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"I Don't Mean to Be Defiant or Anything…": Instructional Films for Girls, 1945-1960

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INF 385T: The Politics of Preservation

Prof. Caroline Frick

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In September 1947, a two-page ad appeared in *Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide* announcing *The Story of Menstruation*, "A 10-minute color movie with sound / by Walt Disney Productions / Sponsored by Kotex* Products." The ad included an excerpt from a favorable review in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, promotional copy describing teachers' and parents' favorable responses as well as girls' responses. Noting that teachers had "shown it to literally hundreds of thousands of students since its release in November of '46," the ad described "How to Get Prints" ("without charge on a short-term loan basis") and included a coupon mailable to the Educational Department of the International Cellucotton Products Co., based in Chicago. The second page featured a backdrop of images from the film showing a recognizably Disney-style girl going about a range of activities; these still images were reproduced in the film's accompanying booklet, *Very Personally Yours*, also shown in a corner of the ad as one of the "FREE" training aids that came with the film.[1] *Educational Screen*'s April 1947 number had included a two-page article dedicated to *The Story of Menstruation*, and a full-page ad from the film with a mail-in coupon for requesting information and a copy of *Very Personally Yours*. The anonymous author of the article praised film as a distinctively useful medium for conveying delicate information in an impersonal, authoritative, unself-conscious way, concluding "Use of the film opens the way for a frank discussion of problems after the showing." This film was meant to provide objective, scientific information about menstruation in a setting that would allow for "frank discussion" in girls' immediate environments following its screening. The article's author suggested that the film would be shown in "high schools, junior colleges, and 4-H Clubs."[2]

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[1] International Cellucotton Corporation, "The Story of Menstruation," advertisement, *Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide*, September 1947, 382-383.

The title quote is from *An American Girl*. Anti-Defamation League Of B'nai B'rith, prod., *An American Girl*, "A presentation of the Audiovisual Division of the Dearborn, Michigan Department of Libraries" (Dynamic Films, 1958), in Prelinger Archives, http://www.archive.org/ details/american_girl_3, (accessed December 7, 2008).

[2] "New Biology Film Helps Girls," *Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide*, April 1947, 215, 218.

During World War II the film industry, like many other industries, converted to war work, producing training films for the military.[3] After the war, educational film production skyrocketed in direct response to this wartime conversion. As George H. Fern and Eldon Robbins wrote in their 1946 manual *Teaching with Films*:

> The men and women who are returning to their home communities to become civilian home builders know from experience that the tempo of learning can be accelerated by instruction with films, and they will expect to find films used for teaching in the local school classrooms.[4]

In the years following the war, 16mm equipment was readily available—as war surplus—leading to an explosion of production companies and distribution outlets.[5] Within the outpouring of educational film during this era, which included science films, films on history and other social studies, career/vocational films, religious films, and how-to sports films—the "mental hygiene" or "human relations" film gained particular headway during this period. Producers like Sid Davis and production and distribution companies like Coronet Films and Young American Films (distributors of Centron Corporation's films) turned out considerable numbers of such films. Producers intended for these films to be shown in schools, but they were also intended for youth organizations and similar venues; *Educational Screen*'s "Church Department" also reviewed instructional films for use in church groups or Sunday Schools.

The rise of instructional film following World War II coincided with emerging awareness of the teenager as a social and cultural category. During and after the war, teenagers in general had more money, either from jobs or from their parents, and became a viable niche market for a range of consumer industries. The increasingly common experience of high school during the Depression

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[3] Rick Prelinger, *The Field Guide to Sponsored Films* (San Francisco: National Film Preservation Foundation, 2006); Ken Smith, *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films: 1945-1970* (New York: Blast Books, 1999). See Michael Birdwell, "Technical Fairy First Class? Is This Any Way to Run an Army?: Private Snafu and World War II," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 25, no. 2 (June 2005): 203-212.
[4] George H. Fern and Eldon Robbins, *Teaching with Films* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1946), vi.
[5] Prelinger, *Field Guide,* vii-viii.

(when jobs were scarce and more young people were able to attend secondary school) became the source of a common culture among young people. For educators, the high school functioned both as a site for academic learning and personal development; for teenagers, the high school environment facilitated the development of a distinctive youth culture, potentially but not necessarily oppositional. Recently, historians of girlhood have portrayed the interwar, wartime, and postwar years as years in which the teenage girl gained cultural power as a consumer, primarily in their roles as future wives and mothers. Girls were encouraged to buy toward their futures but also to purchase clothing, cosmetics, and other goods that would make them attractive—in other words, that would further their goal of finding a husband. The peer-oriented "rate-and-date" system, closely related to high school culture, and its postwar evolution into the "going steady" model put increasing pressure on girls to identify themselves by their ability to attract men—and toward that end, to purchase clothing, cosmetics, and other items intended to increase their attractiveness.[6]

Historians and media scholars have also pointed to the rise of teen-girl stars and plots in commercial film and other mass media, which similarly spoke to girl audiences as consumers, providing models of behavior and consumption to be imitated. In contrast to media scholar Susan Douglas' more upbeat view of the possibilities offered by the "spunky" or "perky" teenage girl in postwar mass media, Scholars like Mary Celeste Kearney, Ilana Nash, and Rachel Devlin have noted a cultural predilection during this era for images of empty-headed, sexualized, consuming teenage girls whose consumption is facilitated by indulgent fathers and whose empty-headedness ultimately

