Author Biography

Emma Lukin

Emma Lukin is a fourth-year History major. She wrote her article on the history of Venereal Disease during World War II as her senior project. Some of her research interests include 20\textsuperscript{th} century subcultures and the history of women and members of the LGBTQ+ community throughout early modern periods in the United States and Europe. Emma is now entering her final year of her Masters in Social Work at the University of Washington and plans to pursue a career as a therapist for children and families.
Following the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States deployed hundreds of thousands of men to Europe and the Pacific to fight in the second World War. In both theaters, American soldiers experienced trauma, pain, and the death of their friends and brothers that took severe tolls on morale as months and years of war dragged on. Solace for many of these soldiers, was sex—fantasies of women back home as well as those in the countries in which they were stationed. According to Mary Louise Roberts, author of *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France*, this “veritable tsunami of male lust” resulted in infamous promiscuity in all theaters of the war.¹ In France, for example, GIs were known to engage in public sex at all hours, incapable of being abated by French officials.² Such behavior led to unprecedented rates of venereal disease, both abroad and at home.

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² Ibid, 9.
Venereal disease in the military carried a significant cost to the taxpayers in order to pay for medical treatments for soldiers. Worse yet, to the War Department, venereal disease had consequences for troop readiness. The numbers of cases were astronomical; according to the U.S. Army Medical Department, there were 242,625 cases of gonorrhea alone that led to days lost in the army in 1944. These huge rates of non-effectiveness are necessary facts in order to understand why the War Department took such a large stake in sex education during World War II.

The problem of venereal disease was not a new revelation to the United States government. It emerged as a serious public health crisis during the Civil War when doctors treated over 73,000 cases of syphilis and over 109,000 cases of gonorrhea among white Union soldiers. The military viewed sex workers as the perpetrators of the crisis and blamed them for poor military readiness. As for World War I, during the twelve weeks leading to December 7th, 1917, there were 21,742 new cases of venereal disease. Of this, Dr. Franklin Martin, Executive Secretary on the Committee for Civilian Cooperation in Combating Venereal Disease, wrote,

The incapacitation of these men involves not only the loss of time; in addition, it has cost the Government to keep them during the period of hospital confinement (which varies from one to eight weeks) more money than is required to maintain the entire command at Camp Dix (the cantonment in New Jersey with 20,859 men) plus an additional sum for medical treatment.

Shortly after Congress declared a state of war in 1941, a group of respected leaders in social hygiene gathered to propose a policy for dealing with

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3 “A Summary of Venereal Disease Statistics During World War II,” U.S. Army Medical Department Office of Medical History.
4 “The Civil War: Sex and Soldiers,” Ditrick Medical History Center, Case Western Reserve University.
5 “Venereal Disease,” Washington on the Western Front, University Libraries at the University of Washington.
6 Ibid.
prostitution and venereal disease in wartime. The Council of National Defense adopted those policies within weeks of the declaration of war, primarily stating that “Venereal infections are among the most serious and disabling disease to which the soldier and sailor are liable; Whereas they constitute a grave menace to the civil population.”7 They continued by recommending that the War and Navy Departments officially promote sexual abstinence, establish a perimeter barring sex workers from military base camps, provide suitable recreation for soldiers, and, importantly, limit alcohol use among the troops. The Council also recommended a special division within the military medical services.8

One of the key messages disseminated in the military’s sex education campaign was the dangers of “unclean” women abroad and at home. The Taft Committee, who met in 1942 to discuss the closure of red-light districts and crackdown on sex workers, described women with venereal disease as “more dangerous to the community than a mad dog.”9 Meanwhile pamphlets established phrases about women, like, “Don’t forget that any girl who lets you use her, or who “consents” easily, is not safe.”10 Campaigns of posters and signage were widely distributed, portraying both ‘easy’ women—who should be avoided at all cost, and the pure wife and mother back home—who should be protected from sexually transmitted disease by faithful husbands. Worse yet, “semi-professional prostitutes”—in other words any woman deemed to be promiscuous by law enforcement—could be detained and forcefully quarantined under suspicion of having venereal disease.1112 The proliferation in male soldiers across the globe

8 Ibid.
11 “‘Red Light’ Areas Declared Ending.”
during World War II led to a drastic increase in casual sexual encounters and subsequently an extreme surge in venereal disease; the consequences of VD upon military success forced the U.S. government to conduct a vastly ambitious sexual education campaign in response to the public health crisis. This campaign was largely defined by the policing of women’s sexuality--a perceived overabundance that was seen as the cause of the venereal disease crisis.

