“Too Good to Be True”:

Discursive Construction of the Ideal Girl

in 20th Century Popular American Girls' Series

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the discursive construction of the trope of the ideal girl in popular American girls' series in the twentieth century. Girls' cultural artifacts, including girls' literature series, provide sites for understanding girls' experiences and exploring girlhood itself as a socially constructed identity, yet are often overlooked due to their presumed insignificance. Simple dismissal of these texts ignores the weight of their popularity and the processes through which they reach such status. This project challenges the derisive attitude towards girls' culture and begins with the assumption that these cultural texts do ideological work and therefore require consideration. The dissertation traces the development of the ideal and non-ideal girl over time, taking into account the cultural, political, and economic factors that facilitate the production of the discourses of girlhood. I include analysis of texts from six popular American girls' series as primary texts; visual elements or media productions related to the series; and supporting historical documents such as newspapers, "expert" texts, popular parents' and girls' magazines, film; and advertising. Methodological approach incorporates elements of literary criticism and discourse analysis, combining literary, historical, and cultural approaches to primary texts and supporting documents to trace the moments of production, resistance, and response in the figure of the ideal girl. Throughout the project, I pay particular attention to the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality in the figure of the ideal girl and her non-ideal counterparts. I argue that girls' series, slipping under the radar as a denigrated cultural medium, capture and perpetuate cultural anxieties around heterosexuality, whiteness and American identity, appropriate gender roles, and class mobility. These texts discipline the non-ideal girl toward the ideal, always with the expectation of failure.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: CONSTRUCTING THE IDEAL GIRL

Writing to publishers Grosset and Dunlap in 1928, Edward Stratemeyer outlined a new hero for an adolescent series, a rapidly developing and highly profitable genre:

> Stella Strong, a girl of sixteen, is the daughter of a District Attorney of many years standing. He is a widower and often talks over his affairs with Stella and the girl was present during many interviews her father had with noted detectives and at the solving of many intricate mysteries. Then, quite unexpectedly, Stella plunged into some mysteries of her own and found herself wound up in a series of exciting situations. *An up-to-date American girl at her best, bright, clever, resourceful and full of energy*.[1]

Stratemeyer's proposal would spark the creation of the *Nancy Drew* mystery series, which would become the longest running and best selling of the adolescent detective genre. In outlining his heroine, Stratemeyer presented young readers with a new role model, one who conveyed many of the social expectations of the ideal girl in the early twentieth century.

This project explores the discursive production of the ideal girl in popular American girls' serial literature over the course of the twentieth century. At this center of the project is an exploration of the ideal girl as such—a historical and cultural construct that becomes concretized and essentialized over time through replication, reassertion, and exclusion. The ideal girl functions much like gender: a copy without an original, continually remade through representations.[2] Because the figure of the ideal girl is a copy, she requires constant reiteration, produced and reproduced through repetition. Despite the fact that the ideal girl only exists as a constructed image, her continued presence impacts our expectations of lived girlhood. Representations do not simply reflect the world; they help constitute our realities. The figure of the ideal girl, haunted by the specter of the non-ideal girl, functions as a political and ideological force, shaping our perception of who and what girls should be.[3] In order to denaturalize and contest the

figure of the ideal girl, this project seeks to consider her discursive production through the cultural site of girls' serial literature.

In order to trace productive shifts in the trope of the ideal girl, I examine her uneven journey over the course of the twentieth century in popular girls' series to construct a genealogical account of the ideal girl. I employ "genealogy" not to produce an end result of a cohesive history of the ideal girl or to find an original, but in a methodological fashion. This genealogy "does not trace concepts back to their origins (a task which presupposes continuity), but to points at which contradictions and contestations erupt in a manner productive of later discursive formations."[4] As Nikolas Rose notes, a genealogy is "not a history of ideas: its domain of investigation is that of practices and techniques."[5] Rather than claiming to produce a seamless history of the ideal girl in serial literature, I examine the representational processes through which the ideal girl is produced and maintained over time—through reiteration, repeated exclusion, and the simultaneous rejection and integration of shifting cultural and social expectations. Children's scholar and cultural critic Henry Giroux captures perfectly the central motivations for this project:

> My concern with the depictions of such representations lies not in deciding whether they are good or bad, but in analyzing them in relation to the pedagogical work they are doing. That is, what knowledge, values, and pleasures do such representations invite or exclude? What particular forms of identity, agency, and subjectivity are privileged, and how do they help to reinforce dominant reactions, messages, and meanings?[6]

To understand the ideological functions of the ideal girl in girls' serial literature and the implications for girls today, we must consider the historical foundations of current mainstream models of girlhood. First, I want to outline the existing scholarship to which this project contributes, as well as provide some descriptions and definitions of the terms and theoretical concepts that are important to the project.

Where the Girls Aren't

As Catherine Driscoll notes, the girl as we currently know her has not always existed, but rather is a modern "assemblage of social and cultural issues and questions" that requires retracing and considering the construction processes.[7] Prior to 1990, academic attention to girls—and adolescents in general—was sparse. Until recently, few scholars in traditional disciplines throughout the Western academic world have considered youth of any gender an important topic of inquiry, and academic research continues to situate adults as the primary locus of analysis.[8] Historians, for example, focus on the lives of (certain) adult men and women, whose experiences are more fully documented than youth. In literary studies, "children's literature" may be included in special topics courses and journal issues, but very few of these texts are found in the widely accepted Western literary canon. Literary scholars who focus primarily on children's literature often consider "children" or "youth" as a monolithic category, untouched by gender or race.[9] The value attributed to children's literature is gendered as well; children's book awards consistently award more prizes to books with boys as main characters than those with girl main characters, and parents and children are more likely to choose books with a boy as the main character, regardless of the gender of the reader.[10] The devaluation of literature written for and about girls reflects a broader cultural denigration of women and girls and their cultures.[11] Overwhelmingly, girls' literature continues to be dismissed as ephemeral, insignificant, and inappropriate for scholarly inquiry.

Within youth research, scholars have historically focused on boys because of their social location in the public sphere; girls' relegation to the domestic sphere made them irrelevant at best and invisible at worst. Because boys' work and leisure activities are typically more visible, scholars argued, they are more readily available objects of study.[12]

Girls' absence from public spaces may partially explain why they have rarely been considered in studies of adolescence or youth. However, academic research on girls did not rise with girls' increased participation in public spaces after World War II.[13] Additionally, girls' increased participation in consumer culture, making them a target of media advertising campaigns, has been firmly established since the 1940s.[14] Despite their role as consumers, girls have rarely been considered in studies of consumption or advertising. The persistence of androcentrism in academic research more fully explains the lack of attention to girls in youth studies and other disciplines.

British cultural theorist Angela McRobbie first called attention to the absence of girls in academic research in the early 1970s. Working within British youth studies and subculture studies, McRobbie questioned why studies of subcultures frequently overlooked the experiences of girls and began a career of addressing girls, girlhood, and girls' culture. In "Girls and Subcultures," McRobbie and Garber argued that girls participate in subcultures in their own ways, but their experiences were ignored completely or discussed in stereotypically gendered ways by scholars.[15] McRobbie and Garber insisted on the need to address girls' location within subcultures traditionally understood as masculine spaces, as well as a commitment to explore girls' own subcultures. McRobbie's work in the early 1970s provided a challenge to subculture studies and youth studies, and coincided with the establishment of Women's Studies departments in the academy. These departments provided a gathering ground on campuses for feminist-minded scholars who were already conducting girl-centered research within traditional disciplines, and McRobbie's work encouraged scholars in various disciplines to acknowledge the experiences of girls as unique and in need of interrogation.[16] By situating age as an intersectional identity category, a focus on girls prompts feminist scholars to further "open up" the category of gender, challenging and

rethinking "gender" itself, and providing a catalyst for new avenues of research. This project participates in a continued exploration of the category of gender, situating girlhood as an intersectional social identity and experience by examining how girls' series actively reproduce the figure of the ideal girl and her non-ideal counterparts in specifically raced, classed, and sexualized ways.

A New Focus: Girls' Studies

Girls' increased participation in public space, combined with the widespread availability of new media, has also intensified their presence in the popular media and news.[17] Girls' growing presence as consumers has led to a proliferation of products and services targeted exclusively at girls, making them of more interest to marketing and advertising researchers.[18] Girl's cultures are receiving growing scholarly attention due to girls' increased visibility and marketers' renewed targeting of girls as consumers of cultural products.[19] Virtually ignored for centuries, girls' cultural artifacts—including those produced *for* and *by* girls—can provide avenues for understanding girls' experiences and examining girlhood itself as a socially and culturally constructed identity category. Since the early 1990s, the development of the field of Girls' Studies has incited an explosion of such academic examinations of girls' history and cultures. Currently, scholars in various disciplines around the world are engaged in a "global mapping project" of girlhood, seeking to recover historical perspectives, understand and improve girls' lives, and counteract the common denigration of girls and their cultures.[20]

Together, these culminating trends have created a space to examine girlhood as a unique phenomenon worthy of academic attention, as feminist scholars increasingly consider age as one of many aspects of gendered identity and experience. Even among feminist scholars, girls have long been thought of as "little women," experiencing gender in precisely the same fashion as adult women. Such a singular approach naturalizes a

transition from girlhood to womanhood and ignores how girls may experience gender differently from adult women. It also elides the ways in which girls' gendered lives are inextricably entangled with race and ethnicity, socioeconomic class, sexuality, physical ability, and geographical location. Girls' Studies scholarship appears to be increasingly moving towards what Jackie Kirk, Claudia Mitchell, and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh describe as "an ongoing mapping project" of global girlhood.[21] Considering girlhood as a global project requires resisting the tendency to ignore or overlook the connections between girls around the globe and instead conceptualizing the discourses of girlhood and girls' experiences relationally. The resulting body of research from this growing community of scholars is complex, interdisciplinary, and exciting. This study joins these scholars in addressing the continued dearth of academic attention to and devaluation of girls and girls' culture.

Why Girls' Serial Literature, and Why Now?

Much of the girl-centered research prior to the existence of a "Girls' Studies" field emerged from the traditional disciplines of history and literary criticism. Despite having a strong historical legacy, a significant portion of current Girls' Studies scholarship focuses on girls in a contemporary context. Given the rise of popular media directed at girls in recent years and the increased visibility of certain girl cultures, scholars, parents, and popular experts alike are particularly concerned with the impact of media on girls. Film, television, popular magazines, and online activities are all popular topics, and examining representations of girls within mainstream media are significant for scholars hoping to understand how girls interact with media, as well as the implications of such interactions. While these studies are vital, I want to undertake the "seemingly contradictory practice of looking backward" at the representations within girls' serial literature over the twentieth century.[22] Utilizing genealogy to challenge our assumptions

of girlhood, constructing a "history of the present" provides illumination for current issues in the representational politics of girlhood.[23]

This genealogy centralizes girls' serial literature, which has long been a source of contention for experts and girls alike.[24] Since their inception in the early twentieth century, girls' serial texts have been ridiculed and cited as sources of moral and psychological danger. Serial writings for adults often came under fire for their lack of intellectual rigor, and concerns over the genre increased as publishers extended the market to children and adolescents. Child psychologists and librarians, two groups whose opinions were highly regarded at the time, voiced fears about the potential negative effects of serial books on young people's development and morality.[25] Despite condemnation by these adult experts and their parents, girls read serial literature voraciously. Publishers intentionally kept the costs of serial books low, making it possible for girls to purchase the books when librarians refused to make them available.[26] Girls frequently read serial literature against their parents' will, hiding the books and circulating them among groups of friends to lower costs.

Moral anxieties about serial literature have subsided significantly, as parents, psychologists, and other "child experts" have shifted their attention to the proliferation of more visible media influences, dismissing girls' serial literature as "vacuous reading," yet essentially harmless.[27] Regardless (perhaps in spite) of the perceived literary value, girls continue to devour serial literature, even while their reading behaviors suggest that they may internalize and share the negative cultural attitudes towards the body of literature.[28] Much like girls' magazines, girls view these series as texts written *for* and *about* them. Many girls and adult women cite the series as contributing to their growing sense of identity and their understandings of girlhood.[29] Serial literature continues to occupy a place of significance for girls, and the genre's perceived insignificance elides the

weight of embedded ideological messages. This project considers how these texts simultaneously reflect and construct cultural understandings of what it means to be a girl, particularly through the figure of the ideal girl. Moreover, these series are a popular and available site in which girls actively participate through reading and interpretive practices. As Romalov argues, "when girls read non-sanctioned serial books, they were engaging in a mild form of protest against those authorities who, believing the books not only inferior but dangerously habit-forming, would keep the books from them."[30] By acknowledging the significance of serial books in girls' lives and examining the role this literature plays in the construction of girl subjectivities, this project contributes to a growing interdisciplinary mapping project of girlhood.[31]

Serial Literature

Girls' series vary from books in a series, for example, the *Anne of Green Gables* series. The distinction between these two genres is murky and somewhat arbitrary, but a few differences can be noted. Both types of books feature the same characters, but the plotline in series books tends to be more formulaic and predictable. The characters in series books are often less complex and static. Their age, appearance, and personality characteristics remain the same throughout the books, and time may be at a standstill. Books in a series frequently portray the movement of a character through time and the series progresses in a linear fashion. Serial books are more episodic; the author may refer briefly to incidents that occurred in previous books, but the texts largely stand on their own. Additionally, the sheer volume of texts in girls' series differentiates them from books in a series directed at girls. Where books in a series are more likely to be written by one recognized author, serial books are typically written by ghostwriters who are provided with character descriptions and outlines—a notable distinction for many critics of serial literature.[32]

Most research on serial literature examines the production processes used by the publishers, particularly the use of ghostwriters and pseudonyms,[33] or the potential harmful effects of serial literature.[34] Analyses of specific girls' series have increased significantly since the 1990s. For example, the *Nancy Drew* series has been the topic of numerous scholarly articles, books and conferences, and continues to be popular with girls and women through reprinting and fan clubs. A surge of celebratory studies on the *Nancy Drew* series in the late 1990s was quickly followed by critical studies exposing the racist and classist images in the books, and recent scholarship on girls' series considers the intersectional representations in various girls' series. However, a genealogical account of the production of the ideal girl throughout these series has not been attempted. Girls' serial literature, given its history as a girls' cultural product long before the rise of movies, television, and magazines aimed at girls, provides an unprecedented avenue for examining the production and reproduction of the image of the ideal girl.

Girls' series provide a prime site for interrogation not only because of its long history as a cultural text for girls and its ability to function "under the radar," in Mickenberg's terms, but because of the format of the genre itself.[35] Unlike individual books featuring girls as the main characters or books in a series, girls' serial books' most notable characteristics are predictability, consistency, and repetition. While readers often can recall the plot and outcome of individual books or books in a series, they rarely remember details of serial books. The most memorable part of the serial is the hero—here, the girl hero who solves the mystery, catches the villain, and wins the day. The genre's repetition of the image of the ideal girl compounds with girls' reading patterns of serial texts, creating the same impression as if one read the same book over and over. For this reason, the entire series, rather than the individual texts, functions as a productive

space for the trope of the ideal girl; she gains strength through her constant and continual reiteration.

Scholars in a number of fields have documented the impact of literature on the developmental processes of children and youth. As Crabb and Bielawski demonstrated in their 1994 study, children's books function as socializing agents and convey more to their readers than a simple storyline.[36] In his foundational article on teaching sociology, Frank Taylor writes:

> Children's books present a microcosm of ideologies, values, and beliefs from the dominant culture, including gender ideologies and scripts. In other words, when children learn how to read they are also learning culture. Learning to read is part of the process of socialization and an important mechanism through which culture is transmitted from one generation to the next.[37]

Girls' series, as a socializing agent particularly directed at young girls, have a powerful impact on girls' identity formation and capacity for exploratory or complex subject positions, as well as their perceptions of others. As Kearney notes, "at the heart of [Girls' Studies] scholarship is a demographic group that has been consistently marginalized, trivialized, and exploited throughout the ages. Girls today may have more agency than those of previous generations, but even the most privileged contemporary female youth remain disenfranchised because of their age."[38] Whatever the perceived literary value, girls treasure these serial texts, learn from them, and interact with them. As McRobbie argues, "elements of contemporary popular culture are perniciously effective" in disseminating and reproducing discourse and therefore need to be examined for their ideological and political significance.[39]As the sheer amount of popular media aimed at young girls continues to expand, we must be aware and critical of the potentially limiting subjectivities such media representations have to offer.

Project Goals

As this dissertation traces the discursive production of the ideal girl through popular American girls' serial literature over the twentieth century, it takes into account the cultural, political, and economic factors that facilitate the representation and reproduction of the discourses of girlhood. These questions guided the project:

- Who is the ideal girl in girls' serial literature? How do the series construct the ideal girl as a model, both unattainable and desired? How is the ideal girl maintained and threatened?
- Does girls' serial literature reflect a broader cultural representation of the ideal girl? In what ways do girls' series help produce the ideal? When and how do ruptures and changes occur?
- Who is the non-ideal girl? How and where does she exist/not exist? How does she simultaneously make possible and disrupt the ideal?
- How is the non-ideal girl included/absorbed/taken into account by the ideal girl?
- How might the replication of one ideal of girlhood in girls' serial literature limit girls' potentiality and restrict new visions of girlhood?

In order to trace the ideal girl over a period of time, I examine popular girls' series from the establishment of girls' series in the early 1900s until now. The study includes texts from the following series (publication dates in parentheses):

- The *Dorothy Dale* series (1908 – 1924)
- The *Nancy Drew* series (1930 – 1979)
- The *Cherry Ames* series (1943 – 1968)
- The *Vickie Barr* series (1947 – 1964)
- *The Babysitters Club* series (1986 – 2000)
- The *Sweet Valley High* series (1983 – 2003)

The final chapter addresses several contemporary adolescent series that are not listed here, as they do not qualify as "serials." The selection of the above series follows the historical trajectory of girls' serial literature since the development of the genre to the

present, although without the assumption that temporal progression guarantees representational continuity. These series are readily available and highly popular; many have been reprinted and continue to have active fan bases. Where available, I included visual elements or media productions related to the series. In order to historically situate the representations in girls' series, I relied on other sites of discursive construction of the ideal and non-ideal girl: newspapers; parents' magazines; girls' magazines; advertising; fan sites. Since "texts" come in many forms and are always intertextual, these additional sources are vital to understanding the historical and cultural contexts of the girls' series and the figure of the ideal girl.

Project Limitations

This study focuses on American serial literature due to availability. Until recently, adolescent serial literature has been a distinctly American genre.[40] However, these series contend regularly with issues of nationality and geography; the non-U.S. citizen or "foreigner" is a popular and complicated trope. These specters of the "Other" are vital to this project's efforts to explore the relationality of the ideal girl and non-ideal girl and to resist the tendency toward their binary oppositions. I have neither attempted to include every popular girls' series, nor have I included every individual text in each series. I selected these series not only because they were (and still are) highly popular and widely read or because they exemplify the genre, but because they capture productive shifts in the figuration of the ideal girl. The format of serial literature allowed me to randomly select a set number of texts from each series for analysis, rather than a cumbersome and unrealistic attempt at close reading every text.

This project does not attempt to offer a comprehensive account of the development of the ideal girl in American culture. Any efforts at such an account would not only be methodologically impractical, but starting from a different epistemological

frame than this project. Similarly, I am not suggesting that girls' serial literature offers the only or best site for examining the discursive development of the ideal girl. Although I make claims here for the cogency of serial literature as a socializing agent in girls' lives, this project presents a situated analysis, approaching one set of cultural texts, in a variety of forms, over an extended period of time.[41]

Text Selection and Methodologies

In examining the development of discourses of girlhood that constantly change, analysis itself demands a certain degree of responsiveness in selecting texts, defining and redefining dominant and resistant strains of discourse, and identifying patterns of representation.[42] This flexible analysis includes paying a "very close and certain kind of attention" to the texts at hand.[43] I chose the series based on the historical trajectory, popularity (both at time of publication and continued through today), availability (several of these series have been reprinted or are readily available in their original prints), and their significance to the ideal girl figure. For example, the *Cherry Ames* series is one of many girls' series published during the 1940s and 1950s that featured nursing, but *Cherry Ames* more closely matches the serial format and shifts the figure of the ideal girl than others (for example, the *Sue Barton* series). Within each series, I chose specific texts based on their availability and impact within the series. Some series (*Dorothy Dale*, for example) contain a relatively small number of texts, allowing for a more comprehensive survey of the series. Others (*The Babysitters Club*, *Sweet Valley High*) contain a significantly higher number of texts. As much as possible, I chose texts that demonstrated the important shifts in the image of the ideal girl, as well as her non-ideal counterparts. With these texts, I used close reading to examine the patterns in representation within their historical cultural contexts. By "close reading," I mean quite

simply that I look for references to appearance, behaviors, traits, and speech patterns, as well as the language used by the author(s) to convey these factors.

Although engaging in close reading of the primary texts, I want to make a distinction between contextualizing the written texts and searching for authorial intent. I do include information on "real" authors and ghostwriters of the series when available, and at times the author's political or personal life has a vital impact on the discourses of girlhood produced within the texts.[44] However, in many girls' series, the author disappears into the realm of ghostwriting. In fact, the series' absence of a clear author supports a guise of innocence and impartiality. I am concerned with what the texts "say" beyond the author's intent, how the text changes meaning over time. Perhaps most important in this project are the ways in which "the writing down of words often allows language and meanings to be controlled more effectively, and to be linked to strategies of centralization and codification."[45] The perpetual relationship between the texts and context contributes to the discursive process, "each defining and redefining the other, saying and doing things differently through time."[46] I employ close reading of the primary texts and situate the repeated tropes—as well as the discontinuities and ruptures—alongside other cultural representations and within their historical context. Rather than using a strict quantitative approach like content analysis, I look for patterns of image and speech, which allows more fully for considerations of the silences and absences that signify the dynamic relationship between the ideal and non-ideal girl.

Key Terms and Theoretical Considerations

Any project that examines an aspect of girls' culture must wrestle with the term "girl," a category that "has proved to be slippery and problematic."[47] "Girl" might refer to the traditional cohort of twelve-to-twenty-aged females, but can also include younger girls (or "tweens"), adult-aged women who identify as girls, or individuals who are not

female-bodied but claim girl identities. In much of Girls Studies work, "girl" and "girlhood" function as "elastic terms, comprising a range of ages as well as generational subjectivities and performances."[48] While I occasionally refer to girls' series readers—a target audience of eight to twelve year old white, middle-class, heterosexual girls—I do not delve into readership or specific girls' responses to girls' series. As Driscoll notes, "talking to girls themselves can neither capture their specificity nor avoid universalizing ideas about girlhood because girl studies is always suspended by its object between the apparently universal category of 'girl' and the pervasive cultural distinctions between girls."[49] I focus instead on the category of girlhood as represented and constructed through the tropes ("the repeated image laden with cultural meaning") of the ideal and non-ideal girl.[50] This project relies on a poststructural theoretical premise of girlhood as a social identity category, a constructed concept that varies over time and place and is produced and reproduced through a countless number of sites.[51] A poststructuralist approach focuses on the role of language as *constitutive* rather than simply *reflective*, interrogates the power of discourse, and rejects the presumption of a "pre-discursive self."[52] I am not claiming that girlhood does not actually exist; like other identity categories such as gender, race, and class, girlhood exists as an experiential reality for the vast majority of female-bodied youth. Although I deal exclusively with the representational and discursive production of girlhood, it is with the understanding that girls' bodies and their experiences of girlhood are very real to them.[53] However, I want to think carefully about how and why what we know as "girlhood" comes to be and, more importantly, how the continually constructed category of girlhood produces certain girl subjectivities and excludes others.

This project relies on the understanding of discourse as a productive system of meaning, "a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is

understood and how things are done in it."[54] Building on Foucault's theories of power and discourse, Judith Butler defines subjectification as "the processes through which we are subjected, and actively take up as our own the terms of our subjection."[55] The role of discourse in producing subjectivities is vital to understanding how serial texts produce, maintain, and challenge the figure of the ideal girl, and how these competing discourses make possible certain subject positions which girls may then take up and make their own. I also want to keep in mind the role of discourse as disciplinary power. The ideal girl functions as a regulatory figure through the continual exclusion and expulsion of the non-ideal. As such, the texts constantly discipline the non-ideal girl toward the ideal, always with the expectation of failure.

In examining the trope of the ideal girl in girls' series, I relied heavily on intersectionality, a feminist theoretical framework and analytical approach based on an understanding that social identities are historically situated "organizing features of social relations" which "mutually constitute, reinforce, and naturalize one another."[56] Social identities and experiences are interrelated, integrated, and co-constitutive; race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, disability and other social identities do not exist separately or in a vacuum, but depend upon one other in their construction. Some postcolonial and transnational feminists have characterized intersectionality as U.S.-centric and limiting analyses to the U.S. "holy trinity" of race, class, and gender.[57] Although intersectionality was initially coined and articulated as a theoretical model in the United States, the ideas that characterize "intersectionality" are not limited to the United States. Just as the concept of intersectionality has provided the tools for feminists to interrogate the connections between identity categories, ideological systems of oppression, and structural and institutions systems of power *within* the United States, an intersectional approach can be adapted to address issues of representation and

identity in relation to nationality as well. Intersectionality proves particularly necessary to this project in mapping the complex relationship between the ideal girl and the non-ideal girl.

My use of the terms "ideal" and "non-ideal" bear some explanation. The "ideal" in the trope of the ideal girl encompasses both the noun and adjective definitions—"perfect" and an "imaginary object or concept." The ideal girl acts as the model, the perfect example of "girl" and yet "something copied," aimed for despite being unattainable. As much as the ideal girl is defined by her attributes or characteristics, she is mutually constituted in relation to the non-ideal girl, the Other: what and who she is not.[58] I discuss this relationship more fully in the following chapter, but I want to briefly review here the foundation and history of the term "Other." Central to a poststructuralist understanding of identities (both those claimed by and assigned to individuals or groups) is the marking of difference as means of identity construction. Stuart Hall writes, "it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the 'positive' meaning of any term—and thus its 'identity'—can be constructed [...] Every identity has at its 'margin', an excess, something more."[59] In this sense, the ideal girl *is* the ideal girl because of what she also is not, in relation to our definitions of "girl;" she is neither a boy (a male-bodied child, youth, or adolescent), nor a woman (a female-bodied adult).

A second and related use of the term "Other" stems from Edward Said's *Orientalism* and its theoretical implications for the fields of literary and cultural studies.[60] For Said, Western (i.e. Europe and the United States) representations of "the Orient" serve to constitute the Middle East and Asia as "Other": irrational, weak, and feminized in contrast to the strong, rational, masculine West, in order to support and justify colonial and imperial ventures. Said's critique of Western constructions of the

Other as not only necessary to the idealization of the West, but as a political and ideological process, are central to this project's examination of the figure of the ideal girl. Despite valuable and needed interventions regarding Western feminist scholarship's Eurocentrism and neocolonial approaches to Other women, existing research focuses on the experiences of Western girls, often to the exclusion of non-Western girls.[61] Studies of girls in the United States rarely consider geopolitical or economic factors, treating American girlhood as an insulated phenomenon. That is, such studies often fail to take up questions of colonialism, nationhood, neoliberal capitalism, and their impact on identity formations, as well as the relationality between girls in the United States and girls around the globe.[62] Such absences contribute to a continued demarcation of girls, where Western girls and non-Western girls exist only in opposition to and isolation from one another. If and when Western and non-Western girls are discussed in relation to one another, the Western girl is the model of modern progress, individuality, and girl power, which the non-Western girl must seek to emulate. Recent scholarship on the "global girl" and Westernized notions of girlhood aim to examine these representative trends.[63]

Mapping the co-constitutive relationship between the ideal girl and non-ideal girl in girls' serial literature demands attention to all of the factors mentioned above, even (and especially) when they are not in the forefront. Although the series discussed in this project are written for an American audience and feature American girls, the Other girl is by no means absent, and these series exist within and participate in the ongoing projects of colonialism and postcolonialism throughout the twentieth century. The ideal girl *as* American is in fact constituted by the specter of the Other girl. Lyn Mikel Brown notes the need to recognize "absent presence," and that presence emerges repeatedly through American girls' serial literature.[64]

The discursive production of the ideal girl does not occur seamlessly; discourse itself is as fragmented and slippery as the subject positions it creates.[65] As "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it; but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart."[66] The serial texts examined here capture and reproduce a dominant and widespread discourse of the ideal girl. These texts also illustrate how the non-ideal girl is incorporated into the ideal girl—how she sneaks in, provides slippage, simultaneously supports and subverts the ideal. I want to avoid suggesting that the regulatory power of discourse is irresistible or unquestionable. More so, I want to resist the tendency to see girls, in particular, as vulnerable and susceptible to the influence of media. The language of victimhood has been particularly prevalent in media studies, where girls are frequently seen as passive recipients of popular culture, rather than active subjects who interact with their mediated world.[67] Girls rarely consume media uncritically, often recognizing the inconsistencies and contradictions between media portrayals of the ideal and their own experiences.[68] Considering girls *only* as victims in need of constant protection limits our understandings of girls' decisions and behaviors, and denies what Lyn Mikel Brown describes as "girls' potential to make themselves."[69] While recognizing the potentially harmful implications of girls' serial literature, this project rejects a view of girls as incapable of critical thought and instead recognizes their potential for critical analyses of their own cultural products.

The final assumption of this project relates to the ongoing debate about the cultural value of popular culture. The selection of girls' series as a site of inquiry contributes to the continuing interrogation of what "counts" as literature—literally what we value as worthy of analysis. As Janice Radway argues in regards to romance novels, a simple dismissal of these texts ignores the political significance of their popularity and

the processes through which they reached such status.[70] It also denies these texts as part of a broader discursive process through which we understand the world around us. In this project, I am invested in challenging the derisive and dismissive attitude towards girls' culture, particularly girls' serial literature, and I begin with the assumption that these cultural texts do ideological work and therefore need to be examined.

Overview of Chapters

The second chapter begins with the launch of girls' series as a genre and the creation of the serial girl hero. The *Dorothy Dale* series (1908-1924), the first recognizable girls' series, constitutes a starting point for understanding the development of the genre of girls' serial literature and the anxieties surrounding it. Here, I discuss central concepts: the creation and virtually instant popularity of the genre, the presence of the ideal girl and non-ideal girl in serial literature, and the discursive construction of the ideal girl as reflective of and participating in a broader cultural, economic, and political context. The *Dorothy Dale* series more closely resembles Victorian children's stories than the competing modern American boys' series, and the character of Dorothy vividly reflects the Victorian model of ideal girlhood. As societal expectations for girls and women were swiftly transforming at the turn of the century, the "modern girl" figure of Dorothy Dale falls behind the times from the beginning, leaving girl readers waiting for a true modern girl ideal.

Dorothy Dale provides the initial fan base for the *Nancy Drew* series (1930-1979), which becomes the best-selling and longest-running serial production to date. The third chapter focuses on the figure of Nancy Drew, who influences every subsequent girls' series and establishes the girl detective as the ideal girl hero in relation to her non-ideal counterparts. The *Nancy Drew* mystery series portrays the ideal girl as brave, adventurous, and active—a true modern American girl. Yet, the series constructs Nancy's

identity as ideal through stark contrast against girls outside her inner circle, rendering Other girls as non-ideal, sometimes less than human. The series does offer young girl readers a girl hero who defies gendered expectations of passivity and frailty, but perpetuates normative standards of feminine beauty.

Chapter four examines the changing construction of the ideal girl in two popular post World War II series. The *Cherry Ames* (1943 – 1968) and *Vickie Barr*(1947-1964) series continue the *Nancy Drew* series' formula of detective action, but within a new context: work. The series follow the antics of a nurse and flight attendant, respectively, and wrangle with changing ideas about girls, women, and paid labor. The series reflect the many inconsistencies of the post-war 1940s and 1950s, in which girls faced regressive social expectations at the same time that their opportunities and aspirations expanded. This chapter explores the contradictory messages about work in these girls' series, and argues that despite the usage of highly feminized careers, the girls go to work not to find a husband, but to find excitement, adventure, and personal fulfillment.

The fifth chapter explores the first of two noticeable turns in the figure of the ideal girl in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as a split between younger and older girls. *The Babysitters Club* series (1986-2000) incorporates many of the trademark elements of girls' serial literature—mystery, friendship, and work—as it takes into account a new issue, multiculturalism. Here, the relationship between the ideal girl and non-ideal girl becomes increasingly visible and complex, as kinder depictions of (some) non-ideal girls contest the clear demarcations of the ideal girl. At the same time, difference is depicted as unexceptional and irrelevant. The series also further constructs the younger ideal girl as an entrepreneur whose participation in a particularly gendered service economy facilitates her induction into her (again specifically gendered) role as active consumer.

Chapter six focuses on the *Sweet Valley High* (1983-2003) series, which merges girls' serial literature with the genre of romance novels. Targeting an older audience and driven by themes of romance, beauty, and competition among girls, this series positions appearance, heterosexual relationships, and romantic viability as girls' central concern, particularly through the avenue of consumption. Unlike the contemporary *Babysitters Club* series, *Sweet Valley High* vigorously resituates the blonde haired, blue-eyed "perfect" American girl while repeatedly expelling the Other, re-centering and narrowing the ideal.

The final chapter addresses recent developments in the discursive construction of the ideal girl in an increasingly globalized media world. Using the relatively recent explosion in adolescent literature and the transition from text to film, this chapter considers how an increased focus on individualism and "girl power" through consumption might be playing out in ways that reproduce—in the guise of meritocracy—specifically raced and classed visions of ideal and non-ideal girls.

Notes

1. Melanie Rehak, *Girl Sleuth: Nancy Drew and the Women Who Created Her* (Orlando: Harcourt Publishing, 2005), 1. Emphasis mine.

2. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

3. I use the terms "ideal girl" and "non-ideal girl" throughout without placing quotations for simplicity's sake. However, this project aims to continually bring attention to the instability and constructed nature of these representations.

4. "Feminist Genealogies" Course Description, *2010 Course Catalog*, Rutgers University.

5. Nikolas Rose, "Identity, Genealogy, History," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 128.

6. Henry A. Giroux, "Teenage Sexuality, Body Politics, and the Pedagogy of Display," in *Youth Culture: Identity in a Postmodern World,* ed. Jonathan Epstein (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), 38.

7. Catherine Driscoll, "Girls Today: Girls, Girl Culture and Girl Studies," *Girlhood Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 13-32.

8. Mary Celeste Kearney, "Coalescing: The Development of Girls' Studies," *NWSA Journal* 21, no. 1 (2009): 1-28. Kearney provides an excellent review of the historical marginalization of girls in academic research.

9. Leonard Marcus, *Minders of Make-Believe: Idealists, Entrepreneurs, and the Shaping of American Children's Literature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Books, 2008). There are exceptions to the elision of gender analysis, but these are limited and most are recent additions to literary criticism. See Meredith R. Cherland, *Private Practices: Girls Reading Fiction and Constructing Identity* (Great Britain: Taylor and Francis, 1994); Margaret Meek, *Children's Literature and National Identity* (Sterling, VA: Trentham Books, 2001); John Stephens, *Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in Children's Literature and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Annette Wannamaker, *Boys in Children's Literature and Popular Culture: Masculinity, Abjection, and the Fictional Child* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Joseph Zornado, *Inventing the Child: Culture, Ideology, and the Story of Childhood* (New York: Garland, 2001) for some examples.

10. Peter B. Crabb and Dawn Bielawski, "The Social Representation of Material Culture and Gender in Children's Books," *Sex Roles* 30, no. 1/2 (1994): 69-79.

11. Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," in *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (London: Harper Collins, 1976); Jackie Kirk, Claudia Mitchell, and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, "Toward Political Agency for Girls," in *Girlhood: A Global History*, eds. Jennifer Helgren and Colleen A. Vasconcellos (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

12. Joseph Hawes, "The Strange History of Female Adolescence in the United States," *Journal of Psychohistory* 13, no. 1 (1985): 51-63.

13. Kearney, "Coalescing," 4.

14. Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945* (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

15. McRobbie and Garber argue that subculture studies only discussed girls in terms of their relationship to boys in subcultures, rarely considering the girls' relationships to one another or the subculture itself.

16. Kearney, "Coalescing," 5.

17. Kearney, "Coalescing," 14; Sharon Mazzarella, ed., *Girl Wide Web: Girls, the Internet, and the Negotiation of Identity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); Angela McRobbie, "Young Women and Consumer Culture," *Cultural Studies* 22, no. 5 (2008): 531-550.

18. Carolina Acosta-Alzuru and Elizabeth P. Lester Roushanzamir, "Everything We Do is a Celebration of You! Pleasant Company Constructs American Girlhood," *Communication Review* 6, no. 1 (2003): 45-70; Naomi R. Johnson, "Consuming Desires: Consumption, Romance, and Sexuality in Best-Selling Teen Romance Novels," *Women's Studies in Communication* 33, no. 1 (2010): 54-73.

19. Angela McRobbie, "Young Women," 532.

20. Kirk, Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, "Toward Political Agency," 16.

21. Ibid.

22. Mary Celeste Kearney, ed., *Mediated Girlhoods* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011), 6.

23 . Nancy Lesko, *Act Your Age! A Cultural Construction of Adolescence* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

24. I provide further information on the definition of girls' serial literature below. I use the terms girls' series and girls' serial literature interchangeably throughout the dissertation.

25. Deidre Johnson, "From Abbott to Animorphs, from Godly Books to Goosebumps: The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Modern Series," in *Scorned Literature*, eds. Lydia C. Schurman and Deidre Johnson (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 148.

26. Kathleen Chamberlain, "Wise Censorship: Cultural Authority and the Scorning of Juvenile Series Books, 1890-1940," in *Scorned Literature*, eds. Lydia C. Schurman and Deidre Johnson (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 190.

27. Sherron Killingsworth Roberts, "Twenty-Five Years and Counting of *Sweet Valley*: Jessica and Elizabeth in Romance Novels for Young Children?" *Journal of Research in Children's Education* 24, no. 1 (2010): 123-139, 128.

28. Chamberlain, "Wise Censorship," 206.

29. Ann C. Garner, "Negotiating Our Positions in Culture: Popular Adolescent Fiction in the Identity Constructions of Women," *Women's Studies in Communication* 22, no. 1(1999): 85-111; Rebecca C. Hains, Shayla Thiel-Stern and Sharon Mazzarella, "We Didn't Have Any Hannah Montanas: Girlhood, Popular Culture, and Mass Media in the 1940s and 1950s," *Mediated Girlhoods*, ed. Mary Celeste Kearney (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011).

30 . Nancy Tillman Romalov, "Unearthing the Historical Reader, or, Reading Girls' Reading," *Primary Sources and Original Works* 4, no. 1/2 (1996): 87-101; 90.

31. I am using "subjectivities" here in the sense that discourses produce specific—and limited—subject positions, which girls then take up.

32. Deidre Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer and the Stratemeyer Syndicate* (Farmington Hills, MI: Twayne Publishers, 1993).

33. Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer*, 43; Carolyn Billman, *The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate* (New York: Ungar Publishing, 1986).

34. Lydia C. Schurman and Deidre Johnson, eds, *Scorned Literature: Essays on the History and Criticism of Popular Mass-Produced Fiction in America* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2002).

35. Julia Mickenberg, "Nursing Radicalism: Some Lessons from a Post-War Girls' Series," *American Literary History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 491-520.

36. Crabb and Bielawski, "The Social Representation," 71.

37. Frank Taylor, "Content Analysis and Gender Stereotypes in Children's Books," *Teaching Sociology* 31, no. 3 (2003): 300-311; 302.

38. Kearney, "Coalescing," 21.

39. Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: Sage, 2009).

40. Johnson, "From Abbott to Animorphs," 52.

41. See Ruth Hubbard, "Science, Facts, and Feminism," *Hypatia* 3, no. 1 (1988); Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook, "Feminist Methodology: New Applications in the Academy and Public Policy," *Signs* 30, no. 4 (2005): 2211-2236; Caroline Ramazanoglü and Janet Holland, *Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 65.

42. Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, (London: Sage Productions, 2007), 161.

43. I owe this phrase to my committee member, Heather Switzer, who passed it on from her own advisor, Bernice Hausman.

44. See Mickenberg, "Nursing Radicalism," 493.

45. Ian Hodder, "The Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research, Second Edition,* eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2000).

46. Ibid., 704.

47. Anita Harris, ed., *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2004), xx.

48. Mary Celeste Kearney, "Introduction: Girls' Media Studies 2.0," *Mediated Girlhoods: New Explorations of Girls' Media Culture*, ed. Mary Celeste Kearney (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).

49. Driscoll, "Girls Today," 26-27.

50. Mary Celeste Kearney, "Birds on the Wire: Troping Teenage Girlhood Through Telephony in Mid-Twentieth Century US Media Culture," *Cultural Studies* 19, no. 5 (2005): 568-601.

51. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

52. Susanne Cannon and Bronwyn Davies, "Postmodern, Poststructural, and Critical Theories," in *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007).

53. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 203. Butler notes the importance of disrupting and deconstructing categories produced through discourse, while acknowledging that individuals experience real material effects of those categories, like gender and race.

54. Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 142.

55. Bronwyn Davies et al., "Becoming Schoolgirls: The Ambivalent Project of Subjectification," *Gender and Education* 13, no. 2 (2001): 167-182, 167; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume One* (New York: Random House, 1978); Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 197.

56. Stephanie A. Shields, "Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective," *Sex Roles* 59 (2008): 301-311, 302.

57. Inderpal Grewel and Karen Kaplan, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

58. Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?" *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996).

59. Hall, "Introduction," 5.

60. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

61. See Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Boundary 2* 12/13, no. 3 (1984): 333-358; and Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1997) for significant interventions.

62. M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

63. Ozlem Sensoy and Elizabeth Marshall, "Missionary Girl Power: Saving the 'Third World' One Girl at a Time," *Gender and Education* 22, no. 3 (2010): 295-311.

64. Lyn Mikel Brown, "The 'Girls' in Girls' Studies," *Girlhood Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 1-12. Also see Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (New York: Random House, 1992), for a discussion of the role of blackness in the American literary tradition in constructing whiteness, as well as the mutual affects of racism on both those who experience and perpetuate it.

65. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 100.

66. Ibid., 101.

67. Kearney, "Introduction," 2.

68. Linda Christian-Smith, "Voices of Resistance: Young Women Readers of Romance Fiction," in *Beyond Silenced Voices: Class, Race, and Gender in United States Schools*, eds. Lois Weis and Michelle Fine (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993).

69. Brown, "The 'Girls' in Girls' Studies," 7.

70. Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

Chapter 2

THE SERIAL GIRL COMES TO LIFE IN *DOROTHY DALE*

[Dorothy] was thinking of home, of her father, the major, then of her brother Joe, older than Roger, and lastly of dear, impetuous Roger himself. Soon she would be home to them again! Was she not their mother ever since she could remember? For her own darling mother had been called away from her little ones so early in a promising life!
~ Dorothy Dale's Camping Days (1911)

The journey of the serial girl hero as ideal girl begins with the creation of the girls' series genre by Edward Stratemeyer, who published his first girls' series in 1908. A decidedly modern genre, the girls' serial emerged in the turmoil of the early twentieth century as girls struggled with their own cultural identities amid shifting expectations of femininity. The *Dorothy Dale* series produced the girls' series audience as it sought to appeal to it, for as Stratemeyer had predicted, girls who were already reading boys' series relished the opportunity to read stories with a girl hero. Many girls must have been sorely disappointed, however. The *Dorothy Dale* series was more closely aligned to Victorian moral stories for children, a far cry from the independent adventure series for boys at the time. Dorothy Dale, "a girl of today" as the first title claimed, seems out of date and behind the times, given her debut in a world fraught with change.

As the first iteration of the ideal girl in girls' serial literature, Dorothy Dale attempts to navigate changing and often contradictory notions of ideal femininity and American girlhood at the turn of the twentieth century. This ideal girl does not mirror the emerging discourses of adult femininity as seen in the Gibson Girl and the New Woman. She begins her journey nestled within the safety of a small New England town, seemingly protected from the outside world and the signs of impending modernity. The character of Dorothy Dale constructs the ideal girl not as a modern girl in the midst of changing social conventions and expectations, but as a patriotic, obedient, and self-sacrificing Victorian old-fashioned girl.

The Victorian Gives Way to Modern

From the middle to the end of the 19th century, the group of individuals we now call "girls" were engaged in a transformation of identity from Victorian young ladies to modern girls.[1] The term "Victorian" represents not only a time period in American history but also a set of ideals, politics, and beliefs that influenced the entire nation. Positioned between the life stages of childhood and adulthood but not yet recognized as a unique group, the young ladies who became girls in the later part of the nineteenth century experienced (and were partly responsible for) significant shifts in behavior and attitude that would shape our current understandings of modern girlhood.[2] Even as these changes occurred, Victorian models of femininity would continue to impact new ideals of girlhood.

Young ladies of the Victorian era were treated as little women, nestled within a feminine domestic sphere with mothers, sisters, aunts, and close friends. With an emphasis on maintaining separate spheres and cultivating "true womanhood," these young ladies spent their time learning how to become future wives and mothers; helping mother was their primary responsibility and pastime.[3] As large waves of immigrants made hired domestic service possible and desirable for upper middle class American families, young ladies' ability to not work became a signifier of social class status.[4] Young ladies began engaging in more leisure activities, attending school in higher rates, and spending more time with peers. As the end of the century approached, experts feared that young ladies were not being adequately prepared for their lives as wives and mothers after schooling. They encouraged mothers to train their daughters properly, lest the nation's next generation be left vulnerable and ill-prepared.[5] Young ladies became girls through changes in schooling, leisure, and work, yet the vast majority could expect to follow in their mother's footsteps, eventually leaving school or work for marriage.[6]

While hegemonic expectations and representations of Victorian girlhood relied on the experiences of wealthy white young ladies, "the Victorian ideal for girlhood—like Victorianism itself—cast its influence well beyond those whose prosperity originally occasioned it."[7] Social admonitions made their way to mothers, who were charged with their daughters' training, via parenting magazines, mainstream newspapers, and even the president.[8] Messages of ideal girlhood were conveyed to girls primarily through their mothers, and through the literature approved for their reading. The young ladies toward the end of the nineteenth century likely found contradictions between their own expectations for their lives and the futures predicted and encouraged within advice and behavior manuals.

From Moral Tales to Adventure Stories

Readers of popular American girls' series today might be hard pressed to find linkages to early children's literature from the Victorian era, which "came into being less to delight than to instruct."[9] The Victorian model of children's literature emphasized the importance of humility, modesty, purity, and filial and religious obedience. Children of both sexes were seen as inherently good, an "island of innocence" to be protected from adult matters. As Nelson notes, the traits to be cultivated in children were the same as those associated with femininity and true womanhood. Women and children found their value in the sphere of domesticity, far away from the dangerous world of adult men. Family experts warned against any literature or activities too adult in nature; children who were exposed to the realities of the world were sure to be corrupted and irreparably damaged.[10] The majority of Victorian children's authors treated very young boys and girls similarly in most respects, encouraging the same traits of kindness, selflessness, and subservience. However, the outcome of their successful socialization differed. Girls who "learned their lessons" were absorbed into the faceless and nameless domestic sphere.

