4 “New Girls for Old”: Psychology Constructs the Normal Adolescent Girl

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Writing in 1916 on the subject of “girlhood and character” for a series of religious education manuals, Mary E. Moxcey registered the wry musings of one father at a southern Sunday school convention on the possibilities for a *female* adolescence. “I don’t know much about this ‘adolescence,’” the man opined, “and I don’t know whether gals is supposed to catch it too; but I do know that the gals is just as ornery as the boys, or a leetle more so.”¹ Moxcey’s mildly amused determination of the aptness of this man’s commentary reveals something about the construction of the adolescent girl that followed in the wake of G. Stanley Hall’s *Adolescence*. For Moxcey and others writing on the subject of female child development in the mid-1910s and 1920s, the “girl problem,” which was the common euphemism for female juvenile delinquency during the Progressive era, no longer referred only to protecting, controlling, and reforming those “deviant” immigrant and working-class girls who failed to comply with the ideals of Victorian femininity. Rather, such commentators took notice of the rapid diffusion of “ornery” behaviors among female youths from across the social spectrum during the early years of the twentieth century. They also identified the “girl problem” with the challenge of understanding, explaining, and responding to the development of the “normal” modern adolescent girl.²

Trained in psychology and active in “club, settlement, Young Woman’s Christian Association and Church school work,” Moxcey promised to make available to a popular audience of parents, teachers, and girl-workers like herself existing scientific knowledge about girlhood garnered from physiology, psychology, pedagogy, and social work. She hereby continued Hall’s link between an inter-
disciplinary science of child development and the practical application of scientific knowledge, making claims as to both the social necessity and the exclusive authority of that knowledge. As Moxcey would have explained it to the concerned father at the Sunday school convention, adolescence, with its accompanying dangers and possibilities, was something every young person was indeed “supposed to catch,” boy or girl, rural or urban, working or middle class. Her aim, then, was to identify those “great underlying uniformities” in the aspirations and problems of all adolescent girls, along with the “general laws or principles” that would help in guiding and solving them. In doing so, she joined other developmental thinkers of the period in problematizing the normal, psychologizing the deviant, and re-encoding certain cultural expectations for gender, race, and class difference and hierarchy.

Previous work by historians on early-twentieth-century girlhood has overwhelmingly focused on the cultural constructions and social experiences of the female juvenile delinquent. Historians have also focused on the popular formulation and activities of the delinquent girl’s more privileged counterpart, the flapper. Missing from the historical record, however, is a consideration of the psychological construct of the normal female adolescent, a concept that during the 1920s bridged the delinquent and the flapper with a uniform set of explanations regarding the mandates of female development. Locating all girls on a psychological continuum from the normal to the abnormal, the psychological sciences of the 1920s pursued what historian Elizabeth Lunbeck calls the “metric mode of thinking” in their approach to the study of the young female. The metric paradigm preferred age and gender characteristics and differences at the expense of class analysis, identifying the universals of female psychological development as the primary motivators of all forms of female adolescent social behavior.

In the normal female adolescent, American psychologists of the 1920s produced a complex and often contradictory figure that both embraced and tempered some of the more socially threatening behaviors of the delinquent and the flapper. Rooted in gender ideologies of the past, yet also priding themselves on their distinctly modern sensibility, these experts placed the developing girl at the center of intellectual, social, and cultural problems concerning female subjectivity and sexuality. Individual and female, independent and selfless, sexually confident and sexually vulnerable, the adolescent girl that emerged from the psychological literature of the decade was generally meant to be a sympathetic figure, whose behaviors were to be explained, tolerated, and duly adjusted, rather than condemned or punished. Such sympathy was not always forthcoming, however. Nor did it serve all girls equally well. Whereas the new psychology
of female adolescence did offer explanations of the growing girl that encouraged broader expectations for female development and greater compassion for deviance than in the past, such explanations came to rest on a range of interpretations that reestablished certain limits on what girls could become, while also laying exclusive claim to the sort of knowledge that would best enable the wider culture to understand them.

Initial scientific conceptions of female adolescence emerged from nineteenth-century medicine within the context of concern for changes in the lives of the white middle class. Rendered traditionally vulnerable and newly vibrant, Hall’s turn-of-the-century budding girl also embodied qualities that reasserted and redefined the parameters for white middle-class femininity. Even so, for much of the Progressive era, it was the working-class and immigrant teenage girl who took on newly heightened significance in the scientific literature, as the changing circumstances of her work and leisure unfolded within a climate of anxious and idealistic social reform. Some of the ensuing discourse about the female juvenile delinquent encouraged new understandings of the development of the girl. We begin, then, by considering some of the key contributions of the Progressive period. Next, we turn to the years following World War I, when changes in the experiences of girls of the white middle class, again, became an important factor in prompting the literature on the psychology of female adolescence to proliferate in earnest.

CASTING THE “GIRL PROBLEM”:
FEMALE JUVENILE DELINQUENCY IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

In the wake of the heated debates by physicians such as Edward H. Clarke and Mary Putnam Jacobi over the effects of coeducation on the civilized girl’s development, white middle-class Protestant reformers named their own version of the “girl problem” as a menace deserving widespread attention and collective response. As young, urban, immigrant working girls sought to forge autonomous and sexualized identities for themselves in the increasingly heterosocial worlds of work and commercialized leisure, reformers of the late nineteenth century warned against what they perceived to be socially disintegrating threats to the Victorian moral code. Drawing on the legacy of antiprostitution work from the antebellum period, wherein fallen women and girls were perceived as either victims of unbridled male lust or dire socioeconomic circumstances outside of their control and from contemporary medical discourse that depicted the teenage girl’s body as inherently vulnerable, reformers’ efforts to raise the age of
Female adolescence, 1830–1930

Consent, combat venereal disease, eliminate prostitution, and regulate commercialized leisure took on a distinctly protective nature. Solutions to the plight of working-class and immigrant girls focused on the creation of institutions to shelter them from the perilous urban environment, including boardinghouses, employment agencies, and working-girls’ clubs offering education and wholesome recreation, as well as passing laws to punish evil men for seducing the innocent.6

The language of female victimization continued to be a powerful tool for reformers well into the twentieth century. The new generation of reformers of the Progressive era, however, also adopted several other interpretations of the “girl problem.” Like their immediate predecessors, Progressives drew their ranks primarily from the white, Protestant middle class and expressed much anxiety over the changes in American society due to the forces of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. Pursuing a broad array of economic, social, and political reforms from many perspectives, Progressives rallied around problems associated with working-class children and youths. Infant health, child labor, and juvenile delinquency all garnered significant attention within Progressive reform. Progressives’ diagnosis of and response to social problems set them apart from previous generations of middle-class reformers. Some, influenced by the ideology of Social Darwinism, adhered to a biological interpretive framework and blamed the innate moral depravity of individuals and groups for the many social ills they saw around them. Others were more likely to identify factors in the environment as the cause for human suffering and social disorder. However they approached or amalgamated these perspectives, Progressives called on the power of the state to reform and regulate both individuals and the social and economic conditions in which they lived. In addition, to identify and understand the social problems that needed attention and to craft and implement policy solutions, they also relied heavily on the research techniques, findings, and authoritative expertise of the burgeoning biological and social sciences.7

In responding to the problem of female juvenile delinquency, Progressives both drew on existing assumptions and proffered some new insights into the development of the adolescent girl. One explanation some Progressives offered to account for the worrisome sexual assertiveness of working-class and immigrant girls was “feeble-mindedness.” Feeble-mindedness was redefined within the context of the early-twentieth-century eugenics movement. Like the progressivism in which it flourished, eugenics encompassed a range of meanings, which helps to account for its broad-based appeal. Rooted in evolutionary theory, eugenics gained legitimacy following the turn of the century with the
rediscovery of Mendel’s laws of segregation and independent assortment, which became the basis for the science of genetics. Eugenicists claimed that the physical, moral, and intellectual qualities of human beings were determined by heredity and believed that racial/social progress could be brought about through the encouragement of reproduction by the biologically “fit” and the limitation of reproduction by the “unfit.” Given the focus on reproduction as the cause of and solution for the problems of modern life, women (as proponents of eugenics ideas and practices and as recipients of eugenics treatment) and systems of thought about gender and sexuality were of central importance in the early-twentieth-century eugenics movement.⁸

Eugenicist psychologist Herbert H. Goddard was at the forefront of defining the condition of feeble-mindedness and associating it with the dangerous sexuality of the adolescent girl. A former student of G. Stanley Hall and director of research at the Training School for Backward and Feeble-minded Children in Vineland, New Jersey, Goddard played an important role in introducing and popularizing the use of intelligence testing in the United States and argued for a link between inherited mental deficiency and criminality. “We are fast approaching the day when we shall realize that disease and defect, mental and physical, are conditions favorable to the commission of offenses against the public,” he wrote in a treatise on juvenile delinquency. “We shall accordingly ascertain the mental and physical conditions of all people and recognize the fact that the persons suffering from abnormal conditions of body or mind are particularly liable to commit a crime.”⁹ Goddard was responsible for coining the term “moron” to refer to those individuals who never developed beyond a mental age of 8 to 12 years. This group of mental defectives was especially threatening, he averred, because they so often seemed to be “normal” to those around them. For Goddard, one of the primary signs and effects of feeble-mindedness in female morons was sexual depravity. By this, he meant that those girls measured to be of low mental ability on intelligence tests always threatened to commit acts of sexual deviance because they were incapable of developing the capacity for self-control that emerged in late adolescence. In addition, any untoward sexual behavior, including prostitution, unwed motherhood, or trading sexual favors for the “treat” of participating in commercial amusements, called forth a diagnosis of feeble-mindedness as its cause. Joined by others in the eugenics movement, Goddard accused moronic girls of indiscriminately seducing hapless boys and endangering the future of the human race by passing on their debauched physical, mental, and moral traits to the next generation of offspring. Since “negative” eugenicists such as Goddard perceived the cause of female devianve to be the product of
inherited traits that could not be changed, the solutions they offered to the girl problem were permanent incarceration and sterilization. By 1923, forty-three states had established institutions to contain the menace of the feeble-minded, and by 1931, thirty states had passed laws authorizing the sterilization of mentally defective persons.¹⁰

Progressive era psychiatrists cast their own version of the young, female sexual predator in the form of the hypersexual female. Many American psychiatrists were enamored with eugenics, but when girls engaged in sexually deviant behavior tested normal or above on intelligence tests, they reinterpreted the girl problem through the lens of the newly formulated psychiatric category of psychopathy. Psychopathy referred to a broader range of behaviors and emotional expressions than intellectual capacity and was a less sharply defined or concretely measurable condition than feeble-mindedness. It was also, therefore, more flexible and potentially more far-reaching in its explanatory power. Psychopathy thus contained intimations of the “metric mode of thinking” and the turn to the problems of the normal personality in modern psychiatry, which became the basis for its cultural authority in the twentieth century. Even so, for many Progressive era psychiatrists the hypersexual female, which encompassed not only sexually aggressive teenage girls but adult women who claimed any measure of sexual and social autonomy, was clearly defective and diseased and posed an aberrant danger to society that required psychiatric treatment to control and contain it.¹¹

Those who made use of the feeble-mindedness and psychopathic explanations for female juvenile delinquency interpreted the sexual misconduct of the adolescent girl as a product not of conscious sexual desire and autonomous sexual decision making but of inherent pathological conditions that could be managed only through the implementation of external social controls. Other experts and reformers of the period, however, drew on, furthered, and redirected some of the assumptions about female adolescence in Hall’s work to see girls as willfully engaged in deviant activities for the purposes of personal pleasure and self-determination. This group of Progressives acknowledged the emergence of a normal female sexual instinct during adolescence, recognized its potential for sublimation under proper environmental conditions, and argued for remedies that emphasized education, opportunities for wholesome recreation, improved economic circumstances, sound family dynamics, and individual psychological guidance over punishment and repression.

Jane Addams set the tone for this approach in her 1909 text, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*. Born in 1860, Addams was raised in an upper-middle-class,
socially conscious family and educated at the pious and academically respectable Rockford Female Seminary in Illinois. During her early years, her thinking about herself and the world were most influenced by nineteenth-century domestic ideology, with its valorization of civilized women’s superior capacity for moral insight, feeling, and agency, as well as romanticism, which emphasized both individuality and the organic connection of all beings. What historian Dorothy Ross calls this “composite domestic/romantic epistemology” propelled Addams to become a leader among the first generations of turn-of-the-century white, Protestant, middle-class new women in seeking to expand the application of domestic values from the home into the public sphere and to align the goal of female self-realization with the fight for social justice. In 1889, she helped to found the Hull House settlement in Chicago, which became a model for social reform efforts in the Progressive era. Through her work at Hull House, Addams continued to derive her principles of democratic social ethics and put these into action by providing direct services to the poor, advocating on their behalf, facilitating their political organization, and encouraging solidarity across lines of class and culture. In all of these endeavors, she also engaged in the practice of what Ross calls “interpretive sociology.” In contrast to contemporary academic sociology’s emphasis on social knowledge that was derived from abstract reflection and the purportedly objective observation of specialized problems, Addams undertook the creation of knowledge about social groups and relations that was “interpretive, socially situated, relational, warranted by personal experience, and gendered.”

The knowledge about youth conveyed in *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* falls under this rubric of “interpretive sociology.” Here, Addams sought to understand working-class immigrant boys and girls on their own terms and then to interpret their experiences to her own class of reformers to elicit sympathetic response and collective social action. She derived her insight into adolescence from the records of the juvenile court but also, more importantly, from her own intimate relationships and experiences with the young people she had encountered at Hull House. This experience with the young authorized her to tell their stories and required her to consider the multiple perspectives on youthful (mis)behavior held by working-class youths themselves, their parents, and the respectable readers of her book. Her conception of “socially situated” knowledge notwithstanding, Addams nonetheless also established the starting point for understanding the adolescent that all of these perspectives first had to concede: the recognition of the powerful “emotional force” that “seizes” all girls and boys with the onset of the sex instinct at puberty. Without attending to the upheavals
in the history of the race that occasioned and were reflected by this force, Addams decidedly joined Hall in seeing the emergence of the sex impulse as the fundamental source of vital energy, compassion, and idealism in the development of the individual, as well as of a distinctive individuality that reached its fullest potential in the service of humankind. In comparison with Hall, she asserted that problems during adolescence arose less because of the inherent volatility of the sex instinct or because civilization inevitably had to repress it, than because modern society had not taken enough initiative to provide alternatives to the crass, commercial outlets ubiquitously available for its expression. In Addams’s analysis, working-class parents, whom she had sympathetically observed making untold sacrifices for their children according to their own understandings of their children’s best interests, were far less to blame for the behaviors of their children than was the failure of the collective will to provide the young with opportunities for “more adequate public recreation” and meaningful, well-paid forms of industrial labor.14

Addams’s construction of particular knowledge about the adolescent girl also differed from Hall’s in important ways. For Hall, as for Spencer and Clarke, the onset of puberty occasioned some measure of both immediate weakness and sustained deficiency in the girl’s development, which justified limiting her educational opportunity during the teenage years and prevented her from making an innovative contribution to racial and social progress as an adult. Hall certainly lauded the girl’s exemplary capacity for feeling and compassion, but he also deemed that her altruism was to be normatively manifested in her roles as wife and mother in the private home. Departing from nineteenth-century critics of precocity in the girl’s behavior, Hall looked bemusedly on the modern girl’s various assertions of independent selfhood, but he also distinctly divorced these from her powers of empathy and worried that they might thwart her realization of her true self and, consequently, compromise the maternal endowment she was to bequeath to the ongoing evolution of civilization.

Addams, in contrast, found nothing debilitating about the onset of female puberty and discovered that the same “quest for adventure” was the primary force driving male and female adolescent development alike. To be sure, she echoed Hall in noting that the roots of such a quest most likely lay in “the unrecognized and primitive spirit of adventure corresponding to the old [male] activity of the hunt, of warfare, and of discovery,” and she noted that the universal adolescent search for excitement was most often misdirected in sex-specific ways. However, she also decisively deemed the adolescent prerogative of “yearning towards the world” to be as much a province of the girl as her brother.
Addams then went on to set the girl apart again by aligning her longing for individuality and her capacity for altruism in such a way that she would not only privately exemplify the compassion necessary for the creation of a truly democratic social life, but simultaneously achieve individual purpose and social change by publicly acting on it. Beginning her description of the modern girls she observed on the city streets with the same sort of benevolent posture assumed by Hall, Addams thus went further in seeing in these assertions of youthful female independence the mutually reinforcing potential for self-realization and social progress:

As these overworked girls stream along the street, the rest of us see only the self-conscious walk, the giggling speech, the preposterous clothing. And yet through the huge hat, with its wilderness of bedraggled feathers, the girl announces to the world that she is here. She demands attention to the fact of her existence, she states that she is ready to live, to take her place in the world. The most precious moment in human development is the young creature’s assertion that he [sic] is unlike any other human being, and has an individual contribution to make to the world. The variation from the established type is at the root of all change, the only possible basis for progress, all that keeps life from growing unprofitably stale and repetitious.

