The Power of the Female Voice: 
US- American Women Protesting 
in the 1960s and 1970s

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INTRODUCTION

Society in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s was characterized by social unrest and constant changes. Innumerable people were ambitious to alter assumed norms and beliefs to create an equal society for all American citizens regardless of their race, religion or gender. Activism in various domains was practiced throughout the country, beginning with the Civil Rights Movement in the South, the Anti-Vietnam War protest, the Student movement, the New Left and, finally, the Second Wave of Feminism. Although each of the movements focused on a different aspect of society, they, nevertheless, all together changed the future of the United States. People went beyond their duty as citizens to create a fundamentally equal society of the future. In order to accomplish the uniting goal of equality, many movements carried out protests to pressure the government to change their policies. The successes of peaceful protests were soon visible in the United States. The Jim Crow laws were eliminated and African Americans were granted equal rights; the wide-spread Anti-Vietnam-War movement contributed to finally ending the war; and the women’s movement succeeded in making abortions legal in nearly every state and passing the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which ultimately erased all legal distinctions between men and women. (Burns xi; Evans Personal Politics 212-21; Dicker; Yates 35-36)

The women’s movement, which developed in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States was later known as the Second Wave of Feminism. Following the suffragette movement nearly forty years later, women once again protested against society’s unequal treatment of women. Feminists of the second wave in the United States were predominantly concerned with the elimination of workplace discrimination, issues regarding women’s health and sexuality, and the deconstruction of the feminine ideal created by society, which encouraged women to predominantly become mothers and housewives, to remain passive and to be solely interested in their beauty. Legal institution, the media, the educational system, the health sector and social sciences, among others, were challenged and pressured to alter their ideas and assumptions on female gender in order to reach egalitarianism. The movement coined their aims in the slogan “The Personal is Political”, which was created to demonstrate that aspects of women’s personal lives were regulated by politics strongly influenced by patriarchy and, therefore, it was not possible to make a clear distinction between the personal and the public sphere. Furthermore, the movement was characterized by different branches, public protests and the founding of so-called consciousness raisings groups, which provided a space for women to make their voices heard and to encourage them to create an image of femaleness
according to their experiences as women. In addition, the American society in the 1960s and 1970s was strongly influenced by patriarchy, which could be found in various domains and policies during that period. Feminists intended to deconstruct patriarchy in order to reach their goal of the equality of the sexes. (Evans *Personal Politics* 100-214, Lee 165-167)

Changing events on a large scale usually trigger extensive literary response, which was also the case with the women’s movement in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. Not only did women use their voices in various groups and at protests, they also articulated their ideas, desires and wishes through literature. The following thesis will examine three feminist literary accounts of the period in order to demonstrate that women used the power of their female voices to pressure society to alter their assumed female gender roles. The three primary sources which will be taken into account for the analysis are *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and as Institution* by Adrienne Rich and *Fear of Flying* by Erica Jong. It is the aim of this thesis to demonstrate that the three female authors used the power of their voices to question the status quo present in the American society of the 1960s and 1970s, which constructed a feminine ideal that restricted women to their biological function of reproduction and maintained the subordinate position of women in society; and additionally protest against it through their literature. The analysis of the sources will not only look at the content presented by the authors, but also at how the female writers present their arguments and demands. The interaction between form and content will be crucial in the analysis. I argue that Betty Friedan’s and Adrienne Rich’s texts are prime examples for consciousness raising and questioning the status quo, because they provide a theoretical approach which is connected to their own experience as women living in post-war America. They aim at raising consciousness through their literature to question the status quo in order to create an equality in society. Furthermore, I claim that Erica Jong’s novel *Fear of Flying* embodies the protest against assumed gender roles in society. The extrovert female first person narrator in the novel finds empowerment through her sexuality, and, therefore, exemplifies various females during the period.

At the beginning of the thesis, a context of second wave feminism as well as a theoretical framework is provided in order to clarify meaning and explain important issues for the later followed analysis. The first chapter presents the necessary background information of second wave feminism in the United States with its development after the Second World War and its connection to the Civil Rights Movement, its members and its major actions. The next chapter deals with
providing a theoretical insight into the movement. Two of the major concepts are analyzed in
greater detail here, which will be “The Personal is Political” and Our Bodies, Ourselves. It is limited
to only two notions, because they show the greatest significance for the analysis of the primary
sources. The theoretical aspects are not elaborated in great detail, because the focus of this thesis
lies on the analysis of the literary accounts. The final theory chapter is concerned with concepts
used in feminist criticism. A brief distinction between the terms “feminist, female, and feminine”
is provided at the beginning of the third chapter, followed by a broader elaboration on the concept
of patriarchy. Ultimately, Sigmund Freud’s ideas and concept are discussed with a strong focus on
feminists’ thoughts towards his ideas of penis envy and Oedipus complex. After the three theory
chapters, the core of the thesis follows, with the analysis of The Feminine Mystique, Of Woman
Born and Fear of Flying. The analysis begins with one of the most important feminist works of the
period The Feminine Mystique written by Betty Friedan. The focus lies on demonstrating that Betty
Friedan’s text aimed at raising consciousness and questioning the status quo present in America’s
society by questioning the construct of the feminine ideal present in society, media and education.
The second theme, which is analyzed in The Feminine Mystique are issues concerning women’s
mental health and sexuality in regard to the construct of the feminine mystique, which was present
in post-war America. Adrienne Rich’s book Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and as
Institution is analyzed next in the same chapter as Betty Friedan’s work. The analysis of Rich’s
text aims at illustrating that the author wants to raise consciousness for the construction of
motherhood as the feminine ideal. It is elaborated how Rich deconstructs motherhood as an
institution in a patriarchal society and how she challenges the belief by presenting her own
experiences as a mother. Additionally, the issues of reproduction and sexuality included in the book
are analyzed with a focus on reproductive rights, rape and female sexual experiences. The last
chapter of the analysis discusses Erica Jong’s novel Fear of Flying. Similar themes as already
analyzed in the other two primary sources are considered in order to create a large image of
women’s protest in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. The chapter begins with a short
overview of the plot and a brief description of the main characters, followed by an analysis of the
way the author protests in form of the first person narrator Isadora White Wing against the feminine
ideal present in society. The second subchapter provides an extensive elaboration on the issue of
female sexuality and how the first person narrator uses sexuality as empowerment. The thesis is,
ultimately, rounded up with a conclusion chapter in which it is demonstrated how the three female
authors found a voice through their literature and what demands they articulated in their texts.
1. CONTEXTUALIZING SECOND WAVE FEMINISM

Second wave feminism developed in the 1960s and was the second large women’s movement in the United States after the suffragist movement in the 19th century. The 1960s were a period marked by social unrest and the urge for social change. The Vietnam War and the practice of the Jim Crow laws in the South, which still restricted African Americans equal rights, triggered a new activism in people around America and encouraged many women to use their voices against domestic restrictions and workplace discrimination. (Conger) Several million Americans participated in making history in the 1960s. They acted beyond the usual practice of citizenship in order to alter social practices. Although, they might not have accomplished all their goals, they certainly shaped the future. (Burns xi) The following chapter will provide the historical background on the second wave of feminism in the United States. It will present the triggers for the establishment of the movement, its development with its connection to the Civil Rights movement and ultimately the most significant actions that transferred it into a mass movement throughout the United States.

The years before the emerging of the second wave were marked by economic and social uncertainty. Feminists of the first wave had won the right to vote in 1920 after a very long and hard battle. Finally, the Nineteenth Amendment guaranteed the vote to all female citizens over eighteen in all states of the United States. It was a hard earned milestone in the fight for the equality of the sexes, however, not the end of it. Many women still experienced oppression in their daily lives and were seen and treated as subordinate to men. Yet, after the suffrage was won and their unifying goal was achieved, the women’s movement fell silent. The “Roaring Twenties”, as the 1920s in the United States were called, were characterized by social freedom for women, personal and cooperate wealth as well as a culture that was focused on self-indulgence. These were also reasons for the disappearance of women’s activism. (Dicker)

However, the wealthy years of the 1920s did not last forever and were followed by the Great Depression, which led the United States into an economic crisis. During this period women turned their backs on activism and devoted all their strength into surviving the difficult times. Some women were the exception, such as Ester Peterson, Maida Springer or Dorothy Day, who remained advocating for working and poor women. They also became involved in the Communist Party, which was a very risky act at that time, because the anti-Communist paranoia in the country was booming and Senator Joseph McCarthy was on the hunt for Communists. Since feminism and
communism are philosophies which question the social norm, people wanted to raise no suspicion in fear of being declared as different which could have led to being accused of communism. Thus, in the period from 1920 to 1960 the National Woman’s party was the only association that declared themselves feminists. (Dicker)

The Great Depression was followed by World War II. The war helped the country recover economically from the depression, yet changed the social structure in the United States dramatically. Men left their homes to fight abroad for their country and women were either also participating in the war as nurses or uniformed personnel, or filled the vacated jobs at home. Twelve million men left the United States and nearly as many jobs had to be filled. Women started to leave their domestic sphere and worked in clerical service or retail work. Some even began to work in heavy industries, where they received a training in drilling, hammering and riveting on aircrafts, ships and manufacturing machinery. They not only gained experience in a very different field than in what many women had worked before, but they also received better wages. (Dicker)

Once the war ended and the men returned home, many women left the workforce again. They either returned to the jobs they had had before, which were often lower paid, or, to their domestic lives. This transition was carried out by many women voluntarily, others, however, were fired in order to make room for the men who returned home from the battlefield. The conventional division of labor, where women work at home and men work outside of the home, was reestablished in the after war period for most middle-class families. Although not all men and women chose this division of roles freely, people believed due to social, cultural, political and economic forces that they were normal, necessary and desirable. The celebration of the domesticity in the postwar era was similar to the Victorian era. The home and the family became the center of women’s lives again after a short period of work experience outside of it. (Dicker)

In addition, the media contributed significantly to these changes. Women’s magazines advertised products that would simplify the domestic life for women, but also enabled their readers to remain in the domestic. (Dicker) Besides the advertisement for new equipment for the household, magazines displayed “feminine” fashion ideals, such as cinched waists, petticoats and accented bustlines. Movie stars like Marilyn Monroe and Jane Mansfield became the sexy-but-innocent role models in the 1950s. Although more women attended college during this time period, the educators
reassured society that these young women were only preparing to be better wives and mothers; and nothing more. (Evans *Personal Politics* 4-5)

The period after World War II altered the cultural landscape of the United States. Security of family life was embraced by many middle-class Americans. Women started to get married at a very young age and had more children than ever. In contrast to the Depression, families started to have three to four children and moved out of the cities into the suburbs. Living the “American Dream” with one’s own house and a happy, large family on the outskirts of the cities was the main aim in the lives of many young couples. Women who would never work a day in their lives and devote all their energies to maintaining the house and taking care of the children while the men were away for work became the reality for the majority of America’s society. (Dicker)

However, not everyone in the United States had access to the “American Dream” of the postwar era. In the South the segregation of black and white people was still maintained. African Americans were not able to vote, their children did not attend the same schools as white children and nearly all public services were divided into “whites only” and “blacks only” sections. Non-violent protests, such as the Montgomery Bus boycott or student’s sit-ins, activated a movement to end racial segregation in the United States, which was later known as the Civil Rights movement. At the beginning of the Civil Rights movement, protesters were met with harsh violence and imprisonment. The way they were treated, however, gained soon attention all over the United States and the outrage for it began to grow. The Civil Rights movement had its peak in the 1960s, which provided the opportunity for women’s right reform. It was a time where the cultural climate in the country was ready for change. (Dicker)

This was not the first time in history that the fight for racial equality gave birth to a women’s movement. The first wave of feminism emerged from the abolition movement of the 1830s and 1840s. The Civil Rights movement in the 1960s enabled women once again to gain experience in an organized movement and collective action. The ideology behind the Civil Rights movement in the belief in human rights and the equality of all human beings was corresponding in every aspect to their own claim. (Evans *Personal Politics* 24-25) From Montgomery onwards, women, especially black women, played a significant role in the movement and contributed highly to its success. Although only a few black women became prominent, their supporting roles in mass meetings, marches, demonstrations and their provision of shelter for numerous activists in the
movement were important contributions. (Linden-Ward and Green 29) In addition, many southern white women, and also men, joined the Civil Rights movement in the early 1960s and used their privileged status to draw attention to the severe racial problems in their society. These southern white women were also the first ones to connect racial and sexual oppression. Reason for that was that the concept of the “white womanhood” was highly present within southern society. It symbolized the idea of being a “lady”, where no practical power of women was required. As long as they maintained the traditional domestic arrangement the purity of the white race as well as the domination of white men was guaranteed. (Evans *Personal Politics* 24-25)

From the beginning of the Civil Rights movement, southern women committed their lives to fight for racial justice. Through involvement in this large movement women discovered strength in themselves, which they did not know they possessed. Furthermore, they found a new sense of self that encouraged them to reject the enemy in themselves, which was the image of the “southern lady”. Although the rejection of the ideas of the white southern society enabled women’s freedom, it was also a wrenching process for many young women. Leaving your family, experiencing violence and poverty was often a very hard task for young people. The isolation they experienced from the environment in which they grew up led a group of white southern activists to found the Southern Student Organization Committee (SSOC). The organization functioned as a place where people could connect with others who felt the same, but also to mobilize more young white southerners to join the Civil Rights movement. Women, however, only received a minor part in the SSOC. Yet, the women who participated actively were strong ones and without them the organization would not have worked. Within the SSOC women experienced much tension due to their gender. Some leading men of the organization were known for their open sexism. Women fought back in often lonely battles, since the SSOC did not provide ground for women to utter their unequal experiences. As a result, the problem was often viewed as an individualistic problem by women who were affected by the unequal treatment within the group. Yet, these unpleasant experiences in the SSOC brought forth later many prominent leaders of the women’s movement. (Evans *Personal Politics* 43-47)

Apart from the SSOC, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was another significant organization in the Civil Rights movement in which many female activist participated. Jane Stembridge was the first paid staff member of the organization. Being the daughter of a southern Baptist minister, her urge to join the movement was driven by her religious beliefs. Many
other southern women shared this belief with her and participated in the movement because of their theological ideas. The SNCC had many famous male leaders who were often more known by the public than the female ones, such as James Forman, John Lewis or Robert Moses. However, the Civil Rights movement was in comparison to other distinctions of roles in America’s society during that time, remarkable egalitarian. (Evans Personal Politics 36-41)

The earliest feminist’s ideas emerged from the southern women involved in SNCC and the whole movement. From the beginning of their involvement, they understood that they were not only fighting an oppressive social system in the South but “were at war with their own culture.” Not only were they white Southern activists, they were also women. These women began to challenge the roles society had forced upon them for many years. Assumptions about female goals, responsibilities and behavior were suddenly questioned. The newly gained strength from the participation in the Civil Rights movement prepared these women to voice their concerns regarding the female image in society. As early as the 1960s the belief of a fundamental change in the roles of the sexes combined with racial equality was shared among women in the movement. Contributing to this demand was the image of the “southern lady”, which was constantly questioned by the large active participation of women in the movement. The fight against racism was believed to be the starting point to erasing all the unequal ideologies in the country. The church was seen as a strong contributor to society’s unequal treatment of women by many women participating in the movement. Jane Stembridge, for instance, accused the church of keeping their female members anti-intellectual and to teach the children in Sunday school to become racists and fascist. Yet, this was still at the beginning of the movement and it took many more women to be part in this movement, before the broader masses of women was ready to protest together in the following years. (Evans Personal Politics 56-59)

In addition to the numerous white Southern women that participated in the Civil Rights movement, students from the northern parts of the country have joined the movement in massive numbers by 1964. Aware of the possibility of imprisonment, violence and even death, students left their northern campuses and joined the movement. Many middle-class white women experienced fear and poverty for the first time in their lives. These extraordinary experiences and first participation in protest and politics shaped many young women. They returned to their northern homes with the strength and the anger to tackle the problem of social injustices not only in the South but also in their hometowns. At that time many might not have named the conflict they have experienced as
women, yet they were ready to act whenever the issue of the inequality of the sexes was tackled. (Evans *Personal Politics* 82-83)

The Civil Right movement triggered various others movements in the mid-1960s in the United States. The Economic Research and Action Projects (ERAP), which worked actively to help the poor, the Anti-War movement that opposed the Vietnam War and the student movement, were major movements of the New Left. This new political dimension was an “ethical revolt against the visible devils of racism, poverty, and war.” (Weinstein 203-216) It attracted students of both sexes; yet the rising awareness for the unequal treatment of women within the movements led soon to the first protests. The wide spread assumption of their male counterparts that women’s parts were primarily in the background and theirs was in the spotlight of the movements slowly fueled rage in many women. More and more active women started to raise the ‘women’s questions’ and to express desires for a movement on their own. Women actively participating in movements of the New Left began to meet in small groups to discuss their gender experiences within the movements. They soon discovered that many of them shared the same experiences. Women’s group started to appear everywhere and attracted the attention of hundreds of women. The soon called ‘women’s liberation groups’ broke the dam for the women’s liberation movement. Numerous women found finally relief that they could express their concerns and anger about the unequal treatment they received in private as well as in public. Although some were uncertain who their enemy was and whom they were fighting, the desire to be treated as equal human beings outshone every concern and strengthened the movement. (Evans *Personal Politics* 107-212)

The new Women’s Liberation movement was developed by women who participated actively in the Civil Rights movement and the New Left. They dared to question society’s old assumptions and myths about female nature. Women began to confront society’s believes with their own experiences, which led to the discovery that something was significantly wrong in the fundamental belief of femaleness in society. The happy suburban housewife’s image of the 1950s showed no relation to most American women in the 1960s anymore. Their participation in various movements enabled them to respect themselves and to apply new strengths. The egalitarian ideology of the New Left, which emphasized the importance and necessity to fight for the freedom of the oppressed, was a further contributor to women’s willingness to protest against unequal social norms. The women of the 1960s created a movement that simultaneously challenged the female roles in the home and the outside workplace. (Evans *Personal Politics* 212-213)
The publication of the book *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan in 1963 was crucial for the women’s movement. The best-selling work demonstrated Friedan’s analysis of numerous middle-class housewives who suffered from the ‘problem that has no name’. The book claimed that women were trapped in the ‘feminine mystique’, which was constructed by the post-war American society and only allowed women to be housewives and mothers. Furthermore, women were only sincerely feminine when they accepted their roles as sex objects and family nurturer. (Yates 4) Friedan exposed that many well-educated, middle-class housewives suffered in silent depression due to their dissatisfaction in their one-dimensional role as housewife-mother. They were not fulfilled with traditional feminine values, yet found no way out of it. Friedan’s suggestions to escape the feminine mystique and to unfold the “problem that has no name” was for women to discover their identity by working meaningfully outside of the home and creating their own ‘life plans.’ (Burns 121)

*The Feminine Mystique* received a magnetic response by millions of US American women and Betty Friedan became instantly prominent. Many women found their own stories in the pages of Friedan’s book and it brought forth a number of future feminists searching for a unifying women’s movement. Following the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, the United States Congress altered Title VII of the Civil Rights Bill and added the word ‘sex’ to it. The bill restricts the “discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, national origins and of sex”. Although the addition of the word ‘sex’ passed Congress, it was widely mocked and many women’s activists were skeptical of its seriousness. (Yates 5) In addition, black attorney Paulie Murray claimed at a convention of women’s clubs that Title VII will never be carried out “unless women march on Washington like the blacks.” (Friedan *Changed my Life* 77) Previous to Murray’s statement, underground feminists approached Betty Friedan to form a movement or an organization for women similar to the black’s movement. Thus, she got together with Murray and Dorothy Haener of the United Auto Workers at the Washington conference in 1966 and suggested a feminist organization to the antidiscrimination activists. It was not met with much enthusiasm by the Women’s Bureau officials and Cabinet members. This, however, encouraged Friedan even more to carry out her idea. Aileen Hernandez, a black EEOC commissioner, gathered with Friedan to draw up plans for the organization. (Burns 122)
The National Organization for Women, short NOW, was officially established in October 1966. It consisted of 300 members with Betty Friedan as president and Aileen Hernandez as vice-president. In their “Statement of Purpose” written by Betty Friedan, NOW states that

We, men and women who hereby constitute ourselves as the National Organization for Women, believe that the time has come for a new movement toward true equality for all women in America, and toward a fully equal partnership of the sexes, as part of the world-wide revolution of human rights now taking place within and beyond our national borders. The purpose of NOW is to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men. […] NOW is dedicated to the proposition that women, first and foremost, are human beings, who, like all other people in our society, must have the chance to develop their fullest human potential. […] We do not accept the traditional assumption that a woman has to choose between marriage and motherhood, on the one hand, and serious participation in industry or the professions on the other.[…]

Friedan played a major role in NOW. Her prominence, her organizational skills and unlimited energy enabled the organization to gain much media attention and members across the United States. NOW’s main actions were carried out in Washington D.C. and New York, however, many local and state chapters developed soon. (Burns 122-123)

1966 marked the start for the organization of the women’s movement. 1968, however, was the year that attracted most public consciousness for the movement. Reason for that was the demonstration of the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City. A large “Women’s Liberation” banner was displaced on the balcony of the contest. Outside of the auditorium a group of women crowned a live sheep to symbolize the objectification of the female body in such a beauty contest. They also mocked the Miss American slogan “the 1968 model: she walks, she talks, AND she does housework” and placed a ‘freedoms trashcan’ in the middle of the crowd. Everyone could throw in objects which they considered items of female torture, such as bras, curlers or issues of so-called “women’s magazines.” (Evans “Beyond Declension” 52-53) Albeit the media coverage of the women’s protest was going to be unflattering and later known as the ‘bra burner’, it was nevertheless very widespread. It provoked a large inflow of new members into all areas of the movement. (Evans Personal Politics 214)

By the end of the 1960s, the modern women’s movement was not a linear or one dimensional movement anymore. Many movements, branches and different stands developed out of the early
beginnings of the movement. These movements performed parallel with occasional overlapping and often as antagonistic movements which developed at the same time. (Valk 4) According to many early scholars of second wave feminism, the beginning of the women’s movement was categorized into two political movements: The Women Right’s movement and the Women’s Liberation movement. (Nicholson 2) Depending on the scholar, different names for the two branches are used, such as Liberal and Liberationist Groups, old and new branch of the movement or liberal and radical feminists. Even though the principles might vary, the distinction between the two branches are nevertheless stable. (Nachescu 31)

On the one hand, the Women’s Right movement was bureaucratically coordinated built on a hierarchical structure within the association. Members of this part of the movement were mainly professional women over thirty with a family, who were starting to pressure federal and state institutions to stop workplace discrimination. (Nachescu 31) The priority of the movement was to create a legal and statutory reform. (Valk 4) Inspired by the *Feminine Mystique* the Women’s Rights movement tackled the dissatisfaction experienced by many middle class housewives. Furthermore, the National Organization of Women (NOW) was a product of the Women’s Right movement. (Nicholson 1-2) In addition, the Women’s Rights movement has often been called conservative feminism because it does not challenge public institutions, such as the democratic government, law, vocational order, the public school or the nuclear family, in themselves. Rather, it demands equal and full opportunities for women to participate in these institutions. The most radical reorganization in America’s society is necessary to carry out these demands. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) is one product of this feminist belief. The ERA aims at erasing all legal distinctions between women and men and to enshrine it in the Constitution of the United States. (Yates 35-36)

On the other hand, the Women’s Liberation movement was a loosely structured, informal group consisting of radical feminists. It emerged out of the New Left and adapted rhetorical devices from the Black Power movement. The aim of the movement, as Katie Sarachild, a member of the New York Radical Women claimed, was to get “to the roots of problems in society”. In order to reach these roots, radical feminists met in small groups, which were known as ‘consciousness-raising groups’. The term was first coined by New York Radical Women in 1967 and gained much significance throughout the second wave. The idea was to mobilize small women only groups to discover and discuss the problems of inequality of women in America’s society. Radical feminists
of the Women’s Liberation movement reused a theoretical method of the 17th century where the study of nature was practiced instead of the study of books. (Nachescu 29-32) The scientific method, Sarachild claims, was “the decision to emphasize our own feelings and experiences as women and to test all generalizations and reading we did by our own experience.” (146)

Consciousness raising groups, or awareness groups or also known as CR groups, formed the foundation of the feminist movement. The aim was to enhance consciousness for the construction of feminine identity by patriarchal society, feminists and by each individual woman herself. The elements for this construction, such as roles, body image, feelings, sexuality and choices, were discussed in the group meetings. The essential feature of consciousness raising groups is that women share their ideas and feelings with each other in a respectful, supportive and women-only settings. In the groups the participants try to discover societal constructed and assumed roles and actions of women. Furthermore, the stereotypes of mother, wife, career women, single women and women in general are analyzed. It is the aim to become aware of the reason behind women’s acting in order to empower women to make decisions about their own lives. (Randolph and Ross-Valliere 922)

Another important indication of consciousness raisings groups is that they differ from therapy groups. The difference is that CR groups do not focus on solving the problem or giving advice, but rather on sharing female experiences in order to better understand and question the individual role every woman has chosen for herself. In addition, the group does not analyze the shared anecdotes, but simply acknowledges and respects them as they are. Awareness groups provide a safe atmosphere for women to share experiences and discuss issues which might have been very difficult to talk about in a different setting. (Randolph and Ross-Valliere 922) Women were finally given a voice. A voice which was taken seriously by the other members of the meeting. The opportunity to finally articulate the anger, concerns, struggles and wishes was provided in CR groups. Drucilla Cornell elaborates the idea of finding a voice in the CR groups by stating that “voices were not just something we had, a natural attribute of our human being, but also something we helped each other develop as we struggled to articulate who we were and who we sought to become in the movement we were creating.” (1033)

The Women’s Liberation movement faced at the beginning the problem of receiving public attention for the importance of fighting against women’s oppression. Other members of the New
Left had difficulties in not only recognizing its importance, but also acknowledging that women’s inequality was fundamental in nearly all social organizations. A theory was necessary to explain the origin and the development of the problem. The Marxist theory was one that affected many members of the Women’s Liberation movement. The class oppression in Marxism shows parallels to the oppression of women in society. Yet, the Marxist theory is based on economics and the elimination of social classes in society without being strongly concerned with sex. For the social world of Marx the difference between men and women is not highly significant since all members of society are seen as workers, peasants, or capitalists. (Nicholson 2, Rubin 28-29)

The application of the Marxist theory to the oppression of women in society was not performed by all women within the movement. Radical feminist’s theories in the beginning argued that the Marxist theory was not completely applicable to the situation women were in since the oppression of women was different from any other oppression. The unequal treatment of women in society was prior and more basic than any other form. Other feminist theorists, however, were more influenced by the Marxist theory and claimed that feminists should focus more on the “historical materialism”. They should apply a method that investigates the way human beings act in social structures in order to satisfy needs and how this behavior changes over time. The problem that occurred with this method was that the focus of the Marxist theory is based primarily on men. Furthermore, the definition of “production” in Marxist terms is problematic for feminist studies, since it is mainly concerned with the production of food and objects. Feminists argued that the definition of “production” needed to be broadened in terms of the creation of human beings and their care in order to apply for women’s oppression. Nevertheless, many scholars argue that no other theory shows as much explanatory power of the oppression of women in society. (Nicholson 2, Rubin 29)

Although liberal and radical feminists addressed the problem of women’s oppression in America’s society in different domains and in different ways, both of them contributed significantly to the success of the whole women’s movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, both branches fought for the same cause- the equality of the sexes in America’s society. Demonstrating their linkage and the connection to the suffragist movement was the Women’s Strike for Equality in August, 1970 in New York City. Betty Friedan initiated the march in order to mobilize hundreds of women throughout the country of all branches of the movement to show the whole country “how powerful we were”. 1970 marked also the 50th anniversary of the 19th Amendment and was thus a
perfect time to raise awareness once again for the equality of the sexes. The Strike claimed “abortion on demand, twenty-four hour child care services, and equal opportunity in job and schooling”. The Strike for Equality was led down Fifth Avenue by Betty Friedan hand in hand with Judge Dorothy Kenyon, who was a suffrage veteran, and a young, radical feminist to show the unity of the movement. Women protested in every other big city and many small towns all over the United States to advocate for the equality of the sexes. Demonstrating the unifying power of the women in the movement, the march was the first assemblage of women for women since the suffrage movement. It was also the first time the media covered the event seriously, which led to the sudden prominence of NOW. New members came in floods and the march marked another turning point in the movement. Betty Friedan’s statement that “this is a political movement and not a bedroom war” was demonstrated by the march once and for all. (Burns 124-125)

The National Organization for Women (NOW) initiated the start of the women’s movement up to the Strike for Equality. The numerous younger, radical women who were veterans of the Civil Rights movement and the New Left, however, turned the women’s movement into a mass movement. They questioned Betty Friedan’s solution in the Feminine Mystique that working outside of the home would solve the problem for women to seek equality, and demanded the complete elimination of sex roles. It was the tackling of the roots of the problem that occurred to many young, middle-class women, who believed in the right to define themselves as they choose and to develop an own identity without restrictions to sex roles. Addressing the problem by its roots generated the massive responds of women towards the movement. (Burns 125-126)

What was needed in the movement now, was a mass media magazine suitable to compete with the glossy magazines on the newsstand in order to articulate the thoughts, ideas and demands of the movement. This was done by founding the feminist magazine Ms. in 1972. Certainly the most famous founder of the magazine and one of the key figures in the whole movement was Gloria Steinem. The idea of the paper was to illustrate women’s issues in the way of popular culture. Language, ads, and images of popular culture were used which the readers were familiar with and already found enjoyable. The result was that the preview issue in 1972 had an immediate sellout.

