

Reel Guidance: Midcentury Classroom Films and Adolescent Adjustment

Jonathan R. MacDonald

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Kathleen W. Jones, Chair
Edward J. K. Gitre
Heather Gumbert

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the cultural and political messages found in “social guidance” films, a genre of films produced for pedagogical purposes in the United States following the Second World War. Educational film producers relied on social science consultants for legitimacy and employed plots that addressed ordinary challenges of daily living encountered by teenagers. Shown in high school classrooms nationwide in the postwar years, these films advertised to young people the usefulness of a psychological understanding of personality adjustment. These films reflected the influence of ideas from both the progressive education movement inspired by John Dewey and the theories of mental hygiene from prewar psychologists. By viewing these films, students encountered advice about improving their individual productivity and they received guidance for developing skills needed in social settings. By parsing the cultural and intellectual messages embedded in these films and relating them to interwar and postwar developments, this thesis shows one way that social experts mobilized to shape the socialization of adolescents. Social guidance films intended to employ the specialized knowledge of the social sciences to promote the production of healthy and successful personalities.

More importantly, this thesis shows how social guidance films, in addressing ordinary teenage concerns, also addressed the political needs of American society at the dawn of the Cold War. The practical advice presented in these films showed adolescents how to tread the line between the preservation of individuality and commitment to the group—the essential problem faced by post war political theorists. Educators looked to the confluence of school, psychology, and film to guide the socialization of youths for their future roles as citizens of a democratic

society. This thesis argues that the messages of psychological adjustment in social guidance films provided one means of promoting democratic values to counter the postwar threat of totalitarianism.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This thesis describes how films produced for schools in the United States following the Second World War used the psychological understanding of personality adjustment in an attempt to shape adolescent minds and behaviors. It examines a genre of educational films known as social guidance films. These films purported to provide expert guidance for the challenges of daily living encountered by teenagers. The content of social guidance films were shaped by the long history of progressive education, advocacy from the psychological sciences, and the political needs of American society at the dawn of the Cold War.

By tracing ideas across the first half of the twentieth century, this thesis reveals the broad ways in which social experts envisioned their commitment to American society and democracy. In the earliest years of the twentieth century, both educators and psychologists expressed concern over the process of adolescent socialization. Their concerns grew in response to national and international political, social, and economic developments, such as the World Wars, the Great Depression, the growth of mass media, and the emergence of postwar youth cultures. They looked to the confluence of the school, psychology, and film as a means to reproduce a new generation of democratically oriented citizens.

In parsing the cultural and intellectual messages embedded in these films and relating them to interwar and postwar developments, this thesis shows one way that social experts mobilized to attempt intervention in the routine development of adolescents. Social guidance films, imbued with specialized knowledge, promised to aid in the production of healthy personalities and the preservation of democratic society.

Dedication

For

Alexandra Wallace Cook

Acknowledgements

“These sources are so rich, this will write itself!” Jonathan said, unprepared for what was to come. Thankfully, with the help of the expert authority figures in his life, Jonathan learned how to write and revise a master’s thesis. It was difficult, to be sure, but after developing the habits needed to be a productive worker, he got it done in record time, meeting all of his deadlines...

Well, that last part is not true, but I am deeply indebted to the careful attention and (nearly) endless patience of my committee. Thank you all for exerting the considerable energy needed to work on this project. Each one of you pushed me to challenge and refine my ideas along the way, allowing this project to reach maturity. I was incredibly lucky to work with scholars who were legitimately interested in the content and implications of this work. If this thesis captures even a bit of your collective intellectual vigor and curiosity, I consider it a success.

My family and friends have supported me along the way. As a first generation college student, I was lucky that both of my parents remained deeply interested in and supportive of my studies. They both fielded countless exasperated phone calls, provided much needed perspective, and offered morale and material support. Willing or unwilling, all of my friends have had to listen to this project develop in the past few years. Jennifer Nehrt and Rebecca Williams did more than offer their ears; they provided helpful and incisive feedback. Their camaraderie was vital in preserving my sanity, no matter what strange adventures I undertook while in graduate school.

