

# Teen Age Temptations: How Romance Comic Books Condemned Precocity

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*WRITER'S COMMENT: I came into Professor Decker's seminar on Adolescence in the Modern World with an interest in romance comic books. I ran across them earlier in my college career and I was interested in how they could have shaped the views of my grandmothers and women like them. Writing this paper provided a great opportunity to better learn how to research and build off an already existing body of academic knowledge. With Professor Decker's guidance, I was able to explore romance comic books specifically written for teenage girls. Her seminar helped me realize the extent in which members of society worried over the supposed threat of young girls throughout history. She provided me with a historical and sociological framework by which to explore how professional, psychological, and social discourse created and responded to a general fear concerning teenagers and their assumed precocity. With this framework, I was then able to analyze how teenage romance comic books became a tool to educate teenage girls about the dangers of precocity. I found that comic books, a seemingly innocent form of entertainment, have a more the more disturbing effect of controlling the behavior of young women in America by teaching them about their role in society.*

*INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENT: With the modern "discovery" of adolescence in the late nineteenth century, youth became a significant social problem and fodder for psychological discourse. Concerns about the emergence of new youth cultures and shifting gender identities rose to the surface. Adolescents themselves coopted and shifted these discourses, setting the stage for the emergence of youth-driven popular*

*culture by the end of the century. We explored these themes in History 102X, Adolescence in the Modern World, an upper division seminar for history majors. For the final project, students wrote papers based on primary research that dealt in some way with the history of youth. Sydney's paper examines the morals embedded in romance comic books marketed to American teenage girls in the postwar period. Her account tells us about a key moment in the history of adolescence when "modern girls" and "juvenile delinquents" were both objects of social scientific study and historical agents who challenged authorities seeking to control their behavior. Her analysis of the plots, messages, and metaphors in the stories indicate the extent to which the writers and publishers sought to shape teenage girls through this popular culture medium, as well as what now appears, in retrospect, as the futility of their actions.*

– Corrie Decker, Department of History

In 1947, Prize Comics published the first issue of *Young Romance*, created by *Captain America's* Joe Simon and Jack Kirby. The comic book became a bestseller: *Young Romance* sold 92 percent of its print run, surpassing 500,000 copies, and over 1,000,000 within the next few issues.<sup>1</sup> Romance comic books infiltrated the market and found a permanent place in American popular culture during the Cold War era. Simon and Kirby created other titles, and other comic book publishers followed suit. Subgenres soon appeared that addressed girls and young women at all stages of life. St. John Publications' *Teen-Age Romances*, the fifth romance comic book series to come on the market, firmly established the teenage subgenre in the romance comic book craze of the late 1940s and 1950s.<sup>2</sup> With its first story, "They Called me a Wayward Girl," which featured a teenager named Doty who mistakenly chases "good times," *Teen-Age Romances* set the dramatic model for

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1 Richard Howell, *Introduction to Real Love: The Best of the Simon and Kirby Romance Comics*. (New York: Eclipse Books, 1998), 46.

2 Michelle Nolan, *Love on the Racks: A History of American Romance Comics* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2008), 55.

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subsequent teenage romance comic books.<sup>3</sup> Robust sales indicated that these sensational stories appealed to readers, and an unnamed *Washington Post* writer complained that too many teenagers and housewives were “turning to comics for heart thrills.”<sup>4</sup>

However, despite the *Post* writer’s complaint, these comic books addressed a concern of many adult American citizens, who voiced worry over an emerging teenage material culture that promoted precocious sexual and marital behavior and placed it outside parental control. In fact, the comic book industry created romance comic books to teach teenage girls the dangers of sexual, marital, and consumerist precocity, even responding to psychoanalytical and societal discourse on female juvenile delinquency. In analyzing these comic books’ plotlines, themes, and depiction of teenage girls, I illustrate that these comic books warned young women about the dangers of precocity and constrained their sexual and social roles. Thus, these comic books ultimately aimed to remedy teenage girl behavior and reestablish parental authority.

The educational purpose of Romance comic books stemmed from a tradition in the comic book industry. Cold War scholar Paul Hirsch argues that the United States government controlled the production of most comic books during World War II through the Writers’ War Board (WWB).<sup>5</sup> Though technically not a government agency, the government funded the WWB and determined 85 percent of its production to engender the American people’s support for government policies.<sup>6</sup> In 1943, for example, the WWB initiated the use of comic books as propaganda to shape Americans’ perceptions of race and ethnicity to correspond with the war efforts against Germany and Japan. This influence lasted until 1948, when the war was over and the government decided the WWB was no longer needed to achieve citizen support.