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[6] Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996). On teenage girls as consumers, see Angela R. Record, "Born to Shop: Teenage Women and the Marketplace in the Postwar United States," in Eileen R. Meehan and Ellen Riordan, eds., *Sex and Money: Feminism and Political Economy in the Media*, Commerce and Mass Culture Series (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp. 181-195; Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945*, Girls' History and Culture Book Series (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004); Kelly Schrum, "'Teena Means Business': Teenage Girls' Culture and *Seventeen* Magazine," in Sherrie A. Inness, ed., *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 134-163; Kelley Massoni, "'Teena Goes to Market': *Seventeen* Magazine and the Early Construction of the Teen Girl (As) Consumer," *Journal of American Culture* 29, no. 1 (March 2006): 31-42. On the evolution of dating culture, see Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

confines their influence to the patriarchal domestic sphere. Deploying the image of the teenage girl for profit in movies, radio, even the theater, the mass media also offered these images as role models for viewers in ways that contributed to other forms of consumption: buy clothing and cosmetics to look like these girls, with movie-going a form of commercial consumption in itself. Georgeanne Scheiner's work on girl stars and fan culture presents a more sympathetic portrait of girls as fans, granting the fans some agency as the creators of social and cultural organizations centering on the images and lives of their favorite female stars. During the interwar decades, leaders of the early Girl Scouts and Campfire Girls movements explicitly constructed their outdoors-oriented programs in opposition to the enervating effects that consumer culture, including excessive movie-going, had on girls.[7]

Instructional film differed considerably from commercial film. Actors and actresses in these films were intended to look as average as possible in order to represent "ordinary" teenagers (generally white and middle-class). Character development in mental-hygiene films may have been stilted, but the intention was instructional rather than aesthetic: the teenagers watching these films were expected to imitate, or learn from, these films' protagonists as well. The lessons offered by this subset of instructional film were to be psychological and relational rather than commercial (one reason why debates over the educational legitimacy of sponsored films dotted the pages of *Educational Screen*). This paper will focus on instructional films for girls which appeared in *Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide* from 1945-1960, either through reviews, as items briefly summarized in the magazine's "New Materials" section, or in ads placed by production companies. It should be

[7] Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Random House, 1994); Mary Celeste Kearney, "Recycling Judy and Corliss: Transmedia Exploitation and the First Teen-Girl Production Trend," *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (November 2004): 265-295; Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Rachel Devlin, *Relative Intimacy: Fathers, Adolescent Daughters, and Postwar American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Georganne Scheiner, *Signifying Female Adolescence: Film Representations and Fans, 1920-1950* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000); Susan A. Miller, *Growing Girls: The Natural Origins of Girls' Organizations in America*, The Rutgers Series in Childhood Studies (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

noted that this paper does not offer a comprehensive list of films directed toward girls during this era, but rather provides discussion of films that met the approval, tacit or explicit, of a professional community. This approval lent these films credence as approved aids for teaching. Because many "mental hygiene" or "human relations" films were directed to mixed audiences and featured both boy and girl protagonists, I have tried to include films explicitly intended for female audiences or which are described as having a girl as its primary protagonist. By these criteria, I identified approximately 90 such films in *Educational Screen* from 1945-1960 (see Appendix for list).

Access is a key problem in working with these films. Ken Smith's *Mental Hygiene*, published in 1999, surveys mental hygiene films available through Rick Prelinger's Prelinger Archives. These "mental hygiene" films are more easily accessible than some of the other categories of film I identified in *Educational Screen*, through websites like the Prelinger Archive at the Internet Archive (archive.org) or A/V Geeks (avgeeks.com). The Internet Archive, however, only contains a slightly more than 2,000 films from the Prelinger Archive; the full archive, consisting of over 60,000 ephemeral films, was purchased by the Library of Congress in 2002 and is not yet accessible through the Library of Congress.[8] Prelinger's *Field Guide*, like the Internet Archive, addresses only a smaller fraction of Prelinger's holdings, listing 452 films.[9] Another major archive for educational film, Iowa State University's American Archives of Factual Films, was purchased by the Library of Congress in 2007. According to a March 2008 posting on AMIA-L by Michael Mashon, head of the Moving Image Section at the Library of Congress' National Audio-Visual Conservation Center, the Center hopes to make the AAFF and the Prelinger Archives available for access shortly.[10] The list of educational films in the University of California at San Diego's Factual Film Archive includes exactly

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[8] Internet Archive, "Welcome to Prelinger Archives," Prelinger Archives, http://www.archive.org/details/prelinger (accessed December 7, 2008).
[9] Prelinger, *Field Guide*, x.
[10] Michael Mashon, e-mail to AMIA-L mailing list, March 14, 2008, http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/byform/mailing-lists/amia-l/2008/03/msg00146.html (accessed November 30, 2008).

one title on the list drawn from *Educational Screen*: *Volleyball Techniques for Girls* (Young America Films, 1957).[11] For the historian of girlhood, the promise of these films as primary sources may be offset by difficulty of access.

Mental Hygiene Films

As a primary source for the history of postwar girlhood, *The Story of Menstruation* has received considerable scholarly attention for an instructional film. Margot Kennard's 1989 dissertation "The Corporation in the Classroom: The Struggles over Meanings of Menstrual Education in Sponsored Films, 1947-1983," is a model of scholarship on such films could be done. Kennard, earning her PhD in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, provided historical context for the film's production and reception, interviewing key players at Kimberly-Clark (including the corporation's Education Administrator at the time of production), Foote, Cone, and Belding, Kimberly-Clark's advertising agency at the time of the film's production, and David Smith of the Walt Disney archives, tracing the production process and the producers' interactions with the teachers and the gynecologist who served as advisors for the film. Locating the film within its production history, Kennard also discusses the film's production and content development within the contemporaneous sex-education curriculums, noting that the film reflected and promoted themes prevalent in contemporaneous sex-education programs: an emphasis on the female body, particularly the egg, an avoidance of any treatment of sexuality (the egg simply is fertilized, with no discussion of what is involved in fertilization). *The Story of Menstruation* emphasized heterosocial

