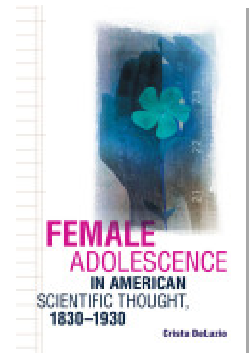
Introduction



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Introduction

In F. Scott Fitzgerald's short story, "Bernice Bobs Her Hair," the self-proclaimed modern Marjorie flat-out refuses any association with the Victorian conventions of girlhood espoused by the four March sisters in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. "What modern girl," she impetuously demands of the more reserved Bernice, "could live like those inane females?"[1] Instead of wholesome, provincial domesticity, Marjorie vows to embrace worldliness and independence and expects to have a whole lot more fun in the process than the likes of Meg, Jo, Amy, and Beth could ever imagine. Flappers—icons of Fitzgerald's era—promised to replace Alcott's once equally emblematic March girls with a model of youthful femininity more suitable to modern times. By the 1920s, they seemed to be everywhere, found widely represented in literature, advertising, and popular culture, as well as roaming the halls of high schools and colleges, working in factories and offices, shopping in department stores, and frequenting dance halls and movie theaters.[2] Despite the seeming ubiquity of the flapper, however, the transition from the "old" girls of the Victorian era to the "new" girls of the modern age, as contemporary psychologists Phyllis Blanchard and Carolyn Manasses put it, did not occur without considerable social and cultural struggle. Even as Marjorie cavalierly dismissed them as hopelessly "out of style," the virtues of the March girls continued to exist in tension with a more updated set of manners and mores wrought from the rapid and dramatic changes giving shape to American life at the turn of the twentieth century.[3]

Playing a leading role in imparting larger meaning to the transformation of old girls into new were scientists and intellectuals working in the fields of medicine, biology, psychology, and anthropology during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This period marked the inception of the modern scientific study of the child. From within and across these disciplines came descriptions of the child's development into maturity, along with prescriptions for directing that development toward the dual ends of personal happiness and social progress, all

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based on the authority of science.[4] Operating within this emerging framework of child development studies, scientists eventually came to render their own version of the new girl known as the "adolescent girl." The central intellectual challenge they found, however, was in reconciling the concepts of femininity and adolescence. This book explores the evolving permutations of that challenge from 1830 to 1930 in order to consider the influences of the scientific construction of female adolescence on child development expectations and meanings of gender in the modern age. What sorts of conceptual problems did fashioning a category of the adolescent girl pose to scientists in these years, and how did they go about solving them? What have been the effects of these efforts on ongoing approaches to the study of the child?

The debates during this period over the meanings of adolescence and female adolescence have influenced subsequent thinking about these concepts and categories. Indeed, the dilemma of reconciling femininity and adolescence still resonates for scholars, professionals, and the wider culture in the early twenty-first century. The work of feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan in the 1980s and 1990s initially renewed interest in this topic. Since then, several notable studies have been conducted by the American Association of University Women, and we have seen the publication of bestsellers such as psychologist Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls.*[5] This body of work begins with the assertion that girls have not been well served by a psychological tradition in which the model for human development is the white middle-class male. As Gilligan explains, girls face a "crisis of connection" during the teenage years, as their attempts to square the (masculine) adolescent mandate for autonomy with the (feminine) requirements of relationship put them in danger of "drowning or disappearing." She and others propose to correct this problem by promising to ascertain the unique challenges adolescent girls face and to promote educational and cultural changes that would better address girls' particular developmental needs.[6]