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Introduction

Alan decided to stay after class one day to speak with his teacher. It was 1951, and like any other afternoon at Alan's middle-class suburban high school, his fellow classmates had gone off to their various after-school commitments: back home, to part-time jobs, or to social outings. But Alan had a question, and it was urgent. Alan's question was not about the content of that day's lecture, his grades, or any upcoming assignments; instead, he was looking for advice. His teacher, Mr. Carson, was there to oblige. Alan wanted to learn how to accomplish more in life. Given the ease with which he responded, Alan's teacher had significant experience advising students. Mr. Carson sat Alan down to discuss the responsibilities of living. Responsibilities increased as people mature, the teacher explained. Infants, children, teenagers, and young adults take on different levels of responsibility when faced with tasks required for daily living. Mr. Carson went on, explaining that Alan, now just a few years from adulthood, needed to learn the virtue of self-reliance if he hoped to find success in school and beyond. Sometime later, Mr. Carson would recount this conversation. He was happy to report that Alan had taken his advice, and it paid off. Alan had become "a happier and better person" for mastering the strategies of self-reliance.¹

Alan, Mr. Carson, and the school building they shared were the fictional creations of Coronet Instructional Films. Their story was not real, but film projectors in schools around the country shared it for its prescriptive pedagogical value. Developed with the input of an "educational collaborator," the president of San Francisco State College, J. Paul Leonard, Coronet's ten-minute *Developing Self-Reliance* was a film crafted to be an entertaining and

¹ Coronet Instructional Films, *Developing Self-Reliance*, 1951, <http://archive.org/details/Developi1951>.

informative educational supplement for high school classes.² As such, its story had to be dramatic and believable, but also vague enough to apply to the various life experiences of its viewers. *Developing-Self Reliance* was one of many dozens of films that attempted to use fictional narratives to impart guidance lessons to their high school teenage audience. While recent viewers have looked to these films with ironic distance, interpreting them as epitomes of postwar conformity, or even as guides that remain relevant to living in the modern world, none have explained their intellectual and cultural scaffolding. Framing the narratives and ideas of these films were decades of intellectual work in education and psychology. By putting prescriptive messages about how to act and how to interact into these films, educators and filmmakers hoped to reach a broad audience of young people they diagnosed as in need of adjustment. This thesis sets out to restore the connection between these films and their interwar intellectual antecedents. In doing so, this thesis shows how these films mobilized interwar ideas to address concerns about democratic society in the postwar world.

Following World War II, a sophisticated form of educational media emerged from private film studios and took root in classrooms across the United States. While educational films of all kinds were popular, one genre in particular proliferated in the decade immediately following the war: social guidance films.³ The content of these films reflected the culmination of several

² This film, like nearly all classroom educational films from the period, cited an authority in the field during its opening credits. The question of their role in film production is discussed later in this introduction. Leonard was author and editor of several books on education, see J. Paul Leonard and Helen Foss Weeks, *Fundamentals of Secondary Education: A Syllabus of Its Development, Present Status, Basic Psychology, and Principles* (New York: World Book Company, 1938); J. Paul Leonard, Alvin C. Eurich, and Society for Curriculum Study, eds., *An Evaluation of Modern Education* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1942); J. Paul Leonard, *Developing the Secondary School Curriculum* (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc. 1946).

³ A note on terminology. I will use the terms “educational films” and “classroom films” interchangeably to describe films that were exhibited in American schools, though “educational” films were used in a number of other venues such as museums, churches, and community meetings. “Social guidance films,” the principle object of my study, are films that imparted lessons relating to personal and social behavior: hygiene, study habits, relationships with family and peers, and so on. “Social guidance films” are sometimes referred to as “mental hygiene films” after terminology popularized by Ken Smith, see Ken Smith, *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films, 1945-1970* (New York: Blast Books,

decades of knowledge accumulated and synthesized by social-scientific experts, educational theorists, and media entrepreneurs, each interested for their own reasons in the successful transformation of teenagers into adults. Social guidance films largely ignored the theoretical in favor of the practical: eschewing health science for hand-washing, job training for work habits, and sociology for social protocol. While these films nominally covered a wide variety of topics, in truth they had two major preoccupations: the individual's relationship to the self and the individual's relationship to society. I argue that through these educational films, social science experts who served as content consultants found an elegant way to disseminate their ideas about how people needed to act and interact in order to achieve personal happiness and to promote social order. Their vision of social order would come through the creation and preservation of a particular vision of American democracy in the postwar world: one where people were individuated, independent rational actors, yet could work with sensitivity in groups to reach consensus. As envisioned by early twentieth century progressives, democracy required the reconciliation of the individual with society. Decades later, social experts would use the language of "adjustment" to show how they imagined this reconciliation would occur. By placing emphasis on the psychosocial ideas in circulation prior to midcentury, I show that these social guidance films were a technologically sophisticated and modern way for psychological experts to attempt intervention in the social adjustment of adolescents in service to democracy.