The advocates for coeducation in the 1870s had made a similar link between civilized adolescent girls’ potential to “rule themselves” and to participate in the “regeneration of the world.” Addams’s more radically democratic vision now counted immigrant and working-class girls as among those who experienced “youth’s most obvious needs” for independence and self-expression and were driven by the “old desire . . . to bring about juster social conditions” for all. Like G. Stanley Hall, she was more willing than Clarke’s initial critics had been to accept the frivolous giggling and outrageous fashions as part of adolescent girlhood. She, however, neither defused nor heightened anxiety over such enthusiasms by perceiving them as mere “surface phenomena” that also threatened to conceal from the girl her essential domestic destiny. Rather, for Addams, girls’ desire “to appear finer and better and altogether more lovely than they really are” was a longing that was “pregnant with meaning,” which had to be fully mined for its deep social significance and also “properly utilized” to realize the Progressive ends of “bring[ing] charm and beauty to the prosaic city and connect[ing] it . . . with the vigor and renewed life of the future.”

Numerous works of the period affirmed that the working-class and immigrant adolescent girl possessed a normal sexual instinct that was too often
misdirected into inappropriate behavior because of the economic and social conditions in which she lived. Sophonisba Breckinridge and Edith Abbott’s *The Delinquent Child and the Home* and Ruth True’s *The Neglected Girl* employed more systematic research methods than Addams, but like her, they also made a firm connection between the formulation of social knowledge and its application to projects for broad-based social reform. Members of the Hull House female network, Breckinridge and Abbott received their doctoral degrees in the social sciences from the University of Chicago and were employed as researchers for the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy. Their study was based on an analysis of ten years of court and reformatory records from the Cook County Juvenile Court and on interviews with court officials and families of delinquents. Likewise, True, a social investigator for the Bureau of Social Research of the New York School of Philanthropy, drew conclusions about the causes of female juvenile delinquency from the extensive interviews she conducted with sixty-five problem girls. As the titles of their works suggest, Breckenridge, Abbott, and True placed particular emphasis on the role of family dynamics in shaping adolescent misbehavior. According to True, girls whose “impatient desire for action and experience” was thwarted by undue parental control or was allowed to languish under parental neglect were at particular risk of “social, moral and physical deterioration.” “The girls’ instinctive idealism, a wild thing here, unnurtured, is as elusive and fleeting as it is beautiful,” she declared. “It is foredoomed to fade swiftly in the midst of unfriendly reality.” Like many other maternalist experts and reformers of the period, Breckinridge, Abbott, and True saw the solution to the girl problem as residing at once in working-class mothers’ adoption of the habits, morality, and child-rearing sensibilities of the private white-middle-class family and in the structural reform of the conditions of industrial capitalism that would make it possible for individual mothers to achieve those ends.

While Addams and her fellow female expert reformers made significant, if also selective and strategic, use of Hall’s developmental psychology in their renditions of the girl problem, it was under the influence of physician William Healy that Progressive era approaches to juvenile delinquency took their most pronounced turn toward psychology, with important consequences for the treatment of juvenile delinquency and normal adolescence alike. Healy was born in 1869 to a poor tenant farming family in Buckinghamshire, England, and immigrated to the United States when he was 9 years old. In a remarkable story marked by hardship, personal initiative, and the benevolence of others, he eventually made his way to Harvard University, Harvard Medical School, and Chi-
icago’s Medical College, where he received his medical degree in 1900. After doing postgraduate research in Europe, Healy returned to Chicago to join a private neurology practice. In 1909, a committee organized by Judge Merritt W. Pickney of Chicago’s juvenile court appointed him to direct the newly founded Juvenile Psychopathic Institute (JPI), whose mission it was to use the medical and psychological sciences to investigate and treat the dismayingly problem of repeat juvenile offenders. Such a goal was impelled by the initial assumption, held by Ethel Sturges Dummer, the child saver, wealthy philanthropist, and leading patron of the JPI, and others on the committee, that recidivists were mentally abnormal and that psychological expertise was necessary to understand and to address the “root” cause of these children’s recurring misbehavior.

The most important direct influence on Healy’s work in carrying out the purpose of the JPI was the eminent psychiatrist and leader in the concurrently burgeoning mental hygiene movement, Adolf Meyer. In his capacity as director of the Henry Phipps Psychiatric Clinic at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Meyer pioneered in turning psychiatry away from a somatic approach to mental illness to a “psychobiological” framework. Mental illness, personal unhappiness, and socially deviant behavior, he maintained, were all caused by a maladjustment between the individual and the environment, the result of a broad array of intersecting biological, psychological, familial, and social factors. Along with other reformers and psychiatrists associated with the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, Meyer saw childhood and adolescence as crucial moments when such maladjustment appeared and therefore could be most effectively remedied. Healy brought Meyer’s mental hygiene framework to bear on the recidivists to Chicago’s juvenile court. He played a leading role in founding a child guidance movement that took as its primary subject the whole child who was best understood and treated as an individual “mind at risk,” rather than the social and economic context in which juvenile misconduct occurred.

In 1915, Healy published his first book advocating for a professional child guidance approach to the problem of juvenile delinquency. The Individual Delinquent: A Text-book of Diagnosis and Prognosis for All Concerned in Understanding Offenders was a massive tome reporting on his analysis of 1,000 case studies of repeat offenders, the average age of whom was between 15 and 16 years old. At the outset, Healy informed his readers of his fundamental finding that delinquency could not be reduced to a diagnosis of mental abnormality and declared that his primary interest was in “the complexity of human nature in relation to complex environmental conditions.” He also emphasized the importance of a developmental approach to comprehending and responding to this multifaceted dynamic. “Just
because the delinquent’s character is the result of a long-continued process of growth,’’ he asserted, “one needs to regard him as the product of forces, as well as the sum of his present constituent parts; one must study him dynamically as well as statistically, genetically as well as a finished result.” Many of the “causative factors” Healy found to be associated with delinquency—including inherited biological defects, physical ailments, stimulants and narcotics, incompetent parenting, poverty, bad companions, and commercial amusements—were commonplace in the Progressive era discourse of juvenile misconduct. Healy’s main contribution was his focus on the interactions among these factors and also the primacy he gave in diagnosing and treating the “mental life” and personality of the individual coping with them—what he succinctly summarized as “the complexity of causation, determinable through study of the individual case.”

Like Hall, Healy made much of adolescence as a delinquency-prone stage of life and singled out puberty as a fundamental cause of the serious “developmental physical abnormalities” and “mental aberrations,” as well as the milder “character changes and peculiarities” that often precipitated juvenile crime at this age. He explained that teenage boys were particularly prone to misbehavior if they suffered from “poor general physical development” or delayed puberty. Teenage girls, however, were apt to act out in sexually inappropriate ways if they experienced overdevelopment or premature development of the sex characteristics. In the case of girls, Healy was surprised to find that “in the great majority of instances the instabilities of adolescence are not at all centered about the menstrual period.” He nonetheless concluded that even in normally developed girls, the “tendency towards restlessness and perhaps misconduct,” and especially the “inclination towards sex misdemeanors,” was frequently exacerbated during the regular recurrence of menstruation. In reporting these latter findings, Healy highlighted a problem he believed plagued those who endeavored to understand either adolescence or juvenile delinquency. “The line of demarcation between the normal and the aberrational during the adolescent period,” he cautioned, “is very difficult to maintain.” Healy asserted that while it was important to distinguish between the “usual storm and stress” and the pathological during this time of life, it was by no means easy to do so. With this admonition, he suggested that at least some elements of his approach to the problem of the relationship between mental life and (mis)conduct in the “individual case” might have broader applicability beyond working-class and immigrant youths who found themselves under scrutiny by the juvenile justice system.

In juvenile courts and female reformatories around the nation during the Progressive era, these strands of thought regarding the female adolescent’s sub-
jectivity and sexuality competed and intertwined to produce a complex mélange of advocacy, paternalism, and social control. They also yielded varied and mixed results in the lives of individual girls and their families. What each of the Progressive era interpretations of the “girl problem” had in common, though, was a continued endorsement of the ideals of nineteenth-century civilized morality, particularly its valorization of female chastity, and a widespread focus on the immigrant and working classes. Progressive experts and reformers emphasized a qualitative difference between the compliant and the deviant, between those who conformed to the desirable norms of social behavior and those who, for whatever of a number of possible reasons, did not.

Yet, as Hall’s, Addams’s, and Healy’s work suggested, the distinction between “good” and “delinquent” girls was not always as evident as some reformers would have liked. The blurring of this line was in part realized by changes in the social activities of the “good” girls themselves. The movement of the white middle-class girl away from the Victorian ideals of girlhood began in the late nineteenth century with the threat she posed to the male privilege of higher education. It continued into the early years of the twentieth century as more girls of the middle class found their way into higher education and the labor market, as they mimicked the sexualized and autonomous behaviors of their working-class sisters, as they cultivated modern manners unique to their particular social environments, and most notably as they succumbed to “khaki fever” and sought out romantic encounters with servicemen during the First World War. The result of this unsettling conduct on the part of the middle-class girl was that by 1920, she too was being steadily drawn into the gaze of the social commentator and the social scientist. Far less likely to receive public punishment or be subjected to state intervention than her working-class or immigrant sister because of her privileged status, she instead became the catalyst for psychological conceptualizations of a normal modern female adolescence.

To acknowledge the white middle-class girl’s capacity for “deviant” behavior, however, meant that deviance itself needed to be reexamined, with the resulting new interpretive frameworks circled back onto the figure of the female juvenile delinquent. Historian John R. Gillis describes this relationship between ideas about normalcy and deviance as “dialectically inseparable in their origins and development.” In the case of the girl, it was the psychological formulation of a female adolescence that effected the dialectical negotiation between the resolutely working-class image of the juvenile delinquent of the Progressive era and the baldly middle-class figure of the flapper that emerged in full force during the 1920s. The female juvenile delinquent remained an important figure in the social
scientific discourse of this period, only now she appeared amid and in relation to
a proliferation of knowledge production about the development of the normal
adolescent girl. 27

RECASTING THE “GIRL PROBLEM”:
NORMAL FEMALE ADOLESCENCE IN THE 1920S

Psychologists’ recasting of the “girl problem” in the 1920s took on meaning in
relation to large-scale transformations in American society and, more specifi-
cally, to changes in young people’s lives, in intellectual and professional develop-
ments in the science of psychology, and in meanings and politics of gender. The
introduction of new industrial technologies in the 1920s made mass production
more efficient and fueled the widely touted economic prosperity of the decade,
although this was unevenly experienced by different groups of Americans. Most
of the economic growth was in the consumer goods industries, including the
manufacturing of automobiles and household appliances such as refrigerators,
stoves, and washing machines. Increasingly, American business was controlled
by large corporations, which created new kinds of jobs that standardized the
labor of both working-class and middle-class employees. Corporate success de-
depended on the efforts of marketers and advertisers, who made use of new
research techniques and retail strategies to sell not only consumer goods them-
selves, but also a consumer ethos that emphasized the values of personal plea-
sure, leisure, and individual status and success over older ideals of productivity,
collective responsibility, and self-restraint. Americans imbibed the values of the
consumer culture, as well, in their engagement with the new forms of media
communication that burgeoned during the decade, most notably the radio, the
movies, and the mass-market press. In part because of the migration of African
Americans and the immigration of eastern and southern Europeans to urban
areas, the majority of U.S. residents lived in cities for the first time in the 1920s.
The mass marketing of the automobile promoted the growth of suburbs, as well.
Many Americans embraced the modern values and lifestyle fostered by the mass
consumer economy, seeing these as signs of and routes toward ongoing social
progress. Others, however, expressed ambivalence, anxiety, and outright opposi-
tion and sought to stem the tide of change through the forces of political conser-
vatism, nativism, and antiradicalism that also took firm hold during the course of
the decade. 28

These developments provided the larger context for the significant changes in
schooling, work, and leisure that took shape for girls and boys from all social
milieus in the 1920s. The combination of compulsory school attendance laws and technological innovations that diminished the need for unskilled laborers meant that more children and adolescents from diverse backgrounds were attending public primary and secondary school than ever before. As historian Joseph M. Hawes explains, this led to the emergence of “an expanded, centrally important public-school system . . . that would socialize all its pupils into the modern metropolitan culture of postwar America.” Attendance at colleges and universities among white middle-class youths was on the rise, as well. At the same time, the expanding urban industrial economy that supported the growth of a mass culture emphasizing entertainment and consumption was aimed in large measure specifically at young people. Girls and boys from across the social spectrum now eagerly frequented the commercial dance halls, amusement parks, and movie theaters and adopted the risqué modes of fashion and style formerly associated with the working class and ethnic and racial minorities. Together, these transformations worked to both regulate and standardize the lives of the young to an unprecedented degree and to foster the creation of distinct and autonomous peer cultures through which the young rebelled against a range of social and cultural conformities. Certainly, the youth culture of the high school and college was never homogeneous. Nevertheless, more than ever before, it seemed that young people had little in common and, indeed, were fundamentally at odds with adults. They also had more in common with each other, irrespective of their class, ethnic, racial, or gender differences. It was, then, as white middle-class girls increasingly appropriated the manners and mores not only of their middle-class brothers but of their working-class, ethnic, and African American female peers as well, that they became renewed objects of interest for scientific experts, who now sought to articulate a set of expectations for a normal psychology of female adolescence that could be relied on to interpret and direct the entire universe of teenage girls’ behaviors.

Such scientific conceptions of the normal adolescent girl emerged within the broader purview of the increasingly professional and popular field of psychology in general and developmental psychology in particular. Beginning in the 1920s, the scientific study of the child became formalized, located in particular institutions, associated with certain credentials and professional identities, and tied to specific funding sources. Hall had done much to inaugurate a formal science of child development. However, even before the publication of Adolescence, he faced criticism by his colleagues in psychology for his lack of scientific rigor in relying on mothers and teachers to gather data for his child-study questionnaires, as well as for his speculative reliance on recapitulation theory. In addition, progressive
educators attacked his support of corporal punishment, his opposition to co-
education, his sanctioning of savage behavior in boys, his antidemocratic sen-
timents, and his perceived prurient attention to sexuality.30 With the waning of the
child-study movement, a new impetus to study the child arose in 1909 when
former mental patient Clifford Beers founded the mental hygiene movement,
spurring a national public interest in mental health. Mental hygienists incorpo-
rated insights from Freudian psychoanalysis, the behaviorism of John B. Watson,
and the holistic psychiatric approach of Adolf Meyer. Placing particular emphasis
on the environmental (as opposed to neurological or inherited) causes of mental
health problems and on the possibilities for prevention, they focused on the role
of early childhood experiences and the influences of family dynamics and paren-
tal responsibility in promoting or inhibiting sound mental health and appropriate
social behavior.31

From 1910 to 1919, mental hygienists contributed to the development of
new approaches to the treatment of juvenile delinquency. Viewing delinquent
behaviors as the product not of inherent mental defects but of personality dis-
orders, mental hygienists such as William Healy contended that psychological
treatment ought to replace the incarceration and punishment of juvenile offend-
ers. This approach led to the foundation of child guidance clinics associated
with the juvenile courts in cities across the country.32 The psychiatrists, psy-
chologists, and social workers who staffed the child guidance clinics faced
persistent difficulties in solving the problem of juvenile delinquency, however.
As a result, they increasingly turned to what they imagined to be the more treat-
able minor behavioral and emotional problems of children from modern middle-
class families as their primary object of concern. Their motives, explains histo-
rian Kathleen W. Jones, were mixed. Child guidance practitioners of the 1920s
were driven by a need “to legitimate their professional authority and thereby
expand the clientele for their services,” as well as by their humanitarian hopes
“to engineer a more perfect society by placing their faith in the promise of
science.”33

Child guidance experts depicted every child as essentially normal, with the
capacity for experiencing some degree of maladjustment during development.
What individuals needed to ensure their personal happiness and well being, and
what society needed to guarantee both the stability and progressive dynamism
of its citizenry, was for parents, teachers, and girl and boy workers of all kinds to
have access to expert knowledge about the expectations for normal development
and the means by which it was apt to go wrong. As Phyllis Blanchard, psycholo-
gist for the Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic, attested:
Gradually, the layman is becoming educated to the real facts in regard to these questions that normality is largely an abstract concept, that abnormality is not a separate entity but differs only qualitatively and by degrees, that each one of us has his own individual differences from the hypothetical normal type, and that, in a sense, we are all abnormal—some more, others less; some in one way, some in another. With this better understanding as to the meaning of abnormal trends, we shall be more prone to seek advice for ourselves and our children, and the psychiatric clinic will thus have, in time, a far-reaching influence upon individual and social welfare.34

In Blanchard’s framework, every child was an essentially abnormal child, with abnormal referring not to inherent defectiveness, but to the high degree of vulnerability to the many minor, but nonetheless consequential, pitfalls of normal development.

