

2012

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California State University, Monterey Bay

Danger in Familiarities: Sex Education and Adolescent Sexuality in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Submitted to:

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May 2012

*In this paper, I focus on the affects of sex education on adolescent sexuality from 1910 until 1940. Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development, I examine how different levels of society changed sex education and the adolescent experience. I analyze texts, movies, and theories of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to find that sex education had no specific affect on the adolescent experience from 1910 until 1940.*

1936 was quite a year for New York City. A massive heat wave overtook the Depression ridden city, and the Summer Olympic in Berlin, Germany gave New Yorkers something to root for. A month before the reelection of Franklin D. Roosevelt, a teen girl and her friends went to a picture show. They enjoyed themselves, talking and laughing through the movie, that is until Alfred Fondler turned around in his seat and slapped the young girl for her constant interruptions. Adults around the country cheered the man; he had shown the young girl that it was not right to ruin the movie for other patrons. The girl, however, disagreed and had the man arrested.<sup>1</sup> The girls felt they were more adults than children, and therefore had the right to be treated as such. These girls found themselves in a debate over the meaning and significance of the time of a life span called adolescence.

With the passage of Compulsory Education and stricter limits on the employment of minors, adolescence took on a new meaning, and began to incorporate new experiences and explorations, which it seemed, had never existed before. Adolescents begin to participate in experiences that are more common with individuals outside of their family unit, specifically peers, changing how they experienced and explored their individual beliefs and feelings. One of the new explorations faced surrounded sex and sexuality. I hope to discover in this capstone is how the sexual education efforts affected how teens viewed sex and sexuality, specifically between 1910 and 1940. Due to budget and time constraints, my research has focused on white,

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<sup>1</sup> "Talking Girl in Film Show Gets Slapped," *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 1936, p. 9.

middle and upper class high school students in the United States because that is the information the most available.

In the United States today, teens seem to have a very relaxed idea about sex and their own sexuality. Shows marketed towards ages 13-25 place a nonchalant spin on sex and send the message that even the possibility of childbirth or disease should not scare teens away from intimate relationships. In MTV's *16 and Pregnant* girls 16 and younger get their own hour of television fame for one night of unprotected sex. Four of the girls from this series have even made a career out of their pregnancies, going on to star in the show *Teen Mom*. These girls set the example that having a baby does not change your life that drastically, friends and dating are still the priority and the grandparents can become the main caretakers of the new infant. For Kourtney Kardashian of E!'s *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, childbirth was no problem at all. Her delivery was taped for the show, and young girls can watch as Kourtney, in no pain, takes her time getting ready to go to the hospital, shaving her legs and doing her full make-up and hair. During the delivery audiences watched as Kourtney, still with no pain, literally pulls her newborn son from her birth canal onto her chest, as easily as she would pick up a T-shirt off the floor. This new son, the result of an unprotected one-night stand with her ex-boyfriend, has only brought Kourtney more fame. While this does show the advanced we have made in sexual conversation, these shows also prove the reward of uninformed sex as a reality show and adoring fans, instead of the real consequences of STDs and children who parents cannot care for. It is important that, as a society, we redirect the discussion on sex back towards the classroom and home, where adolescents can learn about what sex really is and the real consequences and rewards of the act.

Sex education itself is now under debate, as it has been over the last century. Arguments swirl over what should be taught by teachers versus what should be taught at home by parents and family, how religion should affect sexual teachings and who has the right to decide. It is important then to know how we came to this point in history and what changes happened within the educational system to lead the United States to this.

Because of the multiple layers of analysis, Urie Bronfenbrenner's social theory will play a major role in this study. In looking at how social norms changed over time, this social theory will assist me in analyzing why and how the phenomena took place. I will be using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Development Theory allowing me to explore different systems which affected how and why sexual education changed during this period and how that would have affected adolescent understandings of sex.

Urie Bronfenbrenner, a Russian born child psychologist, published his study *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* in 1979. Bronfenbrenner was quickly praised for the work, and psychologists and sociologists saw it as transformative within the world of the social sciences.<sup>2</sup> While his work focuses on the child, I believe it is also applicable to adolescent development.

Bronfenbrenner combined many different areas of study into one model. This model, which he called an Ecological Model of Human Development, explained how many different systems on many different levels interact with the developing individual. His own definition of the model explains it as a

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen J Ceci, "Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005)," *American Psychologist* 61, 2 (2006); 173.