World War II precipitated a broad concern over the social body. It disrupted families and brought all aspects of American society to bear on the needs of total war. While social theorists earlier in the century defined the traits of democratic citizenship, the fight against fascism and the ensuing Cold War brought them a new urgency. Social science experts became convinced

1999). I will avoid the term "mental hygiene films" when describing this genre, reserving its use instead for period psychology/mental health literature.

that human relations had become far more complex in the postwar years than ever before. Family structures that had been under threat from the Depression strained further as men left for war and women took on jobs in war industries. Delinquency scares seemed to confirm the suspicions of social experts. They saw the threat of chaos looming in the streets: a generation of youth born during the lean years of Depression and in the tumult of World War suddenly thrust into a boom economy and a reinvigorated, inventive cultural landscape. Experts suggested wholesome activities such as scouting, school-sanctioned clubs, and part-time employment to help reign in potentially rebellious youths.⁴ The expert prescription was a re-stabilized social order, one where social roles inside and outside of the family were clearly delineated. Only this stability could foster a democratic society, social experts thought, and only a democratic society could stand against threats at home and abroad.⁵ In drawing links between the interwar period and the postwar period, this thesis tells part of the story of the reaction to these perceived threats.

Experts from the human sciences came to believe that the maintenance of democracy required the production of a particular psychological type. For democratic order to prevail during and after World War II, the personalities of citizens needed to become democratic.

Communications scholar Fred Turner identified the democratic personality as “a highly individuated, rational, and empathetic mindset, committed to racial and religious diversity, and so able to collaborate with others while retaining its individuality.”⁶ Citizenship in democracy

⁴ For analyses why midcentury adults were anxious about teenagers, see James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). For their prescriptive responses see, William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); and particularly chapter 14 "In Pursuit of the Perfect Childhood" from Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁵ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 20th Anniversary Edition (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 9.

⁶ Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 3.

required training, or as one historian put it, “citizenship was a developmental journey, leading from the immoderate and intemperate excesses of childhood (or its political equivalent, irrational extremism) to the constitution of a rational, moderate, and self-managing self.”⁷ Not long after the war, social theorist David Riesman would identify this new social type as a conformist, “other-directed” person whose social cues came not from within themselves, but from others.⁸ The delicate balance required to maintain democracy was a balance between individualism and conformity. This idea predated the war, but global conflict brought it into sharper relief, as did the Cold War. In light of national and international challenges, psychologists saw it as their duty to foster the creation of democratic personalities.

The contemporary psychological understanding of adjustment reflected the balance between individualism and conformity. “Adjustment” also served to ease a contradiction within the psychological understanding of the individual, whom experts saw as irrational (when unadjusted) but capable of rationality (when adjusted). Psychologists recognized that the social self was complex and contradictory, torn between competing needs and desires. To be well adjusted was to have these desires properly balanced so that, as one 1957 advice book put it, the “thought and behavior patterns which yield satisfaction today... give indications that the next problems encountered will be similarly successfully resolved.”⁹ Adjustment was a quality that the individual exhibited when meeting challenges on a personal and social level. Through a developmental process that established ideal adjustment qualities, social experts hoped to create personalities that would exhibit the social ideals of rationality, democratic engagement, and

⁷ Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 21.

⁸ David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961).

⁹ Harold W. Bernard, *Toward Better Personal Adjustment*, Second (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957), 19.

individual efficiency. Social guidance films were just one of the many products of this ambitious project to create social harmony through individual personality adjustment.

