The Facts of Life: United States Sex Education Films in the Postwar Era

by

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Introduction

In the first few weeks of his presidency, Donald Trump found a surprising adversary: *Teen Vogue*. The magazine shocked the public with a hard-hitting article, “Donald Trump Is Gaslighting America.” Written by a young, female journalist—Lauren Duca—for a young, female audience, the magazine set off a Twitterstorm as people began to take *Teen Vogue* seriously. Over thirty thousand people tweeted and re-tweeted the article. Many responses expressed disbelief: “This is going to sound odd, but I’ve noticed @TeenVogue has been doing some solid journalism lately. Was it always like this?” commented one user. Another voiced a similar sentiment: “Great article @laurenduca. Who would have guessed @TeenVogue might be the future of political news. Unreal coverage of the election.”

In the midst of this online maelstrom, Duca appeared on Fox’s *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. She battled the show’s eponymous host as they debated various issues from Trump’s first days in office. Towards the end of the interview, Carlson condescendingly informed Duca, “I haven’t read *Teen Vogue* because I’m not a *Teen Vogue* reader.” He goes to say, chuckling, that he was surprised at Duca’s latest writing, given her previous articles: “‘Liam Payne is 100% Certain One Direction Will Continue’ [and] ‘Adriana Grande Rocked the Most Epic Thigh High Boots at Jingle Bell [sic]’ ... Those are your other pieces, but I’m trying to get to what you’re writing about Trump, taking a break from the thigh high boots.” Duca responded to Carlson’s mockery with a defense of her earlier writing, and of *Teen Vogue* generally:

A woman can love Ariana Grande and her thigh high boots and still discuss politics. Those things are not mutually exclusive ... we treat young women like they don’t have a right to a political conversation, and that you can’t enjoy Kylie Jenner’s Instagram and worry about the future of this country ... So, you know what? I did write about Ariana Grande and I did write about the abusive, bigoted,
What is striking about Duca’s retort is not Teen Vogue’s “new” political bent, but the fact that this is still news at all. Contrary to what Carlson (and seemingly the rest of Twitter) believes, teen girls’ magazines, and teen girls, have always been political. For example, when Seventeen magazine debuted in 1944, it covered a range of topics, including tips for throwing the perfect party, fashion advice for a first date, and suggestions on how to read a newspaper to best understand sociopolitical issues. Like Duca’s blend of pop culture and politics, Seventeen encouraged girls in the 1950s to refine their fashion sense while honing their political and civic engagement.

For decades, Seventeen has also kept girls informed on a topic perhaps more incongruous with its reputation than politics: sex. Even in the 1950s, the magazine routinely published articles on sex education, including information about menstruation, reproduction, and anatomy. These articles were just one small piece of the constellation of sexual education available to teenagers, especially girls, in the 1950s. Throughout the decade, girls were exposed to books, films, pamphlets, advertisements, polls, newspaper articles, and entire school courses dedicated to teaching them about sex and sexuality.

This abundance of sex education resources was not controversial; in fact, it was welcomed, as teenagers were expected to learn about their bodies in order to become happy, healthy adults. Yet, the idea of youth talking about sex and sexuality in school would have been at best shocking and at worst criminal just a few decades earlier. The 1950s were an oasis in an ongoing sex education controversy: the fifties were one of the only periods in U.S. history in which sexual education enjoyed widespread support, with

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little public debate.

What was it about this era that not only quieted these debates, but made sex education publicly palatable? How did 1950s sex education become so widely available that mainstream teen magazines like *Seventeen* could publish in-depth articles about the physiology of sex? I argue that this decade generated a perfect storm for sex education as the trajectories of the Cold War, eugenics, and educational film coalesced to undergird widespread support for the subject. Since its origins in the early 1900s, sex education has been intimately linked to eugenics. The subject has long been used to promote positive eugenics, or the encouragement of “good stock”—understood as middle-to-upper-class white people—to reproduce. Sex education has also been taught through classroom film since at least 1914. Not until the 1950s, however, did both educational film and eugenics find their outlets in the atmosphere of the Cold War. In the postwar era, fear of communism provided the pretense for a robust sex education curriculum, specifically taught through film, which conveyed positive eugenics ideology to American teenagers.

This thesis weaves the histories of sex education, eugenics, and educational film to examine the ways in which postwar youth were taught about sex in U.S. public high schools.

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In this thesis, the postwar era will be defined as 1945–1965, a commonly used delineation in U.S. history and one that fits with the primary sources discussed here. 1945 is typically considered the beginning of the period, as World War II ended, Cold War tensions emerged, and landmark legislation such as the G.I. Bill contoured domestic

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2 In this thesis, the terms “educational,” “classroom,” “instructional,” and “academic” film will be used interchangeably, for the sake of variety, to reflect a film shown to students in a school setting, with the purpose of teaching them about a certain subject.
life. While some historians use 1960 as an endpoint, many believe that the early sixties were actually more similar to the fifties. In terms of the histories of sex education and educational films, this window is also one that makes sense. The first sex education film that was seen nationally premiered in 1948, the same year that the federal government began tracking the growth of educational film libraries. I include the years before this to capture the nascent beginnings of the industry, which account for its later development. Sex education also remained largely unchanged until the mid-1960s, with the same films recurring in the major educational film catalogs and journals. The culture wars of the sixties eventually made sex education a flashpoint: massive backlash against the mere existence of sex education in schools grew in the later half of the decade. Films in the mid-to-late sixties began to change, too; representing a diversity of sexualities, races, and cultures became a fixture of the educational film industry in a way that did not occur earlier.

“Sex education” as a term will also be defined broadly, reflecting the postwar understanding of the subject. Students in sex education courses would not have learned just the facts of sex, reproduction, menstruation, and other related processes. Rather, educators, experts, and health advocates believed sex education included topics like dating, “petting,” marriage, parent-child relationships, and more.³ Students often received this sex education in courses called “Family Life Education,” “Health

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³ A teacher from North Carolina covered “sex instruction,” marriage, and “family living” in her family life class (Mildred Morgan, “Teaching Family Relationships in High School,” *Journal of Marriage and Family Living* 11.2 (1949): 43). A member of the California Department of Education wrote that sex education teaches “wholesome feelings about ... sex,” as well as facts about reproduction, adolescence, dating, and marriage (Ralph Eckert, “The Role of the P.T.A. in Sex Education,” *Marriage and Family Living* 13.2 (1951): 58). Another educator similarly argued that lessons should include the physiological, psychological and social aspects of sex, courtship, and related topics (Curtis Avery, “Family Life Education at Work in the Community,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 40.9 (1954)). These are a few illustrative examples of the comprehensive definition of sex education in the postwar era.
Education,” or “Social Hygiene.” These lessons could be taught in dedicated classes with these titles, but were sometimes dispersed throughout the entire curriculum. Postwar youth could have learned about sex in biology classes, puberty in physical education, and family relationships in home economics. The discussion of sex education in this thesis will reflect this far-reaching definition, including distinct and integrated curricula, and sex facts and attitudes.

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In Chapter One, I trace the history of sex education and educational film from their entangled origins in the early 1900s, to and through the 1950s. Not surprisingly, World War II influenced the nature of sex education teaching in the years following. During WWII, sex education was mandatory for all servicemen, and for many nonmilitary citizens on the home front, in order to combat growing venereal disease epidemics. Outbreaks of diseases caused such a manpower shortage amongst soldiers that the federal government was forced to fund educational campaigns on sexual hygiene. Films in particular were a crucial component of these campaigns, as they were easy to distribute and able to reach a mass audience. All branches of the military began producing sex education films, along with thousands of other training and orientation clips for recruits. After WWII, this industry simply converted its focus to a new market: U.S. public schools.

The growing educational film industry and military approval of sex education offer only a partial explanation for the success of postwar sex education, however. Along with educational film, sex education also developed in tandem with eugenics. At first glance, eugenics does not play an obvious role in the postwar period. The prominence of eugenicists starkly declined after WWII, especially as the public awoke to the horrors of
Nazi social engineering. Rather than disappear, however, eugenics simply evolved. Positive eugenics, or the “science” of inducing “desirable” populations to breed (rather than discouraging “undesirable” ones), became the predominant form of eugenics in the postwar period.

I argue in the second chapter that sex education remained the primary tool for conveying positive eugenics beliefs to teens throughout the 1950s. By looking at the writings of one of the most popular postwar positive eugenicists, Paul Popenoe, we can see both the continuity of eugenics thought throughout the fifties, and the eugenics undertones of the postwar sexual education program. Popenoe and other positive eugenicists amplified their message by taking advantage of the Cold War context. The Cold War played out on the home front in the form of a family-centered culture; by politically, socially and economically centering the white, middle-class nuclear family as the key to international security, Americans believed they could protect the country against communism. Wealthy, white families, with members of strong moral fiber, would deflect and diffuse communist infiltration. Eugenicists found the perfect vehicle for their message in this sentiment. I will further explore the connections between positive eugenics and Cold War-inflected domesticity, and specifically how they played out in sex education films, in Chapter Two.

Chapter Three extends this argument to the ways in which teenagers were taught positive eugenics even in seemingly value-neutral biology classes. Biology as a discipline underwent a renovation in the 1950s, driven by an identity crisis caused by competition with other scientific fields for federal funding and public prestige. In response to this crisis, biologists revamped high school-level science. The new curriculum was designed to appeal to the mores of the postwar era and to capture students’ interest by
concentrating on sex, heredity, and reproduction. Included in the curricular renovation were major units on genetic heredity, a field that was closely linked to eugenics. I analyze curricula and films created by the American Institute of Biological Sciences, the major postwar association for biologists, to argue that eugenics lived on even in the biology-based sex education films shown to students.

Given all of these eugenics teachings, postwar youth were subject to rigid social norms and expectations. Chapter Four of this thesis chronicles the ways in which teens responded. Notably, they did not passively accept these teachings, but rather adopted and adapted them. Teenagers were often at the forefront of advocating for more sexual education in order to help them navigate the intense pressures of the decade. Teen girls in particular were typically the ones driving these pro-sex education efforts through their power as consumers; girls became a discrete mass market in the postwar era, one coveted and targeted by advertisers. Girls capitalized on this attention to act as a consumer bloc and exert limited agency over the content of sexual education. In Chapter Four, I consider corporate-sponsored sexual education films and Seventeen articles to fully grasp the impact of girls’ purchasing power.

I have used a variety of sources to inform the chapters discussed above. Each chapter features at least one film that I saw at the Indiana University Libraries Moving Image Archive (IULMIA), which is home to one of the largest educational film collections in the world. I spent almost one week at the archive this summer, supported by a Davenport Grant. While there, I viewed twenty-five, 16-milimeter (16mm) sex education films produced between 1945–1965 by various national companies; these are listed in the Bibliography. Even though I do not discuss all of these films, the very act of projecting the 16mm prints, replete with the scratches indicating each time they had been
played, was an invaluable introduction to the material nature of these primary sources. Viewing the films in the way students in the fifties actually would have seen them was wholly different than simply watching them on a computer: the act of projecting the films, sitting in a darkened room, and watching the images play out on screen, was a physical experience as akin to traveling back in time to a 1950s classroom as possible.

At the IULMIA, I was also able to read reviews of many of the films that I watched, which helped me contextualize them further. I also located the textbooks, pamphlets, and teacher’s guides that accompanied these films. Aside from the films themselves, I used reports and studies compiled by the federal government, teachers college course catalogs, guidance books, master’s dissertations, newspaper, magazine, and journal articles, and film catalogs that illuminate the ties between eugenics, sex education, and classroom film.

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While there have been contentious and continuous debates about sex education itself, historians have generally reached a consensus about the timeline of its development. This established historiography privileges certain decades, such as the Progressive Era, 1960s, and 1980s, and excludes others, such as the 1950s. Historical scholarship on sexual education generally begins with the discipline’s Progressive Era origins in the late eighteen and early 1900s. One representative book on these roots is Robin Jensen’s 2010 work, *Dirty Words: The Rhetoric of Public Sex Education, 1870–1924*.

Jensen discusses the ways in which Progressive Era sex education upheld gender and racial hierarchies. The larger question of Jensen’s writing is why sexual education has

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4 These Educational Film Library Association reviews, and their significance, will be discussed further in Chapter One.

failed to become mainstream, and remains so debated today. She does not offer concrete answers, beyond saying that sex education opponents employ more successful rhetorical strategies than its advocates do. This emphasis on rhetoric defines Jensen’s interest. She focuses on the language of sex education advocates and opponents, rather than the content of the sex education itself.

The next seemingly agreed-upon events of importance in the evolution of sexual education are World War I and World War II. Jensen and many other scholars consider the wars as key to this history, given the federal government’s increased involvement in promoting sex education due to venereal disease epidemics. Despite the role of the federal government in sex education, however, historians have documented ongoing and robust opposition to the subject throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Historians also typically frame the war years as a logical extension of the achievements of Progressives.6 There is therefore historiographical consensus around the importance of the Progressive Era, WWI, and WWII.

This consensus extends to the importance of the 1960s and 1980s, as well. Historians who do not cover the origins of sexual education tend to look at the subject in light of the 1960s culture wars or 1980s AIDS crisis. Historians agree that as a sexual education became extremely contentious as a result of the 1960s culture wars. In the sixties, opponents solidified their rhetoric into what are now time-honored strategies for undermining effective sex education.7 The 1980s are considered another turning point in

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the history of sexual education. In this decade, prompted by the AIDS crisis, sex
education became a given in American public schools. Americans stopped fighting over
whether or not to have sex education at all, and instead began arguing over curricular
content, continuing the sex education controversy.

In this way, the Progressive Era, WWI and WWII, the 1960s, and the AIDS
crisis all feature heavily in the history of sex education and have come to form an
established timeline of events. There is also scholarly agreement over the discussion of
rhetoric. Many authors look more closely at rhetoric than content: historians use specific
anecdotes, textbooks, and teaching practices as evidence for their larger points, but these
are rarely the subjects of discussion themselves. Scholarship on sex education has thus
become over-contextualized: historians focus so much on explaining societal and cultural
shifts in sex education debates that they lose sight of what was actually being taught.
Historians write about larger movements regarding sex education without truly delving
into practical implications on students in the classroom. By explaining the success of
postwar sexual education in terms of eugenics, girlhood, and the Cold War, this thesis
addresses questions and an era that established historiography has largely avoided.

Two key texts—Susan Freeman’s *Sex Goes to School: Girls and Sex Education Before the
1960s* and Robert Eberwein’s *Sex Ed: Film, Video, and the Framework of Desire*—are outliers
from this conventional timeline and focus on rhetorical trends, and were therefore
integral in informing this thesis. Freeman writes about girls’ experiences in postwar sex

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education by examining curricula in Oregon, Tom’s River, and San Diego.¹⁰ In looking at course content, Freeman reveals that sex education cannot be categorized as entirely good or bad; while postwar sex education largely upheld traditional patriarchal gender norms, it also provided an important outlet for girls to discuss their sexuality. Freeman’s feminist theoretical approach, centered on revaluing the agency of women and girls, helps her identify how girls advocated for themselves in the sex education realm. Her book especially influences my analysis in Chapter Four.

Feminist historiography, particularly the methodological emphasis on women’s agency, has informed my thesis in more profound ways. Similarly to Freeman, Johanna Schoen uses a feminist lens to analyze women’s power, or lack thereof, in her book, *Choice and Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare.*¹¹ Schoen examines what, if any, control women had in the eugenics sterilization movement. She finds that women sometimes used the sterilization procedure to their advantage, occasionally turning this violent practice on its head. Likewise in her book, *College Women in the Nuclear Age: Cultural Literacy and Female Identity, 1940–1960,* Babette Faehmel analyzes writing (diaries, letters, publications) produced by female students to understand how they constructed their identities.¹² Faehmel concludes that while normative pressures affected college women, these students also advanced their own desires while on campuses. The idea that women and girls were subjected to societal pressures yet still found ways to assert their interests is true in the history of sex education, as well. The feminist frameworks deployed in these works, especially in

Freeman’s *Sex Goes to School*, offered instructive ways to approach the material discussed in this thesis.

While Freeman’s book was influential, it falls short in its omission of the Cold War and eugenics. Freeman does not fully answer the question of *why* the 1950s were such an oasis, beyond that they were a time in which traditional gender roles reigned supreme. This answer is unsatisfactory given the complex and entwined histories of the Cold War, sex education, and eugenics. She also undervalues the role of biology-based sex education (arguing that students in the fifties learned relatively few scientific facts), in favor of focusing on the teaching of sexual morals and attitudes. Freeman does see a central role for film in postwar sex education, and includes an in-depth discussion of *Human Growth*, a seminal film that influenced later works in the genre. She does not, however, fully explore the relationship between the film industry and sex education.

In contrast, Robert Eberwein’s *Sex Ed: Film, Video, and the Framework of Desire* specifically investigates the role of film in sex education. Eberwein traces the history of the genre, mainly focusing on its emergence during and after World War II. He therefore not only upends the established historiographical timeline, but also considers course content. Yet he analyzes the content of each film from a film studies perspective rather than a historical one, providing a frame-by-frame analysis of certain films and using film theory as the basis for most of his argument. In addition, he also does not focus on eugenics in his analysis, and skips over the influence of the Cold War. Eberwein similarly

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13 Historian Jonathan Zimmerman does write about communism and sex education in one chapter of his book, *Too Hot to Handle*. The chapter focuses on American efforts to export sexual education to developing countries in its sphere of Cold War influence. Zimmerman’s discussion of this trend is too brief, however, and he does not delve into the specifics of what was being taught, or why, at home or overseas. (Zimmerman, “A Family of Man? Sex Education in a Cold War World, 1940–64” in *Too Hot to Handle*).

does not address why the postwar era was markedly different in terms of public support for sex education.

Aside from Eberwein, histories of educational film are few and far between to begin with, and the major works in this field barely mention eugenics. Geoff Alexander’s *Academic Films for the Classroom* traces the history of the industry from the Progressive Era to the present, but largely dismisses sexual education films as a genre.\(^\text{15}\) David and Marsha Orgeron and Dan Streible’s *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States* features a series of scholarly essays, some of which discuss sex and race, but none of which specifically connect eugenics, sex education, and film.\(^\text{16}\)

Histories of eugenics pay similarly cursory attention to the role of sex education. Two formative works in this genre, Alexandra Minna Stern’s *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America*\(^\text{17}\) and Wendy Kline’s *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom*\(^\text{18}\) only briefly mention sex education, if at all. Both authors pay close attention to the role of gender in the twentieth-century eugenics movement as it relates to the Cold War, but do not connect their arguments to the lives of teenage girls. Molly Ladd-Taylor’s biography of Paul Popeneoe, “Eugenics, Sterilisation and Modern Marriage in the USA: The Strange Career of Paul Popeneoe,” examines his postwar career in detail, yet his intentions for a

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\(^\text{16}\) Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible, eds., *Learning With the Lights Off: Educational Films in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Of the twenty-two essays in the collection, only one considers sex education. However, this essay, “Exploitation as Education” by Eric Schaefer, focuses on “exploitation films,” a genre that largely fell out of favor as a means of sex education in the 1950s.


There is an abundance of work, then, on a variety of topics touching on sex education in the postwar era, but few that address it head on. This thesis connects the disparate historiographies of all of these subjects in order to fully understand teens’ experiences of postwar sex education.

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This thesis tells a national story. This narrative should not imply, however, that sexual education and educational films (and classroom instruction) were identical across the United States. In fact, there was intense regional variation as everyone from tiny religious congregations, to amateur film auteurs, to local school districts entered the educational film industry. These smaller entities produced content based on their individual educational interests, such that one school board may have been creating films that were entirely different from those of its neighboring district. There were more producers, distributors, and filmmakers involved in educational film after World War II than historians will ever be able to document.

Amidst this extreme locality, however, dedicated educational film companies, such as McGraw-Hill, Encyclopaedia Britannica, and Coronet, emerged as leading players in the industry. Their films were featured in nationally read catalogs and continued to appear in these catalogs until the late 1960s, overshadowing smaller films. Also, in the chaos of the burgeoning classroom film industry, teachers needed to discriminate between legitimate, esteemed films and ones with no educational value. To this end, they turned to well-known, well-respected sources of classroom films, such as these national companies. As preeminent academic film scholar Geoff Alexander confirms, “Basically

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[teachers in Dallas] were ordering the same films that St. Louis was ordering, that Seattle was ordering, that New York City was ordering ... It’s hard to cut it by regions because they’re all buying basically the same films.”

The history of educational film is at once national and local: local distributors shaped the industry from the ground up, but the prominence of well-established, large companies reigned over the educational film world. Given this national context, my focus is mainly on films produced by these larger national companies that would have been viewed in classrooms across the country.

Paradoxically, though this is a national story, the subjects are largely limited to white, middle-class Americans. As discussed, educational film companies made films intended to appeal to viewers nationally. To attain the widest possible audience, companies did not feature desegregated classrooms or interracial couples. In fact, people of color were largely erased from sex education films altogether. These films, and the other primary sources discussed, reflect an overriding concern with whiteness and the normative values conveyed in the films are associated with the white middle-class.

There were films made for black audiences that included all-black casts, but none of the films I was able to view or research featured interracial casts. Eberwein discusses what sex education for black recruits in WWII, and Jensen looks at differences in what black and white men and women were taught about sex during the Progressive Era. Despite Jensen and Eberwein’s consideration, further research is definitely needed into how sex education played out for people of color, though this is outside the scope of this thesis.

20 Geoff Alexander (Author of Academic Films for the Classroom) in discussion with the author, October 7, 2016.
21 For histories of the major educational film companies, see Alexander’s Academic Films.
22 While schools were technically desegregated in 1954 with the Brown v Board of Education decision, actual desegregation occurred very slowly and often much later. For example, in Connecticut, the 1989 court case, Sheff v. O’Neill found that Hartford was still racially segregated. Efforts to address segregation in the greater Hartford area and in many other locations nationally are still ongoing.
After Lauren Duca gave her impassioned defense of teen girls and Teen Vogue, Tucker Carlson condescendingly advised her to “stick to the thigh high boots.” Duca, clearly shocked at his audacity, responded, “You’re a sexist pig.” Her words can barely be made out as the visual and audio fade out and the segment comes to a close. Duca has gone since the interview to become a Twitter celebrity, regular Teen Vogue contributor, and prominent journalist. Duca’s success speaks not only to her talent, but also to the needs, desires, and interests of teen girls. The magazine would not include such content if it did not appeal to its largely teenage readership. Today’s teen girls demand to be kept informed about Ariana Grande, One Direction, and Donald Trump’s “gaslighting” of the American public. Contemporary Teen Vogue also contains numerous articles about sex, sexuality, and dating, just as Seventeen did in the 1950s. During this decade, girls exercised their consumer power to make the world around them reflect their diverse interests and to finally take them seriously. Given the reaction to Duca’s article, it seems the Twitterverse, and maybe the rest of the world, is discovering (or rediscovering) what girls have been telling us since the 1950s: girls have the power to take on anyone and anything, from Tucker Carlson to sex education.
Chapter One: Human Growth

A Scholastic Surprise

On September 25th, 1923, the seventh-grade boys of New York City’s P.S. 171 “had the surprise of their scholastic lives.” Giggling and nudging each other with excitement, the boys settled into their seats as their teachers unfurled a large, white curtain. The boys were about to see a movie. But this was not just any movie, and it was not being shown just anywhere. This was an educational film being screened during the school day.¹

Though the film was educational, “any movie is better than none in the small boy’s philosophy.” The hour-long film told the story of Emile and Louise, French children who had recently immigrated to the United States with their parents. The boys in the audience “laughed aloud at poor little Emile and Louise with ... their funny ideas about free candy ... in the ‘land of the free’ and followed breathlessly as the picture showed the new arrivals at Ellis Island.” The boys’ teachers looked on, hoping the laughter translated into real learning about how to behave in the “land of the free.”²

Today, classroom film is commonplace. To the contemporary American seventh-grade boy, learning from film would probably not be the “surprise of his scholastic life.” But for the boys of P.S. 171 in 1923, classroom film was beyond novel (so novel that the Los Angeles Times reported on its occurrence from across the country), and extraordinarily contentious. Little did the seventh-graders know, they were at the center of “a

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¹ “Cinema is a Part of Curriculum: New York Schools Teach Civics, Biology and History via Screen,” Los Angeles Times, September 25, 1923.
² Ibid.
controversy around which the use of classroom film has raged” since the late nineteenth century.³

Film’s initial use in the classroom in the early 1900s was deeply divisive given its affiliation with entertainment and potential for upending traditional schooling. The medium was associated with poor, immigrant audiences, cementing its reputation as a corrupting influence. Therefore, the first classroom films sparked intense opposition from parents, teachers, and the general public. Yet, while the boys were in the midst of this “controversy,” they were also fulfilling the goals of the original classroom film advocates. These proponents hoped film would not only captivate students, thus encouraging them to stay in school, but also would teach morals and social norms. Film as a medium was thought to be more effective at conveying such norms than a traditional lecture. In the case of P.S. 171, the boys were not merely watching Emile and Louise for fun, but to learn the proper way to behave in the “land of the free.” Aside from encouraging Americanization, the first classroom films focused heavily on inculcating proper sexual behaviors and values, such that early sex education was largely taught through film.

Despite the advocacy of classroom film and sex education proponents, both subjects remained highly contested in the beginning of the twentieth century. It was not until after World War II, when the military’s involvement jumpstarted the educational film industry, that the medium became a widely accepted teaching tool; relatedly, during the war, film was primarily used for soldiers’ sex education. Thus, the military simultaneously condoned sex education and educational film – setting both up for success in the postwar era.

Progressive Era Origins of Educational Film

Ironically, considering the ensuing controversy, the inventors of film actually embraced its educational power. Thomas Edison, and other early filmmakers, advocated for the use of classroom film. Working in the late 1800s, Edison and his contemporaries often produced clips that were educational: travelogues, newsreels, and scientific motion pictures, which showed microscopic processes like plant growth, comprised film’s earliest genres. From the outset, scientific subjects were considered especially well suited to film. The medium was known to invite students into “a world inaccessible to the unassisted eye” by bringing microscopic cinematography (such as watching meiosis in a cell) and complex lab techniques (such as condensing a week-long dissection into just one hour of film) into the classroom. The intimate connection between science, specifically biology, and classroom film grew even deeper as both subjects developed.

As film grew in popularity and commercial potential at the turn of the century, its educational origins were overshadowed. The medium came to be commonly associated with theatricality and entertainment, not education. More significantly, film and movie theaters were typically considered social spaces for “the poor, the non-Protestant, the non-native born, the non-white, and the young.” Movie theaters represented the deepest anxieties and fears of the Progressive Era: that the extreme rate of

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5 Ibid.
7 The relationship between the discipline of biology and the film medium will be discussed further in Chapter Three of this thesis.
of immigration, almost entirely of Eastern and Southern Europeans who were not considered white, threatened the established social order in the United States.

The Progressive Era is usually defined as the late decades of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries. Immigration in this period occurred at a then-unprecedented rate: in 1898, 229,000 people arrived, followed by 449,000 entering in 1900, and over one million coming to the U.S. in 1905.\(^9\) In 1900 alone, over one-third of the population—twenty-six million people—was immigrants or had at least one foreign-born parent.\(^{10}\) In comparison, the foreign-born population of the U.S. in 1850 was only 9.7 percent.\(^{11}\) These immigrants were mainly Southern and Eastern Europeans;\(^{12}\) to the white middle-class, these new arrivals seemed “alien,” capable of infecting and corrupting the very fabric of American society.\(^{13}\) To stymie this “infection,” the Progressive Movement arose: the white middle-class launched various social campaigns designed to control and Americanize incoming Europeans.

Universal public education was one of these campaigns. Reformers believed public education would rectify the “alien” customs of immigrant youth, indoctrinating them with white, middle-class norms early on. This goal would be achieved only if every student went through the public education system. To this end, passing compulsory school laws was a key part of Progressives’ educational agenda: “Much of the political

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\(^{10}\) Ibid.


\(^{13}\) McGerr writes that the Progressive Era saw of “an extraordinary explosion of middle-class activism” (ibid., 7). He argues that the Progressive movement was thus a class-based one, in which middle-class activists sought to preserve their status by making the rest of the population conform to their standards. Throughout his book, McGerr identifies a focus on consumption, emphases on childhood, the home, and domesticity, possessing a white-collar professional job, and relative wealth as some of the “standards” of the middle-class.
support for the compulsory attendance laws came from citizens who were neither
migrants nor immigrants, but feared those who were.” By 1918, compulsory school laws
had passed in all forty-eight states in the Union. Only twenty-seven states had these laws
just two decades earlier.\textsuperscript{14} Aside from legal changes, Progressives introduced
kindergarten as a means to indoctrinate children with American values at an early age.\textsuperscript{15}
The whole structure of the modern school system, replete with school boards and
superintendents, largely emerged from the Progressive drive for social control: “The
massive flow of these new immigrants merely intensified the administrative progressive’s
drive for more centrally controlled, scientifically managed, differentiated city schools.”\textsuperscript{16}
Urban schools would thus provide a catchall for “the massive flow” of immigration.