[11] University of California San Diego Libraries, Factual Film Archive, "Factual Film Archive General Title List," University of California San Diego Libraries, http://www.ucsd.edu/portal/site/Libraries/menuitem.346352c02aac0c82b9ba4310d34b01ca/?vgnextoid=17480b7eb2914110VgnVCM10000045b410acRCRD (accessed December 6, 2008).

rather than heterosexual activity (the cartoon "girl" is shown waltzing with a boy who looks considerably more childlike than the girl does).[12]

Susan Freeman's recent treatment of sex education's impact on girls during the postwar era points out that sex education in the mid-twentieth century, usually part of a program with a more euphemistic title ("family relations" or "human relations," for example) focused more on socializing teenagers into appropriate heterosexist gender roles than on exploration of sexuality.[13] Though Freeman's discussion of instructional film is limited and focuses primary on the state of Oregon's pioneering sex-education film *Human Growth* (1947), films were part of the sex education curricula Freeman discusses—interestingly, one administrator in San Diego, G. Gage Wetherill is quoted as having preferred filmstrips to films because "[films] move so fast that it is difficult to discuss important points go too fast" (which in some more squeamish classrooms might have been seen as a virtue).[14]

The sex-education movement Freeman describes grew out of a progressive model of education that favored psychological adjustment over subject knowledge. In concert with the progressive "mental hygiene" movement in education, rooted in the prewar years, the postwar era saw a growing number of educational films specifically focused on "human relations" and other aspects of physical and mental development. The mental hygiene movement in education, built on the broader movement's assertion that personality was malleable and that its appropriate adjustment could prevent mental illness, argued that childhood was the logical time for personality development and adjustment, and that schools were the logical place for this. Sol Cohen has argued that this

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[12] Margot E. Kennard, "The Corporation in the Classroom: The Struggles over Meanings of Menstrual Education in Sponsored Films, 1947-1983" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin at Madison, 1989); Susan K. Freeman, *Sex Goes to School: Girls and Sex Education before the 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Walt Disney Productions, prod., *The Story of Menstruation* (International Cellucotton Corporation, Kimberly-Clark, 1946), in YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeT45BELVzY (accessed December 7, 2008).
[13] Freeman, *Sex Goes to School*.
[14] Freeman, *Sex Goes to School*, 73. *Human Growth* came with a set of slides.

entrance of psychology into the classroom, with its emphasis on personal well-being over academic rigor and discipline, marks a "medicalization" of the classroom and of the teacher as well, and has had lasting effects on the American educational system; by the 1930s, Cohen points out, the mental-hygiene movement had stepped up its efforts in high schools as well as in lower schools.[15]

As a result of the new emphasis on film in the classroom, the immediate postwar era saw the development of the mental-hygiene film.[16] Ken Smith has loosely defined the genre as a form of social engineering and has pointed to their emphasis on conformity and "fitting in" (unless, of course, one has fallen in with delinquents, with whom one should *not* "fit in"). And certainly these films call for conformity and address adult fears of delinquency and social unrest among teenagers, particularly in the wake of the relative freedom young people had had during wartime. Grace Palladino has offered a somewhat gentler model, however, for considering the role these films were intended to play in the classroom. Palladino argues the early twentieth century saw the rise of professional "character builders"—Scout leaders, YMCA officials, magazine publishers (as in the case of *Scholastic Magazine*), authors, and other adults who positioned themselves as supervisors of adolescent leisure: as Palladino writes, these adults saw themselves as "providing a parent-free but adult-guided environment after school," the implication being that school was already expected to provide similar guidance during the day. Organizations like the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the Camp Fire Girls, and the YMCAs (and YWCAs) identified themselves as part of a broader network of adults who saw themselves as consciously not forcing adolescents along an approved path, but helping them to choose the path themselves. Of course, character builders—then and now—always

[15] Freeman, *Sex Goes to School*; Sol Cohen, "The Mental Hygiene Movement, the Development of Personality, and the School: The Medicalization of American Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 123-149.
[16] Smith, *Mental Hygiene*; Brian J. Low, "'The New Generation': Mental Hygiene and the Portrayals of Children by the National Film Board of Canada, 1946-1967" *History of Education Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 540-570.

run the risk of their charges being influenced by other populations, including, increasingly, peers less inclined to submit to this kind of suasion.[17]

Palladino's emphasis on character builders dovetails with the intentions of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene's efforts to influence teacher training: teachers were to play pivotal roles in facilitating students' personal development. As Smith notes, teachers in many mental hygiene films seemed to fare better than parents as advice-givers; teachers in these films were portrayed as character builders. Palladino's argument that high schools constituted both a site for top-down instruction and a site for youth culture formation offers more flexibility than Smith's more rigid model of social engineering mindlessly accepted by what he identifies (without offering any evidence to support this claim) as the powerless and "more conformist" teens of the 1940s and 1950s, a model then laughingly rejected by later, apparently more savvy generations.

