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MAKING SENSE OF SEX: ADOLESCENT GIRLS
AND SEX EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1940–1960

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of Ohio State University

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Contrary to the notion that traditional gender roles and conservative sexual norms predominated in the post–World War II United States, this dissertation argues that public school sex education in the 1940s and 1950s challenged gender and sexual conformity. In the era preceding the second wave of feminism, teachers and students collaborated on efforts to develop personal preferences, eliminate the sexual double standard, and dismantle patriarchal relationships. This study points to an unrecognized continuity between the ideas and practices of the 1940s and 1950s and those of consciousness-raising groups and other elements of the women's movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Yet despite its feminist undercurrent, mid-twentieth-century sex and family life education aroused little apprehension among school personnel, parents, and community members. Along with other recent scholarship that has explored the roots of the sexual revolution in the second half of the twentieth century, this dissertation demonstrates how a mainstream institution—public education—fostered shifts in youth's attitudes and belief systems, prefiguring more dramatic social change in the 1960s. Accordingly, this work contributes to the growing body of revisionist literature on the history of sexuality and the social and cultural climate of the century's middle decades.

Combining archival research with questions and techniques of social history, feminist theory, and textual analysis, the project assesses how girls from different
backgrounds learned about gender and sexuality at school. The study draws from examples of sex education across the nation and concentrates on pioneering programs in Oregon; San Diego, California; and Toms River, New Jersey. Primary sources include curricula, such as teachers' guides, student texts, and movies; professional literature on curriculum implementation and classroom practices; newspaper and magazine publicity; and evaluations of programs, many of which presented students' opinions and perspectives. The focus is on girls because their growing bodies and the timetables of their development—as well as their expressed curiosities and needs—shaped how sex education gained legitimacy and offered young people analytical tools.

Seemingly conservative on the surface, especially in its tendency to emphasize protection for girls, sex and family life education contained tensions and contradictions, which enabled girls to critique gender inequality, male dominance, and the commodification of sex, although not heterosexuality. Curricula alluded to the social construction of gender and promoted complementary male-female relationships, liberating girls from expecting submission in marriage and in a number of instances teaching them to read critically messages about love and sex in popular culture. Insights about gender and sex from psychology, history, and other social sciences influenced how educators designed their lesson plans, as did critiques of fascism and convictions about free education. Overall, coursework encouraged girls to scrutinize their bodies and personalities as part of an effort to strengthen the democratic, nonauthoritarian family. In doing so, sex education lessons contributed to girls' sense of sex, gender, and male-female relationships as subjects of personal and collective interest as well as an arena of social change.
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INTRODUCTION

Given today's organized opposition to sex education in public schools and common stereotypes about the 1950s as a conservative period of conformity, one would expect mid-century sex education to be nonexistent, or at least very controversial and conservative. Yet the reality was quite the opposite: major controversy about sex education did not arise until the 1960s, and U.S. sex educators in the 1940s and 1950s exercised considerable license and faced minimal resistance to their efforts. Satisfying educators, students, and parents was not as difficult in mid-twentieth-century public schools as it might seem. Sex education and related courses provided a little something for everyone, and very few who were aware of the curricula took offense.

Sex occupied a prominent place in human relationships and civilization, according to teachers and experts behind the sex education movement in the public schools. Mid-twentieth-century educators interpreted sex within a psychological framework, leading them to make connections among sex, gender, and behavior, especially male-female and family relationships. Although heterosexual intercourse was largely omitted in printed curricula, many teachers encouraged dialogue about such decidedly sexual topics as petting and masturbation, and others faced probing questions
from students when pertinent subjects were overlooked. A broad and sometimes contradictory set of beliefs about sex emerged in lectures, classroom activities, and discussions.

Accenting the psychological realm of sex and gender with their pupils, teachers were prone to talk about homosexual and heterosexual phases of development and offer critiques of mainstream depictions of sex appeal. They also highlighted individual differences and varying opinions about sex, dating, marriage, and family relationships. In place of universal truths and absolute facts was historical, cultural, and individual diversity. Such an approach to sexual matters was a departure from past tradition—a tradition that involved moralistic and medical standpoints in teaching about sex.¹

The beginnings of a new phase of sex education dated to the mid-1930s, as evidenced by the number of classes in health and human relations or family life education offered in secondary schools.² In the process of putting theories into practice, educators reevaluated the ideas of the social hygiene movement’s founders. The development of sex education in the 1940s and 1950s drew not only from the movement to combat vice and disease, but it also grew out of precedents set by home economics departments in the 1930s—a source of inspiration that has received little attention from historians of sex education. As early as 1935, the American Home Economics Association published a teachers’ manual for family relationships in the secondary schools, apparently the first available in wide circulation.³

Echoing social hygiene texts that called for “integration” of material on sex into regular classroom instruction, Teaching Family Relationships placed sex topics prominently in its principal goals. Among the lessons’ objectives were “Some ability to establish and maintain satisfying relationships with the members of his family, with
friends of both sexes, and with other adults outside his family"; "A wholesome idea of the place of sex in life and some understanding of its emotional significance in the lives of men and women"; "Accurate scientific knowledge of the physiological facts of sex"; and "Standards for the choice of a life mate and some appreciation of the privileges and responsibilities of marriage and parenthood." The guide accordingly advised teachers to provide instruction on biological, emotional, and social aspects of puberty, including the physiology of sex and the psychology of male-female relationships.

Mid-century sex educators revised the tactic of integration espoused by social hygiene leaders to fit contemporary goals. Much championed in the decades separating the First and Second World Wars, integrated sex education meant that lessons about sex entered into a variety of subjects taught by regular teachers rather than an outside professional. Proponents of integrated sex education regularly warned against singling out sex as a special topic, offering "sex courses," or even referring to the lessons as "social hygiene" or "sex education" in the company of young people.

During the mid-twentieth century, theorists posed the concept of integrated sex education differently, allowing individual teachers to develop and oversee programs of sex education as human relations. These educators did not view integration as an alternative to single classes but as a form of reinforcement. The single class, sex education expert Lester A. Kirkendall posited, provided functional education to meet young people's requests and needs for information and guidance they could apply to their own lives. The class often bore such titles as family relationships, marriage and the family, health and human relations, and senior problems. Educators did not uniformly shy away from sex or social hygiene units in these separate courses, as recommended during the 1920s. In the 1940s and 1950s, educators rarely tried to sneak sex into the
curriculum. While family living and human relations could serve as euphemisms for teaching about sex, more commonly educators named “sex” as a topic within such courses—even, in some instances, in the ostensibly conservative home economics classroom.¹⁰

When second wave feminists began to challenge sexism in the study of science and psychology in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they too saw sex as pervasive in society. Feminist notions of sex were different—but not entirely different—from the teachings and ideologies that emerged in public school classrooms in prior decades. Although there were no discussions of clitoral orgasms, misogyny, or marital rape in the schools of the 1940s and 1950s, progressive ideas about other aspects of sexuality and gender were nevertheless present.

An examination of school curricula and girls’ voices from these years offers a less dichotomous view of how people understood sex and gender before and after the second wave of feminism. The women’s movement in the 1960s and 1970s revolutionized popular understandings of many aspects of sex—but its participants did not build their ideas in isolation from contemporary thought. Classroom discussions of complementary gender roles, socially constructed male-female roles, the sexual double standard, and exploitation in relationships were in many ways precursors to late-twentieth-century feminist thought about sex.

The history of sex education in the mid-twentieth century contributes to current efforts to revise the history of sexuality and the social and cultural climate of the mid-century decades.¹¹ This study adds the perspective of how young people shaped and experienced changing sexual and gender norms in an era of depression, migration, war, and ongoing political tensions. Girls are central to this history because their changing
bodies often prompted instruction about sex, and their interest in relationships affected the content of sex and family units and courses as well. The timetables of girls' physical development (as they reached puberty earlier than boys) and adults' desire to protect girls supplied much of the impetus for initiating and revising sex education during the 1940s and 1950s, whereas Progressive-era sex education efforts had more often catered to boys' needs. Also relevant was the female life course at mid-century: young women's early marriages influenced educators' decisions about public school sex education for both girls and boys.

Although sex educators' support for a single standard of conduct involved socializing boys to reject male sexual prerogatives, girls were equally if not more crucial to mid-century sex educators' agendas. Many early-twentieth-century sex education efforts had concentrated on educating boys, especially about the dangers of sex with prostitutes and masturbation; yet these lessons were phased out over time as educators developed new curricula with both girls and boys in mind. Motivated by a desire to aid youth's adjustment to sex differences and successful marital relations later in life, mid-century sex educators saw girls as a vital audience and constructed sex education lessons accordingly. Mid-century girls' sex education was not derivative of that given to boys, nor was it an afterthought among this generation of sex educators. Instead, instructors who taught segregated classes of boys and girls devised separate his and hers curricula, usually taught by a teacher of the same sex as his or her students. Public schools would often begin a pilot program of sex education with girls (or less frequently boys), with both groups subsequently receiving sex education simultaneously. Another
strategy—teaching boys and girls together—made use of common lesson plans that, like
the segregated ones, departed from the tradition of bare-bones biological education and
warnings about disease.

Sex education in the 1940s and 1950s encouraged youth to become
introspective and attentive to their behavior, interpersonal relationships, and mental
health. Educators joined psychologists and psychiatrists in their attempts to curb the
growing number of marital failures. Ultimately caused by what experts and laypeople
identified as thwarted adjustment, such problems led to a high divorce rate, and in an
alarming number of incidents, they thought, to sex offenses and vice. Women’s “frigidity”
was one consequence of sexual ignorance with ramifications for family life. Frightened or
kept ignorant about heterosexuality in their youth, some women were reportedly horrified
about sexual expectations upon marriage and in some instances never able to accept or
fulfill their husbands’ sexual needs. Educators may have lamented the absence of
sexual fulfillment for women, but they more openly expressed frustration about the
effects of marital dissatisfaction on divorce and single parenthood, promiscuity,
prostitution, venereal disease, and eugenics.

Guidance for future marriage was accompanied by discussion of dating and
petting during adolescence. Teachers often dispensed dating advice to students, but
they also gave pupils opportunities to discuss peer norms and community standards that
sometimes differed from the teachers’ ideas. Still, many educators succeeded in
conveying conventional beliefs about gender, such as the notion that boys were more
easily aroused and less able to control their sexual impulses. Without reducing the male
sex drive to a biologically determined impulse, teachers readily acknowledged the force
of its expression. Contributing to a gendered distinction of sexual desire, educators often
fed students the ideas that boys pursued girls to gratify male physical needs whereas
girls made themselves into objects of desire and preferred romance to sexual attention.
Yet educators often stressed variation among individuals as more significant than male-
female differences.

In discarding past traditions that assumed essential male-female differences,
mid-century sex educators nevertheless maintained certain assumptions about girls’ and
women’s roles that were conservative. Caution, for instance, was not absent from mid-
century sex education curricula. While dismissing theories that boys needed sexual
outlets for health reasons, educators accepted and promulgated girls’ obligation to set
dating standards. All youth needed to beware of strangers, but teachers indicated that
girls had to remain on alert with dates as well. In a moment of weakness, they
maintained, a girl could easily succumb to boys’ advances and become pregnant,
infected with venereal disease, or stigmatized by a tarnished reputation, and have no
one to blame but herself. As pacesetters for dating and sex—and likely mothers and sex
educators in the home for the next generation of youngsters—girls were necessary
subjects for sex education.

Invited to question the meanings and implications of sex, gender, and sexuality,
youth attended classes that imbued sex with liberal and nationalist ideology. As “liberty
cabbage” (Americanized sauerkraut, so dubbed during World War I) and American jazz
captured the spirit of democracy, so too did mid-century American education—including
sex education—exemplify democratic ideals. While male and female roles remained
distinct in this worldview, teachers explicitly condemned patriarchy. In contrast to
dictatorial features of totalitarian societies, the United States encouraged youth in sex
and family life education classrooms to formulate personal responses to puberty and

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choices for the future. Educators guided young people to choose conformity but did so with terms invoking freedom, opportunity, and American moral superiority and affluence. In the process, classroom discussions articulated possibilities that were not necessarily condoned, but neither were they prohibited outright. Personal choice should not be sacrificed for the sake of conformity, educators seemed to believe, foreshadowing a politics of gendered and sexual empowerment—if only on an individual basis—for women.

Far from complacent or silent about sexuality, the 1940s and 1950s were abuzz with controversy about female sexuality in particular. Wartime and postwar statistics of venereal disease, unwed pregnancy, and declining parental supervision, as well as the Kinsey reports and the case of Christine Jorgensen, whose transformation from male to female revealed the mutability of sex, captivated the public. Sex education simultaneously attracted greater attention in the popular media, as an outpouring of print sources, radio discussions, community forums, and the increasingly popular medium of motion pictures linked youth and sexuality with a perceived crisis of juvenile delinquency and sexual promiscuity during and after World War II.

Not unlike the white slavery panics of the early twentieth century, mid-century preoccupation with sex offenders contributed to this generation of reformers' agendas—in particular their advice to girls. Girls required protection, but they also needed information and tools for making wise decisions in their interactions with strangers and male companions. Although stories of seduction and crime may have generated a greater awareness of the perils of being female, the solution was not to confine girls to the home or limit their education, work, and social activity—especially not during the war—but to advocate their use of sound judgment.
Another way in which the period between 1940 and 1960 is pivotal to understanding social and cultural changes in gender and sexuality was growing attention to racial conflict. The beginnings of the modern civil rights movement and the campaign for racial integration of public schools, in place by the 1940s, were part of the context in which thinking and teaching about sex occurred. The interlacing of sexuality and race has a history worth exploring in greater detail, despite sex educators' usual silence on the issue. One angle is to explore how ideas about whiteness contributed to the construction of gender and sexuality, especially norms and values.

The racial/ethnic and class makeup of a locale had an effect on the type of program generated, as more schools established or adapted their lessons to suit educators' perceptions of their student population. Examples from case studies of three programs reveal how curricular content and resources related to whether a program was formulated in a homogenous, white middle-class community or an integrated urban low-income district. Rural, urban, and suburban distinctions mattered as well. Educators' correlations of family instability with class, race, and anonymity led to experiments conducted within poor communities of color and later adapted to white, middle-class schools in San Diego, California. In Toms River, New Jersey, a white, middle-class environment engendered a program that welcomed pupils' parents as "citizen faculty" and omitted topics supposedly inapplicable to polite society. Oregon's famed sex education movie featured a lily-white cast, but this did not prevent its use with audiences of different races and nationalities; the film was an international success.

As sex education in the United States gained attention in the popular media during the 1940s and 1950s, model programs, such as those in San Diego, Toms River, and Oregon, rose in prominence. An investigation of locally developed curricula from
across the nation allows an assessment of the frequency and popularity of particular
teaching methods. In this dissertation, case studies of three locations provide greater insight into
the personalities and practices involved as well as how local circumstances provided a
context for sex education experiments. Toms River, San Diego, and Oregon typify
heavily publicized trends in mid-century sex education curricula, formulated respectively
as family life, human relations, and health education, and developed by administrators,
teachers, nurses, and consultants. These three cases also demonstrate different
community settings for sex education agendas—from a small East Coast town, Toms
River, where social and economic stratification was less pronounced, to the growing city
of San Diego on the West Coast, where anonymity was becoming a hallmark of urban
life. Oregon’s program, while also reaching an urban population in Portland, stretched
beyond the city to small towns and rural communities.

A wealth of contemporary published sources, from articles in education and
sociology journals and essays published in popular magazines to pamphlets and books
addressed to a wide range of readers, exhibit the vastness of efforts to teach young
people about sex and male-female relationships in the public schools. The three
experiments attempted in Toms River, San Diego, and Oregon attracted a national
audience in mass-circulation periodicals, both women's magazines and such family
publications as Look and Time. Archival collections dealing with school projects are
limited: Elizabeth S. Force, the teacher of Family Relationships in Toms River, has
deposited her papers for researchers to explore, including early drafts of curricula,
umerous clippings, and one workbook that her student Barbara Newman completed in
1956. Bert Y. Glassberg's lectures to St. Louis, Missouri, public school classes are
another rare instance of papers that mid-century sex educators deposited at archives.
Further archival resources include the papers of the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA), a much-studied body that nurtured and followed the experiments closely, retaining publicity, correspondence, and outlines related to sex education curricula, and the E. C. Brown Trust papers, which provide records of the production of classroom materials. Curricula and program evaluations—by pupils, teachers, parents, researchers, consultants, and other community members—help assemble a partial view of classroom practices. Evidence of girls' experiences of sex education remains sparse, yet various documents present opportunities to tease girls' voices out of the historical sources.

Scholarship dealing with mid-twentieth-century U.S. girls' lives has only begun to emerge, yet it offers an important perspective for understanding how sexual and social norms changed over time. Historical research on girls' acquisition of knowledge and ideas about gender and sexuality holds the potential to expand work by scholars of literature, film, education, sociology, and psychology who have examined the coming-of-age process for girls.\(^{17}\) Literary and film scholars have investigated narratives about girlhood, education theorists have studied classroom practices and the implications of curricular content for girls' self-esteem, while sociologists and psychologists have examined the process of girls' development outside the classroom.\(^{18}\) Late-twentieth-century feminists within and outside academia have called attention to sexual assault, abuse, and incest, as well as sexual empowerment and reproductive freedom, and scholarly research on sexuality has begun to historicize what feminist Adrienne Rich labeled "compulsory heterosexuality."\(^{19}\) Equipped with theories and concepts only beginning to emerge in the twentieth century's middle decades, this project highlights links between feminist thought and the history of childhood and youth.
A considerable number of young women who came of age before the sexual revolution of the 1960s attended classes where dating, marriage, and reproduction were subjects of discussion. Classroom discussion of these topics—especially marital partnerships—propelled girls to pursue self-improvement and expect fairness in relationships. Assuming that sex education was one of many experiences that shaped girls' self-perceptions during adolescence—although probably not the most compelling one—public school experiences nevertheless occupied a notable place in girls' lives as schooling was compulsory and high school completion rates rose dramatically. Public school education thus provides an important avenue for investigating the process of gender and sexual socialization.

Historiography on sex education has shown the moralizing aspects of sex education, identified trends in method and content, and highlighted educators' agendas through studies of their published and unpublished writings. Absent from this literature is sustained critical analysis of gender and its role in shaping sex education theory and practice. To some degree, this results from attempts to explain the ideas and practices of sex education in broad strokes, but in some instances historians have accepted a view of the male as the standard for and by which sex education developed. Assumptions about gender, however, were fundamental to twentieth-century sex education's content and methods—and especially its shortcomings. It is important not to write girls and women out of this history or discount the possibilities of gender as an analytical tool.

Throughout the twentieth century, sex educators' rhetoric often decried the double standard of sexual behavior, as historian Jeffrey P. Moran has pointed out; yet confusions, contradictions, and disagreements existed among educators, administrators,
and scholars about the relationship between sex and gendered obligations, with implications for teaching about sex. Contested associations of sex and gender lurked beneath the surface of rallying cries for sex education, especially evident in teachers’ accounts of school experiments and graduate students’ studies of classroom practices. Educators—including school administrators, primary and secondary school teachers, and university professors—were not simply perpetuating old-fashioned notions of gender but attempting to modify definitions amid uncertain times.

Scholars working in multiple disciplinary traditions have explored gendered messages of contemporary sex education, conducting empirical studies and teasing out meanings and mistakes of sex and sexuality education for girls. The premise that sexuality and gender are social constructions, defined historically by society rather than fixed and determined by God, nature, or biology, informs this scholarship. Feminist thought has further influenced how scholars study curricula on the printed page, which does not necessarily reveal what happens in the classroom. As curriculum theorist Bonnie Nelson Trudell has argued, scholars need to be mindful of politics and conflicts involved in formulating and teaching as well as the “lived classroom culture” in which lessons are conducted. Trudell, Moran, and others have pointed to the persistence of problems in sexuality education, related to the balance between information and advice in the curricula. This dissertation builds on and speaks to both historical and multidisciplinary feminist scholarship in an effort to enhance our understanding of the transmission of ideas about gender and sexuality and their impact on girls and young women in particular.

While young people’s requests for sex education often entailed demands for information, the common response of sex educators was to emphasize attitudes and
relationships. Within the classroom, however, these disparate goals became one: youth were counseled to make informed and mature decisions, bolstered by anatomical facts and developmental theories of adolescence as well as rhetoric of democracy and choice. Girls stood to benefit at this crossroads of knowledge and advice, not because the information and guidance necessarily met their needs, but as a result of the encouragement to articulate preferences and possibilities. The goal of protecting and at the same time empowering girls captured longstanding tensions within feminism. While educators did not ordinarily have feminist goals in mind in their efforts to reduce ignorance and improve family success rates, their messages and methods contained a feminist undercurrent. Girls in sex, family life, and human relations classes in the 1940s and 1950s belonged to the generation that, in the 1960s, would agitate for change—perhaps emboldened by the democratic and gender-egalitarian principles they learned in school.

This dissertation consists of five chapters, which explore salient themes in sex education practices in U.S. public schools during the 1940s and 1950s. The first chapter begins with defining the scope of sex education and methods of implementing it in various school districts across the country. It demonstrates broad support of sex education in public schools from various sectors of society, partially attributable to the emphasis on normative heterosexuality. In discarding a “birds and bees” or “facts of life” approach, teachers encouraged youth to think about relationships in ways that challenged male dominance.

Chapter 2 lays out the distinctions of three pioneering communities’ approaches to sex education and shows how the experiments represent competing methods with
common underlying assumptions and much national publicity. Commentators hailed Oregon's movie *Human Growth* as groundbreaking, San Diego's curriculum as one of the most extensive and widely accepted programs ever, and Toms River's course as the best known among contemporary sex educators. Oregon, San Diego, and Toms River represent different tendencies in mid-century sex education curricula. They derived from a variety of sources of leadership, placing different degrees of emphasis on health, human relations, and family life. These communities were, moreover, quite different in terms of socioeconomic and racial/ethnic composition. During the 1940s and 1950s, urban areas in Oregon experienced a wartime influx of southern blacks, San Diego felt the effects of migration and its proximity to the Mexican border, and Toms River developed from a rural area into a resort town. Class, racial, cultural, and language differences were submerged in most accounts of sex education during this period, but these dynamics nevertheless shaped teachers' presentations and girls' understandings of gender and sexuality. A closer look at these three experiments shows the contradictions and tensions within sex education curricula.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine school curricula in terms of biological sex and socially constructed gender roles. The first of these two thematic chapters considers the presentation of knowledge about sexual anatomy, masturbation and sexual arousal, menstruation, and reproduction, illustrating how scrutiny of female bodies was integral to sex education lessons. Contrary to the assumption that biological essentialism would bolster sexist ideas in classroom materials, more complicated and contradictory views of biological sex and behavior emerged among sex education teachers. Biological science was less important to the project of mid-century sex education than was psychology, interpreted in various ways to support and critique the status quo. Chapter 4 more fully
explores how ideas derived from psychology influenced sex education and challenged traditional beliefs about femininity and heterosexual relationships. Educational materials sometimes conflated biological imperatives and social norms, but not without providing potentially subversive perspectives. Whether in coed or mixed-sex classrooms, girls learned self-monitoring as an essential aspect of being feminine and attracting a date (or mate). Ever aware of their "pioneering" status in expanding the terrain of sex education, these educators in the 1940s and 1950s tended to embrace change and espouse liberal ideas about gender roles. Seeking to demystify romantic notions peddled by Hollywood and advertisers, teachers taught girls to read critically messages about love and desire in popular culture.

Chapter 5 places sex education within the political climate of the 1940s and 1950s, arguing that liberal views of human relationships and democratic ideals infused the curricula. In addition to biological and psychological underpinnings of normative sexuality, teachers presented girls' sex lives and gendered behavior as critical to the success of American families and, therefore, American democracy. Individual self-improvement and group participatory democracy were fundamental to sex and family life education classrooms, and authoritarian and patriarchal families were ushered out in favor of healthy and cooperative marital partnerships and family units. As educators largely ignored the antidemocratic and unequal nature of race relations and class conflict during the period—preferring to voice platitudes and evade contradictions—democratic rhetoric in sex and family life education could serve disruptive purposes. Whether or not they heeded the cautions of their teachers or pursued the implications of egalitarianism to more radical conclusions, girls were empowered to make their own judgments about
sex. Through an analysis of girls’ voices, this chapter unravels assumptions about mid-century political conservatism and how students’ critical examinations of sex and gender set the stage for later rebellions.

I conclude the dissertation with a discussion of change and continuity over time in twentieth-century sex education, touching on the late-twentieth-century controversy surrounding sex education, and what all this has meant for girls—exploring the various contours of U.S. society’s preoccupation with girls, their bodies, and their sexualities.
Notes


2See the examples of high school programs nationwide in Joseph K. Folsom, Youth, Family, and Education (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1941), chap. 6. Notwithstanding the growth in curricula, Folsom soberly noted that “probably not more than 10 per cent of youth now in high school are reached by all existing high school programs combined.” Ibid., 119.


5Ibid., 13-15.

6Bigelow noted the emergence of school programs between the wars, which led to reconsideration of sex education's original motivation of reducing venereal disease. In 1944, he called for "rapid advance in teaching the essentials of sex education, without the name, as an integral part of school programs in health education and human relations education." He also stated that educators since 1940 favored placing venereal disease education in units on health and communicable diseases, which thereby established a "new sex education" that dealt with "normal aspects of sex." Maurice A. Bigelow, "Sex Education in School Programs on Health and Human Relations," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 30 (February 1944): 84-87, quotations on 85.


10Examples where "sex" or "social hygiene" were openly named include San Diego's sixth-grade lessons, ASHA's preinduction curricula, and Minnesota's units for high school students, as well as home economics-based curricula in Washington, D.C.,


On the growth of interest in psychology during the mid-twentieth century, see Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).


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For other national contexts, see Marion de Ras and Mieke Lunenberg, eds., *Girls, Girlhood, and Girls' Studies in Transition* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1993); Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1991); Lesley Johnson, *The Modern Girl: Girhood and Growing Up*.


Arguing that “too much can be made of the sex educators’ gender assumptions,” Moran has devoted little attention to how gender has shaped sex education and has argued that sex educators mostly shared their peers and predecessors’ views about male and female sexual differences. Moran, Teaching Sex, 61. See also Moran, "Wholesome Fear," 109.


Trudell, Doing Sex Education, 7, 8.
GAINING LEGITIMACY: SEX EDUCATION IN THE 1940s AND 1950s

As early as 1912, the National Education Association passed a resolution favoring the training of teachers for sex education. Two years later, the organization followed up with a resolution advocating additional but tentative steps toward offering sex education in the schools. Subsequent decades witnessed occasional experiments in teaching about sex, including nature study of plant and animal reproduction in the early grades, information on puberty and the human body in junior high school, and instruction about human reproduction and venereal disease in senior high school classrooms or school-wide assemblies. Educators were interested in providing youth with information about bodies, reproduction, and conduct, because as Victorian prudery was giving way to scientific knowledge about sex, parents were ill equipped to prepare their children for modern adult life. By the 1940s, sex education was far from entrenched in the nation's public schools, yet early-twentieth-century experiments had paved the way for further efforts to make sex a legitimate subject of study in primary and secondary education.

During the first half of the twentieth century, preference for an “integrated” curriculum in sex education was growing among education leaders as an alternative to
talks conducted by outside lecturers. In its original configuration, an integrated
curriculum ordinarily included little more than study of reproduction in plants, insects,
and small animals, or incidental instruction when the topic arose, conducted within
existing classes, especially science and physiology, by the same instructor who taught
all other topics of the course. It is difficult to know how widespread integrated education
was, as it differed little from the unplanned sex education offered incidentally when
students posed questions.

The larger trend in secondary schools, by the 1940s, was to subsume sex under
discussions of interpersonal relationships, shifting the lens away from biology and
instead toward social and human sciences, where educators felt discussion of values
and emotional concerns was more appropriate. Educators with college-level training in
psychology, sociology, anthropology, and home economics forged this transformation.
Health and hygiene classes, sometimes within physical education departments, were a
common placement for a unit on sex, increasingly with a mental health or psychological
emphasis. Over time, a group of educators began to champion separate courses that
were fundamentally about sex and other “problems” of youth, discounting the ability of
integrated sex instruction adequately to fulfill youths’ needs. These courses appeared
with such titles as Social Relationships, Senior Problems, and Family and Home
Relations.³

An inclusive understanding of the term “sex” allowed sex educators great latitude
in subject matter. Anything from venereal disease prevention to procreative heterosexual
intercourse to conduct deemed appropriate for finding a mate and raising a family was
potential subject matter. In biology, health, and social hygiene classes in public schools,
attention to normative gendered behaviors was intrinsic to instruction about sexual

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anatomy and reproduction. Family life education and similar courses—generally focused on dating, choosing a mate, and raising children—hardly mentioned anatomy or heterosexual intercourse, yet clearly encompassed gender and heterosexuality. While physiology was a significant component of courses and units labeled sex education, those categorized as family life education dealt only indirectly with biological sex and sexual reproduction. Yet many educators nevertheless perceived their work as part of a project they labeled sex or social hygiene education.

The history of sex education calls attention to the ways in which biological sex, gender roles, and sexuality were intertwined. Such relationships influenced the design of sex education lectures, units, and classes in public schools. In the absence of consensus on how to teach about sex in the context of marriage, mid-twentieth-century teachers drew on resources from a variety of organizations and disciplines, including social hygiene, medical science, nursing, home economics, child study, intercultural education, anthropology, psychology, and sociology. These various approaches led educators across the nation to adopt multifaceted curricula.

A unit on sex education within a junior high school health course for girls from the late 1930s exemplifies a broad range of subjects and approaches. In Washington, D.C., public schools, teachers sought to promote “all-round healthy life; good looks; clean mind; proper attractive clothes; boy friends; girl friends; adequate work and play” in each of their female students. Covering topics of menstruation and menstrual cramps, female and male reproductive organs, girls’ attitudes toward boys, marriage, fetal development, infant care, illegitimacy, venereal diseases, and prostitution, the lessons offered girls some knowledge about gender and sexuality to facilitate their growing up.4
Typical of courses and units designed for adolescent girls, the District of Columbia curriculum linked biological changes with social, psychological, and mental shifts in behavior and attitude. Addressing "physical" and "mental" adolescent changes, including "rapid growth, womanly development, [and] start of menstruation period" as well as "interest in boys, grown-up attitudes, [and] period of adjustment," the sex education unit linked physical and mental aspects of growing up throughout the lessons. The unit also imparted the idea that adolescent girls should develop heterosexual interest in boys when they reached puberty, and that girls' desire to earn boys' attention and respect would shape their lives up to marriage. Learning about adolescence and adulthood meant acquiring facts as well as adjusting to their implications for a "normal" life that included marriage and children.

This chapter begins with a discussion of what educators meant by "sex" and how they approached the subject with pupils of various ages. It then moves to a discussion of public reaction to sex education in public schools. I argue that definitions and methods of sex instruction made the efforts palatable to adults and youth in the World War II and postwar era. Teachers instructed about sex and promoted a modern form of heterosexuality, which challenged traditional ideas of male dominance and female passivity. Although educators often inserted progressive messages into sex curricula, surveys and parental endorsements—as well as youth opinion—sanctioned sex education with little reservation or fear, but also little awareness of its transgressive potential.
Sex Education: Meanings and Methods

Writing about their experiences teaching sex education to Grand Rapids, Michigan, high school boys and girls in the 1910s, Grace F. Ellis and T. Dinsmore Upton conveyed the course goals as fundamentally about developing character. While many people thought of sex education as an explanation of heterosexual intercourse and reproduction, almost all discussion of sex education encompassed a broader spectrum of gendered—and often not sexual—activities and behaviors. Early-twentieth-century discussions of sex education for youth commonly included expositions on the "sex factor" in life, revealing intrinsic connections in contemporary thinking among anatomical sex, gender, and heterosexuality. Ellis and Upton's ultimate aims for their course captured this amalgamation: "in the boy, the chivalry which will determine his attitude toward women; in the girl, the sense of responsibility which will not only regulate her actions but will influence and stimulate the boy's sense of honor."

Conduct and character were pervasive concerns of sex educators from their first sporadic presentations in classrooms scattered across the country in the early twentieth century. Teaching about sex organs and human reproduction was only a small facet of many mid-century sex education classes in public schools, and heterosexual intercourse was hardly mentioned if referred to at all. This was in part an inheritance from earlier generations of sex educators, like Ellis and Upton, and their conceptions of sex.

Sex instruction, some experts maintained in the early part of the century, "should aim to keep sex consciousness and sex emotions at the minimum, and should avoid everything which tends to awaken or to intensify either." Columbia University education professor and sex education expert Maurice A. Bigelow wrote that the titles "social hygiene education" and "sex education" were, moreover, "convenient headings under
which educators are organizing and directing research and training which contribute to
the general aim of social hygiene," but "not names proposed for new courses of study in
schools or colleges." Instead, Bigelow and others argued for several decades, teachers
should focus on such topics as eugenics and love, which allowed them to differentiate
humans from their animal counterparts. Sex, especially sexual behavior, was almost
incidental to what Bigelow’s contemporaries often called "sex-character education."

Sex education has meant different things to different people over time, reflecting
the changing meanings attributed to sex and sexuality in various periods. Although
distinct connotations applied to the terms "social hygiene," "sex," "family living," and
"human relations" education, mid- to late-twentieth-century educators and popular
commentators often used these overlapping designations interchangeably. Sex
education could refer to instruction about anatomical differences between boys/girls and
men/women, human reproduction, "birds and bees" tales of reproduction among plants
and animals, male-female ("boy-girl") relations, family relationships, and gender roles
and conduct more generally. In some instances, sexual acts and reproduction were
peripheral to the curricula, while in others sexual reproduction was the main point of
instruction. During the mid-twentieth century, sex education was a flexible term,
comprising instruction about anatomy, conduct, personality, and relationships.
Perhaps most consistent across the designations for sex education curricula was
attention to male-female distinctions and attraction. Sometimes the focus but in other
instances the implication of the lessons, sex differences and heterosexuality were ever
present in the curricula.

Most historians have argued that sex education in public schools arose out of the
eyear-twentieth-century social hygiene movement’s campaign to eliminate sexual vice,
prostitution, and venereal disease. Social hygiene perspectives indeed exerted influence over health-based sex education. Grounded in a movement that sought to eliminate sex-related vice, social hygienists characteristically worked against what they perceived as immorality and an abuse of sex, which often resulted in disease, illegitimate pregnancies, and criminal behavior. They also enabled public discussion of sex that previously had been taboo. Scholars generally date the crystallization of the movement to the formation of the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA) in 1914, with roots reaching further back in time to such causes as temperance and social purity. Situated in urban centers across the country, social hygiene organizations consisted of medical professionals, business leaders, and reformers who collaborated on strategies for improving society. Offering sex education to children through the schools was only one possibility for attacking sex-related vice and disease, and one that social hygienists adopted in conjunction with other efforts, including legal and moral reform, public health measures, and parent and teacher education.

Although social hygiene leaders admonished against creating “sex” classes, a number of schools and teachers composed and taught units on sex education in the middle decades of the twentieth century. These schools offered a hybrid of the ideal, discretely “integrated” sex education and the more distinct “emergency” sex lectures, and usually fitted material into health and physical education. In Oregon, for example, the state guide for health instruction noted that “many phases of social hygiene education, classifiable under such major headings as venereal disease control, reproduction, boy and girl relationships, and marriage and family relationships, may be included in health education and in other school subjects.” Oregon’s units on “Structure and Functions of the Human Body,” “Personal Hygiene,” “Communicable Diseases,” and
“Mental Health” were particularly amenable to social hygiene topics. Beginning in the late 1930s, University City schools of suburban St. Louis, Missouri, developed a curriculum in sex education that spanned several grade levels and occurred primarily through the physical education department. Sixth-grade pupils examined “social behavior, human relations, and sex education,” which “fit in naturally in a unit on Group Living” (meaning the modern nuclear family, not communes).\textsuperscript{13} Seventh- and eighth-grade students received instruction integrated into science, guidance, and homemaking courses, while ninth-grade students had a specific unit. In sex-segregated physical education classes that focused on “Social Living,” students studied “social etiquette, dating, parent-student problems, and personal attractiveness” as well as “the whole area of growing up,” including “information on the force of sex, in maturing and in physical or emotional changes.”\textsuperscript{14} Later in high school, a unit on “Family Living and Sex Education” was part of a required semester-long twelfth-grade health course.\textsuperscript{15}

Health educators were not alone in devising alternatives and supplements to the ideal of integrated education. Few leaders of the sex education movement wanted to surrender control of instruction to teachers ill prepared for the task. Thus, to meet the immediate instructional need, some schools offered separate courses and units, more or less “sex” classes, most often with a family or human relations bent. Colleges, universities, and other agencies meanwhile instituted courses and workshops to train teachers to offer sex education.\textsuperscript{16}

Placing sex within the context of creating families and forming sound human relations was in part an effort to make sex less sexy and more civic or “spiritual,” as the authors of one curriculum guide phrased it.\textsuperscript{17} Only infrequently did mid-century educators couch sex education in language of religion or morality, but instead they often used
terms of adjustment and citizenship.\textsuperscript{18} To a large extent, school sex education proponents yielded to common sense thinking about everyday life rather than the specialized knowledge of medical experts, and in doing so, found themselves more aligned with their purity predecessors, emphasizing acquisition of attitude over facts. Although their common sense derived from accumulated wisdom of physicians and psychologists, sex educators wanted to make the subject agreeable for use with children and youth in the classroom arena. Some schools engaged in a parallel program of adult education, and many offered previews of sex education lessons for parents of students enrolled in the classes. Sex education in the mid-twentieth-century was undeniably a family affair.

Also significant in the development of sex education curricula in the schools, through the framework of family living, were home economics instructors. Usually women, home economics teachers were often responsible for teaching girls about personal hygiene, menstruation, and family matters. Over a period of several decades, home economics departments began to focus less on the practical matters of diet and sewing and more on “worthy home membership” and relationships within the family.\textsuperscript{19} During the 1930s, the American Home Economics Association published several readers, revealing the organization's interest in promoting harmonious and fulfilling family relationships.\textsuperscript{20} According to one of these texts, curricula should focus on “three major desires” of adolescents: establishing an “independent personality”; becoming “socially acceptable” and attracting “the other sex”; and making “certain educational and vocational decisions.”\textsuperscript{21}

Family life education was in part an outgrowth of the training in homemaking that public schools offered girls; the former, however, tended to enroll both girls and boys
and departed from the focus on women's household tasks in traditional home economics courses. Although women often taught mixed-gender family life education courses, many were not home economics teachers or trained in the art and science of homemaking. Toms River superintendent Edgar M. Finck recruited English teacher Elizabeth S. Force to develop and teach their school's course on family living. And while girls' enrollment in the course surpassed boys for several years (especially during the war, as girls outnumbered boys in school generally), increasingly boys signed up for the coed course. In coed family relations courses, usually offered in the upper grades of high school, lessons and discussions paid attention to how to have a successful and happy family life. Even though such courses covered household accounting and consumer education, they placed emphasis on the dynamics of family relationships and human relationships. Family living courses considered pupils' present family situations and commonly discussed such topics as getting along with siblings and accepting responsibilities that accompanied unchaperoned dating and other privileges. Where reproduction was the highlight of sex education, family courses culminated with the anticipated future marriage that teachers encouraged each student to imagine without paying much attention to its physical consummation.

Human relations education was another route to offering sex education and guidance about heterosexual gender roles. Like family life education, human relations education appeared in schools during the mid-twentieth century, in this instance a product of the movement toward functional education with real-life implications for students outside the school grounds. Recognizing that most students did not pursue higher education, school personnel perceived a need to offer pupils preparation for adult life and responsibilities, which included providing driver's education, expanding shop
classes, and teaching about personal finance. Practical and vocational courses were more prevalent in mid-century high schools as were courses designed to aid life adjustment, or the process of adapting to adult society beyond the schools.22 The movement for intercultural understanding also provided a precedent and companion focus—improving how people related to and understood one another.23

Chief among adult obligations was forming successful families, contingent in turn on amiable male-female relationships, a strong work ethic, and practical knowledge about daily affairs of the family. Similar to family life courses, human relations incorporated instruction in the psychology and sociology of the family. Human relations courses also focused on individual psychological development and adjustment in society more generally. While divided for analytical purposes, family living and human relations were often merged in practice, as in an Atlanta, Georgia, community high school one-semester course, formally called Personal and Family Living but referred to in shorthand as Social Living.24 The program was instituted within the home economics department but was required for all senior high school boys and girls. Encouraging appropriate heterosexual and gender traits was a fundamental component of these human relations curricula.

In addition to choosing a framework in which to situate sex education, school officials tackled other questions of method—coed versus single-sex, compulsory versus elective, parental permission versus automatic enrollment, and primary versus secondary schools. A few examples of programs indicate the range of offerings. Beginning in the late 1920s, New York's Bronxville public school teachers introduced sex and "sex character education" for boys and girls in the seventh grade. Continuing into the mid-century decades, classes were divided and taught by a teacher of the same sex
as the students during the three weeks (or less) that focused on human sexuality within the yearlong biology course. Denver, Colorado, offered several different programs at each of the district’s high schools, all sharing the feature of being sex-segregated, and the oldest dating back to the 1930s. In the early 1950s, West High School students took Senior Planning, a required course that included twice weekly sessions with physical education teachers; North High School seniors might opt for a Home and Family Living course, a social science elective; at East High School, the Social Problems class was optional for seniors; and South High School seniors could elect to take Home Living from the home economics department. In spite of an apparent consensus on a broad family or human relations focus in which to introduce sex education by the 1940s and 1950s, there were also still schools that used a single lecture, as in Boardman, Ohio, and across the state in Wisconsin junior and senior high schools. Many schools implemented more than one type of sex education at different grade levels and in different departments of the school, as exemplified by the San Diego curriculum.

Led by social hygiene committee secretary and researcher Jacob A. Goldberg, the New York Tuberculosis and Health Association assessed the state of sex education practices in the mid-1940s to determine what was being taught in schools and how health agencies could contribute to broader public education. Published in the Journal of Social Hygiene, the report detailed forty unidentified school programs from among eighty-four survey responses. Presenting the data in raw form and providing little analysis, Goldberg concluded that the previous years saw a rise in interest and development of sex education. "A few school systems are attempting to do some teaching in the elementary schools; about 25 per cent cover human relations materials in the junior high schools; while all of those [forty] listed carry on some type of activity in the
senior high schools," he commented. For more details on individual programs, he referred readers to four texts with wide circulation: Minnesota's *Units in Personal Health and Human Relations*, Oregon's *Health Guide Units for Oregon Teachers*, San Diego's *Human Relations Education*, and a survey text, *Sex Education in the High Schools*. It is easy to imagine that many educators not represented by the survey had already consulted—and, in many cases, attempted—such model curricula.

Rarely did any two schools have identical programs, as individual personalities, institutional parameters, and community dynamics created different environments for launching and teaching sex education. But the programs shared a common field of reference: no teacher of sex education was likely to be unfamiliar with the Oregon film *Human Growth* once it was featured in *Newsweek*. If educators did not have direct contact with ASHA, they probably would have come across at least some of their dozens of pamphlets or publications. In addition to those Goldberg cited, textbooks and monographs by such authors as Paul H. Landis, Judson T. Landis and Mary G. Landis, and Evelyn Millis Duvall circulated widely. Those not contacted by a graduate student interested in studying pupils' reactions to sex education would no doubt have read public opinion polls on sex education as well as letters to the editor and guest columns on the topic of sex education in national publications and local papers alike. With such apparent interest and a variety of models to emulate in health, human relations, and family life education, many school administrators joined the movement to educate about sex in the schools.
Mid-Century Public Support for Sex Education

Public receptiveness to sex education appeared to be on the rise in the mid-twentieth century. This was an indication, educators thought, of adults' decreasing secrecy about sex, but also parents were becoming more aware of their inability to provide proper instruction and guidance in the home. From the 1930s, polls demonstrated a persistent majority in favor of sex instruction. Most remarkable about these poll results is the lack of explanation of what pollsters meant by "sex education"; many people were apparently willing to sanction sex education without a clearly stated definition. A 1943 American Institute of Public Opinion poll—their first one on sex education—found approval for high school sex education nationwide at 68 percent, with only 16 percent in opposition and another 16 percent having no opinion (or possibly mixed opinion). Of greatest concern, according to this survey, was the supposed wartime increase of girls' sex delinquency.32 Those results resembled the survey that Fortune Magazine conducted in 1950 but posed in relation to higher education: 53 percent favored planned discussion in college classes, 16 percent approved of discussion when college students' questions arose, 16 percent opposed the subject, and 15 percent expressed no opinion.33

Polls suggested that school leaders and parents were even friendlier toward sex education than the general public, and this is perhaps why educators posited that support was mounting. The journal Nation's Schools found that 96 percent of five hundred representative public school administrators favored some form of sex education in 1944. The journal's pollsters discovered similar rates of approval among a smaller sample of parents.34 By the end of the 1950s, another survey in Nation's Schools indicated that 72 percent of administrators felt that public senior high schools were...
obligated to teach sex education, with 58 percent agreeing that the education should appear also at the junior high level and 31 percent in the elementary schools. A 1946 Los Angeles venereal disease council poll received a 95 percent approval rating among parents for sex education in junior and senior high school. Seventy-five percent favored sex education in elementary school, an unusual endorsement for initiating sex instruction before puberty. A statewide New Jersey Poll survey posited that adults approved of local schools teaching about sex in 1950 by 81 percent, with 83 percent of parents with children in school concurring. Fewer people in New Jersey (4 percent) were undecided, compared to the 1943 national poll showing 16 percent without opinion. Revealing receptiveness similar to Los Angeles, most New Jersey parents surveyed wanted sex education to be initiated in junior high but some preferred earlier or later grades.

Beyond the classroom, young people made educators and the larger community aware of their needs and convictions about sex education. Twelve hundred teenagers adopted resolutions demanding more and better sex and family life education at the national YMCA–YWCA Conference for high school students in Grinnell, Iowa, in 1947. New York City radio station WQXR held a youth forum in 1948 about whether or not sex education should be included in high schools: the six students' opinions prompted a New York Times headline, “Parents Held Lax in Sex Education.” “Boy governors” at the 1949 YMCA-sponsored conference in Washington, D.C., concluded that “Ignorance about sex and lack of preparation for family responsibilities are the No. 1 handicaps of American youth.” Fifteen-year-old student Donald Kaiser of Joliet, Illinois, wrote to Look magazine in 1951 to express the need for sex education in his school as soon as possible. Teachers, he claimed, were much better sources of information than information picked up outside class.
met for a mock legislative session in 1952, Cleveland high school student and "Governor" Mike Lewis argued that sex education should be mandatory. New York State's and New York City's Hi-Y model legislatures repeatedly adopted laws mandating sex education in public schools.

Complementing young people's enthusiasm for sex education was parents' support, and both were critical in implementing sex education plans. While most schools would give students the option to be excused from classes where sex would be discussed, fear of parental disapproval nonetheless hindered many schools from offering sex education. A major factor in dismantling parental reluctance about sex education was the endorsement of local, state, and national Parents and Teachers Associations (PTA). PTA chapters across the nation established study groups and public meetings on social hygiene topics during the 1930s and 1940s. With a few exceptions, state PTAs in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s had social hygiene committees who led such work. In May 1944, the national PTA body gave resounding support for a "well-planned program of social hygiene instruction . . . throughout public school training" and in other activities and agencies, and many state and local PTAs (earliest among them New Jersey) had already advocated and would continue to support sex education.

