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Navigating “the Ocean of Matrimony:” Marital Expectations and Experiences in Virginia, 1779-1835

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Navigating “the Ocean of Matrimony:”
Marital Expectations and Experiences in Virginia, 1779-1835

by

Richard J. Stocking

A thesis submitted to the Department of History of the State University of New York,
College at Brockport, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

May 12, 2017

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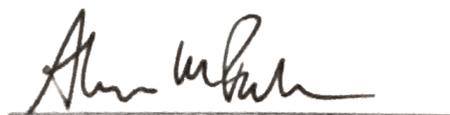
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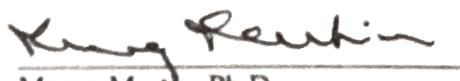
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Dedication

I dedicate the entirety of my work to my mother, Diane, who continues to shine as a beacon of hope, inspiration, and perseverance.

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ABSTRACT

Though historians continue to add important insight on marital expectations and experiences in early national Virginia, a more encompassing examination is necessary. This thesis examines marriage in three interconnected ways to augment the study of marital beliefs and realities. First, sermons, hymns, published religious literature, church minutes, and circular letters describe what Protestant Virginian clergy wrote about matrimony. Second, letters, journals, published books, and newspapers provide a useful understanding as to what lay Virginians expected from marriage. Finally, letters, diaries, autobiographies, and secondary sources provide a glimpse into the experiences of marriage in Virginia. Taken together, this study concludes that from 1779 to 1835, Virginians struggled to reconcile the companionate ideal with the traditional patriarchal marriage model.

Keywords: Marriage, Virginia, Protestant, Christian, Antebellum, Early Republic, Companionate, Patriarchy, Experience, Expectation

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INTRODUCTION: HISTORIOGRAPHY AND CONTEXT

This study builds on a growing body of scholarship that seeks to understand the socio-religious expectations and experiences of marriage in early national Virginia. Beginning in the 1980s, historians began using the sociological theme of emotion to understand marital anticipations and realities. For example, in *The Pursuit of Happiness*, Jan Lewis argues, “Both men and women believed that marriage should be based on affection.”¹ Men expected to find sweetness, purity, and joyfulness in a wife. In return, men should love their wives while acting as rational protectors and providers. Women desired kindness and affection from a husband. Ideally, couples maintained personal and social harmony by following marital prescriptions. Many Virginians found happiness through marriage. However, not all marriages followed social norms.²

In *The Work of the Heart*, Martha Tomhave Blauvelt argues that from 1780-1830, young northern women struggled to perceive and fashion what they did and should feel.³ Notably, northern women used emotional work to fulfill certain tasks outlined by fictional writing, the need to negotiate the positive and negative connotations associated with female education, the expectation of expressing polite elegance, and the decrease in ability to exercise agency once married. Similarly, as we will see, Virginia men and women had emotional work to understand socio-religious ideals for marriage and the realities of spousal interaction.

¹ Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 188.

² Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 188-205.

³ Martha Tomhave Blauvelt, *The Work of the Heart: Young Women and Emotion, 1780-1830* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 1.

Some historians examine the duties that society expected couples to accomplish. In *The Plantation Mistress*, Catherine Clinton argues that southern society required females to perform their “socialbiological destiny” by fulfilling their duties as wives and mothers.⁴ Virginians presumed women to remain pure, pious, and polite throughout their lives. During marriage, men expressed anxiety when absent from their wives whereas both partners articulated fidelity and affection through their correspondence. Husbands and wives understood happiness as a sincere requirement for the progression of social tranquility. Several issues such as emotional incapability, physical violence toward women, frequent absenteeism, alcoholism, and infidelity could ruin marital harmony. While Clinton suggests that southerners understood marriage as God’s will, she does not examine religious documents or the writings of ministers.⁵

Since the 1980s, historians increasingly weigh patriarchal marriage against the emerging companionate ideal. As Cynthia A. Kierner argues, “some historians of the Old South maintain that...patriarchy idealized women as utterly subservient, powerless, and devoid of personal authority.”⁶ At the foundation of patriarchal marriage was a deep mistrust of women. Society associated women with emotion and uncontrollable passion. For instance, John Kukla argues, “Thomas Jefferson felt that ‘female passion must and only could be controlled by marriage.’”⁷ Many Virginians connected female public involvement and deviation from gendered norms with social disorder. According to Kierner, “By the 1790s, reactionaries throughout America identified politically minded women with sexual licentiousness and the turmoil of the French

⁴ Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman’s World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 59.

⁵ Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 58-80.

⁶ Cynthia A. Kierner, “Women’s Piety Within Patriarchy: The Religious Life of Martha Hancock Wheat of Bedford County,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 100, no. 1 (1992): 80.

⁷ John Kukla, *Mr. Jefferson’s Women* (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 2007), 70.

Revolution, and many looked to the patriarchal family to restore order and social authority.”⁸ In Jefferson’s case, his experiences in France observing salon culture and female involvement in politics confirmed his belief in patriarchal ideals. Virginians identified female passion as needing restraint to maintain male control over society and politics. As Clinton persuasively suggests, “Patriarchy was the bedrock upon which the slave society was founded.”⁹ To maintain a racial hierarchy, white males needed to control all women and slaves.

Patriarchal marriage was contractual in nature. As Lewis reasonably argues, “Life and relationships were made, as much as possible, contractual, explicit, and external.”¹⁰ In theory, two families linked a man and a woman for the goal of creating children. Economic interests also weighed heavily on matchmaking. Before marriage, elite families regularly negotiated over the economic concerns of couples. Lewis maintains, “Prospering parents felt an unquestioned obligation to ‘launch’ their children ‘out into some happy subsistence in the world.’”¹¹ The foundation of patriarchal marriage was an obligatory dedication to economic prosperity, creating children, strengthening lineage ties, and maintaining social control.¹²

Increasingly, Virginians adopted the companionate marriage ideal. As Robin C. Sager intelligently argues, “The Old Dominion in the antebellum period was where centuries-old

⁸ Cynthia A. Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women’s Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 103.

⁹ Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 6.

¹⁰ Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 39.

¹¹ Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 25.

¹² For patriarchal dominated marriage in the South, see Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress* 6, 36-37; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 63-64, 101-102, 202, 250, 271- 273; Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches & Anxious Patriarchs Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 3-5, 22-28, 31, 80-83, 334-342; Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 24-28, 36-37.

tradition met reformist social change seeping down from the North.”¹³ In agreement, Anya Jabour asserts, “A patriarchal, autocratic ideal of male leadership was gradually being replaced by the ideal of companionate marriage, emphasizing mutual respect and romantic love between the marriage partners.”¹⁴ Companionate marriage allowed personal choice grounded on individual affection and sexual desirability.¹⁵ Such connections necessitated loving relationships between spouses. Martha J. King maintains, “Spouses shared economic goals, and both work and family prosperity relied on the cooperation of and negotiation with the members of the entire family unit.”¹⁶ While pre-Revolutionary Virginians found happiness from their “social, cultural, and economic situation,” the idyllic life for post-Revolutionary Virginians came from love.¹⁷ Within a companionate relationship, a wife would offer her husband an escape from the evils of the public sphere, relieve anxieties, and support his endeavors. In return, wives expected a kind and loving protector.¹⁸

Historians increasingly argue that marriage underwent a drastic alteration during the antebellum period. In her recent study of marital cruelty in Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin,

¹³ Robin C. Sager, *Marital Cruelty in Antebellum America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 2.

¹⁴ Anya Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic: Elizabeth and William Wirt and the Companionate Ideal* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1998), 9.

¹⁵ Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic*, 9.

¹⁶ Martha J. King, “Clementina Rind: Widowed Printer of Williamsburg,” in *Virginia Women: Their Lives and Times*, ed. Cynthia A. Kierner and Sandra Gioia Treadway (Athens: GA: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 75.

¹⁷ Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 191.

¹⁸ For the companionate marriage ideal in Virginia, see Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 188-204; Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic*, 4-10; Sager, *Marital Cruelty in Antebellum America*, 4, 11-12, 64, 69, 82, 99, 115, 138; Melinda S. Buza, “‘Pledges of Our Love’: Friendship, Love, and Marriage among the Virginia Gentry, 1800-1825,” in *The Edge of the South: Life in Nineteenth-Century Virginia*, ed. Edward L. Ayers and John C. Willis (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991), 10, 21, 29-30

Sager concludes, marriage was in a state of transformation during the late antebellum period.¹⁹ With coverture declining and the companionate ideal expanding, couples understood the ideal marital relationship as an attempt to fulfill duties within a strong emotional attachment. By satisfying such obligations, partners hoped to work together as a stable and industrious nuclear family. While Sager brilliantly suggests that Virginians strove for a companionate ideal within a transforming national culture, she solely focuses on marital experience, while disregarding ideals and popular opinion.

Perhaps the fullest inquiry into the experience and expectations of marriage in early national Virginia is Jabour's, *Marriage in the Early Republic*. She assesses marital realities and ideals along with companionship and male rule by analyzing the relationship between William Wirt and Elizabeth Gamble. Jabour argues that the Wirts' committed themselves to companionate marriage. However, the couple understood the term in different ways. William believed his main role was that of the family's wage earner. He based much of his marriage on letter writing and assumed home as an oasis from the toils of public life. Elizabeth spent much of her time in childrearing and domestic tasks. In marriage, she expected but did not ultimately receive the physical closeness of a husband. Jabour concludes that gender conventions and social actualities in the early republic made a true companionate marriage difficult to accomplish.²⁰

Though Jabour thoughtfully uses the Wirts' relationship to suggest that the realities of marriage contrasted marital ideals, expanding upon her inquiry is necessary to reveal more general conclusions. Jabour's analysis has three distinct limitations. First, her findings regarding the Wirts' relationship may not be true for other marriages because interpersonal relationships are individualized and diverse. Second, she does not include a thorough study of religion.

¹⁹ Sager, *Marital Cruelty in Antebellum America*, 138.

²⁰ Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic*, 162.

Protestant church officials voiced their own prescriptions of marriage to their congregations and to the masses through sermons, circular letters, hymns, and published books. Finally, Virginians learned of social norms through newspapers and conduct literature, which are significantly absent from *Marriage in the Early Republic*. Understanding marriage in Virginia requires a widespread examination of expectation and experience. Analyzing an extensive source base reveals interesting conclusions regarding marital realities and ideals.

From 1779 to 1835, Virginians struggled to reconcile two incompatible marriage models. On the one hand, the patriarchal marriage paradigm stressed male control, female subordination, economic prosperity, and familial connections. On the other hand, the emerging companionate marriage ideal consisted of a heightened emotional connection, mutual respect, and reciprocal interaction between spouses. Virginians negotiated between these paradigms in expectation and in practice. Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist clergy professed patriarchal ideals regarding matrimony. Lay Virginians accepted the conjugal state as a journey for both partners in which each spouse attempted to expand each other's happiness. However, they too supported male dominated marriage. Yet, Virginians experienced diverse and individualized spousal interactions during this period of self-discovery.

Uncovering what Virginians thought about marriage and how individuals acted within matrimony requires a large sample of sources. Letters and diaries are the predominant sources of this study. They reveal much about internal feelings and external society. According to Kierner, "Letters, diaries, and other personal documents reveal much...about people's interior lives and values."²¹ Personal documents allow historians to understand the "attitudes, behavior, and ideals

²¹ Cynthia A. Kierner, "Women, Gender, Families, and Households in the Southern Colonies," *The Journal of Southern History* 73, no. 3 (2007): 646.

that shaped early southern family life.”²² Published books, newspapers, circular letters, church minutes, autobiographies, and hymns significantly supplement our understanding of how society generally understood marriage. Finally, secondary sources complement and reinforce various arguments. Used together, these sources tell a stimulating narrative regarding how Virginians negotiated marital expectations and experiences.

Though this study illustrates what Virginians thought about marriage and their actual experiences, three marginalized groups are absent because of lack of documentation. First, lasting historical records exclude the poor and working class. While making up a majority of the white population, their sources are greatly outweighed in number by remnants left by the upper-middle class and elite. As Sheila L. Skemp asserts, “Many early Americans were illiterate. Even the words of those who could and did write seldom survived the ravages of time.”²³ Secondly, racial minorities are under-analyzed. A scarcity of documentation regarding African Americans and Indians creates a gap in understanding their marriage customs. Thirdly, the underrepresentation of religious minorities such as Quakers, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Jews remains a difficult obstacle. Their stories, though important are not thoroughly examined in this study.

In addition, while attempting to demonstrate what men and women thought about marriage, coverture detracts from the ability to examine women in early America. Adopted from English Common Law, coverture was a collection of laws and customs reinforced by traditional Christian theology. Under coverture, married women took the role of *feme covert* losing their rights to self-representation in court, property ownership, and contract making. Linda Kerber

²² Kierner, “Women, Gender, Families, and Households, in the Southern Colonies,” 646.

²³ Sheila L. Skemp, “An Ordinary Woman,” review of *Book of Ages: The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin*, by Jill Lepore, *Reviews in American History* 42, no. 4 (2014): 638.

asserts, “the founders kept in place a legal system that promoted legal differences between free women and men, especially between married women and men.”²⁴ Coverture continues to undermine the availability of sources linked to early American women. Since coverture limited female public access, remaining historical sources concerning women are scant as compared to the abundant sources left by men.

Augmenting the study of marriage and circumventing coverture requires an expansive analysis. Three parts make up this study. The first two look at the expectations of marriage; the last examines marital experience. In chapter one, the published works, circular letters, hymns, sermons, and private writings of Virginia clergy develop a picture of their ideals regarding marriage and how they explained these beliefs to their congregations. The period studied incorporates the Second Great Awakening and the decade prior. During this period, increasing numbers of Americans identified as Methodists or Baptists. In America, as John Wigger argues, “Between 1770 and 1820 Methodism achieved a virtual miracle of growth, rising from fewer than 1,000 members to over 250,000.”²⁵ At the same time, Presbyterian and Episcopalian churches lost followers. Still, from 1779 to 1835, many Virginian families clung to Episcopalianism and Presbyterianism. At the time this study begins the Episcopal Church dominated Virginian society. By its conclusion, much of the Old Dominion’s population belonged to Baptist or Methodist churches.

Chapter two combines the private correspondence and journals of Virginians with stories printed by newspapers and published writings to demonstrate what literate individuals thought about marriage. During the 1780s, sentimental novels taught women lessons about men. Many

²⁴ Linda K. Kerber, “The Paradox of Women’s Citizenship in the Early Republic: The Case of Martin vs. Massachusetts, 1805,” *The American Historical Review* 97, no. 2 (1992): 353.

²⁵ John H. Wigger, “Taking Heaven By Storm: Enthusiasm and Early American Methodism, 1770-1820,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 14, no. 2 (1994): 167.

novels incorporated premarital and marital relationships. Using women as the main characters, novels warned that men should not be trusted. Sarah Hand Meacham argues, “The plots of the most popular novels turned on whether a girl would make a bad marriage, or find herself seduced, pregnant, and abandoned.”²⁶ Scholars such as Meacham and Catherine Kerrison study how sentimental novels affected southern women.²⁷ The addition of an inquiry regarding expectations as expressed by diaries, letters, and newspapers will bring clarification to matrimonial ideologies in Virginia.

Chapter three focuses on the experience of individual marriages. Private correspondence, journals, memoirs, autobiographies, and secondary sources reveal what Virginians told their spouses and how individuals internalized their relationships. These sources tell readers much about the realities of marriage. Most letters contain sentimental language filled with emotional messages suggesting that matrimony contained a high level of affectionate companionship. Journals reveal the inner workings and emotions of individuals to demonstrate what people thought about their own marriages. Such sources jointly construct how literate Virginians experienced marriage.

Marriage was a personal relationship with no universal standard, yet couples had to bear the tremendous weight of religious and communal expectations. In general, marriages did not follow one specific format and became custom-made relationships. Some allowed a great deal of

²⁶ Sarah Hand Meacham, “Elizabeth Jacquelin Ambler Brent Carrington: A Founder of the Female Humane Association for Orphan Girls in Richmond,” in *Virginia Women: Their Lives and Times*, ed. Cynthia A. Kierner and Sandra Gioia Treadway (Athens: GA: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 190.

²⁷ For the effect of sentimental novels on females, see Catherine Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Catherine Kerrison, “The Novel as Teacher: Learning to be Female in the Eighteenth-Century South,” *Journal of Southern History* 69, no. 3 (2003): 513-526, 532-548; and Meacham, “Elizabeth Jacquelin Brent Carrington.”

respect, agency, and autonomy for wives. Others demonstrated the patriarchal tendencies of Virginian culture. While making a concrete argument regarding marriages is difficult. One aspect is unblemished, during the five decades after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Virginians in thought and in action attempted to come to terms with two incompatible marriage models.

CHAPTER ONE: RELIGIOUS EXPECTATIONS

During the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, the majority of Virginians were Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Baptist, or Methodist. In their writings and sermons, church officials from each sect negotiated between patriarchal marriage and the emerging companionate marriage ideal. The clergy of all four factions reaffirmed male dominated marriage as a perpetual union under God for the propagation of children, supporting a gendered hierarchy, and fulfilling scripture. Methodists separated men from women at revivals and professed inherent differences between the sexes. Baptists attempted to reign in on the variances among their evangelical movements to structuralize the concept of marriage around patriarchy. Episcopalians and Presbyterians endorsed the subservience of women and perpetuity of marriage to maintain social order. Exacerbating the issue were religious texts from the early eighteenth century, which, incorporated patriarchal ideals. While many church officials used the sentimental language of companionate marriage, they conveyed the message of a male dominated hierarchy within social relations.

“The ancient Episcopal churches, which were once so predominant are mostly in a state of dilapidation,” wrote Henry Cogswell Knight, a New Englander commenting on Richmond’s religious scene.²⁸ By the time Knight traveled to Virginia during the 1810s, evangelical religion had uprooted the once powerful and deeply seeded Episcopal church. The enthusiastic and emotional aspects of Methodism, Baptism, and evangelical sects of Presbyterianism appealed to many Americans during the 1790s and gained energy during the early nineteenth century.

