Female Sexual and Mating Behavior

Daughter: Ma, I’m gonna have a baby.

Mother: Where’s the father?

Daughter: I wrote him a letter, but he didn’t answer it.

Mother: I hope it’s a boy! We haven’t had a boy in the family for a long time!

--Moll and Mother

Sex and Mating as Separable Spheres

A conventionalized image of sex life on the street corner has become a staple of much current literature dealing with the adolescent corner group. Sexual behavior is pictured as extensive, untrammeled, and lurid—as a constant round of wild sex orgies, collective perversions, and unrestricted promiscuity. The urban slum is portrayed as the operating arena par excellence of the rogue male and the loose woman. This image is conveyed not only by writers of numerous “juvenile gang” paperbacks—whose covers almost invariably feature a young girl in a tight sweater being eyed lasciviously by corner boys—but also by writers less committed to sensationalism. Harrison Salisbury, for example, uses phrases such as “sadistic contempt,” “primitive sexual needs,” and “collective sex exhibitions” to characterize
sexual behavior in the “gang.” The picture of corner-group sexual behavior as lurid and shocking, as “primitive,” as an uninhibited sex spree, as wholly beyond the limits of “conventional” morality was not borne out by Project data.

Sexual and mating practice of Midcity gang members were governed by well-defined conventions which prescribed acceptable forms of behavior and prescribed unacceptable forms. These practices, rather than representing uncontrolled deviations from “normal” forms, constituted logical stages in the development of adult behavior patterns which were geared to the realistic requirements of mating and childrearing in a lower class community. At the same time, many behavioral adaptations involved serious attempts to accommodate the fact that certain practices common in Midcity were stigmatized in other communities or explicitly forbidden by legal and moral injunctions.

“Sexual” behavior and “mating” behavior can be considered as closely related components of a unified complex—especially when viewed within the context of female behavior. However, a distinction can be made between those aspects of this complex which relate more specifically to “sex” and those which relate to “mating.” In this study, “sexual” behavior will be defined as that which entails direct physical intimacy or sensual stimulation—such as lovemaking, sexual intercourse, contraception, pregnancy, prostitution, procuring, and homosexuality. Behavior concerned with seeking out, arranging, maintaining, and terminating alliances between male and female partners will be called “mating;” “mating” thus involves activities such as dating, making “pick-ups,” “going steady,” betrothal, marriage, “cheating,” separation, and divorce. That “sex” and “mating” can legitimately be considered as separate and distinguishable spheres of activity is documented by the finding, to be presented, that these two areas shared contrasting developments both in regard to the patterning of “disapproved” forms of behavior and in regard to behavior-change trends. For example, “sexual” actions changed little while

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sentiments were volatile; for “mating,” actions were volatile while sentiments remained stable.

Analysis which makes it possible to treat “sex” and “mating” both separately and jointly is also responsive to a difference between the sexes as to the appropriate relationship between these two areas. From the point of view of Midcity females, sexual activity and mating activity appeared, under most circumstances, as integrally related; many males, on the other hand, were able to view “sex” and “mating” as relatively independent areas of activity. Such differences between men and women as to the significance, forms, and meanings of sex and mating necessitate separate treatment of male and female sexual behavior. The present chapter will explore these areas from the perspective of Project females; later sections will explore the sexual and mating behavior of Project males.

Two Forms of Childrearing Unit

The sexual behavior of Project girls takes on meaning only when viewed within the context of mating, marriage, and childrearing practices of the adult female community, and only by assuming an essential continuity between adolescent and adult roles. In common with their age-mates in other parts of the country and in other social status groups, Project girls maintained a lively and consistent interest in the vital issues of physical attractiveness, “boys,” dating, dancing, “going steady,” one’s “personality,” and one’s “reputation.” However, in specific manifestations of these concerns—in the kind of boy one dated, in what constituted a good “reputation,” in how one handled the relationship between “boys” and babies—definite distinctions existed between the corner girls of Midcity and their sisters in the wealthier residential suburbs.

Sexual patterns of lower class girls which differ from those condoned by the middle class community are frequently characterized by terms such as “loose sexual morality,” “infidelity,” and “promiscuity.” Such behavior is often attributed to “inadequate impulse control,” and is seen as the forerunner of “broken homes,”
ruined lives, divorce, desertion, and neglect. Mating patterns which entail a series of sexual alliances of limited duration are considered to be harmful to offspring, and to produce personality disturbance and other undesirable effects. This state of affairs is often explained, in simplified terms, by the notion that many lower class girls and women are unable or selfishly unwilling to limit their desires for more extensive sexual and mating experience, or to trade the thrills and excitement of “romance” for the more routine gratifications of monogamy, motherhood, and home care.

Such concepts create a picture of a mating and childrearing system suffused with immorality, pathology, and disorganization. The sexual behavior of Project girls appears considerably less “pathological” or “anti-social” when examined against the actual pattern of local mating and childrearing practices rather than against an implicit concept of idealized middle class practice. Much of the sexual behavior of Project girls is illuminated on the basis of one simple assumption: two major forms of mating or “marriage” were prevalent in Midcity. These two forms corresponded to two forms of childrearing unit—the monogamous, extended-duration, husband-wife household, and the serial-mating, plural-mother, female-based household.

Characteristics of these two household forms have been dismissed elsewhere. Briefly, the “female-based” type of household is one in which “…a male acting in the ‘father’ role is either absent from the household, only sporadically present, or when present, only minimally or inconsistently involved in the support and raising of children. The household usually consists of one or more women of childbearing age, frequently related to one another by blood or marriage ties, and often includes two or more generations of women; e.g., the mother and/or aunt of the principal child bearer. Associated with the female-based household is the ‘serial monogamy’ mating pattern in which a woman of childbearing age has a succession

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of temporary mates during her procreative years. The distinguishing feature of this type of household is that its successful functioning is not predicated on the consistent presence of an adult male. The unit has the capacity to absorb and utilize an adult male if one is available; however, if such a person cannot be induced to become a “permanent” member of the household, or if he leaves the household after having been a member, the unit is so organized as to remain socially and economically viable. The primary mechanism for securing this viability is the utilization of a group of females to perform certain of the economic and childrearing functions generally executed by males in extended-duration monogamous households. For example—women who do not have small infants requiring constant care will get jobs to help support those who do; they in turn will reciprocate when the situation is reversed. Public welfare payments may be utilized as a routine source of income.

The extended-duration monogamous household includes an adult male who assumes consistent responsibility for securing financial support and who devotes a substantial amount of time and energy to the rearing of children. Households of this type in Midcity differed from the corresponding middle class form in that males generally evinced a lesser degree of focused concern with childrearing and related concerns.

Given the existence of these two household types and their corresponding forms of mating, it would follow that the adolescent sexual experience of Midcity girls, if it were to be effective and adaptive, would have to prepare them for participation in either or both types of unit. Put somewhat differently, each adolescent girl faced a reasonably high probability that some or most of her adult life would involve membership in a female-based household, or in some other way proceed outside the framework of an extended-duration monogamous household. One sixteen year old girl undertook a sober and calculated appraisal of the odds that a man who fathered your child would marry you, and after citing various

287 Ibid., p. 225.
factors relating to the man’s personality, the circumstances of conception, and so on, decided that there was about a fifty-fifty chance. Assuming that this reflected a fairly accurate estimate of the true odds, simple discretion alone would indicate the wisdom of some sort of systematic preparation for participation in the “female-based” life pattern.

It is important to note that the choice between these alternative mating forms was a choice within the local community and not a choice between an indigenous form (intermittent monogamy) and an extrinsic form (extended-duration monogamy) peculiar to the middle class community. Thus, sentiments supportive of the extended-duration form did not reflect a subscription to “middle class values,” but rather to those values within the local cultural system which were supportive of the “extended” rather than the “intermittent” alternative. It should also be noted that these two types are presented here as “ideal” or polar types and that women did not have to maintain an exclusive commitment to one or the other; one’s life experience could include both types—involving either alternating participation in each, or mating-household situations which reflected various combinations of features of the two forms.

Project data do not furnish direct evidence on the proportion of female-based to extended-duration husband-wife households in Midcity. However, limited surveys revealed several areas where 40% of the households were female based, and one area where as many as 80% of all households were of this type. Assuming that the two types of household were at least equally prevalent in some areas, one might expect to find that sentiments supportive of both types would also be equally prevalent. This was not so. On the level of explicit sentiment—and in the dreams, fantasies, wishes, and hopes reported by the girls—sentiments favorable to and consonant with the female-based form were infrequent and fragmentarily developed.

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288 On Boston Housing Authority statistics.
Why were sentiments supportive of the extended-duration husband-wife household so much more prevalent than the empirical prevalence of this form? One reason relates to culturally available images of the “ideal” household. The mass media of the United States, through movies, magazine articles, television plays, and radio serials, project a constant and consistent picture of “conventional” home and family life. The creators of this image are largely of middle class origin or affiliation, and the picture itself generally revolves around idealized middle class family practices involving mom, dad, buddy, and sis, living in a well-tended suburban row house and involved in characteristic middle class concerns such as family solidarity, education, community betterment, and self-improvement. Concerns familiar to Midcity residents—maintenance of a female-based household, coping with local police and politicians, dealing with welfare workers and truant officers, and handling drunken mates—seldom enter this picture.

Midcity females thus had at their command a commercially manufactured image of “correct” behavior against which they could measure their own way of life and find it lacking. No analogous image of conventional practice in the urban slum was readily available as a basis of comparison. When the conditions of slum life are portrayed in national media, they are presented, for the most part, as morally inferior or as regrettable deviations from “correct” forms.

A second reason concerns the relationship of publicly expressed sentiments—especially those expressed in the presence of middle class people—to deeper more personal feelings and to actual practice. Residents of Midcity early acquired knowledge of customary middle class practices and of the sentiments supporting them. This knowledge was utilized throughout life as one device for adapting to a social milieu where the possibility of obtaining important economic and other resources depended on one’s capacity to present the “right” set of pictures to agents of the middle class community. In this process, one frequently expressed sentiments supportive of middle class practice and at the same time maintained quite divergent forms of behavior.
For Midcity females, discrepancy between expressed sentiment and actual practice was particularly marked in the areas of sexual and mating behavior—areas where middle class women were known to maintain strong views. This discrepancy was well documented by quantitative findings relating to “disapproved” behavior of Project girls in regard to sex and mating. As shown in Table 2.8, the two girls' groups stood at extreme positions in regard to discrepancies between sexual notions and sexual sentiments; in addition, the all-group act-sentiment discrepancy in the area of sexual behavior was among the highest of all forms of behavior. In mating behavior (Table 4.8), the most extreme manifestation of discrepancy between act and sentiment was shown by the white female “Molls.”

It would be misleading to regard the discrepancy between what Midcity women claimed to favor and what they actually did primarily as deliberate deception or fraud. These forms of misrepresentation reflected attempts to accommodate to certain basic conditions of female life in Midcity. For example, one skill which was quite useful in maintaining the economic viability of a female-based household was the ability to present to welfare workers, public health nurses, settlement house personnel, and others, a set of sentiments which accorded with “official” forms. A woman was adjudged to have proper attitudes and to merit public assistance in maintaining her household to the extent to which she was able convincingly to espouse these forms. In addition, many Midcity females were sensitive to the moral judgments of higher status women with whom they had contact—employers, welfare and settlement house workers, medical personnel, etc.—and misrepresented their actual practices in an attempt to avoid moral censure.

The discrepancy between image and actuality was particularly evident for Project girls and was related to certain characteristics of female adolescence. In common with girls in other sectors of society, Midcity adolescents constructed fantasy images of marriage and family life which included highly idealized concepts of devoted and constant husbands who would nurture them tenderly and shield
them from toil and discomfort. Fantasy content was derived from images of middle class marriage and family life presented in movies, television, and magazines. Midcity girls, however, in contrast to middle class girls, were constantly in contact with women—including their own mothers—whose actual life pattern contrasted sharply with these idealized images.

