This thesis uses the characters of Betty and Veronica of the Archie Comic series to explore the roles of adolescent females during the 1940s in the United States. The author utilizes feminist and art theory as well as relevant literature to argue that the writers of Archie Comics reflect and reify teenage experience through the characters of Betty and Veronica. Themes addressed include labor roles, dating habits, as well as teen involvement in consumer culture. By addressing the role of adolescent experience, the author hopes to expand conversations regarding women during the 1940s to include the impact of youth culture. The author concludes by suggesting Betty and Veronica represent a larger trend in American society regarding the way in which young women are conditioned to think and act in a particular manner via popular culture.
This Thesis titled

"ARCHIE’S GIRL’S?” BETTY, VERONICA, AND THE RISE OF AMERICAN YOUTH CULTURE, 1941-1950

by

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Dedication

I walked into the graduate director’s office with a “Best of Betty and Veronica” comic book in hand, wondering if he would take me seriously. It was the first week of my Masters program, and I was anxious to share my research proposal. During the summer of 2014, I was perusing my favorite bookstore in German Village, Ohio when I stumbled upon a comic book. Since I was little, each time I visited my grandparents in Connecticut there would be an Archie Comic waiting on my bed. Like catching the glimpse of a familiar face, it was only natural my eyes instinctively gravitated toward the cover showcasing my favorite characters: Betty, Veronica, Archie, and Jughead. I had only read copies from the 1990s, so I was immediately drawn to the reprinted World War II era comics. After a quick glance through the book, I noticed there was more to these comics than bold colors and one-liners.

Did Betty and Veronica join the war effort?! Were boys really assigned points for dates as if they were rationed goods?! My curiosity regarding gender roles, consumer society, and youth culture quickly led me into unforeseen territory. During my undergraduate years, I studied the nineteenth century American South, and I was hesitant to change course. Upon speaking with my graduate director and various professors, however, I realized I needed to follow my instincts toward visual and consumer history. Almost two years later, I’m glad I took a chance on a comic book. I only hope I did justice to the characters that have for so long captured my heart and mind. Within the course of writing this thesis, both of my aforementioned grandparents passed away. I dedicate this project to their memory, and I am forever thankful for the introduction to a lifelong love of comics.
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Introduction

The first issue depicting the original characters of Archie Comics, a series that focused on the daily life of American teenagers, appeared on December 22, 1941. By 1950, the characters Betty and Veronica had gained enough support for the editors to produce their own series known as “Archie’s Girls.” What was so appealing about Betty and Veronica, specifically to female readers, that caused the editors of Archie Comics to dedicate a series to these two ladies? This thesis examines how Archie Comics, and specifically the characters of Betty and Veronica, reflected and recreated the social climate of the mid-twentieth century United States. What messages about gender and femininity did Betty and Veronica send to adolescent females of the 1940s? Taking a deeper look into how Archie Comic artists portrayed Betty and Veronica as well as how audiences received the female comic characters in the 1940s will illuminate ways in which popular culture shapes and reflects perceptions of gender roles, a lasting theme that carries over into the present.

Archie Comics, originally known as MLJ Magazine, is a comic book publishing company founded in 1939 by Maurice Coyne, Louis Silberkleit, and John L. Goldwater. With the arrival of famous comic icons such as Superman in 1938, Batman in 1939 and Wonder Woman in 1941, the “Golden Age of Comics” flourished from 1938 and extended through the mid-1950s when comics increasingly gave way to violence and resulted in self-censorship. Though these comic heroes and heroines receive a good deal of attention, this thesis suggests the most telling story of American comics can be found in the stories of a few average teenagers. Inspired by the Andy Hardy movies starring Mickey Rooney, Goldwater asked colleague and artist Bob Montana to create a high-school styled comic strip in 1941. Along with writer Vic Bloom, Montana created the redheaded, freckle-faced character known as Archie Andrews and the fictional suburbia known as Riverdale. By 1946, MLJ Magazine officially changed its name to Archie Comic Publications, reflecting the popularity of the characters and predicting the longevity of the brand.

Though the entire Archie series is a largely untapped historical source, the characters of Betty and Veronica prove particularly useful for an investigation of femininity in the context of a growing American youth culture. Though the two girls were visually identical barring their hair color, their different personalities and character traits provided endless plot lines and drama for the Archie writers. Betty Cooper first appeared in an MLJ publication, Pep 22, in December 1941. She was often seen as the middle class girl-next-door who sported a bouncy blonde
ponytail. Veronica Lodge, in contrast was the wealthy brunette heiress who moved to Riverdale after being asked to prom via letter by Archie Andrews and accepting. The two girls formed a love/hate relationship, in which Archie was typically the crux of many arguments. Put bluntly, Betty was often seen as “the blonde sweetheart” while “Veronica [was] the rich snob.”¹ Despite the characterization of Betty as the likable girl-next-door and Veronica as the unattainable goddess, comics scholar Bart Beatty suggests this reading could oversimplify the adoration for each character. According to his assessment of the 1960s Archie comics, “Betty and Veronica functioned on the principle of bad girl/worse girl, particularly as they engaged each other. Veronica’s central characteristics were venality, snobbery, and self-involvement, Betty, in contrast, was conniving and opportunistic.”² His analysis focuses two decades after the comics’ inception, yet such traits are developed throughout the 1940s. These traits add to the allure of Betty and Veronica, making them multi-dimensional characters that speak to the stereotypes of teenagers in mid-twentieth century America.

By tapping into the cultural and historical context of the 1940s, I contend that comic figures such as Betty and Veronica reflect and reify teen femininity through their engagement with labor, dating habits, and consumerism. By examining these three major themes throughout the 1940s, one can see how teen femininity encountered transitions that closely aligned with the political and cultural transformations occurring within the United States in the World War II and post-war period. This project will act as a primary means to understand the extent to which Betty and Veronica provided meaning or a way of understanding the world in the 1940s, and what that meant for young females in particular.

To understand how Betty and Veronica fit in to a larger framework, we must broaden the discourse to understand the context in which Archie was produced and consumed by the public. Here, I will engage with three major themes in women’s history that closely align with the three themes I present: women in the labor force, women and consumerism, and dating. Since I am primarily concentrating on the characters of Betty and Veronica in the context of the 1940s, I will focus on scholarship that attempted to explain constructions of femininity and youth during this time period. Brief attention will be given to the topic of youth culture, as Betty and Veronica must be comprehended as adolescent females whose experiences differ from older women. By

¹ Wright, Comic Book Nation, 72
placing Betty and Veronica at the intersection of women’s history and youth culture history, my
discussion extends beyond women’s roles in the labor force and domestic sphere to also include
youth activities such as dating and a nuanced role in consumer culture. An analysis of Betty and
Veronica reveals the intersecting topics of popular culture, age, and femininity.

Scholarship has continually complicated the narrative of women’s roles during the 1940s. In 1963, Betty Friedan noticed a disconnect between how women wished to live and the
feminine “image” propagated throughout society to which they were expected to adhere. She
named this conflict *The Feminine Mystique* and dated the origins of the feminine mystique to the
1940s, arguing women had to undergo a sacrificing of the “self” in order to align with the image
of the feminine mystique. The question then becomes, what aspects of women’s conditions in
the 1940s created a clash in women’s identity?

For starters, the 1940s ushered in several changes for women in the labor force. In 1982,
historian Alice Kessler-Harris wrote a history of the wage-earning woman from colonial times to
the present. As she discussed the mid-twentieth century, she noted that the economic pressures
of the WWII period forced women to step outside their home obligations to support their family.
In other words, in order to be a good mother, women had to work. As labor and wages for
women changed within the war and post-war period, so too did women’s identity. Women
became more self-reliant as they took their place in previously male-dominated positions. In a
more recent book, Kessler-Harris explained women’s new “rectitude” was due in part to “a
breakdown of occupational segregation during the war years; a new ideology of consumerism
and prosperity rooted in the experience of depression…and a political climate that connected
higher standards of living to America’s place in the world.” The changing political and
economic climate thus impacted women’s identity in the war and post-war period by altering
their place in the work force. How did women come to understand their new “duties?”

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University Press, 1982), x.
4 Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman’s Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences* (Lexington: University
5 In addition to working in the labor force, several historians have focused on the domestic role of women in the war
and postwar period. For a discussion of postwar conservatism, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American
struggle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union emphasized a need to define the American ideal. This ideal
permeated society in the 1950s in the form of domestic, middle-class suburbia, to which most Americans tried to
conform. This idealization of home and family life led to the subordination and domestication of women during the
Cold War period. For a contrasting view, see Eugenia Kaledin. *Mother’s and More: American Women in the 1950s*
One answer is connected to the rapid increase of mass culture and the rise of consumerism during the 1940s. Through her analysis of women’s films 1940-1960, Andrea Walsh asserts that popular culture’s “production and reception constitute an interactive process, embodying power relations and cultural conflicts of the larger society.” Women thus began to understand themselves within a larger cultural framework by means of film, magazines, and other popular culture products. In Nancy Walker’s compilation of women’s magazines in the 1940s and 50s, she notes how women during WWII were largely influenced by women’s magazines to support the war effort. With the rise of popular culture and mass media in the 1940s, women began to understand their identity as one that connected to the war effort and the nation. Women learned to think of themselves as filling the economic needs of the country while acting as a support system for males.

By the early 1990s, scholars such as Joanne Meyerowitz continued revisionist endeavors to extend the conversation beyond the stereotypical image of the happy suburban housewife. She emphasized the need to “displace the domestic stereotype, the June Cleavers and Donna Reeds, from the center of historical study.” Meyerowitz’s collection of fifteen essays sparked new directions and conversations in the field of women’s history by looking beyond the stereotypical images propagated by the media in the 1940s and 1950s. Meyerowitz reminds readers that women’s experience in the post-war period were shaped by various factors such as race and class, and should therefore not be oversimplified by the notion of domesticity.

Just as it is important to understand the construction of femininity and women’s roles, it is also imperative to understand the rise of youth culture and how that affected the depictions of Betty and Veronica during the 1940s and 1950s. By the 1980s, the category of youth appeared as a genuine means of historical investigation. Sparked by the sexual revolution of the 1960s, historian Beth Bailey noted there was a sense of nostalgia in America to return to more

(Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984). Kaledin argued against “the dominant myth of victimization” that for so long had been at the center of discourse on women of the WWII and postwar eras.

conservative ways traditionally associated with the 1950s. This prompted Bailey to ask the simple yet profound question, “to what are we being asked to return?”  

Bailey’s response warranted an investigation of the relationship between the sexes via courtship from the 1920s through 1965. Bailey’s study of dating showcases the many changes that characterized youth culture in the mid-twentieth century. The movement of interpersonal relations from the private to the public sphere had a great deal to do with the advent of mass culture and consumerism.

So why use comics to assess femininity during the World War II and post-war period? In *Comic Book Nation*, Bradford Wright argues that comics act as an acute lens through which to study shifts in popular culture, specifically from World War II to the Vietnam era. Popular culture became a lens through which to understand how adolescents have been portrayed in public discourse. The mid twentieth century would mark the turn to mass production of comic books and the rise of the comic book industry. As economic conditions increased, too did the rise of mass consumerism and the comic industry. With seventy-eight percent of its readership aged between six and twelve years of age, Archie Comics provides a perfect source to investigate images that spoke to primarily adolescent readers.

Comics thus provide one key way in which the rise of women’s history and youth culture intersect. As seen in Jill Lepore’s recent publication, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, social movements such as feminism were reflected in the pages of the comics and were, in turn, “consumed” by adolescents who then internalized feminist values. For Lepore, Wonder Woman provided a missing link between the suffrage movements of the 1900s and the second-wave feminism that came about in the 1960s. If comics, according to Wright, can provide a means to

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13 Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 2-4. Also see Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*, translated by Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010), 17. According Gabilliet, “the main factors accounting for this growth were the…creation of distribution channels…[and] the progressive improvement of overall economic conditions in the second half of the 1930s
14 Archie Comics Reaches A Million Milestone with the 500th Issue! 60 Years of Archie Comics,” section “Readership Demographics,” http://www.archiecomics.com/acpaco_offices/presskit/2002%20New%20Media%20Kit%20part%201%20Co%20Info.htm (July 3, 2003) quoted in Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*, translated by Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010), 209. (Note: The link given is no longer considered active. Archie Comic Publications reserves the right to not release readership statistics, so I have relied upon this secondary source for gauging readership by adolescents.)
study shifts in youth culture, and Wonder Woman, according to Lepore, can unmask a secret history of feminism, a look at Betty and Veronica in the Archie Comic series can certainly combine the ways in which women’s history and youth culture intersect. In an attempt to combine these approaches, my investigation draws on such conversations to better understand the experience of young females and the ways in which femininity was constructed through the characters of Betty and Veronica in Archie series from 1941-1950.

It’s important to see Betty and Veronica as feminine figures within the 1940s, primarily through their portrayal in the Archie Comic series and then determine the meaning of these depictions based on historical context and reception. This thesis begins in 1941 with the first publication of Archie in December 1941 and extends through 1950, when Betty and Veronica receive their own series titled “Archie’s Girls: Betty and Veronica.” It uses only the comics which feature Betty and Veronica within the Archie series from 1941-1950, and the daily strips featuring Betty and Veronica from 1946-1950, Reprinted editions of the comics such as Archie Archives Volumes 1-11, which provide a detailed look at the strips published from the very first one in Pep Comics in December 1941 up through 1948 as well as two “Best of Archie Comic” series, republications of Bob Montana’s daily strips from 1946-1950, as well as unpublished comics and daily strips from MSU and Syracuse University, respectively.

The scope and content of this thesis aims to situate Archie Comics within the general context of a growing youth culture during the World War II and post-war period. Though it is difficult to gauge direct audience response to comics from the 1940s, one can still understand Betty and Veronica within the context of adolescent labor, consumerism, and interpersonal relationships. By drawing on Michael Baxandall’s concept of “the period eye,” I hope to look outside the comics to assess the historical and cultural context that surrounds such images, therefore allowing the reader a deeper understanding of how the comics would have been understood during the 1940s. Baxandall notes, “some of the mental equipment a man orders his visual experience with is variable, and much of this variable equipment is culturally relative, in the sense of it being determined by the society which has influenced his experience.”16 By using historical context to assess the experience of reading the comics, the plot lines act as windows into larger cultural trends, while national newspapers, consumer ads, and advice manuals act as a

way to gauge the relevance of such activities. The comparison of being portrayed in the series to those being produced in women’s magazines and other forums in helps gauge the differences in adolescent female experience comparative to the experience of older women.

Chapter 1 focuses on Betty and Veronica as young “working” women. It shows how the girls transitioned from a volunteer-based work ethic that centered around the war effort to domestic tasks that emphasized expectations of females in the postwar period. Betty and Veronica suggest that “work” had a special definition for adolescent females in the war and post-war period that differed from older women’s experience.