²⁸ Henry Cogswell Knight, *Letters from the South and West* (Boston: Richardson and Lord, 1824), 61.

Thriving evangelical sects saw an increase in followers throughout Virginia during the last decade of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century. When it came to marital expectations, each of the four dominant sects maintained similar notions.

Some Methodist revivals and camp meetings segregated men and women. For example, the famed neoclassical architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe's *Plan of the Camp* illustrates separation by race and gender in a densely wooded area. Latrobe labeled his sketch with "Women's seats" on the left and "Men's seats" on the right.²⁹ The pulpit and an open area divided the two seating arrangements, suggesting a social separation between the sexes during services. Behind the stage, to the backs of their fiery preachers, one could find the "Negro tents," entirely away from the white population.³⁰ Latrobe's 1809 illustration of a camp meeting in Fairfax County suggests the separation of sexes rigid within the hierarchy of Virginia's slaveholding society.

Methodists expressed their belief in the inferiority of females. For instance, John Early, a Methodist minister told an English woman named Dorothy Ripley that he "did not believe it was practicable for a woman to preach the Gospel."³¹ Early thought that besides being a woman, Dorothy acted rudely and did not have the qualifications to preach. He postulated religious oratory as a masculine activity, one in which women should refrain. Early, like other Methodists upheld strict subordination of females.

In addition, Methodist ministers believed in the divine origin of marriage. In *A General*

²⁹ Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *Plan of the Camp, August 8, 1809*, Journal of Benjamin Latrobe, August 23, 1806- August 8, 1809, Sketch by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Latrobe Papers, Manuscript Department, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore (185), <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html>.

³⁰ Latrobe, *Plan of the Camp*.

³¹ John Early, "Diary of John Early, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 35, no. 3 (1927): 285-286.

Selection of the Newest and Most Admired Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Now in Use, Methodist minister Stith Mead included songs and poems on a number of subjects. When focusing on marriage, Mead transcribed two hymns: “Wedding Hymn” and “Christian Union.” The “Wedding Hymn” suggests that Methodists believed the Jesus oversaw their marriages. Stith melodically wrote:

Since Jesus freely did appear
 To grace a marriage feast;
 O Lord, we ask thy presence here,
 To make a wedding guest.

Upon the bridal pair look down,
 Who now have plighted hands,
 Their Union with thy favor crown,
 And bless the nuptial bands.³²

Methodist ministers reassured their congregations that Jesus solemnized the matrimonial contracts of newlywed couples by bringing their individual souls together.

Couples taking the matrimonial oath should marry for affection and act to assist each other. After being linked by Christ in perpetual matrimony, Methodists expected a great deal of companionship. Stith continued:

In purest love their souls unite,
 That they with Christian care,
 May make domestic burdens light,
 By taking each their share.³³

Both partners should do their part in taking care of domestic concerns to make a happy

³² Stith Mead, *General Selection of the Newest and Most Admired Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Now in Use* (Lynchburg: Jacob Haas, 1811), 119.

³³ Mead, *General Selection of the Newest and Most Admired Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Now in Use*, 119.

household. In theory, individuals should adhere to a strict Christian faith in their continuous conjugal state. Within marriage, loving partners should make their home a sanctuary from the evils of the outside world by caring for their spouse. In a proper Christian union, couples came together as one in hope, heart, mind, and voice.³⁴ Methodists agreed with both the divine foundation of marriage and companionate marriage within patriarchal restraints.

The autonomous and democratic nature of Virginia's Baptists allowed for many different opinions regarding marriage. According to Meredith Henne Baker, "Resolutions were reached by majority rule at monthly or quarterly meetings... Therefore churches exhibited variances in practice and theology, depending on region and leadership."³⁵ Though various Baptist churches originally handled marriage differently, a circular letter printed in the 1817 edition of the *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association* suggests that in some congregations Baptist clergy attempted to reign in on dissenting practices. The Association's goal for outlining conjugal roles was to "prevent future improprieties, and consequent distresses."³⁶ By 1817, the Dover Association, which included delegates from at least thirty-five Baptist churches spanning several different counties, attempted to control marital practices and beliefs among their followers.

Virginia Baptists upheld a strict gendered hierarchy. The Dover Baptist Association expressed their belief in the docility of females. Their 1802 circular letter maintains stringent submission of females to males. The author states, the "Apostle [Saint Paul] forbids women to

³⁴ Mead, *General Selection of the Newest and Most Admired Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Now in Use*, 123.

³⁵ Baker, *The Richmond Theater Fire*, 188.

³⁶ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association, Held at Upper King & Queen Meeting-House, in King & Queen County Virginia, October 11th, 12th & 13th, 1817* (Richmond: Ritchie, Trueheart & Du-val, 1817), 8.

speak in church and to usurp authority to men.”³⁷ The clergy among the Dover Association expected female compliance to men as a result of Christian faith and the law. The Association’s authoritarian beliefs regarding gender relations equated women to slaves, “The same law that commands women to obedience, equally commands servants, and minor sons to be excluded from church authority.”³⁸ By using an explicit comparison to liken all women to slaves, the author expressed his belief in white male supremacy and female dependency. Baptist clergy believed that women, like slaves, were under the authority of the master of the household. Resembling slaves, women were not “sufficiently independent,” the author of the circular letter claimed they did not have the capability “to give an impartial decision.”³⁹ Women had inadequate judgment for church cases and were prone to “strong and unreasonable prejudices.”⁴⁰ In theory, female dependency caused women to fear persecution if they disagreed with their husbands. For such reasons, men should remain in a superior position in the gendered hierarchy by maintaining a dominant role in marriage.

To support this rigid hierarchy, Baptists argued that marriage was a holy union. The author of the 1817 circular letter reaffirms that Christians believed in the sanctity of marriage. The author states, “It is generally received that marriage is an ordinance of God.”⁴¹ To give “sweetness to society,” God allowed “social affections,” which makes “existence desirable

³⁷ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association holden at Nomony Meeting House, Westmoreland County, Virginia, October 9, 1802* (Richmond: J. Dixon and J. Courtney, 1803), 9.

³⁸ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association holden at Nomony Meeting House, Westmoreland County, Virginia, October 9, 1802*, 9-10.

³⁹ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association holden at Nomony Meeting House, Westmoreland County, Virginia, October 9, 1802*, 10.

⁴⁰ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association holden at Nomony Meeting House, Westmoreland County, Virginia, October 9, 1802*, 10.

⁴¹ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association, October 11th, 12th & 13th, 1817*, 8.

[sic].”⁴² Through matrimony, God created social and familial tranquility. Without the sympathy of marriage, life was dreaded labor in a world of sadness and misery. Consequently, any discontent between partners would lead to social disorder. If practiced correctly, matrimony could enhance happiness, limit sorrow, and maintain communal stability.

Marital services created both a legal contract and a covenant between spouses. Because, “marriage being a civil, as well as a religious contract, there appears to have been a regard had to civil authority there-to.”⁴³ Upon marriage, partners entered a relationship that bound them together under human law and divine command. Couples entered the contract because “They are to be one in affection” and “in their purposes, and pursuits.”⁴⁴ To marry, a couple needed to hold similar, if not identical concepts regarding love and worldly endeavors.

As long as a government strictly conformed to the Bible, its rules should be followed. The Dover Association claimed, “We hail with grateful emotions, the happy epoch in which we live, and the mild, efficient, and wholesome government, which we feel ourselves safe and happy.”⁴⁵ Thus, the matrimonial compact could not be broken because “God himself is said to be the witness” and American law followed scriptural doctrines.⁴⁶ Under God and the government, men and women expected to enter a state in which they became one for eternity.

The members of the Dover Association believed marriage was an exclusive relationship, in which couples shared everything. Sourcing the book of Genesis, the 1817 letter suggests that upon marriage a man will leave his parents and become one with a woman. Within their relationship, couples should hold joint emotions, “They are to rejoice or weep together; the joy,

⁴² *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association, October 11th, 12th & 13th*, 1817, 8.

⁴³ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association, October 11th, 12th & 13th*, 1817, 10.

⁴⁴ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association, October 11th, 12th & 13th*, 1817, 9.

⁴⁵ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association, October 11th, 12th & 13th*, 1817, 12.

⁴⁶ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association, October 11th, 12th & 13th*, 1817, 10.

or the sorrow of one, is to be the joy or sorrow of the other.”⁴⁷ Divorce and extramarital sexual relationships were unwarranted because spiritually, a married couple became one body. In addition, adultery destroyed the natural connection of spouses. Divorce separated conjoined partners because of their inability to accommodate for each other. Polygamy, however, did not allow two individuals to have an exclusive relationship. Baptists rejected polygamy, divorce, and adultery by arguing that wedding vows connected only two individuals in mind, body, and spirit.

To prevent marital strife, Baptist clergy expressed firm rules on the subject of who should marry whom. The Dover Association provided guidelines for ministers to consider before they married two individuals. The 1817 letter urged clergy to ask three questions when marrying a couple. First, does the marriage harmonize with the laws of the country and state? Second, “Is it consistent with the Scriptures?”⁴⁸ Third, does it coincide with the ideals of the local society? If so, a minister should unionize their hearts with a lifelong commitment of “adherence to the happiness of each other [*sic*].”⁴⁹ Using these prescriptions, the Dover ministry attempted to make sure they married partners who would abide by religious, social, and legal norms. Following the precedents of coverture, Virginia law did not allow married women to sue in court, officially own property, or conduct business transactions. The gospel, according to many ministers encouraged public limitations on females. The Dover Association expected Baptist ministers to marry couples who followed such patriarchal standards.

On the other hand, the Baptist Goshen Association of Louisa County, Virginia, was much more lenient with their marital standards. They allowed their white followers to choose their spouse as long as they were Christian. In their 1816 minutes, the Goshen Association permitted

⁴⁷ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association, October 11th, 12th & 13th*, 1817, 9.

⁴⁸ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association, October 11th, 12th & 13th*, 1817, 13.

⁴⁹ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association, October 11th, 12th & 13th*, 1817, 13.

ministers to marry non-Baptists.⁵⁰ Yet, strict restrictions were in place for interracial marriage. The Dover Association held similar beliefs about interracial marriage. In 1805, a member of the Dover Association asked if a white man and black women who lived together in a state of marriage could be admitted to the church. The Association answered, “By no means.”⁵¹ While many Virginian African-Americans went to Baptist services and many slave owning men took sexual advantage of their slaves, Baptist officials did not sanction interracial marriage.

According to Baptist ministers, once married, couples should strive to provide their children with a Christian education. The author of the 1816 circular letter for Caroline County’s Baptist Goshen Association, urged his “Beloved bretheren [*sic*]” to fulfill their duty of “giving Religious Instruction to Children.”⁵² For Baptists it was a parental obligation to educate their children in Christianity because of the direction of certain bible passages. For example, Deuteronomy 6:6-7 encourages parents to educate their children regarding the Ten Commandment while Ephesians 6:4 mandates that fathers raise their children ““in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.””⁵³ By understanding the gospel, educated children would prosper in their spiritual and worldly pursuits. If parents did not teach their children scripture, both parties would not be happy or comfortable. A lack of education would then lead to young corrupt souls to marry ill-advised partners. Even worse, without being taught the word of God, society would

⁵⁰ *Minutes of the Baptist Association, in the District of Goshen: Held at Gold-mins Meeting-House, Louisa County, Virginia* (Fredricksburg: William F. Gray, 1816), 4.

⁵¹ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association Held at Bruington King & Queen County, October 12, 1805* (Richmond: Enquirer Press, 1806), 6.

⁵² *Minutes of the Baptist Association in the District of Goshen held at Bethel Meeting-House, Caroline County, Virginia* (Fredricksburg: William F. Gray, 1816), 13.

⁵³ *Minutes of the Baptist Association in the District of Goshen held at Bethel Meeting-House, Caroline County, Virginia*, 14.

be devastated from a lack of moral instruction.⁵⁴ To combat the possibility of social chaos, the Goshen Association of Caroline County urged their followers to instruct their children in Christianity as a united couple.

The increasing availability of church minutes and circular letters suggests that Virginia Baptists attempted to solidify their ideals across the Old Dominion. From the last quarter of the eighteenth century through the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Baptist associations gradually increased the number of minutes and letters printed. In 1779, the Dover Association planned to have Reuben Elliot print 300 duplicates of the minutes and to deliver six copies to each church in Richmond.⁵⁵ By 1805, the Association resolved to print 500 copies of their minutes and to distribute twelve to the Baptist churches of Richmond.⁵⁶ The Association printed 900 copies of minutes in 1814, with the plan to supply ten copies to each church.⁵⁷ With hundreds of copies being circulated, numerous church officials informed their congregations of similar subject matters discussed at the various Dover Association meetings. As a consequence, many Baptists in Virginia gained an understanding of patriarchal marital values.

In contrast, Episcopal ministers held much more complex notions of marriage, in which the tension between companionship and patriarchy was evident. Episcopal officials understood the emotional state of marriage as controlled by the conduct of both partners. Yet, they believed that men had a higher status and ability to act. In a letter to his newly married daughter, Susan, the Reverend James Madison wrote, “You are allied to a man of honor, of talents, and of an open

⁵⁴ *Minutes of the Baptist Association in the District of Goshen held at Bethel Meeting-House, Caroline County, Virginia*, 14-17.

⁵⁵ *Minutes of the Baptist Dover Association held at Hickory-neck Meeting-House, James City County, Virginia, October 8th, 1799* (Richmond: Samuel Pleasants, 1799), 7.

⁵⁶ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association Held at Bruington King & Queen County, October 12, 1805*, 6.

⁵⁷ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Church Association, held at Mangohick Church, in the County of King William, Virginia, October, 8th, 9th, & 10th, 1814* (Richmond: J. Warrock PR., 1815), 8.

and generous disposition.”⁵⁸ He felt relieved that his daughter married a respectable young man, and hoped she would assume a subservient feminine role.

Madison believed that a husband could do as he pleased, and his wife should accept it without question. Madison opined that a man could stay “out longer than expected,” disappoint his wife, and invite over guests unannounced.⁵⁹ In response, a wife should voice nothing but complete agreement. She should “receive him as the partner of your heart...[and] receive his apology with cheerfulness.”⁶⁰ As long as Susan remained subservient to her spouse, her father and husband would consider her a commendable wife.

Any expression of discontent or management would sour Susan’s marriage. Madison warned, “never to attempt to control your husband by appropriation of any kind.”⁶¹ Female action would lead to marital unhappiness resulting in the stoppage of affections and the weakening of attachments.⁶² Madison argued, “A difference with your husband ought to be considered as the greatest calamity.”⁶³ Though men had the ability to do as they pleased, wives should agree with their actions and remain submissive. In accordance, women could gain nothing but disappointment by disagreeing with their partner. Madison warned, “Besides, what can a woman gain by her opposition or differences? Nothing.”⁶⁴ Therefore, by having differences with her husband, a woman destroyed her relationship and “created her own misery;” sadness in marriage.⁶⁵ Through opposing her husband, a woman could lose much, including a husband’s admiration and love as well as the respect of society and church officials.

⁵⁸ James Madison to Susan Randolph Madison Scott, 1811, Virginia Historical Society.

⁵⁹ James Madison to Susan Randolph Madison Scott, 1811.

⁶⁰ James Madison to Susan Randolph Madison Scott, 1811.

⁶¹ James Madison to Susan Randolph Madison Scott, 1811.

⁶² James Madison to Susan Randolph Madison Scott, 1811.

⁶³ James Madison to Susan Randolph Madison Scott, 1811.

⁶⁴ James Madison to Susan Randolph Madison Scott, 1811.

⁶⁵ James Madison to Susan Randolph Madison Scott, 1811.

Madison suggested that female inferiority and dependency caused joy for both partners. For instance, Madison stressed that marriage is a “state which is replete with happiness or misery.”⁶⁶ The positive or negative outcome of marriage weighed on the ability of wives to remain submissive. Madison argued, “The love of a husband can be retained, only by the high opinion which he entertains of his wife’s goodness of heart, of her amiable disposition, of the sweetness of her temper, of her prudence, and of her devotion to him.”⁶⁷ While both partners should find happiness, men had the ability to act on behalf of the household. In response, women should only act to endorse their husbands’ decisions. Marriage would lead to a state of happiness for both partners as long as the wife remained restrained, subservient, and charming.

To achieve the unquestioning mindset required for matrimonial harmony, Madison advised his daughter to stimulate her mind using literature with subjects that conformed to male rule. He suggested, “Culminate your mind by the perusal of those books which instruct while they amuse.”⁶⁸ Books containing “History, Geography, Poetry, Moral Essays, Biography, Travels, Sermons, and other well written religious productions” provided excellent examples of what young women should read.⁶⁹ Madison warned his daughter “not [to] devote much of your time to novels” because they degrade the moral aspect of the female character.⁷⁰ To Madison, regulated intellectual stimulation seemed important to the emotional standing of his daughter, while popular media such as “Most plays...are not friendly to del[ica]cy which is one of the orn[amen]ts of the female character.”⁷¹ Women should focus their mental pursuits on non-fiction literature that supplemented their morality and religious dedication, not plays or fictional novels

⁶⁶ James Madison to Susan Randolph Madison Scott, 1811.

⁶⁷ James Madison to Susan Randolph Madison Scott, 1811.

⁶⁸ James Madison to Susan Randolph Madison Scott, 1811.

⁶⁹ James Madison to Susan Randolph Madison Scott, 1811.

⁷⁰ James Madison to Susan Randolph Madison Scott, 1811.

⁷¹ James Madison to Susan Randolph Madison Scott, 1811.

which could corrupt their femininity.