The shift in American’s view on sex began in the 1920s, when the economy was thriving, and new forms of media emerged, exposing American middle-class youth to themes of sex and lust that they had not previously seen.\textsuperscript{13} This era of sexual expression and liberation lessened over the decades and ended after World War II as traditional gender roles were reaffirmed and young families flocked to the suburbs. Therefore, the scope of this project will be from the year 1920 to 1950.

Further still, this project will narrow the scope to domestic side of the war effort—at home and on military bases, with some insight into the European front. The Pacific theater was home to a significant portion of venereal disease transmission and promiscuity on behalf of male soldiers, but the unique nature of sex work in the Pacific theater is too complex to be included in the scope of this specific project. The focus instead lies in the propaganda media and print campaigns of the U.S. government, sex education measures, and the heightened policing of women in response to the crisis.

\textbf{Literature Review}

Most previous interpretations of venereal disease during World War II focus on the sex education campaign in terms of media, namely the unprecedented dissemination of public health literature, distinctive venereal disease propaganda posters, and novel scare films. While those interpretations are extremely vital in any discussion of World War II era sexuality and sexually transmitted disease, I

will take a different approach as the main theme of my project. The government’s involvement during the World Wars changed the nature of sex education by creating a conversation about sex in the rapidly changing world of the 20th century. The progression of the public conversation about sex was hindered by deeply engrained misogyny, which led to misinformation about women’s role in sex, society, and the war. This negative perception of women’s sexuality is the pattern that permeated the mid-20th century as a result of the venereal disease crisis, and that perception has affected contemporary sexual education.

One recent scholar that informed this critical lens of the portrayal of women in World War II sex education propaganda is Amanda Littauer, author of *Bad Girls: Young Women, Sex, and Rebellion before the Sixties*. Dr. Littauer is a professor of gender, sexuality, and women’s studies, focusing on the 20th century United States. Her chapter on victory girls emphasizes promiscuity as a gender transgression and the rejection of earlier assumptions that promiscuous women in wartime were victims. She promotes that victory girls and “pickups” were an extension of the cultural patriotism and relatively new heterosocial interaction between young men and women. Littauer’s piece is a perfect example of contemporary trends in the study of sexuality (and therefore venereal disease) in the World War II era, as she adopts a feminist lens in her work that contrasts male dominated historical narratives of the time.

This topic is especially significant today because it speaks to the moral culture of the early-mid 20th century and the evolving role of the government in the private lives, and bedrooms, of American citizens. That role is still in question today, as major players in the U.S. government continue to make threats against Roe v. Wade, the distribution of contraception, and comprehensive sex education in public schools. It is important to understand when and why the government first made the push towards sex education, and to connect the dots between the

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20<sup>th</sup> century morality-based approach to sex and the prevalence of ‘abstinence-only’ education in today’s schools.

**A Culture of Prudery: American Victorianism Through the 1930s**

In “American Victorianism as a Culture,” author Daniel Walker Hower defends the term as a new way of understanding the cultural milieu of the period as opposed to the conventional pre-civil war, post-civil-war distinction. Victorianism in both the U.S. and Britain can be defined as the culture formed from economic and social modernization, a revival of evangelical Protestantism (especially in the United States), and fundamental bourgeois origins. This manifestation of Victorianism was so pervasive in the United States due to the size of the middle class and lack of aristocratic traditions that barred bourgeois Victorian ideals in many parts of England.

Victorianism was a new way of life for a new economic group—the urban middle class. A conservative movement, Victorianism praised strict adherence to Protestant values of hard work, forbearance, obedience, efficiency, and asceticism. Those values, not coincidentally, perfectly aligned with the new capitalist system. Under strict industrial capitalism, this urban middle class was incentivized to work hard and be obedient in service to capital and to God. This lifestyle defined by work and religion did not leave room for pleasure, and the lives of Victorian middle-class people were not flowing with milk and honey.

