Editor
Roderick Phillips, Department of History, Carleton University

Editorial Advisory Committee

Stephanie Coontz, Department of History, Evergreen State College, USA
John Gillis, Department of History, Rutgers University, USA
Robert Griswold, Department of History, University of Oklahoma, USA

Karen Offen, Institute for Research on Women and Gender, Stanford University, USA
Sonya Rose, Departments of History and Sociology, University of Michigan, USA
David Sabea, Department of History, University of California, Los Angeles, USA

Editorial Board

CarlFred Broderick, Department of Sociology, University of Southern California, USA
Barbara Brookes, Department of History, University of Otago, New Zealand
Hubert Charbonneau, Département de Démographie, Université de Montréal, Québec, Canada
Natalie Z. Davis, Department of History, Princeton University, USA
Salustiano del Campo Urbano, Department of Sociology, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain
John P. Demos, Department of History, Yale University, USA
Philip J. Greven, Jr., Department of History, Rutgers University, USA
A. James Hammerton, Department of History, La Trobe University, Australia
Karen V. Hansen, Department of Sociology, Brandeis University, USA
Olwen Hufton, European University Institute, Florence, Italy
Mark Hutter, Department of Sociology, Rowan College, USA
Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, Collège de France, Paris, France
Gerda Lerner, Department of History, University of Wisconsin–Madison, USA
Massimo Livi Bacci, Istituto Di Statistica, University of Florence, Italy

Katherine A. Lynch, Department of History, Carnegie Mellon University, USA
John M. Moeys, Department of Sociology, Arizona State University, USA
Anne O’Brien, School of History, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
Marvin B. Sussman, Individual and Family Studies, University of Delaware, USA, Emeritus
Pat Thane, School of Social Sciences, University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom
Stephan Thernstrom, Department of History, Harvard University, USA
Jan Trost, Department of Sociology, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden
David Troyansky, Department of History, Texas Tech University, USA
Randolph Trumbach, Baruch College and the Graduate School, City University of New York, USA
Wolfgang Voegeli, Hochschule für Wirtschaft und Politik, Hamburg, Germany
Robert Wheaton, Concord, Massachusetts, USA
Arthur P. Wolf, Department of Anthropology, Stanford University, USA
Tatiana Zabelina, Centre for Women, Family, and Gender Studies, Moscow, Russia

For Sage Publications: Allison Brunner, Maria Notarangelo, and Joe Cribben

The editor wishes to acknowledge with gratitude the encouragement of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at Carleton University in providing support for the Journal of Family History.
CONTENTS

ARTICLES

Domestic Violence Prosecuted: Women Binding Over Their Husbands for Assault at Westminster Quarter Sessions, 1685-1720

Jennine Hurl-Eamon .................................................. 435

Representations of Adolescence in the Modern City: Voluntary Provision and Work in Nottingham and Saint-Etienne, 1890-1914

David M. Pomfret ....................................................... 455

Gender, Class, and Generation in Interwar French Catholicism: The Case of the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine

Susan B. Whitney ...................................................... 480

Familial Poverty, Family Allowances, and the Normative Family Structure in Britain, 1917-1945

Colleen Margaret Forrest ............................................ 508

“Many Divorces and Many Spinsters”: Marriage as an Invented Tradition in Southern Malawi, 1946-1999

Amy Kaler ................................................................. 529

BOOK REVIEWS

Land and Marriage Settlements in the Aegean: A Case Study of Seventeenth-Century Naxos, by Aglaia E. Kasdagli

Malcolm Wagstaff ...................................................... 557

Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South, by Marie Jenkins Schwartz

Sally G. McMillen ....................................................... 558

Political Passions: Gender, the Family and Political Argument in England 1680-1714, by Rachel Weil

Margaret R. Hunt ....................................................... 560

Index ............................................................................. 562
The **JOURNAL OF FAMILY HISTORY** is an interdisciplinary journal that publishes scholarly research from an international perspective concerning the family as a historical social form, with contributions from the disciplines of history, gender studies, economics, law, political science, policy studies, demography, anthropology, sociology, liberal arts, and the humanities. Themes including gender, sexuality, race, class, and culture are welcome. Its contents, which will be composed of both monographic and interpretive work (including full-length review essays and thematic fora), will reflect the international scope of research on the history of the family. The journal will disseminate research on recent history that helps inform social debate and policy, as well as work on more distant periods. Timely articles, debates, and reviews will keep readers abreast of currents in theory, methodology, and interpretation.

**MANUSCRIPTS** (three copies), proposals, and correspondence should be submitted to Roderick Phillips, Department of History, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1S 5B6, e-mail: roderick.phillips@carleton.ca. The manuscript should conform to the Notes Style (see Vol. 21, No. 1) of the Chicago Manual of Style (14th edition) and should be double-spaced, with notes, tables, and figures on separate pages. Please include a 100-word abstract and a short biographical statement. A copy of the final revised manuscript saved on an IBM-compatible disk should be included with the final revised hard copy. Submission of a manuscript implies commitment to publish in the journal. Authors submitting manuscripts to the journal should not simultaneously submit them to another journal, nor should manuscripts have been published elsewhere in substantially similar form or with substantially similar content. Authors in doubt about what constitutes prior publication should consult the editor. Manuscripts will not be returned.

The **JOURNAL OF FAMILY HISTORY** (ISSN 0363-1990) is published four times annually—in January, April, July, and October—by Sage Publications, 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320; telephone: (800) 818-SAGE (7243) and (805) 499-9774; fax/order line: (805) 375-1700; e-mail: order@sagepub.com. All rights reserved. No portion of the contents may be reproduced in any form without written permission of the publisher.

**Subscriptions**: Regular institutional rate $300.00 per year. Individuals may subscribe at a one-year rate of $75.00. Single-issue price—$80.00 for institutions; $25.00 for individuals. Address inquiries to Sage Publications (address below). Add $8.00 for subscriptions outside the United States. Orders with ship-to addresses in the U.K., Europe, the Middle East, and Africa should be sent to the London address (below). Orders with ship-to addresses in India and South Asia should be sent to the New Delhi address (below). Noninstitutional orders must be paid by personal check, VISA, MasterCard, or Discover.

Periodicals postage paid at Thousand Oaks, California, and at additional mailing offices.


**Back Issues**: Information about availability and prices of back issues may be obtained from the publisher’s order department (address below). Single-issue orders for 5 or more copies will receive a special adoption discount. Contact the order department for details. Write to London office for sterling prices.

**Inquiries**: All subscription inquiries, orders, and renewals for journals published by Sage Publications with ship-to addresses in North America, South America, Australia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, and the Philippines must be addressed to Sage Publications, 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320, U.S.A.; telephone: (800) 818-SAGE (7243) and (805) 499-9774; fax: (805) 375-1700; e-mail: order@sagepub.com; http://www.sagepub.com. All subscription inquiries, orders, and renewals with ship-to addresses in the U.K., Europe, the Middle East, and Africa must be addressed to Sage Publications, Ltd., 6 Bonhill Street, London EC2A 4PU; England, telephone: +44 (0)2073740645; fax: +44 (0)20 73748741. All subscription inquiries, orders, and renewals with ship-to addresses in India and South Asia must be addressed to Sage Publications Private Ltd, P.O. Box 4215, New Delhi 110 048 India, telephone: (91-11) 641-9884; fax: (91-11) 647-2426. Address all permissions requests to the Thousand Oaks office.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use, or the internal or personal use of specific clients, is granted by Sage Publications for libraries and other users registered with the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) Transactional Reporting Service, provided that the base fee of 50¢ per copy, plus 10¢ per copy page, is paid directly to CCC, 21 Congress St., Salem, MA 01970. 0363-1990/2001 $0.50 +.10.

**Advertising**: Current rates and specifications may be obtained by writing to the Advertising Manager at the Thousand Oaks office (address above).

**Claims**: Claims for undelivered copies must be made no later than six months following month of publication. The publisher will supply missing copies when losses have been sustained in transit and when the reserve stock will permit.

**Change of Address**: Six weeks advance notice must be given when notifying of change of address. Please send old address along with the new address to ensure proper identification. Please specify name of journal. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Journal of Family History, c/o 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320.
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROSECUTED:
WOMEN BINDING OVER THEIR
HUSBANDS FOR ASSAULT AT WESTMINSTER
QUARTER SESSIONS, 1685-1720

Jennine Hurl-Eamon

Recognizances have been studied very little as evidence of domestic violence, yet they can yield many insights for historians. Using more than one hundred recognizances for assaults by husbands upon wives in Westminster Quarter Sessions records, 1680-1720, this article argues that wives could prosecute even a relatively minor incident of violence. In contrast, servants and apprentices appear to have been able to prosecute assaults by employers only if they coincided with contractual violations. Adulterous lovers, neighbors, and extended family were present in domestic violence prosecutions at various times and, along with wives, appear to have played a role in limiting patriarchal power.

Although the early modern patriarch was recognized as the sole owner and master of the household, a detailed study of the records of Westminster’s lower court reveals some substantial limits on husbands’ ability to physically correct their wives. London women, operating in the comparatively liberating atmosphere of the city, were able to make extensive use of the binding-over method of prosecution—the most popular form for female litigators. Thus, in the metropolis more than anywhere else in England, eighteenth-century women formally sought retribution for abuses that occurred within the household. To do so, they relied on the sympathy of the courts and the public in general. Seen in the context of domestic violence as a whole, household patriarchs were not as limited by assault prosecutions launched by servants. In the court records, early modern household violence was represented in complex ways, with adulterous lovers, family members, friends, and neighbors appearing alternately as perpetrators, assistants, and rescuers.

With three seminal articles on the history of wife beating in England covering this very period, one might think the definitive word on the subject had already been given. Margaret Hunt looked at “ten cases of spousal abuse that reached the Consistory Court of London in the years 1711 to 1713”; Susan Amussen used assize court records of
spousal murder, conduct literature offering images of ideal husbandly conduct, and
depositions from church court separation cases in her investigation of domestic vio-
ence; and Elizabeth Foyster examined forty-four Court of Arches divorce cases,
1660-1700, to explore the dangers to male honor inherent in wife beating.¹ All of these
accounts insightfully suggest that male spousal violence was culturally and legally
limited in early modern England and that this limitation made patriarchal power
appear less random and despotic, furthering its legitimacy. While this article will not
contradict their findings, it seeks to augment some of their conclusions and reinforce
others.

Using new evidence from recognizances—a source touched upon only peripherally
by Amussen and not used at all by Hunt and Foyster—this article will show that, while
extreme abuse was certainly prosecuted, much lesser forms of patriarchal aggression
were also brought before the courts, indicating that wives were able to seek retribution
against their husbands in the same way they would any other assault. Husbands were
also not the only target of prosecutions for marital violence. A wife sometimes blamed
his lover or male friends for exerting a negative influence over him. This adds a new
dimension to the perception of patriarchal power explored by Foyster, Hunt, and
Amussen. Following this, a subsequent section offers a comparative analysis of the
wider range of domestic violence. Extended family members are represented in the
records as both victims and assistants of patriarchal abuse. Servants came out in fairly
substantial numbers to prosecute patriarchal assaults, but they were confined to focusing
on the extremity of the violence against them or the contractual violations of their
employers, bearing out Amussen’s and Hunt’s contention that they had significantly
less cultural power as victims than wives did. More evidence will also be provided to
support Hunt’s and Amussen’s work on neighborhood involvement in limiting hus-
bands’ abuse, and a final argument will be presented that reflects Foyster’s conclusion
that abusive husbands risked dishonor and marginalization.

Plaintiffs before the Westminster Quarter Sessions had several prosecutorial
options.² They could attempt to prosecute by indictment, which was fairly expensive
but would result in a trial if the evidence was deemed sufficient, or they could have
their case settled informally by the justice of the peace (JP)—usually generating no
record. The final option was to bind the offender over to answer for the offense at the
next sessions, documented by a recognizance. A recognizance was generated when an
alleged victim came before a JP with a complaint. If the JP believed the charge to be
sufficiently plausible, he could have a recognizance drawn up. To do so, he would issue
a summons for the accused to be brought before him, along with two sureties, each
being required to pledge one half of the sum of the accused (usually £20 to the defen-
dant’s £40), to guarantee his or her appearance at the next quarter sessions and (most
often) his or her peaceful behavior in the interim. In form, the recognizance was a
small slip of paper bearing the JP’s signature, naming the sureties, announcing that the
defendant must appear at the next sessions to answer the supposed victim (or a proxy),
and offering a description of the alleged offense, to a maximum of a few lines. These
lines can be very valuable because the recorder was not constrained by a specific for-
mula and could include a fairly descriptive account of the charge with relative free-
dom. Recognizances tend to involve the so-called middling sorts—the artisans, trades-
people, and shopkeepers of the metropolis—those with associates able to provide the
£10 required of a surety, and women brought recognizances in fairly high numbers, so
they offer a rich source of insight to historians of domestic violence.³
Recognizances describing varying forms of wife beating occurred in significant numbers in Westminster from 1685 to 1720. Over the 35 years, the Westminster justices of the peace bound 154 husbands for “assault” on the plaint of their wives, and an additional 16 for “beating,” 2 for simply “threatening” violence, and 4 to “keep the peace unto” their wives. Though in actual fact these 176 recognizances amount to only about five prosecutions per year in a city of more than sixty thousand, they nevertheless stand as examples of wives’ rejection of husbandly violence. Seen alongside Hunt’s ten or Foyster’s forty-four church court cases, these recognizances clearly dwarf the research upon which past work has been based. Recognizances were likely the most popular weapon of prosecution among abused wives in this period. Despite this, Amussen and Hunt were essentially dismissive of their value for historians.

While separation cases heard in the ecclesiastical courts include rich accounts of ongoing spousal abuse and the broader circumstances surrounding it, the brevity of recognizances allows insight only into the occurrence of a single violent episode and the fact of its prosecution. This article is thus limited to studying the history of domestic violence only as isolated snapshots of the physical forms it took, the individuals most immediately involved, and the initiative displayed by wives in its prosecution. Interestingly, it was not recognizances’ paucity of information on broader circumstances that prompted Amussen and Hunt to reject them as a source. Though Amussen recognized “petitions to justices of the peace against unruly neighbours” as “the best evidence of domestic violence,” she did not extend this praise to the plaints brought by the abused women themselves. Both she and Hunt agreed that the binding-over method of prosecution “was almost certainly available only for very serious cases” of domestic assault. In fact, however, the language of the Westminster recognizances for spousal assault quite often did not differ from that of suits for interpersonal violence in general, suggesting that recognizances were used in a much greater range of cases. Hunt and Amussen also contend that they were an ineffective tool for wives. Because recognizances did not appear to offer much in the way of punishment, they argued, recognizances could reveal little about real instances of abuse for these historians and certainly nothing positive about women’s position before the courts.

It is these assumptions that this article will attempt to modify while providing evidence to buttress Hunt’s and Amussen’s contention that external community involvement was common in early eighteenth-century domestic disputes. Recognizances were resorted to in much higher numbers than the separation cases that form the backbone of past work on domestic assault. While it is impossible to know the true extent of the punishment they might inflict on a defendant, at their most benign recognizances were an inconvenience to the accused husband. He had to find two acquaintances willing to post a relatively substantial sum to support his bond, making his offense even more public. Norma Landau has determined that recognizances were enforced with great efficiency in the metropolis. An accused patriarch bound over by his wife was “threatened with entanglement in the clerical machinery of Quarter Sessions.” Should he fail to appear, his recognizance would be estreated, and he and his sureties would have to scramble to pay the resulting fines in order to avoid being liable for their very expensive bonds, and if he was unable to comply at any stage in the process, he risked imprisonment. If he did appear, he still had to pay a fee—though a smaller amount—which went to the quarter sessions clerk. Recognizances could provide plainants with a certain amount of retribution and would have been taken quite seriously in Westminster by the husbands faced with a summons. As initiators of
recognizances, wives can be seen as publicly questioning the legitimacy of their husbands’ behavior, seeking their humiliation and punishment.

The range of description within the marital assault recognizances suggests that wives did not always have to be severely beaten in order to accuse their husbands of assault. Recognizances were created by a complex interactive process between the prosecutors and the JP (or his clerk). Many of the descriptions that appear on the recognizances are likely the result of direct questions from JPs, fueled by their knowledge of the law and general public attitudes surrounding appropriate husbandly chastisement. The presiding justice (or his clerk), as the recorder, had the most obvious influence over the exact words that found their way into the record. Plainants, nevertheless, had some ability to influence the narrative in the ways that they answered the questions or the information that they volunteered, bringing their own knowledge of public—and even legal—attitudes to domestic violence into the process. The detail of the recognizance binding a husband for “thrusting his caine into [his wife’s] Belly, then stricking her on the nose with the said caine wch made [it] ... bleed & also stricking on her arme, that she thought it was broke,” could only have come from the plainant’s own knowledge of her injuries.9 Similar agency on the part of the victim can be seen in Jane Watson’s reappearance before the law in 1698 to encourage Justice James Dewy to bind constable William Nichols “for refusing to Execute a warrant signed by three Justices of the peace, for the taking the husband of Jane Watson for barbarously . . . beating” her.10 “Ursely” Smith allegedly “swor[e] to be his wife” in the recognizance binding Leonard Smith for “beating abuseing & blooding her at several times,” presumably because he had denied the marriage.11 Information volunteered by victims appears to have often found its way into recognizances, which offer evidence of a wide range of spousal violence, from severe beatings to relatively mild—perhaps even non-physical—abuse. Both wives and recording officials cooperated in identifying unacceptable forms of aggression and limiting the power of the patriarch through this binding-over method of prosecution.

Often, the recognizances for assault brought by wives against their husbands focused on the extreme nature of the violence. Seventy-eight recognizances (50 percent) added evaluative language such as “barbarous,” “violent,” “inhuman,” or words to similar effect, to describe the assault. These characterizations occur in much higher proportions for assaults by husbands than they do for assault recognizances as a whole over the period.12 As Hunt, Foyster, and Amussen have argued, husbands could physically correct their wives in early modern England, but they were constrained within certain widely understood bounds. Thus, when Hannah More brought the plaint that her husband had assaulted her by “almost beating her Eye out of her head,” and Frances Williams that her husband’s assault had struck “three teeth out of her head,” the presiding JP must have deemed this inappropriate patriarchal behavior, worth mentioning in the recognizances.13 When William Williams was bound for similar excess in correcting his wife by “assaulting her very often to the endangering of her Life,” allegedly swearing he would “murder her,” the recognizance added that he was supposed to have “already stab’d at her with a knife against her side, which by reason of her stays did not enter but broke in two pieces;”14 James Steel was accused of assaulting [his wife] . . . with a mopstaff & a pair of Bellows that she is therewith made black & blew & her flesh much bruis’d wth other barbarous usage she receives of him
& in the 15th instant [five days before, he] miserably beat her wth an oaken stick whch has put her in fear he will take away her life.15

These descriptions resonate with the law that allowed a wife to prosecute her husband if he “outrageously beat her” or at least gave her “notorious cause to fear it.”16 The husband was also allowed to “crave the peace against his wife,” presumably under circumstances at his own discretion.17 However, wives took legal action far more often than their husbands did. In the Westminster Quarter Sessions for this period, there were only three recognizances binding wives for violence against their husbands, one for “cruelly Beating [her husband] to the endangering of his life,” another for “assaulting” her husband with the help of another man, and the third for “assaulting and beating [her husband] in a violent manner.”18 Wives may have been expected to accept a certain amount of physical correction from their husbands, but their many plaints of assault suggest that they were quite capable of deeming patriarchal aggression excessive and actively pursuing retribution before the courts.

Even more significant than the bloody tales that found their way into recognizances for wife assault are the equal number of recognizances where wives do not appear to have been beaten excessively. Seventy-six recognizances use no evaluative terminology, describing the offense only as “assaulting” or “assaulting, beating and bruising,” similar to the words used for any run-of-the-mill assault recognizance. An obvious assumption might be that these recognizances were written by lazier JPs who simply recorded every assault recognizance in the briefest way possible and, thus, unsurprisingly, failed to distinguish domestic assault from any other. However, of the seventy-six recognizances with no evaluative terminology, sixty (79 percent) were issued by JPs with a history of using both graphic and standard descriptions in recognizances against husbands. Thus, it seems safe to assume that conscious choice, rather than laziness, underlay the brevity of description in some of the assault recognizances. “Assault,” according to the justicing handbooks, could range from full-on physical attacks to acts as minor as aggressive talk. For example, Dalton’s Countrey Justice asserted that “to strike at, or offer to strike at a man, although he never hurt, or hit him, this is an assault.”19 With the potential for relatively mild acts to be labeled assaults, the standard terminology in these spousal assault recognizances becomes interesting. In a section titled “In what cases assaults may be justified,” some JP handbooks (though, interestingly, not all) guaranteed the husband’s right to correct his wife “in a reasonable and proper manner,” but many recognizances binding husbands for assaulting wives bear no description to indicate that the husband had, in fact, gone beyond what was “reasonable and proper.”20 Indeed, these recognizances look no different from those for regular assaults between individuals, where no physical damage needed to be present at all. In half of the plaints brought to Westminster justices by wives against their husbands, neither the wives nor the court appear to have needed the wide range of derogatory terms available to indicate excessive violence.

Many of these plaints were similar to that of Thomas Beard, who was bound by his wife for “assaulting and beating of her,” or Thomas Pignings, charged to answer his wife simply “for an assault.”21 In some recognizances, extreme violence had not yet occurred but was only threatened or feared probable in the future. Robert Bowell was bound “for beating [his wife] & putting her into bodily fear,” and Thomas Graham had to answer his wife in the next quarter sessions “for abusing her & treating [sic] to cutt off[f] her nose.”22 In accordance with the legal definition of assault, if a wife even sus-
pected that her husband’s violence might reach unacceptable levels, she could prosecute him. Clearly, the women of Augustan London did so, and the violence of which they complained did not always have to be characterized as outrageous. A significant number of recognizances against husbands bear relatively commonplace descriptions, indicating that the husband’s right to physically correct his wife may not have been so deeply ingrained within the mentalité of the wives or the courts in early-eighteenth-century London.

In six of the seventy-six recognizances using ordinary language, and in fourteen of those using more critical language, the husband’s abuse included a denial of maintenance. Providing one’s wife with sufficient food, shelter, and clothing was another husbandly duty enforced by the courts, motivated by much stronger forces than compassion. A woman married to a man of any means was not supposed to be reliant on parish officials for her maintenance, and several charges brought by wives were echoed by parish officials eager to see that the responsibility for her care reverted back to her husband. Elizabeth Turner’s husband was bound for “Assaulting, Beating, Turning her out of Doors & Refusing her Maintenance, whereby she is likely to become chargeable to the Parish of St. Martins in the Fields.”23 William Murfey had not only to “keep the peace toward” his wife for “assaulting her with a drawn sword” but also “answer the complaint of the Overseers of the poor of the parish of St. James Westmr and to give them security that his said wife Elizabeth Murfey doe not become chargeable to the Parish of St. James.”24 Twenty-three recognizances clearly indicate that the husband had either forced his wife from his home or had left home himself.25 John Bayne was represented as “violently assaulting Anne his wife and turning her out of doors,” and Edward Knight was bound for “turning [his wife] and her three children out of doors.”26 Thomas Hurst, on the other hand, was accused of “assaulting beating and Wounding [his wife] and running away from her and keeping company with Lewd women, so that she is Likely to become chargeable to the parish of St. Martin in the Fields.”27 Physical abuse by husbands was not limited to punching and stabbing, and wives, JPs, and parish officers knew that patriarchs were obligated to provide for their wives and were vulnerable to prosecution when they failed to do so.

Thomas Hurst’s infidelities were not the only instance where a prosecuting wife drew a husband’s adultery to the attention of the recording official, who then added it to the charges against him. JP James Butler had a recognizance drawn up on the plaint of Margaret Gross against her husband for “forsaking his said wife & children & . . . betaking himself to live incontinently wth Elizabeth Pickering [alias] Man who has deluded and seduced him from his family.”28 In addition to “beating and bruising his wife,” John Wharton was allegedly “living in adultery with Elizabeth Deane,” and Edward Busse’s assault charge was compounded by his “cohabiting and living with” fellow assailant “Isabella Thomas as man and wife.”29 Suspicion of bigamy was even more strongly communicated in the recognizance where “Stephen Gellott [alias] Stileman” was required to answer his wife “Mrs. Elizabeth Gellot” for assaulting her and “Cohabitating with . . . Constant Bett Passons [alias] Stileman as man and wife.”30 This obvious censorship of masculine sexuality reinforces the valuable insights of historians like Bernard Capp and Elizabeth Foyster, who have raised doubts about the pervasiveness of the sexual double standard and have suggested that male sexuality was not allowed to flourish unhindered by the moral boundaries that confined women.31

Husbands were not always the target in quarter sessions prosecutions of domestic violence however. Wives seem to have vehemently pursued their husbands’ lovers and...
imbued these rival women with a danger that surpassed that of the patriarch in some cases. Ann Golding was bound by Mary Turner “for Living incontinently and going as man and wife with her said Husband Edward Turner, and threatening to murther her where ere she met her, of which the said Mary Turner is in feare.”

Spinster Catharine Griffis was the target of Jane Bath’s prosecution “for assaulting and beating her” to the extent that Bath vowed “that she goes in bodily fear of her & for keeping company with Christopher Baths her husband,” and Mary Marke’s allegedly assaulted a woman and was at the same time “Keeping company with her Husband.”

Dorothy Watson and Diana How, widows, and “singlewoman” Lewry Jones were also all at different times bound for “keeping company” with married men and assaulting their wives. A wife also could receive violence from her husband’s male associates. Edward Reading allegedly assaulted Dorothy Hardil and caused “a difference between she and her husband, so that by their threatnings & her husbands cruelty” she professed herself before the court to be “in danger of” her life, and Daniel Smith reportedly “Violently” assaulted Judith Mitchel while “Endeavouring to make a great Difference between her and her Husband.”

Elinor Richardson’s plaint generated two recognizances. In the first, she accused James Barnett of “strikeing her over the face and hurting her nose in soe much that her Eyes were swollen.”

The second was against Thomas White for “abusing her & making her Arme Black & Blew.” White was listed as a victualler, and the recognizance added that he had been “keeping her Husband in his house att unlawful hours.” These two recognizances likely represent a scene where Richardson had gone to retrieve her husband from the public house and had been assaulted by his companions, Barnett and White. Elinor Richardson may provide further evidence of female agency, depicting herself as actively seeking her husband and trying to remove him from an apparently male bastion. Rather than mute submission, her lack of success resulted in the still more assertive act of having the men bound over. In their position as prosecuting victims, battered wives could sometimes represent themselves as more vulnerable to violence from their husbands’ lovers or friends, accusing their husbands only indirectly.

Some recognizances used terminology that completely reduced the husband’s power, simultaneously making the rival female appear even more powerful and conniving. Anne Atkins had to answer Dorothy Pressick for “assaulting her . . . & stricking her sev[era]ll Blowes” but also for “Delewding her Husband to Keep Company with her.” Mary Pitts was perceived as “Endeavouring to make a Difference Between” Judith Simpson and her husband, in addition to “assaulting strikeing and abusing” her, in the recognizance initiated by the plaint of Judith Simpson. Even when the violence came directly from the husband, he was not always the one prosecuted. Elizabeth Gaudott was bound for “persuading” Ann Heydon’s husband to beat her “in a Barbary manner,” and Sarah Roach for “causeing” Mary Ross’s husband “to assault beate and bruise her.”

Ellinor Kaliff was also said to have been “making a difference between” Dorcas Young and her husband “& causing him to assault, beat and abuse her” along with “Insulting and abusing her” herself. Conversely, on one occasion, a husband prosecuted his wife’s lover, a “mariner,” for “inticeing Elizabethe his wife and livinge in public adultry with her threatening to kill him & way laying him in order thereto.” Even a male friend might be guilty of “inticing [a woman’s] husband to beat and abuse her in a very violent manner,” as Martha Toogood’s prosecution of John Doling alleged. Most often, however, such prosecutions sought retribution from other women, presenting an interesting gender reversal, where the husband was the
passive object that was fought for and perceived, by his wife (and the recording official), to have been manipulated. That so many more recognizances exist against the husbands themselves, however, prevents us from assuming that wives, or the courts, or both, bought into the image of fallen women as evil seducers or simply sought to preserve the marriage by deflecting blame from the real culprit, the husband. Instead, it seems that, in some of these cases at least, lovers or friends were genuinely believed to have caused the abuse, an approach that depicts husbands as passive and emasculated, the pawn of their lovers or friends.

Although the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a predominance of nuclear-based family households in England, the term “domestic” may have encompassed as broad a range of people as it had in previous centuries. Naomi Tadmor’s linguistic analysis of a range of contemporary literature unearthed the very different concept evoked by the term “family” in early modern England. A single male household head, living with no other kin, could still refer to his co-residents as his family, Tadmor discovered. The many different appearances of the word in diaries, conduct books, and novels reveal a highly complex and changing household, with extended family, servants, apprentices, a wife, and children all entering and exiting at different times, depending on life cycle and economic circumstances. Thus, to locate the actors involved in the domestic violence of the early eighteenth century, one has to cast a much larger net than one might in today’s nuclear-based households. The recognizances reflect this, portraying in-laws, stepparents, children, and a host of other individuals of the same surname, who may be cousins, siblings, nieces, or nephews—all of whom were involved in a domestic dispute, either as victims, opponents, or assistants of the abuser. Servants and apprentices (who also may have been in one of the above categories as distant relatives) were not safe from domestic violence either, and as victims, they interacted with the Westminster officials in different ways than wives, illustrating that variations in public sympathy played an important role in limiting patriarchal authority.

Parents and offspring occasionally joined wives in their plaint against patriarchal violence. Charles Vick had to answer “Anne his wife & Elizabeth Finch her daughter” at the next quarter sessions “for assaulting beating & threatening to murder them,” and Solomon Liver was bound at the plaint of “William Frith his Father in Law for assaulting beating and bruising him in a very gross manner and threatening to stick him and his wife wch putt them in danger of their lives.” William Dennett, described in his recognizance as a “gentleman,” was brought before Justice Arnold on the charge of “assaulting of” his mother. Less often, members of the extended family were named as defendants in domestic assault prosecutions. John Edgcock was bound “for assaulting and most Barbarously and Inhumanly Beating and bruising Anne his wife,” and an earlier recognizance asked that his daughter Mary appear to answer “Her mother in law Anne the wife of John Edgcock for assaulting and beating Her & persuading her Husband [John] to barbarously & Inhumanly to [sic] beat & bruise her.” Mary Turmer brought a plaint against her husband Edward “for assaulting and beating her threatening to murther her & not allowing her sufficient maintenance” a month after she had already accused Elizabeth and James Turmer (presumably her in-laws) with “violently assaulted” her. In the Westminster Quarter Sessions, husbands might face not only their wives but also their parents and children in prosecutions for assault. Con-
versely, wives might perceive their husbands’ families to be assistants in the abuse and bring them before the court as well.

This study has found no recognizances for domestic violence directed solely at children. Amussen referred to “fragmentary evidence [that] shows that as with other forms of violence, neighbours attempted to ensure that the ‘correction’ of children was appropriate and limited.” The recognizances portray neighborhood involvement as well, though prosecutions seem to occur more where neighbors have overstepped their bounds in disciplining the children, and the parents are involved as plaintiffs rather than defendants. On August 15, 1709, Mary Taylor brought a plaint before a justice, accusing James Thatcher of “assaulting [her] Children Till they were forced to cry out Murther;” and it appears that in this case a family member subsequently took revenge, because John Taylor “did . . . assault James Thatcher . . . & broke his head,” according to a later recognizance. This resonates with a case heard in the church courts. Mary Sumers’s child “told her that Jane Bentley had taken her into the yard and had beaten her upon which . . . Sumers went to . . . Bentley who was in the Shope of her house . . . next door to Sumers and asked her the reason of her beating her child.” The resulting argument led to a defamation suit. Robert and Sarah Burges brought a plaint against William Beach for “Wounding and Blooding their Child Robt Burges,” and they were bound the next day for “Attempting to assalt” Phillis Beach. There is insufficient information to form a clear picture of whether Thatcher, Bentley, and Beach may have targeted the children as part of a deeply rooted animosity against their families, and so the recognizances represent a long-standing feud, or whether the assaults stemmed from the unauthorized discipline of an errant child and subsequent retaliation from the usurped parents—but the latter seems just as likely. Though the JPs were instructed that “the parent . . . may chastise his childe within age” only “with moderation,” the absence of recognizances for parental abuse of a child indicates the rarity of legal intervention for this form of domestic violence. Nevertheless, it is clear that neighbors intervened in the relationship between parents and children, and there was a notion that children needed to be protected from excessive punishment.

In some recognizances, the plainant and defendant have the same surname, but a relationship is not specified. However, it seems likely that, in some of these cases at least, the parties were related and, for unknown reasons, the JP simply neglected to indicate it. “Margarett the wife of John Carruthers” had prosecuted Andrew Carruthers by indictment for assaulting her, and Mary Singleton had to answer another Mary Singleton along with Ann Singleton “for violently assaulting them last night without provocation & raising a mob about them by whom they were very much abused & beaten.” George and Joseph Boxley were accused of “assaulting and beating” Alice Boxley “in a violent manner and punching her;” and John Elkes allegedly assaulted Sarah Elkes, along with “Insulting & abusing her & through threats Endeavouring to pervert her from the religion of the church of England to be a papish [sic].” In one particularly poignant recognizance, George Ladyman, a cooper, had to answer “Elizabeth Ladyman for Assaulting her on her Arme with his Adds.” The record then described his long-term mistreatment:

by often beating & bruising her body [she] has lain a cripple during the last winter, he knocked her downe with a great stick when four months gon wth Child Confined her in a Garret undr [sic] so much want that she drank her owne water, and will not allow her releif [sic] to live on but threatens to murther her.
The Ladymans were clearly under the same roof, but Elizabeth Ladyman was not named as his wife. Nevertheless, it is highly likely that, if not his wife, she was a sister or similar close relation, and George Ladyman represented the patriarchal figure in her life. Though the description of his abuse reveals an extreme imbalance of power, her assertiveness in prosecuting him is no less revelatory. When various family members prosecuted or were bound for assault, they illuminate the ways in which the courts could become involved in the diverse tensions within the home.

Servants and apprentices shared accommodation with their masters and mistresses and appear to have been almost as likely as wives to publicize abuse of patriarchal authority and seek retribution. As prosecutors, however, they were subject to different constraints than wives. Servants went before JPs with tales of extreme cruelty and abuse, which resonated with popular literature condemning the excesses of employers. Contemporary pamphlet accounts of servant beatings illustrate the public outrage elicited by excesses in punishment. *Great and Horrible News from the West of England* describes a tradesman who tried to hang his apprentice for reading his mail. Though there was no question to the boy’s guilt, and his life was eventually saved as a result of the tradesman calling for help and saying the apprentice had actually hanged himself, the account maintains the master’s guilt, offering the story as “a caution and warning to all people how they dispose of their Children to ill-affected men, who in their rage can know no mean.” Another account of a trial at the Old Bailey described a mistress who

> having got one Sadler a Bayliffs follower, that lodged in her house, to make a whip which they called a *Cat with nine tails* . . . they whipped her [apprentice] with the same so cruelly, that the blood flowed from her in abundance.

Again, the public sympathy was with the servant girl, and the tale was meant as a warning, as the mistress and her male assistant received a guilty verdict. This kind of public compassion helped apprentices and servants to face their abusive employers in the Westminster Quarter Sessions and attempt to gain retribution in cases of extreme abuse.

As Peter Rushton found in a study of quarter sessions’ records for northeast England in this period, servants and apprentices “were quite capable of making their own decisions and acting on their own behalf in defense of their own interest,” and the Westminster recognizances for extreme servant beatings bear this out. More than one-quarter (39 percent) of the fifty-one recognizances for assaulting servants and apprentices used strong language to describe the assault. John Tompkins, apprentice to a chimney sweep, prosecuted his master on two separate occasions, first for “imoderately [sic] correcting and beating him and not allowing him sufficient maintenance” and then for “misusing and imodately beating of him,” according to the recognizances. Glass-grinder Mathew Primesky was prosecuted by “William Vanharpe his apprentice for beating & bruising him in a cruel and dangerous manner with a shovell,” and widow Diana Roxelle allegedly beat “Margaret Sloan her servant . . . in such a Barbarous manner that she [could] not go abroad without indangering her life.” Though, as in Roxelle’s case, the patriarch accused was not always male, mistresses were often widowed heads of households or acting with a man, and the power that these recognizances sought to limit was patriarchal.
testimony must have been key to the recognizance describing Peter Birmingham and Mary, his wife, as

having beaten & bruised her in a violent manner by dashing of her Head against the table doores & chaires until the blood has divers times gushed out at her mouth & nose & likewise cast her on the Ground & stamp’d upon her Breast to the indangering of her life.66

Just as wives’ prosecutions seem to have been part of a general attitude condemning patriarchal excess, the descriptions of assaults on servants heard before the courts resonated with those in contemporary literature that evoked strong public outrage.

Unlike wife assault however, the recognizances for assaults on servants that characterized the violence as relatively ordinary placed equal emphasis on employers’ delinquency in their contractual obligations. This supports Amussen’s contention that “physical correction was . . . more accepted for . . . servants, for whom husbands and wives shared responsibility,” than it was for wives.67 Though 61 percent of the recognizances binding employers used language that was common to assault recognizances as a whole, almost all (with the exception of two recognizances) simultaneously accused employers of shirking their financial obligations.68 In other words, servants’ claims of abuse probably did not receive as much judicial attention as their claims of loss of wages or training. This supports Rushton’s findings that the justices of northeast England were more likely to convict masters and mistresses of abuse if prosecuting servants and apprentices had additional evidence showing contractual violations.69 In Westminster, for example, Alice Greenwood was supposedly a “wet Nurse in [Daniel Debourling’s] house & . . . the sd Daniel Debourling refuseth to pay her one pound & fourpence due to her for wages & forced her out of doors.”70 Richard Burton was bound to answer “Hannah Wicks for Illegally detaining from her thirteen shillings due to her for wages, & also for assaulting of her,” and Henry Mitcham was prosecuted by Frances Skelton “for assaulting and beaeting her and refuseing to pay unto her 31£ due unto her for wages.”71 Apprentices could charge masters and mistresses with shirking their contractual obligations, such as Frances Reginer, who—along with her husband—was accused by her apprentice of “assaulting and beating of her and . . . not teaching of her trade.”72 Similarly, Mary Anne Dawson was brought before the Westminster sessions upon the plaint of “Martha Anne Carew for assaulting her and neglecting to teach her the Business of an Embroideress She being a Covenant servant to her.”73 While public and legal condemnation of wife beating arguably increased with the approach of the Industrial Age, a recent study of the law of master and servant by Douglas Hay reveals a growing tendency to favor the employer through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century.74 Though servants and wives alike brought plaints that emphasized severe cruelty, the recognizances for more run-of-the-mill assault descriptions differ dramatically. Westminster officials, and perhaps the public in general, seem to have deemed a much wider range of patriarchal violence unacceptable when wives, rather than servants, claimed to be victims.