To child guidance practitioners like Blanchard who centered their attention on the abnormalities of the normal child, “normal” remained a highly “abstract concept,” with multiple and often contradictory meanings. Referring to the usual, the desirable, and the necessarily elusive, the idea of the normal posed particular problems for those devoted to thinking about the adolescent stage of development. “Normal adolescence,” wrote psychologist Jessie Taft, “is a combination of terms that may perhaps be considered contradictory. If by normal one means average, and at the same time implies painless adolescence or adolescence without conflict, then certainly there is a contradiction. For the adolescence that occurs without stress and strain is too unusual to be called normal, and if it were the usual thing, it would have no mental-hygiene problems to be discussed.”35 For Taft, Blanchard, and other psychologists of the 1920s, one of their primary tasks became the enumeration and explication of those “mental-hygiene problems” of “normal adolescence,” along with the developmental characteristics, needs, and mandates that underlay them.

Scientists of the 1920s ascertained developmental norms and identified mental hygiene problems by employing rigorous empirical research methods at universities and child welfare stations nationwide.36 Their findings were disseminated through a vigorous parent education movement that sought to enlighten mothers of their role in both causing and ameliorating the conflicts and difficulties in their child’s development. Women received such information from a variety of popular venues, including child-rearing manuals, nursery schools, women’s clubs, college courses, newspaper columns, and the newly founded Parents magazine.37 The work in child guidance, child development research, and parent
education in this period was supported by state and federal tax monies and by two private philanthropic foundations, the Commonwealth Fund and the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial. As with previous endeavors by scientific experts to understand and explain the child, much of the impetus for this work was decidedly inclined toward a concern for child welfare and hope for social reform and progress. Such goals also existed in concert and tension with experts’ interest in enhancing their professional status and influence, their anxiety about preserving social order and stability, and their increasing focus on the therapeutic treatment of individuals and families, as opposed to a broad vision for social change.38

Finally, the incursion of the “new woman” into public and intellectual life and the emergence of modern feminism also played a role in shaping new scientific conceptions of female adolescence.39 White men dominated the newly codifying and professionalizing social sciences of the early twentieth century. College-educated white women, however, also participated in shaping some of the questions, methods, and knowledge claims of the disciplines of sociology, psychology, and anthropology in these formative years.40 Jane Addams challenged the purportedly objective standards of academic sociology with an “interpretive” approach to the formulation of social knowledge that allowed for the influence of personal experience and gendered perspective. In contrast, many other women, especially by the 1920s, were drawn to professional social science precisely because they saw in its “supposedly neutral and meritocratic ideology” their best hope for escaping the sex stereotyping that limited their claims to intellectual and social authority and power. Unfortunately, the same hallmarks of meritocracy and objectivity that women saw as windows of opportunity were used to regulate access to and advancement within the professions as well, with standards of training, credentializing, and licensing often working to further male privilege.41

Ironically, it was because of the sexism women faced in seeking jobs in mainstream academic departments, as well as the low prestige associated with working with children, that some were able to find a home in the field of child development studies.42 Indeed, such was their influence during the 1920s that the editor of the first edition of A Handbook of Child Psychology felt the need to defend against it. “[M]any experimental psychologists continue to look upon the field of child psychology as a proper field of research for women and for men whose experimental masculinity is not of the maximum,” Carl Murchison lamented. “This attitude of patronage is based almost entirely upon a blissful ignorance of what is going on in the tremendously virile filed of child behavior. The time is not far distant, if it is not already here, when nearly all competent psychologists
will recognize that one-half of the whole field of psychology is involved in the problem of how the infant becomes an adult psychologically.” Murchison’s statement reveals the degree to which many men persisted in coding the scientist as male and the scientific enterprise as a masculine endeavor. It also exposes the anxiety experienced by some men in the psychological sciences as their disciplines became increasingly focused on mediating the problems of everyday life, including those related to child rearing and family relations. This marked an appropriation of domestic knowledge from women to the expert that became an important source of male psychologists’ professional and cultural authority. Despite women’s struggles by the late 1920s to hold onto gains made earlier in the century in the fields of professional social science, however, men’s achievement of that authority did not occur without some concessions to the contributions of women scientists.

For all the experts, men and women, who heeded Hall’s call to map the terra incognita of the psychology of the adolescent girl, it was almost impossible not to position themselves in some relation to the various perspectives on feminism and women’s rights that had culminated in women winning the vote in 1920. Indeed, the struggle for suffrage, the subsequent passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, and the ensuing battle over the Equal Rights Amendment inflamed a political, intellectual, and popular debate over equality versus difference in gender relations that came to inform virtually all conceptualizations of female development in one way or another. If women were no longer commonly excluded from public life by virtue of their shared disfranchisement, both proponents and opponents of feminism in the post-suffrage era wondered, were they now to be regarded as different from or the same as men? If different, did that difference connote deficiency, exceptionality, or vulnerability? If the same, did that mean women were entitled to equal opportunity, treatment, or outcomes in private and public life? In pondering these questions, many psychologists rejected feminism outright and used the tools of the discipline to dismiss feminists’ claims to social power and their critique of male domination. Some women in psychology found it hard to sustain a feminist critical stance in the face of the commitment to objectivity within social science ideology; they also sometimes deemed it undesirable to claim a feminist identity lest it jeopardize their authority as disinterested professionals. Even so, some female psychologists who took up the problem of the girl’s development managed to sustain both a devotion to empirical science and some measure of a critical stance against gender inequality. Notable among them were Phyllis Blanchard, Leta Hollingworth, and Lorine Pruette, whose descriptions of and prescriptions for adolescent girlhood are
discussed next. Representing a range of positions on the equality/difference paradox that defined modern feminism, Blanchard, Hollingworth, and Pruette drew on varying currents in feminist thought to name and normalize a category of modern female adolescence. They also constituted the “girl problem” as a particular venue on which the meanings and merits of feminism were to be discerned and debated, at a time when the organized political activity on behalf of women’s rights crested and then declined.

In 1928, Leta Stetter Hollingworth published a textbook entitled *The Psychology of the Adolescent* that constituted a notable synthesis of the psychological literature on normal adolescent development that had accumulated over the course of the decade. Hollingworth was born in 1886 to a doting mother who expressed much interest in her daughter’s early development. In the baby book Margaret Danley Stetter kept before her death when Leta was just 3 years old, she presaged two of the themes that would shape her daughter’s career as a psychologist when she wrote about the sense of injustice her 8-day-old baby girl felt when her father expressed his wish that she had been born a boy and recorded young Leta’s intellectual giftedness and precocity. Following her mother’s death, Leta experienced a painful childhood under the sway of a difficult stepmother and sought refuge in academic pursuits, at which she excelled. After graduating from high school at age 15, she went on to study literature and writing at the coeducational University of Nebraska, where she met her future husband, Harry L. Hollingworth, who would become a leader in the field of applied psychology during the early twentieth century. Following a brief attempt at a writing career and stint as a teacher in Nebraska, she moved to New York City, where Harry was working as an assistant to the Columbia University psychologist James McKeen Cattell. Discouraged by the lack of opportunity available to women to pursue an advanced degree in literature or even, because she was married, to teach in the public schools, she turned in 1911 to graduate studies in psychology at Teachers College, Columbia University. She and her fellow female students experienced considerable hostility. She managed to endure it in part because of her husband’s financial support and intellectual encouragement.47

Leta Hollingworth devoted her graduate career to countering reigning assumptions about women’s limited mental abilities. Some of the foundation for her work was laid by her advisor, the educational psychologist Edward L. Thorndike, who was a firm believer in women’s intellectual inferiority and was therefore not terribly enthusiastic about training women graduate students. Nonetheless, Thorndike, along with such psychologists as Robert Woodworth and Clark
Wissler, sought to replace the evolutionary suppositions of G. Stanley Hall with a rigorous experimental psychology whose findings were beginning to challenge numerous notions about the determining influence of the body over the mind. Hollingworth went further than her male colleagues in applying the methods of experimental psychology to investigating the question of sex differences in mental capacity. Her first contributions to the field were a study that disproved the deleterious effects of menstruation on women’s mental abilities and research that challenged the notion from evolutionary theory that males were more intellectually variable than females. By the time she received her doctorate in 1916, Hollingworth had already made several foundational contributions to research on the psychology of women. Her first academic job, as instructor of educational psychology at Teachers College, however, took her in another direction, and as a result, she came to devote most of her attention for the rest of her career on the social and psychological problems of mentally defective and intellectually gifted children. Her consideration of the normal adolescent in *The Psychology of the Adolescent* thus represented somewhat of a departure from her focus on deficient and exceptional children. Hollingworth did not, however, depart from her allegiance to or faith in the methods of empirical social science. The current “lore” of adolescence, she criticized, rested “upon the mere opinions of professional observers” rather than quantitative research, “which would give observation the status of scientific fact.” While acknowledging that much work still needed to be done in this regard, Hollingworth’s text nonetheless quickly became a standard in the field, offering an authoritative paradigm of the mandates of normal adolescence that thoroughly emblemized the current mode of thinking on the topic.

Hollingworth began her book with the problem of providing a definition of adolescence that would mark the distance psychology had traveled over the twenty-five years since the publication of Hall’s foundational text. Like most psychologists of child development by the late 1920s, she gently dismissed Hall’s “voluminous pioneer works on adolescence” as being “of historic value primarily, rather than of scientific or practical value today.” Indeed, in the most comprehensive analysis of individual human development published since *Adolescence*, Harry Hollingworth decisively rejected recapitulation theory as an explanation for any aspect of postnatal development. Instead, he endorsed a widely held view among social scientists that understood development to be the product of a complex interaction between the forces of nature and nurture. The study of individual development, he maintained, consisted of a multifaceted consideration of “the general facts of evolution and embryology, modified . . . by the
determination of education and training, and under constant influence of social heritage and established institutions.” That said, pressing questions remained about how and in what proportions nature and nurture interacted in the child’s development. As in the past, these questions carried both scientific and ideological import, as experts approached them from a variety of perspectives on the problems of individual freedom and social equality.

The orientation of mental hygiene certainly marked a change in focus to the influences of the child’s immediate environment on development, with many of its adherents professing egalitarian attitudes toward social difference. At the same time, scientists continued to pay attention to the biological influences shaping child development under several guises during the 1920s. Arnold Gesell, Hall’s former student and director of the Yale Psycho-Clinic, provided the most pronounced continuity with the organic developmental paradigm with his maturational model of development, which charted the biologically propelled, normative stages in the child’s physical, mental, and social development. Gesell’s approach created universal standards and expectations for development against which all children were to be ranked and measured, thereby supporting an ethos of conformity in an era of mass consumption and political conservatism. However, he also profoundly criticized the dangerously antidemocratic tendencies of behaviorism, which he accused of subjecting children to indiscriminate parental manipulation and power at the expense of fostering their inherent individuality.

Other liberal social scientists rejected the group classifications based on race and gender difference that predominated in late-nineteenth-century science with appeals to a common human nature or to the individual inheritance of mental capacity and temperament. Still others made gestures to the new science of endocrinology and its effects on the growth of the child. By the late 1920s, a mixture of environmental and biological factors even made its way into the mainline eugenics movement. Faced with criticism from geneticists for their simplistic understanding of the workings of heredity, as well as for their conservative political agenda, and cognizant of the environmentalist orientations of much of social science, mainline eugenicists ensured the survival of the movement and secured the expansion of its sterilization policies by shifting their focus to mothers’ responsibility in child rearing as playing the vital role in impeding or facilitating racial progress.

Within this context, Leta Hollingworth’s *The Psychology of the Adolescent* took up the thorny task of disentangling biological puberty from social adolescence, with the effect of challenging and reaffirming the expectations for gender, race,
and class difference and hierarchy inscribed by earlier architects of the concept of adolescence. Thus, one point of Hall’s with which Hollingworth did partially agree was that adolescence was a stage of life that was unique to modern society. According to Hall’s evolutionary biological paradigm, adolescence emerged via ontogeny’s recapitulation of phylogeny as a product of and facilitator to the acme of modern civilization. In his analysis, it was the civilized boy who experienced the longest period of auspicious moratorium between the achievement of biological maturity and the realization of adult social status, thereby accruing the greatest benefits conferred by this stage of life. Likewise, Hollingworth turned to descriptions of puberty rites in primitive cultures to argue that while bodily changes during the teenage years were universally experienced (differing most markedly by sex), “[t]he years of growth and change which follow [puberty], and which civilized peoples call adolescence, were and are usually disregarded in the practices of savage tribes.” Hollingworth nonetheless also departed from Hall in emphasizing that it was the developmental difficulties afforded and posed by western civilization for the child to “build up habits of self-determination and self support,” rather than sudden physiological change, that accounted for the storm and stress that was preeminently experienced by youths in modern society.57 Hollingworth also differed with her former advisor Edward Thorndike’s views on the matter. Thorndike was a rather lone voice during the early twentieth century in questioning Hall’s proposition that adolescence was necessarily, and beneficially, a period of emotional upheaval for any group of young people—civilized or primitive. Many more social scientists aligned with Hollingworth in attributing adolescent stress to the social environment rather than biology, but continuing to accept it nonetheless, and, indeed, valorizing it as a particular virtue of modernity.58

Even as they attributed the stresses of adolescence primarily to the demanding pressures of advanced civilization, however, experts also located the normal developmental mandates of the adolescent stage, irrespective of their environmentally induced stress factor, as largely beyond or before the influence of social forces. Thus, the central contribution of Hollingworth’s The Psychology of the Adolescent was its identification and explication of four “life-problems” or adjustments that she declared to be essential to the adolescent stage of development. Claiming to have found rudimentary evidence of these adjustments in the puberty rights of primitive cultures, Hollingworth identified them as “psychological weaning,” the struggle to achieve independence from the family; “mating,” the realization of heterosexual desire and its manifestation in marriage and
parenthood; “seeking self-support,” the choice of vocation and the achievement of economic independence; and “achieving a point of view,” the “finding” of the self and the rational determination of its place in society.59

These mandates constituted an organizational starting point for many considerations of adolescence during this period.60 In elaborating on them, experts expressed less interest in the role of biological puberty in shaping adolescent behavior than in the influences of early childhood experiences, family dynamics, peer pressures, the climate of schooling, and the demands of living in a fast-paced, heterogeneous, modern society. Reluctant to replace biological determinism with environmental mechanism, however, optimistic and enlightened psychologists also identified adolescence as the moment in the life cycle when the developing individual would take an active role in negotiating external influences and forge an independent self who would make an innovative contribution to social progress. They hereby deemed autonomy, choice, and self-determination to be the essential hallmarks of the adolescent stage of development. As Phyllis Blanchard and her colleague sociologist Ernest R. Groves explained, adolescence was above all else a period of “personality readjustment,” during which developing individuals were at last able “to acquire insight into their own [emotional] reactions” to parental and social influences and pressures and “remold themselves in harmony with newly acquired ideals.”61 While Hall, too, expected boys in late adolescence to exercise these capacities for individual selfhood, he also extravagantly enthused about the “feminized” qualities of adolescence that were rooted in the dynamics of the pubertal body—(inter)dependence, emotionality, religious enthusiasm, and altruism—of which he depicted the girl as the chief exemplar. As their interest in biological stress waned, psychologists also turned their attention away from these feminine characteristics to focus more fully on the masculine mandates for the adolescent to wrest out emotional, economic, sexual, and intellectual independence in a complex modern world. In deeming these mandates universal to the adolescent life stage, experts only incompletely attended to the ideologies of gender, race, class, and culture that significantly informed them. One result was that the conceptual adolescent girl was freed from an all-encompassing biological determinism. At the same time, her development was increasingly assessed according to her capacity to negotiate the opportunities and problems arising out of freedom of choice and identity formation, mandates derived from the struggles of the modern boy to realize his society’s highest achievements of rationality and individualism.