Progressive school reform was fairly successful in accomplishing this outcome.
By the end of the Progressive Era, 78 percent of the school-age population (five through
seventeen year olds) was enrolled in a public school.\textsuperscript{17} This figure was a sizeable
improvement over the 57 percent enrolled at the beginning of the period.\textsuperscript{18} In 1900, new
public schools were also “appearing at the average rate of one per day.”\textsuperscript{19} New York City
alone saw school enrollment increase by over 60 percent between 1899 and 1914.\textsuperscript{20}
Progressives established the American public school system, at least in part, to exercise
social control over Eastern and Southern Europeans immigrants, who posed threats to
the dominant norms to which the reformers themselves ascribed.

\textsuperscript{14} These data and quote about compulsory attendance laws are found in Wayne Urban and Jennings
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 205.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 239.
\textsuperscript{17} “The Landscape of Public Education: A Statistical Portrait Through the Years,” Educational Policy
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Stuart Foster, “The Struggle for American Identity: treatment of ethnic groups in United States
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
This xenophobia compounded with newfound concerns about childhood. Industrialization was changing the nature of work such that children no longer needed to have a job to support their families. Instead, children were now “economically worthless but effectively priceless sentimental objects” that needed to be protected from the threat of factory work, the city, and other symbols of industrialization. The changing conception of childhood was crystallized in 1904 when Progressive reformer G. Stanley Hall published his 1500-page opus, Adolescence, which coined and defined the eponymous term as those between fourteen and twenty-four years old. Separating out “adolescents” as a distinct category reflected the Progressive drive to insulate young people from the dangers of industrialization.

Within this conflation of xenophobia, industrialization, and urbanization, Progressives attacked cinema as the target of a moral crusade. At best, film was considered “frivolous” and a waste of time. At worst, the medium was thought to be literally evil: newspaper headlines told stories of young boys driven to commit murder because of what they had seen in movies. These headlines ranged from “Boy Shoots Sister: Russell Lowery ‘Acted a Play’ He Saw at the Theater” to “Crime Taught to Youths: Evil Effect of Cheap Moving Picture Shows Described.” Movies were also seen as exerting “hypnotic powers ... [and] theatrical doses of harmful and corrupting ideas” on young people, especially women and immigrants who were thought to have weaker moral fiber and would therefore be more susceptible to film’s insidious

23 Orgeron et al., “Learning with the Lights Off,” 16.
24 Sternheimer, Pop Culture Panics, 26.
25 Ibid.
26 Orgeron et al., “Learning with the Lights Off,” 22.
influences.\textsuperscript{27} Thus, the Progressive crusade against movies painted children, specifically urban, immigrant youth, as villain (capable of enacting violence) and victim (falling prey to the evils of film).\textsuperscript{28} Several states began censoring movies, and the mayor of New York City even temporarily closed all movie theaters in 1908.\textsuperscript{29}

Reformers were not the only ones agitating against educational film, however. Teachers also opposed classroom film in fear that projectors and 16-millimeter would one day replace them. Thomas Edison actually predicted this worst-nightmare situation: “Film teaching will [eventually] be done without any books whatsoever ... The pupils will learn everything there is to learn, in every grade from the lowest to the highest [through film].”\textsuperscript{30} One must understand the depth of the panic over movies to fully appreciate the challenges faced by the educational film industry in Progressive Era. If reformers were not willing to allow film to exist generally, they certainly were not going to permit it in classrooms around their “priceless” children.

Paradoxically, pro-educational film activists were also Progressives, similarly concerned about adolescents and immigration. Technologies like education film were a subtler tool of social control than compulsory school laws, but were a means to the same end. Advocates believed film would entice children to stay in school once they had been compelled to be there.\textsuperscript{31} Also, Progressives thought film would make learning more efficient and effective: film’s “sensory immediacy” was understood to provide students with more engaging insights into scientific procedures, far-off countries, and current

\textsuperscript{27} Sternheimer, \textit{Pop Culture Panics}, 28.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 8–9.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 32.
\textsuperscript{31} Orgeron et al., “Learning with the Lights Off,” 18, 20.
events than the traditional rote classroom lecture. The medium was also believed to possess “inherent truthfulness” in its recording of events and was therefore considered a truly reliable teacher. Classroom film could deliver high-quality education directly into the classroom, giving students access to previously unforeseen science, cultures, and experiences. The pro-film sect of Progressives championed educational film as a tool that could improve the U.S. public school system by keeping students in schools, furthering their overarching goal of enshrining adolescents in a safe environment away from industrialization.

Yet, the “sensory immediacy” and “truthfulness” of film were not the only, and not even the most, important reasons some Progressives embraced educational film. Underlying Progressives’ obsession with educational film was the same xenophobia of non-white immigrants held by anti-film activists. Early on, educational film was used for the “moulding of public opinion” with the thought that the medium could change students’ beliefs. But beyond just changing minds, “Films were used to weave the threads of moral and social meaning ... into the lives of ... people, and thus into the life of the nation.” If films were “weaving thread of moral and social meaning,” then the seventh-grade class of P.S. 171 watching an educational film about “poor little” French immigrants becomes even more meaningful. The boys were reported to have “laughed aloud” at Emile and Louise’s lack of knowledge of American customs; while we do not know the exact content of the film, teaching young boys to deride “new arrivals” for “their funny ideas” suggests that these new arrivals were not behaving in the right way,

33 Ibid.
34 Wesley Meierhenry, Enriching the Curriculum Through Motion Pictures (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952), 89.
35 Charles Hoban, Movies That Teach (New York: The Dryden Press, 1946), 22
or the ways that the white, middle-class Progressives dictated were right. Early classroom films then served as a doubly effective educational tool, one that would not only teach explicit, factual messages efficiently and effectively, but would also indoctrinate immigrant youth with the implicit, value-ridden messages of the Progressive Era.

**Progressive Era Origins of Sex Education**

If educational film was the medium best suited to convey these implicit social norms, then sexual education, or social hygiene as it was then called, was the subject of choice for teaching them. During the Progressive Era, social hygiene came to serve the same dual purpose as educational film. Social hygiene proponents were ostensibly concerned with ending yet another evil of industrialization and urbanization: venereal disease epidemics brought on by the burgeoning sex work industry. But underlying this motive, Progressives also sought to instruct students about how to “lead pure lives,” which were, as always, narrowly defined as those that conformed to white, middle-class standards.

The American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA), the most influential and recognized national organization born from the Progressive social hygiene campaign, explained these dual motives in its first publication, the 1914 *Journal of Social Hygiene*:

> Among contagious diseases the most destructive to the white race are the diseases called venereal; because they are fearfully poisonous and corrupting, and are caused and spread by vices and animal gratifications ... These vice diseases ... are without a doubt the very worst foes of sound family life, and thence of civilization.

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36 “Cinema is Part of the Curriculum,” *New York Times*.
The author goes on to explain that since medicine had advanced far enough that the causes of these “poisonous and corrupting” diseases were known, it was ASHA’s responsibility to educate the public on how to avoid them.

Significantly, the author of this introduction was Charles Eliot, president emeritus of Harvard and one of the founders of ASHA. In addition to his fear of the degradation of the “white race,” Eliot also argued in other essays and speeches that “Each nation should keep its stock pure” and “there should be no blending of races.”

In this way, Eliot promoted eugenics. “Eugenics” as a term was coined in 1883 and “can simply be defined as better breeding.” Eliot was at the forefront of the eugenics movement, which formalized in the Progressive Era. “Better breeding” was a major underlying objective of many Progressive reforms; historians have documented how eugenics motivated Progressive efforts in everything from the obvious, such as immigration quotas, and less obvious, such as economic wage policies. Charles Eliot in particular embodies the ways in which eugenics coalesced in education and social hygiene. His ASHA and Harvard presidencies are indications of the degree to which eugenicist views rose to the level of orthodoxy in sex education specifically and education as a whole generally during the Progressive Era.

40 Charles Eliot argued against the mixing of the races and for the sterilization of the “feeble.” He associated with other prominent eugenicists and worked with many of them to create the College Board and administer the Standardized Aptitude Test (SAT). See Adam Cohen’s article, “Harvard’s Eugenics Era” in *Harvard Magazine* (March–April 2016).
42 Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 11. The history of eugenics will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter of this thesis.
43 Economic historian Thomas Leonard has written several articles about how eugenics influenced Progressive economic policies, as well as the book, *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics & American Economics in the Progressive Era*. The eugenics-based motives of immigration quotas are well documented; a succinct overview, “Eugenics Laws Restricting Immigration” by historian Paul Lombardo can be found online via the Image Archive on the American Eugenics Movement (link in bibliography). In addition, historians have written about the Progressive Era origins and eugenics impetus for everything from Planned Parenthood to national parks.
Eliot wrote the introduction discussed above to argue in favor of teaching sex education. Eliot’s portrayal of venereal disease as “poisonous and corrupting” mirrors language used to describe Eastern and Southern Europeans, immigrant groups often seen as stealthily infecting or insidiously creeping into mainstream American society. Eliot and his ASHA associates portrayed immigrants, especially female immigrants, as the carriers of “vice diseases” that could corrupt the white race and white “civilization” as a whole. Eliot also wrote that the only way to eliminate these diseases was to “bring about certain educational changes ... Improvements cannot be firmly established until the rising generations have been thoroughly imbued with them.” Social hygiene was thus the means to a eugenics end: the preservation of the “white race,” with its “sound family life,” the ideas invoked in Eliot’s essay quoted above, rested firmly on ending venereal diseases, those supposedly carried by immigrants, by implementing “educational changes,” such as teaching sex education, in U.S. schools.

Like Eliot, other authors in the 1914 ASHA Journal espoused a similar eugenics-education model. For example, Winfield Scott Hall, in his article “The Relation of Education in Sex to Race Betterment,” argued that social hygiene education is “our sole hope” to “promote the fit.” Hall specifically called for “the double phase” of eugenics to be taught in social hygiene courses: “First, [eugenics] seeks not only to promote the propagation of the fit, but furthermore to advance the efficiency of the fit. Second, it seeks to avoid the propagation of the unfit.” Hall defined encouraging “the fit” to reproduce as “positive eugenics,” and discouraging “the unfit” from reproducing as “negative eugenics,” labels that contemporary scholars continue to use in demarcating

46 Ibid.
While Hall acknowledged the importance of negative eugenics, his primary interest was in the positive version. He considered negative measures, such as forced sterilization or segregation, to be inefficient. Positive eugenics, on the other hand, “can be brought about in the human race only through education ... Education [can] lead [youth] to choose as his mate a life partner who possesses similar physical and mental qualities, besides possessing a blemishless heredity, as good as we will assume his own to be.”

Hall went on to explain how parents should encourage a positive eugenics mentality in their children by discussing proper sexual mores with them. Hall’s opinions were mainstream in the incipient sex education movement, as yet another Journal author explains his enthusiasm for sex education as “striving to safeguard matrimony from contamination.”

Progressive Era social hygienists, like Hall, Eliot, and others, had explicit eugenics motivations for including sex education in school curricula; the subject was intended to “thoroughly imbue” students with positive eugenics, which in turn would lead to “race betterment.”

Hall does not specifically mention whiteness, or race at all, yet implied is the belief that the white race should procreate, through marriages of those with “similar qualities,” while insulating itself from “contamination,” carried by immigrants and sex workers. Eliot, on the other hand, does identify the “white race” as the cornerstone of civilization, and the one in need of saving from venereal disease. Hall was Eliot’s peer,

47 The terms positive and negative eugenics are used according to these definitions in this thesis.
writing for the same issue of the same journal, and making an even more forceful
eugenics argument than Eliot did; Hall did not have to spell out for his readers that “race
betterment” insinuated the white race. Whether or not Hall mentioned race outright, he,
Eliot, and other Progressive eugenicists thought that teaching sex would lead to healthier
(whiter) marriages, with healthier (whiter) children, who would in turn “possess a
blemishless heredity,” free from the “contamination” of immigrants. Though some
authors do not always directly identify race, their intentions are still clear.

Progressives’ push for social hygiene was intimately connected with their
campaign for educational films. As one ASHA member concluded, “social hygiene is a
subject which naturally lends itself to ... motion picture.”50 In the furor surrounding
classroom film, many of the ones that were produced were venereal disease films,
designed to educate audiences about sexual health and social norms. The earliest-
surviving full-length sex education film was the 1914 production Damaged Goods, though
it is very likely others had been made earlier and no longer survive.51 Like most early
venereal disease films, Damaged Goods illustrated the horrors of syphilis, shocking its
viewers with explicit scenes of symptoms. Spreading Evil, Open Your Eyes, The End of the
Road, How Life Begins, and Fit to Fight were just some of the sex education films created
shortly after Damaged Goods. Though production of venereal disease films was prolific,
the public still largely rejected them for their perceived lasciviousness, and simply for
being educational films, which was still considered an oxymoron.52 Sex education films
were thus doubly contested: they were entangled in educational film debates, and
controversy over sex education itself.

50 Orgeron et al., “Learning with the Lights Off,” 23.
51 Eberwein, Sex Ed, 16.
52 Descriptions of Damaged Goods and these other sex education films, along with the public reaction
to them, are found on pages 19–22 of Eberwein’s Sex Ed.
While there was consensus about the threats of venereal diseases and immigrants, teaching sex proved too provocative to be an accepted solution to these problems. Some reformers even worried that talking about sex might actually encourage young people to engage in it. Fears of untrained teachers created an aura of illegitimacy around formal sex education. Frequent articles, with headlines like “Teacher Suspended over Hygiene Talk,” condemned teachers who “talked too plainly” and told “indecent stories,” prompting panic about lewd educators.\(^5\) Parents and religious leaders also saw school sex courses as overstepping into an area meant for parental education.\(^4\) While the Progressive Era saw the beginning of formal sexual education in schools, it also saw the rise of an organized and durable opposition to teaching sex. Sex education advocacy and opposition coalesced with disagreement about the usefulness of educational film. But both sex education and film proponents and opponents were motivated by the same underlying question: how can we insulate white youth from the dangers of industrialization, while assimilating non-white, urban immigrants?

**The Film Project of World War II**

Despite Progressives’ adoption of film for pedagogy generally and sex education specifically, the medium remained highly contested until World War II. The war marked the inception of “the largest educational film project ever conceived,”\(^5\) and consequently


\(^{54}\) For example, an article in the *Los Angeles Times* called sex education “one of the gravest and most intimately sacred responsibilities that rest with parents.” The National Education Association, a teachers’ union, agreed with the author that sex education should be left to parents. A different article reported, “The teaching of sex hygiene will never be delegated to the American teacher if it can be prevented by the National Education Association.” See “National Educators Oppose Sex Hygiene,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 1, 1914 and “Discuss Sex Hygiene: Speakers Before National Education Association Oppose Such Instruction in Schools,” *Boston Daily Globe*, July 9, 1914 respectively for these quotations.

a key turning point in the history of the genre. As part of the war effort, the federal
government funded this “film project” to educate soldiers and civilians. The government
invested heavily in developing training films for soldiers in every branch of the military.
These films became a routine part of military service, even in early years of the war: upon
entry to the Army, recruits typically watched *Military Courtesy and Customs of the Service,
Personal Hygiene* and *Sex Hygiene.* While these three training films were probably the
mostly widely viewed, there were also vast numbers of other films about how to operate
machinery, how to deal with wartime trauma, and news reports on the “latest activities of
their comrades-in-arms” from other locations.

These wartime films shifted the perception of educational films generally, as their
use finally convinced school administrators and parents alike that films could actually be
educational. A major consensus-building factor was the sheer number of educational
films available during the war. By the end of WWII, 9,000 army-made films were
available. These 9,000 films were also screened an overwhelming number of times: it
was estimated that between July 1, 1943 and June 30, 1945 the U.S. military hosted
3,275,997 screenings of various training films. The explosion of nontheatrical films
during WWII meant every serviceman would return home in the postwar era
accustomed to learning through 16-millimeter. These films were often screened

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56 Hoban, *Movies That Teach*, 27. *The New York Times* also reported that these three films were on the
“must’ list to be viewed by all men inducted into the Army.” See “Movies for the Soldiers,” *New
York Times*, April 5, 1941.
59 Hoban, *Movies That Teach*, 43–4. Hoban was working for the army as this data was being collected
and therefore might be inclined to over-report. He notes in his citations that “All data on film
utilization are taken from ... reports of the Army Pictorial Service. Monthly reports were gathered
over a long period of time on the ... number of uses these prints in training camps in the United
States served” (ibid., 178).
domestically, to a non-military citizen audience, creating an entire generation acclimated to educational film.  

But WWII did not just build unanimity about film’s educational potential alone. Rather, the war reinforced the understanding that films could teach not only factual information, but also “deal vigorously and effectively with social issues and moral conduct.” This wartime recognition of the dual capacity of film reflects Progressive intentions for educational film as both an implicit and explicit teaching tool. The people making the wartime training films overtly understood the twin nature of film’s use. For example, Charles Hoban was affiliated with the Army Pictorial Service of the Signal Corps, which helped with the creation of Sex Hygiene. During and after the war, Hoban became a well-respected and well-known educational film advocate, and eventually the director of the National Education Association’s Department of Visual Instruction. In 1946, he published Movies That Teach. His book acknowledged the dual purposes of educational film: “The war-training film program did more than demonstrate important educational values of films. It brought a change in thinking on the role of films in communicating ideas and information, and in shaping conduct and strengthening values.” His book was both an evaluation of the federal government’s wartime film program and an argument for its conversion into a postwar, domestic educational market: “Films can be used as effectively by schools, colleges, and social groups such as churches, community organizations, labor unions, industrial organizations, etc. [as they are by the military].” Hoban thus foreshadowed both the postwar make-up of the educational film industry and the growing agreement on the use of educational film.

60 Alexander, Academic Films, 19.
61 Hoban, Movies That Teach, ix.
62 Ibid., 18
63 Ibid., 22.
Hoban was just one of many authors and military officials to recognize the belief-changing power of films, and also the normalization of film as a teaching tool.\textsuperscript{64} Just as the federal government’s wartime film program sanctioned educational film, so too did it authorize sex education. \textit{Sex Hygiene} was one of the most widely watched wartime training films, seen by every white serviceman at least once.\textsuperscript{65} The government produced \textit{Sex Hygiene} in response to venereal disease epidemics, which caused so many recruits to be sent home that the outbreaks actually affected the war effort.\textsuperscript{66} The film did not shy away from portraying the graphic symptoms of venereal disease: “\textit{Sex Hygiene} deals with venereal disease and its gruesome results. It is not a pleasant picture to look at. It was, however, rated as a powerful factor in maintaining the relatively low venereal disease rate ... during the war.”\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Sex Hygiene} was one of several sex education films shown to U.S. servicemen: \textit{Pick-Up, Easy to Get} (for African American troops), \textit{Three Cadets} (for the Air Force), \textit{VD Control: The Story of D.E. 733} (for the Navy), \textit{Fight Syphilis, Magic Bullets} and \textit{Know For Sure} are just some of the other sex education films from WWII.\textsuperscript{68} Therefore, not only did an entire generation acclimate to learning from film, these servicemen (and the non-military population attending domestic screenings) were used to learning about sex from film. At the war’s end, sex education and educational film, both of which had been fiercely and passionately debated since their origins in the Progressive Era, were normalized.

\textsuperscript{64} Wesley Meierhenry, Professor of Education at the University of Nebraska, makes the same argument in \textit{Enriching the Curriculum Through Motion Pictures}. Relatedly, The Director of Audio-Visual Services at the University of Alabama actually referred to using educational film as “teaching the G.I. way,” reflecting an understanding of the war-time roots of the genre (see James Caldwell, “Getting the Right Film For the Job,” \textit{The High School Journal} 34.1 (1951): 4).

\textsuperscript{65} Robert Eberwein (\textit{Sex Ed}), in discussion with the author, July 19, 2016.

\textsuperscript{66} Imber, “The First World War, Sex Education, and the American Social Hygiene Association’s Campaign Against Venereal Disease,” 52.

\textsuperscript{67} Hoban, \textit{Movies That Teach}, 28

\textsuperscript{68} Eberwein, \textit{Sex Ed}, 71, 86.
Postwar Educational Film Industry

After the war, the producers, actors, technical crews, and directors involved in the WWII training film market left for the classroom film industry, creating an experienced, professional class of educational filmmakers who directly transferred their expertise from wartime to peacetime.69 As Hoban predicted, “schools, colleges, and social groups” seized on film, resulting in the extreme proliferation of national and local educational film production and distribution.

In 1948, the federal government began cataloging 16 mm educational film libraries by city and state, creating Directories of 16mm Film Libraries. The fact that the government thought it necessary to create such directories speaks to the increased national attention on educational film. The Office of Visual Aids to Education oversaw the documentation, producing reports on 16mm libraries from 1948 to 1956. While the Directories included all 16mm libraries, not solely educational ones, the intended audience was those in the education sector. In the 1949 edition, Seerley Reid, Chief of Visual Aids to Education, introduced the document: “This directory ... has been compiled in order to help teachers, school administrators, and community leaders locate and obtain motion pictures for sale in education.”70 In the preface, Reid stressed the need for such a comprehensive catalog of film libraries since “The schools have only begun to realize the great potential of the motion picture ... One of the more troublesome problems of teachers interested in the use of film ... is that of discovering that aids are available, and where they may be secured.”71 The 1956 Directory continues this plug for educational usage, encouraging “teachers, school administrators, librarians,

69 Orgeron et al., “Learning with the Lights Off,” 41.
71 Ibid.
and community leaders” to use the directories to “obtain and use 16mm films in ... informational and educational programs.”  This explicit appeal to “teachers, school administrators, and librarians” implies that Reid included only libraries with nontheatrical films that would have been considered useful to the education community. The initial 1948 Directory listed 576 film libraries, but was considered a partial list from the outset.  The 1949 Directory included 897 libraries, which grew to 2,002 libraries in the 1951 edition.  The 1953 Directory documented 2,660, updated to 3,330 in 1956.  This tremendous growth was not just due to numbers: the Directories were compiled by sending letters to known film libraries and library associations, creating a self-reporting bias. Still, methodology alone could not account for such extreme inflation. Rather, the growing number of film libraries reflects the dominant postwar consensus on the usefulness of educational film.

Reid’s Directories are just part of the puzzle to determining the immense size of the postwar educational film industry. A 1952 study, commissioned by the Carnegie Foundation, of the Nebraska public high school system also illustrates this trend. Nebraska had been using film sporadically in public schools since 1928, but it was not until after the war that schools in the state began to truly take advantage of the medium.  The study found that before the war, around seven states had statewide audiovisual programs of some kind; immediately after WWII, from 1945 to 1950, “nineteen new state programs were established.”  Just six years later, every single state had an

73 Reid, “A Directory of 897 16mm Film Libraries.”
75 Ibid.
76 Meierhenry, Enriching the Curriculum, 11.
77 Ibid., 187.
audio-visual distribution program.⁷⁸ New York State had had a program since before the
war, but expanded it greatly in the postwar context, such that no longer would seventh-
graders at P.S. 171 be in for the “surprise of their scholastic lives” when seeing a
classroom film. Rather, film would be a routine part of instruction in practically every
subject.

The Directories and the Carnegie study illustrate the unified, cohesive system of
national film production and distribution in the postwar era. The libraries listed in the
federal directories acted as clearinghouses for films; they bought films from sales outlets
and then rented them across the state in which they were located.⁷⁹ Therefore, a national
system of film sale and distribution emerged in which organizations like public
universities or libraries bought films from production companies and then rented or sold
those films to school districts, teachers, or community groups within their state. In
Indiana, California, Connecticut, Texas, and other states alike, film distributors consisted
of high school districts, state and private colleges, private companies (mostly insurance
agencies, airlines, or other big technology corporations), state government departments,
actual libraries, and religious organizations (churches of many denominations and Jewish
associations). Hoban himself went on to become the Director of Visual Education for all
of Pennsylvania.⁸⁰

While each of these distributors may have housed and rented different films, it is
more likely that these institutions held films from the best-known companies like
McGraw-Hill, Coronet, and Encyclopedia Britannica Films (EBF). These three
companies were some of the biggest and most nationally well-known educational film

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⁷⁸ Reid, “A Directory of 3,300 16mm Film Libraries.”
⁷⁹ Ibid.
⁸⁰ Saettler, Educational Technology, 149.
producers in the postwar era. Many of them directly employed writers, actors, and
directors who were active in the wartime film program. In fact, Coronet got its start
when its founder, David Smart, joined the war effort by giving his studios to the U.S.
Navy so it could produce training films. After the war, Coronet transitioned into
making popular social guidance films, which were seen across the country for decades.
EBF and McGraw-Hill similarly created and sold films that had a national, long-lasting
presence. EBF, McGraw-Hill, and Coronet films achieved this prominence because
these companies had more power to get films reviewed, more money to hire respected
educational consultants, and more resources to purchase advertising.

As the educational film industry grew, teachers had increasing access to huge
numbers of films, meaning they had to discern which ones were reliable and legitimate.
In the face of overwhelming choice, teachers routinely turned to Educational Film
Library Association (EFLA) reviews. EFLA was the predominant reviewer of classroom
films: “EFLA’s reputation as a prime resource for information on films ... was stellar.”
An EFLA review included a synopsis, an effectiveness rating, and suggested audience
(elementary, high school, college, etc) for the film. EFLA published its reviews in the
EFLA Bulletin from 1945–1967, after which it became EFLA Evaluations and then later
AFVA (American Film & Video Association) Evaluations. Education experts repeatedly
called for teachers to use the EFLA when choosing classroom films; journal articles

81 Geoff Alexander (Academic Films) in discussion with the author, October 7, 2016.
82 Alexander, Academic Films, 29.
83 As discussed in the introduction, these national companies largely dominated the postwar
educational films industry. In the fifteen educational film catalogs I surveyed for this thesis, films
from these three companies appear in every single one.
84 Alexander, Academic Films, 59.
85 Educational Film Library Association, “EFLA Evaluation,” (New York: Educational Film Library
from various educational publications instructed teachers to consult EFLA reviews for history, social studies, and science films alike. These journal articles, written to help teachers improve their pedagogy, heavily pushed the EFLA, reinforcing its prominence as the primary objective source of educational film reviews. Reliance on EFLA meant teachers largely chose films from established companies (McGraw-Hill, EBF, Coronet). Teachers were thus inclined to purchase films from well-known, well-reviewed sources. While students may have viewed local, less-known films, as well, they at least saw them in tandem with films by larger companies.

The prominence of film in postwar education is also seen in how audiovisual (AV) education became an increasingly important component of teacher education. In the postwar era, Connecticut had four teachers colleges: Willimantic, Danbury, Teachers College of Connecticut, and New Haven State. These colleges worked closely together to accredit future elementary and high school teachers. None of the course catalogs for any of the four Connecticut teachers colleges make references to AV education (as learning from educational films was often called in the postwar era) in 1944–1945. But the 1953–1954 course catalogs tell a different story: by 1953, Teachers College of Connecticut and Willimantic both had dedicated courses on AV education. The Teachers College offered an elective in the form of “an introductory course in which ... selection, evaluation, proper use, sources, and production of audio-visual materials are also considered. Each student will be expected to achieve a reasonable degree of proficiency in the operation of

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such equipment." The course is given the same weight as any other elective, requiring the same number of semester hour as other classes.

