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Trading Up: Postnuptial Agreements, Fairness, and a Principled New Suitor for California

Rebecca Glass

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Trading Up: Postnuptial Agreements, Fairness, and a Principled New Suitor for California

Rebecca Glass†

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TRADING UP

TRADING UP: Postnuptial Agreements, Fairness, and a Principled New Suitor for California

Rebecca Glass

INTRODUCTION

The Uniform Premarital Agreement Act (UPAA) was one of California’s true loves. We saw it first, we took it in, and we did our best to change it for the better. But it has let us down once too often: the time has come to open our hearts to a new suitor, the American Law Institute’s (ALI) Principles of Family Dissolution (PFD).

A California appellate court recently held that the California UPAA does not apply to postnuptial agreements. This holding, which confirms the plain language of the California UPAA, nonetheless highlights a difference in the rights of parties to marital agreements based solely on the timing of the agreement. Given that similar fairness issues arise from both pre- and postnuptial agreements, this difference is inappropriate. However, an extension of the California UPAA to postnuptial agreements is an unacceptable solution; despite recent amendment, the California UPAA still relies on a contract theory that is overly harsh in the marital context. The ALI’s PFD, in contrast, both treats pre- and postnuptial agreements similarly and utilizes a theory that, by balancing freedom of contract and fairness concerns, is more responsive to the nature of these agreements. The California legislature should therefore adopt the section of the PFD that deals with marital agreements.

1. California enacted the UPAA with a few modifications. This Comment will refer to the original UPAA (drafted by the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws) as the “UPAA” and to California’s enactment of the UPAA as the “California UPAA.”
3. The PFD addresses marital agreements in its chapter seven.
A. Marital Agreements: Definitions and Limitations

Pre- and postnuptial agreements are two of the main types of contractual agreements couples make in the context of marriage. Both types of agreements are increasingly popular means by which parties allocate assets during marriage and plan for property distribution at the time of death or divorce. Because these contracts often operate in lieu of the state’s statutory protocol, both also have implications for state policy concerns. The primary distinction between them is their timing in relation to the marriage ceremony. If prospective spouses make such a contract, it is prenuptial; if existing spouses make the same contract, their agreement is postnuptial.

There is little demographic information on people who enter into prenuptial agreements, and even less on parties to postnuptial agreements. What demographic and anecdotal evidence does exist indicates that, at least in the case of prenuptial agreements, there is frequently a financial disparity between the parties. This is only logical, as one of the primary motivations for entering into such an agreement is to protect the assets of the financially stronger spouse from a future claim by the financially weaker spouse. In the case of prenuptial agreements, the financially stronger party may indeed use the agreement as a condition of marriage. The condition, explicit or implicit, is that the wedding will not go forward without a signature. In the case of postnuptial agreements, because the parties are married, the threat of calling off the wedding is no longer present. However, there may be a parallel condition: the financially stronger spouse may threaten to end the marriage if the financially weaker spouse does not sign. The risk in a postnuptial context may be more about exploiting preexisting power imbalances than engendering new ones.

4. Property settlement agreements, also referred to as “marital property agreements,” are the third primary type of agreement. Property settlement agreements divide a couple’s assets as part of a concurrent dissolution. See Principles of the Law of Family Dissolution: Analysis and Recommendations § 7.09 cmt. b (2000) [hereinafter Principles of Family Dissolution]. The timing of property settlement agreements means that they are negotiated at arm’s length. Id. Therefore, these agreements do not raise the same types of bargaining problems created by pre- and postnuptial agreements and are not addressed in this Comment.


8. See Principles of Family Dissolution, supra note 4, § 7.05 reporter’s notes cmt. b (“[P]renuptial agreements will almost always be entered into between people with property or an income potential to protect on one side and people who are impecunious on the other.”).

9. The impetus for the financially weaker party to sign in this case is to demonstrate the purity of his or her intentions—“I love you; I don’t care about the money.” Or it could be the simple and understandable “Please don’t leave me.”
Calculated exploitation by the financially stronger party is only one of the dangers of marital agreements. Both pre- and postnuptial agreements are also subject to the parties’ cognitive limitations to bargaining, such as excessive optimism and the discounting of future benefits. These limitations are exacerbated in the context of marital agreements because, among other things, the parties love and trust one another, neither party knows what changes will take place during the marriage, and a divorce may never transpire. Problems such as these raise difficult issues about the circumstances under which a marital agreement should be enforced.

B. Deficiency in California Law

Unfortunately, California law does not adequately address the enforcement issues stemming from marital agreements. Despite the similarities of the parties who enter into such agreements and the problems associated with bargaining for them, pre- and postnuptial agreements receive very different treatment under California law. The California Family Code devotes considerable attention to prenuptial agreements via the California UPAA, and the state legislature recently amended it to make it more fair and predictable. However, there is no independent body of law that details the enforceability requirements of postnuptial agreements. In addition, a California appellate court recently ruled that the new protections of the California UPAA do not apply to postnuptial agreements. While consistent with the California UPAA’s express terms, the decision’s rationale is flawed, and its holding underscores a serious problem in this area of law. California’s refusal to extend the UPAA’s protections to married couples reflects an inconsistent and less than meticulous legislative approach. Thus, contrary to logic, a couple whose members owe each other a fiduciary duty can enter into a contract that would be per se unenforceable if the couple were unmarried. As more couples enter into postnuptial agreements, it becomes increasingly important that this difference be corrected.

However, mere amendment of the California UPAA would not sufficiently address the problems in California marital agreement law. This insufficiency stems from the UPAA’s overly harsh contract law philosophy. While the legislature’s amendment to the California UPAA has generally improved the law, it has not gone nearly far enough to protect the financially weaker spouse at the end of the marriage.

11. Id. at 254.
Because the ALI’s PFD recognizes that marital contracts are inherently different from commercial contracts and so provides additional protections to the parties, it would be a wiser choice to govern both pre- and postnuptial agreements. The PFD does an impressive job of balancing the goals of predictability and fairness, and should be adopted by the California legislature in place of the UPAA.

C. Roadmap

Part I of this Comment discusses the background and legal history of marital agreements. It begins with a broad overview of prenuptial agreements in this country and introduces the UPAA. Then it discusses the people who generally enter into such agreements and their reasons for doing so. It concludes with a description of the recent developments in California that led to the current state of postnuptial law, focusing on enforceability provisions. Part II describes the unique limitations of contracts in the marital context, introduces the PFD, and compares the PFD’s and the California UPAA’s enforceability provisions. Finally, after examining the goals of predictability and fairness that marital agreement law should aim to achieve, this Comment concludes that the PFD ought to be California’s preferred source of law.

I. Legal Background

A. History of Prenuptial Agreements Generally

1. National Development of the Law

Prenuptial agreements had a tenuous existence as early as the 1500s, but most commentators concur that their modern form began with the adoption of the Married Women’s Property Acts in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Married Women’s Property Acts gave women

14. In the interest of brevity, this Comment will use the term “predictability” to refer to the concept that one should have the freedom to draft a contract according to one’s own wishes and to be able to expect that that contract will be enforced.

15. Similarly, this Comment will use the term “fairness” as a shorthand for fairness to the financially weaker party. This usage should not suggest to the reader a disinterest in the rights of the financially stronger party, but simply that those concerns are addressed in the predictability prong.

16. This Comment does not address the line of cases holding that a marital agreement must not violate public policy. See, e.g., Diosdado v. Diosdado, 118 Cal. Rptr. 2d 494 (Cal. Ct. App. 2002); In re Marriage of Noghrey, 215 Cal. Rptr. 153 (Cal. Ct. App. 1985).


18. See, e.g., Suzanne D. Albert, The Perils of Premarital Provisions, R.I. B.J., Mar. 2000, at 5, 5; Katharine B. Silbaugh, Marriage Contracts and the Family Economy, 93 NW. U. L. REV. 65, 71 (1998). Albert’s work lays out the early development of the law in greater depth than does this Comment; it is worth reading. However, Albert’s article (which focuses on Rhode Island law) incorrectly characterizes In re Marriage of Bonds, an appellate court decision, as the California Supreme Court’s decision. See Albert, supra, at 41; In re Marriage of Bonds, 83 Cal. Rptr. 2d 753 (Cal.
ownership and control over their pre- and postmarital property and also the power to contract with prospective spouses. The Earning Statutes, adopted around the same time, allowed women to earn a wage outside the home and to receive it independent of their husbands, thus giving wives a far greater ability to contract.

Until relatively recently, however, courts considered any prenuptial agreement that "contemplated divorce" (as opposed to simply dissolution upon death) unenforceable as against public policy. The courts justified this characterization by asserting, among other rationales, that such agreements would cause marriage to lose its "dignity and sacredness," lead to endless, minor litigation, and encourage the property-owning spouse to desert the other spouse. The courts also generally rejected prenuptial agreements that sought to displace legislation aimed at protecting the woman's economic well-being. Thus, the courts' traditional, common law approach was to treat prenuptial agreements "with skepticism and outright paternalism."

In 1970, this approach changed dramatically. Driven by a recognition of women's de jure equality, the increasing numbers of women in the workplace, and the expanding emphasis on contractual freedom, the Florida Supreme Court held in Posner v. Posner that prenuptial agreements contemplating divorce were no longer immediately void as contrary to public policy. Other courts quickly followed suit, acting to make prenuptial agreements more easily enforceable. As a lower Florida court explained: "No longer will the courts in viewing antenuptial contracts invariably begin 'with the realization that between persons in the prematrimonial state there is a mystical, confidential relationship which anesthetizes the senses of the female partner.'"

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Ct. App. 1999), rev'd in part, 5 P.3d 815 (Cal. 2000). This error is infinitely misleading, as the discussion infra Part I.B.2 makes clear.

19. Albert, supra note 18, at 5.
20. Silbaugh, supra note 18, at 71.
21. Albert, supra note 18, at 5. The line that California courts draw today is not at consideration of divorce, but at encouragement of it, consistently holding unenforceable agreements that by their terms facilitate or promote divorce or are otherwise counter to public policy. See, e.g., Diosdado, 118 Cal. Rptr. 2d at 496; In re Marriage of Dajani, 251 Cal. Rptr. 871, 872-73 (Cal. Ct. App. 1988); Noghrey, 215 Cal. Rptr. at 157 ("[T]he prospect of receiving a house and a minimum of $500,000 by obtaining the no-fault divorce available in California would menace the marriage of the best intentioned spouses.").
22. Marston, supra note 5, at 897.
23. Albert, supra note 18, at 5.
24. Marston, supra note 5, at 897.
25. Brod, supra note 6, at 253.
26. 233 So. 2d 381, 385 (Fla. 1970).
Legislators also joined in the shift from common law "paternalism" to a modern approach that increasingly treated prenuptial agreements like other contracts. The promulgation of the Uniform Premarital Agreement Act in 1983 and its subsequent popularity with state legislatures both reflected and facilitated the law's transformation. The UPAA was aimed at creating uniformity and increased enforceability. It standardized the concept of the prenuptial agreement as essentially an ordinary contract. In order for such an agreement to be unenforceable under the UPAA, the party challenging its validity must prove either that it was involuntary or both that it was unconscionable when executed and that the other party failed to disclose assets. This test all but does away with courts' discretion to assess the reasonableness of an agreement; the single exception is that if the agreement modifies or eliminates spousal support so as to cause one party to be eligible for public assistance, a court "may" modify the agreement to address this unfairness. This exception notwithstanding, the UPAA's strict, contractual-freedom approach means that contracting parties can be assured that courts will find enforceable most of the agreements under it.

