

Girls "in Trouble": A History of Female Adolescent Sexuality in the Midwest, 1946-1964

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GIRLS IN “TROUBLE”: A HISTORY OF FEMALE ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY IN
THE MIDWEST, 1946-1964

by

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ABSTRACT
GIRLS IN “TROUBLE”: A HISTORY OF FEMALE ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY IN
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Charissa M. Keup

Marquette University, 2012

This dissertation attempts to show how Americans reacted to adolescent female sexuality, looking specifically at unwed school-age pregnancy in the post-World War Two decades. It documents the origins of the transition of the conversation about unwed teens from caring for them in maternity homes and boarding houses to discussing their problems on television shows and in popular magazines. Teenage sexual delinquency and pregnancy have always raised innumerable questions about American culture and values. Because they challenged the traditional concept of motherhood, they offer a lens through which to study American sexuality and reveal that an alternate 1950s existed beyond the traditional stereotypes. Not all girls tacitly accepted the future set out for them. Teenagers actively made decisions regarding their bodies and sexuality. How girls behaved in response to the expectations placed upon them and how the public responded to female adolescents in the past reveals much about American youth, families, and society in general. Despite the fact that historians have devoted significant attention to this time period, few works focus solely on teenagers. The sexuality of female teenagers is often overlooked or combined with studies of women or college co-eds. This dissertation attempts to fill a gap in that literature and prove that the 1950s were indeed a crucial time for adolescents and sex in the United States.

“Girls ‘in Trouble’: A History of Female Adolescent Sexuality in the Midwest, 1946-1964” provides a complex picture of teenage sexuality and pregnancy in the postwar decades. It uses magazines and newspapers, specifically advice columns, to gain insight into public opinion of unwed mothers and teenage females. Letters from girls who wrote to these magazines and newspapers asking for guidance provide a glimpse into their thoughts and fears. Studies conducted by national and local agencies reveal how society addressed the growing problem of unwed pregnancy. Records from maternity homes in Chicago and Milwaukee provide information on the daily experiences of pregnant teens.

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INTRODUCTION

On June 11, 2009, MTV premiered its first episode of *16 and Pregnant*, an hour-long documentary series that “follows a 5-7 month period in the life of a teenager as she navigates the bumpy terrain of adolescence, growing pains, rebellion, and coming of age;[sic] all while dealing with being pregnant.”¹ Just over two years later, MTV is now on season four of *16 and Pregnant*, and a spin-off series following the girls after their pregnancies has been created. *Teen Mom* stars--Amber, Catelynn, Farrah, and Maci--have graced the covers of gossip and fashion magazines nationwide. These four adolescents, all unmarried mothers, have become semi-celebrities, capturing media headlines. Now flashback seventy years earlier to the 1940s when girls like Amber, Catelynn, Farrah, and Maci would have been expelled from school and hidden from public view, often sent away to an “aunt’s house” for nine months. This dissertation attempts to show how American society reacted to adolescent female sexuality, looking specifically at unwed school-age pregnancy in the post-World War Two decades. It documents the origins of the transition from maternity homes and boarding houses to television shows and magazine covers.

Teenage girls and their impregnated bodies were and still are the center of much debate and controversy. Their pregnancies raise innumerable questions about American culture and values. Often associated with shame and immorality, teen pregnancy challenges the traditional concept of motherhood. It sparks debates over sex education and federal assistance. Most importantly, unwed pregnancy provides visible evidence of premarital sex, unleashing moral controversies over abstinence and marriage. This

¹ http://www.mtv.com/shows/16_and_pregnant/season_1/series.jhtml

project explores female adolescent sexuality during the years between 1946 and 1964, arguing that the teenagers of this period set the stage for the sexual revolution of the later 1960s. Using teenage sexual delinquency and pregnancy as a lens to examine American sexuality, this study maintains that an alternate 1950s existed beyond the *Leave It to Beaver* stereotypes. Not all girls tacitly accepted the future set out for them. Teenagers actively made decisions regarding their bodies and sexuality. How girls behaved in response to the expectations placed upon them and how the public responded to female adolescents in the past reveals much about American youth, families, and society in general.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDYING FEMALE ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOR

As Miriam Forman-Brunell states simply, “whether working, writing, playing, or protesting, girls have shaped American history and culture in indelible ways.”²

Throughout American history, girls have not only contributed to “agricultural, domestic, industrial, service, informal, and underground economies” but have shaped the cultures of their families, communities, and the country while also “carving out their own history and shaping their *own* distinct cultures” as well.³ Forman-Brunell, the leading authority on American girlhood, contends that uncovering the history of girls can lead to reconceptualizations of the history of childhood, adolescence, women, and family.⁴

Although they have always been integral to the American narrative, historically speaking girls have been overlooked and their lives undervalued. Since they are “perceived as

² Miriam Forman-Brunell, *Girlhood in America: An Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2001), xxix.

³ *Ibid.*, xxx.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xxxii.

insipid and insignificant, and essentialized as passive and pretty,” girls have been judged as “undeserving of serious scrutiny, critical analysis, and hence scholarship.”⁵

Fortunately, this appears to be an attitude of the past as an increasing number of academics are publishing scholarship on girlhood studies.⁶ By placing girls at the center of historical inquiry, scholars of United States history have made strides in the examination of girls’ agency as well as their accommodation.

The birth of girl studies is frequently credited to Angela McRobbie. Her work focusing on British girls’ culture and teen magazines first appeared in the late 1970s and was said to “re-emerge” more refined and sophisticated in the 1990s. She continues to research youth culture today.⁷ Her *Feminism and Youth Culture* (1991) was a landmark work in the field of girl studies. Although Joan Jacobs Brumberg studied girls and eating disorders in the 1980s, girlhood did not emerge as a burgeoning field of historical inquiry in the United States until the early 1990s.⁸ Ever since then, journal articles and books have been produced each year, demonstrating the growing significance of the field. Despite the success of girlhood studies, additional work is still needed.

The definition of girlhood itself appears to be ambiguous and elusive. Scholars have not reached consensus on when girlhood begins and ends. In a review of Sherrie A. Inness’ edited volume on girls’ cultures, Janet Miron, a historian at York University, states that the “meaning of girlhood is never straightforward; that naturalness can never be assumed or taken for granted; and that girls’ cultures are diverse and complex, and

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ For example, the *Journal of Girlhood Studies* premiered its first issue in 2008.

⁷ Angela McRobbie’s first works include: *Feminism and Youth Culture: From “Jackie” to “Just Seventeen”* 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 1991). Her more recent works include: *In The Culture Society: Art, Fashion, and Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 1999) and *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: Sage, 2009).

⁸ See Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

cannot be reduced to any sort of concise or universal definition.”⁹ Thus there is much room for discussion and interpretation in this field.

Scholars also take a number of methodological and theoretical approaches to studying girl and girlhood. Some academics approach it from a generational view, examining girls according to their age category—young girls, pre-adolescent or tween, adolescent or teenager, or college girls.¹⁰ Another popular topic is the relationship between girls and popular culture and how they influence and shape each other. The idea that girls have developed their own culture is now commonly accepted among scholars and has become a subject of growing inquiry. Recent works draw on the literature on women, youth, and childhood as well as cultural studies and gender history. Agency versus victim is another lively and controversial topic in the field. Were girls active participants or were the passive victims? Historians seek to answer what role girls have played in American history. Another debate revolves around the origins of American girl culture: did it emerge in the twentieth century, the antebellum period, or even earlier? They also question the very nature of girls’ culture: is it repressive or transformative?¹¹ Nonetheless, girls have managed to express themselves in ways divergent from the expectations of adults. Although adults have attempted to instill traditional gender roles and foster desirable feminine behavior, girls have not always responded accordingly.¹² The history of adolescent sexuality exemplifies this point.

⁹ Janet Miron, “*Delinquents and Debutantes* Reviewed,” H-Women, H-Net Reviews (June 1999): 1.

¹⁰ For examples, see Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, eds., *Seven Going on Seventeen: Tween Studies in the Culture of Girlhood* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005) and Lynn Peril, *College Girls: Bluestockings, Sex Kittens, and Co-eds, Then and Now* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).

¹¹ Miriam Forman-Brunell and Kimberley Roberts, “Girls’ Culture,” in *Girlhood in America: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2001), 236.

¹² *Ibid.*, 325.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

As discussed in the previous section, the field of girls' studies has proliferated over the past decade. Recent works on girls have added a new dimension to women's history. For instance, historians such as Anya Jabour have shown that women and girls had vastly different lived experiences.¹³ Women's historians have often placed younger cohorts on the margins of their studies. This dissertation addresses that tendency by focusing on girlhood in the 1940s and 1950s while also engaging other fields of history.

A considerable volume of scholarship examines women in the 1940s and 1950s, especially women in the workforce and gender stereotypes that emerged during this era. For instance, Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound* offers a revealing look into Cold War families, focusing specifically on gender roles and sexuality. May shows how both men and women sought stability in the family after the war.¹⁴ Joanne J. Meyerowitz's edited volume, *Not June Cleaver*, offers a diverse interpretation of women's lives in the 1950s.¹⁵ Her contributors explore the various lifestyles of women during that time, arguing that not all women fulfilled the American ideal of the white, middle-class homemaker. Nonetheless, many of these books fail to appreciate teenage girls and how they became women during these decades. This dissertation builds on the material covered in these major works, but adds to them by evaluating how such stereotypes influenced and shaped the behavior of girls, not just women.

¹³ Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

¹⁵ Joanne J. Meyerowitz, ed. *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

Since the 1980s, a number of historians have addressed the lives of teenagers. The most useful among these are Grace Palladino's *Teenagers: An American History* and Jon Savage's *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture*, which offer insightful reflections into teenage life before, during, and after World War Two.¹⁶ Palladino remains the best summary on teenagers during the twentieth century. She provides details of the daily life of teenagers during the war by incorporating primary sources from the period. Savage presents perspectives of different types of teenagers such as GIs and zoot-suiters during World War Two. Historian Luis Alvarez looks specifically at zoot-suiters and the intersection of culture, race, and politics in *The Power of the Zoot*.¹⁷ Based on interviews with former zoot-suiters, Alvarez argues that American youth used popular culture to oppose traditional norms and gender roles. He also explores the impact of class and race on American youth during the war, using case studies of Mexican American and African American teenagers in Los Angeles. Joseph Kett also discusses teenagers in his work, *Rites of Passage*.¹⁸ Traversing the period from 1790 to 1970, Kett's discourse covers a significant time span while contributing detailed insight into each period. Kett comments in this work that "girls were the first adolescents."¹⁹

While sex has been the subject of numerous historical monographs, only a few books explore teenage sexuality throughout United States history. The definitive text on sexuality is John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman's *Intimate Matters: A History of*

¹⁶ Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996.) and Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (New York: Viking, 2007).

¹⁷ Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance during World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

¹⁸ Joseph P. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

Sexuality in America.²⁰ First published in 1988, this lengthy volume provides a wealth of information on all matters sexual in the history of the United States. Nonetheless, because of the immensity of its subject, D’Emilio and Freedman take a broad approach and seldom focus on adolescents. Beth Bailey’s *From the Front Porch to Back Seat* offers more detailed information on sex and dating for the period of 1920s to 1960s, especially changes in courtship rituals over time, yet she lacks an in-depth investigation of the physical acts that accompanied dating.²¹ Ellen K. Rothman’s *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* examines the concept of “courtship” from 1770 to 1920. Using over three hundred fifty diaries and autobiographies of white, middle-class adults, Rothman argues that youth throughout history have expressed their affection physically and documents the various practices associated with courting, including the “invention of petting.”²²

One of the most compelling works written on female adolescent sexuality is Susan K. Cahn’s *Sexual Reckonings*.²³ Focusing on the South from the 1920s to the 1960s, Cahn argues that conflicts over teen girls’ sexuality reflected larger social issues including race and class. Her regional focus makes the material more accessible and allows her to provide more details while avoiding generalities. She provides significant insight into the African American female adolescent population, discussing their choices regarding sex and birth control. This present dissertation parallels Cahn’s work in its

²⁰ John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. Second Edition. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

²¹ Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

²² Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984).

²³ Susan Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

approach but has a different regional emphasis. Cahn also gives little attention to young unwed pregnancy, an area of much-needed study that this dissertation attempts to address.

Girls who engaged in premarital sexual activity during the twentieth century were labeled “sex delinquents,” a term that became popular during the Progressive era. Although some studies have been produced on female sexual delinquency in other periods of United States history (primarily Ruth M. Alexander’s *The “Girl Problem”: Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900-1930* and Mary Odem’s *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920*), very few books address teenage female sex delinquency during World War Two and after.²⁴ A noteworthy exception is Marilyn E. Hegarty’s recent publication, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War II*.²⁵ This dissertation draws on Odem’s study; however, using documents from Wisconsin, it attempts to provide insight into female sex delinquency in a later time period than Odem.

Other historians have recently attempted to address the gap in the literature on adolescent sexual behavior. For instance, Rachel Devlin investigates female adolescent sexuality during and after World War Two, looking specifically at father-daughter relationships. Devlin finds that the role of the father was often publicized in the media and that the complicated relationship between a male parent and his daughter was given

²⁴ Ruth M. Alexander, *The “Girl Problem”: Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

²⁵ Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

more significance than is typically assumed.²⁶ In *Unspeakable*, Lynn Sacco investigates father-daughter incest throughout United States history. She finds that during the 1940s when extremely young girls were diagnosed with syphilis or gonorrhea the source was most often their own fathers. However, this diagnosis was often blamed on sanitary issues such as using infected toilets or touching infected door handles.²⁷ In her dissertation, “Unsanctified Encounters,” Amanda Hope Littauer argues that sexually active girls helped to shape society’s sexual values and to expose “the deep contradictions in postwar sexual culture.”²⁸ Her final chapter looks specifically at adolescent female premarital sex. Like other scholars of American sexuality in the 1950s, she attempts to explain the “‘gap’ between explicit, encoded, and prescribed sexual standards on the one hand, and tolerated, implicitly acknowledged, and common sexual conduct on the other.”²⁹ This dissertation intends to contribute to this recent literature by providing insight into teenage sexuality through the specific lens of teenage pregnancy.

In the early 1990s, research on adolescent pregnancy from sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, and public policy makers flooded the popular media. National attention focused on the “epidemic” of teen mothers. Much of this interest came from data and surveys gathered by social scientists and sociologists in the previous two decades. The late 1980s allegedly witnessed a steady rise in pregnancies among white teenagers, which sparked even more awareness. Studies and commentaries published in

²⁶ Rachel Devlin, *Relative Intimacy: Fathers, Adolescent Daughters, and Postwar American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

²⁷ Lynn Sacco, *Unspeakable: Father-Daughter Incest in American History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

²⁸ Amanda Hope Littauer, “Unsanctified Encounters: Women, Girls, and Non-Marital Sexuality in the United States, 1941-1963,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California—Berkeley, 2006, p. 12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 317.

the early 1990s attempted to explain these trends and the seemingly growing social problem of teen pregnancy. In one such work, historian Maris A. Vinovskis offered a historical interpretation and background on the issue.³⁰ Vinovskis provided necessary reasoning and historical insight into the issue, showing how the situation in the 1950s was not far from that of the actions of colonialists in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Monographs and articles outlined by Rickie Solinger, Regina G. Kunzel, and Marian J. Morton in the early 1990s remain the most authoritative sources on single motherhood in the United States during the twentieth century. Rickie Solinger's *Wake Up Little Susie!* offers the most comprehensive examination of the postwar decade.³¹ She argues that the treatment and future of unwed mothers before *Roe v. Wade* depended mainly on race. She discusses in-depth how society reacted to single motherhood. Solinger reveals the tribulations that unwed women faced during and after their pregnancies, arguing that the color of their skin determined if they would be rehabilitated or deemed a social burden.

In contrast to Solinger, Kunzel focuses more on the charities, agencies, and social workers than on the unmarried mothers. In *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*, Kunzel shows how assistance to unwed mothers changed over time from an evangelical movement to a more scientific treatment carried out by social workers. She argues that the unwed mothers were indeed "active and resourceful agents." She then places these women in the larger historical context and sees their struggles as a contest for authority "over the

³⁰ Maris A. Vinovskis, *An "Epidemic" of Adolescent Pregnancy?: Some Historical and Policy Considerations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³¹ Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race before Roe v. Wade* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

meaning of gender, sexuality, motherhood, and the family between 1890 and 1945.”³² Morton’s *And Sin No More* provides a city-level case study. Although she covers the longest time span, her work centers solely on Cleveland and the efforts of its agencies, both private and public. She agrees with Kunzel on many points, but diverges on the issue of agency. Morton does not credit unwed mothers with the same amount of agency. Instead, she discovers that unwed mothers have been treated unfairly in regards to public and private social policy, not only because they were poor and nonwhite but also because they were sexually delinquent. These factors left them in various “degrees of powerlessness.”³³ All three studies provide valuable insight into the lives of the unwed mothers as well as the agencies that reached out to assist them. Yet many aspects of unwed pregnancy need greater attention, especially teenage pregnancy.

Most recently, photographer and journalist Ann Fessler has conducted an oral history project centering on young women who “surrendered” their babies in the decades before *Roe v. Wade*.³⁴ Fessler argues that being forced into placing their babies for adoption scarred these women for life. She finds that most of the girls were unable to forget about their babies and suffered serious emotional trauma. Contrary to popular belief, the decision for adoption was rarely the girl’s own; parents, priests, and other community members often shamed them into giving the baby up. Fessler’s work is currently being made into a documentary.³⁵

³² Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 8.

³³ Marion J. Morton, *And Sin No More: Social Policy and Unwed Mothers in Cleveland, 1855-1990* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993), 16.

³⁴ Ann Fessler, *The Girls Who Went Away: The Hidden History of Women Who Surrendered Children for Adoption in the Decades before Roe v. Wade* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).

³⁵ For more information, please see her website, <http://www.thegirlswhowentaway.com/>.

Increased attention to illegitimacy and teenage pregnancy is not unique to the United States, although the United States still has the highest rates of teen pregnancy and birth among comparable countries.³⁶ Canada's similar experiences with unwed mothers have been documented by Janet Azjenstat in *Going It Alone* and Anne Petrie in *Gone to an Aunt's House*.³⁷ In addition, Mary Louise Adams, a Canadian sociologist, finds similar patterns of gender roles among Canadian youth in her work, *The Trouble with Normal*, which traces the public image of sex, constructions of youth, sex delinquency, and sex advice for teens. She also analyzes sex education in Toronto schools.³⁸ Known as "lone mothers" in Western Europe, single unwed mothers in Great Britain have been the topic of several monographs, including *Lone Motherhood in Twentieth-Century Britain: From Footnote to Front Page* and *Lone Mothers in European Welfare Regimes: Shifting Policy Logics*.³⁹ Significant attention has been given to the asylums for "fallen women" run by several congregations of nuns in Ireland, including the film, *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002), and James Smith's book, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* as well as Frances Finnegan's work, *Do*

³⁶ "Fast Facts: Teen Birth Rates: How Does the United States Compare?" The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, December 2010. See Chart in Appendix 1.

³⁷ Janet Azjenstat, *Going It Alone: Unplanned Single Motherhood in Canada* (Toronto: Human Life Research Institute, 1994) and Anne Petrie, *Gone to An Aunt's House: Remembering Canada's Homes for Unwed Mothers* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1998).

³⁸ Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). Historians such as Susan K. Freeman and Jeffrey P. Moran have also looked at the role of sex education in twentieth-century United States. See Susan K. Freeman, *Sex Goes to School: Girls and Sex Education before the 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2008) and Jeffrey P. Moran *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

³⁹ Kathleen Kiernan, Hilary Land, and Jane Lewis, *Lone Motherhood in Twentieth-Century Britain: From Footnote to Front Page* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) and Jane Lewis, ed., *Lone Mothers in European Welfare Regimes: Shifting Policy Logics* (London: J. Kingsley Publishers, 1997).

Penance or Perish: Magdalen Asylums in Ireland. These homes have reputations for their harsh treatment of young unwed mothers.⁴⁰

All of the preceding works provide a solid foundation for studying girls, their sexuality, and unwed motherhood in the United States. This dissertation attempts to fill a gap in the history of the 1950s and girlhood studies by focusing on the teenage girl, sex, and pregnancy. The contradictions between the image and reality of teenage sexuality have been discussed but never from the perspective of the young girl. Using a unique combination of sources and limiting the scope to the Midwest, this project shows how female adolescent sexuality was increasingly scrutinized and what the severe consequences of defying the prescribed sexuality entailed.

THE MIDWEST

During the two decades following World War Two, the Midwestern economy boomed. Long before becoming the “Rust Belt,” the Midwest held great appeal to those looking for jobs. Nonetheless, by the end of the long 1950s, the population of many Midwestern cities including Milwaukee and Chicago peaked and then began a steady decline.

Despite the fact that it currently ranks as the twenty-sixth most populous city in the United States, Milwaukee often gets overlooked in national literature. Once called

⁴⁰James Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) and Frances Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish: Magdalen Asylums in Ireland* (Kilkenny, Ireland: Congrave Press, 2001). In comparison to North American and Western European countries, Japan has maintained a relatively low illegitimacy rate. Ekaterina Hertog discusses unwed motherhood in Japan in her work, *Tough Choices* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009). Hertog investigates why Japan has had little change in the percentage of children born out of wedlock over the past fifty years. Although divorce rates and numbers of unmarried couples have risen, the percentage of illegitimate children has remained the same. In order to find the reasons behind this, Hertog conducted extensive research including oral interviews with academics, single mothers, and social workers.

“the biggest small town in America” and “the most comfortable city in the land,” Milwaukee gained a national reputation for its breweries.⁴¹ Milwaukee flourished during World War Two and thrived as an industrial center in the immediate postwar years. In 1946, for instance, Milwaukee’s unemployment rate was barely 2 percent.⁴² Wanting to create a cityscape that mirrored the economic success, Mayor Frank P. Zeidler approved extensive plans to revamp the city. The 1950s marked the “greatest wave of building activity in Milwaukee’s history.”⁴³

Milwaukee’s long history of housing immigrant groups such as the Irish, German, and Polish made it especially appealing. In addition, especially after World War Two, Milwaukee became an attractive destination for African Americans from the South. They settled in a part of town near downtown called Bronzeville until the 1950s, when housing densities were pushed them north and west. Because Milwaukee’s black population arrived later than Chicago’s, it has been referred to as the “Late Great Migration.”⁴⁴ Historian John Gurda contends that this is the reason behind the significant racial tension that still exists within the city. Because Chicago “historically absorbed the major share of migrants entering the region from the South,” Milwaukee was “a secondary destination at best.”⁴⁵ Consequently, Milwaukee’s African-American population remained minor until after World War Two, growing from 8,821 to 21,772 during the 1940s and reaching 62,458 in 1960.⁴⁶ The other immigrant groups responded with hostility when African Americans began moving into their neighborhoods. Nonetheless, the African-American

⁴¹ John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999), 320.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 323.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 326.

⁴⁴ John McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier: Planning and the Politics of Growth, 1910-1960* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 193.

⁴⁵ Gurda, 360.

⁴⁶ McCarthy, 195.

community grew rapidly, partially due to the youth and fertility of its members.⁴⁷

Overall, Milwaukee's population grew steadily and peaked in 1960 with some 741,324 residents, making it America's eleventh most populous city.⁴⁸ However, it was not internal growth that caused a population increase but rather the aforementioned migrations as well as the annexation of neighboring towns. Starting in the late 1960s, Milwaukee faced the same fate as other Midwestern cities as blue-collar jobs began to disappear and the white flight sent certain residents to the suburbs.

A study of the Midwest could not be conducted without including the Second City. As America's third most populous city, Chicago was and still is the hub of the Midwest. Historically, Chicago has been the leader in social services in the Midwest. With Jane Addams and the Hull House at the lead, the Progressive Era permanently impacted the urban landscape of Chicago. The Progressive legacy carried on throughout much of the twentieth century.

Chicago played "a key role" in World War Two by providing manpower and industrial production.⁴⁹ Because of its role as a transportation center, Chicago served as an ideal location for defense industries. According to the *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, by D-Day in 1944, the average Chicago block had contributed seven residents to the military.⁵⁰ Chicago became an industrial base of over 1,400 companies, filling \$2 billion in war orders by early 1942.⁵¹ It ranked second only to Detroit in the value of war goods produced. In order to fill the need for workers, over 60,000 African Americans from the

⁴⁷ Gurda, 361.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 352.

⁴⁹ Dominic A. Pacyga, *Chicago: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 276.

⁵⁰ Perry R. Duis, "World War II," in *The Electronic Encyclopedia of Chicago* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 2005). <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/>

⁵¹ Pacyga, 276.

South traveled to Chicago for war jobs. This population would continue to grow in the following decades. Chicago was also very visible in the war years because of its proximity to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station, Fort Sheridan, and Glenview Naval Air Station. These military bases made Milwaukee and Chicago prime recreational spots for soldiers. Long after the war ended, men from these bases were travelling to Milwaukee and Chicago to find entertainment, often in the form of young girls.

Chicago's population continued to grow in the 1940s, reaching 3.7 million residents in 1950.⁵² However, after World War Two, people began to head west as the nation's industrial base shifted to states like California. In the 1950s, Chicago faced severe racial tension as the black population grew steadily. African Americans attempted to find new homes within the city, whereas white neighborhoods fought to keep these newcomers out of their backyards. Along with changes within the city demographically, families were moving outside of the main city to the suburbs where they could escape the difficulties of urbanization occurring within the central city. This move caused a great deal social disruption, creating problems to which social workers and community organizations struggled to respond. In regards to illegitimate pregnancies, Chicago proved to be a model for other cities as its community leaders held positions in national organizations and distributed their ideas through national publications.

Milwaukee and Chicago were therefore chosen as case studies within the Midwest because of their differences and similarities. While Chicago offers a "big city" perspective, Milwaukee provides a more intimate look at teenage sexuality. Chicago's reputation for social work makes it a key place to examine the local response to the seemingly growing "girl problem." Chicago's city officials, social workers, educators,

⁵² Ibid., 284.

and other community members reacted to teenage sexuality with committees, social agencies, laws, and other forms of control. Milwaukee responded similarly to teenage sexuality, but not with the same force or intensity.

THE LONG 1950s

This dissertation covers the period from the end of World War Two until the mid-1960s, which historians have begun to call the “long 1950s.”⁵³ Specifically in this work, the “long 1950s” refers to the years between 1946 and 1964, arguing that the later 1940s and the early 1960s are more similar to the years in the 1950s than the early and later halves of the 1940s and 1960s respectively. During this time period, change occurred in almost every aspect of the American family.

Marriage and child-bearing rose to all-time highs; women began marrying and bearing children at younger ages. Those who came of age during and after World War Two were the “most marrying generation on record,” with 96.4 percent of women and 94.1 percent of men tying the knot. The average marriage age dropped and almost everyone who did get married did so before his or her mid-twenties. In fact, 1957 saw the highest rate of teenage childbearing in twentieth-century United States. More than 97 out of every 1,000 women aged fifteen to nineteen gave birth.⁵⁴ This statistic was not as alarming as might have been expected because most of these teenage girls were married at the time of their child’s birth. Family size also increased. In fact, “most couples had two to four children, born sooner after marriage and spaced closer together than in

⁵³ The specific date of creation for the term “the long 1950s” is difficult to determine, but the phrase been used in titles of various panels at the American Historical Association conferences.

⁵⁴ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 202.

previous years.”⁵⁵ In general, families were having more babies than ever, fueling a baby boom that would last from 1946 to 1964. Correspondingly, these years also witnessed the rise of advice books for childcare such as Dr. Benjamin Spock’s *Baby and Child Care* (1946).⁵⁶ Family, or at the least the image of a family, was central to 1950s culture.

World War Two had ended and soldiers returned home to settle down. The Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944, more commonly known as the GI Bill, facilitated this process by providing soldiers with the opportunity to attend college or receive job training and to buy houses.⁵⁷ They were given preferential treatment in hiring for government jobs and subsidized home loans. More people were moving to the suburbs. The first Levittown was constructed in New York in October 1947 and this approach to homebuilding soon spread across the nation, offering affordable houses for a growing middle class. Government programs made it as cheap to buy a house in the suburbs as to rent an apartment in the city. The Highway Act of 1956 also helped provide work and boost business.⁵⁸ Real wages rose during the 1950s and 1960s. Benefits for workers also improved. By 1960, an estimated 60 percent of Americans lived at what the government defined as the middle-class standard.⁵⁹ Televisions, home air conditioning, and automatic dishwashers were now in widespread use. The long 1950s was then seemingly a time of abundance for all levels of society, especially the middle class.

⁵⁵ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 14.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History*, Second Edition (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2009), 873.

One of the defining signs of the 1950s conformity is a devotion to traditional gender roles. Period feature films and television shows depict impeccably groomed housewives catering to the needs of their husbands and children. Young girls growing up in the 1950s were expected to follow their mother's example, to one day become the perfect housewife. The Kitchen Debate of 1959 came to epitomize the dominance of domesticity in the 1950s. When Vice President Richard Nixon attended the American National Exhibition in Moscow where American consumer goods and leisure equipment were on display, he and Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev argued over the merits of capitalism and communism. Nixon contended that the model suburban kitchen represented American freedom.⁶⁰ The significance of gender roles combined with the rise of tailored consumer markets make the 1940s and 1950s a complex era to study girl culture and its development. Girls were faced with significant expectations and even more significant temptations.

While many aspects of life at home were flourishing, others were not. The Cold War began as the United States and Soviet Union's wartime alliance disintegrated. An atmosphere of anxiety emerged with the creation and testing of nuclear bombs. The Korean War, in which an estimated 33,000 Americans died, epitomized the debate over capitalism and communism, testing President Harry Truman's policy of containment.⁶¹ The fight against communism was not limited to foreign policy and international affairs. The Red Scare and McCarthyism created a tense environment on the home front as people were blacklisted and investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Films such as *The Red Menace* (1949), *I Married a Communist* (1949), and

⁶⁰ May, 145.

⁶¹ Foner, 849.

The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951) both encouraged and reflected these fears of communism at home.⁶² FBI director J. Edgar Hoover led the hunt for subversives while also finding time to attract national attention to the issue of juvenile delinquency. During World War Two and the decade after, Hoover targeted adolescent girls who he claimed were endangering American moral values. In interviews with magazines, he warned about the potential threat of youth and crime.⁶³

The fight against communism was only one of many battles being waged in the 1950s. One of the most prominent and confrontational conflicts was over segregation. The 1950s witnessed protests and riots, rallies and violence, all in the name of equality. The Supreme Court decision of *Brown v Board of Education* in 1954 declared that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."⁶⁴ This decision, however, was not upheld in the South, and years of protest and boycotts proved necessary in gaining equality for African Americans. Even though the Civil Rights Act passed in 1964, discrimination continued and would continue long past the 1950s. The long 1950s was then a tumultuous time, filled with both fear and hope as citizens of all races and ages adapted to the postwar economic, political, and social landscapes.

Despite the fact that historians have devoted significant attention to this period, few works focus solely on teenagers. The sexuality of teenagers is often overlooked or lumped tighter with college co-eds. Female adolescent sexuality tends to be combined with studies of women, thus not receiving specific attention. This dissertation attempts to

⁶² Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, Second Edition (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 133.

⁶³ James Burkhardt Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 28. See also J. Edgar Hoover, "Wild Children," *American Magazine*, Vol. 136 (July 1943).

⁶⁴ David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Random House, 1993), 423. Hoover was even featured in the *Youth in Crisis* (1943), a short documentary which was part of the March of Times series. This documentary exaggerated the extent of juvenile delinquency in the country as a result of World War Two.

fill that gap in the literature and prove that the 1950s were indeed a crucial time for adolescents and sex in the United States. It argues what other historians have suggested before: that the roots of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s lie in the 1950s. It further contends that a youth culture shaped by World War Two and then negotiated within the sphere of Cold War and suburbia contributed to the women's and sexual liberation movements.

RACE

While nonwhite women and girls faced similar issues, their sexuality has been viewed and treated differently than that of their white counterparts. Consequently, this dissertation focuses on the sexuality of white adolescent females. Due to racial issues existing since colonial times, nonwhite females especially African Americans have not been granted the same protections under the law as white females.⁶⁵ Instead, African American women have traditionally been assumed to be promiscuous by nature, and consequently, sex with these females has been considered less of a crime, if one at all. For example, according to historians John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, white men in the South during the 1700s “assumed that black women were willing to have sexual relationships with them. In fact, female slaves had little choice about whether to respond to white men's sexual advances, whatever their actual desires.”⁶⁶

Historically speaking, African-American women have been neglected by sexuality reformers whose sole focus has been the young white female. For instance, when the age of consent reform occurred in the late 1800s, purity activists ignored

⁶⁵ D'Emilio and Freedman, 35.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 36.

African-American women and girls.⁶⁷ When the Mann Act, which prevented the transportation of females across state lines for “immoral’ purposes,” passed in 1912, African-American females were once again left out.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, not much had changed by the 1940s and 1950s. Black women were often denied admission into maternity homes. The community ignored the plight of black unwed females, assuming that they would keep their babies and raise them on their own. Black babies were not adopted at the same rates as white babies; they were seen as a financial burden rather than a commodity like the white babies. The Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) Act of 1935 made this even more obvious. When large numbers of black women started applying for ADC money in the late 1950s, the public became outraged. Pitting the white “good-bad girl” against the sexually promiscuous black woman, the public accused black females of becoming pregnant on purpose in order to receive federal monetary assistance. This resembled the stereotype that would later be deemed the “welfare queen.”⁶⁹

Although it was and still is argued that non-white females were more promiscuous and/or more accepting of unwed motherhood, this is a proven fallacy. Unwed motherhood was not encouraged or praised in nonwhite communities. Rather, these women typically had less access to contraception and fewer means of concealing or terminating pregnancies than white females.⁷⁰ The dynamics of race and single pregnancy is brilliantly explained in Rickie Solinger’s *Wake Up Little Susie!*. Solinger’s thought-provoking work remains the main authority on this issue. Because of the significant differences in social attitudes regarding African American youth and the

⁶⁷ Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 10.

⁶⁸ D’Emilio and Freedman, 202.

⁶⁹ Solinger, 30.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 187.

limited services and public resources available to African American unwed mothers during the long 1950s, this dissertation focuses mainly on white adolescent female sexuality.

TERMINOLOGY AND SOURCES

The subjects of this study are referred to as “girls,” “young women,” and “female adolescents” interchangeably. Although these terms can be contested, in general the term “girl” as used in this paper refers a female under the age of twenty. Some historians define “girl” as an “individual engaged in the process of coming-of-age—of becoming adult women.”⁷¹ Because this dissertation focuses on age as a specific categorization, “girl” then denotes a specific numerical time period: females under the age of twenty. In addition, the males alleged to be the fathers of unwed mothers’ children are labeled the “putative fathers.” Sociologists, caseworkers, and the agencies themselves used this term in the postwar decades. Since a father could not be confirmed without a paternity test and since DNA paternity tests were not used until 1988, the male was then only assumed to be the father. Another contested word included in this work is “illegitimacy.” Even though this term is no longer politically correct, it appears frequently in this work because it was the vernacular used during the decades discussed.

“Unwed mother” is another term employed repeatedly throughout this dissertation. “Unwed” is a bit ambiguous. According to the *Encyclopedia of Motherhood*, the unwed mother is “usually not yet a mother, but instead a woman who

⁷¹ Anya Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 5.

becomes pregnant before marriage.”⁷² The 1948 study on “Services for Unmarried Mothers and Their Children” defined an unwed mother as “a woman who is pregnant or is the mother of a child and who is either unmarried or whose husband is not the father of the child.”⁷³ This is the definition that will be used.⁷⁴ “Unwed” and “unmarried” also implies a moral problem. The phrase unwed mother usually had “a negative connotation and alluded to the disrepute and social stigma that awaited an unmarried young woman who became pregnant, as communities considered these girls to have revealed their poor ethical character and lack of morality.”⁷⁵ The terms “teen mom” or “single mom” are now used more frequently in replacement of “unwed mother.”

Finding primary sources on girls and adolescent sexuality proved to be especially challenging. The task became even more difficult when discussing pregnancy and illegitimacy. This dissertation draws on a variety of sources in order to provide a more complex picture of teenage sexuality and pregnancy in the long 1950s. Magazines and newspapers, specifically advice columns, offer insights into public opinion of unwed mothers and teenage females. Letters from girls who wrote in to these magazines and newspapers asking for guidance also provided a glimpse into their thoughts and fears. This dissertation also employs advice books and guides to sex for teenagers to show what teenagers were being taught about sex. Studies conducted by the Women’s Service Division of United Charities of Chicago reveal local programs that addressed the growing problem of unwed pregnancy. The maternity home records from the Florence Crittenton

⁷² Myrl Coulter, “Unwed Mothers,” in *Encyclopedia of Motherhood*, Volume 1, edited by Andrea O’Reilly, (California: SAGE Publications, 2010), 1234.

⁷³ Research Department of Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, “Services for Unmarried Mothers and Their Children, November 30, 1948,” January 1950, p. 1, Folder 9, Box 686, Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, Chicago Historical Society.

⁷⁴ In this dissertation, the author does not discuss teenagers who were married. Instead, this work focuses on those teenage mothers who were unmarried.

⁷⁵ Coulter, 1234.

Anchorage in Chicago provide information on the daily life in a home for unwed mothers and the daily experiences of pregnant teens.

Because of the secrecy and shame traditionally tied to premarital sex and unwed motherhood, the voices of these girls are usually faint or non-existent. Although maternity homes kept detailed records of their clients, most of these records have been destroyed or are sealed from public access, as is the case with the Salvation Army. Thus this dissertation attempts to uncover the background of these girls and their familial situations using a series of client cards from a maternity home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin as a primary case study. These cards reveal the age, religion, nationality, and occupation of the female while providing some information about the putative father. Nonetheless, these cards obviously have their limitations and the personal details about the girl's past and her path to pregnancy remain lost with the client interviews. In order to discover the voice of the female sex delinquent, case files from the Wisconsin School for Girls have been employed. This industrial school, located in Oregon, Wisconsin, served girls from all over the state. Research conducted in these files only examined residents from Milwaukee County. These case files reveal the perspective of the social workers, judges, psychiatrists, and school superintendents as well as providing small glimpses into the minds of the teenaged girls.

ORGANIZATION

This study opens with a description of teenage girl culture in the early twentieth century, ending with the beginning of World War Two. Although the word "teen-ager" would not become mainstream until the 1950s, adolescents have always existed. With the

dawn of high schools, they began to create a unique youth culture. This culture is described in the first chapter. The next chapter discusses the war years and the rising controversy regarding young girls and their sexuality. Victory girls allegedly threatened the social order and put the nation at risk. This chapter investigates the reasons behind these fears, the actual behaviors of young girls in Milwaukee during World War Two, and how public concern would shape the treatment of adolescent female sexuality in the following years. In time, a more visible teenager culture emerged in the 1940s. Kelly Schrum, author of *Some Wore Bobby Sox*, argues that it was teenage girls, not boys, who shaped teenage culture in this formative period. Thus in order to understand teenage pregnancy and how and why it was happening, one must have insight into teenage culture and girlhood during this period. Chapter Three therefore focuses on the long 1950s and the way teenage girls interacted with society, looking specifically at dating, sexuality, and popular culture.

The fourth chapter analyzes society's attempt to control the seemingly-exploding sexual culture. During the postwar period, "uncontained" sexual activity was seen as a threat to American society. At the same time, a vibrant sexual culture including the publication of *Playboy* in 1953 was thriving. Advice books encouraged married couples to have active sex lives. In 1948 and 1953, Alfred C. Kinsey also dropped a major "bomb" on Americans with the publication of his studies on the sexual behavior of males and females. With these publications came panic and fear that youth would see the findings as a green light for sex activities. Community members, teachers, and authorities tried to contain this bubbling sexuality in the institution of marriage. This chapter explores their efforts at "containment."

Despite adult disapproval and attempts at “containment” through strict social controls, teenagers did, of course, engage in sexual intercourse. One of the most serious consequences of this was pregnancy. Those unfortunate girls who did get pregnant faced traumatic repercussions. “Experts” of all kinds attempted to explain teenage pregnancy. Chapter Five includes the voices of these “experts” at the national level. Psychologists, doctors, social workers, newspaper reporters, and journalists all discussed unwed mothers. Psychologists such as Helen Deutsche, Clark Vincent, and Leontine Young influenced the perceptions of unwed teenage mothers. Freudian theories seeped into the formal education of social workers and impacted the way they treated unwed mothers. Later, members of the medical community tackled the issue. In Chicago, public officials and social workers worked together to understand the problem in order to better address it. Consequently, Chapter Six looks at Chicago as a case study of how a city responded to teenage pregnancy. This chapter shows how experts in various fields across the nation impacted the policies at the local level.

The seventh chapter focuses on the girls themselves and how they reacted to their own pregnancies. As mentioned before, although this is an extremely difficult voice to find, some information exists that reveals the race, religion, ethnicities of these girls, allowing a fuller picture to be revealed. This chapter uses a specific maternity home in Milwaukee as a case study in order to provide valuable personal details into the backgrounds of young unwed mothers. Pregnant girls were considered “unfortunate girls” who got caught participating in unsanctioned sexual activities. Their struggles exemplify the debates over adolescent sexuality.

MAIN ARGUMENT

Historian Susan K. Cahn states “from rural migrant girls of the 1920s seeking employment and adventure in the city, to teenage girls of the 1950s fawning and fainting over Elvis Presley, the sexuality of adolescent girls mattered—and it drew the attention of politicians, reformers, moralists, novelists, and social critics.”⁷⁶ This current study attempts to provide insight not only into society and the institutions, but also into the lives of the girls themselves. Some were “nonwhite,” some were poor and from broken homes, but many, especially those who used maternity homes and social services, were white girls from the middle class. Premarital sex and unwed pregnancy were not limited to the stereotypical “bad girl.”

The 1940s and 1950s is the formative period of modern sexuality in the United States. Long before the 1960s and the free love movement, young women were expressing their sexual freedoms. They were saying yes to sex before marriage and to men they would not marry. Girls in the 1940s grappled with the new sexual culture created by the war while still adhering to the rigid sexual mores that the new family structure of the 1950s attempted to enforce. Female adolescents were having sex out of wedlock and it was becoming more socially acceptable to do so as long as they did not get "caught." Unfortunately, birth control and access to birth control did not develop at the same pace. Young girls did not have legal access to oral contraceptives until 1970, and most doctors and Planned Parenthood organizations would not give diaphragms to single women. Because of the social stigma, most teenagers could not buy condoms and such a purchase could potentially be reported back to their parents. As a result, girls had

⁷⁶ Susan K. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 307.

little means of protection from pregnancy or venereal disease, yet they were feeling more pressure to have sex at earlier ages. Obviously, many of them were bound to get pregnant. This paper explores the contradictions of the 1940s and 1950s, focusing on the girls who were not June Cleaver--at least not initially.

This dissertation also attempts to go beyond the stereotypes to discover the unwed school-age mother of the postwar decades. These girls were treated poorly by society and the institutions created to assist them. However, the social opinion of and type of care for these girls changed drastically between 1946 and 1964. While she was once considered an adult and shamed into keeping her baby as redemption for her sin, she was later transformed into a child who should give up her baby in order to redeem herself to society. By giving up her child, she could eventually become a woman worthy of marriage and motherhood. This tied in with the postwar society's growing need for white babies. The baby boom of the late 1940s and 1950s spurred adoptions, as more infertile couples felt they needed a baby to become a family. This also corresponded with the rising popularity of psychology in the postwar decades, a field which viewed teenagers less as adults and more so as children who were in the process of maturing. The practical needs of society and the corresponding psychological trends thereby shaped the care of the unwed teenage mother.

Historian Mary Odem argues that “gender, class, and racial tensions in American society” have tended to fuel moral campaigns against adolescent female sexuality.⁷⁷

Although Odem investigates an earlier time period in her book, this dissertation upholds her argument and applies it to the long 1950s. The assault on teenage sexuality—in particular on unwed pregnant teens—reflects larger social issues. Teenage girls fell

⁷⁷ Odem, 4.

victim to the insecurities and underlying conflicts in the 1950s as it was easier for adults to blame female adolescents for immoral transgressions than to point the finger at themselves. The story of teenage unwed mothers in the 1940s and 1950s then reveals a society full of contradictions. Adults stated that sex was for marriage only but looked the other way when teenagers participated in premarital sexual relations. Older generations had also participated in extramarital affairs and in premarital sex as the Kinsey Reports verified. The 1950s was a decade of conflict and generational tension hidden beneath a veil of conformity. Sexuality, especially youthful sexuality, terrified the older generations. In a world of instability and insecurity, adults sought to maintain control over teenagers, in particular female sexual behaviors. Unwed mothers personified this fear. Consequently, teenage girls and their wombs became the battleground of sexuality.

CHAPTER ONE
MODERN GIRLS AND PETTING PARTIES:
FEMALE ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY IN THE 1920S AND 1930S

In January 1932, a multi-page question-and-answer article entitled “Must I Pet to Be Popular?” appeared in *Ladies’ Home Journal*. Written for an audience of female teenage readers and their parents, this exposé revealed the fears of young girls who desperately wanted boys to like them. One girl described “necking” (any kissing above the shoulders) as that “debateful problem on the road to Popularity.” To her, necking was the deciding factor between “sitting home alone every night vainly hoping for the telephone to ring, or having dates every night, and phone calls galore.”¹ According to the editor of the “Sub-Deb” column in *Ladies’ Home Journal*, most teenage girls growing up in the 1930s faced similar problems. In fact by the late 1920s, petting, caressing, and kissing below the neck, had become standard. According to historian Beth Bailey, necking and petting were “public conventions, expected elements in any romantic relationship between a boy and a girl.”² Vastly different from the dating practices of previous generations, petting and necking were staples of the emerging modern teenage culture.

Bailey contends that youth born in the first four decades of the twentieth century had “sexual experiences fundamentally different from the experiences of their nineteenth-century counterparts.” Even if the physical acts remained the same, the meaning behind them did not. According to Bailey, “sex and sexuality increasingly entered the public

¹ “Must I Pet to Be Popular?” *Ladies’ Home Journal* vol. XLIX no. 1 (January 1932): 7.

² Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 81.

sphere and became part of the very definition of youth.”³ This portion of my study examines the “first sexual revolution” of the twentieth century, focusing on female adolescents and the role of dating and sexuality in shaping a youth culture. Most social historians consider the 1920s the first “modern” decade. In this use, the term “modern” refers not only to changes in technology and science but also in attitudes and beliefs. Although petting and necking were considered “modern,” some historians argue that in regards to dating and sexual patterns, changes in the moral code had “begun well before the battles along the Somme.”⁴ Nonetheless, in the 1920s sexual acts that had once been deemed unacceptable became more common. Even though behavior standards had been loosening, never had it shifted “so radically in such a short time.”⁵ Consequently, parents of teenagers in the 1920s watched in shock as their children rode around in cars, participated in “petting parties,” and danced close together in public. To the older generation, these youth were rebellious and immoral. This attitude of distress led to increased attempts to control teenage behaviors, especially the sexual activities of females. This chapter explains how adolescent sexuality was transformed during the opening decades of the twentieth century while maintaining that the 1920s were a formative period in the establishment of behavioral norms for the following years.

THE MAKING OF ADOLESCENCE

“Teenagers” have always existed as a chronological stage in life, but the concept of adolescence as a behavioral period did not appear as a description of the period

³ Ibid., 77.

⁴ Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 288.

⁵ Ibid., 289.

between childhood and adulthood until the turn of the twentieth century. The birth of adolescence is most frequently credited to G. Stanley Hall who published his findings in *Adolescence* in 1904.⁶ The book sold over twenty-five thousand copies in the United States.⁷ A contemporary of Sigmund Freud, Hall characterized adolescence as “a plastic stage of human development, during which the force of the instinctual endowment of the race expanded its most advanced energies and then gave way to the potential for propitious environmental influence.”⁸ Basing his work on nineteenth-century sexual values and Victorian morality, Hall linked adolescence directly to sexuality. It was during adolescence that most humans fought sexual urges and thus needed to bolster their moral characters. Education, religion, music, and athletics were suitable activities to channel their energy. In particular, Hall instructed mothers to supervise their daughters closely during adolescence. Proper care for girls, according to Hall, included “plain diets, plenty of sleep, little mental strain, regular exercise, and careful instruction in sex hygiene.”⁹ Indeed, the ideal sex hygiene lessons would highlight motherhood rather than the actual sex act. While he stressed the importance of guidance for girls, Hall believed that all adolescents should be monitored and supervised.¹⁰

Hall’s theory of adolescence was widely accepted because of its explanatory power. Although many people considered his ideas common sense, his theory was obviously useful and necessary for a society that required a form of classification for this stage of development. His ideas were also practical in the sense that teenagers were a

⁶ G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904).

⁷ Crista DeLuzio, *Female Adolescence in American Scientific Thought, 1830-1930* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 95.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁹ Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 102.

¹⁰ DeLuzio, 96.

relatively new group in society. At the turn of the twentieth century, adolescents had become more visible to society for multiple reasons. Public schools were expanding, segregating students by age and from adults. People were having fewer children and thus expending more resources on the few children they did have. A person's period of education and occupational training was growing longer, thus delaying marriage. All of these factors combined made young people more noticeable, creating a need for Hall's theories and categorizations.

With the invention of adolescence came more parental anxiety. This was paired with the decrease in family size and increase in child worth at the turn of the century. Sociologist Viviana Zelizer argues that children became more valuable in the early 1900s since parents were having fewer children, and thus investing more time and money in the ones they did have.¹¹ In addition, it was commonly understood that adolescence was a time of sexual maturation, a time for dealing with the consequences of puberty. Parents were concerned that their children would not be able to handle these bodily changes without proper instruction. Society, including G. Stanley Hall, realized the importance of creating guidelines and standards to manage adolescents. This would soon be applied to sex and sexuality, as seen in the efforts to implement sex education and contain teenage sexuality in the twentieth century.

ABSTINENCE: THE AMERICAN MYTH

As historian Stephanie Coontz argues, "the 1960s generation did not invent premarital and out-of-wedlock sex. Indeed, the straitlaced sexual morality of nineteenth-

¹¹ Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 11.

century Anglo-American societies, partly revived in the 1950s, seems to have been a historical and cultural aberration.”¹² More concisely stated, the pattern of premarital sexual activity is not a straight upward line toward promiscuity; rather, it is a series of dips and rises. Historians John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman argue that the meaning and place of sexuality in American life is constantly changing and is continuously reshaped by the economy, family, and politics.¹³ By analyzing these data, one can see how attitudes towards sex and sexuality have not remained constant.

In British America, most of the colonists’ views on sexuality and premarital intercourse derived from mores established in England. In general, there was a clear distinction between proper sexual expression that led to reproduction and sexual transgressions and those that occurred outside of marriage for purposes other than reproduction. Most English settlers tried to maintain traditional patterns of family and community life. In addition, because it created economic burdens for the community, bastardy was a significant issue.¹⁴ The settlement did not want to be financially responsible for the unwed mother and her child; therefore, those who committed such deeds were punished severely. Illegitimate children were treated negatively by the rest of society, and denied the same care and rights as legitimate children. When a marriage could not be arranged, town officials tried to determine whom the father was to ensure he would provide financially for the child. The traditional way of dealing with unwed mothers and establishing paternity in the colonial days was to ask the woman who the father was during childbirth. Colonialists believed that the woman would tell the truth

¹² Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 184.

¹³ John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, Second Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Most evidence available from the colonial period is based on data from New England.

during labor. These “fathers” would have to pay fines and often received a form of physical punishment. On the other hand, women who would not marry faced more severe punishment because their crime was so visible. If they did not own property-- which was likely--they could be whipped instead of fined. They could also be ostracized.¹⁵

Despite these harsh penalties and negative public backlash, women still bore babies out of wedlock. Some historians even contend that out-of-wedlock births may have increased throughout the colonial period, especially toward the end of the seventeenth century, and then “accelerated markedly in the second quarter of the eighteenth century.”¹⁶ According to data analysis conducted by Michael S. Hindus and Daniel Scott Smith in 1975, after 1660 engaged couples increasingly indulged in sexual activity and many of these women were pregnant when they were married. By the second half of the eighteenth century, the rate of premarital conceptions was almost thirty percent of first births.¹⁷ Some historians have suggested that engagement might have included the right to have sex. Premarital sex was less sinful if confined to couples already planning to get married or formally engaged. Most couples would continue forward toward marriage if the girl got pregnant because neither partner suffered any real

¹⁵ D’Emilio and Freedman, 22. The New England legend of Emeline Gurney was the inspiration for a PBS documentary. *Sins of Our Mothers* premiered as a PBS special in 1989. Gurney was from an extremely poor family in Fayette, Maine. When she was 13, she was sent to work at the mills in Lowell, Massachusetts. There she was seduced by her older male boss and soon became pregnant. She gave her son to a local family and then moved back to Maine. Gurney resumed her life, working in the fields and shunning all male advances. Years later when she was in her 30s, a young man came to town for business. They fell madly in love despite the age difference and got married. When his family came to town a year later, they recognized Gurney as his mother. She was then ostracized from society and her story retold as a means of enticing young women to keep their own children so they would not one day marry their own sons.

¹⁶ Kristen Luker, *Dubious Conceptions: The Politics of Teenage Pregnancy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 17.

¹⁷ Daniel Scott Smith and Michael S. Hindus, “Premarital Pregnancy in America, 1640-1971: An Overview and Interpretation,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5 (1975): 537-70.

setback. As long as the couple wed and publically denounced their actions, they were accepted back into the community. As long as the sinners affirmed that marriage was “the rightful place for sexual relations,” they could be forgiven and return to their position in society.¹⁸

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, attitudes about courtship began to change as more young couples sought romantic love. Parental control regarding wedding mates started to wane. Premarital pregnancy was one way young couples could guarantee marriage to their person of choice. This was seen as a “revolt of the young.”¹⁹ Premarital pregnancies also reflected a breakdown of the traditional familial and community regulation of sexuality. Although this did free young women from the constraints of moral codes to an extent, it also led to new risks in consensual sexual relationships: it was now harder to ensure that premarital intercourse would lead to marriage.

In the nineteenth century, there was a substantial decrease in premaritally conceived births. This has been attributed to the widespread effects of the Second Great Awakening and other religious movements which stressed abstinence until marriage and then only for reproduction purposes. Sexual intercourse was “no longer viewed as a normal or tolerated component of the courtship process.”²⁰ Reformers preached of the sins and immorality of premarital sexual activity. The medical community supported this belief by arguing that “any early sexual activity was dangerous to the physical

¹⁸ D’Emilio and Freedman, 27.

¹⁹ Ibid., 43.

²⁰ Maris A. Vinovskis, “Historical Perspectives on Adolescent Pregnancy,” in Margaret K. Rosenheim and Mark F. Testa, eds., *Early Parenthood and Coming of Age in the 1990s* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 138.

development of adolescents.”²¹ Medical writings contended that premarital sex was a waste of strength and vitality. A social emphasis on the purity and innocence of young women also emerged. If she had sex outside of marriage, a woman could destroy her and her family’s reputations, and thereby render her unfit for marriage. After the Civil War, “changes in the role of women, the definition of youth, and the acceptability of premarital sexual activity” combined to make early marriage a “less desirable solution.”²² More girls were receiving formal education at this time and desired to postpone marriage, temporarily or even permanently. In fact, by the end of the nineteenth century, the average at marriage was 26.1 years for men and 22 years for women.²³ These averages would not be seen again until the 1970s. Among the females born between 1860 and 1880—who would be the girls who participated in “courting between the late 1870s and about 1910”—“11 percent never married, the highest proportion in American history.” Furthermore, among the first generation of college women, “the age at marriage and the proportion of women never marrying were even higher than in the general population.”²⁴

Sex reemerged as part of the courtship process again in the early twentieth century as the Victorian mores of the nineteenth century slowly disintegrated. Alfred Kinsey would report in the 1950s that adolescent sexual activity actually increased in the early part of the twentieth century. Indeed, Kinsey’s studies revealed more about that the sexual practices of youth of the 1910s and 1920s than those in the 1940s and 1950s.

Most of the men and women he interviewed came of age in the opening decades of the

²¹ Ibid.

²² Susan E. Harari and Maris A. Vinovskis, “Adolescent Sexuality, Pregnancy, and Childbearing in the Past,” in Annette Lawson and Deborah L. Rhode, eds., *The Politics of Pregnancy: Adolescent Sexuality and Public Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 29.

²³ Jeffrey P. Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 15.

²⁴ Rothman, 249.

twentieth century. Indeed, Kinsey stated that “Today [in 1953] older persons seem less disturbed about the younger generation. The reason seems patent if we realize that the parents and grandparents of today were the youth who introduced the new patterns of sexual behavior thirty years ago.”²⁵ Kinsey showed that women born after 1900 were more likely to have participated in premarital petting and intercourse than their peers born before 1900. The study also found that the younger generations began petting at an earlier age as well.²⁶

Nonetheless, Kinsey’s study also revealed a pattern similar to the colonial days. Although these women did participate in premarital sex, they were far from promiscuous. As the chart below demonstrates, rarely did such acts occur during early adolescence and most of their experiences were with their fiancés. The chart also reveals that this was not the same experience for males—they were more likely to engage in “occasional premarital coitus.”²⁷ Kinsey concluded that premarital sex for women usually led to marriage and that engagement “tended to soften attitudes toward sex.”²⁸ The incidence of premarital sex increased “sharply, to roughly fifty percent of the cohort,” among “women coming of age in the 1920s.” This statistic remained “relatively constant until the late 1960s.”²⁹ The main change was not in the act of sexual intercourse itself but in the attitude regarding it. What had once been unacceptable and shameful had become commonplace.

²⁵ Alfred C. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1953), 301.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 299.

²⁷ Modell, 40.

²⁸ Harari and Vinovskis, 32.

²⁹ D’Emilio and Freedman, 256.

Proportion of Ever-Married Persons Having Had Premarital Coitus with Fiancées and with Others (excluding Prostitutes), by Birth Cohort and Sex (in percentages)					
Birth Cohort	Approximate Period of Premarital Coitus	Males		Females	
		Fiancées	Others	Fiancées	Others
Before 1900	Before 1920	45.4	66.3	31.1	15.3
1900-09	1920s	61.1	71.9	40.2	27.2
1910-19	1930s	50.2	76.5	41.2	18.9
1920-24	Early 1940s	57.6	81.6	33.7	21.1
1925+	mid-1940s+	48.0	80.1	38.4	22.1

Source: Taken from John Modell, *Into One's Own* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 41. Based on Kinsey's findings in his two volumes on sexual behavior.

SEXUAL CULTURE

In 1913, William Marion Reedy wrote that America had “struck sex o'clock.”³⁰

Although many contemporary observers placed the blame for women's sexuality on the dislocations of war, historians have argued that more complex causes existed and even predated the war. For example attitudes towards sex, particularly female sexuality, began to change late in the first decade of the twentieth century. In fact, sexual theory underwent significant transformation from 1890 to 1910.³¹ Writings from European intellectuals in the late nineteenth century eventually gained readership and popularity in the United States. Modern intellectuals, in contrast to Victorians, saw females as sexual beings and rejected previous conceptions of female sexuality. The central figure in the emergence of “modern sexual ethos” was Henry Havelock Ellis, one of the first sexologists.³² Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* published in six volumes between 1897 and 1910, established “the basic moral categories for nearly all subsequent sexual

³⁰ Anne Meis Knupfer, *Reform and Resistance: Gender, Delinquency, and America's First Juvenile Court* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 67.

³¹ Paul Robinson, *The Modernization of Sex: Havelock Ellis, Alfred Kinsey, William Masters and Virginia Johnson* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 2.

³² *Ibid.*, 3.

theorizing.”³³ Ellis has been labeled a sexual enthusiast in that he believed sex was a “wonderful” and “beneficial” aspect of life. He deemed abstinence to be unhealthy.³⁴ He did advocate for a freer sexual life but not for casual sexual encounters. For him, “an extramarital experience was justified only by the intense physical and personal attraction of the individuals involved.”³⁵ Nonetheless, some Americans interpreted Ellis’ writings as a justification for all sexual activity and used his work to support sexual permissiveness and a loosening of the rigid moral codes.

Despite Ellis’ reputation, the seemingly radical change in sexual culture during the first years of the new century was more frequently attributed to Sigmund Freud, the Viennese psychiatrist. Freud’s work was originally written in the nineteenth century but did not become prevalent in the United States until the 1920s. As Ronald Allen Goldberg has argued, Freud turned psychology into a “national mania,” stimulating “a revolution in sexual attitudes by helping to overturn moral codes that he showed to be based on superstition.”³⁶ Freud’s work led to a general discussion of sex and a new attitude toward sexual expression. Like Ellis, people misinterpreted Freud’s writings, believing they supported for all forms of sexual satisfaction. This was not Freud’s intention; rather he sought to explain the sexual nature of humans in order to ease the excessive guilt and repression that humans suffered. He did not promote free love.³⁷ Freud’s theories would continue to haunt society, as explained in Chapter Five, when they were used to explain adolescent sexual behavior.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 30.

³⁵ Ibid., 33.

³⁶ Ronald Allen Goldberg, *America in the Twenties* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 95.

³⁷ Ibid.

Historians such as Kathy Peiss have tied the new moral code of the 1920s to a growing freedom for women. For instance, Peiss looks at the social lives of working-class women at the turn of the century. She found that many young women took advantage of the lack of supervision and escape from parental authority. In addition to enjoying “cheap amusements” that cities offered (such as dance halls, theaters, and amusement parks), these women also engaged in more sexual experimentation. This indulgence has been tied to “treating,” a practice in which young women who had little spending money went out with men who paid for their activities and whom subsequently the women paid back with sexual favors. These practices, in addition to those of the elite radical women in “bohemian centers like New York’s Greenwich Village,” helped spread “a new ideal of womanhood.” In one sense, these elite women were feminists, heavily influenced by Sigmund Freud, Havelock Ellis, and Ellen Key, a contemporary Swedish feminist writer. Believing in equality and sexual satisfaction, these sexual radicals “wrote novels, plays, and magazine articles that reached the middle-class parlor.”³⁸ By the 1920s, these new sexual behaviors had infiltrated the middle-class, especially youth.