Maureen Honey argues that the WWB shaped popular fiction first to drive women into the workforce during WWII and then to transition

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3 “They Called me a Wayward Girl,” *Teen-Age Romances*, vol 1., issue 1 (New York: St. John Publications, August 1949).

4 “Love Stuff” *Washington Post* (1923-1954), January 24, 1950: 8.

5 Paul Hirsch, “This Is Our Enemy: The Writer’s War Board and Representations of Race in Comic Books, 1942-1945,” *Pacific Historical Review* 83, no. 3 (2014), 449.

6 *Ibid*, 449-451, 455.

them back into their homes at the end of the war.<sup>7</sup> Hired out to steamy romance confession magazines popular amongst women readers, writers from the WWB's Confessions Committee created stories to sway American women's behavior.<sup>8</sup> For instance, in these stories, working-class women who supported the war effort found true love.<sup>9</sup> Middle-class women who would not get out and work failed in love. As the war headed to its end, these magazines began to focus on the importance of transitioning women back home.<sup>10</sup> Themes of feminine values, the sanctity and fulfillment of marriage, and the importance of being a stay-at-home wife and mother began to proliferate in confession magazines. Simon and Kirby's *Young Romance* mirrored this teaching effort and established comic book social-role instruction for women. When the teenage comic book subgenre emerged in 1949 with St. John's *Teen-Age Romances*, comic books espoused age-specific teachings that addressed gendered perceptions of juvenile delinquency.

## Sexual Precocity

Teenage romance comic books featured plotlines devoted to adolescent dating rituals, which reflected American society's concerns over the emerging dating culture and its threat to middle-class values. Historian Beth Bailey details the changes in courting practices and gendered perception from World War II to the Cold War.<sup>11</sup> During WWII, dating culture entailed consistent courting, but with rapid changes in partners and little chance for intimacy.<sup>12</sup> For teenagers, dates themselves were commodities, and the more a girl accumulated, the more successful she appeared to her peers.<sup>13</sup> At the end of WWII, dating culture changed. Soldiers came home with the intention of starting a family and

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7 Maureen Honey, "New Roles for Women and the Feminine Mystique: Popular Fiction of the 1940s." *American Studies*, (1983), 37-39, 45.

8 *Ibid.*, 43.

9 *Ibid.*, 43-45.

10 *Ibid.*, 37, 45.

11 Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 14.

12 *Ibid.*, 2-8, 14-16.

13 *Ibid.*, 59-61.

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establishing a stable life.<sup>14</sup> Thus, dating became exclusive, and “going steady” and marrying young became the social and courting norms.<sup>15</sup>

The practice of going steady changed adolescent dating culture. Young girls, from age twelve through high school, still dated frequently.<sup>16</sup> However, they mostly stuck with one partner at a time and treated that partner as a potential spouse. Dating essentially became “play-marriage.”<sup>17</sup> Having a guy to go steady with established a teenage girl’s popularity, whereas before her ability to date as many guys as possible indicated her worth.<sup>18</sup> Going steady gave rise to new concerns. Parents, journalists, educators, and other adults believed that going steady resulted in sexual precocity.<sup>19</sup> This concern was not unfounded. The marital quality of going steady imparted a sense of safety that encouraged teenagers to participate in premarital sexual activities.<sup>20</sup>

Romance comic books reflected this social fear of sexual precocity. Many attempted to validate the practice of going steady while simultaneously instructing readers about its potential dangers. A good example of this is *Teen-Age Temptations*’ “The Kisses I Couldn’t Forget.”<sup>21</sup> The protagonist, Susan, feels her boyfriend Tom does not provide enough fun. She initially learned machinery, Tom’s hobby, to get him to go steady with her. However, she finds that he is too obsessed with their machinery project—a pump—to have any fun and so she breaks up with him. “Fun,” readers soon learn, means kissing and physical intimacy.<sup>22</sup> In an attempt to find someone to date, Susan pursues flirtatious Teddy, who immediately acts on Susan’s desire for intimacy. Within a few scenes into

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14 Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 42.