The change in attitudes toward prenuptial agreements is further reflected by the 1990 case of Simeone v. Simeone. In that case, an unemployed twenty-three-year-old nurse (wife) married a thirty-nine-year-old neurosurgeon (husband) and signed a prenuptial agreement on the eve of her wedding. Upon divorce, the wife argued that the agreement was void.

28. Brod, supra note 6, at 253. Albert and others suggest that this reflected an "overly optimistic picture of women's status" in the years leading up to the UPAA's enactment. Albert, supra note 18, at 7.

29. While the UPAA came out in 1983, it was adopted by different states at different times. California, for example, adopted it in 1985. As of 2002, the UPAA had been adopted in whole or in part in twenty-six states. UNIF. PREMARITAL AGREEMENT ACT references & annotations, 9C U.L.A. 35 (2001) (Table of Jurisdictions Wherein Act Has Been Adopted).

30. But see Elizabeth Barker Brandt, The Uniform Premarital Agreement Act and the Reality of Premarital Agreements in Idaho, 33 IDAHO L. REV. 539, 543 (1997) ("It was not at all clear at the time the UPAA was drafted that the freedom of contract view would emerge as the predominant view if states were left to sort out the enforcement issues without the help of a uniform act."); see also Barbara Ann Atwood, Ten Years Later: Lingering Concerns About the Uniform Premarital Agreement Act, 19 J. LEGIS. 127, 147 (1993).

31. Marston, supra note 5, at 899.

32. Id.; see also Alex Shukhman, Show Her the Money: The California Court of Appeal's Mistake Concerning in re Marriage of Bonds, 20 L.Y. L.A. ENT. REV. 457, 466 (2000). But see Developments in the Law—The Law of Marriage and Family, supra note 5, at 2079, for the proposition that while the UPAA treats prenuptial agreements similarly to ordinary contracts, it does include some limitations on the parties' ability to contract. For example, section 3 limits the subject matter of a contract to issues "not in violation of public policy." Id. (quoting UNIF. PREMARITAL AGREEMENT ACT § 3(a)(7), 9C U.L.A. 36 (1983)).


34. Id. § 6(b).


36. Id. at 163.
because it was unreasonable and formed under duress. In support of this claim, she asserted that she had not understood the agreement and could not have sought the advice of counsel at the time she first viewed the agreement without the "trauma, expense, and embarrassment of postponing the wedding." The court was unconvinced, reasoning that "[p]aternalistic presumptions and protections that arose to shelter women from the inferiorities and incapacities which they were perceived as having in earlier times have, appropriately, been discarded," and that "[p]renuptial agreements are contracts, and, as such, should be evaluated under the same criteria as are applicable to other types of contracts."

By the early 1990s, then, the ideal of contractual freedom in prenuptial agreements had overtaken that of protecting the vulnerable spouse in courts and legislatures throughout the country.

2. The Purpose of Prenups: Why and Who

Before delving into California's own development of prenuptial agreement doctrine, it makes sense to pause briefly and elaborate on the general nature of these agreements.

A useful way of understanding why a couple might enter into a marital agreement is to begin with the premise that every couple enters into a marriage contract whose terms are dictated in a cookie-cutter manner by the state, with no input from the couple. A marital agreement is a way of tailoring that contract so that it reflects the individuals' unique circumstances.

The circumstances that may motivate a couple to enter into a marital agreement are sundry and probably endless. Married couples may wish to enter into such an agreement if one spouse is likely to inherit property or start her own business. Spouses may wish to minimize the potential for a bitter divorce by attempting to ensure that there is nothing to fight over if and when the marriage ends. Couples may believe that the process of drafting the agreement is a beneficial exercise in and of itself, one that elicits frank discussion of sometimes difficult issues. Another common motivation is a desire to keep assets as separate property during marriage and

37. Id. at 167.
38. Id.
39. Id. at 165. The decision in Simeone was not unanimous; indeed, Justice McDermott dissented strongly. See id. at 168-72 (McDermott, J., dissenting).
40. Marston, supra note 5, at 901.
42. Pamela E. George, Can a Woman of the 90’s Have It All? Or, Is She Once Again Faced with That Age Old Question—“What’s A Girl To Do?,” J. Am. Acad. Matrimonial L., Spring 1992, at 73, 75 (citing Breaking the Divorce Cycle, Newsweek, Jan. 13, 1991, at 48).
43. Albert, supra note 18, at 6.
have greater control over their distribution when the marriage ends. Finally, one author has suggested that the fact that “everyone has some property,” coupled with a high divorce rate, should be sufficient motivation to enter into a marital agreement.

Yet clearly, not everyone enters into a marital agreement. The ability and inclination to form a marital contract that reflects one’s unique life circumstances more accurately than a state template vary for individuals with different experiences and characteristics. For example, an individual’s involvement with divorce can affect a decision to enter into a marital agreement. The emergence of a nationwide “divorce culture” may help to explain the increasing use of these agreements. Adult children of divorced parents may be particularly prone to caution when contemplating marriage, using pre- or postnuptial agreements as a kind of safeguard. Further, what little evidence there is on marital agreement demographics suggests that the group most likely to either request or face signing a prenuptial agreement consists of individuals who have themselves gone through a past divorce. That as of 1997 over 40% of marriages were “second or higher-order” marriages for one or both of the parties, and that 60% of these marriages ended in divorce, makes this assertion all the more noteworthy.

Potentially related to, but distinct from, the factor of second or higher-order marriage is the wealth factor. The drafting of pre- or postnuptial agreements can be expensive, particularly where a separate counsel requirement means the hiring of two attorneys per couple. Admittedly, a strong argument can be made that these agreements are “no longer the exclusive domain of the rich or the famous.” However, the expense of

44. Id. at 5.
46. This may involve interesting racial and cultural distinctions. However, the paucity of empirical research on who, exactly, enters into marital agreements extends to these factors as well.
48. George, supra note 42, at 75 (citing Breaking the Divorce Cycle, supra note 42).
50. See Marston, supra note 5, at 891 (citations omitted).
51. See Brod, supra note 6, at 243-48 (inferring such a relationship based on the confluence of two ideas: that second or higher-order grooms tend to be older than their wives and that “age is a proxy for accumulated wealth and business experience”).
52. Id. at 231.
these contracts\textsuperscript{53} likely precludes many couples from forming pre- or post-nuptial contracts.

The second and more telling way in which wealth influences the decision of whether to enter into such an agreement is that while "everyone has some property," not everyone views his or her property as valuable enough to warrant protection from the state’s distributive scheme. It should be no surprise that prenuptial agreements may be less common among couples entering into a marriage with few or comparable assets. As one commentator found, "the purpose and effect of most prenuptial agreements is to protect the wealth and earnings of an economically superior spouse from being shared with an economically inferior spouse."

Presuming that most prenuptial agreements in California involve the waiver of community property rights, the necessary corollary to that statement is that the economically weaker spouse is adversely affected by the agreement’s enforcement.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{B. California Legal Background}

California is a community property state, which means that all real or personal property acquired by either spouse during the marriage belongs to the couple together from the time it is earned.\textsuperscript{56} Marital agreements in California generally function to replace the community property system with one of the couple’s own design.

As is the case with the subject’s national development, there is no discrete history of Californian postnuptial agreement law. There are, however, a few sections of the Family Code that clearly pertain to postnuptial agreements. These are, chiefly, section 721 and section 850. Section 721 allows either spouse to enter into any transaction respecting property with the other which they might enter into if they were unmarried; it also makes clear that spouses owe each other a fiduciary duty.\textsuperscript{57} Section 850 and its related provisions allow married persons to transmute their property,\textsuperscript{58} requiring only that the transmutation be in writing and include "an express

\textsuperscript{53} A 1997 article suggests that the cost of these agreements generally ranges between $1,000 and $5,000, and can be as high as $25,000. Marston, \textit{supra} note 5, at 892 (citations omitted). Since then, these numbers may have gone up.

\textsuperscript{54} Brod, \textit{supra} note 6, at 234. See also \textit{Principles of Family Dissolution}, \textit{supra} note 4, § 7.05 reporter’s notes cmt. b.

\textsuperscript{55} In addition, folk wisdom, reported cases, and national statistics on the feminization of poverty suggest that one may usually substitute the words "richer man" for "economically superior spouse" and "poorer woman" for "economically inferior spouse." See Brod, \textit{supra} note 6, at 248 (citing, among other sources, Terry J. Arendell, \textit{Women and the Economics of Divorce in the Contemporary United States}, 13 \textit{SIGNS} 121, 121-22 & nn.2-4 (1987)); Bix, \textit{supra} note 7, at 232.

\textsuperscript{56} Cal. Fam. Code § 760 (West 1994).

\textsuperscript{57} Id. § 721(a)-(b).

\textsuperscript{58} Transmutation can be in any of three forms: (a) from community property to separate property of either spouse; (b) from separate property of either spouse to community property; or (c) from separate property of either spouse to separate property of the other spouse. Id. § 850.
declaration that is made, joined in, consented to, or accepted by the spouse whose interest in the property is adversely affected."

Transmutation is a common component of postnuptial agreements, but this latter provision does not cover the breadth of contractual possibilities.

The salient point is that these two sections do not include specific, functional requirements as to the enforceability of postnuptial agreements. In contrast to its tangential treatment of postnuptial agreements, the Family Code section on marital agreements is composed almost entirely of the California UPAA, which as its name suggests—and an appellate court has confirmed—governs prenuptial agreements exclusively.

1. Adoption of the UPAA

In 1985, California became the first state to adopt the UPAA. While the state thus joined the national trend toward contractual autonomy, it refrained from adopting the Act and its freedom of contract philosophy unrestrainedly. Instead, the legislature omitted UPAA sections 3(a)(4) and 6(b), which allowed for prenuptial modification or waiver of spousal support. With these exceptions, California embraced the UPAA as a means of standardizing the law and enhancing the enforceability of prenuptial agreements.

Two sections of the California UPAA are fundamental. The first is section 1612, which sets out a seven-item list of subject matter that a prenuptial agreement may address. For our purposes the most relevant is (3): "[t]he disposition of property upon separation, marital dissolution, death, or the occurrence or nonoccurrence of any other event." The
second main California UPAA provision is section 1615. This "key
operative section" details the enforcement of prenuptial agreements.

Section 1615 contains three critical components. First, the burden of
proving that an agreement is unenforceable belongs to the party "against
whom enforcement is sought." Presumably this is the financially weaker
party.

Second, one of the two ways a court may rule an agreement unen-
forceable is for the challenger to prove that it was involuntary. The origi-
nal UPAA, section 6, does not specify what "voluntarily" means, either in
the prefatory note or the comments to this section. The comments do say
(without specific reference to the voluntary prong) that the absence of in-
dependent counsel is not determinative, but "may well be a factor in
determining whether the conditions stated in section 6 may have existed."

