The Changing Girl: Sex Education and Prescriptions of White Girlhood

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This thesis examines sex education manuals for American girls published between 1895 and 1920. These books, written and published by a variety of authors, communicated to girls usually between the ages of ten and eighteen about the events of puberty, courtship, marriage, and motherhood. This thesis argues that these texts were an attempt to establish acceptable boundaries for adolescent girls, telling them about their bodies in order to convey normative ideals of white, upper- and middle-class American girls. Through these texts, parents, doctors, teachers, and authors could instruct these girls about female sexuality in a non-threatening and confined manner. By warning young girls about what society would consider appropriate behavior, these books were engaged in a larger conversation about adolescence, medicine, race suicide, eugenics, whiteness, and venereal disease, through the lens of sexuality. The girls who read these books learned about the changes their bodies would experience during puberty, the acceptable boundaries of friendship with both boys and girls, proper behavior while courting, and even procreation within marriage. Discussions of white girlhood and sexuality were important in the national discourses concerning the future of the nation and the shoring up of white civilization in America, with these texts promoting a more conservative idea of women's sexuality that would reinforce upper- and middle-class tradition and discourage freer conceptions of sexuality that circulated, they believed, in immigrant or working-class communities. Sources often overlooked in previous studies of girlhood and sexuality, these texts tell an important story that uncovers how the sexuality of young women played into issues of national concern.
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Finally, for this work of women’s history I must thank the most important woman in my life, my mother Diane. She has been the most supportive parent any person could ask for. When others may have balked at a daughter who seemingly abruptly changed her career plans from an M.D. to a Ph.D., she was always entirely
encouraging and makes it clear to me every day of my life how proud of me she is. Additionally, having a nurse as a mother has always been a blessing, never more so than inspiring me to pay attention to the sex education story in these pages that had such an impact on young women’s social, cultural, and medical lives. This thesis is dedicated to her.
Until recently it was deemed the better part of parental wisdom to allow a girl to reach that period in her life when she changes from girlhood into womanhood without any knowledge of what the change meant. As a result of this policy of silence, thousands of girls found themselves suddenly confronted with physical and moral changes that were a source of alarm to them and filled them with misgivings from which it took them years to fully recover. Some never fully recovered.

–Edward Bok, the editor of the Ladies Home Journal, in the foreword to The Changing Girl: A Little Book for the Girl of Ten to Fifteen.

At the turn of the twentieth century, sex was a major topic of discussion between parents, physicians, and other adults and America’s youth. Suddenly, there was an explosion of advice literature dealing with sex education for both young boys and girls, with books such as The Changing Girl: A Little Book for the Girl of Ten to Fifteen setting out to instruct the young people about puberty and the acceptable boundaries of sexual expression. From the mid-1890s through the first two decades of the twentieth century, both male and female physicians, along with other arbiters of American culture like advice authors, published dozens of books on the subject that aimed to inform young women about a specific set of themes: the biology of reproduction, the physical and emotional changes of puberty, and their development into American mothers. These books were appropriate for a range of ages, with certain titles meant for parents to read with their daughters and others discussing topics meant for young women preparing for marriage. As Edward Bok explained above, a belief persisted among some Americans that many young women in the upper and middle classes matured, married, and became mothers without understanding their own anatomy, biology, and reproduction.

2 Though never explicitly stated in any of these books, it can be presumed that Bok and his fellow writers are applying these ideas to white, native-born young women of the upper and middle classes. I have found no evidence of a corresponding education movement in minority or immigrant
that “the fallacy of silence finally lead to such fearful results in so many instances that
the public conscious was awakened, and a decided change has come in the general
mental attitude on this question.” As attitudes changed, there “came a universal
desire for some little book that would explain in a simple and yet authoritative
manner, by a reliable pen, just what those changes in a girl...mean and how they can
be intelligently understood and rationally met.”3 The Changing Girl and the many
books like it illustrate the normative ideals of white, middle- and upper-class girlhood
in this period, and by examining the specific attitudes and behaviors they warn
against, we may better understand which societal rules were most threatening when
broken by young girls. These sources reveal one way in which parents, doctors, and
other community members presented female sexuality in a time when discussions
about sexuality were becoming much more open and public.

These sex education books came out of the end of what we now call the
Victorian period.4 The Victorian period has generally been defined by its strict moral
code and sexual containment, and this time period often saw women portrayed as
sexually disinterested or indifferent. As Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz discusses,
Victorianism led to a repression of information for women, as the availability and
sources of sexual knowledge were often limited to other women like sisters,
schoolmates, friends, and coworkers.5 The sex education books at the end of the
century were a reaction to this silence; instead of allowing uninformed girls to discuss

3 Ibid.
4 While some historians have shied away from the term “Victorian” for this era in American history, I
have chosen to use it to emphasize the boundaries of sexuality that “Victorian” represents in the
imaginations of many people.
5 Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Repression in
these matters together, they attempted to curtail knowledge obtained “improperly” from friends or other dubious sources and encouraged education from parents, doctors, teachers, and other trusted adult figures.

This thesis enters into the discussion of several important historiographical fields. The history of adolescence developed fairly recently as a field, and began primarily by focusing attention on adolescent boys. Scholars like Joan Jacobs Brumberg have attempted to move beyond this limitation, bringing together the study of girlhood, medicine, and the body in several important works.\(^6\) Susan K. Cahn notes “the experience of teenage girls has most often been depicted as a dim reflection of male adolescence,” and her study of southern girls from 1920-1960 also works to uncover girls’ lives separated from the male experience.\(^7\) Adolescence itself has had changing definitions over time. Though Kathy Peiss’s subjects in *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* gained a sense of independence through their employment in the big city, many of them were young women who lived with their families and would continue to do so until they were married.\(^8\) At the same time that these young women traversed a path between childhood and full adulthood, their counterparts in the middle and upper classes would often have been treated as children through their late teens or even into their twenties, as long as they continued to be sheltered by their parents and remained unmarried.

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The variance in the definition of adolescence from the present day’s definition to ideas of adolescence at the turn of the twentieth century make it very important to also situate the study of girlhood within the field of women’s history. Women’s history has often overlooked the experience of children, relegating them to a separate category. But wide-ranging perceptions of age boundaries – childhood, youth, young adulthood, teenage years, adolescence, adulthood – means that it is impossible to separate out age groups to be dealt with in vastly different historical fields; hence women’s history cannot just cover the history of adult women. Therefore, it is important in this thesis, as Brumberg and Cahn have done, to place emphasis on the experience of girls and young women. They, like the adults in their lives, were also participating in their society and affecting change in the ways that Americans lived. Whether as working women in the cities or high school students in the suburbs, these young women had an impact on American life. As Cahn discusses, scholars in the field of women’s history have “written about the change from a sexually reticent Victorian culture to a new era of sexual liberalism that acknowledged female sexual desire as central to modern marriage and femininity,” but “few have asked how this expectation of active female desire shaped the process of coming of age: instead teenage experiences are usually folded into generalized histories of women’s work, education and culture.” This thesis looks to examine how adolescent girls were perceived as beings capable of sexual feeling and activity through the lens of sex education books and to emphasize the importance of girls’ experiences to the overall field of women’s history.