Readily apparent discrepancies between the ideal and the actual served for Project girls as a vehicle for criticizing the behavior of adult women—a practice prevalent among adolescent girls in and out of Midcity. A fifteen year old member of the Molls was particularly critical of young mothers in her neighborhood whom she claimed neglected their children, spent all their time visiting one another, and kept on the prowl for new boyfriends. By the time she was eighteen, however, she herself was engaged in behaviors identical to those she had criticized so strongly at the age of fifteen.

Beneath the mistiness of adolescent fantasy there was, for some girls, an almost fatalistic conviction that the ideal could never be realized. Another member of the Molls reported a fantasy about her current boyfriend wherein they had married and she had become pregnant. When her husband learned of this he became very tender, and assured her she would have to do no work and had only to rest and be cared for. Then, also in fantasy, her baby died and her husband left her. Even the freedom of adolescent imagination could not erase the girl’s sense of the inevitability of separation and tragedy.

Given, then, a prevalent discrepancy between image and actuality, one might have expected Midcity females to be chronically dissatisfied or discontented. That some measure of discontent existed was undeniable; however, the actual intensity of this discontent, and its impact on overt behavior has been commonly exaggerated. Much of the evidence for extensive discontent reported by some observers derives from a pattern of behavior which might be called “ritualized griping.”

Every social role generates dissatisfactions—even such roles as corporation executive, college professor, and suburban housewife. Every social role also provides
for conventional methods of “letting off steam” or complaining in regard to role-
generated dissatisfactions. Such “safety valve” complaint patterns, especially when
expressed in the presence of those occupying similar roles, generally involve one or
more scapegoats toward whom some measure of blaze for role-generated discontent
is directed. The executive gripes about “labor,” the professor castigates
administrators, the housewife complains about the unremitting nurturance
demands of her young children.

The role of lower class woman is no exception. In fact, the ritualized griping
pattern of the lower class woman represents a classic form of this phenomenon in
our culture. Countless popular songs and personal accounts of the “True Confession”
type present the components of this complaint pattern in vivid detail. The primary
object of hostility is “My Man” or just “Men,” who are pictured as deceitful, cruel,
inconstant, irresponsible, philandering, and neglectful. Other common objects of
complaint are living conditions (“this lousy dump”), the “rotten neighborhood” which
is no place to bring up kids, and chronic shortage of money. The very prevalence and
constancy of these complaints indicates that they reflect a set of real and persisting
conditions. However, a major purpose of the complaint pattern among lower class
woman—as among other groups—is to facilitate adaptation to situations which
engender displeasure but which are integral components of life conditions to which
the complainer may be strongly committed. The subcultures of graduate students
and enlisted men, among many others, incorporate numerous examples of this
process. Among lower class women, the acceptability of griping to other women
about men may be extremely helpful in sustaining man-woman relationships. Many
of the songs of ritualized complaint, after recounting injustices suffered and wrongs
sustained, end by saying, “I know it’s crazy, but he’s still my man and I love him in
spite of everything.”

A question of considerable importance is whether the patterned complaints of
lower class females indicate a degree of inner discontent significantly greater than
that indicated by the complaint pattern of other roles. The vividness and detailed
nature of the lower class female pattern make it most convincing to those with limited familiarity with the life conditions it reflects. Can it be said, however, that the actual discontent of most lower class women is significantly greater than, say, that of the middle class housewife, with her frequent complaints shout the unceasing demands of housework, the limited amount of time her husband allots to her and to “the family,” the conflicting demands of the contemporary female role, the pressing obligations of “community service,” her inability to keep her temper in dealing with her children, and so on? This must remain an open question. It is important, however, to exercise considerable caution in accepting the ritualized griping of lower class women as an accurate measure of true inner “discontent.”

Sentiments expressed by Midcity women, as already mentioned, accorded primarily with the conditions of the extended-duration type of household; however, some degree of support for the female-based type was also manifested. This generally appeared as approval of specific feature of the extended-duration system rather than support for the system as a whole. Women indicated support for the female-based system when, for example, they emphasized the unreliability of males as parents and household members, when they claimed to prefer non-marital alliances with males, when they expressed determination to shield male children from the influence of their father and men like him, and when they expressed approval of childbearing outside of marriage. Such sentiments were more common among adult women who had experienced the conditions of both types of household than among adolescents with their still-untreated vision of the ideal husband-wife form. As in other instances, one might question whether such sentiments in fact represented genuine support of the female-based system; in this instance, the expression of these sentiments in the face of widespread “official” support for a different system would appear to constitute a more accurate indication of “true” inner feelings.

Adult concepts of men and marriage were reflected in the reaction of the mother of one of the Molls to the worker’s announcement of her own impending
marriage. Expecting the usual congratulations and expressions of delight customarily attending such an announcement in middle class circles, the worker was rather taken aback when the girl’s mother assumed an attitude of condolence. “Well,” she said dubiously, “maybe you’ve gotten yourself a good man, but I doubt it. I don’t think there are any. I guess it’s just somethin’ you gotta go through.” Another Midcity woman, also white, whose living room well was adorned with pictures of three prior mates, each with his offspring, said to the worker who suggested she marry her current mate, “Dearie, I’ve had more experience with men than you, and I’ve learned something. Before you marry ‘em, they pay a lot of attention to you and stay around. As soon as you’re married they change. They’re always out foolin’ around somewhere. So I’ve learned that if you want ‘em to stay around, don’t marry ‘em.” Another woman in the Moll neighborhood, living at the time without a man, was talking about her troubles to one of the Molls. Then she added, “But it’s nothin’ like if I was married. Then you really have troubles, fightin’ with your husband all the time, and all.”

Exposed to adult sentiments such as these, it was not surprising that adolescent girls, although less frequently than the older women, also expressed sentiments congruent with the female-based system. A member of the Negro Queens, for example, reflected the outlook of the multi-mated white woman who advised the worker on the ways of men. The girl, who had become pregnant by a local man, said to the Queen worker, “He’s so nice to me. He sent me a big heart of candy on Valentine’s Day, and he’s going to pay all the expenses for the baby. He wants me to marry him, but I’m afraid if I did he might change…”

**Plural Mating and Collective Motherhood**

The bearing and rearing of children in Midcity, then, could be effected through the medium of two alternative arrangements—the female-based and the extended-duration-monogamous types of household. The effective functioning of this system necessitated a set of supportive values which accorded with its operating
requirements. Central to this system was the relationship of mating and motherhood. These two activities are dominant concerns for all American women. For most middle class women, however, the two are perceived as intimately associated and occupying given sequential positions in the life cycle; one first finds a mate, then legitimizes the relationship by legal-religious sanctions, then bears and rears children within the context of this relationship. The concerns “getting a man” and “being a good wife” are, in general, felt to be equal in importance to “having children” and “being a good mother.”

For women in the Project community, the two concerns of “mating” and “motherhood,” while seen, of course, as related, were accorded a considerably greater degree of independence; mating was one set of activities, with a rationale and patterning of its own: motherhood another set, with its particular arrangements and preoccupations; the two could be engaged in quite independently, and with different males involved in each sphere. As has been mentioned, the concept of the organically associated mating-motherhood system embodied in the middle class ideal was, of course, familiar, and on one level represented a desirable eventuality; on another level, however, the separability of mating and mothering was recognized and accommodated to. Furthermore, these two concerns were granted differing degrees of importance. Most women wanted to have children and also to have a man who would act as father to the children; however, in those frequent instances where such a conjunction could not be arranged, or, having been arranged, became untenable, it was motherhood, without any question, which commanded first priority.

The importance of motherhood and the intensity of concern over babies were outstanding features of female life in Midcity. It could be said that the fundamental objective of the Midcity mating and childrearing system was the achievement and maintenance of responsible collective motherhood. The fact that the problem of maintaining long-term mating relationships was granted lesser importance could be seen as a direct consequence of the paramount value accorded to motherhood. If
having a “steady” man and having a baby could be achieved concomitantly, good; however, the persisting and predictable difficulty of assuring the former could not be allowed to forestall the possibility of the latter. Impregnation was easy to come by, a “steady” man difficult; forms of childrearing and related bodies of sentiment had to be geared to this reality.

Given the fact that “motherhood” was the single most important concern of Midcity females, it would follow that the role of “Mother” was the highest prestige role in the female subcultural world. The desire to assume this role was strong and frequently in evidence. A leader of the Queens, out walking with her eight year old niece, stopped to inspect the occupants of several baby carriages wheeled by her friends. As they walked on, she remarked, “Gee, I wish I had a baby. All the in-town girls are having them this spring.” Her niece responded, “I thought you had to be a woman (viz., grown up) to have babies.” “That’s right, you do,” was the answer, “and when you’re a woman it ain’t too hard to get the stork to pay you a visit.”

This incident illustrates several relevant points. The attitude of the Queen toward the “in-town” girls who were following current fashion by becoming pregnant, and who, like herself, were unmarried, was one of envy, not censure. The statement “I thought you had to be a woman to have a baby,” indicates that the eight year old child already shared the conception that maturity rather than marital status was the basic precondition of childbearing. The incident also shows how concepts associated with the female-based system were taught and learned. Rather than seeing the child’s question as an opportunity to clarify and support the concept of marriage, the Queen chose instead to direct attention to the ease of becoming impregnated. It is quite likely that a middle class aunt would have told the child, “No, dear. You have to be married to have babies.”

The experience of those Midcity girls who conceived children while unmarried illustrates the circumstances under which one became an unwed mother and some of the incentives for assuming this role. During the course of the study or within the following year, seven Project group members became pregnant. Three were
members of the fifteen year old white “Molls” (about one-third of the group), and four of the sixteen and one-half year old Negro “Queens” (about fifteen percent of the group). None of these girls was married at the time of delivery. The sequence of events in each case was similar.

In the face of some community condemnation of “cheapness,” the girl engaged in intercourse with a male who was her age or slightly older. In only one case was this male a member of the girl’s “brother” corner group. During the early stages of pregnancy there were some attempts at concealment, but once the girl’s condition was evident it became a topic of open public concern. None of the girls left the community. Extensive discussions of the circumstances and consequences of the pregnancy were conducted by the girl’s peers and neighborhood women—discussions in which the girl herself was an active participant. There was little direct censure of the fact of pregnancy itself; one peer remarked, “When a girl get pregnant the first or second time, no one says much about it. By the third time, they start to say she must be kinda stupid.”

Following disclosure of pregnancy, efforts would be made to persuade the father to marry his child’s mother. If the boy were known locally, pressures would be exerted by the girl, her female relatives, her corner group peers, and, to a lesser extent, by the boy’s peer group. These pressures were not very forceful, and the boy who rejected them risked neither exclusion from his group nor continued community censure. In one instance, a member of the Molls informed her mother that she was pregnant, and when the mother asked, “Where’s the father?” the daughter replied, “I wrote him a letter, but he didn’t answer it.” The mother then said, “Gee, I hope it’s a boy! We haven’t had a boy in the family for a long time!” No serious attempt to arrange marriage was made by either mother or daughter. In none of the seven cases did the boy agree to marry his child’s mother. In several instances, the girls’ mothers initiated paternity suits against the babies’ fathers; however, such action was not taken primarily as a means of forcing the boy into
marriage, but rather because it was easier to obtain welfare funds if it were known that there had been court action against the father.

Following these rather cursory attempts to secure a husband-father for the girl’s baby, the group of females in the girl’s interactional orbit rallied around to attend to the serious business of arranging the birth, placement, and nurturance of the expected child. This activity was undertaken with much excitement, enthusiasm, and energy. For many of the girls, the period of “pregnancy” for the mother-to-be was conceived as generally equivalent to the period of “engagement” for the wife-to-be. The prospective mother became the center of much excited female attention. Elaborate and well-attended baby showers were held; one of the Molls, with much satisfaction, told the worker, “I didn’t have to buy a single thing for the baby! Between my family and the girls I got all I needed—crib, carriage, layette, everything.”

Prior to birth, discussions were held among the involved females as to which household the baby would be placed in, and how mothering responsibility would be allocated. These decisions were made on the basis of practicality, feasibility, and convenience. In none of the seven cases was the baby given for adoption, nor was any reported consideration given to the possibility of placing the baby anywhere except within the orbit of its mother’s friends and female relatives. In one instance, it was decided that the baby would go to the home of the father’s mother since the mother’s mother’s sister was extra-maritally pregnant at the time, and it was felt that two new babies added to that household would overtax its facilities. The girl moved into the father’s household and primary mothering responsibility was assumed by the father’s mother.