Contemporary cultural theorist Barbara Hudson likewise deems the categories of femininity and adolescence to be mutually exclusive. From her analysis of professional and popular variants of the two constructs, she concludes that they are entirely at odds with—even "subversive of"—one another. Adolescence, Hudson argues, is a masculine construct whose behavioral expectations for independence, rebellion, and sexual experimentation fundamentally conflict with the "master discourse" in the girl's life, that of femininity and its requirements for social compliance, enduring relationships, and sexual restraint. Along with Gilli-

gan, Hudson determines that in matters of relationship, especially, "the discourse of adolescence is clearly at variance with the discourse of femininity." Hudson illustrates how teachers and social workers, for example, variably rely on these conflicting discourses to describe, explain, and regulate the adolescent girl's behavior. Such capriciousness, she maintains, works to engender a sense of incompetence, insecurity, and inadequacy in the lives of many girls, conveying to them the sense that "whatever they do, it is always wrong." For Hudson, it is this dilemma, being held accountable by two opposing sets of emotional and behavioral expectations, that constitutes the essence of the female adolescent experience.[7]

The pioneering historical studies of adolescence substantiate Gilligan's and Hudson's assertions that adolescence has long been conceptualized as a masculine construct. The first historians to examine the changing meanings and experiences of adolescence in the United States and western Europe contended that the "invention" of adolescence during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was firmly embedded in cultural meanings and social expectations for masculinity and functioned specifically to describe and prescribe the transition from childhood to adulthood for male youth. These historians deliberately positioned boys as the central character in their historical narratives, arguing that a predominating concern with changes in the social experiences of boyhood thoroughly preoccupied the architects of modern adolescence. Class is the primary analytic lens through which these historians view their subject. They maintain that the inventors of adolescence initially described and normalized the experience of white middle-class boyhood. Then they extended those norms across lines of class and ethnicity through the languages of biology and psychology, with the goal of facilitating the social control of minorities and the working class.[8]

According to these historians, girls were at best ignored in and at worst deliberately excluded from the early formulations of adolescence. One scholar does suggestively acknowledge that longstanding cultural anxieties about female sexuality and associations of female puberty with physical, psychological, and social danger in some ways rendered the white middle-class girls of the mid-nineteenth century the "first adolescents." Moreover, qualities that came to characterize the modern adolescent—vulnerability, passivity, and awkwardness—"previously had been associated only with girls." In this analysis, however, female adolescence, as either a locus of cultural meanings or as lived experience, remains largely unexplored.[9] Likewise, another historian who focuses on scholars' neglect of the changing experiences of adolescent girls in the past nonetheless maintains that such changes in girls' lives were not matched by a commensu-

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rate "intellectual understanding" of adolescent girlhood and that an "adequate concept" of female adolescence had yet to emerge by the end of the twentieth century.[10]

Even as these historians were writing, others were looking more closely at the ways girls' transition from childhood to adulthood was lived and represented at various moments in the past. Describing the middle-class, working-class, and "delinquent" variants of the female adolescent experience during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this group of scholars offers compelling analysis of the ways in which the categories of class, gender, and age intersected in the lives of particular groups of girls. These historians also examine familial, communal, institutional, political, and cultural responses to the highly visible and oft-rendered problematic presence of the adolescent girl in American society over this one-hundred-year period. Offering up female adolescents as historical subjects in their own right, this body of work endeavors to discern the ways groups of young, single females shaped, and were shaped by, their changing roles in the family, the economy, the framework of social welfare and educational institutions, and the worlds of popular culture in these years.[11]

Efforts to render adolescent girls historically visible have been accompanied by work in cultural studies and contemporary critical developmental psychology that posits that the child and the adolescent are "cultural inventions." The work of Michel Foucault and his method of discourse analysis influenced many of these scholars. This approach sees discourses as composed of ideas and practices that work together to produce knowledge, to organize social relations, to constitute individual subjectivities, and to deploy social power. In examining discourses that have produced the modern child, such scholars subject to critical analysis certain key premises of western science, most notably the presumptions that the child "develops" at all and that developmental norms are universally applicable across groups of social subjects.[12] As psychologist Valerie Walkerdine contends, the "grand metanarrative" of developmental psychology "is premised upon the construction of an object of study, 'the developing child' . . . that . . . is not real, not timeless but produced for particular purposes within very specific historical, social and political conditions." Going further than Gilligan, who seeks to rehabilitate the developmental paradigm for those who have been marginalized by it, Walkerdine insists that psychological studies of the child must now move "beyond developmentalism." "The big story [of developmental psychology]," she claims, "is a European patriarchal story, a story from the centre which describes the periphery in terms of the abnormal, difference as deficiency. I want to explore how this is accomplished and examine how it might be chal-

lenged." Despite their differences, both psychologists share a common purpose in seeking to expose the ideologies and power relations of race, class, and gender that have formed the foundation and scaffolding of the scientific study of the child.[13]

