways. Simplifying Foucault’s argument, a later scholar stated that “far from repressing sex, the Victorians invented sexuality.”²⁵

²³ Garton, *Histories of Sexuality*, 101-102.

²⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, (New York: Random House Incorporated, 1978), Google Ebook Edition.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

Other scholars have also questioned this characterization of Victorians as prudish, describing the ways in which there was no single, dominant sexual ideology. Instead, medical and moral advice was widely distributed, and medical discourse helped shape gender and sexuality norms. If this is the case though, the question remains as to why *Married Love* and other writings of the twentieth century are considered to have such an impact on shaping newer, more radical sexual norms. To understand this, historians must focus on changes in sexuality and gender norms that are specific to the twentieth century, and examine these changes along with those nineteenth century reforms that were reimagined by twentieth-century activists like Stopes.

As soon as *Married Love* was published, it “crashed into English society like a bombshell.”²⁶ This association of *Married Love* with warfare was not far off, considering it was first published in the last year of World War I. Stopes’ argument against women’s “domestication” and lack of rights fit well within the changing sexual culture that followed The Great War. The struggle for the right to vote had been “the cause” for which women united during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and by 1918, the year *Married Love* was published, the fight for women’s rights had achieved its main goal. Women over the age of 30 were given the right to vote, and the idea of a gendered citizenship in which men were given more rights than women had begun to disintegrate. This entry of women into the political sphere helped to break down the theoretical differences between the genders. By acknowledging that women were intellectually and morally equal to men, Britain cleared the way for the acceptance of gender equality in other areas as well.

²⁶ Marie Stopes, *Marriage in My Time*, London: Rich & Cowan Ltd., 1935, 44.

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, sexologists and psychologists such as Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud fundamentally changed the conditions of the debates about sexuality. Their theories eroded earlier, moralist beliefs about women's sexual difference and moral purity, and their theories allowed women to have sexual passions. As one scholar has stated, Freud's theory of libido "not only asserted forcefully that everyone had a sexual instinct, it also undermined the idea that men or women could overcome these drives."²⁷ Ellis agreed with many of Freud's sentiments, viewing sexuality as integral to both women's and men's mental and emotional health.²⁸ These scientific theories of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries cast female sexuality in a new light, making women equal to men in terms of their sexual needs.

It should be noted that these men, unlike Stopes, were medical experts and their theories, although considered unusual by some, were given authority and respect because of their medical degrees. Although Stopes was certainly an academic, her access to the medical world, and especially to the authority with which men like Ellis and Freud were attributed, was limited. Instead, she received the majority of her support from her intended audience: the general public. This is not to say that medical professionals did not read her manual; in fact many did. Their reactions, however, were incredibly varied. While some felt that her book was an astonishing addition to medical texts on the subject of women's sexuality, others felt the book was a "monstrous campaign" against the medical profession and sought to have both *Married Love* and Stopes discredited.²⁹

The Medical World's Reaction

²⁷ Garton, *Histories of Sexuality*, 162.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

²⁹ "Teaching of Birth Control: Attack on Doctor Marie Stopes. Libel Action. Woman's Remarkable Career." *The Daily News*, February 22, 1923, 6.

Many of those medical authorities who saw the book as a welcome addition to the medical field felt that *Married Love* was useful because of its frank descriptions of sexual intercourse. As one doctor stated while acting as a witness in a libel trial against Stopes, “We medical men...have an enormous experience of the misery caused because people have not faced the facts.”³⁰ Most doctors and medical professionals viewed the book this way, believing it to be a tool to alleviate many of the problems of ignorance that seemed to plague newlyweds.

Another medical expert (although not technically a doctor), Miss Jessie Murray, actually wrote a preface for the seventh edition of the book, stating that *Married Love* was meant specifically for “all the earnest and noble young minds who seek to know what responsibilities they are taking on themselves when they marry, and how they may best meet these responsibilities.”³¹ Murray, a close friend of Stopes, described *Married Love* as “calculated to prevent many of those mistakes which wreck the happiness of countless lovers as soon as they are married,” stating that “If it did no more than this it would be valuable indeed.”³² She admonished those who felt the book was “dangerous,” describing how some medical practitioners believed that the book’s “effect on prurient minds might be to give them food for their morbid fancies.”³³ She noted that most if not all of those ideas were already available to the public “in certain comic papers, in hosts of inferior novels, too often on stage and film, and present thus in coarse and demoralizing guise.”³⁴ She, along with many of her colleagues, felt that *Married Love* would help to

³⁰ “Books About Birth Control. Eminent Witnesses for Dr. Stopes. Defense Opens. Counsel on “Dangerous Campaign,” *The Daily News*, February 24, 1923, 5.

³¹ *Married Love*, 2004, 5.

³² *Ibid.* 6.

³³ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

showcase marital relations in a “new light”, providing facts instead of alluding jokes and crude metaphors.³⁵

Although most medical experts agreed with Murray’s assessment of *Married Love*, there were still quite a few who spoke out against Stopes’ push into the world of sexology. This dissenting group of medical experts felt that unlike Ellis, who held a medical degree, Stopes was not qualified to discuss what they considered to be an exclusively medical topic. It did not help that throughout her lifetime, Stopes insisted on referring to herself as “Dr. Marie Carmichael Stopes.” Although it was true that she held a doctorate, her doctoral degree was in paleobotany, not medicine, and these men felt that in referring to herself as “Dr.”, she was misleading the public with illegitimate claims of medical expertise and knowledge. One doctor patiently explained to Stopes that “it is open to a young prospective husband to go and consult his family doctor about the duties and risks of matrimony and it is open to the prospective wife to consult her own mother or better perhaps her married sister and also to consult a good lady *Doctor*.”³⁶ This man, along with many others, felt that if Stopes would simply urge her readers to seek medical advice in matters pertaining to sexual intercourse, there would be no need to publish such a candid book on the topic, especially one written by someone who did not hold a medical degree. It certainly did not help that descriptions of sexual intercourse, while legal in Great Britain, were considered obscene and outlawed in many other countries. Many medical practitioners felt that verbal advice not only made it easier to tailor each

³⁵ Ibid, 5-6.

³⁶ “December 7, 1915, Wimpole Street, London, W. I: Sir T. Barlow to MCS,” Series A, *Stopes, Marie Carmichael, 1880-1958 Collection*, Wellcome Library, London, Eng. [orig. italics]

discussion to the individual, but it also kept doctors from being held liable for disseminating obscene materials.

Some medical practitioners did not contend with Stopes' right to call herself an expert, and instead commented on the ideal relationship between the sexes that she presented. As one doctor stated in a letter to Stopes, after reading the first draft of *Married Love*,

“...as to the need of your propaganda of enlightenment. I don't think I can admit the necessity....Your treatise – for it is a treatise, so far as it goes on the branch of sexual relationship dealt with – puts the prospective wife into a position of criticism, an attitude of the wife on absolutely equal footing with the husband... Whether rightly or wrongly the conventions of age have made the sex relations such that the husband is in some sense dominant and has the initiative in married life.”³⁷

Many of these men did not disagree with the idea of contraception, and instead believed that the time was simply not right for such a progressive “treatise”. These men felt that society would denounce her book because of the agency it provided women, and therefore took from men.