Besides learning from a list of controlled literature, Episcopal ministers expected their congregations to closely follow the Gospel. For example, on January 7, 1820, at the Protestant Episcopal Church of Winchester, the Reverend Benjamin Allen told his congregation, “Science is precious, the arts are good; wealth is useful; but the Gospel – That is the fountain of order, the source of comfort, the wellspring of content, the channel of purity.”⁷² Earthly studies and material items could be advantageous, but religious text restrained the possible chaos associated with human emotion. In addition, Allen argued, the Gospel organized social interaction for all of humanity. Allen indicated that the Bible “sweetens domestic tenderness, and spreads over families all that is amiable: that presides in neighborhoods, to prompt the sympathies of affection, and originate the kindness of love: standing by the pillows of affliction, it wipes away the tear of sorrow and reveals a Paradise of joy.”⁷³ Within the bible, individuals could find their place in the world and understand personal relationships.

Episcopal clergy believed that the Bible assigned specified marital roles. Allen argued, the Gospel “teaches...the husband to be affectionate, and the wife to be a ministering-spirit.”⁷⁴ A husband should be a companion, one who embraces loving conduct toward his partner. Nevertheless, as a helpmate, a wife should attend to the needs of her husband, children, and slaves. In this context, wives acted as an assistant to the household. While a husband should treat his wife with respect and affection, the feminine domain remained entirely within submissive domesticity.

⁷² Benjamin Allen, *The Duty of Spreading the Gospel, A Sermon Preached in the Protestant Episcopal Church of Winchester, VA* (Charlestown: Richard Williams, 1820), 4-5, Rare Books, Virginia Historical Society.

⁷³ Allen, *The Duty of Spreading the Gospel*, 5.

⁷⁴ Allen, *The Duty of Spreading the Gospel*, 10.

The Bible taught couples that God controlled their sexual activity. As a cultural taboo, premarital sex was a significant problem for clergy. Before marriage, church officials expected both partners to remain chaste. On May 4, 1814, a large crowd gathered for the opening of the First Monumental Church in Richmond. The new church, designed by Robert Mills commemorated the untimely deaths of 72 individuals in the disastrous Richmond Theatre Fire of 1811. The Reverend William Wilmer told his followers that, “Chastity is enforced by the consideration that our bodies are not our own, but the members of Christ and the temples of his Holy Spirit.”⁷⁵ Before marriage, individuals should not be sexually active because their bodies belonged to God. Once married, individuals entered a state in which they became one under God, authorizing sexual intercourse with each other only.

Within their sermons and letters, Episcopal leaders strove to syncretize patriarchy and companionship. They suggested that couples should marry for affection and by their own choice. Yet, men were the public actors for their household and women needed to remain entirely domestic and compliant to maintain social harmony. During the 1810s, Episcopal ministers, such as James Madison and Benjamin Allen, attempted to come to terms with companionship and patriarchy.

Presbyterian clergy too considered the two incompatible ideals. In 1813, Irish immigrant and Presbyterian minister George Bourne published *Marriage Indissoluble, and Divorce Unscriptural*. Using scripture as his single source of evidence, Bourne concluded that there were no excuses for divorce and that marital dissolution corrupts the morality of society. To Bourne, divorce was morally, legally, and religiously illegal. In *The Great Catastrophe of My Life*,

⁷⁵ William H. Wilmer, *A Sermon Delivered in the Monumental Church, in Richmond Before the Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the State of Virginia, and at the First Opening on the Monumental Church* (Alexandria: S. Snowden and J.D. Simms, 1814), 11, Rare Books, Virginia Historical Society.

Thomas E. Buckley analyzes Bourne's examination of divorce. However, a study of Bourne's writing is necessary to understand common Presbyterian notions of matrimony during the early nineteenth century.

Bourne suggested that couples should marry for companionate desires. He defined marriage as a holy institution with three major objectives. First, spouses should propagate and nurse children. Second, marriage should "promote the joint happiness of the couple intermarrying."⁷⁶ Third, Bourne urged partners to "form minds for the great duties and extensive destination of life."⁷⁷ Taken together, spouses ideally cohabitated in a reciprocal coexistence to breed children. Bourne expected couples to act as team to mutually endorse emotional pleasure and the progression of the family.

To form practical marriages, spouses should be alike in emotion, thought, and action; any differences could cause significant marital strife. Bourne declared, "Mercenary motives often unite those whose dissimilarity precludes not hymeneal happiness only, but even the practicability of cohabitation."⁷⁸ Marrying for economic benefit often united divergent individuals, resulting in a lifetime of unhappiness. Furthermore, if individuals married "while [having] a stronger affection for another" or if they disliked their partner, then they were "guilty of wilful [*sic*] falsehood."⁷⁹ To refrain from perpetual unhappiness, Bourne suggested that partners should be similar in age, attractiveness, intelligence, politeness, and virtue. In addition, a husband should hold his wife in higher esteem and affection than all other women. Otherwise,

⁷⁶ George Bourne, *Marriage Indissoluble, and Divorce Unscriptural* (Harrisonburg: Davidson & Bourne, 1813), 23, Rare Books, Virginia Historical Society.

⁷⁷ Bourne, *Marriage Indissoluble, and Divorce Unscriptural*, 23.

⁷⁸ Bourne, *Marriage Indissoluble, and Divorce Unscriptural*, 20.

⁷⁹ Bourne, *Marriage Indissoluble, and Divorce Unscriptural*, 21.

marriage could lead to “aversion and disgust.”⁸⁰ Such covetous or deceitful unions not only had mortal consequences but also negative implications upon death. Bourne wrote, “Unions formed from these views, are detestable in the sight of God, destructive of personal and social comfort, and injurious to morality and religion.”⁸¹ Presbyterians learned that marrying for economic gain or in spite of contrasts in character opposed the Gospel, God, their minister, and the common good.

Though Bourne assumed that husbands and wives came together due to a mutual affection, he maintained strict gender conventions. For example, Bourne believed that men had absolute authority over each member in their family. The patriarch, “whose authority being absolute,” wrote Bourne, had more influence and control “than the laws of the national government.”⁸² As his family’s sovereign leader, a husband had the ability to act with supreme autonomy and authority. While a husband should love, comfort, respect, and honor his wife, as the public and physical actor for the household, he should feel obligated to direct her actions. However, he needed to seek his wife’s opinions to maintain marital “maintenance and benevolence.”⁸³ Within marriage, partners should act as a team with the goal of harmony. Yet, Bourne expected husbands to lead their households and women to act as loving helpmates.

Similar to Episcopal, Baptist, and Methodist officials, Bourne supposed women were inferior to men. When describing matrimonial duties, Bourne asserted, “She is the weaker vessel.”⁸⁴ A wife’s domain remained entirely domestic and her primary duties were childrearing and stabilizing marital harmony. To fulfill such duties wives should obey, love, and honor their

⁸⁰ Bourne, *Marriage Indissoluble, and Divorce Unscriptural*, 21.

⁸¹ Bourne, *Marriage Indissoluble, and Divorce Unscriptural*, 21.

⁸² Bourne, *Marriage Indissoluble, and Divorce Unscriptural*, 26.

⁸³ Bourne, *Marriage Indissoluble, and Divorce Unscriptural*, 38.

⁸⁴ Bourne, *Marriage Indissoluble, and Divorce Unscriptural*, 39.

husbands while remaining socially submissive and dedicated Christians. Bourne declared, “On the part of the wife are demanded - chaste conversation coupled with fear - the ornament of a meek [*sic*] and quiet spirit...and the imitation of godly examples.”⁸⁵ Women needed to maintain sexual purity, Christian behavior, and serve a compliant role in matrimony. All three conditions placed women in a subordinate role within Virginia’s social hierarchy. Both partners should “promise that the [marriage] compact should not cease during the continuance of their terrestrial existence.”⁸⁶ To Bourne, marriage, and thus, a gendered social hierarchy was perpetual.

To form an everlasting connection, Bourne argued that upon marriage, spouses entered a moral, legal, and natural contact. God bound partners in divine association, fulfilling a moral commitment. Legally, spouses entered matrimony by pledging, “until death do us part,” in front of a church official. In effect, marriage ceremonies attached partners under God and under human laws. Having children completed the union. Bourne wrote, “the joining relation which they have to their children, strengthen the bonds of matrimony...As they both are of the same blood with child, the moral and legal connection becomes a natural relation which can never cease to be annulled.”⁸⁷ Connecting a moral and legal union with childrearing attached spouses as relatives and made their marriage permanent. Presbyterians ministers, like the clergy of other major Protestant Christian sects, argued in favor of highly patriarchal notions of marriage.

During the late eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Virginians not only learned of marital norms through contemporary hymns, sermons, letters, and literature, they also read religious conduct works from the early and mid-eighteenth century. According to Sarah Robbins, even rural southern women could learn of Enlightenment ideas due

⁸⁵ Bourne, *Marriage Indissoluble, and Divorce Unscriptural*, 38.

⁸⁶ Bourne, *Marriage Indissoluble, and Divorce Unscriptural*, 37.

⁸⁷ Bourne, *Marriage Indissoluble, and Divorce Unscriptural*, 36.

to the steady influxes of books from England.⁸⁸ One example of an influential book written during the eighteenth century is *How Happiness is to be Attained in Marriage* by Anglican clergyman and writer Philip Skelton. In 1814, Thomas T. Skillman republished the book, which spread throughout the United States. As church officials attempted to reconcile male controlled marriage with affectionate relationships, so too did Virginians read older religious literature with traditional ideals.

Skelton, an Anglican minister and Rector of Fintona, Ireland, used scripture to argue in support of strict patriarchy. To Skelton, marriage was the natural transfer of a young woman from her father to her husband. He concluded that marital happiness is attainable only through the uncompromising subordination of the wife. Matrimony permitted a shift of power over a woman from her first protector, her father to her new patriarch, her husband. This transfer resulted in the perpetual preservation of patriarchy.

Skelton emphasized male dominance, yet formulated his argument within the language of companionate marriage. According to Skelton, a young woman chose a husband whom she believed would make her happy. However, she needed parental approval. Parents should allow their daughter to marry, “on grounds apparently promising, for more satisfaction and happiness in a new state of their own choice.”⁸⁹ The Anglican priest expected young men and women to seriously assess their partner’s character before promising marriage. For instance, Skelton wrote, “Their hopes are not likely to deceive them, if, on both sides due care and circumspection have been employed in making and fixing the choice; if they are good in themselves; and in person,

⁸⁸ Sarah Robbins, “Book Reviews,” reviews of *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic*, by Mary Kelly; *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South*, by Catherine Kerrison, *Legacy* 25, no. 1 (2008): 164.

⁸⁹ Philip Skelton, *How Happiness is to be Attained in Marriage* (Lexington: Thomas T. Skillman, 1814), 5.

temper, principles, and schemes of living agreeable and suitable to each other.”⁹⁰ Skelton opined that couples should understand that the foundation of marriage is love and male supremacy, two inharmonious ideals.

Like George Bourne, James Madison, and other Protestant officials would convey years later, Skelton stressed the inferiority of females. Reasoning with biblical metaphors, Skelton wrote, “Christ loves, provides for, and governs his Church, just as the good husband does his wife, and he again loves, provides for, and governs his wife, just as a wise and careful head does the rest of the body.”⁹¹ As Bourne compared a husband to a government, Skelton assessed each man as a domestic and earthly Jesus Christ. The wife should obey her husband with love, knowing that he would keep order among all members of the household. Skelton asserted, “that the husband and wife may know themselves to be but one, *one body or flesh*; and the subjection of the wife to her husband is as plainly laid before us.”⁹² While husband and wife connected as one in the eye of God, the male should act as the dominant character in the relationship.

To reaffirm notions of a gendered hierarchy Skelton cited physical and mental differences between men and women. A woman went, “To your stronger arms, and more courageous bosom, her feebler nature hath fled for refuge in the bustle of a crowded and boisterous world. Through which she knew not how otherwise to make her way.”⁹³ In other words, without a man to direct her, an inherently inferior woman would not know how to live. Throughout marriage women should remain “at all times, and in every instance” gentle and flexible “to everything but vice.”⁹⁴ Skelton assessed the husband as the public actor of the family. The “strength of body...gives the

⁹⁰ Skelton, *How Happiness is to be Attained in Marriage*, 5.

⁹¹ Skelton, *How Happiness is to be Attained in Marriage*, 7.

⁹² Skelton, *How Happiness is to be Attained in Marriage*, 7.

⁹³ Skelton, *How Happiness is to be Attained in Marriage*, 22-23.

⁹⁴ Skelton, *How Happiness is to be Attained in Marriage*, 24.

man a great advantage over the woman in point of acquired knowledge; for while the delicacy and feebleness of her body, and her bearing and suckling of children, confine the woman to domestic cares.”⁹⁵ As a result, a man, “by his strength, is fitted for, and carried out to labor, trade, war, and the like.”⁹⁶ Skelton believed husbands offered wives safety and guidance because of the intrinsic inferiority of women’s mental and physical abilities.

If a woman wanted equality with or superiority over her husband, happiness became impossible. Skelton wrote, “As a married woman, you are still further from your natural element, if you aim at a superiority over your husband, when you are obliged by *nature*, and by *scripture*, and by your *vows*, to obey.”⁹⁷ God commanded women to submit to men “in all things lawful and honest.”⁹⁸ Though a woman selected a husband, once married she took on a subordinate role. To maintain social harmony and male dominance, women needed to remain inferior.

In contrast to his main patriarchal argument, Skelton rationalized marriage as a partnership between spouses. Such “an alliance, [is] founded on the sameness of interest, and on the highest degree of love which the parties are capable of entertaining.”⁹⁹ Couples should overlook small disagreements and differences to maintain love and peace. Skelton outlined five major criteria for well-established marriages. First, spouses must remain strictly loyal to each other. Second, they should have “a gentle and condescending temper, which not only in the sight of God, but of your partner also...will wonderfully promote the harmony, and by that the love you wish to establish.”¹⁰⁰ Third, spouses should practice “meekness and patience [which are]

⁹⁵ Skelton, *How Happiness is to be Attained in Marriage*, 8.

⁹⁶ Skelton, *How Happiness is to be Attained in Marriage*, 8-9.

⁹⁷ Skelton, *How Happiness is to be Attained in Marriage*, 24.

⁹⁸ Skelton, *How Happiness is to be Attained in Marriage*, 8.

⁹⁹ Skelton, *How Happiness is to be Attained in Marriage*, 6.

¹⁰⁰ Skelton, *How Happiness is to be Attained in Marriage*, 16.

necessary to the preservation and improvement of the matrimonial union.”¹⁰¹ Fourth, both partners had to uphold emotional compassion. Fifth, rather than quarreling and endless bickering, spouses should dedicate their lives to pleasing their partner. If completed together, the prescriptions would result in a unification of a “happy pair” combining an “uninterrupted peace and love sweeter than life itself.”¹⁰² Similar to Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodists clergy, Skelton retained many companionate ideals in his argument, while supporting patriarchy and female inferiority.

To reinforce their messages, ministers of all sects maintained they were God’s voice on earth. Clerics understood themselves as a specific and privileged order of men above ordinary individuals. For instance, the Episcopalian Reverend William Wilmer claimed that human nature was “too weak to sustain an immediate intercourse with the most high God.”¹⁰³ Therefore, ministers acted as middlemen between God and their congregations. Likewise, Baptist preachers designated themselves as leaders of their parishioners. The author of the Dover Baptist Association’s 1799 “Circular Letter,” wrote, “By the word pastor, we must understand literally, a shepard [*sic*], or one who has the care of flocks, and when applied to the ministers of the gospel, conveys nearly the same idea as that of Bishop, which signifies an overseer.”¹⁰⁴ While average humans lacked the power to communicate with God, ministers had the power to express God’s voice to his subjects on earth. As a result, clergymen should supervise and direct their followers to the best of their ability in all matters, private and public.

If congregants did not follow their minister’s prescriptions, they would face grave and

¹⁰¹ Skelton, *How Happiness is to be Attained in Marriage*, 17.

¹⁰² Skelton, *How Happiness is to be Attained in Marriage*, 18.

¹⁰³ William H. Wilmer, *A Sermon Delivered in the Monumental Church*, 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Minutes of the Baptist Dover Association held at Hickory-neck Meeting-House, James City County, Virginia*, 7.

unforgiving punishment. To the Episcopal Minister William Meade, God sent ministers to earth as his powerful ambassadors. Meade stated, “God will severely punish all those who reject his ministers, and obey their faithful admonitions, is abundantly evident from his holy word.”¹⁰⁵

Disobeying a minister was likened to a direct sin against God. The responsibility of church officials was to inform the public of God’s intentions. If people chose not to listen to ministers, they had to deal with the harsh and permanent consequence of Hell. During one fiery sermon orated on October 19, 1809, in front of the Presbyterian Synod at Staunton, Virginia, the Reverend Conrad Speece described Hell as:

a society of the seducers and the seduced; a society without love or respect, without the least sympathy to alleviate suffering; a society of mutual tormentors, heaping upon eachother [*sic*] bitter and incessant reproaches; a society, in short, of which every member will feel and express towards himself and all the rest a sovereign and inextinguishable scorn.¹⁰⁶

In 1818, the author of the annual circular letter for the Dover Baptist Association, wrote, “God...often sends his rod upon his disobedient children, in order to chasten their proud and trubulant [*sic*] passions.”¹⁰⁷ To avoid a miserable afterlife and mortal consequences, Christians of all Protestant sects had to accept the service and expectations of ministers.

Virginia did not officially legalize religious freedom until January 16, 1786, when the General Assembly of Virginia passed Thomas Jefferson’s Statute for Religious Freedom. The statute promised religious freedom to all faiths and disestablished the Anglican Church.

¹⁰⁵ William Meade, *A Sermon, on the Occasion of the Death of the Rev. Oliver Norris, Preached in Christ-Church, Alexandria* (Philadelphia: William Stavelt, 1826), 5, Rare Books, Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁰⁶ Conrad Speece, *Value of the Soul: A Sermon Delivered Before the Synod of Virginia* (Richmond: Samuel Pleasants, 1809), 10, Rare Books, Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁰⁷ *Minutes of the Dover Baptist Association, held at Matthews Meeting-House, Matthews County, VA, October 10th, 11th, and 12th, 1818* (Richmond: Shepard & Pollard, 1818), 11.