Boys, on the other hand, received acknowledgment for their achievements and became integrated into the male adult world, where individual recognition was acceptable and desirable. The movement for boys from childhood to adulthood, then, was also one from femininity to masculinity and maleness.[11]

The turn of the twentieth century signaled a shift in the perception of children as inherently innocent, as the idea of adolescence as an independent life stage between childhood and adulthood took hold. Adolescence became institutionalized through required schooling and heightened attendance rates; the creation of the juvenile justice system; and youth organizations like the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.[12] The concept of "adolescence" reached the public with the publication of psychologist G. Stanley Hall's *Adolescence*, a work as lengthy as its full title suggests.[13] Influenced by the German Youth Movement, Freud, and other sexologists, Hall described adolescence as " a turbulent period of physical, emotional, and sexual development during which youths needed to be shielded from adult duties and expectations."[14] Hall's theory of adolescence stemmed from his beliefs about child development. He saw children as incapable of reason and in need of strong discipline and punishment. Adolescents had moved beyond the savagery of childhood and had "great potential," but were also "liable to go astray." During this life stage, adolescents could be expected to incite conflict with their parents and display a general disregard for authority, often engaging in risky behavior. According to Hall, adolescents were always on the verge of depression, decadence, and delinquency, and their proper development into adulthood required constant vigilance.[15]

Hall's theory of adolescence prescribed an extension of childhood through dependence on parents and a postponing of the pressures of adulthood. His advice for parents and teachers included increased physical activity and sports for boys, rest and training for motherhood and marriage for girls, and same-sex education. Hall believed

co-education to be distracting and detrimental to the appropriate conditioning of boys, whom he felt were already weakened by receiving instruction from female teachers. Hall encouraged parents to increase supervision and regulation of adolescents' activities and free time during this period of "storm and stress" to reduce the risks of delinquency. Although Hall focused more attention on adolescent boys, his recommendations for heightened surveillance were particularly salient for adolescent girls, whose sexual behavior was the main target of parental and state concern. Hall's concerns about the potential perils of adolescence coincided with broader eugenics rhetoric of strengthening the (white) nation through its youth.

The Stratemeyer Syndicate Causes a Stir

As parents and newly established adolescent "experts" fretted over societal shifts and the dangers of adolescence, all forms of education and entertainment for boys and girls came under intense scrutiny.[16] Physical, mental, and moral development was of the upmost importance, and experts cautioned parents against literature that encouraged "precocity" in boys and girls before their time.[17] These experts were particularly alarmed by a new genre of literature, the adolescent serial.[18]

Although the serial had long been popular with an adult audience, serial producers began targeting young boys and girls who were entering adolescence. At the helm was Edward Stratemeyer who, after years of writing dime novels and children's stories for other publishers, established his own publishing system. A "production factory" for serial books aimed primarily at adolescents, the Stratemeyer Syndicate utilized a system of "ghostwriters" who would write series' novels based on a set of characters and a basic storyline that was carefully outlined.[19] Each writer received between fifty and one hundred and fifty dollars for each book, with the understanding that he or she had no rights to the finished project. With this system, Stratemeyer was

able to publish books in several series at once, often bringing readers from one series into another.[20] Stratemeyer's goals for the new genre were simple: create stories for adolescent boys and girls that were low cost, accessible, adventurous, and entertaining without being overly moral.[21] Stratemeyer sought to differentiate his new serial books from the Victorian model of children's literature:

> I have no toleration for that which is namby-pamby or wishy-washy in juvenile literature. This is a strenuous age…[The boys and girls] of today are clever and up-to-date and appreciate that which is true to life quite as much as their elders. They love incident and adventure. The best an author can do is to give them a fair proportion of legitimate excitement and with this a judicious dose of pleasantly prepared information.[22]

In the spirit of "legitimate excitement," Stratemeyer produced stories with many of the elements that adolescence experts warned against—danger, adventure, and independence. However, while Stratemeyer's girls' series gained popularity with their target audience and soon accounted for thirty percent of his production, the early girls' series took much longer than the boys' series to shake their Victorian roots.

Dorothy Dale: A Girl of Today[23]

> *Dorothy was the only daughter of Major Frank Dale, one of the prominent veterans of Dalton, a small town in New York state. Dorothy was in her fourteenth year, but since her mother was dead, and she was the eldest of the small family […] she seemed older, and was really very sensible for her age.*[24]

Stratemeyer's first girls' series follows the adventures of the title character, Dorothy Dale, a young girl of fourteen living in the small New England town of Dalton. Although adhering to Stratemeyer's tried and true methods of production, the Dorothy Dale series maintains many of the characteristics of Victorian children's books and young ladies advice manuals.[25] Our first figuring of the ideal girl in girls' serial literature, then, is far more a young lady of yesterday than "a girl of today."[26]

The reader encounters Dorothy in the first volume of the series, published in 1908. Dorothy, the daughter of an Army Major (soon to be Colonel), must tend to her ill

father while maintaining their home, caring for her siblings, and saving her father's newspaper. This first story emphasizes Dorothy's role as "little mother" of her family and her natural desire to serve and protect others. Along with caring for her father, Dorothy also looks over her two younger brothers, Joe and Roger. When Roger, age seven, gets his long curls cut at the barber, Dorothy feels the pangs of losing her baby:

> Then he was a "man" and her baby no longer. It was not the curls so much, but taking her baby from her, that hurt so. The loving mother-spirit, that had made Dorothy Dale the girl she was, seemed to grow stronger now with every tear that clouded her eyes. Yes, he had been her baby, and she had loved him with a wonderful love—sent into her heart, she always thought, by the mother in heaven who watched over them both.[27]

Roger may be Dorothy's baby, but she frequently lends her motherly attention to anyone in need, friend or foe. In fact, the series effectively ends with Dorothy's engagement.[28] The series perpetuates the Victorian expectation that girls must be cultivated as future wives and mothers, and Dorothy's servitude and motherly heart sets an example for her girl readers.

Dorothy's status as ideal girl and her seemingly effortless performance of appropriate femininity, particularly her motherly behaviors, are fascinating, given her lack of an actual mother. A large percent of children's and adolescent literature features motherless or parentless heroes and heroines, allowing a greater degree of freedom of movement. The fate of motherless girls is portrayed differently when their mothers die either in childbirth or early in their childhood than when girls' mothers are merely absent or inattentive.[29] In most stories, motherless girls either overcome dreadful circumstances in order to become integrated into a new family, or take on the role of the mother after her death.[30] Dorothy does have a motherly figure in her aunt, Mrs. White, who visits frequently and advises Colonel Dale on raising his daughter. For the most part, however, Dorothy's femininity seems unquestioned, despite the fact that her readers know nothing of her early childhood. The series' portrayal of Dorothy as "little

mother" to her family and "little woman" to her friends effectively naturalizes girls' futures as wives and mothers. It similarly normalizes classed ideals of femininity, as Dorothy meets all of the expectations of a privileged girl without appearing to have been "trained" in any way. Interestingly, Dorothy makes several references to this training, noting that her friend, Tavia, "has never been trained" in appropriate behaviors for girls. These comments suggest to the reader that Tavia *needs* to be trained—her femininity is insufficient—while making invisible and unquestionable Dorothy's socialization processes. [31]

Framing the Ideal: "A Pleasant Companion"

Throughout the series, Penrose highlights Dorothy's good character through her interactions with and contrast against, her closest friend, Tavia. In the second volume, *Dorothy Dale at Glenwood School*, Dorothy and Tavia, head off to a girls' boarding school in the mountains of New England. This text and the following volumes are a hybrid of school and holiday stories, with an emphasis on the emotional and social trials and triumphs of Dorothy.[32] Dorothy's primary concerns are her family back home, her social standing and good reputation, and protecting her friend Tavia from perpetual disaster. A dark-haired, brown-eyed girl of lesser fortune than Dorothy, Tavia's constant missteps and adventurous spirit actually propel the series forward. Tavia's lower social and economic status is noted numerous times throughout the series through descriptions of her behavior, dress, and familial interactions. A description of their shared room at Glenwood School illustrates the contrast between the girls:

> How differently her division of the room was decorated! Tavia had actually drawn a line—clothes line—straight across the room, marking out the territory of each. Dorothy had put up pictures, birds' nests, flags, and the home colors, while Tavia had reveled in collapsed footballs, moth-eaten slouch hats, shot through and through, and marked all sorts of labels, of the college lad variety. Then she had a broken bicycle wheel, in and out of which were laced her hair ribbons and neckties [...] "No wonder Tavia wants help," thought Dorothy, [...] "I declare, she has the queerest taste—if such things are included in the taste faculty."[33]

Tavia's side of the room showcases her failures of appropriate classed femininity—her room resembles that of a disheveled college boy. Even her best friend questions her lack of taste and refinement. Tavia's father, the town Squire, owes Dorothy for his office appointment, and her mother is described as "helpless and shiftless," embarrassing Tavia with her blatant quest for money.[34] Aware of and humbled by her inferior status, Tavia constantly thanks Dorothy for her generosity and good graces, and refers to Dorothy's aunt as her "fairy godmother" after Mrs. White secures Tavia a place at Glenwood School and acquires the clothing necessary for her attendance.[35] In most instances, Tavia represents the "good poor" who knows her place.[36]

Reckless, abrupt, and often lacking in social aptitude, Tavia frequently distresses Dorothy, while bringing further attention to Dorothy's position as the ideal girl. The series incessantly reminds the reader of Dorothy's superiority. In *Dorothy Dale at Glenwood School*, as Dorothy and Tavia prepare to leave for boarding school, their friends in Dalton throw a surprise party:

> [The girls] had decided that some sort of testimonial should be arranged to give their friends a parting acknowledgement of the regard and esteem in which Dalton school girls held Tavia Travers and Dorothy Dale. Of course Tavia was never as popular as Dorothy had always been—she was too antagonistic, and insisted on having too much fun at the expense of others. But, now that she was leaving, the girls admitted she had been a 'jolly good fellow,' and they would surely miss her mischief if nothing more.[37]

Their school friends decide to throw a lawn party, with "a 'Linen Shower' such as brides were given."[38] Toward the end of the lawn party, the girls present Dorothy and Tavia with their gifts and, naturally, Dorothy receives lovelier and more numerous gifts than Tavia:

> Dorothy found she had fourteen beautiful dainty little handkerchiefs, four handmade collars, and a darling pink and white linen bag [...] next Tavia counted twelve handkerchief, and seven collars. She declared the girls knew she never had a decent collar, and, in her profuse thanks, almost wept with joy at the unexpected blessing.[39]

While Dorothy accepts her gifts graciously, Tavia openly acknowledges her lack of nice things. Dorothy's friendship with Tavia is tempered with inequality; Tavia spends much of her time apologizing for her misbehavior and praising Dorothy for her kindness. Despite Dorothy's worries over Tavia's behavior, she owes most of her adventures to her best friend. Impetuous and often careless, Tavia throws caution and social expectations aside, to the dismay of her companions. Tavia's misbehavior can be read as her inability to conform to social expectations of well-bred young femininity. Tavia's behavior appears juvenile, and Dorothy often worries about Tavia's reputation. In the third volume of the series, Tavia attempts to become an actress, an unacceptable decision for a young woman of a certain "breeding." Dorothy comes to the rescue, but the incident is mentioned repeatedly throughout the series, a constant reminder of Tavia's fragile social standing. Dorothy and Tavia's interactions are much like those of Meg and Jo from *Little Women*, but the series clearly sets up Dorothy as the preferred figure of girlhood.

While the series primarily distinguishes between Dorothy and Tavia via their personalities and behaviors, their physical appearances are worth noting as well. Tavia's bobbed brown hair, deep brown eyes, and freckles hint at her tomboyish or modern girl sensibilities.[40] Tavia may be "pretty—a veritable wildflower," but "Dorothy was of an entirely different type. Her beauty was the sort that grows more and more attractive, as character develops, not depending upon mere facial outline."[41] As in earlier girls' books and advice manuals, the series emphasizes the importance of good character and behavior over physical beauty. However, readers could not miss the association of the ideal girl's valued traits with her ideal appearance as well. Despite the explicit focus on Dorothy's ideal personality traits, the series is certainly not lacking in repeated references to her beauty as well. "Goodness" manifests in the figures of the ideal girl with white skin, golden blonde hair, clear blue eyes, and a slender, graceful body.

"Like a Sweet Little Nun"

Dorothy's traits form the foundation of the ideal girl in girls' series: kind, thoughtful, intelligent, practical, and resourceful. On a number of occasions, Dorothy uses her quick thinking to solve a problem. In the sixth volume, *Dorothy Dale's Camping Days*, Dorothy finds herself locked in a sanitarium after being mistaken for a missing "demented" girl who looks similar.[42] Fearful of the distress her absence must be causing her friends and wary of causing trouble for her attending nurse, Ms. Bell, Dorothy steals a nurse's cap and gown, sneaks out the front door in disguise, and escapes in a canoe. As Dorothy plans her escape, she thinks of the risks:

> "The other attendant comes in at five in the morning," decided Dorothy, "then I must—go!" It was an awful thought! She could hear the guards pacing up and down the corridors, she had seen the high fence with its iron palings, and as to gates—there were guards all about them. "The nurse's clothes!" thought Dorothy. "If I could get into Miss Bell's things! They are here—in her suitcase. Then I might walk out! But I would faint if they spoke to me? No, I would not, I must have courage! I must be brave![43]

Several tense moments later, Dorothy has slipped past the front guards in disguise and out of harm's way:

> No sooner had Dorothy paddled around the bend in the stream that led into the river, than she heard the alarm bell of the sanitarium ring. "That's the alarm for me!" she told herself, "but they can never see me in this narrow pass. How fortunate no one saw me take the boat [...] At any rate, this is lovely," she went on musingly, "and somehow, I feel that I will get back to camp before nightfall." The water was as smooth as glass, and in the sunshine that every moment became more insistent, Dorothy, in her linen dress, paddled away with all the skill she had acquired in dear old Glenwood School lake.[44]

This collection of scenes aptly illustrates the height of Dorothy's "adventures" and the series' overall portrayal of Dorothy's qualifications as the ideal girl. Dorothy's trouble here is a matter of mistaken identity or character, a common theme throughout the series. Facing no real physical harm, Dorothy fears the psychological and emotional damage to her friends and family, as well as the disgrace that might come to the young nurse charged with attending her. While Dorothy presumably learns many skills at

Glenwood School, the series downplays Dorothy's skill and physical prowess and emphasizes her social skills and "natural" tendency toward self-sacrifice and serving others. Even as she fears being caught in her attempts to escape from the sanitarium, Dorothy's concern for her friends and the nurse propel her forward: "'In getting out I may save my dear folks more anxiety, and I can save this poor little woman!' She looked kindly down at the sleeping nurse."[45]

The series' repeated focus on Dorothy's humility, self-sacrifice, and moral strength relies on the Victorian model of true womanhood.[46] A "young lady" or "little woman" more so than a modern girl, Dorothy seems poorly out of place amid turn-of-the-century changing expectations of women and girls. The series differs significantly from Stratemeyer's successful boys' series, which girls were already reading voraciously. The series' depiction of Dorothy Dale as the ideal girl also contrasts with other dominant tropes at the time, particularly those of the Gibson Girl and the New Woman.[47]

Modern Tropes of Femininity

The *Dorothy Dale* series' publication in the early part of the twentieth century situates the stories within competing popular discourses of the new American Girl, the New Woman, and the Gibson Girl. In most cases, the term "girl" continued to refer to unmarried young ladies and younger girls, while "woman" was reserved for married women.[48] Fiction writers in the late nineteenth century characterized the American Girl as savvy, flirtatious and frivolous, but ultimately harmless.[49] The New Woman, a highly contested figure at the turn of the century, was hailed by some as proof of evolutionary progress and condemned by others as "the child of the devil and National Woman Suffrage Association leader Elizabeth Cady Stanton."[50] The popular image of the New Woman was the highly politicized club woman, campaigning for full suffrage and other women's rights, including sexual freedom.[51] While some writers openly supported the

New Woman and progressive politics, many popular cultural representations of the New Woman portrayed her as unfeminine, savage, and undesirable, often depicting the New Woman engaging in "masculine" activities such as drinking and smoking.[52] The Gibson Girl, brought to visual life by illustrator Charles Dana Gibson, was an idealized and depoliticized image of the New Woman, focused on youthful and stylish femininity. Perhaps the ultimate ideal, the "copy without an original," Charles Gibson himself stated, "the Gibson Girl does not exist. She has been as the grains of sand in number."[53] Gibson insisted that he did not base his illustrations on any specific models, but also that they represented "not women sitting on a cloud, idealized, but honest, living, helping women."[54] Despite Gibson's claims, the Gibson Girl trope that became popularized did not portray American women as honest or helping, but as "sirens, luring their diminutive fathers and awestruck suitors to their financial doom."[55] The Gibson Girl imagery focused heavily on women as stylish consumers, whether of goods or men. The Gibson Girl might be independent and confident, often attending college and participating in mixed sex social engagements, but she avoided political activism.

While the figures of the American Girl of the late 1800s and the New Woman and Gibson Girl of the early 1900s were all older than the character of Dorothy Dale or the girls reading the series, these figures dominated the popular discourse on femininity at the time. These tropes were influential, particularly since literary and visual representations of young girls were fairly limited prior to the 1920s.[56] The *Dorothy Dale* series' portrayal of Dorothy, then, is somewhat odd. The series' general avoidance of politics or association with women's rights is not unusual, since most children's and adolescent writers thought such materials irrelevant to and inappropriate for their audience.[57] The series, however, reflects anxieties around the New Woman, particularly through the character of Tavia.

Tavia's misguided hopes of becoming an actress are not separate from her typically reckless and forward behavior. Although Penrose repeatedly assures readers that Tavia is, at heart, a "good girl," the series' treatment of the actress incident hints at the slippery slope for girls like Tavia. This danger speaks to both social class and character; the reader is frequently reminded of Tavia's lower economic and social status: "Dorothy was what might be considered a girl of the aristocratic class, while Tavia belonged to those who consider it a privilege to work for a living and have a keen appreciation of the opportunity."[58] Dorothy downplays the class difference between herself and Tavia. As a well-bred young lady, she knows better than to flaunt her good fortunes. Tavia, as well as her brother and father, are hard working and good-spirited, never lazy or insolent. However, her repeated mention of money and social status confirms that she lacks Dorothy's tact:

> Again the sentiment Tavia had expressed to Dorothy: the difference in classes. This was becoming a habit to Tavia, the habit of almost sneering at those who appeared better off than herself. And yet, as Mrs. White scrutinized her, she felt it was not a sentiment in any way allied to jealousy, but rather regret, or the sense of loss that the lot of Tavia Travers had been cast in a different mold to that of Dorothy Dale.[59]

Tavia's adventurous spirit and tendency to always speak her mind can be read as a commentary on class difference, but it also suggests a disapproval of the New Woman as politicized, vocal, and attempting to move beyond her appropriate role. Her physical appearance, even, reflects a loss or lack of appropriate femininity.[60] Tavia is constantly reined in and reprimanded by Dorothy, who maintains the decorum and deference of proper Victorian girlhood. Tavia might not be the ideal girl, but her character more fully reflects the competing discourses of young femininity in the early twentieth century. Dorothy Dale fails to represent any "modern" girlhood, positive or negative.

Dorothy differs most notably from the American Girl, the Gibson Girl, or the New Woman in her health, or her lack thereof. All three popular tropes of femininity (as well

as many of the women who claimed these identities or were labeled as such) emphasized the importance of physical and mental health. Forsaking the Victorian model in which ideal femininity was associated with sickness or frailty, experts across the board encouraged upper class women at the turn of the century to be strong and healthy for the sake of the nation. This discourse was both classed and raced; the dominant white American class feared the decline of their power through "racial suicide," while upper class African Americans also sought to strengthen the race through positive reproduction.[61] In many of Charles Gibson's famous illustrations, he showed the Gibson Girl engaging in light sports or physical activity. Her shapely figure, clear complexion, and youthful appearance were all meant to signify health and fertility.[62] The turn of the century also saw the rise of the girl tomboy, as parents were encouraged to "grow" healthier and stronger girls.[63] Again, these discourses of health and strength were explicitly linked to racial hierarchies and maintaining social and economic dominance by upper class white Americans.

Although the *Dorothy Dale* series includes scenes of physical activity, Dorothy more closely resembles the fragile femininity of the Victorian era than a healthy "girl of today" in the early twentieth century. Penrose frequently describes Dorothy as delicate and sensitive, "as weak as a baby" at times, and emotional and physical collapses occur repeatedly throughout the series.[64] Dorothy's aunt cites Dorothy's tenuous health in convincing her father to send her away to boarding school:

> "But the child has had so many shocks lately, brother," said Mrs. White. "It does seem the only practical plan is to remove her entirely from these surroundings. Of course, it will be hard for you to let her go away, but you must remember, Dorothy has always been a little over-strained with care for one of her years, and now that your means will allow it, she should have every possible advantage to make up for what she may have lost in the way of nerve force."[65]

Dorothy's father muses, "Dorothy is a very sensitive girl," to which his sister responds, "All fine natures are sensitive, Allen. They neither offend nor relish being offended."[66]

Dorothy's "fine nature" meets further test at boarding school, where one of the girls spreads rumors and Dorothy must persevere through public shame and embarrassment. The reader repeatedly bears witness to Dorothy's heartbreak, as she seems paralyzed by her social expulsion:

> How long Dorothy lay there sobbing out her grief on the little white bed, she did not know. Dusk came and the supper hour, but she made no attempt to leave the room. A maid had been sent to her with some toast and tea, and a line from dear Miss Crane, but Dorothy was utterly unable to do more than murmur a word of thanks to be repeated to the thoughtful teacher.[67]

Similarly, our first encounter with Dorothy in *A Girl of Today* showcases Dorothy "crying her eyes out" when she loses her spot at the front of military parade.[68] Beyond portraying her as emotionally weak, crying over everything from hurtful words to a broken tea set, Penrose also shows Dorothy as physically fragile, certainly "not an athlete" by any means.[69] Her body as easily bruised as her feelings, Dorothy prevails through physical difficulties primarily out of concern for her friends and family. After her escape from the sanitarium in *Camping Days*, for example, Dorothy insists on finding Tavia before collapsing and submitting to care.[70] The concern for Dorothy's "nerve force" and mental and physical frailty reinforce Dorothy's social and class status as a well-bred lady within a Victorian model of girlhood, but again, this depiction contrasts with the other images of ideal femininity in the early twentieth century.

Dorothy's ideal girl status retains remnants of Victorian fragility, and the series expresses anxiety over health, particularly mental health. Mentally ill individuals make repeated appearances throughout the series, beginning with the villain in the first volume, Andrew Anderson. After Dorothy discovers Anderson has been manipulating an older man and assists in his arrest and prosecution, the man is declared mentally unstable and is institutionalized.[71] Anderson's reappearance in the second book sparks Dorothy's nervous episode that leads to her father sending her to boarding school. Later,

in *Dorothy Dale's Camping Days*, Dorothy is mistaken for a mentally ill girl who has escaped from a sanitarium. The collection of scenes surrounding Dorothy's accidental institutionalization, as throughout the series, suggests a real ambivalence about mental illness and the struggling field of psychiatry. Inside the sanitarium, Dorothy attempts to explain to the nurse that she is not the girl for whom they are looking:

> "You are the strongest sick girl I ever saw," declared the nurse. "I hope I have made no mistake."
> "Well, indeed you have," replied Dorothy. "I tell you I am not and have never been a patient at any institution. I thought there was some test of mentality—the eye, isn't it?"
> "But nurses cannot make tests," answered Miss Bell. "We have to wait for the dear professional, all-powerful doctors to do that."[72]

Despite her efforts, Dorothy cannot convince the nurse that she possesses all the necessary mental facilities, and must sneak out of the sanitarium in disguise. The fear and confusion over the mentally ill reaches beyond this case of mistaken identity; *Dorothy Dale's Camping Days* includes two "actual" cases of mental illness—the girl who has escaped the sanitarium runs into Tavia, who has gone missing from camp due to trickery from a "lunatic" named Mortimer Morrison, an escaped mental patient who was previously an actor.[73] The text makes repeated references to the eyes; Tavia notices "a strange glare in the wonderful blue eyes" of the ill girl upon meeting her, and in her first encounter with Morrison, she "thought she had never before seen such glassy eyes."[74] Mental illness seems an inconsistent diagnosis, as the ill girl, Mary Harriwell, soon recovers from her "awful shock" and remains in camp with the girls, fully recovering "her reason."[75] The same doctor who announces Mary Harriwell recovered (after falling repeatedly and being lost in the woods) also declares Mortimer Morrison a danger to society. Mental health, then, is a slippery slope, and Dorothy's mistaken identity and subsequent proof of mental stability attempts to distinguish her from the truly mentally ill.

Does the Other Girl Exist?

Aside from Dorothy's few interactions with the mentally ill, who are portrayed as simultaneously dangerous and harmless, true villains are scarcely found in the *Dorothy Dale* series. Overwhelmingly isolated from those outside her social, racial, and economic circle, Dorothy's true enemies are girls who are not her friends. The Other girl exists as a ghostly figure, rarely breaking through the insulated world of Dorothy Dale. When she does appear, however, the series employs racialized gender stereotypes in portraying the Other girl. The most stunning example is Viola Green, a visitor to Dalton in the opening of *Dorothy Dale at Glenwood School* and a co-resident of the boarding school where Dorothy attends. Rude and conniving, Viola despises Dorothy's popularity from the beginning, and her jealousy grows as the story continues. Viola spreads rumors of Dorothy being arrested, causing many of the girls in her new school to avoid associating with her. In her attempts to shut Dorothy out of her social domain, Viola goes to all lengths, lying to friends and teachers and openly scorning Dorothy.[76] On first meeting, Viola is described as "rather pale," but as the story continues her "true" heritage is revealed.[77] On the train to Glenwood School, Dorothy and Tavia meet Viola's mother, "a small woman, evidently of foreign extraction (Spanish, Dorothy thought)." Mrs. Green dotes on Viola in an extreme fashion and appears physically and mentally on edge: "They noticed that Mrs. Green used her smelling salts freely, she often pressed her hand to her head, and seemed much like a person too delicate to travel."[78] Tavia and Dorothy both note this in "the strange little woman, with the almost glaring black eyes," and speculate that Viola's terrible attitude might be related to her mother's illness.[79] Alerted to her Spanish heritage, the reader's opinion of Viola continues to worsen as the story continues. In casting for the school play, Viola, previously described as "quite pale," "because of her dark complexion [...] was elected to be Frivolita, the Queen of

Pleasure."[80] As the reader learns more of Viola's treachery and deceit, her dark features are highlighted more and more.[81] After being asked to apologize to a teacher for her disrespectful behavior, Viola's true personality emerges:

> "Apologize!" echoed the girl. "As if my mother's daughter could ever stoop to that weak American method of crawling out of things!" and her dark eyes flashed while her olive face became as intense as if the girl were a desperate woman. "Don't they know that the blood of the de Carlos flows in my veins?" she asked herself. "No, that's so, they do not know it—nor shall they. Let them think me Italian, French or whatever they choose—but let them not trifle with Spain!"[82]

Rather than apologize, Viola goes on to make further insinuations about Dorothy to Miss Crane, as "all the Spanish fire of Viola's nature flashed and flamed with her words."[83] Viola's unsavory nature is exposed, reflected in her now-olive face and inappropriate emotional expressions. In the end, Viola receives her due. Her mother falls very ill and Viola's treachery is revealed; she leaves Glenwood School for good and Dorothy regains all her former favor. The series' scathing treatment of Viola suggests widespread contemporary concerns about American identity, immigration, and what was perceived as the inherently inferior nature of non-white imposters who sought to infiltrate American society. The contrast between Dorothy and Viola emphasizes Dorothy's humility, purity, and virtue. In doing so, it links these traits explicitly to white upper class American identity, vehemently excluding the Other girl who attempts to claim a place in the inner circle of the ideal girl.

Too Good to Be True?

The series emphatically stresses Dorothy's goodness, literally using the imagery of Dorothy as an angel in numerous scenes.[84] In the situation described above, Dorothy, much like the good children in Victorian literature, receives her reward for being virtuous, and Viola is punished for her deceit:

> It might be hard to meet the looks of the other girls, but it could not possibly be as hard as what Viola had to bear. So thought our dear Little Captain, she who was ever ready to take upon her young and fragile shoulders the burdens of

> others. But such virtue plainly had its own reward—Dorothy Dale entered the classroom at eleven o'clock that morning, with peace in her heart. Viola Green was out of the school room and was fighting the greatest enemies of her life—Pride, mingled with Jealousy.[85]

Dorothy's "perfect self-control" and tendency to put others first is central to her construction as the ideal girl. And yet, Dorothy seems too good for her readers, the "impossibly good" kind of girl hero who lacks interest and excitement. Dorothy's tales of Glenwood School, friendship, and social mores repeated the messages girls were already familiar with: "be good, and be rewarded." Girls, already bored with overly sentimental moral tales and thrilled by the rowdy adventure stories of the boys' series, must have wanted more. In order to be ideal, the ideal girl may always be unattainable, but she must be admirable and desirable. Girls felt compelled to be good, but they also wanted to see reflections of themselves in their literary heroes. More importantly, they read to have adventures and experience life beyond their limited world. As such, Dorothy Dale was a girl of yesterday before she began.

Notes

1. Jane Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 2.

2. I am not claiming to provide a complete overview of Victorian girlhood here, but rather a brief outline of Victorian principals and dominant representations of ideal femininity that are evident in the *Dorothy Dale* series.

3. Hunter, *Young Ladies*, 21. For a discussion of the alternative ideal to the cult of true womanhood in 19th century America, see Frances B. Cogan, *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1989).

4. Ibid., p. 19; See also Ruth Alexander, *The Girl Problem: Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900-1930* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995); Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Random House, 1997); Elizabeth Clement, *Love For Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); and Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

5. Nancy Lesko, *Act Your Age! A Cultural Construction of Adolescence.* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

6. Hunter, *Young Ladies*, 337.

7. Ibid., 6.

8. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*, 20.

9. Claudia Nelson, *Boys Will Be Girls: The Feminine Ethic and British Children's Fiction, 1857-1917* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 1. See also Peter Stonely, *Consumerism and American Girls' Literature, 1860-1940* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003).

10. Nelson, *Boys Will Be Girls*, 17.

11. Ibid., 14.

12. Georganne Scheiner, *Signifying Female Adolescence: Film Representations and Fans, 1920-1950* (Westport: Praeger. 2000), 24. For a history of the Girl Scouts and other girls' organizations at the beginning of the twentieth century, see Susan A. Miller, *Growing Girls: The Natural Origins of Girls' Organizations in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

13. G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (New York: D. Appleton and Company,1904).

14. Ibid., 101.

15. Hall's feelings about adolescence were conflicted, and reflect what Katherine Henry calls "a certain pattern of argument and counterargument that is ubiquitous in Americna political discourse"—children as both precious and dangerous, a threat in themselves and in need of protection from outside threats. See Katherine Henry, *Liberalism and the Culture of Security: The Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric of Reform* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011), ix.

16. This is not to suggest that parents were not previously concerned with what their children, particularly daughters, were reading. Hunter (2002) notes that parents were cautioned against allowing girls to read novels due to their "incitement to action" (83).

17. Lesko, *Act Your Age*, 81.

18. Kathleen Chamberlain, "Wise Censorship: Cultural Authority and the Scorning of Juvenile Series Fiction, 1890-1940," in *Scorned Literature: Essays on the History and Criticism of Popular, Mass-Produced Fiction in America*, eds. Lydia C. Shurman and Deidre Johnson, (Greenwood, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 192.

19. See Deidre Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer and the Stratemeyer Syndicate* (New York: Twayne Press, 1993); Carol Billman, *The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate* (New York: Ungar Publishing, 1986). Both texts offer wonderful, in-depth treatment of the history and methods of Stratemeyer and his syndicate.

20. Billman, *The Secret*, 44. For example, Nancy Drew books would often include an advertisement for the newest Hardy Boys or Bobbsey Twins book in the back, and vice versa. The readerships for these series overlapped, ensuring increased sales.

21. Kent Baxter, *The Modern Age: Turn-of-the-Century American Culture and the Invention of Adolescence* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 142. See also Chamberlain, "Wise Censorship," 204.

22. Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer*, 5.

23. Many consider Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) the first book written specifically for a girls' audience. This study focuses on the girls' serial genre, which the Dorothy Dale series initiates. For an excellent account of the role of Alcott's *Little Women* in creating a new genre and impacting generations of readers, see Barbara Sicherman, *Well-Read Lives: How Books Inspired a Generation of American Women* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2010).

24. Margaret Penrose, *Dorothy Dale, a Girl of Today* (New York: Cupples and Leon Co., 1908), 3.

25. Like all of Stratemeyer's series, the Dorothy Dale series' author, Margaret Penrose, is a pseudonym for the ghostwriters of the syndicate. While many of the series' "true" authorship cannot be traced, most of the Dorothy Dale series is now attributed to Lilian Garis, a journalist and long-time Stratemeyer ghost writer. She also wrote under the pseudonym Laura Lee Hope.

26. See Hunter, *Young Ladies*, for a historical account of this transition around the turn of the century.

27. Penrose, *A Girl of Today*, 26.

28 . Margaret Penrose, *Dorothy Dale's Engagement* (New York: Cupples and Leon Co, 1917). The series includes one final book, written by another ghostwriter in 1924, which follows one last "adventure" of Dorothy after her marriage.

29. Around the turn of the century, as social reformers sought to find a solution to the "girl problem," absent or inattentive mothers were blamed for producing delinquent daughters. See Alexander, *The Girl Problem*; and Odem, Delinquent *Daughters*; see also Scheiner, *Signifying Female Adolescence*, for film's treatment of these mother and daughter relationships.

30. Little Orphan Annie, Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farms, and Pollyanna are all examples of this portrayal.

31. Penrose, *A Girl of Today*, 105.

32. Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer,* 112.

33. Penrose, *Dorothy Dale at Glenwood School* (New York: Cupples and Leon Co, 1908), 30-31.

34. Penrose, *A Girl of Today*, 4.

35. Penrose, *Glenwood School*, 95.

36. See Dorothy Allison, "A Question of Class," in *The Socialist Feminist Project*, ed. Nancy Halstrom (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002).

37. Penrose, *Glenwood School*, 98.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., 121.

40. Tavia's eyes are most often described as brown, although occasionally they are hazel.

41. Penrose, *A Girl of Today*, 103.

42. Margaret Penrose, *Dorothy Dale's Camping Days* (New York: Cupples and Leon Co., 1911), 188.

43. Ibid., 189.

44. Ibid., 196-197.

45. Ibid., 189.

46. Dorothy's service is often couched in terms of her patriotism and spiritual commitments; on more than one occasion, others refer to her as an angel or missionary. See *A Girl of Today*, 110 for one example.

47. Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth Century Popular Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). Nash argues that popular cultural representations of teenage girls fluctuate between "impossibly good and impossibly bad." The Dorothy Dale series' claim to "clean and wholesome reading" clearly falls within Nash's "impossibly good" category.

48. Penny Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood: Popular Magazines for Girls Growing Up in England, 1920-1950* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1995), 1.

49. The title character of Henry James' *Daisy Miller* (1879) is the most celebrated example of the American Girl figure.

50. Chicago preacher Dr. Henson, (*Women's Tribune*, June 8 1895, p. 90), cited in Martha H. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005). Patterson provides an in-depth discussion of the debate around the New Woman at the turn of the century, as well as the continued significance of her importance to feminist scholarship.

51. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl*, 5.

52. Ibid.

53. Edward Marshall, "The Gibson Girl Analyzed by Her Originator," *New York Times*, Nov. 20, 1910.

54. Ibid.

55. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl*, 22.

56. See Nash, *American Sweethearts*; Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*; Scheiner, *Signifying Female Adolescence*; and Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobbysocks: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).

57. Nancy Romalov Tillman illustrates the tendency of serial authors to undercut or dismiss political issues, particularly suffrage, using the example of the Motor Girls series, a series produced by Stratemeyer and written under the Margaret Penrose name during the same time period as the Dorothy Dale series. See Tillman, "Mobile Heroines: Early Twentieth-Century Girls' Automobile Series," *Journal of Popular Culture* 28, no. 4 (1995): 231-243.

58. Penrose, *Glenwood School,* 11.

59. Ibid., 92.

60. We learn early in the series that Tavia lost her long hair in a railroad accident. She seems not to mind: "I had the time of my life getting it cut off properly, in a real barber shop." Ibid., 140. She also owns a pair of overalls, much to Dorothy's shock and dismay (*Camping Days*, 64).

61. See Lesko, *Act Your Age*, 87.

62. Marshall, "The Gibson Girl," 2.

63. Michelle Ann Abate, *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008).

64. Penrose, *Glenwood School*, 54.

65. Ibid., 66.

66. Ibid., 71.

67. Ibid., 171.

68. Penrose, *A Girl of Today,* 5.

69. Penrose, *Camping Days*, 152.

70. Ibid., 229.

71. Penrose, *A Girl of Today*, 188.

72. Penrose, *Camping Days*, 174.

73. Ibid., 170. The linkage between actors and mental illness is no coincidence, and again suggests a disapproval of Tavia's acting ambitions.

74. Ibid., 161; 90.

75. Ibid, 231.

76. Penrose, *Glenwood School*, 168.

77. Ibid., 111.

78. Ibid., 128-129.

79. Ibid., 130.

80. Ibid., 166.

81. Ibid., 180; 197; 208.

82. Ibid., 209.

83. Ibid., 212.

84. See Penrose, *Glenwood School*, 160; and *Camping Days,* 138.

85. Penrose, *Glenwood School,* 200.

Chapter 3

CONTRADICTORY GIRLHOOD IN THE *NANCY DREW* SERIES

"It was really nothing," [Nancy] protested modestly…"I might have fallen down on the job if father hadn't come along at the critical moment."

"I'm not sure about that, Ms. Drew," and the chief smiled. "You strike me as a very resourceful young lady." ~ The Bungalow Mystery (1930)

Nancy Drew cruised onto the adolescent literary scene in her roadster on April 28, 1930 and began her career as the most famous of teenage sleuths. The series' target audience of white middle-class American girls was on the brink of a cultural change, as the ideal of the modern American girl shifted in light of the accomplishments of the New Woman. While girls at the turn of the century saw an increasing focus on appearance tempered by the continued celebration of valued personality traits—honesty, selflessness, generosity—the young girls in the 1930s felt mounting pressure to reach stricter standards of beauty and style. As the decade progressed, young girls enjoyed greater personal freedoms than the generations before, but those freedoms came with heightened pressure to meet the ideal. The modern American girl was expected to be active, athletic, and brave, while maintaining all the former trappings of femininity, including grace, modesty, and deference. These modern additions were accompanied by stringent attention to appearance and hygiene. As the modern American girl could not hope to achieve these standards alone, the growing realm of advertising began to target young girls along with their mothers, playing a significant role in their cultural development. Commercial advertisements, girl's magazines, and literature bombarded girls with images of the modern girl ideal and included detailed instructions on how to achieve the newest standards of beauty.

As the most widely read girls' series in the 1930s, the *Nancy Drew* mystery series contributed to the dissemination and construction of the American girl ideal. In addition

to entertainment, Nancy Drew provided her young girl readers with a legitimate role model and an opportunity to "imagine herself as a competent and important presence in the world"—a difficult feat to achieve, then and today.[1] With Nancy Drew starring as the modern ideal girl, the series promotes many positive traits sought in modern girlhood. Simultaneously, Nancy, along with the other characters in the series, reinforces restrictive standards of beauty, class, race, and sexuality of the 1930s. In the early years of its publication, the series' ideological messages about immigration, national identity, racial tension, changing class dynamics, evolving gender roles, and modernity reached a vast number of young readers. Thus the series provides a distinct illustration of the complex and often contradictory messages conveyed to girls in the 1930s, as reflected through the construction of the ideal.[2]

Girlhood in the 1930s

Beauty and Bodies: Shifting Standards

The 1930s brought a time of great change in American culture, particularly for white, middle-class young girls. As their families struggled through the distressing times of the Great Depression, many girls sensed a new set of standards being developed in regards to class status and respectability. Girls were encouraged to become more active and adventurous while maintaining feminine decorum. Just as young girls after the turn of the century saw their previously valued traits of self-discipline and service to others overshadowed by physical appearance, girls in the 1930s faced an even greater focus on exterior rather than interior beauty. Where vanity was previously considered distasteful, parents and teachers now encouraged self-scrutiny as "healthy and productive." In a pamphlet distributed by the Massachusetts State Department of Health in 1935, students were encouraged to consider their own physical faults and seek to improve themselves.[3] These self-ratings "failed to suggest that character or personality might compensate for a

few blackheads or a cowlick. Instead, it was based solely on what a teenager saw in the mirror."[4] Girls were increasingly expected to clean up and beautify their entire bodies in a way that had not been stressed before.

As companies began to participate heavily in advertising, beauty and hygiene became further commercialized. Now, companies encouraged both women and girls to purchase all broad range of products to improve their looks and ensure their cleanliness. Mothers, of course, were responsible for the health and beauty of their daughters. Jeanette Eaton, beauty editor of *Parent's Magazine*, made mothers' responsibilities clear when she asked rhetorically: "What mother lives who doesn't want her daughter to be good-looking?" The solution was simple: "Whether a girl is pretty or plain, there is apt to be a beauty problem to solve. It must be handled with wisdom and requires the best resources of the beauty business."[5] Whether the "beauty problem" included acne or weight issues, mothers took responsibility for the appearance and therefore psychological health of their daughters. Such problems suggested neglect—and a potential lack of class propriety—on the part of mothers.

Acne and menstruation topped the list of such nagging beauty problems. For decades, women and young girls had fashioned homemade sanitary napkins to diminish the sights and smells of a monthly cycle. With the appearance of Kotex ads in women's magazines in the late 1920s, homemade sanitary napkins were considered outdated and "unsanitary." Similar ads began appearing in girls' magazines in the early 1930s, and soon young girls considered these products vital to their development—and their reputations. Doctors vouched for the superiority of mass-produced napkins and tampons, ensuring the success of commercial brands.[6] Daughters insisted on the importance of such products to baffled fathers, who were reluctant to spend hard-earned money on beauty trifles.

The move from homemade undergarments to store-bought products also signaled this transition; before long, catalog bras were considered necessities rather than luxuries. As these products increased in popularity, standards of normality became more rigid. Brumberg writes,

> So long as clothing was made at home, the dimensions of the garment could be adjusted to the particular body intended to wear it. But with store-bought clothes, the body had to fit instantaneously into standard sizes that were constructed from a pattern representing a norm. When clothing failed to fit the body, particularly a part as intimate as the breasts, young women were apt to perceive that there was something wrong with their bodies.[7]

As it became more and more popular for young girls to wear store-bought clothes and undergarments, the pressure to conform to body standards increased as well. Young girls browsed catalogs and depended upon their magazines and favorite books to provide them with the latest fashions and beauty advice.

Sexuality, Race, and Class

Strengthening beauty norms coincided with a renewed effort to reform and protect adolescent girls from sexual imprudence, as well as a new focus on the state's official response to the "problem" of female adolescent sexuality.[8] Reformers encouraged state officials to respond to changes (both perceived and real) in girls' behaviors that accompanied rapid growth in urban and industrial sites.[9] Federal and state agencies and reformatories were established in the early twentieth century to police girls' sexual activity, and reformers and social workers moved from a model of female victimization to one of female delinquency. This shift had both positive and negative effects: reformers recognized female agency in sexual activity and widened female participation and inclusion in the justice system, but also heightened regulation and punishment.[10] Reformers looked to the home for clues to the girls' delinquency, and frequently blamed working mothers—many of whom were immigrants, ethnic minorities, or African

American women—for being unable or unwilling to sufficiently monitor their daughters' activities.[11]

Girls from all socioeconomic classes engaged in premarital sexual experiences to some degree. However, girls who worked outside the home presumably had more opportunity and were therefore under more scrutiny. Adolescence experts noted a shift in middle-class sexual behavior as well; girls were believed to engage in petting and premarital sex (albeit with a "steady") at a higher rate than ever before.[12] Experts expressed concern that the social expectations for girls to remain virgins until marriage (or engagement) were losing their influence.[13] Studies like *Middletown* suggested that moral expectations were indeed changing, but that there was an inconsistency between the girls' sexual behavior and the public discourse and popular representation of female adolescent sexual delinquency.[14] Whatever the real sexual behaviors of girls in the 1930s, official and popular discourse both created and reflected the public perception that girls' risk for delinquency—i.e. sexual activity—was heightened.

Warning the Parents

With adolescents holding the future of the nation in their hands, adolescence "became a terrain in which struggles over what would count as an adult, a woman, a man, rationality, proper sexuality, and orderly development were staged."[15] Expert opinion and advice reached the nation through various media forms, including parenting magazines, newspapers, and advice books. These texts instructed parents—mothers, especially—to pay close attention to their daughters' behaviors and remain alert to their ever-changing moods. The advice in parenting magazines actively linked female adolescence with delinquency and sexuality.[16] Writers offered mothers suggestions on how to address the topic of sexuality with their daughters, and recommended that all social interactions with the opposite sex be strictly monitored.[17]

Popular films and literature also circulated notions of adolescence as a time of emotional and psychological instability, as well as the dangers of sexual delinquency. These media genres provide us with "a window into the cultural meanings of female adolescence and how those meanings changed over time."[18] Typically, films and novels in the 1930s accepted and promoted the assumptions of adolescence and dramatized female sexual delinquency as detrimental to the girl, the family, and the nation. Literature directed at children and adolescents was no exception; the majority of these texts acted as warning manuals for boys and girls.

The hugely popular serial literature produced by the Stratemeyer Syndicate, including the *Nancy Drew* mystery series, appears to stand in stark contrast to this pattern of adolescent representation. Unlike prescriptive literature of its time, the *Nancy Drew* series, authored under the pseudonym "Carolyn Keene," features a female adolescent protagonist who is capable, rational and emotionally balanced—the direct opposite of popular tropes of adolescence.[19] Nancy Drew operates almost completely without adult supervision and engages in physically risky behavior on a regular basis, but never succumbs to delinquency. In this sense, the series rejects the warnings and suggestions of adolescence experts. However, the series achieves Nancy's freedom by eliminating the possibility for sexual delinquency. Nancy's adolescence is distinctly non-sexual, maintaining the gendered social prescription for protecting and controlling girls' sexuality. The series also sends mixed messages about the importance of idealized beauty. Although the first few books in the series rarely discuss Nancy's appearance, the introduction of her sidekicks, Bess and George, is accompanied by an increasing emphasis on Nancy's physical appearance as part of her ideal status.

This chapter focuses primarily on the first three books in the Nancy Drew series: *The Secret of the Old Clock; The Hidden Staircase;* and *The Bungalow Mystery*. These

texts were a "breeder" set, published simultaneously in 1930 to spark interest and create reader loyalty for the series. Since most readers begin with the first book in a series, these three texts were the mostly widely read.[20] I also include references from three subsequent texts, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn* (1931) and *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (1931), and *The Secret at Red Gate Farm* (1931), which introduce Bess and George. Given the series' strict adherence to the key characteristics of serial writing discussed in the introduction, the observations made here are largely applicable of the entire series.