Very few doctors took an outright stand against *Married Love*. Most felt that as long as the book was “properly supervised and guarded against improper interpretations,” it was a worthwhile contribution to the many medical texts detailing proper sexual intercourse.³⁸ However, out of the few who did disagree outright with Stopes' vision, almost all of them disagreed with one particular point. As part of her discussion on pregnancy and childbirth, Stopes had included a scant two and a half pages discussing the

³⁷ Ruth N. Hall, *Dear Dr. Stopes: Sex in the 1920s*, 85.

³⁸ Hall, *Dear Dr. Stopes*, 98.

proper use of contraceptives as a way to space births and alleviate the stress put on women's bodies during pregnancy.

It was these pages that created an uproar among the more conservative members of the medical community. The Catholic Church had been opposed to the use of contraception for a long time, and many Catholic doctors disputed the use of contraceptive devices, especially when it was detailed in a text meant for the general public. One such doctor, who identified himself as Catholic in a letter to Stopes, clearly voiced his disapproval when he wrote, "There are things that happen that we all know but respectfully conceal..."³⁹ This doctor made it clear that he did not agree with the inclusion of contraception in the text of *Married Love*.

Dr. Halliday Sutherland, another Catholic doctor who disagreed with Stopes, felt so incredibly outraged by both the general argument of *Married Love* as well as Stopes' endorsement of contraception that he actually wrote a book denouncing Stopes' foray into the world of sexology. Sutherland was not only a doctor, but a Deputy Commissioner of Medical Services, meaning that he worked for the British government providing medical care to veterans and others with pensions. Although many of his personal views were considered controversial by his colleagues, Sutherland was taken quite seriously on medical matters, and was considered an expert on tuberculosis.⁴⁰ As a Roman Catholic, Sutherland was also highly offended by the promotion of contraceptives included in Stopes' publications. In addition, he disagreed with her treatment of the poor, believing that because of her promotion of what he considered a "dangerous method," the cervical

³⁹ "October 16, 1922, Bradford: Dr. BA to MCS," Series A, *Stopes, Marie Carmichael, 1880-1958 Collection*, Wellcome Library, London, Eng.

⁴⁰ "Obituary: Halliday G. Sutherland, M.D.," *The British Medical Journal*, 1, n. 5182 (April 30, 1960): 1368.

cap, she was through her activism and publications, “experimenting” with the lower classes.⁴¹ Stopes of course disagreed with this claim, stating that her books, as well as the family planning clinic she had founded in North London, were meant to help the lower classes and those who could not obtain contraceptive advice through their doctors.

Sutherland divided his book denouncing Stopes into nine chapters. While the first six were focused around his fears about the declining birth rate in Britain, the last three chapters included a detailed discussion of birth control. The first of these chapters, entitled “The Evils of Birth Control,” started with a detailed examination of the Obstetric Section of the Royal Society of Medicine’s meeting in 1921, the year before his book was published. Sutherland quoted three separate, prominent doctors as condemning the contraceptive options available to women. After introducing the prominent medical practitioners who agreed with his opinion, Sutherland spent the rest of the chapter denouncing Stopes’ ideology in particular. Calling the use of contraceptives a “cause of unhappiness in marriage” and “an insult to true womanhood,” Sutherland took phrases directly from the text of *Married Love* and negated them with arguments about the proliferation of adultery and the lack of self-control among humanity that, according to him, accompanied the spread of contraceptive use. Later in the same chapter, Sutherland took direct aim at Stopes’ family planning clinic, stating that

“...the ordinary decent instincts of the poor are against these practices, and indeed they have used them less than any other class. But owing to their poverty, lack of learning, and helplessness, the poor are natural victims of those who seek to make experiments on their fellows. In the midst of the London slum a woman, who is a doctor of German philosophy (Munich), has opened a Birth Control Clinic, where working women are instructed in a method of contraception....When we

⁴¹ Muriel Box, ed., *Birth Control and Libel: The Trial of Marie Stopes*, 12.

remember that millions are being spent by the Ministry of Health and by Local Authorities...it is truly amazing that this monstrous campaign of birth control should be tolerated by the home secretary.”⁴²

Courtroom Publicity: Accusations of Libel

Stopes was a very proud woman and felt that the criticism included in Sutherland’s book went too far. Six years earlier, the American activist Margaret Sanger had been brought to trial and sent to jail for opening a birth control clinic in Brooklyn. It was conceivable that Sutherland’s influence within the British government combined with his intense dislike for Stopes’ actions could instigate something similar in Britain. Although dissemination of contraceptives was not illegal in Britain, as it was in the United States, it was highly discouraged, especially for a woman with no formal medical background.⁴³ To shield herself from the possibility of Sutherland’s opinion infiltrating the British government, which could lead to the illegalization of books about contraception, Stopes chose to put herself on trial and sued Sutherland for libel.⁴⁴

By placing herself in a courtroom setting, Stopes brought publicity to herself and her publications. Her publisher agreed to re-publish her first three books, *Married Love*, *Wise Parenthood*, and *Radiant Motherhood* in early March 1923, as a three-book series, advertising the set as “Dr. Marie Carmichael Stopes’ Recent Libel Trial Books”⁴⁵ The first trial, set in the High Court, began on February 21, 1923. The vast amount of medical evidence and the witnesses brought forward by both sides were thoroughly discussed in many of the London newspapers, and the trial was covered in detail from

⁴² Halliday Sutherland, *Birth Control: A Statement of Christian Doctrine against the Neo-Malthusians*, (London: P. J. Kenedy & sons, 1922), 101.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 12

⁴⁴ Box, ed., *Birth Control and Libel*, 12.