The second chapter grapples with the interpersonal relationships of Betty and Veronica. It will analyze not only how they interact with one another, but also how they negotiate the dating world. The chapter argues that the writers of Archie propagated certain dating patterns of the period such as the “rating and dating” system, coined by Willard Waller, that exposes generational conflicts by the postwar period.

The third and final chapter will aim to understand the rise of consumption, and particularly its affects on young females such as Betty and Veronica. This chapter argues young females were conditioned to have a certain form of autonomy that centered on the act of consumption, and specifically beauty and fashion products. The writers of Archie reflect how market capitalism shaped youth identity, especially in the postwar period.

The conclusion addresses the legacy of Betty and Veronica. My hope is that the project will appeal to a wide range of audiences from scholars of popular culture, gender studies, 20th century United States, as well as more general audiences of comic readers and females of all ages. Move over Archie, this one’s for the girls!
Chapter 1
Active Adolescence: Betty and Veronica’s Changing Labor Roles, 1941-1950

The end of a panel in an Archie Series issue from the summer of 1943, entitled “Welcome Soldiers,” shows the characters Betty and Veronica walking out of a Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps recruiting station. The sergeant tells Betty and Veronica, “I’m sorry girls, we’d love to have you, but you’re too young! Next year perhaps!” At a time when the entire nation was involved in World War II, these two females were denied the opportunity to participate in a military organization – but why? The answer is given directly in the comic: “you’re too young!”

For many readers of Archie Comics, this notion would hit home, as seventy-eight percent of its readership aged between six and twelve years of age. Propaganda posters and advertisements played a large role in shaping older women’s experience during the war, but what about those who were not quite a child, yet not considered an adult? Comic books such as Archie provide access to the messages being sent to pre-teenagers. By targeting a pre-adolescent age bracket, Archie Comics were often seen as preparatory reading for American high school life. Comic scholar Bradford Wright suggested that Archie Comics “offered an idealized, tranquil and nostalgic vision of high-school life primarily for boys and girls who had not yet experienced it.” Though Wright is correct in his assessment, it is also important to understand the Archie writers self-consciously created this nostalgic world. Though the entire Archie series

is a largely untapped historical source, the characters of Betty and Veronica prove particularly useful for an investigation of femininity and the construction of the post-war female teenager.¹⁹

This chapter studies the labor expectations of teenage girls from 1941-1950, which marks a shift in such expectations in the middle of the decade that corresponds with the transition from the war to postwar years. During the Second World War, Betty and Veronica suggest there were particular ways young females could make their efforts count through volunteering or supporting soldiers. For the duration of the war, the girls came to understand their “work” as connected to the nation and the war effort at large. After taking on increased roles outside the home during the war, the mid-1940 comics show Betty and Veronica were both encouraged to hold wage labor positions, but even more so, to tend to household duties.

Betty and Veronica are fictional characters and not historical actors. They do, however, act as a historical reference point. The author’s assumptions speak to social values regarding women in the work place, age, and gender during the time period in which they are produced. This chapter will argue that, during the period of 1941-1950, the writers of Archie Comics reflected changing attitudes about and expectations of women’s roles both in and outside the home, first by creating expectations for volunteer service during the war and subsequently conditioning the girls to perform domestic tasks in the post-war period. This resulted in a tumultuous socialization process for Betty and Veronica and their readers, as the girls attempted to conform to the expectations of multiple authorities, namely the government, parents, and teachers. I do not assert that the experiences of Betty and Veronica ring true for all adolescent females in America. The girls’ experiences, rather, provide a way to investigate expectations of teenage girls during and after war, how their actions often clashed with such expectations, and how popular culture helped create the iconic post-war teenager.

What makes a teenager?

The outbreak of student unrest in the late 1960s, specifically in regards to feminist movements and protests of the Vietnam War, forced scholars to further investigate adolescents and their role in America. Much of these initial efforts were performed by social scientists attempting to define youth culture and understand it as something inherently different from

¹⁹ For the first-ever scholarly study on Archie Comics, see Bart Beaty, Twelve-Cent Archie (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015). Beaty’s study focuses on the “twelve-cent” period from 1961-1969.
previous studies on adult culture or history. Kenneth Keniston, psychologist at Yale University, defined youth culture in 1960 as “the distinctive values, outlooks, manners, roles, activities, and behavior patterns of youth considered as a separate age group.”

In 1961, James S. Coleman argued the emergence of a youth culture was a direct result of compulsory schooling, or schooling enforced by legal institution according to age and curriculum. Though more theoretical in nature, Keniston and Coleman’s work note “youth” as its own construct separate from that of childhood or adulthood.

During the early 1970s, it was clear that implementing “youth” into historical discourse was still a fairly new undertaking that offered just as much confusion as it did promise. In discussing the rising role of youth in 1971, Professor of American History Richard Rapson noted, “It is not clear whether it is a new phenomenon or part of a recurring condition in American life.” Rapson blamed the lack of focus on the American family and childhood for this gap in understanding the increased role of adolescents. He noted that altering the story to a more “youth-oriented American civilization would force the historian to analyze and understand the role of the family and child perhaps as much as he does politics.” Rapson ultimately concluded that there was no excuse for this gap in scholarship, and youth was no longer an “inbetween” stage of child and adult, but rather a construct completely its own, worthy of historical study.

By the 1980s, the category of youth appeared as a genuine means of historical investigation. In Generations of Youth, Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard note how youth cannot be defined as a homogenous group and the “creation of youth cultures speaks to their ongoing negotiations with the multiplicity of their social identities.” From the 1930s to present, youth culture has been largely defined through the clash of adult authority, the institution of high school life, music such as Swing, fashion, and the rise of a consumer culture. It’s important to keep in mind, however, that “any interpretation or discourse of youth is, at the same time, an...
attempt to position youth within a larger social/historical framework.”  

According to youth scholar Jon Savage, the idea of adolescence existed as early as the nineteenth century, yet “the invention of the teenager coincided with America’s victory in the Second World War.” By understanding the 1940s as an important moment in the development of youth culture, Archie Comics acts as crucial source to see how the writers understood and portrayed the development of American youth.

**Defining the Work Force**

The 1940s ushered in several changes for women in the labor force. Economic pressures of the WWII period forced women to step outside their home obligations to support their family. Census records demonstrate that the female labor force from ages fourteen and older increased from 14,640,000 in 1941 to 19,270,000 by 1945. As labor and wages for women changed during the war period, so too did women’s identity. The changing political and economic climate thus impacted women’s identity in the war period by showing the range of roles they could hold within American society.

Women in the work force no doubt played a large role during the war, but not everyone was eligible to take on factory positions or be compensated for their work. As it turns out, many females were not considered as part of the “work force.” According to the United States Bureau of the Census in 1949, individuals “not in the labor force” were defined as:

All persons 14 years of age and over who are not classified as employed or unemployed…This group largely consists of persons engaged in own home housework, persons in school, retired persons, those permanently unable or too old to work, seasonal workers for whom the survey week fell in an "off" season, and the voluntarily idle. Persons doing only incidental unpaid family work (less than 15 hours) are also classified as not in the labor force.”

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29 Ibid, 56.
In order to be considered “employed,” a person must work for compensation or, if unpaid, have put in at least fifteen hours a week on a family farm or business. For men, this left several opportunities for school-age boys to still be considered “employed,” as they put in manual labor on local farms and businesses. School-age females, however, showed fewer options in attaining employment. In 1940, the median age of female workers was 32.3; this number increased to an average of 36.4 by 1945. Only 8% of the female labor force was under the age of 20 in 1940, and this number remained the same up through 1945.\(^{30}\)

Does this mean that the remaining females under the age of twenty participated only in school or housework? This type of conclusion would over-simplify the experience of young females, and one should not assume they spent all their time at home or in a classroom. Assessing the activities of teenagers, and especially teenage females, in the 1940s proves to be a difficult task. Seeing what activities Betty and Veronica engaged with help assess expectations for female participation in the war effort, regardless of whether or not they were considered part of the “work force.” Betty and Veronica’s work experience was shaped in large part by their age and gender during World War II by limiting their participation in military activity and creating expectations for volunteer service.

“Welcome Soldiers”

“I feel so patriotic sending this little gift to Archie at his Uncle’s farm! He’ll appreciate these lovely books!” This is the opening statement by Veronica Lodge in “Welcome Soldiers.”\(^{31}\) The comic opens with Veronica and her mother, who inquires why Archie is on a farm. Veronica explains, “all the boys from school are working on farms during the holidays mother!


For defense, you know!” Veronica is taking the time to send a care package to Archie, thinking he’ll be “frightfully lonely” on the farm. When she reads a letter from Archie explaining he is having a grand time with a bunch of farm girls, however, Veronica is enraged. She calls Betty, and the two girls have a sorority meeting with girls from their high school. Each girl is upset over the fact that their boys are out doing something, and one stands up, remarking “I propose we stop being wall flowers while our boys are gone! Throw a dance—or something!”

The notion of being a “wallflower” was unacceptable to the young ladies of Riverdale. Veronica felt “patriotic” when she sent a package to Archie, only to recognize that he was out having a good time while she was stuck at home. As it turns out, many girls in Riverdale shared this same sentiment, so they decided to take action. What can a group of teenage girls do to support the war? Why, throw a dance of course! The girls decide they will be social (take that, Archie!) while also supporting the war effort by inviting soldiers to the dance. In hosting a dance for some of America’s strongest and brave men, the girls’ expectations are high. Betty suggests she will “pick one out with lots of medals on his chest” while her friend Linda, wants one “with hair on his [chest].” The way the girls discuss their desires suggests their ideal man is not only one who is highly decorated with military honors, but also one that is “manly.” Everyone is excited until Veronica sees the doors open and a group of WAACS walk through the door.

On May 15, 1942 Congress passed legislation to form the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). This new division allowed women to be organized under the United States Army for the first time in the nation’s history. Women received benefits similar to those of men soldiers, and the WAAC instituted training programs that would help women prepare for postwar jobs in positions such as radio operators, motor transport specialists, and administrative specialists. The program was met with so much success that, on July 2, 1943, President Roosevelt signed the bill that would turn the WAAC into simply WAC, thus removing the “Auxiliary” portion of its title. According to an article in the New York Times, the Corps’ new status would ensure equal rank among male and female members, equal rights and benefits, and the size of the Corps would no longer be limited, but designated by the Commander in Chief. Previously, women aged 21-45 were allowed to submit applications for the Women’s Army

Auxiliary Corps. During this transition in 1943, however, the age limit for potential recruits was extended from 20-50, allowing a larger number of women to join the service.\(^{33}\) Needless to say, the WAACS were not the invitees that Betty and Veronica were expecting.

As a group of females walk into the dance, the expectation of spending the evening with handsome soldiers as a way to support the war is shattered. Betty and Veronica make the most of it by asking Veronica’s father and his dinner guests to attend the dance. Archie returns from the farm and comments on how he spent a lot of time with WAACs as well as the farm girls. The next day, the girls are seen leaving the recruiting station. This ending can be read in several ways by investigating the values and social norms inherent in the plot and how the characters challenge or reinforce such norms.

First, it shows the reality and limitations placed on teenage girls regarding what role they could play in supporting the war. Assuming the girls are high-school age (14-18 years-old), they would still be ineligible to join the WAACs, as women were required to be at least twenty years of age.\(^{34}\) The comic reminds young females that organizations such as WAACs are recruiting women, but at the same time, it pays careful attention to the fact that Betty and Veronica are too young to be considered part of the nation’s “work force.”

This sentiment is reflected in posters and advertisements outside of Archie Comics. The WAVES, or “Women Accepted for Voluntary and Emergency Service,” was established in July of 1942 as a division of the United States Naval Reserve. Unlike WAAC, which took just over a year to gain equal status within the United States Army, the WAVES were always seen as an official part of the United States Navy. One particular WAVE poster depicts a little girl staring with a melancholy expression at a portrait of a woman in uniform. Across the top, the words “Wish I could join too!” are shown in bright red

\(^{34}\) Ibid.
amidst a white background. At the bottom of the image are the words “Serve your country in the WAVES.”

Such posters suggest that older women are “lucky” to have the opportunity to join organization such as the WAC or WAVES. As we have already seen, Betty and Veronica attempt to join the WAACS in 1943, but are denied for being too young. The poster also suggests that children and adolescents want to help the war effort. Through such rhetoric and imagery, younger girls are socialized to believe that serving as a WAAC or WAVE is a great honor and something they should aspire to. During the war period, patriotism was the ideal that characterized most female labor efforts. As we saw in the comic, the writers of Archie Comics tap into another layer that paints women as buying into a romanticized portrait of volunteerism.

“Welcome Soldiers” depicts Betty and Veronica both reinforcing the ideal notions of patriotism and romanticism inherent in American society during World War II. At the time, American citizens were encouraged to participate in the war effort, and teenage females were no different. Veronica sees it as her patriotic duty to send Archie reading materials while he is off on the farm. By the end of the comic, Betty and Veronica’s attempt to join the WAACs suggests they are motivated more so by their personal relationships. The ending suggests the girls rush to join the WAACs by a personal desire to be close to Archie or to meet young men rather than sitting at home. They have a desire to not be “wall flowers,” and their actions are still largely defined by what will make Archie and the other boyfriends jealous.

It is important to keep in mind that this slight challenge to the patriotic ideal comes in the form of humor, so it does not directly defy other forms of patriotic propaganda. The writers of Archie humorously remind readers that girls are expected to support the war effort, but cannot be classified as passive, patriotic participants in the war effort.

“Glamour in White”

Although Betty and Veronica are not able to join the work force, they appear throughout the war period in various volunteer positions. In Archie Comics no. 4, released September-

October 1943, Betty and Veronica appear in a comic strip titled “Glamour in White.” In this comic, both Veronica and Betty volunteer as nurses at a local hospital. As Veronica checks in at the nurses station, the head nurse tells her, “It’s a highly commendable thing you are doing Miss Lodge! With the war going on, the Lord knows we can use every volunteer!” Veronica responds politely, “Yes’m. I’m glad to be able to help the war effort!” Earlier, the comic shows Betty and Veronica arguing over whom Archie is dating. Veronica storms away, stating that she has more important things on her mind. She tells Betty she is a volunteer nurse, to which Betty responds, “you’re only doing it to make an impression! I’m volunteering, too! So there!” Once again, though Veronica might have volunteered out of personal desire, the comic suggests that Betty’s involvement is one based on personal competition with Veronica and romantic motivations. This causes readers to pause and reflect on the wide range of motivations for young females when they volunteered to be part of such organizations. Betty and Veronica suggest that, although some girls might be volunteering to do their part in the war effort, others could be doing it to spite their boyfriend-stealing best friend or, more broadly, to be in contact with male soldiers.