Nancy Drew: Girl Sleuth

Unlike Dorothy Dale and other girls' fiction protagonists before her, Nancy Drew's identity as a girl sleuth drives the series and defines Nancy's character. Nancy goes on holiday and travels for fun, as does Dorothy, but Nancy's travels are almost always tied up in a mystery, and Nancy lives to solve the case. The series' depiction of Nancy differs significantly from the ideal girl as established in the *Dorothy Dale* series. Independent, brave, and strong-willed, Nancy enjoys a great deal of personal freedom. Like Dorothy, Nancy lives with her father, but she does not have any younger siblings for whom she is responsible. The Drew's comfortable financial situation enables them to employ a live-in housekeeper, the lovable Hannah Gruen, "an elderly maid of all work who had been with them for many years."[21] Keene makes clear to the reader that Nancy has not abandoned her duties in the absence of a mother:

> Although only sixteen, Nancy was unusually capable, and under her skillful direction everything ran smoothly in the Drew household. On the death of her mother six years before, she had taken over the entire management of the establishment…The responsibility of the household might have weighed heavily upon Nancy, but she was the type of girl who is capable of accomplishing a great many things in a comparatively short length of time.[22]

This early mention of Nancy's household management skills establishes Nancy's appropriate performance of feminine domestic responsibility. Hannah's presence releases Nancy from household chores—something virtually all young girls in the 1930s

surely dreamed of—and allows her the freedom to pursue her own interests.[23] Nancy's financial security and relative lack of household duties frees her to move about as she pleases, often in her dependable blue convertible. Heilburn notes the significance of Nancy's roadster to the appeal of the series:

> She cannot only back it up out of tight places, she can get into it and go any time she wants. She has freedom and the means to exercise it. That blue roadster was certainly for me, in my childhood, the mark of independence and autonomy; the means to get up and go.[24]

Nancy's roadster (and the always available funds to refuel and repair it) contributes to and symbolizes Nancy's autonomy and adventurous spirit as a girl sleuth. Unlike other girls' series written around the same time, the Nancy Drew mysteries take place in various locations, frequently away from Nancy's home of River Heights. Rather than remaining safe within the reach of her father and Hannah, Nancy ventures into unknown and often dangerous situations at distant locales. In Nancy's first couple of experiences, *The Secret of the Old Clock* and *The Hidden Staircase*, Nancy works in River Heights and the neighboring towns, eventually traveling to nearly Twin Oaks. But as Nancy establishes herself as an independent sleuth, she quickly moves to Lilac Inn, several hours away from home, and then to Shadow Ranch in Arizona. Although young girls in the 1930s may not have actually wanted to experience the dangers Nancy faced, her daring nature and desire to explore gave girl readers in the 1930s far more excitement than her serial predecessors.

Throughout the series, Nancy embodies the new ideal of the modern American girl as active. Nancy's mystery stories are flooded with adventure and action, as well as danger. In the first six stories, written in 1930 and 1931, Nancy faces capsizing boats (*The Secret of the Old Clock*), airtight secret staircases (*The Hidden Staircase*), and wild animals (*The Secret of Shadow Ranch*), while escaping from locked cabins (*The Bungalow Mystery*) and strange cult meetings (*The Secret of Red Gate Farm*). The

series' trademark silhouette, dust jackets, and illustrations all show Nancy in action, in control despite moments of danger.[25] Nancy's physical abilities are part of her appeal:

> She never loses an athletic contest; her physical prowess is a hallmark of her character. Nancy walks faster, endures inclement weather better, and carries heavier loads than any of her less physically fit companions [...] Her physical endurance signals her utter fearlessness, her resolve, and above all her boundless capacity to go out into the world and "make things happen."[26]

Nancy's uncanny ability to handle any situation seems strengthened by her countless skills. In *The Secret of Shadow Ranch*, for example, Nancy goes out for a canter, and Keene reminds the reader, "[Nancy] sat her horse well and rose with confidence and ease."[27] Of course, Nancy's skills are never questioned, and no one bothers to wonder how Nancy learned to become a skillful rider of ranch horses in suburban River Heights. Nancy's physical and mental abilities are noted repeatedly in the novels, reminding the reader of her strengths *and* lack of weaknesses.

"A Pretty Girl of Sixteen"

The depiction of the ideal girl from Dorothy Dale to Nancy Drew entails a shift in personality traits and strengths. Physically, however, the ideal remains the same: like Dorothy, Nancy is fair-skinned with blonde hair and blue eyes. Keene notes Nancy's appearance early in each text of the series; *The Secret of the Old Clock* opens with the description of Nancy as "a pretty girl of sixteen" and her father's admiration of her "golden bob."[28] Much like the Dorothy Dale texts, the early volumes of the Nancy Drew series limit the emphasis on Nancy's physical appearance, focusing instead on her character traits and actions.[29] Nancy also shares Dorothy's natural propensity for popularity, finding "time for clubs and parties," with the modern addition of enjoying "sports of all kinds."[30] In the first book, the mentions of Nancy's physical appearance are overshadowed by repeated descriptions of her "naturally clever mind" and ability "to think for herself and to think logically."[31] After the introduction of Bess and George,

however, the series reflects the broader cultural shift in emphasizing the importance of physical beauty for girls.

Every novel begins with an introduction similar to Nancy's initial description in *The Secret of the Old Clock*, with a brief reminder of her "sparkling blue eyes" and golden blonde hair.[32] Readers encounter Nancy's slender build and stylish clothes as part of her description as well. Nearly every new scene includes a brief description of Nancy's always-flattering outfit. Skirts and sundresses dominate Nancy's wardrobe, and yet she never appears constrained by her clothing, even in hot pursuit of a villain through mud and rain. Sometimes the location of the mystery determines Nancy's clothing, as with the case in *The Secret at Shadow Ranch*; however, Keene still provides the reader with a brief description of Nancy's riding outfit.

Nancy's dress plays an important role in maintaining her identity as the ideal girl. On one hand, Nancy consistently challenges expectations of femininity, particularly in her pursuit of a traditionally male-dominated career and its resultant dangers. Cornelius notes Nancy's failures as an ideal future wife:

> If this is the criteria upon which one evaluates a potential mate, Nancy Drew would lose every time. She's rarely around, and when she is, she's off on another mystery. As for growing old with someone, well, Nancy's profession's insurance aside, she hardly seems capable of staying in one spot long enough to mature past eighteen, let alone grow old.[33]

On the other hand, Keene frequently reminds readers that Nancy is very much female. Johnson argues, "Nancy is well mannered, well dressed (usually in skirts or 'frocks'), and well versed in social graces [...] Nancy is thus able to adopt many characteristics associated with male protagonists without seeming masculine."[34] In order to prevent Nancy from falling into the stereotype of a tomboy or lesbian, Keene must secure Nancy's identity as "girl" by repeatedly discussing her beautiful features and traditional women's clothing. Nancy's closet overflows with flattering skirts, feminine suits, pastel blouses,

and towering heels to counteract her potentially masculine behavior. For the girls reading her stories in the 1930s, Nancy Drew provided an ideal model of the modern American girl, both in behavior and in dress. While Nancy chases villains, she always wears the latest trend. Just as Nancy's wardrobe choices help maintain her identity as a female, her stylish dress and shopping tendencies contribute to the commercialization of a feminine identity for her reading audience.

Nancy's clothes fit perfectly on her slim figure, again reinforcing the ideas about "normality" in clothing and body type. In most of the stories in the series, Keene describes Nancy's body as "slender" or "slim." Nancy never appears concerned or distracted by her weight, even when trying on store-bought clothing. Unlike many girls in the 1930s who concerned themselves with "slimming" or reducing, Nancy does not appear to struggle with weight at all. Nancy's eating habits also reflect a healthy attitude towards food and her body type; she always eats heartily but resists overeating. Frequently, Nancy's appetite is curbed by her curiosity. In *The Secret of Red Gate Farm*, for example, Nancy's thoughts about the mystery distract her from eating. Nancy's positive relationship with food and optimistic body image may have been encouraging to some young girls in the 1930s, a period of increasing focus on physical appearance. For most girls, however, Nancy's ideal body was what they admired, not her healthy eating habits. As Brumberg notes, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, "for the first time, teenage girls made systematic efforts to lower their weight by food restriction and exercise [...] the new fashionable figure was slender, long-limbed, and relatively flat-chested."[35] Of course, Nancy has no reason to worry. She embodies the ideal of beauty by American standards—slender, blonde, and blue-eyed. But for young girls reading her adventures, Nancy exists as another example, along with beauty magazines and fashion ads, of what

every girl *should* look like. Rather than providing a positive alternative to "slimming," Nancy's body reinforces the ideal of required slenderness for the modern American girl.[36]

Nancy's Sidekicks: A Delicate Balancing Act

Nancy's eating habits and body type seem fairly insignificant in the first several stories of the series. Although always impeccably dressed, Nancy, and therefore the reader, focuses on the mystery at hand. However, the introduction of George Fayne and Bess Marvin in the fifth volume, *The Secret of Shadow Ranch*, marks a turning point in the depiction of bodies and their corresponding characters. The cousins, close friends of Nancy in River Heights, often accompany Nancy on trips or take her along on visits to relatives, where they inevitably encounter some sort of mystery. Although Mason asserts that George and Bess are the two competing sides of Nancy's personality, I would argue that the two girls provide a buffer for Nancy's perfection, each representing what might happen if the ideal girl fails to get things quite right.[37]

George Fayne enters the Nancy Drew scene on page two of *The Secret of Shadow Ranch*, sharing the details of the upcoming trip to a ranch with Nancy. George, always straightforward, sticks to the facts and speaks plainly, often bluntly. Compared to the descriptions of Nancy and Bess, George lacks luster in the looks department. Although Nancy assures her friend that she is "not a bit homely" and "quite distinctive looking," George disagrees: "You base flatterer! Look at this straight hair and my pug nose! And everyone says I'm irresponsible and terribly boyish."[38] In addition to being described repeatedly as tomboyish and tough, George always seeks action. More often than not, Nancy has to curb George's enthusiasm and hastiness to avoid unnecessary trouble. George maintains enough feminine traits to stay out of the butch lesbian trap; she has a steady boyfriend and (occasionally) wears dresses. However, compared to her cousin,

Bess, and even to Nancy, George lacks the grace and refinement necessary for the ideal girl.

Elizabeth Marvin, or Bess, is George's cousin and virtual opposite. "Elizabeth was noted for always doing the correct thing at the correct time. Though she lacked the dash and vivacity of her cousin, she was better looking and dressed with more care and taste."[39] Described as a "pretty, slightly plump blonde" with an engaging smile, Bess provides a clear contrast to her cousin, George. Slightly overweight and highly emotional, Bess has a reputation for being a romantic. Bess's melodramatic outlook and voracious appetite set her apart from Nancy and George, and she frequently acts as the butt of George's jokes about eating, laziness, and obsession with boys. As Brumberg notes, "Popular serial fiction for younger girls, such as Grace Harlow and Nancy Drew, now had a fat character who served as a humorous foil to the well-liked, smart protagonist, who was always slim."[40] While Bess's weight and eating habits are scrutinized and criticized to a greater degree and on a more serious note in later books in the series, even the first description of Bess in *The Secret of Shadow Ranch* mentions her heavier body type and highlights her eating behaviors.

George and Bess enter as Nancy's friends and frequent partners in mystery solving very early in the series, and they are present in every story after *The Secret of Shadow Ranch*. The trio of girls dance on a balancing scale, each girl representing particular traits and images. Each girl's body type corresponds to a stereotypical personality. George appears tall, athletically built, and wears her hair short with minimal attention to dress or makeup. She charges ahead, often foolishly, without second thought to danger or consequences, and lacks sympathy and tact. On numerous occasions, George scolds Bess for her fearfulness and teases her incessantly. Despite her unkind words to her cousin, George can always be counted on in a pinch, and she often supplies

the "man-power" necessary on different missions when no male characters are available. George actually exhibits much of the same behavior as Nancy, but George's spontaneity and lack of refinement sets her apart from Bess *and* Nancy, and her body stereotypically reflects her personality. The correspondence is not coincidental; George acts the way she does *because* she is athletically built and has short hair—for Keene and her readers, George's personality and physical attributes are intricately connected and dependent upon one another.

Bess possesses all of the graces that George lacks, but she leans too far on the other side of the weighing scales, both literally and figuratively. While George lacks emotion and sympathy, Bess appears as an emotional basket case, always on the verge of a perpetual meltdown. Whether upset over a misplaced watch or rising floodwaters, Bess's reaction to each situation is exaggerated; while Nancy and George assess the situation calmly, Bess flusters about, expecting a major catastrophe. Bess's responses to food occur as frequently as her emotional outbursts, and are often equally dramatic dramatic. While the girls are out searching for clues or just around the house, Bess focuses on the next meal or the one at hand. Although her responses to food in the earlier texts are not as problematic as those in later stories, Keene significantly reminds the reader that only the "plump" girl concerns herself with eating. Mary Linehan notes that Bess's preoccupation with food and weight occurs more frequently in the later stories, after the hunger and deprivation of the Great Depression. But even in the early volumes, Linehan notes, "Nancy does not hunger. She is very different from the fleshy Bess. The girl sleuth cannot be burdened with an appetite, much less a vulnerability to rich and fattening foods. Such human frailties would interfere with Nancy's detecting."[41] Bess, despite her involvement in Nancy's excursions, never contributes as much as George and sometimes gets in the way. Although her failures are not always linked directly to food,

the series depicts Bess as slow, lazy, and uncomfortable in many situations because of her weight. Her body renders her unable to compete with Nancy and George.

As George dangles off one side of the measuring scale for the ideal girl, barely avoiding a tumble into the lesbian abyss below, Bess sits lazily on the other with cake in hand, trying not to be an overly sensitive wimp. Nancy, of course, stands solidly in the middle, her position of leadership and mask of perfection unquestioned. With Bess and George on each side, she easily manages a precise balance of bravery and delicacy. Nancy never neglects her appearance, but her mind remains on the mystery at hand. Without George and Bess to balance her behavior and appearance, Nancy would have a much harder time maintaining such a juggling act. Despite her precarious position in the center of the scales, Nancy's repeated success encouraged young girls in the 1930s, as well as today, to try and follow her example. Leading the way as model of the new American girl, Nancy traipses through dangerous woods, rescues endangered orphans, and maneuvers her shiny blue convertible out of tight spots, all the while looking fresh and attractive.[42] Every by her side, George and Bess's obvious flaws emphasize Nancy's lack thereof and provide comic relief through the questionable tomboy and the whiny fat girl. These girls function as models of loyal friendship, yet their stereotypically conflated bodies and personalities provide young girls with examples of what the modern American girl should not be, buffering Nancy's position as the ideal: slender, beautiful, and clever.

While the *Nancy Drew* series and its central characters reinforce an ideal of physical perfection that could not be reached, the series also provided young girls struggling with new standards of beauty and acceptability in the 1930s with models for action and intelligence. The 1930s also represent a crucial moment in American history in terms of adolescence and the regulation of female adolescent sexuality. The *Nancy*

Drew series rejects many of the gendered assumptions and prescriptions of adolescence that were prominent at the time. Nancy Drew's character also captures the paradoxical ways in which female adolescents were both highly sexualized and yet denied sexual desire.

"Storm and Stress" or Calm and Collected?

> *It was with difficulty that Nancy controlled her anger as she saw the man read Laura's private correspondence. She longed to fly out at him and accuse him face to face. However, she was far too wise to allow herself to be governed by a mad impulse.*[43]

Stratemeyer's formula for serial literature in the 1930s featured "idealized adolescent protagonists" who "embodied as if by prescription Hall's eight 'optimal' adolescent traits" and were capable of stabilizing a middle-class world threatened by modernity.[44] Nancy Drew quickly became the star of Stratemeyer's syndicate and lived up to Hall's expectations, capturing these "optimal" traits effortlessly. Ilana Nash discusses these traits as indicative of Nancy's "personhood," a condition Nash argues was so appealing to young girls in the 1930s because they were denied it in their own lives.[45] Nancy's "personhood" relies on her juxtaposition against non-white and (mostly) working-class characters who are portrayed as less than human. Nancy's construction against the "Other" defends a white racist and elitist patriarchal paradigm.[46] The series' negative representations of poor, non-white, and ethnic minority characters correspond with contemporary expressions of concern over white racial dominance, class stability and immigration control by anti-immigration proponents and eugenicists. Hall, a firm believer in forced sterilization and selective reproduction, almost certainly had white middle-class adolescents in mind when he comprised his list of "optimal" traits to be attained.

Although Nancy Drew certainly possesses all of Hall's coveted traits, her character more accurately disavows the qualities associated with the period of adolescence: irrationality and emotional instability. Rather than displaying the emotional "storm and stress" expected of adolescence, Nancy thinks deductively, rarely letting her emotions run wild. The series begins with an exchange between Nancy and her father, Carson Drew, a well-known and respected lawyer. After Carson Drew answers his daughter's questions regarding a legal case and a potential missing will, Nancy "nodded thoughtfully and relapsed into silence while she digested the facts of the case."[47] Nancy thinks logically, has a natural taste for mystery, and can be trusted with the most sensitive of information from her father's legal cases, and these characteristics are integral to her popularity with her readers. When Warner Brothers produced four "B" films based on the series in 1939 and 1940, girl fans wholly disavowed the filmic depiction of Nancy's character. The films, playing off of the spoof detective genre made popular by *The Thin Man* (1934), featured a Nancy who was young, silly, and flustered, a far cry from the literary figure.[48] Although the films enjoyed some success with an adult audience, the lack of support from young girl readers suggests the significance girls found in the capable, collected girl sleuth.[49]

Nancy's knack for keeping her wits and controlling her emotions extends to her sleuthing. Although Nancy's "intuition" helps her in almost every case, she exudes rationality even in the most dire of circumstances. Whether bound and left in a remote bungalow or trapped in a closet with a dangerous criminal lurking outside, Keene reminds the reader: "it was characteristic of Nancy to keep her head when faced with a brave problem."[50] Nancy exhibits typical emotional responses to events: she worries about her father when he goes missing, is frightened when surprised by a foe, pities her friend Laura's misfortunes, feels slightly embarrassed when praised in public for her

achievements, and expresses gratitude for the "trophies" awarded to her. Rather than lacking emotion entirely, Nancy simply refuses to allow her fears and impulses to get the best of her; control is the name of her game.[51] Most significantly, Nancy's expressions of emotion are responses to outward events; she never mopes or feels sorry for herself. The exact opposite of the depressed adolescent with unpredictable mood swings, Nancy's emotions are balanced and measured, allowing her to think calmly and clearly in risky situations.

Nancy Drew rejects another expected characteristic of adolescence: rebellion against authority. Nancy often acts on her own to solve mysteries, and she alerts legal authorities when she has collected her evidence and needs their assistance in capture. In *The Hidden Staircase*, for example, Nancy calls upon the police after she has fully explored an underground passageway and seen for herself the proof of trespassing and theft. "Without mincing words, Nancy quickly told of the strange things that had happened at the Turnbull house and the discoveries she had made [...] 'I want you to arrest Nathan Gombet,' Nancy ended. 'He is the guilty man.'"[52] The sheriff, who is reclining in his office and joking with his officers when Nancy arrives, seems thoroughly perplexed by the demands of the young sleuth.

As the sheriff and his men follow Nancy back to the Turnbull's residence and approach the criminal's home, Nancy expresses disgust and frustration with the authorities, who she clearly views as bumbling idiots. She hopes to catch the man off guard, denying him the opportunity to hide the stolen goods. "'The sheriff may be stupid enough to refuse to arrest him unless he finds *evidence* on the place,' she thought, in disgust."[53] Once on location, Nancy directs the sheriff and his men deftly, and they obligingly follow her orders, often with astonishment at her brilliance. This is characteristic in the earlier books of the series, although Nancy's deference to legal

authority increases significantly later in the series. Nancy often doubts the competence of the police, but she demonstrates the utmost respect for their authority and social necessity. Nancy knows that she can collect clues, gather evidence and solve the mystery, but only the police can arrest and punish the criminals.

Nancy's respect for authority extends to (or, more accurately, is a reflection of) her adoration of her father. Unlike the troubled adolescent in the popular imagination of the 1930s, Nancy Drew has an uncommonly positive relationship with Carson Drew, her only parent.[54] Keene tells us that Carson "showered a great deal of affection upon his daughter" and prided himself on their shared characteristics; "it was his secret boast that he had taught her to think for herself and think logically."[55] Not only is Nancy exceptionally affectionate with her father (a very un-adolescent trait indeed!), she confides in him and relies on him for guidance in her adventures.

In return, Carson is never overbearing or unreasonable in his demands of Nancy and trusts her fully, which allows her to enact (nearly) perfect obedience. When Nancy promises to be home before dark and arrives late because of a mystery, she quickly gains his forgiveness:

> "Nancy, I've been worried about you," he began. "Don't scold," Nancy begged. "I tried not to break my promise, but I couldn't help it this time. Oh, I had the most exciting afternoon!" "But exciting adventures are hard on poor old Dad," Mr. Drew chided. "When you didn't get back I thought perhaps you had had car trouble on the road. I was about ready to start after you." "I'm terribly sorry. Honestly I am." Nancy looked so genuinely sorry that Carson Drew promptly forgave her. "Tell me about your adventure," he suggested.[56]

Surely many adolescents in the 1930s wished for Carson's quick forgiveness (not to mention Nancy's speedy roadster), as much as parents wished for idealized adolescents who came home when they promised and had a good reason when they did not. Carson trusts Nancy to be honest and well behaved, allowing her freedoms that would have appalled G. Stanley Hall. When Nancy requests permission to stay with the elderly

Turnbull sisters in their presumably haunted mansion, Carson hesitates but allows himself to be "neatly" cornered by Nancy in a matter of moments, declaring, "'You win, Nancy. Your eloquence would convince a jury.'"[57] Nancy's relationship with her father is marked by love, honesty, trust and mutual respect, quite the opposite of the expected turmoil of the parent-adolescent relationship in the popular 1930s imagination.

Nancy's predictably perfect behavior during Carson Drew's frequent absences is certainly another rejection of the popular tropes of adolescence in the 1930s.[58] Parental supervision was of the utmost importance, and film and literature depictions of delinquent girls often blamed parents for a lack of availability and supervision.[59] Carson travels to other cities for business, sometimes leaving Nancy for weeks, but his absence is not detrimental to Nancy. The egalitarian, partner-like quality of Carson and Nancy's relationship would also trouble Stanley G. Hall and other adolescence experts, who argued that adolescents needed firm discipline. Parents who treated their offspring as equals or friends during the period of adolescence were certain to run them straight into the streets, but Nancy's relationship with her father refutes this popular fear. Nancy Drew's ability to be resourceful, think logically and independently, and maintain perfect control of her emotions combines with her recognition of social authority and her positive relationship with her father to secure precisely what G. Stanley Hall advised against with regard to adolescents: a lack of supervision.

What "Counts" as Delinquency?

> *"At least three hours to wait," Nancy sighed. She sank down in a comfortable chair and attempted to read a magazine, but soon gave it up. She realized that the adventure before her was apt to prove a dangerous one. Although unafraid, she was somewhat nervous and waited impatiently for nightfall.*[60]

> *Abandoning her automobile, Nancy Drew hurried across the road and without an instant's hesitation plunged into the thicket where she had just caught a fleeting glimpse of a man she believed to be Jacob Aborn.*[61]

Throughout the series, Nancy Drew is a fascinating contradiction of girlhood; she maintains a perfect image while constantly engaging in adolescent behavior that would be classified by Hall, reformers, and parents in the 1930s as "delinquent." Delinquency included a broad range of activities and behaviors, some more serious like smoking, drinking, petty theft and vagrancy. Other activities appeared less blatantly dangerous and immoral, like staying out late, partying and dancing, and missing school, but parents, teachers, and the authorities agreed that adolescents who engaged in these behaviors without appropriate supervision were on a slippery slope into more severe behavior.

Nancy does not drink or smoke, and since it is always summer in the series, she never misses school. But she frequently stays out past dark, drives dangerously along dark roads, and snoops alone in questionable locations. Nancy even dabbles in petty theft when the mystery case demands it; in her first mystery case, Nancy sneaks a prized clock out of thieves' getaway van and into her roadster. She quickly hides the clock in her trunk from a police officer: "'That was a narrow escape,' she laughed, as she drove away. 'It might not have gone so well with me if the marshal had discovered stolen goods in my car. It certainly wouldn't have been easy to explain how I came by that clock.'"[62] Nancy's theft pays off, since she finds the missing clue and the "true" owners of the clock give it to her as a reward. Nancy also escapes any threat of punishment for her continual trespassing and breaking and entering.

However, we must also remember that adolescent delinquency was—and remains—distinctly gendered. Nancy never ventures into the one realm of delinquency that really matters for adolescent girls: sexual activity. Georganne Scheiner notes that in films about female adolescence after 1920, "the real threat appeared to be adolescence itself. It was represented as a life stage fraught with peril, and the greatest menace

appeared to be the sexuality of adolescent girls."[63] Scheiner's observation holds true for popular literature of the time as well, and Keene ensures that Nancy avoids the pitfall of sexual activity at all costs. Carson Drew may worry about Nancy's whereabouts, but he never needs to be concerned about her propriety or sexual integrity. After all, Nancy is not out partying and dancing with boys who would threaten her virginity; she spends her time mulling over clues and capturing hardened criminals. Nancy's "steady" date, Ned Nickerson, does not appear until later in the series and, as Ilana Nash jokes, Keene "keeps him on a short tether."[64] Young men are largely absent from the series, and Nancy's interactions with Ned, aside from garnering his assistance in her mystery cases, are restricted to group dates with friends and chaperoned dances.[65] Sexuality appears to be almost irrelevant to Nancy's identity, but her absence of sexual interest or activity is integral in protecting her from delinquency status.

This construction of Nancy Drew captures the paradox of female adolescence in the 1930s—she is simultaneously de-gendered and gendered, sexualized and denied sexuality. Many of Nancy's daily activities like hiking, swimming, and horseback riding lack a gendered association. As noted earlier, Hall and his associates recommended regular exercise and exposure to nature for all adolescents, although more so for boys. But Nancy's sleuthing pursuits—snooping, trespassing, searching hidden tunnels, chasing criminals, driving recklessly—de-gender her. I use "de-gender" in the sense that these actions were associated with male delinquents, whose gender remained invisible or naturalized. Nancy's engagement in these activities does not make her seem less of a girl, but rather makes her gender less visible. I would argue that these activities do not necessarily detract from Nancy's femininity, since her performance of proper feminine comportment and duties is both flawless and effortless.

Nancy may be exceptionally clever, but her gender sometimes works against her in predictable ways. Her father, the authorities, and the criminals themselves often note that her achievements are exceptional "for a girl." "Not many girls would have used their brains the way you did," a marshal tells her.[66] Carson Drew's praise of Nancy's detective skills and logical thinking is frequently accompanied by astonishment, for Nancy's is "not at all the sort of head which one expected to indulge in serious thoughts."[67] When Nancy tells her father how she found the missing will after a dangerous run-in with robbers, "Carson Drew stared at her with mingled pride and amusement."[68] Again, we see the contradictions in female adolescence: Nancy can shoot a charging lynx or change a tire in the rain with the best of the boys, but "like most girls, she had never interested herself in the mechanics of what made wheels go around" and cannot identify the cause of a boat's engine failure.[69]

Given the discourse of female adolescence and delinquency discussed earlier, Nancy's gendered identity cannot be detached from her sexuality. In addition to occasional gendered knowledge gaps, being "a pretty girl of sixteen" introduces another obstacle for Nancy: the threat of sexual violation. Keene often mentions Nancy's youth and attractiveness, describing her as "an unusually pretty girl, fair of skin with friendly blue eyes and golden curly hair."[70] Nancy is appropriately modest and unaffected by the attention she receives. Even when "well aware that her hair was in disorder and her clothes were in disarray," she remains "indifferent to her appearance."[71] Keene informs the reader of her attractiveness, while Nancy appears virtually unaware of others' interest in her. On another occasion, Nancy takes the long walk to the business section of River Heights to shop, and "as she swung along more than one passerby turned to look after her in admiration."[72] Keene carefully constructs Nancy as unaware of her attractiveness while drawing the reader's attention to it. Somehow, this "admiration" for

Nancy's athletic physique appears perfectly harmless, as long as the gaze comes from the appropriate person. Her sexual vulnerability is not determined by her traits or actions, but by the character of the potential violator.[73]

The tone changes from admiration to threat when the onlooker is a criminal, and Nancy becomes aware of the danger. In *The Bungalow Mystery*, for instance, Nancy's nemesis, Jacob Aborn, catches her snooping around a seemingly abandoned bungalow in the woods. Immediately, her "inner sense" tells her she is in danger:

> "You clear out, and clear out quick," roared the irate man and he took several steps toward her, flourishing his stick menacingly. "You dare touch me, and you'll wish you hadn't!" Nancy returned defiantly. Yet she thought prudence would be the better part of valor and so she kept on toward the timber and was soon out of sight of the man who kept gazing after her in a manner that showed his evil disposition.[74]

Keene makes clear that Nancy's trespassing and tramping alone through the woods is not the cause for the threat, but the "evil disposition" of Jacob Aborn, who figuratively flourishes more than his stick.

Nancy frequently finds herself in tight spots with danger lurking outside—no fictional girl has ever spent more time crouched in closets, holding her breath. When robbers discover Nancy hiding in *The Secret of the Old Clock*, Keene tells us, "there was no mistaking the ugly threat. One glance assured her that she could expect no mercy."[75] Nancy breaks free and makes a run for the door, but the lead robber quickly reacts: "Almost in one long leap he overtook her, caught her roughly by the arm, and forced her against the wall [...] Nancy Drew struggled [...] But she was powerless in the grip of the man."[76] The hint of sexual violation also subtly reinforces Nancy's innocence through the assumption that violation would not be possible if Nancy's virginity were not intact. Nancy's race and class privilege are undeniable factors in placing the blame on the criminal rather than Nancy. Nancy's status as the white middle-class daughter of a respected attorney insulates her from delinquency.[77]

The series' representation of Nancy's sexuality twists popular understandings of female adolescent delinquency as sexual activity in the 1920s and 1930s. Girls were somehow considered both blameless and responsible for their demise if they wandered down the "pathway of pleasure."[78] Unlike the popular discourse of the 1930s, the Nancy Drew texts never depict Nancy's (often textbook) delinquent behavior as placing her at risk for sexual violation, nor do they blame Carson Drew for allowing her free reign.[79] Films of the period depicted the public's anxiety about female adolescence sexuality, constructing female adolescent characters as sexually aggressive *and* vulnerable.[80] Scheiner notes that adolescent girls' confusion over the conflicting images in films was "hardly surprising in light of the contradictory discourses of femininity and adolescence that stress both sexual attractiveness and sexual passivity."[81] The film adaptations of Nancy Drew in the late 1930s capture this contradiction precisely, as Nancy is sexualized and "emptied" of her wits and skill, as well as her subversive potential.[82] In the texts, however, Nancy remains innocent; she is subtly attractive and knowledgeable enough to recognize the threat of sexual violation, but she expresses no sexual desire of her own.

Outside the Ideal Circle

Nancy Drew's instant popularity as serial girl sleuth and her discursive construction as ideal girl in the 1930s were mutually constitutive, made possible through her brilliant character development and her positioning between Bess and George. Her best friends contribute significantly to Keene's depiction of Nancy as the ideal girl, yet Keene also employs stereotypically negative depictions of Others to further elevate Nancy's status. Although not the first scholar to address the blatant racism and classism in the original Nancy Drew texts, Ilana Nash demonstrates the ways in which the series' writers construct Nancy Drew's identity against characters of other races and classes as a way of protecting white, middle-class values. In the Nancy Drew stories, immigrants or

individuals of foreign descent are dangerous, suspicious, untrustworthy, uneducated, and criminal. Language often acts as an indicator of a character's status as white or non-white, and descriptions of villains use a common trope of children's literature, in which attractive heroes and heroines are contrasted against the villain, identifiable by his or her ugliness or deformity. This pattern seems particularly true for female characters, whose outward appearances are a clear depiction of their inner qualities. Aside from Nancy and her close friends, women in the series are relegated to menial work and are often poor, unattractive, and racialized. I want to focus specifically here on the series' portrayal of Other girls as the non-ideal girl, incapable of comparing to or competing with the ideal girl, Nancy Drew.

The series reflects what Dorothy Allison astutely understands as the American myth of poverty, with a clear distinction between "good poor" and "bad poor."[83] In the stories, however, the "good poor" are not actually poor. They are respectable, middle-class people of honorable backgrounds who have simply fallen on hard times. For example, in *The Secret of the Old Clock*, Nancy comes to the assistance of the Horner sisters, who have lost their inheritance to greedy, swindling cousins. We are frequently reminded that Nancy helps the Horner sisters because the money is due to them, not because they need it more than their greedy, wealthy cousins. Ilana Nash disagrees with Deborah Siegel's assertion that Nancy was "a kind of Robin Hood for the 1930s." She writes, "Robin Hood took from the rich and gave to the poor; Nancy pledges her allegiance entirely to the moneyed classes [...] Genuinely poor people tend to disgust her or arouse her suspicions."[84] The series' depiction of the working poor supports Nancy's suspicions; the majority of the villains are dirty, loud, rude, and poor. Wealth is monitored just as closely as poverty in the series. A clear preference for "old money" exists, and those who possess "new money" are immediately suspect. In *The Secret of the*

Old Clock, for example, both Nancy and her father express dislike for the Tophams for their snooty and flippant attitudes. They represent the "new money" families that lack the taste and respectability of old money. When Nancy enters the Tophams' home under pretenses of selling charity tickets, she seems appalled by their lack of designing taste: "'such an expensive hodge-podge!' Nancy observed to herself, sitting down. She glanced at the pink carpet—which to her clashed with the red window draperies—and at an indiscriminate assortment of period furniture mixed with modern."[85] Keene also notes that Mrs. Topham "was well known for her aspirations to be accepted by the best families in River Heights."[86] The Tophams' "bizarre" décor and lack of grace suggest that they will never "fit in" in River Heights, despite their accumulated wealth.

We see through Nancy's eyes that Ada and Isabel, the Topham daughters, wear their negativity on their bodies:

> Ada tossed her head and her *dark* eyes flashed *angrily*. In spite of the expensive clothes she wore, she was *anything but attractive*, for she was tall and slender to the point of being termed "*skinny*." Now that her face was *distorted with anger*, she was positively *ugly*. Isabel, who was the pride of the Topham family, was rather pretty in a *vapid* sort of way, but Nancy Drew thought that her face *lacked character*. She had acquired an *artificial* manner of speaking which was both *irritating* and *amusing*...the two sisters were older than Nancy, but had been in her class at school. She had found them *stupid*, as well as *arrogant*.[87] (Emphasis added)

Readers understand through Nancy's disapproval that they are not to identify positively with the Topham sisters, and their physical descriptions speak loudly about their inferior social position. The Tophams are a rare breed in the Nancy Drew series, as wealth generally suggests social standing, purity, and normalcy. Ada and Isabel, however, are clearly outside Nancy's inner circle, thereby excluded from ideal status. This exclusion naturalizes Nancy's role as the ideal girl and the impossibility of ideal girlhood: despite their acquired wealth, the Topham sisters cannot buy their way in.

While virtually all non-white characters are working class in the stories, the depictions of racialized characters vary based on their gender. Two African American characters in the beginning of the series offer an interesting insight into the gendering of race. In *The Secret of the Old Clock*, an old African American man named Jeff Tucker plays a minor role as the drunk, lazy caretaker of the Tophams' summer cottage at the lake. Nancy deals with Jeff somewhat kindly, yet she clearly views him as a child, one incapable of taking care of himself and his family, much less valuable property. The second African American character appears in *The Hidden Staircase*. We learn that Nathan Gombet employs an African American woman as housekeeper or servant. As Gombet leads Carson Drew into his home, they pass through the kitchen where a fat, slovenly looking "colored woman" is working over the stove.[88] Rosemary and Floretta, the elderly sisters whom Nancy helps in the story, offer an interesting description:

> 'Nathan has always been queer,' Floretta remarked. 'As long as we can remember he has lived alone.' 'Not exactly alone,' Rosemary broke in. 'He keeps a servant. A colored woman who looks as though she were an ogre.' 'And birds,' Floretta added. 'His house fairly swarms with them.'[89]

Gombet, who has already been described in animalistic terms, "keeps" a woman just as he keeps birds. When Nancy sees the woman in Gombet's house, she thinks, "I never saw a more surly-looking creature. She looks positively vicious!"[90] Nancy expresses concern that the woman's presence makes her journey into Gombet's home "very dangerous." Keene describes the woman further as old, fat, and awkward.[91] She possesses many of the stereotypical traits that we see in Jeff Tucker, particularly the broken dialect. Keene depicts both Jeff Tucker and the African American servant as uneducated, unkempt, and disorderly. However, I find it important to note the distinctions made between the two characters. Unlike Jeff Tucker, Keene portrays the "old negress," as Nancy continually refers to her, as dangerous and violent. Jeff, as an older servant, behaves childishly and intends no harm, like the "Sambo" imagery made popular in the 1930s and 1940s. The

female servant in *The Hidden Staircase*, however, is ruthless, vicious, and belligerent—the "angry black woman" so often depicted in literature as a danger to society. Moreover, Keene literally denies her subjectivity by rendering her unworthy of any name.

The Mystery at Lilac Inn offers another example of the conflation of difference markers, this time of gender and class. A teenage girl, her brother, and his friend play the villainous roles in this story. Mary Mason, her brother Bud, and Tom Tozzle are all working-class petty thieves responsible for the disappearance of "family jewels" belonging to a friend of Nancy's. Nancy first suspects Mary of shady dealings after a brief encounter with her in the Drew home. Nancy, in an attempt to find a temporary substitute for Hannah Gruen, calls the employment agency and requests help. Nancy opens the door, and "beheld a tall, wiry, dark-complexioned girl who obviously was the one sent out from the agency. She had dark piercing eyes and stared at Nancy almost imprudently."[92] Nancy instantly feels uncomfortable, "for the girl had a harsh face and a bold manner," but she accepts Mary's references and offers her employment. However, upon realizing that Nancy's father is Carson Drew, who specializes in criminal and mystery cases, Mary declines the offer and rushes out.[93]

Like the Topham sisters, Mary Mason displays several telltale signs of deviance: she is wiry and dark skinned, with dark eyes and a harsh face. Her refusal to defer to Nancy intensifies her deviance, as she clearly does not know her place. This truculence is demonstrated again later, as Nancy and Mary encounter one another in an upscale dress shop:

> For a moment Nancy was so taken aback that she could only stare, but, recovering quickly, she smiled pleasantly. 'I didn't expect to meet you here,' she said graciously. Mary Mason regarded Nancy with a cold stare. Then, without responding, she gave an impudent toss of her head and turned aside. 'Such insolence!' Nancy thought a trifle angrily. 'One would think she was an heiress instead of a kitchen girl! It was lucky I didn't engage her.'[94]

Mary repulses and angers Nancy with her refusal to acknowledge Nancy's superior class status. Nancy is further disturbed by Mary's intentions to purchase a gown in the exclusive shop. Nancy recalls that Mary "had been rather shabbily dressed" when she interviewed at the Drew home and finds Mary's newly acquired supply of money suspicious. Nancy becomes more skeptical when she finds Mary living in a destitute part of town, and again wonders how Mary can afford to dress nicely on hired help wages. As with the Tophams, Nancy finds Mary Mason suspicious and offensive because she steps outside the attitudes and behaviors acceptable for her class. Clearly, class mobility is not encouraged! Mary also subtly reminds the readers of what could happen if Nancy did not have her father's support and discipline; Mary's lack of supervision leaves her free to engage in criminal activity. Mary's deviant behavior is depicted as a natural function of her working class background rather than of her needs.

In the case of Mary Mason we already find both racial and class-based associations with deviance, and as with Jeff Tucker in *The Secret of the Old Clock* and the African American woman in *The Hidden Staircase*, these conflations are gendered as well. Nancy discovers Mary's involvement in the jewelry theft by following Mary to her home in Dockville, where Mary, Bud, and Tom catch her snooping and tie her up. Although Bud ties Nancy up and interrogates her, Keene constructs Mary as more vicious and evil than her male counterparts. Mary tells her brother that they "must get rid of" Nancy and demands that they "leave her here and let her starve."[95] As the thieves agree to take Nancy on their getaway boat, Nancy pleads to not be gagged: "'Oh, please don't put that thing in my mouth again,' Nancy pleaded. 'I promise I won't cry out for help.' 'Gag her,' the girl repeated coldly, paying not the slightest attention to Nancy's plea.'"[96] Mary regards Nancy with "undisguised hatred" and yells at her brother for making Nancy more comfortable inside the boat. Finally, as the boat strikes another boat

in the dark and begins to sink, Mary convinces Bud to abandon Nancy on the boat, leaving her to drown.[97] Bud is older and bears the signs "of a hardened criminal," but Mary steals the jewels, plans the escape, and leaves Nancy to die. Mary Mason represents the dangers of the adolescent female without close supervision and discipline. The series conflates criminality and delinquency with non-white and working class characters, aggressively constructing such girls as the non-ideal.

Conclusion

Many popular representations of female adolescence existed during the critical time of the 1930s, and the material conditions of adolescence contextualizes the figure of Nancy Drew as ideal girl. The series disavows many of the period's assumptions about adolescence as a period of "storm and stress," instead portraying its protagonist as a resourceful and levelheaded girl perfectly capable of controlling her emotions. Nancy's independence and sleuthing success refutes adolescent experts' warnings that without constant supervision, adolescents would quickly slide into delinquency. However, the series reflects the gendered construction of delinquency and the public's anxiety over adolescent female sexuality. Nancy's sleuthing behaviors and lack of parental control never lead her into delinquency because she avoids any hint of sexual activity.

Therefore, the capable role model also serves as a subtle reminder to her young female audience that their success depends on achieving a contradictory ideal. Nancy Drew captures the impossibility of ideal adolescent girlhood: girls must meet strict appearance standards and be sexually attractive without having their own sexual desire. Nancy's abilities are constrained by the very privileges that allow her to be the most famous girl sleuth in the 1930s. Her whiteness and class status allow her time and money to sleuth as a hobby. However, these identities combine with her gender to deny her the

possibility of sexual desire. Nancy's reputation and status as ideal girl are heavily dependent on her adherence to and upholding of existing social structures.

Notes

1. Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth Century Popular Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).
2. An earlier version of this chapter was published in the *Girlhood Studies Journal* 4, no. 1(2011): 30-48.
3. J. Mace Andrew, "School and Health," *Hygeia* 14 (Dec 1936), 1131.
4. Joan Jacob Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Random House, 1997), 83. Brumberg offers a detailed account of the significant changes in beauty culture in the 1930s and the affects of those changes on girls' physical bodies.
5. Jeanette Eaton, "Good Looks for Daughters," *Parents* (Sept 1934).
6. Brumberg, *The Body Project*, 46–48.
7. Ibid., 110.
8. Elizabeth Clement, *Love For Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
9. Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).
10. Ruth M. Alexander, *The "Girl Problem:" Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900—1930* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995).
11. Steven Schlossman and Stephanie Wallach, "The Crime of Precocious Sexuality: Female Juvenile Delinquency in the Progressive Era," *Harvard Educational Review* 48, no. 1 (1978): 65–94.
12. Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989).
13. Georganne Scheiner, Signifying Female Adolescence: Film Representations and Fans, 1920–1950 (Westport: Praeger, 2000).
14. Robert S. Lynd and Helen M. Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1929); *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1937).
15. Nancy Lesko, *Act Your Age! A Cultural Construction of Adolescence* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 50.
16. Emily Clapp, "When your Daughter Approaches the Teens." *Parents*, (December 1933).
17. Cora Wilson Greenwood, "When Boys and girls Step Out." *Parents*, (December 1938); Katherine Hattendorf, "How to Answer Questions About Sex." *Parents*, (May 1933).
18. Scheiner, Signifiying Female Adolescence, 50.
19. See Scheiner (2000) for a discussion of the "Little Miss Fix-Its" in post-Depression films.
20. After changes in publication rights in 1979, the breeder set was changed to a starter set, which consists of the first six books in the series.
21. Carolyn Keene, *The Secret of the Old Clock* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1930), 13.
22. Keene, *Old Clock*, 12; Here, the series places the death of Nancy's mother when Nancy is ten years old; later in the series, she dies when Nancy is four.

23. The series' depiction of Hannah shifts in the revised stories after 1959; in the revised edition of *The Secret in the Old Clock*, Hannah serves more as a live-in aunt than a maid, "who had helped rear Nancy since the death of the girl's own mother many years ago."

24. Carolyn Heilburn, "Nancy Drew: A Moment in Feminist History," in *Rediscovering Nancy Drew*, eds. Nancy Romalov & Caroline Stewart Dyer, 11–21 (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995), 65.

25 . Again, I am referring exclusively to the original books in the series. The silhouette, dust jackets, and illustrations all change in the 1959 revisions, and again in the later spin-off series of the 1990s. For a wonderful analysis of the visual changes to Nancy's bodily comportment, see Jennifer Stowe, "The Visual Rewriting of Nancy Drew: An Analysis of the Cover Art of the *Nancy Drew* Mystery Series from 1930–1999" (master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999).

26. Ibid., 172.

27. Carolyn Keene, *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1931), 35.

28. Keene, *Old Clock*, 1-2.

29 . Norma Pecora provides a detailed discussion of the changes to the *Nancy Drew* texts in the 1959 revisions, as well as alterations to Nancy's character in the 1980s spin-off series. See Norma Pecora, "Identity by Design: The Corporate Construction of Teen Romance Novels," in *Growing Up Girls*, eds. Mazzarella and Pecora (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

30. Ibid., 12.

31. Ibid., 6.

32. In some instances, Keene describes Nancy's hair as "titian," a strawberry blonde color.

33. Michael Cornelius, "When I Grow Up, I Want to Move to River Heights, USA, Too: The Male Psyche and Nancy Drew," *Dime Novel Roundup* 69, no. 4 (2000): 111–125; 119.

34. Deidre Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer and the Stratemeyer Syndicate* (New York, Twayne Press, 1993), 151.

35. Brumberg, *The Body Project*, 99.

36 . Jennifer Woolston argues that Nancy's body acts "as a vehicle through which she can carry out her desires to solve crimes," providing girls with a subversive role model of bodily comportment. Although I agree with Woolston (and others) that Nancy's active use of her body does stand in contrast to expectations of feminine passivity, I also cannot overlook the ways in which Nancy's body supports normalized standards of beauty. See Jennifer Woolston, "Nancy Drew's Body: The Case of the Autonomous Female Sleuth," *Studies in the Novel* 42, no. 1/2 (2010): 173–184.

37. Bobby Ann Mason, *The Girl Sleuth: On the Trail of Nancy Drew, Judy Bolton, and Cherry Ames* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 53.

38. Keene, *Shadow Ranch*, 2.

39. Ibid., 4.

40. Brumberg, *The Body Project*, 99.

41. Mary Linehan, "Nancy Drew and the Clue in the Chubby Chum," *Dime Novel Round-Up* 68, no. 5 (1998): 179–187; 181.

42 . Elizabeth Marshall argues that Nancy Drew provides a prototype of the "All American Girl," albeit reliant on raced and classed stereotypes. See Elizabeth Marshall, "Red, White, and Drew: the All-American Girl and the Case of Gendered Childhood," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (2002): 203–211.

43. Keene, *The Bungalow Mystery*, 102.

44. Amy Boesky, "Solving the Crime of Modernity: Nancy Drew in the 1930s." *Studies in the Novel* 42, no. 1/2 (2010): 185-201; 188.

45. Nash, *American Sweethearts*, 43.

46. See Lesko (2001); Mason (1995); MacCann (1995); Nash (2006); and Rehak (2005).

47. Keene, *Old Clock*, 6.

48 . *The Thin Man*, directed by W. S. Van Dyke (1934; Culver City, CA: MGM Studies), Film.

49 . Although the depiction of Nancy as a silly, bumbling girl in the films may be necessitated by the comedy/mystery genre, one could certainly argue that the filmic depictions actively seek to undermine a strong, independent female role model. See *Nancy Drew…Reporter,* directed by William Clemens (1939; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros.), Film; *Nancy Drew: Detective*, directed by William Clemens (1938; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros.), Film; *Nancy Drew…Troubleshooter,* directed by William Clemens (1939; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros.), Film; *Nancy Drew and the Hidden Staircase,* directed by William Clemens (1939; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros.), Film. For a full discussion of Nancy's transition from book to film and girls' responses, see Diana Beeson, "Translating Nancy Drew From Fiction to Film," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 18, no. 1 (1994): 37–47.

50. Carolyn Keene, *The Bungalow Mystery* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1930), 143.

51. Some scholars suggest that Nancy's absence of emotion and outrageous physical endurance make her "robotic." I would argue that Nancy is fully capable of expressing emotion, but only in the "proper" time and place.