There are other recognizances to indicate extensive community involvement in domestic violence. As studies of domestic violence for both Britain and Europe in the early modern period have found, neighbors acted as observers and witnesses for sepa-
ration cases attesting long-term abuse, and some of the Westminster recognizances illustrate how integrally many friends and neighbors were immersed in spousal relations. Thomas Lowen had to answer his wife on a charge of “cruelly beating” her, but he also had to answer for “dangerously wounding the wife of Stephen Phillips.” Dorothy Flint was also probably a neighbor or friend of Mary Baldwin who joined with her in binding her husband Thomas Baldwin “for assaulting and beating them & tareing their clothes.” James Hearne seems to have terrorized not only “Alice Hearne his wife” but also William Fletcher, by “assaulting striking and biting him,” and Richard Peake, by “breaking [his] windows.” It is, of course, impossible to determine from the information available exactly who these external characters were in relation to the married couple—whether they were servants, neighbors, or acquainted with them in some other way—but it seems likely that their presence in the prosecutions was the direct result of popular attitudes regarding excessive patriarchal control.

This is reflected in the contemporary literature. Several cases in the publications of the proceedings at the Old Bailey Sessions detail wives’ murders where friends who had attempted to protect them from their husbands eventually served as trial witnesses. When Isaac Smith was charged with stabbing his wife, William Cadwallader and his wife, “Lowra,” testified that “the Prisoner called his Wife Bitch and Toad and such like Names, bidding her to go to her Clerkenwell Crew,” and when he later stabbed her, Mr. Cadwallader answered her resulting cries, “and took her up, and said to the Prisoner, you wicked Man, what have you done? you have kill’d your Wife.” William Cadwallader had tried to prevent the violence, attempting to defuse Smith’s anger at his wife’s refusal to get him food by himself offering “if he would eat such as he [Cadwallader] had he should be welcom to it.” A similar pattern emerged in another spousal murder case, with a female witness averring that she had “perswaded” the wife “not to go” with her husband “for fear he should beat her,” though she was eventually unsuccessful. In both of the literary examples given in the above section on domestic abuse of apprentices, neighborhood rescue was portrayed as imminent. Great and Horrible News from the West described neighbors actually securing the cruel master and bringing him “before a Justice,” and the mistress who whipped her young apprentice to death with the cat-o’-nine-tails “stop’d her mouth with an handkercher, lest the Neighbours should pity her out-cry for the hard cruel usage.” Though meant for comic effect, an account of neighborhood indignation over an actually innocent husband in Fielding’s Tom Jones reveals the support wives might expect from their community. A wife accused her husband of abuse before her female neighbors, and

Fielding then depicted the way in which the word of the supposed abuse traveled throughout the county, became further exaggerated and distorted, and eventually resulted in the husband being brought before the local magistrate. Similarly, some of the recognizances that provide evidence of domestic violence were brought directly by such external parties. William Tule had to answer Elinor Salt “for assaulting and beating [her] & threatinge to doe some bodily hurt to mary [sic] Tule his wife.” Mary Ball’s plaint resulted in a recognizance describing John Richardson as “Encourageing his wife to Beat her saying Beat that Bitch (meaning the
s[ai]d Mary Ball) and swearing that if she did not beat her he would beat his wife.86 Though Richardson’s wife was involved in the assault upon her, Ball’s narrative must have exhorted the court to perceive her as another victim of patriarchal abuse. Francis Brown went before Justice Crake to accuse John Baxter of “assaulting, beating, bruising, knocking him down, stamping upon him & tearing his shirt,” but an additional witness, Ann Townes (probably brought purposely by Brown), gave important evidence that also found its way into the record.87 “On the oath of Ann Townes,” Baxter was also bound “for Cohabiting with Parthenia wife to Francis Brown as man & wife & that the said John Baxter doth not allow his wife and child any maintenance.”88 Though Mrs. Baxter was not an active plainant in this recognizance, the inclusion of her impoverished condition—as well as mention of Brown being made a cuckold—reveals the way that neighbors, friends, and acquaintances attempted to limit patriarchal behavior before the courts by evoking a range of images known to arouse public ire. The support wives might expect from neighbors and friends is even visible in the recognizances where their husbands were the plainants. Mary Norris and Joyce Guante were bound for “assaulting Thomas Hayle & for raising a tumult about his house & for inveighinge his wife from him,” perhaps because they perceived him as more of a threat to her than he believed himself to be.89 More significantly, when Benjamin Hambleton had his wife, Elizabeth, bound for “assaulting and beating him in a violent manner,” the two sureties that came to her assistance, putting up £10 apiece to guarantee her appearance at the next sessions, were “Maria Aires Widow” and “Elizabeth Jackson spinster,” both of the same street as Elizabeth Hambleton.90 There is much evidence in the Westminster recognizances to support historians’ contentions that neighbors and friends evaluated the patriarch’s actions and sought retribution for abuses—either on their own or on his wife’s behalf—when necessary.

In a clear minority of cases, those charged with wife or servant assault were marginalized figures. According to the information in their recognizances, these men operated beyond the bounds of the law or social acceptability, and this would only have helped the prosecutions of those they had allegedly assaulted. Coffeeman Edward Lawford seems to have consistently disturbed the public peace, and the litany of abuses in his recognizance brought “by Mary his wife, John Martin, Jane Wilkinson & Eliza Skinner” illustrate his poor image within the community:

he does assault beat Bruise cut & Endeavour to Kill his said wife, By often drawing his sword and running after her thro’ the neighbourhood, putting them in freights [sic] & Bodily Fears, he raising mobs & creating of Riots & that when the s[aid] Martin forbid him from his House thro’ the many disturbances that he created (threatened Martin he would Naile him) & said Hee had Curst the King w[hi]ch upon a full hearing & on the affidavits of the above s[ai]d Mary Lawford, Jane Wilkinson & Elizabeth Skinner it appeared the Matter was Malicious, falce [sic] & incredulous [he] is a person of ill fame & reputation & that the neighbours are continually in fear of their lives.91

Not only does this recognizance show Mary Lawford’s neighborhood support network, but it also shows that she had little difficulty in testifying against him in a previous case and was able to stand before the courts again as a self-righteous victim. Prosecutions for other types of domestic violence also occasionally portrayed the inherent lawlessness of the defendant. Samuel Johnston, a gentleman, was prosecuted for
“threatening to shoot . . . his uncle,” who happened to be “one of his Majesties Justices of the Peace,” and Louis Deportable, bound to answer “his apprentice for misusing him” showed a similar disrespect for the office by “Disobeying a Summons . . . to appear before [the JP] saying he would wipe his Backside w[i]th the said summons.” The defendants’ blatant lack of respect for the law in certain recognizances reveals the marginalized character of some domestic assailants.

In a few cases, the patriarch reenacted, in front of the JP, the very deed for which he was being bound or directed his hostilities at law officials, compounding his offense and adding to the credibility of his prosecutor. According to his recognizance, when Humphrey Vaughn was brought before the JP “for refusing to pay” his servant Nicholas Milborne “the sume of two and Twenty Shillings or thereaboutes due to him for wages,” he threatened Milborne in the JP’s presence “saying to him the said Milborne Sirrah I’le order you I have not done with you yet, I’le dresse you Sirrah, or words to that Effect.” The recognizance then described him as “behaving himselfe Insolently & audatiously to . . . the . . . Justice of [the] peace, threatening to bring his action against” the JP. Mary Rice complained to Westminster Justice Saintlo that her husband had threatened to murder her, and Saintlo bound him over to “keep the peace toward her.”

The recognizances for Wildman, Rice, and Vaughn present these patriarchs as having an already inflated sense of their own authority, and they probably made their wives’ or servants’ charges of abuse much easier for contemporaries to believe.

This article has described assault victims seeking retribution; unfortunately, there is no way adequately to uncover the events following the initiation of a recognizance from the record itself. Six recognizances bear evidence to suggest that the wives also pursued an indictment, which is slightly lower than the proportion of women who prosecuted by indictment in assaults as a whole for this period. Most often, recognizances simply bear the Latin abbreviation *ven & exon*, meaning that the defendant has satisfied the requirement of the recognizance by appearing at the next sessions to answer the charge against him or her. Many things could have happened to generate such an appellation, not the least of which being that the defendant still had to do penance in some way, either by privately agreeing to a settlement with the accusing party or by receiving informal mediation by the JP. Very rarely do the recognizances themselves offer any more illumination as to the outcome of the prosecution. The dispute between William and Elizabeth Brandy is uniquely revelatory. On August 3, 1709, Elizabeth Brandy brought a plaint against

Mary Cork wife of Thomas Cork . . . for liveing incontinency [sic] with her husband William Brandy and having occasioned her said husband William Brandy several times to beat her on the said Mary Corke’s account and hath been the occasion for her departing from her owne home for feare her said Husband by the said Mary Corke’s Instigation should Murther her of which she hath made oath.
By the following January, the anger of William Brandy’s estranged wife was more fully directed at him. He was brought before a different JP and bound to answer the complaint and Petition of Elizabeth his wife for Inhumanely beating her and threatening to Run away from her and leave her Chargeable to the parish of St. Margaret Westm for which a warrant was this day granted against him.101

While Mary Cork’s recognizance had been respited, the Latin note in the margin of this recognizance clearly indicates that William Brandy appeared and was committed to the Gatehouse, the prison used by the Westminster sessions.102 Elizabeth Brandy made use of the binding-over method of prosecution on at least two separate occasions, and her initiative resulted in her husband’s incarceration. Far more of the defendants in these prosecutions were constrained financially, rather than physically however, as I asserted earlier. It seems likely that husbands—bound for assault and forced to pay a fee to quarter sessions officials—would have been more, rather than less, hostile to the wives whose prosecution had caused this inconvenience. Furthermore, these angry husbands walked the London streets with relative freedom, especially as the recognizance’s stipulation to “keep the peace” or “be of good behaviour” toward the plainant may rarely have been effectively enforced.103

Why, then, did Westminster wives bother to prosecute at all when their husbands received only the slap on the wrist constituted by a recognizance? It seems reasonable to suppose that none of these 169 women would have approached a JP if they felt their husbands’ abuse would escalate as a result. There may well have been a substantial number of wives who were unable to prosecute for this very reason whose identities we shall never know, but the significant group of women who did come forward reveals some instances of spousal violence where retribution was actively sought and possible in the courts. It is important to note that the binding over occurred only at the discretion of the JP; he did not have to draw up a recognizance to every plainant who demanded one.104 Nevertheless, the Westminster JPs consistently had husbands bound to appear in large numbers, exponentially more often than they had wives bound. Hunt, Amussen, and Foyster have reviewed conduct literature extensively for this period, finding several examples to indicate that husbands were expected to limit physical correction of their wives to an absolute minimum—to the extent of avoiding it entirely, as stated in some manuals.105 The wives of Westminster had obviously internalized such ideals and gained moral strength from them. Wives were motivated to go before the Westminster Quarter Sessions to publicize their husbands’ transgressions, and—along with the financial obligations husbands would incur by their wives’ prosecution—their infamy must have been sufficient retribution. Foyster’s analysis provides valuable insight into the importance of self-restraint to masculine honor and the damage the infamy of wife beating presented for husbands’ reputations. This study has added the presence of servants, lovers, and extended family to the ideological limitations on the early modern patriarch. Along with friends and neighbors in the greater community, the Westminster Quarter Sessions was also involved in defining domestic abuse and placing constraints upon its perpetrators. The more than 170 individuals bound for assaulting wives, servants, and other members of the domestic circle before Westminster JPs, 1685-1720, exemplify the prevalence of social and judicial attitudes that were fairly sympathetic to limiting patriarchal power.
In a review of recent work on domestic violence, Garthine Walker noted that when, in the late seventeenth century, “tyrannous or violent husbands were portrayed as aberrations from the norm . . . by extension, nonlethal violence and abuse is characterized as an acceptable part of male authority over women within the household.”106 Certainly, the ideology at the base of the prosecutions reviewed above actually served to strengthen patriarchal power on a broader scale by allowing servants, wives, and the men themselves to feel that the power wielded by the “good” patriarch was moderate and legitimized—in stark contrast to the “bad” patriarch who had to be chastised before the courts. However, this article would modify Walker’s assertion that nonlethal abuse was acceptable. In the end, if patriarchal authority was to be hegemonic, it had to rest on some measure of popular consent. The courts appear to have recognized this, particularly in cases of domestic violence, when there was an informal understanding of the limits of physical coercion of wives and servants, relative to circumstance. Though patriarchal authority was thus as strong as ever in some respects, it was purchased at the price of granting wives, servants, and extended family the right to label certain acts unacceptable and pursue retribution before the courts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research for this article was generously funded by the Rotary Foundation and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Special thanks to Nicholas Rogers, Robert Shoemaker, Elizabeth Cohen, and Ian Gentles for comments on an earlier draft and to Louise Falcini for her help at the London Metropolitan Archives. The errors that remain are my own.

NOTES


3. “It is probable that women used recognizances more frequently than any other type of legal procedure in the secular courts.” Shoemaker, Prosecution and Punishment, 207.


6. Hunt, “Wife Beating,” 18, and Amussen, “Being Stirred,” 80. See also Hunt, p. 19 and n. 37, where she describes the “benign role” of the justices of the peace (JPs) in such prosecutions.


8. Ibid., 35.


10. MJ/SR1921 R98, 30 November 1698.

12. From 1685 to 1720 in Westminster, there were 1,603 recognizances binding men for assaults on women. Of these, only 20.5 percent described excessive violence (46 “barbarous,” 12 “inhuman,” 5 “cruel,” and 266 “violent”).

13. MJ/SR2286 R89, 11 January 1716/7, and MJ/SR1865 R93, 7 January 1695/6, respectively.


15. MJ/SR2339 R81, 22 October 1719.


17. Ibid. “Crave the peace against his wife” means that the husband could bind her over to act peaceably toward him. No conditions were laid to limit the type of offense that would allow husbands to crave the peace against their wives, but violence was much more rarely the topic of these recognizances.

18. MJ/SR2275 R52, 12 September 1716; MJ/SR1873 R102, 14 May 1696; and MJ/SR2330 R50, 25 May 1719, respectively.


20. Joseph Keble, An Assistance to Justices of the Peace . . . (London, 1683), 150, my emphasis. This right of correction is granted to parents over children, masters over servants, schoolmasters over scholars, gaolers over prisoners, and husbands over wives. Note that a number of justicing handbooks (e.g., Dalton, Countrey Justice, 204, and Giles Jacob, The Modern Justice [London, 1716], 38) mention this right for every category except husbands and wives, making the potential for JPs to frown on husbands’ violence of any kind more probable, and many handbooks do not address any right of correction at all.

21. MJ/SR2027 R18, 1 March 1704, and MJ/SR2216 R95, 28 September 1713, respectively.

22. MJ/SR2047 R64, 3 February 1704/5, and MJ/SR1718 R134, 9 January 1687/8, respectively.

23. MJ/SR2177 R41, 27 August 1711.

24. MJ/SR2138 R1, 5 August, 1709.

25. It is interesting to speculate upon whether the wives in the 131 remaining recognizances returned to their husbands’ homes after their prosecution or had already long lived separately from their husbands. Unfortunately, there is no conclusive evidence in either direction, though Amussen offers examples to indicate that women often lived in separate quarters for years before they sought formal legal separation. See Amussen, “Being Stirred,” 79, 82.

26. MJ/SR2225 R72, 19 March 1714, and MJ/SR1897 R112, 11 August 1697, respectively.

27. MJ/SR2353 R1, 21 September 1720.

28. MJ/SR2339 R81, 22 October 1719. Note that the word “alias” is actually in its abbreviated version of “als” when it appears in the recognizances.

29. MJ/SR2098 R89, 12 September 1707, and MJ/SR2177 R76, 13 July 1711, respectively.

30. MJ/SR2143 R64, 19 December 1709. See also MJ/SR1940 R89, 7 October 1699; MJ/SR1836 R8 4, 8 May 1694; and MJ/SR1897 R133, 2 August 1697, for other recognizances where the husband appears to have married the rival woman, though no bigamy charges were laid.


32. MJ/SR1930 R12, 29 June 1699.

33. MJ/SR1940 R89, 7 October 1699, and MJ/SR2108 R34, 26 February 1707/8, respectively.
34. MJ/SR1708 R52, 4 June 1687; MJ/SR2167 R38, 16 January 1710/1; and MJ/SR2270 R110, 8 May 1716, respectively.
35. MJ/SR2315 R75, 17 July 1718, and MJ/SR2083 R85, 6 January 1706/7, respectively.
37. Ibid., R47.
38. Ibid. Note that another recognizance brought before the same JP on the same day bound Elinor Richardson to answer Elizabeth, Thomas White’s wife, for “assaulting abusing slandering & occasioning a Difference between her & her said Husband.” MJ/SR2013 R49, 8 May 1703.
39. MJ/SR2123 R80, 13 November 1708.
40. MJ/SR2192 R112, 29 May 1712, and MJ/SR2138 R71, 5 August 1709, respectively.
41. MJ/SR1831 R98, 31 January 1694.
42. MJ/SR2250 R203, 16 June 1715.
43. MJ/SR1831 R98, 31 January 1694.
45. MJ/SR2295 R256, 1 September 1717, and MJ/SR2300 R130, 16 October 1717, respectively.
46. MJ/SR1964 R56, 8 March 1701.
47. MJ/SR2300 R197, 2 December 1717, and MJ/SR2300 R191, 29 November 1717, respectively. The term “in law” could be used synonymously with “step,” as Anne was probably Mary’s stepmother.
50. MJ/SR2138 R112, 15 August 1709, and R113, 17 August 1709, respectively.
52. MJ/SR2133 R54, 16 June 1709, and R55, 17 June 1709, respectively.
53. Dalton, Countrey Justice, 204.
54. MJ/SR2343 R104, 9 January 1719/20, and MJ/SR2348 R74, 4 May 1720, respectively. Andrew Carruthers “who hath pleaded not guilty to an indictmt for an assault upon Margaret the wife of John Carruthers” was bound in the former recognizance to “Prosecute his Traverse at the next general quarter sessions.” Robert Shoemaker found that one-third of the recognizances in his sample also went to indictment, meaning that those defendants may face a trial and stronger punishments. See Shoemaker, Prosecution and Punishment, 25.
55. MJ/SR2330 R145, 9 June 1719, and MJ/SR2290 R97, 26 June 1717, respectively.
56. MJ/SR2265 R59, 22 March, 1716.
57. Ibid.
59. Ibid., 7-8.
61. Ibid. See OBSP, 28 February 1680/1 (London: T. Davies), 2, and OBSP, 25 February 1680/1 (London: D. Mallet), 1-2, for accounts of Sadler’s trial.
62. P. Rushton, “The Matter in Variance: Adolescents and Domestic Conflict in the Pre-industrial Economy of Northeast England, 1600-1800,” Journal of Social History 25, no. 1 (1991): 94. Rushton also found that servants and apprentices were more likely than their masters to win their cases outright (pp. 95, 97).
63. MJ/SR1950 R42, 23 April 1700, and MJ/SR1960 R90, 19 October 1700, respectively.
64. MJ/SR1974 R109, 1 October 1701, and MJ/SR2098 R104, 13 August 1707, respectively.
65. Sixty-nine percent of the recognizances for assaults on servants named at least one employer who was male.

66. MJ/SR2270 R198, 22 May 1716.


68. For the two recognizances that did not simultaneously mention contractual violations, see MJ/SR2207 R41, 20 January 1712/3, and MJ/SR1960 R129, 14 October 1700, respectively.


70. MJ/SR2310 R17, 16 May 1718.


72. MJ/SR1703 R95, 28 February 1696/7.

73. MJ/SR2255 R74, 13 September 1715.


76. MJ/SR2113 R38, 20 June 1708.

77. MJ/SR2230 R77, 15 June 1714.

78. MJ/SR1940 R32, 30 November 1699.


80. Ibid.

81. Ibid., 27-29 April 1720.

82. Great and Horrible News from the West, 8, and OBP, 28 February 1680/1, 2. Though the latter quotation is from one of the accounts of her male lodger’s, Sadler’s, trial (referred to in note 61, above), the mistress’s gagging of her apprentice was remarked upon in all of the trial versions for both defendants.


84. Ibid., 62-65.

85. MJ/SR1708 R73, 15 April 1687.

86. MJ/SR2133 R61, 21 June 1709.

87. MJ/SR2310 R149, 24 May 1718.

88. Ibid.

89. MJ/SR1693 R131, 21 July 1686.

90. MJ/SR2330 R50, 25 May 1719.

91. MJ/SR2290 R200, 30 April 1717.

92. MJ/SR2339 R106, 30 October 1719, and MJ/SR2310 R209, 3 July 1718, respectively.

93. MJ/SR1855 R25, 8 April 1695.

94. Ibid.

95. MJ/SR2315 R254, 8 September 1718.

96. Ibid.

97. MJ/SR2211 R76, 28 April 1713.

98. Recognizances that bear a clerical annotation to indicate that the defendant has issued a plea of guilty or not guilty show that the plainant has also sought an indictment. This occurs in 4 percent of assault recognizances brought by wives and 9 percent of the total of assault recognizances brought by women during this period.
99. These are Shoemaker’s contentions; see Prosecution and Punishment, 101-5; Landau disagrees, asserting that “the extent to which the issue of recognizances generated settlement of disputes cannot be determined,” but she sees the administrative repercussions forcing an appearance at quarter sessions to be sufficient retribution in the eyes of prosecutors. See Landau, “Appearance at the Quarter Sessions,” 40.

100. MJ/SR2138 R81, 3 August 1709. Note that in R82 for the same date and before the same JP, “William Bromly” had to answer “Elizabeth his wife for Inhumanly beating her turning her out of Doors And threatening to kill her soe that she hath been forced to fly for preservation of her life of which she had made oath.” Should the Bromlys and the Brandys be the same people and the discrepancy be the result of a clerical error, the slight difference in the narratives becomes even more interesting, but it is impossible to determine their correct identities with any certainty.

101. MJ/SR2143 R118, 10 January 1709/10.

102. This may have been due to a failure to pay his fees. See Shoemaker, Prosecution and Punishment, 120.

103. Landau argues that “the proceedings to secure . . . forfeiture” of a recognizance to keep the peace or maintain good behavior “were just too cumbersome.” See Landau, “Appearance at the Quarter Sessions,” 34.

104. Recognizances “were generally to be granted at the complaint of a plaintiff who made oath before a justice that he feared the defendant would physically hurt him, that the charge was not malicious, and that the danger was current.” Shoemaker, Prosecution and Punishment, 26.


REPRESENTATIONS OF ADOLESCENCE IN THE MODERN CITY: VOLUNTARY PROVISION AND WORK IN NOTTINGHAM AND SAINT-ETIENNE, 1890-1914

David M. Pomfret

Historians agree that around 1900 the concept of adolescence was reworked, valorized, and given scientific legitimacy. In Western political, pedagogical, philanthropic, and literary circles, an understanding of adolescence as a distinct and universal stage of life achieved currency. However, broad studies have glossed over local differences in provision for and representations of adolescence. By comparing representations of adolescence drawn from voluntary provision and the workplace in two cities, Nottingham (England) and Saint-Etienne (France), this article highlights the cultural relativity of this construct, the different rhythms of its institutionalization, and the motives that led local interest groups to emphasize or underplay its significance.

On July 13, 1899, a crowd of six thousand young people gathered in the Bois de Boulogne on the western edge of Paris to perform in a “festival of adolescence.” Having made their way to the Pré Catélan at the center of the park, they took part in a variety of displays, including marches, physical exercises, songs, and music, before an assembled crowd of twelve thousand adults. Those who participated in this spectacle were members of Republican after-school societies: patronages, amicales, and alumni societies. In the notes of the accompanying program, the municipal council of Paris, which organized the event, admitted that it had been “looking for an opportunity to show its support for the various after-school societies” for “some time.” Through this event, the council made adolescence and the efforts to provide for adolescents the central focus of civic celebration.

The Paris festival provided a public, ritual expression of a more general and growing concern about this life stage. A fascination with adolescence had begun to permeate scientific, pedagogical, and literary studies in France from the 1880s. Much effort was devoted by interested individuals to identifying the parameters and associated...
behaviors of adolescence. Hygiene-advice guides for parents were supplemented by analyses of puberty. Pedagogues and, from the turn of the century, psychologists began to make the adolescent a legitimate focus for research. The adolescent was also the subject of political debate. The festival of adolescence itself demonstrated the extent to which this concern had also entered the realm of politics. In making adolescence a focus of Republican celebration, the Paris municipal council was responding to the challenge identified by the secular Ligue d’Enseignement. After 1894, the league situated itself at the forefront of the movement to advance understanding of adolescence as a specific life stage affecting sufferers on the basis of age rather than on the basis of class, sex, or social background. Its leaders warned of an “age of danger . . . a time when the crisis of adolescence commences” and that, for young males, endured “between the school and the regiment.”

To deal with the inherent dangers of this condition, a new “pedagogy based on vigilance” was advocated. Around the turn of the century, the recognition of adolescence by contemporaries as a “distinct and universal stage of life” was occurring not only in France but throughout the West. French pedagogues and scientists were influenced by their anglophone counterparts, in particular the psychologist G. S. Hall, who provided the first systematic analysis of adolescence in 1904. The field of adolescent psychology was bolstered further by the appearance of a number of studies before 1914. These texts synthesized, scientized, and legitimated the concerns voiced by social reformers and politicians in the late nineteenth century. Under professional scrutiny, adolescence was isolated and represented as a stage of life during which the “sufferer” needed guidance. It was portrayed as a condition marked by extremes of weakness and energy, degeneracy and inspiration. Adolescents were identified as being physically and mentally malleable. In education and labor reform, voluntary leisure provision, scientific research, and popular novels, these representations of adolescence were encoded.

Historians have disagreed as to the impulse that generated this universalization of adolescence. John Gillis has suggested that before 1900 adolescence, as an period of extended dependence, was “discovered” by the middle classes and disseminated by voluntary movements that emerged from the same social milieu. More recent work has emphasized the importance of the economic and social conditions that led reformers to identify young working-class males as a social problem and adolescence as a life stage experienced by all young people. In spite of such disagreements, historians have accepted the notion of a universalization of adolescence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unfortunately, the emphasis placed on universalization has tended to obscure patterns of cultural variability in representations of this life stage and the responses to them. As Robert Wegs has shown, analyzing the way adolescence was responded to in a specific urban context provides an insight into the particularity of this process. However, to sharpen further the clarity of these insights and to examine cross-cultural differences and similarities, a comparative approach is required.

Through the analysis of two cities, using an Anglo-French perspective, the cultural construction of adolescence can be compared. The cities of Nottingham (in England) and Saint-Etienne (in France) provide the basis for this comparison. Similarities in the status and structure of these two cities make them worthy of selection. As large, industrial, provincial cities, Nottingham and Saint-Etienne were situated within the same rank of European agglomerations between 1890 and 1940. Their provinciality enabled them to dominate their outlying regions. Saint-Etienne was the chef-lieu of the Loire, whereas Nottingham was a county capital. Both had experienced dramatic growth in
the nineteenth century and, by 1890, had more than a hundred thousand inhabitants, the standard measurement of a big city. The local economies of both were founded on coal, textile production, and metalworking.

The comparison of cities with similar demographic and industrial structures provides a stable basis for the study of age relations in a period of cultural transition. The existence of a similar demographic, political, and economic structure meant that both cities confronted similar problems in relation to their young. These, however, did not necessarily produce similar responses. The intention here is to focus on the processes through which adults represented and provided for this life stage through linguistic, institutional, and ritual means. These processes will be examined through analysis of two key areas in which responses to the young were generated, namely, voluntary provision and work. Within them, the individual, the family, the voluntary sector, and the state interacted. They therefore provide important grounds for inquiry as to how the meanings of adolescence were generated in a local urban context.

VOLUNTARISM AND ADOLESCENCE IN NOTTINGHAM AND SAINT-ETIENNE

Even before adolescence shifted to the center of public debate, social reformers, pedagogues, and moral guardians had begun to identify the period between leaving school and reaching adulthood as a problem. A necessary precondition for this to occur was the consolidation of childhood as a universal category. In both England and France, this condition was largely satisfied in the late nineteenth century when both states established a system of compulsory, free, and universal elementary education and vastly reduced children’s working rights, creating a stable upper boundary for childhood between ages twelve and thirteen. The institutional and legislative consolidation of childhood as a period of enforced dependency threw into question the meaning and significance of the years between childhood and adulthood and facilitated the recognition of adolescence as a distinct intermediate life stage. Traces of this process were evident in both contexts.

In the late 1880s, F. G. Hazzledine, a member of the Nottingham Sunday School Union and chairman of the finance committee on the city’s school board, suggested that those over age fourteen needed protection, “which is in the present day so necessary in order that the snares and temptations around them may be shunned.” Hazzledine’s anxieties and the group to which he referred were imprecisely articulated. In the years that followed, local reformers assimilated pedagogical and scientific studies and, as the concept of adolescence was consolidated, used them to validate anxieties and to give scientific conceptual underpinnings to the preexisting public discourse on adolescence. Adolescence was characterized as a period of danger, temptation, and malleability. Thus, around 1900, the Reverend John Brown Paton, an Anglican minister and voluntary worker, argued that the adolescent required “new faculties and powers . . . given as far as possible against the temptations to which it is exposed.”

Voluntary workers such as Paton played an important role in advancing a broader understanding of adolescence in Nottingham. They were at the forefront of a movement that gathered momentum after 1880 to organize new societies offering recreational activities to these endangered young people. After 1900, this local effort intensified. Paton called for teachers and deacons to create associations catering to this group and the “terrible peril” that it faced. The Boys’ Brigade provided an early lead
in this work. This model, developed by the businessman W. A. Smith from 1883 to cater to lads from the tough areas of Glasgow, enrolled boys between ages twelve and seventeen in Nottingham after 1888. Oliver Hind, a local lawyer, established the Dakeyne Street Lads’ Club in 1907. This club, which provided a focus for brigade activities, “went from success to success and its growth was phenomenal.” The organization registered membership increases from 450 in 1892 to 1,328 in 1902.

Through institutional provision for those between school-leaving age and adult wage earning age (around eighteen years), voluntary organizations lent the nebulous construct of adolescence greater currency and specificity in their local cultural contexts. When defined as a period of extended institutionalized dependence, a tiny number of young people (mostly middle-class pupils in secondary education) actually experienced adolescence. However, in this period, the understanding of adolescence as a problem life stage through which young people from all social backgrounds passed gained ground among concerned individuals in Nottingham. The Scout movement was an exemplar of this cross-class approach. Established at the national level since 1904, the Boy Scout movement came to the attention of local voluntary workers following the publication of its manifesto, *Scouting for Boys*, in 1908. Nottingham’s movement developed rapidly after the founder, Baden Powell, gave a speech in the city in February 1908. The first census of the Scout movement in Nottingham was taken in 1910 and revealed that more than one thousand boys were enrolled in fourteen city troops. A year later, a Nottinghamshire Boy Scouts County Council was formed to provide direction. The Scout leaders emphasized recruitment not on the basis of class but of age and subsumed status beneath homogenizing uniforms. Though their ideal of cross-class appeal was not fully realized and the Scouts never became a catchall organization, they drew recruits from bourgeois homes and offset the success of the Brigades in the poorer areas of the city. Their broad demographic focus nevertheless underlined the extent to which the idea of adolescence as a classless category had been accepted.

In providers’ discourse, the homogenizing concept of adolescence was unsexed. Paton, for example, referred to “the adolescent,” using the neuter pronoun “it.” He also suggested that “any street scene on a general holiday... was sufficient to demonstrate the need of some organisation for girls similar to that for the boys.” In common with this approach, adolescence also received its institutional expression in societies for young girls in Nottingham. The Girl Guides were well established in the city before 1914. Paton’s Girls’ Life Brigade was founded in 1902. By 1908, there were 2,793 girls enrolled (with 267 officers). The energy of female volunteers in establishing new clubs for girls was such that an umbrella organization, the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Union of Girls’ Clubs, was established before 1906.

During this period, a similar process of institutionalization was also underway in Saint-Etienne. The Catholic Church pioneered a model for reaching the next generation of worshippers using *patronages*. Through these clubs, the church sought to turn attendees into “honest workers, citizens, and Catholics.” The first to appear in Saint-Etienne was *patronage* Saint-Joseph, created by Célestin Mounier, the vicar of Saint-Roch, in 1864. Combining games (and, after 1905, gymnastics) with ritual, Mounier’s success came to the attention of the diocesan authorities. In 1891, the format was commended by Pope Leo XIII, who cited their work in withstanding the threat of the secular schools as exemplary in his encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. Each parish in Saint-Etienne was, thereafter, duty bound to establish a *patronage*. According to Jean...
Merley, the number of patronages “doubled in the last decade of the century.” In addition to the patronages, several other Catholic associations catering to young people also appeared before 1914. Notable among them was the Sillon group of Marc Sangnier (established nationally in 1894 and active in Saint-Etienne after 1908 with twenty members). Catholic cercles, study groups devoted to providing educational, physical, and musical activities for young people, had been established at the national level in the 1890s and were also in evidence locally before 1914. So too were branches of the expansive Action Catholique des Jeunesses Françaises (ACJF).

The second, prominent strand of provision in Saint-Etienne before 1914 was that of the military preparation and sporting societies. Those who ran these clubs sought to use sport as a form of military training. They identified the success of the Prussians in the war of 1870 partly as a victory of the gymnastics instructors who had used sport to engender nationalist feeling and military preparedness among their young. The drive to regenerate young French people by teaching rifle skills and gymnastics had begun in the 1870s and intensified in the late 1880s and early 1890s. According to historians of French sport, this movement faded with révanchist sentiment toward 1900, when hygienic sports eclipsed military preparation sports in popularity. Certainly, in Saint-Etienne after 1900, such a “hygienic” movement providing athletics, English team games, cycling, and other sports less closely associated with military preparation found its local expression in a number of clubs for the young. However, in this city, team sports and military sports continued to be offered, frequently by the same organizations.

Along with the Catholic groups, preparation societies, and sports clubs, there was also a thriving Republican after-school movement. Inspired at the national level by the Ligue d’Enseignement and prominent politicians such as Henri Berenger, Jean Macé, and Léon Bourgeois from the mid-1890s, Republicans sought to extend protection to those between the school and the regiment (age thirteen to twenty). This important strand of provision was a voluntary expression of the same impulse that had produced state-run enterprises targeting school leavers such as the Ecoles Normales Supérieures (from 1880 for boys and 1890 for girls) and adult education courses (from 1880). The first amicales-laïques in France had appeared in the mid-1880s. Saint-Etienne had to wait until the 1890s for local volunteers to begin to experiment with similar organizations, usually attached to elementary schools (such as maisons), lay patronages, and alumni societies for the young. By 1899, a thousand Republican amicales and patronages existed in the Loire, and in 1907, an umbrella organization, the Fédération des Oeuvres Laïques de la Loire, was established. The president of the federation, Grivollat, declared the need to “form a strong and active group to fight effectively against the clerical spirit and give encouragement to the young” using these organizations.

Importantly, it can be seen that in both cities there was an awareness of the new meaning and significance being attributed to adolescence elsewhere. Nottingham’s lay volunteers utilized scientific discourse to legitimate their endeavors. Distilled accounts of anglophone advances in the study of adolescence were available through the newspaper press and other resources. In spite of Saint-Etienne’s reputation as a cultural backwater with a small and intellectually unreceptive social elite, interest groups and local reformers here also kept abreast of national debates through contacts with organizations such as the ACJF and the Ligue d’Enseignement. Hence, Saint-Etienne’s Republican activists played a pioneering role in the feeble and evanescent maisons de l’adolescence project of the late 1890s.
These cross-cultural parallels in the provision made for those labeled “adolescent” in Nottingham and Saint-Etienne seem to support claims for a synchronous universalization of this life stage. However, in spite of these similarities, on closer inspection the resonance of adolescence and the extent to which discursive and institutional representations of it were mobilized can be seen to have varied considerably. Concern to provide institutional coverage for adolescence was less apparent in Saint-Etienne than in Nottingham. In the English context, the Boys’ Brigades, Boys’ and Girls’ Life Brigades, Boy Scouts, and Girl Guides catered to those between school-leaving age and the commencement of adult rates of pay at age eighteen. Though claims were repeatedly made at the national level for the need to protect those between school and the beginning of military service at age twenty or twenty-one, the institutions that evolved in Saint-Etienne were focused neither on a specific adolescent cohort nor on the specialist needs of this group.35

In the patronages, for example, the young studied the catechism in preparation for the Catholic rite of passage—first communion—at age twelve. However, attendees were usually described as “children,” and no attempt was made to cater specifically to those of school-leaving age.36 The patronages remained “open, free, for apprentices and young workers, [and] children from free and secular schools [entered] at eleven or later, at thirteen, fourteen years or earlier at nine or six years.”37 The amicales also enrolled schoolchildren as well as those between school and regiment. Meanwhile, old boys’ sections set no strict upper limit to attendance. For most of the period, the ACJF focused strongly on those attending the local lycées de garçons, a group already experiencing the enforced dependency and surveillance associated with adolescence.38 As such, it hardly contributed to the universal application of this category.