At the same time, the birth control movement was gaining momentum. Starting in 1913, birth control advocate Margaret Sanger fought to make contraception easily accessible to all women. Sanger initially attempted to open public clinics, but later sought to “legitimate contraception by dispensing it through physicians.”³⁹ Although the latter was successful, it also limited birth control distribution to those with access to a private doctor. Thus most working-class women were relegated to practicing “primitive” methods of birth control or on over-the-counter birth control products appearing on the

³⁸ Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 132.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 133.

market.⁴⁰ In the 1930s, the birth control business grew dramatically as a result of the Great Depression. By 1938, when the industry exceeded \$250 million in annual sales, *Fortune* magazine declared birth control “one of the most prosperous businesses of the decade.”⁴¹ Condom sales “boomed” in the 1920s and 1930s,” partly because they were becoming increasingly available.⁴² Nonetheless, female contraceptives outsold condoms five to one by the late 1930s. The profit came mostly from over-the-counter products, especially feminine hygiene products. “Feminine hygiene” was coined by advertisers in the 1920s to refer to “over-the-counter female contraceptives” including “vaginal jellies, liquids, suppositories, foaming tablets, and the ever-popular antiseptic douche.”⁴³ These products were not always benign or effective. For instance, of the 189 contraceptive jellies on the American market in 1940 “only a handful were found to be safe and spermicidal in laboratory tests.”⁴⁴ Even more distressing was the antiseptic douche, the most popular form of female contraceptive by 1940. It would remain the leading form of birth control until 1960. Unfortunately, this product was ineffective and dangerous. Lysol antiseptic, for instance, was the most popular brand and contained cresol, which could cause “severe inflammation, burning, and even death.”⁴⁵ It was proven to be ineffective in preventing pregnancies as early as 1933 when one study found that 250 out of 507 women who used Lysol for birth control became pregnant.⁴⁶ Despite these statistics, people continued to rely on over-the-counter contraceptives and purchased them in great numbers.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Andrea Tone, *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 151.

⁴² Ibid., 136.

⁴³ Ibid., 151.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 170.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

In addition to the increasing awareness of contraception, the mass media also fostered a change in opinions toward sexuality. By the 1920s, 40 percent of popular magazines were arguing that sex was good for both men and women.⁴⁷ Sex adventure magazines such as *True Confessions*, *Telling Tales*, and *True Story* captivated women's attention throughout the nation.⁴⁸ Young girls read tales of lovers and sexual acts. Sex appeal also saturated magazines and movies. Advertisements featured glamorous women and appealed to vanity. Female movie stars such as Clara Bow became the face of the modern woman. Her sexual attractiveness made her the "It" girl. Even movies that featured a sexual and glamorous woman usually did not encourage promiscuity. Instead, according to historian Lynn Dumenil, the woman's "goal in most movies was marriage or the maintenance of marriage."⁴⁹

This bold, modern woman became known as the flapper. The term "flapper" originated from the nineteenth-century English slang for an unruly girl and initially that is exactly what she was in the eyes of Americans. Identified by her short hair, short skirts, and "boyish" figure, the flapper represented the changing morals and manners of the youth culture. She smoked, drank, and flirted in public, actions traditionally associated with prostitutes. The flapper devoted more attention to herself than others and demanded social freedoms traditionally reserved for men. She also wore makeup, spurring the rise of the cosmetics industry. Her physical appearance represented "female daring and eroticism."⁵⁰ This young woman shocked previous generations who revered Victorian womanhood and traditional femininity. The flapper appeared more sexual than other

⁴⁷ Dumenil, 133.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 141.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 135.

women and seemed to abandon all social restraints. F. Scott Fitzgerald captured this “new woman” in his early novels including *This Side of Paradise* (1920), *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), and *The Great Gatsby* (1925).⁵¹ The flapper was the symbol of the new generation.

In the process, sex became increasingly associated with youth during the 1920s and 1930s. Young people who participated in public sexuality and sexual experimentation were the epitome of youth in general. They contrasted with older generations who sought to control such sexual expression. Historian Beth Bailey explains that the youth culture became a “new and visible phenomenon” in the 1920s.⁵² The youth culture was fueled by the modern changes in education, work, and living space. As more families moved to urban areas, youth received more freedom. On college and high school campuses, youth began to foster their own peer culture. In these places, males and females interacted and comingled more than ever before. Adults worried of the potential dangers of such constant contact. These and other new ways of life put pressure on older traditions that were already crumbling in the new century. “New understandings of sexuality, including popular Freudian theory, the resexualization of women in popular and scholarly thought, and more public acknowledgment that sex could be for pleasure as well as procreation” combined to create an environment conducive to new youth culture and new beliefs on sex.⁵³

⁵¹ Goldberg, 94.

⁵² Bailey, 78.

⁵³ Ibid., 80.

AN EMERGING TEENAGE CULTURE

Although some historians contend that “the teenager” and teenage culture emerged after World War Two, others such as Kelly Schrum maintain that teen culture was formed in the period from 1920 to 1945.⁵⁴ By attending high schools, boys and girls were placed in a shared environment where they interacted with each other on a regular basis at the same time they were experiencing puberty. This social mingling contributed to an increasingly homogenous and independent system of values. Students created a shared identity as they began to consistently exchange ideas and opinions on matters such as music, clothing, dancing, and dating.

Schrum argues further that female adolescents, not males, led the development and formation of a unique teenage culture. Her book, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945*, discusses the evolution of teenage girl lifestyle in the mid-twentieth century through music, cosmetics, fashion, and movies. Schrum found that teenage girls were active participants in creating their own social culture and that this concept can be seen even before the rise of advertising specifically aimed at teenagers. Through their use of popular culture and their peer rituals, adolescent girls initiated America's understanding of “the teenager” as a distinct social category. However, Schrum also claimed that even though the girls employed the commercial products in unique and unintended ways, they were not fully immune to the dominant ideologies imbedded in these products. Her work then suggests the agency of girls while also acknowledging the role of advertisers.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 19.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

Clothes were essential to a teen's success. In order to be popular, teens needed to dress well. According to historian Grace Palladino, a "suitable high school wardrobe" included "several little school dresses, a pair of sports shoes for school, perhaps a beret and a sport coat," as well as "a good dress coat and hat, one or two simple evening dresses," and more.⁵⁶ High school students who could not dress according to the standards enforced by their peers had "no chance to rate with the crowd."⁵⁷ With the dawn of ready-to-wear clothing in the early 1900s, department stores sold clothing for most family members: men, women, and children, leaving teenage girls out. By the 1930s, manufacturers realized this growing market and began to create "teen" sections. Teen sizes also appeared by the 1930s.⁵⁸

Girls received their fashion guidance from multiple sources including women's magazines, advice literature, and their peers. They would read fashion magazines and then discuss them with friends. By the late 1920s, fashion advice dominated girls' writings including yearbooks, diaries, and stories. Although not all girls were particularly interested in fashion, most realized that being popular required the correct wardrobe. In the 1920s, teenage girls attempted to follow the trends of college students and flappers. They bobbed their hair and wore shorter skirts. Ankle socks and saddle shoes were the "ultimate symbols of being a teenage girl."⁵⁹ Starting in the 1920s, girls began to abandon stockings and by the 1930s wearing only socks was the new trend. Department stores soon picked up on this and heavily advertised ankle socks and saddle shoes. This foot apparel became a distinguishing symbol of teenage girls. The socks

⁵⁶ Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Schrum, 33.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

could be worn multiple ways and in different colors while saddle shoes could be decorated with an assortment of materials.⁶⁰ This trend led to the term “bobby-soxer” used to describe teenage girls. The term was widespread among the popular media, but the girls never called themselves “bobby-soxers.”⁶¹

Dancing became a popular pastime for high school students as well as their older sisters in the 1920s and continued to gain momentum throughout the following decades. Because of the spatial proximity and human interaction required, dancing contributed to the changing definition of “appropriate heterosexual relationships among young people.”⁶² Beginning in 1911, dance halls spread rapidly across the country. Dance halls offered youth a chance to mingle and interact in a physical manner. In Chicago during 1925 an estimated 14 million people frequented public dance halls, 12 million to theaters and vaudeville, and 120 million to motion pictures.⁶³ Many high schools “instituted dances, in an effort of varying success, to take the play away from commercial dance halls and road houses.” These dances frequently featured jazz music which allegedly encouraged a more sensual type of dancing. Jazz was all the rage in the 1920s, reaching a mass audience by “becoming the favorite music of American youth.”⁶⁴ Jazz also inspired dancing that was “closer than ever before.”⁶⁵ One author stated: “the dances fostered an unheard-of casualness between partners, permitted greater options in holds

⁶⁰ Ibid., 62.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² John Modell, *Into One's Own* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 71.

⁶³ Knupfer, 69.

⁶⁴ Lewis A. Erenberg, *Swingin' the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 36.

⁶⁵ Goldberg, 95.

and distances, and symbolized the high value placed on mutual heterosexual intimacy and attraction.”⁶⁶

According to historian Lewis A. Erenberg, by the 1930s, youth had “forced dramatic changes in musical performance, democratized the consumption of music, and helped create what jazz critic Ralph Gleason calls a ‘whole way of life’ around swing.”⁶⁷ Girls who thoroughly enjoyed dancing, specifically swing dancing, were labeled “jitterbug” by the press. Their intense love for music and dancing sparked debate. Critics attacked swing for undermining “self-control” and causing “sexual boldness.”⁶⁸ Many saw jitterbugs as the epitome of “mass culture’s flaws.”⁶⁹ While some may have criticized, other social commentators defended swing “as a positive expression of modern youth.” Jitterbugs were able to create a subculture of their own while also inspiring “greater interaction between whites and blacks than ever before.”⁷⁰ Some commentators simply dismissed it as a generational trait—creating music that previous generations disdained. One letter written to the *New York Times* argued that, “Swing is the voice of youth trying to be heard in this fast-moving world of ours.”⁷¹

Historian Ellen Rothman explains that, besides the dance floor, movies were another place where couples could find “privacy and excitement, within limits.”⁷² The motion picture had become a staple in middle-class and working class life. As a central form of leisure, movies offered an escape from the daily routine. In their sociological study on Muncie, Indiana conducted in the early twentieth century, sociologists Robert

⁶⁶ Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin’ Out, Contributions in American Studies*, no. 50 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981), 154.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁷² Rothman, 293.

and Helen Lynd found that 70 percent of the high school boys and 69 percent of the high school girls they surveyed had attended the movies within the previous week.⁷³ In Chicago during the 1920s, over 33 percent of moviegoers were nonadults.⁷⁴ As a reflection of the growing presence of teenagers in society, feature films in the 1920s began to depict the flapper image and the “wild” aspects of youth in productions such as *Campus Flirt* (1926) and *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928). Film expert Timothy Shary argues that films about teenagers in the 1920s were most often “designed to exploit adult fears about youth rather than appeal to real youth interests, as with the depiction of ‘white slavery’ in films like *The Port of Missing Girls* (1928) and promiscuous sexuality in *The Road to Ruin* (1928).”⁷⁵ By the 1930s, on the other hand, teen movies presented youth in tragic circumstances such as in *Wild Boys on the Road* (1933). Nonetheless, by the end of that decade, films like the Andy Hardy series starring Mickey Rooney brought a “wholesome energy to the American image of adolescents.”⁷⁶ These fifteen films, premiering in the 1930s and 1940s, would be the “most significant depiction of adolescent life in America until the mid-1950s.”⁷⁷ Teenagers had captured the attention of the movie industry.

The magazine industry also noticed the teenaged population. In the late 1920s, *Ladies’ Home Journal* became aware of a growing number of teenage readers and created a sub-deb column. According to the magazine, sub-deb referred to “well-to-do teenage girls.”⁷⁸ Correspondingly, this column offered dating etiquette and general advice.

⁷³ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), 264.

⁷⁴ Knupfer, 69.

⁷⁵ Timothy Shary, *Teen Movies: American Youth on Screen* (London: Wallflower, 2005), 6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Palladino, 27.

Reflecting the students' interest in dating and interaction with the opposite sex, *Scholastic* magazine--often used as a teaching tool in the classroom--debuted a new column in September 1936. "Boy Dates Girl," written by Gay Head, became a "recognized authority on teenage life." This column focused on dating etiquette and soon gained widespread popularity amongst high school students. By 1938, so many students had written to Gay Head that *Scholastic* added a question and answer column.⁷⁹ Despite its popularity, the column was limited in its responses. Because principals, teachers, and school boards censured it, the magazine avoided sexual matters and kept the column "proper."⁸⁰ Young girls turned to other magazines for juicy stories about love and lust. They enjoyed scandal magazines such as *True Confessions* which featured fictional stories of young women engaging sexual acts that ended up in disaster. There were many tales of unwed pregnancies and abortions, perpetuating the idea that extra-marital sex could be dangerous.⁸¹

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HIGH SCHOOL

The 1920s witnessed an explosion in education. By the 1920s, high school had become "a mass experience," with almost three-quarters of the young enrolled.⁸² Each year in the decade saw increases in both boys and girls graduating from high school. For instance, between 1922 and 1924 the proportion of all 17-year-olds graduating from high school increased by no less than 2.5 percent annually.⁸³ The high school soon became

⁷⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 32. First published in 1922, the magazine targeted women aged 20 to 35. In the 1930s, circulation reached two million. Similar magazines such as *True Story*, *True Romance*, *Real Story*, *Real Confessions*, and *Real Romances* emerged at this time.

⁸² D'Emilio and Freedman, 257.

⁸³ Modell, 78.

the center of teenage life. In fact, the Lynds described high school as “a place from which they go home to eat and sleep.”⁸⁴ High school was the main stage of adolescent culture where members of both sexes fraternized in classes and school-related activities. According to the Lynds, “the high school, with its athletics, clubs, sororities and fraternities, dances and parties, and other ‘extracurricular activities,’ is a fairly complete cosmos in itself, and about this city within a city the social life of the intermediate generation centers.”⁸⁵

In the eyes of educational reformers, high school was supposed to keep teenagers out of trouble and mold them into responsible adult citizens. Teenagers, however, had other ideas. They enjoyed the unity and freedom that high school encouraged by bringing young people together in one place. Although they might have behaved while on school grounds, when off-campus teenagers engaged in behaviors that were once “dangerously unconventional.”⁸⁶ One obvious example of this was smoking. Previously, smoking could cause serious damage to a girl’s reputation. Now high school girls smoked in public. In addition, high school changed relationships and dating. Since youth of both sexes were mingling more often, the school became the main place for dating and dating often meant entering into sexual relations. Coeducational institutions significantly influenced youth culture as a “distinctive subculture took shape among the middle-class young, with values and activities that set them apart from their parents’ generation.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Lynd, 121.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 211.

⁸⁶ Palladino, 7.

⁸⁷ D’Emilio and Freedman, 256.

The Great Depression contributed to rising high school enrollments. While in 1910, half of all boys age fifteen years old had been gainfully employed; by 1930 the proportion was down to one in six.⁸⁸ By 1936, 65 percent of teenage youth attended high school.⁸⁹ Not everyone agreed that high school education was necessary. Some parents simply could not afford to send their children to high school. Despite the fact that the education may have been free, some families did not have enough money to properly clothe their children. At times, a youngster stopped attending school when he or she no longer had shoes. Thus during this period of time, high schoolers who were considered “popular” usually included those teenagers who could still afford to go to school, buy clothes, and partake in after-school activities.⁹⁰

Historian Grace Palladino argues that the “real goal of adolescence in the 1930s” was “learning to behave responsibly by keeping the future in mind.”⁹¹ Because of the lack of jobs during the thirties, working-class adolescents were sometimes forced out of workplace and into high schools during the 1930s. High school became a “kind of cure for inflated unemployment rates among teenagers.”⁹² It then served to “bridge the gap” between youth and work, a transitional institution.⁹³ High school became responsible for teaching girls how to become homemakers and boys to become breadwinners.⁹⁴ In the 1930s, work was key to “a respectable male’s identity,” while “marriage was the key for

⁸⁸ Modell, 79.

⁸⁹ Palladino, 5.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁹¹ Ibid., 15.

⁹² Joseph P. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 264.

⁹³ Palladino, 15.

⁹⁴ Character-building organizations that were also popular at this time including the Boy Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, YMCA, and Girls Scouts. These groups also helped foster middle-class values and gender roles.

girls.”⁹⁵ Education could be a means to help boys and girls “make the most of their assigned positions in life.” The “well-rounded social education” they received in high school prepared adolescents for the future.⁹⁶ By 1936, sixty-five percent of teenage youth were high school students—the highest point to date.⁹⁷ This change fostered the development of a teenage culture. More youth than ever before now spent the majority of their days together at school interacting with each other.

Historian Kriste Lindenmeyer offers a comprehensive examination of Great Depression childhood in *The Greatest Generation Grows Up*. Lindenmeyer argues that the majority of children in the United States were impacted in some degree by the economic crisis. For instance, many teens were pushed into less fortunate lifestyles in order to survive the Depression years. Other youth ran away, living as vagabonds in various parts of the country.⁹⁸ In his dissertation, historian Daryl Webb contends that the dismal economy in Milwaukee forced girls into exploitative situations. Teenaged girls took jobs in taverns as “come-on girls.” These girls were supposed to flirt with male customers in order to entice them to drink more. One law enforcement official stated that “these girls, unable to obtain work, are forced into this kind of work which is almost certain to bring their ruin.” In addition, Webb found that there were several prostitution rings in the 1930s Milwaukee that employed teenaged girls. These girls claimed that they resorted to prostitution to assist their families.⁹⁹ Whether they were forced to leave their

⁹⁵ Palladino, 17.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁸ Kriste Lindenmeyer, *The Greatest Generation Grows Up* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005), 81.

⁹⁹ Daryl Webb, “‘A Great Promise and a Great Threat’: Milwaukee Children in the Great Depression” (PhD dissertation, Marquette University, 2006), 63.

home or stop attending school, children felt the pangs of the financial hardship and responded to it in their own ways.

DATING IN THE 1920s AND 1930s

The long-used term “dating” was first used on college campuses in the 1920s. Dating differed from “courting” in that in the case of the former the couple established a relationship without a commitment to marriage. It was viewed as an “alternative to group activities, on the one hand, and to serious, marriage-oriented courtship, on the other.”¹⁰⁰ The gap between men and women who courted around 1900 and their children coming of age in the 1920s was “as wide a gulf as that between any two Americans.”¹⁰¹ According to historian Ellen K. Rothman, by 1930 “the terrain through which young Americans passed en route to marriage would be almost unrecognizable to their parents.”¹⁰² By the 1930s, social observers such as sociologist Willard Waller lamented that dating encouraged “thrill-seeking” and “exploitative” behavior.¹⁰³

In addition to the high school, another modern invention that drastically changed dating culture in the early twentieth century was the automobile. In the 1920s, the automobile, the moving picture, and the close dance “dominated and liberated American youth to an unprecedented extent.”¹⁰⁴ Many people cited automobiles as accomplices to the increasing sexual activity. One contemporary commentator even called the car “a house of prostitution on wheels.”¹⁰⁵ Simply stated, backseats became perfect locations

¹⁰⁰ Rothman, 290.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 289.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Willard Waller, “The Rating and Dating Complex,” *American Sociological Review* 2.5 (Oct. 1937): 728.

¹⁰⁴ Rothman, 289.

¹⁰⁵ D’Emilio and Freedman, 257.

for petting parties. According to the Lynds' research in 1924, of the thirty girls charged with "sex crimes" in Middletown, nineteen committed the offense in an automobile.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, in a book written on college campus behavior in 1928, sociologist Robert Angell stated that "the ease with which a couple can secure absolute privacy when in possession of a car and the spirit of reckless abandon which high speed and moonlight drives engender have combined to break down the traditional barriers between the sexes."¹⁰⁷

Besides encouraging sexual activities, the automobile also turned courting into "an act of consumption." Dates now required the young men to spend money on movies, restaurants, and dance halls. One appeal of the date was that it involved leaving the home. The car allowed youth to travel to a movie or a dance hall. They were no longer limited to spending evenings in the parlor or taking evening strolls together. Nonetheless, historians such as John Modell argue that the significance of the car in changing dating patterns is overrated. There were not enough cars in the 1920s for every boy and girl to go on a date. In addition, in places where there were fewer cars, public forms of transportation such as the streetcar provided a means for couples to go on a date. Modell also pointed out that "it was in large cities, where cars remained notably fewer than in the countryside and small towns, that dating evolved." He further claimed that transportation was "less important" than the "availability of somewhere to go," somewhere that a girl would go to and where her parents would permit her to go.¹⁰⁸

Historian Beth Bailey states that "no matter how people conducted their private lives, from the mid-1920s to World War Two the rating-dating system dominated public

¹⁰⁶ Lynd, 258.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Angell, *The Campus* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1928), 169.

¹⁰⁸ Modell, 89.

discourse on courtship.”¹⁰⁹ In this system, “you had to rate in order to date, [and] to date in order to rate.”¹¹⁰ Successfully maintaining this cycle led to popularity. In this system, competition was the key--boys and girls competed to become and then stay popular. Bailey argues that this competition was most visibly enacted on the dance floor. Popular girls would have new escorts for every dance. Willard Waller also investigated college dating practices in his article “The Rating and Dating Complex.” He argued that popularity and thrill-seeking had become more important than finding a suitable mate. In his opinion, dating was becoming more exploitative. The concept of “pinning” was also invented on the college campus. The pin represented a couple’s relationship and served as a premarital agreement to date each other exclusively. These pins usually came from a young man’s achievements in sports or academics. “Getting pinned” set the foundation for what would be called “going steady” in the 1950s. Unlike the 1950s, teenage marriage was rare in the 1930s as marriage became seen as a liability rather than an asset.¹¹¹

The Great Depression affected every aspect of American society. The 1930s marked the lowest birth rates among women between fifteen and nineteen years of age during the twentieth century. Marriage and childbearing for all age groups declined. Single women were seen as an attribute to society because they could contribute to the economy if they were employed. According to historian Kriste Lindenmeyer, in order to relieve the financial burden from boys, group activities became more popular. Girls would often pay their own way during co-ed social events. “Going Dutch” became “increasingly popular among adolescents” in the 1930s, though it was not unique to this

¹⁰⁹ Bailey, 28.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 30.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 42.

decade.¹¹² “Going steady” became another popular dating practice devised by teens to “self-regulate the new freedoms surrounding dating and social activities.” This new status was defined as a boy and girl agreeing to an exclusive relationship that was “not serious enough to proceed with formal engagement and marriage.”¹¹³ Lindenmeyer concedes that this “increase in unsupervised social activities did foster opportunities for sexual activity among adolescents.” Nonetheless, the limited access to birth control and fear of pregnancy outside of marriage encouraged most teens to abstain from intercourse. Indeed, teen pregnancy rates declined during the 1930s. Lindenmeyer suggests that in the 1930s, “most adolescents curbed their sexual behavior to fit what they perceived to be their best interest.”¹¹⁴ Instead, the dating scene in the 1930s more resembled the club activities and athletic events popularized in the 1930s “kleen teen” films.¹¹⁵

One *Chicago Tribune* article on “going dutch” revealed that most girls did not approve of this idea. Instead, the article suggested that girls preferred “home and fireside.” According to one young girl, “when a man and girl go out together and she pays her half, she subtly loses at least part of her respect for him; and he loses some of his respect for her.” The girl explained further that “the marrying kind of man still wants to take care of his lady.” She suggested attending neighborhood events that were inexpensive and staying at home once in a while. She concluded that “if we girls have got to be our own Santa Claus I don’t think we’re going to very happy about it.”¹¹⁶

During the Depression, the *Chicago Tribune’s* advice columnist Doris Blake encouraged young men to attempt dates even if they had no money. She urged the young men to

¹¹² Kriste Lindenmeyer, *The Greatest Generation Grows Up* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005), 195.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹¹⁵ “Kleen teen” refers to a role embodied by Mickey Rooney in his Andy Hardy series.

¹¹⁶ Doris Blake, “Dutch Treat Dates Voted Down by Girls,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 13, 1932.

“give the girls a break” and let them decide whether or not they wanted to date a man without money. She asked the fellows that if the girl did not mind, “Why cut off this course of happiness revenue?”¹¹⁷

NECKING AND PETTING

According to John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman, “despite the evidence of change in sexual mores in the years before World War One, the 1920s do stand out as a time when something in the sexual landscape decisively altered and new patterns clearly emerged.”¹¹⁸ What was so startling was that “sexual expression was moving beyond the confines of marriage, not as the deviant behavior of prostitutes and their costumers, but as the normative behavior of many Americans.”¹¹⁹ Starting in the 1920s, sociologists such as Robert and Helen Lynd noticed changes in sexual relationships among youth. The Lynds’ work on *Middletown*, a study conducted on Muncie, Indiana, covering a period of forty years, revealed that attitudes towards premarital sex were changing especially with the younger generation. They noted that there seemed to be “some tentative relaxing of this taboo” among the youth.¹²⁰ Youth growing up in the 1920s appeared to be more openly affectionate than their mothers and fathers.

During the twenties, “dating, necking, and petting among peers became part and parcel of the experience of American youth.”¹²¹ Dating and petting would “define the experience of courtship” for most of the twentieth century.¹²² Petting referred to intimate

¹¹⁷ Doris Blake, “Slim Incomes Need Not Mean End of ‘Dating,’” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 12, 1934.

¹¹⁸ D’Emilio and Freedman, 240.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

¹²⁰ Lynd, 112.

¹²¹ D’Emilio and Freedman, 256

¹²² Rothman, 289.

physical activity not including vaginal intercourse while necking meant kissing above the neck.¹²³ It is important to note that petting was not an invention in the twentieth century. Rather, Alfred Kinsey found older generations had engaged in “flirting, flirtage, courting, bundling, spooning, mugging, smooching, larking, sparking, and other activities which were simply petting under another name.”¹²⁴ Other terms for petting included “spooning,” “pitched woo,” “snuggle-pupping” and “fussing.”¹²⁵

Historian Paula Fass has argued that the college students of the 1920s helped to shape modern America. Their seemingly rebellious behaviors including smoking and dancing, and their revealing attire set the norm for the rest of American society. This influence trickled down to their younger siblings who were also interacting with the opposite sex in high school classes, extracurricular activities, and social settings. According to Fass, the young also created moral standards that fit their own needs. This led to the growing acceptability of petting. Petting was then the “acceptable middle-class means of expressing erotic and emotional feelings before marriage.” For instance, the deeper the love between the couple, the “further” they considered it all right to go.¹²⁶ Petting was a “compromise, established by the 1920s, between premarital chastity and the new liberalism.”¹²⁷ This would remain the socially acceptable level of intimacy among teenagers until the 1960s.

Even though they had participated in similar acts, older generations deplored the new dating habits of the youth, decrying the deteriorating moral standards of the

¹²³ According to Ann Landers, the term “making out” would arrive during the war, derived from the question males would ask other males after dates: “how do you make out?” Others place the date of origin as 1949.

¹²⁴ Kinsey, 231.

¹²⁵ Bailey, 80.

¹²⁶ Morton Hunt, *Sexual Behavior in the 1970s* (Chicago: Playboy Press, 1974), 133.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

twenties' generation. While the new sexual behavior shocked society, there were peer-imposed limitations and standards. Youth created their own standards: heavy petting was only for couples really in love. The degree of physical intimacy was directly linked to the intensity of the emotional relationship. Young men and women were now interacting within their own class. Boys no longer sought prostitutes to initiate them to sex. Girls of all economic classes were partaking in acts their parents would consider improper, but they were far from promiscuous. While petting and kissing occurred among couples dating casually, it seldom went further than that. Although they might have had higher rates of premarital intercourse, the young women of the 1920s "generally restricted coitus to a single partner, the man they expected to marry."¹²⁸

Writing from the perspective of the 1970s, Morton Hunt argued that dating posed a serious problem in the 1920s: "It afforded the young the opportunity to experiment with physical love, but gave no sanction to premarital intercourse; it liberated the young from the watchful eye of the chaperone, but not from the traditional social values implanted in their consciences." He argued that teenagers then viewed petting as a solution to this problem. Hunt defined petting as "that whole series of acts that lies beyond mere kissing but stops short of inserting the penis in the vagina." Although parents did not formally sanction petting, "they opposed it far less strenuously than they did intercourse." However, according to Hunt, most parents did not realize that petting could include "partial or total nudity, mutual masturbation, fellatio, cunnilingus, and orgasm for one or both partners."¹²⁹

¹²⁸ D'Emilio and Freedman, 257.

¹²⁹ Hunt, 132.

In *Middletown*, the Lynds observed that high school girls in the twenties were reading “magazines of the True Story variety” and watching “sex films.” They stressed that major changes in courting had occurred from the 1890s to the 1920s. Couples had previously gone out in groups; now they paired off. According to a questionnaire given to sophomores, juniors, and seniors in the town, forty-four percent of the boys and thirty-four percent of the girls marked that they had participated in a “petting party.” The Lynds observed that the girls who were known to engage in “petting parties” were “much more frequently in demand for movies, dances, or automobile parties.” What was most surprising was that many of these girls were also from “the best families” in town.¹³⁰ The Lynds cited that the “constant public watching of love-making on the screen and in part, perhaps, by the sense of safety in numbers” had relaxed taboos.¹³¹ Furthermore, the mothers of the youth blamed the girls. They mentioned the “dress and greater aggressiveness of girls” as the factors for the change. One mother stated: ‘It’s the girl’s clothing; we can’t keep our boys decent when girls dress that way.’ Another complained: “When I was a girl, a girl who was painted was a bad girl—but now look at the daughters of our best families!”¹³² When the Lynds returned to Muncie to do a follow-up study in the 1930s, they found that “postponement of marriage, coupled with growing frankness as regards sex, is apparently involving an increase in premarital sexual relations.” However, the Lynds also stated that sex was “one of the things Middletown

¹³⁰ Lynd, 139.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 140.

has long been taught to fear,” and that its institutions operated “to keep the subject out of sight and out of mind as much as possible.”¹³³

Despite her engagement in petting and necking, the modern girl of pre-World War Two America avoided extra-marital sex not because she was not “emancipated intellectually” but rather because she realized that “social customs are still too powerful [for] the individual to defy them without risking personal happiness.”¹³⁴ “The code” which the girls had created for themselves declared that “sexual intercourse without marriage can safely be indulged in when it is a prelude to the more permanent arrangement of matrimony.” Promiscuity was different: it was condemned by the same girls as “cheap” and “common.”¹³⁵ In their 1930 book, psychologists Phyllis Blanchard and Carlyn Manasses discussed the reasons their clients objected to extra-marital sexual relations. They found that “more than half of the girls would fear to cause their parents grief, to contract venereal disease, to be troubled later by feelings of regret, or to find themselves pregnant.”¹³⁶ Girls also expressed “a fear of yielding too much or losing self-control or self-respect.” Blanchard and Manasses attributed this as “evidence of the lasting qualities of the early teachings about sex matters to which they were subjected. They have been unable to free themselves from the inhibiting thought that perhaps mother knew best.”¹³⁷

Being a modern girl in the 1920s was not always easy. Girls faced “smoking, drinking, petting, extra-marital sex relationships, and many other problems.” It was

¹³³ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lund, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflict* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, Inc., 1937), 169.

¹³⁴ Phyllis Blanchard and Carlyn Manasses, *New Girls for Old* (New York: The Macaulay Company, 1930), 70.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

difficult for the girl “to determine what her own position should be.”¹³⁸ The same pressure existed to be popular, to have dates on Friday and Saturday nights, and to find a spouse. Girls were held responsible for determining the pace of sexual activity and were still expected to preserve their reputations so they could become respectably married. In order to make such decisions, girls sought advice from newspaper columnists. Many felt they could not talk to their own mothers or peers about such issues. These newspaper columnists provided information on proper dating etiquette and issues of love and kissing. One such “expert” was Antoinette Donnelly who wrote under the byline of “Doris Blake.” Originally one of the first diet and weight loss authors, she also published advice columns and pamphlets for female readers. Her columns were published in newspapers across the United States and were a regular feature in the *Chicago Daily News* and *Chicago Tribune* during the 1920s and 1930s.

Like their predecessors and their twenty-first-century peers, girls of the 1920s and 1930s were supposed to be the guardians of virtue. Girls were blamed if kissing, necking, and petting went too far. It was her duty to keep the boy in line. When asked about petting, Doris Blake commented that a girl might create the impression that she was “easy” and thus unconsciously encourage the man to expect more of her. For instance, this advice columnist added: “she can’t expect, if she sits in the parlor without any lights, to escape with unrumpled hair or unkissed lips. After all, how can boys be sure, in such inviting atmosphere, that a little necking isn’t expected of them?” She further stated, “the kind of treatment accorded a girl is up to her.”¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Ibid., 64.

¹³⁹ Doris Blake, “Much of Blame for Petting is Girl’s Conduct,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 24, 1935.

DEBATING THE PETTING PARTY

In Phyllis Blanchard and Carolyn Manasses' book, *New Girls for Old*, they mentioned that, "an increasingly large number of modern girls are finding sexual outlets of a more direct nature."¹⁴⁰ Blanchard and Manasses argued that mutual acts of masturbation were not physically hazardous to the girls' health; rather the "injury" came from "emotional conflict about her behavior, and not to the acts themselves." They concluded that a girl "may be better prepared for marriage by her playful activities than if she had clung to a passive role of waiting for marriage before giving any expression to her sex impulses."¹⁴¹ Other experts believed that petting "taught girls and boys how to fall in love and what to look for in future mates." "Mild doses of petting" would not be harmful.

Among the advocates of the role of petting in youth society was Floyd Dell. Dell was an influential American writer whose opinion was easily accessible to the greater public. During the first decades of the twentieth century, he wrote books and articles on politics and social mores. In an article for *Parents* magazine, Dell wrote that petting was bad for teenagers mentally "only when they have been taught to think it wicked and get into mental conflicts about it."¹⁴² He felt that petting actually helped teenagers by teaching them how to fall in love and select a future mate. He further stated that petting parties were "a natural and wholesome part of growing up emotionally into womanhood."¹⁴³ His advice startled parents who claimed they did not engage in such behavior when they were younger.

¹⁴⁰ Blanchard and Manasses, 59.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 61.

¹⁴² Floyd Dell, "Why They Pet," *Parents' Magazine* (Oct. 1931): 62.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 63.

Nonetheless, parents still believed they had responsibility to control their children's dating life. Parents could choose their offspring's companions by hosting various events like supper parties or skating parties or even "impromptu taffy pulls and fudge frolics." They could then supervise their teenagers and control who they socialized with. Parents, most commonly mothers, wrote to advice columnists about the proper age for dating. Writing in August 1933, Doris Blake advised that girls should not date until at least 16 and 17. Blake stated that "at 16 and 17 today many girls are working and their only chance of relaxation is in the evening hours. At 18 today a girl is a grownup and an adult woman, to hear her tell it, and often it is true enough, for she is thoroughly well able to handle herself and the boy friend, too."¹⁴⁴ Fifteen, on the other hand, was far "too young for nocturnal wanderings with only the boy friend to guide, protect and chaperone." Even at sixteen, though, "a mother's watchful eye had better be kept open."¹⁴⁵

Critics blamed various social agents for this new revolution among teenagers. The main scapegoats included the church, the movies, other high school students, and most commonly, the parents. Parents felt the brunt of the anxiety over the disintegrating morals of the new generation. Parents were advised to supervise their children, monitor their friends and activities, and exercise authority at home. It was argued that the parents who did not discipline their children caused moral corrosion among youth. In order to control sex and sexual practices, civil authorities attempted to initiate curfews. Parents were encouraged to limit the amount of private time youth spent together. They also were supposed to recommend double or group dates. Parents could enforce this by

¹⁴⁴ Doris Blake, "Sweet Sixteen Best Age to Begin Dating," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 18, 1933.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

restricting access to the family car since couples were less likely to engage in petting parties if another couple was in the front seat. Another strategy parents used was to encourage dates at home. There the parents could chaperone their children and ensure sexual experimentation did not occur.¹⁴⁶

The *Ladies' Home Journal* encouraged parents to raise “nice” girls. In fact, the magazine’s “sub-deb” column aimed to teach girls the “rules of proper socializing.” This column, like the one in *Scholastic*, aimed to provide girls with dating advice.¹⁴⁷ Unlike *Scholastic*, *Ladies' Home Journal* addressed issues such as “necking” and “petting.” *Parents'* magazine also attempted to discuss issues of teenage sexuality in the 1930s by informing parents of the need to hold conversations with their children about sexual matters.¹⁴⁸

Phyllis Blanchard and Carlyn Manasses also wrote on problems of sex adjustment among young girls. According to their research, “adolescent girls who have been involved in sex difficulties” usually acted in such a manner because of “emotional conflicts.” These girls sought “happiness through sex adventures” due to “insecurity in the love of parents, rebellion against authority, [and] escape from a home situation which provides from one of the normal youthful interest in recreation.” They found that all girls with sex difficulties shared “some state of emotional deprivation;” thus their sex behavior represented “the search for emotional satisfactions which have been lacking elsewhere.”¹⁴⁹ They described the experiences of one sixteen year-old whose father had died and whose mother favored the older sister. This girl then turned to her boy friends

¹⁴⁶ Bailey, 84.

¹⁴⁷ Palladino, 27.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 26.

¹⁴⁹ Blanchard and Manasses, 47.

for the attention denied at home. She was described as having “no overwhelming sex impulses, and seldom obtained any great amount of physical satisfaction from intercourse, but the affection of the boys, their taking her to the movies and parties, and the companionship with them on other than sex levels meant too much in her life for her to give it up at the expense of maintaining her virginity.”¹⁵⁰ In general, the public assumed “promiscuous” girls were of an “abnormally passionate nature” and “over-sexed.” But according to Blanchard and Manasses, clinical studies of adolescent girls “almost never” revealed “nymphomania” as the primary cause of extra-marital sex experiences.¹⁵¹ Instead, these girls used sexual promiscuity “as a means of gaining other emotional satisfactions than just the physical relief from sex tension.”¹⁵² They warned that these sex adventures could end with the birth of an illegitimate child.

CONCLUSION

By the end of the 1930s, it was clear that dating had become a central feature of adolescent life. Questions like “must I pet to be popular?” had significant meaning to young girls who yearned to be accepted by their peers. These questions also raised controversy in the larger society that struggled to decipher youth culture. Another unexpected consequence of high schools was the fact that the government could no longer ignore adolescents. The federal government was “forced to acknowledge that every adolescent needed help to reach the future, whether families could afford to provide it or not.”¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 52.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 53.

¹⁵² Ibid., 57.

¹⁵³ Palladino, 15.

This increasing visibility of teenagers also raised issues about traditional values. Because they were a more noticeable group in general, their behaviors became more apparent and thus more widely discussed. Young girls' behavior was especially scrutinized as their traditional role as the moral gatekeeper entered a new realm. Necking, petting parties, dating, and even automobiles all became topics of debate as parents worried about the morals of the future generation. Nonetheless, despite the attempts of concerned adults, the teenagers of the 1920s had irrevocably shaped the sexual landscape.

The sexual behaviors that became common among youth in the 1920s perpetuated into the 1930s and beyond. Although the flappers of the 1920s soon became an image of the past as the depression of the 1930s took away many of the cherished luxuries of the modern girl, their legends (and their sex appeal) would never fade from public memory; neither would the sexual standards first instituted by the youth of the 1920s. When the flappers of the twenties grew up, their daughters' sexuality would threaten society in similar ways.

CHAPTER TWO
“THE PERILS OF ERRING GIRLS”:
SEX AND THE VICTORY GIRL

On July 3, 1943, Milwaukee’s District Attorney James J. Kerwin asked for an additional eight investigators to assist in stamping out vice in the Milwaukee area. Citing “civic outrage,” Kerwin expressed the need for extra help to assist the police in “stopping evil.” The “civic outrage” and “evil” he was referring to were girls--as young as thirteen--who were “throwing themselves at servicemen.”¹

During that same month, Shirley, a pretty girl of fifteen, stood before a judge in a Milwaukee courtroom to receive her sentence: she would be sent to the Wisconsin Industrial School for Girls until age twenty-one. “Just out of pigtails,” as she was described by a local newspaper, she had been placed in the detention home a few weeks earlier after entertaining a couple of sailors all night in a room she rented in Chicago. Until the preceding April, Shirley had been a diligent high school student with perfect attendance. However, according to her probation officer, Shirley began to “run around just as she pleased.” She soon fell in with older girls and formed the habit of meeting them at a popular rendezvous downtown. Soon she was going to hotels with “whatever sailor happened to pick her up and often she didn’t even know the man’s name.” Milwaukee quickly became too tame for Shirley and she eventually moved to Chicago where she worked in a department store, then a defense plant, and finally a burlesque show house. Meanwhile, she “met the fleet” on a regular schedule. She kept a diary of her adventures, providing an “unblushing confession of staying the night with Tom, Dick, and Harry of the navy.” Then one night while entertaining a couple of sailors in her

¹ “Date-Hunting 13-Year-Olds,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 3, 1943.

room, her landlady became upset by the ruckus and called authorities. The Milwaukee police placed the girl under restraint in the detention home. When questioned about her actions, Shirley told the probation people she “wasn’t worried about pregnancy, nor about anything else, very much.”²

Susan, another pretty blond girl of fifteen, also appeared in juvenile court in July 1943. She too had been a bright girl, earning good marks as a junior in a Milwaukee high school. This changed when she met some sailors on a streetcar in June. The sailors invited her and a friend to their downtown hotel room. The two girls snuck into the room and stayed there half the night. Two days later the whole affair was repeated again, but with more bottles of beer and another sailor. This time, however, when they stepped out of the hotel room, they were arrested by detectives from the morals squad and taken to the detention home. Susan’s mother soon arrived, but blamed the other girl instead of her daughter or herself. Susan’s mother and stepfather both worked in factories. Her probation officer reported that his evidence indicated that Susan was neglected, “perhaps because of the mother’s job.” Authorities soon discovered that Susan had participated in other illicit activities, waiting “for the dark in Juneau park and went the limit there.” Twice she crept into a dark corner of a downtown picture house with a man in uniform-- “a man she had never seen before and whose name she didn’t know”-- and committed the same act there. When questioned about her exploits, Susan explained that “I suppose it was because I felt sorry for him. He might be going away soon and get killed.” Judge Walter Schinz listened to her story and the pleas of her parents before sentencing Susan to indefinite probation.³

² “Juvenile Vice Opening Eyes of the Public,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 6, 1943.

³ “Peril of Erring Girls Arouses Milwaukeeans,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 2, 1943.

Perhaps the most famous image World War Two-era females is Rosie the Riveter. Debuting on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* on May 29, 1943, Rosie, in her bandana and work shirt, clearly showed women that indeed “yes, we can!” In stark contrast to Rosie was her younger sister, or perhaps even her daughter, “Good-Time Charlotte.” Adolescent females throughout the country were said to have gone “khaki-wacky” during World War Two. Labeled “victory girls,” “V-girls,” “khaki-wackies,” “free girls,” “amateur girls,” and “good-time Charlottes,” these girls supposedly traded sexual favors for material goods such as a pair of stockings or a night on the town. Using make-up to look much older, these girls--usually between thirteen and seventeen years old--allegedly went on the prowl at night looking for soldiers.

Although she evaded a precise definition, the “victory girl” was generally assumed to be a young woman who pursued sexual relations with servicemen out of a “misplaced patriotism or a desire for excitement” or as girls who committed “sex delinquency of a non-commercial character.”⁴ However, that was not necessarily the case. According to historian Grace Palladino, these girls were “more innocent than they looked.”⁵ In fact, a “V-girl” could also be a girl or woman who did not engage in sexual relations but rather, as Palladino notes, was simply testing the “perimeters of social freedom in wartime America in ways that suggested sexual misconduct or a vulnerability to new temptations.”⁶ Nonetheless, because of their untraditional behavior, these girls received a great deal of attention from the media, public officials, and reformers, all of

⁴ James Burkhart Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 32; Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 104.

⁵ Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 74.

⁶ Anderson, 104.

whom were intent on preventing sexual delinquency as well as safeguarding public morals and health. This chapter reveals how female adolescent sexuality re-emerged during World War Two as a legitimate danger to the social order, a threat that would persist throughout that decade.

MILWAUKEE GOES TO WAR

Milwaukee historian John Gurda has argued that few cities played a more important role than Milwaukee in the effort to equip the Allies for final victory. Between 1940 and 1944, Milwaukee's manufacturing employment doubled, jumping from 110,000 to nearly 200,000. Among these industries were the Falk Corporation, Allen-Bradley, Pfister & Vofel, Gallun, Trostel, Pabst, and, the "undisputed giant," Allis-Chambers.⁷ Allis-Chambers was by far the largest employer in the region, employing more than 20,000 people during the war. Although manpower was in short supply in Milwaukee during the war, womanpower made up the difference. By 1942, women made up nearly a third of Allen-Bradley's shop force and the proportion climbed to nearly 80 percent at the Allis-Chambers supercharger plant. Because roughly 70,000 Milwaukee men and women entered the armed forces in some way during the war, companies struggled to find workers to fill their plants. Even Milwaukee's mayor Carl Zeidler decided to join the war effort in 1942. Unfortunately, as a lieutenant on an American merchant vessel, his ship sank, killing the former public official. John Bohn who had been serving as the acting mayor since Zeidler enlisted now found himself at the city's helm.⁸

⁷ John Gurda, *Cream City Chronicles: Stories of Milwaukee's Past* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2007), 136.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

On the home front in Milwaukee, rationing began in 1942. A system of ration books and stamps was developed to provide access to limited supplies of goods in the city. Although the shortages were aggravating and the regulations troublesome, morale on the home front remained high. Local residents organized blood drives, scrap metal campaigns, and special community projects such as the American Legion's "Smokes for Yanks" which provided soldiers overseas with cigarettes. Women managed victory gardens as well. Gurda cites that the proportion of Milwaukee-area households growing their own vegetables jumped from 30.2 percent in 1942 to 54.8 in 1943.⁹ Schoolchildren participated in wartime activities as well. For example, shop classes at local high schools made ping-pong paddles for the Red Cross and crutches for the veterans' hospitals. Nonetheless, because of higher wages and abundant overtime, the average industrial worker in Milwaukee had more disposable income.¹⁰ Yet they had little time to spend this money, and leisure and goods were limited. Consequently, Milwaukee's public was "starved" for distraction of any kind.¹¹ This might have made them more sensitive to the issue of the alleged increase of juvenile delinquency within the city's borders and more likely to respond to it.

Because of its proximity to the Great Lakes Naval Training Center in northern Illinois, Milwaukee became a weekend host to thousands of sailors and soldiers. Approximately 7,000 to 10,000 young men traveled to Milwaukee each weekend to enjoy what the city had to offer.¹² Efforts were made to provide wholesome entertainment for these men. For example, the United Service Organizations (USO) set up a center in

⁹ John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Country Historical Society, 1999), 314.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 316.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² "Pastors to Eye Sailor Problem," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 18, 1942.

Milwaukee on Water Street. At this location and others, the USO offered entertainment for the male troops such as dances. The USO also gave out tickets to public dances at the Eagles, Modernistic, and Wisconsin Roof ballrooms, to movies, and even to the Milwaukee Clipper lake cruise.¹³ In addition, hundreds of citizens welcomed the boys into their own homes. These families, such as Mr. and Mrs. Pohlmann of Shorewood, provided “home cooked dinners and a chance to relax in a friendly home” for the young men.¹⁴ The Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) also put on events and offered space to the servicemen. In addition, churches held dances and parties at their parish halls. Some offered automobile tours of the city. The American Legion held picnics.¹⁵ Milwaukee soon earned the reputation as one of the best “leave” towns in the Midwest.¹⁶

GIRLS AT WAR

War created exciting and dangerous opportunities for teenagers as it introduced them to “work, training, and adult independence that had been closed to high school-age youth for years and it changed national priorities, at least temporarily: All of a sudden the nation needed mature, responsible teenagers, willing and able to work for their country, not mindless bobby soxers with nothing better to do than dance.”¹⁷ Most high school students during World War Two did not enjoy the same pastimes of youth as the generations before them. Soldiers and sailors took over the movie theatres and other after-school hangouts. Gasoline shortages prevented the youth from using cars to go on dates or race around playing reckless driving games. There were also fewer available

¹³ “Propose Large Dances to Entertain the Sailors,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 22, 1942.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “Only 2 Out of 8,000 Sailors Go Overboard,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 22, 1942.

¹⁶ “Propose Large Dances to Entertain the Sailors,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 22, 1942.

¹⁷ Palladino, 60.

boys for girls to go on dates since so many men had entered the armed services or were in the work force. Instead, girls were often encouraged to contribute to the war effort and display their patriotism by taking over domestic duties, providing childcare for their siblings, planting victory gardens, and “doing without.” During 1942 and 1943, high school enrollments dropped as youth entered the workforce. One source states that in 1940 approximately one million boys and girls between fourteen and sixteen were employed nationally; by 1944 the figure had risen to nearly three million.¹⁸ Boys who were not old enough to join the Armed Services now had an important social and economic role to fill. Large-scale employment of youth was often the result of employers’ willingness to lower their age requirements for employment, to be less efficient in confirming the ages of their young workers, to lax local government enforcement, and to a labor shortage. This placed juveniles on the streets with freedom from parental control and provided them with disposable income. Thus they entered into a public arena where they soon drew the attention of adults.

Teenage girls, like their mothers, did their part for the war effort. The contribution of teenage girls to the war effort is often overlooked or deemed “frivolous,” but in reality in addition to planting victory gardens and giving up nylon stockings, thousands of adolescent girls entered the workforce during World War Two. By December 6, 1942, over three hundred thousand Chicago-area women or 19 percent of the female population worked in some type of war plant.¹⁹ In 1944, the U.S. Bureau of Labor reported that between 1940 and 1944, the overall employment of fourteen-to-seventeen-year-olds had increased by 189 percent. Although this figure included boy, the

¹⁸ Ibid., 393.

¹⁹ Dominic A. Pacyga, *Chicago: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 278.

percentage increase in the employment of girls during this period was much greater. The number of boys working increased by 169 percent, while the number of girls working increased by 243 percent. Furthermore, the percentage of working girls aged fourteen and fifteen expanded by 361 percent between 1940 and 1944. By April 1944, approximately one out of every five girls between the ages of fourteen and seventeen worked compared to one in thirteen in 1940. In addition, “the range of jobs open to girls widened considerably over the course of the war.” While girls of that age had traditionally been employed in domestic service, by 1943 the majority of jobs held by these girls were in the wholesale and retail sectors, with domestic service making up only 20 percent of the total. Girls worked in ten-cent stores, drugstores, and groceries, “doing everything from working behind the counter to running errands.”²⁰ Girls willingly answered the call of duty and displayed patriotism in various forms including joining the workforce. However, they rarely received attention for their patriotic deeds. Instead, the media focused on sex and delinquency.

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY STATISTICS

Nationally, juvenile crime statistics indicated decreased incidents of misconduct by minor boys during wartime and significantly increased complaints about juvenile girls, primarily for running away or sexual offenses. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the United States Children’s Bureau were the two main government agencies that examined juvenile delinquency during World War Two. J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI published several articles in the early 1940s regarding crime and delinquency of

²⁰ Rachel Devlin, *Relative Intimacy: Fathers, Adolescent Daughters, and Postwar American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2005), 92.

American youth.²¹ Hoover and his agency claimed that their records showed a 55 percent increase in arrests of girls under twenty-one between 1941 and 1942. Arrests for drunkenness increased 40 percent, for disorderly conduct almost 70 percent, for prostitution and commercialized vice 64 percent, for sex offenses 104 percent, and for vagrancy 124 percent. These increases were greatest among girls between fifteen and nineteen years of age. Even among girls under fifteen, there was an increase of more than 49 percent.²² The FBI reported a “surge in adolescent crime during each war year, paced by increasing female arrests.”²³ The Children’s Bureau explained the increase in terms of changing methods of gathering crime statistics and sudden population shifts into war industry areas. In a 1943 pamphlet on delinquency, Katherine Lenroot, director of the Children’s Bureau, stated that available statistics have shown “no alarming tendency to increased ‘juvenile crime’ as newspapers perennially claim.”²⁴ Despite conflicting evidence, both government agencies agreed that at least some increase in juvenile crime occurred during the war. Historian James Gilbert argues that the most important development was the visibility of juvenile crime, especially in areas where rapid population increase strained public institutions. He contends that “considered overall, the rise was probably not great enough to justify the attention focused on it during 1943 and 1944.”²⁵

An analysis of the Milwaukee Police Department Annual Reports reveals an increase in juvenile delinquency during wartime in Milwaukee. The total numbers of

²¹ Gilbert, 28.

²² “Juvenile Delinquency in Its Present Wartime Aspect: An Address Given by Roland J. Steinle, Judge, Circuit Court of Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, October 27, 1943,” p. 3, Juvenile Delinquency Unpublished Manuscript #461, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

²³ Gilbert, 26.

²⁴ Ibid., 34.

²⁵ Ibid., 26.

juvenile detentions as determined by the Milwaukee Police Department from 1941 to 1946 were as follows: 1941, 5,647; 1942, 5,976; 1943, 7,106; 1944, 6,501; 1945, 6,302; 1946; 4,461. In 1943—the peak year—1,332 acts of larceny (defined as all theft except auto theft) and 471 acts of burglary (defined as breaking and entering) were committed by persons under the age of eighteen. In addition, there were 1,582 juvenile detentions for disorderly conduct and 166 for sex offenses excluding rape and prostitution. In 1944, there were 942 juvenile detentions for larceny, 343 for burglary, 1,581 for disorderly conduct, and 146 for sex offenses. A year later, there were 1,069 juvenile detentions for larceny, 419 for burglary, 1,213 for disorderly conduct, and 121 for sex offenses. Comparisons to the number of acts of juvenile delinquency committed before the war are hard to draw because the Milwaukee Police Department did not start separating their arrests into two categories, “persons over 18 years of age” and “persons under 18 years of age,” until 1943. Prior to that, juvenile arrests were excluded from the department’s annual reports.²⁶ Juvenile delinquency began to increase in 1942, peaked in 1943, then started to decline in 1944, and continued to decrease thereafter. Disorderly conduct was the crime most juveniles were detained for, followed closely by larceny. These statistics correspond with those provided by historians John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, who state that arrests nationally for selling sexual favors rose less than twenty percent during the war years, but charges of disorderly conduct increased almost two hundred

²⁶ Milwaukee Police Department Annual Report, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946, Microfilm Collection Milwaukee Police Department Annual Report, 1886-1971, Legislative Reference Bureau, City Hall, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

percent, and those for moral offenses, such as promiscuous behavior or patronizing bars too frequently, increased nearly as much.²⁷

VICTORY GIRLS IN THE NEWS

Starting in 1942, teenage girls began to capture the headlines in Milwaukee's major newspapers. Articles such as "Peril of Erring Girls Arouses Milwaukeeans" and "Date-Hunting 13-Year-Olds" grabbed the attention of anxious Milwaukeeans who feared an expansion of youth crime and immorality.²⁸ These first articles noted the reputation Milwaukee was gaining as a weekend hot spot for sailors and soldiers from the Great Lakes Naval Training Station. One piece published in the *Milwaukee Journal* in 1942 argued that the city had worked to create a reputation as a place of "hospitality for the young men who are preparing for the great battle that is ahead of us all" and that many groups of women had donated time to service centers to ensure that these boys have "welcome and wholesome entertainment and the good cheer which they deserve." However, it also stated that "hordes of young girls" put Milwaukee's reputation at risk when they "invade the downtown on a Saturday night, looking for sailors" and claimed that these "hordes of silly girls who troop downtown" endangered the situation for these boys who deserve hospitality and recreation.²⁹ Readers were informed that the girls were "extremely young—14, 15, 16."³⁰ No one thought to ask what "wholesome, young

²⁷ John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, Second Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 261.

²⁸ "Peril of Erring Girls Arouses Milwaukeeans," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 2, 1943 and "Date-Hunting 13-Year-Olds," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 3, 1943.

²⁹ "Saturday Night in Milwaukee," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 19, 1942.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

soldiers were doing with such underage, oversexed streetwalkers.”³¹ Instead, the public focused its attention on young women.

Concern heightened as reports flooded the papers, claiming that “girls in their early teens flock to Wisconsin Avenue and downtown bars to pick up dates with the city’s sailor visitors.”³² The articles cited a “disturbing delinquency problem” and the “problem of promiscuous dating downtown by girls 13, 14, and 15 years old.”³³ In response, Milwaukee church leaders began to hold meetings to “map plans for dealing with the problem.”³⁴ Dr. John Lewis, minister of Calvary Presbyterian Church and president of the Milwaukee Council of Churches, called one such meeting where he commented on the recent attention Milwaukee had gained among soldiers and sailors. Believing that “the arrival of from 7,000 to 10,000 young men in our city each weekend is bound to create problems of accommodations and difficulties,” Lewis claimed the issue was of “utmost urgency” as “some unpleasant facts will have to be faced and a solution must be found.”³⁵ In order to get a first-hand experience of the situation, Reverend Lewis shed his ministerial garb for civilian clothes to make the rounds at the downtown taverns. What he found was “shocking.” He painted a picture of young girls, many appearing no older than thirteen, under the influence of alcohol, “mauling” their sailor and soldier escorts at the bars and in dimly lit booths.³⁶ Similarly, at an address before the Whitefish Bay Club in 1943, District Attorney Kerwin claimed that there was “shocking sex

³¹ Palladino, 76.

³² “Navy Watching Sailors; Asks Homes Watch Girls,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 21, 1942.

³³ *Ibid.*; “Propose Large Dances to Entertain the Soldiers,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 22, 1942.

³⁴ “Pastors to Eye Sailor Problem,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 18, 1942.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ “Dr. Lewis Reports ‘Shocking’ Week End Delinquency Here,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 2, 1942.

looseness” among young Milwaukee girls, pointing to a ninety percent increase in sex delinquency for Milwaukee women of all ages.³⁷

The Committee on the Alleged Increase in Juvenile Problems in Milwaukee County provided statistics to support some of the claims made in the newspapers. The committee concluded in 1944 that certain juvenile problems had escalated during the war years. Among these were increased occurrences of girls running away, particularly in the fifteen and sixteen year age group; sex delinquency among younger girls; drinking and smoking among youth; and young marriages.³⁸ The committee also noted an interruption of normal relationships with men for many older girls. In addition, social agencies in Milwaukee reported changes in their clientele during the war years. For instance, the Friendship House, a shelter for women and children, reported in 1943 that there was a considerable change in the type of cases referred to them. Formerly, they had received mostly women who were stranded in Milwaukee and needed a night’s lodging until they could obtain funds from home or the Travelers’ Aid could arrange for transportation. The new cases, they reported, were referrals from juvenile and municipal court (girls and women who were picked up in hotels with civilians and servicemen); unmarried mothers; cases of eviction referred from sheriff’s office; and referrals from Travelers’ Aid and from Family and Children’s Agencies for temporary shelter. The Travelers’ Aid Society reported a 20 percent increase in cases in 1943, the greatest increase occurring among girls fifteen and sixteen years of age. These girls were often out-of-town girls who were

³⁷ “Kerwin Cites Delinquency,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 15, 1943.

³⁸ Summarized Report of the Study by the Committee on the Alleged Increase in Juvenile Problems in Milwaukee County to the Social Planning Committee, Milwaukee County Community Fund, and Council of Social Agencies, Folder on Juvenile Problems and Youth Centers Committee, August 1943-July 1961, Box 21, United Way of Greater Milwaukee Records, 1903-1966, Milwaukee Manuscript Collection BG, Wisconsin Historical Society, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. (Hereafter referred to as United Way Collection.)

accused of sex delinquency after the police found them in hotels with older men. They would later be sent home.³⁹

Why did the media focus on teenage girls and their sexual behavior? Historian Susan Cahn argues that “the adolescent sex delinquent complicated the issues of prostitution and promiscuity,” making it difficult to “draw the line between ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ sexuality, between good girls and bad.” She further contends that, when “placed in the national spotlight, sexually active girls provoked a widespread discussion about a topic that at first glance seems far removed from the exigencies of war—the nature of female adolescent sexuality.”⁴⁰ Journalist Jane Mersky Leder claims that this attention also derived from failed efforts to educate the soldiers about venereal disease and appropriate protection. When attempts to regulate men’s behavior did not work, public attention was then refocused on the promiscuous girls who had “loose morals.” Although “there had always been teenage girls who ‘did it,’ of course,” the war made them “more visible, more independent, more mobile.”⁴¹

THE GIRL PROBLEM

“Goodtime girls of high-school age are the army’s biggest problem today as a potential source of disease,” according to a 1943 report from the base surgeon of a large Midwestern army airfield. He further claimed that “while mothers are winning the war in the factories, their daughters are losing it on the streets.”⁴² During World War I, the focus

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Susan K. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 183.

⁴¹ Jane Mersky Leder, *Thanks for the Memories: Love, Sex, and World War II* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), xiii.

⁴² John Costello, *Virtue Under Fire: How World War II Changed Our Social and Sexual Attitudes* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1985), 207.

of moral reformers had been on the dangers of prostitution. However, the moralists of the 1940s devoted their attention to the non-commercial behavior of “victory girls.”⁴³ Even though less than two percent of the teenage population nationally could be labeled promiscuous in the 1940s, this small portion did in fact break society’s rules. Their indiscretions had more impact than numbers alone implied, especially if they were infected with syphilis or gonorrhea.⁴⁴ As juvenile rates of venereal diseases began to rise during the wartime, “V-girls” attracted national and local attention. The American girl next door was no longer the innocent jitterbug but instead a national threat that seduced soldiers and infected them with dangerous diseases.