15 *Ibid.*, 55.

16 *Ibid.*, 49.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*, 51-53.

19 *Ibid.*, 52.

20 *Ibid.*, 53.

21 “The Kisses I Couldn’t Forget,” *Teen-Age Temptations*, vol 1., issue 3 (New York, N.Y.: St. John Publications, August 1953).

22 *Ibid.*, 10, 11.

Teddy's introduction, she tells the readers, "Then suddenly, he turned and took me in his arms."<sup>23</sup>

Susan is satisfied that Teddy is a fun boyfriend who "likes a good time."<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, she cannot forget Tom and keeps the pump that they created. Teddy continues to insist that Susan get rid of the pump to prove she is over Tom. Yet, once she tosses it into the river, Teddy stops calling her. Later, Susan hears other girls talking about how Teddy dates girls for personal gain. Susan determines that Teddy had her throw away the pump and then retrieved it from the river to sell. When Susan tells Tom about Teddy's misdeed, she finds that Tom had already filed for a patent and thwarted Teddy's plans. Susan forsakes Teddy, Tom takes Susan back, and she realizes that this is true love.<sup>25</sup>

This is a lesson of responsibility. Girls who choose physical activity over non-sexual pastimes, such as mechanical work, get themselves into trouble. Girls must control themselves against urges for fun, meaning physical intimacy, unless they want to invite problems. Furthermore, boys who want excitement are immoral. Teddy used Susan to get what he wanted, which was easy financial profit. Furthermore, when dating Teddy, Susan wanted the instant gratification of easy love. She negates the type of love that requires long-term commitment and has the delayed gratification of marriage. This disregard for commitment and responsibility led Susan to trouble. Tom, the hard-working boy who is not interested in overly sexualized behavior, is the only one who can truly love Susan and bring her happiness. In this lesson, sexual precocity leads to unhappiness and non-sexual companionship leads to love.

## Marital Precocity

Teenage sexual precocity was not the only concern. After teenagers had moved past the phase of going steady, they expected to marry by age nineteen or twenty.<sup>26</sup> Historian Elaine Tyler May states that during the postwar era, "everyone of childbearing age," "rich and poor" and "black

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23 "The Kisses I Couldn't Forget," *Teen-Age Temptations*, vol 1., issue 3 (New York, N.Y.: St. John Publications, August 1953).

24 *Ibid.*, 12.

25 *Ibid.*, 13-15.

26 Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 49.

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and white,” increased the marriage rate.<sup>27</sup> Professionals, politicians, and leaders promoted policies and codes that supported the American family unit and encouraged domesticity.<sup>28</sup> Thus, adolescents nearing their twenties were eager to participate in the domestication of America, where the majority “believed wholeheartedly that the happiness of men and women depended on marriage.”<sup>29</sup>

Historian James Burkhart Gilbert notes that beginning with WWII, teenagers attained distinct adult status through the consumer market. Increased wages provided teenagers with real purchasing power, meaning that their parents no longer had control over their consumer habits. This independence gave teenagers the ability to make adult decisions and provided the basis for them to participate in a youth culture separate from the social code of their parents. Teenagers from both the working and middle classes bought the same products and began to share the cultural values that these products propagated. Teenagers became a distinct social group in which class prescriptions did not factor.<sup>30</sup> Their independence provided a quasi adult-status. Hypothetically, these adult-like teenagers, with their newfound independence from class ideology, could make their own decisions about marital and sexual precocity.

The uncontrolled demographic of the quasi-adult teenager became a perceived threat to America society. To American adults, these precociously adult teenagers threatened the middle class, which embodied American moral values and the domestic ideal. Middle-class Americans worried that working-class values informed youth culture. Thus, adults not only believed that teenagers were too ignorant to make adult decisions, they also believed that working-class mass consumerism corrupted teenagers’ potential ability to make such decisions. For young women, this adult status encouraged them to partake in precocious marital actions—marriage was a major factor in marking a young woman’s entrance into adulthood. Thus, teenager girls needed reeducation on proper pre-marital

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27 Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 2008), viiii.

28 *Ibid.*, xviii.

29 *Ibid.*, 80.

30 James Burkhart Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America’s Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1986), 136, 204-205, 207.

behavior to counteract mass consumerism's by-product of precocious marital behavior.<sup>31</sup> Romance comic books filled this educational void by, ironically, reaching these girls through the mass market while counteracting their independent adult status through their plotlines. These plotlines warned against precocious marital behavior by showing that teenage girls who sought adult independence too soon ruined their lives.

