
The Perils of the Back Seat: Date Rape, Race and Gender in 1950s America

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One could hardly find a more cautionary depiction of the perils of dating than the 1960 film, *Where the Boys Are*. The movie was part of a genre of mainstream Hollywood releases from the 1950s and 1960s that explored teenage sexuality in surprisingly open, if conservative, ways. This particular film used the common college experience of unchaperoned group travels for fun, sun and the hope of a relationship to emphasise the risks of sexual experience for young women. Billed as a light-hearted comedy about students on spring break in Fort Lauderdale (Florida), the movie provided clear warnings to young women about the dangers of sexual intimacy. Collectively, the experiences of Tuggle, Angie, Merritt and Melanie, the four main female characters, showed that rejecting sexual experimentation was the only sure way to win a man worth having. Tuggle set her sights on TeeVee, a funny and unorthodox man she picked for a spouse because he was 'basically sincere'. Her hopes were nearly dashed when a floozy caught TeeVee's eye, and offered him easy sexual access that Tuggle withheld. Angie, an athlete, pined for a boyfriend who would overlook her masculine traits. She gratefully accepted the reluctant attention of Basil, a moody jazz musician. Merritt snagged Rider Smith, the wealthy grandson of a millionaire. Melanie, however, barely made it out of Florida alive. She met Dill and, whatever they did together on their first date, she desperately inquired, 'Dill, you'd never say anything? Tell anyone?' Dill was no gentleman, and apparently told all his friends that Melanie was an easy score. Over the course of the movie, Dill's friends passed her around as a sexual partner. By the end, Melanie lay in a hospital bed, raped and hit by a car in a half-hearted suicide attempt. *Where the Boys Are* thus presented four cautionary tales, all centred around men's predatory desire for sex.

'Going all the way' won Melanie no respect, no promise of marriage and indeed spelt her demise. But in this movie, there was little difference between 'nice' boys and cads when it came to sex. All boys pressured women for sexual relations. Even Rider and TeeVee, the 'good' guys, continually pushed Merritt and Tuggle for ever greater degrees of sexual intimacy. Tuggle at one point confided, 'he keeps hinting at what he wants; I keep hinting at matrimony'. She went on, 'he certainly is persistent though. He keeps knocking on the door; just a question of how long I can keep it locked'. Merritt was more frank with Rider about the inevitable contest of wills between men and women over sex. When she insisted that only love justified sex, he replied that such moralistic

attitudes were 'old fangled'. Eventually, Tuggle and Merritt's persistent refusals in the face of pressure (and alcohol) won them a potentially permanent relationship. But the difference between nice boys and those like Dill and his friends was that nice boys would stop pushing for sex *if* they respected you (though they might turn to the floozy in the meantime). Cads took what they wanted if women let them. Merritt began the movie averring that chastity was old fashioned, and that 'back seat bingo' guaranteed future dates; by the end, she realised that giving in to men's pressure for sex flirted with disaster. What began innocently enough in the passion of the moment could move beyond pressure to violence, as Melanie learnt. She foolishly started down the slippery slope of sexual intimacy, and wound up raped and ruined without even a shotgun wedding to provide a tawdry redemption.¹

It is certainly not breaking any new analytical ground to note that the dating patterns of white American teenagers in the 1950s, like those in *Where the Boys Are*, caused endless concern and comment. 'Going steady' not only seemed peculiar to parents, it represented disturbing new developments in sexual expectations.² Americans in the 1950s celebrated marriage as the cornerstone of American civilisation, but they simultaneously worried that it confined men. To be successful, marriage required clear differences between male and female roles that modernity had eroded. Indeed, in the eyes of many experts, gender differentiation was the key component of American racial character. What made America strong as a superior white nation was its highly distinct roles for men and women. These ideals of masculinity and femininity, in which women were caretakers of the home and children and men provided financially for their family in the public world, not coincidentally were often roles denied to black families by segregation and economic discrimination. Whiteness, differentiated gender roles in marriage and civilisation were indelibly connected in this construct.³ Marriage, however, required dating, which presented particular dangers for girls, from groping hands and pushy boys, to pregnancy and the loss of 'respect'. But what represented risks for girls were necessary elements of sexual maturation for boys. Experts naturalised male aggression as proof of manhood even in 'nice boys', and studies of dating confirmed that male aggression targeted the young women they dated, especially in the private confines of the back seats of cars. Dating, in short, was dangerous for girls.

But as the teen culture of dating and going steady, despite its dangers, became more widespread in the 1950s, older, racialised narratives of white women's sexual danger evolved to incorporate new trends. Since the mid-nineteenth century, American, and especially southern, white women had been warned of the dangers of black men, whose desire for sex with pure, virtuous white women represented a knife pointed directly at the heart of white supremacy. White men's duty in this myth was to protect and defend white women. By the 1950s, white women learnt that the danger black men ostensibly represented could accompany them into the back seat with their dates. Even with a white protector, white women remained vulnerable to black criminals who supposedly targeted white couples making out, or kissing, in cars. Such warnings implicitly recognised how unreliable white men could be. As necking and petting became increasingly required on dates, it tarnished white women's supposed virtue. As a result, white men were no longer required to protect white women from black men with their lives. On the contrary, sexual aggression became an important aspect of white masculinity and sexual adventure. In short, by the 1950s, white women confronted a

new set of perils in the back seat, as the men who used to offer protection themselves became the unspoken sources of danger.⁴

This article draws out evolving ideas of race and gender in 1950s notions of dating and teen life. Much of the source material for this article, especially regarding what we would now term date rape,⁵ is drawn from criminal cases from southern states. In the South, the disparity between the rhetoric of chivalry, in which white men were intended to protect white women as the embodiments of white racial power and superiority, and the actual treatment of women, seems most glaring. Southern white teens, however, shared the dating culture of the 1950s with their contemporaries in other parts of the country. Southern girls struggled over the degrees of intimacy they should engage in on dates, and southern boys, like boys across the country, desired to push their dates as far as possible physically. By the same token, the rest of the United States also shared the racial attitudes that existed in exaggerated form in the South. White southerners were not alone in using black men as foils to erase their own misdeeds and even as models of masculine adventure. Wherever they lived, teens and adults unthinkingly played on racial fears to explain and express concerns about dating relationships and behaviours. Southerners like most Americans imagined narratives of sexual danger for white women in particularly racialised terms. At the same time, they stubbornly ignored the danger that familiar white men posed to all women. My point is not that the issues of date rape that I will describe are necessarily unique to the South, but rather to explore how these narratives evolved after the Second World War.

By 1950, going steady had become the dominant form of dating.⁶ Starting as early as junior high, boys and girls paired off into exclusive relationships that could last anywhere from a few days to a few years. As one high school student told a writer from *Ladies Home Journal*, 'at our schools, if you don't find someone to go steady with by October, you just don't date that year'.⁷ Sociological studies confirmed that by the 1950s, 'going steady' had entirely replaced the 'rating-and-dating' system or 'playing the field' that had been the norm in the 1920s and 1930s.⁸ By 1958, one study reported that 68 per cent of college co-eds had gone steady at least once. A 1959 study of high school students in Iowa reported that 82 per cent of female high school seniors had had at least one steady boyfriend.⁹ Steadies did not represent true love, however, but were instead symbols of the desire for conformity and security among teenagers. Group pressure created the imperative to go steady. As one boy in Atlanta allegedly told his parents, 'everyone in my crowd has a steady. I think it's silly, but what can I do?'¹⁰ A Birmingham, Alabama, teenager echoed his sentiments, noting that most teens go steady 'because most of their friends do, not because they are really attracted to each other'. In his view, going steady became a habit.¹¹ A steady relationship also meant stability in an uncertain world. Called 'date insurance' by one child development expert, going steady provided dependability; as one teenager put it, 'you don't have to work so hard to get a date'.¹² Another said, 'you pick a girl and stick with her and she has to be on hand any time you want to go out'.¹³ For many teenagers, a willingness to go steady was a prerequisite for having any dates at all.

While teens worried about the consequences of being home alone on Saturday night, adults professed themselves baffled by the desire of teenagers to pair off. Many of the writers who bemoaned the perils of going steady fondly recalled their days of promiscuous popularity, when the sheer number of dates, rather than the longevity of a relationship, was a measure of one's desirability to the opposite sex. One man who

attended college in the late 1920s celebrated the man 'who dated a different girl every night' and the 'prom trotter' who could amass seven different men's fraternity pins at once.¹⁴ Others mourned the end of stag lines and cutting in on dancing couples, wondering 'Why Do Prom Girls Put Up with the Cartel System of Dating?'¹⁵ As one mother, whose article appeared in the Anniston (Alabama) *Star* confessed, 'it bothers me plenty that at fifteen, young people should be acting the role of old marrieds – faithful, settled, steady and stuffy'.¹⁶ To adults, it seemed a recipe for monotony and boredom.

