Taking Fault with New York's Fault-Based Divorce: Is the Law Unconstitutional?

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INTRODUCTION

New York remains one of a handful of states in the country where it is still not possible to obtain a no-fault divorce unless there is the consent of both parties. Following California's lead in 1970, about half of the states have instituted "pure" no-fault divorce laws, which provide for divorce upon one party's claim that "irreconcilable differences have caused the irremediable

1 See N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW §170 (6) (Consol. 2000) (giving permissible grounds for divorce); see, e.g., MISS. CODE ANN. § 93-5-2 (1999) (requiring joint petition with separation agreement); TENN. CODE ANN. § 36-4-101(12) (2000) (requiring both parties to be in agreement on terms of marital dissolution before court will grant no-fault divorce). See generally Doris Jonas Freed & Timothy B. Walker, Family Law in the Fifty States, 21 FAM. L.Q. 417, 440-43 (1988) (pointing out all states have some form of no-fault divorce); Gary H. Nichols, Covenant Marriage: Should Tennessee Join the Noble Experiment?, 29 U. MEM. L. REV 397, 422 (1999) (stating claim of irreconcilable differences may not be pursued unilaterally by one party without consent of other); Doris Jonas Freed & Joel R. Brandes, No More 'Messin' with Hessen, N.Y.L.J. Aug. 17, 1988, at 3 (stating New York is only remaining jurisdiction in which "living separate and apart" is not grounds for divorce).

2 See CAL. FAM. CODE §§ 2310-2311 (Deering 2000); LENORE J. WEITZMAN, THE DIVORCE REVOLUTION: THE UNEXPECTED SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN AMERICA 15 (The Free Press ed., Collier Macmillan Publishers 1985) (stating that under pure no-fault divorce fashioned in California, divorce could be obtained (1) without grounds, (2) without proving prove fault or guilt or taking any moral position, (3) by unilateral decision of one spouse, (4) without linking financial awards to fault, (5) with standards that are gender neutral and (6) with procedures aimed at reducing adversarial climate and fostering amicable divorce); see also Herbert Jacob, The Silent Revolution: The Transformation of Divorce Law in the United States, reprinted in 86 MICH. L. REV. 1121, 1123 (1988) (explaining that no-fault was technical cover for California's lenient divorce policy which had fostered visible industry of producing fraudulent evidence of marital fault under old fault statute). See generally Walter Wadlington, Divorce Without Fault Without Perjury, 52 VA. L. REV. 32, 85-87 (1966) (pointing out that no-fault statutes containing "living separate and apart" provision assure law applies only to those marriages that have ceased to function).
breakdown of the marriage." Of the remaining states, most have adopted laws that allow for unilateral divorce by one spouse based upon "living apart and separately" for some specified time period.

The New York statute does not require that fault be proven for divorce if both parties have consented to a separation agreement. After living apart for one year and upon substantial performance of this agreement, the parties can be divorced under New York law. A mutually agreed upon separation agreement, substantially performed after one year, is the only means whereby a no-fault divorce may be secured under the New York law.

If there is no mutual agreement to separate and one spouse contests the other spouse's action for a divorce, the divorce action can only be maintained under New York law if a fault ground is sufficiently pleaded. The practical result of a contested divorce is that an adversarial proceeding is required in which the plaintiff must prove the defendant's fault. If proven, the court will impose moral labels on the parties with the defendant designated as the guilty party, responsible for the divorce, and

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4 See Elrod & Specter, supra note 3, at 807 (listing Arkansas and Pennsylvania as requiring three years; Illinois and Maryland requiring two years; Connecticut and New Jersey requiring eighteen months; North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia requiring one year; and Louisiana and Vermont requiring six months). See generally, Marsha Garrison, *The Economics of Divorce: Changing Rules, Changing Results in Divorce Reform at the Crossroads in ECONOMICS OF DIVORCE, COLLECTION OF PAPERS 75* (Law Library 1978) (assessing divorce reform over past twenty years).


the plaintiff as the "innocent victim." 

In 1997, Louisiana became the first state to restore fault-based divorce with the enactment of the Covenant Marriage Act. This created two marriage options in that state, a standard marriage and a covenant marriage. In the standard marriage, a divorce can be obtained by either party petitioning and proving to the court that the parties were living apart and separately for 180 days. However, if married under the covenant marriage law, parties can only be divorced under a fault-based regime, similar to the New York statute. Of more significance, citizens of Louisiana are given the option of choosing which divorce rules control through the type of marriage chosen. A New York domiciliary has no such option and under certain circumstances can be foreclosed by state law from a change of marital status so long as the persons remains a New York domiciliary.

In a line of cases extending from *Griswold v. Connecticut*
through *Turner v. Safley,*\(^\text{17}\) the Supreme Court has shielded the individual's right to marry and the right to divorce from impermissible encroachment by the state with the protections of substantive due process derived from Fourteenth Amendment. This Note considers whether the New York divorce law that requires fault in contested divorce actions can be found to violate Constitutional law. Part I examines the grounds that must be maintained in a contested New York divorce. This examination will reveal that the outcome of such a contested action may result in a permanent bar to marital dissolution, depriving the plaintiff spouse of a remedy under New York law. In Part II, marital rights will be considered in light of the guarantees afforded by the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution. While marriage and divorce are regulated pursuant to state law, which controls this area by a virtual monopoly, the Constitution guarantees that the state may not encroach upon an individual's fundamental rights, which include associational rights, privacy rights and personal freedoms, all of which are implicated in any deprivation of marital status. Part III will show that the New York fault-based divorce law is susceptible to attack as constitutionally unsound as a result of its impingement on these fundamental freedoms. Part IV will put aside the constitutional imperative for the sake of analyzing the justifications offered by so-called women's advocates in defense of this state's divorce law. These justifications will be found specious and alternatives to promote equitable and fair outcomes will be suggested that will also satisfy the Constitutional mandate prohibiting state infringement on individual rights.

I. THE NEW YORK FAULT-BASED DIVORCE LAW

A. The Grounds

To obtain a contested divorce judgment in the New York, the spouse seeking the divorce must prove either a three-year or longer imprisonment of the other spouse\(^\text{18}\) or one of three typical

\(^{17}\) 482 U.S. 78, 95 (1987) (striking down prison regulation which prohibited inmates from marrying, on grounds that it violated Constitutional right to marriage).

\(^{18}\) See N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW §170 (3) (Consol. 2000) (enumerating grounds for which spouse can divorce); see also Defeo v. Defeo, 605 N.Y.S.2d 202, 204 (Sup. Ct. 1993)
fault-based grounds: a showing of (1) cruel and inhuman treatment,19 (2) abandonment20 or (3) adultery by the contesting spouse.21

1. The Ground of Adultery

Until the Divorce Reform Act of 1966, the sole ground for divorce in New York had been adultery.22 With the new law, adultery continued to be a statutory ground 23 carrying with it both the historical stigma that has attached to it,24 as well as misdemeanor criminal liability.25 While the statute no longer contains express provision for penalizing the adulterous spouse in determining spousal maintenance,26 the court has discretion where there is egregious conduct to reduce spousal maintenance (holding incarcerated spouse may maintain action for divorce based on abandonment by non-incarcerated spouse).


20 See N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW §170 (2) (Consol. 2000); DeFeo, 159 Misc. 2d at 493 (allowing husband's divorce action to proceed based on wife's abandonment of incarcerated husband).

21 N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW §170 (4) (Consol. 2000).

22 Until the Divorce Reform Act of 1966, adultery was the only ground for divorce in New York for 200 years. [1 Matrimonial Actions] NEW YORK CIVIL PRACTICE 18-3 to18-5 (David J. Lanser & Judith M. Reichler eds., 2001). This left few options to those who sought a divorce because they were abused, abandoned or because they had a functionally dead marriage. Id. Resorting to perjury and to manufacturing charges of adultery was commonplace, as was collusion of parties in fraud perpetrated on the court when divorce was mutually desired. Id. For wealthy spouses, migratory divorce could be attained in other jurisdictions. Id. In addition to migratory divorces in Nevada or Mexico, another method of evading New York divorce law was through annulment. See generally Jacob, supra note 2, at 35. There were also fewer stigmas attached to a marriage that was not consummated. Id. As a result, New York had the highest annulment rate in nation, with about one-third of all reported annulments in the nation. Id.

23 See N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW § 170(4) (Consol. 2000) (expanding definition of adultery to include deviant sexual intercourse); see also Freed & Brandes supra note 1, at 3 (discussing New York matrimonial law and grounds for divorce).

24 See [1 Matrimonial Actions] NEW YORK CIVIL PRACTICE, supra note 22, at 18-5. Under prior New York statute, persons who were found to have committed adultery that resulted in divorce decree were not permitted to remarry during the plaintiff's lifetime without court permission. Id. It was assumed that such persons were deemed unfit to marry. Id.