The Victorian domestic ideal was defined by the mother as the regulator of the needs of her husband, while upholding his position of dignity and supremacy in the household. This new ideal gave women a new position of honor in Western society and uplifted her—but only in reference to how far she could uplift her husband. If woman is defined as wife, relative to man, and if woman is defined as mother, relative to her family—then the idea of a woman as a sexual being was

16 Ibid.
inconceivable. Sex was accepted as a marital procreative necessity but was not a matter to be discussed. Contrary to the growing double standard that would develop through the 20th century and into the 21st, male sexuality was far from embraced. Sexual austerity was required of both sexes under the stifling moral urgency of the Victorian period.

Given the culture of sexual prudery, it was dismaying when World War I revealed the debauched activities of American soldiers abroad. Traditional military culture had long encouraged “letting off some steam” in soldiers’ free time, but the culture at home had taken a drastic swing towards prudery, leading the prevalence of the media and modern venereal disease treatment to draw public attention to soldiers’ behavior overseas.17 While the German and French armies provided their soldiers with access to brothels and condoms, the U.S. army tried to stifle any eroticism in the troops. Commanding officers were charged with the impossible task of enforcing chastity, and, even under the threat of suspended pay or the stockade—soldiers kept having unprotected sex, often resulting in gonorrhea or syphilis.

A Changing World

An explicit example of the 1920s as an era of sexuality and indulgence is the phenomenon of petting parties. These parties were gatherings in which adolescent men and women would get together to explore kissing and touching in a sheltered environment.18 Paula S. Fass, professor of history at UC Berkeley, and the author of The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920’s, says: “Petting parties varied quite a lot. But certainly, there were parties where young people did quite a lot of erotic exploration—kissing and fondling. These parties always stopped before intercourse. In that sense they had imposed limitations created by the group presence. They were not orgies and they were

17 Frederick Holmes, “Medicine in the First World War,” The University of Kansas Medical Center, July 26, 2018.
not promiscuous—one set of partners only.”19 This sexual experimentation was commonplace in these years, though authorities in schools and temperance groups desperately attempted to stifle the heat. The image below would have been shocking at the time to the older generations, who were both unfamiliar and horrified at the concept of men and women mingling in social settings.

![Image of two young flapper women with their dates on a bed in Chicago, c. 1928](image)

Figure 1. Two young flapper women with their dates, on a bed in Chicago, c. 1928, in Linton Weeks, “When ‘Petting Parties’ Scandalized the Nation,” NPR.

Young women’s participation in petting parties was heretical to a prude society, in which elders reacted in horror to any pre-marital sexual exploration. However, as more women attended college, they were exposed to coeducational environments that weren’t previously available to them. In 1900, 2.8% of the American female population went to college, and that number more than doubled to 7.6% in

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19 Weeks.
1920. Seventy percent of all collegiate women were enrolled in coeducational colleges by 1890. However, black women and other women of color were still largely excluded from higher education. Colleges for African American women like Tillotson College and Bennett College opened in 1926. Collegiate women were the most likely to encounter unknown men in their daily lives, which was perceived as a danger to their safety and chastity. Sexual situations were inevitable, and petting parties were a peer-monitored, socially tolerated (but not accepted) outlet for tension and exploration. Youth in the 1920s were self-consciously defiant and salacious as they expressed their independence from their families and Victorian social standards.

The idea of marriage in popular American society was also changing rapidly, most drastically for the upper classes and intellectual elites. In the early 1930s, Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre pushed polyamory into the spotlight of polite society, titillating the intelligentsia in Europe and, to a lesser degree, the United States. However, before that polyamorous power couple, sex psychologists and so-called sex radicals wrote about the shifting tides of marriage and sex. In his magnum opus, *America’s Sex and Marriage Problems*, Dr. William J. Robinson, an American doctor, sexologist, and early advocate of birth control, wrote.