Adults were responding, in part, to changes in their own sexual culture. Despite the focus on traditional sexual values within marriage, adults in the 1950s were concerned that Americans had become too obsessed with sex. 'Sex is inescapable', warned one popular magazine, 'it is on the billboards, on the stage, screen, radio, and television'. 'We live in a society which gives to sex attraction and sex performance an adulation close to idolatry', warned another.¹⁷ The emphasis of monogamy in marriage and traditional marriage roles sought to counteract what many feared were potentially disastrous preoccupations with sex. Experts pointed out that teenagers could hardly resist sexual experimentation if all they saw around them was a glorification of sex and women's bodies in the media. The media, for their part, even suggested there was a connection between the exploits of adolescent boys and the contradictory message they received at home. College sex offenders tended to come from homes, one concerned article intoned, 'where fathers have openly bragged of amorous adventures, where mothers only half-heartedly concealed their own sex dissatisfaction'.¹⁸

While families in the 1950s seem traditional and conservative in retrospect, to Americans at the time, upholding the undermined institution of the family was a defence against a disturbing unravelling of sexual morality. Of more concern, however, were suspicions that even healthy marriages confined and undermined masculinity. One culprit, experts argued, was that women had encroached on bastions of masculine privilege. One writer in the Anniston *Star* noted that 'our society is becoming geared to female dominance in some areas that used to belong exclusively to men'.¹⁹ Another cited aspects of popular culture, including Ethel Merman's rendition of *I Can Do Anything Better than You* to note that modern women could be 'castrating Delilahs' who 'invaded the strongholds of masculinity in work, play, sex, and the home'.²⁰ The paradox was that American society needed strong, manly men and needed them in traditional marriages, but it seemed uncertain whether men could be truly manly within marriage. Amidst a culture obsessed with Jayne Mansfield's breasts and *Playboy* magazine, there was a concern that married American men were too soft, too contained within the feminine domestic sphere to have the virility needed to counter threats both at home and abroad.²¹

In a culture in which many worried that there were no longer clear-cut differences between men and women, sexual exploits became a defining marker of masculinity.²² Experts insisted that sexual gratification could reinforce masculinity because it was crucial to male happiness. Wives were encouraged to accept and nurture this difference. George W. Crane, a columnist who appeared in the *Alabama Journal* insisted that wives needed to provide their husbands with a sufficient quota of 'erotic calories' to keep their mates 'kind and appreciative'. Indeed, the presiding judge of the Domestic Relations court in Atlanta noted that many of the divorce cases that came before him resulted from 'the lack of sex for congeniality [which] leads to quarrelling

and fussing'.²³ While ideally male sexual satisfaction ensured masculinity and matrimonial success, sexual experimentation and conquest before marriage allowed boys 'to grow and mature and test themselves, not only sexually but as men'.²⁴ The media reinforced this version of masculine dominance. Extramarital sexual relations – even coercive ones – served as a way to reinforce male identity, despite widespread focus on monogamy within marriage.²⁵ Sexual aggression in search of conquest was men's 'one sure proof of masculinity', in a society in which men's 'roles are indistinguishable from women's'.²⁶ It was an 'alternative to economic success in validating manhood' and 'buttressed masculinity in one area safe from female competition'.²⁷ Unfortunately, experts insisted, sexual experience could ironically make a successful marriage more elusive, especially for teenage girls whose first intimate experiences with males usually occurred in the context of dating.

Against this valorisation of sexual experience for men, many adults, from parents to sociological experts, to doctors and clergy members, worried that dating patterns like going steady caused permanent emotional damage and hindered the ability of young people, especially young women, to adjust to marriage. Whether they were alarmist, as was *Ladies Home Journal*, which called going steady 'a national problem', or merely bemused – one mother dismissed her daughter's steady relationships as 'a crisis of a prolonged nature, requiring the most delicate handling'²⁸ – going steady represented treacherous terrain. Many Americans implicitly acknowledged the need for men to 'sow their wild oats', yet predictably worried that going steady permitted intimacies that might lead to disastrous consequences, one of which was pregnancy. One journalist reminded parents, 'these dates mean a new personal freedom and endless hours spent alone together in movies, at dances and in parked cars, with the privacy and opportunity to "go ahead"'.²⁹ Tempted by passion, alone in the privacy of the back seat, things could get out of hand. 'It Could Be Your Daughter', warned the title of a *Reader's Digest* article, highlighting the 'impressive increase in the number of pregnancies among unmarried teenage girls, many of them from so-called privileged homes'.³⁰ One mother warned that 'I am fairly sure – and sociologists back me up – that constant companionship at too early an age is causing an alarming increase in petting and premarital intimacy . . . I think it is simply the desire to belong, to win approval which makes girls "go too far"'.³¹

Pregnancy, however, was not the only danger. Many experts agreed that premarital sexual experience, rather than being an expression of love between committed steadies, could in fact derail women's sexual response in marriage. The frantic fumbblings in the back seat of a car would inevitably prove disappointing or even distasteful to women. Petting might cause 'nervous irritation' in women, warned one writer. *Cosmopolitan* informed its readers of a study showing that girls 'who indulged in the heaviest and most serious sex play before marriage had the poorest marital adjustment record'.³² According to doctors, many wives suffered from 'frigidity' as a consequence of trying to contain sexual excitement while petting in a parked car. Parental warnings that were intended to 'discourage the young girl from experimenting' with sex and 'getting into trouble', led her to see sex as shameful, even with her husband.³³ One doctor described the lasting effect of sexual frustration before marriage this way: 'the girl who has spent her pre-marital years withdrawing from physical contacts and tensing her muscles in order to avoid response, has acquired a set of nervous and muscular co-ordinations which she does not unlearn easily after marriage'.³⁴ It was the result of what Albert

Ellis, a psychiatrist who wrote frequently on sex, derisively called 'the sex tease of courtship'.³⁵

The rise of marital counselling as an industry in the 1950s both reflected and addressed many of these concerns. According to marital experts, many of whom gained a national following, marital success required firm adherence to rigidly defined and clearly differentiated gender roles. Indeed, for many experts who had earned their marital expert stripes through earlier eugenic programmes to produce fitter families, achieving ideal gender differentiation had replaced enshrining immutable racial differences as the focus of their efforts to improve American society.³⁶ Such a focus created the possibility of common gender interests superseding racial divisions. Making men be men and women be feminine became more important than maintaining the supposedly self-evident racial characteristics of white superiority. Encouraging educational programmes to teach teenagers how to select appropriate mates and forge successful marriage relationships based on male dominance and female submission captured the attention of institutions formerly concerned with protecting racial purity. In the eyes of experts, gender fault lines far surpassed issues of race in producing an American populace that could successfully withstand the conflicts facing Cold War America. In this framework, successful gender differentiation required allowing and encouraging male aggression.³⁷

Going steady became the framework through which teenage boys tested their manhood. Many girls, however, were decidedly ambivalent about the social and sexual interactions going steady included, even though they desired the popularity that going steady symbolised. A willingness to go steady assured that one had dates, but by the age of thirteen or fourteen many of those dates occurred in a car. It was estimated that every date required spending anywhere from one- to three-quarters of the time together necking and petting.³⁸ According to students interviewed for a *Ladies Home Journal* article, the most important part of every 'car date' was the forty-five minutes to two hours spent in 'courting'. The use of 'courting' by white southern teenagers in the 1950s transformed the older, traditional meaning of courtship into one that included 'just a lot of hugging and kissing' and 'making love just as fast and as far as you can!' 'One southern student defined a "big court" simply as "a case of roaming hands".³⁹ Indeed, some boys stated that the advantages of going steady included 'you can go further with a girl if you're going steady'.⁴⁰ Whereas courtship had previously implied a relationship of commitment moving towards marriage, by mid-century courting came to mean not just a dating arrangement, but the very act of boys pushing for greater degrees of physical intimacy.

Being willing to 'court' was an expected part of dating for teenagers, and the unwillingness to do it could mean more than just a lack of affection or lack of future dates. It might be interpreted by the opposite sex as evidence of more deep-seated psychological problems. As one boy insisted, 'if I take a girl out five or six times and she doesn't want to court with me, she just doesn't want me – or else there's something definitely lacking in her personality'.⁴¹ And while most men told researchers that they engaged in 'the Big Court' because they enjoyed it, women were much more likely to respond that they groped in the back seat of cars because their dates 'expected it'. Their concerns become even more apparent in the work of sociologists across the country.