As we will see in the examination of each of the four mandates for adolescent development below, some architects of the “new girl” saw such expectations as
filled with possibility and honed in on the positive changes in the modern female adolescent’s psychology and social experiences. For them, modern girls were now finally poised to assume the masculine privileges that had long been associated with the adolescent stage of life. Others responded with anxiety and sought to offer reassurances about the enduring “feminized” qualities of the female psyche. A few attended to the girl’s experience of development as a way to challenge the dominant expectations of the adolescent stage itself. Even as no clear consensus reigned, psychologists of the 1920s tried hard to engender an authoritative set of requirements for normal female development that was meant to prescribe the surest route for every girl to personal happiness and social adjustment in the modern age.

THE FOUR “LIFE-PROBLEMS” OF NORMAL ADOLESCENCE

The “Captain of Her Own Soul”:
The Problem of Female Adolescent Autonomy

Scientific conceptualizations of child development have historically served as one important site for formulating and contesting the ideology of American individualism. The sociocultural context of the early twentieth century, into which a formal science of child development emerged to claim more authority than ever before, was particularly overwhelmed by rapidly changing ways of experiencing and defining the individual self and its relationship to the social order. Among such changes that Americans witnessed in these years were the growing anonymity of large cities; the massive movements of migrants and immigrants across internal and national boarders; the increased standardization of labor under mass production; the unsettling challenges to traditional religious beliefs by the certainties of science; the rising divorce rate; the abundant promises of mass culture to satisfy desires for personal pleasure; and the lamentation over the condition of human alienation within cultural modernism.  

Experiences of these changes differed, of course, along the lines of gender, race, class, and age. By the 1920s, opportunities for autonomy for many men of both the middle and working classes had notably declined as work in both white- and blue-collar jobs allowed fewer occasions for self-management and individual discretion. Middle- and working-class women, too, faced this increased standardization of labor in the workplace. Yet they also assumed both a real measure and the appearance of greater autonomy as they embraced expanding opportunities for consumption, leisure, work, and political participation. Likewise, working- and middle-class boys and girls coming of age in this period escaped some older
forms of dependency as they cultivated all-important peer relationships, fostered autonomous youth cultures in dynamic urban environments, and assumed active roles as workers and consumers in an advanced industrial economy. Many adolescents, however, were also subjected to greater adult surveillance than ever before as they came into conflict with new sorts of limits imposed on individual freedom by such institutions as the high school, the juvenile justice system, and the mass market. They also faced new pressures to conform to certain kinds of behavior by their own agemates.\textsuperscript{64} The socioeconomic forces that contributed to a decrease in personal autonomy for some and an increase for others gave rise to cultural anxiety that both worried about the personal implications of individuals having too little freedom and the social consequences of individuals having too much.

The newly codifying social sciences of the early twentieth century offered up many interpretations of these social changes and took on the problem of the relationship between the individual and the social as fundamental to the purpose of their inquiry. Sociologist William I. Thomas conceived of the relationship between individualization and socialization as a dialectic, each to be pursued for the sake of the other. He explained:

The problem of the desirable relation of individual wishes to social values is twofold, containing (1) the problem of the dependence of the individual upon social organization and culture, and (2) the problem of the dependence of social organization and culture upon the individual. In practice the first problem means: What social values and how presented will produce the desirable mental attitudes in the members of the social group? And the second problem means: what schematizations of the wishes of the individual members of the group will produce the desirable social values, promote the organization of culture and society?\textsuperscript{65}

Psychologists involved in the applied areas of child guidance and clinical psychology overall claimed to be optimistic about the compatibility of the dual mental hygiene imperatives for personal fulfillment and social adjustment. Yet, as Thomas’s questioning alludes, anxiety about the potential irreconcilability of these developmental goals often percolated beneath the surface of their confidence. Radical social theorists V. F. Calverton and S. D. Schmalhausen quoted the playwright Ibsen as the man who perhaps best understood this “sick paradox of the age”: “Suppress individuality and you have no life; assert it and you have war and chaos.”\textsuperscript{66}

When such anxiety was registered by social scientists, questions about the nature and role of woman were never far behind. Indeed, the paradoxes of
postsuffrage feminism prompted such questions because woman’s collective and unique responsibility to domestic and social welfare now competed with women’s diverse demands to exercise individual freedom and pursue personal fulfillment. In the context of these concerns, the figure of the adolescent girl posed her own set of problems peculiar to her age and her gender. Thus, in his introduction to Phyllis Blanchard and Carlyn Manasses’ *New Girls for Old*, Calverton belied the generally enthusiastic tone of the work to chastise the twentieth-century new girl for her seemingly overwhelming capacity for selfish, amoral individualism:

The new girl of today . . . seldom sees herself in terms of civilization. Instead she sees herself in terms of herself, without concern for values that are other than purely, or impurely, personal . . . Scornful of the moral ideas and social philosophy of the old generation, she has no anxiety to create new moral ideals or a new social philosophy. She does not realize that the rejection of an old set of moral values necessitates the erection of a new set. She does not see that her conduct must be determined by more than a pleasure-pain principle; that as a social being living in a social world she must think of herself in terms of social rather than individualistic behavior.67

Together with Schmalhausen, Calverton served as editor of the *Modern Quarterly*, the successor to the radical journals *The Masses* and *The Liberator*, and of three major interdisciplinary anthologies published between 1929 and 1931 that attended to problems of the relationship between the individual and the social, changes in gender and sexual norms, and intergenerational conflict in modern times. In his writings, he issued a strong critique of patriarchy and its damaging masculine sensibility. Despite his harsh indictment of the modern girl, then, he held that she was justified in proclaiming her freedom from an old set of manners and morals that were “unquestionably masculine in their emphasis.” The challenge of the contemporary adolescent girl, Calverton asserted, was to foster a new morality that would at once “exalt herself” and expose the pretenses and sufferings of a decadent patriarchal and capitalist culture. In this way, she would help to open avenues for expanded possibilities for “communal fellowship” and the greater “humanization” of civilization.68

If some of the more radical implications of Calverton’s conceptualization of individual freedom and social progress were beyond the reach of most psychologists of the 1920s, the basic problem of the modern adolescent girl’s claims for autonomous selfhood was not. Indeed, it was a small group of psychologists who lent a calming voice to what could sometimes be an unforgiving characterization of the flapper as she emerged in the popular parlance of the decade. Now looked
on as an authority emeritus on these matters, G. Stanley Hall set the tone by recasting his budding girl into the “flapper Americana novissima” in his 1922 *Atlantic Monthly* piece. If the girl in her teens “seems to know, or pretends to know, all that she needs, to become captain of her own soul,” he proclaimed, “these are really only the gestures of shaking off old fetters.” Hall’s rendering of the flapper charted the breadth of the terrain from defense to dismissal that psychologists would travel over the course of the decade in their accounting for the possibilities of female adolescent autonomy. Explaining the figure of the flapper by way of the mandates of female development, psychologists both attested to the imperative of the expression of the girl’s individuality and offered assurances of the containment of the independent female self by the essential feminine qualities of vulnerability, sociability, and selflessness.

The first American psychologist to address in-depth the question of female adolescent autonomy was Phyllis Blanchard, whose 1920 publication of *The Adolescent Girl: A Study from the Psychoanalytic Viewpoint* was to be widely cited throughout the decade. Blanchard was born in 1895 in rural New Hampshire, where by her own account she experienced a “lonely and isolated” childhood. She credited her mother, who was deeply unhappy with her marriage and with the “dull routine” of farm life, with spurring her on in the pursuit of higher education and a professional career. She graduated from the University of New Hampshire in 1917 and earned her PhD in psychology from Clark University in 1919, where she studied with Hall and read widely in the works of Freud, Alfred Adler, Carl Jung, Havelock Ellis, and Ellen Key. Following a brief stint at the New York Reformatory System and Bellevue Hospital, she joined the faculty at the University of Pennsylvania, where her husband, Walter Lucasse, was a professor of chemistry, and began what would be an illustrious career at the Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic.

In her first publication, Blanchard was eager to acknowledge her debt to Hall, “without whose unerring insight . . . this book would never have been written.” In fact, Blanchard’s several writings on female adolescence served as a bridge between Hall’s depiction of an adolescent girl almost wholly circumscribed by the Victorian mandate for a selfless femininity and emerging views that would try to reconcile female self-effacement with a universal adolescent mandate for personal independence and individual achievement. Along with other feminist psychologists of her generation, Blanchard’s interest in investigating and enabling the possibilities for such a reconciliation in the developing female psyche was rooted in personal experience. As a contributor to *The Nation*’s series on “These Modern Women” (1926–1927), in which she was invited to reflect on
the autobiographical origins of her feminism, she admitted, “The long struggle between my own two greatest needs—the need for love and the need for independence—probably had its effect upon my final choice of a profession.” In elaborating on this point, she explained that her parents’ difficult marriage, which was interpreted to her exclusively through her mother’s perspective, had fostered in her a deep “antagonism toward men” during her youth and young adulthood. As a result, she came to live under the “guiding fiction” that only one aim was worth pursuing—“the attainment of distinction by my own efforts without the need to love, honour, or obey any man.” It was the study of psychology that led her to recognize that women were capable of sexual desire and that “women needed men even as men needed women.” This insight led her to seek both love and freedom in her own life, a goal at which she ultimately counted herself to have been successful.72

In her first go-round at squaring femininity with adolescence in The Adolescent Girl, Blanchard attempted to synthesize the various schools of psychoanalytic thought to formulate her own unique thesis about female development. Following Hall, she conceded that the view of adolescence as a period of “organic instability” was “correct as far as it goes.” She also picked up where Hall left off in emphasizing the psychological nature of the crisis the girl faced at adolescence. To do so, she drew on the works of Freud, Adler, and Jung to posit the existence of an adolescent conflict between “love and ambition” that was peculiarly female in nature. The psychological dangers that threatened the adolescent were not, Blanchard argued, the product of a contest between the sexual instincts and outer repressive forces, as Freud proclaimed, nor of the struggle of the will for power, as Adler contended. Rather, the real basis for psychological conflict at adolescence lay, as Jung had explained, in the vying between these two motives for simultaneous realization in the life of the individual. Although individuals were always susceptible to the neuroses that could result from the imbalance of these two motives, the adolescent was particularly vulnerable to their competing influences because it was at this age when the exclusively “egoistic” proclivities of childhood were challenged by the “altruistic” impulses that first made their appearance with the onset of the sexual instinct. Furthermore, while the adolescent boy experienced the vying between self-realization and service to others largely as a stage to be passed through, for the girl the competition initiated a psychological stress that held serious consequences for her development. “The struggle is more profound in the girl than in the boy,” Blanchard asserted, “because she must learn to achieve complete subordination of the egocentric tendencies which have been the sole guide of her conduct up to this time. The
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boy, on the other hand, after a brief period in which his emotional life is flushed with this new impulse to serve his fellows, returns to a great extent to his old condition of egoism and self-aggrandisement.”

Of course, Hall had also made a claim for a feminized stage of development during which boys and girls alike were to awaken to racial imperatives that were to move them beyond their own selfish needs and desires. Civilized boys then went on to assume a leadership role in the advancement of biological and cultural evolution, while also cultivating the maximum possibilities for individual self-realization. Girls, however, ideally remained entirely devoted to the selfless sexual imperatives of marriage and motherhood. Blanchard’s analysis emphatically reinscribed the gendered bifurcation of these developmental mandates, now displacing the altruistic impulses of adolescence almost entirely on the girl. Indeed, she asserted that only a modicum of selflessness accompanied the onset of the sex instinct in the boy, for his role in procreation, which involved no sacrifice comparable to that of the woman in childbirth or child rearing, was “intimately connected with his own pleasure” and therefore remained “in entire harmony with his egoistic tendencies.” Blanchard then went on to follow through on Hall’s suppositions about female adolescent discontent. She asserted that because of the female “inferiority complex,” which, according to Adler, was induced by the organic changes that occurred at puberty and gave rise to a protest against femininity, and because of the unprecedented opportunities for modern girls to exercise freedom and independence in their daily lives, girls too often ignored, denied, resisted, or thwarted their essential feelings of compassion. The result was the emergence of a “bitter conflict” in the female psyche between the individualistic and social energies of the libido and an adolescent girl who was, inevitably, in a state of war with herself.

Unlike Freud and Adler, who resigned girls to an acceptance of their inferiority, or Hall, who consigned the expression of their altruism to the private nuclear family, however, Blanchard’s accounting of the adolescent girl entailed a critique of male standards of development. She also issued yet another rallying cry for girls to exercise their capacity for individual freedom by extending their compassion into the public sphere. Given the jeopardy posed to social progress by the ravages of the recent world war, Blanchard was especially eager to proclaim the vital contribution that an unselfish female nature was to make to social healing and advancement at this moment in modern civilization. She thus dismissed the girl’s current “antagonism to the established order of things” as a misguided attempt “to follow the man-made path instead of blazing the trail for herself.” Indeed, according to Blanchard, it was because the “emphasis upon the
egocentric ideals of life borrowed from a man-made set of values” were “so utterly foreign” to female nature that feminism had never received universal support among young women. A “true feminism” would not focus on the rights of women for economic independence or political equality, she argued, but rather would seek to make possible the fullest expression in the family and society of the uniquely female capacity for unselfish love and devoted service. With this reaffirmation of the importance of female difference to social progress, Blanchard identified the crisis of female adolescence as a defining moment for both the individual girl and the future welfare of humankind. “[I]f [woman] is to be successful in making the love ideal an integral part of the world mind,” she maintained, “she must first be certain of its supremacy in her own nature.”

Blanchard’s influential first book thus renewed older claims about the psychological and social benefits of female selflessness, now filtering them through the modern lens of psychoanalytic psychology. Whether and in what fashion the girl might become the “captain of her own soul” also found respondents among psychologists with expectations for the possibilities for female autonomy that differed from Blanchard’s. Such varying propositions for female adolescent selfhood made their appearance in two psychological discussions of the decade: the first regarding the tenor and boundaries of the parent-child relationship and the second concerning the role of individual personality and capacity, as opposed to group classification, in determining the educational and welfare needs of the child.

The question of female adolescent autonomy arose first out of a larger psychological discussion about the nuclear family. The current state and future fate of the family as a social institution was a prevalent topic of social scientific investigation and popular discussion during the 1920s. As the forces of economic, cultural, and sexual modernism seemed sure to continue to alter its traditional forms and functions, psychologists of various intellectual persuasions stepped forward to reaffirm the family’s primary influence on all aspects of the child’s development. While vestiges of expectations of the family as an economic unit with a hierarchical structure remained, increasingly family life came to be conceived and experienced as a site in which egalitarian relationships fostered self-expression and emotional intimacy among husbands and wives and parents and children. Potential conflict between the sexes and the generations also came to characterize the modern family, and as such, psychologists offered up their authority as the best source of insight and negotiation in the pursuit of personal happiness, family strength, and social welfare. In this spirit, they overwhelmingly
located the cause of social problems associated with rebellious, dependent, or neglected children to be rooted in domineering, indulgent, or unaffectionate parenting. To some degree, psychologists were willing to exonerate what they saw as well-meaning middle-class parents from blame, by determining parental inadequacies to be rooted in unresolved mental conflicts from the parents’ own childhoods. Most important, they were eager to assure that all parents could make use of psychological expertise and learn better ways of caring for their children to nurture the mental health of each individual child, while at the same time promoting family cohesion and social stability.77

One of the most important developmental mandates psychologists of the 1920s expected parents to enable was “psychological weaning,” the dependent child’s achievement of emotional separation from the nuclear family during adolescence. A core prescription in all schools of developmental psychological thought of the decade, behaviorist, psychoanalytic, and mental hygienic alike, psychological weaning was described in terminology afforded a biological imperative. Thus, in her explanation of this task, Leta Hollingworth both likened it to the process of physical weaning and, with a certain measure of humor, decreed it an essential attribute of growing up in all times and places. “In primitive life,” she asserted, “there was no question of the mother’s apron strings, not only because apron strings had not at that time been invented, but because release from the family situation was then accomplished by formal public action.” In the absence of such formalities in modern society, this dictate was to be facilitated by individual parents in the private home, who were expected to be neither too indulgent or protective nor too distant or domineering, so as to further in their children a capacity for autonomy that directed them toward both self-realization and social responsibility.78 The ideal of psychological weaning established expectations for self-reliance and individual freedom in a modern world that appeared to be dangerously eroding both individuals’ obligations for self-control and their opportunities for self-determination. While such real and perceived erosion of the possibilities for the cultivation and expression of individual selfhood were rooted in the complex constellation of socioeconomic factors discussed earlier, however, psychologists primarily attended to this problem by focusing on the dynamic relationships within the nuclear family. Seen as an essential function of private family relations, the individual subjectivity achieved there was variously touted by psychologists as having the potential to compensate for, adjust to, and resist against those forces threatening to undermine personal autonomy in broader social relations.79

Only a very few social theorists outside of psychology addressed the problem
of psychological weaning to attempt a structural critique of the nuclear family. Thus, for the radical Schmalhausen, who described himself as a “socialistic logician, believing profoundly in the communization of many vital aspects of life,” psychological weaning was less the route to autonomous individualism than to the cultivation of humanistic love in social relationships broader than those of the pathological nuclear family structure. According to Schmalhausen, the nuclear family was the sinister product of Christian capitalism, with the mother/child relationship a site of emotional oppression marked by domination, narcissism, and particularism from which children emerged incapable of fostering a sense of true social solidarity with their fellow human beings. “There is but one real problem in our lives: to seek liberation from neurotic bondage,” he proclaimed. “To be free—to be free—from those who would enslave and crucify us—with their love! . . . But what weapons are subtle enough against the insidious power of love? Especially mother love.” For Schmalhausen, the only lasting remedy for such danger, as well as the surest path to universal personal happiness and social evolution, lay not in any individualistic therapeutic remedies, but in the conversion of the entire social system to socialism. “Sanity,” he succinctly counseled, “is more profoundly a social than an individual problem.”