52. Carolyn Keene, *The Hidden Staircase* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1930), 179.

53. Ibid., 181.

54. Heilburn (1995) and Nash (2006) chart some of the quirks of Nancy's relationship with her father. Heilburn focuses on the significance of the absence of Nancy's mother in her freedom, while Nash discusses Nancy and Carson's relationship as an example of the simultaneous fetishizing and "emptying" of adolescent female sexuality.

55. Keene, *Old Clock*, 6.

56. Keene, The Hidden Staircase, 51–52.

57. Ibid., 54. On more than one occasion, Carson and Nancy joke about Nancy officially joining her father in his detective legal firm. Although this never occurs (Nancy remains strictly amateur), their partnership should not be dismissed as a frivolous joke. The series repeatedly emphasizes Carson's respect for Nancy's talents. For a full discussion of the amateur detective trend in the 1930s, see Philippa Gates, "Detecting as a Hobby: Amateur and Professional Detectives in the 1930s," in *Detecting Women: Gender and the Hollywood Detective Film* (New York: Suny Press, 2011).

58. Carson's hands-off parenting style serves an obvious practical purpose, allowing Nancy to stumble upon mysteries and pursue them.

59. See Scheiner, *Signifying Female Adolescence*, 26.

60. Keene, *The Bungalow Mystery*, 93.

61. Ibid., 77.

62. Keene, *Old Clock*, 176–177.

63. Scheiner, *Signifying Female Adolescence*, 29.

64. Nash, *American Sweethearts*, 47.

65. The world of River Heights, like virtually all adolescent fiction, is predictably heteronormative. Nancy's lack of genuine interest in Ned could be read in other ways, and Mabel Maney's *Nancy Clue* spoofs brilliantly twist Nancy's presumed heterosexual identity. See Julia D. Gardner, "'No Place for a Girl Dick:" Mabel Maney and the Queering of Girls' Detective Fiction," in *Delinquents and Debutantes,* ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

66. Keene, *Old Clock*, 172.

67. Keene, *The Bungalow Mystery*, 2.

68. Keene, *Old Clock*, 180.

69. Ibid., 115.

70. Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, 11.

71. Keene, *The Bungalow Mystery*, 157.

72. Keene, *Old Clock*, 52.

73. De Jesus (1998), Gardner (1998), MacCann (1995), Nash (2006), and Parry (1997) all discuss the raced and classed depictions of criminality and deviance in the series.

74. Keene, *The Bungalow Mystery*, 89.

75. Keene, *Old Clock*, 131.

76. Ibid.

77. If Nancy was poor or an immigrant, it is unlikely that she would have starred in her own mystery series in the 1930s, no matter what her skills and "intuition."

78. Scheiner, *Signifying Female Adolescence*, 37.

79. In addition to being the hero of the series, Nancy is also an unofficial extension of the legal system of River Heights and the surrounding areas. As long as Nancy's interests lie with restoring and maintaining the existing social order, her audience excuses her sleuthing behaviors.

80. In the 1920s, films focused on adolescent sexual delinquency abounded: *As the World Rolls On* (1921), *Lilies of the Streets* (1925); and *Port of Missing Girls* (1928) are some examples. See Scheiner, *Signifying Female Adolescence*, 33-38.

81. Ibid., 38.

82. Nash (2006) also discusses the significant changes to the Nancy Drew character from text to film in the late 1930s.

83. Dorothy Allison, "A Question of Class," in *The Socialist Feminist Project*, edited by Nancy Halstrom (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002).

84. Nash, *American Sweethearts*, 79.

85. Keene, *Old Clock*, 83.

86. Ibid.

87. Keene, *Old Clock*, 15.

88. Keene, *The Hidden Staircase*, 108.

89. Ibid., 123.

90. Ibid., 132.

91. Ibid., 144.

92. Carolyn Keene, *The Mystery at Lilac Inn* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1931), 18.

93. Ibid., 22.

94. Ibid., 76-77.

95. Ibid., 157.

96. Ibid., 160.

97. Ibid., 172.

Chapter 4

THE IDEAL GIRL NEGOTIATES THE FRACTURED FIFTIES

No matter how exciting is was to be an airline stewardess,
it was best of all to be one of the Barrs—and home!
~ The Secret of Magnolia Manor (1949)

Although the *Nancy Drew* series can be credited for defining and popularizing girls' serial literature in the early 20th century, the mid-1940s demanded the construction of new paradigms of girlhood. Producers of girls' serial literature, faced with the realities of hundreds of thousands of young women joining the work force during World War II and continuing to pursue work outside the home after the war's end, created new series to accommodate the reality of young women's participation in paid labor. Two of these newcomers, the *Cherry Ames* and *Vicki Barr* series—featuring a nurse and an airline stewardess, respectively—portrayed these recently accepted occupations for girls as adventurous and rewarding.[1] The series depicted women's contributions to the war effort as both exciting and admirable. Cherry and Vicki both enter the workforce, seeking self-fulfillment and independence, during a period of time characterized by negative public opinion of working women. As such, these two series provided their target audience of young girls with role models who challenged the dominant discourses of appropriate feminine labor.

At the same time, the series counter celebrations of resourcefulness and independence with strong notions of home, family, and gendered life expectations. Vicki and Cherry participate in occupations framed as appropriately middle-class and feminine. Like Nancy Drew before them, Cherry and Vicki's adventures are tempered by their adherence to dominant ideals of middle-class domesticity and physical beauty. The series reflect the many inconsistencies of the post-war 1940s and 1950s, in which girls

faced regressive social expectations at the same time as their opportunities and aspirations expanded. These series capture the negotiation of these contradictions through the image of the ideal girl, as Cherry and Vicki expand the definition of the ideal girl while reifying many of her key traits. Cherry and Vicki's status as "ideal girls" relies on their relationships to and juxtaposition against the Other in the series. Simultaneously, the series also refigure certain Others—particularly young women—as exotic and innocent in order to justify Cherry and Vicki's career work as safe and respectable. Much like the earlier *Nancy Drew* series, the depictions of the Other in the *Cherry Ames* and *Vicki Barr* series reflect contemporary anxieties about nationhood, race and ethnicity, and appropriate gendered behavior.

The Fifties Family in Popular Imagination

Both the Cherry Ames and Vicki Barr series began publication in the mid-1940s and reached the height of their popularity during the 1950s. The fifties evokes images of the "traditional" nuclear family: a breadwinning husband, the wife as homemaker and stay-at-home mother, several beautiful children, and a sprawling ranch home with a white picket fence in the suburbs. Innocence and safety were the order of the day, creating an environment where children could play in the streets and locked doors were unnecessary. Families ate dinner together, husbands and wives had no secrets, and children were protected from the trials of adulthood.

This image of the 1950s family, as noted by historian Stephanie Coontz, only exists as a nostalgic reconstruction in the American imaginary.[2] The 1950s were far more contradictory and rife with struggle than this popular image suggests. In actuality, the period after World War II was an anomaly in American family life, not a return to tradition as often claimed. The Cold War era was marked by a desire for security, sought through whatever sacrifices necessary and achieved through what historian Elaine Tyler

May calls a "discourse of containment."[3] Psychologists, politicians, and social experts hailed the nuclear family, safely removed from the perceived dangers of urban centers, as necessary to the preservation of the American way of life and the security of the nation itself. The move to the suburbs and embracing of a secluded nuclear family model coincided with a celebration of household consumption, leisure time, and upward mobility.[4] This ideal was restricted to a certain demographic, and the transition to suburban life for a select few meant a re-entrenchment of class division along racial lines. The middle-class suburban nuclear family ideal was decidedly white-washed, as the suburban housing and lending market, as well as the newly emerging set of white collar jobs, excluded all but middle-class white men.[5] African American and Latino families remained segregated in cities, while previous funding for housing was redirected to the suburbs.

The suburban family utopia of the 1950s also focused on a distinct version of fiscal accomplishment, centered around the wage-earning male breadwinner. Family experts touted the role of exclusive breadwinner as a vital achievement for men returning home from war and reestablishing male authority. This ideal contradicted the realities of the declining family wage and a shift from blue collar to white collar definitions of masculine work.[6] Women were increasingly discouraged from working outside the home, despite the desire for a second income to support new standards in consumption. Keeping up with the neighbors meant not only having increased purchasing power, but doing so within the constraints of a particularly gendered division of labor. Family experts and state officials revived and recreated the cult of domesticity with a vengeance, citing a secure, close-knit nuclear family as a patriotic duty, vital to the survival of the nation against outside threats.[7] Those who failed to conform to this ideal were viewed as suspect and downright unpatriotic.

The isolated nuclear family in the suburbs was a clear movement away from previous family formations of large, extended family networks.[8] Parents, experts, and governmental officials urged young people to marry earlier and establish their own separate households in the suburbs, loosening the ties of extended families and reducing their influence. This shift was especially pronounced for second and third generations of immigrants, who were eager to downplay their ethnic backgrounds and prove their Americanness by replicating the white middle-class ideal.[9] More so than for white young people, individuals of ethnic or immigrant status needed to conform to norms to avoid suspicion or rejection.

Experts intent on promoting the suburban nuclear family focused heavily on sexuality as a site of control. Although the nostalgic images of the era suggest a virtual absence of sexuality, the proscription to avoid the topic of sex created instead an incitement to discourse. Women, in particular, faced the dilemma of being sexually available and attractive to their husbands, while protecting their children from the dangers of sexual knowledge.[10] Marriage experts cited sexual desire and activity as a vital component of a "healthy" marriage. Women were not only expected to satisfy their husbands' sexual needs, but also to cultivate their own desire and sexual satisfaction, often without any additional effort on their husbands' part.[11] Earlier glorifications of motherhood in American culture provided an "out" from sexual activity, as mothers were encouraged to be fully consumed and preoccupied by love for their children. The 1950s discourse of mutual sexual satisfaction within marriage created an additional burden.[12] Women were now required to be fully devoted and available to both their children and their husbands, turning their sexual identities on and off at the flip of a switch.[13] In this golden age of popular psychoanalysis, the need for women—mothers, in particular—to manage their sexuality extended beyond their relationships with spouses to those with

their children. Experts warned about the threat of mothers who were unable to negotiate this sexual tightrope, those who shared too much or were too attached to their children. Throughout popular media and in public discourse, white middle-class women were under a great deal of pressure to meet these strenuous expectations. Charged with shoring up their husbands' sense of masculinity, restoring the American family to its rightful place, and reproducing children to protect the nation's future, women in the fifties were simultaneously hailed as domestic heroines and managed by the threat of failure.

Fracturing the Ideal: Wives at Work

Popular imagery of the post-war era creates a virtually seamless message about womanhood. Yet, as Joan Meyerwitz notes, the reality of women's lives in the period was much more complex and varied than the idealized image of white domesticity suggests.[14] The most notable contradiction from the stereotype of fifties domesticity was women's active participation in the work force. Public opinion at the end of World War II strongly urged women to return to their homes and relinquish their jobs to men. However, throughout the 1950s, women—especially married suburban mothers—sought work outside the home. In fact, "in 1960 twice as many women were at work as in 1940, and 40 per cent of all women over sixteen held a job [...] the proportion of wives at work had doubled from 15 per cent in 1940 to 30 per cent in 1960."[15] The most significant shift was in "well-educated wives from families with moderate incomes," who sought jobs at a higher rate than those from working class backgrounds.[16] Even as popular discourse demanded that women prioritize their identities as wives and mothers, many of the same sources (magazines, relationship guides) acknowledged work as a viable and rewarding activity. Regardless of the reasons given by women for pursuing work outside the home, their active participation complicates the picture of simple suburban domesticity.

Future Wives and Mothers: The Girls Get Schooled

Girls growing up in this environment of post-World War II 1940s and 1950s faced a barrage of mixed messages about their futures.[17] During World War II, young women of all backgrounds were encouraged on all fronts to go to work and school in order to support the war effort. Although this work was presumably short-term, it provided new opportunities for girls and shifted public opinion about the respectability of women working outside the home. After the end of the war, however, this seemingly progressive attitude towards careers for women was quickly retracted. Girls of the era experienced what Susan Douglas sees as a serious disconnect between traits of Americanness—independence, self-sufficiency, bravery and determination—and those of womanhood.[18]

Unlike boys, girls were discouraged from planning for future schooling or a career.[19] College was a place to find a husband, with many young women seeking Mrs. degrees and an engagement ring.[20] Middle-class nice girls could expect to marry early and look forward to a life of babies, apple pies, and household consumer conveniences.[21] In Hollywood, actresses who made their names as sexpots and career girls in 1940s films revamped their images in the 1950s, appearing in films and the popular press as domestic goddesses enjoying marriage and motherhood.[22] Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, psychologists, family experts, and governmental bodies urged parents to train their daughters well, linking fears of threatened family life and national security. If young girls were not trained properly and made aware of their duties as future wives and mothers, the entire nation might be in danger.[23]

Many real girls saw contradictions between the popular discourse and Hollywood representations and their observations of their own mothers.[24] Some white middle-class girls whose mothers seemed to be living out the ideal as suburban housewife saw

dissatisfaction, unhappiness, and boredom beneath outward appearances of suburban nirvana.[25] African American girls saw no representations of themselves at all in the ideal; middle-class or not, suburban perfection excluded them. Working-class girls of all racial and ethnic backgrounds also received the message that suburban leisure was not in their futures. Their working mothers' lives were a glaring contradiction to the images of smiling, stay-at-home suburban mothers that permeated popular culture. At home and in school, girls' lives were filled with preparation for their futures as wives and mothers. Although only certain girls could hope to reach this ideal, all girls received the message: being a good girl meant marrying early, becoming a mother, and finding fulfillment in suburban domesticity. College and paid work, seen as patriotic duties in the early 1940s, were reframed by the end of the decade as short-term options until marriage.

Girls Go to Work: *Cherry Ames* and *Vicki Barr*

Building on the *Nancy Drew* series, the girls' series of the 1940s and 1950s offers an image of the ideal girl as relatable yet exceptional. In their late teens and early twenties, Cherry and Vicki are older than their target audience of eight to twelve year olds.[26] Their adult age does not displace them as girls; they are very much depicted as girls on the brink of adulthood.[27] Nursing and flight attendance were both careers made popular for young women in the late 1930s and early 1940s, as the previously male-dominated professions found themselves in need of workers during World War II. Capturing the call for young women as nurses, the *Cherry Ames* series (1943-1968), one of several nursing series produced during the period, enjoyed wide readership during publication and a continuing fan following, with over five million copies sold to date.[28] The *Vicki Barr* series (1947-1964) was equally popular during publication and preempts in many ways the glorification of the stewardess profession in the 1960s.[29]

Despite the initial popularity of these professions for women, by the time these two series began publication, World War II had ended. Most women were either displaced or downgraded in the workplace, married middle-class women were admonished to return to their place in the home, and young women and girls were discouraged from seeking careers or work outside the home.[30] The surge of women in nursing and flight attendance had effectively gendered these careers, but public opinion on the acceptability of young women working shifted practically overnight from support to disapproval.[31] In this context, Cherry and Vicki's nursing and flying endeavors are as bold and daring as Nancy Drew's sleuthing. Unlike Nancy, however, Cherry and Vicki go to work—and get paid—with careers, independence, and adventure in mind.

The swift change in perspective on girls' paid labor participation can be seen in the framing of work in the first book of each series. *Cherry Ames, Student Nurse* (1943) opens with Cherry packing her suitcase for nursing school. Almost immediately, the reader knows of Cherry's fears:

> Cherry swallowed hard. She did not feel eighteen and through with high school and almost a student nurse. For all her dreams and hopes, she still was not entirely sure nursing was for her. All the tales she had ever heard flashed through her mind – you see so much suffering, you scrub floors, you might give the patient the wrong medicine, and all the other nightmares.[32]

Despite these fears, Cherry wants a profession of her own. Moreover, "she wanted to do vital work, work that the world urgently needs. She honest-to-goodness cared about people and she wanted to help them on a grand and practical scale."[33] Cherry's parents support her decision to pursue nursing. On the date of her departure for school, her mother reminds her: "Well, Dad and I feel you've chosen just about the finest profession there is. And just about the most necessary one in wartime. We're mighty proud about it."[34] Cherry's twin brother, Charlie, who dreams of being a pilot, is also off to school, but given the greater need for planes than for men to fly them, Charlie heads to engineering

school rather than flight school. *Student Nurse* repeatedly references the great need for nurses because of the war, and stresses nursing as a service to one's country. As Cherry's friend and mentor, Dr. Joe, tells her on her departure, "A nurse is a soldier."[35] Throughout *Student Nurse*, which chronicles Cherry's first year in nursing school, Cherry and her readers are repeatedly reminded of the patriotic value of nursing and the weight of responsibility in choosing such a profession.

The *Vicki Barr* series debuted only three years after the publication of *Cherry Ames, Student Nurse*, but *Silver Wings for Vicki* (1947) suggests a more ambivalent opinion about girls' work.[36] Not quite the minimum age of twenty-one, Vicki attends the local recruitment fair for Federal Airlines without her parents' knowledge. Upon acceptance, Vicki must win over her father, a college economics professor, who feels strongly that Vicki should complete her four-year college degree. Luckily, Vicki enlists the help of her mother, a young, progressive-minded woman characterized by her witty retorts to her husband.[37] Unlike Cherry's nursing, Vicki's desire to be a flight stewardess is couched in terms of personal fulfillment and adventure, not patriotic sacrifice. With the war behind them, Vicki's professor father and his colleagues see no need for young ladies like Vicki to risk danger and dishonor. Throughout her adventures, Vicki often encounters individuals who are suspicious of her intentions and credentials as a flight stewardess. Although the first few *Cherry Ames* books focus heavily on nursing as a war service, the tone of the majority of the books align with the *Vicki Barr* series, in which work provides a means for girls to achieve autonomy and financial independence, gain experience, and explore the world beyond their hometowns. Within the cultural climate of the post-war period, these series are unusual, depicting work as a viable, respectable, and potentially lifelong endeavor for girls.

Despite the fact that their pursuit of career work opposes mainstream expectations of respectable middle-class white girls, Cherry and Vicki replicate the established image of the ideal girl in American girls' serial literature. The characterization of their work as acceptable and within the bounds of the ideal becomes possible through their adherence to respectable middle-class white femininity. Much like the later *Nancy Drew* books, both the *Cherry Ames* and *Vicki Barr* series include prescriptions of feminine decorum and beauty. Each serial book begins with a brief description of Cherry or Vicki, with the first book of each series providing the most detailed image:

> Cherry was well worth admiring. She was slender and healthy and well-built; she moved with a proud erect posture that made her seem beautifully tall and slim. Her eyes and her short curly hair were very dark, almost black—the clear-cut black that glistens. Groomed to crisp perfection, Cherry was as vivid as a poster in her red wool sports suit. And her face fairly sparkled with warmth and humor.[38]

Cherry's dark hair and eyes are a first in serial girl heroines, but any doubts about her whiteness are quickly put to rest with the introduction of Cherry's twin brother, Charlie, who has blonde hair and blue eyes. Cherry's name also corresponds with her rosy cheeks, which are often described as standing out against her pale white skin.

While Cherry's strength of character and resourcefulness are mirrored in her "healthy" and "beautifully tall" frame, Vicki's might hides behind a "cream puff" exterior:

> Her eyes were as blue as the June sky overhead, this peaceful Sunday morning. Adventure! She sighed longingly. Yet no one could have appeared less adventurous than Vicki Barr. She was small, with a delicate, almost shy face, and soft ash-blonde hair. She seemed very fragile [...] Her airy grace, the smallness and blondeness of her, made Vicki seem about as durable as a cream puff.[39]

Vicki attempts to appear older and more capable during her recruitment interview with Federal Airlines, wearing "her gray suit, crisp white blouse and gloves, in an effort to tone down her Dresden-china prettiness."[40] Upon seeing many of the other girls waiting to interview, Vicki fears she looks far too "fluffy" for the job. After circling the room for

the interviewer's observation—"a small, graceful figure"—Vicki asks whether beauty is a requirement for the job. Ruth Benson, assistant superintendent of flight stewardesses and conductor of the interviews, answers in what seems a practical fashion:

> "Real beauty isn't necessary, but you have to be nice to look at: well groomed, pleasant, and not too tall or heavy. After all, a plane must carry the biggest payload possible, and the heavier the crew the less paying weight we can carry. Did you see that tall girl who came in ahead of you? She was qualified for this work in everything except that she's five feet eight and weighs proportionately."[41]

Although "real beauty" might not be a stated requirement for the job of flight stewardess, Ms. Benson's last-second deliberations over Vicki reveal the implicit significance of appearance: "Very charming; pretty…really interested in the business of air travel."[42] Vicki, despite being under-qualified in experience and age, gets the job in the end. Vicki must get the job, of course, because the series' existence depends upon it. However, her readers understand that Vicki's "Dresden-china prettiness" and feminine charm weighs heavily in Miss Benson's decision.

For both Vicki and Cherry, as for Nancy before them, physical appearance is only one requirement for admission to the ideal girl club. Vicki's cream puff exterior hides "wiry muscles" and "an amazing capacity for beefsteak."[43] The qualities that impress Ms. Benson during Vicki's interview—beyond her attractive exterior—are those which establish her as an ideal girl: proper hygiene and first aid training, nutrition and cooking skills; knowledge of music, art, and current events; education in psychology and public speaking; and courtesy, poise, and tact. These are all markers of a middle-class upbringing and education, making Vicki perfectly suited to "handle all sorts of people, tactfully, in any sort of situation."[44] Vicki also exhibits appropriate levels of feminine modesty. "You're a bit shy but that's pleasanter than being too aggressive," notes Miss Benson.[45] Vicki puts forth her relationship with her father as final proof to Miss Benson that she has the right "personality" for the job. Vicki tells Miss Benson that she often

encourages her father in his cooking hobby: "'I read through Dad's cookbook one day when he wasn't home, so'—she grinned—'so I could be Dad's own little girl."[46] Vicki cites her ability to cater to her father as evidence of her ability to get along with people, and Ms. Benson responds affirmatively, "'Sympathetic interest in people is the first qualification of a good flight stewardess. Or,' she added, with a smile, 'of any charming woman.'"[47] For Ms. Benson and Vicki's readers, Victoria Barr is not only the right kind of girl to be a flight stewardess, she is quite simply the right kind of girl.

Nancy Drew's critics argue that the heroine might as well be a teenage robot, and her ability to bounce back from countless scrapes and concussions *is* rather disconcerting, particularly given her absence of any character flaws. Cherry and Vicki's generation of serial heroines leave room for more identification. While equally admirable as Nancy, both Cherry and Vicki frequently remind their readers that they, too, have flaws. Cherry admits almost immediately, "[She] might not always be prompt but she was neat and she did get things done. 'My lone virtue,' she thought, 'neatness.'"[48] Cherry often finds herself scrambling to be on time and her tardiness causes a number of near-calamities. Vicki cites her tendency toward daydreaming as her main flaw, often "floating around looking like a piece of bric-a-brac," as her younger sister playfully jokes.[49] These "flaws," of course, are trivial compared to the long laundry list of positive traits, but even these tiny defects provide girl readers with possibilities for identification. The image of the ideal girl yields ever so slightly. The ideal girls' step down from perfection makes her more relatable, more seemingly real, therefore more ideal through the guise of attainability. Cherry and Vicki maintain all the characteristics of the ideal girl established in early girls' series, but they openly cater to the new, more modern girl seeking adventure and responsibility.

The *Cherry Ames* and *Vicki Barr* series sell young girls on the lure of adventure, but within careers that seem more legitimate and more likely than sleuthing. "Girls!" calls the figure of Vicki Barr from the back page of *Cherry Ames, Island Nurse*, "Excitement and danger make my career as air stewardess thrilling…and make my books thrilling, too!"[50] But conspicuously peppered throughout the danger and excitement are reminders of hearth and home. Cherry and Vicki both love their careers and often discuss their work as a "calling," a "lifelong dream" or ambition. At the same time, the novels frequently remind the reader that both girls look forward to love, marriage, and a settled family life of their own. On Vicki's last evening before departing for training, she wanders through her home:

> The upstairs rooms were quiet, still warm and fragrant from the heat of the June day. Vicki paused at the open door of her mother and father's bedroom. When she got married and was mistress of a household, she was going to have a four-poster bed and framed samplers like her mother's.[51]

Given that the vast majority of girls in Vicki's reading audience would marry and establish their own household—sooner rather than later—the series' bold reminder of Vicki's future intentions seems an unnecessary statement. Both series contain countless seemingly conflicting references. Throughout their adventures, Cherry and Vicki often think lovingly of their homes, and the setting of home as significant as the family who inhabits it. Indeed, virtually all of the stories begin or end with the girls being at home. *Cherry Ames, Cruise Nurse*, begins as such:

> Cherry had been dreaming. It was such a very pleasant dream she didn't want to stop. She was dreaming that she was back in her own room in Hilton, Illinois. She had cautiously opened one eye to make sure everything was exactly the same in the dream as it was in real life: Her dressing table with its dotted-swiss skirts and brisk red bows; the crisp, ruffled white curtains, tied back with bright-red ribbon […] Cherry sighed. If only the dream could come true.[52]

Cherry soon realizes that she *is* home, and remembers her recent fatigue and illness as a traveling nurse in New York. Her supervisor sends her home immediately and arranges

for Cherry to serve as nurse on a Caribbean cruise. As much as she loves her work, Cherry relishes her visit home:

> Breakfast in bed. Window-shopping with Midge, home too, for the holidays. Long, satisfying talks with Midge's father, Dr. Joe. And best of all, wonderful quiet evenings around the fire with her mother and father. They talked very little as they munched buttered popcorn and lazily cracked nuts, watching the smoldering logs crumple into dying embers. But the very peace and quiet of those happy evenings had gradually stopped the dull ache in her tired body. And now that Charlie was home on vacation, too, life was perfect.[53]

Cherry sometimes muses to herself, "I guess I'm pretty much of a homebody in spite of all my wanderings."[54] Of course, Cherry and Vicki's linkage to home is not entirely out of character, as both girls' capacity for domesticity is vital to their identity as ideal. Vicki's initial interview with Ms. Benson focuses heavily on her domestic strengths: "Fortunately, Vicki had had training in both hygiene and first aid. Her nutrition and cooking courses would come in handy too, for serving meals aloft."[55] Likewise, Cherry's nursing duties lean heavily on her domestic capabilities.

Despite Cherry and Vicki's admissions of occasional homesickness, the girls often make it clear that they miss their work and colleagues when they are home just as much as they miss home when they are away. Enjoying their brief vacations and rests at home, the girls are always dreaming of their next adventure, looking forward to their return to work. Rejecting the popular sentiment that girls would only work if necessary, Cherry and Vicki both illustrate the possibility of girls' genuine desire to work. Furthermore, Cherry and Vicki disrupt the popular notion that girls should only work until they get married, and only as an avenue for finding a husband. Nursing and flight attendance were popularized as "natural" work for young women, providing great opportunities to meet their future spouses. Flight attendants, in particular, had a public reputation of working just long enough to find a pilot or businessman as a husband, and the turnover statistics supported that image. In the 1940s, nearly thirty percent of female flight

attendants left the workforce due to engagement and marriage; the job served as a "guarantee of eventual domesticity," training young women as future homemakers.[56] Flight attendants, nurses, and other "pink collar" workers could use their career time to practice domestic skills necessary for housekeeping, and take advantage of dating opportunities.[57]

Much like the earlier *Nancy Drew* stories, Vicki and Cherry are far too taken with their work to date seriously or consider marriage. Cherry and Vicki do participate in dating, and the series' dust jackets often cite romance as one of the perks of the career. "Charming, bright and hardworking," reads one promotion of the *Vicki Barr* series, "her career as an air stewardess bring her glamorous friends, exciting adventures, loyal roommates and dates with a handsome young pilot and an up-and-coming newspaper reporter."[58] However, these "romances" are hardly more than casual dates, since neither Cherry nor Vicki seem intent on finding a husband. Both girls revel in the "bachelor girl" lifestyle, sharing small apartments with friends and coworkers and enjoying the freedoms of single life.[59] Cherry, Vicki, and their collegial girlfriends express varying degrees of interest in dating and marriage, portraying a complex range of attitudes toward social expectations of domesticity. Among Cherry's close friends, Bertha Larson is engaged to a young man from her hometown but has no plans to leave nursing; Josie Franklin has a steady beau throughout the series; Ann Evans hastily marries an army man while stationed with him in England and retires from nursing; and Gwen Jones enthusiastically mocks dating rituals and domesticity.[60] Similarly, Vicki Barr and her friends display a range of attitudes and levels of participation in dating. Although the girls in both series may assume that they will eventually marry, they see their work as exciting and rewarding, not a husband hunting ground.

The series' references to home and marriage act as a reminder to girls that these remained the ultimate appropriate outcome for all young women.[61] However, the open-ended attitude toward marriage, pared with the girls' enjoyment of work, leaves space for girls to see career work as a viable option. Cherry and Vicki's careers are their primary identification, and neither series concludes (unlike many girls' series from the same time period, *Sue Barton* and *Trixie Belden*, for example) with marriage ending a career. An absence of marriage as finality in the series allows girls the opportunity to imagine work beyond the proposed time-filler until their "true calling" of housewifery and motherhood. By going off to work, Cherry and Vicki also resist the admonition to girls of waiting. Late 1940s and 1950s social etiquette encouraged girls to simply be patient—no need to plan ahead, to pursue college or a career—and the right boy would come along at the right time. Cherry Ames and Vicki Barr do not wait at home for the boys; they make plans for their lives and carry them out.

Moving Beyond the Midwest: Containment and Modernization

The *Cherry Ames* and *Vicki Barr* series illustrate changes in girls' serial literature in the 1940s and 1950s to include career work as a viable option for the ideal girl. These series also shift in their depiction of United States national identity and treatment of nations outside the U.S. As discussed in the previous chapters, early girls' series like *Nancy Drew* and *Dorothy Dale* reflect contemporary anxieties about immigration and American identity.[62] These early series overwhelmingly construct ethnic immigrants and African Americans as villains, and poorness and ethnicity are often conflated with each other and with negative behaviors. Given the initiation of the *Cherry Ames* and *Vicki Barr* series during the cultural climate of World War II and the Cold War, one would expect the series to perpetuate the popular discourse of containment and suspicion toward all outside influences.[63] Instead, these two series suggest a superficial attempt to

construct other nations and individuals of non-U.S. citizenship in a more positive light, particularly those which seek to emulate American progress. The series might also participate in promoting a sense of hemispheric safety, depicting the United States' neighbors to the north and south as friendly allies against the threat of communism in Europe.

This seemingly progressive representation of foreign nations and foreign peoples is a necessity, given the ideal girls' movement away from the series' vision of their safe Midwestern hometowns. Unlike Nancy Drew, who rarely strays far from River Heights, Cherry and Vicki's work often requires them to travel outside of Middletown, USA. I use "Middletown" here to indicate the "every girl" mentality of these series. Like Nancy's hometown of River Heights, Cherry and Vicki's small hometowns are meant to evoke a sense of averageness and normalcy. Once again, that "every girl" image actively excludes those who are not white, heterosexual, and middle-class, and reifies those classifications as the norm. "Middletown" also recalls the Lynd's studies of Muncie, Indiana, which vividly illustrated that Midwestern towns are far less idyllic and sanitized than popular culture or romanticized historical accounts suggest.[64] Despite these contradictions, girls' series in the 1940s and 1950s continue to rely on the image of the "heartland" as the safe, sanctified home to which the career girl returns for comfort.

In order to categorize Vicki and Cherry's work as safe, respectable, and within the realm of acceptable ideal girlhood, the series must recast dangerous Others as less threatening. The *Cherry Ames* and *Vicki Barr* series construct nations outside the U.S. and their inhabitants as exotic, fascinating and primitive, yet attempting to replicate the U.S. and move into the future. *The Hidden Valley Mystery*, the second book in the *Vicki Barr* series, vividly illustrates this updated representation of the Other.[65] Thrilled with

the promise of adventure in her new assignment to Mexico, Vicki spends her flight to the new location reviewing a guidebook to Mexico:

> As her blue eyes skimmed across the pages, Vicki grew more and more fascinated. Centuries ago, emerging out of the mists of early time, the Aztec Indians had built up their empire in Mexico. For more centuries the Aztec empire endured, growing highly civilized in many ways: with free towns and citizens who voted, although Aztec kings ruled; with metropolitan cities having several hundred thousand inhabitants; with flourishing agriculture, fine arts, and a science of astronomy which has never been surpassed.[66]

Vicki's guidebook documents Mexico's struggle for independence from a variety of outside forces. These nations (Spain, France) are scolded for their invasions, but praised for introducing "the civilization of Europe" to the primitive Mexican people.[67] According to the guidebook, one of Mexico's own, Porfirio Díaz, presents the greatest threat to the nation. Under his rule, "the Mexican people once again were kept impoverished, uneducated, and practically slaves."[68] Vicki's guidebook constructs Díaz's greed and dictatorship as far more insidious than those of outside invaders, suggesting that Mexico's greatest danger is internal weakness. However, Vicki learns of Mexico's eventual triumph:

> Finally, by 1910, Mexico had driven out all foreign invaders and domestic tyrants. Now she became a democracy in reality, writing a Constitution and a Bill of Rights – freeing the towns and villages – subdividing the large land holdings among citizens. Good presidents, Cárdenas, Camacho, Alemán, hastened this program along and introduced modern school and clinics and machinery. The Mexican Army fought alongside the other Allies in winning World War II. The most ultramodern farming techniques, industries, buildings, arts, and educational plans were now under way, Aztec and Spanish suddenly catching up with the twentieth century.[69]

The guidebook links Mexico's success to the nation's adoption of democratic policies and its efforts to emulate the United States' "ultramodern" plans. With lip service to the Aztec Indians' exceptional achievements prior to invasion, the guidebook then notes the role of modern technologies in "catching up" with other nations. The naming of "good" presidents and Mexico's support of the Allied Nations in World War II (without mention

of political coercion) establishes Mexico a safe location for Vicki.[70] The vague and sanitized history presented by Vicki's guidebook neutralizes the nation's status as Other; Mexico may be exotic and primitive in ways, but efforts to replicate the progress of ideal nations—namely, the United States—makes the nation an acceptable locale for the ideal girl's next adventure. Reassured by her guidebook, Vicki is free to sympathize with the people of Mexico, "poor and hungry and illiterate," and imagine herself in their place.[71]

If Mexico exists as an exotic, if backward, nation, Old World Europe is also Othered in the series, harkening to a romanticized past. In *Island Nurse*, Cherry Ames serves as a private nurse to an elderly Scottish lord, Sir Ian Barclay, who owns mines on an island off the coast of Canada.[72] Upon her arrival at Sir Ian's castle, Cherry imagines the Old World it conjures: "Cherry looked up to the gray walls of the big house, with its square tower, balconies, and tall chimneys, like a castle, atop the cliff. 'How beautiful!' Cherry exclaimed. 'Makes me think of gallant knights and fair ladies.'"[73] This ahistorical vision depicts Old World Europe as romantic and honorable, however outdated.

Modernizing the Other Girls

As the ideal girl of the Vicki Barr and Cherry Ames series moves beyond the safety of the Midwestern United States, her interactions with Others become more complex. In the Nancy Drew series, Nancy's inner circle of her closest friends and family reflects her own identity: white, middle-class, and presumably heterosexual. Certain girls are positioned as innocent, helpless, and in need of rescue or assistance, and are therefore potential allies. These (always white) girls are inducted into Nancy's circle after Nancy helps them regain their middle or upper class status. The Other girls—poor, non-white, ethnic minorities or immigrants—are firmly and sometimes violently excluded from the realm of the ideal girl. In the Vicki Barr and Cherry Ames series, the clear demarcations between these groups lessen, while the range of girlhood narrows. The

series integrates certain girls who were previously excluded into the group of worthy rescues, highlighting their similarities to the ideal girl. Meanwhile, the series' attempts to lessen previous associations between poverty, crime, and people of color succeed in virtually eliminating representation of poor girls.

The character of Meg in *Cherry Ames, Island Nurse* illustrates the realignment of the Other girl alongside the ideal girl. Sir Ian's daughter, Meg, is twenty years old. In their first meeting, Meg figures as a remnant of the Old World past: "She did not announce her arrival. She simply appeared in the doorway like a princess out of a fairy tale."[74] Immediately, the book highlights Cherry and Meg's compatibility:

> Cherry and Meg regarded each other for a long moment. Each girl liked what she saw. And Sir Ian lay there and admired the pair: Meg with wavy brown hair; violet eyes, honest and sparkling with humor; fine regular features, friendly mouth, and as slim as a young willow. Cherry with glossy dark curls; dark, expressive eyes; red cheeks, and slender figure. What a beautiful picture they made! Renoir would have loved to paint them. The two girls broke into smiles and shook hands warmly. It was the beginning of a friendship which Cherry and Meg were to treasure.[75]

The series aligns Meg with the ideal Cherry here, given her pleasing physical appearance and associated character traits.[76]

Despite their friendship, however, Meg is clearly depicted as distinctly different from Cherry. References to Meg construct her as otherworldly: "a princess from a fairy tale," "a pretty water sprite," "a butterfly."[77] In contrast to Cherry, the modern American girl with freedom and a career, Meg represents ties to tradition, particularly traditional feminine responsibilities:

> Next morning, Meg left for St. John's to do some extensive marketing and shopping for the house. She expected to be gone a couple of days or so. It took good management to keep a household the size of the Barclays' running efficiently. Meg managed it so effortlessly that no one was aware of how much time and thought she spent in making everything operate smoothly.[78]

Although readers know that Cherry is capable in domestic duties as well, Meg's domesticity defines her. The emphasis on Meg's effortlessness in managing the family

estate naturalizes her duties while highlighting her efforts, reifying the association of the romanticized Old World with separate spheres of labor. Physically isolated on the island and within the castle, Meg appreciates Cherry's company and modern sensibilities, while remaining loyal to her family's culture and father's expectations. Compared to resourceful Cherry, Meg often appears fragile and timid, even exaggeratedly feminine in her selfless domesticity:

> Meg had begun working as a volunteer in the office at the hospital. In addition, she was helping out at the library in the afternoons until someone could be found to replace the librarian's young assistant who had left to get married. Meg spent most evenings until bedtime with her father.[79]

Meg's commitment to serving others supersedes her interest in Cherry's mysterious adventures. Cherry, on the other hand, seems perfectly capable of balancing her (paid) service duties and her sleuthing.[80]

Similarly, *The Secret of Magnolia Manor* emphasizes the similarities and distinctions between Vicki Barr and Marie Breaux, while romanticizing the "Old World French" aspect of New Orleans Creole culture.[81] Upon her arrival, the Old World beauty and nostalgia of the French Quarter awes Vicki: "'New Orleans,' she thought, her soft blue eyes wide with excitement, 'the most romantic city in the whole country!'"[82] As a copilot drives her to the pension where she will be staying, Vicki is taken with the romance of the city:

> Vicki felt as if she had suddenly been transported to a fairy-tale city. Lacelike wrought-iron balconies formed porches on every floor of the three-storied buildings, and Vicki saw that one of them was surrounded by a cornstalk fence with twining morning-glories [...] "My stars," Vicki gasped. "Is this really the U.S.A.?"[83]

The copilot, Dusty, echoes Vicki's sentiments and furthers the image of New Orleans as fairytale-like, saying, "Practically every house in the Vieux Carre has a ghost."[84] Through Vicki, we understand New Orleans as out of time and place, an anomaly of quirky cultural traditions in the modern United States.[85]

Vicki also learns through Dusty about the family with whom she will be living, the old Creole family of Breaux. As with Cherry and Meg, Vicki is close in age to the family's niece, Marie, who is nearly eighteen. Marie's youth contrasts with her family and the city of New Orleans, depicted as ancient, yet "full of southern hospitality and delightful Creole mannerisms."[86] Unlike Vicki, who becomes a flight stewardess despite her young age, Marie remains restricted by traditions, kept "practically under glass" by her elderly uncle Paul, the patriarch of the family.[87] Vicki expresses concern about Marie's situation and her own entrance into such an environment: "What had her mother's well-meaning friend, Mrs. Landry, let her in for? Traditions and conventions could be more confining than the strictest rules and regulations, and all four of them irked Vicki's venturesome spirit.'"[88] Vicki's modern girl sensibilities contrast strongly with Marie, who "wouldn't think of crossing the street without Uncle Paul's full approval."[89] A "slender, dark-haired girl," Marie seems childlike in comparison to Vicki, her maturation stunted by Uncle Paul's rules:

> "Why, she's as lovely as a flower," Vicki thought as the young girl came gracefully down the steps. Her skin was magnolia-white and made her thickly curling hair seem even darker than it was. One tiny hand slide along the iron railing and her small feet seemed to skim down the staircase. She came across the patio to stand demurely beside her uncle with an air of old-fashioned obedience as he introduced the two girls.[90]

Similar to Meg in *Island Nurse*, Marie represents old-fashioned notions of femininity and classed propriety. Although Vicki clearly disagrees with Uncle Paul's regulations, she respects the family traditions as an important part of Creole culture. As with the Scots in *Island Nurse*, the Creoles are excused from expectations of modern progress; their stilted family customs emphasize Vicki as the ideal.

Within this context, the reader sympathizes with Marie, who, despite her unhappiness, seems incapable of breaking free of cultural restrictions. Vicki pities her, noting for the reader the differences between the strict traditions in the Breaux

household and her own relaxed home. As does Meg's selflessness, Marie's helplessness defines her and situates her as an antiquated contrast to Vicki. Vicki—capable, brave, and appropriately indignant—fights Marie's cause for her. Vicki Barr and Cherry Ames' status as ideal girl depends on their juxtaposition again these girls, whose whiteness and wealth afford them pity, while their cultural ties render them helpless and lagging behind American progress.

Vicki Barr's interactions with Seńora Anita Vellajo in *The Hidden Valley Mystery* are quite similar to those with Marie, indicating a cautious inclusion of certain non-U.S. girls to the ideal girl's world.[91] As with Meg and Marie, the series constructs Anita as a childlike innocent, a victim of a culture less modern and progressive than the U.S. The initial description of Anita echoes that of Marie:

> A Mexican girl quietly took one of the reclining chairs near Vicki—a girl scarcely as old, and not quite as tall, as herself. She had the biggest, brownest, gentlest eyes Vicki had ever seen. They seemed to fill her whole shy little face. Her lacy black dress seemed to Vicki too grown-up a style for this small, slight girl. Her dignified air had a childlike appeal.[92]

Vicki immediately draws the reader into sympathetic feeling for Anita, who at the age of nineteen is widowed with two small sons. Throughout the story, Vicki repeatedly refers to Anita as a girl, emphasizing her innocence and vulnerability. More so than Meg and Marie, who seem to be bridging their cultural ties with their own desires, Anita is linked to both the land and culture of Mexico. "Anita Vallejo was as natural and innocent a part of these tropics as a drifting cloud," Vicki notes, "Her dark face on its slender stalk of neck reminded Vicki of a flower on a stem."[93] Notably, the discursive association of Anita with the physical landscape of Mexico emphasizes her status as racialized Other.

The series' treatment of Mexico and its people illustrates a shift from earlier girls' series, which depict virtually all non-white and non-U.S. individuals as suspect and dangerous. Here, the girls embrace a "when in Rome" attitude towards different cultures

and are often urged to do so in the spirit of international and intra-cultural cooperation. As Vicki's supervisor reminds her,

> "For goodness' sake, don't wear slacks in Mexico, Mexican girls don't wear them. Don't spend like a show-off. Speak *their* language, not yours. Incidentally, Vicki, it's rude down there to say you're an American. You're a North American. Remember, the South and Central Americans are Americans too. The point is to be friends."[94]

With pointed efforts to "be friends," certain Others are now exoticized and patronized, constructed as childlike victims to be saved. While Vicki and Cherry might admire the beauty and romance of these backward cultures, their role as ideal girls demands that they save the Other girls, converting them to American standards of modernization.

Meg, Marie, and Anita share another similarity that guarantees their integration into the ideal girl's circle: wealth. Meg and Marie come from old family money, and Anita owns a lavish hotel in a popular Mexican resort town. While the *Nancy Drew* series expresses considerable anxiety around protecting wealth and class mobility, the *Cherry Ames* and *Vicki Barr* series depict the American middle-class ideal as established and unremarkable. Unlike the wealthy girls whose limited freedom and mobility seem tied to their class status, both Cherry and Vicki live in comfortable homes that are described as cozy and average. The repetition of these descriptions normalizes middle class status, deflecting potential conversations about class tension. Gone are the poor girls from the Nancy Drew series, both the poor but noble girls Nancy helps to regain their deserved fortunes, and the villainous poor girls who attempt to rise above their station. Poor or working class girls in the Cherry Ames and Vicki Barr series are overwhelmingly rendered invisible.

Conclusion

Julia Mickenberg (2007) argues convincingly that girls' serial literature could function "under the radar" of scrutiny due to its status as a debased commercial medium

by the 1940s and 1950s, as the anxiety over serial literature's dangers had quieted considerably. The seeming insignificance of girls' series, I agree with Mickenberg, allows potential space for ideologically subversive images of girlhood. As members of a new era of popular American girls' series, the *Cherry Ames* and *Vicki Barr* series provided their target audience of young girls with a more complex picture of the ideal girl during a period of cultural and social change. Building on the image popularized by the *Nancy Drew* series, the ideal girls of the 1940s and 1950s series moved their sleuthing into the paid labor force, earning their own living and subverting dominant social discourses of disapproval for women working outside the home. In the *Cherry Ames* and *Vicki Barr* series, the girls go to work not to find a husband, but to find excitement, adventure, and personal fulfillment. The series' celebrations of independence and adventure coexist with references to home and romance, illustrating the contradictory messages received by girls during the period.

Part of these series' ability to stay "under the radar" was the classification of nursing and flight attendance as highly feminized, middle-class career options. These careers seem a "natural" choice for a successful girls' series, further normalizing the middle class girl. Although Cherry and Vicki uphold the image of the ideal girl as white, middle-class, and heterosexual, they stand in sharp contrast to the contemporary messages to girls about waiting patiently and preparing for marriage. Rather, Cherry and Vicki wholeheartedly disavow any prescriptions for inaction. The series also suggest a tentative change in constructions of the Other girl, one that reaches full exploration when girls' serial literature returns to popularity in the 1980s.

Notes

1. The *Cherry Ames* series, published between 1943 and 1968, includes twenty-seven stories. The *Vicki Barr* series consists of sixteen stories, published from 1947 to 1964.

2. Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

3. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 34.

4. William L. O'Neill, *American High: The Years of Confidence, 1945–1960* (New York: Free Press, 1986).

5. Coontz, *The Way*, 30.

6. May, *Homeward Bound*, 48.

7. Ibid., 17.

8. Ibid., 24–25.

9. Coontz, *The Way*, 105.

10. Carol A. B. Warren, *Madwives: Schizophrenic Women in the 1950s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 48.

11. Estelle Freedman and John D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 254.

12. May, *Homeward Bound*, 133.

13. Warren, *Schizophrenic Wives*, 8.

14. Joanne Meyerwitz, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

15. Henry William Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920–1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 218.

16. Ibid., 219.

17. Wini Brienes, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Random House, 1994); Georganne Scheiner, *Signifying Female Adolescence: Film Representations and Fans* (Westport: Praeger, 2000).

18. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 25.

19. Brienes, *Young, White, and Miserable*, 68.

20. May, *Homeward Bound*, 78.

21. Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in the Twentieth Century* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 32.

22. May, *Homeward Bound*, 41–43.

23. Mary Celeste Kearney, "Birds on the Wire: Troping Teenage Girlhood Through Telephony in Mid-Twentieth-Century U.S. Media Culture," *Cultural Studies* 19, no 5 (2005): 568–601.

24. Popular parenting books and magazine columns of the period advised heavily on how to prepare girls for dating and marriage. Parents received guidance on how to make their girls more social, more "normal," and more marriageable. "Is Your Little Girl a Good Wife" (Benjamin, L.P., *Ladies Home Journal*, November 1947, 220) is one such example.

