

Sex and the Married Girl: Heterosexual Marriage and the Body in Postwar Canada by Heather Stanley

Megan Blair

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important findings of the Inquiry into a readable format, with community members at the forefront, driving the narrative.

The strength of this book reflects the people who told their story. While this is a history of different levels of government extracting Indigenous land, it is the land defenders and their relentless demands for treaty justice that are at the heart of it. Even

the book cover tells a story of healing and resistance. The cover photo features Dudley George's great-niece and great-nephew walking together, in their regalia, firmly rooted on their traditional territory.

Lianne C. Leddy

Associate Professor, History, Wilfrid Laurier University

Sex and the Married Girl *Heterosexual Marriage and the Body in Postwar Canada*

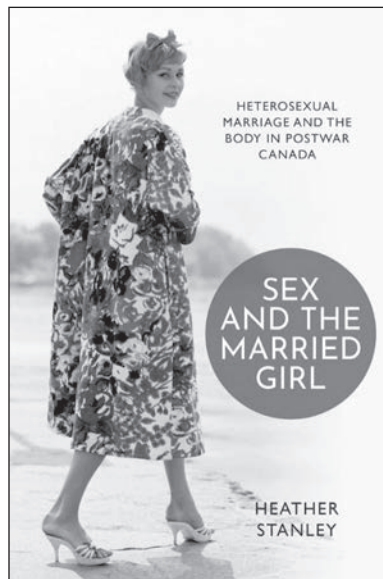
by Heather Stanley

Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2023. 216 pages. \$75.00 hardcover. ISBN 9781487501198. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN 9781487521141. \$29.95 (utorontopress.com).

Postwar gender roles in Canada have often been characterized by women's retreat to domesticity and images of blissful family life. These characterizations have been perpetuated by media through movies and sitcoms and have been used more recently by Conservative politicians to reflect on a golden age of wholesome, simplicity. In *Sex and the Married Girl*, Heather Stanley confronts this idealized image and investigates the realities of marriage, sex, and motherhood in postwar Canada. Stanley interrogates medical and religious discourses on marriage and sex to reveal how these supposedly private matters were carefully constructed to encourage 'normal-

cy' and how the maternal body "became the lever through which the family, and eventually the state, could be moved and postwar society carefully shepherd into a new era" (6). Stanley partners this archival evidence with eighteen oral history interviews of women's experiences with sex and marriage in the postwar period.

Stanley's book builds upon important studies on youth in postwar Canada by historians such as Mary Louise Adams and Mona Gleason by considering how discourses of normalcy were created, sustained, and enforced on adult women. *Sex and the Married Girl* also centres the body as both discursive and corporeal and considers



how discourses of ideal bodies served to police corporeal bodies and shape them into conformity. Though Stanley's source base and oral histories come largely from western Canada, many of the arguments and observations are relevant to consider for all of Canada and Stanley's methodology could be mirrored in other regional or local studies.

The bulk of *Sex and the Married Girl* focuses on medical and religious prescriptive discourses regarding sex and marriage. Stanley provides a thorough analysis of the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (*CMAJ*) to trace how the medical profession created and deployed ideas about 'normal' women's bodies. Stanley argues that the medical establishment understood women's bodies to be inseparable from maternity and that "motherhood was [...] a biological imperative for all normal women" (16). Discourse from the *CMAJ* revealed that by having children, women proved their adherence to expected gender roles, the success of their marriage, and their psychosexual maturity. The most interesting revelation of Stanley's analysis of the *CMAJ* is her argument of how the non-medical term 'feminine' became part of medical terminology. Being feminine, according to medical professionals, was achieved when a woman's "gender and sexual roles were in congruence with her biology" (33) and was equated with normality.

In her examination of religion, Stanley analyzes the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and United church perspectives on marriage and sex. Stanley argues that the central theme among all denominations was that the 'one-flesh' body was the ideal expression of normal gender roles, marriage, and heterosexuality. Stanley parses through the intricacies of each denomination's perspectives on marriage, sex, and

contraceptives, as well as their relationship to medicine. Religious institutions in the postwar years though, particularly Protestant sects, were grappling with how to balance tradition with social change and Stanley illustrates this in religion's reckoning with subjects such as contraception, abortion, pre-marital sex, and homosexuality.

The most intriguing part of Stanley's book is eighteen oral history interviews conducted with women who were married in the postwar years. Stanley situates her oral history interviews within a feminist oral history approach that values interviews as life narratives rather than statistical data. This is clear when reading Stanley's chapter on oral history, which often includes lengthy quotations from interviewees with deep analyses of the positionality of each woman and their relationship to Stanley as the interviewer. The content from Stanley's oral history interviews is entirely contained to the final chapter of the book. Though this makes for a very interesting and engaging chapter, there could have been more explicit connections between the interviews and Stanley's analysis of medicine and religion that occurred earlier in the book. Having evidence from the oral history interviews embedded in earlier chapters could directly speak to the realities of women's lives in comparison to the prescriptive discourse. With such evident effort and care taken by Stanley with the oral history interviews, hearing more of them throughout the entirety of the book would have been favourable.

Stanley's book is successful in revealing the machinations of sex and marriage in postwar Canada. Throughout the book, Stanley is clearly attuned to the ways in which homosexual sex and marriage were excluded through religious and medical discourse, as well as the ways in which non-white women were often othered, particu-

larly by the medical profession. Stanley seamlessly connects histories of medicine, religion, sexuality, and gender, making *Sex and the Married Girl* of interest to historians of many subjects. Overall, Stanley succeeds in expanding the lens of post-war

sex and marriage to complicate our understanding of these private, yet also very public, matters.

Megan Blair, PhD Candidate
University of Waterloo