This arrangement appeared to be quite satisfactory to all—including the father’s “steady” girlfriend, who did not view this situation as particularly disruptive to their relationship. The one person who evinced some dissatisfaction was the father’s sister, who was less than enthusiastic over the idea of sharing the household with a peer whose motherhood would make her the center of attention. It
is notable that in this situation, despite the actual and potential bases of friction among the various women involved, mothering duties for the baby were performed by at least five women—the mother, the two grandmothers, the boy’s sister, and his girlfriend. Each of these women devoted some period of time, as her work or school schedule permitted, to the cooperative venture of caring for the new baby.

The sequence of events attending birth and the arrangements for baby care outlined here resemble the classic pattern described for lower class Southern Negroes, urban and rural, in the early 1900’s. It was, however, unexpected to find this pattern in so “pure” a form among contemporary northern urban Negroes of considerably higher social status (the mother of the child in the situation just described completed high school and attended nursing school), as well as among the white girls. Furthermore, although this pattern has been most closely associated with Negro culture, the similarities between Midcity’s whites and Negroes in this regard were far more impressive than the differences.

Becoming pregnant while unmarried was part of a pattern which included non-marital intercourse, bearing and keeping one’s baby, and raising children within the context of the multiple-mother, female-based childrearing system. Unwed motherhood was an integral component of this system, and its prevalence undergirded the vitality of the system itself. But unwed motherhood, while not in itself illegal, violated moral standards which were well known to the girls and to the Midcity community as a whole. Why, then, was this practice so prevalent, and why was it so effectively accommodated by the subcultural system of Midcity? Surely these girls and their mothers were not deliberately motivated to violate well-known standards. Nor were the girls “abnormal” in the sense that they lacked the capacity to control their impulses in the face of known prescriptions. The prevalence of unwed motherhood, as well as its entrenched nature, provides an opportunity to examine the part played by certain cultural influences in inducing and sustaining

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289 References to H. Powdermaker, Davis and Dollard, Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong.
this practice.\textsuperscript{290} The genesis of unwed motherhood, as in other forms of violative behavior, can be seen as the product of a complex and dynamic interaction between inhibitory and supportive forces.

A major inhibitory influence in all communities where married motherhood represents a culturally supported standard is the practice of stigmatizing females who became pregnant while unmarried. In middle class communities the process of stigmatization, while probably not as extensively developed as in the past, still constitutes a relatively effective deterrent to that order of sexual involvement which has a good probability of eventuating in unwed motherhood. Stigmatization operates in two related level: through socialization the girl learns to fear the stigma of “illegitimate pregnancy,”\textsuperscript{291} and acquires an “internalized” desire to avoid the associated feelings of guilt, shame, and humiliation. On the level of practice, stigmatization of a middle class girl who in fact does become pregnant outside of marriage may take several forms, including hostile gossip, imputations of moral culpability, or actual exclusion from certain social groups—including, in some instances, kinship groups.

Another inhibitory influence lies in the concept of “reputation”—one of whose implications is that a girl whose pre-marital sexual behavior causes her to be categorized as “bad” will suffer reduced opportunities of getting a “good” husband. In most instances, desire to avoid the real or alleged consequences of stigmatization and of acquiring a “bad reputation” serves fairly effectively to counteract those pressures which might induce the unmarried middle class girl to engage in pregnancy-producing activities.

Unmarried motherhood was also stigmatized in Midcity, and the conception of a “bad reputation” was present as well. However, the nature, weightings, and operation of these inhibitory influences differed significantly from the corresponding


\textsuperscript{291} The term “illegitimate” used in this connection is inaccurate since there is no specific law against being pregnant while unmarried.
middle class forms. The concept of “reputation” will be discussed in the following section. Stigmatization in Midcity differed from the middle class form in a number of respects.

First, the intensity of stigma was considerably less. As already mentioned, there was a tendency to excuse a girl’s first few pregnancies on a sort of “girls-will-be-girls” basis. The lesser weight of stigma was also evidenced by the patterning of secrecy in regard to unwed motherhood. The stringency of secrecy and urgency of concealment which characterizes non-marital pregnancy in middle class communities was virtually absent in Midcity. The fact of unwed motherhood was widely and openly discussed both in and out of the presence of the girl. Nor did unwed motherhood constitute an adequate basis for exclusion from most social groups. In fact, as shown, the status of unwed motherhood could put a girl in a favored position among her group mates and female relatives.

A second difference concerns the forms of behavior which were subject to stigmatization in Midcity. Although the label “cheap” was applied to certain sexual practices, other practices which are stigmatized in middle class communities were not so labeled. Examples of these will be cited in the next section. A third difference between Midcity and middle class communities involves the phenomenon already described whereby certain practices which were condemned on an “official” level were in fact supported on an “unofficial” level or exemplified through prevalent practice, or both. This phenomenon, of course, is present in all communities, but the difference of primary relevance here involves the extent to which, in Midcity, the “officially” condemned was “unofficially” supported.

It is thus evident that the stigmatization process had less inhibitory force in Midcity than in most middle class communities. But the relatively weaker press of stigmatization could not, in itself, account for the substantially greater prevalence of unmarried motherhood or for its culturally patterned nature. To understand these features it is necessary to search out the positive incentives which
undergirded this practice. The following sections will cite five kinds of incentive to bear children irrespective of one's marital status.

Bearing a child, for the young mother, could represent an attempt to secure attention, to actualize the role of adult female, to strengthen affiliation with one's mother, to achieve greater closeness to a man, and to achieve greater community acceptance. For the adolescent girl, motherhood was one highly effective way of securing attention and becoming the object of affectionate solicitude. It was also, as will be discussed, a way of restoring important female relational bonds which may have weakened by resentment-provoking mating behavior. Attention was primarily sought from and granted by females—one's mother, other female kin, and female peers. Project girls were well aware of the attention-securing power of motherhood, and could be quite explicit about using pregnancy as a means to this end. The leader of the Molls frequently expressed envy of her older sister who had become non-maritally pregnant at the age of sixteen, claiming that by so doing she had obtained for herself the lion's share of their mother's affection. Throughout the course of the Project the younger girl attempted quite directly to obtain maternal affection by the same means; although she did not succeed in bearing a child, several miscarriages gave evidence of continued effort. The effectiveness of pregnancy in securing the attention of one's peers was attested by the baby showers given for the pregnant girl by her peer group as well as the many peer-conducted discussions of her forthcoming motherhood.

Female social workers furnished for the potential mother an additional source of attentive concern, and the presence or availability of such workers in the local neighborhood may have strengthened incentives to become pregnant. The "unmarried mother" is a major focus of contemporary social work. Female workers in particular manifest this concern—both as an obligation of their professional role and as a "natural" concomitant of their status as adult females. Local social workers were thus a particularly effective source of attention and nurturance for the unwed mother—because they numbered among the group of females in the girls’ relational
orbit who were expected to focus attention on the new mother, and because of their professional obligation to devote special attention to such girls.

In addition, the social worker had access to important sources of aid and support for the expectant mother—including financial aid—so that an affiliation with a worker could prove a most valuable resource for the girl embarking on a career of childbearing. Further, since social work education trained the female worker to mute her personal moral reactions to non-marital pregnancy, the potentially deterrent power of stigmatization by a middle class woman was only indirectly brought into play. The Queen worker, in particular, assumed the role of social-work mother for a sizeable group of pregnant girls both in and out of the Queens. Local girls who were not members of the Queens, in fact, utilized the worker more directly as a source of nurturance and attention than those girls who wore more intimately involved in a female network.

A second incentive for unmarried motherhood was the desire to be grown up. The potency of this motive in the case of the boys has already been discussed; for example, the desire to be seen as a “man”—an adult male—was a major reason for assuming the pattern of entrenched drinking. The press to achieve adult status was also compelling for the girls. While for the boys no single practice or set of practices could fully validate the status of “adult male,” in the case of the girls, “adult women” and “mother” could be seen as virtually coterminous. Becoming a mother was the single most effective way of actualizing the status of adulthood and the role of a female. Since the adolescents of Midcity assumed the status of “adulthood” at an earlier age than their middle class peers, for girls, the press to achieve this status through motherhood was commensurately greater.

A third order of incentive involved the relation between the girl and her mother. Aspects of this relationship which supported the assumption of unwed motherhood were complex and often not readily discernible. The bond between mother and daughter, important in all cultural systems, was particularly important
in Midcity where the successful functioning of the childrearing system depended heavily on the maintenance of close mutual ties among females.

During childhood the relationship between mothers and daughters was generally quite warm and cooperative, with daughters starting at an early age to help their mothers in many childrearing and home-caring duties. At the onset of adolescence, however, the relationship between mother and daughter tended to become increasingly strained. Tension between the two was manifested in many ways—ranging from chronic bickering to violent arguments. Daughters felt that their mothers were unreasonable and arbitrary; mothers saw their daughters as rebellious and intent on causing “trouble.” A major element in this increased tension was the entry of the girl into the mating arena.

As mentioned elsewhere, the sense of generational distinctness was less well developed in Midcity than in middle class communities; mothers began both earlier and more acutely to see their daughters as direct competitors rather than objects of nurturance. As their young daughters became swept up in the exciting world of boys, dating, and sexual intimacy, the mothers became increasingly envious. Such envy was seldom forwarded as an explicit basis for maternal dissatisfaction; rather, mothers complained about the “type” of boy their daughters’ associated with, the exclusivity of their preoccupation with “boys,” and the girls’ neglect of household obligations.

Since the mothers’ envy was seldom made explicit, the girls were perplexed and upset by what appeared to them as an unjustified degree of bitterness inexplicably arising in a formerly affectionate relationship. The girls were aware of the fact that shared motherhood solidified bonds between females; having a baby was a way of reversing the trend toward increasing estrangement and re-solidifying the bond between mother and daughter. Joining one’s mother in the role of mother was not explicitly recognized as a reason for becoming pregnant, but, as in the case of other incentives, an awareness on a deeper level of the uniting power of shared motherhood served to support the girls’ assumption of the “mother” role.
Mothers served in another important way to spur motherhood on the part of their daughters. In the Western cultural tradition it is most often the mother who assumes major responsibility for inculcating attitudes which are designed to forestall premature impregnation. Mothers caution daughters to be careful in contacts with men and enjoin them to guard their virginity and their “reputation.” Midcity mothers also played this role, warning their daughters against irresponsible sexual involvement and telling them that one had to remain a “nice” girl to get a “good” man. But at the same time as they were explicitly urging their daughters to maintain a “good reputation,” mothers were frequently communicating on an implicit level quite a conflicting message which said, in effect, “bring a new baby into our household.”

In a cultural system where the role of mother was so highly valued by females, it is not surprising that the desire to act as mother remained strong throughout a woman’s life. As women grew older, it became more difficult to operate facilely in the turbulent world of mating and men, but the desire to mother remained strong. Infant babies were especially prized and were regarded with great delight, particularly as older children became “problems” which were difficult to cope with. But while the possession of a new infant was highly gratifying, the process of obtaining one’s own—involving men, pregnancy, delivery—became increasingly arduous, and finally, after the menopause, impossible. Under these circumstances, an adolescent daughter—young, vigorous, fit for childbearing, surrounded by men and eagerly participating in sexual and mating activities—provided the ideal vehicle for conceiving and bringing a new baby into the household.

The mother-grandmother knew that there was a high probability that she would become the de facto mother of the new child; she knew that after the initial excitement and gratification of becoming a mother, her daughter, still young and swept up in the excitement of the world of mating, would become increasingly reluctant to perform the tedious and demanding tasks involved in the care of an
infant, and would more and more leave the basic responsibilities of motherhood to her. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that many mothers made only perfunctory efforts to see the new grandchild placed in a separate husband-wife household; this would remove the treasured new infant from her orbit of care.