I divide this thesis into three chapters. In the first chapter, “Personality Instruction,” I look to educational theory and the psychological sciences in the first half of the twentieth century to show how experts constructed a model of adolescence and progressive schooling that they thought would produce well-adjusted pupils. This chapter features a discussion of Life Adjustment Education, an educational movement that rose to prominence during the late 1940s and continued until the progressive paradigm began to erode in the mid-1950s. Chapters Two and Three show how films translated the complex ideas of educational psychology into a program of action for adolescent viewers. My second chapter, “Mastering the Self,” discusses social guidance educational films that contained messages of individual self-regulation. These films addressed various subjects, from personal hygiene, to mental health, to personal productivity. Because the purpose of social guidance films was to communicate proper adjustment, and contemporary social scientists recognized the power of groups in ordering the lives of individuals, the third chapter of this thesis looks to messages of social interaction. In “Mastering Cooperation,” I look to films that detailed the individual’s relationship with peers, parents, and society. Taken together, these chapters show how social experts attempted to disperse their messages about the importance of psychological adjustment on an individual basis and in group settings.

The makers of social guidance films did not use these two categories in film production or promotion. The purpose of my categorization is twofold. First, these analytical categories come partially out of contemporary social science, which advocated both for self and social mastery. Second, these categories allow me to group together separate but related subgenres of

social guidance films. While my disambiguation suggests a roughly hewn difference between these films, there is in fact significant overlap between the films analyzed in chapter two and chapter three. Often the former category of film suggested that self-mastery was a necessary tool for navigating the social world. Likewise, films in the latter category suggested that the skills needed for a healthy social life were transferable to the individual's solitary existence. This overlap in themes suggests that these films ought to be viewed as a unified filmography, rather than as individual films about particular topics. By looking at the messages in this filmography, we can see how "success" was defined, how problems were explained, and how adolescents were supposed to find solutions to these problems.

Literature Review

Educational films are complex sources. Social guidance films in particular speak to a wide variety of social, political, and cultural developments in mid-twentieth century America. In light of this, I try to engage with a wide body of literature. With an eye towards prescribed ideals of adolescent socialization, I position myself at the intersection of three fields of study: the history of adolescence, the history of education, and the history of the psychological sciences.¹⁰ Each of these bodies of literature is rich, but seldom have all three been put in conversation with one-another. Yet they overlap significantly: social scientists responded to the perceived threat of maladjusted (delinquent) adolescents in part through the school system. Educational films were just one of the ways that they did so. By making these connections, I attempt to create a history of ideas found in the interwar and postwar periods.

¹⁰ When appropriate, I also draw on the history of film and the history of Cold War culture, though I do not substantially engage with these historiographies. Films are my primary sources, and histories of the Cold War provide vital context to understand them.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, social experts came to understand adolescence as a liminal state between childhood and adulthood.¹¹ Medical and social experts constructed the idea of adolescence while also defining its properties and establishing regimes of control. Historian Kent Baxter has argued that the invention of adolescence was itself a result of modernity, and that the adolescent came to represent broader social anxieties in the modern age. Further, historian Peter N. Stearns has argued, “parents in the 20th century were more anxious, not just differently anxious” than their predecessors. This anxiety developed in response to numerous changes, including social and economic changes that facilitated the independence of teenagers and the subversion of established family orders. The invention of adolescence and the growing imperative to regulate it coincided with the solidification of a youth peer culture larger than at any preceding time in American history. These two developments have fueled a wide array of scholarly inquiry into the development of the teenager, of teen culture, and of the potential danger that adolescents posed to society.¹²

In the case of midcentury teenagers, scholars have generally focused more on how their behavior was proscribed than how it was prescribed. Historian James Gilbert looked to adult reactions to the shifting social mores among adolescents—the youth culture “problem”—at midcentury. By examining attempts to control anti-social behavior, Gilbert’s study revealed a broad adult reaction that engulfed not just delinquents but all adolescents. He found midcentury explanations for delinquency in the corrupting power of peer culture shaped by mass media. Films, comic books, and unseen adolescent social circles became newly available to teens, due to their increased financial independence. In his analysis of the meaning of “zoot suits” for youth

¹¹ Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood*.

¹² *Ibid.*, 285–86; Kent Baxter, *The Modern Age: Turn-of-the-Century American Culture and the Invention of Adolescence* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2008); Peter N. Stearns, *Anxious Parents: A History of Modern Childrearing in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

during World War II, historian Luis Alvarez determined that reaction towards delinquency near midcentury also had much to do with the policing of racial and class boundaries.¹³ While adults defined and policed unacceptable behavior for adolescents, they also attempted to define and encourage ideal behaviors.