It should be noted here that although the problem of girl mothers (filles mères) received considerable attention from voluntary organizations concerned with girls, this did not boost the recognition of female adolescence in Saint-Etienne. Those who pioneered its study generally tended to identify the period between school and marriage or motherhood as an intermediate stage.39 However, while the Guide and Girls’ Club movement in Nottingham catered specifically to adolescents, the demographic target of organizations for girls of this age in Saint-Etienne was broader. For example, the Association Catholique des Oeuvres pour la Protection de la Jeune Fille, established in 1901, catered to “all girls obliged to earn their own living.”40 Though such organizations were concerned with fille mères, the breadth of their approach and the primary status of these girls as mothers precluded their recognition as adolescents.41 The military preparation societies did not place any specific emphasis on adolescence either. They usually enforced age segregation by dividing members into “pupils” and “adults.” Those between the ages of thirteen and twenty had no distinct section but trained with the adults (see Figures 1 and 2). In describing membership statistics to the mayor, the gymnastic society, Espérance, indicated two divisions, “pupils” and “members.” The pupils, noted the president, were “mostly in attendance at the écoles primaires municipales.”42 By 1909, this was beginning to change. Another society, Intrépide, received pupils from age ten and gave full adult status to those over age sixteen.43 Nevertheless, little effort was made to separate children from adolescents in the age ranges that were elsewhere becoming a convention. Although the Scout movement developed in France after 1911, this English import made little impact in Saint-Etienne before 1914, nor did the other projects dealing specifically
with the adolescent age group, such as the maisons and the cercles d'études. Rather than engineering the institutional separation of adolescence, those organizations that flourished instead blurred the distinction between age subcategories.
In contrast to their counterparts in Nottingham, voluntary workers in Saint-Etienne rarely gave linguistic expression to an intermediate stage between childhood and adulthood.\(^{45}\) Society leaders described their target demographic in broader terms. The Société Amicale, Velocipédique, et Athlétique, for example, sought to provide for “youth.”\(^{46}\) Star Club Stéphanois and Intrépide vowed to provide for “young people.”\(^{47}\) The ACJF and cercles also adopted this vague vocabulary. Only late in the period did direct references to adolescence become more prevalent. In 1911, one organizer described efforts made to save the young from “the pernicious and unhealthy temptations which are everywhere during adolescence.”\(^{48}\) Even so, in Saint-Etienne, the exact parameters of this life stage remained ambiguous, and the imprecise phrase, “young people,” remained the predominant term of reference.\(^{49}\)

**ADOLESCENCE AND WORK**

Disparities in the meaning of adolescence also had their corollary in discussions of and provisions made for school leavers’ transition to work. In Nottingham, early attempts to facilitate school leavers’ access to the workplace were made. The city’s education committee established a Scholars’ Labour Bureau in 1908 under the terms of the Children’s Act of the same year. In 1909, all children leaving school in Nottingham were registered with the Labour Exchange under the auspices of a Juvenile Advisory Committee run by the Board of Trade in cooperation with the education committee. The position of adolescent workers was a topic regularly discussed by councilors. A conference held by volunteers on the matter led to the establishment of a social advisory committee to discuss the employment of school leavers in 1911.\(^{50}\) This
committee aimed to improve the direction of adolescents into suitable occupations through “watching” or “after-care committees.” These were attached to each school and liaised with families to “ensure no child enters any occupation in ignorance of its true industrial value.” Such agencies played a significant role in raising awareness about the separate and specific economic characteristics of those between school-leaving age and adult wage-earning age in Nottingham. In the statistics, surveys, and charts of the education committee and the public debate over “boy labour” in particular, this life stage was validated. The discursive and institutional response to this problem reflected and reinforced the recognition of the young people as adolescents.

In Saint-Etienne before 1914, attention was beginning to be directed toward the use of protective legislation to maximize the economic potential of the limited number of young workers available. Even so, it took much longer for these concerns to break the surface here than in Nottingham. Only on the eve of World War I did the municipal council begin to show some interest in improving the process whereby school leavers were placed in work. Placement was already organized by profession and had been loosely regulated by the municipality since 1892. In 1912, the council used the law of March 14, 1904, to more closely regulate existing offices and set up a free communal placement bureau in the Bourse du Travail. Nevertheless, real advances in this area only occurred during the interwar period. Before 1914, the institutional impulse given to adolescence by the local authority was weaker in Saint-Etienne than in Nottingham. Thus, evidence drawn from voluntary provision and work placement suggests that broad parallels in the universalization of adolescence concealed local disparities. To explain these differences, it is necessary to analyze in greater depth the urban cultural context in which they were generated.

ADOLESCENCE IN ITS URBAN CULTURAL CONTEXT

In the English context, the discussion of, institutional provision for, and ritual representation of adolescence occurred during a period of profound urban change. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, urban elites identified large cities as a negative influence sapping the physical and moral strength of their citizens and the economic vitality of the nation. Rapid in-migration raised fears that traditional social ties destroyed by the city were being reconstituted in new and dangerous forms. Nottingham’s boundary extension in 1877 brought an accompanying population increase from 86,621 to 157,000. By 1901, the number of inhabitants had grown to 239,753, and by 1911 there were 259,902 people living in the city. This rapid augmentation in population size led concerned individuals among the clergy and social elites to identify the city (the center of worker sociability) as a potential incubator for revolutionary socialism.

A second influential anxiety arose from demographic change. Impressive urban in-migration was accompanied by a demographic trend toward an aging population. In 1896, those between twenty and thirty years old formed the largest demographic cohort. By 1911, the cohort between ages forty and fifty had become the largest. This decline in the number of young people as a proportion of the total population occurred at a time when population growth was perceived as an index of national strength. Local social commentators linked anxieties over national status and economic performance with the problem of an aging population.
The relative numerical decline of the adolescent cohort not only stimulated a reappraisal of this group’s social position but also provoked a protective impulse toward it on behalf of voluntary workers and local authorities. The desire to extend institutionalized dependency up the age spectrum was boosted further by the high degree of public visibility of school leavers in Nottingham. This visibility owed much to the success with which children had been incarcerated in elementary schools, a process begun earlier in England than in France. It was also related to the types of professions that many school leavers entered. Many of this group moved into trades that were semiskilled or unskilled, with little potential either for promotion or retention after age eighteen, at which time employers were obliged to pay higher wages. These so-called blind-alley trades typically involved work in the streets of the city holding such jobs as distribution, shop work, errands, and street trading. As the efficiency of the nation’s labor force was ascribed new importance, economic commentators began to investigate more seriously the nature of young people’s experiences of the labor market. A growing number of surveys and reports highlighted the risks involved in this kind of work, suggesting that on the threshold of acceding to adult worker status and wages blind-alley workers were often sacked in favor of the next generation of cheap school leavers. Thereafter, they formed a deskilled and drifting workforce.

In Nottingham, large numbers of school leavers moved into such blind-alley trades as distribution. In 1901, 32 percent of boys between ages ten and fifteen were employed as messengers, porters, or errand boys. Only 15 percent of girls in the same age group were employed in the same fields. This ratio changed little up to 1914. New market conditions and increased mechanization in traditional industries created demand for a new army of semiskilled machine operatives. At the same time, it produced perceptions of widespread reduction in the demand for skilled labor. As the need for knowledge of the whole productive process diminished, this had a disproportionately negative effect on demand for apprentices, hastening further the decline of this traditional rite of passage. Positions in respectable trades began to offer similar conditions and prospects to those in distribution. If young people did enter traditional trades, they often did so as improvers rather than as skilled laborers or genuine apprentices. As demand for young laborers in these industries fell, the rational response was to seek work in distribution, where demand remained high. Hence, perceptions of a blind alley, coupled with the highly visible nature of the work that absorbed a significant percentage of young workers between ages thirteen and eighteen, boosted the relevance of adolescence as an intermediate life stage in Nottingham before 1914.

With blind-alley work came higher wages in the short term. These wages contributed to the family income. The adolescent worker kept only a fraction of the income earned. However, with work came a diminution in parental influence over how, where, and when disposable income was spent, especially in the case of young men. In the Edwardian period, the spending power of this social group contributed to its visibility in the cinemas, taverns, and dance halls of the city as well as in its streets and squares. The participation of these young people in commercial culture outside adult surveillance was considered not only unedifying by urban elites, voluntary workers, and other commentators but also morally and physically damaging. The Nottingham Methodist Council voiced its “deep concern” over posters advertising forthcoming movies and found the posters “highly sensational and indecent character... injurious to the moral culture of our young people.” Alarm grew over the sale of intoxicating liquor to the young in theaters and “the bad behaviour of the younsters of the city,” in public streets
and squares, perpetrated by “not only the more benighted types” but also by “appar-
ently respectable boys.” As John Brown Paton put it, “The boy will have his leisure”;
it was “only a question whether the devil is to provide it, or whether the boy is to find
his recreation under the sheltering, healing wings of the church.”

In Saint-Etienne, as in France more generally, high demand for school leavers
reflected a more general dearth of manpower. Between 1892 and 1914, the total pop-
ulation of Saint-Etienne increased by only 20,774, while the cohort under age twenty
as a proportion of the total population fell in size across this period. Though eco-
nomic growth was vigorous, labor shortages formed. Demand for school leavers’
labor remained high. In these conditions, the perception of a blind-alley problem
affecting school leavers did not develop. The shortage of labor in the key local indus-
tries of coal mining, textiles, and metal manufacturing ensured that young people were
inducted more or less directly into traditional trades. Those between the school and
regiment were not identified with a particular problem industry, as in the case of distri-
bution in Nottingham. Their likely career paths also took school leavers away from
physical visibility in the open spaces of the city and into workshops, factories, and
mines.

The structure of industry in Saint-Etienne and the persistence of artisanal traditions
impaired that essential prerequisite for the universalization of adolescence: the consol-
idation of childhood as a clearly distinct, economically useless, and dependent phase
of life. To be sure, in a process given impetus by the Ferry Laws during the 1880s, the
Republican government had placed on the statute books a free, compulsory, secular
system of education. However, in many large industrial cities, the implementation of
this ideal met with some resistance from those who opposed middle-class ideas of a
nonworking childhood. Up to 1914, it remained common for young people in
Saint-Etienne to begin work at age twelve or even earlier. Here, small workshop-based
and family-owned units of production were a significant feature of the local economy.

In ribbon-weaving workshops, the sons and daughters of master weavers contributed
to the family economy from an early age (see Figure 3). The Réveil des Tisseurs de-
scribed how

the very young child begins to make spools, then, under the vigilant eye of the father
and mother, he begins to work in the profession, putting on the spools, checking the
threads . . . hearing the conversations with the sales assistants and . . . engaging in the
whole work-study experience which forms a good ribbon-weaver.

This professional cohort identified the right of the child to work as part of its heri-
tage and culture. In spite of legislation passed in 1874 and 1891 to restrict child labor,
this remained poorly regulated in Saint-Etienne, especially in such trades as ribbon
weaving. An important consequence of this was the blurring of boundaries between
childhood and adulthood. Members of the general council warned the divisional in-
pector that “the customs of the area [and] the indifference of certain parents towards
their children . . . results very often in a state where the principal course of action is
breaking the law.” The child’s right to work was defended into the twentieth century,
especially in times of economic downturn.

In defending working traditions, the family had an impressive battery of rights at its
disposal. As has been pointed out elsewhere, the government had begun to write the
distinctiveness of males and females between ages thirteen and eighteen into the labor
laws of 1892 and 1900. The efforts of the Republic to shore up the role of the family, and in particular the father, as a beneficial moral influence on the young through this legislation hampered the economic definition of a separate group of adolescent workers requiring extra protection. Establishments where families worked under the authority of the father, mother, or guardian were made inspection-free zones under the labor law of 1892. Behind the closed doors of the workshop, parents continued to resist the enforcement of a nonworking childhood.

These rights and the work culture that they sustained had broader implications for the development of patterns of adolescent sociability. Legislation endowing fathers with the right to imprison their children, to receive their wages, and to direct their career path using work books strengthened the influence of the family over the lives of its young. In a period when the majority of young people continued to live with their parents until marriage, parents were able to restrict the status of the young living under their roof to semi-autonomy for a longer time. Although France was in the midst of a rural exodus during this period, rates of in-migration into Saint-Etienne were low. In addition, almost three-quarters of inhabitants were of local origin. As Jean Merley has noted, “More than 80 per cent of the city’s inhabitants were geographically local and their immobility contributed to stability and homogeneity.” In accordance with patterns of migration into nearby cities, many of those in-migrants who arrived from outside Saint-Etienne already had family or other contact groups in the city. As a consequence, the number of stéphanois adolescents living in the city outside the direct influence of their families was small.

The persistence of apprenticeship as an important feature of the local economy also restricted opportunities for autonomous work and leisure activity. As in Nottingham, a
declining number of school leavers took up apprenticeships. While the identification of a crisis in apprenticeship elsewhere in France occurred around the turn of the century, in Saint-Etienne it was 1912 before this was, finally, “not in doubt.” Only then did local ribbon manufacturers begin to press for the establishment by the chamber of commerce and municipality of apprenticeship schools to help “dispel the crisis of the profession.” It is likely that these efforts expressed the belated recognition that those within the age parameters of apprenticeship were a distinctive group worthy of special consideration. In any case, the reaction of the workshop masters was to tie the young even more closely into artisanal traditions and culture. Though this entailed a clearer focus on one life stage, the issue of age difference remained secondary to concerns that a strong sense of professional identity be inculcated in apprentices.

Transgenerational and family-centric sociability was a more prominent feature of young people’s experiences in Saint-Etienne than in Nottingham. Living in urban districts characterized by a significant degree of professional homogeneity, workers in Saint-Etienne displayed a strong tendency to socialize along professional lines. Young people and adults mingled in the same societies (see Figure 4). Bound into a deeply rooted culture of sociability centered on sports clubs, local bars, and cafés, adolescents were, as a consequence, less visible as a separate social group. Although anxieties about autonomous adolescent sociability crystallized around the figure of the suburban “apache” in Paris at the turn of the century, the term only achieved currency in Saint-Etienne after World War I.

Figure 4. Club Members of Saint-Etienne Cycle, circa 1900
Source: Archives Municipales de Saint-Etienne. Reprinted with permission.
Note: The mixed age range of members pictured supports the claim that in Saint-Etienne Cycle, as elsewhere, sport tended to provide opportunities for fraternization on a professional rather than a generational basis.
Strong familial statutory powers, deeply ingrained traditions of workshop apprenticeship, and restrictions on the autonomous sociability of the young weakened the resonance of adolescence in Saint-Etienne. However, in understanding divergences between the histories of this life stage in Nottingham and Saint-Etienne, the muted response to adolescence in the stéphanois voluntary sector was of even greater significance. The comparison of the voluntary sectors of the two cities reveals the greater strength and breadth of philanthropy in Nottingham and its consequences for the mobilization of adolescence.

The form that responses to adolescence in Nottingham took owed much to the liberal nonconformist culture of voluntarism in which they were worked out. The need to cater to the young was broadly accepted in this context, and a remarkable degree of cohesion developed on this issue between religious and secular interest groups. On the shared ground between them, it was possible to generate a discourse that emphasized the national dimensions of civic duty. This cohesive culture was both reflected in and sustained by the nebulous concept of social citizenship. Situated in a provincial center of England, the undisputed world center of philanthropy, volunteers used this concept to articulate the expectation that citizens in positions of power would accept responsibility for improving and civilizing the city and its inhabitants. This “evangelical form of religious individualism” proved highly successful, as it “permeated every aspect of the local life and even penetrated... the recesses which rejected its philosophical basis.”

Thus, in Nottingham, the clergy, with the tacit or direct assistance of the social elites, religious workers, and lay activists, sustained a common goal, a discourse, and activities for adolescents in Nottingham before 1914. This unity was an essential influence in rendering adolescence broadly recognizable and relevant.

In contrast, the social basis of the voluntary sector in Saint-Etienne was too narrow and the stéphanois cultural context too fragmented for a consensus to develop. Although sections of the clergy, inspired by social Catholic ideas, dominated local charitable work before 1890, they failed either to retain this preeminent position or to secure the basis for a broader consensus. Instead, the Catholic Church ranged itself alongside the traditional textile-manufacturing social elite that was itself struggling to come to terms with the rise of a new, dynamic, industrial (often non-Catholic) patronat. While the artisan masters of the forges and the ribbon manufacturers retained an important social position (reinforced by intermarriage and reflected in lifestyle), this new patronat consisting of engineers, merchants, and businessmen from more modest social backgrounds working in heavy industry and arms had, after 1870, also entered the ranks of the urban elite. Divisions between new and old industry militated against the development of a stable and cooperative context for voluntary work. New industrialists, renowned for their lack of concern for worker welfare, were not accommodated by the pioneers of local philanthropy under the banner of a common citizenship. Instead, the church and traditional elites identified them, with the army of lower-middle-class pro-Republican volunteers, as opponents in the contest for social influence.

These contextual factors dealt a triple blow to the dissemination of adolescence in Saint-Etienne. First, the partnership of social elites with the clergy disinclined the latter from attacking child labor. The drive to combat children’s work practices ran up against ingrained local traditions. The work of the young was regarded as a family affair in which volunteers were loathe to interfere. Second, the lack of a cohesive voluntary sector in which the new industrial patronat could be accommodated retarded
the spread of ideas about social obligation to this powerful but disengaged element. Consequently, the arrivistes had no stake in prolonging the exclusion of young people from the workplace. Enforced dependency was, in any case, unpopular among a social stratum that had “little need for diplomas and preferred experience” to even the utilitarian Ecole de Mines. Third, the lack of a cohesive voluntary sector with volunteers united on the issue of extending protective surveillance ensured that the failings of the local authorities often went unnoticed and that, unlike in Nottingham, the philanthropists had little influence on the municipality. Even if their voice had been louder, representatives of the old craft industries (especially ribbon weaving), who shared a reluctance to enforce the new rights of the child, were prominent on the municipal council.

Hence, when the Association Générale des Commerçants de la Loire inquired in 1907 as to who exactly was the “friend of the minor,” it noted that “we have already defenders of the widow and the orphan . . . but we lack a friend of the minor.”

In spite of the divisiveness of the local voluntary sector, it is not, at first, self-evident as to why sectarian rivalry failed to generate a more, rather than less, dynamic mobilization of adolescence, as Republicans and Catholics sought to gain the upper hand. However, on closer inspection, it is clear that in Saint-Etienne neither the social elites, religious workers, Republican volunteers, military preparation instructors, or even the hygienic sports providers had much to gain through mobilizing adolescence. Sectarian conflict cut across provision and generated intense competition for the loyalty of a finite number of potential young adherents. Through the institutionalization of the young, the Catholics aimed to reassert their influence, the Republicans sought to build on the education reforms, and the nationalist military preparatists attempted to induce loyalty to la patrie. Consequently, these voluntary workers targeted a broader demographic than in Nottingham. The Athlétic Club Olympiques Stéphanois, for example, attempted to cater not to any particular age range but merely to pry from its Catholic rivals those “young people who, at the end of the century, too often grow up around the cleric’s robe and the cross.” In this climate, the potential for a concentrated focus on one subcategory of preadulthood was undermined. Here, the key was to secure loyalty as early as possible and, as a result, the contest to provide was pushed further down the age spectrum. While volunteers in Nottingham highlighted the dangers of urban space for adolescents, in Saint-Etienne sectarian rivalry ensured that this danger was associated with a broader age range. A child left unsupervised in the streets might easily be exposed to the ideological influence of the opposition. The emphasis was placed on early conversion. Concern to generate a broad appeal was reflected in the elasticity and imprecision of the vocabulary used by organizers to describe the young. Ideological impulses ensured that the group identified as adolescents in Nottingham was described imprecisely in Saint-Etienne as “young people” and “youth.”

While philanthropists in Saint-Etienne had little use for adolescence, in Nottingham the construct provided a valuable tool for those seeking to overcome resistance from parents to middle-class intervention in family life. In a society with no traditions of general military preparation, those interested in exercising influence over the rising generation negotiated access to them through such representations. Objections had initially been voiced by parents to the provision format used by voluntary organizations such as the Boys’ Brigade and the Scouts. By linking services for vulnerable adolescents to a clearer sense of national purpose, providers wore away this opposition after 1900. The unstable domestic and international situation also helped Nottingham’s Scout, Guide, and Brigade movement to confidently (and successfully)
assert the validity of their methods and the model of citizenship they produced. In 1913, the Nottingham Evening Post acknowledged that there was “no movement at the present time more deserving of encouragement” because these “citizens of the future upon whom the welfare of the nation will depend” faced “greater temptation than formerly for them to go astray in their habits.”

In contrast to Nottingham, longer traditions of military preparation for the young existed in Saint-Etienne. Compensated by official recognition of their authority and unnerved by widely perceived external threats to French strategic interests, many parents acquiesced before the demands made on their young. Here, traditions of the child soldier were well established, as the enthusiastic local response to the battalions scolaires indicated. That the stéphanois remained receptive to the idea of a preadulthood into which adult duties were introduced relatively early was demonstrated by the enthusiasm with which children of school age were inducted into volunteer-run rifle-training societies. Maurice Crubellier’s characterization of French rifle societies in the 1880s and 1890s as “concerned with youths rather than children” flies in the face of evidence from the stéphanois region. In addition to other contextual influences, the customary assignation of such duties at an earlier age in Saint-Etienne made it less imperative for volunteers to use adolescence as a tool to pry the young from their families.

This is not to argue that there was no transitional stage between childhood and adulthood in Saint-Etienne. The completion of one’s apprenticeship remained a key rite of passage, and compulsory military service was identified as the marker par excellence of the transition to adult status for male preadults. Since young men began military service at the age of twenty or twenty-one and left school at age twelve or thirteen, an extended state-sponsored interregnum between childhood and adulthood did exist. However, neither apprenticeship nor military service was recognized locally as being a marker of adolescence.

In contrast to Nottingham, where its decline was more rapid, apprenticeship continued to be important in Saint-Etienne and remained a significant rite of passage. The apprentice experienced a gradual and often painful progression through a series of workshop rituals in completing the apprenticeship. Young male glassworkers, for example, were welcomed to their trade with initiation rites that took the form of painful practical jokes. Jean Mounier, a stéphanois glassworker, recalled the need to “watch out for the burning rods they [the adult workers] hold out to you and the shards of broken glass they conceal when they shake your hand.” However, working under the same roof as adults and often engaged in the same tasks, the difference between apprentices and their fellow adult workers was less evident than in the case of the segregated lycéens and collégiens or the uniformed society members. From general work practices to the scars on the apprentice glassworkers’ hands, common experiences and modes of interaction fostered a shared professional, rather than age-related, source of identity.

Although military service established a high upper threshold for preadulthood, this interval was rarely referred to as “adolescence.” The rite was widely resented and, on occasion, violently rejected by young workers in Saint-Etienne. The extension of the period of service in 1913 drew vociferous protests as the idea of delaying adult status until after age twenty contravened deeply ingrained local traditions of early work. Military service was seen as an onerous and unwelcome incursion into working life. Local
volunteers were well aware of the problems inherent in this external imposition. They encoded senior status for those of school-leaving age into institutional provision and referred not to adolescence but to a long, amorphous period of youth.

CONCLUSION

Historians have identified the democratization of adolescence in the West after 1890 as a synchronic process. In this period, it has been claimed, the understanding of adolescence as a problem life stage through which all young people passed gained ground among those concerned with the economic and social problems of the nation. In England and France, much evidence exists to support such broad claims. The state and volunteers worked to secure the upper boundary of childhood and to advance the institutional and linguistic expression of adolescence as a period of extended dependence. However, the comparative study of Nottingham and Saint-Etienne, two cities situated within these national contexts, suggests that cross-cultural parallels concealed local differences in the resonance of adolescence and the rhythms of its institutionalization. These disparities owed much to the impact that local cultural variables had on the understanding and relevance of adolescence.

Although the concept of this life stage as a problem age received its earliest literary expression in France, the modern concept found more fertile ground in Nottingham than in Saint-Etienne in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.106 An awareness of the national debate on adolescence existed in both contexts, but the willingness to cooperate across the public and private sector in Nottingham provided a more suitable climate for the consolidation of nonworking childhood and the democratization of adolescence. In Saint-Etienne, regardless of early institutional experiments, less explanatory capacity was ascribed to adolescence than in Nottingham before 1914. Here, norms of working life, demographic conditions, and the stronger influence of the family retarded both the consolidation of childhood as a noneconomic category and the identification of adolescence as a distinct and universal life stage. The disunity and sectarian strife that characterized the local voluntary sector and widely perceived external threats led providers to set broad parameters for the institutional enrollment of young people.

The comparison of evidence from work and voluntary provision in these two cities throws into question claims for a synchronic universalization of adolescence and demonstrates the need to give consideration to the varied pace and rhythm of this process at the local level. To be sure, local developments were affected by the national context in which they were situated and suggested much about the issues, concerns, and responses relevant to it. However, it is clear that the assumption, unspoken or not, that developments in Paris, London, and even other similarly sized provincial cities applied across the board has produced a falsely uniform impression of change. Even such 'universal' influences as compulsory state legislation were inflected by variables at the local level. By recognizing the fallacy of uniform change, the key question of whose interests it served can be addressed. This article has traced the political, economic, and strategic motives that prompted local groups to respond differently to representations of adolescence. Even using a limited comparative sample of two cities, it can be seen that representations of the urban young offer the potential for rich historical insight. The cross-cultural comparison of adults' responses to the urban young can be utilized
to highlight the motives which influenced representations and, ultimately, to begin
to discern the contours of a more textured, complex, and spatially varied history of
adolescence.

NOTES

1. Municipalité de Paris, Fête de l’Adolescence: Offerte par la municipalité de Paris aux
œuvres post-scolaires laïques, le dimanche 30 juillet, 1899, au bois de boulogne (Paris: Librairie
Française d’Éditions d’Art, 1899), 9.

2. Kathleen Alaimo, “Adolescence, Gender and Class in Education Reform in France: The
Development of Enseignement Primaire Supérieure, 1880-1910,” French Historical Studies 18,
no. 4 (1994): 1025-56; Patricia Meyer Spacks, The Adolescent Idea: Myths of Youth and the


4. The Ligue d’Enseignement, established in 1866, strove to advance the cause of secular
Republican education in France. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the league
began to turn its attention toward after-school clubs and societies.

5. Léon Bourgeois, L’Éducation de la démocratie française, discours prononcé de 1890 à
1896 (Paris: E. Cornély, 1897), 157; Jean Macé, quoted in Jacques Ion and Jean-Pierre


7. Ibid., 421; John Davis, Youth and the Condition of Britain: Images of Adolescent
Conflict (London/New Jersey: Athlone/Atlantic Highlands, 1990), 27, 84; Barbara A. Hanawalt,
“Historical Descriptions and Prescriptions for Adolescence,” Journal of Family History 17, no.
4 (1992): 331; Harry Hendrick, Images of Youth: Age, Class and the Male Youth Problem,
1880-1920 (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1990), 133-48; J. F. Kett, Rites of Passage: Adolescence in
America from 1790 to the Present (New York: Basic Books, 1977); J. R. Wegs, “Working Class

8. Five years later, the French pedagogue and inspector general of elementary education in
France, Gabriel Compayré, provided a resume of the ideas of G. S. Hall. Mendousse’s L’Ame de
l’adolescent was published in the same year. In England, in 1911, J. W. Slaughter published a
popular pedagogical aid condensing Hall’s ideas. Gabriel Compayré, L’Adolescence, étude de
psychologie et de pédagogie (Paris: P. Delapane, 1909); G. S. Hall, Adolescence: Its Psychology
and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education
(New York: Appleton, 1904); G. S. Hall, Youth, Its Education, Regimen and Hygiene (New
York: D. Appleton, 1906); J. W. Slaughter, The Adolescent (London: Allen and Unwin, 1911);

9. M. Auguste Lemaître, La Vie mentale de l’adolescent et ses anomalies (Saint-Blaise,
France: Foyer Solidariste, 1910); Marguerite Evard, L’Adolescente: Essai de psycholo-


12. J. R. Wegs, Growing Up Working-Class: Continuity and Change among Viennese

13. Saint-Étienne was the seventh largest urban center in France in 1896. In 1881,
Nottingham was the eighth largest agglomeration in England.

Nottingham, ed. J. V. Beckett (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997), 480-513;


18. This was part of a broader movement to be found, earlier, in other large English urban centers. An important forerunner was the settlement movement, established by Canon Samuel A. Barnett in Whitechapel. Frank Dawes, *Cry from the Street: The Boys’ Club Movement in Britain from the 1850s to the Present Day* (London: Wayland, 1975), 23-50.


20. Having received a circular from Smith in 1888, the North Nottingham Institute, led by J. A. Dixon and Reverend L. H. Gwynee, sought to provide a local branch. Nottinghamshire County Library (NCL), L36.881, *The Boys’ Brigade, 1st Nottingham (St. Andrew’s Company), Centenary Year, 1888-1988* (Nottingham, UK: Boys’ Brigade, 1988), 5.


23. Historians’ rather casual use of the capacious phrase “youth movement” to refer to English uniformed groups has obscured the subtlety of providers’ response to specific age groups (and in particular, adolescence).


25. Ibid., 320.


30. The Action Catholique des Jeunesses Françaises, established by Albert de Mun in 1886, had 60,000 members in 1905 and 140,000 in 1914. It aimed to provide recreational activities to create an elite of Catholic young people and used the motto “**piety, study, action.**”


33. Johannes Merlat, L’Enseignement populaire dans le département de la Loire (Saint-Etienne, France: Societe de l’Imprimière de La Loire Républicaine, 1900), 55.

34. Ion and Augustin, Des Loisirs, 16.

35. The Scout movement, which developed in France from 1911, made little impact in Saint-Etienne before 1914.


37. According to Nicole Verney-Carron, attendees were usually between eight and thirteen years old (i.e., of school age). Nicole Verney-Carron, “Le Ruban et le métal, recherches sur les élites économiques de la région stéphanoise au XIXe siècle (1815-1914)” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Lyon II, 1995), 271; Pierrard, Enfants, 199.

38. Only late in this period did it begin to extend its reach to a broader social range. ADL 1M486, Police Report, Mottié, Special Police Commissioner, “Reunion d’études mensuelles du groupe de l’association catholique des jeunesse françaises à Saint Jean Bonnefonds,” 10 November 1912.


40. Archives Municipales de Saint-Etienne (AMSE) 2Q49, Minutes, Meeting of Municipal Council of Saint-Etienne, Demand of Association Catholique des Oeuvres pour la Protection de la Jeune Fille for Recognition as a Public Utility, 28 August 1924.


42. AMSE 4R15, Letter, President of Espérance, to Mayor of Saint-Etienne, 9 June 1891.

43. AMSE 4R4, Statutes, L’Intrépide, 20 July 1909.

44. The activities of Saint-Etienne’s Grand’Eglise cercles only began to attract police attention as late as 1912. Before this time, only the groups in Roanne and Lyon had come to the attention of the police. ADL 1M485, Police Report, Special Police Commissioner (Police des Chemins de Fer), 6 July 1912.

45. This accords with Michelle Perrot’s briefly stated claim that in the late nineteenth century workers “spoke indifferently about ‘young people’ [jeunes gens] . . . never of ‘adolescents’” and that those under age twenty were “barely distinguishable” in this discourse. Michelle Perrot, Les Ouvriers en grève: France 1871-1890 (Paris/La Haye: Mouton, 1974), 313-14.

46. AMSE 4R3, Letter, Tardy, Société Amicale, Velocipédique, et Athlétique, to Mayor of Saint-Etienne, April 1903.

47. AMSE 4R3, Letter, Gressin, President, Star Club Stéphanois, to Mayor of Saint-Etienne, 30 August 1911.

48. AMSE 2R13, Letter, Manchon, President, Oeuvres Post Scolaires d’Enseignement Scolaire, to Mayor of Saint-Etienne, 18 April 1911.

49. In 1915, the term “youth” (jeunesse) was used by the prefect of the Loire to refer to young people between thirteen and eighteen. In a note, the schools inspector of the Loire informed his colleague that “I wrote to all the mayors of the department to ask them to employ all of their patriotic enthusiasm to get the largest possible number of young people [jeunes gens] between thirteen and eighteen years to join the military preparation societies.” AMSE 4R16, Letter, Prefect of the Loire to Mayor of Saint-Etienne, 11 January 1915; ADL T684, Minutes,
School Inspector of the Loire to Elementary School Inspector of Saint-Etienne, 19 January 1915.


51. NCA, City of Nottingham, Education Committee, Report of the Education Committee as to the Education (Choice of Employment) Act, 1910, 3 March 1913.

52. Duncan Gray, Nottingham through 500 years: A History of Town Government, 2d ed. (Nottingham, UK: Nottingham City, 1960), 204.


55. The Education Act of 1870 was followed with supplementary legislation making elementary education compulsory in 1880 and free in 1891. Through the Ferry Laws of 1881 and 1882, the Republic established the legislation necessary to create a compulsory, free, and secular system.


57. In England, there remained around 343,000 apprentices in the early twentieth century, but the apprenticeship scheme was widely perceived as being in decline. Charles More, Skill and the English Working Class, 1870-1914 (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 99-100.

58. NCA CACM91/10, Watch Committee Minute Book, 28 January 1891, 41-42.


62. In 1888, 34.7 percent of all males and 34.0 percent of all females were under age twenty as opposed to 30.2 percent and 28.0 percent of males and females, respectively, in 1911.


64. AMSE 7C1, “L’Esprit de famille,” Le Réveil des Tisseurs 6 (March 1899), 1.

65. This culture was frequently represented in song, such as in Benjamin Ledin’s “Enfant quand tes yeux.” Benjamin Ledin, Chansons passementières et poésies stéphanoises (Saint-Etienne, France: P. Lacroix, 1927), 62.


67. This was also the case in Lyon. During the late nineteenth century, the response of the household silk weavers to depression conditions was to increase the employment of family labor. George J. Sheridan, “Household and Craft in an Industrializing Economy: The Case of the Silk Weavers of Lyons,” in Consciousness and Class Experience in Nineteenth Century Europe, ed. John Merriman (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979), 107-28.

68. The minimum working age for children was set at thirteen by the law of 1892 relating to the Work of Children, Female Minors, and Women in Industrial Establishments. A new legal category, the “female minor” (fille mineure), was introduced to prevent females under eighteen from working more than eleven hours per day. In 1900, the law of March 30 limited young people under eighteen to a ten-hour day. Alaimo, “Shaping Adolescence,” 429; Heywood, Childhood.
69. A number of rights asserting the authority of the family over those between ages thirteen and eighteen were encoded in legislation in the late nineteenth century. The establishment of a system of work books delivered to children on their thirteenth birthday under the law of 1892 enshrined the respect of the Republic for the father and strengthened his influence over the career direction of his children. Fathers also enjoyed the right to imprison their sons and daughters for up to a month before age sixteen and for a longer period between age sixteen and eighteen. Until the late 1890s, parental permission was required to marry before age twenty-five.

70. This legislation defending the authority of the family over its young in France contrasted with legislation passed in England during the same period that began to strengthen the position of the young vis-à-vis their parents or guardians. Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed*, 201-4.


76. In 1898, of the 602,000 adolescents under age eighteen working in industry and commerce nationally, 540,000 had no contract.


78. Ibid.


80. As late as 1929, the mouthpiece of the ribbon-weaving industry, the *Réveil des Tisseurs*, advocated “a great movement . . . in favor of apprenticeship, an essential culture which makes the children of the people into men.” AMSE 7C1, “Apprentissage et syndicalisme,” *Le Réveil des Tisseurs* 52 (June 1929), 1.

81. While segregation was never rigid in Saint-Etienne, professional differences often had their spatial corollary. In contrast, Nottingham, according to one commentator, was “unique in having all these divisions hopelessly mixed up. It is a city without beginning or end. Public buildings, private dwellings and factories are mixed up in endless confusion.” Richard Illiffe and Wilfred Bagguley, *Victorian Nottingham: A Story in Pictures 1837-1901*, vol. 20 (Nottingham, UK: Nottingham Historical Film Unit, 1983), 86.
Bars and cafés in the city tended to be identified with specific professional groups, such as the miners in Le Soleil or the glassworkers in La Verrerie and Richelandière. In the boules, rifle-shooting, cycling, and sarbacane clubs attached to these meeting places, miners, arms manufacturers, glassworkers, and metalworkers socialized. In keeping with dominant work practices, they often gathered in “teams.” The continuing practice of professional inheritance meant that such gatherings might often include more than one generation of the same family. Jacobs, “Community of French Workers,” 83-87.


The cohesion, consensus, and cooperation that characterized the voluntary sector in Nottingham were strong enough to overcome denominational differences. John V. Beckett and Brian Tolley, “Church, Chapel and School,” in A Centenary History of Nottingham, ed. J. V. Beckett (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997), 368.


This context contrasts markedly with that described by Elinor Accampo in relation to Saint-Chamond. The voluntary sector of this town, a near neighbor of Saint-Etienne, was dominated by an extremely homogeneous patronat committed to shared values of Catholicism and Legitimism. Thus, Saint-Chamond “retained a reputation for being particularly charitable.” As Accampo notes, this approach was “unusual, particularly for the Stéphanois industrial basin after 1850.” Accampo, Industrialization, 142, 145.


In contrast, Steven Beaudoin’s study of Bordeaux has indicated that a nonsectarian “spirit of co-operation and public obligation prevailed” in the city, which united public officials and private associations. Though he admits that “we know too little of the factors which fostered cooperation,” Beaudoin cites Paris, Marseille, and Saint-Chamond in support of his claim that elites in other large urban centers acted in a similar fashion. Conversely, the evidence from Saint-Etienne underlines the importance of taking the specific urban cultural context into consideration in explaining cooperation or its absence. It might also be noted that, of the cities cited by Beaudoin, Marseille and Saint-Chamond were unusual in terms of the high degree of political homogeneity that characterized their urban elites (radical socialist and ultramontane Catholic, respectively). The anglophile traditions of Bordeaux’s elites and the unusually “important and powerful Protestant, republican minority” at their heart would seem to be key areas worthy of further study in determining the grounds on which compromise was worked out. Steven M. Beaudoin, “ ‘Without Belonging to Public Service’: Charities, the State, and Civil Society in Third Republic Bordeaux, 1870-1914,” Journal of Social History (spring 1998): 675-77, 689, 691.
90. In relation to the patronat’s disinterest in its workforce, Alphonse Merrheim, leader of the Confédération Générale du Travail, perceived that “it is in the Loire that the workers suffer most. One must not forget that the patronat of the Loire is arrogant, intransigent . . . not only in spirit but also in the equipping of the workplace, imposing enormous and unequalled levels of tiredness on workers and paying them the lowest wages in France.” Alphonse Merrheim, quoted in Étienne Fournial, ed., Saint-Etienne: Histoire de la ville et ses habitants (Saint-Etienne, France: Horvath, 1976), 271.


92. Nicole Verney-Carron has illustrated the tardiness with which secondary and further education developed in Saint-Etienne before 1914. The transformation of the old Royal college into a boys’ lycée (which had begun in 1841) was completed only in 1892. The local Lycée de Jeunes Filles was established only in September 1895. This contrasted with Nottingham, which had four higher grade schools in 1891 and was the birthplace of the national Recreative Evening Schools Association. The latter’s educational inheritance helped to disseminate the understanding of adolescence as a time of extended dependency and paved the way for its cross-class expansion thereafter. Verney-Carron, “Le Ruban,” 426.

93. Between 1893 and 1906, three mayors emerged from the ranks of the textile industry. They were Barralon, a braid manufacturer (who served from October 1893 to January 1895); Chavanon, a ribbon merchant (January 1895 to May 1900); and Ledin, a ribbon weaver (May 1900 to July 1906).

94. AMSE 6F1, A. Fonfroide, ed. (Association Générale des Commerçants de la Loire), Rapport sur le projet de loi déposé par M. M. Saurien et Doumergue: Deuxième grand réunion des employeurs et commerçants petits et moyennes de la région du centre et du sud-est, Saint-Etienne, 8 septembre 1907 (Saint-Etienne, France: Loire Républicaine, 1907).

95. AMSE 4R15, Letter, Committee of Athletic Club Olympiques Stéphanois to Mayor of Saint-Etienne, 22 August 1902.

96. Steven Beaudoin cites the willingness of Bordeaux public officials and private associations to collaborate in providing vacation daycare centers for children as evidence of the general and underlying capacity of French volunteers and public officials to overcome sectarian divisions. However, it is worth noting that while agreement may have been reached on other matters, where children’s services were concerned providers were unable to set aside their differences. In spite of the Pastor Comte’s efforts, the first national congress of the colonies de vacances produced deadlock and the eventual duplication of holiday camp services along sectarian lines. Beaudoin, “Without Belonging,” 680; AMSE 22F55, Report, First National Congress of the Colonies de Vacances, Saint-Etienne, June 1904.