The real radical solution of the marital problem will not be reached until

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21 Veronica G., Thomas, and Janine A. Jackson, “The Education of African American Girls and Women: Past to Present,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 76, no. 3 (2007): 357-372; Tillotson opened in 1881 as a senior college for African Americans but became an African American’s college in 1926. It returned to a coeducational institute in 1934. Bennet College was established in 1873 as a coeducational historically black school for former slaves but was established as a college for primarily African American women. It remains a historically black college for women today.
22 Weeks.
23 Ibid.
we have radically changed our entire outlook on sex, until our ideas of sex morality have become healthier and saner, until we agree to admit that there is such a thing as sex, and until we have learned something of its physiology and psychology.25

Dr. Robinson’s idea to solve the marital problem centers around the contemporarily popular concept of companionate marriage. Companionate marriage is a proposed form of childless marriage popularized by Judge Ben Lindsey, defined as “legal marriage, with legalized Birth Control, and with the right to divorce by mutual consent for childless couples, usually without payment of alimony.”26 In this relationship, both men and women work and live together in married unions, provided with the social freedom to form a lasting bond. Though not a “free love” advocate in the slightest, Judge Ben Lindsey supported sex as pleasurable, not limited to procreation, saying:

I suggest that the proper view for society to take of extra-marital sex is to recognize that some persons have an inclination toward varied sex experiences, and that some haven’t; and that it is no function of society to discriminate against those who have such inclinations provided they duly respect and consider the genuine rights of other people. Their conduct is as much a personal matter, to be personally determined, as the choice of one’s politics or religion.27

Going in a different direction, Dr. Robinson also seems to encourage polyamory in his book, though more so for men than women. Interestingly, Robinson doesn’t oppose non-monogamy for women but says that women are less inclined to seek extramarital relationships due to inherent sexual differences in men and women.28 Polyamory was certainly not an idea entertained by the wider public, though there was a common expectation that men struggled with fidelity more

25 William J. Robinson, America’s Sex and marriage Problems; Based on Thirty Years Practice and Study, by William J. Robinson (New York: Eugenics, 1928) 262.
26 Ben Lindsay and Wainright Evans, “Preface” in Companionate Marriage (New York: Brentano's LTD, 1927).
27 Ibid, 108.
28 Robinson, 180.
than women.

Dr Robinson repeatedly refers to the role of venereal disease in marital tragedies—husbands who, during the war “in la belle France he caught from a pretty Parisienne an ugly disease which would keep him disabled for many weeks,” hereditary insanity stemming from a syphilitic husband, embittered women stricken with gonorrhea, among others. However, despite the tragedy that Robinson waxes on about, he opposes those who claimed venereal disease to be divine punishment for sexual promiscuity and maintains that promiscuity and non-monogamy have nothing to do with the existence of venereal disease. He summarizes:

If a man had relations with one hundred women or a woman had relations with one hundred men and if they were all free from disease, no infection would take place. The man and the woman would remain free from disease in spite of their promiscuity. In other words, gonorrhea or syphilis can only result from a pre-existing gonorrhea or syphilis.\(^{30}\)

The creation of *Esquire* magazine in the 1930s as a medium marketed towards middle-class men marked a turning point in the cultural ideal of marriage. *Esquire* railed against prim and proper Victorian ideals of love, its editorial policy specifically stating “this is a men’s magazine, it isn’t edited for the junior miss. It isn’t dedicated to the dissemination of sweetness and light.”\(^{31}\) Publications like *Esquire* extended familial love to romantic love—which now essentially encompassed sexual desire and eroticism. *Esquire* was also an explicitly misogynist magazine, specifically taking issue with the moral pedestal that the authors felt Victorian society had placed women upon. *Esquire* portrayed the modern woman as a gold digger, uncreative, uncontrollably emotional, a frivolous leech.

Perhaps most interestingly, *Esquire* portrayed women as sex-obsessed

\(^{29}\) Robinson, 150.
\(^{30}\) Ibid, 262.
deviants. The authors said that women thought about sex more than men did, women were likely to be unfaithful in marriage, and women enjoyed pornography more than men—often resulting in the need for psychiatric treatment. Women were liars and not to be trusted. “Women with their ill-timed joys and superficial sadness, never kept the promises given by their eyes. Even the rapture they yielded was transitory; after a while, it had a taste of corruption and death.”32 Publications like Esquire defenestrated women from their virtuous pedestal in the eyes of many modern men in the early 20th century. If women could be sexual, if women could be deviant—then any previously conceived notion of them as a gentle force for good for men and families was a lie.

This definitively marked the end of the Victorian era of sexuality. Ideals of marital and familial love were replaced with concepts of romantic love as women began to emerge from the private sphere and develop autonomy. Cultural perceptions of women became more complex. The static ideal of a timid domestic Victorian wife eroded as men encountered more and more women outside of the home—petting parties, colleges, the workplace, and the entertainment industry. This erosion led to a wave of misogyny, as men felt betrayed by the broken promise of a demure Victorian sweetheart. Therefore, the male-dominated culture developed a dichotomy in order to understand the modern woman: there was indeed the rare sweetheart at home but there was a greater multitude of dangerous deviant women. One certainly may have sex with the latter in a moment of weakness, especially in the haze of wartime, but that was a moral failing to be avoided. This dichotomy was repeatedly echoed through the military’s sex education campaign that blamed the sexual indiscretions of American soldiers on women perceived to be deviant.

**Military Sex Education**

Though preaching abstinence among the troops, the U.S. War Department and other military officials were aware that soldiers would continue

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32 Stearns and Knapp.
to have sex with women whenever they could. Therefore, their coinciding strategy would be two-fold: disseminate educational pamphlets, posters, and films while distributing condoms and VD self-treatment kits. These pamphlets would be furnished to every soldier upon enlistment, with the goal of filling in educational gaps in regard to sex—information that the young men had not learned in school.

One particular pamphlet by the War Department entitled “Sex Hygiene and Venereal Disease” provided a comprehensive explanation of basic sexual health, heavily seasoned with misogyny and moralizing. The pamphlet begins innocuously enough: “a few facts about sex…” the first of which summarizes the importance of cleaning one’s penis. However, in the first paragraph of the document, there is already an indicator of the attitudes behind the creation of these pamphlets.

SEX is one of the most important things in your life, for it makes you a man. It’s something to be proud of. But, like everything else you prize, it must be well cared for.33

The pamphlet continues on for a few sections about wet dreams and masturbation—“self-abuse,” before saying that it is very normal for men to want to have sex with women, and that women want to have sex with men. The document attributes these desires to ‘the sex glands’ and clarifies that they are nothing to be ashamed of. This basic biological explanation of sex normalized human sexual desire, which had previously been seen as a weakness to hide. The application of that explanation to both men and women also marks a huge transformation in the ideas of women’s sexuality: women want to have sex with men because of biology, and that is acceptable. However, the author then says,

Just because you have this desire is no reason why you must give in to it. Sex relations should be kept for marriage. Between people who aren’t married they often lead to shame, sorrow, and disease. The public knows this so well that laws forbid sex relations between persons not married to

33 “Sex Hygiene and Venereal Disease—War Department,” National Research Council Division of Medical Sciences, Sept. 30, 1942.
So, sexual desire is a normal biological reality, but sexual educators want to enforce the belief that acting on those desires is immoral outside of marriage. This attitude that attaches moral implications to sex leads predictably to misogyny. Multiple warnings that, “You wouldn’t like to think that the girl you marry had been used by other men,” proliferate this document. Above all, the message is that you cannot tell which women have venereal disease, so the best way to avoid it is to abstain from sex until marriage. Sex workers or women who hang around bars are the most dangerous, as they have been “used” and definitely aren’t the type of woman one would consider marrying.

Consent was a weighted word in this period—much of the language surrounding consent carried the implication that a woman’s readiness to engage in sex meant that she was promiscuous. The War Department’s 1942 sex education pamphlet states to the troops: “Don’t forget that any girl who lets you use her, or who ‘consents’ easily, is not safe.” First, the repeated choice of the phrase, to “use” women, as a synonym for sex is clearly dehumanizing. Though the document had established earlier that women also have a “perfectly normal” desire to have sex with men, the phrase to “use” a woman exposes the underlying belief that women’s worth is in their virginity and as their place as a sexual object. Once a woman has sex she has been “used” and her value has decreased. The quotations around “consents” implies a fundamental lack of concern over women’s consent. In fact, the focus of the public in the early-mid 20th century was not on rape but on false allegations of rape. The idea of rape was confined to violent stranger attacks, and even then, it was questionable as to whether the woman was at fault.