In a study of 267 students in Florida, when asked what interfered with their enjoyment of a date, women listed 'necking and petting' as often as they listed having

a date that seemed uninterested in them.⁴² Another study of high school dating patterns confirmed that many girls thought that dates expected 'too much necking and petting'.⁴³ One teenager described dates with her steady, saying, 'we bat it out for an hour or more every time we go out'.⁴⁴ 'Boys all urge you', another woman insisted, 'they tell you it's life, it's normal and all that. But all they want is their way'.⁴⁵ For women and girls, dates became battles with boys over the limits of sexual relations, as expert opinion reminded them that boys were naturally more amorous and prone to sexual aggression. Even Abigail Van Buren, whose advice column for teenagers, 'Dear Abby', was widely read, likened walking home on a date for girls to 'playing pat-a-cake with an octopus'.⁴⁶ Dr Goodrich Schaffler, a gynaecologist whose articles appeared in *Ladies Home Journal* and *Reader's Digest*, believed that the best evidence of this coercion was the growing number of unwanted pregnancies among teenagers. The 'continuing insistence, the relentless masculine pressure . . . naturally overcomes the natural hesitation and unwillingness in the girl . . . unquestionably, boys are much more aggressive sexually, much less inhibited than they used to be, at least toward "nice" girls. Too many men regard sexual episodes as sport or as evidence of daring and conquest'.⁴⁷ The consequences could be life altering for women. An oral history of women who 'went away' to give birth secretly and relinquish their children for adoption noted that 7 per cent of the more than 100 women interviewed reported that their pregnancies resulted from what we would now term date rape.⁴⁸

Women, of course, bore the burden for keeping sexual interaction under control. Sociological studies confirmed that women drew the line when it came to the gropings of their dates, and for good reason: as early as 1945 women had been warned 'the average man will go as far as you let him go. A man is only as bad as the woman he is with'.⁴⁹ As one boy told a researcher, 'any girl who thinks a guy's going to put on the brakes first is either naïve or just plain dumb'.⁵⁰ One 1958 study reported that almost two-thirds of women felt guilt that they had 'gone too far' with a date or steady. Advice columns in southern newspapers reflected the pressure that girls faced to be intimate with their dates.⁵¹ In *Tips for Teens*, a fifteen-year-old who had been told she was too young to date by her parents nonetheless struggled with a boy who insisted on kisses. A woman named Connie wrote to Beatrice Fairfax for advice about her steady of a year who told her he loved her and wanted to get married in 'a vague kind of way', but spent most of their time together 'trying to get me to have an affair with him'. Fairfax suggested that the man was not interested in marriage and she should move on. Another seventeen-year-old girl agonised over her less-than-attentive steady who even went out with her best friend. 'I had intimate relations with this boy because he kept trying to persuade me, so I finally gave in'. Fairfax recommended the girl should stay away from boys until she was mature enough to be immune to their persuasions. In both cases, Fairfax reaffirmed that giving in to boys' entreaties for sex virtually guaranteed that they would soon leave 'to look for new conquests'.⁵² Told all their lives that women's value resided in their virtue and attractiveness as wife and mother, and reminded that the loss of reputation could ruin their lives, it is little wonder that girls might regard dates with ambivalence.⁵³

The rape cases that came before the courts in this period illustrate the perils of the back seat. Juries confronted the criminal consequences of male aggression on dates. Morris Cunningham was convicted in Georgia of assault with intent to commit rape in 1952 after he 'attempted familiarities' at a drive-in theatre, and then afterward parked

on a deserted dirt road and attempted them again.⁵⁴ When Olan Rushing asked fourteen-year-old Janice Turner to go to a movie with him in 1954, she dutifully asked her father for permission. When she got into the car, she discovered another man hidden under the seat, and Rushing picked up two more men by the side of the road. They drove Turner to a creek where they took turns raping her.⁵⁵ Jerry Manning was convicted in 1955 of rape and with aiding and abetting rape on a date with teenager Carol Ann Donnelly. Donnelly told the court that Manning asked her for a date while she was working at a drive-in restaurant. After sharing drinks at another restaurant, she asked to be taken home. Manning took her instead to an airstrip where his friend was waiting and both men raped her.⁵⁶ These cases are noteworthy in that they outline the extremes of male aggression, and because they resulted in conviction, no small feat at a time when women were blamed routinely for their inability to fend off aggressive men. These convictions probably reflect the fact that the victims were extremely young – fourteen in many cases – or that there were multiple assailants, hardly the scenario of an ‘average’ date. Indeed, for these men, sexual conquest was a group endeavour.

Many more cases probably proceeded like that of Mae Bell Kirkwood in Louisiana in 1946. Kirkwood, who was somewhere between eighteen and twenty years old at the time, was on a date with James McFarland at a drive-in theatre. She told a grand jury that McFarland attempted to rape her three times over the course of the movie. On the fourth time, he struck her on the head and succeeded in raping her. Evidence clearly indicated that she had had sexual intercourse, probably for the first time. But the grand jury refused to indict McFarland because it believed the intercourse was consensual. According to the opinion, at a crowded drive-in, ‘it would seem that the young lady had ample opportunity, if she so desired, to have extricated herself from the situation’. The court also noted that she had helped him by removing her coat. Unsuccessful with a criminal complaint, Kirkwood’s father sued for civil damages, but his case was dismissed.⁵⁷ It was expected that young women’s vigilance and awareness of the long-term consequences of petting would protect them from male sexual aggression. Any sign of willingness to engage in petting could legally be interpreted as consent to intercourse.

The court cases above represent the most extreme instances of violence. Most girls never reported assaults to authorities when their dates got out of hand. Sociological studies made it frighteningly clear how frequent male aggression was and, indeed, how normal, accepted and silenced it remained in the dating world of teenagers and college students. In separate studies of college dating practices and high school dating practices, researchers reported that almost 56 per cent of college women and over 62 per cent of high school women experienced what they termed ‘offensive episodes at some level of erotic intimacy’, on a date. The offensive behaviour ranged from attempts at necking and petting to sexual intercourse and violent attempts to force intercourse using ‘menacing threats or coercive infliction of physical pain’.⁵⁸ And while some women reported that incidents of sexual aggression came out of the blue, these ‘offensive episodes’ occurred more frequently and became more violent the more established the dating relationship was. The authors conceded that this finding contradicted the conventional wisdom that men were more aggressive with women to whom they were less emotionally attached or who were of a lower economic status. Nevertheless, the experts noted that respondents believed that these episodes were the woman’s fault. ‘In short, girls frequently report

that they “let it get out of hand”, and men reply that [the girls] were asking for it’.⁵⁹ Consequently, neither the respondents nor the researchers termed this behaviour rape.

Researchers speculated that, rather than offering women protection, women’s established emotional involvement in a relationship allowed their dates to ‘exploit’ them sexually.⁶⁰ Many boys believed that they could push a girl further the more they dated her. Both studies also noted that, especially in cases in which the sexual aggression occurred in a dating relationship in which there had already been some level of consensual erotic play, girls did not report violent behaviour.⁶¹ Most women either kept their experiences to themselves or discussed deterrence and avoidance techniques with their peers. One female college graduate recalled group discussions in sorority houses pondering how to fend off escalating aggression from dates: ‘freshman year, the problem is what to do when a boy tries to unbutton your blouse, sophomore year, when he reaches up your skirt; and after that, everybody shuts up’.⁶²

Some researchers dismissed the assumption that boys were less likely to victimise girls they cared about or ‘respected’. Nevertheless, one familiar explanation that parents and experts gave for the offensive behaviour of men on dates was that boys assumed their date was a ‘bad girl’ or of lower-class status. Boys and girls both learnt that a boy’s behaviour reflected the reputation of their female companion. It was her responsibility to demand respect, otherwise she ‘asked’ for it, and presumably was never respectable to begin with. It was a powerful way to let aggressive dates off the hook. At the same time, there was a widespread assumption that girls from lower classes were less moral and more likely to agree to intercourse. Studies of sexual attitudes across class lines, however, revealed that sexual attitudes were remarkably similar, that working-class women expressed the same moral sentiments as middle-class women. The difference was the attitudes of boys who sought sexual experience from lower-status women whom they would never consider marrying. Studies confirmed that while nearly half of middle-class high school boys surveyed reported genital contact during petting or intercourse with dates of their own social class, three-quarters reported such behaviour with girls they perceived to be of a lower social class. As one student in New Orleans proudly stated, ‘we’d get these “cat” girls from the other side of — street . . . We’d pick them up at dances. Everybody knows about them’. Another boy from the same study indicated that sexual activity became the marker of status for girls, almost independent of other indicators: ‘it’s OK for a crowd of boys to pick up some girls. And I wouldn’t have any qualms about going all the way with that type of girl cause she’s probably just a cheap whore anyway’.⁶³ Indeed, as one expert noted, some boys believed that whether a girl was ‘good’ or ‘bad’ could only be proved by a ‘pragmatic test’. The male actually tried to seduce the girl. If she succumbed, she was branded ‘bad’ and ‘immoral’.⁶⁴