97. Tir de l’Observatoire, for example, which declared the intention to “develop the art of shooting amongst our valiant French youth (jeunesse)” taught those of school age. AMSE 4R3, Letter, Committee of Tir de L’Observatoire to Mayor of Saint-Etienne, 22 April 1914.


100. This was a city in which the erreur patriotique of the battalions scolaires had been perpetuated for five years longer than in Lyon. Even in 1894, the battalions were reluctantly given

101. In 1891, the Tir du Soleil society spoke of “the keenness of the pupils of our schools who come each year to visit our rifle range.” ADL 32Msup2, Letter, President, Tir du Soleil to Prefect of the Loire, 27 February 1891.


103. The period of service was reduced to two years from three in March 1905 and extended again to three years in August 1913.


This article examines the history of the female branch of the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne movement during the 1920s and 1930s. Although the largest organization of young working women in France at a time of intense youth mobilization, the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine’s (JOCF’s) distinctive nature as a movement of young women has been omitted from historical accounts. This article examines the movement’s approaches to spirituality, activism, work, and femininity and argues that the JOCF had a complicated approach to both young women and femininity. Indeed, it encouraged young working women to adopt Catholic approaches to morality and to prepare for future roles as mothers at the same time as it promoted notions of spiritual equality and encouraged active, independent, public roles in the present.

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed unprecedented attempts to mobilize youth in Europe. Across the continent, adult parties and institutions worked to shape young people and to forge them into building blocks of new societies or defenders of long-established faiths and traditions. Catholics played a central role in these efforts, especially in France. During the 1920s, French Catholics reinvigorated old organizations and created new ones, and they made youth central to their attempts to attract constituencies that had long remained outside the church’s reach. Of particular significance was the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne (Young Christian Workers), or JOC. Begun in 1926, this organization was designed to spearhead the creation of a new relationship between the church and the French working class. Unlike some of their competitors, Catholics understood working-class youth to include both young men and young women, and they created a separate organization for young working women, the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine (JOCF), in 1928. This organization, which aimed to create female activists who could work alongside male Jocists to bring Catholic beliefs and values to the working class, became the largest movement of young working women in France in the 1930s.
If interwar French Catholics took young working women seriously, the same cannot be said of historians who have studied the interwar JOC. The major historical work on the JOC devoted only three pages to the interwar JOCF as a distinct movement; the history of the JOCF, the book implied, could be gleaned from that of its male counterpart. Of course, scholarship produced by historians of women has suggested that the two movements were likely quite different and that their differences are worth exploring. Historians of women and religion, for example, have outlined the many and profound ways the gender of the faithful affected religious dogma, practice, experience, and activism. They have analyzed how male religious figures created specific appeals to women and how women, in turn, interpreted these overtures in a range of complicated ways. They have also documented how women used opportunities created by religion to carve out new types of public activism at moments when women’s access to public and political activity was more restricted than that of men. But the young women of the JOCF were marked not simply by their gender but also by their age and class, and scholarship on women and religion has had less to say about the relationship between young working women and religion in modern industrial societies. However, the very fact that the JOCF’s members were young and working class meant that they had different relationships to family, to work, to sexuality, to commercial culture, to social and political activism, and to religion than either the adult, often middle-class women involved in religious activism or the young working men of the JOC. These distinctive relationships affected both the overtures Catholics made to young working women and the meanings they had for the young women involved.

The JOCF, then, provides a good opportunity to consider the ways gender, generation, and class intersected with Catholicism at a particularly intense moment of youth organizing in France. Analysis of the movement’s publications and members’ recollections reveals that the organization had a complicated approach to young women and femininity and that this sometimes led to surprising results. Combining gender-specific messages with methods and practices drawn from the male JOC, the JOCF sent mixed messages regarding appropriate femininity. Indeed, it encouraged young working women to adopt Catholic approaches to morality and to prepare for future roles as mothers at the same time as it exhorted them to take active, independent, public roles in the present. For their part, the young working women of the JOCF both demonstrated publicly on behalf of Catholic notions of family and motherhood and asserted their independence vis-à-vis JOCF ideology and male clerical influence. Of course, the very fact that the movement encouraged the development of notions of self-worth and independent action among young working women made it innovative in a country that was profoundly marked by both class and gender inequality. There is no better indication of the movement’s complex approach to young women and femininity than the fact that a number of female Jocists who later left the church and gravitated to the Marxist Left still credited the JOCF with teaching them how to think, how to take responsibility, and how to work on behalf of the working class.

To understand the complicated ways gender, class, and generation interacted within this youth movement, it is necessary to start by situating the JOCF’s establishment within the context of the JOC’s emergence in France in the 1920s. The male JOC was established to evangelize young working men at a moment of heightened concern over the threat of Communism on the part of French Catholics. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the establishment of a French Communist Party dedicated to violent, class-based revolution in 1920 gave new urgency to what Catholics had called “the
social question” since the late nineteenth century. Concern over the fact that the church exerted so little influence over the industrial working class became especially pronounced in the mid-1920s after the Communists achieved their first electoral successes, especially in the municipalities ringing Paris. For Catholics like Father Lhande, the radio evangelist and author of the best-selling Christ in the Suburbs, Communists were poised to use control in the suburbs to advance revolution—by literally cutting off the capital from the rest of the country. But the threat posed by the “red suburbs” came not merely from the prevalence of an abhorrent political ideology but also from the fact that suburban dwellers were believed to live in what Catholics considered a state of complete amorality. Outside the reach of the church and its teachings on the family, workers formed free unions and neglected their children. For French Catholics, this combination of amorality and political radicalization was an incendiary mix, one that had to be combated.

For many Catholics concerned by the threat of Communist revolution, young people provided the most promising target for a counteroffensive. As Lhande pointed out, young people were both less corrupted than their elders and less serviced by the emerging networks of Communist organizations; they were, he continued, “there for the taking.” Of course, French Catholics had long made children and youth central to their evangelical and political initiatives. Having controlled education in Old Regime France, Catholics struggled during the nineteenth century to maintain a central role in the provision of primary and secondary education against the inroads of French Republicanism. After the Ferry Laws of the 1880s established free, lay primary schools and made primary school attendance compulsory, Catholics created new initiatives to reach young people, including gymnastic associations, summer camps, and parish youth groups. Of course, class profoundly affected both the ways childhood and youth were experienced and Catholics’ particular concerns regarding young people. When it came to the children of the industrial working class, late-nineteenth-century Catholics were particularly concerned about the moment of a child’s abrupt entrance into the workforce at twelve or thirteen; at this point, the child was considered almost certain to lose his or her religious and moral moorings. Nonetheless, these concerns over the particulars of working-class experience did not lead to the establishment of separate organizations for young workers before the First World War. By the early 1920s, then, young workers who participated in Catholic organizations did so alongside more privileged children, and they often suffered a variety of indignities reserved for the less fortunate within French Catholic parishes.

The heightened concern over the Communist threat in the 1920s encouraged discussion of new ways to reach young workers, especially among a group of young priests who were trained in the post–World War I period. For many, the Belgian youth movement the JOC seemed the best solution. Begun by Canon Cardijn, this organization departed from earlier social Catholic initiatives toward young workers in a number of ways. First, it grouped only young workers—a fact that made it deeply suspect among many Catholics who were convinced this would only encourage class struggle. Second, the JOC’s founders attempted to adapt Catholic doctrine in a way that would appeal specifically to young workers. Thus, priests created a new popular religiosity that centered around the figure of the Worker Christ (le Christ Ouvrier). Because the adults involved believed that young people needed an ideal, a great cause to serve, the JOC assigned young workers a central role in a spiritual revolution, one whose political overtones could not be missed even as they were steadfastly denied. Within the
JOC, it would be young workers—not clerics—who would bring Catholic teachings on religion, the family, and morality to the working class; in this way, they would counter the Communist threat.

But which young workers, exactly? In fact, questions involving gender and, more particularly, young women’s relationship to the movement asserted themselves early on. On one hand, there was little doubt that young men would serve as the centerpiece of the new movement. This resulted in part from interwar Catholics’ sensitivity to both the gender composition of their faithful and to the gendered nature of interwar mass politics. Although the role gender—especially new notions of masculinity and fatherhood—played in extreme right interwar French politics has recently received increased attention, there has been less attention to the ways masculinity and its display figured in interwar religious organizing and demonstration. But French Catholics had long been attuned to the gender configuration of their faithful and to the political ramifications therein. After a long period of what historians sometimes refer to as a feminization of the church in the nineteenth century, interwar Catholic figures consciously attempted to draw men back to church and to create mass organizations of men. In fact, attempts to mount a powerful, male presence in the streets and stadia that became increasingly central to interwar French political life became a striking feature of interwar Catholicism. In this context, transforming the working class or simply creating a strong presence among French workers involved the creation of a new male elite, one that could challenge the overwhelmingly male Communist and Socialist parties in the public sphere.

But Catholics’ goal of creating a new working class also involved the transformation of workers’ private lives; in this endeavor, young working women had a special role to play. Because Catholics viewed the family as the basic cell of society, they were particularly concerned to counter what they viewed as a crisis of the family among French workers by forging new attitudes toward family among a working-class youth elite. If this necessitated the inculcation of new Catholic approaches to masculinity and fatherhood in young male workers, it also necessitated the creation of new approaches to femininity and motherhood among young working women. When it came to the family, in fact, Catholics believed that women played a pivotal role as both those responsible for the crisis and, hopefully, those able to transmit new values. Within Catholicism, of course, there was a long history of dichotomous representations of women, and Catholics involved with the JOC were no exception. In JOC writings, women were depicted as either sources of sexual temptation or repositories of purity, as neglectful mothers or paragons of maternal virtue. For Catholics involved with the JOC, then, building a new working class entailed creating a new Catholic working-class woman, one who would preside over the home, support her husband, and educate her children in Catholic values.

Not surprisingly, then, efforts to create a separate branch for young women began soon after the JOC was founded. But the possibility of creating a JOC for young women quickly gave rise to a number of gender-specific concerns. For one thing, a multitude of organizations for girls and young women already existed within French Catholicism, and Catholic officials worried about both the possibility of duplication and the possibility that a new organization would antagonize the powerful laywomen who controlled movements such as the Guides and the newly formed youth branch of the Ligue Patriotique des Françaises. In fact, when word of the possible foundation of a JOCF spread, the leaders of these two movements made their opposition known.
There was also concern over the movement’s suitability for young women. The JOC’s particular method involved combining independent action by young workers with subtle supervision by movement chaplains. The idea was to give chaplains ultimate control over the movement—and especially over the activists’ spiritual formation—while allowing young workers control over day-to-day activities. Jocists wrote, published, and distributed their own newspapers; organized congresses and public demonstrations; investigated their surroundings and worked to transform young worker attitudes; and attempted to represent young workers at the workplace and in the public arena. This kind of active, independent youth role was at odds with parental and clerical expectations regarding young working women in France during the 1920s. At this time, parents kept a much tighter rein on their working adolescent daughters than on their sons; in these circumstances, for instance, simply attending night meetings was frowned upon. Not surprisingly, then, Catholic clerics were not convinced that this movement was appropriate for young women. These concerns over suitability were compounded by the fact that female Jocists would work closely with male chaplains, most of whom were drawn from the ranks of the youngest clerics. In a French Catholic world where gender segregation functioned as one of the defining principles and where male clerics were trained in exclusively male settings and exposed to ideas that often cast women as sources of sexual temptation, close contact between young working women and young priests was viewed as unseemly—not to mention unsettling for some of the priests involved.

Because of these kinds of gender-related concerns, resistance to the establishment of a female branch emerged in many quarters. (Local sections began with the efforts of a parish priest, usually a young vicar, who gathered information about the movement and identified young women from the parish who could serve as the nucleus of a new section.) Archbishops initially refused to sanction the establishment of JOCF sections, and the young priests and young female workers they enlisted were often forced to move slowly. The first JOCF section, for instance, was initially named the Daisies, while other sections sometimes resorted to bringing in female advisors to guide the young women. Nonetheless, the first JOCF section was officially established in early 1928 in Clichy, a suburb northwest of Paris, and sections began to be established in various French cities and towns, especially in the Paris region and the Nord. Until 1935, the JOCF was the only national organization devoted solely to young working women.

As the organization developed, the JOCF’s creators were faced with the delicate task of creating a female branch that would be both Jocist and appropriate for young women. The clerics involved attempted to solve this problem by retaining many of the JOC’s methods and activities while adapting its message in ways designed to create a new, explicitly female activist. To begin, the JOCF took a similar approach to youth activism. At the local level, dues-paying members were expected to attend general assemblies and comport themselves as Jocists, while more active members—militantes—were expected to attend smaller study sessions and take a leading role in neighborhood activism. Like the JOC, the JOCF combined independent youth activism with subtle clerical supervision. The first female Jocists studied movement materials and planned outreach and activities in conjunction with their chaplains. Those young women who took a leading role in local sections planned general assemblies, ran smaller study sessions on a range of topics, and made their way through the often dense social Catholic literature. For their part, JOCF leaders encouraged young
women to take leadership roles in all aspects of the movement, and they backed their members when conflicts with chaplains arose over control within the movement.23

Female Jocists were also responsible for producing and distributing the JOCF’s various publications. The most important of these was the organization’s newspaper, *La Jeunesse ouvrière féminine*, which provided a record of movement activities and campaigns as well as articles on various aspects of young working women’s lives. Like its male counterpart *La Jeunesse ouvrière*, *La Jeunesse ouvrière féminine* was viewed as both a recruiting tool and an instrument of movement cohesion; by 1939, its print runs reached 178,500 copies, making it by far the most important newspaper directed toward young working women in France. And like their male counterparts, female Jocists were expected to sell the newspaper door to door and in other public spaces. Of course, the significance attached to young working women doing this was quite different than it was in the case of young men; when young women sold newspapers door to door, it was perceived as a transgressive activity. In fact, many female Jocists later recalled that their newspaper selling had led to raised eyebrows and, sometimes, to being pelted with rotting vegetables or being spat upon.24 Significantly, the JOCF never wavered from sending its militants into the streets in this way, regardless of the consequences. Indeed, the JOCF’s song about newspaper selling was so supportive of this endeavor that it told the story of a Jocist who was forced to give up her disapproving fiancé rather than abandon her commitment to being a “petite vendeuse de journaux.”25 That the JOCF never wavered in its encouragement of this activity distinguished the organization from the Popular Front Communists, who discouraged young women from selling the Communist youth newspaper in the streets after 1935 as part of their attempt to shape a new, more traditional Young Communist femininity.26

Like the JOC, the JOCF also made Cardijn’s “see, judge, act” method the centerpiece of its movement. According to this approach, young workers began by studying a certain issue or situation, moved on to evaluate what they saw, and finally, decided on a course of action to remedy any problems they had discovered. Because the organization attempted to transform young workers’ understanding of their private lives, environment, and work, the studies were guided by a series of questions that pointed in a particular direction; nonetheless, as we will see, the method left a certain room for discussion and discovery. The “see, judge, act” method was applied in a variety of ways and was designed to lay the basis for both individual transformation and movement action. Regarding the latter, it could be used by sections to investigate the local conditions facing their particular section, including the number of young working women in the neighborhood, the types of work they engaged in, the conditions they faced at the workplace, their housing conditions, and their leisure patterns; new sections were required to complete a certain number of surveys (*enquêtes*) outlining the living and working conditions of local young working women before they could be affiliated to the national JOCF.

If the method used was the same as it was in the JOC, the JOCF focused its *enquêtes* on issues that were considered especially appropriate for young women and that reflected the JOCF’s goal of training young women in new values and, more precisely, preparing them to be good wives and mothers.27 To accomplish this mission, JOCF leaders realized they had to counter a range of influences, especially those found in mass and commercial culture. Although Catholics had long been concerned about the impact of popular novels on young women, the 1920s witnessed the increased popularity of a new form of entertainment for European young people: the cinema. If mov-
ies were popular among young workers of both sexes, they played a particularly significant role in the lives of young working women, who had less access to other forms of leisure—such as cycling or organized sport—than young men did. Indeed, a 1935 JOCF investigation found that in cities well served by movie theaters, more than 50 percent of young working women between the ages of thirteen and twenty went to the movies at least four times a week. Of course, young working women did not simply attend the movies but also immersed themselves in the larger cinema culture by avidly following the fortunes of film stars in a range of movie magazines. For Catholics, young working women’s enthusiasm for the cinema and its stars was dangerous because it exposed them to new, inappropriate models of femininity and sexuality and encouraged them “to dream of a luxurious existence and of pleasures that are both impossible and unworthy.” To counter this, the JOCF’s publications devoted considerable attention to combating the cinema’s perceived hold on young working women. *La Jeunesse ouvrière féminine*, for example, went to considerable lengths to oppose the artifice of the star system and to convince its readers that “it is much easier for a woman to be happy as a housewife than as a movie star.” Of course, the cinema’s influence was not the only thing that had to be combated. Catholics were also concerned about young working women’s larger relationship to commercial culture and, particularly, to the spending patterns associated with it. JOCF publications argued that young working women wasted their pocket money on trifles, while the JOCF’s investigations found that young women sometimes scrimped on eating so they could afford to go dancing or buy makeup. For JOCF leaders, such behavior endangered young working women’s health and detracted from their proper preparation for marriage and motherhood.

The JOCF, then, would have to train young working women in a range of new attitudes and behaviors, and it planned to use the *enquêtes* and study sessions to accomplish this task. During the 1930s, JOCF sections participated in national investigations (*grandes enquêtes nationales*) into a particular issue affecting young working women; the issue was chosen by the national leadership and would occupy the movement for either one or two years. Although the movement studied working and housing conditions and workplace accidents from 1930 to 1932, it shifted its attention to issues involving young working women’s leisure and health, their preparation for marriage, and their morality for the remainder of the decade, when France was particularly polarized politically. Female Jocists studied young working women’s behaviors in their neighborhoods and local workplaces, and they discussed their findings in study sessions. No area of young women’s lives was left untouched. Jocists contemplated, for instance, the qualities they should look for in a man and the ways they should approach dating, and they did so using questions that were designed to leave little doubt as to the correct response. The Jocists were encouraged to abstain from flirting and to remain pure. The Jocists also evaluated leisure activities (including current films) for their appropriateness and were expected to attend evening gatherings where they learned to mend, cook, crochet, and otherwise prepare themselves for marriage. At one evening get-together, for example, the Jocists sang “Les Maman’s” and discussed the song’s major themes. By focusing on these kinds of issues, the JOCF’s efforts mirrored those of adult social Catholic women who were engaged in their own campaigns to promote gender-specific social Catholic values; not surprisingly, the 1934-35 *enquête* into young working women’s health served as the basis for a 1936 book published by two prominent social Catholic women.
But if JOCF activities were clearly designed to encourage a particular approach to motherhood and femininity among young working women, they did not always achieve their desired effect. Much to the consternation of movement leaders, many young women—including militants—refused to attend the evening, domestic-themed get-togethers.34 Those who attended sometimes turned the sessions to their own purposes. At a moment when there were few opportunities for organized sociability among young working-class women, study sessions and evening gatherings could become a rare opportunity for Jocists to discuss among themselves issues relating to dating and marriage. In fact, young women’s recollections indicate that the contours of their discussions were often broader than had been intended by the chaplains or the JOCF’s female leaders. One former Jocist noted, for instance, that Jocists spoke about questions regarding sexuality with a lot of frankness, albeit with a certain delicacy.35 Others made clear that they took advantage of study sessions to talk about matters of the heart. As one admitted after she became a committed, serious militant, when she first became involved with the JOCF all she wanted to discuss at JOCF meetings were things related to love.36 Another noted that even when she was the secretary of her local section, she continued to flirt and hang around with guys.37 There were other indications that Jocists made their own judgments about the validity of the JOCF’s message regarding purity, marriage, and maternity. Six of the twenty-one female Jocist leaders prominent enough to rate biographical entries in the Maitron biographical dictionary of the French working class never married.38

What is important to realize, however, is that the JOCF’s messages and activities were not designed simply to inculcate a particular approach to motherhood and femininity in movement members but were also designed to further young working women’s intellectual formation at a moment when they had limited access to formal education. According to French law, girls were required to attend primary school from ages six to thirteen (or age twelve if they completed their certificate of primary studies), and they did so in sex-segregated schools whose curriculums and textbooks often stressed subjects and approaches deemed appropriate for girls.39 Few young working women continued their education past primary school, and during the 1920s and 1930s, a large percentage left school without obtaining their certificate of primary studies.40 Given this rudimentary education, the effort involved in preparing meetings or enquêtes was often substantial and was designed in part to lead to the acquisition of new skills and the refinement of others. As JOCF leaders reminded militants in 1937, for example, preparing written agendas for JOCF meetings not only ensured that meetings ran smoothly but also meant that Jocists retained the habit of writing after they left school.41 Of course, the extent to which a young woman’s involvement with the JOCF enhanced her intellectual formation depended on a number of things, including her position in the organization (local and national leaders were obviously most advantaged in this regard) and her section’s particular chaplain. From young women’s recollections, it is clear that some chaplains were more devoted to both their young charges and the movement than others; those Jocists lucky enough to have had a dedicated and energetic chaplain often spoke later of the profound importance these men had had in their lives and in their educations. When it came to the movement more generally, many Jocists later credited the JOCF with teaching them skills that would remain important throughout their lives, regardless of their jobs or subsequent political or trade union activism. One explained, for instance, that the training she had received in the interwar JOCF helped her survive after she lost her husband during the Second
World War: it helped her learn a trade—in this case midwifery—quickly, because it taught her to catalogue information, to listen, and to present material. Another noted that her experience in the JOCF was important because it taught her to speak in public, draft a report, and write a pamphlet.

Of course, the JOCF aimed not simply to inculcate new attitudes and promote the development of skills; it also attempted to transform young female workers into lay missionaries, ones who would be responsible for evangelizing their fellow female workers. To create youth missionaries, movement chaplains attempted to make Catholicism appealing and accessible by creating a Jocist spirituality that featured movement songs that Jocists could belt out at meetings or in street demonstrations, interactive masses that were performed in French and featured spoken choruses, and adaptations of the Gospels that emphasized similarities between the first Christians and twentieth-century Jocists. Whether conveyed through song or meditations, however, the messages directed toward Jocists were usually gender specific.

Gender difference was particularly apparent when it came to the way Christ—the central figure in Jocist spirituality—was presented in the meditations studied during Jocist study sessions. As historians have shown, historical representations of Jesus have varied considerably depending on the religious, political, and cultural imperatives of the moment. Not surprisingly, the Jesus found in JOCliterature was designed to appeal specifically to young male workers. Thus, the Worker Christ was portrayed as a hardy, male worker, one who had worked with his hands and had chosen to be a worker; he served as the young workers’ model. The presentation of Christ was more complicated when it came to female Jocists. When female Jocists pondered their work lives, they were sometimes encouraged to see Christ as a worker, one who had ennobled their work and their lives. But the depiction of Christ as worker was relatively rare in JOCF materials; when young women studied the Gospels, they usually did so using meditations that featured a very different Christ. In ways consistent with nineteenth-century notions of female piety, the male clerics who wrote the meditations outlined a relationship between Jesus and the young female worker that was characterized by friendship, emotional intimacy, and sometimes, longing. One meditation published in the militants’ newspaper *L’Équipe ouvrière féminine* described the profound sense of loss Christ’s resurrection had caused among young female workers. It portrayed the moment of Christ’s greatest glory as one that had been transformed into a moment of discomfort and sadness over the disappearance of the human, physical Christ. Sympathizing with its readers, *L’Équipe ouvrière féminine* noted, “Christ is risen! This explains your discomfort. In the evening, he appeared to you grander, more majestic, but also more distant.” The meditation continued by acknowledging a young woman’s need to love a human, embodied Christ:

You have a human heart which needs to love, and you are not ashamed. But you know that love demands the presence of the friend. Now, if yesterday Christ was less handsome to look at, at least he was more human. His smile rested on your soul like a tenderness, his words gave rise to an unspeakable calm in your heart. You felt understood and you were won over.

Deprived of Christ’s physical presence, female Jocists were reassured of his continuing presence within their hearts. They were told that the voice they heard inside their
heads was his, and that this voice fulfilled different male roles: master, husband, friend, and father.50

The intimate relationship between Christ and the young female worker portrayed in JOCF literature could also take the form of a mystical union. In one meditation, the young woman’s desire to live only through Christ made her an extension of him. The female Jocist read, “I am nothing by myself but everything through Christ. I am attached to Christ, no what’s more: I am an extension of him.”51 The union between Christ and the female Jocist was illustrated through the metaphor of a tree: Christ was the trunk while the female Jocist was the branches. Within this metaphor, the gift of grace became at once the Jocist’s spiritual and physical nourishment, one that she desired ardently. The passage read,

As the trunk sends all the sap into its branches, He spills his fertile grace into me. He wants, he strives for it, he pushes me. And if he wants it so much, what should I long for in turn? Only one thing: his sap, his liquid flesh, his presence, his continuous, rich penetration which spreads through my entire being.52

Without confusing spiritual and sexual longing, it seems clear that the intense relationship between Jesus and female Jocists that was encouraged in JOCF literature was designed to further the movement’s emphasis on sexual purity and virginity by channeling young women’s desires toward an unattainable Jesus.

If a tender, intimate Christ was central to JOCF piety, so too was the Virgin Mary, who had long been central to female Catholic piety. Unlike male Jocists, female Jocists were encouraged to contemplate Mary’s example in study sessions and in their own reading, and they were encouraged to emulate her example; as L’Équipe ouvrière féminine noted, “The Virgin Mary is our model.”53 That the JOCF would encourage young women to take Mary as their model was not surprising, for Mary had long been used to symbolize the major virtues—virginity, purity, and maternity—that the JOCF was trying to promote. Thus Jocists were told that Mary’s all-encompassing love for God had led her to embrace virginity, while it was her role as mother of Christ that had led to her historical significance. In this way, Mary served as a model for young women’s moral and spiritual behavior, both in the present and in the future.

As we have seen, then, JOCF literature and activities offered young working women a Jocist spirituality that differed in important ways from that offered the young men of the JOC. But what can we say about how young women might have acted on these exhortations, given that, as Robert Orsi suggested in another context, women’s devotion “took shape . . . somewhere between the desires of the devout and the ambitions of the clergy”?54 Of course, the exact nature of devotion is highly individualized, and there is little doubt that there were different levels of commitment to both the movement and its religious messages among movement members. In fact, those who went on to become leaders sometimes spoke later about the process by which they became truly devout. Nonetheless, certain observations about both the place piety had within the organization and the shape that piety took can be made. First, religious devotion was clearly more important within the young women’s organization than it was within the young men’s organization. In the early 1930s, in fact, JOCF leaders expressed concern over its members’ religious enthusiasm and warned them that the JOCF needed to avoid the appearance of a devotional association. Militants were
chided for naming sections after religious figures, for relying too heavily on religious motifs in the decoration of section locals, or for letting the study of the Gospels detract from their attention to the enquêtes.55 These kinds of concerns were simply never voiced within the JOC press. Moreover, piety was not simply more important within the JOCF but seems to have taken different forms—ones that reflected the messages young women received. Many young women who commented on the specific nature of their devotion made clear that they saw Jesus as, to quote one woman, “a friend and confidante” and that, like women before them, they sought to became close to him by taking communion as often as possible.56 During the Second World War, in fact, a number of young women in one JOCF section were so determined to take communion every day that they obtained a special dispensation from the Bishop of Versailles that allowed them to drink something before setting off on their one-hour trek to the church before work.57

If religious devotion mattered more in the lives of female Jocists, it also assumed a different role in the public face of the movement. A good example of this was the JOCF’s 1934 pilgrimage to Rome. The pilgrimage, which followed the JOC’s initial pilgrimage by three years, was designed to generate excitement for the movement and help shape members into religious activists who would take the JOCF’s message to an often hostile working class. Meticulously planned, it brought twelve hundred female Jocists to Turin, Rappallo, Assisi, Pisa, and most especially, Rome. In Rome, the Jocists toured the historical sites of Christianity, with special emphasis on those of persecution and Christian suffering. At each stop, the female Jocists listened to speeches that drew direct parallels between their challenges and those faced by the first Christians and that exhorted them to follow the heroic example set by their Christian forefathers and foremothers. At the Coliseum, for example, Abbé Bordet extolled those Christians who had been willing to die rather than renounce their love for Christ or betray their ideal and highlighted the roles played by the “humble virgins” and girls of twelve and even seven who had faced lions, tigers, and furious bulls with superhuman courage. Comparing the times of Christian persecution to the Jocists’ mid-twentieth-century milieu, he urged them to listen to the voices of those saints, virgins, and martyrs who told them, “Have courage! have confidence! what we did you can do again, because it’s the same Christ who struggled with us and in us and who will fortify you against the reborn monster of modern paganism.”58 At the Catacombs, Monseigneur Fontenelle again likened the Jocists to the Christian virgins who, he noted, “swore to take Christ as their fiancé and sealed their engagement in blood.” He had every confidence, he told the young women, that they would do the same thing the virgins had done.59 To reinforce these messages, Jocists were provided with accompanying meditations that encouraged them to evaluate their commitment and willingness to sacrifice in light of the early Christians’ behavior. The meditation that focused on the lesson of the martyrs noted, for example, “How cowardly I feel in front of these examples. . . . The martyrs did not hesitate to accept death and I cannot resolve to make the small sacrifices required by daily observance.”60 The high point of the trip came when the Jocists were received by the Pope. He blessed their effort and explained how they shared the apostles’ glory; in return, the Jocists pledged not to stop or rest until they had returned all French young working women to Christ.

Although the pilgrimage’s organizers attempted to transport the young women workers back almost two thousand years in time, they were careful to use modern technology and mass tourism to maximize the impact on those who attended and extend the
excitement to those who remained at home. At a moment when going to the movies was young working women’s favorite pastime, the organizers surprised and delighted the pilgrims one evening with a film made of them in front of St. Peter’s that morning.\(^6\) When the pilgrims returned to France, the JOCF relied on a longer film of the pilgrimage to maintain excitement among the pilgrims and create excitement among those who had been left behind. By January of 1935, the JOCF leadership reported that demand for the film had been so high that another copy had been produced—and that this was already booked by local sections for months to come. And if organizers tapped into young working women’s enthusiasm for film, they also made sure that the trip offered the possibility of a kind of religious mass tourism. At a time when young women workers rarely had much opportunity to travel within let alone outside France, the pilgrimage offered the opportunity to visit a number of Italian cities, including Rome, Turin, Pisa, Assisi, and Rapallo. The Jocists were even transported by special motorcars along mountainous, seaside roads to Montallegro. Pilgrimage organizers were also careful to make trip souvenirs available. Both religious and touristic souvenirs were sold on the pilgrims’ special trains to Rome, while commemorative albums, magazines, and photographs were available for purchase once they returned home. All these things helped make the pilgrimage a special event, one that was designed to transport the young women outside their ordinary lives and heighten their commitment to the movement. The pilgrimage seems to have had the desired effect on many female Jocists. In a typical example, one Jocist wrote after she returned home that she had been “enchanted” by the pilgrimage. After listing her most wonderful memories, she concluded, “And after all that, how could I not always want to do better for Christ?”\(^6\)

The fact that female Jocists like the one above could exult unproblematically in the pilgrimage highlights another difference between the male and female branches: they had starkly different relationships to politics at a time of heightened political tension in France. Although the JOC steadfastly maintained that the movement occupied a position outside and above politics, its rivals on the Left (especially the Young Socialists and the Young Communists) attacked the organization by linking it to clerical politics and, during the mid-1930s, by criticizing its decision to remain outside the Popular Front coalition. The JOC’s own 1931 pilgrimage became a source of controversy, and the JOC was continually forced to defend its decision to remain outside the traditional parameters of working-class politics and instead work toward a Christian revolution, one that would alter attitudes but leave structural conditions intact.\(^6\)

The JOCF, however, was not subjected to these kinds of pressures for a number of reasons. To begin, young working women were perhaps the group least likely to be associated with or involved in politics in interwar France. Young working women were without the franchise (many for reasons of both age and gender), and there were few sustained efforts to involve them in working-class politics. On the Left, for example, there were no separate organizations for young women until 1935; from 1920 to 1935, therefore, the small number of young women who became involved in Socialist or Communist youth politics did so in mixed-sex organizations where young men and masculine ideals predominated. When the Communists did create a separate organization for young women in 1935, the organization avoided political and trade union activity and, instead, focused on social activism and sociability in ways similar to the JOCF. Young working women were simply not associated with working-class politics, and as a result, the JOCF’s distance from—and even opposition to—the Marxist Left was not considered a problem. Of course, the flip side of this was that women were also
considered less hostile to religion. As we saw, piety played a more important role in the JOCF than in the male organization, and the movement was often greeted differently by women than by men. Jocists of both sexes reported that their mothers were generally more sympathetic than their fathers to their involvement with the movement, and pilgrimage stories got a different reception among female workmates. One Jocist reported that her female workmates in a metalworking factory took an unpaid hour to hear her account of Rome. It is extremely hard to imagine this happening in a male workshop.

If the JOCF attempted to shape young working women’s attitudes toward family, morality, and religion, it also attempted to shape their attitudes toward work and their position as workers. Work was the dominant experience for young working women in urban France. As we have seen, school attendance ended for the vast majority of girls at age twelve or thirteen, and young women in their teens and twenties were employed at higher rates than any other age group of women in France. Of course, the transition from primary school to full-time work was an abrupt one; indeed, many talked later about how depressed they had been after their first days at work. From the start, girls and young women worked long hours—often over fifty or even sixty hours a week—and, until 1936, without paid vacations. They received little training, as apprenticeships rarely existed for young women and there were few professional courses designed to enhance women’s skills. As a result, most working-class young women occupied a range of low-skilled, badly paid jobs that were at the bottom of the pay scale and concentrated in a limited number of sectors of the French economy. Some worked in industries like textiles or clothing that had long employed large numbers of women but that were in decline; some worked in new, more modern industrial jobs in industries like metals, electricity, chemicals, or food processing; and an increasing number worked in a range of white-collar jobs in shops, stores, or offices. During the depression of the 1930s, a growing number of young women resorted to some kind of domestic work, especially in their first years in the workforce. The early work experiences of Jeannette Thorez-Vermeersch, the wife of Communist Party leader Maurice Thorez and a Communist organizer in her own right, were typical of the situation faced by many young working women in interwar France. She worked first (at age twelve and a half) as a domestic (where she was horrified to find that her employer expected her to wash her sanitary napkins), then did menial domestic work for a wine merchant and an entrepreneur de transports, before moving to a textile factory. There was little doubt that young working women occupied the lowest rung on the occupational ladder.

Given this reality, how did the JOCF approach young women’s work and young women workers? The organization’s attitudes toward women’s work were complicated. The JOCF’s creators were determined to recruit among workers, and they targeted—especially rhetorically—factory workers, who were considered the most spiritually and morally forsaken as well as the most authentically working class. The importance placed on recruiting factory workers was demonstrated by the fact that the JOCF’s first leader, Jeanne Aubert—who had been on the verge of joining the postal service before becoming JOCF president—did stints in three metalworking factories before taking the reins of the JOCF. Although much of the JOCF’s interwar leadership was, like Aubert, drawn from the ranks of white-collar workers, available information suggests that JOCF sections drew young women employed in a range of jobs and industries and that the precise makeup of sections depended in large part on the economic profile of the particular area. Once in the JOCF, young working women were
generally encouraged to take pride in their work and in the fact that they were workers. Female Jocists learned that Christ had dignified their labor and that they themselves had worth and an essential dignity as children of God. Canon Cardijn himself liked to tell Belgian and French Jocists that the soul of a young working woman was worth all the gold in the world. As triply disadvantaged members of a society that was stratified according to age and class and dominated by men, many female Jocists remembered being profoundly affected and empowered by these ideas of spiritual equality and working-class dignity. One remembered typically, “It was terrific! For us, whom one called ‘factory girls,’ having our dignity as young workers, as daughters of God recognized was terrific!”

Another recalled,

I was a daughter of the poor. I was ashamed of it sometimes. I sometimes envied girls with well-off parents. The J.O.C. revealed to me the value, dignity, and importance of each person. So I was no longer ashamed. I was proud to be a worker and the daughter of workers.

One even recalled that she got into trouble for proclaiming that young female workers were as good as the daughters of their employers.

But if young women’s labor had been ennobled by Christ, the organization’s publications made it clear that not all work was suitable for young women, and almost none was suitable for mothers. Like other social Catholics, JOCF writers opposed work for young women that involved extreme physical exertion, abrupt or violent movements, or nervous tension on the grounds that this kind of work was liable to affect young women’s health, especially their reproductive capabilities. Instead, young women were encouraged to undertake work that required attributes that were deemed feminine, such as patience, taste, artistic sense, and manual dexterity. By linking concerns over strenuous work to women’s reproductive capabilities, of course, JOCF rhetoric reflected a broader pronatalist discourse that assigned women special responsibility for the state of the French population. But JOCF rhetoric was more complicated than this: it was also rooted in concern over the very real health problems faced by female adolescents who worked long hours in often difficult conditions and who often lived in insalubrious housing. As the Jocists documented in their enquête on young working women’s health and in the pages of their newspapers, serious illness—especially tuberculosis—was a constant threat for young working women. Many developed health problems that made working difficult, many were sent to sanatoria, and a surprising number died. Obituaries appeared frequently in the Jocist press, and a Jocist reported at one point that her small section was following four patients in four different sanatoria and seven more in the neighborhood. Looking back, in fact, it is hard to disagree with the JOCF’s 1944 assertion that new kinds of wartime work were compromising young working women’s health, especially, they argued, since this work came at a time of severe food shortages.

But if young women were encouraged to stay away from certain types of work, married women were to withdraw altogether from the workplace when they had children. Both the JOC and the JOCF adopted the position that married women’s work outside the home posed a pernicious threat to the family, and they made the campaign to return mothers to the home central to their larger platforms. Banners calling for women to return to the home (“La Femme au Foyer”) were given a prominent place in the street demonstrations and in the large indoor rallies of the late 1930s. Although both
branches of the movement campaigned around this issue, it received special attention within the JOCF. It was, for example, the JOCF’s president Jeanne Aubert who read the movements’ joint resolution on the family at the opening session of the tenth anniversary congress in Paris in 1937.