25. Brienes, *Young, White, and Miserable*, 77–79.

26 . Unlike Nancy, Cherry and Vicki age slightly in the first few books of each series.

27. Adrianne Finlay, "Cherry Ames, Disembodied Nurse: War, Sexuality, and Sacrifice in the Novels of Helen Wells," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 43, no. 6 (2010): 1190. Finlay suggests that girls' series heroines offered young girls sanitized a version of adulthood that was still far more inspiring than the limited possibilities of childhood.

28. Ibid., 1189–1206. See also Sally Parry, "'You are Needed, Desperately Needed!': *Cherry Ames* in World War II," in *Nancy Drew and Company*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Press, 1997).

29. For a brilliant historical account of the flight stewardess profession, see Kathleen Barry's *Femininity in Flight: A History of Flight Attendants* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

30. Coontz, *The Way*, 160.

31. May, *Homeward Bound*, 58. As both May and Coontz document, women's labor was one of the most contradictory issues of the 1950s; although men and women stated that they believed women should not work unless necessary, employment of both single and married women grew steadily over the course of the decade.

32. Helen Wells, *Cherry Ames, Student Nurse* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1943), 6.

33. Wells, *Student Nurse*, 6.

34. Ibid., 9.

35. Ibid., 14.

36. Helen Wells, *Silver Wings for Vicki* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1947).

37. Like most minor serial characters, Vicki's parents are only attributed one or two key characteristics. Vicki's mother, Betty Barr, has a "young face and trim figure," and sympathizes with Vicki's adventurous spirit and goals of self-sufficiency. Vicki's father, Professor Barr, is a college economics professor and aspiring amateur chef.

38. Wells, *Student Nurse*, 4.

39. Wells, *Silver*, 1–2.

40. Ibid., 12.

41. Ibid., 19.

42. Ibid., 22.

43. Ibid., 1, 18.

44. Ibid., 18.

45. Ibid., 19.

46. Ibid., 9.

47. Ibid., 21.

48. Wells, *Student Nurse*, 4.

49. Wells, *Silver Wings*, 5.

50. Helen Wells, *Cherry Ames, Island Nurse* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1960).

51. Wells, *Silver Wings*, 31–32.

52. Helen Wells, *Cherry Ames, Cruise Nurse* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1960), 1.

53. Ibid., 7.

54. Ibid., 9.

55. Wells, *Silver Wings*, 18.

56. Barry, *Femininity in Flight*, 50.

57. Ibid., 25.

58. Wells, *Island Nurse*, dust jacket back cover.

59. See Betsy Israel, *Bachelor Girl: The Secret History of Single Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2002), for a discussion of the public image and lived realities of single women in the twentieth century.

60. *Cherry Ames, Student Nurse* introduces the reader to each of these girls, but their dating practices become more evident in *Cherry Ames, Visiting Nurse*. Ann Evans marries Jack Powell in *Cherry Ames, Army Nurse* and appears in small non-nursing roles in several later books in the series.

61. Susan Douglas (1994) argues that the 1950s were significantly contradictory for girls and young women, particularly in terms of mainstream social expectations and girls' changing aspirations.

62. Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth Century Popular Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana Press University, 2006).

63. May, *Homeward Bound*, 212.

64. Lynd, Robert and Helen Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, 1929); and Lynd, Robert and Helen Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York: Harcourt, 1937).

65. Helen Wells, *The Hidden Valley Mystery* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1948).

66. Ibid., 39.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid., 41.

69. Ibid.

70. The rhetoric of the Truman Doctrine (1947) permeates the guidebook descriptions' of Mexico's efforts to modernize. The series reflects the anxiety around communism and containment, while situating Vicki far away from the vortex of danger, Europe.

71. Wells, *The Hidden Valley*, 42.

72. Wells, *Island Nurse*, 63. Both *Cherry Ames* and *Vicki Barr* include adventures into Canada, another "safe spot" for the ideal girl.

73. Ibid., 63–64.

74. Ibid., 50.

75. Ibid., 50–51.

76. The description of Meg and Cherry here provides yet another illustration of a common trope in girls' serial literature: physiognomy as character reference. Meg's violet (!) eyes convey humor and honesty, unlike the small, beady eyes of *Island Nurse*'s villain, Little Joe Tweed.

77. Wells, *Island Nurse*, 50; 84; 104.

78. Ibid., 80.

79. Ibid., 91.

80. Here, Meg illustrates a particularly classed example of women's domestic responsibilities in managing a household. Cherry and Vicki appear to avoid these domestic duties at home, but perform them daily in their paid work.

81. Helen Wells, *The Secret of Magnolia Manor* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1949).

82. Wells, *The Secret*, 1.

83. Ibid., 8–9.

84. Ibid., 9.

85. The reader's introduction to the city through Vicki's eyes includes additional tropes of Otherness. Vicki notes "an old Negro woman, wearing a headkerchief and a stiff white apron over her started dress," as well as "a Frenchwoman in a mule-drawn wagon laden with vegetables" and singing in French (8).

86. Wells, *The Secret,* 9. Marie, as the last and youngest member of the old Breaux family, represents the impending decline of what the series depicts as outdated customs.

87. Ibid., 5.

88. Ibid., 6.

89. Ibid., 13.

90. Ibid., 18.

91. Wells, *The Hidden Valley*, 103.

92. Ibid., 104.

93. Ibid., 140.

94. Ibid., 21.

Chapter 5

THE BABYSITTERS CLUB SELLS DIVERSITY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Kristy thinks the Baby-sitters Club is a great idea. She and her friends Claudia, Stacey, and Mary Anne all love taking care of kids. A club will give them the chance to have lots of fun—and make tons of money.
Kristy's Great Idea (1986)

After a significant decline in serial literature in the 1960s and 1970s, girls' series gained popularity again in the 1980s.[1] Most new series targeted either "teen" girls or "preteens," an age-based grouping made increasingly visible by mainstream marketing campaigns. The series' content and tone differed slightly for the two groups, yet despite the surface distinction of target audience by age, the majority of series in the 1980s and 1990s situated girls in relation to personal relationships and capitalism. The most popular of younger girls' series, *The Babysitters Club,* written by Ann M. Martin, recounts the adventures and mishaps of a group of middle school girls who begin their own babysitting business. The series constructs the ideal girl as a young, active producer—entrepreneur and earner—in an American capitalist system.

The Babysitters Club also moves girls' series toward diversification of the friend group, which, in a departure from the solo hero in girls' series of the past, reaches focal status. In striving for racial inclusion, the series participates in a complicated negotiation of the progressive movements of the sixties and seventies and the subsequent backlash against identity politics and political correctness in the eighties. Although the series makes an effort toward inclusion, multicultural diversity exists as tokenism, lacking historical or political contextualization, and any discrimination the girls face is strictly social. In a series that features girls earning money, issues of poverty and privilege remain unexamined, and questions of sexual desire, heterosexual or other, are largely invisible. Moreover, the series' construction of the ideal girl (however diversified) as an

economic actor moves her firmly back within the domestic space and the safety of small-town America.

Material Conditions: Girlhood in the 1980s

Economics and Politics

The 1980s in America, like any other time period, was in many ways a response to previous decades of economic and political change. The 1980s are largely remembered as a time of great economic boom, a conservative "backlash" against the progressive gains of the 1960s and 1970s, increased globalization via trade liberalization, and the internationalizing of culture through expanding television markets.[2] Alongside Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain and Brian Mulroney in Canada (during Reagan's second term), U.S. President Ronald Reagan embraced deregulation of trade and privatization of industries, while establishing major tax breaks to stimulate the economy, freeing companies to expand and take advantage of increasingly global opportunities.[3] These tax breaks were made possible in part by Reagan's funding cuts for a wide array of social support programs that had been in place since Roosevelt's New Deal. Wall Street saw unprecedented gains, as corporate mergers and takeovers resulted in tremendous success for a few individuals.[4]

Not surprisingly, the economic prosperity promised by the Reagan administration was not universal.[5] Troy Gil notes that the decade of the 1980s,

> like so many others in our history, was a time of high drama, great progress, and intense frustration—a time when more people than ever before fulfilled the American dream, but many of us, in true American fashion, from the Left and the Right, realized it was not yet enough—and justifiably demanded liberty and justice and equality and prosperity and meaning and morality and community for all.[6]

Those achieving the "American dream" were increasingly separated from those who were feeling the effects of economic restructuring and reduced or eliminated social services.[7] While corporate takeovers and mergers lined the pockets of a few and, in some cases,

"cleaned up" corporations, these ventures also devastated "ordinary workers" at the bottom of the corporate ladder.[8] Certain sectors of the welfare system were hit hard, as were the programs' recipients, whom the Reagan administration cast as lazy, irresponsible leaches on American society. For example, "in 1981, even though 'means-tested entitlement programs' represented only about 18 percent of federal benefit payments to individuals, they sustained 40 percent of Reagan's budget cuts."[9] Working class women and their children, many already teetering on the verge of poverty, saw necessary services and provisions disappear. The racialized language and imagery conjured by Reagan's "welfare queens" exacerbated divisions between poor whites and blacks, not to mention the rising number of Hispanic and Asian immigrants.[10]

Reagan garnered public support for these changes through rhetorical strategies that built on the individualism of the 1970s. Reagan channeled the focus on the individual into a national discourse of self-sufficiency, independence, and entrepreneurship in order to create "flexible workers" and dismantle the existing social safety net. The newly celebrated "flexible worker" allowed corporations to consolidate responsibilities and tasks, hiring temporary and contract workers who could replace long-term workers at lower pay and be released without warning or penalty for the employer. Educated and skilled workers were able to move up, while the employment status of unskilled or temporary laborers became increasingly fragile and unpredictable.[11]

The Culture Wars

Despite many fiscal policy shifts to the Right in the 1980s, a number of historians argue that the decade was, in fact, not so revolutionary on social issues as conservative groups would have liked.[12] Ronald Reagan, while gladly aligning himself with rising conservative groups like Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority during his appointment as

governor of California, tended to avoid controversial social issues in his policy making.[13] As Ehrman (2005) claims, "When the 1980s ended, abortion still was legal, religion had not returned to the public schools, and the women's and gay rights movements were as strong as ever."[14] Such a statement seems odd, given that *Roe v. Wade* had suffered a number of restrictions, the religious right had established itself in the political realm, and both feminism and gay rights movements were on the defensive.[15] Although a retrospective analysis of the decade may suggest that the cultural shift to the Right was not as drastic as imagined, those living in the 1980s were well aware, whether actively engaged or not, of the so-called "culture wars," the battle for what would prevail as American values. While those of the political Left felt the hard-fought gains of the 1960s and 1970s were being turned back, many conservatives (not only restricted to the strengthening Christian Right) felt that American values and morals had been damaged by such social changes.[16]

The language of social justice and rights of the 1960s transformed into the "me mentality" and individualism of the 1970s, which many saw as detrimental to the American identity and way of life.[17] The 1980s, then, transferred the "me mentality" to capitalism and consumption, as advertisers increasingly sought to appeal to individualism. Racial tensions coincided with adoption and acceptance of multiculturalism and inclusivity. The homophobic tendencies of the AIDS coverage occurred alongside increasing visibility of GLBTQ individuals in government, film, theater, and other aspects of public life. A rhetorical celebration of motherhood and homemaking mixed with women's continued gains in the workplace, including changes in sexual harassment legislation. As radicals on both the Left and Right of American politics battled over the direction American culture would take, the majority of Americans adopted their own individualist attitude, avoiding active engagement with

ideological issues in their everyday lives. At the same time, this commitment to individualism, along with the mainstreaming of social issues in the sixties and seventies, led many Americans to become more tolerant, as reflected in the popular culture of the era.

Popular Culture and Girlhood in the 1980s

Perhaps the most notable aspect of girlhood in the mainstream and historical accounts of the 1980s, as demonstrated in the discussion above, is its virtual invisibility. With the exception of the "teen pregnancy" panic in the 1990s (certainly not the first or the last of its kind), girls and girls' culture did not garner much attention, at least not enough to cause a stir. Likewise, the most prominent and memorable elements of popular culture in the 1980s excluded or ignored girls. The label "decade of excess" extended to Hollywood, where star directors with exorbitant budgets produced mega-blockbuster action films.[18] Dominated by *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones*, the top ten films of the decade were all fantasy or science fiction films with a focus on special effects.[19] This sector of the industry, however, does not necessarily reflect the diversity of films (or television) being produced in the 1980s. As Gil writes, "the content providers who program our hundred-channel universe have reduced historians' generalizations into generational stereotypes."[20] Gil refers here to our collective understanding of the political climate of the 1980s, yet his statement also applies to our perception of the popular culture of the decade. During this period, Hollywood saw a simultaneous diversification of filmed entertainment products and a number of corporate media mergers, globalizing the entertainment industry.[21] Following Gil, Prince argues that the films of the decade were not simply "symptoms of (a) the Spielberg-Lucas model of filmmaking or (b) Reaganesque political culture," but that the 1980s were "a volatile era" in film and Hollywood, not defined "in terms of some fundamental schema."[22] Although many of the

films of the 1980s (particularly the blockbusters) did participate in the overall ideological shift to the Right, many films explored new territory and new audiences. The genres of teen comedies and "friend films," in particular, became increasingly popular as marketers focused on teens as a target audience. Many of these films addressed adolescent girls as their primary audience, and some of the most memorable cultural representations of girls in the 1980s can be found in these films.

The most popular adolescent films of the 1980s were John Hughes' series of films featuring the group of young actors that came to be called the "Brat Pack." Hughes' films (*Sixteen Candles* [1984], *The Breakfast Club* [1985], *Pretty in Pink* [1986], etc.) became instant hits and continue to enjoy a significant following, both from adults who enjoyed their initial releases as teenagers, and contemporary youth.[23] Hughes' films offer his audience a particular type of girl, one who focuses on appearance, popularity, and heterosexual romance.[24] DeVaney notes that in Hughes' films, girls are almost always "daddy's girls," reinscribed within a patriarchal culture and physically restricted to the home and school.[25] In Hughes' films and elsewhere, smart girls are either nonexistent, or they are punished and ostracized.[26] More importantly, girls are restricted spacially in these films; the girls appear primarily at home in in school, and any "outside" adventures are limited to their suburban safe zones. "Danger" appears only in the form of social exclusion or romantic failures, and the girls' primary objective centers around a (popular) male romantic object. Certainly, these heavily conventional portrayals of girls are not limited to John Hughes' Brat Pack films, but unlike the "blockbuster" films of the decade, these films claimed to capture adolescence as reality, not as fantasy. In fact, many longtime fans cite the films' "realistic portrayal" of high school and adolescence as one of their reasons for loving Hughes' films.[27] This claim of realism, or "capturing"

adolescence as it "really is," makes Hughes' portrayal of girlhood particularly powerful in terms of ideological impact. Ben Stein writes,

> To set forth a way of life on television is not necessarily political in terms of left, right, or center. Still it has some policy content. To replicate one's life and tell the world that it is the model of how life should be lived is a normative statement with some degree of power and forcefulness.[28]

Regardless of Hughes' personal or political intent, the films' portrayal of a specific version of girlhood functions as a "normative statement," making claims not only about what girls are like, but also how girls should be.

Hughes' restriction of girls to domestic space occurs in other films in the 1980s, many of which suggest a continued (and often heightened) anxiety around girls' potential neglect or rejection of domesticity. Much like the popular discourses of the 1950s in response to women's movement into the workforce, conservatives in the 1980s claimed that women who worked would neglect their families—or fail to marry and have children entirely—and abandon femininity, leading to a collapse of the nuclear family and the demise of the nation.[29] Many of these fears were directed toward Second Wave feminists, as women's labor rights and support for working women were central concerns of the feminist movement. Pat Robertson voiced these concerns in a fundraising letter opposing Iowa's potential adoption of an equal rights amendment, stating: "the feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians." Although extreme, Robertson's fears (and claims about feminism) were neither new nor unique. The dread of women's changing roles extended to adolescent girls, who needed to be returned to domestic space in order to protect the family and the future of the nation.

As Susan Douglas argues, women experience a conflicted relationship with the mass media, as the popular representations they see may be in direct contrast to their

experiences.[30] Douglas notes a distinct disparity between the traits associated with femininity and those touted as "American," such as independence, strength, and self-sufficiency, making it virtually impossible for women to be successfully feminine *and* American.[31] Popular culture representations in the eighties extend this dilemma to girls. Told by family and teachers that they could succeed in school, go to college, have a career *and* a family, girls saw little of this potential in the mass media. Rather, they saw the ideal girl in popular culture, exemplified by John Hughes' girls, who had no interest in school, remained at home, and relied on daddy until she found the right boy to marry.

These representations of girls in mainstream popular culture reached greater visibility and availability during the 19890s than ever before, as popular film and television could be viewed inside the home, purchased, and watched repeatedly. Sarah Hentges recalls her search for female characters in popular culture while growing up in the eighties and nineties, and the lack of complex, positive female characters:

> I would seek out female protagonists, even when they were dumbed down or hypersexualized. Still, as a girl, I came to expect very little of myself because the popular culture where I saw myself reflected, directly or indirectly, expected very little of me, and reflected little of me. If I had a boyfriend or husband, some kids, maybe a job and a house, then I had exactly what any woman should want.[32]

Certainly Hentges' conflicted relationship with popular culture is not unique, and she notes the ideological impact of repetitive portrayals of girls and women in "a narrow range of plot lines, characters, products, and activities."[33] Girls outside the white, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class ideal are even less likely to see themselves reflected in popular culture. While these visual representations restrict potential subject positions, limited economic resources and social power amplify girls' spacial containment, as independence is increasingly couched in terms of purchasing power.

Capitalist Consumption as Independence

Marketers began targeting teenage girls as a unique consumer group as early as the 1940s. The culture of consumerism in the eighties intensified the focus on teenage girls and extended to an even younger audience. Girls were urged to construct their identities through consumption of branded products.[34] As girls used magazine quizzes to determine their "type," they could then identify the appropriate products to convey their identity to the world.[35] This "typing," as Hentges suggests above, provides girls with a limited number of predictable identity categories or roles to play. These identities are easily marketable: the romantic, the traditionalist, the modern girl, etc., with an increasing number of associated products. Despite the limited number of available identities for purchase, marketers promote the options made available to girls as a way to be unique, individual, and independent.

The desire to purchase products that "match" or express their identities also encourages girls to participate in the production side of capitalism. If girls want to obtain the right products and their parents are unwilling or unable to purchase them, girls are more likely to find other means of gaining access. While "treating" and other tactics remain common, some girls in the eighties, particularly younger girls outside of traditional employment, came to see themselves as capable of earning their own money to purchase products.[36] Although there were not many visible examples in the media of girls earning their own money, a few success stories of girl "start ups" supported the broader cultural emphasis on entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency in the 1980s, not to mention a heightened culture of conspicuous consumption.[37]

The Babysitters Club: Girls as Entrepreneurs

The Babysitters Club, one of the most memorable and widely available girls' series in the twentieth century, reached a new generation of girl readers during a crucial

shift in American identity, economic and social realities, and girls' culture. The series, which began publication in 1986 after Scholastic editor Jean Feiwel suggested the idea for the stories, exemplifies the positioning of girls within capitalism in the 1980s. Beginning with *Kristy's Great Idea*, each book in the series follows the babysitting adventures of the four original members of the group, who are joined by six other friends/sitters by the end of the series. Kristy, Claudi, Mary Anne, and Stacey are all seventh graders at Stoneybrook Middle School in fictional Stoneybrook, Connecticut.[38] The series achieved almost instant success, thanks in part to Scholastic's role as an "education" press, publishing and promoting the series in school libraries around the country through sponsored book fairs, monthly book clubs, and classroom magazines.[39] The series was so successful that the Disney Channel produced a thirteen-episode television series, which aired on a number of channels and eventually released to home video.[40] In 1995, Scholastic and Columbia Pictures released a feature film, which combined a number of the series' storylines.[41]

Ann M. Martin is the "real" author who wrote a large majority of the series' books, as well as the pen name for the series. Martin's authorship remains on all 213 books in *The Babysitters Club* series, as well as all the books in the spin-off series and "Super" editions. Given the series' initial popularity, Scholastic soon sped up publication and Martin began producing the series in ghostwriter fashion, creating outlines and editing the volumes written by other writers.[42] Advertised in book fair pamphlets and promoted through monthly book clubs, the series quickly became recommended reading for the target audience of eight to twelve year old girls. Readers could purchase each book (either at a school book fair or through the mail) for $3.50 and Scholastic published at the rate of one book per month. The series' success, Feiwel felt, was quite simple:

> I really think that what made the series tick was the fact that there was really nothing like it out there. The books deal with issues like friendship, family, and

> school, and present small slices of life's problems within a manageable context. And they also deal with what it means to be independent, which is what the babysitting angle is all about.[43]

The "babysitting angle" was the hook of the series, and parents and teachers appreciated the characteristics and behaviors promoted by the series. The series enjoys the same adult support today, illustrated by Oprah's promotion of the series' re-issue in 2009:

> In a world of Gossip Girls and vampires, The Babysitter's Club could provide young girls with positive role models, characters their parents would be pleased for them to emulate. So Kristy, Mary Anne, Claudia and Stacey are back. Whether you think of them as old friends or a baffling phenomenon, you'd do well to introduce them to your kids—just don't be surprised when they're dressing up as Claudia or demanding return trips to the library.[44]

Martin herself states, "I hope that they come away with images of girls who are positive role models who are take charge."[45] By framing girls as "take charge," the series spoke to young girls growing up within a rhetorical context of economic achievement and self-sufficiency through entrepreneurship.

Scholastic's choice of babysitting as an ideal means of employment for young girls is an interesting one, given the history of anxiety around the occupation in the United States. Babysitting has long been a gendered profession, particularly since the 1920s, with the creation of the teenage girl and new needs for childcare during both world wars.[46] As Miriam Forman-Brunell argues, such cultural concerns about babysitting are "shaped by an underlying and ongoing critique of female adolescents" themselves, as well as the growth of a unique girl culture.[47] More importantly, babysitting can function as a means to control and restrict girls—to take into account and actively neutralize girls' growing desires for autonomy and freedom. A domestic occupation, babysitting serves as appropriate training for girls who must be wives and mothers, as girls' abandoning domesticity has been a fear for generations. *Ladies Home Journal* contributors frequently fretted, "If our daughters lose the desire to become homemakers, we shall lose our homes."[48] Forman-Brunell notes, however, that many girls were drawn to babysitting

not as a way of preparing for an inevitable future as housewives and mothers, but as a means of independence through employment. *The Babysitters Club* series participates simultaneously in promoting both aspects of babysitting, through the language of entrepreneurship and professionalism, and the romanticizing of the figure of the babysitter herself.

The Ideal Girl(s)

The re-emergence of girls' serial literature in the eighties includes a number of noticeable changes in the figure of the ideal girl of the 1940s and 1950s, as portrayed through Vicki Barr and Cherry Ames. First, no longer does one character occupy the position solely. Rather, the "ideal girl" becomes "ideal girls" in *The Babysitters Club* series. Just as the *Vicki Barr* and *Cherry Ames* series began to portray the ideal girl as more believable, the ideal girls of the *BSC* appeal to girl readers' desires for more realistic and relatable girl heroes. Unlike the girl companions of the earlier series, who function as tagalongs or foils to further glorify the solo ideal girl, all four girls (and eventually, the other club members as well) are vital to the club's success and receive equal attention in the series. The extension of ideal girl status to more than one girl complicates the figure of the ideal girl, and allows readers to choose their favorite club member without sacrificing devotion to the ideal.[49]

The series (and the club) begins with four founding members: Kristy Thomas, Claudia Schiffer, Mary Anne Spier, and Stacey McGill, who live and attend middle school in Stoneybrook, Connecticut. Dawn Schafer, who moves to Stoneybrook from California, joins the club in the fourth book of the series, *Mary Anne Saves the Day*. Each book in the series is told from the perspective of one of the club members, and each of the club members "stars" in the same percentage of series titles.[50] This strategy suggests the equal status of all the club members, even those who are not founding members or officers.

Each book begins with the initial perspective of the narrating club member, who gives the reader her version of the club's establishment, the key members, her role in the club, and the club's significance to her life. Although a different club member narrates each book, the descriptions of the various club members are notably consistent, in an effort to illustrate the girls' diversity. Because the girls are neatly "typed" (much like the magazine quizzes Douglas mentions), readers can easily identify each club member and understand her perspective before the book even begins. The club members' brief descriptions of each other are vital to the series' message of individuality.

Kristy Thomas, Club President

Mallory begins her first description of the club members with Kristy:

> What an interesting group we are. We're very different, but we get along really well. Kristy, for instance, is loud and outgoing. And full of ideas. She's quite serious about running the club. She's small for her age and cares zero about her appearance. In fact, she almost always wears jeans, sneakers, a turtleneck, and a sweater. She comes from a family of brothers, two older ones, and a little one, David Michael. Her mom, who was divorced, recently remarried a millionaire, so now Kristy lives in a mansion across town from her old house (and across town from the rest of us). She has a new little stepsister and stepbrother, Andrew and Karen, whom she loves to pieces.[51]

Mary Anne provides additional commentary on Kristy's role as president, crediting her with the organization and professionalism of the club, thanks to her bossiness.[52] Claudia offers the following on Kristy's appearance: "Kristy has long brown hair which she doesn't do much with yet, and big brown eyes which will look great with makeup in a couple of years. She's small for her age. She looks more like a ten-year-old."[53] All of the books' descriptions mention Kristy's bossiness, leadership, and tendency to speak her mind. Dawn says, "Kristy never wastes a second. She's a take-charge, rushing-around kind of person."[54] Kristy's own self-portrait notes that she is "impulsive" and "can't keep [her] mouth shut."[55] The series constructs Kristy as the tomboy leader of the group: full of ideas, a bit stubborn, and fiercely loyal.

Mary Anne Spier, Secretary

Mary Anne is Kristy's very best friend, and all of the girls routinely link she and Kristy through comparison and contrast. Claudia's first description provides a typical example:

> Even though Kristy and Mary Anne are in seventh grade, just like Stacey and I are, they can be very childish. They're not interested in boys or clothes yet, and sometimes they do the weirdest things. Mary Anne still dresses up her stuffed animals…Mary Anne also has brown eyes and brown hair. Her father makes her wear her hair in braids. I wonder how long that will go on. And both of them wear kind of little-girl clothes—kilts and plain blouses and stuff like that.[56]

Although Claudia sees Kristy and Mary Anne as very similar, Jessi notes their differences:

> It's hard to believe that Mary Anne and Kristy are best friends. This is because in a lot of ways they're opposites. Oh, they look alike, all right. They're the two shortest kids in their grade and they both have brown hair and brown eyes, but that's where the similarities end. Kristy is loud and outgoing, Mary Anne is shy and introspective…And Mary Anne is sensitive and caring […] She's a good listener and takes people seriously.[57]

Mary Anne is the sweet girl next door: shy, thoughtful, and sweet. Mary Anne's father bears a significant influence on the series' portrayal, and factors in all of the girls' descriptions of Mary Anne, as well as her own. Mr. Richard Spier is a kind but overbearing father who has trouble seeing his daughter grow up (Mary Anne's mother died of cancer when she was an infant), and Mary Anne struggles to prove her maturity and establish independence.

Claudia Kishi, Vice-President

Kristy and Mary Anne have grown up together on the same street with Claudia, and their stories are central to the series' development. The series distinguishes Claudia from Kristy and Mary Anne, and their spacial separation emphasizes their "triangle" relationships. Kristy and Mary Anne live next door to one another, close enough to communicate via flashlight code through their bedroom windows. Claudia, on the other hand, lives across the street—not far, but separate. Kristy notes this difference, saying,

"We've grown up together, but somehow Claudia has never spent as much time with us as Mary Anne and I have spent with each other."[58] Kristy cites Claudia's art classes as a reason for this, but goes on to say, "this year, the gap between us seems to have widened just since school started [...] Claudia suddenly seemed...older. She talks about boys, and spends most of her time adding to her wardrobe and talking on the phone."[59] Kristy and Mary Anne both mention Claudia's maturity in comparison to their own, but Mary Anne's tone suggests envy, compared to Kristy's tone of loss. Mallory's condensed description of Claudia illustrates her position within the club and key characteristics:

> Now, let me get back to Claudia Kishi. She's the one who already has pierced ears, remember? Claud is the vice-president of the Babysitters Club and probably the trendiest, coolest kid in all of Stoneybrook Middle School. She's into art and makes some of her own clothes and jewelry [...] Whether she makes her clothes or buys them, they are totally cool, and you can count on Claudia to add her own personal touches. No matter what she wears, she looks great. That's because she' Japanese-American—beautiful and exotic with dark, almond-shaped eyes; long black hair that she styles in all different ways; and an absolutely clear complexion. It's unfortunate that Claudia is a poor student, because her older sister, Janine, is a genius. Claudia's parents give her grief about this, but Mimi, her grandmother, never does.[60]

Claudia's other defining traits include a "junk food addiction" and a love for *Nancy Drew* mysteries, which she "can almost always solve [...] before the detective in the story can."[61] Claudia's difficulties with school are a frequent theme throughout the series, although her IQ is above average.[62] Claudia's parents are strict about school, but they allow her to dress freely and have her own phone line (the club holds meetings in Claudia's room for this reason).

Stacey McGill, Treasurer

Stacey is one of the founding members of the club and Claudia's best friend. Stacey describes herself in relation to the other girls: "If I could have looked at myself, I would have seen a second trendy dresser, [...] more sophisticated than Kristy's or Mary Anne's,

but not nearly as beautiful as Claudia's."[63] Mary Anne further emphasizes Stacey's sophistication:

> Stacey entered Claudia's room, looking gorgeous, as usual. If you ask Stacey, she'll tell you she's plain, but that's crazy. Stacey is glamorous. She moved to Stoneybrook, Connecticut, from New York City last summer. She's very sophisticated, and is even allowed to have her hair permed, so that she has this fabulous-looking shaggy blonde man, and she wears the neatest clothes [...] I'd give anything to be Stacey. Not to have diabetes, of course, but to have lived in New York City and to be able to dress like a model every day [...] Stacey often creates a sensation.[64]

As Mary Anne notes here, Stacey has diabetes, a topic that often dominates Stacey's stories. The series portrays Stacey's maturity through her big-city upbringing, her ability to stay out later than the other girls, and her responsible management of her diabetes. Stacey and her family move back to New York relatively early in the series (book thirteen, *Goodbye Stacey, Goodbye*), only to return again later (book twenty-eight, *Welcome Back, Stacey!)*. Although Stacey is one of the original four members of the club, she is often figured as an outsider in Stoneybrook, a position she and Dawn Schafer share.

Dawn Schafer, Alternate Member/Treasurer

Like Stacey, Dawn moves to Stoneybrook from a "glamorous" locale (California), has beautiful blonde hair, and maintains a healthy diet. Jessi describes Dawn as "a true California girl," with "long (and I mean *long*) hair that's so blonde it's almost white." Dawn "loves health food (won't touch the junk food that Claudia's addicted to) and always longs for warm weather."[65] Most notably, each girl in the club describes Dawn as confident and self-possessed:

> Boy, is she different from anyone else in the club. She's a real individual. Dawn moved to Connecticut last year with her mom and her younger brother, Jeff. They moved all the way from California after her parents got divorced, and they picked Stoneybrook because Mrs. Schafer grew up here, or something like that. Dawn is so Californian that it's almost sad to see her transplanted to the East Coast. She's laid-back (but very organized and responsible), adores sunshine and warm weather, and even looks Californian, with incredibly long, pale blonde hair and sparkling blue eyes [...] Dawn is not only an individual, she's a survivor.[66]

Both Stacey and Dawn rely on the club for friends in a new location, and each of them go to great lengths to smooth over differences and resolve arguments in the group. When Stacey moves back to New York, Dawn takes over as club treasurer.

Jessi Ramsey, Junior Member

In the fourteenth book in the series, the club inducts two new recruits, Jessica Ramsey and Mallory Pike. Jessi and Mallory are sixth graders (the original members are now in eighth grade) and best friends. Mallory describes a number of their characteristics, as well as their roles in the club:

> There are just two other members of the Babysitters Club: Jessi and me. Since we're young, we're called junior officers. Of all the kids in the club, I guess Jessi and I are the most alike, except for some obvious differences that don't matter at all. For instance, I'm white and Jessi is black. And I have seven brothers and sisters, while Jessi has just one younger sister (Becca) and a baby brother (John Philip Ramsey, Jr., nicknamed Squirt). Beyond that, well, we're both the oldest in our families but think our parents treat us like babies. We both want pierced ears desperately but will probably get braces on our teeth instead, and we both wish we could wear trendier clothes and get decent haircuts. We love to read, too, especially horse stories—although I want to be a writer one day, while Jessi dreams of maybe being a ballet dancer.[67]

As with Kristy and Mary Anne, Jessi and Mallory are frequently paired together and described through similarities and contrasts. Jessi describes herself as "a good dancer, a good joke-teller, a good reader, good at languages, and most important, good with children. But a *terrible* letter-writer."[68] Jessi's hobby of ballet dominates her identity in the series.

Mallory Pike, Junior Officer

Like Jessi, Mallory feels far less mature than the older girls in the club, despite the fact that she is the oldest of eight kids. Perhaps more than any other character, Mallory wants to be unique, a noticeable theme in her descriptions of the other girls. Jessi's description of Mallory is equally telling:

> You know that Mal has seven brothers and sisters. She loves to read, write stories, and illustrate her stories. She thinks her parents treat her like an infant, and she can't wait for the day when her braces will be off, her ears will be pierced, and her glasses will be gone. She's dying for contacts and wishes she could straighten her head of curly hair. As Mal once said, being eleven is a real trial.[69]

Although all of the girls' stories struggle with increasing maturity and independence in some way, Mallory's identity revolves around her quest to grow up and be recognized as a unique individual. Perpetually embarrassed by her curly red hair, glasses, and bland clothing, Mallory's obsession with "growing up" translates into her envious descriptions of the older girls in the series.

Uniqueness, Individuality, and "Diversity"

As illustrated above in the brief sketch of Mallory, the girls' descriptions of one another not only emphasize the most important characteristics of each club member, they also speak back to the narrating girl's identity as well. Mallory's comments about Dawn's individuality highlight Mallory's own location within a large family, as well as her lesser ability to construct her desired identity through appearance. This sort of "call and response" tactic functions in a number of ways to construct the ideal girl. Each girl's description highlights one of the other club members as *their* ideal girl—Stacey for Mary Anne, Dawn for Mallory, Claudia for Jessi, etc.—by focusing on their ideal traits. The narrating girl exposes her own self-perceived flaws or failures in comparison to the ideal girl, thereby making the narrating girl more realistic and sympathetic to the reader. Martin, in recalling girl reader's letters to her, states,

> "I think most kids can find at least one character that they really identify with. I used to get letters all the time saying things like "I'm like all of the characters in the club. I'm like Stacey because I like fashion; I'm like Claudia because I like art." They'd list all of the girls. So I think kids find the characters easy to identify with."[70]

Because each of the stories are told from the perspective of a different club member in a cyclical fashion, the series repeatedly glorifies and humanizes each of the girls through

their own self- and other- descriptions. The repetition both supports and undermines the series' emphasis on uniqueness and individualism. The series constructs the girls' "unique" identities through a limited number of personality traits, hobbies, and their appearance. Likewise, the girls themselves actively construct their own identities and the identities of their friends as unique through the same factors. The consistency and predictability of each girl's description/identity reduces the girls to their types, detracting from the attempts at distinctiveness.

The series' collection of girls—and their equal status as ideal girls—suggests a distinct attempt to present a diverse group as characters/role models. Martin's efforts here support both Gil and Ehrman's suggestions that, despite considerable resistance in the eighties to the "political correctness" made possible by the movements in the sixties and seventies, those movements *did* lead to a mainstreaming of concepts like multiculturalism or racial inclusion. On a basic level, Claudia and Jessi, the two racial Others of the *Babysitters Club*, are integral members of the club and are treated no differently within the texts than the other girls. To firmly establish this sense of inclusion, Martin situates racial difference alongside other differences in appearance and personality; skin color is no more important to the girls' identities than a favorite book, hobby, or hair color. Mallory's description of she and Jessi illustrates the degree to which Martin downplays the role of racial difference. From Mallory's perspective, she and Jessi's racial categories are just one of several "obvious differences that don't matter," like their number of siblings. Jessi's own introduction to the series, however, notes the significance of racial difference in a town like Stoneybrook, Connecticut. Jessi begins her story with her love of dance, how she moved to Stoneybrook, and a brief description of her family. Then, abruptly:

> My family is black. I know it sounds funny to announce it like that. If we were white, I wouldn't have to, because you would probably *assume* we were white.

> But when you're a minority, things are different. Of course, if you could see me, there wouldn't be any question that I'm black. I have skin the color of cocoa—darkish cocoa—soft black hair, and eyes like two pieces of coal.[71] (emphasis in original)

Jessi begins her self-description with her love of dance, as do the other girls, suggesting that her love of ballet is a more salient aspect of her identity than her race. However, Jessi goes on to note that her family's transition to Stoneybrook had not been easy:

> We're the only black family in our neighborhood, and I am—get this—the only black kid in the whole entire sixth grade at Stoneybrook Middle School. Can you believe it? I can't. Unfortunately, things have been a little rough for us. I can't tell if some people here really *don't like* black people, or if they just haven't known many, so they're kind of wary of us. But they sure weren't very nice at first.[72] (emphasis in original)

Jessi, unlike Mallory, is well aware of how much her racial difference matters. On a few occasions, Jessi notes issues of prejudice or social exclusion.

Aside from Jessi's early comments about the invisibility of whiteness and the visibility of her racial difference in a nearly all white town, the series portrays race as relatively insignificant. More accurately, Jessi and Claudia's racial difference receives no greater notice than their hair color or favorite hobby, while the (white) racial status of the other girls goes virtually unmentioned. With the exception of Mallory's description of herself as white in comparison to Jessi, the white girls' skin color or racial identity is not discussed. Every single book mentions Claudia's ethnicity (Japanese American), as well as her "flawless" complexion and straight black hair. As such, the series' efforts at racial inclusion tend toward tokenism and racial "Othering," further exoticizing racial difference and normalizing whiteness by leaving it unexamined.[73] Further, Jessi and Claudia both treat issues raised by their non-whiteness as individual social problems to be conquered, as part of their "unique" identity in the group. The series suggests that Claudia's overcoming ethnic prejudice (in the form of a family who does not want her to

babysit) as no more troubling than Mary Anne finally convincing her father to redecorate her room.[74]

The same perspective applies to physical disability. For example, in *Jessi's Secret Language*, Jessi uses her experiences as a racial outsider to connect to a babysitting charge. When Haley expresses conflicted feelings about her deaf little brother, Matt, Jessi tells her that she understands how it feels to be excluded:

> "Sometimes the kids at school tease me because I'm black, and *no one* knows how that feels the way [my sister] Becca does."
>
> Haley nodded thoughtfully. "I guess you do understand," she told me. (She sounded very grateful.)[75]

Here, the teasing Haley and Matt initially face from other kids in the neighborhood equates to the discrimination experienced by Jessi and her sister, Becca; racial difference and physical disability are not so different. Jessi, Haley, and the other club members teach the kids in the neighborhood sign language, and soon all of the kids welcome Matt and Haley as part of the community. The series addresses some realities of physical disability beyond social exclusion: the practical demands of special schooling; transportation; safety issues; and financial stress.[76] Despite the superficial linking of two sites of oppression, the series stops short of making connections between the institutionalized and systemic elements of a society that privileges whiteness and the able-bodied.[77] Jessi's father does not have difficulty getting a high-paying job in nearby Stamford, nor does the premier ballet school in Stoneybrook exclude Jessi. Jessi and Claudia each face one incident of racial prejudice in the series, and each issue is purely social in nature, simply a matter of individual discrimination that meets a tidy resolution. Despite this attention to racism as a personal matter, however, the series' overall treatment of racial difference as "diversity"—as just another aspect of the girls' "unique" identities—neutralizes any potential critique of racism as an intersecting system

of oppression.[78] Rather, the series' "diversity" efforts trivialize racial inequalities, returning the girls and their readers again and again to the norm of whiteness.[79]

The series' treatment of Stacey's diabetes aligns with the apolitical depiction of race (and disability) as relatively insignificant. Despite Stacey's frequent troubles with her diabetes (the illness dominates several of the stories told from Stacey's point of view), Stacey and the other girls continually emphasize that she can be "normal," just like the other girls. Stacey's first self-description includes a lengthy explanation of how she discovered she had diabetes, her struggle with the diagnosis, and her learning to manage the illness. Stacey alternates between insisting on her normalcy and acknowledging that her illness often makes her feel "weird":

> The doctor explained that you can give yourself injections of insulin every day to keep the right amount in your body. When you take insulin and control your diet, you can lead a *normal* life. That was why I was learning how to give injections—so that I could inject myself with insulin every day. Tell me that's not *weird*.[80] (emphasis mine)

Although Stacey wants her friends and family to treat her as though nothing is wrong—the series depicts her parents' concern as overbearing and unnecessary—she repeatedly mentions the ways in which her illness excludes her from "normal" activities. Likewise, the other girls' descriptions of Stacey assert her normalcy, citing her diabetes only as one of her identity traits: permed blonde hair, stylish clothes, and diabetes. However, virtually every description of club meetings in the series notes Stacey's inability to eat junk food along with the others, and their club parties require accommodations for Stacey's "special needs" diet.[81] In doing so, the series undermines efforts to position Stacey as "normal," instead constantly bringing attention to her "weirdness." Throughout the series, Martin attempts to construct a world in which diversity is commonplace, even unremarkable. By constantly claiming "normalcy" and placing race and physical ability within the context of uniqueness and individuality, the text instead repeatedly brings

attention to difference, simultaneously emphasizing it while denying its practical implications.

Although Martin incorporates racial difference (and to a certain degree, the social or individual aspects of racism) and physical ability as parts in her spectrum of unique individuality in *The Babysitters Club* series, her efforts at diverse representations stops short. In a series that advocates babysitting as a means of income, issues of financial disparity and poverty are blatantly absent. All of the girls in the club are middle-class, as indicated by the descriptions of their homes, clothing, and hobbies. The girls' parents have comfortable jobs and provide for their families with ease, including the girls' hobbies and primary wardrobes. For example, Jessi's parents have no problem paying for Jessi to attend the most prestigious ballet school in the Stamford area, and Jessi "helps out" by using some of her babysitting money to pay for pointe shoes.[82] Claudia's parents pay for Claudia to take private art lessons two days each week, and for her older sister's college classes.[83] Stacey's parents take her back and forth to New York City to seek out new treatments for her illness, and the costs of insulin and these trips, although mentioned, are never cited as a problem. Despite the statistical likelihood of women experiencing a significant drop in living standard after a divorce, the series gives no indication that Dawn or Kristy's mothers, both of whom are divorced, have any financial difficulties.[84] Even Mallory's parents, with eight children to support, are able to purchase new school year wardrobes for their children at the Stamford mall.[85] Each of the girls uses the money earned through babysitting to supplement their wardrobes and hobbies, while all primary needs (and many secondary desires) are met by their parents without question. This middle-class standard of living extends to all of the club's sitting clients, who are able to afford babysitters in order to run errands, go shopping with friends, or attend markedly middle or upper class social and cultural events.

Kristy's "millionaire" stepfather acts as the series' only economic diversity, and Kristy's adjustment to a higher standard of living is secondary to her emotional adjustment to the new family structure. Although Kristy mentions Watson's wealth a number of times early in the series, as she grows more comfortable with her new family, the portrayal of Watson's economic status as "abnormal"—i.e. not middle class—lessens until Watson's "millionaire" status becomes normalized. The invisibility of poverty in the series extends the erasure begun in the girls' series of the 1950s. Rather than conflating poverty, deviancy, and racial Otherness, as does the *Nancy Drew* series and other early girls' series, *The Babysitters Club* continues what the *Cherry Ames* and *Vicki Barr* series initiated: the absolute removal of representations of poverty. No longer cast as criminals, poor girls have no role to play in the middle-class world of plucky entrepreneurship in *The Babysitters Club*. The girls begin the babysitting club for a number reasons: to help out parents and potential clients; to be responsible and independent; to have fun and earn their own money. None of the girls rely on the money they earn to buy basic clothing or food, nor do they have to contribute their earnings to help their families survive. By excluding representations of poverty, the series supports the exaggerated construction in the 1980s of middle class normalcy and upward mobility, as well as the continued portrayal of the ideal girl as comfortably middle class.

The Babysitters Club series also extends the earlier series' depiction of the ideal girl as desexualized. Here, the girls' potential for sexual desire is practically nonexistent; the only hints of (normal) sexuality are limited to the "age appropriate" determinant of interest in boys. In the early introductions to each of the girls, they often note who is and is not interested in boys: Claudia and Stacey, the two "mature" girls, definitely like boys; Kristy finds boys repulsive and stupid; Mary Anne and Dawn can't seem to make up their minds. Mary Anne is the only club member with a steady "boyfriend," Logan, an initial

surprise to everyone in the club, given Mary Anne's shyness and lack of general interest in pursuing boys. Attraction to other girls, like poverty, remains entirely out of the picture and out of the question. Overall, the girls' "interest" is limited to vague ideas of romance, not physical or sexual desire, as illustrated by Claudia's daydream about Trevor:

> Our grade is being taken on a field trip to visit the colonial Bradford Mansion in Wutherby. We're split into groups and Trevor and I are in the same group. After we tour the house, we go out back to the gardens and start wandering through the giant maze made of yew hedges. Trevor and I reach a dead end together and are just about to turn around when we realize it's snowing, even though it's June. "Hey, what's that?" says Trevor. He points to a little wooden door hidden in the bushes. "I don't know," I reply. "Let's see. Maybe we can get out of the snow for a while." We open the door and find ourselves in another world. The snow is gone, and so are the maze, the Bradford Museum, and the other kids. We're no longer in Wutherby. For all I know, we're not even on Earth. Maybe we're in the fourth dimension. It doesn't matter. Wherever we are, we're alone together…[86]

Claudia's teacher interrupts her daydream, and she concludes, "Darn. I have never been able to finish that daydream. If my teachers would just leave me alone, I could find out what happens."[87] Claudia's daydream typifies the series' construction of girls' sexuality as desexualized and passive. The field trip locale emphasizes Claudia's identity as a young school girl (despite her avid dislike for school), and the Alice in Wonderland-like fantasy elements of the daydream accentuate its juvenile nature. Emptied of any sexual desire, Claudia's daydream is peppered with vague signifiers of romance. Most importantly, Claudia wishes that she could finish the daydream to "find out what happens;" she lacks control of her own mental creation, unable to direct her fantasies. Unlike the older girls in earlier series, whose equally desexualized "romances" are sideshows of their exciting adventures, the series depicts the girls of the club as innocent children, outside the possibility of sexual desire or knowledge.

"Those Girls:" The Older Girl as Other

The Babysitters Club series features a younger ideal girl than the previous girls' series, closer to the age of the target audience readers. The girls' youthful innocence is central to their status as ideal, as made evident through the series' construction of the Other. The series does contribute to the rendering of poor girls and non-heterosexual girls as non-ideal through their exclusion from the series. However, the series actively portrays older girls as the dangerous Other, emphasizing the club girls' youth as the foremost characteristic of the ideal. By contrasting older girls with the ideal club girls, the series reflects and contributes to fears about girls' growing autonomy and independence, conflating ideal girlhood with innocence and dependency.