Parents, working in conjunction with teachers and professional organizations, helped build legitimacy and momentum in the movement for sex education. In San Antonio, Texas, a sex education teacher called on all the city's PTA presidents to go over every detail of the new curriculum and was met with "enthusiastic approval." A state PTA convention in Florida in 1947 prompted the Hillsborough County schools' family life education program, led by the county's PTA Social Hygiene Chairman, Martha Johnson. Parental groups in Mamaroneck, New York, and Cranston, Rhode Island,
overwhelmingly approved the screening of *Human Growth* and other films, including McGraw Hill's *Human Reproduction*, for their public school students.\(^5\) By the end of the 1940s, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, and both the American Association of School Administrators and the National Conference on Education of Teachers, had taken positions in favor of sex education in the classroom and teacher training.\(^5\)

Not all parents, of course, supported sex education in schools. School authorities believed that parental resistance to sex education came primarily from those inadequately prepared for conducting the job at home. Some parents were relieved to have trained teachers assume responsibility, while others hoped teachers would supplement parental efforts to instill wholesome attitudes at home. Numerous sources geared toward parents were available, heightening adults’ awareness of arguments in favor of sex education for youth.\(^5\) In addition to PTA meetings and public forums, books and pamphlets proliferated—with a general audience of parents and teachers in mind—giving guidance for those teaching children and youth about sex. Noted authorities published books with popular presses and pamphlets sponsored by ASHA, public health and medical associations, and other social service agencies. By the end of the 1930s, articles in popular periodicals gave advice to parents about sex education in the home and occasionally outlined school programs. Numerous magazine articles by and quotations from such experts as Frances Bruce Strain and Benjamin C. Gruenberg appeared in a wide array of mass-readership publications, including *Harper's* and such women's magazines as *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping*.\(^5\) The problem, though, was that not all parents were inclined to pursue such self-education, and
many—especially mothers who worked outside the home, a large proportion of the African American population—had little time to devote to their own education.\(^5\)

Colleges were offering more courses in marriage and family life, responding primarily to students' demands for such practical and functional education; officials hoped that better sex education might eventually occur in the home.\(^5\) As historian Beth L. Bailey has pointed out, sociologists in particular took responsibility for researching and teaching the subject as a result of changing marriage norms during the decades of the Great Depression and Second World War, providing professional legitimacy to students' quest for information about love, marriage, and sex. Marriage education courses at the college level dated back to the late 1920s, with significant growth appearing in the 1940s; over five hundred colleges offered marriage courses by the end of the 1940s.\(^5\) Not only were such courses a boon to future teachers, but future parents who enrolled in the courses were likely to favor sex education in their children's schools and provide a better foundation for teaching in their homes.\(^5\)

School boards, state legislators, and the U.S. government gave periodic shows of support during the mid-twentieth-century. The District of Columbia's board of education approved sex education in 1943, and the San Francisco school board made a similar move sanctioning human relations and family life courses in 1949.\(^5\) Wisconsin's State Board of Health approved sex education in 1949, and two states—Oregon and Michigan—passed laws during the decade that gave government legitimacy to teaching sex education but did not mandate it.\(^5\) A failed legislative challenge in California in 1947 allowed San Diego and other locales' educators to proceed with their programs.\(^5\) Having created a division of venereal disease within the U.S. Public Health Service during the First World War, the federal government continued to demonstrate interest in the related
tasks of venereal disease prevention and sex education. Especially through its subdivisions concerned with educational policies, the Division of Venereal Disease collaborated with ASHA in bringing greater attention to the problems.\textsuperscript{61} Another source of pride for social hygienists was renowned sex educator Lester A. Kirkendall's appointment as social hygiene consultant and senior specialist in health education—to offer assistance to school systems, teacher-training facilities, and other educational organizations—during World War II.\textsuperscript{62}

By the end of the 1950s, educators could look back over the two previous decades and discover quite a bit of progress. They had collected data and testimony that revealed many of their ideas put into practice. Numerous schools implemented planned programs, parental and public resistance appeared negligible, and careers could be made by promoting sex education or teaching it in the classroom. Even if this generation of students' exposure to sex education was proportionately small, some future parents would have both classroom and their own personal training to assist them in raising the next generation with well-adjusted sex attitudes and knowledge. But toward the end of the 1950s, there was also cause for pessimism, as the apparent consensus among sex educators began to falter. A minority of sex educators began to assert, after decades of research, that premarital sexual intercourse was not always harmful.\textsuperscript{63} Their bold statements revealed fault lines and foreshadowed controversy to come.

Conclusion

Sex education in the 1940s and 1950s appeared in various locations in a decentralized fashion. Building on the leadership of different organizations and interest groups, including social hygiene, home economics, progressive education, parent-
teacher groups, and federal government agencies, a multidimensional program of sex education emerged in sporadic sites across the nation. Various practices and avenues for offering sex education became apparent, publicized among professional educators as well as the general public. The dominant frameworks for teaching about sex that developed during the period were health, family living, and human relations. As social hygiene and character education gave way to health, family living, and human relations education, elements of Progressive (and even older) mentalities persisted. Yet sex education's transformation in the mid-twentieth century nevertheless reveals new views of the family, sexuality, and human relationships in ascendance.

Inspired as they were by social sciences, the era's perspectives on sex and the family did not permeate the schools in a top-down fashion. Rather, surrounding communities and students in particular were instrumental in shaping the parameters of public school sex education. The widespread concerns and occasional demands of outspoken youth fueled educators' initiatives, leading them to take concerted steps toward comprehensive education about sex in mid-twentieth-century US public schools. Whether directly confronting teachers and administrators or indirectly demonstrating their need for information and guidance, girls were critical to the genesis of mid-century programs.

Although it is difficult to imagine a nation preoccupied with national security and suspicious of left-wing causes reacting positively to sex education curricula, it is important to remember that sex education was ultimately about adjustment to adolescent and adult gender roles. Less about sexual acts and more about the nebulous realm of personality and mental health, mid-twentieth-century sex education nevertheless brought
with it unintended consequences. Taking seriously youth’s questions and demands, teachers, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate, instructed young people to be self-aware and critical observers of relationship dynamics.
Notes


During and after the war, a number of schools modeled their sex education curriculum on that offered in Esther Emerson Sweeney and Roy E. Dickerson, eds., *Preinduction Health and Human Relations* (New York: American Social Hygiene Association, 1953) and earlier drafts of the manual. See Roy E. Dickerson, “Pre-Induction Course for High School Students,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 31 (April 1945): 211-16.


“The Matter and Methods of Sex Education,” *Social Hygiene* 2 (October 1916): 573-81, quotation on 574. This is probably evidence of a model of sex education geared toward boys, which declined by mid-century. See also Maurice A. Bigelow, *Sex Education: A Series of Lectures Concerning Knowledge of Sex and Its Relation to Human Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1918).

Maurice A. Bigelow, “The Established Points in Social-Hygiene Education, 1905-1924,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 10 (January 1924): 2-11, quotation on 3. Educators continued to oppose publicly calling a course “sex education,” even when sex information was included and, in professional circles, they used the phrase to describe their work. See,

My use of the term implies this broad definition unless otherwise noted.


Hoyman, Health-Guide Units, v.


Ibid., 65.

Ibid., 67.

See, for example, “Notes on Recent State Activities Relating to Sex Education,” Journal of Social Hygiene 31 (April 1945): 220-27.

Purity reformers deployed a moral and religious approach to social ills earlier in the century, and while social hygiene's messages were laden with Victorian morality, their tendency was to focus on disease. Burnham, "Progressive Era Revolution." Although the ASHA curriculum for preinduction discussed morality, the authors explained that "spiritual health and development" involved "any view of health that regards man as a totality," including religious or philosophical convictions or some combination of the two. Dickerson and Sweeney, *Pre-Induction Manual*, 90.


23 See, for example, [Committee on Intercultural Education,] *We the People: Official Report of the Three-Year Program of the Intercultural Project of the San Diego City Schools* (San Diego, Calif.: San Diego City Schools, 1949).


example, also offered family life education at the senior high school level, in addition to the sex lectures and incidental instruction.


29 Goldberg, "Sex Education in Forty Cities," 444.

30 Lillian L. Biester, William Griffiths, and N. O. Pearce, *Units in Personal Health and Human Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1947); Hoyman, *Health-Guide Units*; Wetherill, *Human Relations Education*; and Benjamin C. Gruenberg, with the assistance of J. L. Kaukonen, *High Schools and Sex Education* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1939). The fourth text that Goldberg mentioned was possibly confused Gruenberg with Baker because their books' titles were so similar; Goldberg listed Gruenberg as author of a title by Baker—the latter probably his intended reference. Baker, *Sex Education in High Schools*.


The poll appeared in a supplement to the September 1949 issue of *Fortune*, devoted to higher education issues. Results from the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion to the same question posed in September 1943 showed a 76 percent approval rating, with 15 percent disapproving and 9 percent undecided. See Mildred Strunk, ed., "The Quarter's Polls," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1949-1950): 709-32, esp. 748.

What About Sex Instruction?" *Nation's Schools* 33 (June 1944): 49.

"Sex Education Has Place in Junior, Senior High Schools," *Nation's Schools* 65 (March 1960): 94. While respondents' comments gave a sense of what some people had in mind for sex education, the endorsement of sex education pertained to the abstract rather than particular curriculum content.


"Parents may be problems in some instances, but more often they are only imagined as opposing any attempts at sex education in the schools." Ewell G. Pigg, "Sex Education in High School Science," Science and Mathematics 41 (December 1941): 851-54.


Especially prominent at the state level were California, Colorado, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C. See National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Forty-Eighth Annual Convention; Mrs. J. W. Brewer, "Social Hygiene Department," Parent-Teacher Courier, January 1916, 17; Mrs. A. A. Weamer, "Armed with Resolution: Social Hygiene
Education in the Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 33 (October 1947): 327-32; and "Notes on Recent State Activities," 222. See also Alma M. Volk, "Rock Island's Program of Sex Education," *School Executive* 65 (May 1946): 53-54, esp. 54; Dykstra, "Wisconsin Educates"; and Cone, "High School Course."


Mildred Morgan, "The Hillsborough Study: A Grass Roots Development of a County-Wide Family Life Program Which Includes Sex Education," unpublished manuscript,
1962, American Social Hygiene Association Papers, Box 12, "Florida–Hillsborough" folder, Social Welfare History Archives, Minneapolis, Minnesota.


Manley, "Where, When, and How?" 22.

By the 1930s, sex education materials were less likely to be labeled obscene. See Constance M. Chen, "The Sex Side of Life": Mary Ware Dennett's Pioneering Battle for Birth Control and Sex Education (New York: New Press, 1996); and Leigh Ann Wheeler, "Rescuing Sex from Prudery and Prurience: American Women's Use of Sex Education as an Antidote to Obscenity, 1925-1932," Journal of Women's History 12 (fall 2000): 173-95.

This type of literature is voluminous, especially for the 1930s. See, for example, Frances Bruce Strain, New Patterns in Sex Teaching: The Normal Sex Interests of Children and Their Guidance from Infancy to Adolescence (New York: Appleton-Century, 1934); Thomas D. Wood, Marion O. Lerrigo, and Thurman B. Rice, Sex Education: A Guide for Parents and Teachers (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1937); Edith Hale Swift, Step by Step in Sex Education (1938; reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1950); and Benjamin C. Gruenberg, "Schools and Sex Education," Child Study, January 1939,


57Noel Keys’s University of California, Berkeley, students—enrolled in his highly popular Youth and Marriage Today course—voted 99 percent in favor of sex education in high school for students age sixteen and up. D. Jennings, “Sex in the Classroom,” *Collier’s*, 15 September 1945, 22-23, 51.


60 The "Tenny Bill" (S.R. 1026) would have limited sex education to senior students and mandated its instruction by a physician only, but with PTA opposition and the House never taking action beyond reporting the bill out of committee, the initiative died. Greta Willis Slater, "An Historical Study of the Social Health Program in the San Diego City Schools, 1937-1966" (master's thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1966), 61-62.

61 Imber, "Analysis of Curriculum Reform," chap. 5; and Moran, Teaching Sex, 73-75.


CHAPTER 2

MID-CENTURY TRAILBLAZERS: THE OREGON METHOD, TOMS RIVER EXPERIMENT, AND SAN DIEGO PIONEERS

While the United States underwent a sexual revolution in the 1920s, the effects of changing social norms were little felt within public schools. During the 1920s, sex education curricula did not reflect changing social and sexual norms, although the increased attention to sex education as a discussion topic no doubt emerged because sex talk was less taboo. What was new in the schools in this decade was not more permissive standards, but rather indication of some interest in educating students about puberty and human reproduction. The number of school officials publicizing their sex education programs remained quite small, and excepting a few outspoken advocates, commitments to sex instruction were at best tentative. Although between 40 and 45 percent of high schools surveyed by the United States Public Health Service in the 1920s offered some form of sex education to their students, schools with very little instruction counted as doing something. Early proponents of sex education in the schools were most likely to find support for their curricula in biology classes, where students were beginning to examine changes in the human body and reproductive processes as part of nature and science.

Not until the mid-1930s—taking cues from the growing movement for marriage education at the college level—did sex education gain prominence in public schools.
expanding beyond the framework of the physical sciences and format of single lectures. Only when sexuality could be discussed in a social or human sciences context did its social dynamics and changing nature move to the forefront of sex education. Research from such fields as sexology, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and psychiatry had reached a larger audience by the 1930s, at which point teachers were in a position to include the relationship between human behavior and sex in their courses. The discovery of sex hormones in the 1920s and 1930s also contributed to a behavioral emphasis in sex-related curricula.

By the late 1930s, however, it was still rare to find school personnel willing to break from the status quo and initiate planned curricula related to sex. Incidental discussion of reproduction and one-time lectures on venereal disease were by far more common than programs conceived to introduce comprehensive education about sex. Only a few brave leaders launched such broad initiatives. In the late 1930s, educators took preliminary steps toward comprehensive sex education in the state of Oregon, in Toms River, New Jersey, and San Diego, California. Prompted by different local events, each of the three initiatives was several years in the making, attracting national publicity by the mid-1940s. Although not the only programs in the spotlight, the three graced the pages of local newspapers, mass-circulation magazines, and scholarly publications alike, making them among the most publicized and familiar nationwide.

While a comparatively small number of public schools began experiments in the classroom, most of the nation engaged in auxiliary sex education activities, some of which were preparatory to offering sex education in the schools. Community forums, institutes, workshops, and teacher training classes, sponsored by social hygiene societies, parent and teacher groups, universities and colleges, and state departments of
health and education, proliferated in the mid-twentieth-century decades. Across the
country—especially in the South, Rocky Mountain states, and New England—parent and
community education programs were a top priority in the 1940s and 1950s, as in
Mississippi's “Education for Responsible Parenthood” and Utah’s “Happy Family Life"
programs.⁷ Researcher John Newton Baker's 1942 survey of sex education in the high
schools of forty-six states found negligible attention to sex education in twenty-seven
states, established courses in school districts that lacked statewide support in nine
states, and programs with state institutional support in ten states. All regions of the
country were represented in each of these three categories, except for the South, where
support for sex education at the state level was lacking in the early 1940s.⁸

This chapter traces the development of programs designed to teach sex
education to youth in schools in Oregon, Toms River, and San Diego, demonstrating the
various ways in which educators approached the project and prioritized their goals. The
three cases represented a range of strategies for sex education that were adopted in
schools nationwide, and although they did not fully cover the gamut of options, they
encompassed the most influential models.⁹ Experiments in classrooms in St. Louis,
Missouri, using radio broadcasts of lectures by a local physician, and areas surrounding
Cleveland, Ohio, involving field trips to the city's health museum to view three-
dimensional models of human anatomy and childbirth, are examples of alternatives to
the three approaches discussed in this chapter.¹⁰ Notwithstanding these Midwestern
educators' innovations, their efforts contained elements of the Oregon, Toms River, and
San Diego models, as did many other programs across the country and a few outside
the United States.¹¹
In the tradition of sex education developed earlier in the century, Oregon began introducing sex in health and science classes in the 1940s, where teachers and curricula framed information about sexual organs and functions within a biological narrative of human reproduction and personal hygiene. In this model designed for older elementary and junior-high sex education, the “facts of life”—a common euphemism for information about sex—were the focus. Educators and administrators employing the “Oregon method” followed the example of the Oregon-produced classroom movie, *Human Growth* (1947), which encouraged boys and girls to discuss puberty, human development, and reproduction with their usual teacher in their ordinary classroom rather than with a specialist or outside lecturer.12

The high school Family Relationships course in Toms River exhibited school personnel's growing interest in human relations within families, and took a second approach to sex education—one that avoided detail about the physiology of sex altogether. Toms River educators spent more time discussing dating, choosing a mate, and childcare with high-school juniors and seniors than revealing what happened on honeymoons or displaying diagrams of sexual organs. Nevertheless, educators understood the Family Relationships course—first taught in 1941—as a form of sex education.

The pioneering program in San Diego embodied a third approach, combining education about procreation and guidance for personal adjustment while exposing students to the physical aspects of sex and dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Beginning in 1942, San Diego educators attempted the broadest curriculum experiment, examining multiple manifestations of sex and gender in several courses between the sixth and twelfth grades, and pairing older methods with more novel techniques, such as
group counseling. By 1947, teachers had developed and conducted what San Diego educators believed to be the first district-wide public school social hygiene program in the United States.¹³

The three curricula shared common features and implications, including unintended and liberating consequences of what often began with intent to preserve the nuclear family.¹⁴ Sex education lessons of the 1940s and 1950s contained both conservative aims and progressive potential. On the one hand, the content of the curricula sometimes reduced sexuality to biological facts; other lessons omitted important details; and ultimately the teaching reinforced heterosexual gender conformity and middle-class standards of morality. On the other hand, and I think more significant, the experiments broke new ground, as they involved officially sanctioned discussion of marriage and sexuality in public school classrooms. Teachers broached subjects that Victorian ways of thinking had deemed adult and impolite, and they often discouraged bodily shame and encouraged diversity of opinion.

**The Oregon Method**

For years educators have sought a method of sex education which would get rid of embarrassment and self-consciousness and bring the subject into the open. The state of Oregon is the first to come up with an answer.¹⁵

Mid-century sex education in Portland, Oregon, reflected the city’s longstanding interest in progressive causes. Responding to the social ills of venereal disease and sexual vice in the early decades of the twentieth century, Oregon social hygiene activists had actively promoted sex education in addition to implementing reactive campaigns.
against disease and prostitution. Established in 1911, the Oregon Social Hygiene Society (OSHS)—like its counterparts in cities across the United States—increasingly focused on educating young people. The OSHS consisted of social reformers who were interested in reducing disease and vice related to sex. Leaders assisted in developing an elementary-school based program, with help from the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA) and federal funding, in three Oregon communities in 1920. Beginning in 1929, Ellis C. Brown, a medical doctor and OSHS member, provided financial assistance to the OSHS, and his will stipulated a continuation of monetary support for reducing sexual ignorance, particularly among youth. OSHS members expected Brown's will to enable their work to continue, as he had suggested in a 1929 letter to the organization when he initiated his financial support of $5,000 per year. Upon their benefactor's death in 1939, OSHS members learned from Brown's lawyer that no more funds would be forthcoming, and the OSHS folded shortly thereafter.

Having regularly sent their executive secretary, Fred B. Messing, into schools during the 1930s, in addition to his conducting community meetings, religious retreats, and conferences, where he lectured about sex, OSHS leaders imagined that Brown's half-million-dollar estate would allow the association to move forward with this work. Moreover, the money would enable Messing to continue counseling young people and their parents at the OSHS office and during community visits. Upon learning that the University of Oregon president would administer the Brown endowment—a stipulation Brown had written into the document—OSHS leaders felt frustrated. University administration was a poor choice, they believed, because young people between the
ages of fourteen and twenty-five not attending school most needed attention. They feared that educational efforts would remain confined to the college population, who they presumed needed it least.22

Enhancing OSHS leaders’ sense of entitlement to Brown’s estate was the belief that they were doing critical work. Endorsement came from the director of secondary education for the state of Oregon, high school principals, deans of girls, students, and parents.23 A February 1938 newspaper article authored by a Forest Grove High School student expressed teenagers’ frustration over the lack of sex instruction at their school. “Dr. Fred B. Messing, who has been speaking on the subject to various local civic groups, has made a practice of hiring out to schools... This would perhaps not be completely satisfactory, but it is a step of progress. School officials are seriously considering the matter of securing the services of Dr. Messing, and will probably decide according to the opinion of the school on the question.”24 This article, along with correspondence indicating that 585 Washington High School students in Portland had made written statements in favor of the lectures, reveal laudatory attention to the social hygiene society’s work.25 After ten years of lecturing across Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, the society had more than thirty-eight hundred favorable statements from students.26

The social hygiene society’s grassroots approach to sex education did not survive the loss of Brown’s support, nor could it overcome the approbation of the county medical association and the city health officer. Multnomah County Medical Society members maintained that the “education of school-children with respect to sex, as with other phases of health education which involve the judicious interpretation of medical knowledge, should be carried on by or under the direction of graduates in medicine,
rather than lay persons." In Portland City Schools, they insisted, sex education must "be under the strict control of the City Health Officer and the Board of Directors of School District No.1." The social hygiene society, however, lacked medical credentials. "In the course of our conference with representatives of the Oregon Social Hygiene Society," read a document from the medical society's committee on school health, "it was evident that one of the difficulties arises from the fact that the Society has no established relationship with the organized medical profession." Medical professionals thus pulled rank on the reformers affiliated with OSHS.

Lawyers interpreted Brown's will to create a new entity, the E. C. Brown Trust, thereby attaching the university clout and abundant resources to the project of sex education. Trust leaders quickly established a formal relationship with the medical profession, distinguishing it from the OSHS. Distancing their organization from the social hygiene reform movement, trust directors shared the county medical society's opposition to having laypersons give "emergency" or occasional talks to young people in schools, clubs, or individual conferences. Medical lectures were not at first ruled out, provided that the lecturer was an informed physician. But ultimately the trust moved toward weaving sex education into the regular curriculum. Such a goal was not entirely new, but instead harkened back to the OSHS's efforts to implement a regular biology curriculum including sex education. As explained in a 1928 summary of the Oregon biology innovation, "It was hoped, indeed, that a course in biology, under the leadership of competent teachers, and infused with the spirit of science, would prove to be an effective way of providing for sex education in the school curriculum." Although the debate over how the Brown money was to be spent had pitted medical professionals against reformers, the two groups had much in common.

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In accord with Brown’s stipulation that the trust administrator would be the University of Oregon president, Donald M. Erb took charge in 1939 and launched the trust’s activities in 1941, as the nation was entering the Second World War. At first unfamiliar with the social hygiene agenda, President Erb, an economist, undertook a study of the literature on social hygiene and discerned that the point of sex education was to educate youth about reproduction. Considering the social hygiene movement’s “emotionalism” outdated and undesirable, Erb wanted the trust to devote itself to a more “scientific atmosphere and setting.” Accordingly, he selected as trust director a medical doctor, Portland’s City Health Officer Adolph Weinzirl—notable as the leading opponent of OSHS’s sex education efforts—who served between 1941 and 1948.

Weinzirl’s original opposition to persons without medical training offering sex instruction in the schools waned, but he remained committed to “scientific” approaches. By the mid-1940s, national social hygiene leaders routinely discouraged medical lectures about sex, as did educational leaders not connected to the social hygiene movement. The trust instituted training programs and provided appropriate literature to teachers and administrators interested in sex education, responding in part to the trend away from reliance on medical doctors. Erb and Weinzirl’s medical and public health approach to sex education had lasting implications, even though they had joined the national trend toward instruction by regular teachers. Trust leaders sought new methods of conveying sex education in the classroom, but they still understood the proper classroom focus as founded on objectivity. The outcome of their quest was the production of the movie Human Growth, which offered a solution for reticent and reluctant teachers and administrators who lacked medical expertise.
Financial and legal incentives prompted the creation of the film. Trust officials learned in April 1944 that Brown’s estate was generating large revenues for the trust, exceeding their expenditures—thus making it imperative that the trust undertake a larger project to retain nonprofit status. While the idea for the movie was still in the works, the Oregon state legislature passed a law mandating physical and health education statewide, further enabling the work of the trust and paving the way for *Human Growth*’s success. Social hygiene education was not made compulsory by this law, contrary to the assumptions of numerous correspondents who wrote to the state superintendent of public instruction. But sex education advocates were nevertheless inspired. Following the law’s passage, the Brown Trust published in bulk a manual for health education in secondary grades, which implicitly endorsed sex education by recommending units on social hygiene. Secondary teachers throughout the state received the manual as evidence of how teachers could comply with the new statute.

In 1946, Weinzirl and University of Oregon President Harry K. Newburn moved forward on the development of a sex education motion picture, altering their plans midway through the process for pedagogical rather than financial or legal reasons. According to a newspaper account, a New York film studio produced a movie script, but because it continued to emphasize animal reproduction, trust officials rejected the New York version and commissioned a local psychologist to start anew. Known for his filmmaking work for the Navy during World War II, University of Oregon psychologist Lester F. Beck used his experience and expertise to create a film that focused on human reproduction. By 1947, Beck had written the movie script for *Human Growth*, and the trust had commissioned Hollywood actor Eddie Albert to produce the movie. With professional actors portraying the adults, seventh-grade students from a Los Angeles
classroom served as the cast. Completed in fall 1947, the movie circulated widely in Oregon, and by early 1948 it enjoyed national publicity and demand.

Popular magazines and local newspapers gave favorable coverage of the first version of *Human Growth.*38 “The film, ‘Human Growth,’ candidly presents the long-touchy subject, sex education, as educators and social hygiene supporters have long sought—objectively, with a simple scientific vocabulary for replacement of gutter terminology, and for the first time, from the human point of view rather than in the terms of other animal life,” an Oregon journalist wrote.39 Calling it an “epoch-making movie,” a writer for *Life* maintained that young viewers “by their serious interest and response, had proved the film successful,” while *Time* indicated that the movie’s content was “casual” and “decent.”40 Adding to its acclaim, revisions of the state health education manual recommended use of *Human Growth* in the schools, and spokespersons for the state board of education boasted about the innovative movie in response to inquiries from across the nation.41

*Human Growth* became a vehicle and model for sex education in classrooms in Oregon and across the country. Expanding beyond Weinzirl’s vision of providing facts, the film brought psychology into sex education. Influenced by the trend toward family life education, Beck and others broadened the school’s role to highlight personal and emotional aspects of sex in society. In other words, sex education touched on mental health and social development as well as physical well being.42 As was the case with the social hygiene movement, the Oregon method of the 1940s rested on Protestant ideals, depicting small families.43 Yet the film did not appeal to fear or other emotions that social hygienists had purportedly used to steer youth’s behavior, preferring instead to emphasize scientific authority. What made the state’s approach stand out were the
considerable financial and institutional resources behind the trust, the fact that the 
production of few sex education films previously had been attempted, and the 
misunderstanding that sex education was compulsory in Oregon.

The most publicized aspect of sex education in mid-century Oregon, the 
screening of *Human Growth* typically took place in seventh-grade health classes. The 
explicit goal of the film, according to the teachers' guide, was to "develop wholesome 
feelings concerning the subject matter" of reproduction and growth. According to 
promotional materials, the trust sold 1,353 prints of the film, and more than two million 
school children viewed the movie's first edition between 1948 and 1962.44 Twenty 
minutes in length, the movie featured four scenes. First, it displayed a white, middle-
class pupil's home on the evening prior to a classroom's screening of *Human Growth*. 
The second scene showed the teacher and classroom, with students from a preview 
committee (who had screened the movie in advance) highlighting key points in the film. 
The lengthiest portion of *Human Growth* exhibited these pupils learning about 
reproduction from an animated "film within a film," and the final scene returned to the 
classroom where the teacher fielded questions from the students, based on the movie 
they had just watched.45 Integral to the use of this film in the classroom was a question-
and-answer period following the movie, led by students' health or science teacher.

Its creators intended *Human Growth* as a tool for teaching sixth- to ninth-grade 
students, with parental permission, about sexual development and reproduction in 
mixed-gender classrooms. Equally important to hesitant school administrators, teachers, 
and parents, the movie demonstrated how such subjects could be discussed among 
children. Thousands of parents viewed the film at Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) 
meetings and screenings organized by the trust, and surveys repeatedly demonstrated
near unanimous consent for showing the movie to adolescents. The popularity of the movie resulted in part from its producers' recognition that objective facts could be presented in a gentle and comforting way. Trust officials were aware, as the author of Oregon's health education curriculum Howard Stanley Hoyman phrased it in 1953, that to proceed using the "narrow, factual type of sex education would have placed Oregon schools in an untenable position." Relying on "an obsolete educational principle—that schools exist merely to teach facts" was indefensible; instead, schools' purpose was "to help change the behavior and guide the personal development of boys and girls—not merely to impart specific factual information." Avoiding "explicit problems such as the sex drive," however, the Oregon method exchanged community sanction for omission of relevant information.

Sex education through Human Growth was only the most visible and nationally broadcast part of a larger, integrated curriculum of health education. Sex instruction as well as information about venereal diseases (in a unit on communicable disease) and such topics as mental health appeared at other grade levels in various Oregon schools. Students in a 1947 senior girls class in Bend, Oregon, for example, discussed "questions on premarital sex relations, premarital physical examinations, petting, necking (the girls call it 'snuzzing'), how to get the boy friend to meet a girl's parents, the value of a kiss, and a few questions about engagement behavior from girls who were planning to get married when school was out." Although the Oregon method was not reducible to a single movie, Human Growth was what made the state curriculum unique. Other aspects of the curriculum, including questions and discussions about boy-girl relations and a focus on mental health during adolescence, were remarkably similar to lessons at other schools.

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Trained in education and previously the University of Oregon registrar, Curtis Avery became director of the trust in 1948 and contributed to the declining significance of medical science in Oregon sex education. During his tenure, Avery guided the trust to deal with both the science and psychology of sex and gender. He concentrated his first years on bringing together sex educators for conferences and networks and publishing the *Coordinator*, a journal for Oregon teachers, parents, and family life education advocates. Participation in local, regional, and national dialogues led to greater emphasis on family life in the trust's materials, especially through the sex education development programs that the trust undertook in the early 1950s in three areas across the state. Treating sex education as a subset of family life education, Avery and his colleague, Oregon State University family living expert Lester A. Kirkendall, argued that there was more to sex education than teaching about human reproduction. Instruction about sex, they concurred, included "information and attitudinal development with respect to sex roles, and their psychological, social, and economic implications."

From the beginning, Oregon social hygiene advocates and educators had embedded their values into sex education, and although there was a "facts of life" emphasis in the material, especially in *Human Growth*, morals and emotions were never absent. "Genital education" with a strict focus on anatomy might have been an easier approach, claimed Hoyman, but he and other proponents of sex education in Oregon maintained that such "short cuts in providing sex education for modern youth" were inadequate. As discussion of family and relationships took precedence in sex education, sexuality remained relevant, if understated, in publicity about Oregon's method of sex education. Discussions of dating behavior, for example, involved questions of sexual expression and limitations. Based on his research about young

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college men and his avid interest in the findings of Alfred C. Kinsey's research team, Kirkendall observed mounting evidence of sexual activity among youth during his career. In response, Kirkendall eventually made a case against the condemnation of premarital sexual relations and was a cofounder of the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), a liberal sex education organization established in 1964.54 While in the 1960s SIECUS took positions on such topics as birth control and premarital sex unimaginable in the 1940s and 1950s, Oregon's initial steps in sex education nevertheless paved the way for this bold movement.55

As the University of Oregon was in the process of administering statewide sex education efforts, the chair of the ASHA committee on education, Maurice A. Bigelow, wrote to former OSHS executive secretary Messing in 1943. Bigelow inquired about how the medical college was handling the task and shared second-hand information that Weinzirl was "not very successful in lecturing to lay audiences, such as parents and teachers." Simultaneously seeking information and offering advice, Bigelow wrote "I want to know what is actually being done by schools under the direction of their own officials. That is the only kind of social hygiene work which is permanent.56 Ultimately, trust leaders had arrived at the same conclusion about sustaining sex education, and while Human Growth facilitated the entry of sex education into the curricula, it was Oregon educators—no longer beholden to the medical profession or the social hygiene movement—who adapted and institutionalized curricula across the state. And it was Oregon students' questions and concerns that provided the content of the question-and-answer sections of the film and accompanying book, modeling for other schools and youth groups how to teach adolescents about sex.
In class the other day we were discussing the meaning of the word “success.” . . . One seventeen-year old boy remarked quietly, “I'll consider myself a success if I'm a good husband and father and have a home where we can raise children to be real men and women.” Whatever your idea of success is, you will be truly successful only if your personal relationships are reasonably warm and satisfying.57

Toms River, New Jersey, was a small town that grew rapidly during the middle decades of the twentieth century, as industry and highways began to permeate the resort town on the Jersey shore.58 No longer a community of chicken farmers and small business owners, Toms River confronted new populations and new challenges to the status quo. Especially vulnerable during this period of change were young people, who, upon graduation, had received little or no training for making adult decisions about money, jobs, love, and their futures. Concerned about juvenile delinquency and the growing incidence of divorce, community leaders attempted to reform society locally by targeting young people through the schools. To address such concerns, Edgar M. Finck, superintendent between 1919 and 1948, convinced the Dover Township Board of Education to support an experiment in family life education in the late 1930s.

Although popular in the predominantly white population of Toms River, Finck had aroused consternation among the black community in the 1920s.59 He oversaw the creation of a separate and unequal "opportunity school" for black students from Berkeley Township and Seaside Park Borough—“tuition pupils” who were temporarily attending Toms River schools. Black families boycotted the one-room school (with no indoor
plumbing) and embarked on a legal challenge and appeal to the governor, assisted by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In 1927, the state commissioner of education ruled that the segregated school for black pupils was unlawful. The Dover school board responded with a refusal to admit Berkeley Township elementary pupils, and, in 1927, South Toms River became a separate borough and school district. The failure to integrate probably came as no surprise for the African Americans involved, given that Klansmen in neighboring Lakewood used the high school facilities for changing into their robes, and Toms River KKK initiation ceremonies in August 1923 attracted thousands. As a graduate student sympathetic to Finck wrote in his 1957 study of the school, racial segregation was "the most unfortunate incident" of the superintendent's first ten years, but not one that tarnished his reputation.

Following this public relations debacle, Finck's efforts to transform public school education to meet students' vocational and personal needs attracted virtually no controversy. His success was attributable to the topics he chose, most notably family life education. Finck worked with young, widowed English teacher and Toms River High School graduate Elizabeth S. Force to institute a course that at first glance seemed similar to home economics. Based on an examination of subjects promoting healthy family life and sound interpersonal relations, the coed course of study responded to young men's and young women's concerns about popularity and social acceptance, emphasizing adult responsibilities. Although they did not conceptualize the discussions as about "sexuality," boy-girl relations during youth were prominent in the lesson plans and course workbook. Relying on peer and community standards—rather than scientific research—as the measure of appropriate behavior, Force and her colleagues shaped a sex education method quite unlike social hygiene efforts to impart knowledge, shape
attitudes, and control vice. Whereas Oregon's film concentrated on teaching younger adolescents the facts of growing up, Toms River's curriculum included few facts and instead encouraged older adolescents' examination of values surrounding gender roles and sexual behavior. When the Toms River class viewed *Human Growth* in the 1950s, it was a way to address sex education for children, discussed in the context of parenting.  

Family Relationships, a course originally designed in 1939 and first taught in 1941, placed Toms River in a position of national prominence for what was called "family life education." A semirural area along the coast, Toms River and Dover Township were home to a single high school until the early 1950s. The 1942 Toms River High School graduating class was the first set of students with the option of enrolling in Force's one-semester elective course. A group of approximately twenty to twenty-five junior- and senior-year students—"representing a variety of social, religious, economic and cultural backgrounds," according to Force—gathered in a space decorated to resemble a living room in the high school's vocational building. There they discussed topics related to gender roles and touched on such aspects of sexuality as dating, necking, petting, and what getting engaged and marrying entailed. Their discussions were prompted by a workbook, *Ten Topics toward Happier Homes*, that each student completed for the course. Because of enrollment patterns during the war years, when fewer teenage boys attended high school, three times as many girls as boys took Force's class. Although the numbers had evened out by 1946, the experiment had its start in a predominantly female classroom environment. Like much coed instruction in sex and family life, the course instructor was a woman.  

The origins of the Toms River program shared features with Oregon efforts in first gaining community support. Having cooperated with the school board on
“opportunity” schooling in the past, Finck approached his school board colleagues and testified in favor of the course. Whereas Oregon educators could display their film as evidence of their plan, Finck presented the concept of the Toms River curriculum as a verbal description, which allowed him to be evasive about the significance or relevance of sex. Like Finck, Force was well known in the area, and the community trusted her leadership. Furthermore, Family Relationships joined Social Behavior, Economic Competence, and Consumer Education as courses that would make school more relevant to students—especially given a student body of which only 3 percent pursued postsecondary education. Not only knowledge but also “the values of strong homes and families in the American way of life” were essential to “fortifying American Democracy,” as the promotional brochure for Family Relationships pupil workbooks indicated.

Toms River educators, like Oregon educational leaders, grew to understand their curriculum as a method of ensuring adolescent mental health. But whereas Human Growth’s producers mainly intended to ease adolescents’ concerns about the physical aspects of puberty and teach them that sex was not a taboo subject for the classroom, the Toms River class had ambitions that reflected their assumptions about older teenagers. They hoped to enlighten juniors and seniors about how to overcome social problems and prepare them to face adult futures. Significant factors influencing mental health, according to a New Jersey health education guide, included the socioeconomic background of the student, whether or not the family was “broken,” brothers and sisters, the adolescent’s birth order, and the family’s connection to “local culture.” Furthermore, the state guidebook advised teachers that “the importance of television, radio, movies, comic books, magazines, and the like, must not be overlooked. . . . They color the
adolescent’s thinking, influence his behavior, and contribute to the formation and
development of his sense of values.” Family Relationships offered to assist youth in
making sense of all these factors and messages.

Joining other commentators, Toms River educators denounced the changes that
took place in family structures during the 1940s and 1950s. A local increase in divorce
rates and a belief that two parents were essential to meeting children’s needs motivated
the course’s focus on creating stable families, as Force and Finck pointed out in their
manual for teachers and administrators. “Our course in Family Relationships is, then, a
frank attack on the divorce evil. Concurrently, it is an attack on juvenile delinquency,
much of which originates in broken homes.” Temptations for teenagers—associated
with the allure of motion picture romance and the newly opened local drive-in movie
theater—made such guidance timely for Toms River. But in the context of the Cold
War, I would argue, it was the seductiveness of capitalist consumption and values,
rather than the specter of communism, that threatened to undermine family order and
stability in Toms River.

While medical models originally guided educators in Oregon, the vehicle for
Toms River more often resembled the marketplace. Arguing that there was no single
way to handle the topic of sex, the guidebook’s authors suggested that successful
programs’ essential features included an examination of community needs, in essence
an examination of the market in which one would conduct the experiment. Force and
Finck likewise called for personnel with an ability to convey “proper attitudes and
ideals.” “Proper,” with its Victorian connotations, no doubt referred to middle-class
values, those appropriate to such professionals as Force and Finck. In addition to the
middle-class etiquette and values offered in such companion classes as Social Behavior

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and Consumer Education, the Family Relationships course clarified for youth how to approach marriage and the family with democratic ideals and status consciousness, key features of middle-class family living.

More important than educational credentials in selecting a teacher for family life education was ability as a salesperson. In addition to exhibiting appropriate demeanor and values to the class, the Family Relationships teacher had an obligation to be a "salesman, not necessarily a super-salesman, but an effective one," according to Force and Finck. Teachers needed to "sell" their course—its concern about family matters and lack of "one correct answer"—to their students, and the guidebook urged teachers to make the course relevant for all students, regardless of their "ages, sexes, backgrounds, [and] attitudes." Thus the democratic and free-market approach to family living permitted a range of voices—but in a middle-class community such as Toms River, where middle-class students were the norm, the prospect of a free-for-all expression of ideas was less threatening than it was elsewhere. The teachers' guide accordingly advised teachers when the topic of dating arose in the classroom: "Do more listening than talking! Keep ears and mind and heart open! Guidance and standards are more likely to be accepted if they come from the group than if you pronounce them. Youth is likely to accept youth's standards; it is not so likely to accept adult standards." Educators in Oregon never advised teachers to defer to youth standards, and in part the difference between the two agendas is explained by Toms River's relative homogeneity, the school's lesser emphasis on facts, and the older age of the students addressed.

In spite of broad parental support statewide for sex education, estimated at 81 percent in 1951, Toms River school authorities were reluctant to move forward quickly. While Force claimed that she handled information about sex on an individual and as-
needed basis with her students, the Toms River curriculum did not include a unit on human reproduction. A journalist writing in 1948 maintained that "sex instruction is not given in the course, even though the students would like to have it, because the parents of the community aren't ready yet for such an 'advanced' classroom attitude. But individual advice on sexual and all other problems can be had, on request, in special consultations."84 Most newspaper and magazine articles at the end of the 1940s clarified that parental permission was required for personal conferences or referrals to further information or community resources related to sex.85 But the use of Human Growth in the 1950s in Toms River illustrates that sex was not omitted from the classroom; rather than a discussion about marital sexuality, however, students discussed how to teach children about puberty and reproduction. Screening a film in high school designed for sixth-grade students was unlikely to raise eyebrows.

Sexual intercourse and reproduction were excluded from the original family life curriculum in Toms River, and sex-related questions were cast as individual problems rather than group needs. Like the Brown Trust, which had abandoned the social hygiene method of personal counseling for young people in the late 1930s, Toms River educators downplayed personal consultations in their methods. Such individualized services could be obtained elsewhere, through guidance departments in schools, churches and synagogues, or various social service agencies in the community. Instead, Force and other teachers emphasized problem-solving skills in a variety of areas, including preparation and requirements for marriage, myths and realities of married life, self-evaluation of marriage potential, rights and responsibilities of family members, economic matters in marriage, dating, engagement, marriage ceremonies and vows,
living together, and parental responsibilities. Not above using gimmicks to make the sell to youth, Force gave units what she called “intriguing” titles, such as “Happiness versus Hokum” and “What Are You Doing Tonight?”

Opportunities for discussions about sex education in the Toms River model of family life education arose in several places, including the attention to teaching children about sex. Although Toms River educators lacked associations with social hygienists, they deferred to medical professionals only on occasion, such as for the unit on engagement. This unit posed a single question about physical preparation for marriage, advising a visit to the family doctor to assess the individuals’ health. The teachers’ guide indicated that physicians could become a source of sex information, and teachers might choose to invite one to make a class presentation. Force and Finck emphasized, however, that teachers must “brief him first,” presumably to ensure that the doctor’s information was appropriate to the audience and did not undermine other messages in the curriculum. Perhaps such briefings ensured minimal attention to sex, as Force mentioned that doctors who visited the class usually responded to students’ questions, on such subjects as “obesity, acne, diet, use of alcohol and tobacco, nervousness, [and] the effect of radiation on the next generation.”

The Family Relationships workbook, and a textbook based on the course plan, never covered the specifics of reproduction, at least in part because these were older teenagers who were presumed to have learned the facts (or misinformation) about reproduction at an earlier age. Instead, the curriculum focused on the concerns young people had about getting along with their families and peers—especially ideas and conduct appropriate to becoming adults, finding a mate, and raising one’s own family. They learned only incidentally about such subjects as venereal disease, which emerged
during discussion of legal requirements for marriage. Family Relationships was a training
ground for teenage boys and girls to learn about gender and sexual expression together.
According to Force, sex was "a thread running through all life and therefore essential for
our consideration. Physical aspects of sex, [the planning committee] agreed, could not
be isolated from the emotional, social and spiritual life of an individual. We did not
devote special blocks of time to this but took up issues related to sex as they naturally
arose. Our consideration of these matters was thoughtful and frank. We used films,
brochures and books to meet various maturity levels."90

Despite the fact that Force later authored a textbook based on Toms River,
Family Relationships was not conceived as a "textbook" course but one built around the
course workbook, popular periodicals, movies, and guest speakers.91 Force encouraged
students to conduct mini-surveys of community opinion and interviews with older friends,
neighbors, and family members. She provided students access to copies of newspapers
(New York Times and New York Herald Tribune) and periodicals (Harper's, Atlantic
Monthly, Saturday Review, and Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social
Science), as well as items from popular magazines to serve as "readers" for the course,
wherein students might find articles on divorce trends or youth problems, and pertinent
advertisements.92 Conscious that the study of family relationships was not an exact
science, the teachers' guide to the course workbook advised flexibility with students.
Most questions posed had no right or wrong answers, and Force claimed that she
evaluated students' work in terms of the thoughtfulness of the response.93

Toms River advocates of family life education attempted to estimate the course's
effectiveness, measuring specifically their goal of reducing divorce rates as well as
evaluating the mental health implications of the course.94 In September 1947, they
conducted a survey of all pupils who had completed the course. Among the replies were seventy-five students who had married in their first few years after graduation, admittedly a time during which fewer marriages would have faltered. They found that "exactly none" of these former students were divorced. "At the national rate of one divorce for every three marriages, we might have expected 24 divorces," they wrote. Knowledge of no terminated marriages emboldened Force and Finck to give Family Relationships credit for "tangible results." Notwithstanding the likelihood of divorces in the future, they felt that "it is hardly likely" that divorces among their former students "will ever approach the national rate." With such optimism, Force left for New York City in 1957 to work for the ASHA committee on education, and Toms River High School continued to offer Family Relationships as an elective.

After a decade of instruction, Force commented that a "mental health emphasis" had become more prominent in how they taught the optional course in Family Relationships. From the outset, course planners felt that information about sexual relations was less urgent for older teenagers than immediate preparation for finding a mate and making oneself into a desirable marriage partner, as well as fostering realistic expectations for future roles. In the process of offering the course during the 1940s, however, Force noted a shift in focus. Whereas initially the class had emphasized "the importance of mutual interest, of common social, economic, cultural, and religious background to happy marriage," students discovered contradictions with their observations of actual marriages and determined that similarities were not the most important factors. Thus Force argued that mental health had become the primary
emphasis, as Toms River educators responded to the needs of their student market and attempted to shape their attitudes and personalities, in hopes of increasing the potential for future family successes.

San Diego Pioneers

It was revealing to find that [parents] were anxious to overcome their prejudices and ignorance about sex. This experience was so enlightening to us and so buoyant that it spurred us on to the development of a school program that is said to be [one of] the most extensive and widely accepted school programs ever developed.99

Evolving from a vacation and retirement area to an urban industrial and war production center, San Diego experienced major growth during the 1940s and 1950s and faced dramatic social change.100 As elsewhere, new faces and large crowds added to the temptations, such as popular amusements, that seemed to lure youth down the wrong track. The presence of single military men and blue-collar workers exacerbated fears about the safety of girls and young women. As was the case in other West Coast cities, San Diego police officers perpetrated racial violence against Mexican American and African American youth in 1943 in what were called “zoot suit’ incidents.”101 Racial tensions only added to the sense of social change during the period, as the war saw an increase in the city’s African American population and concern about protecting national borders.102

In her letter to parents, Logan School principal Martha Farnum premised sex education lessons, beginning in 1943, on dramatic demographic transformations occurring in San Diego as the United States became involved in the war and the city
became inundated with military personnel and factory workers. San Diego was no longer a small town, and, Famum noted, “training and protecting children is complicated by the presence of so many strangers (war workers and service men), by over-crowded housing conditions, by inadequate recreational facilities, [and] by decreased parental supervision due to war work.”

Exacerbating these social issues during the mid-1940s were pervasive racial discrimination within such city institutions as the police force and recreational facilities, and, following the war, the decline of employment as an estimated 3,200 black people worked for the government or the war industries, particularly Consolidated Aircraft.

Describing the unprecedented work being done in San Diego’s pioneering sex education program, a Ladies Home Journal article conveyed how youth’s stories inspired the curriculum. One such girl, “Maria,” was an example of what concerned administrators and teachers. Maria was “from a district of very poor Mexican immigrant families, where both parents are often forced to work, and where barriers of language and superstition—not to mention the extremely early age of maturity of Mexican girls, sometimes as early as eight years—make the illegitimacy rate among grade-school girls a serious problem.” Labeled “boy crazy,” twelve-year-old Maria wished she had a steady boyfriend, and, according to school authorities, was “out of hand” and “headed for plenty of trouble.” Like other girls in trouble in San Diego, Maria was not “sexually awakened”; the article maintained instead that many pregnant girls did not have enough knowledge “to avoid the situation.” Confronting the dire circumstances facing girls in San Diego who allegedly lacked parental supervision, familial affection, and information about sex, San Diego educators took a comprehensive approach to sex and human relations.
In a city rife with racial tension, de facto segregation of African Americans and Mexican Americans in the city's public schools led administrators to engage the problems of the new social order differently in various neighborhoods and schools. Educators devised curricula to aid pupils in their transition from elementary to junior high school and from junior to senior high school, important markers in adolescent development and passage into adulthood. Working in committees and in close collaboration with nurses, teachers, PTA members, and civic organization leaders as well as national leaders in sex education, the director of health education for San Diego City Schools launched an impressive curriculum. Although principles behind the Oregon method and the Toms River experiment in family life education appeared in San Diego's curriculum plans, city school officials attempted a more thorough training in various aspects of growing up.