In many young men’s eyes, premarital sexual activity was a necessary part of their own sexual development, and they specifically targeted women they thought would be willing. ‘A man should know more and lead the woman [in sexual relations]’, one Ivy League freshman reported. Invoking the double standard, he went on, ‘I want my wife to be all mine – undamaged by premarital relations with anyone else. But I have to learn about sex for my own good. I will have to take advantage of every opportunity I get with girls who are the type you go out with for sex’.⁶⁵ And while boys professed to ‘never lay a hand on a girl I respect’, given what they interpreted as an opportunity on a date, they took what they could get. ‘Bad’ girls, however, were not necessarily characterised

by objective measures of class status or even reputation. They were girls who seemed 'nice', but foolishly gave in to male entreaties when they should have resisted. These girls, who failed their pragmatic test and could be coerced into sex, became 'bad', and word quickly spread. A high school student in New Orleans, when asked how he could tell what level of intimacy he could expect from his date, said, 'some time another guy might say, "Boy, you really had a hot time . . ." It gets around'.⁶⁶ Boys were also less willing to stick to their own moral standards. A study attempting to compare college students' ideal limits on sexual behaviour with their actual behaviour found that while boys had definite ideas about the degree of intimacy that was appropriate at various stages of a relationship, 'they engage in as advanced type of sex play as they can despite the inherent inconsistency involved in comparing their ideals with their conduct'.⁶⁷ One woman recalled being called a whore after petting with a boyfriend, who chastised her saying 'that if any boy had done with his sister what he had done with her, he'd kill him'.⁶⁸ In short, boys sought to take what sexual contact they could, whatever their professed beliefs about appropriate levels of intimacy, or what they thought was appropriate for girls to do.

It is important to note, however, that the emphasis on sexual conquest as proof of masculinity also carried perils for boys. An unwanted pregnancy could force a sexually active male into an early marriage, perhaps with an unsuitable or undesirable partner. Boys feared pregnancy because it could derail college plans and carry potentially permanent implications for class status and future earnings, especially in small towns where marriage was expected, leading to a lifetime stigma of gossip and innuendo.⁶⁹ Girls, however, were more likely to carry the burdensome consequences of pregnancy alone. Many girls 'went away', had their babies, relinquished them for adoption and were told simply to 'forget'. Most never could.⁷⁰ Myths about sexual intercourse and pregnancy only made things worse. One survey showed that most men and women did not know at what point in a woman's menstrual cycle she was most likely to become pregnant. Many erroneously believed that men and women had to achieve simultaneous orgasms in order to conceive. And many believed that a virgin could not get pregnant during her first experience of sexual intercourse.⁷¹ It is hard to ignore this supreme irony: sexual experimentation was seen as an important way to prove masculinity, but a resulting pregnancy could force a young man into marriage, an institution that confined and even undermined the very masculinity that his sexual conquest had proved.

Dating norms in the 1950s thus carried inherent contradictions. Unwanted pregnancy could be a disaster for both parties, but sexual experience proved manhood. And while everyone agreed that it was a woman's responsibility to limit intimacy during a date, it was up to the male to determine whether she really meant it or not. If she failed to keep intimacy within accepted limits, she became fair game for any boy seeking sexual experience. But even being in a relationship did not guarantee respect. Many women tolerated actions from their dates and their steadies that bordered on the criminal. Yet, other than saying that they found their dates' behaviour offensive, they did not talk about sexual coercion. Indeed, popular ideas about women's consent to sexual relations became increasingly murky in the 1950s. Believing that women were not always conscious of their sexual desires and might say 'no' when they meant 'yes' caused men, women and the courts to look with suspicion on women's refusals of sexual relations and their claims of rape.⁷² Because women were held to fantasise about being raped or verbally resist rape while subconsciously desiring it, or might accuse men of rape after

consensual sex as a way to mitigate their own shame, women's verbal protestations were not sufficient proof of non-consent in rape cases and needed to be corroborated by other evidence.⁷³

Defence attorneys in cases of rape growing out of dates gone awry often made consent the centrepiece of their defence. Appeals are filled with efforts by the defence to suggest that even a protesting victim was consenting to sexual relations. In a case from Alabama in 1954, the victim told the court that she had been riding with the defendant when he stopped the car and attempted to have sex with her. She fought him off and tried to run, but he convinced her to get back into the car by telling her he would take her home. He then stopped the car a second time and raped her. The defendant conceded that they had had sexual relations, but insisted that they were with her full consent. He was convicted and sentenced to two years in prison, and the Court of Appeals upheld the verdict.⁷⁴ Luke Teague's defence attorney was more forceful in advancing the seemingly paradoxical claim that women's consent need not be freely given. He asked the judge in the case to instruct the jury regarding the victim's consent in the following manner:

There can be no rape if there be any kind of consent. It matters not how this consent was obtained, or how reluctantly that consent might be given, if there was the least part of consent on the part of the woman during the transaction, then a person charged with rape could not be convicted of rape. She may express her consent by her conduct at the time of the intercourse, and even though she may verbally proclaim unwillingness, consent may be implied by her action.

The judge refused to give the instruction to the jury, perhaps because Teague and his friends had abducted the victim, a fellow teenager, from a drive-in restaurant when she was out with friends. Teague was convicted and sentenced one to two years in prison, and his conviction was upheld by the Georgia Supreme Court in 1951.⁷⁵

These cases are again unusual in the fact that they resulted in conviction. More cases probably resembled that of Richard Chakejian in Virginia in 1957. His case illustrates the degree of sexual coercion that was part of dating on college campuses. He was a white student at the University of Virginia and was accused of raping a seventeen-year-old white girl who had come to Charlottesville for a weekend of parties. When she accompanied him to his apartment, he interpreted her actions as consent to sexual relations and proceeded to rape her twice. Neighbours, alarmed at her screams, called the police. When they arrived at Chakejian's apartment, she accused him of rape. At trial, the defence argued that she only cried rape when caught engaging in an illicit sexual relationship by the officers at the door. The jury apparently agreed, acquitting Chakejian even though her screams had been loud and persistent enough to alarm the neighbours.⁷⁶

Chakejian's defence centred on the claim that women's verbal refusals alone did not in and of themselves indicate a lack of consent to sexual intercourse. His attitude was apparently common among young men, as other studies showed. A New Orleans high school student interviewed by researchers argued, 'But when a girl says "No", you don't always know what she means. Usually it's just because they think they should. If the boy feels that she really doesn't want to stop, then he should keep trying'. Surprised, the research team added a question to the rest of the study of when they should respect a woman's 'No'. Boys were evenly split (41 per cent to 43 per cent) about whether a boy should stop if he doubted the sincerity of her attempts to limit intimacy. Almost

two-thirds of girls thought a boy should stop even if the girl seemed ambivalent in her refusal. When boys thought she really meant no, 89 per cent believed they should stop. But more than 10 per cent still thought the boy could continue to push. While the researchers thought this attitude was a sign of chivalry – that if the boy respected the girl, he would stop – it still allowed boys to determine for themselves whether or not their date ‘really meant it’. In boys’ eyes, no did not always mean no, and when they thought it might not, they were free to exert pressure on their dates for more sexual intimacy.⁷⁷

Clearly, although the coinage of the term ‘date rape’ occurred relatively recently, the phenomenon it describes probably extends back to the advent of dating, and increased with the privacy that cars provided.⁷⁸ Sexual danger accompanied all women, whether considered respectable or not, on every date, even with men they had dated before, knew and supposedly trusted. Nevertheless, most young women did not recognise this threat as something they could protest against or prosecute in court. Most did not consider themselves victims of a crime, and believed that they had somehow brought their experience upon themselves. Boys would be boys, the larger culture insisted, and men brought to the peak of sexual excitement could not help themselves. Indeed, since men were using sexual experimentation to make the transition from boyhood to manhood, popular culture implied that women’s submission, however reluctant, was a necessary component of male maturation. Rather than label many ‘nice’ boys as criminal sex offenders, 1950s Americans chastised women for not being respectable enough to prevent unwanted attempts in the first place.⁷⁹

The perils of the back seat, however, occurred in a context not only of mass consumption, drive-ins, teen movies and poodle skirts; it also took place in a country characterised by racial inequality. In the South, concerns about new forms of heterosocial interaction wove themselves into traditional concerns about the dangers white women faced in a segregated society. Girls were warned that if they went too far boys would not respect them; they were also told that by necking and petting with dates in the back seats of cars, they risked the clutches of the familiar, but now modernised, ‘black beast rapist’, the mythical black man crazed to gratify his supposed lust for white women even at the risk of extralegal violence.⁸⁰ Indeed, Joan Cordle, who came of age in Alabama in the 1960s, recalled being warned not to park with her date on streets popular with dating couples because she might be raped by roving gangs of black youths who targeted white couples in parked cars.⁸¹ While this narrative of sexual danger rewrote old racial fears to fit modern circumstances, it reflected new understandings of gender as well. Women who claimed sexual assault by black men in such situations found themselves morally tarnished by the sexual activity that being in the back seat implied.