Considering these films and their producers as "character builders" allows both to be considered alongside other organizations and media intended to instruct and persuade teens to make mentally healthy choices. Often, but not always, these organizations were divided by gender, as in Scouting, for example, and thus provide a range of ways of considering both the gender norms imparted by these individuals and groups, and young people's interpretations of or reactions to those norms. Many of the mental-hygiene films produced during this time were intended for mixed-sex audiences. As Freeman has noted, "human relations" or "family relations" classes were intended to locate sexuality within a broader framework of heterosexual gender role development. Many of these films, especially those focusing on dating, manners, and popularity, did not then simply focus on gender roles, but on heterosexual roles, presented through films showing boys and girls interacting and so modeling appropriate heterosocial/sexual behavior. In other words, these films demonstrated not just "how to be a girl," but "how to be a girl with boys" and vice versa. Importantly, though,

[17] Palladino, *Teenagers*, esp. 18-26, quote on 18.

films like *The Outsider* (Young American Films/Centron, 1951) and *Are You Popular?* (Coronet, 1947) also focused on homosocial and heterosocial friend relationships as well. Susan Jane, the "outsider," is brought into the crowd by a sympathetic girl who remembers feeling like an outsider herself.[18] Caroline, the popular girl in *Are You Popular?* is described as more likable than the girl who parks on dates because she is "just as interested in girls as in boys."[19] *More Dates for Kay*, a 1952 Coronet film showing a girl named Kay doggedly manipulating boys in order to get "more dates;" while the apparent intent of the film is to endorse Kay's almost obsessive behavior, the framing device—a popular older sister offering advice to her dateless younger sister, first telling her about fun times the older sister had had with girlfriends on dateless nights, and then describing Kay's campaign (the older sister noting that she didn't always "approve" of Kay's tactics)—suggests alternatives to Kay's behavior, alternatives the younger sister embraces, since the film ends with her calling several girlfriends to arrange for a girls' night out, rather than following Kay's unnerving example.[20]

A subset of films that could be characterized as "mental hygiene" films for girls are films stressing grooming and appearance. Frequently overlapping in content with films on dating or popularity, these films suggested that more careful attention to grooming and looks would improve popularity; see for example McGraw-Hill's *Habit Patterns* (1954), where a particularly cruel female narrator mocks a sobbing teenage girl for her sloppy habits, which have ruined her chances at joining the popular crowd.[21] These films focus on outward appearance as a form of character

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[18] Centron Corporation, prod., *The Outsider* (New York: Young America Films, 1951), in Prelinger Archives, http://www.archive.org/details/Outsider1951 (accessed December 6, 2008).
[19] *Are You Popular?* (Chicago: Coronet Instructional Films, 1947), in Prelinger Archives, http://www.archive.org/details/Outsider1951 (accessed December 5, 2008). A new version of *Are You Popular?* was released in 1958; it is available at A/V Geeks but not available at the Internet Archive.
[20] *More Dates for Kay* (Chicago: Coronet Instructional Films, 1952), in A/V Geeks, http://avgeeks.com/pivot/entry.php?id=502 (accessed December 2, 2008).
[21] Knickerbocker Productions, prod., *Habit Patterns* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Text-Film Department, 1954), in Prelinger Archives, http://www.archive.org/details/HabitPat1954 (accessed December 3, 2008). Titles at the beginning of the film indicate that *Habit Patterns* was part of McGraw-Hills "Psychology for Living" series, correlated with McGraw-Hill's textbook *Psychology for Living*. Smith has noted that McGraw-Hill films were generally always produced as companions to their textbooks. Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 32

development. Given the implicit emphasis on certain kinds of consumption, one would assume corporate sponsorship, but the films of this genre included in *Educational Screen* tended to be produced by independent film production companies. Two exceptions stand out: *Miss Dunning Goes to Town* (1950) produced by Toni Co./Merchandise Mart and the unfortunately named *Tricks of the Trade* (1957?) produced by the Educational Services Department of Bristol-Myers' Products Division. Neither film is readily accessible.[22]

The Story of Menstruation is likely the mental-hygiene film for girls that has received the most scholarly treatment, discussed at length by Margot Kennard and more briefly by Joan Jacobs Brumberg in *The Body Project* (1989) and mentioned by Susan Freeman in her account of postwar sex education.[23] The film is also summarized briefly in Rick Prelinger's 2006 *Field Guide to Sponsored Film*, which indicates that the film is held at the Library of Congress' Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division; *The Story of Menstruation* is also included in Ken Smith's more irreverent collection guide *Mental Hygiene*. [24] The film is currently viewable at the A/V Geeks website (at http://www.avgeeks.com/pivot/entry.php?id=149) and available for purchase as part of the A/V Geeks collection DVD, "The Mouse Forgets..." (http://avgeeks-

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[22] *Miss Dunning Goes to Town* is included in *Educational Screen*'s "Current Materials" section for September 1950. *Tricks of the Trade* is mentioned in the same section (renamed "New Materials") for June 1957. "Current Materials," *Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide*, September 1950, 311; "New Materials," *Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide*, June 1957, 312. A brief summary of *Miss Dunning Goes to Town* is also included in the *Educational Film Guide* for 1951, available online through the Prelinger Archive. *Educational Film Guide* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1951), http://www.archive.org/details/51educationalfilmg00wilsrich (accessed December 7, 2008).

[23] Regrettably, Kennard's in-depth analysis of the production of two Kimberly-Clark films, *The Story of Menstruation* and *Julie's Story* (1983) may be difficult for twenty-first-century scholars interested in postwar film to imitate, since her discussion hinged on her ability to arrange to interview key players; Kennard notes that the Personal Products Corporation, producers of Confidence Because You Understand Menstruation (1956?) and *It's Wonderful Being a Girl* (1960?) refused to provide her any information. It is far less likely that a twenty-first-century scholar would be able to interview participants in the creation of a 1947 instructional film. At the same time, Kennard also notes that it took her two years to locate *The Story of Menstruation* because the film was no longer in distribution. The rise of the internet and the existence of projects like the Internet Archive and A/V Geeks have changed this problem slightly, although if a given film is not made available online, or if there are technical difficulties (on December 5, 2008 the A/V Geeks' version of *The Story of Menstruation* would not load properly), the film is still inaccessible to scholars.