As Schmalhausen’s revilement of the mother/child relationship bluntly revealed, the concept of psychological weaning was never a gender-neutral proposition. Traversing quite a distance from Blanchard’s valorization of female selflessness, which she rooted in women’s capacity to mother, it could be used as a tool to disparage both developing girls and loving mothers for their failures either to achieve independent selfhood in themselves or enable it in others. “This problem of throwing off infantile dependency is especially hard, it seems,” asserted Leta Hollingworth, “with only children, with youngest children, with physically delicate children, and with girls. Also, the difficulties seem to arise quite largely from the possessive attitudes taken by the mother.” The misogyny in many such explications of the concept of psychological weaning was palpable. Behaviorist John B. Watson accused emotionally needy mothers of coddling their sons and daughters for their own selfish reasons, such that as adults, they would be unable to achieve economic independence, marital happiness, or the capacity to parent their own children successfully. At the same time, Freud’s psychoanalytic account of the Oedipus complex deemed adolescent girls to be essentially lacking in the psychological wherewithal to overcome infantile fixations, hereby relegating them to perpetual emotional and social childishness. For many psychologists of the period, the first problem was to be remedied by women seeking greater intimacy with their husbands, even as they continued to
attend, with appropriate reserve, to their children’s emotional needs. In addition, the second was to be solved by girls transferring their emotional dependence from their parents to their husband in marriage.  

For Leta Hollingworth, though, who devoted much of her early professional career to disproving accepted notions of inherent female psychological deficiencies, and for a few other psychologists eager to expand the possibilities for female autonomy, the problem of female individualization was recognized largely as a product of social factors that were subject to change. Questioning the universality and uniformity of the maternal instinct among women, Hollingworth argued that mothers held on so tightly to their children simply because society allowed them few other alternatives for meaningful social activity. “While affirming the essential nature of woman to be satisfied with maternal duties only,” she proclaimed, “society has always taken every precaution to close the avenues to ways of escape therefrom.” She also categorically rejected a Freudian interpretation that conceived individualization to be the product of intrafamilial psychosexual dynamics. Some degree of “homesickness” was biologically natural in all maturing children, she matter-of-factly averred, as they mourned the loss of physical comfort and solicitude that were theirs in infancy and early childhood.  

Psychologist Lorine Pruette kept with this line of analysis and critique and attributed the greater prevalence of “homesickness” among adolescent girls not to psychopathology or unresolved Oedipal conflicts but to the conventional idealization of the qualities of duty, sacrifice, and loyalty inherent in the image of the good daughter. To free the adult woman from the “dogma of the child,” and hence to promote less oppressive mothering, and to relieve the adolescent girl from her greater susceptibility to the emotional pain of psychological homesickness, both Hollingworth and Pruette advocated that the growing girl be encouraged to cultivate her own unique capacities and emotional satisfactions exclusive of her role either as daughter or potential mother.  

In New Girls for Old, Blanchard and Manasses also acknowledged the imperative for girls to separate from their families of origin, albeit with some important qualifications on the mandate. Here, they stepped forth in taking the bite out of some of the more virulent attacks on mothers that predominated in the psychological literature of the period. “Because of [mothers’] love and anxiety,” they benignly asserted, “it never quite seems to them that their daughters have grown old enough or wise enough to be the sole arbiters of their fate.” They also questioned how absolute the requirement of psychological weaning ought to be for the developing child, citing their findings of reports from perfectly well-adjusted girls who nonetheless preferred to live with their parents until they
married, and carefully qualifying the ideal of the self as an isolated individual. “To be sure, since we are erotic and social beings, we can not be altogether self-sufficient,” Blanchard and Manasses pointedly maintained, “but it is vitally necessary that we become so to a point where we are not entirely dependent upon the reactions of another individual for our sense of security and well-being.” Blanchard thus joined Hollingworth and Pruette in appropriating the concept of psychological weaning away from its association with female failure and deficiency to create a space in psychological theory for the possibility and value of female self-realization. Whereas Hollingworth and Pruette criticized the social arrangements that made it impossible for the girl to achieve the essential goal of an independent female self, Blanchard continued to hope that girls and women would at least partially reject the “egocentric ideals of life borrowed from a man-made set of values” and instead embrace the “love ideal” that was at the essence of their nature. It was a difference of opinion that would resonate in feminist psychologies of girls and women for a long time to come.

Along with the imperative for psychological weaning, the effort by psychologists of the 1920s to consider the whole child as an individual case—to approach every child as an “individual in the making”—also raised questions about the prospects for female adolescent autonomy. Following from William Healy, psychologists attested that whether in the family, the school, or the juvenile court, the assessment of the particularities of the individual child’s physical, mental, and emotional potentials and limitations was the surest route to healthy development, effective education, or beneficial treatment. “The true picture [of modern youth],” diagnosed Blanchard and Manasses, “is not one of an insurrectionist younger generation, all following the same line of conduct, as modern journalism would have us believe; it is rather that of distinct individuals struggling with very human problems and desirous of making some endurable adjustments to the demands of living.” For the growing girl, such a perspective intimated that the group classification of sex difference might not always serve to define wholly her capacity or determine her destiny. “The matter of first concern, in a consideration of the education for the adolescent girl,” stated psychologist Winifred Richmond, “is the girl herself.” Psychologist Willystine Goodsell emphatically agreed. In her 1923 treatise on girls’ education she reviewed for her readers the range of empirical studies on female intelligence and health conducted over the past fifty years that soundly disproved the claims of opponents of coeducation that bodily difference determined the girl’s abilities or necessarily circumscribed her education. Admittedly, some questions remained about whether girls differed from boys in their “fundamental taste[s] and interest[s].” For Goodsell,
though, this was not a sign of essential sexual difference but simply an indication that more attention needed to be paid to fostering the girl’s individuality from an early age. “Until women choose their field of work and have the same opportunity for self-development and self-expression within it as their brothers have,” Goodsell declared, “it seems idle to estimate temperamental differences, which may in generous measure, if not wholly, be explained by the diverse life experiences and training of the two sexes from babyhood.”

Most psychologists of the period were compelled to recognize that the diversity and pace of modern life had considerably broadened the scope of the “feminine milieu,” such that all women no longer conformed to a single life pattern. During the years of the girl’s adolescence, therefore, it was imperative that she receive the proper guidance by parents, teachers, and child guidance professionals to help her to negotiate her array of educational, vocational, recreational, and mating choices. Objective scientific tests to measure intelligence, skills, interests, and temperament would direct both the average girl away from expectations beyond her capacity and the exceptional girl toward challenges appropriate to her talents. The mandate of individualization thus proposed that sex was no longer the only gauge on which to chart the girl’s life course. To offset the risk that all of this would devolve into female selfishness, however, psychologists emphasized that the mandate of individualization encompassed a dual aim: that every girl find self-satisfaction and individual achievement in venues that promoted her own personal happiness, while at the same time optimizing her chances for contributing to the efficiency, stability, and progress of the wider social order.

“To say that the culture of personality, the liberation of individual powers, is the supreme end of education is to state only a half truth,” insisted Goodsell. “[I]ts complement is the fact that this cultivation cannot reach full fruition in isolation—partial or complete—from the living currents of social life around us.” Unlike Blanchard, Goodsell did not deem a “nurturing sentiment” to be inherent in the girl’s nature. Nonetheless, she did argue that it was vital that this sentiment be encouraged through the modern girl’s education, as indeed it had been “through many centuries of evolution.” For it was in the adolescent girl’s “feeling for human life” that lay the world’s best hope for “progress toward more healthful, happy, and beautiful living.”

The cultural work performed by this body of 1920s psychological thought that reified both the universality of developmental mandates and the individuality of the human subject was varied and contradictory. In one regard, the focus by psychologists on universally shared developmental norms, on the one hand, and the uniqueness of the individual, on the other, reinforced one another and
contributed to a larger effort by social scientists during the early decades of the
twentieth century to reject group classifications as insidious and detrimental to
the realization of human equality. Indeed, many social scientists worked hard in
these years to replace longstanding assumptions about essential racial and gen-
der difference with the notion of a common human nature marked by endless
individual variations. In other ways, though, developmental psychology’s dual
focus on the universal and the individual also managed to effect an obfuscation
of the categories of social difference that made it difficult to probe the ideological
underpinnings of developmental thinking. Thus, to deem psychological weaning
a universal mandate of adolescent development, and not to examine conditions
in the family or society that made its achievement more difficult for girls, left
girls especially vulnerable to diagnoses of psychological failure. Likewise, to
proclaim that girls had the same individual opportunities as boys and only had to
be psychologically tested to determine their unique capacities failed to address
the problems of gender bias in intelligence and personality testing, the various
kinds of conditioning that shaped girls’ “native” abilities going into these tests,
and the array of social obstacles facing those girls who attempted to pursue the
possibilities that the tools of psychological assessment charted for them. Some
feminist psychologists took it as their task to scrutinize such proclamations.
However, they, too, contributed their own sorts of unexamined assumptions
about social categories to the mix. Thus, when Blanchard registered her forceful
critique of the patriarchal sensibility that informed the universal value of individ-
ualism, she only went so far as to make girls the sole repositories of an alternative
value system built on the ideals of altruism and service. Such an analysis con-
tinued to leave the influence of patriarchal values on ideas about male develop-
ment largely immune to critique.

Moreover, despite the recognition of the importance of individualization for
the girl’s growth into maturity, most psychologists in these years also continued
to reify gender differences of one kind or another as the primary distinguishing
quality between human subjects. Thus, women and girls were still understood
to be different from men and boys, but now they were also recognized as
different, as individuals, from one another. While freeing girls and women from
all-encompassing deterministic assumptions about femininity, the latter concep-
tualization also allowed for continued exploitation of notions of female mystery
and incomprehensibility, as well as theoretically denied women a basis for social
solidarity based on gender. The difference/difference dilemma had the potential
to catch girls and women in a double bind perhaps worse than ever before. The
adolescent girl was now expected to be both selfless, by virtue of her gender, and
self-realized, by virtue of the mandates of her life stage, although psychologists were not always clear about how she was to negotiate these two developmental demands. Indeed, the best that some psychologists did in these years was to perceive these motives in conflict, with this particular burden coming to define in large part what it meant to be an adolescent girl. The ramifications of the double bind were marked by deep ambivalences. Those who, like Blanchard, championed the expression of female difference as the key to the girl’s development and to social salvation also unwittingly offered justification for the limitation of female opportunities for psychological growth and social participation. Conversely, those who, like Hollingworth, argued for female attainment of a masculine-style individualism, however critical of the social relations that worked to block such a goal, also opened the girl up to ridicule at her inability to achieve selfhood, to accusations of selfishness and frivolity, and to denial of a previously acclaimed unique female role in the world and of the kinds of personal and social power such a role afforded. Such ambivalences were particularly palpable in discussions about the developing girl’s sexuality, and it is there that we now turn.

“Mating”: Female Adolescent Sexuality in the “Age of Compulsory Expression”

In the 1920s, psychologists began to speak collectively of a normal female adolescent sexuality. The shift in the psychological discourse was in part descriptive, for a science of the normal was compelled to take into account the increasingly sexualized behaviors of adolescent girls and women in a variety of venues across the social spectrum. Indeed, while women’s and girls’ adoption of the practices and ideologies of sexual modernism was a gradual phenomenon that began before the turn of the century, there was no denying that by the 1920s, times had changed. Under the influences of an expanding market economy, changing patterns of work, schooling, and leisure, and the contributions of feminism, young women, especially, now asserted the same rights to sexual expression and pleasure that their brothers had long claimed. As sexologists’ analysis of this cohort revealed, adolescent girls and young women born after 1900 were far more likely than previous generations to take part in premarital petting and intercourse. Among college educated women, the changes in behavior were the greatest, with those born after 1900 for the first time being more likely than their less educated agemates to engage in premarital sex. Moreover, even greater numbers of girls in this period pursued sexual freedom in their manner of dress and use of cosmetics, their enthusiasm for the suggestive dances
of the Jazz Age, and their eager consumption of new forms of entertainment and advertising, where the ideal of heterosexual experimentation and expression was sold in countless subtle and not-so-subtle ways. In addition to registering its observations of these behaviors, the psychological discourse about female sexuality in the 1920s was also normative and served as a site of struggle over the organization and regulation of the power dynamics of sex/gender relations amid current forces of social change. Thus, as women and girls of all classes increasingly made appeals to traditional male prerogatives of higher education, wage labor, political participation, and sexual autonomy, some psychologists sought to reestablish the grounding of a conventional domestic femininity in large part on the terrain of sexuality. For Hall, who drew on Freud and Ellis to make some significant gestures toward the possibilities of a normal female adolescent sexuality, the emancipated and immodest flapper constituted a relief rather than a threat, with her newfound sexuality serving as one of the surest signs of her enduring femininity. “[T]rue progress,” he asserted, “demands that sex-distinctions be pushed to the uttermost, and that women become more feminine and men more virile. This need modern feminism has failed to recognize; but it is just this which flapperdom is now asserting. These girls not only accept, but glory in, their sex as such, and are giving free course to its native impulses.” In Hall’s account, as in Ellis’s and Freud’s, the natural sexual impulses the adolescent girl was so eager to express, and which served as the foundation for her sex/gender difference and identity in adulthood, were marked by volatility and passivity, aimed at making herself desirable to adolescent boys and older men, and oriented toward marriage and reproduction. Feminist psychologists of the 1920s also expected that the “native impulses” of youthful femininity now included, and even mandated, some semblance of heterosexual desire. They also, however, raised as many questions as they answered about what composed woman’s original (hetero)sexual nature and how it developed over the life course. As a direct counterpoint to Hall, Leta Hollingworth noted that the female sexual impulse was so influenced by social conditions that it was hard to determine what constituted its essence; it was, therefore, inadvisable to interpret it as a sign or cause of other aspects of essential sexual difference. Uniting this range of perspectives, though, was a general agreement among child guidance experts that underlying the social phenomenon of adolescence was biological puberty and the various problems of sexual adjustment this physiological event posed for the teenage boy and girl. No longer deemed the primary cause of the modern adolescent’s volatility, biological puberty nonetheless was recognized as fundamental in properly organizing the erotic sensibilities of
the developing child. “These four or five years [following the onset of puberty] hold the only chance the average boy and girl will have to establish their heterosexuality,” mental hygiene leader Frankwood E. Williams ominously warned. “Once prevented, it can never come naturally and normally again.” Williams’s attention to puberty in this regard depended on two other suppositions about sexuality made by psychologists in this period, both of which were derived from psychoanalytic explanations of the psychosexual development of the child. The first, widely endorsed premise was that the sex instinct made its appearance during infancy and affected the developing child long before the onset of puberty. For many child guidance experts, this childhood sex instinct manifested itself not as feelings of desire, but as curiosity about the body, sexual difference, and reproduction. Its imperatives were, therefore, best satisfied by an education that provided the child with knowledge about these aspects of sexuality in developmentally appropriate ways. The second premise was that girls in particular passed through a “homosexual stage” in early adolescence, during which they were prone to “crushes” on their female peers and older women. Compelled to account for the homosocial orientation of much of girl culture, many developmental psychologists deemed the emotional and even physical attraction between girls and women to be normal. However, they also warned of the danger to the adolescent girl’s psychological health if she failed to move on and achieve the developmental goal of heterosexual adjustment. Both suppositions, while containing the potential to conceptualize the sexuality of the developing female child in new ways, ultimately worked to heighten awareness of puberty as the moment when the maturing sex instinct focused on desire for the “opposite” sex.