Just how accurate are Betty and Veronica’s experiences as volunteer nurses? An article from the New York Times in November 1942 explains how chairman of the American Red Cross and leader of the Junior Red Cross, James T. Nicholson, urged “increased mobilization of American youth behind the war effort.” Nicholson was quoted, saying, “ ‘This world-wide struggle is a stirring challenge to the youth of America…We are offering them an opportunity to play their part.’ ” Here, a tone of patriotic duty emphasizes that even teenagers are expected to play a role in the war effort. A spread in the Chicago Tribune from September 1943 praises nineteen girls for pledging four to six hours every week at the Hinsdale hospital and sanitarium and notes, “The Junior Red Cross members who volunteer for hospital service must have completed the tenth grade of school and have the approval of their teachers as well as their parents.” The article emphasizes that the girls were allowed to perform only nonmedical tasks

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37 “Junior Red Cross Asks Aid of Young Americans,” New York Times, November 2, 1942 accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers
38 “Hinsdale Junior Red Cross Girls Help Hospital: Use After School Hours in Nonmedical Tasks,” Chicago Daily Tribune, September 19, 1943, accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers
such as clerical work, cleaning, carrying food trays, and wheeling patients, suggesting teenage girls were only expected to participate, but their work was confined to a series of mundane tasks.

Betty and Veronica are assigned a series of similar tasks, such as mopping the floors and washing dishes. Though the plot line centers on the shenanigans of the two girls as they fight over Archie, their experience at the hospital shows how, once again, the expectations of Betty and Veronica clash with the reality of volunteering and the ideal form of patriotism expected of the two girls. The head nurse shows Betty what her tasks will be, to which Betty responds, “I… I didn’t know nurses mopped floors!” After the nurse reassures her they do, Betty comments, “How do you like that? After I spent all day in the beauty parlor getting ready to meet handsome patients!” Similar to the expectations the girls had in holding the dance, Betty assumes that, by being a nurse, she will get to meet and take care of male patients. She even prepares for it by going to the beauty salon. Betty’s reaction is a testament to the way in which women were encouraged to participate in the war effort. Propaganda posters often advertised women being a support system (sexual or otherwise) on behalf of male soldiers. In her work on women’s war efforts and sexuality, Marilyn Hegarty presents a strikingly different picture of women in World War II than the national asexual symbol of Rosie the Riveter. Hegarty argues that women were often rebuked or considered dangerous for being overly sexual, while, at the same time, sexualized by wartime discourse as a means to serve as moral support for soldiers. This discourse “valorized a militarized type of masculine sexuality [and]…operated to cast female sexuality as threatening…”

By the end of the comic, both Betty and Veronica forego their assigned duties to tend to Archie and are rebuked by the head nurse for doing so. Through their experiences as nurses, Betty and Veronica remind readers that the propaganda campaigns encouraging women to volunteer were often characterized by the need to serve male soldiers in some fashion.

War Waitresses

The war effort permeated not only local hospitals and recruiting stations, but schools as well. A comic released in May of 1945 shows Betty and Veronica are standing in front of a large bulletin board with a bright yellow background that draws the reader’s eye. It reads: “NOTICE Because of the war a shortage of waitresses has resulted in the faculty lunchroom. Volunteers

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are urgently needed! Do your part for victory...students will be given extra credits for this work." Although Betty and Veronica were denied admission to the WAACs, they are able to help as volunteers, much like their time in the hospital. Though they are not earning wages for their labor, the school is shown offering extra credit as an incentive.

As many young women left to join industry positions or join organizations such as the WAC and WAVES, their previously held positions were left unfilled. As part of the New Deal, the Works Progress Administration had trained waitresses and provided them positions in local school districts. An article from the *Washington Post* in October 1942 reads, “The Works Project Administration has informed the schools that WPA labor soon would be withdrawn from the food program, reclassified and sent into war work.”

Such positions needed to be filled by younger volunteers, even in the fictional world of Riverdale.

All goes well as Betty and Veronica first step into their new roles as waitresses. Upon seeing them in the cafeteria, the principal, Mr. Weatherbee, exclaims that they are “patriotic girls!” Here, the writers portray an authority figure within the comic commending the girls for their patriotism, thus establishing once again patriotic duty to one’s country as the ideal standard during the war to which teenagers are expected to conform. As the plot unfolds, however, the writers tap into the underlying motives of the girls, thus complicating the expectations of teenage women in their role as patriotic citizens.

Betty is ecstatic that she might give “10 extra credits for this [volunteering as a waitress]!” Though there is no personal conflict driving the girls to participate such as their...
experience as volunteer nurses, the incentive of extra credit is enough to get them to volunteer and suggests motivation for volunteering extends beyond sheer patriotic obligation. The girls end up causing disaster by dropping trays, spilling food, and even accidentally serving a teacher a mouse. At the end of the comic, the girls are shown washing dishes, as the head supervisor shouts at them, “The next time you decide to be patriotic, join the WACS!” This is a conflicting message for multiple reasons.

First, it suggests that the only reason the girls volunteered was due to a sense of patriotic duty. Though this sentiment might have played a role, the girls clearly show that the extra credit is also a major factor in their volunteering. Secondly, as shown in “Welcome Soldiers,” the girls are supposedly “too young” to join the WACs, yet now they are being told this might be a better option for them. This statement from the supervisor seems to highlight the conflicting messages teenage females received during the war. They were expected to volunteer or participate in a certain manner, yet their age limited the options through which they could showcase their patriotism. Additionally, when they do attempt to participate, the authors depict them unhelpful or incompetent, thus suggesting they aren’t “cut out” for the work they are supposed to be doing. By complicating the reasons for volunteering and the success with which the girls complete their tasks, the writers of the Archie series use humor as a means to show how teenage girls do not always match the given ideal of patriotism.

By looking closely at the work habits of Betty and Veronica from 1941-1945 in three specific comics, the Archie series shows the unique position young females faced during the war period. They were often considered too young to take industry positions or to participate in wage-earning jobs, yet they are still incredibly active in the war effort through volunteer positions. From the comics, we gain a window into the possible activities for young females. While young women were consuming propaganda, children and teenagers were consuming comic books. Through Betty and Veronica, young girls are being socialized to think of their labor during the war period as auxiliary, unpaid, and largely framed around helping men or finding a man. Betty and Veronica provide one way for modern audiences to reconceptualize and contextualize the experience of young females during World War II and how they partook in the war effort. The Archie writers use humor to portray the clash between the patriotic ideal to which the girls were expected to conform compared to their underlying motivations and expectations that speak to the unique identity a growing youth culture.
No More War

The comics of the postwar period, like the war period, do not necessarily reflect the realities of female teenage experience, but rather the expectation of what the female role would be from 1946-1950. With the official end of the war in August 1945, the writers of Archie Comics recognized that Betty and Veronica would no longer spend the majority of their time volunteering in hospitals, as waitresses in the school, or even selling war bonds and throwing dances for soldiers. What then, became the primary role of female adolescents in the post-war period? In her large study on postwar periodicals geared toward women, Joanne Meyerowitz notes that all the magazines she sampled “advocated both the domestic and the nondomestic, sometimes in the same sentence.” The characters of Betty and Veronica suggest adolescent females wrestled with similar tensions. During the postwar period, the writers of Archie Comics show how, despite attempts to participate in a wage earning economy, the ideal for female teenage expectation shifted from patriotic duty to domesticity and family life.

Off to Work?

In a comic from March of 1946, Veronica’s father, Mr. Lodge, is shown yelling at his daughter for buying nine new dresses totaling five hundred thirty five dollars. Veronica responds innocently with, “Well, what do you want a girl to do, Daddy?” Mr. Lodge quickly counters, “Go get yourself a job after school – maybe then you’ll learn to appreciate the value of money!” Betty and Veronica decide to follow Mr. Lodge’s advice and model as a way to earn some quick cash. The girls partake in two jobs as models for local artists, yet they ultimately damage an artist’s canvas and destroy several dresses in a

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designer’s fashion show. By the end of the comic, Mr. Lodge receives two bills for a total of $15,000 worth of damages and begs Veronica to reconsider working. He informs her that, if she does, he will double her allowance. Veronica says she will, ending the comic panel with a wink toward the audience.

Differing from the war period, this comic suggests that work outside the home depended less on volunteerism and the war effort and more on earning a living and “appreciating the value of money” as Mr. Lodge explains to Veronica. It also suggests the girls are unfit for real work, as they can’t even manage to earn money by standing still and posing. The end of the comic, however, sends a conflicting message over whether or not young girls should participate in wage labor activities. The damage they cause within their jobs suggests that Betty and Veronica did more harm working than they would if they simply didn’t work. Similar to their experiences as volunteer nurses or waitresses, Betty and Veronica don’t always appear “cut out” for work. Additionally, the wink from Veronica at the end suggests that she got her way by not having to work in the end. This sentiment suggests she prefers to receive an allowance rather than earn her own money. In an increasing consumer society, money was a key component to the teenage way of life, as I will argue in the next chapter. In terms of labor, however, adolescent females were being sent specific messages regarding what their expected roles would be in the postwar period, and these expectations are clearly defined by domestic tasks throughout various other comics.

“Bread” Winners

Despite this brief mention of Betty and Veronica earning their own money, this seems to be a rare occurrence in the Archie series in the postwar period. Archie and other male figures are seen taking jobs shoveling snow from sidewalks, ushering at the local movie theatre, and serving sundaes at Pop Tate’s Chok’lit Shop. Betty and Veronica, rather, are shown participating in various domestic tasks that constitute the majority of their “work.” The girls are often portrayed performing such tasks as cooking and cleaning at school in the

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form of home economics classes.

A comic from January of 1947 opens with Betty and Veronica fighting before the start of a water polo match. In their frenzy, Betty and Veronica accidentally knock a bag belonging to the school principal, Mr. Weatherbee, into the pool. Enraged that he will not be able to bring home a loaf of bread to his wife, Mr. Weatherbee insists the girls make him a new loaf of bread. Betty first expresses the girls’ hesitancy: “Golly Ronnie- we haven’t gotten to bread baking yet-what’ll we do?” Veronica knows that they need to start with flour, so the girls begin there. The girls then remember they are missing one crucial ingredient: yeast. They are unsure how much to use, but Betty believes it should be “Five or six- maybe a couple more for good measure!” It isn’t long until they start to make a mess of the school kitchen and Mr. Weatherbee grows irritated. He insists the girls wrap up the dough so that his wife may finish baking it at home. On his way home on the public bus, the dough starts to expand and causes a series of comical events to unfold. The comic then ends back in the home economics classroom with a note from Mr. Weatherbee, which reads, “Bread baking is strictly forbidden!”

Betty and Veronica were unfamiliar with how to bake a loaf of bread because they “hadn’t gotten to bread baking” in their home economics, or domestic science class. Dating back to the Morril Act of 1862, when land grant colleges sought to educate farm wives in the running of their household, home economics was a typical component of American life by the mid-1940s. The annual Lake Placid Conferences on Home Economics from 1899 to 1908 helped to coin the official term of “home economics” and to further define the subject as a discipline. These conferences helped spur the establishment of the American Home Economics Association, which advocated for home economic programs in schools across the United States. In the Journal of Education from September 1918, the association is described as being “composed of men and women interested in improving conditions of living in the home, the institutional

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Since the early 20th century, home economic classes were offered as part of secondary education in high schools throughout America.

Betty and Veronica’s increasing role in such classes hint at the changing expectations for the girls in the postwar period. In the comic previously described, Mr. Weatherbee removed the girls from their water polo match so that they may make him a loaf of bread. Despite the fact that Veronica is the captain, Mr. Weatherbee has no problem directing the girls to the kitchen. By doing so, the writers of Archie suggest authority figures played a role in regulating expectations for young females. According to Mr. Weatherbee, it was more important for the girls to make him a brand new loaf of bread than to take part in their water polo match. Secondly, the comic suggests a need for home economics classes and what can go wrong when young females do not properly understand the mechanics of baking or cooking. The comical nature of the comic strip exaggerates such consequences, but nonetheless places value on learning such tasks. By asserting they have not “gotten to bread baking yet,” the girls indicate that they are in the process of acquiring certain skills. This basic knowledge could have prevented the chaos that unfolded later in the comic strip. The comic underscores not only the value of domestic knowledge as a prevailing ideal for female teens, but also the power of an authority figure to enforce it.

**All-star Homemakers**

Just a few months later, Betty and Veronica are back in the kitchen at school, but this time they have better luck. The comic opens with a title page depicting the two girls’ faces and a word cloud that reads:

![Figure 7 Archie Comics No. 25](image)

This statement clearly relays expectations of Betty and Veronica to the reader regarding domestic skills. The phrase “home on the range” could be read as play on words of the popular poem-turned-song, which was adopted as the state song of Kansas in 1947. It could also, and more likely, be referring to a stove range. This bold statement at the very beginning of a comic featuring Betty and Veronica sends the signal to its readers that women who marry must “feel at home on the range.”

Just as Mr. Weatherbee expected that the girls knew how to bake bread, the writers of Archie are telling their audience in more explicit terms that Betty and Veronica are in cooking class for the purpose of marriage.

According to women’s magazines, such domestic skills and familiarity with kitchen appliances would come in handy during the postwar period. In her introduction describing women’s magazines from 1940-1960, Nancy A. Walker suggests, “As early as June 1944, a Good Housekeeping article featured designs for efficient ‘postwar kitchens’ - the phrase providing a succinct description of the expectations for women’s postwar work.”

Once a woman married, the kitchen became a place of pride and joy. Up until this point, Betty and Veronica have been depicted as disasters in the kitchen. This particular comic, however, situates them as role models. Betty and Veronica see a group of Riverdale’s Rivals for the basketball game getting off a bus outside their classroom window. The girls decide to cook up something that will their team win the big game later that night, which places them in an auxiliary position to the basketball team as helpers. Veronica decides to use a secret ingredient, Mexican jumping beans, to put a little pep in the boys’ step. The boys are successful, with Archie and Jughead scoring a combined twenty baskets. This comic suggests that women can play vital support staff roles in others’ lives through domestic tasks such as cooking, yet it can also be read as a subversive statement that challenges this notion of women in purely supporting roles.