At first concentrating on adult education, educational leaders began implementing sex education training during the 1930s. As early as 1928, San Diego City Schools Board of Education member Vesta C. Muehleisen had written to the ASHA to inquire about national accomplishments and methods of sex education. In conjunction with the district's adult education departments, the ninth district of the California Congress of Parents and Teachers, which included San Diego, laid the groundwork for offering sex education in the schools. They began in the mid-1930s by offering parents—primarily PTA mothers—opportunities to improve their understanding of sex. Chair of the ninth district Social Hygiene Committee, Mrs. J. W. Brewer, coordinated parent "study circles" and gave talks to public audiences upon request. Brewer's observations, based on conversations with mothers, were that parents wanted to know "the correct way to teach sex facts to children" in an honest fashion with the proper
vocabulary. Mothers were especially concerned about "repeated sex crimes against children, the causes, the effects and the remedies." Also drawing adult attention was a series of "family relations" conferences in San Diego, led by the famed director of the Institute for Family Relations in Los Angeles, Paul Popenoe, beginning in 1936.

Only in the late 1930s—after educators and other professionals had established a public dialogue among adults about sex education—did the idea of conducting sex education in public schools become viable. The ninth district's health committee announced that during the 1937-1938 school year, doctors would be available to give talks on sex education to parents; the committee sent letters to each local PTA, and PTA leader Evelyn L. Dowdy reprinted the letter in an article in the ninth-district magazine, the Parent-Teacher Courier. Urging PTA members to "let your president know of your interest in sex education," Dowdy averred that readers "should be especially interested in this timely subject," as it would be added to the "modern school curriculum in the near future." It was PTA parents' responsibility to "be progressive" and enlightened about their children's education, according to the author. Several months later, high school sociology teacher William J. Lyons presented a further entreaty in favor of school sex education: "very little is being done to teach the social phases of sex in general"—a situation Lyons lamented—"which would include the development of proper mental attitudes."

By the early 1940s, educators, administrators, and PTA leaders had prepared community members for the sex education experiment. They had invited parents to forums, posing the question "Should Sex Education Be Taught in the Public Schools?" G. Gage Wetherill, a medical doctor and director of health education for the San Diego City school district, usually led such discussions, and he also made appearances at local..."
PTA meetings to brief parents and earn their approval for the curriculum. The PTAs of at least two schools voted to approve the course before it was offered. Judging by attention to child psychology at PTA meetings and in their publications, parents were very concerned about children's "mental hygiene," and therefore wanted to learn what school experts considered normal and abnormal behavior in children.

Convinced of their work's legitimacy and fueled by positive reception at community forums, Wetherill seems to have worried little about opposition to sex education. Although in San Diego, he told readers of the Journal of School Health in 1960, "consensus always turned out in favor of instituting sex education in the schools," others might not be so fortunate. Perhaps realizing its potential for failure elsewhere or that times had changed in the intervening decades, Wetherill stated that he did not recommend San Diego's public forum approach. In San Diego's experience, he claimed, the school only encountered dissent from unenlightened folks who were eventually won over to support sex education.

San Diego educators adopted strategies similar to Toms River's marketing scheme, and they also strategically used medical influence. Working in favor of the forums, Wetherill argued, was the fact that doctors and nurses who commanded the community's respect conducted the public discussions. Having "sampled the readiness in a number of areas," they "built some background in the right places": namely PTA groups and civic organizations. Yet such campaigning could prove exhausting or devastating for sex educators attempting to launch a new program.

Among the pedagogical choices San Diego educators made was the integration of sex and family life education—what they termed "human relations education"—across the general school curricula in the 1950s. Wetherill's evaluation of the Stephen Kearney...
Junior-Senior High School curriculum in the 1940s had revealed that human relations education appeared in biology, home economics, general science, physiology, hygiene, social problems, physical education, mathematics of personal bookkeeping, social studies, and English. Further steps were taken in the 1950s, as courses integrated material related to sex without major fanfare or requests for permission from parents, emphasizing personal growth and interpersonal relationships. Some tenth-grade English courses adopted the title “Personal and Social Adjustment to Living” in the early 1950s, catering class discussion to “problems which students are facing, and which therefore interest them.” Such concerns included self-understanding, getting along with others, and establishing social relations. Along the same lines, San Diego High School English department head Ruth Weis prepared and made available to San Diego teachers a new “life-adjustment English guide . . . , offering practical suggestions for dealing with specific problems encountered in the teaching of English.” In home economics courses—offered over six consecutive years of junior and senior high school—pupils focused “primarily on the improvement of the individual as a member of a family and of the society in which she lives.”

It was school personnel who regularly had contact with the students—most notably the school nurse, Viola I. Lampe—who devised the curriculum guide for the sixth-grade social hygiene course. “Growing Up,” as the lessons were called, helped students deal with the onset of puberty. As Wetherill explained, school officials chose to introduce students to sex education, beginning with an introduction to the “biology of reproduction, plus only a few of the more basic concepts of family life education, because we found these to be the areas of greatest interest at this level.” It might seem ironic that sex education, without overbearing emphasis on the family, was deemed
appropriate for San Diego youth in the early stages of puberty; yet educators felt that basic tenets of reproductive knowledge needed to precede the practical advice that family life education offered. "It was useless," Wetherill argued, "to try to teach the total broad concept of family life education before satisfying the curiosities concerning reproduction and the usual sex interests and misconceptions so common in the thinking and discussions of children at this stage in development." Clearing up misinformation—or substituting reliable sources of knowledge for peer or street education—was a crucial motivator of the San Diego curricula. Although the context was different from Oregon's movie, allusions to the family were likewise common in the curricula.

San Diego schools first implemented social hygiene education to classes of sixth-grade girls in May 1942 at Logan Elementary School. Fifteen additional elementary schools offered the lessons in the following year. The Logan school was located in a predominantly African American and lower-income section of the urban school district, and the community's girls seemed to school officials in special need of education—as Maria's story, among others, had suggested. An interracial neighborhood, Logan Heights was one of few places in the city where youth of color could participate in activities, visit recreational facilities, and walk the streets with little fear of discrimination or discomfort. While schools with large percentages of children of color were thought to be less prestigious, African Americans in San Diego, according to one survey, nonetheless had confidence in the school system during the 1940s. Experiencing greater social mobility than African Americans, some San Diego Mexican American
families during the 1940s and 1950s were able to gain access to white neighborhoods and professional jobs; however, many remained in such integrated areas as Logan Heights and the city's outlying areas.\textsuperscript{128}

Coordinated by the school's female principal and nurse, and supported by Wetherill, the social hygiene program sought to alleviate female pupils' ignorance about their bodies, especially regarding menstruation and physical hygiene.\textsuperscript{129} After launching the program for girls, school personnel initiated classes for boys the following summer, apparently prompted by parents' eagerness to have personal hygiene instruction for boys as well as girls. An adult leader from the San Diego Boys' Club took charge of teaching the boys.\textsuperscript{130} Teachers and community leaders' fears of urban transformation shaped their view of what was best in terms of children's welfare, and possibly made the school's role in educating children of color more urgent in white educators' minds. Prominent among educators' assumptions was the idea that communities of color lacked appropriate adult role models.

Growing Up lessons began with acknowledgement of wartime social change in gender roles: many fathers were away serving the nation and mothers were working outside the home, destabilizing the ideal family consisting of a breadwinning father and a homemaking mother. The lesson plans conveyed a need for greater protection of girls in the midst of such upheaval.\textsuperscript{131} Given the large number of mothers working outside the home, Lampe started the first lesson with emphasis on new responsibilities as one grows older. Instructing students to respect the limits their parents placed on their freedoms, the narrative intended for students explained that it may be difficult for young people to abide by their parents' rules. Lampe provided an example of a girl of twelve named Jane. Jane's mother would not let her attend a military show on a school night,
because of the late hour as well as out of concerns about potential danger. Because
Jane was a friendly girl, her mother feared she would “pick up an acquaintance with
some stranger,” thinking he was a nice guy. What if the fellow appeared to be nice, but
was not? “He might talk the girls into doing things that might lead to difficulties, even real
trouble for them.” Allusions to dangers—“difficulties” and “real trouble”—
euphemistically suggested, in contemporary language, child molestation and pregnancy.

The guide instructed teachers to reiterate concern about protecting girls and the
importance of selecting friends carefully and avoiding strangers—thus using girls’
choices of proper behavior as a starting point for girls’ sex education.¹³³

As explained in the letter requesting parental permission, the original three-
lesson plan for girls instructed pupils in the names and functions of anatomical parts,
“the story of the baby,” and how girls’ bodies change during puberty, including
menstruation and personal hygiene.¹³⁴ Unlike the Oregon experiment, which placed
young adolescent boys and girls in the same classroom, San Diego curriculum involved
instruction in single-sex classrooms. Wetherill noted that San Diego schools had
attempted mixed-gender instruction but found students less than willing to discuss such
subjects as menstruation and nocturnal emissions under such circumstances.¹³⁵ But
while San Diego teachers were prepared to discuss intimate sexual issues and
separated boys and girls to facilitate their personal disclosures, their approach alternated
between straightforwardness and evasion.

In the first lesson of Growing Up for girls, not only did the teacher share advice
about social adjustments, she also called attention to various organs of the male and
female anatomy. Teachers did not ordinarily identify labia or the clitoris in their lessons
for school children during the mid-twentieth century; San Diego’s guide for teachers,
however, took care to identify the labia, demonstrating the curriculum planners’ sense that girls should know the appropriate names for body parts. (The clitoris was apparently not important, as it was omitted from the San Diego lessons.) The guide directed instructors to explain the location of the labia “in front of the anus and between the legs” and describe them as “two folds of skin” that “we have.” The narration continued with an anecdote meant to be shared with the class: “The other day a girl came to my office; her face was red and she was embarrassed. She said she had a sore down there, and pointed between her legs. If she had known the right name to use she would have told me she had a sore on her labia. She wouldn’t have been embarrassed and I would have known just where the sore was.”

The suggestion that vocabulary was the source of embarrassment evaded the possibility that the sore may have resulted from poor hygiene, masturbation, consensual sexual contact, incest, or rape—situations which were likely embarrassing to share with an adult regardless of the terms available.

In contrast with this specific elaboration of female genitalia, San Diego educators also employed the “birds and the bees” approach with sixth graders. In the second lesson, they read pupils Karl de Schweinitz’s children’s book, Growing Up: The Story of How We Become Alive, Are Born and Grow Up, which had a lot to say about plants and animals, eventually turning to the topic of “mating” in humans. What kinds of information students derived from the book can only be imagined. The chapter on mating included pictures of a crowing rooster, a male peacock with open feathers, and works of art that supposedly showed human interest in love and beauty. De Schweinitz approached information about human sexual intercourse indirectly, as indicated by the following passages: “With animals, the male usually tries to place the sperm in the body of the first female he meets after the time for mating is come”; and “Like the animals a
man and a woman may feel like sending the sperm to join the egg but they do not do this unless they love each other. Each man and each woman waits to marry the one whom he or she can love." Even less informative about human sexuality were films suggested for use if five lessons were advisable: From Flower to Fruit and The Sunfish pertained to pollination and fertilization of fruits and fish eggs.

Teachers in San Diego thus presented lyrical and metaphorical materials to explain sex. The reading of de Schweinitz’s Growing Up in lesson 2 was called an “appreciation lesson,” indicating the goal was not to convey facts but inspire awe. According to the first edition of the San Diego curriculum guide, “Since the purpose of this lesson is appreciation, no oral questions or discussions will be included.” Lampe advised teachers to complete the story, then “say to the children, ‘If there are parts of this story you have not understood, or if you have questions you wish to ask, you may write them on a piece of paper, sign your name, and put them in the question box.’” In subsequent years, the appreciation lesson began with the same justification for the lesson plan but a greater openness to questioning. “Since the purpose of this lesson is appreciation,” the new wording asserted, “oral questions or discussions will be included during the reading.” San Diego teachers eventually consented to answering anonymous questions from twelve- and thirteen-year-olds—the same sixth-grade students with whom they discussed labia and wet dreams—but continued to use a reader that euphemistically discussed reproductive sexual intercourse in humans. It seems as though San Diego educators’ assessment of youth’s needs led to more honesty, openness, and explicitness, yet they retained a contradictory faith in childhood innocence and obliviousness.
Writing for national publications, Wetherill asserted that the interests of children and young people had determined the subjects teachers addressed. His contention that sixth-grade students were most curious about the biology of reproduction helps explain the continued use of the de Schweinitz book. San Diego teachers adopted what he referred to as a “factual or scientific approach,” but one mediated through plant and animal biology. Students in sixth grade could learn “the basic concepts [and] reasons and purposes of sex in life as accepted by our culture and as meant by God,” which laid the foundation for a broader discussion of family life at the upper grade levels.\(^\text{142}\)

Wetherill also posited that parents were generally better able to give information to their children “pertaining to romance, growing up and marriage . . . than reproduction.”\(^\text{143}\) As in the other schools, San Diego educators did not assume they were the only source of information about sex, but saw their role in sex education working in conjunction with the home, church or synagogue, and community agencies.\(^\text{144}\)

Over time, San Diego educators expanded the number of class sessions in the Growing Up curriculum. By 1951, the curriculum guide reconfigured material into five lessons. In lesson 2, during which pupils watched four films on plants and animal reproduction, boys and girls began attending the lessons together—a departure from the former three-lesson plan where classes were sex segregated.\(^\text{145}\) But the guide continued to have boys and girls separated for the other lessons, with separate screenings of Human Growth for boys and girls featured in lesson 5.\(^\text{146}\)

The new lessons, moreover, included greater differentiation of the content the two groups. Boys’ classes covered units on glandular changes, growth of sex organs, formation of sperm, seminal emissions, masturbation, menstruation, reason for body change, sex relations, and use of self-control.\(^\text{147}\) Girls’ classes covered sex organs,
menstruation (at length), masturbation, reason for change, sex relations, and use of self-control." In the section on sex organs for girls, the anecdotal passage on labia was reduced to a brief description of the external organs: "two thick folds of skin, called the labia, which protect the two body openings in this region." Shortly following the Growing Up pilot project, San Diego City Schools implemented a second experiment for junior-high girls, called "Know Yourself and Others." Beginning at Roosevelt Junior High in the 1943-1944 school year, the sessions, eventually known as "group counseling," involved a similar program for boys in subsequent years. Explaining the original mission of the course, Roosevelt Junior High Dean of Girls Sue Ernest commented that "young people have never lived in a more chaotic world, nor in one wherein so frequently adolescents assume duties of adults." The course followed a series of informal talks to girls in the school gym. Pupils requested more information at the conclusion of such talks, and eventually received a six-week course of study during their physical education course. On the heels of the "Know Yourself and Others" experiment, San Diego administrators encouraged group counseling in the high school years, most commonly in the last year of junior and senior high school. At each grade level, students were to determine the issues of greatest concern for group discussion. Group counseling attempted to provide education and guidance for young women and young men. Recounting "some of her own problems and experiences as a girl [and including] both serious and humorous situations that she had encountered," Ernest eased into the subject with her female students. This approach served to reduce reticence among pupils, who "realized that they, for once, could discuss freely the problems about which they were curious but could never mention except in isolated circumstances."
teacher began by establishing the purpose of the lessons: "to consider friendship, boy-
girl, parent-child and family relationships, and to establish wholesome attitudes and
practices in personal and family relations." On the first day of group counseling, the
teacher asked students to submit unsigned written questions that would determine the
plan for the class.153

With consultation from the dean of girls and the school nurse, the ninth-grade
science teacher in charge of the original course, Margaret Olsen (formerly a school
principal in the Midwest), then assembled the girls' questions according to how
frequently they appeared. She conducted the sessions in reverse order of interest,
allowing "time to get acquainted and build up wholesome attitudes before discussing the
more difficult problems."154 Most commonly asked, and apparently most "difficult," were
questions regarding social and sexual behavior: "how to be attractive to boys, how to act
and what to talk about when with boys, social etiquette, petting, how long to go with the
same boy, and emotional controls." The next category, which dealt with physical
development, involved "changes in body figure and posture in adolescence,
menstruation, other physical changes as one grows older, reproduction, fertilization and
early embryonic development, birth and growth of a baby, [and] sex relations in
marriage." Additional questions students posed related to family relations and personal
attractiveness, with the latter category encompassing cosmetics, poise, and "health for
attractiveness."155 Of three "home relations" issues of discussion, one was "more acute
problems such as a mother's jealousy of the father's affection for the daughter,"
revealing how teachers may have interpreted girls' comments as variations on the so-
called oedipal complex.156
Slight modifications were made to group counseling methods in its first half decade. The purpose of the lessons enlarged, adding "social problems in this changing world, personal conduct and personality growth" to the topics of discussion. The 1951 account of group counseling no longer mentioned unsigned questions, although this method undoubtedly persisted in some schools.¹⁵⁷ Unlike sixth-grade teachers who could rely on the recommendations of Growing Up, counselors did not work from detailed guidelines; rather, they were expected to adapt the lessons to students' needs at each school.

Group counseling was much less predictable than the sixth-grade Growing Up lessons. Schools invested authority in high school counselors based on an assumption that they were capable of countering negative influences of pupils' home environments, once they were aware of their students' particular challenges. Wetherill advised, "It is important that social-hygiene counselors understand the backgrounds from which some students come. Teachers protected by the environment of the better social circles may be unaware of these backgrounds," which included "excessive drinking, bickering, and vulgarity."¹⁵⁸ In other writings he noted that "some students come to school from families where there is marital unhappiness, perversion, and prostitution." More explicitly, he commented that "teachers are often shocked when they learn that certain of their students are confronted with problems of incest in their homes, sexual perversion among friends or seductive sex attractions in their immediate environments."¹⁵⁹ Although he refrained from identifying particular perversions, it is probable that they included exchanging sexual favors for money and sexual activity with persons of the same sex.

San Diego counselors in close contact with teenage students were cognizant of the problems they faced in their daily lives, and Wetherill suggested that sex researcher
Kinsey’s findings provided statistical support for what he learned anecdotally from teachers and counselors: teenagers were not innocent and unaware of sexuality, which either they had experienced personally, or witnessed accidentally or vicariously. Unlike educators in Toms River and Oregon who avoided discussion about sexual variation, education leaders in San Diego found the “Kinsey reports” pertinent to their work in the school.\textsuperscript{160} San Diego guidance counselor and sex education advocate Richmond Barbour reluctantly commented on the female report in his column in the \textit{California Parent-Teacher}, indicating that not only educators but also teenage girls were talking about Kinsey’s alleged claim that young women were too inhibited. Barbour had received numerous letters from parents, concerned that the 1953 report was influencing their daughters. In his interpretation of Kinsey, Barbour reported that the book advocated petting and suggested that “girls who experiment with sex before marriage are apt to become happier wives than those who don’t.” Barbour shared with the readers his advice to his daughters: Kinsey’s conclusions are only theories, and Kinsey—a biologist—was inadequately trained to speak to questions of sociology and psychology. Young women should, in his opinion, more or less ignore Kinsey’s opinions and know that his theories were subject to criticism.\textsuperscript{161}

Similar to the Toms River curriculum, San Diego sex education did not necessarily assume that the ideal American family was the reality for students who attended their schools. Wetherill and others had a sense of the diverse family situations from which their pupils came. Yet San Diego educators acknowledged that family problems seemed more varied than divorce and delinquency, in part due to a greater disparity of wealth and different cultural environments in the city. More concerned with immediate goals than with preparing students for future marital success, San Diego
educators taught students about their bodies, reproductive capabilities, and risks. While San Diego educators began to use the Oregon film Human Growth in the 1950s, teachers were far more frank in confronting students' personal and family struggles—related to sex as well as race, culture, and class.

Conclusion

Enjoying periodic public attention and largely uninterrupted local support, the programs in Oregon, Toms River, and San Diego sustained themselves in their respective communities during the 1940s and 1950s. In their longevity, they were somewhat of an aberration from contemporary efforts to educate about sex through the schools. But they were nevertheless exemplary of the possibilities for sex and family life education at different grade levels, with various strategies for placement in the curriculum and sex segregation.

Each of the three cases also demonstrates how material could be at once progressive and conservative, removing some barriers but fortifying others. Oregon's promotion of classes in which boys and girls learned about sex and human growth together was fairly unconventional at the time. But with the exception of a few lone voices that considered any discussion of sex in mixed company promiscuous, most parents and communities were won over by the absence of titillation in the film. The opening scene depicting an upper-middle-class white family of husband, wife, and two siblings quickly put to rest any objections about transgression: family values legitimized Oregon's method. Apparently no one objected to Toms River's Family Relationships course, which partly fulfilled people's expectations about instilling respect for the family. Yet an examination of the kinds of topics up for discussion shows that the course
encouraged students to question traditional values. San Diego educators seemed to go furthest of all, mentioning genital sores and providing time for discussion of masturbation a planned part of the lessons for sixth graders and open-ended discussion for high school students. In defiance of the move away from “birds and bees” metaphors, however, San Diego kept as part of their sixth-grade lessons into the 1950s books and films that talked circuitously about human sexuality.

Adopting the broadest range of strategies for sex education, San Diego’s human relations education curricula ventured beyond what Oregon and Toms River educators advocated. The expansive content of the San Diego curriculum, however, reinforced gender roles and seems to have been particularly invested in preserving girls’ reputations—imposing middle-class ideals on girls from poorer communities of color. Conservative in some regards, San Diego lessons were also occasionally iconoclastic, broaching subjects that the timid dared not raise and attempting unconventional methods. San Diego educators usually used sex-segregated classrooms but also tried the coed method; they implemented programs at a variety of school levels—including elementary grades—and they worked with an array of tools, from motion pictures to diagrams to open-ended questions and guidance and to explicit discussion of sexual organs and activity.

The larger undertaking and more adventurous initiatives of San Diego pioneers might make the Oregon method and Toms River experiment appear more hesitant. The slower pace of curriculum development in the other two case studies was partially about reluctance, but it also reflected a less ambitious program as well as a relatively lesser sense of urgency. Rising divorce rates in Toms River were not the same as the alleged sex delinquency, incest, prostitution, or girls reading the Kinsey reports for advice on
petting and intercourse that alarmed San Diego authorities. In Oregon, concern with providing a curriculum to the entire state—a program adaptable in a variety of communities—limited the scope of the Brown Trust's endeavors. Oregon's contribution was linked to their twenty-minute sex education movie, only a kernel of their curriculum, which makes it difficult to assess what happened in classrooms. Oregon's development projects in the 1950s took the trust into more rural areas, not known for embracing change, especially if that change called into question parental and religious authority. And whereas a district-wide program, as in San Diego, could benefit from a health education administrative center, Oregon's diffuse undertakings were not amenable to centralization. Acting independently, the Toms River experiment enjoyed almost two decades of Force's leadership and teaching, making its program stand apart with the greatest internal continuity.

The three cases show how relationships with regard to the social hygiene movement, medical and social science professionals, organizations, and individual leaders—as well as community concerns and contemporary ideologies—shaped the curriculum that each developed. In some ways the national publicity that the three experiments received was disproportionate to the amount of work they were doing: while San Diego garnered the least amount of popular press, Oregon's acclaim came almost exclusively from a single motion picture and a misinterpretation of a state law. Attention to Toms River, in part related to Force's promotional articles, pamphlets, and books, corresponded to fascination in mid-century American popular culture with the family and romantic love and its ostensibly nonsexual and wholesome aspects. Media publicity only scratched the surface of the programs in San Diego, Oregon, and Toms River. A closer
investigation of their content and pedagogical practices reveals the depth and inconsistencies of the various curricula—aspects of sex and family living education overlooked by popular and professional acclaim.
Notes


2 Newell W. Edson, *Status of Sex Education in High Schools* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1922), and Lida J. Usilton and Newell W. Edson, *The Status of Sex Education in Senior High Schools of the United States in 1927* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1928). Moran has calculated that each study found that around 2,500 senior high schools offered sex education. He claims that out of 1,665 schools teaching sex education integrated with other material, the number of schools teaching "eugenics and heredity" (1,306) was followed most closely by "reproduction" (1,154), with the ambiguous "social aspects' of sexuality" (850), venereal diseases (571), "internal secretions' and menstruation" (420), and "seminal emissions" (171) garnering significantly less attention. See Jeffrey P. Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 105-7.

3 For examples of such programs begun in the 1920s, see Harry Beal Torrey, *Biology in the Elementary Schools and Its Contribution to Sex Education* (New York: American Social Hygiene Association, 1928); Russell. B. Babcock, "A Seventh Grade Course in
Sex Education,” *Progressive Education* 13 (May 1936): 374-82; and Earle Goudey, “Questions That Are Not Asked,” *Progressive Education* 13 (May 1936): 383-88. The movement to offer science courses that dealt with human and animal biology in the early twentieth century was new, expanding a past emphasis on natural science, particularly in the lower grades. See Torrey, *Biology in Elementary Schools*.


House 12 (April 1938): 461-65, esp. 463; and Mary Helen Stohlman, “Sex Education in the Public Schools of the District of Columbia,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 25 (October 1939): 330-39. A proliferation of articles in the 1940s on sex education curricula in a variety of locations likewise failed to provide more than a single account of each undertaking.


9 A paper outlining three approaches to sex education in 1937 captured what was to come in Oregon, Toms River, and San Diego. The author indicated that study of the biology of reproduction, the study of personal relationships, including the family, and the study of individual personality development—a newer trend—were the three major approaches to introducing sex education in the schools. See Anita D. Laton, “Approaches to Sex Education in the Schools,” *University High School Journal* 16 (April 1938): 147-55.

10 Bert Y. Glassberg, “The St. Louis Board of Education Program on Personal and Family Living,” March 1957, Box 7, folder 183, Bert Y. Glassberg Papers, Becker Medical


15“Sex Education: Oregon Film Provides New Approach to Delicate Problem,” *Life*, 24 May 1948, 55. A similar claim appeared in a local newspaper: the film’s depiction of “the reproductive processes of the human body . . . will be the only one of its kind to be produced anywhere in the world, and it is expected to revolutionize teaching
techniques." Velma Clyde, "Sex Education: Oregon Takes Lead over Rest of Nation," 
Portland Oregonian, 4 May 1947. First to receive such national acclaim, Oregon schools 
were far from lone pioneers in attempting sex education.

The OSHS began as a subcommittee of the Physical Department of the Portland 
Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in 1911, and became a statewide 
organization soon afterward, in order to acquire state tax support. OSHS was active until 
1918, when the state withdrew funding. Organizers reactivated the OSHS in the mid-
1920s, with E. C. Brown's support after 1929, and briefly again in the 1950s, to 
coordinate investigations of vice and prostitution. Curtis E. Avery, "Toward an 
Understanding of Sex Education in Oregon," in Sex Education: Concepts and 
Avery, with David S. Brody and Margie R. Lee (Eugene, Ore.: E. C. Brown Center for 
Family Studies, 1969), 17-26, esp. 17-19; Minutes of the Oregon Social Hygiene 
Society, 7 August 1940, Box 1, file 15, and E. C. Brown to President and Executive 
Committee, 26 March 1929, Box 1, file 5, both in Oregon Hygiene Society Records, 
Oregon Historical Society, Portland (hereafter OHS Records).

Torrey, Biology in Elementary Schools, 3-5.

Brown took interest in both youth organizations and social hygiene, and in addition to 
assisting the OSHS, he contributed to the Portland YMCA—the parent organization from 
which the OSHS emerged. Curtis E. Avery, Meet the E. C. Brown Trust Foundation 

Brown to President and Executive Committee, 26 March 1929; and Avery, Meet the E. 
C. Brown Trust, 5. In the context of the Great Depression, $5,000 was a lot of


21Brown designated that the University of Oregon president would be the administrator of the trust, believing that such a figure would be “most likely to possess the breadth of understanding and depth of educational experience” required for the job, according to A Brief History of the E. C. Brown Trust (Portland, Ore.: E. C. Brown Trust, 1958), 2-3.

22Lynch, “Reply of the Oregon Social Hygiene Society.”

23See John Newton Baker to Fred B. Messing, 11 December 1939, Box 1, file 2, and correspondence with Fred B. Messing, Box 1, file 6, all in OHS Records.

24D. A. Emerson to John Newton Baker, 5 December 1939, cited in Baker to Messing, 11 December 1939, and “A Problem Indeed,” newspaper clipping, Forest Grove High School newspaper, 21 February 1938, bound vol. 17, both in OHS Records. See also Messing correspondence, Boxes 5, 6, and 7, OHS Records. Messing was apparently
neither a medical doctor nor a Ph.D., signing his correspondence without a designation of title or degree. Yet correspondence occasionally addressed him as “Dr. Messing” and student evaluations usually referred to him as “Dr. Messing.”

Four other high schools, a Hi-Y club, and a PTA organization were also mentioned as inquiring about the discontinuation of the lectures. [Oregon Social Hygiene Society] to Howard C. Steams, 3 April 1939, Box 1, file 5, OHS Records.

Ibid.

Howard C. Steams to Reverend Raymond B. Walker, 12 July 1938, Box 1, file 5, Multnomah County Medical Society Committee on School Health, “Report of the Committee on School Health Concerning Sex Instruction in the Public Schools,” [December 1937?], 1, Box 2, file 3, and Maurice A. Bigelow to F. B. Messing, 20 July 1943, Box 1, file 7, all in OHS Records.

Multnomah County Medical Society Committee on School Health, “Report of the Committee,” 1, OHS Records.

Torrey, *Biology in Elementary Schools*, 3.

Pajot, "Guiding Principles," 2, ECBT Papers. See reference to this decision at a 15
December 1937 meeting in Stearns to Walker, 12 July 1938, and reiteration of this
position on 31 October 1939 was referred to in [Oregon Social Hygiene Society,] untitled
and undated typescript, Box 1, file 5, both in OHS Records.

House Bill No. 53, "An Act to Provide for Programs of Health Instruction and Physical
Education," was first read 16 January 1945. The text of the bill is contained in Box 96,
Legal Reference files, "Sex Education Legislation, Oregon, 1945," ASHA Papers. See
also Rex Putnam, "Social Hygiene in Oregon Schools," Phi Delta Kappan, March 1948,
303-4, and Rex Putnam and Dorotha Massey, "Social Hygiene Education in the Oregon

See the hundreds of letters in Boxes 18 and 19, Health and Physical Education, 1945-
53, General Correspondence, Department of Education (General) Papers, Oregon State
Archives, Salem (hereafter Oregon Education Papers). One of several sources giving
the incorrect information about the law was Bob Gilmore, "Sex Goes to School in

Howard Stanley Hoyman, Health-Guide Units for Oregon Teachers, Grades 7-12
(Portland, Ore.: E. C. Brown Trust, 1945); Putnam, "Social Hygiene in Oregon Schools,"
Putnam and Massey, "Social Hygiene Education in Oregon Schools"; and Curtis E.
Avery, "The Oregon Program of Sex Education," [1964], Box 1, file "Miscellaneous
Published Papers," ECBT Papers.

Avery, Meet the Trust, 9. According to this document, ASHA had wanted to cooperate
on the film but withdrew support along the way.

Clyde, "Sex Education."
37 Avery, Meet the Trust, 8.


40 "Sex Education: Oregon Film," 55; and "Sex in the Schoolroom," 71.


43 The film did not touch on the subject of family planning. Not only would mention of birth control have been illegal, but Brown Trust leaders also felt it would have been inappropriate because it would suggest to pupils that "they do need such knowledge" and might also "encourage its use in illicit sex experiences that would violate legal, moral and religious codes." Howard Stanley Hoyman, "Basic Issues in School Sex Education," Journal of School Health 23 (January 1953): 14-22, quotation on 16. Thanks to Caryn Neumann for pointing out Human Growth's depiction of the Protestant family ideal of few children as opposed to the Catholic norm of larger families.

44 By the time the second edition was in print, trust advisors had lowered the appropriate age group to sixth and fifth graders—thus advocating use of the film in elementary schools rather than junior high schools. Avery, "Oregon Program," ECBT Papers.

45 Sy Wexler of Los Angeles, California, provided access to a print of the 1947 film and promotional materials, which remain in his possession. [Lester F. Beck], Human Growth: Film Guide for Teachers and Discussion Leaders (Portland, Ore.: E. C. Brown Trust, [1949]); and Human Growth, 3d ed., promotional pamphlet (Highland Park, Ill.: Perennial Education, 1976). See also Eberwein, Sex Ed.
For statistics on parental approval, see Harris, Lemon, and Beck, "Sex Instruction in the Classroom"; "Jury' of 350 Mothers"; "Audiences Approve"; Sullivan, "Touchy Sex Subject"; and Marcille Hurst Harris, "Parent-Teacher Attitudes toward Sex Education and the Film Human Growth" (master's thesis, University of Oregon, 1949).


Summary of the E. C. Brown Trust Conference on 'Sex Education and Mental Health,” 16-17 December 1949, 10, Box 1, ECBT Papers.

Hoyman, Health-Guide Units. See also Putnam, "Social Hygiene in Oregon Schools," Putnam and Massey, "Social Hygiene Education in Oregon Schools"; and Gilmore, "Sex Goes to School."

Gilmore, "Sex Goes to School."

Beginning in 1952, the journal was reproduced by mimeograph and originally called the Coordinator; it was later renamed the Family Life Coordinator and then the Family Coordinator, ultimately published by the National Council on Family Relations. Avery, Meet the Trust, 8-9.


Hoyman, "Basic Issues," 22.


113
On SIECUS, see Moran, *Teaching Sex*, chap. 6.

Bigelow to Messing, 20 July 1943, OHS Records.


According to 1940 census figures, there were twenty-three Negroes and one person of “other races” who resided in Dover Township. Dover Township made up less than one-fourteenth of the county’s population. Ocean County population in 1940 numbered 37,706, with 1,330 individuals designated as Negro. Ocean County had 4,807 foreign-born residents in 1940. In 1950, total population figures were 56,622, with a Negro population of 1,536. The black population was concentrated just north of Toms River in
Lakewood Township (the largest in the county) and to the south in South Toms River
borough and Berkeley Township. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population by Municipality,
Ocean County, 1930-1980, and U.S. Bureau of the Census, New Jersey, Characteristics
of the Population, 1940, table 28, 60.

59School Segregation, Toms River, N.J. Case, Papers of the NAACP, Part 3, Series A,
microfilm collection; and Donald F. Martin, "A History of the Public Schools of Dover
Township, New Jersey, from 1900 through 1955" (Ed.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1957),
216.

Martin, “Public Schools of Dover Township,” 205-7, citing New Jersey Courier, 1 July
1927, and “Minutes of the Dover Township Board of Education,” 7 July 1927.

60Some Say Toms River Is Next Objective of the Ku Klux Klan, "Toms River, New
Jersey Courier, June 22, 1923, 1; and “Spectacular Visit of Ku Klux at Toms River M. E.
Church,” Toms River, New Jersey Courier, August 23, 1923, 1

61Martin, “Public Schools of Dover Township,” 216.

62Ethel Lewis, Robert R. Riegle, and Dorothy Jameson (chair) compiled the original
course guide, under Finck’s supervision. Tentative Course of Study: Family
Relationships (Toms River, N.J.: Toms River High School, 1939), 1, Box 1, Elizabeth
Sculthorpe Force Papers, Ocean County Historical Society, Toms River, New Jersey
(hereafter Force Papers).

63Elizabeth S. Force, “What Teen-Agers Want to Know about Sex and Marriage,”
American Magazine, January 1953, 34-35, 103-6, esp. 106.

64Educator Helen Manley claimed in 1964 that the Toms River program “is perhaps best
known” among pioneers in school sex education. Helen Manley, “Sex Education: Where,


6"Ibid., 6, 3. The classroom setting was a space that had "the environment of a very pleasing living room, with pine paneling, comfortable lounge chairs and sofas, and a small kitchenette. Both individual and group work can be carried on here in an
atmosphere which is most conducive to friendly understanding and learning."


69Elizabeth S. Force and Edgar M. Finck, *Family Relationships: Ten Topics toward Happier Homes* (Elizabethtown, Penn.: Continental Press, 1948). Although the workbook was not published until 1948, it is likely that a mimeographed version was in use prior to this date.


71Force recalled that French teacher (and French native) Renee Ewart also occasionally taught the course. After Force left to work for ASHA in 1957, a male instructor taught the course. Elizabeth S. Force, interview by author, New York City, 7 August 1999.


73Ten Topics toward Happier Homes, promotional brochure, Box 2, file 12, Force Papers.


75Ibid., 46.

76Elizabeth S. Force and Edgar M. Finck, *Family Relationships: Ten Topics toward Happier Homes, a Handbook for Administrators and Teachers Who Use the*

77 For a recollection of the changes taking place in Toms River from the perspective of a young man who graduated from high school in 1953, see Mac Eagle, *Raised in Toms River and Damn Proud of It* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Mac Eagle, 1996), esp. 17-36, 65-90, 119, 136, 143. Although Eagle never took the Family Relationships course, his parents were friends with Force and occasional guests in her classes. Ibid., 78.

78 Although educators were apparently unconcerned about communism in Toms River, the state of New Jersey’s *Secondary School Bulletin* posted an announcement from the New Jersey Commission to Investigate Communistic Teachings in January 1954. The commission advised school administrators to pay closer attention to personnel, curricula, and library holdings, and further recommended that “comparative studies of the Soviet Russia system be part of the curriculum in all schools at the appropriate level under competent supervision.” Moreover, they argued that “there should be a constant effort upon the part of teachers and all school personnel to point out the advantages of living under the American system.” See [New Jersey] *Secondary School Bulletin* (October 1954): 1-2, quotations on 2. According to Force, Toms River school administrators did not impose upon her such an obligation. Force interview.


81 Ibid., 29.

82 Force did not recall any black pupils in her class, had little memory of foreign-born students, and recalled a few Jewish young people in her classes. Force interview. A photograph of four young women—two apparently white and two African American—working on a family living project appeared in “Purposeful Education for Tomorrow’s Citizens,” Annual Report of the Toms River Schools, 1949-1950, 11. See also Esther Emerson Sweeney to Conrad Van Hyning, memo, 18 October 1965, 3, Box 30, file 1, ASHA Papers.


84 Stearns, “ABC’s of a Happy Marriage,” 132. No evidence of personal consultations remains, and, in 1999, Force dismissed the idea that she served as a counselor to individual students. Force interview.


86 Ten Topics promotional brochure, Force Papers.


88 Force, Teaching Family Life Education, 23.
89Unit 4 of the course aimed "to guide the individual in the selection of a proper mate. To
Teach individuals so to adjust themselves that neither one's personality is dwarfed. To
Help individuals find an agreeable method of courtship. To give them the knowledge
Necessary in the legal preparation for marriage." Other units offered teaching about
"Necessary influences for happiness in marriage," and "the family's biological aspects"
Ibid., 15.

In 1950, Harcourt, Brace publishers asked Force to produce a textbook. She
Commented that she eventually used the high school textbook in her course, along with
Several other texts. Ibid., and Force, Your Family.


A psychiatric evaluation of Family Relationships and Social Behavior commented
Favorably on the course and lavished praise on Force as instructor (and source of
"Maternal support and sympathy") for both courses. Committee on Preventive
Psychiatry, Promotion of Mental Health in the Primary and Secondary Schools: An
Evaluation of Four Projects (Topeka, Kans.: Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry,
1951), esp. 6-8, quotation on 8. On Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, see Ellen
Herman, The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts

Force and Finck, Family Relationships Handbook, 1-2. Further details of the study cite
That Finck's staff distributed the survey to 166 graduates and received answers from 35
Men and 123 women. One hundred percent of the men were still married, and 66 out of
68 women had successful marriages, for an overall rate of 73 out of 75, or 97 percent. (Two couples had separated.) Kohrs, "They Study How to Live," 5; and Ten Topics promotional brochure, Force Papers.


97Ibid. Also emphasizing the class' success, a journalist noted that the schools' statistics demonstrated far fewer couples splitting up during the first three to five years following marriage, which according to this article, amounted nationally to 1.6 million marriages for 500,000 divorces in 1945. Stearns, "ABC's of a Happy Marriage," 33.


100Census figures indicated that the city of San Diego increased from a population of 203,341 to 362,658 between 1940 and 1944. Laurence I. Hewes, Jr., with the assistance of William Y. Bell, Jr., Intergroup Relations in San Diego: Some Aspects of Community Life in San Diego which Particularly Affect Minority Groups, with Recommendations for a Program of Community Action (San Francisco: American Council on Race Relations, 1946), 10. As one source noted in 1958, "for each two people living in the City of San Diego in 1940 there are now five." Irving B. Tebor and Helen L. Larrabee, Background for Planning for Social Welfare in San Diego County (San Diego: Research Department, Community Welfare Council, 1958), 1. The city of San Diego population increased between 1940 and 1950 by 64.4 percent, compared with 14.5 percent for the United States as a whole. Tebor and Larrabee, Planning for Social Welfare, 3.

101Hewes with Bell, Intergroup Relations, 17, 26.
The African American population, concentrated in the integrated, overcrowded, and economically depressed interracial neighborhood of Logan Heights, measured around 15,000 in the late 1940s. Hewes with Bell, *Intergroup Relations*, 11-12; and Tebor and Larrabee, *Planning for Social Welfare*, 12. Estimated to be larger than the black population, the Mexican American community in San Diego was not measured by census figures, since Mexican Americans were counted as “white.” Hewes with Bell, *Intergroup Relations*, 12. Approximately 3.1 percent of the population in 1940, nonwhite minorities made up 6.5 percent of the city’s population in 1950; Mexican Americans in San Diego numbered approximately 38,000 in 1950, and African Americans numbered around 28,000 by 1957. Hewes with Bell, *Intergroup Relations*, 12; and Tebor and Larrabee, *Planning for Social Welfare*, 11. For a personal account of racial dynamics in the city, especially with regard to the police force, see Gene Sylvester Muehleisen, interview by Sally West, transcript, San Diego, California, 1 December 1933, San Diego Historical Society, San Diego, California. The county of San Diego had 219 Indian pupils enrolled primarily in rural schools alongside white students in 1944. Margaret Van Voorhees, “The Passing of the Reservation School,” *Parent-Teacher Courier*, April 1944, 5.


Hewes with Bell, *Intergroup Relations*, 12.


113 Wetherill claimed that “two years were spent preparing this community for sex education,” with key leaders in the community involved and speeches given at community meetings. Wetherill, “Who Is Responsible?” 363. In addition to the preparations listed above, a committee of teachers, deans, principals, and school librarians formed, they consulted with the ASHA, the PTA developed and distributed questionnaires to assess parents and high-school students’ interests, and the school district’s Adult Education Department offered courses, as did San Diego State College and the Extension Division of the University of California. G. Gage Wetherill, Human Relations Education: A Report, 2d ed. (New York: American Social Hygiene Association, 1951), 4-6.

114 Slater, “Study of the Social Health Program,” 30. See also “Sex Education Question up to S.D. Round Table,” San Diego Union, 2 November 1937, 12; and “Sex Education Put Forward as Public Problem,” San Diego Union, 4 November 1937, 6. Schools that sponsored such programs included Roosevelt Junior High (Family Relations Conference, May 1936 and April 1937), Garfield (Family Life Series, February-March 1937), Grant (3 November 1937), and San Diego High School (16 January 1939). Falk,
“First Conference,” 10; Moore, “Conference High-Lights,” 5; “Sex Education Public
Problem,” 6; Moore, “Resume of Series,” 14; and Mrs. H. L. Lund, “For Sex Education,”
Parent-Teacher Courier, February 1939, 15. No evidence suggests that the first school
to sponsor the sixth grade curriculum—Logan Heights—offered a public forum.
San Diego schools adopted social hygiene classes throughout the 1940s and 1950s,
and PTAs gave input on the decision. Wetherill made a number of visits to PTA
meetings. See Robert Louis Stevenson PTA Minute Book, 14 January 1958, 141,
Parents and Teachers Association Papers (hereafter San Diego PTA Papers),
unprocessed boxes, San Diego Historical Society, San Diego, California. PTAs voted to
approve a social hygiene course before it was to be offered to sixth grade students. San
Diego Historical Society holdings of PTA Papers are very irregular for this time period,
and it is difficult to know how regularly PTAs voted to approve the curriculum prior to its
implementation. For two examples, see John Greenleaf Whittier Elementary School PTA
Minute Book, 25 February 1954, 31; and Central Elementary School PTA Minute Book,
19 February 1959, 10-11, both in San Diego PTA Papers.
Robert Louis Stevenson PTA Minute Book, 10 January 1956, 48; Stockton Elementary
School PTA Minute Book, 17 March 1949, 45, and 25 January 1951, 80-81; and John
Greenleaf Whittier Elementary School PTA Minute Book, 28 January 1954, 23, all in San
Diego PTA Papers. Ordinarily PTA meetings involved discussion of fundraising and
carnivals, making guest speakers on child psychology and sex hygiene stand out in the
pages of PTA minute books. In contrast, PTA magazines commonly included articles by
school professionals about children’s health and well being and proper parenting
skills—including matters related to sexuality. See, for example, K. H. Sutherland, “Sex

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118 Ibid. For a similar observation, see Lloyd S. Van Winkle, "The Teaching of Sex Education in the Elementary School" (Ed.D. diss., Colorado State College of Education, 1949), 40.


123 The superintendent admitted to "starting with the point of view that every girl is a potential homemaker," but also claimed that the school district's home making education is "forward-looking" and "goes far beyond the old concept of 'food' and 'clothing.'" Crawford, "How R We Doing?" 18. Such innovations included a section for eight grade girls on "good grooming," coinciding with "a time when they are increasingly conscious of appearance and are seeking guidance." Rhea Black, "Teaching Good Grooming," *Curriculum Digest: San Diego City Schools in Action* 15 (March 1955): 6. "Home
mechanics” for ninth grade homemaking students was another innovation, undertaken at Horace Mann Junior High. “Girls Enjoy Experimental Shop Activity,” *Curriculum Digest: San Diego City Schools in Action* 16 (March-April 1956): 5.


127 Ibid., 18.


129 Few people of color held teaching and administrative positions in San Diego public schools during this period, and presumably sex educators in San Diego were predominantly white, middle-class, and Protestant Christians. Slater, “Study of the Social Health Program,” 38-39. See also Hewes with Bell, *Intergroup Relations*, 18-19, 23. However, a photograph from Logan Elementary School in 1953 appears to show an African American first-grade teacher. *Curriculum Digest: San Diego City Schools in Action* 14 (November-December, 1953). Other classroom photographs occasionally showed integrated student populations, but in every other instance the teachers appear white.

130 For parents’ interest in boys’ classes, see Slater, “Study of the Social Health Program,” 41. See also Viola I. Lampe, “Growing Up: Lessons in Health and Human Relations for Sixth Grade Boys and Girls,” in Wetherill, *Human Relations Education*, 42. The Boys Club was among the organizations in San Diego sensitive to race issues—it
either operated interracial clubs or developed African American branches. See Hewes with Bell, *Intergroup Relations*, 19.


133 Ibid., 44–45. The sample first lesson for boys expressed a similar concern about “trouble” and “serious difficulties” that might have arisen for boys in the war environment who did not carefully choose their friends, but did not link such adversity to interactions with girls or women. Nor did the boys’ lesson express the teacher’s concern “to protect you all.” Ibid., 51.


De Schweinitz, *Growing Up*, 103, 104. The book sustained multiple printings and several revisions, but ultimately kept the same focus. The text's second edition, from 1947, rephrased the first sentence quoted above and deleted the second. Only marginally more specific, this version claimed “Men and women know that when the sperm joins the egg a baby will start growing, and when they mate, each wants to mate with the person he or she loves.” Karl de Schweinitz, *Growing Up: The Story of How We Become Alive, Are Born and Grow Up*, 2d ed. (New York: MacMillan, 1947), 88-89. Both the original and revised bibliography for the San Diego curriculum listed a 1945 version.


*From Flower to Fruit*, 16 mm, 16 min., Eastman Teaching Films and Encyclopedia Britannica Films, Chicago, Ill., 1933; and *The Sunfish*, 16 mm, 11 min., Encyclopedia Britannica Films, Chicago, Ill., 1941. For descriptions of the films, see Lampe, “Growing Up,” in Wetherill, *Human Relations Education*, 30. *The Miracle of Reproduction* and *Human Growth* were added to the expanded lesson plans in the 1950s and 1960s.


Lampe, “Growing Up,” in Wetherill, *Human Relations Education*, 47. Ordinarily students did not have to sign their names.