“study of the progressive, mutual accommodations between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which these settings re embedded...”<sup>3</sup>

Bronfenbrenner thought that most studies focused on only one system’s affect on the development of an individual and did not take into account how other settings influence development, or even how interactions between systems and settings shape development. Each system incorporates a broader context, and the aspects within that context that affect any developing personality.

The first system, outside of the individual adolescent, is the microsystem. The microsystem consists of the people who directly interact with and influence the adolescent. This includes parents and family or friends and peers. Each of these groups has a personal and direct relationship with the individual adolescent and therefore most affect the thoughts and ideas of the adolescent. Bronfenbrenner incorporates Kurt Lewin’s theories into his microsystem; that the reality of relationships and interactions within the microsystem does not affect development as much as the perception of the relationship by the developing individual.<sup>4</sup> Just understanding that the relationship between adolescent and parent exists, for example, is not sufficient in understanding how that relationship facilitates development. There must also be an understanding of how each party values and understands that relationship.

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<sup>3</sup> Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 21.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout his model, Bronfenbrenner incorporates Lewin’s theories and relationships. It becomes very clear as he explains each system, that it is equally, if not more, important how relationships are perceived by developing individuals. *Ibid*, 23.

The second system, called the mesosystem, contains the interactions between those in the microsystem, specifically those “in which the developing person actively participates...”<sup>5</sup> This would include how different microsystems interact, others who are involved in overlapping microsystems, and how the developing person interprets the interactions between the microsystems. Not only the interactions between his or her parents and teachers, but also how he or she understands and anticipates those interactions will affect an adolescent.

The exosystem, the third tier of Bronfenbrenner’s model, contains factors that the individual is not “an active participant”<sup>6</sup> but which directly affects the adolescent develops. It is important to understand this system, especially when studying adolescents, because there is so much in their experience that others determine. A school board decides the curriculum, for example, or a parent’s workplace decides family income and possibly even limits the amount of parental involvement.

The largest system in the model is the macrosystem. This would be the structure of the world in which the adolescent lives, any culture, society or norms that create “consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems...”<sup>7</sup> This system, while on the surface seems easy to identify and examine, is actually very complex and can change almost instantly. Many levels form an individual’s culture and society: location, race, gender and socioeconomics. The culture and norms of a white middle-class male living in Eagle Point, Oregon will differ from a Hispanic lower-class female who calls Austin, Texas home. This system can determine many of the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 26.

interactions of the lower systems as well, since laws, both written and unwritten are encompassed within the macrosystem.

The final system, and one added by Bronfenbrenner much later, is the chronosystem. This system brings in the element of time and the “changes and consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also of the environment in which that person lives.”<sup>8</sup> Time becomes an important factor when we consider all the different ways a family or other social structure can change over time. A parent’s death will affect the microsystem of a developing person no matter the age of the individual. However, a parent’s death when the developing child is 4 years old will have vastly different affects than if the parent dies when the child is 15 years old. Time periods, and therefore the chronosystem is the most important system in my historical research because I will be looking at changes over time, and how the time periods changed sex education and adolescent exploration.

Bronfenbrenner also outlines how ecological experimentation and studies should be designed. He states

“An ecological experiment is an effort to investigate the progressive accommodations between the growing human being and its environment through a systematic contrast between two or more environmental systems or their structural components...”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bronfenbrenner added this system in 1984 in a later paper which followed advancements in the ecological model. Mary Gauvain and Michael Cole *Readings on the Development of Children*. (New York, NY: Worth Publishers, 2005), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 35.

My study of the sex education curriculum in the United States and its affects on adolescent exploration of sex does fall into this definition of ecological research. My research will explain not only how sex education changed and grew, but also how communities reacted to this education, and how society itself affected what was and was not taught or how it was received. A combination of all five systems creates a basis in which I write this paper.