The pattern of having the new baby placed in the household of the grandmother, who then shared basic mothering functions with the actual mother, meant that for many children only a vague distinction was made between “mother” and “grandmother,” and the woman one called “mama” might well be one’s grandmother, or even great grandmother. This blurring of generational distinctions was sometimes effected quite deliberately. A member of the Kings said of his new sister (or niece), “Ma and sis both went away, and when they came back, I had a new sister. But no one said whose it was.”

A fourth incentive for motherhood involved the attempt to solidify relational bonds with one’s lover. The girl who estimated that there was a fifty percent chance that her baby’s father would not marry her could also focus on the fifty percent chance that he would. In a situation where girls controlled few really persuasive devices to bring about an agreement of marriage, it was always possible to hope that the knowledge by one’s mating partner that he was your baby’s father would serve as the critical factor which would tip the scale in favor of such an agreement. Even if this pressure did not succeed, the chance was often seen as worth taking; a member of the Queens said of her baby’s father, “I never really expected him to marry me. But at least I have his baby. This way I feel that there will always be a part of him that really is mine.”

A fifth kind of incentive related to the concept of “reputation,” discussed in the next section. The girl who risked condemnation as “cheap” while engaging in those activities which led to pregnancy knew that malicious gossip and aspersions on her “reputation” would be muted or fade once her baby was born. When she moved from the role of “bum” to “mother,” the female community would rally around with support, attention, and nurturance. The new mother would be
attended, worried over, babied. A girl who felt her acceptance by the community endangered by a worsening “reputation” as “cheap” could semi-deliberately court pregnancy, knowing that the advent of a child would reverse the process by which she was being excluded, and would produce active re-immersion in group life.

It will be noted that most of the incentives just cited also apply in the case of middle class girls. Becoming a mother, for middle class as well as lower class girls, may serve to secure attention, to actualize the role of adult female, to strengthen bonds with one’s mother, to please one’s mother, and to strengthen ties with one’s mate. Why, then, is unmarried motherhood so much more common in communities like Midcity? A principle applicable to various forms of violative behavior as well as unwed motherhood can be articulated here. Violative behavior occurs as customary practice when culturally derived incentives to engage in that form of behavior outweigh the force of culturally derived inhibitants.

The amplification of this principle and its application to a range of violative practices will be undertaken in subsequent sections. In the present instance, the occurrence of unwed motherhood can be viewed as the product of a complex interplay between incentives and inhibitants. Some, but by no means all, of the inhibitory pressures were the stigmatization of unmarried motherhood and the concept of “bad reputation;” some, but by no means all, of the incentives were the gaining of attention, achievement of adult status, strengthening mother-daughter bonds or ties between lovers. All of these influences—inhibitory and incentive—were culturally defined and culturally supported.

All individuals exist in a cultural environment of competing choice alternatives. Midcity girls who became unwed mothers were those for whom the strength of cultural incentives overbalanced the strength of inhibitory influences. It was not that unmarried motherhood is stigmatized in middle class communities and un-stigmatized in Midcity, or even that stigmatization is stronger in middle class communities and weaker in Midcity. What is critical here is that in the complex balance between inhibitory and incentive forces in the two types of community, the
overall cultural balance in Midcity was more strongly weighted in favor of the violative form of behavior. This means that there was a greater likelihood that more people would become involved in such behavior as customary practice. An additional factor in these sets of weightings is the fact, already cited, that the difficulty of obtaining a married mate and the ease of obtaining an unmarried mate was considerably greater in Midcity than in middle class communities; this aspect of the cultural milieu added further weight to that constellation of forces which could tip the balance in the direction of unmarried motherhood. Unmarried motherhood, then, can be viewed as the product of a complex balance of cultural influences rather than as a simple consequence of any single influence, or as an uncomplicated sort of moral laxity, or inability to control impulsive behavior.

Sexual Intercourse and the Concept of “Reputation”

There is no known cultural system which does not specify with considerable precision the circumstances under which sexual intercourse should or should not occur. The Midcity situation was no exception. It is also true that in all societies sexual intercourse does occur under circumstances which do not accord with “official” cultural definitions. Here, too, Midcity conformed to principle. It is particularly important in a society like the United States in which different social subgroups follow different patterns of practice to distinguish at least three levels in regard to sexual behavior: “official” norms—standards of acceptability which are incorporated in legal statutes; “operative” norms—definitions of acceptability maintained on an explicit level by a specified subgroup; and actual practice—what people actually do.

It has already been shown that the “operative” norms of Midcity in many cases did not correspond to “official” norms; for example, intercourse among unmarried adolescents was in direct violation of “official” norms but did not seriously violate “operative” norms. It is also important to determine how patterns of practice related to the “operative” norms of Midcity. What proportion of Project
girls actually engaged in sexual intercourse, and how did such involvement relate to “operative” standards of acceptability? For boys, as will be shown, engagement in heterosexual intercourse could serve as a basis of prestige, so there was little reticence in admitting to such activity—although the actual identity of sexual partners was not usually specified. Among the girls, however, the actual nature and extent of one’s sexual involvement was rarely made explicit. In the presence of other females the girls neither affirmed nor denied such activity; they simply failed to include it as an appropriate topic of discussion—if the topic was broached, it was referred to obliquely and by indirection.

There were several reasons for the dearth of overt discussion of sexual intimacy. Among one’s peers there were good reasons for maintaining an aura of ambiguity; if a girl claimed to be engaging in intercourse with men, she risked being considered “cheap” or being accused of boasting; if she denied intercourse, she risked stigma as immature, prudish, or inexperienced. It was safest simply to avoid mention of the topic. In the presence of middle class adults a major barrier to open discussion was the existence of two sets of terms to refer to sexual matters—the “polite” or middle class set, which the girls could not manage, and the “traditional” four-letter or lower class set, which was quite familiar but which the girls were more reluctant to use in the presence of a middle class adult.

With their male peers, in contrast, discussion of sexual matters was quite free and easy—primarily because it could be conducted within a framework of humor. There was a good deal of public teasing about sexual availability, experience, and even specific techniques. In such exchanges references were direct and revealed considerable knowledge of the mechanics of intercourse. Girls who were teased by boys about being sexually experienced or available generally responded in kind. One girl who had been roughhoused and tumbled about by a group of younger boys complained to them that if she went home in disarray her mother would think she had been engaging in sexual intercourse; she was told by the boys not to worry since her mother already knew that she did. Allegations of
this type were generally accepted by the girls in good humor, and with little evidence of resentment.

Largely because of the girls' reluctance to share the actual details of their sexual experience with one another or with workers, specific information as to the nature of their sexual involvement was difficult to obtain. Even a worker who knew a particular girl quite intimately could never be quite sure whether or not she was engaging in intercourse with her current boyfriend or other males. However, despite the impossibility of complete certainty in all cases, there were two orders of evidence of such involvement. One was incontrovertible; a girl who became pregnant could be supposed with a high degree of certainty to have engaged with a male in such a way as to produce the observed result. The other kind of evidence was obtained through the workers' intimate long-term involvement in the neighborhood situation. On the basis of observation, reports by peers, and informed inference it was possible to obtain quite reliable knowledge as to who “did” and who “didn’t,” and to discriminate unfounded rumor from fact.

Of fifty Project girls, seven became pregnant during the study period. This means that an absolute minimum of fifteen percent of the girls had engaged in intercourse. As already stated, the percentage of involvement was higher among the white girls. There was reliable evidence that about twelve other girls had had sexual relations with one or more men. Thus, about forty percent of the girls in Project groups, on a low estimate, had had an intimate heterosexual experience. As to age at initial intercourse, there was evidence of such involvement, usually pregnancy, for several girls of thirteen or fourteen. However, girls who became pregnant at earlier ages tended to be outside the orbit of established corner groups.

Little data on comparable groups of girls is available; with some exceptions, the majority of studies on incidence of extra-marital intercourse are based on self-reported information furnished by college level women—a group representing a small minority of the total female population. Kinsey reported that 2% of 3,300 white college level girls admitted to intercourse by age fifteen, and an additional
18% by age twenty. The highest percentage of self-reported involvement in sexual intercourse by unmarried college level women aged sixteen to twenty-three, as reported by Ehrmann, was 25%, a figure obtained by several investigators. If forty percent is a low estimate of the actual proportion of fifty unmarried corner girls who engaged in intercourse before age eighteen, it would appear, as would be expected, that the incidence of extra-marital intercourse among these corner girls was higher than among college level girls, unless the college girls were consistently under-reporting true incidence.

It should be noted, however, that the “forty percent” figure is close to that obtained by Kinsey for girls of similar status; 38% of his white grade-school-level girls aged sixteen to twenty reported pre-marital coitus, and 32% of his high-school-level girls. It would thus appear that the extent of actual involvement in sexual intercourse among Midcity corner girls was quite similar to that reported by lower status adolescents in general, despite conceptions of “gang” girls as highly permissive and promiscuous.

It is also of interest to note that Project findings contrast with trends reported by Kinsey and his successors in regard both to the relative incidence of non-marital coitus and non-marital pregnancy among white and Negro females. Kinsey’s “Female Behavior” report indicates that among single females well over twice as many lower status Negro girls as white girls had engaged in intercourse by age twenty, and that over five times as many had been pregnant. Differences of this kind did not appear among Project girls’ groups. In regard to non-marital intercourse, there was evidence of involvement for four out of ten white girls and sixteen out of forty Negro girls—an equal proportion. In regard to non-marital pregnancy, thirty percent of the white girls were so involved compared to twelve percent of the Negro girls. The fact that the Negro girls were about two years older

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293 Reference to Ehrmann, Premarital Dating Behavior, p. 42.
295 Kinsey, ibid., p. Gebhard, Pregnancy, Birth, and Abortion, p. 156. (Data weak on lower status groups).
than the whites and thus had had more time to become pregnant makes this latter figure even more impressive. Although these figures may not be fully accurate for several reasons, including the secrecy surrounding reporting of sexual activity, they would indicate roughly that there was little difference between white and Negro Project girls in their experience of non-marital intercourse, and that the white girls were more apt to become pregnant outside of marriage at an earlier age. These figures, however, do not provide a basis for concluding that white Catholic girls in Midcity engaged in non-marital intercourse to just about the same degree as Negro Protestant girls of the same social level. It should be recalled that the Negro girls were of higher social status than the white girls, and it would thus appear that the greater propensity towards sexual “freedom” commonly attributed to Negro females was counterbalanced, in this instance, by the fact that the white girls were lower in social status. One factor limiting the sexual involvement of the Negro girls was the highly organized nature of their indigenous sanctioning system, to be described shortly.

Under most circumstances the sexual and mating activities of Project girls were conducted in an arena which allowed ample opportunity for illicit behavior. There was no system of formal chaperonage and associations with male peers most frequently took place outside the orbit of parental or other adult supervision. Sexual intimacy with female peers served as an important basis of prestige for boys with whom the girls were in constant contact. Yet, in the face of the fact that the mating environment of Project girls afforded ample opportunity for involvement in violative forms of sexual behavior and provided few formal agencies of restriction, the extent of their involvement in non-marital intercourse was, as just shown, quite similar to that of many non-corner girls of similar or even higher social status.

The previous discussion of unwed motherhood focused primarily on factors supporting such involvement; the present discussion will focus primarily on factors which inhibited unacceptable sexual activity; it is important to remember, however, that both supportive and inhibitive influences were related components of the same
subcultural system. A major device for effecting limitation was the concept of “reputation.”

The term “reputation” represented a concept of central importance in both male and female subcultural systems, but signified something quite different in each. Among the boys the term—generally shortened to “rep”—referred to “toughness” or masculine prowess in combat or combat-like activities: among the girls, “reputation” referred essentially to the nature and extent of one’s involvement in sexual or sex-related activities. “Good” reputation denoted condoned sexual behavior; “bad” reputation, disapproved behavior. When used without an evaluation adjective (“She has some reputation.”) the term connoted disapproved rather than approved behavior.

The fact that a girl’s overall “reputation” as a person was measured primarily by one particular kind of behavior—sexual activity—shows that such behavior was central to cultural conceptions of the female role. The fact that the term without modification implied sexual looseness showed both that violative sexual behavior by females was not unexpected, and that some measure of stigma was associated with such activity.