Why might Betty and Veronica’s domestic skill set be emphasized during the postwar period? As the history of home economics suggests, such ideas and classes had permeated American society long before the outbreak of the war and would only gain steam up through the 1950s. If they were part of a female teenager’s every day life during the war, however, why did


they play a more significant role in the plot lines surrounding Betty and Veronica from 1945 and after? One answer comes in the form of the “domestic ideal.” Historian Elaine Tyler May argues that the Cold War and ideological struggle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union that broke out at the end of the Second World War emphasized a need to define the American ideal. This ideal permeated society in the form of domestic, middle-class suburbia, to which most Americans tried to conform. This idealization of home and family life led to the subordination and domestication of women during the Cold War period.50

Though there have been various studies disagreeing with May’s interpretation, the domestic ideal is a useful frame for reading Betty and Veronica and how they represent femininity in the postwar period.51 In November of 1947, a comic shows the Riverdale teacher, Miss Grundy, who is distraught over the fact that no one is taking her Domestic Science course. She believes “it’s all due to the new athletic program!” Betty and Veronica have put together a baseball team, and by stroking Mr. Weatherbee’s ego about his days as a baseball star, they receive an order for the supply room to give them all the equipment they need. The girls are particularly excited over their new uniforms, until a catfight breaks out in the locker room. In the last panel, the girls are shown walking through the door of the “Domestic Science” class with bandages on their faces. Miss Grundy is stunned: “All you girls want to enroll in my Domestic Science Class- B- but I thought you were going out for baseball!” Veronica explains, “We changed our minds!” Betty

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51 Scholars such as Joanne Meyerowitz continued revisionist endeavors to extend the conversation beyond the stereotypical image of the happy suburban housewife. She emphasized the need to “displace the domestic stereotype, the June Cleavers and Donna Reeds, from the center of historical study.” Meyerowitz’s collection of fifteen essays sparked new directions and conversations in the field of women’s history by looking beyond the stereotypical images propagated by the media in the 1940s and 1950s. Her study reminds readers that women’s experiences in the post-war period were shaped by various factors such as race and class. See Joanne Meyerowitz ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America: 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).
then delivers the punch line, remarking, “Yeah—we got to thinking a woman’s place is in the home!”\textsuperscript{52} Though the comic begun with the girls choosing athletics over Domestic Science class, the ending suggests that they never should have wavered from these gendered expectations. In the end, all they had to show for it were bandages on their faces. Whether or not the writers of Archie comics are trying to send a direct message to its female readership or simply mock the gendered stereotypes is unclear. Yet the appearance of such dialogue indicates a reinforcement of the domestic ideal. By making “a woman’s place is in the home” the last sentence of a panel, it forces the reader to ponder the thought. Similar to the bread baking comic where the girls could have avoided the mess by knowing how much yeast to use, this comic suggests girls could have avoided a few bumps and bruises if they simply would have enrolled in the Domestic Science course—and stayed within the boundaries of their expected gender roles. The humor of this particular comic would most likely leave readers thinking “silly Betty and Veronica!” In this last comic, we see a challenge to the domestic ideal, and the girls pay the price.

The increased emphasis on Betty and Veronica performing domestic tasks during the postwar period points to a transition of ideals and social norms that the writers of Archie reflect in the comic series. During the war period, the ideal to which teenage girls were expected to conform was that of patriotism and civic duty to the nation. Betty and Veronica are shown volunteering at hospitals or as waitresses to meet such expectations. The writers of Archie comics, however, undermine these patriotic values by suggesting motivations for teenage girls to work or volunteer outside the home are largely based on petty teenage issues involving relationships and competition with one another. Such a contradiction reflects the differing messages young girls received in wartime propaganda. The fact that the girls defy or do not always live up to the patriotic ideal is negated by the humor inherent within each panel. It’s funny that Betty went to the beauty parlor all day and didn’t want to mop the floors because that is something one would expect of a teenage girl. Their age and gender provide the writers a unique opportunity to showcase not only social norms, but also how expectations for youth culture might differ from those of older women.

The postwar period reflects a shift regarding Betty and Veronica’s workload. Rather than mopping floors or waitressing, they are often seen in a kitchen setting. The actions of Betty and Veronica, based on the writers of Archie, suggest there are particular expectations for teenage girls in the postwar period: enroll in domestic science courses, know how to make certain food staples such as bread, and use such skills to support others, particularly men. Rather than promote a steadfast devotion to the nation through volunteering, the writers of Archie suggest domesticity and marriage as an ideal patriotic duty. As Betty and Veronica fumble their way through bread baking and soup making, readers might laugh at their inability to perform basic culinary tasks. As adolescents, Betty and Veronica are still learning domestic tasks that a reader might only expect to be mastered by a slightly older woman. Regardless, the assumptions inherent within the Archie series from 1941-1950 regarding Betty and Veronica’s working tasks exemplify certain norms and ideals to which the female characters are expected to conform.

One must pay close attention to the humor of each comic to assess the clash between motive, age, gender, and ideal. A comical moment within the panels often highlights the distinct role of the female teenagers during the war and postwar period. Though the writers speak to larger gender ideals of the time period such as civic duty and domesticity, the experiences of Betty and Veronica show the slight freedom for teenagers to navigate such ideals and expectations. Although they might end up with a few Band-Aids as shown in the last comic, the girls dared to try something new. The unique character of American youth culture blossomed amid the pages of Archie Comics as teenagers such as Betty and Veronica wrestled with where they fit in society. As we will see in the following chapters, however, being a teenage girl during the 1940s meant much more than where one worked.
Chapter 2
Must Rate to Date: Betty and Veronica and the Dating World

The cover of Archie no. 3 from the summer of 1943 shows Archie sweating profusely as Veronica stands to his left and Betty stands to his right, both shooting daggers from their eyes aimed at Archie’s head. In a single word bubble, the girls are shown simultaneously asking, “Well, just which one of us are you taking to the prom Archie?” By the no. 22 issue in September of 1946, the cover shows Archie sitting with Veronica and Jughead at the local soda shop. Jughead says, “So what happened after you told Betty you couldn’t keep the date, Arch?” It is then the reader realized Archie was sporting a black eye and a rather large bump on his head.53

As depicted by its prominent place on the covers of Archie Comics, one plot line that became central to the character development of Betty and Veronica was their constant competition over Archie both during World War II and the postwar period. In many respects, the humor of the comics centered on each girl vying for attention from Archie or other male figures. Though funny, a closer investigation of the girl’s interactions with each other and their male counterparts reveals a good deal about one vital aspect of a growing youth culture: the dating world. What can the Archie comic series tell us about dating for adolescent females during the 1940s? Betty and Veronica are the ladies to ask. Just don’t cancel on them, or you might end up with daggers or a black eye.

The mid-twentieth century brought about many changes for adolescents and teenagers, but the dating world was perhaps the change that had the most direct and daily effect on how they lived their lives. In her work on the history of dating from 1925 to 1965, historian Beth Bailey argued, “in the twentieth-century, youth increasingly moved their courtship from the private to the public sphere.”54 Suddenly parlor dates in a woman’s home were replaced by movies and rides in a car. The freedoms adolescents experienced during the war period in terms of taking on jobs and volunteer positions extended into their social life. They expected to go on dates and, in a sense, have control over their future.

53 Cover, Archie no. 3, 1943; Cover, Archie no. 22, 1946, microform accessed via Comic Art Collection, Michigan State University Libraries
This chapter will use an assortment of comic panels and daily strips to argue that the writers propagated certain dating patterns of the period while also revealing the irony and complexities behind them. Betty and Veronica reflect the confusing place of many teenage and adolescent females in society during the 1940s. As they wrestled to find their way in the workplace as discussed in the previous chapter, they also dealt with changes on a more personal level. Adolescents and females in particular experienced a form of indoctrination through their relationships with their families, institutions such as high school, and peer groups. These relationships acted as a form of social control through which the girls could assess what was popular or acceptable in terms of teenage behavior. Dating habits are one lens through which these expectations of moral codes and gender norms are expressed in the Archie comics. The manner in which the writers and artists depict the dating experiences of Betty and Veronica can help modern audiences visualize middle class teenagers and all the complexities that went with adolescence.

From Courting to Dating

During the nineteenth century, courtship was largely defined by the practice of calling, or seeking the company of a woman in her own home. This practice extended through the first decades of the twentieth century. The famous etiquette writer, Emily Post, wrote in her 1922 manual that an eligible debutante’s name written below that of her mothers on a calling card indicated she was eligible for invitations from suitors. As cultural historian Beth Bailey explains, this act of courtship allowed the woman more control, as she had the power to ask a man to call, and when he did, it was expected he would court her in her “sphere,” or at her home. As the 1920s came about, however, traditional courtship rules drastically altered. Ellen Rothman explains, “What happened in the 1920s was that ideas and behavior which had once marked the outermost limits of acceptability moved to the center of the middle-class youth culture.” This decline of traditional calling practices in the early twentieth century marked the rise of what would become known as the dating culture.

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Dating as a term in the modern sense did not originate until the turn of the twentieth century. As Baily discusses, a date was often used to describe the exchange of money for a prostitute.\(^{58}\) Before the 1920s, those practices that often led to a proposal and marriage were defined as courtship. In the 1930s sociologist Willard Waller published an article on campus life at Penn State University. Waller argued that the system of courtship had been replaced by the “rating and dating” system. “Dancing, petting, necking, the automobile, amusement park, and a whole range of institutions and practices permit or facilitate thrill-seeking behavior,” Waller noted in his unfavorable assessment of this new system.\(^ {59}\) It is in this era where the seeds of modern youth culture and the dating system were sown. Using Beth Bailey’s model of conventions of courtship, which argues convention structures experience rather than determining specific actions, this chapter will analyze historically specific trends during the 1940s that speak to expectations of dating during the 1940s. Betty and Veronica will act as the check point through which to assess dating conventions of this period and will help lend a broader understanding to the dating experiences of adolescent females.

**Creating Competition**

During the war period, dating habits were largely based on competition, but not just any form of competition. As Bailey argued, “American youth prized a promiscuous popularity, demonstrating competitive success through the number and variety of dates they commanded.”\(^ {60}\) Simply put, the more dates a teenager obtained, the more their popularity increased, thus increasing their appeal to potential new daters. This encouraged both men and women to attract the attention of the opposite sex and keep their options open so that they always had plans for a date, thus giving the appearance that they were in high demand.

For young women, this meant that competition was both inevitable and interpersonal. Throughout the comics, Betty and Veronica are seen incessantly competing for time in the spotlight. The attention they seek typically comes in the form of male approval, or at least recognition. In “Nominate a Drum Majorette” from the January 1944 issue of Archie Comics,

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\(^{58}\) *Ibid*, 22.


Betty and Veronica both hope to be chosen to lead the school band on the football field. The comic opens with both Betty and Veronica asking Archie, “Of course you want me to be the drum majorette, don’t you Archie???” Archie’s sports a grimace on his face, showing how uncomfortable this decision makes him. Archie tells Betty he “wouldn’t think of calling on anyone else!!” At the nomination pep rally, however, Archie is tricked into yelling out Veronica’s name at the time of nominations.” Veronica is happy and gives Archie a kiss on the cheek, while Betty passes Archie, clearly angry. She informs Archie, “For your information, Mr. Andrews, it was Reggie Mantle who nominated me! Good bye!” With two girlfriends to please, Archie was bound to disappoint someone. Betty wanted Archie to nominate her, as that would publicly link Archie to Betty. She is quick to remind him, however, that another man still nominated her, thus showing she does not need Archie’s approval, but cherishes it over others.

This constant competition plays out between the girls for the remainder of the comic and reveals an adult perspective on the tactics young women might use to garner attention or attract possible dates. The principle, Mr. Weatherbee, holds the ultimate decision-making power in selecting a drum majorette. As the girls enter his office, Veronica is shown wearing a slinky red dress, for which Mr. Weatherbee chastises her, “That’s not the kind of form I meant!” Betty rips of her overcoat, remarking, “then maybe this is!” revealing a short, yellow costume with matching heels. Mr. Weatherbee, horrified, yells, “Stop! Put your clothes back on at once!” as Veronica chides Betty, “Why you little exhibitionist…” In the end, neither girl receives the position, as they are both considered too distracting to the football players, who continually miss passes and plays as they stare at the girls.

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61 Ed Goggin, pencils by Harry Sahle and inks by Clem Harrison, story and art originally published in Archie Comics No. 6, 1944. Appears reprinted in Archie Archives: Volume Two, (Milwaukie: Dark Horse Archives, 2011), 204-209.
Despite the interpersonal competition between the girls for Archie and other male attention, there are “check points” apparent in both adult and peer reaction. Mr. Weatherbee, as an adult authority figure within the comic series, mediates the girls behavior by clearly expressing what they wore was inappropriate. By calling each other names like “hussy” and “exhibitionist,” the girls are signaling to each other that their behavior is not suitable, despite the fact that they have similar tactics for winning the attention of Mr. Weatherbee and others. By the end of the panel, neither girl wins. In “Nominate a Drum Majorette,” the authors of the Archie series are signaling expectations for high school girls. It is natural for them to seek the attention of male suitors to increase their popularity, but they must be careful about the kind of attention they seek, or else it might backfire.

In addition to being kept in check by authority figures, girls were advised to be careful about how they achieved popularity with the opposite sex. In *McCall’s* magazine in January 1946, a spread called “How to get along with other women” includes advice from five Hollywood celebrities: Shirley Temple, Betty Hutton, Joan Bennett, Bette Davis, and Dorothy Lamour. Shirley gives advice, stating, “Try to avoid hurt feelings. Most teen-age girls are more sensitive than people realize. If you tear down another girl’s reputation, those who hear you will be sure that’s how you talk about them behind their backs.” Dorothy Lamour makes a similar remark by noting, “A woman who tries to enhance her own prestige by saying unfavorable things to men about other women always lowers herself in a man’s eye.”

In addition to complimenting one another and offering each other advice, these celebrities warn young girls of the danger of stooping to certain standards in order to raise their own popularity or status, particularly in the eyes of a male. The article notes, “Betty Hutton, whose popularity with the male contingent has never been questioned, is just as well liked by women.” Such advice columns suggest that male attention might be the ultimate goal, but women must not put one another down in order to gain popularity points. By depicting Betty and Veronica as catty, the writers of Archie comics reflect a larger concern with tension among and between females in obtaining male attention.

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Rating and Dating

One way in which teenagers went about deciding who to date and how often was through the rating system. The ‘rating and dating’ system began in the 1920s yet declined in the 1930s due to the economic pressures of the depression. In his 1937 study of Penn State University students, Willard Waller describes the emergence of the rating and dating complex. In order to rate well, men must “…be prominent in activities, have a copious supply of spending money, be well-dressed, ‘smooth’ in manners and appearance…dance well, and have access to an automobile” while women must have “good clothes, a smooth line, ability to dance well, and popularity as a date.” These factors allowed young men and women to “rate” one another. The higher you rated, the more dates you received. As a woman, the more dates you received, your popularity increased, and the cycle continued.

The rating and dating system gained steam in the early 1940s, yet the war drastically altered the number of available dates and the manner in which dates were handled. The shortage of men permeated not only the economy, but social life as well. This man shortage lasted well into the later war years, as one article from the New York Times in July 1944 shows: “Recent developments do not point to any diminution in the manpower shortage.” As men kept being asked to fill war positions, this not only altered the economy, but social life as well. For women, when it came to dating, war meant they always kept their eyes and options open.