V-girls in Milwaukee and throughout the nation were blamed for the rise of casual sex and venereal disease. While girls were viewed as the perpetrators, servicemen were then seen as the “hapless victims” of these sex-crazed girls.⁴⁵ Throughout the duration of the war, pamphlets were produced that reflected such ideas. The extent to which the “victory girl” actually represented a new mode of sexual behavior is not known. Historians such as John Costello argue that wartime circumstances did change sexual conduct, especially among younger women. According to Army and Navy venereal disease contact reports, 26.6 percent of the contacts named by military men (those females with whom the servicemen had engaged in sexual intercourse) were under twenty years of age.⁴⁶ In the address given by Judge Roland J. Steinle on October 27, 1943, he stated that the proximity of military of training camps to communities had led to an increase of juvenile delinquency especially among young girls. Steinle continued: “the

⁴³ D’ Emilio and Freedman, 261.

⁴⁴ Palladino, 75.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Anderson, 109.

uniform is, of course, an attraction. Young girls go out to parties with soldiers and sailors, partly for fun and thrills and partly to display their new found boyfriends in uniform.” He stated that “statistics show that social disease in many places are being spread by young girls twelve to seventeen years of age today.”⁴⁷ Once again, girls were being portrayed as pursuers of uniforms, accountable for the spread of venereal disease. Nonetheless, the Report on the Study of Juvenile Problems included statistics that indicated that venereal disease rates in Milwaukee were low and not increasing. Nevertheless, the report itself stated that “venereal disease is a serious problem. The Police and Health Departments and other groups, however, [were] attempting to meet this problem.”⁴⁸ The reason behind the city’s low venereal disease rates was attributed to that fact that “a program of physical examinations of sex delinquents” had been in effect in Milwaukee for ten years prior to the war.⁴⁹ Another report done by the Committee on the Alleged Increase in Juvenile Problems stated that the “monthly rates for syphilis and gonorrhea during 1941, 1942, and the first six months of 1943 gave no evidence of a trend.” In fact, the Milwaukee rate was lower compared to other cities with populations over 200,000.⁵⁰

The number of runaway girls also increased during the war. A report made in 1942 acknowledged these runaways came from mostly rural and semirural areas, and were mostly between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one. Accordingly, these girls flocked to the war-activity centers such as camps and war-production areas in order to

⁴⁷ Address by Steinle, 9.

⁴⁸ Report on Study of Alleged Increase in Juvenile Problems, 4.

⁴⁹ “Delinquency Controlled,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 12, 1943.

⁵⁰ Summary of Contacts with Social Agencies Relative to Types of New Cases Coming to Their Attention, Report from Committee on Juvenile Problems, September 16, 1943, p. 5, Folder on Juvenile Problems and Youth Centers Committee August 1943-July 1961, Box 21, United Way Collection.

seek adventure, romance, marriage, and economic opportunity.⁵¹ An example of such a case occurred after a Milwaukee girl had been caught by a truancy officer in Illinois and brought back home to Milwaukee by her father. This sixteen-year-old Milwaukee girl skipped school one day and hitchhiked to Texas, then back to Illinois. There she worked as a waitress where she engaged in “improper conduct” with a soldier who went overseas. She claimed that she was engaged to that soldier although she confessed to the juvenile court judge that she had similar relations with a sailor she only knew as Johnny. Her parents were lectured by the judge on their responsibilities and the girl was placed on probation.⁵² In addition, the *Milwaukee Journal* reported that the “missing persons” file in the Milwaukee detective bureau was “expanding rapidly” as teen age girls left their homes to be near their military beaus.⁵³ From January to July in 1943, the detective bureau received around 200 reports from parents requesting police aid in finding daughters who disappeared after falling in love with a soldier, sailor, or marine. Captain of Detectives Adolph Kraemer stated that “most of the girls reported missing have left for army camps. Some of them married soldiers and live on army posts where quarters are provided for them, while others live in hotels or rooming houses near army camps.”⁵⁴

THE MYTH OF THE VICTORY GIRL

The question remains how sexually active was the victory girl? Was she as “promiscuous” as the media claimed? According to Leder, the vast majority of young women were not pickups. Rather, many were courted by community members to do their

⁵¹ Walter C. Reckless, “The Impact of War on Crime, Delinquency, and Prostitution,” *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 48, no. 3 (November 1942): 386.

⁵² “Juvenile Case Rise Is Noted,” *Milwaukee Journal*, December 7, 1942.

⁵³ “Juvenile Vice Opening Eyes of the Public,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 1943.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

patriotic duty by entertaining the troops at United Service Organizations (USO) dances and other government-sponsored activities. Soldiers learned early on to appeal to a young woman's patriotism in addition to her heart and libido.⁵⁵ Wartime affairs were intensified by the need to make the most of every hour. The phrase "I'm going overseas tomorrow, so stay with me tonight" became a popular line.⁵⁶ However, one estimate holds that sexually active victory girls represented only at most 1 in 1,700 out of their age group. Another source states that only two percent of the female population became involved in this behavior.⁵⁷ These statistics do not match up with the "hordes of girls" the media was reporting. Whether these 13 year olds were mauling soldiers or not, teenage girls faced a complex reality during the war in terms of gender roles and social customs.

What people fail to mention is that "many a teenage girl was told that having intercourse with a soldier before he was shipped out, perhaps never to return, was a way to contribute to the war effort."⁵⁸ Others failed to mention the pressure that the young men placed on the girls. For instance, one woman recalled that when the hometown National Guard was called up "immediately all the young men started to pressure the girls to have sex."⁵⁹ Only a few of these observers acknowledged the fact that these men were usually older than the girls. Historian Marilyn Hegarty argues that although

⁵⁵ Leder, xiv.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Palladino, 75. In fact, during the 1940s the illegitimacy rate rose more rapidly for nonwhite women than for white, almost 10 times greater. The girls the media was describing were not non-white.

⁵⁸ Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 130.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

authorities focused on teenage girls as the transmitters of disease, they “failed to note that sexual congress with underage girls was a criminal offense.”⁶⁰

Historian Amanda Littauer contends that the “victory girl” emerged from “the interaction of government research and mass media.” She contends that the discourse on the V-girl “both expressed and perpetuated a myriad of fears, including the risks of overzealous patriotism, adolescent sexual experimentation, and parental loss of responsibility and control....”⁶¹ She argues that in order to gain legal control over the commercial and noncommercial sexuality of these women, public leaders exaggerated the youth of such girls associated with venereal diseases. This led to the “problem” of “girl delinquency.” She states that the V-girl was constructed at the “intersection of public policy, social practice, and popular imagination,” making her a “hybrid of mystique and reality.”⁶² As a symbol of cultural and familial disorder, she anticipated the “juvenile delinquency” scare of the 1950s.

UNCOVERING TEENAGE PREGNANCY DURING THE WAR

On June 27, 1943, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* published an article entitled “Warns of Perils for Young Girls on Chance Dates.” This article told the tale of two “lonesome” fourteen-year-old girls, Esther and Mary. Esther’s father worked days and her mother worked nights so Esther usually ate supper alone. One summer evening Esther and Mary took a streetcar to Grant Park near downtown Chicago. There they met two young men who had a bottle of liquor that they eagerly shared with the girls. A few months later the

⁶⁰ Ibid., 131.

⁶¹ Amanda Littauer, “Unsanctioned Encounters: Women, Girls, and Non-Marital Sexuality in the United States, 1941-1963,” (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2006), 108.

⁶² Ibid., 109.

court physician determined Mary was pregnant. She only knew the young man who was now the father of her unborn baby as “Jack.”⁶³ The article told another story of how three other young girls, two fourteen and one fifteen, traveled to the Loop for some fun on a Saturday afternoon. There they met three males who took them to several taverns. The girls became intoxicated and feared going home in such a condition so they agreed to stay with the men at a “\$1 a night hotel.” Two of the girls became pregnant.⁶⁴

The concept of the victory girl becomes even more complicated when considering unwed motherhood. Young girls were indeed getting pregnant, which means that some of these girls were obviously participating in sexual intercourse. These seemingly innocent rendezvous and “patriotic acts” with sailors became life-changing when the girls found themselves pregnant and unwed. Although many historians have focused on women during the war and even on sex and victory girls (most recently being Marilyn Hegarty’s *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes*), young unwed mothers have been largely ignored. This can be partially attributed to the fact that studying unwed mothers in any time period is challenging, but it proves even more arduous during times of social chaos. During World War Two, it was easier to conceal an illegitimate pregnancy. For instance, a young girl could tell her doctor or other acquaintances that her “husband” was stationed abroad. Because many husbands were actually away from the home fighting in the war, this would be a likely and plausible situation. Unwed mothers could then lie about their marital statuses on birth certificates. This, in addition to baby farms and other black markets for babies, makes out-of-wedlock birth rates especially difficult to estimate. Although some of the numbers reported in the media

⁶³ June Geserick, “Warn of Perils for Young Girls in Chance Dates,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 27, 1943, 17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

were exaggerated, the United States did witness an increase in the number of unmarried pregnant girls asking for assistance and in the number of illegitimate births. A 1968 publication from the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare revealed that estimated illegitimacy rates between girls 15-19 increased slowly during the war years, from 8.0 per cent in 1941 to 9.5 per cent in 1945.⁶⁵

The war, undoubtedly, created situations conducive to illegitimacy. In her paper, “Unmarried Mothers in Wartime,” presented at the regional meeting of the National Conference of Social Work in New York in March 1943, Children’s Bureau specialist Maud Morlock discussed the changing social environment and its impact on young adolescent girls. Morlock claimed that with a “greater understanding of sex psychology and freedom between the sexes,” and an “attitude that ‘nothing is too good for the soldier,’” companionship between male and female adolescents changed and so did their “interpretations of what is wholesome.”⁶⁶ Adolescent girls would either follow their boyfriends or “go to [cities] in the hope of finding masculine companionship.”⁶⁷ An article on “unwanted babies” in Chicago stated that illegitimacy had accelerated due to “the departure of men for camps, the shifting of population to meet war production needs, and the availability of work for women in low income groups.” The article also cited “a new sense of irresponsibility on the part of some men in service and the general moral relaxation that has inevitably accompanied war.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ A bigger jump was found among females 20 to 24 years old, 9.8 in 1941 to 15.3 in 1945. National Center for Health Statistics, *Trends in Illegitimacy: United States—1940-1965*, Public Health Services Publication No. 1000, Series 21—No. 15, February 1968, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D.C., p. 25.

⁶⁶ Maud Morlock, “Unmarried Mothers in Wartime,” Paper presented at the regional meeting of the National Conference of Social Work in New York, March 1943, p. 2, in Folder 9, Box 47 Child Welfare League, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁸ Lloyd Wendt, “Unwanted Babies!,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 16, 1942, D1.

Like other cities nationwide, Milwaukee reported an increase in illegitimate births and girls using public services for assistance with such births. In January 1943, District Attorney Herbert J. Steffes announced an increase of about 20 percent in illegitimate births among girls in their early teens in Milwaukee. He attributed this to the “fact that girls 14, 15, and 16 years of age are permitted to stay out late hours indiscriminately and unsupervised.”⁶⁹ In the past, the district attorney’s office had handled about 350 cases involving illegitimate births each year; in 1942, they dealt with 420.⁷⁰ The Friendship House reported to the Committee on the Alleged Increase in Juvenile Problems in September 1943 that they were handling more cases of unmarried mothers. In the same report, the Red Cross stated that it had a number of girls who were illegitimately pregnant requesting help in locating servicemen so that they could be married. In addition, the number of unmarried mother cases reported at children’s agencies in Milwaukee increased over the first six months of 1942 and 1943 in comparison to 1941. In 1941 from January to June, the intake of unmarried mothers at children’s agencies was 164; in 1942, it was 191 and in 1943, it was 180. Similarly, admissions of unmarried mothers to selected maternity homes showed a slight increase in 1942 and 1943. In the first six months of 1941, maternity home intake of unmarried mothers was 45; in 1942, it was 50 and by the following year, 55.⁷¹

⁶⁹ “Note Increase in Erring Girls,” *Milwaukee Journal*, January 17, 1943.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Summary of Contacts with Social Agencies, 4. The children’s agencies in Milwaukee providing care for unmarried mothers during the war years were the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau, Children’s Service Association, Jewish Social Service Association, Lutheran Children’s Friend Society, and Lutheran Welfare Society. Milwaukee’s maternity homes included the Martha Washington Home and Misericordia Hospital Maternity Home (now known as Rosalie Manor).

WHO'S TO BLAME?

Who or what was to blame for the behavior of these adolescent girls? Everyone seemed to have a different answer. Most law enforcement and public officials cited parental neglect as the most important factor leading to juvenile delinquency and blamed working mothers as a primary cause of such negligence. At a panel discussion attended by the Milwaukee Council of Parents and Teachers held at the Wisconsin Avenue School in March 1944, Dr. W.W. Theissen, assistant superintendent and guidance director in Milwaukee public schools, stated that “homes from which both parents are absent at work are the homes where most delinquency arises.”⁷² Police Chief Joseph T. Kluchesky said that children and adolescents needed to be taught that the wartime ideals of aggression and destruction were not in themselves admirable. Finally, Mrs. Theodore J. Kummerlein, president of the Cumberland School PTA, declared that juvenile delinquency was caused by parents who needed to develop happiness and honesty in children, and to set a good example of how to use leisure time properly. *The Annual Report of the Milwaukee Police Department* for 1943 concluded that because “thousands of mothers have gone into war industries or are working outside of the home” the juvenile situation had changed in Milwaukee and juvenile delinquency had increased. The report for the following year noted yet another increase in juvenile delinquency. Furthermore, John J. Kenny, chief probation officer in Milwaukee, observed in July 1943 that parental supervision is the “best of all ways to curb the current upsurge in sex delinquency among girls.”⁷³

⁷² “Child Behavior Topic of Panel,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 16, 1944.

⁷³ “Link Parents to Delinquency,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 7, 1943.

Other agencies also saw parents as the main cause of female, adolescent sexual delinquency, specifically citing mothers and their wartime behavior. For example, the Juvenile Court of Milwaukee reported a large increase in girl cases as a result of parental neglect. The court argued that the daughter often mimicked her mother's behavior: mothers going out with married men. A 1942 article in the *Milwaukee Journal* argued that delinquency among girls was “an educational problem—educating the parents of these 13 and 14 and 15 year old girls who let them run around alone at night. It's either that or it's a police problem, but either way, you can't blame the sailors and soldiers.”⁷⁴ Police Chief Kluchesky stated that sex delinquency seemed to be more serious, particularly with minor girls and servicemen. He claimed:

We've whipped up the war psychology. Girls are taught through everything they hear and read and see in the movies, that it's patriotic to go out with boys in uniform. Then we blame the girls for getting a little too bold and free with them. Many cases of sex delinquency would not have happened if someone along the way, particularly parents, had warned these young people.⁷⁵

An example of such a case would be a girl, barely fifteen, who had been deserted by her father while her mother worked nights; the teenager was allowed to run around. This fifteen-year-old admitted to a juvenile court judge that she had had “improper relations with more soldiers than she could recall.”⁷⁶ A report done by the Committee on the Alleged Increase in Juvenile Problems argued that some girls had become sex delinquents because “they knew their mothers were going out with other married men and thus felt it is all right for them to do so.”⁷⁷ While the juvenile court and its probation officers blamed

⁷⁴ “Propose Large Dances to Entertain the Sailors,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 22, 1942.

⁷⁵ “Youth Trouble Up To Parents,” *Milwaukee Journal*, October 20, 1943.

⁷⁶ “Juvenile Case Rise Is Noted,” *Milwaukee Journal*, December 7, 1942.

⁷⁷ Report on Study of Alleged Increase in Juvenile Problems, 4.

the parents of the juvenile delinquents, community members at large believed “strong action by authorities [could] control the evil quickly and effectively.”⁷⁸

Besides parental neglect, authorities also considered the sale of liquor to minors as a contributor to the increase in sex delinquency among young girls. Wartime allegedly incited a sharp increase in smoking and drinking among Milwaukee juveniles. In May 1943, District Judge Harvey L. Neelen observed that “more cases involving sales of cigarets [sic] and intoxicating liquor to minors were presented before me in the last two months in [than] any recent years.”⁷⁹ In a December 1943 article entitled “Drink Called Big Factor in Wartime Delinquency” in the *Milwaukee Journal*, probation officers remarked that the sale of liquor to minors is “one of the primary factors in the increase of sex delinquency among young girls.”⁸⁰ One officer commented that in nearly every case investigated by the probation office the delinquency had its origin in drinking, usually in a place downtown. The officer went on to say that some of the girls would go downtown deliberately to meet “pick-ups.” In the article, the case of a thirteen year-old girl who looked her age is cited. She allegedly was able to get drinks in three or four bars downtown and even picked up a soldier. The article also mentioned that some downtown facilities introduced cards that youthful patrons needed to sign before they were sold liquor. Nonetheless, one of the probation officers commented that these signature cards were “manifestly nonsense” and would not work.⁸¹

Authorities also viewed taverns and tavern owners as contributors to the juvenile delinquency problem. In October 1943, Police Chief Kluchesky declared that “keeping

⁷⁸ “Milwaukee Delinquency Problem,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 7, 1943.

⁷⁹ “Many Minors Smoke, Drink,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 11, 1943.

⁸⁰ “Drink Called Big Factor in Wartime Delinquency,” *Milwaukee Journal*, December 3, 1943.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

minors out of taverns is the big problem.”⁸² District Attorney James J. Kerwin supported this statement when giving an address before the Whitefish Bay Club at the Whitefish Bay Inn. He placed the blame of sex delinquency on tavern operators who sell liquor to young boys and girls, stating that “[i]f they keep on doing so, I’m going to close them up.”⁸³ Other incidents further fueling the condemnation of taverns as causes of juvenile delinquency occurred in December 1943. A fourteen year-old girl named Betty testified in district court that she had been sold two bottles of beer and two glasses of beer at a downtown bar on October 25. Another girl who was eighteen years old had been served beer and whiskey in the same tavern. The manager of the bar and his bartenders were questioned on why they did not call the police sooner or why they had not made the young girls sign cards swearing they were twenty-one.⁸⁴

In most of the cases, the victory girls did not view themselves as victims. Rather they argued that they were responding to the wartime conditions in their own ways. Since they had no immediate part to play in the war and their male contemporaries had been shipped to war or put to work, some adolescent girls felt they had no such outlet for patriotism. Psychologists argued that these victory girls would then pursue soldiers as a means to join the wartime adventure. In a *Report on the Study of the Alleged Increase in Juvenile Problems*, the committee mentioned that young girls gave the excuse that “because the men in the service are sacrificing their lives for them, they should show the men as good a time as possible and give them anything they want.”⁸⁵ Furthermore, an article in the *Milwaukee Journal* stated that the girls “excuse their indiscretions on the

⁸² “Delinquency Controlled,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 12, 1943.

⁸³ “Kerwin Cites Delinquency,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 15, 1943.

⁸⁴ “Bought Beers, Girl, 14, Says,” *Milwaukee Journal*, December 10, 1943.

⁸⁵ *Report on Study of the Alleged Increase in Juvenile Problems*, 4.

ground that it is patriotic to bolster the morale of our fighting men. They plead that they have nothing but themselves to give. They even admit that in many cases they are the aggressors.”⁸⁶ Psychologists argued that female sex delinquency was a result of the girls’ desires for love, attention, and excitement rather than sexual gratification and female emotional maladjustment. These girls’ expressions of sexual freedom were viewed as threats to the institution of the family and to society as a whole. The idea that war might undermine conventional morality or that predatory soldiers might manipulate and infect young teenage girls was never raised.⁸⁷

IMPACT OF WAR ON GIRLS

Historian Marilyn Hegarty contends that the “dual discourse of female sexual mobilization and control” during the war had long-term consequences. The increasing visibility of women in society as well as the discourse on victory girls “left a persistent trace of suspicion regarding female sexuality that complicated women’s postwar status.” In addition, though many women ultimately returned to domestic life, others “continued to challenge the status quo.”⁸⁸ In this manner, the war had an unintended impact on gender roles and relations between the sexes, paving the way for the feminist liberation movement in the later 1960s.

The war also had unexpected effects on girls who watched their lives change drastically within the period of a few years. One girl described it as liberating since there were “no male role models to shape her expectations and behavior.” She further explained that she “probably would not have been allowed so much personal freedom to

⁸⁶ “Milwaukee Delinquency Problem,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 7, 1943.

⁸⁷ Palladino, 75.

⁸⁸ Hegarty, 162.

roam the library, the city, the fields, neighborhoods, woods, and have a paper route” if her father had been home. She concluded that the war taught her a lot about herself: “Now I know there is not a whole lot I can’t do, even as a woman.”⁸⁹ Gerda Lerner has even gone so far to state that homefront girls became the movers and shakers of the feminist movement. She wrote, “It was left to the college-age daughters born of the World War Two generation to furnish the womanpower for the new feminist revolution... they felt personally cheated by the unfulfilled promises of legal and economic equality.”⁹⁰ These girls also had strong female role models—mothers that had answered the call of duty during the war. William Tuttle argues that it was the “homefront events involving father’s absence and mother’s working” that “first awakened the questioning of gender roles.”⁹¹ Young girls now had role models of working women to emulate. The idea that “work could be rewarding and could add a new dimension to a young woman’s life gained new acceptance.” However, this perspective clashed with the realities of suburban life during the 1950s.⁹²

CONCLUSION

Articles in the *Milwaukee Journal* and *Milwaukee Sentinel* lamenting the problem of juvenile delinquency also revealed larger social trends occurring in Milwaukee.

Parents were leaving the home. Fathers went to war or into the war industry. Mothers

⁸⁹ Quoted in William Tuttle, “Daddy’s Gone to War”: *The Second World War in the Lives of America’s Children* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 228.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 229.

⁹² Joseph M. Hawes, “The Strange History of Female Adolescence in the United States,” *Journal of Psychohistory* 13.1 (Summer 1985): 58.

entered the workforce, leaving youth unsupervised. Family roles did change. Teenagers, especially males, also participated in war work and consequently had more money to spend. Female girls ventured into the public arena, some getting service sector jobs such as waitressing where they were put in contact with all sorts of men, including servicemen. These changes did in fact disrupt society. In Milwaukee, juvenile delinquency did increase, but this was not unexpected. Nor was it an isolated statistic. Female juvenile delinquency increased more than male juvenile delinquency. These statistics were, however, exaggerated by Milwaukee newspapers. In 1942, the “girl problem” captured the attention of citizens nationwide as reports of increased juvenile delinquency flooded the local and national newspapers. These articles also contained explanations for such behavior including parental negligence, the influence of alcohol, the lack of traditional pastimes for youth, and inadequate attention provided by the churches and social organizations. What no one mentioned in the media was the idea that these girls were “endangered.” Instead, by the end of World War Two, young women “became the danger.”⁹³ Even though the war ended, the image of women, especially girls, as the sexual aggressors in society never disappeared. In the following chapters, society’s reaction to this new image and its impact on sexuality and pregnancy are explored.

Sex delinquency among female adolescents during World War Two received the most attention among social commentators. According to them, combining a lack of parental supervision, alcohol, and servicemen with young impressionable girls in an environment of instability could only lead to trouble. Milwaukee girls were more than a product of their environment. They actively chose to disobey the law in order to proclaim their sexual freedom. They were responding to the social changes as well as the

⁹³ Hegarty, 68.

societal expectations placed upon them. They had been raised to get married and become good wives. When their male peers were shipped to war or moved to join in the war industry, teenage girls were left with limited options. However, not all girls responded by “mauling” servicemen at bars. One must remember that only two percent of the female population became involved in this behavior. A more accurate portrayal would be of girls entering the workforce where they had more options than ever before. The startling aspect of the war for the adults was not an increase in juvenile delinquency but rather a decrease in their influence over youth. Female sexuality especially represented an issue that adults desperately sought to control but could not. Thus teenage girls, like Shirley and Susan, fell victim to the anxiety of adults and to authorities who saw female sexuality as a threat to the social order.

CHAPTER THREE
BECOMING JUNE CLEAVER:
TEENAGE GIRLS AND SEX IN THE “LONG 1950S”

In 1949, the editors of *Ladies' Home Journal* conducted an investigation into the lives of American teenagers. Determined to discover the intimate details of teenage life, reporters travelled the country interviewing youth about morals, religion, politics, food choices, fashion, and extracurricular activities.¹ The editors justified the significance of gathering the teenage viewpoint, explaining that the study would provide an understanding into the lives of youth. The writers stated: “To know and understand them within the bounds of their own homes and schools is important. To see them as part of the full picture of our ideologically distraught world is imperative.”² Working-class and minority high school students were also included in this report, providing a variety of perspectives of youth experiences. The results of this study were published monthly in issues of *Ladies' Home Journal* and then collectively as a book in 1949. The fact that a major magazine would devote large amounts of time and resources to the study of teenagers revealed the growing popular obsession with this new category of “youth.”

Although the term *adolescent* had not been invented until the turn of the twentieth century, by the 1950s this group of young people had an identity of their own. Teenagers were attracting more attention than ever before. Adolescence had become “a legal as well as a social category.”³ For instance, most cities had juvenile courts and most department stores had teen sections. An increasing amount of movies and products were being

¹ Maureen Daly, ed. *Profile of Youth* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1949), 9.

² *Ibid.*, 11.

³ Joseph Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 245.

created and marketed with teens in mind. This was partially due to sheer numbers: the adolescent population skyrocketed in the 1950s. By 1960, there were approximately 11.7 million girls between the ages of twelve and eighteen in the United States.⁴ Adults were both intrigued and appalled by this growing population. First, the attention seemed to be more about inquisitiveness and novelty. The “crazy fads in clothing, music, dating, and language” fascinated some adults while shocking others.⁵ By the mid-1950s, fear became more conspicuous than curiosity as teenagers seemed to be growing more disrespectful and deviant. “Parents, leaders of youth serving organizations, high school teachers, community leaders, government officials, and academic experts” struggled to interpret teenage behavior.⁶ To those of the preceding generations, “the very creative energy that welled up in rock and roll, new words, fashion and customs threatened the stability of American society.”⁷

Most notably, teenage girls became the target of this anxiety and concern. Their new visibility in society, partially due to the stereotype of the victory girl during World War Two, was reflected in movies, books, magazines, and a growing market that catered solely to them. However, more negative effects arose as girls’ sexuality failed to fade from the limelight after the war. Society continued to monitor them, fearful that their reckless sexual activities would lead to the downfall of not only local communities, but also the nation. Teenage girls needed to be raised properly and uphold moral values. They were supposed to say no to male advances so that they could one day become “good” wives and mothers. This required a respectable reputation and virginity—or at

⁴ Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995), 25.

⁵ James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America’s Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 13.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 15.

least no proof of the contrary. Teenage girls were supposed to be the future June Cleavers, but this proved to be quite the challenge in an increasingly sexualized culture.

SEX IN THE LONG 1950S

In 1956, sociologist Pitrim A. Sorokin published *The American Sex Revolution* in which he claimed that the sex revolution occurring in America was “as important as the most dramatic political or economic upheaval” and was “changing the lives of men and women more radically than any other revolution of our time.”⁸ He further argued that “during the last two centuries, and particularly the last few decades, every phase of our culture has been invaded by sex. Our civilization has become so preoccupied with sex that it now oozes from all pores of American life.”⁹ Because of this “rising tide of sex,” Sorokin figured that it was “not surprising that our youths indulge in premarital relations as their parents so often do in extramarital affairs.”¹⁰ He further expressed that, “if the present rate of decline of premarital virginity continues, this virtue is likely to become within a few generations a myth of the past.”¹¹ What Sorokin failed to realize was that this time had already arrived.

Alfred C. Kinsey provided the evidence to prove that American men and women had long been partaking in sexual activities of numerous kinds. He “pointed out the hypocrisy in daily American life, the differences between what Americans said about sex and what they actually did.”¹² His 1948 and 1953 studies revealed that not only men, but also women who were not prostitutes, engaged in premarital sex. This stunned most

⁸ Pitrim A. Sorokin, *The American Sex Revolution* (Boston: P. Sargent, 1956), 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹² David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Random House, 1993), 573.

Americans who had traditionally endorsed the virtue of female virginity and viewed sex in a similar manner as Sorokin.

The impact of Kinsey on American society, sexuality, and academic inquiry is immeasurable. Numerous books have been written on the influence of his work and his enduring legacy, the most recent and most noteworthy being Miriam Reumann's *American Sexual Character*.¹³ Kinsey's renowned books, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, popularly known as the Kinsey Reports, were published in 1948 and 1953 respectively.¹⁴ Contemporary observers referred to their publication as similar to the "explosion of the atomic bomb."¹⁵ Kinsey's studies were immediately controversial. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* stirred up significant reaction on its own, but it was the publication of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* that led to public outrage. As historian Miriam Reumann states, Kinsey was "simultaneously hailed as a liberator, denounced as a pornographer, compared to the scientific martyrs Darwin and Copernicus, and declared a Communist bent on destroying the American family, all themes that would persist in discussion of his work."¹⁶ Discussion of Kinsey's work was not limited to academia but rather "millions of Americans purchased and discussed them, rendering the reports' vocabulary and findings a part of everyday knowledge."¹⁷ The reports soon became "cultural landmarks."¹⁸

¹³ See James H. Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997); Jonathan Gathorne-Harding, *Kinsey: Sex, The Measure of All Things* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); and Miriam Reumann, *American Sexual Character: Sex, Gender, and National Identity in the Kinsey Reports* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Alfred C. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, Co., 1948) and Alfred C. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1953).

¹⁵ Reumann, 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 286.

The most significant impact of the Kinsey reports was the fact that their publication “propelled sex into the public eye in a way unlike any previous book or event had done.”¹⁹ Simply stated, Kinsey made people talk about sex. This discussion entered the national dialogue as Kinsey seemed to captivate everyone’s attention. People were afraid that the Kinsey Reports would give young people the wrong idea about sex. By hearing that more people than commonly believed participated in premarital intercourse, youth might feel justified in partaking in the same activities. The Kinsey Reports also confirmed women’s position as a sexual being: “the very fact that women’s sexual behavior and attitudes could be the subject of a scientific study was remarkable in itself.”²⁰ Kinsey definitely altered America’s view on sexuality.

At the same time, sex was becoming more visible in American popular culture. Hugh Hefner published his first issue of *Playboy* in December 1953.²¹ Aiming at a male audience with its centerfolds of nude models, *Playboy* literally sold the idea that “sex was pleasure, to be enjoyed, not something dark to be sought illicitly and clandestinely.”²² The “playboy” was a “youthful, unmarried, urban male known for his seductive prowess and upscale consumption.”²³ This concept promoted by Hefner contradicted the family man in the suburbs. Instead, the playboy lifestyle combined capitalism and sexual

¹⁹ Ibid., 285.

²⁰ Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Women’s Oral History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 3.

²¹ For more on *Playboy* magazine and Hugh Hefner, see Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Doubleday, 1983); Bill Osgerby, “The Bachelor Pad as Cultural Icon: Masculinity, Consumption, and Interior Design in American Men’s Magazines,” *Journal of Design History*, 18 (2005): 99-113; Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Carrie Pitzulo, “Bachelors and Bunnies: ‘Playboy’ Magazine and Modern Heterosexuality, 1953-1973,” Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 2008.

²² Halberstam, 575.

²³ Fraterrigo, 6.

freedom, portraying marriage as a “financial trap.”²⁴ Correspondingly, Helen Gurley Brown provided the female counterpart of the “playboy” in her 1961 monograph, *Sex and the Single Girl*. An instant best-seller, *Sex and the Single Girl* served as the “guidebook for the unwed working woman.”²⁵ According to Gurley Brown, women had as little use for marriage as men did. She further promoted the idea of sex without marriage. She openly advocated the concept that even nice girls could engage in and enjoy premarital sex without consequences.²⁶

Indeed, sex permeated American culture. “Through literature, movies, magazines, popular fiction, and pornography,” sex—including extramarital sex—had been “put on display.”²⁷ Nonfictional works like Kinsey’s as well as fictional works such as Grace Metalious’s *Peyton Place* and Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* were popular reads in the 1950s.²⁸ This relatively open discussion of sexuality worried many who feared that sex left uncontained could destroy the traditional American lifestyle. Reumann argues that in the decades following World War Two, sex “assumed a central unprecedented place in discussions of America’s troubles and future.”²⁹ Experts could no longer blame problems of sexuality on the disruption of war. Society then became consumed with finding the source of this seemingly unprecedented increase in immorality. Teenage girls proved to be an easy target.

TEENAGE CULTURE

²⁴ D’Emilio and Freedman, 302.

²⁵ Ibid., 303. See Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl* (New York: Bernard Geis, 1962).

²⁶ D’Emilio and Freedman, 304.

²⁷ Ibid., 277.

²⁸ Grace Metalious, *Peyton Place* (New York: Julian Messner, 1956) and Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (Paris: Olympia Press, 1955).

²⁹ Reumann, 20.

By the 1950s, youth had become mass consumers and advertisers had noticed their spending capacities. The teenage market that sold clothes, entertainment, and even advice had ballooned into a \$9 billion enterprise.³⁰ The full employment and flourishing economy after the war allowed American families to provide their teenagers with consumer goods. Both boys and girls actively participated in the new postwar society.

Historically speaking, despite the fact that their domestic work had been often dismissed as “chores” or the “unremunerated duty of daughters,” teenage girls have played a substantial role in America’s economic development.³¹ The economic contribution of female girls was also clear in the “long 1950s,” a period in which girls actively participated in the economy through earning and consuming. Because girls had limited options to earn money, they sought creative means of employment. They yearned to participate in the postwar consumer culture. Their wages paid for “records, clothing, and magazines,” or even college tuition.³²

As discussed in the previous chapter, girls entered the workforce during World War Two in unprecedented numbers. After the war, these young girls, like their mothers, were then encouraged through public service campaigns to return to their homes. The U.S. Department of Labor’s Children’s Bureau launched the “Back-to-School Campaign” in order to convince employers and parents that the adolescent needed to return to school after wartime. These efforts were successful as a majority of girls did not retain the kinds of jobs that they held during the war. Instead, after 1946, job opportunities for teenage girls were restricted almost entirely to babysitting. This form of domestic labor was one

³⁰ Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 157.

³¹ Miriam Forman-Brunell, “Truculent and Tractable: The Gendering of Babysitting in Postwar America,” in *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls’ Cultures*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 69.

³² *Ibid.*

of the few jobs open to teenage white middle-class girls in the 1950s. Historian Miriam Forman-Brunell has written extensively on the role of babysitting in girl culture during the postwar period. She argues that babysitting emerged during this time as a “burgeoning new service industry due to major changes in employment opportunities for women, rising affluence, a consumer culture, the baby boom, suburbanization, changing leisure patterns, child-centered families, teen culture, and the agency of adolescent girls.”³³ Babysitting was the “largest field of female adolescent employment.” As a result of the baby boom, during the 1950s, nearly half of the nation’s 7.9 million teenage girls worked as babysitters.³⁴ By 1947, babysitting had become “one of the fastest-growing service industries and teenage girls had forged an identity as its ‘workers.’”³⁵ Babysitting was also seen as an opportunity for girls to develop “social identities as ‘career girls.’”³⁶ Most importantly, the money made from babysitting allowed girls to participate in the post-war consumer society.

According to the *Ladies’ Home Journal* “Sub-Deb” column, many high school girls held outside jobs “to earn money for school expenses, entertainment and to help buy their own wardrobes.”³⁷ Indeed, girls were consumed with fashion during the 1940s and 1950s. By the end of World War Two, “bobby sox, saddle shoes, rolled jeans, and baggy sweaters” had become “entrenched teenage fashion staples.”³⁸ Girls in the postwar decades wore poodle skirts, which were large circular skirts often decorated with large appliques. Pleated skirts were also popular. On top, girls donned blouses and cardigans.

³³ Ibid., 61.

³⁴ Ibid., 62.

³⁵ Ibid., 65.

³⁶ Ibid., 68.

³⁷ Maureen Daly, ed. “Dollars and Sense,” *Ladies’ Home Journal* (August 1947): 28.

³⁸ Kelly Schrum, “‘Oh the Bliss’: Fashion and Teenage Girls,” in *The Girls’ History and Culture Reader: The Twentieth Century*, eds. Miriam Forman-Brunell and Leslie Paris (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 148.

Some wore silk scarves tied to the sides of their necks.³⁹ For boys, Levis with leather jackets were all the rage, eventually becoming the “James Dean” look. Department stores began to adjust to the girls’ needs and desires. They soon set up special sections solely for teenage merchandise. The department stores had teenage boards that worked with buyers and hosted fashion shows. Some stores even went to local high schools to promote sewing classes and provide sewing patterns.⁴⁰

In addition to fashion, teenage girls also enjoyed watching television. By 1952, almost half of the nation’s households had a television set; by 1960, only fifteen percent did not.⁴¹ Sitcoms became a popular program genre in the 1950s. Shows like *The Honeymooners*, *Lassie*, *Father Knows Best*, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, and *I Love Lucy* featured popular characters whose lives thousands of viewers watched and copied. These shows captured the hearts of the American public. Children enjoyed shows like *Disneyland* while their parents watched *The Ed Sullivan Show* on Sundays. Television producers soon realized the money-making potential of teenagers and dancing. In August 1957, Dick Clark’s “American Bandstand” premiered, featuring dancing teenagers and bands. The “Bandstand Kids” received significant attention and became the “it” figures for their peers nationwide. They “taught high school students how to be teenagers.”⁴²

Teenage movies in the 1940s and 1950s revealed America’s fascination with youth. In 1949, the films *City Across the River* and *Knock on Any Door* drew attention to

³⁹ Maureen Daly, ed. “What’s New—and What’s News!,” *Ladies’ Home Journal* (September 1948): 28.

⁴⁰ Schrum, “Oh the Bliss,” 151.

⁴¹ Palladino, 101.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 134. For more on this, see Matthew F. Delmont, *The Nicest Kids in Town* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

the issue of juvenile delinquency.⁴³ These movies set the stage for the more popular films involving teenagers and delinquency in the mid-1950s, especially *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Blackboard Jungle*.⁴⁴ Other genres of teenage movies appeared in the 1950s, including hot-rod movies and horror films. The aforementioned *Rebel Without a Cause* as well as *April Love*, *Love Me Tender*, and *I was Teenage Werewolf* established the importance of the teenage audience.⁴⁵ By the end of the 1950s, three-quarters of the movie audience was teenagers.⁴⁶ The film industry also played a “leading role in breaking down sexual taboos long before television would touch them.”⁴⁷ According to historian Kelly Schrum, high school girls acquired knowledge about “heterosexual romance, dating, passion, and sexuality from the movies they frequently attended.”⁴⁸ Regardless of the fact that these messages had long existed in society, they became more powerful when “glamorous stars on the big screen” appeared to promote them.⁴⁹

Rock ‘n’ roll became the music of the day, replacing jazz and swing that brought earlier youth to the dance floor. Just as adults had lamented the perils of jazz and swing, they also decried rock ‘n’ roll which “celebrated the wrong kind of values and promoted a hedonistic view of life that mocked the very notion of wholesome adolescence.”⁵⁰ Elvis Presley soon became the embodiment of all the things wrong with rock ‘n’ roll and the type of people who enjoyed it. His music appeared lower-class and his hip-thrusting gyrations seemed seductive and sinful. One member of the Senate Subcommittee on

⁴³ Timothy Shary, *Teen Movies: American Youth on Screen* (New York: Wallflower, 2005), 19.

⁴⁴ Nicholas Ray, *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and Richard Brooks, *Blackboard Jungle* (1955).

⁴⁵ Nicholas Ray, *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), Henry Levin, *April Love* (1957), Robert D. Webb, *Love Me Tender* (1956), and Gene Fowler, Jr., *I was Teenage Werewolf* (1957).

⁴⁶ Douglas, 71.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁸ Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox*, 154.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Palladino, 127.

Delinquency even decried Elvis Presley as a “symbol, of course, but a dangerous [one].” He further contested that Presley’s “strip-tease antics threaten[ed] to ‘rock –n-roll’ the juvenile world into open revolt against society. The gangster of tomorrow is the Elvis Presley type of today.”⁵¹

Besides delinquency, rock ‘n’ roll was tied to sexuality. “With its urgent rhythms, suggestive lyrics, and origins in African-American and working-class communities,” rock ‘n’ roll contained sexual overtones that “excited young people.”⁵² Female Elvis fans were known for attempting to rip off his clothes or covering his car with lipstick.⁵³ This caused great concern among middle-class parents and community leaders who became determined to stop Elvis and the sexual desires his music appeared to inspire.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MAGAZINES

At the end of World War Two, women were publicly acknowledged as the main consumers of the household. As historian Lizabeth Cohen discusses in her work, *Consumers Republic*, women became the primary shoppers of the family. Advertisers actively targeted women and their younger counterparts. This was most obvious in magazines where full-page advertisements were positioned to attract and lure women.⁵⁴ According to sociologist Kelly Massoni, through much of their history “women’s magazines conveyed two kinds of feminine ideals: the domestic homemaker of “service” magazines and the stylish beauty of “fashion” magazines.”⁵⁵ Women’s magazines such as *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping* were very influential in the postwar

⁵¹ Gilbert, 18.

⁵² Fraterrigo, 38.

⁵³ Palladino, 130.

⁵⁴ Massoni, 19.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 20.

decades. Because television did not become a common feature in households until the mid-to-late 1950s, and even then, it had very limited programming compared to today's standards. Consequently, magazines remained a central source of information for women. They were of extreme importance in shaping and reflecting the "values, habits, and aspirations of American women and their families."⁵⁶ Women's magazines also had a sizable circulation. For instance, *Ladies' Home Journal* "claimed the largest circulation of any magazine in the world." During the 1940s and 1950s, the leading women's magazines including *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *McCall's*, and *Redbook* boasted subscriber lists of two to eight million. The actual readership was much higher.⁵⁷ Teenage girls also read these magazines as demonstrated by the appearance of regular teen columns. For example, in the 1950s Abigail Van Buren answered their questions in a column feature in *McCall's* and *Ladies' Home Journal* had a "Sub-Deb" column.⁵⁸

Tabloid magazines, similar to their twenty-first-century descendants, captured the attention of girls in both urban and rural areas. Scandal magazines such as *Real Love*, *True Love*, *True Confessions*, and *Modern Romances* were popular amongst teenage girls in the postwar period. In each issue, tales of scandalous affairs, love and romance, sex, seduction, and secrets filled the pages, giving readers a sense of adventure. Despite the reputation of these magazines for being outrageous and extreme, it did not stop readers from identifying with the characters.⁵⁹ Despite their inclusion of scandalous stories of abortions and affairs, these magazines also expressed tantalizing tales of love and

⁵⁶ Nancy A. Walker, ed., *Women's Magazines 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press* (Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 1998), 1.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ The significance of these magazines in regard to teenage unwed mothers will be discussed in Chapter 6.

romance. Love-making was glamorized. Those professionals who worked with adolescents such as psychiatrists, doctors, and social workers reported that fantasy tales influenced girls in their decisions to pet and engage in sexual intercourse. Like motion pictures, magazines reinforced adult notions of sexuality and made them easily accessible to youth.

While they enjoyed their mothers' magazines, teenage girls went crazy when a magazine was created that catered solely to them. The significance of *Seventeen* magazine in shaping teenage girl culture is incomparable.⁶⁰ Within two days, *Seventeen* sold out of its first edition of 400,000 copies. Its second edition of 500,000 copies sold out in the same amount of time, and within sixteen months, *Seventeen* had a circulation of over one million.⁶¹ Historians Kelley Massoni and Kelly Schrum have analyzed the historical significance of *Seventeen* magazine not only in regards to girl culture but also in the lens of a developing consumer culture with teens as the new target of advertisers. In order to persuade marketers that teenage girls were a viable market, the makers of *Seventeen* created "Teena," the prototypical teenage girl. By the mid-1950s, many other publications had followed in *Seventeen*'s footsteps, catering only to teenage girls. Some examples include *Junior Bazaar*, *Teen World*, *Modern Teen*, *Teen Time*, *Teens Today*, *Teen Parade*, *Flip*, *Dig*, *Teen Digest*, and *Hep Cats*.⁶² Key features of these magazines were confessional letters and advice columns. Advice columns in magazines and

⁶⁰ The impact of *Seventeen* magazine has been thoroughly analyzed in recent years. Kelly Schrum and Kelley Massoni have both written on the significance of the magazine in shaping teenage girl culture. See Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004) and Kelley Massoni, *Fashioning Teenagers: A Cultural History of Seventeen Magazine* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2010).

⁶¹ Palladino, 103.

⁶² Gilbert, 23.

newspapers played a major role in providing young girls with information about dating and sexual relations, issues that will be discussed later.

MASCULINITY IN CRISIS

In November 1958, historian and social critic Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. asked the readers of *Esquire*: “what has happened to the American male?” Schlesinger declared that “something has gone badly wrong with the American male’s conception of himself.” He questioned the conformity of American society, stating that national politics had become “boring,” that individualism had been lost. The key to restoring masculinity would be the “achievement of identity, the conquest of a sense of self.” This, according to Schlesinger, would be much more productive than “all the hormones in the test tubes of our scientists.”⁶³ The editors of *Look* magazine published *The Decline of the American Male* in the same year.⁶⁴ This book, based on a series of articles published in *Look* magazine during 1958, revealed the growing fear that men were losing their position as the dominant sex. These editors discussed the idea that men were losing their individuality, that they were just part of a routine. This idea of conformity was discussed by other writers in the 1950s, including David Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), Sloan Wilson in his novel, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955), and William Whyte in *The Organization Man* (1956).⁶⁵

⁶³ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., “The Crisis of American Masculinity,” *Esquire* (November 1958): 64, 66.

⁶⁴ *Look* magazine was a bi-weekly, general-interest magazine which was published in Des Moines, Iowa from 1937 to 1971. By 1948, it sold 2.9 million copies per issue. By 1954, circulation had reached 3.7 million.

⁶⁵ David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950); Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955); and William Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956).

During the 1940s and 1950s, masculinity and femininity were “defined through opposition to one another.”⁶⁶ Masculine men were “powerful dominant, aggressive, and ambitious” while women were “dependent, submissive, nurturing, and belong in the home.”⁶⁷ These definitions clashed with the “changing social realities, which often merged men’s and women’s ‘spheres.’”⁶⁸ They affected every aspect of American society, especially dating. Males and females had been raised to adhere to traditional gender roles. But at the same time, those roles were becoming more ambiguous. Many tied the “breakdown of traditional sexual morality” to the “growing instability of traditional gender arrangements.”⁶⁹

Historians have argued that as men returned to the domestic environment after World War Two and moved away from the aggressive male domain of the battlefield, they faced an identity crisis.⁷⁰ Definitions of masculinity then had to be reinterpreted to adapt to the new American lifestyle and culture. Scholars of masculinity such as E. Anthony Rotundo, Michael Kimmel, and Howard Chudacoff have written about the crisis of masculinity in the late 1800s and have discovered a similar crisis in the 1950s.⁷¹ In *The Hearts of Men*, Barbara Ehrenreich discusses gender history in the 1950s, arguing that the masculinity crisis played a crucial role.⁷² She contends that the prevailing gender roles were not only unattainable but also limiting and oppressive. She claims that the fear

⁶⁶ Bailey, 98.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Reumann, 30.

⁷⁰ For more on men and war, see Michael C.C. Adams, *The Great Adventure: Male Desire and the Coming of World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) and James Marten, *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union and Confederate Veterans in the Gilded Age* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2011).

⁷¹ To learn more about the history of masculinity in the United States, see E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Michael Kimmel, *Guyland* (New York: Harper, 2008); Howard Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Gary Cross, *From Men to Boys* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

⁷² Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men* (New York: Doubleday, 1983).

of being thought of as homosexual placed pressure on men to get married.⁷³ This crisis of masculinity, like the ones before it, was blamed on women.

Even contemporary social critics spoke out regarding women's negative influence on masculinity. For instance, Philip Wylie labeled the concept of domineering mothers who controlled their children and husbands as "momism." His book, *Generation of Vipers*, was first published in 1942 and was in its twentieth printing by 1955.⁷⁴ He portrayed women as attempting to usurp power from men. This fear of women as threatening masculinity was portrayed in magazines with Wylie himself attacking "momism" in articles for *Playboy*.⁷⁵ Wylie believed that American society was becoming "womanized."⁷⁶

After World War Two, Americans had to face the changes of the new postwar economy and society. These changes affected traditional masculinity. Because so many women had entered the work force during wartime and would, eventually, return there, the "fundamental masculine role of provider was being undermined."⁷⁷ By 1950, married women comprised fifty-two percent of the total number of working women.⁷⁸ The dual income of husband and wife had become an economic necessity in order to participate in the new consumer society. Simultaneously, an idea was permeating society that women were becoming more aggressive and demanding, embodying more "manly" traits.

According to the editors of *Look Magazine*, the decline in masculinity also impacted teen-age boys and their relationships with girls. They claimed that "going

⁷³ Robert J. Crober expands on this idea in *Homosexuality in Cold War America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

⁷⁴ Fraterrigo, 29. See Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1942).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁷ Bailey, 104.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

steady” was “completely opposed to the male’s recognized biological nature.” Boys were supposed to “seek the company of a variety of females.” Instead, teen-age girls were scheming to “impose monogamy earlier and earlier.”⁷⁹ The editors then complained that the young American female controlled the “increased premarital sex activity,” that she was “expected to regulate him.”⁸⁰ This pattern then continued into married life where the wife would manage the couple’s sexual relations.

THE FUTURE JUNE CLEAVER

When one recalls the ideal woman of the 1950s, the picture of June Cleaver, Donna Reed, or Harriet Nelson often comes to mind. These fictional wives and mothers captured the hearts of Americans in television shows while also securing a place in the memory of a nostalgic America. The stereotypical woman of the 1950s was a white middle-class housewife who cleaned the house, took care of the children, and waited upon her husband in her perfect house in the suburb. This stereotype was and is still perpetuated in the television shows of the time, their reruns, and in contemporary movies, sometimes even in historical accounts. Undoubtedly, this image was fabricated as it was unattainable for most women especially those with lower incomes or who were non-white. As historian Joanne Meyerowitz simply states: “in the years following World War Two, many women were not white, middle-class, married, and suburban; and many white, middle-class, married, suburban women were neither wholly domestic nor

⁷⁹ J. Robert Moskin, “Why Do Women Dominate Him?” in *The Decline of the American Male*, editors of *Look*, (New York: Random House, 1958), 5.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

quiescent.”⁸¹ Nevertheless, the model was still impressed upon young women growing up in the 1950s. Girls and women alike strove to be that ideal housewife and mother.

According to sociologist Constance Nathanson, “normative conceptions of female adolescence are powerfully shaped by ideas concerning the futures for which young women are being prepared.”⁸² The “long 1950s” witnessed a flight to the suburbs as newly-formed families left the crowded cities for newly built single-family homes. The GI Bill allowed for white middle-class couples to have their own homes. The rise of the suburbia and the general economic prosperity allowed women to stay at home and care for their children. It was not unusual for women to set aside educational or career opportunities to become wives and mothers. A girl attended college to find a mate and to get her “MRS. Degree.” Marriage, not school, was girl’s path to adulthood. For girls in the 1950s, adolescence remained a waiting period until marriage.

Gender roles in the 1940s and 1950s placed additional stress on young females. Girls were taught to be the submissive partner whose main duty was to take care of her husband and children. They were supposed to be mothers and that was to be the most fulfilling role of their lives. Historian Stephanie Coontz has described the long 1950s as the “golden age of marriage.” Indeed, the 1950s marked the lowest marriage ages in half a century. By the end of the decade, the age of marriage had reached an “all-time low” in America. In fact, by 1959, almost half of all women were married by the age of nineteen and seventy percent were married by twenty-four. Low marriage ages were also common among males. In 1950, more than forty percent of American males between twenty and

⁸¹ Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 2.

⁸² Constance A. Nathanson, *Dangerous Passage: The Social Control of Sexuality in Women’s Adolescence* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

twenty-four were married.⁸³ Marriage was a central feature of the 1950s culture. Women were getting married at earlier ages and having more children than their counterparts in previous generations. Those who came of age during and after World War Two were the “most marrying generation on record,” with 96.4 percent of women and 94.1 percent of men eventually getting married. The average marriage age dropped and almost everyone who did get married did so before his or her mid-twenties. Family size increased. In fact, “most couples had two to four children, born sooner after marriage and spaced closer together than in previous years.”⁸⁴

Young people expected to get married and start a family. Those who deviated from that tradition were viewed as strange or different. 80 percent of Americans participating in a poll taken in 1957 labeled people who “chose not to marry... ‘sick,’ ‘neurotic,’ and ‘immoral.’”⁸⁵ Single women were then seen as “potential threats to stable family life and to the moral fiber of the nation.” Promiscuity was “one of the greatest fears,” but it applied only to females.⁸⁶ These ideas were perpetuated in books such as *The Modern Woman* by Marynia Farnham and her husband. They claimed adult females were abandoning womanhood by demanding equal rights. The popular media as well as the school and medical community supported the idea of gender roles and the female’s subordinate position. While in the 1930s and early 1940s, women had been portrayed as sexy, single women who could have a career; this came to a halt in the late 1940s and

⁸³ Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, A History* (New York: Viking, 2005), 225.

⁸⁴ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 14.

⁸⁵ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 186.

⁸⁶ Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947).

1950s. In movies, television programs, popular magazines, and marriage handbooks, the subordinate position of women in society was constantly reinforced.

Nonetheless, girls in the 1950s “grew up watching their mothers work and learning a broad, general set of attitudes that stressed the contradictory values of individualism, social altruism, and the need for financial security.” But most importantly they saw that “their mothers were not happy.”⁸⁷ This perspective was not perpetuated in the media and would not enter public discussion until 1963 with the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*.⁸⁸

“DOES HE OR SHE GO STEADY?”

From the mid-1940s into the 1960s, “adolescent behavior changed abruptly in several categories: sex and marital behavior, work habits, consumption, and attitudes to peer institutions.”⁸⁹ By rejecting dating customs that stressed competition and embracing marriage and steady relationships, postwar youth reflected the same growing values of security and stability that adults sought. In general, Americans yearned for “security and human closeness,” and this trickled down to the youth who emulated their elders. For the former, “going steady” mimicked the practice of getting married. High school students had long been following dating cues from their college-aged peers. In the late 1940s and 1950s when college students were getting married younger and younger, their brothers and sisters in high school mirrored this behavior by increasingly dating only one person. The fact that these “eighteen-year-old marriages” often became “dismal failures” and

⁸⁷ Joseph M. Hawes, “The Strange History of Female Adolescence in the United States,” *Journal of Psychohistory* 13.1 (Summer, 1985): 58.

⁸⁸ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1963).

⁸⁹ Gilbert, 17.

these “twelve-year-old steadies” became the “sexual revolutionaries of the 1960s” does not “lessen the value of the sense of human need these young people introduced to the public model of courtship they transformed.”⁹⁰ Far different than their parents’ patterns of dating, “going steady” and early marriage alarmed a rapidly changing society which feared that young people were growing up too fast.

Going steady was a custom that developed among teenagers in the late 1940s and 1950s. According to the *Ladies’ Home Journal’s* study of American teenagers, *Profile of Youth*, as many as fifty percent of the students in an average high school senior class were going steady.⁹¹ This practice included special rules that peers invented and regulated among themselves. Going steady involved both a commitment and “monogamy,” but it did not necessarily include intention to marry or even love.⁹² Teenagers described this social custom in very different ways. For instance, in the interviews for *Ladies’ Home Journal*, teenagers’ responses as to why they went steady ranged from “I wasn’t dating anyone else, so I thought I’d better hang on to the one I had” to “We’re seriously in love, just waiting to get married.”⁹³ Therefore, within the teenage culture itself, going steady could involve a wide range of emotion. Nonetheless, even though the motivations may have varied, going steady remained central to teenage life.

Often times, going steady consisted of seeing each other two to seven nights a week, refusing to date all others, announcing steady status by exchanging rings or wearing matching clothes, and having the status published in the gossip column of the

⁹⁰ Bailey, 56.

⁹¹ Daly, *Profile of Youth*, 27.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 28.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

school paper.⁹⁴ “Going steady” was similar to its predecessor, “getting pinned,” in that a young man offered a belonging to solidify his commitment to a girl. In the 1930s, it was a pin. In the 1940s and 1950s, formal signs of going steady included exchanging “class rings, Hi-Y pins, or identification bracelets” and wearing “identical plaid shirts, reindeer sweaters or Argyle socks.”⁹⁵ The boy was expected to walk “his girl” to and from classes, call her on the phone numerous times a week, and ask her for dates at least once or twice a week.⁹⁶ Friday or Saturday night dates could include going to a movie, enjoying a hamburger or malt at a restaurant, or attending a dance.⁹⁷ The length of a relationship could span from a week to all three or four years of high school. Because the postwar culture emphasized marriage and family, girls—especially white, middle-class girls—were raised to fit a certain mold. These girls were expected to grow up, find a husband, and start a family. Since girls could get married at eighteen, the hunt for marriage began at a very early age. In the postwar years, dating occurred earlier than before--for many high schoolers, dating began at ages thirteen or fourteen.⁹⁸

Girls and boys saw benefits in going steady. For instance, boys enjoyed the reassurance of always having a date on Saturday and also not having to constantly pay a lot of money to impress girls on dates. A steady was cheaper than open dating. They also did not have to worry about being rejected by a girl. Girls felt “safer” having a steady because then they knew what to expect. They could learn to trust their boyfriends. Other girls worried about being left at home on Saturday nights. If a teenager was going steady, she would be guaranteed to not be alone. Teens also admitted that going steady

⁹⁴ Ibid., 27.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 31.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 148.

⁹⁸ Bailey, 48.

sometimes permitted premarital sex. One letter to Ann Landers from a girl concerned about her friends stated: “each of these three girls, within this past year, was worried to death she might be pregnant. And yet they don’t see anything wrong in what they are doing. They all say they plan to marry their steadies eventually so that makes it all right.”⁹⁹ The commitment involved with going steady sanctioned their sexual activities.

In her very astute analysis of the custom of “going steady,” Amanda Littauer found that “in both working-class and middle-class subculture,” teenage girls faced an “enduring dichotomy between (virginal) ‘marriage-ability’ and (sexual active) ‘popularity.’”¹⁰⁰ Going steady made the contrast less firm by offering a middle solution. By committing to a serious, long-term, monogamous relationship, sex became justified or less questionable. Peer norms of the 1950s allowed for and approved of sexual acts as long as they were performed within steady relationships that were most likely going to end in marriage. As Littauer concisely states, “because it was constructed as loosely approximating marriage, going steady became a partially sanctioned middle-ground on which unmarried girls could selectively engage in heterosexual intercourse.”¹⁰¹

The “one very real difference” that existed between petting in the post-war decades and during previous eras was that young people had more freedom and a greater lack of supervision than had previously existed. Petting, as defined by family life educator Evelyn Millis Duvall, was “any combination of fondling, caressing, and kissing between members of opposite sexes which tends to be sexually exciting to one or both of the partners.” Necking was “any love-making above the neck,” whereas petting was “the caressing of other more sensitive parts of the body in a crescendo of sexual

⁹⁹ Ann Landers, *Ann Landers Talks to Teen-Agers about Sex* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), 30.

¹⁰⁰ Littauer, 327.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 328.

stimulation.”¹⁰² Petting often started with “ordinary kissing” but eventually led to “deep kissing,” “fondling of a girl’s covered or uncovered breasts,” and then to a caressing of the lower portions of the body, from the thighs to the vulva.” Extreme petting could include “apposition of the genital organs, with or without clothing, perhaps with orgasm, but without coitus.”¹⁰³ Petting was not as controversial as sexual intercourse. It was assumed that most girls would pet; “going all the way” was a totally different story.

According to historian Beth Bailey, petting and necking were “part of the definition of youth culture,” in the postwar period, and as a consequence, “normalization of sex came partly through the dating system.”¹⁰⁴ New standards were “reinforced gradually as youth encountered similar expectations of sexual behavior from many different people.” In this way, necking and petting became “integral parts of the dating system.”¹⁰⁵ As one marriage text published in 1952 simply stated, necking and petting were “customary” for young Americans. If the girl wished “to be a member of the dating group,” then necking was required.¹⁰⁶ Heavy petting had become “a fact of high school life.”¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Kinsey noted an increase in non-coital forms of premarital sex in the postwar years. The ultimate cultural taboo still focused solely on intercourse.¹⁰⁸ Going steady allowed girls to participate in these acts without damaging their reputations. It allowed couples to sexually experiment within an acceptable realm since steady dating was said to be a step toward potential engagement and subsequently marriage.

¹⁰² Evelyn M. Duvall, *Facts of Life and Love for Teenagers* (New York: Association Press, 1956), 205.

¹⁰³ Maxine Davis, *Sex and the Adolescent* (New York: The Dial Press, 1958), 143.

¹⁰⁴ Bailey, 81.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ E.E. LeMasters, *Modern Courtship and Marriage* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 191.

¹⁰⁷ Palladino, 168.

¹⁰⁸ May, 112.

THE CONTROVERSY OVER GOING STEADY

After World War Two, women outnumbered men for the first time in the United States. In order to explain this situation, society provided numerous reasons. American women blamed foreign women for stealing American men. In fact, by 1946, 50,000 American GIs had married English women, 10,000 had married Australian females, and 30,000 had married French, Belgian, or other foreign women.¹⁰⁹ Popular women's magazines decried the lack of bachelors. Advice flowed on how to catch a man and keep him. While girls were being taught to "catch a man" and secure his commitment in marriage, at the same time they were being warned against the perils of going steady too young. The growing custom of steady dating among teenagers was a concern not just to teenagers but also to educators and parents. Girls seemed to be getting two very different messages.