Within the JOCF, however, preparing young working women for their future roles as mothers always occurred alongside helping them address their present realities. And so if the JOCF campaigned for mothers to leave the workplace, its members also endeavored to improve working conditions for young working women currently in the workforce. The *enquêtes*, which asked Jocists to note carefully the various conditions at the workplace, served as the basis for their action. The Jocists’ workplace activism did not call for structural change but focused primarily on making concrete changes in the hygienic, safety, and moral conditions facing young women at the workplace. Theirs was not an especially critical stance, and even the social Catholic writers Céline Lhotte and Elisabeth Dupeyrat conceded that the Jocists were much more likely to record their own failings than those of their employers. Nonetheless, the Jocists attempted to effect concrete change, and when it came to industrial work, Jocists did things like campaigning for a separate toilet for young women or calling in the inspector to stop men from taking over and ruining the women’s toilet. They also demanded sinks in which young women could wash their hands, places to eat where the food would not get covered in dust or other vapors, and proper changing rooms. Like their counterparts in the female Catholic trade unions, the Jocists also took aim at issues regarding workplace safety. They called for protective gear for workers, encouraged the use of first-aid kits in cases of small accidents, and campaigned against workplace accidents.

The JOCF’s most striking effort at the workplace was the attempt to protect and support the youngest workers, especially when they were subjected to attacks on their moral dignity that we would probably call sexual harassment. Although young workers of both sexes were hazed and harassed during the interwar period, the harassment of young female workers was often sexual in nature. At this time, in fact, sexual harassment of young women workers was a widely acknowledged problem, even if few remedies were put forward. An interwar factory inspectress (*surintendante*) reported that in one textile factory, for example, “male workers impose themselves on young female apprentices in the bins by touching them inappropriately. Elsewhere, young women are hung upside down by their feet until they let themselves be kissed.” Young women reported that they were often cornered or subjected to numerous advances. Jocists drew on Jocist notions that made sexual purity central to a young working woman’s Christian dignity in the attempt to protect themselves and others from these kinds of unwanted advances. They reported turning their backs on suggestive language (whether it came from men or older women) and challenging men who made advances to young working women. One remembered, for instance, getting into serious arguments with “those foremen who abused young women in their group.” As this woman made clear, moreover, the Jocists’ defense of young women workers could extend to helping those who had gotten pregnant as a result of such advances and had had abortions. Significantly, the Jocists’ defense of what they saw as young woman’s moral dignity had tangible benefits for interwar Jocists, who made themselves visible by the badges they wore. Many reported that the Jocists gained a reputation that helped shield them from unwanted advances. As one of the many Jocists who later commented on this noted, “I heard my bosses making bets about who would get his way with the
young female worker first. But they knew whom to target, because Jocists were considered untouchable.83

The strike movement of May-June 1936 marked an important turning point in both the JOCF’s workplace activism and its relationship to Christian trade unionism. As scholars such as Christine Bard have pointed out, women occupied a particular place within French Catholic trade unionism in the 1920s and 1930s: they were active in all-female unions within a larger, mixed-sex Catholic trade union confederation (the Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens, or the CFTC), and they made up a larger percentage of trade unionists than their female counterparts in the labor confederations on the Left, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) and the Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire.84 Although the numbers of workers involved were often quite small, female Catholic unions often played a significant role in industries dominated by women; in 1923, for example, Christian trade union representatives negotiated the collective agreement that ended the 1923 strike in the fashion industry. Not surprisingly, female Catholic trade unionists realized the recruiting possibilities presented by the JOCF early, and they reached an agreement with the JOCF in 1931—before the male unions did.85 But although some female Jocists reported working on behalf of the female unions, the overlap between the JOCF and the female unions appears to have been quite small in the early 1930s.

The strike movement of May-June 1936 altered the JOCF’s relationship to workplace activism and Christian trade unionism. The strikes, which began in aviation factories in May, spread to a broad range of industries and workplaces, especially those in manufacturing and large-scale commerce, in early June; according to the Ministry of Labor, the number of strikers reached 1.8 million in June.86 For contemporaries, however, the number of strikers was less important than the form the strikes took: for the first time, French workers—including elegantly dressed young women who worked in department stores—occupied their workplaces and factories. For most Catholic observers, who were still reeling from the May elections that had brought a Socialist-led Popular Front government to power, the sit-down strikes had brought France to the verge of revolution.87

Both the form and the extent of the strike movement took JOCF militants and leaders by surprise, as it did others involved in the trade union movement. Since few female Jocists had been involved in trade union activism, most had no knowledge of even the most basic principles of trade unionism or the Catholics’ particular approach. As a result, many—like their male counterparts—wrote to JOCF leaders for advice as to how to proceed. The report on the strikes later drawn up by the movement cited the following letter from a female Jocist as typical. She wrote,

Given the current circumstances, I regret knowing nothing about syndicalism. Would you please tell me by return mail: 1) What does a “cahier de revendication” consist of? 2) Who draws it up? 3) What should it demand? 4) To whom is it submitted? If you could enclose a copy of the CFTC plan that would be perfect.88

Of course, if militants asked these kinds of specific questions, the organization faced a number of larger questions. Should its members join the strike movement? If so, how should they behave? In short, what should be the JOCF’s position regarding this unprecedented strike movement?
When formulating the organization’s position on the strike movement, the JOCF leadership—like that of the JOC—followed the lead of prominent social Catholics, especially the Jesuits connected with Action Populaire. In their pronouncements on the strikes, the Jesuits stressed that while the workers’ demands and grievances were legitimate, the form the strikes took was not. Indeed, they attacked the occupation of workplaces as a violation of private property, denounced what they saw as the strikes’ politicized nature, and deplored the fact that the strikes had brought France to the brink of revolution. Faced with this kind of analysis, the JOC and JOCF leaderships were in a difficult position, especially since many of their members were participating in the strike movement. In Paris, for instance, a June 13 meeting of eleven JOCF sections brought together 196 Jocists, 70 of whom were on strike and had spent at least one night in their factories or workplaces.89

Both the JOC and the JOCF leaderships adopted the Jesuits’ broader analysis while encouraging the Jocists to try and influence the strikes according to Jocist and social Catholic principles. This meant endeavoring to do a number of things. Jocists were instructed to be vigilant against immoral behavior, which might take the form of excessive drinking or inappropriate relations between the male and female strikers who were often spending day and night in the factories. Jocists were also encouraged to depoliticize the strikes whenever possible and to defend the religious needs of strikers. Indeed, the JOC’s subsequent report made special mention of two female Jocist strikers who succeeded in negotiating that they be allowed to leave the factory to attend mass. Jocists were also encouraged to defend and represent young workers during the formulation and defense of strike demands. Finally, Jocists were encouraged to defend the Catholic trade unions at a moment when the CFTC was under considerable pressure. When the strikes broke out, the CFTC’s negligible presence in many workplaces was made worse by the fact that the recently reunified CGT was attempting to monopolize the negotiations and the new recruits that often resulted from the strike movement. This meant that CGT members often pressured workers to join their unions, and many Jocists reported being threatened with dismissal if they did not join the CGT. In many instances, Jocists were the only ones available to defend the CFTC.90

It is hard to determine just how successful the Jocists were in influencing the strikes or exactly what roles female Jocists played during the strike movement. Certainly, some female Jocists later reported in almost identical terms that when the strikes broke out in their workplaces workers sought them out to become involved and to represent other workers. One noted, typically, “In 1936, I lived the occupation of my factory. There wasn’t a union but, spontaneously, the workers came to find me to be a delegate and launch the union.”91 If, as Siân Reynolds has argued in her excellent analysis of the role gender difference played in the strike movement, women strikers played more significant roles in the organization and direction of the strikes in all-female workplaces, it follows that female Jocists had the greatest opportunity to play a significant role in workplaces where female workers predominated or made up a significant proportion of the workforce.92 In these instances, there would have been fewer men to step in and take control, the CGT would have had a less important presence, and there would likely have been less antagonism toward Catholic trade unionism.

Certainly the Jocist female striker featured in an article in the newly launched Communist young women’s newspaper Jeunes filles de France fit this profile. The story, which described the encounter between a female Jocist striker and a local section of the new single-sex organization Union des Jeunes Filles de France, merits closer attention.
because it suggests the extent to which Jocists attempted to play active roles in the strikes and were recognized for doing so by Communist young women. According to the story, the night the Young Communist women heard that the 130 female and 70 male workers of Maison Dinou had gone on strike, they immediately dropped their evening course in stenography and rushed to the factory to see what assistance they could provide. Returning the next day with the requested phonograph, they asked to speak with a Jocist striker who was then taking her turn standing guard at the factory gate. The Jocist, who had presented the young women workers’ demands to the employer, questioned the Young Communist women on a range of issues concerning their attitudes toward religion and family life and on their ultimate goals. According to the article, the Jocist striker concluded that Jocists fought alongside Communist and Socialist comrades for the same demands—sometimes even for the same ideal—without, however, taking the same path. Even though the story was clearly designed to promote the Communists’ Popular Front “outstretched hand” policy toward Catholics, it also reflected the reality that female Jocists were among those who took part in the factory occupations and often struggled alongside the Catholics’ ideological enemies to represent young female workers and Catholic interests. In the aftermath of the strikes, Jocists were encouraged to continue their efforts to win over fellow workers and be leaders at the workplace. Indeed, the newspaper directed toward federation leaders encouraged Jocists to know their rights and duties as Christian workers and attempt to conquer workers in the workplace to the Christian ideal.

If the JOCF became increasingly active at the workplace, it also became increasingly involved in its members’ leisure activities as the 1930s progressed. Like other Catholics, JOCF leaders believed that a young working woman’s leisure needed to be used profitably, in a way that would lead to moral and physical improvement and help prepare young working women for their roles as wives and mothers. In the early 1930s, then, the JOCF tried to shape young women’s leisure by encouraging them to see healthy movies (the Jeunesse ouvrière féminine included reviews to guide its members in this regard), accumulating libraries of appropriate reading material, and sponsoring evening get-togethers. By the mid-1930s, the JOCF had expanded its leisure offerings and was sponsoring hikes, encouraging its members to take advantage of Catholic youth hostels, and attempting to expand the number of camps it offered. Of course, provision of appropriate and appealing leisure activities became considerably more important after the social legislation of the summer of 1936 established the forty-hour work week and the two-week paid vacation. In the wake of this legislation, the JOCF stepped up its efforts to offer wholesome and appealing leisure activities. During the late 1930s and during the Second World War, the JOCF expanded its efforts to provide camps for young women workers; sponsor group hikes, cycling outings, and even mountain-climbing expeditions; and hold get-togethers where young women sang, danced, and read poetry. The organization also introduced young women to the rudiments of camping by teaching them how to set up a tent, build a campfire, and of course, stay clean while in the wilderness.

For all the Catholics’ seriousness of purpose, it is important to point out that the JOCF’s increased attention to providing its members with access to new kinds of outdoor activities resembled the approaches taken by left organizations affiliated with the Popular Front movement. During the mid-1930s, the Socialists (who led the government coalition) and the Communists repeatedly invoked the spirit of youth and worked to allow young people to use their new weekends and paid vacations to discover nature
and explore the French countryside. Although Popular Front notions of youth included young women, the coalition’s overtures to youth were often sharply gendered. When it came to the Communists, therefore, young men took part in the new popular aviation program, while young women were channeled toward activities deemed more appropriate for them, such as swimming or gymnastics. For its part, the Communist young women’s organization promised to provide “a rational organization of leisure,” one that would protect young women “from immoral literary and cinematic productions.” In the end, then, the JOCF offered its members activities that were similar to those offered by the Communists, and at least one Young Communist woman later reported that when female Jocists and Communists compared notes on their weekend activities on Mondays, they found they were remarkably similar.

During the Popular Front period, the JOC’s tenth anniversary congress of 1937 stands as both a high point of the movement and a demonstration of the JOCF’s complicated approach to young women. The tenth anniversary congress took place in July, during the 1937 International Exhibition held in Paris. As historians have made clear, the International Exhibition was a highly politicized event where Communists, fascists, democrats, and Catholics attempted to use the various exhibitions, monuments, and pavilions to tout their ideologies and approaches. For French Catholics, who were seeking new ways to assert themselves after the Popular Front election victory of May 1936, demonstrating strength among youth was considered crucial. Thus, they made sure that Catholic Scouts and youth hostelers constituted half those at the scouting pavilion and model youth hostel, and they organized the largest sporting demonstration held during the exhibition. With all these successes, however, it was the JOC-JOCF’s tenth anniversary congress that proved most exciting to Catholic supporters. As the first joint undertaking by the JOC and the JOCF, the congress featured carefully choreographed pageants, massive outdoor meetings, and an interactive mass that drew an estimated eighty thousand identically attired Jocists of both sexes who enthusiastically pledged their allegiance to the movement and its goals. The congress was the largest gathering of youth during the exhibition. That Catholics had succeeded in mobilizing so many young workers was considered particularly impressive, and writers from a range of conservative Catholic dailies enthused over this unprecedented display of working-class faith. Le Figaro proclaimed that the Jocists had conquered Paris, while La Croix told its readers, “A movement which is capable of mobilizing 100,000 is a great power.” The Catholic intellectual Henry Daniel-Rops wrote later, “It was clear to everyone that, with this public demonstration of intense faith, the Church had begun a new era.”

The JOCF’s involvement in the congress exemplified the organization’s complicated approach to young working women: the congress emphasized gender difference and made calls for mothers to return to the home a centerpiece at the same time as it gave young women a prominent role in the proceedings. Aubert, the JOCF’s leader, had an especially prominent role during both the congress and the period leading up to it. During the winter of 1937, she was the only young woman to tour the exhibition site with exhibition officials, and she also spoke on the radio. Once the congress started, Aubert presided over its first public meeting, which drew twenty-five thousand to the Vélodrome d’Hiver to consider the familial future of young workers. The next day, she joined the JOC’s leader Fernand Bouxom and Father Guérin in presiding over a session on young workers’ work life that took place in front of an estimated forty thousand...
Jocists, ten Bishops, and numerous heads of Catholic youth organizations. Female Jocists were also centrally involved in the proceedings and demonstrations. During Saturday night’s “festival of labor,” they spoke out about the special challenges facing women workers and took central roles in the two-thousand-person spoken chorus. As the JOC-JOCF’s brand of familial and spiritual politics took center stage in 1937, the young women played a leading role.

As exciting as the events of the congress were, JOCF leaders were careful to mix participation in the congress with new opportunities for tourism. Various packages combining attendance at the congress with Parisian sightseeing were offered to female Jocists. To facilitate the young women’s explorations, their congress manual provided information about the skills needed for Parisian tourism, including instructions about taking the metro and the bus and using a public telephone.104 Although the Communists also planned a youth congress to coincide with the exhibition, the JOCF was the only organization of young women to visit the exhibition in great numbers and to use the dormitories constructed by exhibition organizers to house visitors to Paris. Indeed, the young women one finds in the government report on exhibition housing are smiling, identically attired Jocists.105 The combination of a highly successful congress and the opportunity to visit Paris and the exhibition made the 1937 congress an especially memorable event for the Jocists, one that heightened their commitment to the movement.106 In the congress’s aftermath, both the JOC and the JOCF benefited from a surge of new recruits and new enthusiasm among Catholics, lay and cleric alike.

The arrival of war in 1939 put an end to both the movement’s momentum and to a particular era in French youth organizing. During the dark, complicated years between 1939 and 1945, the Jocist movement and its militants faced a range of new challenges and choices, while the emergence of an authoritarian government in Vichy determined to organize youth in new ways in the southern, unoccupied zone altered the landscape of youth organizing.107 Although the period from 1939 to 1945 is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth pointing out that the war only heightened gender-related differences between the two branches of the movement.108 Both the JOC and its militants faced a range of challenges and choices not faced directly by the JOCF and its militants. For example, those young men who were old enough faced military service and, sometimes, long stretches in prisoner-of-war camps. Young men also grappled with the decision over whether to report for mandatory labor service in 1943 or, effectively, move into the Resistance.109 Those young men who remained behind participated in a movement that occupied a political position different from that of the JOCF. Indeed, the JOC was viewed with more suspicion by German occupiers, and its relationship with Vichy would be the subject of controversy for decades to come.110

Things were quite different for the JOCF and its members. The movement’s activities could easily be translated into wartime social assistance, and they met with less suspicion from the Germans. Moreover, the movement’s distance from political life meant that there was less concern—both at the time and later—over its relationship to Vichy and the Resistance. And although the young women suffered through a range of wartime hardships, they also experienced the exhilaration that came from experiencing new freedoms and rising to new challenges.111 As many of their male counterparts languished in prisoner-of-war camps, JOCF militants sometimes violated curfew to hold meetings and organized trips to the seashore or to the mountains to go camping or hiking. From the photographs that appear in JOCF archival collections, it is clear that
the young women often enjoyed themselves considerably during these excursions. Raymonde Tourbier later articulated this peculiarly female blend of wartime suffering and excitement when she recollected,

What is striking to me is that at this moment (39-45), in difficult, often dramatic circumstances: fatigue, undernourishment, neverending lines for food (and what food!), alarms going off almost every night, bombardments, total lack of heat . . . we were happy, we had a lot of fun (and with not much), we sang a lot, we were dynamic, and there was a great friendship between us that still exists.112

In the end, how are we to evaluate this movement? As we have seen, the JOCF differed from the JOC in many ways, and its relationship to young women was complicated to say the least. On one hand, the movement worked to prepare young women for future roles as mothers and guardians of the private, and its discourse regarding women’s roles, sexuality, and work included many elements that were quite conservative or at least traditional. On the other hand, the movement offered a message of spiritual equality and encouraged young working women to assume active, independent roles in the public sphere. The organization exhorted provincial leaders, “Be someone, be outstanding. Have character, that’s it; have enough substance to make an impact.”113 The very fact that the JOCF encouraged young working women to value themselves and make an impact on the world around them made the organization somewhat unique in a country that was so highly stratified by class and gender. Not surprisingly, many young women who were active in the JOCF gained confidence, skills, and a sense that what they did mattered. Many also became lifelong activists. To be sure, of course, many interwar Jocists went on to use these skills and confidence on behalf of adult Catholic organizations, as had been intended by the movement’s founders.114 What is both interesting and significant, however, is that some who went on to make very different ideological and political choices still credited the JOCF with forming them into activists. Yvonne Ruffet, who later became active in the CGT and voted Communist, credited the JOCF with making her who she was by teaching her to think, to take responsibility, and to always work on behalf of the working class.115 Lucienne Champion, a textile worker who later joined the French Communist Party, noted similarly, “All that I learned from the J.O.C. remained the basis of my subsequent commitment. It was central to my development as an activist and it prepared me to take responsibility as an adult.”116 That women who went on to embrace Communism could still credit the JOCF in this way highlights the JOCF’s distinctive approach to and complicated legacy for the young women involved. A history of interwar youth organizing that omits their story is only a partial history indeed.

NOTES

1. Pierre Pierrard, Michel Launay, and Rolande Trempé, La J.O.C.: Regards d’historiens (Paris: Éditions Ouvrières, 1984), 53-56. Interestingly, the book’s virtual omission of the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine (JOFC) so infuriated the organization’s interwar leader, Jeanne Aubert, that she wrote her own history of the movement’s formative years, one that was based on the voices and experiences of the women involved. See Jeanne Aubert, J.O.C. qu’as-tu fait de nos vies? La jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne féminine 1928-1945 (Paris: Éditions Ouvrières, 1990).


4. This is not to say that young working women’s relationship to Christianity and Catholicism has received no attention. In his book on St. Jude, for example, Robert Orsi discusses how a young generation of American Catholic immigrant daughters turned to St. Jude as they tried to negotiate an approach to sexuality and marital choices that moved beyond Catholic teaching and parental advice. Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude*, chap. 2.


10. Class difference played itself out in many ways in French Catholic parishes during the 1920s and 1930s. The kinds of weddings or funerals one received and the seat one occupied in church often depended on what one was able to pay. Not surprisingly, young workers who went on to become Catholic trade unionists often remembered with bitterness the class-specific ways they were treated. One later told researchers that when he had placed first in his catechism class, parents of more well-to-do children went to see the parish priest to demand that this be reversed and that he be ranked lower. Cited in Christine Bard, *Paroles de militants: Témoignages de syndicalistes C.F.T.C./C.F.D.T. du Nord-Pas-de-Calais, 1925-1985* (Lille, France: Association 1888-1988, 1990), 12.

12. As historians of youth have demonstrated, definitions of “youth” and “young” have varied at different historical moments, as well as according to class and, often, gender. In interwar France, the Catholics involved with the JOC generally understood the category “working youth” to begin with permanent entrance into the labor force and end with marriage, which often occurred in a young man’s mid-twenties. For a more general discussion of youth as a social and cultural construct, see the introduction to Giovanni Levi and Jean-Claude Schmitt, eds., *A History of Young People*, vol. 1, *Ancient and Medieval Rites of Passage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).


15. This attempt to mount a powerful, male presence in the streets and stadia of France is perhaps best exemplified by the Fédération Nationale Catholique (FNC) and the sporting association the Fédération Gymnastique et Sportive des Patronages de France (FGSPF). The FNC, which was founded by General de Castelnau in 1924 as part of the attempt to counter ant clerical moves made by the newly elected Cartel des Gauches government, sponsored huge rallies of tens of thousands of men in cities across France in 1924 and 1925. For more on this, see Gérard Cholvy and Yves-Marie Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse de la France Contemporaine (1880-1930)* (Paris: Éditions Privat, 1986), 285-86. The FGSPF occasionally sponsored huge public demonstrations of strapping male Catholic athletes. During the 1937 Exposition Internationale, for instance, it was this Catholic sporting association that sponsored the largest demonstration, one that grouped twenty-five thousand gymnasts. Interestingly, this was the largest such demonstration in France since 1923. Archives Nationales (hereafter AN) F1212218. Finally, that clerics sought to draw men to church is suggested by the comments of Cardinal Baudrillart. He noted in March 1936, “On a été si content depuis la guerre de les voir remplies d’hommes, de voir tant de braves gens, anciens combattants et autres demander des messes, des sermons.” Alfred Baudrillart, *Les Carnets du Cardinal Baudrillart (20 novembre 1935–11 avril 1939)* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1996), 147-48.


17. Archives Départementales des Hauts-de-Seine (hereafter ADHS) 45J6, “Quelques notes sur la J.O.C.F.”

18. As Abbé Boulier, a Jesuit centrally involved in the movement’s first days, noted in a letter, the challenge for chaplains was “to get them to understand their very particular task within the J.O.C.: they must be everything—and be the only ones to realize it.” Letter from J. Boulier to J. Cardijn (June 30, 1927) published in full in Débes and Poulat, *L’Appel de la J.O.C.*, 143.

19. Support for the JOC was especially strong among a new generation of priests who had received their training in the immediate postwar period. These newly ordained priests, many of whom had fought in the First World War, were enthusiastic about the need for new approaches to the working class and the possibilities presented by the JOC. As a result, they played prominent roles at all levels of the movement.

20. In his recent biography of JOC founder Father Guérin, Pierre Pierrard discusses the fact that the educational and associational life of Guérin and his fellow priests was exclusively male and that this had consequences for the clerics. Indeed, Guérin was uncomfortable around women, and it took a while for this beloved father of the JOC to be able to shake the young

21. This is reflected in the documents found in ADHS 45J442 and 443 as well as in the testimonies in Aubert, *J.O.C. qu’as-tu fait de nos vies?*


23. In 1934, for instance, the newsletter for provincial leaders advised the young women on maintaining control over the lesson on mass in the face of clerical resistance. “Cercle d’étude religieux,” *Bulletin des dirigeantes fédérales*, March 1934, 8.


25. See the song “La petite vendeuse de journaux de la J.O.C.F.”

26. For more on this, see Whitney, “Embracing the Status Quo.”

27. At an early JOC study session in Montmartre in 1928, Aubert explained, “Comme vous le savez, notre Mouvement de J.O.C.F. est fait à l’exemple du vôtre … mais ce que nous voulons aussi, c’est préparer les jeunes ouvrières à leur future mission de mères chrétiennes, celles qui demain seront à la fois épouses et mamans et qui devront être pour vous l’appui, le soutien dans les heures difficiles.” “Quelques notes sur la J.O.C.F.,” ADHS 45J6.


32. During 1936 and 1937, for example, when France was deeply divided over the Popular Front government and experiment, the JOCF investigated issues concerning a young working woman’s preparation for marriage.

33. Lhotte and Dupeyrat, *Révélations sur la santé*.

34. This problem was mentioned, for example, in the April 1931 edition of *L’Équipe ouvrière féminine*, which was directed toward militants. In January 1934, the *Jeunesse ouvrière féminine* wondered how, in light of continuing resistance, the organization would be able to imbue young women workers with a proper appreciation of the family.

35. ADHS 45J442, declaration of Raymonde Tourbier.

36. ADHS 45J443, declaration of Yvonne Ruffet.

37. ADHS 45J443, declaration of Paulette Beaudor.


39. The school-leaving age was raised to fourteen in 1936. For more on gender-specific approaches to girls’ primary education, see Linda L. Clark, *Schooling the Daughters of Marianne: Textbooks and the Socialization of Girls in Modern French Primary Schools* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).

40. Although national statistics regarding the percentage of girls who received their certificat d’études primaires are not available, Catherine Rhein’s study of interwar Parisian young working women suggests just how low completion rates were among young working women during this period. Rhein found that 48 percent of her sample of female retirees born between 1907 and 1912 had no diploma whatsoever, while another 32 percent had achieved only their primary school certificate. Catherine Rhein, “Jeunes femmes au travail dans le Paris de l’entre-deux-guerres” (Thèse de doctorat de 3e cycle, Université de Paris VII, 1977), 82.


43. Aubert, J.O.C. qu’as-tu fait de nos vies? 228.

44. For more on Jocist spirituality, see Pierrard, Launay, and Trempé, La J.O.C., 42-46.

45. When there was increased attention to adolescence at the end of the nineteenth century, for example, some Catholic writers used the figure of an adolescent Jesus in their writings for newly discovered adolescents. Thiércé, Histoire de l’adolescence, 210-11.

46. See, for example, Regards Jocistes sur l’Évangile (1933).


50. According to this meditation, His voice was “the imperious voice of the Master that demands to be obeyed, the urgent voice of the husband which begs his fiancée to remain pure, the worried voice of the friend which warns of impossible dangers, the tender voice of the Father which encourages and praises accomplishment.” “Méditations sur l’Évangile,” 3. This was consistent with what Kselman found.

51. L’Équipe ouvrière féminine, March 1931, 6.

52. Ibid.

53. L’Équipe ouvrière féminine, June 1932, 8.


55. L’Équipe ouvrière féminine, March 1932, 8.

56. Caroline Walker Bynum examines medieval women’s particular relationship to the Eucharist in “Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion.” In her study of nineteenth-century bourgeois Frenchwomen in Northern France, Bonnie Smith also found that communion had particular significance for women. Smith, Ladies of the Leisure Class, 100.

57. ADHS 45 J1442, declaration of Raymonde Tourbier.


61. Rome, 47.

62. Ibid., 120.

63. For more on this see Whitney, “The Politics of Youth,” 378-90.

64. Rome, 125.

65. According to the 1931 census, 60.9 percent of women between fifteen and twenty-four were considered economically active; this percentage dropped to 41.5 percent for those women between twenty-five and thirty-nine. From a table in Siân Reynolds, France between the Wars: Gender and Politics (New York: Routledge, 1996), 86.

66. By 1931, for instance, there was one white-collar worker for every two female industrial workers, as opposed to one white-collar worker for every three industrial workers in 1906. Madeleine Rebérioux, “Les Femmes et la révolution industrielle” in Le Féminisme et ses enjeux, cited in Reynolds, France between the Wars, 93.

67. Catherine Rhein noted, for instance, that working as a bonne à tout faire during the interwar period was often a transitional thing. Rhein, “Jeunes femmes au travail,” 175.


69. Unfortunately, there are no surviving national membership records that might help us in this regard. In one local area that was studied closely, it was estimated that 52.6 percent of Jocists
were industrial workers; 14.2 percent came from the petites professions; 23.8 percent were white-collar workers; and 9.3 percent were in domestic work. Cited in Aubert, *J.O.C. qu’as-tu fait de nos vies?* 100.

70. Ibid., 364.
71. Ibid., 363.
72. ADHS 44J443, declaration of Yvonne Ruffet.
73. See, for example, “À la recherche d’un métier féminin,” *La Jeunesse ouvrière féminine*, October 1933, 1. For the similar approaches to these issues taken by female Catholic trade unionists, see Christine Bard, “L’Apôtre sociale et l’ange du foyer: Les Femmes et la C.F.T.C. à travers Le Nord-Social (1920-1936),” *Le Mouvement social* 165 (October-December 1993): 23-41.
74. “Métiers féminins,” *La Jeunesse ouvrière féminine*, August 1928, 4. The conviction that young women should do “feminine” kinds of work did not change. After the Second World War, for example, the JOCF national governing body passed a resolution demanding that work that had been done by men before the war be returned to them and that certain types of work be outlawed for young women. “Travail féminin,” ADHS 45J584.
75. Concern over the size and health of the French population was pronounced in many quarters in France, especially during the mid- to late 1930s. For a general look at pronatalism in interwar France, see Marie-Monique Huss, “Pronatalism in the Interwar Period in France,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 25 (1990): 39-68. For an analysis of the ways gender figured in the pronatalism of the Alliance Nationale, see Cheryl Koos, “Gender, Anti-Individualism, and Nationalism: The Alliance Nationale and the Pronatalist Backlash against the ‘Femme Moderne,’ 1933-1940,” *French Historical Studies* 19, no. 3 (1996): 699-723.
76. Contemporaries and historians agree that working-class housing in interwar France was often miserable and even potentially dangerous for young people. Surveying the literature, Helmut Gruber notes with regard to the Department of the Seine, for example, that “all sources and commentators seem to agree that more than half of the worker housing in the department of the Seine was poor with some fifth of it real slums.” Helmut Gruber, “French Women in the Crossfire of Class, Sex, Maternity and Citizenship,” in *Women and Socialism/Socialism and Women: Europe between the Two World Wars*, ed. Helmut Gruber and Pamela Graves (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998), 296.
77. Aubert, *J.O.C. qu’as-tu fait de nos vies?* 53.
78. “Les Jeunes Femmes du Milieu Populaire et le Travail” (1944), ADHS 45J584.
81. Aubert, *J.O.C. qu’as-tu fait de nos vies?* 51.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid., 80.
85. The 1931 agreement stipulated that the JOCF could recruit for the unions and that the JOCF would receive 20 percent of the dues for each young woman its members brought into the union. Pierrard, Launay, and Trempé, *La J.O.C.*, 62.

87. On June 11th, for example, Abbé Desgranges, who was then a deputy in the National Assembly, noted in his diary, “Beaucoup d’étrangers ont quitté précipitamment Paris. Ils croient à la révolution très prochaine. Les nouvelles que nous viennent des pays étrangers, malgré la prudence forcée de la T.S.F. et de la presse, sont navrantes car beaucoup considèrent la France comme perdue et prennent leurs dispositions en conséquence.” Jean-Marie Desgranges, *Journal d’un prêtre député, 1936-1940* (Paris: La Palatine, 1960), 34.

88. “ Documentation sur les grèves.” I very grateful to Father Jean-Pierre Coco for sharing his photocopy of this archival document with me.

89. Ibid.

90. The role that Jocists played defending the CFTC and maintaining a Catholic presence during the strikes was applauded by Catholic deputies like Henri Meck. See, for example, *Journal officiel de la République française*, Débats parlementaires, Chambre des Députés, 2e séance du 23 mars 1937, 1190.

91. Berthe, *Je te dois tout*, 123. This is almost identical to the recollection of Jeanne Bayeux-Labbé who noted, “Il n’y avait pas de syndicat mais spontanément les ouvriers sont venus me chercher pour être déléguée et lancer le syndicat.” ADHS 45J442.


95. Although there are few secondary sources that examine interwar French Catholic approaches to leisure, a good place to start is Christophe Boussenart, *L’Échappée belle: 1936, les Ch’tis à l’assaut des loisirs* (Lille, France: Éditions Publi-Nord, 1986).

96. For the most comprehensive analysis of Popular Front approaches to youth leisure, see Pascal Ory, *La Belle illusion: Culture et politique sous le signe du Front populaire, 1935-1938* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1994), 713-88. See also Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, especially 133-34.


100. For Catholic initiatives and successes, see “Le Centre principal de la jeunesse,” *La Vie Catholique*, May 5, 1937, in AN F12 12140. Catholic initiatives were aided by the general ineptitude of Popular Front Exhibition organizers, especially when it came to initiatives regarding youth. It was, for instance, because the planned “Rassemblement de la Jeunesse” was cancelled that the Catholics’ sporting demonstration became the largest such demonstration at the exhibition.


102. For press clippings on the congress, see ADHS 45J430, “Coupures de presse.”


105. AN F12 12139, folder: Hébergement.

106. The excitement generated by the congress is evident from the testimonies of many female Jocists in ADHS 45J442-3.

107. Much of the literature on the JOC during the war has been written by movement militants. See, for example, *Jocistes dans la tourmente* (Paris: Éditions Ouvrières/Éditions du...


108. Since the mid-1980s, there has been a growing literature examining the ways gender was important during the two world wars. Scholars have argued that the wars affected men and women very differently and that war provided a moment when gender systems were temporarily reconfigured in ways that offered women the possibility of new roles. For the pioneering collection examining these issues, see Margaret R. Higonnet et al., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987). In the case of France during the Second World War, there have been a number of recent studies that examine the role gender played in government policy and discourse, in resistance and collaboration, in wartime experiences, and in postwar purges. Focusing on women’s experiences during the war, Hanna Diamond’s *Women and the Second World War in France, 1939-1948: Choices and Constraints* (London: Longman, 1999) also provides a valuable bibliographic essay on works related to the issue of women, gender, and the war in France.

109. JOC archival collections (ADHS 44J155) include moving letters from Jocist prisoners of war to their chaplains, which often describe how they believed their captivity brought them closer to Christ and to the first Christians. There is a good analysis of one Jocist’s—in this case, the future Catholic trade union leader Eugène Descamps—decision not to report for labor service in 1943 in Franck Georgi, *Eugène Descamps, chrétien et syndicaliste* (Paris: Les Éditions de l’Atelier/ Éditions Ouvrières, 1997).

110. Indeed, Father Guérin would be arrested by the Germans in August 1943. For more on this, see Pierrard, *Georges Guérin*.

111. This kind of wartime mixture of hardship, challenge, and exhilaration for young women has been documented by other historians of women for both the First and Second World Wars. See, for example, Deborah Gorham, *Vera Brittain: A Feminist Life* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1996), chaps. 5 and 6.

112. ADHS 45J442, declaration of Raymonde Tourbier.


114. Based on her study of responses from eight hundred former Jocists, Jeanne Aubert concluded that former Jocists went on to have their primary public engagement in the following areas: 25 percent were primarily active in adult Catholic family movements, 14 percent in the adult Action Catholique Ouvrière, 11 percent in parish organizations, 10 percent in trade union activism, 8 percent in social activism, 7 percent in religious life, 6 percent in municipal action, 6 percent in the consumers’ movement, 3 percent in political action, and so forth. With that said, she also noted that many combined more than one type of activism. Aubert, *J.O.C. qu’as-tu fait de nos vies?* 396.

115. ADHS 45J443.

In 1945, the Family Allowances Act was incorporated into law. The family allowances scheme depended on the maintenance of a normative family structure and a wage system that discriminated against women. Eleanor Rathbone, along with social surveyors of the 1930s and social policy makers, recognized the family wage system as a primary cause of poverty among working families. Unfortunately, the family allowances scheme did not address the poverty caused by long-term unemployment or the absence of a male wage earner within the family structure. As a social policy solution to familial poverty, consequently, family allowances reflected both the contemporary social processes and the normative family structure to the detriment of impoverished families.

Maternal and child welfare policy in Britain during the interwar period may be viewed within the greater context of economic policy decisions. The implementation of family allowances in 1945 is one example of the confluence of maternal and child welfare policy with economic policy during this period. The movement for family allowances in Britain began with the formation of the Family Endowment Committee in 1917. The movement’s more radical ideology, the idea that family allowances would provide women with some amount of needed economic independence, was established when Eleanor Rathbone published her polemic on family allowances, *The Disinherited Family*, in 1924. She was the driving force behind the campaign for a plan that would provide additional financial resources to aid families in the upbringing of the nation’s children. As a member of Parliament for English Universities from 1929, Rathbone agitated for family allowances as an opportunity to lessen women’s financial dependence on their husbands and lessen the poverty associated with larger families. The discussion of family allowances put forth by John Maynard Keynes in his work *How to Pay for the War* marked the shift of the political culture of Westminster toward overwhelming support of the concept of family allowances. This support, as well as the eventual implementation of a family allowances scheme, resulted from economic pragmatism and the desire to avoid inflationary wage increases for male workers rather than from a commitment to women’s economic independence. Keynes deter-
mined that allowances might be useful as a means to protect lower-income families against inflation and a rising cost of living during the Second World War. This article examines the specific social construction of the family and the relationship of the family to the state that guided the movement for family allowances in Britain between 1917 and 1945.

The movement for family allowances (or children’s allowances, as they were defined by Sir William Beveridge in the Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services)
3 focused on the radical idea of the state provision of an equal standard of living for equal work rather than equal pay for equal work. Family allowances also served as a response to demands for a minimum wage and addressed the feminist argument against a family wage that discriminated against female workers. A family wage was intended to provide for the normative family: a wage-earning man, his wife, and their assumed to be three children. Women’s wages were significantly lower because their wages were seen as supplemental to the man’s family wage. More important, family allowances addressed the increasing levels of poverty facing large families, as described by the London School of Economics and Political Science and B. Seebohm Rowntree in their respective surveys of British poverty.4 When the Family Allowances Act of 1945 was finally read in Parliament, the debate centered on whether the mother or the father should receive payment. Parliamentary support of family allowances was paradoxical in that it challenged traditional family structures by making payment of allowances to the mother yet legislated a specific family dynamic by supporting the normative family structure.

**RECOGNIZING FAMILIAL POVERTY**

The historiography of the family allowances movement focuses on two general themes: the first as an example of policy formulation and the second a feminist elucidation of the workings of middle-class reformers. The primary focus of the movement for family allowances, namely, the impoverished family and its relationship to the state, is absent from much of the literature. Sir William Beveridge encouraged study of the relationship between the family and the state in the period preceding the Second World War. In his notes for *Changes in Family Life*, Beveridge wrote that

> family relationships are not only the most interesting or most important things in life to most individuals. They are also among the most important and interesting subjects of scientific study. . . . Like all institutions of man . . . [the family] changes continually itself and it stands in changing relations to other human institutions, such as the tribe and the state.5

Interestingly, sociological and historical studies of the movement for family allowances tend to focus on the political or organizational activities of the movement, proving the notion of political pragmatism in this instance, rather than center discussion on the family itself as a socially constructed institution. Recent sociological studies of the family suggest that a paradigm exists in which “historical change and human agency play more central roles. In this view, change is constant, and human institutions are always in the process of being remade by the people involved in them.”6 Was this historically the case among those living near the poverty line in Britain during the period from 1930 to 1945? Jane Lewis suggests that “state welfare provision becomes the
cause rather than the effect of women’s agency.” The Family Endowment Society was, organizationally, the center of the movement for family allowances, but what was the discernible impact of its agitation on the lives of families living near the poverty line, the human institution, as it were, that was in the process of being remade? A system of family allowances addressed only one cause of familial poverty, the large family size of some families. As a solution to poverty, however, allowances overlooked all the economic causes of familial poverty, except family size, in order to maintain the normative family structure.