Absent a more specific definition, general contractual principles gov-
ern. As Judith Younger writes, "[t]he inquiry into voluntariness begins as a
common law review for fraud, overreaching, or sharp dealing." The bar
for proving these is quite high, and so the Act makes establishment of in-
volutariness next to impossible. This is particularly so if the parties re-
tained separate counsel for execution, but even a simple clause in the
contract indicating that it was entered into voluntarily will make a showing
of involuntariness difficult. Whether or not the agreement was truly vol-
untary, it would be hard to contest a clause attesting to its voluntary nature.

Finally, the other way for a challenger to proves an agreement unen-
forceable under the California UPAA is to prove that the agreement was
both unconscionable at the time it was executed and that there was a lack
of disclosure by the other party of property or financial obligations prior to
execution. Courts evaluate the unconscionability prong retrospectively,
evaluating the contract's fairness at the time it was executed. The comments to
section 6 of the UPAA again make clear that contract principles reign: the drafters explain that the standard for unconscionability is not
novel, but is the same as is used in contract law, entailing protection from
one-sidedness, oppression, and unfair surprise.

68. CAL. FAM. CODE § 1615(a) (West 1994).
69. Id. § 1615(a)(1).
70. The comments reference case law in certain states but do not endorse any particular definition
71. Id.
72. Judith T. Younger, Perspectives on Antenuptial Agreements: An Update, J. AM. ACAD.
73. See George, supra note 42, at 84.
74. CAL. FAM. CODE § 1615(a)(2) (West 1994). The drafters even cite to section 2-302 of the
Uniform Commercial Code, the epitome of contract law. Id.
75. Id. § 1615(a)(1)-(2).
Each contracting party may satisfy the disclosure prong through actual disclosure, waiver of disclosure, or actual or constructive knowledge of the other party’s property and financial obligations. In practice, this means that an astute attorney may need only include “waiver of disclosure” language in every agreement she drafts in order to preempt a challenger’s claim under 1615(a)(2). It also means that under the UPAA, a court may enforce an irrefutably unconscionable agreement provided it meets the disclosure requirement. Bion M. Gregory, the chairman of the group that drafted the UPAA, asserted pointedly, “If you have a fair and reasonable disclosure, we feel you ought to have a contract which is enforceable, even though it’s a contract that a hundred other people would not have entered into.” This statement and the law that it comments upon reflect a goal of increasing the enforceability of prenuptial agreements, so long as they steer clear of obvious contractual pitfalls like coercion, duress, and fraud.

2. The UPAA in Practice: Bonds and Pendleton

The strict enforcement provisions of the UPAA ultimately proved too harsh for California. Two California Supreme Court cases, issued on the same day in 2000, served as the catalyst for a legislative softening of the law. The first was In re Marriage of Bonds. In Bonds, professional baseball player Barry Bonds sought to enforce a prenuptial agreement against his former wife, Sun, upon divorce. Although many of the facts were disputed in that case, the general circumstances were as follows: Sun had emigrated from Sweden in 1985; she and Barry met in 1987; and in January 1988 the two decided to marry. Whether or not Sun knew about or consented to the agreement beforehand, or understood it at the time of execution, she signed it the night before her wedding. She did not have separate counsel.

Basing its decision largely on the credibility of the witnesses (and, in doing so, favoring Barry), the trial court held that Sun had entered into the agreement “free from the taint of fraud, coercion and undue influence.”

77. George, supra note 42, at 85.
78. See Albert, supra note 18, at 36 (“The practical effect of these provisions will be to validate almost every (unconscionable) agreement.”).
80. See id.
81. 5 P.3d 815 (Cal. 2000).
82. Id. at 816.
83. Id. at 817.
84. Id. at 818.
85. Id. at 819.
86. Id.
The appellate court reversed, holding that the trial court did not attribute enough significance to Sun’s lack of counsel in the face of Barry’s two attorneys and his agent. In reaching this holding, the appellate court considered Sun’s lack of income, dependence on Barry, and probable lack of awareness and understanding of her right to, and need of, separate counsel. A law review article written in response to the Bonds appellate court decision criticized the court for creating a heightened standard in contradiction of the UPAA, arguing that there is no independent counsel requirement under the Act.

Indeed, when the California Supreme Court reversed the appellate court’s holding, it did so in large part because it found that lack of independent counsel is “only one of several factors that must be considered” in assessing voluntariness. It held that the appellate court had erred in applying strict scrutiny to the agreement merely because Sun had not been represented by independent counsel. Moreover, the court concluded that the trial court was justified in finding that Sun had entered into the agreement voluntarily. Finally, the California Supreme Court held that while prospective spouses “morally owe” one another a duty of fair dealing, the legislature did not intend that voluntariness in prenuptial agreements be assessed in light of the strict fiduciary duties imposed on persons like lawyers, or (pursuant to Family Code section 721) married couples. The agreement, denying Sun a share of Barry’s considerable earnings during their marriage, was enforced.

The other case that prompted California’s rethinking of prenuptial agreements was In re Marriage of Pendleton. In Pendleton, Candace Pendleton sought spousal support upon divorce in spite of a prenuptial agreement in which she and husband Barry Fireman forever waived any right either had to such support. Both had been represented by independent counsel, and the agreement indicated that both had read and understood the contract’s legal consequences. The court’s analysis centered on the California legislature’s decision (made prior to this agreement’s execution) not to adopt the provision of the UPAA that expressly permitted parties to

88. Id. at 807.
89. See Shukhman, supra note 32, at 486.
90. Bonds, 5 P.3d at 817.
91. Id. at 816-17.
92. Id. at 817.
93. Id. at 832.
94. Id. at 838.
95. 5 P.3d 839 (Cal. 2000).
96. Id. at 840.
97. Id.
a prenuptial agreement to modify or eliminate spousal support contractually.

The trial court ruled that waiver of spousal support was against public policy, and therefore unenforceable. The appellate court reversed, reading the legislature’s rejection of the UPAA spousal support provisions as an acknowledgment that the assessment of spousal support waivers fell within the province of the judiciary. The appellate court then had to determine whether, under section 1612(a)(7), spousal support waivers fell under the heading of a “violation of public policy.” It found that the current state of family law had shifted such that the courts should no longer per se prohibit spousal support waivers or limitations.

The California Supreme Court affirmed the appellate court’s ruling, agreeing that “[t]he most reasonable understanding of the legislature’s [omission was] that it was satisfied with the evolution of the common law . . . and intended to permit that evolution to continue.” The court then found that the common law practice of barring prenuptial spousal support waivers was “anachronistic,” and that the adoption of the UPAA and the improved condition of married women in contemporary California pointed to a need to update public policy. Finally, it held that “no public policy is violated” by enforcing a prenuptial spousal support waiver made by intelligent, well-educated, financially secure people who are represented by counsel, and declared the agreement valid.

In dissent, Justice Kennard noted that “the inequities that may result from premarital spousal support waivers are much graver than those that may result from a premarital waiver of community property rights.” That is to say, if community property rights are modified or eliminated by contract, a judge can still protect the financially weaker spouse if that judge has discretion over spousal support.

Bonds and Pendleton increased enforceability of prenuptial agreements at the expense of financially more vulnerable spouses. Barry Fireman’s attorney declared that the California Supreme Court “has strongly indicated that a more favorable judicial climate lies ahead regarding the allowable scope of premarital agreements as well as the factual circumstances under which they will be enforced.” Applauding the increased enforceability in California, Barry Bonds’s attorney

98. Id. at 840-41.
99. Id. at 841.
100. Id. at 848.
101. Id. at 847-48.
102. Id. at 845.
103. Id.
104. Id. at 847-48.
105. Id. at 848.
106. Id. at 851 n.3 (Kennard, J., dissenting).
announced, “the Supreme Court is trying to make it easier for people to enter into prenuptial agreements as consenting adults.”

3. The Legislature’s Fix to the UPAA

The California legislature did not share these attorneys’ glee. Less than five months after the supreme court’s decisions in Pendleton and Bonds, Senator Sheila Kuehl proposed Senate Bill 78 (SB 78), which responded directly to the decisions by addressing the enforceability of spousal support provisions and the requirements for voluntariness under the California UPAA. Of Pendleton, Senator Kuehl asserted that the state’s highest Court had “fundamentally misinterpreted” the legislature’s intent in regards to spousal support; the bill was to make this intent explicit. The bill answered Bonds “head on” by explaining the circumstances that must exist for a court to determine that an agreement was made voluntarily. The bill passed quickly and with much support: the votes were 61-6 in the Assembly; 39-0 in the Senate. Some practitioners complained that the bill moved through the legislature with “so little fanfare” that lobbyists for and against it did not have time to prepare a thorough lobby to Governor Gray Davis. Their complaints notwithstanding, the governor signed the bill into law within two weeks of its arrival on his desk.

SB 78 amended California’s version of the UPAA in the area of spousal support by adding subsection (c) to section 1612. Although Senator Kuehl initially sought to ban spousal support waivers entirely, the compromise that ultimately passed limited such waivers in two ways. It first declared unenforceable a spousal support waiver for which the challenging party was not represented by independent counsel at execution. It next made unenforceable spousal support waivers that are unconscionable at the time of enforcement.

110. Gherini, supra note 109, at 170.
111. Id.
112. Id. at 170 n.162.
114. Gherini, supra note 109, at 170.
116. CAL. FAM. CODE § 1612(c) (West 1994).
117. Id.
SB 78 also clarified and expanded the definition of "voluntary" in response to the Bonds holding. The new subsection 1615(c) states that a court will presume that a prenuptial agreement was executed involuntarily unless the court finds all of the following:

1. the party against whom enforcement is sought was represented by independent legal counsel or expressly waived separate counsel in writing after being advised otherwise;
2. not less than seven days passed between the time that party was presented with the agreement and the time the agreement was signed;
3. the party against whom enforcement is sought, if unrepresented, was fully informed of the terms and basic effect of the agreement as well as the rights and obligations he or she was giving up;
4. the prenuptial agreement was not executed under duress, fraud, or undue influence, and the parties did not lack capacity to enter into the agreement;
5. any other factors the court deems relevant.

By introducing these elements into a court’s voluntariness inquiry, the legislature weighed in heavily in favor of fairness to the weaker spouse. The fifth clause in particular, "any other factors the court deems relevant," provides the courts broad discretion to assess fairness. The amendment may also have a dramatic effect on the burden of proof. Section 1615(a) still provides that the "party against whom enforcement is sought" must prove that he or she did not execute the agreement voluntarily. Yet by adding subsection 1615(c), which introduces the presumption that an agreement is involuntary unless certain requirements are met, the legislature seems to have discretely shifted the burden of proving voluntariness to the party seeking enforcement.

Such developments, which make it more difficult to enforce prenuptial agreements, did not please everyone. “I'd like the law to make people behave as grown-ups and not (treat) them like little children,” declared attorney Robert Nachshin, “I don't think women need extra protection—they’re smart and savvy.”