Going steady was seen as a form of teenage rebellion in the fifties.¹¹⁰ In general, even if dating was accepted, going steady was not. This trend became alarming to parents who were worried about the intensity and long-term effects of going steady. Parents disapproved of it because of its link to increased pressure to pet, and in a short span thereafter, to have sexual intercourse. One girl told a *Ladies' Home Journal* editor that "I'd have an easier time telling my mother I wanted to get married than I would explaining why I wanted to go steady."¹¹¹ Magazines and teenagers tried to convince their parents that the meaning of going steady had changed, that these relationships were not as serious as engagements. Rather, going steady usually provided popularity and security, two things youth sought after in the postwar decade.

¹⁰⁹ Bailey, 39.

¹¹⁰ Brett Harvey, *The Fifties* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994), 4.

¹¹¹ Daly, 32.

One of parents' main fears regarding the practice of going steady was its connection to sexual activity. A *Ladies' Home Journal* article presented a direct link between going steady and illegitimate pregnancies. It stated that the "widespread custom of going steady in the early teens is clearly a factor in the alarming upsurge of illegitimate babies born each year to teen-age girls."¹¹² Parents felt that if a boy and girl spent enough time together they would eventually become "involved emotionally or sexually to the point where their futures [were] jeopardized."¹¹³ Parents and those who worked with teenagers worried over the emotional implications of going steady. Break-ups were tough for teenagers. *Profile of Youth* told of teenagers who attempted suicide in response to being dumped by steadies or those who committed acts of vandalism out of jealousy.¹¹⁴

Going steady was also tied to the home environment. Psychologists agreed that if the home environment was "happy and normal," then a teenager would not go steady as frequently and if he or she did, the relationship would be "relatively harmless." "The popular, well-adjusted teen-ager" would not need to go steady, but would rather "play the field" instead.¹¹⁵ Psychologists also claimed that going steady could have a "permanent emotional effect that makes later marriage anticlimactic."¹¹⁶ Experts produced studies that defended their stance on the dating custom. One study conducted by the associate

¹¹² Betty Coe Spicer, "If You Don't Go Steady, You're Different," *Ladies' Home Journal* (December 1959): 68.

¹¹³ Evelyn M. Duvall and Joy Duvall Johnson, *The Art of Dating* (New York: Association Press, 1958), 194.

¹¹⁴ Daly, 29.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

general director of the American Institute of Family Relations concluded that a teenager going steady “stunt[ed] her intellectual and social growth.”¹¹⁷

The renowned advice columnist Ann Landers was a well-known critic of going steady. She fervently warned her readers to not limit their options to one person. In fact, she referred to it as the “not-so-popular girl’s vaccination against ‘stay-at-home-it is.’”¹¹⁸ Confident girls would be more willing to play the field and compete for dates. She believed that, in general, teen-agers themselves often did not enjoy going steady but favored the social security it provided. Landers blamed the practice of going steady and the parents who allowed or even encouraged it for the rise in divorce rates in the early 1960s. She criticized a mother of a thirteen-year-old girl who wrote a letter disagreeing with Landers’ position on going steady. She claimed that this mother and others like her were raising their young daughters to be “man-traps.” According to Landers, these girls would become “so jaded and bored at 17” that there would be “nothing left to do but get married.” Then by the age of 19, there would be “no place to go but to the divorce court.”¹¹⁹ Landers further advised that going steady denied youth the opportunity to learn about different kinds of people. Dating lots of people would teach teenagers many life lessons including how to get along with all types of personalities. Landers expressed this in phrasing accessible to teenagers: “going steady is like settling for one outfit when you could have twenty.”¹²⁰ Finally, Landers, like other experts of the period, linked going steady to increased sexual activity, and worse, teen pregnancy.

¹¹⁷ “Going Steady Perils Teen Girl’s Chances,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 30, 1958.

¹¹⁸ Landers, 23.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

The Catholic Church was another major opponent of the practice of going steady. Priests throughout the country warned youth that dating one person could lead to significant trouble, including early marriage or even “forced marriages.”¹²¹ Some Catholic schools banned going steady. The Milwaukee Archdiocese Superintendent of Schools, Monsignor Edmund Goebel, remarked in 1960 that although there was no formal ban on going steady in Milwaukee Catholic schools, the Church “strongly discouraged” the practice.¹²² However, the Catholic Church did speak out formally against going steady at national conventions, revealing the significance of the issue to the Church. For instance, in March 1957, the director of the national family life bureau of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, Monsignor Irving DeBlanc, declared at the opening session of the 25th National Catholic Family Life convention that going steady was “pagan” unless there was a “reasonable chance” that the couple would get married within two years. He further stated that the “habit of teen agers going steady” had to be stopped if the “concept of Christian marriage” was to be preserved. He then tied going steady to the rising rate of unwed mothers and divorces in the United States.¹²³

“THINK BEFORE YOU PARK”

Advice columns and dating handbooks were very popular among teenage girls in the long 1950s. Because the policies of dating had changed, teenagers felt they could not turn to their parents for advice. In the minds of youth, their parents were too old to understand the contemporary dating scene. Teenagers then sought guidance from their peers or from the popular media. Teenage girls frequently wrote to newspaper advice

¹²¹ “Pupils of Catholic School Ordered Not to Go Steady,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 18, 1960.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ “Going Steady Called Pagan,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 19, 1957.

columnists as well as magazine editors. Several guidebooks based on these columns were published in the late 1950s and early 1960, such as *Datebook's Complete Guide to Dating* (1960) and *Ann Landers Talks to Teen-Agers about Sex* (1963). Both books were based on letters written to the media regarding dating and sex. The books then answered these questions and offered information on additional topics. Other experts wrote handbooks on love, dating, and sex for teenagers. These authors included “doctors” such as Evelyn Millis Duvall and Maxine Davis, both of whom were prominent family life educators in the 1950s. Usually priced at fifty cents, the books were affordable for most middle-class families and were popular among both teenagers and their parents.

Girls frequently wrote in to columnists asking how to be popular without petting or how to catch the interest of the boy she liked. One of the most popular topics was how to handle a boy when he tried to get “fresh.” Most often the columnist blamed the girl for putting herself in the situation: she should have known better than to enter into that situation. To avoid necking or petting, one advice book encouraged girls to

plan activities which are really active—go skating instead of sitting in a movie. Plan a group picnic. Start a project together—something you will make together or learn together. In short—keep busy doing something. On one level, it will literally take your minds off necking. On another level, it will use up energy so that the urge for physical expression in necking will not be as great.¹²⁴

Necking and petting were said to be “rampant where there are few activities for dating pairs to enjoy together.” If these activities were missing, Dr. Evelyn Millis Duvall encouraged the youth to “call it to the attention of their adult leaders and request that together some more adequate provisions be made for the social life of the community.”¹²⁵

Girls were taught to avoid situations in which their will power and self-control in regards

¹²⁴ Duvall and Johnson, 190.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

to sexual matters would be tested. For instance, in *The Art of Dating*, published in 1958, Dr. Duvall warned that “so many young people use the freedom of the parked automobile for unrestrained, irresponsible sexual activity that anyone who parks is suspect.” She argued that if a girl was “really smart,” she would not go on “a car date with him in the first place.”¹²⁶ Duvall advised girls to “think before you park.”¹²⁷ Another guidebook stated that if a boy suggested a drive-in movie, then “try to get out of it.” However, if the girl did say yes then she should “forestall a pass by asking him to get you something to eat,” but importantly she should “flatly refuse to sit in the back seat.”¹²⁸ The same guidebook recommended that “if a boy deliberately stimulates you sexually, ask him not to; if he continues, don’t go out with him anymore.”¹²⁹ For the authors, the topic was straight-forward and easy: just say no and avoid the situation all together. For the girls, it was not as simple.

Girls worried about being popular. They stressed about not getting dates because they did not pet, whereas others feared petting too much and gaining a reputation for being “fast.” As much as girls did not want the status of being “easy” and “available,” they also did not want to be accused of being “too self-conscious” and “too frigid.”¹³⁰ They desperately sought the advice from these “experts” on how to become popular without sacrificing their beliefs.

Parents were another popular topic in these books. Teenagers complained about the lack of guidance they received from their parents. One girl wrote to a magazine about her parent issues. Allegedly, she tried to get help from her parents regarding dating and

¹²⁶ Ibid., 185.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 186.

¹²⁸ Art Unger, ed., *Datebook’s Complete Guide to Dating* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960), 133.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 55.

¹³⁰ Duvall and Johnson, 181.

petting, but “they seem[ed] to become embarrassed and change[d] the subject.” The editor agreed that “most parents find it difficult to talk naturally about a subject which was treated in such a hush-hush manner when they were growing up.” She encouraged the girl to “seek the guidance of a sympathetic teacher or psychological or religious counselor.”¹³¹

THE SEXUAL DOUBLE STANDARD

Professor Susan J. Douglas argues in her book, *Where the Girls Are*, that girls growing up in the 1950s and 1960s received contradictory ideas from media sources regarding sexual intercourse. Whether in the movies or magazines, sex was everywhere. Douglas claims girls heard these messages “every time we turned on the radio, or our record players, or threw a quarter in the jukebox.”¹³² Girls were taught to be chaste but witnessed their male counterparts as well as teenage film characters engaging in the same acts that were forbidden to them.

While girls were told to say no and reject the male advances, boys were told that they were “more readily aroused,” thus “less able” to stop necking and pecking at a “‘safe’ point.”¹³³ For boys, sex could be a “mere sexual outlet” or a “proving of virility through conquest.”¹³⁴ This was viewed as a valid defense of their participation in sexual activities. Girls, too, engaged in sexual activity, as Kinsey verified, but their activity was not justified the way it was for males. For women born after 1949, the odds were that they would have sex before they reached the age of twenty. Nonetheless, their partners

¹³¹ Unger, 42.

¹³² Douglas, 80.

¹³³ Unger, 63.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

were more than likely to be their future husbands.¹³⁵ If girls had sex, marriage or love needed to be their excuse.

Young women might have been having sex, but the risks were much higher for them than their male companions. In his book on unwed mothers, psychologist Clark Vincent discussed the double standard of sex between males and females, and the battle that usually ensued:

The traditional double standard affects a harsher judgment of the female than of the male for sexual misbehavior. The male's pursuit of sexual favors during courtship is acceptable evidence of his masculinity; but the female's granting of such favors is more likely to be considered evidence of her lack of feminine skill in the age-old game of retaining her suitor without losing her virginity.¹³⁶

There were clearly two separate standards of morality for the sexes with the female facing the more rigorous one. One guidebook on sex and the adolescent lamented the simplicity of the days when teenage boys just went to prostitutes for sexual initiation. Instead, the author argued that the new practices complicated the situation: "nowadays very few boys under twenty employ the services of prostitutes. Those who have sexual intercourse usually find partners of their own age, among their own friends."¹³⁷ Now girls who had sex were "not prostitutes," but "merely girls who cannot say 'No'."¹³⁸

During the long 1950s, the media perpetuated gender stereotypes. Indeed, the double standard regarding male and female sexuality that had long existed in American society became even more apparent. This was the idea that the boy should want sex and actively try to pursue it while the girl abstained from it and kept the boy in line. Girls were supposed to say no. Psychologists and sociologists used "science" to justify this

¹³⁵ Ann Fessler, *The Girls Who Went Away* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 7.

¹³⁶ Clark E. Vincent, *Unmarried Mothers* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 3.

¹³⁷ Davis, 163.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 164.

idea, arguing that boys were biologically predisposed to want sex. Girls, on the other hand, had more control over their sexual urges because they were less sexual overall. Consequently, in regards to sexual activity in adolescent relationships, girls were supposed to be in charge. A good girl would not permit boys to “go all the way.” Girls were not supposed to want to have sex for the sake of physical pleasure. Instead they allegedly desired sex as a sign of love and romance. A teenage girl should never view her lover in terms of sexual relations. Her mind should be “occupied with visions of her wedding, her future home, herself at that important figure, A Wife.”¹³⁹ Women were not to become sexual beings until after marriage, if then.

Another obvious double standard emerged: society was becoming more tolerant of extra-marital sex, but not of unwed pregnancies. Most teenagers may have tolerated petting and sexual intercourse for unmarried peers that were “in love,” but premarital pregnancy was still considered a “social disgrace and a personal disaster.”¹⁴⁰ Sociologist Margaret Mead argued in 1949 that “as a culture,” the United States had “given up chaperonage,” thus permitting “situations in which young people [could] indulge in any sort of sex behaviour that they elect.” Society might have become passively more tolerant of premarital sex, but it had not “relaxed one whit [its] disapproval of the girl who becomes pregnant, nor simplified the problems of the unmarried mother who must face what to do with her child.” Concisely stated: “Technical virginity has become steadily less important, but the prohibition of extra-marital pregnancy remains.” Mead noted that society disapproved of abortion and, “because of the conflict in attitudes between Protestants and Roman Catholics on the ethical issues involved,” birth control

¹³⁹ Ibid., 110.

¹⁴⁰ Daly, *Profile of Youth*, 153.

was “impossible to obtain.” She further explained that “We bring girls up to be free and easy and unafraid, without the protections given by shyness and fear to girls of many other societies.” At the same time, we also bring up “our boys up to be just as free and easy, used to girls, demanding towards girls.” She compared dating to a “ski-slide,” stating that the controls of the game are “placed in the hands of the girl. The boy is expected to ask for as much as possible, the girl to yield as little as possible.”¹⁴¹

Nonetheless, girls faced a difficult situation since they were the ones expected to keep the relationship from going “too far.” While parents may have encouraged dating, they expected their offspring, especially their daughters, to maintain parental standards. Girls were the ones who were supposed to say no and to control the level of physical activities. Virginity until marriage was greatly stressed in the youth culture at the same time that sexual allure dominated media. Girls were supposed to set the limit; however, boys could be aggressive and exert significant pressure on their partner who felt forced to submit. Females who chose to give in risked serious consequences.¹⁴² Nice girls did not have sex or at least they did not get pregnant. One father who learned of his teenage daughter’s unplanned pregnancy responded that “boys would always be boys, but girls who let them get away with it were ‘damn stupid.’”¹⁴³ Being a good girl in the 1950s meant keeping her “private life private” and remaining a “technical virgin.” However, only if she intended on marrying the boy could a girl go farther. Losing her “virginity” “almost inevitably resulted in marriage” for girls who were in long-term steady

¹⁴¹ Margaret Mead, *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in A Changing World* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1949), 290.

¹⁴² May, 112.

¹⁴³ Palladino, 167.

relationships.¹⁴⁴ The dilemmas of teenagers and sex will be explored further in Chapter Four.

CONCLUSION

Teenage girls in the 1950s faced many of the same pressures and expectations that had been placed on their mothers; however, one of the major differences was the increasingly sexualized society in which the younger females were raised. Teenage girls grew up listening to Elvis, reading *Peyton Place* and *True Confessions*, and watching *Blackboard Jungle*. The media featured one message while parents and educators promoted another: despite the fact that sex was more openly portrayed in the media, it was only appropriate for married couples. In an age of affluence, girls were supposed to become the wives and mothers modeled on television. They were supposed to be the paragons of patience and virtue so that they could properly raise the next generation of Americans.

Indeed, the long 1950s was a time of adjustment and reaction. Gender was a defining factor, and at times, a stabilizing force. It shaped the economy, society, the family, and sexual behavior. After experiencing a depression and a war, the youth of the country responded to the social unrest in a way unexpected by their elders: becoming more like them. The 1950s' superficial adherence to traditional gender roles affected the youth who quickly embraced adult activities, especially going steady. One should not underestimate the significance of "going steady" to the teenagers of the "long 1950s." The practice of going steady came with pressures of physical intimacy. Girls were in charge of the moral behavior of the couple, and thus they faced a fight against physical

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 169.

urges and social standards to preserve both her virginity and her reputation. Despite the risks, girls engaged in premarital sex, and in turn, this alarmed not only her parents but also the greater society. The latter's response to premarital sex and their attempts to control and contain it are considered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR
“PROMISCUOUS” GIRLS:
“CONTAINING” TEENAGE SEXUALITY

On August 19, 1948, fifteen-year-old girl Muriel Watson was committed to the Wisconsin School for Girls until the age of twenty-one. Although she had a prior record for keeping late hours and drinking, her current offense was immorality. During her initial admission interview, she admitted being “sexually promiscuous over a period of four years with eighteen boys.” Muriel claimed she had started having sex at age eleven and her partners included married men. When further questioned about her sexual knowledge, she replied that she did not know “how babies are born or why girls menstruate.” She confessed to the school psychiatrist that her activities had not “been good for her or made her happy.” While Muriel was charged with immorality and removed from her family home, her male sexual partners went unpunished.¹ Muriel’s story reflects the gendered bias of the crime that detained numerous girls in industrial schools or detention homes throughout the United States beginning in the late eighteenth century. Charged with “immorality,” these girls were often sent away to remote parts of the state or closely monitored by parole officers. Girls accused of immorality could be guilty of an array of activities from being a victim of rape, engaging in premarital sex, or being illegitimately pregnant. Their sexual activity led to their imprisonment or reform, a reflection of the larger social and political context.

Throughout the 1950s, a Cold War mentality permeated all areas of society.

During this time of “crisis and rapid social change,” a “fear of sexual chaos” emerged and

¹ Name changed by author to protect identity of girl. Case File 5929, Box 133, Wisconsin School for Girls: Inactive Case Files, 1875-1959, Series 311, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin. (Hereafter referred to as WSG Files)

“nonmarital sexual behavior” became “a national obsession.”² Young girls became the focal point of this growing anxiety. Like communism and homosexuality, female adolescent sexuality needed to be “contained.” Historian Mary Louise Adams argues that “young people were simply the means through which adults attempted to fashion solutions to postwar social problems.”³ Youth became the scapegoat for the aftermath of World War Two. By focusing on youth, adults found “a route to the tightening of moral standards that had been relaxed during the war.”⁴ This chapter argues that white female adolescent sexuality became increasingly viewed as a real threat to the social order. Without “containment,” teenage girls could allegedly destroy the country and impede the fight against communism. This helps explain why young unwed mothers or other conspicuously promiscuous girls were isolated from society and treated as outcasts in order to “protect” not only the girls themselves but also the nation. This chapter then explores the preventative measures enacted by society in attempts to safeguard their community from the threat of adolescent sexuality.⁵

SEX AND THE TEENAGE GIRL

Family life instructor Maxine Davis described the change in sexual expectations over time in her handbook for teenagers, *Sex and the Adolescent*. Historically speaking, boys had long been assumed to be promiscuous; their “sowing of oats” was tolerated and even deemed natural, while sexual outlets for girls were forbidden. In order to ensure

² Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 82.

³ Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 109.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ This chapter draws heavily on the case files of the Wisconsin School for Girls. With regards to the files, only the cases from Milwaukee County were studied. This complete collection can be found at the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison, Wisconsin.

“respectable” girls would be virgins at the marital altar, boys were encouraged to patronize prostitutes. However, as discussed in previous chapters, by the 1950s boys were engaging in sexual intercourse with partners of the same age and social background. Davis reported that most studies confirmed that at least half of all brides had engaged in premarital sex. She questioned why girls partook in such activities before marriage, claiming that most girls did not enjoy the physical act of intercourse. Reasons for having sex included: “it just happens,” the desire to be popular, an attempt to keep her steady boyfriend, a feeling of inferiority, a lack of self-esteem, and love.⁶ In contrast, no one questioned the sexual motives of male adolescents. Similarly, in a 1963 report on this situation, Susan Daggett Taylor, a nurse at a venereal disease clinic for teenagers in New York, argued that young people had embraced this sexual double standard. She expressed that the girls who came to her clinic “seemed to feel more guilty and tended to be less promiscuous than the boys. They seemed to drift into sexual relationships to keep a boy friend, to keep up with their peers, or from curiosity.” In comparison, she observed that the boys “rarely expressed guilt. They seemed to believe that they were engaging in behavior which is considered normal for boys.”⁷

Sociology professor Paul H. Landis further reinforced this point in his book on dating, claiming that “in dating some boys will try to push a girl for whom they care little beyond the point she is willing to go.” He then stated: “they are less conscious of the risk to reputation and the possibility of pregnancy than are girls. Boys face less criticism if the relationship goes too far. This is unfair but the facts of life are so. One can’t

⁶ Maxine Davis, *Sex and the Adolescent* (New York: Permabooks, 1960), 165.

⁷ Susan Daggett Taylor, “Clinic for Adolescents with Venereal Disease,” *American Journal of Nursing* 63.11 (November 1963): 66.

overlook them.”⁸ Landis argued that when a girl participated in necking or petting with a boy, she created a “strong stimulating effect” on the boy. Landis recommended that the girl should “analyze her own behavior and tighten up her standards.” It was subsequently her fault if the boy attempted to get “fresh.” Furthermore, Landis supported the idea that the girl ask herself, “What did I do to make him think he could get by with it?”⁹ Thus the full responsibility fell on the female, excusing the male.

The pressure to “go all the way” seemed immense for young girls, who felt torn between physical and emotional desires and social norms. Author and magazine editor Gladys Denny Schulz recalled receiving numerous letters from fifteen and sixteen-year-old girls inquiring about sexual intercourse. One “typical” letter reported:

I am in love with the most wonderful boy in the world. Jack loves me just as much as I love him. We know we are going to be married when we grow up, and Jack says that makes it all right for us to have sex relations now. He says he won't let me get pregnant, and he has such a wonderful character that I know he won't. Honestly, Mrs. Schultz, is there any good reason why we shouldn't have sex relations?¹⁰

Clearly, this teenaged girl felt compelled to engage in intercourse and provided her reasoning behind it. If they were eventually going to get married, why wait? Mrs. Schulz urged the girl to say “No,” arguing that if her boyfriend was such a “wonderful boy” then he would not suggest this act to her. She also informed that girl that no male could promise absolutely that a girl would not get pregnant from intercourse, once again reminding the girl of the physical consequences only she would bear.¹¹ Similarly, in his 1956 pamphlet on dating, Landis reported that “sex problems of many kinds plague

⁸ Paul H. Landis, *Your Dating Days: Looking Forward to Happy Marriage* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1954), 27.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰ Gladys Denny Schultz, *It's Time You Knew* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1955), 195.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

youth.” He explained that “With girls, they more often center about such problems as how to behave on a date, ‘going too far,’ and how much physical contact should be permitted on a date.”¹² He further clarified this point, stating, “Most girls are concerned about ‘how far to go,’ for sex with them involves not only moral questions but the risk of pregnancy and disgrace.”¹³

Despite the warnings against the dangers of premarital sex, girls did indeed partake in sexual intercourse during the long 1950s. Girls admitted having sex in a variety of places. For instance, many girls and their partners pretended they were married and got hotel rooms. Despite the fact that most decent hotels required couples to be married in order to share a room together, girls and their partners found ways to get around this rule. Girls frequently cited the back seat of an automobile as the location of their acts as well as in movie theaters, fields, and parks. The lakefront in both Chicago and Milwaukee was a popular site for sexual rendezvous. Others reported having sex in their own bedrooms or those of their partners, while some simply patronized alleys, basements, or garages. One particularly bold girl stated she had sex on the school fire exit stairway. Girls actively sought out private places to engage in sexual intercourse and some displayed great creativity in this regard.¹⁴ Some girls even chose to have sexual intercourse with more than one partner at once or with numerous boys consecutively. One Seattle girl admitted to having intercourse with seventeen of her male classmates, “one after the other in the presence of the whole group.”¹⁵

¹² Paul H. Landis, “Coming of Age: Problems of Teen-Agers,” pamphlet, Public Affairs Committee, May 1956, 3.

¹³ Ibid., 14.

¹⁴ This information was gathered from the Wisconsin School for Girls files. Girls were often asked to tell their stories to the judges or were asked about the site of their crimes.

¹⁵ Stephen Fleck, “Pregnancy as a Symptom of Adolescent Maladjustment,” *International Journal of Social Psychology* (Autumn 1956): 126.

Nonetheless, if one was “going all the way,” it was rarely discussed in public. One woman talking about sex in the postwar decades claimed that “you were good or bad. Between the culture of the family and the culture of religion, you were very bad if you had sex.”¹⁶ Another interviewee who grew up in the 1950s further stated that “the girls who didn’t get pregnant were all virgins. We swore up and down we were virgins. If you fooled around, nobody else knew about it.”¹⁷ This attitude was a reflection of the larger society which promoted virginity as the middle-class ideal. Philip Wylie echoed this idea in a book chapter he wrote in 1954: “They also tell us—and this may be news to many—that virginity is pretty much a fable...To perhaps most Americans, this will be news—or at any rate, they will feel obliged to pretend it is news, even if that pretense is a kind of lie.”¹⁸

TEENS AND VENEREAL DISEASE

Venereal disease had been a primary health issue since World War One in the United States. During the Progressive Era and 1920s, sex education courses and hygiene leagues were created to educate the public about the risks associated with these diseases and to prevent them from spreading. By the 1950s, penicillin and other drugs had been created to “cure” diseases contracted during sexual activity. Nonetheless, society continued to be “threatened” by the sweep of venereal disease. During World War Two, young girls had been blamed for the widespread of venereal disease nationally, as discussed in Chapter Two. The “victory girl” stereotype infiltrated American society and inspired unsubstantiated fears. In the early 1950s when venereal disease began to rise

¹⁶ Ann Fessler, *The Girls Who Went Away* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 34.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁸ Philip Wylie, “Virginity and Pre-Marital Sex Relations,” in Albert Ellis, ed. *Sex Life of the American Woman the Kinsey Report* (New York: Greenbert, 1954), 27.

once again on the national level, public authorities and the media turned toward teenagers as the perpetrators.

When discussing juvenile delinquency and teenage pregnancy, a third issue was almost always raised: venereal disease. Experts in the long 1950s tied juvenile delinquency and venereal disease together. This is clearly seen in the first line of a May 30, 1959 *Milwaukee Journal* article: “Teenage promiscuity, showing up in striking rises in illegitimacy, delinquency, and venereal disease, has stung the social welfare field into a new concern with adolescents.”¹⁹ Although the article failed to realize that social workers had long been occupied with the health and actions of teenagers, the column showed how the rising rates of illegitimacy seemed to be corresponding with the rising rates of its two siblings: juvenile delinquency and venereal disease. Like illegitimate births, venereal disease among youth was viewed as a definite and undeniable proof of rising promiscuity. Venereal disease was also seen as sign that the “infected youngster” had “obviously deviated from the accepted pattern of approved social behavior.”²⁰

In 1956, the U.S. Public Health Service declared that teenagers were now responsible for “almost half of all new cases of syphilis and gonorrhea.”²¹ In November of that same year, the American Social Hygiene Association announced that it would be conducting a “two year study of promiscuity and venereal disease among young people.” The ASHA stated that although rates of venereal disease had remained steady between 1947 and 1954, there had been an increase in 1955 “among teenagers, particularly

¹⁹ Ellen Gibson, “Promiscuity of Youth Stirs Social Workers,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 30, 1959.

²⁰ Undated booklet published by U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, “Venereal Disease in Children and Youth, p. 1, Folder 224, Box 21, Institute for Sex Education Records, University of Illinois-Chicago. (Hereafter referred to as UIC)

²¹ Alexandra Lord, *Condom Nation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 113.

girls.”²² According to the Public Health Service, the problem of venereal disease among teenagers age fifteen to nineteen years old had risen almost eleven percent between 1957 and 1958.²³ This same report stated that every day 148 cases of venereal disease were reported among persons less than twenty years of age. Furthermore in 1960, the Public Health Service released information providing evidence that women “were more likely to contract venereal disease at eighteen years of age than at any other age.”²⁴ A 1964 pamphlet reported “venereal disease strikes one teenager every nine minutes.”²⁵

Alarmed experts claimed that most adolescents did not even know they had venereal disease. For instance, an article in *Readers Digest* in October 1956 stated that “three out of every four youngsters found with [venereal disease] have gone without treatment from one to four years and possibly have transmitted the disease to others during that time.”²⁶ Others claimed that young people who were aware that they had a venereal disease often avoided doctors because they were underage and afraid of the repercussions. Historian Alexandra Lord reports that because states began to require couples to take blood tests before entering into marriage, venereal disease was “less easy to hide.” The evidence from these tests then “revealed that rates of venereal disease, which had been declining among the general population, had now begun to climb among teenagers.”²⁷

²² “Venereal Disease among Teen-Agers on Rise, Group Says,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 16, 1956.

²³ Celia S. Deschin, Director of Study, American Social Health Association, *Teen-Agers and Venereal Disease: A Sociological Study of 600 Teen-Agers in New York City Social Hygiene Clinics* (Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1961), 6.

²⁴ Lord, 113.

²⁵ U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, “Strictly for Teenagers: Some Facts about Venereal Disease,” Public Health Service Publication No. 913, Revised 1964.

²⁶ Robert S. Bird, “Venereal Disease Now A Threat to Youth,” *Readers Digest*, October 1956.

²⁷ Lord, 94.

Society believed that the increasing rates of teenage venereal disease were directly linked to increased sexual promiscuity. Experts argued that the increasing spread of venereal disease among teenagers was proof of their sexual activity. Some observers claimed that because of the existence of penicillin as a cure to venereal disease, young people no longer feared infection and this led to increasing sexual activity. Because these new drugs were quite effective, the seriousness of venereal disease became underrated. Sex education experts argued that these medicines led to a reduction in venereal disease prevention education. Some even labeled it as “complacency.”²⁸ As mentioned earlier, venereal disease was also linked to juvenile delinquency. In her study on venereal disease and teenagers, Celia Deschin claimed that many people believed that “delinquents” or teenagers from “low-income, demoralized families with whom little rehabilitation was possible” were the primary sources of venereal diseases.²⁹ Deschin also found that most Americans also attributed venereal disease to “persons recently arrived” such as Puerto Ricans or Mexicans.³⁰

Others claimed that venereal disease was such a problem because of the lack of sex education. An employee at one of Chicago’s Venereal Disease Clinics told the *Chicago Daily News* that the “youngsters” at the clinic never received education on recognizing the symptoms of venereal disease. The employee further reported that parents were often too embarrassed or uneducated to discuss the subject with their children, stating: “There are so many ignorant parents that thinking of leaving the job to

²⁸ Deschin, 2.

²⁹ Ibid., 107

³⁰ Ibid., 109. Deschin also mentioned that this was true in the colonial days as well. Colonists believed those who came from outside the community were responsible for any communicable diseases.

them is just plain naïve.”³¹ In this same article, the journalist revealed that “Chicago school authorities admit that little emphasis has been given to venereal disease—a part of the communicable diseases section of the personal health curriculum.”³² It appeared that parents and schools were unable to correctly convey proper sex hygiene information to the youth in Chicago. Deschin’s study of 600 teenagers with venereal disease concluded that “the degree of ignorance that the teen-agers displayed with respect to venereal disease and sex” underscored the “need for more education and at an early age.”³³ The report further argued that denying sex education was “highly illogical at a time when the mass media are pouring forth information about sex of precisely the kind that stimulates sexual experimentation, the consequences of which are so greatly deplored by the community.”³⁴ Deschin also revealed “the degree of ignorance” displayed by teenagers in respect to venereal disease and sex.” The study “underscore[d] the need for more education and at an early age.”³⁵

Alexandra M. Lord explores the relationship between government and sex education in the 1940s and 1950s in her recent monograph, *Condom Nation*. She argues that the federal government did implement “aggressive and innovative techniques throughout the 1950s, and education was a central component of these efforts.”³⁶ Many sought to dispel common myths about venereal disease. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare created public health service publications regarding venereal

³¹ Florence B. Benell and Robert M. Johnston, Jr., “Rising Teen-Age Threat,” *Chicago Daily News*, not dated, Folder 240, Box 22, Institute for Sex Education Records, UIC.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Deschin, 113. For a more thorough investigation of Deschin’s study, see Amanda Littauer, “Unsanctioned Encounters: Women, Girls, and Non-Marital Sexuality in the United States, 1941-1963.” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2006.

³⁴ Deschin, 113.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Lord, 94.

disease and teenagers. One such pamphlet, “Strictly for Teenagers: Some Facts about Venereal Disease,” listed popular tales about venereal disease. It stated that venereal diseases could not be transmitted through contact with “a toilet seat, doorknob, shaking hands, etc.” The point of the pamphlet was to inform youth in an accessible manner about the basic information regarding venereal disease. By discussing the serious nature of the disease and the means of contraction as well as the symptoms and effects, these pamphlets attempted to educate the youth in order to prevent them from having unprotected sex.³⁷

In her book for teenagers, advice columnist Ann Landers stated that “every day my mail brings me dozens of similar letters from teen-agers who ‘think they may have something’ and beg me to tell them what to do.” The number of inquiries revealed the significance of the issue. Landers argued that teenagers needed to be educated about venereal disease because there were so many misconceptions being spread amongst the youth. For instance, one fifteen-year-old girl from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, wrote to Landers about “little sores on the intimate parts of her body” that itched badly. The girl explained that “I just couldn’t have a venereal disease because I’ve gone all the way with only one boy and he is my steady. He’s a very refined young man and comes from a well-to-do and prominent family. He couldn’t have given me anything like *that*.”³⁸ Many teenagers believed that venereal disease only existed among the poor, prostitutes, or the lower class. Consequently, nice girls or girls of middle class could not be at risk of venereal disease. Landers then stressed the importance of dispelling this myth to teenagers and provided information on the symptoms and treatments of gonorrhea and

³⁷ HEW, “Strictly for Teenagers.”

³⁸ Ann Landers, *Ann Landers Talks to Teen-Agers about Sex* (New York: Fawcett Juniper, 1963), 75.

syphilis. She urged infected teenagers to seek medical treatment and to be honest about their sexual partners to avoid spreading the disease even farther.³⁹

The stigma of venereal disease and its unfortunate repercussions for youth were captured in contemporary sex education films. For instance, *The Innocent Party*, produced by Centron in 1959, was an educational film on venereal diseases. The film opens with Don getting in a car and making out with a random girl he met on the street. Later in the film, Don and his steady Betty leave a party early and decide to park the car for a while. The film then shows Betty and Don pulling off the side of the road. The next scene shows them sitting in the front seat remorsefully, obviously regretting the fact that they let their petting party go too far. Their shame is quite clear—Betty is almost in tears. Soon after, Don reveals to a friend at school that he has sores “down there” and wonders if the girl he met on the street could have had “something.” He then goes to the doctor and discovers he has syphilis. He naively asks the doctor: “what am I going to tell my dad?” The doctor convinces Don to tell Betty that she had been exposed. Reluctantly, Don persuades Betty to go to the doctor’s office with him. After learning the news, Betty starts crying and the doctor attempts to point out that she will be thankful she got diagnosed one day. Betty simply replies: “right now, I’d rather be dead.”⁴⁰ Her response reveals the shame and stigma associated with venereal disease. Her diagnosis with syphilis serves as a confirmation that she partook in sexual intercourse, an act she clearly regretted. Although this film is supposed to be an educational film warning of the physical and mental side effects of venereal disease, the message that premarital sex is wrong is also emphasized.

³⁹ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁰ *The Innocent Party* (Centron, 1959) video, 17 minutes, available at http://www.archive.org/details/innocent_party.

SEX EDUCATION IN THE LONG 1950S

Sex education was continuously stressed as a solution to problems such as venereal disease and teen pregnancy. Many believed sex education would help prevent the spread of disease and pregnancy. One social worker and mother argued that “ignorance and mis-information concerning sex and the venereal diseases is conducive to trouble for our young people.”⁴¹ Consequently, reformers pushed for more widespread adaptation of sex education courses in high schools. However, sex education in the long 1950s did not always involve explaining the physical act of sexual intercourse. Rather, as historians Susan K. Freeman and Jeffrey Moran have pointed out, these courses served to prepare high school students for their future roles as wife and husband, offering practical preparation for the lifestyles most women and men would pursue in the 1950s.

Although sex education had been in place since the beginning of the twentieth century and the formation of the social hygiene movement, formal instruction of sex education did “not acquire popular support or become widespread until the 1940s.”⁴² Educators believed that parents in the mid-twentieth century were becoming “more aware of their inability to provide proper instruction and guidance at home.”⁴³ These courses were not “federally or state-mandated programs but experiments that emerged in local contexts, building from a national dialog among social hygiene and education professionals.” Even though the words “sex education” might not appear on their school transcripts, sex education was integrated into a variety of courses, entitled “Family Life

⁴¹ Mary Ellen Goodman, “Arming Teen-Agers Against the Enemy,” presentations for the 1961 VD Conference, Chicago, Illinois, December 5, 1961, p. 10, Folder 227, Box 21, Institute for Sex Education Records, UIC.

⁴² Susan K. Freeman, *Sex Goes to School: Girls and Sex Education before the 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2008), x.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 13.

Education” or “Social Living.”⁴⁴ These courses often stressed successful marriage practices. In a way, the sex education proponents were trying to prevent social problems such as divorce and delinquency when advocating for sex education. They believed that “education could generate social and behavioral change.”⁴⁵ According to Freeman, during the mid-twentieth century, sex education was “a wide-ranging concept that encompassed instruction about anatomy, conduct, personality, and relationships.”⁴⁶ The concept of adolescence was also included into sex education. Educators sought to “assist young people’s psychological ‘adjustment’ and ‘development’ during adolescence.”⁴⁷

Sex education changed in the 1940s from centering on venereal disease prevention to the “safeguarding” of the American family.⁴⁸ As a direct result of World War Two, reflecting the chaos afflicting society, Americans believed the family unit was disintegrating. In 1944, Dr. William F. Snow, director of the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA), argued that venereal disease and promiscuous behavior were results of the breaking down of the family.⁴⁹ He then moved the focus of sex education to family life. These family life courses would then include teaching skills such as “balancing a checkbook, applying for a job, learning to date, planning a wedding, finding a hobby.”⁵⁰ This seemingly trivial skills were actually very relevant to the lives of these teenagers who were marrying at a younger age than the rest of their twentieth-century peers. Consequently, sex education in the 1940s and 1950s was more of an “attempt to train adolescents to conform to middle-class family life standards” than a discussion of

⁴⁴ Ibid., x.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁸ Jeffrey Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 124.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 150.

sexual intercourse and pregnancy.⁵¹ In agreement with Freeman, historian Alexandra Lord argues that the “postwar trend toward early marriage shaped sex education programs.” Instead of focusing on preventing pregnancy or the spread of venereal disease, these classes centered on “family life.” If sex was mentioned, it was always within the context of marriage.⁵²

Most girls were simply taught that sex was evil. The main messages they received spoke of “hesitancy and guilt.” This negatively influenced their life and could even instill an irrational fear of the opposite sex. A woman who graduated from high school in 1964 reported that she had not had sex education in school; she further explained: “you just didn’t talk about sex. It was negative, it only got you in trouble.”⁵³ Some girls reported that although they received education about the anatomy and biology of male and female sex organs, they were not informed of the feelings and emotions involved. In regards to the biological aspects of reproduction, one high school senior reported that she “had read all about that in a book when [she] was eleven. But nobody ever told [her she] was going to get so emotional about it.”⁵⁴ When questioned about their sexual deeds, many unwed school-age mothers admitted that they knew what they were doing was wrong and regretted their decision. They sometimes also claimed that they did not realize they were actually engaging in sexual intercourse or the potential ramifications of such activity. Since the act of sexual intercourse was not seen as a proper subject for discussion, accurate information about the actual act of sex as well as forms of birth control and venereal disease protection was difficult to find for young

⁵¹ Ibid., 155.

⁵² Lord, 96.

⁵³ Fessler, 39.

⁵⁴ Maureen Daly, ed., *Profiles of Youth* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1949), 155.

girls. Some pregnant girls expressed their naivety by stating they did not know they could become pregnant during their first time or that they believed an orgasm was necessary to become pregnant.⁵⁵

In *Sexual Behavior of the Human Male*, published in 1948, Alfred Kinsey revealed that “children learned most of what they knew about sex from other children.” In his 1953 edition on human females, he found that “no more than 5 percent of his female interviewees had received anything more than incidental information from their parents or religious mentors; all the rest had had to get most of their sexual information from their peers.”⁵⁶ The *Profile of Youth*, a text based on articles and surveys produced by *Ladies Home Journal*, found similar results. The series discovered that “most teenagers do not get information about sex from their parents; they do get information frequently in a distorted and inaccurate form, from books (popular novels, medical texts, lewd pamphlets, and comics), movies (both family type and “flea-show specials”), and conversation among themselves, usually quoting older friends.”⁵⁷ These books, often obtained through the mail, were passed around among friends. Some teenagers had even read scientific books by Freud and Kinsey.⁵⁸

A nurse working at the Adolescent Social Hygiene Clinic in New York observed that teenagers rarely received information on sex and its consequences from their parents. She reported that their information on the topic was “usually poor” and that teens often attained their knowledge from their peers. This information, in turn, was often

⁵⁵ Evelyn Stone, “Essential Difference, if Any, between the Married and Unmarried Mother,” paper presented at Central Eleanor Club, Chicago, IL, March 24, 1941, p. 10, Folder 1, Box 206, Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago Collection, Chicago History Museum. (Hereafter referred to WCMC)

⁵⁶ Morton M. Hunt, *Sexual Behavior in the 1970s* (Chicago: Playboy Press, 1974), 121.

⁵⁷ Daly, 65.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

“incorrect.”⁵⁹ The director of family life for the National Council of Churches, Reverend Dr. William Genne, reported in June 1960 that teenagers were not informed enough on sex to “handle it safely.” He stated, “they read a novel like ‘Peyton Place’ and they think they know what sex is about.” He recommended that parents begin sex education with their children at the sixth grade level when students start to become curious about their bodies and puberty.⁶⁰ A *Ladies’ Home Journal* article in April 1948 claimed that parents wanted to educate their children on the subject but “lack[ed] the scientific knowledge” to do so.⁶¹ The author suggested that parents attain pamphlets and films from the American Social Hygiene Association as well as the U.S. Public Health Service. In reviewing the case files of the girls at the Wisconsin School for Girls (WSG), it became clear that most girls received or at least reported that they had received sex instruction from their mothers. If the mothers were not listed, then it was either an aunt or other female relative. Nonetheless, in interviews with the institution’s psychologist, many of the girls expressed not receiving authentic sex education and not knowing what they were doing.

USE OF BIRTH CONTROL AMONG TEENAGERS

Prevention or management of pregnancies was not a new concept in the postwar decades. As explained in Chapter One, the condom had long been a popular form of contraception and a means of venereal disease protection. This device became even more widespread during the 1940s and 1950s when Trojans, Shieks, and Ramses, on sale since

⁵⁹ Susan Daggett Taylor, “Clinic for Adolescents with Venereal Disease,” *American Journal of Nursing* 63.11 (November 1963): 65.

⁶⁰ “Youth Uninformed,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 21, 1960.

⁶¹ Margaret Hickey, “Parents Want Help,” *Ladies’ Home Journal* (April 1948): 23.

the early 1900s, became more readily available at drugstores.⁶² In addition, the 1930s witnessed an expansion in contraception sales, especially among females. Referred to as feminine hygiene products, they were widely advertised in magazines such as *McCall's* and *Redbook*. The antiseptic douche was the “most popular, affordable, and least reliable female contraceptive.”⁶³ The commercial douche became the most popular birth control method in the United States, “favored by women of all classes.” It would remain the “leading female contraceptive” until the advent of the Pill in 1960.⁶⁴ Unfortunately for women who sought to prevent pregnancy and venereal disease transmission, douches were ineffective and potentially dangerous. Nonetheless, they remained popular because unlike diaphragms and spermicidal jelly, they could be bought over-the-counter or on street corners or concocted at home.

Despite the existence of these over-the-counter birth control products, protective devices were not easily accessible to teenagers. The Food and Drug Administration did not approve the Pill until 1960 and even then, it was only prescribed to married females. One sociological study of teenage sex and illegitimacy published in 1972 revealed that few sexually active unmarried teenagers used oral contraceptives before 1968.⁶⁵ Diaphragms, another common form of female contraception, were also only available from the doctor’s office. This made them difficult for single women to obtain. Although birth control agencies had been around since 1916, these offices were often stigmatized and unfamiliar to most women. Planned Parenthood Federation of American was created

⁶² Andrea Tone, *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 200.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Phillips Cutright, “The Teenage Sexual Revolution and the Myth of an Abstinent Past,” *Family Planning Perspectives* 4 (January 1972): 29.

in 1942. As the “only national birth control organization” in America until the late 1960s, Planned Parenthood aimed to strengthen the family by focusing on a “new concept of birth control”: family planning.⁶⁶ These clinics offered fittings for diaphragms, but again, most women did not have access to such places. So they chose to either take contraception into their own hands or forgo it. Furthermore, information regarding contraceptives was not readily available because up until 1960, thirty states had “statutes on the books prohibiting or restricting the sale and advertisement of contraception.”⁶⁷

Most young girls in the 1940s and 1950s, therefore, did not have access to reliable birth control.⁶⁸ Consequently, they relied on the boys or men to provide contraception. Before the Food and Drug Administration approved oral contraceptives, males were the main party responsible for the prevention of pregnancy. As stated in the *Profile of Youth*, “preventative responsibility” was “considered the boys’ problem.”⁶⁹ They were supposed to protect their female partners from pregnancy. For instance, in oral histories describing the 1950s, girls talk about how they made their male partners promise not to impregnate them. In one such collection of oral histories from young women who surrendered their babies for adoption before *Roe v. Wade*, several of the young mothers mentioned that they asked their male sexual partners not to get them pregnant and trusted them when they said they would not. Some of their male partners practiced withdrawal

⁶⁶ Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 242.

⁶⁷ PBS, “The Pill,” http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/pill/peoplevents/e_comstock.html

⁶⁸ It is difficult to discern the use of contraceptives among unmarried women during the 1950s and 1960s. According to historian Elizabeth Siegel Watkins, demographers produced the first study of contraceptive practices among unmarried women in 1971. For more information, see Elizabeth Siegel Watkins, *On the Pill: A Social History of Oral Contraceptives 1950-1970* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

⁶⁹ Daly, 153.

and convinced their mates that they knew what they were doing.⁷⁰ In these girls' cases, their partners obviously did not know what they were doing—the girls ended up pregnant. In the WSG files, those few girls who did mention contraception only cited the use of “rubbers,” not diaphragms or douches.

Psychiatry professor Melitta Schmideberg discussed the lack of contraception use, contending that this failure was “due to a similar mixture of ignorance and inhibition, plus the additional fact that young people have difficulty in obtaining contraceptives.” She further stated that “the girl depends on the male to use protection and may be too ignorant or too embarrassed to insist.”⁷¹ In his 1961 study of unwed mothers, sociologist Clark E. Vincent observed the lack of information regarding sex and contraception:

A few of the young teen-age ones from upper-middle income families expressed considerable disillusionment concerning their parents' teaching that only poor, ignorant, and sick girls became pregnant before marriage. Most indicated that they knew about contraceptives and the elementary facts of reproduction, but did nothing to prevent conception. ‘It just didn't occur to me that I would get pregnant, so I didn't use anything.’ ‘I don't understand, it just doesn't happen to other girls in my neighborhood.’ ‘My parents are furious! They say this sort of thing doesn't happen in nice families.’⁷²

Some young women denied the fact that they were having sexual intercourse and thus did not use birth control because otherwise they would be admitting that they were not only *having* but were also *planning to continue* to have sex. Some of these girls did not know that the actions they were partaking in could get them pregnant. Although this naive attitude was not the usual case, sex education—meaning information on the biological

⁷⁰ Fessler, 44.

⁷¹ Melitta Schmideberg, M.D., “Psychiatric-Social Factors in Young Unmarried Mothers,” *Social Casework* (January 1951): 6, Folder 9, Box 47, Child Welfare League Collection, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota-Minneapolis.

⁷² Clark E. Vincent, *Unmarried Mothers* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 16.

aspects of sex—was such a rarity in the 1940s and 1950s that ignorance at this level was plausible.

MARRIAGE AS FORM OF “CONTAINMENT”

Although they continued to promote abstinence, experts realized the difficulty of maintaining premarital virginity in light of the new sexual culture created during wartime. According to historian Elaine Tyler May, the war had caused a “massive unleashing of sex.”⁷³ So much so that experts believed “repression was no longer possible.”⁷⁴ In order to cope with this new culture, these commentators attempted to teach young people how to keep sex “contained.” Instead of stressing sexual repression, sexual containment was the new strategy. The only acceptable form of control would be marriage. Consequently, in the immediate postwar years, experts began to push early marriage as the “best way to contain sex.”⁷⁵

The idea of early marriage first emerged as an “antidote to illicit sex” in the 1930s when men and women were hesitant to marry for financial reasons.⁷⁶ Simply stated: “Sex was a commodity purchased by marriage.”⁷⁷ Parents were then encouraged to help their children to get married in order to prevent premarital sex. This idea would become much more popular during and after World War II. Young marriage was seen as a way to “sidestep some of the problems of the contemporary code of sexual morality.”⁷⁸ A 1958 *Chicago Tribune* article supported this idea, stating that “many parents, frightened by Kinsey statistics about immorality, encourage early marriage as a way to help their

⁷³ May, 88.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 33.

⁷⁷ Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Women’s Oral History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 8.

⁷⁸ Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 47.

youngsters maintain their moral standards.”⁷⁹ In a 1956 Public Affairs Pamphlet, marriage expert Lester A. Kirkendall explained that “[t]hose who work with young people know... that a sizable number of teenagers marry to satisfy their sexual curiosity.”⁸⁰

In addition to sexual desire, as discussed in Chapter Three, the long 1950s provided the perfect setting for marriage. It was a period of general job prosperity which allowed the financial stability for a family. Television, radio, and movies glamorized marriage and family life. This marriage-friendly environment helped spark the lowest marriage ages in half a century. By the end of the 1950s, the age of marriage had reached an “all-time low” in America. By 1959, almost half of all women were married by the age of nineteen and seventy percent were married by twenty-four. (And, on the other hand, as early as 1950, more than forty percent of American males between twenty and twenty-four were married.⁸¹) A *Harper’s Magazine* article reported that “A girl who gets as far as junior year in college without having acquired a man is thought to be in grave danger of becoming an old maid.”⁸² Marrying young had become part of the new youth culture. As historian Jessica Weiss has observed: “Before the war, marriage had signified the end of youth, whereas by 1945 American youth embraced marriage.”⁸³

Youth culture reflected this trend toward early marriage. *Seventeen* magazine increasingly featured advertisements for household furnishing, replacing fashion

⁷⁹ Joan Beck, “Are Teen Marriages Working Out?” *Chicago Tribune*, May 11, 1958.

⁸⁰ Lester A. Kirkendall, “Too Young to Marry?” Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 23 (June 1956): 4.

⁸¹ Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, A History* (New York: Viking, 2005), 225.

⁸² Charles W. Cole, “American Youth Goes Monogamous,” *Harper’s Magazine* (March 1957): 32.

⁸³ Jessica Weiss, *To Have and To Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 17.

advertisements with these new promotions.⁸⁴ Marriage now seemed to be the “logical finale to going steady.”⁸⁵ As family life expert Maxine Davis explained it, most couples who had gone steady for several years had already discussed the major issues concerning marriage and home life, and often could “see no reason why they should *not* get married.”⁸⁶ Conversely, because teen marriage was so prevalent, other girls considered it as a very real and viable option. In the Wisconsin School for Girls case files, for instance, many students express the desire to marry their boyfriends or sexual partners. In fact, some attempted to become pregnant in order to gain their parents’ permission to marry. In the Purdue Opinion Panel Report, “Courtship Conduct as Viewed by High School Youth,” in which sociologists polled high school students across the nation to garner their responses to dating and marriage, most female high school students claimed that nineteen to twenty-one years old was the approximate age at which they would like to marry.⁸⁷

Maxine Davis also suggested the “economy in general” encouraged early marriage.⁸⁸ Because of the postwar prosperity, young people could afford to get married at an earlier age. Not only were boys working, but girls could also work to support the family. Nonetheless, if teenagers were still in school at the time of marriage, some parents agreed to help them out until they were finished. In addition to their parents, youth could also rely on credit and installment plans to assist them financially in setting

⁸⁴ Joseph Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 265.

⁸⁵ Davis, 197.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ H. H. Remmers, A.J. Drucker, and H. T. Christensen, “Courtship Conduct as Viewed by High School Youth,” *The Purdue Opinion Panel*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (December 1950): 34.

⁸⁸ Davis, 196.

up a home. Davis also cited the “precarious times” as a reason for early marriage.⁸⁹ World War Two and the Korean War helped perpetuate the idea that tomorrow might never come. Young people subsequently sought stability and strength in the home life through their spouses and offspring. This “sense of impermanence” drove youth to “grasp for the best of life as soon as possible.”⁹⁰ In a similar vein, sociology professor and author Paul H. Landis cited a possible “shortage of men” as one of the reasons early marriage had become so desirable for girls.⁹¹ After the war, when indeed the male population in the United States had decreased, young women felt that their chances of finding and then marrying a respectable man were rapidly decreasing. Consequently, Landis believed they were more inclined to marry early to secure their future as a wife.

Feelings of shame and guilt also motivated young people to get married, particularly women. Although mass culture continued to become more sexualized during the 1950s, girls were still expected to avoid sexual temptation. If they did give in, it was only to be to a boy that they would marry or at least be willing to marry if she did become pregnant. According to historian Stephanie Coontz, although premarital sex had “increased gradually but steadily” from the 1880s through the 1940s, the 1950s witnessed an “ideological backlash to the sexual permissiveness of the wartime era.” Women adopted what some researchers have called “a transitional sexual standard,” which meant premarital sex was “acceptable for men under most conditions and for women if they were in love.” Women could have sex with the men they loved or men they were prepared to marry because pregnancy was still a relevant concern. In her mind, if a young woman got pregnant, she would have to marry that man. Sexual pressure or guilt

⁸⁹ Ibid., 197.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Landis, *Your Dating Days*, 47.

could prompt an earlier marriage than desired. Some girls felt that if they did participate in sexual intercourse then they should “legitimate” their behavior by marrying their sexual partners.⁹² Girls who engaged in premarital sex activity that did not lead to marriage were looked down upon; those who ended up pregnant and unmarried were stigmatized and ostracized. Based on her collection of interviews from young women coming of age in the 1950s, Brett Harvey found that “the importance of sex as a motive for marriage [during that time period] can hardly be overestimated.” The potential consequences were “too devastating to risk.”⁹³ One fifteen-year-old girl wrote to Dear Abby that she desperately wanted to marry her sixteen-year-old boyfriend but her parents would not acquiesce. She told Abby that she wanted to get married so that she would not “get into trouble.”⁹⁴ Abby replied that the girl should learn how to control her “emotions” before she considered marriage.⁹⁵

The 1950s witnessed more births to teenage mothers than any other decade, yet the widespread panic that would accompany teen pregnancy in 1970s failed to appear twenty years earlier. The reason behind this was that most of the teenage mothers in the 1950s were also wives. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, as recently as 1960 about 85 percent of births to mothers under twenty occurred after marriage. Even among the very youngest of mothers, those age fourteen or younger, about 30 percent of births were to married girls. However, what these statistics failed to reveal was that many of these marriages were arranged post-conception in order to hide an illegitimate pregnancy. In fact, it is estimated that almost one-half of the first children

⁹² May, 107.

⁹³ Harvey, 75.

⁹⁴ Abigail Van Buren, “Dear Abby: End the Hanky-Panky,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 10, 1961.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

born to teenagers during the 1950s were conceived before the couple's wedding.⁹⁶ Dr. Lee Burchinal, professor of sociology at Iowa State University, conducted a survey in 1958 to determine why girls married young. He interviewed sixty girls who had married before graduating high school and an addition sixty of similar backgrounds that had not. The survey revealed that girls who married young had not only started dating at an earlier age, but had also begun going steady earlier than their female peers who did not marry young. Dr. Burchinal also found that a third to half of all young marriages involved premarital pregnancies.⁹⁷

While some saw teenage marriage as a solution to illicit sex, others viewed it as a social problem in itself. Renowned advice columnist Dorothy Dix was a staunch opponent of teenage marriage. In a column on September 7, 1947, Dix stated that she was against teenage marriage because "teen age girls are not fitted for marriage. They are emotionally undeveloped. They don't know what they are going to be themselves, not what they are going to want in a husband, and their tastes change from day to day."⁹⁸ Dix cited the "matrimonial wrecks" from World War Two as evidence, stating that the "divorce courts are working overtime...."⁹⁹ Family life expert Evelyn Duvall claimed that teenage marriages involved "more discord and less happiness" than those marriages formed by couples in their twenties and thirties. Another family life expert Maxine Davis contended that some teenagers got married because they confuse "physical attraction with love."¹⁰⁰ Because they were accustomed to petting, their sexual appetites led them to

⁹⁶ Margaret K. Rosenheim and Mark F. Testa, eds., *Early Parenthood and Coming of Age in the 1990s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 5.

⁹⁷ Jean Anderson, "Teen-Age Marriage Craze," *Ladies' Home Journal* (March 1963): 116.

⁹⁸ Dorothy Dix, "Early Marriages," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 7, 1947.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Davis, 199.

marriage, not true love. Davis also warned that some young people married simply because they had no confidence in themselves. The girl who grew up thinking she was unattractive might have been too eager to marry the first boy who asked her out because she feared being alone for the rest of her life. This fear and lack of self-esteem could push young people to the altar.¹⁰¹ When discussing teens that married as a result of pregnancy, Davis warned that these couple might later resent each other.¹⁰²

Articles in major national magazines wondered if parents were doing the right thing by permitting their teens to marry early. A *Ladies' Home Journal* article reported in 1963 that almost 40 percent of brides in the United States were teenagers. The magazine labeled this an “alarming rate” and wondered what was going on with the nation’s teenagers.¹⁰³ One *Coronet* magazine article even decried teenage marriage as a “tragic trap.”¹⁰⁴ In this article, family life experts warned of the perils of early marriage, calling teenage marriage “one of our most serious problems.” It further claimed the “tremendous upsurge since World War II has caused economic misery, emotional damage and a shocking divorce rate.”¹⁰⁵ People linked the teen-age marriages to rising divorce and annulment rates. The teenage marriages of the 1950s and early 1960s were said to be responsible for the high divorce rates in the late 1960s and 1970s.

THE GIRL PROBLEM

While marriage seemed to be the main path for adolescent girls, there were many other girls who failed to follow the social track laid out for them. There were many who

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 202.

¹⁰² Ibid., 185.

¹⁰³ Jean Anderson, “Teen-Age Marriage Craze,” *Ladies' Home Journal* (March 1963): 66.

¹⁰⁴ David Landman, “The Tragic Trap of Teenage Marriage,” *Coronet* 49 (February 1961): 118.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

disobeyed the sexual norms of the times. Adolescent female delinquency was not a new problem in the 1940s; rather girls had been subjects of public concern since at least the 1880s. Although boys were—and are still—considered more likely to be delinquent than girls, authorities focused significant energy on controlling girls' behavior for most of the twentieth century. The term “girl problem” emerged in the late nineteenth century to identify the seemingly rising delinquency among girls. Authorities and social workers alike have used the phrase “girl problem” to describe issues regarding girls' behavior in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Historian Susan K. Cahn has defined “girl problem” as the merger of three separate problems:

the problems of economic and sexual exploitation that girls or young women often encountered in urban industrial settings; the generational tensions occasioned by young women's bold styles and actions, especially their sexual and reproductive behavior; and the conceptual problem of defining the passage from girlhood to womanhood in legal practice and social theory.¹⁰⁶

She further claims that “since at least the 1880s, reformers around that nation had dedicated themselves to finding answers to what became known as the “girl problem.”¹⁰⁷

In order to solve the “girl problem,” society either proceeded “proactively on providing decent jobs, housing, and education to young women in the city,” or with “more punitive legal and penal reforms designed to protect adolescent women from the perceived hazards of modern city life and their own youthful inclinations.”¹⁰⁸

The threat of young female adolescent sexuality at the opening of the twentieth century was the result of an assortment of social factors. First, many young women were living on their own and working in cities. As urban areas expanded, more girls flocked to

¹⁰⁶ Susan K. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 45.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

these centers for jobs and social lives. This made them vulnerable to sexual experiences and assault while also making them a more visible presence in society. At the same time, Progressive reformers felt that these girls could turn to prostitution as a means to survive in the city and so a “heated anti-prostitution” campaign was launched in the early 1900s.¹⁰⁹ Meanwhile, the eugenics movement linked illegitimacy to degeneration. Because only an immoral and mentally defective girl would partake in extra-marital sex, she endangered society by reproducing. Her children were consequently tainted and would contribute to the decline of the white race. Many of these girls were classified as mentally “defective” or “feebleminded” in order to isolate them from society. Because they often did not uphold social mores in regards to sexual behavior, they were seen as a risk to society’s gene pool and consequently sent away to institutions. Women reformers encouraged the removal of “delinquent” girls and ran such institutions in order to “protect” both the girls and society.¹¹⁰ In addition, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, public health experts and physicians sought to eliminate venereal disease and promoted social hygiene education. These experts accused young girls of being the primary source of infection. As a consequence of the combination of these circumstances, “Americans soon came to perceive the sexuality of young, unmarried women as a major social problem that threatened society with vice, family breakdown, disease, and racial degeneration.”¹¹¹

During the Progressive Era, “an interest in female delinquency, the expansion of reform institutions, and the rise of professionalism in medicine and psychiatry” led to a

¹⁰⁹ Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 96.