A good example of comic books instructing against marital precocity is *Teen-Age Temptations*' "Without a Conscience."<sup>32</sup> This story features Janice, who is sixteen but looks nineteen. The night before her boyfriend Hal Kerner joins the army, the two have a party with friends. Their friends dare them to get married. Janice and Hal go through with the dare to fool the minister into marrying them, by pretending that Janice is older than her age. Afterwards, they spend a night of sexual passion together. The next day, Janice tells the readers how that morning brought the "unhappy realization" of what they "had done."<sup>33</sup> Janice does not know whether she genuinely loves Hal and if she is ready for the lifelong commitment of marriage. She and Hal have the marriage annulled. This precocious marital and sexual act brings Janice great unhappiness. Her actions during "that one night as Hal's wife" mark her as a "bad girl."<sup>34</sup> Janice loses her friends and only boys of bad reputation want to go out with her afterward.

Janice fails to learn her lesson about the dangers of precocious behavior; she runs away from home, lies about her age, and joins the Women's Army Corps (WACS). At first, she finds joy "in being treated grown-up."<sup>35</sup> Soldier Jimmy Kane soon expresses interest in her. While on a date with Jimmy, Janice runs into Hal. Hal calls Janice later, confessing his love for her, and saying that he had intended to stay married to her. He demands that she stop seeing Jimmy, whom he claims is "the worst of the wolves."<sup>36</sup> Janice ignores Hal's warning and goes with Jimmy to his

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31 Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 135-136, 158, 200.

32 "Without a Conscience," *Teen-Age Temptations*, vol. 1. issue 3 (New York, N.Y.: St. John Publications, August 1953), 16.

33 *Ibid.*, 17.

34 *Ibid.*, 18.

35 *Ibid.*, 19.

36 *Ibid.*, 20-21.



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parents' place on a three-day pass. She soon discovers that Jimmy only wants to seduce her. He had overheard her conversation with Hal and viewed her actions with her ex-husband as proof that she would "play ball" and "knows the score."<sup>37</sup> Realizing that Jimmy wants to have sex with her, Janice runs away. Hal comes to her rescue and takes her back to the camp.

Once at the camp, Janice confesses her age and accepts discharge. As she is leaving, Hal finds her, professes his love once more, and tries to propose to her. However, Janice has learned that precocious behavior is dangerous and that she is not yet a real adult. She states, "We're both very young, Hal...I don't want to make the same mistake over again."<sup>38</sup> She then tells the readers, "I knew that by the time Hal was back home, we'd both be old enough to be positive, maybe this time...We'd be married for keeps!"<sup>39</sup>

This story is a warning against precocious actions of all kinds. It demonstrates the perils of quasi-marriage practices and quasi-adult behavior. Even though Janice's looks allow her to act as an adult, she is not one yet. All endeavors as an adult have failed, because, as Janice notes at the end, she is just not "old enough."<sup>40</sup> The most important message for readers is that they should not rush into marriage. One of the main dangers is sexual precocity, which has its clear consequences, such as an incurable bad reputation. Further, Janice's ordeal reflects concern about precocious behavior in girls leading to irreversible psychological damage.<sup>41</sup> After her experiment, Janice is too terrified of relationships to accept Hal's love. She is unable to move on even though she has learned from her dangerous actions. Instead of starting a normal, non-precocious relationship with Hal, she avoids one altogether. She is mentally and emotionally damaged. Thus, this story warns against the temptations of adult-like freedom that mass consumer culture propagated, which for teenage girls translates into precocious marital behavior.

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37 "Without a Conscience," *Teen-Age Temptations*, vol. 1. issue 3 (New York, N.Y.: St. John Publications, August 1953), 22.

38 *Ibid.*, 23.