The most vivid example of this portrayal occurs in *The Truth About Stacey*, in which the girls' success as a babysitting club meets competition from another group of girls, "The Babysitting Agency." Led by Liz Lewis and Michelle Patterson, the Agency initially copies the structure and format of the Club, marketing their members as older and more responsible.[88] The members *are* older; Claudia tells the other club members that Liz and Michelle are in eighth grade, and shares what else she knows:

> "Liz and Michelle could be fourteen or fifteen. I wish you guys knew who they are. You'd faint. Those two aren't baby-sitters any more than I'm the queen of France."
>
> "What's wrong with them?" [Stacey] asked.
>
> "For one thing, I wouldn't trust them farther than I could throw a truck," said Claudia. "They have smart mouths, they sass the teachers, they hate school, they hang around at the mall. You know, *that* kind of kid."[89] (emphasis in original)

Claudia's description of the two girls and tone of disapproval is interesting, given what we know about the club girls themselves. The series begins with Kristy "sassing" a teacher, Claudia hates school, and all of the club girls (even Kristy) enjoy going to the mall. The distinction seems to be the issue of trust, as illustrated by further descriptions

of the older Agency girls. Kristy learns that Liz and Michelle only book babysitting jobs with a bunch of other older kids, like an employment agency. Unlike the Club, the Agency babysitters are not responsible to each other or their clients. When Kristy and the other club girls attempt to recruit older members to compete with the Agency's later hours, two of the Agency girls "join" the Club, only to intentionally skip out on their babysitting gigs, embarrassing the club and threatening its reputation. When the Club girls confront them, the older girls admit to the trick. The Club members feel helpless when a number of their regular clients start using the Agency, but the situation soon rights itself after the older Agency girls turn out to be bad babysitters.

Throughout the story, the girls situate their youthfulness as innocent *and* responsible, in contrast to the older girls' dangerous irresponsibility. Kristy notes repeatedly that the Club "is known for responsible baby-sitters," and they set out to prove their superiority to the older girls in the Agency.[90] The girls' new flier highlights this distinction:

YOUNGER IS BETTER!
RESPONSIBILITY + PUNCTUALITY=
THE BABY-SITTERS CLUB
THE FIRST AND FINEST BABY-SITTING SERVICE
QUALITY CARE FOR KIDS[91]
(emphasis in original)

The entire series supports the "younger is better" assertion; older girls are too concerned with makeup and boys to pay appropriate attention to their babysitting charges, and the distractions associated with their gendered age are constructed as undesirable and dangerous. Stacey learns from one of her charges, Jamie, that while one of the Agency girls was babysitting him, she watched television and talked on the phone rather than playing with him, had her boyfriend over, smoked in the house, and even burnt a hole in a chair.[92] Another charge, Charlotte, tells Stacey that one of the older Agency girls said she only babysits for the money and does not like kids.[93]

The story reaches its height when the Club girls collectively encourage their charges to alert their parents to the issues with the Agency sitters, in order to avoid "tattling" or appearing jealous or unprofessional. However, when they find Jamie playing near the street without cold weather outerwear while under the poor supervision of an Agency girl, the Club girls discuss the situation:

> "Wow," said Kristy. "This is serious. That baby-sitter, whoever the so-called agency found for the Newtons, lets *three*-year-olds play outside on their own. Do you know what could have happened to Jamie?"
>
> "He could have been hit by a car," said Claudia.
>
> "He could have wandered off," said Mary Anne. "You know, the brook's not frozen over yet. What if he fell in?"
>
> "There are worse things," [Stacey] added. "What about all the missing kids these days? Someone could have driven by and just scooped him in to a car."[94]

The girls collectively decide that their charges' safety is more important than their reputations, and Stacey meets with Jamie's mother to tell her about the incident. Repeatedly, the girls emphasize their concern for keeping the kids safe and happy, *not* edging out the Agency or earning back their old sitting charges. Rather than portraying the girls' exposure of the Agency as "tattling" or juvenile, jealous behavior, the series makes clear that the club girls are doing the right thing *for the right reason:* the safety of the children. The girls' decisions and babysitting behavior receives the approval and support of the parents, spoken for by Mrs. Newton: "I want you to know how grateful we are that you girls were brave enough to come forward and tell us what was going on."[95] The girls themselves—and the series—construct the Club girls as responsible and dedicated, unmarred by age. The older girls, in contrast, are self-absorbed, irresponsible and untrustworthy, placing their own (inappropriate) desires ahead of the needs of their babysitting charges. Moreover, the older girls' desires and behaviors are openly constructed as dangerous, as evident in the club girls' discussion above.

The Babysitters Club clearly constructs younger girls as better babysitters (and better girls) because they are the stars of the series, which caters to a younger audience. However, this girls' series openly pits young girls against older, portraying older girls as the dangerous and undesirable Other. In doing so, the series expresses distrust and disapproval of girls' attempts to assert independence and maturity in unsanctioned ways. That a girls' series about babysitting features this anxiety about girls' growing efforts at independence is no surprise, given the gendered history of babysitting. The girls of the Babysitters Club are "good" babysitters who put the safety and happiness of their charges above everything else—including the resultant income. As Stacey tells her charge, Charlotte, "If your mom and dad called me tonight and said, 'We need you to sit for Charlotte tonight, but we're broke and we can't pay you,' I'd come anyway."[96] The club girls' genuine enjoyment of babysitting and love of children is never challenged, and is integral to their success as babysitters. The older Agency girls serve as a reminder to the club girls and their readers: without the appropriately feminine traits of self-sacrifice, nurturance, and innocence, girls' attempts at independence through entrepreneurship can go badly awry.

Safe and Sound: Returning the Ideal Girl to Suburban Domesticity

The Babysitters Club series makes several significant shifts in the discursive construction of the ideal girl. The series extends the status of ideal girl to a newly "diverse" population through tokenistic inclusion and mainstreaming racial difference while depoliticizing its lived realities. The series situates the younger girl as ideal and the older girl as her non-ideal Other, thereby restricting the ideal girl's reach of maturity and independence. The ideal girl remains trustworthy, dependable, and responsible, but older girls are discursively disconnected from these valued traits, which are vital to the series' portrayal of the young girls as successful entrepreneurs. In depicting girls as

responsible actors, capable of succeeding in their own business, Martin places girls squarely within the capitalist system of earning and purchasing power, particularly within the eighties' economic and cultural context of self-sufficiency and flexibility.

To some extent, the ideal girls of the Babysitters Club appear to be more self-sufficient and independent than the ideal girls of the previous series, who are not fully in control of their labor. However, the series offers the ideal girl "power" and independence through a specifically gendered job, while withdrawing full economic independence. Girls and women who read the series remember the club girls' dependence on their parents, as well as the restrictions of movement and expression due to their age. Although these characteristics of the series make the club girls more relatable, they also serve as a constant reminder of girls' relatively limited access to social and economic resources or power. Finally, the series returns the ideal girl(s) of the eighties squarely to the domestic space and suburban safety escaped by her fifties predecessors.

Notes

1. The cause for the decline in new girl's series through the 1960s and 1970s is not entirely clear, although changes in the Stratameyer Sindicate's ownership, leadership, and publishing rights might be a factor, as well as a decline in the hardback market. An inquiry into the political economy of publishing at the time would be necessary to understand the gap in new series, and and is beyond the scope of this project.

2. The term "backlash" was made popular by Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1991). See Kimberly R. Moffitt and Duncan A. Campbell, eds. *The 1980s: A Critical and Transitional Decade* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011) for a complex range of perspectives on the political and economic shifts of the 1980s.

3. John Ehrman, *The Eighties: America in the Age of Reagan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 90.

4. Ibid., 97–99.

5. Troy Gil, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 113-114. Gil uses the popular show *Hill Street* to discuss the depiction of poverty, diversity, and failure in the 80s. Gil notes that because these realities did not fit neatly into Reagan's "morning in America" narrative, he simply ignored them.

6. Ibid., 23.

7. Ehrman (2005) argues that critic's claims about the increasing disparity between the wealthy and poor in the 1980s were based on skewed reporting and statistics (119).

8. Ehrman, *The Eighties*, 100.

9. Ibid., 135.

10. Ehrman (2005) claims that working women's descent into poverty "was caused by social changes, especially increased divorce and illegitimacy rates, that were unrelated to the workplace or lingering sex discrimination" (109). It seems doubtful that the women in such circumstances saw such issues as unrelated or unconnected.

11. Ehrman, *The Eighties*, 102–103.

12. See Ehrman (2005); Gil (2005); Gilbert T. Sewall, ed., *The 80s: A Reader* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1997) for examples. These three authors, in particular, invest in the "gradual progress" narrative, arguing that the 1980s was a time of slow, yet positive change, despite some setbacks for progressive politics. Other scholars focus explicitly on the continued oppositional politics that took place during the era, often in spite of difficult and hostile climates. See Bradford Martin, *The Other Eighties: A Secret History of America in the Age of Reagan* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011); Moffett and Campbell (2011); and several chapters in Gil Troy and Vincent J. Cannato, eds., *Living in the Eighties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

13. Ehrman, *The Eighties*, 172.

14. Ibid., 173.

15. The near-hysteria surrounding the HIV and AIDS scare of the 1980s and the pervasive homophobia dealt with by the gay community is only one such example. See chapter 7 of Martin (2011) and Virginia Anderson, "How Broadway Has Cared: The AIDS Epidemic and the Great White Way," in *The 80s: A Critical and Transitional Decade,* eds. Kimberly R. Moffitt and Duncan A. Campbell (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011).

16. Sewall's (1997) introduction and brief editorials on the pieces in his reader reflect this conservative sense of threat from "adversary culture." Sewall seems particularly concerned with the cultural shifts toward individual rights and gratification, which he blames on the rights language of social justice movements and "identity politics."

17. The "culture wars" at universities across the nation captured the debate between traditionalists who feared that "fundamental" and "universal" truths were being replaced by identity politics and lesser works, and those who argued that claims of universality actually privilege white men's knowledge claims. Stanford University and Dartmouth University were both central to this controversy, and Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987) started the fire; H.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987) added fuel to the controversy. This debate about the elitism and eurocentrism of higher education is far from over.

18. Ty Burr, *Gods Like Us: On Movie Stardom and Modern Fame* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012). Burr calls the 1980s "the glamour backlash" and uses the film *Animal House* (1978) to discuss what he sees as a generational rejection of the political correctness of the 1960s and 1970s (see 237–238).

19. Stephen Prince, *A New Pot of Gold: Hollywood Under the Electronic Rainbow, 1980-1989* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2000). See appendices for top films in different categories of the 1980s.

20. Gil, *Morning in America,* 353.

21. Prince, *A New Pot*, xii.

22. Ibid., xv-xvi.

23. Ann DeVaney, "Pretty in Pink? John Hughes Reinscribes Daddy's Girl in Homes and Schools," in *Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood*, eds. Frances Gateward and Murray Pomerance (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 202.

24. Ibid., 208.

25. Ibid., 209.

26. Timothy Shary, "The Nerdly Girl and Her Beautiful Sister," in *Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood*, eds. Frances Gateward and Murray Pomerance (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 236.

27. DeVaney, "Pretty in Pink?" 202.

28. Ben Stein, "The View from Sunset Boulevard," in *The 80s: A Reader*, ed. Gilbert T. Sewall (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1997), 33.

29. Mary Celeste Kearney, "Birds on the Wire: Troping Teenage Girlhood Through Telephony in Mid-Twentieth-Century U.S. Media Culture," *Cultural Studies* 19, no. 5 (2005): 568–601.

30. Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Random House, 1994). Although Douglas focuses on the 1950s and 1960s, her analysis continues to be applicable through the 1980s and 1990s.

31. Ibid., 25.

32. Sarah Hentges, *Pictures of Girlhood: Modern Female Adolescence on Film* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2006), 1.

33. Ibid.

34. Anita Harris, "Jamming Girls Culture: Young Women and Consumer Citizenship," in *All About the Girl: Culture, Power and Identity*, ed. Anita Harris (New York: Routledge, 2004).

35. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 99.

36. See Ruth M. Alexander, *The "Girl Problem": Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900–1930* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995); Elizabeth Clement, *Love For Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); and Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), for historical accounts of "treating" as a means for girls to acquire desired goods in the twentieth century.

37. The term "conspicuous consumption" was coined by Thorstein Veblen, a 19th century economist who expressed concern about the increasing role of businessmen in American capitalism. Veblen worried that the business or "professional" class, whose conspicuous consumption contributed nothing to society and weakened industry. See *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: MacMillan, 1915).

38. In book eleven of the series, the main characters move on to eighth grade, where they stay for the remainder of the series. Some of the new members of the club are a bit younger (Jessica, Shannon, and Abby) and are often referred to as "junior members." According to Martin, "If we had allowed the girls to age in real time, they would have been twenty-eight-years old by graduation day!" See "FAQ: The Babysitters Club," on Scholastic's webpage: http://www.scholastic.com/annmartin/about/faq_bsc.htm.

39. See Scholastic's "Who We Are" webpage: http://www.scholastic.com/aboutscholastic/index.htm.

40 . *The Babysitters Club,* directed by Noel Black and Lynn Hamrick (1990; New York: Scholastic Corporation).

41 . *The Baby–sitters Club,* directed by Melanie Mayron (1995; Culver, CA: Columbia Pictures).

42. Sally Lodge, "The Babysitters Club to Reconvene," *Publishers Weekly*, January 7, 2010.

43. Ibid.

44 . Rachel Bertsche, "The Babysitters Are Back!" *Oprah.com*, May 7, 2010.

45 . Ibid.

46. Mariam Forman-Brunell, *Babysitter: An American History* (New York: New York Press, 2009), 24.

47. Miriam Forman-Brunell, "Anxious Adults and Bad Babysitters: The Struggle Over Girlhood in Interwar America," *Girlhood Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009): 130-147, 131. For a full treatment of the history of babysitting in the United States, see Forman-Brunell's full length work (2009).

48. Marcelene Cox, "Homemakers in the Making," *Ladies Home Journal*, May 1944, 152-153.

49. Interviews with adults who read the series when younger and current young readers suggest that the girls' relatibility contributes significantly to the series' success, as does the ability to "pick your favorite" girl. See Pam Bettis and Mary F. Roe, "Reading Girls: Living Literate and Powerful Lives,"

RMLE Online 32, no. 1 (2008): 1–18; Adele A. Greenlee, Dianne L. Monson and Barbara M. Taylor, "The Lure of Series Books: Does it Affect Appreciation for Recommended Literature?" *The Reading Teacher* 50, no. 3 (1996): 216–225; Gay Ivey, "A Multicase Study in the Middle School: Complexities among Young Adolescent Readers," *Reading Research Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1999): 172–192; "Louann Reid and Ruth K. T. Cline, "Our Repressed Reading Addictions: Teachers and Young Adult Series Books," *The English Journal* 86, no. 3 (1997): 68–72; and Catherine Sheldrick Ross, "If They Read Nancy Drew, So What?: Series Book Readers Talk Back," *LISR* 17 (1995): 201–236, for analyses of adult and adolescent attractions to girls' serial characters. See also "The Babysitters Club," *Children of the Nineties* blog, 10 Jan 2010; Motoko Rich, "Comeback Planned for Girls' Book Series," *New York Times* Dec 30, 2009; Tali Yahalom, "The Babysitters Club's New Cult," *The Daily Beast* blog, 27 Mar 2010.

50. The series includes a total of 132 original books, plus 36 Mysteries and several "Super Specials." The Super Specials feature all of the club members and the chapters alternate between the members as narrators. In the original series, each of the central four members (Kristy, Claudia, Mary Anne, and Stacey) is the title character of 20 or 21 books, and 6 or 7 of the mysteries. Dawn stars in 16 original books and 5 mysteries. The junior members Mallory and Jessi each star in slightly less books (11 and 13, respectively), as they join the club at a later time. Jessi also stars in one mystery. Logan and Shannon (alternate members) do not star in or narrate any of the original series books or mysteries, although they each are featured in a "Reader's Request" book. Abby, who joins the club much later (book 90), stars in 7 original books and 3 mysteries.

51. Ann M. Martin, *Mallory and the Trouble with the Twins* (New York: Scholastic, 1989), 6.

52. Ann M. Martin, *Mary Anne Saves the Day* (New York: Scholastic, 1987), 8.

53. Ann M. Martin, *Claudia and the Phantom Phone Calls* (New York: Scholastic, 1986), 15.

54. Ann M. Martin, *Dawn and the Impossible Three* (New York: Scholastic, 1987), 18.

55. Ann M. Martin, *Kristy's Great Idea* (New York: Scholastic, 1986), 2, 4.

56. Martin, *Claudia,* 15.

57. Ann M. Martin, *Jessi's Secret Language* (New York: Scholastic, 1988), 16.

58. Martin, *Kristy's Great Idea,* 7.

59. Ibid., 8.

60. Martin, *Mallory*, 8-9.

61. Martin, *Claudia,* 3.

62. Ibid.

63. Ann M. Martin, *The Truth About Stacey* (New York: Scholastic, 1987), 9.

64. Martin, *Mary Anne,* 5-6.

65. Martin, *Jessi's Secret Language,* 17. For an example of Dawn as a California stereotype, see Ann M. Martin, *Dawn Saves the Planet* (New York: Scholastic, 1992).

66. Martin, *Mallory*, 7–8.

67. Ibid., 9.

68. Martin, *Jessi's Secret Language,* 11.

69. Ibid., 18.

70 . Bertsche, "The Babysitters Are Back!" 1.

71. Ibid., 3.

72. Ibid., 5.

73 . Carolina Acosta-Alzura and Elizabeth P. Lester Roushanzamir find similar tokenistic representations in the *American Girls* series and dolls, which actively construct a number of "diverse" American identities for girls' consumption. See "'Everything We Do is a Celebration of

You!: Pleasant Company Constructs American Girlhood," *The Communication Review* 6, no. 1 (2003): 45–70.

74. Ann M. Martin, *Keep Out, Claudia* (New York: Scholastic, 1992).

75. Martin, *Jessi's Secret Language,* 95.

76. The series' treatment of Stacey's diabetes continues this portrayal of physical disability throughout the series. For the most part, Stacey's diabetes is an integral part of her identity as a unique individual *and* a source of social conflict, which she must overcome *as* an individual.

77 . For a discussion of disability within popular representations and the intersections between disability and feminist theory, see Rosemarie Garland Thompson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

78. See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

79. Elizabeth Marshall, "Consuming Girlhood: Young Women, Femininities, and American Girl," *Girlhood Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009): 94–111; Angharad N. Valdivia, "Living in a Hybrid Material World: Girls, Ethnicity, and Mediated Doll Products," *Girlhood Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009): 73–93. Both Marshall and Valdivia discuss the ways in which girls' dolls, particularly the dolls in the *American Girl* line, utilize concepts of multiculturalism, diversity, and hybridity to market "ethnic" dolls that continually resituate whiteness as the American norm.

80. Martin, *The Truth*, 18.

81. Dawn also eats healthy food (one of Dawn's "Californian" traits, according to the other girls), and this similarity is yet another way in which Dawn "replaces" Stacey in the series during her absence. However, the girls make clear that Dawn turns down junk food because she doesn't like it, not because she cannot have it.

82. Martin, *Jessi's Secret Language,* 23.

83. Martin, *Kristy's Great Idea,* 26.

84. In the first book, Kristy notes that her mother "feels guilty" that she has to work full-time, but that "she likes the fact that she can support us so well. It makes her feel proud and independent. But she still feels guilty" (16).

85. See Martin, *Mallory*, 4. Mallory does note that with eight children, her parents are very practical when it comes to money; on the back to school shopping trip, Mallory gets new loafers rather than the "cool pink shoes with green trim." However, the Pike's ability to shop for back to school shoes—however practical—in a mall boutique rather than a thrift store suggests their relatively comfortable economic position.

86. Martin, *Claudia,* 35–36.

87. Ibid.

88. Unlike the Club, the Agency offers clients a range of ages in sitters, has both male and female options, and most of the sitters are able to stay out later than the Club girls.

89. Martin, *The Truth*, 10–11.

90. Ibid., 105.

91. Ibid., 110.

92. Ibid., 112–113.

93. Ibid., 119.

94. Ibid., 128.

95. Ibid., 160.

96. Ibid., 119.

Chapter 6

SWEET VALLEY HIGH ROMANCES THE IDEAL GIRL

Elizabeth floated through the living room and up the stairs to her room. She headed straight for the mirror and smiled at what she saw reflected there. Yes, that was definitely the face of a person in love. What was even better, she thought, was that it was the face of a person who was loved in return.
~ Double Love (1983)

The resurgence of girls' serial literature reached a new marker in 1985, as the first young adult novel made the *New York Times* paperback bestseller list. The book was *Perfect Summer*, a "Super Edition" of Francine Pascal's *Sweet Valley High* series.[1] The best-selling and most popular of a new subgenre merging romance paperbacks and girls serial literature, the *Sweet Valley High* series (hereafter *SVH*) and its spinoffs extended all of the trappings of 1980s optimism and excess that would bleed over into the nineties. *SVH* follows the daily lives and romantic endeavors of identical twins Elizabeth and Jessica Wakefield as they attend high school in fictional Sweet Valley, California. Targeting a slightly older audience of twelve to fifteen year old girls, *SVH* and similar series capitalized on the changes in publishing and marketing that led to the tremendous success of adult romance paperbacks. In addition to the centrality of heterosexual romance noted by scholars examining the adult genre, the girls of "teen" or adolescent romance series of the eighties and nineties focus heavily on physical appearance and the necessity of beautification rituals and "body work" as a means of preparing for and securing the romantic dream.[2] These processes take place via participation in the consumer market, as the girls in the series construct their identities through partially through their material purchases.

SVH conveys a second turn in the construction of the ideal girl through girls' series in the 1980s. Like *The Babysitters Club*, *SVH* situates girls within a capitalist system of production and consumption, portraying the ideal girl as capable and eager to

participate and construct her identity as an active agent of capitalism. Unlike *BSC*, however, which emphasizes the ideal as young, innocent, and capable, *SVH* idealizes a romanticized vision of adulthood that revolves around heterosexual romance. *SVH* participates in returning the ideal girl to center, rejecting the inclusion and diversity attempted by the *BSC*. Further, *SVH* resituates the white wealthy girl as ideal in a way that is both celebrated and unapologetic, with a virulent vilification of the non-ideal and a new emphasis on exaggerated heteronormativity. The series' wholehearted re-entrenchment of a narrow ideal within the context of the romance genre demonstrates early inklings of what McRobbie warns of: the simultaneous dismissal and "taking into account" of feminism.[3]

Excess as Optimism in the 1980s

The idyllic locale of fictional Sweet Valley, California, reflects in many ways the sunny outlook of the eighties and the relentless optimism of President Ronald Reagan. Despite real difficulties for many Americans as a result of changing political and economic polities, Reagan and his administration wove a convincing tale of "morning in America," a narrative of rising living standards and success for all.[4] By ignoring stories of failure or poverty and exuding an aura of success, Reagan cultivated an optimism that was grounded in consumerism as a form of patriotic confidence. The new genre of teen romance paperbacks was only part of the broader marketing to the teen market, as advertising departments expanded on the teenage target marketing begun in the first half of the century.[5] The "Cabbage Patch Christmas" of 1983 illustrated children's new power to direct their parents' spending, as well as the limitless potential purchasing promise of the American dream.[6] New "luxury" name brand clothing lines also targeted the adolescent market, with Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren leading the way.[7] Popular culture celebrated the "excess as optimism" mentality, with huge blockbuster film

budgets and an increasingly celebrity-centered media mainstreaming the lives of movie stars and the new American royalty, the supermodel.[8] With changes in the film industry and corporate media mergers, the "daily lives" of celebrity film stars and supermodels became increasingly available to the public.[9] Their lives and purchasing habits were idealized and normalized, portrayed as both enviable and achievable.[10] With an intensified focus on identity construction through consumption in the eighties, marketers became increasingly adept at finding ways to reach—and create—new target markets, and the publishing industry was no exception.

Reaching the Reader: Romance Genre Publishing

Janice Radway's (1984) foundational study on the paperback romance novel charts many of the changes in the printing and publishing industry that made possible the substantial rise of sales in the romance genre in the early 1980s.[11] Radway took issue with simplistic claims that increased romance novel sales in the eighties proved a straightforward backlash against women's cultural and political gains of the feminist movement, and women's desire to re-embrace patriarchy. She found that romance readers cited complex and often conflicted reasons for their reading choices, and she argued for the importance of placing those choices within an economic and productive context. Despite potentially subversive readings, Radway found that romance reading within a patriarchal society "creates the need for vicarious pleasure and meets them in a way that perpetuates the inequalities."[12] In her own studies with young school girls reading teen romance novels, Linda Christian-Smith sees "popular fiction as potentially a point both for ideological closure and for utopian possibility."[13] Christian-Smith finds that romance novel reading functions as "a means for young women's incorporation into a patriarchal and profit-driven structure, and as a potential means of resisting women's traditional places in this structure."[14] While Christian-Smith acknowledges the potential

for alternative reading and girls' use of romance reading as resistance to teachers, she argues that the novels position femininity and heterosexual romance as inevitable and desirable; "romance reading in no way altered the young women's present and future circumstance, but rather was deeply implicated in reconciling them to their places in the world."[15] Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber found similar patterns in girls' magazines, arguing, "romance pervades every story."[16] In their analysis of *Jackie* magazine, the following themes emerged: 1) romance is the key to sexuality, not sex; 2) girls' lives are dictated by emotions; 3) girls must be aware of the potential for romance and be constantly "on the hunt;" 4) romance induces competition with other girls; and 5) the acquisition of the boy is seen as the central resolution.

A number of scholars, building on the work of McRobbie and Garber, Radway, and Christian-Smith, examine the ways in which girls read romance novels. Frazer (1987), Cherland (1994), and Cherland and Edelsky (1993) have argued that girls *do* find agency and exercise resistance in their romance reading practices.[17] In contrast, Gilbert and Taylor (1991) argue that that the structure and rhetorical devices of romance novels leave little room for multiple or alternate readings.[18] Moffitt (1993) claims that girls often use the novels to "work out" potential relationship problems in their own lives; however, she and Christian-Smith both note that these solutions rarely translate to girls' actual choices or led to changes in their real relationships.[19] In her application of Radway's model to the *Nancy Drew Files* series, Norma Pecora notes the continued weight of the preferred reading in teen romance novels, in which romance and femininity are inextricably linked, and "accomplishments are defined as getting a guy and living happily ever after."[20] Similar patterns exist in the series targeting younger girls; both the *Sweet Valley Twins* series (ages six to eight) and *BSC* (ages nine to twelve), although not explicitly concerned with sexuality, set up what Valerie Walkerdine calls "regimes of

meaning" that lead girls inevitably to heterosexual romance as the ideal resolution.[21] Moreover, girls reading romance novels cite the reliable, predictable romantic gendered scripts as highly desirable.[22] As Christian-Smith writes, through romance novel reading, "[girls] fantasized the ideal romance."[23] Girls recognize the idealized nature of romance novels and the disjuncture between the texts and their own lives, but still yearned for the unrealistic ideal.[24] Intricately linked to the fantasy of idealized heterosexual romance is the lure of the idealized family,[25] financial security, and purchasing power as freedom.[26] Romance novels collide with girls' magazines and advertising to cultivate "commercial femininity," in which consumption is vital to constructing appropriate femininity and achieving romantic desires.[27]

The *SVH* series exemplifies the teen romance genre, as it capitalizes on genre marketing changes, idealizes heterosexual romance, and promotes a model of commercial femininity. Like previous generations of serial literature, *SVH* has come under scrutiny by parents, school and public librarians, and academic scholars who see the series as "skillfully marketed junk food" that detracts from proper or appropriate reading habits.[28] And, like their predecessors, girls who read *SVH* and other romance serial novels ignore or rebel against such warnings. In fact, girls may actively read romance literature because of its condemned status, engaging in resistant reading by choosing texts that adults find inappropriate or lacking.[29]

The *Sweet Valley* Franchise

The *SVH* series capitalized on the "romance renaissance" and reinvigorated the ghost writing production system begun by Stratemeyer in the early twentieth century.[30] Unlike Ann M. Martin (author and creator of the *BSC* series), who wrote many of the books herself, Francine Pascal utilized the ghostwriter system from the series' beginning, outlining each story and "farming out" to ghostwriters provided by the series' publisher,

Cloverdale Press. Cloverdale and Pascal churned out a new book every month beginning in October 1983, allowing for rapid expansion of the original series and the production of several spin-off series.[31] The publishers used the same marketing strategies as developed for adult romances, placing the *SVH* novels where the teen girl could easily see and buy: local drugstores, bookstores, toy stores, and shopping malls.[32] The design of the books themselves was meant to attract the target audience—lightweight paperbacks in cheery pastel jackets, featuring photo-realist images and snappy, dramatic titles.[33] The covers also feature a small pennant-style flag with the series number, invoking a fascination with high school culture in the eighties and "the 'collect all twelve' mentality most children have grown up with."[34] Like the *Nancy Drew* and *BSC* series (and to a lesser degree, *Cherry Ames*), the original *SVH* series has seen steady popularity since the first volume in 1983, with the series going to reprint (with revisions) in 2008.[35] In 2011, Francine Pascal published *Sweet Valley Confidential*, the first book written entirely by Pascal, which catches readers up on the lives of the series' main characters.[36]

Much of the existing scholarship on the *SVH* franchise focuses on the series' "naively optimistic" portrayal of life and celebration of unrealistic privilege, and girls' reading practices and responses to the novels.[37] How the novels utilize fantasy and play on desire, and how girls interact with these elements, justifies scholarly attention. Here, I want to consider how the series functions within the trajectory of the ideal girl through girls' series, and how the series' constructs the ideal girl within that process. It is tempting to consider the series' portrayal of Jessica and Elizabeth Wakefield, a pair of "perfect" twins—blonde, blue-eyed, tan, slim and toned, wealthy, popular, and above all, heterosexually desirable—as ideal girl as simply a symptom of the series' excessive optimism and escapism. As one girl reader remembers, "They just seemed too fake. Everything was, I mean, beautiful blonde twins that go to this perfect place, and it was

fake and unrealistic and all their problems seemed so stupid."[38] However, it is important to consider *why* this version of the ideal girl makes a resurgence *as* utopian. Through its portrayal of the Wakefield twins and their interactions with non-ideal girls, the series forcibly narrows the ideal, brings wayward girls into line (although not into ideal status), and expels those who do not seek to meet the new standards. Moreover, the series' emphasis on heterosexual romance leads to an ideal girl whose sole priority is heterosexual desirability, achieved through beauty rituals, body work, competition, and capitalist consumption.

Double Love: The Wakefield Twins as New (Old) Ideal

As the series' heroines, Jessica and Elizabeth illustrate a number of important changes in the ideal girls as girls' series merge with the romance genre. First, the series positions the ideal girl as solo, unlike the "friend group" approach of the contemporary *BSC* series. This re-centering invokes the "trio" model of the *Nancy Drew* series, with the twins' perfection and ideal status being emphasized by the support of their close friends. Here, however, the ideal girl is also split into two sides, Jessica and Elizabeth. The "choose your favorite sitter" mentality of the *BSC* series is reduced here to only two options: "good" twin or "bad" twin. The re-centered ideal girl(s) are both unique and indistinguishable. The ideal girl(s) in *SVH* are focused almost exclusively on appearance and relationships, with no mysteries or jobs to get in the way. Ideal status is not a given, but attained and maintained through constant "body work" and beauty rituals. While Elizabeth and Jessica each have a few character flaws, the series situates their negative body image and obsessions with appearance as their most relatable trait. Previously unconcerned with her appearance (remember Nancy's ignorance of her attractiveness) or too busy solving problems to be concerned with beauty rituals, the ideal girl now spends an inordinate amount of time and energy on improvement, often through shopping. The

ideal girl(s)' focus on appearance reveals the "true" defining characteristic of the *SVH* ideal girl—her status depends upon her heterosexual relationships and romantic viability.

Jessica and Elizabeth: Re-Centering and Splitting the Ideal

> *Elizabeth and Jessica Wakefield are identical twins at Sweet Valley High. They're both popular, smart, and gorgeous, but that's where the similarity ends. Elizabeth is friendly, outgoing, and sincere—nothing like her twin. Snobbish and conniving, Jessica thinks the whole world revolves around her. Trouble is, most of the time it does. Jessica always gets what she wants—at school, with friends, and especially with boys.*
> ~*Double Love*, Back cover

The *SVH* series begins with the above description of the twins, featured prominently on the back cover of the first book in the series. This first book in particular pits Elizabeth and Jessica in direct competition over a boy, but the series repetitively constructs the twins as inherently opposite. Overall, the twins seem easy to distinguish. Jessica is a flirtatious, brash cheerleader who loves gossip, mischief, and shopping. Elizabeth, the older twin by four minutes, is the smart, responsible writer for the school newspaper, who takes her studies seriously, looks out for others, and often cleans up Jessica's messes. Much like the ideal girls in the *BSC* series, the ideal girls of *SVH* can be easily summarized in a few descriptive characteristics. Despite these differences, the series constantly plays on the idea that the twins are, in fact, practically indistinguishable. Since childhood, the twins have been able to take each other's places when necessary, fooling even their own parents. When dressed appropriately and playing the part of Jessica, Elizabeth is able to "pass" as her twin, without a hint of suspicion from teachers, boyfriends, best friends, or their mother.[39] The series also portrays the twins as a "split soul," as the twins can feel one another's pain and tell when the other needs help. With the ideal girl as a set of twins, the figure of the ideal girl is both doubled and split, amplified and fractured. Because the series constructs the twins as opposites *and* so alike they are interchangeable, the ideal girl is Elizabeth/Jessica—the twins

together. This split/doubling move makes the ideal girl(s) increasingly unattainable; neither of the twins fully embodies the ideal on her own.

In many ways, *SVH* returns the ideal girl to the "trio" model exemplified by the figure of Nancy Drew in the early series. Just as the contrast with Bess and George "centers" and elevates Nancy, Jessica/Elizabeth's status is constructed and (re)presented partially through the supporting characters, their close friends. Much like the *Nancy Drew* trio, the twins' closest friends embody the excess or exaggerated traits of the ideal, the failure to attain the necessary balance of ideal femininity. Jessica's best friend is Lila Fowler, the only child of divorced parents, who lives in a mansion with her father, an extremely successful businessman. Depicted as a self-centered snob whose father compensates for his absence by pandering to her every whim, Lila's wealth and greed are reflected in her attitude towards those around her; her scorn for her inferiors permeates her character. Lila's money can only buy her so much, and the series often notes that although Lila is better dressed thanks to her limitless clothing allowance (and Mr. Fowler's credit cards), her version of beauty—long brown hair and green eyes—cannot compete with Jessica's blonde-haired, blue-eyed perfection. Moreover, the series' depiction of Lila as vapid and uncaring tempers Jessica's tendency toward greed and vanity, recasting these previously unacceptable traits as "normal" or typical for the ideal girl.

On the opposite side of the trio is Elizabeth's best friend, Enid Rollins, also a brunette with "big green eyes."[40] Positioned as Lila's opposite, Enid is a reserved, quiet and kind girl who focuses on her schoolwork. Elizabeth describes her as "bright and witty," but her brilliant personality remains reserved from most people.[41] A year younger than the twins, Enid's reticence stems from being teased about her intelligence after moving forward a year in elementary school. Unlike Lila, Enid's mother is fully involved

and overprotective, treating Enid like a child. Lila's self-centeredness and obsession with popularity and appearance is reversed in Enid, who cares deeply for others and pays far more attention to her classes than her hair or wardrobe. Enid's exaggerated bookishness and drab appearance shores up Elizabeth's role as the "smart pretty" ideal girl; unlike Enid, Liz knows how to balance school with fun and when to prioritize her owns needs.

The series institutes the trio model to heighten the twins as ideal, by portraying Lila and Enid as direct opposites. Their contrast, however, elides the many similarities of the two; beyond their shared brown hair and green eyes (even attempts at "diversity" through hair and eye color are abandoned here), Enid and Lila are both supported by their wealthy families, are white and able-bodied. More notably within the context of the teen romance genre, both girls are heterosexual and depicted as romantically viable. Like Jessica, Lila skips from one male conquest to the next, while Enid has a "steady" boyfriend. The series' construction of Lila and Enid coincides with the contradictory depictions of Jessica and Elizabeth as opposites and the same. Lila and Elizabeth are *not* friends, nor are Jessica and Enid. The repetitive use of dualisms in the texts exacerbates the series' narrowing of the ideal.[42] Jessica/Elizabeth as the ideal girl(s) are elevated to ideal status through comparison against their friends—who are strikingly near the ideal—and through outright disciplining or expulsion of the non-ideal girl. As in the trio model of the *Nancy Drew* series, the failure of the ideal girl(s)' closest friends to meet such high standards further restricts the range of possibility for the ideal girl.

The *SVH* series' usage of the characters of Enid and Lila to re-center and narrow the figure of the ideal girl results in the incorporation of new normative traits and behaviors for the ideal girl. In a distinct shift from the ideal girl(s) in previous girls' series—and even in the contemporary *BSC* series—the ideal girl(s) of *SVH* rarely consider the needs of others. The problems of supporting characters matter "only insofar as they

[affect] the sisters' lives."[43] As dictated by the genre, *SVH* focuses not on solving a mystery or other social issue, or on completing a job, but on personal relationships and romantic endeavors. As such, previously undesirable traits become incorporated as typical and even necessary for the ideal girl. In order for Jessica to remain beautiful, popular, and wanted by all the boys of Sweet Valley, she *must* be vain and sometimes manipulative—just not as much as Lila. Even the good twin, Elizabeth, must be more self-promoting and politically savvy than Enid; Elizabeth knows the importance of looking the part to earn favor. Together, the series' portrayal of the twins situates these traits as acceptable and desirable aspects of ideal girlhood, elevating a self-centered, individualized, and self-promoting version of femininity that revolves around ritualized "body work," obsession with appearance and image, and heterosexually romantic viability.

Perfection Takes Hard Work

One of the most memorable aspects of the *SVH* series may be the constant references to "body work" and beauty rituals with an aggressive pursuit of physical perfection as the goal.[44] I am not suggesting that beauty rituals have no long been a normalizing disciplinary force (and a distinct source of pleasure) in girls' lives.[45] However, not until the *SVH* series and similar romance series in the eighties did the body and appearance receive such attention. For example, the series opens with the following passage:

> "Oh, Lizzie, do you believe how absolutely horrendous I look today!" Jessica Wakefield groaned as she stepped in front of her sister, Elizabeth, and stared at herself in the bedroom mirror. "I'm so gross! Just look at me. Everything is totally wrong. To begin with, I'm disgustingly fat…" With that, she spun around to show off a stunning figure without an extra ounce visible anywhere.
>
> She moaned again, this time holding out one perfectly shaped bronze leg. "Isn't that the grossest? I swear I must have the skinniest legs in America. And the bumpiest knees. What am I going to do? How can I possibly go to school looking like this today? Today of all days!"

> Jessica stared at herself in the full-length mirror and saw a picture of utter heartbreak and despair. But was what actually reflected in the glass was about the most adorable, most dazzling sixteen-year-old girl imaginable. Yet there was no stopping Jessica Wakefield when she was in this mood.
>
> "Why couldn't I at least have had an oval face? It looks like someone stuck a pumpkin on top of my neck. And this hair—a dull yellow mess of split ends. I hate it!" In a gesture of absolutely hopelessness, she ran her hand under her silky blond hair, flipped it up, and watched as it drifted lightly back to her shoulders.
>
> "Only thing duller are my eyes. Look at that color, Liz." She poked her face an inch from her sister's hose and fluttered long eyelashes over almond-shaped eyes the blue-green of the Caribbean." They're so blah."
>
> Without waiting for Elizabeth's response, Jessica reached again into her bag of sorrows. "I mean, there could be a telethon just for all the things that're wrong with me! I can't even look at myself another minute!"[46]

That the Sweet Valley franchise begins with a vivid description of the Wakefield twins' "perfect" appearance—"both girls were five feet six on the button and generously blessed with spectacular, all-American good looks"—is fully indicative of the series' persistent, almost obsessive, attention to physical appearance and narrowed beauty standards. While readers are encouraged to identify with either Elizabeth or Jessica based on their good twin/bad twin roles, their "twinness" and interchangeability emphasizes their looks over their personalities. Together, the twins' most relatable attributes are their unjustified insecurities and negative body image.

After Jessica's melodramatic evaluation of her appearance to begin the series, rarely does more than two or three pages pass without a reference to appearance, a description of an outfit, or an observation of some type of body work by one of the girls. The series integrates numerous elements of what McRobbie calls "bedroom culture, " with the twins (more often Jessica than Elizabeth) lounging around, shopping, or discussing boys and beauty tips. The following scene is typical:

> The worn oriental rug that Lila used as a beach blanket was littered with magazines, tanning oil bottles, and candy wrappers. Lila was busy painting Amy's

> toenails, and Jessica sat and stared at the ocean while Cara read a quiz from *Cosmopolitan* out loud.
>
> "Question three: Your man buys a new suit that you think should be burned and the ashes scattered. Do you: a) tell him he looks great; b) offer to help him shop for clothes the next time he goes; or c) scream and put a paper bag over your head?"
>
> Lila shrieked with laughter.
>
> "Yeow! Lila, you just slopped nail polish all over my foot!" Amy wailed.
>
> "Sorry," Lila said in an unconvincing way. She dabbed at the peachy smear with a cotton swab. "What's your answer, Jessica?"[47]

Lounging on the beach, tanning and painting their nails (note the rug as casual indicator of Lila's conspicuous wealth), the girls discuss boys and—in true "bedroom culture" fashion—take a typing quiz from a teen magazine. These scenes repeatedly emphasize the pleasure and necessity of beautifying rituals as a means of becoming more attractive to boys. The scenes with Jessica and her close friends often highlight the pleasures of consumption, normalizing middle-class consumption through comparison to Lila's wealth. While Jessica's beauty rituals and shopping patterns are depicted as fun and celebratory (if self-indulgent), Elizabeth's more "natural" look and lesser attention to clothing appears seamless and effortless. Less explicit than Jessica in her body work, Elizabeth's "natural" beauty practices represent a middle-class gendered standard, one that seems innate and is unchallenged. Within the *SVH* series, the ideal girl has free range to be self-indulgent and narcissistic, a la Jessica, as long as she has fun. Less obvious and more insidious is the continued gendered performance of middle class "taste" as natural and ideal; the ideal girl must be impeccably groomed, well-dressed, and "enhance" her beauty with (at the very least) mascara and blush, as modeled by Elizabeth. Together, Elizabeth/Jessica make the incessant pursuit of perfection central to the trope of the ideal girl.

Despite the series' frequent reminders that Elizabeth/Jessica exemplify the ideal beauty standard, the girls' attractiveness is paired equally with self-criticism and insecurity. These moments of weakness may well be intended to secure readers' sympathy or ensure that the girls seem realistic in some way. Indeed, readers may find Jessica's negative perception of her "perfect size six" toned thighs as heartwarming and relatable: even perfect girls have doubts! However, these persistent mentions further highlight Elizabeth/Jessica's unreachable ideal status, while situating insecurity as central to the ideal girl(s)' personality. Unlike Nancy Drew, who might seem robotic in her absence of flaws, or the younger girls of the *BSC*, who exhibit varying levels of confidence and self-doubt based on the situation, *SVH* portrays the Wakefield twins as routinely insecure and self-deprecating, with no apparent justification for being so. The series constructs the ideal girl as stereotypically attractive and popular *and* perpetually insecure. These moments of insecurity and self-criticism function similarly to advertising: they remind readers that the body work must be done, the beauty rituals must be observed, and the products must be purchased. The pursuit of perfect, even for the perfect Wakefield twins, is never done.

Fantasizing the Romance

While the series depicts beauty rituals and body work as "bedroom culture," a potentially disruptive space for girls, the scenes work more actively within the teen romance genre as a means of enforcing heteronormativity. As McRobbie found in her studies of girls' interactions with *Jackie* magazine, the girls in *SVH* center their bedroom culture around the primary goal of increasing their attractiveness, making themselves more romantically enticing prospects. The perpetual hunt for romance is both active and passive; the girls' lives are practically consumed by it, yet rarely do they actively pursue a

romantic interests. The series contrasts Jessica and Elizabeth's romantic approaches, again pitting them as opposites:

> "This halter top would look really sexy with my red shorts," Jessica said, holding up a scrap of lacy white cloth as she smiled sweetly at her twin. "You don't mind, do you, Lizzie?"
>
> "I wouldn't want to look too sexy around Scott if I were you," Elizabeth warned darkly. "It might be like waving a red cape in front of a bull."
>
> With a toss of her sun-streaked mane, Jessica flopped onto the bed besides her sister, scattering the articles Elizabeth had been proofreading for *The Oracle*. "What's wrong with sex appeal?" she demanded, arching an eyebrow. "Actually, if you want to know the truth, you could use a little more of it yourself. Not that you're not gorgeous." Jessica laughed and fluttered her eyelashes at the sister who was her mirror image.
>
> "Naturally." Elizabeth giggled.
>
> "You just need to play it up more. You know, like in all those ads where the mousy secretary lets her hair down and undoes the top button of her blouse, and suddenly everyone in the office notices what a knockout she is."[48]

Despite Jessica's seemingly forward attitude toward sexuality, her actions rarely match her words. "Appeal" is the key; time and again, Jessica plays coy and sets herself up for a boy's attention, and her frequent "toying" or teasing often ends badly (as hinted above in Elizabeth's essentialist warning against riling boy's animalistic sexual desires). The above conversation also highlights the role of advertising in providing potential sexual scripts, as Jessica refers to the "mousy secretary" trope as an means for Elizabeth to express her sexuality.

Comparably, Elizabeth's romantic endeavors are tame. Even though the "scrap of lacy white cloth" mentioned above belongs to her, such clothing signifies differently on her body than on Jessica's, since Elizabeth rarely wears clothes with sexual intent. Elizabeth's confidence a student and journalist fails to spill over to her perception of her romantic desirability. When Elizabeth's steady boyfriend, Todd, buys a motorcycle and

takes other girls (including her best friend, Enid) for a spin, Elizabeth "felt her grip" on Todd "slipping away:"

> Elizabeth didn't know how much longer she could take it. It was only Todd's second day on the bike, and already she was imagining that every girl he rode with was a candidate to take her place. Even Enid, the last person in the world who'd ever want to steal Todd, seemed a threat.[49]

Sweet, popular, beautiful Elizabeth is helpless against feelings of jealousy and inadequacy when it comes to romance. By a few days later, Elizabeth is convinced that Todd will leave her because she refuses to ride the motorcycle:

> Elizabeth felt sick. Her anger at Todd dissipated as a sobering, dark thought set in. Todd's missing the party had nothing to do with his grandfather or with traffic. The 'things' he'd had to take care of definitely had something to do with her. He sounded so solemn, she had the awful feeling she's drawn the short straw in his choice between her and the motorcycle.
>
> This wasn't the way it was supposed to be. Didn't the tender kisses they'd shared and the promises of love they'd exchanged mean anything to him? "Go on, Todd, get it over with," she said glumly.[50]

This scene, in which Todd chooses his relationship with Elizabeth over his dream of owning a motorcycle, highlights both the highly idealized portrayal of heterosexual romance *and* the ideal girl's passivity *as* ideal. Rather than question Todd about his behavior or discuss their relationship, Elizabeth anguishes over her fears and misperceptions, saying nothing and waiting for the impending break-up. Elizabeth/Jessica exhibit strength and action in other areas, yet the ideal girl(s) lack real initiative in the one area by which they are defined: their romantic viability and relationships. "It is here," Walkerdine writes, "that girls are produced as victims to be saved."[51] This shift in definitive identity for the ideal girl cannot be overlooked. Unlike the ideal girl in earlier series, who finds identity in her hobby or career, the ideal girl of *SVH* lacks an identity outside her romantic endeavors—or rather, her passive romantic appeal.