With this type of study in mind, in combination with the type of information I hope to find a qualitative method seems the obvious choice for this type of research. According Jennifer Mason, a sociology professor at the University of Leeds, her working definition of qualitative methods includes being

“grounded in a philosophical position... [and] concerned with how the social world is interpreted... [with] methods of data generation which are flexible... [and with] more emphasis on ‘holistic’ forms of analysis and explanation.”<sup>10</sup>

This means that qualitative research is more concerned with assigning a why and how to the phenomena that it studies, instead of just proving that it exists. My “data” is not so much numerical, but written evidence through primary and secondary sources to support my position. Many of my sources focus on how sex education curriculum has changed in schools, and the political and social discussions surrounding it. Others focus on the experience of adolescence, including what is involved in defining adolescence, adolescents’ experiences, questions and

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<sup>10</sup> Mason comes to this definition after researching through various other definitions of qualitative methods and how other scholars see it should be defined. She uses this definition, she says only for her book. I believe this definition is very well thought out and under stable and therefore would like to use it myself. Mason is a sociologist at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. Jennifer Mason. *Qualitative Researching*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 1996), 3-4.

growths. Both of these topics will aid me in not only finding evidence from the time, but also in analyzing why that evidence exists and what it means for the high school students of that time.

This evidence, or primary sources, will be the basic data for my research. I can find this data through a method called archival research, which involves finding primary sources, such as diaries, letters, speeches, pictures and other sources that come straight from the period. Ian Hodder, sings the praises of these documents because they allow for an unbiased telling of the historical narrative. He states that unlike post-moment interviews and observations, in which many try to explain their motives, documents offer the straight account of what happened, what was said, or what was thought, without the interruption of a conscious.<sup>11</sup>

I will be piecing together the documents by comparing them to each other and to scholarly works about what is happening in the society around the document. By using not only what is specifically stated in the document I will be able to infer my findings about early sex education and its affects on the adolescents who were exposed to it.

One of the issues with this type of research is the amount of information available. Archives, because they are kept from the past, are only available if they were saved from the time and are possibly one of a kind and not copied. This combined with my own financial and time constraints, will possibly limit the amount of archives I will be able to find.

Researching adolescents and sex education can become tricky without clearly set definitions. For sex education, that definition comes quite easily. Sex education is anything that was put forward to the community with the purpose of informing or persuading on the matters of

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<sup>11</sup> Ian Hodder. "The Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture" in *Qualitative Research Methods* edited by Darin Weinberg. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 266.

sex and sexuality. The meaning of adolescence, however, does not come so easily, because the term seems to evolve as society evolves. The term or some counterpart of it was used as early as the Renaissance. The “early modern period”, as John Modell and Madaline Goodman classify it, seemed to not have a well-defined adolescence. Instead “youth”, until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was a time period in which children were old enough to contribute to the family’s financial stability but not old enough yet to inherit land and create their own family home. Youths were often “fostered out” meaning they were sent to other families homes to learn skills. This was seen as an important part of raising the children.<sup>12</sup> There did not seem to be an emphasis on the experience of adolescence and of exploration. Without this exploration, youths’ ideas and beliefs about the world around them.

This system mainly took place in Europe, and within the European social systems. As Europeans crossed the sea to the Americas, they brought this system with them. When the Industrial Revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century took hold in the United States, the system began to change. Now that there were new jobs available, the youth did not have to wait to inherit and create their family home. They were able to begin working at an earlier age and stay working longer days.<sup>13</sup> The change from a bound family unit to a peer influenced society began to change, and with the how adolescents learned about and related to the world around them.

G. Stanley Hall was the first to bring up the set idea of adolescence. In his 1905 work *Adolescence: Its Psychology And Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion And Education*. Hall, greatly regarded for his expertise on the subject, wrote a

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<sup>12</sup> Modell, John, and Goodman, Madeline. “Historical Perspectives.” In *At the Threshold: The developing adolescent*, edited by S. Shirley Feldman and Glen R. Elliott., 93–122. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 95-96.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 98.

two volume edition of this work which includes what adolescence is, when it starts and ends, how and why it happens and how it should be dealt with in every aspect of familial and social settings. He very broadly states that adolescence is a “new birth”, one from playful child to responsible adult. He points out that every aspect of life changes when an individual reaches adolescence, as they understand adult life and meaning.<sup>14</sup> Halls work is the foundation not only for this capstone, but also for most of the works in which I pull my information and sources.

Modell and Goodman, based off of historical findings, also give their definition of adolescence as

“an organized set of experiences closely tied to the structure of adult society...[a period] of emergent adult biology that is not quite coordinated with adult roles, of hopes that are not yet seasoned with contact with adult reality, and of peer culture and society that mimic those of adults but without adult ambitions and responsibilities.”<sup>15</sup>

In this definition it is clear that adolescence takes place before adulthood, and allows for experiments and exploration in a safe controlled setting. However, it also forces experiments, which are not always allowed, especially when dealing with sex during adolescence. My own definition, and the definition for this paper will be the time of the life span between the spermarche in boys and menarche in women and financial and social independence in which exploration is the main focus.