35 “Sex Hygiene and Venereal Disease—War Department.”
36 Ibid.
37 “Sex Hygiene and Venereal Disease—War Department.”
38 Robinson.
Soldiers, and many men, in the 1930s, were not concerned about consent. A woman’s enthusiastic consent even had negative implications—it meant she was not ‘safe’ and had likely been used before.

In addition to these pamphlets, the U.S. government produced scare films about venereal disease in a shift of tactics that advertised to an audience of both soldiers and the general public—including women. This medium had the same elements as the pamphlets: promoting abstinence while educating about safe sex. Public health physician James A. Dolce was among the most avid proponents of film as an important medium for health education, arguing that well-written and produced films would gather a large audience and educate people more than other teaching aids would.39 These movies were indeed well produced and heavily funded, featuring popular actors of the time and depicting entertaining plots and characters.

In one 1942 film, “Sex Hygiene,” a physician on behalf of the War Department spoke directly to the camera: “For many years prudery or false modesty has caused the basic facts of sex to be withheld from large numbers of our young people...This ignorance of sex, and the possible effects of illicit sexual intercourse, have left a vast trail of human wreckage; countless numbers of blind, deformed and hopelessly insane.”40 This demonstrates a clear breakaway from previous ideas about sex education, public health, and Victorian ideals of modesty and restraint. In fact, physicians at this time attributed poor public health and rampant venereal disease to false modesty. Still, abstinence is highly recommended, and sex is framed by morality.

Venereal Disease propaganda posters, another prominent tactic in the sexual education campaign, most tangibly demonstrates the misogyny that underpinned the government’s attitudes towards the crisis. These posters always

40 Otto Brower and John Ford, Sex Hygiene (1942; Academy Film Archive, 2007).
framed women as the threat and the aggressor, luring men into vice and infecting them with diseases they would bring home to their virginal sweethearts. Further still, the posters associated women with the enemy, in this case the Axis. Because venereal disease took such a toll on the troops and the war effort, the public health strategy was engineered to appeal to patriotism. Figure 1 is typical for the period. A sex worker holds up a champagne glass in a toast. We, the audience, know she is a sex worker because of her heavy makeup, painted nails, and the alcohol she is consuming. The champagne represents venereal disease, and the woman represents all “bad women”—pick up girls, streetwalkers, prostitutes. However, what is interesting is the attachment to the Axis forces: “A toast to Hitler and Hirohito.” Good girls back home are patriots, and “bad,” promiscuous girls are not. Bad women are Axis agents—they are the enemy.

Figure 3 opposes the sex worker depicted in Figure 2. This woman is the sweetheart patiently waiting at home. She is virginal, doe-eyed, and coy—she is certainly faithful. This woman is attractive but modest, the ideal of what a
woman should be. The poster appeals to soldiers to stay abstinent for the sake of their devoted sweetheart. It reminds the soldier that back home they will have a family, a respectable girl, or a loving wife to return to, and that venereal disease could ruin that.

A final poster is particularly unique because it transgresses the binary Madonna and prostitution dichotomy of the previous two posters (see fig. 4). This woman does not have heavy makeup: In fact, she looks sweet and bashful. She could be any man’s wife or sweetheart at home. But in that lies the danger! She may look clean, but... Clean is synonymous for abstinent, sexually inexperienced, pure, safe. This woman is not clean. She is another pick-up, ‘good time’ girl, or prostitute like the first woman. Many of these posters warn soldiers that they
might think a girl is safe and clean, but if she slept with them, she’s likely slept with everyone else making her dirty and diseased.

The clear enemy in the military’s war on venereal disease was sex workers. Therefore, while public health and military officials warned men to beware of these women, they cracked down on their very existence and attempted to shut down prostitution wherever they could. Obviously, this meant the closure of “red light” districts in the United States, especially in the areas surrounding military bases. One 1942 article in The New York Times reported, “’Red Light’ Areas Declared Ending.” The article details how the National Advisory Police Committee on Social Protection reported that their campaign had almost completely eliminated the ‘red light’ districts in the United States in less than
a year.\textsuperscript{41} Charles P. Taft, head of the committee, claimed that it was easy to shut down official prostitution in these districts—the challenge was in “semi-professional prostitutes.” These “semi-professional prostitutes” were loosely defined as any woman perceived to be promiscuous, especially with soldiers. Taft described these women as “more dangerous to the community than a mad dog.”\textsuperscript{42} The committee’s recommendations were that the police cooperate with military venereal disease control officers in order to do contact tracing, consult with local business owners (bars, hotels, taxi companies) to root out prostitution, test women accused of prostitution for sexually transmitted disease, and patrol suspicious areas. Lastly, the article describes the committee’s assertion that a large percentage of venereal infections in the military could be traced to “girls in their early ‘teens” that were “motivated by a misguided sense of patriotism.”\textsuperscript{43}