The beginning panel of a comic from May 1944 reads, “The Tappa Haffa Keg sorority of Riverdale High meets to cover a big problem—the man power shortage!” As previously mentioned, the “man shortage” permeated multiple aspects of American life. By directly addressing it in this comic, the authors speak to a reality many teenage girls faced.

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63 Waller, “The Rating and Dating Complex,” 730.
and adolescent females were facing. Veronica asks if there are any suggestions to help this problem to which Betty responds, “Couldn’t we conduct some sort of date bureau?” Betty is met with a room full of approving remarks from the girls. Among them include: “Swell, then we could ration men!” “Sure! Just like sugar!” “Yeah! And ham!” The girls pin up a notice notifying men that “From this point on all males will be rationed and rated by points according to their merit.”

The men are rated by point value, and each woman is allowed 15 points per week. Among the men shown, the football captain is worth 15 points, Archie is worth 7 points, and Jughead is worth 2 points (poor Jughead). Ginger’s boyfriend complains, “Heck honey, I’m worth more than 7.5 points!” Ginger responds, “But just think, dear, that way we can go out twice a week!” A few panels later, Betty says to Veronica, “There goes that splurge, Sally Green, spending her 15 points all at once! Joe has gasoline and Tommy has the car!”

Did the writers of Archie Comics create this plot for humor sake, to mirror reality, or both? Date bureaus were not uncommon during the war. As men were called away, women would create profiles with a date bureau that would allow them to date military men when they needed a date to a dance or other event. Date bureaus were perhaps more common among college-aged girls, who had a bit more freedom. In an article from the Chicago Tribune in February of 1943, University of Chicago female students open a Date Bureau as men get ready to depart for the armed services. A few months later in May, Taft High School announces its Date Bureau to make sure no girl attends the alumni dance without an escort. The article reads:

The man power shortage won’t worry the girls who plan on attending the Taft Alumni Association’s third annual dance Saturday evening. For alumni association heads have devised a date bureau especially for the dance, and any girl willing to buy a [bid] for herself and a serviceman will find herself dancing with a uniformed escort on the roof.

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67 “Cadets Departing, So U. of C. Co-eds Open a Prom Date Bureau,” The Chicago Daily Tribune, February 13, 1943 accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers.
The date bureau was though up after the association’s plans for the dance threatened to fall thru, simply because there were not enough men. With few men and multiple women wanting dates, it appears a date bureau was a simple solution to a larger social problem. Reflecting reality, the writers suggest Betty and Veronica’s plan is the perfect way to obtain dates while also keeping fellow females in check.

Though the men aren’t to thrilled to be “treated like groceries,” the women devise a system they feel is fair. Depending on the man, she could go on one, two, or multiple dates a week. The fact that the football captain calls for a full week’s allowance in one date reiterates the importance of popularity in the dating world. The intentional lower rating Ginger gives her boyfriend allows her to see him multiple times a week. As long as they are an item, the boyfriend doesn’t mind. He even responds, “You’re right, Ginger.” With the reassurance that he will get two dates a week with the same girl, his lower rating does not seem to affect him in the way it might if he were competing for other girls.

Double Standards

Both men and women were expected to obtain multiple dates for popularity’s sake, yet the Archie writers suggest there were different social expectations for males and females in terms of obtaining multiple dates. In January 1944, Archie no. 7 included a Betty and Veronica headliner entitled “Ration Trouble.” The comic opens with the two girls sitting on the beach in fashionable bikinis, flanking a snoring Archie. Both notice what appears to be a singular, handsome lifeguard. Veronica thinks to herself, “Hmm he’s certainly a gorgeous hunk of man! How I’d like to date him!” Betty’s thought bubble, in a similar fashion, reads, “He’s just my type! I’ll bet his dates are rationed! I

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wonder how many points it takes to get him off the shelf!”

For one to understand Betty’s comment, one must first understand the context of the World War II and rationing. In order to provide enough food and supplies to the war effort, the government imposed a rationing of high-demand goods to ensure that all citizens had equal access. Foods that were often rationed were those that were seen as luxuries and in high demand such as coffee, sugar, butter, and meat. By comparing the lifeguard to a rationed object, Betty assumes he must be in high demand by multiple women. This reference is something readers at the time could have related to, as it links the low prospects of the dating world with the lack of availability of particular goods and services.

As the comic continues, both girls make attempts to catch the attention of the lifeguard, whom the reader has discovered is actually two people (twins named Tim and Tom). One twin falls for Betty, while the other falls for Veronica. Each man invites the lady of his choice to be his date at a house party later in the evening. Both convinced that they were successful in winning over the lifeguard, the girls are rather confused when they run into one another at the house. Both men are attentive to their dates, but Betty and Veronica believe one man attempting to date them both is playing them. Veronica angrily shouts at Tim, “you calmly let me sit here while you danced with her.” Betty throws a pie in her Tom’s face, remarking, “the very idea! Thinking he could come back to me after that slinky Veronica refused him!” The girls only figure it out in the second-to-last panel, as they are sitting on the beach with Archie and Tim and Tom walk by. The comic ends with Archie saying, “How d’ya like that? One minute they’re mushin all over me, the next, they’re walkin’ off with a coupla guys! I never will understand women!”

In addition to rationing reflecting the dating scene during World War II, the rest of the comic reveals a double standard or irony in the manner in which Betty and Veronica expected to be treated. Despite the fact that they are both dating Archie and he is lying next to them, they both attempt to catch the attention of a handsome lifeguard. Though they find the lifeguard attractive, the driving force in the girls’ actions is competition with one another. As Bailey notes, “competition was the key term in the [dating] formula- remove it and there was no rating,

70 Jacqueline Foertsch, American Culture in the 1940s, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 175.
By winning against each other, both Betty and Veronica would rate higher, increase their popularity, and therefore continue to acquire more dates. As Betty swims out to fake drown, she turns to the readers and says, “I wonder if this is far enough out to yell for help! If this works Veronica will burn up!” Here, Betty shows that, though the date will be prize enough, angering Veronica by getting the date would be a satisfying feeling.

Archie’s comment at the end suggests a deeper commentary on women and dating. Though he humorously plays off the idea of women being difficult to understand, he also capitalizes on the double standard in the comic. When each girl thought they had won the date, they were happy to attend the party. The moment they thought they were being played, however, they became enraged and left. It becomes very clear to the reader that Betty and Veronica do not enjoy coming in second to one another. With that being said, they return to Archie, who constantly gets in trouble throughout the series for attempting to date both of them. Just as with the twins, Veronica and Betty do not like it when Archie chooses the other girl. In the end of “Ration Trouble,” however, both girls leave Archie for another guy. Through his seemingly innocent comment, Archie reveals the complexities of dating during World War II. If competition was key, did the same rule apply for both genders? The authors do not attempt to answer such a question, but rather leave the reader wondering if all truly is fair in love and war.

**Adult Approval**

One might wonder, “where are the adults with all this dating going on?!” Since Archie was typically seen as a wholesome, family comic, it would only make sense for there to be some sort of family approval or guidelines within the comics themselves. What is interesting about the Archie series during the war, however, is that there is little interaction with parents in regards to dating. Rather, the teens appear to have a large amount of freedom regarding who they date, when, and where. Bailey describes these newfound freedoms as a result of increased

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opportunities for young people to enter the public world in terms of jobs and extracurricular activities. In particular, “women who belonged to the public world by day began to access the public world in general…Though considered risqué by some, dining out alone with a man or attending the theater with no chaperone did not threaten an unmarried woman’s reputation.”

These new found freedoms were thus the result of a changing world that shifted courting practices from private homes to public spaces.

In the previous comic, both Betty and Veronica are asked on a date at the beach and end up at the man’s house that evening, without any mention of meeting the parents or asking for their approval. Along with the extra freedom enjoyed outside the home in regards to working and volunteer positions, teenagers also enjoyed a healthy freedom in their social life. This doesn’t mean, however, that the adolescent dating world went completely unchecked in Riverdale. Despite the rise of public dating practices, there were still limits to what was deemed acceptable.

At the end of the comic where the girls ration dates, all goes well until Mr. Weatherbee is informed of the “date bureau” occurring at the school. He reacts negatively, stating, “It sounds immoral. You have my permission to investigate thoroughly professors!” Throughout the remaining panels, Betty and Veronica convince the two professors that they are older women and part of the date bureau. When a mouse ends up on the table, both girls jump out of their disguises, landing in the laps of their professors. A waitress gives the girls a picture, which looks a good deal as though Betty and Veronica were sitting in the professors’ laps. When the professors report to Mr. Weatherbee on the date bureau, Betty holds up the incriminating photo in the background. The professors inform Mr. Weatherbee that it is the “finest idea we’ve heard of in a long time!” In the last frame, Betty and Veronica share a congratulatory handshake and a smile.

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72 Bailey, From Front Porch to Back Seat, 19.
The writers of the comic remind the reader that adults would think of such behavior as “immoral.” What is perhaps most interesting, however, is that the girls get away with it in the end. The girls succeed in challenging the power of authority, showing they have a say, if not full control, over what goes on in their social lives. Along with the new challenges the war brought to teenage girls, it also brought opportunities and freedom for social growth. This new found freedom would culminate in the post-war period and help to permanently reshape the dating world.

Despite the rise of adolescent independence during the 1940s, Archie writers still depicted parents as engaged in the courtship or dating of their children. Though some parents focused on traditional values stemming from before the war, “Pragmatic ‘modern’ parents accepted the fact that they could not control teenage behavior. Like character builders, though, they firmly believed that they could still mold it along acceptable lines, as long as they were flexible.” Teenagers were thus provided a certain amount of freedom, as long as it was deemed acceptable by their parents.

A daily strip from August 17, 1948 shows Mr. Lodge attempting to kick Archie out of his house after he has clearly overstayed his welcome. Mr. Lodge finally yells, “Archie! Don’t you know how to say good night?” Archie glances up from the couch with lipstick on his mouth and responds, “And how!” The final panel shows the butler kicking Archie out of the Veronica’s front door. Despite the new freedoms, the writers of Archie comics still suggest that parents play a role in the dating process. As soon as Mr. Lodge finds out his daughter is kissing Archie, Archie is immediately removed from the Lodge home. The humor of the comic relies on the understanding of petting and necking, or physical contact outside of intercourse, as a major component of the dating world.

Though “petting parties” were most popular in the 1920s, Alfred Kinsey’s 1948 study declared “petting” was still important to the dating process of young men and women. Thirty-nine percent of women under age fifteen and eighty-eight percent of women aged 16 to twenty were said to have had petting experience. As one scholar put it, “Light petting, better known as

73 Palladino, Teenagers, 30.
74 Bob Montana, Daily Strip, August 17, 1948, Bob Montana Cartoons, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries.
necking, was certainly respectable in the adolescent social world, even if the subject was taboo. Petting was a fact of life that parents had to live with… [Petting] served an important function in the process of growing up.” Even though such actions were deemed acceptable by adolescents and teens, the writers of Archie comic still capture the taboo nature of necking or petting for parents. By capturing the willingness of adolescent teens to engage in such activities and the response of the adult, the writers portray a generational conflict that underscores the changing nature of the dating world during the mid-twentieth century.

**Men Bring the Money**

As noted in the previous section, the rise of dating culture is typically explained by the increased freedoms adolescents and teens encountered in the early to mid-twentieth century, but what exactly did these new freedoms look like? Movie theatres were one particular area in which dates moved from the private to public sphere. These arenas perfectly crossed the boundary between private and public space. Elaine Tyler May notes:

> Young people watching these cinematic moral lessons learned the style of romance…the message of the plot reinforced the need for restraint. Love-struck viewers might hold hands or embrace in the darkened theaters; but not much else could happen. They sat in a public place, facing the screen without talking to each other, watching attractive film idols instruct them in the art of gaining allure without losing virtue.

Movie theaters were thus both a place young people could “escape” while still being in the public eye. The writers of Archie Comics often reflected the popularity of movies in the Archie series as a spot to go on dates. One daily strip from March 1947 opens With Betty saying, “Archie! You haven’t taken me to a movie in ages!” She continues, “Didn’t you ever want to sit in the dark with someone and watch a big love scene and- and-” Archie cuts her off, “You mean dub-in a few extra sound effects? If it’s that kind of entertainment you want- would ou like to see a real romantic movie?!” Betty responds enthusiastically, until Archie tells her he has a date with Veronica, so she can use his movie pass. Though the humor lies primarily in Archie once again ditching Betty, it also captures the role of movies in dating. Betty enthusiastically

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expresses interest in more than simply watching the movie, which shows the writers of an older
generation are well aware of what such dates might entail.

In addition to increased public spaces such as dance halls and movie theatres, technology
played a major role in the increased practice of dating. As Bailey argues, the automobile played
a major role in dating becoming a national practice, as it provided teens privacy and mobility.
Rather than calling on a girl and meeting her in her home, men now had the opportunity to pick a
woman up, which transferred the power and direction of a date to the male.\(^{79}\) The rating and
dating system rewarded men who had access to vehicles, as it showed they could take women on
public dates. Increased mobility meant increased opportunities for date activities.

One requirement of having a car for dates was also having money to pay for car expenses
in addition to the date itself. As Bailey notes, “an invitation to go out on a date…was an
invitation into a man’s world—not simply because dating took place in the public sphere…but
because dating moved courtship into the world of the economy. Money—men’s money—was at
the center of the dating system.”\(^{80}\) A newspaper daily strip from February 1948 shows Archie
putting his coat on his father with a thought bubble that reads, “If I kill Pop with kindness maybe
he’ll slip me five skins to take Veronica to the Valentine dance!” Archie grabs his father’s
slippers, pipe, paper, and aspirin. He begins, “here’s your aspirin, Pop… and I wonder if…” Mr.
Andrews interjects with, “NOT A RED CENT!” to which Archie responds by taking the aspirin
for himself.\(^{81}\) Since teens were not full members of the work force, they often relied on parents
for allowances and other spending money. Having access to a vehicle increased a man’s
popularity, but it also increased his costs.

The more dates a man went on, the more money he would have to spend, as it was
assumed men would cover all expenses on a date. In an advice section on dating in
Mademoiselle headlines, “The man always pays!” the section reads, “When the wheels of
commerce are turning, when the check is arriving, it’s a faux pas to look actively concerned.
You’re not supposed to know what prices the tickets are or how many pennies the dinner-for-two
comes to.”\(^{82}\) Men were expected to pick up the tab, and women were expected to remain

\(^{80}\) *Ibid*, 21
\(^{81}\) Bob Montana, Daily Strip, February 9, 1948, Bob Montana Cartoons, Special Collections Research
Center, Syracuse University Libraries.
\(^{82}\) “Someone’s Looking at You,” *Mademoiselle*, March 1941, 162.
ignorant of the money men spent on a date. Even in the world of Riverdale, women were not expected to pay.