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<sup>14</sup> G. Stanley Hall. *Adolescence: Its Psychology And Its Relations To Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion And Education*. (New York, NY: D Appleton and Company, 1905), x.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 93.

The second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought political and social unrest to the United States. The American Victorian Era was ending, and new attitudes about rights were beginning to form. A decade earlier workers' movements began to come forward, demanding fair pay for fair hours, opposing child labor and demanding improvements in working conditions. While these were not new complaints and arguments, they exploded across the country in the early 1900's. They continued throughout the first twenty years of the century, and no workforce was immune to their power.

The Progressive movement focused on the social issues that worried the middle class, like poverty, disease and political and economic unrest. One of the issues the Progressives saw within urban communities was the work of children and adolescents in factories. This work was dangerous and long, and kept the children out of the safety of the home where the newly endorsed nuclear family unit could protect and guide them. The work of adolescent boys could be explained, they would one day have to be the breadwinners for their own nuclear family unit, and the sooner they could reach economic independence, the sooner they could begin to establish that family. For young women however, the workplace was a dangerous and corrupting place, which young adolescent girls had no place in by the 1910s. Jobs took adolescent girls away from learning their later roles of housewife, and corrupted them into delinquency, an issue the Progressive reformers were anxious to confront.

Though Victorian values were out of style, purity and virginity until marriage were still highly treasured by the middle class reformers. The Victorian outlook on the girls who gave up this treasure was pity and sorrow; they were seen as victims of the world around them, too weak to protect themselves. However, the college-educated, female Progressive reformers did away

with this notion, insisting instead that these girls were delinquents who needed guidance from mothers at home and teachers in school.<sup>16</sup> The girls who worked were exposed to moral vices of other girls around them, and were asked to participate in the adult world before they were mature enough to understand their decisions.

The solution to the promiscuity issues Progressives saw came in the form of Child Labor and Compulsory Education/Attendance Laws. These laws, enacted and enforced by state governments, worked to get children under the age of 15 out of the workplace and into the classroom. According to Adriana Lleras-Muney, an economic scholar out of UC Los Angeles, in her paper “Were Compulsory Attendance and Child Labor Laws Effective? An analysis from 1915 to 1939” shows that “legally requiring a child to attend school for one more year, either by increasing the age required to obtain a work permit or by lowering the entrance age, increased educational attainment by about 5%.”<sup>17</sup> Since 5% is not much as far as attrition rates, the laws were not as effective as educators and legislatures wanted. However, these laws did create a system, in which junior high and high schools opened to the middle and lower socioeconomic class. Before this shift, these schools had only been available to the very wealthy. School was still expensive, with shoes, books and supplies in constant rotation; however, the publicly funded schools were able to grow, since they did not require tuition. Adolescents at this time however, did not necessarily need to attend schools to get a sexual education.

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<sup>16</sup> Mary E. Odem. *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and policing adolescent female sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920*. (Chapel Hill, NC: the University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 95.

<sup>17</sup> This percentage is based on white students only. Lleras-Muney also examines African American students in her report, which I choose not to include because I could not find enough data on the minority adolescent experience during 1910-1940. Adriana Lleras-Muney. “Were Compulsory Attendance and Child Labor Laws Effective? An analysis from 1915 to 1939” *Journal of Laws and Economics*, 45:2 (2002): pg. 401.

In 1915, Dr. Henry Guernsey re-released an updated version of his 1882 pamphlet *Plain Talks on Avoided Subjects*. The pamphlet is meant to help parents explain puberty and sex to adolescents however, it only focuses on the life cycle and biological growth of humans. When he does talk about sexual topics, he forbids them, thinking they will lead to the “secret vice of the worst kind” (i.e. masturbation). Even with parents or doctors, touching can lead an adolescent to “animal passions” and children can be “ruined forever.” For girls, Guernsey is even harsher about the amount of pleasure they can receive. He indicates that women should find no pleasure in any kind of sex, and that their pleasure should come from pleasing their husbands domestically. For those unmarried, genitals should be ignored and pleasure should come from school and home tasks.<sup>18</sup>

For those adolescents who did attend school, sexual education classes were beginning to pop up in urban schools. In Chicago for example, Ella Flagg Young brought in local doctors to teach her classes about cleanliness and venereal diseases during the 1913-1914 school year. She split her class along gender lines as well, to uphold the honor of her students. Parents did not appreciate this method and wanted teachers who were already comfortable with their students to teach this awkward subject.<sup>19</sup> Yet, the world was about to change drastically and the roles of this young age group were about to shift.