[24] Prelinger, *Field Guide*, 85; Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 58-59, 209.

store.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=113); at this writing it is also available on Youtube.com (at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeT45BELVzY).

Significantly, virtually every menstruation film made during this time was sponsored by a feminine-products company; while Smith notes that no educational-film production was willing to take on the subject, *Educational Screen* supported the use of such films for the treatment of such a delicate subject. Smith's chapter "Sneaky Sponsors" addressed the pro-capitalism stance of many corporate-sponsored films, but what Smith does not mention is the continuing discussion over the use of sponsored film in the classroom in the pages of *Educational Screen*, which registered both resistance and reluctant acceptance: *The Story of Menstruation* was upheld as a positive example of a sponsored film, with the *Educational Screen* reviewer noting that "No mention of the sponsor's product appears anywhere, only the name of Kotex on the title cards at the beginning and end, putting responsibility for the subject matter directly upon the sponsor."[25] In 1959 Portland, Oregon's superintendent of schools Amo de Bernardis published an article in *Educational Screen* which bore the somewhat resigned headline "Here to Stay—Sponsored Materials." De Bernardis noted that

> any attempt to build good will by performing some public service also involves selling. . . . [and] today there is a definite trend away from such advertising. There will always be a few agencies that will try improper advertising, but it is now easy to screen out this material or direct the reader's attention to its purpose.[26]

Character building and commercial intent or production do make troubling bedfellows: Palladino discusses *Seventeen*, without question a commercial enterprise, as a character builder, and certainly the magazine did—and does—present itself as offering life lessons in addition to fashion advice.[27] The

[25] "New Biology Film," 215.
[26] Amo de Bernardis, "Here to Stay—Sponsored Materials," *Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide*, February 1959, 86-87, quote on 86.
[27] Palladino, *Teenagers*, 90-92, 102-9. See also Schrum, ""Teena Means Business;"" Massoni, ""Teena Means Business.""

difficulty, for the editors of *Educational Screen* and for the teachers using sponsored films, was how to separate the positive messages from the commercialism.

Beyond Mental Hygiene

As character builders—or the products of character builders—mental hygiene films undoubtedly speak to how gender norms were shaped and conveyed through instructional film. The emphases on popularity, on dating, on conformity for girls all concur with historical and sociological discussions of postwar gender norms directed toward girls: the "feminine mystique," to use Betty Friedan's powerful critical phrase, is well upheld in these films.[28] But there are other aspects of girls' lives that can be fruitfully explored through instructional film of the time, aspects that are less discussed in the history of post-World War II girlhood. My survey of *Educational Screen* during these years has turned up career films, how-to sports films, and films by the Girl Scouts of the United States of America and other organizations aimed at fostering world peace, among others.

In *Mental Hygiene*, Ken Smith devotes a separate chapter to mental-hygiene films for girls, including home economics and secretarial-skills films. Smith's categorizations are based on his assertion that social-improvement themes permeated most instructional film during this era. It is difficult to argue that a home economics film called *The Way to a Man's Heart* (produced by the National Livestock and Meat Board in 1945) which features a homely young woman winning her nutrition professor through both a makeover and savvy knowledge of meats does not constitute a mental-hygiene film.[29] At the same time, even as it suggests that a career is only a way station on the road to marriage, the film and others like it do frame home economics as a professional identity.

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[28] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; repr., New York: Dell Publishing, 1984). See also Bailey, *Front Porch to Back Seat*; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).
[29] Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 56-57, 219-220.

Other home economics films, which feature home economics professionals appearing as themselves, underscore the potential careers open to women in this field: the professionalization of home economics also meant the opening of a profession, and a significant aspect of the history of women's professions has been built on women moving into the workplace by doing work associated with home. Regardless of the hearth-and-home messages implied by films like *The Way to a Man's Heart*, home economics films nevertheless presented a viable, if ambiguous, career option for women.[30]

Other career-oriented films for girls addressed other areas of "pink-collar" work, with films on teaching, nursing, stewardessing, and child care. Films promoting teaching as a career carried particular meaning given the prevalence of mental-hygiene rhetoric by the postwar period. Teaching was valorized as a character-building vocation for the teacher for the benefit of her students, as suggested by the title of the British Information Services' 1951 film on teaching, *A Life in Her Hands*. The National Education Association produced several films to encourage girls to become teachers: … *And Gladly Teach* (1959), *Not by Chance* (1958), and *What Greater Gift* (1952); the Harmon Foundation offered *Adventure into Teaching* (1953) and Encyclopedia Britannica Films produced *The Teacher* in 1951(?).

Several other pink-collar careers were represented in *Educational Screen*'s summaries. Films like *Girls in White* (RKO Radio Pictures, 16mm Educational Division, 1949), *The Nurse* (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1950), and *Successful Scholarship* (McGraw-Hill, 1959) presented nursing as a career for girls. Nursing as a profession for women underwent significant changes as the result of a nursing shortage during and after World War II; once upheld as almost nunlike profession requiring a woman to forego marriage, the nursing shortage brought married women back into nursing,

[30] Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 53-60; Joan Jacobs Brumberg, "Defining the Profession and the Good Life: Home Economics on Film," in *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, ed. Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 189-202.

changing the dynamics of the profession. Were these changes reflected in these films?[31] The pages of *Educational Screen* also turn up two sponsored films describing, one presumes, the glamorous life of a stewardess: *Scotty Wins Her Wings* (United Airlines, 1952?), described in *Educational Screen* as showing "how girls are trained for careers as Mainliner stewardesses,"[32] and *Inside Story of an Airline* (Delta Airlines, 1958?) [blurbs]. Most strikingly, three films treating women's careers in the military are listed. The United States Air Force produced *A Charm for Katy* (1957?), where Katy learns about her sister Gwenn's experiences as an Air Force flight nurse,[33] and United World Films released two films about careers for women in the Military, *Share a Proud Tradition* (1959?) and *Military Lady* (1960?), which describes a military career for women. *Share a Proud Tradition* offers a portrait of "The U. S. Marine Corps as a career opportunity for young women," and *Military Lady* is described as showing "the role of the Women's Corps in the U.S. Army; opportunities for education and advancement."[34] In the wake of women's participation in World War II in various branches of the armed services, these three films call for further contextualization. None are easily accessible online.