Wrong Kind of Girl: Identifying the "Other" in *Sweet Valley High*

The utopian world constructed by the *SVH* franchise epitomizes the Reaganesque optimism and U.S.-centric perspective of the eighties. The reinvigorated American dream of the eighties and nineties as wealthy and worry-free is embodied by the Wakefield twins—white, blond-haired and blue-eyed "all-American" beauties with toned and tanned "perfect" bodies, deep pocketbooks, and a seemingly endless supply of romantic interests. Reagan's sunny "morning in America" rhetoric permeates the series, down to the idyllic locale of Sweet Valley, CA. Much like Reagan's rhetorical strategies, *SVH* repeats the story of success (here, via romance and consumerism) again and again, fortifying a vision of middle-class utopia by excluding images of racial tensions, homophobia, and poverty. The contemporary *BSC* series, despite its tokenism, integrates "diverse" characters as central to the ideal girl group. *SVH* employs the opposite tactic, introducing Other girls for interest or excitement; their impact is minimal and their relevance short-lived. Operating without the explicitly racist dialogue of the early girls' series, *SVH* makes the most aggressive effort to discipline the non-ideal towards the ideal. "Bad" girls—poor, non-white, disabled, fat, unpopular—are either reformed or rescued by Elizabeth/Jessica, or they are expelled from the ideal girl(s)' world. The series justifies a vicious vilification of those who fall short or reject attempts at reformation, contributing further to the series' blatant narrowing of the ideal.

Out of Reach: American Identity, Racial Difference, and Exclusion

With little exception, *SVH* eliminates the possibility or racial tension or discrimination from its utopian setting by simply avoiding portrayals of non-white characters. Whiteness and Americanness are synonymous; race remains unmentioned and unnoticed, despite constant references to characters' appearance that clearly positions them as white. The invisibility of whiteness as a racial category is further made

possible by the treatment of the few non-white characters in the series. The portrayal of Jade Wu in *Out of Reach* (1988) provides an example of the series' dismissal of diversity.[52] Jade, a Chinese-American sophomore at Sweet Valley High School, wants to dance in the school's talent show. Her parents are "traditional" Chinese parents, portrayed as restrictive and anti-progress. Jade's grandparents own a Laundromat in town, and she fears that her friends at school will discover this and see her as a stereotype. Throughout the book, Jade makes every effort to distance herself from Chinese customs, hoping to be accepted as "just an American." The story culminates with Jade's traditionalist father granting Jade permission to dance *and* to date David, a (white) boy who has been working on the set for the talent show. When asked to join a prestigious dance company under an Americanized name by a scout at the talent show, Jade finally "chooses" her Chinese heritage and declines. The story of the only Chinese American girl in the series relies on a traditional/modern split, utilizing stereotypes of Chinese as repressive, unsympathetic, and anti-modern.[53] Jade's rescue takes place via Elizabeth, who helps Jade garner the courage to reason with her father and effectively "modernize" (i.e. Americanize) his belief system.[54] Despite Jade's refusal to accept an Americanized stage name at the end of the story, her overall achievement has been her ability to bring her family to an acceptable degree of Americanness, thereby allowing her to win the dance competition, earn the friendship of *SVH* students and—most importantly—attract the romantic attention of David. Jade's symbolic rejection of "traditional" Chinese culture reinforces the rescue narrative so prevalent in girls' series and disciplines the non-ideal girl toward the ideal.[55] Jade's reformation is largely irrelevant to the ideal girl; her character appears only in the story here, and she plays no real part in any other *SVH* title.

Rosa's Lie (1991) tells a similar story, this time with a Mexican-American girl.[56] The book deals with the dilemma of Rose Jameson, a new student at Sweet Valley High School. Rose's real name is Rosa Jiminez, whose parents moved to the United States from Mexico, changing their last name to Jameson. Rosa goes by "Rose" when the family moves to Sweet Valley, determined to hide her ethnicity from her new friends. Rose quickly becomes popular—she is "exotic looking" but light-skinned enough to pass for white—and tells a number of lies to conceal her secret, hoping to join the Pi Beta Alpha sorority. After hiding her family and passing her Nana off as the maid, Rosa finally admits her lies and secret. The Pi Betas, in an attempt to comfort Rosa, tell her that they will keep her secret. Rosa finally decides to reject the offer to join the Pi Betas:

> The Pi Betas had accepted the fact that Rose was Mexican, but it was obvious they would just as soon ignore it. And they seemed to assume Rose wanted to do that, too. The other girls might not be overtly disturbed by the fact that Rose was a chicana, but they certainly were not going to encourage her to explore her heritage. No, if Rose joined the Pi Betas, she would have to deny the biggest part of herself. She would have to become completely American.[57]

As with the Jade Wu storyline, *Rosa's Lie* revolves around Rosa's ethnic identity and its impact on her social life. The story again portrays an outside culture as repressive; the "traditional" Nana, while lovable, disapproves of her granddaughter's "modern" American clothing and fears for the loss of family traditions (represented here by recipes). Rose, in an attempt to reconcile her Mexicanness with her Americanness, seems to abide by an all-or-nothing approach, as suggested in the passage above. However, Rosa's decision to not join the exclusive sorority, yet to remain friends with the sorority girls, frames the social exclusion of ethnic minorities as a matter of *choice*, not discrimination. Thereby, the all-white sorority girls (and the larger whitewashed community of Sweet Valley) appear inclusive and blameless, despite their obvious intent to ignore or downplay Rosa's ethnicity.

Both examples illustrate a notable pattern in the series' use of "diversity": non-white characters are defined entirely by their racial or ethnic difference. Two later books tell the story of a new girl named Cheryl Thomas, who is black. In *Stepsisters* (1993), Cheryl moves to Sweet Valley after her father, a famous photographer, meets and marries the mother of Annie Whitman.[58] *Stepsisters* deals primarily with Annie's exaggerated efforts to integrate Cheryl into Sweet Valley High and her struggle with her own feelings about racial difference. It is worth noting that this story is told entirely from Annie's perspective, not Cheryl's, and Cheryl serves primarily as a venue for Annie's white guilt. Although Cheryl does question Annie's intentions at one point, the story ends with Cheryl and Annie reaching perfect understanding with one another after a brief apology—as the cover catch line exclaims, "Family at last!" In the next book, *Are We In Love?* (1993), Cheryl and Steven (the twins' older brother) begin dating, and the story peddles through the difficulties of an interracial relationship.[59] After much deliberation, the story concludes with Steven and Cheryl's decision to be friends, and Cheryl begins dating Steven's (black) friend, Martin. Oddly, the story frames Steven and Cheryl's short-lived romance as "the first interracial couple at Sweet Valley High," although two relationships developed in previous books are between white girls and Hispanic boys.[60] The series' use of the character of Cheryl epitomizes Toni Morrison's (1992) analysis of the role of blackness in the white literary imagination, serving as a means to explore unequal relationships and feelings of guilt.[61] Not only is Cheryl defined by her racial difference and others' reactions to her race, reducing her character to one aspect of identity, the story nullifies any racial tensions by the end of both stories by repairing Cheryl's friendship with Annie and dissolving her interracial relationship with Steven. As with Rosa, Cheryl declines the big to join Phi Beta Alpha, framing her social difference as

her choice and not a matter of racial bigotry. Cheryl, like Rosa and Jade, disappears from the *SVH* primary storylines, reappearing only occasionally in passing.

Unlike the token characters in the *BSC* series, who are integral members of the ideal girl group, the racial others in *SVH* appear only briefly and are reduced to their racial difference. With the exception of these brief attempts at inclusion, the series pushes Rosa, Jade, and Cheryl to the fringes of the *SVH* world. Their haunting presence does not challenge the series' construction of the ideal; rather, their fleeting appearances are insignificant *and* vital to the narrowed ideal.

She's Not What She Seems: Dying to Fit In

SVH eliminates the problematics of addressing racial difference by including only a few token characters whose identities and stories are driven entirely by their experience as racial outsiders in white Sweet Valley, California. After having each of these characters "choose" exclusion from the social in-crowd, the series relegates them to the fringes of the series, virtually negating their existence. With the majority of the series' characters as white, the series does not limit discrimination to non-white characters. Given the series' emphasis on physical appearance in its construction of Elizabeth and Jessica as ideal girl(s), the use of physical bodies and beauty standards to delineate other members of the in-crowd further differentiates the ideal. The girls of *SVH*, more so than the boys, are willing to go to any lengths to fit the normative beauty ideal embodied by Elizabeth/Jessica. The series' treatment of girls deemed fat, ugly, or promiscuous vividly illustrates the ways in which the discourses of femininity discipline non-ideal girls toward the ideal. Though the series appears to address issues like body image, anorexia, bullying, and suicide, the comprehensive depictions of these non-ideal girls as successfully rescued, reformed, and molded into the appropriate form confirms the series' overall narrow construction of ideal girlhood.

One prominent example occurs early in the original series in *Power Play* (1984).[62] The story tells the trials of Robin Wilson, an overweight and therefore unattractive and unpopular girl at Sweet Valley High. Elizabeth learns from Robin's mother that Robin plans to leave school because she is so unhappy. After multiple attempts by Elizabeth to help Robin and countered efforts by Jessica to further humiliate and alienate her, Robin "chooses"—note again the language of choice and self-empowerment—to change herself without assistance (or hindrance) from the twins. By the end of the book, Robin has transformed into a skinny, beautiful girl. The Sweet Valley High elites welcome her to Pi Beta Alpha, make her co-captain of the cheerleading squad, and crown her Miss Sweet Valley High. Robin's greatest triumph comes when she rejects Bruce Patman's offer to take her to the big dance (in revenge for his having previously humiliated her at a dance) in favor of another boy, Allen. While the book seems to disapprove of Jessica's cruelty and bullying, Jessica's only real "punishment" is sharing cheerleading captain status with Robin and being named runner-up in the Miss Sweet Valley High competition. Bullying appears as a normal part of high school life, and Robin's ultimate "victory" suggests that the bullying, in the long run, solved her problems.[63] In no way does the text critique Robin's extreme dieting and exercise methods, nor her crippling desire to be accepted. A brief moment of contemplation comes when Elizabeth asks Robin if she is starving herself, which Robin denies. Satisfied, Elizabeth then tells Robin that she is proud of her. Robin's efforts to control and manage her body are portrayed as only slightly unusual, and her eventual success justifies her means.[64] The story of Robin equates thinness and attractiveness with popularity, romantic viability, and personal happiness, achieved through extensive body work and competition with other girls.

Similar to the series' treatment of racial difference, Robin's "othered" fat body dominates her storyline. The series always references Robin's "transformation" when she is mentioned (however briefly) in other books. The only other book focused on Robin details her descent into anorexia when she fears her boyfriend might leave her. In *The Perfect Girl* (1991), Robin constantly critiques her body and equates her outward appearance with her entire self-worth.[65] Robin attempts to control her body, to narrate and dictate its boundaries, illustrating the series' attempts to expel that which is not ideal.[66] After Robin is hospitalized, the story concludes with Robin being reassured of George's love. Yet again, the character's quest for personal fulfillment is met by her heterosexual romantic interest. Despite all of Robin's work—and the series' approval of her body work by granting her popularity and a boyfriend—Robin falls short of ideal status; she cannot escape her non-ideal former self.[67]

The series' only regular portrayal of a non-ideal female body is Lois Waller. Lois is described as "a bit chubby," but not excessively overweight. Lois's mother is the school dietician, and Elizabeth and Lois are supposedly good friends (this approval bears little weight, as Elizabeth is nice to virtually everyone). Unlike Robin, Lois plays the accommodating nice fat girl, whose "great personality" makes up for her appearance. Elizabeth gives the following assessment of Lois: "Lois would never be a fashion model, but she clearly had a great relationship with Gene, and her outlook on life was completely optimistic. So what difference did it make if she couldn't wear size-six jeans? None at all!"[68] This description, notably, comes in *The Perfect Girl*, as Elizabeth tries to convince Robin that George still loves her. Lois's acceptability is guaranteed by her boyfriend, even if her non-ideal body places her outside the ideal girl(s)' inner circle. Rather than serving as a source of personal understanding or pleasure, the body functions as a performative trope, representing norms and enforcing society rules.

SVH depicts the fat body as grotesque and in need of revision (there are no "in between" female bodies in Sweet Valley, only fat and thin), and the series also presents disabled bodies as non-ideal. Disabilities are temporary issues to be overcome; if permanent, the disabled body must be eliminated entirely. Two central characters, Enid Rollins (Elizabeth's best friend) and Ken Matthews (Todd's best friend) deal with disability (partial paralysis and blindness, respectively) caused by accidents, but these seemingly life-changing disabilities end up being temporary, serving as necessary dramatic fodder for the plot.[69] By the end of each story, the characters have regained their able-bodied status, Ken through the romantic attentions of a new girlfriend. In the meantime, however, Ken and Enid are portrayed as helpless and bitter, as the stories depict the loss of the able body as emotionally and physically crippling.

The series' most vivid depiction of disability is in the character of Regina Morrow, who has been deaf since birth. First introduced in *Deceptions* (1984), Regina and her older brother, Nicholas, move with their parents to Sweet Valley.[70] In an odd twist on character development, Regina begins dating Bruce Patman, notoriously the richest, most self-absorbed, and often cruelest boy at Sweet Valley High. Bruce falls in love with Regina and changes his ways. In *Head Over Heels* (1985), Regina decides to go to Switzerland for a year, where a new treatment may restore her hearing.[71] After Regina returns, Bruce cheats on Regina with Amy Sutton, and Regina begins hanging out with the "wrong crowd."[72] In an attempt to prove she does not need Bruce, Regina snorts cocaine at a party, leading her to die from an undetected rare heart condition. Again, the series depicts Regina, the only character with a permanent disability, as vulnerable and fragile. Further, Regina's disability is not visible, and the series compensates for her hidden disability by repeatedly reminding the reader of Regina's extraordinary beauty and wealthy family. Although *On the Edge* clearly intends to warn against the dangers of

drug use, Regina's death eliminates disability from the utopia of Sweet Valley, returning to comprehensive able-bodied normalcy.

In addition to providing the climactic removal of disability from the realm of the ideal girl, *On the Edge* also contributes to the series' widespread characterization of the non-ideal as poor, sexually active, and inherently criminal. Regina's death is blamed on Molly Hecht, a poor girl who throws the party and lives on the wrong side of the tracks. For the most part, poverty exists on the very fringes of the ideal girl(s)' world, acting as a disciplinary threat to keep the ideal girl—and her readers—in line.[73] The series' conflation of poverty and criminality is comprehensive, and poverty frequently serves as an indicator of poor morals and bad behavior. Many of these poor characters are eliminated quickly, often violently. For example, the twins' older brother, Steven, dates a girl named Tricia Martin, whom Jessica says is "from one of the trashiest families in Sweet Valley." Tricia lives with her sister (Betsy, who has a reputation of promiscuity) and father (a "notorious drunk") and sister in an apartment in a "poorer part of town." The series echoes Jessica's disapproval of the Martin family by eliminating her character; Tricia dies of leukemia in *When Love Dies* (1984).[74] Soon after, Steven begins dating Cara Walker, one of Jessica's best friends and an SVH cheerleader.[75] The series' replacement of Tricia with an "appropriate" romantic match for Steven rhetorically reinforces essentialized markers of class and approves of class stratification. The series links poverty, sexuality, and immorality through repeated examples of non-ideal girls, who are constructed as inherently inferior and therefore in need of reform or punishment. Tricia's "trashy" family, like Regina's lingering disability, requires her complete removal from the realm of the ideal girl.

Wrong Kind of Girl (1984) illustrates the conflation of poverty and sexuality, and the ideal girl(s)' power to reform or save the non-ideal girl.[76] The book tells the story of

Annie Whitman, who wants to join the Sweet Valley High cheerleading squad. Jessica determines to use her role as head captain to keep Annie out, as she fears Annie's reputation as the "wrong kind of girl" will hurt the squad. Annie's bad reputation is due to her presumed promiscuity; she apparently goes out with a number of boys. Aside from joining the cheerleading squad, it appears that Annie's main concern is her next date. Although the text does not say so explicitly, Jessica and others believe Annie to be sexually active, hence her reputation as "easy Annie." Her reputation of promiscuity is integrally tied to her classed identity and family structure: Annie lives with her single mother and her "sleazy" boyfriend in a "shabby frame house with peeling paint" (the absence of home ownership is a marker of failure). Annie's situation exemplifies the stereotype of poor single mothers, whose children are unsupervised and neglected.[77]Annie's reputation as "easy" contrasts that of Jessica's, whose normative nuclear family and class status protects her dating habits from scrutiny. Annie's behavior, filtered through her material conditions, reads as a lack of discipline and "good choices."[78] However, Annie decides to stop dating so much in order to focus fully on "cleaning up" her reputation and joining the cheerleading squad. Her success depends entirely on the acceptance of the ideal girl. Although the other cheerleaders vote to allow Annie to join the squad, Jessica "blackballs" her. Only after Annie attempts suicide does Jessica change her mind, allowing Annie on the squad and into her inner circle. Here, the ideal girl(s) exerts almost exclusive control over the non-ideal girl's status, single-handedly controlling her access to social inclusion, a new reputation, and happiness. Further, the story depicts the non-ideal girl as in need of reform, only properly achieved when designated as such by the ideal girl(s). Her willingness to submit to reform—even to the extreme of attempted self-elimination—confirms the need for reform. Annie's sacrifice and subsequent reward extends to her family; her mother breaks up with her

"sleazy" boyfriend and they move to a "better" part of town. Soon after, Annie's mother meets and marries a wealthy photographer.[79] Using stereotypes of poverty and aberrant sexuality, and invoking turn-of-the-century efforts to manage the sexuality of adolescent working class girls, *SVH* portrays active sexuality and poverty in girls as non-ideal, further reinforcing the ideal girl as wealthy and free from sexual taint.[80]

The Evil Twin: A Rejection of Reform

In the story of Annie Whitman, as with other "saved" girls, the non-ideal girl's desire and willingness to be reformed—to be disciplined toward the ideal—is absolutely vital to her survival. In order to be worthy of rescue and potential integration into the ideal girl(s)' circle, the non-ideal girl must recognize her inadequacy, revel in the ideal girl(s)' superiority, and make the necessary changes to be closer to the ideal. A failure on any of these points marks the non-ideal girl as excessively Othered and beyond reform, as illustrated by the character, Margo. Beginning with *The Morning After*, the series introduces Margo, a girl living in New York City who looks eerily like the twins, but with black hair.[81] Margo, who has been cycled through numerous foster homes, decides that she will leave New York and make a new life in sunny California. The mini-series traces Margo's steps to Sweet Valley, where she decides she will take over Elizabeth's life:

> Margo stood in the shrubbery peering through the Wakefields' living-room window. She'd forgotten to wear a jacket, and the driving rain had soaked her to the skin, but she didn't feel the cold—she was warmed, electrified by the spellbinding scene within.
>
> *Everything is perfect,* she thought rapturously, devouring the details with hungry eyes. The glittering tree, the brightly wrapped gifts, the homemade breakfast, and best of all, the people. The sweet, lovely mother in her elegant satin bathrobe, distributing gifts and kisses; the tall, handsome father, smiling benevolently; the cherished twin daughters; the manly, protective older brother [...]
>
> Lifting on hand, Margo brushed the windowpane with her fingertips. *My house. My family. Merry Christmas, everyone.* She smiled, wanting to laugh, to sing, to dance in the rain. *Next year it will be me!* Next year *she* would come down the stairs in her flannel nightgown; *she* would be served a special breakfast by her loving father; *she* would get kisses and hugs under the mistletoe; *she* would give

> and receive thoughtful, wonderful presents. She would be Elizabeth Wakefield in just one week.[82]

Unlike Annie, who is happy to change herself to achieve Jessica's approval and be part of her circle, Margo exemplifies the danger of the girl who refuses reform. A non-ideal girl who wants too much, a psychopath and serial killer, Margo is willing to lie, steal, and murder in order to achieve her goal: to become the ideal girl, Elizabeth Wakefield.

> Margo [as Jessica] wrapped her arms around Elizabeth, hugging her back. A smile played on her lips as she thought about the next time she would hold Elizabeth like this. *Tomorrow,* Margo anticipated, her eyes gleaming. *Tomorrow night we'll meet again, Elizabeth, in the embrace of death. Your death, my birth.*
>
> Of course, it wouldn't actually be the end for "Elizabeth Wakefield." Margo patted Elizabeth's shoulder before pulling back from the hug, her hand lingering on the other girl's arm. *It'll only be the end for this pretty little body. Your identity, your soul, will live on inside me.*[83]

Margo is the monstrous Other; she rejects possibilities for improvement, expected of those in inferior social positions, refusing to "work hard" or try honest means of uplift. Perhaps more significantly, Margo fails to accept her secondary status to that of the ideal girl. Not content to be part of the ideal girl(s)' circle like the others, Margo seeks to claim ideal status for herself. Of course, Margo's "true" nature cannot be hidden:

> The room was like a direct glimpse into Margo's diseased, rotten soul. Her fresh-skinned, beautiful face was like a mask; this was the *real* Margo. [...] The room was a filthy mess. As Josh walked, he kicked aside half-eaten bags of chips and donuts and greasy paper plates holding the moldy remnants of fast-food meals. More appalling than the garbage, though, more frightening even than the assortment of knives carelessly scattered on the desktop, was the bizarre way in which Margo had decorated her temporary home. [...] It was plastered with glossy color photographs, some regular-sized and others enlarged. *The Wakefield sisters, Jessica and Elizabeth!* [...] Most telling of all, however, was the message Margo had left on the mirror [...] "I am Elizabeth."[84]

The portrayal of Margo as a "diseased, rotten soul" and the embodiment of improper desire and ambition by a poor, sexually active product of the welfare system cannot be overlooked. Margo's storyline illustrates the unattainability of the ideal girl and the punishment for non-ideal girls who seek to supplant her. The mini-series culminates

with Margo's violent death, and the twins return to idyllic existence, the non-ideal girl's threat successfully eliminated.

Conclusion

The *SVH* series merges the excess of the eighties and nineties with the tropes of the adult romance genre, turning girls' series toward an increased focus on appearance and heterosexual romance moonlighting as sexual desire. With this genre shift and the contemporary split between younger and older girls, the series participates in a blatant re-entrenchment of the ideal girl as white, middle-class, and heterosexual. Further, the series constructs the ideal girl as primarily self-centered, concerned with appearance and reputation, and defined by her romantic viability and heterosexual relationships, made possible through constant body work and consumption. Rather than expanding the limits of the figure of the ideal girl, *SVH* narrows the ideal girl trope and expels, often violently, the non-ideal girl, who is reinscribed as Other.

Perhaps the most drastic change in the figure of the ideal girl as the Wakefield twins is a whole-hearted embracing of what Susan Douglas calls "narcissism as liberation," the framing of consumption and beauty as power, and the justification of a self-centered ideal of femininity.[85] In a departure from previous constructions of the ideal girl in girls' series, who often focused on saving someone or solving a problem, the ideal girl as Elizabeth/Jessica revolves entirely around their immediate personal issues. The split twin ideal guarantees that when the twins are concerned with each other, they are merely looking out for themselves. This mirroring amplifies the narcissism inherent in the series' construction of the ideal girl, whose viability and worth stem from her romantic viability, made possible through her happy endorsement of and adherence to beauty standards and capitalist consumption practices. The ideal girl's self-centered body work and constant competition with other girls—even with herself, in the

Elizabeth/Jessica split—is normalized as trivial *and* as absolutely necessary. The conflation of ideal femininity with narcissism, competition and independence via consumption reflects the ways in which popular culture and capitalist structures began to take up the language of feminism, co-opting a "pseudo-feminist" discourse of girl power and choice, while reinforcing disciplinary beauty standards and reinscribing girls back within a patriarchal, heteronormative social order.[86]

SVH, like other girls' series, produces and reproduces the figures of the ideal girl and non-ideal girl, who serve as discursive tools. These figures not only discipline acceptable models and expressions of girlhood, they produce girlhood by offering different subject positions to occupy. The cumulative effect is the relegating of certain girls to certain subject positions.[87] I do not want to dismiss here the potential for resistant reading or the fact that many girl readers recognize the unreality of the series' portrayal of life. However, I want to be wary of a relentless desire to read agency into a situation without acknowledging the real impact of repeated claims of perfection or the ideal, the consolidation of such images on the psyche. While girls may reject the standards of the ideal in their serial reading, that rejection remains in response to the ideal: is its disciplinary power diminished or strengthened?

Notes

1. Amy Pattee, "A Second Look: Sweet Valley High," *The Horn Book* (July/August 2008): 413–417, 413. See also Pattee's full-length work, *Reading the Adolescent Romance: Sweet Valley High and the Popular Young Adult Romance Novel* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

2. Mary Celeste Kearney**, "**Birds on the Wire: Troping Teenage Girlhood Through Telephony in Mid-Twentieth Century US Media Culture," *Cultural Studies* 19, no. 5 (2005): 568–601; Mary Celeste Kearney, "Productive Spaces: Girls' Bedrooms as Sites of Cultural Production," *Journal of Children and Media* 1, no. 2 (2007): 126–141; Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Socks: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920–1945* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006) for the feminization of teen culture and the term "teenager" itself. For a history of girls' beauty rituals, see Joan Jacob Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Random House, 1997).

3. Angela McRobbie, "Young Women and Consumer Culture," *Cultural Studies* 22, no. 5 (2008): 531–550.

4. Troy Gil, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 121.

5. Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby*, 1.

6. The Cabbage Patch dolls were named the top toy of 1983, and parents paid exponentially over the list price, some even traveling overseas to buy the "must have" toy of the year. See Gil, *Morning in America*, 131.

7. Ibid., 218–222.

8. Stephen Prince, *A New Pot of Gold: Hollywood Under the Electronic Rainbow, 1980-1989* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2000), xi; "Best-Selling Beauties," *Life* (Oct 1981), 120.

9. Ty Burr, *Gods Like Us: On Movie Stardom and Modern Fame* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), 237.

10. Gil, *Morning in America*, 130.

11. Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

12. John Willinsky and R. Mark Hunniford, "Reading the Romance Younger: The Mirrors and Fears of a Preparatory Literature," in *Texts of Desire*, ed. Linda Christian-Smith (London: The Falmer Press, 1993), 91.

13. Linda Christian-Smith, "Constituting and Reconstituting Desire: Fiction, Fantasy, and Femininity," in *Texts of Desire*, ed. Linda Christian-Smith (London: The Falmer Press, 1993), 1.

14. Ibid., 2.

15. Linda Christian-Smith, "Sweet Dreams: Gender and Desire in Teen Romance Novels," in *Texts of Desire*, ed. Linda Christian-Smith (London: The Falmer Press, 1993), 52, 62.

16. Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," in *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (London: Harper Collins, 1976), 282.

17. Elizabeth Frazer, "Teenage Girls Reading *Jackie*," *Media, Culture and Society* 9 (1987): 407–425; Meredith Cherland, "*Private Practices: Girls Reading Fiction and Constructing Identity* (Great Britain: Taylor and Francis, 1994); Meredith Cherland and Carole Edelksy, "Girls and Reading: The Desire for Agency and the Horror of Helplessness in Fictional Encounters," in *Texts of Desire*, ed. Linda Christian-Smith (London: The Falmer Press, 1993).

18. Pam Gilbert and Sandra Taylor, *Fashioning the Feminine* (North Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1991).

19. Mary Anne Moffitt, "Articulating Meaning: Reconceptions of the Meaning Process, Fantasy/Reality, and Identity in Leisure Activities," *Communication Theory* 3, no. 3 (1993): 231-251.

20. Norma Pecora, "Identity By Design: The Corporate Construction of Teen Romance Novels," in *Growing Up Girls: Popular Culture and the Construction of Identity*, eds. Mazzarella and Pecora (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 55.

21. Valerie Walkerdine, "Some Day My Prince Will Come: Young Girls and the Preparation for Adolescent Sexuality," in *Gender and Generation: Youth Questions*, eds. McRobbie and Nava (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1984), 175. See also Sherron Killingsworth Roberts, "Twenty-Five Years and Counting of *Sweet Valley*: Jessica and Elizabeth in Romance Novels for Young Children?" *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 24 (2010): 123–139; Valerie Walkerdine, *Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Willinsky and Hunniford, "Reading the Romance Younger," 87.

22. Cherland and Edelsky, "Girls and Reading," 1993; Mary M. Huntwork, "Why Girls Flock to Sweet Valley High," *School Library Journal* 36, no. 3 (1990): 137–140; Shiri Reznik and Dafna Lemish, "Falling in Love with *High School Musical*: Girls' Talk about Romantic Perceptions," in *Mediated Girlhoods*, ed. Mary Celeste Kearney (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).

23. Christian-Smith, "Sweet Dreams," 54.

24. Reznik and Lemish, "Falling in Love," 159. Moffitt (1993) calls this "understood fantasy."

25. Walkerdine, "Some Day," 173.

26. Christian-Smith, "Sweet Dreams," 61; "Constituting and Reconstituting," 4.

27. Christian-Smith, "Constituting and Reconstituting," 4; Reznik and Lemish, "Falling in Love," 154. See also Kelly Schrum, "'Teena Means Business': Teenage Girls' Culture and *Seventeen* Magazine, 1944–1950," in *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures*, ed. Sherrie Inness (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

28. Mary M. Huntwork, "Why Girls Flock to *Sweet Valley High*," *School Library Journal* 36, no. 3 (1990): 137–140. For some examples of public concern, see Stanley Bank, "Assessing Reading Interests of Adolescent Readers," *Educational Research Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1986): 8–13; Margo Jefferson, "Sweet Dreams for Teen Queens," *The Nation* 234 (22 May 1982): 613–617; Berta Parrish, "Enticing Readers: The Teen Romance Craze," International Reading Association Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA: May 1984; Diane Roback, "Selling Young Adult Books," *Publishers Weekly* 226 (19 Oct 1984): 24–27; Leonard A. Wood, "How Teenage Book Tastes Change," *Publishers Weekly* 230 (22 Aug 1986): 39.

29. See Christian-Smith, "Sweet Dreams," 51; Huntwork, "Why Girls Flock," 140; Pattee, "A Second Look," 414; Pecora, "Identity by Design," 50; Schrum, "Teena Means Business," 137.

30. Michael Cart, *From Romance to Realism: 50 Years of Growth and Change in Young Adult Literature* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996).

31. All of the series are attributed to Francine as creator and "Kate William" as the pseudonym for the collective writing team. The *Sweet Valley* franchise includes the *Sweet Valley Twins* series in which the twins are middle schoolers; *Sweet Valley Kids* series, which features the girls as seven-year-olds; *The Unicorn Club* series, a spin-off of the *Twins* series, which follows all of the characters in an "exclusive" club, including Jessica; the *Sweet Valley Junior High* series, in which the girls have moved to eighth grade; and *Sweet Valley University*, which moves the twins to college. Each series targeted a different age group, while aiming to create a lifelong reader of the franchise. The series was also translated into a television series, which aired for four seasons and was based only loosely on the original series. The television series starred Brittany and Cynthia Daniel, who made their debuts as Doublemint Twins models.

32. Pecora, "Identity by Design," 56.

33. Huntwork, "Why Girls Flock," 137.

34. Ibid., 138.

35. See Pattee, *Reading the Adolescent* (2011) for further details on the series' production and marketing.

36. Francine Pascal, *Sweet Valley Confidential: Ten Years Later* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011).

37. Although not all feminist responses to *SVH* (and other teen romances) have been condemning, Bronwyn Davies notes that often, feminist attempts to provide more realistic (and less sexist) alternatives to these books fail, exactly because they aim to supplant the fantasy elements of the novels, something girls report as desirable. See Davies, "Beyond Dualism and Towards Multiple Subjectivities," in *Texts of Desire*, ed. Linda Christian-Smith (London: The Falmer Press, 1993).

38. This quote comes from a young girl named Betsy, in interviews with girl readers conducted by Angela Hubler. See Hubler, "Can Ann Shirley Help 'Revive Ophelia?' Listening to Girl Readers," in *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures*, ed. Sherrie Inness (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 278.

39. For just a couple of countless examples of this "passing," see Francine Pascal, *All Night Long* (New York: Random House, 1984) and Francine Pascal, *Dear Sister* (New York: Random House, 1984).

40. Pascal, *All Night Long*, 9.

41. Francine Pascal, *Dangerous Love* (New York: Random House, 1984), 9.

42. For a full discussion of the use of dualisms in romance novels, see Davies, "Beyond Dualism," 1993.

43. Pattee, "A Second Look," 413.

44. Amy L. Best, *Prom Night*: *Youth, Schools, and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 36. See Best's full analysis of the role of body work in constructing "a carefully fashioned feminine self."

45. For discussions of girls' contradictory relationships with beauty rituals in different time periods, see Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989); Best, *Prom Night*, 2000; Wini Brienes, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Brumberg, *The Body Project*, 1997; Jane H. Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Kearney, "Productive Spaces," 2007; Angela McRobbie, "Young Women and Consumer Culture," *Cultural Studies* 22, no. 5 (2008): 531-550; Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby*, 2006; among others.

46. Francine Pascal, *Double Love* (New York: Random House, 1983), 1-2.

47. Francine Pascal, *Two Boy Weekend* (New York: Random House, 1989), 20.

48. Pascal, *All Night Long*, 4-5.

49. Pascal, *Dangerous Love*, 50.

50. Ibid., 83-84.

51. Walkerdine, "Some Day," 175.

52. Francine Pascal, *Out of Reach* (New York: Random House, 1988).

53. See Christine Griffin, "Good Girls, Bad Girls: Anglocentrism and Diversity in the Constitution of Contemporary Girlhood," in *All About the Girl*, ed. Anita Harris (New York: Routledge, 2004).

54. See Ozlem Sensoy and Elizabeth Marshall, "Missionary Girl Power: Saving the 'Third World' One Girl at a Time," *Gender and Education* 22, no. 3 (2010): 295–311, for a discussion of the problematic promotion of Western girls as "saviors" to non-Western girls.

55. For a full history of the "savior" narrative in Western/non-Western feminist dialogues, see Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

56. Francine Pascal, *Rosa's Lie* (New York: Random House, 1991).

57. Ibid., 150.

58. Francine Pascal, *Stepsisters* (New York: Random House, 1993).

59. Francine Pascal, *Are We in Love?* (New York: Random House, 1993).

60. The two couples are Sandra Bacon and Manuel Lopez (Francine Pascal, *Caught in the Middle* (New York: Random House, 1987) and Annie Whitman and Tony Esteban (Francine Pascal, *Cheating to Win* (New York: Random House, 1991). In both stories, the non-white boys are in some sort of trouble (Manuel is blamed for an accident, and Tony appears to be taking steroids).

61. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (New York: Random House, 1992).

62. Francine Pascal, *Power Play* (New York: Random House, 1984).

63. Meda Chesney-Lind and Katherine Irwin's research charts the popularization of the "queen bee" phenomenon and the normalization of teen girls' bullying. See "From Badness to Meanness: Popular Constructions of Contemporary Girlhood," in *All About the Girl,* ed. Anita Harris (New York: Routledge, 2004).

64. See Brumberg, *The Body Project*, 1997.

65. Francine Pascal, *The Perfect Girl* (New York: Random House, 1991).

66. See Judith Butler's discussion of the abject, "Subversive Bodily Acts," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, 2007), 375–376.

67. Robin's struggle with food and her intensive body work are particularly interesting in comparison to Jessica and Elizabeth. Although the twins both express dissatisfaction with their bodies and actively participate in other beauty rituals, the series rarely mentions any intentional exercise or

dieting. In fact, the twins frequently visit Dairi Burger, a popular burger hangout, and they never hesitate to order bacon cheeseburgers or milkshakes. This marks another distinction between the ideal girl(s) and the other girls in the series: in spite of the emphasis on beauty and body work, the ideal girl(s) do not, in fact, have to work. Their ideal bodies are protected by their ideal status, desirable yet unattainable.

68. Pascal, *Power Play*, 130.

69. See Francine Pascal, *Crash Landing* (New York: Random House, 1985) and *That Fatal Night* (New York: Random House, 1989).

70. Francine Pascal, *Deceptions* (New York: Random House, 1984).

71. Francine Pascal, *Head Over Heels* (New York: Random House, 1985).

72. Francine Pascal, *On the Edge* (New York: Random House, 1987).

73. Vivyan Adair, "Branded with Infamy: Inscriptions of Poverty and Class in the United States," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 27 (2001): 452-471, 464.

74. Francine Pascal, *When Love Dies* (New York: Random House, 1984).

75. Francine Pascal, *Memories* (New York: Random House, 1985).

76. Francine Pascal, *Wrong Kind of Girl* (New York: Random House, 1984).

77. Adair, "Branded with Infamy," 458.

78. Ibid., 463.

79. Annie also plays the role of reformer later, as she attempts to integrate her new stepsister, Cheryl, and later reform her boyfriend, Tony Esteban. Annie's shady past and her repeated connection to the few non-white characters, suggests yet another linkage of "Others."

80. For discussions of attempts to reform working class girls in the early twentieth century, see Ruth M. Alexander, *The "Girl Problem": Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900-1930* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995); Elizabeth Clement, *Love For Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); and Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*, 1995.

81. Francine Pascal, *The Morning After* (New York: Random House, 1993). *The Morning After* is the first of a "mini-series," books 95-100 of the original series, ending with *The Evil Twin*. The mini-series was published during the summer of 1993 and concludes what many consider to be the "original series," with subsequent books taking the twins out of the Sweet Valley locale.

82. Francine Pascal, *The Evil Twin* (New York: Random House, 1993), 118.

83. Ibid., 222.

84. Ibid., 135.

85. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 245.

86. McRobbie, "Young Women," 531.

87. With the ideal girl situated as such, the series' unrealistic utopia and Walkerdine's cautions about the lure of fantasy are worth considering. As Walkerdine argues, girl readers are not oblivious to the unrealistic nature of romance novels, but that they may revel in the "unreality" of the stories, briefly forgetting the disparity between their own lives and those of the Wakefield twins (Walkerdine, "Sweet Dreams," 167). The role of fantasy and psychic desire may explain why now-adult fans of *SVH* continue to revisit the series.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

While this genealogical account of girls' series in the twentieth century cannot be comprehensive, it does provide some valuable insight into the trajectory of the figure of the ideal girl as a disciplinary tool in girls' culture. The *Dorothy Dale* series, which began publication in 1908, is somewhat of an anomaly in relation to the other girls' series, in that it does not reflect the contemporary dominant discourses of femininity: the New Woman, the Gibson Girl, and the New American Girl. Rather, the *Dorothy Dale* series constructs an ideal girl who seems stuck in a Victorian children's story. Dorothy is "impossibly good," and her "adventures" are restricted to social snafus and misunderstandings. Dorothy sets the physical standard for girls' series—white, blonde-haired and blue-eyed as ideal, and she is insulated from the threat of outsiders or Others.

In the 1930s, the character of Nancy Drew establishes the "Stella Strong" model of ideal girlhood: modern, "up to date," active, adventurous, clever, and self-sufficient. Like Dorothy, Nancy is well-off, white, and presumably heterosexual, but the series shifts ideal girlhood to centralize strength and self-sufficiency. Here, the ideal girl has a purpose beyond social functions; the Nancy Drew series centralizes Nancy's sleuthing. Nancy's ideal status is constructed in part through her contrast against the villains, who are almost always people of color and working class. Unlike Dorothy Dale, where the ideal girl is "protected" from outsiders who might threaten her gentile sensibilities, Nancy actively participates in exposing and managing outsiders. Although the series incorporates a number of new traits for the ideal girl, it employs blatant stereotypes, reinforcing standards of beauty and feminine respectability.

In the 1940s and 1950s series, *Cherry Ames* and *Vicki Barr*, the ideal girl goes to work—and gets paid. These post-war series incorporate work as an acceptable option for

the ideal girl. Further, this takes place during a time when public opinion about women's participation in paid labor outside the home was mixed. Public discourse recognized women's desire and need to work, sometimes even validating work as fulfilling, while also insisting on the maintenance of a gendered division of labor. These debates about women's labor focused on white, middle-class, married women, yet this was the demographic whose employment increased the most in the 1940s and 50s. As such, the Cherry Ames and Vicki Barr series illustrate how girls' series could function "below the radar," challenging mainstream condemnation of women's paid labor. Cherry and Vicki both choose their careers as fulfilling life work. At the same time, the series repeatedly hints at the ideal girls' eventual "settling down"; marriage and motherhood are assumed as eventual and inevitable. The ideal girl remains white, stereotypically attractive, and appropriately feminine—in fact, their labor is gendered, and their ability to perform femininity is vital to their career success. Other girls—specifically, those who are not American or marginally so—are saved by the ideal girl. As such, the ideal girl (as Vicki and Cherry) is constructed as modern, "normal" or average, and liberated, in contrast to Other girls, who are restricted by their "traditional" cultures. Unlike Nancy Drew, where poverty is conflated with deviance, the series in the post war period eliminates most suggestions of poverty, further normalizing middle-class comfort as the ideal.

After a dip in new series in the 1960s and 1970s, girls' series are revitalized in the 1980s. The two series analyzed here illustrate the split between a younger and older target audience, and the two different directions for the ideal girl. *The Babysitters Club* targets a younger audience and positions the ideal girl(s) as active participants in capitalism. In a shift from the previous ideal girl as solo hero, the BSC expands the ideal girl trope to "girls"—the series follows the babysitting adventures of a group of middle school friends who begin their own babysitting business. Although the girls are

constructed as entrepreneurs in charge of their labor, this seeming freedom or equality occurs with the girls in a specifically gendered enterprise, and returns the ideal girl(s) squarely to suburban safety in Stoneybrook, Connecticut. The series attempts to incorporate multicultural diversity, promoting each girl as a unique, special individual that is emphasized through the girls' "call and response" descriptions of each other. The efforts at diversity, however, are tokenistic; the club includes one black girl, one Asian girl, and one girl with a disability. The series depicts racial and physical difference as just another unique characteristic, no more significant than hair color or favorite candy. However, the series' repeated claims of the irrelevance of these differences actually emphasize their significance, and return repeatedly to whiteness. The most notable shift in the ideal girl is her age; the *Babysitters Club* constructs the ideal girl as young and innocent; older girls are the dangerous Other. Although the club girls engage in some of the same behaviors as the older girls—misbehaving at school, mall surfing, shopping, etc.—the older girls' actions are tainted by their age and their inappropriate desires.

Launched just a few years before the *Babysitters Club*, the *Sweet Valley High* series targets an audience of slightly older girls, 11-15, and merges girls' series with the romance paperback genre. In the same economic and cultural context as the *Babysitters Club*, the *Sweet Valley High* series situates girls within capitalism, but this time as strictly as consumers. The ideal girl is defined entirely by her heterosexual relationships/romances and her romantic viability: i.e. attractiveness. The ideal girl's appearance is of upmost importance to this viability, and is made possible through constant body work and beauty rituals. The series unapologetically re-centers whiteness, rejecting the social justice movements and "political correctness" of the 1960s and 1970s. Here, the ideal girl's surroundings contribute to her ideal status—Reagan's rhetoric of optimism and patriotism through consumption is reflected in the sunny California locale

of Sweet Valley. *Sweet Valley High* (the school and the series) are decidedly whitewashed and wealthy, and the Wakefield twins produce the most narrow figure of the ideal girl in girls' series. While lacking the blatant stereotypes of the 1930s era *Nancy Drew* series, the *Sweet Valley High* series succinctly eliminates Other girls: non-white, poor, sexually active, or disabled. The ideal girl(s) attempt to discipline non-ideal girls toward the ideal through reform, and those who refuse reform—who fail to recognize the ideal girls' superiority—are erased. The most notable shift here is the genre's centralizing of heterosexual romance in a way that "undoes" feminism—through narrow beauty standards, the importance of beauty to the ideal girl's status, and the regressive depictions of romantic relationship dynamics. The individualism noted in the *Babysitters Club* transitions in *Sweet Valley High* to narcissism and female competition.

Noteworthy Findings

In tracing the changes in the figure of the ideal girl, several unexpected and notable factors arose. First, I assumed that the most striking characteristic of the ideal girl would be her "hero" status, or her positioning as out of reach. Rather, the ideal girl's relatability was a much stronger factor, and more important in terms of her ideal status. The character's "flaws" were used to garner the reader's affection and facilitate transference. So, tracking the changes in the ideal girl's "flaws" was an interesting way to see the shifts in the ideal girl's status *as* the ideal.

This "history" was useful in that it reveals the unevenness of what we might consider progress. If we think about the ideal girl in girls' series as potentially becoming a more empowering role model for girl readers, this study demonstrates that progression through time does not guarantee social progressivism. Almost every series contained contradictions, and more feminist leanings were then reigned back in or undercut entirely. For example, the ideal girl as Vicki and Cherry in the supposedly regressive

1950s is far closer to a feminist ideal role model than the vapid, self-absorbed girls of *Sweet Valley High*. The one exception to this, in terms of linear progression, would be the attention to physical appearance. Physical appearance or beauty reaches a more central location in the ideal girl's identity, and in the series' mention of physical appearance, as we move through the 20th century.

Finally, the trope of the ideal girl as white, middle-class, able-bodied, heteronormative, and American becomes more "concretized" as the series encounter cultural changes and takes them into account. For example, in the *Babysitters Club* series, the series addresses the challenges to white supremacist representations by the movements of the 60s and 70s by incorporating "multiculturalism" or "diversity." The series appears progressive and inclusive, when in fact the tokenism of the Other characters—and the repeated positioning of them as Other—strengthens whiteness as the ideal. In most cases, the series noted or addressed challenges indirectly or superficially, without altering the hegemonic construction of the ideal girl.

Possibilities of Girlhood

The ways in which these series concretize or stabilize a particular figuring of the ideal girl turns us to Judith Butler's processes of subjectification and the limits and possibilities of girlhood(s).[1] In depicting the ideal girl as such, the series (and indeed, girls' literature and culture in general) produce specific subject positions as possible, delineating who can and cannot occupy positions of ideal and non-ideal girlhood. There are, also, certain renderings of girlhood that are excluded or made invisible, beyond the limits of possibility, past even the outskirts occupied by the Other girls. In reading these texts, girl readers negotiate these boundaries in their processes of subjectification—of making themselves as subject while also being subjected to existing discourses of girlhood. As Butler notes, all efforts of subjectification take place within a context of

risk—every choice of subjectivity must be measured against the resultant gains or punishments of the individual's societal norms. For all girls, but especially for girls who constantly see themselves (or girls like themselves) depicted as non-ideal or rendered entirely invisible, reading these texts requires a certain level of bravery and determination to read in resistance. Taken together, the collective depiction in girls' series over the course of the twentieth century confirms Toni Morrison's claim that blackness forms the boundaries of whiteness in American literature.[2] Indeed, this study demonstrates the ways in which the Other girl is absolutely vital to the construction of the ideal. One cannot underestimate the toll of these repeated representations. However, as Butler suggests, the individual's subjectification—the becoming a subject through being subjected to discourse—is necessarily facilitated by subordination and thereby facilitates resistance.[3] The very discourses that seem to restrict the possibilities of subjecthood—here, the repeated tropes of ideal and non-ideal that restrict the possibilities of girlhood—are also the "preconditions of agency," creating fissures in the idealized figure that is simultaneously cemented and making other girlhoods livable.[4] It is with the difficulties of this potential in mind that I turn to current representations of the ideal girl in literature.

Future Research: The Ideal Girl On The Big Screen

On August 17, 2012, online retailer Amazon announced that Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* trilogy had surpassed J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series as their highest-selling book series.[5] The replacement of the top-selling series—one written for children and adolescents—by another adolescent series illustrates the tremendous rise of adolescent literature in the past ten years.[6] Through publishing mergers and franchising, adolescent literature has become the new hot commodity, with books inspiring films and a seemingly endless array of related products and experiences.[7] The target audience for

these series has also expanded beyond the initial adolescent market to an adult and global audience. The *Harry Potter* series, for example, has been translated into 67 languages and sold over 450 million copies, with the corresponding films holding the record for the highest-grossing film series to date.[8] As these series have achieved global acclaim, contemporary literary girl heroes are brought to visual realization through film and franchise marketing. Whether the primary star (Bella Swan, Katniss Everdeen) or part of a hero group (Hermione Granger), these girl literary characters attain the status of mainstream media models via the actors who portray them, while also becoming fused with the lives and personalities of their filmic portrayers.