By constructing a regime of acceptable adolescent expression, adults sought to reign-in would-be rebels through preventative measures. Historian William Graebner applied the theories of social control he first elaborated in the 1987 book *The Engineering of Consent* towards midcentury youth in his study *Coming of Age in Buffalo*. While in part a work of local and public history, Graebner's analysis of the regulation of teenagers nonetheless has broad scholarly implications for the study of postwar youth cultures. He argues that social engineers implemented a dizzying array of controls in an attempt to nudge teenagers towards the dual imperatives of unity and homogeneity (a functioning consensus, with no serious outliers) built around the philosophy of progressive "democratic" education. These efforts were located primarily in the school, "the locus of the most consistent efforts to shape [teen] behavior and values." Graebner showed that in everything from student government, to supervised school activities, to the procedure of lunchrooms, administrators tightly regulated school life in an attempt to create a "more responsible student population."¹⁴

These histories of adolescence at midcentury reveal that adult regulation came in both proscriptive and prescriptive varieties. While the former category was elaborated through rules, laws, and restrictions, the latter appeared in officially sanctioned "culture": dress, media, and

¹³ Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s*; Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008).

¹⁴ William Graebner, *The Engineering of Consent: Democracy and Authority in Twentieth-Century America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era*, 7–8.

activities endorsed by adults. Social guidance films were among this latter category, and serious study of them adds to our understanding of the ways that adults attempted to influence teens towards socially defined “good” behavior.

The history of childhood is closely related to the history of education. Schools have served the needs of society by reproducing among children the knowledge and skills needed to negotiate the social world of which they are a part. Historians have offered extensive discussions of the role of schools in American society. When discussing education in the twentieth century, historians have tended to focus on the response of educators to the social imperatives of modernity. Writing in 1982, David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot identified a distinct phase of American education as lasting from 1890 to 1954. During this period, they argued, “educational leaders were social engineers” who closely guarded their expert authority through participation in professional societies and by claiming profound social knowledge. In their telling, schools reflected the broader changes of American society in the early twentieth century: increasingly managerial and subjected to greater social and national needs. This narrative retains explanatory power thirty years later, as evidenced by Tracy Steffes’ recent monograph *School, Society, and State: A New Education to Govern Modern America*, in which she argued that school reform placed increasingly burdensome social obligations on schools while “expand[ing] the institutions, the reach, and the authority of the state.” Joel Spring has looked at schools as centers of what he calls “ideological management,” where the control of ideas served as a source of power through interaction and contention between differing interest groups. Together these accounts reveal how experts, the needs of the state, and interest groups shaped the ideological texture of schooling in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁵

¹⁵ I discuss developments in educational philosophy and corresponding historiographical debates in more detail in my first chapter. David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America*,

Along with educators, a growing force of social experts also prescribed solutions to problems facing midcentury Americans. Historian Ellen Herman identified a “romance” of psychology as characterizing the post-World War II United States. This “romance” required “aggressive social intervention... by experts acting as an organized constituency,” who provided advice for living “in the name of enlightenment.” Though Herman situates her work in the postwar years, psychological authority had been developing for decades prior to World War II. Historian Kathleen W. Jones showed just how uneven the processes of legitimation were that accompanied the rise of expert “child guiders” in the first half of the century. Parents did not accept psychological authority over the family outright. Nonetheless the general pattern remains: psychological expertise assumed an increasingly prominent role in efforts to address individual and social problems, and it found new venues through which to disseminate knowledge to the public.¹⁶

Social scientific experts deployed their knowledge in an attempt to shape the public along socially beneficial lines. Chief among these concerns at midcentury was the fostering of democratic ideals to stand against fascism, and later communism. As historian James Cohen-Cole found, social science experts during the Cold War articulated an ideology of open-mindedness that (ironically) created a prescriptive set of ideal political and social beliefs.

According to Cohen-Cole, experts constructed the ideal citizen of a democratic republic as

1820-1980 (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 6–7; Tracy L. Steffes, *School, Society, and State: A New Education to Govern Modern America, 1890-1940* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 7–8; Joel Spring, *Images of American Life: A History of Ideological Management in Schools, Movies, Radio, and Television* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 1–3.

¹⁶ I discuss developments in the psychological sciences in the first half of the twentieth century in more detail in my first chapter. Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 9; Kathleen W. Jones, *Taming the Troublesome Child: American Families, Child Guidance, and the Limits of Psychiatric Authority* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); See also, Eva S. Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust: America's Obsession with Self-Fulfillment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

consensus-oriented, tolerant, able to operate in group settings, and to defer to experts, yet still retain an individuality which separated them from the mass. One area for disseminating their ideas was the school. Historian of education Sol Cohen has referred to this psychological activism in the schools as the little-studied “medicalization of education.” Informed by these examples, I identify social scientists as key actors in an evolving midcentury discourse centered on the fate of democratic civic order. When viewed through the lens of psychological proselytization, it becomes apparent that social guidance films represent one of the richest sources for understanding not only the medicalization of education, but also the psychologization of adolescence, and of all American life.¹⁷

While I do not engage substantially with scholars of film studies or cultural historians of film, this thesis in part contributes to an emerging literature on the meanings of non-theatrical cinemas. Historians have long recognized the importance of cultural sources in the process of reflecting and reproducing social values. For historians of the twentieth century, media has provided a unique insight into the ways that cultural values were constructed, reproduced, and challenged. This thesis shows how expert-endorsed guidance strategies targeted at students in American high schools found expression through the medium of film.

From their inception, motion pictures have performed an educational function. Film historian Robert Sklar observed that motion pictures developed out of a scientific impulse to understand the natural world, “to make visible what was not apparent to the human eye.”¹⁸ Films designed for entertainment found their first audiences among the urban working-class. As films

¹⁷ James Cohen-Cole, *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Sol Cohen, *Challenging Orthodoxies: Toward a New Cultural History of Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

¹⁸ The first motion picture is generally regarded to be Eadweard Muybridge’s *Sallie Gardner at a Gallop* (1878), a series of sequenced photographs of a galloping horse. It was created to show that when a horse is at a full gallop, all four of its feet lift off of the ground simultaneously, see Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, Revised and Updated (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 5–7.

shed their reputation of working-class novelties and emerged as a middle-class art form, this didactic impulse reasserted itself through the development of documentaries and other “factual” films. While many well-known academic and popular texts have told the story of Hollywood films, only recently have scholars begun to uncover the story of alternative and ephemeral cinemas: amateur, industrial, educational, documentary, government-sponsored and other kinds of film.¹⁹

Histories of educational films have been particularly slow to emerge. Paul Saettler published the first edition of the authoritative text *The Evolution of American Educational Technology* in 1968, but the ideological content of educational media did not receive scholarly attention until the 1990s. The first work to examine the ideological basis of educational media was an edited collection by Elizabeth Ellsworth and Mariamne H. Whatley published in 1990. The authors of this collection applied media theory to visual educational supplements to show that “the conventions of film, video, and photographic representation are not neutral carriers of content” but instead invested with meaning particular to their context, authors, audience, and format.²⁰

The sustained analysis of film content has been slow to emerge due to the relative inaccessibility of these sources until recently. Ken Smith’s *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films*,

¹⁹ See, for instance James E. Combs and Sarah T. Combs, *Film Propaganda and American Politics: An Analysis and Filmography*, vol. 4, Garland Filmographies (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994); Robert Eberwein, *Sex Ed: Film, Video, and the Framework of Desire* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999); Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); Eric Smoodin, *Regarding Frank Capra: Audience, Celebrity, and American Film Studies, 1930-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Robert Fyne, *Long Ago and Far Away: Hollywood and the Second World War* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2008); Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Inventing Film Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Voderau, eds., *Films That Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009); Patrick Voderau, Bo Florin, and Nico de Klerk, eds., *Films That Sell: Moving Pictures and Advertising* (Palgrave, 2016).

²⁰ Elizabeth Ellsworth and Mariamne H. Whatley, eds., *The Ideology of Images in Educational Media: Hidden Curriculums in the Classroom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990), 3.

1945-1970 published in 1999 was the first book-length analysis of the film genre discussed in this thesis, and of educational films generally. Smith, a former television comedy writer, argued that the social guidance film genre (which he dubbed “mental hygiene films”) emerged because of adult anxiety about the newfound independence of teenagers in the postwar period. Working with archivist Rick Prelinger, Smith screened hundreds of films, sought out and interviewed surviving members of educational film studios, and drew together the first summation of this vibrant industry. Smith rightly calls for viewers to treat these films as serious historical documents rather than amusing novelties, though his writing often emphasized their comedic aspects. In collecting information about dozens of films and film studios, Smith’s work has served as a starting point for much of this historiography.²¹ There remains a great deal left to be uncovered.