¹¹⁰ Michael A. Rembis, *Defining Deviance: Sex, Science, and Delinquent Girls, 1890-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 52.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

more active effort to fix the “girl problem.”¹¹² The college-educated, female leaders of the Progressive movement saw an error in the “Victorian assumption of girlhood sexual passivity and victimization.”¹¹³ In contrast, these reformers began to view young girls who participated in extra-marital sexual activity as “delinquents” who needed “guidance and control.”¹¹⁴ Because they believed increasingly in female sexual agency, social activists no longer viewed these girls as hapless victims of seductive men. Rather, they blamed societal and family conditions, and focused their efforts on the girls and their environments rather than the men. During the Progressive Era, reformers encouraged the establishment of special police agents, juvenile courts, detention centers, and state reformatories “to monitor and correct sexual misconduct among young women and girls.”¹¹⁵ They introduced the concept of using *institutions* as a means to control female sexuality. As a result of an expansion in the number of reformatories, many more young girls were “institutionalized for moral offenses than had been previously” and for more longer commitment terms, usually several years.¹¹⁶ The state governments became more active in the 1920s and 1930s, working with the various professional fields to enlarge “its jurisdiction over delinquent girls.”¹¹⁷ Girls who could not follow the traditional sexual standards of the time were categorized as “defective delinquents, psychopaths, adventuresses, spieler girls, women adrift, charity girls, or fallen, feebleminded, or inverted women.”¹¹⁸ Anne Meis Knupfer found that these descriptors could encompass

¹¹² Anne Meis Knupfer, “‘To Become Good, Self-Supporting Women’: The State Industrial School for Delinquent Girls at Geneva, Illinois, 1900-1935,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9.4 (Oct. 2000): 421.

¹¹³ Odem, 95.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 96.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 118.

¹¹⁷ Knupfer, 421.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 423.

“such practices as standing on a street corner, accepting a car ride from a male stranger, or flirting with a boy in the corner drugstore or confectionary.”¹¹⁹

One solution to the “girl problem” was the creation of what were labeled “industrial schools” in the late 1800s. These institutions were used up until the 1970s to contain girls who were seen as threats to society. Both Wisconsin and Illinois (in addition to numerous other states) had industrial schools: the Wisconsin School for Girls and the Geneva School for Girls respectively. The Wisconsin School for Girls first operated as the Milwaukee Industrial School, a private institution for delinquent and orphaned girls as well as very young boys.¹²⁰ The school began receiving taxpayer support in 1876 and changed its name in 1878 to the Wisconsin Industrial School for Girls. The school originated as a result of the Wisconsin legislature outlawing “the practice of committing young people under twenty-one to county poorhouses.”¹²¹ A board of “resident lady managers ran the school. It was designed as a “reformatory for vicious, stubborn, and unruly girls, under seventeen years of age.”¹²² The state took full control of the school in 1917, but it remained in Milwaukee until 1941.

The Wisconsin Industrial School for Girls’ mission was to “train and restore” young women ages fourteen to eighteen who were vagrants, who had violated criminal or civil laws, or who had ‘fallen into bad habits or have inherited vicious tendencies or are in manifest danger of doing wrong.’”¹²³ Between 1875 and 1920, Wisconsin counties

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 422.

¹²⁰ Wisconsin Historical Society website, http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary/index.asp?action=view&term_id=14615&term_type_id=3&term_type_text=things&letter=I

¹²¹ Joan M. Jensen, *Calling This Place Home: Women on the Wisconsin Frontier, 1850-1925* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2006), 220.

¹²² State of Wisconsin, *Governor’s Message and Accompanying Documents of the State of Wisconsin*, vol. 11 (Madison: Democrat Printing Company, 1893), 297.

¹²³ Jensen, 221.

committed more than 1,700 young women to the industrial school for rehabilitation.¹²⁴ From the beginning, local court judges determined the fate of the young girls, deciding whether or not they would be sent to the industrial school. The Wisconsin Industrial School for Girls moved again in 1941. Located ten miles south of Madison in Oregon, Wisconsin, this new Wisconsin School for Girls (it changed its name again in 1945) under the direction of Superintendent Ethel Brubaker stressed “humane methods” over “harsh discipline.”¹²⁵ Nonetheless, the school continued to be used as a means to mitigate the “girl problem” by isolating the “bad girls” from the rest of society.

In his study on the Geneva School for Girls in Illinois, historian Michael Rembis finds that the nature of institutionalization of female girls began to change in the 1950s as institutions were used less frequently as eugenics preserves. Instead, Freudian psychology and personality theories were used to explain the behaviors of female juvenile delinquents in the 1950s. Rembis maintains that those at the Geneva State Industrial School began to see the girls as “maladjusted” as a result of their childhood experiences. Like the eugenicists before them, these experts often blamed the mothers for their daughters’ delinquency. The difference in the 1950s was that it was “the mother-child relationship and not the mother’s ‘germ plasm’ that was at fault.”¹²⁶ Freudian theory in regards to both the mother and father’s relationship with the girls would also be applied to teenage pregnancy, as will be considered in the next chapter.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ In August 1972, the school became a coeducational juvenile reformatory. It closed soon after in 1976 when the facilities were transformed into an adult prison, known as Oakhill Correctional Institution. The then current inmates were transferred to Lincoln Hills, a co-ed facility for juvenile delinquents. See Wisconsin Historical Society website, http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary/index.asp?action=view&term_id=14615&term_type_id=3&term_type_text=things&letter=I. Little has been written on the Wisconsin School for Girls.

¹²⁶ Rembis, 134.

THE FEMALE SEX DELINQUENT

The “girl problem” continued to vex society into the 1950s, when juvenile delinquency began to attract national attention. While young males were often charged with larceny and assault, girls’ crimes usually involved sex offenses or incorrigibility. Michael Rembis has found that “unlike young women, boys’ sexual conduct was rarely criminalized, even in the case of rape.” Whereas boys’ crimes were “primarily against property,” the court system thought girls’ usually “pose[d] a sexual or eugenic threat to the individual offender or to society.”¹²⁷ Consequently, up until the late 1960s, girls could be placed in state reformatories and detention homes simply for engaging in premarital sex or being pregnant out of wedlock.¹²⁸ These cases were heard before children’s court judges under the umbrella charge of “immorality.” “Immorality” had a wide definition during this time period. For instance, the Milwaukee County’s Children Court described it as: “...she habitually so deports herself as to injure or endanger the morals or health of herself or others.”¹²⁹ Girls who did not follow the sexual norms of the times could then be sent away to industrial schools. Like maternity homes of this time period, these schools quarantined the “bad girls” so their immoral behavior would not spread.

Girls were charged with immorality if they engaged in sexual relations with boys or men, even if these acts were forced. For example, the early cases at the Wisconsin

¹²⁷ Rembis, 41.

¹²⁸ Since the origin of juvenile courts and reformatories in the early twentieth century, people had been questioning the treatment of out-of-wedlock pregnancy as a crime. In the introduction of Percy Kammerer’s 1918 study, *The Unmarried Mother*, Dr. William Healy asked why bringing a child into the world was considered a crime. He believed all life, whether created in a legal or illegal manner, should be respected and that the mother and her child should be of a “great concern.” Thus, the mother’s actions were not on par with larceny, assault, or murder, he asserted. Nonetheless, this was not the common opinion. Most police authorities and mental health experts believed that the best place for unmarried pregnant girls was away from society, whether in a maternity home or in a state industrial school.

¹²⁹ Milwaukee County Children’s Court Records, WSG Case Files.

School for Girls revealed that almost ten percent of admitted delinquent girls had been “sexually abused by male relatives or neighbors.”¹³⁰ Many of the girls listed older males as their sex partners. These men might have intimidated the girls into participating in sexual behavior. Nonetheless, the girls were the ones who were punished, while the males were either given probation or dismissed due to lack of evidence. These girls could then be sent away to the Wisconsin School for Girls until they were twenty-one.¹³¹ For girls who were fourteen or fifteen years of age, this meant six or seven years in a training school away from their friends and family. Although many girls were eligible for parole and many were indeed paroled, they were still placed in custody of the Department of Public Welfare. Consequently, parole officers closely monitored their lives. The parole officer would call upon the girl’s residence and check in with the girl, her parents, or her guardians. Often times, these girls ended back in the Industrial School or were transferred to the Wisconsin Home for Women if their behaviors and attitudes worsened. Girls at the Industrial School who appeared too mature in terms of sexual experiences could also be sent to the Wisconsin Home for Women where they would be detained until after the age of twenty-one.¹³²

Because these girls engaged in extramarital sexual relations, they were viewed as threats to society and the court felt justified in sending them away. These girls were usually brought into the judicial system by police or vice squad members who picked them up and placed them in detention homes. Others were brought to court by their

¹³⁰ Jensen, 222.

¹³¹ If the girl was thought to be mentally challenged as determined by various tests and psychiatric evaluations automatically conducted upon her arrival, she was sent to one of the colony schools located throughout Wisconsin. The terms “retarded” or “dull” were frequently used to describe girls who partook in “immoral” behaviors. Whether or not they were actually mentally challenged is hard to determine from the documents.

¹³² WSG Case Files.

parents who needed external assistance. These parents encouraged the judge to place their daughters in the industrial schools because they could no longer control their offspring. In some cases, though, the parents pleaded with the judge to let their daughters stay at home, arguing that they would change their ways and provide a stricter and safer home environment. These challenges to court authority left guardians and families open to attack and scrutiny.

Parents of delinquent girls were often deemed “failures,” unfit to make future plans for their daughters. As a result, the judges in the Children’s Court of Milwaukee County frequently embraced an attitude of paternalism as can be seen in their conversations with the girls in court. For instance, one judge expressed his desire for a delinquent to get her life on track. This thirteen-year-old girl had admitted to meeting servicemen at the movies or in Juneau Park as well as frequenting public dances and taverns. The judge addressed the girl stating:

You will spoil your whole life... We want to protect you against that, because you look to us like one of those nice girls that some day will meet a very nice boy when she is old enough and he may propose to her and she will marry him and be happy ever after, and I don’t want you to spoil that chance, because you have a nice chance if you keep yourself high-grade and rate yourself very highly.¹³³

It is clear that the judge was expressing paternalism towards the girl and pushing her towards the stereotypical path of females in the postwar decades.

A girl’s sentence to the Industrial School usually depended on the home environment. If the parents were seen as incapable, the girl was sent to the school for “protection.” For instance in July 1950, Judge John J. Kenney of the Children’s Court of Milwaukee County told a delinquent’s parents that she was being sent to the Wisconsin Industrial School because of their bad parenting. He stated:

¹³³ Case File 5903, Box 128, WSG.

Here you have a little girl apparently that whoever picks her up has relations with her. A couple men that she doesn't know, she calls them Mexicans; as a matter of fact they were Porto [sic] Ricans. Another fellow picked her up in the park and on the way home. I feel that for Elizabeth's own protection it's necessary that she be placed where she can't conduct herself in that manner.¹³⁴

The fear of pregnancy often motivated parents to have their daughters placed in institutions. The court also worried about these potential pregnancies. In the court records of one girl who had previously been charged with immorality, Judge Kenney expressed his gratitude that she had not yet gotten pregnant:

While she says that there was an element of force in it, in the snowbanks, a short distance from the skating rink—it all goes to show you, the department, the police, nobody seems to be able to prevent this girl from getting into serious difficulties. We're very fortunate that we aren't faced right at this time with a thirteen or fourteen-year-old girl pregnant. I feel that for the protection of this girl it's going to be necessary for me to place her this morning in the Girls School. It's not with the thought of punishing her, but protecting her, because she doesn't protect herself.¹³⁵

A similar case involved fourteen-year-old Susan Smith, who was committed to the Wisconsin School for Girls on charges of delinquency and violating probation. In August 1950, Susan listened as Judge Kenney described her numerous sexual relations, "so-called pickups." These men, usually soldiers, would engage in sexual intercourse with Susan at the park or the lakefront. Susan admitted to having sex experience with six or seven men. When announcing her assignment to the industrial school, Kenney summarized Susan's position in society, stating: "Well[,] that former habit of stealing has now become complicated with this ease with which you're getting involved in sexual matters. Here you are at fourteen, and when you're brought here you think you're pregnant. I think we can all be very very thankful that you're not."¹³⁶ Pregnancy was a

¹³⁴ Case File 6117, Box 144, WSG.

¹³⁵ Case File 6171, Box 148, WSG.

¹³⁶ Case File 6139, Box 146, WSG.

significant fear for judges and case workers who believed that premarital sex, left unchecked, would undoubtedly lead to pregnancy.

Although girls were often placed in industrial schools in conjunction with other crimes, some were sent solely because they engaged in premarital sex with multiple partners. Regardless of the particular crime, a girl's sexual history played a role in her story. Her sexual experience was explicitly stated in her case file, even if it was irrelevant to the crime she committed. For instance, when a group of girls rioted at the House of Good Shepherd, a Catholic institution for delinquent girls in Wauwatosa, the girls who led the escape were sent to the Wisconsin School for Girls. Despite the fact that the crime was rioting and attempted escape, each girl's story stated whether or not she had had sexual experiences. Her sexual background contributed to the court's overall opinion of her.¹³⁷ If she had such experiences, she was additionally labeled "immoral" and punished accordingly. Thus during the 1940s and 1950s, industrial schools like maternity homes were convenient places to hide and isolate girls who did not follow the sexual norms of the times.

CONCLUSION

As discussed in previous chapters, young females who engaged in premarital sex were viewed as rebellious and immoral. Sex was confined to marriage and those females who displayed obvious signs that they violated this moral code were ostracized. Like unwed pregnancy, venereal disease was viewed as a clear and certain sign that a person

¹³⁷ See Case Files 5784, 5785, and 5786, Box 125, WSG.

had “obviously deviated from the accepted pattern of approved social behavior.”¹³⁸

Although teenagers were not provided with the necessary contraceptive means to protect themselves, they were still held responsible and punished when they became pregnant or contracted a venereal disease. This chapter reviewed evidence proving that involvement in premarital sexual activity could lead to institutionalization or a criminal record.

Access to birth control was also limited in the 1940s and 1950s. Because young girls were not supposed to engage in sex outside of marriage, they were not educated on how to protect themselves from pregnancy or venereal disease. They were simply taught to “say no” and to have a healthy marriage. Early marriage was initially believed to be a means of controlling sexual behavior. Because the general prosperity of the 1950s allowed youth the financial means to do so, teenagers were marrying earlier than their twentieth-century peers. Consequently, if steady couples did get pregnant, they often got married to cover up the illegitimate pregnancy. Thus girls who ended up pregnant *and unwed* were “losers.” Because they could not get the man to marry them, they had to pay for their sins. The “choices” available to young unwed teenagers will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹³⁸ U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, “Venereal Disease in Children and Youth,” undated, p. 1, Folder 224, Box 21, Institute for Sex Education Records, UIC.

CHAPTER FIVE
“IT COULD BE YOUR DAUGHTER”:
TEENAGE PREGNANCY ACCORDING TO THE “EXPERTS”

“Each of us knows one of her—the probable, the possible, the actual unwed mother. She may be our daughter. None of us can afford to be indifferent to bastardy’s spreading threat to our traditional high-minded concept of American womanhood.” --Henry Galus, 1962¹

As the age of unwed mothers decreased, their presence became more visible as a risk not only to the girls and their families but also to society as a whole. Because a young unwed mother she was not old enough to fend for herself, she was viewed as a significant burden upon society. As the quotation above exemplifies, some even viewed her as a hazard to national morals and principles. The medical community as well as academia began to devote time and attention to the plight of the pregnant teen. These “experts” sought to discover the causes of teenage pregnancy so they could diagnose it. Like a disease, many believed teenage pregnancy could be eradicated as long as a common source could be identified.

Unfortunately for these “experts,” the causes of teenage pregnancy proved to be too complicated and diverse to fit into a simple formula. Because the girl in question was legally a minor, parents often played a larger role in her life and thus her decisions regarding the pregnancy. Parents were also the most commonly named cause of the girl’s behavior. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, “experts” in a variety of fields attempted to “solve” teenage pregnancy. Many arrived at the conclusion that it was the upbringing of the young girl that led to her “getting into trouble.” The father received a significant amount of blame but most of the responsibility fell to the main female in her

¹ Henry Galus, *Unwed Mothers: A Penetrating Study of the Alarming Rise of Illegitimacy in America* (Derby, CT: Monarch Books, 1962), 24.

life: the mother. This chapter explores how the larger society including both the “experts” and the popular media viewed teenage pregnancy, and contends that it was a sensationalized social problem that garnered attention mostly because of the “sins” and scandalous behavior involved. Many viewed teen pregnancy as a serious issue and thus sought out a variety of ways to investigate it.

THE FACTS ABOUT TEENAGE PREGNANCY IN THE 1940S AND 1950S

Due to a variety of factors and historical issues, deciphering statistics regarding illegitimacy in the United States pose a challenge. Data on illegitimacy were often misconstrued based on the source of such information. For instance, the Division of Vital Statistics published a report in 1968 on “Trends in Illegitimacy” that listed the source of its data as the “certificate of live birth filed for each child born in the United States.”² At this time, only thirty-four states and the District of Columbia included an item asking for the legitimacy status of the child. Prior to the 1940s, most states did contain a legitimacy question on their certificates, but concerns over confidentiality encouraged many states to remove it.³ Therefore, the quality of illegitimacy statistics depended not only on the *completeness* of the birth registration form, but also the *accuracy* of the answers. This was an issue because many women lied about their marital status in order to spare themselves and their offspring the shame of illegitimacy. An additional constraint was that the findings included all unmarried women aged fifteen to forty-four years of age. Consequently, statistics that do exist on teenage pregnancies are imperfect.

² U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, *Trends in Illegitimacy, United States-1940-1965* (Washington DC: Public Health Service, 1968), 1.

³ Ibid.

According to the National Office of Vital Statistics, the number of out of wedlock births rose “appreciably” during the postwar period. This increase was “sizeable” among both “white and non-white groups.” Prior to 1943, there had been little annual change in the number of illegitimate births to white women. Then, between 1943 and 1946, the number rose from 42,800 to 61,400. This figure declined over the following five years, though it still remained well above prewar levels. Starting in 1953, the number of out of wedlock births among white women once again increased steadily, reaching 67,500 in 1956 and 70,800 in 1957, the year that the birth rate peaked in the United States. Among non-whites, the number of illegitimates rose from 46,800 in 1938 to 130,900 in 1957.⁴ According to this same study, teenagers gave birth to a large portion of illegitimate infants. (See chart below.) The rate of teenage childbearing reached its all-time high in 1957 with approximately 96 births per 1,000 women, ages fifteen to nineteen.⁵ In 1957, 13 percent of all teen births were illegitimate, compared to 79 percent in 2000.⁶

Substantial increases in illegitimate births had occurred in all age groups since the 1930s.⁷ For instance, the number of illegitimate births to girls under twenty years old was 42,400 in 1938 and 81,000 in 1957, a 91.0 percent increase. In 1957, births to unwed mothers eighteen years of age or younger was 63,000, comprising 30 percent of all illegitimate children. In 1957, the very young unwed mothers—those fifteen years and under—tended to be nonwhite. They outnumbered whites about 3 to 1. According

⁴ Joseph Schachter and Mary McCarthy, “Illegitimate Births: United States, 1938-1957,” Vital Statistics—Special Reports, Selected Studies, Vol. 47, No. 8, September 30, 1960, p. 226, US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, National Office of Vital Statistics.

⁵ Heather Boonstra, “Teen Pregnancy: Trends and Lessons Learned,” *The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy* 5.1 (February 2002): 7.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Depression years witnessed the lowest birth rates of women aged 15-19 in the twentieth century. See Susan Harari and Maris Vinovskis, “Adolescent Sexuality, Pregnancy, and Childbearing in the Past” in *The Politics of Pregnancy: Adolescent Sexuality and Public Policy*, ed. Annette Lawson and Deborah Rhode (New Haven: Yale, 1993), 34.

to the “Trends in Illegitimacy” study, in 1940 illegitimate births to girls 15 to 19 years old made up 7.4% of all illegitimate births. This rose to 12.6 in 1950 and 15.3 in 1960.⁸ In 1955, there were a total of 56,421 illegitimate live births to girls 15 to 19 years old. Of this number, 39, 255 girls were non-white and 17, 166 were white.⁹ According to this study, in earlier years unwed white mothers on average had been older than nonwhite unwed mothers. By 1957, this difference no longer existed. In 1938, it had been 21.0 and 19.7, respectively; in 1957, it was 21.6 for each group. This figure, 21.6 years, compared to 26.1 for married women. By today’s standards, these statistics may not appear so alarming; however, back in the post-World War Two decades, they were shocking. In addition, because teenagers were becoming a more visible group to society in general, their out-of-wedlock pregnancies gained even more attention than in previous decades.

⁸ HEW, 4.

⁹ Ibid., 13.

Illegitimacy Rates by Age of Mother, Girls Ages 15 to 19 Years Old in The US	
Year	Percentage
1940	7.4
1941	8.0
1942	8.2
1943	8.4
1944	8.8
1945	9.5
1946	9.5
1947	11.0
1948	11.4
1949	12.0
1950	12.6
1951	13.2
1952	13.5
1953	13.9
1954	14.9
1955	15.1
1956	15.6
1957	15.8
1958	15.3
1959	15.5
1960	15.3

Source: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, *Trends in Illegitimacy, United States-1940-1965* (Washington DC: Public Health Service, 1968), 25.

Number of Illegitimate Births in the United States in 1938 and 1957 by Age			
	1938	1957	Percent Increase
Under 20 years	42,400	81,000	91.0
20-24 years	26,400	60,500	129.2
25-29 years	10,000	29,800	198.0
30-34 years	5,000	18,200	264.0
35-39 years	3,100	9,400	203.2
40 years and over	1,000	2,800	180.0

Source: Joseph Schachter and Mary McCarthy, "Illegitimate Births: United States, 1938-1957," *Vital Statistics—Special Reports, Selected Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 8, September 30, 1960, p. 229, US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, National Office of Vital Statistics.

Estimate Number of Illegitimate Live Births, By Age, 1938-1957			
Year	Total	Under 15 years	15-19 years
1938	87,900	2,000	40,400
1940	89,500	2,100	40,500
1945	117,400	2,500	49,200
1947	131,900	2,900	52,900
1950	141,600	3,200	56,000
1955	183,300	3,900	68,900
1956	193,500	4,200	72,800
1957	201,700	4,600	76,400

Source: Joseph Schachter and Mary McCarthy, "Illegitimate Births: United States, 1938-1957," Vital Statistics—Special Reports, Selected Studies, Vol. 47, No. 8, September 30, 1960, p. 230, US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, National Office of Vital Statistics.

Percentage Distribution of Illegitimate Live Births, By Age, 1938-1957			
YEAR	TOTAL	UNDER 15 YEARS	15-19 YEARS
1938	100.0	2.3	45.9
1940	100.0	2.4	45.2
1945	100.0	2.1	41.9
1947	100.0	2.2	40.1
1950	100.0	2.3	39.5
1955	100.0	2.1	37.6
1956	100.0	2.2	37.6
1957	100.0	2.3	37.9

Source: Joseph Schachter and Mary McCarthy, "Illegitimate Births: United States, 1938-1957," Vital Statistics—Special Reports, Selected Studies, Vol. 47, No. 8, September 30, 1960, p. 230, US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, National Office of Vital Statistics.

ILLEGITIMATE LIVE BIRTHS BY AGE OF MOTHER IN CHICAGO, 1963		
Age of Mother	1962	1963
Under 15	230	268
15 years	404	556
16 years	576	716
17 years	682	750
18 years	838	774
19 years	932	888
Total 15-19	3,432	3,684

Source: Trends of Illegitimacy in Cook County, prepared by Research Department of the Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, 1965, Folder 10, Box 686, Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago Collection, Chicago History Museum.

THE EXPERTS EXPLAIN TEENAGE PREGNANCY

As sociologist Clark Vincent stated in 1961, “illegitimacy has never been a dull subject.”¹⁰ The “problem” of the unmarried mother had been capturing the attention of authorities and crusaders for decades. In the Progressive Era, reformers had taken a significant interest in the plight of the unwed mother and a number of studies were conducted to determine the causative factors. These early researchers studied the mentality, age, education, home environment, and occupation of the unmarried mothers. In line with Progressive theories, these activists believed that unwed mothers could be rehabilitated once the underlying cause of their pregnancy was discovered. They found that most of these girls came from “bad environments,” where they were exposed to immoral and drunken behavior, or from households broken by divorce. For instance, Percy Kammerer concluded in his 1918 study of 500 case records of unwed mothers that a variety factors could influence the girls’ behavior: “bad home conditions,” “contaminating environment,” “bad” companions, employment at “surroundings uncongenial,” “demoralizing recreation,” “lack of knowledge of sex matters,” abnormal sexualism, mental defects and aberration, and assault, rape, or incest.¹¹ Other Progressive Era researchers found that a significant number of girls registered with the social agencies were “mentally deficient” or “feeble-minded.”¹² In the first half of the twentieth century, it was not unusual for girls who committed any acts of delinquency to be labeled as “feeble-minded.” Another important factor that these studies identified was age. Indeed, most of these unwed mothers were under twenty-one years of age. In 1935, sociologist Enid Severy Smith declared that the “incidence of unmarried motherhood is

¹⁰ Clark E. Vincent, *Unmarried Mothers* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 2.

¹¹ Percy Kammerer, *The Unmarried Mother* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1918), 27, 28, 35.

¹² These terms would continue to be used to describe unwed mothers up into the 1960s.

primarily an adolescent problem.”¹³ Following this trend, the problem of *teenage* unwed mothers would become increasingly more evident in the 1940s and 1950s.

Following the lead of their Progressive predecessors, the experts of the post-World War Two decades attempted to identify the causes of unwed teenage pregnancy. As Elaine Tyler May explains in her work, *Homeward Bound*, in the postwar period professionals such as psychiatrists, scientists, and psychologists were considered experts and provided “scientific and psychological means to achieve personal well-being.”¹⁴ These experts approached problems from the therapeutic perspective, offering civilians coping strategies and “helping people feel better about their place in the world, rather than changing it.”¹⁵ These growing fields influenced the care and treatment of unwed mothers. Practitioners offered their opinions on teenage unwed mothers and the causes of their pregnancies. Because experts were so popular and widely trusted, their viewpoints shaped society’s attitude and reactions to social problems.

In the 1940s and 1950s, those working with adolescent unwed mothers concluded that out-of-wedlock pregnancies were a symptom of underlying emotional difficulty. According to these experts--many of whom studied Freudian theory--the pregnancy occurred in an attempt to solve subconscious conflicts. In these cases, the girl acted out because of her internal anguish and consequently participated in behaviors that could lead to pregnancy. Experts conducted studies at maternity homes, welfare agencies, and outpatient clinics. In addition, authorities and community members started to focus their attention on other causes of delinquency besides psychological explanations. Some

¹³ Enid Severy Smith, *A Study of Twenty-Five Adolescent Unmarried Mothers in New York City* (New York: Salvation Army Women’s Home and Hospital, 1935), 16.

¹⁴ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), xxv.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

blamed the media and the increasingly sexualized culture. Others blamed society's more liberal attitude toward sexuality. After World War II, attitudes towards the sexual act itself had changed, but society's response to illegitimate pregnancy had not. Renowned sociologist Leontine Young agreed that "if one observes public reactions today [1954], one can hardly escape the conclusion that it is not so much the sexual relationship to which we object [to] as the fact of the baby."¹⁶ Experts noticed the changing opinions on sex and the increased freedom in sexual behavior among all income groups.

The frequent absence of romantic ties to the putative father seemed to prove the point that a girl was acting out of subconscious desires rather than love. Young observed that "very few of these [young women] are interested in men. They show much less concern and initiative in attracting men than the average girl and often have lacked normal social and romantic contacts. For many, their only sexual experience seems to be the relationship which results in pregnancy."¹⁷ According to those who worked with teenaged unwed mothers, the emotions of mature love were seldom found in these girls' relationships with the putative fathers. They interpreted this as a sign of rebellion or subconscious desires as a result of an unstable home life.

Family life specialist Dr. Evelyn Millis Duvall explained to teenagers why some girls "get into trouble" in her book, *Facts of Life and Love for Teen-Agers*. She stated that the "more common reasons" why a girl became pregnant before marriage were:

- (1) she wants a baby out of wedlock as a way of "getting back at" her father or mother;
- (2) she does what she sees others doing;
- (3) she is starved for affection;
- (4) she impulsively gives rein to her feelings and does not practice

¹⁶ Leontine Young, *Out of Wedlock: A Study of the Problems of the Unmarried Mother and Her Child* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1954), 6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

restraint; (5) she does not know enough about the facts of life to protect herself; (6) she may have been the victim of an unscrupulous boy or man.¹⁸

Duvall detailed all of these potential causes. Nonetheless, she ultimately placed the blame on the girl, arguing that “society tries to safeguard girls from such circumstances by rules and regulations designed for their protection. When a girl defies these safeguards she places herself in a highly vulnerable position. Better by far is willing conformity to the standards of one’s culture....”¹⁹

An array of explanations sought to illuminate teenage girls’ sexual behaviors. For example, some attributed it to her unattractiveness. Because teenage culture placed a great emphasis on looks, a girl who was not attractive could “compensate by making herself available on a sexual plane.”²⁰ Consequently, her low self-esteem led her to engage in sex. One doctor claimed that because girls had a “natural desire” to be popular, it inspired them to partake in sexual activity. This same physician also argued that it was the “girl’s feminine instinct to please that makes her yield.”²¹ Another expert even blamed teen pregnancy on comic books. On April 21, 1954, during a Senate subcommittee hearing on juvenile delinquency, Dr. Fredric Wertham, a well-known psychiatrist and author of the *Seduction of the Innocent*, gave testimony regarding the influence of comic books on a school in New York.²² According to Wertham, at this school, “in 1 year 26 girls became pregnant.” He believed this to be “ethical and moral confusion.” He further stated that “these girls were seduced mentally long before they were seduced physically, and, of course, all those people there are very, very great—not

¹⁸ Evelyn Millis Duvall, *Facts of Life and Love for Teen-Agers* (New York: Popular Library, 1957), 63.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁰ Benjamin Morse, *The Sexually Promiscuous Female* (Derby, CT: Monarch Books, 1963), 31.

²¹ Goodrich C. Schauffler, “Today It Could Be Your Daughter,” *Ladies’ Home Journal* 75 (Jan. 1958): 112.

²² Fredric Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1953).

all of them, but most of them[—]are very great comic book readers, have been and are. As a remedy they have suggested a formal course of sex instruction in this school.”²³ In his book, Wertham argued that comic books “stimulate[d] children sexually.”²⁴ Thus experts from various fields of study sought various creative ways to explain the seemingly increasing problem of teenage pregnancy.

ELECTRA COMPLEX AND MOTHER ISSUES

As mentioned earlier, many social workers and academics blamed parents for the unwed pregnancy of an adolescent female. These unwed mothers allegedly “felt rejected and unwanted by their parents.” Feelings of “loneliness, anxiety, or hostility toward parental ties” were said to “intensify sexual urges.”²⁵ This attitude, as discussed in Chapter One, had long been accepted in society. Parents who did not fulfill their parental duties increased the chance that their daughters would become sexually delinquent. One caseworker argued that “the sexual acting out and resultant pregnancy of the adolescent girl is clearly symptomatic of the conflict in the parental relationship.” The conflicts she had with her parent “made it impossible for the girl to achieve a degree of ego integration that permits her to mature normally.”²⁶

²³ Committee on the Judiciary, *Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books): Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency*, 83rd Cong., 2nd Sess., April 21, 1954, 85.

²⁴ Wertham, 175.

²⁵ U.S. Children’s Bureau, “Group Work and Recreation in Maternity Homes for Unmarried Mothers,” p. 2, paper to be given at National Conference of Social Work, San Francisco, CA, April 17, 1947, in Folder 132, Box 16, Florence Crittenton Anchorage Collection, University of Illinois-Chicago. (Hereafter referred to as FCA Collection)

²⁶ Lillian E. Taylor, “Criteria for Choice and Use of Boarding Homes for Unwed Pregnant Girls,” paper given at the 1956 National Conference of Social Work, under the auspices of the National Association on Service to Unmarried Parents, p. 3, Folder 2, Box 2, Wisconsin Division of Family Services Unmarried Mothers Subject File, 1937-1971, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department. (Hereafter referred to as WDFS)

Specialists frequently cited poor relationships with parents as the main cause for the girl's rebellious behavior. Parents of all types--including dominant mothers, passive mothers, aggressive fathers, or absent fathers--were held most responsible for the girl's actions. Many pregnant, unwed girls were denied healthy relationships with their parents and lived in homes characterized by "conflict and confusion." She had "suffered deprivation or rejection, and...was sometimes caught up in the conflict between her parents and used by both to punish each other." The daughter was "frequently lonely, feeling lost and unloved, and almost always came to the [social service] agency with an attitude of distrust and resentment." She had "little knowledge of sex, the meaning of pregnancy, and all its physical and medical aspects. The pregnancy had little reality for her, she could not think in terms of a baby, but she knew she was in trouble and unless she conformed to the wishes of her parents, she might lose them."²⁷

Although the Oedipus complex, a theory posed by Sigmund Freud in the late nineteenth century, had been used to discuss the psychological and emotional development young children in the early twentieth century, it was not until World War Two that this concept was applied to girls and their transformation into women.²⁸ A fascination with Freudian theory permeated society in the postwar era. During World War II and after, promiscuity of young girls was blamed on the absence of their fathers due to war. According to historian Rachel Devlin, "postwar interest in the female

²⁷ Frances Mary Penna, "Specific Factors in Casework with the Very Young Adolescent Mother and Her Family," paper given at the National Conference of Social Work, Atlantic City, New Jersey, April 1950, p. 2, in Folder 9, Box 47, Child Welfare League of America Records SW055, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota-Minneapolis. (Hereafter referred to as Child Welfare League Records)

²⁸ Rachel Devlin, "The Oedipal Age: Postwar Psychoanalysis Reinterprets the Adolescent Girl" in *The Girls' History and Culture Reader: Twentieth Century*, Miriam Forman-Brunell and Leslie Paris, eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 218.

adolescent Oedipus complex exploded.”²⁹ During the 1940s, the idea of “a successful Oedipal father-daughter relationship” became necessary for the psychological health of young girls. Psychologists then diagnosed those female adolescents who appeared to be disturbed or maladjusted as suffering from “Oedipal conflict.” The frustrations from Oedipal desires could allegedly lead to female juvenile delinquency and antisocial behavior including teenage pregnancy.³⁰

According to the experts, girls who had children out of wedlock usually suffered from a poor relationship with their fathers. If the relationship had been disturbed because of separation or because of “severe rejection by a dominant or over permissive father, there remain[ed] an unconscious desire for a father person who will love her.”³¹ The girl then sought this father figure through sexual relations with other men. During adolescence, the girl was supposed to “give up her infantile love object, her father, for another man.” It was this “struggle for independence, for a heterosexual adjustment” that must be “mastered” to “achieve emotional maturity.”³² In this case, a girl had been prevented from maturing in the correct manner, thus leading to pregnancy.

Helen Deutsch, a psychoanalyst and devout follower of Freud, published the first of her two volumes on female adolescent development, *The Psychology of Women*, in 1944. This work was the second “most widely read work on adolescence during the postwar period,” behind only Erik Erikson’s *Childhood and Society*. Deutsch’s volumes went through sixteen printings between 1944 and 1965 and remained “the unchallenged authority on all aspects of girls’ psychological passage from girlhood to womanhood”

²⁹ Ibid., 219.

³⁰ Ibid., 218.

³¹ Penna, 1.

³² Ibid.

until the 1960s and the rise of feminism. Because of its extreme use of “Freudian” theory, her work fails to retain much significance today. Nonetheless, during the 1940s and 1950s, her opinions influenced society and the treatment of young girls.³³

In the second volume of *The Psychology of Women*, Deutsch argued that “illegitimate motherhood” was “above all a social problem” that was “judged differently in different societies.”³⁴ In this 1945 volume, the type of unmarried mother “most frequently encountered, because she is most frequently in need of public assistance,” was the young girl “still in the throes of adolescence.” Deutsch stated that “a complicated combination of psychic motives” or “simple sexual curiosity” could lead a “young and immature girl” to the “very adult task of motherhood.”³⁵ She claimed that some girls felt an intense “solitude” that led them to seek refuge in “life, excitement, and forbidden pleasures.” Girls that lacked “tenderness in their environment” were especially “prone to such uncontrolled sexual indulgence leading to motherhood.”³⁶ She also professed that some girls entered a desperate psychic state that they could no longer be in control of their actions. Deutsch referred to this as a “twilight state” in which the girl might not even remember participating in the act that led to her pregnancy. Instead the female might deny that she is even pregnant or claim that she has no idea how it happened.³⁷ Deutsch believed that these actions were bound to reoccur if the girl did not get help. She also believed that some girls were “from birth destined to be unmarried mothers.” For these girls, unwed motherhood was a “family tradition.”³⁸ If an aunt, mother,

³³ Devlin, “The Oedipal Age,” 222.

³⁴ Helene Deutsch, M.D., *The Psychology of Women: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, vol. 2: Motherhood (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1945), 332.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 335.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 374.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 372.

grandmother, or sister had previously bore an illegitimate child, the teenage girl could not avoid the same fate. Other experts supported this idea. For example, professor of psychiatry Melitta Schmideberg argued that “If the mother herself is promiscuous, trouble is likely to ensue” among her offspring.³⁹

Reflecting the new respect for “experts,” Leontine Young was often hired as a consultant to federal, state, and local governments and “served on national boards of organization addressing the problem of unwed motherhood.”⁴⁰ In 1954, she wrote a book reflecting the influence of psychology in the postwar decade. Based on her own work with unwed mothers, *Out of Wedlock* provides contemporary insight into the actions and behaviors of unmarried mothers. Echoing the dominance of Freudian ideology, Young put primary blame on the parents, explaining that the girls were either “mother-ridden” or “father-ridden.” The worse of the two diagnoses was the “mother-ridden.” Those who were “mother-ridden” suffered from an overbearing mother, who was both masculine and feminine. In this family, the mother ruled the home while the father was a passive bystander. The father was often a “stranger” to the girls since the mother refused for them to develop a healthy relationship. This kind of mother fell into a dreaded stereotype of the 1950s: “Momism,” a theory developed by Philip Wylie.⁴¹ These mothers were said to be too masculine and could develop unhealthy Oedipal relationships with their sons. Young believed that unwed mothers developed a similar

³⁹ Melitta Schmideberg, M.D., “Psychiatric-Social Factors in Young Unmarried Mothers,” p. 2, Folder 9, Box 47, Child Welfare League Records.

⁴⁰ Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race before Roe v. Wade* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 24.

⁴¹ See discussion of “Momism” in Chapter 3.

relationship, that is, they constantly sought their own mother's approval. This was affirmed when after giving birth, they attempted to give their babies to their mothers.⁴²

Experts drew an equally unflattering picture of "father-ridden" girls. According to Young, "almost without exception, these girls describe their fathers not only as dominating but as rejecting and tyrannical, and often as cruel and abusive."⁴³ These girls allegedly were resentful and spiteful, fostering hatred towards men. They then became pregnant to get back at their fathers or to hurt their sexual partners. The girls demonstrated similar rage towards the putative father of their babies. Their male sexual partners tended to be pick-ups or short-term acquaintances, further proving the point that they were not participating in sex as a result of love or deep emotional connections with their partners. Rather Young argued that these "father-ridden" girls were using their babies as "weapons" against their own fathers.⁴⁴

Although parental fathers received some attention, more blame was placed on mothers. Psychologists and social workers alike believed that the girl's "sexual acting out" was an "expression of anger or competition with her mother." Some claimed she yearned "for a perfect or infantile love from her mother as is symbolized by the baby she produces." Others claimed that the adolescent felt unloved and then accepted sexual advances as "acts of love and affection."⁴⁵ According to Jane Wrieden, a Salvation Army social worker, the pregnancy could be linked to "her early childhood relationships carried

⁴² Young, 52.

⁴³ Ibid., 60.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁵ Howard L. Paulsen, "Direct Casework with the Adolescent Unmarried Mother as Given in a Child Welfare Agency," paper given at the Meeting of the National Association on Service to Unmarried Parents, National Conference on Social Welfare, May, 1961, p. 11, Folder 2, Box 209, WCMC.

over to the present, especially the mother/daughter relationships. Her pregnancy is often a purposive acting out of her inner drives.”⁴⁶

Because most teenage girls still lived with their families, doctors and experts could interview other family members. Dr. Irene M. Josselyn took advantage of this opportunity in the early 1950s. She too concluded that the mothers of young pregnant teenage girls were often to blame. She cited two “strikingly frequent” situations. In one case, the girl’s mother had had a rigidly controlled childhood, and thus in turn sought to give her daughter more freedom. The mother in this instance “placed no barriers upon the girl’s behavior so that sexual acting out was almost inevitable.”⁴⁷ Josselyn believed that the girl appeared to be acting out “an unconscious impulse of her mother’s that had been kept in check in the mother by the severity of her background, but which was never integrated into her personality.”⁴⁸ The second situation was of the sexually promiscuous mother, who had been sexually active before marriage or engaged in extra-marital activities. Here Dr. Josselyn surmised that the girl “really identified with the permissive standards by which her mother actually lived.” Furthermore, the doctor applied Freudian theory to conclude that the girl had “actually incorporated the real super-ego of the mother rather than the façade of super-ego that the mother had verbalized.”⁴⁹ In both cases, the mother’s behavior was to blame for her daughter’s pregnancy.

Other psychiatrists recognized these two scenarios in their studies on young unwed mothers. One claimed that the mother’s resentment over the “flowering youth of

⁴⁶ Jane E. Wrieden, “The Meaning of the Maternity Home,” *Children* 3 (January-February 1956): 24.

⁴⁷ Irene M. Josselyn, M.D., “What We Know about the Unmarried Mother,” p. 6, paper delivered at National Conference of Social Work, National Committee on Service to Unmarried Parents, Cleveland, Ohio, June 1953, in Folder 2, Box 2, WDFS.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

her daughter when she herself is beginning to fade” might cause hostility between mother and daughter that would propel the daughter to lash out by engaging in sexual activities. In a more creative analogy, another psychiatrist claimed that “the young woman is like the fly caught in the web of the spider—as she struggles to free herself she becomes all the more thoroughly entangled—and more than not, she ends up closer to Mother than she ever was (exactly what she aimed for, unconsciously).”⁵⁰

Social workers acknowledged that “having a baby for the mother” or “acting out the mother’s unconscious forbidden impulses” was a common feature in young unmarried mothers. Marcel Heiman, a psychiatrist, found that some young unwed mothers had difficulty giving her child up for adoption because her own mother wanted to keep the child, and in fact, at times “it was her own mother who wanted to have the child in the first place.”⁵¹ At the National Conference of Social Work, a social worker described how when a 15-year-old relinquished her baby for adoption, the teen’s mother became enraged and claimed that if she could not keep that baby, she would have one herself—and did so for the first time in fifteen years.⁵² Another social worker expressed that when the mother of the teenaged girl insisted on keeping her daughter’s baby it often served a “double purpose, to punish her daughter and to fulfill her own neurotic needs.”⁵³ Other experts claimed some daughters became pregnant in order to give the baby to their mothers.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Heiman, 2.

⁵¹ Ibid., 4.

⁵² Virginia Shake, “Case Work Service to Unmarried Mothers Who Keep Their Babies: A Private Family Agency’s Experience,” paper given at National Conference of Social Work, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 21, 1957, p. 6, Folder 2, Box 2, WDFS.

⁵³ Penna, 4.

⁵⁴ Young, 52.

Psychologist Stephen Fleck conducted a study of 100 girls at the Florence Crittenton Home in Seattle in the late 1950s that focused on the relationships of pregnant girls under the age of twenty-one with their mothers. Fleck highlighted Ruby, a seventeen-year old, who was “struggling intensely to escape from her mother’s over-protective dominance.” He claimed that Ruby “almost consciously chose to become pregnant in order to achieve this.”⁵⁵ Fleck further linked the pregnancies of other clients to their mothers’ remarriages; sixteen of the girls in the study got pregnant when their mothers remarried.⁵⁶ Twenty-seven of the girls admitted feeling rejected by their mother before they got pregnant; Fleck attributed this feeling of rejection as leading to their pregnancies.⁵⁷ Fleck determined that the pregnancy in these girls was then “not a specific symptom in the sense of a particularly psychopathological evolution, but rather a neurotic solution that comes through varied psychodynamic forces and conflicts.”⁵⁸ He further concluded that this problem was “frequently one of adolescence[,] and closely related to typical adolescent conflicts and adjustment needs.”⁵⁹

THE OTHER “EXPERTS”

“Where does an unmarried girl go when she discovers she’s pregnant? Should she keep her baby or put it up for adoption? How can she obtain financial assistance? Who is she? What is she like? Is she criminal or stupid or just an innocent victim?”⁶⁰ This caption from a tantalizing November 1961 article in *True Love* magazine reflects the

⁵⁵ Stephen Fleck, “Pregnancy as Symptom of Adolescent Maladjustment,” *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 2.2 (September 1956): 121.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Kenneth Eric, “The Unwed Mother,” *True Love* (Nov., 1961): 49.

curiosity and interest unwed mothers sparked among the general public. While “experts” in academia or the medical field weighed in with psychological and sociological analyses, the popular media conducted its own investigations. Dedicated to discovering the “truth,” these other “experts” sought to provide information to the general public through more informal, popular, and accessible means such as magazines, newspapers, and film.

Historian Ricki Solinger cites the fact that “women’s magazines and other mass circulation media” frequently featured articles on unwed mothers and maternity homes. She claims that society found these stories “interesting—heartrending, titillating, perhaps compellingly disgusting.”⁶¹ Newspapers, women’s magazines, confession magazines, and movies all addressed the topic of teenage unwed mothers. Curiosity manifested itself in exposes and tell-all tales. Investigative journalists attempted to get the “inside scoop” by talking to the girls in maternity homes or interviewing family doctors whose patients were young unwed mothers. The titles of these articles usually included the words “tragedy,” “trouble,” “problem,” or “shame,” instantly inspiring a negative interpretation of the issue. They also used the phrase “in trouble” instead of “pregnant” to describe these young, expectant mothers. The expression getting “in trouble” automatically signified that the girl had engaged in wrongful behavior.

By the early 1960s, the media, especially women’s magazines, had adopted a new tactic to entice readers: making the issue personal. By sparking the idea that this unmarried pregnant girl could be your own daughter, the media helped inspire both fear

⁶¹ Solinger, 108.

and sympathy.⁶² Newspapers and films from these decades also reinforced this idea and popularized the concept.

“IT COULD BE YOUR DAUGHTER”

By the end of the 1950s, the unwed teenage mother had transformed from the promiscuous black girl or the poor white factory worker into the “good-bad girl” who could be your next-door neighbor. In fact, she could even be your daughter. In an article first published in the January 1958 issue of *Ladies’ Home Journal*, Dr. Goodrich C. Schauffler, a gynecologist and a regular medical advice columnist, warned readers that “the girl who gets in trouble today is not necessarily the girl from the wrong side of the tracks.” Nor was she a “true psychiatric case.” Rather, “illegitimate pregnancies often occur[ed] among sweet nice girls like your daughter and mine.”⁶³ Dr. Schauffler further noted that an increasing number of these pregnancies among unmarried girls were from “so-called privileged homes,” in the “very swankiest part of town.”⁶⁴ The idea that unwed pregnancies could occur among “good” girls was becoming more common, but not necessarily more accepted.

Advice columnist Dorothy Dix came to a similar conclusion about the changes in stereotypes of unwed mothers. She stated:

If there were only a few of these girls who had strayed off the straight and narrow path or if they were just girls who had had no decent upbringing or who were just

⁶² Two contrasting images of the unwed mother began to unfold in the late 1950s and early 1960s: the young, white, unwed mother who gave up her baby at no expense to the public and then returned to be a contributing member of society in contrast to the promiscuous non-white woman who had more than one illegitimate child and raised them at the expense of the taxpayers. Rickie Solinger explores the complex relationship between race and stereotypes in great detail in *Wake Up Little Susie!* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁶³ Goodrich C. Schauffler, M.D., “Today It Could Be Your Daughter,” *Ladies’ Home Journal* (January 1958): 43.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

innately immoral, we might leave them to drink their bitter cup, but such is not the case. Most of these girls are not bad girls.⁶⁵

Other journalists echoed Dix's observations that girls who became pregnant out of wedlock were not inherently "bad." In "The Problem of Unwed Mothers," an article published in *Look* magazine in July 1949, the author argued that "there are some startling facts connected with this problem: A very high percentage of illegitimate babies were born to 'good' girls; the 'bad' ones know how to take care of themselves."⁶⁶ The author used the example of a maternity home in Los Angeles to prove his point. He claimed that "more than half [of the clientele] came from families that rate financially as middle class or better."⁶⁷ In other words, they were not poor, destitute, or mentally incompetent girls—the longtime, stereotypical unwed mothers. Another writer attacked the stereotypes associated with illegitimacy, arguing that they were "dangerous because they lull people into the belief that unwed motherhood is peculiar to a certain type of girl and thus cannot strike close to home. It can and it does."⁶⁸ This article claimed that the "vast majority of unwed mothers are not 'bad' girls but badly adjusted girls."⁶⁹ The author recommended that "like it or not, you must accept the fact that an unwed mother is any American girl...She can be anybody's child—your neighbor's, your own."⁷⁰

Yet another newspaper investigation into unwed mothers and maternity homes asked, "what kind of girls are these who 'get into trouble'? Are they slum products, streetwalkers, and hardened delinquents? No. Statistics show that the majority are from moderate but comfortable homes, 'nice girls' who should be taking their places as wives

⁶⁵ Dorothy Dix, "Dorothy Dix Says: Unwed Mothers," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 16, 1945.

⁶⁶ Dan C. Fowler, "The Problem of Unwed Mothers," *Look*, Vol. 13 (July 19, 1949): 33.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Lester David, "Unwed Mothers: An American Tragedy," *Coronet* (October 1958): 158.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

and mothers in a few more years.”⁷¹ The article labeled unwed mothers as “society’s problem children.” Another newspaper article written in November 1959 declared the presence of a new type of unwed mother. Journalist Norma Lee Browning of the *Chicago Tribune* described this new image, stating “she is what sociologists call the good-bad girl, and what most of us call a ‘nice’ girl—until she becomes statistically recorded as an unwed mother.”⁷² Browning cited that the “biggest change in an age-old problem” was the rate of illegitimacy among the “good-bad teenagers.”⁷³ She demonstrated in her article that it was not just the licentious or delinquent girls who were getting pregnant; rather she quoted a sociologist saying that “at least 75 per cent of unwed mothers are not promiscuous.”⁷⁴

An article in *Look* magazine also reflected the idea of the new unwed mother as the girl next door. Entitled “My Daughter is in Trouble,” the article was written from the perspective of a family doctor. He described a change in mores among women, stating that they are expected to experiment before marriage “and often those experiments lead to tragedy.”⁷⁵ He also noted that these girls were not from “lower income levels;” rather they were girls from “our so-called ‘best’ families.”⁷⁶ The doctor offered similar advice to “avoid trouble”: keeping out of situations that invite problems—“moonlight sails, back seats of cars, prolonged necking.”⁷⁷ He also placed some blame on parents, who “today have unconsciously been putting too much pressure on their girls to grow up too fast, to

⁷¹ Jean Reiman, “Unwed Mothers,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 14, 1951.

⁷² Norma Lee Browning, “Problem of the Unwed Mother,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 1, 1959.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Virgil G. Damon, M.D. and Isabella Taves, “My Daughter Is in Trouble,” *Look*, Vol. 26 (Aug. 14, 1962): 26.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 32.

be popular, to marry.”⁷⁸ Nonetheless, the doctor made it clear in the article that these girls were not necessarily “bad” girls but were rather his friends’ daughters—the message being that it could be any one’s daughter who ended up “in trouble.” In a *Ladies’ Home Journal* article, writer Glenn Matthew White describes that teenage pregnancy was more likely to occur in “fatherless” or “motherless” homes. Nonetheless, he also warned that “illegitimate pregnancy ‘could happen’ to your daughter,” unless changes were made in society. He stated that ““ordinary girls gone wrong”” occurred because of “a complex of reasons or just plain bad luck.”⁷⁹ Another piece in *Coronet* magazine attempted to draw people’s awareness to the issue of illegitimacy and its negative effects on children by making it a local and personal matter. The author argued that because “illegitimacy is a tragedy that knows no economic, racial, or religious distinctions,” then “every community in America can do its part in solving an age-old problem.”⁸⁰

An article for *McCall’s* entitled “What Can We Do about America’s Unwed Teen-Age Mothers?” quoted the executive director of the Florence Crittenton Association of America, Mary Louise Allen, who said that “unmarried mothers come from all levels of society and from all economic circumstances....”⁸¹ She also cited that these girls were “merely an unlucky part of a much larger group. They come from that enormous number of females who have premarital intercourse.”⁸² When describing what type of teenager becomes pregnant, Allen stated that it could be the “young, naïve high school girl from a loving, protective, middle-class home, attracted to a boy whose adolescent sex drive at

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Glenn Matthew White, “Teen-Age Illegitimate Pregnancy... Why Does It Happen?” *Ladies’ Home Journal* (Aug. 1958): 41.

⁸⁰ Ellis Michael, “The Real Shame of Illegitimacy,” *Coronet*, vol. 26 (Sept., 1949): 29.

⁸¹ Mary Louise Allen as told to Eleanor Harris, “What Can We Do about America’s Unwed Teen-Age Mothers?,” *McCall’s* (Nov. 1963): 42.

⁸² Ibid.

some point became more than either of them could handle.”⁸³ Indeed, the social agencies and maternity homes themselves seemed to embrace this new image of the unwed mother. At the seventy-fifth anniversary meeting of the Florence Crittenton League, the organization’s statement of purpose argued that the “the old problem of ‘sin and prostitution’” could now be “restated in modern concept to ‘it could be your daughter today.’” The agency recognized its changing population. It realized that they had “in actuality a different kind of unwed mother.” These girls were “not the little girl wronged by a heartless man as a rule or the trade woman of the red light district.” Instead they were “any average American girl or woman, high school girls, college girls, professional women, secretaries, factory girls who simply got caught in a game where the majority of her contemporaries are engaged in the same game but without the dire consequences of illegitimate pregnancy.”⁸⁴

Like the medical “experts,” the media blamed the parents. In “The Unwed Mother,” a 1961 *True Love* article, the stories of three young unwed mothers—Donna, Sally, and Jean—were discussed. Each had become pregnant for different reasons but the pregnancies were all results of the girls’ home lives. For instance, Donna’s father had abandoned her mother and six siblings. Sally had an overly dominant mother and a father who was “always too busy to notice her.” Sally then “unconsciously resorted to having an illegitimate baby as the only means she knew to get his attention and concern.”⁸⁵ Jean

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ “75th Anniversary of the Florence Crittenton League of Compassion,” 1958, p. 14, Folder 8, Box 40, Florence Crittenton Collection SW006, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota-Minneapolis.

⁸⁵ Eric, “The Unwed Mother,” 53.

had an alcoholic and promiscuous mother, so she “used the only means she knew to get out of [her home].”⁸⁶

An article in *Ladies' Home Journal* published in 1947 featured the perspective of a teenage mother. Katie, the young mother, told the reporter that her situation was “mostly mother’s fault, really.” She complained that her mother was “always railing at all of us. She didn’t like anything we did and she wouldn’t let have dates or go out much, even to harmless old birthday parties.”⁸⁷ This led Katie to run away from home at an early age. She then fell in love with a man who abandoned her soon after she told him of her pregnancy. Katie suggested to the reporter that “maybe if all girls knew all these things and could talk about having babies, and making love, and what marriage is and what sex is, then maybe there wouldn’t need to be any more babies without fathers, and more and more mothers without husbands.”⁸⁸ A 1951 article authored by the aforementioned executive director of the Florence Crittenton Homes Association, Mary Louise Allen, stated that “poor parent-child relationships that are usually characterized by emotional neglect, extreme permissiveness, or overprotection” were the “fundamental cause” of unmarried motherhood.⁸⁹ All of these articles suggested that the “solution to the unwed mother problem” was “more acceptance of children, more wholesome family living. Bringing up children to understand and accept discipline. Helping them to realize as early as possible that there are rules—rules to follow in family life, social life, any kind of life. Knowing and understanding a child.”⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Joan Younger, “The Unwed Mother,” *Ladies' Home Journal* (June 1947): 45.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 107.

⁸⁹ Lester David, “Unwed Mothers: An American Tragedy,” *Coronet* (October 1958): 160.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 161.

THE UNWED MOTHER IN THE NEWSPAPERS

“Somewhere in your city, in a slum area or a prosperous middle-class suburb, a tearful teenage girl is in trouble. She is going to have a baby, but she is not married.”⁹¹

This sentence opened a 1960 *Milwaukee Sentinel* article on the increase of unwed teenage mothers in the United States. The article reported that pregnancies among teenage girls were rising each year. It listed the causes of teenage pregnancy as: “more tolerant attitudes toward unwed mothers[;] poverty and ignorance in slum areas; changing family roles, with more freedom for children; a hunger for love and affection; the popular custom of ‘going steady’[;] and improved health care, which has cut the infant death rate.”⁹² Although she received significant attention from journalists, the unwed mother was not an adored or respected figure; rather, she was often depicted as a miserable or desperate character. Newspapers and magazines presented her as a shameful and troubled woman, often linked to stories of unwed mothers who abandoned or killed their children. The journalistic medium reinforced animosities aimed at pregnant teens. Articles found in national and local newspapers revealed significant concern and interest in unwed mothers, especially the teenaged ones. Newspapers were a means of receiving information on unwed mothers, in both news form as well as personal inquiry.

Young pregnant girls frequently appeared in the national newspapers as victims of rage and anger. For instance, in March 1956, a seventeen-year-old boy from a small town in Wisconsin made the *Chicago Daily Tribune* for murdering his pregnant teenage girlfriend. Allegedly, the boy attacked the girl with a lamp in his grandmother’s

⁹¹ “Unwed Teenage Mothers in U.S. Increase Each Year,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 6, 1960.

⁹² *Ibid.*

basement when she threatened to tell his parents that he was the father of her baby.⁹³ In another tragic incident, eighteen-year-old Rachel Perry of New York was pushed off a bridge and into the Hudson River by her twenty-year-old boyfriend who was actually married with two children. The man told the police that he and the girl had made a suicide pact but instead he shoved her over the rail and then watched as she “bounced off an abutment and splashed into ice-jammed waters.”⁹⁴ A day later, the police discovered her body. Not only did unwed mothers risk potential brutality from their mates, they could also be victims of their lover’s partner. An article in the *Chicago Tribune* told of an outraged wife who brutally murdered her husband’s fifteen-year-old mistress when she discovered them in bed together.⁹⁵ Although the husband had committed the same deed, it was the young girl who suffered the consequences. Other newspaper articles depicted unwed mothers as deranged and destructive, even capable of abandonment and murder. For instance, headlines such as “Unwed Mother Kills Her 3 Babies; Hides Bodies,” “Unwed Mother Who Burned Infant Girl Held to Grand Jury,” and “Unwed Mother Who Killed 4 Ruled Insane” were featured in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*.⁹⁶ These headlines fed the negative stereotypes already embraced by the general public. The unwed mother, especially the teenaged one, was seen as incapable of raising her own child. Even if she was able to take care of the child at the time, there was always a chance that she would eventually murder or dispose of her offspring.

⁹³ “Convict Youth in Slaying of Wisconsin Girl,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 19, 1956.

⁹⁴ “Confesses Pushing Pregnant Girl, 18, Into Hudson River,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 23, 1960.

⁹⁵ “Wife of Man Held Admits She Killed Unwed Mother, 15,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 30, 1948.

⁹⁶ “Unwed Mother Kills Her 3 Babies; Hides Bodies,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 30, 1952; “Unwed Mother Who Burned Infant Girl Held to Grand Jury,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 16, 1948; and “Unwed Mother Who Killed 4 Ruled Insane,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 16, 1949

The young unwed mother could also put her family at risk. One story that caught the attention of Milwaukee newspapers in March 1949 told of a missing sixteen-year-old girl, Patricia, whose body was found in the Milwaukee River, tied to a cement block.⁹⁷ It was later discovered that her sister's boyfriend had shot Patricia in the head twice before throwing her body into river. This nineteen-year-old male feared that Patricia would tell her parents about her seventeen-year-old sister's pregnancy. It was later exposed that the boyfriend married the sister before telling her of his crime.⁹⁸ He was eventually charged with first-degree murder.⁹⁹ The article revealed the unexpected and twisted consequences of teenage pregnancy.

These investigative newspaper pieces also sought to uncover the causes of this social problem. One Chicago newspaper article stressed the diversity among unwed mothers but cited an "unhappy family background" as a common denominator. The father may be "particularly punitive or restrictive and her mother inhibited, cold, unloving, and rigid in her attitudes."¹⁰⁰ Another article placed the blame on "a wide field of targets:"

Youngsters exposed to raw sex in everyday living, torrid movies and TV scenes, obscene literature, night rides and hard liquor, lack of parental discipline, lax law enforcement which winks at boys and girls registering at cheap hotels and cabins, exposé magazines, pep-pill and reefer parties, teenage gang codes which virtually require illicit sexual relations.¹⁰¹

A 1958 article entitled "Problems of Unwed Mothers" interviewed Mrs. Maryon Leary, director of a Florence Crittenton home, and asked her why so many teenage girls were

⁹⁷ "Diver, Magnet Are Working; No Clues Yet," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 22, 1949.

⁹⁸ "Babich Denies Girl's Charges," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 14, 1949.

⁹⁹ "Kraemer on Stand Today in Babich Trial," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 13, 1949. Surprisingly, despite the fact that he had killed her sister, the pregnant sister remained married to the man. He was paroled in 1958. See "Parole Babich; Will Live in Another State," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 30, 1958.

¹⁰⁰ Joan Beck, "The Tragedy of Unwed Mothers," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 17, 1957.

¹⁰¹ Roger Greens, "Unwed Mothers—What Can We Do?" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 9, 1959.