⁴⁵ “Dr. Marie Carmichael Stopes’ Recent Libel Trial Books”, *The Times Literary Review (London)*. March 9, 1923, 192.

beginning to end. Although the list of medical experts that agreed with Stopes was almost exactly equal to the list that agreed with Sutherland, one name stood out as giving evidence for Sutherland. His first witness was Professor Anne Louise McIlroy, a famous specialist in gynecology who had written multiple articles denouncing Stopes as a “fraud.” McIlroy was known for her pioneering work in women’s obstetrics and gynecology, and was the first female Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at London University.⁴⁶ Quoted multiple times by newspapers covering the trial, McIlroy called Stopes “dangerously misguided in her conception of medical issues.”⁴⁷ As a female doctor and gynecology specialist, McIlroy’s harsh testimony led to a perceivable change in the way newspapers discussed Stopes’ publications. Even those newspapers that had started their coverage of the trial with a positive outlook on Stopes began to write about *Married Love* and Stopes’ other books as “curious revelations”, instead of “remarkable” and “notable works”.⁴⁸ Although public opinion about the libel trial began to swing in Sutherland’s direction, Stopes’ publications still remained on the public’s radar. As one historian has pointed out, “It was not mere agreement with Stopes, but a curiosity about what [*Married Love*] contained” that made it such a commercial success.⁴⁹

Along with the public’s ambivalence towards *Married Love*, the Lord Chief

Justice Hewart betrayed his confusion during his final speech. It was clear that although

⁴⁶ Dame Anne Louise McIlroy was known as one of the leading experts on pregnancy, promoting multiple new treatments. One of the first to insist that women use anesthesia during childbirth, McIlroy was the first female Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at London University. She was well-known for her promotion of abstinence as birth control, and her dislike of the cervical cap, along with other forms of contraception. For more information on Anne Louise McIlroy, see Stephen Terry, “Dame Anne Louise McIlroy”, in *The Glasgow Almanac: an A-Z of the city and its people*, ed. Stephen Terry et. al. (London: Neil Wilson Pub Ltd, 2005), Kindle edition.

⁴⁷ “Books About Birth Control,” February 24, 1923, 5.

⁴⁸ “Teaching of Birth Control: Attack on Doctor Marie Stopes: Libel Action: Woman’s Remarkable Career,” *The Daily News*, February 22, 1923, 6; “Stopes Libel Suit. Ex-Labour Minister in the Box. Dr. Sutherland. Ideas “Lowering to Morality.” *The Daily News*, February 28, 1923, 6.

⁴⁹ Geppert, “Divine Sex, Happy Marriage, Regenerated Nation,” 414.

he might disagree with portions of Stopes' books and actions, he did not disagree with Stopes' overall "mission."

The mission is variously described at various points of the argument. The teaching about sex is mixed up with the teaching about contraceptives. The teaching about contraceptives is mixed up with other matter. But it is all said to have been done in pursuance of a mission, that mission being the proper teaching about sex to young people. The mission itself is not being questioned....the truth of the words complained of is the question I set before you."⁵⁰

Multiple newspapers summarized Hewart's words, making clear the distinction between the trial's purpose - deciding whether Sutherland had indeed written libel - and Stopes' overall objective of providing a readable manual to "young people".⁵¹ By carefully delineating between the trial's purpose and Stopes' mission, the newspapers helped to preserve Stopes' positive public image.

After almost four hours of deliberation, the final verdict was in favor of Dr. Sutherland, stating that the words he had written were in fact true. Many newspapers reported the confusing verdict of the trial, in which the jury came to the conclusion that although Sutherland's comments about Stopes were true, they were also defamatory towards Stopes. Although the newspapers took this as a ruling in favor of Stopes, Judge Hewart's final opinion was clearly revealed in his awarding of the final verdict and £100 in damages to Sutherland. Many newspapers took a stand against this ruling, showing their support for Stopes instead of Sutherland. Two days after the trial ended, *The Daily News* wrote

⁵⁰ Box, *Birth Control and Libel*, 376-377.

⁵¹ "Jury Finds for Dr. Stopes. Statements Held to Be Defamatory. £100 Assessed. The Lord Chief Justice's Summing Up." *The Daily News*. March 1, 1923, 3.

“A High Court Common jury has declared that the statements made by Dr. Sutherland in his attack on the birth control crusade of Dr. Marie Stopes, though true in fact, were defamatory, and constituted unfair comment. This the Lord Chief Justice interprets as a verdict for Dr. Sutherland!....what the jury says by implication is that Dr. Stopes and anyone else who thinks that the welfare of her patients and of the public is served by a certain recognized medical procedure has the right to advocate it unhampered by palpably false attacks...”⁵²

This outpouring of support for Stopes, along with her appeal of the case to the House of Lords, publicized her books like never before. Although the case, after a second appeal, was found in favor of Sutherland, the deluge of support for Stopes that was created by the newspapers thrust Stopes and her publications into the international spotlight. *Married Love* especially, became internationally read, and was soon put on trial in the United States for its frank discussion of birth control methods.

Obscenity, *Married Love*'s Reception in the United States, and the Comstock Act

During the Stopes-Sutherland libel trial, there were many arguments debating the appropriateness of the topics covered within *Married Love*, especially its frank discussion of contraception and its equally frank discussion of sexual acts. These arguments led to a large debate about whether the book's content was “obscene.” Even before the Stopes-Sutherland trial, there were many people who opposed the book's publication because of the material presented within it. These people felt that Stopes' ideas would “lower public morality”, and the Lord Chief Justice, in his final speech of the libel trial, stated that

“...passages which describe the male organ in quiescence and in erection, which describe the encouragement which a man should give to a woman and a woman should give to a man before the act of intercourse is entered upon, and which

⁵² “Dr. Stopes Not Libelled. Ruling on Jury's Findings. Defendants Win. Lord Chief Justice and Rule of Law.” *The Daily News*, March 2, 1923, 6.

analyze the successive phases and sensations of the act of sexual intercourse?
Obscene!”⁵³

This feeling that *Married Love* was too vulgar for public consumption also carried over the Atlantic, and when the book was first published in Britain the United States forbid the sale of the book within its borders.

The prohibition of obscenity had a long history in the United States. Legal precedent against publishing obscene materials had originally been set by *Regina v. Hicklin* in 1868. This British court case ruled that it was illegal to distribute materials meant to “deprave and corrupt” morally ambiguous minds. In the United States, this same ruling was upheld sporadically in state courts until 1873, when it was made federal law through the Comstock Act. Although this law made it illegal to distribute obscene materials specifically through the mail, it was applied to books and other literature sold through stores as well. The definition of the term “obscene” was eventually widened from its original definition of lascivious and overtly erotic materials to also include any information on contraception. Because of this, Stopes’ book was considered too obscene for public consumption within the United States and many publishers refused to even try to publish it because of possible legal action.

However, this lack of publishing does not mean that Americans did not read or hear about *Married Love*. Some people who travelled back and forth from Britain to America brought copies back with them, and by word of mouth, the major points of the book were disseminated among the population, as demonstrated by surviving letters

⁵³ Box, *Birth Control and Libel*, 376-377.

written to Stopes from Americans.⁵⁴ When the book was first published, contraception and women's rights advocates in the United States, including Margaret Sanger, also promoted *Married Love* to the public.⁵⁵ Realizing the potential profit to be made from selling the book in the United States, the publisher Dr. William Jay Robinson tried to release an American edition of *Married Love*, but he was arrested because of the Comstock Act. After hearing that her publisher had been heavily fined and all copies of her book were confiscated, Stopes fought back with a legal suit, stating that her book was not obscene and did not detail sexual intercourse in a vulgar way⁵⁶. The judge in the case deemed the book obscene very quickly, but it only took three years for the issue to arise again. In 1924, an American publisher again tried to distribute copies of *Married Love* and was shut down by the police. This time Stopes, already planning a speaking tour in the United States, travelled to New York to fight for her book in person. The media sensation surrounding Stopes' time in the United States was enormous, and although Stopes was defeated again, the publicity created a permanent fascination with both *Married Love* and Stopes' public character. Stopes' trip to America also created a distinct connection in the public's consciousness between Stopes and the American Margaret Sanger, a contemporary activist and disseminator of contraception.