G. Gage Wetherill to Harriet A. Scantland, 27 June 1951, Box 82, file 9, ASHA Papers.

129


148 Ibid., 60-66.

Sue Ernest, “Know Yourself and Others—Experiment at Roosevelt Junior High,”

Parent-Teacher Courier, May 1944, 4.

Ibid.


Wetherill, Human Relations Education, 10.

Ibid., quotation on 10; and Slater, “Study of the Social Health Program,” 46-49.

Wetherill, Human Relations Education, 10-11, quotations on 10.

Ibid., 10. This item appeared in the revised edition of the guide, prefaced in this instance by the idea that these are questions and concerns both boys and girls raised. However, the outline was not modified from the first edition, which derived from girls’ questions alone. Wetherill, Human Relations Education, 2d ed., 10-11. On Freud, psychoanalysis, and mother blaming, see Kathleen W. Jones, Taming the Troublesome Child: American Families, Child Guidance, and the Limits of Psychiatric Authority (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), esp. chap 7. On the oedipal complex, see Sigmund Freud, A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing Company, 1943).


Although physical changes occur constantly as individuals develop from infancy into adulthood, mid-twentieth-century sex educators singled out the accelerated growth process known as puberty as a special moment in life. "It is the biological changes that set the adolescent period apart for special consideration," explained education professor Ruth Strang in her text on the psychology of adolescence, claiming that sexual maturity was "of central importance" among the changes during this time of life. Puberty referred to the acquisition of physical, sexual maturity during the early teen years, and this period of rapid growth brought with it emotional adjustments supposedly unique to adolescence. Educators understood adolescence as the phase accompanying puberty and encompassing psychological adaptation to the changing physical body as well as social norms. School officials paid great attention to puberty and adolescence during the twentieth century, inaugurating separate "junior" high schools to attend to the specific needs of pubescent youth beginning in the 1920s.

Not only did educators find it useful to separate younger adolescents from their older and younger peers, they also began to develop curricula that directly confronted questions and problems of adolescents. In lessons designed in San Diego, for example, instructors began teaching about puberty just prior to students' entry into junior high
school. San Diego teachers prepared youth with the knowledge that puberty brought the ability to procreate, and they acknowledged adolescence as "the time at which boys and girls start to become young men and women." Slightly ahead of the curve, San Diego's lessons for sixth grade students contained information about sexual organs, menstruation, and reproduction, material that other schools offering sex education covered around seventh or eighth grade.

Mid-century pubescent girls, whose visibly changing bodies conveyed their physical maturity and ability to procreate, served as a catalyst for launching sex education in the latter elementary grades or early junior high school years. Known to reach puberty earlier than boys, girls in the twentieth-century United States on average experienced menarche, or began to menstruate, around age twelve. "A girl of six years may run around in a sun-suit with practically no bra," observed psychologist Helen Kitchen Branson, but a girl of thirteen who had begun to menstruate should not. Upon menstruation, girls were old enough to have babies and must keep their breasts concealed, she argued. At the same time that business entrepreneurs and health professionals emphasized the need for breast support, the psychologist advocated for attention to and protection of adolescent girls' breasts.

Just as puberty and adolescence were linked in many educators' and parents' minds, so too were knowledge and protection. Information had a protective function to serve in addition to learning for learning's sake. Public attention to girls' bodies—resulting from early development, lack of modesty, or being in the wrong place at the wrong time—could lead to embarrassment and lamentable sexual experiences for girls.
ultimately compromising their potential for marital satisfaction. As Branson advised, "We owe our young people, and especially our girls, the knowledge which is available for their protection."  

Public school sex education similarly followed the logic that girls' bodies were vulnerable, and that education somehow provided a means for protection. The mid-century decades were a time of sex crime panic, when professionals and the lay public often perceived the sex offender as a male child molester who preyed on young girls. Without explaining precisely why, some educators believed female (and male) students needed knowledge, perhaps to guard against naivete and victimization by sexual predators. More often voiced was educators' desire to instill in students a wholesome regard for sex and its role as a positive force in American society.  

In the public school setting of the late 1930s through the 1950s, educators placed limits on how much knowledge to offer girls and boys, but rarely did they fear education's negative potential. Educators writing about sex did not believe, as contemporary and modern-day opponents have suggested, that sexual knowledge led to sexual behavior. All children were equally susceptible to misinformation, which could lead to misconduct, they believed. School personnel favoring sex education repeatedly insisted that sex information was everywhere available, and it was only a question of whether youth would be educated on the streets or by a reputable source. According to most mid-century sex educators, boys and girls should receive identical instruction on sex and its place in the family, species reproduction, and society more generally. Drawing on common sense observations and popular literature by parents and psychologists, such
as Strang and Branson, public school sex educators embraced developmental psychology and empirical research that documented “normal” and statistically typical patterns of growing up.

During the 1940s and 1950s, sex educators were nearly unanimous in their optimism about the possibilities of using the social sciences to enhance youth’s understanding of sex. For instance, in 1950, sex education expert Lester A. Kirkendall critiqued a sex education film because of its emphasis on “the biological aspects of sex and maturation” rather than broader aspects of sex.12 Those broader aspects included male-female differences, which were not absolute biological facts; rather, educators maintained, they were acquired characteristics with some relationship to anatomy and hormones. Psychological theories about developmental stages, anthropological evidence about non-Western societies, and mental health expertise about marriage and the family acquired greater attention from sex educators than did scientific studies about hormones, sex changes, and other biological matters. Sex educators also took into consideration the opinions and curiosities of young people, addressing many of the questions about bodies and reproduction that youth posed.

Given this framework, physical aspects of sexual development and reproduction, as they were discussed in the classroom, were never exclusively physical. Intertwined with facts were beliefs about psychology, gender roles, and society. This chapter examines the ways in which sex education curricula presented human bodies and their functions, highlighting the depiction of girls’ and women’s bodies. Composed of sections on sexual anatomy, masturbation and sexual arousal, menstruation, and reproduction, the chapter corresponds to pedagogical narratives of growth and maturity, which culminated with parenthood and made no mention of women’s bodies after giving birth.
Because sex education materials did not always distinguish among biological processes, learned behaviors, and social norms, it is impossible to discuss their "scientific" content without analyzing the presentation of gendered norms in science- and health-based sex and personal hygiene education. While occasionally laden with male bias and lacking objectivity, information about the body and sexuality in sex education curricula was more often contradictory than male-centered. These contradictions created opportunities for female students to question the physical and behavioral expectations surrounding sex.

**Sexual Anatomy**

As crafted, revised, and implemented during the mid-twentieth century, introductory public school sex education lessons pointed to the physiological changes in the body that enabled human reproduction, stressing the dignity of sex within marriage as a natural (that is, biologically driven) phenomenon. Rather than issuing direct objections to premarital sex, as anti-venereal disease education campaigns formerly had done and conservatives do now, school officials aimed to convey respect for sex as they spoke of bodies and reproduction in uninflected tones, devoid of embarrassment.

Calling attention to sexual anatomy was nonthreatening to parents and community members skeptical about sex education curricula, as long as teachers avoided the topic of adult sexual behavior. Among the very few objections to sex education in this period was concern that morals were left out, not that sexual anatomy was discussed. Educators and parents seemed to agree that vulgar language and phrases needed to be replaced by proper terms. Director of health education for San Diego City Schools G. Gage Wetherill explained that teaching boys and girls about anatomical changes accompanying puberty, proper names and functions of body parts,
and processes of reproduction and childbirth (along with responsibilities pertaining to adulthood) "help[ed] children develop good attitudes toward living."15 While the first draft of "Growing Up" lesson plans for San Diego’s sixth-grade pupils indicated that their function was "to build wholesome attitudes and give correct information about growing up," the revised curriculum guide reversed the sequence of the phrase, with "correct information" preceding "wholesome attitudes."16 Possession of facts, educators in San Diego and elsewhere contended, was a foundation for sound attitudes toward sex.

Science classes were especially conducive to introducing vocabulary and facts. In Winnetka, Illinois, junior high sex education teacher Russell B. Babcock took great care in the first few weeks of class to establish respect for scientific facts, repeating without embarrassment or emotion such terms as "'excretion,' 'reproduction,' 'sperm cells,' [and] 'ova.'"17 Similarly, Los Angeles biology teacher Eva Kirby recommended that science classes launch sex education lessons with a study of the urinary system—"an excellent place for the introduction of much of the vocabulary needed in the study of reproduction." The merit of this approach, she contended, was to provide an "understanding and objectification of the pelvic anatomy and physiology" from the outset.18 Educators wanted to convey an impression of these body parts as normal and respectable subjects of discussion, thus discouraging any lewd or fearful associations youth may have developed with regard to the body’s so-called private parts.

Teachers and promoters of sex education interpreted students' inquisitiveness as a need for accurate information from an authoritative source to replace the crude instruction they received from their peers or obscenity scrawled in public places. Both the girls' and boys' group-counseling teachers at San Diego's Roosevelt Junior High School during these years separately recounted that "dirty words," appearing on school
property before the courses began, ceased upon the implementation of the social hygiene curriculum. Teachers assumed scientific knowledge was most appropriate and necessary for pubescent girls, in part because science allegedly offered objective facts. If natural law was the cause of physical changes during puberty, students might feel less self-conscious, recognizing that such processes were beyond their control. Another contribution of objective facts was to detract from misinformation, such as myths about how babies were made, that led some girls who had never had heterosexual intercourse to wonder if they were pregnant. Yet teachers knew that more than facts was needed to mold young people's attitudes.

Free from the taint of titillation, proper vocabulary and a scientific perspective on sex held the promise for many educators of eliminating youth's prurient curiosity about human sexuality and potentially inhibiting or curbing their negative associations. A poor sex education instructor might leave girls expressing a desire never to marry or have children, numerous educators felt, but a good one could entice girls with an objective and scientific perspective that stressed how natural such life events were. This latter approach offered a potential solution to the supposedly endemic problem that marriage counselors and psychologists had discovered: "frigid" wives whose neuroses derived from ignorance and left them unable to enjoy sexual intercourse with their husbands.

Sex education pedagogy, educators believed, had significant implications for young people's adjustment during adolescence. Students could attain a positive and healthful relationship with their bodies through instruction by well-adjusted teachers and carefully selected teaching devices. Although teachers could never be standardized, administrators in various school districts attempted to obtain for girls' classes an attractive, married female teacher who could speak about sex with ease.
tools, especially visual aids, likewise depended on resources and individuals involved at each school, and varied from place to place. Similar to sex education for youth generally, use of visual aids for school sex education at the beginning of the twentieth century met with controversy among professionals. Classroom use of visual devices grew popular in the mid-twentieth century, and sex educators selected images from books and employed animated films—usually featuring drawings and diagrams of human anatomy as well as representations of fetuses and babies.

Anatomical models of external and internal reproductive organs were a common means for instructing children about human bodies' capacity for producing children. Models and charts provided a graphic component to sex education, but one that was abstract and generally truncated around the genital organs—and therefore not graphic in a sexual sense. While films about animals and classroom pets established the principals of reproduction and family life for younger children, upon reaching puberty students were more likely to learn about human bodies and reproduction in their classes. For the most part, drawings and models of pelvic anatomy objectified the body parts, providing little context for their position on adult bodies. Originally published by the Progressive Education Association in 1937, *Life and Growth* was a textbook for human relations education that gave an unusual view of male and female bodies and their reproductive organs (figure 3.1). Rather than depicting the organs in isolation, drawings in the text situated forms of bodies next to detailed sketches of organs.

Most models drew inspiration from, if they did not directly replicate, the drawings and models of gynecologist, sexologist, and sex reformer Robert Latou Dickinson. Dickinson's drawings were technically correct, but they were not produced with a young audience in mind. Both the original (1946) and the revised (1951) guides for San Diego...
Figure 3.1. A rare representation of genital organs in relationship to adult bodies. *Life and Growth* (1937)
social hygiene courses provided teachers with Dickinson's technical drawings as a
reference (figure 3.2). The same drawings, in enlarged versions referred to as "male
and female human forms showing location of reproductive organs (from American Social
Hygiene Association)," were part of the teaching kit for San Diego schoolteachers.
Whereas Dickinson's medical practice and research had sought to promote female
sexual pleasure, schoolteachers possibly used his drawings to discourage interest in
sexual anatomy.

Avoiding reference to real human flesh, classroom posters, charts, and projected
images were especially conducive to introducing vocabulary and launching discussion.
Diagrams were numerous, as the collection available at the Susan Dorsey High School
in Los Angeles illustrates. Teachers could draw upon a filmstrip provided by the
California State Department of Health based on Dickinson's Birth Atlas; Frohse
Anatomical Charts of the Male and Female Pelvis; Turtox Chart of Anatomy of Birth; and
mimeographed diagrams of reproductive systems that a teacher had prepared. San
Diego's Visual Instruction Center furnished a teaching kit for sixth-grade social hygiene,
which included charts on male and female sex organs, infant growth stages,
menstruation, and fraternal twins, as well as two books, Karl de Schweinitz, Growing Up,
and Frances Bruce Strain, Being Born. In 1951, the center also had six motion pictures
available for use in sixth-grade social hygiene classes, including the Oregon film Human
Growth. Eventually they acquired and used The Story of Menstruation.

Displaying reproductive anatomy warranted caution and consideration of the
educational strengths of the materials as well as their psychological impact. "As
desirable as movies are for certain purposes," Wetherill maintained, "they do not lend
themselves readily to discussion. They move so fast that it is difficult to discuss
Figure 3.2. Dickinson drawings used in San Diego’s “Growing Up” (1946, 1951)
important points. When the movie is over, psychologically the children are often ready to
do something else. Slides or drawings in our experience stimulate better discussion than
have movies." Perhaps sensitive to this concern, filmmakers loaned and sold copies of
the Oregon movie Human Growth with accompanying slides.

According to many sex educators, abrupt introduction of sex organs along with
their sex functions could be psychologically damaging, or it could potentially undermine
the efforts to instill wholesome attitudes. In addition to displaying charts of the nervous,
circulatory, and digestive systems, Babcock drew for his class of Winnetka students
anatomical diagrams of reproductive organs on the blackboard showing "their
approximate locations." Aiding students' appreciation of these drawings was the fact that
"already in a discussion of the excretory system the penis and vagina have been met." Even in Life and Growth, when organs were shown in relationship to adult bodies,
images were not prematurely introduced. Students had to wait until chapter 8 to see the
illustrations.

Sex education instructors selectively chose the anatomical parts they introduced
to their pupils, taking into consideration what they perceived as their psychological
implications. Individual schools sometimes developed their own visual materials, but
many teachers made use of existing diagrams and films. Dickinson diagrams of female
anatomy displayed sixteen terms: sacrum, cervix, coccyx, vagina, rectum, anus,
fallopian tube, ovary, fundus (upper end) of uterus, bladder, urethra, symphysis (bone),
clitoris, labium minor, labium major, and hymen—clearly a level of depth and technicality
unnecessary for introducing sexual anatomy to sixth graders. The illustration's
accompanying lesson in the first edition of San Diego's "Growing Up" instructed sixth-
grade girls' teachers to reference a smaller set of terms: breast, nipple, navel, buttocks, rectum, bowel, labia, bladder, vagina, uterus, and, on the male body, penis.

Both female and male students learned about female and male anatomy, and all students learned a more extensive vocabulary related to women's bodies. In the San Diego boys' lesson and on the male chart, the drawing depicted the spermatic duct and prostrate gland, among other terms never mentioned in the lesson. The boys’ lesson plans elaborated on the female anatomy, covering the same terms in the girls’ lesson (minus the labia), and drew further attention to the scrotum, testes, and testicles. Greater attention to female bodies did not upset the effort to teach about male and female bodies in a similar fashion. They were both truncated similarly above the navel and below the upper thighs, they were drawn to the same scale, and they both indicated a complex internal anatomy—contrary to the idea that and women and men are opposite and that women's genitals were internal and men's external. That they were facing opposite one another in perspective also vaguely suggested sexual union, but the flaccid penis and pelvic tilt of each diagram would have made it difficult to envision sexual intercourse, even if the drawings appeared side by side.

Whereas the San Diego lesson plans focused on a small number of anatomical terms, a widely cited volume on sex education with origins in Minnesota recommended more detailed treatment of female bodies. Developed by the state Department of Health and the College of Education at the University of Minnesota, the lessons were tested in cooperating schools: University of Minnesota High School and Alexandria, Floodwood, and Wayzata public schools. While San Diego lessons left out the vulva and clitoris in their description of female anatomy, the Minnesota book Units in Personal Health and Human Relations both labeled them on diagrams and offered lessons plans on how to
discuss them (figure 3.3). With fewer labels, their drawings of male and female anatomy appear less technical and therefore more suited for an adolescent audience than Dickinson's charts. The male diagram resembles Dickinson's work in proportion and placement of organs, while the female one apparently followed the model of another designer, indicated by the phrase following the artist's signature “after Spalteholz.”

Scholars have noted that sex education materials and discussions have tended to omit information about the clitoris and female sexual desire, while discussion of nocturnal emissions and masturbation for boys described physical manifestations of sexual arousal. Yet the authors of *Units in Personal Health and Human Relations* listed and defined the function of seven endocrine glands and gave physical descriptions and approximate sizes of external and internal sex organs, most notably the clitoris. Attributed no function other than being “equipped with very sensitive nerve endings,” the clitoris was “located just inside the upper junction of the inner lips of the vulva [defined in the preceding section of the lesson] . . . covered by a thin fold of skin . . . about 1 inch long and all but the head [likened above to “the size of a pea”] is hidden in the tissue.” The Minnesota plan also gave a great amount of detail about hormones and glands, but is especially notable for its attention to the clitoris and its depiction as a sensitive organ.

San Diego educators seem to have taken care to minimize attention to sexually sensitive organs in girls, despite a brief passage in the second edition of the teachers' guide about masturbation in girls. While adding new material in various lessons, educators placed less emphasis on the breasts and organs of elimination in lesson 1. Removed from the revised lesson plan were body parts and functions that were not essential to explaining reproduction, including the breast, nipple, navel, buttocks, rectum, and bowel. The revised curriculum thereby singled out those organs that contributed
Figure 3.3. Drawings from Minnesota's *Units in Personal Health and Human Relations* (1947)

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directly to the production of eggs and sperm—perhaps in part to take out the breasts and nipples, increasingly displayed in the media for titillation purposes. The narrative no longer began with the infant suckling its mother’s breast but instead started with puberty.

San Diego teachers reframed sex education in their revised version of “Growing Up” with the theme of growth and its mental, psychological, and physical components. In place of the original attention to breasts and elimination organs, greater detail appeared regarding some aspects of sexual function, specifically related to glands and hormones. This included greater attention to internal female anatomy. Educators added the pituitary gland, fallopian tubes, testes, and scrotum (the latter two new to the girls’ lessons), and a fourth lesson for girls gave more description of ovaries, tubes, vagina, and the uterus.

Accentuating glands and hormones and deleting nipples and buttocks from the lessons must have been part of an effort to make the lessons more focused, and specifically more focused on the internal and invisible aspects of sexual development. Whereas the first edition of “Growing Up” detailed separate lessons for girls and boys, the second edition synthesized the two groups’ lessons (except for lesson 4) into a common lesson plan designed to be given to boys and girls separately. After explaining some basics about growing up in lesson 4—rapid growth during adolescence, how girls’ and boys’ bodies change shape—the guide directed teachers to focus on gland activity. Among the glands discussed were the sweat and oil glands, with hygiene and diet implications and recommendations. The pituitary gland’s functions, the teacher was to explain to students, controlled growth and sex glands: testes for boys and ovaries for girls. According to the guide not only did mature sex glands allow humans to reproduce, but they also were, in part, “responsible for differences between boys and girls.” For this
section, the instructor was advised to write the italicized terms (pituitary gland and puberty) on the chalkboard. In this rendering of the body, science, rather than divine will or “Mother Nature,” explained the processes of sexual development beneath the skin and in the psyche.

Girls and boys’ classes both studied female anatomy, linked from the very first lesson with the production of babies. Girls and boys learned about girls’ sex organs, both internal (ovaries, tubes, uterus, and vagina) and external (“between her legs . . . two thick folds of skin known as the labia,” which protected the urethra and vagina). Pointing to the charts while explaining the terms, locations, and, briefly, the functions of the female and male anatomy, a teacher could use visual images to illustrate the oral presentation. The brief passage about boys’ anatomy for lesson 1 simply noted that the “testes are in a pouch of loose skin called the scrotum, which hangs behind the penis,” mentioning further the function of the penis in urination. Both girls’ and boys’ genitals were linked with urinary function in the opening lesson on anatomy, and instruction on girls’ sex organs included reference to the uterus as “the part of the body in which the baby grows.” Although neither sperm nor eggs received mention in the first lesson, the text left the sex function of the penis unnamed but linked girls’ sex organs, mainly the uterus, to carrying a fetus.

Further instruction on bodies and glands was left to lessons 4 and 5—in which distinct boys’ and girls’ lessons were given, followed by a viewing of the Oregon film Human Growth, where gender-specific needs and questions could be aired without attention from the other sex. Lesson 4 for girls reiterated the pituitary gland’s role in the growth of sex organs and elaborated on how growth became visible in the female pubescent body. Such changes included hair growth, voice changes, and breast

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enlargement, tenderness, and sensitivity. The teacher advised that girls would need a brassiere, not to shield their body from the male gaze but to “support” the breasts.\textsuperscript{52} Menstruation occupied the bulk of attention in lesson 4, followed by comments on masturbation, why bodies change, “sex relations” before marriage, and self-control. Breast growth, menstruation, masturbation, and attraction to boys were the changes girls could expect to experience during adolescence, and the overarching message was one of personal control of bodily processes.

But girls were not the only ones who needed to make adjustments when breasts began to develop. In at least one case, a St. Louis, Missouri, sex educator during the 1940s and 1950s taught boys to behave decently around girls whose breasts were swelling. After explaining to ninth-grade boys that breast development in girls was nature’s early preparation of future mothers for childbearing and breastfeeding, lecturer and medical doctor Bert Y. Glassberg told boys’ classes that ignorance of these facts sometimes led to poor conduct choices. Boys would sometimes “take a peculiar malicious kind of delight in making nasty, dirty, insulting, slanderous, disturbing remarks about the breasts of a girl who passes them in the corridor or on the street.” Glassberg explained that girls did not enjoy this attention, and well-informed boys “would find nothing about the breasts to make derisive, or unkind, or cutting, or slurring, or slanderous, or just plain dirty remarks that causes a girl to be uncomfortable and embarrassed.”\textsuperscript{53}

In wide circulation during the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, \textit{Human Growth} was a popular device for teaching sexual anatomy and reproduction (as well as proper conduct) to school children, but one that made few explicit references to sexual parts of the body. Drawings of male and female reproductive anatomy appeared in the
Figure 3.4. Glands at work in the twelve-year-old boy and girl. *Human Growth* (1947)

animated portion of the film, and an authoritative male voiceover narrated the hormonal changes that produced adult sex organs (figure 3.4). While an animated film-within-a-film exhibited scientific facts about the body, this sequence was sandwiched between scenes from a classroom, where a female teacher displayed appropriate sex education classroom etiquette. Echoing the perspective of Wetherill and the San Diego curriculum, the teachers' guide for the film's first edition noted, "an approach which emphasizes interest in the GROWTH of human beings rather than the bald facts of reproduction is psychologically sound." To discuss bald facts of reproduction (a phrase that conjures images of naked bodies and sexual intercourse) would potentially "incite curiosity and experimentation," something that filmmakers hoped to avoid. Instead the film provided "essential information," promising to "satisf[y] in a wholesome way the child's need for an understanding of how life begins and continues."
Such a psychological approach is not surprising: psychologist Lester F. Beck wrote the film script, teachers' guide, and accompanying book. He was no doubt instrumental in framing the movie around the family and the more wholesome aspects of growing up and reproduction. "Follow the lead in the picture," he advised in the teachers' guide; "emphasize the family life implications of the material." Facts alone were not enough to instill respect for sex, and teachers using the film needed to model appropriate behavior, much as did the movie's actors who depicted the parents and the teacher.

The film's implicit messages, justifying and legitimating the exhibition of reproductive anatomy, occurred in the initial scenes. Human Growth opened with a scene from a white, upper-middle-class home, where father, mother, and their two children, George and Josie, were enjoying an evening together in the living room. George was reading a book about Indians for school, and shared aloud with his family the fact that "only the grown people have clothes on." He continued, without hesitation or embarrassment, exhibiting a demeanor instilled by sound instruction: "It says here that until they were 12 or 13 years old the children in this tribe wore no clothes at all. (Reading) "The wearing of loin cloths and skirts was considered a sign of sexual maturity."55

While the family setting reassured viewers of the film's respectability, it did so by contrasting the "normal" white American family with the partially exposed bodies of Native Americans. Sexualized Native American bodies in the film hinted at cultural variation in sexual norms, but, more important, reinforced prescribed norms for white children who were featured in the movie's classroom.56 In the tradition of National Geographic and other "middlebrow" magazines that showed nudity in so-called primitive...
Figure 3.5. The book *Hiwassee Island* (1946) provided images of Native Americans for the movie *Human Growth* (1947).

societies, middle-class parents were not likely to object to the exposure of naked Native American bodies in the book (figure 3.5).

An instructional film for children, *Human Growth* bore no resemblance to nudity featured in such contemporary magazines as *Playboy* and even the quasi-educational *Sexology*, but instead belonged to a Western middle-class tradition of viewing classical artwork and “other” cultures.

Cartoons and silhouettes appeared on the screen in the animated portion of the film, at first displaying male and female bodies’ outer forms and differentiating the sexes by gendered hairstyles and contrasting body frames rather than by genitalia. Beginning with “two average babies, a little boy and a little girl,” the male narrator described how these infants would mature at different rates, indicating the moments when girls grew more rapidly and appeared more mature than their male peers. A sequence of still images pairing boy and girl silhouettes provided visual imagery for the narrative, which
described the visible bodily changes from childhood to adulthood (figure 3.6). "When they reach their late teens or early twenties they are fully mature people," the narrator maintained, "with the boy being appreciably larger than the girl."

Observations about growth, although articulated in an authoritative and objective voice, were nevertheless subjective and influenced by notions of gender. This became apparent in the discussion of the form of the body changing; growing up was not only about becoming larger but also about developing a new body shape. "The boy's shoulders are broader and his body more muscular, while the girl's body is more curved and feminine," observed the narrator. While broad and curved were features that could be quantified and measured—and therefore possessed some degree of objectivity—the references to "muscular" and "feminine" conflated biology and socialization. Muscular may have been a trait boys ordinarily developed in growing up, but it was premised on
physical activity. More revealing was the reference to girls' bodies becoming "feminine," a term that meant little more than "like a woman." Was there nothing more to observe in girls' bodies than the development of curves?

Concern about children viewing sex education films—especially boys and girls together—was threatening to some, but Human Growth was successful in winning over converts to screening the film in classrooms, no doubt because of the directors' grasp on the psychology of sex education for children. Pursuit of parental approval often preceded the screening of Human Growth in elementary and high school settings, a step not thought necessary when using charts and film strips of anatomy in the classroom. Filmmakers' discretion and seemingly conservative choices about content matter ensured minimal controversy. As a Portland, Oregon, newspaper writer explained in a feature on the highly publicized film, "the stylized drawings, screened in carefully chosen colors, do not have the detail of medical drawings and are warmly praised by parents who have viewed the film."58 According to this reviewer, filmmakers had struck a balance between scientific and technical and between attractive and alluring in their design of the film.

While some lesson plans, texts, and films dared to touch on such topics as physical arousal and sexual feelings, Human Growth did not introduce pleasure in its terse depiction of puberty and reproduction. The companion book based on the script, written for youth and published two years later, in 1949, approached sexuality more openly and in greater detail—in part because it followed up on the unanswered questions that youth had actually posed following screenings of the film.59 The book was
more forthcoming in its discussion of bodies, sexual anatomy, and feelings, because it had more space to elaborate and its intended use was as a reference book for young people who wanted more information.

When dealing with the female body in print, the book *Human Growth* was more specific about nonreproductive sexual anatomy and how one might identify female genitalia externally—revealing self-conscious limits placed on the film, probably due to its shorter length and its availability for public viewing rather than private reading. The text defined the vulva as the "outside portion of the girl's sex organs, between her legs . . . consist[ing] of thick folds of skin known as the outer lips, with tissue underneath. A groove runs between these folds. Inside the outer lips there are thinner folds of tissue called the inner lips." Beck and graduate student assistant Margie Robinson included in the book an acknowledgment of female sexual organs separate from discussing their role in procreation. The authors located the vaginal opening further back from the "opening for urination," and finally, offered a tactile description of the vagina: a "canal 4 inches long, composed of stretchy muscle fiber with a rough texture."  

This book's explicitness contrasted sharply with the film's oblique references to the ovaries, tubes, and vagina (internal organs), and the "pubic region" that both male bodies and female bodies possessed. The book was, however, similar to the text of San Diego's "Growing Up" and Minnesota's recommended curriculum—both of which were available by the time *Human Growth* went to press. The decidedly unsexy and less familiar terms spoken in the film (ovaries, tubes, vagina, and pubic region) contrasted with the more interesting, familiar, and even sensuous terms in the book (legs, skin, lips, and groove), reflecting conversations with youth, and, perhaps, boosted confidence in the aftermath of the film's success.  

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Providing youth with a vocabulary for human sexual anatomy usually involved more than learning to label body parts as though they were countries or continents on a map. Educators, in their perpetual efforts to instill wholesome attitudes and replace crude concepts with refined knowledge, did more than offer vocabulary terms. They taught about how sexual organs and hormones functioned in human beings, in some cases offering discussion of physical sensation, but most commonly linking the organs and hormones to capacity for marital procreation. In contrast to pedagogical strategies that inspired fear, mid-century lessons could be almost boring. Such an attitude applied not only to reproductive organs but also—when discussed—to such subjects as desire.

Masturbation and Sexual Arousal

Educators explained the physical and hormonal changes that occurred during puberty as a precursor to reproduction. Although only rarely did teachers acknowledge that physical changes produced new sensations of physical, sexual desire, they often linked puberty with interest in being around persons of the other sex. When masturbation arose as a topic of discussion, whether upon student prompting or as part of a planned curriculum, teachers tended to focus on the fact that the practice caused no physical harm (as had been believed in the past) but that there were potential psychological side effects. Occasionally classroom discussions and reading materials illuminated the physical aspects of masturbating, but the weight of attention was to its mental or emotional implications.

Probably only a slight percentage of schools offering sex education had written curricula that discussed masturbation, but it was an inevitable question of many young people, especially when anonymous questions were permitted. For instance, none of the
questions in *Human Growth* dealt with masturbation, but this was not because Oregon youth differed from those in other places.\textsuperscript{62} The creators of *Human Growth* hoped to evade controversy by avoiding topics that were sexually stimulating. Filmmakers explained in retrospect that they deliberately chose to leave out erection of the penis and masturbation in the first edition of the film for "reasons of expediency in accomplishing the over-all purpose of enlisting public acceptance of the very idea of sex education."\textsuperscript{63}

When teaching materials from the 1940s and 1950s did refer to or explain masturbation, there were a few orthodox ways of handling the discussion. The common point in all articles, curriculum guides, and resources for educators that discussed masturbation was the fact that the practice did not result in physical illness or deformity.\textsuperscript{64} A related observation often made in these types of sources was that adolescents should avoid a mental obsession with masturbating and be aware of the social sanction against it.\textsuperscript{65} Mental rather than physical consequences were the risk.

In the course of discussions about masturbation, implicit assumptions about male and female differences sometimes emerged. Comparing boys' and girls' lessons reveals a gender-differentiated understanding of sexual arousal. While impossible to know exact figures, teachers were apparently more reluctant to discuss masturbation with girls, for reasons that might have related to the instructors' inclinations or to their sense of what information girls needed or found relevant. At Plainfield High School in New Jersey in the early 1940s, for example, plans for boys' classes paid more attention to the subject than did girls' classes. Lessons for male pupils followed an outline that consisted of "Masturbation in Boy" (including "definition," "effects," "treatment," and "comparison with girl") as well as "Masturbation in Girl" (including "effects" and "treatment")—apparently there was no need to redefine what masturbation meant in the case of girls. Meeting
separately and studying a different curriculum, Plainfield girls' classes learned about masturbation as a subset of a lesson on "The Male Organs of Generation." The teacher stressed that the practice was a habit rather than a disease, and apparently said nothing about its relevance for girls.66

By the end of the 1950s, several sources indicate less discrepancy between boys' and girls' education about masturbation. Plainfield's sex education lessons, offered through the physical education department and probably designed in the late 1930s, seemed premised on the idea that girls and boys required different amounts and kinds of education; so too did the original version of San Diego's "Growing Up" lessons for sixth graders. By the 1950s, however, an effort to equalize the information for boys and girls was apparent. Whereas the original lesson plans from 1946 discussed masturbation only with groups of boys, lessons for both boys and girls included a discussion of masturbation in the revised edition in 1951.67 Mirroring the text for boys, the girls' lesson observed that "Some girls form the habit of rubbing their genitals to produce a pleasant feeling. This habit is known as masturbation."68 The boys' lesson kept its insistence on the idea that masturbation did not make a boy "'dirty' minded"; it also mentioned that the practice might cause lack of self-respect and prevent marital sexual adjustments.69 The narrative for girls omitted the allusion to dirtiness and conveyed ideas about loss of self-respect and risks for marital success in a fashion more concise than the boys' lessons.

St. Louis lessons for ninth-grade boys distinguished between male and female propensity for sexual arousal. Glassberg explained in his lectures to boys that "necking becomes a sexually stimulating experience to the young man [but not] to the young woman because there is a very considerable difference in the manner in which men and women are sexually aroused." Men would delight in touching the woman's body above
the waist, he contended. "Most girls do not care for the experience," however, "but some of them are willing to submit to it because they believe it's part of the price they have to pay for the privilege of being taken out by such a wonderful hunk of a man as you happen to be." Glassberg maintained that eventually "petting arouses sexual feeling in the girl," although he did not explain how or why the process was less rapid (nor did he explain how he knew this). Both boys and girls could eventually succumb to "the very powerful emotions which they have allowed to be set off within them," and Glassberg reminded his pupils, as did other sex educators, that intercourse could lead to feelings of guilt and other unwanted repercussions, including pregnancy and disease. Unlike most other educators who left records of their sex education work in the schools, Glassberg took a firm and moralistic position against steady dating.

Steady dating was more dangerous than was masturbation in Glassberg's estimation, and, if anything, he attempted to convince girls to be less uptight about the idea of sexual activity. Beginning a lecture for ninth-grade girls with a discussion of nonsexual drives, such as learning and athletics, he moved to explain the sex drive, which involved "within the individual a feeling that he would like to express in some manner or other, certain things having to do with sex. But when we use the term drive," he noted, using male pronouns but probably intending both genders, "we must understand that there is nothing within the individual which is forcing him to engage in a sexual activity." He pointed out to the girls the variety among humans in their sexual drives, suggesting that individuals (and not men and women) were different—and contradicting his lecture for boys, in which he discussed differences in male and female arousal. He ultimately conveyed that girls should set up their own personal standards.
with regard to sex, not mimicking other girls out of peer pressure, hinting that pressure from girls played a role in leading girls to become sexually active.74

Using motherhood as a point of departure, Glassberg went into greater depth about sexual matters with his audience of ninth-grade girls. He explained how mothers sometimes became disturbed by the ways in which their children fondled themselves, but that this process of discovery was natural and no cause for alarm. Mothers were prone to cause harm to a child by calling attention to his or her self-stimulation. Innocent childhood sexual exploration, in which boys and girls exhibited their genitals to one another, was another opportunity for mothers to exhibit restraint so that children would not be embarrassed or emotionally scarred by their natural curiosity. The wise parent, he claimed, would simply let these simple interactions proceed, allowing the children's curiosities to be satisfied without interruption or self-consciousness. Even when discussing puberty with his audience of female adolescents, Glassberg advised them as future mothers: they should inform their daughters about puberty prior to the onset of menstruation, using facts rather than myths and without hesitation or embarrassment.75

When he finally approached the subject of masturbation during adolescence with the girls, Glassberg spoke in great detail and claimed to be indifferent to whether or not a girl masturbates. He noted that some girls—but not all—"discover . . . that if they play with the sexual area of their body they arouse a pleasurable sensation within themselves," an act known as masturbation. He explained that masturbation may be a temporary habit or practiced over "a very considerable period of time," but that in any case, no harm or injury would result that would detract from her ability to become a wife or mother. Moreover, a girl who did not masturbate should "know that the reason she does not engage in this practice is simply because she has no need to engage in it and
she is not missing an experience which she ought to be having.” Variation in girls’
masturbation practices was wide, and there was no norm to which girls should aspire, he
explained. As a “highly individual matter,” he nevertheless noted, “masturbation
becomes a tension relieving experience,” one sometimes used “to lessen some of the
anxiety which we feel in the ordinary course of living.” Whether or not girls masturbate,
according to Glassberg, was “a matter of no consequence,” although in his sole, brief
caveat about masturbation’s negative potential, he mentioned that “sometimes it leads to
worry about the practice itself.”

Similar to Glassberg’s lectures, but unusual among printed sex education
curricula of this era, San Diego’s description of masturbation—“rubbing [the] genitals to
produce a pleasant feeling”—amounted to an explanation of how to do it. San Diego
educators, however, took a stronger position that youth ought to abstain from the
practice, unlike Glassberg. While the pleasant feeling was not physically harmful,
Growing Up lessons averred, it nevertheless “should be avoided,” given the potential for
such outcomes as guilt. Suggesting that girls would feel shame or lack self-respect if
they masturbated, Lampe gave advice on how to quit: choose the right friends, develop
“high ideals about boys and marriage,” eliminate irritation of genitals (“as may be caused
by lack of cleanliness or uncomfortable clothing”), and finally keep busy with a variety of
hobbies.

Taking a different approach, the Minnesota unit for sex education in grades six,
seven, or eight included detail about sexual arousal in conjunction with physiology.
Following a description of the development of reproductive organs, the text provided
answers to the question, “What are some of the problems which boys and girls have
because of these physical changes as they mature?” The unit noted a number of
emotional and physical reactions, including interest in the other sex and the advent of
“sex tensions.” Among the “various ways of reacting to sex tensions” were “daydreaming
about romantic situations,” erotic dreams during sleep, and masturbation. San Diego
lessons also emphasized emotional changes and sexual sensations that accompanied
adolescence, such as a girl feeling “stirred or thrilled when a boy she admires is with
her.” But rather than speaking about youth’s methods of dealing with the feelings, San
Diego teachers were to advise students to control such urges in the same way as anger
or fear.

Daydreams, sexual dreams, and masturbation were nothing for youth to be
troubled about, according to the Minnesota curriculum. Daydreaming, the authors
pointed out, was okay as long as it did not become a substitute for participating in social
and recreational activities. Dreams with sexual content that occurred during sleep were
involuntary and occasional, they explained; for boys the dreams might include nocturnal
emissions and for girls they may involve “being embraced or kissed by boys” and “sexual
sensations.” Young people should remember, the text continued, that the dreams were
“a normal part of the growth process, and no one should feel ashamed or guilty because
of them.” Masturbation was “practiced by both boys and girls,” the authors noted without
judgment in their lessons for boys and girls.

The authors of Minnesota’s curriculum wrote in neutral and fairly explicit terms
what masturbation was. They elaborated that masturbation, or “self-stimulation of the
sex organs by manipulation,” usually proceeded to a point where “in the male the penis
becomes erect and the seminal fluid is expelled, and in the female until the sensations
reach the climax known as orgasm.” The somewhat vague reference to manipulation
neglected to explain ways in which one stimulated oneself, leaving open possibilities in a
fashion that might have been enticing (or frustrating) for some. Their use of the term “orgasm”—a word rarely encountered in literature on sex education for youth during this period—was also noteworthy because it applied to female sexual satisfaction. Such an explanation may have been commonplace in sex advice books for married adults, but it was extremely uncommon in books for pubescent girls and boys.

Despite the explanation of masturbation in neutral terms, there are clues that the authors did not intend to promote the practice to their students. A multiple choice question at the end of the unit asked students to identify masturbation with one of the following phrases: “A. sometimes causes insanity; B. is a good way of taking care of sex tension; C. is not physically harmful.” The key indicated that “C” was the correct answer, but whereas “A” was definitely wrong, the idea behind choice “B” was not contradicted by the lesson. The only “objection to masturbation” expressed in the unit “is that the individual who practices it may become satisfied with this method of responding to sex impulses and never establish normal heterosexual relationships.” Creators of the Minnesota curriculum may have believed this to be an adequate deterrent for masturbating youth—or perhaps they felt there was no legitimate reason to dissuade young people from the practice as long as it did not interfere with normal heterosocial relations in adolescence. As for desisting masturbation, the Minnesota text advised similar recourse to hobbies and alternate activities, as had the San Diego curriculum. Not quite as even handed as St. Louis’s lectures, which gave girls license to masturbate if they felt like it, the Minnesota authors neither mentioned losing self-respect nor did they insist on exercising self-control. The recommendations were there “if a young person who masturbates wishes to discontinue the practice.”
Arousal and desire, as discussed in sex education texts and lessons, involved a significant amount of personal choice and individual variation. In this context, some materials suggested that there were gendered differences in what triggered sexual feelings and physiological differences in sexual organs. Yet discussions of masturbation tended to offer a common theory of the practice to both boys and girls. And in keeping with the mental and psychological focus of the era, “sex tensions” discussed in these materials had little to do with anatomy and procreative potential and much more to do with individual inclination. Masturbation and sexual arousal, although they were minor topics in the sex education lessons of the 1940s and 1950s, posed a contradiction to the presentation of anatomical knowledge that was essentially tied to reproductive ability. In these lessons, students acquired a glimpse of a realm of sexuality independent of procreation and marriage. Much more prominent in girls’ lessons about sex, menstrual education returned the focus to the biological capacity for childbirth as well as the emotional aspects of entering puberty and attracting male attention.

Menstruation

Menarche represented girls’ passage into womanhood, and parents and teachers tended to interpret a girl’s first menstruation as a signifier of growing up, becoming a woman, and leaving behind childhood innocence. This event typically took place at age twelve or thirteen, when bonds among girls were expected to weaken and heterosexual interest to develop. According to classroom and educational materials, menarche marked the onset of ovulation for girls, and was intricately linked with heterosexuality, marriage, and motherhood. It was almost never tied to sexual arousal or an urge to masturbate.
At the forefront of education about menstruation was an unlikely duo—cartoon designer Walt Disney and the manufacturer of Kotex menstrual hygiene products. Disney and Kimberly-Clark’s collaboration on the 1946 film *The Story of Menstruation* featured menarche’s correlation with gendered maturity as a narrative structure for learning menstrual hygiene. Distributed free of charge, *The Story of Menstruation* found its way into classrooms across the country. Ideas from the movie—and promotion of Kotex products—circulated even further via the pamphlet “Very Personally Yours.”

Employing animation to describe the biological process known as the menstrual cycle, *The Story of Menstruation* was for menstrual education what *Human Growth* was for teaching about physical growth and reproduction. Viewed by 105 million girls and young women, the movie was in use for over thirty-five years. Catering to a female audience, the Disney production was unusual in its use of a woman narrator. Other “feminine” features of the film were its appeal to Mother Nature and abundance of pink imagery. Menstruation was apparently a delicate subject best discussed in the company of women.

While schools with curricula on human reproduction in biology classes might have briefly touched on menstruation, perhaps through screening *Human Growth*, the biology or life science instructor was not a key figure in menstrual education. Instead, schools offering instruction on menstruation placed lessons in physical education and health courses, and in some instances in home economics courses—situations where girls were ordinarily separated from boys and where the subject was likely to arise. A comparatively small number of boys viewed *The Story of Menstruation* in sex-segregated or coed classrooms; at any rate, the intent of the film was to reach girls as likely consumers of Kotex products. Of all teaching about the body, menstrual

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education most warranted a female teacher—someone who understood menstruation firsthand and whom girls would trust to listen to their fears about their "secret," a euphemism for menstruation that Kimberly-Clark promoted in its advertising campaigns of the 1940s. Although opposed to superstition and working to banish taboos, product manufacturers nevertheless advocated polite secrecy about menstruation.

Mid-twentieth-century adults exuded mixed feelings of celebration and protection for their daughters and pupils as they reached menarche, revealing that scientific objectivity had not entirely replaced sentimentality. While the Victorian taboo on discussing menstruation had partly subsided, the topic of menstruation was not openly discussed. In fact, mothers' neglect in preparing their daughters to expect their periods was an impetus for school instruction about menstruation. Equally unfortunate in the minds of school personnel were mothers who gave daughters information authorities deemed incorrect.

Because medical thinking and commercial products had transformed the "American way" of menstruating in the twentieth century, most mothers—through no fault of their own—were ill prepared for modern instruction. Print advertisements and drugstore displays of menstrual hygiene products, beginning in the 1920s, brought menstruation to the public's attention and initially served as a means for raising girls' awareness about menstruation. By the 1940s, education departments of menstrual hygiene product manufacturers took more assertive measures to reach girls, offering them free educational pamphlets. In 1946, when Kotex manufacturers accelerated their educational agenda with The Story of Menstruation, they launched not only a more aggressive advertising campaign but also an intervention into the perceived maternal inadequacies of women who had come of age in the 1920s. By the early 1950s, San
Diego lessons for girls included a demonstration of how to use a sanitary napkin and belt, how long to wear them, how to purchase them at school from a stock in the teachers' toilet room, how to carry them around, and how to dispose of them, both at school and at home. The Story of Menstruation filmmakers explicitly intended their educational movie to supplant women's advice, particularly their use of homemade menstrual protection and old wives' tales passed down to daughters, nieces, and neighbors. Citing students' favorable reactions to the film, advertisement copy from 1947 proclaimed that "Fear and superstition are banished in the light of scientific fact. And common-sense rules for physical and mental health take the place of rumors and taboos." The filmmakers' common sense was different from "fear and superstition" and "rumors and taboos" that they claimed many women were perpetuating outside the schools. The version of science, "common-sense rules," and "physical and mental health" that filmmakers espoused usurped women's informal methods of menstrual education—possibly widening the gap between mothers and daughters yet offering some useful facts.

Just as Human Growth avoided a "bald" presentation of facts, The Story of Menstruation placed facts in a package that was intended to comfort girls, based on an understanding of the film's psychological impact. Although purportedly scientific and factual, a squeamish approach to facts and outright misrepresentation of menstrual blood compromised the filmmakers' commitment to science and truth. Abandoning realism, filmmakers coddled girls with simplicity. The "ghastly effect of a realistic rendering [of female bodies] was avoided," a writer for Educational Screen observed, and neat diagrams adopted instead. The use of anatomical diagrams was a departure
from in-home methods of education mothers and female relatives adopted, but diagrams were less than realistic and therefore suited the psychological purpose of age-specific simplicity.

In another instance of defiance of facts, filmmakers deliberately presented menstrual blood as white rather than red for self-avowed “psychological” purposes. The teachers’ guide for *The Story of Menstruation* explained the filmmakers’ decision owing to a “definite purpose.” “Pretesting, using the normal color, red, to demonstrate the discharge, revealed that the audience reacted unfavorably to the red. So, for psychological reasons, white was used.” Perhaps they felt the association of red blood with injury and pain was too graphic for audiences between fourth and seventh grades. The makers of *The Story of Menstruation* instructed teachers to point out that the discharge was red, but apparently they did not encourage teachers to discuss the fact that the color of menstrual blood varied in shades of red and brown. Certain facts were withheld as though they were too vulgar for a young audience of girls—yet the filmmakers did not bother to explain the psychological principles involved, perhaps assuming that their “common sense” merited no explanation.

*Human Growth* also avoided red in its depiction of menstruation, likewise representing the uterus lining and menstrual flow in a sanitized white. Like *The Story of Menstruation, Human Growth* was a color production and white blood cannot be explained by a contrast effect that a black-and-white picture might necessitate. When the process of menstruation was explained, *Human Growth*’s narrator indicated that little blood was lost while the uterine lining was shed, perhaps a signal to girls that a familiar red substance was involved. Yet the film provided no explanation of the color of the discharge nor did it note the inaccurate depiction on the screen.
Further contradicting the notion that scientific education was a process free from embarrassment, educators and product manufacturers highlighted the importance of privacy when teaching about girls' menstrual cycles. Keeping one's menses secret from boys and men was apparently not incompatible with modern menstrual hygiene. Although boys and men should be informed about menstruation in the abstract, they need not know specifically when a girl or woman was menstruating—and teachers helped girls to strategize on how to keep their cycles private. In circles of girls and women, such as in a girls' physical education or health class, such circumspection was unnecessary. By avoiding the topic in heterosocial peer culture and at the dinner table, girls could avoid offending boys or men or embarrassing themselves.