The role of puberty in establishing heterosexuality, along with the older concomitant view of puberty as the fundamental determinant of dichotomous sexual difference, was also reinforced by findings in the emerging science of sex endocrinology. As historian Nelly Oudshoorn explains, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, gynecologists and biologists in Europe and the United States developed “the concept of sex hormones as chemical messengers of masculinity and femininity.” Sex endocrinologists thought of the sex hormones in dualistic terms, with the gonads of each sex secreting singular, “opposite, antagonistic” substances. These scientists thus made important new discoveries about how the body worked, while also remaining “very close to common-sense opinions about masculinity and femininity.” Prominent American physician William P. Graves incorporated the findings and interpretative framework of sex endocrinology in the 1929 edition of his gynecology textbook. Emphasizing that
an understanding of the hormones was “essential in the study of every branch of medical science,” he also admitted that “much of the knowledge gleaned in this new line of research still remained “contradictory and confusing.” The high degree of speculation regarding the functioning of the endocrine system did not, however, stop this physician from asserting the primacy of the influence of the “glands of internal secretion” over the entire functioning of the female organism. Substituting the idea of the metabolic chemical reaction for what was previously perceived as interorgan relationships structured by the workings of the female nervous system, Graves embraced the use of the term “female sex hormone” to refer to the secretions produced by the ovaries, “since it implies the wide distribution of the substance, and at the same time begs the question as to the place or places in which it is elaborated.” The term also begged the question as to the timing of the elaboration of the sex hormones in individual human development. Gynecologists and physiologists recognized the important, if still poorly understood, role of the endocrine system in governing growth and sexual differentiation from the earliest weeks of embryonic life. At the same time, they reestablished puberty as the crucial period for the formation of the “sex complex,” the “metabolic synthesis” that produced the traits of biological and psychological masculinity and femininity, as well as gave way to the possibilities for heterosexual eroticism in normal adolescent boys and girls.

The new science of endocrinology thus provided some continuity with earlier conceptualizations of adolescence as a biologically driven phenomenon. Even so, references by psychologists regarding the influence of the hormones over female adolescent development remained markedly tentative during the decade less because of the lack of existing scientific knowledge on the subject than the commitment by social scientists to discerning the interaction between the forces of nature and nurture in human development. Given this focus, psychologists accepted the imperative of heterosexual expression as a biological fact and avidly pursued what they saw as more compelling questions regarding the socioeconomic causes of sexual taboos, the social and psychological consequences of sexual repression, and the proper ways to educate children about the developing body and its normal sexual urges.

Psychologists’ contention that the sexual impulse existed as a normal biological urge for the girl as well as the boy was, nonetheless, a significant one, as was the corollary that it held similar potential to cause difficulties in adjustment during her adolescent years. The boldest claims about what this meant for adolescent behavior came from feminist psychologists who advocated that the adolescent girl ought to be able to satisfy her “avidity for new sensations”
through physical encounters with boys. Thus, Blanchard endorsed various kinds of sex play, short of intercourse, that would give the girl “a direct physical relief to the fundamental impulses of sex.” She and Manasses also enthusiastically recommended petting as perhaps the most effective way for the psychologically healthy girl to expend her sexual energy, while still remaining within the bounds of existing social expectations for female behavior. The maintenance of a balance between expression and control was, in fact, the key to successful adolescent adjustment and, not insignificantly, to her future domestic bliss:

Thus the girl who makes use of the new opportunities for sex freedom, when not driven by other emotional maladjustments to carry her behavior to too great lengths, . . . is likely to find her experiences have been wholesome. Contrary to a section of popular opinion, she may be better prepared for marriage by her playful activities than if she had clung to a passive role of waiting for marriage before giving any expression to her sex impulses.105

Still, to manage the contradictions inherent in such recommendations and to negotiate the labyrinth of dangers and possibilities born from both the biological expression and the cultural repression of sexuality, many psychologists opted to revisit an interpretive approach with a long history in ideas about female sexuality. Thus, the psychological consensus in these years continued to hold that female adolescent sexuality should be manifested as something other than autonomous desire. Indeed, before she endorsed petting as the best way for the girl to express and contain her sexual impulses, Blanchard drew from psychoanalysis and endocrinology to assert that the adolescent girl was metabolically better equipped than the boy to divert her newly awakened sexual ardor into other emotional outlets. This was because she experienced “no direct source of constant [sexual] stimulation such as that furnished by the accumulation of spermatic fluid in the male.” Keeping with Ellis's fascination with the “diffusion” of the sexual impulse throughout the girl’s temper, Blanchard’s early work described the girl’s newfound sexual energy as a “general change of feeling-tone,” conditioned by the functioning of all the glands of internal secretion, that was more likely to be felt as love, compassion, or religious ecstasy, and less so as anger or fear, than autonomous sexual desire.106

Others who subscribed to a psychoanalytic approach focused on the adolescent girl’s capacity for sublimation, on her ability to convert her sexual energy into either high creative pursuits or more mundane practical employments. In her foreword to William Thomas’s *The Unadjusted Girl*, one of the works of the decade that located the cause of female juvenile delinquency in the mis-
placed expression of universal psychological wishes, Ethel Dummer lauded such possibilities:

Those who, in Freud’s teaching of the danger of sex repression to mental health, find merely sanction for license, miss the point of his wonderful message. This theory that life force, libido, creative energy, follows the Law of Conservation true of Physical force—that as motion may become heat, light or electricity, so this inner power may be transmuted from procreative effort to creative work of hand and brain—would seem to explain much of the modern success in the rehabilitation of the young prostitute.107

Moreover, if the girl’s sexual impulse was more often experienced and expressed as something other than physical pleasure, her sexual (mis)behavior, when it did occur, was primarily motivated by underlying emotional conflicts that had little to do with the willful satisfaction of bodily desire. In numerous case studies of girls from a range of social backgrounds, child guidance experts marshaled the evidence for such a claim. Hungry for love or good times, girls were thought to pursue sexual encounters to compensate for inadequate parental affection or to satisfy the more benign youthful cravings for freedom, adventure, and recreation. Likewise, other behaviors that seemed to bespeak a female adolescent sexual confidence, such as smoking, drinking, dancing, wearing cosmetics, or dressing suggestively, almost always could be traced, with the help of a trained expert, to extrasexual emotional motivations that were to be approached not with condemnation and punishment but with compassion and clinical treatment.108

These sorts of analyses partly echoed past formulations that inextricably tied female passion (or, rather, passionlessness) to romantic love, the desire to serve others, and the yearning for motherhood. What was different in the psychological discourse of the 1920s, though, was that the proposed substitutions for the girl’s sexual desire were increasingly seen as the distinct product of an adolescent, as opposed to a mature, psyche. Thus, even as Freud’s theory of female psychosexual development focused on the transference of the girl’s aggressive sexual impulse into the desire for a baby, some feminist psychologists were beginning to speculate on whether the maternal instinct was present during girlhood at all. Keen as she was on valorizing the “love ideal” as an essential aspect of female nature that was rooted in the capacity to mother, Blanchard recognized the manifestation of maternal feeling in the girl in her care for her younger siblings, her love for strange children, and her interest in baby animals. However, she also acknowledged that there were strong social pressures on the girl to feel such solicitousness and suggested that whatever maternal instinct
female adolescence, 1830–1930

existed in the adult woman arose out of the biological experience of mothering. “That there should be even these suggestions of maternal instinct during adolescence,” Blanchard wondered, “is remarkable when we consider that at best it can only be faintly prophetic of the powerful impulse to come, since it lacks the complete physiological background which only motherhood itself can give.” “It is possible,” Lorine Pruette mused in a similar vein, “that a fuller development of the girl’s emotional life is necessary before she can feel so strong an interest in children as in sweethearts.” Even more boldly, Hollingworth wondered whether the sex instinct, if left uneducated, would become the reproductive instinct at all, in girls or boys. “As thinkers about youth’s problems,” she suggestively contended, “it is important for us to bear in mind that each human being is born without knowledge of the causal connection between sexual response and reproduction; that each has to learn it, either by instruction from others, or as primitive man had to learn, by sheer experience of cause and effect.” For these psychologists, it was not the longing for motherhood that compelled the girl into sexual exploits but rather emotional deprivations that had their roots in the needs of childhood and eminently immature cravings for excitement and fun.109

Within the wider culture, such a view allowed for at least two possible interpretations. For some, such as the feminist and birth control advocate Margaret Sanger, who published several influential sex education manuals in these years, the distinction made between the adolescent and mature female psyche provided justification for both the sex education and the protection of girls during childhood and adolescence and the right of adult women to make autonomous decisions regarding their sexuality.110 Many others preferred not to distinguish the adolescent girl from the adult woman but to conflate the two with the flapper serving as the emblem of female sexuality. Depicted in many popular venues as possessing a layer of sexual bravado barely disguising her essential ignorance, dependence, and vulnerability, the flapper was embraced for her daydreamy, giggling eagerness to please and to respond to male sexual desires. With her sexual impulse understood as the product of juvenile yearnings for independence and enjoyment, at best, and childish longings for emotional solicitude, at worst, the normal adolescent girl set a standard for female sexuality that in many ways served to reinforce and create anew links between femininity and the powerlessness of immaturity.111

Feminist psychologists’ renderings of female adolescent sexuality made some contributions to this view. However, they also distinguished themselves in the apprehension they expressed about the psychological and social implications for the growing girl of what Lorine Pruette termed the “age of compulsory expres-
“What kind of girl, then,” Blanchard asked, “is she who is victimized by this new freedom of modern youth, who finds that her trust in her boy companions has been misplaced and that they have taken advantage of her condition?” She found an example of such a potential victim in one 14-year-old girl who revealed her discomfort at the heightened expectations for female eroticism: “All the other girls let the boys kiss them,” the girl remarked, “and if I don’t they will think I am a poor sport . . . But I don’t really like it very much, especially with some of the boys.” In one respect, Blanchard’s musing and description of this clinical case resonated with those depictions of the adolescent girl that attempted to render her vulnerable and to diffuse her claims to social and sexual power. Her concern also sought to expose the power relations structuring the supposedly natural and beneficent imperative for female sexual expression during adolescence. Indeed, along with their enthusiastic commendation of female sexual expression, Blanchard and Masasses also acknowledged that girls were pursuing sexual freedom in a social world still strongly influenced by a double standard for sexual conduct. These psychologists regretfully affirmed that girls suffered far greater consequences than boys for their inability to maintain the appropriate balance between the pursuit of erotic pleasure and socially sanctioned forms of sublimation and self-control.

Lorine Pruette further suggested that those promises to girls and women for greater sexual and economic freedom made by both feminists and the seductions of a modern capitalist culture had fallen far short of their claims to improve the status of women in society. Pruette, who was born in 1896 in rural Tennessee, described herself as a “lonely, bitter” child who by her teens had developed the tenets of what she referred to as “a sort of perverse feminism”—“a well-developed dogma on the world’s injustice toward women because they could not have everything they wanted, on nature’s injustice toward women because they have to bear the children, and a lack of interest in God because he was a man.” She studied at Clarke, with Hall, and at Columbia, where she received her PhD in 1924. In addition to her work as a college teacher, she also served as a psychological consultant at R. H. Macy and Company and to various New York hospitals. She identified herself as a writer as well as a psychologist and was well known in the 1920s for her publications on the modern woman in professional journals, as well as in such venues as the New York Times and The Saturday Evening Post. Like Hollingworth, Pruette was critical of the social conditions that hampered women’s opportunities for individual achievement. She struck a much more disillusioned tone than either Hollingworth or Blanchard in her several writings on the adolescent girl. In a world in which, for good or for ill, the
adolescent girl viewed feminism as hopelessly anachronistic, in which she was expected to labor in a workplace rife with gender discrimination, and in which her femininity was assessed on the basis of her sex appeal, Pruette warned, she found herself dangerously adrift in a sea of compulsory freedoms, with no larger vision of self-development or social progress to guide her. “She is a very small and untried knight, riding off to the jousting,” she wryly observed of the flapper. “She is uncertain of her weapons . . . She is uncertain of her antagonist. Is it Man, or men, or the world? She does not even know the prize, but she thinks it must be something wonderful if it is to be worthy of her.”¹¹⁶

Highly ambivalent about the role of the modern adolescent girl in achieving progress for the female sex, Pruette posed as one possible solution to the problems she raised a developmental view of femininity. “We have been having an interlude of women as perennial adolescents,” she ruefully noted, “. . . but there are signs that the interlude is about over.” The modern girl, whose femininity was conceived of largely as a function of youthful heterosexuality, represented but one necessary stage in the development of the human female. According to Pruette, and to feminist writer and lecturer Beatrice Forbes-Robertson Hale, it was this generation of girls who would finally enable woman to “grow up”—to become both more feminine, by drawing on the traditional strengths of the female sex as wives, mothers, and social caretakers; and less so, by deflecting currently exaggerated sexual energies into socially meaningful intellectual and political work. Resisting the current tendency to equate the flapper with mature womanhood, but also recognizing that the modern adolescent girl was most likely an enduring social fixture, Hale turned from a focus on the evolution of the female of the species to a consideration of individual human development. Female “exhibitionism,” “narcissism,” and “sexual free-booting,” she suggested, were perhaps episodic behaviors in the woman’s life, appropriate to the adolescent stage of development, but by no means emblematic of adult womanhood.¹¹⁷

Ironically, while formulations such as Pruette’s and Hale’s did little for the image of the adolescent girl, they were potentially useful in redeeming the character of the modern woman. However begrudgingly, Pruette and Hale accepted the dominant psychological characterization of female sexuality in these years, a sexuality exuberant and vulnerable, as well as highly susceptible to influence by extrasexual emotional motivation. Where they parted company with other psychologists and the culture at large was in their refusal to accept the youthful flapper as the womanly ideal for modern times. Indeed, they relied on the logic of developmental psychology to offer up the adolescent girl herself as a buffer to this ideal. Thus, as modern psychology made it increasingly clear that
adolescents were not adults, new possibilities opened up for the identification of qualitative differences between girls and women. Recognition of these qualitative differences became a way for Pruette and Hale to return to the adult woman some measure of social power that they perceived to be lost in the grounding of femininity on youthful eroticism. Puberty, they understood, did give rise to a female sexual impulse that sought expression in the various behaviors the flapper was so prone to exhibit. Nonetheless, the maturing adolescent could be expected to outgrow the excesses of her youthful sexuality and to embrace a form of adult femininity marked by the more exalting characteristics of conjugal love, maternal devotion, and social service.

The normalization of female adolescent sexuality thus became a way for thinkers from a variety of perspectives to express and at least partially resolve ambivalences about modern gender roles and sexual mores for the larger society. Across the board, psychologists recognized puberty, with its newly discovered flourishing of hormonal activity, to be the initiating moment for normal heterosexual eroticism, in boys and girls. Some celebrated the ingratiating, puerile sexuality of the flapper as an emblem of modern femininity. Others objected to this conflation and instead contributed to the discussion about female development to claim for the adult woman a fully autonomous sexual subjectivity or to reclaim for her the ennobling powers derived from the more traditional female virtues. In any case, the very manifestation of the sexual impulse during the girl’s adolescence was at last undisputed by most psychologists.