In a comic from 1945, Veronica is shown lounging on her bed in lingerie. She tells Archie over the phone, “I have a delightful surprise for you… I’ve changed my mind about going to the Thanksgiving dance with Reggie. I’m going to let you take me. Isn’t that nice?” The next page shows Betty calling Archie telling him she will allow him to take her to the dance, and just a few panels later, Julia receives a call from Archie Andrews saying he can’t take her to the dance. It becomes obvious to the reader that Archie first asked Veronica, but when she said no he asked Betty. When Betty declined, he moved to Julia. Both Betty and Veronica show up at Pop Tate’s Soda Shoppe, where they bicker over who will accompany him to the dance. Veronica shouts, “Archie promised to take me, you she-wolf!” to which Betty responds, “He promised to take me you man-hunter!” The two girls bicker and destroy the Thanksgiving decorations in the Soda Shoppe. In one of the last frames, the owner of the shop is seen writing a “Bill for Archie Andrews” which contains $5.65 worth of damage for 1 picture, 1 cake, decorations, and 2 chocolate sodas. Though the girls created the mess, Archie is the one who gets stuck with the bill. The writers of Archie tap into this convention by using humor. It seems even when the man does not show up for the date, he is still expected to pay for his lady, or in this case, ladies.

The Men Return - the Competition Remains

With the end of the war, dating culture exploded. For women, free time that was previously dedicated to volunteer hours after school became time to fill with leisure activities and, of course, dates. In fact, “teens seemed to enjoy life with increasing confidence in themselves, especially during the postwar period.” In regards to the dating world, some things remained the same while others seemed to change. For starters, competition remained a key component to dating life an only continued to grow throughout the 1940s. The dating and rating system remained popular during the war, yet it began to fade during the postwar period. Dating had become such an important part of adolescence that, “by the early 1950s, the social world of

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dating, popularity, and the never-ending search for a boyfriend had replaced more long-term, adult goals like discovering talents and choosing a career.”

Dancing remained a key way for women to attract the attention of men, and the more men she danced with, the more her popularity soared. “In the 1930s and 1940s, this competition [for dates and popularity] was enacted, most visibly, on the dance floor. There success was a dizzying popularity that kept girls whirling from escort to escort.” In a newspaper daily strip from January of 1948, Veronica is shown dancing at a ball. Her partner asks her, “Well, Miss Lodge, are you enjoying our winter ‘snow’ ball?” Veronica responds, “Yes, Dean! I’ve danced with every boy here…” This simple line signals to reader that Veronica is popular and in high demand. Some scholars have argued the dating and rating system diminished in the postwar period, but, at least in Riverdale, having multiple dance partners and dates remained a sign of popularity for several years after the war.

Unlike the war period, which saw a rationing of men and the girls on dates with multiple partners in each comic, the postwar period seemed to bring a slight change of focus. Just one year after the end of the war, Betty and Veronica appear in a comic in 1946 entitled “Go to the Dogs.” The comic opens with Veronica sitting in her room as her phone rings. She begrudgingly remarks out loud, “Creeps! No homework—no date! This is worse than a lost weekend but I’ll be darned if I’ll let Betty know I’m a no-show tonight!” As Veronica answers the

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84 Palladino, Teenagers, 110.
85 Bailey, From Front Porch to Back Seat, 31.
87 Bailey, From Front Porch to Back Seat. Bailey argues that the rating and dating system diminished after World War II to a more steady form of dating that valued one partner. Though Betty and Veronica idolize Archie throughout the 1940s, their continuation of dates with other people in the postwar period suggests, at least for the writers of Archie Comics, competition and multiple partners was still highly valued as a key component for dating success.
phone, Betty sings, “Veronica, dear, have I got th’ most gorgeous hunk of muscles calling on me tonight” to which Veronica responds, “Oh Betty, doll, I didn’t really want to go out tonight, but do you know that solid hubba with freckles on the boxing team? Well-I I just couldn’t say no!” As the reader turns the page, he or she discovers that neither of the girls have dates, and both plan to go to the local dog show.

Before the girls discover one another at the dog show, the reader knows full well that each is lying about having a date. Through Veronica’s dialogue in the first frame, it is clear that not having a date on a Friday or Saturday night is unacceptable and something a girl might want to keep to herself. Historian Beth Bailey noted that many girls were even advised to take as many dates as possible to keep appearances. Most of the women writing advice columns in the postwar period were females who had come of age at the height of the “rating and dating” system, and thus encouraged girls maintain multiple dates throughout the week.89

In the matter of two pages, however, the Archie writers reveal the reality behind the façade that most teenage girls constructed at this time. Betty and Veronica attempted to keep up the image they are in high demand, signaling this remains an important part of competition and dating through the postwar years. At the same time, however, it is apparent that even Betty and Veronica do not have dates some nights. The Archie writers thus expose, if only slightly, a truth behind the concept of dating and popularity. Perhaps the image of having a date was even more important than the date itself. Such comics, however, highlight the possible generational differences between advice column writers, the Archie writers, and the adolescents who read them.

The postwar period saw a drastic increase in steady relationships and marriages. According to historian Elaine Tyler May, this was due to a desire to turn inward, toward domestic security and containment due to the pressures faced by an increasingly uncertain Cold War atmosphere. She explains, “In the early years of the cold war, amid a world of uncertainties brought about by World filled with uncertainties brought about by World War II and its aftermath, the home seemed to offer a secure, private nest removed from the dangers of the outside world.” May shows a table of the median age for females at first marriage, which decreases from 21.5 in 1940 to 20.5 in 1950. As the marriage age decreased, young adults sought

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more serious relationships at a younger age. In a period where “going steady,” or exclusively dating one individual, was more popular than seeing multiple partners, the writers still suggest it is a young female’s goal to obtain as many dates as possible. During the era in which these writers came of age, this was certainly the norm. Waller writes in his piece on the rating and dating complex that, “…the clever coed contrives to give the impression of being much sought after even if she is not.” However this more accurately reflects the adolescents of 1937 in which it was written rather than the adolescents of the war and post-war period.

Concluding Thoughts

As seen through the experiences of Betty and Veronica, the dating world underwent several changes during the World War II and postwar period. During the war, the girls attempted to garner as many dates as possible by dating multiple people. After the war, the girls still sought competition with one another, but dating was increasingly checked through parental control. The war period reflected the gendered double standards that appeared not only in the workplace, but also in the dating world. When men asked multiple women, it was seen as a sign of disrespect. When a woman wanted to date multiple men, however, she was simply maintaining her popularity and high rating as a worthy woman.

During the postwar period, the authors reflect concerns about the amount of freedom teenagers had gained during the war years by emphasizing parental roles in dating. For men such as Archie, financial responsibility often fell on him to maintain dates and take Betty and Veronica to dances. Betty and Veronica, on the other hand, worked to keep up an image that they were in high demand, while their parents’ protection proved they were a worthy pursuit. As the 1940s drew to a close, technology and money played an increased role in the dating process. The 1940s brought about new commodities that would forever change the way teenagers interacted with one another and the outside world. As we will see in the next chapter, though a crucial part in being a teenagers, dates would not be the only way for teens to spend their money and their and time.

91 Waller, “The Rating and Dating Complex,” 730.
Chapter 3
Buying Beauty: Betty, Veronica, and the Rise of Consumer Culture

Veronica Lodge first receives her own headline in the Archie series in Spring of 1943. The story opens with a frame of Veronica in the tub telling Archie that she will walk to prom because she has a very important errand to run. As she walks down the street dressed to the nines, men from every angle stop to stare, whistle, and try to catch her attention. As she enters the drug store, men drop what they are doing to watch her. She gets to the counter and delivers the punch line, “I want another shade of nail polish, please! I can’t wear this… why nobody would ever notice me!!”

With this being either Betty or Veronica’s first solo appearance in the series, it is an important depiction of Veronica as a character and, more generally but of utmost significance, as a young female. The comic demands laughter at how a girl as beautiful as Veronica would think a new nail polish would determine whether or not a man notices her. In this particular plot line, the writers of Archie touch on yet another cornerstone of American youth culture during the 1940s: the rise of consumer culture. As seen through the intention of the comic, it Veronica does not need nail polish to attract attention. As this chapter will show, however, the identity of teenagers during the 1940s was near inseparable from the messages they received from advertising and peers. Knowingly or not, the writers of Archie reveal the absurdity behind the commodification of beauty in this comic. As the war ended and the American economy boomed, consumer culture would explode as never before. What do Betty and Veronica reveal about the role of adolescent females in an increasingly commodified American society? Act now, and for only 10 cents, you can read the rest of this chapter to find out!

By the onset of World War II, teenagers were able to congregate and produce a coherent form of teen identity within American society. This emerging culture, as Palladino argues, forced “advertisers and merchandisers…to recognize an attractive new market in the making,

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92 Veronica in Archie No. 2, Spring 1943, Michigan State University Comic Art Collection
one that was not necessarily bound by adult standards or tastes." By the mid-twentieth century, adolescents and teenagers created a world all their own that demanded a space in the public sphere. In her study, Palladino argued youth culture was closely connected to the economic and social climate of the United States. The evolution is most apparent in the transition from the socially controlled adolescents of the 1920s to the semi-autonomous consumers of the 1950s. Unlike the patriarchal, controlling Progressive-era generation that preceded them, teenagers of mid-twentieth century America “shared in a larger youth culture defined by common mores, experiences, and consumer goods.” It was this latter defining factor of youth culture, consumer goods, that also shaped the world of Riverdale.

This chapter will use multiple comic panels, daily strips, and women’s magazines to argue the writers of Archie explored the boundaries of female teen participation in consumer culture without allowing them full autonomy as consumers. Betty and Veronica exemplified the conventional women’s role in consumer culture primarily through their engagement with fashion, beauty products, and celebrities, but they also differed from older women regarding the extent of their purchasing power. Though fashion and frugality played the most prominent roles in their consumer habits during the war, the postwar period saw a transition to an increasingly commodified way of life. Moving forward, it is important for the reader to keep in mind Betty and Veronica exist on two levels of consumer culture. For starters, they are the products of a mass produced comic and are therefore “consumed” by the American public. A second layer suggests Betty and Veronica are the result of an increasing mass media and consumerist society, which the writers reproduce for readers in the form of plot lines and character development.

**The Rise of Consumer Culture**

The tradition of women as active consumers long predates the mid-twentieth century. Even in the nineteenth century, magazines such as Godey’s Lady’s Book encouraged women that consumption was a way for them to exert power. By purchasing items that helped the United States economy, women were, in a sense, supporting the political and economic growth of their

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nation. By the onset of World War II, women were targeted to help in the war effort. In addition to volunteering as we saw in Chapter 1, women were also encouraged to purchase goods that directly benefited soldiers and industrial war efforts. An add from Good Housekeeping in 1942 discusses how women purchasing Lady Pepperell Sheets are playing a large role in the war effort, insisting, “And don’t think it’s any small bit you’re doing. You are playing an active part in America’s defense.”

By equating purchasing power with the war, women were taught they were playing an important role. In her study of women’s magazines, Nancy Walker notes, “During the five years after World War II, consumer spending increased by 60 percent and of this, the amount spent on household furnishings and appliances increased a dramatic 240 percent.” Women were specifically targeted as leading consumers, and as Walker shows, much of this spending was tied to household items. Rather than assess the purchasing power of all women, this chapter uses age as an additional category of analysis to differentiate between the experience of older women and that of adolescent and teen girls.

**Teenage Purchasing Power during the War**

It is a basic rule of economics that, in order to purchase various goods and services, one must first have some form of currency or exchange goods. During the war period, expendable income was a luxury few had, especially teenagers. Throughout the series, Archie is often in need of money and seems to be perpetually broke. How would young men make enough money to pay for a milkshake, movie ticket, or even gas for the car? One answer came in advertising. Historian Dawn Spring argues that the onset of World War II pushed the institutionalization of persuasive information that would help to create the consumer republic and become a defining factor of American life. One major goal of advertising was to create a consensus among the American people. Though Spring’s argument caters to the domestic and

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95 “The sheets that help keep bombers flying,” *Good Housekeeping*, January 1942, 77.
97 Bart Beaty, *Twelve-Cent Archie*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 17. Beaty’s study covers the “twelve-cent period” from December 1961-July 1969. Though his analysis address sources that postdate my source base by twenty years, his observations reflect the common themes of the Archie series that have transcended time and perhaps become a cornerstone stereotypes of teenage youth culture.
foreign effects of free enterprise, it is an important argument to understand the characters of Betty and Veronica in relation to female adolescent experience during the 1940s. Despite the fact that Betty and Veronica did not have global outreach in the 1940s, their characterization still added to the “consensus” of mass marketed beauty and fashion products.

On the inside cover of Archie Comics Number 13 from March 1945, the American Seed Company advertises a quick way for teens to meet their consumerist desires or make some quick cash. In pitching the sale, the advertisement reads, “Everyone wants American Seeds for Victory Gardens…you’ll sell them quickly and get your prize at once, or if you prefer, take one-third cash commission on all seeds sold.” American Seed Company thus gets a slew of door-to-door salesmen and women, while the youngsters get to pick a prize or make some money. Such prizes were often geared toward particular genders with phrases like “Boys!” or “Ladies!” Figure 2 shows a list of “prizes” offered to both boys, girls, and gender-neutral prizes which did not designate whether they are meant for males or females:

![Figure 17 Prizes for American Seed Company in Archie Comics No. 13](image)

By creating prizes directly targeted toward adolescent and teen boys or girls, industries appealed to a different market. Though they did not have the means to purchase homes or washing machines, young girls were still being trained to desire beauty or fashion products. In the December 1942 issue of Mademoiselle, nineteen pages are dedicated to 139 items for sale, ranging from bracelets to leather gloves to perfume. As consumer products became popularized, merchandizers carved out a niche market geared toward adolescents, and magazines advertised such products. As Jon Salvage explains, “Although their purchasing power was

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100 “MLLE’S Presents” Mademoiselle, December 1942, 101-120.
101 For more information on the reaction of American adolescents to World War II and their role as consumers see Richard Ugland, The Adolescent Experience during World War II: Indianapolis as a Case Study (Indianapolis: Department of History, Indiana University PhD, 1977). Though it remains a prominent source on adolescence during WWII, this dissertation is not widely accessible. Access is provided by the UMI Dissertation Services from Proquest, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
not individually significant, their numbers when placed together in relation to the slightly older, unemployed college-age cohort gave them new economic importance. Advertisers and producers took notice.”

Consumer power for adolescents and teens grew during World War II, and only increased in the postwar period.