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9 Cahn, 9.
Also central to this study is the history of sexuality. Like scholarship on other topics in the field of sexuality, the discussion of sex education at the turn of the twentieth century works to dismantle and "challenge older, stereotypical views of Puritans, Victorians, and liberated moderns."\(^{10}\) As John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman identify in their now canonical work *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, much of the older scholarly discussions of sexuality focused on answering three questions: Were Americans repressed? Did presumably repressed groups (i.e. Puritans and Victorians) enjoy sex? And has society progressed sexually in the last three hundred years?\(^{11}\) The scholarship of the last twenty years has brought an incredible explosion of interest in and focus on sexuality that has moved beyond these questions and has redefined the way that we look at sexualities in the past. For instance, scholars since the 1970s have worked to dismantle some of the stereotypes of Victorian Americans as prim and proper. Carl N. Degler argued that "it is far from clear that there was in the nineteenth century a consensus on the subject of women's sexuality or that women were in fact inhibited from acknowledging their sexual feelings." By looking at the previously undiscovered surveys of forty-five "Victorian" women by Dr. Clelia D. Mosher, Degler determined that the writings of male doctors in the nineteenth century about women's sexual disinterest were not supported by Mosher's evidence; she did not uncover an actual sexual disinterest in Victorian women.\(^{12}\) Similarly, this myth of repression may lead many to assume that there was no form of sex education in the 1890s, or that parents and children did not

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\(^{11}\) Ibid.

discuss sexual intercourse, even within the confines of marriage. Yet sexual knowledge had to be distributed and gained somehow, and the sources used in this study were just one way to examine that dispersal of knowledge.

Sex education itself is not a new field of study. The most comprehensive monograph on the subject is Jeffrey P. Moran’s *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century*. Moran ties the creation of the category of “adolescence” at the beginning of the twentieth century to sexuality, examining the back-and-forth between adults attempting to contain adolescent sexuality and adolescents trying to break free of these constraints. Much of the work on sex education has been done outside of history, in fields like library science. These include works such as that of Patricia J. Campbell, who traces the publication of sex education books from the 1890s through the 1970s. The most recent work in the library science field on the topic is *What Adolescents Ought to Know: Sexual Health Texts in Early Twentieth-Century America*. In this work, Jennifer Burek Pierce positions the sexual health movement that forms the primary basis of this thesis within the international health community, tracing its roots to France and Dr. Alfred Fournier’s book *Our Sons, When They Turn 18*. Robin E. Jensen has looked at sex education from the field of communications, examining the rhetoric used by sex education promoters to see how these women were able to get sex education into the

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13 This supposition can be supported by the most common response I receive when asked about my research. When I say that I study girls’ sex education from 1895 to 1920, the first question I immediately hear is “Was there sex education then?”


public eye. There are also several historical studies that look at sex education in the period after the 1920s; the best of these is Susan K. Freeman's *Sex Goes to School: Girls and Sex Education before the 1960s*, which focuses on the entrance of sex education into public schools in the 1940s and 1950s. Though these studies all make important inroads into understanding sex education, this thesis takes a closer look at the sex education texts from around 1895 through the first two decades of the twentieth century, repositioning sex education by finding it in an earlier period than dealt with in many of these other studies and identifying sex education that was occurring outside of public schools.

The early twentieth-century sex education manuals used in this thesis can be analyzed as mechanisms of norm construction to show how white, middle- and upper-class girls were expected to behave decorously and politely within the bounds of Victorianism. As Moran explains, “The authors of advice manuals concerned themselves not solely with sex but with the entire constellation of values that made up Victorian respectability.” Their discussion of proper behavior makes quite obvious what they considered appropriate, articulating and simultaneously cataloguing behaviors considered “inappropriate” for young girls. At a time when nineteenth-century formalized courtship was changing with the emergence of leisure and youth cultures, these books provided a way to police the behaviors of young women and men who could not always be kept under the watchful eyes of their parents.

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19 Moran, 6.
20 On the changes in relationships between adolescent men and women staring in the early twentieth century, see Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*
Adolescents were not the only ones dealing with new ideas of sexuality. The "new modern" man and woman who began to emerge in the 1910s struggled with new ideas of sexuality as well. As Jane Gerhard explains, these Americans inherited a confusing view of sexuality from their parents and grandparents: "on the one hand, Victorians viewed sexuality as a form of spiritual union that elevated sexual intercourse into a form of romantic, emotional, and, ultimately, reproductive intimacy." At the same time, "Victorians also saw sexuality as a base physical appetite that was unfit for civilized discourse or civilized women and properly kept to back alleys and red light districts." Modern women rejected these ideas, with several generations of "new women" emerging who challenged these very gendered ideas of sexuality. From the settlement workers of the 1870s and 1880s to the working-class women around the turn of the century to the post-World War I flapper, these women tried to redefine acceptable boundaries of sexuality. Young women often played a role in these changes. However, the sex education books and sexual health community of these decades often pushed back against this modern sexuality, trying to reinstate and reinforce older ideas of propriety.

Discussing sexuality in a public forum like these books was something that could not have been easily achieved in earlier years. The issue of censorship was one that was debated throughout the late nineteenth century. The federal act for the "Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of


Immoral Use” was passed through Congress in 1873 and gave the United States post office the power to regulate obscenity sent through the mail system. This act, known commonly as the Comstock Law after its proponent Anthony Comstock, had a profound effect for decades on what material and information could safely be printed and distributed in the United States. By the time the sex education books dealt with here were published in the 1890s and the first decades of the 1900s, obscenity and censorship had been a topic of debate for several decades.

The medical community played a huge role in these debates over sexuality. In 1903, G. Stanley Hall published a two-volume work, Adolescence, in which he essentially identified, named, described, and analyzed the period of the life cycle separated from childhood and adulthood. Hall defined adolescence as “that period of chastity between puberty, or sexual awakening, and marriage, when the young man or woman’s sexual impulses could finally be expressed,” though his discussion mainly focuses on young men. For Hall, sexuality was a vital part of the adolescent experience, with chastity one marker of civilization. Hall, like President Theodore Roosevelt and others, “worried that civilization was becoming weak and that powerful manhood, as represented through Victorian ideologies of self-restrained manliness, was becoming impotent.” However, self-restraint was still necessary for young women. For these commentators, while Victorian rules were becoming a

22 Horowitz, 13.
23 Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz discusses fully the Comstock Law and its ramifications in part four of her book Rereading Sex (297-436).
26 Moran, 15.
hindrance to masculine power, restraint and control were still the foundations of normative femininity. As a more “civilized” people, white middle- and upper-class Americans were expected to avoid the “barbarous” practices of “inferior” races. Through eugenics and other social reforms, scientists, psychologists, social workers, and others hoped to combat the decline of white American civilization. Eugenicists argued for control of negative physical, psychological, and emotional characteristics. This philosophy extended heredity of physical traits, such as hair or eye color, to emotional and psychological responses. A young woman’s child could end up not only with her husband’s curly hair but his bad temper, violent tendencies, and alcoholism as well.