Another point of some psychological consensus in these years was the view that sexual control did not, in fact, pose the biggest problem for the girl during her adolescence. Indeed, even in the “age of compulsory expression,” many psychologists continued to deny the normalcy of manifestations of youthful female sexuality that ultimately belied the “natural” female tendency toward restraint or its yearning toward marriage and motherhood. Thus, as Blanchard first suggested in 1920, and as other psychologists reaffirmed over the course of the decade, the defining conflict of normal female adolescence was not between sexual license and sexual control but rather between “love and ambition.” Psychologists’ assertion of the centrality of this psychic tension in the life of the girl could be relied on to deny the girl the capacity for full sexual agency and to rescue her from becoming utterly reduced to a sexual persona. It also became a way for such experts to foreground the individual psychological, as opposed to the collective social, dimensions of the relationship between the worlds of public work and private family relations that increasing numbers of girls and women found themselves compelled to negotiate in modern times.
Experts’ treatment of the distinctly female conflict between love and ambition took on its most concrete form in discussions over the girl’s capacity to manage the relationship between home and work. That this was now a “multiple choice situation,” as Blanchard and Manasses put it, was widely touted as marking an important break with the past. Thus, in 1916 Mary Moxcey echoed the predominant cultural sensibility of the Progressive era in declaring that the choices girls and women faced between home and career were mutually exclusive. “The disconcerting part of it all,” Moxcey regretted, “is that the choices are so few, and yet so complicated in their results—and that nothing will wait.” During the 1920s, psychologists posited that the conflict between the girl’s allegiance to individual aspirations and to the needs of her future family was not absolute, but they also acknowledged that the “freer environment” only made her difficulties of adjustment that much greater.¹¹⁸

Navigating the multiple choices related to home and work was articulated by social scientists and experienced by girls and women at a time when the marriage rate was rising, the age of marriage was dropping, the birth rate was falling, and greater numbers of young women, especially, were working outside the home, often through the first years of their married lives. Significantly, it was also a time when the conventional split between the public and the private was tenaciously maintained by the free-market system, through reinforced and new structures of gender segregation and discrimination and the failure of big business to accommodate adequately the changing needs of families in a dynamic social order.¹¹⁹ For men, work life and home life were deemed wholly compatible by existing forms of socioeconomic organization. For women, however, reconciling the two was largely construed as a matter of internal conflict and personal choice, as a problem to be resolved at the level of the individual female psyche. Psychologists played an important role in this construction. The developmental mandate for adolescents to seek self-support had much to do with preserving the role of the white middle-class male as the primary self-sufficient provider for his family and very little to do with mapping the possibilities for broad-based female economic independence. Indeed, based as it was on a presumption that economic circumstances were entirely self-determined, it had even less to do with the conditions of necessity governing the realities of most working-class people’s lives, man or woman, adolescent or adult. Child guidance experts were, in fact, at
the forefront in providing scientific justification for the white middle-class girl’s efforts to realize vocational achievement in this period. However, they were also leaders in construing love and ambition as a vying dualism in the developing female psyche, as well as in rendering the relationship between the public and the private a psychological, as opposed to a social, problem, to be resolved through the developmental process of each individual adolescent girl by and for herself.

With both marriage and employment rates of young women on the rise, the architects of female adolescence offered up a reinterpretation of the relationship between work and girlhood appropriate to modern times. They took part in a larger longstanding cultural discussion and debate about women’s economic roles. In the 1920s, this conversation was joined by three sets of voices. The first group was composed of feminists in the National Women’s Party who proposed the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923. ERA advocates drew on the language of liberal individualism to argue that women’s political and social equality depended on their achievement of economic independence. According to ERA proponents, women had the same rights and responsibilities as men to self-support, irrespective of their marital ties or family relationships. Women’s ability to work at whatever jobs suited their talents and inclinations, to be compensated for their labor equally to men, and to retain control of the wages they earned were the foundation for both their development as full human beings and for the contributions they were to make to social progress.

The second position on women’s economic roles was voiced by middle-class women labor reformers affiliated with such organizations and government agencies as the National Consumers League, the Women’s Trade Union League, the Women’s Bureau, and the Children’s Bureau, who continued the fight begun in the Progressive era to secure protective labor legislation for working women. Working-class women comprised half of the female labor force and two-thirds of employed wives in the 1920s. They performed low-paying, low-status, gender-segregated, and often dangerous jobs in the manufacturing, agriculture, and service sectors of the economy. From the many studies labor reformers conducted of their lives, they concluded that working-class women pursued wage earning out of necessity to ensure their families’ survival. Although labor reformers supported equal pay and vocational training for women, they also endorsed the family wage, which idealized a sexual division of labor based on the roles of the male provider and female homemaker. Labor reformers were vehemently opposed to the ERA because it threatened laws that limited the hours or kinds of jobs women worked. They denied that working women were capable of competing on an equal basis with men because of their roles as mothers.
or because of the pernicious gender discrimination structuring the economy and society. Labor reformers were joined in the debate over the ERA by male trade unionists, who supported protective laws to preserve their own dominance within the traditionally male sectors of the economy, and by many working women themselves. Although some women trade unionists spoke of their work in terms of rights, personal satisfaction, and independence, many saw their wage earning in terms of the contributions they made to the family economy and feared the hardships they would incur if even the modicum of protection they received from labor laws was taken away.

The third voice in the conversation over women’s economic roles was that of “career-marriage advocates.” These were middle-class white women who pursued jobs in the white-collar sectors of the economy, which ranged from clerical work to creative and professional employment. Although cleaner and less physically taxing than working-class women’s jobs, women’s white-collar work, too, was marked by gender stratification, unequal pay, and few opportunities for advancement. Middle-class married women who worked outside the home garnered widespread attention in the popular press throughout the 1920s. Commentators weighed in on why women sought to combine marriage and career and how men, women, children, and society were affected. Those who supported women who combined career and marriage did not speak of women’s work in terms of economic independence or necessity but rather in terms of personal fulfillment, individual choice, and social enhancement. Some feminists in the 1920s recognized that women could achieve economic independence only if domestic labor were socialized or professionalized or if men’s roles in the private sphere also changed. Career-marriage advocates believed otherwise. Like women labor reformers, they believed that women were primarily responsible for homemaking. The individual working woman, they optimistically advised, should draw on her family’s private resources to secure help with domestic labor. As keen supporters of companionate marriage, career-marriage advocates believed that women’s work outside the home contributed to the happiness and well-being of those within it, without providing any critique of institution of the family.

Child guidance experts’ fashioning of the adolescent mandate to seek self-support made important contributions to the career-marriage advocacy position. Educational, vocational, social, and developmental psychologists alike overwhelmingly attested to the imperative for the girl to cultivate a “life-career motive” during her adolescence. Every girl, these experts proclaimed, was to pursue some personally satisfying and socially useful endeavor “over and above
the normal one in acquiring a husband.” As Leta Hollingworth explained, because the modern industrial economy had moved production from the home to the factory and had so diversified the workforce both boys and girls were now able to select specialized occupations on the basis of their individual abilities and interests, rather than sex or caste. For both, then, adolescence was a period of discernment of individual capacities (made possible with the aid of mental tests), of gathering and assessing information about vocational options, and of beginning the course of advanced education and training required to pursue a particular type of work. Whereas experts directly correlated the boy’s efforts to navigate the dizzying world of vocational choices with the achievement of economic independence, most explications of the female adolescent mandate to seek self-support maintained strong links to conventional female roles in the private sphere. The girl’s preparation for and engagement in work outside the home was now understood to be a necessary component of her development but only insofar as it allowed her to bide time efficiently before marriage, made early marriage more economically feasible, contributed to the status of her new family, kept her engaged enough in personal pursuits so as not to become a domineering mother, and enabled her to respectably postpone childbearing, for which, during adolescence, she was deemed physically, psychologically, and economically unprepared. Willystine Goodsell associated the girl’s imperative to work less with women’s domestic roles than with the cultivation of the female virtues of self-sacrifice and community service. “Every year,” she lamented, “there are graduated from high schools and colleges thousands of young women who are actuated by the selfish desire to make a place for themselves in the world, even at the cost of others, or to continue their agreeable intellectual pursuits untroubled by the necessities and strivings of their fellow beings.” Critical as she was of the “crude materialism” driving the life motives of modern boys and girls alike, her hopes that girls would take up vocations that would enable them to bring their “intelligence, goodwill, and working ideals” to the ends of ameliorating the epidemic of selfishness in the modern world nonetheless distinctly disassociated female labor from any economic motive at all, domestic or otherwise.

Another key difference between boys’ and girls’ experiences with the mandate to seek self-support lay in the sorts of “mental-hygiene problems” it engendered as they moved through adolescence. For the boy, struggles arose over selecting a vocation from a vast array of choices and, perhaps, over the necessity of reconciling his personal ambitions or preferences with his innate abilities. The girl faced these problems as well, but her imperative to seek self-support also
conflicted with another of the fundamental mandates of the adolescent life stage itself. As Leta Hollingworth explained: “The vocational desires of intelligent girls are increasingly for work suited to their mental abilities. They do not wish to take up housework as a life-occupation, but the difficulty of reconciling mating with differentiated work is obvious. To organize the self as worker with reference to the self as mate successfully and harmoniously is one of the chief psychological problems of the adolescent girl of our day.” Hollingworth accepted the inevitability of this conflict for all girls and put her faith in individual rationality and wherewithal to resolve it. Thus, even as she advocated for professional child care, birth control, and changes in public opinion about working mothers, she focused most of her attention in her discussion of the mandate to seek self-support on the capacity of a small, elite group of girls to make the key adolescent adjustments to vocation and mating, largely on their own accord. “This policy [of educating gifted girls according to their own unique talents and abilities],” she lauded, “is to give girls a chance to solve their own problems on their own initiative, by . . . permitting them to work out the relation between work and love by intelligent experimentation.”

Like Hollingworth, Blanchard and Manasses also inscribed the “relation between work and love” in psychological terms. They, however, were careful to note that the girl’s rational capacity to navigate her choices was compromised by the “inner compulsions and drives” that influenced her decision-making process. “The young woman who is confronted with the choice of a career versus marriage may believe that she has given thoughtful consideration to her decision,” they warned. “But her attitude toward these questions is seldom rational; rather it is motivated by the memories of her early experience.” The adolescent girl had reached the age when she could begin to recognize the effects of those early experiences on her desires and behavior, but she often required psychological guidance to do so successfully. Furthermore, whereas Hollingworth focused on the ongoing experimentation by a small group of girls in resolving their psychological conflict, Blanchard and Manasses argued that for most girls, the struggle would be worked out through the exigencies of development itself. In her youth, they explained, the girl was expected to cultivate her unique capacities and talents and even to draw on them to contribute to the economic success of her new family during the early years of her marriage. Then, gradually, her egoistic ambitions would normally give way to the primary psychological motivation of her adult life, the desire to sacrifice her self-interest for the needs of her husband and children.

Lorine Pruette was not so sure. In 1924, she published Women and Leisure: A
Study of Social Waste, a highly critical assessment of the middle-class woman’s social position in advanced civilization. Women presided over smaller families in homes with dwindling requirements for physical maintenance, Pruette argued, but they had not proved themselves worthy of the leisure now bestowed on them. Instead, they had become the “mid-wives of a mediocre culture.” The first part of Women and Leisure constituted an exhortation against female idleness and an endorsement of women’s work outside the home. The latter part was primarily concerned with the analysis of the results of a survey of the “home interest and the career interest” of 347 adolescent girls, which Pruette claimed to be “a field study of the feminine psychic and emotional life more intensive and extensive than any which has [yet] been undertaken.” In reporting on her investigation of girls’ own accounts of their unique developmental challenge, she countered predominant expectations for either an essential female adolescent psychic conflict between desires for love and ambition or the reconciliation of the two wishes solely by way of individual effort, rational decision making, or the processes of individual development.\(^\text{125}\)

What Pruette found to be significant about her findings was a “considerable vacillation of desires” predominating in the psyches of at least one-half of the girls she questioned. When girls were asked what they would most like to become if they could choose from “anything in the world,” 61 percent chose occupations outside the home, while 39 percent said they would most like to be a wife and mother. When put to the test of actually choosing between home and career, however, 64 percent of those surveyed now replied that they would prefer a “home of [their] own, with husband and children to care for but without independent income and outside work.”\(^\text{126}\) When Pruette asked the girls she interviewed to record one of their daydreams, she found a similar “dual-motif” of desire. For Pruette, such seeming vacillation was not, however, a sign of the girl’s inherent psychological inconsistency but rather of “the presence in the girl’s life of two elements both of which deserve consideration” in a modern social order. As the recordings of their daydreams revealed, many girls managed satisfactorily to realize both categories of yearning on the level of the imagination. It was society, Pruette argued, not individual female psychology, that created the struggle in the growing girl and that ultimately thwarted the satisfaction of her sustained yearnings for both achievement and romantic love:

An apparent inconsistency of desires, or fluctuation between desires, is compelled by the industrial and social conditions of the day. No such inconsistency is demanded of the man who expects both an active life outside the home and a
satisfactory home life as well... With the same fundamental desires, the same vital urge, the one appears because of social tradition and industrial exigencies inconsistent, the other consistent.

Once the social organization was restructured to better accommodate these two desires that were fundamental to women as well as men, Pruette maintained, girls and women would exhibit a greater measure of psychological health, all female social unrest would be rendered obsolete, and a major form of social wastage would be virtually eliminated.\textsuperscript{127}

For Pruette, the normative seeker of self-support was the white middle-class girl. Indeed, despite her focus on the influence of social conditions in creating and potentially mitigating conflicts between love and work, she paid no attention to the role of economic necessity in shaping the girl’s experiences with the two developmental mandates. Neither did Hollingworth or Blanchard and Manasses. Hollingworth expressed confidence that mental testing would put all adolescents on an equal playing field, with intelligence, not caste, determining whether a girl would work outside the home or what kind of work she would do. How “nonintelligent” girls who had no choice but to perform both manual and domestic work would deal with conflicts between them, she did not say. For Blanchard and Manasses, “fundamental attitudes” were far more important than “economic pressure[s]” in giving rise to the struggle between love and ambition. Girls from all social stations, then, would benefit more from psychological insight and self-understanding, rather than a change in economic circumstances, in pursuing a satisfactory resolution.\textsuperscript{128}

Despite Pruette’s doubts about the purely psychological and developmental nature of the home/career conflict, she was nonetheless careful to point out that the majority of girls she questioned “removed themselves from the suspicion of belonging to the mythical ‘third sex’ by their definite... desires for love and home.”\textsuperscript{129} Blanchard and Manasses also acknowledged that every girl most likely wanted “a judicious mixture of love and work and play” in her life. However, in a survey of their own, they, too, took pains to highlight their finding that 82 percent of 252 girls surveyed expressed a decided preference for marriage. “We are undoubtedly safe in saying that the modern girl seems to want marriage most of anything in life,” they confidently asserted.\textsuperscript{130} Such confidence flowed from several sources. It arose first from these psychologists’ faith in empirical social science and their conviction that by objectively determining what girls said they wanted they had accurately measured what they wanted. It was also born out of their hope, rooted in their particular feminist inclination, that the new girl
would be able to both cultivate her individuality and honor her femininity, to pursue a vocation appropriate to her unique inclinations and to fulfill the desire for home life that every normal girl was ultimately unable to ignore. Finally, their assertion derived from their more critical feminist understanding of the persistent social impediments to women’s emancipation. “[T]he modern girl is at last in a position where she must face reality,” they conceded, “and summon all the reserves of courage and energy which she may possess in order to adapt to it.” Her challenge, then, was to figure out a way “to compromise with life situations, and to make the best possible adjustment to difficult circumstances.” Whereas Pruette took a primary interest in the “difficult circumstances” that rendered love and ambition a psychological conflict for the girl in the first place, Blanchard and Manasses remained more concerned with the individual girl’s psychological “adjustment.” During this period in which social and individual problems were increasingly cast into a psychological framework, it was Blanchard’s and Manasses’ focus that held greater sway among the architects of modern female adolescence. Every normal adolescent girl faced the mandates to seek self-support and to assume a domestic role and identity. Where conflict arose, psychological explanations and remedies would offer her the most compelling solutions.

“Achieving a Point of View”: Intellect, the Self, and Sexual Difference

The fourth and final problem of adolescent adjustment was the mandate for the developing individual to cultivate a systematic explanation of the self in the universe. At adolescence, Leta Hollingworth contended, every child needed to arrive at “some satisfactory answer” to questions about “the meaning of existence” and the meaning of his or her “own existence in particular.” She recognized at the outset of her discussion of this mandate that pondering such questions often included the formation of a religious sensibility. The linking of religiosity and adolescence had a long history in philosophical thought and had been prominently revived at the turn of the century by G. Stanley Hall’s fascination with adolescent conversion. Hall’s assertions about the connection between the two were premised on the claim that a religious impulse first manifested in the growing child as the sex instinct emerged at puberty. His more quixotic associations between sexual ardor and unity with the divine were, however, largely abandoned by subsequent thinkers in favor of a focus on the development of mental capacity. “Religion becomes a problem of adolescence,” Hollingworth asserted, “not because there is at that period a development of religious instinct,
but because *intelligence* develops during the teens to a point where question and answer arise as manifestations of growth in mental power."