Additionally, on December 15, 1791, Virginia approved the Bill of Rights giving the amendments the two-thirds majority among the thirteen states needed for ratification. The First Amendment prohibits the federal government from making any law that establishes or prohibits the “free exercise” of religion.¹⁰⁸ By the end of 1791, state and federal law allowed Virginians religious freedom. Nevertheless, the perceptions of many Virginians remained embedded in traditional patriarchal marital concepts derived from Anglican customs.

The Anglican ideals formulated during the colonial period and early national era affected Virginian culture and helped formulate socio-religious norms. Anglicanism dominated perceptions about the legality and morality of marriage and divorce. Until after the Revolution, an Anglican clergyman needed to witness a marriage to fulfill its legality. Thomas E. Buckley argues, “Anglican cultural values on marriage and divorce perdured in the old South because members of other denominations – Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians – absorbed and supported them.”¹⁰⁹ Even as other sects saw substantial increases in followers, Anglicanism had lasting effects on the marital beliefs and customs in Virginia.

While Episcopalians and some Presbyterians attempted to hold on to male-controlled models of gender relations, Baptists, Methodists, and evangelical Presbyterians increasingly did the same albeit using emotional appeal. To evangelicals, the solution to all negative aspects in life was religion.¹¹⁰ According to Amanda Porterfield, by the end of the 1790s, arguments supporting female autonomy or public interaction “came to seem increasingly dangerous and even repulsive, as religious moralists associated anyone who would uphold such arguments with

¹⁰⁸ U.S. Constitution, Amend. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas E. Buckley, *The Great Catastrophe of My Life: Divorce in the Old Dominion* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press) 51.

¹¹⁰ Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 6.

sexual license.”¹¹¹ Evangelicals gradually “exploited nostalgia for monarchy” to reinforce God’s authority which suppressed the possibility of expanding women’s rights and critical thought.¹¹²

Many evangelical clergy maintained their support of patriarchal dominated marriage.

During the early republic, Virginian church officials from each of the four major Protestant factions felt tension between patriarchy and companionship. Many Clergymen grounded their marital philosophy on the traditional male-controlled model while trying to incorporate elements of the companionate ideal. Though church officials believed couples should marry for affection and strive to maintain reciprocal happiness, the ideal objectives of marriage were to produce children, maintain a gendered social hierarchy, and follow biblical standards. Clergy increasingly articulated their marital viewpoints to their congregations through sermons, church minutes, circular letters, and religious literature. Many members of the clergy argued that they were God’s voice on earth. In such a context, individuals who did not follow the patriarchal prescriptions of church leaders acted in sin against God. The message delivered by religious heads regarding marriage influenced the expectations and beliefs of lay Virginians.

¹¹¹ Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, 6.

¹¹² Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, 115; Jonathan D. Sassi, “Evangelicals, Infidels, and Politics in the Early Republic,” review of *Conceived in Doubt*, by Porterfield; *Church-State Relations in the Early American Republic, 1787-1846*, by James S. Kabala; *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States*, by Eric E. Schlereth, *Reviews in American History* 42, no. 2 (2015): 217-218.

CHAPTER TWO: THE IDEOLOGY OF LAYMEN

While church officials propagandized mostly patriarchal theories of marriage on Virginians, laymen upheld their own expectations concerning the conjugal state. In diaries, letters, published books, and newspaper articles, Virginians accepted marriage as a negotiation between partners within patriarchal restraints. The general public expected both spouses to perform specific gendered duties in a male dominated society to advance the happiness of the family. Within such perceptions, many individuals understood matrimony in an emotional way, by stressing love and duty.

Some women expressed their marital beliefs as Christian duties. These women reasoned that accomplishing such obligations required total subservience to their husbands. When Elizabeth Foote promised to marry Lund Washington, she hoped she could fulfill the role of “a dutiful obedient wife.”¹¹³ In 1779, Elizabeth anticipated that throughout marriage she would please her husband “in everything that is not against the divine laws.”¹¹⁴ Her emotional state in marriage depended on two aspects: God’s will and her own ability to dutifully serve her husband. Religion weighed heavily on Elizabeth’s life and she hoped God would make her marriage a happy one. By serving her husband and following God, Elizabeth believed her marriage would be successful.

Virginia women understood their subservient status as a socio-religious responsibility.

¹¹³ Elizabeth Washington, Journal, November 1779, in “‘A dutiful obedient wife:’ The Journal of Elizabeth Foote Washington of Virginia, 1779-1796,” by Linda Eileen Parris, MA Thesis (Williamsburg: The College of William and Mary, 1984), 60, Virginia Historical Society.

¹¹⁴ Washington, Journal, November 1779, 60.

Early in her marriage, Elizabeth made a list of “some rules to go by.”¹¹⁵ She yearned to remain in good favor with God by pleasing him in any way possible. Emotionally, Elizabeth wanted to cultivate her “humility, meakness [*sic*], & patience.”¹¹⁶ In matrimony, she believed in the domesticity of the female role. She wished to treat her “domesticks [*sic*] with all the friendly kindness that is possible.”¹¹⁷ Elizabeth, like other newlyweds expected to live a dutiful life by appealing to God, remaining inferior to her husband, and fulfilling housekeeping responsibilities.

Men expected women to perform such gendered duties. For example, in 1791, John Baker wrote his cousin Eleanor Stuart concerning her recent marriage. John expected that as a wife, Eleanor should perform the role of Mrs. Stuart. John wished to visit Eleanor’s home in Staunton, Virginia, “to see how you manage matters in the house keeping line.”¹¹⁸ He anticipated that Eleanor might have some trouble accomplishing her role early on, but expected her eventually to “be quite settled and methodical in your business.”¹¹⁹ Virginians presumed that once married women should act as competent homemakers; a domestic responsibility designed to maintain the family.

Throughout the early republic, Virginians understood their marital roles as social obligations. Both sexes believed it was their duty to follow God’s will and unite to propagate children. Men expected to assume the responsibility of being the physical protector of their wives and the financial earner for their households. Women anticipated dedicating their lives to the domestic sphere, specifically in childbearing, childrearing, and housekeeping. In 1824, Mary Randolph introduced her book, *The Virginia Housewife Or, Methodical Cook* by writing,

¹¹⁵ Washington, Journal, Summer 1784, 61.

¹¹⁶ Washington, Journal, Summer 1784, 62.

¹¹⁷ Washington, Journal, Summer 1784, 63.

¹¹⁸ John Baker to Eleanor Stuart, June 20, 1791, Stuart Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

¹¹⁹ John Baker to Eleanor Stuart, June 20, 1791.

“Management is an art that may be acquired by every woman of good sense and tolerable memory.”¹²⁰ According to Toby L. Ditz, “Virtually all domestic advice writers, even reformers who praised women’s intellectual abilities and advocated companionate marriage, tried...to square praise of women’s housewifery with their duties to their husbands.”¹²¹ Randolph’s book affirms this argument. She designates household management as a gender-specific role, in which a woman must fulfill in servitude of her husband. In a wife, a husband should expect “a companion, who gives his home charms that gratify every wish of his soul, and render the haunts of dissipation hateful to him.”¹²² As important, a wife must oversee domestic tasks and take charge in caring for children. When a woman satisfied her gendered obligations than she would “be a treasure to her husband; and...the model of an exemplary mother.”¹²³ If both partners fulfilled their responsibilities, they believed they would live in contentment and add to the peace of society.

According to the companionate ideal, couples should not marry exclusively for money. Yet, once married, Virginians expected a long journey toward economic success. For example, in 1788, Richard Archer wrote Elizabeth Randolph concerning her upcoming wedding with David Meade. Archer asked Randolph, “Let me ask the natural consequences of matrimonial connection, is it not posterity?”¹²⁴ Archer expected that when Elizabeth married David Meade in September they would immediately begin providing for the future by making informed economic

¹²⁰ Mary Randolph, *The Virginia Housewife Or, Methodical Cook*, 1824, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), v.

¹²¹ Toby L. Ditz, “Domesticating Women: The Gendering of Politics in Great Britain and Anglo-America,” review of *Separated by Their Sex: Women in Public and Private in the Colonial Atlantic World*, by Mary Beth Norton, *Reviews in American History* 40, no.3 (2012), 268.

¹²² Randolph, *The Virginia Housewife Or, Methodical Cook*, vi.

¹²³ Randolph, *The Virginia Housewife Or, Methodical Cook*, vi.

¹²⁴ Richard Archer to Eliza Randolph, March 28, 1788, Patrick Crawford Hoy Papers, Section 1, Virginia Historical Society.

decisions because they had the ability and youth to do so. With fatherly advice, Richard recommended that Elizabeth should, “Consider The situation of you both the manners, customs, and luxury of The Country you live in. The extensiveness of your acquaintance, the estimation you stand in with those acquaintances [*sic*], and I trust they will have no bad tendency [*sic*], if you will not suffer yourself to be blinded by local prejudice.”¹²⁵ Since communal networks and reputation weighed heavily on Virginia social conditions, Richard stressed the couple’s ability to remain in good standing with their community.

Like clergymen, lay Virginians believed in the divine nature of marriage. Revolutionary War Veteran Major Isaac Hite, Jr., identified marriage as a connection between two humans orchestrated by God. According to Hite, “God has wisely implanted in Mankind a Desire of uniting into a lasting Friendship those who are to be... Partners.”¹²⁶ Hite argued that it was God’s plan to create a system in which individuals came together for childrearing. To create such a bond, individuals had to have “mutual Love & Esteem” toward each other.¹²⁷ He specified marriage as an emotional connection between two people with a goal to have children.

Hite’s matrimonial views necessitated a strict contractual relationship. He asserted, “Marriage can be defined [as] a Covenant between a man & a Women.”¹²⁸ The requirements for such an agreement necessitated “faithful Cohabitation, & joint Care of a common offspring.”¹²⁹ Therefore, he expressed three “chief Articles of a marriage” which validated the marital contract.¹³⁰ First, both partners had to remain faithful. In a society that valued chastity, sexual

¹²⁵ Richard Archer to Eliza Randolph, March 28, 1788.

¹²⁶ Isaac Hite, “Oconomics, on the domestic Rights of Obligations,” 1785, Virginia Historical Society.

¹²⁷ Hite, “Oconomics, on the domestic Rights of Obligations,” 1785.

¹²⁸ Hite, “Oconomics, on the domestic Rights of Obligations,” 1785.

¹²⁹ Hite, “Oconomics, on the domestic Rights of Obligations,” 1785.

¹³⁰ Hite, “Oconomics, on the domestic Rights of Obligations,” 1785.

promiscuity was impermissible, especially among females. Second, a commitment to “the well-being of the family, particularly [the] ‘Right Education of their Children.’”¹³¹ Through education, parents should act to instill domestic virtue in their daughters and civility in their sons. Third, death was the only way to end a marital union.¹³² Together the triad formulates a marriage ideal focused around the permanent development of a family until the death of a partner. However, some circumstances could invalidate matrimony.

Hite narrowed connubial problems worthy of divorce down to two major categories: natural and moral. Believing in the sanctity of marriage in most situations, he suggested, a variety of possible “Impediments,” that could “void a valid Contract.”¹³³ Acts that justified divorce included, “Fornication...wilful [*sic*] Desertion, Impotency, & some other Causes marked out by different States.”¹³⁴ Unlike many of his contemporaries, Hite proposed divorce as a rational end to an invalid contract and hinted to regionally diverse nuptial practices. He blamed the perpetrator of marital issues for the problems. He argued, “the guilty Party deserves the highest Punishment.”¹³⁵ However, the “innocent Party sh[oul]d be suffered to marry again.”¹³⁶ Hite claimed that deeming a victim unmarriageable was “strangely inhuman.”¹³⁷ Since single people were detrimental to the structure of society, he concluded that “guilty Parties...sh[oul]d not be hindered from marrying, except it be with the Partners of their Guilt.”¹³⁸ In other words, marital violators should wed an individual who committed a similar act against their former spouse. Hite’s analysis does not differentiate between the sexes. Rather, his understanding of

¹³¹ Buckley, *The Great Catastrophe of My Life*, 58.

¹³² Hite, “Oconomics, on the domestic Rights of Obligations,” 1785.

¹³³ Hite, “Oconomics, on the domestic Rights of Obligations,” 1785.

¹³⁴ Hite, “Oconomics, on the domestic Rights of Obligations,” 1785.

¹³⁵ Hite, “Oconomics, on the domestic Rights of Obligations,” 1785.

¹³⁶ Hite, “Oconomics, on the domestic Rights of Obligations,” 1785.

¹³⁷ Hite, “Oconomics, on the domestic Rights of Obligations,” 1785.

¹³⁸ Hite, “Oconomics, on the domestic Rights of Obligations,” 1785.

marriage required a dual effort between the spouses for the common goals of love and advancement of offspring.

Other Virginians attempted to describe marriage using a set of various comparisons. For instance, Elizabeth Beverly Kennon used the metaphor of a canoe sailing on a rough ocean to explain marriage to her friend Samuel Mordecai. Elizabeth wrote Samuel a nautical narrative, “You say [you] are very willing to take a partner in your Canoe, to paddle lifes [*sic*] voyage together.”¹³⁹ When “embarking on the Ocean of matrimony,” Elizabeth presumed that Samuel would find a wife “pleasing...when you first receive her on board.”¹⁴⁰ However, the rough seas of monogamy could turn an “Angel” into a symbol of “darkness, and horror.”¹⁴¹ To clarify her abstract arguments, Elizabeth utilized the example of the Corbin family as “proof, of the instability of all things in this world of changes, and chances.”¹⁴² She was rather certain that Sam heard the terrible story, and does not detail every event. Rather, Elizabeth warns that the Corbins’ relationship soured so severely that they turned away from “all other tender ties [of] connubial life.”¹⁴³ Though the couple was “once romantically in love, as ever Tom Jones and Sophia Western were...now they cannot speak tolerably civil to, or about each other.”¹⁴⁴ Elizabeth combined her maritime metaphor, the real life example of the Corbin family, and the English comic novel *Tom Jones* to emphasize that as the duration of matrimony extended the opportunity for hostile spousal relations increased.

In addition, Elizabeth compared the emotional relationship between partners to a risky

¹³⁹ E[lizabETH] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, September 12, 1816, Kennon Family Papers, Section 1. Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁴⁰ E[lizabETH] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, September 12, 1816.

¹⁴¹ E[lizabETH] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, September 12, 1816.

¹⁴² E[lizabETH] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, September 12, 1816.

¹⁴³ E[lizabETH] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, September 12, 1816.

¹⁴⁴ E[lizabETH] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, September 12, 1816.

game of chance. Courting could help Sam's chances of finding a wife dedicated, "always to love, and cherish, and so on."¹⁴⁵ Yet, Elizabeth worried that "it [is] difficult to keep such a promise sacred, when the object proves the very reverse of what you hoped to find."¹⁴⁶ She supposed a spouse who brought happiness to marriage, like the wife of Samuel's brother, was "a prize of inestimable [*sic*] values on the matrimonial Lottery."¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the price to take a chance on the marriage lottery was "the loss of Liberty."¹⁴⁸

When entering the lottery of matrimony men and women expected to lose a degree of autonomy in exchange for several responsibilities. According to Elizabeth, married men were "kept awake by the crying of children! scolding servants! [and] providing for a family!"¹⁴⁹ Elizabeth upheld that Virginian husbands should maintain patriarchal dominance over the family to maintain a slave society. White men had to keep in place a hierarchy based on slavery. To do so, all women needed to remain in a secondary, subservient, and domestic role.

To make the chances of winning the lottery favorable, Elizabeth instructed Samuel to remain vigilant of dubious females during courtship. For example, in 1815, when Samuel was out of the country, Elizabeth relayed the romantic endeavor a mutual friend named Moses. After seven years, the "solitary Bachelor [was] still; in search of" a wife.¹⁵⁰ According to Elizabeth, Moses hastily fell in love with Mary Long. Elizabeth considered Mary's beauty and "encouraging message...as a Trap."¹⁵¹ Mary had written Moses asking "him not to think [of] her

¹⁴⁵ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, December 21, 1817, Kennon Family Papers, Section 1. Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁴⁶ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, December 21, 1817.

¹⁴⁷ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, December 21, 1817.

¹⁴⁸ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, December 21, 1817.

¹⁴⁹ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, December 21, 1817.

¹⁵⁰ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, June 25, 1815, Kennon Family Papers, Section 1. Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁵¹ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, June 25, 1815.

[as] forbid[d]e[n] fruit, for she could assure him she was not!”¹⁵² As a cultural taboo, premarital sexual relations or rumors of promiscuity made women, like Mary, imperfect marriage models. Exacerbating the issue, Moses heard of Mary’s previous engagement, which ended his love for her. Because Moses refused to court a woman with a tarnished reputation, Elizabeth understood him as a “courteous Knight.”¹⁵³ Elizabeth hoped Samuel and her own sons would “be as prudent as Moses; and as the saying is ‘turn a Deaf Ear’ to the allurements of all...you may meet with.”¹⁵⁴ The courtship process required a wise and dedicated individual capable of recognizing a suitable companion and casting away women of questionable character.

A cultural prescription of male seniority developed from the association of marriage with childrearing. Elizabeth hoped Samuel would make a “fortunate choice” when choosing a wife.¹⁵⁵ She warned that certain age discrepancies between spouses could lead to disaster. Of the Corbins, Elizabeth wrote, “from the first I thought [their dissolution probable]... as there was a such a disparity in their ages: for she is fifteen years older than he is!”¹⁵⁶ The disparity in age was “quite too great a difference” for matrimonial happiness.¹⁵⁷ To assume the responsibility of patriarch, that is to create children, progress the family economy, and control the household, husbands needed wives of childbearing age. A woman fifteen years older than a husband was a threat to Virginia’s social system.