26 See N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW § 236(A)(1) (West 2001) (providing that "the court may direct either spouse to provide suitably for the support of the other..."); [1 Matrimonial Actions] NEW YORK CIVIL PRACTICE, supra note 22, at 18-5; see also N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW §236 practice cmt. (McKinney 1999) (Alan D. Scheinkman) (stating before enactment of § 236(A)(1), adultery would automatically bar "women" from receiving alimony).
awards in extremely egregious cases.27

When the adultery ground is litigated, the proceeding may become extremely acrimonious, especially when an accusatory spouse sets out to humble or embarrass with evidence from detectives, witnesses and photographs.28 While litigating adultery may afford the plaintiff spouse an upper hand in negotiations,29 adultery is the most difficult ground to succeed upon because of arcane statutory defenses and arduous evidentiary requirements.30

The plaintiff has the burden of proving the inclination and the intent to commit adultery as well as opportunity.31 Vague testimony as to identification of parties or dates, or incomplete testimony that does not lead to a strong inference of adultery is insufficient.32 Moreover, where the defendant can make a showing that frequent association with the correspondent was for proper and non-incriminating purposes, the divorce will be dismissed.33 In cases where it is alleged that defendant is living under the same roof in an adulterous relationship, a strict degree of additional evidence is necessary.34 Such a living arrangement alone is not sufficient proof of adultery, as it goes to the element of opportunity and not to inclination or intent.35

27 The present provision states that fault is not a factor in equitable distribution. N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW §236(B). However, where the court deems that the fault is egregious, the court can find authority in § 236(B)(6)(a)(11) that states, "any other factor which the court shall expressly find to be just and proper." Id. Using this open-ended provision, the court can then reduce spousal maintenance for the adultery. Id.

28 See [1 Matrimonial Actions] NEW YORK CIVIL PRACTICE, supra note 22, at 18-6; see also WEITZMAN, supra note 2, at 8-10.

29 See Weitzman, supra note 2, at 9-10 (quoting divorce lawyer Raoul Felder's explanation of use of scandal to get vulnerable executive to settle quickly).

30 See [1 Matrimonial Actions] NEW YORK CIVIL PRACTICE, supra note 22, at 18-6.

31 See Graham v. Graham, 157 A.D. 52, 56, 141 N.Y.S. 766, 768 (App. Div. 1913) (noting that what appears to be improper may be innocent and allegations may be suspect when plaintiff tries to obtain divorce for reasons of his own adultery); [1 Matrimonial Actions] NEW YORK CIVIL PRACTICE supra note 22, at 18-21.


33 See Conger v. Conger, 82 N.Y. 603, 603 (1880) (noting that "frequent meetings were proper and for innocent purposes"); Pollack v. Pollack, 71 N.Y. 137, 153 (1877) (explaining that where evidence capable of sustaining two interpretations offered, such as when sole proof tendered is that of opportunity to commit adultery, is not sufficient showing for adultery charge); Graham 157 A.D. at 58 (accepting defendant's explanation that she was in barn with correspondent, farmhand, to tend chickens).

34 See [1 Matrimonial Actions] NEW YORK CIVIL PRACTICE, supra note 22, at 18-31 (noting "fairly strict degree of proof" is necessary).

35 See Axtell v. Axtell, 119 N.Y.S. 644, 645 (Sup. Ct. 1909) (finding that living under same roof is only proof of opportunity and not inclination) (dictum); see also McGill v. McGill, 77 A.D.2d 892, 432 N.Y.S.2d 1015 (App. Div. 1980) (agreeing with lower court
New York's Civil Practice Law and Rules bar the plaintiff spouse from testifying about the adultery, creating a significant evidentiary burden. Coupled with this evidentiary burden are statutory defenses that can result in dismissal of the action due to plaintiff's conduct. If the plaintiff were also guilty of adultery, such that a divorce would have been granted to the defendant, then the defense of recrimination could be raised that would deny a divorce to the plaintiff. The doctrine of recrimination is based on the premise that a plaintiff who comes to court with "dirty hands" should not be rewarded. Even if adultery is proven, divorce may be denied when the innocent spouse has engaged in condonation.

Condonation, the most commonly raised defense, occurs when the plaintiff has forgiven the defendant for the adultery. This is usually shown by testimony or evidence that the parties, after the known adulterous conduct, have cohabited and engaged in sexual relations. Another defense involves the plaintiff's connivance or procurement in the misconduct, where it can be shown that the plaintiff or the plaintiff's agents actually caused

that "adultery must be based upon clear and convincing evidence and cannot be based on "mere suspicion" (Lazer, J., dissenting). But see Westervelt v. Westervelt, 258 N.E.2d 98, 98 (N.Y. 1970) (finding adultery with evidence of living under same roof, social engagements together and taking contraceptive pills).

See N.Y. C.P.L.R. § 4502(a) (Consol. 2000) (stating that "husband or wife is not competent to testify against the other in an action founded upon adultery, except to prove the marriage, disprove the adultery, or disprove a defense after evidence has been introduced tending to prove the defense").

See N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW § 171 (Consol. 2000); [1 Matrimonial Actions] NEW YORK CIVIL PRACTICE, supra note 22, at 18-77 to 18-78 (noting adultery is only charge in divorce where there are statutory defenses identical to 1837 law).


See Weitzman, supra note 2, at 10-11.

See N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW § 171(3) (Consol. 2000).


or committed the adultery.\textsuperscript{43} Additionally the action could be barred by the five-year statute of limitations.\textsuperscript{44} Because of the acrimonious nature of an adultery proceedings and the legal difficulties posed by the defenses and evidentiary burdens, often times multiple grounds are pled, in conjunction with an adultery charge.\textsuperscript{45}

2. The Ground of Cruel and Inhuman Treatment

Under New York Domestic Relation Law § 170 (1), a divorce will be granted where the defendant's conduct is found to have adverse consequences on the plaintiff.\textsuperscript{46} The plaintiff must prove that the other spouse's conduct "so endangers the physical or mental well being of the plaintiff so as to render it unsafe or improper for the plaintiff to cohabit with the defendant."\textsuperscript{47} This definition and what rises to the level of cruel and inhuman treatment has been the subject of much judicial controversy.\textsuperscript{48} In order to maintain the action, the plaintiff in a long-term marriage must show serious misconduct and not mere incompatibility.\textsuperscript{49} Moreover, a high degree of proof is required to show that there is actionable cruelty, usually corroboration by medical experts or third parties,\textsuperscript{50} especially in the case of a long-
term marriage. Insufficient evidence can lead to dismissal for failure to state a cause of action. In a long term marriage, discord and friction between the spouses is often not enough to sustain a divorce, unless physical abuse is involved. The amount of physical abuse necessary to obtain a divorce is not clearly defined. An isolated act of violence may or may not be


See Waterman v. Waterman, 490 N.Y.S.2d 436, 438 (Sup. Ct. 1985) (dismissing action for failure to state cause of action where cruel and inhuman treatment was alleged by defendant's silent treatment, name calling and slight physical contact); see also Wilkins, 91 A.D.2d at 771 (noting failure to converse or communicate does not rise to level of cause of action for divorce on ground of cruel and inhuman treatment); Concetto v. Concetto, 377 N.Y.S.2d 164, 165 (App. Div. 1975) (stating that name-calling and two isolated acts of alleged violence failed to suffice for finding cruel and inhuman treatment). Cf. Echevarria v. Echevarria, 353 N.E.2d 565, 566 (N.Y. 1976) (stating that even one beating constitutes more than single act of violence when it is composed of repeated and prolonged acts of physical abuse); Bulger, 88 A.D.2d at 885 (noting plaintiff need not establish actual physical injury at hands of defendant or specific number of instances of physical abuse and that pattern of conduct including verbal abuse and physical harassment is sufficient).


See [Matrimonial Actions] NEW YORK CIVIL PRACTICE, supra note 22, at 15-25; see also Concetto, 50 A.D.2d at 883 (stating that name-calling and two isolated acts of alleged violence failed to suffice for finding of cruel and inhuman treatment); Mante v. Mante, 34 A.D.2d 134, 136, 309 N.Y.S.2d 944, 947 (App. Div. 1970) (noting that cruel and inhuman
held sufficient to grant a divorce.\textsuperscript{56} In a short marriage, lasting four years or less, the New York Court of Appeals has held that two beatings did not constitute "mere incompatibility," and stated that a single beating could constitute more than "a single act of violence when it is composed of repeated and prolonged acts of physical abuse."\textsuperscript{57} On the other hand, an isolated violent act coupled with other misconduct may be considered sufficient.\textsuperscript{58} Adulterous conduct, especially if open and notorious, may also be accepted as proof of cruel and inhuman treatment.\textsuperscript{59} Thus, one commentator has noted that "the action is fraught with speculation as to the type of conduct which can be held sufficient to grant affirmative relief."\textsuperscript{60}

While the degree of proof is a serious obstacle to obtaining a treatment is an ad-hoc determination).


\textsuperscript{57} See Echevarria, 353 N.E.2d at 566 (stating that one beating constitutes more than single act of violence when it is composed of repeated and prolonged acts of physical abuse); \textit{see also} Bulger v. Bulger, 450 N.Y.S.2d 601, 601 (App. Div. 1982) (noting that plaintiff need not establish actual physical injury at hands of defendant, but that pattern verbal abuse and physical harassment is sufficient); Barnier v. Barnier, 349 N.Y.S.2d 113, 113 (App. Div. 1973) (holding that humiliation, denying sexual attention, and neglect are sufficient to sustain action for divorce for cruel and inhuman treatment).

\textsuperscript{58} See Echevarria, 40 N.Y.2d at 264 (stating that even one beating constitutes more than single act of violence when it is composed of repeated and prolonged acts of physical abuse); Johnson v. Johnson, 325 N.E.2d 167 (N.Y. 1975) (upholding, without explanation, granting of divorce for husband's single violent act coupled with pattern of bickering and harassment); \textit{see also} Weilert v. Weilert, 495 N.Y.S.2d 707, 708 (App. Div. 1985), rev'd on other grounds, 562 N.Y.S.2d 139 (App. Div. 1990) (finding ample cruelty where husband verbally abused wife for two years and struck her and child once while intoxicated). \textit{Cf.} Wenderlich, 34 A.D.2d at 727 (finding wife not entitled to divorce as result of husband striking her once).