Sanger was the most well-known advocate of contraception in the United States at the time of Stopes' arrival. Sanger had been censored on multiple occasions for printing articles about contraception and birth control in her newspaper-bulletin, *The Woman Rebel*, a feminist newspaper printed purposefully to fight against the Comstock Act. In

⁵⁴ Hall, *Dear Dr. Stopes*, 127, 130, 133.

⁵⁵ Esther Katz, ed. *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger, Volume 1: The Woman Rebel, 1900-1928*, (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 281.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 11-112.

the first issue, Sanger had included an editorial entitled “The Prevention of Conception.” This described Sanger’s commitment to the necessity of women receiving “clean, harmless, scientific knowledge on how to prevent conception.”⁵⁷ Eventually, Sanger was arrested for continuously defying the Comstock Act. Her arrest created a media sensation and she eventually began a birth control clinic to promote her ideas in 1916.⁵⁸ Again, she was arrested and tried for her illegal actions. After her clinic was shut down, Sanger continuously fought to distribute information about contraception to the public.

The similarity in their causes drew Sanger and Stopes together. They had originally met in 1915, when Sanger fled to England to avoid prosecution for her publications. Throughout the next year they exchanged letters about Stopes’ progress on *Married Love* as well as intellectual conversations about abortion, contraception, and other matters. Unfortunately multiple disagreements hindered any further friendship between the two. By 1920, other British advocates for contraception, especially those in the medical field, had begun supporting Sanger instead of Stopes. This was partially due to Sanger’s medical training as a nurse, which gave her a professional appeal within the medical field.

Issues of partisanship in the United States also hindered their relationship and in July 1921, Sanger wrote to Stopes, afraid that Stopes’ American supporters would abandon her if she continued her association with the Voluntary Parenthood League. Run by Mary Ware Dennett, an American women’s rights activist who also wrote on the subject of birth control, the group was a rival organization to Sanger’s own National

⁵⁷ Quoted in Jean H. Baker, *Margaret Sanger: A Life of Passion*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2011, 78.

⁵⁸ Baker, 7.

Birth Control League and had been pressuring Congress to allow contraception in the United States. Stating that it had been “entirely repudiated by the medical profession as well as by the most influential people who formerly gave it their support,” Sanger pleaded with Stopes to end her commitment to Dennett’s organization. She also asked that her letter be kept “in confidence,” afraid that other advocates would hear of her criticisms.⁵⁹ Instead of following Sanger’s requests, Stopes chose to write directly to Dennett, disclosing much of the information in Sanger’s letter and asking for her advice on the matter. Sanger viewed this as a “violation of confidence” stating that Stopes was “fully aware that controversies existed, yet [she] rushed into a partisan support of a group who...have done a great deal in bringing about controversies and disintegration to the cause.” Maintaining that Stopes had “taken her stand,” Sanger ended her professional friendship with Stopes.⁶⁰

By the time of Stopes’ visit to the United States in 1924, both Stopes and Sanger publicly disagreed with one another, with Sanger describing Stopes as not having “any medical backing” and Stopes describing Sanger as “too forceful” in her approach.⁶¹ However, this “contentious relationship,” as one of their contemporaries described it, did not keep the general public from comparing the two advocates.⁶² Their similarity in message was still obvious to journalists and their supporters, and it was no surprise that Stopes’ arrival in America was described as the arrival of “The Margaret Sanger of

⁵⁹ Katz, ed. *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger*, 304-305.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 316-317.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 318, 322. [original italics]

⁶² Harold Begbie, *Marie Stopes: Her Mission and Her Personality ; an Impression*, (London: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1927), 13.

England.”⁶³ However, although they did have quite a few ideals in common, their major goals remained distinctive, and their influence on American society was very different.

In the early twentieth century, especially during and in the aftermath of World War I, Americans became familiar with the work of Sigmund Freud. Freud’s writings on female orgasm in particular were frequently read by Americans interested in understanding his theories on “frigidity.” According to Freud, orgasm from vaginal intercourse denoted maturity and healthy sexuality while the need for outside stimulation meant that the woman was immature and unhealthy. These definitions led many women to feel inadequate.⁶⁴ Adding this inadequacy to the emotional distance associated with “pure” and “modest” women of the period, Freud and other psychoanalysis experts described these women as “frigid,” or psychologically unable to fully participate in sexual intercourse with their partner. However, Stopes disagreed with Freud’s theories. Feeling that all women were able to become active partners in sexual intercourse, Stopes actively denounced Freud’s ideas on orgasm. Promoting the use of foreplay and clitoral stimulation, as well as full participation of both parties in all sexual matters, *Married Love* encouraged women to be unashamed of their bodies and sexuality.

Unlike Sanger, whose focus was primarily on the use of contraception and women’s rights, Stopes’ theories, especially within *Married Love*, were focused more on marriage and family life. Specifically, she focused on fully incorporating sexual intercourse into marriage and creating a partnership between husband and wife, in order to create a complete and rewarding marriage. In order to do this she fully endorsed

⁶³ “The Margaret Sanger of England and Her Baby: Dr. Marie Stopes [photograph],” *New York Times*, August 24, 1924, RP4.

⁶⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, New York: Basic Books, 1963.

orgasm for both parties, whether that involved simply “touching and caressing” or vaginal intercourse.⁶⁵ This focus on the necessity of both men’s and women’s orgasm was a refreshing turn away from Freudian sexual theories encouraging only vaginal orgasm, and helped her popularity soar among both men and women in the United States. In contrast, Sanger’s theories focused more directly on women’s rights, specifically the legalization of contraception. Although Sanger did have male supporters, especially within the medical field, the great majority of her support was not from married couples but strictly from women. Although both women were considered incredibly influential, Stopes’ influence was on marital relations and women’s roles in sexual intercourse, not only contraception.

Stopes’ Personality and Her Relationship with Other Activists

Unfortunately for Stopes, her popularity with the general public did not transfer to popularity with other advocates. Like Sanger’s relationship with Stopes, other advocates in Great Britain were critical of Stopes’ personality and lack of a medical degree.