The early twentieth century also witnessed increased concerns among the white middle and upper classes about “race suicide.” Birthrates among white American women had declined from 7 children to 3.5 children between 1800 and 1900, when urban families were less likely to need or want as many children as were necessary in the agrarian society of the early nineteenth century. “Race suicide,” an idea put forth by Roosevelt and others, was the fear that the declining birthrate among Anglo-Saxon Americans would allow America to be overtaken by immigrants, African Americans, and other groups considered by the white middle and upper classes to be non-white and therefore non-American, thus diluting the American

"race." Some attributed the declining birthrate to the increasing emphasis on women’s education, which allowed some young white women the option to have a career instead of or in addition to becoming mothers. Concurrently, concerns arose over the young women in the working classes who were often portrayed as having a looser moral code, the “charity girls” that Kathy Peiss has defined in her work as working women who sometimes bargained their company or even sexual favors for a trip to the amusement park or to the movies. The confluence of these concerns over looser morals and “lower” races resulted in a serious debate; American commentators looked to uphold the ideal “Mother of Tomorrow” who could raise proper, pure American children and wanted to find a resolution to the working “woman adrift” who would not contribute in such a way to future generations.

One solution to these fears of social amalgamation was the “science” of eugenics, which some Americans believed could prevent negative or immoral behaviors through the procreation of upstanding, moral members of society (“positive eugenics”) and the limitation of reproduction in “undesirable” people (“negative eugenics”). Positive eugenics was promoted through publications from doctors, scientists, and reformers who encouraged young white American women to conform to the proper roles of wife and mother, who wanted nothing more than to live out

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30 Bederman, 200.
32 Wendy Kline defines these two opposing female characters. The “Mother of Tomorrow” appeared at the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, California in 1915 as a white woman who “controlled the racial makeup of future generations” and “symbolized the widespread cultural debate on the meaning of womanhood in the twentieth century” (8). The “woman adrift” was the urban working woman who were drawn to the cities and away from their families by new economic opportunity. According to Kline, one in five women in urban environments lived on their own, subverting the domestic ideal of family living. Kline, 9-10.
their lives within the home, raising good American children. By being upstanding wives and mothers, they could avert this “race suicide.” In contrast, negative eugenics would discourage the reproduction of non-white women, working women, or the mentally ill who might harm the American populace. While this discourse included publications that discussed the implications and dangers of their reproduction, the negative eugenics movement went even further to encourage these women to not reproduce. The depicted faults of these young women – immorality, imbecility, or illness – were not purely medical problems; they were a genetic anomaly that needed to be resolved and prevented from being passed into the next generation. At a time when birth control was often seen as immoral or even dangerous among the white upper and middle classes, these young women were encouraged to medically end their reproductive capacity through sterilization. In many cases, this sterilization was forced in mental institutions or other homes for young women where they could not resist the treatment. Though mostly male physicians led the charge for sterilization for the “unfit” mothers, some female reformers supported them in their cause.33

Society itself was transitioning into a new era along with the growing adolescents of the nation. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the increasing professionalization of many fields, including medicine, social work, and psychology, all of which influenced sex education at the turn of the century.

33 Kline, 7-31. See also Susan Cahn’s “Sex, Science, and Eugenic Sterilization” in Sexual Reckonings (156-180). Several works have been written on female delinquency around this time period, including Regina G. Kunzel, Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993) and Mary E. Odem, Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920 (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1995).
Professionalization required that doctors, social workers, and psychologists receive increased education and training, thereby allowing them to claim a level of expertise not reached by the average American. Women also stepped into these careers for the first time, demanding education and the right to work as professionals in public life.\(^{34}\) Throughout the nineteenth century, and finding their first success with Elizabeth Blackwell’s graduation from Geneva Medical College in 1849, women fought to enter the medical profession. Though many colleges would not accept women into their medical programs, medical colleges for women sprang up for those wanting a medical education, and “by the end of the nineteenth century, female physicians numbered between 4 and 5 percent of the profession, a number that remained relatively stable until the 1960s.”\(^{35}\) Though they could become qualified in all areas of medicine, many female physicians found themselves drawn to or pressured into work treating women and children, which some saw as a natural place for female doctors to fill. Women supposedly had natural healing talents that assisted in their success as wives and mothers, which in female doctors could be applied not only to their families, but to their patients as well. Though many opposed the entrance of female doctors into the profession, on the grounds that such work could corrupt their morality and violate female modesty, supporters pointed out that women who nursed their family members were not protected from medical realities and female modesty allowed women doctors to properly treat female patients. Additionally, “women physicians seemed exceptionally suited for teaching the practical tenets of family


health and hygiene that would both protect and soothe an anxious public.”

By the turn of the century, these arguments and beliefs put female physicians in the perfect position to treat and educate the public on such sensitive topics as sex education and social health, a field that educated the public on topics like contagious diseases and how to prevent them.

At the same time, Progressive activists campaigned for the prohibition of alcohol, women’s suffrage, government oversight of industry, and other reforms that had the potential to radically change American life. Women stepped into the public arena to fight for these causes, leading the way to constitutional amendments that criminalized alcohol and guaranteed a white woman’s right to vote. This new “modern” woman had the capability to participate in electoral politics, attend school, and become professionals, moving beyond the expected role of wife and mother that earlier generations were confined to. However, these new opportunities were primarily limited to white, middle or upper class women.

Coupled with concerns over women’s new roles outside the home were anxieties over venereal disease, which throughout the period received major national attention as rates of syphilis and gonorrhea infections skyrocketed. As historian Allan M. Brandt explains, “the specter of venereal diseases—and new knowledge about the impact of these diseases on the family—fueled anxieties regarding the future of domestic life.”

By reining in the sexual behaviors of young white, middle- and upper-class women, authors of sex education books attempted to combat immorality, enforce ideas of eugenics, and ensure adherence to societal expectations.

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36 Morantz-Sanchez, 5.
for young girls as they grew into young mothers. Many of the authors of these texts were involved in the social hygiene movement that sprang out of the worries over venereal disease in the first decades of the twentieth century. Social hygiene became formalized with the founding of the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA) in 1913. The physicians and reformers who made up ASHA prioritized public health over censorship of sexual information, with prevention of syphilis and gonorrhea deemed more important than suppression of the knowledge of sexual activity. This did not translate into condoning sexual activity before marriage; instead ASHA worked to educate young people about the dangers of being sexually active outside of wedlock. Whereas before it was accepted that young men had sexual urges that could be satisfied outside of marriage with prostitutes or other “loose” women, the social hygiene movement worked to reverse this idea. By holding young men to the same sexual standards as their future wives, American families could be protected from infections of venereal diseases that could be passed on to the next generation.38

It was through this lens of changing Victorian sexuality, adolescence, and Progressive Era politics that the topic of sex education became debated. As Wendy Kline points out, “Though social-purity campaigners and Progressive reformers attempted to control public discussion of sexuality and channel it back into marriage and the home, the proliferation of reform literature, as well as the increasing popularity of commercialized leisure and heterosexual activity, served only to widen the public discussion of sexuality.”39 It was now necessary for there to be a public forum to discuss proper sexual behavior, activity, and especially restraint. As Julian

38 Simmons, 19-27; Brandt, 7-51.
39 Kline, 18.
B. Carter argues, “Access to sexual knowledge was, then, the solution to the significant problem of the future of the American family.” By publishing these books and putting them into adolescent girls’ hands, the authors explicitly hoped to instruct girls about their bodies and what to expect from puberty, while implicitly they looked to combat the social problems that they believed could be reduced through young women’s adherence to the guidelines for propriety laid out in their manuals. By couching these instructions in terms of medical or social science expertise, these books prescribed values and standards of normative, white, middle-class girlhood, allowing a reconstitution and reification of womanhood that could combat fears of the new opportunities that women could and did have in American life. A close reading and analysis of these texts uncovers what were considered appropriate topics of conversation in girls’ sex education of the period, how these topics were discussed, and what activities and sentiments were considered appropriate or forbidden to girls.