Curricula presented contradictory messages about menstruation being natural and simultaneously cause for secrecy and special kinds of hygiene. The Educational Department of Kimberly-Clark recommended to teachers that above all they “clarify to the girls that menstruation is a normal function, one to be accepted as a matter of course.” As much as trying to inform girls about the physiology of menstruation, the curricula conveyed modern messages and attempted to rid girls of myths, fears, and apprehensions surrounding their menstrual cycles—something that nurses must have repeatedly encountered for the curricula to keep emphasizing the point.

Since girls' practices of menstrual hygiene were essential to maintaining privacy about menstruation, the film as well as other forms of menstrual education returned to questions of hygiene frequently. One category of questions involved how to maintain secrecy around boys. In reply to a sample student question about boys peeking in girls' purses, the teachers' guide for *The Story of Menstruation* posited that the product should be “either wrapped in a tissue or protected by an envelope partly” for hygiene purposes,
but also to avoid potential embarrassment. Counseling girls on how discretely to opt out of swimming or dancing (supposing they did not feel up to it) during their periods, the guide insisted that learning to decline an offer politely was a skill "we all have to learn." The answer did not advise revealing that one was menstruating, but nevertheless validated menstruation as an excuse for sitting out of these activities.97 The ideal scenario, they implied, was that informed boys would suspect that the excuse was related to menstruation and would not press the issue.

Glassberg’s references to menstruation in lessons for St. Louis boys in the ninth grade reveal how he conveyed ideas about knowledge and secrecy to boys, but not without prescribing roles for boys in upholding menstrual etiquette. He recommended tacit awareness with consideration. “Girls frequently ask me how I can let my boy friend know that I’m menstruating,” the medical doctor told his male audience. “Now I have assured the girls that I would explain this fundamental difference between the things taking place in your body to you, and that you would come to know without being told, because I agree with the girls, this is a private, personal matter.”98 He further suggested that boys should be understanding, respecting a girl’s wishes to opt out of activities “not because she’s ill but simply because she feels less well during these few days of the month than she ordinarily feels.”99 Noting that mothers also menstruate, Glassberg recommended that boys be agreeable to take care of chores and demonstrate thoughtfulness, which would make a mother “extremely glad that she had a son like you.” He continued that future wives would appreciate their spouses’ extra consideration during menstruation. With this advice, boys stood to "make these women, your girl
friend, your mothers, or your wives far more appreciative of you as a man than they
could possibly be if you were ignorant of, or oblivious to, these profound changes taking
place in the body of the woman.  

Girls' learning to keep menstruation a secret was part of a supposedly modern
attitude toward menstruation; yet sex segregation for learning about menstruation and
avoiding activities during menstrual periods seemed to revert to more archaic patterns
that menstrual educators presumably sought to avoid. While learning to deal with
menstruation in "mixed company" was part of the modern approach, boys and girls did
not ordinarily learn about the topic together—and when they did, pupils did not discuss
the hygiene of menstruation. Unlike their mothers, girls had begun using disposable
sanitary napkins rather than the rags that previous generations used for menstrual
"protection," thus allowing for less visibility of used menstrual products despite an
increased visibility of discretely marketed disposable products. Other aspects of
modern menstrual hygiene were about physical and emotional problems related to
menstruating. As stated in "Growing Up": "I don't want to hear one of you girls say you
are sick or having your sick period. It is not a sick period. It is a perfectly normal part of
living and growing up." Yet why would a girl not want to dance during her period if it
was not accompanied by sickness?

During the early twentieth century, the medicalization of menstruation transferred
authority about women's bodies to physicians. However, given the predominance of
women in the field of nursing, preference for women teachers for menstrual education,
and public schools' regular employment of nurses, school administrators rarely called in
outside doctors for lectures but left instruction in the hands of trusty nurses. Where
incidental instruction about menstruation took place, no one voiced opposition to female
physical education and home economics teachers broaching the subject and offering
guidance to girls. To teach about menstruation, one did not need to be married and a
parent, and no special qualifications or training appeared necessary. As innocuous as
menstrual education might have seemed, the undertaking helped solidify the expansion
of teachers' roles in providing youth with practical education, supplanting parental
responsibility for preparing their children for adult life. Teachers did not intend to relieve
mothers of their obligations to their daughters, but hoped to promote modern methods of
helping daughters control their bodies: maintaining proper diet, bowel movements, rest,
and exercise, not to mention use of hygiene products to guard against stains and
odors.\textsuperscript{104}

Given the abundance of practical advice and the focus on hygiene, communities
were not prone to take offense at menstrual education; how girls controlled their
menstrual flow and daily habits during menstruation was less a subject of public concern
than was controlling sexual behavior. Adults generally perceived of menstruation as a
bathroom matter for girls to solve in privacy with no direct connection to sexual
delinquency or failure to adjust to sex in marriage. \textit{The Story of Menstruation} lavished
girls with advice on personal grooming and becoming feminine, accompanied by a dose
of health and anatomy. Advice on remaining cheerful, staying fresh, maintaining good
posture, and minimizing frustrations during menstruation were highlighted by images of a
cartoon sun winking at a caricatured white girl, and the girl admiring her reflection in a
mirror. Details about grooming, behavior, and social norms did not set menstrual
education apart from sex education in general, but were characteristic of the melding of
gender conduct and sexuality in diverse forms of sex education.

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Natural metaphors, such as the “birds and bees,” as well as “modern” imagery of rationalized society, helped demonstrate reproductive and menstrual processes. A mixing of metaphors and allusions occurred not uncommonly in the same teaching device, showing how scientific rigor was compromised to tell a story. San Diego’s revised curriculum in 1951 suggests an effort at greater objectivity of bodily processes. Whereas the pituitary gland’s “control-center” had delivered “messages through the blood stream to the ovaries,” according to the first edition of “Growing Up,” the second edition simply stated that upon puberty girls’ bodies begin to produce mature ova.105 Eggs “mature[d]” rather than “ripen[ed],” and they “disappear[ed]” rather than “die[d],” when San Diego pupils learned about menstruation in the 1950s.106 Maturity may have been more fitting for human tissue than ripening (more commonly associated with fruits), and whereas dying eggs might have sounded similar to abortion or miscarriage (or rotten eggs), eggs that disappeared might have seemed less troublesome to flush down the toilet.

Sometimes The Story of Menstruation seemed to deliberately invoke giddiness and fancifulness, even though its stated goal was to enlighten girls with modern science. In the movie, the pituitary gland was posited as a message control center but the ultimate authority was Mother Nature. According to the female narrator of the movie, Mother Nature commanded bodily functions “through automatic control centers called glands.” Going beyond “Growing Up” in terms of metaphor and personification (what would you expect from Disney?), The Story of Menstruation portrayed Mother Nature as giving “orders,” hormones as “busy little messengers,” and the pituitary gland and ovaries obedient participants in a passive female body.107

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Offering vocabulary and facts, lessons on menstruation introduced or refreshed students' understanding of female reproductive anatomy, usually with the aid of charts provided by sanitary pad manufacturers. Scientific vocabulary supposedly offered an improvement on the monosyllabic and juvenile words many parents provided their children for the body and using the toilet. Yet scientific vocabulary—like science as a whole—never existed outside of values and culture. San Diego teachers followed lessons on reproductive anatomy with more specific details of menstruation and menstrual hygiene for girls. After undergoing revisions, Lampe rewrote the explanations of menstruation in "Growing Up"—apparently attempting greater precision and objectivity while ridding materials of old-fashioned euphemisms. She was not, however, very successful.

Revealing the difficulty of achieving objectivity, San Diego lessons show differential treatment of girls' and boys' discharge of sex cells. While it is problematic to assume that menstruation and seminal emissions are parallel events (since only one is associated with orgasm and pleasure), they do share the characteristics of beginning during puberty and eliminating sex cells from the body. They were also essential topics for sex-segregated sex education during puberty as occurrences that most children experience with some level of confusion, shame, and embarrassment. Both menstruation and nocturnal emissions were called "natural" in the San Diego lessons, but rather than sperm cells dying or disappearing, boys' emissions were "a natural way by which the body disposes of the excess fluid."109 In the same lesson for boys, teachers explained menstruation with larger implications. "Since the girl is too young to have

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married and mated, there is no sperm to meet the egg and start it growing to be a baby, so it stays in the uterus for a little while and then passes out through the vagina," teachers were guided to instruct the boys.¹¹⁰

Menstruation seemed more problematic somehow than seminal emissions in the rendering that "Growing Up" provided. Language indicating menstruation as a problem or injury appeared in the original San Diego lesson plans, working at cross-purposes with the effort to persuade youth it was perfectly normal. Teachers were to explain that the uterine lining would gradually heal in preparation for the next month's menstrual period.¹¹¹ The revised curriculum did not mention healing but referred to a rebuilding of the lining, a mechanical rather than organic metaphor, but one nevertheless suggestive of a problem to be fixed.¹¹² Such language was absent in discussions of boys' seminal emissions and wet dreams.

Menstruation education was, in many ways, an extension of providing children with proper bathroom etiquette, but possessing greater implications for heterosexual adjustment. Advice about hygiene predominated in the approach to teaching girls about menstruation, indicating to girls how they could behave in good taste, avoid offending others—especially the other sex—and remain feminine during what teachers insisted was a natural process. In spite of their commitment to removing its veil of superstition, educators still perpetuated silences and euphemism about menstruation, perhaps because the educators themselves had retained the idea that menstruation was repulsive. It is difficult to know how many instructors, like Glassberg in St. Louis, taught boys—without patronizing—to respect women and their needs during menstruation.

Among the contradictions of menstrual education was its attempt to supplant ignorance with objectivity—an agenda undermined by lessons that focused on secrecy
on the one hand and Mother Nature on the other. And while menarche and participation in heterosexual activity may not have coincided in many girls' lives, menstrual education drew attention to the possibility. Educators associated the advent of menstruation with girls' increased attention to their appearance and heterosocial acceptability, and, in *The Story of Menstruation*, linked menarche to the fun-loving and active heterosocial lifestyle of Disney's cartoon character. The film and other educational materials acknowledged procreative capability and encouraged femininity, designated in terms of hygiene, discretion, and heterosocial attraction. Male-female attraction may have seemed like a safe subject—indeed an adolescent "fact of life"—to mid-twentieth-century educators. Menstrual education provoked hardly any controversy; however, its framework implicitly assured girls that they were entitled to sexual feelings and adult-like heterosexual behavior upon menarche.

**Reproduction**

Whether educators designed the instruction for mixed-sex audiences (as in *Human Growth*) or for sex-segregated classes (as in San Diego), boys and girls learned about reproduction in much the same terms—how a sperm cell met an egg cell and began the process of creating human life. "Sperm are deposited close to the mouth of the uterus," the San Antonio, Texas, teachers' guide for senior high school classes explained in response to the question "How is the egg fertilized?" The school's unit on "Reproduction: The Story of the Beginning" initially pointed out that parents were involved in reproduction, and, for instance, that fathers were responsible for the child's
sex. Yet the discussion of how pregnancy occurred left out any mention of humans, reinserting them in the narrative only when the fetus had begun to grow in the mother’s womb.114

Reproduction narratives in mid-twentieth-century sex education were generally heroic and full of normative prescriptions, metaphors, and euphemisms. The opposite of reproduction—women’s failure to conceive—resulted in menstruation, which was discussed in much less glorified terms. Teachers instructed about successful conception and prenatal development as a triumph of human biological capacity. San Antonio’s lessons went so far as to proclaim reproduction as the “closest thing to divinity that man possesses.”115

Vagueness about men and women’s roles in procreation detracted attention from the people—and more specifically the sexual activity and potential pleasure—involving in sexual intercourse. The emphasis, after all, was on reproduction, not sexual stimulation or climax, which must have left youth very confused about why reproduction and sex education were formerly or currently viewed as taboo. The union of egg and sperm cell was the focus during the narrative of reproduction, anthropomorphizing the sex cells as though they were characters in a fairy tale. Similar to what feminist anthropologist Emily Martin discovered in her examination of 1980s college textbooks, the “romance” preceding the union privileged male sperm as active and female eggs as passive, mirroring stereotypical gender roles and heterosexual courtship norms.116

Young viewers may have blinked and missed it, but Human Growth did imply that married adults who participated in the act of “mating” were instigators of the birth process. Without defining the term or explaining the act of mating, the film left students to read between the lines, or make connections to previous lessons in animal biology, if
they wanted to understand this all-important sex act. The film, however, continued apace with its story of "how life begins," moving directly to the drama of sperm and egg. In the question and answer portion of the movie, the teacher praised Alan for correctly answering the question of when human life begins with the response "when a sperm cell enters an egg cell." The cursory mention of the father's sperm cells "pass[ing] from the penis into the vagina of the mother" was, by the end of the film, an insignificant detail in the process of human reproduction—no doubt a move intended to desexualize the film.

Educators chose metaphorical language and avoidance of the topic of heterosexual intercourse—and sometimes inaccuracies—in teaching adolescents at various stages of primary and secondary education. Classes for primary and junior high schools from Illinois to California relied, for instance, on de Schweinitz's children's book Growing Up. Prior to 1947, this book, in obvious defiance of truth, claimed that sexual intercourse only occurred in the context of love between married women and men. The author deployed the sperm and egg story, but alluded to human agency. Avoidance of discussing the "sex act itself" worked best with older adolescents who surely had gathered some type of knowledge about sex, as an account of a twelfth-grade family living course at Arsenal Technical High School in Indianapolis, Indiana, indicated.

The Story of Menstruation's narrative was especially evasive about sexual intercourse, although it drew attention to the "story of the egg." In fact, the movie never made mention of sperm cells in its description of conception. Pregnancy occurred, the narrator explained, "when a woman is going to have a child." It was the egg that got impregnated—not the woman—making the woman a passive participant in her own pregnancy. In the teachers' guide, sample questions pertained exclusively to menstrual hygiene and conduct, regarding such concerns as what was the "normal" amount of flow...
and length of the period, should girls use tampons, and what activities were permissible during one's period. In this film and discussions of its subject, pregnancy was the caveat and biology a sideshow while menstrual hygiene was the center of attention, but only for the duration of the unit on menstruation.

Omission of information, however, did not preclude youth from demanding answers to sex questions. Most instances of sex education included a question and answer session, usually through anonymous questions deposited in a box. Students had an opportunity, then, to obtain information left out of the film or to question the content of class presentations and movies. A report from Hillsborough County, Florida, for instance, indicated that most questions students asked following a screening of Human Growth were about the baby. But the account also revealed youth's insistence on learning about sexual intercourse. Pupils regularly questioned the teacher, “How do the male cells get into the female?” If Hillsborough County teachers followed the suggested responses to questions from the book Human Growth, they explained “The sperm cells pass from the penis into the upper part of the vagina. This happens during mating, or intercourse. In mating, the penis becomes stiff and hard, so that it can fit naturally into the vagina.”

Human Growth's question and answers gave guidance on explaining that sexual intercourse does not always result in pregnancy and why some children are born out of wedlock, providing facts as well as moral imperatives. Important techniques in conveying moral standards included pointing out social norms and encouraging youth to identify with the infant and child born out of wedlock rather than the adults engaging in nonmarital sex. Offering the adult perspective, the book noted, “From time to time all human beings who have reached sexual maturity feel the urge to mate with the opposite sex. This urge can lead a young man and woman to mate before they are ready to marry.
and establish a home. As the result of such a union, a baby may be born." The response continued by shifting focus away from the adults to society and unwanted children. “Since our society disapproves of unmarried parents, not only must these parents face the disapproval of society, their child must also face it. Moreover, because these unmarried parents are not prepared for the responsibilities of a home and family, they are not able to give their child the care and love all children need.”123

Questions San Diego youth dropped into their school’s question boxes likewise showed their lingering pursuit of answers about sexual acts, or perhaps their amusement at forcing adults to address their questions. They also reveal that San Diego educators seemed rather willing to provide some information about sexual intercourse and sexual pleasure. Because their curriculum—especially in its revised edition—circulated as a model of how to teach sex education, San Diego’s inclusion of questions about sex and how to answer them is noteworthy. Students wanted to know, “How do sperm cells get out?” “How long does the penis have to stay in the vagina for the sperm to enter the mother’s body?”—indicating they already understood that the penis had to be inside the vagina for mating to occur. They also inquired, “Do men and women mate just when they want to have babies?” and “What is another word meaning mating?”124

San Diego sex education leaders adopted a fairly straightforward approach to answering youth’s questions about sexual activity, although they sometimes too lapsed into moralizing. Before sperm cells exited the penis, they explained, the organ would become erect; “muscular contractions squeeze the sperms and semen into the tubes and out of the penis.”125 “Not very long. Perhaps only a few minutes. The time varies” was the suggested answer to the question about how long the penis remained inside the vagina during intercourse.126

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San Diego educators echoed de Schweinitz's emphasis on love and marriage as a factor in mating, but finessed the question of sexual activity outside of marriage and love, in a manner more evasive than the Human Growth book. They guided teachers to answer questions about when men and women have intercourse with the statement, "A father and mother may love each other very much, and mating is one way of showing their love."\textsuperscript{127} Regarding synonyms for mating, the guide first answered "sexual intercourse," but followed with the explanation that "There is also the common four-letter word which we often see written on the walls of toilets. It means to mate, but it is a cheap and ugly word." The text further pointed out that children who did not know proper terms for sex used the four-letter word because they lacked "the right information" and knowledge of "how wonderful" the birth process is. "Any boy or girl who really understands how life begins would not want to make something cheap and ugly of it by using vulgar words or drawing vulgar pictures."\textsuperscript{128}

Oregon and San Diego educators attempted to be objective in defining sexual intercourse and determined to address sincere questions from youth, as had the 1947 Minnesota guide Units in Personal Health and Human Relations. The Minnesota plans both provided definitions of the term "sexual intercourse," as had San Diego's curriculum and the book for Human Growth, which compensated for lack of an answer in the movie. Minnesota's suggested definition was "The penis of the male is inserted into the vagina of the female in order that the seminal fluid containing sperms may be deposited where the sperms can enter the uterus."\textsuperscript{129} In St. Louis, the phrasing with which Glassberg explained intercourse to ninth graders was "in the sexual relationships of marriage the penis of the husband is introduced into the vagina of his wife to deposit sperm cells at the mouth of the womb."\textsuperscript{130} The similarities among these definitions suggest that the
authors may have built upon one another’s ideas, a theory further supported by bibliographical citations. The film guide for Human Growth, although dated 1947, includes a reference section that cites the 1949 book Human Growth, Units in Personal Health and Human Relations, and Life and Growth, as well as a number of pamphlets published between 1943 and 1949. Likewise, the second edition of “Growing Up” listed Human Growth film and book in its bibliography. Although Lampe did not include Units in Personal Health and Human Relations among references for “Growing Up,” San Diego counselor Geneva E. Gordon’s observation in the early 1950s that it was “a real text, the first good, usable one to appear” indicates that some San Diego educators put it to use.

Minnesota’s blueprint for sex education went further. In the teacher’s guide for a senior high school unit, the Minnesota authors provided answers to questions that senior high school students might ask. Among them were “Can a doctor prove that a girl is a virgin?” which involved a discussion of the hymen and the point that assuming “that a girl is not a virgin simply because the hymen is absent or has been broken” was wrong. Another question regarded a “safe period” when intercourse would not result in pregnancy, and yet another brought up the question of abortion. The suggested answers for those questions involved reference to studies which “indicate that fertilization may take place on any day of the menstrual cycle.” Mention of abortion included reference to both “natural causes” and surgical procedures; the latter, the authors maintained, was illegal “for reasons other than the protection of the mother’s life or health.” In a lesson suggested for senior high school or junior college, Minnesota educators recommended discussions of “erogenous zones” as well as three phases of sexual intercourse:

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“preliminary love play,” “the act of copulation,” and “relaxation,” among other sexual topics. It is highly improbable that such discussions occurred in many classes of high school students.\(^{136}\)

There were contradictions in the curricula of even the most progressive plans. San Diego’s approach, for one, continued to use the euphemistic de Schweinitz text into the 1950s, while knowing some of the more explicit questions of youth. In the same (revised) edition of “Growing Up” that printed the appendix of questions and answers, some of which pertained to intercourse, a new and misleadingly titled “Sex Relations” section of the sixth-grade curriculum offered few facts and primarily consisted of advice about abstinence. Once more, the text turned the focus to the unloved child, who might not have the mother and father that “every family needs.” Sex relations before marriage “almost always” resulted in “unhappiness,” the lesson explained, and potential pregnancy and “heartache” would be likely results. Sliding into moralizing, the lesson proclaimed that “if boys and girls really want to do what’s right, they will be strong enough to control themselves and not take the chance of causing so much unhappiness.”\(^{137}\) At this point in the lesson, a brief mention of syphilis and gonorrhea further contributed to (and concluded) the discussion of sex relations and potential “pain and suffering.”\(^{138}\)

This discussion of so-called sex relations, using terms of neglect and suffering, reinforced the unit’s presentation of masturbation, reasons for change, and self-control that were also part of the lesson. But in San Diego, “Growing Up” was not the last word on sex. The class had a question-and-answer session, including anonymous questions, and there was also junior and senior high group counseling. In group counseling, the topic of sex relations would again emerge and peers could assert their varied
perspectives based on personal experiences. Some of the more explicit topics contained in *Units in Personal Health and Human Relations* were potential subject matter, especially for those students whom Gordon taught.

Although most courses in sex education probably did not include contraceptive information, a surprising number did in fact talk about family planning. Whether they talked about the idea of family limitation, or more specifically about practices that controlled procreation, remains unclear. Evidence indicating that teachers discussed specific contraceptive devices or methods, however, is lacking, but mention of family limitation would undoubtedly have prompted questions from youth about how (and perhaps why). Those who felt such information was inappropriate included members of Michigan's State Department of Public Instruction, teachers at Arsenal Technical High School in Indianapolis, and individuals associated with the Denver, Colorado, city schools.139 Minnesota authors explained that their state law prevented them from discussing contraceptive devices.140

Instruction related to contraception occurred in a variety of educational contexts. Having engaged in limited discussion with his seventh-grade science classes, Babcock reported that he told these students "that there is medical knowledge available from doctors which makes it possible for parents to control the size of their families." He claimed this was adequate information for students at that level.141 A couple of classes had planned discussions of birth control, including Family Relationships courses in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Units in Bio-social Relationships a public high school in Greeley, Colorado.142 A survey of Pennsylvania public schools in the early 1950s claimed that less than 20 percent of the respondents who had formal programs in sex education covered planned parenthood, usually in separate boys and girls classes at the twelfth-
grade level or in girls' home economics classes. This percentage translated to forty schools, a small proportion of 477 replies the researchers received, but nevertheless a notable number.

"Growing Up" considered the possibility and implications of sexuality outside the context of marriage and reproduction in a lesson that was to a great degree about physiology, but it did so in terms inspired by psychology. If unhappiness was the likely outcome of premarital sex, and sex was a pleasurable activity that could only be fully enjoyed between husbands and wives, what was the reward for self-control? With no biological justification for delayed gratification—there was prophylaxis for venereal disease and while unmarried pregnancies might be emotionally painful and cause unhappiness, they were not debilitating—educators resorted to psychological motivation for abstinence. Adjustment, a key term for mid-century psychologists and educators that more or less meant adopting social norms, was the desired outcome of social hygiene, sex education, and health and human relations education. Such lessons were appropriate for health classes but even better suited for social studies.

Conclusion

While *Human Growth*’s teacher/actor beckoned students watching the film to ask any questions they wished, the questions posed by the film’s students revealed a degree of classroom decorum and wholesome curiosity that educators no doubt hoped viewers would emulate. The film’s question-and-answer sequence encouraged questions focused on reproduction and childbirth; it remained silent on sexual intercourse and other sexual matters. According to the Hillsborough County report, discussion following screenings of *Human Growth* involved “answering all questions asked with respect and
interest so the students will feel it perfectly proper to ask any kind of question they might have in mind.” Was any question really “proper”? “Children throughout the county ask the same questions,” the report’s author noted, perhaps offering reassurance that question-and-answer sessions did not enter risqué territory. “The baby is the center of interest—freaks, disease, blue babies, sex, color of hair, twins (especially Siamese) are all discussed.” The report alleged that students inquired about the film’s central emphases: sperm, eggs, fetuses, and infants. Other questions were no doubt voiced, although perhaps teachers ignored or minimized them in promoting sex education.

The perspective of Human Growth not only eluded matters of sexual behavior; it also rendered women passive or sometimes absent, even in the postconception stages of fetal development. Pupils’ outside exposure to pregnant women (especially mothers or relatives) might have led to curiosity about the female body, yet during the course of the film, the silhouette of the adult woman faded into the background. Meanwhile, the narrator described the birth process from the perspective of the fetus (figure 3.7). In essence, the film’s narrative scripted a view that focused on the infant and, to some extent, changes during puberty, but, ultimately, steered viewers away from questions about adult women, men, and sexuality. Inquiring students nevertheless posed questions that educators might have wished to avoid.

Sexual intercourse was neither the climax nor the main event of mid-twentieth-century sex education. The narrative of growth instead drew attention to the creation of life, often couching conception in celebratory terms and regaling youth with pictures and stories of animal and human babies. Growth was a process that involved everything from puberty to childbirth, and educators sought to instill in youth a wholesome regard for nature’s plan and the responsibilities of “civilized” society. Curricula stressed both
physical and psychological aspects of puberty, including the development of sexual organs and menstruation, as well as their accompanying emotional consequences. In rare cases, they approached the topic of sexual arousal.

Gender socialization, which helped prepare boys and girls to become husbands and wives and fathers and mothers, was a common thread in discussions of sexual anatomy, masturbation, menstruation, and reproduction. And while girls and women were rarely absent from the narrative of growth, their relative insignificance in comparison to sperm, eggs, and fetuses sometimes displaced attention from girls’ actual bodies onto diagrams and charts and stories of courting sex cells, yielding objectification if not objective facts. Yet San Diego, St. Louis, and Minnesota plans—and offshoots of these sources—extended the potential for a more honest and relevant, if contradictory, discussion of anatomy, growth, and physical processes related to sex. In the process of educating about the physical aspects of sex, teachers exposed young people to multiple

Figure 3.7. Shadow of a maternal body before childbirth. *Human Growth* (1947)
ways of thinking about the body. Biology, health, and psychology were among the frameworks for presenting, maintaining, and modifying sexual norms. Clearly there was competition for authority: between science and religion, medicine and mental health, and parents and teachers. Mid-twentieth-century sex education curricula wavered between modern permissiveness and defense of the status quo, leaving girls in a position to assert their authority as adolescents and decision makers.
Notes


4By the 1960s, a number of sex educators believed students needed the information before reaching puberty, as in Anaheim, California, where lessons about puberty began in the fourth grade. See Jeffrey P. Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 173.


On teenagers and bras, see Brumberg, *Body Project*, 108-18.


In her research on "troublesome" children of the early twentieth century, Kathleen W. Jones found that within the child guidance clinics of the 1930s, sex education was more often a remedy for troubled boys than troubled girls—in spite of the fact that girls' sexual behavior was often the source of female juvenile delinquency. Child guidance professionals, trained as experts in mental hygiene, believed that knowledge about heterosexual reproduction could steer boys away from masturbation and same-sex sexual activity; these professionals viewed girls who possessed knowledge about sex, however, as showing "signs of 'sophistication,'" implying that girls' sexual knowledge led to precocious sexual experimentation with adult men. Kathleen W. Jones, *Taming the Troublesome Child: American Families, Child Guidance, and the Limits of Psychiatric Authority* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), esp. 162-68, quotation on 168. Focusing on preventative rather than reactive solutions to sex delinquency, public school sex educators were less wary of sharing sex information with girls.

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See, for example, Stuart E. Marsee, “The Status of Sex Education in Oregon Secondary Schools with Suggestions for Its Organization and Improvement” (master’s thesis, University of Oregon, 1942), 70.


13Marriage manuals since the early twentieth century had suggested that sex in marriage served other functions, including increased intimacy; yet lesson plans and texts for youth—certainly those geared to younger adolescents—generally remained silent on this topic. See, for example, Marie Carmichael Stopes, Married Love: A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties (London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1918).


20 For evidence of girls' ignorance about pregnancy, see the testimonies in Howard M. Bell, *Youth Tell Their Story* (Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education, 1938), 42, 91. For an anecdote about a pubescent boy who thought lumps in his breasts meant that he was pregnant, see Kirkendall, *Sex Education as Human Relations*, 80.


22 On failure to achieve sexual adjustment due to women's ignorance and fear, see Miriam C. Gould, *The Psychological Influence upon the Adolescent Girl of the*

Sex education leaders commonly deemed a teacher's adjustment and attitude more important than her training in the subject matter, although some special training was desirable. See, for example, Kirkendall, *Sex Education as Human Relations*, chap. 15; and Strain, *Sex Guidance*, chap. 12.

On disapproval of use of visual aids in sex education among professionals attending the Fifteenth International Congress of Hygiene and Demography in 1900, see Wallace H. Maw, "Fifty Years of Sex Education in the Public Schools of the United States (1900-1950): A History of Ideas" (Ed. D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 1953), 37, 68.


29 Kirby, “Family Life Education,” 37; and Dickinson and Belskie, *Birth Atlas*.


31 Lampe, “Growing Up,” in Wetherill, *Human Relations Education*, 2d ed., 72; *Human Growth*, 16 mm, 20 min., E. C. Brown Trust and Eddie Albert Productions, Portland, Ore., 1947; *From Flower to Fruit*, 16 mm, 16 min., Eastman Teaching Films and
Encyclopedia Britannica Films, Chicago, Ill., 1933; *The Sunfish*, 16 mm, 11 min.,
Encyclopedia Britannica Films, Chicago, Ill., 1941; *The Snapping Turtle*, 16 mm, 12 min.,
Encyclopedia Britannica Films, Chicago, Ill., 1940; *Snakes Are Interesting*, 16 mm. 12 min., Muri Deusing Film Productions, Milwaukee, Wis., 1947; and *Dangerous Stranger*, 16 mm, 12 min., Sid Davis Productions, Los Angeles, Calif., 1950.

The Story of Menstruation, 16 mm, 10 min., Walt Disney Productions, 1946. Some San Diego schools used the film with fifth-grade girls as needed and others could opt to use it with sixth-grade girls. G. Gage Wetherill, “Sex Education in the Public Schools,” *Journal of School Health* 31 (September 1961): 235-39, esp. 237. The film was used in boys' classes (but not in girls' classes) in junior high group counseling during the mid-1960s. Augustine Escamilla, *Guide for Secondary Social Health Education* (San Diego, Calif.: San Diego City Schools, 1966), 24, 41.

G. Gage Wetherill to Jean B. Pinney, 18 January 1950, Box 82, folder 9, American Social Hygiene Papers, Social Welfare History Archives, Minneapolis, Minnesota (hereafter ASHA Papers). Wetherill was no doubt speaking from experience of screening *Human Growth* at San Diego schools.


San Diego instructors used charts prepared by nurse Alice Creelman, which were made into filmstrips and slides. Slater, “Study of the Social Health Program,” 79.


Ibid., 45-46, 52-55.

The drawings are attributed to the Medical Art Shop of the University of Minnesota, initialed JEH, and dated 1943 and 1944 respectively. Biester, Griffiths, and Pearce, *Personal Health and Human Relations*, 41, 43.

Ibid.


Ibid., 52.

Ibid., 47-53, quotation on 52. It is unclear if the charts were displayed to the class, or the parenthetical “see chart” was intended for teachers only. A subsequent lesson in the unit, making use of charts, advised that teachers prop the illustrations on the blackboard’s chalk tray and leave up the diagrams during the class period so students could study them more closely. This might mean that the Dickinson diagrams were intended primarily for teachers’ edification but were also potential classroom displays.

Ibid., 55.

Ibid., 52.

Ibid.

Ibid., 60. Fashion and health advisers alike, in such magazines as *Seventeen* and *Parent’s Magazine*, endorsed the idea that bras (especially made of nylon) gave needed support to breasts—even for adolescents. See Brumberg, *Body Project*, 108-18.

Bert Y. Glassberg, “The St. Louis Board of Education Program on Personal and Family Living,” [March 1957,] Grade 9, Lecture #4 – Boys, 7, Box 7, folder 183, Bert Y. Glassberg Papers, Becker Medical Library, Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, Missouri (hereafter Glassberg Papers).

Beck, *Film Guide*, “Complete text of the film story,” n.p. This is not at all what the book says, but apparently the filmmakers had the authors’ permission. See Beck, *Film Guide*, acknowledgements, n.p.; and T. M. N. Lewis and M. Kneberg, *Hiwassee Island* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1946), 188.

According to Richard A. Littman, an associate of the film’s creator during the 1950s, Beck was “brilliant,” interested in cultural anthropology, and had a Native American half-brother; his intentions would not have been to reify cultural differences or objectify “Others.” Richard A. Littman, phone communication with author, 18 October 2001.

Patricia Penn Hilden’s analysis of representations of Indians in American culture suggested that naked dark bodies feature in *National Geographic* were “emblems of American liberalism.” Patricia Penn Hilden, *When Indians Were Nickels: An Urban Mixed-Blood Story* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), esp. 94, 104. As was the case for normative roles within the dominant American culture, secondary school curricula assumed that gender roles and sexuality among Native American tribes were ahistorical. See also Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

Ann Sullivan, “Touchy Sex Subject Handled Objectively in New Film: Bird, Bee Tint Out of Vogue,” *Portland Oregonian*, 15 February 1948, 24. It is hard to imagine in 2000, viewing pre-Technicolor images, that someone would intentionally choose the dull colors. They surely were not selected to excite. Slides were available for loan or purchase along with the film, using images from the movie. The series of 20 slides featured bodily images that could be discussed in greater detail, and in some instances, included labeling of the names for various parts. Beck, *Film Guide*, “Structure and
Theory of the Film,” n.p. The guide praised the effectiveness of slides as a teaching tool, and E. C. Brown Trust records indicate that most purchases of the movie included the slides. Receipts register, June 1950–October 1958, Box 1, E. C. Brown Foundation Papers, Division of Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.


60Ibid.

61Ibid., 13.

62Having accompanied Beck on screenings of the film, Littman confirmed my supposition that students did voice concerns about masturbation during question-and-answer sessions. Littman, telephone communication.


64See, for example, Biester, Griffiths, and Pearce, Personal Health and Human Relations, 30, 145, 152; Howard Whitman, Let’s Tell the Truth about Sex (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1948), 104-10; and Edith Hale Swift, Step by Step in Sex Education (1938; reprint, New York: MacMillan, 1950): 170-73.

65See, for example, Babcock, “Seventh Grade Course,” 381; and Lampe, “Growing Up,” in Wetherill, Human Relations Education, 55-56.

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Evert R. Pearcy, “Sex Education in the Senior High Schools of New Jersey” (master’s thesis, West Virginia University, 1940), 38, 41. The girls’ lesson also noted “Use Meagher’s Conclusions,” which were not indicated. Such sources as the curriculum outlines included in Pearcy’s thesis are disappointingly cryptic.


Ibid., 57.

Glassberg, “St. Louis Program,” Grade 9, Lecture #6 [- Boys], 4, Glassberg Papers. Although not labeled for boys, passages such as that above suggest that a male audience was intended. Apparently a corresponding girls’ lecture was not preserved in this collection.

Ibid., 5.

Ibid., 6-11, quotation on 6.

Glassberg, “St. Louis Program,” Grade 9, Lecture #5 – Girls, 2, Glassberg Papers.

Ibid., 3.

Ibid., 3-7.

Ibid., 7-8


Biester, Griffiths, and Pearce, Personal Health and Human Relations, 29-30. It is difficult, however, to assess how frequently teachers used this guide or adopted its greater explicitness in classrooms.
79Ibid., 64-66, quotation on 64.


81Ibid., 32.


84On marketing Kotex, see Kennard, “Corporation in the Classroom.” Although San Diego City Schools did not show the movie to sixth-grade students, the 1948 pamphlet appeared in the 1951 teachers’ manual as a free, recommended resource for girls. Lampe, “Growing Up,” in Wetherill, *Human Relations Education*, 2d ed., 74.


86Kennard, “Corporation in the Classroom,” 36.

Kennard, "Corporation in the Classroom."

See, for example, Glassberg, "St. Louis Program," Grade 9, Lecture # 5 – Girls, 7.

The phrase is from Brumberg, *Body Project*, chap. 2.

Ibid., 46-47.


Kotex advertisement, 382-83.


Ibid., 6.

Ibid., 8. Sex education plans for Plainfield High School classes in New Jersey dealt with "what to say when in a mixed group and swimming is suggested" while one is menstruating. Course of Study for Girls in Sex Education in Plainfield High School, Plainfield, New Jersey, in Pearcy, "Sex Education in New Jersey," 41.

Glassberg, "St. Louis Program," Grade 9, Lecture #4 – Boys, 5.

Ibid.
San Diego group counseling covered "menstruation and its function, including attitude of boys to menstruation" in the second meeting. Wetherill, "Sex Education in the Public Schools," 237. On the changing hygiene of menstruation and its relationship to generations and ethnicity, see Brumberg, *Body Project*, chap. 2


Brumberg, *Body Project*, 49.


Ibid.


Kirkendall, *Sex Education as Human Relations*, 69.

110Ibid.
111Ibid., 48.
114Ibid., 64-65.
115Ibid., 66.

Kennard, “Corporation in the Classroom,” 191.


Ibid.


Ibid., 68.

Ibid., 70.

Ibid., 71.

Ibid.

Biester, Griffiths, and Pearce, *Personal Health and Human Relations*, 98. I have seen no other texts for school sex education from this period that discussed hymens.

Glassberg, “St. Louis Program,” Grade 9, Lecture #3, 11, Box 7, folder 183, Glassberg Papers.


Ibid., 151.

Ibid., 188-209, quotations on 200, 202.


Ibid.


Babcock, “Seventh Grade Course,” 381.


Morgan, “Hillsborough Study,” ASHA Papers.

Ibid.
"The emotional and social factors involved [in sex education] are of equal if not
greater importance than the child's acquisition of information on the physiology of sex
and reproduction," explained the authors of "The School's Responsibility in Social
Hygiene Education" in 1940. "So conceived," they argued, "sex education is an
inseparable part of the education of the total personality of the child." In fact, teachers
devoted a large proportion of the time spent in sex education and family living classes to
matters that were only remotely connected to the physical body. As was especially
apparent in teaching about menstruation, lessons often provided more advice about
conduct and mental health than about physiology. Learning about the body, the sexual
organs, and their reproductive capacities amounted to learning how to become an adult
man or woman, according to the norms of society. When the physical body was not the
center of focus in these lessons, educators' attention to gendered behaviors and
personality adjustment was most prominent.

Sex education in public schools of the 1940s and 1950s stressed personal
psychological development and maturity. Anxiety about shifting gender roles
accompanied mobilization for war, as men and women adopted new tasks to make ends
meet or defend U.S. interests in the international arena. School personnel and sex educators dedicated themselves to assisting in these times of crisis; responsible for the training of young people, they sought to instill in youth a sense of purpose and commitment to the family and nation. They further attempted to compensate for the apparent inadequacy of parental attention to matters of grooming, hygiene, and conduct. Stable families and a stable nation required psychologically mature men and women, and schools provided a laboratory for inculcating so-called American values, including white middle-class norms, complementary heterosexuality, and gendered ideals. In this context, many parents and citizens welcomed sex education—as it was conceived during the middle decades of the twentieth century—as a strategy for dealing with social change.

If surviving economic hardship in the 1930s and the quest for victory in the 1940s temporarily trumped gender conventions, they did not revolutionize girls’ and women’s acceptable traits and behaviors. During the 1930s and early 1940s, many women had to work in order to put food on the table, while others sought to assist the war effort. As gender roles were temporarily recast in the context of depression and war, many young people in the mid-twentieth century grew up in homes where gender roles were not static. Sex educators of this era often commented on youthful idealism, and one aspect of that idealism was a faith in possibilities not constrained by gender.

Parents’ opinions on matters of gender conduct and dating restrictions may have varied, but they did not impede the implementation of sex education lessons. Even without consensus on such matters as women’s employment outside the home or etiquette for young women’s interactions with soldiers, adults generally entrusted schools to teach sex and family life education with emphasis on mature attitudes and
decent behavior. Although there was occasional opposition to schools pursuing such practical, nonacademic subjects as life adjustment education, few parents, community members, or prominent educators objected to sex education, and many took comfort in sex education's messages about normative gendered and heterosexual behavior.³ Who could object to schools helping adolescents accept their maleness or femaleness in preparation for future marriage?

During the mid-twentieth century, adolescence was perceived as a critical moment for adjusting to sex, gender, and heterosexuality. "To accept one's physique and masculine or feminine role" and "to develop new relations with age mates of both sexes," the Detroit, Michigan, source book for family life education posited, were the first two "developmental tasks" of adolescence.⁴ Accepting sex differences, or the distinctions between being male and female, was crucial to building an individual identity and wholesome relationships between the sexes during adolescence, and it was supposedly also a contributing factor in future marital success. Courses aimed at adolescents conveyed how gender roles and relationships with the other sex were significant to mental health, privileging companionate marriages and nuclear families but occasionally acknowledging alternative situations in which young women might find themselves. Notions of gender differences contained racial and class subtexts, idealizing the masculine and feminine features of white, middle-class men and women.⁵

This chapter explores how sex educators presented femininity (and masculinity), what they called "sex differences," and boy-girl relationships—topics linked to sex but more clearly about gender and heterosexual identity. I argue that educators' exaltation of normative femininity, masculinity, and heterosexuality was a tool for resolving adolescent problems, which educators pursued with hopes of reducing social instability among
students of all races and backgrounds. In the process, psychological theories about adjustment, behavior, and norms infused the curricula. Their emphasis on mental (rather than physical) health led educators to discard some aspects of sexist and racist thinking about the physical body, yet psychological approaches contained their own racialized logic, and complementary gender roles were not always liberatory in the ways that educators supposed. Although conservative beliefs about gender and heterosexuality pervaded classroom materials and circumscribed teachers' perspectives, sex education's psychological bent helped weaken moral and biological absolutes, a step toward dismantling limitations on gender and sexuality.7

Through teachers' relentless attention to gendered attributes and heterosexual conduct, schools helped institutionalize dating practices and reinforce gendered etiquette. Although hampered by patronizing but usually unspoken assumptions about gender, race, class, and sexuality, sex and family living education offered girls tools that could prove useful. The attempt to show heterosexual relationships as complementary partnerships revealed a progressive mindset regarding women's roles—a mindset that had no place in schools of earlier decades, when character rather than identity was the focus. Sex education curricula's language of psychology, personality, fulfillment, and purpose encouraged girls' development of subjectivity and autonomy.

Yet the principles of subjectivity and personal autonomy, on the one hand, and prescribed heterosexual gender roles and social ideals, on the other, clashed in sex education curricula of this era. School materials alternated between reinforcing the status quo and offering new options to youth. Amid that tension, girls gained opportunities to formulate their own paths for their futures. Independent living and college campuses offered freedom for exploration and dissent in the 1960s, fueling the
decade's sexual revolution; yet the possibilities for questioning sexual and gender norms, I argue, emerged in earlier decades and earlier in the life cycle of mid-twentieth-century girls, via an unlikely source: the public schools.

**Femininity**

Sex education lessons contained both explicit and implicit messages about femininity, many of which derived from contemporary popular culture and psychological theories. In its most literal sense, femininity referred to traits belonging to women, but more commonly in sex education and popular usage, femininity encompassed acquired and culturally specific characteristics. Neither expressive of innate womanly charm nor simply a matter of possessing a female body, femininity entailed a certain kind of cultivated womanhood. A blend of conventional poise and mannerisms with commercial sexual allure, femininity in the 1940s and 1950s merged the attributes of white, middle-class respectability and glamour. Popular magazines and cinema—and later, television—helped recast femininity during the early to mid-twentieth century, building on the style young working women developed at the turn of the twentieth century. Despite the efforts of working-class white women and women of color to fashion their own version of femininity, white, middle-class affluence and taste epitomized the feminine ideal. Teachers encouraged girls from lower-income families to seek beauty; such girls' attempts at making themselves feminine with fewer resources, including "ethnic" physical attributes and marginal purchasing power, contributed to the development of feminine identity in the mid-twentieth century.

Providing girls with assistance in acquiring femininity was one of several functions that sex and family life education served in an effort to help marriage weather
various strains during the 1940s and 1950s. Educators were not reinforcing the status quo but concerned with stabilizing society following the depression of the 1930s and wartime disruption of social norms in the 1940s—and in competition with popular culture. Teachers and school administrators modified Victorian morals and manners in an effort to attract youth’s interests and set mid-twentieth-century students on a path to adolescent adjustment and successful marriage and family life. As much as reverting to the past, educators were adapting formulas from contemporary society and popular culture to strengthen marital heterosexuality. Teaching girls how to become feminine involved drawing from the past and present—and, in some cases, imagining new directions—as a means to develop happiness and fulfillment. Individual satisfaction did not simply serve the individual, experts presumed, but contributed to harmonious interpersonal relationships and family stability, hallmarks of a democratic nation.

Heterosexuality was fundamental to notions of femininity, and the promotion of heterosexual attraction and pairing (at appropriate stages) was ubiquitous in the classroom in the 1940s and 1950s. Educators conceived of femininity in relationship to masculinity and defined femininity in contrast to masculinity; they united the two forms of gender expression in the framework of attraction between the sexes. In some instances, educators explicitly referred to their intention to make youth into good heterosexuals, and a few teachers wrote about how their classes studied stages of development culminating in heterosexual adjustment. Describing her senior class in 1952, a teacher in Highland Park, Michigan, explained that her students examined “the normal development of the affections from ego-centric infancy through the homosexual stage to the transfer to heterosexuality.” Many teachers, however, did not in their classes or in
published articles name as their goal the encouragement of heterosexuality. Nevertheless, their combined efforts modeled normative heterosexuality as the route to maturity.

As an ideal, femininity is a form of gender performance; women and girls are not inherently feminine but earn the label through the enactment of certain behaviors, many of which relate to outward appearances. Feminist scholars today acknowledge—and many sex educators in the 1940s and 1950s, too, realized—that biology does not produce femininity but that social forces and personal effort create it. Without the lens of feminism, mid-twentieth-century sex and family life educators nevertheless saw femininity as variable and socially and culturally constructed. Unlike many late-twentieth-century feminists, who have argued that femininity is oppressive to women, mid-century educators encouraged girls to be introspective and employ self-control as a means of enhancing physical attributes, developing desirable traits of behavior, ensuring self-satisfaction, and maximizing marriage potential. Reverberating with mass-market periodicals aimed at female consumers, self-help and self-improvement advice was rampant in sex and family living curricula.

Educational materials identified anatomical as well as cultural and social components of femininity and masculinity. With regard to female and male identities and relationships, there were few facts and definitions to learn, and the preferred teaching method was discussion questions. One of the more authoritative sources on the facts of reproduction, the book version of Oregon’s sex education movie Human Growth, contained a glossary, which defined “feminine” as “like a woman; having the qualities of a female” and “masculine” as “like a man; having the qualities of a male.” Young readers learned in this book and elsewhere that not just any characteristics of women and men
counted as feminine and masculine.13 Presuming that most people (even youth) knew what made a woman feminine and a man masculine, educators still felt compelled to teach young people to cultivate and respect such differences. They did so in several different ways: showing correlations between physical and emotional changes during puberty; offering guidance on attitude, hygiene, grooming, and conduct; and modeling appropriate gender roles.

To help youth make sense of puberty, educators taught junior high school classes that physical and emotional changes occurred simultaneously. Both the body and emotions contributed to preparing young people for continuing the cycle of human growth and reproduction. Puberty and growth were natural, and the feelings that accompanied it were normal, films for junior high school students instructed.14 If physical and emotional maturity did not harmonize perfectly during adolescence, *Human Growth* and *The Story of Menstruation* provided hope: girls and boys could bring their bodies and feelings into alignment as they grew into heterosexual adults.15 Among the steps in that process were understanding puberty and reproduction and appreciating the differences between the sexes.