In taking another look at the intellectual and cultural formation of "adolescence" during the period of its invention, this study both makes use of recent cross-disciplinary approaches to the study of the child and provides historical perspective on them. How did earlier generations of scientists bring together conceptions of femininity and adolescence to describe and explain the adolescent girl and her development? What range of factors—intellectual, cultural, social, and professional—shaped their conclusions at particular historical moments? What expectations for the adolescent stage of life and female development did they bequeath to the child studies experts in our own time? The intent here is to explore the dynamic interrelationships between ideas about adolescence and femininity and the ways in which these two discourses not only excluded but also intersected with, mutually constituted, and undermined one another at various historical moments. The goal is to trace the multiple and contested articulations that constituted the discourses as they changed over time. In doing so, this analysis follows recent trends in the history of science by resisting dichotomies that associate men with conservative scientific views and women with progressive ones or biological paradigms with the oppression of marginalized groups and cultural paradigms with social equality.[14] Rather, the production of scientific knowledge about adolescence and female development has been more multifaceted than either historians or contemporary social scientists have recognized. Such knowledge admittedly has played a role in perpetuating social injustice. Exploring the nuanced thinking entailed in the transformation of "old" girls into "new" during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is essential to understanding that role and the ongoing struggle against its enactments and effects.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, notions of gender, race, and class figured into the scientific production of adolescence as a "universal," "developmental" category that privileged maleness, whiteness, and middle-class status as its normative characteristics. In this body of scientific thought, often girls were ignored, excluded, or deemed deficient because of their sexual difference. However, the white middle-class girl in particular was not easily dismissed by experts devoted to describing and prescribing the development of the child. Through an exploration of the attention girls sometimes (quite prominently if not necessarily adequately) received, we come to see the ways that ideas about

[136.0.111.243] Project MUSE (2025-01-31 07:32 GMT)

their development helped influence and even challenge the modern concept of adolescence. Indeed, from an examination of ideas about the adolescent girl in the past, we discover that the recent criticisms of Gilligan, Hudson, Walkerdine, and others have a history.

This study offers close readings of works on the topics of adolescence and female development by a range of thinkers, situating them in wider intellectual, cultural, and social contexts. The focus is on what scientists and intellectuals in the United States contributed to initial meanings of the concepts of adolescence in general and female adolescence in particular. Such intellectuals were, however, part of broader transatlantic conversations about development, childhood, and gender. Thus, their engagement with their British and other European counterparts is also an important part of the story.[15] Some of the figures focused on, most notably psychologist G. Stanley Hall and anthropologist Margaret Mead, made major (although certainly not wholly original or undisputed) contributions to their fields of scientific endeavor. Many others were interpreters of other experts' findings and ideas who claimed the mantle of scientific authority in shaping cultural understandings of the adolescent girl and her development. All were popularizers or, more high-mindedly, public intellectuals, who were eager to disseminate and to apply their scientific knowledge to the making of their vision of more evolved human beings and a better society. Such experts garnered so much attention (if not unmediated influence) at certain moments because their scientific knowledge reflected and legitimized broader cultural common sense about the female child, even as they helped to both produce and challenge aspects of that common sense.[16]

Some historians debate the location of the experience and concept of adolescence in history. The term "adolescence" has Latin roots and was used during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Young people have always experienced the biological changes of puberty, and descriptions of these changes can be found in the classical texts of medical literature. Several historians have found evidence of rebellious youth cultures and accompanying concern over youth as a dangerous period of life in early modern Europe and Colonial America.[17] This analysis does not discount the possibility that adolescence as a concept or experience existed before the nineteenth century in the United States. Nonetheless, it recognizes that the concept took on its modern connotations during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and argues for the important role scientists across several disciplines played in formulating and popularizing the category of adolescence in the wider culture.[18]