Starting in the early nineteenth century and continuing to the present, “ministers, doctors, quacks, and laymen of one sort or another have eagerly assumed the burden of counseling Americans about sex, sex roles, and allied topics.” Before the mid-1890s, advice books addressing women’s bodies were primarily targeted at adult married women. These books did address puberty and young girlhood, but from the perspective of advice for mothers for dealing with daughters, rather than advice for the daughters themselves. Texts like these include Dr. George H. Napheys’s The

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Physical Life of Woman: Advice to the Maiden, Wife, and Mother (1869) and Mrs. E.B. Duffey’s What Women Should Know: A Women’s Book for Women Containing Practical Information for Wives and Mothers (1873).\textsuperscript{42} Napheys focused mainly on physiology, especially diseases that contemporary medicine and science discovered (or even invented) and hoped to treat in women. Even at this early date, Napheys acknowledged the importance of bodily knowledge in individuals, saying, “Had every person a sound understanding of the relations of the sexes, one of the most fertile sources of crime would be removed...None but physicians can know what sad consequences are constantly occurring from the want of it.”\textsuperscript{43} As a doctor, his experience with women and their problems gave him the expertise and authority to write this lengthy book about women’s bodies in the three stages of their lives: “maiden, wife, and mother.” Duffey wrote in response to books like Napheys’s to give the “female perspective,” asserting that “being of the masculine sex, [male authors] are by no means infallible on such matters.”\textsuperscript{44} She went on to focus on physical differences between the sexes, puberty, love, marriage, childbearing, infant care, and diseases and disorders that could affect women during pregnancy and their infants as a means of clarifying such differences.

In the 1890s, Dr. Lyman B. Sperry created the new form of sex education books. With Confidential Talks with Young Women (1893), he established a format of sex education books for girls that would dominate for the next two decades. As

\textsuperscript{43} Napheys, x.
\textsuperscript{44} Duffey, 8.
with many of the books to follow, *Confidential Talks* went through many reprints and editions. Sperry wrote in the first person, addressing the reader as “you,” creating a rapport and relationship with the reader that removed some of the preaching or didactic tone that might otherwise repel young female readers. He began by explaining the biology of reproduction, starting with “God’s purpose” as declared in the book of Genesis and moving forward through plant, invertebrate, fish, bird, marsupial, and mammalian reproduction. These explanations transitioned “naturally” into a description of female reproductive organs and how during puberty these organs begin to change. Sperry couched this discussion in terms of womanhood and motherhood: “Hitherto you have been ‘only a little girl’… Now, whether you will or not, you must weigh anchor and leave this comparatively safe harbor of girlhood, to make your voyage on the broad ocean of womanhood, with its varied opportunities, joys and responsibilities.”

Descriptions of menstruation and ovulation were followed by advice on how to stay healthy, including proper nutrition and sleep habits, loose-fitting clothing, and recreation and amusements. These themes connect Sperry’s work back to the earlier advice literature for women by Napheys and Duffey, which also focused on health rather than explanations of bodily functions.

By 1897, multiple series of sex education books were in production, and authors based entire careers on their knowledge of sex education and their prestige as educators. One of the most noted for these series was the Self and Sex series published by Lutheran minister Sylvanus Stall and his Vir Publishing house. Stall used his position as a man of God to promote the worth of his series. With his stamp

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45 Lyman B. Sperry, *Confidential Talks with Young Women* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1898), 43.
of approval and the religious undertones of the series, he tried to avoid the censorship and indecency charges that plagued the publications discussing sexual knowledge at the turn of the century while still providing what he deemed the necessary medical and scientific information. Stall created an empire of hygiene books that were sold door-to-door by an army of salesmen. For only a dollar when first published in the 1890s, Americans could purchase these guides that would take them through every stage of life – childhood, adolescence, early marriage, and middle age. In eight books, four each for men and women, Stall’s series purported to steer American men and women through a lifetime of good health and good morals. He was helped by endorsements from many of the notable doctors and reformers of the day. By prefacing his books with testimonials from figures such as Frances Willard of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, other authors, teachers of both children and at universities, Stall ensured that his texts were well supported by leading educators and gained their imprimatur for his mission. Guiding his salesmen through a nearly 400-page book entitled *Successful Selling of the Self and Sex Series*, Stall made a science of marketing directly to a specific audience. His involvement with Christian missionary groups also boosted his sales, and eventually the Self and Sex series would be translated into many languages and sold abroad in Europe and Asia through missionary networks.46

Stall was not the only author and publisher to get into the sex education business. His main competitor was Dr. Winfield Scott Hall. Hall, a native of Illinois, was educated at Northwestern University and in Leipzig, Germany, where he

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received his M.D. He taught biology and physiology at Haverford College and Northwestern. Like Stall, his religious background and beliefs had an impact on his work, and he served as director of the Presbyterian Board of Christian Education. As a doctor, Hall had the opportunity to provide the medical information that was necessary for sex education, though his work, like Stall's, was still founded upon Protestant moral values. He would go on to write about fifty books on hygiene, sex education, and the like, including works for the Edward Bok Books of Self-Knowledge for Young People and Parents. Though a medical professional, Hall's advice in these books often lagged behind the current medical knowledge and understanding of physiology and sexuality. Unlike many other doctors after the turn of the century, he continued to encourage sexual continence both outside of and within marriage and discouraged masturbation as unhealthy and morally wrong, even continuing to claim a link between masturbation and madness, a belief that was going out of vogue in this period. Despite these faults, he still found much success in his many publications, though never quite reaching the sales numbers of Sylvanus Stall and his book series.47

The Self and Sex books for men were written by Stall himself, but he turned to female physicians to produce the texts for women. The most notable of these authors was Dr. Mary Wood-Allen, who devoted a long medical career to educating families about health and hygiene. Wood-Allen was born in rural Ohio in 1841 and spent her childhood caring for her sickly mother. At the age of 14, she began teaching music in order to earn money for college, and by 1861 she graduated from Delaware College in Ohio. She married a fellow Delaware graduate and began life as

47 "Dr. Winfield Hall, Educator, 81, Dies" New York Times, October 4, 1942, 52; Pierce 162-171.
a wife and mother. However, after her first son’s death from childhood illness and the birth of her second sickly son, she and her husband traveled abroad for several years, during which both attended medical courses in Vienna and Berlin. In 1875, Wood-Allen graduated with her medical degree from the University of Michigan and soon after gave birth to her daughter Rose. Rose would later join Wood-Allen in her sex education work, becoming a writer and publication editor in her own right. In Rose’s biography of her mother, she writes that Wood-Allen “found great need of instructing [patients] in the simplest laws of hygiene. To cure seemed to her the smallest part of a doctor’s calling. She felt that it was her place to teach her patients how to avoid sickness.” This dedication led to the beginnings of a lifelong speaking career, in which she addressed mothers and families about hygiene concerns. Working with the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, Wood-Allen’s lecture circuits often brought her into contact with inquiring mothers who wished to learn the best ways to address children’s questions about reproduction, sexual health, and other topics. By 1892, she had published two books, Teaching Truth and Child-Confidence Rewarded. These brought her to the attention of Stall, who asked her to write What a Young Girl Ought to Know (1897) and What a Young Woman Ought to Know (1898). She continued to publish her own books separate from the series, such as Almost a Man (1895), its companion Almost a Woman, and a new edition of Teaching Truth in 1902. Though it is impossible to determine sales figures or the circulation of these books in public libraries, Wood-Allen’s books must have been in high demand solely based upon the multiple editions and printings that many of her titles went through.