Further, this transition occurs during a period in which "young women are being constructed as a vanguard of new subjectivity," with the successful girl expected to "take charge of her life, seize chances, and achieve her goals."[9] The role of the girl actor as literary-turned-filmic character coincides with a celebrity culture that repeatedly constructs and reifies limited ideals of feminine appearance and behavior through excessive visibility and public scrutiny. The translation of the girl hero from book to media franchise takes place within a postfeminist context, in which "girl power" through consumption and "glamorous individuality" are touted as proof of gender equity.[10] The language of choice and individual responsibility elides the raced and classed dynamics of "girl power," while working "to invalidate systemic critique."[11] As such, the hypervisibility of these girl stars might be playing out in ways that reproduce—in the guise of meritocracy—specifically raced, classed, and sexualized visions of ideal and non-ideal girls. While we can celebrate the global popularity of girl heroes, we might also consider how this visibility heightens the pressure on girls to pursue the ideal, while facilitating the cementation of a literary character into a specific embodied form, potentially limiting

girls' ability to self-identify with the girl hero and shifting identity construction processes.

The Possibilities of Transference in Girls' Literature

The success of the *Harry Potter, Twilight,* and *Hunger Games* series is not wholly new to adolescent literature, nor is the motivation of profit or the reproduction as visual media. The *Nancy Drew* series was translated as four "B" films in the late 1930s, starring Bonita Granville in comedy-mystery spoofs modeled after *The Thin Man*.[12] The series also inspired the *Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew* television show, which aired in the late 1970s, and a 2002 film starring Emma Roberts.[13] *The Babysitters Club* series aired first as a television show in 1990 and then as a feature film in 1995,[14] and the *Sweet Valley High* series spurred a television series as well.[15] However, none of these visual productions achieved any sort of notoriety, even among the original series' girl audiences. While the series' books themselves continue to be easily acquired in terms of access and cost, the visual translations of these girls' series have been significantly less available.

As this dissertation demonstrates, the ideal girl as constructed through girls' series in the 20th century has shifted repeatedly, taking into account social and political changes. With little exception, the trope of the ideal girl has remained undeniably narrow: white, privileged, able-bodied girls who uphold and maintain existing social expectations and power relations. With all of Nancy Drew's positive traits, one cannot deny that Nancy spends most of her time protecting the already wealthy and punishing the poor villain, most often a person of color or an immigrant, who seeks to rise above his or her social and economic status. Cherry Ames and Vicki Barr provide positive examples of girls' potential as independent workers, yet they also confirm heteronormative narrative of girls' inevitable roles as wives and mothers. Girls of color,

poor and working class girls, girls with non-normative bodies, and sexually deviant girls are cast repeatedly as other, relegated to the edges or rendered invisible. Yet, despite the consistently narrow construction and re-construction of the ideal girl, girl readers continue to identify with the girl hero and imagine themselves in her place through transference. The desire to take on the role of girl hero seems to make possible, even necessitate, an imaginary negotiation of the narrow definitions of the ideal girl, particularly for girl readers who see themselves represented in the series as the non-ideal. This ability to reimagine and refigure the ideal girl may be possible in part to the limited physical descriptions in the early girls' series. From *Dorothy Dale* through *Cherry Ames* and *Vicki Barr*, the ideal girl's traits and behaviors receive more attention than her appearance. Without constant written or visual reminders of the ideal girl's appearance, girls who are not white, wealthy, able-bodied, or heterosexual may more easily be able to put aside (or ignore completely) the "ideal" and imagine themselves as girl hero.[16] In fact, these negotiations seem necessary for all girl readers, since the ideal girl's status is defined in part by her unattainability.

What I am referring to as "transference" are the processes of playing girl hero through reading girls' series—imagining oneself as ideal girl or girl hero in order to explore new identities, work through problems, and imagine potential subject positions.[17] The long history of girls' series as dismissed or ignored by adults contributes to the belonging of girls' series *to* girls; their sole possession of these series *as their own* contributes to their appeal, and the sense of ownership, for many readers, continues into adulthood. This speaks to the ways in which girls' culture—here, literature—need not be validated by adults to justify its worth. In fact, Christian-Smith and others' interviews with girl readers suggest that the dismissal or denigration of girls' serial literature by adult authority figures may contribute to its value for girls.[18] Many girls take additional

pleasure in reading unapproved literature, claiming their reading practices and choices as their own territory. As girls manipulate literary representations of girlhood to explore and fit their needs, while also being impacted by the limitations of such representations, what happens when the ideal girl transitions from page to screen, becoming the girl star?

Girl (Con)Fusion: Does Girl Hero = Girl Star?

The three popular franchises discussed here are not "girls' series" in the strict sense, but rather books in a series with an intended adolescent audience. However, the centrality of girl heroes in the series warrants their consideration, as these contemporary franchises saturate the cultural landscape in a way not seen before. As these literary franchises have become global phenomena, literary girl heroes—here, Hermione Granger, Bella Swan, and Katniss Everdeen—have become household names, played by girl actors. The embodiment of the girl hero by specific girl actors within a celebrity-driven popular culture results in a fusing of the character with the actor: Hermione Granger and Emma Watson appear one and the same. This differs slightly from typecasting, which female stars, particularly child actors, have long experienced.[19] Rather than being tied to a "type," these girl actors are linked in the public imagination to their specific filmic characters. Although the fusing of Hermione Granger and Emma Watson may be the most extreme due to the length of time Watson spent portraying Granger's character, this blending applies to all three character/actor duos.

Moreover, the enmeshing occurs within a culture that is celebrity-obsessed and reality-television-driven. More expository than straightforward star worship, contemporary fandom incorporates elements of what Hal Niedzviecki calls "peep culture," "a never-ending spectacle of bodies and souls willing to bare all in the name of entertainment, self-betterment, and instantaneous recognition," in which we want to know everything about everyone, and likewise have everyone know our own intimacies.[20]

While Niedzviecki focuses on the revelatory practices of everyday individuals (himself included), the "peep culture" extends to celebrities, whose privacy seems easily disregarded or denied. The glamorous and idolized/idealized girl star's status collides with an exaggerated desire to know the "real" girl.[21] The girl actors who embody the girl heroes, then, are subjected to constant surveillance and public scrutiny, hypervisible within a postfeminist popular culture. I want to consider how the movement of ideal girl as literary girl hero to film star within the context of "peep culture" and postfeminist discourses might impact girls' transference possibilities and subjectification processes. First, I provide a brief summary of postfeminism as a set of ideologies, discourses, and assumptions that permeate contemporary culture.

Postfeminism: "Girl Power," Choice, and Precariousness

While the *SVH* series illustrates a more straightforward "backlash" against feminism in the 1980s and 1990s—particularly in the prioritizing of heterosexual romance and narrow beauty standards—the series that renewed the popularity of girls' serial literature also participates in the beginnings of what Angela McRobbie calls a postfeminist sensibility, one that has become increasingly prominent in the twenty-first century. McRobbie (2008) defines postfeminism as "a social and cultural landscape" marked by an "undoing" of feminism in ways that appear harmless and fun. Postfeminist discourse "takes into account" the gains of feminism (specifically, the Second Wave) as a political and social movement, acknowledging these achievements as necessary. Simultaneously, postfeminism frames feminism as dead—no longer relevant or palatable to modern young women.[22] Young women, in exchange for abandoning feminism, are "offered a notional form of equality, concretised in education and employment, and through participation in consumer culture and civic society."[23]

Crucially, as Tasker and Negra note, postfeminist culture "works to commodify feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer," intricately linking postfeminist discourses to late capitalism.[24] This takes place specifically through "Girl Power" rhetoric of choice, independence, and empowerment, which companies employ to sell a wide range of products.[25] Susan Douglas writes, "Women's liberation metamorphosed into female narcissism unchained as political concept and goals like liberation and equality were collapsed into distinctly personal, private desires."[26] As suggested by Douglas, postfeminist discourse reframes feminist political goals as strictly personal, where "choice" is positioned as an endless variety of lipstick shades. These concepts of choice and freedom are central to postmodern definitions of the individual, resulting in a heightened emphasis on personal responsibility for success and failure. Young women are seen as capable and flexible, with the world of possibilities open to them, despite the realities of insecurity and risk.[27] "Girl Power" anthems like Beyonce's "Girls Rule the World" abound, depicting girls as "in charge" while ignoring continued gender inequality around the globe. With gendered (and, in a similar vein, racial) discrimination presumably eliminated, all girls must simply make the right choices to empower themselves and become successful. Success stories throughout popular culture support this attitude, shoring up the exceptional as typical and further framing failure as personal choice.[28]

Within the contemporary postfeminist landscape, the characters/stars Hermione Granger, Bella Swan, and Katniss Everdeen might be seen as proof of girls' potential for accomplishment (as well as the almost unbelievable success of the series' authors, all women).[29] The female film star appears to capture the defining features of the successful "future girl": financial success and independence achieved in a self-chosen, fulfilling career, without sacrificing "traditional feminine pleasures."[30] In what ways does the girl

star function as a disciplinary ideal for girl readers of the series? How is this disciplinary function amplified by her hypervisible status? I am not debating whether these girl stars are "good" or "bad" as heroes for young girls. One would be hard pressed to categorize Kristen Stewart as a hero or role model, let alone the character of Bella Swan.[31] My own opinion of *Twilight* aside, the reality remains that many girls (indeed, many adult women) idolize and identify with Bella, and thereby Kristen, as well as Hermione/Emma and Katniss/Jennifer. I am not arguing for or against any of these literary-turned-film characters as the "correct" girl hero, or casting judgment on whether or not the corresponding girl stars should be role models. Nor am I concerned with the faithfulness of the characters' adaptation by the girl stars.[32] All of these conversations are worth having, but my interest here is how these transitions from character to star impact girls' likelihood or ability to engage in transference as a revelatory or exploratory subjectification process. I want to raise two potential concerns, both of which are somewhat speculative.

Consuming the Girl Star

A telling example of the fusion between character and actor, Kristen Stewart's romantic endeavors have received constant attention in public media since the premier of the first *Twilight* film in 2008. As Stewart plays out her *Twilight* romance with co-star, Robert Pattinson, it becomes difficult to tell where the films end and where her "real" life begins. Stewart's constant presence in tabloid magazines, television shows, and other highly visible avenues, as well as public responses to Stewart's "personal" life, illustrate what might be called an incitement to consumption—an invitation to consume the ideal girl/girl star.[33] This takes place in two ways. First, the girl stars' elevation as symbols of the series franchises also positions them as franchise products to be consumed. The character/girl star is neatly compartmentalized and commercialized,

packaged for readers and viewers' purchase. This process aligns neatly with offering girls power through consumption, as girls can easily construct their identities in relation to their ideal girl of choice through purchasing products. Not only are the girl characters/stars literally offered for purchase on newsstands, their star identities are equally parceled out in franchise merchandise. Notably, the products most aggressively marketed to young girls are those encouraging bodily adornment: Bella's hair comb and moonstone ring, and Hermione's Yule Ball earrings and dress, for example. The promotion of specific products coded as feminine emphasizes the girl character's appearance and adornment over her personality traits or behaviors. While official *Harry Potter* sites sell Hermione's wand, time turner necklace, and jewelry, for example, her S.P.E.W. badges (a symbol of her campaign against house elves' enslavement) are nowhere to be found.[34] These products, replicated from the film artifacts, offer girls purchase as an alternative for action, while rendering the potential action invisible. In promoting consumption as "choice," girls' potential civic engagement and political interests are downplayed or denied entirely. Further, as girls see a limited range of girl stars/characters to identify with, patterns of typing effectively pit the girl stars/characters against one another, inviting readers/viewers to choose sides.

The induced competition between girl heroes leads us to a second aspect of consuming the girl hero. Postfeminism within celebrity culture "perpetuates woman as pinup, the enduring linchpin of commercial beauty culture."[35] The girl stars' heightened visibility within a celebrity culture that exposes and critiques their bodies, eating and exercise habits, and romantic and familial relationships—to a greater extent than their male co-stars—encourages girl readers and viewers to engage in this scrutiny of their heroes. This can be seen in the recent conversation about thinness standards of Hollywood with Jennifer Lawrence, the actor who plays Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger*

Games films. In an interview with *Vogue* magazine, Lawrence stated, "in Hollywood, I'm considered obese."[36] Lawrence's candid comments about her "curvy" body have garnered continued attention, as news writers and fans figuratively pat Lawrence on the back for speaking out. At the same time, Lawrence continues to undergo the same scrutiny about her appearance as other highly visible female celebrities. For example, in an Examiner.com article, the writer calls Lawrence's comments "refreshing."[37] Yet, at the end of the article, readers are offered the following "you might also like" stories:

> Jennifer Lawrence without makeup
> Jennifer Lawrence wardrobe malfunction
> Is a feud heating up between Jennifer and Kristen?
> Jennifer Lawrence and Bradley Cooper dating?[38]

In similar fashion, an Entertainment Today.com article praises Lawrence's bravery while also offering commentary on her body:

> Jennifer Lawrence is waging a war against Hollywood's unattainable body standards, one sought-after curve at a time. And while the "Hunger Games" star has one of the hottest and healthiest bods in town, don't expect her to turn into one of those shrinking starlets when it comes to her figure and her opinions.[39]

Although the article claims to support Lawrence's "waging a war," it undermines Lawrence's efforts by participating in the exact Hollywood bodily discourses that Lawrence attempts to disrupt. By framing Lawrence's curves as "sought-after" and "one of the hottest" bodies in Hollywood, the article subjects Lawrence's body to judgment. The article concludes by asking readers: "Does she look obese to you? Tell us on Facebook."[40]

The only other topic of conversation in the Entertainment.com article is Lawrence's romantic relationship, and the Examiner.com article also recommends a dating story on Lawrence. The attention to romance and dating (as noted previously in the coverage of Stewart) centralizes the girl stars' romantic viability and heterosexual romantic endeavors, which are also opened up to critique.[41] Whether positive or

negative, the dialogue about Lawrence's body illustrates the degree to which women's and girls' bodies continue to be seen as public property, available for approval or disapproval and under constant surveillance. The articles' invitation to comment encourages readers to participate, normalizing such conduct as typical fan behavior.[42] The incitement to scrutinize, previously enjoyed by male viewers as a means of maintaining patriarchal power, is extended to girls as well, as the demographic most likely to consume tabloid and fashion magazines and blogs. Does the visual portrayal of the ideal girl as literary girl hero in a specific bodily form, enacted by a girl star in the public eye, limit girl readers' ability or willingness to imagine themselves as girl hero? What changes occur when the reader's understanding of Hermione—the imaginary vision of Hermione, the girl in Hermione's place, or even the tiny, vague sketches of Hermione at the beginnings of chapters—is supplanted by the images of actor Emma Watson? Moreover, how does the growing star status of Jennifer Lawrence engulf Katniss's character? At what point does the incitement to consume Emma Watson, famous actor, surpass the desire to identify as Hermione Granger, girl hero?

Re-centering Whiteness

In the cases of Emma Watson as Hermione Granger, Kristen Stewart as Bella Swan, and Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen, the ideal girl as literary girl hero achieves visual realization as a white, able-bodied, heterosexual, conventionally attractive girl star. The fusing of the girl star with her character incorporates the star's wealth as part of her ideal status, regardless of (and often in spite of) the character's socioeconomic location.

The reassertion of whiteness in the ideal girl is in contrast to the relatively recent celebration of racially or ethnically ambiguous beauty. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting notes the rise of the "mulatta" figure in hip hop videos:

> That the vast majority of the young women in these videos are either fairer-skinned, ethnically mixed, or of indeterminate ethnic/racial origins, with long, straight, or curly hair would suggest that along with the stereotype of hypersexuality and sexual accessibility, a particular type of beauty is offered up as ideal [...] The "mulatta" figure, a pejorative term if ever there was one, is typically depicted as tragic because of her "in-between" racial status. Yet the "mulatta" has also been deemed in literary and film annals as the most ideal in the arena of feminine beauty, and the secretly longed for in the heterosexual marketplace of desire. This status comes about precisely because of her mixed-race heritage involving some configuration of "black" and "white," which in the European and American male imagination signals the perfect blending of skillfulness in matters of sex (read: black) and physical beauty (read: white).[43]

Sharpley-Whiting's analysis of the hypersexualized image of racially ambiguous women extends to modeling and tourism, where racial mixing is offered up as a tantalizing "sampler" of sexual experiences.[44] The racially ambiguous or "mixed" woman as ideal sexualized beauty can be seen in new lines of "diverse" dolls for girls, which employ the same racially ambiguous bodies in the place of diversity. Doll company Mattel, for example, launched the "Flavas" dolls in 2003, a line of "Barbie-type dolls characterized by ambiguous ethnic identities—with 'neutral' skin color and vague facial features, the dolls could easily be Latina, African American, Asian, or white."[45] Rather than exploring the dynamics of racial issues or depicting racial diversity, the line presents race (and gender) as "just a flava, a street style, an individual characteristic, and a commercial product."[46] Similarly, the Bratz dolls, "are the poster girls of postfeminism with subtle racial hybridity thrown in for good measure."[47]

The Bratz dolls' translation to a feature length film demonstrates "the extent that Bratz is willing to push ethnic registers," as the dolls, previously "more of a Beyonce and Jennifer Lopez look compared with the Grace Kelly look of Barbie," lost their different looks in casting; "the actresses, while of slightly different shades of skin and hair, are all ambiguously white."[48] Valdivia argues that the Bratz dolls, along with the "multicultural" American Girls doll franchise, fail to promote true diversity or multicultural representation, but invoke the Other as a selling tool. In the process, "all return us

squarely to whiteness."[49] Notably, the racial and ethnic signifers in doll products for girls cannot shake the associations of sexuality. The resulting critiques of certain dolls as sexualized and therefore not age appropriate means an implicit reassertion of whiteness as feminine ideal.[50] Similarly, Disney's much anticipated (and much criticized) introduction of a Black princess with *The Princes and the Frog* (2009) was quickly followed by a return to whiteness with the release of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Tangled* in 2010. While the debate over racial and ethnic representation continues, sexual and class difference remain invisible and unspoken.

As for the trio of girl stars discussed here, while some might applaud the replacement of the standard blonde with brunettes, the girls' "diversity" stops at hair color. The worldwide promotion of these globally recognized characters embodied by girl stars who maintain a narrow ideal in every way appears unremarkable. How does the visual enactment of these ideal girl characters as such implicitly exclude Other girls by maintaining their invisibility? In what ways do these representations contribute to the continued delineation of certain girls as non-ideal? Do the images of these girls demand or reinforce the narrative of "missionary girl power," of certain (white) girls as rescuers of other girls—for example, Katniss and Rue (note Rue's smallness, her frailness, her innocence and childlike qualities, marking her as a girl of color who is worthy of rescue).[51] How does the framing of these girls as universal, and universal girlhood itself as modern, rely on assumptions of opposition between modern (i.e. Western) and traditional (i.e. non-Western) culture? How does the conflation of modern girlhood with capitalist consumerism mask girls' socioeconomic differences, as well as the economic processes that produce such difference?

Transference Lost? Resistant Reading and the Oppositional Gaze

It can be disheartening to see these processes take place—the reiteration of a narrow ideal, the re-entrenchment of specific visions of girlhood to the exclusion of others. My goal here is not to deny the potential for resistant readings among girl readers or suggest that they are cultural dupes with no capacity for cultural critique. A number of studies demonstrate that girls do read and watch critically, even selectively, and speak back to dominant cultural messages. Research also illustrates the ways in which girls' interactions with popular media are influenced by their racial, sexual, and classed identities and social locations.[52] Both bell hooks and Stuart Hall argue for the transformative power of the oppositional gaze in spectatorship.[53] Whether or not the movement of the ideal girl as girl hero from text to screen impacts girls' transference as a subjectification process, and in what ways, lies in interviews with real girls, which is beyond the scope of this project.[54] However, I do not think we can overlook significance of these girl heroes, not simple as "good" or "bad" role models, but as highly visible representations of girlhood. There are far less celebrated and complex representations of girls in film than boys, so this impact demands consideration.

However, these girl actors may also be exposing fissures in the dominant discourses of ideal girlhood. These girl actors do have some space to disrupt these normative tropes, and I think there is some evidence, at least, of Jennifer Lawrence doing so.[55] Lawrence's speaking out about the restrictive expectations of femininity in terms of body size and weight, exposes the regulatory power Lawrence's comments make the disciplinary processes visible and audible, potentially encouraging girls and women—and boys and men as well—to rethink their participation in the scrutiny of themselves and others. These ruptures are vital if we are to re-think how we understand gender identities and girlhood.

Notes

1. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

2. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Random House, 1992).

3. Butler, *The Psychic Power*, 14.

4. Ibid.

5. Saabira Chaudhuri, "Hunger Games Becomes Amazon's Best-Selling Book Series," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 17, 2012, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390444508504577595093439203530.html.

6. While a number of adolescent series have reached wide audiences and been translated into film, I focus here on the three "superstar" series: *Harry Potter*, *Twilight,* and *Hunger Games*. In addition to being the top-selling adolescent series in terms of books and films, these three franchises all feature girl heroes as a (if not *the*) central character. J.K. Rowling, *The Harry Potter Series*, New York: Scholastic, 1997–2007; Stephanie A. Meyers, *Twilight*, New York: Little, Brown, 2005–2008; Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, New York: Scholastic, 2008–2010.

7. Daniel D. Hade, "Curious George Gets Branded: Reading as Consuming," *Theory into Practice* 40, no. 1(2001): 158–65.

8. "Rowling 'makes £5 every second,'" *British Broadcasting Corporation*, October 3, 2008, Retrieved March 14, 2013, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/7649962.stm. "All Time Worldwide Box Office Grosses," *Box Office Mojo, LLC.*. Last Updated March 14, 2013, Retrieved March 14, 2013, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/world.

9. Anita Harris, *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

10. See McRobbie's use of the term "glamorous individuality" in her analysis of the British television makeover series, "What Not to Wear." Angela McRobbie, "'What Not to Wear' and Post-Feminist Symbolic Violence," in *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 125.

11. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, "Introduction," in *Interrogating Postfeminism,* eds. Tasker and Negra (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 3.

12. *Nancy Drew: Detective,* directed by William Clemens (1938; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros); *Nancy Drew and the Hidden Staircase*, directed by William Clemens (1939; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros); *Nancy Drew…Reporter,* directed by William Clemens (1939; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros); *Nancy Drew…Troubleshooter,* directed by William Clemens (1939; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros).

13. *Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew Series*, created by Edward Stratemeyer (1977–1979; Universal City, CA: Gary Larson Productions); *Nancy Drew*, directed by Andrew Fleming (2007; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros).

14. *The Baby-sitters Club*, directed by Noel Black and Lynn Hamrick (1990; Burbank, CA: The Disney Channel) Television Series; *The Baby-sitters Club,* directed by Melanie Mayron (1995; Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures) Film.

15. *Sweet Valley High*, directed by Russ Brandt and David West (1994–1998; Los Angeles, CA: Saban International) Television Series.

16. See Melinda L. de Jesús, "Fictions of Assimilation: Nancy Drew, Cultural Imperialism, and the Filipina/American Experience," in *Delinquents and Debutantes,* ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York: New York University Press, 1998), for one such example and discussion of these issues.

17. My use of the term "transference" here is unrelated to the psychoanalytic term, defined as "the redirection of feelings and desires and especially of those unconsciously retained from childhood toward a new object" (*Websters New Collegiate Dictionary, 8th Ed,* 1976).

18. Linda Christian-Smith, "Voices of Resistance: Young Women Readers of Romance Fiction," in *Beyond Silenced Voices,* eds. Lois Weis and Michelle Fine (Albany, NY: State University of New

York Press, 1993); Meredith Cherland and Carole Edelsky, "Girls and Reading: The Desire for Agency and the Horror of Helplessness in Fictional Encounters," in *Texts of Desire,* ed. Linda Christian-Smith (London: The Falmer Press, 1993).

19. The original "girl star," Mary Pickford, struggled to move beyond her role as "America's Sweetheart." See Ty Burr, *Gods Like Us: On Movie Stardom and Modern Fame* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012).

20. Hal Niedzviecki's "Peep Project" includes a book, blog, and documentary on peep culture. See http://thepeepdiaries.com/home.

21. Linda Duits and Pauline van Romondt Vis, "Girl Make Sense: Girls, Celebrities, and Identities," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (2009): 41–58.

22. Angela McRobbie, "Young Women and Consumer Culture," *Cultural Studies* 22, no. 5 (2008): 531–50.

23. Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath,* 2.

24. Tasker and Negra, "Introduction," 2.

25. Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (Toronto: Vintage Canada Press, 2000).

26. Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*: *Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Random House, 1994), 246.

27. Harris, *Future Girl*, 7–8. See also Emma Rich, "Young Women, Feminist Identities, and Neo-Liberalism," *Women's Studies International Forum* 28, no. 6 (2005): 495–508.

28. A number of scholars engage with the complexities of identity, subjectivity, individuality, and choice within postmodernity. For a good summary of these scholars and their theoretical assertations, see Shelley Budgeon, *Choosing a Self: Young Women and the Individualization of Identity* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

29. J.K. Rowling's exaggerated "rags to riches" story, framing Rowling as a homeless mother who worked hard enough and became a millionaire (despite her upper middle class upbringing and education), is a perfect example of such postfeminist discourse.

30. McRobbie, *The Aftermath,* 20. The term "future girl" is Harris's.

31. For an excellent analysis of the problematics of *Twilight* as reading for girls, see Anna Silver, "Twilight is Not Good for Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family in Stephenie Mayer's *Twilight* Series," *Studies in the Novel* 42, no. 1/2 (2010): 121–38.

32. For discussions of fidelity and other issues in adaptation from book to film, see Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, eds., *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text* (London: Routledge, 1999); and James M. Welsh and Peter Lev, eds., *The Literature/Film Reader: Issues of Adaptation* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2007).

33. I am intentionally invoking here Foucault's "incitement to discourse," as laid out in *The History of Sexuality, Volume One* (New York: Random House, 1978).

34. Given that *The Hunger Games* films are still in production and relatively new, it is unclear how Katniss's mockingjay pin will be positioned. One of the few products available, the pin does serve as a piece of adornment; however, it is also the symbol of resistance against the Capital.

35. Tasker and Negra, "Introduction," 3.

36. Christa D'Souza, "November Vogue: Jennifer Lawrence Cover Interview," *British Vogue.com*, last modified October 5, 2012. http://www.vogue.co.uk/news/2012/10/05/vogue-archive-jennifer-lawrence-cover-interview.

37. Alexandria Rhodes, "Jennifer Lawrence's Response When Asked to Gain Weight for Movie," *Examiner.com*, last modified November 23, 2012. http://www.examiner.com/article/jennifer-lawrence-s-response-when-asked-to-gain-weight-for-movie.

38. In Rhodes' defense, the recommended "you may like" articles are linked by the website, not offered by Rhodes' herself.

39. Gina Serpe, "Jennifer Lawrence: 'In Hollywood, I'm Obese,'" *Entertainment Today.com*, last modified November 8, 2012.

http://todayentertainment.today.com/_news/2012/11/08/15027319-jennifer-lawrence-in-hollywood-im-obese?lite.

40. Ibid.

41. Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff's analysis of "chick lit" illustrates the "extraordinary tenacity of notions of heterosexual romance against the backdrop of significant cultural and demographic changes," an observation that also plays out in the popularity of "chick flick" films and romantic comedies. See Gill and Herdieckerhoff, "Rewriting the Romance: New Femininities in Chick Lit?" *Feminist Media Studies* 6, no. 4 (2006): 487–504.

42. Other factors are also significant, but beyond the current project's scope: the continued feminization of fan and celebrity culture; the "frivolity" of fandom and celebrity worship; girls' understanding of such trivialization and their responses to it. See Amy L. Best, *Prom Night: Youth, Schools, and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2000) for discussions of frivolity and femininity. See Linda Duits, "The Importance of Popular Media in Everyday Girl Culture," *European Journal of Communication* 25, no. 1 (2010): 243–57.

43. T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Pimps Up, Ho's Down: Hip Hop's Hold on Young Black Women* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 29.

44. Ibid., 41.

45. Sarah Banet-Weiser, "What's Your Flava? Race and Postfeminism in Media Culture," in *Interrogating Postfeminism,* eds. Tasker and Negra (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 201.

46. Ibid., 202.

47. Angharad N. Valdivia, "Living in a Hybrid Material World: Girls, Ethnicity and Mediated Doll Products," *Girlhood Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009): 73–93; 83.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid., 79. See also Elizabeth Marshall, "Consuming Girlhood: Young Women, Femininities, and *American Girl*," *Girlhood Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009): 94–111.

50. Ibid., 89.

51. Ozlem Sensoy and Elizabeth Marshall, "Missionary Girl Power: Saving the 'Third World' One Girl at a Time," *Gender and Education* 22, no. 3 (2010): 295–311.

52. See, for example, Melissa A. Milkie, "Social Comparisons, Reflected Appraisals, and Mass Media: The Impact of Pervasive Beauty Images on Black and White Girls' Self-Concepts," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (1999): 190–210; Deborah Schooler, L. Monique Ward, Ann Merriwether, and Allison Caruthers, "Who's That Girl: Television's Role in the Body Image Development of Young White and Black Women," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2004): 38–47;

53. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference,* ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990); bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992).

54. Bronwyn Davies explores the potential of Butler's usage of subjectification as a process of resistance. See Davies, "Subjectification: the Relevance of Butler's Analysis for Education," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27, no. 4 (2006): 425–38.

55. I'm particularly interested to see where the Hunger Games will go in terms of the storyline, how the films will deal with the series' scathing critique of the capital, systemic and structurally enforced poverty, and the like. While interviews with Lawrence suggest that she finds the critique and the role of Katniss compelling, it is unclear whether or not those critiques will reach the general public.

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APPENDIX A

GIRLS' SERIES

This appendix includes full lists of the series discussed in this dissertation. Some series (*Dorothy Dale, Cherry Ames, Vicki Barr*) are not numbered (i.e. the series does not utilize numbers as part of the series' culture or identity); however, for clarity, I have presented all of the series as numbered in this appendix.

Dorothy Dale **(1908–1924)**

1. *Dorothy Dale: A Girl of Today* (1908)
2. *Dorothy Dale at Glenwood School* (1908)
3. *Dorothy Dale's Great Secret* (1909)
4. *Dorothy Dale and Her Chums* (1909)
5. *Dorothy Dale's Queer Holidays* (1910)
6. *Dorothy Dale's Camping Days* (1911)
7. *Dorothy Dale's School Rivals* (1912)
8. *Dorothy Dale in the City* (1913)
9. *Dorothy Dale's Promise* (1914)
10. *Dorothy Dale in the West* (1915)
11. *Dorothy Dale's Strange Discovery* (1916)
12. *Dorothy Dale's Engagement* (1917)
13. *Dorothy Dale to the Rescue* (1924)

Nancy Drew **(1930–1979)**

1. *The Secret of the Old Clock* (1930)
2. *The Hidden Staircase* (1930)
3. *The Bungalow Mystery* (1930)
4. *The Mystery at Lilac Inn* (1930)
5. *The Secret at Shadow Ranch* (1931)
6. *The Secret at Red Gate Farm* (1931)
7. *The Clue in the Diary* (1932)
8. *Nancy's Mysterious Letter* (1932)
9. *The Sign of the Twisted Candles* (1933)
10. *The Password to Larkspur Lane* (1933)
11. *The Clue of the Broken Locket* (1934)
12. *The Message in the Hollow Oak* (1935)
13. *The Mystery of the Ivory Charm* (1936)
14. *The Whispering Statue* (1937)
15. *The Haunted Bridge* (1937)
16. *The Clue of the Tapping Heels* (1939)
17. *The Mystery of the Brass-Bound Trunk* (1940)
18. *The Mystery at the Moss-Covered Mansion* (1941)
19. *The Quest of the Missing Map* (1942)
20. *The Clue in the Jewel Box* (1943)
21. *The Secret in the Old Attic* (1944)
22. *The Clue in the Crumbling Wall* (1945)
23. *The Mystery of the Tolling Bell* (1946)
24. *The Clue in the Old Album* (1947)
25. *The Ghost of Blackwood Hall* (1948)

26. *The Clue of the Leaning Chimney* (1949)
27. *The Secret of the Wooden Lady* (1950)
28. *The Clue of the Black Keys* (1951)
29. *The Mystery at the Ski Jump* (1952)
30. *The Clue of the Velvet Mask* (1953)
31. *The Ringmaster's Secret* (1953)
32. *The Scarlet Slipper Mystery* (1954)
33. *The Witch Tree Symbol* (1955)
34. *The Hidden Window Mystery* (1956)
35. *The Haunted Showboat* (1957)
36. *The Secret of the Golden Pavilion* (1959)
37. *The Clue in the Old Stagecoach* (1960)
38. *The Mystery of the Fire Dragon* (1961)
39. *The Clue of the Dancing Puppet* (1962)
40. *The Moonstone Castle Mystery* (1963)
41. *The Clue of the Whistling Bagpipes* (1964)
42. *The Phantom of Pine Hill* (1965)
43. *The Mystery of the 99 Steps* (1966)
44. *The Clue in the Crossword Cypher* (1967)
45. *The Spider Sapphire Mystery* (1968)
46. *The Invisible Intruder* (1969)
47. *The Mysterious Mannequin* (1970)
48. *The Crooked Bannister* (1971)
49. *The Secret of Mirror Bay* (1972)
50. *The Double Jinx Mystery* (1973)
51. *Mystery of the Glowing Eye* (1974)
52. *The Secret of the Forgotten City* (1975)
53. *The Sky Phantom* (1976)
54. *The Strange Message in the Parchment* (1977)
55. *Mystery of Crocodile Island* (1978)
56. *The Thirteenth Pearl* (1979)

* The *Nancy Drew* mystery series has several spin-off series, including: *Nancy Drew Files, Nancy Drew Girl Detective, Nancy Drew Notebooks,* and *Nancy Drew On Campus*.

Cherry Ames **(1943–1968)**

1. *Cherry Ames, Student Nurse* (1943)
2. *Cherry Ames, Senior Nurse* (1944)
3. *Cherry Ames, Army Nurse* (1944)
4. *Cherry Ames, Chief Nurse* (1944)
5. *Cherry Ames, Flight Nurse* (1945)
6. *Cherry Ames, Veterans' Nurse* (1946)
7. *Cherry Ames, Private Duty Nurse* (1946)
8. *Cherry Ames, Visiting Nurse* (1947)
9. *Cherry Ames, Cruise Nurse* (1948)
10. *Cherry Ames, At Spencer* (1949)
11. *Cherry Ames, Night Supervisor* (1950)
12. *Cherry Ames, Mountaineer Nurse* 91951)
13. *Cherry Ames, Clinic Nurse* (1952)

14. *Cherry Ames, Dude Ranch Nurse* (1953)
15. *Cherry Ames, Rest Home Nurse* (1954)
16. *Cherry Ames, Country Doctor's Nurse* (1955)
17. *Cherry Ames, Boarding School Nurse* (1955)
18. *Cherry Ames, Department Store Nurse* (1956)
19. *Cherry Ames, Camp Nurse* (1957)
20. *Cherry Ames, At Hilton Hospital* (1959)
21. *Cherry Ames, Island Nurse* (1960)
22. *Cherry Ames, Rural Nurse* (1961)
23. *Cherry Ames, Staff Nurse* (1962)
24. *Cherry Ames, Companion Nurse* (1964)
25. *Cherry Ames, Jungle Nurse* (1965)
26. *Cherry Ames, The Mystery in the Doctor's Office* (1966)
27. *Cherry Ames, Ski Nurse Mystery* (1968)

Vicki Barr (1947–1964)

1. *Silver Wings for Vicki* (1947)
2. *Vicki Finds the Answer* (1947)
3. *The Hidden Valley Mystery* (1948)
4. *The Secret of Magnolia Manor* (1949)
5. *The Clue of the Broken Blossom* (1950)
6. *Behind the White Veil (*1951)
7. *The Mystery at Hartwood House (*1952)
8. *Peril Over the Airport (*1953)
9. *The Mystery of the Vanishing Lady* (1954)
10. *The Search for the Missing Twin (*1954)
11. *The Ghost at the Waterfall* (1956)
12. *The Clue of the Gold Coin* (1958)
13. *The Silver Ring Mystery* (1960)
14. *The Clue of the Carved Ruby* (1961)
15. *The Mystery of Flight 908* (1962)
16. *The Brass Idol Mystery* (1964)

The Babysitters Club (1986–2000)

1. *Kristy's Great Idea* (1986)
2. *Claudia and the Phantom Phone Calls* (1986)
3. *The Truth About Stacey* (1986)
4. *Mary Anne Saves the Day* (1987)
5. *Dawn and the Impossible Three* (1987)
6. *Kristy's Big Day* (1987)
7. *Claudia and Mean Janine* (1987)
8. *Boy-Crazy Stacey* (1987)
9. *The Ghost at Dawn's House* (1988)
10. *Logan Likes Mary Anne!* (1988)
11. *Kristy and the Snobs* (1988)
12. *Claudia and the New Girl* (1988)
13. *Good-bye Stacey, Good-bye* (1988)
14. *Hello, Mallory* (1988)

15. *Little Miss Stoneybrook ... and Dawn* (1988)
16. *Jessi's Secret Language* (1988)
17. *Mary Anne's Bad Luck Mystery* (1988)
18. *Stacey's Mistake* (1988)
19. *Claudia and the Bad Joke* (1988)
20. *Kristy and the Walking Disaster* (1989)
21. *Mallory and the Trouble with Twins* (1989)
22. *Jessi Ramsey, Pet-sitter* (1989)
23. *Dawn on the Coast* (1989)
24. *Kristy and the Mother's Day Surprise* (1989)
25. *Mary Anne and the Search for Tigger* (1989)
26. *Claudia and the Sad Good-bye* (1989)
27. *Jessi and the Superbrat* (1989)
28. *Welcome Back, Stacey!* (1989)
29. *Mallory and the Mystery Diary* (1989)
30. *Mary Anne and the Great Romance* (1990)
31. *Dawn's Wicked Stepsister* (1990)
32. *Kristy and the Secret of Susan* (1990)
33. *Claudia and the Great Search* (1990)
34. *Mary Anne and Too Many Boys* (1990)
35. *Stacey and the Mystery of Stoneybrook* (1990)
36. *Jessi's Baby-sitter* (1990)
37. *Dawn and the Older Boy* (1990)
38. *Kristy's Mystery Admirer* (1990)
39. *Poor Mallory!* (1990)
40. *Claudia and the Middle School Mystery* (1991)
41. *Mary Anne vs. Logan* (1991)
42. *Jessi and the Dance School Phantom* (1991)
43. *Stacey's Emergency* (1991)
44. *Dawn and the Big Sleepover* (1991)
45. *Kristy and the Baby Parade* (1991)
46. *Mary Anne Misses Logan* (1991)
47. *Mallory on Strike* (1991)
48. *Jessi's Wish* (1991)
49. *Claudia and the Genius of Elm Street* (1991)
50. *Dawn's Big Date* (1992)
51. *Stacey's Ex-Best Friend* (1992)
52. *Mary Anne + 2 Many Babies* (1992)
53. *Kristy for President* (1992)
54. *Mallory and the Dream Horse* (1992)
55. *Jessi's Gold Medal* (1992)
56. *Keep Out, Claudia* (1992)
57. *Dawn Saves the Planet* (1992)
58. *Stacey's Choice* (1992)
59. *Mallory Hates Boys (and Gym)* (1992)
60. *Mary Anne's Makeover* (1992)
61. *Jessi and the Awful Secret* (1993)
62. *Kristy and the Worst Kid Ever* (1993)
63. *Claudia's ~~Freind~~ Friend* (1993)
64. *Dawn's Family Feud* (1993)

65. *Stacey's Big Crush* (1993)
66. *Maid Mary Anne* (1993)
67. *Dawn's Big Move* (1993)
68. *Jessi and the Bad Baby-sitter* (1993)
69. *Get Well Soon, Mallory* (1993)
70. *Stacey and the Cheerleaders* (1993)
71. *Claudia and the Perfect Boy* (1994)
72. *Dawn and the We ♥ Kids Club* (1994)
73. *Mary Anne and Miss Priss* (1994)
74. *Kristy and the Copycat* (1994)
75. *Jessi's Horrible Prank* (1994)
76. *Stacey's Lie* (1994)
77. *Dawn and Whitney, Friends Forever* (1994)
78. *Claudia and Crazy Peaches* (1994)
79. *Mary Anne Breaks the Rules* (1994)
80. *Mallory Pike, #1 Fan* (1994)
81. *Kristy and Mr. Mom* (1995)
82. *Jessi and the Troublemaker* (1995)
83. *Stacey vs. the BSC* (1995)
84. *Dawn and the School Spirit War* (1995)
85. *Claudia Kishi, Live from WSTO!* (1995)
86. *Mary Anne and Camp BSC* (1995)
87. *Stacey and the Bad Girls* (1995)
88. *Farewell, Dawn* (1995)
89. *Kristy and the Dirty Diapers* (1995)
90. *Welcome to the BSC, Abby* (1995)
91. *Claudia and the First Thanksgiving* (1995)
92. *Mallory's Christmas Wish* (1995)
93. *Mary Anne and the Memory Garden* (1996)
94. *Stacey McGill, Super Sitter* (1996)
95. *Kristy + Bart = ?* (1996)
96. *Abby's Lucky Thirteen* (1996)
97. *Claudia and the World's Cutest Baby* (1996)
98. *Dawn and Too Many Sitters* (1996)
99. *Stacey's Broken Heart* (1996)
100. *Kristy's Worst Idea* (1996)
101. *Claudia Kishi, Middle School Dropout* (1996)
102. *Mary Anne and the Little Princess* (1996)
103. *Happy Holidays, Jessi* (1996)
104. *Abby's Twin* (1997)
105. *Stacey the Math Whiz* (1997)
106. *Claudia, Queen of The Seventh Grade* (1997)
107. *Mind Your Own Business, Kristy!* (1997)
108. *Don't Give Up, Mallory* (1997)
109. *Mary Anne to the Rescue* (1997)
110. *Abby the Bad Sport* (1997)
111. *Stacey's Secret Friend* (1997)
112. *Kristy and the Sister War* (1997)
113. *Claudia Makes Up Her Mind* (1997)
114. *The Secret Life of Mary Anne Spier* (1997)

115. *Jessi's Big Break* (1998)
116. *Abby and the Best Kid Ever* (1998)
117. *Claudia and the Terrible Truth* (1998)
118. *Kristy Thomas, Dog Trainer* (1998)
119. *Stacey's Ex-Boyfriend* (1998)
120. *Mary Anne and the Playground Fight* (1998)
121. *Abby in Wonderland* (1998)
122. *Kristy in Charge* (1998)
123. *Claudia's Big Party* (1998)
124. *Stacey McGill...Matchmaker* (1998)
125. *Mary Anne in the Middle* (1998)
126. *The All-New Mallory Pike* (1999)
127. *Abby's Un-Valentine* (1999)
128. *Claudia and the Little Liar* (1999)
129. *Kristy at Bat* (1999)
130. *Stacey's Movie* (1999)
131. The Fire at Mary Anne's House (1999)

* *The Babysitters Club* series also includes a number of spin-off series with titles not listed here: *Super Specials, Readers' Requests, Mystery* and *Super Mystery* titles, *Portraits* collections, *Babysitters Club: Friends Forever, Babysitters Little Sister,* and *California Diaries*.

Sweet Valley High **(1983–1993)**

1. *Double Love* (1983)
2. *Secret* (1984)
3. *Playing With Fire* (1984)
4. *Power Play* (1984)
5. *All Night Long* (1984)
6. *Dangerous Love* (1984)
7. *Dear Sister* (1984)
8. *Heartbreaker* (1984)
9. *Racing Hearts* (1984)
10. *Wrong Kind of Girl* (1984)
11. *Too Good To Be True* (1984)
12. *When Love Dies* (1984)
13. *Kidnapped!* (1984)
14. *Deceptions* (1984)
15. *Promises* (1984)
16. *Rags to Riches* (1985)
17. *Love Letters* (1985)
18. *Head Over Heels* (1985)
19. *Showdown* (1985)
20. *Crash Landing!* (1985)
21. *Runaway* (1985)
22. *Too Much in Love* (1985)
23. *Say Goodbye* (1985)
24. *Memories* (1985)
25. *Nowhere to Run* (1985)

26. *Hostage!* (1986)
27. *Lovestruck* (1986)
28. *Alone in the Crowd* (1986)
29. *Bitter Rivals* (1986)
30. *Jealous Lies* (1986)
31. *Taking Sides* (1986)
32. *The New Jessica* (1986)
33. *Starting Over* (1986)
34. *Forbidden Love* (1987)
35. *Out of Control* (1987)
36. *Last Chance* (1987)
37. *Rumors* (1987)
38. *Leaving Home* (1987)
39. *Secret Admirer* (1987)
40. *On the Edge* (1987)
41. *Outcast* (1987)
42. *Caught in the Middle* (1987)
43. *Hard Choices* (1988)
44. *Pretenses* (1988)
45. *Family Secrets* (1988)
46. *Decisions* (1988)
47. *Troublemaker* (1988)
48. *Slam Book Fever* (1988)
49. *Playing For Keeps* (1988)
50. *Out of Reach* (1988)
51. *Against the Odds* (1988)
52. *White Lies* (1989)
53. *Second Chance* (1989)
54. *Two-Boy Weekend* (1989)
55. *Perfect Shot* (1989)
56. *Lost at Sea* (1989)
57. *Teacher Crush* (1989)
58. *Broken Hearted* (1989)
59. *In Love Again* (1989)
60. *That Fatal Night* (1989)
61. *Boy Trouble* (1989)
62. *Who's Who* (1990)
63. *The New Elizabeth* (1990)
64. *The Ghost of Tricia Martin* (1990)
65. *Trouble at Home* (1990)
66. *Who's to Blame* (1990)
67. *The Parent Plot* (1990)
68. *The Love Bet* (1990)
69. *Friends Against Friends* (1990)
70. *Ms. Quarterback* (1990)
71. *Starring Jessica!* (1990)
72. *Rock Star's Girl* (1991)
73. *Regina's Legacy* (1991)
74. *The Perfect Girl* (1991)
75. *Amy's True Love* (1991)

76. *Miss Teen Sweet Valley* (1991)
77. *Cheating To Win* (1991)
78. *The Dating Game* (1991)
79. *The Long-Lost Brother* (1991)
80. *The Girl They Both Loved* (1991)
81. *Rosa's Lie* (1991)
82. *Kidnapped by the Cult!* (1992)
83. *Steven's Bride* (1992)
84. *The Stolen Diary* (1992)
85. *Soap Star* (1992)
86. *Jessica Against Bruce* (1992)
87. *My Best Friend's Boyfriend* (1992)
88. *Love Letters for Sale* (1992)
89. *Elizabeth Betrayed* (1992)
90. *Don't Go Home With John* (1992)
91. *In Love with a Prince* (1993)
92. *She's Not What She Seems* (1993)
93. *Stepsisters* (1993)
94. *Are We in Love?* (1993)
95. *The Morning After* (1993)
96. *The Arrest* (1993)
97. *The Verdict* (1993)
98. *The Wedding* (1993)
99. *Beware the Baby-Sitter* (1993)
100. *The Evil Twin* (1993)

* The *Sweet Valley High* series includes another forty-three titles under the original *SVH* name; however, many consider the first 100 titles the "original" series. The *Sweet Valley* franchise includes a number of spin-off series not listed here: *Super Editions*, *Super Thrillers, Super Stars,* and *Magna Editions*. The franchise also includes the *Sweet Valley Twins* series with its own spin-offs, and the *Sweet Valley University* series.