Willimantic’s 1953 program is more robust. “Audio-Visual Aids in Education” is listed as a required class for seniors. The “course is divided into three sections; the psychology and philosophy underlying the use of audio-visual materials in education; the previewing, auditioning, and evaluating of materials, and the operation and care of audio-visual equipment.” There is also an elective on “Motion Picture Projection and Evaluation.” In a list of facilities on Willimantic’s campus, such as music studios, the library, and a campus bookstore, the Audio-Visual Education Laboratory received special attention: “The college had an audio-visual education laboratory that provides ... equipment ... [and] distributes ... filmstrips, and other audio-visual material for classroom use ... Students are taught the proper use of equipment and audio-visual material as part of their basic training for becoming teachers.” By 1958, three of the four teachers colleges included basic AV education in the form of required classes, and all four included visual aid instruction in their general curriculum. The 1958-1959 Danbury curriculum required “Audio-Visual Instruction” to be taken in one’s junior year. Teachers College of Connecticut kept their AV course as an elective, but boasted of an Audio-Visual Education Center, similar to Willimantic’s 1953 Laboratory. New Haven State additionally offered a graduate elective called “Workshop in Audio-Visual Aids.” The course descriptions in New Haven State’s catalog especially elucidate the omnipresence of AV education; required courses in elementary education, reading and

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90 Ibid., 47.
91 Ibid., 21.
language arts instruction, arithmetic, social studies, junior high school certification, guidance and counseling, psychology, and even French included the caveat that “students will become acquainted with audio-visual aids and learn to use the equipment.”\textsuperscript{92}

The ubiquity of AV aids in these courses shows how film had permeated instruction generally. Future teachers were expected to show films in the classroom and know how to use AV equipment properly. These would-be educators would have to discern good quality educational films, understand how to use them effectively, and actually play them for their future students. AV education requirements, electives, and facilities loomed large in Connecticut teacher education by the end of the 1950s, showing how teachers were expected to use AV aids to effectively educate their students.\textsuperscript{93}

Postwar Sex Education

The solidification of postwar AV programs in teacher’s colleges was mirrored by that of sexual education. As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, the postwar era was one of the few moments in U.S. history in which sex education enjoyed strong public support. Historian Susan Freeman, in \textit{Sex Goes to School}, documented what this support looked like, mainly by examining opinion polls and laws. According to Freeman, the first national opinion poll on sex education in high schools was administered toward the end


\textsuperscript{93} This is not just a Connecticut story. For example, the Southwest Texas State Teachers College 1944–1945 course catalog had a class on “the use and value of Audio-Visual Aids in teaching” (Southwest Texas State Teachers College, “Forty-Second Annual Teachers College Catalog 1944-45,” 88). The 1959–1960 catalog had a more robust offering, including applications of AV materials to a future teacher’s “major field” and information on “production, selection, acquisition, processing, an utilization of such materials” (Southwest Texas State Teachers College, “Fifty-Seventh Annual Catalog 1959–1960,” 108). While two states do not constitute a national trend, the Texas and Connecticut catalogs speak to the growing prevalence of film in the U.S. education system.
of World War II; this 1943 poll found that 68 percent of parents approved of sex education in high school, 16 percent were opposed, and 16 percent had no or a mixed opinion. One year later, a survey of “representative public school administrators” conducted by *Nation’s Schools*, a professional journal, found that 96 percent of those officials supported sex education in public schools. An updated version of the survey in the late 1950s reported that 72 percent of administrators actually believed that “public senior high schools were *obligated* to teach sex education.” Support in urban centers was even stronger: Los Angeles county parents polled at a 95 percent approval rating for sex education in public high schools, with 75 percent agreeing it should even be taught at the elementary level. A New Jersey poll from four years later reported similar numbers.⁹⁴

The rising tide of public opinion was matched with a growing number of local and state laws that made it easier to teach sex education in school. While state and local governments did not generally pass laws requiring sex education, they did often “sanction” its presence in curricula by making it legal, but not mandatory, to teach. San Diego took such action in 1947, with the South San Francisco School Board following suit two years later. Oregon and Michigan passed similar laws during the 1950s. Freeman concludes her discussion of the burgeoning institutional support for sex education saying, “By the end of the 1950s ... numerous schools had implemented planned programs ... public resistance appeared negligible, and ... professionals had successfully carved out careers in promoting and teaching sex education.”⁹⁵

Aside from laws and polls, newspaper headlines also signaled the shift in public perception of the subject. Gone were the Progressive Era warnings of deranged teachers

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⁹⁴ The data in this paragraph is provided in Freeman, *Sex Goes to School*, 13–16.
⁹⁵ Ibid., 17. The National Education Association, which strongly opposed sex education in schools during the Progressive Era, had changed its tune by the fifties, as well, approving of the subject for high schoolers (ibid., 145).
corrupting students, replaced instead by reports of support for sex education. *Washington Post* told readers in 1949 that “in the last two or three years particularly there has been great popular interest” in sex and “family living” education in schools.\footnote{Lindsay Malvina, “Teaching the Facts of Life: End of Shush-Shush,” *Washington Post*, February 2, 1949.} Atlanta *World* reported a similar trend: after one Georgia school decided to incorporate sex education into its curriculum, “an overwhelming number of letters of approval from parents, expressing a desire to have their children taught Sex Education, poured into the Principal’s office.”\footnote{“Sex Education Program Launched at Liberty City Elementary School,” *Atlanta Daily World*, January 27, 1949.} The superintendent of Chicago public schools even had to field criticism that the district’s sex education was inadequate; so many people complained about the dearth that school officials had to issue a report on what sex instruction was actually being given to Chicago students.\footnote{“Sex Education in Schools is Told by Willis,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 30, 1965.} While some opposition to sex education still existed, the overwhelming message in the press was one of sustained, extensive approval for the subject.

This public acceptance was again illustrated in Connecticut teachers college course catalogs. The same catalogs discussed previously reflected a growing emphasis on biology, particularly as it related to sexual reproduction. In the 1953–1954 catalogs for Teacher’s College of Connecticut and Willimantic, “Biological Science” was a required course for all teachers. The course description emphasized the class’s relationship to sex education: “Brief survey of man and his biological world, including the structure and functions of the body, reproduction, development and heredity.”\footnote{Teachers College of Connecticut, “Teachers College of Connecticut Catalog 1953–54” (New Britain: 1953–54), 114.} Unlike Willimantic, Teacher’s College also offered a special elective, “Genetics and Eugenics,” which gave
would-be teachers “a study of the basic principles of heredity, with consideration of gene action and the relation of heredity to sex in animals. Applications to man are stressed.”

By 1958–1959, all of the schools except Danbury required potential teachers to take some kind of biology course. While biology was mandatory, no other science class was required for general teaching certification (except at Willimantic, which required “Physical Science,” as well). Teacher’s College prescribed one year of “Personal Hygiene” along with biology, while New Haven additionally mandated “Personal and Community Health” and “Human Development and Behavior.” The distinction of biology and other hygiene courses as required for future educators, regardless of whether they would be teaching English, History, or Health itself, illustrates the postwar emphasis on sex education as a subset of biology.

Teachers at these Connecticut colleges put their education into practice by screening sexual education films for local parents. In 1948, Willimantic Teachers College showed the sex education film Human Growth for the Connecticut Parent-Teacher Association. Three hundred parents attended the viewing, which was just informing them of what was already occurring in local high schools: most Connecticut schools had at least a preliminary sex education program by 1948. The sex education courses, which would have caused outrage and condemnation just a decade earlier, were now widely accepted. Connecticut’s parents, teachers, students, and administrators reception of sex education, specifically taught through film, was a microcosm of general acceptance of the subject in the rest of the country.

100 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
Willimantic’s screening of *Human Growth* in particular was emblematic. In many ways, the national story of postwar classroom films begins with *Human Growth*. The E.C. Brown Trust, a philanthropic organization, produced the movie in conjunction with the University of Oregon and the actor, Eddie Albert.\(^{103}\) The film’s debut in 1948 achieved national success and renown. *Human Growth* garnered laudatory publicity from *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Life* when it first premiered.\(^{104}\) Every article detailed the positive reception of *Human Growth* from parents, teachers, and students alike.\(^{105}\) Local newspapers, such as the *Hartford Courant*, the *Washington Post*, and *Atlanta Daily World*, also reported on citizens from their respective cities seeing the film in school, generally with the same encouraging response.\(^{106}\)

The only opposition to the movie noted was that of a small Catholic minority.\(^{107}\) While the Catholic community was vocal in its opposition to the movie, and to any formal sex education, it was greatly outnumbered by parents in favor of the film. In Connecticut, 500 Catholic congregants refused to let their children see *Human Growth*, but the principals of the high schools involved allowed screenings to continue given that “a majority of West Hartford parents want their children to see the film.”\(^{108}\) Catholic opposition was again overruled in Albany, where the Diocese issued a statement against screenings of *Human Growth*, only to have the New York State Health Commissioner

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104 Ibid., 1–2, 114.
105 Ibid., 115–6.
ignore the outrage and continue the sex education program. Any other qualms about the film were generally satisfied once parents previewed it. The Los Angeles Times reported that all it took to reduce disapproval amongst parents was to screen the film; likewise, once California parents saw it, seven-hundred of them approved and allowed Human Growth to be shown in all sixth-grade Pasadena science and biology courses.

Despite any objections, Human Growth shaped the postwar educational film industry in cinematic style and subject. The film included many features that became standard in later sex education films, including animated sequences, a voiceover narrator, and the use of a film-within-a-film. Human Growth opens with a domestic scene of a family at home, before transitioning to a group of students in a classroom. The students are in a sex education class, where they view an animated film “Human Growth.” The real-life audience (presumably also students) of Human Growth also sees this animation, creating a film-within-a-film. As film historian Robert Eberwein notes, this technique was replicated in numerous subsequent sex education films. Eberwein argues that the film-within-a-film trope “dramatizes” the audience:

Those watching the film, like those watching the film within the film, are encouraged to ask questions as members of an extended audience ... The students watching the film projected ... with their teacher are observers of students and their teacher in a film entitled Human Growth watching a film of the same name ... the film dramatizes the conditions of its own reception to involve its potential audience more fully.

The movie drew students in by representing relatable schoolchildren on screen. The cinematic students also demonstrated proper behavior, by listening attentively to the

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111 Eberwein, Sex Ed, 115.
narrator explain anatomy and quietly raising their hands to ask questions about childbirth. According to Eberwein, these behaviors would “involve its potential audience more fully” by modeling how real adolescent viewers of the film should conduct themselves in their own sex education classes. Later sex education films utilized similar techniques to engage students. Aside from its cinematic influence, Human Growth encouraged other producers and companies to enter the sex education film market, especially given the postwar consensus over sex education in schools.

*Human Growth* also continued the now historic trend of embedding social values in sex education and educational film. The opening scene of the film orients the viewer by showing us a living room with a mother, father, brother (George), and sister (Josie). George is lying on the floor reading a textbook for his school report about Native Americans (see figure 1). Some of the first lines of dialogue center on these indigenous figures, with George commenting that “only the grown [Native Americans] have clothes on ... until they’re 12 or 13 years old, the children wear no clothes at all.”

Susan Freeman, in her discussion of *Human Growth*, notes that this opening scene both couches sex education safely in the realm of the white, middle-class (as seen from the setting), while situating it in contrast with the “uncivilized” nakedness of the Native Americans. The safety of the family setting permits the later discussions about anatomy and reproduction. After the dialogue about the Native Americans, Josie tells her parents that her teacher is screening a sex education film in class the next day. She and her father discuss the imminent film viewing, followed by a fade-out to her talking about the same film in her school class. This seamless transition further emphasizes the continuity

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112 *Human Growth*, 16 mm, directed by Sy Wexler (1948; Oregon: E. C. Brown Trust and the University of Oregon).
113 Freeman, *Sex Goes to School*, 77.
between the home and the school, again reinforcing the idea that the family sanctions Josie’s sex education.

Once at school, Josie and her classmates watch “Human Growth.” “Human Growth” is the film-within-the-film and is an entirely animated sequence with a male voiceover. The animation covers a wide range of topics related to sex education, including puberty, menstruation, fertilization, maturation, and pregnancy. Within each topic, coded messages about heterosexuality and gender roles pervade. Puberty is defined as a time of “physical changes [that] usually makes the boy feel more manly and the girl feel more womanly ... these are normal feelings” (figure 2). Fertilization is described as what occurs “when the sperm cells of the father pass from the penis, into the vagina of the mother” and the two unite. In this way, girls and boys are presumed to fulfill heterosexual gender roles, starting as a manly boy or womanly girl and ending in the union of “the father” and “the mother.” The narrator tells us that from this union, “growth continues and this baby will become a full grown boy or girl and eventually a father or a mother thus continuing the cycle of human growth.” This quote is the final line in the animated sequence, before we are taken back to the “real-life” classroom where the students discuss the film.\footnote{Human Growth.}

*Human Growth* promoted positive eugenics through its rhetoric and visual imagery. The film features an entirely white cast, and only includes white people in the animation. This overwhelming whiteness, especially when considered in context of the initial scenes of the white, middle-class nuclear family and in the milieu of the postwar era as a whole, becomes a message that “continuing the cycle of human growth” refers specifically to the growth of the white, middle-class family. The real-life teacher in the
classroom movie reinforced this lesson by telling her class, “This motion picture was selected to give you an understanding of the way the cycle of human growth is repeated over and over from generation to generation.” The narrator of the animated portion sent the same message when he says, “growth is more than just growing up,” but about becoming masculine or feminine, and eventually having (white) children of your own.\textsuperscript{115} Students were thus taught that reproduction was an imperative; sexual education films packaged and sold this eugenics program to white teenagers, who were at once its targets, recipients, and end-products. \textit{Human Growth} continued the Progressive intentions for both sex education and educational film: the filmmakers used the medium to convey value-ridden messages about positive eugenics, or encouraging white teens to reproduce, a concept that will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

\textbf{Conclusion}

\textit{Human Growth} is a touchstone film that exemplifies the entwined histories of sex education and academic film. The film is in many ways the culmination of the Progressive agenda for both fields. Progressives pushed educational film for its technical capacity to improve education, but also for its ability to easily convey social norms. Relatedly, the same reformers fixed on sex education to address venereal diseases, while inducing immigrant youth conform to white, middle-class standards. Progressives’ implicit and explicit goals were initially stymied, as both fields remained highly contested until World War II. During WWII, the federal government signaled its approval of sexual education and of educational films, funding several widely seen sex hygiene films. The ubiquity of sex education and instructional film during World War II created a

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Human Growth}. 

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postwar consensus over the usefulness of both, for teaching biological facts and for encoding normative messages about sex and gender. The postwar era saw the explosion of the educational film industry, seen in the growing number of educational film libraries, the prominence of national educational film producers, and the diffusion of AV-education in teacher's college curricula. The 1950s also saw the growth and acceptance of sexual education. The market for sex education films would be filled by both biology-based films, discussed in Chapter Three, and social guidance films, discussed in Chapter Two. *Human Growth* arose in the emerging educational film and sex education consensuses; the film was ostensibly made to educate students about sex, reproduction, and puberty. Yet a closer reading of the film reveals deeper eugenics messages embedded in this veneer of educational neutrality. *Human Growth* would have been extremely controversial just a few years earlier. But by 1948, the country had acclimated to sex education and educational films, and was ready to accept their seemingly permanent place in the U.S. school system.
Chapter Two: Social-Sex Attitudes in Adolescence

A More Perfect Union

Bob and Mary were meant to be. Their relationship was not your typical adolescent infatuation—it was “for keeps.” When the two first met at a house party, they were not entirely sure that theirs was true love. But as they spent more and more time together, Bob and Mary began to realize things between them were different. They built a relationship based on mutual respect and affection while playing tennis, cooking dinner, and going on trips. When Bob and Mary fought, it was only over jealousy, the possibility that someone else could intrude on their happiness; yet, they knew they would always make up because of the strength of their love. Through thick and thin, they stuck together, married, and lived happily ever after.

In hindsight, Bob and Mary’s devoted relationship was not purely accidental. Rather, there was a specific formula that led to their eventual marital bliss, involving prescribed sexual education and dating multiple partners. Mary went out with Sam, George, and Jack before settling down with Bob. These prior boyfriends allowed Mary to discern what she wanted in a mate, and what she eventually found in Bob. Along the way, her parents provided her with clear facts about the biology of sex. Her mother was also careful to teach Mary proper sexual values: “She [Mary] knows the physical facts. But that alone doesn’t give her a healthy attitude toward boys. I’ll have to talk to her more about how to have fun without being silly.” Bob, too, played the field, sometimes going out with a different girl every night of the week. Bob’s mother similarly ensured that he had a healthy sexual education; she encouraged him to play sports so as to develop normal, masculine athletic interests. Her encouragement paid off, as by the time
Bob met Mary, “he could take girls in his stride just as he did [sports] games.” Playing the field and parental guidance therefore provided a recipe for Bob and Mary’s romantic success.

As the final moments of Bob and Mary’s love story played out on screen and the lights flickered on in classrooms across the United States, teenagers digested this recipe for success. Right before the credits rolled on the happy couple, a title slide invited teenagers to pick apart Bob and Mary’s experience by answering questions like: “Are Mary and Bob typical ... teenagers? Have they a sound background for marriage? What do you think?”1 Students wrote down, discussed with peers, or quietly contemplated their answers while Bob and Mary headed off on their honeymoon. These questions would have been answered by high schoolers in family life courses, health class, or even home economics. While the exact context in which students spent twenty-two minutes watching Bob and Mary’s courtship would have varied, their learning was universally been considered sexual education.

Bob and Mary were the protagonists of McGraw-Hill’s Social-Sex Attitudes in Adolescents, one of a five-film series called Adolescent Development.2 This series contained several widely viewed sexual education films.3 Social-Sex Attitudes in particular epitomized

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1 Social-Sex Attitudes in Adolescents, 16 mm (1953; New York: McGraw Hill Text-Film Department and Crawley Films).
2 “Motion Pictures,” Educational Screen (1952): 318.
3 Social-Sex Attitudes appears often in educational film catalogs from the postwar era. In the sixteen catalogs I surveyed for this thesis, two were published before the film was made, with Social-Sex Attitudes appearing in ten out of the remaining fourteen. Those nine include the University of Tennessee’s Educational Films (1955), the U.S. Information Agency’s U.S. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Motion Picture and Film Strips (1958), H.W. Wilson’s H.W. Wilson Educational Film Guide 1954–1958, the University of Illinois’ Guide to Audio-Visual Aids (1956 and 1962–64), the Arkansas State Health Department’s Health Film Catalog (1956 and 1960), the University of Michigan’s Educational Films (1973), the Connecticut Department of Education’s Films on Guidance (1966), and Educational Screen (in both the September 1953 and January 1954 publications). The film was also frequently reviewed in ASHA’s Journal – see Elizabeth McQuaid, “Book Notes,” Journal of Social Hygiene 40.5
the “social guidance” genre. Social guidance films usually contained some scientific facts about the physiology of puberty, menstruation, and reproduction. But this information was outweighed, or occasionally foregone entirely, in favor of “inculcating a certain kind of behavior or promoting behavioral change.”4 The emphasis on behavior reflected the popular understanding of sexual education as being about transmitting more than just facts. Elizabeth Force, one of the most well-respected sex education teachers of the postwar era, shared this sentiment; Force wrote in ASHA’s 1952 *Journal of Social Hygiene* that sex education is based on the idea that “attitudes, ideals, and ideas concerning love, marriage, and parenthood” are teachable.5 The New Jersey Department of Education agreed with Force, writing in the *Journal* that sex education was centered on “help[ing students] to form wholesome attitudes which will assist them in meeting personal problems and will lay the foundation for sound marriage and family life.”6 These definitions reflect the broad understanding of sexual education in the postwar era: not only were students learning about the biological facts of life, they were also absorbing “wholesome attitudes” and “ideals” that promoted certain values and behaviors.

Despite this normative messaging, social guidance education still maintained scientific authority: films in this genre included title screens crediting experts, such as professors or doctors, on adolescence and family life. Many were correlated with textbooks that teachers could use to analyze the film’s content in the classroom.

(1954) as an example. Lastly, *Social-Sex Attitudes* was also evaluated by the EFLA in 1953 (the significance of which was discussed in Chapter One).


Filmmakers used these experts and textbooks to establish social guidance films as legitimate, before using their content to further the “goal of behavior modification.”

Because of their blatant advertising of social norms, some contemporary academics have dismissed the social guidance genre as “camp,” unworthy of academic study. These scholars believe that social guidance films are simply too embedded in the mores of their decades of origin. This attitude, however, ignores the intent of the genre: to teach students integral life lessons about how to act and think in accordance with societal norms. Today, these films may strike us as funny or even ridiculous because the concerns of 1950s teens seem archaic. But this modern interpretation overlooks the fact that these films were not intended to be humorous; teenagers were shown these films in high schools, churches, afterschool programs, and even in college, and took their content seriously. In addition to presenting “social values of a specific era,” social and sexual hygiene films also showed relevant information about the human body, adolescence, and relationships. To dismiss these films as mere “camp” is to ignore the ways in which they were once valuable pedagogical tools taken seriously by students, educators, and administrators alike.

High school students who watched Bob and Mary find love would have absorbed key lessons about dating, proper sexual development, marriage, and family.

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7 Skip Elsheimer and Kimberly Pifer, “Everything Old is New Again; Or, Why I Collect Educational Films,” in *Learning with the Lights Off*, ed. Devin Orgeron et al., 444.
8 Geoff Alexander, one of the preeminent scholars on this subject, takes a strong stance on this distinction. He writes that guidance films are “largely dependent on the social values of a specific era, and thus ... become quickly dated as fashions, mores, and tastes evolved ... The primary objective of academic films, on the other hand, was to disseminate knowledge” (*Academic Films*, 5). He believes academic films have been discounted because the “prevailing camp, kitsch, and socio-historic relevancy” of guidance films, which are more entertaining to modern audiences (ibid., 5). While “social guidance” was definitely a genre unto itself, these films were not un-academic. Social guidance films cited experts, were shown in classrooms, and were marketed the same way as other “academic” films. Alexander’s categorization of guidance films is unfair, and the distinction between “academic” and “guidance” is inaccurate.
These issues predominated in *Social-Sex Attitudes*, and in the minds of postwar teens, their parents, and even the federal government. The postwar era saw the resurgence of a family-centered culture, promoted by prevailing social norms, along with public policy and political rhetoric. The “connections among cold war politics ... and the domestic ideal” have been analyzed by historian Elaine Tyler May as “domestic containment,” that is, the deployment of the white nuclear family as a defense against insidious outside influences like communism.\(^9\)

May argues that domestic containment in the fifties is considered a “disruption,” or an isolated decade out of place in the larger trajectory of history.\(^10\) However, if we situate her theory within the longer trajectory of positive eugenics, it becomes clear that domestic containment was the continuation of a larger program of positive eugenics. As discussed in Chapter One, positive eugenics centers on encouraging the reproduction of “good stock,” which invariably connoted the white race.\(^11\) In this chapter, I will argue that social hygiene programs resulted from an intentional and ongoing campaign of positive eugenics, such that domestic containment, social guidance, and the family-centered culture should not be understood as a departure, but rather a logical culmination of eugenic advocacy.

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\(^10\) Ibid., xvii.

\(^11\) The terms “positive” and “negative” eugenics have been used since the Progressive Era. As a reminder, Hall (an ASHA member who wrote “The Relation of Education in Sex to Race Betterment” for the *Journal of Social Hygiene*) defined “positive” as encouraging the “superior” to reproduce and “negative” as discouraging the “inferior” from procreating. These terms are still used by contemporary historians, such as Wendy Kline and Alexandra Minna Stern (whose books are discussed later in this chapter) and are used as such in this thesis, as well.
History of Eugenics

Eugenics in the 1950s did not resemble the eugenics of the Progressive Era. While the concept of eugenics endured, its specific type or mode changed. Originally, negative eugenics—forced sterilization and segregation—was more popular and well-known than positive. The ASHA members discussed in Chapter One may have focused on positive eugenics, but their Progressive peers were generally more engrossed with the negative. This preoccupation with negative eugenics arose from the diffusion of Mendelian genetics. Mendel’s findings about heredity, based on his experiments with peas, became widely well-known during the Progressive Era.12 His pea-driven genetics tell us that traits are passed down from generation to generation through reproduction. Progressive biologists, geneticists, and eugenicists alike seized on this idea and undertook experiments to “prove” that these inheritable traits included alcoholism, criminality, intelligence, and “feeblemindedness” (a catchall term for any mental disorder or deviance from norms, such as getting pregnant out of wedlock or recurring unemployment).

These scientists would have understood all of these traits to be purely based on biological heredity.13 Unsurprisingly, immigrants and the poor, or the groups seen as upending white middle-class hegemony, were primarily classified as feebleminded. The conflation of morality and heredity became a popular and pervasive idea during the first half of the twentieth century.

At first, reformers thought they could segregate the mentally ill, criminal, feeble and generally deviant into hospitals, prisons, and other social institutions. Segregation

would keep the “bad stock” from infecting the “good stock” and would ensure “a better, more prosperous race of human beings” by preventing the two from mixing.\footnote{14} Unsatisfied with simply separating out the “unfit,” reformers turned to sterilization to ensure the “bad stock” would never reproduce. Sterilization was also thought to be cost effective, as over time the “bad stock” would die out and stop being such a “drain” on society.\footnote{15} Indiana passed the first sterilization law in 1907 and California followed suit in 1909.\footnote{16} By the end of the Progressive Era, eugenics enjoyed popular support, as well as scientific legitimacy. Reformers effectively marketed and promoted strains of positive and negative eugenic thought, such that by World War I both had been deeply engrained in the American psyche.

During and after World War I, sterilization became the predominant form of eugenics in the U.S. The procedure was more popular among eugenicists, and the general public, largely due to changing gender roles. Women’s entrance into the public sphere, through education, dating, and the workforce, renewed fears about industrialization, urbanization, and declining white supremacy. At this point, these fears were prompted not so much by immigration (which eugenicists succeeded in slowing through restrictive quotas), but by female sexual promiscuity. It seemed as if “good” women (middle-class white women) were rapidly adopting forms of sexual promiscuity previously associated with working-class women.\footnote{17} Ironically, sterilization indicated an acceptance of these evolving sexual mores; resigned to the fact that women of all classes and ethnicities were going to have sex, eugenicists focused on controlling that sexuality: “Individuals could be

\footnote{14}{Kline, \textit{Building a Better Race}, 12.}
\footnote{16}{Kline, \textit{Building a Better Race}, 50.}
\footnote{17}{Ibid., 48.}
left free to exercise sexual agency ... as long as the state controlled procreation. Sexually promiscuous women ... did not need to be institutionalized for their ... deficiencies as long as they were sterilized.”18 While sterilization still targeted the working-class and immigrants, it was now couched in the language of sex and gender. Regardless of motive, these negative eugenics measures still enjoyed widespread public support; as one historian put it, “After a decade of popular discussion of eugenics in the press, in schools, and in churches, most of America was familiar with the language of eugenics” by WWI.19

WWI also marked the first time more women were sterilized than men.20 The transition to sex-based eugenics was also bolstered by the wartime emphasis on disease prevention. WWI venereal disease campaigns painted “the female high-grade moron [a woman who ‘passes’ as normal, but is really promiscuous or diseased] was not only a threat to the family ... but was now also a threat to national security ... Information about the role of middle-class women in the transmission of venereal disease heightened public anxiety.”21 Fear of disease made women both a vector for infection and biologically subpar. Again, the sterilization of poor, immigrant women and prostitutes (but also any woman who violated gender norms, including by having premarital sex) was widely seen as beneficial to “building a better race.”22

Sterilization continued to be a popular practice up until World War II. The rates of sterilization grew, even as the science backing the procedure came under fire. The geneticists and biologists who had previously championed Mendelian heredity largely

18 Ibid., 49.
21 Kline, Building a Better Race, 44.
22 Ibid., 14.
backed away from this stance in the 1930s. Eugenicists handled this criticism with dexterity, simply evolving their science to include New Deal era sentiment. Eugenics advocates framed sterilization as a type of social welfare, complementing New Deal programs. Sterilization of the mentally ill, deviant, and criminal was a state intervention intended to “stabilize social institutions.” The procedure was billed as a social good that would decrease the population on the country’s welfare payroll.

These negative eugenics measures finally lost public favor after the atrocities of World War II. Nazi horrors caused a dramatic decline in the popularity of negative eugenic methods, especially if they seemed to target one specific group. The doctors, social workers, and bureaucrats allowing sterilizations were careful not to appear to target any one population, so as to distance themselves from the Nazis. Eugenics in the late 1940s was “repackaged” once again to focus not on whether eugenics should exist at all, but on “good” versus “bad” eugenics. Everyone, eugenicists included, could agree that Nazi-style practices were “bad,” but simply encouraging the “fit” to breed, while carefully applying sterilization on a case-by-case basis, could be “good.” Thus, sterilization continued, but “the criteria for authorizing surgery progressively shifted from hereditary fitness and innate mental capacity to able parenthood and social skills.”

This repackaging was therefore overtly centered on gender and white motherhood, or positive eugenics. Instead of targeting groups to get rid of, eugenicists promoted reproduction within groups they wanted, specifically the white middle-class. They

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23 Ibid., 100.
24 Ibid., 98.
26 Stern, Eugenic Nation, 3, 5.
27 Ibid., 109.
28 Ibid., 154–5.
would focus publicly and direct the majority of their efforts on increasing breeding amongst this desired group. By the end of the war, and throughout the postwar era, this positive eugenic ideology reigned supreme.

“Mr. Marriage:” Paul Popenoe

The tenets of positive eugenics directly played out in 1950s sex education. In fact, sex education in the fifties may be seen as the result of a carefully designed program of positive eugenics marketed to white American teenagers. Positive eugenicists from the time—especially the illustrious Paul Popenoe, or “Mr. Marriage” as he was known—laid out a concrete plan for transforming U.S. education, specifically sex education, into a eugenics-based system. The career and life of Paul Popenoe best illustrates the longevity of positive eugenicists in American history, as well as the efforts to teach eugenics through sex education.

Popenoe’s career mirrors the trajectory of eugenics in the U.S. He first entered eugenics through agriculture, working on genetics of plant reproduction in the early 1900s. During WWI, Popenoe worked for the U.S. Army Sanitary Corps, identifying soldiers with venereal diseases. He went on to serve as the executive secretary of ASHA. While at ASHA, and throughout the 1920s, Popenoe was a fierce advocate for sterilization, even writing language that inspired Nazi laws.

Popenoe was always a big believer in positive eugenics as well. In the introduction to his most popular book, the college textbook Applied Eugenics, Popenoe writes, “The problem of eugenics is to make such legal, social, and economic

30 Stern, Eugenic Nation, 158.
32 Ibid., 298.
adjustments that 1) a larger proportion of superior persons will have children than at present, [and] 2) that the average number of offspring of each superior person will be greater than at present.” When he published *Applied Eugenics*, most of his peers would still have been focused on sterilization of the “unfit.” While Popenoe does spend whole chapters of his textbook on sterilization, birth control, and other means of controlling the reproduction of “inferior persons,” he largely envisions his audience as the “superior persons” he wanted to induce into reproducing. Popenoe details a genetic theory in which positive traits, such as intelligence, good looks, and even height, converge in superior populations: “Eugenically, perhaps the most important generalization in regard to individual differences is that good qualities tend to go together, and bad ones likewise.” This tendency means that if people with these “good qualities” reproduce, then “on the whole [there would be] a wider distribution of health, intelligence and efficiency.”

To accomplish his goal, Popenoe laid out a concrete and specific eugenic plan for the United States. His agenda included sterilization, birth control clinics, selective abortion, marriage laws, required physical examinations, and even producing movies and other works of popular culture that promoted marriage. Popenoe argued that “parenthood must be made attractive enough ... to lead people to want to be parents ... The hindrances that stand in the way of gratifying a desire to be parents must be eliminated, reduced, or compensated.” To accomplish this, he suggested reforming the tax code to benefit families. Popenoe also connected eugenics and capitalism: “The

34 Ibid., 55.
35 Ibid., 137.
36 Ibid., 256.
The competitive economic world is, in several ways, selective of superior ability.37 The naturally gifted and talented would rise to the top, earning good jobs with high salaries.

In turn, he argued against social welfare policies and the minimum wage, which he thought artificially interfered with capitalist natural selection. Popenoe laid out a family-oriented vision in which the economy and government, along with popular culture, were all oriented toward insulating the white nuclear family.38

One of Popenoe’s most integral agenda items was education. He wrote that schools have a unique responsibility for inculcating eugenics thinking among youth. This eugenic education would start as early as elementary school with nature studies that illuminate “heredity and reproduction.”39 But nature studies would only serve as a jumping off point:

In the high school period ... the school should undertake definitely to provide information and attitudes necessary to future success in marriage and parenthood ... Problems of relations between the sexes should be dealt with here, together with the necessary fundamental ideas about the basis of choice of a mate, the basis of marriage and the family ... the technique of home-making, and even the care of children.40

His plan included the biological facts of sex and reproduction, but the “attitudes necessary ... in marriage and parenthood” are paramount. He also focused more on social norms, such as “relations between the sexes” and “techniques of homemaking” than on the anatomy or physiology of sex. Therefore, Popenoe’s prescient text detailed a

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37 Ibid., 117.
38 Like his Progressive predecessors, Popenoe does not always say “white” when he refers to the “fit” or “superior.” He does explicitly say that people on welfare, with low IQs, or with poor physical or mental health should be precluded from reproducing (Applied Eugenics, 130, 147, 185). In earlier books, such as The Child’s Heredity (1930), Popenoe lays out a more overtly racist theory; he presents a racialized history of the world, in which “old Americans” of pure European ancestry are genetically predisposed to succeed (Child’s Heredity, 135). He also claims that women are more emotional than men and thus have lower intellect and contribute less to society (ibid., 29).
40 Ibid., 257–8.
social hygiene education program, one that would come to fruition in the decades following the publication of *Applied Eugenics*.

No school-education child in America would escape this program, as in Popenoe’s world, “The educational system should be a sieve, through which all the children of the country are passed ... Compulsory education, as such, is ... of service to eugenics through the selection [of the gifted versus not] it makes possible.”41 (Not coincidentally, Progressive reformers first conceived of compulsory school laws in 1900s as a catchall to Americanize immigrant youth). So not only would all schools be organized around developing “a heterosexual outlook on life”42 among young people, they would also allow eugenicists and their colleagues to identify and promote the best and brightest youth, while weeding out the supposedly inferior. While his exact vision did not come to fruition, the postwar era did see the development of a sexual education program designed to promote “a heterosexual outlook on life” through inculcating values about marriage, dating, and sexuality.

Popenoe’s stature only grew in the postwar era. As negative eugenics fell out of favor in the wake of WWII, Popenoe shifted his advocacy to focus exclusively on positive eugenics. He became a regular correspondent for *Ladies Home Journal*, authoring their most popular column to-date, “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” (which earned him the title, Mr. Marriage).43 Popenoe was regularly cited in newspapers as an expert, or, as one journalist referred to him, “one of the top authorities in the field of marriage and family relations.”44 He was a fixture on the lecture circuit, speaking to youth groups,

41 Ibid., 314.
42 Ibid., 261.
synagogues, and colleges. Popenoe was so ubiquitous as a marriage expert that he even gave a talk to furniture craftsmen about “Human Relations in the Furniture Making Industry.” He was a regular guest on Art Linkletter’s radio show, “House Party,” where he “answer[ed] questions from the studio audience” about family relations. Popenoe was a prolific writer, publishing books, pamphlets, and articles throughout the postwar era, while also starring in several of iterations of his own TV shows, such as “Divorce Hearing” and “Preliminary Hearing” (both of which featured real couples on the brink of breaking up).

The crux of Popenoe’s postwar popularity was the American Institute of Family Relations (AIFR), an organization he founded in the 1930s to provide counseling to couples and individuals looking for love. Located in Southern California (where Popenoe settled down permanently at age thirty-two after marrying a nineteen-year-old dancer), the AIFR was the most prominent source of marriage counseling in the postwar era. While the AIFR had existed since the thirties, it truly took off after WWII: throughout the 1950s, the AIFR saw, on average, 15,000 cases annually. Popenoe served as the founder and director of the institute, but the AIFR’s thirty-seven on-staff counselors

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46 “Popenoe Will Talk to Makers of Furniture,” Los Angeles Times, November 2, 1953.


48 Stern, Eugenic Nation, 158.

49 Ibid., 165.
conducted sessions with and advised those thousands.50 A Chicago Tribune columnist defined the AIFR as “one of the oldest, largest, and most widely recognized of all family service bureaus ... The institute’s work is nonprofit and is carried on by a staff of qualified counselors.”51 The column described the AIFR’s weekly Workshop in Human Relations, intended for women searching for husbands. The Workshop was not a “Lonely Hearts Club” or singles group, as the article made explicitly clear, but rather a place where women could hone important skills that would help them attract a mate, such as improving their personality (including “intellectual, artistic, and recreational interests”), grooming, posture, and speech. Women who signed up for the workshop started their journey by taking a personality test, which they would then review with an AIFR counselor. After interpreting the test results, the woman would enter the “group therapy program” where she would work on the aforementioned skills.52 Unsurprisingly, the AIFR counselors and administration functioned as mouthpieces for Popenoe’s positive eugenics ideology. The AIFR training manual instructed employees to utilize their eugenics training when counseling couples, including encouraging them to have more children and to remain in their marriages at all costs.53 The thousands of couples who received counseling, read about the organization in a newspaper, or went to a workshop, were exposed to Popenoe’s beliefs. In this way, the AIFR helped disseminate Popenoe’s message to an even wider audience.

While Popenoe is just one figure in the eugenics movement, his career was remarkably durable and he was in regular contact with other leaders of the eugenics

51 Browning, “Want to Find a Husband?” Chicago Daily Tribune.
52 See Norma Lee Browning, “Want to Find a Husband?: Here Are Some Do’s and Don’ts That May Help” for the description of the Lonely Hearts Club.
53 Stern, Eugenic Nation, 161.
movement. For example, E. S. Gosney, another prominent Californian eugenicist, funded Popenoe’s research, and the AIFR, through his own organization, the Human Betterment Foundation. Popenoe also used personality tests developed by Lewis Terman, a psychologist who standardized his personality and intelligence tests based on his eugenic views of race and gender. Therefore, Popenoe was both at the forefront of eugenic thought and enmeshed with other leaders in the field.

Popenoe began his career as a mainstream, but still relatively unknown, sterilization advocate, only to become one of, if not the, most widely recognized positive eugenics marriage counselors. His career path not only demonstrates the larger trajectory of the movement, but also the continuity of eugenics through postwar era. While Applied Eugenics, the AIFR, and Popenoe’s other endeavors became popular after WWII, most existed since the 1930s. Popenoe’s ideas specifically, and positive eugenics more generally, had been around for decades by the 1950s, when they simply found their appropriate outlets in the Cold War atmosphere of the era.

**Domestic Containment**

Popenoe’s ideas overlapped in key ways with what Elaine Tyler May has described as “domestic containment,” an unwritten cultural policy in the postwar era that promoted heterosexuality, the family, and marriage as defenses against communism. May’s book

54 Ladd-Taylor, “The Strange Career of Paul Popenoe,” 305.
56 When May published *Homeward Bound*, it upended traditional historiography. May explains that conventional scholarship on the 1950s was disjointed, with a gap between “diplomatic” and social histories, such that “one [was] left with a peculiar notion of domestic tranquility in the midst of the cold war [sic] that has neither been fully explained nor challenged” (May, 10). May connected these worlds in *Homeward Bound*. While May’s book was groundbreaking, some historians have since taken issue with elements of her work. Contemporary gender historians believe *Homeward Bound* created “mythic images” of housewives and motherhood, which contribute to “monolithic” ideas about the decade (Joanne Meyerowtiz, ed. *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*
opens with a telling anecdote about a newly married couple descending into a backyard fallout shelter for their honeymoon. A profile on the couple was featured in *Life*, telling the story of how their love and togetherness would be strengthened by spending two weeks in the security of the shelter. This story is the perfect microcosm of domestic containment in its portrayal of “the nuclear family in the nuclear age: isolated, sexually charged, cushioned by abundance, and protected against impending doom.” The palpable sense of “doom” reflected the panic felt by Americans at the possibility of a communist takeover and death by atomic bomb. As communism loomed as an undefined, intangible entity, Americans translated their nebulous fear into strict social codes on the home front; if citizens maintained robust moral fiber and strength of character, they could resist communist infiltration. The home became the repository of this resistance such that the family was a “psychological fortress ... [that] would ward off the hazards of the age.” Americans “wanted secure jobs, secure homes, and secure marriages in a secure country ... in the domestic version of containment, the ‘sphere of influence’ was the home.” Anyone who threatened this security, such as single women, homosexuals, childless adults, or anyone who was not white, endangered the entire American way of life; deviants could be easily lured into communism because they lacked the integrity that would allow them to fight deception. This deviance included promiscuous women, who could use their “sexuality as a dangerous force” to turn

(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 1–2). These revisionist historians these tropes, not only by telling the stories of non-wealthy American women of color, but also by adding nuance to the “seeming placidity and prosperity of the 1950s” (Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 23). While these authors interrogate May’s evidence, they do not challenge her overarching claims about domestic containment, leaving May’s lasting impact on the history of the postwar era intact.

58 Ibid., xxi.
59 Ibid., 13–4.
60 Ibid., 91.
susceptible men into communists.61 Female sexuality would therefore have to be contained by channeling it into a marriage.

Domestic containment was actually demonstrated in popular culture. The public images of female movie stars, like Joan Crawford, Lana Turner, Ann Sothern, and Claudette Colbert, who had been independent, sexualized women before WWII, were transformed on magazine covers into devoted housewives. Even modeling agencies began hiring mothers, rather than single women.62 Women who did not embrace motherhood, in contrast, were depicted as threats to national security. For example, in novels by Mickey Spillane, an extremely successful pulp fiction author from the fifties, sexy single women tricked male protagonists into giving up state secrets to communist spies.63 Along with cementing the ideals of domestic containment, these movie star makeovers and books played right into the hands of Popenoe, who, as discussed, advocated for popular culture to promote marriage.

Aside from pop culture, the federal government also began concentrating on the family. In 1959, Richard Nixon met with Nikita Khruschev at the American National Exhibition in Moscow to deliberate over which country had the best kitchen appliances; in this now infamous kitchen debate, Nixon argued that American suburbanism and consumerism proved American superiority. The patriotism of the U.S. housewife was touted as symbolic of American democracy. Nixon was not alone in praising housewives: J. Edgar Hoover, then director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, “spoke to ‘homemakers and mothers’ about their unique role in fighting ‘the twin enemies of

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61 Ibid., 68.
62 Ibid., 125.
63 Ibid., 85.
freedom – crime and communism.” Federal policy matched this rhetoric, with the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) promoting motherhood and housekeeping duties as women’s “professional” career. A special consultant to the FCDA, Philip Wylie, warned against “momism,” or the risk of moms diverting their sexual attention to their sons, who would then commit “sexual transgressions that could lead them down the path to communism.” Cold War fears of communism triggered federal policy and popular culture to home in on female sexuality, family, and marriage “as a bulwark against communism,” creating the doctrine of domestic containment. However, long before Nixon, Hoover, and the FCDA implemented marriage-oriented policies, Popenoe and his peers advocated for changing laws to benefit couples and families. Popenoe therefore foreshadowed many of the social and political elements of domestic containment.

Along with these top-down influences, May discusses how domestic containment impacted the lives of everyday couples living in the fifties. She uses the Kelly Longitudinal Study (KLS), a long-term survey conducted by Everett Kelly, a psychologist at the University of Michigan. Kelly collected written responses from 300 white, middle-class, mostly Protestant couples over the course of the postwar era. May examined these surveys and found that while none of the participants directly mentioned communism or the Cold War, most enacted behaviors that aligned with domestic containment. Almost all of the women wrote that they sacrificed nothing when they married, when in fact two-thirds of them gave up careers. Most of the respondents

64 Ibid., 121.
65 Ibid., 90.
66 Ibid., 84.
67 Ibid., 20.
believed having children “strengthened their patriotism and morals.”68 Most strikingly, KLS couples generally rated their marriages very highly (the KLS included a scale for marital happiness), even though their essays revealed deep unhappiness. They spoke favorably of the institutions of marriage and family, while also reporting real hardship and sacrifice, and then remaining in unhappy relationships. It was almost as if the respondents knew how they were supposed to feel about family and marriage (likely from popular culture and public policy), so they ignored the cognitive dissonance of their realities. The KLS couples did not expressly articulate domestic containment, but they still implicitly knew these pressures existed and could be seen as acting in response to them.

Despite the connections between positive eugenics and domestic containment, only a few historians have actually connected the two. In fact, early historians initially overlooked the continuation of eugenics to and through the postwar era. Histories on the topic originally focused so much on negative measures, especially the role of the Nazis, that the influence of eugenics post-WWII was missed. Earlier works also fixated on the eugenics science of race, often at the expense of discussing gender and sexuality. Contemporary histories address these issues, writing about the myriad ways in which eugenics affected women, homosexuals, and other groups. Two seminal works in this field are Alexandra Minna Stern’s *Eugenic Nation* and Wendy Kline’s *Building a Better Race*. Both explore the nuances of eugenics as it developed throughout the twentieth century, paying specific attention to gender. In their discussion of the 1950s, Kline and Stern allude to the impact of the Cold War, but do not fully flesh out its role in the history of eugenics. Stern mentions that positive eugenics “flourished in the 1950s” because it

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68 Ibid., 24.
“resonated with the cultural and ideological contours of the Cold War, above all, the doctrine of containment, which applied not only to the Soviet Union ... but also to gender and the family.”⁶⁹ Kline acknowledges this argument, but believes that the positive eugenics movement provides a better explanation for the “powerful pronatalist climate in postwar America” than the Cold War does.⁷⁰ Also, neither Kline nor Stern discuss how eugenics affected young people and do not touch on sexual education.

In retrospect, it is clear that “doctrine of [domestic] containment” and the eugenics impulse present in the postwar era worked in tandem to shape sex education in the 1950s. The climate of the Cold War, especially the prevalence of domestic containment, created the perfect outlet for positive eugenics messages. By the 1950s, eugenics had evolved to be comfortably centered on white women; Popenoe and his contemporaries believed the U.S. needed a political, social, and educational system that would induce white, middle- and upper-class women to reproduce. At the same time, a burgeoning fear of communism turned public attention to the white, middle-class nuclear family. These two trends coalesced, I argue, allowing positive eugenics thought to dominate in the postwar era, especially in the realm of sexual education.

Going Steady

Bob and Mary’s love story exemplified how Popenoe’s philosophy culminated in postwar sex education. Bob and Mary were not just any teens, they were teens that enacted key tenets of Popenoe’s positive eugenics blueprint for sex education in their everyday lives. Their “playing the field” with multiple partners before choosing each other was a common instruction in postwar sex education. It is perhaps surprising then,

⁶⁹ Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 166.
that “going steady” emerged as a common expression in 1940, growing throughout the 1950s to peak in usage in 1957.71 Going steady was considered “play-marriage mimicry” in the form of monogamous dating, but it was typically temporary.72 On the surface, going steady fits with the culture of the fifties; yet, adults actually expressed deep concern over the dating ritual, and indeed it seemed to violate both positive eugenics and domestic containment.

Another social guidance film, Going Steady?, an aptly titled ten-minute film made by Coronet, dealt specifically with the “problem” of this practice specifically. Going Steady? focuses on Marie and Jeff, a couple that looks, sounds, and acts a lot like Bob and Mary. The film opens with two title slides that inform viewers:

“This is a story of two young people who face the question: Going Steady? The question is not answered for them; it is not answered for you. This film is designed to explore the problem and suggest some of the things you will have to consider when you face the question: Going Steady?” (Figure 3).

After this introduction, we are shown Marie, who is waiting dejectedly in her living room to see if Jeff will call. When Marie’s mother tells her “there are other boys in the world,” Marie reveals that she is conflicted about whether or not to date other boys. She knows she and Jeff are going steady, but “it’s not serious, really it isn’t.” Jeff, as it turns out, also does not think the two are “serious”: we first see him calling Diane, Marie’s friend, to ask her out on a date. When Diane rejects him because of her friendship with Marie, Jeff is sent into a tailspin about whether going steady with Marie is really the right choice. He later discusses the issue with his parents who tell Jeff going steady is acceptable “as long as you don’t make any commitments.” His mother explains: “Of course, the first time

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you go steady, you don’t expect it to be permanent ... You’ll likely go steady with several different girls before you begin to think seriously of marriage.” She reminds Jeff that she and his father both dated other people before getting married. In the end, Marie and Jeff decide to keep seeing each other, albeit even less seriously than before. As in Social-Sex Attitudes, Going Steady ends by asking questions directly to the audience: “This story hasn’t answered all your questions, has it? ... When you are faced with this problem, what will your answer be? What are the advantages—and the disadvantages—of going steady?”

While the film purported to give viewers a choice, going steady was always defined as a “problem,” a negative, which must be solved in some way. Marie and Jeff’s choice to keep dating was just one possible “solution” to this “problem.” Social-Sex Attitudes similarly portrays Bob and Mary’s dating multiple people before they got together as avoiding the “problem” of going steady. In yet another social guidance film, As Boys Grow, a coach encourages his male students to go out with girls for fun, again emphasizing that dating does not have to be “serious.” In It’s Wonderful Being A Girl, yet another social guidance film, the protagonist, Linda, congratulates herself on having “danced with more boys than anybody” and being asked on date even though she was only fourteen. All of these films reveal a deep-seated anxiety about young people settling down too soon.

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73 Going Steady?, 16 mm, advised by Judson T. Landis (1951; Chicago: Coronet Instructional Films).
74 As Boys Grow, 16 mm, directed by George Watson (1957; Medical Arts Production).
75 It’s Wonderful Being a Girl, 16 mm, directed by Hans Mandell (1959; New Jersey: Personal Products Company and Audio Productions). This film will be discussed in detail in the final chapter of this thesis, as it is relatively unusual because it was sponsored by the Personal Products Company. It’s Wonderful would still have been sold, watched, and distributed in the same way as other social guidance films.
On its face, this anxiety seems to contradict both positive eugenics and domestic containment. If nuclear families defend against communism and bolster the white race, then children should be encouraged to settle down and reproduce as soon as possible. But going steady actually represented a retreat from the free-market style courtship of earlier decades, and therefore was a threat to eugenic mate selection and potentially the entire American way of life.

1950s’ dating culture was markedly different from that of previous decades. In the 1930s and 1940s, the courtship ritual “rating and dating” was prominent. Rating and dating grew out of the conditions of the Great Depression: “This promiscuous form of dating emerged, in part, because the economic reality of the Depression prevented people from settling down since they could not afford to get married.” Rating and dating took place entirely in the public sphere; dating became increasingly capitalist and commoditized as men paid for dates (food, entertainment, gifts) and women paid them back in attention (both social and sexual), creating a direct purchase of women’s company. This dating culture encouraged men and women to date several people. Being highly “rated” meant being coveted by the opposite sex and subsequently going on dates with multiple partners. Girls were careful to “keep their stock high” by staying “in circulation” on the dating “market.” This language of rating and dating further illustrates the capitalistic mentality of the system.

The decline of this capitalist courtship in the fifties made parents, eugenicists, and educators alike fearful about the practice of going steady. Their hesitations could

77 Bailey, Front Porch to the Back Seat, 22.
78 Ibid., 26–7.
79 McComb, “Rate Your Date,” 45.
reflect a generational divide, as these were parents raised on the rating and dating of the 1930s and forties. However, parental concerns also indicate deeper fears over the complacency of going steady, which eliminated the capitalist natural selection of rating and dating. Popenoe and his fellow eugenicists were strong proponents of natural selection: they frequently cited Darwin's theories of evolution as evidence for the superiority of the white race, and of men over women. For the eugenicists, “natural” selection could be practically applied as mate selection, in which those of superb intellect, beauty, and ability would “naturally” choose one another (ignoring the irony of the fact that Popenoe and his peers counseled them in these choices): “Since individual happiness, social welfare, and eugenic progress depend so largely on successful mate selection, the subject deserves much more attention than it has received.” Allowing “good stock” to play the field and shop around for a mate was therefore crucial.

Popenoe's 1930 book, *The Child's Heredity*, drove this point home in its final line: “The greatest opportunity a man ever has ... is in the selection of a set of genes to add to his own for the creation of children. This is the final test of intelligence.” Teens who “went steady” thus skipped over the eugenics process of natural selection, making the practice a “problem” for Popenoe and other eugenicists.

Eugenicists’ anxieties over going steady reducing opportunities for thoughtful mate selection fed into Cold War worries over the decline of capitalism. In the framework of domestic containment, going steady could be seen as threatening not only selection, but also the economic system of the country by taking young people “off the market.” If rating and dating was seen as free-market competition in a commercialized

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80 See Popenoe’s discussion of natural selection on page 80 of *Applied Eugenics* as an example.
dating culture, then going steady was the elimination of this capitalist natural selection. Parents approved of children marrying young, as long as the child first “played the field” to make sure their would-be spouse was actually a good fit.

Ensuring that couples were well-suited, and thus less likely to get divorced, was an integral element of the going steady panic. As seen in Going Steady? and Social-Sex Attitudes, adults worried that if children simply married the first person they dated, the couple would not actually be compatible. Gladys Denny Shultz, a writer for Ladies Home Journal, further illustrates these concerns in her book, It’s Time You Knew. Schultz’s book is a social guidance manual for teen girls and their mothers, covering topics from dating, to homosexuality, to menstruation etiquette. Shultz decided to write the book after receiving an abundance of letters from young girls asking for guidance about “necking and petting.” In chapter fourteen, “What About Going Steady?”, Shultz gives an anecdote about Maureen, a seemingly “lucky girl” who marries her high school steady, Philip. Maureen and Philip wed shortly after high school, only to find that “as life companions, they had nothing in common at all.” Shultz writes that all of the unhappy marriages she knows of were the result of the couple not having dated enough people before settling down. She goes as far as to advise high school girls to petition their principal to have a “panel discussion on the subject of steady dating at school” to get more information about its pitfalls. 

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83 While I could not ascertain if Popenoe and Shultz knew each other directly, Popenoe did positively review one of Shultz’s later books, Society and the Sex Criminal. A quote from the review was subsequently used to advertise her book. See “Display Ad 192,” Chicago Tribune, August 1, 1965.
85 Ibid., 9.
86 Ibid., 180.
87 Ibid., 182.
Knew guided young people away from going steady for fear that it would result in incompatible couples.

The euphemism of having something “in common,” or sharing a “similar background,” with one’s future spouse was typical eugenics shorthand. Marital compatibility tests used by Popenoe and other AIFR counselors were intensely focused on “background.” Counselors gathered information on each partner’s religion, education, “order of birth” (only child, middle child, eldest, etc), parents’ occupations, economic status, and “area of residence” (“large city: hotel area,” “large city: apartment area,” “small town,” “rural,” etc).88 This information would also be collected for the parents of the potential couple, as well. Scoring well on these compatibility tests meant that the partnership would be eugenically blessed; Popenoe and his colleagues repeatedly “proved” that marriages between people with shared backgrounds were more likely to succeed than those between mismatched partners.89 This “evidence” was widely reported as popular science in national newspapers, with quotable lines like “stout males tend to marry stout women.”90 Sometimes the idea was even more explicit, such as when one graduate student wrote in his dissertation on marriage counseling that, “In age, race, religion, education, and economics, the couple should be like or nearly so ... It must be remembered that it is the interaction of all the factors together that will be indicative of the degree of success or failure in a union.”91 Through this messaging, positive eugenicists coopted the idea of marital compatibility to further their agenda: by ensuring that only people of the same race, age, economic status, and religion would marry,

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89 Popenoe outlines some of the required “traits” that couples should share in order to have a successful marriage on pages 230–2 of Applied Eugenics.
“superior” people would wind up in long-lasting marriages, in which they would produce “superior” children.

Eugenicist instructions about “choosing a mate” from a similar background are articulated in *Social-Sex Attitudes* and *Going Steady*. Mary and Bob’s relationship in *Social-Sex Attitudes* only works “because of similar family and educational backgrounds, they had much the same way of looking at things.”92 Jeff’s dad in *Going Steady* practically screams at Jeff about the “danger of drifting into marriage” without seriously evaluating his compatibility with a future mate.93

The belief that “like” couples were more likely to stay together fed into domestic containment. As May explains, domestic containment relied on the stability of the white, middle-class nuclear family. Divorce, resulting from an incompatible marriage, symbolized the destruction of this familial protection. Also, unhappy homes with unhappy parents would produce children of lacking moral fiber, who would be susceptible to the infiltration of communism. Ensuring stable homes, with happily married parents and happy children, concepts central to both positive eugenics and domestic containment, would only be possible if adolescents learned to “play the field” and discern what qualities they really wanted in a lifelong partner.

**Homosexuality**

Similarly to going steady, homosexuality generated attention in social guidance films and literature, and represented a variety of fears in the postwar era. The 1950s saw growth in

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92 *Social-Sex Attitudes*.
93 *Going Steady*.
public demonization of homosexuality, particularly lesbianism. Legislation from the decade increasingly criminalized and policed lesbians and sex workers, who were commonly considered to be gay, as well. Lesbians went from being considered psychotic individuals to a collective threat that needed to be diffused. Being gay represented a literal risk to national security according to the unwritten rules of domestic containment, which defined “uniform American sexuality” as a barrier against communism. Sexual deviants, such as lesbians, were seen as “security risks because they could be easily seduced, blackmailed, or tempted to join subversive organizations, since they lacked the will and moral stamina to resist.” Ensuring heterosexuality in American youth was therefore a matter of protecting the future of American democracy.

Eugenicists have always been distressed by homosexuality, which they see as a detriment to the race. Popenoe and his colleagues at the AIFR used tests, specifically Lewis Terman’s personality test, to identify homosexuals based on how well the test-taker adhered to gender norms. Surprisingly, Popenoe did not think homosexuality was necessarily heritable or genetic; rather, he thought “homosexual trends” were only sometimes “due to biological inferiorities” but were “more often the result of unfavorable home environment, faulty education, and the effects of arrested emotional growth.” Popenoe and his colleagues thus believed that having quality sexual education at an early age could prevent homosexuality. This view played into domestic containment

95 Ibid., 371.
96 Ibid., 364.
97 May, Homeward Bound, 91.
98 Ibid., 92.
99 Stern, Eugenic Nation, 9.
100 Ibid., 198.
by furthering the idea that homosexuals were emotionally deviant, as if they could be taught to embrace a heterosexual lifestyle.\textsuperscript{102}

The positive eugenic outlook on homosexuality was repeatedly portrayed in the social guidance genre throughout the fifties. In \textit{It's Time You Knew}, Shultz discusses lesbianism in her glossary of “sex aberrations.” Like Popenoe, Shultz takes a developmental approach to homosexuality: “The commonest sex aberration is failure to transfer one’s sexual and love interest from members of one’s own sex to members of the opposite sex. Normal people who have attained heterosexuality fall in love with persons of the opposite sex.”\textsuperscript{103} This definition explains heterosexuality as the product of “normal” development from adolescent to adult, while homosexuality occurs if one step in the progression toward being straight goes wrong.

Mary, from \textit{Social-Sex Attitudes}, provides yet another illustrative example. As a girl, Mary had several close female friendships, which Mary’s mother interpreted as “crushes:” “To Mary’s mother it seemed unnatural … this concentrated affection [between Mary and her girl friends].” The narrator reassures us that these crushes are meaningless as long as Mary progresses to the “next stage” of being attracted to men. Again, heterosexuality is the product of healthy, natural development. Since Mary was receiving proper sex education from her family and school, she “reached that stage” and “her next crush was on the captain of the school football team.”\textsuperscript{104}

The sex education film \textit{Sexuality and Crime} provides an in-depth examination of the “deviance” of homosexuality. Despite the title of the film, the narrator Dr. Douglas

\textsuperscript{102} Popenoe stuck to this point of view very late into his career – in 1973 he wrote a letter to the editor for the \textit{Los Angeles Times} in which he argued that a gay man is “one-third of a man … [and] pitifully defective.” See Paul Popenoe, “Is It Nonsense to Call Homosexuals Sick?” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, June 23, 1973.

\textsuperscript{103} Shultz, \textit{It's Time You Knew}, 220.

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Social-Sex Attitudes}. 

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Kelley, a University of California professor, does not believe homosexuality is inherently criminal. Rather, “the homosexual is not sick. He really is an individual who has not matured as completely as the heterosexual.” This “abnormal” sexuality is excusable, as long as “the individual eventually achieves a normal, heterosexual relationship.” Again, sexuality is conceived as a natural, linear progression toward heterosexuality. Some homosexual deviance along the way is concerning, but ultimately forgiven, if the desired end-goal, heterosexual marriage and reproduction, is produced. Thus, *Sexuality and Crime* reinforces the idea that young people must be educated to produce normality (heterosexuality). Social guidance films were a particularly vivid expression of postwar fears of homosexuality. Boys and girls, but especially girls, had to learn to develop “normally” so they could reproduce and further their race, while also protecting the country against communism.

**Sexual Satisfaction**

Yet within the strict structures of domestic containment and positive eugenics, postwar youth were also supposed to have a healthy, fulfilling sex life. Encouraging sexual satisfaction may seem to contradict both ideologies; proponents of both would not want to encourage sexuality generally, as loose sexual morals could literally bring the downfall of civilization. However, May argues that in domestic containment, sexuality within a marriage was encouraged. Wives’ sexuality was actually good in that it contributed to the function of a happy home. In this context, “motherhood was the ultimate fulfillment

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Popenoe and other eugenicists also encouraged female sexuality as long as it was directed towards marriage and reproduction. In fact, Popenoe and the AIFR counseled couples on “women’s right to marital happiness.” Popenoe believed this “marital happiness” included women’s sexual and mental satisfaction; Popenoe and his colleagues actually used pamphlets to promote the female orgasm to married couples. Healthy, long-lasting marriages included women’s sexual pleasure.

The idea of female satisfaction was also taught in postwar social guidance films and advice books. Going Steady? ends with Marie and Jeff discussing how to proceed with their relationship. While neither are sure of the exact parameters of “going steady,” Jeff tells Marie that he will call ahead more often to plan their dates in advance. While this is a seemingly small concession, it was something that meant a lot to Marie, who is satisfied with the arrangement at the end of the film. The two end their discussion by deciding to listen to records in Marie’s living room; as Marie puts on a record, she comments, “This is going to be fun!” Stylized dialogue aside, the film ends with Jeff conceding to Marie’s wishes for more scheduled dates, and with Mary’s approval of the new arrangement.

Social-Sex Attitudes more explicitly addresses the idea of female satisfaction. In one scene, Mary lectures her friends about how babies are born. Unlike her friends, Mary had proper sexual education and does not believe in any of the folklore or myths about pregnancy that her friends subscribe to. Mary tells her friends that she is not afraid of giving birth because “after all, people have been having babies for thousands of years.”

The narrator goes on to tell us that “For Mary the fulfillment of a healthy sex life held no

107 Ibid., 133.
109 Stern, Eugenic Nation, 179.
110 Going Steady.
fear… it was a natural function which would contribute to the ultimate happiness of home and a family” (figure 4). The narrator aligns himself with May’s theory of domestic containment in which “motherhood was the ultimate fulfillment of female sexuality.”

While a healthy sex life meant motherhood for Mary, it also meant undergoing sex education and receiving information about one’s body and sexuality, albeit information that was encoded with gender norms. Later, when Mary and Bob are engaged, the couple is shown kissing while lying on a couch. The narrator tells us that “their love was eclipsing their need for a marriage ceremony, but they wanted their marriage vows to have real meaning.” The narrator’s line implies that Mary and Bob thought about consummating their love, but decided to wait until after marriage. Yet, the image of Mary and Bob kissing, as the narrator tells us they are going to eventually get married, implies that the fulfillment of their physical desires is imminent. While positive eugenics and domestic containment definitely restricted female sexuality, they paradoxically taught women that healthy marriages included their sexual and emotional happiness.

A “Wonderful Teaching Device”

These teachings about sexual satisfaction, homosexuality, and going steady did not merely exist in these films, but were reinforced in actual classrooms. Future educators at the University of Southern California’s (USC) School of Education wrote sex education curricula that included social hygiene films and books by Popenoe and other prominent

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111 Social-Sex Attitudes.
112 Ladd-Taylor describes the tension between encouraging women’s sexual satisfaction and prescribing strict gender roles in terms of AIFR marriage counseling specifically. See pages 310 and 322 of “The Strange Career of Paul Popenoe.”
eugenicists. One such curriculum, “A Guide for Teaching Sex Education in High School” by George Mattias illustrated how social hygiene played out in schools. Mattias introduced his guide saying, “The United States can’t be a strong nation with slovenly morals, family-breakdown ... and all the social weaknesses of poor sex conduct.” This opening reflects common concerns of domestic containment: the security of the country depends on sexual norms. Mattias outlined three units—“How Life Begins,” “Wholesome Sex Attitudes,” and “Health and Hygiene”—for his sex education course. Each unit furthered the overarching goals of deepening students’ knowledge of reproduction, heredity and genetics, and family living. The units consisted of a lecture, suggested films, readings, and activities. Throughout the curriculum, Mattias worried that going steady “limits the youngster’s experience to one person,” said homosexuality is not detrimental as long as sexual interest eventually “transfers” to the “opposite sex,” and encouraged students to embrace sex as a “wholesome part of living.” Mattias’s lectures thus almost identically echoed the ideas about homosexuality, sexual satisfaction, and going steady discussed in this chapter. These eugenics undertones become explicit when he directly cites Popenoe’s advice on “petting.” He also lists an AIFR bulletin written by Popenoe, “Are Virgins Out of Date?” as recommended reading. In addition, Mattias specifically advised that students view and discuss both Social-Sex Attitudes and Going Steady. He noted that both of the films were easily available to Los Angeles schools via

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113 While the information presented below is from dissertations, most of the authors (including Mattias and Eslinger (discussed below)) state their intent to summarize teaching that was already happening in the field or to gather resources that were already being used so current teachers would have them all in one place. The dissertations can thus be seen as representative of sex education that was already taking place in the classroom. Also, while they are all from the University of Southern California, the state was regarded as a leader in the positive eugenics movement. See Chapter Three, “Instituting Eugenics in California” in Stern’s Eugenic Nation for background on eugenics in California specifically.

the California State Department of Health and the school district itself. In fact, the use
of film is repeatedly mentioned throughout the dissertation, with Mattias mandating that
film “should be utilized” in every unit.

The inclusion of educational film was recommended by another USC School of
Education student, Harland Eslinger, in his curriculum, “A Suggested High School
Course of Study for Marriage and Family Relations.”115 After guiding students through
lessons that helped them understand mate selection (including the need to date people of
similar health, race, nationality, religion, and values), reproduction, and marriage,
Eslinger listed several books and films to complement the course. He suggested Going
Steady? and other social guidance films produced by McGraw-Hill and Coronet. Also
recommended are books by Popenoe and other leading eugenicists. The courses
designed by Eslinger and Mattias are just two of many that concretely connected
eugenicists’ writings and social guidance films in sex education courses.116

These suggested curricula also show an inclination toward using film to teach
social hygiene. Film’s narrative qualities were thought to help social hygiene ideas come
alive for students. One family life educator suggested that all such courses use films,
which make “wonderful teaching devices,” especially when employed to augment
student discussion.117 As another teacher put it, films “help to give concreteness to many
concepts and procedures ... These sensory materials ... are natural and indispensable tools

115 Harland Eslinger, “A Suggested High School Course of Study for Marriage and Family Relations,”
Masters diss., The University of Southern California School of Education, 1953.
116 For examples of other works, see Lisle Bresslin, “A Syllabus on Marriage and Family Relationships
for Junior College,” Masters diss., The University of Southern California School of Education, 1948;
C. G. Hutchinson, “A Family Life Teaching Manual,” Masters diss., The University of Southern
California School of Education, 1951; Norman Michel, “A Guide for Parents, Teachers and
Counselors in Teaching Sex Education,” Masters diss., The University of Southern California School
of Education, 1949; and Teodoro Rodriguez, “A Unit on Sex Education for the High School,”
Masters diss., The University of Southern California School of Education, 1951.
117 Mildred Morgan, “Teaching Family Relationships in High School,” Journal of Marriage and Family
Living 11.2 (1949): 43
in teaching programs today.” A different teacher, Ruth Osborne of Illinois’ Hinsdale Union High School, went into even greater detail about her film use; writing in the Journal of Marriage and the Family, Osborne began her article saying, “the use of films in family life education is widely accepted.” She fully integrated film into her classroom, not as a “crutch” to be used only once or twice, but as a routine part of instruction. Osborne especially enjoyed pausing films after climactic scenes, letting the class discuss or role-play what might happen next. She found that this strategy generated a “lively, involved discussion.”

Several studies revealed that Osborne was not alone in her teaching techniques. In a survey of 100 Nebraska high schools, 79 were found to use film in health education classes, making it the most commonly used teaching tool. A similar analysis of Pennsylvania high schools showed that teachers preferred film to other supplementary methods, such as field trips, charts, or guest lectures. This trend continued at the junior college level, as well; researchers surveying California’s public junior colleges reported that for social hygiene courses, “the use of films was mentioned more often than anything else as a supplementary method.” Films were by no means the sole instructional tool used, but the medium was definitely considered vital for its discussion-raising ability and narrative qualities. These studies, articles, and dissertations indicate how Paul Popenoe and his colleagues’ long-term vision for sex education coalesced in

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postwar classrooms. Drawing on its Progressive Era roots, as discussed in the previous chapter, educational film in the 1950s was used in social hygiene classrooms as a means to a eugenics end.

**Conclusion**

At the end of *Social Sex Attitudes*, students are invited to draw their own conclusions about Bob and Mary. As discussed, questions like “Have they [Bob and Mary] a sound background for marriage? What do you think?” come onscreen right before the credits roll. While these questions give the illusion of choice, in reality each query posed to the teenage audience had a strictly prescribed moral answer. If the students could not discern the answer from the film itself, they would have been inundated by newspaper articles, guidance books, counselors, and teachers who could provide the appropriate response. This response would, of course, be one that implicitly reinforced the teachings of positive eugenics. Postwar positive eugenicists, especially Paul Popenoe, set out programs for social guidance that taught students how to choose good fit mates, avoid homosexuality, and procure happy, satisfying marriages. Beneath the often-neutral language about mate selection and satisfaction were embedded assumptions about the superiority of the white race.

This eugenics program flourished in the postwar era in the context of domestic containment, in which the white nuclear family became a “psychological fortress” against communism or any threatening, outside force. This outlet allowed Popenoe and his peers’ teachings to become common knowledge, taught in social guidance classrooms around the country. In the next chapter, we will see how teens were subjected to the same pressures even in their seemingly value-neutral biology classes.
Chapter Three: The Treasury of Human Genes

Child Coupons

In the summer of 1964, a speaker at the Los Angeles County Museum’s Science and History lecture series gave a talk on the future of the family: “[In the coming decades] a man and woman who planned to marry would visit a ‘genetic clinic’ where chemical tests would be given to show if they were likely to have defective children,” the speaker claimed. If the couple “passed” this test, they would be granted permission to marry. In the lecturer’s vision of the future, the decision to have children would be monitored as well: “The right to the first child would be automatic,” but parents would have to apply and be found genetically fit to have a second child. If they reproduced without permission, the speaker called for harsh punishment, including heavy fines or even sterilization.¹

Three years later, this speaker gave an almost identical talk to a 4,500-person audience at the yearly conference of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). He reiterated practically verbatim the need for a pre-marital genetics test: “If one or both [partners] are carriers of defective genes, they can be advised not to marry or at least not to have children.” While some couples would just be advised, for others, the “avoidance of parenthood ought to be mandatory.” School administrators listened as this speaker again expounded upon the need for “coupons ... allowing [parents] to have only two children,” and called for sterilization as a punishment for violating this edict.²

Without knowing the speaker’s identity, one might assume he was a eugenicist. His lectures articulate a Popenoe-esque vision of the future replete with pre-marital licenses and counseling. As discussed in the previous chapter, Popenoe himself was an ardent advocate for limiting the reproduction of “defective” parents, and consequently believed strongly in both of these measures. But this speaker was not a eugenicist at all. In fact, he repudiated eugenics as racism.

H. Bentley Glass, the man who delivered these two speeches, was rather a Johns Hopkins University professor and the “officer or director of nearly a dozen leading scientific societies.” His societal memberships included the American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Institute of Biological Sciences, American Society of Human Genetics, American Society of Naturalists, Genetics Society of America, and the National Association of Biology Teachers. He also served on the editorial boards of numerous respected journals, including *Science, Biological Abstracts* and *Quarterly Review of Biology*. Glass advised on the Atomic Energy Commission’s Committee on Biology and Medicine, as well as the National Academy of Science’s Committee on the Genetic Effects of Atomic Radiation Genetics Panel. When he died at age 98, the *New York Times* commended Glass for his “ubiquitous career as writer, scientific policy maker and theorizer ... [who] refused to stay within the bounds of academia.”

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3 Ronald Ladouceur, “‘All With Stories to Tell’: Carleton S. Coon, Bentley Glass, Marston Bates, and the Struggle by Life Scientists in the United States to Construct a Social Mission After World War II,” Masters diss., State University of New York, 2008. In his dissertation, Ladouceur cites several book reviews in which Glass takes his colleagues to task for over-emphasizing the hereditary importance of race. Ladouceur writes, “Glass was a fierce critic of mainline eugenics” (ibid., 46).


The president, vice-president, editor, and member of these various organizations, Glass had a broad reach as one of the controlling voices of biology in the postwar era.

Along with his numerous other commitments, Glass oversaw an extensive revision of the American high school biology curriculum. During his tenure as a member and president of the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS), Glass was heavily involved in the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (BSCS). The BSCS pilot program debuted in the 1960–1962 school year, during which it was tested in by 350 teachers and 30,000 students across twenty states. When finished, the BSCS had definitively overhauled high school-level biology in the U.S.

While Glass and his AIBS colleagues were conducting the BSCS, they were also developing the Secondary School Biological Sciences Films Series (AIBS film series). The series included 120 thirty-minute films upon its completion in 1960. The films complemented the BSCS, in that both were a part of AIBS’ “massive effort to help high school teachers strengthen instruction in biology in the postwar era.” Like the BSCS, these AIBS films would go on to be used in high school classrooms across the country throughout the early 1960s.

Unsurprisingly, given Glass’s involvement in both projects, the BSCS and AIBS film series incorporated his vision of biology. Specifically, these ventures reflected Glass’s involvement in genetics, which was considered a subset of the discipline of

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7 The BSCS has been written about in several dissertations and full-length books. Despite the attention given to the BSCS, there is little written about the AIBS film series, discussed below. Therefore, the BSCS will not be discussed in depth in this chapter, in favor of the film series. For more information on the history of the BSCS, see Laura Engleman, ed., *The BSCS Story: A History of the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study* (Colorado: BSCS, 2001); Ivor Goodson & Peter McClaren, *School Subjects and Curriculum Change* (Pennsylvania: The Falmer Press, 1993); Audra Wolfe, “Speaking for Nature and Nation: Biologists as Public Intellectuals in Cold War Culture,” Masters diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2002; and Ladouceur, “All With Stories To Tell,” Masters diss.
biology. Glass recognized the problematic proximity between eugenics and genetics enough to publicly denounce the faulty science and racism of eugenic practices. Yet, he did not fully understand the extent to which he actually endorsed eugenics through his own research, public appearances, and educational ventures. Glass adopted a eugenics-mindset to genetics, but genuinely did not believe that he was espousing eugenics. Regardless of his motivation, however, Glass (and many of his peers) used the field of genetics to put forward a eugenics-inflected vision, especially in the realm of education.

Glass’s scientific authority gave him leeway to popularize and promote his vision of genetics in textbooks, films, and other educational materials disseminated throughout the U.S. The AIBS films included discussions of heredity (which often implied eugenics lessons), specifically as it applied to sexual reproduction. These films were shown in biology classrooms, but still would have been considered part of sexual education.

While Popenoe was focused on social guidance, Glass and his AIBS peers were focused on hard science: in this chapter, I argue that AIBS and other biology-based sex education films became one of the predominant means of biology instruction in the postwar era. These instructional films used the veneer of science to appear value-neutral, while actually promoting the same eugenics ideas disseminated by Popenoe.

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9 Ladouceur argues that Glass saw himself as a moral compass for his peers, guiding them away from race- and class-based eugenics, towards softer, “reform” versions of the “science,” such as his belief that “improvement in social and economic conditions would lead to improvement in the genetic capacity of the whole species” (Ladouceur, 48). Despite Glass’s self-concept of himself as anti-eugenics, his “reform” eugenics often closely resembled more mainline visions like those of Popenoe.

10 The postwar conception of sex education as a broad field that included biology, family life education, social hygiene and more was discussed in the introduction to this thesis.


Prestige Envy

If World War II was a key moment in the history of educational film, it was also a substantial moment in the evolution of American science, especially the discipline of biology.\(^{11}\) To the public, biologists had very little impact on the war effort. In contrast, physicists and chemists emerged from the war as heroes: unlike biologists, these scientists were seen as directly contributing to the end of the war, especially given the detonation of the atomic bomb. This widespread attention and acclaim meant that physicists and chemists received not only more federal funding, but also public prestige. There was also the sense that physics, medicine, and other sciences were unified at the outset of the postwar period; scientists in those fields were concentrated on common goals, and worked toward them as a unit. Biology, on the other hand, could still have been considered a collection of disparate disciplines, from zoology, to botany, to physiology, to genetics. In short, biology as a discipline had an identity crisis after World War II. Impatient to escape being routinely outshone and out-funded by other sciences, the biological community began to organize.\(^{12}\)

The American Institute of Biological Sciences was formed in direct response to the decline in the prestige and funding of biology. AIBS began as a “voluntary association” of different organizations and societies that were all “interested in advancing the biological sciences by research, by teaching, and by application to human welfare.”\(^{13}\) This statement of purpose appeared in the first issue of the *AIBS Bulletin*, which was

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\(^{11}\) See Chapter One for background on WWI as a turning point for educational film.


published from 1951 to 1962 and was regularly mailed out to 14,000 members across sixteen different scientific societies.14 This initial editorial also included AIBS’ intention to address various crises facing biology. The most urgent crisis was that of “overspecialization,” or the sub-division of biology into too many distinct areas. Some of the earliest authors in the Bulletin also responded to the feeling that they were being outpaced by other sciences. One such author, President of the University of Minnesota James Morrill, conveyed this sentiment in his article, “Biological Sciences and the University.” Morrill wrote about funding for the sciences at the university level:

“Biologists these days [feel] themselves at some disadvantage in our academic cosmos – considering by comparison the war-won priority of the physical sciences in so far as governmental and industrial support of research is concerned.”15 Morrill therefore perfectly articulated the low point of biology in the postwar era. His concern was echoed by several of his AIBS peers, but also amplified by many who were specifically concerned about biology education.

AIBS members felt that their discipline was even further threatened because they were not actively wooing younger generations. One AIBS associate, Professor of Botany Harriet Creighton of Wellesley College, worried that “Organized groups such as chemists and engineers are experienced in this kind of work [recruitment], and I think if we are not careful they will do such a successful job ... that the biological sciences ... will lose out.”16 Two other letters to the editor from that same issue alone, one from a teacher in Pennsylvania and another from a guidance counselor in Los Angeles,

expressed the same fears. Still others worried that students would feel a trickle-down effect from the weakening of biology at the federal and academic levels and would be put off by the discipline: “Students of the biological sciences often seem to be worried about their place in the peck-order of science. They feel that the glamour, recognition, and money are going to physics, chemistry, medicine ... with biology left out in the cold.” Therefore, not only was this lack of prestige discouraging for biologists themselves, but scientists felt it could have long-lasting repercussions on the future of the field.

The prevailing concern that chemists, physicists, and other scientists were actively recruiting students was especially acute. In a 1952 Bulletin, two separate articles bemoaned the lack of new, enticing biology resources available to students. W. H. Bragonier, Professor of Botany and Plant Pathology at Iowa State College, and an author of one of these articles, specifically pointed out that “print materials” advertising the “vocation” of the biological sciences were lacking. Another article singled out The American Chemical Society’s “colorful 16-page pocket-sized booklet, called ‘Shall I Study Chemistry?’ which is distributed free to ... schools and colleges,” as a model that AIBS should emulate. The author was particularly impressed that the chemistry brochure “ran to 75,000 copies” in its first printing. He encouraged AIBS to produce its own material that could be given to would-be biologists in schools.

The intense fear that students would prefer chemistry, physics, or another “hard” science to biology was a central concern of AIBS in its early years. Professors, high

21 Ibid.
school teachers, and professional biologists alike wrote articles and letters to the editor voicing their opinions on this potential ripple effect. AIBS had already taken action to address the crisis of overspecialization—the organization of AIBS itself unified disparate zoologists, botanists, geneticists, and physiologists under the umbrella of biology. Now, the Institute would take steps to address the growing crisis in education by making biology relevant to students again. AIBS’ leaders attempted to do this by refocusing biology on its Progressive Era roots, specifically centering new curricula on sex, reproduction, and heredity.

The Progressive Era 2.0
The history of biology education mirrors the histories of sex education, educational film, and eugenics. All four fields developed around the same time period for the same reason: Progressive reformers, fearful of the rising tide of immigration, undertook educational campaigns, involving new educational technologies, to Americanize new arrivals. This Americanization largely revolved around teaching young people appropriate sexual norms and values. Presenting adolescents not only with information about their bodies and sexuality, but also imbuing that information with Progressive-style xenophobia (as argued in Chapter One) was the approach taken by sex education and biology advocates alike.

The origins of high school-level biology date back to the Progressive Era campaign for education reform. Historian of science Philip Pauly writes that before 1900, schools offered no formal biology, and instead usually had separate electives on physiology, botany, and zoology. In the midst of the Progressive Era, however,
reformers joined these various areas into one “comprehensive discipline of biology.”

New York City was the hub for this reorganization, both because it was the center of the publishing industry (which meant new biology textbooks could be written and produced easily in the city) and because of its large immigrant population. New York public school students “epitomized both the potential for immigrants to overwhelm American civilization and the hope that ... education offered the smoothest path to assimilation.”

Given these demographics, educators from New York City began introducing biology into schools. Over the first few decades of the twentieth century, young New Yorkers experienced some of the first high school biology classes. The subject of these classes was first and foremost sex:

New York biology educators gradually came to realize that the most distinctive training in living they could provide their students was to educate them about sex. As a prominent and universal biological function, sex was integral to the conceptual structure of their course ... Lack of knowledge about sex was thought to be the source of many psychological, medical, and social problems ... Understanding the processes of reproduction ... sexual function, and the principles of heredity would help students not only to live better themselves but to produce children within marriage who would be as free as possible from defect and disease. The result ... would be better life for all.

The ideologies of “the leading New York biology educators” meshed with those of Progressive advocates for sex education and instructional film. These reformers targeted the same population, and used education as a means to an assimilative end.

Early biology education also highlighted key Progressive ideas about childhood, such as those discussed in Chapter One regarding the conception of the child as priceless and adolescence as a critical period of development. Progressive biology educators

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23 Ibid., 164.
24 Ibid., 166.
25 Ibid., 177.
believed that by teaching youth about their own physical growth and connections to the
natural world, young people would both further understand themselves and be insulated
from the dangers of industrialization. Biology education also played into a Progressive
advocacy of educational technology; Progressives thought that science was especially
suited for classroom film. Yet, as with explicit sex education in the Progressive Era, this
sex-based biology education was not without controversy. Similarly to sex educators,
biology teachers were accused of arousing students’ interest in sex, inciting pushback
from the public.

Biologists in the postwar era harkened back to their Progressive Era ancestors. In
order to make their discipline relevant again, biologists in the 1950s refocused on sex,
reproduction, and heredity. These topics were seen as ones that would raise the prestige
of biology by making the field essential to students’ futures. Many prominent postwar
biologists espoused this view, arguing for the prioritization of sex education in high
school biology curricula. For example, two university professors wrote in *The American
Biology Teacher*, the journal of the National Association of Biology Teachers, about the
role of sex education in biology: “[Sex instruction should be] included in biology courses.
The processes ... of the human body [should be] openly discussed without restraint ...
Adolescent boys and girls are curious about their bodies ... Our schools should be a
source of dependable information concerning this fundamental phase of human

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26 Ibid., 171.
27 Ibid., 182.
28 The National Association of Biology Teachers (NABT) was another organization involved in the
postwar era reorganization of biology. NABT was an active member of AIBS and consulted on both
the BSCS and AIBS film series. H. Bentley Glass, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, served as
the president of AIBS for several years and was also a founding member of the NABT. In this way,
both organizations were closely linked.
biology.” The professors do not consider “sex instruction” and “the processes ... of the human body” to be part of a separate course of sex education, but rather a “fundamental phase of human biology.” The title of the article, “The Effectiveness of Our Schools in the Teaching of the Biological Sciences,” also suggests how integral the science of sex was to biology as a whole.

In the same Biology Teacher issue, a teacher told his colleagues that “the understanding of human physiology, genetics, and sex education are all responsibilities of the biologists” to teach in school. A few years later, yet another educator similarly urged his peers to “direct their attention toward the health education material in biology” as topics like sex and reproduction are “better taught in the field of biology.” The consistent call from and for biology teachers to integrate sex education into their classrooms reflects how the discipline returned to its roots in the postwar era: in order to address the crises facing biology in the 1950s, educators turned to sex and reproduction to make the field relevant to teenagers’ everyday lives.

Eugenics : Genetics :: Genetics : Eugenics

The integration of sex and biology in the fifties was not the only way in which biologists returned to their roots. The xenophobia and eugenics seen in Progressive Era biology was also a central focus of the discipline in the postwar period. As discussed in the

previous chapter, negative eugenics fell out of favor after World War II. The downfall of eugenics as popular and socially acceptable meant that it had also largely been debunked as a scientific approach; “eugenicists” were no longer considered veritable scientists, but rather junk-science racists. Just as negative eugenics evolved into the positive eugenics of social hygiene, so too did it transform into genetics in the scientific realm. In the sciences, eugenics became genetics, which was a subdivision of the larger discipline of biology. Postwar biologists had Progressive-style, eugenics concerns about “good stock” and “bad,” but discussions about genetics subsumed these worries. Unlike Progressive Era biologists, however, these postwar messages were directed at white, middle-class youth to induce them to reproduce, similarly to the positive eugenics of social hygiene.

The demonstrable links between pre-WWII eugenics and postwar genetics have been well documented by historians. One foundational work in this field is Daniel Kevles’ *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*. First published in 1985, Kevles specifically illuminates the deep ties between geneticists of the 1940s and 1950s and the eugenicists that came before them. He chronicles the rise of genetics from a discounted, overlooked field to a burgeoning discipline over the course of the fifties, forming a “new eugenics.” Kevles also argues that even geneticists cashed in on the positive eugenics of the postwar era; instead of advocating for sterilization or other negative measures, geneticists focused on encouraging white couples to reproduce. Therefore, Kevles not only shows how eugenics lived on past World War II, but also that geneticists were largely the ones fulfilling the eugenics vision in the postwar era.33

Since Kevles’ seminal work, scholars have extended his argument. For instance, Nathaniel Comfort writes in *The Science of Human Perfection: How Genes Became the Heart of*

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about the clear ties between medical genetics and eugenics, especially in the postwar era as medical genetics solidified as an area of study. Comfort argues that the fifties in particular marked a turning point for genetics:

Human genetics continued to be allied with eugenic goals of human improvement and directed evolution [even after WWII] ... The field’s leaders also felt it essential to dissociate human genetics from earlier and now disreputable views. They had to create, in other words, the feel of a fresh, new, and ethically squeaky-clean field – without throwing out the eugenic baby with the Nazi bathwater.34

Similarly, Susan Lindee describes in her book, Moments of Truth in Genetic Medicine, that “human genetics was transformed from a medical backwater to an appealing medical research frontier between 1955 and 1975,” with more and more scientists entering the field.35 Yet another historian of genetics, Diane Paul, contends in The Politics of Heredity: Essays on Eugenics, Biomedicine, and the Nature-Nurture Debate that geneticists in the fifties and sixties had a consensus on the “in-principle desirability of eugenics” despite the field’s decline in status.36 With Kevles as a starting point, Paul, Lindee, Comfort, and others since have examined the close ties between eugenics and genetics. These authors establish that genetics was almost a direct outgrowth of eugenics, such that the vision of the future promoted by Progressive eugenicists like Eliot and Hall (discussed in Chapter One) never really disappeared in the science of the postwar era.37

35 Susan Lindee, Moments of Truth in Genetic Medicine (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 1.
37 Paul, Lindee, and Comfort also consider the extension of the eugenics-genetics connection into the twenty-first century, especially through developments like genetics counseling, the Human Genome Project, and “designer babies.” The authors grapple with how contemporary genetics do or do not resemble eugenics, though none offer cut-and-dry answers. These authors do not claim, nor do I, that genetics is entirely eugenics; without discounting the many useful and beneficial contributions geneticists have made, Comfort, Lindee, and Paul suggest that genetics has an ongoing, complicated relationship with eugenics. As Comfort puts it, “To identify contemporary genetic medicine with the
Like positive eugenics and social hygiene, the field of genetics was largely able to make this transition by finding an outlet in the atmosphere of the Cold War. During the Cold War, fear of the atomic bomb prompted newfound interest in the effects of radiation. The public increasingly came to understand that radiation produced terrifying effects, such as mutations. Geneticists and eugenicists also deeply feared mutation, or unrestrained variation, which threatened the orderly and controlled progress toward a better race that both fields preferred. Geneticists in the fifties therefore argued that “atomic radiation made human control of evolution necessary.” This push from the scientific community, plus widespread terror over the effects of radiation, allowed geneticists to amplify their message. As Comfort writes, “the atomic bomb was the best thing that had ever happened to human genetics.” The public was eager to hear how the effects of radiation might be controlled, and geneticists were happy to address that concern.

Dr. H. Bentley Glass was often the one who provided citizens with information about the genetic effects of radioactive fallout. Glass’s research mainly focused on the genetics of radiation, and national newspapers regularly reported on his work. Glass warned the public of how birth defects, “sexual maldevelopment,” and “mongoloid

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eugenic impulse does not necessarily make high-tech healthcare insidious. Conversely, it does complicate the notion that eugenics is necessarily a social evil” (Comfort, 246).

38 Comfort, Human Perfection, 151.
39 Ibid., 161.
idiocy” could result from the atomic bomb. He testified several times in front of Congress on the topic, cautioning legislators, “radiation, no matter how small the dose, endangers future generations of mankind.” At an AIBS-sponsored event, Glass once went as far as to say that the atomic age might be the “last chapter of human history, the terminus of the time-scale” if the U.S. was not careful enough about radioactive fallout. To this day, Glass’s legacy is largely defined by his work on radiation. The context of the Cold War thus allowed Glass and his geneticist peers to take their message to the national stage. Geneticists like Glass captured public attention by capitalizing on Cold War fears of radiation.

At the same time, Glass was also transforming public education in the sciences. Glass participated in and even led massive educational projects, such as the BSCS and the AIBS film series. Though Glass repudiated eugenics, the 1964 and 1967 lectures at the beginning of this chapter illustrate how he did adopt eugenics beliefs. Additionally, as Comfort points out, eugenics motivated geneticists’ concern over radiation. Glass and his colleagues at AIBS brought their genetics-eugenics perspectives to the curriculum and films they produced, the details of which will be discussed later in this chapter. These geneticists took their message to high school education, signaling their desire, as Popenoe urged in *Applied Eugenics*, to create a “sieve”-like educational system through which all students would filter. This ensured that their message would reach the widest possible audience of postwar youth.

Biology teachers were ready and willing to embrace this genetics-eugenics vision. Throughout the fifties, various educational journals routinely included articles that espoused the “new eugenics” of genetics. In *The American Biology Teacher*, Herbert Parkes Riley, Head of Botany at the University of Kentucky, advised biology teachers to embrace genetics. Parkes argued that the most important thing for biology students to learn, be it at the high school or college level, was “heredity and development,” including “biological inheritance” and “the basic laws of Mendel.” Parkes especially wanted students to understand “traits found to be inherited in human beings,” though he does not identify which traits those may be. He did specify that “human genetics and eugenics” are key topics for any genetics course. Parkes also included “mutations and the mutation process” and “radiation effect on hereditary mechanisms” as vital information to teach. Students would be especially interested in these topics, Parkes wrote, because genetics and heredity can help understand the consequences of the “explosion of the first atomic bomb.”

Unlike Parkes, Oscar Riddle, a biology teacher from Plant City, Florida, did detail exactly what heritable traits students should discuss: “Some gradations of mental ability … [are] rigidly controlled by genes.” Riddle further identified feeblemindedness, maternal instinct, and some “constitutional … inequalities in both physical and mental spheres” between races as genetically heritable. Riddle also overtly rejected “Nazi doctrine” as “absurd,” but reiterated that ignoring genetic racial differences does “a poor service to … the advancement … of biological science.” Riddle, like Glass, was thus the perfect embodiment for the genetics-eugenics link in the 1950s. He avoided blatant racism,

while still promoting eugenics beliefs, with the cover of genetics-based scientific authority.

Riddle, Parkes, and Glass clearly attempted to shape high school education. All three wrote in *The American Biology Teacher*, a publication intended for biology educators. Parkes’ essay was actually part of a series called, “Training of Biology Teachers.” These educators exemplify how eugenics messages percolated into the field of genetics in postwar biology education, despite attempts by geneticists to distance themselves from scientific racism. Even in schools, overwhelming interest in the atomic bomb provided a cover for genetics, such that eugenics did not simply live on in academia or genetics laboratories, but rather in biology classrooms.

**Full Color, Large Screen Sound Films**

The genetics-eugenics message was taught most often through classroom film. The medium was considered best-suited to science education because it truly brought subjects like genetics and heredity alive for students. The same journals that featured Glass, Parkes, and Riley also regularly promoted the use of classroom film. For example, H. O. Goodman, Professor of Zoology at Michigan State University, laid out a concrete plan for teaching genetics in high school, one that specifically included classroom film. Goodman began his article, simply called “Human Genetics,” by reminding teachers that “Without suggesting that human genetics be the indispensable course in any high school teacher’s curriculum ... the subject deserves high priority among the possible disciplines a teacher might elect to study.”

According to Goodman, integral topics were Mendel’s laws, sex linkage, and chromosomal behavior. But in Goodman’s vision, genetics would

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not be taught as an isolated subject; rather it would be explained in a way that illuminated its practical applications to students’ lives. Such applications included “counseling individual families concerning hereditary abnormalities. The broad implications of genetics in the related areas of race, immigration, eugenics, and evolution present further possibilities [for class discussion].”

The best genetics classes, however, would not “be taught employing lectures alone,” as “the possibility of judicious use of audio-visual aids should not be overlooked ... the presentation of scientific and documentary motion pictures will ... have greater significance for the student when he sees as well as hears them.” Goodman therefore not only suggested content for a genetics curriculum, but also the tools needed to teach it. Given that lectures alone would not suffice, film was integral to postwar genetics education.

Goodman’s suggestion that genetics be taught through film was not unusual. The AIBS Bulletin, The Science Teacher, and The American Biology Teacher regularly recommended classroom films, how to incorporate them in lessons, and activities to complement them. Films were praised for their efficiency (if someone has already recorded a lecture, a teacher might as well show the tape instead of repeating it) and accessibility (if a school did not have equipment to perform advanced scientific processes, students could see view on film). But, as Goodman noted, there was another advantage to instructional video: educators in the fifties, like their Progressive predecessors, generally believed that

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48 Ibid., 25.
49 Ibid., 26.
students learned better via film. Scientific topics like genetics would “have greater significance for the student” if shown on screen. Other educators agreed with Goodman, saying “Audio-visual aids are ... devices for capturing and holding the interest of the student. They become powerful teaching tools in the hands of a competent instructor.” Films would not replace teachers (this fear was another rollover from the Progressive Era), but could enhance learning by “capturing and holding” students’ attention. Despite any fears, biology teachers were told to “Consider the enormous potential of the [film] medium in the biological sciences, where full color, large screen, sound films might bring the whole world of living things into the classroom” such that students can truly appreciate “the variety of life.”

Using classroom film would therefore address several of the “crises” facing biology in the postwar era. The medium would hold student interest, drawing them into the discipline and potentially away from the competing fields of physics and chemistry. Film was also especially suited for displaying “advanced scientific processes,” like meiosis, which was integral to the study of genetics. Along with these benefits, film was an efficient way to bring expert scientists to high schoolers. Film’s propensity for efficiency, accessibility, and excitement made it the medium of choice for postwar biology. Biologists in the 1950s therefore drew on their Progressive roots yet again: they adopted film for classroom use in order to convey explicit scientific facts through its technical capabilities, but also implicit genetics-eugenics tenets through its ability to hold students’ interests. The creators of the AIBS Secondary School Biological Sciences Film

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Series would deploy this same reasoning to justify their films, and to propel them into the classroom.

**AIBS Film Series**

When H. Bentley Glass spoke to the LA County Museum and American Association of School Administrators in 1964 and 1967 respectively, his work on the AIBS Film Series was long complete. The entire series was filmed, edited, and ready for distribution by 1960. Tenth-graders had been studying from AIBS student manuals and watching the films for years when Glass laid out his vision for child coupons and pre-marital tests. While Glass was not the only biologist involved in the film series, the films and their ephemera do reflect both his and the larger postwar understanding of genetics. In fact, the whole AIBS Secondary School Biological Sciences Film Series epitomized the state of biology in the postwar era: the justification for the film series in the early fifties was the low levels of prestige and funding of biology, the chosen medium was film, and the focus of the series was heredity and reproduction.

The idea to create a comprehensive, educational film series began in the mid-1950s. AIBS became an independent organization in 1955 (it had previously been affiliated with the National Academy of Sciences). Upon independence, one of the AIBS administrators’ first decisions was to charter a Committee of Education and Professional Recruitment. In its first year, the Committee discussed ways to overhaul high school

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53 Arnold Grobman, “The Biological Sciences Curriculum Study,” *AIBS Bulletin* 9.2 (1959): 21–3. When one thinks of education and the Cold War, Sputnik looms large. While Sputnik and the National Defense of Education Act (which massively increased funding to U.S. education and was passed in response to the spacecraft launch) did heavily shape science education in the fifties, the AIBS film project was conceived of before the Sputnik launch and did not, as far as I was able to discern, receive NDEA funding. Interestingly, however, NDEA did include a specific provision to
biology in the U.S.\textsuperscript{54} Later deemed a “thorough housecleaning,” the overhaul was necessary since, as discussed, students were believed to be avoiding biology because it seemed dull and irrelevant.\textsuperscript{55} Producing one overarching biological curriculum would also address concerns that the discipline was too disconnected. Lastly, the film series and other AIBS educational initiatives received sizable funding in “grants from government agencies” and private foundations, meaning biology was finally cashing in on the increased science funding of the postwar era.\textsuperscript{56}

As we have seen, given the propensity for biologists to use educational film, the choice of medium for the AIBS curricular renovation was also telling. AIBS staff echoed the reasoning of other biology educators in explaining their decision to use film. Dr. H. Burr Roney, who appeared on-screen as a lecturer in most of the AIBS films, laid out the benefits of film in an \textit{AIBS Bulletin} update about the series:

Such a powerful means of bringing teachers and their subject matter to students as instructional film, represents an unparalleled opportunity for increasing the effectiveness of teachers, broadening the minds and backgrounds of learners, and, ultimately, advancing our profession ... The development of such film courses has now, we hope, reached its biological maturity with the series for secondary schools being produced under the auspices of the American Institute for Biological Sciences.\textsuperscript{57}

Like his peers, Roney saw a large role for film in the classroom, given its ability to “broaden minds and backgrounds.” Fully utilizing film’s potential was one of the foremost aims of AIBS staff. In another article, the staff identified three goals for the

\textsuperscript{54} Grobman, “The Biological Sciences Curriculum Study,” 21–3.

\textsuperscript{55} Menzies, “They’re Taking the Bugs Out of Biology,” \textit{Boston Globe}.

\textsuperscript{56} James Dickson, “American Institute of Biological Sciences: A Progress Report,” \textit{AIBS Bulletin} 9.1 (1959): 16. The film series was funded via grants from the National Science Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Foundation for Educational Advancement. The films were distributed by the McGraw–Hill Text-Film Company (one of the major national educational film companies), which covered distribution costs.

\textsuperscript{57} H. Burr Roney, “A New Approach to the High School Biology Course,” \textit{AIBS Bulletin} 9.2 (1959): 18. Figure 5 shows Roney lecturing in \textit{Reproduction}, one of the AIBS films.
film series: the exploration of fundamental biology concepts, the inclusion of contemporary research, and “that the fullest use would be made of the camera medium.” The “fullest use” was defined as filming microscopic images of “highly visual topics [like meiosis] ... fundamental to the proper understanding of genetics.” The use of film specifically, and the creation of the AIBS Film Series generally, were therefore direct responses to the state of biology in the 1950s.

Once AIBS administrators demonstrated the need for the films, they started crafting content. Writing the film scripts, along with the accompanying student and teacher’s manuals involved a total of 102 total consultants (although only seventy-four were continuously active throughout the whole process). These consultants were high school and college biology teachers, who hailed from across the United States. In charge of coordinating the wide-ranging educators was the Film Series Steering Committee, a subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Professional Recruitment. The Steering Committee began its work by producing one pilot film, gathering feedback on that, and then moving into full production. When the series was completed in 1960, it consisted of 120 thirty-minute films, aimed at the tenth-grade, available across the country as an entire set or individual films. The films were broken down into ten units: “Cell Biology,” “Microbiology,” “Multicellular Plants,” “Multicellular Animals,” “Reproduction, Growth and Development,” “Genetics,” “The

59 Ibid., 354. The overwhelming interest of AIBS members in the filming of meiosis is intriguing. While the process is scientifically important and compelling, it is also the moment of creation of the sex cells. Even at this cellular level, the AIBS filmmakers were preoccupied with sex. See figure 6 for a microscopic image of meiosis from the AIBS film, Reproduction.
60 Those involved came from a wide variety of places, from West Virginia to Wyoming to Texas to California to New York to Michigan. For a full list of consultants and the institutions they were associated with, see Roney, “A New Approach to the High School Biology Course,” 19–20.
Diversity of Plants,” “The Diversity of Animals,” “Ecology,” and “Life, Time and Change.” Each subject had twelve films that progressed in sequential order, but could also be viewed out of context to offer educators maximum flexibility. The films were sold in regular educational film catalogs, just like any other instructional film from the postwar era.62

Once a teacher ordered an AIBS film, he or she would receive not just the filmstrip, but also student and teacher’s manuals for the class. The teacher’s manual gave “in concentrated form the essence of the films as well as specific suggestions for their use.” The manual had sections on “basic concepts and facts to emphasize” from each film, pre-film preparation, objectives for the lesson, “activities to extend interest,” and a bibliography of additional resources.63 The student manual included sections for key questions, study material (with important terms identified in bold), words and expressions (the terms pulled out from the body of the text into a word bank), and study questions.64 Despite the different section headings, the student and teacher’s manuals featured almost identical material and were written by the same consultants. Both manuals also contained similar information about the role of genetics and heredity, and an overwhelming emphasis on reproduction.

While the Genetics unit of the film series does not go as far as Glass’s suggestions of child coupons, it does sound reminiscent of his worldview. The student’s

61 See Roney, “A New Approach to the High School Biology Course,” page 19 for this information in this paragraph about the creation of the film series.
62 The films appeared in nationally read educational journals and catalogs, just like the other films discussed in this thesis thus far. As an example, see “Science – Biology,” Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide (August 1962): 483.
study guide on *The Science of Genetics*, the first film in the Genetics series, tells readers that “the similarity of offspring to parents is well stated in the old saying, ‘Like begets like.’” The section expands on this colloquial phrase, by defining genetics as “the study of hereditary variation, including the control of developmental patterns and the transmission of control information from one generation to another.” Genetics is construed as worthwhile of scientific attention not only to improve plant and animal breeding, but also because “Knowledge of hereditary abnormalities in humans has permitted counselors to advise afflicted individuals about marriage ... Direct benefits such as these from genetic investigation are numerous.”

The last film in this unit, *The Treasury of Human Genes*, picks up on this theme by asking key questions such as, “What are the chances of genetic disease among humans?”, “How may genetic defects be avoided?”, and “What control does man have over his store of genes?” The answers to these questions veer into standard eugenicist themes; the manual tells students, “Among the 3,000,000,000 people on earth ... there is a genetic potential which might be very good or very bad, depending on how we use it.” Students were taught that natural selection, which normally would have prevented the “very bad” genes from reproducing, was no longer applicable as scientific advancements allowed humans extreme control over their environment. But “mankind pays for its sheltered existence by the accumulation of undesirable genes and has the responsibility of building up the treasury of human genes in whatever way possible.” What constitutes “undesirable” or “very bad” genes is never explicitly identified; but this explanation of the young person’s “responsibility of building up the treasury of human genes” is...

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65 American Institute of Biological Sciences, “Part VI Genetics,” *Student’s Study Guide.*
66 Ibid.
followed up by the caveat that genetics counselors are available to advise couples about whether or not they are genetically fit enough to reproduce.67

The eugenics undertone grows even stronger in the subsection, “How May Man Improve His Treasury of Genes?” While the answer to this eponymous question is careful to avoid directly telling people whether they can or cannot have children, it does clearly articulate which populations should reproduce:

A problem which man faces is the difference in reproductive rate of various human types. This problem is less a matter of removing abnormalities than of promoting qualities such as intelligence and skill. There is evidence that professional people of the United States have strikingly fewer children than unskilled persons. These groups may also differ in their genetic potential. If man is to improve or even to keep up his treasury of human genes, the relative rate of reproduction must be shifted in favor of better genetic types.68

By describing intelligence and skill in this hereditary fashion, the student manual harkens back to key tenets of eugenics. The ending “if” statement also puts the onus on future generations, or the students reading this text, to “keep up” the “treasury of human genes” by reproducing at higher rates. The Treasury of Human Genes therefore intends to incite “reproductive morality” in its readers. Historian Wendy Kline defines “reproductive morality” in Building a Better Race, as “a eugenically based ideal that called on prospective parents to consider their progeny’s potential impact on the race.”69 Sexual reproduction should always be at the forefront of a young person’s—or prospective parent’s—mind; reminding students that their primary goal should be parenthood is thus a key element of reproductive morality. By framing reproduction as a “responsibility” and the declining birthrate of “professional people” as a “problem,” The Treasury of Human Genes promotes reproductive morality. Students were cued to consider the impact

67 All of the quotes in this paragraph are found in American Institute of Biological Sciences, “Part VI Genetics,” Student’s Study Guide.
68 Ibid.
69 Kline, Building A Better Race, 126.
their “very good genetic potential” could have, implicitly encouraging them to embrace the responsibility of reproduction, and thus a reproductive morality more generally.

The Genetics unit begins by defining genetics as inheritance across generations. The inaugural film in the unit also homes in on the role of genetics counselors in staving off “genetic abnormalities.” This underlying theme is present throughout the films in the unit, including Mutations, Inheritance in Man, and Nature and Nurture. Finally, the message comes to a head in the final film, The Treasury of Human Genes. The student guide to the film specifically asks its readers questions such as “What control does man have over his store of genes?” only to later tell them that “mankind ... has the responsibility of building up the treasury of human genes in whatever way possible.” This information, coupled with the warning that “professional people of the United States have strikingly fewer children than unskilled persons,” and that “these groups ... differ in their genetic potential” provides a fairly clear answer to the preceding questions.

While only this one unit contains the hard science behind genetics, the theme of reproductive morality is woven throughout all the sections. In the Reproduction film, the first in the Microbiology unit, students are told that reproduction is “the vital bridge between generations.” The study guide repeatedly emphasizes this “vital” role of sexual reproduction to the survival of the human species. This same weight is given to procreation in The Multicellular Animal unit. The exact phrase, “In the course of its lifetime, a young plant or animal becomes an adult and then is able to start having young of its own,” is also repeated verbatim in the study guides for two different films from the

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70 American Institute of Biological Sciences, “Part II Microbiology,” Student’s Study Guide.
71 American Institute of Biological Sciences, “Part IV The Multicellular Animal,” Student’s Study Guide.
Reproduction, Growth and Development unit. A similar sentiment is conveyed in the Reproductive Hormones study section: “All the parts of the reproductive system in both males and females, as well as the functions associated with reproduction, have just one purpose—that is, to ensure the union of egg and sperm, and thus the development of a new individual.” Lastly, the teacher’s manual tells instructors to have students not only understand “the biological importance of reproduction,” but also to “visualize its broad implications.”

At face value, none of this information is scientifically inaccurate. It is undeniably true that reproduction is necessary to the survival of the species. However, this basic biological assumption has been manipulated throughout the film series in service of reproductive morality. By constantly inundating students with the imperative of reproduction to “develop a new individual,” to “have young of [your] own,” to continue the “vital bridge between generations,” and to promote the expansion of a “professional” population, AIBS transcends facts and teaches values. Especially considering the eugenicist content in the Genetics unit, these messages about sex seem even more overt. Even if students did not consciously recognize this underlying significance, the repeated value judgments placed on reproduction signals the priorities and intentions of the film series.

72 American Institute of Biological Sciences, “Part V Reproduction, Growth, and Development,” Student’s Study Guide.
73 Ibid.
**Human Reproduction**

The AIBS films were just some of the instructional films created for the biology classroom that included this reproductive morality. The series was one of many that framed sexual reproduction as part of students’ larger responsibility to future generations. McGraw-Hill, the company that distributed the AIBS films, also produced *Physical Aspects of Puberty, Human Reproduction,* and *Your Body During Adolescence,* which all included the same theme. Coronet made several biology films, such as *Reproduction in Animals* and *Human Body: Reproductive System* about reproduction specifically. Indiana University (IU) also participated in this trend, producing the film, *Basic Nature of Sexual Reproduction.* In addition, National Educational Television (NET) was behind *New Life From Old* and *Physiology of Reproduction,* two other biology-based sex education films.75

As with AIBS films, NET, McGraw-Hill, IU, and Coronet films inculcated reproductive morality. For example, in *Human Body: Reproductive System* the narrator underscores the cyclical nature of reproduction: “After a period of development, usually nine months, a new individual is born. A new human being who in turn will continue human life for another generation.”76 A similar sentence appears in every single one of the films listed above. Again, statements like these are not factually inaccurate when taken out of context. Yet all eight of these films overwhelmingly remind students that their duty is to future generations; the purpose of sexual reproduction was framed solely as a means to ensure the continuity of human life for “another generation,” and young people in the fifties were the primary recipients of this message. When considered within

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75 NET films initially debuted on television, but were packaged, distributed and sold the same way that any other educational film was in the postwar era. Teachers could purchase NET films from catalogs, just as they would with a Coronet or McGraw-Hill film.

76 *Human Body: Reproductive System,* 16 mm, advised by John S. Gray and Albert Wolfson (1959; Chicago: Coronet Instructional Films).
the larger history of the genetics, biology, and the postwar period, the constant repetition of the imperative of reproduction became a reproductive morality.  

These values were picked up on by students, who absorbed them during biology class. One such biology class, taught by Dr. Thomas Knepp to tenth-graders in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, watched McGraw-Hill’s Human Reproduction. The screening came after a “two-week unit study of sex and human reproduction.” Human Reproduction fits perfectly with the genre of biology-based sex education films; after reiterating the miraculous nature of reproduction and birth several times, the narrator concluded the film saying, “[From] a woman’s egg and a man’s sperm ... comes the child who himself will grow up to be a parent ... [Children] themselves will learn one day that becoming a parent is one of life’s greatest joys and one of its greatest responsibilities.” As Knepp ended his reproduction unit with the film, this narration was also the final message students would hear on the matter. Like in Treasury of Human Genes, the Human Reproduction narrator framed a reproductive morality as an adolescent’s “responsibility” to future generations. The idea of “improving the race” was not explicitly mentioned in the film, but parenthood as an imperative—a joy, but also a great responsibility—was. In this way, biology education reminded students to keep their future offspring in mind at all times.

77 The fact that these non-AIBS films reflect the ideals that Glass and his cohort professed could indicate how their genetics-eugenics beliefs became engrained in the very DNA of biological science in the postwar era. If this were the case, it would make sense that films not even directly made by AIBS would have naturally expressed Glass and his peers’ ideologies. The tenets of eugenics were therefore not just in the brushstrokes of any one artist (such as Glass), they were in the paint itself.


The students in Knepp’s class later repeated similar sentiments when discussing the film together, showing how they ingested this reproductive morality. One girl in Knepp’s class commented, “[Human Reproduction] was one of, if not the best, cleanest and healthiest ways in which we teenagers can be informed of our duties to ourselves and to our children.” A boy noted, “everyone should know what things take place in the body. All, or at least most of us, are going to be fathers or mothers one day, and we should know what it is all about.” These students’ responses indicate that they had absorbed the core values of a reproductive morality; Stroudsburg teenagers did not question the usefulness of the film as it applied to their future role as parents. While Knepp only included these two student comments, he presents them as representative of his whole class’s thinking.\(^{80}\)

Knepp was not the only teacher who used Human Reproduction to inculcate reproductive morality. Florence Patterson, a biology teacher at Streator Township High School in Illinois showed the same film to her students.\(^{81}\) Patterson had been teaching biology, including human reproduction, at Streator High for ten years. She began the unit by discussing reproduction in lower-level animals, before proceeding to humans. After the film, Patterson expanded on some central themes with her class. In particular, she cautioned them against premarital sex, given the possibility of pregnancy: “Can anyone measure how deep the satisfaction is to be able to look into the eyes of ... your baby, with the stamp of your own heredity in its every cell ... and not be ashamed of your

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\(^{80}\) See page 62 of Knepp’s essay for these students’ reactions.

part in its coming?\textsuperscript{82} Her explanation, with its emphasis on genetic inheritance, aligned with the overarching biological teachings seen in the AIBS Genetics unit.

Patterson highlighted that her unit was effective at changing student behavior. She gave an example of one girl whose two older sisters had babies before marriage. After taking Patterson’s biology class, the girl pledged to wait until marriage to have children. Patterson was pleased that the course had such an impact, but offered the caveat that “with that family background and her ineptitude in learning ... the immediacy of the temptation might prove stronger than her presently stated resolution, but at least she had caught a glimpse of the ideal, and that was a step forward.”\textsuperscript{83} Her response is steeped in genetics-eugenics thinking: Patterson believes that given the girl’s family history and low academic performance, she is hopelessly predisposed to falling short of “the ideal.” Patterson’s disdain for this student illuminates some limitations of reproductive morality; she does not want just any student to take on the responsibility of parenthood, but rather the students from good “family backgrounds” and with high aptitudes for education. While all students would be taught how vital parenthood is to generational continuity, only some would be encouraged to actually procreate to “improve the race.”

\textbf{Conclusion}

Historians of sex education often write off the postwar era as irrelevant to their study because students did not learn anything factual during the 1950s. For example, in \textit{Sex Goes to School}, Susan Freeman argues that learning about sex in the postwar era was entirely attitudinal: students were taught about dating and hygiene, rather than the

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 584.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 586.
biological facts of life. Yet, students were regularly presented with the science of sex; this learning just occurred more often in their biology class, rather than in a course dedicated to sex education. Postwar teens learned about everything from microscopic images of meiosis, to the intricacies of fertilization, to the hormones involved in birth. The focus on reproductive morality and eugenics in this chapter should not distract from the fact that students did learn scientific material. The actual facts of life would just have been presented along with value-ridden information about the “facts of life.”

The value-laden messages conveyed to teenagers were mainly taught through lessons on genetics and reproduction. Numerous films, teacher’s manuals, and journal articles indicate the continuation of elements of eugenics in postwar genetics. A repeated and overwhelming emphasis on reproduction was also woven throughout biology education, thus inducing a reproductive morality in youth. That students were even covering sex and heredity at all was, at least in part, a feat of the reorganization of biology during the 1950s. Biologists hoped to lure students into the field by highlighting the real-world relevance of reproduction and genetic inheritance. This attraction was thought to be amplified by instructional film, a medium biologists loved not only for its technical capabilities, but also attention-grabbing features.

The AIBS films never went as far as Glass did, staying far away from predicting the use of child coupons or forced sterilization. But Glass and his likeminded colleagues were intimately involved in the creation of the AIBS films and other biology-based sex education films in the postwar era. Their ideas about heredity and reproduction were prominent in all the films, encouraging teenagers, but only those with “very good” genetic potential, to reproduce. Teenagers concretely absorbed this reproductive morality, as seen in their responses to the film Human Reproduction. Glass and his AIBS
involvement were thus a perfect microcosm of the biology community’s need to be more relevant, the influence of Progressive beliefs on modern morality, and the power of the educational film to teach values—all of which allowed Glass and his peers to weave eugenics into the very fabric of American sex education, influencing students’ attitudes towards sex and reproduction. As we will see in the next chapter, however, teenagers did not passively absorb these teachings, but rather actively used what limited agency they had to navigate postwar pressures.
Chapter Four: *It’s Wonderful Being A Girl*

The Things You Have to Know

“Everything is taught in San Antonio high schools except the things you have to know.”

In 1947, a high school student raised his hand in his physiology class and made this “rather bitter statement.” His classmates echoed his complaint, then immediately began organizing to demand a class that would teach, “the things you have to know,” or the details of sex, reproduction, and dating. The boy and his peers formed a committee to petition the San Antonio superintendent for the inclusion of sex education in public schools. Their mission was successful, as the superintendent began planning a Family Life Education curriculum that would go into effect that same year.

When the class heard that they had achieved their goal, the reaction was not excitement. Instead, a different boy grumbled, “Aw, it won’t be any good. Some ole teacher will decide what to teach.” So the students reorganized with a different agenda: to assist with the actual development and implementation of the Family Life course. Students demanded that the curriculum include topics they cared about most, such as parent-child relationships, elements of a healthy marriage, and, of course, dating and “petting.”

In the end, their activism was again successful. The superintendent created a planning committee, comprised of student representatives from every San Antonio high school. The teenagers on the committee made their concerns, especially over the frustrations of going steady, clear in regular meetings with school administrators and

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1 The quotes from these boys can be found in Payton Kennedy, “Family life education in San Antonio,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 39.4 (1953): 156.
teachers. Once the course actually began, teens continued to make their desires the focus of education: a review of the program written six years after its creation noted that classes still mainly centered around student-led discussions and role-playing. By the time the review was published in 1953, over 7,000 San Antonio teenagers had gone through the student-driven course thanks to two boys’ disdainful comments.2

These San Antonio high schoolers were just some of the many young people actively involved in fighting for postwar sex education. Sex education in the postwar era was, in many ways, a youth-driven phenomenon, with teenagers leading efforts to expand curricula nationwide. In the previous two chapters, the enormous pressures and complex ideologies that impacted teenagers’ daily lives were discussed. From eugenics to Cold War concerns, teenagers were pushed and pulled in various directions as they were induced to conform to impossibly rigid social norms. In order to navigate these intense expectations, young people demanded more information, in the form of sex education. A symbiotic relationship thus formed: sex education in the postwar era was both driven from the top-down (positive eugenics teachings embedded in films and lessons) and bottom-up (teens insisting that sex is taught in the classroom). As we will see in this chapter, teenagers utilized the consumer power of their youth culture, which solidified and expanded in the 1950s, to exert the limited agency they had to negotiate societal standards to suit their interests.3

The ways in which students asserted control in sex education classes is the focus of historian Susan Freeman’s *Sex Goes to School*. Freeman argues, “classrooms and schools

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2 Ibid., 158.
3 The terms “teenager” and “adolescent” are embedded in the histories of youth culture and therefore I am conscious of their use in this chapter. The origins of each term are discussed in the next section. Throughout this chapter, I use “teen,” “teenager,” “youth,” and “young people” to connote those ages thirteen to eighteen. This age range represents advertisers’ understanding of who counted as a “teen,” reflecting the focus on the consumer power of youth discussed here.
... were arenas in which students voiced consent as well as dissent to the social expectations of mid-twentieth-century gender and sexual norms. She explores the powerful pressures of heterosexuality that teenagers were exposed to, and how they transformed those pressures through class discussions. Freeman specifically looks at how sex education curricula in Oregon, California, and New Jersey did or did not allow students and educators to have agency. Yet, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Freeman does not consider eugenics or the Cold War in her discussion of students’ experiences. Unlike Freeman, I have identified both of these topics as elements of the forces that pushed and pulled teenagers in various directions.

In this chapter, I expand on Freeman’s premise that teenagers did not passively consume norms: instead, teenagers adopted and adapted normative messages to shape postwar sex education and joyfully embrace being teenagers.

**Youth Culture and Sex Education**

Teens’ agency largely grew from their power as consumers in a unified postwar youth culture. While youth culture originated in the Progressive Era, it did not truly solidify until the 1950s. As mentioned in Chapter One, “adolescence” was first defined in the late nineteenth century. Progressive G. Stanley Hall coined the term to separate young people (Hall defined “adolescents” as those ages fourteen to twenty-four) from adults, in order to protect youth from industrialization. Despite the Progressive emphasis on adolescence, it was not until the Great Depression that young people attended school in record numbers. Youth in the 1930s were culturally and legislatively discouraged from

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4 Freeman, *Sex Goes to School*, xi.
working, so as not to compete with adults for limited available jobs. Adolescents were thus concentrated in schools; it was estimated that two out of every three high school age student was enrolled by 1936. This clustering of young people in school meant that peer groups became the main influencers in their lives and a “cohesive youth culture” developed for the first time. The swelling population of high schoolers also led adults to pay more attention to them: the 1930s saw the creation of advice and guidance books made explicitly for the classroom.

World War II, however, brought the end of the government incentives and mandates to stay in school. Youth began to be encouraged to enter the workforce to take the place of men being drafted overseas. As the war pulled the country out of the Depression, the spending power of adolescents, one of the biggest markets left on the home front, grew. “Adolescents” came to be known as “teenagers,” the popular term for describing “youth as a discrete, mass market.” Even the frequency of the use of the words “teen,” “teen-ager,” and “teenager” grew dramatically in the 1950s. The phrase “youth culture” was also devised during WWII, signifying just how pervasive the concept had become.

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5 Savage, Teenage, 294. As Savage explains, initiatives like the National Youth Administration poured millions of dollars into encouraging students to stay in school by employing them on school campuses.
6 Ibid., 292.
7 McComb, “Rate Your Date,” 42.
8 Ibid., 41.
10 Savage, Teenage, 453.
12 Savage, Teenage, 453. Savage notes that a sociologist came up with this phrase in 1942. The fact that adults were the ones defining “youth culture,” “teenager,” and other terms complicates the question of agency. If adults were handing down “youth culture” to teenagers, did young people only have as much agency within it as grown-ups allowed them? While adult control may have been a limiting
While the war upended the trajectory of youth culture by taking young people out of school and sending them back to work, this proved to be only a temporary disturbance. The term “teenager” itself may have been “researched and developed” during WWII, but it was the postwar era that was “spearheaded by the idea of the Teenager.” Beginning in 1945, the number of teens in the workforce immediately began to decline. Postwar teens enrolled in high school in record numbers, with approximately 60 percent graduating high school and 50 percent going on to at least some college. There also were simply more young people to attend high school, as the “baby boom” enlarged the school-age population. Historians of education agree that the 1950s marked a qualitative change in public secondary education—high school as an institution became “a strategic part of the national experience in 1950.”

At the same time, youth culture, specifically girls’ youth culture, became even more strictly delineated as advertisers realized the extent of the teen market. Towards the end of the war, advertisers estimated that teenagers had a “spending capacity” of $750 million. As one youth culture historian put it simply, “teens [in the postwar era] enjoyed unprecedented spending power.” With the introduction of “teenagers” in the fifties, girls were recognized as a valuable market; girls’ culture would continue to be defined by

factor, the rest of this chapter illustrates key ways in which teens were able to assert their own interests, using what limited agency they did have.

13 Ibid., 465.
14 Rollin, Teen Culture By the Decades, 113.
17 Savage, Teenage, 448. For an example of how girls earned the money that gave them such a high spending capacity, see Miriam Formanek-Brunell, “Truculent and Tractable: The Gendering of Babysitting in Postwar America,” in Delinquents and Debutantes, ed. Sherrie Inness. In this chapter, Formanek-Brunell writes that of the eight million girls in postwar America, half of them babysat in the fifties, providing a legitimate source of income for many of them.
18 Rollin, Teen Culture By the Decades, 156.
their purchases throughout the postwar period. The strength of fifties youth culture was due to both the growing concentration of teens in school and their immense purchasing power.

It was in this context that students like those in San Antonio demanded more and better sex education. The San Antonio high schoolers utilized postwar youth culture—their concentration in a peer group within the U.S. public school system—to change educational outcomes. As we have seen in Chapters Two and Three, white American teenagers were inundated with information inducing them to go steady (but only if they played the field first), to settle down (but only with someone who matched their genetic, cultural and socioeconomic background), and to follow myriad other rigid social codes, such as those taught in films like Going Steady? and Social Sex Attitudes. In response, young people demanded more information. Teens pushed for sex education to help them navigate the intense expectations society placed upon them. To that end, they not only insisted on sex education, but also shaped its content around their concerns.

Like their peers in San Antonio, students in Pennsylvania similarly guided course content based on their interests. In the 1950–1 school year, 80 percent of Pennsylvania’s public secondary schools offered some form of sexual education. This 80 percent figure was obtained by two ASHA researchers who surveyed and interviewed staff at a representative sample of Pennsylvania high schools. Significantly, the researchers found that in schools with distinct sex education programs (separate classes dedicated to the

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20 John Masley and Arthur Davis found this statistic based on survey results they collected from PA high schools. In 1950, Masley and Arthur sent written surveys to every high school in the state. They received 777 replies, which amounted to 75.4% of the total high schools in the state. The sample was representative in terms of size and location of high schools across PA. Masley and Davis also report that their survey and interview methods were “reviewed and criticized” by “recognized leaders” in their field.
subject rather than integrating it into science or health classes), administrators reported, “they got more help [determining the curriculum] from teachers and students than from any other source.”\textsuperscript{21} While many schools had distinct courses, others had an informal system in which teachers addressed students’ questions as they came up naturally. Survey results showed that teens in these less-structured programs still asked their teachers questions about the “problems of adolescence,” including “physical, emotional and social changes,” as well as dating, necking, and petting. Even though these schools did not have dedicated health or sex education programs, educators had to address these concerns in other classes as students forced teachers’ hands with questions.\textsuperscript{22}

Just as in San Antonio and Pennsylvania, so too did adolescents in Connecticut determine the direction of their sex education. In 1955, the Connecticut State Department of Education released “Suggestions for Home and Family Living Classes – Secondary School Level – Boys and Girls” based on responses gathered at a “Special Workshop held at Glastonbury High School on March 3, 1955.”\textsuperscript{23} The students in the Workshop indicated that their favorite part of the course was “that they elect units by vote in class. The students were most pleased ... because ... they had a share in planning.” According to the students, the most important elements of the course was that it covered “dating problems, manners and dancing” and because “you can use things you study in later life.”\textsuperscript{24} The report also encouraged instructors to “allow students to raise

\textsuperscript{21} Masley and Davis, “Sex Education in Pennsylvania’s Public Secondary Schools,” 109.
\textsuperscript{22} See Masley and Davis, “Sex Education in Pennsylvania’s Public Secondary Schools,” pages 112-3 for descriptions of sex education integrated throughout the curriculum, rather than in a distinct course.
\textsuperscript{24} See page 3 of the report cited above for students’ reactions.
questions so you get them within their interest.” Suggested activities included student-led small group discussion and role-playing, which would both prioritize students’ voices.

In Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Texas, teenagers did not simply call for more sex education, but specifically dictated what they wanted that education to consist of. Students like those in San Antonio used the power of their youth culture to create a teen bloc in which they could advocate for their own educational interests. Once they had successfully initiated courses, teenagers actually set the agendas for those classes, primarily focusing on topics like going steady. In fact, when teens had a hand in planning their sex education, they consistently emphasized going steady as “the thing you have to know.” The ability to direct educators to focus on this dating practice, potentially at the expense of other topics adults wanted to cover, indicates how teens exercised agency in the postwar era.

Yet teens’ overwhelming attention to going steady could also reveal the pervasiveness of positive eugenics in the postwar era. As discussed in Chapter Two, going steady was a key component of positive eugenics, one that came up in several social guidance films and books. The fact that students also geared the sex education courses they helped create toward dating issues suggests the pressure they might have felt to successfully navigate the “problem” of going steady as it was framed by positive eugenicists like Popenoe. Teenagers in Connecticut, Texas, and Pennsylvania were not the only ones who implicitly addressed eugenics concerns in their sex education advocacy. Rather, these teens were a microcosm of a larger trend that was playing out across the country, which reflected eugenic and Cold War concerns.

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25 Ibid., 6.
Hi-Y Youth and Government

The national story of teens’ campaign for sex education was revealed in the Young Man Christian Association’s (YMCA) Youth and Government Program. The Youth and Government Program was coordinated by High School YMCAs (or Hi-Ys, as they were colloquially known) throughout the postwar era. In Hi-Y Youth and Government meetings, teenagers were given the chance to experience political work, first by developing their own bills, then by convening at state legislatures to hold mock assembly sessions where the bills would be passed (or shot down) in youth committees. Across the U.S., in Hi-Ys from California to New York, students proposed and passed bills on sexual education.

For example, on April 23rd, 1948, the “boy legislators” of Minnesota’s Hi-Y Youth and Government Program occupied the state legislature to pass one such bill. Introduced by Evan Williams and Grannis Pierson of North High School, the bill “provide[d] that a Program of sex education be a required course in all high schools in the State of Minnesota.” Individual schools could determine the length of the course, but it had to include at least “the basic theories of human reproduction” and “information of the common venereal diseases.” The last section of the bill instructs teachers that, “the method of presentation shall include: texts, lectures, films, slides, and discussions.”

The Minnesota high schoolers that passed the legislation discussed above likely came up with the idea for a sex education bill on their own. The Youth and Government Program encouraged total autonomy amongst its teenage participants. A workbook from the California Hi-Y Youth and Government Committee defines itself as, “a program of

‘doing’ ... The specific focus ... is lawmaking and developing of public policy as practiced in state government.” 27 Students were expected to gain hands-on policy knowledge, and to draft very precise, well-crafted legislation. Other sections in the book included “How Should A Bill Be Developed” (meet with local policy leaders, identify issues affecting your community), “What Are the Points of A Good Bill” (easily applicable, concise, focused on just one topic), “Instructions on Drafting A Bill” (type neatly, underline key parts, research thoroughly), a “Sample Bill,” and “How Should I Prepare for the Model Legislature” (keep an organized calendar, send in your registration fee). 28 Participating in the Youth and Government Program thus required hard work and preparation—teenagers were expected to take legislating seriously.

One of the most important points, stressed in both capital letters and emphatically underlined, was student autonomy. Students were instructed, “DO NOT ALLOW ANY ADULT TO COMPOSE YOUR BILL FOR YOU – this is YOUR project – You may get adult advice and counsel on your bill – But be sure the final ideas and wording are your own.” 29 This forceful reminder reflects the agency that high schoolers could have experienced in the Youth and Government Program. Students generated their own ideas for legislation, reflecting issues that they cared most about, and saw those ideas come to fruition when their bill was presented to the youth assembly later on. These bills were at least intended to be teenage creations from start to finish.

Once students had drafted their legislation, they reported to their state legislatures to introduce, debate, and vote on theirs and their peers’ work. The New Hampshire Youth and Government delegation provides an overview of one such event.

28 Ibid., 7–13.
29 Ibid., 7.
in their “Final Report” of the “N.H. Y.M.C.A. Fifth Youth and Government Legislature.”30 The New Hampshire students began by electing officers, such as a teenage governor, president of the assembly, stenographer, and more. When they arrived at the New Hampshire State Legislature on Friday afternoon, “everything was turned over to us [the students] including office of the [actual] governor and governor’s council chambers.”31 The adult New Hampshire governor greeted the teens, offering words of legislative wisdom over a welcome banquet.32 After the banquet, “the [teenage] delegates went to the state house, three blocks away, where things really began to happen. The senate assembled in the senate chambers under the gavel of Julia Larkin of Portsmouth, president of the senate.”33 President Larkin, as she is subsequently referred to in the report, went on to assign delegates to committees such that debate could begin over the students’ bills. The youth spent the whole next day discussing and voting on proposed legislation. The formality of these proceedings, including teenagers being referred to only by their titles, such as “President Larkin,” further illustrates just how seriously these mock assemblies were taken. The New Hampshire report also speaks to the autonomy teens possessed in their delegations, fully controlling the entire operation.

Despite the relative freedom youth enjoyed in Hi-Ys, they were still subjected to larger societal pressures, specifically those of domestic containment. Fostering civic participation in the American political system was the overarching theme of the Hi-Y movement. The program was identified as “A project of citizenship training ...
specifically designed for ... the potential leaders of tomorrow’s communities.”

Nationwide, the Youth and Government motto was “Democracy must be learned by each generation.” Indoctrinating youth into this “project of citizenship training” is notable in the climate of the Cold War, especially given the doctrine of domestic containment as discussed in Chapter Two. In domestic containment, the family acts as protection against communism. Training young people, or “the potential leaders of tomorrow’s communities,” on the ideals of American democracy would therefore have been vital to national security. In some cases, this motivation was explicitly anticommunist; in a newspaper article covering an annual Hi-Y model legislature in Oklahoma, the author reminded readers, “These youth and others believe in American government and all it stands for. They are the most important weapon we have in our battle against the communist ambition to destroy freedom.”

While the Youth and Government program was founded in 1936, long before the Cold War, it appears to have taken on a new urgency and meaning in the postwar era. Students had to participate in the Hi-Y legislatures not only as part of their “citizenship training,” but also because if youth did not actively appreciate and maintain democratic ideals, American democracy could be destroyed by the “battle against communism.” In the fifties, training the “leaders of tomorrow’s communities” in the intricacies of politics meant weaponizing them to ensure the continuation of American values.

The New Hampshire governor drove this point home when he spoke to the New Hampshire youth delegation. Governor Lane Dwinell introduced himself as an “admiring bystander” in the day’s proceedings, not wanting to interfere with the teens’ work. He then offered a stark note about the importance of democracy: “We sometimes

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34 “Youth and Government Program for California Workbook,” 2.
forget how precious our liberty is, because we have always had it here. Remember it and preserve it.”

Again, this emphasis on students as responsible for “remembering” and “preserving” liberty, freedom, and democracy suggests that the Hi-Ys of the 1950s took on special meaning in the Cold War, pinning hopes on students not only as future parents, but also as the guardians of democracy. The Governor does not explicitly contrast American democracy with Soviet communism, but he does situate the Hi-Y teens in the “proud legacy” of events like the Revolutionary War and ratification of the Constitution. By drawing on the ideals of American independence and democracy, while New Hampshire’s youth directly enacted them, the Governor, and the Hi-Y movement as a whole, sent a clear message about the superiority of the American political system.

Teenage participants in the Hi-Y legislatures picked up on this lesson, and took it seriously. For example, Linda Farley, a high school senior and the youth governor of the California Model Legislature in 1960, made combatting communism her top legislative priority. In a newspaper article covering her election, Farley argued in favor of strengthening American education in order to “keep up with our rival, Russia.” Farley also echoed the official Hi-Y motto saying, “Democracy ... is the best political system, but only when all its citizens take their responsibility seriously.” Farley indeed took that responsibility very seriously as she intended to one day become a U.S. ambassador, representing “the best political system” overseas. The article also noted that Farley’s career goals did not “mean she’ll pass up marriage. She wants to marry following

37 The idea that liberty and freedom must be actively preserved and maintained by American youth is also present in Seventeen magazine articles from the postwar era. Some of these articles are discussed in depth later in this chapter.
graduation from college ... She also wants to have four children.” 39 Farley was, in many ways, the epitome of domestic containment. Her career goals were explicitly anti-communist, but were still subsumed to her role as a future wife and mother. Even in the world of the Hi-Ys, which were literally governed by teenagers, young people were subjected to the pressures of domestic containment.

But if this anti-communist motivation gave teenagers a foot in the door to legislatively announce their interests, they took this opportunity and ran with it. Farley and her peers may have passed some bills related to the Cold War, but it is far more likely that they attended to topics they cared about; as one newspaper article noted, the vast majority of legislation passed by Hi-Y delegations “reflected matters of special concern to teen-agers.” 40

The topic of the most “special concern” was sex education. Teenagers in the Hi-Ys passed legislation on numerous issues, but sex education remained a common theme for proposed bills in the postwar era. Like their Minnesota peers, the teens in the Model General Assembly of the 1948 Virginia Youth and Government Program passed a sex education law that same year. The Virginia bill would “include Sex Hygiene and Family Relations into the curricula of the High Schools in the State of Virginia.” While the course would not be mandatory as it was in Minnesota, Virginian sophomores and juniors could elect to take the class, which consisted of “three class periods of sixty minutes each per week in mixed groups and two class periods of sixty minutes each per week to segregated [boys from girls] groups.” 41

41 The Virginia YMCA Model General Assembly, “Bill Book 1948” (Richmond: April 9, 10, 1948).
The New York Hi-Y team also drafted and approved bills about sex education. In a 1944 article, the *New York Times* reported that the model legislature, led by Peggy Hessler and Lee Bastiani of Buffalo, passed a grand total of twenty-two bills, including one “providing a compulsory four-year course in sex education for all high school students.” Two years later, another cohort of New York Hi-Y members “took over the functions of the City Council” to unanimously approve a “sex education bill setting up a one-term course to be taken either in the junior or senior year.” Seventeen-year-old Ruth Clarke of Erasmus Hall High School sponsored the bill, noting that she “encountered no difficulty with the sex education measure” and that all her peers were in favor of it. In 1948, the *Times* printed an almost identical story: “The City Council was taken over ... by thirty-three high school students, members of the Hi-Y clubs of Brooklyn and Queens ... an annual affair.” Once again, teens unanimously passed a bill, this time introduced by seventeen-year-old Jerome Schiffman, “to provide a course in sex education in all public high schools.”

In Arizona, teens included more detail about the content of their proposed sex education course, similarly to their counterparts in Minnesota. The Third Arizona YMCA Model Legislature gathered in Phoenix in 1951 and mandated that all public high schools would “present a compulsory course in preparation for marriage and family living.” This course would be taken in one’s junior or senior year and would “adequately present eugenics, physiology, marital relations, and family life.” Students also stipulated that teachers would have to be well trained in order to accommodate this new class:

44 Ibid.
“The State Board of Education shall require one or more of the state teacher training colleges to set up courses of training adequate to prepare teachers for presenting marriage and family living to adolescent youth.”

A few years later, the Illinois Youth Legislature gathered to pass “an act relating to sex education in public schools” during students’ senior years. The Illinois course, proposed by the 1958 youth delegation, also required teachers to “take a special course in presenting and teaching a subject of this type.” While not specified in the bill, this requirement would presumably involve setting up new courses at “teacher training colleges” in Illinois, as well.

In this way, the story of postwar sex education comes full circle. The first chapter of this thesis chronicled the creation of a postwar educational film market, specifically centered on sex education. Part of that new industry included the introduction of teacher education courses designed both to help future educators utilize the new technology and to deepen their knowledge of sex education. In the 1950s, teenagers in Arizona and Illinois were demanding the exact same thing: teacher training that would accommodate their desire for more robust sexual education. Teenagers in Minnesota specifically called for teachers to use films in a newly created mandatory sex education course. While these students’ demands may not have been the impetus behind entire industries or teacher education curricula, these bills do show how youth were at the forefront of calling for sex education. Around the country, in states like Virginia, Illinois, and New York alike, youth made it clear that sex education was their priority.

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Hi-Y teens also strove to implement some eugenics-oriented policies, related to their push for sex education courses. Aside from the Arizona delegations’ specific inclusion of “eugenics” in their sex education bill, other teens made more subtle references to the topic. In Minnesota, teenagers Edward Hane and Raymond Waldon of St. Paul’s Wilson High School passed a health education bill requiring “health services” ranging from nutrition to “moral betterment.” A larger teenage coalition, Roy Rasmuseun, Gerald Meland, James Sandelin, and Robert Daun, passed two separate bills “promoting public health [by] requiring pre-marital medical examinations and providing penalties for violations thereof.” These examinations would include blood tests for syphilis, gonorrhea and tuberculosis, and would mandate that couples file their results with the State Board of Health.48 The California workbook provides examples of previous bills, such as one “requiring parents of delinquent minors to attend family relationship classes” and “providing for compulsory physical-dental examinations of school children.”49

On the surface, these proposed bills might not seem explicitly eugenicist. Yet, including a health examination in the requirements for a marriage license was a central focus for many eugenicists. Popenoe included the concept in Applied Eugenics as part of his vision for the future: “Eventually marriage will not be permitted without a thorough examination as to physical and mental abilities and that in certain cases a marriage license will be issued only after evidence that one or other of the applicants has been sterilized.”50 He thought obtaining a premarital exam should be such an encoded norm that “Anyone who proposes marriage without presenting evidence of fitness will come

50 Popenoe, Applied Eugenics, 185.
to be looked upon with suspicion.” Glass, too, was an explicit supporter of marriage licenses, as discussed in the beginning of Chapter Three. While we do not know where Roy, Gerald, James and Robert got their idea for their marriage license bill, it definitely reflected mainstream eugenics thinking.

The “compulsory physical-dental examinations of school children” also has larger eugenics implications. As discussed in Chapter One, the Progressive Era saw the birth of an organized eugenics movement, with Progressives introducing mandatory school attendance as a means of social control. Part of this control involved monitoring urban immigrant youth for infectious diseases by implementing routine and required health inspections on all public school children. This logic also supports Popenoe’s theory, discussed in Chapters Two and Three, that the school should act as a “sieve” to sort and categorize all children. The inclusion of the marriage license and physical examination bills shows that teens in the fifties were involved in generating support for certain elements of the eugenics agenda.

1950s teens were deeply invested in both sex and eugenics education. The sex education and eugenics legislation promoted by Hi-Y teenagers often resembled the ideas put forth by Popenoe, Glass and others. At the same time, domestic containment undergirded the very existence of the Youth and Government Programs teenagers were participating in. To what degree did youth actually imbibe the eugenics and Cold War

51 Ibid.
52 As discussed in Chapter Two, Popenoe worked closely with other eugenicists who shared his ideas, and his beliefs were widely disseminated. For example, Popenoe’s colleague, marriage counselor Abraham Stone, wrote a eugenics argument for premarital exams in “Heredity Counseling: Eugenic Aspects of the Premarital Consultation,” in *Eugenics Quarterly* 2.2 (1955). Glass also had a wide reach as a scientific authority to espouse his genetics-eugenics views. The consistency of Stone’s opinion with Glass and Popenoe’s reflects a consensus on these eugenics measures.
teachings in the very courses they were fighting for? If we take a closer look at youth culture, specifically as it relates to consumerism, we can see that young people transformed these lessons to focus on “matters of special concern to teen-agers.”

**Seventeen**

Teens’ advocacy for eugenics and sex education measures involved them in a feedback loop: they actively pursued more sex education in order to help them navigate the extreme pressures of the postwar era, only to receive an education that reinforced strict social norms (such as those about homosexuality, sexual satisfaction, and going steady discussed in Chapter Two and the reproductive morality discussed in Chapter Three).

But teenagers did not simply act as mirrors for the expectations thrust upon them, rather they reflected and refracted these teachings. While teens’ agency, especially that of teen girls, was severely limited in the postwar era, they did use what limited self-control their youth culture and purchasing power afforded them to adopt and adapt the social codes imposed on them.

The purchasing power of girls in the postwar era is exemplified in the founding of *Seventeen* magazine. As discussed earlier in this chapter, youth culture solidified after WWII, especially as advertisers focused on teenagers as consumers. *Seventeen* was a major source of revenue for advertisers, who could market products to its large, mostly female subscriber base. *Seventeen’s* first issue debuted in 1944 and sold 400,000 copies in its first six days of existence.54 Five years later, it had 2.5 million subscribers. 55 The magazine defined teenage girls not only to themselves, but also to the rest of the country:

Seventeen magazine was instrumental in developing the image of the teenage girl as a consumer of the magazine and the products advertised within its covers, but also as a member of society. It invested the teenage girl with two separate, yet related identities: the image of a consumer for manufacturers, businessmen, and advertisers; and the image of the teenage girl for girls themselves.\textsuperscript{56}

Seventeen reflected the contradictions and paradoxes felt in the lives of teen girls during and after WWII. The magazine treated its readers (white, middle-class girls) as responsible engaged citizens (by presenting them with articles about current events and politics), but also as mindless consumers susceptible to peer pressure.\textsuperscript{57} The magazine also encouraged girls to pursue their studies, though “career articles did not overshadow Seventeen’s emphasis on cleaning, decorating, shopping, cooking, or planning parties.”\textsuperscript{58} With the introduction of Seventeen and “teenagers,” WWII cemented girls as a valuable market for advertisers.

Seventeen’s editorial board understood the influence teen girls had in their roles as consumers. The magazine’s leaders commissioned a study in 1945 to analyze girls’ purchasing power.\textsuperscript{59} An “independent research organization”—the same one that administered the Gallup polls—was contracted to survey Seventeen readers and their mothers about their spending. The company interviewed and surveyed 1,010 subscribers

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. In comparison, Mademoiselle (which also targeted female teenage readers) had 169,633 subscribers in 1940, five years after its debut. By 1954, Mademoiselle had 522,162 readers, still short of Seventeen. That same year Glamour, which Seventeen considered competition, had 647,740 readers. I could not locate subscription rates for Calling All Girls and Charm, two magazines that Seventeen thought to be rivals. Magazines such as Life, Good Housekeeping and Ladies Home Journal did have more subscribers than the teen magazines. In 1954, Ladies Home Journal had over five million readers, with Good Housekeeping reporting over three million. However, these magazines were also intended for adults and probably had a wider subscription base. The subscription rates for the magazines noted here can be found in N. W. Ayer & Son’s, Directory: Newspapers and Periodicals (Pennsylvania: N. W. Ayer & Son, Inc.). I consulted the 1940, 1954, and 1955 editions.