120. Id. § 1615(a).
121. But see Philip G. Seastrom & Brian G. Seastrom, Drafting and Litigating Premarital Agreements, ORANGE COUNTY LAW., July 2003, at 44, 49 (arguing that the amendment leaves the burden of proof question unanswered).
122. Sanders, supra note 118, at A3.
which he posed the question, "What does that mean?" Other commentators raised additional concerns. The requirement that a party be "fully informed" does not require that the party actually understand the agreement; it is therefore unclear what a practitioner must do to fulfill his or her duty of disclosure to the unrepresented party. Furthermore, the requirement that an attorney for one spouse "fully inform[]" the unrepresented spouse presents potential problems with regard to dual representation, as well as the ethical obligations of attorneys to be loyal to their clients. Observers also questioned when the seven-day waiting period commences, finding the term "first presented with the agreement" troublingly malleable.

As discussed in the next section, recent litigation revealed an additional shortcoming of SB 78 and the current Family Code that warrants immediate legislative action.

4. Postnuptial Agreements and the UPAA: Friedman

By its terms, the California UPAA only applies to prenuptial agreements. SB 78 did not expressly change these terms. In re Marriage of Friedman, decided in 2002, was the first California appellate case to address whether the amended Family Code section 1615 nevertheless implicitly applied to postnuptial agreements.

The background facts of Friedman began developing in December 1990, when Jill, an attorney, met and fell in love with Keith, who had just sailed around the world and wanted to start a forensic consulting firm. Weeks later, doctors diagnosed Keith, who had no health insurance, with leukemia. Although Keith's initial thought was to "go off sailing again and just die," the couple decided instead to marry so that Keith's cancer treatment could be covered by Jill's insurance. The couple married in January 1991. Within days, Keith contacted his attorney about drafting a postnuptial agreement; Keith's goal was to protect Jill from creditors if he did not survive the medical treatment. The attorney drafted the agreement—which declared that the parties' individual income, business

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124. See Gherini, supra note 109, at 172-73.
125. Id. at 173; see also Seastrom & Seastrom, supra note 121, at 50.
126. Seastrom & Seastrom, supra note 121, at 49-50.
127. CAL. FAM. CODE § 1610(a) (West 1994).
129. Id. at 414. Jill is an insurance defense lawyer. Appellant's Opening Brief at 27, Friedman (No. B151847).
130. Friedman, 122 Cal. Rptr. 2d at 414.
131. Id.
132. Id.
133. Id.
property, and debts would be separate property—and the couple signed it. Keith recovered from the leukemia, and in time his forensic consulting firm “flourished beyond [the couple’s] dreams.” In May 2000, the parties divorced, and Jill claimed that the postnuptial agreement was invalid. The dispute was centered upon the circumstances of the agreement’s drafting and execution.

Keith’s law firm did some estate-planning work for Keith and Jill contemporaneously with its work on the postnuptial agreement. Jill asserted that this work led her to believe that she was a client of the firm and that no one at the law firm ever indicated otherwise. When the firm billed the couple for its work at the beginning of 2001, the invoices bore only Keith’s name, but the billing entries showed both Keith and Jill as receiving services. Jill claimed that the firm failed to: (1) get a waiver for its conflict of interest, (2) advise the couple of its fiduciary duties to one another, (3) ascertain that the parties disclosed their assets, (4) explain to Jill the rights at stake in the postnuptial agreement, and (5) advise Jill to seek independent counsel.

Keith and the law firm asserted that the postnuptial agreement was valid because Jill quite obviously represented herself when she reviewed and signed it. In support of this contention, they produced a letter dated February 7, 1991, which accompanied the mailing of a draft agreement. In the letter, Keith’s attorney wrote, “I, and my firm, can only represent Keith .... Since Jill is an attorney, I presume that she will review the documents herself, or to the extent she chooses, have them reviewed by an attorney of her choice.” In addition, Keith pointed to the agreement itself, which included the language, “Jill is acting as her own legal counsel.”

Despite Jill’s claims that she never saw the February 7 letter and that the recitals in the postnuptial agreement were false, the trial court found that the law firm represented both parties “on the estate plan but not the postnuptial agreement.” The court ruled that the language in the postnuptial agreement regarding Jill’s self-representation constituted a “clear waiver” of the firm’s representation, despite Jill’s assertions that such a...
waiver did not satisfy California Rule of Professional Conduct 3-310(c). Moreover, the court stated that Jill was "a bright woman,"—"a trained attorney"—who had signed the agreement "freely, voluntarily, intelligently with superior knowledge of the law and the rights that she was relinquishing." Jill appealed the trial court's enforcement of the agreement.

Remarking that "[j]udicial erasure of a competent adult's signature on an agreement does not serve the purpose of the law of contracts," the appellate court affirmed the trial court's holding. Although Jill did not raise the argument at trial, she argued on appeal that the agreement was not enforceable, under or by analogy to Family Code section 1615. On that point, after describing Bonds and the effect of SB 78, the court declared:

Wife's reliance on Family Code 1615 is misplaced. This section does not govern postnuptial agreements. Premarital agreements are not interpreted and enforced under the same standards as interspousal agreements. See In re Marriage of Bonds, [5 P.3d 815, 831 (Cal. 2000)]. It is well settled that property settlement agreements occupy a favored position in California. See, e.g., [In re Marriage of Egedi, 105 Cal. Rptr. 2d 518, 522 (Ct. App. 2001)].

This holding, while potentially not fundamental to the ultimate outcome in Friedman, nonetheless is quite troubling both as legal argument and as precedent. The court's statement that Family Code section 1615 does not govern postnuptial agreements was certainly supported by language in the UPAA Prefatory Note and elsewhere, and it conclusively slammed the door on postnuptial application of the amended section 1615. Yet, rather than rest upon the textual basis for its holding, the court supported it with two somewhat illogical statements.

First, the court cited Bonds for the proposition that prenuptial agreements and postnuptial agreements are interpreted and enforced under different standards, but failed to note the court's rationale for the different treatment. The California Supreme Court in Bonds did distinguish between pre- and postnuptial agreements, but it did so on the basis that postnuptial agreements are in fact entitled to more protections than prenuptial agreements, due to married couples' fiduciary relationships. The

146. Respondent's Brief at 15, Friedman (No. B151847). California Rule of Professional Conduct 3-310 is entitled Avoiding the Representation of Adverse Interests; it was relevant to Jill's claim that she was a client at the firm and that the firm knew that she and Keith had adverse interests. Appellant's Opening Brief at 21, Friedman (No. B151847).
147. Friedman, 122 Cal. Rptr. 2d at 415.
148. Id. at 414.
149. Appellant's Opening Brief at 31-33, Friedman (No. B151847).
150. Friedman, 122 Cal. Rptr. 2d at 417-18 (emphasis added).
153. Id.
Friedman court thus turns Bonds’s pre- and postnuptial distinction on its head.

The second misleading statement in the Friedman court’s section 1615 rationale is that “property settlement agreements occupy a favored position in California,” a proposition for which the court cites In re Marriage of Egedi. It is unclear what the court meant by including this statement, but a likely interpretation is that the statement reflects a fundamental misunderstanding about the different types of marital agreements. At issue in Egedi was a property settlement agreement in which an attorney acted as scrivener for a couple dividing their assets at the time of divorce. This is a far different set of circumstances than a newlywed couple drafting a postnuptial agreement. Postnuptial agreements have much more in common with prenuptial agreements (both involve the planning for distribution of assets in the case of dissolution) than with property settlement agreements (which involve actual arm’s-length division at the time of dissolution). The comment that courts favor property settlement agreements, while accurate, is irrelevant when the case at issue does not include a property settlement agreement. Thus, the Friedman court’s reference to and reliance on Egedi is a muddying of the doctrinal waters.

Under the heading of “Final Observations,” the Friedman court stated that its mission had been to evaluate the legality of postnuptial agreements at the time of execution, and that “subsequent events” are irrelevant. This remark may have been a response to Jill’s argument that, although SB 78 was codified after the Friedmans executed their agreement, the law should be applied retroactively. It is unclear. What is clear, leaving aside the unfortunate case of Jill and Keith Friedman, is that the protections that the legislature endeavored to add with SB 78 for parties entering into prenuptial agreements are not available to those who enter postnuptial agreements, and that the Friedman court’s rationale for so finding is neither compelling nor cogent. Further, the Friedman court’s unwillingness to apply section 1615’s protections to postnuptial agreements contravenes the Bonds court’s reiteration of the principle that parties to postnuptial agreements, as fiduciaries, owe each other a higher duty of care than

154. Friedman, 122 Cal. Rptr. 2d at 417-18 (citing In re Marriage of Egedi, 105 Cal. Rptr. 2d 518, 522 (Cal. Ct. App. 2001)).
155. Egedi, 105 Cal. Rptr. 2d at 520.
156. See Mitchell A. Jacobs & David L. Marcus, Prenuptial Agreement Statutes Don’t Cover Postnuptial Pacts, L.A. DAILY J., Aug. 13, 2002, at 7 (reasoning that “the [Friedman] postmarital agreement was not an agreement settling a pending divorce action, the enforcement of which the law may favor in order to reduce litigation”).
157. Friedman, 122 Cal. Rptr. 2d at 418.
158. Appellant’s Opening Brief at 33, Friedman (No. B151847).
159. See Jacobs & Marcus, supra note 156, at 7 (“It would seem that the protections that the Legislature found were needed to protect potential spouses before marriage would apply with greater force after the marriage.”).
unmarried couples. The California Supreme Court denied review of Friedman on October 16, 2002, and in so doing missed an important opportunity to clarify and improve upon the protections available to parties in postnuptial agreement law.

II
ANALYSIS AND SOLUTION
A. In the Legislature’s Lap

The ever-increasing number of couples contemplating postnuptial agreements\(^1\) and the family law attorneys who draft them need to know the parameters of California’s postnuptial agreement law, and particularly its standards of enforceability. However, according to its own terms\(^2\) and judicial interpretation,\(^3\) the California UPAA does not apply to postnuptial agreements. In the absence of an independent body of law pertaining only to postnuptial agreements, it is unclear what the law on postnuptial agreements is.

It is clear only that in California, parties to postnuptial agreements are less protected from unfairness than are parties to prenuptial agreements. Yet, there are compelling reasons for enforcing pre- and postnuptial agreements similarly. First, the parties to a postnuptial agreement are married and thus owe each other the highest duty of good faith and fair dealing.\(^4\) Next, what little evidence exists suggests that the people who enter into both types of agreements share relevant motivations and/or demographic characteristics.\(^5\) Finally, both types of agreements are subject to the same kinds of drafting limitations, discussed in detail in the following section. Just as the California legislature acted promptly to clarify the law and to prevent overly harsh enforcement of marital agreements in the wake of Bonds, it must now act again.