In comparison to the feminist media that already existed and which published only periodically, such as off our backs, Ms. magazine reached out to a broader masses of women all over the United States. Women who had not yet been part of the movement recognized their own stories, experiences and wishes in the pages and images of Ms. magazine and developed a sense of
companionship. Onka Dekkers, one writer for *off our backs*, describes *Ms.* magazine’s quiet entrance into the homes of millions of women throughout the United States as “tarantulas on a banana boat”. The magazine developed into a form of mass media consciousness-raising space, which changed the lives of many females across the United States. (qtd. in Farrell 51-52)

One significant feature of the magazine was the letters section where readers shared their experiences of daily lives. These stories where then connected to broader policy and legislative issues, which demonstrated the connection between the personal and the political. One of the main issues discussed in this section was abortion. “We have had Abortions” was an article published in the first issue by Barbralee Diamonstein and tackled the issue of abortion for American women including a list of women who had had an abortion. It encouraged other women to come forth as well. The editors received thousands of postcards of readers who signed the petition for legalizing abortion and acknowledged that they had had an abortion themselves. The petition was thus sent to national and state legislatures in order to press for better abortion rights for women in the United States. Furthermore, the magazine always provided contact information for their readers regarding further activism under their articles. Although the magazine did not cooperate with any political party, it certainly was not afraid to comment on political decisions happening across the country. Throughout the years of publication, *Ms* magazine worked hard for reproductive rights for women. (Farrell 54-56)

In addition, *Ms.* magazine functioned as a mass media umbrella for feminism beginning with its first issue in 1972 until its last issue in 1989. The magazine provided a space for sharing female experiences, opinions and ideas across barriers of class, age, race, ethnicity and sexuality. It was the aim to demonstrate a pluralistic feminisms, which spoke to and included a wide variety of women. Furthermore, the magazines’ famous closing phrase “Yours in Sisterhood” should demonstrate the inclusive feminist approach the magazine aimed at. Yet, the magazine could not always fulfill their expectations. A cover story about a stay-at-home, white middle class mother attracted special attention among the diverse readers of the magazine. The critique was that women of color, working class women or less privileged women had more severe concerns than a white middle class woman’s complaint about staying home. (Farrell 58-59) This critique has been claimed throughout the second wave of feminism and especially afterwards. The question of who was included in the ‘sisterhood’ has been raised by various scholars. Many argue that the second wave of feminism was a movement solely for white middle class women living in the suburbs who
were unhappy and unsatisfied with their lives. This perspective on second wave feminism, however, is quite limited. The movement was indeed multiracial and very diverse. Scholars, such as Sara Evans, argue that this critique was based on inadequate historical research. The voices of feminists of color, such as Toni Morrison and Gloria Anzaldúa, demonstrated in the late 1970s and early 1980s that in reality numerous sources of identity are embodied in human beings. Their voices quickly drew attention in feminist debates to the idea of intersectionality and social construction. The interplay of not only gender, race and class but also religion, family, ethnicity or region, became visible. (Evans *Foreword* vii-x)

During the 1970s the rise of multiracial feminism began. Women of color and Latina women participated in NOW and in consciousness raising groups. Therefore, the common belief that ‘black feminism’ developed as a reaction to ‘white feminism’ was questioned by many scholars, because it underestimated the work many women of color contributed to the success of the movement. In addition, various organizations were formed by Latinas, black women, Native Americans and Asian Americans within the movement in the 1970s. One of the earliest was a Chicana feminist group in the 1971, followed by ‘Asian Sisters’, an Asian American feminist group that focused on drug abuse by young females in Los Angeles. The most famous feminist organization founded by Native American women’ was ‘WARN- Women of All Red Nations’. All three of these early multiracial feminist groups developed out of and worked closely with mixed-gender nationalist organizations. Black women’s earliest feminist organization grew out of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and was called ‘Third World Women’s Alliances’. This first cooperation of black feminists laid the foundation for later organizations and the increase in the publication of black women’s writings. (Thompson 337-341)

Many accounts of second wave feminism focused on the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, the founding of NOW and consciousness raising groups, and forget to include the diversity of the movement. Certainly, Betty Friedan’s analysis was based on white middle class women, nevertheless her publication broke the ground and raised consciousness that it was time for all women to speak up and start a movement. Second wave feminism was, thus, indeed a social movement that included a wide variety of ideas, concerns, and beliefs and most importantly a diverse group of women. Neglecting the diverse contributions to the movement by women of color and different ethnicities would be flawed. Without their contribution the movement would not have been the largest and farthest reaching social movement of the time. (Thompson 338, Gilmore 1)
2. Theoretical Positioning of Second Wave Feminism

The following chapter aims at discussing two of the main theories and notions that occurred and were widely used during the second wave of feminism. Certainly other approaches were used as well, nevertheless, these two are especially important for the analysis carried out in this thesis and are, therefore, the only ones which will be elaborated in more detail. Firstly, the idea of “the Personal is Political” as one of the major claims of second wave feminism will be defined. Secondly, issues concerning women’s health and sexuality will be discussed, which were coined by the slogan and the publication of Our Bodies, Ourselves during the 1960s and 1970s in the United States.

2.1. ‘The Personal is Political’

One of the major as well as most controversial beliefs shared among second wave feminists was that the personal and the political spheres were not entirely separable. The idea was coined by Carol Hanisch in 1969 under the slogan ‘The Personal is Political’ and soon gained much attention within the movement. Feminists began to challenge the assumed separation between public and private spheres of ordinary women in consciousness raisings groups. In order to explain their experiences, a generation of theories for the roots of the problem was necessary. The theoretical insight of Simone de Beauvoir as presented in her book The Second Sex demonstrated the societal and cultural construction of womanhood and functioned, thus, as the foundation. Beauvoir argues that “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.” (294) In her book she illustrates gender relation in society and how women are constructed to function as subordinate to men. She claims that “humanity is male and man defines women not in herself but as relative to him. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute- she is the Other.” (5) The analysis presented in Beauvoir’s book helped feminists understand that they have to aim beyond achieving only formal equality of the sexes but rather at establishing women’s rights to live as free and autonomous individuals as defined by themselves and not by society. The root of the problem lies in women’s status as ‘second sex’. In order to eliminate this status and to receive women’s emancipation from patriarchy, the personal needs to be politicized. Then, a proper democratic society with women as equal citizens will be created. (Lee 165-167)
The slogan was not met with enthusiasm by all members of the feminist movement in the 70s. Liberal feminists and others were concerned that the politicization of the personal sphere will open doors for the government to dominate every aspect of private life. However, this is not what the slogan intended. The notion of ‘the Personal is Political’ was used by feminists in order to challenge the assumption of the personal sphere as powerless. The private life is constructed of networks of power and thus, “feminism stands for the politicization of power.” This idea has nothing to do with governmental interference in every aspect of private life. An example would be the claim for reproductive freedom. Feminists can protect their claim that reproductive rights are private decisions, yet at the same time illustrate to the public what might influence women to have abortions. These influences, however, might be indeed very politically, such as the economy, the workplace structure or society’s negative view on unmarried mothers. (Williams 94)

To conclude, ‘the Personal is Political’ was a unifying slogan throughout the second wave of feminism in the United States. It represented the power political actions had on the personal lives of many women. This was discovered in consciousness-raising groups, which functioned as spaces where women observed that most of the negative experiences they had personally because of their gender were certainly not to be solved personally, but rather solved politically. Hanisch emphasized in her essay that it was time for women to stop blaming themselves for their failures, which have been shaped on the political level and were hence transformed onto the personal. (Hanisch)

2.2. OUR BODIES, OURSELVES

‘The Personal is Political’ was the umbrella term used in second wave feminism in the United States for the most private aspects of human identity, such as relationships, family life, sexuality and also health. Especially, the aspect of women’s health was often discussed in consciousness raising groups and soon became the center of attention within the movement. Members of the movement recognized the importance of the topic in connection with the political level and were eager to improve the situation for women concerning their own bodies and health. A women’s health movement was soon born. The grassroots campaign aimed at increasing women’s power over their own bodies. In the 1960s and 1970s more and more women were consumers in the health care industry. The new birth control pill was introduced in the 1960s and more women began to rely on doctor’s prescriptions. Therefore, it was essential that understandable information was available for them. The first and most extensive publication that offered information about female
health and sexuality was *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, published in 1971 by the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective. Soon known as the ‘bible for women’s bodies’, it immediately became a bestseller and read throughout the United States. The book included the topics of sexuality, birth control, pregnancy, anatomy, patient as victim, prepared childbirth, postpartum and childcare, medical institutions and laws, and organizations for change. (Kline 63-66, Linden-Ward and Green 334, 355)

The invention of the Pill was crucial for women’s health. It was not only the first medication developed for a social rather than a medical purpose, it also had a revolutionary potential which changed women’s lives. The Pill was relatively cheap and, thus, available for the majority of America’s population. It was significantly beneficial for women with financial problems who could not afford to have many children, or illegal abortions. Although the Pill proved to be the most effective contraceptive, critique within society was articulated. It was assumed that the Pill would lead women into promiscuity. The debate whether the Pill would encourage women to have innumerous bed partners, was, however, merely on morality and social stratification aimed at the female gender than on concerns regarding women’s health. In addition, the Catholic Church also opposed the Pill. Nevertheless, the Pill gave women personal control over their bodies, which lay the ground for the sexual revolution that established in the 60s within the social movement. (Linden-Ward and Green 335-340)

Besides the new contraceptives invented in the 60s, abortion was a highly important issue. As already mentioned previously, feminists of the second wave tackled the issue of abortion variously throughout the movement. NOW, *Ms.* Magazine, radical feminists, in consciousness raising groups and on various other occasions, pressed for better abortion rights. The reason for that was that in the 60s it was a medical issue which was predominantly discussed by doctors. Furthermore, throughout the states abortions were illegal for women and the belief that not wanting to have children was unnatural was still widely spread in 60s. During that period women who wanted to have an abortion had to do it illegally, and often risked their lives. Underground abortion rings, hence, established in many cities. It was not until 1967 that the first state in the United States made abortion legal: Colorado. Fifteen other states followed and altered their law by making abortions legal in cases of incest, rape or maternal health issues. The topic of abortion could also be found in the landmark publication on women’s health *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. The chapter is very informative and provides facts about women’s anatomy and on the procedure of abortion. In
addition, the most important claim that is made in the book is that abortion is every women’s right to control their own bodies, which is one of the major principles of second wave feminism. (Linden-Ward and Green 344-356)

The sixties were a period that altered women’s health in many ways. New birth control was invented, the issue of abortion was debated publicly and ultimately made legal in some states. Women gained greater opportunity to be in charge of their own bodies and hence their future. In addition, sexuality and sex evolved into a public subject. Various events during the 60s contributed to the so-called “sexual revolution”. Young people went to college together, the Pill was invented, sex was separated from reproduction and, of course, the evolvement of social movements which questioned traditional authorities. Whether this revolution benefitted only women was questionable, nevertheless, it encouraged women to think differently about themselves and to control their own body and sexuality. (Linden-Ward and Green 367-369)

One major event during the period was the deconstruction of the vaginal orgasm as the “right form” of orgasm. This belief was triggered by Freud’s idea that the vagina was the prime female sexual organ that was in charge of erotic sensation. The clitoris orgasm was not seen as the ultimate goal for women. The reason for the assumption was also that the clitoris orgasm did not require a penis, and was thus seen as masturbatory, which was not common female practice during the time period. Conservative writers went even as far as considering women who preferred clitoral orgasm as neurotic, immature and, masculine; however, females who reached vaginal orgasm as mature, maternal and feminine. These myths were common beliefs, which were strongly questioned and criticized during the sexual revolution by many feminists and will be also discussed later in this theory in the analysis of the primary sources, which also tackled the issue of the vaginal and clitoris orgasm. (Linden-Ward and Green 369)

Yet, probably the biggest change the 60s provided for women was the freedom to speak about sex. Literature appeared by female authors that included sex scenes and talked openly about sexuality. Novels which suggested free love became best sellers during the time. The focus on sex in connection with love shifted to sex in connection with pleasure. The claim by many feminists was to alter the outdated model of sexuality which was created by men in order to serve men. New sexual trends aimed at putting women more in charge of their sexual experiences. These changes ultimately led to the sexualized society of the late 60s in the United States and this growth was not
only heterosexual. Homosexuality became more present in society and was received with more tolerance than in the years before. The women’s movement, as many other social groups during that time, provided space for homosexual women to define themselves as they wished. The taboo of being homosexual was slowly starting to break, nevertheless it would take many more years to be accepted fully in the society of the United States and in every other part of the world. (Linden-Ward and Green 373-377)

Summing up, it can be said that the 1960s changed women’s health issue as well as their perception of their own sexuality tremendously. The invention of the Pill lay the ground for a sexual revolution that improved women’s view towards their bodies and sexuality. Issues such as abortion were made public in order to improve women’s health and to provide women with rights over their own bodies. Ultimately, myths of the 50s, such as the bad clitoris orgasm, were questioned and finally deconstructed by women themselves.
3. CONCEPTS OF FEMINIST CRITICISM

After having focused on the theoretical positioning of second wave feminism, the following chapter will discuss important concepts of feminist criticism which will be further used in the analysis of the primary sources. Firstly, the terms feminist, female and feminine will be defined and distinguished from each other, which is essential for the later analysis in order to clarify meaning. Secondly, the concept of patriarchy, which constructed the foundation of society and thus triggered major criticism within in the feminist movement, will be explained. Connected to the idea of patriarchy are Sigmund Freud’s concepts and thoughts, which will be discussed ultimately. The focus here will be on Freud’s construction of femininity in connection with his concepts of penis envy and Oedipus complex.

3.1. FEMINIST, FEMALE, AND FEMININE

The terms ‘feminist’, ‘female’, and ‘feminine’ have been used in various ways throughout the second wave of feminism. In order to use them in feminist criticism, a clear definition of the three terms as well as an understanding of their differences is urged by many scholars. Generally speaking, Toril Moi suggests that ‘feminism’ is a political standpoint, ‘femaleness’ is a subject of biology and ‘femininity’ is defined by culture. (117) The following sub chapter will examine the three concepts briefly based on Moi’s definition.

Firstly, the term ‘feminist’ and ‘feminism’ need to be distinguished from ‘female’ and ‘feminine’.

The terms are political labels which demonstrate the support for the principles of the women’s movement. In this thesis, the use of feminist or feminism will be in connection to the second wave of feminism, which emerged in the 1960s. Furthermore, ‘feminist criticism’ identifies a certain kind of political discourse. Moi defines it as a “critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism, not simply a concern for gender in literature.” Other methods can be used in feminist criticism and a variety of political views can be found among feminists, which demonstrates that there is not one right way of feminism, but numerous. Nevertheless, feminist criticism must be applicable somehow to the examination of the institutional, personal and social power dynamics between the sexes. (Moi 116-117)

Secondly, the terms ‘female’ and ‘femaleness’ are significant for feminist criticism. In connection to the feminist approach it is essential to state that being female, which is biologically determined,
does not ultimately indicate being a feminists. In terms of feminist criticism, this means that not all books written by women on women do automatically question patriarchy or stereotypes of women; and are therefore not necessarily feminist. During the emerging of feminist criticism a confusion between female texts and feminists existed. It was, for instance, frequently believed that the act of describing female experiences was already indicated as feminist. On the one hand, there is some truth in this assumption. Patriarchy has always attempted at silencing women and thus the act of visualizing women’s experiences is an anti-patriarchal move. Yet, on the other hand, women’s experience might have been alienated by patriarchy and thus represents a deluded or degraded perspective. Therefore, the assumption that femaleness equals feminism is certainly flawed. (Moi 120-122)

Thirdly, the term ‘feminine’ has a significant role in feminist criticism. The most common belief among feminists, inspired by Simone de Beauvoir, is that ‘feminine’ is culturally constructed and represents forms of sexuality and behavior established by cultural and social norms. Hence, feminine symbolizes nurture in comparison to female, which represents nature. Society, especially patriarchal societies have great influence on the construction of femininity. According to Beauvoir’s approach, patriarchal oppression of women inflict certain social principles of femininity on women in order to construct the belief that they are natural. In addition, someone who rejects the feminine standard risks to be labeled unfeminine and unnatural. Moi argues that patriarchy aims at confusing women with the two terms ‘feminine’ and ‘female’; and furthermore making them believe that femininity is the essence of femaleness. Feminists, on the contrary, intend to deconstruct this confusion and patriarchal belief. Women are indeed female, however, there is no guarantee or need for them to be feminine. (Moi 122-123)

To conclude, Toril Moi’s definitions of the terms ‘feminist’, ‘female’ and ‘feminine’ offer an understanding of the discrepancy between the three terms. Being female does not automatically mean being a feminist or being feminine. The confusion among the usage of these terms have demonstrated the importance for their definitions. Certainly, there are connections between the terms, however, they differ significantly in their origins, which is especially important in feminist criticism.
3.2. **Patriarchy**

In the development of feminist thought the concept of patriarchy has been essential. According to Joan Acker, “patriarchy provided the essential focus and the identification of the theoretical object of rapidly developing innovative thinking about the subordination of women” in the 1960s and 1970s. (235) Yet, there exists a broad variety of definitions concerning patriarchy. Social scientists have used the concept of patriarchy for a long period of time. Weber, for instance, defined patriarchy in 1947 as a system of government in which the head of the household had to be male. In addition, this definition also indicates the domination over younger men who were not household heads, which was for Weber certainly as important as the domination over women in the household. (Walby 214) Weber’s definition has been advanced by various scholars. Lerner, for instance, defined patriarchy in 1968 as the “manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general.” (239) Radical feminists have also used a more advanced definition than Weber’s. Their focus, similar to Lerner, was on the domination of women by men. The issue of oppression of men by men was not of high importance. (Walby 214)

Sylvia Walby elaborates this idea further and argues that the inclusion of the generational element in the definition of patriarchy, as Weber and also Hartmann (1979, 1982), another major writer on the question, stated, is misleading and should be omitted. Furthermore, she describes the concept as a “system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.” (214) By defining patriarchy in terms of social structure and practices, Walby rejects the notion of biological determinism, and thus, the idea that men are naturally in a superior position than women. In addition, she claims that there are different levels of abstraction that need to be considered in order to conceptualize patriarchy. The concept exists as a structure of social relations on its most abstract level, in connection with capitalism and racism for instance. At the next level six structures of patriarchy can be identified, namely, “the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions, such as religion, the media and education.” (214) These six structures of patriarchy posed by Walby are a concept of social structures that demonstrate the institutionalized features of society. (221)
The first structure is the patriarchal mode of production. This is one of the two structures which deal with the economic oppression of women. The defining characteristic here is “the relation of production under which the work is performed.” Women’s work might range from cooking to cleaning and is carried out in the home and for her husband and family. Usually, the female is not rewarded with money for her work in the home, but it is rather seen as the arrangement between wife and husband. The husband also has possession of the labor power the women produced. Therefore, the structure of the household has demonstrated significant inequality. Firstly, the division of labor in the domesticity shows a great differentiation between men and women. Secondly, this differentiation in domestic labor influences significantly other aspects of social relations. Thirdly, the division and its consequences on other social relations illustrate in itself a form of significant inequality between the sexes in the domesticity. Furthermore, Walby also raises the question of fertility and reproduction. Women are in charge of reproduction, yet this is not defined as an own structure due to the reason that it is determined by various entities outside of the domesticity, such as state intervention’s on abortion rights for instance. (Walby 221)

The second structure on the economic level is patriarchal relations in paid work. The significant feature of this structure is the denied entry of women into the paid labor force by men. Women are either excluded entirely from paid work or segregated within it, which leads to low wages for women and the devaluation of their work. A social relation is highly present in this structure between the men, the excluder and devaluer, on the one hand and the women, the excluded and devalued, on the other. This constitutes indeed the critical aspect of the relation. (Walby 223)

The patriarchal state is another structure of patriarchy. It needs to be added that the state’s being patriarchal is not a consequence of its capitalism, but due to its patriarchal nature. This includes the relative exclusion of women on the state level as well as their lack of power within political forces. Furthermore, it has a number of significant effects on gender relations. A patriarchal state shapes the rules on divorce and marriage, abortion, fertility, contraception, wage discrimination, sexuality, homosexuality, prostitution, pornography and male violence in terms of the decision on rape as well as the question of housing for battered women. These issues have tremendous effects on gender relations, thus one might argue that the patriarchal state is the most crucial and at the same time the most alarming structure of patriarchy. (Walby 224)
The next patriarchal structure is male violence. Although it might appear in very individual cases, in reality it is constructed of a social structured nature. It is practiced by men as a form of power over women. Male violence contains of rape, wife beating, father/daughter incest, sexual harassment at work and sexual assault. It has causal power, because of its significant impact on shaping women’s action. The lack of state intervention to stop male violence contributes highly to the belief that violence is a resource to domi-nate women. The patriarchal states do not interfere as long as the violence is not ‘extreme’ or in ‘inappropriate’ circumstances, for instance in a public sphere on a strange woman. Certain violence in specific context, for example towards the own wife in the domestic sphere, is often accepted by patriarchal states. (Walby 225)

Following male violence, Walby demonstrate that sexuality is also important in terms of patriarchal structures. Patriarchal relations in sexuality are based on the idea of heterosexuality and its rejection of homosexuality. Its major concern is to guide women towards marriage. Sexuality gained an important place in radical feminist theory. (Walby 226) According to Mackinnon sexuality in feminism can be compared to labor in Marxism. She believes that through sexuality men gain the ability to oppress, objectify and dominate women. (515-516) Furthermore, some feminists have claimed that today in the subordination of women, sexuality is more important as a consequence. They, thus, link sexuality with gender. This idea, however, is challenged by Walby who believes that sexuality needs to be examined as a structure on its own and separate from other subordination’s of women. (226-227)

The last one of the six structures of patriarchy stated by Walby is patriarchal culture. It can be defined as a set of institutionally-rooted discourses, which is important for the shaping of gender subjectivity. The discourse on femininity and masculinity show a great range and vary in terms of class, age and ethnicity. Their common ground is their differentiation of masculinity from femininity. Further aspects that are important patriarchal discourse are religion and education. Religions have historically been very significant by laying down concrete ideas for men and for women. The educational system has shown great differentiation of male and female students. Male have received in general more credentials, whereas women experienced more closure in the educational system. Despite religion and education, discourse on femininity and masculinity are highly institutionalized in all sites of social life. (Walby 227)
Theorizing patriarchy was a crucial step to alter flawless social theory and to conceptualize women’s subordinate position. Furthermore, it contributed to the identification of a political goal for the women’s movement in industrial countries that would be necessary for achieving women’s liberation, namely the deconstruction of male dominated structure. A theory that closely analyzed this structure was needed in order to achieve societal change. The idea was that feminist theory “should give voice to the previously silenced as well as increase understanding of the oppressed.” Soon, however, critics claimed that this belief cannot be applied to every woman. Radical feminists’ idea of patriarchy that all women suffer from the same universal oppression of men, was soon questioned by women from ethnic and racial minorities as well as working class women. They claimed that this notion of patriarchy was strongly influenced by white middle class and could, therefore, only be applied to white, middle-class women. (Acker 235)

In addition, the concept of patriarchy and its application globally varies significantly, depending on the society and the culture. Liberal democracies such as the United States, Canada and most of Europe, demonstrate a greater inclusion of women in the workforce, higher education levels and more protection of civil and political rights for women in comparison to, for instance, Bangladesh, Iran or Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, patriarchal patterns are not static, but rather constantly changing and developing around the globe. In recent decades, for example, patriarchal relations have been extensively modified in Bangladesh. A country which was dominated by patriarchal structures, such as female seclusion and patrilocal ideas of marriage, has been put under pressure to improve the sex ratio, decline the fertility rates and trade liberalization. This is just one example of the altering process many societies have experienced in recent years in order to change patriarchal structures. (Farrelly 2)

Although the construction and definition of patriarchy has been criticized and as Oyeronke Oyewumi, for example, claims that patriarchy (as in the dominant definition) is a Western construct, it nevertheless was crucial for the feminist movement. It functioned as the basis for their claim to change society in its roots in order to gain equality of the sexes. In addition, it is a major concept that has been questioned in the primary sources chosen for the analysis of this thesis. The common definition of patriarchy by Lerner as well as the six structures of patriarchy according to Walby will be used and examined in my analysis in this thesis.
3.3. **Freudian Ideas and Concepts**

In addition to the idea of patriarchy, Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalyses were crucial figures in the society of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. The ideas and concepts he had developed were widely taught and contributed significantly to the construction of gender roles by patriarchy. Thus, this chapter will provide insight into Freudian theory and its contributions to the construction of femininity. In addition, Freud’s concepts of penis envy and Oedipus complex will be elaborated in more detail as well as feminists critique on his thoughts.

Freud fulfilled “the need of conservative societies and a population too reluctant or too perplexed to carry out revolutionary changes in social life” for a pioneer to reestablish the old doctrine of a separate sphere in scientific language, as Kate Millett points out. Her account on Freud and its influence on the society in the United States is carried out in great detail and with a very critical eye. She points out that Freud’s intentions, as well as his followers’ and his popularizers’, were to justify the discriminatory relationship between the sexes, to affirm traditional roles and to confirm temperamental discrepancies. Freud’s discovery as a great pioneer of the time appealed to support a point of view which was extremely conservative. (Millett 178-179) With these claims, Millett speaks for many feminists during the 60s and 70s in the United States who wanted to break down the patriarchal structures in society.