\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 142–3.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 153.

\end{footnotesize}
between the ages of thirteen and eighteen (the magazine’s target demographic). The survey revealed the socioeconomic status of the average Seventeen reader. 59 percent of respondents reported that their parents would pay for their entire college tuition, which was feasible given that 82 percent of their fathers were employed in a professional, business or skilled job.

Fathers were not the only wage earners in the family, however. 51 percent of the girls interviewed held jobs, mostly in babysitting, to earn money. Playing up girls’ economic sway, the study noted, “And it’s not just ‘pin money’ she’s working for either... When [she] works she earns $13.48 a month ... This, in addition to a regular family allowance -- $2.13 a week.” When asked what they typically spent their money on, girls said everything from movies to candy to school supplies to music. The report would have been of particular use to advertisers, as it goes into incredible detail about the average amount teenagers spent on different items (“price paid for last school or street dress bought”) and their brand preferences (asking girls to rate their favorite brands of lipstick, shampoo, soap, etc.). These survey questions indicate a keen interest in girls’ spending habits, as well as awareness that they had a significant amount of money to spend.

Aside from advertisements, Seventeen was a principal source of girls’ sex education in the fifties. In 1951, the magazine published an anthology comprised of some of its

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60 The study takes care to assure its reader that its findings are representative. Those surveyed were distributed throughout urban, suburban, and rural locales and fairly evenly across ages. The actual questionnaire used is included in the publication. The study’s authors also note that interview and survey questions were pre-tested to ensure accuracy. Also repeated throughout the study is the caveat that participants never knew the report was commissioned by Seventeen so as not to create bias.

61 These numbers are averages from all of the responses.

62 These figures are from the Seventeen study, “Life With Teena: A Seventeen Magazine Survey of Subscribers and Their Mothers Conducted and Compiled March, 1945.” See figures 9 and 10 for the illustrations that accompanied some of these data.
most popular articles from its first six years in existence.63 Called The Seventeen Reader, the book presented articles, short stories, and even poems that had appeared in the magazine.64 Included in collection were selections like “Sex ... The Life Force,” “What is a Kiss?” and “The Moon and the Mood” (an article about menstruation). While these are only three of the thirty-five total pieces, they still indicate that Seventeen regularly covered topics like sex and sexuality and that those articles were popular among its annual readership of over two million.

The articles also presented a more liberal outlook on sexuality than more formal sex education did. For example, in “Sex ... The Life Force,” sex was described as “a simple and sane and beautiful thing.” The article reassured girls that “It would be extraordinary if you had reached your present age without developing a thoroughly healthy, normal curiosity about sex.” The article provided some biological information, including terms for female anatomy (ovaries, uterus, cervix) and an explanation of fertilization. It also included the caveat, “Naturally, since ours is a democratic country, there are varied opinions on sex and marriage.”65 The emphasis on individual opinion and the stress on the normalcy of sex contrasted with the more prescribed sex education of social hygiene. Even when films like Social Sex Attitudes and Going Steady? provoked the viewers with on-screen questions, the queries were fairly explicitly answered by the film’s narrative. Seventeen, on the other hand, provided the “right” answer (the article did come down heavily in favor of waiting until marriage to have sex, citing the social stigma of premarital sex as one of several reasons for abstinence), but allowed for more

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64 Ibid.
“democratic” choice. “Sex ... the Life Force” even invited girls to seek out information about sex (from trusted sources like a parent, pastor, or teacher).

“What is a Kiss?” similarly encouraged girls to make their own decisions, while tentatively embracing their sexuality. Seventeen did not seek to stop girls from kissing: “Kiss a boy only when you feel he’s extra-special. (You’ll notice that we are not saying ‘a boy you deeply love.’ That will happen after several boys and many kisses).” The idea of kissing many boys could reflect eugenicists’ desire for young people to explore multiple partners before finding the one “you deeply love.” But Seventeen paired this advice with the caveat that “Petting and kissing are neither ‘all wrong’ nor ‘all right’” and girls should not judge their friends for having different standards than they do. The authors also noted that kissing is “normal and healthy,” as long as one is not succumbing to peer pressure. The eugenic undertone of the message was therefore offset by the overarching emphasis on girls thinking for themselves and making their own decisions. The subtle subversion of this eugenic lesson is indicative of the ways in which girls, and postwar youth generally, both adopted and adapted the social norms prescribed to them.

In “The Moon and the Mood,” Seventeen continued this relatively empowering messaging. The entire article sought to demystify menstruation, as well as to end the social stigma surrounding it: “It seems very strange that this simple function would worry and even distress such a large number of people.” Aside from telling girls that periods were “natural, normal and necessary ... Let’s stop calling it The Curse,” Seventeen also wanted its readers to buck up during menstruation. Girls were told off for believing in “old wives’ fiddlesticks” about things they could or could not do on their periods:

“We don’t know where the idea started that you can’t take baths while you are

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66 These quotes can be found on pages 183–4 of “What is a Kiss?” in The Seventeen Reader.
menstruating, but will it please go back where it started and not bother us any more?\footnote{68} The magazine also instructed girls not to be coy with boys on the topic, either: “Boys aren’t nearly as aghast at the idea of menstruation as you might imagine. They learn about it in their biology class, and if they have any intelligence at all, they understand it.”\footnote{69} Seventeen presciently urged girls to accept the normal functions of their reproductive systems, in ways that went beyond the mainstream teachings of formal sex education at the time.\footnote{70}

Seventeen took the same nominally subversive attitude and tone when it came to politics, as well. Three of the articles in The Seventeen Reader explicitly discussed government. All three resoundingly praised the American political system, in ways that were very reminiscent of the Hi-Y focus on democracy. Like the New Hampshire governor, Seventeen reminded its audience that their freedom is priceless, and required hard work: “The only insurance of Freedom is our love for it, our willingness to work and think and act for it.” The magazine’s readers were reminded that they were “lucky” to live in a country that values choice—in everything from our political leaders to “the dates you have and the clothes you buy.” While the Soviet Union was never mentioned outright, girls were reminded that other people were not as “lucky,” lacking not only freedom of choice, but also “enough to eat, enough to wear, [and] school for all.”\footnote{71}

\footnote{68} The colloquial, friendly tone conveyed in this quote is carried throughout the Reader. The magazine never devolved into being condescending, but always maintained a matter-of-fact character. By leveling with girls in this tone, Seventeen signaled that it took its readers and their interests seriously. \footnote{69} “The Moon and the Mood,” 48. \footnote{70} The taboo surrounding menstruation still exists. A new thought-piece about the stigma of periods appears in the media almost annually. Not coincidentally, girls are still on the forefront of fighting the menstrual taboo. Two girls, tenth-graders Andrea Gonzales and Sophie Hauser, recently created a computer game called “Tampon Run,” in which users throw virtual tampons at their animated enemies. Hauser and Gonzales describe the reasoning behind the game as: “The taboo that surrounds [menstruation] teaches women that a normal and natural bodily function is embarrassing and crude ... Tampon Run is a way of discussing the taboo in an accessible way” (tamponrun.com). \footnote{71} These quotes can be found on pages 169–70 of “It’s Not An Easy Thing,” in The Seventeen Reader.
Seventeen thus repeated the well-worn anti-communist rhetoric of the postwar era: youth were the vanguard protecting American democracy.

Seventeen did not just remind its readers of their role in American politics, but also mandated that they take action to create change. Seventeen readers were told they were never too young to participate in politics; the magazine reminded girls that if they could not yet legally vote, there were myriad other ways to get involved, including writing letters and volunteering. Seventeen expected its subscribers to be informed: an entire article in the Reader was devoted to teaching girls how to effectively read a newspaper so as to fully understand current events. Seventeen made it clear that political participation was expected at all levels, explaining that state and local politics are just as important as national elections. Teen girls were also instructed to look up voting records, form their own opinions, and “talk about politics. Better yet, ask questions about politics.” It is not hard to imagine California youth governor Linda Farley reading one of these articles and adding “become an ambassador” to her life plan alongside motherhood. As we have seen from the Hi-Y legislatures, once teenagers like Linda start asking these questions, and start gaining political access and control, they exert their interests. While the underlying motivation for these Seventeen articles may have been anticommunist, they read as a call-to-participation, inciting girls to get involved in local, state, and national politics.

72 “How To Read A Newspaper” in The Seventeen Reader, 266–288.
73 “Your Place in Politics,” in The Seventeen Reader, 238. Relatedly, Seventeen included articles arguing for a “democratic” family structure. Families should not be dictatorships, the magazine said, but rather teens should be included in important conversations about how to spend money, what time to set for curfew, etc. Seventeen offered tips to teens for how to be taken seriously and included in familial decision-making. Historian Susan Freeman explores this democratic impulse, and how it influenced girls’ ability to shape sex education discussions and their relationships outside of school, in Chapter Two of her book. It is plausible that anticommunist sentiment underscored the prevalence of democratic marriages and family structures, as discussed by Freeman and present in Seventeen.
“Prelude”

*Seventeen* accomplished a similar adoption-and-adaptation of more explicit eugenics messages. The *Reader* includes “the most popular story ever published in *Seventeen,*” entitled “Prelude.”74 The fiction piece tells the story of Nancy Hollister, the all-American, blonde, beautiful prom queen. Nancy was also a talented piano player, and her passion for music set her apart from her more vapid friends who only cared about fashion and gossip. One day, after piano practice at school, Nancy had a chance encounter with another student, a boy who stayed late after school to clean the music room as part of his scholarship. The boy, not identified by name for several pages, was immediately described as working class: “Faded denims, checkered with awkward patches of darker blue ... his sweater, gauze-thin at the elbows, had long been outgrown.”

As Nancy packed up her things, the boy sat down at the piano, playing music that instantaneously enthralled Nancy. His skills at the piano were staggering—Nancy knew right away that he outshone her talent, despite her years of practice and even though her parents paid for “the best [mu]sic teacher in the city.” Entranced by his music, Nancy asked for his name. He introduced himself as Stephen Karoladis, prompting an internal monologue from Nancy: “He came from the foreign section of town and wore ragged clothes. Nobody in [her] crowd knew anybody like that.”75 The two chatted about music, with Nancy growing to like him more and more as she realized how earnestly he loved the piano.

“Prelude” makes the differences in Nancy and Stephen’s background apparent, without saying too much about their disparate upbringings. Before Stephen asked Nancy

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74 “Prelude,” in *The Seventeen Reader,* 60.
75 These initial descriptions of Nancy and Stephen, as well as their meet-cute, take place on pages 62–63 of “Prelude” in *The Seventeen Reader.*
out for the first time, Nancy realized “that he hesitated ... because he was Stephen Karoladis and she was Nancy Hollister.” Even without truly describing their dissimilarities, *Seventeen* readers would have understood the gulf between the couple. Nancy and Stephen’s differences were eugenically inflected, as teens were inundated with articles, classes, and films reminding them, “like should marry like.” Nancy’s parents eventually made these concerns explicit, worrying when Stephen stopped by the house that the match was “a problem” because “He probably has a hopeless background. And of course he’s foreign.” This push-pull continued with Nancy’s friends mocking Stephen for his ragged outfits, Stephen being unable to afford flowers for the prom, and Nancy worrying that they do not have enough in common aside from their love for music. In the end, however, *Seventeen* reminded readers that “Whatever happened, it was Nancy’s problem, and ... it was very important for Nancy to work it out for herself.”

The story reaches a climax on the last page, with Nancy struggling to decide whether or not to pursue a romance with Stephen. Though she greatly enjoyed being with him, as the two laughed easily and continued to bond over piano, she knew her life with him would never be “very easy” or “very comfortable.” Despite this, she chose to commit to him, rather than return to her status quo:

> [If Nancy rejected Stephen], she would step into and fill neatly the pattern which had been laid down ever since she was born, the safe, sane, sensible pattern of people who always did the correct thing, went to the correct places, wore the correct clothes ... [She] flew to the mirror for a final glance at herself, her face bright and glowing ... “I do understand! ... It’s [about] knowing what is important and what isn’t ... ‘Stephen, I’m coming!’

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76 “Prelude,” 64.
77 “Prelude,” 65–6.
78 Ibid., 80.
79 Ibid., 83.
80 Ibid., 83–4.
With that final line, Nancy ran downstairs to meet Stephen, who was flower-less, but nonetheless ready in his ill-fitting rented tuxedo for the prom. In many ways, this ending expressed Paul Popenoe’s deepest fears. Nancy was the perfect target of Popenoe’s positive eugenics campaigns: she came from money (her parents hired the best music teacher, she wore the nicest clothes), was popular (she has numerous friends and was voted prom queen), intelligent (the story opened with a description of her fancy “Gothic style” school, where she excelled at her lessons) and, we can presume, white (the story does not say this outright, but the constant references to Stephen’s foreignness in contrast to Nancy’s own upbringing, along with their last names, signal her whiteness). In an ideal eugenic world, Nancy would, as Popenoe suggests, “marry in [her] own set and in [her] own race as well as ... on [her] own mental level. Thus there [would be] a continual bringing together ... of the genes responsible for high degrees of superiority.”

But Nancy did not follow this eugenics agenda, which she indicated in her refusal to “fill neatly the pattern which had been laid down ever since she was born.” Instead, she rebelled and chose to date Stephen, with his threadbare sweaters, “dark” coloring, and musical talent.

The jubilant ending of the story, with Nancy rushing downstairs “bright and glowing,” signaled Seventeen’s approval, or at least lack of judgment, of Nancy’s choice. The magazine accepted Nancy’s autonomy, respecting her decision to buck prevailing trends. In the sex education articles discussed earlier, as well as in “Prelude,” readers were given advice, even introduced to social norms, but were also reminded that they could—and should—make their own decisions. Seventeen enabled teenagers to carve out

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81 Popenoe, The Child’s Heredity, 177.
their own worlds, those in which they made their own choices about “petting and kissing” and Nancy could end up with Stephen.\textsuperscript{82}

\textit{It's Wonderful Being A Girl}

Perhaps most importantly, in these teenage worlds, being young, and being a girl, was fun. As discussed, girls leveraged their unprecedented postwar purchasing power to influence the world around them such that \textit{Seventeen} and even sex education had to absorb some of their desires. Girls as a consumer bloc reframed girlhood as something good, positive, and even enjoyable. This trend is exemplified in one postwar sex education film, \textit{It's Wonderful Being A Girl}, produced by the Personal Products Company, a subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson.\textsuperscript{83}

\textit{It's Wonderful} stands out from the other films discussed thus far in that it was sponsored: while it does contain scientific and physiological information, it also features advertisements for Modess, a brand of sanitary pads.\textsuperscript{84} The film would still have been shown in classrooms as part of sex, health, or science courses, just like the other films discussed in this thesis. \textit{It's Wonderful} appeared regularly in educational film catalogs where it was marketed and listed the same way as other social hygiene and biology sex

\textsuperscript{82} A counterargument to this reading could contend that Stephen and Nancy’s relationship embodied the eugenicist agenda of assimilating Eastern and Southern Europeans. After all, Stephen experienced deep anxiety about his differences (his clothing, lack of money, etc.) and wanted to please Nancy. However, the story is told from Nancy’s point of view, and emphasizes her choosing Stephen, rather than vice versa. For these reasons, “Prelude” specifically and \textit{Seventeen} generally seem to come down on the side of Nancy breaking eugenics rules, rather than Stephen assimilating to them.

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{It's Wonderful Being a Girl}, 16 mm, directed by Hans Mandell (1959; New Jersey: Personal Products Company and Audio Productions).

\textsuperscript{84} The film includes information on the emotional and social aspects of puberty, but also biology-based discussions about menstruation, fertilization, and gestation. For example, the film features an animated zygote traveling through the female reproductive system. Students watching \textit{It's Wonderful} would also learn that puberty starts due to secretions from the pituitary gland, which causes secondary sex characteristics to develop. The film therefore has both social guidance and biology elements.
At twenty-minutes long, the film was approved for high school, junior high school, and even elementary audiences.

Johnson & Johnson produced *It's Wonderful* in coordination with Audio Productions, a company that specialized in educational film. Mrs. Jane Yates, Johnson & Johnson’s Director of Education, commented on the goals for the film: “Educating these girls by means of a story involving their contemporaries is an effective technique. This method, of course, requires constant attention to new fashions.” Yates acknowledges the twin motivations of *It's Wonderful*: in trying to market a product to girls, a major corporation had to pay “constant attention to new fashions... and attitudes,” those largely determined by the purchasing power of their target audience. The film’s director, Hans Mandell, reiterated the influence girls’ interests had on the content: “To achieve authenticity ... [we] encouraged girls to talk in a natural manner.”

While we do not know how effective the movie was at selling Modess, the Personal Products Company did claim that six million people saw the film by 1966 (seven years after it came out). Whether or not this number is accurate, *It's Wonderful Being A Girl* purposefully centered on girls’ experiences, both to reflect their interests and to market them a product.

*It's Wonderful* follows the story of Linda, a young girl on the precipice of puberty. The movie opens on Linda’s extremely feminine bedroom. As the camera pans over her

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85 The movie appears in the Arkansas, Michigan, and H.W. Wilson film catalogs cited in Chapter Two. It was also featured in professional publications like *Business Screen Magazine* and *Educational Screen & Audiovisual Guide* starting in 1959. For example, the film is described as a “sensitive film on menstrual hygiene sponsored by makers of “Modess”, offers help on the emotional as well as physical problems of growing up” in the August 1961 issue of *Educational Screen.*


posters, stuffed animals, and floral bedspread, the narrator tells us, “Here in her room today, you will meet a girl named Linda Brown. You will like Linda. Though she doesn’t look like you or have the same name, her experience may be similar to yours.” Linda then enters and begins preening in front of a mirror (figure 7). Moments later, her mother appears, bringing her two gifts: a new sweater, because of “the importance of liking what you wear,” and Modess, because they are “soft, very absorbent, and sanitary, too.” The next scene in the film is an ad; Linda’s mom explains how to use Modess (constantly remarking on how easy it is to do so), the benefits of the product, and how unobtrusive Linda will find the pads (figure 8).

After this commercial, the film transitions back to telling Linda’s story. We mostly see Linda enjoying herself—she is shown dancing, playing sports, and taking photos with her friends “at the club.” Later, when Linda is moping because she has her period, her teacher sets her straight and tells her to focus on having fun. Linda offers her own commentary on the turbulence of puberty: “How funny it is when you’re my age,” she ponders during a short internal monologue. These monologues occur throughout the film, providing a window into Linda’s psyche. Also interspersed throughout It’s Wonderful are gleeful shots of teens running, singing, and swimming.

As Linda’s story draws to a close, she celebrates her fourteenth birthday. After her birthday party, she returns to her room, where her story began, in her fancy dress and pearls. Staring in the mirror once again, she says to herself: “I’m fourteen! Just think of that!” Her mother once again enters the bedroom to bring Linda Modess. Linda tells her mother, “Oh, mom, I’m so glad I’m a girl,” as the camera pans out. The narrator speaks the final line: “All in all, Linda Brown finds that it’s wonderful being a girl. And surely you will too.” This dialogue illustrates the overarching message of the aptly titled
movie. Linda does not just accept girlhood, rather she celebrates it. In a world of overwhelming pressure (including those in the film that remind her to sit up straight and treat her body “like a temple”), Linda finds joy in being a girl. Johnson and Johnson purposefully chose to promote Modess with this messaging, taking into account the “fashions and attitudes” that were meaningful to girls. The film frames sex education as one of the joys of girlhood, showing that even amidst the pressures of the postwar era, youth found that “it’s wonderful being a girl.”

Conclusion
Young people were a key force behind postwar sex education. Teens were at the forefront of pushing for increased sex education in schools. Across the country, youth in Hi-Y legislatures passed bills mandating that states cover sex in the classroom. Teens’ involvement did not end once sex education had been implemented, however. Rather, they continued to influence the direction of course content, involving themselves in the planning process of sex education classes. This immense influence largely arose from teens’ consumer power. Since youth became a distinct group due to the cohesion of postwar youth culture, advertisers began focusing on young people, especially girls, as a market. This allowed teens to negotiate the intense pressures facing them in the 1950s. Teens adapted the eugenics teachings of sex education, and the anticommunist rhetoric of the postwar era, to fit their own agendas, as seen in Seventeen articles. Seventeen celebrated the fact that the postwar youth culture allowed girls, at least in theory, to make their own decisions. Girls used this relative independence to define girlhood as

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88 *It's Wonderful* was accompanied by a pamphlet, “Growing Up and Liking It” that had similar advertising and educational purposes (the educational content is almost identical to that of the film, just without Linda’s narrative arch). The titles of both the film and pamphlet exemplify the message of embracing one’s girlhood.
positive. When products, such as Modess, were marketed to girls, the emphasis was on the fun and happiness inherent in girlhood. Despite prevailing rigid norms and social codes that girls were expected to adhere to, girls used the agency they had as consumers to embrace being a girl. As the last line of Seventeen’s “The Moon and the Mood” reminded its readers, “After all, girls, it isn’t as if you were doing something you shouldn’t. To the contrary! So hold your head up proudly. You’re just being a woman. And that’s not bad at all.”

89 “Moon and the Mood,” 48.
Conclusion

Since causing a Twitterstorm in December, Teen Vogue has not backed down from its intense political coverage. Fittingly, Lauren Duca—author of the “Donald Trump is Gaslighting America” article that launched the magazine to national consciousness—now has a regular column, “Thigh High Politics.” In addition to Duca, other Teen Vogue authors have published pieces like “4 Ways Trump’s Policies Totally Contradict Melania’s Speech on Women’s Empowerment” and “This is What It’s Like to Decide to Get an Abortion.” The magazine’s inclusion of these topics, and the boundary-padding ways in which it invites girls to consider their sexuality, identity, and beliefs, are a contemporary continuation of the legacy of sex education and girls’ youth culture from the 1950s.

Sex education in public schools began in the Progressive Era. Reformers were attracted to the subject for its power to assimilate Eastern and Southern European immigrants. These sex education proponents were also typically eugenicists: in the early 1900s, students learned who should or should not reproduce through sex education. Progressives specifically taught sex education and biology, which formalized as a discipline at the same time, through film. The visual quality of film was thought to vividly capture scientific processes, exciting students such that they would stay in school and continue to digest eugenics messages. This Progressive film-sex-eugenics agenda did not succeed at the time, however, as classroom film and sex education both proved too controversial to become widespread. In contrast, the eugenics movement established a long-lasting foothold in the American psyche.
After World War II, the landscape of all of these fields changed dramatically. Eugenics especially underwent an identity crisis brought on by public awareness of Nazi social engineering. With support for negative eugenics on the decline, eugenicists reevaluated, evolving into genetics in the scientific realm and gender-based positive eugenics in the social realm. At the same time, military investment and involvement in educational film during WWII permanently altered public opinion of the medium; Americans were now convinced that films were worthwhile, and the wartime film industry transferred its skills and assets to the domestic education market. Harnessing the power of newly acceptable educational film, positive eugenicists saw their Progressive Era sex education program come to fruition. The climate of the Cold War, specifically the family-centered culture promoted by domestic containment, provided an outlet for positive eugenics in sex education.

In particular, the social hygiene genre of educational film articulated positive eugenics most directly. Teenagers were taught about homosexuality, sexual satisfaction, and going steady in ways that aligned with the thinking of mainstream eugenicists, such as Paul Popenoe. Popenoe’s ideas played into domestic containment, a concept that was also communicated in social hygiene films. Even in biology classes, students were inundated with eugenics. The prestige and funding crises facing biology in the fifties forced the discipline’s leaders to make their subject relevant again, by teaching sex, reproduction, and heredity through film. Employing similar reasoning as their Progressive predecessors, biology educators thought film was especially suited to this disciplinary makeover. Postwar biology films, especially those made by AIBS, were therefore integral tools in inculcating ideas about reproductive morality and genetic inheritance, again in ways that supported a positive eugenics agenda.
In this way, the 1950s were the perfect storm for sex education, making the
decade an anomaly from those that came before and after. While historians have adopted
different approaches, emphases, and outlooks on the history of sex education, they
routinely agree that it was controversial. Yet, the public was willing to allow, and even
embrace, sex education during the fifties because several factors coalesced to make the
subject palatable: the convergence of domestic containment, biology’s reformulation,
and the emergence of a robust educational film industry allowed positive eugenics to
become the standard for postwar sex education.

Teen girls were at the eye of this storm.¹ In the fifties, young people developed
an insular and powerful youth culture, which allowed them to push back on the
normative teachings of sex education. Teens were thus involved in a feedback loop in
which they demanded more instruction, in order to navigate domestic containment and
positive eugenics, only to receive education that reinforced restrictive norms. However,
teen girls leveraged their consumer power to break open this feedback loop, swaying the
content of Seventeen, Hi-Y legislation, and classroom films alike, in ways that allowed
them to find joy in being girls.

The historiographical consensus on the timeline of sex education masks girls’
agency in the subject. Most histories of sex education overlook the postwar era.
Scholarship in this field also largely categorizes sex education as a failure: by focusing on
the rhetoric of sex education opponents, historians attempt to understand why the
subject itself has been so unsuccessful. Contemporary sex education is similarly classified

¹ As stated in the introduction, this thesis deals only with the experiences, youth culture, and
education of white girls. While the sex education of African Americans is discussed in Jensen’s Dirty
Words, Eberwein’s Sex Ed, and other histories, scholars have not expressly investigated black teen
youth culture and sexual education. Yet, sex education films were produced for black audiences from
the Progressive Era through the 1950s. Future research on sex education films expressly marketed to
black teenagers is necessary to fully understand their classroom experiences with the subject.
as a failure: in 2014, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) found that fewer than half of
U.S. high schools teach adequate sex education. The CDC also reports that only 59
percent of teenagers today use condoms, “reflecting no progress in more than two
decades.” Conversely, these findings mean that almost half of U.S. teens currently
receive quality sex education. In the 1950s, too, some young people received factual
information about sexual education. This thesis, however, does not purport to categorize
sex education, either today or in the 1950s, as a success.

In fact, the history of U.S. sex education as discussed in this thesis illuminates
how the subject revolves around the social control of girls. From Paul Popenoe, to H.
Bentley Glass, to Tucker Carlson, (white) men have been trying to control girls for
decades. For Popenoe, this took the form of social guidance, which he deployed to teach
women about sex, putting the burden on them to maintain perfect marriages. For Glass,
control should be exerted over women’s reproductive processes: girls, but only certain
(white, wealthy) girls, were taught that they had to reproduce to preserve a “treasury of
genes.” For Carlson, girls’ interests cannot be varied, but rather follow a strict
dichotomy; one can enjoy either popular culture or politics, but not both.

But the history of sex education must be read more closely to reveal how girls
pushed back on these stereotypical expectations. Centering girls’ experiences in the
postwar sex education shows how they utilized what was given to them—sex education
as a form of social control—and transformed it. For these girls, sex education was not a
blanket failure; they had their questions answered and voices heard, albeit in ways that
promoted gender stereotypes. Today’s teens receiving sufficient sex education might also

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2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “New findings from CDC survey suggest too few
3 Ibid.
use their exposure to the subject to their advantage, shaping and reshaping the lessons they are taught. Studying the actual content of these programs, what girls were and are actually taught, challenges the historiographical agreement on sex education’s failure, and exposes the nuances in the history of the subject. Therefore, there is a historiographical imperative to look deeply at topics, such as sex education, and periods, such as the 1950s, in which agency seems to be severely limited.

The fifties were an oasis because social control seemed successful—girls absorbed eugenics messages through educational film in science, sex, health, home economics, and physical education courses. But for as long as this impulse to control has existed, so too has girls’ resistance: from *Seventeen* in the 1950s to *Teen Vogue* in 2017, girls have defied and surpassed expectations, finding power in girlhood.
Appendix

Figure 1: George, seen working on his essay about Native Americans, and his father in the safety of their suburban home.

Figure 2: A boy and girl from the animated “Human Growth” entering puberty to become more “manly” and “womanly”

Figure 3: Title slide from *Going Steady?*


Figure 4: May from *Social-Sex Attitudes* explaining pregnancy to her misinformed friends

Figure 5: Dr. H. Burr Roney lecturing about meiosis in the Reproduction film of the AIBS Series

Figure 6: Part of the meiosis process as shown in a microscopic shot from Reproduction

Images on this page from Reproduction. 16 mm. Taught by H. Burr Roney. 33 min. American Institute of Biological Sciences, 1960.
Figure 7: Linda preening in her bedroom mirror at the beginning of *It's Wonderful Being A Girl*

Figure 8: Linda’s mother demonstrating how easy Modess pads are to use

Figure 9: “Life With Teena” chapter that discusses girls’ consumer power (including her ability to influence major family purchases, her friends’ shopping, and family’s spending)

Figure 10: “Life With Teena” chapter about Seventeen’s popularity among teen girls

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