If the legislature does act to fill the gaping hole that Friedman helped to illuminate, it will likely choose between one of two models. Its first option is to extend the California UPAA to cover postnuptial agreements, and thereby overrule the appellate court’s judgment in Friedman. This would certainly be the easiest action to take, as it would require minimal revision to the Family Code. The legislature’s second option is to adopt the ALI’s PFD. This option is an approach to marital agreements that goes beyond contract law principles and avoids many of the enforcement pitfalls present

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160. Hansen, supra note 5, at 30 (“[W]hile postnups are not nearly as common as prenups, they nevertheless are growing in popularity.”).
162. See Friedman, 122 Cal. Rptr. 2d at 417-18.
163. CAL. FAM. CODE § 721(b) (West 1994).
164. See supra Part I.A.2.
in even California's version of the UPAA. Accordingly, it deserves the serious consideration of California lawmakers.

B. The Limitations of Contract in the Marital Context

To determine whether the extension of the California UPAA to post-nuptial agreements or the replacement of the marital agreement framework with the PFD is a better choice for California, it is necessary to understand the particular context of marital agreements.

1. General Limitations of the Bargain Principle of Contract

In contract law, the bargain principle assumes that parties are the best judges of their own self-interest and thus of whether the bargain's terms advantage them. Courts have always recognized some limits to the bargain principle; one already discussed in this piece is unconscionability. Unconscionability is a contract law doctrine under which a contract can be voided because of unfairness. When analyzing unconscionability issues in a consumer context (for example, in which an individual contracts with a powerful corporation), courts generally distinguish between procedural unconscionability (in which the contract negotiation is unjust) and substantive unconscionability (in which the terms of the contract are so one-sided that they would be onerous and oppressive to the weaker party). Unconscionability is thus a prime example of a public policy limit to the bargain principle.

However, there is another type of limit, which is not attributable to unfair exploitation by one's bargaining partner: the cognitive limit. Professor Melvin Eisenberg begins his eminent analysis of cognitive limitations with the premise that limited information and limited information processing bound human rationality. The limited information prong means simply that contracts concern the future, so uncertainty exists. Professor Eisenberg's more substantive contribution concerns the processing limitations. He asserts, on the basis of cognitive science research, that even competent people systematically make significant cognitive errors.

Three such "cognitive flaws" bear heavily on marital agreements:

165. PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY DISSOLUTION, supra note 4, § 7.05 cmt. a.
166. See id.
167. See LOI L. FULLER & MELVIN ARON EISENBERG, BASIC CONTRACT LAW 77-78 (7th ed. 2001).
168. For example, a contract that includes an exculpatory clause relieving a party from liability for her own intentional wrongdoing is unconscionable because it is contrary to public policy. See CAL. CIV. CODE § 1668 (West 1985).
169. See Eisenberg, supra note 10, at 212. This exceptional article is highly recommended reading.
170. Id. at 214.
171. Id. at 213.
172. Id. at 216.
(1) excessive optimism about future developments; (2) treating low-probability events as if they had zero probability; and (3) discounting future benefits. 173

Excessive optimism manifests itself in interesting ways. In one study, almost 90% of drivers believed their driving skills were better than average. 174 In another study, the number of students who believed they were less likely to develop drinking problems was seven times greater than the number who thought they were more likely. 175 In the most famous study on the subject, and one of particular relevance in the context of marital agreements, When Every Relationship Is Above Average, researchers polled couples about to get married. While the couples correctly estimated that 50% of American couples would divorce, they estimated that their own chance of divorce was 0%. 176 The respondents similarly estimated that 40% of spouses pay alimony when ordered to do so by a court, but 100% predicted that their own spouse would do so. 177 Similarly, Richard Birke and Craig Fox have asserted that in negotiations, “most people tend to make unrealistically optimistic forecasts regarding their own future outcomes.” 178

Studies have also found that people not only underestimate but ignore low-probability risks. 179 The primary studies on these cognitive limitations are insurance-related. Even when offered subsidized premiums, for example, people prefer to insure only against high-probability, low-loss risks and tend to reject insurance against low-probability, high-loss risks. 180 Eisenberg asserts that this failure to appreciate future risks is linked to the problem of unrealistic optimism: “If actors are unrealistically optimistic, they will systematically underestimate risks.” 181

Additionally, Eisenberg finds that people systematically discount future benefits—a flaw he also refers to as “faulty telescopic faculty.” 182 Eisenberg gives the example of tax-favored pension plans; the rationale is that without an external push, many people would lack the foresight to save for the future, 183 believing, as the cliché goes, that a bird in the hand is

173. Comments to the PFD also highlight these three limitations. PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY DISSOLUTION, supra note 4, § 7.05 cmt. b.
174. See Eisenberg, supra note 10, at 216.
175. Id.
176. Id. at 217 (citing Lynn A. Baker & Robert E. Emery, When Every Relationship Is Above Average: Perceptions and Expectations of Divorce at the Time of Marriage, 17 LAW & HUM. BEHAV. 439, 443 (1993)).
177. Id. at 217-18 (citing Baker & Emery, supra note 176).
179. See Eisenberg, supra note 10, at 222-23.
181. Id. at 225.
182. Id. at 222 (paraphrasing A.C. PIGOU, THE ECONOMICS OF WELFARE (1920)).
183. Id.
worth two in the bush. By undervaluing future benefits, a negotiating party is likely to find that an agreement that made some sense in the present shortchanges her in the long run.

That these broad cognitive limitations would affect parties to marital contracts is self-evident. However, it is worth discussing the ways in which "agreements about marriage are more likely than commercial agreements to involve special facts that test the limits of the bargain principle." This concept above all else justifies greater protections for parties to marital agreements than are provided for in the California UPAA.

2. Problems with the Contract Approach as Applied to Marital Agreements
   a. Unconscionability

Marital agreements are different from commercial contracts in several important ways. First, there are differences in the knowledge and disposition of potential or actual spouses as compared to potential business partners. It is fairly common in a commercial setting for both sides’ negotiators to be experts in the relevant market and to devote significant resources to analyzing risk. In contrast, while one or both parties entering into marital agreements may have been married previously (and as such may have a slightly better idea of the potential risks of marriage), this does not put them on a par with a "team of [expert analysts] with [formal] task-specific training." If a substantial number of these cases involve older and previously married men marrying younger, not previously married women, there is no reason to assume that the women, who are usually financially weaker, benefit from their prospective husbands’ "training."

The potential for a disparity in the parties’ topic-specific sophistication and knowledge is relevant in terms of cognitive limits, as the next section discusses, but it also makes unconscionable agreements more likely. This is especially so in light of the wealth and age disparities that are often present among the parties to marital agreements. All of these factors bring with them the threat of power differentials in the relationship, which can taint negotiations. Absent statutory protections, it is simply too easy for a wealthier, older husband with access to superior legal counsel to use his power in the relationship to leverage an unfair, one-sided (and thus substantively unconscionable) agreement. Procedural unconscionability results from unjust contract negotiations; arguably an example of such unfair negotiations is In re Marriage of Bonds. While Barry may not have been

184. Principles of Family Dissolution, supra note 4, § 7.05 cmt. a.
185. See id. § 7.05 cmt. b.
186. Id.
187. See Bix, supra note 7, at 232.
188. 5 P.3d 815 (Cal. 2000).
himself an expert in the relevant market, his counsel certainly was. That Sun signed the agreement the night before the wedding, without her own legal counsel and with questionable understanding of the contract’s terms, \(^\text{189}\) contributes to the agreement’s procedural unconscionability. Future or current spouses are not expert or seasoned negotiators squaring off against one another in a business forum, but individuals with differing knowledge, means, and power.

**b. Differences in Cognitive Limitations**

There are numerous ways in which the marital context increases cognitive limitations. In addition to increasing the risk of unconscionable agreements, the relative lack of knowledge and resources of many parties to marital agreements may also increase cognitive errors, while commercial parties’ comparatively great knowledge and analytical resources may decrease them.

Beyond their background, parties to commercial contracts have an altogether different mindset from parties to marital agreements. In a business setting, parties understand that each side is unapologetically out to maximize its own best interest. On the other hand, prospective or actual spouses generally assume that they share “a mutual and deep concern for one another’s welfare.” \(^\text{190}\) Even the *Bonds* court recognized this, conceding that “persons contemplating marriage morally owe each other a duty of fair dealing and obviously are not embarking upon a purely commercial contract.” \(^\text{191}\) In contrast to impassive, hardened negotiators focused on financial gain, parties to marital agreements may be better described as “unsuspecting innocents acting in an emotional fog.” \(^\text{192}\)

These differences in mindset in turn have two potential consequences for the likelihood and severity of cognitive errors. First, an emotional state of love and trust is likely to increase errors like unrealistic optimism, whereas one of financial self-interest is more likely to reduce them. Further, it is unlikely that the parties to a marital agreement would expend significant resources to avert cognitive errors. In contrast, when a business has sufficient economic interests in a deal, it may devote significant resources to analyzing risk. \(^\text{193}\) This will tend to decrease the likelihood and severity of cognitive errors.

Second, differences in context also lead to differences in negotiating style. Commercial actors have little reason to be pressured into unfavorable

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189. Id. at 818-19.
190. PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY DISSOLUTION, supra note 4, § 7.05 cmt. c.
193. See PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY DISSOLUTION, supra note 4, § 7.05 cmt. b.
contract terms. In contrast, Stephen Sugarman has argued that “because entering into marriage [is] more often . . . the result of romantic love than hard-headed business bargaining, there is reason to fear that many individuals would not insist upon terms that would sufficiently protect themselves.”

The differences in negotiating styles can in part be ascribed to exacerbated discounting of future benefits as a result of the romantic mindset. The comments to the PFD point out that haggling over terms applicable only at divorce can undermine the good feeling or “expressive function” engendered by an earlier agreement to marry, and that this can lead to the suppression of genuine misgivings about terms.

Much of the scholarship in this area concerns prenuptial agreements, but the same concerns of trust and love “disarm[ing the parties’] capacity for self-protective judgment” apply to postnuptial agreements. While mid-marriage may not always be the “time when the parties are most likely to be optimistic” that the marriage will endure, that the parties are entering into a postnuptial agreement (rather than a property settlement agreement) indicates that they view their marriage as ongoing. In addition to the influence of love, such negotiations also raise the possibility of the exploitation of power imbalances in the relationship, which may be more deeply seated in an existing marriage.

Another significant difference between marital agreements and ordinary commercial agreements is the timing of enforcement. In the business context, the terms of the contracts negotiated usually go into effect immediately, have continued relevance, and apply “every day, until the parties’ relationship ends.” Pre- and postnuptial agreements, on the other hand, become effective only if the relationship ends, an event that may never take place. This fact bears heavily on the negotiating stance parties take in marital agreements, in light of their cognitive limitations. As the When Every Relationship Is Above Average study demonstrates, couples are likely to “heavily discount the possibility of divorce, because they will overemphasize the concrete evidence of their currently thriving

194. Bix, supra note 192, at 194.
195. Stephen D. Sugarman, Dividing Financial Interests on Divorce, in Divorce Reform at the Crossroads 142 (Stephen D. Sugarman & Herman Hill Kay eds., 1990). Barbara Ann Atwood also used this quote from Sugarman in her discussion of the “unique emotional atmosphere” of drafting prenuptial agreements. See Atwood, supra note 30, at 134, 135 n.34.
196. See Principles of Family Dissolution, supra note 4, § 7.05 cmt. b.
197. See id. § 7.02 cmt. c.
198. Bix, supra note 192, at 193 (emphasis added) (describing prenuptial agreements). Bix also states that parties are “unlikely to be able to think clearly for themselves regarding the consequences of divorce at any time.” Id.
199. Younger, supra note 17, at 698 (“[P]arties are in a confidential relationship, likely to be of unequal bargaining power and in less than rational states.”).
200. See Principles of Family Dissolution, supra note 4, § 7.05 cmt. b (emphasis omitted).
201. Id.
relationship.\textsuperscript{202} If one is overly optimistic about her marriage, loves and trusts her spouse or prospective spouse, and perceives the 50\% chance of divorce as a zero-probability event, she is unlikely to negotiate the terms of a marital agreement with much tenacity. It therefore makes sense to design enforcement provisions that encourage and require her truly informed consent.