Virginians assumed marriage would result in either contentment or unhappiness for both partners. By 1816, Samuel desired to marry soon. Elizabeth replied, “be content as you are; and

¹⁵² E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, June 25, 1815.

¹⁵³ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, June 25, 1815.

¹⁵⁴ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, June 25, 1815.

¹⁵⁵ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, September 12, 1816.

¹⁵⁶ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, September 12, 1816.

¹⁵⁷ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, September 12, 1816.

[be] not in a hurry to take a step, on which so much depends.”¹⁵⁸ In the meantime, Elizabeth wanted her young friend to content himself in the moment, “for once done; the Die is cast forever; and your happiness or misery is fixed in the world.”¹⁵⁹ Virginians expected marital relationships to provide the emotional climax of their lives. At its best, matrimony brought spouses absolute domestic pleasure. At its worst, marriage became perpetual anguish. Elizabeth wrote Samuel, reminding him that upon reaching Heaven, he would remember “with regret, to the days of other years, the days of single blessedness.”¹⁶⁰ Before the uncertainty of marriage, bachelorship allowed young men a great deal of autonomy.

As a maternal friend, Elizabeth warned Samuel to not rush into marriage. She knew, “so many rendered unhappy by matrimony” and worried of a similar fate for Samuel.¹⁶¹ When rumor spread that the three Sawyer sisters would travel to Richmond, Elizabeth seemed concerned that Samuel might hastily fall in love with one of the beautiful siblings.¹⁶² Elizabeth with strict motherly advice wrote, “now Sam you may come and look at them: but I put my Veto on any thing [*sic*] more; no fallen [*sic*] in love with either of them, no courting, no marrying: I positively say NONE.”¹⁶³ Elizabeth sought to deter Samuel from “a dismal conclusion,” by comparing the progression of the marriage state to nautical catastrophe, articulating constant reminders of the unfortunate Corbin family experience, and mandating no emotional attachment to young belles.¹⁶⁴

The correspondence between Elizabeth and Samuel demonstrates the importance of

¹⁵⁸ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, September 12, 1816

¹⁵⁹ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, September 12, 1816

¹⁶⁰ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, September 12, 1816

¹⁶¹ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, January 12, 1818.

¹⁶² E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, September 12, 1816.

¹⁶³ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, September 12, 1816.

¹⁶⁴ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, September 12, 1816.

rumor in local affairs. As Cynthia Kierner argues, “all sorts of people were in fact producers, consumers, and subjects of gossip in eighteenth-century Virginia.”¹⁶⁵ Reoccurring throughout Elizabeth’s letters were requests for insight regarding Samuel’s actions and the daily activities of his community. In 1816, Elizabeth asked, “Are you in love? Is the lady an inhabitant of our far famed Borough?”¹⁶⁶ Not only did Elizabeth seek information about Samuel's emotional relationship, but she also wanted to know where his rumored love resided. Elizabeth inquired, “is miss [*sic*] Adeline Myers the fair one who holds your...palpitator [*sic*] in bondage?”¹⁶⁷ In Elizabeth’s opinion, women controlled the emotions of men.

Like other Virginians, Elizabeth heard such rumors from a vast array of sources. One of her speculative informants was woman known to spread, “Rumours [*sic*] with her hundred tounques! [*sic*”¹⁶⁸ In another letter, when requesting “all the news of your city, ”Elizabeth reminded Samuel that all “old women are all gossipers.”¹⁶⁹ Through writing, Elizabeth hoped to “retail the news, anecdotes [*sic*], occurences [*sic*], and Chit Chat of the day.”¹⁷⁰ In 1815, Elizabeth informed Samuel, “you have only been from here a few months, many changes have taken place: birth, marriages, and deaths.”¹⁷¹ Elizabeth went on to describe recent social interactions, with a special focus on marriages. The topic of matrimony remained of particular interest among letter writing Virginians deep into the nineteenth century.

Through her letters, Elizabeth defined what a suitable wife should offer Samuel. Only

¹⁶⁵ Cynthia A. Kierner, *Scandal at Bizarre: Rumor and Reputation in Jefferson’s America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 69.

¹⁶⁶ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, December 29, 1816, Kennon Family Papers, Section 1. Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁶⁷ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, December 29, 1816.

¹⁶⁸ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, December 29, 1816.

¹⁶⁹ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, N.D. Kennon Family Papers, Section 1. Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁷⁰ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, January 12, 1818.

¹⁷¹ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, June 25, 1815.

after a long period of consideration, Samuel should choose “a charming girl.”¹⁷² One who acted as a helpmate to sail the ocean of matrimony. Elizabeth advised Samuel to “come and try your luck with our charming Borough Israelite: the amiable Adeline.”¹⁷³ Elizabeth rationalized that Samuel would be happiest with an affectionate woman, especially if she followed Judaism, as he did. Society expected individuals to have a period long deliberation before their vows to prepare themselves for the long journey of marriage.

While men should not rush into marriage, aging bachelors became social outcasts. A few years later, in 1818, Kennon began urging Samuel to marry. In a letter dated January 12, 1818, Elizabeth insisted, “get married as fast as you can.”¹⁷⁴ She then goes on to warn of “the comfortless condition of an-old Bachelor.”¹⁷⁵ In youth, bachelorhood had benefits, however remaining single at an old age hindered society. “I consider an old bachelor, as an animal,” wrote Elizabeth, “who lives on the common stock, without contributing his share.”¹⁷⁶ An aging man without a family added nothing to his community; rather he was dependent on social welfare. Elizabeth condoned government intervention for such men, claiming, “the Laws shou[ld] make use of as many stratagems, and as much force to drive reluctant Savage into the toils; as the Indians do, when they hunt the Rhinoceros [sic].”¹⁷⁷ As Samuel approached the age of thirty-two, Elizabeth warned that he should marry soon. To Elizabeth marriage was necessary for men before they reached middle age.

¹⁷² E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, December 29, 1816.

¹⁷³ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, December 21, 1817.

¹⁷⁴ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, January 12, 1818, Kennon Family Papers, Section 1. Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁷⁵ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, January 12, 1818.

¹⁷⁶ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, January 12, 1818; for original quote see, Oliver Goldsmith, *Letters from a Citizen of the World to his Friends in the East* (Bungay: J. and R. Childs, 1820), 88.

¹⁷⁷ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, January 12, 1818.

Virginians often used fictional literature to communicate their marital ideals. For instance, in the same January 12, 1818, letter, Elizabeth paraphrased lines from Oliver Goldsmith's "The Citizen of the World," a series of letters first published in the *Public Ledger*, an English magazine. Beginning in 1760, the Irishman created a fictionalized Chinese philosopher, named Lien Chi Altangi to comment satirically on British society.¹⁷⁸ During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the letters circulated widely throughout the United States in book format. Elizabeth condensed "Letter LXXII" into one paragraph for Samuel.¹⁷⁹ Altangi claimed that if he were an Englishman, he would remain a bachelor. There were two main reasons for this hypothetical claim. First, according to Elizabeth, Altangi could "never find [the] courage to run through all the trouble prescribed by law."¹⁸⁰ Second, he could never come to terms with courting a whole family. Lien Chi found it reasonable to date a woman, but he would not want to date her family members. The "many obstacles to marriage" in England, Elizabeth restates, made "celibacy...both frequent, and fashionable."¹⁸¹ In America, however, marriage remained popular.

Elizabeth Kennon's writing demonstrates what many elite Virginia women thought about marriage. It was a conjunction of two individuals to take on life together. While at the start of the conjugal voyage spouses might find a romanticized tranquility in the comfort of their partner, the troubles and responsibilities of marriage could make their experiences more complex. Young men should take advantage of the autonomous nature of bachelorship because once the vow was taken, life changed permanently. In the letters of many Virginians, matrimony and love were highly discussed topics. Such correspondence kept absent individuals updated on local news

¹⁷⁸ Goldsmith, *Letters from a Citizen of the World to his Friends in the East*.

¹⁷⁹ Goldsmith, *Letters from a Citizen of the World to his Friends in the East*, 227-230.

¹⁸⁰ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, January 12, 1818.

¹⁸¹ E[lizabeth] Kennon to Samuel Mordecai, January 12, 1818.

while spreading anecdotal advice. Through metaphors, narratives, and rumors, Elizabeth Kennon declared her marital prescriptions to Samuel Mordecai.

When couples promised to marry, their parents often conversed regarding specific marital expectations and obligations. For instance, in 1820, Robert Conrad promised to wed Betsey Powell. Betsey's father, Burr Powell wrote Robert's mother, Rebecca Conrad concerning the upcoming joining of families. Burr expected to give up his protection of Betsey, while his wife would cease her counsel over their daughter. Burr assured Rebecca that "there is no young man of my acquaintance, to whom I could comfortably resign my charge than the one she has chosen and I add with pleasure + sincerity, that there is no lady, in my judgement, [*sic*] better qualified, a[nd] better disposed than your self [*sic*] to supply to her a mothers place."¹⁸² Since the couple planned on living with Rebecca in Winchester, Virginia, Burr was willing to relinquish his paternal reign. As importantly, Burr trusted Rebecca to teach his daughter "the duties of family management."¹⁸³ Burr expected Betsey to participate in a practicum of domestic responsibility under the guidance of Rebecca. He anticipated that Rebecca's "influence" would, "prevent their conforming too much to prevailing customs of the time + running into wasteful + unnecessary expenditures."¹⁸⁴ In the early part of his daughter's marriage, Burr Powell assumed that Rebecca Conrad would teach the newlyweds how to navigate between marital paradigms.

Like ordinary Virginians, the authors of advice books struggled to merge patriarchy with companionship. In 1828, Virginia Randolph Cary published *Letters on Female Character*. The book contains thirty letters, which Cary claimed her mother wrote. Most of the letters involve the feminine ideals of domesticity, purity, and piety. Within her analysis, Cary demonstrates how

¹⁸² Burr Powell to Rebecca Conrad, October 11, 1820, Holmes Conrad Papers, Section 6, Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁸³ Burr Powell to Rebecca Conrad, October 11, 1820.

¹⁸⁴ Burr Powell to Rebecca Conrad, October 11, 1820.

Virginians conceptualized marriage and that Christianity condoned complete female subservience. Cynthia Kierner argues, “Cary... emphasized women’s moral, legal, and religious duty to submit to male authority.”¹⁸⁵ According to Cary, God created women to serve as helpmates for men. Because women are “inferior to man in moral as well as in physical strength,” they needed to accept their domesticity and subordination.¹⁸⁶ Without religion, women remained morally corrupt and deformed society.

To harmonize humanity, women needed to accept their inferiority. Women should stay out of “the fierce turmoil and withering excitement of political debate.”¹⁸⁷ Cary worried that female involvement in the public sphere would lead to the deterioration of feminine duties. In turn, the children of public women would grow up without affection and lack proper religious instruction. As many of her contemporaries did, Cary used the French Revolution to demonstrate the results of female equality. By “attempting to elevate the weaker sex to a station which demands masculine strength, national as well as individual misery have been produced.”¹⁸⁸ To Cary and other Virginians, French society had deteriorated because French women ignored their domestic responsibilities. She feared increased female public access because of the possible negative social, political, and religious consequences.

Parents had the obligation to educate girls to fulfill certain roles to tranquilize society. From a young age, parents should prepare their daughters for marriage. Cary argued, “Women must be brought up in a fitness for their conjugal duties.”¹⁸⁹ Parents should teach their daughters to accept obedience as their chief responsibility to God. Cary maintained that the domestic and

¹⁸⁵ Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, 181.

¹⁸⁶ Virginia Randolph Cary, *Letters on Female Character, Addressed to a Young Lady, on the Death of her Mother* (Richmond: Ariel Works, 1830), 21.

¹⁸⁷ Cary, *Letters on Female Character*, 22.

¹⁸⁸ Cary, *Letters on Female Character*, 22.

¹⁸⁹ Cary, *Letters on Female Character*, 44.

inferior nature of women should bring personal cheerfulness. “There is not in nature a more beautiful spectacle, than that of a female, invested with all the purest attractions of her sex, in the act of soothing the toil-worn companion of her destiny, under his characteristic moodiness of humour [*sic*],” wrote Cary.¹⁹⁰ Once married, women needed to obey their husbands while continually tending to their children and housework. Keeping busy, especially with domestic duties would make marriage happy and keep society morally sufficient.

Upon marriage, some Virginians feared the possible absence of contentment. Cary forewarned that married life might not be as blissful as courtship: “Women are most prone to commence conjugal life, by expecting the same devoted attention from the husband, that they received from the lover. This expectation will almost always be disappointed.”¹⁹¹ Happiness would come only from finding a Christian husband, maintaining sensibility, and a strict adherence to Christianity. To maintain “true affection,” couples needed to supply “a perennial flow of vital kindness, springing from the heart, and sanctioned the understanding.”¹⁹² Like Elizabeth Kennon, Virginia Cary understood marriage as a negotiation between the two marital ideals.

By remaining considerate to their spouse, Virginians believed they could increase marital happiness. In one letter about the fictional twenty-year marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Arundel, Cary maintains that under certain circumstances, couples could live in eternal affection. Though Mr. Arundel noticed the uncommonness of marital happiness in the general society, he suggested, ““If we only follow common sense, and the Christian rule of doing as we would be done, there is

¹⁹⁰ Cary, *Letters on Female Character*, 47.

¹⁹¹ Cary, *Letters on Female Character*, 83.

¹⁹² Cary, *Letters on Female Character*, 84.

no doubt but happiness would be the result.”¹⁹³ In recollection, Mrs. Arundel advocated couples to love one another more than they love themselves.¹⁹⁴ At the beginning of their marriage, Mr. Arundel served as a politician, an occupation his wife thought tainted their relationship. Mrs. Arundel believed her husband brought home the toils of his public life, which interfered with their domestic happiness. To find contentment between her husband’s actions and her sorrow, Mrs. Arundel decided to submit to Mr. Arundel’s will. For example, on the topic of their children’s education, Mrs. Arundel wanted to maintain motherly affection, while Mr. Arundel wanted to instill toughness. While at first, Mrs. Arundel was sad, she decided to give in to her husband’s wishes. Instantly, by assuming her Christian duty as a submissive and loving wife, she began to feel cheerful. “A woman really loves her husband,” wrote Cary, “it will give her far more pleasure to obey him, than to govern him.”¹⁹⁵ To maintain conjugal happiness a woman should practice self-sacrifice, self-restraint, complete spousal affection, and never attempt to control her husband.¹⁹⁶ Cary used the fictitious story of the Arundels to argue that the duty of a wife was to submit to religion and thus to her husband.

During the early republic, newspapers, like published books, informed Virginians of social prescriptions. Newspapers connected literate Virginians to the larger world through the reprinting of columns from major cities such as New York and Philadelphia. Wide issuing allowed similar beliefs to spread among the literate classes and created a broad consensus of marriage ideals.

Like the private correspondence of individuals, various diaries, and the messages expressed by clergy, the authors of newspaper articles tried to come to terms with the patriarchal

¹⁹³ Cary, *Letters on Female Character*, 88.

¹⁹⁴ Cary, *Letters on Female Character*, 88.

¹⁹⁵ Cary, *Letters on Female Character*, 93.

¹⁹⁶ Cary, *Letters on Female Character*, 88-94.

marriage model and the companionate ideal. In “Breaches of Promise of Marriage. A Letter to Miss Tabitha Tring and others,” a reprinted article from *The American Statesman*, the author suggests that marriage based on economic prosperity is a precedent remaining from British culture. The author wrote, “It is well known that in England, marriages are formed on *mercenary* principles, and that courtships are *negotiations for pounds and shillings*.”¹⁹⁷ In America, matrimony required a strong emotional attachment. Any promise of marriage, lacking “affection, that is in fact, without the *moral power* to fulfill the promise, must of itself be null and void.”¹⁹⁸ The British precedent of coverture weighed heavily in American courts and in general society. Yet, in their marital expectations, Americans increasingly turned to emotional attachment rather than financial gain.

Newspapers often printed anecdotes or poems with relevant societal information about marriage. *The Genius of Liberty*, a newspaper printed from 1817 to 1839 in Leesburg, Virginia, regularly reproduced such stories. For example, one poem, “The disappointed Husband,” told a humorous tale of a man named Dick, who, “being tired of single life, Resolved to get himself a wife.”¹⁹⁹ Dick decided to publish an advertisement for a companion. Soon after, many women responded. An unnamed woman offered her hand in matrimony and Dick accepted because of, “Her virtue, person, and her worth.”²⁰⁰ Early in marriage, Dick “thought himself supremely blest.”²⁰¹ However, as time passed, his wife spent her time gambling, dressing, and flirting. The poem ends with Dick making another ad in the newspaper in attempt to sell or donate his wife.

The fictitious story reveals important insight concerning marital ideals during the 1820s.

¹⁹⁷ “Breaches of Promise of Marriage. A Letter to Miss Tabitha Tring and others,” *The Genius of Liberty* VI, no. 31 (Leesburg, VA) August 13, 1822.

¹⁹⁸ “Breaches of Promise of Marriage. *The Genius of Liberty* VI, no. 31, August 12, 1822.

¹⁹⁹ “The disappointed Husband,” *The Genius of Liberty* VII, no. 38, September 30, 1823.

²⁰⁰ “The disappointed Husband,” *The Genius of Liberty* VII, no. 38, September 30, 1823.

²⁰¹ “The disappointed Husband,” *The Genius of Liberty* VII, no. 38, September 30, 1823.

Men looked for a virtuous wife. In thought and in action, women should remain chaste, domestic, subordinate, and indifferent. These idealized qualities upheld male dominated marriage. Not only should a man judge a woman's characteristics, he should also look to her family's wealth. A man should select a partner who fulfilled a gendered stereotype while coming from an affluent family. Once married, men expected to take direct control of the house. Promiscuous women who did not partake in housekeeping could not make proper wives. Such a contrast from social norms interfered with the gendered hierarchy of Virginia's slave society.