Project girls could be grouped into three general categories in regard to “reputation”: “good” girls, “bad” girls, and “worst” girls. Each of the girls’ groups—the Molls, the Queens and the groups associated with the Outlaws and Bandits—included one “worst” girl, so recognized by both boys and girls. These distinctions were not sharply drawn, and the behavior of “good” and “bad” girls had much in common. The girls themselves did not explicitly distinguish these three types nor did they apply these terms directly to one another. They did, however, rate one another along a gradient of “goodness of reputation.” Most outsiders tended to overlook these intra-group distinctions and tag the group as a whole as “cheap.” In addition, neighborhood adults, especially women, including the girls’ mothers, tended to perceive the girls as far more promiscuous, unrestrained, and sexually “loose” than they actually were.
So well established was the outside expectation that membership in a corner group automatically entailed sexual violation that all kinds of imagined transgressions were ascribed to the girls. Small or relatively innocent incidents would be blown up into shocking, full-scale sex orgies by a rapidly snowballing process of neighborhood gossip. The girls were both amused by the distorted quality of these rumors and disturbed by the adult propensity to exaggerate their “badness.”

Priests were seen as particularly prone to probe for illicit sexual involvement with an eye to magnifying its seriousness; one girl angrily claimed to have told a priest in confession that it was none of his business whether or not she was involved in heterosexual intimacy. The girls were also disturbed by the failure of adults to recognize the sensitive distinctions between greater and lesser “badness” maintained within the group; a girl striving to maintain a “good” reputation would be upset to find herself included in a blanket categorization of “cheap” applied to the whole group. The consistent tendency on the part of adults to exaggerate the “badness” of the girls and to elaborate on the extensiveness of their sexual involvement probably reflected, in part, implicit desires for personal involvement in such imagined activities; forms of sexual involvement the adults themselves secretly envied were attributed to the girls, magnified, and then condemned in a spirit of shock and indignation.

One important way in which the concept “reputation” operated to curb disapproved forms of sexual activity involved the assertion that a girl who acquired a “bad reputation” as the result of adolescent sexual activity would either jeopardize her chances of marriage or doom herself to an inferior type of husband. As shown in subsequent discussion, this assertion was not supported by actual developments. There appeared to be little relation between the kind of “reputation” a girl acquired and the kind of man she got. It is also noteworthy that concern over a girl’s “reputation” was far more active among females than males. This would suggest that the concept of “reputation” and its reputed consequences served largely as a
device used by mothers and other women in an attempt to curb certain forms of sexual activity—but that the consequences of acquiring a “bad reputation” were in fact considerably less disadvantageous than represented.

The concept of “reputation” is also current in middle class communities, where it is similarly used as a device for controlling sexual behavior. There were, however, differences between Midcity and middle class communities in the kinds of behavior which went to make up a “bad reputation.” Certain practices which would be stigmatized in middle class communities were accepted in Midcity. What were some of these practices, and conversely, what were some practices which were seen as definitely “bad” in Midcity? Project girls could engage quite freely in open sexual discussion in mixed-sex situations, use the “obscene” terms for sexual actions or organs, joke about male sex organs to one another, or openly identify themselves as unwed mothers without incurring significant stigmatization. Several members of the Queens were extremely fluent in types of profanity generally associated with all-male situations, and utilized this fluency in public situations. A Queen watching a King football game yelled from the stands, “There’s a brown-ass cat!” when one of the Kings appeared on the field.

Distinctions between what was acceptable and what was not were often quite subtle. A form of dancing practiced in the Project area and referred to variously as the “Dirty Boogie,” the “Grind,” the “Fast Grind,” the “Dirty Dig,” and other names, consisted of an elaborate stylized pantomime of the sex act, performed sometimes by a boy and a girl, sometimes by two boys, more frequently by two girls. Bodily postures, movements, and specific techniques of sexual intercourse were executed vividly and in detail. A member of the Molls evinced considerable indignation upon witnessing a particularly expressive performance of the “Dirty Boogie” at a public dance. “I think it’s disgusting! Doin’ that right out in public.” Then she added, “Us girls do that, too, but always when we’re by ourselves!” Thus, engaging with another person in a stylized re-enactment of the sex act was not in itself seen as “cheap,” but a public performance in the presence of middle class adults and others was so seen.
Similarly, knowledge that a girl was engaging in sexual intercourse with her boyfriend was not in itself a sufficient basis for categorizing her as “cheap.” What did produce such categorization were practices such as “boasting” on one’s “steady” boyfriend by having sexual relations with another, going from one sexual involvement to another in rapid succession, and, in particular, the practice of engaging sexually with a boy seen to be the “property” of a girl in the same peer group. Disapproval of practices of this kind reflected standards applied to adult mating practice. Stigmatization occurred in these instances not because non-marital intercourse was illicit, but because the solidarity of the female group was threatened when a girl moved in on the man of a peer, thus showing herself to be essentially untrustworthy.

The girls also censured forms of dress which exceeded condoned limits of bodily exposure. Standards of acceptability depended on circumstances; for example, a degree of exposure which would be condemned during ordinary afternoon activity was permissible at an evening dance. Revealing forms of dress were censured primarily because they were seen as giving the wearer an unfair advantage in the brisk and serious competition for men rather than on grounds of taste or decency. Wearing an unusually tight sweater, a very low neckline, or extremely short shorts in a situation where men were present and other girls were dressed less revealingly was seen as unfair exploitation of available resources.

The practices just cited represent only a few examples of permitted and condemned forms of sexual behavior in the areas of language, dancing, and dress, and are far from an exhaustive list. Even these few examples, however, show that while Midcity permitted sexual practices which would be unacceptable to middle class communities, there were still many forms of sexual behavior in Midcity which were condemned. How did female groups establish standards of acceptability, and how did they secure adherence to these standards?

In common with other intimate face-to-face groups, Project girls utilized systematic mechanisms to achieve these ends. Prominent among these were gossip,
sarcastic references to the behavior of offending girls in or out of their presence, and a prevalent pattern of teasing or humorous castigation. In addition, however, to these more customary methods the Queens also utilized a highly structured, quasi-ritualized device for delineating and enforcing “correct” standards of behavior. This was a practice they called “Topic Night.” Twelve or fifteen girls would seat themselves in a circle, and the behavior of each girl in turn would be subject to critical appraisal by the others. This type of informal female Kangaroo Court was scheduled to be held once a month, but during some phases was staged as often as once a week. During “Topic Night” the behavior of all members was subject to group review. Girls not only criticized practices they did not approve of but also commended those they approved. Group members were censured for not being “loyal” to their current boyfriend, for keeping too many boys on the string, for being “loud” and unladylike, for failure to reciprocate party-giving obligations, for inappropriate dress, for disorderly drinking behavior, for neglecting their health. Girls whose recent behavior had been neither commendable nor condemnable would be passed by with “She’s OK.” A girl whose behavior met with active approval would be granted recognition in terms such as “She’s my babe!”

The existence of “Topic Night”—a highly organized method of defining and enforcing standards—does not accord with conceptions of corner girl sexual behavior as “normless” or unguided by established rules. This device enabled the group to evaluate specific behaviors of every member with a high degree of precision. It allowed for sensitive distinctions between alternative forms of practice, permitted girls to speak in rebuttal if they felt unjustly censured, noted “progress” in reference to prior criticism, and rewarded meritorious behavior. The sanctions it controlled were of the most effective type—censure, disapproval, and the possibility of exclusion by one’s most intimate and meaningful reference group. The standards which the girls imposed upon themselves would, in all probability, have been considered overly rigid if applied by outside adults. The impact of this indigenous sanctioning system was reflected in the relatively low incidence of non-marital
intercourse and unwed motherhood among the Queens and by the fact, to be discussed later, that none of the girls became involved in prostitution.

The existence of Topic Night as a self-initiated system of limitation might have been utilized by the worker as a readymade vehicle for implementing her own task of inhibiting disapproved behavior. This she did not do. The girls themselves several times explicitly requested that she apply her evaluative standards to their behavior, thus adding adult authority to group-initiated sanctions. Feeling that his would put her in a difficult position, the worker refused, suggesting instead that the girls use “Topic Night” as an opportunity to air and receive help with their “problems.” This suggestion was received coolly; the girls conceived “Topic Night” as a limit-setting mechanism rather than a vehicle for achieving subjective insight. The worker had played no part in the establishment of “Topic Night;” in fact, she opposed the whole idea and did what she could to discourage it. She felt that “Topic Night” afforded the girls too unrestricted an opportunity for the venting of personal hostility—failing to recognize the extent to which such hostility actually served to define group norms and establish behavioral limits.

The fact that the Queens utilized so formally structured a device to achieve standard-setting purposes usually effected less formally in other groups probably related to the fact that their group, in common with their brother group, the Kings, included individuals of unusually diverse social backgrounds and aspirations. Although all members of the Queens originated in households clearly identifiable as “lower class” they occupied a range of status levels within that category, which was broader than that of any white group observed in Midcity. Some of the girls later went on to post-high-school training while others assumed the classic role of mother in a female-headed household. Given a group with relatively diverse status origins and a high potential for the development of an even greater status spread, the institution of “Topic Night” afforded an unusual opportunity to formulate precise and explicit standards on an ongoing basis, and to reward conformity and punish
deviation in a situation where definitions of acceptability were necessarily fluid and not readily obtainable from adults or one’s family.

The operation of the concept of “reputation,” distinctions between greater and lesser “badness,” and the process of applying group sanctions are illustrated by the case of the “worst” girl of the Queens. She had been raised in a female-based household by a solicitous foster mother (called “grandmother”) who repeatedly cautioned her against becoming “cheap” like her real mother, who was still living in Midcity with her current mate. At the age of sixteen the girl began to engage in forms of sexual behavior which violated the Queens’ standards of acceptability. She made advances to virtually every member of the Kings, thus stigmatizing her group-mates with boyfriends in the Kings. She dressed revealingly, and was deliberately provocative in speech and action. Since she was quite attractive and skilled in provocation, she readily found favor with the boys. Among the girls, however, she was consistently censured, both in and out of her presence.

But these actions in themselves, while clearly disapproved, would not alone have provided sufficient grounds for really severe censure. What did arouse the Queens was the girl’s involvement in a practice unequivocally regarded as “cheap.” This practice, known variously as a “gang bang,” “gang slug,” “line-up” (Outlaw area), and “train” (King area), was present but not particularly common in Midcity. It involved a type of sexual activity in which a group of males engaged successively in intercourse with a single female.

The girl made little attempt to conceal from the other girls the fact that she served as the object of collective sexual relations; in fact, she mildly flaunted this rather convincing evidence of her widespread appeal. The other Queens made it clear that such involvement lay beyond the bounds of accepted convention. A particularly severe critic was a girl who later became pregnant by one of the Kings. “We don’t mind so much her going off on ‘deals’ (intimate sexual involvements) with the boys all the time,” she said, “but these aren’t ordinary deals!”
One might suppose that a “reputation” of this kind would have contributed to lowered self-esteem on the part of the girl. Project data furnished no direct evidence of this. However, one clue to the impact of such involvement on the girl’s self-image emerged from an incident where a group of boys were arranging for a “line-up” with the girl. One member of the Kings, angry at the girl because of a recent quarrel, refused to join his companions in this enterprise. The girl was quite upset, and accused the reluctant boy of not liking her. Her response implied, “I’m good enough for all the others, why not you?” It would appear in this instance that the value of being liked and sexually desired by all the boys outweighed the censure of the girls, and that the girl responded to rejection by one in a group of plural sexual partners much as a less adventurous girl would respond to rejection by a single swain.

In light of the fact that the “bad” girl’s behavior closely approached the outer limits of group toleration, it is most significant that she was never totally rejected. As censure mounted, she was pushed further towards the periphery of the group, but was still contained within its effective operating orbit. Just as the “good” and “bad” factions of Project groups needed one another, so the “bad” girl’s continued inclusion in the group served useful functions for both girl and group. For the Queens, the present example of the “bad” girl kept before their eyes a model of what they were to avoid, furnished them an opportunity of indirect self-censure through censure of her, and enabled them to assuage doubts over their own sexual practices by the knowledge that whatever they were doing, she was doing something worse.