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By the time of her death in 1908, Mary Wood-Allen had made a profound impact upon both American mothers and children and the actual business of sex education, and her books continued being published in new editions into the 1910s.

Wood-Allen’s *Almost a Woman* introduced the other dominant form of sex education books. Instead of directly instructing girls and young women about their bodies like Sperry had, Wood-Allen often used fictional narratives to instruct them about the same topics. She told the story of Helen Wayne, a thirteen-year-old girl whose parents have a series of talks with her about the meanings of becoming a woman, focusing on how she is expected to behave with boys, her girl friends, and what great things she is expected to do as a woman. Reprinted in the first two decades of the twentieth century as part of Wood-Allen’s “Teaching Truth” series, this book became an example of how storytelling could convey a doctor’s message as effectively as the often more scientific, written lecture style of other authors.49

After Sperry and Wood-Allen came a long line of other writers and works that addressed these same issues. Common themes and discussions throughout the texts include physical changes, often using biological explanations of nature to transition to descriptions of human anatomy and function. One example of this approach is found in *Confidences: Talks with a Young Girl Concerning Herself*, which Dr. Edith B. Lowry wrote “with the desire to aid mothers in giving the necessary instruction to their daughters.” Aimed at girls from ten to fourteen, Lowry hoped that mothers would give the book to their daughters, or read it aloud with them.50 The book’s conceit is a conversation addressed to a little girl named Violet, narrated by her

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mother, and shares with Violet the miracle of flower and bird reproduction. By
drawing connections between flowers, birds, and little girls, the mother tells Violet
how she too has ovaries full of eggs that can become babies after growing in her nest,
also known as the womb. Motherhood in this volume is portrayed as the natural
desire for girls, with women who choose not to become mothers described as
perverse: “Little girls love their doll babies, and spend much time in caring for them,
but as girls grow into womanhood they desire real babies. A woman who does not
desire children has had her mind perverted by false ideas or fear.” Although this
book was written for younger girls, this blunt statement summarized what Lowry and
other authors believed and intended to convey, that the highest and most noble
occupation for a woman was motherhood. Ironically, Lowry herself spent her entire
adult life outside of the home. After six years as a teacher, she became a nurse in
1905 and earned her medical degree in 1907 from the Bennett College of Medicine
and Surgery. Though married to fellow doctor Richard Lambert in 1911, she
continued her public life, serving as acting chief of the Bureau of Hospitals for the
U.S. Department of Health during World War I. These details from her life show
the inherent contradictions of female physician authors who spent their careers
instructing young girls that their highest aspirations should be to become wives and
mothers.

Though this thesis identifies them as one of the earliest forms of “sex
education,” interestingly enough these books often glaze over definitions of sex

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51 Ibid., 44.
52 Mark Caldwell, A Short History of Rudeness: Manners, Morals, and Misbehavior in Modern
America, (New York: Picador, 1999), 221; “Dr. Edith B. Lowry: Author of Hygiene Books Was a
Leader in Public Health Work” New York Times, March 9, 1945, 19. It is unclear if Lowry ever had
children, with her obituary noting that she was survived by a nephew and mentioned no children.
activities and the possibility of pleasure, instead focusing on descriptions of the function of female sex organs as the means to becoming mothers. Descriptions of conception explain that children contain genetic material from both parents usually without explicitly stating how the sperm and the egg meet. In *Father and Daughter: A Story for Girls* and *Daughter, Mother and Father: A Story for Girls*, Dr. Winfield Scott Hall does just this. The first book tells of Margaret Dawson, a doctor’s daughter, who goes every Saturday morning to her father’s office to learn the biology of life with her best friend Bertha. The second concentrates on conversations between Margaret and her parents, covering topics from menstruation to dating habits to proper relations with her fiancé. In this later book, Margaret asks her mother about the experiences of two separate girls from school. Both young women have recently given birth to children, but one is disparaged within their community while the other is celebrated. Mrs. Dawson takes this opportunity to describe how eggs are inseminated. As she explains, “this fertilizing of the egg in the human being requires a physical contact between the sex organs of the father and the sex organs of the mother. Furthermore...it requires nine months after this physical contact before the baby is developed and ready to be born.” Margaret quickly understands that children should not be born until at least nine months after marriage, explaining why the girls at school look down upon one new mother. Margaret tells her mother emphatically, “Why, mamma, I’d rather die.” By setting up motherhood as “the most sacred relationship in all human experience,” Mrs. Dawson explains that

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55 Ibid., 20.
premarital sex “of course, [is] not according to our social customs and as a consequence the parents are subject to criticism.”\textsuperscript{56} Wood-Allen tells a similar story in \textit{Almost a Woman}. Ada Lee and Edith Chenowyth are the same age, were in the same class in school, and even sang together at their graduation. Both have babies, but “now [Edith] has a baby and every one scorns her, while Ada has one and she is honored and loved.” The answer, of course, lies in marriage: Edith had a child out of wedlock, while Ada is properly married.\textsuperscript{57}

Wood-Allen’s narrative in \textit{Almost a Woman} has Helen Wayne learn about the reproductive process from her mother. Mrs. Wayne explains that “if, when the ovum starts from the ovary to make its way through the tube, the spermatozoa are deposited at the mouth of the uterus, they will find their way up into the cavity, and if one meet an ovum and enters into it, a new life is begun...You can understand that, for the spermatozoa to be placed where they can find their way into the uterus, means a very close and familiar relation of the man and woman.”\textsuperscript{58} Though more detailed than most descriptions of sexual intercourse in other texts, Wood-Allen still fails to explain the actual mechanics of the act, though she does say, through Mrs. Wayne, that after a loving couple has been pronounced man and wife by a clergyman and are formally married, “it is perfectly proper for them to do what before would not have been proper.”\textsuperscript{59}

Books targeted at older young women were slightly more explicit about sexual relations. Like discussed in the epigraph to this thesis, Edith B. Lowry also

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 20-21.  
\textsuperscript{57} Wood-Allen, \textit{Almost a Woman}, 61.  
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 63.  
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
believed that women were entering into marriage without sexual knowledge and that this would be detrimental to their physical and mental health. She wrote, "It would be considered very immodest for a girl to discuss such matters. She does not feel free even to talk with her mother or other adviser, and so she goes to the altar ignorant of many things she should know...Had she been taught what to expect, much of the unhappiness of married life might have been avoided."  

She went on to explain the basic workings of sexual intercourse within the bounds of fertility: "Before pregnancy can take place there must be a meeting and fusion of the vital elements of the two sexes...It is brought about by coitus, by means of which the semen of the male is deposited in the vagina of the female." Though providing a little more information than other accounts, such technical explanations give little indication of any pleasure that could be obtained through such an act or even that it could be performed outside the bounds of reproduction.