When World War I broke out, the United States did not immediately send their military over to fight in the trenches. However, after the Zimmerman telegram the U.S. entered the war in 1917. When the Selective Service Law was passed, millions were drafted and sent to Europe to

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<sup>18</sup> M.E. Melody and Linda M Peterson. *Teaching America about Sex: Marriage Guides and Sex Manuals from the Late Victorians to Dr. Ruth*. (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 37.

<sup>19</sup> Susan K. Freeman. “Facts of Life and More: Adolescent Sex and Sexuality Education.” In *Adolescent Sexuality: A historical Handbook and Guide* edited by Carolyn Cocca, 45-63. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006, 49.

fight beside French and British troops deep inside the disease-ridden trenches that stretched across the European landscape. As the troops departed they were given a special sexual education, propaganda to keep them healthy enough to die for their country. In past wars, soldiers had been encouraged to “exercise their sexual muscles” in order to fight with more enthusiasm in the fields. The American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA) stated, “Venereal disease is the greatest single factor in the non-effective rate of the Army.”<sup>20</sup> The government formed the Committee on Training Camp Activities to create a curriculum that would keep soldiers from following their passions into the arms of diseased women. This would be the first government funded sex education program in the United States, and they included slides, movies, plays and pamphlets.

The troops won the war, and came home to warm welcome. The prizes they brought home however started to spread throughout the United States, and sexually transmitted diseases became a new homeland war front. The ASHA, finished protecting the soldiers abroad, released a series of poster campaigns. The first series of posters was released for boys in 1918, called “Keeping Fit”. The beginnings of this series taught young boys about hygiene and exercises, the basics of health and wellness. Number 14 emphasizes that boys should enjoy playing sports and being outside with their friends. It also explains the “self-abuse” (masturbation) is a “selfish, childish and stupid habit” which can “hinder a boy’s progress towards vigorous manhood.”<sup>21</sup> Number 17 reinforces that “Continued thinking about sex matters is harmful.”<sup>22</sup> Just as Dr.

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<sup>20</sup> Robin E. Jensen. *Dirty Words: The Rhetoric of Public Sex Education, 1870-1924*. (Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 71.

<sup>21</sup> “Images of adolescent sexuality” In *Adolescent Sexuality: A historical Handbook and Guide* edited by Carolyn Cocca, 45-63. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006, 137.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 138.

Guernsey had stated three years before, masturbation was a harmful practice. It was explained to adolescents that it would harm their growth and hurt their ability to become a functioning and productive adult.

For girls, the propaganda was no better. Their series of posters, released in 1922, spends much time on the biological process of reproduction. Numbers 17, 22 and 24 all explain what will happen inside a young girl's body as she begins to menstruate, how pregnancy occurs, and the very basics of birth.<sup>23</sup> Number 34 warns women against "chance acceptances", or men who woo unmarried women and lead them into a life of moral corruption, making them unsuitable for later marriage. It was poster Number 33 in the female's series would prove to be the telling of the decade that lay ahead.

Poster number 33 in the female half of the American Social Hygiene Association's series pictures a couple dancing, and is meant to teach the correct dancing posture with a partner. The poster is entitled, "Danger in Familiarities" and dancing could be a quick and easy way to become quite familiar with someone in a short amount of time. The danger came when those familiarities began to break down the "conventions...society has built to protect you and the race."<sup>24</sup> As the 1920s progressed, it was easy to see just why this would be an issue for young adults in the United States.

The Roaring Twenties seemed to explode with new life and passion. Jazz boomed and the place to be was at dance halls and speakeasies dancing and having a good time. The entire

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 144-146.

<sup>24</sup> In this poster "race" does not necessarily lead to nationality or ethnicity, but rather civilized society. Ibid, 147.