Stretching the definition of "career" slightly, several how-to films addressed a key source of income for teenage girls: babysitting. Miriam Formanek-Brunell has noted that a shortage of sitters during the early years of the boom gave teenage girls (and, prior to 1960, some teenage boys) a certain amount of leverage in negotiating wages and other benefits with parents. At the same time, the publication of pamphlets and other materials intended to instruct girls in babysitting techniques framed babysitters as professionals. Films like *The Baby Sitter* (1950?) and *Helping in the Care of Younger Children* (1953?) both produced by independent production companies (Young America Films and

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[31] Susan Rimley Leighow, "An 'Obligation to Participate': Married Nurses' Labor in the 1950s," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz, Critical Perspectives on the Past (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 37-56.
[32] "Current Materials," *Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide*, October 1952, 350.
[33] "New Materials," *Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide*, April 1957, 208.
[34] "New Materials," *Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide*, March 1959, 150; "New Materials," *Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide*, May 1960, 249.

Coronet, respectively), and the film *Enter the Babysitter*, produced by the Baby Development Clinic's Visual Education Department in 1950), were likely part of that professionalization process.[35]

With the exception of some of the secretarial and home economics films, none of these career films are readily available online. The same is true of virtually all the sports how-to films for girls referenced in *Educational Screen*, likely produced for physical-education classes or girls' organizations. Coronet produced a number of such films, including *Archery for Girls* (1949?), what appears to be a series of films on *Basketball for Girls* (1949?), *Soccer for Girls* (1947?), *Softball for Girls* (1947), *Speedball for Girls* (1948?), and *Swimming Techniques for Girls* (1947?). Basketball and softball seem to have received the most attention from instructional film producers, with Young American Films and Teaching Aids Services also offering basketball films for girls (*Basketball Techniques for Girls* [1956?] and *Basketball Rules for Girls* [1957?]) and United World Films and Teaching Aid Services also offering softball films (*Girls, Let's Learn Softball* [1959?] and *Softball Rules for Girls* [1956?]). Of these films, only *Volleyball Techniques for Girls* was readily findable, and as noted earlier, only through the University of California San Diego's Factual Film Archive. The second edition of Coronet's *Basketball for Girls—Fundamentals for Girls* are listed at A/V Geeks, dated 1972, is listed at A/VGeeks.com (at http://avgeeks.com/pivot/entry.php?id=719). The date is particularly significant: Title IX legislation, designed to allow for girls' equal participation in school and sports activities, was passed in 1972. These sports films, all produced prior to Title IX, could provide useful insight into how girls' sports and physical education activities were framed prior to this legislation.

Finally, in the wake of World War II, many articles appeared in *Educational Screen* suggesting that instructional films had the power to bring about world peace by teaching young people about life in other countries. Analysis of these discussions and related advertisements and film listings, as

[35] Miriam Formanek-Brunell, "Truculent and Tractable: The Gendering of Babysitting in Postwar America," in *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 61-82.

well as the range of films intended for this purpose, is a project in itself. But several films directed toward girls addressed these themes as well. The Girl Scouts of the United States of America produced films designed to promote Girl Scout activities (for example, *Let's Go Troop Camping* [1952?]) and to highlight the worldwide Girl Scout movement. Films like *Wider World* (1956?) and *Hands Across the Sea* (1951?) were intended to familiarize Girl Scouts with their sister scouts around the world—a goal that fit in with the broader goals of world peace through understanding discussed in *Educational Screen* and beyond: the blurb in *Educational Screen*'s "Current Materials" for this film reads: "shows the unifying ideals and activities of Scouts and Guides around the world."[36] The Girl Scout films are not readily accessible (and, interestingly, none of these films are mentioned in Mary Degenhardt's *Girl Scout Collectors' Guide: A History of Uniforms, Insignia, Publications, and Memorabilia* [2nd ed., 2005]).[37]

One film addressing the issue of prejudice centers on a young female heroine; listed in *Educational Screen* as *The Diary of an American Girl*, this film turns up in the Prelinger Archives as *An American Girl*. The online listing for the film indicates that the film was produced by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith; titles within the film announce it as "A presentation of the Audiovisual Division of the Dearborn, Michigan Department of Libraries" and a Dynamic Films release. In this film, Norma, an ordinary teenager reads Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* and is moved by Frank's story; when Norma's younger sister gives her a bracelet with charms that turn out to be Jewish symbols, Norma discovers that her friends are anti-Semitic. Rejected by her friends and her friends' parents, Norma reads from her diary at a PTA meeting. The film's anti-anti-Semitism is mild (the film concludes with Norma writing in her diary that she didn't insist on wearing the bracelet because she's a friend to Jews, but rather because she is "no one's enemy") but the film's