The unique timing aspect of marital agreements also affects the parties' priorities when drafting. This goes to Professor Eisenberg's "limited information" prong.\textsuperscript{203} Couples simply cannot anticipate all of the changes that will take place in the marriage between execution and enforcement, nor the implications of such changes. As a result, parties frequently discount future benefits.\textsuperscript{204} One of the better examples the PFD gives of this tendency is that parties may give less weight to the interests of hypothetical future children than they would give to existing children.\textsuperscript{205} More fundamentally, "even childless parties who anticipate having children are often unable to anticipate the impact that children will have on their values and life plans."\textsuperscript{206} Because the problems with the original agreement may only become apparent at the time of dissolution,\textsuperscript{207} it makes sense for the law to assess at the time of enforcement whether the agreement would work a substantial injustice. This is consistent with the "second look" approach that Professor Eisenberg advocates.\textsuperscript{208} In light of the aforementioned cognitive limitations, he concludes that in the case of a significantly changed marriage, a court must determine whether the parties likely had a mature understanding that the marital agreement would apply even in the kind of circumstances that actually occurred.\textsuperscript{209}

c. Public Policy Distinction

Finally, marital agreements differ from ordinary commercial contracts because of their sensitive subject matter. It is generally understood that the law's willingness to enforce a contract presupposes that the contract is not contrary to important public policy,\textsuperscript{210} such as the protection of minor

\begin{itemize}
  \item 202. See Eisenberg, supra note 10, at 254.
  \item 203. See id. at 214.
  \item 204. See PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY DISSOLUTION, supra note 4, § 7.05 cmt. b.
  \item 205. Id. § 7.05 cmt. c.
  \item 206. Id. § 7.05 cmt. b.
  \item 207. See George, supra note 42, at 85.
  \item 208. See Eisenberg, supra note 10, at 232.
  \item 209. Id. at 258; see also George, supra note 42, at 105 (submitting in 1992 the idea that "such agreements be reviewed for unconscionability at the time of dissolution"). See generally Brod, supra note 6 (advocating a "substantive fairness" approach).
  \item 210. PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY DISSOLUTION, supra note 4, § 7.05 cmt. a.
\end{itemize}
Marital agreements frequently set aside otherwise-applicable, protective public policies, while commercial agreements generally do not. And states have long maintained a special interest in marriages and families. Therefore, it makes sense that marital agreement law, as compared with commercial contract law, emphasizes that the agreements be executed fairly and not cause substantial injustice upon enforcement.

With these limitations in mind, Part II.C examines the sections of the PFD relevant to this Comment's inquiry and compares them to the California UPAA framework. Based on the implications of the limits of the bargain principle in the marital context, Part II.D then evaluates which of the two frameworks is superior.

C. The Principles of the Law of Family Dissolution

1. Background

In 2002, the American Law Institute wrapped up over a decade of work and released its Principles of Family Dissolution on the subjects of child custody, child support, distribution of marital property, and compensatory payments to former spouses. The ALI, writing to provide guidance to legislatures and courts alike, had lofty goals. The PFD aims to "treat wives, husbands, and children fairly when the family dissolves, recognizing that . . . the achievement of fairness differs depending on the individuals, their choices, and their expectations." This required a careful balancing of two well-established American traditions: privacy and regulatory impulse—or, mapped to our quandary, freedom of contract and fairness.

The PFD discusses marital agreements in its chapter seven. Significantly, the chapter declares that the same doctrine applies to pre- and postnuptial agreements, a position the drafters assert is already the law of many states. Consistent with the PFD's balancing goal, the chapter's objective is more than simply to allow parties "to accommodate their particular

211. Id. § 7.05 cmt. c; see also Atwood, supra note 30, at 131 (identifying the state's authority over agreements that do not affect children as derived from the state's interest in the institution of marriage).
212. Principles of Family Dissolution, supra note 4, § 7.02 cmt. c.
214. The ALI is an academic organization with the stated goals of achieving legal "clarification," "better adaptation [of law] to social needs," and the "better administration of justice." Principles of Family Dissolution, supra note 4, chief reporter's foreword.
215. Id., director's foreword.
216. Id.
217. Id.
218. Id., chief reporter's foreword.
219. See id. § 7.01 reporter's notes cmt. c. This treatment further supports the concept that the difference between pre- and postnuptial agreements is largely one of timing.
needs and circumstances by contractually altering” their legal rights.\textsuperscript{220} Under the PFD, that freedom to contract is “subject to constraints that recognize both competing policy concerns and limitations in the capacity of parties to appreciate adequately, at the time of the agreement, the impact of its terms under different life circumstances.”\textsuperscript{221} This concern for fairness is observable in the chapter’s two main enforcement sections: section 7.04 (“Procedural Requirements”) and section 7.05 (“When Enforcement Would Work a Substantial Injustice”), examined below.

2. Relevant PFD Provisions and Their Differences from the UPAA

a. Requirements for Enforceability

Under the PFD section 7.04, an agreement is enforceable if it is in writing, it is signed by both parties, and the party seeking enforcement can show that the other party’s consent was informed and not a product of duress.\textsuperscript{222} With regard to the latter requirement, the PFD provides the specific conditions under which a court may rebuttably presume a pre- or postnuptial agreement to be voluntary.\textsuperscript{223} First, both parties must have been advised to obtain separate counsel and have had a reasonable opportunity to do so.\textsuperscript{224} Second, if the parties did not have separate counsel, the agreement must have stated in “easily understandable” language both the nature of the rights to be altered and the possibility that the spouses’ interests are adverse.\textsuperscript{225} Prenuptial agreements have the added requirement of execution at least thirty days prior to the wedding.\textsuperscript{226}

To enforce terms limiting one party’s claims to compensatory payments or, more commonly, a share in marital property, the PFD also requires that the party challenging enforcement either knew (“at least approximately”) the enforcing party’s assets and income or received from the enforcer a written statement of such information.\textsuperscript{227} The enforcing party can satisfy this requirement by providing a disclosure statement containing certain specified information.\textsuperscript{228}

These enforceability requirements are significantly different from the original UPAA, but have more in common with the amended California version. First, the PFD’s informed consent without duress provision is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{220} Id. § 7.02.
\item \textsuperscript{221} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{222} Id. § 7.04(1)-(2).
\item \textsuperscript{223} Id. § 7.04(2)-(3), (4)(a).
\item \textsuperscript{224} Id. § 7.04(3)(b).
\item \textsuperscript{225} Id. § 7.04(3)(c). This is an objective standard based upon “an adult of ordinary intelligence with no legal training.” Id.
\item \textsuperscript{226} Id. § 7.04(3)(a).
\item \textsuperscript{227} Id. § 7.04(3)(a).
\item \textsuperscript{228} Id.
\end{itemize}
essentially the equivalent of the original UPAA’s voluntariness condition. In contrast to the original UPAA’s vague approach, however, and closer to California’s amended version, the PFD details the specific factors that comprise a demonstration of voluntariness.

Second, while the original UPAA places the burden of proof on the challenging party, both the California version and the PFD shift that burden to the party seeking to enforce the agreement. This is quite a dramatic change, particularly in regard to marginal cases. Moreover, it likely reflects a shared goal of “[cautioning the stronger party] against overreaching tactics that would make this burden of proof more difficult to meet.” The PFD’s drafters even acknowledged SB 78’s amendment to Family Code section 1615, with its “several provisions similar to those advanced here.”

Despite this overlap, it would be a mistake to overlook the differences between the PFD and California law. First, under California’s current system, and the model UPAA, one can meet the disclosure requirement either through actual disclosure, waiver of disclosure, or knowledge. The PFD has no waiver provision, which should eliminate the potential for nullifying the disclosure prong via clever drafting. Still, the PFD’s approach should not be too arduous to comply with. A party need only provide the other with a written statement containing the specified information to meet the requirement. There is no separate requirement that the party receiving the disclosure understand it.

The PFD’s disclosure provision is weightier than that of either the original or the California UPAA for another reason. Lack of disclosure under the UPAA would not in and of itself void an agreement; recall, the UPAA requires both lack of disclosure and unconscionability. The PFD makes clear that lack of disclosure would alone be sufficient to find an agreement unenforceable.

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229. See Younger, supra note 17, at 717.
231. This is arguable, but the inference seems to be there. Under the California UPAA, an agreement is not voluntary unless several factors are proven. Presumably, the party seeking enforcement would have to prove them. See Cal. Fam. Code § 1615(c) (West Supp. 2003). However, because any shift in the burden of proof in California was not made explicit, it does not execute this protection for the weaker party as cleanly as does the PFD. See supra text accompanying note 121.
232. Principles of Family Dissolution, supra note 4, § 7.04(2)-(3).
233. See id. § 7.04 cmt. b. Younger states that the PFD’s drafters intended the difference in wording to reflect their emphasis on the enforcer’s tactics and not the challenger’s state of mind. She dismisses the change as “elegant variation.” Younger, supra note 17, at 717.
234. Principles of Family Dissolution, supra note 4, § 7.04 cmt. b.
235. Id. § 7.04 reporter’s notes cmt. d.
238. Principles of Family Dissolution, supra note 4, § 7.04(5).
In regard to voluntariness, the PFD is similar to but distinguishable from the California UPAA. Thanks to SB 78, both have requirements of independent counsel or, alternatively, of the provision of information about the rights at stake in the agreement. Both require that parties executing prenuptial agreements do so within a given period of time before the wedding in order to minimize the involuntariness and duress that can arise as a result of last-minute demands. The PFD is slightly more protective on that point, requiring a thirty-day waiting period compared to California’s seven days.

The California UPAA’s voluntariness provisions are arguably more protective than the PFD’s in two respects. First, the former examines and bars not simply duress, but fraud, undue influence, and lack of capacity as well. Again, the significance of this difference is unclear. The California UPAA’s concern with lack of capacity would seem important, particularly in the face of the PFD’s objective test for “easily understandable” language. However, even if both parties had a reasonable opportunity to obtain counsel or if the agreement is in easily understandable language, the PFD still provides an opportunity for the challenging party to rebut the presumption of voluntariness. This provision seems to provide the flexibility needed to address the “wide variety of fact situations presented in real practice.”