To reassure adolescents, educators offered advice for growing up, suggesting as incentives personal satisfaction as well as heterosexual success in dating and ultimately in marriage. They believed that visible secondary sex characteristics and menstruation could be troubling for young people emotionally and psychologically, and adjusting to physical changes was part of becoming an adult. As the movie *Human Growth* phrased it, the development of secondary sex characteristics “usually make the boy feel more manly and the girl more womanly, which are perfectly normal feelings.”16 At least this was the ideal scenario. The message was that young people were supposed to begin to
"Don't be droopy," she warns. She says that good posture is important.

Figure 4.1. *The Story of Menstruation* offered advice on how to cope emotionally and physically during menstruation. *Educational Screen* (1947)

think of their bodies and selves as "manly" and "womanly," or masculine and feminine, in keeping with their biological sex. Such attributes were inseparable from heterosexual attraction; "manly" implicitly meant attractive to women, and "womanly" attractive to men.

Illustrating the rewards more clearly, the Disney film *The Story of Menstruation* put a fairy-tale spin on its advice to girls about how to cope with menstruation. When the narrator admonished girls, "Don't be droopy," she was referring to both standing up straight and not drowning in self-pity (figure 4.1). Instead, girls learned that they should adjust their posture and develop a positive disposition. The application of cosmetics was one place to start; while the screen showed a girl applying make-up in front of a mirror, the narrator pointed out that it was a good idea to "keep looking smart and well groomed to give you new poise and lift your morale." A feminine appearance and pleasing disposition during menstruation were thus strategies for adapting to physical maturity. A sequence demonstrating the remedy showed a tearful girl, frustrated with tangles in her hair. The narrator's advice to "stop feeling sorry for yourself" motivated the girl to become perky; she smiled, admired her new and improved reflection, and abandoned the mirror for a dance with a young man.17
The movie's exhortations taught girls to downplay or disguise any physical or emotional discomfort experienced during menstruation, as historian Margot Elizabeth Kennard has argued. *The Story of Menstruation*, according to Kennard, suggested that "the solution to emotional changes is to put on a smile and change your attitude so other people in your life will not be affected by your unpleasant feelings." While "changing a 'bad' feeling into a 'good' feeling so those you have to live around won't be affected" may have been one effect of this attitude adjustment, not all potential outcomes were degrading to girls. To begin with, the movie acknowledged that girls might have physical or emotional discomfort, a useful recognition of how some girls experienced menstruation. But more important, telling girls not to feel sorry for themselves was not bad advice.

*The Story of Menstruation* filmmakers wanted to promote a healthy attitude toward menstruation, unencumbered by fears or anxiety. Filmmakers attempted to "minimize the mental handicap which hampers so many girls during their periods," as one reviewer commented. Puberty was supposed to mark the onset of feelings of femininity, replete with anticipation of dating and marriage, and these feelings could be hindered by self-pity, as could be a general sense of self-worth. While teaching girls to manufacture "good" feelings when they really felt bad verged on encouraging duplicity, filmmakers were possibly making sincere attempts to minimize girls' suffering—if only by providing them knowledge and sanitary hygiene products. And their desire to help girls overcome a mental handicap was less patronizing than their historical predecessors. Unlike nineteenth-century medical authorities, most famously Edward A. Clarke, who
had maintained that women’s physiology hindered their capacity for education, mid-twentieth-century educators were proposing that girls’ feelings were easily overcome with a positive attitude. Girls ought not to feel set back during menstruation in terms of their ability to concentrate on schoolwork or perform regular daily activities—although nothing in extremes (figure 4.2).

Femininity did not entail passivity or relegation to the domestic sphere, but neither did it grant girls and women license to live large. The menstruation film warned against taking activity too far; “When you come to think of it,” The Story of Menstruation narrator reminded the audience, “most of your daily routine is on the mild side.” Presuming that viewers were well-behaved girls, the narrative implied that moderation in...
athletics and social activities was appropriate and the norm for girls at any time of the month, erasing altogether working or playing hard and stressing a middle-class code of gendered behavior.

Psychological problems plagued both adolescent boys and girls, judging by the materials presented in sex and family life education classrooms, and all were counseled to gain control over unwieldy emotions. Psychological adjustment was closely linked to acquiring maturity, and successful passage into young adulthood required femininity for girls and masculinity for boys. Ordinary girls had the burden of overcoming a “mental handicap” to mature appropriately, and, according to the film, whining or feeling sorry for oneself during menstruation was thought to be immature or childlike. Perhaps comparable for boys was learning to deal with nocturnal emissions and daytime erections and ejaculation. However, there were no films devoted to hygiene in these areas.

Teachers and instructional materials joined other media in fostering the development of femininity and masculinity from the onset of puberty, especially through guidance about attitude, hygiene, grooming, and conduct. They touched on the roles of hormonal changes in the body but paid greater attention to associated mental and psychological adjustments as well as practices that made the process complete. As the San Diego “Growing Up” curriculum suggested, a well-adjusted adolescent gained emotional security by possessing pride in his manhood or her womanhood. Moderate satisfaction with one’s sex and gender, in other words, could serve the aims of marital and heterosexual stability, whereas shame or bravado might sabotage such a conclusion. At the root of masculinity and femininity, in fact, was satisfaction regarding one’s biological sex, male or female—a social and emotional response to puberty rather
than a physical one. Commenting on the implementation of sex education lectures in Lansing, Michigan, for instance, physicians Harold A. Miller and Robert S. Breakey noted that "the developing boy or girl should be led to feel pride rather than shame in his or her sexual characteristics and capacities."22

Successful achievement of femininity could be a means to reduce awkwardness and curtail erratic behavior, the archetypal struggles of adolescence that had been linked to sexual development in the Western imagination since the beginning of the twentieth century.23 To some extent, this required creating and fostering an aesthetic that valued self-confidence and self-respect. Achieving femininity might also occur when girls adopted a restrained form of expressing their heterosexuality and admiration of gender difference. In Washington, D.C., in the late 1930s, for example, home economics teachers sought to instill in senior high school girls "an appreciation of sex as a creative force for the enrichment of life," which connected male and female identities and attractions with the generative (and pleasurable) function of heterosexual sex. The lesson conveyed "a sense of social responsibility in all expressions of the mating instinct" as well as the belief that "only successful mating gives satisfactory companionship," thus suggesting appreciation prior to marriage and consummation afterward.24 Appreciating sex and deferring sexual satisfaction, then, were important steps in becoming an adjusted adolescent girl.

An appreciation of sex was not the exclusive terrain of girls; instructors taught boys as well to value sex differences and their contributions to heterosexual love and reproduction. A San Antonio, Texas, curriculum guide for family life education from the early 1950s showed how appreciation was imperative for both sexes. In mixed-sex classes, San Antonio teachers aimed to "help the student to understand the basic
differences due to sex; to promote tolerant understanding of, and appreciation of the
values in, the differences between boys and girls."\textsuperscript{25} The latter type of appreciation
reveals how gender differences were not distant features of adults but a framework
relevant to youth's categorization of peers in dualistic categories.

Just as San Diego schools offered what its curriculum advisors called an
"appreciation lesson" on the process of reproduction, attempting to instill awe in young
people about the beauty of nature's plan, their lessons also encouraged a wholesome
recognition and appreciation of masculinity and femininity. Such appreciation, while
generally based on physical anatomy and outward appearance, was not meant to vary
with body size or the speed of its development. Masculinity and femininity were not fixed
and objective but rather fluid and subjective categories exhibited differently by various
boys and girls in accord with their secondary sex characteristics. Growing Up lessons
conveyed to the boys' classes that masculinity was available to all boys, and that penis
size was not a measure of a boy's masculinity—nor were breasts indicative of how
feminine a girl was, the San Diego lessons advised girls. "Small sex organs do not mean
that the boy is less masculine than the boy with large sex organs," the guide instructed
teachers to tell their classes; variations of breast size in girls, the lesson plans averred,
were also "normal differences."\textsuperscript{26} Boys and girls experiencing anxiety about their rate of
growth or current size ought not to fixate on their progress or size but instead consider
the bigger picture: the cycle of human growth and the development of heterosexual
interests in preparation for marriage.

In addition to physical components of femininity, teachers invoked references to
proper hygiene habits and self-awareness in girls as practices applicable to femininity. In
Figure 4.3. Gendered grooming rituals. *Human Growth* (1947)
developing feelings of manliness and womanliness at puberty, many materials purported, boys and girls grew attentive to their appearances. In *Human Growth*, such practices included boys shaving their beards and combing their hair and girls coifing their hair and applying lipstick (figure 4.3). The book supplement to the film added that with puberty came girls' "new interest in clothes" and desire to "experiment with a touch of lipstick or fresh-smelling cologne." "All this attention to how one looks," the authors wrote with regard to girls only, "is another stage in the process of reaching adulthood." Without explaining why, the text asserted that self-awareness and concern about appearance, especially among girls, was to be expected.

Attempting to guide students' acceptance of adult gender identities, teachers stressed that early to late bloomers and every size and shape in between could achieve femininity if they were girls or masculinity if they were boys. Yet educators' insistence on this point suggests that at least some girls and boys were not readily convinced—and that success was relative to other variables, including race. Even though sex education materials linked anatomical growth and gender socialization and touted conventional femininity as available to all girls, white girls and women, especially those with fair complexions, more easily achieved the ideal. One physical aspect of becoming an adult woman, *Human Growth*'s authors explained, was the growth of hair on arms, legs, and, in some cases, on the face. Facial hair was likely to be more noticeable on the upper lip and sides of the face for "girls with dark hair and skin." The book reassured girls that such hair growth should not concern them: "this does not mean, however, that brunettes are any less feminine than blondes—body hair on the latter just doesn't show as much."
Even as the book denied that certain adult features were more or less feminine, the authors reiterated contemporary adult ideals and supposed norms, and in mentioning hair removal as an option elsewhere in the text, they contradicted the premise that hairiness did not detract from femininity. If naturally occurring features of the female body were considered within the realm of femininity, women's hair growth would require no special attention. And since Human Growth's authors asserted that all women experienced hair growth, for instance, it might logically be construed as characteristic of women and therefore feminine. Yet facial hair, being more pronounced in men, carried an unspoken taint of masculinity. Furthermore, women's practices of hair removal, noted in the book, suggested that many women struggled against their bodies to be feminine—an inconsistency that must have been apparent to some girls. Seeking to encourage something in between neglect and obsession about the body during adolescence, educators forwarded advice about hair removal to inquisitive female students. Girls, after all, had posed the question.

While shaving was a rite of passage for all boys at some point during adolescence, special techniques were necessary only for those unfortunate girls whose hair cropped up in abundance or in the "wrong" places. Human Growth made no mention of the common practices of women removing underarm or leg hair, although this may not have been typical. The text's authors advised girls, "There are various ways of removing superfluous hair from the face and limbs. Hair can be plucked, cut, or even shaved—but before attempting any of these remedies, it is very important for a girl to consult her parents, the health teacher at school, or the family doctor, who can suggest the best ways to remedy unattractive facial hair." The book instructed boys, too, on removing unattractive hair, but their instructions were more straightforward, suggesting
Figure 4.4. *The Story of Menstruation* suggested that girls’ pursuit of beauty could ease problems associated with puberty and menstruation. *Educational Screen* (1947)
that a boy should start shaving "whenever his beard starts to look unsightly." Albeit a potential source of concern or self-consciousness, boys' hair growth and removal required no professional or adult intervention.

Recommended grooming rituals, a subject of discussion in both single-sex and mixed-sex classes, exhibited gendered assumptions about self-perceptions and self-esteem. Scenes in *The Story of Menstruation* in which the girl studied her reflection in the mirror conveyed more than fixing one's hair style; they replicated advertising and popular culture's emphasis on glamour, especially so-called natural beauty (figure 4.4). Adults and peers expected adolescent girls to strike a balance between being ostentatious and heedless of one's appearance, which in turn encouraged girls to remain perpetually aware of their looks, but not to the point of vanity. In Virginia Milling's English class in Newark, New Jersey, boys offered suggestions to girls about how to win dates, illustrating peer ideals about girls' appearances. The boys' suggestions implied that the ideal girl should carefully monitor her self-presentation to cultivate a desirable feminine appearance. She should exert some effort to maximize her beauty, but not go to excess: no excessive makeup, no public application of makeup, no lipstick smeared on her teeth, and no lip liner; not "too much jewelry" and only "delicate" earrings; and "well-chosen clothing," with slacks explicitly excluded. Where, when, and how she made up her face and selected her clothing and jewelry conveyed whether a girl was attractive and datable, or whether she was unfeminine, gaudy, or overdone. Such prescriptions, repeated in various arenas but generally stated in the positive rather than negative, encouraged girls to base their dating potential—although not necessarily their self-esteem—on their looks.
In addition to tending to bodily hygiene and physical attractiveness, puberty demanded that young people—again, especially girls—pay closer attention to their behavior. As educational theorist Robert J. Havighurst explained, boys' adjustment to the masculine role was "so easy to achieve that it hardly appears to be a task at all." Girls, however, needed more coaxing, because there was "often much more hesitation among normally well-adjusted girls to assume the usual feminine role." Such hesitation, he maintained, derived from the belief that during adolescence women became "definitely the weaker sex" but also became "attractive to men, and thus gain one kind of power while losing another." The feminine role, then, entailed a loss of strength and ability (relative to men) and a newfound heterosexual allure. Applying such theories to educational practice, Havighurst asserted that "the school can help girls to think through the problem of accepting the feminine sex role," which was one of the functions of sex and family living courses.

Health-based courses as well as those pertaining more specifically to relationships promoted the idea that embracing feminine or masculine behavior was crucial to overcoming the psychological hardships of adolescence. Health classes in Oregon, for example, included study of the "development of heterosexuality," "sexual development and personality," and "sex as related to the mental-emotional problems of adolescents." The Family Relationships course in Toms River, like health courses, emphasized psychology and behavior, but unlike health courses, did so to the near exclusion of the physical body's role in shaping the experience of youth. In family living, social behavior, and even English courses, at Toms River and other schools, students engaged in activities in which they established peer standards for adolescent
appearance and conduct, particularly dating. Discussions generated checklists for how to be popular—an attribute contingent on possessing appropriately feminine and masculine characteristics.35

Contributing to multiple and sometimes contradictory standards of conduct were the warnings and suggestions teachers gave girls on other subjects, including contact with strangers and physical vulnerability. Yet warnings were not always unfounded or unfair to girls. The lesson plans for the first edition of San Diego’s Growing Up classes instructed teachers to relay a story to girls about “Jane,” a girl whose mother wanted to protect her from venturing out at night among young men in the military.36 Interactions with soldiers could promise fun, but they could also spell danger for girls—and it was important for them to be aware of the risks. When discussing menstruation in lesson 3, the teacher noted that pregnancy and nursing were the usual occasions in which periods stopped. But illness could cause the cessation of menstruation, one of “nature’s ways warning you that something is wrong.”37 Alerting girls to be wary if their regular periods stopped was useful health advice.

Some references to protecting girls in Growing Up, however, were less informative. In the first edition’s first lesson for both girls and boys, teachers were to point out that a brassiere served the function of protecting the breasts from injury.38 In this instance the warning was unnecessary, as teenage breast injuries were not especially common and the more usual justification was to supply shape to the breasts.39 Also vulnerable (for unstated reasons) were girls’ genitalia, in which the description of labia was to “protect the two body openings” of the pubic area, according to lesson 4 of the second edition of Growing Up.40 By comparison, protective language was entirely absent from the boys’ lessons plans. For instance, when boys learned about the foreskin of an
uncircumcised penis—an anatomic part with a relatively similar protective function, no mention was made of its protective role. The first edition of the boys' lessons, like girls' lessons, mentioned keeping out of trouble, but not with reference to protection.

Conduct advice was not always gendered or based on a double standard, but often classroom materials (and newspaper and magazine articles brought into the classroom) articulated different rules for men and women and boys and girls. Courteousness, for instance, was a trait to be admired in both sexes. Yet particularly in the realm of dating and engagement, male and female participants faced different expectations; in the words the Newark students used to head their lists of desirable traits, a girl was a labeled as an object, a "date-girl," while a boy was a subject, an "escort." According to their peer-developed standards for dating, boys were obliged to deal with money and make decisions, whereas girls were supposed to be pleasant companions. “Acting like a boy” or seeming “hard boiled” were traits high school boys disliked in girls in Morely, Michigan—demonstrating that peers were more likely to criticize tomboyish traits in girls than were their teachers.

As in dealing with most topics in sex education, teachers avoided talking about aberrations when discussing femininity. Perhaps because they recognized the varied ways in which girls developed into heterosexual maturity, teachers typically did not include discussion of tomboys in their lesson plans. Discouragement of girls who were tomboyish, or who resisted adopting feminine ways during adolescence, was remarkably absent from planned sex education and family living curricula, including San Diego's lessons plans, Oregon's movie and book, and Toms River's course workbook. Especially given the extent to which femininity was tied to heterosexual attraction, and given teachers' belief in homosexual and heterosexual phases of development, being a
tomboy was likely interpreted as a form of arrested development that would correct itself with guidance and encouragement rather than criticism. Furthermore, precocious development of heterosexual interests in girls seemed more alarming to educators than reluctant development, although they worked to avoid both.\textsuperscript{45}

On occasion, norms of conduct and gender roles were featured as static—emanating from an inner essence of men and women or acquired and fixed by adulthood—but more frequently teachers acknowledged their fluctuation. Most obvious was the incremental and relative development at the individual level, but dialogue about historical changes in gender roles was also part of a number of sex and family life education courses. Force's teaching materials recognized that social change had expanded acceptable gender roles, at least for white, middle-class women. These expanded roles removed some of the stigma for girls who found traditional feminine roles difficult to accept because, as Havighurst had noted, they wanted a career and sought the freedom, power, and independence granted to their fathers and brothers.\textsuperscript{46}

Commonly subject to discussion were the increasing numbers of women who worked outside the home in the mid-twentieth century.\textsuperscript{47} Force's family living textbook from the mid-1950s indicated, for instance, that young women confronted a broader set of choices than previous generations (figure 4.5). The "Modern Girl's Dilemma" contrasted a contemporary white woman with an old-fashioned one; the pensive and ambitious female graduate, who considered multiple options before her, replaced the demure young woman, who wore a Victorian dress and pursued a single road to marriage and motherhood. At the top of the modern girl's list of options were marriage and (relatively fewer) children, but three of the five available roads led to a career,
THE MODERN GIRL’S DILEMMA

Once upon a time the young girl had little choice...

Almost all women and girls took

Now, a choice of many roads is offered...

Women and girls wonder

Marriage and children

Marriage without children

Marriage, career, and children

Marriage and career

Career

Figure 4.5. Girls had more options for their futures by comparison to the past. *Your Family Today and Tomorrow* (1955)
represented by a large desktop with ink pen, telephone, and paper (absent was a typewriter). While a career without marriage and children was one of her choices, it was sparsely decorated and at the bottom of the list.\textsuperscript{48}

The gulf between male and female roles had become somewhat narrower in the middle decades of the twentieth century, and teaching devices sometimes reflected or even celebrated such change. Force's text showed the Victorian woman wearing clothing that accented and embellished her curves, whereas the modern woman's curves (if she had them) were disguised by her graduation gown. Marking her as a woman instead were her haircut (relatively short but bouncy and feminine), her legs and shoes, her small hands, and a pearl necklace. She appeared confident and serious, as would befit a middle-class high school or college graduate. Intended as a text for classes of boys and girls and circulated in communities that were likely more diverse than Toms River, the book invited readers to identify with the female character. A career woman without children, Force conveyed attitudes about women's place in society changing over time, and she granted equal validity of female and male perspectives in family relationships classrooms.

Yet not all depictions of women's roles acknowledged choices. \textit{Human Growth} depicted women's employment as ephemeral and slighted women's education, while granting motherhood a position of prominence (figure 4.6). Illustrating the narrative point about life events accompanying sexual maturation, a male figure is shown with cap, gown, and diploma. A female and male form are shown at work, but the narration "when they have completed their education [and] have steady jobs" was accompanied by images of a hierarchical workplace, where the man held a professional job and the
Completing education and finding steady employment were male prerogatives. *Human Growth* (1947)

A woman a subordinate one. Throughout the film, women mostly were shown as mothers and caregivers, representing women's responsibility for nurturing children.

Not intended as a point of discussion, the pictures in *Human Growth* are nonetheless striking for what they conveyed about roles available to women. The image of a woman typist indicated women could pursue employment outside the home; the drawing depicted a woman sitting before a typewriter, her stiff form outlined by a fitted blouse and skirt, her arms extended toward the typewriter keys, and her legs exposed under the table. The man at the adjacent desk (solid and six times larger than the table on which her typewriter rested) leaned to the side, occupying more space and signifying authority and comfort. In addition to representing a gender-segmented labor force, the illustration gave clues about how body posture and display factored into masculinity and...
femininity. Work and life beyond the domestic sphere, as represented by the supposedly universal white woman, was temporary, somewhat awkward, and less relevant to an adult female identity than was motherhood.

Although teachers and texts sometimes circumscribed the available options for women, the ideas about femininity conveyed in classrooms enabled preteen and teenage girls in sex and family living courses to gauge the relevance of certain conventions to their own lives. Girls probably cared less about how motherhood contributed to female identity than they did about how heterosexuality unfolded in their teenage years. Whether the prescriptions were subtle or overt, in the form of visual images or narrative passages, delivered as constructive criticism or positive reinforcement, rarely did questions of emotions, attitudes, hygiene, grooming, and conduct receive univocal responses. After all, these classes taught youth to value and accentuate their individuality.

Yet, as prescriptions about femininity make clear, there was little room to maneuver in terms of heterosexuality. Contemporary women could more easily shake the necessity of bearing children than they could the imperative to participate in—or at least dream about—dating, engagement, and marriage. And while the notion that feminine identities demanded an admiring male audience must have been difficult to resist, the flexibility of a psychological rather than a physiological foundation for identity helped open space for girls to question and imagine something different.

Sex Differences and Male-Female Relationships

Curricula that highlighted the virtues of femininity and masculinity, the differences between women and men, and male-female relationships may seem to have drawn
attention away from sex. Whether or not sex was at stake, though, depends on how sex is defined. Sexual intercourse and reproduction summoned less attention than did male-female differences and relationships in most sex education and family living courses in the 1940s and 1950s. But sex, as understood by educators and contemporaries, encompassed much more than sexual acts; a person’s sex was a fundamental component of their personality and interpersonal relationships. Recent scholarship on heterosexual and queer identities, moreover, has prompted researchers to examine the construction of sexuality in ways less familiar to mid-century theorists and students.

While heterosexuality was not under siege during this period, the parameters of normative heterosexuality were undergoing redefinition. The publication of the Kinsey reports, sex panics and controversies, alarm about juvenile delinquency, and rising divorce rates signaled a changing society in which sexuality appeared more mutable and transgressive than in the past—certainly in comparison with Victorian norms.49 In this milieu, sex educators took seriously the job of shaping the next generation’s heterosexual development.

Fundamental to educators’ understandings of sex differences was the union of male and female in marriage. The idea that marriage maximized the collaborative potential of complementary male and female traits was not unique to sex educators or this time period, but reflected ideas in ascendance for decades past.50 Teaching about this understanding of gender and marriage to captive audiences of adolescents and teenagers through public schools, however, was a new phenomenon. The rise in divorce rates during the mid-twentieth century did not lead sex and marriage experts to conclude that marriage was becoming obsolete. Rather, they viewed marriage as a formula for successful integration of male and female characteristics and personalities, successful
only when both parties made an informed commitment to the relationship. Marriage was beleaguered in the mid-twentieth century, they thought, but not beyond recovery. By preparing young people for marriage, teachers encouraged students' consciousness of male-female roles and differences. Whether the emphasis was on difference or compatibility, and whether the foundation for differences was biological or cultural, teachers heightened students' attention to the significance of gender in adolescence and adulthood.

Contrast between male and female identities taught students to position themselves with their respective gender. Teaching devices geared toward mixed-gender classes, whether at the junior or senior high school level, tended to employ this comparative approach, and the contrast appeared both in visual representations and written (or spoken) terms. The first page of the adolescent development unit in the guide for family living from Detroit, Michigan, for instance, showed a boy and girl of high school age, holding hands (figure 4.7). Art teacher Carl Owen's line drawings featured a rectangular-shaped male torso and hourglass female figure, exaggerations of male-female differences. The teens sported a matching patterned jacket (his) and skirt (hers), and both appeared white skinned and fair haired, but the resemblance ended there. While the girl's waist was extremely narrow, her shoulders, arms, legs, and buttocks exhibited roundness, unlike the straight lines of the male shoulders, arms, and legs. (The jacket hid his buttocks.) In a gentlemanly fashion, he carried the books and papers, while her arm extended out from her body, empty handed, displaying a bangle bracelet around her wrist.

While highlighting male-female differences, curricula also emphasized increasing complementarity between boys and girls as they reached adulthood. A figure in Your...
Figure 4.7. Practicing heterosexuality during adolescence. Detroit Family Life Education Guide (1958)
Figure 4.8. Guiding youth toward achieving heterosexuality, step by step. *Your Family Today and Tomorrow* (1955)
Family: Today and Tomorrow, the textbook that Force authored, displayed the path toward marriage as one of growing compatibility between boys and girls (figure 4.8). The sequence began with “group friendships, no pairing off,” followed by “group dating, crowd activities and fun, and no pairing off,” and then “double dating, two or more couples sharing dates” for teenagers. The fourth rung, “single dating or going steady,” was for “later teens near the adult line” and “engagement and marriage” “for mature people only.” The image of the Detroit couple depicted youth who approached the apex of the figurative dating ladder: Holding hands, the teenaged couple showed a young man and woman maintaining—yet also bridging—their differences through heterosexual romance.

Downplaying opposition and competition between the sexes was one way educators sought to reinvigorate matrimony. Sex and family life education reinforced differences between boys and girls, calling attention to male-female differences not so much as oppositional but as compatible. The cliché that “opposites attract” was not, they believed, a sound foundation for marriage and sex education classes, as it suggested the potential for marriage across such differences as race, ethnicity, class, or religion. Teachers often cautioned against “mixed marriages” between individuals of different religious backgrounds. As Force’s textbook noted, “Opposites sometimes attract, but strong marriages are built on similarities—in family and financial background, in religion, in education, in age.” Yet open-ended discussion questions, with no right or wrong answers, undermined the authority of such prescriptions as the dating ladder and the cautions against mixed marriages.

As much as sex educators spoke in terms that seem conservative today, they often viewed themselves as less traditional than other educators. Advocating a
contemporary "liberal" perspective on gender—"that men and women need to accept each other as individuals with different capacities and potentialities"—sex education consultant Lester A. Kirkendall explained in 1951 that such a viewpoint departed from what he identified as two earlier understandings of gender. An authority known for his research on sex education and his appointment as health education consultant for the U.S. Public Health Service during World War II, Kirkendall maintained that both feminist contentions that men and women were "exactly alike" and traditional beliefs about "opposite" sexes were losing favor. Enlightened individuals, he posited, "realize that each sex has an important and unique contribution to make to family and social life." Such a perspective informed the sex and family life curricula of mid-twentieth-century public schools.

Teachers possessed varying opinions about the nature of sex differences; some believed that differences were products of natural or divine law, while others thought that the differences were established through culture, and many adhered to beliefs that straddled the two ends of the spectrum. This question was not, however, a subject of major contention among educators. Less concerned with origins and explanations of gender than outcome, sex and family life leaders nevertheless tended toward a social constructionist view. Kirkendall phrased the ideal attitude to convey in sex education as "a flexible, equalitarian [sic] regard for individual personality and an acceptance of the unique values of sex membership." Being male or female was akin to being (or becoming) members of a particular club, relishing the perks and benefits that accrued to what he dubbed each person's "sex membership." Rather than a source of limitation for
girls and women, as turn-of-the-century educators and medical professionals had contended, sex differences were emblematic of possibilities to many mid-century educators.

Complementary male-female relations served the goal of reinforcing male-female specialization, especially in the division of labor. In response to the question “why does a woman develop such a different shape from a man?” for example, the authors of *Human Growth* referred to men’s productive and women’s reproductive capabilities. The book explained that as a girl grew up, her body underwent changes: “her hips become broader and her abdomen longer than those of a man in order that her body may have room for a baby. Her breasts fill out so that when she has given birth, she may provide her baby with milk.” Male bodies were endowed with different capabilities and obligations, according to the text. “Men’s bodies are able to perform heavy work, such as digging and building. For such activities they have broader shoulders and stronger muscles.” The book’s authors did not address the fact that not all women became mothers, and many men did not do heavy labor, letting stand an explanation that emphasized biological imperatives for social norms—in spite of evidence to the contrary. Rather than reflecting contemporary white, middle-class ideals of masculine and feminine behavior, the response seemed to uphold an ahistorical and universal gendered division of labor.

Some curricula conveyed how biological differences allegedly yielded compatible male-female needs and emotions. In San Antonio, lessons queried “Are there differences based solely on the fact that some people are born boys and some girls?” “Are boys treated differently in the home from girls?” “Should boys be treated differently?” “Should you be glad you are a boy or a girl?” Such questions, and their
affirmative answers, contributed to the unit’s objectives to “stimulate thinking about actual ways and means of getting along better with himself, his family, and his girl or boy-friend” and inculcate appreciation and acceptance of gender differences. The teachers’ guide itemized four categories in response to a question regarding the differences between boys and girls: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. According to this text, boys were larger and stronger than girls; boys and girls were of equal intelligence but boys reacted logically and girls reacted illogically (“often”); boys had greater and girls (“apparently”) had lesser emotional stability, while boys had stronger and girls had weaker (“really just different”) emotional reactions; and boys and girls were similar when it came to prayer but boys had less and girls had more church attendance. Taking the questions to the next level, the instruction guide had a column in which one could “check those [differences and similarities] that help boys and girls to get along.” Differences in size and strength and similarities in intelligence and prayer were selected in the guide. The only category not marked was emotional differences, indicating that the real work to be done in resolving gender differences involved emotions and attitudes—the realm of psychology.

Sex education often invoked gender-specific emotions and attitudes, and in this arena some teachers and class materials maintained that gender roles were learned, especially in civilized society. These ideas were prominent among family life educators who embraced psychological explanations for behavior. Various experts in the field of marriage and family life education, including Kirkendall and Force, contended that boys and girls behaved in certain ways because of their socialization. Certain tendencies may have resulted from biology, but more pertinent, given the growing authority of cultural anthropology and social psychology, were the ways that children learned to interact with
others. After more than a decade of experience teaching Family Relationships, Force explained why girls were more interested in marriage. Boys “have not been oriented to marriage as girls have been. A girl practices her future homemaking role from the time she is a child by holding the baby and helping her mother cook. To be a bride is a goal constantly held up before her,” she noted. “The boy, in contrast,” wrote Force, “plays soldier and reads in the funny papers that husbands are poor, browbeaten creatures, and hears about the high cost of rearing a family and caring for a wife.” Without directly critiquing this system of gender training, Force remarked on its pervasiveness; implicit were its potential flaws. She hoped her course would moderate some of the extremes of the gender spectrum, such as girls fixating on finding a marriage partner and focusing on the pageantry of weddings while boys supposedly remained unconcerned about finding a mate and heedless of a need to plan for successful marriages and families. Force was not arguing for a rejection of gender roles, but by revealing their social construction, she pointed to their fragility.

In-class discussions and exercises arguably made gender divisions more prominent in young people’s consciousness. Not all aspects of family living classes focused on gender differences, but many topics did. In the Adolescent Development unit of the Detroit schools’ family life education program, gender differences were everywhere. “Psychosexual” growth was one of five kinds of development on which the unit focused, with subsections on understanding growth, adolescent developmental tasks, military service, differences between men and women, adolescent problems, and relationships with the other sex. Teachers in Detroit’s school system used the family life course to address the roles of men and women in contemporary society—growing up, serving the country, or getting along with others. Gendered differences and
contributions to society may have seemed common sense to many adults, but the
lessons reveal that gender roles were not self-evident or reproducing themselves
automatically, and therefore they merited instruction in secondary schools.

Writing assignments in various classes contributed to the project of helping youth
understand modern society and articulate the importance of gender in their own words.
When read aloud in class, such compositions enhanced peer awareness of gender
norms but also encouraged individual subjectivity. Helen Randolph, teacher of Senior
Problems at North Hollywood High School in California, advised teachers in 1950 to use
such paper topics as “The Kind of Husband (or Wife) I Intend to Be” and “The Kind of
Girl (or Boy) I Want to Marry.”63 A suggested activity in Minnesota’s 1947 Units in
Personal Health and Human Relations likewise asked students to “Outline a plan of
activity for a week that would meet the need for well-rounded development (1) for a high
school boy, (2) for a high school girl.”64 Yet another instance of itemizing male and
female traits in separate categories occurred in Mildred Sanders Williamson’s 1950
family life course at Five Points High School in Alabama; boxes and posters labeled
“orchid” and “onion” contained the positive and negative traits that boys viewed in girls
and vice versa.65

Sex and family life educators dedicated themselves to the task of reducing young
people’s anxiety during adolescence and preparing them for marriage, which required
attention to the development of male-female relationships. They believed that adolescent
angst derived from concerns about how to interact with the other sex. “How can we
develop happy and wholesome relationships with people of the other sex?” was a
question to which sex education authors Lillian L. Biester, William Griffiths, and N. O. Pearce devoted an entire unit in their widely circulated and referenced 1947 text, *Units in Personal Health and Human Relations.*

The promotion of heterosexual relationships during adolescence did not mean that teachers advocated youth participating in sexual intercourse or other types of sexual activity to achieve psychosexual development. Instead they perceived dating relationships as a desirable way for young people to practice relationships with members of the other sex and thereby move beyond the homosexual (or homosocial) phase of childhood in the direction of marriage. Although *Units in Personal Health and Human Relations* authors posited that “physical changes” during adolescence “form the basis for their new interest in each other,” guidance in the areas of emotions and behavior remained necessary. This work could be accomplished at the junior or senior high school level, as the authors designed the unit for use in either type of classroom.

Sex and family life educators for the most part promoted ideas about heterosexual relationships in two phases. At puberty, they sought to inform students about anatomical changes related to reproduction. While teaching about subjects as menstruation, nocturnal emissions, and childbirth, instructors fostered gender consciousness and noted the onset of heterosexual attractions at puberty (but did not yet recommend dating). Toward the end of high school, teachers had other goals. In classes for students on the verge of graduating, they emphasized preparations for engagement and marriage. They accepted and assumed that most teenagers were dating by that age. Classes offered an opportunity for students to improve their current relationships as well as dating or marriage potential by contemplating their personalities and interpersonal skills.
Some teachers assumed that youth needed little stimulation to develop interest in the other sex; rather, adult and peer guidance was imperative. "One girl in my class said she had been 'engaged' to four different fellows in two years," Force commented. "The boys pounced on her for being fickle. I pointed out that adolescents, in the first flush of their sexual awakening, tend to fall wonderfully in 'love' with the whole opposite sex. Only gradually do they discriminate on the basis of such mature considerations as companionship and character."68 Marriage and Family Living contributor Louise Ramsey likewise noted that most youth easily developed an interest in heterosexual dating and marriage, but that they needed guidance in the applications of those sentiments. According to Ramsey, adolescent pupils' interest in attracting the other sex could assist teachers in a variety of projects, including psychological development and the acquisition of healthful behavior. She claimed that "Fortunately, where youth is thinking in terms of making himself or herself attractive to the opposite sex and later into a parent worthy of fine children, he or she will give heed to instruction on improving health, posture, and appearance. A boy will adopt new habits of food, exercise, and even bathing if acne has threatened his popularity," she observed. "A girl will part company with coco-colas when she finds that her skin responds favorably."69 Ramsey's assertions reveal a confidence about heterosexual attraction in youth that seemingly needed no prompting, only it ought to be channeled into self-improvement.

Whether in junior high school and just learning the ropes of boy-girl relations or in senior high school and making preparations for future marriage, high school students seem to have been receptive to messages about how to be liked and become popular.70 Popularity may have been the immediate goal for young people, but teachers saw an opportunity to lend dignity to self-improvement strategies as part of the process of
heterosexual adaptation and eventually mate selection. In an eighth-grade social hygiene class in Rock Island, Illinois, students were encouraged to study self-improvement with books on personality and etiquette at their disposal. "The positive approach to sex education was carried forward through the do's. The pupils were encouraged to become interested in any activity which could help an adolescent become socially popular in an acceptable manner."71

Yet educators' efforts to enhance boys' and girls' heterosexual inclinations risked overstimulation. "Growing interest in the other sex springs from normal impulses which need to be understood by the adolescent," sex education authority Mabel Grier Lesher wrote in a guide for parent education. "But this sex-interest is complicated by family attitudes, parent restrictions, morality-defying companions, passion-teasing movies, sexy stories, and lures to questionable adventure. Much explaining and guidance is needed if the boy and girl are to steer through the complications successfully." Furthermore, she noted, "The natural attraction between boys and girls should be recognized by both as a normal part of growing up. But it calls for self-control and chivalry by the boy, and for fair-play by the girl in not increasing his problem of control through thoughtless or deliberate familiarities."72 Conventional gender roles, then, held the potential to offset premature heterosexual activity.

One obstacle to boy-girl relationships at the junior high school level was the discrepancy between when most boys and most girls reached puberty: a problem for teachers who wanted to stress mutuality and compatibility between boys and girls. They attempted to resolve this problem by suggesting that boys and girls would catch up with one another eventually. Acknowledging that the pace of puberty and emotional development occurred slightly earlier in girls than in boys, teachers nevertheless tried to
assert that there was parity between the sexes; neither boys nor girls were at an advantage. While describing the physiological changes that young people ordinarily experience as they grow up, a pair of silhouette forms—male and female—illustrated the film *Human Growth.* The narrator conveyed that the male and female physical changes during puberty were relative to one another, comparable, and noncompetitive. At one point the narrative implied that the fluctuation in male and female height during puberty achieved resolution in the end, with the “boy again being appreciably larger than the girl.” As another statement of reassurance, the narrator explained that on reaching the late teens and early twenties, “the differences in sexual maturity will have disappeared.” According to such teaching materials, the imbalance between the sexes during puberty was temporary.

While emphasizing the uniqueness of the two sexes, teaching materials usually avoided fueling a boys-against-girls mentality so as not to alienate any pupils from developing attractions to the other sex. At least two strategies were commonly employed. One was to note the relative progress of each sex as they matured. Although the young man had physical advantages in the end in *Human Growth,* this occurred in conjunction with the age at which many people married, and thus at a point where collaboration—in the institution of marriage—settled the differences. In the event that members of the audience, usually seventh and eighth grade students, lacked affection or allegiance to those of the other sex, a future of heterosexual attraction and consummation in marriage beckoned them by the late teens and early twenties, the film asserted.

A second way that teachers attempted to promote heterosexual attraction was by having boys and girls think about the positive traits of the other sex. In Milling’s American
literature course in Newark, senior students spent time discussing how girls and boys became popular after having read a short story. "A wave of interest and eagerness swept the class" as the teacher proposed a discussion of "What, in your estimation, makes a girl sought after; a boy popular? The girls will discuss the boys only and the boys the girls only." The outcome of the discussion was a mimeographed pamphlet, in multiple colors, with columns on "attributes of the perfect escort" and "the perfect date-girl," titled "How Do You Rate on a Date?" The youth-generated list of ideal qualities demonstrates that young people contributed to the shaping of gender differences, and the expectations girls had for boys and boys had for girls were not uniform. Girls sought to instill courteous and sincere behavior in boys, while boys itemized (in a much longer list) expectations for girls' physical appearance and reinforced male superiority and control of dating situations. The student-generated list of traits reveals that young people participated in imagining gender roles in the classroom, but they rarely questioned social and gendered norms in a collective way.

Heterosexual interests in the latter teenage years, teachers thought, could be channeled into future-minded concern with marriage. Mid-twentieth-century educators prompted students near graduation to engage in preparation for marriage and family life, as many would have no further formal education and were likely to marry in the few years following high school graduation. In 1950, women, on average, married at age twenty and men at age twenty-three. In the 1940s and 1950s, high school graduates were less likely to delay marriage than their parents' generation had.

In marriage and family living courses for high school juniors and seniors, instructors brought language from psychology into the classroom, including models of heterosexual development. Explicit discussion of homosexuality and heterosexuality
focused not on sexual activity but on the orientation of attraction. In other words, the homosexual phase did not imply sexual activity with persons of the same sex, but interest and pleasure in interactions with same-sex companions. Heterosexuality similarly meant appreciation and desire for interactions with the other sex—which, upon maturity and marriage, included heterosexual intercourse.

Educators were confident that having youth study marriage and family relationships—and placing male-female relationships within that framework—during their high school years would contribute to reducing divorce rates. Teachers and administrators in Denver public schools agreed that “Education for Home and Family Living,” as they called their course, offered young people an opportunity to “meet marriage and the responsibilities of a home with more than romantic, superficial notions about marriage.” Also focusing attention on potential conflict in marriage was the course offered at Garfield Heights High School, in Cleveland, Ohio, named “Social Relations—Premarriage Problems.” Noting that most of her thousand former students from Toms River had since married and had children, Force recognized that no matter the amount of training and preparation, some marriages would fail. One such failure was reported by a former student, who wrote to Force that “I know I am handling my failure better than I would have had I not had the opportunity to think so seriously about such matters when I was in high school years ago.” Knowing that not all marriages would succeed, educators nevertheless found comfort in the thought that young people would take matrimony seriously.

Gender antagonism was not entirely missing from sex and family life education classrooms, and a small amount of competition could be fruitful. Exercises that might engender a battle of the sexes, however, were not about defeating the other side but
coming to a clearer understanding of different perspectives. Such discussions were a healthy form of debate that might give young men and women more insight about one another. Force reported from her experience that “The boys admit that they do kiss and tell. The girls have a pretty good idea of what the boys discuss in their bull sessions. This is all thrashed out in the classroom, and it is fun to hear the boys and girls tell one another off. After the heated discussion is over, each sex has a better understanding of the other’s viewpoint. This leads to more respect for one another, too.” Especially because her class consisted of older teenagers in their last years of high school, when the majority of youth had long since abandoned their homosocial inclinations, Force was confident that there was no danger in stimulating a little controversy. As reported by a teacher in Greeley, Colorado, a student noted that “Sex instruction could not be taught in a better manner than in a mixed group [of boys and girls]. Sometime in life we are going to have to face these problems together, and not alone.” The Greeley students wished only that instruction would begin at the junior rather than the senior high school level.

When courses focused on sex differences and male-female relationships in the 1940s and 1950s, prescriptions of appropriate gender norms and normal heterosexual interests tempered the more liberatory messages about gaining maturity and expanding autonomy. Young people might make more choices as they approached adulthood, but they ought to remain alert to the consequences youthful behavior could have for the future. While sexual behavior was mostly unspoken in the classroom, heterosexual interests and developing an attractive appearance and personality were omnipresent. Teachers encouraged youth to discover and cultivate interests in the other sex, especially using exercises that guided students’ imagination into thinking about male-female relationships. Social norms, however, were not biological absolutes; and
emphasis on identity and psychology drew attention to the variations in socialization and cultural norms, and, indeed, their vulnerability in times of social upheaval.

Conclusion

Sex education in public schools, during a period of economic depression, recovery, and mobilization for war, reflected social anxiety about gender identities and roles. Appealing to young people’s desires to attain maturity and acceptance, educators sought to stabilize society by reinforcing what they thought were complementary female and male characteristics among the next generation. Sex and family life education showed boys and girls how to avoid abnormality and suppress undesirable personality traits, in the interest of becoming ideal candidates for marriage and parenthood. By allowing biological imperatives and gender roles to bleed together, teachers led girls to believe that appropriate gendered choices, behaviors, and interactions—“boy-girl relations”—in adolescence had ramifications for their future identities as wives and mothers. Even though teachers sometimes acknowledged a range of possible futures, the emphasis for girls on femininity and heterosexuality began at puberty to influence their self-consciousness and interactions with others.

Cooperation and harmony between boys and girls was crucial during adolescence, and coed courses allowed young people to practice gender-appropriate courtesies and roles. In the movie Human Growth, the teacher selected a boy (Dick) to operate the film projector and a girl (Carolyn) to record questions from the class on the blackboard. From behind the projector, Dick asked a girl in the class (Nancy) to please turn out the lights. Classroom dynamics modeled in the film were not only about how to conduct oneself during sex education lessons but also how to establish gender-
appropriate conduct during adolescence. When sex education is studied as lessons about reproduction only, the broader contemporary meanings of sex and the central relevance of gender to this instruction are missed. And yet messages about heterosexuality and femininity probably made a greater impression—because of their repetition—than did the details of menstruation or conception.

Language of cooperation between the sexes often distorted the power differential between girls' and boys' future options. In Human Growth, for example, the narrator stressed the compatibility of men and women and their mutual achievement of maturity, but indicated separate tracks for male and female adulthood—at least in their ideal configuration. While the narrator explained that differences in sexual maturity dissipated around the age of twenty, an image depicting adult roles appeared on the screen (figure 4.6). The model family consisted of a white, middle-class man with a diploma and a desk job, a bride on his arm, and children at his side. Representing typical roles for white, middle-class women were a perky young (blonde) secretary, a bride latched onto her groom, and a mother holding an infant and surrounded by three additional children. While intending to illustrate the "normal" adult roles available upon sexual maturity, the film's images also hinted at distinct gendered privileges and conventions, marked by race and class as well, that ultimately united man and woman in a common goal: family building.

Yet teachers communicated to boys and girls a need for reading sources about marriage, romance, and the family with a critical perspective, a lesson best illustrated by Force's family relationships course. Her students (and others using the curriculum) talked about the "drudgery" of marriage and parenthood, and they critiqued the claims of advertisers who used love, sexuality, and abundance to sell their products. Student

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Barbara Newman’s 1956 workbook contained an advertisement for a refrigerator that featured white, middle-class excess. Her observations about the clipping noted that the house and its inhabitants were “perfectly groomed, without a speck of dust” and that the young girl featured was a “little angel.” Arguing that the ad did not depict a typical family, Newman pointed out that “the little girl does not typify the little girls I babysit for. Also, I think the advertisement overdoes itself in trying to sell its product, for how could three people eat all that food?” Other clippings in her workbook included an article “Husband and Wife Relations on TV Are Boring Stereotype” and advertisements that used glamour to sell hair rinse, soft drinks, soap, and facial moisturizer. Following the workbook’s instructions, Newman identified the false and misleading claims of advertisers. Her analysis was not far removed from questioning gendered and heterosexual prescriptions.

Examples from other classroom environments suggest that Barbara Newman and other students in Force’s classes were not alone in devising their own interpretations of social expectations and stereotypes. The attention to emotions and attitudes in sex and family life education invited students to make subjective judgments. Their opinions were necessary to establish how gender and sexuality operated in popular culture aimed at youth, in peer culture, and in individual identities and interpersonal relationships.

Sex and family living classes thus revealed and justified sex differences and gender expectations to youth, sometimes projecting traditional roles and at other times suggesting new interpretations and possibilities. Rationales for gender roles were not exclusively grounded in physical anatomy nor were they polarized as opposites or extremes. Yet the differences were more than benign forms of cultural variation, where
boys and girls could choose attributes of personality to their liking. One North Carolina school teacher referred to the part of the curriculum in which youth learned to understand and value their new identities as young men and women as “self-analysis.” Amid rhetoric of choice and democracy, which was pervasive in postwar secondary education, a powerful system of social norms that encouraged introspection and self-improvement promoted adolescent development and acceptance of one’s sex. Despite the fairly rigid view of psychological development, girls and boys were empowered to consider the kind of person they wanted to become and to discuss in each others’ presence such topics as career choices, marriage potential, and, to a lesser extent, pleasure and desire.

Arguing that boys and girls both ought to enroll in family life education classes in the late 1950s, National Council on Family Relations President and high school textbook author Judson T. Landis noted progress in education and the possibilities for further social engineering with respect to gender relations. “Preparation for marriage and parenthood is even more important for men than it is for women,” he contended. “Women tend to think about marriage and in an informal way to get prepared for it, while men are likely just to marry and become parents. In the past, women have had to carry most of the responsibility in adjusting to the husband and in taking care of the children. . . . But if families are to be successful in providing the climate for effective personality growth, then fathers must carry their full share of the load.” Such liberal sentiments acknowledged that traditions of training girls to think about and prepare for marriage and family life had been successful, and now it was time to put some pressure on boys to follow suit.
Taking pride in one's maleness or femaleness was a central message that teachers conveyed to students in sex and family life education. To the extent that adolescent problems derived from sex and gender, educators were able to grasp an easy solution: the promotion of heterosexual femininity and masculinity along with marriage preparation. But educators alone did not create sex education. Youth were active participants, and as the next chapter explores more fully, students voiced alternative ideas, nurtured by the subjective and often contradictory information about personalities and heterosexual romance they received from teachers, peers, families, religious and social groups, and popular culture.
Notes


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6 Educators in the 1940s and 1950s did not use the term "gender," but most of what they meant when discussing sex differences was what we would call gender differences today. I prefer "gender" to signify the social differences between boys and girls and men and women, but in an attempt to convey the mentality of contemporary educators, I sometimes call attention to their language, "sex."