Menarche itself is a common topic in these books and is often celebrated as a sign of maturation and a step on the way to becoming a mother. Through the turn of the century, physicians were still not entirely sure of the purpose or function of menstruation; it was not until at least the 1920s that physicians identified hormones like estrogen and began to understand their effects on women. Even G. Stanley Hall, the expert on adolescence, was perplexed by menstruation, saying in 1904, "Precisely what menstruation is, is not very well known." But though its purpose was not understood, the authors of these sex education books did acknowledge it as a clear

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61 Ibid., 74.
sign of a girl maturing into womanhood. In the medical field, regular menstruation was seen as a sign of good health, resulting in great emphasis put on girls’ menstrual cycles. The age at which girls reached menarche was also of great importance; on average, girls in this time period would have their first period somewhere around age sixteen, though the average age began to drop in the last decades of the nineteenth century.63

Within the sex education texts, there is a level of convenience that most likely did not occur for real girls. The first talk that Margaret Dawson has with her mother in Daughter, Mother and Father concerns the onset of puberty. In his biology classes with his daughter in the previous pamphlet, Dr. Dawson had told Margaret that puberty would bring “‘the ugly duckling’ stage of development,” which Margaret recognizes that she is passing through.64 Conveniently, Mrs. Dawson relates that only the night before she and her husband had “agreed that the subject of womahood should be further explained to [Margaret], and while he was frequently requested by mothers to explain it to their daughters, whom they brought to his [medical] office, he could not help but feel that it was really a mother’s duty to her daughter.”65 Using the example of a lilac bush that sits outside of their sewing-room window, Margaret’s mother teaches her about periodic life cycles, specifically for a woman. As she tells Margaret, “When a girl really steps across the threshold from girlhood into womanhood the special experiences that mark that crossing of the threshold into

64 Hall, Daughter, Mother and Father. 4.
65 Ibid., 5.
womanhood are the beginning of a series of periodic changes....When a girl is about 13 years of age—though it may come as early as 12 or even 11 in some girls, and as late as 14 or 15 in others—as a rule, she has her first period."66 She will know this change has come when she finds "a stain on her garments. The garment that is next to her body, perhaps her night-dress, or the garment that she wears during the day will show a stain of blood that has evidently come from her sex organs."67 Mrs. Dawson explains the duration and frequency of periods and explains that the blood comes from the "lining of he mother-room, or uterus."68 Though it may take time to adjust to this cycle, Margaret must "remember...they are your Creator’s preparation of you for future motherhood."69 Only three weeks later, Margaret awakes to find that her mother’s lesson on menstruation was well-timed indeed. When she informs her mother, her mother shows her the drawer in her dresser that is already stocked with disposable sanitary napkins. Mrs. Dawson seems to have thought of everything!70 Other girls in these series have similar experiences, in which they discuss menarche mere days or weeks before they experience it themselves.

Emotional changes are also a focus of these works, instructing girls that puberty brings not only physical changes like menstruation, but greater emotional volatility and sensitivity as well. Dr. Mary G. Hood wrote, "At the time of adolescence, as the girl is growing out of girlhood into womanhood, she is likely to be more emotional, more moody, than she has previously been. She is sometimes irritable; perhaps laughs and cries in the same breath; is extremely sensitive to what

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66 Ibid., 6.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., 7.
69 Ibid., 8.
70 Ibid., 10-12.
older people say; chafes at the restrictions of parents and teachers. She...can not understand why she feels as she does. She simply knows that she is restless and uncomfortable." The main point of passages such as these is to explain the need for control. Rose Woodallen Chapman, daughter of Dr. Mary Wood-Aiken, dedicates a full chapter to the topic of "Gaining Self-Control." She declares sensitivity to be a motherly instinct, allowing women to "respond quickly to the cry of the little baby. The thought that it may be suffering in some way moves the real mother to instant attention." Not only should girls learn to control their emotions for their own happiness, but also because these emotions will eventually affect their children. According to early twentieth-century medical understanding about pregnancy and heredity, a mother's emotions, actions, and even thoughts could influence children in utero. Chapman emphasized this point with an example meant to instill fear in her readers: "There are cases on record of babies who have had convulsions and died because their mothers had not learned how to exercise self-control, how to avoid such deadly emotions as anger and hatred." By controlling emotions both during pregnancy and after, readers could prevent their children from inheriting their negative emotions and their resulting traits.

Discussion of emotions inevitably included discussion of girls' relationships, both with female friends and young men. One common theme in these books was the danger of girlhood friendships. While it was entirely appropriate for young women to have female friends, the level of intimacy of such friendships was a concern for

73 Chapman, 40.
advice writers. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, who has studied homosocial relationships in the nineteenth century, notes, “a female world of varied and yet highly structured relationships appears to have been an essential aspect of American society.”74 In her study of nineteenth-century girlhood, Jane Hunter affirms the importance of female friendship, especially for girls in boarding schools and high schools. According to Hunter, “the rituals of boarding school life centered around the making and breaking of special friendships, known variously as ‘affinities,’ ‘specials,’ or ‘darlings’ and increasingly as either ‘smashes’ or ‘crushes.’” Evidence of these relationships appear in the writings of young girls, from diaries to letters to poetry.75 Concern over the intimacy of these relationships is reflected in the sex education books. In Almost a Woman, Helen Wayne and her mother observe two young girls through their front window “with their arms about each other’s waists.” Helen asks, “Don’t you think it silly for girls to be so ‘spooney’?”76 Her mother tells her “such morbid friendships are dangerous, both to the health and morals.” She specifically condemns girls who hug, hold hands, and even perform mock weddings and call each other man and wife, and she warns her daughter “you may feel assured that the relation is unnatural and that the drain upon the nervous system is very great.”77 She gives the example of one girl who “actually destroyed the health of a number of girls in a school” through these types of relationships; “she always had one devoted friend who could not live without her…and it is said that [one] girl took her own life from jealousy” over this

76 Wood Allen, Almost a Woman, 40.
77 Ibid., 41.
However, Mrs. Wayne does not discount the importance of friends, saying she “should be pleased to see [Helen] having a sincere, womanly, noble affection for another girl, one which would not waste itself in sentimentality.”

Through this exchange, Wood-Alien makes it clear that a line exists between respectable female friendship and more “dangerous” interactions. These discussions reflect a greater concern at the time over homosocial relationships. The most extreme manifestations of this fear were found in sensationalized newspaper stories starting in the 1890s that told of inappropriate girl relationships, which crossed boundaries of proper heterosexuality into lesbian relationships and eventually resulted in murder. Lisa Duggan identifies this as an “influential cultural narrative” which “[portrayed] romance between women as dangerous, insane, and violent.” Importantly, the “Sapphic slasher” threatened privileged white womanhood, the precise targeted audience of these sex education books. By warning against close female friendships and their dangerous, possibly even murderous, consequences, these authors and their parental audiences are also shoring up normative ideas of female heterosexuality, in which lesbian relationships cannot exist.

Mary Wood-Alien was not alone in relaying these fears of homosocial relationships; examples of these worries are found in the work of other authors. Dr. Wood-Alien’s daughter also describes the dangers of these too-intimate friendships. Chapman says:

“It is easy to tell when you are getting into one of these sentimental relationships. When you find that you want to be leaning on your friend,
indulging constantly in demonstrations of your affection; when you can't bear
to be separated from her, even for a few hours, and during her absence want to
give yourself up to longing for her return; when, in a word, you care more for
the enjoyment of those emotions that her presence excites than you do for
anything else at just this time, you may know that there is something
unhealthy in this relationship.  