Betty Jane Morace, a nursing student in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1955, for example, reported that she and her date were attacked while stopped at a roadside park. They were ‘sitting on the rear seat because’, as they explained, ‘the weather was hot and they wished to open the doors for ventilation’ and did not want the dome light on.⁸² A black man, later identified as Edgar L. Shay, approached the car, shone a flashlight in their faces and threatened to ‘blow their brains out if they moved’. He then allegedly locked Morace’s date in the boot and raped her. Shay’s attorney questioned the couple, asking Morace ‘if she and [her date] did not have an affair that night, and that this was the reason for . . . reporting she had been raped’.⁸³ In another case, Robert Penedo, a white man, allegedly ran for help while two black men dragged his date into an alley in

New Orleans and raped her.⁸⁴ Another white woman and her companion parked their car in a secluded spot off a highway near Birmingham, Alabama, in 1957. A short time later, while they were 'listening to the radio', two black men broke the car window. While one held her escort near the front of the car, the second raped her. They then switched positions. Samuel Taylor was convicted and sentenced to death after the all-white jury heard his friend, a black man named William Welch, relate how Taylor had told him he was going to 'go hunting some "white stuff"' shortly before the assault. Taylor's black companion, who was also convicted of raping the girl, only received ten years in prison because Welch refused to testify against him, claiming he had been coerced by police.⁸⁵

Cases of rape involving black assailants were more likely to be reported and accepted by authorities because they confirmed assumptions held by many white southerners about rape, black men's sexual nature and the dangers that white women faced. But they were far more complex than historians might initially assume. While the narrative of a black beast rapist was still powerful, by the 1950s it came into conflict with newer ideas about white women's own sexual nature and the increasing amounts of protest by a growing civil rights community that black men could muster when charged with a crime that could provoke the most extreme responses from whites.⁸⁶ While black men still faced probable conviction, their sentences did not approach the maximum allowed by law, as a 1955 case from Virginia makes clear. In July of that year, four black youths, ranging in age from fourteen to seventeen, were arrested on two counts of rape, one of a black woman and one of a white woman. The group of boys was accused of attacking couples parked in well-known lovers' lanes. Their testimony either confirmed or played upon the suspicions of the illicit sexual intimacy that occurred on dates, as they told police the white man had his hand up the woman's skirt as they approached the car. According to the four black boys, the couple feared that the boys would report them to the police. In exchange for their silence, they claimed, the white man offered them sexual relations with his date, a white woman. The couple disputed this account, claiming she had been raped sequentially by the youths while they simultaneously held her date nearby. The four blacks were convicted of rape and assault, and sentenced to twenty years in prison. They were released on parole after serving seven years.⁸⁷

The possibility that courting couples might encounter violent criminals did not begin in the 1950s. Virginia Foster Durr (1903–1999), for example, reported a confrontation with a pair of armed black men that her date diffused in the 1920s.⁸⁸ Nor were white couples alone vulnerable. Other cases involved groups of white men who attacked black couples in cars. Moreover, the four black boys in Virginia received a twenty-year prison sentence to serve concurrently for the rape of a black woman they assaulted while she was on a date with a black man.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, for white men, the expectation historically had been that they would protect and defend the honour of their dates, not abandon them to violent criminals, white or black. The mere presence of a white man assured white society that his white female companion was safe from alleged black predators.

In the first five decades of the twentieth century, the assumption of white men's effective protection was so solid that it could actually provide accused rapists a defence in court. The mere presence of a white man during an alleged assault was sufficient in and of itself to raise doubts that the white couple was telling the truth about the crime. In 1906, for example, Mable Risley accused Joseph Thomas of attacking her and her white

fiancé, Forest Gooding, while the two were walking in a public park in the evening. While Gooding went for help, Risley told the court, Thomas raped her. While Thomas was convicted and sentenced to death, the prosecutor, Crandall Mackey, wrote to the governor on Thomas's behalf. Mackey argued that the couple had manufactured the rape charge to cover their own premarital indiscretions. What white man, he implied, would abandon his lady love to a black assailant? He had no proof of these allegations, but Thomas was released.⁹⁰ A dissenting opinion in South Carolina in 1934 made the same point. In a case in which a black assailant supposedly attacked a white couple parked on a date and raped the woman, a justice wrote, 'it is impossible to believe that he [the white male companion] could stand by and see the woman who was in his care subjected to the foul embraces of a negro . . . without making an effort to defend her though he died in the attempt'. The white couple's description of events was thus unbelievable, and the conviction of the black man should be overturned.⁹¹ Similarly, in 1943, a Virginia court convicted Samuel Legions of breaking into a white couple's home while they slept and raping the wife. Legions appealed against his conviction, and the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals ruled that the white husband's very presence and utterly feeble attempts to protect his wife rendered her claim of rape suspect. 'The whole thing does such shocking violence to any righteous conception of human conduct as to be unbelievable even to the most credulous and naïve.' Legions's conviction was thrown out because no white man would fail to protect a white woman.⁹²

By the 1950s, expectations of protection were different. White parents warned that white women parked with white dates faced sexual danger not merely from their date, but also from roving gangs of black men in search of 'white stuff'. The presence of a white male companion was no guarantee of safety. At the same time, however, white fears of black rapists also placed a tool in the hands of couples who sought to deflect attention away from their own social and sexual misdeeds. Claiming that they had been attacked allowed a couple to blame a black man for the temptations of the back seat. Edward Shay's attorney in Mississippi, after all, had suggested as much when he asked the white couple during cross-examination if they had had an affair that night. By preying on the vulnerability of black men to such accusations, white couples sought to escape social censure for their own violation of moral codes. Similar considerations resulted in the release of five black men accused of raping a white woman in Richmond, Virginia in 1951. She and her date apparently concocted the accusation after they had been discovered drinking together after dark in a public park.⁹³

The Richmond Five, as the five accused men in Virginia were called, were lucky to escape charges. Willie Tolbert, Jr, arrested in August 1949 in South Carolina, was not. He was convicted and sentenced to death after being accused of abducting a white couple and raping the woman. The girl, who happened to be the daughter of the local district attorney, told a virtually unbelievable tale, but one calculated to ignite white outrage. After going to a movie and grabbing a bite to eat, the couple allegedly parked their car off the road. They had been there less than five minutes, they testified, when a black man jumped into the car and grabbed the car keys. He pulled the woman out of the car and kissed her, boasting, 'now, don't you say you've never been kissed by a Negro in South Carolina'. He then forced the couple to have sex together while he watched (which they claimed to fake). Then, threatening to kill her if she resisted, and while the boy walked around the car 'dazed', he raped her and reportedly told her he planned to impregnate her. He then got into the driver's seat with the couple and proceeded to

drive around the countryside, stopping twice for gas and cigarettes. After about two hours, he returned the couple and their car to the spot where they had originally parked and let them go.⁹⁴ Tolbert was arrested, convicted and sentenced to death for the crime.

Shortly before his execution, Tolbert granted interviews to two newspapers in which he offered another narrative of the evening's events. He told the reporters that the white couple had approached him and asked him to buy them whiskey. After an evening of drinking together, Tolbert engaged in consensual sexual relations with the young woman. Tolbert insisted that the young white man had offered the girl to him after the white couple had had sexual relations in the back seat of the car. The fantastic story of the abduction, the rape and the wild, two-hour ride was, in Tolbert's view, the desperate attempt by two white teenagers to account for why they might have been seen that night in the company of a black man. Tolbert's story won him no sympathy. He was executed shortly thereafter, and both the editor of the local black newspaper and the Associated Press reporter who interviewed Tolbert and published his account of events were convicted of libel for defaming the white couple.

One might wonder why Tolbert told such an inflammatory tale, especially if he was hoping to win a commutation of his death sentence.⁹⁵ What could more offend the chivalrous pretensions of southern white men than to claim that a white man on a date not only abandoned his duty as protector, but had actually offered to share his companion with a black man? While such a statement may not have helped Tolbert's cause, he was not the only black man to make such a claim. In the 1955 case from Virginia, one of the four youths told police that the white male offered his date to the four black men in exchange for not notifying the police that the couple had parked for illicit purposes. While this claim, like Tolbert's, failed to win the black man leniency at trial, the fact that he raised it at all signalled a shift in white men's chivalrous obligations.⁹⁶ What had changed was that white men were no longer required by southern social custom to give their lives to protect white women from the supposed ravages of violent black men.