This campaign against sex workers was deemed to be successful in many regards. The combined efforts of the police, public health officials, and the military led to huge amounts of arrests and detainments. The FBI Uniform Crime Reports reported that the percentage of girls arrested for sex-related offenses increased by 130% between 1941 and 1943.\textsuperscript{44} The May Act made prostitution near U.S. defense bases a federal crime.\textsuperscript{45} However, the problem of venereal disease persisted. Class and racial lines had a huge influence on who the police and military prosecuted. Police rarely prosecuted upper- or middle-class white girls for fraternizing with soldiers, but did punish poor women, especially black women and other women of color, for perceived transgressions. Young black girls would be arrested for suspected ‘semi-professional’ prostitution, detained, tested for venereal disease, and either arrested, released, or sent to quarantine wards for

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{41} “‘Red Light’ Areas Declared Ending.”
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} “‘Red Light’ Areas Declared Ending.”
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Amanda H. Littauer, “Victory Girls: Sex, Mobility, and Adventure on the Home Front,” in \textit{Bad Girls: Young Women, Sex, and Rebellion before the Sixties}, 18-51 (University of North Carolina Press, 2015).
  \item \textsuperscript{45} “Classification 18: May Act,” Headquarters and Field Office Case Files, Index, and Microfilm, 1942-1949, Aug. 15, 2016.
\end{itemize}
In a climate that persecuted women on the basis of promiscuity so much that it became policy, the pin-up girl phenomenon is certainly a paradox. This phenomenon included a distinction between women who expressed their sexuality for their own pleasure and women who expressed their sexuality for men’s entertainment: promiscuous women were dangerous and pin-up girls were a fantasy. Pin-up girls were glamour models whose photographs were mass-produced via posters. These posters were very popular with soldiers during World War II, with many men hanging them in their barracks. Hugh Hefner, the creator of *Playboy* magazine said, “After school, armed with my diploma, I joined the army. Just like any boy doing his military service, I had the minimum essentials in my case—a uniform, a helmet, and a pin-up.”

Protestant capitalist culture preached the virtue of a wife and mother, a moral guardian of the home to aid her husband in all manners and ensure the success of the home. Under this paradigm, woman attained worth through her status as a mother or a wife, in other words her fertility. Nor was this worth based on the illusion of fertility—sexual attractiveness—but in terms of her reproductive capacity. The pin-up girl defied that paradigm—the appeal was both in her raw visual sensuality and her elusiveness. However, what distinguished the pin-up girl from “good-time girls” that VD Propaganda posters warned of, was the voyeuristic aspect of pin-up posters. Pin-up girls were generally posed to appear caught by surprise, in a moment of partial nudity and vulnerability. Her skirt is caught on a ladder or a desk drawer, she hasn’t quite finished knitting that sweater she’s working on, or she’s giving her dog a bath in her underwear.

Pin-up girls offered young soldiers an outlet for their sexual energy and reaffirmed their masculinity. They also served another purpose: to promote

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46 Strom.
48 Ibid.
American patriotism and the war effort. Posters showed scantily dressed women promoting war bonds and urging men to join the war effort. Some women wore versions of military uniforms, while others donned aprons or house dresses and played the role of the sweetheart at home. Betty Grable, among the most popular pin-up girls was described as a symbol of American womanhood. Pin up posters were products designed to appeal to soldiers and remind them of the women and the home they wanted to protect while simultaneously satisfying their sex drives—hopefully eliminating risky sex culminating in venereal disease. Though masturbation was outwardly discouraged as a moral failing, sex education materials clarified to soldiers that masturbation did not have ill effects on one’s health, as had been taught in the decades prior. The promotion of pin up magazines among the troops exposed true attitudes towards masturbation—it certainly wasn’t something to be supported but it was better than having sex. This demonstrates the unprecedented realism that the War Department adopted in their approach to sexual education; they understood that complete abstinence from all sexual activity was unrealistic. Masturbation to pin-up magazines was a safe enough comfort for soldiers, especially if it kept them away from ‘good-time’ women.