[36] "Current Materials," *Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide*, December 1951, 420.
[37] Mary Degenhardt, *Girl Scout Collectors' Guide: A History of Uniforms, Insignia, Publications, and Memorabilia* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2005).

use of typical mental-hygiene themes of social rejection to address racism is significant. The scenes showing Norma so engrossed in *Diary of a Young Girl* that her father takes it out of her hands at the dinner table; Norma is intellectually engaged by Frank's story, and her assertions that people should "think for themselves" go beyond the standard "be yourself as long as you're conforming" messages of mental-hygiene, because Norma is thinking about issues that include but also go beyond her own social scene.[38]

Mental hygiene films by no means constituted any producer or distributors' entire catalogs. Producers' advertisements in *Educational Screen* increasingly included longer and longer lists of available films, with fewer and fewer being obvious mental-hygiene titles, which corresponds to Smith's assertion that these films began to fade out by the end of the 1950s.[39] Yet "mental hygiene" films seem to be most easily accessed, thanks to the rise of websites like the Internet Archive and A/V Geeks. As a result, historians of girlhood interested in instructional film may find their analyses skewed by what is readily available and, underlying the question of access, by what has been preserved—an issue that scholars of girlhood interested in commercial film may be less likely to face.

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[38] Anti-Defamation League Of B'nai B'rith, prod., *An American Girl*, "A presentation of the Audiovisual Division of the Dearborn, Michigan Department of Libraries" (Dynamic Films, 1958), in Prelinger Archives, http://www.archive.org/details/american_girl_1, http://http://www.archive.org/details/american_girl_2, http://http://www.archive.org/details/american_girl_3 (accessed December 7, 2008).

Two of Anne Emery's junior novels from this period also deal with racial prejudice: Emery's *Tradition* speaks out against anti-Japanese sentiment and the third volume in Emery's Dinny Gordon series, *Dinny Gordon, Junior* features Dinny struggling with her friends' anti-Semitism and breaking up with her boyfriend as a result; like Norma, Dinny is not pro-Jewish, but sees anti-Semitism as irrational and a sign of intellectual weakness. Anne Emery, *Tradition* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1946); Anne Emery, *Dinny Gordon, Junior* (1964; repr., New York: Berkley Highland, 1966).

[39] Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 52

Coda: The Issue of Snark

The issue of availability for these films dovetails with a particular historical difficulty represented, perhaps inadvertently, by Ken Smith's treatment of mental hygiene films in *Mental Hygiene*: though Smith claims to want to take the films seriously, his previous, admitted history of having first encountered these films while cutting them up to be shown radically out of context on Comedy Central comes through in the book. Though he acknowledges the liberal, progressive stance of the mental hygiene movement, Smith's characterization of the films as tightly controlled social engineering undercuts his assertion that the people who made them had noble goals and were not "evil or stupid."[40] Having gotten that disclaimer out of the way, Smith presents the films in the book as sources (or targets) of snarky, knowing humor. That Smith, and we, can make fun of these films suggests that we believe that we know better or are more enlightened, and so do not need to learn anything from these films. We can then only detach from them and appreciate them as antiquated artifacts. And indeed, these movies are funny when viewed out of context: if one needs, as Woody in *Dating: Dos and Don'ts* (Coronet, 1949) apparently does, instruction on how to choose which girl to ask out, one may have other issues at play. On the other hand, knowing that in 1949 teenagers were operating within a "rate-and-date" system (there is a reference to Woody's "really having to rate" in order to date a pretty, popular girl, whom he rejects as an option because she tends to act superior) which placed more emphasis on appearance, popularity, and money, the suggestion that Woody pick a girl he feels more comfortable with takes on different meaning.[41]

Context is a delicate framework. Primary sources like *Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide* can also serve as secondary sources, providing valuable context for instructional films' intent, both in terms of content and in terms of intended classroom use. Though it does not provide access to

[40] Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 30.
[41] Cf. Bailey, *Front Porch to Back Seat*.

actual classroom activities, *Educational Screen* and the handbooks and manuals published during these years to guide teachers in their use of A/V materials suggest best practices and tips for classroom use of films. Advertisements for equipment along with articles and reviews of films and equipment provide insights into issues faced by teachers, from the delicate content problems of sex education suggested to the more practical problems of facilitating note-taking in a classroom darkened for film showing.

Without context, primary materials can have a limited shelf-life, and are increasingly open to appropriation (or misappropriation, depending on one's perspective). Ken Smith asserts (without any evidence to support his statement about postwar kids' reception of mental hygiene films) that

> These films look hopelessly cornball to us, but that's because we can draw from fifty years' worth of media exposure. The kids who saw them back in the 1940s and 1950s didn't have that luxury. They weren't as critical-minded as we are. Also, the people who made these films worked very hard to make the plausible and realistic to the kinds of that time as possible.[42]

Smith suggests that viewers today are more media-savvy; what he does not mention is that by the end of the twentieth century American culture was well on the other side of the social, cultural, and political upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s. Here in the twenty-first century much of our media culture seems to embrace a post-modern (or pseudo-post-modern) ironical stance that appears to celebrate oppositional or alternative culture while also subtly linking those cultures to (or appropriating them for) mainstream culture. Nostalgia for the 1950s is now a common trope for social and political conservatives who wish to return to an idealized social and cultural consensus (while disregarding the historical realities of the era); disdain or ironic detachment from this same idealized consensus is an equally common trope for the left. At the same time, the 1950s have been a significant source of cultural bricolage ever since the first 1950s revival of the 1970s.[43] Kitsch images

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[42] Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 29.
[43] Mary Caputi, *A Kinder, Gentler America: Melancholia and the Mythical 1950s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Daniel Marcus, *Happy Days and Wonder Years* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

from the era abound, and our viewing of the instructional films at sites like the Prelinger Archives and A/V Geeks are colored by these compounds of historical and cultural blindness, ironic detachment, and oddly affectionate fascination with kitsch.