In Tolbert's case, the white male companion had done little more than walk around 'dazed' while his girlfriend was raped. And while a few male companions escaped blame because they were locked in the boot, others stood talking with black assailants as their accomplices took turns with their white companions. Still other white men ran, ostensibly for help, leaving white women to what most white southerners would have considered a fate worse than death. The mandates of white supremacy and patriarchy no longer required that white men put themselves at risk to protect their dates, nor even to direct their aggression at alleged black assailants. White men's sexual aggression toward women was naturalised at the same time that they were relieved of the burden of protection. Indeed, perhaps the two developments went hand in hand and were part of a larger American culture that increasingly saw the fault lines of society along the axis of gender, rather than of race. Seeing white women as little more than conquests in games of masculine domination, some white men saw common gender interests with black men. While the statements of Tolbert and John Smith were probably intended to be self-serving, they also suggest that white women may have been little more than trophies to be passed among men of both races to affirm their sexual power.

It is, of course, difficult to determine the extent of this shared masculinity. Most white men would have denied it vehemently as an affront to their sense of chivalry and their whiteness, both still based – rhetorically at least – in part on ideas of protection.

Southern whites were very comfortable, however, with fiery rhetoric about matters of race, while they simultaneously behaved otherwise out of public view. And many white men were hardly chivalrous with their own dates. What is clear is that the evidence that remains occurred in cases in which the white couple felt compelled to make accusations against black men because they feared their actions would be exposed to the eyes of whites. Many other cases may have occurred without that fear. In a culture that excused, and even celebrated, male sexual aggression, it is conceivable that white men would abandon chivalry in favour of male privilege, even with other black men.

The bond of manliness between white and black men, however, had its limits. While white male companions may have shared white women with black men either as part of an evening's entertainment or as a prize to ensure silence, white couples did not keep silent if they felt their actions might be exposed. In a culture that placed great rhetorical emphasis on preventing any sexual congress between white women and black men, roving black men attacking vulnerable white couples in parked cars carried extraordinary potential to terrify whites. It was an almost guaranteed method of diverting attention from the misbehaviour of youth, the sexual temptations of the back seat and the sexual aggression of white dates. For a couple that 'went too far', accusing a phantom black menace offered an escape that some white couples were not afraid to take. What is perhaps surprising, however, is that it was a ploy that the courts occasionally recognised, in part because they viewed white females as not entirely trustworthy. Under pressure to guard their reputations at all costs, white women might be party to such a ruse, especially since they were far less likely to name their date as the villain.

The back seat was perilous indeed. While few white men abandoned their dates when confronted by rapists, many more were willing to coerce their dates into sex themselves. Chivalry no longer required white men to risk their own bodies to protect those of white women, and it no longer prohibited exploitation of even respectable white women. Such attitudes reinforced the gender distinctions that many white Americans thought to be so important, by making men safe from harm and enabling them to use white women sexually in the quest of their own manhood. Masculinity and cowardice, it appears, could co-exist quite nicely in post-war conceptions of manhood, even to the point that they silenced women's possible complaints. In a context in which ideas about women's supposed psychological need to deny their desire held sway and women's value depended on their chastity, all women were liable to be seen as dishonest and disreputable.

As the 1950s progressed and witnessed the birth of the modern Civil Rights Movement, African Americans made rape an issue of civil rights. They protested against the disparity between punishment received by white and black convicted rapists, as well as the danger that black men faced when accused by white women and the willingness of white men to sexually exploit black women. By the end of the decade, their efforts in the streets and the courts began to bear fruit.⁹⁷ Black men claimed the right to protect black women and black women increasingly gave testimony of the violence they received at the hands of white men, testimony that white women could often not give when they were raped by white men. These changes highlight the rhetorical purposes of protection itself, and its role in the social construction of manhood. As white women knew, protection did not necessarily mean sexual integrity or the right to sexual autonomy and expression. While white women who accused their white dates

of rape were sometimes able to gain the attention of the courts, more often they were punished as 'cheap' or 'loose' for their participation, whether willing or not, in the sexual adventures of their companions. The chivalry of white men could in reality be a thin veneer, despite thick rhetoric to the contrary. Virginia Durr implied as much when she remarked that she was disgusted by 'the vileness of the jokes that are told by "nice" southern men . . . I think it is a good indication of the corruption that exists in the relationships of men and women'.⁹⁸ It would be decades before American society, north and south, would openly acknowledge this corruption. Date rape, after all, was a term that would not be invented for another thirty years.

Notes

1. *Where the Boys Are*, Director: Henry Levin, 1960. Susan Douglas gives the movie a more optimistic reading, suggesting that at the end Merritt will still consider premarital sexual experimentation. See Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1994), pp. 78–80.
2. This article focuses on the dating behaviour of white teens. In part, this reflects the erasure of diversity from mainstream popular culture. Magazines, movies and newspapers assume that their readers, like their subjects, were white unless they specifically sought to portray black Americans. In the one sociological study of dating among African American teenagers that I was able to find, the authors reported that, while black teenagers in 1964 dated, they did not engage in public recreation like movies and soda shops to the extent that white teenagers did. The authors attributed this difference to the lack of financial resources among black teenagers required for this kind of date. See George E. Dickinson, 'Dating Behavior of Black and White Adolescents before and after Desegregation', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 37 (1975), pp. 602–8, here p. 604. Magazines that focused on African Americans, such as *Jet* and *Ebony*, acknowledged dating culture among black teenagers. Rachel Devlin, in her study of post-war father-daughter relationships, also describes some similarities between the interests of middle-class black daughters and their white counterparts. See Rachel Devlin, *Relative Intimacy: Fathers, Adolescent Daughters, and Postwar American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 127–40. There is very little scholarly analysis of the treatment of black women as rape victims, in part because until the 1950s black women found it very difficult to have their charges of rape prosecuted by the legal system. Stereotypes that black women were innately promiscuous made it easy for perpetrators to claim black women consented to intercourse. See Dawn Rae Flood, '"They Didn't Treat Me Good": African American Rape Victims and Chicago Courtroom Strategies during the 1950s', *Journal of Women's History* 17 (2005), pp. 38–61; Lisa Lindquist Dorr, *White Women, Rape, and the Power of Race in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 231–40.
3. For a more detailed discussion of this model, see Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).
4. This article builds on the recent historical re-examination of gender and culture in the 1950s. Prominent works on gender and the 1950s include Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Benita Eisler, *Private Lives: Men and Women of the Fifties* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1986); Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Women's Oral History* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993); Joanne Meyerowitz (ed.), *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Jessica Weiss, *To Have and To Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Lynn Peril, *Pink Think: Becoming a Woman in Many Uneasy Lessons* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002); Georganne Scheiner, 'Look at Me, I'm Sandra Dee: Beyond a White, Teen Icon', *Frontiers* 22 (2001), pp. 87–106, esp. pp. 39–40; Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).
5. Date rape or acquaintance rape were terms coined in the 1970s to refer to forced sexual encounters involving 'people who meet in a social setting, a scenario that the woman would have no reason to think might lead to acts of forced sex'. While date rape meets the legal definition of rape, involving sexual relations by force and without the consent of the victim, many see it as a 'lesser' crime either because the woman somehow 'asked for it' or because the associated trauma is presumed to be less because she knew her attacker. Later