In the nineteenth century, a group of unorthodox physicians involved in the

antebellum health reform movement initially undertook such a task. They drew from the broader focus on development in British, European, and American thought to begin to delineate a period of life between childhood and adulthood that they referred to as the "age of puberty." Health reformers helped to pave the way for the interpretation of Charles Darwin's work, which predominated later in the century, that conceived all forms of development—whether of individuals, species, societies, and culture—as organic, linear, hierarchical, and purposeful. Such expectations shaped their conception of an age of puberty as both a problematic and an auspicious period of life, to be both managed and enabled by adults enlightened by scientific knowledge about human nature. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, health reformers were followed by medical doctors, educators, and other scientifically minded intellectuals who sought to define an "epoch of development" between childhood and adulthood within the debate over the merits and detriments of coeducation. As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, the pioneering developmental psychologist G. Stanley Hall emerged as the foremost inventor of the modern concept of adolescence, which he fully explicated in his influential two-volume work *Adolescence,* published in 1904. During the Progressive era, psychologists, sociologists, and reformers attempting to solve the problem of juvenile delinquency reiterated and redefined conceptions of adolescence. By the 1920s, psychologists associated with the flourishing mental hygiene and child guidance movements spearheaded the growth of a scientific study of "normal" child development, which included demarking the characteristics and mandates of "normal" adolescence. Also during the early decades of the twentieth century, anthropologists brought the newly articulated culture concept to bear on both nineteenth-century ethnographic accounts of puberty rites and using evolutionary theory to explain child development among "primitive" and "civilized" peoples.

At each of these particular historical junctures, some scientists seriously considered how the girl (most often white and middle class) would figure into "universal" developmental expectations in general and the adolescent stage of life in particular. They pursued and debated a range of responses to the girl's development: marking, accounting for, and assessing her developmental differences, holding her up as an exemplar of certain developmental norms, and extending to her the same prerogatives conferred by the process of development claimed by her brother. Their conceptualizations of the adolescent girl were shaped by a mix of influences, including ideas about human nature, especially theories about the relative role of and interaction between nature (biology) and nurture (environment or culture) in propelling the child's development and

producing sexual and racial difference; their individual and collective biographies, including their gender, race, and class identities and positions; their disciplinary orientations and professional status and aspirations; the activities and experiences of girls and boys; and the first wave of women's rights activism and the emergence of modern feminism. Together, these scientific experts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contributed to a developmental paradigm whose primary subject was the white middle-class male, while also probing some of that paradigm's limits and questioning some of its tenets.

It is, then, a constellation of ideas about adolescence and female development that contemporary child development experts have inherited and with which they continue to wrestle. Significantly, Carol Gilligan alludes to the history of ideas about female adolescence in justifying her attention to the topic in the 1990s. "For over a century," she and her colleague Lyn Mikel Brown write, "the edge of adolescence has been identified as a time of heightened psychological risk for girls . . . This crisis in women's development has been variously attributed to biology or to culture, but its psychological dimensions and its link to trauma have been only recently explored."[19] Yet, positioning herself as newly discovering what was by the late twentieth century an old problem, Gilligan also borrows from the *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology* to note that "[a]dolescent girls have simply not been much studied."[20] In part, this project began as an attempt to provide some historical insight into the current preoccupation with female adolescence. How *was* adolescence formulated as a "crisis" in female development by scientific experts in the past? How did such experts demark the possibilities and limits for the girl's development within the reigning paradigms of biology and culture in scientific thought? How might knowledge of this history inform a critical appraisal and appreciation of approaches to the "crisis" of female adolescence in the present? By focusing on earlier moments in which adolescent girls were the object of scientific and cultural concern, this book illuminates the intellectual origins of the relationship between adolescence and femininity—"subversive" and otherwise—to contribute to a better understanding of efforts to reconcile them in our own time.