Although, Freud himself was uncertain about the actual needs of women, which he once claimed to his students, he continued constructing a psychology of women. Millet argues further that the tragedy of Freudian psychology was probably that his interpretations of females were based on clinical observations. Freud observed women suffering from two different causes: “sexual inhabitation and a great discontentment with their social structure.” Due to this observation, Freud believed that the second was over dependent upon the first. Freud claimed that female sexual fulfillment was the solution “for what were substantial symptoms of social unrest within an oppressive culture.” Yet, this insight made Freud not question the oppressive structure of society upon women and their dissatisfaction because of it, but rather came to the conclusion that it must be an independent and universal feminine tendency. Freud called this tendency “penis envy” and constructed a concept that had great influence on society. Freud’s theory of the psychology of women including his three characteristics of the female psych, passivity, masochism and narcissism, are also based upon this concept. (Millett 178-179)
The origin of penis envy lies in the childhood and the female’s discovery that she lacks a penis. He argues that the women’s discovery that they lack the male genital haunts women throughout their lives and contributes to the development of their temperament. His entire construction of the female psychology is based on the unchangeable fact that women are born female, which in fact meant for Freud to be born ‘castrated’. The moment the little girls realize this castration by spotting a penis of a brother, father or playmate indicates the beginning of self-recognition and envy for the male sexual organ. (Millett 180)

They notice the penis of a brother, or playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions, at once recognize it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time forward fall a victim to envy for the penis. (Freud “Anatomical Distinction” 190)

Freud claims further that this discovery marks a turning point in the young female’s life. It has great influence on her personal growth, which can be identified in three possible lines of her development. According to Freud it can lead to sexual inhibition or neurosis, it can change the character in the sense of the masculinity complex or, finally, it can lead to normal femininity. He further believes that after recognizing the lack of a penis, the little girl loses her enjoyment in her phallic sexuality, which she has gained by her excitation of her clitoris. “The far superior equipment of the boys”, as Freud calls it, has altered the little girl’s self-love and in connection the love to her mother. She discovers that her mother also lacks the male genital and thus, gradually, leads to the effect that the young females drop her as an object. (Freud “Femininity” 7) He believes that the “daughter cannot forgive the mother for having sent her in the world so insufficiently equipped.” (Freud and Strachey 50) Freud concludes that “as a result of the discovery of women’s lack of a penis they are debased in value for girls just as they are for boys and later perhaps for men.” (“Femininity” 7)

The rejection of the mother by the daughter after she discovered her penis envy, leads to the next concept Freud developed: the Oedipus complex. Freud generally distinguishes between “five libidinal stages: the oral phase, the anal phase, the phallic stage, latency, and puberty.” The Oedipus complex has been discovered to happen in the phallic stage, which Freud describes as the phase where not the genitals of both sexes play a role, but “only the male one (the phallus).” (Freud and Strachey 11) The little girl is assumed to have already discovered the envy for the male sexual organ and has thus blamed and eventually rejected her mother. She, then, turns to her father, who
possesses the wanted object. The desire to have a penis turns into the wish to have her father’s baby, according to Freud. Therefore, the little girl experiences rivalry and jealousy towards her mother. The little girl has been convinced by now of the deficiency of her clitoris, her sexuality and finally herself, as Millett sums it up. Yet, the little female is not able to carry out all these feelings and is thus led to replace and sublimit these emotions with passive feminine receptivity. Finally, the peak of this phallus stage including the Oedipus complex is believed to be reached at the age four, according to Freud. (Millett 184, Hockmeyer 21)

Although the peak is reached at age four, Freud argues further that women remain wanting a penis until maternity. He, and large parts of society that has been influenced by his thoughts, assume that females never give up hoping for a penis, which later is equated with the desire for a baby. “Her happiness is great if later on this wish for a baby finds fulfillment in reality, and quite especially so if the baby is a little boy who brings the longed-for penis with him.” (“Femininity” 8) Freud’s assumption has triggered various criticism due to his conversion of giving birth, a powerful female accomplishment into nothing more than the chase after the male sexual organ. (Millett 184-185) In Freud’s assumptions, motherhood is solely an indication of the desire to be a man. (Belsey and Moore 5)

As already visible in Kate Millett’s analysis of Freud’s concepts, the critique towards him began to grow in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and England. Especially radical feminists saw great flaws in his concepts. Feminists of the early 70s strongly believed that psychoanalysis reinforced the patriarchy they so strongly criticized and aimed at deconstructing. Many shared the opinion that Freud was an “arch-misogynist”, who was solely concerned with the reestablishment of women’s role within a patriarchal society. (Belsey and Moore 5) His concept about the Oedipus complex was particularly objected by feminists. Freud’s theory has been identified as very androcentric, as Hockmeyer points out, in terms of “the assumed primacy of the male organ, the description of early female sexuality as essentially male (phallic), the concept of penis envy and mother blame, and the overriding assumption of female inferiority.” Furthermore, Freud’s claim that “anatomy is destiny” has also been strongly criticized, because it constructs the foundation of female oppression. (Hockmeyer 20-21)

The argument challenging Freud’s concepts that has been raised by various critics was that women did not particularly envy the male penis, but rather what it symbolized in society. It is assumed that
long before the female sees the male organ, she is fully aware of male supremacy due to the societal and culture construction of it in which she grows up. They experience it in media with its construction of the differences between the sexes, in school, family and religion. Many of these constructions are learned from early childhood on that they appear to be there by nature. Therefore, it is argued that girls do not envy the actual penis, but rather that the penis indicates supremacy in society and the lack of it inferiority. Millett even claims that Freud therefore confused “biology and culture, anatomy and status” by claiming that every female envies the male genital. (Belsey and Moore 4-5, Millett 187)

Kate Millett’s account of Freud’s concepts and theories in her work Sexual Politics might be one of the most critical ones, but also one of the most important ones for radical feminists. The counterpart to Millett’s work constitutes Juliet Mitchel’s Psychoanalysis and Feminism. Mitchel challenges the opinions of Millett’s and her followers by stating that Freud’s negative account of women was indeed a characterization of a certain culture and not universal symptom. The two writings demonstrate the disagreement about psychoanalysis within the feminist movement. Yet, the question here is not whether one side understood Freud’s text and the other did not, however, it needs to be examined what the two authors’ aim was. They simply asked different questions. As we have already discovered, Millett wondered how Freud’s psychoanalysis contributed to the oppressive situation of women. Mitchel on the other hand was interested in discovering how psychoanalysis can explain the oppression of females. These different approaches demonstrate nicely what feminists had known all the while: that all writings and culture itself are plural. Different approaches construct various understandings. Mitchel aims at discovering that the victims of patriarchy are at a point to fight back, whereas Millet is concerned with the victimization of women by patriarchy. Yet, one approach is not more feminist than another, but simply different. (Belsey and Moore 5-7)

Summing up, although Freud himself claimed that his beliefs of femininity were not “always friendly”, he nevertheless was a major thinker in the Western world in the twentieth century whose concepts and thoughts contributed to the understanding of human nature, especially to the construction of femininity and masculinity. (“Femininity” 11) Yet, over time his ideas have been strongly criticized for fueling the belief in women’s inferiority and male supremacy. His concepts have been particularly criticized by feminists and scholars during the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, which will also be illustrated in the analysis of the primary sources in this thesis. How the
three (female) authors viewed Freud’s ideas as well as how they used them to raise awareness for the inequality of the sexes and to question the status quo of the 60s and 70s in the United States will be examined.

4. SPEAKING UP: CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING AND QUESTIONING THE STATUS QUO

The following chapters will constitute the analysis of the primary sources, which will also be the core of this thesis. It is the aim of this section to demonstrate that the theoretical writings *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan and *Of Woman Born – Motherhood as Experience and Institution* by Adrienne Rich, functioned as literary accounts to raise consciousness; and to question the status quo in the American society of the 1960s and 1970s, during the second wave of feminism. Besides their theoretical functions, all of them were bestsellers and were thus, read by millions of women (and men) in the United States and throughout the world. This analysis will not only look at the issues the two authors raised in their books, but predominantly at how they are presenting their ideas in order to raise awareness for the broader issue. The connection between form and content will be crucial in this analysis. The concepts which will be examined in more detail in this thesis will be the construction of the feminine ideal by patriarchal society with the influence of Freudian thoughts and other external forces, the consequences of this construction as well as issues concerning women’s health and sexuality. The analysis will begin with the groundbreaking work by Betty Friedan *The Feminine Mystique* and finally, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* by Adrienne Rich.

4.1. THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE (BETTY FRIEDAN)

“Feminism began with the work of a single person: Friedan” (Nicholas Lemann)

*The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan is a theoretical work on US-American women living in postwar America published in 1963. The trigger for her book was the results of a questionnaire she distributed to her former classmates at Smith-College, an all-female university in the United States, which revealed that the majority of women did not pursue their careers outside of the home and, thus, suffered from frustration. Friedan, a housewife and mother herself, shared the same feelings with her former colleagues, and soon discovered that there were many more women who suffered from ‘the problem that has no name’ as well. The findings of the survey at Smith College
constituted the basis for Friedan’s book and led her to interview numerous more women throughout the United States. In addition, her former training as a journalist benefited her research greatly. *The Feminine Mystique* revealed that the majority of well-educated, white, middle-class, US-American women whose occupations were housewife and mother; suffered from a lack of self-fulfillment, which led in many cases to severe depression. Friedan argues that the sources for the problem lay in society’s fundamental beliefs on women’s roles and femininity, which were taught at school, transported through media and, which found its evidence in Freudian thoughts. When Betty Friedan published her book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 it broke the ground for many unsatisfied women in post-war America. The version of the perfect life as housewife-mother in suburbia began to lose its magic and numerous women started to suffer from ‘the problem that has no name’. Betty Friedan’s book had a radical effect on women throughout America. It provided a voice for millions of women who had fought and suffered in silence for too long and by doing this, it changed history. Through the book women felt a sense of solidarity and companionship, a form of sisterhood. Furthermore, it encouraged many women to pursue their careers outside of the home or to finish their education. (Shriver v-vii)

The book, however has also been viewed with a critical eye. Friedan’s use of interviews of author-selected subjects is viewed as scientifically flawed. Scholars argue that a random sampling would have been better in this case. Another critique she received for her work was the exclusion of experiences of minority women and her focus on only white, middle and upper-class women. Not only her work, but also the whole feminist movement has often been criticized for being a white, middle-class only revolution, as already discussed in previous chapters of this thesis. Yet, this belief needs to be examined in more detail. The time period where Friedan published her book in the United States was a majorly white and middle-class demographic. Besides, there is no written law that indicates that an author has to write about everyone. Thus, there is nothing wrong with Friedan’s decision to focus predominantly on white, middle-class America. Although Betty Friedan’s approach towards the topic might not have been entirely flawless, it nevertheless started a revolution that shaped and changed the future for not only American women but numerous women around the globe. In addition, the book has been sold over three millions copies. After Betty Friedan’s passing away in 2006, the New York Times magazine classified *The Feminine Mystique* as “one of the most influential non-fiction books of the twentieth century.” (Shrivel vi-xi)
4.1.1. The Feminine Ideal

The success of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*’s can be traced back to the author’s courage to question the status quo in society. She was not afraid to write about assumptions on gender that were made by a society strongly influenced by patriarchy. By doing that she provided a voice for millions of women around the United States who felt the same way, yet were not able to articulate it. In addition, Betty Friedan did not simply provide facts or data about the situation of women, but used vivid descriptions, rhetorical questions aimed at the readers, numerous different examples, personal experiences and a number of metaphors and similes to illustrate her arguments. She interviewed “suburban doctors, gynecologists, obstetricians, child-guidance clinicians, pediatricians, high-school guidance counsellors, college professors, marriage counsellors, psychiatrists, ministers” (20), and most importantly, innumerous women. Her interaction with and research on various areas revealed a body of information which had not occurred in public yet, because it questioned the “standards of feminine normality, feminine adjustment, feminine fulfilment, and feminine maturity by which most women were still trying to live.” (20) Therefore, it is the aim of the analysis in this section to investigate how Friedan challenges the construction the feminine ideal in her book.

As already elaborated in *Chapter 3.1. Feminist, Female, and Feminine*, the idea of femininity is constructed culturally and often influenced by a patriarchal society, which restricts women to their submissive and passive roles. The construction of femininity plays a significant role in Betty Friedan’s book, as already visible in the title. She claims that the majority of women in post-war America were trapped in a so-called “feminine mystique.” The mystique limits women to reach their individual potential, however, encourages them to fulfill the idea of femininity: “The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity. It says that the great mistake of Western culture, through most of its history, has been the undervaluation of this femininity” (28) Betty Friedan does not simple state and explain the situation of women in post-war America, she strongly questions the ascribed role for women. Furthermore, she illustrates in a rather explicit way what attributes and external forces contributed to the construction of the feminine ideal in order to raise consciousness among her readers to start questioning the status quo.
On the very first pages of *The Feminine Mystique* Friedan demonstrates with a long list of examples how society shaped the ultimate goal for women: femininity.

Experts told them how to catch a man and keep him, how to breastfeed children and handle their toilet training, how to cope with sibling rivalry and adolescent rebellion; how to buy a dishwasher, bake bread, cook gourmet snails, and build a swimming pool with their own hands; how to dress, look, and act more feminine and make marriage more exciting; how to keep their husbands from dying young and their sons from growing into delinquents. (5)

The passage above demonstrates that the author uses vivid descriptions taken out of everyday life in post-war America connected with the authors own experience as a mother, wife and housewife in suburbia. A list of various examples is provided in order to illustrate clearly to the reader what was expected from women in the post-war era. Furthermore, the author presents her arguments in a readable journalese way in order to communicate its message to the broad masses of American women. In comparison to earlier feminist works, such as *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, *The Feminine Mystique* is a less radical and theoretical reading, yet more pragmatic and reformist. In addition, the author uses popular jargon instead of philosophical language, which corresponds with its readers’ interests and contributed significantly to its wide reaching success. (Dijkstar 290-294) Certainly, some of her depictions are slightly exaggerated and often meant ironic, such as cooking “gourmet snails” and building “a swimming pool with their own hands.” (5) Nevertheless, I believe that this exact use of exaggeration and irony, as visible in the extract above, support her claim that it is questionable to believe that femininity is the absolute goal for women to reach.

Friedan’s analysis was conducted majorly among white, middle-class housewives living in suburban areas of the United States. In the eyes of America’s society and the media, suburban middle-class housewives represented the “dream image of young American women, and the envy of women all over the world.” (7) In order to question the assumption of the “happy housewife heroine” (21), Friedan describes the suburban housewife with a slightly mocking tone:

> The American housewife- freed by science and labor-saving appliances from the drudgery, the dangers of childbirth, and the illness of her grandmother. She was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children, her home. She had found true feminine fulfillment. (7)

In addition, the repetition of the female personal pronoun in the description of the female concerns is striking. The author clearly emphasizes in the passage that the children and the home were only
female concerns—“her children, her home.” (my emphasis) In order to stress the separation of the different spheres among husband and wife, Friedan further states, “As a housewife and mother, she was respected as a full and equal partner to man in his world.” (8-my emphasis) The belief of the separated spaces for women and men was a very common practice during the 1960s. The celebration of the domesticity after the Second World War installed the belief of strict boundaries between the spaces for men and the spaces for women in their daily lives. The suburb, and thus the domestic, was defined as women’s space, whereas the city, as the work place, was the space for men. Additionally, the suburban family home symbolized and functioned as women’s enclosures. (Torre 29) Friedan’s demonstration of the belief that was installed in the minds of the majority of the people certainly proves the separation of spheres.

Although these rigid boundaries between women and men were clearly a product of a society dominated by men, hardly anyone in the post-war era questioned them, as Friedan concludes, “nobody argued whether women were inferior or superior to men; they were simply different.”(8) Betty Friedan was among the first ones to tackle the issue and to ask the question whether women and men are different. Later in feminist studies the debate whether women and men are different through nature or nurture has been a crucial issue. The second wave addressed different perspectives on this idea. Generally speaking two antagonistic beliefs existed among society. On the one hand, the idea was shared that the differences between men and women are rooted deeply in nature, and, is, hence, not possible to eliminate. On the other hand was the belief that men and women are more or less the same. Many feminists of the second wave often used the latter belief in order to pressure the status quo; especially liberal feminists made use of the idea that women and men are the same. Radical feminists, however, focused more on emphasizing the difference between men and women in order to alter social structures. Their aim was to change the perception of women in society and, thus, alter society as a whole. (Nicholson 3)

Friedan did not include her own opinion on the “nature vs. nurture” debate in the book, however, claimed numerosely throughout the book that women are simple human beings and thus deserve, the same rights as men to reach their individual fulfillment. Turning away from the rather controversial “nature vs. nurture” debate and claiming a very basic fact, demonstrates once again that Friedan’s analysis is less radical and more pragmatic. In addition, the emphasis of the basic, but highly important argument that women are human beings, raises consciousness for the underlying problem of society. In order to strengthen her claim even further, she poses a simple
question at the reader: “Did women want these freedoms because they wanted to be men? Or did they want them because they also were human?” (62) The author aims at opening the eyes of society to question their assumption of women and to encourage them to see that “being a woman was no more and no less than being human.” (118)

Society in post-war America, however, was strongly influenced by the belief that women and men are different through nature and that each gender was supposed to follow their own gender script. Betty Friedan discovered first-hand what the gender script required of women in comparison to men. At one point during her research for the book, the author visited an upper-income community, where she interviewed twenty-eight wives, all of whom were housewives and mothers. The feminine mystique was so extraordinarily present in the community “that if a little girl said: ‘When I grow up, I’m going to be a doctor’, her mother would correct her: ‘No dear, you’re a girl. You’re going to be a wife and mother like mummy.’” (191) The exchange between the daughter and mother demonstrated how the feminine mystique occupied family homes in the post-war era. By including the direct quotes of the conversation between a little girl and her mother, the reader might recognize their own voice as a parent in it and, hence, becomes aware of the problematic situation young females were put in. It illustrates the reality of “growing up female” in post-war America and demonstrates that from an early stage on little girls were trained to fulfill the feminine mystique, which in other words meant burying their dreams of a career and individuality. (261)

Besides interviewing various housewives on the feminine ideal and the problem that occurred with this construction, the author also investigated large forces in the post-war American society, which contributed significantly to the construction of the feminine ideal. Friedan was eager to discover what influenced all the well-educated women to “go home”, as she calls the return of the women to the domesticity throughout her book. (24, 145, 148, 165) Her doubt was triggered by the image she had in her mind of the well-educated couple in college and then the sudden break, where the woman was denied to pursue her career further, yet the man was not.

She was, after all, an American woman, an irreversible product of a culture that stops just short of giving her a separate identity. He was, after all, an American man whose respect for individuality and freedom of choice is his nation’s pride. They went to school together; he knows who she is. […] What keeps the women home? What force in our culture is strong enough to write ‘Occupation: housewife’ so large that all the other possibilities for women have been almost obscured? (165)
In the author’s depiction of the young couple the different assumption of gender is visible. The woman is described by Friedan as a product of a culture, whereas the man is defined as an individual, free person, who is his nation’s proud product. Walby’s definition of patriarchy with its structures can be applied here, which argues that the suppression of women is societal constructed. The extract exemplifies the patriarchal culture that was present in post-war America, because it distinguishes clearly between the two concepts of femininity and masculinity. The woman is restricted to fulfill her potential and more or less urged to return home, whereas the man does not even have to face this decision; it is clear from the beginning that he will become a part of the work force. (Walby 227- cf. Chapter 3.2. Patriarchy)

In order to discover the forces that seemed to have had such a great influence on the majority of women in post-war America, the author investigated the portrayal of women in the media in the 50s and 60s. Betty Friedan had been a journalist herself in New York City after her education at Smith College and at Berkley. (Meyer 581) The experiences she made at a women’s magazine influenced her strongly to question the image of women that was presented in the media, which was according to her investigation “young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies, and home.” (23) With this expressive description, the author wants to illustrate for her readers how women magazines constructed the feminine ideal and to raise awareness that there might be a great difference between the images in magazines and the reality of their own lives in the suburbs.

In the mind’s ear, a Geiger counter clicks when the image shows too sharp a discrepancy from reality. A Geiger counter clicked in my own inner ear when I could not fit the quiet desperation of so many women into the picture of the modern American housewife that I myself was helping to create, writing for the women’s magazines. (21)

As a journalist herself, she was supposed to create the feminine ideal, yet discovered that the images and ideals were unrealistic. Her reference to a Geiger counter, which is an instrument to measure the presence of radiation, illustrates the alarm she recognized in herself as she discovered that there was a great difference between real women and women depicted in women’s magazines. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary) The magazine’s images, however, shaped the culture of the time significantly, because they were read by over five million American women per publication. In addition, most of the magazines in post-war America, such as McCall’s or Ladies Home Journal, were run by men and included, thus, a male influenced point of view. (23) The content that was discussed in
the magazines was limited to housework, child caring and marriage. Friedan includes a whole editorial in her book to illustrate what the magazines major concerns were. She revealed that a typical issue of *McCall’s* included “a story called ‘wedding day’, patterns for home sewing, a poem called ‘A Boy is a Boy’” and many more similar topics. (22) After investigating *McCall’s* stories, Friedan asks desperately “Where is the world of thought and ideas, the life of the mind and spirit” in these magazines? (23) The argument by the magazines for including only content on household, child bearing and beauty was explained by one male editor, who worked for different women’s magazines:

> Our readers are housewives, full time. They’re not interested in the broad issues of the day. […] They are only interested in the family and the home. […] Humor? Has to be gentle, they don’t get satire. […] Education? That’s a problem. Their own education level is going up. They’re tremendously interested in education for their children. (24)

The author clearly illustrates with this statement, how women were viewed in society. They were believed to be centered on their homes and their families. The education women received was even believed to be a problem for the magazines, because now they might have to include more sophisticated topics. As visible from the statement above, the women magazines of the 50s and 60s were perfect examples of a patriarchal culture. They functioned as an institution which aimed at maintaining and demonstrating the rigid difference between femininity and masculinity. Furthermore, the editor in this case refers to the women as “they”, which can be interpreted as a process to make women the *Other*. Although the process of claiming the *Self* and the *Other* is a fundamental human thought, Simone de Beauvoir argues that because women have been subordinated to men throughout history, their otherness has seemed to be an absolute. Therefore, the accusation of women as the *Other* differs from other minority groups. Women have always found themselves as *Others* in a world where this idea has been installed by men. (Beauvoir “Introduction” 13-5) Beauvoir’s argument is visible in the abstract above, and hence also in the depiction of women in the magazines Friedan investigated in post-war America.

Friedan further claims that the image the women’s magazines transported to their female readers was similar to the female image of a time period before. As she listened to the editors of women’s magazine, the author states that “a German phrase echoed in her mind- ‘Kind, Küche, Kirche’, the slogan by which the Nazis decreed that women must once again be confined to their biological role. But this was not Nazi Germany. This was America.” (24) As Friedan briefly explains, the
slogan, also known as the three K’s, was established during the Holocaust to bind women to their homes and children. They were accused of leaving their children and housework behind and to flood the labor market, which led to the fact that *Familienväter* were not able to find work. In order to reinstall the “appropriate” gender roles, the Nazi regime used the slogan “Kinder, Küche, Kirche” in their propaganda, which was met by a responsive audience. The widely held view during the Nazi time was that women’s emancipation was threatening the institution of marriage as well as the balance between feminine and masculine principles. (Bridenthal 148) According to Friedan’s investigation of women’s magazine the belief of maintaining separate spheres and keeping the balance between feminine and masculine attributes was still present in post-war America and, thus, not a product of the past. Nevertheless, Friedan’s remark to Nazi Germany was indeed very polarizing at a time where the war was still fresh in many minds. Yet, it demonstrated what the media intended to do to women, namely to stop their emancipation and individuality, which Friedan and later many feminists of the Second Wave strongly criticized.

Betty Friedan’s analysis of popular women’s magazines in post-war America aimed at demonstrating that they were a repressive force, which inflicted damaging images on American women. Meyerovitz, however, later criticized Friedan on her analysis of women’s magazines, due to her lack of variety of magazines in her work. He argues that there were indeed magazines that promoted the independence of women and included other portrayals than the “happy housewife heroine” (21), as Friedan calls the images in the magazines. He discovered magazines that included various spheres for women, such as the workplace outside of the home or their engagement in public politics. Furthermore, he states that Friedan’s account was only “one part of the cultural puzzle” of the era. (1455) Nevertheless, he acknowledges that Friedan’s book spoke to millions of women and changed many of their lives. It might not have been complete in the analysis of popular culture, yet it contributed significantly to improve the representation of women by the media. (Meyerovitz 1455-1458)

In addition to the women’s magazines, Friedan also investigated American businesses and discovered that “the perpetuation of housewifery, the growth of the feminine mystique, makes sense (and dollars) when one realizes that women are the chief costumer of American businesses.” (166) She revealed through her research that businesses made millions on the feminine mystique and thus were not interested in deconstructing it. It was even common practice to categorized women into different types: “‘The True Housewife Type’, ‘The Career Woman’, and ‘The
Balanced Homemaker.” (168) Certainly, “The True Housewife Type” was the businesses’ favorite. The housewives of this category spent most of their money on house supplies and, thus, boosted their businesses. The only “problem” that could occur with the ideal category was the growing tendency of women who began to reject new devices, which would make their housework easier. Friedan discovered that many housewives aimed at maintaining their status as the “hard working housewife”, who did all her work with her bare hands and therefore rejected various modern housework equipment. (175) Housework was turned into an art by many women. They polished their houses every day, baked their own bread and changed the bedsheets twice a week. According to Friedan this was done in order to seek fulfillment, which they could not find anywhere else due to their enclosure in the suburban home. Nevertheless, neither the exaggerated care of the home nor the extensive baking or cooking was able to ease the suffering of their loss of individuality. (194-198)

Friedan called the strategy the household supplier businesses used “The Sexual Sell.” (166) It was an explicit directed marketing strategy to reach the female sex and it started already at a very young age. The advertisements already aimed at teenage girls and tried to turn them into housewives, which Friedan declared as “the real crime.” (188) Girls grew up with images presented in the media of boys dreaming about going to the moon and girls becoming housewives. A sharp distinction between the two genders was visible. Although, ads might say “never underestimate the power of women” (188), Friedan claims that by portraying women predominantly as housewives and mothers that is exactly what the nation did.

Like a primitive culture which sacrificed little girls to its tribal gods, we sacrifice our girls to the feminine mystique, grooming them ever more efficiently through the sexual sell to become consumers of the things to whose profitable sale our nation is dedicated. (188)

In order to emphasize her claim that the pictures of women transported in the media and through advertisement shape and influence the dreams of every young girl in the United States, she makes a rather controversial comparison by claiming that the consumer society of the post-war era carries out a similar act as the sacrificing of little girls in underdeveloped cultures. The harsh comparison is certainly a critique on the consumer driven society after the war. It was the beginning of capitalism in the United States and due to a thriving economy, people were able to live the American Dream. The changes that took place in society were also visible in advertisement, which
Friedan strongly criticizes in rather explicit terms, in order to raise awareness for the problematic construction of the feminine ideal presented to little girls by the media.

It should be added that Friedan clarifies in her book that the “the manipulators and their clients in American business can hardly be accused of creating the feminine mystique.” (185) Many diverse forces and participants interacted in creating the feminine mystique. Yet, the author claims that “they are the most powerful of its perpetuators; it is their millions which blanket the land with persuasive images, flattering the American housewife, diverting her guilt and disguising her growing sense of emptiness.” (185) To illustrate how wide the advertisements reached and how they occupied the homes of many Americans, the author speaks in metaphorical terms. She claims that the images were like blankets over the country, covering every aspect of society with the image of the happy housewife and, in order to help the housewife to fill her emptiness they charmed her. In addition, the large companies had successfully used the concept of modern social science to transport ads that left any observer with the idea that American women simple did not want to become anything else than suburban housewives. They might have not been the only ones who constructed the image of the feminine ideal, however they were also not the ones interested in deconstructing it. (185)

Another major force that maintained the feminine ideal was the education system in post-war America. The era showed the highest number of female college students in the history of the United States, yet, surprisingly, fewer females than before the war pursued a career after graduation.

The shock, the mystery, to the naïve who had great hopes for the higher education of women was that more American women than ever before were going to college- but few of them were going on from college to become physicists, philosophers, poets, doctors, lawyers, stateswomen, social pioneers, even college professors. (119)

While describing the situation that was happening at US-American colleges, Friedan picks up once again one of her trade-mark and provides a long list of examples of careers which female college graduates decided not to pursue. The purpose of including a long list of various professions could be identified as a strategy to open the eyes of her readers. One might start thinking about their own doctor, their own lawyer or their own college professor and might then recognize that the author’s argument indeed holds some truth. In consciousness raising groups the same technique had been used. Women met and shared experiences out of their daily lives and then connected them with
each other in order to dismantle the overall picture of society. (Randolph and Ross-Valliere 922) I would argue that Friedan’s way of illustrating the situation for women in post-war America is a similar form of raising consciousness. Her explicit descriptions with various examples should transport a picture to the reader with which they might be familiar, and, hence, raise their consciousness for the need of change.

Furthermore, Friedan includes in her depiction of the situation of female college students various interviews with women in their twenties at her alma-mater Smith College. The interviews provide a large picture of how the feminine mystique has reached even the best educated women of the country. The interviewees assured Friedan that they were not interested in following a path in academia or in pursuing their careers elsewhere. One girl, for instance, told her through the interview that “everybody wants to graduate with a diamond ring on her finger. That’s the important thing.” (121) Numerous other college women in their twenties told Friedan similar future plans. College was only the period before the ‘real life’ could begin, which meant for the majority of them, marriage, children and housework. The author, however, started to question the answers she received at the interviews: “Could these girls who now must work so much harder, have so much more ability to get into such a college against the growing competition, really be so bored with the life of the minds?” (122) She could not accept or believe the women’s answers towards their future after college.