- research, beginning in the early 1980s forcefully argued against these assumptions. See Peggy Reeves Sanday, *A Woman Scorned: Acquaintance Rape on Trial* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), pp. 18–19.
6. Numerous articles in magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Woman's Home Companion* and *Good Housekeeping* – magazines unsurprisingly aimed at mothers, especially those concerned about their daughters – expressed concern about going steady as a new form of heterosexual interaction. While these publications were not specifically southern, they were national in scope, reflecting concerns that pervaded the lives of southerners as well as parents in other regions of the country. There are no specifically southern periodicals of this variety, but advice columns, such as ‘Judy Brown Advises’ in the *Birmingham News*, shared the same concerns about dating as did the women’s magazines.
 7. ‘Going Steady . . . A National Problem’, *Ladies Home Journal* 66 (July 1949), p. 44.
 8. See e.g., Samuel Harman Lowrie, ‘Dating Theories and Student Responses’, *American Sociological Review* 16 (1951); pp. 334–40, esp. p. 337; Robert D. Herman, ‘The “Going Steady” Complex: A Re-Examination’, *Marriage and Family Living* 17 (1955), pp. 36–40, esp. p. 37. For the classic study examining dating in the 1920s and 1930s, see Willard Waller, ‘The Rating and Dating Complex’, *American Sociological Review* 2 (1937), pp. 727–34.
 9. Robert J. Bell and Jay B. Chaskes, ‘Premarital Sexual Experience among Coeds, 1958 and 1968’, *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 32 (1970), pp. 81–4, here p. 82; William J. Cameron and William F. Kenkel, ‘High School Dating: A Study in Variation’, *Marriage and Family Living* 22 (1960), pp. 74–6, here p. 75.
 10. See John R. Christ, ‘High School Dating as a Behavior System’, *Marriage and Family Living* 15 (1953), pp. 23–8, esp. p. 25. Quote in Clark W. Blackburn, ‘True Love vs. Sexual Curiosity’, *Cosmopolitan* 149 (October 1960), p. 54.
 11. ‘The Preppers Speak – Pros and Cons of the Question: Should Teenagers Go Steady?’ *Birmingham News*, 5 October 1952, p. D–2.
 12. Ruth Connor and Edith Flinn Hall, ‘The Dating Behavior of College Freshman and Sophomores’, *Journal of Home Economics* 44 (1952), pp. 278–81, here p. 280; ‘Going Steady . . . A National Problem’, p. 128.
 13. ‘Going Steady . . . A National Problem’, p. 128.
 14. Charles W. Cole, ‘American Youth Goes Monogamous’, *Harper's Magazine* 214 (March 1957), p. 31.
 15. ‘Why Do Prom Girls Put Up With the Cartel System of Dating?’, *Saturday Evening Post* 222, 15 April 1950, p. 12.
 16. ‘Teen Agers Shouldn't Go Steady’ [Family Weekly section], *Anniston Star*, 26 January 1958, pp. 6–7.
 17. John Laurence, ‘Society, Sex and the Single Woman’, *Coronet* (March 1953), p. 71; Sidney G. Morton, ‘We're Misleading Our Teenagers about Love’, *Today's Health* 43 (December 1956), p. 28.
 18. Robert Stein, ‘Sex on the Campus?’, *Coronet* 28 (May 1950), p. 101.
 19. Joseph Newton, ‘Seven Steps to a Happy Husband’, [Family Weekly section], *Anniston Star*, 5 January 1958, p. 6.
 20. Helen Mayer Hacker, ‘The New Burdens of Masculinity’, *Marriage and Family Living* 19 (August 1957), p. 228.
 21. Miriam Reumann explores these concerns in depth through national reactions to the release of the Kinsey Reports on male and female sexuality. She argues that Americans made an explicit connection between sexual behaviour and national character. See Miriam G. Reumann, *American Sexual Character: Sex, Gender, and National Identity in the Kinsey Reports* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Other historians have also noted the conflicting messages that Americans received about the importance of family. See Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 124–56; Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), pp. 23–41; Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), pp. 177–201.
 22. The fear of eroding differences between men and women was not invented in the 1950s and existed at least as early as the 1920s. However, it took on a particular context in the midst of the Cold War. See K. A. Cuordileone, ‘“Politics in an Age of Anxiety”: Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949–1960’, *Journal of American History* 87 (2000), pp. 515–45, esp. p. 516.
 23. Dr George W. Crane, ‘The Worry Clinic’, *Alabama Journal*, 7 January 1957; ‘Divorce Rate in US Now Fairly Stabilized’, *Alabama Journal*, 9 January 1957, p. 8–A.
 24. Jane Whitbread, ‘A Report on Current Attitudes toward Chastity’, *Mademoiselle* 49 (July 1959), p. 39. See also Lester A. Kirkendall, *Premarital Intercourse and Interpersonal Relations* (New York: Julian Press, 1961), pp. 86–9.
 25. Movies like *That Touch of Mink* (1962) and *The Apartment* (1960) were premised, in part, on the idea that wives did not understand their husbands, that marital sexual relations were unsatisfying for most couples

- and that it was men's prerogative, even married ones, to pressure available women for sex. The efforts of the male leads to achieve sexual conquests countered the dehumanisation of workplace routine, and literally separated the men from the boys.
26. Whitbread, 'Report on Current Attitudes', p. 39.
 27. Hacker, 'The New Burdens of Masculinity', p. 231.
 28. Patricia Matthews, 'If Your Son or Daughter is Going Steady', *Good Housekeeping* 131 (December 1950), p. 53.
 29. 'Sex Freedom and Morals in the United States', *Ladies Home Journal* 66 (June 1949), p. 48.
 30. Goodrich C. Schauffler, MD, 'It Could Be Your Daughter', *Reader's Digest* 72 (April 1958), p. 55.
 31. Thelma Bassy, 'Teen Agers Shouldn't Go Steady', [Family Weekly section], *Anniston Star*, 5 January 1958, pp. 6–7.
 32. Margaret Widdemer, 'Cad's Paradise', *Good Housekeeping* 131 (October 1950), p. 238; Blackburn, 'True Love vs. Sex Curiosity', p. 56. Articles like 'The Perils of Promiscuity', *Reader's Digest* 71 (July 1957), made similar points. Lester Kirkendall tried to determine whether premarital intercourse strengthened or weakened relationships. His results were mixed, reflecting the relative strength or weakness of other factors in the relationship. Lester Kirkendall, *Premarital Intercourse*, pp. 182–200.
 33. John Kord Lagemann, 'Memories that Inhibit Married Love', *Coronet* 42 (July 1957), pp. 68–70.
 34. Peggy Craig, 'What have "Sex Experts" Done to Children?', *Coronet* 37 (January 1955), p. 113.
 35. Albert Ellis, *The American Sexual Tragedy* (New York: Twayne, 1954), pp. 57–74.
 36. See Alexandra Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 154.
 37. See Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, pp. 150–81, esp. pp. 168–9; Kline, *Building a Better Race*, pp. 140–56.
 38. The estimates of the time spent necking is from 'The Dating Behavior of College Freshman and Sophomores', p. 279.
 39. 'Sex Freedom and Morals in the United States', p. 88.
 40. 'Sex Freedom and Morals in the United States', p. 49.
 41. 'Sex Freedom and Morals in the United States', p. 86.
 42. 'The Dating Behavior of College Freshmen and Sophomores', p. 278.
 43. Harold T. Christensen, 'Dating Behavior as Evaluated by High-School Students', *American Journal of Sociology* 57 (1952), pp. 580–86, here p. 581.
 44. 'Going Steady . . . A National Problem', p. 131.
 45. Whitbread, 'Report on Current Attitudes', pp. 37–40.
 46. Abigail Van Buren, 'Things My Mother Never Told Me – Blue Jean Biology', *McCall's* (September 1959), p. 30.
 47. Dr Goodrich Schauffler, 'Today It Could Be Your Daughter', *Ladies Home Journal* 75 (January 1958), p. 112.
 48. Ann Fessler, *The Girls Who Went Away: The Hidden History of Women Who Surrendered Children for Adoption in the Decades before Roe v. Wade* (New York: Penguin, 2006), p. 33.
 49. Kiowa Costonik, *How to Win and Hold a Husband*, quoted in Brett Harvey, *The Fifties: A Woman's Oral History* (New York: Harper Collins, 1983), p. 1.
 50. In a 1959 article in *Teens Today*, quoted in Peril, *Think Pink*, p. 97.
 51. Many southern newspapers carried at least one advice column. Dorothea Dix's column appeared in the *Florida Times Union*, in Jacksonville, Florida, (along with 'Teen Mail' and 'They Ask Kitte') and the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. Letters to Beatrice Fairfax appeared in the *Alabama Journal*. 'Tips for Teens' and 'Teen Talk' appeared in the *Montgomery (Al) Advertiser*. 'Ask Judy Brown' was a regular feature of the *Birmingham News*, while the *Atlanta Constitution's* readers sent their concerns to the 'Teen Age Mail' column. 'Ask Judy Brown's' queries varied most widely, from money issues in marriage to dating to how to soften rough elbows. Most columns carried numerous letters from young teenagers beset by the pangs of puppy love. Consistently, these teenagers (usually, though not always, girls) were told that they were too young to go steady and should date a wide variety of members of the opposite sex, reflecting adult ambivalence about going steady. That many of these columns were syndicated nationally suggests that the concerns of teens crossed regional boundaries.
 52. 'Tips for Teens by Elinor Williams', *Montgomery Advertiser*, 11 June 1954, p. 10–A; 'Beatrice Fairfax', *Alabama Journal*, 7 January 1957, p. 1–B; 'Beatrice Fairfax', *Alabama Journal*, 11 January 1957, p. 3–B.
 53. Women's responsibility for sex control has been well established by other historians. See Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*; Tyler May, *Homeward Bound*; Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable*; Eisler, *Private Lives*. Importantly, while much emphasis was placed on women's virginity, many oral histories of the 1950s confirm that it was one's reputation for virginity rather than its actuality that was important.