For the girl, the fact that she was contained within an orbit of group censure put affective limits on what inclinations she may have had to move still further beyond the bounds of acceptability. For example, movement toward professional prostitution would probably have forced her exclusion. As it was, the girl’s continued movement toward the periphery of acceptence was halted by an event which, as has been shown, had great power to mend strained bonds among women; she became pregnant.
The baby’s father was not one of the Kings; this fact, perhaps, was a source of considerable relief to a fair number of her group-mates. At any rate, the Queens rallied to her side, became involved with her in the exciting issues of childbearing and putting pressures on the father, and made her the object of much concerned attention. Shortly before the baby was born she was given an elaborate baby shower arranged and attended by the Queens—including those who had censured her most severely. Even her real mother, whom she had not seen for years, reappeared with gifts for the girl and her baby. By becoming pregnant she had moved from the low prestige role of “everybody’s girl” to the high prestige role of “mother,” and thus was re-incorporated into the orbit of female acceptance.

It is possible at this point, by way of summary, to cite a number of conditions characteristic of the sexual and mating life of Midcity corner girls. Sex and mating activity was of fundamental concern. Mating and courtship were pursued actively and were conducted almost exclusively outside the orbit of parental supervision. A major raison d'être of the female corner group was to provide recurrent proximity to a reservoir of corner-boy mates. Girls could engage in forms of sexual behavior which are condemned in middle class communities without incurring significant stigmatization. On the other hand, such behavior was far from unrestricted but was subject to well-defined and effectively enforced rules of limitation. Many forms of behavior which did not accord with middle class standards in fact reflected the actual conditions of adult female sexual and mating life and constituted a form of preparation for effective motherhood. Corner girls were permitted a fair number of different mating relationships during adolescence, but they were expected to become quite invested in each; practices such as moving rapidly from one male to another, keeping several boys on the string, or engaging in mating activity without emotional involvement (“triflin’”) were strongly condemned.

Data on the actual experience of Project girls in their adult mating relationships or carriages were not available. However, the fact that there were differences between the mating conditions just cited and the “dating” pattern of the
middle class community provides the basis for consideration of the degree of “strain” involved in making the transition from adolescent “mating” activity to marriage. In a society where mating partnerships are not arranged by established agencies such as the family and where individuals are allowed considerable freedom in choosing a mate, location and selection of a satisfactory partner entails a fairly active search by individuals of both sexes. For females in the United States, successful mating activity involves the capacity to test out a number of potential partnerships—becoming sufficiently involved with the man so as to furnish a realistic test of potential compatibility, yet not so involved as to commit oneself to a relationship which might prove unsatisfactory.

Achievement of this delicate balance between commitment and detachability is one of the distinctive skills of the “mating” phase, a skill which may be developed to a high degree. Another delicate balance relates to the competitive conditions of the mating situation. Where females in a given group are in competition with one another for the highest status men, there is a constant temptation to employ one’s sexual assets for maximum effectiveness in the competitive struggle. At the same time, a girl who exceeds the limits defined by her peers runs the risk of exclusion by her female companions—a group she needs and will continue to need after marriage. For middle class girls this is perceived as a conflict between the demands of “popularity” with boys and “respectability” among girls.

A middle class girl can become skilled in accommodating these conflicting demands, and even come to relish the demanding but exciting game of involvement, de-involvement, and re-involvement. Once the game terminates in marriage, however, the whole set of complex skills developed in the mating phase becomes abruptly obsolete. Not only is the opportunity for practice gone, but continuation of activities and attitudes appropriate to mate-finding would be directly destructive to the requirements of extended-term monogamous marriage. While affording many opportunities in the areas of motherhood, home care, and community service, the role of middle class wife can be extremely constricting in regard to sexual and
mating activity, and overstepping the limits of condoned practice can evoke serious sanctions. Middle class girls, then, in moving from the role of “date” to “wife” may experience a type of “role transition” which can be quite difficult. Some women never fully succeed in this—especially in a culture where the nubile woman is so consistently glorified.

For many of the corner girls of Midcity, in contrast, the essential conditions of an adult mating system which involved serial monogamy and limited-term alliances were in many respects similar to the conditions of adolescent mating. The basic mating-phase skills of coquetry, allure, capacity to achieve adequate but not excessive involvement, the ability to relinquish a less satisfactory for a more satisfactory mate, and the ability to attract men without alienating women, could also be practiced during the period of motherhood.

Girls assumed the demanding role of “mother” within a network of affiliated females similar to the adolescent corner group, and frequently including the same women. For the new mother, these women provided practical information on child care, the promise of shared responsibility, and a dependable source of psychological support in the likely event that one’s mate proved inadequate in this regard. With so high a degree of similarity between the conditions of adolescent “mating” and those of adult “marriage,” the corner girls of Midcity were not subjected to the degree of psychic strain involved in the abrupt transition between the contrasting roles of middle class “date” and middle class “wife.”

A mate-finding system based on numerous pre-marital trials of successive partners probably reached its apex among the United States middle classes during the “rating and dating” phase of the 1920’s and 1930’s. It is quite likely that the mating practices of Midcity corner girls during this same period remained relatively unchanged, being less responsive to “jazz age” mating fads. It is also possible that the increasing trend toward earlier assumption of permanent partnerships and the stress on “going steady” at a younger age rather than “playing the field” which

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296 Reference to Wilson Waller (Rating and Dating article), Margaret Mead (Male and Female).
upsets many contemporary middle class mothers may reflect a reaction against the serious difficulties of role-transition involved in the shift from “popular date” to faithful wife, and a move by contemporary middle class girls to alleviate conditions of psychic strain to which lower class girls were never subject.

**Homosexuality**

Physical intimacy among members of the same sex, a highly charged issue among the boys, received little attention from the girls. Women could manifest a considerable degree of mutual intimacy without risking stigmatization. Use of terms of endearment among females (“dearie,” “honey,” “You’re my babe.”) was quite common. Females, both adolescent and adult, could dance with one another in public without incurring stigma. Nor was there any evidence that the dancing partner who took the man’s part thereby subjected herself to accusations of masculinity. The most extreme instance of this occurred when the “dirty Boogie” type of dance was performed by two females; the girl who took the male part duplicated, in pantomime, the actions of the male in sexual intercourse, but no explicit homosexual connotation was placed on such activity.

Females of all ages could engage without censure in certain forms of behavior generally seen as “masculine” in other social milieu. This point will be expanded in the discussion of male sexual and mating behavior. During the “tomboy” phase of early adolescence, for example, many girls assumed a masculine demeanor, adopted “male” forms of dress and language, and sought personal prestige in terms of “male” criteria of “toughness,” criminal proficiency, and so on. This youthful rehearsal of the male role was related to the fact that it was necessary for adult women in female-based households to perform a range of functions generally performed by males in mother-father households, such as assuming primary responsibility for breadwinning, dealing with potentially hostile outsiders, and imparting to male children essential components of maleness.
It would follow that definitions of what constituted “queer” behavior were somewhat broader than in the middle class community. However, as in the case of heterosexuality, overstepping limits of locally defined acceptability also evoked censure. Although no Project girl was known to have engaged in overtly homosexual activity, it was clear that sanctions to forestall movement in that direction were available. Two members of the Queens who spent a long time giggling and feeling around in a phone booth were sarcastically accused by a third of being lovers.

Overt homosexuality, when actually practiced, was strongly censured. However, in contrast to the boys who used the term “faggot” as a prime epithet, accusation of female homosexuality as a pejorative device was rare. The one recorded instance of this involved adults rather than adolescents; the father of one of the Molls, in a fit of anger, accused his wife of having sexual relations with neighborhood women. Girls with experience in correctional institutions saw homosexual involvement as an inevitable consequence of institutional confinement. A member of the Molls who had made friends with a group of ex-correctional inmates claimed with some indignation that every one was a practicing homosexual, that they had learned this at the correctional institution, and expressed shock at the fact that one of these girls had her female lover’s name carved on her leg. In her eyes, homosexuality was far more reprehensible than prostitution. Of another group of girls, she remarked, “Every one of them girls is pimpin’ off someone, but at least they ain’t Lesbies (Lesbians)!”

Prostitution

The female corner group of Midcity did not serve as a source of recruits for professional prostitution. Membership in a corner group appeared to insulate girls from prostitution rather than provide them an entrée. Prostitution flourished in Midcity. Arrests for “soliciting” were frequent. Most of the girls were personally acquainted with prostitutes, or knew of prostitutes in their neighborhood. They were familiar with the operation of professional prostitution, with the inclusion of
police in the “pay-off” orbit, with the relationship of prostitute and procurer. Despite this familiarity and the easy access to professional prostitution furnished by its local ubiquity, not a single Project girl became involved in prostitution during the study period. One member of the Queens was on particularly friendly terms with a local procurer, but this closeness did not result in a business arrangement between them. Members of the Kings who had ambitions in the direction of procuring were obliged to go out of the Midcity area to recruit a “stable.”

There was no obvious barrier to involvement in prostitution. Many Project girls were attractive and provocative, and at an age when their market value was excellent. Remuneration was quite adequate since fees had kept pace with contemporary increases in general wage scales. The girls were not subject to discriminatory exclusion because of their social class or ethnic status. But in the face of ample opportunity and few evident impediments, every in to prostitution remained an opportunity the Project girls did not avail themselves of. One external reason for this was the stigmatization associated with prostitution. Although prostitution did not entail as much stigma as homosexuality, it evoked considerably more stigma than being “cheap.” The accusation of prostitution served for the girls as a pejorative similar in intensity to the accusation of “homosexuality” among the boys. During a heated argument, a fifteen year old corner girl who had been accused of stupidity by a group-mate (her “best friend”) retorted angrily, “I’d rather be that than a fat whore!” This accusation apparently constituted “fightin’ words” since the impugned girl at once struck out at her friend and a rough male-type slugging match ensued, ending only when male group-mates moved in and separated the battlers.

But the fact that prostitution was stigmatized did not in itself constitute a sufficient curb. As shown in the discussion of unwed motherhood, a practice could be commonly adopted despite some degree of stigmatization. The major inhibitory force derived from the basic cultural configuration of the corner group itself. As already shown, the female corner group served as a major vehicle for preparing girls
for collective motherhood. Here they learned to cooperate with female peers in joint enterprises in the face of friction over men. Here they re-enforced one another in the value of babies and the delights of mothering. Fundamental values of the corner group were geared to the support of present and future motherhood.

Professional prostitution also involves a highly organized cultural system; but “motherhood” is not its prime focus. Of two major roles played by females, “mother” and “lover,” the culture of prostitution is geared to support the values, emphases and behavioral models associated with the role of lover. Despite a well-established pattern of complaint (“ritualized griping”) about the universal worthlessness and depravity of men, the hard conditions of her trade, and the cruelty of her procurer, the self-esteem of the prostitute as a professional is bound up in being a skilled and competent lover. Her professional success depends on developing and maintaining those skills and practices which make her maximally appealing to the men she serves, and fundamental values of prostitution—however implicit they may be—are geared to the support of the “lover” role.

It has already been shown that the culture of the Midcity female corner group contained the practice of overtly provocative sexual behavior within specific limits. One was allowed to be as provocative as necessary to create favorable circumstances for impregnation, but not to focus on sexual provocation to the point where the requirements of female solidarity and subsequent collective mothering would be threatened.

The basic emphasis, then, of female corner-group culture created a general climate that was unsympathetic to prostitution. Both subcultural systems furnished well-organized and sustaining guides to female life patterns, but their basic focuses were in large part mutually incompatible. The classic reason given for “why I became a prostitute,” is that after being impregnated and deserted, one has “no place to go” except into a life of sin. Midcity corner girls, similarly circumstanced, did have someplace to go. They and their out-of-wedlock children were welcomed and nurtured within the collective mothering orbit of Midcity female culture.
Membership in a corner group thus served, in effect, to insulate Midcity corner girls from prostitution during a vulnerable period in their lives.