Second, the California UPAA is potentially more protective than the PFD because of its ability to consider “any other factors the court deems relevant” in determining involuntariness. However, Robert Nachshin makes a reasonable point when he asks whether that provision allows a judge “to interpret every clause and stipulation through a subjective filter.” Such leeway will inevitably result in disparate outcomes upon similar circumstances. By affording judges so much discretion, the law disrupts the balance between contractual freedom and fairness, and adds an element of unpredictability to parties’ assessment of whether a court will void or enforce their agreement. An abstract requirement of fairness, ambiguously applied using subjective standards, “fail[s] to promote...”

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239. See id. § 7.04(3)(b)-(c); Cal. Fam. Code § 1615(c)(1), (3) (West Supp. 2003).
240. See Cal. Fam. Code § 1615(c)(2) (West Supp. 2003); Principles of Family Dissolution, supra note 4, § 7.04(3)(a). As the PFD explains, “Premarital agreements are rarely proposed on impulse... There is usually no reason why this process cannot begin early enough to be completed a month before the wedding.” Id. § 7.04 cmt. d.
242. Cal. Fam. Code § 1615(c)(2) (West Supp. 2003). The PFD waiting period is also more clear than that of the California UPAA, which has an ambiguous “presented with the agreement” start date. See Seastrom & Seastrom, supra note 121, at 49-50.
244. See Principles of Family Dissolution, supra note 4, § 7.04(3)(c).
245. Bix, supra note 7, at 236.
247. Nachshin, supra note 123.
That the PFD does not include a comparable provision is just as well. Moreover, the PFD takes a substantial leap ahead in the fairness competition by virtue of its section 7.05.

b. Substantial Injustice

The main way in which the PFD departs from the California UPAA is on the issue of unconscionability: unlike the UPAA, the PFD does not examine an agreement’s substantive unconscionability at the time of execution. Any agreement signed, in writing, and entered into with disclosure and informed consent, and without duress satisfies the requirement at the time of execution, no matter how unfair it is. However, the PFD inserts into the enforceability analysis an evaluation of the contract’s fairness at the time of enforcement, something the UPAA does not include. The analysis has two main components.

First, the court must assess whether one or more “threshold triggering event[s]” have taken place. Just three events qualify: (a) more than a fixed number of years have passed; (b) the parties were childless at the time of execution and subsequently had or adopted a child; or (c) there was an unanticipated change in circumstances that had a substantial impact on the parties or their children. Lest this last item smack of the same generality as the California UPAA’s voluntariness catchall provision, the PFD drafters took pains to clarify their intent. The party challenging the agreement “need not show the nature of the parties’ deliberations and their cognitive capacities at the time of execution, which may have been many years earlier.” Rather, the drafters propose an objective test under which the challenging party can merely demonstrate that “normal, competent individuals” would not have anticipated the parties’ circumstances at divorce, or the impact the agreement’s terms would have on such circumstances. The party seeking to enforce the agreement may rebut the showing with subjective evidence that the parties in fact were likely to have anticipated such matters.

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248. See Phillipson, supra note 213, at 86 (making the argument with regard to Wisconsin law).
249. See Younger, supra note 17, at 718.
250. Id.
251. See PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY DISSOLUTION, supra note 4, § 7.05.
252. Bix, supra note 7, at 238.
253. The comments to this section suggest that a state choose a period of “about 10 years.” This would leave most divorces unaffected, as most occur after fewer years of marriage. PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY DISSOLUTION, supra note 4, § 7.05 cmt. b.
254. Id. § 7.05(2)(a)-(c).
255. Id. § 7.05 cmt. b.
256. Id.
257. Id. An illustration: where one party in the couple was aware of a heightened genetic risk of illness, and the agreement was drafted after consideration of that risk, this would likely rebut an objective showing. Id.
Second, if the court determines that a threshold event occurred, it
must then determine whether enforcement would work a substantial
injustice.\footnote{258} Again, the party asserting the probability of a substantial in-
justice carries the burden of proof.\footnote{259} He or she must bring to the court's
attention, and the court must weigh, the following factors: (a) the magnitude
of the disparity between the outcome under the agreement and the outcome
otherwise; (b) for short marriages, the difference between the challenger's
circumstances if the agreement is enforced and if the marriage had not
occurred; (c) whether the purpose of the agreement was to benefit third par-
ties, and whether that purpose is still relevant; and (d) the impact of
enforcement on the parties' children.\footnote{260}

The comments to section 7.05 repeatedly stress that its thrust is not to
bail out an unhappy party when an agreement simply "turned out less
favorably" than he or she expected.\footnote{261} Such was the concern of the majority
in Simeone, which reasoned that "[v]irtually nonexistent is the marriage in
which there has been absolutely no change in the circumstances of either
spouse during the course of the marriage."\footnote{262} Under the PFD, a contract
that "makes reasonable provision" for the party challenging the agreement
does not qualify as a substantial injustice, even if its outcome is "much less
generous" than the result under governing law.\footnote{263} The idea is to prevent the
worst kinds of injustices under the most considerably changed circum-
stances. This breathes life and vision into Justice McDermott's dissent in
Simeone, which argued that "[i]t borders on cruelty to accept that after
years of living together . . . two individuals emerge the same as the day
they began their marriage,"\footnote{264} and yet narrows that potentially endless in-
quiry considerably.

The concept of evaluating fairness at the time of enforcement is not
foreign to California lawmakers. Recall that the legislature's amendment of
section 1612 in response to Pendleton instructed courts to determine
whether an agreement modifying or eliminating spousal support is uncon-
scionable at the time of enforcement.\footnote{265} The same principle is at work in the
PFD, but applicable only under certain circumstances and with more

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{258} See Principles of Family Dissolution, supra note 4, \S \ 7.05(2).
\bibitem{259} Id. \S \ 7.05(3).
\bibitem{260} Id. \S \ 7.05(3)(a)-(d).
\bibitem{261} See id. \S \ 7.05 cmt. a.
\bibitem{262} Simeone v. Simeone, 581 A.2d 162, 166 (Pa. 1990).
\bibitem{263} Principles of Family Dissolution, supra note 4, \S \ 7.05 cmt. e.
\bibitem{264} Simeone, 581 A.2d at 170-71 (McDermott, J., dissenting).
\bibitem{265} Cal. Fam. Code \S \ 1612(c) (West Supp. 2003). The PFD drafters noted the similarity
between the Principles and the amended California UPAA. See Principles of Family Dissolution,
supra note 4, \S \ 7.05 reporter's notes cmt. a.
\end{thebibliography}
guidance than a general and inevitably subjective conception of “fairness.” The clear disadvantage of the PFD’s “substantial injustice” inquiry is that it means parties cannot be certain at the time of execution that their agreement will be enforceable at the time of divorce.\textsuperscript{266} There is no wholly satisfactory answer to this complaint, but these parties may be comforted by the knowledge that if circumstances change dramatically and their marriage ends, the court has the authority to protect them from an agreement that is no longer just.\textsuperscript{267} Certainly, section 7.05 reflects a compromise between the competing concerns of freedom of contract and fairness. Whether this compromise is superior to that achieved by the California UPAA is examined next.

D. The PFD Best Serves California’s Interests

Foremost, in evaluating marital agreement law, the legislature must consider two interrelated but sometimes conflicting interests: fairness and predictability. This Comment will tackle them in reverse, saving until last the contentious issue of fairness.

1. Predictability

Predictability in this context means the degree to which the parties entering into agreements and their attorneys can accurately assess whether and how the agreements will be enforced. Predictability is an obvious goal, closely tied to, but not synonymous with, the concept of contractual autonomy.\textsuperscript{268} Allowing couples to make marital contracts encourages them to think realistically about the marriage, to anticipate and plan for contingencies, and to form relationships on their own terms—\textsuperscript{269}all of which are recognizable public policy aims. Undermining predictability may discourage parties from entering into marital agreements, which would in turn detract from these valuable benefits.

The California legislature likely had predictability in mind (as well as fairness) when it amended Family Code section 1615 to clarify the meaning of the word “voluntary.” Under the California UPAA, parties can now be confident that if they follow subsection (c)’s specific requirements, a court should find their agreement voluntary. Or at least that was the idea.

\textsuperscript{266} Bix, supra note 7, at 243.

\textsuperscript{267} The problem with this answer, of course, is that the parties complaining are not likely to be the ones who need protection. See discussion infra Part II.D.

\textsuperscript{268} Contractual autonomy or freedom is a broader concept, and includes a moral component relating to an individual’s right to bind himself or herself according to his or her own wishes without state interference. This Comment recognizes the power of such an ideal but (1) contends that freedom of contract is never pure but subject to the constraints of public policy, especially in the context of marriage, and so (2) focuses on predictability as the most relevant and practical part of that concept. Subject to necessary external restraints regarding the content of his or her contract, the enforcing party is most concerned with being able to expect that the contract he or she executed is indeed enforceable.

\textsuperscript{269} See PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY DISSOLUTION, supra note 4, § 7.02 cmt. b.
Although clearly well-intentioned, the statute’s catchall provision undoes much of the good work the preceding requirements (of separate counsel, a seven-day waiting period, etc.) did in terms of predictability. The inclusion of “any other factors the court deems relevant”\textsuperscript{270} as a requirement adds an unpredictable, subjective element to the process. Despite this one easily corrected flaw, the California UPAA’s assessment of fairness only at the time of execution encourages both enforceability and predictability.

Some have argued that the PFD moves “at least a little” in the direction of greater certainty with regard to enforceability.\textsuperscript{271} Compared to the original UPAA, this is a valid point, though it is less so when applied to the California UPAA, with its more detailed definition of voluntariness. Although the PFD does not contain the California UPAA’s voluntariness catchall provision, it clearly makes enforcement less predictable than does either the original or the California UPAA by virtue of the “substantial injustice” test of section 7.05. That even a well-counseled and fair marital agreement may become unenforceable due to unanticipated events and the application of PFD section 7.05\textsuperscript{272} means that contracting parties cannot be certain that a court will find their agreement valid at the time of dissolution. The drafters of the PFD restricted fairness evaluations at the time of enforcement to the three scenarios\textsuperscript{273} that may cast the most serious doubt on the parties’ capacity to have properly evaluated the significance of the agreement’s terms.\textsuperscript{274} The burden is then on the challenging party to bring to the court’s attention specifically delineated factors that demonstrate substantial injustice.\textsuperscript{275} This inquiry is narrow enough that the drafters expect it to be “inapplicable” to most marital agreements.\textsuperscript{276} Still, in order to determine whether the PFD renders some marital agreements intolerably unpredictable, one must weigh predictability against the goal of fairness.