- Many women did have sexual intercourse well before they married. See Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), p. 258. There was, of course, also a persistent double standard. Dorothea Dix, for example, when asked by a young man if he should marry a woman he loved who had had six previous affairs without regrets, replied that he would never be able to trust her once they married. ‘Dorothea Dix’, *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 16 February 1951, p. 34.
54. *Cunningham v. State*, 85 Ga. App. 216, 68 Southeastern Reporter, 614.
 55. *Rushing v. State*, 94 Southern 2d 770. Rushing was convicted by an Alabama court of carnal knowledge of a girl over twelve but under sixteen.
 56. *Manning v. State of Florida*, 93 Southern 2d 716.
 57. *Kirkwood v. McFarland*, 47 Southern 2d 74. The case was brought by Kirkwood’s father as she was an unemancipated minor over the age of eighteen.
 58. Eugene J. Kanin, ‘Male Aggression in Dating–Courtship Relations’, *American Journal of Sociology* 63 (1957), pp. 197–204, here p. 197. See also Clifford Kirkpatrick and Eugene Kanin, ‘Male Sex Aggression on a University Campus’, *American Sociological Review* 22 (1957), pp. 52–8, esp. p. 53.
 59. Kanin, ‘Male Aggression in Dating’, p. 201.
 60. Kirkpatrick and Kanin, ‘Male Sex Aggression’, p. 53.
 61. Kanin, ‘Male Aggression in Dating’, pp. 202–3; Kirkpatrick and Kanin, ‘Male Sex Aggression’, pp. 56–7.
 62. Johnson, ‘Sex and the College Girl’, p. 60.
 63. Warren Breed, ‘Sex, Class, and Socialization in Dating’, *Marriage and Family Living* 18 (1956), pp. 137–44, here pp. 140 and 142.
 64. Winston W. Ehrmann, *Premarital Dating Behavior* (New York: Henry Holt, 1959), p. 195. See also Kirkendall, *Premarital Intercourse*, pp. 56–77.
 65. Whitbread, ‘Report on Current Attitudes’, p. 39.
 66. Breed, ‘Sex, Class, and Socialization in Dating’, p. 140.
 67. Robert L. Karen, ‘Some Variables Affecting Sexual Attitudes, Behavior and Inconsistency’, *Marriage and Family Living* 21 (1959), pp. 235–9, here p. 239.
 68. Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable*, p. 119.
 69. I thank Jack Johnson and the Organization of American Historians audience for raising this point when I presented a version of this article at the OAH 2004 Annual Meeting in Boston, Massachusetts.
 70. See Ann Fessler, *The Girls Who Went Away*.
 71. Dr Geolo McHugh with J. Robert Moskin, ‘What Americans Need to Learn about Sex: The McHugh Report’, *Colliers*, 9 November 1956, pp. 36–40, esp. p. 38; Eisler, *Private Lives*, p. 131. Eisler believes that the myth that you could not get pregnant the first time was ‘the number one myth’ when she was in college, and was responsible for more unwanted pregnancies than all the other myths, including the need for simultaneous orgasm to achieve conception, combined.
 72. Helene Deutsch, *Psychology of Women* (1944), in Susan Brownmiller, *Against Her Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Bantam, 1975), p. 252. Brownmiller sharply criticised Deutsch’s theories for offering men an iron-clad defence for rape – that all women, deep down, wanted it to occur, and therefore consented subconsciously. Deutsch was often quoted in popular articles on women and sexuality in the 1950s.
 73. See e.g. Glanville Williams, ‘Corroboration – Sexual Cases’, *Criminal Law Review* (October 1962), pp. 662–71; Note, ‘Corroborating Charges of Rape’, *Columbia Law Review* 67 (1967), pp. 1,137–8; Note, ‘The Resistance Standard in Rape Legislation’, *Stanford Law Review* 18 (1966), p. 682; Note, ‘Forcible and Statutory Rape: An Exploration of the Operation and Objectives of the Consent Standard’, *Yale Law Review* 62 (1952), pp. 52–68.
 74. *Duckett v. State of Alabama*, 73 Southern 2d, 773.
 75. *Teague v. State of Georgia*, 67 Southeast Reporter 2d 467, quote on p. 469.
 76. Chakejian’s case was not covered in the Charlottesville paper, though the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* covered the trial extensively because his alleged victim was a Richmond native. A summary of the trial appeared on 1 March 1957. See also, *Commonwealth v. Richard N. Chakejian*, Law Order Book #24, 197, February Term, 1957, Charlottesville Corporation Court, Charlottesville, Virginia.
 77. Breed, ‘Sex, Class, and Socialization in Dating’, p. 141.
 78. For a discussion of sexual coercion on dates in the 1920s, see Lisa Lindquist Dorr, ‘Fifty Percent Moonshine and Fifty Percent Moonshine: Social Life and College Youth Culture in Alabama, 1913–1933’, in Ted Ownby (ed.), *Manners and Southern History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), pp. 45–75, esp. p. 58.
 79. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, p. 90.

80. Numerous historians have explored the role of the black beast rapist in southern culture and race relations. This mythical creature grew in stature in the late nineteenth century, and was routinely trotted out to justify lynching and other aspects of racial terror used to control the economic, social and political power of African Americans. At the same time, however, while the rhetoric about the black beast rapist was fierce, it did not always predict how white southerners would respond to allegations of black-on-white rape. See Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Sex across the Color Line in the Nineteenth Century South* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997); Diane Miller Sommerville, *Rape and Race in the Nineteenth Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Dorr, *White Women, Rape*.
81. Jackie Cordle Paper, May 2002, in possession of author.
82. Being in the back seat implied greater degrees of intimacy than even the front seat, as men were not hampered by the steering wheel. Some women even looked on the steering wheel as an ally in their efforts to fend off aggressive dates. See Harvey, *The Fifties*, p. 6.
83. *Shay v. State of Mississippi*, 90 Southern 2d 209, quotes at pp. 209, 210, 211.
84. *State of Louisiana v. Labat*, 75 Southern 2d 333.
85. *Taylor v. State of Alabama*, 97 Southern 2d 802, quotes at p. 803.
86. For a complete discussion of rape as part of the struggle for civil rights, see Dorr, *White Women, Rape*, pp. 205–43.
87. *Commonwealth v. Garland Warren Marshall*, Case 8097, 8098, 8099, 8100; *Commonwealth v. Dan L. Thomas, Jr.*, Case 8101, 8102, 8103, 8104; *Commonwealth v. William Robinson*, Case 8105, 8106, 8107, 8108; *Commonwealth v. John Camillous Smith*, Case 8109, 8110, 8111, 8112, Circuit Court of Fairfax County, Fairfax, Virginia. The maximum punishment under Virginia law for rape was the death penalty or life in prison.
88. Virginia Foster Durr, *Outside the Magic Circle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), p. 66.
89. The rape cases that began to appear in Virginia courts in the 1950s brought by black women against white men revealed how vulnerable black women were to gangs of white men, even when they were on a date. See Dorr, *White Women, Rape*, pp. 231–42; Danielle L. McGuire, ‘“It Was Like All of Us Had Been Raped”: Sexual Violence, Community Mobilization, and the African American Freedom Struggle’, *Journal of American History* 91 (2004) pp. 906–31, here p. 923.
90. Crandall Mackey to Governor Davis, 2 December 1919, *Commonwealth v. Joe Thomas*, Petition for Conditional Pardon, 29 January – 6 February 1920, Executive Papers, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.
91. *State v. Floyd*, 174 SC 288 (1934), at p. 332.
92. *Legions v. Commonwealth*, 181 Va. 89 (1943), at pp. 91–2.
93. *Richmond Afro-American*, 4 August 1951, 11 August 1951, 18 August 1951, 1 September 1951. The white press did not cover the case other than to note that police had released the men. See the *Richmond News-Leader*, 10 August 1951, 23 August 1951.
94. I thank Kari Frederickson for bringing this case to my attention. My description of events is from her book, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1931–1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 209–13. The case and its coverage in the black press ignited a political controversy.
95. Tolbert had insufficient funds to appeal against his conviction but he and his supporters may have tried to have his sentence commuted to life in prison. It was a frequent strategy in Virginia.
96. See Pre-Sentence Investigation, John Camillous Smith, 23 March 1956, p. 2, *Commonwealth v. John Camillous Smith*, Felonious Assault No. 8110, Circuit Court of Fairfax County, Fairfax, Virginia.
97. Danielle McGuire makes the connection between black women’s sexual exploitation the growth of protest organisations that became the civil rights movement. She argues that black women created a culture of testimony rather than one of dissemblance, making black women’s sexual integrity an issue of civil rights. See McGuire, ‘It was Like All of Us’. See also, Dorr, *White Women, Rape*, pp. 209–43.
98. Virginia Foster Durr, *Freedom Writer, Letters from the Civil Rights Years*, Patricia Sullivan (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 79.

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