As an exercise in the study of policy formulation, the movement for family allowances offers the historian and the social policy analyst an example of the primacy of economic and fiscal concerns over the social and moral needs of the community. In his detailed history of the movement for family allowances, John Macnicol draws attention to the political pragmatism that led to the passage of the Family Allowances Act of 1945. He argues that family allowances were ultimately attractive to the government only in so far as they were an alternative to, and a way of avoiding, the whole question of minimum wages, and also as a way of ensuring the work incentives and labour mobility essential to the successful working of a free-market economy.

The policy process that led to the introduction of family allowances before any of the other social insurance proposals put forth in the Beveridge Report is the focus of Hilary Land’s contribution to Change, Choice and Conflict in Social Policy. As a social policy analyst, Land offers something other than a historiographical perspective. She views the movement for family allowances as a “useful illustration of the ways in which particular problems gain the attention of governments and how one social policy can be seen and adopted as at least a partial solution to those problems.” Both Macnicol and Land make extensive use of the documents maintained at the Public Records Office that describe the political maneuvering and administrative details inherent in the policy-making process generally and specifically in the case of family allowances. They are not as concerned with the actual family structures and family dynamics that were affected by the political and policy maneuvering.

Apart from attracting the interest of social policy analysts and historians, the movement for family allowances has drawn considerable attention from feminist historians perhaps because it was, in a sense, organizationally a continuation of the British suffrage movement. Similarities also existed in the political culture (i.e., a war culture) that led to women’s enfranchisement at the conclusion of the First World War and the enactment of family allowances at the conclusion of the Second World War. Feminist historiography of the family allowances movement, however, offers only a limited discourse on the families that benefited from the additional five shillings per week and is thus inadequate to assess the impact on the social construction of the normative family. The volume edited by Harold L. Smith, British Feminism in the Twentieth Century, contains several significant pieces related to a political and organizational understanding of the movement for family allowances. Yet, the Smith volume lacks a structural analysis of the family as a social organization in its relationship to feminism. Carol Dyhouse offers something of a useful analysis in her work Feminism and the Family in England, 1880–1939, but her analysis proves ineffective in relation to family allowances because of her focus on the middle class and her rejection of class- and gender-
structured social analysis. In assessing the nature of women’s work within the family, Dyhouse dismisses the Marxist notion of a sexual division of labor within families in the period covered by her work. Dyhouse argues that middle-class feminists were able to rely on working-class women in their capacity as domestic servants and therefore did not need to divide household labor among family members.11 Family allowances, however, were not intended primarily to assist middle-class women, nor does a study of feminism and middle-class families offer insight on the family dynamics and family structures of those living near the poverty line.

Family allowances attempted to alleviate the discrepancies between the wages of those with families and those without in an effort to end familial poverty. Yet, this was achieved within the bounds of a specific normative family structure with its inherent socially constructed gender roles. In her effort to delineate “models of equality for women,” Jane Lewis argues that women’s history or the history of feminism alone does not provide a sufficient historical examination of the conceptualisation of equality for women. . . . Genuine equality of opportunity can only be achieved by more of a focus on gender, rather than on women, and more attention not just to the relationship between benefits and welfare as conceptualised by Rathbone, but between the gender distribution of benefits, work and welfare.12

The gender distribution of work should include the work performed by women within family structures. However, as Lewis suggests in her article “Gender, the Family and Women’s Agency,” the need to disaggregate the family unit [from social policies] resulted in the awareness not just that the family has always been the main provider of welfare, but that “the family” has stood as a euphemism for female family members performing the unpaid work of caring for young and old, as well as husbands.13

It follows that the family wage system proved to be inadequate because, as Rathbone pointed out, it provided for “3 million phantom wives, and for over 16 million phantom children.”14 The attempt to equalize the standard of living among Britain’s working poor with a family allowances scheme was a revolutionary idea with far-reaching implications for the contemporary economic structures, yet a standard minimum wage might have more efficiently reduced poverty levels. This notion of a normative family structure guided the social policy processes that led to the introduction of a system of family allowances in 1945. Furthermore, the maintenance of the normative family structure was more relevant to the introduction of family allowances than were the economic realities of the impoverished families and communities. The interaction between the three segments of discourse—social surveyors, charity organizations, and policy makers—in the creation of family allowances legislation articulated an understanding both of mothers and of their role within families. From this understanding of specific gender roles, a policy emerged. A social policy that existed apart from maintenance of the normative family structure was not implemented to the detriment of impoverished families.
SOCIAL SURVEYS AND THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF POVERTY

Economic deprivation and a national government characterized Britain in the 1930s. High unemployment, hunger marches, and dole queues form only part of the story. The extent of poverty led to an increased understanding of the wage system and the family as a social institution. Those who suffered the most from widespread unemployment were not the male heads of families but the women and children who comprised those families. Larger families fared far worse. The Pilgrim Trust study of unemployed men reminded society that beyond the man in the queue we should always be aware of those two or three persons at home whom he has to support. This is the justification for the view underlying this report, that no examination of long term unemployment is possible which does not include those “shadows behind the queues,” the women and children at home, and the economic problems of family life and dependence in family life.15

In their history of the 1930s, John Stevenson and Chris Cook assert that a “more general factor which determined living standards was family size. Large families were generally associated with poverty, and they were found to be a major cause of poverty among the unemployed too.”16 The experience of the 1930s focused the attention of social surveyors and sociologists on poverty, but the existence of a normative family structure guided their examination of familial poverty. Solutions to such poverty, therefore, were dependent on the maintenance of a family structure that viewed mothers as dependent members of families that were supported by male wage earners.

Social surveys detailed the living conditions of those living near the poverty line. The surveys brought to the fore the issues that needed to be addressed in the creation of social policy that would adequately determine and define familial poverty in Britain. The social surveys provided the data from which the policy of family allowances as a solution to familial poverty emerged, yet the surveys suggest that a minimum wage policy might have more effectively reduced poverty among the working poor. As chairman of the Inter-departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services, Beveridge sent a secret memorandum to the War Cabinet in 1942 that detailed the extent of poverty in England. His information, based on survey data compiled by the London School of Economics and B. Seebohm Rowntree in their respective studies, stated that “what has been shown for London and York . . . in detail applies to the country generally.”17 Eleanor Rathbone also used the Rowntree statistics from the 1901 study of York, Poverty: A Study of Town Life, and the 1918 discussion in The Human Needs of Labour18 as the basis for her discussion of familial poverty in The Dis-inherited Family. She was critical of Rowntree’s estimates of poverty but relied on them “because they are probably the best known and the most scientifically worked out, and as they are also the lowest, everything that is said of our failure to achieve them in practise applies in even greater measure to higher estimates.”19 Both social surveyors and social workers noted that family size was the primary determinant of poverty, yet it was believed that familial character determined the family’s standard of living more so than the amount of a family wage. The absence of a standard definition of poverty contributed to this stigmatizing characterization.

Poverty was defined subjectively by the social surveyors at the start of the twentieth century, but by the late 1930s a more scientific definition based on nutritional needs
was established. Once scientific standards were in place, Rowntree and other social surveyors raised the standard poverty line to incorporate their increased knowledge. For the purposes of the Beveridge Report, poverty was defined by R. F. George in his 1937 article “A New Calculation of the Poverty Line.” The article’s calculations determined that the definition of the poverty line or the “minimum needs standards should be significantly higher than those hitherto accepted with the result that the extent of absolute poverty has been underestimated.” The definitions of poverty used by the social surveyors illustrate the social construction of a poverty line, and indeed, social surveyors admit the contrived nature of their definitions. The New Survey of London Life and Labour indicated that there was no universal definition of poverty, and the meaning attached to the term varies from place to place and from time to time. It has not the same significance as destitution, which is a stronger word; families may be poor but not destitute. It does not correspond closely with pauperism, which signifies relief from public resources; and indeed, since the standard applied to applications for relief is by no means constant, the connection between poverty and pauperism would not enable us to measure the former. We must relate poverty to some minimum standard of economic welfare, which is based on provision of the primary needs of food, clothing, shelter, warmth, etc.

In assessing familial poverty and then determining solutions for said poverty, it was apparent that both family structures and the poverty line were social constructions. Solutions for poverty therefore must be examined alongside a society’s moral understanding of its obligation to the impoverished. For this reason, the macro approach of the social surveyors in detailing the extent of poverty was informative but inconclusive as a base for social policy decisions.

Another significant problem for the social surveyors, and again a social construction, was the wage system itself. The system provided a living or family wage for the male head of house. Women’s wages were often significantly lower than those of their male counterparts because the wage system assumed that a woman’s income was merely supplemental to her husband’s living wage. Rathbone’s insight on the wage system challenged the structure of a system that failed to “define either the size of the family for which a ‘living wage’ should provide or the standard of living at which it should be maintained.” A family wage was intended to meet the subsistence level of an average family composed of a working husband, his wife, and their three children. That this was not the average British family did not affect the family wage system. The family wage caused familial poverty in the duality of its discrimination against larger families and women workers. In the London survey, the largest cause of familial poverty was not the inadequacy of a family wage to support said family but rather the absence of a family wage provided by a working husband. The London School of Economics survey found that families with more than three dependent children account for only 16 or 17 per cent. of all families in poverty. . . . Overwhelmingly the largest contribution to poverty. . . . is made by the families with no male earner, and no dependent children. This group includes primarily women living alone, especially old women.
The London data implied that changes to the wage system would do more to alleviate poverty in general, whereas a system of family allowances would only help those with dependent children or those in the future who might have children.

Advocates of family allowances argued that as family size was a primary determinant of poverty, allowances based on that size would, therefore, most effectively alleviate poverty. Rathbone found that families were typically impoverished because of the "inadequacy of the wage to meet the needs of the household dependent on it." The investigators that completed the Rowntree study of York found that almost one-third of those surveyed lived below the poverty line as a result of family wages that were too low to support the families in question. The Rowntree survey assessed fifty-three shillings per week as the minimum wage, inclusive of rent, on which a family of five could be expected to subsist. Examples taken from the investigators' notes suggest the conditions in which families in York were forced to live:

14666: 2 bedrooms, sitting-room and kitchen. Rent 6s. 9d. Man aged 30, wife 32 and 3 children aged 6, 4 and *11 months. The man is a baker’s labourer, and receives 38s. 0d. a week. The w.c. is shared with another family. House is very unhealthy. Previously lived in a Council House, but had to give this up because the rent was too high. [Female children’s ages are demarcated with an asterisk.]
Total family income, 38s. Deficiency 2s. 6d. per head.

13131: 3 bedrooms and kitchen. Rent 4s. 2d. Man aged 39, wife 35 and 5 children aged 11, 9, 5, 4 and *7 months. Man is a casual labourer for a merchant, and receives 45s. per week. The Council allows this family to live at a cheaper rate owing to the husband’s low wage. The normal rent is 9s. 5d.
Total family income, 45s. Deficiency, 1s. 6d. per head.

12126: 3 bedrooms, living room and scullery. Rent 9s. 6d. (Council House). Man aged 31, wife 30, and 3 children aged 7, 6 and 2. Man is an unskilled worker and earns 43s. a week. The man and woman are continually having rows and throwing things at each other. The woman puts the children to bed, and then goes to public houses with different men. The husband gambles a good deal. The house is very neglected.
Total family income, 43s. Deficiency, 1s. 11d. per head.27

The primary concern of both the social surveyors and sociologists was the prevalence of poverty among children. The Rowntree data showed that 52.5 percent of children under the age of one, 49.7 percent of those between ages one and five, and 39.1 percent of those between five and fifteen lived in families classified with an income below the poverty line.28 Solutions to familial poverty must necessarily account for the higher levels of poverty among children, but the system of family allowances sought to engender the prevention of childhood poverty rather than simply reduce the occurrence of impoverished childhood.

The redefinition of the poverty line and the social surveyors’ emphasis on a broader understanding of poverty, inclusive of women’s and familial poverty, provided the opportunity to challenge many of the social constructions that led to such poverty in the 1930s. George stressed that
under no circumstances can the “poverty line” be regarded as a desirable level. It seeks to assess the cost of a standard of living so low, that while persons below it are living in extreme poverty, those just above it would commonly be regarded as very poor.²⁹

Rowntree’s study of York illustrated the differences between the proposals most frequently put forward for dealing with poverty arising from low wages . . . : the fixing of statutory minimum wages and the granting of family allowances. Facts disclosed by this investigation make it possible to show how many of the 5,600 persons now living in poverty due to inadequate wages would be raised up to or above the minimum standard if wages of varying amounts were fixed by statute . . . and also what would be the effect of granting family allowances of 5s. weekly per dependent child for a family.³⁰

The results of this segment of the survey in York suggested that a minimum wage would have been the more effective method of dealing with familial poverty (see Figures 1 and 2).

With this information, it is curious that in the Beveridge Report the assumption was the creation of a system of family allowances and not a minimum wage. According to

---

**Figure 1.** Persons Raised Out of Poverty with a Family Allowance of Five Shillings per Week

Keynes, in 1940 the estimated cost of a family allowances scheme was £132,000,000 at five shillings per week for every child based on 10 million children under the age of fifteen in the country.\(^{31}\) The actual cost of a minimum wage is difficult to discern and difficult to compare accurately to the cost of family allowances, as much of the discussion focused on a defined subsistence level rather than a minimum wage.\(^{32}\) A contemporaneous problem, however, was the declining British birth rate, and it was thought that family allowances might encourage an increase in propagation. Family allowances were seen by many as a solution to poverty and to the birth rate crisis. (As noted below, this notion caused a significant controversy among certain social policy analysts.) Furthermore, family allowances were a solution with a specific agenda, and the alleviation of poverty might be understood as a secondary benefit of the scheme. The economic system of a family wage paired with a family allowance scheme did not alleviate familial poverty so much as it maintained a specific family structure and supported a distinct ideology of motherhood.

THE MORAL IMPERATIVE OF POVERTY

Widespread poverty did not easily coexist with the normative family structure that guided the movement for family allowances. Many of the charity groups that assisted the impoverished in the 1930s attributed poverty to immoral behavior. Such groups
recognized the importance of the family as a social institution, but throughout the 1930s charity organizations continued to impose standards of morality on those families whom they served. The conditions of those living at the poverty line were detailed with anecdotal evidence of squalor and poor parenting skills. As a solution to widespread poverty, charity organizations sought to alter family dynamics among the poorer sections of society to meet the normative family structure. Increasingly, however, this normative family structure was not met among any class of society and least among the impoverished classes. There was some argument that a family allowances scheme would increase the birth rate among the poorer classes to the detriment of society. This was dismissed by many, including London School of Economics social policy analyst Richard Titmuss. Titmuss opposed those individuals who believed the “answer to falling fertility, irrespective of the character of society . . . [was] to be found in family endowment.”

Family allowances could only address existing poverty caused by an inadequate family wage for the normative family. They were not a solution to other causes of poverty, nor would they address the social problems that accompanied such poverty. The attempt by the Beveridge Report to alleviate want addressed many of the causes of poverty, but it failed to structurally change either the wage system, women’s position as dependent members of their families, or the moral condemnation of the impoverished.

According to charity groups, the children of those families that were determined to be “of a really low social standard . . . [were] relatively numerous.” For this reason, there was some concern that the introduction of family allowances might alleviate the increasing perception of a negative population growth crisis by encouraging poorer families to have more children. Beveridge, however, argued that family allowances were “required no less for the purpose of maintaining and improving the quality of the population than for the purpose of preventing want or maintaining the numbers of the population.” The growing governmental concern about the declining birth rate encouraged a misplaced emphasis on family allowances as a solution to poverty among larger families. Furthermore, the focus on the declining birth rate, with existing poverty deemed its cause, detracted from the process of creating real solutions for impoverished families. Yet, family allowances were not perceived as a solution to child poverty by many of those interviewed by Mass Observation. Without job security and a minimum wage, family allowances of five shillings per week would necessarily be diverted away from the needs of the children to serve the family as a whole. A twenty-five-year-old woman of the artisan and skilled working class asserted that rather than provide family allowances the government should ensure that a man was paid “well for doing his daily job. We don’t want anything given to us; we will work for it. Bring up the standard of living, that’s what they [the government?] want to do.”

Paradoxically, family allowances might have been a short-term solution for the widespread poverty among larger families, but a long-term solution necessitated a reduction in the rate of population growth to improve the overall economic status of society.

The reduction of poverty was primarily dependent, however, on changes to the wage system reflecting changes to the social construction of the family. A wage system that did not differentiate based on the gender of the employee or the size of the employee’s family but paid a standard minimum wage would reduce poverty among the working poor. A system of family allowances would most certainly help larger families, but an overall improvement in the economic status of society could best be achieved by a minimum wage system rather than a system of family wages. The family
wage system in the prewar period ensured that larger families in particular would experience disproportionate levels of poverty. As the social surveyor Herbert Tout observed in his survey of Bristol,

Poverty is a characteristic of a family, and not of an individual, who is said to be in poverty only because he happens to be a member of a family which is in poverty. It is extraordinary that when we apply this conception of poverty to individuals it is found to affect those under 15 years of age so much more so than any others.37

The Children’s Minimum Council estimated “that only 13.7% of the general population live in families where the total weekly income to meet all expenditure is 10s or less per head, but that as many as 25.3% of all the children in the country are living in poverty.”38 Furthermore, a family wage system functioned only because of a specific family structure that supported the “old ideal of women as the providers of a comfortable background to life, anonymous and scarcely recognised.”39 Titmuss advanced this argument with his suggestion that the “existing wage system does not recognise a wage-earner’s responsibilities (whether he is married or has a family), it inevitably leads to the penalisation of parenthood.”40 Titmuss also recognized the gendered nature of the current wage system and its subsequent implications for the lives of women and children. He sought to “reduce the drudgery of a mother’s life . . . [with] better housing, . . . further health services, extended communal feeding, communal laundries.”41 Family allowances were important in the reduction of familial poverty only as a component of a larger state-sponsored welfare system. Much of the hardship experienced by the impoverished would not diminish without additional state support and, crucially, changes to the wage system that reflected a new understanding of family economic structures.

The effect of poverty on families experiencing long-term unemployment was different from that experienced by families in poverty due to insufficient wages, yet an interesting parallel existed. The Women’s Group on Public Welfare (WGPW) described 75-80 percent of the long-term unemployed and their families as “decent folks, who have never taken charity in their lives, and who cling to self-respect and cleanliness, often in the most heartbreakingly difficult conditions.”42 Social attitudes contributed to the notion that family allowances would not address these social problems because larger families were somehow determined to be improper. A thirty-nine-year-old housewife told Mass Observation for the report Britain and Her Birth-Rate that “at one time too it was thought more fashionable and ‘refined’ to have only one or at most two children. Only the unintelligent poorer classes bred prolifically.”43 The size of a family was directly related to the levels of poverty44 and the occurrence of long-term unemployment. As Table 1 indicates, the Pilgrim Trust determined that it was easier for a single man to acquiesce in unemployment than it [was] for the married man who has no children or only one, but in families where there is more than one child it becomes progressively more likely that an unemployed man who is head of the family will be able to reconcile himself to being out of work. . . . The problem then is that many men with families find themselves as well off, or in some instances, better off, “on the dole” than they would be if they were working.
The Pilgrim Trust further argued that among the unemployed in receipt of assistance, “their economic situation, measured by a poverty standard, deteriorates progressively with increasing size of family, and that when there are more than one or two children there is almost always evidence of hardship.” A system of family allowances would help those already employed receiving an inadequate family wage, but family allowances would not address the larger problem of attitudes toward either those long-term unemployed living in poverty or those with larger families.

Evidence of the familial hardships faced by the impoverished were detailed by charity groups in their micro approach to the causes of and solutions to poverty. The WGPW determined that wasteful spending by those already living near the poverty line was a primary contributor to poverty. Impoverished families were more likely to overcome poverty and the squalor of their lives with “character, especially if supported by the unmeasured and tremendous force of tradition.” Such moralizing, however, did nothing to alter the social processes, which resulted in widespread poverty among families in the 1930s. The family structure was deemed crucial to overcome the character problems caused by poverty. In 1934, a Charity Organisation Society handbook determined that

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Dependents</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6 or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Categories I and II</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category III</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Category I: those who think still only in terms of work. Category II: those who are beginning to accept unemployment as a normal state for themselves, though they still perhaps look for work, often as a matter of habit rather than with any conviction. Category III: those who have accepted unemployment as their normal state and for whom it would be hard to bring themselves to take work if it were available.

The Children’s Minimum Council (CMC) studied levels of milk consumption among impoverished families. The council determined “not only that milk consumption falls steeply with income and that little fresh milk is bought in the poorer homes but also that in many houses where there are young children no fresh milk is bought at all.” Such an approach suggested that a family allowance of an additional five shillings per week would have significant results since “one of the most disturbing facts brought to light” by the CMC was that “in working class homes, the more children there are to
need milk, the less can be bought for them.”51 The findings by the CMC suggested that nutritional allowances, rather than cash payments, would have adequately addressed some of the consequences of familial poverty such as malnutrition. The Mass Observation report, Britain and Her Birth-Rate, concluded something of the same idea. Rather than provide cash allowances, “quite apart from reasons of social atmosphere, concentration on goods and services seems desirable on eugenic grounds—for they can be standardised and mean the same for everyone’s child, whereas money will always encourage most those who have least.”52 Provision of goods and services, such as milk for children, equal to five shillings per week would have ensured that the same standard would apply to all families, but it also would imply moral paternalism.

Family allowances and the declining birth rate may have been contemporaneous issues, but discussions of a causal relationship were primarily limited to supporters of eugenics. Following his study of the declining birth rate and the impact of poverty on families, Titmuss concluded that it was

somewhat disconcerting to learn . . . that at a time when the falling birth rate . . . is occasioning serious concern to the government . . . that such concern should fail to appreciate the absence of any relationship today between wage rates and family responsibilities, size of family and housing policy.53

Titmuss believed that family allowances were acceptable on “humanitarian and social welfare grounds and they can take their place in any society, but they are no answer to a declining birth rate.”54 Rathbone responded to those arguments with the simple suggestion that if there was

reason to suppose that a certain form of provision would influence the birth-rate in a way that is undesirable from a eugenic or economic or moral point of view, that is a reason for changing the form; not necessarily for abandoning the provision.55

Instead, many of those involved in the family allowances debate as well as members of the public believed as Beveridge did that “no one who doesn’t want children for their own sake is likely to have them because there are family allowances.”56 This view was shared in the Mass Observation report, which illustrated the notion articulated by Beveridge that

some people who would like more children probably do not have them because of the financial burden involved. . . . An adequate system of children’s allowances might not have much effect on the population; it would certainly have some effect and the right effect.57

The government sought to determine the best method of caring for the nation’s children, whether payment in kind or cash benefit, but first it was necessary to determine what, if any, the state’s role was in caring for the nation’s children.

FAMILIAL POVERTY AND SOCIAL POLICY SOLUTIONS

The social surveyors provided evidence of the need for a social policy to address the occurrence of childhood poverty. Rathbone and the various charity organizations,
which addressed childhood poverty, provided a moral imperative to eliminate such poverty. In determining the extent of familial poverty caused by the family wage system, the Beveridge Report relied on impartial scientific authorities [that] made social surveys of the conditions of life in a number of principal towns in Britain. . . . Of all the want shown by these surveys, from . . . one-quarter to one-sixth was due to the failure to relate income during earning to the size of the family.58

Yet interestingly, it was the wartime experience, and not the extensive data of the social surveyors, that brought family allowances and the need to care for children to the fore of policy thinking. Promotion of the plight of poor women and children during the war was exacerbated by the experience of the evacuations. As the WGPW made clear in its study Our Towns, “The dreadful lesson of evacuation was the light it threw upon the home conditions of the lowest of town dwellers.”59 The evacuations forced the whole of British society to witness the levels of poverty experienced in the towns and cities. They were forced to look at poverty “as England was forced . . . , with shame and a burning sense of neglect and wrong.”60 (See Figure 3 for details of the numbers of London County Council schoolchildren evacuated and living below the poverty line.)
The experience of war was also the impetus for the creation of social policy ideas that were not intended as an alternative to family allowances but served as such an alternative nevertheless. The plan put forth by Keynes in *How to Pay for the War*, while still incorporating the normative family structure, was not dependent on its continuation and in that sense was a more progressive social policy idea.

Supporters of family allowances saw allowances as a solution to many of the social problems facing Britain in the years before the Second World War. The central question of purpose remained: were family allowances intended to redistribute wealth, or were they intended simply as a measure to reduce child poverty? Perhaps the more critical question involved the family wage system and the ability of a system of family allowances to provide equal standards of living for equal work. As such, family allowances were intended to reduce childhood poverty by eliminating discrepancies between men with families to support and men without families to support. The Treasury, however, insisted that family allowances would not alone address the inadequacy of the current wage system to provide for the welfare of children. According to Titmuss, much of the social policy that emerged after the Second World War was a result of the increasing perception that the “proper function or even obligation of Government [was] to ward off distress and strain among not only the poor but almost all classes of society.”

Family allowances were different. Keynes viewed family allowances as a necessity during the Second World War. Allowances would protect families against the negative economic consequences of war while also providing for those families separated from the male wage earner either as a result of evacuation or military service. Following the extent of women’s work during the First World War, it is curious that in the event of war the normative family structure continued to dominate social and economic policy discourse. Women’s war work, therefore, was not associated with providing for families so much as it was with women’s service to the nation.

The state’s role in caring for the nation’s children in the matter of family allowances was not an entirely new question, as wartime separation allowances had existed during the First World War, but as a peacetime initiative the state was accepting significantly more responsibility than it had previously held. Family allowances, however, were not an adequate solution to the many causes of familial poverty. The Treasury recognized this and explained that it would be necessary, moreover, to consider the problem of child welfare as a whole, because the payment of family allowances could deal only with one aspect of it, and the question would arise whether the introduction of family allowances is the best and most desirable way of improving the conditions of the children of the nation.

The Treasury was unique in its belief that before determining if family allowances were indeed the most desirable method of improving the condition of children’s lives it was necessary to determine what aspects of larger social problems family allowances might alleviate. The Treasury acknowledged that it will be generally conceded that proposals in regard to family allowances form part of a big social question, including the question whether the assumption of further responsibility by the state for the welfare of children should take the form of assistance to the parents in cash or direct provision in kind.
The Treasury’s argument further suggests the need for an integrated maternal and child welfare policy that would address a more complete picture of the conditions facing women and children rather than simply within economic policy discourse.

An alternative to family allowances existed that addressed many of the Treasury’s concerns by implementing both a scheme of family allowances and a minimum wage scaled to workers’ social circumstances. Such a proposal relied on the normative family structure, but it also addressed the wage system that was determined to be a primary contributor to familial poverty. Interestingly, it was the proposals put forth by Keynes in 1940 as a solution to the question of how to pay for the war that directly addressed the wage system. Keynes suggested a children’s allowance of a “flat payment of 5s. per week per child or £13 per annum, both for income-tax payers and for the insured population.”66 This was a rate identical to that which was settled upon after much disagreement in the Beveridge Report. Yet, Keynes was concerned that his plan to pay for the war might be criticized since the distribution of financial burden demanded “too heavily a relative sacrifice from the higher income group. It certainly uses the opportunity of war finance to effect a considerable re-distribution of incomes in the direction of greater equality.”67 More important as a challenge to wartime inflation and a rising cost of living was the Keynesian approach to the traditional family wage structure. In his plan, a family wage scaled to social conditions of the male wage earner was coupled with the suggestion of an untraditional minimum income. The Keynes plan was a departure from Rathbone’s insistence that a family allowance scheme was the only system that would equalize familial incomes. According to Rathbone, family allowances were necessary because a wage system which, whether based or not on the needs of a family, is all that is available in the great majority of cases to cover the maintenance of families, involves a sort of cycle of prosperity for the average working man and his household.68

Keynes proposed that in addition to his child allowance of five shillings per week per child, the “basic minimum income should be allowed free of deferment, I propose 35s. a week to unmarried and 45s. a week to married men.”69 In this manner, Keynes addressed the central arguments against the current wage system as a cause of poverty by creating both a scheme of family allowances and a minimum wage scaled to the social conditions of workers.

**CONCLUSION**

The issue of family allowances united many of the prevalent social policy questions of the 1930s within a single theme; however, family allowances were not in themselves an adequate solution to the most pressing problem of familial poverty. Eleanor Rathbone recognized the structural problems of a family wage system, but her solution was dependent on the maintenance of a normative family structure. The Keynes solution, while also dependent on the normative family structure, included necessary changes to the wage system. A system of family allowances served to equalize the standard of living among the working poor. It was not a solution to widespread poverty, and it did little to address the social processes that led to the poverty of the 1930s. Rathbone believed that it was
necessary to consider how the present wage system works out from a social and moral point of view; in its bearing on the capacity and the will to produce; on the harmony of the family and the welfare of its individual members; on the problem of population.70

The implementation of family allowances emerged from a greater economic context rather than as a policy intended to transform systemic familial poverty.

The solution to poverty in Great Britain was primarily dependent on changes to the wage system, as Rathbone recognized, but a system of family allowances would equalize “conditions between the large and small families only in respect of families whose income is at or near subsistence level.”71 Rathbone’s influence on the implementation of a family allowances scheme following the publication of the Beveridge Report is unquestionable. In the epilogue to the second edition of The Disinherited Family, Beveridge wrote of his total conversion to family allowances. He was convinced that “whatever else was done or not done for social progress and the abolition of poverty, what Eleanor Rathbone wanted must be done.”72 What Rathbone wanted, of course, was a system of family allowances with payment made to the mother. It was a revolutionary concept that “part of the total income should be assigned to those individual citizens who were undertaking the rearing of the citizens of the future, in order to make sure that they had the means for this task.”73 With the “double redistribution of income through social insurance and children’s allowances,” Beveridge believed “acute poverty can be abolished at once; by no other means can it be abolished in any measurable time, if ever.”74 Family allowances, thus, became the social policy solution for poverty caused not only by family size but also by a wage system that discriminated against women and families. The implementation of the Beveridge Report by the Attlee governments created a system of social policy initiatives, described as welfare capitalism, designed to prevent the occurrence of such widespread poverty again. The core of this system was Keynesian economics and the welfare policies of the Beveridge Report, but Keynes’s notion of a minimum wage scaled to the social conditions of workers remained absent from the Labour government’s new Jerusalem.75

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Miles Taylor and James S. Donnelly, Jr.

NOTES


3. Social Insurance and Allied Services, a report by Sir William Beveridge (hereafter referred to as the Beveridge Report), Command Paper 6404 (London: HMSO, 1942; reprint, 1966), 154-58 (page references are to reprint edition). Interestingly, according to Jose Harris, “many of Beveridge’s ideas had been formulated and much of his report drafted before more than a fraction of evidence had been received.” Jose Harris, William Beveridge: A Biography (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1977), 413.


article “Eleanor Rathbone and the Economy of the Family,” 104-23. Martin Pugh considers the decline of feminism and the subsequent encouragement by the state of women’s domestic role as wives and mothers in his piece “Domesticity and the Decline of Feminism, 1930-1950,” 144-64. See also Martin Pugh, Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain, 1914-1959 (London: Macmillan, 1992), chaps. 5, 7, and 8.


13. Lewis, “Gender, the Family and Women’s Agency,” 38.


17. Inter-departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services (hereafter referred to as ICSIAS), The Scale of Social Insurance Benefits and the Problem of Poverty, memorandum by Sir William Beveridge to the War Cabinet, 16 January 1942, WBP VIII 28, BLPES.


28. Ibid., 156.
35. Beveridge, draft of “Children’s Allowances and the Race: Restoring the Breed,” 14 February 1943, WPB IX a 78, BLPES.
41. Ibid.
42. WGPW, *Our Towns*, 4.
43. *Britain and Her Birth-Rate*, 75.
46. Ibid., 209.
47. The most prevalent forms of wasteful spending were over-insurance for burial, extravagant hire-purchase agreements, use of the inferior type of clothing club, excessive spending on drink and tobacco, recourse to money lenders, betting and football pools, pawnning, expenditure on patent medicines and certain much advertised proprietary foods and sweets, “comics,” and pocket money for children. WPGW, *Our Towns*, 10.
48. Ibid., xviii.
50. CMC, *Memorandum on Milk*.
51. Ibid.
52. *Britain and Her Birth-Rate*, 134.
54. Titmuss and Titmuss, Parents Revolt, 121.
55. Rathbone, Family Allowances, 186.
56. Beveridge, draft of Family Census, Star, 4 January 1946, WBP IXa 81, BLPES.
57. Ibid.
59. WGPW, Our Towns, xvi-xvii.
60. Ibid.
61. Titmuss, Problems of Social Policy, 506.
62. Separation allowances also provided for the families of military personnel.
64. Family Allowances: Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Command Paper 6354 (London: HMSO, 1942), paragraph 2.
65. Ibid.
66. Keynes, How to Pay for the War, 39.
67. Ibid., 38.
68. Rathbone, Family Allowances, 32.
69. Keynes, How to Pay for the War, 39.
70. Rathbone, Family Allowances, 32.
71. Beveridge, notes, 14 February 1943, WBP IXa 78, BLPES.
72. Lord William Beveridge, epilogue to Rathbone, Family Allowances, 270.
73. Ibid.
74. ICSIAS, The Scale of Social Insurance Benefits.
“MANY DIVORCES AND MANY SPINSTERS”:
MARRIAGE AS AN INVENTED TRADITION
IN SOUTHERN MALAWI, 1946-1999

Amy Kaler

In the author’s 1999 interviews, elders in a district of southern Malawi insisted that the marriages of their children and grandchildren are a weakened and degenerate form of the marriages of their own youth. However, data from the 1940s shows that identical beliefs about marriage were held even then. Marriage is thus constantly presented as an institution in crisis, deteriorating from an Arcadian form located in the ever-receding past. The author uses an expansion of the notion of invented tradition to describe this historically consistent rhetorical presentation of marriage and suggests questions that this invented tradition presents for family historians.

The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.
—L. P. Hartley

This article is an essay on persistence and change in the way people think about marriage: at once a semisacred institution, a site of bitter conflict, and a lode of rhetorical and symbolic resources. I examine the complaints about contemporary marriage and laments for a vanished golden age of marriage that surface again and again in conversations in a district of southern Malawi over the course of fifty years. These complaints and laments are worthy of note, I argue, for two reasons: first, they persist across generations, showing remarkable continuity, while, second, the details of these laments change from generation to generation, which I argue is related to changes in the material and cultural circumstances of Malawian marriages. These consistent complaints about the present and invocations of the idyllic past are not merely descriptions of social reality. I claim—they are also an example of the “invention of tradition” within the domestic world of the family and also a diagnostic of the changing, but always unstable, relationships between the genders and the generations. One basis of
complaint succeeds another over the years, even as the perception of marriage as
unstable and degenerate remains consistent. In this article, I describe these changeable
yet consistent laments about marriage, and I suggest what new insights and expansions
of social theory are triggered by these persistent stories.

This phenomenon of complaint and lament is not limited to Malawi, of course. In
*The Way We Never Were*, Stephanie Coontz argues that Americans are in thrall to the
idea that once there existed a golden era of family life in the 1940s and 1950s, a state
from which families in the 1990s have sadly fallen. However, using historical informa-
tion on marriage, divorce, work, and child-rearing patterns, Coontz demonstrates that
this golden past of the family is a chimera. Families are always beleaguered and embat-
tled, she claims; family bonds have always strained under the demands of individual
desires as well as under economic and social imperatives.3 I found the same chimera of
harmonious family life on the other side of the world, in the upper west Shire area of
Malawi.4 As people do everywhere, those of upper west Shire, particularly the elderly,
tell and retell stories that explicitly and negatively contrast “life of nowadays” with
“life of the past” and that focus in particular on the sentimental lives of families and on
marriages.

Despite the popular portrayal of a golden past, anthropologists and other observers
consistently describe marriage in the matrilineal regions of southern Malawi as unsta-
ble and divorce as frequent, from the 1940s up to the present day.5 Speaking of the pres-
ent day, at the end of the 1990s, Morris claims that

> marriage in Malawi is a fragile institution and divorce is common. Many women in ru-
ral areas have a series of transient but stable partnerships, and all the women I know
well in Malawi . . . have had children by several different husbands or partners.6

Tavrow found that in Machinga district, only 55 percent of all women and 43 per-
cent of all men had been married only once and that among those age forty to
forty-nine, the oldest group in her sample, two-thirds had had more than one marriage.7
Other studies in upper west Shire have found similar rates of marital dissolution. In
2000, Schatz found that fifteen8 out of twenty-five, or 60 percent, of married women in
a purposive sample had been divorced at least once.9 In a comparative study of the
three main regions of Malawi, Zulu found that women in Chiradzulu, near upper west
Shire, were not only more likely than women in other regions to be currently divorced
but also were less likely to remarry after divorce and, among those who did remarry,
more likely to divorce a second time.10

Fifty years earlier, social anthropologist J. Clyde Mitchell, of the Rhodes
Livingston Institute, had come to similar conclusions about the fluxile nature of southern
Malawian marriages in upper west Shire. He found that between a third and a half
of marriages contracted by women “had been dissolved by divorce by the time the
childbearing period has ended” and that by the time a woman had finished childbear-
ing she had been married on average 1.7 times.11 Divorces were common at all ages;
even among women between the ages of twenty and thirty, there was an average of 0.45
divorces per woman (i.e., roughly one in two young women had been divorced).12
Mitchell attributed this to the tenuous position of husbands within largely matrilineal
villages.
Husbands are seen to be strangers. . . . Only a small proportion of a husband’s time is spent in the village into which he has married. While doing censuses I found that it was always difficult to get information about the husbands in the villages because they were frequently not there and very little was known about them, beyond the village from which they came.\(^\text{13}\)

Colonial officials also expressed concern about matriliny, which they held responsible for the high divorce rate. Their view was that that men were unwilling to invest effort to “improve” their wives’ villages or to work with their in-laws, when they could easily find themselves expelled.\(^\text{14}\) The unstable nature of southern Malawian marriages was thus defined as a problem for economic development.