“getting into trouble.” Leary stated that parents were to blame, arguing that “if you let young people run wild, their impulses are very likely going to lead them into trouble.”¹⁰² She encouraged parents to impose discipline in their homes. The article also cited going steady, liquor, automobiles, lack of love, and “excessive emphasis on sex” as other causes for the girls’ behavior.¹⁰³ Norma Lee Browning blamed the changing patterns of sexual behavior, that women were “playing a more aggressive sex role” and that these roles were being passed down to young people.¹⁰⁴ She concluded that the “American public should take a good look at the new good-bad girl it has created.”¹⁰⁵

Some newspaper articles contained advice on how to prevent teen pregnancy. One idea was that relief payments should be taken away or cut back for unwed mothers. Some people even suggested jail time for “repeat offenders”—women who had more than one illegitimate child. In contrast, there were others who offered a sympathetic view of unwed mothers. Many articles cited Mrs. Katherine B. Oettinger, chief of the federal Children’s Bureau, who argued that punishment was not the solution. A surprisingly empathetic article recommended that the “American public should take a good look at the new good-bad girl it has created and ask itself: If she insists on keeping her child, can we accept her in our social ranks? And if so, how?”¹⁰⁶ This author sought to find a way in which the unwed mother and her child together, not separately, could be integrated back into society.

Although the girls themselves wrote to advice columnists (discussed in Chapter Seven), mothers and grandmothers were also frequent correspondents. For instance, one

¹⁰² Joan Beck, “Problems of Unwed Mothers,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 23, 1958.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Browning, “Problem of the Unwed Mother.”

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

very concerned mother wrote to “Dear Abby” about her fifteen-year-old daughter who was “in trouble.” The girl had been going steady with a “nice boy from a good family” for a year. The mother had “never dreamed that [her] daughter was in danger with him.” The boy and his parents supported the idea of marriage, if no other solution was possible. However, the concerned mother felt a maternity home and adoption was the better choice for her daughter. She asked Abby for her opinion. Abby replied that she agreed with the mother and offered to provide her with the names of such homes in her area. She further added that forcing a boy to marry could make him a “miserable husband and a worse father.”¹⁰⁷ One “Grandmom of 12” questioned Abby’s advocacy of maternity homes. Instead this woman believed the girls should face a more severe punishment, asking “Why not make the girl who has sinned stay at home and face the music?” This “grandmom” felt the girl would be less likely to commit the same deed if she was forced to raise the child. “Dear Abby” responded that “when a young girl makes one mistake, and is forced to ‘face the music,’ the child suffers more than the mother profits.”¹⁰⁸ One particularly shrewd “Mother of Girls” wrote to “Dear Abby” offering an innovative solution to the problem of illegitimacy. She argued that “if the parents of these unwed mothers would present the babies to the parents of the unwed fathers to raise, I am sure there would be a sharp decline in the number of illegitimate children.”¹⁰⁹ This mother observed the double standard in which young unwed mothers and often times their families were forced to handle the situation on their own without financial or emotional support or even accountability from the male partner or his family.

¹⁰⁷ Abigail Van Buren, “First Tackle Problem,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 5, 1965.

¹⁰⁸ Abigail Van Buren, “Who’s Hurt?” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 15, 1961.

¹⁰⁹ Abigail Van Buren, “A Farm’s Not a Zoo,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 17, 1959.

TEEN PREGNANCY IN FILM

Movies also reflected the views of the “experts” of the time. Most movies featured flawed parents who caused their teenagers to rebel in the form of premarital sex. The pregnant teen then became the unexpected heroine while the parents or deceitful males were the villains. Although the pregnant girls in these films did struggle with how to handle their pregnancies—abortion, adoption, or early marriage—all of them ended up with a significant other. Starting in the late 1940s, some pregnant teens in the films were able to experience a happy ending without too much misfortune. The characters in these films looked like the girl next door and often exuded a child-like innocence. Again, the media reinforced the idea that the “tragedy” of unwed pregnancy could occur in your co-worker’s home, your neighbor’s or even your own.

The movie, *Not Wanted*, premiered in 1949.¹¹⁰ In this story, Steve, an older musician, seduces nineteen-year-old Sally Keaton, a pretty and bubbly “nice girl.” Sally’s overbearing mother constantly criticizes her and attempts to control her life. Her mother also regularly insults her father and it appears that she is the dominant one in the relationship. Despite her mother’s warnings, Sally continues to see Steve and they have sex one time before he moves to a different city. Sally later discovers she is pregnant, only to learn that Steve has abandoned her and left for South America. When discussing her relationship with Steve, Sally expresses that she feels “silly and cheap.” She believed they would get married; he only saw her as a fling. Heartbroken and desperate, Sally finds a maternity home where they promise to protect her and keep her secret. When asked if they should contact her parents, she replies adamantly: “I couldn’t bear it if they knew.” After much distress, Sally finally agrees to give up her baby for adoption. She

¹¹⁰ *Not Wanted*, directed by Elmer Clifton and produced by Ida Lupino (1949), DVD.

soon regrets this decision and tries to get her son back. Failing that, she attempts to kidnap a different baby and is arrested; she is released, but is so distraught that she tries to throw herself off a bridge. Luckily, her other male love interest is there to stop her. Although Sally is depicted as a tragic character, her mother and Steve are the main villains. A *Look* magazine review stated that “it makes an unvoiced plea for tolerance, better understanding of girls who ‘go wrong.’”¹¹¹ Nonetheless, some advertisements for the movie featured the line, “Her Story, the Nation’s Shame,” reflecting the overt negativity associated with unwed teenage pregnancy.¹¹²

The 1959 movie *Blue Denim* depicted the tragic potential of young love and premarital sex.¹¹³ In the movie, two high schoolers, Arthur and Janet, face the consequences of premarital sex when, after one irresponsible night, Janet becomes pregnant. Out of fear, the young couple attempt to solve the situation on their own without telling their parents. Arthur manages to find an abortionist and steals money from his father to pay for the procedure. Janet hesitantly decides to go to the abortionist alone. Meanwhile, Arthur finally breaks down and tells the truth to his father who rushes to save Janet. They rescue Janet just in time. Nonetheless, Arthur’s parents and Janet’s father leave him at home while they decide what to do about the baby. Janet tells them that she wants to move in with aunt who lives in a town 200 miles away and give the baby up for adoption. The next morning upon hearing the news, Arthur hurries to meet her at the train station where he proposes. The couple makes plans to get married. While the movie version of *Blue Denim* offered a somewhat happy ending, this was not the conclusion in the original screenplay. The first edition “featured an abortion as the

¹¹¹ Fowler, 34.

¹¹² “Display Ad 35,” Chicago Daily Tribune, October 12, 1949.

¹¹³ *Blue Denim*, directed by Philip Dunne (New York City: 20th Century Fox, 1959), DVD.

solution,” but the film board rejected this version.¹¹⁴ MGM tried to make the film more socially acceptable by suggesting that the story end with a miscarriage or an adoption. 20th Century Fox eventually acquired the rights to *Blue Denim* and originally agreed to have the unmarried girl keep her baby and postpone the marriage until they were “old enough to make a mature decision.”¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, the final version of the film featured a marriage.

In *A Summer Place*, Sandra Dee’s character, Molly, falls in love with Johnny, played by Troy Donoghue.¹¹⁶ Both of them are teenagers whose parents have their own issues with love and sex. The girl’s mother, Helen, appears extremely prudish, forcing her daughter to wear girdles to hide her figure. The seemingly sexless Helen obsesses over her daughter’s virginity. For instance, after Molly and Johnny get stranded on the beach overnight, Helen assumes they engaged in sexual intercourse and hires a doctor to examine her daughter. Molly pleads with her mother not to allow the examination, screaming “I didn’t do anything wrong. I’ve been a good girl.” Nonetheless, the mother insists on an exam, which reveals Molly was still “good.” Molly’s father, Ken, is more empathetic to Molly’s situation and questions his wife’s view on sexuality. Helen still forbids the two youngsters to see each other. This illicit love makes the couple grow even closer and they eventually have sex. Molly finds out she is pregnant and calls Johnny, presuming that he will be upset with her. Instead he comes immediately to her side and promises to marry her. They ultimately receive their parents’ permission to marry and the last scene shows the newlywed couple kissing happily on the beach.

¹¹⁴ Susan Harari and Maris Vinovskis, “Adolescent Sexuality, Pregnancy, and Childbearing in the Past” in *The Politics of Pregnancy: Adolescent Sexuality and Public Policy*, ed. Annette Lawson and Deborah Rhode (New Haven: Yale, 1993), 37.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ *A Summer Place*, directed by Delmer Daves (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1959), DVD.

Unlike other movies, *A Summer Place* does not include horrendous consequences for the “promiscuous” girl. She wins the sympathy and approval of the audience, not disdain and ostracism like other pregnant teens. Instead, the mother appears to be the villain: a repressed and over-bearing mother who is accused of nearly “destroying” her own daughter.

The movie *Too Soon to Love* tells the story of two high school students, Cathy Taylor and her beau, Jim Mills.¹¹⁷ Her parents, especially her father, are controlling and over-bearing. They forbid her to go out with friends or attend social activities. Cathy rebels against them by dating Jim and sneaking out with her classmates. After a romantic evening on the beach, Cathy becomes pregnant. She informs Jim of her condition, saying “I’m so ashamed, I can’t even bear to look at myself I’m so ashamed.” She pleads with Jim to marry her but he says he is too young to care for a family right now. She tells him, “You make me feel so dirty.” They seek out an abortionist who lectures her on engaging in premarital sex. Jim tries to steal money in order to pay for the abortion but gets caught. Cathy then attempts to drown herself in the ocean, but Jim saves her just in time. The movie ends with Jim declaring his love to Cathy and agreeing to marry her.

These movies further promoted the message that the good girl could get pregnant. This was also demonstrated in *Susan Slade*. In this film, a young girl named Susan Slade becomes pregnant by a mountain climber who dies before they can get married.¹¹⁸ The young girl must face her parents who decide that in order to save her reputation and their own they must act as if the baby is their son. Later Susan is courted by two boys, but after the baby is hospitalized, she has to divulge the truth that her brother is actually her

¹¹⁷ *Too Soon to Love*, directed by Richard Rush (Universal Pictures, 1960), DVD.

¹¹⁸ *Susan Slade*, directed by Delmer Daves (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1961), DVD.

son. Upon this revelation, the one courtier turns on her and takes back his proposal. The other love interest, played by Troy Donoghue, proves his real love for Susan and promises to take care of her and her son. The movie showed that teen pregnancy did not always lead to tragedy and misfortune. In this case, the young unwed mother did not have to end up as a spinster or recluse.

Communications professor Susan Douglas argues that in these later movies, girls who did say yes to premarital sex were not always tramps. Thus while the voices of teachers, priests, advice columnists, and parents warned that “nice girls” did not partake in such activities, “another voice began to whisper, ‘Oh yes they do—and they like it, too.’”¹¹⁹ Still the double standard prevailed: boys were allowed to sow their wild oats, so to speak, and girls were not. Nonetheless, Douglas claims that “the seeds of doubt and eventual rebellion were planted.”¹²⁰ Girls in the movies and in real life faced a major dilemma: whether to act on sexual impulse or obey the double standard.¹²¹

CONCLUSION

In her 1996 study on politics and teenage pregnancy, sociology professor Kristen Luker stated that “the ‘epidemic’ years” for teenage pregnancy were the 1950s, “when teenagers were having twice as many babies as they had had in previous decades but few people worried about them.”¹²² Although she clarifies this statement by pointing out that most of these girls were teenage wives at least by the time of the babies’ births, she fails

¹¹⁹ Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995), 81.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Other movies made in the late 1950s and early 1960s that involve teen pregnancy: *Eighteen and Anxious* (1957); *Unwed Mother* (1958); *Diary of a High School Bride* (1959); and *Married Too Young* (1962).

¹²² Kristen Luker, *Dubious Conceptions: The Politics of Teenage Pregnancy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 8.

to recognize the significant amount of attention that these young unwed mothers did receive, not only from the popular media but the academic and medical communities as well. The next chapter will discuss the great deal of time and resources that cities such as Chicago dedicated to unwed teenage mothers. Indeed, as this chapter demonstrates, the young unwed mother was the topic of movies, magazine and newspaper articles, sociological studies, psychological cases, and medical examinations. She was a popular figure in the media, though not a beloved one.

It was during the 1950s that a new social construction of the unwed mother emerged, a perspective that had been created and fostered since World War II. The unwed mother aroused fear and anxiety: not only could she be a drain on public resources and a threat to social order but she could also be your own daughter. Both the media and academics from a variety of fields attempted to explain and then solve teenage pregnancy. Most of these experts discovered a similar cause: lack of parental or familial love. Whether it was a negligent or absent father or a controlling and domineering mother, one of the parents failed in some way to provide the proper love and family life for their impressionable adolescent daughters. After identifying possible causes, the experts then sought to solve the problem. While their suggestions were indeed creative, none could be universally applied or accepted. Chapter Six will explore these ideas and how they were applied at the city level. Whether diagnosed by psychologists or stereotyped by the media, the young unwed mother remained in the limelight. While not physically donning a “scarlet letter,” the unwed mother remained the recipient of scorn and disapproval.

CHAPTER SIX
HELPING THE “BAD GIRLS”:
EXAMINING TEENAGE PREGNANCY AT THE CITY LEVEL

On October 14, 1951, the *Chicago Tribune* published an article on young unwed mothers, featuring the sad story of a sixteen-year old named Jane. According to the article, Jane’s friends and classmates believed she was “spending a gay six months in the west.” In reality, “only her heartbroken parents, the family doctor, and an understanding aunt in Denver who has agreed to forward her mail” knew she actually resided “less than ten miles from her home, waiting for the birth of her baby in a home for unwed mothers.”¹ This newspaper passage painted the tragic tale of a young, white, single mother in the postwar period. Because she was “not part of a legal, domestic, and subordinate” relationship with a man, the unwed mother could be “scorned and punished, shamed and blamed,” thus limiting her options for care.² Consequently, most unwed school-age mothers like “Jane” spent their pregnancy in the following ways: being diagnosed as neurotic, even psychotic by a mental health professional; being expelled from school; becoming unemployed; being cared for in a Salvation Army or some other maternity home; or ending up poor, alone, ashamed, and threatened by the law.³

As described in the previous chapter, at the national level experts of all types attempted to solve the problem of unwed mothers by deciphering their behavior. Psychologists and sociologists alike advanced numerous theories to explain the girls’ pregnancies. As a result, these experts and the media at large shaped the way young

¹ Jean Reiman, “Unwed Mothers,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 14, 1951,

² Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie!: Single Pregnancy and Race before Roe v Wade* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 4.

³ Ibid.

unwed mothers were treated and the options available to them in regards to the future of their babies. At the local level, social workers tried to apply these ideas in treating their clients. Chicago offers an ideal case study of a city that worked vigorously to meet the needs of this growing constituency. This chapter looks at how Chicago, one of the leading centers of social work in the twentieth century, responded to its teenage mothers.⁴ In an interview with a local newspaper, Babette Block, a prominent social worker in the city, claimed that “Chicago has the nation’s best accommodations for unwed mothers. No woman, regardless of race, creed, color, or financial condition need go without care. We operate on a community and cooperative basis with other agencies and girls are assure complete aid.”⁵ Through innovative programs and the establishment of social agencies, Chicago attempted to mitigate the situation of young unwed mothers. Although these efforts were not always successful, the mere existence of the programs reveals the greater significance of this issue to that society.

“THE CHICAGO PLAN”

By the late 1940s, most major US cities had social agencies in place to assist unwed mothers. Women and girls were encouraged to seek help from these agencies rather than unauthorized sources such as the black market or private homes.⁶ These agencies were often organized under an umbrella council which would keep records and

⁴ In 1939, the Chicago Committee on Illegitimacy, which had been in existence since 1916, published “Standards on the Care of the Illegitimate Mother.” Maud Morlock, the key figure on care for the unwed mother in the long 1950s and a director of the Children’s Bureau praised this publication, stating: “even though you had to work under great handicaps of inadequate service, I am tremendously impressed.” She suggested that other communities could benefit from Chicago’s example. Chicago was clearly an early leader in the care of unwed mothers. See Letter from Maud Morlock to Mrs. Edward J. Lewis, June 9, 1939, in Folder 7-4-0-8, Box 827, Record Group 102, National Archives at College Park, Maryland. (Hereafter referred to as NACP)

⁵ Gladys Erickson, “Fear Senseless: 20 Agencies Aid Unwed Mothers,” *Chicago Herald American*, October 16, 1952.

⁶ Both Chicago and Milwaukee had thriving black markets for babies throughout the twentieth century.

oversee the appropriate placements of unwed mothers. The tale of unwed mothers in Chicago involves an intricate web of social agencies and individuals, all attempting to assist the unwed mother in the most effective manner. However, these endeavors often turned out to be inefficient. The Chicago Plan, as it was titled by its creators and initiated in 1943, sought to streamline the system by forming a central organization to which all agencies dealing with unwed mothers were supposed to report.⁷ Each unwed mother would be assigned to a single caseworker who handled her entire case. This caseworker would arrange housing, medical care, and baby placement if necessary. The caseworkers worked with the corresponding agencies to make sure that any unwed mother who needed assistance was able to receive it.⁸ Unfortunately, a lack of qualified staff, funding, and cooperation among organizations led to the eventual collapse of the Chicago Plan. Nonetheless, the mere existence of such an effort demonstrated the local desire to create a better community and a community's attempt to care for its own. The Chicago Plan offers an exemplary case study of social action at the metropolitan level.

To understand the Chicago Plan, one needs to look at the Chicago Council of Social Agencies in the 1930s.⁹ During these years, “a mounting concern over the treatment of unmarried mothers in the city” emerged, inspiring “a comprehensive evaluation of residential institutions in the area.”¹⁰ The 1936 study of unwed mothers revealed that most unmarried mothers in Chicago were not receiving prenatal care. The

⁷ The title “The Chicago Plan” or the “Plan of Chicago” was originally employed in 1909 in association with Daniel Burnham’s designs for metropolitan Chicago.

⁸ The presence of a professional caseworker reflects the larger transition from evangelical care to professionalization that occurred in the 1920s and 1930s.

⁹ The Council of Social Agencies had numerous names over time including the Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago. Historian Michael W. Sedlak describes how these federations of charities “became the most highly professionalized segment of the social service delivery system.” See Michael W. Sedlak, “Young Women and the City: Adolescent Deviance and Transformation of Educational Policy, 1870-1960,” *History of Education Quarterly* Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring, 1983): 14.

¹⁰ Sedlak, 15.

study also revealed that many of these unmarried mothers ended up at the Cook County Hospital. The director of the Social Service Department of the Cook County Hospital, Miss Helen Beckley, pointed out at this time that the problem was a “social and not medical and thus the responsibility of community agencies.”¹¹ The 1936 study also revealed that many mothers were not making plans for their children prior to childbirth and consequently rushed into decisions including independent placements without the protection of a child-placing agency. Many unmarried mothers were unaware of the various agencies offering care. In addition, no organized statistical data was being collected on unmarried mothers, making it difficult to identify weaknesses in the community’s responses.¹²

Consequently, after years of planning, a group of devoted Chicago citizens opened the Community Referral System (CRS) on July 15, 1938. The CRS was founded under the auspices of United Charities to address the needs suggested in the 1936 study. The original functions of the CRS consisted of:

- 1) Centralizing information in regard to the available facilities for the care of the unmarried mother and her child,
- 2) Gathering statistical data concerning this group,
- 3) Assisting social agencies and individuals in the community, in making referrals to the proper agencies,
- 4) Offering care if no other care was available thru existing resources,
- 5) Pointing up the gaps in service so that definite recommendations could be made to the Council of Social Agencies for developing community facilities to meet the needs more adequately.

Another duty of the CRS was to publicize the available services for unmarried mothers “through newspaper articles, newspaper columnists, articles in local hospital and medical

¹¹ “History of Family Service Bureau of United Charities’ Special Project with Unmarried Mothers, 4-1-35 to 6-24-40,” dated June 24, 1940, p. 1, Folder 3, Box 52, United Charities of Chicago Collection, Chicago History Museum. (Collection hereafter referred to as UCC)

¹² Helen Renald and Frances H. Higgins, “A Description of the Development of a Referral Center for Unmarried Mothers,” March 1943, p. 1, Folder 6, Box 78, Children’s Home and Aid Society of Illinois, University of Illinois-Chicago. (Collection hereafter referred to as CHAS)

trade journals, letters and publicity sent directly to physicians and ministers.”¹³ These publications, especially the newspaper articles, generated an enormous response, proving the “usefulness of this medium in reaching unmarried mothers or their families who were unfamiliar with social agency service and who did not know where to turn for the kind of confidential and understanding help they needed.”¹⁴

In the late 1930s, the CRS funded a “Study of Facilities for the Care of the Unmarried Mother in the Chicago Area,” conducted by Lillian Ripple. The purpose of this investigation was “to secure data on the basis of which plans might be made for future program for care of unmarried mothers in the Chicago area.” There were three major areas of concern: “1) which agency or agencies should offer care to the unmarried mother and her child; 2) what type of care these agencies should offer; and 3) what the division of field should be among the agencies serving unmarried mothers and their infants.”¹⁵ This study was based on registration cards from the Referral Center, two hundred samples of case records, and interviews with executives of agencies offering care to the unmarried mother. It revealed that the city’s care for unwed mothers needed improvement and recommended that:

a private, non-sectarian, specialized service be established to work with unmarried mothers. This service should not only serve the major portion of unmarried mothers receiving care from private agencies but its function should include responsibility for interpretation of the problem to the community, promotion of standards and of legislation and coordination of all services to the unmarried mother and her child.¹⁶

¹³ Babette Block, “Review of the Women’s Service Division of the United Charities of Chicago,” December 1951, p. 3, Folder 2, Box 209, Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago Collection, Chicago History Museum. (Collection hereafter referred to as WCMC)

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Annie O. Blair, “History of Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago’s Activity with Unmarried Mothers,” p. 2, November 1964 Folder 2, Box 687, WCMC.

¹⁶ Summary of Conferences with Agencies Who Participated in Study of Cook County Health and Welfare Services for Unmarried Mothers and Their Children in November 1952 (Chicago: Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, 1955), p. 1, Folder 2, Box 205, WCMC.

Based on this recommendation, the Chicago Plan was developed, including the creation of the Women's Service Division (WSD) in 1944. The WSD quickly put into action other parts of the Chicago Plan which would address the needs mentioned in the Ripple study.

Although the WSD was not set up as an entirely separate administrative unit, there was a separate budget and a staff with special supervisory control. Four districts were established in Chicago covering specific geographical territories. Despite these organizational strategies, from the beginning the WSD experienced challenges in finding specialized staff and adequate funding. In June 1944, it became clear that the WSD would not be able to serve all new unmarried mother cases on its own. It became apparent only "a few months after WSD was established that the need and demand for case work service for unmarried mothers in the community were even greater than had been anticipated."¹⁷ The organization decided that instead of trying to handle every case of an unmarried mother, it would be the leader "in developing a community program of care" and foster cooperation among other agencies in the city.¹⁸

The Women's Service Division, like the CRS, then attempted to collect quantitative information about the unmarried mother in an effort to provide better services. This organization spent years gathering data and conducting surveys to better understand their clientele. Statistics were hard to acquire because it required cooperation from the other social agencies. Nonetheless, the administration of the WSD "utilized

¹⁷ Genrose Gehri, "Women's Service Division of the United Charities Study of 158 Brief Service Cases, 1944" (March 1945), p. 1. Folder 3, Box 54, UCC.

¹⁸ Summary of Conferences with Agencies Who Participated in Study of Cook County Health and Welfare Services for Unmarried Mothers and Their Children in November 1952 (Chicago: Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, 1955), p. 5. Folder 2, Box 205, WCMC.

psychiatric consultation extensively both for teaching and for actual handling of cases.” The staff was able to gain a better understanding of the problems regarding illegitimacy and then provide leadership not only in Chicago “but through conference and institute participation their influence received national recognition.”¹⁹ Eventually in 1954, the four districts of the WSD were abolished, and unmarried mother intake and service was “handled in an undifferentiated way in all the existing districts.” The WSD was then absorbed by the Family Service Bureau of United Charities, reflecting the more family-oriented care of the 1950s.

The other parts of the “Chicago Plan” eventually failed as well. During the 1950s, the city’s other social agencies neglected to follow the original guidelines and recommendations. The “Chicago Plan” had been based on agencies working together to “provide adequate services to the unmarried mothers of this community.”²⁰ All agencies needed to agree to adhere to the plan. This level of collaboration became difficult to maintain. The failure of the plan was attributed to the “general shortage of facilities,” which in turn changed policies and practices to meet such shortages. Furthermore, “large or uncovered caseloads and the shortage of or rapid turnover in staff had resulted in misunderstandings in many areas and in failure to communicate properly in specific cases.”²¹ The “Chicago Plan” had recommended that agencies communicate with each other in order to keep track of which agency was taking care of each case, in order to prevent overlap. Unfortunately, this aspect of the plan did not work out as designed and a

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Recommendations Committee of Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, “Study of Cook County Health and Welfare Services for Unmarried Mothers and Their Children,” April 1956, p. 16. Folder 2, Box 205, WCMC.

²¹ Ibid., 17.

breakdown in communication was common among all types of agencies.²² Eventually in 1958, the Committee on Unmarried Mothers in Chicago noted in their meeting minutes that the “so-called ‘Chicago Plan’ was no longer a reality since United Charities had had to discontinue the special staff of the Women’s Service Division. Lack of funds made it unlikely that it could again, at least in the near future develop a special staff to carry out the function which had been assigned it under the ‘Chicago Plan.’”²³

Nonetheless, although the WSD and the “Chicago Plan” both had their limitations, their studies and associated programs helped bring attention to the changing population of unmarried mothers. By the mid 1950s, the WSD noticed an increase in the percentage of minor girls being served. In 1957, minor girls (those under the age of eighteen) made up 19.2% of the total caseload and 24.5% the following year. However, it was also noted that this trend was primarily among the “Negro group.”²⁴ Under the original “Chicago Plan,” children’s agencies were supposed to serve “unmarried mothers who themselves need care as dependent children.”²⁵ However, a report by the Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago on the services offered to unmarried mothers revealed that most of the children’s agencies had been unwilling to accept the young unmarried mother. These agencies stated that it was “virtually impossible to place a pregnant adolescent girl in a boarding home and she would be unacceptable in any of the present children’s institutions.”²⁶ Thus, even though the children’s agencies might have been

²² Ibid.

²³ Minutes of Advisory Committee on Unmarried Mothers, January 23, 1958, p. 1. Folder 1, Box 205, WCMC.

²⁴ Lillian E. Taylor, Review of Women’s Service Division Incomplete Referral and Short Term Cases Closed from January through June 1958, dated January 20, 1960, p. 3. Folder 3, Box 55, UCC.

²⁵ Recommendations Committee of Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, “Study of Cook County Health and Welfare Services for Unmarried Mothers and Their Children,” April 1956, p. 1. Folder 2, Box 205, WCMC.

²⁶ Ibid.

better suited to offer the care these girls needed as minors, they did not have the resources to provide for them. The WSD reported that family agencies as well as maternity homes and the WSD itself were then attempting to meet the needs of this constituency as will be discussed in the rest of this chapter.

Family Agencies Assisting Unwed Mothers in Chicago Area in 1948
American Red Cross
Berwyn Welfare Association
Catholic Charity Bureau
Church Mission of Help
Family Service of Evanston
Family Service Association of Oak Park
Salvation Army
United Charities
Wilmette Family Service Association
Family Service of Winnetka

Source: Research Department, Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, *Services for Unmarried Mothers and Their Children, November 30, 1948* (Chicago: Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, 1950), p. 1. Folder 9, Box 686, WCMC.

Children's Agencies Assisting Unwed Mothers in Chicago in 1948
Augustana Nursery
Catholic Home Bureau
Chicago Foundlings' Home
Chicago Child Care Society (formerly Chicago Orphan Asylum)
Cradle Society
Illinois Children's Home and Aid Society
Jewish Children's Bureau
Lake Bluff Orphanage
Lutheran Child Welfare Association
Lutheran Home Finding Society

Source: Research Department, Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, *Services for Unmarried Mothers and Their Children, November 30, 1948* (Chicago: Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, 1950), p. 1. Folder 9, Box 686, WCMC.

Public Agencies Assisting Unwed Mothers in Chicago in 1948
Chicago Department of Welfare
Cook County Bureau of Public Welfare (Aid to Dependent Children)

Source: Research Department, Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, *Services for Unmarried Mothers and Their Children, November 30, 1948* (Chicago: Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, 1950), p. 1. Folder 9, Box 686, WCMC.

Maternity Homes in Chicago during the 1940s and 1950s
Chandler House
Chicago Foundlings Home
Florence Crittenton Anchorage
Misericordia Home
Salvation Army Booth Memorial Hospital
St. Vincent's Infant Asylum

BOARDING HOMES

Although maternity homes were the recommended avenue for young unwed mothers, there were some girls whose lifestyles were not compatible with the maternity home environment. Boarding homes were offered as another option. While maternity homes tended to serve large numbers of females at a time and were usually located in a larger mansion or multi-story building, boarding homes were smaller houses either run by an agency, a family or a single woman. In a report entitled, "Foster Family Care of Unmarried Mothers," Director of the Women's Service Division of the Family Service Bureau, Babette Block explained that some girls could not adjust to living in maternity homes, spurring the creation of the boarding home option. These homes were "frequently used for the very young unmarried mother who needs personal attention and a closer relationship a boarding mother than she could receive in the maternity home." Boarding homes served to fashion a pseudo-family for the young girl who did not have her own or could not go back to her own family. Boarding homes were also better options for the young adolescent girl "for whom early placements [were] necessary if the pregnancy [was] to be concealed from their immediate families and community."²⁷

²⁷ Babette Block, "Foster Family Care for Unmarried Mothers," January 12, 1953, p.1, Folder 1, Box 49, Child Welfare League of America Collection, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota-Minneapolis.

Another population of girls who were better suited for boarding homes came from “deteriorated homes in which the family [was] not competent or fit to give the girl proper guidance or supervision.”²⁸ Because some girls had troubled relationships with their parents, the boarding home setting offered an ideal situation. The girl would be given closer supervision and “a living experience with a mature, healthy woman.”²⁹ The boarding home mother would be the primary relationship for the girl and provide her with stability. She could also live with other pregnant girls, which would lessen her feeling of difference. The boarding home seemed to be a more beneficial program for the young adolescent.

The Boarding Home Division of the Women’s Service Division (WSD) began in 1944. This program had been included in the “Chicago Plan.”³⁰ One subsequent report revealed that an average number of 124.3 girls lived in these boarding houses per year between 1944 and 1949. The breakdown among races was 63.8 White, 59.5 Negro, and one Nisei. The number of boarding homes available averaged nineteen per year between 1944 and 1949. As could be expected for this time period, these houses were segregated by race, so that only white girls could stay in the homes of white people. The report noted that the “Nisei placement was in a white home.”³¹ Until 1956, the WSD had “provided care for some minor unmarried mothers under its boarding home program in addition to the limited use of maternity homes.” However, the program was not established specifically for the young unwed mother but instead “to provide care for any

²⁸ Minutes of the Recommendation Committee on the Unmarried Mothers Study, Welfare Council, April 8, 1957, p. 1 Folder 1, Box 205 WCMC.

²⁹ Taylor, 3.

³⁰ Recommendations Committee of Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, “Study of Cook County Health and Welfare Services for Unmarried Mothers and Their Children,” April 1956, p. 14. Folder 2, Box 205, WCMC.

³¹ “Boarding Home Report,” February 2, 1950, p. 5. Folder 6, Box 54, UCC.

unmarried mother needing care outside her own home where maternity home care was not available or not a sound plan.”³² In 1956, the boarding home program was terminated due to “the agency’s inability to procure competent staff for the redevelopment of its boarding home program for specific groups of unmarried mothers that had been determined to need such care.”³³ They could not find enough administrators as well as boarding home mothers to run the program. Until a boarding home program could be established, two of the local maternity homes, Florence Crittenton Anchorage and Booth Memorial Hospital, both accepted young adolescent pregnant girls, though in the early 1950s, neither of these agencies felt competent in meeting the needs of this age group.³⁴

When the boarding home program was terminated in 1956, the acuteness of the problem became clear. By 1957, finding services for the adolescent unmarried mother in Chicago was deemed “extremely difficult.” Locating places for girls who could not remain in their own homes was especially challenging. Maternity homes were either filled or had restrictions regarding age or race. The WSD then decided to try to establish a boarding home program specifically for pregnant girls sixteen years of age and under. The need for such a program within the community was quite clear: illegitimacy rates among girls of that age group had increased over the past five years. The WSD cited the fact that percentage of minor (18 years and under) caseload was five times greater in 1957 than in 1948. There had also been a “significant downward shift in the median age of the illegitimately pregnant, minor girl.”³⁵ For instance, in 1948, the group consisted

³² Women’s Service Division, “Report of Proposed Boarding Home Program for Young, Adolescent, Unmarried Mothers,” February 8, 1960, p. 1. Folder 3, Box 410, WCMC.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Florence Crittenton Anchorage was run under the auspices of the Florence Crittenton Homes Association while Booth Memorial Hospital was affiliated with the Salvation Army. Both organizations had numerous maternity homes across the country.

³⁵ WSD “Report of Proposed Boarding Home Program,” 1.

mostly of seventeen year olds and an occasional sixteen or fifteen year old. By 1957, the group consisted mostly of fifteen year olds with an age range down to eleven years old.³⁶ Because of this downward shift in age of the minor unmarried mother, the agency faced great difficulty in planning for the group's needs, especially those who required care outside their own homes. Foster home care was not available and the children's agencies could not find homes for these girls because they had had sexual experience.³⁷

Although the stigma of the unwed mother had decreased over the years, it still remained. It was reported that many persons were "unwilling to take unmarried mothers into their own homes or in interesting others to do so because of the stigma attached to the girl which would in turn mean loss of status for them in their own community." Some feared that the "girls would continue to be sexually promiscuous while in their homes." Other citizens suggested this type of housing would "pamper the girls" and stated that they did not want their community to bear the cost for caring for these girls.³⁸ When searching for neighborhoods to build a boarding home, all but one neighborhood community rejected the idea, refusing to allow the "bad girls" into their environment. In mostly middle-class communities which had the room to board girls, the "rejection of the girl with sexual experience predominated."³⁹

In its last attempts to salvage the project, the WSD printed the plans for the home in the local newspapers. Unfortunately, this publicity did not elicit the expected response. The WSD then decided that based on all of the findings, "the [Chicago]

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 6.

³⁹ Ibid. This is ironic because as discussed in earlier chapters, it would not be uncommon for middle-class girls to be sexually experienced at this time.

community would not and could not support such a program.”⁴⁰ Although this aspect of the planning was disappointing, the WSD did succeed in informing the community “about the extent of the problem with recognition that the needs and problems of this group can be best handled within an institutional setting.” However, the constant question remained: who was responsible for the minor unmarried mother? The children’s agencies had been assigned this duty under the Chicago Plan but they lacked facilities to care this group and were never able to assume the responsibility. The WSD had then stepped in when it was not equipped to do so—and failed. Thus these attempts to establish a boarding home program led the agency yet again back to the question of who is responsible for this age group?⁴¹

EDUCATING THE UNWED MOTHER

One of the primary issues that social workers faced when handling young unwed mothers was schooling. Under state laws, school attendance was compulsory for all girls sixteen years and under. However, girls who were pregnant were excused from school during the duration of their pregnancy. In fact, in the 1940s and 1950s most public schools throughout the nation responded to pregnancies by suspending or expelling the girls. Schools usually expelled the girl and forbid her return to campus although these girls often chose to leave school before their pregnancies became noticeable. When they were ready to return to campus, school administrators encouraged girls to transfer to another high school, preferably to one in another district. Some cities including Cleveland forbade girls over sixteen to return to school; they could only enter night

⁴⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁴¹ Ibid.

schools.⁴² Educational officials claimed they were doing this for the girl's own good in addition to protecting her peers. Concerned parents and teachers argued that the presence of a pregnant teen would encourage misbehavior and negatively influence the morals of their children. In the end, they tended to treat pregnancy like a contagious disease. Consequently, pregnant girls and school age unwed mothers faced serious challenges in terms of obtaining an education. This became an even more critical and heated issue as the ages of unwed mothers declined nationally.⁴³

There was no national standard regarding the schooling of the unwed mother. Most cities and school districts decided their own policies, although as mentioned before they were quite similar. The Chicago Board of Education initially labeled unwed teenage mothers as "socially maladjusted." These girls were then placed under the supervision of the Director of the Socially Maladjusted.⁴⁴ The Board of Education followed a general policy in regards to pregnant students, although until 1951 the main decisions fell to the discretion of the principal. A girl could also be suspended from school for immoral conduct for thirty days. If over sixteen, she could leave school without being brought into court on a truancy petition. Thus those girls over sixteen could give other reasons besides pregnancy for withdrawal from school. Younger girls and families avoided informing the school of the pregnancies by requesting transfers to a relative or friend's

⁴² Cleveland Joint Committee of the Case Work and Children's Councils on Services to the Unmarried Mother, "Report of the Joint Committee on Services to the Unmarried Mother," April 18, 1950, p. 3, Folder 2, Box 205, WCMC. In this same report, it was also noted that the Cleveland Public schools did not offer any public instruction on a home school basis for pregnant girls either in their family residences or at maternity homes.

⁴³ Major legal changes were not made to the education of pregnant girls until the passage of Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments. Although more popularly known for its impact on collegiate athletics, this amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 included equal rights for pregnant and parenting students, and prohibited expulsion or exclusion of pregnant students from any programs or activities.

⁴⁴ Minutes of Ad Hoc Committee on Services to Unmarried Mothers, April 17, 1961, p. 1, Folder 4, Box 205, WCMC.

home in another city or another state while providing another reason for such transfer. In addition, forced or voluntary marriage excused the girl from school attendance. A statement from a doctor requesting an excused leave because of poor health could also hide the pregnancy. Thus it was difficult to determine the precise numbers or prevalence of teenage pregnancies.⁴⁵

In order to address this growing crisis, the local maternity homes began to offer schooling. Throughout the nation, private maternity homes worked with local Boards of Education to develop a school program. Salvation Army and Florence Crittenton homes took the lead in this regard. For instance, in Chicago, Booth Memorial Hospital, run by the Salvation Army, was the only maternity home that offered school courses through the Chicago Board of Education. Junior and senior high school students received daily nine-to-three instruction during a regular school week. The Chicago School Board also provided teachers and materials for these students and worked to make arrangements for their return to their regular schools if so desired. The Booth Memorial Hospital was also a branch of the Chicago Public Library, maintaining a small library within the home. The books were requested and loaned to the girls for one or two week periods.⁴⁶ Other maternity homes offered different opportunities to pursue studies. A private maternity home called the Chandler House had correspondence courses available and the Chicago

⁴⁵ Leota Boetticher, "Problems of the Unmarried Mother of School Age as Seen by the School," presented at "Problems of the Unmarried Mother of School Age," the Ninth Institute under the auspices of the Committee for the Study of Unmarried Parenthood of the Council of Social Agencies of Chicago, November 17, 1948, Hamilton Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, p. 7, Folder 14, Box 54, CHAS.

⁴⁶ The Salvation Army Booth Memorial Hospital, Description of House and Procedures, p. 7, Folder 6, Box 397 WCMC.

Foundlings Home had a typing class.⁴⁷ The Florence Crittenton Home had private tutoring by volunteers for the high school and college levels.⁴⁸

The Chicago community had long realized the need for formal and practical training of African American unmarried mothers. It was not a new problem in the 1940s and 1950s. In fact, the city addressed these concerns as early as April 1929 when the Board of Education opened a school at the central Urban League facility, known as the Keith School. From 1929 to 1939, a total of 250 girls attended a school which eventually changed its name to the Moseley School.⁴⁹ The institution's main purpose was to assist "young colored unmarried mothers of school age."⁵⁰ Mrs. Mattier Waters, a household economics teacher, directed this program. Mrs. Waters also acted as a caseworker, making referrals when necessary. In 1942, the school moved to a room at the Haven School where they had their own bathroom; thus they could avoid interacting with non-pregnant students. Located at 15th Street and Wabash Avenue, the Haven School also had special classrooms for delinquents. The staff consisted of two teachers. The girls were chiefly referred to the program through other schools, specifically through principals and truant officers. Many of the girls came from underprivileged homes so the

⁴⁷ The Chandler House was the maternity home connected to one of Chicago's well-known adoption agencies still in existence today, the Cradle. The Cradle Society founded the Chandler House in 1949. Located at 6100 Sheridan Road in a "good residential neighborhood," it could house eighteen expectant mothers and two in the convalescent period, totaling twenty girls at any given time. The Chandler House was non-sectarian, available to residents and non-residents as long as they were white. The Board of Directors of the Cradle Society governed it. The most controversial policy of the Chandler House was that it was only open to those wanting to put their babies up for adoption. Allegedly, the Cradle Society would abandon the girl if she chose to keep her baby. There were people who believed that the Cradle Society was involved in a scandal with a certain doctor at the Evanston Hospital who pushed the unwed mothers into giving up their babies. The Cradle Society arranged the adoption. See "Chandler House: Boarding Home and Sanctuary for Expectant Mothers," undated pamphlet published by the Cradle Society, Folder 4, Box 57, CHAS. See also Confidential material reported by Connie Fish dated March 21, 1955, Folder 12, Box 309, WCMC.

⁴⁸ "Summary of Services Offered by Maternity Homes in the Chicago Area," December 1958, p. 2, Folder 6, Box 205, WCMC.

⁴⁹ Minutes of Meeting of Women's Service Division Staff, June 19, 1944, in Folder 3, Box 54, UCC.

⁵⁰ Boetticher, 10.

school environment was better for them than staying at home. The school was half-time academic and half-time home arts training. The average day included preparing and serving breakfast and lunch as well as studying home arts and academics. They also performed housekeeping duties that included checking supplies, shopping, storing supplies, and laundering of uniforms and table linens. Since the girls came from all parts of the city, they were provided with carfare as well as “a simple hot breakfast and a substantial and adequate luncheon.” They ate these meals in their own classroom to “avoid stares of the curious.” The school hours were from nine until three-thirty. In order to give the girls privacy, they were allowed to arrive at school a few minutes after nine o’clock and were dismissed after the regular dismissal period, thus “not coming in contact with the other children.”⁵¹ The Moseley Branch of the Haven School was closed in October 1950.⁵² Allegedly the sub-committee had done its job and no longer saw a need for the program.

A reflection of the growing significance of school-age unwed mothers was the fact that the annual institute in November 1948 of the Committee for the Study of Unmarried Parenthood in Chicago centered on the theme of “Problems of the Unmarried Mother of School Age.” It specifically focused on agencies working with this age group, such as schools, the Juvenile Court, family and children’s services, and the County Hospital. A child psychologist from the Chicago Board of Education, Mrs. Leota

⁵¹ Waters, 13.

⁵² In Milwaukee, the Martha Washington home, a member of the Salvation Army, was the only maternity home to offer schooling to its clientele. The metropolitan community did not respond formally to the need of schooling for pregnant teens until January 1966 when Lady Pitts School was created. This school began as a private school, a project developed by a group of 40 African American women known as “Our Concerned Committee.” The school was originally located above the Shiloh Tabernacle and run with support from the Milwaukee Public Schools. In the early 1970s, Lady Pitts became part of MPS and moved into Custer High School. Lady Pitts is still up and running today, although its future is uncertain. See Erin Richards, “Lady Pitts Likely to Close,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, January 16, 2011.

Boetticher, presented one of the conference sessions. In her presentation, Mrs. Boetticher stated that she believed the problem was “far greater than we know.” The “immaturity and the youth of the girls” constituted a special problem. Mrs. Boetticher informed her audience that schools were “endeavoring to meet the problem of the unmarried mother by closer cooperation with community and social agencies who [offered] special guidance for these girls.”⁵³ Each high school had an adjustment teacher, attendance counselor, and placement counselor who could meet with individual pupils regarding personal problems or those who were referred to them by other faculty members. At the request of the school authorities and the Director of the Bureau of Child Study, the adjustment teachers and psychologists at both the high school and elementary levels received an in-service-training course from the Council of Social Agencies on handling the unwed school-age mother. Boetticher stated that the course had “resulted in better understanding and cooperation between the schools and social agencies.”⁵⁴

Boetticher discussed positive examples of girls reentering neighboring high schools where they were unknown and allowing them to successfully complete high school. Most schools would not accept unmarried mothers back because they felt “the girl [would] talk to other girls about her experiences and may also make advances to boys in the school.” Boetticher also stated that in many cases of the unmarried mother should not be placed in the secondary schools because of “mental immaturity but should be in a vocational center or in an advanced ungraded division.”⁵⁵ She concluded unmarried school-age mothers were “too complex a problem for the school alone.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Boetticher, 7.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 10.

By 1949, the City of Chicago Board of Education had formed a committee regarding the education of unwed mothers. The Committee Interested in the Care of Unwed Mothers participated in the 1948 Conference. This committee developed four recommendations for the Board of Education: 1) Pregnant girls shall be excused from school as soon as the state of pregnancy has been established; 2) A home-teaching program shall be provided for each girl during her pregnancy; 3) A representative from the school system shall be assigned to serve as a liaison between the social agencies and the Board of Education in working out the problems and referring them according to the status of the cases; 4) Provision shall be made for continued education when the pregnancy is over. Despite the committee's recommendations, the Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Mary E. Courtenay, decided that "for the present at least, that the provisions we are now making for pregnant girls is the best we can offer." After citing a few reasons for the decision, the superintendent stated her deep concern for these "unfortunate girls" and the board's "genuine desire to do what is best for them." She admitted that their present school location was "far from ideal," but that the Board would attempt to help them in the future.⁵⁷

In 1951, "Guidance for Principals" was produced by the Board of Education. This was a set of procedures to be followed in making provisions for unwed mothers in the schools. It was developed partially in response to the closing of the Moseley School. This new policy required principals to send in a "School Problem Report" along with the Attendance Officer's report when a pregnancy was established, "either by indisputably obvious evidence or by a physician's statement." The girl in question would be excused

⁵⁷ Letter to the Committee Interested in the Care of Unwed Mothers from Mary E. Courtenay, September 8, 1949, in Folder 38, Box 4, Chicago Urban League Collection, University of Illinois-Chicago.

from school attendance for one year from the date of the report. At the end of that year, the school would then present a letter to the Department of Special Education regarding the girl's decision to either return to school or stay at home. If the girl chose to return to school, the Assistant Superintendent in charge of Special Education would then determine the girl's placement in a "school other than the local school within reasonable reach of her home." The principal was instructed to inform the girl that "the unhappy episode in her life must not be discussed with other children, nor her experience exploited in any way." Once again the girl was to act like her pregnancy had never occurred. The "Guidance for Principals" also stated that if the girl should "become a source of unwholesome discussion in the new school," the receiving principal could request the girl to be placed in "a school for social adjustment."⁵⁸

It was not until March 1955 that the Board of Education proposed a plan for referring to the CRS all cases of girls under 17 years of age who were excluded from school attendance due to pregnancy. A 1955 report of the Women's Service Division (WSD) revealed that family agencies knew "little about the teen-age unmarried mother excluded from the public school system since the schools did not refer such girls." In the next sentence, the report clarified that this new plan had been "worked out between the public schools and the Community Referral Service."⁵⁹ The Board of Education would

⁵⁸ Mary E. Courtenay and Lester J. Schloerf, "Guidance for Principals," April 20, 1951, Folder 1, Box 50, WCMC. This was not an uncommon policy. For instance, a Report on Services to the Unmarried Mother in Cleveland written in April 1960 revealed that the "present program within the school system does not make it possible for many girls either to continue their education or to resume school attendance after the baby is born. The Cleveland Public Schools by policy do not permit a girl to re-enter the school she was attending prior to her pregnancy. Girls under 16 years of age may re-enter another public school, but girls over 16 may enter only night schools. Public instruction on a home teacher basis is not available to a pregnant girl either in her own home or in a maternity home." See Report of the Joint Committee on Services to the Unmarried Mother, April 18, 1960, p. 3. Folder 2, Box 205, WCMC, CHS.

⁵⁹ Division on Family and Child Welfare, Division of Health, Summary of Conferences with Agencies Who Participated in Study of Cook County Health and Welfare Services for Unmarried Mothers and Their

then indicate all girls who had been excused from school attendance because of pregnancy. The CRS would then screen the girls to determine if a social agency was active with the family. For the period March 18, 1955 through February 9, 1956, the CRS received 245 referrals of girls ranging in age from 12 to 17 years old. 88% of these girls were 14 or 15 years old. 80% were “Negro.”⁶⁰ For the school period of September 1956 through June 1957, there were 417 referrals to the CRS of girls excused from school attendance because of pregnancy.⁶¹ Of these 417 cases, 311 were African American, thirty-four were White, and seventy-two “Unknown.” Most were sixteen years of age or under: 2 were eleven, 5 were twelve, 34 were thirteen, 119 were fourteen, 201 were fifteen, 51 were sixteen, 4 were seventeen, and 1 was unknown.⁶² These 417 referrals increased to 1,163 girls for the period between September 1963 and August 1964.⁶³ The role of the CRS was to contact the families to see if they were active with a social agency. If not and the family was in need of assistance, the CRS then referred them to a social agency. Some families, however, felt they did not need service and refused these referrals. Because the majority of these girls were black, it can be assumed that white girls were better able to conceal their pregnancies from school officials, most likely due to other resources more readily available to them. These numbers also excluded parochial and private schools which traditionally had a larger white population.

Children in November 1952 (Chicago: Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, 1955), 4. Folder 2, Box 205, WCMC.

⁶⁰ Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, “Working Paper: Study of Cook County Health and Welfare Services for Unmarried Mothers and Their Children,” April 1956, p. 1. Folder 2, Box 205, WCMC.

⁶¹ Lillian Taylor, “Case Review Summary of Community Referral Service—Board of Education Referrals to Women’s Service Division from September from June 1957,” September 4, 1957, Folder 7, Box 54, UCC.

⁶² Community Referral Service, “Girls Excluded from School Because of Pregnancy,” February 3, 1961, Folder 4, Box 205, WCMC.

⁶³ “Trends in Illegitimacy in Cook County,” November 1964, p. 2. Folder 10, Box 686, WCMC.

In April 1961, the Director of the Department of Socially Maladjusted Children at the Board of Education reported to the Committee on Services to Unmarried Mothers that modifications had been made to the policy regarding unmarried mothers in the school system. Dr. Otho Robinson announced that there would no longer be a “barrier for the girl who wishes to return” to school. The girl would have to meet with a nurse first to receive instruction on personal hygiene, such as odor prevention and milk seepage. Although the re-admittance policies might have been relaxed, the Board did not waver in its decision of “not returning girls to the school they had attended when their pregnancy occurred.”⁶⁴ In September 1964, the CRS and Board of Education decided that it would no longer be necessary to refer girls to the CRS. Instead, the girls who were “excused” from school would then receive counseling from the schools “through their counselors, adjustment teachers, teacher nurses and social workers.”⁶⁵ The girls also had the option of seeking community services. More serious changes would not be implemented until passage of Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments to the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

⁶⁴ Minutes of Ad Hoc Committee on Services to Unmarried Mothers, April 17, 1961, p. 1. Folder 4, Box 205, WCMC.

⁶⁵ “Trends in Illegitimacy in Cook County,” November 1964, p. 2. Folder 10, Box 686, WCMC.

Pregnant Unmarried Girls Referred to CRS by Chicago Board of Education, September 1959 to August 1963				
Age	9/59-8/60	9/60-8/61	9/61-8/62	9/62-8/63
11	1	0	1	0
12	11	3	2	4
13	37	33	22	27
14	149	94	90	119
15	238	233	255	265
16	120	222	238	316
17	12	53	99	118
18	5	16	31	31
19	2	5	11	10
20	1	0	1	2
Total	576	659	750	892

Source: "Pregnant Unmarried Girls Referred to CRS by Chicago Board of Education, September 1959-August 1963," in Folder 231, Box 21, Instituted for Sex Education Records, University of Illinois-Chicago.

MATERNITY HOMES

Maternity homes emerged in the late 1800s as "rescue homes" for "troubled" women.⁶⁶ These original facilities served prostitutes, widows, orphans, or abandoned females as well as unwed mothers and their illegitimate children. Initially the homes were established to provide structure and religion to these women and their children. Unwed mothers and their offspring often stayed for months or even years, and received training to become domestic servants. Housework was believed to be the best vocation for the unwed mothers who came to these homes. The matrons insisted that the unwed mothers keep their child as a means of repenting their sin and preventing future pregnancies. In addition, because common beliefs existed about the unwed mother getting pregnant as a result of her own abnormalities or genetic defects, the illegitimate

⁶⁶ The early history of maternity homes has been well documented in the works of Regina Kunzel, Marian J. Morton, and Katherine G. Aiken. See Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Marian J. Morton, *And Sin No More: Social Policy and Unwed Mothers in Cleveland, 1855-1990* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993); and Katherine G. Aiken, *Harnessing the Power of Motherhood* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998).

child shared the mother's stigma and consequently was considered unworthy of adoption. In order to "redeem" herself, the unwed mother spent significant lengths of time in the maternity home, and would keep and raise her own child. This was often viewed as a form of punishment for their actions and a means to prevent further pregnancies. According to Ricki Solinger, the "best hope for the prewar maternity home resident was that she would redeem herself spiritually by dint of hard work and the dutiful rearing of her illegitimate child."⁶⁷ The young unwed mother was then "simply an outcast, an undone woman who might seek redemption, but not rehabilitation."⁶⁸ This policy of the unwed mother keeping her infant remained in tact until the early 1940s.

The mid-twentieth century maternity home took on a different look and purpose than its predecessors. As historian Regina Kunzel has documented, unmarried mothers were transformed from "unfortunate 'sisters' to be 'saved'" to "'problem girls' to be 'treated.'"⁶⁹ The problem went from a sociological and even theological problem to psychological. This was a response to a variety of societal changes including the increase in illegitimate pregnancies in middle-class females, the significance of the family in the postwar decades, and a steady decline in the age of unwed mothers. As the age of this very special clientele decreased, the maternity home became more of a social center, offering extensive programs and providing necessary structure in the life of a teenaged girl. In addition, the postwar homes began to focus on cultivating femininity and womanhood in order to produce a future wife and mother. If the girl followed the lessons and advice provided by the maternity home workers, then she would be fully restored and ready to re-enter the world. The pregnancy and corresponding maternity home

⁶⁷ Solinger, 106.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Kunzel, 2.

experience would serve as a “minor detour to regular American womanhood.”⁷⁰ More succinctly put: “today’s unwed mother could expect to be somebody’s wife tomorrow.”⁷¹

Maternity homes peaked in the postwar period when there were approximately 200 licensed homes in 44 states. The Florence Crittenton Association of America, Catholic Charities, and the Salvation Army ran over two-thirds of these.⁷² Collectively, they cared for 25,000 girls a year. Almost 35 percent of applicants were denied admission, revealing the wide demand for maternity home care.⁷³ Chicago had a variety of maternity homes in the postwar decades including: Florence Crittenton Anchorage, St. Vincent’s Infant Asylum, Salvation Army Booth Memorial Hospital, Misericordia Home, Chicago Foundlings Home, and Chandler House.⁷⁴ What made maternity homes so appealing to certain populations was the “secrecy and protection” they offered.⁷⁵ For instance, maternity homes in the post-World War Two decade focused on first-time mothers. Postwar maternity homes also reported a “rise in the number of white middle-class women seeking the services of homes and social agencies.”⁷⁶ As stated in the previous chapter, this “new” type of unmarried mother captured the attention of professionals and the media. She required a new type of care. In the 1950s when the populations in the maternity homes began to change, so did the maternity homes. No longer were they simply waiting rooms but rather places of learning and productivity.

As both Ricki Solinger and Regina Kunzel have pointed out, maternity homes did more than simply house women in a time in need. Rather, maternity homes served as a

⁷⁰ Solinger, 122.

⁷¹ Ibid., 128.

⁷² Ibid., 103.

⁷³ Ann Fessler, *The Girls Who Went Away: The Hidden History of Women who Surrendered Children for Adoption in the Decades before Roe v. Wade* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 134.

⁷⁴ In comparison, Milwaukee had two, one of which will be discussed in-depth in Chapter Seven.

⁷⁵ Solinger, 105.

⁷⁶ Kunzel, 146.

component of a larger debate over sexual misconduct. Pregnancy obviously signified a loss of virginity—there was no denying that these girls had taken part in premarital sex. The maternity homes then helped to negotiate the future path of this female who had violated social norms. Previously, maternity homes had been a shelter in which to hide the girls from their sins and help them to find suitable jobs so that they could raise their illegitimate children in the shadows. In the postwar decades, maternity homes helped young women “overcome” sexual misconduct and “correct her course toward femininity and motherhood.”⁷⁷ Or as described by Kunzel, they were no longer “‘fallen women’ to be redeemed and reformed,” but “‘sex delinquents’” to “be treated.”⁷⁸ The girl would no longer be “stained, just soiled.”⁷⁹ This view, of course, fit in with the changing viewpoints of sex and sexuality in the long 1950s.

Maternity homes changed over time, as a reflection of both changing social norms and their clientele. In 1960, the Child Welfare League of America described the “basic purpose” of a modern maternity home as an institution to “meet the individual needs of the unmarried mother, but without shutting her off from the natural flow of social activity and community living, and as part of an over-all community program.”⁸⁰ A social worker commented in 1964 that maternity homes had undergone five major changes during the postwar decades. These included eliminating the “intramural delivery room” in favor of “collaboration with local hospitals,” doing away with nurseries to avoid “unnecessary group care of infants,” removing the position of nurses, introducing group counseling

⁷⁷ Solinger, 105.

⁷⁸ Regina G. Kunzel, “The Professionalization of Benevolence: Evangelicals and Social Workers in the Florence Crittenton Homes, 1915 to 1945,” *Journal of Social History* Vol. 22 No. 1 (Autumn, 1988): 31.

⁷⁹ Solinger, 107.

⁸⁰ *Child Welfare League of American Standards for Services to Unmarried Parents* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, Inc., 1960), 44.

programs, and “enabling a total service to be offered to unmarried parents under one auspice.”⁸¹ He recognized that although unmarried mothers still sought the maternity home for the same purpose as their predecessors—concealment—more unmarried mothers were hoping to receive some type of “treatment” or help as well.⁸²

Maternity homes did not welcome everyone. Many had restrictions based on race and number of prior pregnancies, for example. During the long 1950s, most maternity home clients were white. Many maternity homes were segregated and had limited number of spaces for black girls. In 1961, for instance, the Salvation Army reported that out of the 8,227 unmarried mothers they served, 85.6 percent were white and 14.4 percent were non-white.⁸³ During the time period of this study, the United States witnessed the Civil Rights movement and a larger societal attempt to desegregate both public and private institutions. In regards to unwed mothers, white females were given more care and financial assistance than black females. Because the black community had traditionally taken care of their own youth and accepted the illegitimate child into the family, the need for unwed mother facilities was not as significant. This was both a cause and effect of the limited resources available to black unwed mothers.

In order to enter most of the maternity homes, girls were subjected to venereal disease tests such as the Wassermann or Kahn tests.⁸⁴ The homes also required vaginal smears as well as nose and throat cultures. Girls with active venereal diseases were denied admission. Many homes rejected mothers who had previously bore children out-

⁸¹ Carl Schoenberg, “The Expanding Nature and Purpose of the Maternity Home,” *Child Welfare* Vol. XLIII, No. 1 (Jan., 1964): 15.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸³ The Salvation Army Maternity Homes and Hospitals, Service to Unmarried Parents and Their Children, pamphlet, 1961, p. 5, from Salvation Army National Archives, Alexandria, Virginia.

⁸⁴ The Wassermann test was used to detect syphilis. It was later replaced by the Kahn test which was allegedly more accurate and revealed results faster.

of-wedlock, favoring “first-time offenders” instead. These homes felt first-time mothers would be easier to rehabilitate—they still had the potential to become useful members of society. Other homes discriminated on the basis of religion. As mentioned earlier, most of these homes were religiously affiliated; thus there were separate homes for Catholics, Jews, and Protestants. Although many homes run by Christian organizations such as the Salvation Army did accept most girls, those run by Catholic, Jewish, or Lutheran agencies mostly served members of their own religion. Religion often played a factor in determining to which home to send the unwed mother. In large cities which housed more than one facility, girls could choose to go to a home affiliated with their own faith. Some maternity homes also had residency requirements; most gave preference to girls residing in the local county.

As teenagers became more visible in larger society as a specific population with special needs, maternity homes slowly recognized the different services needed by this group and adjusted their programs accordingly. By 1964, caseworkers and maternity homes were treating teenage unwed mothers as teenagers who were going to become mothers and were attempting to adapt to the circumstances and emotional requirements of their age group. As one well-known social worker stated in an article for *Child Welfare* in January 1964, “teenageness, maternity, and out-of-wedlock status combine to produce a distinctive set of conditions that has diagnostic and treatment implications.... No doubt the teenage unmarried mother has distinctive needs that may call for specific resources and treatment.”⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Rose Bernstein, “Services for Teenage Unmarried Mothers,” *Child Welfare* Vol. XLIII, no. 1 (Jan., 1964): 13.

Maternity homes were seen as an important resource for most communities because certain types of unwed mothers needed the care they provided. Maternity homes were considered useful for

“the younger, rebellious girl who has rejected or been rejected by her family, who needs some period of disciplined direction. Living with a group where a minimum of conformity is necessary may be needed for her if such training was neglected in her home. Also, at the time of her removal from her natural environment she may find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to accept another family. She may need the more impersonal atmosphere of a Maternity Home until she has attained some measure of peace and security.”⁸⁶

Maternity homes also started to offer psychiatric care or forms of group counseling. This reflected the larger idea that illegitimate pregnancy, especially among young girls, was a result of psychological issues rather than sociological ones. In the 1940s and 1950s, the home was seen as piece of the larger casework for the girl. The maternity home then went under transition during this time period as its clientele and purpose changed.

The rising popularity of the maternity home corresponded with the expectations of maternity and femininity in the postwar period. Parents of a white pregnant girl chose the maternity home because it offered “secrecy and protection,” while also promising “personal revelation and transformation.”⁸⁷ The white unwed mother could go to the home, deliver a child, and then return to her normal life. This choice protected both the girl and her parents, whose social status and reputations were also connected to the sexual purity of their daughter. The postwar maternity home then offered the proper tools for parents to handle their young daughter’s pregnancy: casework and adoption. After delivery, daughters would be able to escape their sexual pasts and return to normal life,

⁸⁶ Committee on Problems Related to Unmarried Parenthood, “Discussion of Some Phases of Case Work with Unmarried Mothers,” Series of Papers, April 1941, p. 16, Folder 1, Box 206, WCMC.

⁸⁷ Solinger, 105.

eventually going on to marry and have other children. Or so they were told.⁸⁸ The next section provides a case study of a maternity home in Chicago to better illuminate the structural changes that occurred as the home's clientele became younger and younger.

THE FLORENCE CRITTENTON ANCHORAGE

The Chicago home that would become Florence Crittenton Anchorage (FCA) was founded in 1886 by the Women's Christian Temperance Union as a "slum mission" for "friendless women."⁸⁹ Like other maternity homes, although always offering care to girls pregnant out of marriage, the FCA originally provided shelter for abandoned women and their children. In the early years, the FCA strove to keep women and their children together, believing that mothers needed to maintain custody of their children. In 1893, Charles Crittenton donated a large sum of money to the home, leading to its formal dedication as Florence Crittenton Anchorage.⁹⁰ In 1895, the home moved to a rented house on Wabash Street before a larger property on Indiana Avenue was purchased in 1903. This new residence served as a maternity home until late 1943, when the house

⁸⁸ Though the girl's voice is missing in this chapter, this is not to say that the girls were not impacted by the decisions they or their parents made. Adoption was especially painful for young girls, an experience they were told to immediately forget and move on. Many of them never did. Ann Fessler, an adoptee herself, interviewed hundreds of women who gave up children from adoption in the postwar decades. The stories told by these women reveal pain and sadness; most were never able to fully recover from the trauma of illegitimate pregnancy and adoption. The shame and guilt followed them for most of their lives, even after they married and had other children, as the social workers so eagerly hoped they would do. Even though they were considered "redeemed" by society since they paid for their sin by leaving the community and giving their baby to a "real" family, some of these girls had not forgiven themselves. See Ann Fessler, *The Girls Who Went Away: The Hidden History of Women who Surrendered Children for Adoption in the Decades before Roe v. Wade* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).

⁸⁹ The home was originally called Anchorage when the Florence Crittenton Association took it over in 1893, with the name changing to Florence Crittenton Anchorage. Thus the Florence Crittenton Anchorage refers specifically to the Florence Crittenton home in Chicago.

⁹⁰ Regina G. Kunzel has written an article describing the transition from evangelical work to professionalization within the Florence Crittenton homes. She discusses the conflict that emerged between evangelical workers and social workers, demonstrating larger, national changes involving gender and the public sphere. Regina G. Kunzel, "The Professionalization of Benevolence: Evangelicals and Social Workers in the Florence Crittenton Homes, 1915 to 1945," *Journal of Social History* Vol. 22 No. 1 (Autumn, 1988): 21-43.

was condemned. The FCA shut down for six years, but re-opened its doors at a new location on Drexel Boulevard in 1949.⁹¹ Following the trend of other maternity homes nationwide, the agency closed permanently in July 1973, citing financial difficulties.⁹² Throughout its tenure, the FCA played a vital role in the lives of its clients and proved to be a much-needed community service. Its postwar maternity home offers an ideal case study of how one organization addressed the issue of young unwed mothers.

In 1953, there were a total of forty-eight Florence Crittenton maternity homes across the United States, providing care for more than 5,000 unwed expectant mothers.⁹³ According to a pamphlet produced by the Florence Crittenton Homes Association, these homes did “far more than provide for shelter and delivery for the girl and care for her baby.” Instead the girls were provided a secure residence where, under supervision, they could “function as normal human beings” and “gain an idea of the worth of themselves and their place in our social order.” “Case work, psychiatric, psychological, and vocational techniques” helped the girls change their lives.⁹⁴ The FCA averaged a capacity of thirty-two girls, ages fifteen to forty years old with the median being seventeen to twenty-two. Because of the range in age and education, the group living situation was challenging. Nonetheless, the FCA cited its “spacious and attractively furnished” residence as key to allowing privacy while simultaneously providing a “homelike” atmosphere.⁹⁵ In Chicago, the Florence Crittenton Anchorage originally

⁹¹ Marion K. Craine, Untitled Report on Florence Crittenton Anchorage, January 1956, p. 1, Folder 153, Box 17, Florence Crittenton Anchorage Records, University of Illinois-Chicago. (Collection hereafter referred to as FCA Collection)

⁹² “Maternity Home Here for Unwed to Close,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 16, 1973.

⁹³ “Florence Crittenton Services” in Historical Development of Florence Crittenton Service Brochure, Prepared by Headquarters Office, Florence Crittenton Homes Association, Chicago, IL, February 1954, p. 1, Folder 105, Box 13, FCA Collection.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ FCA, Report of Board Managers, March 28, 1955, p. 1, Folder 5, Box 39, United Way Collection, UIC

limited its intake to girls older than 18. However, the growing demand for homes among the teenage population made them lower their age minimum in the 1950s.

The home also began to change its physical appearance as well as its services. The house itself was described as “attractive” and “colorful” with a “pleasant informality” in regards to daily life.⁹⁶ The new house had an enclosed yard and patio. The program of daily events at the FCA was threefold in purpose: “to help the residents to help themselves; to find ways in which they can help others; and to have other activities which can be instructive or just amusement.”⁹⁷ Another document listed the basic essentials of their clientele:

They need a chance to live in cheerful, comfortable surroundings; to be as free as possible from external worries and community censure; to be given good medical care; and to have help from others in facing and resolving their particular problems and fears, which include planning for the babies.⁹⁸

This marked a significant change in philosophy from the earlier days when there was no real choice in planning for the babies and when the home was not supposed to be a “cheerful” or “comfortable” environment. In 1951, the FCA stated that “in our modern maternity home we try to make the living as nearly normal as possible, so that returning to family and job will not be difficult.”⁹⁹

Florence Crittenton Anchorage recognized its role as a member organization of the Chicago Plan. Correspondingly, it followed the rules set out by the WSD and coordinated with caseworkers. As part of the Chicago Plan, most of the girls at the FCA

⁹⁶ Marion K. Craine, Untitled Report on Florence Crittenton Anchorage, January 1956, p. 2, Folder 153, Box 17, FCA Collection.

⁹⁷ Florence Crittenton Anchorage Board of Managers Report of Accomplishments, 1952, p. 3, Florence Crittenton Collection, Folder 1, Box 19, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota-Minneapolis.

⁹⁸ “Activities Program,” Undated, p.1, Folder 132, Box 16, FCA Collection.

⁹⁹ Paper labeled Florence Crittenton Anchorage, Chicago Illinois, dated February 1951, Folder 5, Box 318, WCMC.

during the 1950s were referrals from the family agencies, principally the United Charities. The girls therefore continued to receive casework and planning with the family agency while residing in the maternity home.¹⁰⁰

Over time, the home became more accepting in regards to its clientele. For instance, in 1940, the agency stated that “a girl of any age, *white* and any religious faith may be admitted.”¹⁰¹ Thus their intake was relegated to Caucasians. When the home reopened in 1949, it had changed its stance on race, reporting to have a “non-sectarian and non-racial” intake policy. The FCA did mention the presence of “Negroes” and even “Nisei” within their homes. In 1950, the FCA stated that its “intake policy” was “unrestricted as to race, color or creed[;] the population was white, negro, Nisei, Mexican, Filipino, and Chinese.”¹⁰² However, it still did not accept girls with “serious mental limitations.”¹⁰³ It also maintained a policy of requiring a physical exam and venereal disease testing. Girls with venereal diseases were still denied admission.

Despite its reputation for being “anti-adoption” in the 1930s, Florence Crittenton Anchorage appeared to have changed its perspective when it re-opened in the late 1940s. A 1938 policy stated that it was FCA’s goal “to keep mother and child together” and further concluded that “no material advantages can make up to the child for the loss of a mother’s love” and that motherhood “strengthens the character of every girl who has the mentality to grasp it.”¹⁰⁴ This would be reversed when the home re-opened in 1949. For instance, in 1951, Florence Crittenton Anchorage realized the changes that were taking

¹⁰⁰ Marion K. Craine, Untitled Report on Florence Crittenton Anchorage, January 1956, p. 2, Folder 153, Box 17, FCA Collection.

¹⁰¹ Author’s own italics. “Report for Maternity Committee,” January 26, 1940, p. 1, Folder 153, Box 17, FCA Collection.

¹⁰² “Florence Crittenton Anchorage,” February 1951, unnumbered, Folder 5, Box 318, WCMC.

¹⁰³ FCA Policies and Procedures, February 1949, p. 1, Folder 153, Box 17, FCA Collection.

¹⁰⁴ Board of Managers of the Florence Crittenton Home, “What the Florence Crittenton Home Does for Girls,” 1938, p. 1, Folder 153, Box 17, FCA Collection.

place within their own clientele. They reported how an increase in adoptions had led to closure of their nursery. A report in 1956 stated that the home had discontinued its infant nursery “when the board decided that cost of operation was not warranted by the number of infants under care.”¹⁰⁵ As of June 1950, the FCA no longer maintained a nursery. Thus girls who did keep their babies could return to the home alone, leaving the baby in care of another “cooperating agency worker” or the girl could leave the hospital with her baby “to go to the place arranged with her case worker.”¹⁰⁶ The case worker, not the home itself, arranged adoption plans.¹⁰⁷

The Executive Director of the FCA in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Genrose Gehri, had already established herself as an expert in the care of unwed mothers. When faced with an increasing younger population of clients, Gehri wrote to other homes to seek ideas on programs. The Family Service of Philadelphia told her of the discussion series they presented to the Florence Crittenton Home of Philadelphia. The series, “Courtship and Marriage” and “Friendship, Dating and Marriage,” were similar to programs being offered in schools under the title of family life. They wanted the girls to “get a better understanding of sound goals for love relationships and a more realistic evaluation of a man as a future husband.”¹⁰⁸ Gehri also sought to find money-making opportunities for the girls. Before the home closed in 1943, the clients did work for local businesses within the home. This helped supply the girls with some personal cash. When the home re-opened, Gehri sought similar opportunities. She wrote local

¹⁰⁵Marion K. Craine, “Evaluation of Florence Crittenton Anchorage,” January 1956, p. 1, Folder 153, Box 17, FCA Collection.

¹⁰⁶“Florence Crittenton Anchorage,” September 1950, p. 6, Folder 5, Box 318, WCMC.

¹⁰⁷ Adoption will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

¹⁰⁸ Letter to Miss Genrose Gehri from Gertrude K. Pollak, dated July 7, 1953. Folder 132, Box 16, FCA Collection.

businesses to see if they had any work for the girls. Contrary to the popular image of unwed mothers doing laundry, Gehri was not trying to find physical labor to pay the bills for the home. Rather she was trying to help the girls who needed money for themselves.¹⁰⁹

In addition, a Girls' Council became a popular tool within maternity homes to keep peace and develop leadership skills. After discussing such a Girls' Council with the home director in Seattle, Gehri decided to initiate one at the Anchorage. According to her correspondence, the girls reacted well to the new development. Therefore, like other maternity homes, the FCA fostered the creation of a Girls' Council. According to the 1958 FCA manual, this group was comprised of five girls who were elected by the residents of the house to enforce the house rules. The Council was supposed to be a "form of self-government" that assisted the girls in gaining responsibility. The girls on the Council held their position until they left the home at which time another girl would be elected. The three officers were chairman, co-chairman, and secretary. When the chairman went to the hospital for delivery, the co-chairman would assume her position. The committee would meet once a week to discuss any house problems and would hold meetings for all residents once a month. Staff members only attended these meetings if invited. Minutes were recorded at each meeting, and any new rules or changes would be recorded and put in the house manual.¹¹⁰

Girls were also responsible for housework, which the staff believed built teamwork and responsibility. Each girl would be assigned household tasks "in

¹⁰⁹ Letter to Mr. Jesse A. Jacobs, Manager, Subscriptions Investigating Department, Chicago Association of Commerce and Industry, from Genrose Gehri, dated, October 22, 1949, Folder 122, Box 15, FCA Collection.

¹¹⁰ "Girl's Council," Undated, Folder 132, Box 16, FCA Collection.

accordance with her physical ability.”¹¹¹ The staff then worked with the girls to complete their duties. A nurse maintained close contact with the girls in order to teach them hygiene and diet. The girls also ate their meals together so they were able to gain social graces and table manners. In addition, the staff ate with the residents in order to “watch eating habits as well as to get some facets of the various personalities which do not always show up in other areas.”¹¹²

The residents were allowed to go outside for personal errands or recreation during “their free hours in the day” as long as they completed their assigned tasks.¹¹³ In order to maintain their spirits, the girls were also encouraged to go out for walks, to shop, and to go to the movies. They were urged “to keep up their social contacts as much as is possible in individual situations.” They visited each other in the hospital and went walking together. The staff believed this would help ease their return to the “normal community” and prevent dependency issues.¹¹⁴ Girls who were in their eighth month of pregnancy, however, were not allowed to leave the house alone.¹¹⁵ The ability to leave the home and go out into the community contrasted greatly with earlier home policies which forbid the girls from leaving the home.¹¹⁶

“Playing” was also considered a way to develop group spirit and fill the girls’ free time. The home provided recreational activities such as games, a piano, phonographs, croquet, and ping pong. The home also had an Activities Committee made up of

¹¹¹ FCA Policies and Procedure, February 1949, p. 2, Folder 153, Box 17, FCA Collection.

¹¹² “Activities Program,” Undated, p.1, Folder 132, Box 16, FCA Collection.

¹¹³ “Florence Crittenton Anchorage,” September 1950, p. 4, Folder 5, Box 318, WCMC.

¹¹⁴ “Activities Program,” Undated, p.2, Folder 132, Box 16, FCA Collection.

¹¹⁵ “Florence Crittenton Anchorage Manual,” 1958, p. 9, Folder 163, Box 18, FCA Collection.

¹¹⁶ However, this freedom did become an issue later in the 1950s when a review of the agency reported that the home was located in a “deteriorated section of the City which restricts the freedom which girls might otherwise enjoy.” The Home then attempted to provide more activities on the grounds to make up for the larger community. See Marion K. Craine, Untitled Report on Florence Crittenton Anchorage, January 1956, p. 2, Folder 153, Box 17, FCA Collection.

residents who planned programs for each month. Activities included “charm classes” (which consisted of learning about grooming, make-up, posture, etiquette, etc.), films, games (such as “poker, pinochle, rummy, gin rummy, bridge, scrabble, and Chinese Checkers”), handicrafts (such as ceramics, knitting, leatherwork, and sewing), lectures (on adoptions, family living, history, medicine, music, transportation, and art), office procedures, and reading.¹¹⁷ Television and radio were also available to the girls. The Red Cross offered a home nursing course at the FCA. In addition, the girls participated in volunteer work which consisted of making items such as aprons, dish towels, and stuffed animals to sell for fundraisers. They also stuffed animals and completed office work for local organizations.¹¹⁸ The girls were offered a chance to attend religious services. Pastors from local churches would give services whenever possible. The girls responded well to the ministers with briefer services and less formal attitudes. However, one Baptist pastor was not popular among the girls because he preached on a mother’s responsibility to her child which “sent two of them away in hysterics.”¹¹⁹

In order to make life as “normal” as possible, the maternity home celebrated holidays, allowing girls to plan parties on numerous occasions. For instance, a Group Worker’s Report for March, April, and May of 1964 documented quite a few celebrations. In March, the girls threw a St. Patrick’s Day party. They also held a “Easter Parade of Hats.” In April, they hosted a Casino Party and a Honolulu Party.¹²⁰ In addition, each girl received a card on her birthday. For Christmas, the girls were able to make baked goods and candy as they might do at home. They also decorated the house

¹¹⁷ Florence Crittenton Anchorage, “Effort Made on the Activities Program,” Undated report, [p. 2], Folder 132, Box 16, FCA Collection.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁰ “Group Worker’s Report,” March-April-May 1964, p. 1, Folder 143, Box 17, FCA Collection.

and played Christmas hymns. The Board of FCA made stockings for the girls and filled them with treats, which they opened on Christmas morning. The house also provided presents for girls who did not have any.¹²¹ They had a Christmas tree and lit a fire every night in the fireplace. Girls had the option to attend church service on Christmas Eve. On both Christmas and New Year's Eve, the girls were allowed to stay up as late as they wanted. There was usually a Christmas party, and on Christmas day, the girls were allowed to have friends and relatives over for dinner.¹²²

These new activities, parties, shorter stays, and ability to leave the home and/or have visitors were a drastic change from earlier homes. Prior to World War Two, maternity homes had been seen as form of punishment for girls who violated societal norms. One report described these homes of the past:

Long stays were thought necessary for rehabilitation; the girls rarely left the house and never alone; mail was read before it was posted or distributed; the telephone could be used only in emergencies; there was much emphasis on training in household arts and child care and on religious instruction. Too often when a girl left the home after this isolation from the world (from six months to two years) she did not know how to adjust without the accustomed disciplines and routines.¹²³

Obviously living in maternity homes such as Florence Crittenton Anchorage during the long 1950s was not ideal. The simple fact that girls were forced to leave their own homes and communities to go live in a foreign environment for the duration of their pregnancy was clearly tragic. Nonetheless, starting in the 1940s, maternity homes made an active decision to alter their practices and embrace the larger national trends in social work and

¹²¹ Recreation and Education Committee Notes, November 16, 1949, p. 3, Folder 17, Box 3, FCA Collection.

¹²² Florence Crittenton Anchorage, "Effort Made on the Activities Program," Undated report, [p. 6], Folder 132, Box 16, FCA Collection.

¹²³ Paper labeled Florence Crittenton Anchorage, Chicago Illinois, dated February 1951, Folder 5, Box 318, WCMC.

psychology. This was reflected in their activities and treatment of the girls. The FCA demonstrated how these larger changes were implemented on the local level.

CONCLUSION

As sociologist Constance Nathanson concisely stated: “Pregnancy makes sex visible; it converts private behavior into public behavior.”¹²⁴ The pregnancies of young unwed mothers became a public matter when girls sought care outside of their own homes. Not unlike their Progressive Era predecessors, women, usually with degrees in social work, attempted to help their fellow females by establishing services to assist them with their illegitimate pregnancies. As the age of unwed mothers declined, the needs of this constituency changed as well. The WSD and its member agencies adjusted their programs to better incorporate younger clients. The Florence Crittenton Anchorage offers insight into how a specific maternity home (although part of a larger chain) reacted to its changing demographic.

Nonetheless, the services available to pregnant teenagers in the post-World War Two decades were extremely limited. Medical care, social service counseling, and educational opportunities were “woefully inadequate.”¹²⁵ These pregnancies had long-term implications even if the girls chose to place the babies for adoption, as will be discussed in the next chapter. These young females were still children themselves and the debate over whose responsibility it was to care for them shaped the type of care they actually received. Nonetheless, social agencies in Chicago as well as state agencies attempted to meet the needs of this special situation. In fact, Maud Morlock, director of

¹²⁴ Constance Nathanson, *Dangerous Passage* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 4.

¹²⁵ Osofsky, vi.

the federal Children's Bureau, praised the leadership of Chicago's Welfare Council and its work with unmarried mothers, calling the program "very active and productive."¹²⁶

In regards to education, school-age unwed mothers faced several obstacles put in place by concerned citizens and parents who felt immorality could spread among other children. The Board of Education in Chicago segregated unwed mothers and encouraged their relocation. They failed to realize that exclusion exacerbated the problem. More schooling, counseling, and guidance were needed, not less. Although these agencies worked to help girls who were already pregnant, they did little to prevent the problem. None of these agencies offered information about birth control, nor did they attempt to alleviate the larger social inequities which often led to illegitimacy. Instead, these were reactionary institutes that aimed to assist their clientele and address a seemingly increasing social problem.

¹²⁶ "Minutes of Meeting of Committee for the Study of Unmarried Parenthood," June 23, 1950, p. 2, Folder 2, Box 210, WCMC.

CHAPTER SEVEN
“NICE GIRLS DON’T GET PREGNANT”:
UNCOVERING THE YOUNG UNWED MOTHER IN THE “LONG 1950S”

“I’m a girl 16 years old and I’m in trouble. I’m 4 ½ months pregnant. I stay with my mother and stepfather but I just can’t tell them. They’ve always been strict with me and I won’t get sympathy from them. I know they would whip me. The baby’s father left before I could tell him and I haven’t anybody at all to help me. There isn’t anybody I can marry. I haven’t said so before but I’m single. Don’t want to destroy the baby but I would like to go some place where I could work in a hospital and have my baby adopted to somebody so my parents couldn’t find out, but I don’t know where to go. Please help me. I’m desperate.”¹

–Sixteen-year-old female from Vacey, Virginia, March 27, 1950

This passage is taken from a letter addressed to the United States Children’s Bureau in response to an article featured in *True Confessions* magazine. This is only one of many letters sent by young women pleading for assistance from this agency during the 1940s and 1950s. Pregnant teenage girls, especially those living in rural areas, often knew little about the public resources available to them. Thus when gossip or romance magazines such as *True Confessions* ran articles on unwed mothers which included the address of the Children’s Bureau, many girls responded with letters of inquiry. In her article “Pulp Fictions and Problem Girls,” historian Regina Kunzel describes the impact of “scandal magazines” in the twentieth century.² Featuring stories of love and sexual transgressions, these magazines had a wide readership across the nation. Because of the inherent scandal of unwed motherhood, stories involving single pregnancy “made

¹ Letter from Merkie Deel, March 20, 1950, Folder 7-4-3-1-4, Box 457, Records Group 102, National Archives at College Park, Maryland. (Hereafter referred to as NACP)

² Regina Kunzel, “Pulp Fictions and Problem Girls: Reading and Rewriting Single Pregnancy in the Postwar United States,” *American Historical Review*, vol. 100, no. 5 (Dec., 1995). *True Confessions* was a popular magazine originating in the early twentieth century. By the 1920s, many women and girls consumed the love and scandal stories that the magazine featured. Initially, it published literally “true confessions,” but eventually moved to a “mixture of mythic confession and movie-start revelation.” See John Modell, *Into One’s Own* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 74.

frequent appearances in romance-confession magazines.”³ Consequently, pregnant teenagers could read these dramatic stories and relate to the characters. When the publications included the address of the United States Children’s Bureau, girls wrote to the agency’s headquarters to ask for assistance. These letters offer a rare insight into the girls’ situations, providing a limited and unique glimpse into the lives of young unwed mothers.

Much of this dissertation has focused on what others thought about sex, teenage girls, and pregnancy as well as how agencies, the government, and the general public responded to these matters. This chapter in contrast seeks to reveal the characteristics of the teenage girls themselves. Who were these “bad-good” girls hiding in maternity homes or living with relatives until delivery? Who were their partners? How did they feel about their pregnancies? Unfortunately, many of these questions cannot be answered as thoroughly as desired. Most girls viewed their pregnancies as a source of shame, a time in their lives to be forgotten. Consequently, diaries and personal accounts of their experiences are almost non-existent. Some maternity homes did have newspapers composed by the girls; however, these remnants are few and far apart. In regards to the manuscripts of maternity homes and social agencies, the girl’s voice was often not included unless it benefited the reputation of the organization. Many of the homes that assisted these girls are no longer in existence and their records have either been destroyed or are scattered amid other archives.⁴ Thus, this chapter seeks to examine the limited

³ Kunzel, 1465.

⁴ As previously mentioned, finding sources on the background of the unwed mother prove to be a challenging feat. Agencies such as Florence Crittenton Mission no longer exist and consequently their records regarding client data do not exist. The Salvation Army still assists unwed mothers today and its archives in Alexandria, Virginia house the records and interviews of unwed mothers from all of its maternity homes. Unfortunately, the current Salvation Army administration refuses to open these case

sources available to paint a more accurate and complex picture of teenage pregnancy in the long 1950s.

THE “UNFORTUNATE GIRLS”

In 1961, a fifteen-year-old girl wrote to Abigail Van Buren stating that she was “deeply in love” with her sixteen-year-old boyfriend and “would do anything for him.” However, although she and the boy were in love, she did not want “to get into trouble.” She pleaded with “Dear Abby” to tell her parents to permit her marriage to avoid such “trouble.” The girl further stated: “It’s not only bad girls who get into trouble. Sometimes a girl is really in love.” This letter revealed the very real urges of young females to partake in sexual intercourse and the associated threat of pregnancy. It also reinforced the idea that marriage was the only socially acceptable place for sexual activity, particularly regarding the possibility of pregnancy. Unfortunately for this love-struck girl, “Dear Abby” responded that she supported the parents’ decision because there was much more to marriage than “physical urges.” “Dear Abby” advised her to not “mistake your first romantic impulses for a love that will endure a lifetime.” The girl was thus told to wait until she was older and more mature to have sex within the boundaries of marriage.⁵

If a pregnancy was the result of rape or incest, a girl was promiscuous, or if she became pregnant during her first time participating in intercourse, she was viewed the same way. As family life expert Evelyn Mills Davis put it: “whatever the reason, the girl who took one chance too many, whether it was her only experience or one of a number,

files to researchers, citing privacy concerns. Although information does exist in this instance, it remains sealed from public access.

⁵ Abigail Van Buren, “Dear Abby: End the Hanky-Panky,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 10, 1961.

finds herself in a tragic position.”⁶ Davis further stated that if the girl found herself to be pregnant she faced limited options: “hasty marriage, if that is possible; giving birth to her fatherless child; or abortion.”⁷ This helps to explain the despair and anguish girls felt. With such narrow choices and the threat of public humiliation and shame, many of them felt alone and helpless which pressured them into making hasty decisions.

“Getting into trouble” was a legitimate fear for girls in the postwar period, a time in which oral contraceptives were not readily available. In her oral history of women in the 1950s, Brett Harvey declares: “in the absence of legal abortion, an extramarital pregnancy could be—and almost always was—disastrous.”⁸ Unwed pregnant girls were viewed as “unfortunate” primarily because they could not get the putative father to marry them. During this time of high teenage marriage rates, girls who did not get married were the “losers,” so to speak. Not only did they make the “mistake” of premarital sex, but also they did so with boys who did not want to marry them or were unacceptable to marry, according to their own standards or those of their parents. In this time of lower marriage age and a culture which rewarded those who did marry, unwed pregnancy was especially stigmatized and its penalty was severe.

Marriage was the first option. When that failed, most girls who did not seek abortions were sent away. One girl told of a classmate who got pregnant: “A girl in my class at school was going steady with a boy like that. She got pregnant. The boy wouldn’t marry her. Her parents had to send her away.”⁹ Photojournalist Ann Fessler recalls in her book, *The Girls Who Went Away*, that “Just about everyone who lived

⁶ Maxine Davis, *Sex and the Adolescent* (New York: Pocket Books, 1960), 156.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Women’s Oral History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), xvi.

⁹ Betty Coe Spicer, “If You Don’t Go Steady, You’re Different,” *Ladies Home Journal* (December 1959): 94.

through this era has a memory of a girl from their high school, college, or neighborhood who disappeared. If she returned, she most likely did not come back with her baby but with a story of a sick aunt or an illness that had kept her out of school.”¹⁰ As Brett Harvey succinctly states in her oral history of the 1950s, to be unmarried and pregnant in the 1950s was “the deepest kind of trouble.”¹¹ Thus many girls who did get pregnant outside of marriage during the long 1950s attempted to conceal their pregnancies as long as possible. In *Profile of Youth*, a series of articles about teenagers in the United States first printed in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, the editors discovered that “occasionally a girl suspected of pregnancy by her classmates just ‘takes a trip’ and returns to classes.”¹² According to their interviews, youth viewed pregnancy as “a social disgrace and a personal disaster.”¹³

Nonetheless, according to the *Profile of Youth*, knowledge of unmarried pregnant girls was not that rare in the schools. For instance, one school had no statistics on the number of unmarried pregnant girls, but at least three single girls were reputed to have babies at home. Another girl had been “getting fat” during spring exams. She then left town for the summer and returned to school three weeks late. Although she never admitted having a child and continued to go steady with the same boy, people believed

¹⁰ Ann Fessler, *The Girls Who Went Away* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 8. Ann Fessler, a photographic journalist, initially intended to share her experiences as an adoptee looking for her own unwed mother. Instead, she found both mothers and adoptees in similar situations. Fessler decided to interview these unwed mothers, most of whom were teenagers at the time of surrender. Her oral histories reveal emotions and realities vastly different from the common interpretations of adoption in the post-World War II era. Fessler argues that adoption was not always the first choice for the unwed mother but rather a painful and scarring experience that was often forced upon her. Her book was recently turned into a documentary entitled *A Girl Like Her* (2012).

¹¹ Harvey, 22.

¹² Maureen Daly, ed., *Profile of Youth* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1949), 153.

¹³ *Ibid.*

she had done “a fine job of covering up” her situation.¹⁴ The fact that teenagers made the connection that “going away” was often tied to pregnancy reveals how common teen pregnancy was; it also acknowledges how associated pregnancy was with disrepute. Because a girl literally had to be removed from her home and school, and then returned without a mention of her experience proves the power of shame and the significance of the established moral values and conformity of the time.

Unmarried teenage pregnancy violated the social norms, often leaving the young girl with feelings of ignominy and desperation. One book described unwanted pregnancy among teenage girls as “pathetic.”¹⁵ As one handbook for teens stated: “Girls and their parents still carry a heavy burden of shame and humiliation” even though attitudes toward sexual activity had become a bit more liberal.¹⁶ One girl stated that she was “scared” about her future. She asked, “How can I ever go through with this? I am disgraced all my life now.”¹⁷ Another girl told her tale of unwed pregnancy and her attempts to end the pregnancy:

At night I sat in hot baths and slept with my head pounding from the effects of quinine. I drank tansy tea and swallowed capsules of turpentine until all I wanted to do was retch out my insides and die. I thought of dying. With all my heart I wanted to die. As the time went on, I wanted to more and more.... “I’ll kill myself,” I would murmur into the darkness at night. “I’ll take poison and kill myself.”¹⁸

Although adoption was the most popular choice among young white women in the 1940s and 1950s, young women also saw suicide and infanticide as solutions to what seemed like a dire problem. The girls who chose these outlets obviously felt they were in

¹⁴ Ibid., 135.

¹⁵ Davis, 155.

¹⁶ Ibid., 156.

¹⁷ Margaret Hickey, “Unmarried Mothers,” *Ladies’ Home Journal* (June 1949): 23.

¹⁸ Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie!: Single Pregnancy and Race before Roe v Wade* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 108.

desperate situations and murder might be their only way out. These situations captured media attention and perpetuated negative stereotypes about unwed mothers, as was discussed in Chapter Five.

In an article for *Coronet* magazine, one young unmarried mother whose parents had feared friends and relatives discovering her pregnancy told her nurse that “I hope it [her baby] is born dead. And I wish I’d die, too!”¹⁹ Her desperation was not unique. Girls who became illegitimately pregnant often expressed their wish to die rather than facing the shame and scrutiny of bearing an out-of-wedlock child. Others wished the death of their child and the “overwhelming sense of guilt” was said to cause mothers to “commit frantic acts of cruelty against illegitimate children.”²⁰ Some girls considered suicide as a solution to their pregnancy. One girl stated that she was desperate enough to jump to a lake. In interviews with high schoolers in 1948, a story was told of a pregnant girl was found in her bathroom by her parents “with both wrists slashed.”²¹

Some girls were so afraid of public and familial reaction to their pregnancies that they attempted to conceal them. Parents reported not knowing their daughter was pregnant until she started going into labor. Other girls simply left home to avoid telling their parents. Mary Louise Allen, Executive Director of the Florence Crittenton Association of America, stated in 1963 that approximately one half of the residents in Florence Crittenton homes refused to tell their families about their pregnancy.²² In letters to the federal Children’s Bureau, girls asked for help but also pleaded for confidentiality. For instance, one seventeen-year-old from Waterloo, Wisconsin, wrote: “I don’t know

¹⁹ Michael Ellis, “The Real Shame of Illegitimacy,” *Coronet* 26 (September 1949): 25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Daly, 153.

²² Solinger, 109.

what to do I can't tell my mother because she isn't well[;] if I told her the shock would maybe kill her and my dad wouldn't understand how I could get my self in trouble. I can't eat or sleep any more I just keep thinking about it."²³ Another nineteen-year-old girl requested to leave the state, mentioning that "I would rather be out of Wisconsin as I have relatives living in all corners, and by chance, it would be possible for them to find out. That I don't want. I know I must go somewhere until my child is born; I can't stay here." She further added: "I know that I can't stay here in this small town because talk will inevitably get around. It won't only be me who will suffer but my mother and dad and kid brother twice as much."²⁴ Girls were quite aware of the stigma attached to pregnancy and sought to protect not only themselves but also their families from the associated shame and humiliation.

A 1949 magazine article told of a teenage girl named Marie. Marie was "a pretty, dark-haired girl who found herself 'in trouble.'" When her parents learned of her condition, they reacted in "fear—fear of what others would think, fear of the smug righteousness of friends, neighbors, and relatives." The article reported that her family reacted so hostilely to Marie that she eventually began to have a "psychopathic hatred of the unborn child."²⁵ In an article with the *Ladies' Home Journal*, a young unwed mother described her experiences at a maternity home and her relationships with other clients in similar predicaments. She came to the conclusion that "you can't call your soul your own once you've had a baby without a marriage certificate."²⁶ Her statement reflected the treatment that young girls often received from society. Many were not allowed to make

²³ Letter from Beatrice Bockhoest, August 1950, Folder 7-4-3-1-4, Box 457, Records Group 102, NACP.

²⁴ Letter to Dr. Leona Baumgartner from Frances Kruse, October 18, 1949, Folder 7-4-3-1-4, Box 457, *ibid*.

²⁵ Ellis, 25.

²⁶ Joan Younger, "The Unwed Mother," *Ladies' Home Journal* (June 1947): 105.

decisions for themselves or their babies. Their fates fell in the hands of maternity home supervisors or their parents.

THE “UNWED” FATHER

This dissertation does not include the father in proper proportion to the mother in the case of teenage pregnancies, but this is simply a reflection of the history of these instances. Although the male contributed equally to the sexual act that put the girl in an industrial school or in a maternity home, he rarely faced consequences for his actions. Rather many times, the male was relieved of his half of the burden. In the 1880s, the behavior of men was the target of age-of-consent campaigners; however, in the twentieth century, the male seducer was often exonerated and the girl became the problem. In addition, very little was done to prevent the male from engaging in the act in the first place. Although girls were warned over and over again to protect their virtue and to not engage in sexual conduct, boys did not receive the same counseling. The female was the one endangering herself. In the 1950s, little was done to curb the sexual activity of males. Nonetheless, contraception was largely the male responsibility before the rise of the pill in the 1960s. One study based in Los Angeles reported that most of the teenage boys had some knowledge of sex and knew of contraceptives before they actually had sex, but seldom used protection when having sex relations.²⁷ As historian Joseph Hawes observed in 1985: “the history of adolescent female behavior, more than anything else

²⁷ Reuben Pannor, “Casework Service for Unmarried Fathers,” *Children* Vol. 10, No. 2 (March-April, 1963): 65.

reflects the determination of society to define and control women's lives in ways totally unlike its effort to control men."²⁸

In a "Dear Abby" column published in June 1966, a self-proclaimed physician at a "very prominent home for unwed mothers" asked Abigail Van Buren "why the boys involved [were] not made to accept financial liability or punishment of any kind." The physician further inquired: "Why do the parents of the girls allow the guilty boys to go unpunished?" Van Buren simply replied: "Because the parents of a girl who finds herself in such an unfortunate situation want only to protect their daughter from further hurt. And to bring legal action against the boy in all likelihood would mean publicity."²⁹ This letter and response clearly expresses the gendered issues involving teenage pregnancy and the obvious inequality in the share of blame. This also helps explain why there is so little information on the putative father. While psychologists and sociologists produced numerous studies on the unwed mother and even her parents, they rarely devoted attention to the unwed father. In fact, sociologist Clark Vincent stated in 1962 that there was "only one study of unmarried fathers for about every thirty studies of unwed mothers."³⁰ The boy involved was "father" only by biological participation. In many situations, the girl refused to give the name of the boy involved to spare him from charges of carnal knowledge and abuse, or because she simply did not know his name. Other situations were more complicated, including backroom deals between both participants' parents. As noted by "Dear Abby," some parents refused to acknowledge the putative father's identity in order to protect their daughters. Lola Bowman told the

²⁸ Joseph M. Hawes, "The Strange History of Female Adolescence in the United States," *Journal of Psychohistory* Vol. 13, No. 1 (Summer 1985): 59.

²⁹ Abigail Van Buren, "Boys Go Scot Free," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 6, 1966.

³⁰ Clark E. Vincent, "Spotlight on the Unwed Father," *Sexology* (March 1962): 539.

story of one set of parents who “didn’t know who the father of the baby was and didn’t want to know; they also didn’t want him to know Ruth had been pregnant lest he reveal it.”³¹ In this situation, the girl’s privacy was of utmost importance so that she could return to her previous life without suspicion. The family desperately wanted to prevent the truth from being exposed even if it meant denying a father the knowledge of the existence of his offspring.

Nonetheless, Evelyn Millis Duvall expressed that some boys who got their steadies pregnant felt guilty about her situation, even if he was not exposed as the father. She mentioned that the risk of “sowing wilds oats so often” could lead to a “harvest of a crop of thistles.”³² She also discussed how some boys suffered such guilt about their mistakes that they agreed to marry girls for whom they had no affection. A letter from a teen-aged boy to Ann Landers provides a rare glimpse into the male perspective:

My girl is 15. I am 17. We started going steady two years ago which was our first big mistake. The more time we spent together the easier it was to go a little further. Before we knew it we were doing things we had no right to do. We made up all kinds of excuses to justify our behavior—even that old line about living every day to the limit because tomorrow we might be hit by an H-bomb. Then my girl found out for sure that she was in trouble. I’ll never forget the agony of telling our parents. They were so shocked and hurt. It was the most horrible experience a couple of kids can go through. Now my girl is in another city with relatives. Our parents have decided it would be best if we didn’t write or see each other. The baby will be put out for adoption. I don’t know how my girl will feel about me when all this is over. All I can say now is that I am heart-sick and miserable.³³

³¹ Lola A. Bowman, “Community Planning for Unmarried Mothers,” paper presented at National Conference on Social Welfare, Chicago, Illinois, May 13, 1958, p. 6. Folder 6, Box 1, Louise Cottrell Collection, University of Illinois—Chicago. (Hereafter referred to as UIC)

³² Evelyn Mills Duvall, *Facts of Life and Love for Teen-Agers* (New York: Association Press, 1956), 67.

³³ Ann Landers, *Ann Landers Talks to Teen-agers about Sex* (New York: Fawcett Juniper, 1963), 119.

Despite the image of putative fathers as absent figures or, at the worse, immoral seducers, there were some males who felt empathy for their partners and also suffered the emotional pain of unwed pregnancy.

In other situations, the boy's parents stepped in and sought to save his reputation at the expense of the girl's. Several magazine and journal articles mentioned that a boy's parents might contribute financially to the maternity home care or medical expenses of the girl in exchange for silence in regards to their son's involvement. Sometimes the boy's family simply moved out of town. As one doctor simply put it: "the girl, with or without her parents' help, must see her ordeal through alone."³⁴ Similarly, one newspaper article simply stated: "the woman pays." It further explained that "in many cases, the reputed father simply disappears, seldom contributing money for the child's support, or the unwed mother is reluctant to set the law after him."³⁵

Rickie Solinger labeled the putative father in the long 1950s an "unexamined phantom," acknowledging the lack of attention given to the other contributor to an illicit pregnancy.³⁶ Clark E. Vincent further explored the "mystery" behind the unwed father in his article, "Unmarried Fathers and Mores."³⁷ He argued that some putative fathers are unjustly labeled "sexual exploiters." The stereotype, if any, of the unwed father was that he was older and better educated than the young girl he impregnated. Based on his sociological study of 201 white unmarried fathers, Clark Vincent argued that his data did not support this stereotype. Instead, he found that over 56 percent of the fathers were

³⁴ Schauffler, 112.

³⁵ Roger Greens, "Unwed Mothers—What Can We Do?" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 9, 1959.

³⁶ Solinger, 36.

³⁷ Clark E. Vincent, "Unmarried Fathers and Mores: 'Sexual Exploiter' as an Ex Post Facto Label," *American Sociological Review* Vol. 25, No. 1 (Feb., 1960): 40.

within three years of the unwed mother's age.³⁸ Vincent also argued that "in some cases" the unwed fathers were "but pawns of unwed mothers, who use them only to resolve their own psychological problems and deprive the fathers of the dignity of even having an identity."³⁹

One sociologist characterized the unwed father as a "non-deviant rule breaker," illustrating the less severe consequences he suffered in comparison to the female.⁴⁰ Another article referred to the putative father as the "forgotten man" and a "somewhat nebulous figure, left free to attempt to detach himself physically and emotionally from a problem in which he has been intimately involved."⁴¹ Some maternity homes held especially negative opinions of putative fathers, even forbidding the mother to be in contact with them.⁴²

A lack of trained staff and lack of financial resources were the main reasons cited for not including services for unwed fathers.⁴³ Although many caseworkers agreed that the adolescent unmarried father often needed help as well, there were not enough funds to provide the necessary services, thus few were available to him. As early as 1940s, Maud Morlock called for greater attention to be given to the young putative father. Decades later, the same plea was being made. In 1960, the Child Welfare League recommended that "special efforts should be made to work with him, and to develop studies regarding him." It explained that "in many instances, he has emotional problems similar to those of the unmarried mother. Parenthood outside of marriage may create conflict and guilt,

³⁸ Ibid., 43.

³⁹ Vincent, "Spotlight on the Unwed Father," 539.

⁴⁰ Erdwin H. Pfuhl, Jr., "The Unwed Father: A 'Non-Deviant' Rule Breaker," *Sociological Quarterly* 19 (Winter 1978): 113.

⁴¹ Samuel Futterman and Jean B. Livermore, "Putative Fathers," *Journal of Social Casework* (May 1947): 174; Reuben Pannor, "Casework Service for Unmarried Fathers," *Children* 10.2 (March-April, 1963): 65.

⁴² Solinger, 124.

⁴³ Pannor, 65.

particularly for the young father, which impair his adjustment to adult life.”⁴⁴ Because the young unwed father did not bear the physical evidence of his actions, he avoided the stigma and negative stereotyping that fell upon the young unwed mother. However, he was also denied the proper care and assistance that he possibly needed.

MAKING THE “CHOICE”

Teen pregnancy challenged the concept of age. Unwed teenage mothers were especially challenging to caseworkers who struggled to treat the girls as both a child and a future mother of a child. Younger girls were especially difficult to work with because they often maintained little concern about the long-term effects of their situation. Many of them lacked the ability to examine their decisions from a more mature perspective. As one caseworker declared, these young girls were “children” and were in “no way equipped to assume the responsibilities of motherhood nor [were] they capable of completely caring for themselves.”⁴⁵ The debate then centered on which type of agency was better suited to serve the needs of unwed school-age mothers: the children’s agency or the family agency. For instance, a psychiatrist argued that the focus in care should be “shifted from the individual to the family when working with out-of-wedlock pregnant teenagers.”⁴⁶ This expert saw the case being worked in conjunction with a family agency

⁴⁴ Katharine F. Lenroot, *Child Welfare League of America Standards for Services to Unmarried Parents* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, Inc., 1960), 26.

⁴⁵ Lillian E. Taylor, “Criteria for Choice and Use of Boarding Homes for Unwed Pregnant Girls,” p. 2, paper presented at the 1956 National Conference of Social Work, under the Auspices of the National Association on Service to Unmarried Parents, in Folder 2, Box 2, Series 2991, Archives Department, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.

⁴⁶ Marcel Heiman, “Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancy in Adolescence,” paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Florence Crittenton Homes Association, Atlantic City, New Jersey, June 7, 1960, p. 5, Folder 1, Box 50, Florence Crittenton Collection, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota-Minneapolis.

because the school-age unwed mother was often still “living in her parents’ home” and was “legally, emotionally, and economically dependent upon their planning for her.”⁴⁷

In some cases, the parents of the girls were more difficult to deal with than the girls themselves. Because of her legal dependence, the parents were a major factor in considering the plans for the unwed mother and her child. Because the teenage mother was “legally a minor,” her parents were then still responsible for her and “their attitudes and plans for her” could be highly influential.⁴⁸ When the young girl got pregnant, the choice regarding her baby was rarely left to only her. Instead, the girl’s parents played a large role in the girl’s decision. Legally, the girl herself was still a child and in some legal jurisdictions, the girl was not allowed to relinquish her baby without the consent of her parents or “the appointment of a guardian *ad litem*.”⁴⁹ Often times, the parents already had a plan in mind and this was the plan that was eventually executed.

For social workers, unwed school-age mothers were particularly difficult to treat because of their unique position as a “child” having a “child.” In regard to society’s classifications of youth, the school-age unwed mother was still an adolescent yet she was facing an “adult” problem. Social workers then attempted to find the best way of handling an unwed mother. Some argued that they should focus on the personality and on the emotional needs of adolescents in general and shape her treatment accordingly. The school-age unwed mother experienced physical and emotional dependency on her family, while also struggling for emancipation and identity. In the 1962 *Handbook of*

⁴⁷ Jeanette Hanford, “Problems of the Unmarried Mother of School Age as Seen by Family and Children’s Agencies,” paper presented at the Ninth Institute of the Committee for the Study of Unmarried Parenthood of Council of Social Agencies of Chicago, Folder 14, Box 54, Illinois Children Home and Aid Society, UIC.

⁴⁸ *Child Welfare League of American Standards for Services to Unmarried Parents* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, Inc., 1960), 24.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

Information produced by the Salvation Army, social workers were warned when dealing with adolescent unwed mothers to “avoid the pitfall of expecting adult reactions and behavior because she is pregnant of one who is a child not only legally but emotionally.”⁵⁰ One study of 100 girls at the Florence Crittenton Home in Seattle revealed that the girls could not fully comprehend their situations. Instead they viewed their future babies as dolls or toys “to be possessed or almost a symbolic extension of themselves, ‘something that will belong to me.’”⁵¹

The social workers then had to find a way to help the girl participate in making a decision for her baby. One social worker urged her to remember that a girl has “a right to say what is to happen to her child.”⁵² Parents usually experienced feelings of guilt or failure in regards to their daughters’ actions. They then responded to these feelings by “getting rid of the baby” or keeping him/her. Another social worker reported that some parents insisted on placing the baby for adoption “both to protect their own position and to deprive their daughter of the baby she wishes to keep.” Other parents experiencing similar feelings reacted differently, insisting on keeping the baby “to force their daughter to live with the remainder of “her badness” or out of guilty feeling that they must make

⁵⁰ “The Salvation Army Services to Unmarried Parents and Their Children: Maternity Homes and Hospitals, February 1962, p. 26, in Folder 2, Box 209, Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago Collection, Chicago History Museum.

⁵¹ Stephen Fleck, “Pregnancy as Symptom of Adolescent Maladjustment,” *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* Vol. 2, No. 2 (September 1956): 122.

⁵² Frances Mary Penna, “Specific Factors in Casework with the Very Young Adolescent Mother and Her Family,” p. 11, paper given at the National Conference of Social Work, Atlantic City, New Jersey, April 1950, p. 2, Folder 9, Box 47, Child Welfare League Collection, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota-Minneapolis.

amends as grandparents for their failure as parents.”⁵³ Clearly, parents often needed as much help as their daughters.

ADOPTION

Prior to World War Two, adoption of children born to unwed mothers was rare. Society in general believed that these women must pay for their sins by raising their illegitimate children. In addition, the offspring of unwed mothers also carried “the permanent stain of biological and moral ruin.”⁵⁴ Consequently, these babies were considered to be undesirable. In postwar America, though, the public stigma regarding adoption had faded.⁵⁵ Instead of being a high-risk endeavor, it quickly transformed into an acceptable means to achieve the model family. As discussed in previous chapters, after World War Two people settled down to marry and reproduce. Because the media glorified parenthood and tied it to the essential meanings of femininity and masculinity, young married couples were pressured to have children. Parenthood became a “patriotic necessity.”⁵⁶ America’s baby boom, spanning the years 1946 to 1964, witnessed an increase in demand for children to adopt among those who could not produce their own. Childless couples “sought adoption in record numbers as one solution to their shame of infertility.”⁵⁷ Beginning in the 1940s and booming in the 1950s, adoption became society’s answer to the problem of infertility. Adoption became an attractive means to

⁵³ Lola A. Bowman, “Community Planning for Unmarried Mothers,” p. 11, paper presented at the National Conference on Social Welfare, Chicago, IL, May 13, 1958, Folder 6, Box 1, Louise Cottrell Collection, UIC.

⁵⁴ Solinger, 151.

⁵⁵ For more information on adoption in the postwar decades, see Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie* (New York: Routledge, 1992) and E. Wayne Carp, *Family Matters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000). In addition, practically speaking, because the rates of single pregnancy rose in the postwar period, the issue of unwed mothers keeping their babies would have been a bigger problem in society.

⁵⁶ Carp, 28.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

attain a family, but more importantly, it also “fixed” an increasingly problematic social issue: unwed mothers. By giving up their babies, the young unwed girls could be released back into society while providing a worthy couple with the opportunity to contribute to society by raising the child properly.

Adoption agencies such as those in Chicago were overwhelmed by applications in the postwar period. The demand for children exceeded the number available. One expert estimates that by the mid-1950s of the 4.5 million childless couples in the United States, one million were trying to adopt one of the 75,000 children available for adoption.⁵⁸ The Children Welfare League of America’s executive director, Joseph P. Reid, estimated in 1957 that the odds of receiving a child were between 18 to 1 and 10 to 1, depending on what region of the country a prospective couple lived. This lack of children available through recognized adoption agencies drove people to seek out the black market. Officials worried that couples were receiving children through doctors, lawyers, relatives, or the unwed mothers themselves. Young unwed mothers were especially vulnerable because they were often in extremely desperate situations and in dire need to get rid of their babies.⁵⁹

A black market for babies exploded in the 1950s, causing alarm among social workers and the federal Children’s Bureau. In 1955, the fear of this black market was so great that the Senate Sub-committee on Juvenile Delinquency spent time investigating the issue. Democratic Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee referred to the black market as

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Adoption soon became an issue of race as white babies were seen as commodities and black babies as burdens. As previously mentioned, in regards to the white community adoption alleviated the financial stress of unwed mothers on the community. White unwed mothers provided childless couples with babies. In contrast, black unwed mothers whose children were not in demand for adoption needed financial support, usually in the form of Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). See Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie!: Single Pregnancy and Race before Roe v Wade* (New York: Routledge, 1992), for more information about race and adoption.

“one of the sordid sides of the juvenile delinquency problem.” He concluded that more agencies needed to be available to assist unwed mothers, stating that: “young women properly cared for and with kind consideration of their problems are not targets for these baby salesmen.” Senator Kefauver also pushed for federal legislation since at that time, there was no law prohibiting interstate sale of babies and thirty-three states had no laws forbidding the sale of babies within their boundaries.⁶⁰

A 1956 article in *Cosmopolitan* magazine revealed that girls learned of the black market “through newspaper ads, cards discreetly dropped in restaurants, whispers in bars, taxis and beauty parlors.”⁶¹ Sociologist Clark E. Vincent argued in 1956 that mothers turned to “gray” or “black” markets mostly because of the financial aid they received from the interested couple.⁶² This usually occurred among younger girls who were hiding their pregnancies from their parents. Since most states required a minor to have her parent’s signature before relinquishing her child for adoption, the black market appealed to unmarried teenagers in desperate situations. An August 9, 1959 article in the *Chicago Tribune* reported that “at least 20,000 young unwed mothers sell their babies” on the black market each year, usually “with price tags ranging from \$1,500 to \$3,000.”⁶³ Even though black markets were frowned upon, society encouraged young unwed mothers to put their babies up for adoption so that they could one day become wives and mothers in the “proper” manner.

Unwed mothers felt the pressure to relinquish their babies, making the decision even more complicated and stressful. Fessler argues that for many young women,

⁶⁰ “Black Market in Babies Described in Senate Probe,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 24, 1955.

⁶¹ Alice Lake, “Why Young Girls Sell Their Babies,” *Cosmopolitan* (Dec., 1956): 44.

⁶² Clark E. Vincent, “The Adoption Market and the Unwed Mother’s Baby,” *Marriage and Family Living* Vol. 18, No. 2 (May 1956), 124.

⁶³ Roger Greene, “Unwed Mothers—What Can We Do?,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 9, 1959.

adoption was “not a question of choice but of doing what society demanded—a demand that society has never fully acknowledged.”⁶⁴ Many girls wanted to keep their babies but knew they were unable financially to do so. In a letter to advice columnist Abigail Van Buren, a seventeen-year-old girl in a maternity home wrote that she was “terribly confused” about keeping her baby. Although she originally planned on keeping her baby, her priest “strongly urged me to give my baby up for the baby’s sake.”⁶⁵ Van Buren agreed that this was the right decision and encouraged other girls to consider adoption as well. The general culture in the 1950s disapproved of the unwed mother keeping her baby. According to Lola A. Bowman, Director of Casework for the Children’s Service Society of Wisconsin, writing in 1958: “most caseworkers agree that in our culture the adoptive placement of an illegitimate child offers the best chance of happiness for both the mother and the child...”⁶⁶ In fact, young women who did keep their babies were labeled the “least healthy of unmarried mothers.”⁶⁷ One case worker even categorized unmarried mothers who kept their babies into three groups: “first, the severely ill girl who, because of intellectual or psychological damage, relates poorly to both reality and to the caseworker; second, the extremely deprived girl with poor judgment and defective conscience who keeps the infant because it is a part of herself and third, the young unmarried mother who might be described as acting out the family neurosis in having and

⁶⁴ Fessler, *Girls Who Went Away*, 13. Ann Fessler produced a documentary based on her book which premiered in March 2012. The issue has also been featured in a *60 Minutes* episode and a handful of newspaper articles.

⁶⁵ Abigail Van Buren, “Dear Abby—She Calls It Two-Faced,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 27, 1962.

⁶⁶ Lola A. Bowman, “Community Planning for Unmarried Mothers,” paper presented at National Conference on Social Welfare, Chicago, Illinois, May 13, 1958, p. 3, Folder 6, Box 1, Louise Cottrell Collection, UIC.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

keeping a child for her parents.”⁶⁸ Another New York psychiatrist argued that “the sicker the out-of-wedlock mother, the greater her need to hold on to the child, for unhealthy reasons.” To this psychiatrist, there was a “direct relationship between the severity of a girl’s emotional disturbance and her inability to surrender her child.”⁶⁹ Consequently, the pressure to surrender the baby was quite significant.

ABORTION

Abortion has existed as an option for unplanned pregnancies since the colonial days. Until the early nineteenth century, midwives, folk doctors, and pregnant women themselves performed abortion legally. It has been estimated that as many as one third of Protestant pregnancies ended in abortion in 1881.⁷⁰ However, by 1900, every state had passed laws against abortion.⁷¹ Although it was not openly discussed or promoted, women knew about abortion. Most historians agree that for a large portion of United States history, abortion “remained relatively accessible through informal networks, from physicians driven by competition for patients, and from a thriving criminal underground.”⁷²

If a medical abortion procedure was unattainable, some girls resorted to inducing miscarriages, using pills or herbs that rarely worked. They then turned to more drastic

⁶⁸ Virginia Shake, “Case Work Service to Unmarried Mothers Who Keep Their Babies: A Private Family Agency’s Experience,” p. 8, paper given to the National Association on Service to Unmarried Parents at the National Conference of Social Work, Philadelphia, PA, May 21, 1957, in Folder, Box 2, Series 2991, Archives Department, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.

⁶⁹ Marcel Heiman, “Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancy in Adolescence,” paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Florence Crittenton Homes Association, Atlantic City, New Jersey, June 7, 1960, p. 5, Folder 1, Box 50, Florence Crittenton Collection, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota-Minneapolis.

⁷⁰ R. Sauer, “Attitudes to Abortion in America, 1800-1973,” *Population Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (March 1974): 53-67.

⁷¹ Harvey, 23.

⁷² *Ibid.*

measures such as insertion of sharp objects into the vagina. These actions were obviously dangerous and potentially fatal. When at-home attempts failed, girls then sought outside help. Despite the limited availability of “therapeutic” abortions at hospitals, underground or “back-alley” abortion practices were more common during these decades. Skilled abortion practitioners such as Dr. Robert Douglas Spencer of Pennsylvania did exist, but very few women—especially teenaged ones—had access to such professionals. Only a few licensed physicians were willing to perform abortions and therapeutic abortions required testimonies from more than one doctor confirming the threat of the pregnancy to the mother’s health.⁷³ Only wealthy women could afford this complex arrangement. Nonetheless, women sought abortionists through sisters, friends, husbands, doctors, and co-workers—someone usually had a friend who knew someone. However, because abortions were illegal and morally condemned, finding help was not always successful.⁷⁴ Obtaining abortions was especially difficult for young girls because they often did not have the means to find such practitioners and/or pay for the procedure.

Despite the difficulties, Planned Parenthood estimated in 1957 that between 200,000 and 1.2 million abortions took place annually in the United States.⁷⁵ The age spread of the women receiving abortions was unknown. Alfred Kinsey reported that twenty percent of sexually active single women in his 1953 survey had had abortions.⁷⁶ Because of both greater social mobility and available money, females from the middle and upper socioeconomic classes were more likely to have access to safe abortions.⁷⁷

⁷³ Howard J. Osofsky, *The Pregnant Teen-Ager: A Medical, Educational, and Social Analysis* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1968), 100.

⁷⁴ D’Emilio and Freedman, 254.

⁷⁵ Harvey, 25.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Osofsky, 11.

Poor women were the ones who often fell to the “mercy of back-alley butchers or well-meaning but incompetent quacks.” Indeed, thousands of women visited the emergency room as a result of “hemorrhaging from incomplete abortions, or raging with fevers from septic infections.” By 1962, these “black market abortions” allegedly killed “an estimated five to ten thousand women a year.”⁷⁸ When a girl elected to have an illicit abortion, she risked her life. The fact that so many chose to do so reveals the level of desperation and despair these young girls faced.

SEEKING HELP

Letter writing was one form of agency the girls maintained and utilized. When they had questions, they sought advice from local newspapers, national magazines and newspapers, national organizations, and even the President of the United States. “Mrs. Griggs,” the popular local advice columnist of the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, received several inquiries from teenage girls regarding sex and pregnancy. Some girls wrote asking for dating advice and proper courtship behavior. Others wrote when they found themselves pregnant and had nowhere else to turn. National advice columnist Dorothy Dix wrote in 1945 that “every day there flows across my desk a stream of tear-sodden letters from frantic girls, who are mere children—little bobby sockers who are still in their teens, asking questions that I read through tears.”⁷⁹ Similarly, national advice columnist Ann Landers received “mountains of mail” regarding teen sex and pregnancy, so much so that she wrote a book.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Harvey, 24.

⁷⁹ Dorothy Dix, “Unwed Mothers,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 16, 1945.

⁸⁰ Ann Landers, *Ann Landers Talks to Teen-agers about Sex* (New York: Fawcett Juniper, 1963), 15.

Ann Landers Talks to Teen-Agers about Sex featured common questions about teenage sexuality and attempted to provide reasonable advice. She even wrote a chapter entitled “How to Help Yourself Stay Out of Trouble” in which she included advice on how to avoid getting pregnant by not having sex as well as remorseful letters from girls who had already gotten “into trouble.” One letter from a teenage girl in Kenosha, Wisconsin, stated: “I never should have had all those drinks. If I hadn’t been crocked I wouldn’t be in this mess. I’m so ashamed I can’t look my mother in the eye. But I’ll have to tell her—and soon. Please send me the name of a home I can go to, a place not far from Kenosha. I’d rather not be right in town.”⁸¹ The girl expressed feelings of regret and humiliation over being intoxicated. Landers counseled teenagers to avoid these types of situations, warning that “when you plop yourself right square in the middle of a tempting situations, you are begging for trouble.” She further advised teenagers, especially the girls, to avoid un-chaperoned events and not to entertain their boyfriends while babysitting.⁸²

In addition to teenaged mothers who wrote to newspaper columnists for solutions to their problems, former unwed mothers wrote to them with recommendations based upon their own experiences. Some of these females encouraged young girls to give up their babies for adoption. One such letter told the story of a woman who at sixteen years old went “through the mill” and put her baby up for adoption. This author justified her decision, saying that “I was a young girl who made a bad mistake, but I knew I had my

⁸¹ Ibid., 50.

⁸² Ibid., 51.

life before me. Any mother who has given her baby away know that it is harder to give up a child than to keep it. And far less selfish.”⁸³

Women and girls alike wrote to the federal Children’s Bureau and other agencies asking for assistance, either monetary or advisory. “From its earliest days,” the Children’s Bureau had “concern for children born out of wedlock.”⁸⁴ Unmarried parents became such a social issue that in 1955 the Bureau allocated a full-time specialist to addressing this problem.⁸⁵ This “Specialist on Services to Unmarried Mothers” cooperated “with national voluntary agencies providing maternity home care to unmarried mothers in developing standards and guides for needed services.”⁸⁶ Thus girls could write to the United States Children’s Bureau to acquire information about local services and agencies. Girls wanted to know who could help them in their own town or state. Others pleaded for clothes or money. Some expressed tremendous desperation; several simply asked for more information. Sometimes even mothers wrote on behalf of their minor daughters, asking for help in finding a proper solution or the location of the nearest maternity home. The Children’s Bureau received numerous letters of inquiry after articles were published in national magazines. For instance, when an article on illegitimacy was published in *Personal Romance*, not only did the magazine itself receive letters from readers desperate for the addresses of the nearest maternity homes, but the Children’s Bureau also received significant correspondence. In a letter to Mary Louise Allen of the Florence Crittenton Anchorage, Ursula Gallagher wrote that the Children’s Bureau had received a total of 161 letters from girls throughout the country “requesting

⁸³ Abigail Van Buren, “Wooing Via Windshield,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 23, 1960.