39 *Ibid.*

40 *Ibid.*

41 Devlin, *Relative Intimacy*, 26-27.

## Male Authority and What Bad Girls Wear

Concerns about teenagers and their sexual and marital precocity led to increased emphasis on male authority in a teenage girl's life. According to Rachel Devlin, psychoanalysts of the 1950s held that a girl needed a man's influence to develop correctly and that this influence should come from the father, who expressed his dominance in behaviors construed from Freud's Oedipal complex.<sup>42</sup> If a father and daughter had a positive relationship in which the daughter sought paternal approval from her father, they had a healthy Oedipal relationship. If a daughter did not accept male dominance, or she partook in sexual or marital precocity, then the necessary Oedipal relationship was awry and needed correcting. Psychologists believed that "daughters" would be so motivated by "their Oedipal needs" for sexual and moral approval from their fathers that the paternal sphere of influence would strengthen.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, through their strengthened influence, fathers could keep daughters from precocious sexual and marital behavior. These father-daughter Oedipal relationships destroyed any existing matriarch and trained women to acquiesce to the dominant male role that emerged from the postwar cult of domesticity.<sup>44</sup> Fathers could block "teenage alienation" perpetuated by mass youth culture by establishing the sexual standard by which girls measured their behavior.<sup>45</sup> Psychoanalytical discourse warned that without male dominance, a girl would become "masculine in nature."<sup>46</sup> Fathers had the capacity to steer daughters into proper sexual roles that led to a life of sane and moral sexual fulfillment and ensured that daughters achieved proper femininity.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the father's authority had to fill the void left by the mother's incapacity for authority.

As Elaine Tyler May notes, female sexuality became a perceived threat to America during the early Cold War era.<sup>48</sup> Women who incorrectly

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42 Devlin, *Relative Intimacy*, 26-27.

43 *Ibid.*, 6.

44 *Ibid.*, 19.

45 *Ibid.*, 5, 88.

46 *Ibid.*, 70.

47 *Ibid.*, 10, 28-29.

48 May, *Homeward Bound*, 96.

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channeled their sexuality could push men into “sexual transgressions” and turn them into communists who would destroy America, while women with dominant partners avoided becoming sexual dangers to society.<sup>49</sup> It was a woman’s responsibility to find a man who recognized and accepted his masculine role. If she did not marry a dominant man, she risked becoming too dominant herself. Furthermore, this dominant behavior would remain unchecked and such a woman would find herself making amoral decisions due to lack of male influence.<sup>50</sup>

Comics mirrored the importance of male authority. Their stories indicated that to avoid harmful precocious behavior one should obey male authority. An extreme example of this type of lesson is *Hi-School Romance*’s “I Was The Loneliest Girl in School.”<sup>51</sup> The story featured Penny, who is tired of boys treating her “like a tin goddess” and doing whatever she says.<sup>52</sup> She decides she will no longer date any “spineless male who has to ask for the chance” to do so.<sup>53</sup> She tells the reader that all she wants is the one man she can respect.<sup>54</sup> Soon her desire is met, when manly Douglas Trumble saves her when she breaks her foot. Penny becomes more attracted to Douglas when he will not submit to her wishes to date right away. However, once they start dating, Penny is disappointed that he bends to her will.<sup>55</sup> She tells the readers, “I began to turn to other boys, hoping, I guess, to make Doug jealous.”<sup>56</sup> Douglas is not jealous. He tells Penny that he does not care; her “happiness is all that matters” to him.<sup>57</sup>

Penny leaves Douglas for Wally, whose “domineering” behavior she mistakes for appropriate male “dominant” behavior.<sup>58</sup> Due to Wally’s bullying, Penny finds herself in a situation where she needs saving.

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49 May, *Homeward Bound*, 96.

50 *Ibid.*

51 “I Was The Loneliest Girl in School,” *Hi-School Romance*, issue 3 (New York, N.Y.: Harvey Comics, February 1950), 11.

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Ibid.*

54 *Ibid.*, 12.

55 *Ibid.*, 13.

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Ibid.*

Douglas rescues her by punching Wally. Afterward, he lectures Penny for her foolish behavior. He tells her, "Being worshiped didn't make you unhappy—it was because you took advantage of it! You failed to realize that a man wasn't weak just because he was nice!"<sup>59</sup> Penny admits to her foolishness but says, "You let me boss you around... And I don't want that! I want you to tell me!" Douglas then admits that he needs to be, and will be, more dominating and will give her orders from then on. Penny ends the story by telling the readers, "Doug is going to college next month... And when he returns I'm going to take a vow... To Love!... To Honor... To Obey!"<sup>60</sup>