1920's were about rebellion. Gangsters ran wild and the Prohibition movement's Amendment 18 still held strong. Adults rebelled against government and social expectations, and adolescents were happy to follow right behind them. According to Paula S. Fass the '20's is the beginning of a distinct youth subculture. This subculture developed from the increased number of college bound adolescents, isolated to their campuses and therefore forced to determine their own morality and values. While Fass only focuses on the wealthy elite, she also points out that a new "petting" trend emerged on college campuses. "Petting" was, and very much still is, a way for adolescents to experiment sexually, beginning to understand pleasure and role of sex in a relationship. "Necking" also became widely popular, this time with high school age students.<sup>25</sup> They learned all of these new behaviors from each other however, and not from teachers at school or parents at home.

Sex education in the 1920s had still not taken off as a valuable part of the school day curriculum. Mary Ware Dennett and Maurice A. Bigelow both tried a new technique for bringing sex education into the classroom. During the sex education lesson, they did not split their students into gendered groups, but taught both sexes about the entire sexual process together. They also stated much earlier. Young children in grammar school were taught about the natural need for sexual intercourse through the "birds and the bees". Once in junior high teachers explained to students how puberty would begin to affect their bodies and personalities, something they found easy to relate to. High school students, who were still seen as beginning adults, were taught about the adult responsibilities of sexual relationships including when, where

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<sup>25</sup> Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: America's youth in the 1920's*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 129.

and the consequences for engaging in these acts.<sup>26</sup> Educators can still find the traces of Dennett and Bigelow's system today in the science curriculum of some states.

Dennett, in addition to her revolutionary teaching methods, found herself engrossed in the birth control movement. Her accomplice, and sometimes rival for the leadership of the campaign was Margret Sanger. Sanger spent most of the 1920's writing books and pamphlets arguing in favor of reproductive rights for women. Where Dennett focused on education, Sanger focused on the freedom, birth control would allow women. In all three of her 1920's books (*Women and the New Race* [1920], *The Pivot of Civilization* [1922], and *Happiness in Marriage* [1926]), Sanger makes it a point to show that birth control would allow women to shed their submissive sexual roles and gain control of their relationships.<sup>27</sup> She does not mention adolescents in her works, but does believe in the pursuit of knowledge about sexual matters, including in schools.

In 1926, Joseph Collins, M.D. released *A Doctor Looks at Love and Life*, a challenge to past ideas. In his text, he shocks with his theory that masturbation is not a sin, but in fact medically necessary. While he does not spend any of the book talking about the mechanics of sexual intercourse, he does use science to show how masturbation is important on both physical and psychological levels. He states that it is a way to release sexual repressions that can build up in the body and become harmful. This theory of course goes against accepted social beliefs and the theological values of the time. However, Collins take his treason two steps further, insisting that in the future "sexual morality" will be determined by science, not the church. His text is also the holds the first discussions of homosexuals. He discusses homosexuals as a zoologist would

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<sup>26</sup> Freeman, "Facts of Life and More," 49.

<sup>27</sup> Melody and Peterson, *Teaching America about Sex*, 51.

discuss apes, as advanced, but mentally just not up to average.<sup>28</sup> Collins, despite his views on masturbation, is clear that any sexual acts should take place within a marriage, and focuses very little on educating the masses on sexual relationships.

On October 29, 1929, the Dow Jones plummeted and the United States began a decade long journey through the Great Depression, the worst depression in the countries history. The unemployment rate across the country grew and 4 million workers, ages 14 to 24 were looking for work.<sup>29</sup> With no jobs, adults pushed adolescents out of the way to get the remaining jobs, and the young adults were forced to stay in school longer. High schools became a common experience and became a viable and easy way to get information out to the American adolescents. The new full high schools focused on how to get the students jobs after they graduated. The New Deal brought trade school classes and extracurricular clubs to schools to help the students begin to learn a trade they could excel in.<sup>30</sup>

With the growth of high school enrollment, the adolescents' experience began to normalize. Students and teachers developed expectations about what should be taught how it should be received. Theories developed about the best way to teach adolescents, and especially how to help them grow into the adults they would soon become. Many educators saw high school as a safe, innocent area in which students could explore and experiment with a safety net of adult supervision.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>29</sup> Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History*. (New York: BasicBooks, 1996), 36.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 35.