One way of recovering these films' original intent is to unearth their original contexts, a task aided by Smith's discussion of key production companies and by Prelinger's recent publication of the terser and more scholarly *Field Guide to Sponsored Film* (2006). Along those lines, another significant line of inquiry might be analyses of specific ways in which these films have become dated, a possibility embodied by the second part of Kennard's dissertation, which focuses on *Julie's Story*, a menstruation film sponsored by Kimberly-Clark and released in 1983; Kennard compares the film's themes with those of *The Story of Menstruation*. As late as 1997, women's historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg estimated that by that time *The Story of Menstruation* had been seen by over 93 million women "either at school or in some single-sex setting."[44] How well did *The Story of Menstruation* hold up over those decades? Would a middle-school student in the mid-1970s (as the author was when she received a copy of *Very Personally Yours*) have understood the datedness of the pamphlet? (Jitterbugging during one's period didn't seem to be a big issue then).

On December 3, 2008, the Radcliffe Center for Advanced Studies' Schlesinger Library at Harvard University held a "Movie Night at the Schlesinger Library" featuring "Short educational films from the 1940s to the 1970s aimed at girls" with discussion after the films to be led by Melissa Dollman, audiovisual cataloger at the Schlesinger Library, and Amy Sloper, an assistant film curator at the Harvard Film Archive. According to Dollman, the films screened included *Girl on the Magazine Cover* (1940), *The Menstruation Story* (1946) [likely *The Story of Menstruation*], *Pattern for Smartness* (1948), *That Junior Miss Spirit* (1970), *and I Have To Be Me* (1974). For this event, copies of *I Have to Be Me* and *The Story of Menstruation* were purchased from A/V Geeks, and the other films were downloaded

[44] Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 47.

from the Internet Archive. The films were downloaded and/or converted and then burned to a long-playing DVD, to be shown on a large pull-down screen in the Schlesinger's meeting room.[45] One wonders who attended this session, and to what extent audience members were drawn by the kitsch factor suggested by the event's title (which was, in itself, refreshingly kitsch-free), what directions the discussion took, and what role Dollman and Sloper played in contextualizing these films. How did the films "read" to audience members? Had any of the audience members seen them as young women? Can these films be taken seriously as historical artifacts without being reduced to hysterical representations of a benighted era? Can we laugh at these films and still acknowledge their value as primary (and perhaps secondary) sources?

Also, not being Ken Smith, I am not convinced that teenagers in the 1940s and 1950s did not find these films funny. How many of us took seriously the films we were shown in our own health class, or, to jump forward to a different era of prescriptive film, the "after-school specials" of the 1970s and 1980s? In the mid-1980s, in my seventh-grade health class, we were shown duck-and-cover films that were blackly funny to us, since we knew perfectly well that our high school was down the road from the headquarters of McDonnell Douglas. Monsanto was around there too. A friend of mine said once, looking at old yearbook photos of our high school's Civil Defense Club: "I guess they were there to tell us what to do when the bomb falls: 'All right, everyone! DIE!" By the 1980s, in the wake of the Korean and Vietnam Wars and with Ronald Reagan as president, the Cold War looked and felt considerably different from its post-World War II incarnation. Time had passed, and far more information about the effects of atomic weaponry was circulating than had been available immediately after the bombs were first dropped in Japan. The context had changed, and *Duck and Cover* (and the film whose title I can't remember, about a family who survived a bomb

[45] "Movie Night at the Schlesinger Library: Short Educational Films from the 1940s to the 1970s Aimed at Girls," Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, http://www.radcliffe.edu/events/movie_night_2008educational.aspx (accessed December 7, 2008); Melissa Dollman, "Schlesinger Library Movie Night," e-mail message to the author, November 21, 2008.

blast by hiding in their basement)[46] seemed dated and naïve to us. Might not the teenagers of the late 1950s have found *Dating Dos and Don'ts* or *The Story of Menstruation* or *Are You Popular?* as funny as we do? Might the teenager of 1949 have laughed, too?

Ultimately, mental hygiene films, and virtually all instructional films in general, should be understood as cultural products created by adults for young people—by character builders with an interest in molding the behavior of children and young adults. If the social control inherent in these films seems blatant to our twenty-first-century eyes, we should keep in mind that as a culture we are hardly free of social control mechanisms; some would argue that social control of youth has been ceded to the marketplace.[47] If we want to know what teenagers made of character builders' efforts, we will have to find different sources. If we want to know how adults—or at least some adults—hoped teenage boys and girls would behave, mental-hygiene films are one place to start, and the Prelinger Archives and A/V Geeks offer access to at least some of these resources. If we want to understand how career options and/or physical fitness and sport, were presented to teenage girls, we know that instructional films addressing these issues were produced and distributed. One hopes that these films are held in the Prelinger or AAFF collections. Until the Library of Congress makes those collections available, we don't necessarily know whether it is possible to view or screen these films.

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[46] We knew that the family had survived a bomb blast because they were slightly dirty. The smudged mother stood in the kitchen, finger in her mouth, as the narrator intoned something like, "When choosing foods after the blast, it is important to exercise caution." Our class clown yelled, "Yeah! Don't touch anything!"

[47] Douglas Rushkoff, rept., *Frontline*, "Merchants of Cool," PBS, December 7, 2007 (originally aired February 27, 2001), PBS Frontline, http://www.pbs.org/ wgbh/pages/frontline/ shows/cool/view/ (accessed December 7, 2008).

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