**Disapproved Forms of Sex and Mating Behavior**

Project workers regarded both sexual and mating behavior as important targets of change. Many customary sexual practices of Project group members were in clear violation of explicit middle class moral standards, and some of these practices violated legal statutes as well. Mating behavior was a particular concern of the female workers. Project staff members came to feel that one of the few really hopeful approaches to effecting long-term changes in Midcity adolescent behavior was through the girls. Workers realized that “gang” values had a deeper hold on the boys, and that the achievement and maintenance of masculine self-esteem was intimately bound up with adherence to forms prescribed by the corner group. The girls, in contrast, were less committed to the “core” practices of the male corner group, and furthermore, were highly sensitive to the negative moral evaluation placed on many of their activities by the workers and other middle class adults. The workers felt that the strong verbal support given by many girls to “approved” forms of sexual and mating behavior indicated a high degree of readiness to assume alternative practices, if these could be cited, explained, and made available to them. Female mating practices were seen as central to the maintenance of the Midcity cultural system, and it was felt that any changes induced in this area would have a significant impact on the behavior of the next generation of adolescents.\(^{297}\)

Workers saw two ways in particular for girls to improve their position and prospects through altering their mating practices; first, by seeking as mates boys whose social status was higher than that of their customary corner-boy associates, and second, by adopting sexual and mating practices which were consonant with the extended-duration monogamous household rather than the female-based form.

The degree of success achieved by the workers in effecting change in sexual and mating behavior is thus of special interest because of the importance accorded these areas. The change process in these areas is also of interest because of the unexpected complexity of changes which did occur. Despite the fact that sex and mating are closely related, trends in these two areas showed marked contrasts, both in the overall patterning of change and in particular responses to given procedures and attributes of the workers.

Before presenting the specifics of the change process, however, it is necessary to cite “approved” and “disapproved” behavior maintained by each Project group during the study period. Table 1.8 lists those forms of sexual behavior which were regarded with approval or disapproval by Project workers. It will be recalled that “sexual” and “mating” behavior were distinguished from one another by designating as “sexual” behavior which entails direct physical intimacy or sensual stimulation, and as “mating” behavior that concerned with seeking out, arranging, maintaining, and terminating alliances between male and female partners. The following listing does not maintain this distinction with absolute cleanness; some behaviors designated as “sexual” may also involve aspects of partnership-arranging. However, all behaviors designated as “sexual” do reflect a primary concern with matters more closely related to physical intimacy than to the establishment of partnerships.

There was a high degree of agreement among the workers in evaluating sexual behavior; this reflects the fact that ideal concepts of right and wrong in this area are quite specific and well developed. Even though all adults are well aware that practice seldom conforms to ideal standards, belief in the rightness of the standards remains high. Since there is also a tendency for adults to expect of adolescents a higher degree of conformity to “ideal” standards than is expected of adults, standards applied to adolescents are frequently more clear-cut and less subject to qualification.

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298 Reiss, op. cit.
Table 2.8 indicates the level of disapproved sexual actions and sentiments for all groups during the full study period, and the standing of each of the seven study groups in these respects.

The all-group level of disapproved action in the area of sexual behavior (77.1%) was high, ranking sexual actions third among “high disapproved” forms. The level of disapproved sentiment, in contrast, was medium (49.7%), with sexual sentiments occupying a middle rank among other forms of behavior. The excess of disapproved sexual actions over sentiments (-27.4) was among the highest of all forms of behavior, ranking with theft and drinking in this regard. In all three of these measures—standings in disapproved actions, disapproved sentiments, and discrepancy between actions and sentiments—sexual behavior closely resembled drinking behavior, with these two forms occupying adjacent ranks in each instance.

Examination of the standings of the several groups shows that the white females fell well below the other six groups in disapproved sexual actions, while the Negro females ranked high. It would thus appear that among the girls ethnic status was importantly related to patterns of sexual activity, with the actions of Negro females violating Project evaluative standards to a considerably greater degree than was the case for the white girls. This situation prevailed despite the fact that the Queens were of higher social status than the Molls, so that in this regard the influence of ethnic status apparently outweighed that of class status. Among the male groups, however, this kind of distinction was absent; the position of the Negro group was almost identical with that of two white groups. For males, age differences appeared to be more important than ethnic differences; the two younger groups showed higher levels of disapproved action than the three older.
Table 1.8
Forms of Sexual Behavior
(Relative to Idealized Middle Class Standards)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approved Actions</th>
<th>Disapproved Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Avoiding, reducing frequency of non-marital intercourse</td>
<td>1) Engaging in, encouraging, increasing frequency of non-marital intercourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Avoiding, attempting to avoid venereal disease, non-marital impregnation</td>
<td>2) Acquiring venereal disease; impregnating or becoming pregnant while unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Avoiding involvement in, censuring specific acts of rape, attempted rape, procuring, prostitution, collective intercourse (&quot;gang bang&quot;), other &quot;obscene&quot; acts</td>
<td>3) Engaging in rape, attempted rape, procuring, prostitution, collective intercourse (&quot;gang bang&quot;), voyeurism, exhibitionism, other &quot;obscene&quot; acts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Avoiding association with prostitutes, pimps, homosexuals, those reported to be particularly &quot;loose&quot; or promiscuous</td>
<td>4) Associating with pimps, prostitutes, homosexuals, those reported to be particularly &quot;loose&quot; or promiscuous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Using non-&quot;obscene&quot; terms in referring to sexual behavior; &quot;serious&quot; discussion of sex and sexual problems</td>
<td>5) Direct involvement in homosexual intimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Seeking &quot;scientific&quot; sexual information from worker or others</td>
<td>6) Discussing, referring to sexual behavior in &quot;obscene&quot; terms; obscene joking in &quot;inappropriate&quot; situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Using non-&quot;obscene&quot; terms in referring to sexual behavior; &quot;serious&quot; discussion of sex and sexual problems</td>
<td>7) Reading, purchasing, disseminating pornographic material; participation in production of pornography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Defining role of other sex in exclusively &quot;sexual&quot; terms; utilizing illicit sexual prowess as a major claim to prestige</td>
<td>8) Defining role of other sex in exclusively &quot;sexual&quot; terms; utilizing illicit sexual prowess as a major claim to prestige</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Engaging in highly &quot;provocative&quot; behavior; assuming lewd or &quot;obscene&quot; bodily postures</td>
<td>9) Engaging in highly &quot;provocative&quot; behavior; assuming lewd or &quot;obscene&quot; bodily postures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sentiments Approved by Project

1) Expressed censure of, stated intent to avoid non-marital intercourse
2) Expressed censure of, stated intention to avoid venereal disease, non-marital impregnation.
3) Disapproval, censure of rape, prostitution, procuring, other illegal sexual practices
4) Expressed support for sexual "respectability," "moral" sexual practice
5) Disapproval, censure of "promiscuity"
6) Disapproval, censure of obscenity, lewdness, "suggestive" bodily postures, "promiscuity"
7) Disapproval of homosexuality

Sentiments Disapproved by Project

1) Stated intention to engage in, approval of non-marital intercourse
2) Perceiving non-marital impregnation as inevitable
3) Approval of rape, procuring, prostitution, collective intercourse, voyeurism, exhibitionism, other "obscene" acts
4) Belittlement of sexual "respectability," "moral" sexual practice
5) Stated intention to engage in, approval of sexual intimacy with numerous partners
6) Approval of homosexuality
Table 2.8  
Group Standings in Project Disapproved Forms of Sexual Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percent Actions</th>
<th>Disapproved Actions N = 184</th>
<th>Disapproved Sentiments N = 177</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jr. Bandits</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sr. Bandits 70.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>92.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kings 58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jr. Outlaws</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jr. Outlaws 56.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jr. Bandits 45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sr. Bandits</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sr. Outlaws 43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sr. Outlaws</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Molls 41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molls</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>Queens 36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>All 49.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discrepancy between Actions and Sentiments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Sentiments Relative to Acts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>-55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jr. Bandits</td>
<td>-48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sr. Outlaws</td>
<td>-33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jr. Outlaws</td>
<td>-32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings</td>
<td>-30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sr. Bandits</td>
<td>-17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molls</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>-27.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sentiments regarding sexual behavior presented a contrasting picture. The all-group level of disapproved sentiment was considerably lower than that of disapproved action, and group standings were spread more uniformly over a narrower range. The major difference between “action” and “sentiment” standings concerned the two female groups. In disapproved actions, the Negro girls ranked high and the white girls low; in sentiments, the two girls’ groups ranked together,
both showing lower levels of disapproved sentiment than any of the boys’ groups. This meant, as shown in the “discrepancy” standings (Table 2.8) that there was a good correspondence, for the white girls, between what they professed and how they acted; for the Negro girls, in contrast, the gap between word and deed was highest of any group. While indicating considerable verbal support of “approved” forms, the Negro girls in fact maintained a high level of “disapproved” practice. The small action-sentiment discrepancy shown by the white girls was in the opposite direction; their deeds were less “disapproved” than their words.

For all Project groups, with the exception of the Molls, the level of disapproved action was substantially higher than that of disapproved sentiment. The all-group excess of disapproved actions over sentiments, 27.4%, ranked sexual behavior with drinking and theft as “high discrepancy” forms of behavior. Drinking, sex, and theft have in common the fact that they all engage strong evaluative responses by virtue of being specifically violative or having a high violative potential.

Table 2.8 also shows that there was a good correspondence between a group’s level of disapproved action and the magnitude of discrepancy between action and sentiment; the more extensively group members engaged in disapproved sexual actions the less likely it was that their expressed sentiments would accurately reflect actual practice. Any conclusions as to actual practice based on sentiments expressed by the youngsters themselves would have been highly inaccurate. This finding raises serious questions as to the validity of data on sexual practices based on self-reported information.

Worker evaluations of group mating practices reflected an image of “proper” mating behavior based on customary middle class courtship and mating patterns. Seen as desirable were “planned” dates, some measure of parental knowledge and influence in regard to mating partners and activities, and choice of “respectable” mating partners. Seen as undesirable were pick-ups, rowdy or disorderly behavior in mating situations, and profane or abusive behavior toward partners. The workers
were definitely and unanimously opposed to any use of alcohol in connection with mating activity.

Table 3.8 lists approved and disapproved forms of mating. As in the case of sex, there was some overlap between “sex” and “mating” with some forms listed as “mating” behavior inevitably involving some measure of physical intimacy, but a primary focus on the establishment of partnerships is common to all listed forms. The general patterning of disapproved mating behavior in the area of “mating” was quite different from that of sexual behavior. Table 4.8 indicates group standings in this regard.