One of the few who were not critical of Stopes was Havelock Ellis, a British physician and psychologist who wrote numerous books on a large variety of sexual practices. Ellis and Stopes met before Stopes was finished writing *Married Love*, and he wrote letters to her throughout the writing process. Although Ellis’ most relevant work to Stopes’, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, was not published until 1933, he recommended many of his smaller works to Stopes, including *Analysis of the Sexual Impulse: Love and Pain*, *The Sexual Impulse in Women*, written in 1903. Although Ellis was “helpful and

⁶⁵ *Married Love*, Oxford World Classics Edition, 52.

generous” to Stopes, and their professional relationship continued through the 1930s, Stopes disliked Ellis’ interest in atypical sexualities and worked hard to distance herself from him in her writings.⁶⁶ In her personal correspondence and within *Married Love*, Stopes made it clear that she wished to focus on heterosexual, marital relations, and eventually she became frustrated with Ellis’ constant discussion of “irregular” sexualities, stating that reading his writing made her feel dirty, “like breathing a bag of soot.”⁶⁷ Although Stopes was careful not to publicly state her dislike of homosexuality, she did discuss it occasionally in private letters. In one such letter, written to Lord Alfred Douglas – the “Bosie” of the Oscar Wilde scandal – she felt that homosexuality was “horrid” and a “terrible scourge of modern society.”⁶⁸ Although she was friends with Douglas, who wished to write about homosexuality without appearing to defend it, and Ellis, who had written multiple medical texts discussing sexual inversion, it was clear that Stopes disliked homosexuality and wished to focus on “the potential beauties and realities of [heterosexual] marriage.”⁶⁹

Stopes and Ellis disagreed about his other relationships as well. Ellis was a close friend of Margaret Sanger, and he refused to stop talking to either party when she and Stopes began to argue. His relationship with Sanger caused Stopes to feel alienated by Ellis, and their professional relationship suffered. Stopes became extremely critical of Ellis’ focus on abnormal sexualities, and Ellis began to claim that she had “grossly misinterpreted” his theory of the rhythm of sexual desire in women in *Married Love* and subsequent publications. He also claimed that she had not given him enough credit in her

⁶⁶ Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, 112.

⁶⁷ Marie Stopes, Obituary of Havelock Ellis, *Literary Guide*, September 1939. Quoted in Vicent Brome, *Havelock Ellis, Philosopher of Sex: A Biography*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 147.

⁶⁸ Hall, *Dear Dr. Stopes*, 211.

⁶⁹ Brome, *Havelock Ellis, Philosopher of Sex*, 147.

research about women's sexuality.⁷⁰ Although Stopes and Ellis continued to write to each other until Ellis' death in 1939, their relationship was not a happy one, and consisted of both parties constantly criticizing each other's work.⁷¹

A less critical supporter of her work was George Bernard Shaw, whom she met while on vacation during World War I. After sending him a play she had written, which he promptly told her to rewrite completely, the two began a literary friendship. Stopes wrote to him about researching for *Married Love* and once it was published, Shaw described it as "the best thing of the kind I have read."⁷² Shaw's public position in regards to Stopes' work was slightly more ambiguous however. Although Shaw agreed with her writings on proper sexual intercourse and marital relations, his eugenicist views kept him from being a full-fledged supporter of birth control. Like his fellow eugenicist, H. G. Wells, Shaw worried that birth control would lead to a decline in the birth rate among the hard-working middle class, and believed that it was only the "completely hopeless" and "good-for-nothing" lower classes who were in need of contraception.⁷³ Stating that he was "particularly bothered" by birth control, Shaw suggested that Stopes stop emphasizing it in her writings and instead focus on her place as a "matrimonial expert, which is something much wider and more needed than a specialist in contraception."⁷⁴ Shaw also urged Stopes to emphasize her doctoral degree, thinking that more people would believe her if she was publicly known as a doctor.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Ibid., 191.

⁷¹ Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, 112.

⁷² Hall, *Dear Dr. Stopes*, 203.

⁷³ Gareth Griffith, *Socialism and Superior Brains*, (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), 180; Hall, *Dear Dr. Stopes*, 208- 209.

⁷⁴ Hall, *Dear Dr. Stopes*, 208.

⁷⁵ Hall, *Dear Dr. Stopes*, 208.

Although Shaw was critical of Stopes' emphasis on contraception, publicly, he was still a large supporter of her work. During the Sutherland-Stopes libel trial, Shaw wrote to multiple newspapers, stating that Sutherland had certainly gone too far in his defamation of Stopes and that Stopes deserved some form of retribution. When the verdict of the trial was publicized, Shaw wrote to Stopes that "the decision is scandalous" and even wrote to newspapers describing his disagreement with the verdict.⁷⁶ Afterwards Shaw continued to conduct interviews with the press in which he mentioned Stopes' publications. However, like Ellis, Shaw's relationship with Stopes started to eventually sour when she began to misquote him to the press. Shaw continued to support Stopes' original works on marriage, but as she became more and more embroiled in questions of birth control, he felt less and less inclined to encourage her work. Although they continued to write to each other, their public relationship eventually faded.

Like Shaw, H. G. Wells also supported Stopes' work, although he disagreed with her theories concerning periodicity in both men's and women's bodies. Although he did not write as often as Shaw or Ellis, Wells also wrote to Stopes and expressed his support of *Married Love* and her basic theories of female sexuality. Like Shaw though, he refused to support her beliefs in regards to birth control, and eventually withdrew his support of all her works when it became clear that she wished to construct the need for birth control as a major point in later publications.

Eugenics Theories and Academics' Support of Stopes

⁷⁶ "The Case of Dr. Stopes. From Mr. Bernard Shaw." *The Daily News*, March 2, 1923, 6; Hall, *Dear Dr. Stopes*, 205.

Like Wells and Shaw, most academics were cautiously optimistic about *Married Love*, agreeing with some parts while disagreeing with others. Prof. Earnest H. Starling, a professor of physiology at the University of London, was extremely impressed with *Married Love* and agreed to allow Stopes to publish his letter praising the book in the sixth edition. Stating that “the need of such guidance as you give is very evident,” Starling made clear his admiration for *Married Love*. However, he also prudently excluded any discussion of contraception, instead emphasizing Stopes’ theories regarding women’s sexuality and marital happiness. Starling ended his letter stating that “At the present time it is of vital importance to the State that its marriages should be fruitful – in children, happiness, and efficiency (and all three are closely connected).”⁷⁷

This allusion to theories of eugenics was repeated by many other scholars, writers, and activists. In fact, Stopes herself was a large supporter of eugenics ideas and was fully invested in “creating a society in which only the best and the beautiful should survive.”⁷⁸ Scholars of the early twentieth century, including Stopes, had been educated on the theories of Darwin and many of them applied these theories to their own social improvement theories.⁷⁹ At the time, proponents of eugenics had two major arguments that often went together, both of which Stopes believed in. On the one hand, Stopes believed that marriages, although based on love and mutual respect, should be fruitful and include the birth of multiple children. On the other hand, Stopes believed passionately that the lower classes, as well as those with disabilities and other unwanted genetic traits, should be persuaded not to reproduce because of their supposed inferiority.

⁷⁷ Stopes, *Married Love*, 6th Edition, x.

⁷⁸ Stopes, *Married Love*, 2004, xvii.

⁷⁹ Donald Mackenzie, “Eugenics in Britain,” *Social Studies of Science*, 6, n. 3/4, (September 1976): 499.

Her theories supporting contraception worked well in this way, since they promoted healthy, spaced, and loved middle and upper class children while at the same time promoting less children (and eventually none) in the lower classes. Her ideas on eugenics were certainly not revolutionary, and had been discussed by many other authors since Darwin's publishing of *On the Origin of the Species*. Set within the context of marital happiness, however, her theories on contraception and child spacing were considered by many in the academic field to be a very practical application of eugenics theory.⁸⁰

Official book reviews of *Married Love* make academics' agreement with the majority of Stopes' theories incredibly clear. The Journal of Ethics published a review in 1918, only a few months after *Married Love* was first published. In this review, F. W. Stella Browne wrote that the book was "doubly important," not only because of its discussion of the physical processes associated with sexual intercourse, but because of Stopes' theory of women's periodicity.⁸¹ Browne also mentioned Stopes discussion of contraception, calling it a "fine vindication" and hoping that she would write more on the matter. Like Starling, Browne ended her review with a slightly ambiguous, yet positive statement: "she is far-seeing enough to realize some of the deficiencies of present conditions and present moral ideas."⁸² This allusion to Stopes' discussion of both conjugal rights and the social situation of inter-war Britain illuminates Browne's understanding of current gender conditions and the current social order. Browne's extremely positive review did not list a single negative aspect of *Married Love* and ended

⁸⁰ Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, 134-135.

⁸¹ F. W. Stella Browne, "[untitled review]," *International Journal of Ethics*, 29, n. 1, (October 1918), 112.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 112.

by suggesting that Stopes “carry her researches and her conclusions further, to the very root of the matter.”⁸³ This suggestion that Stopes continue her discussion on procreation and childbirth was certainly taken to heart, and her second book, *Wise Parenthood*, was released later that same year.

Even though the book was banned in the United States, reviews were still published in American journals. Mary Ware Dennett, authored a review article in *The Survey*, a leading journal of the social work profession and social reform, later in 1918. Stating that *Married Love* was one of the first marriage manuals written from a woman’s perspective, Dennett’s review was also incredibly positive.⁸⁴ Focusing on Stopes’ emphasis on marital happiness, Dennett suggested that both women and men read the book as a way to enlighten themselves on how to “make marriage a work of art.”⁸⁵ Slightly surprisingly, Dennett does not discuss contraception, although that might be explained by the fact that *The Survey* was an American journal and subject to the Comstock Act’s rules about obscenity. Although Dennett’s review has a more romantic air to it than Browne’s, it shows very clearly that academic individuals on both sides of the Atlantic viewed *Married Love* in an extremely positive light.

This support of *Married Love* is also included in a number of other books about marital love and contraception that were published in the 1920s. Published in both the United States and Britain, many of these books had eugenics-themed arguments and focused on the ways in which marital harmony enriched society as a whole. Influenced by both Sanger and Stopes, these writers focused on bettering sexual practice as a way to

⁸³ Ibid., 113.

⁸⁴ Mary Ware Dennett, “[untitled review],” *The Survey*, (October 12, 1918), 50.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 51.

solve social problems, including prostitution, venereal disease, alcoholism, and other vice associated with the lower classes.

One such author was William John Fielding. An author, editor, and sexologist, Fielding was an avid socialist and edited many of Sanger's publications. A supporter of Stopes as well, Fielding worked to create a unified eugenics effort built around proper sexual relations that would span both continents. Fielding published books throughout the 1920s, including *Sanity in Sex* (1920), *Sex and the Love Life* (1927), and *Love and the Sex Emotions* (1930). Most of his publications focused on the same themes as *Married Love*, and he mentioned Stopes' publications in the references section of *Sex and the Love Life*.⁸⁶ Reiterating many of Stopes' ideas about women's sexuality, Fielding did not try to create many original theories. Since he did not try to create personal relationships with either Sanger or Stopes, Fielding was free to act as a go-between, combining their ideas on socialism, eugenics, marital love, and contraception into texts meant for other activists and medical personnel.⁸⁷

Another book published at the same time as *Married Love* was *The Psychology of Marriage* by Walter M. Gallichan. Along the same lines as Stopes' work, Gallichan's text was meant to discredit Freudian ideas of frigidity and female sexuality. Surprisingly, Gallichan's book included a section on contraception very similar to Stopes', but his text was not perceived as violating the Comstock Act. This could be attributed to the fact that although he discussed contraception, he did not discuss a specific type of birth control. Also a prolific author, Gallichan's publications were well-known in both the United

⁸⁶ William J. Fielding, *Sex and the Love Life*, (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1927), 299.

⁸⁷ Katz, ed. *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger*, 360.

States and Great Britain. Like other authors of the time, Gallichan added a section about family planning and eugenics. Unlike Stopes and other authors however, Gallichan's discussion did not uphold eugenics ideas. Believing instead that "the more we learn of mankind, the more we shall learn to esteem the passion that is the source of human life," Gallichan felt that the ideals of eugenics were focused too much on "breeding" and not enough on "love."⁸⁸ He did believe, however, that those considered "unfit" to bear children should consistently use contraception. Although Gallichan did not fully agree with Stopes' or Sanger's eugenics theories, he did agree with Stopes' discussion of marital happiness, and cited her writings in his later texts.⁸⁹

Stopes' Interactions with the Lower Classes

Stopes did not simply write about her eugenics policies, she also put them into practice. As soon as *Married Love* was published, Stopes began to receive letters from women, many of whom were seeking more advice on child spacing and contraception. At one level, Stopes' treatment of these women corresponded with others of her generation: the lower classes were "polluting the purity of the best British stock by their reckless multiplication."⁹⁰ On the other hand, Stopes felt compassion and sympathy for these women, and she responded generously to many of their pleas for assistance. By supplying these women with information about contraceptives, Stopes was not only reacting kindly but also upholding her eugenics belief that the lower classes should procreate less, if at all.

⁸⁸ Walter M. Gallichan, *The Psychology of Marriage*, (Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1918), 242-244.

⁸⁹ Walter M. Gallichan, *The Sterilization of the Unfit*, (New York: T. W. Laurie, 1929).

⁹⁰ Hall, *Dear Dr. Stopes*, 15.

As one scholar states, “Britain in 1918 was still a society in which the rich got richer and the poor got children.”⁹¹ The average number of children in lower class families was up to four times higher than upper class families, and the difference in income was worsened by widespread unemployment, especially in large cities like London.⁹² Many commentators blamed the working classes themselves for their inferior position in society, citing drunkenness, prostitution, and gambling as working class vices. These commentators also cited working classes’ larger families as keeping them from “reaching towards prosperity.”⁹³ At the same time, many stated that it was not necessarily fair to blame the working classes for their conditions, since information about birth control was not readily available to most working class women. In this way, *Married Love* and Stopes’ 1919 pamphlet, *A Letter to Working Mothers*, were indispensable in their discussion of pregnancy spacing and contraception.

Still, these publications did not answer all of working class women’s questions. The question asked by many was simple: where do we obtain these contraceptive devices. Again, Stopes was able to supply the answer. In 1921, Stopes, with the financial support of her second husband, Humphrey Roe, opened a birth control clinic in North London. Although her choice to run the clinic with only the expertise of nurses was seriously questioned by the medical community, working class women began to arrive at her new headquarters as soon as it was opened, hoping to receive not only information on contraception, but actual contraceptive devices. Many expressed their frustration that poor women had not been privy to information about birth control. One

⁹¹ Ibid., 15.

⁹² Ibid., 15.

⁹³ Hall, *Dear Dr. Stopes*, 209.

woman wrote “I have many of my friend working class women who need and are grateful for the kind help Dr. Marie Stopes has given them. I feel it a great injustice and unchristian like to think that rich women should have this knowledge and a poor woman should live in ignorance of it.”⁹⁴ Another wrote to Stopes, stating that she “had to undergo an operation after [her pregnancy] and they told me not to have any more children but they never told me how to avoid it...”⁹⁵ It was obvious to Stopes that these women were not getting the answers they needed from their doctors and had turned to her guidance instead.

At the clinic, Stopes insisted on distributing a high-domed cervical cap that she had designed herself and which was based on the French models. Again, her theoretical basis in eugenics was displayed with the name of the device: the ‘Pro-Race’ cap. The name was meant to help promote only healthy pregnancies and strong, vigorous children, and was handed to women with a pamphlet stating exactly that. Stopes also kept meticulous records of her patients, and although the information was never officially published, statistics taken from her records were used to promote the clinic’s usefulness to society.

It was not only working class women who came to Stopes for advice. Although not as numerous, husbands also wrote and asked questions about contraception. One husband who wrote to Stopes asking for more information on spermicides stated that he had “restrained...from [sexual intercourse] except when we desired our only child...its been a lesson in self control!”⁹⁶ Other men wrote to her expressing issues of impotence,

⁹⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁹⁵ Hall, *Dear Dr. Stopes*, 22.

⁹⁶ Hall, *Dear Dr. Stopes*, 16.

for which she referred many of them to read other sexologists' works, including those of Havelock Ellis'.⁹⁷

There were a few who disagreed with Stopes' advice. While some disagreed with it because of a religious or moral stance, there were a few who simply believed that contraception was too expensive. Writing that Stopes seemed "to have set out with the conviction that all married people being on a similar low moral level to your own, are anxious to pay fabulous sums for this kind of book," one working class man made it a point to disagree with her advice on contraception, stating that not all lower class families were of low moral character and that all methods besides restraint "too costly" to use effectively.⁹⁸ Although this was definitely a sound argument against her advice when *Married Love* was first published, by the mid-1920s, Stopes' clinic had inspired other women to open similar clinics in other large cities, making it possible for many working class individuals to obtain contraceptive devices for a very minimal price.⁹⁹

The Reactions of Religious and Moral Conservatives

There were of course, those who disagreed with her text on moral grounds. In her surviving correspondence, many of the working class individuals who took issue with *Married Love* identified as religious and moral conservatives, and almost all of them identified as Catholic. Multiple writers agreed with Sutherland's belief that Stopes was interfering in affairs that were best left alone, asking if "Women can have a child without Gods [sic] help?" and stating that "No law in England can make Birth Control. Nor you

⁹⁷ Holtzman, "The Pursuit of Married Love," 42.

⁹⁸ Hall, *Dear Dr. Stopes*, 16.

⁹⁹ Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, 145.

either.”¹⁰⁰ Because of Stopes’ stance on birth control, many religious conservatives disagreed with her book as a whole, describing *Married Love* as promoting “unnatural” and “unhealthy” ideas about marriage.¹⁰¹

After Stopes’ birth control clinic gained notoriety, attacks against her by the local Catholic community steadily worsened. Eventually in November 1928 verbal attacks turned physical when Elizabeth Ellis, a Roman Catholic who had written multiple letters to Stopes denouncing her providing women with contraceptives, tried to set fire to Stopes’ mobile clinic in Bradford, England. Ellis believed that she was acting “in obedience with God’s law” and was fortunately arrested before anyone was injured. Ellis was released on bond and a week later tried again, this time succeeding and causing £200 worth of damage to the caravan. Stopes’ response was to place advertisements in the local newspapers and raise enough money that by January 1929 she was able to buy two new caravans. Incredibly proud of her supporters, Stopes published a gloating note in the *Birth Control News*, which was run by her organization, and she attacked Catholics who resorted to “the good old medieval practice of burning instead of enlightening the enemy...”¹⁰²

In the same issue, Stopes also attacked Sutherland for forming an anti-birth control organization, The League of National Life. Sutherland then sued Stopes for libel, in a reverse of the libel trial against Sutherland six years earlier. This time, Sutherland lost the case as well as the appeal when the judge ruled that Stopes had not written libel,

¹⁰⁰ Hall, *Dear Dr. Stopes*, 22-23.

¹⁰¹ Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, 145.

¹⁰² Marie Stopes, “[no title]”, *Birth Control News*, January 28, 1929, quoted in Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, 193-194.

simply the truth.¹⁰³ This change of legal opinion in regards to Stopes reflects the ever-broadening appeal her ideas and actions had with the general public.

Fortunately for Stopes, religious conservatives, like all the groups of individuals who read *Married Love*, were not homogenous in their dislike of her theories. Although many Catholics criticized Stopes for her promotion of contraception, there were some who supported her theories of gender equality and marital partnership while tactfully separating themselves from her when it came to her theories on birth control. In fact, included in the first seven publications of *Married Love* was a letter from Father Stanislaus St. John, a Catholic priest living in London who was sent an advance copy of the text by Stopes, with the request that he write the Forward. Although he declined the offer, he did allow his letter to be printed alongside Dr. Jessie Murray's introduction. Although he made it clear that he disagreed with her section on contraception, explaining that "In our [Catholics'] belief...the destruction of one spermatozoon is not the question, but the deliberate prevention of eternal happy existence which, in the supposition, might arise from its preservation."¹⁰⁴ Referring to her section on contraception, St. John made it clear that as a Catholic priest, he could not endorse that section of her text. However, this did not mean that he disagreed with her text as a whole. In fact, he began his letter by stating that her "theme could not have been treated in more beautiful or more delicate language, or with a truer ring of sympathy for those who, through ignorance or want of thought, make shipwreck of their married happiness."¹⁰⁵ Near the end of his letter, he again stated his support of *Married Love*, stating that "Apart from what, as a Catholic, I

¹⁰³ Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, 194.

¹⁰⁴ Stopes, *Married Love*, 6th edition, xv.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, xiv.

object to in it, it contains so much most helpful matter that I feel sure it will bring to many a happiness in married life now wanting through the ignorance and the consequent want of sympathy which you so rightly deplore.”¹⁰⁶ As St. John’s letter clearly shows, some religious conservatives, although they might have disagreed with Stopes’ policies regarding birth control, were still willing to entertain and even support her theories regarding women’s periodicity and marital happiness.

It should be noted that religious conservatives were not the only one to disagree with Stopes’ promotion of contraception. Within the text of *Married Love*, Stopes had included a very short discussion of Neo-Malthusian doctrine, describing the use of contraceptives as a way to control the population.¹⁰⁷ This upset a number of moral conservatives, even those who agreed with her theories regarding marriage equality. Sutherland’s book denouncing Stopes also condemned her agreement with Neo-Malthusians, stating that contraceptives, instead of leading to a lower overall birthrate, would simply lead the majority of individuals down a path of true immorality, or as Sutherland phrased it, to a “genesis of gibbering idiocy.”¹⁰⁸

***Married Love* Returns to the United States- Obscenity in 1931**

As one scholar has correctly stated, “ten years after the publication of *Married Love*, Marie was indisputably a celebrity, known throughout the world for her works on sex.”¹⁰⁹ This fame was certainly present in America, where many of her books, along with *Married Love*, were still banned from publication. Stopes, who hoped to “have a

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., xv.

¹⁰⁷ Stopes, *Married Love*, Oxford World Classics Edition, 74-77.

¹⁰⁸ Sutherland, *Birth Control*, 35.

¹⁰⁹ Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, 203.

clinic in every country in the world,” now certainly had the support to do just that.¹¹⁰ Before she began that mission, however, she turned again to her old friend, George Bernard Shaw, for a favor. Spurred by the multitude of letters written to her about bootlegged copies of her publications being distributed in the United States, Stopes enlisted Shaw to help her remove *Married Love* from the publishing blacklist in the United States.¹¹¹ Shaw, along with at least twenty other well-known doctors and literary figures, including H. G. Wells, created a petition which they sent to the United States government in 1929. This petition was very similar in style and wording to one that Shaw had sent during the 1919 obscenity trial. Although the petition certainly helped create publicity for *Married Love*, the United States government would not budge. It was not until the next year, when copies of the book were seized for being imported into the country, that a federal judge finally agreed with the petitioners, and helped arrange for another obscenity trial.¹¹²

Married Love was put on trial again on April 1, 1931. It took only a few days for the judge to rule that the obscenity law did not apply to *Married Love*. Stating that the book was “a considered attempt to explain to married people how their mutual sex life may be made happier...,” the judge not only denied any charges of obscenity but endorsed the book himself.¹¹³ The *Springfield Republican*, after quoting the judge’s ruling, stated that *Married Love* was “essentially a work of popularization, and those that need of the information here provided will find it presented, as the judge suggests, with a

¹¹⁰ “October 20, 1935, MCS to Earle H. Balche,” Series A, *Stopes, Marie Carmichael, 1880-1958 Collection*, Wellcome Library, London, Eng.

¹¹¹ Hall, *Dear Dr. Stopes*, 128, 130, 133.

¹¹² “Married Love Trial Set. Hearing on Alleged Obscene Book to Be Held on April 1.” *New York Times*, March 6, 1931, 15.

¹¹³ ““Married Love” Work on Sex Psychology by Dr. Marie C. Stopes” *Springfield Republican*, May 5, 1931, 7e.

considerable amount of social argument and personal emotion.”¹¹⁴ Although not completely different from public opinion ten years before, this attitude certainly differed from judicial opinion in the previous case.

Part of the reason for this shift was the shift in American writers’ attitudes towards women’s place with marriage. Many men who were politically supportive of women’s rights wrote books during the 1920s that adopted aspects of companionate marriage similar to Stopes’ writings, while still supporting ideals of male superiority overall. These men created a definitive distinction between the “normal modern woman” and “women whose proclivities toward self-indulgence manifested themselves in a resistance to wifely and maternal duties...”¹¹⁵ The normal modern woman, as one scholar has described her, was confident in her sexuality instead of modest and ‘frigid’, and was still feminine and “decidedly oriented toward men for companionship, love, and sexual fulfillment.”¹¹⁶ This was exactly the ideal wife and woman described in Stopes’ *Married Love*, and by the 1930s, popular acceptance of this type of woman was clear. Seen in this light, it becomes more obvious why a male judge would ignore the precedent set by his forerunner and remove *Married Love* from the government’s list of obscene texts.

Immediately after it was removed, copies of *Married Love*, which at this point were being published by three different British companies, began pouring into the United States. An interesting thing about these copies was that many of them were missing two pages, which were literally torn out of the books before being sent overseas. These two

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 7e.

¹¹⁵ Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society*, (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 125.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 125-126.

pages included the section in which Stopes had addressed issues of contraception. This precaution was taken to keep those groups who disagreed with the judge's opinion from placing the text on trial again. Later in 1931, Stopes' American publisher, the New York Eugenics Publishing Co., chose not to follow suit and included the text on contraception. This inclusion, although it did spark some controversy when it was noticed by anti-birth control groups, did not cause enough outrage to require a second trial to legitimize the text.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

Although Stopes was certainly not the first person in America to challenge sexual norms with texts such as *Married Love*, her inclusion in American history helps to highlight the international element of this movement towards companionate marriage and the "new modern woman." By combining Stopes' actions with the works of Americans such as Sanger, historians are able to appreciate the larger, global context of discussions about contraception. This larger context helps create better understandings of not only the history of sexuality, but gender history as well.

Within Britain, the character of Marie Stopes is so well-known that historians tend to highlight only certain aspects of her actions or texts. Although this detailed focus does help in understanding the reactions of certain groups within Stopes' audience, it is difficult to visualize and understand her audience as a whole when historians delve so deeply. To this end, it is worthwhile to create a comprehensive study of Stopes' audience in its entirety in order to better understand the sexual atmosphere of the inter-war years.

¹¹⁷ Rose, *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution*, 209-211.

By studying the varied reactions to *Married Love*, historians complicate the picture of the nineteen-twenties and early thirties, showing that while many who read and wrote about *Married Love* did so because of its status as an important and popular book, others reacted more to Stopes' personality and her status as a public figure and activist, using her publications and actions as simply examples of her ideology. Still others understood Stopes as an academic or medical professional, and appreciated her work within the confines of medical knowledge. The discussion of all these views as a group helps to bring the full reading population of Stopes' book into view, placing both *Married Love* and Marie Stopes as major actors in shaping inter-war sexual discourse within the public, medical, and academic fields.