**Teenage Purchasing Power in the Post-War Period**

If consumerism played a slight role during World War II, it increased dramatically in the post-war period. As historian Lizabeth Cohen notes in her work on United States consumer culture, “Americans after World War II saw their nation as the model for the world of a society committed to mass consumption and what were assumed to be its far-reaching benefits…Mass consumption…dictated the most central dimensions of postwar society.” Products and advertising changed in the postwar period. No longer needing to cater to the patriotic, unified nature of the war effort, advertisements focused on the desire to sell products solely for the satisfaction of receiving a prize. An advertisement by American Specialty Co. in Archie number 17 tells boys and girls they can “get swell prizes for yourself or gifts for Mother and Dad.”

The emphasis is no longer on a larger effort to help the country, but more of an individual basis. Products that were once marketed as having an effect on the nation at large now targeted individual consumers and their personal needs.

As more producers targeted adolescents and teens, the young consumers had to find ways to afford such products. According to Salvage, “high school students still got money from their parents, which, supplemented by…temporary jobs, sent them out into the department stores in search of clothing and cosmetics.” As we saw in Chapter 1, labor positions for young females were not readily available, and even Archie’s father denies him when he asks for money to take the girls on dates in Chapter 2. Despite Salvage’s analysis that parents funded teenage purchases, the Archie series often depicts the clash between teenage desire for money and the willingness for parents to provide such funds.

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104 American Specialty Co. Advertisement in Archie No. 17, November-December 1945, Michigan State University Comic Art Collection.
In January 1949, Betty and Veronica star in a comic strip entitled “Fare Enough.” The comic opens with Veronica saying, “Jeepers, Betty. I’m broke too! –can’t you get an advance from your father to get your new dress!” Betty responds, “That’s just it Ronnie –I hate to bother him while he’s working at home---.” For a minute, both girls are stumped until Veronica suggests, “Why not borrow your father’s car and run a taxi service?” Betty, thinking it a brilliant idea, says, “Not bad, Ronnie! This burg could use an extra cab!” The girls take a single customer, who ends up being the boss of Mr. Cooper, Betty’s father. The girls cause such trouble that, when the boss finds out the car belongs to Betty’s father, he fires Mr. Cooper on the spot. Despite the fact that the girls tried to earn their own money, they end up doing more harm than good. The Archie writers suggest, similar to their lack of success in domestic tasks in Chapter 1, the girls are also incapable of earning their own money and must therefore rely primarily on their parents. For adolescent females, money was primarily spent attempting to garner dates, marry, or fall in love. How did a woman achieve such things? Most focus centered on a woman’s physical appearance, style, and imitation of celebrity beauty.

**Frugal Spending During the War**

During the war period, fashion and jewelry were at the top of the “to buy” list for young females. Companies knew funds were limited, especially for adolescent females who primarily volunteered and were unable to work in wage labor. Advertisements during this time period created their products to cater to women in such circumstances. An Archie Comic from November 1944 includes an advertisement for rings. It reads:

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Ladies! Have you ever longed to own a real diamond ring? Of course you have. But today, due to the war, diamond prices are soaring higher and higher. Yet you can still satisfy your natural desire for beautiful jewelry at a price you can easily afford.\textsuperscript{107}

During the war, jewelry prices increased, but the demand did not seem to decrease. In a 1944 government report on gemstones, “the sale of taxable jewelry in 1944 reached a record total of approximately $1,063,000,000, 7 percent above the previous high of $998,094,416 set in 1943…. Diamonds, Swiss watches, rings, and gold-plated silver-based jewelry were the leading items.”\textsuperscript{108} In a period where mass production skyrocketed and supplies were allocated toward the war effort, being fashionable was still in demand. Regarding diamonds specifically, sales reached a peak, only slightly topping those of 1943. Prices, however, continued to increase. The government report noted, “The price of fine cuttable rough continued to advance in 1944. Since 1939, small cut has tripled or quadrupled in price; fine cut stones have doubled in price…”\textsuperscript{109}

The advertisement in the comic, then, reflects truthful sentiments about the increasing price of jewelry. Here, they notify the teen audience that even though they will not be purchasing real diamonds, they can still be stylish and save money.

In addition to jewelry, girls were often taught the importance of hygiene in order to enhance their beauty. During the war, this meant coming up with clever techniques to keep their physical appearance up-to-par with expectations. The cosmetic world blossomed amidst the numerous advertisements in both comics and magazines, but the one particular physical feature to receive the most attention was a woman’s face or complexion. The inside cover of Archie No. 19 from March 1946 shows “How Gloria became a Bride.” It gives the quick story of a local girl named Gloria, who has blackheads and pimples on her face. As all the girls in her town get married, she assumes she’ll take the title of “old maid.” Then a friend tells Gloria about Le Charme facial cream, and within a week, a handsome soldier tells her, “Gloria, what a smooth, lovely skin and complexion you have, dear. How about us getting married?” Gloria thinks to

\textsuperscript{107} Harem Co. Jewelry Advertisement, \textit{Archie Comics No. 11}, November/December 1944. Michigan State University Comic Art Collection.


\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Ibid.}
herself “I’ll never be without le Charme. It’s worth it’s weight in gold.” Le Charme tapped into a social desire of young girls- to fall in love and marry. By directly relating a smooth complexion to the reason men fall in love, Le Charme boosts its product as a simple method: use this cream, and a man will want to marry you.

Readers of Archie would have seen such an advertisement right alongside the stories of men swooning over Betty and Veronica. They might notice how the authors never depict Betty and Veronica with poor skin. Betty and Veronica are thus the ideal, and the writers are well aware of the beauty standards of this period. Beauty ads litter the pages of women’s magazine, such as Dorothy Gray advertising a special dry skin lotion, TREO Corsets advertising a “model” figure, or Dreene shampoo advertising lustrous, “satin-smoothed” hair. Coiffed curls, a fresh face, and a small waistline seemed to be the recipe for attracting a man. It is no wonder Betty and Veronica have men drooling over them, but would they have used all these products? As it turns out, it sure seems they were willing to try.

In Archie No. 15, Betty and Veronica star in “The Plastic Mask.” The opening frame shows well-manicured nails holding on to a Girl’s Magazine, which suggests “Make your own life mask!” Betty and Veronica flip a coin to see who will be the guinea pig, and it is decided that Betty will be the first one to try the mask. Veronica smears her face with Vaseline and plaster of Paris, placing a straw in Betty’s mouth so she can breathe. A door-to-door insurance salesman rings the doorbell and distracts Veronica, causing her to leave Betty profusely sweating. Unable to take it any longer, Betty tries to pull the mask off, to no avail. It takes the insurance salesman hitting her face with a baseball bat to remove the mask. Betty, clearly upset, chases Veronica as the insurance salesman runs out of the home.

Much like the facial advertisements in Vogue, Mademoiselle, McCall’s, and other ladies magazines, Betty and Veronica are not immune to trying new beauty products. After all, according to girls like Gloria, clearer skin means finding love and a husband, and at the very least, gaining or maintaining popularity, which as was assessed in Chapter 2, was crucial to

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10 LeCharme Products Advertisement, Archie Comics No. 19, March-April 1946, Michigan State University Comic Art Collection.
12 A “life mask” refers to a beauty mask with the intent to clear pores and increase clarity of complexion.
receiving dates. During the war, however, such masks were expensive to purchase, so many women made their own. In a War-Time Guide Book from 1942, an entire chapter on cosmetics teaches women how to make everything from their old cold cream to liquid face powder, and even bath salts and shampoo. The “Simple Cold Cream” instructions read, “Melt on a water bath ½ oz. paraffin, 2 oz. lanolin, 7 oz. white petrolatum. Dissolve ½ oz. borax in 3 oz. water and add above while stirring briefly.” By instructing women how to make creams and masks at home, such guidebooks allowed adolescents and teens a chance to try out beauty products without spending much money. By incorporating an at-home “life mask” into the comics, the writers of Archie further define Betty and Veronica as your typical teenager during World War II- finding ways to remain stylish and beautiful while not breaking the bank.

If popularity was so important in the dating world, advertisers were well aware of this necessity. An advertisement from January 1946 shows a picture of a woman dancing with a man, who gazes lovingly at her. Below the image, it asks, “Do you want to learn this secret of fragrant appeal known to so many popular girls?” It turns out this “secret” is Cashmere Bouquet soap, which “adorns your skin with the fragrance men love.” No longer about catching and keeping a man, the 1940s sees an increasing commodification of love and the dating world. Advice manuals played their part, but if women really wanted to garner the attention of men, there were certain products that would be sure to get the job done. During World War II, it was more practical for women to make such products themselves. As American society transitioned into the postwar period, however, product markets increased, as did consumer demand.

**Fashion During World War II**

Jewelry and beauty products were not the only things girls looked for in order to stay fashionable. As Rollin explains, “When America entered the war, clothes took on a sober, patriotic mood of sacrifice and hard work… During the war, many women wore a uniform look…Waist-length jackets...were popular with men and women.” In the January 1945 issue of Archie Comics, a “Betty and Veronica Fashion Page for Teenagers.” The page shows Betty,

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Veronica, and their friend, Julia, modeling different fashions from pleated flannel skirts, saddle-stitched belts, and chalk stripe wool fabric lined with rayon. “Ray Riverdale!” If there is one commodity that dominates the female audience throughout the Archie series during World War II, it is dress patterns. Just a few months after the fashion page appears, the series includes a two-page spread entitled “Be Lovely with Betty and Veronica.” The pages show six images of Betty and Veronica, each styling different outfits with the dress patterns listed by a single image. In the bottom right-hand corner is a yellow cut-out with instructions of how to order the patterns. Betty and Veronica seem to be up-to-date with the fashions of the time, but why hadn’t any fashion pages been seen in the Archie Comics before 1945?

As youth took on an increased role in society, markets began branding their products toward teen trends. In the August 1, 1945 issue of Vogue, the editors revealed, “Vogue launches a new series of designs in Junior sizes…scaled to the lean, little-waisted proportions of 9 to 15 figures.” By the September 1’ 1945 issue, Vogue features it’s Junior Fashion Editor, Miss Constance Bradlee, in town tweeds, wool, and rayon-and-cotton flannel blouses. It seems the Archie writers are making sure Betty and Veronica are up-to-date on their latest fashions. The key difference? Vogue identifies the actual clothes ranging from seven to twenty-five dollars. Archie Comics sells dress patterns at 15 cents each. Archie thus captures the true nature of the adolescent consumer. Although they wish to remain fashionable, most teens do not have the means to purchase high-end garments from department stores. By suggesting Betty and

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Veronica use dress patterns rather than purchase items off the rack during the war period, the characters become more accessible to adolescent and teen readers.

Though borrowing from the style of Vogue and other high-end magazines, Betty and Veronica make their own fashions during the war period. Another “Betty and Veronica Fashion Page from March 1945 shows the girls in different outfits. Once picture shows Veronica with the caption, “A bright jerkin gives a long slim look to your figure. Why not make them yourselves using tweed vests or jackets that have been discarded.” Here, Betty and Veronica are not selling clothes or patterns. Rather, they provide teenage girls with a look at the latest fashion, and even tips how to create them without spending a dime. During a time when money was scarce and, the writers of Archie suggest young females could keep up with the looks in Vogue without having to spend money. It allows readers to imagine themselves as part of this up-and-coming fashion world for adolescents, yet it does not promote extreme spending or participation in such a market. Besides, if girls are spending their money on dresses or hats, how would they afford their Archie Comics? The war period forced everyone to be thrifty spenders, and as Archie Comics suggest, adolescent females were no different.

Postwar Fashion

During the postwar period, American fashion and beauty took on a life of its own. Recounting the depiction of an “American girl” from Life in 1946, Rollin describes:

American girls wore casual clothes: sweaters, plaid skirts with pleats, and tailored jackets…The American look included a slim waist, long legs, and a friendly smile revealing well-cared-for white teeth. The American girl was healthy and well-nourished; she bathed often, her nails were well manicured, her posture was excellent. She had a natural poise and enthusiasm that did not require or enjoy constricting, artificial clothes…above all, she was young, white, and upper middle-class.

Based on this description, the writers of Archie comic reflect a conventional standard for American beauty in the characters of Betty and Veronica. The girls always appear to be well dressed, they have long legs with slim waists, and they always seem to follow the latest fashions. In the January 1946 issue of Archie, Betty and Veronica “tell their secret” regarding their fabulous dresses they wear. The comic shows Betty and Veronica going through a stack of mail

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122 Rollin, Twentieth-Century Teen Culture, 123.
from fans asking where they buy their clothes. Betty faces the audience and says, “We’re going to let you in on our secret girls! We don’t buy our dresses- we make ‘em!” The girls then take a trip to “the place that makes the most exclusive patterns in the world,” Simplicity Patterns. According to the modern day Simplicity website:

Founded in 1927, Simplicity is headquartered in New York City where the design, patternmaking, samemaking, instructional and consumer service departments reside. Simplicity has long been known as a company committed to sewing education and support. In the early 1940’s, Simplicity embarked on a major sewing education program, by which travelling representatives, fashion shows, educational books and literature were presented and disseminated across the country.123

Betty and Veronica make two of the dress patterns and model them for readers, even telling them what pattern number to order if they like that particular dress.124 Though no longer as pressed for money as during the war period, Archie Comics still promotes girls making their own dresses. On one hand, the girls are encouraging their readers to purchase patterns and save money by making their own dresses. On the other, however, the writers of Archie also use the differing socio-economic status of the two girls to suggest there are differing levels of participation in the fashion market, particularly in the postwar period.

**Middle Class Markets**

After WWII, the American economy entered a “boom” period in which the affluence of the United States and low unemployment contributed to general social stability throughout subsequent decades. As Professor of History at Brown University James T. Patterson notes, “the prosperity of the [postwar era] broadened gradually in the late 1940s, accelerated in the 1950s, and soared to unimaginable heights in the 1960s.”125 Alongside the economic boom and rise of mass media, the notion of the middle class began to take hold in American society. Despite the fact that “class” and social hierarchies were not strictly enforced in the United States as in other countries, the gap in wealth made it clear that there were certainly different social orders in which one existed. Oftentimes, class status during the 1940s and 1950s was associated

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with mass consumerism. If you owned a refrigerator or a TV set, you could consider yourself middle class.\textsuperscript{126} This notion of consumption and associated class levels played a major role in constructing American identity during the mid-twentieth century.

Though the story of the middle class had been growing in American history since the nineteenth century, government support for the “average American” boomed with the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal programs of the 1930s along with the GI Bill of 1944. As the United States transitioned into the 1950s, government programs for the middle class remained a priority. While in the midst of the Cold War, America made every attempt possible to define itself in opposition to communism. What could be more American than the middle class suburbia? “Because the United States was founded on the principles of democracy and equality, it makes perfect sense that ‘average’ Americans are viewed as most symbolic of what makes this country great and different from others.”\textsuperscript{127} As Patterson notes, “Booms that had started in the late 1940s- in home and school-building, suburban development, house-hold gadgetry, automobiles, television, children’s wear and toys- expanded in the 1950s and early 1960s.”\textsuperscript{128} Yet again, consumerism becomes a major means by which to judge one another, in both the adult world and the teenage world.