Colonial officials were harsh and moralistic in their criticism of the people of southern Malawi, claiming that the Yao were “generally and distinctly immoral: ‘No man dare trust his wife out of sight for any length of time.’”\(^\text{15}\) Once colonial judicial systems had been established, court cases involving divorce, adultery, and other “misbehaviour” backlogged the court system.\(^\text{16}\)

Mair, in 1953, extended reports of the fluidity and fragility of marriage back into the past, claiming that

> there is a general consensus of opinion in this region [central Africa] that marriages have always been easily dissolved. Most modern writers indicate that the reasons which are held to justify divorce need not be weighty, and the procedure which makes it effective is not complicated.\(^\text{17}\)

These authors and others attribute the fragility of marriage to, inter alia, the internal stresses of matriliny, in which men are torn between their natal homes and the families that they have married into; the absence of bridewealth payments to seal the marriages; or cultural ideologies that stress the brother-sister tie over the weaker husband-wife tie (cf. Richards’s “matrilineal puzzle”).\(^\text{18}\) The relatively high status of women in matrilineal families, which enables them to cast off marriage if they decide the husband is undesirable,\(^\text{19}\) and the persistence of high rates of male out-migration in search of wages are also attributed to the fragility of marriage. Whatever the cause, the consensus is that marriage is casual and that husbands and wives come and go quite casually.

Marriage breakup, according to anthropologists, has always characterized Malawian marriages, at least as far back as research methods can reach. One might expect, then, that this apparently enduring feature of the southern Malawi social landscape would be recognized by the people who live there and would be considered normal or unchanging. However, as we shall see, elders today do not think that marriage fluidity was ever normal. Rather than acknowledging that ephemerality and atomization were normal characteristics of Malawian marriage, they insist that marriage as an institution is presently in a crisis situation. Those aspects of Malawian marriage that scholars\(^\text{20}\) have identified as persistent features of African nuptiality—the looseness of the marriage tie, the tendency for marriage relationships to be casual and impermanent—are described by these elders as pathological features specific to the present day, as a degeneration from an older norm of marriage. In contradiction to anthropological

---
observations of their lives, in which high divorce rates and fragile marriages are portrayed as the norm, Malawian elders claim that that during their childhood marriages were stable and long lasting. By contrast, they describe the state of marriage in the present, in 1999, as what I call a “degenerate institution,” a falling away from a prototypical state of grace located at some point in the past.

Moving backwards from the 1990s to the 1940s, in the archives of the Rhodes library at Oxford University, I read unpublished interviews conducted in the same region by J. Clyde Mitchell during the 1940s, during the childhood of those very people I interviewed in 1999. In these interviews, too, marriage is described as a degenerate institution. The 1940s interviewees also depicted marriage as riven with conflicts and individual misbehavior, and just like their children fifty years later, they claimed that marriage of their day was a degenerate institution, decayed from an even more distant pristine past. From these two sets of data, from the 1940s and 1999, I establish that marriage has always been perceived as an institution in trouble, that the very feature that anthropologists have identified as constant is always presented by Malawians themselves as a unique, historically specific crisis.

Once this is established, however, I must explain this consistency. The most obvious explanatory framework is modernization theory. In brief, modernization theorists would probably claim that the pressures of social and economic change since the 1940s and continuing on into the present have forced a trend toward nucleation and individuation within marriage, away from older norms of communalism and the importance of kin networks. A more pessimistic perspective on social change might label these processes not “modernization” but “war and colonialism.”

Yao tradition holds that the Yao came into the area now known as southern Malawi more than two hundred years ago, originating in what is now Mozambique. In the nineteenth century, the Yao encountered, first, the series of military and political shock waves initiated by the Zulus of southern Africa (known as the mfecane), which sent swarms of both invaders and refugees into Yao territory, and later, the advent of British colonialism (directed toward stamping out the slave trade and extracting taxes and labor). It is possible that these two forces may have pulled asunder strong family structures that existed before the mfecane and before colonialism. If this is true, then the complaints about modern marriage may be a way of harking back to a dimly remembered time, located sometime in the early nineteenth century or earlier, before the whites and the mfecane-linked invaders came.

Unfortunately, I have no evidence as to what upper Shire family life was like in this historical period. The written accounts that survive concern trade, local politics, and attempts to convert Africans to Christianity rather than such “unimportant” domestic matters as marriage, and I am not aware of any surviving oral accounts that deal with the period before the mfecane.21 Thus, while I cannot dismiss the possibility that this invocation of an Arcadian past for marriages reflects the actual state of affairs before the turbulence of the nineteenth century, I cannot support that possibility either.

Modernization and the quest for verifiable historic reality are not the only, nor even the best, lenses through which to view these complaints about marriage. Drawing from political sociology, I argue that Hobsbawm and Ranger’s concept of invented tradition and the idea of the usable past can shed light on why, in 1999, I heard substantially the same accounts of degeneracy that Mitchell heard fifty years earlier.
PERCEPTION OF MARRIAGES PRESENT AND PAST: 1999

This section is based mainly on interviews with thirty elders in the Kalembo Traditional Authority, in upper west Shire, supplemented by other interviews and focus groups conducted in the area. These elders were interviewed as a component of the Malawi Diffusion and Ideational Change (MDIC) project fieldwork in 1999. This set of interviews was piggybacked onto a larger set, which was aimed at learning how and why people talked to one another about HIV and family-planning issues, with selection based on a random sampling procedure (for details of the MDIC sampling method, see http://soda.pop.upenn.edu/networks/sampling_homepage.htm). For this larger project, four special interviewers accompanied project interviewers to the homes of their designated respondents and were instructed to seek out the oldest person in the household. The research instrument was an open-ended set of topics and questions to be raised with the respondents, all on the general theme of how life has changed between the respondent’s young adulthood and the young adulthood of the respondent’s children or grandchildren. Interviews were taped and then translated and transcribed in the field; the transcripts were later analyzed in Philadelphia with the assistance of Ethnograph software.

The people who have settled in the area since the nineteenth century are Yao by ethnicity, with significant Chewa, Lomwe, and Ngoni minorities. They are predominantly Moslem, and the Christians in the area tend to be more recent arrivals, dating from the 1930s. The Yao are potentially polygamous, but polygamy is reportedly on the decline in the area. In 1999, 87 percent described themselves as matrilineal (although these norms are changing). They farm family plots vested in the women of the family, with some cotton grown for market. This part of Malawi is considered to have slightly better infrastructure and institutions than the rest of the country as a result both of historical patterns of concentration of commercial agriculture and transport in the area (creating waged jobs and more disposable income for men) and the status of southern Malawi as the base of support for the current government, headed by a Moslem Yao, Bakili Muluzi, which is reportedly directing development money and projects into the area. However, other aspects of modernity, such as levels of education, are lower in the south than elsewhere in Malawi.

Presently, upper west Shire is not (superficially, at least) riven by political and economic crises to the extent of other parts of Africa or even of Malawi. Nonetheless, tensions, struggles, and conflicting moral claims on a domestic scale do occupy the attention of residents. In my work there, most of these tensions and conflicting moral claims focused on sexuality, specifically sexual misdemeanors, and the sexual irresponsibility of the young adults. In the section that follows, I draw from different research studies conducted by members of MDIC.

Based on focus groups interviews with village elders in two villages in the MDIC field site, Mtika found a great fear among these elders that their district was becoming tainted by the rising of uhule, translated as “sexual immorality culture.” They claimed that indiscriminate and commercialized sexual relations were much more common now than when they were young and feared that recent HIV prevention campaigns were pandering to this rise in uhule. In their youth, said the elderly men and women, sexual relations had “a moral bond attached to it, a social contract between partners embedded in cultural norms, beliefs and values of a local village or commu-
nity.” By contrast, at the close of the century, said one man, “sex among the young folks is like buying a bottle of Coke and drinking it.” The elders blamed young people’s unwillingness to rein in their sexual behavior for the impending epidemic of AIDS. One respondent claimed that

something has happened, something that makes it difficult for moral values that hold us together as respectable people to transfer from the older generation to the younger one. . . . Young people of these days no longer respect the elders’ wisdom [concerning sexual matters], young people say the elders do not know anything . . . . Our villages are dying because of such an attitude.

Young people are not afraid of death, said another man, and their lack of fear condemns the rest of us, as they have no inhibitions against unsafe sex: “They say to us that death, whether from AIDS or another cause, is death—as long as all of us will die, why worry? [and why bother with safer sex?]”

Mtika’s findings are corroborated by other MDIC research, in which both elders and young people repeatedly singled out sexual immorality as the main contentious issue (contrasting, as we shall see, with the issues singled out in the 1940s). Schatz interviewed a random sample of twelve couples in the area about marriage dynamics. When asked to tell a story about a marital dissolution that they knew of or, alternately, about why they believed that marriages were likely to fail nowadays, eight of the twelve told stories or offered explanations that foregrounded sexual infidelity or other forms of sexual misbehavior, as opposed to other potential bones of contention such as financial mismanagement or arguments with in-laws. The following example is from a woman of unknown age (but probably in her thirties):

Interviewer: When do you think divorces are more common, these days or in the past?
Respondent: These days.
Interviewer: . . . But what are these disagreements, why are there more divorces these days than in the past?
Respondent: . . . you know men are very difficult to live with, it is unlike women, because if the husband hears rumours about the wife, bad rumours, you will find the husband leaving his wife.
Interviewer: What rumours?
Respondent: For example, if the husband has been told the wife had sex with another man.
Interviewer: Oh, that means you’ve the confidence [you believe that] women these days are not faithful to their husbands, they sleep with other men apart from their husbands.
Respondent: Oh yes, now if the husband hears this, chaos breaks up. Yes, that can cause divorce.
Interviewer: So why is it that women are not faithful to their husband these days?
Respondent: Men are also to blame. . . . These women do so after getting rumours that the husband is also moving with another lady.
The respondent went on to say that the first of her two divorces had been precipitated by infidelity, by her discovery that her husband was sleeping with another woman while she herself was pregnant.

Another woman, thirty-four years old, also claimed that divorce was common and adultery was the main cause.

Respondent: Our old people were the ones who enjoyed marriage and not these days, there are divorces these days.
Interviewer: Why do you think it is like that?
Respondent: It is because of the youth.
Interviewer: What about the youth, what is wrong with them?
Respondent: The youth of today, they just live as if they are not married, moving around with other boys and girls.
Interviewer: So is it possible for a wife to know that her husband has got a girlfriend?
Respondent: Very possible.
Interviewer: So what happens next?
Respondent: The wife may start her own things, she may start moving around with other men.
Interviewer: So what happens when the husband knows?
Respondent: It's when the divorce comes now.

In my own open-ended interviews with elders about perceptions of social change, complaints about sexual misbehavior take up more space than any other topic. Similar concerns surfaced in focus groups conducted by Agnes Kavinya with gender-separated, age-mixed groups of men and women, in which unrestrained sex and bad behavior within marriage was associated both with “nowadays” and also with domestic problems that beset the participants’ families. For example, in one focus group, participants tied the problem of having too many children to sexual misbehavior.

Respondent 1: People, especially girls of these days, are not afraid of men.
Moderator: Should we say the main problem is women?
Respondent 2: Yes, it’s the women who start it all.
Moderator: What do others think? Is it true that women of these days do not control themselves so much?
Respondent 3: Yes, it’s true, that’s why you see some people are giving birth to children without enough spacing in between.
Moderator: Don’t you think this is happening because men of these days are more troublesome when it comes to sex than men of those days?
Respondent 3: This happens because both of the people lack self-control, unlike in the past when our fathers and mothers were controlling themselves. (Women’s focus group, May 8, 1997)

In my own interviews as well, elders asserted unanimously that the institution of marriage had deteriorated from what they remembered from their youth. They located this deterioration along two parameters, which I have named ephemerality and atomization.
In talking about ephemerality, elders focused on the beginning and the ends of unions. Young people entered into marriage on a whim, they said, without observing the proper protocol, and ended their marriages just as easily, divorcing their partners rather than trying to work through the inevitable slings and arrows of marriage. Entry into marriage was not taken seriously and was becoming increasingly casual and informal. Young people might or might not have more stresses on their marriages than their parents did, but they lacked the stamina to persevere through difficulties. They claimed that in their youth being married and being single were two discrete states, and they criticized the young people of today for blurring the distinction and drifting in and out of ephemeral marriages. Thirty-five percent of the elders spoke at length about their perception that modern marriages were more ephemeral than those of the past.

The marriages of long ago were not coming to an end anyhow for any minor reason while those nowadays can end anywhere, whether at the market or where people have met, it can end there. Once they have quarreled once, the marriage comes to an end, while long ago the marriage comes to an end for real [i.e., nontrivial] reasons.

In the past marriages could quarrel, but everything ended inside the house, but today you can’t do it [quarrel] twice, and he [the husband] could leave.

In contrast, elders claimed they had stayed with their own marriages despite difficulties.

Some marriages [today] do live for only two days, then you hear that the marriage has come to an end. After two days you could hear that they have been divorced, but in the past we could be staying for long. Yes. We got married when I was fourteen, and he [her husband] has passed away this year.

Elders contrasted the ease of terminating modern marriages with their own memories of the process to be followed when a marriage was coming to an end. Nowadays, they said, husbands and wives often decided to break up the marriage in a fit of pique, whereas in the old days, couples had followed rituals and procedures designed to slow down the pace of dissolution and get both parties to reflect on whether or not the marriage was beyond saving.

Marriage in the past was very difficult to end anyhow [on a whim], because there were many different issues to be discussed before the end. You had to consult the [traditional] courts. But marriages of today, they just end anyhow, any time you want you can be going home [i.e. returning to one’s natal home]. . . . Quarreling, even in those old marriages we had quarrels. Someone got angry. If you called advisors, they said, “If you quarrel in your house, do not say ‘I am not going to follow to your garden,’ do not say that, but go [together], one digging here and another there, and you will be happy with each other when the garden is completely dug.” [Interviewer: So today this can’t happen?] Mmh, if you quarrel for two days, the husband will say “I am going!” “Where are you going, my husband?” “Oh, you are not the only woman! [i.e., I am going to look for another wife.]” Then that marriage has ended. In the old days, we could forgive each other.

As with the ending of marriage, the beginning of marriage was also described as problematic. Young people were said to marry each other “anyhow,” without consideration for the weightiness of marriage and without following appropriate formalities.
Some elders even claimed that a casual promise in the marketplace or on the road was now considered tantamount to a wedding.

Today’s boys can’t be told to build a house before they sleep together with their wife. They just say “I am taking her to my parents,” and we tell them, if you have loved [had sex with] the girl, go with her. [Interviewer: Which ways are today’s girls using when they want to get married, do they tell you that you may know that they are getting married?] They do what they want, not as we were doing. This is so because they take the man home before they tell elders, they don’t know his [their future husbands’] heart, but they just say, “come home with me.” And we just look and say “this one is doing things on her own,” so we tell the man, “Take the girl to your home.” Because if we say, “We don’t want such behavior,” they will say, “They don’t want us to get married.”

Elders also located changes in marital patterns along a second parameter, which I call atomization. This term refers to the shifting locus of decision making about nuptiality away from the extended family and the elders and into the hands of the youth. Young people, say the elders, make their marriage arrangements and settle their marriage affairs on their own, without the involvement or even the knowledge of their elders and other family members. The circle of participants in decision making about marriage, in other words, has shrunk from the wide circle of elders, relatives, and parents to a circle of two, the man and the woman.

Elders also located changes in marital patterns along a second parameter, which I call atomization. This term refers to the shifting locus of decision making about nuptiality away from the extended family and the elders and into the hands of the youth. Young people, say the elders, make their marriage arrangements and settle their marriage affairs on their own, without the involvement or even the knowledge of their elders and other family members. The circle of participants in decision making about marriage, in other words, has shrunk from the wide circle of elders, relatives, and parents to a circle of two, the man and the woman.

The atomization of modern marriages was said to begin at the very beginning, with young people arranging their own marriages without the involvement of parents. Their elders complained that they were being sidestepped by young people when it came to arranging marriages.

In the past, there was no saying “Go in such and such a direction and we will meet each other on that road, you, I want to marry you,” there wasn’t. The way you [the interviewer] have come [i.e., a young man approaching a family compound on his own] is not the way of starting a marriage. You should have been sent by somebody, perhaps your young brother has sent you, saying “go there and propose to a lady for me.” And it went well with full respect.

Long ago, if you wanted to marry, there were some customs here at home. When you found a partner, people from your relatives could go to that girl’s relatives and there they could find ankhoswe to witness the marriage, and if there was chicken they could slaughter it and eat it together and celebrate the marriage. . . . And the parents said, “My child should marry this person,” based on the work that the family was doing [i.e., evaluating how hard working their prospective in-laws appeared to be], the parents only. And that marriage would last longer, that one which the parents chose.

Even when young people were legitimately married, elders worried that they were being cut out of the decision-making processes within the family, in a pronounced disjunction from the past. The flow of advice between old and young had been dammed because of the reluctance of young people to listen.

The marriages of the past and that of nowadays are quite different, because the women of the past were good followers to advice given by their parents. But those of nowadays don’t follow the advice given by their parents, whatever they are told not to do is exactly what they do. Is this a real marriage? Not at all! . . . In the past they were able to
understand their parents’ advice. If told not to move [to leave their homes], they didn’t move, but nowadays if told, “Do not leave, I am coming to visit,” that’s when they move, leaving the house empty. And is this fair? That’s the difference. . . . The people of today are deaf to understand good advice from the parents.

It is important to note what elders were not complaining about. They were not complaining about insufficient flows of material and economic resources from their children (at least not in the interview setting) but rather about a decreased flow of attentiveness and respect from youths to elders. Although the interview guide provided ample opening for elders to complain about economic nucleation and about the concentration of material resources among the nuclear families of the young, not one respondent did so. All focused instead on the psychological and symbolic aspects of a shift toward nuclear families. Thirty-eight percent of the elders spoke at length about their belief that atomization of families was more prevalent than in the past.

One might wonder whether these opinions are a reflection of the curmudgeonlyness of the elderly or whether they reflect more widespread views on the degeneracy of modern marriage. From interviews with a random selection of twelve married couples of all ages, it appears that the idea of Arcadian marriages in the past is a robust one, shared across age groups. Of the twelve people interviewed, when asked to compare the rate of divorces “nowadays” with the rate “in the past,” all but one claimed that there were more divorces nowadays. As one young woman in her thirties said, “Our parents were living together for a long time, but in our age, ah! Now there are many divorces and there are many spinsters.” Another man of roughly the same age blamed the degeneration of marriage on the “youths of today”:

There are lots of divorces these days, but they are mainly among the youths . . . the youths of today are very self-centered. They cannot hear what they are told so when there are disagreements they just do things in their own way . . . the stubbornness of youth, they cannot be told what to do.

Still another blamed the decline of marriage on the fact that “the world has come to an end” and young people’s hearts were “full of devils.”

PERCEPTIONS OF MARRIAGES PRESENT AND PAST: LATE 1940s

In these 1999 interviews, elders counterposed the disintegration of marriages today with their idealized version of the past. As the quotations above demonstrate, the past is defined as a time when marriages were stable, orderly, and long lasting. If marriages today are depicted as a nexus of contemporary pressures and problems, marriages in the past are depicted as stable and timeless, governed by “our culture” rather than by the forces of modern life. However, if we look at surviving evidence of marriages of the past, we get a distinct sense of familiarity. The residents of upper west Shire fifty years ago complained about the same breakups, breakdowns, and failures that the grandchildren claimed were peculiar to the life of “nowadays,” the turn of the twenty-first century.

Southern Malawi in the 1940s was different from southern Malawi today. Mitchell characterized the terrain as well watered and generally rich and the local standard of
living as high by central African standards. However, signs of soil exhaustion and deterioration were beginning to appear, and deforestation was becoming apparent. As a consequence of this and, more important, as a consequence of the British curtailing activities such as warfare and slave trading at the beginning of the century, young men were increasingly likely, in Mitchell’s time, to venture south to South Africa or west to what was then Southern Rhodesia in search of work. Since 1893, all families had been subject to a hut tax, which typically led young men out to work in the mines or, during the Second World War, to enlist in the King’s African Rifles (KAR).

Signs of goods procured through migrant labor were scattered throughout the homes in the area; while large objects such as furniture as well as most implements were made locally, some households “sported tea sets, steamer trunks, and wardrobes of European clothing.” This inventory is consistent with the unpublished notes and interviews of Mitchell’s research assistants, in which trunks and boxes, clothes, sets of utensils, and especially cloth and clothes were frequently mentioned as goods brought back by returning laborers.

Labor migration had increased sharply after the mid-1930s when the world boom in cotton prices, which had enabled men to raise money for hut taxes without leaving home, abruptly ended. The colonial Postwar Development Commission estimated that by the mid-1940s, approximately 40 percent of the able-bodied men were out of the country, either in the British Armed Forces or working as migrant laborers in the countries to the south. Men in upper Shire region were somewhat less likely to migrate than men in the lower Shire, but offsetting this tendency is the fact that the upper Shire area was known for its exceptionally high rates of recruitment into the KAR.

Labor migration and its causes, consequences, and complications have preoccupied social historians of southern Africa since the days of the Rhodes Livingstone Institute. Why men chose to go to towns and mines, what they did there, how they forged and reforged cultural bonds, and how they tried to create relationships with people in their rural homes have been the subject of much anthropological and sociological inquiry from the 1930s to the present. However, most of what we know about labor migration has followed the male migrant in his peregrinations, focusing on the migrant leaving home, being in the workplace, and returning home. Mitchell’s notes give us a somewhat different perspective on labor migration by providing a window on the ways that male migration, and its presence in the forms of goods and money, stirred up problems in households back in rural areas.

In the middle of the twentieth century, tensions within households centered on control over the labor of young men. The colonial government was demanding a hut tax that could only be paid by young men leaving the area in search of paid work, but at the same time, women and elders tried to lay claims on the services of their sons and husbands in order to cultivate the plots at home. Davison locates these dynamics within an ongoing process of disempowerment of women and elders, relative to young men. She argues that before colonial rule took firm hold in the early twentieth century women had been slowly losing control of family land to slave traders and to forced resettlement, following on the heels of local wars. A boom in the marketing of cotton in the first few decades buffered the tensions in families, but by the time Mitchell arrived on the scene, many young men had left their natal and marital families to seek money elsewhere. As in the 1990s, households in the 1940s were the sites of debates over proper behavior of family members. However, while in the 1990s these debates focused on
sex and sexual morality, in the 1940s these debates were not about sex so much as money.

In the opinions of those left behind in the villages, many young men were not nearly as consistent and dutiful as they should be in sending money back or in providing for the needs of their relatives in the extended family as well as the wants of their wives and children. In Mitchell’s files in Oxford, many interviews and notes are taken up with accounts of family disharmony centering on the moral failures of young men to provide for their maternal kin as well as their nuclear families. A few examples follow.

There was a woman who was living with her brother ccJohn. When he was living there John went to work [in town] and after a month he brought a cloth to give to his child Cesululu. When he brought the cloth his sister said “Why do you buy a cloth for your child when I cook your food for you?” She bought some medicine [poison] to give to the child. John took his sister to Cemponda [the chief]. Cemponda said that this was very bad and chased her to PEA [Portuguese East Africa].

Awesi Binti Ndala went to Salisbury with her husband CheSaidi. Binti Ndala and her husband took goods and when they got to their home the young brother of CheSaidi began to speak [bad gossip] saying, “All the goods he merely gives to his wife, he does not give it to us, he does not give us a bicycle. If we beg it from him he refuses.” [The jealous siblings put a curse on Saidi’s child, who dies.]

There are some parents when a man has married their daughter, even if he gives them politeness and does everything for them they will despise him but he does not do anything [wrong]. The parents want only money from the man. A man who has been under employment, they expect some money and clothes from him, fish, soap and other goods and other things such as meat that they call him a good man. The one who only goes hoeing [i.e., stays at home and farms] they call him a fool because he does not earn anything else.

In one particularly gruesome account of family tensions caused by the inflow of goods and resources caused by young men’s labor migration, titled “Binti Liwewe died because of goods from Salisbury,” a young wife is reported to be angry with her mother-in-law because her husband has given his mother goods that the wife thought should rightfully be hers:

I do not know what to do with that spouse of mine. When I grumble, I merely grumble. To be poor here because my husband has taken the goods to his mother’s village, what is the sense or meaning of that?

The wife decides to poison her mother-in-law, who dies.

These tensions over money and resources are mirrored in patterns of marital disruption. Such disruption seems to have come to a head with the great famine of 1949, as reported in Megan Vaughan’s account of the famine in nearby Blantyre district. Blantyre district lies south of Kalombe, where my 1999 interviews were conducted, and it is possible that Vaughan’s interviews are not completely generalizable to the upper west Shire. However, the entire Shire region was badly affected by the famine, and the economic and ethnic mix (predominantly Yao, Ngoni, and Lomwe) is much the same.

Under the stress of the food shortages, families atomized and marriages vanished. Indeed, the “role of marital relations in shaping the pattern of suffering” characterizes
the accounts of the women Vaughan interviewed about the famine. The collapse and failure of marriages are memorialized in songs sung while pounding maize, in which women recount their husbands’ behavior during the famine, “praising them for their exemplary behaviour, or (much more frequently) berating them for their neglect.”

Their songs were “critical of men and cynical about marriage.”

We have suffered this year
Our men are divorcing us.
Oh, what shall we do with this hunger?

Women said that they had been abandoned, that their husbands had either returned to their natal villages to seek food from their mothers or sisters or migrated in search of places where they could work for food. Those who did find food cooked and ate it alone, secretly or in the dark, so that their wives and children could not ask for their share. In their songs about these events, “women stress how frequently they were abandoned by men, how harrowing it was to be left responsible for their suffering and dying children, how they became sterile and how they were humiliated by the [government-run] feeding system.” In effect, “the primary family unit [i.e., a man, his wife, and their children] was often pulled asunder.”

However, the 1949 famine was clearly an exceptional time. Could the extraordinary privations of the famine explain the problems in marriage at that time? In other words, are the pounding songs about the badness of husbands anomalous cultural artifacts rather than part of a historical continuity in the evaluation of marriages as troubled and crisis ridden? Vaughan herself thinks that this may not be the case. She believes that the complaints about marriage heard in 1949 are an attenuated version of ongoing problems and tensions, not something new.

Evidence from relatively more normal times earlier in the 1940s supports this conclusion. Even apart from the anomalous events of the famine, marriages were subject to high rates of dissolution, and most important for my argument, marriage was perceived as an institution that had degenerated from an idealized past, located somewhere back around the turn of the century.

Mitchell’s notes and interviews, collected before 1949, provide evidence of widespread complaints about marriage and link these complaints to conflicts over the distribution of goods and remittances produced through male migration. While Mitchell, heavily influenced by structural anthropology, was primarily interested in schematizing kinship norms and in studying the changes in the roles of local political leaders since the beginning of British rule, he also collected notes and stories, recorded on slips of paper, on an eclectic variety of topics. His collection methods would not meet the standards of present-day ethnography or oral history: respondents are often not identified, and often no indication is given as to gender or age; no attempt is made to consider the production of their stories or the circumstances under which they were interviewed; and the material collected is biased toward normative accounts of “our Yao culture” or “the way things are” rather than personal experiences. Nonetheless, Mitchell’s collected accounts do provide some insight into a world in which marriages were unstable and, most important, in which the institution of marriage was constructed as being in crisis, as a symbol for all the troubles and discontents of the modern times of the 1940s.
The next evidence from Mitchell that I will consider is his reports of the cases heard in the lower courts, presided over by chiefs at the village level. He sent observers to courts in several villages to observe what cases were being heard and how the troubles were being resolved, presumably in order to get a sense of the prevalent lines of fissure and discontent in the community. The courts where his assistants observed were first-line courts, which could impose limited sanctions (fines not exceeding £1 and imprisonment not exceeding one month). The most serious cases, which could involve penalties such as hard labor or whipping, were taken to more senior courts.

Of the cases that ended up in the lower courts, more involved marriage breakdown than any other cause. In the case of Chiwalo court, twenty-four out of fifty-two cases observed by Mitchell’s assistant were marriage divorce cases due to adultery (in addition to several other divorces involving different kinds of marital misbehavior, such as rudeness to one’s mother-in-law or not paying the hut tax for one’s wife). This evidence stands in contradiction to elders’ assertions in 1999 of the frequent disruption of marriage that they saw around them. Husbands, wives, and members of extended families brought these cases to the chief, complaining about their spouses, and in the case of women, they often had a new partner waiting in the wings while they divorced the former spouse. The following cases are typical:

4.12.44 Kalalijiof Chiwalo committed adultery with the wife of a lascar. This woman is a soldier’s wife, the woman bore a son. Then Mpweleje (husband) came to the court to speak his case. Kalalijji was asked, he said “I have no words to say, I have done wrong. Please charge me, I have married this wife [slept with a woman who was married to another man].” The wife was asked, “What do you want?” She said, “I do not want a soldier of KAR, I want a new husband.” The chief said, “Kalaliji, you are bad. Why have you taken a wife of Mpweleje?” Kalaliji was told to pay two pounds [compensation], fined 10 shillings, wife to pay 8 shillings.

11.2.45 Ajusa married a woman, the sister of Jaki. Then Ajusa went to Southern Rhodesia. When he came back he found his wife having a baby. When he came to the court Jaki said, “I do not want my brother in law to marry my sister.” The wife said, “I do not want the old one.” Ajusa said, “I am not the owner [father] of the baby.” Jaki was charged 2 pounds and fined five shillings.

17.9.44 Jafali took the wife of Saidi, Saidi went to the court to speak a case [to bring a charge against Jafali]. When the case was being spoken, the wife was asked, “What do you think?” Then she said, “I want a new husband, I do not want the old husband.” So Jafali was charged 2 pounds and the fine was 8 shillings, the wife’s fine was three shillings.

As in the case of drought stories, it could be argued that these accounts of divorce at the chiefs’ courts are anomalous, that they represent extreme cases rather than the norm. However, Mitchell’s calculations of divorce rates among women in the villages he studied extensively suggest that such divorces were common experiences. The original survey response forms from Mitchell’s genealogical surveys, housed in the Rhodes Library, also bear this out, as many men (though fewer women) report up to five divorces in their married lives preceding the survey in 1947. Because only a fraction of Mitchell’s village surveys survive, it is impossible to aggregate these to the regional or district level or to be sure that the village records that survive are representative.
However, the evidence strongly suggests that divorce was commonplace. For example, in Bidi Mkula village, a small hamlet, the fourteen adults of marriageable age (e.g., older than eighteen) recorded twenty marriages to one another and to people who were absent from the village, of which seven had already ended in divorce when Mitchell’s surveyors came calling. In the slightly larger village of Mlungu, twenty-seven adults had had forty-two marriages, resulting in fourteen divorces. In Majaja, an even larger village, thirty-seven adults reported forty marriages and sixteen divorces (including one man in his early forties who had had five marriages and four divorces).

Marriages ending in divorces and atomized marriages arranged by the young people themselves thus appear to be common in the old days. Yet the words of the men and women of those days, taken down by Mitchell, suggest that, just as in the 1990s, marriage was viewed as an institution in crisis. Mitchell’s respondents castigate the marriage “of the present day” and claim that it represents a deviation from the “pure” marriage of the past. Mitchell’s informants also describe marriages of the 1940s as having become ephemeral, unsecured by ties of family and kin. Like their counterparts in 1999, they complain about the number of young people who get married “nowadays” without the involvement of marriage witnesses and about young men and women who set up house together on their own, over the objections of their families. For example, a local teacher told Mitchell,

Long long ago the boys and girls respected each other, a boy or a girl was ashamed to talk with each other, but nowadays the boys and girls are not ashamed to have intercourse, they can seduce girls in public. Also those old times nobody could be allowed to marry a girl in the village without the consent of the witness of that marriage, but nowadays every person, if he goes to Zomba [the capital city] he can marry there. That is because the boys and girls of today do what they want. A girl if she wants to be married she can go to the market or just in the road and meet there a boy and ask him, “Do you want to marry me?” The boy can say, “Yes, I do want to marry you but I am afraid of your parents.” The girl says, “Let us go home, I will tell my parents that I want this boy and they will not forbid me.”

The teacher went on to tell a complex tale of how this modern girl would go on a hunger strike if her parents continued to object or would run away to South Africa with the boy. These actions would in turn cause hatred and problems within the family, leading to the breakdown of the extended family at the hands of the young people’s conjugal unit. According to an interview with “Bwanga,” “The young people of today do not like to bear children but to be barren and to be a prostitute . . . [and] they break their marriages.”

By contrast, said other interviewees, the women of “long ago” were “meek”; they were “staying without marrying until they were fully grown,” rather than going around to dances without the permission of their relatives. These women of the past “had a very good heart and were patient too” because “they were accustomed to wearing bark clothes,” rather than the elaborate clothes that women “nowadays,” in the 1940s, insisted on. Another informant claimed that nowadays, unlike in the past, “There is no [married] woman who does not steal [in this context, covet goods brought by men] and have intercourse with [other] men.”

The respondents of the 1940s blamed the resources flowing into their communities as remittances from male migrant workers for causing atomization and encouraging
young people to run their marriages without reference to the wishes of their kin.70 Quarrels within families over who should have the clothes, bicycles, and other goods brought back by young men could pit wife against mother-in-law, son against father-in-law. According to Mitchell’s informants, young couples decided to move out on their own71 or at least to separate themselves from their relatives (and, in the view of most informants, to abandon their responsibility to share the benefits of wage employment with all the members of the family). This atomization resulted not in court cases, as the divorce cases cited earlier suggest, but in gossip, backbiting, bad feelings, and family feuds.

**DISCUSSION**

We have here two sets of accounts of marriages—one from the 1940s and one from the 1990s. How are we to understand the similarities and the differences between these accounts? One might, as Mitchell did, adopt a modernization perspective on family change. Setting himself up in opposition to the other sociologists and anthropologists of his day, who believed in a timeless and essentially unchanging African way of life, Mitchell claimed that village life was being transformed gradually and inexorably as a result of modern wage economies, modern towns, and modern goods. From such a theoretical perspective, one could claim that these two sets of accounts are both reflections of the same generations-long process of stress and strain on marriage brought about by the forces of modernization, including wage earning, integration into wider commodity circuits, and attendant cultural changes. Modernization is rarely considered to be an overnight process, so it is reasonable to think that the stresses of modernization would be felt over the longue durée and that families from the 1940s up to the 1990s would complain of its effects.

Goode is the best-known proponent of this idea, arguing that as a result of global economic processes involving the ascendancy of the market and attendant cultural changes, family forms all over the world would tend to converge toward a nuclear fluid-entry/fluid-exit form—the processes that my respondents identified as atomization and ephemerality.72 Goode was an optimist and believed that these changes pointed the way to a better age, a world of individual success and the elimination of the drag of tradition.73 His optimism is not shared by those who followed him in studying modernization and the family nor by the people of southern Malawi, who perceived atomization and ephemerality as signs of decline. However one may interpret the telos of modernization, the identification of modernity and modernization with marriage disruption is certainly consistent with Goode’s ideas.74

A modernization perspective would also be consistent with the way that my informants saw themselves and others. The overarching aim of my interviews was to find out “How is life today the same or different from life of the past?” and informants overwhelmingly claimed that there was much more change than continuity between “nowadays” and “when you were a young man [or] woman.” References to modern times, to the times of chitukuko (development and progress) rather than the old days of ukapolo (suffering or “slavery”) abounded in interviews. Modernization was the dominant local trope for social change, be it good or bad.75

However, a modernization perspective cannot explain why people in southern Malawi consistently represent the marriage as a degenerate institution, one that has fallen off from a supposed golden norm in the past, rather than simply a dysfunctional
or stressful one. Why, in the 1990s, was the past constructed as a time of stable and harmonious marriages, when evidence from the 1940s suggests that those qualities of stability and consistency attributed to marriages were not present? Modernization theory cannot adequately explain why elders from the 1940s to 1990s construct this fictive past at the same time as bemoaning the state of marriage in the present.

With the use of concepts borrowed from political science, I believe we can explain the construction of this fictive past from the perspective of both the 1940s and the 1990s. It has been constructed, I argue, because it is usable in the present, and its utility lies in its status as an invented tradition. Hobsbawm defined invented tradition as a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules, which seek to inculcate certain values or norms of behavior by repetition which automatically implies continuity with the past. . . . They normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historical past. 76

Hobsbawm distinguishes the concept of custom, which “dominates so-called ‘traditional societies,’”77 from tradition. Custom, he claims, is action based on precedent, in which actors repeat actions that they claim have been handed down from times past and are therefore invested with rightness and authority. While the elders I interviewed used the vocabulary of custom when they talked about marriage and when they invoked the degeneracy of marriage, I believe that their rhetorical action, in speaking of modern marriage as a degenerate institution and contrasting it with marriage in an idealized past, is closer to Hobsbawm’s definition of invented tradition than to his definition of custom. Custom is essentially just a repeated act; a tradition, in contrast, is a repeated act that explicitly refers to a past, with implications for the present. The repeated invocation of this story of idealized marriage in the past versus degenerate marriage today fits into this definition. The rhetorical act of telling and retelling this story both invokes and deploys an imagined past, not to glorify the present or to overwhelm some other account of the past, as in most accounts of invented tradition, but to express some very domestic grievances in the present.

The practice of inventing tradition is well established in southern African history. Martin Chanock, for example, claims that the body of prohibitions and strictures known as customary law in Malawi and Zambia did not spring from time-honored practice but was substantially created through the interaction between local chiefs and colonial administrators, as the administrators were seeking to codify local customs into something paralleling British law. Chiefs took advantage of this opportunity to define “custom” to the British in ways that were most advantageous to themselves as chiefs, men, and elders—for example, by claiming that it was traditional for women and youths to remain almost entirely subservient to men and elders or for chiefs to hold power over allocating land and other resources. The consequence, says Chanock, was that “custom” was redefined as “rights to service, particularly of women.”78

Chanock claims that this tendency to reinvent “African tradition” was particularly pronounced with respect to marriage and family issues in the earliest period of white administration at the beginning of the twentieth century. Elders, for instance, would claim that the payment of substantial bride-price had always been part of their tradition and would call on the colonial administration to enforce these payments and to punish young husbands who would not pay up, despite evidence that bridewealth had not been historically practiced by all ethnic groups, particularly not by matrilineal ones. 79 Yet it
suited both the chiefs and the colonial administration to behave as if bridewealth was truly customary—the chiefs because, as fathers of marriageable women, bridewealth enhanced their own wealth, and the administration because earning bridewealth was seen as a way of stabilizing families and curbing tendencies toward immorality among young women, whose husbands would exercise tighter control over their wives if they had paid for them. As Jane Parpart, in a review of Chanock, puts it, “Rural African elders used the myth of a stable past to assist them in their quest to control increasingly independent young men and women.”80 This dovetailed neatly with the colonial administrators’ own interests in maintaining a stable hierarchy in the rural areas. As a consequence, customary law, as it was codified and written down by the British, and as it is upheld even today, does not necessarily reflect actual patterns of practice in past years. “Custom,” says Chanock, reflects attempts by elder men to “knit together the tearing social fabric” in the face of their obstreperous sons and daughters, and colonial officials’ connivance.81

While the invention of customary family law is similar to the invention of the golden age of marriage, the complaint-and-lament cycle that I have described here differs from the processes described by Chanock and by Hobsbawm and Ranger in two important aspects. First, to appreciate how complaints and laments about marriage could be considered an invented tradition, we must take the notion of invented tradition out of the realm of the public political spectacle and place it into the realm of the home and family, of chatting and domestic conversation. These complaints about degenerate marriage produced in domestic spaces are speech acts rather than material artifacts. They contrast with Hobsbawm and Ranger’s examples of invented traditions—the kilts of the Highland Scots, the paraphernalia of judges, or the elaborate pseudo-English dais erected for the visit of the viceroy to India. These things are all easily visible physical objects and spectacles, unlike the complaints about degenerate marriages, which are acts of speech. Stories about how married people “in the old days” did not quarrel are obviously not as concrete as kilts and judges’ wigs; however, these repeated speech acts fulfill much the same function in that they conjure and refer to a particular version of the past.