\textsuperscript{60} [1 Matrimonial Actions] NEW YORK CIVIL PRACTICE, supra note 22, at 16-06. \textit{See generally id.} at 16.04 (discussing variations of conduct in divorce and separation situations); \textit{id.} at 18.09 to 18-13 (discussing how statute of limitations on adulterous conduct will vary, affecting relief sought).
divorce for cruel and inhuman treatment, especially for a long-term marriage, the divorce may also be thwarted by the defense of provocation. Following the "clean hands" doctrine, the court requires that the party seeking the divorce be blameless. Another defense may be raised when the "innocent" spouse has continued cohabitation following acts of cruelty, following a rationale similar to that of the condonation defense for adultery.

3. The Ground of Abandonment

Although a ground for separation since 1813, abandonment was added as a ground for divorce in 1966. Abandonment is generally defined as (1) willful and voluntary leaving of the marital home, (2) without justification and (3) with the intention of never returning. A waiting period of one year before commencement of the divorce action is required.

If there is consent from the other or an agreement to separate, by definition there is no abandonment. The abandonment must

61 See Melnick v. Melnick, 538 N.Y.S.2d 441, 443 (App. Div. 1989) (upholding jury denial of divorce for wife's misconduct of throwing objects and garbage at husband because husband provoked wife by telling her he was dating another woman).
62 See Mante v. Mante, 309 N.Y.S.2d 944, 949-950 (App. Div. 1970) (stating although wife was entitled to divorce on basis of cruel and inhuman treatment, her misconduct of abandonment caused forfeiture of her right to divorce); see also Rect v. Rect, 321 N.Y.S.2d 395, 396 (App. Div. 1971) (denying divorce to either party due to guilty activities by both parties); Defeo v. Defeo, 605 N.Y.S.2d 202, 203 (Sup. Ct. 1993) (finding that plaintiff was blameless when wife's conduct constituted abandonment and justified divorce);
64 See WEITZMAN, supra note 2, at 10 (discussing defenses for divorce and adultery). See generally Bracksmayer v. Bracksmayer, 22 N.Y.S.2d 110, 112 (Sup. Ct. 1940) (defining cohabitation and discussing condonation in divorce context).
66 See N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW § 170 (Consol. 2000) (adopting wording from Williams v. Williams, 29 N.E. 98, 98 (N.Y. 1891) (defining abandonment in separation action); see also Hage v. Hage, 492 N.Y.S.2d 172, 175 (App. Div. 1985) (requiring that abandoned spouse be firmly resolved not to live with other spouse and not to fulfill marital obligations for at least one year, with such conduct being unjustified and without consent of abandoned spouse); Harman v. Harman, 209 N.Y.S.2d 568, 569-70 (App. Div. 1961) (requiring that action for abandonment state sufficient facts to establish willful abandonment, that defendant left with intention not to return, and that times and places of acts of abandonment be specified).
be willful and voluntary. The essential element of permanence of the abandonment is a fact specific determination, requiring the court to carefully scrutinize the circumstances and conduct of the parties. For the abandonment ground to succeed, there must be no justification for the permanent leave-taking. This requirement is a vestigial remnant from New York's action for separation, and is based on the same legislative concerns that the wife will employ the abandonment action as an extortion tactic. Although specifically formulated for this select set of facts, the rule remains, and the finding of misconduct by the plaintiff or justification for the departure will bar a divorce.

Where physical violence is a justification for the abandonment, the burden required is not as stringent as those required for

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69 See N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW § 170(2) (Consol. 2000) (stating that action for divorce may be maintained on grounds of abandonment of plaintiff by defendant for period of one or more years); see also Harnen, 12 A.D.2d at 784 (stating action for separation based on abandonment complaint must state facts sufficient to establish that abandonment was willful with no intention of returning).

70 See Mirizio v Mirizio, 161 N.E. 461, 462 (N.Y. 1928) (refusing to create formula to establish permanent abandonment, although recognizing time is often most significant factor); see also In re Smiley, 330 N.E.2d 53, 64 (N.Y. 1975) (Fuchsberg, J., dissenting) (stating that parties must abide by technical requirements of proof if seeking to obtain divorce based upon abandonment); Graves v. Graves, 675 N.Y.S.2d 843, 845 (Sup. Ct. 1998) (holding no cause of action for divorce based upon husband's abandonment of wife where order of protection has removed him from marital home).

71 See Pike v. Pike, 19 N.Y.S.2d 711, 712 (Sup. Ct. 1940) (finding justification because of wife's assaults on husband).

72 The Joint Committee retained the no-justification requirement despite dissatisfactions with it so as to preclude a wife from "perversely" using the abandonment action in an attempt to hamstring the husband-defendant who has sought a migratory divorce. See Joint Legislative Comm. On Matrimonial and Family Law, No. 8, at 96 (N.Y. 1966). The plaintiff's burden to prove that the leave-taking was unjustified was left as protection for the husband who otherwise would have been prey to what the legislature viewed as extortion by the wife: The wife then, in effect, extorts ransom from the husband in the form of a property settlement or excessive alimony before she consents to the arrangement of a migratory divorce. It has been forcefully argued that Section 202 at least offers the husband a practical defense which would often discourage avaricious wives from undertaking such perversions of the separation action. For this reason, the Committee, with some reluctance proposes retention of Section 202 for the present .... Id.

73 See Johnson v. Johnson, 561 N.Y.S.2d 1018, 1018 (App. Div. 1990) (holding that husband's claim of abandonment was invalid as plaintiff-husband had been in prison during period of abandonment); Walden v. Walden, 41 A.D.2d 664, 664, 340 N.Y.S.2d 709, 709 (App. Div. 1973) (finding it was error to preclude evidence of adultery as defense to abandonment). See generally Lisa E. Martin, Providing Equal Justice for the Domestic Violence Victim: Due Process and the Victim's Right to Counsel, 34 GONZ. L. REV. 329, 346 (1999) (noting that any misconduct by plaintiff may not only render divorce proceedings more difficult, but may also bar custody rights as well).
maintaining a charge of cruel and inhuman treatment. Thus, it appears easier to justify abandonment caused by violence, which would bar the grant of a divorce, than it would be to grant a divorce based on cruel and inhuman treatment.

In 1960 the Court of Appeals enlarged the ground of abandonment in *Diemer v. Diermer* by finding the unjustified refusal of a spouse to have conjugal relations for one year gave rise to a cause of action in abandonment. This enlargement however, did not open the "floodgates to actions" in abandonment as feared. The courts require that sexual abandonment be "unjustified, willful and continued" and that the allegedly abandoned spouse repeatedly request the other spouse for cohabitation. The courts have not granted divorce for abandonment where it was shown that the abandonment was due to misconduct by the other spouse. The courts, moreover, have required that the evidence of unjustified refusal be specific. Additionally, a divorce based on lack of conjugal

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74 See [1 Matrimonial Actions] NEW YORK CIVIL PRACTICE, supra note 22, at 16-41 (discussing the difficulty for proving cruel and inhuman treatment in divorce proceedings).
75 See [1 Matrimonial Actions] NEW YORK CIVIL PRACTICE, supra note 22, at 16-41.
76 8 N.Y.2d at 206 (1960).
77 See id.; see also Silver v. Silver, 253 A.D.2d 756, 757 (N.Y. App. Div. 1998) (granting divorce to husband after showing of willful and unjustified refusals by wife to have sex for one year period).
78 See [1 Matrimonial Actions] NEW YORK CIVIL PRACTICE, supra note 22, at 16-36 (noting that while divorce for abandonment was not available in 1966, statute did allow for separation action on same ground and divorce action became patterned on earlier cases for separation).
81 See N.Y. DOM. REL. LAw § 170(2) (Consol. 2000) (stating action for divorce may be procured for abandonment for at least one year); Schine, 31 N.Y.2d at 119 (stating abandonment must be unjustified and without consent).
relations will not be granted where the plaintiff spouse has acquiesced to a sexless marriage because there has been no act of abandonment.\textsuperscript{82}

**B. Domestic Relations Law Section 170 May Result in Permanent Bar to an Interstate Divorce**

The stringency of both the proofs required for the elements of each ground for divorce and the ease with which defenses can defeat these grounds make it difficult, and in some cases impossible, to overcome the fault requirement in a contested divorce.\textsuperscript{83} Therefore, it is entirely possible that a New York citizen wishing to dissolve a marriage may never be able to obtain a divorce from the contesting spouse\textsuperscript{84} so long as the contesting spouse remains fixed in opposing the divorce and so long as the plaintiff remains a citizen of New York.

As a result of the State’s refusal to alter the marital status of the parties, the plaintiff, unable to obtain a divorce, is thereby forced into a dilemma.\textsuperscript{85} Due to the bigamy laws,\textsuperscript{86} he or she is barred from entering a new marriage and as a result may

\textsuperscript{82} See Frances G. v. Vincent G., 525 N.E.2d 739, 740 (N.Y. 1988); Schine, 31 N.Y.2d at 119 (inferring that sexless marriage is not constructive abandonment if consensual); Solomen v. Solomen, 49 N.E.2d 470, 471 (N.Y. 1943) (stating that consensual repudiations of marital obligations is not abandonment unless there is good faith renewal of marital obligations).

\textsuperscript{83} See, e.g., Beigeleisen v. Beigeleisen, 676 N.Y.S.2d 684, 684 (stating wife seeking divorce under "cruel and inhuman treatment" failed to show serious misconduct and therefore failed to procure divorce); Wenderlich v. Wenderlich, 311 N.Y.S.2d 797, 797 (App. Div. 1970) (stating that striking plaintiff was insufficient to establish cruel and inhuman treatment); McGill v. McGill, 432 N.Y.S.2d 1015, 1016 (App. Div. 1980) (stating adultery must be proven through clear and convincing evidence, where living and vacationing together is insufficient to prove adultery).

\textsuperscript{84} See e.g., Zweig v. Zweig, 580 A.2d 939, 941 (Vt. 1990) (stating that divorce action would not be barred due to prior divorce proceeding in sister state if subsequent action is based on events subsequent to prior action). Compare Gordon v. Gordon, 59 So. 2d 40, 43-44 (Fla. 1952) (following jurisdictions that hold subsequent divorce action in sister state will not be barred regarding same facts if different cause of action asserted), with Ball v. Ball, 76 S.W.2d 71, 72 (Ark. 1934) (stating that final decree in divorce action in sister state should apply as bar to subsequent action as to all causes of action which could have arisen from same facts and circumstances).


abandon the contesting spouse or commit adultery. This result is the very misconduct deemed culpable by the law, yet for which the law offers no remedy when there is a contesting spouse. Furthermore, where abandonment does not result, the law creates a situation fraught with the danger of domestic violence, where the antagonistic spouses, pitted against one another in an adversarial proceeding, continue to cohabitate.

II. CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTIONS FOR THE RIGHT TO MARRY AND THE CONCOMITANT RIGHT TO DIVORCE

A. Marital Status as Subsumed by Personal Autonomy and the Right to Privacy

The right to marry has been associated with the Constitution's broad grant of personal autonomy for which there is a grant of presumptive immunity from governmental regulation. Justice Harlan first articulated this concept in the United States Supreme Court in 1961 in the dissent in Poe v. Ullman, where he recognized the right of citizens to be free of arbitrary government intrusion in their private affairs. A precursor of

87 See N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW § 6 (Consol. 2000) (providing that marriage between previously married persons are void unless dissolved or annulled); see also Cave v. Cave, 137 N.Y.S.2d 857, 858 (App. Div. 1955) (stating that marriage is void if contracted by person whose spouse is living, unless previous marriage has been annulled or dissolved); Stein v. Dunne, 103 N.Y.S. 894 (App. Div. 1907) (stating that second marriage is void where first marriage has not been dissolved or annulled even with absence of judicial decree), affirmed 190 N.Y. 524, (1907). See generally N.Y. PENAL LAW § 255.15 (Consol. 2000) (codifying criminal act of bigamy).

88 See Cave, 285 A.D. at 450; see also supra nn. 1-10 & accompanying text.

89 See Marther Heller, Note, Should Breaking Up Be Harder To Do?: The Ramifications a Return to Fault-Based Divorce Would Have Upon Domestic Violence, 4 VA. J. SOC. POLY & L. 263, 266-68 (1996) (arguing that return to fault basis would adversely affect abused women). See generally Martha R. Mahoney, Legal Images of Battered Women Redefining the Issue of Separation, 90 MICH. L. REV. 1, 5-8 (1991) (discussing patterns of abuse for women who attempt to separate from their spouses and significant others). But cf. Margaret F. Brinig & Steven M. Crafton, Marriage and Opportunism, 23 J. LEGAL STUD. 869, 879, 890-91 (1994) (stating that states where no-fault divorce is available do not necessarily have lower instances of domestic violence).


92 See id., at 535-55 (Harlan, J., dissenting) (arguing view that marital privacy was
the Harlan articulation was the 1942 Supreme Court ruling in *Skinner v. Oklahoma*, where the Court recognized the basic rights of marriage and procreation and found the state's sterilization of a criminal population a violation of the equal protection guarantees of the Fourteenth Amendment. In *Loving v. Virginia*, the Court held that a state miscegenation statute was unconstitutional, noting that "the freedom to marry has been recognized as one of the vital personal rights essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness by free men."

1. The Right to Marry

It was the landmark case of *Griswold v. Connecticut*, which firmly established the the right to marital privacy in the Fourteenth Amendment, through the resurrection of the doctrine of Substantive Due Process, where the rights of a married couple in matters of procreation and family were protected from impermissible state encroachments. *Eisenstadt*

guaranteed by Fourteenth Amendment liberty and that intrusion of personal privacy by state required careful scrutiny). *See generally Olmstead v. United States*, 277 U.S. 438, 478-79 (1928) (Brandeis, J., dissenting) (arguing every man, as against government, has right to be let alone); *Pierce v. Soc'y of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510, 534-36 (1925) (recognizing rights of parents to be free from arbitrary intrusions by government in child rearing).

*See id.*, at 541-43 (recognizing marriage as fundamental to human existence and survival). *See generally Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390, 399 (1923) (emphasizing recognition by Fourteenth Amendment of right to marry).

*See id.*, at 12 (recognizing freedom to marry as constitutionally protected right, essential to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness).

*See id.* at 499 (recognizing that freedom of choice in area of marriage is protected by Due Process clause of Fourteenth Amendment); *Lawton*, supra note 87, at 2481-88 (discussing origins of Constitutional right to marry).

*See Griswold*, 381 U.S. at 482-84 (distinguishing *Lochner* era use of doctrine to support freedom to contract from this new use of substantive due process for privacy). *See generally Moore*, 431 U.S. at 499 (recognizing that freedom of choice in area of marriage is protected by Due Process Clause); *Developments, the Constitution of the Family*, supra note 16, at 1161-97 (discussing fundamental right to autonomy in areas of marriage); *Lawton*, supra note 87, at 2481-88 (discussing Fourteenth Amendment as origin to Constitutional right to marry).

*See Griswold*, 381 U.S. at 486 (affording heightened judicial protection from state interference for marital privacy); *see also Developments, the Constitution of the Family*, supra note 16, at 1161-87 (outlining Court's progressive adoption of substantive due process to protect fundamental rights, using procreative rights as illustration). *See
v. Baird\(^{101}\) extended the privacy right enunciated for married couples in *Griswold* to that of the individual.\(^{102}\) The monumental decision of *Roe v. Wade*\(^{103}\) rendering state prohibition against abortion unconstitutional,\(^{104}\) was a natural consequence of the premise of procreative autonomy set down in the seminal decisions of *Griswold* and *Eisenstadt*.\(^{105}\) The Supreme Court jurisprudence protective of individual's right to autonomy and personal freedom was forged by the trilogy— of *Griswold*, *Eisenstadt* and *Roe*,\(^{106}\)— and gave rise to the jurisprudence of decisional autonomy that accorded the individual the right to be free of state intrusion in matters affecting personal and family choices.\(^{107}\)

In *Zablocki v. Redhail*,\(^{108}\) decided in 1978, the Supreme Court aggressively enlarged the scope of privacy rights to include an

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\(^{101}\) 405 U.S. 438 (1972).

\(^{102}\) See *id.* at 453-54 (proclaiming that right of procreative autonomy defined in *Griswold* was right of individual, whether married or not); *Developments, The Constitution of the Family*, supra note 16, at 1184-85 (discussing how *Eisenstadt* decision goes beyond *Griswold* rationale); see also Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey, 505 U.S. 833, 851 (1992) (recognizing that Constitutional protection of personal decisions extends to individuals).

\(^{103}\) See *id.* (rendering state prohibition against abortion illegal).


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individual's right to marry.\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Zablocki} struck down as unconstitutional a Wisconsin law that prior to obtaining a marriage license, permission from the state was needed based on a showing that prior support obligations were complied with and proof that his premarital children would not become public charges.\textsuperscript{110} The Court affirmed the right to marry as fundamental, and stated that the Court had "routinely categorized the decision to marry as among the personal decisions protected by the right of privacy."\textsuperscript{111} Moreover, the state law was deemed a "serious intrusion" on the right to marry as some were "absolutely prevented from getting married" by the law, while others were effectively "coerced into forgoing their right to marry."\textsuperscript{112} 

\textit{Turner v. Saitley}\textsuperscript{113} solidified the \textit{Zablocki} court's designation of Constitutional status to the right to marry\textsuperscript{114} and held that \textit{Zablocki} applied to prison inmates.\textsuperscript{115} Under Missouri law, marriage between prison inmates was almost completely prohibited.\textsuperscript{116} As the regulation was not reasonably related to

\textsuperscript{109} See id. (holding that statute violated Equal Protection Clause by interfering with exercise of fundamental right to marry).

\textsuperscript{110} See id. at 386. See generally M.L.B. v. S.L.J., 519 U.S. 102, 116 (1996) (noting close consideration Court gives to important family issues); Meyer, supra note 107, at 532 (stating that current Constitutional protection for family privacy includes right to marry).


\textsuperscript{113} 482 U.S. 78 (1987).

\textsuperscript{114} See id., at 95 (stating that prison inmates "retains those [Constitutional] rights that are not inconsistent with his status as a prisoner or with the legitimate penological objectives of the corrections system. . ."); \textit{Zablocki}, 434 U.S. at 387; \textit{Id.} at 375 n.1 (providing pertinent parts of Wisconsin statute which failed to recognize foreign marriages for which state permission was not sought, invalided marriages not in statutory compliance and criminally penalized non-compliance). See generally WIS. STAT. § 245.10(1), (4), (5) (1999).

\textsuperscript{115} See \textit{Turner}, 482 U.S. at 78 (1987) (holding that Missouri prison restrictions on inmate correspondence violated Constitutional right to marry).

penological interests and the fundamental right to marry was impermissibly burdened, the court struck the law down as unconstitutional.117

2. The Right to Divorce

As Zablocki and Turner make it improper for state law to unduly burden the fundamental right to marry, it appears logical to extend this Constitutional dictate to a state divorce law, such as New York's, that also unduly burdens the right to marry by making divorce decrees unattainable in a contested divorce under many circumstances.118

In Boddie v. Connecticut,119 the Supreme Court noted how singularly important the judicial system is in regard to marital relations: "Without prior judicial imprimatur, individuals may freely enter into and rescind commercial contracts, for example, but we unaware of any jurisdiction where private citizens may covenant to dissolve marriages without state approval."120 In Boddie, an indigent was barred from getting a divorce because he could not pay the filing fees.121 The Court found state denial of access a violation of due process rights and struck down the statute.122 Because of the importance of marriage in our society, the court found that the state monopoly of divorce made it

right to marry as fundamental); Sherri L. Toussaint, Comment, Defense of Marriage Act: Isn't It Ironic. . .Don't You Think? A Little Too Ironic?, 76 NEB. L. REV. 924, 940 n.114 (1997) (characterizing Turner as unanimously extending to inmates fundamental right of marriage established in Zablocki).

117 See Turner, 482 U.S. at 91.

118 See Bradford, supra note 10, at 623 (arguing eligible status to remarry is valid corollary to right to marry); Melissa Lawton, Note, The Constitutionality of Covenant Marriage Laws, 66 FORDHAM L. REV. 2471, 2481 (1998) (stating that right to marry includes right to divorce because of similarity in the voluntary right); Donna J. Zenor, Note, Untying the Knot: The Course and Patterns of Divorce Reform, 57 CORNELL L. REV. 649, 652 (1972) (viewing right to end marriage as corollary of right to marry); see also Cathy J. Jones, The Rights to Marry and Divorce: A New Look at Some Unanswered Questions, 63 WASH. U. L.Q. 577, 643 (1985) (arguing divorce should be treated as fundamental); Lisa E. Martin, Providing Equal Justice for the Domestic Violence Victim: Due Process and the Victim's Right to Counsel, 34 GONZ. L. REV. 329, 338 (1998) (characterizing right to obtain divorce as "fundamental").


120 See id. at 376 (1971).


122 See Boddie, 401 U.S. at 383.
imperative that access to judicial relief be unimpeded to every person. According to Justice Marshall, the correlative relationship between the right to divorce and the right to marry, which has been afforded Constitutional protection under the Fourteenth Amendment, was made explicit in Boddie: "[W]e recognized that the right to seek dissolution of the marital relationship was closely related to the right to marry, as both involve the voluntary adjustment of the same fundamental human relationship." The significance of Boddie's conferral of a Constitutional right to divorce was illuminated by United States v. Kras, where the plaintiff, a bankruptcy petitioner, sought to follow the precedent of Boddie, so that the bankruptcy fee provisions of the Bankruptcy Act would be found unconstitutional. The Court distinguished Kras from Boddie, finding that if the fee barred Mr. Kras from discharging his bankruptcy, his position would not be "materially altered in the Constitutional sense." On the other hand, the access to court denied by the fees to Mr. Boddie involved his marital interests and the "associational interests that surround the establishment and dissolution of that relationship." The Court noted that there have been many

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123 See M.L.B. v. S.L.J., 519 U.S. 102, 113 (1996) (stating State must provide access to judicial processes, like marriage dissolution, without regard to party's ability to pay court fees); Meltzer v. C. Buck Le Craw & Co., 402 U.S. 954, 955 (1971) (stating no person can be denied access to civil courts because of inability to pay a fee); Boddie, 401 U.S. at 375-76 (noting due process rights are threatened by state monopoly over divorce).

124 Sosna v. Iowa, 419 U.S. 393, 420 (1975) (Marshall, J., dissenting); see also Abdul-Akbar v. McKavie, 2001 U.S. App. LEXIS 1281, at *23 (3d. Cir. 2001) (stating right of judicial access without regard to cost exists for civil cases when denial of judicial forum would implicate fundamental human interest, including ability to obtain divorce); JOEL E. NOWAK & RONALD D. ROTUNDA, CONSTITUTIONAL LAW 801-802 (5th ed. 1995) (interpreting choice to marry and divorce as fundamental and subject to strict scrutiny judicial review).


126 See id., at 434; Standlee v. Arizona, 1991 U.S. App. LEXIS 30594, at *3 (9th Cir. 1991) (citing Kras and asserting that bankruptcy "did not rise to the level of a fundamental right"); Abdul-Akbar, 2001 U.S. App. LEXIS 1281 at *23 (stating bankruptcy filings are not interests that rise to level of fundamental human interests).

127 See Kras, 409 U.S. at 444-445. Cf. Ortwein v. Schwab, 410 U.S. 656, 659 (1973) (holding interest of seeking increased welfare payments does not rise to level of Constitutional significance as interest of obtaining divorce did in Boddie); Nickens v. Melton, 38 F.3d 183, 185 n.5 (5th Cir. 1994) (stating right to appeal civil damage suit is not as fundamental as right of marriage).

128 See Kras, 409 U.S. at 444; see also M.L.B., 519 U.S. at 116 (stating that "[c]hoices about marriage...are among associational rights [Supreme Court] has ranked as 'of basic importance in our society'" (quoting Boddie, 401 U.S. at 376)); Zablocki v. Redhail, 434 U.S. 374, 385 n.10 (1978) (stating that "[t]he denial of access to the judicial forum in Boddie touched directly on the marital relationship and on the associational interests that
decisions in which it recognized the "fundamental importance of these interests under our Constitution."\textsuperscript{129} The court in \textit{Griswold} specifically found the Fourteenth Amendment protected associational freedom implicit in the "zone of privacy".\textsuperscript{130} Furthermore Justice Brennan articulated in \textit{Roberts v. United States Jaycees} the Constitutional protection of an individual's right to associational freedom from state regulation.\textsuperscript{131} The Bill of Rights, designed to protect individual liberty, must offer "Constitutional shelter" for individuals from unjustified interference from the state in an individual's associational choices.\textsuperscript{132} These safeguards are necessary because intimate relations are crucial, not only as sources of emotional enrichment, but also as part of the individual's liberty interest which encompasses the individual's ability to define identity through associational choices.\textsuperscript{133}

In \textit{Sousna v. Iowa},\textsuperscript{134} another divorce petitioner was barred from divorce.\textsuperscript{135} In that case, the petitioner was barred as a result of residency requirements, since the petitioner had not resided in

surround the establishment and dissolution of that relationship"); Skinner v. Oklahoma, 316 U.S. 535, 541 (1942) (stating that "(m)arriage is one of the 'basic civil rights of man; fundamental to our very existence and survival'").

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Kras}, 409 U.S. at 444; \textit{see also} \textit{Zablocki}, 434 U.S. at 394 (holding Wisconsin state law denying marriage licenses to residents that were unable to fulfill child support obligations unconstitutional, as violation of Due Process); Cleveland Bd. of Educ. v. LaFleur, 414 U.S. 632, 639-40 (1974) (recognizing freedom of personal choice in matters of marriage and family life that they are protected by Due Process Clause).

\textsuperscript{130} \textit{See} \textit{Griswold} v. Connecticut, 381 U.S. 479, 486 (1965) (stating marriage promotes socially beneficial consequences); \textit{see also} \textit{Carey} v. Population Servs. Int'l, 431 U.S. 678, 684 (1977) (stating decisions relating to marriage are within outer limits of personal privacy demarked by this court and therefore free from unjustified governmental interference); \textit{LaFleur}, 414 U.S. at 639 (stating that personal choice in matters of marriage and family life are of those liberties protected by Due Process Clause).

\textsuperscript{131} 468 U.S. 609 (1984); \textit{see also} Ward v. Athens City Bd. of Educ., 1999 U.S. App. LEXIS 22766, at *19 (6th Cir. 1999) (stating that marriage to spouse was exercise of First Amendment right to freedom of association); Marcum v. Catron, 70 F.Supp.2d 728, 734 (E.D. Ky. 1999) (stating undue state interference in marital relationships unconstitutionally infringes upon freedom of association); Brown v. Dayton Metro. Hous. Auth., 1993 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 21297, at *17 (S.D. Ohio 1993) (stating that "freedom of personal choice in matters of marriage and family life is one of the liberties protected by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment" (quoting Moore v. East Cleveland, 431 U.S. 494, 499 (1977))).


\textsuperscript{134} 419 U.S. 393 (1975).

\textsuperscript{135} \textit{See id.}, at 395 (holding where couple with three children moved from New York to Iowa and within month wife petitioned Iowa court for divorce, Iowa court lacked jurisdiction).
the state for the one-year period required by state law. The court found the imposition of a time requirement justified in that it forced those seeking an Iowa divorce to be attached to the state and thereby prevented the state from becoming a "divorce mill." The statute also insulated Iowa's divorce decrees from collateral attack. Moreover, the Court distinguished Sosna from Boddie by the difference in deprivation endured, characterizing the deprivation in Sosna as a mere delay for the new resident as opposed to an exclusion for the indigent in Boddie that would last "forever."

Justice Marshall, joined by Justice Brennan, dissented from this view, finding that the residency requirement resulted in "unrecoverable losses." When the year has elapsed, it could

136 See id. at 395. The statute which the Court relied upon, IOWA CODE § 598.6 (1973) provided, in pertinent part: "[a] petition for dissolution of marriage... must state that the petitioner has been for the last year a resident of the state... and that the maintenance of the residence has been in good faith and not for the purpose of obtaining a marriage dissolution...." Id. at 395 n.1. At the time Sosna was decided, such residency requirements were by no means uncommon, as Iowa was one of forty-eight states to have one. Id. at 404. In terms of time duration, such requirements ranged from six weeks to two years. Id. at 405.

137 See id., at 407 (stating power of State to regulate marriage and divorce is near complete and is only limited by specific Constitutional provisions); Boddie, 401 U.S. at 385 (Douglas, J., concurring) (asserting that "[t]he State... has absolute right to prescribe the conditions upon which the marriage relation between its own citizens shall be created, and the causes for which it may be dissolved." (quoting Pennoyer v. Neff, 95 U.S. 714, 734-35 (1878))); Simms v. Simms, 175 U.S. 162, 167 (1899) (stating "[w]ithin the States of the Union, the whole subject of the domestic relations... belongs to the laws of the State, and not to the laws of the United States."); see also Sosna, 419 U.S. at 404 (adhering to century long jurisprudence and regarded regulation of domestic matters as within "virtually exclusive province of the [state]."); id., at 406-07 (stating residency requirements may be reasonably justified on grounds of significant collateral consequences to State, such as disposition of property and determination of child custody).

138 Sosna, 419 U.S. at 407. The Court held that Iowa had a significant interest in having its divorce decrees recognized by other states in light of the fact that the judicial power of a state to grant a divorce has been traditionally found on the domicile of the petitioner. Id. When a divorce decree is entered after a finding of domicile in an ex parte proceeding, the Supreme Court has held that the finding of domicile is not binding upon other States and could be subject to attack. See Williams v. North Carolina, 325 U.S. 226, 229 (1945) Thus, the one year residency requirement in Sosna was viewed as an effective counter to such collateral antics. See Sosna, 419 U.S. at 407. The Court characterized the residency requirement as "precisely the sort of determination that a state in the exercise of its domestic relations jurisdiction is entitled to make." Id. at 408-09.

139 Sosna, 419 U.S. at 410. In Boddie, 401 U.S. at 383, the Court voided a statute that prohibited an indigent from obtaining access to the state's divorce courts. Id. The Court further reasoned that the statute in Boddie intended to exclude permanently a certain segment of the population, the poor, from divorce court. Id. at 410. The Court held that the one year residency requirement did not amount to the total deprivation imposed on the impoverished petitioner in Boddie. Id.

140 Sosna, 419 U.S. at 421 (Marshall, J., dissenting) (stating "[the majority's] analysis... ignores the severity of the deprivation suffered by the divorce petitioner).
not be argued that the petitioner was made whole since "the year's wait prevents remarriage and locks both partners into what may be an intolerable, destructive relationship." Moreover, Justice Marshall argued that if the state statute in *Boddie* had required indigents to wait a year before filing for a divorce, that the Court still would have struck down the state law as unconstitutional.

III. THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN DOMESTIC RELATIONS VIS-A-VIS THE FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT

A. Domestic Relations is the Exclusive Province of the State

Despite the Constitutional shelter of the Fourteenth Amendment for the individual's marital rights, both in marriage and its dissolution, the Supreme Court has long held that domestic relations is the "virtually exclusive province of the states." Marriage and divorce have been closely regulated by state legislatures based on an implicit morality. Justice Powell, in his concurring opinion in *Zablocki*, points out that the State is "the collective expression of moral aspirations" and is properly interested in seeing that the rules of domestic relations reflect the values of its people. Within its borders, each state

141 See id. at 422. Cf. Memorial Hospital v. Maricopa County, 415 U.S. 250, 269 (1974) (voiding Arizona law which conditioned receipt of medical care in non-emergency cases on one year residency in county); Stanley v. Illinois, 405 U.S. 645, 647-48 (1972) (recognizing injury to unmarried father of being deprived of his child upon death of his wife, if such child were declared ward of state pursuant to state statute); Shapiro v. Thompson, 394 U.S. 618, 637 (1969) (voiding statute which conditioned receipt of welfare payments on one year residency requirement).

142 See *Sosna*, 419 U.S. at 422, n.2; see also *Boddie*, 401 U.S. at 383-86 (Douglas, J. concurring).


144 See *Zablocki*, 434 US at 398 (Powell, J., concurring) (noting marriage and divorce were originally subject to regulation by ecclesiastical authorities); see also *Maynard v. Hill*, 125 U.S. 190, 209 (1888) (affirming that noncompliance of statutory law severing wife's right to property); J. Thomas Oldham, *Divorce Reform at the Crossroads*, 80 CAL. L. REV. 1091, 1103 (1992) (discussing counterproductive effect morality plays in removing "fault" factor in divorce proceedings).

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has defined what constitutes the institution of marriage: proscribing at what age a person can marry, defining the procedure for marriage, the duties and obligations of the parties, the property rights of the parties and the grounds for dissolution.\textsuperscript{146} State laws have also banned incest, bigamy, and homosexuality, and required bloods tests as preconditions for marriage.\textsuperscript{147}

\textbf{B. The Constitutional Infirmity of New York Divorce Law}

While the law of domestic relations is controlled by the state and wholly within its dominion, the state still must act within Constitutional limits.\textsuperscript{148} When an individual's protected marital rights are abridged by the state, "the question is whether the state interests that support the abridgment can overcome the substantive protections of the constitution."\textsuperscript{149} In this inquiry, the issue is whether New York divorce law which results in the permanent deprivation of fundamental marital rights can be overcome by state interests.\textsuperscript{150}

1. The 1966 Liberalization as a Safeguard of the New York Legal System

In 1966, the legislature liberalized the divorce laws by enlarging the grounds for divorce to include abandonment without justification,\textsuperscript{151} and cruel and inhuman treatment.\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{146} \textit{See Maynard}, 125 U.S. at 209 (interpreting Oregon Donation Act, 9 Stat. 496 (1850)); see also Brian H. Bix, \textit{State of the Union: The States' Interests in the Marital Status of Their Citizens}, 55 U. MIAMI L. REV. 1, 15 (2000) (recognizing United States domestic relations law has traditionally been under state control).


\textsuperscript{149} \textit{See Zablocki}, 434 U.S. at 391, 392; see also Lawton, \textit{supra} note 148, at 2481 (discussing uncertainty in interpreting Constitutional case law concerning right to marry).


\textsuperscript{151} \textit{See} Carpenter v. Carpenter, 718 N.Y.S.2d 105, 106 (2000) (ruling abandonment
While recognizing that divorce was warranted under these intolerable circumstances, the 1966 law was also concerned with the visible fraud that was being perpetrated on the judicial system.153 With adultery as the sole ground for divorce, the judiciary was faced with collusion by the parties, in which the parties agreed to secure a divorce by manufacturing adultery through perjurious testimony.154

The liberalization of the divorce laws not only added the "new" fault grounds, but it also included the ability to obtain a divorce after two years of separation (amended later to one year).155 Separation could be obtained under an agreement of separation or by a judicial decree of separation awarded to a plaintiff for essentially the same grounds as a divorce.156 The so-called "conversion divorce," whereby the separation agreement or separation decree converts to a divorce after one year, has been said to be the New York equivalent of no-fault divorce157 because the conversion divorce does not require fault for the divorce to be granted.158

The purpose for offering this option was to eliminate two of the

need not be established as ground for divorce).


155 See N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW §170(5), (6) (Consol. 2000). See generally Cicerale v Cicerale, 382 N.Y.S.2d 430 (Sup. Ct. 1970) (invalidating separation agreement due to improper execution); Martin v Martin, 312 N.Y.S.2d 520 (Sup. Ct. 1970) (granting divorce where parties to separation agreement have fulfilled terms and two years have passed).


158 See Gleason v. Gleason, 256 N.E.2d 513, 516 (N.Y. 1970) (stating that "as is apparent, the legislative design was to render this a basis for divorce, it follows that it makes no difference whether it is the 'innocent' or 'guilty' party who seeks to convert the judicial separation into a final divorce"). See generally Shapiro v. Shapiro, 298 N.Y.S.2d 785 (Sup. Ct. 1969) (discussing fault in divorce proceedings); Ullo v. Ullo, 453 N.Y.S.2d 559 (Sup. Ct. 1982) (dealing with fault in divorce proceedings).
"chief evils" under the prior divorce law: collusive or fraud-ridden divorce based on fabricated claims and migratory divorce, which were threatening the integrity of the legal system. The legislature finally recognized the necessity of divorce in a "dead marriage," culminating in the creation of the "conversion divorce."

Implicit in the statutory scheme is the legislative recognition that it is socially and morally undesirable to compel couples to a dead marriage to retain an illusory and deceptive status and that the best interests not only of the parties but of society itself will be furthered by enabling them "to extricate themselves from a perpetual state of marital limbo."

Although the conversion divorce was successful in permitting non-contesting spouses to extricate themselves from each other and in freeing the judiciary from the visible collusive perjury rampant under the old law, the Divorce Reform of 1966 was not as helpful to an individual whose petition for divorce was contested by the other spouse. While the two new fault grounds of cruel and inhuman treatment and abandonment were added to the law, the requirements to succeed under these grounds were at times insurmountable. There may well be a

159 See Gleason, 26 N.Y.2d at 39 (discussing dangers of false claims in divorce proceedings). See generally Rappel v. Rappel, 240 N.Y.S.2d 692 (Sup. Ct. 1963) (denying full faith and credit to Nevada divorce where proponent was continuously domiciled in New York and had traveled to Nevada specifically for that purpose); Perrin v. Perrin, 250 N.Y.S. 588 (Sup. Ct. 1931) (invalidating Pennsylvania fault based divorce where proponent's spouse made no appearance nor was personally served).

160 See Jacobs, supra note 2, at 35.


163 See Joel R. Brandes, 'Hessen' Revisited-The Cruelty Ground for Divorce, N.Y.L.J., Jan 25, 2000, at 3 (reporting conduct constituting cruel and inhuman treatment in Hessen v. Hessen, 33 N.Y.2d 406, 410 (1974), was upheld in Brady v Brady 64 N.Y.2d 339, 344 (1985)); see, e.g., Hessen v. Hessen, 308 N.E.2d 891, 892-93 (N.Y. 1974) (denying husband divorce despite trial court's finding that "wife had been uncooperative, stubborn, unfair, unreasonable and irrational in her treatment of the plaintiff"); see also Johnson v. Johnson, 561 N.Y.S.2d 1018 (App. Div. 1990) (finding imprisonment for over fifteen years does not constitute abandonment because "one of the elements of such a cause of action is an unjustified separation").
"dead marriage" in which both parties were engaged in adultery, or where the sexually abandoned spouse could not succeed because the abandoned spouse has not repeatedly asked for conjugal relations for one year, or where the mistreatment does not rise to "cruel and inhuman". In addition, New York divorce law offers no remedy to those spouses who are in a "perpetual state of marital limbo" as were the parties in Gleason. The statute deems it "morally and socially" proper to grant a divorce in a "dead marriage," yet installs permanent obstacles to non-functioning marriages when one spouse contests the divorce. While Gleason articulates a non-fault ethic, stating, "if there is no longer a viable marriage, the question of fault, of 'guilt' or 'innocence,' is irrelevant." This contradicts New York's—fault-based law when an agreement to separate is unattainable.


168 Gleason, 26 N.Y.2d at 34.

2. The New York Law Cannot Justify Permanent Denial of a Fundamental Right

Thus, the New York law creates a statutory classification of persons who cannot exercise a fundamental right.\textsuperscript{171} Those denied divorce are permanently deprived of their associational and decisional freedom to divorce and re-marry by the overreaching intrusion of the state in their personal lives.\textsuperscript{172} "When a statutory classification significantly interferes with a fundamental right, it cannot be upheld unless it is supported by sufficiently important state interests and is closely tailored to effectuate only those interests."\textsuperscript{173} If New York divorce law is to be Constitutionally valid, there must be sufficiently important state interests.\textsuperscript{174} These interests must be of sufficient merit to justify denying the right to marriage and divorce, which are association and decisional freedom guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.\textsuperscript{175}

Since New York has recognized the need for extrication from a "dead marriage," there is no rational justification for requiring denial of associational freedoms that other citizens are imbued with.\textsuperscript{176} Not only does this violate substantive due process, equal protection issues may arise as well, since the state is condoning disparate treatment for similarly situated individuals.\textsuperscript{177} Furthermore, \textit{Eisenbrandt} and \textit{Roe} make clear that the substantive due process protections identified in \textit{Griswold} were rights accruing to individuals, and not solely to married couples.\textsuperscript{178} Therefore the Constitutional rights recognized in \textit{Gleason} should be available equally to all.\textsuperscript{179}

While almost every state legislature has addressed the problem of the individual unable to secure a divorce in a non-functional marriage,\textsuperscript{180} New York does not give such individuals

\textsuperscript{171} See supra, nn. 118-147 & accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{172} See supra, nn. 118-150 & accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{173} Zablocki, 434 U.S. at 388.
\textsuperscript{174} See supra, nn. 118-142 & accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{175} See generally N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW § 170 (Consol. 2000).
\textsuperscript{176} See supra, n. 161 & accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{177} See supra, notes 118-150 & accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{178} See supra notes 93-101 & accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{179} U.S. CONST. amend. XIV.
\textsuperscript{180} See supra nn. 2-3 & accompanying text.
any remedy.\textsuperscript{181} Since these individuals are suffering permanent deprivation as a result of the state's monopoly on marital dissolution, their deprivation would bring them within the \textit{Boddie} infirmity criteria.\textsuperscript{182}

3. The Divorce Law Fails to Accomplish Its Goals

While inflicting permanent deprivation on some individuals, the New York divorce laws cannot claim to satisfactorily accomplish state interests.\textsuperscript{183} Despite the liberalization of the 1966 law, the New York legal system still wrestles with the "chief evils" of perjury and evasion that the 1966 reform law were designed to correct. In contested divorce actions based on fault grounds where there is reason to destroy credibility, perjury is still commonplace according to New York divorce lawyers.\textsuperscript{184} The evasive route of migratory divorce still remains to those who are permanently barred from securing a New York divorce.\textsuperscript{185} Moreover, this evasion appears to be condoned by the Supreme Court.\textsuperscript{186} Additionally, the permanent deprivation to divorce is contradictory to public policy, which finds it socially and morally offensive to keep couples locked in dead marriages.\textsuperscript{187} Thus, the New York divorce law is defective because it deprives a fundamental liberty right guaranteed under the Fourteenth Amendment and this encroachment does not satisfy strict scrutiny analysis.\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{181} \textit{See} N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW § 170 (Consol. 2000).
\textsuperscript{182} \textit{See Boddie}, 401 U.S. at 375-76 (stating where state has monopoly over methods of dispute settlement, it infringes on defendants' rights).
\textsuperscript{183} \textit{See supra}, nn. 159-170 & accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{185} \textit{See}, e.g., Zweig v. Zweig, 154 Vt. 468 (Sup.Ct. 1990), \textit{cert. denied}, 498 U.S. 942 (1990) (holding that divorce where parties had been living apart for fifteen years was not barred by New York \textit{res judicata}, which denied divorce on fault grounds).
\textsuperscript{187} \textit{See Gleason}, 256 N.E.2d at 516 (stating that to compel couples to stay in dead marriages is not in best interests of the parties or society).
\textsuperscript{188} \textit{See Zablocki}, 434 U.S at 395 (holding Wisconsin statute unconstitutional under Fourteenth Amendment because it interfered with fundamental right to marry, and it could not be justified on basis of state interest).
IV. THE ENIGMA OF THE NEW YORK FAULT-BASED LAW VIS-A-VIS THE DIVISION OF PROPERTY

According to Lenore Weitzman's study of the California no-fault divorce law, women were adversely affected economically by no-fault law. The economic effect was felt in two ways: first, loss of leverage in property settlement negotiations, and second, as a result of division of property without regard to the fault of the parties.

A. The "Weitzman Thesis" That No-Fault Caused Women to Lose Leverage in Divorce

The Weitzman Thesis posits that fault-based divorce gave women who were otherwise economically dependent on their spouses, leverage in the economic outcome of divorce. The thesis first assumes that the husband is seeking the divorce, and that the wife would not herself seek a divorce. Under the New

189 See Weitzman, supra note 2, at 26 (stating consequences of no-fault divorce law fall most heavily on economically weaker wife); see also Biondi, supra note 106, at 624 (noting reform of fault based divorce laws is less equitable in system where women are at economic disadvantage compared to men); Marsha Garrison, Equitable Distribution in New York: Results and Reform: Good Intentions Gone Awry: The Impact of New York Equitable Distribution Law on Divorce Outcomes, 57 BROOK. L. REV. 621, 633 (1991) (discussing effect of 1960's divorce reform on women's declining per capita income and standard of living following divorce).

191 See Weitzman, supra note 2, at 12 (stating that under previous law, property awards were linked to fault); see also Biondi, supra note 108, at 620-21 (stating fault based divorce gives women added leverage by facilitating greater beneficial settlements, receipt of greater economic shares of property and spousal support, and creation of false fault grounds in situations where only husband wants divorce but cannot obtain one without his wife's approval); Martha L. Fineman, Implementing Equality: Ideology, Contradiction and Social Change: A Study of Rhetoric and Results in the Regulation of the Consequences of Divorce, 1983 WIS. L. REV. 789, 801-802 (1983) (discussing argument that no-fault divorce decreases economically dependent woman's bargaining power and prevents sympathetic courts from responding to her economically disadvantaged situation).

192 See Weitzman, supra note 2, at 26 (stating that "[t]he no-fault rules have eliminated the lever that lawyers used under the old law to get decent economic settlements for wives."); see also Biondi, supra note 108, at 620 (noting that fault based divorce provides leverage for economically disadvantaged spouses, usually women, to obtain economic support from their spouses); Winner, supra note 184, at 34 (arguing that "[w]hen a man no longer had to seek his wife's consent for a divorce, women lost their leverage in divorce settlements").

193 See Weitzman supra note 2, at 27-29 (noting New York divorce statistics actually indicate more women seek divorce than men). But see Lloyd Cohen, Marriage, Divorce, and Quasi Rents: Or, "I Gave Him the Best Years of My Life", 16 J. LEGAL STUD. 267, 268 (1987) (arguing present value of wife's human capital contribution to marriage declines faster and earlier than husband's, thus inducing him to seek divorce first).
York fault law, the wife can contest the divorce and the grounds would likely fail for a lack of fault. She could also threaten to counterclaim for divorce and air the husband's fault at a public trial. This resistance and threat of trial are said to have given her leverage otherwise lost in a no-fault regime when faced with a divorce action by her spouse.

While fault-based divorce might have allowed for this tactic, it would seem to be counter to the legislative intent as articulated in the 1966 Committee Report. In at least one place the legislators were concerned about "avaricious wives" taking actions merely as negotiation strategies. The legislators characterized such actions, not as leverage, but as extortion. Based on this legislative intent, women's groups who have fought to keep New York divorce fault-based as leverage do not have a legally tenable position.

194 See Weitzman, supra note 2, at 9 (indicating threats of exposing culpable spouse's actions at public trial persuaded parties to agree to out of court financial settlement); see also Biondi, supra note 108, at 620-21 (explaining when fault ground exists, wife may demand settlement by threatening public trial); Winner, supra note 184, at 34 (concluding that whereas women had leverage in divorce settlements under fault-based regimes, no-fault divorce has allowed powerful party to blackmail his/her spouse).

195 See Weitzman, supra note 2, at 9 (indicating threats of exposing culpable spouse's actions at public trial persuade parties to agree to out of court financial settlement); see also Biondi, supra note 108, at 620-21 (explaining when fault ground exists, wife may demand settlement by threatening public trial); Winner, supra note 184, at 34 (concluding that whereas women had leverage in divorce settlements under fault-based regimes, no-fault divorce has allowed powerful party to blackmail his/her spouse).


197 See id.

198 See id.; [1 Matrimonial Actions] NEW YORK CIVIL PRACTICE, supra note 22, at 16-47 to 16-48 (asserting recommendation of Joint Committee to preclude greedy spouse from extorting large sums of money in form of property settlement); Peter J. Galasso, Matrimonial Law Struck a Chord, N.Y.L.J., July 12, 2000, at 2 (stating use of non-economic basis to exact economic benefit seems to fit definition of 'extortion'); see also Alexandra Leichter, The Problem of Getting the 'Get'; Impact of Jewish Divorce Law on Matrimonial Litigation, MATRIMONIAL STRATEGIST, July 1998, at 4 (noting New York's "Get Law" enables courts to award larger proportionate interest in marital property and/or increase spousal support award to wives whose husbands would otherwise attempt extortion in exchange for "the get").

199 See [1 Matrimonial Actions] NEW YORK CIVIL PRACTICE, supra note 22, at 16-47 to 16-48 (stating Advisory Committee "felt that the necessity for the plaintiff to prove an unjustified leaving by the defendant,... was sufficient protection"); Oliver Koppell, In Defense of Divorce Reform 1990, N.Y.L.J., May 18, 1990, at 2 (opining "objection[s] to divorce on no-fault grounds is the loss of the 'leverage' [that is] now in the hands of the party against whom the divorce is sought. A less polite expression for this 'leverage' is the opportunity for extortion"). See generally Gary Stein, Jail Worked on Ex Who Didn't 'Get' It, SUN-SENTINEL (Fort Lauderdale), Aug. 30, 1996, at 1B (discussing husband's tremendous leverage in Jewish divorce negotiations because only he is empowered to give "the get").
B. Property Division by Judicial Award Discounts Fault as a Criteria in Redistribution

While current New York divorce law was enacted in 1966, before the passage of the reform oriented 1970 California no-fault divorce law, New York property division law was enacted in 1980 and reflected a no-fault perspective. Under this law, consideration of the fault of the parties with regard to property redistribution will only be considered where the marital misconduct is judged "egregious." Therefore, when a divorce is granted, even under a fault ground, fault is rarely germane to the determination of property division. Leaving the fairness of New York's property division law aside, the inapposite premises of these intertwined statutes are irreconcilable. Ironically, in many states where it is possible to obtain a no-fault divorce, fault will be one of the factors used in the property division. This

200 See N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW § 236(b)(5), (d)(13) (Consol. 2000) (directing courts to consider "any other factor which the court shall expressly find to be just and proper"); Freed & Brandes, supra note 1, at 22 (criticizing 1966 reform as inadequate and falling short of meeting all legitimate desires and needs of trouble families). See generally Barbara Bennet Woodhouse, Symposium, Sex, Lies and Dissipation: The Discourse of Fault in a No-Fault Era, 82 GEO. L.J. 2525, 2534 (1994) (indicating trend toward "fault blindness," with statutes of one quarter of the states using general fault-based factors as one of many relevant considerations in property distribution).


202 See Blickstein v. Blickstein, 472 N.Y.S.2d 110, 113 (App. Div. 1984) (stating occasions in which fault should be considered in determining distribution of property will be very rare and will involve situations in which "marital misconduct is so egregious or uncivilized as to bespeak of blatant disregard of marital relationship"); Jacobs, supra note 2, at 166 (noting fault has been banished from most divorce proceedings and replaced by new criteria to determine property division); Cerisse Anderson, Lower Standard Set For Evidence of Abuse; Pattern of Violence Ended in Attack with Barbell, N.Y. L.J., Dec. 19, 2000, at 1 (explaining New York's general rule which excludes marital fault when considering equitable distribution except for "egregious cases that shock the conscience" of court).

203 See N.Y. DOM. REL. LAW § 170 (Consol. 2000) (listing six grounds for divorce action: cruel and inhumane treatment, abandonment, confinement in prison, adultery, one year separation decree or a written separation agreement); Blickstein, 472 N.Y.S.2d at 113 (holding considerations of marital fault are irrelevant to basic assumptions underlying equitable distribution law such that each party has made contributions to marital partnership and upon its dissolution each is entitled to his or her fair share); Jacobs, supra note 2, at 167 (noting men are routinely viewed as responsible for accretion of marital assets and therefore receive larger percentage of assets upon divorce).

204 See O'Brien, 66 N.Y.2d at 589 (holding court may consider marital fault just and proper factor in equitable distribution); Blickstein, 472 N.Y.S.2d at 113 (recognizing
further undermines the public policy justification for New York fault-based divorce law since fault is a basis on which a divorce is granted, but it is not a basis for the property division.205 The distributive award can result in a lopsided distribution, awarding the "guilty" spouse a greater share of the property due to his greater economic contribution to the marriage.206

CONCLUSION

The interests of the state cannot be said to justify the New York fault-based divorce statute because it impinges on fundamental Constitutional freedoms protected under the Fourteenth Amendment. In fact, the divorce statute dating from 1966 is so flawed as to contradict its own stated purposes, as expressed by the legislative committee report and articulated by the Gleason court.

Moreover, the divorce statute is irreconcilable with the no-fault tenets of the New York's property division law, it's corollary statute. The sanguine effect of fault as providing leverage in the bargaining process to the older female spouse cannot be sustained under the legislature's stated aversion to such tactics. Nor can a statute that infringes on Constitutional rights be sustained based on the pretext that it affords leverage to the disadvantaged spouse in an adversarial arena.

If the divorce law produces unjust financial consequences, then marital fault in some cases by virtue of its extraordinary nature may be relevant and should be considered when distributing marital property upon dissolution of marriage; HOMER HARRISON CLARK, THE LAW OF DOMESTIC RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES, § 16.03 at 182 & n.20 (2d ed. 1988) (allowing fault to be considered in equitable distribution of property in States of Connecticut, Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia and Wyoming, but Florida and Virginia will limit consideration of marital misconduct with economic impact).

205 See N.Y. DOM REL. LAW § 236(b)(5), (d)(13) (Consol. 2000) (stating court may consider any factor which is just and proper in property division). See generally Winner, supra note 172, at 34 (noting that women's groups have fought against bills with provisions that offer economic protection to women when these bills have included no-fault provisions). But see Nicolla v. Nicolla, 513 N.Y.S.2d 305, 306 (App. Div. 1987) (noting allegations of adultery would not affect equitable distribution because no apparent extraordinary circumstances existed).

206 See WEITZMAN, supra note 2, at 15-16; see also Kobylack v Kobylack, 442 N.Y.S.2d 392, 395 (Sup. Ct. 1981) (concluding fault should be used "only as a consideration to tilt the balance where there are insufficient assets to make the parties economically whole"), reversed on other grounds, 62 N.Y.2d 399, 402 (1983). See generally Giannola v. Giannola, 441 N.Y.S.2d 341, 343 (Sup. Ct. 1981) (holding while fault can be relevant it would not preclude distributive award since under equitable distribution "each party to the marriage is entitled to take with him, that which he contributed").
the state lawmakers must examine the Equitable Distribution Law. First, it must reconsider the bar on lifetime alimony that results in inadequate financial protections to older homemakers who may not be able to find employment at advanced ages. Second, the legislature must reexamine its reluctance to accept a partnership analogy for the marriage contract. The question must be addressed whether it is equitable to continue to make asset distributions based on contribution to the marital assets that do not presume a 50-50 split, and usually result in larger property awards to economically successful husbands because women generally earn lower wages in the workplace while assuming the greater burden of family responsibilities. If property distributions were based on more equitable principles, it would not be necessary to resort to leverage to achieve fairer property division outcomes by means of the constitutionally flawed fault-based ground requirements. There is simply no acceptable justification for the fault-based regime and it is high time that New York reformed its divorce law as almost every other state in the nation has done, so that its statutes comport with Constitutional imperatives that guarantee individuals the fundamental rights of association and personal autonomy.