This account of “crushes” aptly describes the ways that young girls would act with
one another. Hunter describes relationships that included dates for walking, buggy
rides, dancing, even sleeping together in the same bed. Dr. Mary G. Hood too
emphasized the dangers of these friendships, which “frequently end disastrously in
nervous weakness...[such a relationship] has in it the seeds of weakness, pain,
disappointment and sorrow.”

This closeness led to fears of homosocial relationships progressing into more
dangerous areas. Chapman describes girls who have “accidentally discovered
[pleasure] in their relations with each other...all unknowingly, [they] have wrought
havoc in that sacred part of their natures, undermined their health, and thus partially
unfitting themselves for the noble work of motherhood.” Further, they may try to
recreate these feelings physically. “So unnatural and wrong is this that it is known as
self-abuse, and no girl of ideals who understands these things would ever allow
herself to form such a habit.” She goes on to describe how girls who have
participated in this “form of self-indulgence” may try to lead others into temptation.

Other authors chose to be much more blunt about masturbation. Dr. Caroline

81 Chapman, 30.
82 Hunter, 179-192.
83 Hood, 143.
84 Chapman 31.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid. These fear and warnings were never explicit about homosexuality and did not relate
knowledge about intimate physical relationships between girls. The most explicit implication is this
reference to learning about self-abuse from female friends.
Wormeley Latimer advised, “Except for the care required by cleanliness the sex organs should never be handled.”87

The evils of masturbation were often couched in terms of danger to the reproductive organs. For younger readers, such as in Lowry’s Confidences, this was often subtly addressed. After young Violet has been taught about the (literal) birds and the bees, and learned about her own “nest,” her mother warns her of the dangers of “injury to the nest.” Her mother says to her, “You, who know how necessary is every part of the body, would not allow anyone to injure any part of it, especially the part that contains the mother nest...Think how badly you would feel, when it came time for you to marry and have a baby, if you found the nest had been so injured that you could not have any.” She continues, “You know, the nest as well as the rest of the body belongs to you alone, and no one has a right to injure it, but sometimes girls...do things that are harmful.”88 Not only should Violet protect her nest, she should know that other children have not been instructed as she has, showing that the fears of peer groups extended from female friendships to the sharing of inappropriate information. “Sometimes [uneducated children] have very wrong ideas and will do many things that are harmful. Not only that, but they will try to get you to do them. Some little girls who do not understand what their organs are for will even play with them, for they think it gives them a pleasurable sensation. I am sure they would not do this if they understood that by so doing they were injuring the precious nest.”89

Here Lowry related a message common to many of these books—information received from peers was not to be relied upon, when mothers were more

87 Latimer, 48.
88 Lowry, Confidences, 90.
89 Ibid., 91.
knowledgeable and willing to answer questions properly. Additionally, as Michel Foucault has informed us, the discussion of sexuality and repression invariably provides knowledge of the actions and behaviors meant to be repressed.90 The “precious nest” discussion may have provided information to these young girls that they never would have gotten from their peers or through self-discovery, possibly subverting the intentions of the educators and children’s parents.

Young women’s relationships with young men were also an issue to be dealt with. The sex education books encouraged social boundaries between girls and boys, and with the increase of public high school education, these boundaries became necessary as young men and women often socialized together.91 In Latimer’s opinion, it was the role of the mother to monitor the friendships of her daughter with both boys and girls. Mothers may be deceived by female friends, such as “the nice well-mannered girl who seems to the mother so desirable a companion” who “may all the time be warping her daughter’s mind along the lines of selfishness, worldliness, or vulgarity, or, worse still, introducing her to a knowledge of evil of which she might otherwise be ignorant for years to come.”92 In contrast, Latimer expected the mothers to be “more on their guard” with male friends, “and less ready to be guided by appearances.” Mothers should ensure that a male friend’s “attentions are suitable in character, respectfully offered, and modestly received. Without this watchfulness on a mother’s part, a girl may find herself in difficulties.”93 However, it was not entirely

91 According to Jane Hunter, girls made up 53 percent of secondary school students in 1872, and increased to 57 percent in 1900, including about 60 percent of public school students. Hunter, 170.
92 Latimer, 56.
93 Ibid., 56-57.
the role of the mother to police the behavior of her daughter. When Wood-Allen’s Margaret Dawson runs to her parents for permission to take an unchaperoned automobile ride, her mother leaves it up to her and her best friend Bertha to decide if this would be appropriate. They decide it would not be proper without an older person to accompany them.

Margaret’s parents in *Daughter, Mother and Father* also teach her about appropriate behavior as she grows older. When a sophomore in high school, Margaret takes a sleigh ride with four couples and a chaperone, escorted by her friend Bertha’s brother John. While John’s behavior is entirely gentlemanly, another young man on the journey makes “remarks that were not in the best taste” and puts his arm around his date, culminating in “a scuffle with [his date] in his attempt to steal a kiss.”94 Dr. Dawson explains to her that the girl’s behavior encouraged the young man, reflecting the sexual double standard that made it the responsibility of the young woman to reject a young man’s inappropriate advances. Familiarity such as that demonstrated by the couple above was generally warned against in other sex education books as well. Hood told her readers to “expect your young men friends to be courteous as well as friendly, and to treat you with respect... The formal expression of courtesy helps to prevent extreme familiarity, which so readily exceeds its bounds.”95

Four years later, Hall’s character Margaret has finished high school, spent a year at “a school of domestic science and household arts,” a year traveling through Europe, and has become engaged to Bertha’s brother John. They decide to wait a

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94 Hall, *Daughter, Mother and Father*, 32-33.
95 Hood, 141-142.
year to get married so that they have time to prepare. She asks her mother for advice, saying, “As an engaged couple I suppose that our relations may be somewhat different from what they have been as simple friends.” Mrs. Dawson allows that they may exchange “Society’s Sacred Symbol of Protection, the embrace” and “Society’s Sacred Symbol of Affection, the kiss.” However, they should protect against arousing “a sex excitement” through these actions. Because of their long engagement, they should be more aware of these dangers and limit the embraces and kisses, since “these demonstrations of love may easily start a sex excitement.” Her second suggestion is that John only visit Margaret once a week during the engagement. Hood echoed these concerns for excitement, warning readers “a girl may thoughtlessly excite in her friend physical feeling that can only with difficulty be controlled. Maidenly reserve, complete modesty, will teach a girl how to respect the personality of her friend and will enable her to be fair to him.”