In a potential husband, women should not look for wealth, rather they should look for an affectionate friend who would make a suitable partner. The author of "The Ladies' Friend" warned of the drastic consequences associated with marrying for prosperity:

Suffer not your Imagination to be dazzled by *mere* splendor. The glitter of wealth and equipage has induced many a poor girl to sacrifice her peace at the shrine of vanity; and her nightly pillow steeped in tears and regret. has soon told her that 'better is a dinner of herbs where *love* is, than a stalled ox'²⁰²

The author paraphrased Proverbs 15:17 from the *King James Bible* to show that love is vital to a successful relationship, but economic accomplishment is not. Only through "attachment, fidelity and affection," from, "A good man" could a woman have a workable marriage.²⁰³ A union with a loving man, based on economic impartiality, gave women the best chance of happiness throughout her life. The result of materialism and unrestrained emotion was marital unhappiness. Articles included stories of individuals consumed by worldly items, which in effect intensified avaricious passions and destroyed domestic peace.

Newspaper articles maintained that marrying for money would distort conjugal

²⁰² "The Ladies' Friend," *The Genius of Liberty* I, no. 8, March 4, 1817.

²⁰³ "The Ladies' Friend," *The Genius of Liberty* I, no. 8, March 4, 1817.

happiness. One article suggested, “The most unhappy marriages are the monied [*sic*] ones, and parents often render their own and their children’s lives miserable by persuading them to marry for convenience instead of love.”²⁰⁴ Another included an extraction from Ben Franklin’s conduct manual, *Reflections on Courtship and Marriage*, “Many unhappy matches are occasioned by mere mercenary views in one or both of the parties, or by the head strong notion of ill conducted passions.”²⁰⁵

Corresponding with private journals and letters, newspapers described marriage as a natural duty. The author of “The Ladies’ Friend” asserted, “Marriage is, doubtless, the most natural, innocent and useful state.”²⁰⁶ Virginian cultural norms suggested that matrimony benefitted individuals by making them useful to nature and society. The absence of men made women defenseless. According to the author, “She cannot go with care or safety into public.”²⁰⁷ Such articles reinforced the expectation of the male protector role, a guardian of female virtue from the chaos and corruption of the outside world. Furthermore, without marriage, a woman would see “her friends gradually drop away from her life [like] leaves in autumn, leaving her a pining, solitary creature.”²⁰⁸ Only a husband remained as caretaker and friend when friends and family died.

During the first quarter of the nineteenth century, people in the United States discussed if husbands owned their wives. “Has a man a right to the possession of his wife,” an article reprinted in *The Genius of Liberty*, describes a case in the “court of common pleas, & general

²⁰⁴ “Sentiments on love and marriage.” *The Genius of Liberty* I, no. 27, July 15, 1817.

²⁰⁵ “Salutary Hints. On an Interesting Subject to Young People,” *The Genius of Liberty* II, no 32, August 18, 1818; original quote in Benjamin Franklin, *Reflections on Courtship and Marriage: in Two Letters to a Friend. Wherein a Practicable Plan is Laid Down for Obtaining and Securing Conjugal Felicity* (Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin, 1746), 7.

²⁰⁶ “The Ladies’ Friend,” *The Genius of Liberty* I, no. 8, March 4, 1817.

²⁰⁷ “The Ladies’ Friend,” *The Genius of Liberty* I, no. 8, March 4, 1817.

²⁰⁸ “The Ladies’ Friend,” *The Genius of Liberty* I, no. 8, March 4, 1817.

sessions of the peace in Genesee, Livingston County, N.Y.”²⁰⁹ A man sued his father-in-law for taking his wife away, “detaining her, against her own will, and that of her husband.”²¹⁰ The plaintiff won the case and the defendant appealed. At the subsequent case, the father revealed that his daughter, “was a minor, and married against the will and consent of the defendant.”²¹¹ At first, the court deemed the marriage legal. However, the defendant’s counsel argued, “that the father had a right to the custody and services of his minor child.”²¹² The court eventually arranged a new trial after relieving the plaintiff of liability. While the story does not include the outcome of the new trial, one thing is clear, in theory, all women were subject to possession by men. The only question was which man.

Though the case did not take place in the Old Dominion, its reprinting in the state suggests that Virginians continued to consider women as property. Social norms and Virginian law affirmed that women belonged to men. If legally married, men possessed their wives. If single, fathers directed their daughters. Though the question a woman’s will came into play, it was merely to maintain that she deliberately entered the married state. Virginian culture did not accept women as capable actors in their own lives. Rather men, as public actors and heads of households owned and directed females.

In contrast, some newspaper articles incorporated the companionate ideal in their descriptions of marriage. In an article entitled “Sentiments on love and marriage,” the author

²⁰⁹ “Has a man a right to the possession of his wife?” *The Genius of Liberty* VI, no. 24, June 25, 1822.

²¹⁰ “Has a man a right to the possession of his of wife?” *The Genius of Liberty* VI, no. 24, June 25, 1822.

²¹¹ “Has a man a right to the possession of his of wife?” *The Genius of Liberty* VI, no. 24, June 25, 1822.

²¹² “Has a man a right to the possession of his of wife?” *The Genius of Liberty* VI, no. 24, June 25, 1822.

compares the “Beauty of a person” to an “annual flower.”²¹³ While “beauty of mind [is] like a perennial [sic] one, lasts for more than a season.”²¹⁴ Courting couples should consider physical attraction as secondary in comparison to the mindset of their partner. Respect and admiration should make up the core of a relationship. In expectation, Virginians accepted beauty as an admirable trait, but sincere emotional attachment created the path for an ideal marriage. In a partner, an individual should have an agreeable companion. Spouses needed to maintain a sincere love to have a workable marriage. One article described love as “a passion of the soul, croanating from the heart. It is created by esteem and admiration, and supported by mutual confidence and respect. It is the basis on which all the sweet and social enjoyments of life are founded.”²¹⁵ Before all else, spouses should see each other as friends connected by genuine love.

Stories also warned the populace of issues they may come across during courtship or marriage. Many articles recommended men to watch their significant other and to judge her character to make sure that she is of sound virtue. Men should be on guard for women who expressed an over-the-top sensibility and, “Avoid these artificially *fascinating* damsels.”²¹⁶ Similarly, men must, “Beware of that glittering eye, that giggling laughter, and bewitching conversation-that sparkling drapery and theatrical gesture-which attracts the whole attention of the promenade.”²¹⁷ Insincerity in women added to a cultural anxiety regarding sexual promiscuity. Since chastity and indifference weighed the status of women in Virginian society, men needed to watch for tell-tale signs of promiscuous behavior.

Popular opinion often questioned whether licentious women had the ability to fulfill the

²¹³ “Sentiments on love and marriage,” *The Genius of Liberty* I, no. 27, July 15, 1817.

²¹⁴ “Sentiments on love and marriage,” *The Genius of Liberty* I, no. 27, July 15, 1817.

²¹⁵ “Love,” *The Genius of Liberty* I, no. 35, September 9, 1817.

²¹⁶ “On the choice of a wife,” *The Genius of Liberty* VII, no 26, July 8, 1823.

²¹⁷ “On the choice of a wife,” *The Genius of Liberty* VII, no 26, July 8, 1823.

sacred marriage vow. Articles warned that such women might lose interest and could not make affectionate partners. Even if they attempted to “remain faithful to their marriage vow, their continuance will, in general, be owing, not to a principle of love, but fear of exposure.”²¹⁸

Newspapers reiterated anxiety regarding promiscuous women, their destruction of the sanctity of marriage, and its effects on society.

Newspapers incorporated stories that attempted to guide young couples during the early parts of their marriage. The author of an article entitled, “Addressed to married ladies,” argued for male control and female submission within marriage.²¹⁹ Following certain rules would lead to happiness in matrimony. Specifically, wives needed, “To avoid all thoughts of managing a husband.”²²⁰ Since men were only human, wives had to expect mistakes and upsetting periods during their relationship. When the behavior of their husband did not meet companionate expectations, a wife should, “pass it over...and try to mend his [temper] by attention, cheerfulness, and good nature.”²²¹ Women should act only as the helpmates of men. The article suggests that submissive men are unnatural, but women are naturally obedient to their husbands. Virginians acknowledged that true female power and happiness derived from the love and honor of her husband.

Virginian newspapers endorsed the belief that upon taking marital vows, couples entered a complex contract with various different parties. First, by taking marriage vows in front of a church official, couples validated a contract with God. One author argued that marital oaths created a “sacred institution.”²²² The author continues:

²¹⁸ “On the choice of a wife,” *The Genius of Liberty* VII, no 26, July 8, 1823.

²¹⁹ “Matrimonial Maxims,” *The Genius of Liberty* XII, no 5, February 9, 1828.

²²⁰ “Matrimonial Maxims,” *The Genius of Liberty* XII, no 5, February 9, 1828.

²²¹ “Matrimonial Maxims,” *The Genius of Liberty* XII, no 5, February 9, 1828.

²²² “The Marriage Vow,” *The Genius of Liberty* II, no. 35, September 8, 1818.

If you have forgotten the truth you plighted to your bride let me remind you of it.- When before the minister of the Church, you were asked this question-‘Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God’s ordinance in the holy state of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor and keep her in sickness and in health; and *forsaking all others keep thee only unto her so long as ye both live?*’ what air did you reply? ‘*I Will*’²²³

Since Virginians understood clergy as God’s representatives on earth, stating, “I will” contracted them to a Christian marriage for life. Second, by making the “solemn declaration: ‘I take thee to be my wedded wife,’” spouses entered a contract with each other.²²⁴ Third, by taking on social obligations, Virginians had a relationship with society in which they felt they must fulfill. Finally, a spouse entered a moral contract that connected their love to their partner’s affection. Together, partners, “enter[ed] into the most important of all contracts; you take a human being as your partner for life, to share your bed and your fortunes.”²²⁵ Without meeting the agreement by living peaceably and creating children, couples believed they failed God, themselves, and society.

Stories in Virginia newspapers portrayed Christian marriage as the only civilized matrimonial custom. The *Family Visitor*, printed in Richmond, included stories of the alleged barbaric nuptial tendencies of non-Christians. Marriage in Indians tribes, especially among the Creek, had no ceremony. The absence of a marital formality, the author suggested, led the Creek to separate due to “trifling offenses.”²²⁶ By introducing Christianity to the Natives, the author hoped they would “do away with this practice, and induce them to pay more respect to the

²²³ “The Marriage Vow,” *The Genius of Liberty* II, no. 35, September 8, 1818.

²²⁴ “The Marriage Vow,” *The Genius of Liberty* II, no. 35, September 8, 1818.

²²⁵ “The Marriage Vow,” *The Genius of Liberty* II, no. 35, September 8, 1818.

²²⁶ “Creek Indians,” *Family Visitor* I, no. 35, (Richmond, Va.), November 30, 1822.

marriage state.”²²⁷ In addition, men on the Sandwich Islands (modern day Hawaii) took “and put away their wives when they pleased,” and did not have any marriage ceremony.²²⁸ However, by marrying indigenous couples, Christian missionaries intended to instruct them in the Anglo-American social norms and the Gospel. White Virginians could not comprehend how any other marital system functioned in society.

Virginian newspapers such as the *Petersburg Republican*, the *Southern Religious Telegraph*, and the *Richmond Enquirer* included stories concerning marriage throughout the United States and in foreign countries. One column described a new state law in Connecticut. According to the article, “an act was passed for the due and orderly celebration of marriages.”²²⁹ The law made it mandatory for couples who wanted to marry to proclaim their intentions in “open church,” or post them “on the door of a church.”²³⁰ In addition, the law required ministers and justices of the peace to obtain “the consent of the parents or guardians of the [marriage] partners.”²³¹ Another article told of \$3,300 in damages awarded to Miss Ann Wade from Mr. Charles R. Cocky for breaching a marriage contract.²³² The *Richmond Enquirer* printed stories concerning marriages and rumored marriages among the royal families in Portugal, England, and Russia.²³³ As Robin Sager argues suggests, “The institution of marriage has always been a lightning rod for public discussion.”²³⁴ This was especially true for Virginia newspapers, which frequently included discussions and descriptions of marriage to formulate a consensus of

²²⁷ “Creek Indians,” *Family Visitor* I, no. 35, November 30, 1822.

²²⁸ “Marriage in the Sandwich Islands,” *Family Visitor* 4, no 2, April 16, 1825.

²²⁹ “State Concerns,” *Petersburg Republican* 15, (Petersburg, Va.), July 21, 1820.

²³⁰ “State Concerns,” *Petersburg Republican* 15, July 21, 1820.

²³¹ “State Concerns,” *Petersburg Republican* 15, July 21, 1820.

²³² “Breach of Marriage Contract,” *Southern Religious Telegraph* 9, no. 36, (Richmond, Va.), September 4, 1830.

²³³ “Foreign: Later from Europe,” *Richmond Enquirer* 32, no. 57, (Richmond, Va.), November 20, 1835; “Private Correspondence,” *Richmond Enquirer* 32, no. 70, December 29, 1835.

²³⁴ Sager, *Marital Cruelty in Antebellum America*, 2.

American marital ideals and contrast them with foreign examples.

Combining newspapers, published books, letters, and diaries illustrates that Virginians understood marriage as a workable relationship between two partners. Most assumed couples should marry for devout affection, not entirely for economic progress. Mutual love mattered more than parental direction and oversight. Many Virginians acknowledged the conjugal state as a negotiation between companionate marriage and the patriarchal model. The generalized objective was to propagate children and most couples understood their communal emotional state as essential to the practicability of their marriage. In matrimony, women expected themselves to remain inferior and subservient to their husbands for the benefit of their family and the general good of society. Males anticipated finding a loving and submissive partner. Men and women predicted that matrimony would be a journey, with highs and lows within a social hierarchy based upon strict patriarchal standards. However, the experience of marriage was much different than cultural expectations.

CHAPTER THREE: MARITAL EXPERIENCE

Married Virginians experienced a struggle between patriarchal dominated marriage and the companionate ideal. Some couples maintained a great deal of reciprocity, reverence, and affection. Other marriages followed the patriarchal trend expressed by Protestant clergy by maintaining male supremacy and female inferiority. Though various ministers formulated marriage around a patriarchal relationship and lay Virginians described matrimony as companionship within a male dominated society, spousal relations were diverse and individualized.

Early in marriage, many couples hoped to maintain the companionate ideal. Thomas Hughes of North Carolina enjoyed marriage so greatly that he wished he had taken vows at an earlier age. In a letter to his sister, Frances, living in Richmond, Thomas wrote, "I have been married but five weeks and probably am not a competent judge of the married State, but if I had my time to live over again. I think I would marry many [years] sooner."²³⁵ Thomas wished that the rest of his marriage would go as well as the first weeks. He wrote, "Mine I hope is a mild and steady happiness, resulting in a union of hearts and supported by a perfect union of thought and action."²³⁶ To Hughes, the ideal state of marriage necessitated a seamless joining of partners to please each other.

Some Virginians remembered the entirety of their marriages as affectionate. For instance, in a memoir addressed to his children, former United States Secretary of State, United States

²³⁵ Thomas Hughes to Frances T. Hughes, February 2, 1818, Montague Family Papers, Section 7, Virginia Historical Society.

²³⁶ Thomas Hughes to Frances T. Hughes, February 2, 1818.

Attorney General, and Governor of Virginia, Edmund Randolph characterized his marriage to Elizabeth Nicholas as the joining of two individuals in absolute happiness. The couple married on August 19, 1776. Yet, in 1810, Randolph remembered his wife as winning “me by the best of all graces, cheerfulness, good sense, and benevolence.”²³⁷ Elizabeth embodied the loving and feminine nature of an idealistic Virginia wife.

Edmund Randolph expressed a great deal of mournful nostalgia in his writings. In addition to his memoir, Edmund wrote, “A prayer for my family,” in which he attempted to memorialize Elizabeth. Edmund suggests that he and the children “Keep her example ever before our eyes...by daily recalling to our view her virtues by which we believe her to have assended [*sic*] onto a seat of eternal bliss.”²³⁸ Edmund’s prayer served as a reminder to his children that their mother lived a virtuous life as a Christian woman and now rests in Heaven. Her actions on Earth improved her family and society by “manifesting a christianlike [*sic*] temper and conduct to all mankind.”²³⁹ Edmund believed Heaven awaited Elizabeth in death because of her humanitarian actions, such as, “feed[ing] the hungry, clothe[ing] the naked, and visit[ing] the sick.”²⁴⁰ Such a promise might have helped alleviate mournful feelings in the years following Elizabeth’s death.

The marriage between Edmund’s son, Peyton Randolph and Maria Ward Randolph epitomized the companionate marriage ideal. Their marriage centered around mutual affection, love for their children, and shared support regarding health concerns. Peyton wrote in a letter

²³⁷ Edmund Randolph, Memoir, March 25, 1810. Daniel Family Papers, Section 2, Virginia Historical Society; Kennon Family Papers, Section 1, Virginia Historical Society.

²³⁸ Edmund Randolph, “A prayer for my family,” March 25, 1810. Daniel Family Papers, Section 2, Virginia Historical Society.

²³⁹ Randolph, “A prayer for my family,” March 25, 1810.

²⁴⁰ Randolph, “A prayer for my family,” March 25, 1810.

dated 1806, “I reciprocate your tender wishes.”²⁴¹ Peyton understood his marriage in terms of mutuality, consisting of a common affection and reverence with his wife. Throughout the limited remaining correspondence between the couple, several reoccurring patterns regarding reciprocal admiration and support are observable.

The Randolphs’ shared a deep obsession over the welfare of their children. The couple produced ten offspring, yet, only three outlived Peyton and Maria. The children’s high mortality rate makes the couple’s preoccupation easy to understand. Peyton often wrote Maria asking for updates regarding the health of their ill children. On July 12, 1807, Peyton requested Maria to “Tell me how you are and our darling little hope.”²⁴² On May 3, 1808, Peyton asserted, “Write me by every opportunity the state of your health and that of our son.”²⁴³ When Maria provided details of the children, Peyton typically responded with emotional rejoice, “On my return, I was much gratified to find a letter from you, bearing the pleasing tidings of your health and that of my children.”²⁴⁴ Since many of the Randolph children met a premature death, Peyton and Maria’s letters often incorporated a discussion of their health, with Peyton requesting new updates and highlighting Maria’s important maternal role in their upbringing.

A second theme involves intense health related discourse, namely, Maria’s obsession with Peyton’s physical health. For example, in October 1806, Maria wrote Peyton recommending treatments for possible health issues. Maria wrote, “Should you feel any syptoms [sic] of a cold, bath your feet in warm water when you go to bed; & drink a little warm milk

²⁴¹ Peyton Randolph to Maria Randolph, 23 Oct. 1806, Peyton Randolph Papers, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

²⁴² Peyton Randolph to Maria Randolph, 12 July 1807.

²⁴³ Peyton Randolph to Maria Randolph, 3 May 1808, Peyton Randolph Papers, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

²⁴⁴ Peyton Randolph to Maria Randolph, 4 Sept. 1813, Peyton Randolph Papers, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

toddy.”²⁴⁵ Furthermore, Peyton frequently visited “healing springs” at Maria’s request.

Following her prescriptions, Maria adds how much she misses her husband, hopes for his health, and a claim that she will feel better upon his return. Maria’s letter shows how much she relied on Peyton and how his health was crucial for the stability of their new family. Without good health, Peyton could not provide the public necessities needed for a comfortable home life.

In addition, Peyton concerned himself regarding Maria’s deteriorating mental health. An issue Peyton claimed, “makes you [Maria] less capable of affording maternal aid.”²⁴⁶ Maria’s depression stemmed from many conditions. First, the loss of so many children. As Susan E. Klepp points out in “Revolutionary Bodies” Virginia women had a “paralyzing fear of death” from pregnancy.²⁴⁷ Maria undoubtedly feared dying from birthing complications. Secondly, the high mortality rate among the Randolph children had a lasting effect on Maria’s mind. Losing so many offspring tarnished the productivity of Maria’s body. The third factor in Maria’s depression was the absence of her beloved husband. When Peyton was away, Maria notified him that she will only be mentally and physically sound upon his return. Peyton knew that a depressed and anxious Maria could not take care of their surviving children. Not only did Peyton feel anxiety for the sake of his children but also for Maria. Since Maria was the center of his existential happiness, her caring spirit needed to remain in order to keep Peyton successful.

The third theme of the Randolphs’ letters is their deep love for one another combined with feelings of loneliness during the absence of their partner. The emphasis on love is important to understand the mutuality of their relationship. Yet, historians tend to overlook feelings of affection in their analyses of marriages. However, the Randolphs described their relationship in

²⁴⁵ Maria Randolph to Peyton Randolph, Oct. 1806.

²⁴⁶ Peyton Randolph to Maria Randolph, 3 May 1808

²⁴⁷ Susan E. Klepp, “Revolutionary Bodies: Women and the Fertility Transition in the Mid-Atlantic Region, 1760-1820,” *The Journal of American History* 85, no. 3 (1998): 928.

terms of a reciprocal love. Maria wrote:

I have been miserable about you to day [*sic*] my dearest husband-I would give worlds if you had not gone out in this wretched weather...I am at a terrible loss without you my dear love... I do not feel well, but I must I shall be better when you return.²⁴⁸

Maria missed her husband while he was away and worried about him in the outside world.

Peyton's absence threatened every aspect of Maria's existence, from working to sleeping.

Undoubtedly, she had trouble taking care of the children while Peyton was away participating in legal and business endeavors. Maria articulated the mutuality of her relationship; a feeling the Randolphs' shared.

Peyton's dedication to domestic tranquility is apparent in several of his letters. Peyton wrote:

If the dear pledges of our love are preserved to us, and we are permitted to witness the development of every manly grace and every female charm. Believe me, my Maria, this is the source of all real happiness. All other pleasures are turbulent in the moment of enjoyment, and flat and insipid in the recollection. Those which spring from the domestic circle, have a divine serenity in their [service], which refines and exalts the soul.²⁴⁹

Peyton suggested that the domestic sphere of home life provides a vital happiness, one that brings masculinity and femininity together. He wrote that the pleasure of companionate marriage outweighed anything and everything else in life. Peyton's happiness stemmed from his relationship with his wife and children, not his relation to the public sphere.

In some circumstances, the close relationship between husband and wife could change a

²⁴⁸ Maria Randolph to Peyton Randolph, Oct. 1806, Peyton Randolph Papers, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

²⁴⁹ Peyton Randolph to Maria Randolph, N.D. Peyton Randolph Papers, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

partner's religious beliefs. As a young man, Edmund Randolph considered himself a deist. Not trusting the Church of England, he presumed that some "of the ministry, poisoned me with looks of infidelity."²⁵⁰ Randolph followed suit with many of his revolutionary peers. "When we were united I was a deist," he wrote, "made so by my confidence in some, whom I revered."²⁵¹ Edmund believed that Elizabeth's religious upbringing instilled her with intolerance. He wrote, "Up to the commencement of the revolution, the church of England was the established religion, in which she [Elizabeth] had been educated with strictne[ss] if not bigotry."²⁵² Though Edmund deeply distrusted the established Church of Virginia and resonated that his wife's upbringing was radically intolerant, their relationship altered his religious ideology.

In marriage, Edmund's religious skepticism weighed against Elizabeth's Anglican commitment. One "Sund[ay] evening," Edmund wrote, "Mr. Wythe and Mr. Jefferson came to my house...to play with me at chess."²⁵³ Elizabeth "did not appear in the room" and Edmund reasoned that her absence was a form of protest against the religious views of their guests.²⁵⁴ Rumor spread throughout Virginia and the nation that George Wythe and especially Thomas Jefferson were deists, or worse, atheists. Such widespread speculation may have soured Elizabeth's feelings toward Edmund's associates. Moreover, Elizabeth's church attendance was "unremitted" and she never questioned the "sacred truths."²⁵⁵ Elizabeth's dedication to Anglicanism and disapproval of deism influenced Edmund to increase his commitment to religion.

Edmund recognized Elizabeth as an actor in his religious life. Edmund asserted, "I cannot

²⁵⁰ Randolph, Memoir, March 25, 1810.

²⁵¹ Randolph, Memoir, March 25, 1810.

²⁵² Randolph, Memoir, March 25, 1810.

²⁵³ Randolph, Memoir, March 25, 1810.

²⁵⁴ Randolph, Memoir, March 25, 1810.

²⁵⁵ Randolph, Memoir, March 25, 1810.

answer for myself that I should have been brought to examine the genuineness of holy writ... if I had not observed the consolatory influence of my dearest Betsey.”²⁵⁶ Elizabeth did not convert Edmund. Rather, her virtue influenced Edmund to reconsider his youthful skepticism and accept religion. Edmund increasingly turned to Christianity and away from secular thinking. In recollection, he pondered, “For several years since I detached the vanity of sublunary things,” knowing “that the great good of men consisted in christianity [*sic*] alone.”²⁵⁷ Edmund thought back to childrearing and wished he and Elizabeth “had instituted a course of family prayer for the benefit of our children.”²⁵⁸ Such religious instruction would have positively influenced his children at a time when their minds were impressionable. Toward the end of Elizabeth’s life, the couple “frequently joined in prayer.”²⁵⁹ In nostalgic memory, Edmund remembered their joined prayer as a duty in which he happily fulfilled.

For some, the death of an affectionate spouse could raise their attachment to Christianity. Baptist Minister, John Alderson, Jr., used the death of his wife as a personal spiritual revival. He had a close relationship with his “bosom companion” and considered her death in 1805, “the severest affliction he had ever realized...and was exceedingly depressed.”²⁶⁰ Though he lost his helpmate, he eventually accepted the mournful incident as positive for his religious dedication and practice.

In companionate marriage, some women had an increased opportunity to exercise agency in the public sphere through influencing their husbands. Besides acting as the family “minister,”

²⁵⁶ Randolph, Memoir, March 25, 1810.

²⁵⁷ Randolph, Memoir, March 25, 1810.

²⁵⁸ Randolph, Memoir, March 25, 1810.

²⁵⁹ Randolph, Memoir, March 25, 1810.

²⁶⁰ James B. Taylor, *Lives of Virginia Baptist Ministers, Lives of Virginia Baptist Ministers* (Richmond: Yale & Wyatt, 1838), 153.

Elizabeth Randolph was Edmund's "adviser" in economic affairs.²⁶¹ She recommended that Edmund sell his slaves during times of economic hardship. Simultaneously, Elizabeth reminded Edmund to spend his money wisely. Edmund remembered that Elizabeth "foretold to me...that my facility in spending money for the accomodation [*sic*] [of] others, would make scarcely one friend, and create enemies in some whom I should most oblige."²⁶² Though Elizabeth provided Edmund with conservative recommendations about saving money, the couple remained philanthropic. However, Elizabeth scrutinized where their money was truly going. Edmund wrote, "She would not bestow it at random, but inquired into the reality and extent of the misery, proportioned her contribution to her means, and the expectations which other wretchedness might reasonably form."²⁶³ Nevertheless, Elizabeth did contribute economic relief to the poor. According to Edmund, after her death, "the tears of the poor who now lament her speak the rest."²⁶⁴ Elizabeth Nicholas Randolph's family and community remembered her as a humanitarian hero.

Absent from his beloved Maria, due to his occupation as a lawyer traveling the Virginian circuit, Peyton Randolph quickly accepted that his wife wanted a stable domestic life. In 1807, Peyton attempted to gain steady employment and progress his political career by campaigning for a United States Congressional seat to represent Virginia's Twenty-second District. While Randolph did well in the city of Richmond, he lost to the incumbent, John Clopton by 164 votes.²⁶⁵ Out of necessity, Peyton resumed his legal career until late 1808, when in a letter, he

²⁶¹ Randolph, Memoir, March 25, 1810.

²⁶² Randolph, Memoir, March 25, 1810.

²⁶³ Randolph, Memoir, March 25, 1810.

²⁶⁴ Randolph, Memoir, March 25, 1810.

²⁶⁵ American Antiquarian Society, "Virginia 1807 U.S. House of Representatives, District 22," *Lampi Collection of American Electoral Returns, 1788-1825*, Digital Collections and Archives at Tufts University, 2007, http://elections.lib.tufts.edu/catalog/tufts:va.uscongress.22.1807#note_4.

foreshadowed a drastic change. Peyton earnestly wrote:

Yes my dearest Maria, I can never be truly happy, until I see you independent of the world, and beyond the necessity of all temporary expedients. For this object I have renounced all schemes of ambition, and am determined to devote myself to the single object pursuit of your welfare.²⁶⁶

By the end of 1808, Peyton attempted to rent a house in Richmond and to gain employment that would allow him the benefit of physical proximity to Maria.

Peyton's plan to move positively affected in his private and public life. In 1809, Peyton won the First Seat in the Governor's Executive Council in a campaign against nine other candidates, including former Governor of Virginia, James Wood.²⁶⁷ Taking the responsibilities of Executive Councilor increased Peyton's political success, allowing him to work under prominent Virginians such as future President of the United States, James Monroe. In addition, Peyton gained a solid financial income that did not depend on a lucrative, yet overpopulated legal career. In addition, the change allowed Peyton to live with Maria in shared love.

Peyton's relocation to Richmond increased his political notoriety. When Governor George William Smith died in the Richmond Theater Fire, Peyton fulfilled his obligation and served a Governor of Virginia from December 27, 1811, to January 3, 1812. On December 31, 1811, Peyton urged the Virginia legislature to appoint a new governor, due to the disorder of the executive branch.²⁶⁸ The legislature selected James Barbour while Peyton quietly transitioned into the role of official court reporter for the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals. Maria

²⁶⁶ Peyton Randolph to Maria Randolph, November 1, 1808, Peyton Randolph Papers, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

²⁶⁷ American Antiquarian Society, "Virginia 1809 Executive Council, First Seat," *Lampi Collection of American Electoral Returns, 1788-1825*, Digital Collections and Archives at Tufts University, 2007, <http://elections.lib.tufts.edu/catalog/tufts:va.executivecouncil1.1.1809>.

²⁶⁸ Baker, *The Richmond Theater Fire*, 73.

influenced Peyton to return to her, which allowed him to gain political success and marital happiness. Until his death in 1828, Peyton remained mostly in Richmond. All themes throughout the Randolphs' letters deal with the mutuality of their relationship. The couple held a deep love for one another; they shared similar concerns, and held an increasing reciprocal influence over each other.

Some wives acted as public assistants for their husbands. In spite of the patriarchal views argued by Baptists associations, a considerable amount of Baptist ministers appreciated their wives' efforts as educated helpmates. In 1791, William Creath married Lycretia Brame. She "proved an efficient helper in his labors as a minister of Jesus Christ," wrote William.²⁶⁹ Another minister, John King married an educated woman. As King's associate, "She appropriated much of her time in affording such assistance as he needed."²⁷⁰ Similarly, Mary Young aided her husband, Noah Davis with the difficulties of working as a Christian minister. He cheerfully "thank[ed] God for such a companion."²⁷¹ After they married, the Davises moved to Accomac, Virginia, then for a short time, they settled in Norfolk where Noah served as the pastor of the Cumberland Street Baptist Church. At a meeting on January 21, 1825, at Davis's home, locals created Seamen's Friend Society for the aim of "propagation of the Gospel among seamen of this port."²⁷² The Society elected Davis as its first chairman. Women, such as Mary Young Davis, Mrs. William King, and Lycretia Brame Creath often assisted their husbands in their religious duties.

²⁶⁹ Taylor, *Lives of Virginia Baptist Ministers*, 328.

²⁷⁰ Taylor, *Lives of Virginia Baptist Ministers*, 227.

²⁷¹ Noah Davis, Diary, July 10, [1828] in *Lives of Virginia Baptist Ministers*, by James B. Taylor, 461.

²⁷² "The Sailors' Magazine and Seamen's Friend," (Norfolk, Va., Seamen's Friend Society, 1876), in *The Sailors' Magazine and Seamen's Friend, and Life Boat* (New York: American Seamen's Friend Society, 1876), 97.

Though ministers found assistants in their profession, their relationships often had rough patches. For example, Noah Davis wrote of his relationship, “Our pathway has not been free from thorns, but these we must expect in the wilderness of the world. We have had some difficulties.”²⁷³ The Davises chose to use moments of turmoil to confirm their belief in Christ and commitment to each other. Noah wrote, “we hope they have not passed by as wholly unprofitable.”²⁷⁴ To the Davises, marriage was a workable relationship, in which they faced happy and difficult periods. However, the couple overcame their differences to reaffirm companionship by navigating marriage together.

The absence of a spouse often incited anxiety amongst both partners. For instance, in 1811, Edwin James Harvie wrote his wife, Martha Hardaway Harvie, “I am most anxious to see you and our children.”²⁷⁵ Edwin feared that the trip from Richmond to Amelia to see his wife would cause him great exhaustion. Yet, he sentimentally wrote, “The pleasure that I should derive from enfolding you in my arms would more than compensate me for any fatigue that I might experience from the ride.”²⁷⁶ In October 1806, a newly married Maria Ward Randolph wrote Peyton Randolph, “I can not [rest] or work, & I fear I shall not sleep to nigh[t]...How anxiously shall I number the hours which separates me from my darling husband! And with what exquisite delight shall I hail his return to the arms of his fondest wife.”²⁷⁷ The return of a beloved spouse or the receipt of their letters brought happiness.

During their husbands’ absence, wives likened the lack of letters to a sin against their

²⁷³ Noah Davis, Diary, July 10, [1828] in Taylor, *Lives of Virginia Baptist Ministers*, 461.

²⁷⁴ Noah Davis, Diary, July 10, [1828] in Taylor, *Lives of Virginia Baptist Ministers*, 461.

²⁷⁵ Edwin James Harvie to Martha Harvie, August 24, 1811, Martha Judith Harvie Old Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

²⁷⁶ Edwin James Harvie to Martha Harvie, August 24, 1811.

²⁷⁷ Maria Randolph to Peyton Randolph, October 1806, Peyton Randolph Papers, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

marriage. Writing to her husband Raleigh Travers Daniel, Elizabeth Susan Riddle Daniel inquired whether he felt bad when she did not write. Elizabeth, herself felt devastated when Raleigh failed to write. Elizabeth wrote Raleigh on April 2, 1832, stating how “disappointed and low spirited [she felt] yesterday when the mail passes without a letter for me.”²⁷⁸ Because Virginia men, especially lawyers and politicians traveled frequently, letters allowed individuals to keep in touch, even at great distances and during long periods of absence. While Elizabeth hoped for long daily letters, at minimum she expected regular updates of Raleigh’s location, his emotional state, and when she should expect him home.²⁷⁹

Receiving a letter from an absent spouse was a blissful moment. On the morning of November 25, 1831, Elizabeth woke up anticipating a letter from her husband. “Scarcely was I dressed for breakfast when the mail arrived and I waited with subdued impatience till your letter was handed to me – a sweet a precious reward for my long suspense and anxiety,” wrote Elizabeth.²⁸⁰ She read the letter over and felt increasingly “amused” and “pleased.”²⁸¹ Letters acted as a symbolic and real bond between absent literate marriage partners.

A deep dedication to companionate marriage resonated among some African-Americans. In March 1804, another individual named Noah Davis was born in Madison County, Virginia. Noah and his family were the slaves of Robert Patten, a lawyer and co-owner of a large grain mill. In his published recollection, Noah considered his childhood fortunate because his master

²⁷⁸ Elizabeth Susan Riddle Daniel to Raleigh Travers Daniel, Daniel Family Papers, Section 3, Virginia Historical Society.