The all-group level of “disapproved” mating actions (50.9%) was close to the average for all behavior areas (46.9%). No group fell in a notably different range from other groups, and the “spread” of standings was fairly uniform. Among the males, the three older groups ranked higher in “disapproved” actions than the two younger groups. As in the case of sexual actions, the white female Molls showed the lowest level of disapproved behavior. The situation in regard to disapproved sentiments resembled that of actions in a number of respects. The all-group average of 48.9% was close to the average “sentiment” standing for all behavior areas (50.4%). Standings fell within a similar range, and the “spread” was also quite uniform. The major difference between “action” and “sentiment” standings was that the Molls, who ranked lowest in disapproved actions, ranked highest in disapproved sentiments.
**Table 3.8**

*Forms of Mating Behavior*

(Relative to Evaluative Position of Project Workers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions Approved by Project</th>
<th>Sentiments Approved by Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Engaging in mating, courtship activities in &quot;appropriate&quot; situations (e.g., dances, &quot;dates,&quot; parties, etc.)</td>
<td>1) Supporting &quot;restrained,&quot; non-&quot;exhibitionistic&quot; behavior in relations with other sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Conducting courtship according to &quot;conventional&quot; dating patterns (viz., advance arrangements, girl called for at home, girl returned to home, etc.)</td>
<td>2) Censuring fighting over mating partner, prospect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Choosing mating partner from group of more &quot;law-abiding&quot; local residents or from residents of higher status non-local neighborhoods</td>
<td>3) Censuring use of profanity, vituperation, violence in relations with, in reference to mating partners, prospects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Seeking advice from adults concerning courtship practice, criteria of mate-choice, etc.</td>
<td>4) Censuring public love-making, illicit sexual intimacy with mating partners; support of concept of &quot;limits&quot; in pre-marital intimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Seeking, obtaining parental approval in choice of mating partner</td>
<td>5) Censuring, stated intent to avoid &quot;wild parties,&quot; use of alcohol in connection with mating activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Conducting mating activity so as to exclude illicit sexual involvement</td>
<td>6) Stated desire to avoid being &quot;cheap;&quot; resentment of being characterized as &quot;cheap&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Consolidating &quot;steady&quot; relationships by exchange of rings, other gifts</td>
<td>7) Supporting idea of extended-duration monogamy, faithfulness in marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Entry into marriage with female not pregnant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Fulfilling responsibilities to, remaining faithful to marriage partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions Disapproved by Project</th>
<th>Sentiments Disapproved by Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Engaging in mating activity in &quot;inappropriate&quot; circumstances, situations (e.g., bars, taverns, penny arcades, gym practice, area clubrooms)</td>
<td>1) Conceiving mating activity primarily as a means of attaining prestige among one’s group-mates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Being &quot;picked up&quot; by strangers or &quot;picking up,&quot; whistling at, forcing oneself on, accosting strangers</td>
<td>2) Seeing sexual intercourse as an inevitable concomitant of courtship or mating activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Being obscene, violent, insulting, vituperative to mating partner, prospects</td>
<td>3) Advocating, favoring use of alcohol in connection with mating activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Drinking, proposing drinking during mating activity</td>
<td>4) Picturing other sex as evil, malign, malicious, worthless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Utilizing mating relations as a direct basis for engagement in fighting, gang conflict</td>
<td>5) Describing, conceiving marriage primarily as a means of escaping parental authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Carrying knives, guns, other weapons, illegal objects during mating activities</td>
<td>6) Seeing unhappiness, unfaithfulness, separation, divorce as inevitable aspects of marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Engaging in illegal acts to enhance one’s mating desirability, gain favor with other sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Giving mating activity precedence over school or family obligations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Refusal to accept responsibility for impregnated mating partner and/or offspring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Making choice of mate from among &quot;troublesome,&quot; law-violating community residents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.8

**Group Standings in Project-Disapproved Forms of Mating Behavior**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percent Actions</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percent Sentiments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sr. Bandits</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>Molls</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sr. Outlaws</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>Kings</td>
<td>61.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>Jr. Outlaws</td>
<td>55.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jr. Outlaws</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>Sr. Bandits</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>Jr. Bandits</td>
<td>41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jr. Bandits</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>Sr. Outlaws</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molls</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>48.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discrepancy between Actions and Sentiments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Sentiments Relative to Acts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sr. Outlaws</td>
<td>-31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>-18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sr. Bandits</td>
<td>-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jr. Bandits</td>
<td>-3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jr. Outlaws</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molls</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The general similarity between “action” and “sentiment” standings produced a low discrepancy between action and sentiment on the “all-group” level—only 2%. This was in sharp contrast with the high action-sentiment discrepancy in the allied area of sexual behavior. The white female Molls showed the highest excess of disapproved sentiments over actions—26.8%—while the Senior Outlaws showed a high discrepancy in the opposite direction, with disapproved actions exceeding sentiments by 31.5%. Understanding of these findings, as well as the differences between sex and mating in the general patterning of disapproved behavior, will be facilitated by a limited comparison of disapproved actions and sentiments in these two areas.

On the level of action, there were marked differences between sex and mating. With the exception of the Molls, group standings in these two areas were almost exactly reversed; in sexual actions, Senior Bandits and Senior Outlaws ranked low, and Junior Bandits, Queens, and Junior Outlaws high; in mating actions, Senior Bandits and Senior Outlaws ranked high, and Junior Outlaws, Queens, and Junior Bandits ranked low. In addition, as already noted, the action-sentiment discrepancy in sexual behavior (27.4) was among the highest of all areas, while the discrepancy in the case of mating (2.0) was among the lowest.

On the level of sentiment, in contrast, similarities were more marked than differences. Again with the exception of the Molls, group standings in these two areas were quite similar. The seven groups fell within a very similar range, values and “spread” were similar, and the “all-group” standing in sex differed from mating by less than 1%.

How can one account for these rather striking differences between “action” and “sentiment” in two areas of behavior—sex and mating—which in many respects are so intimately related? The influence of three factors will be considered: sex differences, age differences, and the relation between actions and sentiments.

The most distinctive pattern in regard to sex and mating was shown by the white Molls, girls of thirteen and fourteen. In sex, the Molls ranked lowest in
disapproved actions, and second lowest in sentiments. Sentiments, however, were slightly more “disapproved” than actions. In mating, the Molls were also ranked lowest in disapproved actions, but highest in disapproved sentiments and in excess of sentiments over actions.

A picture emerges of a group of corner girls whose sexual behavior was only moderately “bad” compared to other groups. The Molls neither engaged in nor gave much verbal support to “disapproved” forms of sexual practice. Rather significant, however, was the fact that in both sex and mating their sentiments were more “disapproved” than their actions. The Molls’ effort to appear “badder” than they really were reflects several factors. In attempting to gain prestige in the eyes of the boys, whose standards during this phase they much admired, the girls professed a degree of sexual sophistication and experience which in fact they had not yet achieved. Presenting this picture to the boys also enabled the girls to endow themselves with an aura of sexual availability which was somewhat deceptive, but which served the purposes of provocation, along lines already discussed. It is significant in this respect that actions showed a tendency to catch up with sentiments; within a year of worker termination, three of the Molls became pregnant while unmarried.

In mating actions, as in sexual actions, the Molls ranked lowest in “disapproved” behavior. In mating sentiments, however, they ranked highest. The low level of disapproved action reflects the Molls’ status as younger and white; they were considerably less venturesome or aggressive than either the males or the Negro girls; despite a few forays into downtown “joints” to test their capacity to be “picked up” by sailors, the girls usually confined their mating activities to a restricted “home” locale and a restricted group of known local “boys.” Thus, their actions in the area of mating practice were less likely to violate Project standards of acceptability than actions of other more venturesome groups. In their expressed sentiments, however, the Molls maintained a conception of men, mating, and marriage which did not conform to the Project workers’ picture of a “healthy”
outlook. These sentiments concerned “men” and “marriage” as well as “boys” and “courtship.” While the girls evinced considerable excitement about “boys” as pre-marital partners, they were most pessimistic about marriage—picturing men as faithless, unhappiness as fated, divorce and desertion as inevitable. As already mentioned, it was not too long before the accuracy of this conception was validated for several of the girls through personal experience.

The Negro Queens, sixteen and seventeen, presented quite a different picture. The Queens’ level of disapproved action in regard to sex was higher than any of the male groups except one, while their level of sentiment was lowest of all groups, resulting in the highest discrepancy between sexual action and sentiment. It is evident that the Negro girls, in contrast to the white girls, engaged in sexual practices which quite clearly violated Project standards, while at the same time indicating considerable verbal support of these standards. The fact that the Queens’ standing in disapproved actions was close to that of the male groups probably reflected the fact that among the Negroes female sexual activity was permitted to resemble “male” behavior to a greater degree than among the whites—both in regard to the quality of sexual participation and to taking the initiative in mating. Unlike the Molls, however, who tried to convey an impression of sexual sophistication while actually remaining quite inexperienced, the Queens had little need to resort to verbal claims in order to establish their sexual sophistication, a factor which contributed to their low level of disapproved sentiment.

In addition, as already mentioned, the Queens were most attentive to sexual and mating standards supported by “ideal” middle class norms. The fact that they ranked lowest of all groups in the expression of “disapproved” sentiment regarding both sex and mating reflects the same process operative in regard to “Topic Night”—a serious attempt to delineate and support standards of “acceptable” behavior, and to censure “disapproved” forms of practice. This pattern of sentiment, however, was not congruent with practice. In both sex and mating, the Queens’ level
of disapproved sentiment was substantially lower than their actions; in “mating” they ranked second in this regard, and in “sex,” first.

Among the male groups, the patterning of disapproved behavior was more closely related to differences in age than to ethnic or social status. Comparing disapproved actions in sex and mating shows that in disapproved sexual actions the two younger groups ranked higher and the three older lower; for mating, the situation was reversed. These clear-cut groupings on the level of action were not paralleled on the level of sentiment; however, the older male-younger male opposition appeared again in regard to the act-sentiment discrepancy for mating, where the older male groups shared in common a higher discrepancy between act and sentiment and the two younger groups a lower discrepancy.

This is a rather surprising finding. Why did the older male groups rank low in disapproved sexual actions but high in disapproved mating actions, while the younger groups showed an opposite trend? Project data do not indicate any obvious reasons for this, but do provide a basis for the following interpretation. A major difference between the younger (14-16) and older (17-19) males was that the sexual and mating activities of the older boys, as they approached marriage, revolved around the “steady” pattern to a greater degree, while the younger boys were still involved primarily in the more wide-ranging and exploratory “conquest” pattern.

Insofar as the younger boys conceived of girls more as objects of sexual conquest and less as prospective spouses, their activities in the “sexual” area involved a higher likelihood of “disapproved” forms of behavior—sexual intimacy with pick-ups, exposure to venereal disease, “obscene” sexual references, and other “disapproved” acts. The older boys, by contrast, perceived and related to girls less as objects of sexual conquest and more as prospective spouses. While this orientation afforded fewer opportunities for explicitly violative sexual behavior (intimacy with one’s “steady” was not in general strongly disapproved), it did, rather unexpectedly, afford greater opportunities for disapproved behavior in the area of “mating.”
One reason was that interaction with mating partners was more frequent, consistent, and open; in this situation, “disapproved” forms of mating practice were more evident. As already noted, the “steady” relationship reflected many features of the marital relationship, so that “disapproved” forms of behavior in mating were often anticipatory of similarly disapproved aspects of marriage. For example, there was much drinking with and in the presence of girlfriends, and considerable argumentation and verbal hostility. It will also be recalled that it was important for the boys to demonstrate to their group-mates that they were the “boss” in the mating partnership, and one way of doing this was to be publicly domineering with or abusive to one’s steady. This pattern was manifested in an extreme form by one of the Senior Bandits who was reported by his group-mates to have spit in his girlfriend’s face, poured beer on her hair, dropped ice cream down her dress, slapped and punched her face, pushed her down a flight of subway stairs, and suggested she engage in sexual activity with other Senior Bandits and with strangers.

A final point of some importance emerges from the comparison of disapproved behavior patterns in sex and mating. Of four sets of standings—sexual actions, sexual sentiments, mating actions, and mating sentiments—the most distinctive and the most differentiated pattern appeared in the area of sexual actions. In mating, action and sentiment patterned similarly; ranges and “spread” were similar; the all-group discrepancy between action and sentiment was negligible. Sexual behavior, in contrast, showed a wider range of variation and the action-sentiment discrepancy was high. Further, as has been noted, distinctive groupings in the patterning of action tended to disappear in the patterning of sentiment.

Although “sex” and “mating” are closely related, violative or “disapproved” behavior in the area of sex more strongly engages emotions such as indignation, shock, guilt, and shame. This means that expressed sentiments regarding sexual behavior are much more likely to reflect widely held and widely familiar “normative” concepts of sexual morality. The sentiments of Project group members regarding sexual behavior were far less “disapproved” than their actual actions.
and social status differences which appeared in the patterning of actions tended to “wash out” on the level of sentiment. The range of variation in expressed sentiment was also narrower, as if such expression was affected by the centripetal pull of an “official” norm, and was compelled by the force of that norm to cluster in around a narrower normative center. These processes were less pronounced in the area of mating where “moral” norms are less explicitly delineated and the range of permissible practice is wider. This conclusion—that status-connected differences which appear on the level of “action” tend to be reduced or to “wash out” on the level of “sentiment” in those behavioral areas which engage strong evaluative responses—emerges clearly from the broader comparative analysis of all forms of behavior, and has important implications for methods of obtaining accurate information relating to “high charge” forms of behavior.