The traditions that elders invented are not the formalized public spectacles that Hobsbawm and Ranger documented but a more domestic tradition—the nostalgic notion of the “good marriage,” located in the past and contrasting with “degenerate marriage” nowadays, whenever nowadays may be. Just as the Scottish patriots and national boosters of the nineteenth century, with their creation of the tartan as a symbol of Scotland’s proud history, created a past that most likely never existed, so too the complaints about marriage in southern Malawi create a past that may or may not be historically true.

Second, the construction of degenerate marriage as an invented tradition refers not to the supposedly glorious past of a nation or state but to a supposedly glorious domestic past. To date, most historians have talked of invented tradition in terms of attempts at nation building. Traditions, they argue, are invented to create a glorious shared past, when it would be politically expedient to have one or to justify the oppression of a perceived other when, again, it is expedient for some interest group to have that other suppressed.82 However, the nation-state is not the only arena in which tradition inventing goes on. By extending the notion of invented tradition to encompass rhetorical artifacts such as the invocation of the good marriages of the past counterposed with the bad marriages of the present, we domesticate this concept, extending its range from the
public sphere of nation building and nation creating to the private sphere of marriage and family relations.

This invention of a past filled with good marriages is also carried out in a wider range of spaces and settings than the spectacles of public performance and symbolism captured by Hobsbawm and Ranger. This particular tradition is invented and reproduced in public settings such as weddings and funerals, in the marketplace, and in homes and private spaces in which men and women chat about the way of the world. In addition to ranging across public and private settings for its enactment, it is invented equally by women and men, unlike the nationalist spectacles chronicled in Hobsbawm and Ranger. Women, as much as men, talked about their perception of young people out of control and the loss of the golden days of marriage. Both men and women use the rhetoric of marriage as a degenerate institution as a way of making moral claims on the present as well as talking about the past.

CONCLUSION

What can we learn from this tale of marriage as an institution always in crisis, always in a state of deterioration from what it had been in the past? Most obviously, it tells us that we should not take local nostalgia and local stories of a serene and harmonious past at face value. Whether in the 1940s or the 1990s, marriage is always presented as something that used to be better, something that is now a corrupt version of a pure prototype. Just as the elaborate kinship schemata of the structuralist anthropologists such as Mitchell do not map perfectly onto the messy and complex lives of actual people, as can be seen by revisiting his data, so too present-day accounts of how “the marriages of the past were the true marriages” do not map onto accounts drawn from that past.

Above and beyond this caveat, I believe there are three main things that we can gain from these stories. First, these accounts can help us liberate the use of the conceptual tool of invented tradition from being solely associated with nation building and political history. The persistence complaints about degenerate marriages, and the consistent rhetorical performances of these complaints across the generations, suggest an expansion of the notion of invented tradition. Because this particular tradition is enacted through rhetoric and in conversation, it lacks the spectacular and concrete aspects of more widely known invented traditions. In contrast, the tradition of “good” marriage located in the infinitely receding past is not a tradition manifested in formalized public ceremonies. In contrast, this invented tradition is located in domestic spaces such as homes and family conversations as well as in public discourse.

Second, I believe that this evidence of bad marriages and bad behavior suggests that marriage (and the relations of heterosexuality that marriages formalize) is inherently unstable. The bases of this instability may change over time, but what does not change is the fact that marriage is always a contested terrain, always subject to shattering, decay, or bad behavior. This should lead us to define marriage and heterosexuality as permanently beleaguered, shaky institutions. What may appear to be a crisis in the institution of marriage, amid widespread reports of degeneration and decay, should more properly be viewed as a constant, normal state.

The evidence I have presented here suggests that the most significant shift in marriage troubles is from a locus of a distributional issue to a locus of sexual impropriety. In the 1940s, complaints about marriage were very likely to be related to the distribu-
tion of resources, money, and material goods, especially those procured through labor migration and military service. Marriage breakdowns were attributed to these problems, produced by the inflow of goods and money from young men and the disagreements among family members that these provoked, especially in the context of competing claims between nuclear-family member and extended-family members. In contrast, today, marriage problems are more likely to be described in terms of sexual misbehavior and promiscuity, and sexual irresponsibility is at the forefront when people talk about what is wrong with marriage.

This is not to say, of course, that sexual issues were completely absent from complaints about marriage in the past, nor that distributional issues are completely absent today, but that the balance of these two sources of conflict has shifted across the generations. I suspect that the shifts may be attributed to two historical changes. The first is changes in material life in upper west Shire, with the proliferation of goods and commodities in the region itself and with the democratization of cash-earning opportunities so that a wider range of people, beyond young men, are involved in the market, and thus young men are no longer the main source of money or commodities. The second change is the arrival of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in upper west Shire, which is universally attributed to immorality and promiscuity. Sexuality, good and bad, moral and immoral, is woven through talk of the new disease, and this predominance is likely to be related to the fact that sexual issues predominate when people, especially elders, talk about what is wrong with marriage today.

The third thing that these stories of degenerate marriage and the invention of a tradition of good marriages suggest is that talking about marriage is a way of expressing more general discontent about contemporary processes. Marriage as an institution is like a lightning rod, drawing to itself complaints about the changing world.

This lighting-rod quality of marriage is particularly notable when I compare talk about marriage to talk about other aspects of life. When talking about other, non-marriage-related aspects of life in their youth-versus-life “nowadays,” elders were much more ambivalent as to whether things were better or worse nowadays. For instance, while some claimed that farming had been easier in the past and that the land was more fertile then, others claimed that the arrival of fertilizers and pesticides meant that even depleted soils could produce something nowadays, which had not been possible earlier. In terms of health, while most elders said that people nowadays were sicklier and weaker than they had been in the past, they all agreed that clinics and hospital medicines were a good thing, so the net effect of modern times on health was neutral, if not weakly positive.

Why then was marriage singled out as a degenerate institution, especially when, going back to records from the past, we see that even in these old people’s youth marriage was also being treated as a degenerate institution? What is it about marriage that makes it apparently a lightning rod for accusations of degeneracy? This is the most intriguing, and the most difficult to answer, of the questions that may be provoked by this study.

In creating a tradition of good marriages in an ever-receding past, as contrasted with degenerate marriages in an omnipresent nowadays, people in both the late 1940s and 1999 were not expressing historical truths as much as sociological ones. In this case,
the truth they were expressing is that human relations, especially where they involve collaboration and accommodation between gender and generations, as marriages do, are always a source of conflict and disappointment. Talking about marriage is a way of talking about these difficulties, of expressing ambivalence and concern about the inevitable failures of others to meet one’s expectations. In the 1940s, these failures centered on the disappointments of distribution, and in the 1990s, on the disappointments of sexuality, but in both cases marriage provided a unique idiom for articulating these disappointments, particularly for elders.

Talking about marriage and the degeneration of marriage may be a time-honored way to talk about more general malaise and tensions, especially tensions between generations. Marriage, in other words, provides an idiom or a vocabulary through which elders can express their discomfort with their juniors, as well as a way that younger people can claim a moral high ground for themselves by aligning themselves with a supposedly virtuous past. Modern marriage and its discontents provides both the rhetorical occasion and the means through which to express general disapproval and disappointment as the social world continues to change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Mellon and Rockefeller Foundations for their financial assistance during the research for this article. I would also like to thank McDaphton Bellos, Rosemary Sapangwah, Jonathan Matamba, and Violet Boillo for research assistance in Malawi; Eliya Zulu, Mike Mtika, Agnes Kavinya, Enid Schatz, and Alex Weinreb for permission to make reference to their data collected in upper west Shire; and Susan Watkins and Guy Thompson for their comments on earlier versions of this article.
APPENDIX
Map of Malawi, Showing Mitchell’s and Malawi Diffusion and Ideational Change (MDIC) Project Field Sites

NOTES

4. It is difficult to know exactly what to call the geographic area with which I am concerned. Over the past sixty years, the same area has been designated Kasupe, Mangochi, Machinga, and Balaka, according to different political and administrative regimes. For the sake of consistency, I have chosen to refer to the area in which both J. Clyde Mitchell (see below) and I did fieldwork as “upper west Shire,” referring to its location relative to the Shire river. This designation is perhaps vague, but I believe it is the least cumbersome way of designating this particular area (see the map in the appendix).
8. Three of these women had been deliberately included in the sample because of their divorced status, so a truer and more representative figure might be twenty-four out of forty-one, or 59 percent.
12. Ibid., 298.
13. Ibid., 328.
16. Ibid.

22. The area I refer to as upper west Shire is on the west side of the Shire River and south of Lake Malombe and was the focus of the Malawi Diffusion and Ideational Change (MDIC) project in southern Malawi. The MDIC study area district overlaps with the tribal authority areas in which Mitchell did fieldwork in the 1940s, particularly in the area known as Kalembo. While these two areas do not map perfectly onto each other due to shifting administrative boundaries, the overlap is significant enough that I believe it is reasonable to look for patterns between them (see the map in the appendix).


24. This must be viewed in the light of overall conditions in Malawi, which is one of the ten poorest countries in the world.


27. Ibid., 13.

28. The HIV prevalence rate for Malawi as a whole is estimated at approximately 13 percent, placing it in the middle rank of countries threatened by AIDS (as compared with estimated rates of 20-25 percent in neighboring countries such as Zimbabwe). In Machinga, a district in upper west Shire, 14.9 percent of women attending rural antenatal clinics tested positive for HIV (U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Division International Programs Center, HIV/AIDS Surveillance Data Base, 1999). While very few MDIC informants would acknowledge knowing someone with AIDS, our fieldwork was frequently halted by funerals, as often as two or three a week, of young people in their prime, who were whispered to have died from AIDS-related diseases. In a survey of the area in 1998, 81 percent of men and 74 percent of women knew someone who had died of AIDS-related illnesses, although only 16 percent and 14 percent, respectively, currently knew a person living with HIV. Erin Eckert, Veronica Arroyave, and Gertrude Masautso Kara, “Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Survey for District Health Services: Machinga and Zomba, Malawi 1998” (unpublished manuscript, Tulane University School of Public Health, 1998).


32. These two parameters, ephemerality and atomization, were highly correlated. Ephemerality was often explained in terms of atomization; for instance, elders made the argument that marriages are short lived and divorce happens easily (atomization) because young people try to handle their marital disputes by themselves and do not seek the counsel of their elders (ephemerality). Similarly, atomization could be explained as a consequence of ephemerality—because young people move in and out of marriages quickly and casually, they do not bother to invest time and energy in getting the support of their elders.

33. I do not claim that the elders’ perceptions were accurate (or inaccurate) or that what they told my interviewers actually reflects objective changes in marriage patterns. Instead, I am trying to establish the existence of a folk history of generational change in marriage patterns, a set of shared beliefs about how marriages have changed for the worse.

34. Their criticism contrasts with anthropological literature on African marriage, which stresses the processual character of marriage, in that there is rarely a sharp distinction between
being unmarried and being married (e.g., Bledsoe, “Transformations,” and Meekers, “Process of Marriage”).

35. This percentage may seem small, but its significance lies in the fact that elders in the interviews were not asked directly whether they thought marriages were ephemeral or atomized compared with marriages in the past. Instead, they were given the opportunity to talk about what they thought were the differences between their own marriages and the marriages they saw among their sons- and daughters-in-law or their grandchildren. Thus, their comments on atomization or ephemeral time arose spontaneously.

36. Interestingly, women among the elders were more likely than men to stress their own fidelity and constancy. While both men and women deprecated the ephemeral quality of modern marriages, all the personal accounts of long-standing, nonephemereral marriages were told by women, while several men told their own marital histories as a sequence of marriages. For example, the head of one of the villages in the study said,

1951, it’s when I started to learn about marriage. Then I stayed for about two years there [in his first marriage]. I had two children, but they died, then I left the woman and went to marry another woman here at home, and then I left because the woman was disobedient and stubborn, and she was drinking beer and I didn’t like that. Then I went to marry a third wife. . . . then in 1958 I married this family [his present wife].

37. *Ankhoswe*, variously translated as “marriage-witness,” “marriage surety,” or “marriage counselor.” These were people, usually older blood relatives, chosen at the time of marriage to act as advisers and counselors for the husband and wife and to mediate in marital disputes. Elders whom I interviewed claimed that the *ankhoswe* were not respected as they used to be, but as we see below, young people today said that the *ankhoswe* still played an important role in marriages.

38. See note 35.

39. Conducted by Enid Schatz in June 1999, the same time period as the interviews with elderly people.

40. In this context, “spinsters” probably also refers to divorced women. It is interesting that this woman identified the proliferation of unmarried women as a social problem, while her elders were equally concerned about the misbehavior of unmarried women and unmarried men.

41. However, younger interviewees differed slightly from their elders in their view of the modern malaise of marriage. While the younger interviewees all mentioned the ephemeral nature of modern marriage, they did not identify atomization as a major problem. In fact, when asked to tell a story about a marriage breakdown that they had heard of, half of them included the role of the *ankhoswe* in their stories, mentioning that the couple in the story had sought the assistance of their counselors. This is in marked contrast to the views of the elders, who claimed that counselors were completely disregarded and disempowered nowadays.


43. Ibid., 295, 301. See also Mitchell, *Yao Village*.

44. Mitchell found records of labor migration from southern Malawi to the Transvaal in South Africa as early as 1903, and the flow of male labor south and westward had been steadily increasing since then. Mitchell, “Yao of Southern Nyasaland,” 305.

45. Ibid., 303


51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., box 17.

53. Ibid., box 20, file 1.

54. My interviewees remembered the 1949 famine well and often used it (as well as a contemporaneous infestation of locusts) as a way of gauging their ages (e.g., “At the time of the locusts, my first child was just born”).


56. Ibid., 119.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid., 34.

59. Ibid., 123.

60. Ibid., 133.

61. Ibid., 121.

62. Chiwalo was a district neighboring Kalembo.

63. It is possible that the number of divorce cases heard by the chief’s court is actually an underestimate of marriage breakdown, as cases may have been resolved informally between the families concerned. However, Mitchell’s notes provide no way to check this hypothesis.

64. Mitchell’s observations are consistent with Mandala’s accounting of divorce cases heard in chiefs’ courts in lower Shire in the mid-1940s. Elias Mandala, *Work and Control in a Peasant Economy: A History of the Lower Tchiri Valley in Malawi, 1859-1960* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 266-67. Mandala found that the “overwhelming majority” of cases heard by chiefs’ courts in Port Herald district were divorce suits based on troubles wrought by protracted male absence from the home for labor migration. The local Native Association, an organization of traditional leaders under the jurisdiction of the colonial government, expressed its concerns over marital breakdowns occasioned by men leaving the district for work and not providing for their wives.

65. Papers of J. Clyde Mitchell, Rhodes House Library, Oxford University, MSS Afr S 1998, box 17. The teacher from whom this story was obtained identifies himself as Lomwe, rather than Yao (the dominant ethnic group in the area). However, Mitchell makes a point of saying that the Lomwe and the Yao were so similar in culture and custom that what is true of one group is likely true of the other.

66. As in the 1990s, the influences of modern life were blamed for the breakdown of the institution of marriage and for young people’s unwillingness to submit to their parents’ approval and guidance in marriage matters. Many respondents blamed the rise of new forms of entertainment, such as “English-style” dancing and music performances, in which “the bass player is always called Roger.”

The English dance has spread all over the country and people do not want other dances . . . . There are some young men when they start marriage they begin their marriage at a dance. Then their marriage does not stand for a long time. The marriage finished in a few days and it [the end of the marriage] started when they have quar-
If you marry a woman at a dance you have married a stupid woman of the crossroads, i.e. women who are going this way and that without knowing their character. It means prostitutes who do not like marriage. (Papers of J. Clyde Mitchell, Rhodes House Library, Oxford University, MSS Afr S 1998, box 17, file 1)

67. Ibid.
68. Other interviews, ibid.
69. Ibid.

70. We should not assume that these remittances led to a life of unprecedented luxury for people in upper west Shire. Mandala points out that many men remitted almost nothing to their families, and others returned home with only lice and sexually transmitted diseases to show for their time working abroad. See also Wiseman Chirwa, “Sexually Transmitted Diseases in Colonial Malawi,” in Histories of Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa, ed. Philip Setel, Milton Lewis, and Maryinez Lyons (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999), 143-66. Upper west Shire appears to have been somewhat better off than lower Shire, where Mandala worked, particularly because upper west Shire had very high recruitment rates into the King’s African Rifles. Nonetheless, the very scarcity of remitted money and goods may account for the vehemence of the conflicts surrounding these goods and money.

71. Writing in 1953, Mair claimed that among matrilineal populations in Nyasaland “today young husbands are impatient to be free from the authority of their parents-in-law and are apt to request this permission much earlier than they would do so in the past.” Among the Yao in particular, “it seems to be more common for a woman to follow her husband if he leaves [her matrilineal village] without [her relatives’] consent,” even though “a woman’s relatives do not willingly agree to let her leave the village until she is past child-bearing.” Mair, “African Marriage,” 101.


73. “I see in [the family] and in the industrial system that accompanies it the hope of greater freedom: from the domination of elders, from caste and racial restrictions, from class rigidities. Freedom is for something as well: the unleashing of personal potentials, the right to love, to equality within the family, to the establishment of a new marriage when the old has failed. I see the world revolution in family patterns as part of a still more important revolution that is sweeping the world in our time, the aspiration on the part of billions of people to have the right for the first time to choose for themselves—an aspiration that has toppled governments both old and new, and created new societies and social movements.” Ibid., 55.

74. See also Ferguson, Expectations of Modernity.

75. See also Amy Kaler. “‘They See Money and Think That It’s Life’: Elders’ Philosophy of Money in Rural Malawi” (Unpublished paper, Population Studies Center, University of Pennsylvania, 2000).

76. Eric Hobsbawm, introduction to Hobsbawm and Ranger, The Invention of Tradition, 1.
77. Ibid., 2.
78. Chanock, Law, Custom and Social Order, 11.
79. Ibid., chap. 10.
81. Chanock, Law, Custom and Social Order, 226.

82. The same is true for uses of the concept of a “usable past” (coined by historian Van Wyck Brooks), a cognate concept to invented tradition. An Internet search for instance of this term being used turned up references to the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial, Philippine architecture, Renaissance humanism, and the character of Daniel Boone, to name only a few examples. Two full-length books have been titled A [or The] Usable Past: one, by William Bouwsma, deals with “such topics as political thought and historiography, metaphysical and practical conceptions of
order, the relevance of Renaissance humanism to Protestant thought, the secularization of Euro-
pean culture [and] the contributions of particular professional groups to European civilization.”
The second, edited by Lois Zamora, deals with “colonization and independence, mestizaje and
melting pot, domination and self-determination, and the ambivalence of history in a new world”
(both book descriptions from the Amazon.com Web site). These two titles show how thoroughly
the concept of a usable past has been entwined with national politics and nation-state relations.
Although, as I establish here, the domestic sphere is replete with reconstruction and re-creation
of the past, this sphere appears to have been undertheorized by sociologists in particular.

83. Interviews were all conducted in respondents’ homes, a setting that falls on the private
side of the public-private spectrum. Yet one should not assume that a household setting a priori
qualifies as a private setting. Respondents’ accounts of this tradition were still something of a
public performance for the benefit of the interviewers (who were young people from the com-
munity) or for any onlookers who happened to be there. In one typical instance, an elderly
woman was complaining about the flightiness of young wives today when her granddaughters,
who were in their mid-teens and who were preparing food nearby, began to laugh and tell each
other, “Listen, Granny is summoning us.” I asked the interviewer what “summoning” meant in
that context and was told that it derived from the idea of “serving a summons,” bidding someone
to appear and answer charges in the chief’s court—in other words, accusing someone of bad
behavior. The fact that the old woman’s account of young people’s badness was interpreted as an
accusation suggests that, in telling these stories, elders were not merely recounting what they
believed to be true about the past. They were also engaged in building the social reality of the
present, creating a standard of behavior and assuming for themselves a moral high ground in
chastising others for not meeting it.
Aglaia Kasdagli’s book is a rich and fascinating contribution to the growing historical literature on the relationships between people and land in Greece. Her focus is Naxos, the largest of the Cycladic islands, and her period the century and a half following the introduction of direct Ottoman rule (1566), which included the War of Candia (1645-69) and the Morean War (1684-99). Kasdagli begins conventionally, with Part I covering the background to her study—the geography of the island; its population (mostly Greek Orthodox but with a Latin or Roman Catholic elite and a few Jews and Muslims); its history from 1207, when it became the center of the Duchy of Naxos; and the role of customary law. Chapter 3 is devoted to the sources. The sources are principally more than three thousand notorial acts, written in the vernacular Greek of the islands but containing some Italian words. Kasdagli maintains that they go to the heart of the social mechanisms in Naxos since they cover sales of property, marriage contacts, and arbitrations. She discusses the representativeness of the sample, concluding that it formed 5-10 percent of notorial production in the period and is therefore a reasonable basis for inference.

Parts II and III are the core of the book. In Part II, chapter 5 describes the agricultural and pastoral bases of the island’s economy, while chapter 6 analyses land tenure and shows the importance of forms of sharecropping. Chapter 7 analyses the relationships between control over land and social structure. It reveals the survival of seigniorial rights, including various payments, until well into the eighteenth century.

Part III will probably be of greatest interest to readers of this journal because it is devoted to the family and the transmission of property. In chapter 8, Kasdagli discusses wills and marriage contracts. She analyzed 209 wills and discovered that they were not the primary means of transferring property. Marriage contracts were much more important. The contracts of 403 individuals were examined and shown to be more representative of the social spectrum than wills were. Dowry emerged as important in all social groups, but it was not only women who received dowries. Although actual age was difficult to determine, Kasdagli was able to deduce that there was a significant age difference between men and women at the time of marriage from the proportions of women (81 percent) and men (69 percent) endowed by their parents and the numbers of women (7 percent) and men (29 percent) presenting their own dowries. Both genders received houses and land as dowry, while 67 percent of all grooms received livestock, compared with 52 percent of brides; 78 percent of grooms were given chattels, compared with 98 percent of brides. Men usually received receptacles for storage purposes. Women, on the other hand, were presented with jewelry and clothing, kitchen utensils, and furnishings.

Co-residence after marriage seems to have been rare, though the size of the average nuclear family has been difficult to calculate. Analysis of the notorial data in chapter 9 suggests that each couple, on average, had 2.8 children, making a household size of four to five individuals. A report from 1601, however, suggests that Latin families were much smaller, with an average size of 3.1 persons.

Dowry and inheritance are the subjects of the penultimate chapter. Kasdagli decided to handle them through the concept of diverging devolution of property, and she found that the system was governed by custom. It was normal for children to share their mother’s dowry on her death. If a bride died childless, her husband was entitled to a complete set of bedclothes (krevatosstosti) out of her chattels, but the rest of her property reverted to her next of kin. Should a groom die...
without children, his wife enjoyed a life interest in his property. However, this custom, as well as krevatostrois, gradually died out during the seventeenth century. All children had rights to a share in their patrimony. They were entitled to equal shares when parents died intestate and no marriage contracts (frequently made well before a marriage) had been agreed. Otherwise, the nature of each child’s share was determined by the dowry givers. Their decisions were guided by custom. Female property tended to be inherited by females, while some vestiges of primogeniture survived among the elite; eldest daughters also seem to have received preferential treatment. Preference for the firstborn was apparent, too, in naming patterns, linking property devolution to the transmission of baptismal names. According to Naxian custom (also found elsewhere in Greece), the first daughter was called after her maternal grandmother and the first son after his paternal grandfather. The grandchild, then, could expect to inherit property from the grandparent whose name she or he assumed. Although the norm in property transmission was to care for the younger generation, some provision was made for their elders. Property fragmentation was a continual risk in the system, and various measures were taken to reduce its scale so that family estates remained viable and status was maintained. Thus, economic interest (even survival) was intimately linked to customary norms, familial love, and sense of duty.

The final chapter is devoted to the question of whether the seigniorial lords, who remained the dominant group in Naxos throughout the seventeenth century, should be understood as simply the survivors of a feudal aristocracy or whether they can be seen best as representatives of the emergent class of merchant capitalists that became so important throughout Greece in the next century. The problem is the lack of any information about commerce, let alone those who were involved in it. Nonetheless, Kasdagli believes that she can detect a new group of self-made men coming onto the scene, an outcome that agrees with current Greek historiography.

—Malcolm Wagstaff
University of Southampton


Reflecting the renewed scholarly interest in the history of childhood is Marie Jenkins Schwartz’s Born in Bondage. This contribution to our historical understanding of slave children also helps broaden our understanding of slavery in the antebellum South. The study is a sympathetic, well-researched account of what slave youngsters experienced as they grew up and how both the rightful parents and slave owners sought to influence and control the maturing process.

Schwartz adopts a chronological approach, beginning with conception and ending with courtship and marriage. Her primary sources include published slave narratives, slaveholder records, and whites’ letters and diaries, census data, and manuscript collections from library archives. Like recent studies on southern history, this monograph takes into account important regional differences, comparing the situation in the upcountry, on the coast, and in the deep South and how these varied settings affected the treatment of young slaves.

What one can never forget in reading this account is that slave children had two sets of parents—their biological parents and their owners—making childhood a difficult, tricky experience. “Children had to learn how to negotiate a dangerous world, which entailed pleasing two sets of adults with very different expectations,” Schwartz writes (p. 78). Raising slave children and making them conform to different, sometimes conflicting, demands created a contest between adults—a contest, of course, between unequal players. White planters exerted a great deal of influence over each slave child, sometimes naming an infant, determining the amount of
food and clothing rationed to each one, determining what type of work a child would perform, overseeing social activities, and perhaps selecting a marital partner. Slave parents yearned to spend more time with their children but could rarely put their needs first, especially when youngsters’ demands interfered with the work that adults owed their masters.

Many white owners tried to act in a paternalistic manner toward slave children, though such posturing rarely convinced slaves that whites had their needs at heart. Considering themselves to be wise, kindly parents, some slaveholders tried to transfer the loyalty and affection of slave children from the biological parents to themselves. Yet slaves well understood that their own family life was always tentative; that they, their siblings, or parents might be sold at a moment’s notice; that punishment could result merely from an owner’s bad temper; and that their lot in life was oppression and hard work. Either set of adults could punish children; both could also reward them. As youngsters matured, many learned to negotiate between these adults, sometimes avoiding punishment by playing one off against the other.

Each healthy infant promised slaveholders future rewards either as a commodity to sell or as a bound laborer. Owners carefully calculated the contribution of each new addition to their plantations. In the upper South, with its mixed-crop economy, many owners put their priority on increasing the number of slaves, regarding them as a commodity to be sold when cash was needed. Thus, many exhibited real concern about the health of pregnant slave women and new mothers, wanting to ensure the life and future well-being of each newborn. Planters in the deep South were more concerned with present needs and profits from their cash crop and thus were less likely to release a pregnant slave woman from field work or extend time off after her confinement. Weaning slave infants was rarely prolonged because it interfered with the work a woman owed her master. Communal child care was common on large plantations because owners wanted to free mothers of this responsibility; the work they performed should benefit the owner.

Slave children made important contributions to the economic viability of both the plantation and their own households. Youngsters, by the age of six or seven, were watching over or entertaining white children, picking up trash, bringing food and beverages to field workers, or learning a specialized skill. In their own homes, slave youngsters helped to weed the family garden, fish and trap, watch younger siblings, and help their mothers cook, spin, and launder clothes.

Gender was an issue in slaves’ maturation. Adolescent female slaves faced greater peril than did adolescent males. By a certain age, many were likely to catch the eye of black and white men and be susceptible to sexual exploitation. When young women were sold to another plantation, they became even more vulnerable, as they lost the protection of family and friends.

Little here will surprise those who are familiar with American slavery. The system was fraught with danger for young and old alike. Slave infants were twice as likely to die as white infants, and slave youngsters experienced a higher rate of mortality growing up than did their white counterparts. From the time they were young, slaves learned to walk a fine line between dutiful behavior and how far to push the system in order to avoid punishment or sale. While Schwartz makes us well aware of the experiences of slave children and the dangers they faced, some of her revelations echo common child-rearing practices of the antebellum period, comparisons that Schwartz might have emphasized in her narrative. Engaging in productive labor was standard procedure for all but the most privileged American children at this time.

Inevitable comparisons of Schwartz’s analysis will be made to Thomas Webber’s Deep Like the Rivers (1978) and Wilma King’s Stolen Childhood (1995), which also studied slave children but reached different conclusions. Schwartz positions herself between these two earlier works, focusing more on the actions and reactions of adults who saw themselves as responsible for slave children and on the details of youngsters’ development. Unlike Webber, she does not feel that children’s isolation from white owners necessarily protected them; in contrast to King, Schwartz demonstrates that slave youngsters did experience childhood and were treated differently than adults.
"Born in Bondage" is an informative, gracefully written, detailed account and will stand as a definitive study on an important topic.

—Sally G. McMillen

Davidson College


The theory of separate spheres makes a varying set of claims to the effect that, at some time in the early modern period, Western European and American women became isolated within a private sphere of home, family, and child rearing. There have always been suspicions that this model was more prescriptive than real, and from the beginning there were doubts as to whether staying at home was ever a serious possibility for any except fairly well-off women. However, in recent years, the criticisms of “separate spheres” have gotten sharper and more theoretically sophisticated. The model is said to underestimate female agency both within and beyond the home, to overstate the autonomy of putatively male institutions and cultural trends, and to reinstate the binaries it claims to be unmasking. If the critics are right, the better path would be to refuse to define any aspect of early modern culture as ipso facto masculine or feminine. But it has proved a complex enterprise to actually chart the new terrain beyond the confining hermeneutic of public-private and male-female. *Political Passions*, explicitly concerned with “following the trail of gender and politics” (p. 429), is a bravura attempt to do just that: to demonstrate the essential interconnectedness of two powerfully gendered institutions—the family (long assumed to be the province of women) and high political theory (long assumed to be exclusively by, for, and about men).

The period 1680 to 1714 is, in many respects, the *origo et fons* of modern British political thought and practice. It witnessed the installation of a parliamentary monarchy in England, the publication of John Locke’s *Two Treatises on Government*, the foundation of the Bank of England, and the Act of Union between Scotland and England. It was during the lengthy wars with Louis XIV, in this same period, that England established itself as a major European, indeed, world power. For these and other reasons, this is a heavily researched period, but it is also one that is closely associated in most people’s minds with elite men and public events: war, revolution, parliamentary politics, high political theory, commerce, banking, and empire. There have been surprisingly few attempts to insert gender into the standard narrative, despite the fact that women occupied the English throne for twenty-four of these thirty-four years.

Weil explodes traditional distinctions between male and female spheres (and between the history of political thought and the history of the family), showing that both high Whig and Tory theory and the revolutionary slogans of the streets were shot through with anxieties about marriage, divorce, the fitness of women for rule, population growth, biological paternity, inheritance, power relations within the family, sexual loyalty, lesbianism, and cross-class sexuality. And she makes it clear what the implications of these anxieties are for some of the most fundamental presuppositions of Western political thought. Take, for example, Weil’s discussion of the famous division between politics and the family in John Locke’s *Second Treatise on Government* where she demonstrates how concerns about family and paternity deriving from the political controversies of the day both led Locke to attempt this analytical sundering and made it impossible for him to achieve it successfully. Here Weil stakes out a middle position between Mary Shanley and Carole Patemen, the two most influential feminist theorists who have worked on Locke’s political thought. But unlike them, Weil is not very interested in claiming (or dis-
claiming) Locke for feminism. Instead, she uses Locke, along with some of the other Whig theorists, as bellwethers to show how widely assumptions about the family and hierarchy fluctuated throughout this whole period.

For Weil, politics is not a set of abstractions hatched long ago by male geniuses in ill-lit rooms. Rather, it is a colorful landscape populated by elites as well as nonelites, men as well as women, low rumor as well as high theory, all constantly interacting with one another. A chapter on the Glorious Revolution focuses on the rumor that James II’s wife Mary of Modena’s pregnancy in 1688 was fraudulent (the so-called Warming Pan Scandal) and shows how the ensuing crisis of political legitimacy presented both dangers and opportunities for women as pundits and obstetrical “experts.” This essay is iconoclastic in more ways than one in that it shows that patriarchalism actually offers opportunities to some women, if only because patrilineal systems rely so heavily on female trustworthiness and expertise.

As one might expect, a key theme of the book is the challenge women monarchs pose for political theory and rhetoric. Chapter 4 illuminates a largely new aspect of postrevolutionary conceptions of monarchy by showing that Mary’s (of William and Mary) much publicized ambivalence about ruling actually provided political capital for her supporters. Chapter 8, on Queen Anne and Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough, focuses on the two women’s intense emotional, and quite possibly physical, relationship—or, more precisely, on the couple’s extremely bitter split-up—treating this politically fraught episode in a far more nuanced way than anyone else has done. Not only does Weil go over all the usual sources (and some that were previously unknown), but she manages to make real sense of an episode that has long perplexed Anne’s biographers and students of political history alike—ill-equipped as they so often are to consider women’s friendships as affairs of state.

For people who still saw the bonds holding a subject to his or her king as comparable to the bonds of matrimony, breaking the one inevitably implied that the other hung in the balance. It is a very original move on Weil’s part to look, in chapter 5, at some actual attempts at obtaining divorces a vinculo (i.e., a full divorce by act of Parliament) in and around the time of the Glorious Revolution. She examines both the ways people took a private issue (divorce) and “read” it in terms of political theory and the way they used an ideal of familial order to legitimate themselves politically. At the same time, we get a very nuanced account of the way the divorce issue—both as metaphor and in terms of actual cases involving real people—exacerbated divisions between high church and low, Tory and Whig, jurors and nonjurors.

Mary Astell, often called “the first English feminist,” is the only woman of the period about whom a really significant amount has been written. Weil’s discussion, in chapter 6, of Astell’s peculiarly masochistic brand of feminism has a somewhat iconoclastic tone, but one that is probably timely. Despite the praise often heaped upon her by modern scholars, Astell is more than a bit strange, and Weil’s book does a real service by showing not just how counterintuitive Astell’s thought was and is but how unusual it was even when compared to other late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century British writers on both women and marriage.

There are many things to admire about Political Passions, from its elegant and sure prose to its unwillingness to rush to judgment; from its wide familiarity with the sources to its insights into the foibles, day-to-day anxieties, and occasional incoherence of the greatest political theorists of the day. This is an extremely important book for students of political theory and for historians of gender and the family alike. It is interdisciplinary yet thoroughly expert in every realm it touches. Its conception and organization are bold and original, yet its conclusions are thoroughly grounded in the sources. If Weil’s aim was to subvert the distinction between male and female spheres—in fact, to thoroughly mix the two together—she has amply succeeded. One has the sense, as one reads it, of being present at the birth of a new era with respect to both family history and the history of political thought. Weil has truly staged her own small revolution.

—Margaret R. Hunt
Amherst College
INDEX
TO
JOURNAL OF FAMILY HISTORY
VOLUME 26
Number 1 (January 2001) pp. 1-152
Number 2 (April 2001) pp. 153-320
Number 3 (July 2001) pp. 321-432
Number 4 (October 2001) pp. 433-568

Authors:


CROZIER, IVAN, “‘Rough Winds Do Shake the Darling Buds of May’: A Note on William Acton and the Sexuality of the (Male) Child” [Research Note], 411.

DARROCH, GORDON, “Home and Away: Patterns of Residence, Schooling, and Work among Children and Never Married Young Adults, Canada, 1871 and 1901,” 220.


GAUvreau, Danielle, and Peter GOSSAGE, “Canadian Fertility Transitions: Quebec and Ontario at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” 162.


GOSSAGE, PETER, see Gauvreau, D.


HUTTON, PATRICK H., “Late-Life Historical Reflections of Philippe Ariès on the Family in Contemporary Culture,” 395.
KLEIN, LISA M., “Lady Anne Clifford as Mother and Matriarch: Domestic and Dynastic Issues in Her Life and Writings,” 18.
MARKS, LYNNE, “‘A Fragment of Heaven on Earth’? Religion, Gender, and Family in Turn-of-the-Century Canadian Church Periodicals,” 251.
RIBORDY, GENEVIÈVE, “The Two Paths to Marriage: The Preliminaries of Noble Marriage in Late Medieval France,” 323.
TAKAI, YUKARI, “The Family Networks and Geographic Mobility of French-Canadian Immigrants in Early-Twentieth-Century Lowell, Massachusetts,” 373.
WAGSTAFF, MALCOLM, “Family Size in the Peloponnesian (Southern Greece) in 1700,” 337.

Articles:
“Canadian Fertility Transitions: Quebec and Ontario at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” Gauvreau and Gossage, 162.
“The Family Networks and Geographic Mobility of French-Canadian Immigrants in Early-Twentieth-Century Lowell, Massachusetts,” Takai, 373.
“Family Size in the Peloponnesian (Southern Greece) in 1700,” Wagstaff, 337.

“‘A Fragment of Heaven on Earth’? Religion, Gender, and Family in Turn-of-the-Century Canadian Church Periodicals,” Marks, 251.

“Gender, Class, and Generation in Interwar French Catholicism: The Case of the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine,” Whitney, 480.

“Home and Away: Patterns of Residence, Schooling, and Work among Children and Never Married Young Adults, Canada, 1871 and 1901,” Darroch, 220.

“Home Ownership and Spacious Homes: Equity under Stress in Early-Twentieth-Century Canada,” Baskerville, 272.


“Lady Anne Clifford as Mother and Matriarch: Domestic and Dynastic Issues in Her Life and Writings,” Klein, 18.

“Late-Life Historical Reflections of Philippe Ariès on the Family in Contemporary Culture,” Hutton, 395.


“Marriage in 1901 Canada: An Ecological Perspective,” Burke, 189.


“Representations of Adolescence in the Modern City: Voluntary Provision and Work in Nottingham and Saint-Etienne, 1890-1914,” Pomfret, 455.

“The Two Paths to Marriage: The Preliminaries of Noble Marriage in Late Medieval France,” Ribordy, 323.


Book Reviews:


“Changing Britain: Families and Households in the 1990s, edited by Susan McRae,” Fink, 311.


“Political Passions: Gender, the Family and Political Argument in England 1680-1714, by Rachel Weil,” Hunt, 560.


Research Note: