

Cracks in the mold

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



The mid twentieth century proved to be a compelling, interesting time for the United States and an era that changed the World. The Civil Rights movement brought the end to de jure segregation and racism and this incredible grassroots movement served as a foundational model for other groups to mock and seek their own liberation. The 1960s spurred movements not only for African Americans, but also for the LGBT community and women. With the emergence of America as a media savvy economic powerhouse post the World Wars, a tide sort of changed within the community of women. According to Sara Evans in the selection " Cracks in the Mold, " women in the 1950s recognized they were somewhat limited to performing the dutiful tasks of motherhood, but many were outright no longer finding fulfillment in such rolls (176). Evans describes the complexities of sexism in the United States' culture while also she explains that both a conservative female push and a more radical feminist movement helped shape the legislation and attitude changes permeating through twentieth century America. In the 1950s, the attitudes surrounding women's roles were very " Leave it to Beaver" oriented. Women were homemakers, not educated thinkers who should compete in a global economy. In a 1956 Life magazine article, the introduction charges that " many of woman's current troubles began with the period of her preoccupation with her ' rights" (Evans, 177). " Ladies, we have won our case, but for heaven's sake let's stop trying to prove it over and over again" (177). But in fact, women had to " prove it over and over again. " Women from different ideologies, stronger or more moderate in their philosophies would have to fight for equal opportunity well beyond the disillusioned consumer crazy 1950s. When a

growing overall sentiment of unhappiness seemed to seep up from the "feminine mystique" facade, many critics fought back against the society-challenging thoughts of mid-century feminists. Theorists such as Phillip Wylie blamed the new age convenience ridden Mom for the ills in society while Freudian thinkers such as Marynia Farnham schemed for plans that would encourage women to embrace a domestic rather than expansive lifestyles (177). While with a twenty first century mindset it can be easy to readily indict those who opposed feminism or those who furthered the feminine mystique as backwards minded, I think it is important to view this time period from a relativist historian outlook. Considering the mindset and sweeping reforms occurring in the United States during this time period, it must be remembered that these "radical" changes to the female gender role were unprecedented. "To admit discontent was to face a psychic void," for women in this time period as Evans wrote in *Cracks in the Mold* (187). Further, these hurdles of accustoming to new times faced greater challenges when women had to go against the grain of the mass media. Although a growing number of women attended college and gained critical numbers in the work force, the mass media asserted a triumph of domesticity (Evans, 178). As with many things in United States history and ever apparent today in the 21st century, the media has a giant influence on what is deemed acceptable or not acceptable. The media decides the norms. Female magazines dazzled with accessories, decorations and feminine fashions designed to be more revealing or suggesting than ever before. The advertisement movement helped catapult the United States capitalist economy. With this advertisement energy came the peddling of all kinds of

consumer household goods; laundry detergents, odor free kitchens and even “ Poppin’ fresh” breads (178). Adlai Stevenson summed up the average woman’s intentions. “ Inspire in her home a vision of meaning of life and freedom.... Help her husband find values that will give purpose to his specialized daily chores... and teach her children the uniqueness of each individual human being”(178). This limited outlook for women was rapidly challenged and just ten years later, removed from 1950s dogmas, women made impressive charges in society and legislation to solidify equality. What began as tremors in thinking and societal rule bending led to a direct disintegration of the pedestal on which feminine mystique sat. Ten years later, Life was publishing articles in contrast to its old days, articles in which the focal point was on “ working mothers” (183). The illusion of the happy housewife was no longer holding water in terms of popular consensus. With the election of John Kennedy in 1960, the public mood towards change was that of positive sentiment (184). And of course, the media ended up evolving into a crusader of change; instead of bolstering the stay at home mom, the mass media honed in on the “ trapped” housewife. Feminists gained a major victory in 1964 with the passage of Title VII, prohibiting sex discrimination in the workplace. In general women embraced the idea of equal opportunity and meritocracy. However, two sects of women made marks on the feminist movement. Professional women whom were already career established around the birth of the feminist boom took a more moderate approach. Their main intentions were drawn upon “ women’s rights, ” and legal victories. These women surely paved the way and made great strides, but Sara Evans argues that these women’s demand for public realm equality did not go deep

enough (188). Evans claims that these women were not “ prepared to question the mainstream itself” (188). Without challenging the entire system, the operation of sex roles in most aspects of society would still remain. The young women of this generation were more prominent in the female revolution according to Evans. These women had been sent paradoxical messages for the better part of their life, and their radical work towards thinning sexism attacked the problem in the private sector of homes and also the public sector usually pertaining to policy. Women of all mindsets, left and right, professional and barely college bound helped set the stage for true change in woman’s rights. For this generation of women, feminism saw a fruitful revival. For these women, the set of experiences accompanying the Civil Rights allowed for a grassroots movement to catalyze in their own oppressed group.