⁸⁴ Children’s Bureau, “Material Prepared for House Appropriations committee for the Record, April 1961,” dated May 19, 1961, page 2, Folder 7-4-0-3, Box 892, Records Group 102, NACP.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

information about facilities or various services” between August 8, 1959 to December 10, 1959 after reading a *True Confessions* story.⁸⁷ Like the Children’s Bureau, other organizations received letters of inquiry after being mentioned in romance magazines. For instance, the National Association on Services to Unmarried Parents “received three hundred letters and many phone calls” after one such acknowledgment in a popular magazine.⁸⁸

In 1948, after publishing an article about maternity home care in *The Woman Magazine*, the author Judy Flander wrote a letter to Katherine F. Lenroot at the Children’s Bureau regarding the significant amount of inquiries her magazine had received in response to the article. Flander stated that “[w]hen so many letters arrived asking where this home was located it brought to light the fact that many girls are not getting help simply because they do not know to whom to turn. And that’s the reason for my article.”⁸⁹ In addition, Maud Morlock, renowned Children’s Bureau specialist, wrote to sociologist Leontine Young in January 1949 regarding Flander’s article as well as a second article published in *Collier’s* in December 1948. Morlock stated that the Children’s Bureau had “a number of requests from unmarried mothers” and the Women’s Service Division in Chicago had “as many ten applications in one day” as a result of the articles. Morlock also reported that those seeking help from the WSD were not only from Chicago but also from Kentucky and Texas. She further added that “[i]n interviewing the girl, they [WSD case workers] have asked what she would have done if she had not seen the article. The reply was that they were at their wit’s end and did not know what to

⁸⁷ Letter to Mary Louise Allen from Ursula Gallagher, December 14, 1959, Folder 7-4-3-1-1, Box 894, Records Group 102, NACP.

⁸⁸ Solinger, 113.

⁸⁹ Letter to Katherine F. Lenroot from Judy Flander, June 4, 1948, Folder 7-4-3-1-4, Box 166, Records Group 102, NACP.

do.”⁹⁰ Articles in national magazines directly influenced young girls and provided them with necessary resources and information.

When the *Chicago Sun-Times* published a series of articles on unmarried mothers in 1950, the director of the Women’s Service Division, Babette Block, complimented the editor on the work and informed him that the agency had already received numerous “application from unmarried mothers as a result of your series.” She also stated that “making facilities known to upset, disturbed young women who often are almost paralyzed from fright and know not where to turn, is a rich contribution toward helping people to a better life adjustment.”⁹¹ In this same letter, Block revealed how the WSD had been “avalanched with applications from unmarried mothers, and with letters from Deans of colleges, physicians, research students, etc. wanting information” when the agency was mentioned in article on the unmarried mother in “magazines such as *Colliers*, *Woman’s Day*, and *Coronet*.”⁹² One can tell from the response to these publications that there was a great demand and need for assistance for unmarried mothers.

As mentioned earlier, some girls sought help from the President himself. These letters were forwarded to the Children’s Bureau where the unwed mother specialists, including Maud Morlock and her associates, answered them. The girls asked the President to help them because they had no one else to turn to. They believed he above all other people could help them. For instance, a letter to President Harry Truman from a seventeen-year-old girl from Warren, Ohio on August 9, 1946 acknowledged his position of authority, stating: “I guess this is just another one of my crazy ideas, but I’m hoping and praying that you will help me. I have read of so many people writing to you

⁹⁰ Letter to Leontine Young from Maud Morlock, January 4, 1949, Folder 7-4-0-7-3, Box 455, Ibid.

⁹¹ Letter to R.J. Finnegan from Babette Block, May 3, 1950, Folder 7-4-0-2, Box 454, Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

personally for help, and you have helped so many.”⁹³ She as well as others realized that he had other more serious problems to handle, but hoped he would spare his time. One girl mentioned her patriotism, citing that she was a “decent young citizen.”⁹⁴ These girls attempted to persuade the president that they were good girls, deserving of his attention.

In the letters received by the Children’s Bureau, the teenagers often referred to themselves as good girls who had made mistakes. Most referred to their situation as being “in trouble.” The girls expressed that they were in need of help, but many stated that they were willing to work to pay for their stays. They were not expecting a free ride—they were willing to work off their “sins.” Almost all of them expressed remorse and regret for their actions. For example, one girl from Springfield, Illinois wrote:

I am going to have a baby and I don’t have a husband. I’m six months along I don’t have any money [or] any one to turn to for help. I don’t know what to do. I hope you can help me. I haven’t been to a doctor yet. I am sixteen and at the present time I’m living with my sister and brother... I know I have made a mistake and believe me I’m sorry. But I realize it’s too late now. I want my baby more than anything in the world. If you can help me please do. You can see what a problem I have. Over and over I study and try to think what I’m going to do[;] please help me.⁹⁵

Several of the girls readily admitted that they were wrong and erred in judgment when engaging in sexual activities with their male partners.

Many girls expressed the need for confidentiality, admitting that their parents did not know of their pregnancies. They hoped their parents would never learn of their condition. Although most were concerned about themselves, their main fears seemed to be the reactions of their parents. One eighteen-year-old girl from New York wrote: “I cannot risk the chance of my family knowing about this mistake until I find out what

⁹³ Letter from Ada Pettay to President Truman, August 9, 1946, Folder 7-4-3-1-4, Box 166, Ibid.

⁹⁴ Letter from Henrietta Brown to President Truman, June 3, 1947, Folder 7-4-3-1-4, Box 166, Ibid.

⁹⁵ Letter from Letha Miller, March 6, 1950, Folder 7-4-3-1-4, Box 457, Ibid.

arrangement I can make about going away and not bringing a scandal on my parents, I'd rather go away if possible and then write them and make some excuse about my leaving. I know it would break my parent's heart when I break the real truth to them."⁹⁶ Her main fear was the response of her parents rather than her health and the future of her offspring. This was not uncommon. Another girl expressed similar worries, confessing: "I have no money and I had rather die than to tell anyone that I am going to have a child, I live in a small town and my folks are very respected people and I don't want to bring them shame."⁹⁷ A nineteen-year-old girl from Merrill, Wisconsin, echoed these sentiments: "As to what to do, I don't know; I know that I can't stay here in this small town because talk will inevitably get around. It won't only be me who will suffer but my mother and dad and kid brother twice as much."⁹⁸ These letters revealed the intense desperation and anxiety suffered by young unmarried girls.

In some of these letters received by the Children's Bureau, girls told stories of betrayal and devastation. One nineteen-year-old girl wrote:

I am a poor girl [but] have a good mother. I got in trouble with a man who promised me a home and a future. After learning I was pregnant he told me he was married[;] he got cruel and refused any further care. He got drunk and came and tried to kill me. I had a good job but as I got large and ashamed. I went to an aunt's in Chicago.⁹⁹

She concluded that she was sorry for her mistake "which has hurt mother," explaining that she was not the "wild type" since she did "not smoke or drink."¹⁰⁰ Some explained that their male partners had deserted them once they found out about the pregnancy.

⁹⁶ Letter from Barbara Armani, October 26, 1949, Folder 7-4-3-1-1, Box 456, Ibid.

⁹⁷ Letter from Audrey Crawford to Leona Baumgartner, October 22, 1949, Folder 7-4-3-1-1 Box 456, Ibid.

⁹⁸ Letter from Frances Kruse to Leona Baumgartner, October 18, 1949, Folder 7-4-3-1-1, Box 456, Ibid.

⁹⁹ Letter from Marna Westerfield to Leona Baumgartner, November 9, 1949, Folder 7-4-3-1-4, Box 457, Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Others, like the author of the letter above, reported that the fathers were actually married and could not help them. In another letter to Ann Landers, a sixteen-year-old girl explained: “I let him have his way because I was in love with him and didn’t want to lose him. When I told him I thought I was in trouble, he said ‘Gee, that’s tough. My dad would kill me if he knew I was mixed up in something like this. You’re on your own, kid. I hope you get along O.K.’”¹⁰¹ This girl had obviously engaged in sexual intercourse because she believed she was with a partner who loved her. Unfortunately, when proven wrong, she was left heartbroken and pregnant, and only she had to suffer the consequences.

MILWAUKEE’S “UNFORTUNATE GIRLS”

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the maternity home movement began in the late 1800s and continued into the 1970s. Because Chicago was a bigger metropolitan area, it had more services available to unwed mothers than Milwaukee. Nonetheless, Milwaukee had two maternity homes, Rosalie Manor and the Martha Washington Home run by the Salvation Army. Milwaukee also had a few social service agencies that handled unwed mother cases. These included the Children’s Service Society of Wisconsin, Lutheran Welfare Society of Wisconsin, Lutheran Children’s Friend Society, Catholic Social Welfare Bureau, Jewish Family and Children’s Service, and Milwaukee County Department of Public Welfare.¹⁰² Like Chicago, Milwaukee offered the help of a

¹⁰¹ Landers, *Ann Landers Talks to Teen-Agers*, 46.

¹⁰² Pamphlet, “How Can You Help An Unmarried Mother,” issued by the Division for Children and Youth, State Department of Public Welfare, Madison, Wisconsin, 1952, Folder on Unwed Mothers and Their Children 1941-1952, Box 37, United Community Services of Greater Milwaukee, Records 1903-1965, Milwaukee Manuscript Collection BG, Archives Department, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.

social worker to assist unwed mothers with “housing, medical care, confinement, financial assistance, relationships with her own family, temporary boarding care, care for child in her own home” as well as adoptive placement, temporary boarding care, or other forms of care for their babies.¹⁰³

Rosalie Cadron-Jette, a fifty-year-old Canadian widow, created the order of Misericordia Sisters in 1848 to aid unwed pregnant women. In 1908, two of the sisters traveled to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where they opened Rosalie Manor, a home for unwed mothers. This eventually became a six-bed maternity hospital. The home was originally located at 22nd and Juneau, but later moved to 22nd and Kilbourn. In 1969, the Misericordia Sisters bought land in Brookfield, Wisconsin (a suburb of Milwaukee), where Elmbrook Memorial Hospital is now located. The residential and outpatient program for unwed mothers continued there until 1984 when, in response to changing needs and the development of new programs to better serve this clientele, Rosalie Manor Community and Family Services moved to its current location on West Burleigh Street in Milwaukee.¹⁰⁴

Throughout the middle of the twentieth century, Rosalie Manor continued to care for unwed mothers. Here nuns and social workers conducted entrance interviews with their new clients. The administrators filled out cards for each of the girls, listing her

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Rosalie Manor website, http://www.rosaliemanor.org/about_us/history.html. In 2010, Rosalie Manor officially disassociated from the Catholic Church. This was primarily over the agency’s desire to include sex education in their programs, rather than focus on abstinence-only education. Rosalie Manor administered the Families United to Prevent Teen Pregnancy program from Fall 1998 to Fall 2001. The U.S. Congress hired Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. to evaluate the effectiveness of this abstinence-only education after-school program. The study’s findings revealed that those teens who received the abstinence-only education were just as likely as those who did not participate in the program to engage in premarital sex. Simply stated, the program was proven to be ineffective. Similar research was conducted in Miami and two rural areas, Powhatan, Virginia and Clarksdale, Mississippi. These areas had similar results. See Dani McClain, “Program Shows Little Effect,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, April 16, 2007.

name, address, age, occupation, religion, nationality, race, marital status, parents' names, and information about the putative father. The bottom section of the card was filled out after the baby was born with the baby's name, date of birth, and the agency handling the newborn. Although some residential maternity homes offered care for the infants, Rosalie Manor did not. These client cards were usually not filled out completely. Often many cards contained blanks, especially regarding information about the fathers. There are many reasons to explain this, mostly regarding the girls' desire for confidentiality. Even if the girl provided this information, she could have easily given a false identity. As discussed earlier, the shame associated with unwed pregnancy often put girls in difficult situations in which they would be hesitant to give away personal identification for fear that someone they knew would learn of their secrets.

Even though there are some technical issues with the cards, significant information can be discerned. The information that follows is derived from the client cards of girls under twenty years of age who registered at Rosalie Manors during the years 1946 to 1964. From this limited information, a more detailed picture of the young unwed mother emerges. The number of teenaged girls at Rosalie Manor increased as the years went on. In fact, the teenaged clientele almost tripled between 1946 and 1964. This reflects national trends of the period. At Rosalie Manor, the young unwed mothers tended to be older teenagers, usually between seventeen and nineteen years of age. Although girls as young as twelve and thirteen stayed at the home, they were not the majority. In fact, the average age of the teenaged girls at Rosalie in the postwar decades was 17.4 years old.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ The author acquired the client cards from Rosalie Manor with permission from the agency. The names of the girls were redacted.

Number of Teenaged Girls at Rosalie Manor, 1946-1964	
YEAR	NUMBER OF GIRLS
1946	46
1947	59
1948	61
1949	56
1950	68
1951	61
1952	37
1953	80
1954	82
1955	92
1956	79
1957	71
1958	88
1959	95
1960	114
1961	106
1962	100
1963	98
1964	119

Source: Rosalie Manor Client Cards, 1946-1964

AVERAGE AGE OF TEENAGED GIRLS AT ROSALIE MANOR, 1946- 1964	
YEAR	AGE
1946	17.8
1947	17.5
1948	17.7
1949	17.5
1950	17.5
1951	17.4
1952	17.6
1953	17.4
1954	17.2
1955	17.5
1956	17.3
1957	17.1
1958	17.2
1959	17.2
1960	17.4
1961	17.5
1962	17.4
1963	17.3
1964	17.5
Average	17.4

Source: Rosalie Manor Client Cards, 1946-1964

A majority of the girls at Rosalie Manor were Roman Catholic, which would be expected for a Catholic organization. Non-Catholic girls would be more likely to receive aid in planning for their babies from an agency sponsored by their own religion or from a non-sectarian agency. For instance, the Lutheran Children's Friend Society and the Lutheran Welfare Society assisted Lutheran clients. Among the non-Catholic denominations, Lutheran was the most frequently listed religion after Catholicism at Rosalie Manor.

RELIGION OF TEENAGED CLIENTS AT ROSALIE MANOR, 1946-1964		
YEAR	CATHOLIC	NON-CATHOLIC
1946	33	13
1947	41	17
1948	49	11
1949	49	7
1950	58	8
1951	51	10
1952	30	7
1953	63	15
1954	74	8
1955	76	11
1956	70	9
1957	66	4
1958	76	11
1959	80	13
1960	101	11
1961	100	5
1962	78	19
1963	82	15
1964	109	9

Source: Rosalie Manor Client Cards, 1946-1964

The majority of the clients were white. This was also an accurate reflection of the time period. Not only were white girls more likely to patronize maternity homes across the nation in general, but also at this time in Milwaukee history, the African American population was not very large. In 1950, there were only 21,772 African Americans in Milwaukee, comprising 3.4% of the total population.¹⁰⁶ Although the black population continued to grow, as late as 1960, Milwaukee had the third lowest percentage of African Americans among the twenty-five largest cities in America.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, services offered to African American girls would be significantly fewer. Of the African American girls at Rosalie Manor (who were listed as “Black” or “Negro” on the client

¹⁰⁶ John McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 196.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 195.

cards), most were Catholic. Those who were not Catholic were either Baptist or Methodist.

Race of Teenaged Girls at Rosalie Manor 1946-1964			
YEAR	BLACK	WHITE	OTHER
1946	1	44	0
1947	4	55	0
1948	3	58	0
1949	3	52	0
1950	3	63	1
1951	1	58	1
1952	3	33	0
1953	3	77	0
1954	0	81	0
1955	1	87	2
1956	6	73	0
1957	2	67	0
1958	2	83	0
1959	1	90	0
1960	2	111	0
1961	0	104	0
1962	1	96	2
1963	1	97	0
1964	2	114	2

Source: Rosalie Manor Client Cards, 1946-1964

The girls were also asked to list their nationality. Most girls were of some German, Irish, or Polish heritage, again an accurate reflection of the larger Milwaukee population between the 1940s and 1960s. In the 1950s, more girls started to list their nationality as American. By 1964, 44 of the 118 girls who listed their nationality on the client cards stated “American” was their nationality. (Interestingly, between 1946 and 1964, on most of their client cards African Americans left the nationality section blank.)

MOST COMMON NATIONALITIES OF TEENAGED GIRLS AT ROSALIE MANOR, 1946-1964					
YEAR	GERMAN	IRISH	POLISH	AMERICAN	TOTAL
1946	17	2	2	0	45
1947	11	2	4	0	54
1948	20	2	5	0	58
1949	17	6	3	2	55
1950	19	4	6	11	68
1951	11	3	9	4	61
1952	7	3	2	7	36
1953	16	2	8	15	76
1954	17	0	5	17	78
1955	20	3	9	17	87
1956	11	1	4	4	72
1957	13	2	8	8	68
1958	18	4	8	10	86
1959	20	6	5	26	92
1960	21	3	11	21	111
1961	19	2	7	34	103
1962	12	2	9	19	99
1963	20	5	6	23	98
1964	11	7	8	44	118

Source: Rosalie Manor Client cards, 1946-1964

The girls listed a variety of occupations including but not limited to: waitress, operator, student, office work, store clerk, housework, factory, bookkeeper, and nurse's aid. Between 1946 and 1964, the most common occupation was student. Because these girls were so young, they would most likely still be attending high school or a vocational school. Those who were not in school worked in the typical low-income, female positions of the time period: office work, clerical positions, waitress, factory, and domestic work.

OCCUPATION OF TEENAGED GIRLS AT ROSALIE MANOR, 1946-1964		
YEAR	STUDENT	TOTAL GIRLS
1946	33	71
1947	23	57
1948	23	61
1949	25	55
1950	20	65
1951	20	56
1952	11	34
1953	25	70
1954	28	76
1955	34	81
1956	33	71
1957	39	65
1958	45	76
1959	47	83
1960	51	105
1961	35	71
1962	41	81
1963	39	73
1964	41	83

Source: Rosalie Manor Client Cards, 1946-1964

THE MALE SEXUAL PARTNERS

Although information regarding the putative fathers rarely showed up on the client cards, some girls did list the age and occupation of their partners. Information besides age, occupation, name, and address was almost never written down on the Rosalie cards. Thus we can only discern a few insights about the fathers. Some girls simply wrote unknown on that section of the card. What we can tell about the putative fathers is that were usually older than their female companions, but only by a few years. While the average age of the teenaged unwed mother at Rosalie Manor between 1946 and 1964 was seventeen years old, the average age of the putative fathers was twenty-one years old. Nonetheless, on average, the male partners of the teenaged girls were not

teenagers themselves. This remains the same today. In addition, there were a few cases each year in which the age gap would be quite disturbing by today's standards. For instance, in 1957, a sixteen-year-old girl named a forty-seven-year-old male as her partner, and in 1955, a thirteen-year-old girl stated that a fifty-eight-year-old man had impregnated her. These situations would be disconcerting then as they are today.

AVERAGE AGE OF PUTATIVE FATHERS, 1946-1964	
YEAR	AGE
1946	22.9
1947	22.3
1948	21.7
1949	21.2
1950	21.1
1951	21.7
1952	20.3
1953	21.6
1954	21.1
1955	22.5
1956	21.7
1957	21.6
1958	20.4
1959	20.2
1960	20.4
1961	20.8
1962	19.6
1963	20.4
1964	20.1
AVERAGE	21.1

Source: Rosalie Manor Client Cards, 1946-1964

On some cards, the girls simply stated that the putative father was dead or had been killed in a war. Because the United States engaged in wars with Korea and Vietnam during the years of this study, this could be a viable occurrence. Indeed, many of the girls listed the various branches of the armed forces as the occupation of their male

partners. In fact, serviceman (Army, Marines, Air Force, Navy) was the *most frequently* listed occupation for the putative father throughout 1946 and 1964. This is most likely connected to the fact that Milwaukee was in close proximity to the Great Lakes Naval Center and had been seen as a leave town during World War II. The base maintained that reputation even after the war. Other common occupations of the putative fathers included truck driver, farmer, student, and factory worker.

In several Rosalie Manor cases, the girls noted that their partners were married men. Thus, even though the girls were labeled unwed mothers, the men were not necessarily unmarried fathers. These girls probably knew of the men's marital status but engaged in sexual relations anyway. According to family life specialist Evelyn Millis Duvall, "falling in love with a married man" was "not at all uncommon, especially among teen-age girls." She claimed married men were attractive because they were "so much more grown up and excitingly mature" in comparison to the "childish and silly" boys a girl's own age. Duvall claimed married men could be "hungry-hearted" and seek attention from young girls. She further warned that the girl would be blamed for any affair with a married man. A girl who "wants to punish herself will find that getting involved with a married man is a sure way of doing it."¹⁰⁸ Other times, the men were older and divorced. Marital status did not seem to deter the young girl.

Among Rosalie Manor clients, incest was also evident. These girls tended to be younger. One example included a thirteen-year-old girl who was in seventh grade at the time. Her thirty-six-year-old father, a dentist, had impregnated her. In 1962, a white, Catholic seventeen-year-old girl from Sauk County, Wisconsin came to Rosalie Manor and listed her biological father as the putative father of her unborn child. Incest was not

¹⁰⁸ Duvall, 237.

uncommon in sex delinquency cases. Although these girls were technically victims of their relatives' crimes, they were the ones who ended up in industrial schools or maternity homes, not the male participants. The girls were treated like damaged goods, their prized virginity taken away, leaving them at risk to engage in further sexual relations with their relatives or to partake in a life of promiscuity with other men. Often times, the girl's role in the act of incest was questioned; some authorities claimed the girl was a liar. Family "experts" in the 1950s claimed that incest was a "one-in-a-million occurrence." Some psychiatrists even conveyed that "women who reported incest were simply expressing their Oedipal fantasies."¹⁰⁹

The case files of the Wisconsin School for Girls (WSG), the state industrial school to which delinquent girls were sent, reveal the contrary. According to these files, uncles, cousins, brothers, fathers, and stepfathers engaged in sexual acts with these girls. However, the family was quick to deny allegations even when confronted with significant evidence. Most of the time, the male relative was not prosecuted. When incest occurred among siblings, the parents attempted to protect both children. Often denying the allegations when the girl told authorities, parents rarely punished their male offspring. Instead, these acts of incest often negatively influenced the girls' behavior. Among the girls, incest usually prompted further delinquent behavior. This was the case with Mary, a fourteen-year-old, Italian, Catholic girl who was sent to WSG for incorrigibility in 1953. She claimed that her twenty-four-year-old brother forced her to have sexual relations with him. Consequently, she left home and "roamed the streets" until she met

¹⁰⁹ Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, A History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 241.

another girl who took her to Chicago and “introduced her to numerous men.”¹¹⁰ Marie reported that when she returned home, she did tell her mother of her brother’s advances, but her mother did not believe her.¹¹¹

AFTER DELIVERY

According to the limited records at Rosalie Manor, the future of the babies was determined by an outside agency. Because a majority of these girls were Catholic, the Catholic Welfare Bureau in different Wisconsin cities such as La Crosse, Madison, and Superior or the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau in Milwaukee were placed in charge of handling adoptions or foster care. If the girl was Lutheran, the Lutheran Children’s Friend Society usually took care of the plans. The Jewish Family and Children’s Society helped the Jewish cases. The Children’s Service Society of Wisconsin handled the girls who preferred a non-sectarian agency. If the girls were technically wards of the state, their babies would fall under the auspices of the Milwaukee County Public Welfare Department.

For some girls, there was no decision regarding the future of their babies as sometimes the babies were stillborn or died shortly after birth because they were premature. Some of these young girls failed to receive medical attention during their pregnancies, so the risk of having a stillborn or premature baby could be quite high. For girls who kept their babies, sometimes they were not able to take the baby home right away. In some situations, the baby could be placed in foster care until the mother could care for him/her. In other situations, the mother’s family took the child home. At

¹¹⁰ Case File 6404, Box 160, Wisconsin School for Girls: Inactive Case Files, 1875-1959, Series 311, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Rosalie Manor, if the client kept her infant, it was not unusual for both to go home with a sister, aunt, or other female relative. For those who chose adoption, the baby would then be put under the authority of another agency. After giving the baby up for adoption or placing it in foster care, many of the young women either returned home to their parents or went to live with another female family member such as an aunt, grandmother, or sister. According to a paper presented by Lola A. Bowman, Director of Casework at the Children's Service Society of Wisconsin, at the National Conference on Social Welfare on May 13, 1958: "in most instances, the minor unmarried mother return[ed] to her own family after the birth of her baby...."¹¹² The success of the girl's re-adjustment then depended "not only on the extent of self-understanding and desire for change the girl ha[d] achieved but also on the extent to which parental attitudes and handling have been modified."¹¹³ How easily the girl transitioned back into "regular" society determined the level of "success" of the agency.

These youngsters who surrendered their babies were then expected to go back into society as if nothing had happened. They were supposed to continue their schooling or careers as scheduled and eventually find the "right" man to marry. The hope was that they could return back to society and follow its sexual norms. The girls were expected to get married and start families in the proper order. And, indeed, sometimes this did happen. Former clients sent letters to the homes after their departure, praising the work of the home. The Salvation Army home in Milwaukee, known as the Martha Washington Home, received several such letters. This correspondence often stressed the religious

¹¹² Lola A. Bowman, "Community Planning for Unmarried Mothers," paper presented at National Conference on Social Welfare, Chicago, Illinois, May 13, 1958, pg. 3. Folder 6, Box 1, Louise Cottrell Collection, UIC.

¹¹³ Ibid.

influence of the home on their lives. One girl wrote “I am grateful for everything that was done for me in the home but I believe it was the spiritual help I appreciated most. I never prayed before I came to the Home. Now I pray for you all everynight.”¹¹⁴ The girl had clearly gained some version of faith and was grateful for her new outlook on life.

Another girl shared her feelings toward conversion, stating:

I was a soul winner for the Lord at one time—then this terrible mistake. I had no spiritual life after that. My soul was hungry and I felt very much alone. It was so good to be in your little chapel and hear the Word. I can’t tell you what you have done for me spiritually. You have helped me to get back to the Lord and I can’t thank you enough.¹¹⁵

These letters are proof that not all girls looked back at their time in the maternity home with bitterness. In some cases, the maternity home achieved its goal of rehabilitation and release.

Other girls were not as lucky. In her memoir/expose, photojournalist Ann Fessler reveals the deep pain girls felt in relinquishing their babies for adoption. For girls who were basically forced into surrendering their babies to adoption, they lived with the remorse, guilt, and shame of their pregnancies. Fessler described the major impact of this decision on the girls’ lives:

Surrendering a child for adoption has been described by many of the women I interviewed as the event that defined their identity and therefore influenced every major decision they made thereafter. Since most of these girls surrendered when they were between the ages of sixteen and twenty-three, the event shaped their entire adult lives.¹¹⁶

Some of these girls suffered from such extremes of anger, guilt, and depression that they were never fully able to move on from the experience. Others found it difficult to form healthy relationships with men. Some resented their families for being so unaccepting of

¹¹⁴ Untitled Document, dated 1953, Salvation Army National Archives, Alexandria, Virginia.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Fessler, 207.

their pregnancies and offspring. Others hated themselves for not only getting pregnant but also then giving up their babies or not fighting hard enough to keep them.¹¹⁷ Fessler argued that adoption was particularly devastating at this time because there were no resources out there to help these young women cope—they had no “proper guidance or counseling.”¹¹⁸ Thus many of the girls who went away to maternity homes and surrendered their babies felt the repercussions of their actions long after they were “released” back into society.

CONCLUSION

Teenage pregnancy was a significant fear among sexually active youth in the 1940s and 1950s. Pregnancy was tangible proof of sin, not only according to the church but also society at large. Consequently, youth who chose to defy these rules faced serious consequences, including ostracism and isolation. How the girls reacted to their situations reveals their limited opportunities to demonstrate personal agency. Although a girl could have made the decision to engage in premarital sexual activity for a variety of reasons including love, lust, or curiosity, when it came to determining on the fate of her child, most often the decision regarding their babies’ futures was not their own. Rather parents, clergy, social agencies, and the public media placed pressure on the young, white, unwed mother to relinquish her child and then re-enter society in order to become a wife and mother in a respectable manner. For the young unwed mothers, this decision was not that simple.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 188.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 210.

Girls actively sought advice and assistance. Openly expressing their desperation in letters to doctors, magazine authors, the United States Children's Bureau, and even the President of the United States, these young unmarried mothers realized the severity of their situations. Most felt they could not turn to their families or local community for support due to the shame and stigma attached to unwed pregnancies. Instead they looked to national and local resources for assistance. Nonetheless, the simple fact that these girls sought to fix their own situations is noteworthy. In a society where they were condemned and humiliated, they begged for refuge to people they did not even know; they had faith that their country would be able to help them.

Rosalie Manor was only one of hundreds of maternity homes open to young white girls in the long 1950s. By examining the clientele, one gains a better sense of the actual constituency of these agencies. The girls came from a variety of backgrounds, proving that stereotypical molds were difficult to form. Although the stories of these girls are an invaluable missing piece, much can be determined from their demographics. Despite the stereotypes that had previously painted unwed mothers as uneducated, poor, even mentally deficient, and "loose" women, the client cards and demographic information present a vastly different image. The unwed mother of the long 1950s could be your next-door neighbor, your daughter, or your classmate, a fact that both perplexed and terrified society.

CONCLUSION FROM MATERNITY HOMES TO *TEEN MOM*

A young white boy no more than sixteen years of age stands in a normal neighborhood setting wearing boxers and jeans. He appears to be a normal adolescent male until one looks at his stomach. His stomach is bare, fully exposing a pregnant belly. The caption reads: "It shouldn't be any less disturbing when it's a teenage girl."¹ This advertisement, which could be found on the sides of buses, billboards, and bus shelters throughout Milwaukee first premiered as part of the United Way of Greater Milwaukee's task force on teenage pregnancy in 2007. Along with radio spots and other visual images featured throughout Milwaukee, these advertisements address an issue that is not new to the city. Milwaukee currently has one of the highest teen birth rates in the nation. Ranking sixth among the fifty largest United States cities, Milwaukee surpasses Atlanta, Chicago, Kansas City, and Los Angeles. After releasing a report deeming teen pregnancy in Milwaukee a "crisis," the United Way of Greater Milwaukee formed the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Oversight Committee to address the needs of the community and established methods to "break the cycle of poverty" to which teen pregnancy is a major contributor.² The committee is also in charge of enforcing the report's nine recommendations which aim to significantly reduce the amount of births to teens in Milwaukee. Betsy Brenner, co-chair of the United Way Committee on Teen Pregnancy,

¹ Jennifer Batog, "United Way Continues Campaign to Reduce Milwaukee's Teen Births," *Business Journal of Milwaukee*, April 24, 2007,

<http://www.bizjournals.com/milwaukee/stories/2007/04/23/daily19.html>. For a copy of the discussed advertisement, see the One Milwaukee's website, created by SERVE for United Way of Greater Milwaukee, http://www.onemilwaukee.org/onemke_site.htm, accessed on October 29, 2007.

² *If Truth Be Told... Teen Pregnancy, Public Health, and the Cycle of Poverty*, Report on Teen Pregnancy Prevention (Milwaukee: United Way of Greater Milwaukee, 2006) Available at http://www.unitedwaymilwaukee.org/PDFs/UWGM_teenpregreport.pdf.

commented that teen pregnancy is “insidious,” that “this is a battle that will take a very long time in Milwaukee.”³

Brenner is right, but she fails to acknowledge the fact that Milwaukee has been battling teen pregnancy throughout the twentieth century. Even in the early 1900s, baby farms, where unwed mothers would pay someone to take their babies, were established within city limits and the fear of a white slave market captured newspaper headlines.⁴

Later, an introduction to a report on the unwed mother and her child, given by the Committee on Unwed Mothers and Their Children in January 1953, also reflected this idea. Entitled “Not a New Problem,” the report explained that “the problems connected with unwed parenthood have been of concern to people for ages.”⁵ However, although a constant concern, unwed school-age mothers have been seemingly invisible to society.

These young girls were purposefully hidden from society for most of the century.

Whether sent to maternity homes or to a relative’s house, the unwed school-age mother

³ Batog. In 2008, Milwaukee ranked number two in the nation for cities with the highest teen pregnancy rates. Meanwhile, the state of Wisconsin fell to the bottom on a list of states with the highest teen pregnancy. Studies revealed that Milwaukee’s teen pregnancy rates were directly tied to the city’s African American population. Further investigation revealed that a majority of these teen pregnancies resulted from statutory rape. In response, the United Way of Greater Milwaukee launched a campaign to reduce teen birthrate by forty-six percent by 2015. This campaign has attracted national attention with its controversial public service announcements, ranging from Disney-esque princesses talking about rape to the aforementioned photos of pregnant boys. These bold and somewhat disconcerting advertisements were meant to spark reaction and attract attention. See Karen Herzog, “Teen Pregnancy Campaign Scrapped Over Copyright Issue,” *JS Online*, May 3, 2011, <http://www.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/121166363.html>.

⁴ See articles such as “Girls Robbed at the Farms,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 12, 1903; “Baby Farmers are Trembling,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 13, 1903; “Police Probe ‘Baby Farm,’” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 8, 1925; “Girl to Expose White Slavery,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 11, 1935; and “White Slavery Returns,” *Milwaukee Journal*, August 18, 1936. Baby farms were a means for which unwed mothers could get rid of their illegitimate children. Baby farmers often took in babies for five to ten dollars. They would then sell these babies or raise them to become workers. Baby farms were most popular around the turn of the century. This practice would change drastically in the 1940s and 1950s when unwed mothers could sell their babies on the black market for thousands of dollars in contrast to paying baby farmers to take their babies. See Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 169.

⁵ Report on The Unwed Mother and Her Child from the Committee on Unwed Mothers and Their Children, January 29, 1953, Folder on Unwed Mothers and the Children January 1953-July 1954, Box 37, United Community Services of Greater Milwaukee, Records 1903-1965, Milwaukee Manuscript Collection BG, Archives Department, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.

rarely stayed within the public's sight during her pregnancy. Teen pregnancy was then concealed out of shame and humiliation, especially in the 1940s and 1950s, until it gradually entered the public arena in the 1960s and 1970s, setting the stage for the "battle" that exists today.

CHANGING PATTERNS IN SEX AND FAMILY

Numerous changes occurred in regards to family structure and life cycles in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. In turn, these adjustments influenced the sexual behavior of Americans. Historians John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman argue that it was during this time that life cycles "became considerably more complex and unpredictable."⁶ For instance, the marriage rate declined by a quarter between 1960 and 1980 while the median age of marriage increased for both sexes.⁷ Women had more control over their fertility due to the legal distribution of oral contraceptives after 1963. In addition, divorce rates began to rise in the mid-1960s. According to D'Emilio and Freedman, the divorce rate skyrocketed between 1960 and 1980, jumping ninety percent.⁸ These changes contributed to "a major shift in sexual behavior and attitudes."⁹

In the 1950s, polls revealed that "fewer than a quarter of Americans endorsed premarital sex for men women."¹⁰ These figures had been reversed by the 1970s. From the mid-1960s onward, sexual activity among "white females zoomed upward, narrowing substantially disparity in experience between them and their male peers."¹¹ In addition,

⁶ John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 330.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 331.

⁹ Ibid., 333.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 334.

sexual experience started at a younger age. One study cited that “the proportion of women aged fifteen to nineteen who reported having sexual intercourse rose from an estimated 33 percent in 1970 to 46 percent in the early 1980s.”¹² Experts linked this rise in adolescent premarital sexual activity to “the general easing of public attitudes” about sex.¹³ Sociologist Kristen Luker has pointed out that sheer fact that people began to collect evidence on teenage premarital sexual activity in the 1970s but not earlier is in “itself significant.”¹⁴

Early childbearing began to cause widespread concern in the 1960s due to a variety of social factors. For instance, there was an “expanding pool of young women who were available to bear children” as the baby boomers entered adolescence in the 1960s.¹⁵ Because there were more teenagers in general and more school-age mothers in fact, more attention was paid to the issue. In addition, there was a fear of overpopulation starting in the 1960s. Consequently, organizations to assist family planning were created to help prevent “unintended and unwanted births.”¹⁶ As was pointed out earlier in this dissertation, 1957 was the peak year for teenage pregnancies. This fact was not as alarming to contemporaries because many of these pregnancies were occurring among married teenagers. Through the 1960s, changes that had occurred in the postwar decades with regard to American sexual activity continued. However, the marital trends among teenagers did not. Thus “at the same time that premarital sex was becoming more prevalent and more accepted, the appeal of early marriage was diminishing among

¹² Mark F. Testa, “Introduction,” in Margaret K. Rosenheim and Mark F. Testa, eds. *Early Parenthood and Coming of Age in the 1990s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1992), 5.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Kristen Luker, *Dubious Conceptions: The Politics of Teenage Pregnancy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 62.

¹⁵ Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., *Unplanned Parenthood: The Social Consequences of Teenage Childbearing* (New York: The Free Press, 1976), 9.

¹⁶ Ibid.

youth.”¹⁷ It then appears that more teenage couples were deciding *not* to marry solely on the account of out-of-wedlock pregnancy. This marked a change from earlier generations. It was this trend in the 1960s that then led to adolescent parenthood being increasingly “equated with unwed parenthood.”¹⁸ In the late 1960s, publications by government researchers and demographers linked illegitimate pregnancy among teenagers to “a host of social and economic ills.”¹⁹ This “concern over unplanned childbearing and its relationship to poverty inevitably prompted a series of intervention efforts.”²⁰ Experts then saw a change in the general population’s attitude toward access to birth control for teenagers. According to Frank Furstenberg, Jr., “[b]y the early seventies, a majority of Americans said they favored the provision of contraception to teenagers who requested it.”²¹ More services and programs appeared in the early 1970s to assist school-age mothers. This generated more public attention, and solidified teenage pregnancy and teenage pregnancy as social problems.

THE “EPIDEMIC” OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY

In 1976, the Alan Guttmacher Institute published its “landmark report,” *11 Million Teenagers: What Can Be Done about the Epidemic of Adolescent Pregnancies in the United States*.²² The title of the report encouraged fear and exaggeration, and marked the first time the term “epidemic” was publicly used to describe teenage

¹⁷ Ibid., 10.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 11.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Testa, 6. See Alan Guttmacher Institute, *11 Million Teenagers: What Can Be Done about the Epidemic of Adolescent Pregnancies in the United States* (New York: Planned Parenthood Federation of America, 1976). This report situated the epidemic is one of white teens. Wanda S. Pillow, *Unfit Subjects: Educational Policy and the Teen Mother* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004), 28.

pregnancy. Indeed, the term “teen pregnancy” itself was first coined in the 1970s to describe the consequences of the “inappropriate sexual behavior of unmarried girls younger than twenty.”²³ The term first appeared in the 1970s in several government documents. “Politicians, government officials, birth control advocates, educators, and others” used the term “epidemic” to describe the teenage pregnancy rates, even though these rates had been higher in the 1950s than they were in the 1970s. In fact, between 1955 and 1977, this rate had dropped 44.8 percent.²⁴

Fears of an “epidemic” can be attributed to the fact that teen pregnancy rates were rising among white teens, four times more rapidly than among black teens. In addition, these girls in the 1970s were not married, nor were they planning on marrying the putative fathers for the most part. During the 1970s, “rates of nonmarital childbearing rose steadily, while rates of marital childbearing among adolescents declined.”²⁵ In the eyes of the general public, the most disturbing element of this rise was that significant increase of nonmarital birth rates among white girls. It rose by 74 percent between 1970 and 1984.²⁶ Furthermore, students were gaining more access to sex education, birth control, and abortion; parents felt they were losing control over their teens.²⁷ The phrase “teen pregnancy” has since become “symbolically linked with the economic and moral character of United States society.” Education specialist Wanda Pillow argues that the

²³ Rickie Solinger, “Teen Pregnancy,” in *Girlhood in America: An Encyclopedia*, Vol 2 edited by Miriam Forman-Brunell (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2001), 645.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 649.

²⁵ Susan E. Harari and Maris A. Vinovskis, “Adolescent Sexuality, Pregnancy, and Childbearing in the Past,” in *The Politics of Pregnancy*, eds. Annette Lawson and Deborah L. Rhode (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 38.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Solinger in *Girlhood*, 650.

“problem of teen pregnancy, even in its short history, has been defined differently at precise moments for varying political and social needs.”²⁸

The 1970s was an exciting and important time for teenagers, as their rights became legal issues. With these federal actions came fierce debates and immense data and media coverage. The sexual behavior of teenagers was thoroughly investigated and made public via studies and statistical analysis. Although married adolescents had gained the right to use contraceptives in the Supreme Court’s *Griswold v. Connecticut* decision in 1965, the rights of unmarried teenagers, especially those under age eighteen, remained uncertain.²⁹ The legal system debated whether or not teenagers had a legal right to contraception. In the 1970s, Supreme Court decisions and federal laws guaranteed teenagers’ reproductive rights. For instance, in the 1971 decision *Ordway v. Hargraves*, a Massachusetts court granted girls attending public school the right to *not* be expelled from school because of pregnancy.³⁰ Also in 1972, *Eisenstadt v. Baird* made it legal for unmarried persons to have access to birth control.³¹ In 1977, this right was extended to unmarried minors in *Casey v. Population Services International*. This case declared a New York State law which restricted the sale of over-the-counter contraceptives for people under the age of sixteen unconstitutional.³² One of the most famous Supreme Court cases, one that continues to be debated today, *Roe v. Wade*, legalized abortion for all women including teenagers in 1973. These decisions were not made solely on the behalf of women’s rights but rather on the fact that these unmarried or unplanned

²⁸ Pillow, 18.

²⁹ Luker, 65. It is important to remember that the Twenty-Sixth Amendment was not ratified until 1971. Consequently, in the 1960s, the age of legal adulthood had been twenty-one in most states. By the 1970s, states were in the process of altering laws to correspond with a new age of majority.

³⁰ Rickie Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 237.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Luker, 68.

pregnancies were causing financial burdens for both the individual and society. In other words, there were political and economic motivations behind these actions.

During this same time period, reflecting similar concerns about teenage pregnancy and its impact on greater society, Congress passed acts to help mitigate the problem. Congress enacted Title X of the Public Health Service Act in 1970. This provided federal grants to family planning programs and other preventative health services. Congress amended Title X in 1977, requiring family planning clinics to serve teenagers for free and without parental notification.³³ During the 1960s and 1970s, Congress and the Supreme Court appeared to be acknowledging the sexual activities of adolescents by offering them access to health services and contraception.

According to sociologist Kristen Luker, the term “teen pregnancy” came into existence when Democratic Senator Edward Kennedy proposed his National School-Age Mother and Child Health Act in 1975.³⁴ During hearings related to this legislation, “school-age mothers” were identified as a special group worthy of national attention. Although the proposal did not pass, these hearings propelled teenagers into the public limelight. Teen pregnancy began to be linked as a cause of poverty. In addition, the national debate over abortion helped fuel the significance of teen pregnancy prevention. During Democratic President Jimmy Carter’s administration, Kennedy once again proposed legislation—the Adolescent Health, Services, and Pregnancy Prevention and Care Act—which passed in 1978.³⁵ This act helped fund family planning programs and sought to provide services to pregnant adolescents. It also created the federal Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs (OAPP).

³³ Ibid., 69.

³⁴ Ibid., 71.

³⁵ Ibid., 72.

These newly acquired rights were not without criticism. As historian Rickie Solinger has written, teenage girls became seen as “threatening emblems of sexual and reproductive insubordination.”³⁶ Although much was accomplished in the 1970s, there was also backlash in the 1980s when conservatives gained power under Republican President Ronald Reagan. While the experts and politicians of the 1970s had seen “more contraception and sex education” as the solution to teen pregnancy, those of the 1980s focused on chastity.³⁷ Reagan’s administration then worked to “re-stigmatize and politicize teenage pregnancy and limit the options and benefits available to pregnant teenage girls.”³⁸ In addition, his administration and New Right politicians associated teen pregnancy with the black community, even though the black teen pregnancy rates continued to fall in relation to white rates. In the 1980s, policymakers embraced abstinence-only education, a reversal of the previous decades. For instance, the Adolescent Family Life Act superseded Kennedy’s Adolescent Health, Services, and Pregnancy Prevention and Care Act in 1981. The Adolescent Family Life Act became known as “the chastity bill” since it required government-funded programs to discourage teenage sex and abortion while praising adoption as an appropriate solution to teenage pregnancy.³⁹ In addition, new policies cut federal support for a number of programs that assisted pregnant teens. Whereas in the 1970s, teen pregnancy had been seen as a result of insufficient access to birth control and abortion, in the 1980s it became allegedly the

³⁶ Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power*, 238.

³⁷ Luker, 76.

³⁸ Solinger, “Teen Pregnancy,” 650.

³⁹ Solinger, *Pregnancy and Power*, 240.

consequence of sexual permissiveness, welfare programs, and weak cultural values among minorities.⁴⁰

Based on the amount of media and public attention devoted to teen pregnancy in the 1970s and 1980s, one might assume that the births to teenagers had increased rapidly. In reality, the births to teenagers actually declined.⁴¹ It is important to remember that teen pregnancy peaked in 1957 when the rate of teenage childbearing was 97.3 births per 1,000 women ages 15 to 19. This declined to 52.8 births per 1,000 women ages 15 to 19 in 1977 and 51.7 births in 1983.⁴² Another significant change was the rise in the number of female teenagers ages 15 to 19. This population increased by 58.1 percent between 1960 and 1977.⁴³ However, the difference between birth rates in 1957 and 1977 is that most of those in 1957 occurred within marriage while those in 1977 were out-of-wedlock births. From 1960 to 1977, the birth rate among unmarried girls ages 15 to 19 increased by 64.0 percent.⁴⁴ One scholar concluded that “the great increase in out-of-wedlock births among teenagers [was] the result of an increase in premarital conceptions and a corresponding decrease in marriages.⁴⁵ In addition, more of these girls were keeping their babies. By 1988, “almost 90 percent of all out-of-wedlock births [were] kept by the mother.”⁴⁶ The major difference between girls in the past and pregnant teens today, as Luker points out, is that “these days very few teens give up their children for adoption, and relatively few get married in order to make their babies ‘legal’—the two really

⁴⁰ Solinger, “Teen Pregnancy,” 650.

⁴¹ Luker, 81.

⁴² Maris A. Vinovskis, *An “Epidemic” of Adolescent Pregnancy?: Some Historical and Policy Considerations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 25.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

notable revolutions in this area of American life.”⁴⁷ Luker further argues that in the 1970s and 1980s, “pregnant teenagers made a convenient lightning rod for the anxieties and tensions in Americans’ lives.”⁴⁸ The same could be said about those in the 1940s and 1950s.

SCHOOLS AND MATERNITY HOMES

Schooling has always been particularly challenging for pregnant teenage girls. The federal Children’s Bureau conducted a survey in 1968 which revealed that “more than two-thirds of the nation’s school systems had a policy expelling pregnant students immediately, whether they were married or not.”⁴⁹ The same policy was not enforced for boys who impregnated such girls. Dr. Harold Osofsky, who served as medical director for a program to help young mothers in the 1960s, argued that the “educational, judicial, and social decisions which exclude pregnant teen-agers from school are nothing more than harshly punitive and unjust.” He went on to claim that the pregnant teenager is “burned at the stake like the witches of old in order that others may benefit from her punishment.” Osofsky and other experts pointed out the hypocrisy in such exclusion stating that “[s]ociety criticizes her for living on welfare roles, and yet she is excluded from possible education which would allow her to have a meaningful role as an adult, and, perhaps, as a result, to keep off the welfare roles.”⁵⁰

This began to change in the 1970s. Title IX was passed in 1972 and became effective July 12, 1975. Prior to Title IX, girls were routinely dismissed from school for

⁴⁷ Luker, 10.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 62.

⁵⁰ Howard J. Osofsky, *The Pregnant Teen-Ager: A Medical, Educational, and Social Analysis* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1968), 67.

being pregnant.⁵¹ Although more famously known for its impact on female sports programs, Title IX also specifically addressed “the right of the school-age mother to equal access to an education equivalent to her peers.”⁵² It states that a student cannot be discriminated against “on the basis of such student’s pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy or recovery therefrom, unless the student requests voluntarily to participate in a separate portion of the program.”⁵³ According to education professor Wanda Pillow, Title IX immediately increased access to schooling for white teen mothers between 1975 and 1986.⁵⁴ A study conducted by the Alan Guttmacher Institute in 1986 found that the high school completion rate among females who became mothers at 17 or younger increased from 19 percent in 1958 to 56 percent in 1986.⁵⁵

By the 1970s, maternity homes in the United States were on the decline. According to state statistics, fifty-two percent of births out-of-wedlock in Milwaukee County were to teenagers, and all but nine percent of these unwed mothers chose to keep their babies.⁵⁶ The maternity homes had waiting lists before; now they were half-occupied. Florence Crittenton Anchorage shut down in July 1973. The acting executive director, Mrs. Frances Barnes, cited “a lack of public support, a low number of clientele, and high operational costs” as the reasons behind the board’s decision to terminate services at the Anchorage.⁵⁷ In article from August 1972, the Florence Crittenton Anchorage claimed that its clientele was “now primarily the younger girls who take advantage of the service.” The article stated that the average age of girls at the home was

⁵¹ Pillow, 32. See also Chapter 6.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁵ Lena Williams, “Pregnant Teen-Agers Are Outcasts No Longer,” *New York Times*, December 2, 1993.

⁵⁶ Nina Bernstein, “Help Ebbs for Unwed Mothers,” *Milwaukee Journal*, January 20, 1974.

⁵⁷ “Maternity Home Here for Unwed to Close,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 16, 1973.

fifteen. The executive director attributed this to the “tremendous increase in unwed pregnancies among the younger, school-aged girls” as well as the “number of alternatives” such as the pill and abortion available to older girls and not their “younger counterparts.”⁵⁸ The Booth Memorial Hospital, the last of the maternity homes in the state of Illinois, closed its seventy-bed maternity unit in October 1982. The agency cited the “rising operating costs combined with private and public spending cuts.”⁵⁹ Although several hospitals in the Chicago area had programs to serve unwed mothers, there would no longer be residential facilities. Similarly, the two residential maternity homes in Milwaukee County, Martha Washington Home and Rosalie Manor, changed their programs in the 1970s and no longer served solely as traditional maternity homes. Instead, these institutions opened their doors to “other troubled girls” who were not pregnant but needed special treatment for emotional or behavioral problems.⁶⁰ The Martha Washington Home became known as Booth Services; however, despite these alterations, the home closed its doors in December 1979, citing funding problems as the main cause.⁶¹ Rosalie Manor still exists today, despite financial difficulties and its severed relationship with the Catholic Church.⁶²

⁵⁸ Luci Horton, Crittenton Anchorage Faces Financial Ills, *Chicago Tribune*, August 17, 1972.

⁵⁹ John C. White, “Last 2 Homes for Unwed Mothers Closing,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 24, 1982.

⁶⁰ “Teenage Pregnancy: It Couldn’t Happen to Me,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 20, 1979.

⁶¹ Major Birgitta Nilson, “Study Report on the Decision to Close the Facility,” October 1, 1979, Regional Files, Salvation Army National Archives, Alexandria, Virginia.

⁶² As of 2010, Rosalie Manor received independent designation so that it would no longer be tied to the doctrine of the Catholic Church. It has since changed its abstinence-only education programs to embrace lessons on contraception and safe sex. Once hiding girls from their sins, the agency now teaches them how to protect themselves.

TODAY

In October 2010, seventeen-year-old Gaby Rodriguez of Yakima, Washington, revealed to her family, friends, and classmates that she was pregnant. Still in high school, the senior continued to attend school and face the criticism of her peers. Gaby soon found herself the subject of many rumors. Indeed, she later confided that she had been the subject of gossip and a victim of horrible remarks made by her classmates: "A lot of rumors were just that I was irresponsible. No college...it was bound to happen. I knew she would get pregnant. Doesn't she know she just ruined her life." Gaby then surprised her classmates and faculty members when at a school assembly in April 2011, she removed her "belly" and revealed to them that her "pregnancy" was actually her senior project.⁶³ What Gaby proved was that stigma and discrimination against the teenage mother still exist. Many believed that because she was a pregnant teen, her chances at success were severely limited. Reaction to her reveal varied; most admitted being relieved that she was not actually pregnant. Others appreciated the courage the young woman had to conduct such an experiment. Regardless of the response, the ultimate message was quite clear: stigma and prejudice against unwed teenage mothers still endures in the United States.⁶⁴

Just as they did in the 1940s and 1950s, pregnant teenagers continue to capture national headlines. For instance, on December 21, 2007, the front page of the *New York Times* featured the story "TV's Perfect Girl Is Pregnant; Real Families Say, 'Let's

⁶³ Adriana Janovich, "Pregnot: Toppenish High Student Fakes Pregnancy as Social Test about Stereotypes, Rumors," *Yakima Herald-Republic*, April 20, 2011.

⁶⁴ Gaby Rodriguez's story is now featured in a Lifetime Original Movie, *The Pregnancy Project* (2012) and in her own book, *The Pregnancy Project: A Memoir* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

Talk.”⁶⁵ The article was referring to sixteen-year-old Jamie Lynn Spears, the star of Nickelodeon’s hit show “Zoey 101.” The news was especially shocking to younger girls and their parents who watched the show and viewed Spears’ character as a positive female role model. One parent stated that “[Spears] was supposed to be one of the good clean actresses for girls to follow after. I think it sends an awful message for young girls.”⁶⁶ Nickelodeon announced that the current season of “Zoey 101” would be its last and the series finale aired in May 2008. Spears basically disappeared from the public spotlight to raise her daughter, Maddie. In addition, two movies premiered in 2007 featuring unwed pregnancies, *Knocked Up* and *Juno*. *Juno* was especially controversial because it portrayed the pregnancy of a sixteen-year-old high school student. The title character decides at first to get an abortion but later chooses adoption. The issue of teen pregnancy once again entered national conversation when in September 2008, then Governor of Alaska Sarah Palin became the Republican Vice President candidate and acknowledged that her seventeen-year-old daughter was pregnant and unmarried. Palin and her husband quickly announced that they were proud of their daughter for deciding to have her baby and that she would indeed be marrying the baby’s father.⁶⁷ Thus the country suddenly entered into dialogue concerning not only teenage pregnancy but teenage marriage as well.

Although some of today’s teenage mothers might be on television and magazine covers, the life of an unwed teenage mother in the United States still is not ideal. Most

⁶⁵ Sara Rimer, “TV’s Perfect Girl Is Pregnant; Real Families Say ‘Let’s Talk,’” *New York Times*, December 21, 2007.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Monica Davey, “Palin Daughter’s Pregnancy Interrupts G.O.P. Convention Script,” *New York Times*, September 2, 2008. The father of the baby, Levi Johnston, was eighteen years old at the time. The couple never actually married.

teenage mothers do not graduate from high school, and very few attend college. Most are on some type of government assistance. The fathers of these babies are not in the picture. Since the 1950s, United States teen birthrate has actually declined; however, the proportion of nonmarital teen births has increased significantly.⁶⁸ The birthrate among teenagers in the United States is higher than in any other industrialized nation.⁶⁹ Currently, the teen birth rate in the United States remains six to nine times higher than developed countries with the lowest birth rates.⁷⁰ A recent study found that 70 percent of teenage girls who give birth leave school and that illegal discrimination is a contributing factor to this high percentage.⁷¹ As MTV's *Teen Mom* series has revealed, the life of a teenage mother in the United States is far from perfect. Out of the four girls from the original *Teen Mom* cast, three managed to graduate high school and are trying to earn an advanced degree. One has lost custody of her child and is currently in prison serving a five-year sentence for possession of a controlled substance and violating parole. The only girl who is still dating her baby's father is the one who chose to give up her daughter for adoption. Teen pregnancy remains an important social issue as its repercussions affect not only the girl and her child but also the greater public.

Years after the second and third waves of women's liberation, prejudice towards females and their sexual behaviors prevails. Even in 2012, individuals on national television, feel free to make offensive comments in regards to females and sex. An

⁶⁸ Heather Boonstra, "Teen Pregnancy: Trends and Lessons Learned," *The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy* vol. 5 no. 1 (February 2002): 7.

⁶⁹ Luker, 183.

⁷⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Vital Signs: Teen Pregnancy---United States, 1991—2009," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* Vol. 60, no. 13 (April 8, 2011). Available online at http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6013a5.htm?s_cid=mm6013a5_w.

⁷¹ Tiseme Zegeye, "Get Tested or Get Out," Blog Entry, ACLU, August 6, 2012, http://www.aclu.org/blog/womens-rights-lgbt-rights-religion-belief-reproductive-freedom/get-tested-or-get-out-school?ms=eml_120808_buffet&etname=120808+Buffet&etjid=395274.

example of such a comment includes Republican funder Foster Friess' statement in an interview on MSNBC in February 2012: "Back in my day, they used Bayer aspirin for contraceptives... The gals put it between their knees and it wasn't that costly."⁷² This hostility towards young women, their bodies, and their sexualities remains as well as their unequal access to healthcare. These social constructs rest on antiquated cultural and religious customs created by males in order to preserve a power hierarchy. The boy is praised for his sexual activity and little is done to ensure he faces the consequences. For instance, today eight out of ten teen fathers do not marry the mothers of their children and pay less than \$800 annually for child support.⁷³ The terminology of rape is being adjusted to make it more difficult for a man to be accused of such an act in these instances. Most rapes go unreported. This further reveals the gender inequities still present in our society.

CONCLUSION

Helen Leftkowitz Horowitz succinctly states that "although much separates the early twenty-first century from the nineteenth century, under the surface of technological change, many of the profound issues that Americans grappled with in that earlier era remain our own."⁷⁴ As this dissertation has demonstrated, several debates over morality caused great unrest and social tension in the long 1950s. Young girls were victims of the long 1950s' conformity and anxiety. The future was placed in their responsibility: they were the ones who had to keep their male counterparts in line, who had to preserve their

⁷² <http://video.msnbc.msn.com/mitchell-reports/46417914#46417914>.

⁷³ <http://www.stayteen.org/teen-pregnancy>.

⁷⁴ Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Attitudes toward Sex in Antebellum America: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006), 31.

virtue in order to become marriage material, who had to raise the children. They were the gatekeepers and purveyors of society's morals. Thus, when they made mistakes, the penalties were more severe. Unfortunately, these issues still resonate in today's society.

The "girl problem" has existed throughout history in one shape or another. Girls have suffered discrimination and abuse based purely on their sex. Faced with the "Madonna-Whore" paradigm, there has been no middle ground. Girls' virginity was and still is monitored and valued in ways that boys' virginity never has been. Girls who have sex are deemed "sluts" or even "criminals" while their male peers are seen as "studs" or "playboys" for committing the same acts. Boys are glorified while girls are condemned. Girls have been raised to "hold the line," and if they agree to have sex, they are blamed and criticized. Although girls have not always listened to the sexual authorities, they have been and are constantly reminded of the consequences of disobedience. Meanwhile, boys are "just being boys" and their sexual urges are justified by biology.

During the long 1950s, the sexual revolution established its roots. The sexual revolution did not begin with the FDA approval of the Pill in 1960. Rather, it started with girls who experienced increased freedom and fewer chaperones in World War II, who said yes to their steadies, and who gave in to sexual urges—for better or for worse. The girls in the maternity homes in the 1940s and 1950s were both active participants and victims of these early battles. They often willingly participated in sexual activity yet were forced to face the often dire and enduring consequences. Sexually active teenage girls scared adults who believed they were losing control over their daughters. Youth has long been the scapegoat of older generations. If their daughters could so easily disregard moral and social norms, then something must be terribly wrong within society. It was

easier to blame the girls and their apparent sexual promiscuity than to point the finger at themselves and re-examine their own sexual mores. Teenage girls were not the only ones engaging in extramarital relations or “risky” sexual behavior.

The problem was not just the girls, though unfortunately it was often portrayed that way. Society often ignored the male sexual partners, as demonstrated by the limited amount of information regarding teenage male sexual deviance or unwed teenage fathers. Instead the attention was focused primarily on the girl. She had gotten herself into the mess and she had been caught. She was in trouble. She was delinquent and deviant. This same judgment exists today, though admittedly not as severe. Meanwhile, the boy often faced no repercussions for his actions. He was allowed to stay in school or to continue his life, even escaping child support or other paternal obligations. This dissertation is yet another example of the various ways that society attempted to control adolescent females and their bodies while giving little concern to the behaviors of males.

This study tells a story that is not included in history textbooks or in standard texts on women during the postwar decades. Rather this is a story that remains hidden. The most relevant and pertinent sources remain sealed in social agencies’ archives or lost in juvenile court records. The emotional and personal histories remain stories that families purposely tried to forget or to conceal from the community, relatives, and friends. Nonetheless, it is a story worth telling, a painful reminder of a shameful time in our own history that we as a society should force ourselves to uncover in order to learn from the past and make wiser choices for our youth in the future. This dissertation puts forth the experiences of sexually active girls in the long 1950s to provide new historical

insight and awareness to the issue of female adolescent sexuality and teenage pregnancy, matters still pertinent today and that should not be ignored.

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 Child Welfare League of America
- University of Illinois-Chicago
 Children's Home and Aid Society of Illinois

Florence Crittenton Anchorage
 Institute for Sex Education
 Juvenile Protective Association
 Louise Cattrell Collection

Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin
 Wisconsin Industrial School for Girls
 Wisconsin Industrial Home for Women

PERIODICALS

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