The increased attention to consumer goods and differing “classes” in society is reflected in the Archie comic books, particularly in the characters of Betty and Veronica. Beyond the interpersonal dating dilemmas, there are also apparent economic differences between Betty and Veronica. In “Betty Gets the Needle” from February 1949, Veronica greets Betty by saying, “C’mon in, Betty! I have something to show you!” Betty reluctantly responds, “Not more new clothes, Ronnie!” followed in the next frame with “I think you’re spoiled Ronnie Lodge!” Veronica proceeds to showcase four of her newest fashions. Betty returns home, looks begrudgingly at her wardrobe, but her mother insists


\textsuperscript{127} Samuel, \textit{The American Middle Class}, 5.

\textsuperscript{128} Patterson, \textit{Grand Expectations}, 314-15.
“Betty, no! You’re spending entirely too much money on clothes! It’s time you learned to make
your own!” Betty gasps, “Make my own!” To which her mother responds, “Exactly! Men like
women who are handy around the house! How do you think you’re father married me?” Besides
the fact that this statement is in direct conflict with earlier comics and advertisements suggesting
Betty knows how to make her own clothes, it also promotes the idea that making clothes will
make a woman more eligible for marriage in the eyes of a man. Letting this idea sink in, Betty
thinks to herself, “Maybe mom’s got something there! Men do go for clever women!”

It is in comics such as this one that the reader picks up the differences between Betty and
Veronica’s economic status. Besides the large mansion, private jets, and chauffeurs, Veronica
also seems to have an endless budget for high-end fashion. Betty, on the other hand, comes from
a middle-class family and cannot always afford such luxuries. Though Veronica has money,
Mrs. Cooper suggests Betty can catch a man’s attention by being thrifty and making her own
dresses. Sewing, then, becomes a valuable skill for marriage.

Betty and Veronica’s differing wealth is also captured in a 1948 comic entitled, “I Can
Get It For You Wholesale!” The opening frame shows Betty’s dress ripping at the side as she
bends over to pick up a book. “Ouch! Another rip- and this is my last presentable dress!” she
remarks. Betty assumes she’ll have to go to the local dress shop, but Veronica disagrees, “Their
styles are so ‘tacky.’ Listen I can get you clothes wholesale, straight from a New York
manufacturer who is a friend of Daddy’s! Not only will you get the latest styles but you’ll save
money…” Betty is thrilled and thanks Veronica profusely. Not even a full page into the comic,
it is clear that Veronica’s wealthy father has connections that allow her to receive the “latest
styles” from New York and other fashion-forward cities. After a series of mishaps, Betty is
offered a dress at cost for $30.00, which she is told is a “bargain.” Once the girls get back to
Riverdale, Betty sees her exact dress in the local dress shop window for $15.00. Betty gets a
crazed look in her eye, Veronica runs and hides, and the last panel shows Betty yelling, “I know
you’re in there, come on out and fight— I’ll show you something wholesale! Wholesale
murder!” Though Betty’s anger and Veronica hiding in a nearby trashcan is a source of
laughter, it also speaks to the importance of money. Though Veronica has easy access to

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129 Art by Samm Schwartz, story and art originally published in Laugh Comics No. 31, 1949. Appears
reprinted in Archie Archives: Volume Eleven, (Milwaukie: Dark Horse Archives, 2015), 200-205.
130 Art by Irving Novick, story and art originally published in Archie Comics No. 31, 1948. Appears
clothing due to her father’s social status and extreme wealth, Betty cannot afford to throw away an extra fifteen dollars on a dress. Such comics show how consumerism directly tied economic status and wealth, and how two girls with similar tastes might react differently when money is involved.

**Hollywood Glamour and Celebrity Culture**

Though young girls might have bought their patterns from the Archie Comics series, Betty, Veronica, and their readers were all looking to one place for inspiration: Hollywood. With the increasing role of technology in the home during the 1930s and into the 1940s, the influence of fashion and beauty began to permeate private life as much as it had public life. No longer just performers on a stage, the onset of mass media both altered and preserved music in a way unprecedented before the middle of the twentieth century. This meant people could not only hear their idols, but see what he or she looked like. Young teens in particular could see the clothes, makeup, and hairstyles of their favorite stars. Hollywood was the world of glitz and glamour that set the bar for beauty.

In a comic story from September 1945, Betty and Veronica hear that a famous male celebrity is staying at the Riverdale Hotel. They sneak into the man’s bedroom and implore “Mr. Croonatra” (take a guess at who that might be) to tell them what type of girl he prefers. He responds, “Well the Lana Lamour type, if you must know!” The girls leave, and Veronica goes to a local dress shop. As she stands outside the window staring at a lovely red gown, Veronica thinks to herself, “Aha—here’s the dress I saw advertised! If Croonatra wants the Lana Lamour type, that’s what he’s going to get!” As one might guess, the girls show up to the dance wearing the exact same dress, only to be introduced to Mr. Croonatra’s date, Lana Lamour, who is also wearing the red dress. Mr. Croonatra comments nervously, “Ha, ha! Odd isn’t it? You all happen to be wearing the same gown, I mean! Oh well, thank heavens there are only three!” The last frame pans out to show at least four other girls wearing the same dress.
exact same dress.\textsuperscript{131}

The girls try to be exactly what Mr. Croonatra likes by conforming to a Hollywood stereotype, yet the writers of Archie show that this can backfire with everyone looking the same. As historian David Steigerwald explains:

One could argue that in bourgeois society, the marketplace of fashion regulates consumption without sumptuary laws. But such an argument ignores a fundamental difference between fashion under the ancient régime and in modern consumer society. In the former, the objects of fashion were held out as the perquisites of power, unattainable by the masses; in the latter, they are held out as enticements to the lower classes to throw themselves headlong into the game of consumption. Perhaps the abundance of goods in consumer society cheapens the social power that any good carries. There is an inflation factor at work. The more goods or the more of any one good, the cheaper their social meaning...\textsuperscript{132}

Simply put, if a particular item such as a dress holds prestige and social value, its value decreases as more women wear it. Veronica thought that by purchasing a celebrity gown she would stand out to Mr. Croonatra, but it appears several other girls had the same idea. This comic wrestles with the growth of consumer society- if producers market the same thing to every young girl, how is it possible to stand out? As the quantity and accessibility to certain items increases, their social value decreases. Despite the fact that many of these items were mass produced, celebrities were often used to market beauty and fashion products so that young girls would continue to buy in.

During the 1940s, Hollywood stars were the go-to for makeup, hair, and fashion. As Lucy Rollin states, “The makeup styles of the glamorous film starts of the early Forties also appeared among teens, gradually increasing in use after the war until most girls of eighteen invested a good portion of their earnings in cosmetics.”\textsuperscript{133} In a series of Mc Calls magazines from 1945-1946, Hollywood women are invoked in an assortment of beauty advertisements. In October 1945, we see Merle Oberon of “Night in Paradise” as the face of Max Factor Hollywood’s newest Tru-Color Lipstick. November 1945 showcases Marlene Dietrich representing Woodbury-Wonderful Skin. The ad reads, “If you’d like to star in your own love

\textsuperscript{131} Bill Vigoda and Al McLean, story and art originally published in \textit{Archie Comics No. 16}, 1945. Appears reprinted in \textit{Archie Archives: Volume Five}, (Milwaukie: Dark Horse Archives, 2012), 77-82.


drama, try Woodbury Complete Beauty Cream this very night.” Wife of actor Robert Montgomery is featured in April 1946 for her red lips. The line below her name reads, “And that’s why TANGEE GAY-RED is starring on Hollywood’s smartest lips.” Though only a few selected examples of hundreds, these advertisements exhibit the popularity of equating Hollywood with the epitome of beauty. It is no wonder Betty and Veronica wanted to purchase something that made them look like a Hollywood star. The lesson that Archie teaches that the beauty magazines do not, however, is that Riverdale did not need seven “Lana Lamours.” As consumerism increases during the 1940s, so does accessibility to different products. The result of this, however, is the reduction of “cultural capital” by purchasing mass produced items.  

**Consuming Music and Technology**

In addition to being a celebrity, the mention of Mr. Croonatra and other jazz singers within the comic series marks another form of consumption: the rise of radio, music and technology. The first panel from a 1943 comic strip entitled “Welcome Soldiers” shows Archie dancing with Veronica and Betty dancing with Jughead as a line of soldiers wait to take turns. Betty and Veronica are throwing a dance for soldiers, and Veronica insists on having the best music at the dance. She remarks they will “even have Danny Woodwin’s Band there!” Betty responds, “Why Ronnie, that’s the biggest swing band in the country!” Using the name of a popular swing singer of the time, Benny Goodman was known as the “King of Swing.” One scholar explains:

Swing music had been shaping teenage style since 1937, when Benny Goodman and his band first got high school students to dance in the aisles of New York’s Paramount Theater...swing music reoriented teenage social life and high school style in the early 1940s. Thanks to radio programs that regularly featured the most popular bands in live performance, it was easy enough to join the crowd.

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134 Pierre Bourdieu first coined the term “cultural capital,” which refers to goods that are purchased or acquired with social meaning, enhancement, or value. He expanded such theories in his most well known work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* translated by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984). In this work, Bourdieu argues a person’s position in society determines his or her taste or aesthetic appeals in the form of high or low culture.


Though some might interpret such an event as pure juvenile chaos, students dancing in the aisles of the Paramount Theatre was what made swing and jazz music. Often compared to swing, jazz music was considered, “interactive, participatory music in which the audience played a major role.” An article in the New York Times from September 1937, just six months after Goodman’s appearance at the Paramount, struggles to define swing as a music genre. It notes, “Webster’s [dictionary] is conferred respectability upon jazz, but lexicographers still have no ears for swing.” The article then quotes composer Robert Bride explaining swing: “‘A musician cannot define it without doing it; it must be heard, not read about.’” This participatory aspect of swing is incredibly important to its branding and appeal. In another comic, Archie was willing to spend thirty-five dollars on a big-name band in order to dance with Betty and Veronica, only to find out Benny King was expecting one hundred times that amount. Music, and the experience of the sound and dance, is one product on which the Archie characters were willing to spend money.

In addition to spending money on experiences such as live music, Betty and Veronica also dealt with the costs of new technology. In a comic entitled “Penny Wise” from 1948, Veronica snaps a picture of Betty hanging on a hammock while reading. Veronica asks Betty to take pictures of her in her new wardrobe. After the photo shoot, Veronica tells Betty she’ll develop one role of film and Betty and develop the other. Betty things, “Where am I going to get the money? Daddy’s been on my neck about finances…” Betty then gets the idea to develop her own pictures, which she believes will save money. After going through the trouble of creating a new darkroom, Betty fails to develop the

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139 Ibid.
140 Bob Montana, Unknown Title in Archie #1, 1942, appears reprinted in Archie Archives: Volume 1, (Milwaukee: Dark Horse Books, 2011), 60-63.
film and apologizes for her mistake. Her father yells, “Mistake? I’ll say it was a mistake! This set of A#!!!? prints have cost five dollars apiece… it’s all coming out of your allowance!” After her father’s tirade, Betty meets up with Veronica, who tells her, “Look, Betty! Everyone a beauty- and they only cost seven cents a print at the drug store!” Unlike the war period, which suggested the girls could save money by doing or making things themselves, this comic suggests the true convenience of the consumer age. Veronica is able to save time and money simply by going to the drug store while Betty’s plan to save money by doing it herself backfires.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Through their engagement with beauty products, fashion, and celebrities, Betty and Veronica suggest that adolescent females held a special spot in American consumer society during the 1940s. Though mass-produced products permeated the entire decade, the war period taught women to be thrifty in how they achieved fashion and beauty standards. The postwar period, however, saw a dramatic increase in mass produced products such as dresses and cosmetics. Though the tension is always evident, the postwar period also brings to light the difference between Betty and Veronica’s socio-economic levels. Betty still tries to save money on technology and clothes by doing things herself, whereas Veronica is often seen in the latest “upscale” fashions.

One thread that remains throughout the decade is the gap between generations. Though they are not purchasing large ticket items such as a house or appliances, Betty and Veronica are only able to participate in the consumer society to the extent that their parents allow them or that their own means afford. This sense of nuanced consumer participation is a hallmark of adolescent experience, and females in particular, in the 1940s, Young women are being conditioned to have a particular form of consumer autonomy, one that balances the line between individual power and adhering to broader conventions.

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Conclusion

Modern Betty and Veronica: Popular Culture and the Lasting Impact on Gender

Betty and Veronica act as one way through which readers can understand the popular perceptions of female adolescents and teenagers during the 1940s in the United States. Through their actions and engagement with their audience, readers find that Betty and Veronica’s experiences are largely characterized by male expectations and their actions are dictated by carefully crafted gender roles from the time in which the comics were produced. Such expectations are largely captured in the themes of labor, dating, and consumer culture, which allow the conversation of female experience to encompass both domestic roles as well as youth culture activities. Through an understanding of each theme, the girls show how gender expectations often aligned with the economic, political, and cultural transitions within the United States during this period.

This study allows scholars to place adolescents and teens within larger conversations of women’s experience during the war and postwar period. Chapter 1 reflected the recognition of the girls’ odd place in American society through their engagement with volunteer positions and domestic tasks rather than the ability to join the workforce. Chapter 2 showed how adolescent and teen females are often conditioned by authority figures in the realm of dating and relationships. Finally, Chapter 3 revealed how girls were conditioned to have a particular form of autonomy in the form of buying goods that once again made them ideal to the male gaze.

As the girls increased in popularity, the series dedicated a comic solely known as “Archie’s Girls: Betty and Veronica” in 1950. Despite the title linking the girls to the classic redhead, they made quite a name for themselves. At the turn of the 21st century, Mattel signed a contract with Archie Comic Publications allowing for the production of Betty and Veronica dolls. Fast-forward to September 2014, famous Girls actress-turned-writer Lena Dunham was interviewed on Jimmy Kimmel Live regarding the Archie Comic series, and specifically the characters of Betty and Veronica. Ms. Dunham shared her plans to write a four-part series in

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*Archie Comics*, which was published in 2015. She discussed how she wanted to provide a more feminist touch to the classic characters in order to reflect the advances in society for women.¹⁴³

Betty and Veronica thus represent a larger trend in American society that extends far beyond their character’s inception in the mid-twentieth century. From a young age, females are conditioned via popular culture that the way they work, act, dress, date, and even purchase items is determined by their gender. Much like the advice manuals of the 1940s and the magazines of modern day, comic books reinforce gender norms and stereotypes. Betty and Veronica represent an ideal form of mid-twentieth century femininity as dictated by society at large. In both the 1940s and modern day, popular culture represents a particular form of feminine fiction that continues to mold America’s youth.

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