The ultimate goal of friendships with young men was portrayed as finding a husband, and girls were encouraged to choose their friends wisely, as they might eventually find themselves in love with a young male friend. These lessons on heterosocial and heterosexual relationships were where eugenics often entered the discussion, with proper selection of a mate a vital part of ensuring that the following generation would be strong and pure. Dr. Winfield Scott Hall and his coauthor and wife Jeannette Hall explained it simply, using two terms, positive and negative eugenics. Positive eugenics described “conditions that accentuate desirable qualities,” with negative eugenics meaning “the avoiding of the disadvantageous and

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96 Hall, *Daughter, Mother and Father*, 43 (italics in original).
97 Ibid., 43-44.
98 Hood, 142-143.
unfortunate in the development of the individual.”99 The Halls spent much more time on the negative, explaining, “There are certain unfortunate impairments, physical or mental, that should be studiously avoided in the mating of human individuals; such, for example, as hereditary insanity, syphilis, imbecility, degeneracy, criminality and chronic alcoholism.” The Halls claim that if a parent has any of these, “their offspring will certainly be profoundly influenced by this impairment, perhaps three-fourths of their children being distinctly sub-normal,” suggesting that young people should ask potential spouses for family histories to know the likelihood of emotional or psychological problems in potential offspring.100

Wood-Alien also addressed heredity in her books for older girls. In What a Young Woman Ought to Know, she explains, “each individual has not only his human inheritance, his racial inheritance and his national inheritance, but he also has an endowment of family traits.”101 She emphasizes, as do the Halls, the prevalence of hereditary alcohol and tobacco habits, suggesting that young women can save their children from these behaviors through their own actions. “As a young woman you hold great power over the race in yourself, and through your influence over others, especially over young men.”102 Her use of “race” illustrates how sex education for young white women was inherently tied to ideas of whiteness.

Scholarship on whiteness recognizes these ties and has found them in other arena besides sex education; in his work, Julian B. Carter analyzes “the discourses of

100 Ibid., 227 (italics in original).
101 Mary Wood-Alien, What a Young Woman Ought to Know, new revised ed. (Philadelphia: Vir Publishing Company, 1913), 217
102 Ibid., 226.
modern sexuality through which whiteness became normalized and, thereby, hard to see.\footnote{Carter, \textit{The Heart of Whiteness}, 2.} Building upon Gail Bederman’s discussion of whiteness and masculinity, Carter draws attention to connections in the early twentieth century between “normality” and “civilization.”\footnote{Ibid., 4.} Whiteness became the definition of normal, with non-whites and lower classes defining barbarism, and these ideologies would become the basics of eugenics. The sex education books support Carter’s arguments, with Wood-Alien being only one of several authors who used language of racial difference, with the white race at the top of the hierarchy. While eugenics was broadly used to contain deviance and prevent “race suicide,” the sex education books looked much more narrowly at emotional and psychological characteristics. As the Halls and Wood-Alien described, the fate of white middle-class society rested upon the choices that young women made. By choosing appropriate, healthy white husbands, these young girls would ensure the strength and health of the next generation of white children.

The emphasis on motherhood that runs throughout sex education books suggests that though young women were being educated at higher rates than ever before, attended professional and graduate programs, and held various types of employment outside the home during this period, young girls in the white upper- and middle-class were still expected to aspire to nothing more (or less) than being ideal, perfect mothers. As the Halls stated, “Every normal young woman wishes to be a
home-builder,—a wife and mother." Edith Lowry railed against the lack of preparation that many girls received for motherhood and housekeeping:

There must be something wrong with our system of education when the aim of this education seems to be to prepare a girl for a temporary position in an office or store or for a gay social life; and when there is no preparation for the important work of home-making and the rearing of children. A girl would not be expected to run a complicated and delicate piece of machinery without having adequate instruction concerning the necessary care of it. But the girl is allowed to go blindly into marriage and is expected to manage her home and care for her children with practically no preparation.

Ironically, these manifestos of preparing for lives as homemakers were often written by female physicians, who stepped outside this expected role to attend medical school. Some, like Mary Wood-Allen, claimed authority as both a doctor and a mother, with her daughter Rose Woodallen Chapman following in her footsteps to become an author of sex education books. The Halls had different expertise; as they wrote in their preface, the book was “prepared by a teacher-mother and a physician-father as a guide for girls, young women, young wives and young mothers; answering their questions and giving instruction which should guide the young woman into healthy, happy wifehood and proud, efficient motherhood.”

Overall, the sex education books of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offer a wealth of knowledge about prescriptive white, middle- and upper-class girlhood. Although these books cannot prove how girls lived their lives, they can explain how young girls were expected to live their lives in order to stay within the boundaries of normative respectability. By educating these women about their bodies, physical and emotional relationships, and their roles as mothers, the authors—

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105 Hall and Hall, ix.
106 Lowry, Herself, 77.
107 Hall and Hall, x.
physicians, experts, professionals, parents—defined what it was to be a normative white, middle- or upper-class girl at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{108}

They also clearly enter into many of the discourses in the first decades of the twentieth century that expressed fears or concerns over where America was heading. Chief among these were the debates over what women’s role would be in twentieth-century American society. Many saw women’s place as in the home, working for her family’s benefit as a housewife and mother, continuing middle- and upper-class traditions from the previous decades. In contrast, some young women looked to leave the home, whether as working-class women who needed to move to urban areas to support themselves and their families or as women from the privileged classes who looked to better themselves and their communities through education and professional work in fields like medicine and social work. These texts fought against both of these changes, presenting wife and mother as the only roles that young girls and women should aspire to.

Another key discourse was the shoring up of whiteness and white civilization. In a time that Americans feared their nation was being taken over by hordes of working-class, uneducated, un-American peoples, it was imperative that young white women of the middle and upper classes be encouraged to choose husbands who also epitomized the ideals of whiteness, who would pass both positive character traits and light skin to their offspring. Encouraging motherhood as the only life path for girls would also help with these racial concerns, leading to higher birthrates among the white population and ending worries about “race suicide.”

\textsuperscript{108} These specific texts leave working-class, immigrant, or non-white girls sexuality unaddressed, and cannot explain how they learned about anatomy, biology, sexuality, and societal mores in this period.
Tied up in both of these discourses was the central question of women’s sexuality. For the authors of these texts and the parents and others who endorsed them, it was necessary to put forth in writing (and many times, between the various different books) what the proper place of sexuality was for these young women. These ideas shored up older views on sexuality and fought directly against the newer expressions of sexuality that were emerging in the period in the working class. These texts taught girls that sexuality was to be contained within the institution of marriage. Furthermore, sexuality in these texts was explicitly linked to producing children; there was little indication that intimate encounters had any purpose beyond procreation. Not only should sex itself be contained, discussion of the topic was to be restrained to private settings and would be inappropriate with anyone besides those holding the proper knowledge – namely, trusted adults like parents, doctors, or teachers. These books also reinforced ideas of normative heterosexuality, discarding other forms of sexuality as immoral and, even worse, physically dangerous. Something not realized by the authors, though, was the inherent contradiction in discussing sex and its “proper” forms. Just by putting forth this knowledge, both the acceptable forms of sexuality and the unacceptable or dangerous actions that young people could take, they allowed for the possibility of such actions among adolescents. And once the information was put forth, no matter how many warnings authors and parents gave, they could not control how young women would use such information.

More research is needed on these sex education texts. It would be useful to determine how and where these books were distributed, marketed, and who purchased them, which can be achieved in part by researching contemporary advertisements for
publishing houses and bookstores. Other publications that addressed these issues, such as articles in the popular press, would also contribute to this study, along with further research into the sex education authors themselves to illuminate their professional backgrounds and motivations. Further study of the professionalization of medicine and the influence of organizations like the American Medical Association may inform this discussion of medical information and motivations for publishing such material. Additionally, this study does not examine the sex education books for young boys and men that appeared concurrently with books for young women. Identifying themes within the books for young men, often written by the same authors as the books for young women, would provide a more complete picture of how adolescents were expected to behave. Examination of these sources and further research questions into the books’ backgrounds will complete the picture of white, middle- and upper-class sexuality at the turn of the twentieth century.
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