7 Historian Ellen Herman has argued that the mid-century rise of clinical psychology contributed to the women's movement of the late twentieth century, collapsing sharp distinctions between self/other, psychic/social, and personal/political. See Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), esp. chap. 10.


(February 1951): 51-61, esp. 56; and Howard Stanley Hoyman, “Basic Issues in School Sex Education,” Journal of School Health 23 (January 1953): 14-22, esp. 15. See also Jonathan Ned Katz, The Invention of Heterosexuality (New York: Penguin, 1995). Katz has argued that “it's difficult to critically analyze heterosexual discourse without using the word. To openly name heterosexuality, and to speak explicitly and at length about it, removes it from the realm of the taken-for-granted, subjecting it to the dangers of analysis—and the possibility of critique.” Ibid., 66-67.

"Employing the example of Aretha Franklin singing “You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman,” Judith Butler has noted how femininity and masculinity always exist in juxtaposition to one another as part of a binary gender system. Butler has maintained that “The articulation 'I feel like a woman' by a female or 'I feel like a man' by a male presupposes that in neither case is the claim meaninglessly redundant. Although it might appear unproblematic to be a given anatomy... , the experience of a gendered psychic disposition or cultural identity is considered an achievement.” Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), 22.

"Drawing from theorist Michel Foucault's concept of discipline but revising it to account for gender, philosopher Sandra Lee Bartky has offered a useful model for analyzing the elements that constitute femininity. According to Bartky, self-scrutiny and discipline regarding such attributes as body size, configuration, gestures, movements, and ornamentation yield feminine bodies and personas; regulating diet, exercise, posture, gaze, and use of cosmetics and clothing are fundamental to achieving femininity. Sandra Lee Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” in Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance, ed. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby..."


15*Human Growth*, 16 mm, 20 min., E. C. Brown Trust and Eddie Albert Productions, Portland, Ore., 1947; and *The Story of Menstruation*, 16 mm, 10 min., Walt Disney Productions, 1946.

16Despite this articulation of the link between biology and emotions, the film conveyed how femininity derived from social expectations and gendered socialization. Psychological theories and anthropological studies informed the choices made by *Human Growth's* creators. Although postpubescent white female and male characters in *Human Growth* modeled femininity and masculinity with little variation, the opening scene, featuring contrast between white, middle-class and “primitive” Native American expressions of sexual maturity, indicated that culture informed gendered behaviors.


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18 Kennard, "Corporation in the Classroom," 111.

19 Ibid.


28 Ibid., 43.

29 Advocating a personal hygiene units for girls, Cleveland, Ohio, school nurse Frances Y. Henthorn noted "Removal of axillary hair (methods)—meaning armpit hair removal—as a subject for elementary school pupils. See Frances Y. Henthorn,


31 Virginia Milling, “How Do You Rate on a Date?” *Clearing House* 19 (November 1944): 165-66, quotations on 166.

32 Havighurst, *Developmental Tasks*, 38, 37.

33 Ibid., 38. In his foreword, Havighurst mentions that family living educators had taken an interest in his work on human development and education. The book was revised from a pamphlet originally used with his classes at the University of Chicago. Ibid., v.


Both versions noted that it could take a year or more to have a regular cycle, and that regular cycles varied between twenty-one and forty-two days.


41 Ibid., 57.


43 Milling, "How Do You Rate?” 166.


45 An atypical, harsh critique of homosexuality in adolescents appeared in the curriculum guide for San Antonio: “The boy or the girl who is attracted to his own sex and attempts a ridiculous facsimile of man-woman relations is more to be pitied than anything else. He
needs psychiatric treatment to be reclaimed for normal living." Kennedy, Course of Study, 62.

46Havighurst, Developmental Tasks, 37-38.


Educators generally overlooked the fact that Victorian norms had been replaced with more modern ideas about sexuality and gender in the 1920s, in some instances possibly because their childhood preceded the 1920s and in others perhaps to make their "progressive" stance seem more pioneering than it really was.


See, for example, Wetherill, *Human Relations Education*, 16; Lillian Biester, William Griffiths, and N. O. Pearce, *Units in Personal Health and Human Relations* (Minneapolis:


58 Kennedy, *Course of Study*, 25. Acknowledgments indicate that the volume was "revised by Mrs. Payton Kennedy in the light of student evaluations and her experience in teaching the course for three terms in the schools to approximately 1900 students."

Ibid., n.p.

59 Ibid., 26.

60 Ibid., 26.


64 Biester, Griffiths, and Pearce, *Personal Health and Human Relations*, 133.


Ibid., 164. Although the authors believed in a physical basis for heterosexual attractions, high school students still needed guidance and education about the social components of those attractions, including human psychology, dating etiquette, and marital preparations. The origins of heterosexuality may have been natural, in their thinking, but the manifestations of those desires were clearly social.


Educators frequently recounted girls' questions, which were used to shape curriculum in a number of schools. See, for example, Wetherill, *Human Relations Education*, 10.

Alma M. Volk, "Rock Island's Program of Sex Education," *School Executive* 65 (May 1946): 53-54, quotation on 54.


Milling, "How Do You Rate?" 165.

World War II, the GI bill, and the Korean War contributed to the trend toward earlier marriage—men were able to support a family at a younger age and departure overseas...
led many young couples to tie the knot sooner rather than later. Jessica Weiss, To Have and to Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 4, 22.

76 See, for example, Oberholtzer and Sugarman, “Denver Educates”; and Cosgrove, “School Guidance.”


78 A short outline of this course appeared in Baker, Sex Education in High Schools, 120-21.

79 The unnamed student’s letter is quoted in Force, Your Family, ix.


82 In a lecture he gave in 1950, Kirkendall noted that new books on sex education were emphasizing “individual roles of the sexes” and that understanding the “unique contribution of each sex” was fundamental to adolescent development and sex education. Kirkendall, “Sound Attitudes,” 251.

83 Barbara Newman, completed workbook, 1956, 24-25, Elizabeth S. Force Papers, Ocean County Historical Society, Toms River, New Jersey.

84 Ibid., 8, 13 ff.


CHAPTER 5

"MUCH MORE THAN SEX EDUCATION":
HUMAN RELATIONS AND THE PROMISES OF DEMOCRACY

Bombs exploding at Pearl Harbor in 1941 delivered a blow to national security. While retaliation against the Japanese was on the minds of many Americans following the attack, a number of the nation's experts and policy makers stayed focused on internal threats to national welfare. Among these leaders were champions of sex and family life education, who in the years following U.S. entrance into the war took further steps to implement curricula about sex and marriage in the schools. While the nation mobilized for war against enemy nations, authorities were likewise on guard against domestic threats to a sacred institution of American life: the family. Whatever the strengths of democracy, the much-touted "democratic family" was perceived to be in crisis during this period. Given the number of "broken" families and juvenile delinquents, experts proclaimed, intervention was necessary to set individuals—particularly young people—and their families back on course.¹

While the Second World War may have accelerated and brought new attention to changing social, gender, and sexual norms, these were in fact trends set in place earlier in the century. As early as 1932, the National Education Association's American Association of School Administrators had identified cultural reasons to institute sex education that were little different from World War II-era concerns: women's newly
gained freedom, urban features of mobility and anonymity, the availability of birth control and prophylaxis, new insights into behavior developed by Sigmund Freud, sex stimuli available through popular culture, and the demise of common sex standards. Moreover, families had been changing since the nineteenth century—urban dwellers outnumbered rural residents and ranks of wage-earning women grew by comparison to those never employed. The further development of these trends during the post–World War II era revealed that the war years were not so much an aberration but a continuation of social change. Threats to families were not unique to the war years.

Yet to minimize family instability during the mid-twentieth century, educators redoubled their efforts to promote adolescent adjustment and family cohesion. In the spirit of democracy, educational leaders eschewed imposing standards and roles on the nation's allegedly free citizens, be they adults or adolescents. In the spirit of capitalism, they sought to manage and discipline the process of growing up through the schools. Free, public education provided an opportunity for teachers and administrators to offer guidance to a younger generation, and many educators attempted to secure young people's present development, future happiness within family units, and active American citizenship. Educators relied heavily on tools from psychology to promote adolescent adjustment and fortify the democratic family ideal, and they did so through curricula related to sex and the family, especially under the umbrella of human relations education.

Sex education for youth had focused on character development since its inception, and the framework of good character drew upon social hygiene movement founders' attachment to Judeo-Christian standards of morality. By the beginning of the Second World War, however, school officials and teachers rarely invoked religious
justification or secular ethics when discussing matters of gender and sexuality. Instead of morality, educators promoted maturity, a concept that pertained to the development of emotional control, critical reasoning skills, and freedom from parental oversight. In courses that were about growing up and becoming adults, adolescents' immaturity—as in cracking jokes about sex or giggling during discussion of sexual reproduction—was simultaneously cause to withhold information and evidence of a need for instruction.4 Thus educators prefaced their units and courses on sex with attention to how physical and mental maturity enabled students to receive the instruction, directing students to stifle their giggles and conceal any discomfort with the topic. Self-discipline was a crucial feature of this maturity, and teachers expected their students to exhibit self-control in the classroom, particularly when sex and human relationships were the topics of the day.

Although successful families reflected the success of capitalist democracy, typified by material comforts and free choice, family failures were apparently not an indication of national shortcomings. Rather than questioning the nation's political and economic system, sex educators guided youth to develop an idealistic yet practical approach to human relationships. Educators accordingly proposed to meet modern challenges to family life by encouraging personality growth and age-appropriate heterosexual relationships among the nation's young people, aiding them to reconcile freedom and responsibility in ways that would restore confidence in American achievements. Attaining maturity had ramifications not only for personal adjustment and harmonious family relationships; developing awareness of one's own hygiene, reproductive capabilities, and personality—as well as heterosexual interest in dating and marriage—mattered to a society that valued the perpetuation of the nuclear family.5
This chapter examines how notions of self-improvement and democratic family relationships were central to teaching sex education within a framework of human relations. The first section outlines significant changes in teaching about sex between the early and mid-twentieth century, showing the influence of psychology as well as pedagogy that centered on youth's needs and interests. Mental health and national well being were interrelated, and educators made these connections in their lessons on sex, the family, and human relations. In the second section, I explain how egalitarian ideals accompanied a model of democratic family life, which sometimes questioned rigid gender and sexual roles and consistently critiqued patriarchal and authoritarian living arrangements. Sources that reveal girls' voices and perspectives suggest the potential for their being empowered by the curricula, but not always in the ways that teachers intended. I argue that sex education conceived as human relations education contributed to a relaxation of strict gender roles, loosening of conservative standards of sexual morality, and increased sensitivity to misinformation and injustice. Concluding the chapter is an analysis of the radical potential of the rhetoric of democracy, equality, freedom, and choice.

**Human Relations, Psychology, and Democratic Pedagogy**

While the purpose of sex education in the early twentieth century was to promote purity and prevent disease, mid-century sex education classes embraced rationales that extended farther afield from providing facts about continence, heterosexual intercourse, venereal disease, and reproduction. Expanding the early movement's marginal interest in education about the family, school officials broadened sex education in the direction of family living and interpersonal relationships in the 1940s and 1950s. This occurred at a
moment when social sciences were gaining authority in American culture and the study of marriage and the family was becoming more prominent. Interpersonal relationships, most notably those between men and women, became an arena for introspection as well as intervention—fueled by the rise of the helping professions, and steeped in psychological and psychoanalytic thought. Sex, as presented in the classroom and within society in general, became less a matter of medical interest and more an issue of social concern.

As Oregon educator Lester A. Kirkendall titled his influential 1950 book, "sex education as human relations" became the trend for the postwar era, in which relationships and emotions occupied a more prominent place in sex education pedagogy than did physical acts and their bodily consequences. Capable teachers could aid students to understand human relations with a small amount of training and expertise; several college courses or workshops in psychology or related disciplines along with common sense and community respect could suffice as preparation for teaching about sex through a human relations framework. The often cited concern about properly prepared instructors grew less inhibiting as the content and context of sex education became less medically oriented and more connected to philosophies of responsible living. Teacher of Family Relationships at Toms River High School, Elizabeth S. Force, was a case in point. Well known in the community, Force studied English in college and taught the subject at her high school alma mater before superintendent Edgar M. Finck recruited her for the family living experiment that became a nationwide success story.

The concept of human relations during the 1940s and 1950s was deeply connected to political ideology as well as psychology. Not just any human relations—but particular configurations premised on beliefs about democracy and liberalism and fears...
about changing standards of morality and family living—were the subjects of study. In
the midst of a war against totalitarianism, imposing standards on young people was
suspect. But even prior to the war, educators were examining the role schools might
serve in meeting the needs of youth. Young people needed training and guidance for life
after high school, proponents of the movement for practical or functional education
concurred, especially given that a college-preparatory curriculum was inappropriate for
many students who would finish their education at the time of their high school
graduation. More than an effort to produce democratic citizens through the schools,
educators sought to meet what adults perceived and youth articulated as the needs of
young people.

Vice, venereal disease, hasty marriages, and the rise in divorce rates troubled
mid-century authorities, who deemed that these outcomes were undesirable for youth as
well as society. As graduate student Lloyd S. Van Winkle wrote, educators and
administrators were bothered “during the early years of the war to see so many
evidences of pure ignorance on the part of the very young high school girls who were
marrying with seemingly no preparation from home or ‘abroad’ for such an undertaking.
It was then that the high school counselors felt that something must be done for girls.”
Among the complaints of young brides was that “they had found sex life revolting, which
was one of the many things creating a state of unhappiness in this relationship toward
their husbands.”10 Counselors held mothers responsible for conveying “a negative
attitude toward boys in general, thus creating in the minds of the girls themselves, an
almost insurmountable feeling of fear and misunderstanding toward the whole
matter.”11 Again the family had proved inadequate.
School authorities wanted to prompt young people to make wise decisions about life for themselves, assisted by the wisdom of counselors and teachers. As the authors of the 1947 Minnesota curriculum put it, “it has become more important than ever before that boys and girls develop attitudes, ideals, and habit patterns that will enable them to live wholesomely and effectively as individuals, as members of the family, and as citizens in the community.” What may have seemed like an obvious and timeless desire for guiding youth conduct had particular historical contours: school officials wanted to compel youth to acquire wholesome respect for marital sex, but they did not want to foist morals upon young people. Fear of God and risk of disease were inappropriate tools to prod mid-century youth into socially sanctioned behavior, although a few educators used dated methods to assert old-fashioned messages. In a national climate in which freedom supposedly abounded, educators most often sought to bolster the American way of life with gentler methods; they sought to empower young people to discover their unique personalities, grow comfortable in heterosocial environments, and imagine and plan their ideal families.

The human relations model built on and recast the so-called positive sex education, a type of sex education that early social hygiene leaders recommended as an antidote to medical lectures that aroused fear. Not only was mid-century sex education to focus on the uplifting elements of reproduction and the sex instinct, as its predecessors did, but also part of its expansive vision were such topics as getting along with others, building healthy marriages, and developing a life philosophy. This larger conception of sex education called for more extensive units and even semester- or year-long courses on the subject. In such courses, the study of sex bled into the study of the family, which in turn involved learning how to form satisfying relationships with family
members as well as peers and dating partners. "Many of the problems of adolescence," claimed the authors of the Minnesota curriculum, "which have their origin in changing human relations, are the result of ignorance and diffidence coupled with the absence of readily accessible and reliable information from authoritative sources. Unless education in this area is provided," they argued, "young people must contend with the natural adolescent changes, urges, and reactions with little understanding and many fears, superstitions, and misconceptions."¹⁵

Most sex educators believed that students needed edification about personalities—more so than bodies—to cope with the exigencies of life during the war and in the postwar era. Personality, maturity, and citizenship superseded morality and biological science as cornerstones of education about sex and gender in the mid-twentieth century.¹⁶ Early sex educators who sought to instill values of continence would have considered visiting a prostitute, having same-sex sexual relations, or masturbating immoral acts that exhibited a lack of self-control. Also concerned about self-control, mid-century educators generally viewed such uses of the "sex impulse" as indicating a lack of self-control, based not in immorality but in "immaturity" and failed adjustment to social norms. Although ultimately the two sets of educators had similar behavior and ideals in mind, they posited them differently—in concert with contemporary thought.

Whereas language of self-control dominated the early literature on social hygiene, self-improvement was the catchphrase of the mid-century movement. Education as a means of self-improvement was a longstanding tradition but one newly applied to sex education. Whereas education for decades had been linked with personal achievement and bettering one's social and economic status, educators had to establish an association between sex education and personal gain. At its most superficial, units on
growing up taught young people—especially girls—the virtues of tending to their personal hygiene and appearance. In a Dallas, Texas, elementary school home economics unit from the 1950s, “good grooming” and cosmetic application fostered middle-class standards of home and family living (figure 5.1). But more broadly, in the process of expanding the meanings of adolescent adjustment and sex education, proponents focused on emotional growth, mental health, and life adjustment—forms of maturity one might derive from wholesome attitudes toward sex and growing up. Sex education may not have meant pulling oneself up by one’s proverbial bootstraps, but it did involve an opportunity to develop a fetching personality and social ease in a heterosexual world.
Mid-century sex educators employed new techniques in the classroom, increasingly using young people's questions and demands to design the curriculum. In Hayward, California, a 1947 student petition led the school system to inaugurate a sex and family life education course, and a request to the superintendent from a committee of summer schools students in San Antonio, Texas, helped launch their program. While social hygienists had given some attention to young people's wishes in the early twentieth century, the phenomenon of tailoring sex education lessons to specific communities and youth interests grew commonplace in the 1940s. That educators felt beholden to young people's opinions and evaluations reflects the importance of a growing "youth market," or constituency of youth who possessed a collective identity and purchasing power, in this instance not at the marketplace but at school. It also reveals the influence of child-centered education, associated with the progressive education movement and committed to meeting children's expressed needs.

Educators posited that girls of color and working-class girls were most vulnerable to misinformation about sex as well as an absence of role models. Howard M. Bell's Maryland study of 13,528 young people (ages sixteen to twenty-four) in the late 1930s found that white youth were twice as likely to discuss sex at home as were African American youth. The percentage of black young people (13.9 percent) opposing sex education in Maryland schools was significantly less than that of white young people (20.4 percent). Bell found this especially notable given that "85 (or 70 per cent) of the 120 youth who admitted they were unmarried mothers or fathers, were Negroes." The original version of "Growing Up" noted that parents of Logan School children—predominantly people of color—were "confused and embarrassed" by their children's questions about sex. Those parents were "poorly informed themselves,"

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according to the guide, unaware of their children’s maturity, and in some instances “filled with inhibitions about sex.” Educators’ sense of urgency in reaching girls was compounded by the wartime changes in family life, and in Logan Heights, the lack of privacy in lower-income families’ homes.

Described as a “rough and ready” eighteen-year-old girl from “low socio-economic status,” one teenage girl explained in a school composition her approach to dating, exhibiting to teachers the reality some girls faced. Because “you meet some very bad boys, and never know whether or not to go out with a fellow who asks for a date,” she opined, one could only learn from experience and attempt to be tough. “If you think he is trying to get fresh with you. Well that is the time to tell him off. Slap him in the face. But sometimes a fellow is very persistent. The saying is that a fellow will go as far as a girl will let him. But the way I see it is for the girl to go and find out for herself.”

Excerpted in a college-level textbook, this girl’s story exemplified one end of the spectrum of girls’ experiences with dating—and was apparently not unusual. The author of the textbook, Ruth Strang, had collected student writings from teachers across the country and used them as data for her tome on girls’ personalities and psychology. The section of the text that contained this anecdote included another similar story of dating gone awry; the chapter excerpted only one composition that depicted the kind of dating behavior displayed in prescriptive pamphlets and movies. As a result, Strang commented after the positive story, “We should have more accounts of parties and other social experiences that have proved so thoroughly enjoyable and desirable for adolescents of different ages.”

Whereas early-twentieth-century leaders had largely dictated lessons based on their authority doctors, scientists, and as learned men (rarely were they women), mid-
twentieth-century teachers arranged their instruction based on observations of youth and interactions with them in everyday classroom settings. When pupils voiced interest in the parameters of acceptable—and attractive—behavior for boys and girls and the achievement of a satisfying life during and after high school, teachers provided forums for discussion. These teachers, many of them women with years of experience and contact with youth, did not limit themselves to instructing youth in managing the sex instinct, as early advocates of sex education had proposed.28 Teenagers’ questions could not be satisfied by former school leaders’ tendency to stress the ethics, aesthetics, and eugenics of the ideal monogamous family from an adult perspective—although students sometimes sought adult advice.29 Instead, it was the shared agendas of teachers and students that guided sex education into the 1940s and 1950s.

As students struggled to define their value system and sense of self-worth, sex education and family living teachers opened the floor for discussion from a variety of perspectives and a flexible range of topics that students chose. “If ever there were a course in which the desires of students should be cultivated, expressed, and served,” wrote sociology professor John Newton Baker in his 1942 study of high school curricula in forty-six states, “sex education is such a course.”30 The use of question boxes to elicit anonymous concerns and questions from youth was an important component in constructing a curriculum centered on student needs.

Senior high school courses could often dispense with anonymous question boxes, especially in instances where youth had learned to discuss sex without embarrassment. In Toms River, juniors and seniors posed aloud in class many of their questions about sex and boy-girl relations: “What do you do when a boy gets fresh?”
asked one "comely" girl in Force's Family Relationships course in 1953. "Do you have to
make love when you go out with the boys? If we do, will they talk about us?" girls
frequently asked.31

Even in the framework of the physical sciences, girls pushed for information
about relationships. Describing how she crafted her tenth-grade science classes
according to students' needs, for instance, Los Angeles science teacher Eva Kirby noted
that girls' anonymous questions tended to relate to "intercourse and birth," followed by
"boy-girl relations," and boys' questions related to intercourse, masturbation, and
venereal disease.32 Force and Kirby and many other teachers like them invited students' 
questions and organized their curricula to address subjects that concerned their pupils.

Girls sometimes requested facts about sexual anatomy and how one became 
pregnant, reminding teachers that a focus on relationships to the exclusion of questions
about sexuality was unsatisfactory. In Bell's study, one-half of those surveyed claimed to
have obtained most sex information from their peers. Realizing that this was often
inadequate, 75 percent of those questioned favored sex education at school.33 Although
girls claimed to have received more information at home than boys acknowledged, many
remained mystified. In seeking information in the Girl Scouts, one young woman
reported that when her peers had made inquiries, "the leader would look prissy and say
'a Girl Scout is clean in thought, word, and deed,'" cutting off the conversation and
building an association between sex and filth.34 Educators were compelled by such
evidence to devise curricula that would counteract girls' exposure to negative influences,
especially prudish women who led girls to link sex and secrecy or repulsion.

Students wished to remove the mystery surrounding sex and the body, and a few
young women from the Maryland survey indicated that they became pregnant without
understanding how or why. New York City school board member Ellsworth B. Buck summoned this type of evidence in his campaign to expand sex education in the city schools. "School never taught me anything about my body," one individual that Bell interviewed had claimed; "I can tell you how to cut up an ant or a caterpillar, but I can't tell you anything about myself." As for where babies came from, one young woman reported that "I found out when I started to have 'em." Identified as a mother of three and a "single, colored girl of 20 who left school because of pregnancy," a different respondent said, "Sex education should start being taught in the elementary schools, because so many parents are ignorant on this subject, and others are so old-fashioned that they feel that such things shouldn't be talked about." Other girls and young women had similar experiences: "I know I didn't know enough. I didn't believe it even when they told me my baby was coming" and "Nobody told me anything, and I had to get married because I was going to have a baby." Unsatisfied by birds-and-bees approaches to sex education, girls in the 1940s and 1950s often requested information about "petting," heterosexual intercourse, contraception, and abortion. Typical subjects of sex and family life education—such as getting along with the other sex, learning to deal with menstruation, and looking ahead to marriage and parenthood—concerned adolescent girls in this era. But they also voiced questions about topics that some teachers preferred to omit, including sexual pleasure and male aggression. When asked by their eighth-grade homemaking teacher in California to submit unsigned questions about boy-girl relationships in 1958, about half of the girls in the class explicitly inquired about sexual behavior: "What do you do on your wedding night?" "How do you have intercourse?" "Is it safe for young girls to have an abortion?" "Does it hurt to have intercourse?"
As students raised instructors’ awareness of the problems and worries of young people, teachers adapted their curricula and pedagogy accordingly. As a San Diego sex educator explained, “If you preach to the students, they yawn in your face. If you show shock or embarrassment of any kind, they spot it instantly and you’ve lost them.” Among the questions that girls raised to her on a typical day were “Why won’t parents let their daughters go out—not even with girls?” and “Why do boys have so much more freedom than girls, in their families?” Other questions alluded to restrictions: “What is wrong with going on a hayride? My father will not let me go.” Girls also sought advice about dating and petting: “What is a good way to stop when he gets ideas?” and “What is a French Kiss? Will you discuss this with us, please?” Gordon’s students included a pregnant fifteen-year-old girl (presumably white, since “race” is only ever mentioned for people of color); she also counseled one seventeen-year-old with problems at home, and another, a Filipina engaged to a Filipino sailor and requesting information about contraception.

Seemingly not scandalized, teachers in San Diego’s group-counseling program made sure that discussion was oriented toward students’ needs. On the first of five meetings of the ninth-grade girls’ group during the mid-1950s, the teacher would have the students submit questions following a screening of the film Name Unknown. Scenarios in the film included sex crimes involving babysitting for a “strange man,” parking, and accepting “pick-ups.” According to Catherine Marsman Jones, a counselor in the San Diego school district in the 1950s, teachers used these questions to design the course discussions to fit students’ expressed needs. These questions were read to the students on subsequent group meetings, and they also informed the teacher about the pupils “since they indicate the levels of social and sexual maturity.”

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In addition to catering to students’ thoughts and feelings in determining and modifying instructional agendas, teachers invited student critiques. Although they derived insight from outside experts, speakers, and authors, rarely did teachers seek professional assessments of their courses. Instead, teachers, including student teachers, asked pupils to provide evaluations. Numerous graduate students during this period attempted to measure the effectiveness of the courses via questionnaires distributed to students and high school graduates. Evaluating the Social Problems course for his master’s thesis in 1952, Wendell P. Hill had Western State High school students in Michigan complete questionnaires following various units, including “Understanding Yourself,” “Boy and Girl Relations,” “Courtship and Marriage,” and “Family Life.” Seniors indicated whether or not the lessons had improved their understanding of specific topics, and some responded to the request to make suggestions for improvement. Students in this survey and others frequently commented that the material was too elementary for their age. A number of Western Michigan students wanted the lessons to encompass “sex vices and crimes,” “venereal disease,” “sex cravings,” “birth control,” “wedding night,” and “place of sex in marriage.” High school girls in Geauga County, Ohio, similarly suggested improving sex education by discussing “how to improve personality,” “accidental pregnancy,” “effects of kissing, sexual feelings,” “dirty jokes and actions,” “prostitution,” “how to say ‘no’ without hurting feelings,” “sex conduct and self-control,” “venereal disease,” and “birth control.”

Sometimes, too, school professionals asked for parental input after previewing lessons or observing changes in behavior upon their children’s enrollment in the course. But as San Diego City Schools’ health education director G. Gage Wetherill reported, parents were prone to defer to teachers. Parents with whom he spoke insisted
that school people "see so many of the sex-social problems of high school students and counsel them day after day," thus making teachers ideal sex educators for youth.49 Wetherill also noted that "some of these youngsters come up with pretty perplexing and involved sex problems that are appalling to the naive and uninitiated."50 Yet those curricula shared with parents tended to downplay controversial and risqué topics, in part because such topics usually arose when students—not always predictably—volunteered them. Educators especially sought parental approval for using the classroom to improve young people's behavior and aid their mental health. Had students' behavior at home improved? Did they cooperate better with their siblings? Did they exhibit greater emotional maturity? These were the questions teachers asked, in addition to examining the successes and failures of marriages among former pupils.

Accountable to students and parents, sex education in the 1940s and 1950s aimed to please, not to pressure. While a military model of expediency and venereal disease control may have put sex education on the agenda of a number of public schools, by mid-century such opportunism contributed little to a movement sympathetic to progressive and democratic methods of teaching.51 In an exceptional mid-century curriculum that emphasized the perils of petting and promiscuity, the ASHA manuals for preinduction curricula—intended for older teenagers, adaptable for military recruits or civilians, and used in a number of public schools—listed negative outcomes: sexually transmitted disease, illegitimacy, abortion, and hasty and unhappy marriage.52 But like other contemporary teachers' guides, the curriculum's emphasis was overwhelmingly on the positive rewards of good behavior and wise management of the "sex endowment."53 Discussion questions throughout the social hygiene chapters allowed young people to propose decisions in hypothetical situations, in part to review the teacher's advice but
also in recognition of each individual's right to make a personal decision. Even when, on occasion, the moral advice seemed heavy handed, mid-twentieth-century teachers gave students opportunities to find and articulate their own sense of what was best.

High school teachers in the 1940s and 1950s embraced discussion as an important classroom tool, employing small groups, panels, “socio-dramas,” and role-playing. Such learning activities were more amenable to classes in which retention of information was less important than exploring ideas and issues, such as current events.\textsuperscript{54} The National Defense Act of 1958, however, placed emphasis on science, foreign languages (including Russian), and mathematics—subjects that were not well suited to open discussion but instead rewarded teachers who provided rigorous instruction.\textsuperscript{55} Many political leaders and people generally seemed to think that educators had attached too much value to personality growth and not enough to academic skills. Discussion, however, remained an essential component of sex and family living courses at the end of the 1950s.

Particularly popular in garnering community support for sex education and related classes, the panel or roundtable discussion allowed for the expression of different opinions and approaches to sex-related topics. Educators used the method when promoting sex education to the public. Whether as in San Diego, where panels convened at high schools in evening open forums to solicit support for beginning a sex education curriculum, or as in Portland, Oregon, where student panelists conveyed the needs for sex education to community leaders, these demonstrations offered a range of viewpoints.\textsuperscript{56} The voices usually conveyed similar attitudes, however, thus creating the appearance of a democratic, grassroots consensus to institute sex education. While true that individuals and groups of ordinary citizens and young people genuinely promoted
and encouraged sex education, panel coordinators handpicked participants to express ideas that suited them. Thus, any major objections would have had to come from the audience, a position with notably less influence. In addition to managing public opinion, popularizing sex education in this way was a means of staging contemporary, progressive pedagogy—the type of pedagogy befitting a democratic nation.

Hierarchy was not a value that teachers emphasized vis-à-vis students in sex education and family living courses, and instructors often gave up some of their authority to impress students with the principles of democratic organization. As students placed their chairs in circles for classroom discussions, their communication with one another was not always mediated through an adult leader. Panels, socio-dramas, circle discussions, and small buzz groups put youth's expressions at the center of attention, bolstering the importance of intergroup communication. Just as boys and girls learned to get along with and speak respectfully to one another in the classroom, teachers emphasized the benefits of camaraderie between husbands and wives and among siblings.

In classrooms, group and panel discussions usually involved peers, who expressed differences of opinion about matters related to sex. Although teachers often guided students to focus on particular topics, they did not exercise control over the content of pupils' comments. In Fair Lawn, New Jersey, for example, teacher Elliott E. Kigner had his ninth-grade students in an all-female science class submit anonymous lists of "their five most vital personal problems." After the collected lists were read to the class (presumably by the instructor), students wanted more discussion. "The students then voted for a committee of five girls who would plan what could be done and organize the agenda, after considering the views of the class," Kigner explained.
Following the third period of discussion, Kigner had girls provide evaluations of the experience. On a positive note, girls indicated “that they felt good (a) at being able to express their problems and (b) in realizing that other people have similar difficulties.” Common criticisms included moving too fast from one topic to the next and the absence of advice from the teacher and school psychologist, who sat in on the class for the sessions. This exercise apparently delighted the girls, and the school subsequently instituted a group guidance program. In sum, the teacher praised the experiment for its impact on girls: raised awareness that other girls encountered similar problems, lowered inhibitions in group discussions, increased willingness to pursue individual consultations outside the class as needed, and an overall improved self-understanding and maturity.

Even more so than in the public forum, classroom discussion allowed for an array of opinions and perspectives, with little more than peer-consciousness and self-censorship prohibiting dissenting voices. In classroom discussions and on course evaluations, students revealed opinions and experiences that were sometimes contrary to adult standards. Virginia Milling’s 1944 senior English class in New Jersey, for example, explained to their teacher that the protagonist from William Allen White’s story “Mary White” “wouldn’t be popular in West Side” Newark. “I liked Mary White,” Milling wrote in the journal Clearing House, “but I warned myself quickly that that was no reason why my pupils should.” In the process of listening to students, teachers revised their assumptions as well as their lesson plans. In Milling’s class, she had her pupils devise lists of what made boys and girls popular at their school, with each sex laying out the features they found attractive in the other.

Student participation in classroom panels and course evaluations empowered youth as “citizens” of the sex education classroom. Like the U.S. model of citizenship, in
which men and women participated in town meetings and public forums and exercised power through voting, classroom procedures required mature and responsible citizens. School officials adopted the goal of making students into responsible men and women by aiding their transition from adolescence to adulthood and treating them as valuable participants. Preinduction curricula, developed in Cincinnati during World War II and organized into a nationally distributed manual in the early 1950s, offered high school teachers and leaders of young adults guidance in meeting the challenges of the “national emergency,” or war- and postwar-related changes in U.S. society. In the 1952 curriculum, authors noted that “development of the best health in outlook, attitudes and physical and spiritual fitness is both essential to all living and to making one’s maximum contribution to the nation’s needs.” National interests and personal needs and development dovetailed in a democracy, according to the guide. Attributes of personal adjustment yielded character and development suitable for democratic living.

Prompted by youth and their questions, numerous schools established sex and family life education courses in the 1940s and 1950s. These courses empowered youth to request information and guidance but ultimately guided young people to make decisions for themselves. While teachers coordinated the classes and shared their personal ideas and interpretations of gender and sexual norms, and thereby never fully relinquished their authority, students nevertheless provided and shaped much of the course content, especially when discussing personal problems and boy-girl relationships.
Gender, Sexuality, and Marital Relationships

"The purpose of these classes is to help our boys and girls develop more robust personalities so that they may face up to emotional problems later in life without breaking down," explained H. Edmond Bullis and Emily E. O'Malley in their guide for coed human relations classes.64 Initiated in Delaware in 1941, the courses for junior high school students encouraged pupils to identify and solve personal problems. "For children adrift on the tides of puberty a constant worry is the boy-girl relationship," Bullis and O'Malley wrote. Orienting their discussions "to four inner human drives: self-preservation, adventure, interest in the opposite sex, and recognition," the teachers found it "refreshing to hear boys and girls speak openly, somewhat nobly, in fact, of 'interest in the opposite sex' as a powerful driving force of human beings. It was reassuring too to hear this inner drive tied to the emotion of love rather than shame or vulgarity."65

Understanding and managing heterosexual attractions and interactions was a common focus of mid-century sex education discussions, in which teachers invited attention to both male and female roles and points of view. In the process of explaining the meaning and significance of growing up and becoming sexual beings, teachers validated male and female perspectives and experiences. Whereas curricula that focused on general human values—as opposed to male-female interactions—might posit a supposedly universal "man," topics related to interest in the other sex necessitated two distinct sexes. Rather than collapse male and female into a universal human experience, teachers understood that girls' rites of passage and gendered experiences were equally important to understanding sex and guiding behavior.
Boys and girls had unique contributions to make to discussions about sex, marriage, and the family, especially apparent in classroom activities that compared and gave comparable weight to boys' and girls' opinions. In sex and family life education classes, teachers often had students create lists of responses to a particular question—such as, “what traits do you seek in a mate?”—and then examine the answers collectively. The exercise of comparing boy and girl responses to questions emphasized gender differences as well as the supposed desire of young people to attract a suitable dating partner and a future mate. San Antonio family life educator Payton Kennedy stated hyperbolically that such a classroom activity “makes it possible for boys and girls to develop insight into the feelings of each sex that would be utterly impossible elsewhere.”

Sex educators were sensitive to gender differences in part because the narrative of reproduction gave women, their bodies, and their roles as mothers the spotlight, something impossible to capture without differentiating male and female. The focus on building relationships—especially in the domestic sphere—highlighted the traditionally female realm of caring and nurturing, an additional reminder that female perspectives mattered. Recognizing that girls were more prone to analyze relationships and imagine and plan for marriage than boys, Force seems to have had little investment in perpetuating this gendered pattern with her students in Toms River. “Boys, what specific preparation for marriage can you make during the dating period? . . . Girls[?]” queried the workbook for the Family Relationships course. Force expected both male and female students to engage in the activity of planning for marriage.

While Force’s sample answers to this question indicates that she retained allegiance to separate roles for men and women, a student’s response to this item in her
workbook reveals a more egalitarian impulse. The workbook gave as examples one
common point—"Read some books on marriage preparation"—along with two unique
points each for boys and girls. Young men should "Save money" and "Take out
additional insurance" while young women should "Collect items for your home" and
"Practice cooking." Toms River High School student Barbara Newman responded in
her 1956 workbook with identical answers for boys’ and girls’ necessary preparations:
"talk to minister, parents & friends" and "observe other married couples" were the items
she inserted. Equal preparation of men and women, to her, apparently meant the same
kind of preparation—at least in learning about commitment and developing a philosophy
of marriage.

Offering students an opportunity to examine gender as well as personality
differences, Force’s workbook provided an anecdote to launch discussion. "This is my
wedding,’ declared the bride-to-be firmly. ‘I shall have it as I like; not as Aunt Tilly likes,
or as Grandma likes, or my in-laws like.’ Is she right? In error? Discuss your attitude
toward her statement.” Force evasively remarked in the teachers’ guide, in conjunction
with this question, that "boys’ answers and girls’ answers will probably differ
considerably.” Inviting students to discuss their attitudes to this scenario allowed them
to establish their own sense of "right" and "error." But the sample answers in the
workbook and the notation in the teachers’ guide suggested and even stimulated
gendered responses. The guide recommended comparing boys’ and girls’ responses in
the classroom—accenting, and perhaps reinforcing, gender consciousness. Given the
absence of a single (or his and hers) right answer to this question, students’ responses
were unlikely to fall neatly along gender lines.
On matters of sexual contact prior to marriage, most written curriculum guides never detailed the obligations of girls and boys, although a number alluded to the fact that girls should act as boundary keepers. Taking great care to avoid overgeneralization about gender and sexual stimulation, Alice V. Keliher stated in her 1937 text *Life and Growth*, “It is thought that boys need less stimulation than girls, that their sex organs respond more quickly under emotional excitement. For many this is true. There are, however, great differences.” Developed under the auspices of the Commission on Human Relations of the Progressive Education Association, the text encouraged each boy and girl to take responsibility for setting his or her own limits. Without prescribing a proper course of action, the author assumed that variation was inevitable but not necessarily based on gender: “both the boy and girl involved in a petting situation where there is love-making, kissing, and caressing must realize the point at which such stimulation may lead them further than they want to go.”

Other classroom materials made it clear that girls should act as guardians of virtue, given boys’ alleged propensity for stimulation. With uncommon explicitness, the 1953 ASHA preinduction curriculum placed the burden on girls. The authors instructed, “since boys are more easily stimulated than girls it is wise to avoid sexually stimulating situations (parked cars, darkened living-rooms, etc.) and to dress and act decorously.” This advice was one of several points that the curriculum made—to both boys and girls—teaching youth to accept the disparity between girls’ and boys’ duty to abide by acceptable standards of appearance and sexual behavior. The 1952 version of the ASHA curriculum had posed the issue of girls’ dress and behavior to girls in question form: “Can the way a girl dresses, talks and behaves constitute a temptation to young men? Does this place an obligation on girls?” The guide also had made a comparatively
reticent reference to “unwise ways of behaving with boys or thoughtless exposure to sexual stimulation (in petting, etc.).” The changes in the 1953 publication indicate willingness on the part of the authors to be more specific, adding the belief about boys’ quicker arousal and the references to cars, darkened rooms, and decorous appearance and behavior, probably in response to teachers’ trial use of the lessons.

A single standard—rather than a double standard—of behavior prevailed in most sex education lessons, yet girls and boys typically had separate roles in upholding the standard. Some courses emphasized the common goal and others paid greater attention to the different gendered responsibilities. In mixed-gender classes, teachers were more likely to point out uniform obligations for boys and girls, notwithstanding such gendered practices as asking and paying for dates. Ambiguity, however, was not uncommon: an account of the coed home and family living course for seniors in Highland Park, Michigan, in the early 1950s indicated that they discussed “the responsibility of each partner in the area of lovemaking” during the engagement period. This vague allusion to sexual roles may have meant gender-specific responsibilities akin to those mentioned in the ASHA curriculum, although it could have involved general responsibilities for both men and women, similar to *Life and Growth*.

Gender-specific advice was to some degree warranted, given the experiences and consequences of sexual aggression that some girls encountered while dating. A sixteen-year-old girl hoping to place limits on her boyfriend’s intentions to “do it” (in her words) was pleased when a class at her northern Ohio school addressed the subject in the mid-1940s. Her sex education course “helped her to find an answer,” explained Elva Horner Evans of Cleveland’s Family Health Association, remedying a situation in which none of the books available at her school “could give her the help she needed to limit
Tom's lovemaking. And given the types of questions eighth-grade girls posed for a visiting sex education lecturer in the late 1950s, knowing how to deal with boys' assertiveness and aggressiveness concerned many girls: "What happens when you are seduced?" "How does a boy rape or fuck you?" "What should you do if a boy tries or does rape you?" and "Why are men so eager?"

At times, curricula appear to have empowered girls, suggesting that they were not potential victims of male aggression but instead had equal power in dating situations. In some cases, teachers even implied that girls possessed control over their dating partners, with both boys and girls alternately subject to weakness. Yet they were essentially giving girls false illusions in identifying male sexual aggression as a "weakness" rather than an exercise of power or manipulation. The girl who was "emotionally mature," the ASHA curriculum guide, for instance, maintained, "refuses to subject any male to undue sexual stimulation and protects him from his weakness or poor judgment and against her own weakness. She knows that she can always say 'no' and wisely uses her control over him." At least one sex educator felt that girls could use such power to prevent sexual assault. An eighth-grade girl who attended talks in her California homemaking class responded in a survey two weeks later that the talks had been informative. Among the answers she claimed to have received at the lecture was "that a boy couldn't rape you against your will unless you were too afraid to help yourself." The author providing the student responses in a 1960 Marriage and Family Living article did not clarify whether this was the lecturer's position. He only explained, in a separate passage, that an alleged local incident of rape, highly publicized in the media, probably prompted students' questions on the subject—perhaps leading the instructor to discount girls' fears as paranoia.

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Some educators and youth seem to have believed that control in dating and sexual scenarios was not always gendered in traditional ways. Both boys' and girls' lessons in the ASHA preinduction curriculum called attention to how people could exploit each other in relationships, without assuming this was the propensity of one sex over another.\textsuperscript{85} Kirkendall and Curtis E. Avery's 1955 framework with which to evaluate successful interpersonal relationships made no allusion to gender roles and held both partners accountable to the same standards of honesty, trust, values, empathy, and affection.\textsuperscript{86} Kirkendall and Avery, as well as students, suggested that gender did not determine sexual exploitation or assertiveness. A high school student anticipating medical doctor Bert Y. Glassberg's sex education lectures in St. Louis, Missouri, submitted an anonymous question, for example, implying that girls sometimes pressured boys to have sex. The student asked, "What can a boy do if the girl starts thinking of intercourse [sic] and marriage?"\textsuperscript{87}

Lessons did not rule out the possibility of girls taking things too far. But rather than assuming that girls' lack of restraint would lead to precocious sexual activity, teaching materials were more likely to emphasize emotional disturbance and social stigma. The Delaware curriculum warned, "Suppose we let this INTEREST IN THE OTHER SEX become too important," posing an example of a girl whose heterosexual interests were greater than the norm. "What may happen to a girl who is too 'boy crazy'? What might happen to her school work? What might happen at home to her family relations?"\textsuperscript{88} The solution was to keep the human drives—those that affected all humans—in balance. The lesson implicitly suggested that this was a greater problem for girls than boys, but did so without directly addressing girls' risk of pregnancy. Balanced interests appeared to have gendered dimensions, as boy-crazy girls along with sissy
boys (but not tomboys) came under scrutiny in the Delaware lessons. The text’s chapter on emotional conflicts focused on a boy who was a “sissy,” close to his mother, disinterested in sports, shy, and a daydreamer. In this instance, the authors advocated a balance of interests using deviation from prescribed male gender roles as a measure of emotional instability. Girls who were boy-obsessed and boys who were feminine displayed the limits of gender flexibility in this curriculum.

Curricula held both men and women, as well as male and female teenagers, to similar expectations of emotional maturity in interpersonal relationships. A common method for conveying this principle was teaching students to be empathetic. Instructors taught students to minimize nonsexual conflict within families and between individuals through various means, most of which did not single out women for special attention or burdens. Encouraging activities “which develop an ability to put oneself in someone else’s shoes,” Detroit’s curriculum guide recommended “role-playing, dramatization, case studies, and discussions of scenes from plays and current fiction.” Youth learned to avoid or reduce girl-boy, parent-child, and sibling friction through imagining and learning about the perspective of the other. “Actual contact with infants and small children helps the adolescent to think about the adjustments that must be made in the home by young parents,” wrote Denver, Colorado, educators Kenneth E. Oberholtzer and Myrtle F. Sugarman. “Many have talked about democratic living in a political and historical sense, but have not thought about the meaning of democracy as applied to home relationships.” In addition to contact with children, they recommended use of novels and short stories, which allowed students to discuss what they would do in particular situations.
Understanding someone else's perspective enabled youth to participate responsibly and maturely in group situations. Suggested role-plays for Detroit's unit on family living patterns included acting out family decision-making in one family that applied democratic principles of family living and another that did not. Democratic family councils worked only when participants were able to be empathetic toward the others in the group, or as Glassberg explained, when children and their parents "come to recognize one another as human beings." Thought by many to be an indication of immaturity, selfishness was an impediment to group decision-making (not to mention a precursor to developing exploitative relationships), and therefore role-playing and peer cooperation would help youth, both boys and girls, grow out of such a position.

White students and students of color learned to develop problem-solving skills while viewing and discussing _Palmour Street_, a movie made by and for African Americans, depicting the emotional ties and hardships of a Southern black family with two working parents. The movie was a mental hygiene film, concerned with children's emotional growth and development. _Palmour Street_ proved effective among all groups, according to family living expert Thomas Poffenberger. He noted that with non-black groups it was "helpful to prepare the audience by saying that the film was made for Negroes, but because of its excellence is now used with all groups." Based on his screening of the film with predominantly white adult groups in Oregon, he commented that the value of the film lay both in how it dealt with universal problems, including sex education, as well as its potential to improve cross-racial understanding.

Force apparently shared this perspective, as her study guide for viewing the film in the Family Relationships course asked students to identify "What makes this a good home?" On Newman's corrected worksheet, Force added the positive comments
"patience & interest, physical care" to Newman's response "There was love, security, and recognition within this family. There was also the understanding present to overcome the difficulties which inevitably arose." At the end of the film, the husband and father of the family suffered an injury, imposing a strain on other members of the household, especially the wife and mother. In closing, the narrator asked the audience what the woman might do in this scenario. The film thus enabled viewers to identify universal values and human needs through the perspective of a black woman. Such values and needs, the film indicated, could be satisfied in families outside the white, middle-class norm.

Most significant in reconfiguring household gender relations was the rejection of patriarchal families. Teachers advocated democratic family relations, which entailed cooperation and contributions of all members of the household. Family living authorities discarded rigid gender patterns along with patriarchal authority in the democratic family ideal. Reflecting the increasing presence of married women, including mothers, in the workforce in the 1940s and 1950s, family living and human relations classes did not assume that men were sole breadwinners during this era. Educators appear to have made a concerted effort to exhibit fluidity in gender roles, showing household care as both women's and men's work. In textbooks, benevolent fathers appeared not in charge of households but as active participants in them, engaged in such activities as washing dishes, cooking, and spending time with children (figures 5.2 and 5.3).