²⁷⁹ Elizabeth Susan Riddle Daniel to Raleigh Travers Daniel, May 9, 1834. Daniel Family Papers, Section 3, Virginia Historical Society.

²⁸⁰ Elizabeth Susan Riddle Daniel to Raleigh Travers Daniel, November 25, 1831. Daniel Family Papers, Section 3, Virginia Historical Society.

²⁸¹ Elizabeth Susan Riddle Daniel to Raleigh Travers Daniel, November 25, 1831.

allowed “his servants [*sic*] many privileges.”²⁸² In addition, Noah’s parents devoted themselves to the Gospel. In December 1818, Patten sent Noah to Fredericksburg to take on a shoe making apprenticeship. In 1831, Davis became a member of the Baptist church. At the age of twenty-seven, Noah met his future wife at the Fredericksburg Baptist Church.

Noah learned that religion could bring a couple together. Though the two had known each other for a while, Noah did not find interest “until the day she was baptized.”²⁸³ The couple had nine children while living “happily together, as husband and wife.”²⁸⁴ Eventually, as a free man, Noah moved to Baltimore and became a deacon of the Second Baptist Church. Yet, because his wife belonged to another master in Virginia, Noah had to leave her and their children behind.

To harmonize his family, Noah decided to purchase their freedom. By 1851, Noah saved enough funds to procure his wife and two of his children. After the death of the mistress of Noah’s three other children, he raised money and eventually bought their freedom in 1858. By shoemaking and fundraising in northern cities, Noah earned over \$4,000, all of which he used to free his wife and children. The reunited Davises then relocated to Maryland, also a slave state, where Noah served as a leader of the local Baptist community. Noah’s love for his wife and their children strove him to work hard at attaining their freedom. The institution of slavery disrupted and destroyed many relationships in African-American communities. Yet, some individuals like Noah Davis, acted to unite and reunite their families.

Alcohol and gambling could strain any marital relation. Virginians, especially women, likened gambling to a moral vice. One that could wreak havoc on their family's economic and

²⁸² Noah Davis, *A Narrative of the Life of Rev. Noah Davis* (Baltimore: John F. Weishampel, Jr., 1859), 9.

²⁸³ Davis, *A Narrative of the Life of Rev. Noah Davis*, 26.

²⁸⁴ Davis, *A Narrative of the Life of Rev. Noah Davis*, 27.

social standing. Alcohol abuse had horrible and well-chronicled consequences for American families.²⁸⁵ According to Catherine Clinton, “A drunken husband made it impossible for the wife to maintain domestic harmony.”²⁸⁶ Inebriation could heighten a male’s violence toward his family, which incited fear among females in a population that had easy access to alcohol. Drunkenness could also lead to a male’s inability of being a sufficient wage earner. Women undoubtedly participated in gambling and drinking. However, according to Clinton, society understood both activities as masculine and informed women of their evils from a young age.²⁸⁷ Gambling and alcohol consumption deteriorated a family’s assets and diminished cohesion.

When men did not drink to excess or gamble, their wives took it as a blessing. For instance, Elizabeth Washington wrote of her husband, “he is a perfectly sober man – there can be no one who dispises [sic] drinking more than he does.”²⁸⁸ Writing that society “dispises [sic] those kind of men” who regularly get intoxicated, Elizabeth cherished that Lund, “disapproves of all drinking except at dinner- & that must be in a very moderate manner.”²⁸⁹ Elizabeth also enjoyed Lund’s disapproval “of all kind[s] of gaming, - let it be little or much, - which I look upon as a great blessing.”²⁹⁰ Elizabeth believed that many women in society failed to appreciate husbands who did not participate in vices and thanked providence for every blessing.

If God did not offer women sober husbands, some women acted to deter their husbands from alcoholism. For example, while on a business trip to Petersburg, Peyton Randolph drank

²⁸⁵ For the effect of alcoholism on southern families, see Buckley, *The Great Catastrophe of My Life*, 74, 87, 90, 95-95, 102, 107-8, 171-75, 185-87 and Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 106-7. For the effects of alcohol on late antebellum families, see Sager, *Marital Cruelty in Antebellum America*, 81-108.

²⁸⁶ Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 106.

²⁸⁷ Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 105.

²⁸⁸ Washington, Journal, Spring 1789, 75.

²⁸⁹ Washington, Journal, Spring 1789, 75-76.

²⁹⁰ Washington, Journal, Spring 1789, 76.

“claret & Burgandy [*sic*] with Capt. Scoll & others.”²⁹¹ Later, Peyton “returned to the tavern in a state that philosophers might envy.”²⁹² Peyton’s wife, Maria did not agree with his intoxication and she let Peyton know her concern. On July 19, 1807, Peyton wrote his wife promising to “preserve sobriety & temperance.”²⁹³ In a similar fashion, according to Anya Jabour, after Elizabeth Gamble found William Wirt “in a state of brutal intoxication on the street...she made absolute abstinence a condition for marriage.”²⁹⁴ Alcoholism detracted from family unity and had negative social consequences. In an effort to wield control over domestics, some women influenced their husbands to remain sober.

Not all women could act to change behavior. According to Thomas Buckley, alcohol ruined the marriage between twenty-nine-year-old Simon Cauffman and seventeen-year-old Rachel Cardozo. In 1816, Rachel, a “member of Richmond’s small but well-established Jewish community” married Simon.²⁹⁵ Early in marriage, the couple lived in Philadelphia and had three children. Yet, Simon banished Rachel from the City. She and her children returned to Virginia. Simon drank alcohol and was convicted of theft on numerous occasions. After his first sentence, he wrote his estranged wife, pleading for forgiveness and promising sobriety. In 1824, Rachel filed for divorce when she heard of Simon’s third arrest. Rachel’s petition noted that Simon brought disgrace upon her family’s honor because of his inebriated state.²⁹⁶

Not all marriages followed the companionate ideal. Many strayed away from a loving partnership. On May 20, 1805, Presbyterian minister Archibald McRobert married first cousins

²⁹¹ Peyton Randolph to Maria Randolph, N.D.

²⁹² Peyton Randolph to Maria Randolph, N.D.

²⁹³ Peyton Randolph to Maria Randolph, July 19, 1807, Peyton Randolph Papers, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

²⁹⁴ Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic*, 15.

²⁹⁵ Buckley, *The Great Catastrophe of my Life*, 95.

²⁹⁶ For the relationship between Simon Cauffman Rachel Cardozo, see Buckley, *The Great Catastrophe of my Life*, 95

Nancy Yarbrough and Walton Knight. According to Robin Sager, early in their relationship, Walton tormented and embarrassed Nancy. Walton “demanded that Nancy kiss him in front of [her family]...until an uncle told him to stop.”²⁹⁷ Walton repeatedly physically assaulted Nancy. Exacerbating their issues was Walton’s refusal to allow his wife “power and responsibility in the domestic sphere.”²⁹⁸ On numerous occasions, Nancy sought refuge with her family members, especially her grandmother, Martha Walton. Walton Knight attempted to write his wife and grandmother, using the sentimental language of love and religious persuasion. However, Nancy refused to return home. In December 1809, Walton filed a petition for divorce to Virginia’s legislature on the grounds of adultery. Nancy submitted her own divorce petition citing “her husband’s cruel treatment” had forced her to flee her home.²⁹⁹ The assembly turned down both petitions. Although they remained separated, it was not until Nancy’s death in 1813 that the marriage officially ended.³⁰⁰

Virginia women understood marital violence as a miserable occurrence, especially if a wife was of good moral character. In a letter to her sister Anna Cutts, Dolley Payne Madison wrote about the “sad things of Turreau.”³⁰¹ Allegedly, he had “whiped [*sic*] his wife & abused her before all the servants.”³⁰² Abusing a female in front of slaves distorted Virginia’s racial hierarchy by showing domestic turmoil and instability. Dolley wrote, “I pity her sincearly [*sic*] as

²⁹⁷ Buckley, *The Great Catastrophe of my Life*, 85.

²⁹⁸ Buckley, *The Great Catastrophe of my Life*, 84.

²⁹⁹ Buckley, *The Great Catastrophe of my Life*, 90.

³⁰⁰ For the relationship between Nancy Yarbrough and Walton Knight, see Buckley, *The Great Catastrophe of my Life*, 80-92.

³⁰¹ Dolley Payne Madison to Anna Cutts, June 4, 1805, in *The Selected Letters of Dolley Payne Madison*, ed. David B. Mattern and Holly C. Shulman (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 62.

³⁰² Dolley Payne Madison to Anna Cutts, June 4, 1805, in *The Selected Letters of Dolley Payne Madison*, ed. David B. Mattern and Holly C. Shulman, 62.

I believe [sic] her an amiable & sensible woman.”³⁰³ A man should have control over his wife and servants, but his obligation to a wife was that of a protector. As Robin Sager argues, “Virginians carefully regulated and policed the practice of violence.”³⁰⁴ Such abuse added to the distortion of social harmony due to the masculine inability to dutifully regulate his family and property.

Some spouses were inharmonious due to differences in theology. The Baptist Minister, John Corbly originally married a Catholic woman. His first wife “proved to be a thorn in his side.”³⁰⁵ Following her death, “he married a most amiable woman, by whom he had several children.”³⁰⁶ The couple and their children lived on the border of Pennsylvania and Virginia. On the morning May 10, 1782, Corbly and his family headed to church for services. Corbly noticed his wife forgot the family bible and went back home to retrieve it. Upon his return, “he saw two Indians running, one of whom made a direful yell.”³⁰⁷ Suspecting an attack, Corbly went to Garards Fort “to get assistance.”³⁰⁸ When he and the men returned, “he found his wife killed with a tomahawk,” and four of his seven children murdered.³⁰⁹ Corbly found happiness in his second marriage, yet a massacre cut it short.

For some Virginia women, the experience of marriage was the daily attempt to fulfill their submissive gendered duties. These individuals happily followed along the lines of religious expectations. In marriage, Elizabeth Washington happily accepted her inferiority to her husband.

³⁰³ Dolley Payne Madison to Anna Cutts, June 4, 1805, in *The Selected Letters of Dolley Payne Madison*, ed. David B. Mattern and Holly C. Shulman, 62.

³⁰⁴ Sager, *Marital Cruelty in Antebellum America*, 139.

³⁰⁵ Taylor, *Lives of Virginia Baptist Ministers*, 106.

³⁰⁶ Taylor, *Lives of Virginia Baptist Ministers*, 106.

³⁰⁷ Taylor, *Lives of Virginia Baptist Ministers*, 106.

³⁰⁸ Taylor, *Lives of Virginia Baptist Ministers*, 106.

³⁰⁹ Taylor, *Lives of Virginia Baptist Ministers*, 106.

In 1789, she wrote, “I never could take any pleasure in having my own way.”³¹⁰ However, Elizabeth did not believe she was conforming to her husband’s will. Rather, she attempted to obey “the Scripture direction given to wives [that] has been the ruling principal [*sic*]... in the married state.”³¹¹ In 1784, after being married “the better of four years,” Elizabeth wrote, “I can truly say I have never had cause to repent of my marriage.”³¹² She believed that there was no other man that could be such a perfect match as her “dear Mr. W.”³¹³ Elizabeth understood her role in marriage as a socio-religious duty. As Sager argues, marital “participants emphasized duty over romantic emotion as the key ingredient of a successful relationship.”³¹⁴ By dutifully appealing to her husband in thought and in action because of her dedication to religion, Elizabeth reaffirmed her perceptions regarding marriage.

Providing a conclusive argument regarding all marital experiences in early national Virginia is impossible. In her analysis of Elizabeth and William Wirt’s relationship, Anya Jabour argues that “the promise of companionship within a marriage partnership of mutuality, reciprocity, and symmetry proved false for them and for other men and women in the early American Republic.”³¹⁵ While not all marriages fulfilled the companionate model, historians must consider, as Rhys Isaac proposes, that “experience is, after all, ultimately personal.”³¹⁶ Each marriage differed in some aspect. Certain marriages adopted the companionate ideal by incorporating love, mutuality, and respect. Others reaffirmed southern patriarchy with male

³¹⁰ Washington, Journal, Spring 1789, 75.

³¹¹ Washington, Journal, Spring 1789, 75.

³¹² Washington, Journal, Summer 1784, 61.

³¹³ Washington, Journal, Summer 1784, 61.

³¹⁴ Sager, *Marital Cruelty in Antebellum America*, 82.

³¹⁵ Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic*, 162.

³¹⁶ Rhys Isaac, “Stories of Enslavement: A Person-Centered Ethnography from an Eighteenth-Century Virginia Plantation,” in *Varieties of Southern History: New Essays on a Region and its People* ed. Bruce Clayton and John Salmond (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 3.

control, violence, and emotional incapability. In some relationships, wives exercised a great deal of agency, in others they could not, or chose not to. As a consensus, conjugal experiences among Virginians remained personal, diverse, adaptable affairs.

CONCLUSION

A matrimonial relationship in itself is a negotiation. Spousal interaction depends on a number of influences such as experiences, beliefs, social norms, gender conventions, religious ideology, economic standing, popular media, individualized emotions, and social standing. According to Edward L. Ayers, Virginians did “not fit easy generalizations.”³¹⁷ Indeed, the inner workings of Virginian marriages suggest vast discrepancies among each household. Virginia’s religious figures focused around a male-dominated household in which both spouses fulfilled gender-specific roles. Laymen understood matrimony as a workable relationship between two spouses within a culture of patriarchy. Yet, the actual experience of marriage varied. Some marriages incorporated the companionate ideal. Others remained strictly patriarchal. Often marriages did not concentrate on one ideal, but went in between the contrasting paradigms. These findings suggest that the realities of spousal relations developed autonomously for numerous reasons such as differences in religion, class, race, geographical location, and personal ideology.

Analyzing both experiences and expectations allows for a deeper understanding society and culture in Virginia during the early national period. Episcopalian and Presbyterian Church officials held patriarchal ideals regarding their marital outlooks. Upon marriage, clergy combined men and women into one entity. A couple’s primary goal was to produce offspring. The man should act as the family’s leader in all aspects inside and outside the household. While more diverse and autonomous, Methodists and, especially Baptists also followed the patriarchal

³¹⁷ Edward L. Ayers, introduction to *The Edge of the South: Life in Nineteenth-Century Virginia*, ed. Edward L. Ayers and John C. Willis (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991), 2.

trend. Feeling pressure from differentiating practices and messages from various churches, church officials attempted to reign in on marriage during the 1810s.

Together, the four major religious sects reinforced the same definition of marriage: an everlasting relationship between one man and one woman. Southern women, according to Kierner, “were expected to be pious, pure, nurturing, virtuous, and ultimately subject to male authority.”³¹⁸ Men should maintain honor, industry, and act as the head of the household in the private sphere and especially in the public sphere. At the foundation of prescribed spousal relations was a gendered hierarchy, in which women were inferior to men. Church officials perpetuated their commitment to patriarchy through their sermons and writings.

Laymen formulated their opinions of marriage around a complex notion of the companionate ideal. In popular opinion, individuals should marry for willful affection and should be similar in thought and action. While spouses should come together for the propagation and education of children, they should work to make each other happy. Many Virginians, including Elizabeth Kennon, accepted marriage as a practical relationship, in which each partner should labor to make the other happy. In contrast, Virginia Randolph Cary and Mary Randolph argued that women should remain subservient and domestic while acting as their husbands’ helpmate. In addition, individuals such as Major Isaac Hite argued for couples to remain faithful to their marital contract by having children, remaining faithful, and loving one another.

The authors of newspapers articles attempted to formulate a general popular marital opinion. Yet, like other Virginians, their authors navigated between the differentiating ideals. Some described marriage as an affectionate relationship based on respect and mutuality. Other articles assessed marriage as a divine compact in which a male owned a wife. In sum, popular

³¹⁸ Kierner, “Woman’s Piety Within Patriarchy,” 81.

opinion swayed between the companionate ideal and patriarchal concepts in newspaper articles, published books, letters, and journals.

In experience, couples acted significantly different from each other. Many couples like Edmund Randolph and Elizabeth Nicholas Randolph, and Peyton Randolph and Maria Ward Randolph fully embraced the companionate ideal and strove to fulfill it. These relationships suggest the companionate ideal held a significant place in the marital practices of Virginians during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. Within affectionate marriage, women exercised agency most frequently, albeit mostly for domestic ends. Others, such as Elizabeth Washington found happiness by attempting to fulfill socio-religious domestic duties and by thanking God for finding her a perfect husband. In contrast, male control and physical abuse ruined some marriages. Walton Knight's harsh treatment of his wife Nancy Yarbrough led to their separation. Alcoholism could devastate marital relations such as in the case of Simon Cauffman and Rachel Cardozo. Taken together, marital realities were different for every couple. From 1779 to 1835, Virginians found themselves trying to counterbalance two discordant marital ideals.

In 1835, matrimonial realities remained highly diverse and independent. As Cynthia A. Kierner justifiably suggests, "the actual experiences of southern women seem to have been complex and varied."³¹⁹ So too were their conjugal relationships. Some couples attempted to incorporate companionate ideals into their marriages. However, because of Protestant beliefs and social norms, matrimony in Virginia had lasting patriarchal components. In her recent publication, *Marital Cruelty in Antebellum America*, Robin C. Sager concludes, "To put it simply, marriage was changing in the 1840s and 1850s. With coverture waning in influence, a

³¹⁹ Kierner, "Women's Piety Within Patriarchy," 81.

new set of companionate ideals emerged.”³²⁰ Yet, in Virginia, the origins of this transition in marital customs developed decades earlier. As American ideals and experiences evolved into the mid-nineteenth century, Virginians found themselves continuing to balance two incompatible marital models.

³²⁰ Sager, *Marital Cruelty in Antebellum America*, 138.

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