2. Fairness

In the context of this Comment, fairness means protection for the financially weaker spouse from enforcement of an overly harsh marital agreement.\textsuperscript{277} This Comment has already examined the ways in which cognitive limitations can produce unfair results in the marital context. The differences between the California UPAA and the PFD are largely attributable to their respective techniques for and emphases on addressing these

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{270} \textsc{Cal. Fam. Code} § 1615(c)(5) (West Supp. 2003).
  \item \textsuperscript{271} Bix, \textit{supra} note 7, at 240.
  \item \textsuperscript{272} \textit{Id.} at 244 n.52.
  \item \textsuperscript{273} \textit{See Principles of Family Dissolution, supra} note 4, § 7.05(2)(a)-(c).
  \item \textsuperscript{274} \textit{See id.} § 7.05 cmt. c.
  \item \textsuperscript{275} \textit{See id.}
  \item \textsuperscript{276} \textit{See id.} § 7.05 cmt. a.
  \item \textsuperscript{277} This Comment is not insensitive to fairness to the financially stronger spouse, but deals with that kind of fairness as tied to the issues of predictability and contractual autonomy. \textit{See supra} notes 14 and 15.
\end{itemize}
potential inequities. Both models retrospectively evaluate agreements for fairness at execution. The two have comparable requirements for proving voluntariness; the largest exception is the California UPAA’s catchall provision. The California UPAA and PFD differ in another respect in their assessment at execution. While the California UPAA requires both nondisclosure and unconscionability in order to find an agreement unenforceable, PFD section 7.04 more protectively treats nondisclosure as sufficient to void an agreement. The California UPAA stops there, but the PFD provides in section 7.05 for an additional fairness evaluation at the time of enforcement in the marriages that have changed the most since execution. The PFD’s acknowledgment that circumstances change during marriage and that people drafting an agreement cannot take into account every possible contingency weighs heavily in favor of fairness. The combined safeguards of section 7.04 and section 7.05 will likely protect the financially weaker partners—usually women—from “the worst possible consequences of unwise choices.”

3. Balancing Predictability and Fairness

The PFD is thus more protective than the California UPAA, but does it go too far? The kind of fairness inquiry envisioned by section 7.05 can butt up against the goal of predictability, but it is defensible, and indeed imperative, for two reasons. First, courts have always recognized limits to the bargain principle based on equity. Pre- and postnuptial agreements exacerbate the contracting couples’ cognitive limitations and take place “against a backdrop of statutes and case law that express important public policies.” One such policy, as Gail Frommer Brod argues, is a state’s concern with mitigating spouses’ economic harm at divorce. California honored such a policy when it amended its law on spousal support waivers to include a similar fairness assessment at the time of enforcement. Indeed, that inquiry is far less defined and constrained than the test described at length in PFD section 7.05.

Second, PFD section 7.05 finds support from the theory of philosopher John Rawls. Rawls postulated an “original position” in which people

279. Principles of Family Dissolution, supra note 4, § 7.04(5).
280. See id. § 7.05.
281. Bix, supra note 7, at 241 (emphasis omitted).
282. But see Developments in the Law—The Law of Marriage and Family, supra note 5, at 2097-98 (asserting that the PFD does not go far enough and advocating a presumption of unenforceability for prenuptial agreements that deviate from a 50-50 property split).
283. See Principles of Family Dissolution, supra note 4, § 7.05 cmt. a.
284. See id. § 7.05 cmt.c.
285. See Brod, supra note 6, at 285 n.304 (citing Barbara Klarman, Marital Agreements in Contemplation of Divorce, 10 U. Mich. U.L. Reform 397, 404-05 (1977)).
did not know their place in society, class position or social status, their fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, their intelligence, strength, and other, similar attributes. Thus positioned behind a "veil of ignorance," the people would be best able to design a just society. Because they would start out as equals, individuals would not be at odds with one another, nor tempted to exploit their social and natural circumstances to their own advantage. As Rawls deduced, "it hardly seems likely that persons who view themselves as equals, entitled to press their claims upon one another, would agree to a principle which may require lesser life prospects for some simply for the sake of a greater sum of advantages enjoyed by others." An admittedly simplified characterization of this theory is that someone who does not know which piece of cake he or she will get will be sure to cut the pieces fairly.

While it takes some extrapolation to apply the veil of ignorance to marital agreements, the task is possible. Putting ourselves in the original position, we can agree that, like the state, we would wish to mitigate spouses' economic harm at divorce—or, if that concept is too broad, that we would at least want to mitigate the worst kinds of harm. In the original position, we would not know, if we were to marry and divorce, whether we would be the spouses with the big wedges of cake or with the meager last slivers, and so we would advocate a fairly applied slicing system. The analogy can be taken too far (if it has not already): pushing marital agreements to provide for a fifty-fifty split would discourage parties from entering into such agreements—after all, what would be the point?—and overlooks some of the important benefits of doing so.

Agreements that benefit the financially stronger party more than the financially weaker party should not be per se objectionable. Fairness may be the principal goal, but it must coexist with values such as predictability.

288. Id.
289. Id. at 118, 121.
290. Id. at 13.
292. One might argue that Rawls's philosophy does not map as well to a voluntary institution like marriage as it does to an inevitable one like birth—that we need be less concerned with protecting marriage's willful participants. However, one can respond that marriage is almost inevitable, as "nearly everyone marries at some point," Developments in the Law—The Law of Marriage and Family, supra note 5, at 2075, and that as reflected by both our public policy recognizing a special interest in the well-being of marriage and family, Phillipson, supra note 213, at 85, and the unique cognitive errors arising in the context of marriage, see supra Part II.B.2.b, this application of Rawls's equality theory is useful to our analysis.
293. See Developments in the Law—The Law of Marriage and Family, supra note 5, at 2098.
294. See supra Part II.D.1.
The task is to find a reasonable balance between the parties’ interests in forming an enforceable agreement according to their own terms, and making certain that the agreement was both negotiated fairly and will not have catastrophic effects on one of the parties when it is enforced.

The PFD achieves this balance masterfully and serves both the interests of fairness and predictability better than the California UPAA. A comparison of their voluntariness provisions illustrates this superiority. The most significant difference between the two sets of voluntariness requirements is that the California UPAA includes a catchall provision allowing a judge to invalidate an agreement based on “any other factors the court deems relevant” while the PFD includes no such provision. This catchall phrase drastically reduces predictability and confounds drafting—anything can be relevant. Nor does it demonstrably add much in the way of fairness, since there is no guarantee that relevant factors will support the position of the weaker party and since the statute already requires the judge to take into account those factors that most obviously relate to fairness. The PFD, by contrast, provides essentially the same voluntariness standard without this unfortunate provision.

The PFD is also superior to the California UPAA in regard to disclosure requirements. Under the California UPAA, one can meet the law’s disclosure requirement by actual disclosure, waiver, or knowledge. The PFD has no waiver provision, and so makes less likely unfair agreements in which one party does not really disclose assets to the other. In addition, lack of disclosure under the California UPAA is not sufficient to void an agreement but must be accompanied by unconscionability. By making lack of disclosure alone sufficient to void an agreement, the PFD again best serves fairness concerns. Predictability is not materially different under either system.

The greatest difference between the two models, and the area in which the balancing is most pivotal, is unconscionability. The California UPAA evaluates an agreement’s unconscionability at the time of execution. The PFD, in contrast, evaluates what might be described as unconscionability at

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295. A counterargument is that individuals behind Rawls’s veil of ignorance might just as soon define fairness as assurance that their agreements be enforced (predictability) or the ability to make their own agreements (autonomy) as opposed to this Comment’s conception of fairness. In response, while fairness can certainly include the concepts of predictability or autonomy, in its essence it most centrally connotes even-handedness. Autonomy can lead to an inhumane twisting in the wind. Cruel and unusual punishment can be predictable under a brutal regime. But even-handedness is necessary, if not always sufficient, to the concept of fairness.


298. Id. § 1615(a).

299. See id.
the time an agreement is to be enforced. Provided that a threshold triggering event has occurred, such as the addition of children to the marriage, the PFD allows judges to determine whether enforcement of the agreement would work a “substantial injustice” on either party. In that case the judge can void the agreement. The “substantial injustice” provisions of the PFD of course make marital agreements less predictable. A judge may still refuse to enforce a marital agreement even if the agreement met the disclosure requirements and the voluntariness requirements—even if it was indisputably fair when drafted. The California UPAA, without an equivalent fairness assessment at the time of enforcement, is clearly more predictable in this regard. And, as discussed earlier, the PFD is clearly more fair. The PFD stands for the principle that contractual autonomy and the interest in predictability must occasionally bend to the fundamental goal of fairness. If one truly believes that fairness is the highest good, then a preference for the PFD is warranted.

CONCLUSION

This Comment addresses two problems with California’s current marital agreement law. The first problem is that this body of law is inconsistent. No case illustrates this point better than the recent California Court of Appeal decision in Friedman. The Friedman court held that Family Code section 1615 does not govern postnuptial agreements. Not only was this finding poorly justified, it also points to a disturbing and illogical state of affairs: parties to postnuptial agreements receive less protection under California law than do parties to prenuptial agreements. In light of the fiduciary duty married couples owe one another, “[i]t would seem that the protections that the legislature found were needed to protect potential spouses before marriage would apply with greater force after the marriage.” It makes no sense that by marrying one another and entering into a confidential relationship, it becomes easier for a couple to enter into and enforce against one another an unfair contract.

The second problem discussed in this Comment is that the enforceability provisions of the California UPAA are insufficient for both pre- and postnuptial agreements. Marital agreements are different from commercial contracts in important ways. The nature of parties who enter into marital agreements, their intimate relationship, their disposition and degree of expertise in the negotiating process, and the timing between execution and enforcement are distinct. The PFD reflects this understanding by incorporating a threshold event and a “substantial injustice” requirement into the enforcement framework. By contrast, the California UPAA lacks these features, leading to inconsistent and unpredictable outcomes.

This Comment argues for the adoption of the PFD model in California, emphasizing the importance of fairness and predictability in marital agreements. The PFD’s provisions provide a more balanced approach, ensuring that agreements are fair and predictable, while also respecting the autonomy of the parties. It is argued that the PFD is the preferable model for marital agreements in California, offering a more equitable and predictable framework.
enforcement all contribute to an exacerbation of cognitive limitations and an associated increase in the likelihood of unfairness. Accordingly, the law must provide more protections for parties to marital agreements than parties to commercial contracts.

Bonds306 illustrates the unfairness that can result from a lack of basic protections like independent counsel. That case led Senator Kuehl and the California legislature to try admirably to make the California UPAA fairer and more predictable. SB 78 made some progress but did not ultimately succeed at either goal. The amendment’s catchall provision makes predictability difficult; agreements that were unconscionable at the time of execution but involved either disclosure or waiver of disclosure are still valid; and there is still no fairness evaluation at the time of enforcement. In contrast, the PFD unabashedly makes enforcement “subject to constraints that recognize both competing policy concerns and limitations in the capacity of parties to appreciate adequately [at execution] the impact of its terms under different life circumstances.”307 The PFD’s “substantial injustice” test appropriately assesses fairness at the time of enforcement, and its threshold requirements appropriately limit that assessment to marriages with the most changed circumstances.308 While the possibility of a fairness evaluation at enforcement, no matter how proscribed, necessarily undermines the goal of predictability, this compromise is necessary.

The Principles of Family Dissolution strikes a just balance between the goals of fairness and predictability. It treats marital agreements differently from commercial contracts, and prenuptial agreements the same as postnuptial agreements. For these reasons and, fundamentally, because it solves both of the problems this Comment identified with the current body of law, the California legislature would be wise to consider the PFD’s immediate adoption with regard to marital agreements.

308. See id. § 7.05.