This story illustrated the dangers of female dominance and the importance of male dominance and female obedience. Penny is right to crave male dominance; however, her instincts about what male dominance entails is wrong, and her method of seeking it results in a dangerous situation. When she demands male dominance in a masculine way and turns the natural dynamic upside down, she creates trouble for herself. She needs a man, Douglas, to instruct her in male dominance and how to accept it appropriately. The end reveals that Penny is wrong for questioning the behavior of Douglas – the male authority. Douglas is also wrong for not asserting proper masculine control, which Penny responsibly points out. The story conveys to female readers that they must not only accept authority, they also must ensure their future spouses assert their masculinity. It also serves as a warning for any boys who may read the story. They must take on a dominating role in their relationships and assume authority over their girlfriends. Since these comic books often contained advertisements geared towards boys, it is entirely possible that comic book creators had this in mind when writing the story. The end of the story hints that Penny will soon be ready for marriage because she understands and is ready to assume the role of an obedient housewife.

A teenage girl's successful assimilation of male authority could also be measured through her fashion habits. According to Rachel Devlin, a teenage girl's fashion choices indicated the success of the Oedipal relationship between a father and daughter.<sup>61</sup> Devlin states that teenage

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<sup>59</sup> "I Was The Loneliest Girl in School," *Hi-School Romance*, issue 3 (New York, N.Y.: Harvey Comics, February 1950), 14.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Devlin, *Relative Intimacy*, 83.

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consumerism allowed girls to create a distinct fashion subculture,<sup>62</sup> indicating their escape from parental authority and marking a change in their relationship to domesticity. Mass media showed that these products gave girls dominance over the household through scenes in which they commandeered “the phone, the bathroom, [and] the living room.”<sup>63</sup> Female adolescent subculture thus became a threat to the American domestic ideal in which male authority supposedly reigned. Teenage romance comic books reflected this concern by connecting fashion to precocious sexual mannerisms.

In these comic books, fashionable girls were those who acted or appeared precocious. For example, Janice’s precocious looks in “Without a Conscience” got her into trouble.<sup>64</sup> In scenes directly following Janice’s and Hal’s passionate night, Janice appears more scantily clad in jean shorts and a strapless top with her legs spread. In *Going Steady*’s “Bargaining For Happiness,” protagonist Kathy wears a sexualized red dress as she lounges in a chair with one leg over the arm, her legs spread as she openly defies her father’s authority, deciding to date bad guy Dick.<sup>65</sup> Susan from “The Kisses I Couldn’t Forget” wears a red dress and leans back seductively as she contemplates which boy would give her some “fun.”<sup>66</sup> This connection between fashion and precocity suggested to readers that participating in fashion consumerism was itself dangerous by association.

## Conclusion

Teenage romance comic books were meant to educate female youth about their social role. In the postwar era, this new form of literature sought to teach youth about middle-class standards. These romance comic books appeared on the market at a time when society became concerned about the sexual precocity of teenage girls. When young people bought into mass culture, they signified that their parents could

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62 Devlin, *Relative Intimacy*, 97.

63 Ibid.

64 “Without a Conscience,” 18.

65 “Bargaining For Happiness,” *Going Steady*, vol. 1, issue 11 (New York, N.Y.: St. John Publications, February 1955), 11.

66 “The Kisses I Couldn’t Forget,” 11.

not instill middle-class values in their children.<sup>67</sup> Much of society, including professionals and journalists, believed that family, especially mothers, had no control over their children. Journalists and politicians indicated that the family unit was increasingly losing its perceived and actual power over the development of the child, and an apparent void for moral instruction opened.

Through this analysis, I have demonstrated that teenage romance comic books filled this gap with anti-precocity themes. In emphasizing the dangers of precocity, these comic books aimed to shift the concern of precocity from adult society to the teenage girl. Precocious sexual behavior could emotionally scar a young girl as well as ruin her reputation and stunt her growth as an individual and as a member of society. Precocious marital behavior was worse: as a claim to adult status, it opened more avenues for psychological damage that rendered a girl unfit for marriage and future happiness. To help keep out of trouble, girls were supposed to seek out male authority. In highlighting the industry's propagandistic intention, this analysis questions how much the comic book industry intended romance comic books as a form of entertainment. Thus, this study of seemingly frivolous romance comic books stressed that there are many insidious tools available to shape the role of female citizens.

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<sup>67</sup> Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 20, 32, 131-132, 204-207.

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