These individuals began teaching sex education classes and seminars their way. They created curriculums with like-minded people, collaborating with local social hygiene committees and other educators. Their seminars were not just open to the high school students they taught during the day. Many programs were held in the evening off of school grounds, partially so the entire community could be involved, but also because most programs did not receive support from their school boards or districts. Because of the lack of support, most program workers kept their heads down, so much so that in an early 1940's study by John Newton Baker about the availability of sex education, many were not recorded.<sup>31</sup>

These programs used every form of media to get information out to the community. Most of the texts available surrounding sex in the 1930s focused on marriage. Theodore H. Van de Velde seems the expert on sexuality in marriage, writing three books during this decade. Van de Velde's trilogy focuses on saving marriages he believes were torn apart by the oversexualized 1920's, beginning with the very problem of sex. His first and second books, *Ideal Marriage* (1930) and *Sexual Tensions in Marriage* (1931), Van de Velde the procreation should be the main focus of sex in a healthy marriage, and argues against Sanger's birth control movement. The views, he affirms, are based in Christian values. It is not until his third book *Fertility and Sterility in Marriage* (1931) that he parts himself from the church, not due to changes in beliefs on sex, but because he now believed the Church to be an "illusion". In fact, his ideals in this book are consistent with his previous two works, with the exception of his stance on birth control. Van de Velde now admits he is in favor of more methods of birth control than just the "cycle method", or the method of timing a woman's menstruation to avoid sex during ovulation.

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<sup>31</sup> Susan K. Freeman, *Sex Goes to School: Girls and Sex Education Before the 1960s*. (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 46.

In a revised edition of *Ideal Marriage* released in the 1960's, Van de Velde's trilogy is credited with being one of the most profound classical works on sex and relationships.<sup>32</sup>

Movies about the consequence of immoral sex became popular in the 1930s. The movies normally surrounded a main male, who finds himself seduced by a corrupted, sexually deviant young woman. The hero contracts a venereal disease, normally syphilis or gonorrhea, which results in the ruin of his and his family's lives. *Damaged Lives* (1933) and *Damaged Goods* (1938) both follow this pattern, *Damaged Lives* ending in the death of the hero's lover, and *Damaged Goods* ending in the death of the hero's wife and newborn child, all three because of the fear of syphilis.<sup>33</sup> Syphilis was a major American epidemic by the 1930s and in 1932; the government sanctioned the controversial Tuskegee Prison Experiment, which tested treatments of the horrible disease.

The research on the history of sex education and the evolution of adolescence both exist in separate schemes, each focusing on its own purpose. In the history of sex education we see the change from soldiers directed to public directed. Sex education began as a way to keep soldiers on the front lines long enough to win a Great War in Europe. Eventually though it became necessary to protect the civilians at home after the war ended. Though schools did not seem to have many sex education programs, the beginnings of modern sex education can be found in the pioneer work of Ella Flagg Young and Mary Dennett.

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<sup>32</sup> Melody and Peterson, *Teaching America about Sex*, 110.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Eberwein, *Sex Ed: Film, Video, and the Framework of Desire*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 21.

Adolescence, in itself is also a fairly new concept, a little over 100 years old. However, just in the first thirty years of its acknowledged existence, the experience of adolescence changed dramatically. It begins as young adults chooses a life path; some were afforded the luxury of high school and college, while others had to work. It grew into its own culture, lost in an age of Jazz music and rebellion in the 1920's. The adolescent experience finally found its way to the classroom, then to the beginnings of the modern adolescence.

Due to the long process of getting adolescents into the classroom, sex education did not focus on teaching a school curriculum. Sex education focused on the entire population of the United States, adults expected adolescents in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to follow the adult example as they found their own independence. In the 1910s, society treated adolescents with adult responsibilities, meaning those who stayed home would be exposed to the "Keeping Fit" poster series, and expected to learn from it what any adult should be and do. Those adolescents who became soldiers followed the instructions of their adult commanding officers and the example of their fellow adult soldiers, keeping themselves clean and ready for battle.

The rebellious culture of the 1920's benefitted the adolescent, who was now able to go out and enjoy life on the town. Those who went to school gained the benefit of early sex education, and those who worked learned quickly what society expected from their networks of married peers. Finally, the Depression of the 1930s brought students into the classroom and gave communities the ability to rally around the new common thread between their young adults. Students became to center of community efforts to learn about sex, using movies and text because they were in a centralized location with a common experience that could reach everyone.

I found that sex education's effect on adolescents from the "creation" of adolescence until World War II was no different from the effect sex education had on the adults of the United States. With only some exceptions, sex education was not tailored to fit the school setting and therefore adolescents had to learn from the society around them about what to expect when beginning to have sex.

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