The creators of textbooks and other classroom materials called attention to expanded men's roles within the family and the erosion of their roles as authoritarian figures; they also commonly accepted women's roles as workers outside the home and as decision-makers within it. In financial matters, women could be both earners and
Figure 5.2. Husband and wife – and Toms River graduates – share household task of doing the dishes. *Family Relationships Primer* (1949)
“mmm—that smells as good as Mother’s.”

Figure 5.3. Husband cooking. *Family Living* (1950)

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spenders, and they were active participants if not "experts" on budgeting, consumerism, and home finances (figure 5.4). As the authors of *Personal Adjustment, Marriage, and Family Living: A High School Text* explained, "We are growing away from the patriarchal type of family, and in not so many American families is the husband the absolute authority on all matters. Most modern young people think of marriage and family living as a democratic way of life. They expect to make all important decisions jointly."100 Teachers thus sought to expand conventional gender roles but not eliminate them altogether. San Antonio's curriculum guide posited as an objective of the marriage unit: "to look upon wifehood and motherhood as a career demanding not only command of a variety of homemaking skills but also the best in personal growth and adjustment for success; to recognize the real greatness of achievement of a man who is a good husband and father, not just a good provider for his family."101

In contrast to patriarchal households of the past, modern democratic marriages and families supposedly recognized the contributions of both men and women to negotiating relationship dynamics and household decisions, suggesting a significant change in men's and women's domestic lives. Textbooks encouraged students to compare contemporary marriages to those of the past as a way of recognizing and appreciating freedoms unknown to past generations. Whereas patriarchs ruled preindustrial European-American families, contemporary marriage was "approaching the ideal of equality between husband and wife," read a caption to two illustrations demonstrating this point in *Your Marriage and Family Living*, a high school textbook (figure 5.5).102 Similar to the illustration in Force's textbook of the modern girl's choices for her future (figure 4.5), this image indicated progress for women, no longer relegated to the subordinate role of "obedient helpmate who confined her interests to home and
Figure 5.4. Cooperative financial planning and a "consumer expert" in each marriage. *Personal Adjustment, Marriage, and Family Living* (1950)
In our great grandparents' time the husband was a patriarch who ruled his family and provided for it. The wife was an obedient helpmate who confined her interests to home and children.

Marriage today is approaching the ideal of equality between husband and wife. By discussing problems together, sharing views, sacrificing self-interest, they try to help each other realize the goals for which each strives.

Figure 5.5. Modern marriage as a partnership of equals. Your Marriage and Family Living, 2d edition (1954)
While such changes had been decades in the making, their presentation in family living courses suggests that educators partially attributed "broken" homes and poor adolescent adjustment to antimodem family relationships.

Even though roles were not so rigid as they once were, the Family Relationships workbook did not indicate that all gender divisions had been eliminated. In one workbook question, Force noted "At one time the man's duties and the woman's duties were rigidly divided and clearly defined." Assuming this assertion was not debatable, the author inquired, "Why is this no longer true?" Newman accepted that change had occurred, and without expressing her feelings about the change, she forthrightly—and perhaps optimistically—contended that working women had created households where men contributed to household chores. Sharing, along with empathy, captured the relationships that made marriages and families modern and democratic. Wrote Newman, "In our modern era, a great many women work including many mothers. This alone has created a great change in married life. Very often, the man shares in the household duties."

The notion that men and women shared household responsibilities struck a chord with some students, appealing in particular to the idealism of youth rather than reflecting the reality of the division of labor in most contemporary households. On the following page of the workbook, an exercise involved listing in separate columns for husbands and wives tips that might minimize exhaustion and nervous tension in marriage—a striking supposition that men might suffer from traditionally "female" ailments. In response, Newman wrote a single list rather than two lists differentiated by gender. Her advice was seemingly applicable to both men and women: budgeting, not worrying about minor things, being healthy, maintaining a positive attitude toward chores, vacationing and
going out periodically, listening to music, occasional indulgences, and developing a work philosophy were tips for ensuring healthy marriages. Men and women should not only share the burdens of housekeeping and remain cheerful, but also enjoy the pleasures of recreation—at least in the abstract.

In as much as teachers claimed to offer egalitarian and complementary male-female roles, they tended to reinforce a division of labor that left women responsible for most care work. In Highland Park’s senior family life education course, during which both boys and girls visited a nursery school laboratory, students gained “practical experience in preparation for parenthood.” Indicating that both men and women should observe children’s behavior and take an interest in child development, the teacher emphasized that the nursery exercise enabled future parents to study children’s behavior and their emotional needs. This activity did not train youth to change diapers or juggle tasks, because coed family life education promoted equal interest in the family but not a restructuring of the division of labor between mothers and fathers.

Although gender differences persisted in the families that educational materials depicted, gendered hierarchies often were absent, subtle, or disavowed. The family in Human Growth’s opening scene, for instance, showed the father and mother engaged in gendered recreational activities—him reading the paper, her doing needlepoint—but both parents displayed interest in their children’s school work, appearing to be equal partners in parenting. Evening activities as well as household duties continued to be based on gendered assumptions, and teaching materials ignored how privileges were built into the division of household labor. In single-sex classes, San Diego school nurse Viola I. Lampe and others who followed her lesson plans emphasized the household contributions that girls and boys could make during wartime. Girls could help by
“washing dishes, making beds, and helping to care for the baby and younger brothers and sisters” and boys should act as “the man of the house” when fathers were absent, the curriculum guide maintained. Such recommendations presumed that tasks for boys and girls were separate but equally important to the household.

Pleasing one’s marriage partner took different forms according to gender, judging by the attention to marital relationships and roles in sex and family living curricula. Husbands and wives not only had different roles to perform, but society tended to measure their success using different scales. Force’s workbook asked students to observe married couples and to make lists of men’s and women’s attitudes and behaviors that contributed to marital strife, presupposing that each gender had different standards and guiding students to articulate them in gendered terms. Newman complied in her workbook, entering three criticisms of husbands: “(1) Not being appreciative of what their wives do for them (2) Forgetting everyday courtesies (rudeness) (3) Arguing in public with wife.” Wives, she suggested, displayed objectionable behavior and attitudes on two counts: “(1) Being bossy or nagging (2) Not caring about appearance.” When stating, in positive terms, what traits made for “harmonious relationships between married couples,” Newman mentioned three behaviors and attitudes for each partner in the separate spaces provided. For men, she noted performing courtesies, remaining interested, and complimenting their wives, and for women, she indicated taking interest in “husband’s work and welfare,” maintaining an attractive appearance, and exercising courtesy.

The workbook probed the causes of gender differences as a way of addressing the question of gender responsibilities in the home. “Even very young girls are interested in dolls and babies. Were you? Boys usually reveal less interest in children. Is this
because girls have a 'maternal instinct,' and boys lack a 'paternal instinct'?” Force queried. “How would you explain this apparent difference?” Newman responded with allusions to both nature and nurture: “This is a many-sided question. Most believe that this is natural instinct, which tends to make a girl more interested in motherhood and boys interested in manly things. There is also the theory that this is not instinct, but instead a cultural tendency. That is, one does what is expected of him in a given society.” Even if Newman had not made up her own mind on this question, she was aware of different approaches to it—and perhaps confused about her own relationship to a maternal instinct, given her lack of response to the opening query. And if it was true, as the workbook argued, that gender roles had changed in the past hundred years of U.S. history, Newman may have been inclined to accept the latter point of view.

Girls also learned to challenge and critique the stereotypical and exaggerated claims of advertisers and cinema, when asked to examine depictions of love, romance, and beauty. In the ASHA curriculum guide, educators alerted students to the potential confusion that media fostered in girls and women, who were “living in a world in which normal interest in sex is highly exploited for profit and frequently misrepresented or overemphasized (in advertisements, plays, magazines and newspapers, on the radio and in burlesque shows, etc.).” Risks for boys were quite different; apparently they were less vulnerable to the mixed messages in popular media and more attracted by the pull of an underworld of commercialized prostitution. Teachers gave boys’ classes a list of myths and facts about male continence and prophylaxis. While girls also learned about venereal disease, the overlap between the two sets of lessons was slight. The curriculum’s authors apparently deemed as risks to girls such reading material and entertainment that was everywhere available, whereas risks to boys were concentrated
in vice districts and military camps. Nevertheless, lessons for both boys and girls included exposing the myths and fallacies about love and sex.

Some teachers went so far as to have students select and critique representations of romance and sexiness in popular culture, an exercise that would reduce the types of risk that, according to the ASHA curriculum, disproportionately affected girls. One teaching guide, published by the Teachers College at Columbia University, suggested having students “Analyze advertisements to find which make an appeal to interest in the opposite sex and what relation this has to the advertised product,” as one of several devices for evaluating what students had learned in the course. This same teaching guide also mentioned that students might “Analyze advertisements relating to ‘feminine hygiene’ to discover the facts presented or implied in them; errors; omissions. Same for advertisements of ‘doctors’ or ‘institutions’ claiming to restore ‘virility’ or to combat ‘loss of manly vigor.’ Summarize your conclusions as to the trustworthiness of the advertisements.” Force’s workbook instructed students to clip advertisements and point out their false claims: “Copy below from these advertisements about love and marriage that you consider misleading, untrue, or inaccurate.” The workbook also had students, in two places, evaluate the realistic content of family life in recent motion pictures. The teachers’ guide asserted, however, that teachers must guard against “sounding cynical or bitter about marriage” in exploding the myths. “A good laugh at the ‘romantic nonsense’ woven about love and marriage will establish reasonable attitudes more clearly than will cold analysis. Have fun with this unit,” the manual advised.

Discussion and essay questions that involved evaluating popular media were fun, and the activity gave girls (and boys) tools that they could use to examine messages...
about love and romance from other sources, including parents, teachers, and peers. Explaining her preference for this type of exercise, Force remarked that it generated “immediate interest,” showed how broad the scope of family living was, and made pupils “Family Relationships’ conscious.” Classroom and workbook activities also made students more gender conscious and authority conscious. And if the authority of books, movies, and other media was subject to critique, so too were other supposed authorities on any number of questions, including nature/nurture debates, dating and sexual standards for men and women, and household obligations.

Depictions of nonauthoritarian households nevertheless hinted that gender equality was still elusive in democratic families and in sex and family living classrooms. Expectations for women and men had changed; yet they remained more restricted for women than were opportunities for men. Although forward-thinking teachers, such as Force, suggested that girls could chose from several paths for their futures, the overwhelming message to girls was that they would discover fulfillment in heterosexual marriage and raising a family. Boys, too, might anticipate such satisfactions, but in different degrees. In the 1940s and 1950s, a woman’s pursuit of marriage and family meant compromising one’s work, struggling with rare access to reliable and affordable childcare, and coming under scrutiny on the one hand for child neglect and on the other for maternal overinvolvement. Even though family living courses often discussed the “working wife,” the abstract terms of textbooks did not convey what feminists have called double duty—combined responsibility for going to work and performing most of the household labor, notwithstanding husbands’ “help.”

Girls in sex and family living courses may not have learned to view all aspects of heterosexuality and family life with a critical lens, but they nevertheless obtained
analytical tools. Classes gave them a degree of expertise about interpersonal relationships, based on cursory knowledge of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and history. As explained by veteran sex educator Helen Manley of University City Schools in Missouri, the young person entering adulthood, work, or military service "needs a fortification stronger than mere facts and physical prowess—He needs an understanding of human relationships, the values of which will insure his emotional maturity and his ability to come through any experience unscathed." He, and she, needed insight into human behavior, including individual preferences and personalities, empathy, sharing, and cooperation. Such education served to assist youth in acquiring maturity and building strong marriages, and it also offered practical, and potentially liberating, applications for the near future.

Conclusion

Educators identified the family as less patriarchal and more democratic during the 1940s and 1950s, but the shift toward democratic families was not complete if children needed to be taught, via sex and family living education, to view home relations as more egalitarian. Many families, no doubt, had not adopted democratic family councils and, moreover, still harbored authoritarian adults and coercive disciplinary procedures. Capitalizing on youthful idealism, however, teachers applied the rhetoric of fairness and consideration to family and human relations, in hopes that young people would grow up to be less exploitative and domineering than their parents' generation. Youth might obtain values at school that their parents neglected to offer.

Although the family was allegedly the fundamental building block of democracy, its ability to socialize children into model boys and girls was faltering. Critics endlessly
lamented the rise in juvenile delinquency and the increasing frequency of "broken" homes. Some believed that mothers working outside the home, as well as the absence of role models during the war, contributed to young people's independence and rebellion against social norms and laws. As home life underwent change, schools were in a position to offer guidance and stability. Girls with working mothers could rely on female teachers to point their feminine development in the right direction; boys whose fathers were absent could turn to male coaches who often gave informal advice and sex education lessons. Coed classes modeled "normal" male-female relations in a wholesome environment, something expert observers found lacking in many mid-century homes.

Educators were concerned about both boys and girls during this period, but it was their worries about girls that appeared prominently in publicity for sex education. Female teachers, nurses, and reporters provided evidence of girls' changing behavior and lack of guidance. Exhibiting the growing attention to girls' needs, in the first network radio show that dramatized the issue of sex education for youth, the "Doorway to Life" program presented in 1947 "the story of Trudy, an 11-year-old girl who was sheltered from the facts of life by her well-meaning if misguided parents." Advised by social workers and psychologists, script authors William S. Alland and Virginia Mullen "used the example of the specific girl by way of filling in the larger pattern of evils which can come from what is basically parental deceit." Trudy's quest for answers led her to "look for hidden meanings in almost every aspect of her life, with a consequent deterioration in her attitudes and values."121 Her story revealed the heightened vulnerability of girls who did not receive sex education in the home as well as the potential benefits of sex education in the schools.
Some aspects of sex and family life education increased girls' skills of analysis regarding changing marital relations. Explaining the "big" reason that students should study marriage and family living, Barbara Newman penned in her notebook a response that highlighted social change: "Time changes many things, and this one field, that of marriage and parenthood, has altered tremendously within recent past generations. This difference lies in a higher standard of living, education, and social growth. The latter, especially, has pulled family unity farther apart, making happy marriages and family life sometimes difficult to create."122 History was not a narrative of progress, but neither was there a blissful past to return to, as Newman realized. After viewing the film Family Circles, she noted that "the problems facing today's families were faced by families in the past century as well, disproving the theory of the good old days."123

Even though popular culture and classroom materials conveyed to girls ideas of how they ought to express themselves, prescriptive messages about gender and femininity were not seamless and entirely restrictive for girls. As sociologist Wini Breines has shown in her investigation of white American girls in the 1950s, "tensions and paradoxes" were inherent in mid-century popular culture's prescriptions of feminine behavior, visible in countercultural and Beat dissent, such music forms as rhythm and blues, and working-class images and conduct. These seeds of rebellion worked to undermine monolithic gender norms in an era associated with conformity.124 In a similar way, school messages about sex and family life contained subversive elements, occasionally acknowledging realities that stood in defiance of norms: teenage marriages, single motherhood, homosexuality, male-female antagonisms, and loss of control in general. This permitted girls to adapt educators' messages to their own curiosities and desires, which were shaped by forces beyond the classroom.
While prompting young people to formulate their ideals and wishes, teachers met youth on their terms and enabled the development of peer standards of conduct. In the process of scrutinizing heterosexual practices at school, young people learned to value the prerogative of personal decision-making, question the depiction of love and romance in popular media, and insist on gender-egalitarian standards and expectations. Describing the San Diego group-counseling program in 1951, Wetherill explained, "There is an acceptance feeling, not an authoritarian relationships as exists in too many classrooms." The San Diego boys' counselor likewise emphasized the rhetoric of democracy; "Group counseling occurred through free discussion and thinking on vital issues of choice, which might more readily affect the attitudes and subsequently the personality and behavior of the group members." A movement in the schools that began as a means to prepare youth for stable marital relationships ultimately handed them the tools with which to challenge adults' hypocrisy and silences as well as the limitations of the domestic ideal.

In sex and family life classrooms, rather than clamp down on youth's freedoms, teachers attempted to persuade young people of their civic obligations to behave responsibly—contrasting the U.S. situation with the rise of totalitarianism in other nations. The San Diego City Schools employee handbook from 1941, for instance, emphasized the importance of democratic procedure in all educational experiences. "In non-democratic countries, the major objective of the school is to teach pupils how to take orders without question. It is the purpose of education, however, in our own country to develop free, tolerant, and creative citizens who are not too much hampered in thinking things out for themselves, and who will be willing to stand on their feet and speak their mind without fear of reprisal." Thus, the guide instructed, teachers should encourage
students' self-respect and respect for one another, ultimately accepting the rule of the
majority. These values, the text pointed out, "can be put into practice in the classroom, in
the student government organizations, and in a variety of extra-curricular activities."\textsuperscript{127}

School classes and even regulations sought to exemplify democratic ideals in a
number of ways, many of which pertained unevenly to boys and girls. One example from
San Diego was the "control of pupil spending": "The democratic spirit of free American
education discourages lavish expenditures by pupils for clothing, jewelry, etc. . . . It is
obvious that were there no controls on pupil spending, pupils from less fortunate homes
might be embarrassed by their inability to spend or contribute as much as pupils from
families in better financial condition." While supposedly referring to the spending of all
pupils, the regulations applied to girls. Clothing regulations were among the specific
regulations, as well as price caps on class sweaters, class jewelry, and photographs.
Senior high schools had "a general and established policy" of appropriate clothing for
girls, including plain skirts which covered the knee; white sport shirts with collars on the
outside and tucked into skirts (a "middie may be worn" in place of a shirt); and tailored
jackets or sweaters provided a shirt was worn underneath. Low-heeled sport shoes were
required, there were no hat regulations, and occasionally designated "Print Days"
allowed girls to wear cotton print dresses.\textsuperscript{128}

But San Diego school officials also ventured to minimize the ill effects of some
forms of racial and gender discrimination. School officials established Americanism
panels in the early 1950s, which consisted of "students who now have, or have had,
some contact with a specific cultural background. Members now participating represent
all of the racial, and many religious, backgrounds." Supported by the schools' Intercultural Education Steering Committee, the panelists made presentations to
students, teachers, and PTAs. In traditional shop and home economics curricula, San Diego schools also made strides toward dismantling differential opportunities. Girls at Horace Mann Junior High school requested training in shop, and the shop teacher, William Olive, agreed to offer them ten weeks of training during their usual homemaking class. The students learned to use drill presses, power handsaws, and power jigsaws. Building on this success, the school made plans to have the boys' shop class use the homemaking room to learn cooking, food service, and table manners.

Limited in scope and representing only preliminary steps, these corrective educational efforts still left in place the norm: that outside of Americanism panels, students shared a common culture, and that in home economics courses for girls and shop classes for boys, traditional gendered teachings persisted. A more widespread revamping of curriculum would have been more effective in dismantling prejudice and stereotypes, but the school nevertheless was upsetting the status quo in launching these new initiatives during the 1950s.

In nations ravaged by totalitarianism and communism, citizens were supposedly passive victims of propaganda—government-engineered thought control. Not so in the United States, authorities maintained, in spite of government-produced propaganda during the war and the attacks on civil liberties that constituted the Second Red Scare. One of the greatest enemies of sane ideas about marriage, educators recognized, was advertising spawned by the "free market." Teachers were mindful of the false notions about love and romance, pervasive in cinema, radio, and print media, and they sought to disabuse students of the hollow slogans and glamorized myths ubiquitous in popular culture. Yet teachers were often sympathetic to the advertisers, presumably good men just doing their job of trying to sell a product. While youth ought not to heed the advice of
beauty cream ads or mimic the behavior of Hollywood's latest femme fatale, neither
should they become critical of capitalism's excesses. As Force and Finck pointed out, "It
is not our purpose [in these exercises] to attack the advertiser." Nevertheless, youth
learned to be thoughtful consumers of the media—a skill that would serve them well in
questioning authority in years to come.

Classes dealing with sex, families, and human relations empowered girls to think
about their bodies and life choices, legitimizing self-scrutiny about appearance and
personality and encouraging future-minded goal setting. But even as positive sex
education often celebrated options in modern society and their implications for
democratic living, limits on girls and women persisted. Emboldened by teachers'
recognition of the importance of peer culture, girls had the potential collectively to push
at the boundaries of adult expectations. Entitled by their high school courses in the
1940s and 1950s to examine sex, gender, and democracy, young women, by the 1960s,
were poised to raise further questions about injustice in family relationships and society.
Notes

Among educators' concerns was venereal disease, but preoccupation with the incidence of syphilis and gonorrhea among soldiers and their families was less of a motivation for people in the schools. For a different perspective on the relationship between venereal disease and sex education during World War II, based on the American Social Hygiene Association's interest in combating disease, see Jeffrey P. Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), chap. 5.


“If the pupils are not mature enough to discuss these matters without silly giggling, better not attempt the course.” Elizabeth S. Force and Edgar M. Finck, *Family Relationships: Ten Topics toward Happier Homes, a Handbook for Administrators and...

5 On how “immaturity”—especially effeminacy and homosexuality in men—made the nation weak, see Elaine Tyler May, Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era (New York: Basic Books, 1988), chap. 4, esp. 94.


8 For example, the senior high school mixed-gender course in family living, wrote a Cleveland, Ohio, registered nurse, depended less on “content but even more so on the personality and character of the teacher.” Anne R. Falther, “Family Life Education in the School Health Program,” Journal of School Health 28 (June 1958): 179-182, quotation on 181-82.
It was only after she had taught the course at Toms River for several years that she began graduate study in psychology at New York University, where she received a master's degree in 1947. Force eventually studied with experts Paul Popenoe and Frances Bruce Strain. See the biographical statement accompanying Elizabeth S. Force, “Toms River Looks Back—1951-1941,” *Journal of Social Hygiene* 38 (January 1952): 2-10.


Ibid., 28.


Bert Y. Glassberg's lectures to St. Louis high school students are an example of a physician using a lecture series to convey caution and conservative ideas about sex and gender, yet they are a source rife with contradictions. For instance, he openly discussed such topics as petting, sex urges, masturbation, and homosexuality—and in the latter instance, he recommended to girls that there was no need to be concerned about predatory lesbians; they were not usually interested in girls who ignored them. Bert Y. Glassberg, “The St. Louis Board of Education Program on Personal and Family Living,” [March 1957.] Grade 9, Lecture #5 – Girls, 2-9, and Grade 9, Lecture #6 [– Boys], 6-11, both in Box 7, folder 183, Bert Y. Glassberg Papers, Becker Medical Library, Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, Missouri (hereafter Glassberg Papers).

By 1924, "emphasis on the moral, the normal, the healthful, the helpful, and the esthetic aspects of the sexual processes in human life" was orthodoxy among sex

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15 Biester, Griffiths, and Pearce, Personal Health and Human Relations, 5.

16 Moran, Teaching Sex, 157-58, makes a similar argument.


19 Moran dates this type of innovation to the 1960s. See Moran, Teaching Sex, chap. 6, esp. 174.


In 1938, under the auspices of the American Youth Commission of the American Council on Education, Bell coordinated a study of Maryland youth. Generally designed to uncover youth's problems and needs, the survey inquired about sex knowledge, sources of information, and preferences regarding sex education in school. See Howard M. Bell, *Youth Tell Their Story* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1938), 40. The sample was 84.6 percent "White" and 15.4 percent "Negro." Ibid., 257.

23Ibid., 90. I am not sure how to interpret the author's emphasis on "admitted," but my guess is that he assumed the number to be greater than admitted—perhaps even more black youth were single parents, although perhaps black youth were overrepresented because they were more honest than whites. On unwed motherhood and race during this period, see Solinger, *Wake up Little Susie*.


27Ibid., 341.


29Ibid., 10-11.


34Bell, Youth Tell Their Story, 42.

35Ibid.

36Ibid., 91.

37Thomas Poffenberger, "Family Life Education in This Scientific Age," Marriage and Family Living, May 1959, 150-54, quotations on 152.


40Ibid., 55.

and Name Unknown, 16 mm, 10 minutes, Los Angeles, Calif., Sid Davis Productions, 1951.

42 An exception is a single report on the Toms River Family Relationships class. See Committee on Preventive Psychiatry, Promotion of Mental Health in the Primary and Secondary Schools: An Evaluation of Four Projects (Topeka, Kans.: Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, 1951).


45Hill, “Study of High School Course,” 50-55. For eleventh- and twelfth-grade girls’ responses to a talk before their Girl Scouts group—similarly indicating that material was too elementary, see [Katherine] Gardner to Dr. Glassberg, 5 March 1958, Box 3, folder 15, Glassberg Papers.


47Elva Homer Evans, “Sex Education: It Can Be Taught as a Separate Course,” *Health and Physical Education* 17 (May 1946), 268-70, quotations on 269.


Moran argues that venereal disease again became central to sex education during World War II. For ASHA and its projects, this was true, but for the experiments in schools already in place, and those developing during the war years, they were more often geared toward conduct in a broad sense rather than attacking syphilis and gonorrhea. See Moran, Teaching Sex, chap. 5.


The term appears in both versions of the preinduction curriculum. See, for example, Dickerson and Sweeney, Pre-Induction Health Education Manual, 121.


Ibid., 19-20, 74.


Ibid., 467.

Ibid., 469.

Virginia Milling, "How Do You Rate on a Date?" *Clearing House* 19 (November 1944): 165-66, quotation on 165.


Ibid., 5.

At a high school in Morely, Michigan, for example, a student recommended that their sex-segregated social hygiene classes each compose a list of desirable and undesirable qualities in the other sex, and then post the lists so that girls could examine boys' opinions and vice versa. This practice was initiated upon the request and met with great


72Among other sources positing girls' responsibility for setting sexual standards with boys, see Miller and Laitem, *Personal Problems*, 74.


74Sweeney and Dickerson, *Preinduction Health and Human Relations*, 121, 132.

75Dickerson and Sweeney, *Pre-Induction Health Education Manual*, 136, 137.

76On schools that employed the 1952 test curriculum, see the correspondence in Box 83, folders 1, 2, ASHA Papers.


Poffenberger, "Family Life Education," 152.


The emotionally mature man "displays a readiness to protect a girl against her own weakness or poor judgment and an unwillingness to take any advantage of her." Dickerson and Sweeney, *Pre-Induction Health Education Manual*, 141, 124. The 1953 manual rewrote the points to state, "The emotionally mature girl assumes a protective role in her relationships with boys, so conducting herself as to safeguard a boy against undue sexual stimulation," and "The emotionally mature man assumes a protective role with women, guarding them against their own weakness or poor judgment." Sweeney and Dickerson, *Preinduction Health and Human Relations*, 123, 134.

Poffenberger, "Responses of Eighth Grade Girls," 44.

Ibid., 39. The author's claim, in a coauthored pamphlet from 1953, that "more sexual advances to children are made by people they know (including relatives) than by strangers" makes this dismissal of rape victims as complicit in their sexual assault seem surprising. See Lester A. Kirkendall and Thomas Poffenberger, "Parents, Children, and


87[Questions on Sex Education, Normandy Hi-Y Group,] postmarked 3 March 1958, Box 3, folder 70, Glassberg Papers.


89Ibid., 84.


93Glassberg, "St. Louis Program," Grade 9, Lecture #2, 7, Glassberg Papers.


95Poffenberger, "Lesson for Group Leaders," 11.


Ibid.

Force and Finck, Family Relationships, 80.

Newman, completed workbook, 80, Force Papers.

Ibid., 81.


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and girls, and duplicating copies for each pupil, was also publicized in Biester, Griffiths, and Pearce, *Personal Health and Human Relations*, 166-68.


110 Ibid.

111 Ibid., 84.

112 Sweeney and Dickerson, *Preinduction Health and Human Relations*, 124.

113 Ibid., 134-36.

114 Anita D. Laton and Edna W. Bailey, *Suggestions for Teaching Selected Material from the Field of Sex Responsiveness, Mating, and Reproduction* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1940), 73.


116 Ibid., 13, 22.


118 Ibid., 16.


123 Barbara Newman, "Family Circles" worksheet, 17 February 1956, in ibid., 80.


128 Ibid., 33.


CONCLUSION

"What a relief to learn that all my worries and my problems are normal!"

Commenting on Elizabeth S. Force's Family Relationships class in Toms River, New Jersey, one teenage girl wrote in the 1940s, "The course made me realize that all girls go through the same things." Family Relationships and similar courses gave students an opportunity to learn about their customs and norms as well as a chance to hear from their peers. In an informal classroom setting where youth gathered on couches and comfortable chairs, students collectively discussed the trials and tribulations of being a teenager, gaining independence from parents, dating and going steady, choosing a mate, planning a wedding, and ultimately marrying and forming families of their own. Judging by students' enthusiastic reports on Family Relationships, it was an enlightening, reassuring, and bonding experience.

After taking the ASHA preinduction course in a Cincinnati, Ohio, public school, girls revealed that the unit eliminated their unnamed concerns and worries about subjects that their parents had not discussed. Similar to the New Jersey student and Cincinnati girls, female high schools students at a laboratory high school affiliated with the University of Florida commented favorably about their experiences of sex education in home economics, stating that "knowing the truth" eliminated fears. They welcomed the
new vocabulary that permitted them "to talk about sex without it seeming vulgar." Only three of one hundred of the Florida girls surveyed felt that schools should leave sex education to parents.³

Sex education and family living courses in public schools contributed to a process of removing sex and relationships from the realm of privacy. Lessons on puberty at the later elementary and junior high level or discussions of family living in senior high school were opportunities for frank and honest discussion about youth's questions and problems. Such topics as growing up, secondary sex characteristics, dating, and reproduction became subjects of collective discussion, helping minimize taboos about sex talk among adolescents and contributing to a view of bodies, sexuality, and relationships as public concerns rather than individual, private matters. In addition to reducing the potential for self-consciousness in discussing sex, the discussions encouraged young people to evaluate and develop their perspectives on male-female relationships and related topics.

Many students expected no less than a straightforward approach from their teachers. The relieved Toms River student was probably one of many who, in sex education and family living classrooms across the country, insisted that teachers not "beat around the bush."⁴ Responding to what they liked best about a sex education talk in the late 1950s, eighth-grade girls praised a visiting sex education lecturer who "didn't beat around the bush," "got to the point," and was "blunt, frank, and understanding." The words "frank," "straight out," "direct," and "matter-of-fact" predominated in the explanations of what students liked about the talk. One girl pronounced, "He talked to us, not at us, and answered our questions well."⁵
Preference for straightforward facts and guidance, however, was not universal. When physiology instructor Cecil M. Cook, of Van Nuys High School near Los Angeles, California, asked his twelfth-grade students to respond to a sex questionnaire in the late 1950s, his frankness courted trouble. At the state Board of Education hearing on Cook’s conduct, “The state’s star witness blond Patricia Mather, thought the quiz itself ‘shocking,’” reported Newsweek. Mather’s “distaste increased when Cook’s tabulation showed that nearly half the class had gone a long, long way in ‘near intercourse’ and that a fourth had gone all the way.” To her chagrin, the witness relayed, some students were laughing during the presentation of the data. Another female student asserted that “all the kids sort of gasped” on learning the results.

Explicit discussion of sex could prompt blushing and shame among girls (and possibly boys), but it could also serve to dignify discussion of sexual norms, practices, and values in contemporary society. A “self-possessed brunette miss,” Judy Kessler, in her testimony before a largely adult audience of parents and Board of Education members, expressed opinions which resembled those of youth who insisted that teachers not beat around the bush. In her statement, Kessler articulated her need for answers, and, moreover, she commented, “The teacher’s manner was dignified.” “There was never any feeling of vulgarity or dirtiness,” claimed Kessler; “In my opinion,” she held forth, “the conduct of the class was above question. I was never embarrassed at all.”

Many young people were curious about questions of conduct and norms and willing to announce that concern. Countless students expressed their curiosity through anonymous questions to an instructor or lecturer. “Do you happen to know what percentage of men and women in the U.S. have sexual intercourse before marriage?”

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asked a teenager in St. Louis, Missouri, in an unsigned question submitted in advance of
a 1958 sex education lecture. Another queried, "Do you believe that modern literature
tends to dwell too significantly on sexual relations and sexual promiscuity? Is it an
accurate representation of true life?" Other questions included "What does society think
of petting by teenagers? (In this day and age) Also: What do you think about the same
subject?" and "How do you feel about intercorse [sic] in a whorehouse?"6

Others, similar to Kessler, raised their questions and concerns to a broader
audience. Taking a public stand, Ruth Clarke, a seventeen-year-old from Erasmus Hall
High School in New York City, proposed a required sex education for schools at the Hi-Y
"City Council" in 1946. She "encountered no difficulty with the sex education measure for
which she was sponsor," and the vote was unanimous, unlike the unsuccessful measure
to raise subway fares. All students who spoke on the provision for mandatory sex
education favored the proposal.9

Young people's commentaries about sex and teenage problems in the 1940s and
1950s reveal their active pursuit of knowledge and insight about sex, bodies, conduct,
and relationships. For many girls, sex did not remain a taboo topic, in part because they
learned to discuss it in school classrooms, often in mixed-gender company. "At one time
I never could have talked so without blushing like a beet," explained a pupil in Force's
class.10 Yet Toms River courses—and others similar to them—enabled students, both
boys and girls, to talk in mixed company about matters often viewed as personal.
Embarrassment and awkwardness were likely to limit the ways that girls negotiated
physical and/or sexual contact in heterosexual relationships. Learning to talk about sex
without fear of being labeled precociously sexual or a slut, however, was a step forward
for girls, one that empowered them to assert their perspectives and priorities in
becoming physically intimate or choosing a dating partner or mate.11

Previous scholars have not investigated mid-century girls' roles and experiences
in sex and family living education, missing the fact that girls were in many ways the
instigators and beneficiaries of such courses. Their bodies matured earlier than boys,
which made information about menstruation and pregnancy more immediately pertinent
to their lives. Their interest in relationships occurred at a younger age than their male
counterparts, and many girls were prone to seek advice and input from teachers as well
as peers on such questions as dating and mate selection. Girls benefited from the
courses, because teachers sanctioned their introspection and analysis of relationships
and guided them to useful ends. Female students learned about the significance of their
reproductive organs and the process of menstruation; they learned how reproduction
occurred and fetuses grew inside women's bodies; and, in some instances, they learned
about sexual feelings and masturbation as normal aspects of growing up for many girls.

As much as teachers inserted unexpected material in their lesson plans, they did
not fully demystify the physical body. This was especially the case when they conveyed
outmoded ideas about women's physical capacity or grooming standards, or when
materials focused on the fetus to the exclusion of the pregnant mother. Nor did
instructors always guide thinking about gender in affirmative directions, since some
remained convinced of social limitations on women. Nevertheless, in the process of
covering material about the body and relationships, teachers enticed adolescent girls to
explore new terrain.

Educators' broad conception of sex in the 1940s and 1950s led them to focus on
a wide variety of subjects, including some that were seemingly remote from the area of
sexuality. Educators' definition of sex as involving male-female differences and attractions meant that such topics as dating and finding a mate were inherently sexual; although not always about heterosexual intercourse or even sexual contact of other sorts, these topics amounted to teaching and advising about heterosexual lifestyles. Equally evident are the ways in which these lessons hinged on discussion and analysis of gender.

Rather than asserting gender as a given, a number of teachers and texts explained its historical and cultural variations; they were less likely to recognize heterosexuality as a social construction, however. Many mid-century teachers, like their contemporaries, believed that the division of roles and responsibilities along gender lines was acceptable and even ideal. They did not always respond to variation from gender norms as problematic, and, furthermore, they attempted to place boys and girls on an even footing with regard to interest in marriage and the family. Yet rarely were lifestyles that did not include heterosexual partnerships granted any serious consideration.

Sex education nevertheless had several positive outcomes during the 1940s and 1950s. First, it won the support of the public, the student body, and the administration in a number of locales, contributing to more openness of discussion, less shame about the body, and diversity of opinion. Although comprehensive sex education later came under attack for its explicitness, numerous classes benefited in the meantime. Second, mid-century sex education shifted attention away from negative repercussions of sexual contact—the emphasis of earlier projects—and onto the positive elements of sex and gender, including emotional satisfactions that sexual relationships ought to entail for men and women. Third, and least examined in scholarly literature, sex and family living
education supplied girls with critical tools for questioning exploitation and male dominance, in relationships, in family dynamics, and in society.

As a democratic undertaking, sex education and family living courses—and their advantages—were not only offered to girls. Male and female students alike benefited in instances where their input shaped the curriculum. Oregon's *Human Growth* demonstrated how to offer sex education in the schools to coed groups of young adolescents, but equally as important, it served as a launching point for further discussion, premised on the kinds of questions to which youth sought answers. Interactive curricula at the high school level, especially group counseling in San Diego and Family Relationships courses in Toms River, organized successive classes around the concerns of each set of students. Methods of group discussions and panels, as well as other activities, distributed power in the classroom among the students, making the learning process one of exchange rather than lecture.

Discussion-oriented pedagogy helped embolden youth as judges of one's own and one another's sexual conduct and gender expression; open-ended questions about desirable qualities in a mate held out the possibility of each student formulating a unique agenda for marital success, not dictated by the wisdom of adults or scholarly research. In coed classes in particular, the possibilities for marital happiness were not differentiated by gender, as teachers promoted complementary rather than hierarchical male-female relationships. While it is not clear that parents and community members sought to empower youth in these ways, few objected to the promotion of emotional maturity and good conduct among young people.

In the mid-century decades, Parent-Teacher Associations commonly favored and promoted sex education, as did the National Education Association and various...
professional organizations. They faced little to no organized opposition, although commentators frequently cited Catholics as holding back progress in sex education. A Chicago school cancelled its family life curriculum in a home economics course after a newspaper headline claimed in 1948 that “Chicago High School Offers Sex Instruction,” and unnamed special interest groups pressured the school administration to drop the course. But such incidents were rare, and few interest groups were mobilized around the issue at the time.

In the mid-twentieth century, upstanding administrators, teachers, and PTA leaders were in many cases able to convince parents and communities of the merits of sex education in schools. But there were limits to the degree of openness, both in sex education curricula and in public forums and discussions among adults. The personal (and even professional) lives of leading sex researchers and educators were not subjected to scrutiny as has been the case with public figures more recently. Even in the case of the Van Nuys educator whose controversial choice to measure the sex experience of his students brought him censure, the publicity surrounding the case did not extend into his personal life other than mentioning his marriage and three children.

While mid-century sex educators may not have been innocent of violating social taboos or possessing prurient curiosities, such matters did not become public information, therefore making it possible for people with liberal or unconventional ideas about sex and sexual relationships to shape the curriculum. It was only in conversation with associates of sex educators from the 1940s and 1950s that I learned about private lives and research agendas mostly hidden from the historical record—extramarital affairs with graduate students and research that involved instructing young men to masturbate.
and then describe their experiences.¹⁴ Such knowledge certainly would have undercut sex educators' ability to "sell" sex education, but it did not become an issue in an era when exposés of a sexual nature were less common.

Sex education started to appear less innocuous by the mid-1950s, as some educators began to take an impartial stance on premarital sex. Cook's hearing for his high school survey demonstrates one manifestation of parents' fears. In subsequent decades, sex education came under greater scrutiny from concerned parents, often mobilized by the religious Right.¹⁵ Several of the programs developed in the 1940s and 1950s caught the attention of the Right in the 1960s, who decried the communist, humanist, and anti-Christian values of leading sex education authorities. The author of a pamphlet published by Sword of the Lord Publishers bemoaned in 1969—twenty years after the program had been inaugurated—that San Diego children learned about sex in the sixth grade and viewed the film The Story of Menstruation.¹⁶ When the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) and Planned Parenthood Federation of America became active in sex education struggles in the 1960s and 1970s, promoting "comprehensive" sex education that included such taboo topics as premarital sex, contraception, and abortion, conservative forces became more active and visible in the struggle over sex education.

By the end of the twentieth century, sex education had become a hotly debated topic, and conservative approaches seemed triumphant in the realm of education. Welfare reform legislation in 1996 offered massive federal funding to states for use in abstinence-only education, or education that stressed abstaining from sex; all fifty states applied for such funds.¹⁷ State and federal governments' allocation of $440 million for abstinence-based sex education bolstered the conservative agenda to remove
contraceptive and “safe sex” information from schools. Some states found ways to continue offering comprehensive education; yet one study revealed that more than one-third of the nation’s schools prohibited discussion of contraception other than highlighting its failures.18

Despite a 1999 poll indicating that 84 percent of parents wanted their children to learn about sex and birth control at school, abstinence-only sex education was gaining ground. Among the most outspoken proponents of abstinence only was Texas governor and U.S. president George W. Bush.19 Whereas mid-century parents and adults tended to favor sex education, the main obstacles to creating such programs were inertia and lack of training. Today’s predicament seems quite different. One explanation for the discrepancy between popular support of school sex education and public policy limiting it is the mobilization of advocacy groups who wield influence beyond their numbers and set the terms of the debate—polarized terms, to be sure.

Another distinction between the climates for mid- and late-twentieth-century sex education is the degree of sexual explicitness in the schools’ surrounding environments. In the decades separating the 1950s and 1990s, such controversy-inspiring topics as condoms, sexual harassment, HIV and AIDS, and gay and lesbian lifestyles have become visible parts of popular culture as well as permissible subjects in some classrooms.20 Half a century earlier, prophylaxis, contraception, sexual assault, and homosexuality were embarrassing subjects for many adults, and only infrequently did school children receive planned instruction in these areas. Yet the absence of planned discussions of such topics did not ensure their omission in classrooms of the 1940s and 1950s, and it was at youth’s prompting that teachers adopted a broader program of sex education. Numerous opportunities for youth to place anonymous questions in question
boxes or voice personal concerns in mid-century class discussions compelled teachers to address premarital sexual activity, masturbation, rape, and abortion, among other topics. So too did anecdotes in the media, or in the case of such doctors as Glassberg and school nurses, among their patients and students.

In the late 1990s, school-aged children and teenagers arguably discovered most of their information and developed attitudes about sex outside school. Many young people’s first impressions of sex no doubt came when media exposed the sex scandal involving former President Bill Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky. Even though Clinton denied having sex with Lewinsky, their encounter was sexual in ways explicitly detailed by the Starr report and popularized accounts of it—in newspapers, on talk shows, and in other exposés. The publicity surrounding their illicit affair combined with popular depictions of sex and sexiness in consumer culture to reinforce a notion of sex as involving power, public attention, identity, commercialism, and scandal. Some of the commentators who exposed Clinton and called for his impeachment acted in sympathy with proponents of abstinence-based school curricula, who expound on the virtues of chastity and dwell on the draconian outcomes that sexual activity can (but does not always) involve.

Mid-century discussions and peer exchanges were not free from prescriptive and sometimes moralizing messages. Even those teachers whose presence in the classroom was less than pedantic had numerous opportunities to shape the discussion and information to suit particular adult agendas. In some instances, instructors supported restrictive gender codes of etiquette, as when they instructed girls in methods of secrecy during menstruation and when discussions of dating reasserted girls’ obligations to be heterosexually attractive but not temptresses. Teachers assisted girls in
developing greater self-awareness and self-monitoring, with notions of self that were
fully saturated with gender. Instructors frequently separated women's bodies from their
selves, and isolated the process pregnancy—as a tale about the growth of babies—from
the experiences of pregnant women. And the vision of possibilities for women's lives,
presented through textbooks, movies, and classroom discussions, reinscribed
heterosexual marriage and procreation as the ultimate satisfactions available to women.
Jobs, education, and other ambitions, in some instances, were valued in their
contribution to household needs rather than as individual goals.

The discussion method employed in almost all sex and family living courses mid-
century involved dialogue, which meant that students' perspectives found expression
and often predominated in the learning experience. An ethic of fairness in discussions of
dating pervaded both youth and adult assessments of boy-girl relationships, and this had
the potential to be gender egalitarian. Yet much of what boys and girls said in class
reiterated the social prescriptions for a gender division of labor and responsibilities.
While it might be only fair that a boy who paid for the date could determine the
restaurant at which the couple would take their meal, fairness was not simply a matter of
purchasing power. In abstract ideals, girls and boys had equal rights and responsibilities
to ensure dating success, but often these responsibilities were gendered and therefore
placed special burdens on girls. The example of girls who allowed intimacies and excited
male "weaknesses" illustrates how "fairness" was not always fair to girls, who had to
attempt to control both their own conduct and their dates' behavior as well.

As a necessary precursor to feminist consciousness, the gender consciousness
instilled in girls by sex education and family living curricula in some ways enabled them
to recognize their collective identity and gain awareness of gender and gender
inequality. Pupils studied gender and examined the relevance of the lessons to their personal development and future plans. The occasional historical comparisons in family living curricula in particular helped situate gender as a social and historical construct, mutable and subject to change. At the same time, through sex and family courses as well as other aspects of the curricula, schools taught youth to embrace democratic idealism and optimism about human progress. A rhetoric of fairness and democracy was incompatible, in a number of instances, with prescribed heterosexual gender roles and expectations. While it is impossible to know what went on in girls' minds, there was certainly potential for girls to use their analytical skills to recognize the contradictions and question gender dichotomies and restrictions.

Teachers encouraged young people both to be introspective and to strive for self-improvement. At a superficial level, Dallas educators suggested that students in the twelfth grade Home and Family Living classes develop a score card to rate their appearance. But introspection typically involved an examination of one's personality and adjustment to heterosexual maturity—including one's ability to exercise self-control, balance work and leisure, establish independence from one's parents, and participate in the peer culture of dating.

As historian Ellen Herman has argued, the women's liberation movement and other movements in the New Left gained from concepts originating in psychology, which allowed them to see how the personal and political were connected. Among the resources psychology offered feminism were abilities to distinguish public and private as well as the psychological and social. Second wave feminists took these resources into different territory, using them to critique gender discrimination and male-dominance systemically and collectively. A similar dynamic was at work in sex education, in classes
where group discussions united students to explore sexual and gender-related topics, examine personal and family problems, and identify individual needs, desires, and inclinations in the context of their peers, families, and society. They learned about the process of adjustment to social norms, including the fact that the process was not natural or uniform, but required certain amounts of effort that one might choose, or not choose, to exert.

Disconnected from a feminist movement, sex and family life educators nevertheless conveyed to their pupils a critique of patriarchal households. The ideal democratic household did not depend on a patriarch; in fact, it was cooperative relationships that gave the democratic family the stamina it needed to survive the trials and tribulations of the World War II and postwar eras. What did such a scenario offer to adolescent girls in the 1940s and 1950s? The model of democratic families—like the privileges enumerated in the bill of rights—extended to girls and women the possibility of autonomy, respect, and equal treatment. While girls did not go directly from their courses in sex education and family living to build consciousness-raising groups and protest injustice, their generation, as had their precursors arguing for women’s rights a century earlier, held authorities accountable to the democratic principles they espoused. Sex education was, then, a complicated undertaking, with both conservative and politically radical lessons for mid-century girls.
Notes


4Many students used this language, according to Kenneth Gray Hale, "An Inquiry into the Sex Education Knowledge, Needs, and Interests of 1,390 Twelfth-Grade Students" (master's thesis, San Diego State College, 1952), 78.

5Thomas Poffenberger, "Responses of Eighth Grade Girls to a Talk on Sex," Marriage and Family Living (February 1960): 38-44, quotations on 42.


7"Sex in the Classroom," 84.

8[Questions on Sex Education, Normandy Hi-Y Group.] postmarked 3 March 1958, Box 3, folder 70, Bert Y. Glassberg Papers, Becker Medical Library, Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, Missouri.


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12 For examples of Catholic leaders' occasionally voiced opposition to sex education, see "Harvey Says Reds Sway Rule of City," New York Times, 17 May 1937, 11; and "Sex Education Held Unwise in Schools," New York Times, 8 February 1939, 24. For examples of passing comments or brief allegations of Catholic opposition in the 1940s, see Harold Issacs, "Youth: Shall Our Schools Teach Sex?" Newsweek, 19 May 1947, 100-102; and "Where Babies Come From: University of Oregon Program of Education on Family Life," Newsweek, 22 March 1948, 90. Researcher Howard Whitman explained that Catholics did not oppose sex education, but preferred it to take place in the home rather than in the schools. See Howard Whitman, Let's Tell the Truth about Sex (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1948), 14-16.


19 Ibid.


23 Ibid., 280.
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