In order to uncover what caused so many women to abandon their education after graduation, the author dug deeper into their interests and ideas about their college education and discovered that their boredom was more a defense and a façade. “They go through the motions, but they defend themselves against the impersonal passions of mind and spirit that college might instill in them—the dangerous non-sexual passion of the intellect.” (123) The feminine ideal was so exclusively present in the colleges in the post-war era that it restricted well-educated women to follow a career because of the fear of being considered “unfeminine”. The examples of women Friedan interviewed demonstrated that young females were afraid of pushing themselves to the limit and acquire an education and knowledge, all due to the fact that society constructed the perfect female roles as mother and housewife. No matter how smart they were, eventually they dropped their education and “went back home.”
The one lesson a girl could hardly avoid learning, if she went to college between 1945 and 1960, was not to get interested, seriously interested, in anything besides getting married and having children, if she wanted to be normal, happy, adjusted, feminine, have a successful husband, successful children, and a normal, feminine, adjusted, successful sex life. (124)

Friedan demonstrates the contradiction of college experience for women in post-war America. The place where people were encouraged to test their minds and acquire great knowledge was suddenly turned into a space of repression of the human (female) mind. The depiction provided in Friedan’s book presents how women’s abilities were suppressed and limited to only pursuing a feminine ideal. In addition, the author demonstrates the belief that femininity was equaled with normality and everyone who rejected the notion of femininity was considered unfeminine, which equaled abnormality.

Women received this idea not only through their parents and their college maids, but also through college professors. Friedan discovered that there was a “new sex-direction of woman’s education” (125), which derived its thoughts from Sigmund Freud and, which contributed significantly to the belief that women should turn their backs on their minds and should be more concerned with their “capacity for sexual orgasm.” (125) In order to raise attention for this problem Friedan uses explicit language here. The author aims at demonstrating that women were predominantly viewed in terms of their reproductive ability. “Of course, there weren’t any courses at University that taught women how to have sexual orgasms, it was still the 1950s in good old, prude America. Yet, they aimed at preparing women for their future role as mother and housewife and not as scientists or professors.” (125) Women were encouraged to take courses in sociology, anthropology and psychology. In addition, minor arts, such as textiles or ceramics were suggested for women because they were considered more feminine than “fine art, which is masculine, ‘flamboyant and abstract’.” (127) The rigid boundaries that were visible between women’s sphere and men’s sphere, as already discussed previously in this section in terms of the domestic and public sphere, were again obvious in the education system. Friedan describes clearly how certain sciences, such as physics or mathematics, were reserved territories for men, whereas less abstract thinking was declared for women. The author argues further that the sex-directed curriculum would go as far as “replacing college chemistry with a course in advanced cooking.” (126) Friedan adds, that “there were a few cries of outrage, of course, from the old-fashioned educators who still believed that mind was more important than marriage bed” (125), but they were soon silenced by the new sex-oriented approach. If not before, then by now Friedan’s work has proven to be an eye opener for what has gone
significantly wrong in the education of women in the 1950s. The wasted potential of female minds was the consequence of this sex-oriented education. Friedan’s explanatory power describes clearly what educators and society thought of women’s potential and their abilities to be active participants in our society.

Furthermore, it is rather shocking that gender specific education could already be found in high schools. Friedan claims, for instance, that it was “even more insidious on the high-school level than it was in the colleges, for many girls who were subjected to it never got to college.” (128) Girls who were interested in fields, such as architecture, were advised against it by school counsellors with the argument that there are no jobs available for females in this area. (128) Friedan emphasizes that although women might have had the right to choose their own educational path, the external forces in society provided barriers after barriers for women. In addition, the author argues that there was a lack of female role models in the 1950s and 1960s. Students “seldom heard about a woman who has successfully broken convention.” (135) The lack of including powerful women in education and the discouragement provided by experts on the educational level led to the fact that nobody wanted to be the “exceptional woman.” (135) It was easier to swim with the stream than against it.

Towards the end of Friedan’s observation of the education system in post-war America, she explicitly challenges the beliefs and ideas shared and taught by sex-directed educators.

If an education geared to the growth of the human mind weakens femininity, will an educations geared to femininity weaken the growth of the mind? What is femininity, if it can be destroyed by an education which makes the mind grow, or induced by letting the mind grow? (136)

The posing of rhetorical questions in the abstract above aims at raising once again the readers’ consciousness. The refusal of silently accepting the roles society invented for women is important for raising the consciousness and women’s protest. In order to change the assumed roles of women in society and the belief of femininity, women needed to start to think about themselves and their lives in a critical way and Betty Friedan aimed at encouraging women to do exactly that with her publication of *The Feminine Mystique*. Her account, however, was not immune to critical responses.
Tamar Rabinowitz, for instance, also investigated the educational system of post-war America in her thesis in 2007 and discovered a slightly different landscape than Betty Friedan. The three major all-women colleges Rabinowitz used in her analysis were Smith, Vassard and Barnard. Her biggest critique on Friedan’s analysis of the educational system was her ignorance of the range of educational opportunities. Rabinowitz argues that the colleges did indeed encourage women to pursue their careers and their interests. According to Rabinowitz, Friedan ignores the complex changes society was facing in the post-war era, especially in terms of female social roles. Furthermore, she revealed that the educational systems were not as flawed and as patriarchal as Friedan claimed it to be. Yet, the influence of the belief in femininity and domesticity that was present in the post-war society were also visible in the schools’ principles. Thus, she agrees with Friedan that the head of the colleges were influenced by the societal belief on women during the time, and evidence that they promoted the idea that colleges were there to prepare women to be great mothers and wives could be identified in their statements. The schools also acknowledged the trend for female under graduates to stop their education in order to get married, which supports Friedan’s claim that young female college students’ main goal was to “have a diamond ring on their finger.” (121) Again scholars have discovered that Friedan’s analysis shows flaws in certain areas, which, however, does not underestimate the author’s aim to rekindle women’s consciousness. (Rabinowitz 50-55)

The images that were promoted by popular magazines, in advertisements and through education demonstrated the feminine ideal, which women were supposed to reach. By doing this an alienation process of women who refused to fit into the feminine ideal took place. “Career woman” and “feminist” became bad words in society, studying physics was considered “unfeminine” and doing further research in your field of interest was seen as “peculiar.” (7, 49, 61, 93, 121) Friedan sums up the belief with the following remark:

They were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents. They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights- the independence and the opportunities that the old fashioned feminists fought for. (5)

Friedan supports her argument with the usage of the verbs “teach” and “learn”. She demonstrates that women were educated by society to fulfill the feminine mystique and to oppose any other characteristics or belief. In addition, she calls the feminists of the previous period “old-fashioned”
in order to emphasize the new ideal woman, who had been created by society in the post-war era. Feminists were believed to be a product of the past and not necessary anymore in the striving years after the war, where the middle-class housewife “was free to choose automobiles, clothes, appliances, supermarkets; she had everything that women ever dreamed of” (7-8) and had no need to be unsatisfied with her role in society.

In order to illustrate how fixed the wish for femininity and the fear of being unfeminine was in the minds of many women, Friedan includes various extreme examples of American women. “In a New York hospital, a woman had a nervous breakdown when she found out she could not breastfeed her baby. In other hospitals, women dying of cancer refused a drug which research had proved might save their lives: its side effect were said to be unfeminine.” (6) The women’s seriousness about their wish to fulfill the feminine ideal is striking in Friedan’s examples. Many were willing to risk their lives in order to reach the assumed ultimate female goal. Encouraged by pretty pictures in newspapers, magazines and drugstore ads that showed slogans such as “If I have only one life, let me live it as a blonde” (7), women across the country carried out life risking actions to fit in the feminine picture. Friedan pushes even further to demonstrate the view of society on the unfeminine woman with the following statement:

The new feminine morality story is the exorcising of the forbidden career dream, the heroine’s victory over Mephistopheles: the devil, first in the form of a career woman, who threatens to take away the heroin’s husband and child, and finally, the devil inside the heroine herself, the dream of independence, the discontent of spirit, and even the feeling of a separate identity that must be exorcised to win and keep the love of husband and child. (31)

The expressions the author uses in the passage are very explicit. She claims that the career woman was viewed as the “devil” and the process of erasing the idea of independence as “exorcising”, whereas the housewife is the heroine. Friedan makes with the description a sharp discrepancy between the two female roles. In addition, Friedan mentions in her argument Mephistopheles, who is a devil figure that can be found in writings around Faust by authors such as Johann Wolfgang Göthe. Göthe’s Mephistopheles has super natural powers, which, however, are not enough to beat Faust. Although he acts humanely, he is more of “a tourist in a foreign land.” (Washington 664) The description of Göthe’s Mephistopheles can be adopted to how career women were viewed in post-war America. I argue that Friedan used the metaphor of Mephistopheles to demonstrate that
in post-war America career women were eventually similar to “a tourist in a foreign land.” They did not match the picture of the feminine ideal and were, thus, visitors in a society which viewed them as exceptional. In addition, the dramatic expression supports Friedan’s claim that the American post-war society was brainwashed with ideas strongly influenced by patriarchy. “Friedan held a mirror up to Americans, both frightening and encouraging them to have a shock of recognition”, states Daniel Holowitz in his remaking of The Feminine Mystique and, hence, sums up nicely, in my opinion, what Friedan intended to do. (24)

The last external force that had great influence on the construction of the feminine ideal, which will be discussed in detail in this analysis, are Freudian concepts and thoughts. Freud’s concepts will be taken into account because Friedan claims that “the feminine mystique derived its power from Freudian thought.” (79) As already elaborated in Chapter 3.3, Freudian Ideas and Concepts Sigmund Freud was one of the great thinkers in the Western World at the beginning of the twentieth century, and thus his ideas and concept were viewed as highly significant in the post-war society. Declared as one of the greatest thinkers during that time Freud’s conservative view on women in connection to the concepts of penis envy and Oedipus complex enjoyed prestige. Nevertheless, more and more people, including Betty Friedan, started to question Freud’s assumption on the natural inferiority of women. Women began to notice a large discrepancy between Freud’s assumption on femininity and their own desires and wishes. Due to the influential status of the social science it was not easy to simple underestimate their findings by feelings of boredom or frustration, which many women Friedan interviewed experienced. (Meyer 583) “How can an educated American woman, who is not herself an analyst, presume to question a Freudian truth?” (79)

Nonetheless, Friedan questions Freud’s assumption of femininity and aims at demonstrating the paradoxes that occurred in his findings: “I do question, from my own experience as a woman and my reporter’s knowledge of other women, the application of the Freudian theory of femininity to women today.” (80) One of the greatest critiques Betty Friedan utters, similar to many feminists later, is towards Freud’s concept of penis-envy. In Friedan’s point of view Freud’s investigation was strongly influenced by the culture and time he lived in, which was Vienna in the Victorian era. She therefore argues that it cannot be applied to women universally. The post-war American society, however, used the concept of penis-envy “as the literal explanation of all that was wrong with American women” (80) without taking into account, according to Friedan, that Freud was “a
prisoner of his own culture.” (81) Friedan emphasizes in her chapter on Freud that “today” and in “modern science” the point of view has shifted and proved that his assumptions were indeed linked to previous times.

Much of what Freud believed to be biological, instinctual, and changeless has been shown by modern research to be a result of specific cultural causes. Much of what Freud described as characteristics of universal human nature was merely characteristics of certain middle-class European men and women at the end of the nineteenth century. (81)

Friedan’s claim of the cultural bound of Freud’s assumption is emphasized by her use of a repetition at the beginning of the sentences in the passage above. Repetitions show the reader that the author wants to stress their claim, which is in this case the challenge of the majority of Freud’s beliefs.

In addition to Friedan’s belief that Freud was strongly influenced by Victorian times in Europe, she also believes that Freud viewed women rather negatively. In order to demonstrate her claim to the reader she states that “to Freud, even more than to the magazines on Madison Avenue today, women were a strange, inferior, less-than-human species.” (84) Friedan effectively compares Freud to a salesman in New York City to stress that they share the same false transportation of women’s nature. The linkage between Freud and the popular magazines illustrate Friedan’s claim that various cultural forces were at play in the construction of the image of feminine fulfilment. (Bowlby 62-3) Freud’s flawed description of women is further emphasized by claiming that Freud “saw them as childlike dolls, who existed in terms only of man’s love, to love man and serve his needs” (84) and compares his assumption on women with the belief humans had years ago about the sun going around the earth: “It was the same kind of unconscious solipsism that made man for many centuries see the sun only as a bright object that revolved around the earth.” (84) Especially Friedan’s comparison to the old belief about the interaction between sun and earth aims at demonstrating that Freud’s beliefs, too, were products of the past and, thus, needed to be revised in order to fit the current time period. The idea that women are superior to men by biology needs to change in order to grand women equal human rights and freedom.

Anti-Freudian writers such as Kate Millett have agreed with Betty Friedan’s challenge of Freudian concepts and his influence on America’s women. Other scholars such as Juliet Mitchel, however, claimed that Freud indeed took the culture and the time period he lived in into account whilst investigation women. Mitchel argues that “science is a knowledge” and that Freud made something new out of an old thought not by bounding it to the culture he lived in but by distancing himself
from that very culture. She further claims that Freud cannot be held responsible if his theories and concepts are used to install an outdated feminine model in society by misinterpreting his thoughts. (320-7) The views on Freudian ideas have varied within the second wave of feminism, as already elaborated in Chapter 3.3. Freudian Ideas and Concepts, and therefore the critique towards Friedan’s account of Freud also vary.

The external forces of media, advertisement, sex-directed education and social sciences played a significant role in the construction of the feminine ideal. What has not been discussed in greater detail so far in this analysis, is the construction of motherhood and family. One of the crucial attributes of the feminine ideal, according to Friedan’s book, was to become a mother. She claims that many females of her generation were actually aiming at not becoming their mothers, who predominantly were mothers and housewives too, but did not have any other role model: “We did not want to be like them, and yet what other model did we have?” (56) Many women lived the lives of their mothers all over again in America’s suburbia. The only exception was that the majority of them was financially safer and, thus, had the opportunities to have more children than their own mothers. The post-war era in America was, therefore, characterized by a baby boom. (20) The suburban housewife is described in the book with a “station wagon full of children” (21), which should demonstrate how the population in suburbia expanded because of the feminine mystique.

Friedan views motherhood as it is constructed by a patriarchal society very critically in her book. Through her interviews and investigations she discovered that many women tried to live the life they never had for themselves through their children, in order to seek their own fulfillment, which they were often denied by societal standards. The process then enabled mothers to be longer connected with their children. The connection between child and mother is defined as symbioses, which is a process of “two organism living as one.” (232) The belief is that the intensive bound between mother and child takes place predominantly during pregnancy and is then ultimately broken by giving birth, where the two organism are separated. It has been discovered, however, that symbiosis can also go on longer, when the mother cannot separate herself from the child. (232-4) Friedan argues that “this destructive symbiosis is literally built into the feminine mystique” (234) and claims that it is found more often between mother and son than between mother and daughter. She discovered, for instance, that mothers were not able to let their children go to nursery alone, because they could not see their children leaving them. (234-6) It might not sound as unusual at the beginning, Friedan, however, discovers that it had great influences on society as a whole.
Friedan provides in her analysis, as Bowlby calls it, “a whole gallery of monstrous females” (66), who did not want their sons to grow up because they feared their separation. Various examples provided by psychoanalysts are stated in the book in order to draw attention to the questionable relationship that occurred between some mothers and their sons: “These mothers freshened up, put lipstick on when the son was due home from school, as a wife for a husband or a girl for her date, because they had no other life besides the child.” (160) The bizarre relationship that could be found between some mothers and their sons resulted in the fact that the sons “could not be men at the front or at home, in bed or out, because they really wanted to be babies.” (154) The consequence of women’s dissatisfaction at home was projected onto their children, especially their sons, and was finally recognized by society. Although society began to notice that it was indeed a “mistaken choice” for women to return home, Friedan argues that “the insult, the real reflection on our culture’s definition of the role of women, is that as a nation we only noticed that something was wrong with women when we saw its effects on their sons.” (164) The author concludes with the passage how female and male gender were viewed differently in society. Friedan’s choice of words illustrate the rage she most likely felt while discovering how unequal women’s role in society really was.

In Friedan’s critical description of motherhood in the 50s and 60s in the United States she uses vivid metaphors. Motherhood is, for instance, depicted as a “trap” where the majority of women found themselves in post-war America left alone and enclosed in a suburban house with their children at school and their husbands at work. (Bowlby 63) In addition, she includes Margaret Head’s declaration of the celebration of the domesticity as the “return of the cavewoman.” (117) The metaphor of the “cavewoman” corresponds with Friedan’s definition of the trap. Both description symbolize that women found themselves locked away from the opportunities that were presented to their male counterparts. Similar to the times before the war, women were back in the domesticity, yet, Friedan argues that this time “the chains that bind her in her trap are chains made up of mistaken ideas and misinterpreted facts, of incomplete truths and unreal choices.” (19) The metaphor of “chains” for the ideas that had been installed into the minds of the majority of women also corresponds with the depiction of the suburban trap. The metaphors illustrate the restrictive feelings many women experienced in their role as mother and housewife. Instead of living the American dream of the post-war era, numerous women found themselves in a trap chained to their ideas of feminine fulfillment.
In the past sixty years we have come full circle and the American housewife is once again trapped in a squirrel cage. If the cage is now a modern plate-glass-and-broadloom ranch house or a convenient modern apartment, the situation is no less painful than when her grandmother sat over an embroidery hoop in her gilt-and-plush parlor and muttered angrily about women’s rights. (17)

A Nebraskan housewife and mother with a PhD in anthropology stated the quote above. Her vivid description of the “cage” where women found themselves trapped in, expresses that although it is almost fifty years after the first women’s movement, the situation in its roots has not changed much. The description of the two different places where women operated emphasizes the time difference between the women of the suffrage movement and the women living in the post-war era. In addition, it demonstrates that although women have gained the right to vote and to attend college, they still have to live their lives according to a feminine ideal that society constructed for them. They are encouraged to predominantly fulfill the role of mother and housewife. The situation might be different for women, yet Friedan demonstrates that this does not mean it is automatically less painful.

In addition to the use of the metaphors of trap and chains for the suburban house, Friedan questions whether the domesticity in suburbia is a “comfortable concentration camp” (247) for millions of American women. This claim is unquestionable Friedan’s most controversial statement in her analysis. The author does not only compare the suburban home to a concentration camp, she even correlates the American housewife to the victims of the Holocaust.

In a sense that is not as far-fetched as it sounds, the women who ‘adjust’ as housewives, who grow up wanting to be ‘just a housewife’, are in as much danger as the millions who walked to their own death in the concentration camps- and the millions more who refused to believe that the concentration camps existed. (247)

Although she later in the book withdraws her claim, it nevertheless is an extreme comparison. The Holocaust deniers are also included in her depiction, which should emphasize that the bystanders during the Second World War were nearly as much to blame as the ones who actually committed the crime. The comparison used by Friedan can be interpreted that not only the women who return back to the domesticity are responsible but also the ones who allowed it to happen. The author, therefore, believes that is to some extent, certainly not completely, a similar tragedy for society.
Furthermore Friedan’s claim is connected to an investigation by Bruno Bettelheim, who was a prisoner at Dachau and Buchenwald during the Second World War. Bettelheim was a psychoanalyst and an educational psychologist, who discovered during his time at the concentration camp that prisoners underwent a severe process of dehumanization which led to the effect that they became “walking corpses”. They were forced to give up their individual behavior and adopt a childlike behavior in order to become an anonymous part of the masses. Their individuality and their ability to predict and prepare for the future was devastated, which ultimately led to the completion of the process of dehumanization. (Bettelheim 291) Therefore, it was said that the prisoners became their own worst enemy and found themselves trapped in the “prison of their own minds.” (247) Friedan believes that the dehumanization process at concentrations camps is similar to what has happened to American housewives. “They have become dependent, passive, childlike; they have given up their adult frame of reference to live at the lower human level of food and things. […] They are suffering a slow death of mind and spirit.” (248) By adapting the beliefs of the feminine ideal shared in society women became participants in the masses and lost their individuality. Again the author describes women with several adjectives to stress and to illustrate explicitly what they have become. Furthermore, Friedan advises women to “refuse to be nameless, depersonalized, manipulated, and live their own lives again according to a self-chosen purpose.” (249) In order to accomplish that, Friedan claims that women finally “begin to grow up.” (249)

The harsh comparison of the Holocaust to women’s lives in the post-war era in the United States has ultimately caused critical responses by various scholars. Horowitz, for instance, has argued that Friedan’s claim represents her anti-fascism point of view which she articulated at Smith. (26) Indeed, this might be the case; nevertheless, it is rather harsh to compare the feminine mystique and America’s women with the victims of one of the greatest human crimes in history. Friedan clearly wanted to receive attention and raise consciousness with her work. The metaphors she used so far, certainly, served her purpose. After having shocked her readers by mentioning the concentration camp, Friedan quickly clarifies that “American women are not, of course, being readied for mass extermination [...]”(248) and the “the suburban house is not a German concentration camp, nor are American housewives on their way to the gas chamber.” (249) The clarification, however, mildens her harsh articulation only to a small amount. The reader still struggles with pictures in their minds of concentration camps and gas chamber victims in comparison with happy housewives in beautiful suburban family houses. The comparison certainly
functioned to alter the image of the American dream family living in the suburbs. Shrivel, however, criticized Friedan for taking back her comparison in the end. She claims that “there’s no point in making an analogy only to retract it.”(x) Although I agree with Shrivel, I also believe that Friedan used the metaphor of the concentration camp in order to awaken America’s women and to raise feminist consciousness. Yet, she still aimed at reaching the broader mass of American women, and, as she said herself, it was still a time “in good, old, prude America” (125), therefore; she did not want to sound too radical and had to milden her argument by withdrawing her controversial statement in the end. Feminists were after all believed to be “man-hating, embittered spinster” (61), and this image was certainly nothing she wanted to represent to her readers.

In addition to the critique Friedan received for her comparison of suburbia to concentration camps during the Nazi regime, Scholars such as Dijkstar, Bowlby or Horowitz among others, have claimed that Friedan tackled the issues of women’s oppression only on a superficial level. She did not question the institutions that oppressed women in themselves, such as marriage or motherhood. Her analysis rather focused on the external forces, such as the media, consumerism and sex-directed education, which enabled the construction of a feminine ideal in the post-war era. Her attack was, therefore, aimed at the perpetuators of the feminine mystique that tried to maintain the subordinate position of women, because they could benefit from it. She did not, however, explicitly challenge the very nature of the institutions. In her opinion, it was a matter of mistaken choice that encouraged numerous women to “go back home”, which the critics believe to be a too easy answer to the problem of female oppression. Nevertheless, Friedan laid the foundation for a second wide spread women’s movement which altered the situation and the future for innumerous women in the United States, and across the globe. Her publication raised feminist consciousness in a great number of women and provided a voice for women, who had not yet the power to speak for themselves. (Bowlby 69, Dijkstar 295-300, Horowitz 24)

One of Friedan’s strongest claim to raise consciousness was the documentation throughout her book of the effort of post-war American society to reintroduce the “Cult of True Womanhood”, which was a phrase that occurred frequently in literature in the mid-nineteenth century. (Dijkstar 291, Yates 41) According to Barbara Welter, true womanhood was characterized by “piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity”, which can be translated into “mother, daughter, sister, wife-woman.” Women were judged by these attributes by their husbands, their neighbors, society and also themselves. True Womanhood was to be accomplished by all female members of society,
because their sex alone required them to do so. The women were promised happiness and power if they lived according to their designated roles. Everyone who rejected the notion of True Womanhood was viewed as an enemy of civilization, of the Republic and ultimately of God. (Welter 151-2) Friedan depicted in her book the cult by discussing various forces that projected the attributes of submissiveness and domesticity onto the females of the post-war America. It is also described in the book that society greatly influenced women’s decision in every aspect of life, which correlates to the previous notion that women were judged by other members of society according to the four principles of True Womanhood. The author again aims at emphasizing that post-war American society restricted women to behave as it was common in previous times. Friedan’s idea of the feminine mystique can, therefore, be interpreted as a modern form of the cult of true womanhood.

The effort to define women’s role predominantly as mothers, wives and housewives soon showed consequences. The image of the happy suburban housewife living in a beautiful house on the outskirts of the city with adorable children and a successful husband, slowly began to dissolve. Friedan discovered in her interviews and observations that the majority of the middle-class, white suburban housewives suffered from an identity crisis. In order to fulfill their empty lives at home they pursued the dream image of the happy female that was presented to them through the media and advertisements.

The public image, in the magazines and television commercials, is designed to sell washing machines, cake mixes, deodorants, detergents, rejuvenating face-creams, hair tints. But the power of that image, on which companies spend millions of dollars for television time and ad space, comes from this: American women no longer know who they are. (53)

Friedan claims again here that external forces perpetuate the feminine mystique and because US-American women experienced a sense of loss of identity they were the perfect target group for consumerism. The author supports her claim with vivid descriptions consisting of a long list of household equipment. The products mentioned in the extract above illustrate the areas women had to focus on. A washing machine is important to keep the family’s clothes clean and to represent to the outside world that they are a neat family. Cake mixes are products used in the kitchen, which was believed to be the women’s sphere; and, ultimately, supplies to maintain the everlasting female youth which was expected from women. The products Friedan listed are not chosen without a purpose. I believe she wanted to emphasize that the media and advertisement aimed at reaching
women in the areas that were dominating their lives in order to make the most profits, and these areas were certainly the household and their own beauty. Nevertheless, Friedan also claims with the passage that the images presented to women are only superficial. There is a large discrepancy between the image presented by the media and the reality of many American women, which led to the fact that many women aimed at fulfilling these “glossy images” (53), yet in the process they were losing their own identity.

The author has experienced herself what it is like to live according to the feminine mystique and thus losing her own identity. In the book she includes her own experience after graduating from college and receiving a graduate fellowship, but in the end denying it and deciding to become a full-time mother and housewife: “During the congratulations, underneath my excitement, I felt strange uneasiness; there was a question that I did not want to think about. ‘Is this really what I want to be?’”(51) Influenced throughout her adolescence by the images of happy housewives and society’s perception of women, Friedan made the same decision as many other well-educated women in post-war America and turned her back onto a further education. It needs to be added here that Friedan followed a career as a freelance reporter next to having children and taking care of the household. Nevertheless, she did not pursue a career in psychology, which was her actual field of study at Smith. Her decision to “live according to the feminine mystique as a suburban housewife”, however did not come without a price. (52) Friedan discovered what it meant to be haunted by the little question in your head: “Is that all?” According to her own experience she “could sense no purpose in her life, I could find no peace, until I finally faced it and worked out my own answers.” (52) The inclusion of her own struggle as a suburban housewife adds a personal note to the book. The readers may feel a stronger connection to the voice behind the words and, thus, it might encourage them more to question their current status as women in society.

The reduction of women to the definition of their biology “encourages women to ignore the question of their identity.” (53) This ultimately led to a nameless aching dissatisfaction felt by innumerable women, which the author coined in the term “the problem that has no name.” (5) The investigation Friedan carried out revealed that women began to realize that housework and children did not fulfill them. According to the author’s research “in 1960, the problem that has no name burst like a boil through the image of the happy American housewife.” (11) Women would meet with each other and talk about the inner turmoil they discovered in their lives as housewives and mothers. Eventually, even the media was attracted by the problem that could be found on nearly
every suburban lawn. Friedan, however, demonstrates in her book that the media coverage was more deceiving the problem than seriously reporting about it. “Time’s cover story on ‘The Suburban Wife, an American Phenomenon’ protested: ‘Having too good a time… to believe that they should be unhappy’.” (11) The problem was underestimated and at the same time women’s identity crisis was made fun of, which discouraged many women to question their situation or seek help.

The problem was dismissed by telling the housewife she doesn’t realize how lucky she is—her own boss, no time clock, no junior executive gunning for her job. What if she isn’t happy—does she think men are happy in this world? Does she really, secretly, still want to be a man? Doesn’t she know yet how lucky she is to be a woman? (13)

Friedan demonstrates how society reacted to women who articulated their problem; they were criticized for even mentioning it. In order to illustrate the gunfire of criticism with which women were confronted by society, Friedan states question after question. Society questioned the reliability of women’s articulation of the problem. The contemporary situation of women had been compared to previous times with the common practice of comparing one bad situation with an even worse one in order to underestimate the newly occurred problem. Friedan discovered this shared belief within society and aims at explaining the different time frame that needs to be kept in mind in order to establish a society where women are finally viewed as human beings.

Our increasing knowledge, the increasing potency of human intelligence, has given us an awareness of purposes and goals beyond the simple biological needs of hunger, thirst, and sex. Even these simple needs, in men or women today, are not the same as they were in the Stone Age or in the South Sea cultures, because they are now part of a more complex pattern of human life. (113)

The changes in society are very important to take into account when discussing the needs and roles of the sexes. As Friedan states with the quotes above, the times are more complex than they were before. Doors that have been opened to women appeared to be closed again by society, simply because they would not correspond with the feminine ideal women had to fulfil. Friedan argues that is an ignorant statement to say that because women were happy with their roles in society in the past, they have to be satisfied with the same role now as well. In addition, she strongly challenges this belief and aims at urging other women to do the same. “I do not accept the answer that there is no problem because American women have luxuries that women in other times and lands never dreamed of. […] The women who suffer this problem have a hunger that food cannot
As already discovered before, Friedan often uses metaphors to articulate her skepticism towards the feminine construct by society. This time she uses the metaphor “hunger” for the fulfillment many women lacked in their roles as mothers and housewives. She emphasizes once again that the problem cannot be understood as the “age-old material problems of man: poverty, sickness, hunger, cold.” (15) The emotional distress women experienced could be traced back to the elimination of their own identity that was maintained by various forces, such as the media, ads, psychologists and educators. Friedan, thus, encourages women in her book to no longer ignore the voice within them that says “I want something more than my husband and my children and my home.” (20) The author believes that this is the only way for America’s society to receive a thriving future: “It may well be the key to our future as a nation and a culture.” (20)

Summing up, after having investigated various forces in society and having talked with a vast amount of women, Friedan reached the thesis that “the core of the problem for women today is not sexual but a problem of identity- a stunting or evasion of growth that is perpetuated by the feminine mystique.” (58) She argues further that “culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfill their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role.” (58) Although Friedan was among the first feminist voices that emerged in the second wave, she was certainly not the last one. Her critical description of the feminine ideal, which questioned various aspects of society and life in post-war America aimed at encouraging women to make their voices heard and protest in order to receive the human rights that everyone deserves, because she strongly believed that “this is not what being a woman means, no matter what the experts say.” (15)

4.1.2. Women’s Mental Health and Sexuality

The next concept that will be analyzed in greater detail are issues concerning women’s health and sexuality. Women’s health and sexuality became major issues during the second wave of feminism in the United States. As already elaborated in the theoretical chapter 2.2. Our Bodies, Ourselves, women in the 1960s in the United States started to make the topics of female health and sexuality public issues and started to raise awareness for them among society. Since Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique was published rather at the beginning of the movement and because her focus was not explicitly on the issue of women’s health and sexuality, it constituted only a small part of her analysis. Nevertheless, it will be analyzed in this thesis with a focus on women’s mental health.
and sexuality. It will provide an insight into the beliefs of the beginning of the movement and can, thus, be compared to the accounts of it in the other two primary sources by Adrienne Rich and Erica Jong, which were published later in the 1970s. Furthermore, the issues of women’s health and sexuality correspond with the previously discussed concept of feminine ideal and the thus emerging consequences.

Friedan’s approach towards women’s health was mainly concerned with mental health problems which occurred in many women when the feminine mystique was fulfilled. She discovered that the lack of fulfilment led to severe mental health problems in women. Many women began to report to suffer under extreme tiredness, which one doctor decided to investigate further in the 1950s. After having innumerable female patients who all reported similar syndromes beginning with extreme tiredness to severe depression and even suicide thoughts and attempts. The problem was known as “housewife’s fatigue” among doctors. Their patients tend to sleep longer than ten hours a day in order to fight their tiredness. At the beginning, the cause for the problem was assumed to lie in the amount of work and roles women had to fulfill at home. Friedan wonders, whether women were “trapped simply by the enormous demands of her role as modern housewife: wife, mistress, mother, nurse, consumer, cook, chauffeur; expert on interior decoration, child care, appliance repair, furniture refinishing, nutrition, and education.” (19) The author provides a list of various tasks women were assumed to fulfill in their role as housewife and mother. Vivid descriptions are used here again to construct an image of the ideal, feminine woman. Although society demanded various task from women, doctors discovered that the source of the problem was not to fight with sleep or reducing the tasks at home, but rather with activities that actually needed their energy capacity. Housework in many cases did not fulfil the women’s abilities, which led to the boredom and dissatisfaction. Women were encouraged by only a few doctors to leave the house now and then to do something they enjoyed, the majority, however, prescribed medication to fight the emotional distress. Friedan discovered that “many suburban housewives were taking tranquillizers like cough drops” (19), but hardly anyone recommended them to seek fulfillment with work or education outside of the home to fight the boredom.

The beauty of the feminine mystique began to vanish and the dream of the life of a suburban mother and housewife turned out to be a nightmare for many women. In one community Friedan observed that “sixteen out of the twenty-eight were in analysis or analytical psychotherapy. Eighteen were taking tranquillizers; several had tried suicide and some had been hospitalized for varying periods,
for depression or vaguely diagnosed psychotic states.” (191) The numbers Friedan provided are indeed shocking, yet they demonstrate the reality for many American women in comparison to the flawed image that was transported through the magazines and advertisements. In addition, Friedan recognized that the victims of the feminine mystique who suffered severe emotional distress shared the same telltale signs. The description of the patient suffering from the problem that has name aims at raising consciousness in the readers. It transports a rather clear image of how strongly the inner turmoil influenced people.

Their voices were dull and flat, or nervous and jittery; they were listless and bored or frantically ‘busy’ around the house or community. They talked about ‘fulfillment’ in the wife and mother terms of the mystique, but they were desperately eager to talk about this other ‘problem’; with which they seemed very familiar indeed. (192)

In her demonstration of the mental illnesses that occurred among housewives and mothers, Friedan includes records of a doctor in the suburbs of Bergen County, NJ, in the 1950s. Dr. Gordon and his wife discovered during their practice as psychiatrists and social psychologists that “approximately one out of three young mothers suffered depression or psychotic breakdown over childbirth.” (237) The author compared this number to previous medical records and discovered that before the 1950s one woman out of 400 suffered from a psychotic breakdown during pregnancy and one woman out of 80 suffered from less severe depressions. (237) Indeed this is only one small suburban era of the United States which Friedan illustrates in her book; nevertheless, the great discrepancy is quite shocking. In addition, the doctor discovered that the cases showed a similar pattern concerning the women’s educational level. All patients had given up their education “below the level of their ability”. Friedan argues therefore that the majority of the sufferers are women who abandoned their education and left college or even High School. (237-8) By providing actual medical data from a doctor during that period, Friedan strengthens her argument and demonstrates that even the numbers show that there is something wrong with the assumption that women have to only become housewives and mothers.

The lack of fulfilment and the loss of identity that many women, whom Friedan interviewed, experienced, led to such severe depressions that some had suicidal thoughts or in the worst case attempted to take their own lives. In consideration of demonstrating how severe the feminine mystique influenced the mental health of many women, Friedan included a statement of a mother of four, who confessed to have had suicidal thoughts and who also experienced envy towards her
children. The young woman did not see any reason to go on living anymore due to the lack of fulfilment she experienced in her role as mother and wife: “There doesn’t seem any reason for me to go on living. I don’t have anything to look forward to. [...] But the worst thing is, I feel so envious of my children. I almost hate them, because they have their lives ahead, and mine is over.” (245) The statement illustrates the reality of many young housewives, who fulfilled the feminine mystique by bearing children and staying at home, yet when the children are old enough to look after themselves, the great emptiness often returns. Fortunately, only a small number of suburban housewives in the post-war era resort to suicide. The majority, however, paid “a high emotional and physical price for evading their own growth.” (236)

For the author it was clear that the source for the high numbers of female patients suffering from emotional distress and depressions was the lack of the fulfilment they discovered in their role as mothers and wives. A suburban psychiatrist supported Friedan’s believe and assured her that the problem was certainly not sexual. (9) Yet, Friedan discovered through her research that many women mentioned sexuality, even though the author did not explicitly ask about it or conducted a Kinsey study. Friedan would ask women about their interests outside of the home or their education and many of them assumed that the answer the author wanted to hear had to be sexual, which made her suspicious—“Was the problem that has no name a sexual problem after all?” (210) After discovering the women’s urge to talk about their sex lives and also their fantasies, the author started to investigate the issue of female sexuality further and revealed that there was, however, a “false note” (210) to all their remarks. The way women reported their sexual experiences to the author sounded unreal, although they indeed took place. Women would tell her about their fantasies of running off with a new men to Mexico or about the affairs they had over summer. (210-212) The examples of women, however, also revealed that the majority of them did not find fulfillment in their sex with their husbands, their sexual fantasies or even their affairs.

Are they using sex or sexual fantasy to fill needs that are not sexual? Is that why their sex, even when it is real, seem like fantasy? Is that why, even when they experience orgasm, they feel “unfulfilled”? [...] Or is that feeling of personal identity, of fulfilment, they seek in sex something that sex alone cannot give? (212)

After posing these questions, the author does not immediately provide answers. The questions are aimed at the reader to encourage them to reflect on their own lives and experiences in order to find the answers. What the author, however, includes is an investigation of society’s perspective on the
issue of sex. Friedan argues that in the fifteen years previous to her research the “sexual frontier has been forced to expand”, which made sex “the only frontier open to women” who lived to fulfill the feminine mystique. The “sex-hunger” of American women had been documented by studies, by experts and by the mass media. (212-213) It has shown that references to sex increased dramatically in the 1960s in America’s media: “In American media there were more than 2 ½ times as many references to sex in 1960 as in 1950, an increase from 509 to 1,341 ‘permissive’ sex references in the 200 media study.” (213) The numbers Friedan presents illustrate the changes that were taking place in post-war American society. Issues which had been taboo before where starting to be discussed publicly, which, however, also had some negative side effects. Women were ultimately encouraged to fulfill sexual ideals and fantasies they now found in movies and novels. These, often false, ideas began to shape the belief of sexual experience and settled into the minds of many.

The new sexual images presented to the females turned them, according to Friedan, “more often into sex-seekers than sex-finders.” (215) The reason for that was the absence of their husbands, who were most likely busy in their jobs, as the only provider of the families, the children were always at home and simply because there were hardly anyone available to fulfill the fantasies with. Therefore, “American women are doomed to spend most of their lives in sexual fantasy” (215), which led to further dissatisfaction. In order to satisfy their needs somehow, Friedan refers to the result of the Kinsey study, which discovered that “one out of four, by the age of forty, had engaged in some extramarital activity.” (216) While women began to seek sexual fulfillment, men tended to show less interest in sexuality anymore, according to Kinsey. The study revealed a shocking image of the assumed happy marriage life in America’s suburbia. In addition, the report presented a correlation between the educational level and sexual satisfaction. Women who had a higher level of education experience more often sexual fulfilment, according to the Kinsey investigation. “Women who went furthest on the road to self-realization, women who were educated for active participation in the world outside the home” demonstrated far greater “capacity for complete sexual enjoyment, full orgasm, than the rest.” (264-5) Friedan includes the study in her research to support her major claim that women need to seek fulfilment as individual people in order to live a happy and sexually fulfilled life. The report supports her argument strongly and demonstrates once again how significant it is for women to fulfill their individual capacities.
The issue of sexuality is predominantly discussed with regard to heterosexuality in Betty Friedan’s book. Her focus lies on discussing how housewives and mothers seek sexual fulfilment. Yet, she makes some small remarks towards homosexuality as well, which caused much controversy later. The remarks are aimed at male homosexuality, which she sees as one of the consequences of the feminine mystique, because mothers treated their sons as babies for too long, as already elaborated previously in this thesis. Friedan refers to Freud’s and other psychoanalyst’s assumptions that homosexuality in men is evoked through an intense relationship between mother and son. She further claims that male homosexuality is also far more common than female homosexuality, which she relates back to the feminine mystique that occupied a large number of women in the post-war era. Her account on homosexuality is in general very negative. One of the most controversial statements regarding homosexuality the author presents in her analysis is her remark that “homosexuality is spreading like a murky smog over the American scene.” Friedan uses the imagery of pollution to demonstrate her point of view on homosexuality. In addition, she emphasizes her belief that American’s society was in danger of feminization and thus male homosexuality was the final stage of the feminine mystique. (Bowlby 67) The homophobic tone of Friedan’s comment is certainly shocking for readers today, yet such an articulation was more or less standard for the period, as Holowitz argues. (28)

Friedan’s account on homosexuality in *The Feminine Mystique* was among the first ones she articulated towards that topic, but certainly not her last one. In her later work as a leader of the feminist organization NOW, she also remarked controversial statements regarding homosexuality, which, especially, radical feminists were not pleased with. According to Betty Friedan at the end of the 1960s, lesbians formed a “lavender menace”, which, in her opinion, might undermine feminism. The phrase “lavender menace” was used by Betty Friedan at a NOW meeting in 1969 and referred to homosexual women who aimed at equating homosexuality with feminism. The term was later used by homosexual activists to promote equal rights for gay people. Although not the whole membership of NOW shared Friedan’s belief on homosexuality, due to her prominence her view was quickly associated with the organization’s position on the issue. Friedan’s statement rekindled the debate whether NOW and the women’s rights movement in general were mainly associated white, middle-class women and lacked the diversity they always preached. Betty Friedan eventually acknowledged her wrong judgment towards lesbian feminism. She acknowledged that she was “very uncomfortable” about homosexuality, which resulted in her harsh statements. In
1977 at a Women’s Conference in Houston, Texas, Betty Friedan revised her previous claim and guaranteed her support for the fight for lesbian rights. Lavender balloons were led free to celebrate the milestone Friedan signified with her statement. It was a significant moment for the women’s movement, which demonstrated the unity they have always claimed. (Valk 79, Shukla 111-112)

To conclude, Friedan’s account on women’s health and sexuality is indeed not as broad as her challenge of the construction of the feminine ideal. Nevertheless, she provides insight into the beliefs that were shared among society concerning women’s sexuality. Again she emphasized how external forces, such as the mass media, advertisement or social science, influenced the construction of female sexuality. It was also visible that the topic of sexuality has slowly entered the public scene in the 1950s and 1960s, which will later be even stronger visible in the 1970s. Friedan claims that sexuality played a major role in the construction of the feminine mystique, yet the mental problems many women experienced were not the exact outcome of sexual dissatisfaction. In terms of women’s health, the author did not include issues such as abortion or sterilization, which were major concerns of the Women’s Health movement during the second wave of feminism and, which will be also visible in Adrienne Rich’s text, but rather focused on mental health problems, which occurred in many women, when they lived according to their designated feminine roles. Her emphasis lies on revealing the severe mental health problems which were the effects of a feminine ideal constructed by society and culture strongly influenced by patriarchy. Although some ideas presented by Friedan were later revised and altered, they provide a picture of the beginning of the second wave, which The Feminine Mystique, among others, set into motion. In order to present the broad spectrum of second wave feminism and its aim to raise consciousness, the next chapter will analyze Adrienne Rich’s Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution, which was published in 1976. The same concepts of the feminine ideal as well as women’s health and sexuality will be investigated to draw connections to and illustrate differences to The Feminine Mystique.
4.2. *Of Woman Born-Motherhood as Experience and Institution*  
(Adrienne Rich)

“All human life on the planet is born of woman.” (Rich 13)

Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* was published in 1976. Before the publication Rich was already an established feminist poet, who wrote her first series volume of poetry fifteen years previously to *Of Woman Born*. The author had already been known to write about political themes in her poetry and to confront society. *Of Woman Born* was, thus, a provocative writing as well. The book is a non-fiction prose examination of the construction of motherhood as experience and institution. Rich was among the first feminist scholars to examine and write about the institution of motherhood in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. Due to Rich’s analysis, motherhood has become a central issue of feminism. The book aims at comparing motherhood as experience to motherhood as an institution in a society that was predominantly patriarchal. Rich includes in the book her own experience as a mother of three and how the demands of society had influences on herself as a mother. It is the author’s aim to challenge the beliefs on motherhood shaped by patriarchy and to provide an authentic account of it. Similar to Betty Friedan, Adrienne Rich questions assumptions of women constructed by society in order to raise awareness for the oppression of women in post-war American society. Rich, however, does not discuss external forces which constructed the feminine ideal, but rather examines how motherhood was a major goal to reach for women in order to be fully feminine. (Napikoski)

The analysis will start with examining how Rich challenges the construction of the feminine ideal, which will in this case focus mainly on the importance of motherhood for feminine fulfillment. It will be elaborated how Rich questions the influences of Freudian thoughts as well as how patriarchal society alienated women who did not confirm to the ideal feminine role. The second subchapter of this analysis will discuss issues concerning women’s health and sexuality presented in *Of Woman Born*. It is the aim of this section to demonstrate that Rich’s non-fiction work, as Friedan’s work, was written to raise consciousness among her readers to question the status quo, which was present in the US-American society of the 1960s and 1970s and, which maintained the subordinate position of women.
4.2.1. Motherhood as the Feminine Ideal

Adrienne Rich’s work *Of Woman Born-Motherhood as Experience and Institution* contrasts her own experience as a mother with the ideas that were shared among society concerning motherhood. Similar to Friedan, Rich illustrates in her book that becoming a mother was believed to be the ultimate goal of feminine fulfillment. Growing up in the 1950s, the author experienced firsthand what society expected from women.

I became a mother in the family-centered, consumer-oriented, Freudian-American world of the 1950s. […] I had no idea of what I wanted, what I could or could not choose. I only knew that to have a child was to assume adult womanhood to the full, to prove myself, to be “like other women.” (25)

The short description of her experience as a woman in the post-war era in the United States at the beginning of her book, illustrates what was demanded of women. Rich aims at demonstrating that in order to be accepted fully as a woman, she had to become a mother. Yet, the fulfillment of the assumed gender role was not an easy task for Rich. Throughout her adolescence she has been a writer and book lover and was, therefore, not immensely concerned with stereotypical female activities, such as putting on make-up or catching a man. Nevertheless, the feminine ideal was the status quo, and thus she tried to fulfill the role of the ideal female: “To be “like other women” had been a problem for me. From the age of thirteen or fourteen, I had felt I was only acting the part of the feminine creature.” (25) Her strong interest in literature and her desire to become a writer were not considered feminine during the 1950s, which made the author feel guilty throughout her adolescence. The guilt, however, vanished as she finally got married and expected her first child. She believed that she was finally “like other women.” (25) Although, Rich considered herself a very independent women and not drawn to fulfill feminine stereotypes of the time, marriage and motherhood released her of a vast amount of guilt. She believed that she has ultimately reached “true womanhood”, and, thus, also changed her behavior slightly, which she describes with the following anecdote of her first day of marriage:

I have a very clear, keen memory of myself the day after I was married: I was sweeping the floor. Probably the floor did not really need to be swept; probably I simply did not know what else to do with myself. But as I swept that floor I thought: “Now I am a woman. This is an age-old action, this is what women have always done.” (25)
The incident indicate what Rich wants to demonstrate to her readers, namely that the feminine ideal and the assumption of the role of female gender were so present in women’s minds that, although they knew that they were absurd, still aimed at fulfilling them. Similar to Friedan, the incident is described rather vividly to awaken the reader and to raise their consciousness. In addition to her remark about the feelings she experienced after her wedding, the author also includes how pregnancy influenced her status of being a true woman. Rich writes that “as soon as she was visibly and clearly pregnant she felt, for the first time in her adolescence and adult-life, not guilty.” (25) Motherhood is depicted as an eternal truth for women, which has always been pursued by the female gender. It is clearly Rich’s effort to demonstrate what high prestige motherhood enjoyed in the society of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, but also how the idea and the expectations of motherhood showed great discrepancy from the reality of it. (Van Cleaf 257)

The social burden of being female restricted Adrienne Rich as a woman in the 1950s to fulfill her individual desires fully as a poet, yet demanded of her to live a life according to her role as a woman. Rich discovered, however, that she was not the only woman who had a college degree, but was supposed to fulfill other roles than a career outside of the home. In order to illustrate her own experiences and the one of other women during the era, she provides a rather clear picture of the situation she encountered as a mother and of how other women acted, for instance, at dinner parties.

The life of a Cambridge tenement backyard swarming with children, the repetitious cycles of laundry, the night-wakings, the interrupted moments of Peach or of engagement with ideas, the ludicrous dinner parties at which young wives, dedicated to their children’s welfare and their husband’s careers, attempted to reproduce the amenities of Brahmin Boston, amid French recipes and the pretense of effortlessness—above all, the ultimate lack of seriousness with which women were regarded in that world— all of this defied analysis at that time, but I knew I had to remake my own life. (27)

The author provides a comprehensive description of women’s lives in post-war America. The picture that Rich constructs with the extract above, however, is quite negative. The examples of motherhood she includes are clearly the least favorite ones. The scene the author encountered at dinner parties or at any engagement with other well-educated women in their twenties and thirties represented to her the unserious and inferior status of women in society. Rich describes how the wives aimed at fulfilling the role of the perfect wife and mother in a slightly mocking tone in terms of their effort to imitate “the amenities of Brahmin Boston” or to share French recipes, whilst looking effortlessly in their roles as mother and wife. She confronts their aim at fulfilling the ideal
feminine role by reminding the reader of the “lack of seriousness with which women were regarded in that world.” (27) The explicit description provided by the author transports an authentic image to the reader and aims at provoking their consciousness to remake their own lives, as Rich was eager to do for herself as well. (27)

The images, which women were supposed to fulfill during Adrienne Rich’s time, were soon questioned by the author. Being part of a community of well-educated women, Rich discovered that society did not expect of them to contribute significantly to the outside world, but rather inside of their own homes. The roles they were expected to fulfill were not connected to the education they had received, but rather bound to their biological determination of their sex. The restriction, however, was not met with much enthusiasm by the author, which she illustrates with the following remark:

I did not then understand that we- the women of that academic community- as in so many middle-class communities of the period- were expected to fill both the part of the Victorian Lady of Leisure, the angel in the House, and also of the Victorian cook, scullery maid, laundress, governess, and nurse. (27)

Corresponding with Friedan’s claim of the return of the images of women of Victorian times, Rich discovered that the roles women were assumed to fulfill related more to the Victorian era in Great Britain than to the United States after the war. She presents an extensive list of what was expected of women to accomplish and at the same time demonstrates her lack of understanding. The demands on women constructed by society led Adrienne Rich to the belief that women had to indeed decide between their individuality and motherhood. Although Rich mentions that her husband was always very supportive of her desire to write, she knew that it was seen more as a hobby than a real profession. He was, unlikely for the time period, very eager to support and help Rich with the children and the household so that she could fulfill her desires to write and read. Nevertheless, the author struggled to bring her life into focus. She aimed at maintaining her individuality as a writer and a woman, however, experienced that it was more difficult than expected to reject the female gender script.

The twentieth-century, educated young woman, looking perhaps at her mother’s life, or trying to create an autonomous self in a society which insists that she is destined primarily for reproduction, has with good reason felt that the choice was an inescapable either/or: motherhood or individuation, motherhood or creativity, motherhood or freedom. (160)
The confrontation Rich provides between motherhood and other ways of fulfillment reflect the reality many women faced. Although they had choices their mothers and grandmothers had not been granted, societal demands were still inevitable for the majority of women. In order to fulfill the feminine ideal women were assumed to become mothers.

The construction of the feminine ideal Rich presents is predominantly concerned with convincing women that motherhood is the ultimate goal of feminine fulfillment. On the contrary, the author also includes how women were viewed who rejected that notion. Similar to Friedan, Rich presents and, most importantly, questions the alienation process of strong and independent women which took place in society. The experience many feminists made was the negative perspective on strong women for centuries in America’s society, especially after the suffragettes.

What we did see, for centuries, was the hatred of overt strength in women, the definition of strong independent women as freaks of nature, as unsexed, frigid, castrating, perverted, dangerous; the fear of the maternal woman as “controlling,” the preference for dependent, malleable, “feminine” women. (70)

Over ten years later than Betty Friedan’s work was published and consciousness had already been raised for the flawed belief and construction of the feminine ideal, Rich discovered still similar ideas. Independent women were still portrayed negatively as she explicit describes in the abstract above. In order to demonstrate the alienation process of strong women in society, Rich uses rather provocative adjectives that were used in society to describe them.

In addition to the negative connotation strong women had to experience in society, Rich also discusses the situation for women without children. Her investigation revealed that childless women, as well as homosexual women, which will be discussed later in this analysis, were viewed as a threat to society: “Women who refuse to become mothers are not merely emotionally suspect, but are dangerous.” (169) Throughout history, women who intentionally decided against motherhood have seldom been characterized as approving in literature. Their choice, however, has been assumed to be the result of a childhood trauma, poor parenting or, because they show little to no identification with their own parents. Furthermore, women have been accused to put their individual desires for a career over their biological function to reproduce. (Reading and Amatea 255) Rich even claims that society viewed childless women as a “human failure” and explains further that “both childbearing, and childlessness have been manipulated to make women into negative quantities, or bearers of evil.” (249) The metaphor of “bearers of evil” used here can be
understood and equaled to women’s ability to reproduce, which can, on the one hand, enable women to fulfill the societal constructed ideal of femininity, which is motherhood. Yet, on the other hand, this very ability can function as a curse for women who are not willing to become mothers and are, hence, disowned by society.

While Rich speaks about the construction and the experience of motherhood, she never separates herself as a mother from herself as a writer. The author refuses to view the intellectual moment and the physiological one in isolation. (Maraini and Ciccarello 690) Thus, Rich questions the construction of a so-called childless mother, and wonders whether she herself as a mother of grown up children is considered ‘childless’. “Am I, whose children are grown up, who come and go as I will, unchilded as compared to younger women still pushing prams, hurrying home to feedings, waking at night to a child’s cry?” and asks further “What makes us mothers?” (251) The author raises questions at the readers to encourage them to think about and to challenge the assumed perceptions in society. Again Rich describes motherhood very explicitly with examples that are rather negative than positive to illustrate a real image of the role as mother in comparison to the flawed illustrations in the media.

Although society viewed childless women as a “threat to male hegemony” (252), Rich argues that especially the “unchilded” women have contributed significantly to society because they were free to practice their intellect and were not restricted to their role as mothers. In order to support her claim Rich includes a long list of women who brought forth significant work and, who were also no mothers, such as “Charlotte Bronte, Margaret Fuller, George Eliot, Emily Bronte, Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti, Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir.” (252) The list aims at deconstructing the negative stereotype of women without children and should demonstrate to the readers that exactly the strong women, whom they learned about during their education, were the ones society reversed into abnormal creatures for ordinary women. Moreover, Rich rejects the idea that categories of “childed” and “unchilded” women even exist. She argues that this construction is “a false polarity, which has served the institutions both of motherhood and heterosexuality.” (250) The categories functioned to maintain the superior status of men in society by alienating strong, independent women who might pose a threat to men in the outside world.

The challenge of the “institution of motherhood” constructed by patriarchy is the major aim of Rich’s book. The author intended to deconstruct the idea by presenting her own experiences as a
mother in an authentic way. The book, for instance, begins with extracts from a journal Rich kept during the 1960s, where she had already been a young mother. From the very first sentence of her journal Rich reveals her true feelings about motherhood, which are not only love and tender, but at times anger, guilt and suffering: “My children cause me the most exquisite suffering of which I have any experience.” (21) She is not afraid to voice what the majority of women were afraid to mention and to demonstrate that motherhood is not always love and tender. At times the author experiences that her feelings towards “these tiny guiltless beings” turn her into “a monster of selfishness and intolerance”, who feels envy towards the “barren woman who has the luxury of her regrets, but lives a life of privacy and freedom.” (21) Rich’s true account of her feelings as a mother, which she experienced occasionally are indeed very provocative, yet at the same time very authentic to which many women can relate to. The author brought to paper what many women feared to articulate due to social expectations. Mothers were not allowed to be selfish and their only dedication was supposed to be towards their children. Rich certainly aimed at fulfilling society’s assumptions on women, yet discovered that it was impossible to fulfill them at all times.

After presenting a few accounts of her suppressed feelings towards her children, which the author remarked in her journal, she illustrates and challenges “unexamined assumptions” (21) of the relationship between mother and children. “First, that a “natural” mother is a person without further identity, who can find her chief gratification in being all day with small children […]” (22) Mothers were assumed to be isolated with their children at home. The sacrifice of their own self was taken for granted in a society that was predominantly concerned with maintaining patriarchy, according to Rich. Because of this rejection Rich claims that “children and mothers are the “causes” of each other’s suffering.” (23) In addition, she also challenges the belief that mothers are assumed to love their children unconditionally at all times. The belief that mother’s love has to be absolute at all times is, according to the author, simple not possible, but, yet, it was assumed by society: “I was haunted by the stereotypes of the mother whose love is “unconditional” […] (23) Although even her oldest son explained to her that he believes it is not possible for any human being to love another person consistently, the societal demands expected of mothers “to love that way.” (23)

The author, as a young mother, found herself trapped in a cycle, in which every time she picked up a book or started writing her children would suddenly need her attention. She experienced that “her anger would rise” because the state between them was designed that her “needs always balanced against those of a child.” (23) The inequality the author presented between mother and child led to
anger in herself and the need to be selfish. As a result, Rich confesses that she “could love so much better after even a quarter-hour of selfishness.” (23) The author demonstrates her struggle between being a mother and an individual person. According to the gender script which society constructed, women were not supposed to put their individual desires above their children’s needs, thus Rich’s account on her own experience as a mother was quite controversial for the period, but at the same time an eye-opener for many women, who thought they were alone in the struggle between being a mother and an individual human being with desires that are occasionally selfish.

As the author has extensively explained in the extracts previously mentioned, “love and anger cannot coexist” in the form of a mother, simple because “female anger threatens the institution of motherhood.” (46) In order to understand the construction of the institution of motherhood Rich provides a broad definition in the book. It is defined by Rich as a construct by patriarchy which limits women to their biological ability to reproduce. The institution determines the expectations of women’s behavior as mothers and constructs the “foundation of human society was we know it.” (39) Rich further claims that

This institution allowed me only certain views, certain expectations, whether embodied in the booklet in my obstetrician’s waiting room, the novels I had read, my mother-in-law’s approval, my memories of my own mother, the Sistine Madonna or she of the Michelangelo Pietá, the floating notion that a woman pregnant is a woman calm in her fulfilment, […] (39)

The description of the expectations of women illustrates the external forces that constructed the institution of motherhood and planted it in the female minds. Friedan discovered similar forces which were perpetuator of the feminine ideal and which showed significant influences on women. In addition, Rich mentions purposefully spaces and experiences that are most likely encountered by females, such as the obstetrician’s waiting room or the mother-in-law’s approval, to demonstrate that exactly in female spaces and female interactions the portrayal of feminine expectations was highly present. The author experienced that the institution of motherhood alienated her from her own body and self. It was not motherhood, but the perceptions and expectations she was supposed to fulfill. (39)

Rich’s major claim is that the institution of motherhood is constructed and maintained by patriarchy. The author understands patriarchy in its most common definition as the suppression and exploitation of women by men. (cf. 3.2. Patriarchy) Her accounts challenge the construction of
motherhood in patriarchy explicitly. She believes that the “patriarchal institution of motherhood is not the “human condition” any more than rape, prostitution, and slavery are.” (33) All of the conditions mentioned by the author are products of male oppression and are, thus, to be questioned because they enhance a form of power relation. The author compares motherhood purposefully to extreme forms of oppression and violence in order to awaken the reader. The question of the powerful and the powerless are essential issue in the discussion of patriarchal structures, as Rich states, “power is both a primal word and a primal relationship under patriarchy.” (64) Women have always been viewed as less powerful than men, which limited them in the decision making process and in shaping the notions of society. It has always been the case, as presented by the author, that “the powerful (mostly male) make decisions for the powerless: the well for the sick, the middle-aged for the aging, the “sane” for the “mad”, the educated for the illiterate, the influential for the marginal.” (64) The author’s elaboration illustrates society’s structure where people in power automatically make decisions for less powerful members. The question of power has always played a major role in women’s lives due to their often assumed powerless status in society, whether it was the right to have power over their own bodies, the right to choose the place where to give birth or to have the power to decide over their future career. Suffering of powerlessness has, therefore, been a constant in the majority of women’s lives during the 1960s and 1970s. (182)

In addition, the ones in power tend to not recognize their own superior condition or the situation of the oppressed, because their lives have had the same pattern throughout. If the relation between the ones in power and the ones without has been an essential construct of society, the ones in power might not even see their favored position, which is often the case in patriarchy. Men have to some extend always seen themselves above women, as Simone de Beauvoir investigated and later defined as women’s status as the Other or the Second Sex by society. (cf. 2.1. “The Personal is Political”) Rich compares women’s condition to the powerlessness of black slaves in the South during the times of slavery. The belief was shared among many white slaveholders that the slaves were actually satisfied with their situation. The author, hence, compares it to the belief shared among men that their wives were liberated women and indeed happy with their roles as housewife and mother. “Southern whites maintained well into the years of Black civil-rights struggle that “our Negroes” were really satisfied with their condition. In similar vein, a complacent husband will announce that his wife is a ‘liberated woman’.” (65) The example Rich includes of the oppression of slaves compared to that of women aims at demonstrating to the reader that the powerful people
are most likely to suppress or deny the personal reality of others, mainly of the suppressed. (65)
Therefore, it is important for the oppressed group to raise their voices and show the truthful account of their conditions. Rich’s depiction of motherhood aims at raising this consciousness in women to alter social standards.

Not only is the institution of motherhood challenged by the author, but also the entire social structure of the family. The unequal power relationship between the two genders is highly present in the family in patriarchy. Rich claims that “Engels is correct in his famous statement that in the patriarchal family the husband is the bourgeois and the wife and children the proletariat.” (119)
The author brings in Friedrich Engel’s remark on the origin of the family, where he claims that because the men is predominantly the bread winner in the family, he is granted a higher position in the structure of the family than the mother, whose main work is taking care of the children and maintaining the home. He further indicates that not even a democratic republic can eliminate the antagonism between the two classes. However, it sets the very ground where the unequal status of the two genders can be challenged. The most important condition, which needs to be installed is the equality of all members of both parties in front of the law in order to abolish the supreme status of men over women. (Engels, Unternmann, Morgan 744)

Corresponding with Engel’s remark on family in patriarchal is Rich’s challenge of the privileged status of fathers in patriarchal families. She discovered that it had significant influences on the relationship between mother and children.

[…] the token nature of fatherhood, which gives a man rights and privileges over children toward whom he assumes minimal responsibility […] – all these are connecting fibers of this invisible institution, and they determine our relationship to our children whether we like to think so or not. (277)

Rich emphasizes here that although the institution of motherhood is an invisible construction, the male supremacy in the patriarchal family, nevertheless, conducts women’s roles as mothers. As the dominate care taker, women are assumed to have most of the responsibility towards their children, yet men enjoy the privileged status in the family. Rich argues, therefore further that “the mother-child relationship is the essential human relationship. In the creation of the patriarchal family, violence is done to this fundamental human unit.” (127) The violence the author mentions is not a form of “actual violence” (275), but more a process of interfering in the relationship between
mother and child in order to demonstrate the relationship of power. In patriarchal society women represent subjectivity and relationship, whereas men represent separation and objectivity. Women are, thus, assigned to the nuclear family, yet men still decide where the female principles are valid and where not, which represents the power relationship between men and women in a family in a patriarchal society. (Farewell 193-4)

In order to maintain the power relationship between men and women, Rich argues that “guilt is the most powerful form of social control of women” to which “none of us can be entirely immune to it.” (206) Rich demonstrates that women during her time were constantly experiencing the fear of being guilty; for instance, when they aimed at fulfilling a career outside of the home, when they did not conform to the feminine ideals or, when there was something wrong with their children. The author claims that “under the institution of motherhood, the mother is the first to blame if theory proves unworkable in practice, or if anything whatsoever goes wrong.” (222) Women were the ones who were made constantly guilty and as a result constantly questioned themselves “Am I doing what is right? Am I doing enough? Am I doing too much?” (223) Rich includes the standard questions which every mother has most likely asked herself. An authentic picture of the feelings women experience as mothers is represented by the author in order to demonstrate to the readers that they are not alone with their thoughts. She further claims that “the powerless responsibility for human lives, the judgements and condemnations, the fear of her own power, the guilt, the guilt, the guilt” (277) constructed the reality for many mothers. It aims at presenting that the unequal status of women led to the experience of great guilt. The repetition strengthens her claim and at the same time demonstrates how present it was in women’s lives.

The time period in connection with the fixed gender roles associated in society constructed the feminine ideal, including the institution of motherhood. In order to maintain this social order and beliefs, social sciences were often used as a foundation. As already elaborated in Friedan’s work, Sigmund Freud was one of the most prominent thinkers in the Western hemisphere during the post-war era, and, hence, his concepts and ideas enjoyed prestige in society. Similar to Friedan, however, Rich was not entirely in favor of his beliefs and aimed at challenging his assumptions. The two concepts, which are again criticized the most, are Oedipus complex and idea of penis envy. Rich acknowledges that “no one aspect of his theory has been more influential than the so-called Oedipus complex” (196) and further explains that nearly every mother, no matter if she had read Freud’s
essays or not, was trying to refuse physical affection towards their sons in fear of being “seductive” or of “castrating” them which would, according to Freud, result in homosexuality.

In addition, she presents various scholars who were Anti-Freudians and who shared similar beliefs as Kate Mitchell towards Freud’s ideas on Oedipus complex and penis envy. (cf. 3.3. Freudian Ideas and Concepts) Among them are Karen Horney, Clara Thompson and Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, who share the feminist approach towards penis envy that it is present in little girls because the penis demonstrates privilege and favor, and the concept is, thus, a consequence of a society which values men more than women. In addition, Horney was among the first once to question Freud’s thoughts and claimed that his assumptions towards the Oedipus complex could not be interpreted universally, but rather believed that they were results of individual cases. (196-8) Rich includes Horney assumptions, yet states that “for us her views do not press far enough.” (197) Rich aims at demonstrating that for Freud “culture depends on the son-father relationship.” (197) The father represents culture itself and civilization represents the identification with the father, not the mother. (198) The claims Rich makes should illustrate the power patriarchy has over women and that Freud himself “was also a man, terribly limited both by his culture and his gender.” (196) For Rich, Freud’s assumptions are flawed because of his own experiences as a man in a world that is dominated by his gender. Therefore, Rich claims that “his work, on both women and on men, lacks a kind of truth which has been called political and which I would call poetic and scientific as well.” (202)

In the millions words written on women and by women, Rich’s account on motherhood is truly revolutionary. Scholars have argued that her voice was both personal and scholarly, which resonated with innumerous women around the United States. In addition, she was not afraid to question the assumptions of motherhood in a patriarchal society, which was much needed in feminist criticism. (Hirsch 201) Rich’s narrative functions as a prime example of how “the personal is political”. The book puts into practice what feminism has aimed at teaching society. It presents a mixture of reflection and ideological analysis combined with the author’s personal experiences, which in the process creates a new way of writing that differs significantly from the one of male writers, who tend to refuse to mix the person with the idea. Rich, however, knows that she is a mother and at the same time a writer, and, thus, refuses to separate her two identities while presenting and deconstructing the idea of motherhood as an institution. The author does not hide behind patriarchal thought, but rather aims at encouraging women to share and reflect on their
personal experiences in order to create a fairer world for women. (Maraini and Ciccarello 689-90) In her revised version of her book Of Woman Born ten years later Rich states in her foreword “Only the willingness to share private and sometimes painful experience can women enable to create a collective description of the world which will be truly ours.” (16) Of Woman Born is a prime example of how Rich shared her experiences in hopes of devoting to the feminist idea of creating a world that is “truly ours.” (Van Cleaf 256)

4.2.2. REPRODUCTION AND SEXUALITY

After having analyzed how Adrienne Rich challenges the feminine ideal of the 1960s and 1970s with her focus on the deconstruction of motherhood as an institution, the following subchapter will analyze how the author discusses issues concerning women’s health and sexuality. The chapter will begin with elaborating issues of women’s health in regard to the regulation of the reproductive power of women by men. Issues, such as abortion, sterilization as well as rape have been raised by the author and will, thus, be analyzed in this chapter. Ultimately, the topic of sexuality will be discussed in terms of the female body and female sexuality in patriarchy. Additionally, it will be investigated how Adrienne Rich views homosexuality in her book.

The female body has been viewed in patriarchal structures throughout history as a construct with two opposing sides combined in one body. On the one hand it was viewed as “impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination, “the devil’s gateway. On the other hand, as mother the woman is beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing.” (34) Rich provides a vivid description of how the female body was viewed, especially the negative connotations are stressed in the extract. The purity as well as the seductiveness of the female body has caused controversy throughout history. Rich stresses this assumption by calling it “the devil’s gateway”, which emphasizes that the female body was accused of provoking evil in men and thus functioned as the gateway to carry out this evil. Yet, on the other hand, the female body has always been the necessary territory for reproduction. Women’s ability to reproduce has been viewed as sacred. The positive side of the female body was predominantly associated with woman’s role as mother.

The powerful ability to reproduce is crucial for patriarchy and, therefore, Rich claims “the woman’s body is the terrain on which patriarchy is erected.” (55) The female body is “terribly necessary” (112) for men to satisfy their sexual needs and to provide them with their own offspring. Yet, at
the same time women’s bodies have experienced throughout history the control of men. Rich further states that “the female generative organs, the matrix of human life, have become a prime target of patriarchal technology.” (127) The claim emphasizes that during Rich’s time period in the 1960s and 1970s, men were in charge of defining women’s rights over their bodies. As already elaborated in the chapter 2.2. *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, until the women’s movement in the 60s and 70s various regulations of the reproductive power of women was declared by men, such as abortion rights, sterilization or the definition of rape. The power men had over women’s body is called “patriarchal technology” by Rich in order to demonstrate that patriarchy decided how the female body was supposed to function. Because of the lack of power over their own bodies, Rich argues that “this culture and its political institutions have split us off from itself.” (285) In order to stress her argument she provides a clear depiction of how women experience the alienation process towards their own body due to the images and the remarks they have seen and heard throughout their lives.

I know of no woman- virgin, mother, lesbian, married, celibate- whether she earns her keep as a housewife, a cocktail waitress, or a scanner of brain waves- for whom her body is not a fundamental problem: its clouded meaning, its fertility, its desire, its so-called frigidity, its bloody speech, its silences, its changes and mutilations, its rape and ripenings. (284)

The female body as it had been defined in patriarchy has developed into a problem for many women. Rich demonstrates how it turned out to be disturbing for many women no matter what their professions were or how their lives looked like. By emphasizing the different professions, the author wants to stress that it has not to do with the women’s intellect or their careers, but rather with the societal constructed image that women have of their bodies. Rich claims that it is a problem for all women. Additionally, Rich describes the female body’s activities and wishes in rather lively terms by calling the menstruation for instance “bloody speech”. The author’s writing style reminds the reader of her background as a poet. She plays around with words connected to speaking, such as speech and silence, which could be interpreted as the voice the female body inherits but is not able to use in a patriarchal society where the female body is controlled by men. The only way is through menstruation which at the same time is a symbol for men of the impurity of the female body. Female menstruation has always been a problematic issue for men. Therefore, “the menstrual taboo” has been invented by man, which is the process of declaring female menstruation as an act that has to be denied or at least made invisible. Margaret Mead has assumed for instance that “the menstrual taboo was created by men out of primitive fear of blood.” (105) The purely natural
menstruation cycle “is yet another aspect of female experience which patriarchal thinking has turned inside out rendering it sinister or disadvantageous.” (106) Rich illustrates how strong patriarchal power is over the female body and how it influences the connection between women and their own bodies negatively. Natural processes were alienated and turned into a taboo, simply because they were not as purely as the image many had in their minds of the female body. The author, however, is not afraid of tackling issues which were assumed to be taboo in order to provoke her readers to question the assumptions in society. There is indeed nothing wrong with women’s bodies during their menstruation, it even demonstrates that “a woman is potentially, if not actually, a mother.” (107) On the other hand, however, the fluids that exit men’s bodies are viewed positively. Rich aims at demonstrating that only the female body has been accused of being polluted whereas “men often exalt and romanticize the seminal fluid.” (106) The author’s remark emphasizes once again that predominantly the female body was territory of suppression caused by patriarchy whereas men tend to idealize their body with its functions.

The author herself experienced firsthand what it meant to have a body that is dominated and regulated by men. In the book, Adrienne Rich describes how she experienced throughout her three pregnancies flares of arthritis and other small illnesses, which made her decide after her third son was born to have a sterilization. Her husband supported her decision, yet wondered whether she would feel “less feminine” after the operation, which demonstrates again the high prestige motherhood enjoyed in society and how it was a major contributor to the feminine ideal. Nevertheless, Rich was confident with her decision and decided to have a sterilization. Her decision, however, had to be approved by her husband and to be presented to a male panel. Since the author had a profound medical reason to have a sterilization it was accepted by the all-male committee. Her own judgment as a woman over her own body would not have been enough. (29) The description of this personal decision provides an insight into the powerlessness women experienced during her time. Women were not able to regulate their own bodies; in almost every case approval first by their husbands and then by a committee of unfamiliar men was needed. Rich’s situation indicates that the government during that time in the United States was a patriarchal state, which can be seen on the significant effects government regulations had on gender relations. (cf. 3.2. Patriarchy)

Even stricter regulated than sterilization was the process of having an abortion. The topic of abortion had an advent in the public during the 1960s. Feminists pressured state governments to
legalize abortion in order to secure a safe medical process for women who did not want to keep the embryo. It took until the 1970s until abortions were made legal in some states in America. (cf. 2.3. Our Bodies, Ourselves) In the book Rich did not aim to discuss all the opinions in favor or against abortion, but simply wanted to demonstrate what consequences the regulation of abortions as illegal had on numerous women in the United States. Women who were victims of rape, unwanted pregnancies or who simply were not able to afford another child often risked their lives in order to have a self-abortion. Rich presents some of the methods women used:

   Self-abortion by wire coat-hangers, knitting needles, goose quills dipped in turpentine, celery stalks, drenching the cervix with detergent, lye, soap, Ultra-Jel (a commercial preparation of castor oil, soap, and iodine), drinking purgatives or mercury, applying hot coals to the body. (267)

The vivid descriptions of the various methods that were used demonstrates that “an illegal or self-induced abortion is no casual experience. It is painful, dangerous, and cloaked in the guilt of criminality.” (268) Rich aims at demonstrating that women did not carry out a self-abortion because they just did not want to have children; they carried out a life risking procedure because there was no other way for them. The methods that were used illustrate how desperate the women must have been to be able to do something as painful and dangerous to their own bodies. The author, hence, further claims that “no free woman, with 100 percent effective, nonharmful birth control readily available, would “choose” abortion.” (269) Unfortunately, this was still not the case in the 1960s. Rich believes that abortion was the result of a society where women’s bodies were dominated by men and women’s free will was suppressed. She, therefore, concludes that “in a society where women always entered heterosexual intercourse willingly, where adequate contraception was a genuine social priority, there be no “abortion issue”.(269) The author’s claim might be a little simple, nevertheless it aims at encouraging the reader to pressure society to create a society where women’s rights over their own bodies are central.

Besides sterilization and abortion, rape was another concern that was regulated by a patriarchal state during Rich’s time. Laws regulated that a man could not have been accused of raping his own wife. Rich considers the “conjugal rights” of man “violence of the institution of marriage.” (26) Patriarchal state regulations, which enabled men to carry out their power in the most violent way over women are the most powerful instruments to maintain patriarchy and, hence, the suppression of women. The law which in a sense permitted husbands to rape their wives indicated that women
were the property and, thus, no rape could occur there. In addition, Susan Griffin indicates that rape was understood in society as stealing some other men’s property. This approach explains why a husband could not be accused of raping his own wife, because “how can any man steal what already belongs to him?” (Griffin 22)

In the 1970s, rape was the most frequent committed violent crime in the United States. (Griffin 26) Rich includes in her book anecdotes of women who have been raped and the reaction they earned from their family, especially their mothers. One story of a woman who had been raped when she was a young girl revealed that her mother told her that she had brought disgrace to the family. Another woman had been raped by her father when she was little and her mother told her not to tell anybody about it, which later in life made the woman more furious towards her mother than towards her molester. (244) The examples Rich presents, demonstrate how society viewed rape, namely as the fault of the victims. Griffin calls rape, therefore, “a form of mass terrorism.” (35) Rape chooses its victims without consideration, yet the propaganda that was highly present in society and which aims at maintaining male supremacy, told women that they were the ones who caused rape. Women were accused of being “in the wrong place at the wrong time” or of “behaving as if they were free”. The accusation of women was such a common belief shared among society that the fear of rape kept females at home, off the streets in the dark and, additionally, passive and modest, because they feared that any other behavior could be interpreted as provocative and, hence, lead to rape. Griffin as well as Rich urge in their writings that women will not be entirely free if the act of rape is still a threat for them. The nature of men’s behavior must change in order to free women from the constant threat of being raped. (Griffin 35)

The perception of rape victims in the post-war society in the United States indicates also how women were viewed as sexual beings. Rich explains that women were not understood as sexual beings, they were “permitted to be sexual only at a certain time of life” (183), which was usually assumed to be before they were mothers and, thus, at a younger age. “The sensuality of mature- and certainly of aging- women has been perceived as grotesque, threatening, and inappropriate.” (183) Rich illustrates how the male dominated society shaped the image of women as sexual beings. The cultural forces restricted women as mothers to be sexual. Rich explains in her book, however, that childbirth and breast feeding were indeed sexual experiences which the mother encountered, but she was supposed to suppress and not talk about it because they were considered inappropriate feelings. The author describes that natural childbirth can have great influence on women’s later
sexual experiences, because it can increase the capacity for genital pleasure. Many women, therefore, have orgasms for the first time after they had a natural birth. Rich further states that it had been documented that women experienced erotic sensation while actually giving birth. The experience, the author assumed, has, however, been denied by scientists as well as the women who might actually experience them until recently. By including a new perspective towards child birth in terms of female sexuality Rich aims at demonstrating how cultural forces desexualize women. Childbirth had been conceived by patriarchy as “a kind of production” and not as a female experience. It was believed that female sexuality was primarily used for reproduction. Furthermore, Rich claims that women need to choose their own forms of sexuality in order to reach sexual autonomy. (183-184)

The freedom for women to define their own sexuality poses a threat to patriarchy, because it could also mean that women were able to reject heterosexuality. This would, hence, mean that patriarchy was in danger of surviving. Rich claims that “patriarchy could not survive without motherhood and heterosexuality in their institutional forms.” (43) Women were defined to be mothers to maintain men’s offspring. Homosexual women were, therefore, viewed as the “embodiments of the great threat to male hegemony” (252), because they rejected the idea of reproduction. Their sexual orientation was alienated by patriarchal society which Rich illustrates in her book. Unlike Friedan, Rich does not degrade homosexuality, but rather tries to demonstrates how patriarchal society viewed homosexuality, which was indeed a very negative perception. Mothers were afraid to “cause” homosexuality in their sons if they treated them too sensitively or showed too much affection. Connected to Freud’s idea of the castration process, society was encouraged to raise boys to “real male” in fear of having a homosexual child. It was all the result of patriarchal ideology, which feared homosexuality in both men and women. (210-11)

Rich presents in her book a wide range of issues concerning women’s health and sexuality. Most of them are linked to her major claim of rejecting the institution of motherhood as it is created by patriarchy. The author illustrates vividly how “the female body has been both territory and machine, virgin wilderness to be exploited and assembly-line turning out life.” (285) Unlike Friedan, Rich demonstrates how women’s reproductive power was regulated by men during her time. She includes her personal experience of her sterilization in order to raise awareness how little power women had over their bodies, yet how much power men had over them. Summing up it can be said that Rich presents an authentic approach towards a variety of topics concerning women’s
health and sexuality. The author is not afraid of depicting the reality of women’s experiences in a society and culture that is dominated by men. As many scholars have argued, Rich’s account on women’s lives in the 1960s and 1970s is a revolutionary one which connects the private with the public and thus creates a new way of storytelling, which not only reached millions of women in the United States but also raised their consciousness.

Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* and Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born- Motherhood as Experience and Institution* are two feminist classics, which influenced millions of women around the world to raise their voices to fight female oppression. The authors provided a voice for women who suffered in silence locked away in their homes and in their assumed roles as mothers and housewives. Friedan and Rich were not afraid of questioning the construction of the feminine ideal by a society which was “deeply resistant to fundamental change.” (Rich xiv) External forces in society, such as the media, education, doctors, social scientists, as well as policies constructed by a patriarchal state were challenged by the two writers in order to make the public aware of the fundamental inequality of the two sexes located in the society of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. Friedan and Rich used literature to express the power of the female voice by questioning the status quo and deconstructing the feminine ideal and thus encouraging innumerous women to protest. Mary Carruthers once said “language is the medium in which we carry our past, determine our present, and condition our future.” (282) Betty Friedan and Adrienne Rich have both done exactly that. Through language the authors illustrated the past and the present and aimed at changing the future for women.
5. Speaking Out: Protest

Betty Friedan and Adrienne Rich’s books functioned as consciousness raising writings, which questioned the status quo. The following chapter and last primary source analyzed in this thesis will press a little further and illustrate the protest, which the two other writings erected. Erica Jong’s novel *Fear of Flying* will be used as an example for women’s protest. Unlike Betty Friedan’s and Adrienne Rich’s work, Erica Jong’s book is a novel and not a theoretical text, but also a feminist bestseller, which was published in 1973. The openness about sexuality the novel presents, hit the feminist nerve and sexual revolution, which was at full swing during the 1970s. The analysis of the last primary source will begin with a short overview of the plot of the novel including a brief description of the main characters. The short overview of the novel will be followed by the analysis of the representation of the feminine ideal, which the main character encountered in society throughout her life. It will be elaborated how the author protests against the feminine ideal of the time in the form of the main character Isadora White Wing. Ultimately, the focus of the analysis will shift to the main theme of the book: women’s sexuality. Issues concerning women’s sexuality that are raised in the novel will be analyzed in greater detail. It is the aim of this section to demonstrate that Erica Jong’s novel with its focus on female sexuality is a protest against the assumed gender roles and sexuality during the 1960s and 1970s.

5.1. Fear of Flying (Erica Jong)

“Bigamy is having one husband too many. Monogamy is the same.” - Anonymous (a woman)

The novel *Fear of Flying* by Erica Jong was published in 1973 and has been considered a feminist breakthrough. (Shapiro 71) It tells the story of the lustful heroine Isadora White Wing, a mid-thirty Jewish American journalist living with her psychoanalyst husband Bennet Wing in New York City. The couple has been married for five years and Isadora begins to experience unrest in her marriage and desires for other men. Nevertheless, the couple travels to a psychoanalytic congress in Vienna together, the birthplace of Freud and his psychoanalyses. Being in psychoanalytic therapy almost her whole life, Isadora knows the drill and also most of the other doctors who are going to the congress with them. At the congress in Vienna Isadora accidently meets another professor from England, Adrian Goodlove, to whom she feels immediately drawn. His imperfect body and appearance, his sexist remarks and his impoliteness attracts her against all the odds. In order to prove to herself that she can once again be a sexual, independent and free woman, she starts an
affair with him and leaves her husband to travel with Adrian through Europe. Adrian forces her to finally live in the moment. In the spirit of existentialism the two take a road trip through Europe. The trip, however, turns out to be not as romantic and sensual as the protagonist expected, but rather contained intensive alcohol consumption, lack of sexual intercourse and innumerous depressing moments for Isadora while working through her past, which in the end leads the protagonist back in the arms of her husband.

The three main characters in the novel are Isadora White Wing, her husband Bennet Wing and her affair Adrian Goodlove. Isadora is the first person narrator of the story. She is a mid-thirty writer currently in her second marriage to Bennet Wing, an Asian psychoanalyst. The marriage has faced ups and downs in their five years, which led to the fact that both of them are in psychoanalysis to work up their past as well as their marriage problems. The story revolves around Isadora’s life, telling the story about her two marriages, her crazy family, her childhood and finally her decision to leave behind her husband to take off to Europe with a man she had just met, Adrian Goodlove. Adrian is depicted as the typical anti-hero in the story. He is not extremely attractive, impolite and at times even dirty. Nevertheless, Isadora feels immediate attraction to him. The protagonist seems to be an independent woman, yet occasionally deeply depressed and cautious about herself. It appears that on the one hand Isadora aims at living an individual life as an independent woman, but on the other hand fears loneliness and tries to fulfill the assumed female gender roles in society and the expectations of her family. Her struggle between the desire to be independent and the desire to belong leads her first in the hands of Adrian Goodlove but in the end back to her husband Bennett.

5.1.1. GROWING UP FEMALE

The novel evolves around the female first person narrator Isadora White Wing, who grew up in the United States after the Second World War. The narrator describes that from an early stage on she experienced what it was like to “grow up female in America.” (9) The ideal feminine image transported by the media, practiced at school and at home shaped the first person narrator’s life. “You grew up with your ears full of cosmetic ads, love songs, advice columns, whoreoscopes, Hollywood gossip, and moral dilemmas on the level of TV soap operas.” (9-10) A rather vivid picture has been created of how Isadora experienced her youth. Especially the media with its advertisements had a strong influence on young women. In order to demonstrate how young
females were conceived by the media to follow a feminine ideal that was mostly concerned with beauty, appearance and catching a man, an extensive list of advertisement slogans is additionally included in the novel.

‘Be kind to your behind.’ ‘Blush like you mean it.’ ‘Love your hair.’ ‘Want a better body? We’ll rearrange the one you’ve got.’ ‘That shine on your face should come from him, not from your skin.’ ‘You’ve come a long way, baby.’ ‘How to score with every male in the zodiac.’ ‘The stars and sensual you.’ ‘To a man they say Cutty Sark.’ ‘A diamond is forever.’ ‘If you’re concerned about douching…’ ‘Length and coolness come together.’ ‘How I solve my intimate odor problem.’ ‘Lady be cool.’ ‘Every women alive loves Chanel No.5.’ ‘What makes a shy girl get intimate?’ ‘Femme, we named it after you.’ (10)

The slogans illustrate an image of the perception of women. All of them transport a stereotypical image of women, which assumed that their main concerns were their appearance, their beauty, their sexual activity and their love lives. Hardly any ads encouraged women to become scientists or inventors, because the priority for women was believed to be in other spheres. In addition, the explicit language which the author uses throughout the book is already visible here, although it is to a smaller degree than what is yet to come, it is visible that Jong is not afraid of talking about female intimacy to illustrate what version of female gender was presented through media.

The author, however, not only presents which images were transported to females in the post-war era in the United States, Jong also claims what significant influence this perception had on women. She states that it did not matter if women were smart and interested in pursuing a career or living an independent life, the images were so present in young people’s lives that no matter what, women would live their lives pursuing a feminine ideal. The ideal encouraged them to get married, have children and eventually leave behind their dreams of an individual career. Additionally, women were strengthened to value their beauty and their seductive power more than their minds.

And the crazy part of it was that even if you were clever […], even if you studied history or zoology or physics and hoped to spend your life pursuing some difficult and challenging career– you still had a mind full of all that soupy longings that every high-school girl was awash in. It didn’t matter, you see, whether you had an IQ of 170 or of 70, you were brainwashed all the same. (10)

Similar to Betty Friedan, Jong names the process of constantly confronting women with a flawed image of femaleness “brainwashing”. The “soupy longings”, as the author calls it, could be found in nearly every woman, because the image of perfect femininity was so extraordinarily present in
society that it danced in front of America’s women on a daily basis in the 60s and 70s and indeed brainwashed them. Moreover, not even the most intelligent females were able to escape the assumed roles constructed by society which restricted women predominantly to become mothers and wives.

Despite of the media, the narrator in *Fear of Flying* also experiences that social sciences had great influence on women, which the two other primary sources have proven as well. The narrator in the novel has been in psychoanalysis for quite some time and, thus, has also changed her doctors numerous times. At the beginning of the novel, she explains her recent fall out with her psychoanalyst. The narrator explained to her doctor that she “felt dishonest when she used her seductiveness to get what she wanted from men.” (20) The analyst, however, always believed that “any protestation against conventional female behavior had to be ‘phallic’ and ‘aggressive’.” The narrator claims that the doctor interpreted any women’s liberation idea as a neurotic problem and even challenged her belief of being a woman. “‘Maybe you don’t understand what it means to be a woman’, he countered. […] ‘Don’t you see that men have *always* defined femininity as a means of keeping women in line? Why should I listen to you about what it means to be a woman?’” (20) The incident in the novel provides a clear picture of how the female image was strongly present even in social science. Women who did not confirm to their assumed gender role by society were believed to be abnormal, neurotic and even sick. Furthermore, the narrator’s reply to the doctor’s remark on women represents the idea that was shared among feminists during the second wave, namely that the concept of femininity was culturally constructed by a society that was interested in maintaining the subordinated position of women. Yet the incident also shows that men believed to know what it meant to be a woman and, therefore, defined it, as it can also be seen with Freud’s theories.

Sigmund Freud and his ideas occur various times within the novel. The married couple travels to a psychoanalytical congress to Vienna, which is the birthplace of Freud. There they visit Freud’s former home and dive into his past. Freud’s greatest influence on the first person narrator is, however, in the form of her husband Bennett, who is also a psychoanalyst. He derives his thoughts from Freud’s theory and practices psychoanalysis. In addition, both of them see psychoanalyst frequently. The “Jewish science” as it was named by anti-Semites has great influence on the protagonist’s marriage. (7) Her husband wants to talk about every issue first with his therapist and then with his wife. The narrator, thus claims, that their “marriage has become a *menage à quatre.*
You, him, your analyst, his analyst. Four in bed. This picture is definitely rated X.” (8) The passage demonstrates that psychoanalysis has great influence on their marriage. The narrator experiences it as if the therapist is part of their marriage, even in bed with them. The situation is presented in rather sexual terms by declaring that all four of them end in bed, which is Jong’s trademark throughout the book.

In addition, the first person narrator mocks the technique used by psychoanalysts of analyzing dreams and the unconscious of the patient right from the beginning of the novel. She declares that her therapists have always interpreted every dream or desire in terms of female sexuality according to Freud’s concepts of penis envy, phallic stage or Oedipus complex. To prove her claim Isadora provides an anecdote of one of her many therapeutic sessions in which she illustrates how frustrated she became with her analyst for always interpreting everything in terms of Freud’s concept. “But the broken leg in the dream represents your own ‘mutilated genital.’ You always wanted to have a penis and now you feel guilty that you have deliberately broken your leg so that you can have the pleasure of the cast, no? No!” (7) The random connection between the narrator’s broken leg and Freud’s assumption of the female’s desire to have a penis demonstrates how the author aims at showing the absurdity of the belief that women who are more independent only want to be male.

Besides the remarks towards the concept of penis envy, Freud’s Oedipus complex also occurs in the novel. When Isadora cannot make up her mind with whom she wants to be with, her husband “was convinced that Adrian ‘only’ represented her father, and in that case it was kosher.” (140) The importance of Freud’s thoughts in the narrator’s marriage is again visible here. Her husband values Freud’s concepts more than showing his affection for his wife and pursuing her to stay. By using the word “kosher” the author emphasizes the Jewish connection to Freud’s ideas. It symbolizes a playful account of the connection between Judaism, psychoanalysis and the narrator herself, who is in fact Jewish. Furthermore, Bennett believed that his wife was “merely ‘acting out’ an Oedipal situation” and “as long as it was Oedipus, not love” he could understand it (141), which stresses further the prestige Freud’s idea on the Oedipus complex enjoyed. Towards the end of the novel the concept occurred again in a more provocative form than before. Isadora was visiting her sister and her family in Beirut, when her brother-in-law was trying to pursue her to have oral sexual intercourse with him. The narrator certainly declined and was left with a shock that her own brother-in-law would make such an attempt at her. Yet, she began to think about what the consequences of such an action would be, which led her back to Freud’s theory of the Oedipus
complex, which includes little girls’ affection towards their own fathers. “Because if you start blowing your sister’s husband, the next thing you know you’ll be blowing your mother’s husband-and good grief- that’s daddy!” (266) She adds to her revelation the idea that was shared among her psychoanalysts: “But your shrink insist that it’s Daddy you really want. So why is having him so unthinkable? Maybe you should blow Daddy and be done with it? Maye that’s the only way to overcome the fear?” (266) Without further elaborating the provocative statement is left here by the author. It demonstrates again the protest the book symbolizes without any verbal restrictions followed by the author. Jong articulates the anger many women might have experienced and dares to ask the questions nobody was able to voice. The reader might be left slightly shocked about her assumption of having sexual intercourse with the own father, but at the same time the courage to state something provocative as that might encourage other women to raise their voices and protest against norms assumed by society.

In order to enable women to raise their voices, Jong declares in her novel that now was the time for women to protest, because now there are books written by women who provide a different side of the story than before. In the author’s typical provocative and sexually explicit tone she states that “throughout all of history, books were written with sperm, not menstrual blood” (27), which should demonstrate that the beliefs were created and shaped only by men. Jong aims at providing a female voice in the form of the main character Isadora who rejects stereotypical ideas about women. Freud’s ideas on femininity is for instance one of them. The rejection of Freudian thought is also visible in the narrator’s decision to choose Adrian, a Laing psychoanalyst over her husband Bennett, who derives his thoughts from Freud. (Estrin 311) Freud and Laing were both highly influential psychoanalysts in the twentieth century, yet differ slightly in their ideas and assumptions. Laing was a psychoanalyst and a political radical whose interest was predominantly on schizophrenia and how social interrelationships in which humans are set influence intelligibility. Although he believed in Freud’s theories, Laing aimed at using and creating them in a new way. (Mitchel 233-4) Isadora’s leaving of her husband can, therefore, be interpreted as a rejection of Freud’s thoughts and concepts, as it has already been visible in the other two feminist writings as well as in various feminist scholars during the second wave.

Connected to the idea of femininity with its influence of Freudian thoughts, was the alienation process of unmarried women that was carried out by society in post-war America. It is also visible in Erica Jong’s novel, as I have already discussed in the analysis of the two other primary sources.
The narrator experiences that after five years of her marriage she begins to feel desires and longings apart from her husband. She claims that “five years of marriage had made me itchy for all those things: itchy for men, and itchy for solitude. Itchy for sex, and itchy for the life of a recluse.” (11) The author constantly repeats the verb “itchy” to emphasize how desperate the first person narrator is for change. Repetition tend to strengthen arguments and to present their significance to the readers. Additionally, the verb “itchy” triggers the feeling of something tickling, which needs to be stopped. The narrator, however, refuses to relive herself just yet, but reminds the readers that the “itches were un-American- […] It is heresy in America to embrace any way of life expect as half of a couple. Solitude is un-American.” (11) This idea, nevertheless, only applies to women, whereas men might be even considered “glamorous bachelors” (11).

But a woman is always presumed to be alone as a result of abandonment, not choice. And she is treated that way: as a pariah. There is simply no dignified way for a woman to live alone. […] Her friends, her family, her fellow workers never let her forget that her husbandlessness, her childlessness- her selfishness, in short- is a reproach to the American way of life. (11)

The narrator describes explicitly how society shapes women’s beliefs and even claims that marriage is one aspect of the “American way of life”. Everybody who wanted to be “herself instead of half of something else” (11) was viewed suspiciously. Unmarried women without children were considered selfish which led many women during that time into bad marriages, simply because they did not want to live alone. Additionally, being single was in many cases “downright dangerous” for women, as the narrator states. It often implied poverty and “the unquestioned status of social pariah.” (87) By using the strong expression of “pariah” for women who decided to remain unmarried or without children, the author emphasizes the lower status these women enjoyed and how society constructed the concept on purpose to pursue women into marriage in order to maintain male hegemony.

The first person narrator experienced throughout her life the consequences of images of femininity presented in society. She could not imagine herself unmarried and on her own, even though she longed for personal freedom numerous times within the novel. In the end, however, the fear of loneliness and rejection by society was stronger than her desire for individuality. In order to demonstrate how present the image of marriage was in her mind, the narrator claims that “all my fantasies included marriage. […] I couldn’t imagine myself without a man. Without one, I felt lost
as a dog without a master; rootless, faceless, undefined. [...] Being unmarried in a man’s world was such a hassle that anything had to be better.” (86) The emphasis here lies on demonstrating that the world the narrator lives in is clearly dominated by men, where women enjoy a suppressed status. The comparison with a dog illustrates the sense of being lost the narrator experiences without a man. She needs a man to be guided similar to a dog who needs a master. The great influence men have on the narrator’s personality is additionally visible in the extract. She experiences a sense of incompleteness without a man by her side, which demonstrates again the severe influences of the social constructed feminine ideal on women. Even the most independent women, as the narrator represents one, could hardly imagine themselves without a man.

Additionally to the fear of being without a man, the narrator describes how she imagined marriage throughout her adolescence. The pictures she had in mind were the ones transported by media and through literature. In her mind marriage was all about “total mutuality’, ‘companionship’, ‘equality’.” (87) The narrator soon, however, discovered that her ideal marriage was far from the reality and that she certainly lacked knowledge about how a marriage functioned during her time period. “What did I know? [...] Did I know about how men sit there glued to their paper while you clear the table? How they pretend to be all thumbs when you ask them to mix the frozen orange juice?” (87) A few examples are provided how the narrator experienced inequality in her marriage. It represents the daily chores women were supposed to carry out while men took a break from their busy lives. The power relation that occurs within a marriage where women are supposed to carry out all the housework alone and men enjoy a superior statues due to the work they do outside of the home is named by the narrator as “the bullshit of me-Tarzan, you-Jane.” (87) The reference to the jungle characters should illustrate how primitive the relation was between men and women and also how absurd it was, because she is living as an educated woman in post-war America and not as an illiterate wilderness resident. In the narrator’s belief an intact marriage can only be achieved when both partners outgrow the primitive behavior and finally except each other as two equal partners in the world. In order to receive that, the narrator believes that especially men are in urge to alter their mindset. She encourages them to leave their “nonsense” behind and accept women as their equal. (88) Jong’s declaration in the form of the first person narrator speaks, therefore, with every essence to the feminist beliefs shared among the second wave.

The concept of marriage is throughout the novel rather complicated for the first person narrator. On the one hand, she experiences fear towards being alone and losing her husband, yet on the other
hand she wishes to practice her freedom and to break out of her known environment. The novel presents the constant struggle of the first person narrator between her urge to run and her fear of loneliness. At one point in the story, for instance, Isadora believes that her husband has left with another woman, because she flirted too much with Adrian, which suddenly releases in her a great fear of being alone. “In a flesh, I knew he had left with Marie and taken her home to bed. I was terrified. I’d finally provoked him into it. That was the end of me. I’d spend the rest of my lonely life husbandless, childless, and neglected.” (89) Jong describes explicitly how the narrator experiences the panic of her husband leaving her. Isadora even believes that it would be the end of her because now she will have to live alone. The incident emphasizes how dependent the first person narrator is on her husband or on men in general. She is not able to imagine herself without a man by her side.

Moreover, the fear of being alone haunts Isadora throughout the novel. Occasionally on her trip with Adrian, the narrator experiences strong desires to be back with her husband in her well-known environment and with security. She does not want to be the runaway woman anymore in search of her identity and an adventure with an almost stranger, but rather longs to be ordinary.

I suddenly had a passion to be that ordinary girl. To be that good little housewife, that glorified American mother, that mascot from Mademoiselle, that matron form McCall’s, that cutie from Cosmo, that girl with the Good Housekeeping Seal tattooed on her ass and advertising jingles programmed in her brain. (277)

The exercising of freedom in a society which restricts women to their biological role can be very difficult, which leads many women back to their known environment, their homes, their marriages. As Betty Friedan already stated in her writing: “Freedom is a frightening thing.” ( Feminine Mystique 165) Many women are most likely to rather suffer unhappiness in their marriages and their roles as mothers and housewives than to take the courage and break out of their assigned roles to practice their individual freedoms. The narrator experiences the struggle between her urge to run away from the ordinary on the one hand and the longing for safety on the other hand. The female images that are presented in the abstract demonstrates the stereotypical roles of women the narrator grew up with. Isadora suddenly experiences the desire to become every female image the media presented from the happy housewife to the lovely cover model of Cosmopolitan magazine. The brainwashing process is emphasized in her longing again by claiming that she wanted to be a housewife with slogans “programmed in her brain” (277), which is a strong choice of words to
symbolize the brainwashing the media carried out. Additionally, the abstract demonstrate that the author’s verbal range is clearly not restricted to any norms. She is not afraid to include words, such as ‘ass’, in her novel in order to protest against society’s construction of the feminine ideal and to reach the reader’s attention.

The narrator’s longings to fulfill the American female ideal, however, did not last long and she remembered that the pretty images she had in mind about the happy wife or the cheerful cover model also have great flaws. Marriage after all was not always the solution to the fear of loneliness. Being with someone did not mean automatically less loneliness, which the narrator experienced in her marriage with Bennett.

I thought of all those mornings in New York when I had awakened with my husband and felt just as lonely. All those lonely mornings we stared at each other across the orange juice and across the coffee cups. [...] Marriage could be lonely too. Marriage could be desolate. (278)

By leaving behind her husband and taking off with her lover Adrian, Isadora experiences great struggle. At times she wants nothing more than to be with her husband, yet at the same time she painfully remembers how their marriage was just as lonely as the loveless relationship she encountered with Adrian during their trip. The loneliness is emphasized by the repetition of the adjective “lonely” in the abstract above. It provides a truthful account of the reality of marriage and not as the media presented it in a flawed perspective. In fact, it can be interpreted as a protest against the belief that marriage was the ultimate feminine fulfillment and the happiest of all partnerships.

Similar to the other two primary sources, Fear of Flying also discusses the decision women had to face between their desire to be an individual person and pursuing a career or becoming a mother and housewife. Rich, for instance, called it the decision between individuation and motherhood. (160) Friedan refers to it as the “mistaken choice”, which encouraged women to “go back home” and to reject an individual career (246) and Jong illustrates it in the form of the first person narrator who struggles between her identity as a writer and as a woman. The narrator’s struggle can be traced back to her childhood. Her mother has indicated that she had left her career behind because of her children and, thus, was the embodiment of the either/or choice for women, which haunted the first person narrator throughout her life. Isadora’s mother would assure her hat “‘Women cannot
possibly do both’, she said, ‘you’ve got to choose. Either be an artist or have children’.” (44) Isadora’s mother represents the influences of a patriarchal society where women were restricted to their biological function of reproduction and then encouraged to find fulfillment in their roles as mothers: “Of course my mother had a rationalization for it all- a patriarchal rationalization, the age-old rationalization of women seething with talent and ambition who keep getting knocked up.” (44)

Because of her mother’s lost dream of becoming an artist, Isadora was supposed to live the life her mother never truly had. Her mother “shepherd her career as if it was her own” (167), but at the same time Isadora realized that her mother had two opposing sides in her. The narrator calls it the “bad” and the “good” mother, where the bad mother on the one hand openly expressed her regrets to have had children instead of a career and the good mother, on the other hand, who loved their children deeply and showed great affection towards them. (172) The role model her mother symbolized for the narrator taught her that women were meant to suffer a split in personality. They were meant to struggle between their own identity and their role as a mother. Jong pictures Isadora’s mother purposefully with two sides in order to create a truthful account of women’s suffering. One could argue that the feminine mystique as Betty Friedan defines it applies to Isadora’s mother, because she was not able to find complete fulfillment in her role as mother and housewife even though she loved her children deeply. Furthermore, she functions as a role model to her daughters, who all, besides Isadora, followed their mother’s path and became mothers and housewives. Isadora, however, experienced her mother’s life differently and therefore decided to live a slightly different life. “What I learned from her I learned by example, not exhortation. And the lesson was clear: being a woman meant being harried, frustrated, and always angry. It meant being split into two irreconcilable halves.” (172)

Encouraged by the negative side effects of being a mother and a housewife as she saw in her own mother, the protagonist decided to follow her desire to become a writer. “Because I don’t want to be a woman. Because it’s too confusing. Because Shaw says you can’t be a woman and an artist. Having babies uses you up, he says. And I want to be an artist. That’s all I’ve ever wanted.” (171) The narrator describes the difficulty to be a woman and an artist. Motherhood would interfere with her creativity and ability to write and, therefore, she pursues her career instead of having children. In addition, she distinguishes between being a woman and an artist to emphasize that being a woman was an indication for becoming a mother and not much more. Nevertheless, for her family the narrator represented a failure because of her decision to become an artist instead of a mother.
As already mentioned, all her sister were married and had children, besides Isadora. (51) They shared a different belief of what it meant to be a woman and also on happiness. For Isadora’s sister it was most important to become mothers. The striking difference between the protagonist and her sisters in terms of the perception of their gender is visible within the novel. Isadora impersonates the protesting and provocative woman, who aims at deconstructing an assumption about female gender through her individuality and sexual openness in contrast to the other females in the novel, who are living their lives according to the gender script present in society.

Furthermore, the fact that the narrator in *Fear of Flying* is a woman and an artist has caused interesting critique by some scholars. Rabinowitz, for instance, has argued whether Isadora’s gender caused her suffering or whether it is because she is an artist, who were supposed to suffer to some extent anyway. He further states that the suffering of women due to their gender can, thus, be confused with the artists’ suffering. (qtd. in Hogeland *Feminism and Fiction* 15) His belief, however, has been challenged by Hogeland who believes that Rabinowitz misses a significant aspect that is concerned with feminist literature, namely that the protagonist as a writer represents a freer female character due to her career. Therefore, it is the best choice for the feminist writings of this period, because the protagonist even though she is a woman has more freedom as an artist and can, hence, reject traditional femininity and gender scripts more easily. (Hogeland *Feminism and Fiction* 15)

The narrator’s rejection of the assumed female gender roles is obviously visible in her decision to leave behind her husband and take off with a man she has just met. Her decision to do that, however, was not an easy one, yet at the same time she could not withdraw her decision according to herself. “It was a bet, a dare, a game of Russian roulette, a test of Womanhood.” (188) The narrator wanted to test her own abilities and fulfill her fantasies of being an individual, free and sensual heroine. The comparison with the Russian roulette, nevertheless, indicates that the narrator was indeed aware of the dangers that her decision might bring with it. She risked losing her husband and ending up alone. The metaphor in the title of the novel demonstrates also linkage to the narrator’s “test of Womanhood.” (188) *Fear of Flying* represents on the one hand the narrator’s actual fear of flying with an airplane, which is depicted at the beginning of the novel, when the couple is on their way to Europe and the narrator experiences severe panic attacks and sweaty hands. Yet, on the other hand it can be understood as the fear of being a free and individual person. The narrator might represent a strong, individual woman, yet at the same time she is extremely afraid of being without
a man. In addition, Shapiro has argued that the narrator fears anti-Semitism, which is visible in her lack of comfortability while being in Vienna and also in her stories of her time in Heidelberg, Germany. She lived there with Bennett and discovered what it meant to be a Jewish woman in Germany and potentially a victim of the Holocaust. Although her parents did not practice Judaism actively at home, Isadora experienced an urge to do vast research on the issue of Judaism and the Second World War while being in Germany. The title of the novel can, thus, indicate various meanings. (Shapiro 71)

Although the narrator spreads her wings and rejects her fear of flying by leaving with Adrian, she soon finds herself trapped again in a relationship that is dominated by male rules. Their trip through Europe was supposed to be in the sense of existentialism, which Adrian has already experienced previously during his time in Paris. The belief is shared that the participants only live in the moment and in the past, yet avoid every thought about the future. “When I threw in my lot with Adrian Goodlove, I entered a world in which the rules we lived by were his rules- although, of course, he pretended there were no rules. […] Existentialists were not to inquire what would do tomorrow.” (193) In addition, there are no rules as there are in society, which means that beliefs of fidelity for instance do not exist. Isadora, however, experiences that Adrian tends to alter the rules whenever he wishes. “Adrian made the rules, but he also had the tendency to change them frequently to suit himself.” (194) The first person narrator left behind her marriage with its restrictions and therapies to live out her fantasies and freedom, yet found herself again trapped in a relationship dominated by male rules. It appears that she was not able to escape patriarchy even though she tried. The trip through Europe with Adrian’s false account of their equality and the non-existence of rules can be viewed as the struggle women had to face in society. Although they practiced their freedom, the patriarchal society created rules that women eventually had to follow.

Nevertheless, the trip with Adrian forced Isadora to face her past. She worked through her past and explained her “whole hysterical history of searching for the impossible man and finding herself always right back where she started: inside her own head.” (273) The impossible search to find the perfect man in order to experience fulfillment took her into circles which at times brought her further away from herself, but at other times drew her closer to herself. In the end of the novel she discovered that her happiness was not ultimately dependent on finding the perfect man but on accepting herself. A healthy relationship, where both partners are equally, would indeed contribute to the narrator’s happiness, yet it was not the main requisite. The end of their trip as well as the end
of the novel is marked by Adrian leaving Isadora to return to see his children and Isadora eventually returning to her husband. At first, Isadora experiences great betrayal by Adrian for leaving her, after some time, however, she encounters a freedom she has never felt before. “I was nobody’s baby now. Liberated. Utterly free. It was the most terrifying sensation I’d ever known in my life. Like teetering on the edge of the Grand Canyon and hoping you’d learn to fly before you hit bottom.” (295-296) The metaphor of flying occurs at the end of the novel again, which symbolizes that the narrator had to live through all the struggle to finally defeat her “fear of flying”. Although she returns in the end to her husband, she discovers that no man can enable her to find herself or give her life purpose, she can only find it in herself. The “infinite mystery of human existence” can only be solved by the narrator herself. (Shapiro 72)

Summing up, the feminine ideal that is presented in Erica Jong’s novel *Fear of Flying* corresponds with the depictions in the two previously analyzed sources. The construction is similarly challenged by the female authors. In contrast to the two theoretical works, *Fear of Flying*, however, features a female protagonist who embodies the protest against societal constructed femininity. Isadora White Wing tries to reject female gender roles assumed by society, which she conquers to some extent, yet finds herself haunted by the transported images at other times. The main character, nevertheless, impersonates the feminist protest that was present in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s.

**5.1.2. SEXUALITY AS EMPOWERMENT**

The 1970s in the United States was a period with a blooming sexual literature market. The period was marked by a conversion in audience, tone and content from the previously published literature in the decade. Sexuality was viewed as an essential aspect of identity formation and critical for self-awareness. The sexual literature of the 70s shifted away from the belief of promoting sexuality to enhance an intact marriage towards the concern that sexual relationships and sexual exploration are crucial aspects of self-exploration. In addition, the focus lay on personal satisfaction and identity creation. (Ward 120-3) Fiction has functioned as a crucial arena of women’s sexual revolution in the 70s, where feminists were able to utter their radical ideas on the issue of female sexuality. (Hogeland “Sexuality” 602-6) Erica Jong’s novel *Fear of Flying* declared women’s heterosexual freedom like no other novel in the decade. The double sexual standard for women as well as how it was fortified by patriarchy and its literature are under attack in the novel. (Hogeland *Feminism and Fiction* 70-1) The last subchapter of the analysis of *Fear of Flying* will thus examine
how the author protests against the assumption of female sexuality by society in form of the main character Isadora in the novel. The focus of the section will lay on the topic of sexuality with only minor remarks towards issues concerning women’s health, because they are not predominantly present in the novel.

The novel’s major strength is the deconstruction of female sexual restrictions. One of the author’s most famous formulations presented in the novel is the idea of the “zipless fuck.” (12) It is the narrator’s lustful fantasy about the perfect sexual experience preferable with a stranger.

The Zipless Fuck was more than a fuck. It was a platonic ideal. Zipless because when you came together zippers fell away like rose petals, underwear blew off in one breath like dandelion fluff. Tongues intertwined and turned liquid. Your whole soul flowed out through your tongue and into the mouth of your lover. (12)

A clear image is created by the author of how the “zipless fuck” is supposed to be. It represents the ultimate sexual experience women, married or single, dream of, which the author describes in rather vivid terms by using images of flowers and depicting the unity of the two love makers. The sexual fantasy is described in very sensual terms and as a full body experience, where even your own soul enters the body of the partner. In addition, the fantasy represents a sexual ideal without power relations between the two genders. “There is no power game. The man is not ‘taking’ and the woman is not ‘giving’.” (15) Fantasies enabled women to imagine what it would be like to be free from social agreements of marriage, from double standards and power games. The concept of the ‘zipless fuck’ additionally demanded the conditions of brevity and in the best case anonymity to have the ultimate sexual experience. (12) The conditions necessary for the accomplishment of the narrator’s sexual fantasy are values which have more often been related to men’s sexuality than to women’s, which demonstrates that the novel tends to associate male sexual characteristics to the female narrator in order to emphasize its protest against assumed female sexuality and gender roles.

The pure fantasy the narrator has about the ‘zipless fuck’ turns out, however, to be impossible for women to experience in real life. Not only is it “rarer than the unicorn” (15), but also impossible to achieve in a society surfeited with gender politics, where women’s sexual relationships are an ideological minefield. Although Isadora considers herself a “free woman”, sexual freedom is still limited for women, which the novel aims at demonstrating. The concept of the “zipless fuck” is merely a construct in the narrator’s mind, which she is eager to pursue, however, in the end it turns out to be a very frightening experience. (Hogeland Feminism and Fiction 70-1)
Throughout the novel the narrator reduces men to some extend to sex objects. Especially the protagonist’s time in Florence with her best friend Pia in the summer of 1965 symbolizes the reduction. The narrator claims that “gradually, the men were reduced to sex objects.” (108) The two young women travelled through Europe and eventually enjoyed sexual freedom in Florence, where the two females had innumerable bed partners. Due to their professions as writer and painter, the women considered themselves ‘free women’ and experienced sexual adventures. The narrator’s promiscuous activities were viewed as heroic by her readers. (Estrin 311) Although the author represents reversed gender roles in regard to sexuality, where women reduce men to their sexual ability and not vice versa, the narrator experiences that her life still “seems to come down to a long succession of sad songs about men.” (109) Moreover, the narrator discovers that the women she admired most and considered “free women”, who were writers and artists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Emily Dickens, the Bontes or Virginia Woolf, were all “timid in their lives and brave only in their arts.” (109) The narrator realizes that not even her heroines where entirely free from gender restrictions.

The narrator does not only discover that throughout her adolescence she was never entirely free of longing to be “half of a couple” (10), she was also confronted by ideas of female sexuality constructed by a patriarchal society. The “sexual myths of the 50s” (214), as Jong calls it, have had great influence on the narrator’s growing up. As already elaborated in the theoretical chapter 2.2. *Our Bodies, Ourselves* as well as in the analysis of the two other primary sources, women’s sexuality was predominantly defined by men during the 1950s and 1960s in the United States. The novel provides insight into women’s experience on their own sexuality as it had been defined by men. The narrator for instance claims that “until I was twenty-one, I measured my orgasms against Lady Chatterley’s and wondered what was wrong with me. Did it ever occur to me that Lady Chatterley was really a man? That she was really D.H. Lawrence?” (24) The great influences male writings had on the protagonist and her sexuality are visible in the extract. The lack of literature written by women which defined female sexuality and femininity enabled the superior status of men in society, because there were hardly any accounts on womanhood and what it meant to be female in the society of the 1950s and 1960s by women. Women enjoyed sexuality, therefore, according to rules created and written about by men.

Nevertheless, changes began to take place concerning literature on women’s sexuality with special regard towards the belief on the superior status of the vaginal orgasm in comparison with the clitoris
orgasm. It started out with Masters and Johnson’s *Human Sexual Revolution* in 1966 which stressed the deconstruction of the vaginal orgasm as the ultimate goal for female satisfaction. (Hogeland “Sexuality” 611) The dam was then broken once and for all by Susan Lydon’s essay “The Politics of Orgasm” in 1970, which finally described female sexuality from a woman’s point of view. She kindled the debate whether the vaginal orgasm is the only way for women’s satisfaction and strongly challenged that belief by stating that it had been created by men to keep women suppressed and dependent on their sexual organ, the penis. The clitoris orgasm, however, presented an option for women to receive an orgasm independently from the male genital and has, thus, been viewed as a threat to men who always wanted to control women. (Lydon 200-1)

The shared belief concerning the two variations of female orgasm are also discussed in Jong’s novel. The narrator experiences a lack of sexual intercourse with her first husband Brian, whom she married in college. They shared a large amount of time with and a great sexual affection for each other before they got married. Their marriage, however, influenced their relationship significantly, which made the first person narrator wonder if something was wrong with her: “I was sure that Brian’s failure to fuck me was my fault, not his.” (214) Their absence of sex made the narrator recall the sexual education she received by society, which she explains in the three following “sexual myths of the 50s” (214):

A. There is no such thing as rape. Nobody can rape a woman unless she consents at the last minute. (The girls in my high school actually used to repeat this piously to each other. God only knows where we got it. It was the received wisdom, and like robots, we passed it on.)

B. There are two kinds of orgasm: vaginal and clitoral. One is ‘mature’ (i.e. good). The other is ‘immature’ (i.e. evil). One is ‘normal’ (i.e. good). The other is ‘neurotic’ (i.e. evil). This pseudohip, pseudopsychological moral code was more Calvinistic than Calvinism.

C. Men reach their sexual peek at sixteen and decline there after…” (214)

The narrator finds herself strongly influenced by beliefs shared among society in the 1950s and 1960s. She derives her thoughts from them and concludes, therefore, that her husband must have declined sexual intercourse, because he was already passed his sexual peek and is hence not interested in sex anymore. The ‘sexual myths’ provided an answer for the narrator, yet it was certainly not a very truthful one, which the narrator later discovered when her husband turned out to be seriously mentally ill.
As already illustrated in Friedan and Rich’s analysis, Jong also presents in her novel two of the major issues concerning women’s health and sexuality in second wave feminism, namely the elimination of the belief that rape does not exist and the deconstruction of the supreme position of the vaginal orgasm. Although Jong does not elaborate extensively on these two constructions, she nevertheless provides a vivid description of how present these beliefs were among young women in the United States by claiming that high school girls would repeat, for instance, the belief that rape does not exist like a mantra to each other. Moreover, the author demonstrates that women did not even know who constructed these ideals, yet they were so present in their lives that they would live according to them blindly—“brainwashed all the same.” (10) In addition, the author undermines the importance of the belief of the superior status of the vaginal orgasm by calling it a “pseudohip, pseudopsychological moral code.” (214) Jong’s undermining of the psychological explanation provided by Freud, among others, that women were only to enjoy sexual satisfaction through their vagina, corresponded with the belief shared among second wave of feminism. (Lyod 198) Additionally, her explanation can be understood as a protest against the assumption shared in society, especially by her remark that the idea of the vaginal orgasm was “more Calvinistic than Calvinism” itself (214), strengthens her provocative account.

After having focused on Isadora’s sexual experiences and influences throughout her adolescence and her first marriage, the author’s depiction of the narrator’s sexual relationship with her second husband Bennet as well as with her affair Adrian will now be analyzed. The narrator in the novel is currently in her second marriage with Bennet in their sixth year. Isadora begins to feel unsatisfied in her marriage regarding the lack of excitement and affection she experiences in their partnership. The narrator articulates her strong feelings towards her husband and claims that at times she even feels hate towards him for being who he is.

I am hating Bennett for not being a stranger on a train, for not smiling, for being such a good lay but never kissing me, for getting me shrink appointment and Pap smears and IBM electrics, but never buying me flowers. And not talking to me. And never grabbing my ass anymore. And never going down on me, ever. (26)

The irrational feelings the narrator experiences in her unrest in her marriage are visible in the extract. She declares that she even hates her husband for his positive characteristics, such as “being a good lay” or buying her “IBM electrics.” (26) The passage, however, illustrates also that although sexuality seems to be very important for the narrator it is still not everything. Isadora is frustrated
with her husband’s lack of emotions and romantic actions, which the author emphasizes by starting every sentence with the same beginning. It illustrates the narrator’s frustration further.

Isadora’s unhappiness in her marriage puzzles her, yet at the same time she wonders whether marriages are supposed to be like that after five years. “What do you expect after five years of marriage anyway? Giggling in the dark? Ass-grabbing? Cunt-eating?” (26) Jong is once again not afraid of articulating the first person’s narrator’s feelings in an explicit way. The rhetorical questions the narrator poses indeed attract the readers’ attention by using rather explicit sexual terms. In addition, it proves again that Isadora is not interested in being “the ideal woman”, which is in the narrator’s depiction “a kind of Jewish Griselda”, who “sits quietly on the upper balcony of the synagogue while the men recite prayers about the inferiority of women.” (230) Isadora rather represents the bad woman who utters her dissatisfaction after five years of marriage and who is eager to free herself from sexual assumptions made by society. “I was not a good woman. I had too many other things to do.” (231) (Shapiro 72)

The narrator does not only experience dissatisfaction in her marriage, she also feels longings for new sexual adventures. Isadora encounters that sexual intercourse in a long-term relationship slowly begins to be unexciting which triggers the feeling towards new sexual experiences with new men. The author compares the narrator’s sexual dissatisfaction in her marriage as well as her sexual desires to different kind of cheeses.

What was it about marriage anyway? Even if you loved your husband, there came that inevitable year when fuckin him turned as bland as Velveeta cheese: filling, fattening even, but no thrill to the taste buds, not bittersweet edge, no danger. And you longed for an overripe Camembert, a rare goat cheese: luscious, creamy, cloven-hoofed. (9)

The simile the author uses represents the sensual experiences the narrator aims at finding in comparison with the unexciting sexual intercourse she has with her husband. The usage of different cheeses to present the narrator’s desires is well chosen, because the cheeses are rather contrasting and describe, thus, the difference between the familiar sexual intercourse with her husband in contrast to the unknown sexual experiences the narrator longs for with someone new. The rich imagery used to describe the narrator’s sexual desires provide a vivid image for the reader.

Although the narrator had not been unfaithful to her husband throughout the five years of marriage until she met Adrian, her longings for sexual adventures were highly present in her imagination, as
it was already visible in her construction of the ‘zipless fuck’, which has been discussed earlier in this sup-chapter. Besides her fantasies of finding her ‘zipless fuck’ and having sex with a stranger on the train, the narrator also describes explicitly how she pretended to have sexual intercourse with someone else while having it with her husband. Her desire to pretend that Bennet was someone else made her also question what fidelity in marriage defined. “What did it matter that technically I was ‘faithful’ to Bennett? What did it matter that I hadn’t screwed another guy since I met him? I was unfaithful to him at least ten times a week in my thoughts- and at least five of those times I was unfaithful to him while he and I were screwing.” (37) Isadora articulates the universal linkage between what people want and what they fear. Her fantasies represent her desires, yet she fears to live them in real life and, therefore, decides to only imagine it. (Estrin 315) Her imagination, however, makes the narrator still feel extremely guilty, especially when her fantasies involve Adrian later in the novel.

I shut my eyes tightly and pretended that Bennett was Adrian. I transformed B into A. We came-first me, then Bennett- and lay there sweating on the awful hotel bed. Bennett smiled. I was miserable. What a fraud I was! Real adultery couldn’t be worse than these nightly deceptions. (37)

The explicit description of her sexual intercourse with Bennet, while she pretends that he is Adrian, describes the narrator’s struggle between the two men and represents the guilt she feels. Her guilt, however, turns into anger later in the novel, when she once again obeys to social conventions and leaves her sexual desires for Adrian behind and goes instead to bed with Bennet.

How hypocritical to go upstairs with a man you don’t want to fuck, leave the one you do sitting there alone, and then, in a state of great excitement, fuck the one you don’t want to fuck while pretending he’s the one you do. That’s called fidelity. That’s called monogamy. That’s called civilization and its discontents. (83)

The narrator realizes how deceitful her acting is, yet at the same time wants to exemplify that marriage as she experiences is a hypocritical bound. Due to social restrictions the narrator is afraid to live her fantasies and the sexual freedom she so eagerly wants to receive. Her anger is, thus, aimed not only towards herself for lacking the courage to follow her desires, but also towards society which constructed certain burdens, especially for women. The author emphasizes the anger the narrator experiences by starting again various sentences in a row with the same beginning.
Nevertheless, in the middle of the novel the narrator decides to follow her instinct and begins an affair with Adrian in Vienna. The affection the two character share were visible right from the beginning. The author depicts their relationship already in very sexual terms when Adrian called her a “cheeky cunt” and “grabbed a fistful of her ass and gave it a long playful squeeze.” (29) Although his first attempt at the narrator was rather offensive, she feels immediate affection towards him. “I would have followed him anywhere. Dachau, Auschwitz, anywhere.” (29) The author again plays here with extreme comparisons. Just as the reader was taken into the romantic words of the author by stating that the narrator would follow Adrian anywhere, she breaks the illusion of a romantic plot and provides examples of concentration camps during the Nazi time. Jong demonstrates once again her provocative verbal range. As the narrator in the novel is Jewish the statement proves to be even more aggravating.

The affair the two characters begin is dominated by Isadora’s sexual affection towards Adrian. Her fantasies of a sexual relationship with a stranger seems to finally come true. “Sweet Jesus, I thought, here he was. The real z.f. The zipless fuck par excellence. What in God’s name were we waiting for? “(30) The first person narrator was eager to forget about her husband and finally practice her sexual freedom. She could not think of anything else when she was together with Adrian. In order to demonstrate Isadora’s sexual passion towards Adrian, Jong provides expressive descriptions. She uses the power of words to present the reader powerful images of Isadora’s sexual affection, such as “My underpants were wet enough to mop the streets of Vienna” (30) or “His tongue tastes better than a nipple to an infant.” (85) The rich imagery Jong uses enables the reader to visualize Isadora’s body’s desires and pleasures, yet at the same time tests the boundaries of verbal range. Especially the comparison of Adrian’s kisses to an infant’s connection to the woman’s breast is certainly very provocative. Jong aims at defining new verbal ranges for women to express their sexuality through literature. (Shapiro 70)

Despite the vivid description of Isadora’s affection for Adrian, their sexual intercourse is also described rather expressively. The narrator expresses her excitement of going to bed with a new man after being married for quite some time. She articulates the emotions she feels by being intimate with a different man and, thus, provides an image of the fantasies various other married women might share with her.
The best thing of making love with a new man after all those years of marriage was rediscovering a man’s body. [...] But Adrian’s was like a new country. My tongue made an unguided tour of it. [...] We were tasting each other. We were upside down and his tongue was playing music in my cunt. (95)

The author uses metaphors and similes to describe the characters’ intercourse. She compares Adrian’s body to a foreign land to emphasize that he is unfamiliar to the narrator, yet at the same time exciting to discover. Furthermore, she romanticizes Adrian’s oral action by calling it “playing music” (95) to illustrate the enjoyment she experienced by being with him. Jong also uses four-letter words again, which is another transgression, that of propriety. Feminists were outraged when male writers would refer to them in sexist terms or use the word ‘cunt’ for women. For female writers, however, it was no problem to do so, as it can be seen with Jong’s novel. It is a similar process as in which African Americans call themselves ‘nigger’ or Jewish people name themselves ‘kikes’, yet white people or non-Jewish people are not allowed to do that. The action of the oppressor is reversed and the enemy’s weapon is used by the victims, which then states one superiority. What before was experienced as suffering, is then reversed into pleasure. (Diot 495) Jong’s use of the word ‘cunt’ for vagina is a great example of that reversed process. The narrator enjoys her liberation by being free to call her own genital whatever she likes.

The affair between Isadora and Adrian, nevertheless, enjoys a rather small amount of actual sexual intercourse due to Adrian’s deficient erections. The character’s impotence corresponds to the author’s depiction of Adrian as the typical anti-hero. In Isadora’s mind he was supposed to be the ultimate sexual experience, yet it turns out that he does not have much interest in having actual sexual intercourse. The two characters, nevertheless, enjoy great intimacy. “His curled pink penis which tasted faintly of urine and refused to stand up in my mouth. His very pink and hairy balls which I took in my mouth one at a time.” (95) The description the author provides of their sexless interaction is again rather explicit and to some extent vulgar. Adrian’s impotence, however, starts to offend the first person narrator who is clearly not used to it. She articulates her frustration by pointing out that nothing “could be more poignant than a liberated women eye to eye with a limp prick.” (97) Adrian’s sexual insufficiency is viewed as an insult to Isadora’s liberation. One can also not ignore the irony behind the author’s depiction of Adrian as impotent. The narrator who views herself as a sexual liberated woman and finally takes the step to start an affair and to satisfy her needs ends up with a man who is not able to have an erection.
In addition, Isadora saw Adrian’s impotence as “the ultimate weapon in the war between the sexes.” (97) Men were able to control women sexually through their penises, which they were able to be in charge of in comparison to women’s “all-weather cunt” (95), as the author calls it. She further elaborates that “neither storm nor sleet nor dark of night could faze it” (97), which was the greatest disadvantage of the female sexual organ. The rather humoristic description of the female genital, nevertheless, symbolizes the domination of men over women, who could regulate their sex organ and, therefore, sexual intercourse as well. Because of the inequality regarding sexual availability between the two sexes, Diot has argued that Jong has created Isadora to play the role of the exhibitionist and the rapist at the same time while enjoying her female role. Although she is not able to rape him physically, the author reduces the man to impotence, and thus makes fun of her sex partner. The humor that can be found in the novel derives from breaking the taboo of sex and by articulating her own sexual drives and desires. Jong, thus, enables her readers, man as well as women, to laugh at their libido. (Diot 494-8)

Another controversial demonstration in the novel is the positive effect the narrator’s affair had at the beginning on her sex life with her husband. After being together with Adrian occasionally during the congress in Vienna, Isadora eventually always returned to her husband, who already knew what his wife had been doing. Nevertheless, he did not ask her about the affair with Adrian instead shared some intimacy with Isadora.

He had made love to me, to Adrian’s slime, to our triangle in all sense of the word. He had never been as passionate and tender, and I had rarely been so excited. […] It was clear that Adrian had made a difference in our lovemaking, had made us appreciate each other in a new way. We touched each other completely. Suddenly I was as valuable to Bennett as if he had fallen in love with me for the very first time. (138)

The narrator discovers that the affair with Adrian has actual positive influence on her marriage for a short time being. It made her appreciate the sexual activity with her husband more. By stating this, the author, however, aims at breaking another taboo. Jong depicts the positive effects the affair had on the narrator’s marriage and reverses Isadora’s promiscuous activities into something beneficial. The provocative positioning, nevertheless, corresponds with the novel’s aim at protesting against assumed female sexuality and women’s desires.
The peak of bizarre sexual depiction is, however, reached when Isadora is surprised by her husband Bennett in the hotel room with Adrian. She has spent once again a night with Adrian, but this time her husband enters their hotel room and has sex with his wife right next to the sleeping Adrian.

Bennett stripped instead, and fucked me violently right there on the cot adjoining Adrian’s. In the midst of this bizarre performance, Adrian awoke and watched, his eyes gleaming like a boxing fan’s at a particularly sadistic fight. When Bennett had come and was lying on top of me out of breath, Adrian leaned over and began stroking his back. Bennett made no protestation. Entwined and sweating, the three of us finally fell asleep. (156-157)

The scene in the novel is certainly very obscure. Not only has the married couple sexual intercourse next to the wife’s affair, afterwards all three characters lay together in bed and Adrian even starts to caress Bennet. The incident illustrates the sexual liberation men and women enjoyed during the time period. Jong wants to break sexual assumptions predominantly concerning women, but also in regard to men. Sexuality was starting to be viewed in terms of self-exploration and creation of identity, regardless of societal boundaries. (Ward 121-3)

Similar to how Isadora’s affair with Adrian has started, it ended. She went with him on the trip through Europe where she experienced a lack of actual sexual intercourse instead of the great sexual adventure she had imagined. At the end of their trip Adrian went back to England to see his children and Isadora went to find her husband. The conclusion the first person narrator drew from her experience was that she believed she was at fault because she broke the “basic rule of the sexes” (299) by pursuing him and not vice versa. “Me and women, women and men. It will never work, I thought. […] They wanted their women wild. Now women were finally learning to be wanton and wild- and what happened? The men wilted. It was hopeless.” (299) The narrator’s conclusion at the end of the novel represents the struggle women were facing during the 1960s and 1970s. On the one hand the period was marked by social unrest and significant changes in various areas of society, yet on the other hand, society proved to still be resistant to fundamental changes (Rich xiv). “It was the same old jargon of the war between the sexes, the same old fifties jargon in disguise” (298) as Jong declares in the novel.

The novel in the end comes full circle and picks up Jong’s famous construction of the ‘zipless fuck’ from the beginning of the book again. Isadora and Adrian’s trip comes to an end and Isadora leaves to return to her husband Bennett. She eventually receives the chance of her “zipless fuck” on the train from France to England. A conductor offers his help and tries to pursue her, which the narrator
immediately rejects. It took Isadora until later to realize that her fantasy about the ‘zipless fuck’ on trains had been offered to her, but instead of seizing the chance to experience her long wished fantasy the narrator was offended by the stranger’s move. “My zipless fuck! My stranger on the train! Here I’d been offered my very own fantasy. The fantasy that had riveted me to the vibrating seat of the train for three years in Heidelberg and instead of turning me on, it had revolted me!” (331) The narrator experiences an extreme shift in her emotion towards her beliefs on her sexuality. The rejection she experienced towards her opportunity of her greatest fantasy made her in the end wonder whether there was something “romantic about men at all.” (338) (Hogeland *Feminism and Fiction* 70-1)

All in all, it is the core of the novel for the narrator to find a voice through her sexuality. Jong is eager to break taboos in order to “liberate her own aggressive pulse.” (Diot 495) Male writers have always been allowed to write openly about sexuality, under female pens it was, however, proscribed. The author, nevertheless, dares to articulate her body’s wishes and pleasures in a very obscene way without fear of breaking any taboos. It was a most scandalous action regarding aesthetic and moral taboos during that time. Jong deconstructs the whole narrative of the passive, feminine woman and provides an image of the provocative, sexual human, which may or may not lay in every female. (Diot 495-6) Enthusiasts of Jong’s novel have claimed that they believe to know various women who have experienced similar desires as Jong’s first person narrator and can, thus, strongly identify with the plot line. Isadora’s voice spoke to innumerous women, because she says what the readers would not say, does what the readers would not do. It provoked its readers, broke taboos and provided a voice for millions of women in the United States. (Estrin 314)

To conclude, Erica Jong’s novel *Fear of Flying* is with its 18 million sold copies undeniable a feminist classic and was considered a feminist breakthrough during the 1970s. It mirrored and engaged a generation. The depiction of the lustful heroine who is, on the one hand, eager to fly and, on the other, terribly afraid of it, reflected many women during the 1960s and 1970s. The novel is a protest against the construction of female identity and sexuality by a patriarchal society. Elaine Showalter claimed that Jong “defied the restrictions on women’s verbal range, sexual condor, and narrative voice” in the novel (qtd. in Shapiro 70), which sums up nicely what the author’s aim was. Jong’s novel demonstrates the power of the female voice by rejection patriarchal constructions of women and providing an authentic and indeed provocative account of female sexuality.
CONCLUSION; FINDING A VOICE

It was the aim of this thesis to analyze the three primary sources *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* by Adrienne Rich and *Fear of Flying* by Erica Jong with regard to their function as feminist protests in the 1960s and the 1970s in the United States. The three primary sources demonstrate the power of the female voice during the second wave of feminism. The female authors made their voices heard through their texts by questioning and protesting against the status quo in post-war American society, which restricted women to fulfill their individual potential by assigning femininity and motherhood as the ultimate goal for all females. Although all three texts tackled the issues regarding the feminine ideal and women’s health and sexuality differently in their literature accounts, the female authors shared the common goal of aiming at creating a society, in which women were enabled to reach their individual fulfillment, and, in which they were granted equal human rights as their male partners enjoyed. In order to accomplish that, Betty Friedan, Adrienne Rich and Erica Jong demanded various aspects in their writings.

Friedan’s major claim is that women need to participate in the outside world and pursue a career or an interest, which they actually enjoy, to find self-fulfillment. In her opinion, the solution to the problem that has no name cannot be found in the four walls of the suburban dream house or in therapy, but rather in creating a new life plan by each individual woman, which challenges their capacities and lets them grow apart from their role as mother and housewife. According to Friedan, it is a mistaken-choice made by women and encouraged by the perpetrators of the feminine mystique, which stops women from growing up and, which chains them to the feminine ideal. The author’s claim of women’s “free choice” to follow the assumed feminine role created by society and, hence, her lack of questioning society with its institution in itself might indeed sound rather simple and for many critiques her solution and her demands did not go far enough. (Bowlby 69, Horowitz 30) Nevertheless, Friedan’s words raised consciousness in innumerable women in the United States and around the world. She was a significant sculptor of prevailing feminist consciousness and a barometer of popular understanding of what feminism is. (Stacey 560) Her accounts in *The Feminine Mystique* did not occur because she had only been an unhappy and bored housewife, which would be similar to claiming that Rosa Parks took a seat at the front of a segregated bus simply because her feet hurt. Friedan knew her unrest was rooted in the fundamental belief common in society that women’s only roles were care-taker and nourisher of the family. In
addition, she knew that she shared her frustration with numerous women throughout the United States and that it was, hence, time to tackle the woman’s question once again. (Horowitz 30) Friedan was certain that “the time is at hand when the voices of the feminine mystique can no longer drown out the inner voice that is driving women on to become complete.” (309)

In contrast to Betty Friedan’s work, the focus of Adrienne Rich’s book was predominantly on the deconstruction of motherhood as an institution constructed by patriarchy. Rich’s demand already dug deeper than Friedan’s account into society’s institutions in the post-war era. As a mother herself, the author experienced the discrepancy and painful demands society projected onto mothers, which, hence, influenced the women’s own experiences throughout motherhood. The author, therefore, strongly believes that “the institution of motherhood must be destroyed” (280) in order to grant women the freedom to enjoy and to define motherhood individually and not as a feminine constant.

The changes required to make this possible, reverberate into every part of the patriarchal system. To destroy the institution is not to abolish motherhood. It is to release the creation and sustenance of life into the same realm of decision, struggle, surprise, imagination, and conscious intelligence, as any other difficult, but freely chosen work. (280)

Rich’s demands in her work are indeed revolutionary. She demonstrates to the reader how the boundaries between the external, sociological realities, understood in her work as “motherhood as institution”, and the internal, subjective realities, “motherhood as experience”, are rapidly shifting. (Luker 1561) The shifting, however, needs to be stopped in order to create a new world for women, in which women “will truly create new life, bringing forth not only children (if and as we choose) but the visions, and the thinking, necessary to sustain, console, and alter human existence- a new relationship to the universe.” (286) Adrienne Rich further believes that in this new world “sexuality, politics, intelligence, power, motherhood, work, community, intimacy, will develop new meanings; thinking itself will be transformed.” (286)

In addition to the two theoretical works by Betty Friedan and Adrienne Rich, I also analyzed Erica Jong’s novel Fear of Flying. Since it is not a theoretical writing, the demands that can be found in Fear of Flying are not articulated as explicitly as in the other two texts, but can be rather found in the novel as a whole and personified in the first person narrator. The author created Isadora White Wing, a narrator who embodies the feminist protest that was taking place in the 1970s in the United States. She finds, especially through her sexuality, a voice and an empowerment to protest and
reject assumed female gender roles in society. Jong aims at demonstrating that sexual freedom can be carried out by women as well as by men and that sex is not something to be ashamed of or something wrong, but rather something healthy, which is important for the creation of an identity. The novel tests society’s expectation of female sexuality through explicit and obscene language, a lustful heroine and an unromantic, but rather sexual plot. Jong turns the reader into the ultimate bed-partner, who has been seduced by the first person narrator, partly because of all they know. (Estrin 311-313) The novel’s challenge of the female sexuality in connection with verbal range and narrative voice, broke long assumed taboos and, eventually, altered literary restrictions for female writers.

In conclusion, it was seen that all three primary sources are prime examples of feminist literature of the second wave, which share numerous aspects, yet at the same time differ widely in certain areas and develop distinctly. Each one, however, contributed significantly to change women’s unequal role in America’s society of the 1960s and 1970s. The texts encouraged additional women to make their voices heard in order to create a society where women and men are viewed as equal partners and granted the same human rights. The authors were not afraid to challenge society’s beliefs on women’s role and behavior. Similar to other feminists of the period, Friedan, Rich and Jong questioned Freudian concepts and ideas, the flawed female images presented through media, and the social burdens constructed by a patriarchal society in regards of education, work, and reproductive rights. All three texts aimed at presenting an authentic image of what it means to be a woman in a society strongly dominated by patriarchy and resistant to change. The authors successfully created a truthful account of womanhood, motherhood and female sexuality.
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Primary Sources


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