This shift in explanation of the adolescent’s tendency toward religious fervor reflected a larger preoccupation in the psychological sciences during the early years of the twentieth century with the quality of human intelligence and, especially, with the differing quantities of mental capacity determined to be possessed by various social groups and discreet individuals. The injunction for the adolescent to “achieve a point of view” and thereby to “find” the individual self and locate that self in relation to the wider world was thus significantly informed by current formulations of the meaning of “intelligence.” These, in turn, were related to wider intellectual and cultural debates concerning sexual difference. The relationship between femininity, intellect, and selfhood was in many ways remade during the 1920s. In these years, the results garnered from newly developed intelligence tests scientifically justified the girl’s claims to individual achievement in educational and vocational endeavors. The displacement of mental capacity as a marker of femininity, however, resulted in a vacuum that almost immediately was filled by an array of psychological explanations that attempted to set new parameters around the self and its place in the social world based on alternative components of essential sexual difference.

The rise of intelligence testing in the United States was influenced by the French psychologist Alfred Binet, who in 1905 created a test to measure mental deficiency in school children. Together with Théodore Simon, Binet also developed a classification scheme that grouped test takers by “mental age.” In 1908, Herbert H. Goddard brought the Binet-Simon tests to the United States. The Binet-Simon test was revised in 1916 by Stanford University psychologist Lewis Terman and became the Stanford-Binet IQ test. Initially, the IQ test was used to identify the mentally defective in the population, resulting in the “feeble-minded” category and the determination of a causal connection between abnormal intelligence and criminality. The IQ test was also used to classify and rank racial and ethnic groups, serving as the newest scientific tool for determining the relative worth of various human subjects. During the First World War, Terman, along with Herbert Goddard and psychologist Robert Yerkes, for the first time conducted intelligence testing on a massive scale, overseeing the systematic measurement of the mental abilities of almost 2 million draftees. The Army experiment led both to a greater enthusiasm among some psychologists for the social applications of intelligence testing, as well as to the first widespread public debate over the reliability and implications of the tests’ findings. The 1920s was
marked by sustained contention among social scientists regarding the initial applications of IQ testing. Many scientists acknowledged the complexity of the notion of intelligence and questioned the existence or measurability of a single trait known as general intelligence. Many also sought to discern the role of education and the environment in shaping inherited mental capacity.133

Even before the Army tests were conducted and debated, the links between low intelligence and antisocial behavior in children and adolescents had begun to be loosened, an effort that was spearheaded largely by the work of William Healy. In the wake of Healy’s work on juvenile delinquency, sociologists and psychologists sought alternative explanations for misbehavior among the young beyond deficient mental capacity. The slackening of the bond between feeblemindedness and delinquency also rendered the relationship between intelligence and psychological and social adjustment in the developing child more complex. Thus, Phyllis Blanchard assured that the majority of feeble-minded individuals could be guided into vocational pursuits suitable to their limited level of intelligence, so they would become relatively productive and, most certainly, unthreatening members of society.134 As a corollary, Leta Hollingworth contended that it was actually children with superior mental capacity who had the most difficult time achieving a point of view and finding the self during adolescence; these children were, therefore, acutely susceptible to rebellious, antisocial, and self-destructive behavior. “It is in fact true,” she asserted, “that a very high degree of intelligence is required in order to entertain the abstract thoughts that lead to anxiety about the future and to ethical considerations.” Harry Hollingworth agreed. Like Leta Hollingworth, he posited that the “storm and stress” of adolescence was induced not by biology but by the complexities of modern life, which the “intellectually superior adolescent” was most poised and challenged to make sense of and adjust to. In contrast, among primitive peoples, whose simple environments were not conducive to the highest development of the intellect, youths were “supplied with a point of view upon life and death.” They were, therefore, spared the difficulty and the privilege of having to wrest one out on their own. With these claims, the Hollingworths joined many of their fellow psychologists in valorizing adolescent angst among white middle-class youths (who were as a group coded as having average or above-average intelligence) as a wellspring of social progress and even a sign of the superiority of western civilization. Harry Hollingworth, however, also echoed the accompanying concern that young people would not be able to live up to such grand expectations. “Religious dogmas, literary standards, political methods, social institutions may all go into
the discard until youth finds better ones or becomes discouraged in the search,”
he opined. “In due time the youth becomes a conservative, a radical grown
beyond adolescence.”

Along with the complication of the association between intelligence and
psychological adjustment or socialization, social scientists also leveled challenges
at longstanding assertions about woman’s inferior mental capacity. During the
early twentieth century, a small but effectual group of female social scientists
continued to steadily chip away at the notion that the female reproductive
organs had anything to do with any individual woman’s cognitive (dis)abilities.

At the forefront of this effort were psychologists Helen Thompson Woolley and
Leta Hollingworth, who in addition to conducting their own research and pub-
lishing their own monographs, sequentially authored a series of reviews of the
psychological literature on sex differences in mental traits for The Psychological
Bulletin between 1910 and 1919. In these reviews, Woolley and Hollingworth
charged their male colleagues with bias in interpreting psychological data; ad-
vanced the notion that socialization and not natural female deficiency accounted
for those sex differences in mental traits that could be identified by sound scien-
tific method; and highlighted the body of empirical evidence rapidly accumulat-
ing that revealed girls’ performances on tests of general intelligence to be equal
or superior to that of boys. In 1918, Hollingworth admitted her difficulty at
arriving at the title for her review, “Comparison of the Sexes in Mental Traits,”
thereby expressing the degree of confusion marking her discipline’s shift away
from assumptions about inherent psychological differences between the sexes:

To entitle it “Sex Differences in Mental Traits” would lead the reader falsely to
infer that all or most of the comparisons have shown differences. To call it “The
Mental Traits of Sex” would imply that it discloses mental traits which are sex-
limited. On the other hand, a title like “Sex Identity in Mental Traits” would be
unfair, especially to such expressions of opinion as are to be included, which take
the time-honored view that there are, and must be notable, inherent psychological
differences between the sexes. Simply to adopt for a title “The Psychology of Sex”
would give the erroneous impression that the review treats of literature pertaining
to the sexual instinct. The title finally chosen seems to circumvent most of these
difficulties.

By 1919, Hollingworth rendered such confusion, and the consistent return of
contradictory findings about the relative intelligence of males and females, a sign
of certainty that the search for difference in mental traits in the sexes was a futile
and pointless exercise. “Perhaps the logical conclusion to be reached on the basis
of these findings,” she resolved, “is that the custom of perpetuating this review is no longer profitable and may as well be abandoned.” By 1922, Terman himself asserted that results garnered from modern mental testing determined that women’s claims to intellectual equality with men could no longer be ignored. “[A]mong psychologists,” he stated, “this issue is as dead as the ancient feud as to the shape of the earth.”

In the literature on normal child development, what emerged during the 1920s was a consensus that intelligence was indeed inherited but individually, not through group affiliation. Nurture was deemed to have an important influence on the manifestation of mental facility, but the focus was largely on its potentially negative effect. Environmental factors, according to Blanchard, had “a limiting rather than an accelerating power over intellectual development.” The native capacity that the IQ test claimed to measure was reified as the most reliable indication of each individual’s chances for educational and vocational success, so long as inherent ability was met with commensurate forms of social opportunity. When it came to the adolescent mandate of “achieving a point of view,” then, any individual boy or girl of a certain intellectual capacity, at least, had the same chance of facing and resolving the crisis of the self that portended both the distress and the promise of youth that were its hallmarks in modern society.

Even as inherited individual intelligence became in some ways more important to those concerned with understanding and guiding the development of the child, it also became less less important. “Intelligence, however high,” Blanchard cautioned, “cannot be used to the best advantage by the persons thus improperly socialized, because it is comparatively powerless to control the emotional responses or to alter their early conditionings.” Having been revealed as an unreliable indicator of (anti)social behavior, or of sexual difference, intelligence increasingly became only one of several components that shaped the development of the individual self and was frequently deemed to be the least significant among them. Personality and temperament, inclination and desire, and many nonintellectual qualities such as industriousness, perseverance, flexibility, confidence, ambition, sociability, and cooperativeness, which psychologists recognized as more pliable than cognitive capacity, overshadowed mental prowess as the keys to both fulfillment and happiness for the individual self, as well as harmony and progress for the wider society. “There are . . . many factors involved in success in life,” Helen Thompson Woolley succinctly stated in an early attempt to devise a “new scale” for measuring the physical and mental capacities of adolescence. This was as true for girls as it was for boys. “So far as present studies show,” Ruth Shonle Cavan and Jordan True Cavan explained,
“intelligence is not closely linked to other traits or characteristics, and whether a girl develops a well-adjusted personality does not depend upon her degree of mental capacity so much as upon the emotional and social habits which are instilled in her from childhood on.”

As Leta Hollingworth explained, “a person’s Self,” was composed of the “sum total” of how he or she “appears, thinks, feels, and acts.” The final goal of adolescent development was for the child to become aware of the many traits, characteristics, thoughts, emotional responses, experiences, and habits that shaped who he or she was up to that point in the life cycle, judiciously select among them, and unify them into a coherent, stable whole. For many psychologists of the 1920s, this imperative for self-determination was as much a right and responsibility for the growing girl as it was for the boy. “This unifying element [the girl] will find in those aspects of her home, her vocation, her social and her community life which come to be considered worthwhile,” Grace Loucks Elliott declared, “and which determine what she avoids and to what she gives herself with abandon.” Yet, at the same time that some psychologists were envisioning the possibility that the girl might join with her brother in this most consequential task of discovering and shaping the self on her own accord, others set out to delimit the contours of the self she would find when she went looking for it. With the mental equality of women firmly established, these psychologists now looked to the extraintellectual qualities of the self to offer insight into the meaning of essential sexual difference. Until the age of adolescence, Hall conceded in his depiction of the flapper, intelligence tests constituted an accurate measure of the girl’s individual capacities and offered a useful guide to the appropriate directions in which her educational and vocational endeavors might move. At that point, though, when puberty established the terms for biological sexual difference, these tests “baulk, stammer, and diverge,” and remained unable to chart the vast, and vastly important, territories of the girl’s self that were determined by an enduring femininity. “Common observation seems to tell us that boys and girls are different,” concluded psychologist Beth Wellman a decade later. “Perhaps the aspects of mental life that have been measured are not the crucial ones in which the real differences may be expected.”

With this query in mind, psychologist Joseph Jastrow, who throughout his influential career never wavered from his search for differences in the masculine and feminine mind, took on both the socialization argument and the results from IQ testing to make a case for the importance of sexual difference to the continued advancement of modern civilization. In a 1929 article titled “The Implications of Sex,” Jastrow placed himself firmly within the social scientific consensus
of the late 1920s regarding the influences over human development to affirm that
girls and boys, men and women, were the product of both nature and nurture. Too often missing from this dictum, he pointed out, was the more compelling
truth that nurture was best understood as “man’s interpretation of nature’s
intentions.” “It is itself natural,” he explained, “that men should find in nature
the suggestions for their direction of human traits to what becomes estab-
lished custom and career. Sociological trends may seem unnatural because they
misinterpret or distort natural differences of men and women, and they cer-
tainly can both exaggerate and suppress them; but in some measure they follow
their clew.”

In regard to the problem of determining the significance of intelligence,
Jastrow attempted to establish a hierarchy of psychological traits, in which cer-
tain attributes were determined to be more reliable than others for revealing
nature’s differing plans for the two sexes. Concerning IQ testing, “[w]e may
concede both the validity of the measurements and the sufficient accuracy of the
yardstick, uncertain as it is,” he allowed. “What is questioned is the assumption
that for reaching a significant comparison of efficient masculine and feminine
traits, one trait is as good as another, is as pertinent as another.” Traits were, in
fact, to be “weighed as well as measured,” with the rather prosaic form of
intellectual proficiency gauged by the IQ test earning a low score in terms of its
indication of the nature or significance of sexual difference.

Once he determined the comparable cognitive capacity of men and women
to be a similarity that made no difference, Jastrow then identified a whole range
of diverging masculine and feminine “supporting qualities” that were to better
serve as the guideposts for any man or woman’s search for selfhood, purpose,
happiness, or achievement. These “supporting qualities” in the male included
exploration, invention, inquiry, mastery, and objective interest; in the female,
they were sympathy, esteem, good will, gentility, and the “refinements of the arts
of living.” “The resulting perspective of the masculine mind and the feminine
mind grows in contrast on a nearer approach, a closer analysis,” he wrote. “The
elements, the features of the composition, are much the same, for so are men
and women by virtue of a common heredity and endowment; but what is
emphasized, central, and of major import in the one recedes in the other in favor
of a different set of major factors, each in turn in closer relation to what is bio-
psychologically male or female.”

Although Jastrow’s argument clung tenaciously to past formulations of essen-
tial sexual difference that emphasized both the complementary and hierarchical
nature of that difference, it also exhibited a careful awareness of the current
scientific and social terrain on which it maneuvered. Just as Hall had been compelled to allow for the economic, sexual, and political “emancipation” of the flapper by the beginning of the 1920s, so Jastrow accounted for the role of nurture, conditioning, and socialization—the touchstones of current developmental thinking—at decade’s end. Yet both psychologists nonetheless managed to chart the qualities and proclivities of a female self that continued to locate girls and women firmly within the domestic sphere. Harking back to the past, firmly located in the present, such arguments were also harbingers of things to come. In the early 1920s, convinced that the significant mental differences between the sexes did not lie in the realm of intelligence, but in other aspects of the self, Lewis Terman began work on the quantifiable measurement of the traits of “masculinity” and “femininity,” qualities he associated not with cognition but with personality and temperament. Terman and his associates’ *Attitude Interest Analysis Survey* was first published in book form in 1936 and served as a tool to diagnose the normalcy of the psychological subject’s gender identification well into the 1960s.\(^{149}\)

As it had begun in the nineteenth century, the intellectual transformation of “old” girls into “new” continued to be a highly contested process during the early decades of the twentieth century as social scientists described and prescribed the development of the “normal” adolescent girl for modern times. In the 1920s, psychologists named and interpreted the four “life-problems” of the adolescent stage of development to allow for both challenge to and retrenchment of the ideologies of gender that had structured ideals of girlhood in the past. Thus, prior efforts to identify the qualities and consequences of essential sexual difference were dampened, if not defeated, over the course of the decade by the reification of the universality of developmental mandates and the individuality of the human subject, by reigning environmentalist assumptions in child guidance theory, and by empirical determinations of female intellectual equality. A widespread acceptance among psychologists that the mandates of female development now included some measure of autonomy, sexual expression, vocational achievement, and self-determination especially benefited the white middle-class girl. Yet, the conceptual problem remained regarding how she would exercise these masculine privileges of adolescence within the parameters of her femininity.

Some social scientists in this period saw adolescence and femininity as utterly incompatible, as with those who deemed the girl an essential failure at psychological weaning. Others assured that the enduring qualities of the feminine psyche could not help but dull the edge of each of the four mandates, as with
those who deemed the girl’s sexual expression to be more a sign of her eagerness to please than a reflection of autonomous desire. For feminist psychologists, the problem of reconciling femininity and adolescence proved to be especially thorny. As biological explanations of child development were complicated by environmentalist approaches, the “feminized” qualities of adolescence gave way to a focus on the problems and opportunities of the adolescent to exercise the capacities for autonomy, choice, and self-determination. Leta Hollingworth and Lorine Pruette at times responded by seeking to challenge those conditions in the family and society that rendered the mandates of femininity and adolescence incongruous in the first place. Unwilling to sacrifice the essential female “love ideal” to the masculine imperative for “egoism and self-aggrandisement,” Phyllis Blanchard took a different approach and reiterated the possibility of a “feminized” adolescence, though now for the girl alone. One point on which these scientists did agree was that in modern times, girls, like boys, were indeed “supposed to catch” adolescence. They also collectively affirmed that once the girl caught it, and took on those struggles “universal” to the stage and peculiar to her sex, the psychological sciences would provide much of the insight necessary to explain her to herself, her parents, and the society in which she came of age.