School Sex Education

While the audience for military sex education in the 20th century was male, subsequent sex education conducted in public schools held a co-educational audience. The former campaign emphasized the need for male soldiers to beware of promiscuous women, while the latter emphasized the need for young girls to adhere to chastity and beware of male influence. Leading up to the 1920s in the United States, sex education—then known as hygiene education—focused on morality and cleanliness. The focus was on the immorality of pre-marital sexual

49 Favre.
behavior, masturbation, and non-procreative sex. The American Federation for Sex Hygiene’s official recommendations for education stated that there should be “no study of external human anatomy and very limited study of internal anatomy.”

During and after World War II, faced with the realities of the venereal disease crisis, the traditional abstinence only education had to change. In the prefatory note of “Sex Education in Schools and Youth Organizations,” written by the England Board of Education in 1943, the authors cite the circumstance of war as the cause for the decay of social and sexual restraints that called for a new strategy of sexual education. The world had changed post-war and educators understood that youth had been exposed to an unprecedented level of sexual content through posters, pulp novels, music, and films. They had seen posters on venereal disease, and they had questions that, unanswered, would create ignorance that could only lead to poor judgement. Men and women mingled more than ever, and both sexes had more freedom to postpone marriage to pursue an education or other individual endeavors. A need for sex education began to be seen as the cause for all sorts of social ills. Newell Edson wrote for The Journal of Educational Sociology in 1935,

Sex education is of vital concern to the community. Its courts, jails, institutions, and hospitals are crowded with those who have failed in social adjustment from lack of such education. Its clinics are thronged with venereal patients who suffer because of wrong sex education. Its family courts attempt to make marital adjustments the foundations for which should have been laid in childhood and youth. Its social workers, ministers, doctors, and lawyers are wrestling with problems which wise sex education could have prevented. Its youth, keenly aware of sex in their lives, find it amazingly easy to acquire unsound information and practices but very difficult to get scientific facts and satisfying standards.

52 Board of Education, Sex Education in Schools and Youth Organisations (London: 1943).
This demonstrates a clear shift from military sex education to school sex education. Edson recognizes that military sex education came too late in the lives of contemporary youth that had been aware of sex from a young age, causing advice about abstinence or prophylaxis to fall on deaf ears. Edson and others proposed a modern sexual education strategy for a modern, less innocent, era.

Contemporary school sexual education has shifted from abstinence-only to a more realistic approach—an echo of the trend that educators experienced in the first half of the 20th century. Modern abstinence-only sexual education was introduced to the United States in the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, a eugenical ambition under the guise of moral or health concerns.54 In this particular act, the underlying belief was that people on welfare, primarily black people and people of color, were having unprotected sex leading to unwanted pregnancies and perpetuating a cycle of poverty, crime, and—worst of all—government assistance.

Today’s evidence shows that abstinence-only education does not work. In fact, abstinence-only education correlates with higher rates of teen pregnancy.55 A narrow focus on abstinence is not realistic, proving Edson correct; youth are keenly aware of sex in their lives, and if they are not provided with a comprehensive honest sexual education, they will seek it from less than accurate sources, such as friends, television, pornography. Not only that, but comprehensive sexual education is crucial in the prevention of sexual assault. Only ten states mention consent, sexual assault, or healthy relationships in their sexual education curriculum.56 This irresponsible decision to omit sexual assault from educational vocabulary leads to generations of men who do not take a woman’s consent seriously. Abstinence-only education also places an enormous burden on young

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56 Ibid.
girls to maintain chastity and protect their virginity. This misogynistic belief takes the ritualized form of virginity clubs and purity balls—teaching youth of both sexes that a woman’s worth is in her chastity. Instantly we revert to the World War II era dichotomy: bad, unclean girls have sex and good, safe girls are virgins, and men should beware of the former.
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