A handful of master’s theses and doctoral dissertations have been written on the subject of educational films. In 1998, Ronald S. Green looked to these films as counterpoints to the emerging teen culture of the 1950s in his dissertation “Innovation, Imitation, and Resisting Manipulation: The First Twenty Years of the American Teenager.” He determined that adult attempts at guidance (including through educational films) led directly to the emergence of a unique youth-generated culture. Because Green specifically examined the emergence of this youth culture, he did not examine the precise nature of expert prescriptions. He identified the primary purpose of social guidance films to be the shaping of teenage cultural expression along adult-approved lines. By contrast, I highlight the ideology of these films. Social guidance films

²¹ *Mental Hygiene* makes a very suggestive argument in linking these films to the broader social and economic developments that lead to newfound independence for a generation of teenagers. Yet Smith does little other than read these films as emblematic of a monolithic postwar conformity. Though the book’s title reflects the prewar psychological sciences, it contains only a brief discussion of the ideas and imperatives of American psychology from the period. Nonetheless, Smith’s initial connections between the big ideas of progressive education, psychology, and films have influenced all subsequent studies of this material, including this thesis. Ken Smith, *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films, 1945-1970* (New York: Blast Books, 1999).

worked on multiple levels: they certainly carried messages about appropriate cultural expression, but they communicated these (and other ideas) through a scientific understanding of adolescent behavior and psychology. Michelle Anne Boule's 2004 dissertation provided many suggestive links between social guidance education and midcentury social-scientific thinking. For example, she argued that these films, much like David Riesman's seminal text, *The Lonely Crowd*, signaled the coming of an other-directed personality type that looked to peer approval for behavioral guidelines rather than traditional forms of authority. While Boule looked primarily to social scientific work in the postwar years to inform her reading of educational films, I find their content to be rooted in the interwar psychological interest in the adolescent, where the ideas that found expression in these films first circulated and coalesced.²²

Book-length academic treatments of classroom films have only emerged in the past decade. It would be difficult to exaggerate the role of activist archivists, film festivals, and academic conventions in stimulating scholarly investigation of educational films. Rick Prelinger has long led the charge in the preservation of this material. Large portions of his film archive (including his collection of Coronet films) were digitized and made available on The Internet Archive; most of his film collection was donated to the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division of the Library of Congress in 2002. Other collectors have continued this tradition of private collection and advocacy, most notably Skip Elsheimer at North Carolina's A/V Geeks Archive, who has collected over 20,000 films. The Orphan Film Symposium, sponsored by New York University's Cinema Studies program, has met

²² Ronald S. Green, Jr., "Innovation, Imitation, and Resisting Manipulation: The First Twenty Years of the American Teenager" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1998); Michelle Anne Boule, "Hot Rods, Shy Guys, and Sex Kittens: Social Guidance Films and the American High School 1947-1957" (Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 2004); See also, Claire Hope, "Cold War Educational Propaganda and Instructional Films, 1945-1965" (Master's Thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2011).

periodically since 1999, stimulating both archival and interpretative action. In 2012 Dan Streible, the symposium's chief organizer, co-edited the collection *Learning With the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States*, a diverse collection of nearly two-dozen essays that touch on various aspects of the medium's history.²³

Geoff Alexander, director of the Academic Film Archive of North America, joined this conversation in 2010 with *Academic Films for the Classroom* and again in 2014 with *Films You Saw in School: 1,153 Classroom Educational Films, 1958-1985*, both excellent reference works. Alexander drew much of his information from oral history interviews conducted with former employees of film studios. Alexander argued that educational films can be divided into two genres, what he referred to as “academic and guidance films.” He was mainly concerned with the former sub-genre, which he argued, “were designed to enhance the learning experience in the humanities and sciences,” unlike guidance films “[which] had the prime object of inculcating a certain form of behavior, or promoting behavior change.”²⁴ In drawing the line so strictly between so-called “academic” and “guidance” films, Alexander made too hasty a judgment of the latter category's significance. As we are now decades removed from their creation, Alexander argued that guidance films “serve primarily as historical markers indicating societal change,” unlike academic films which “[remain] fresh, interesting, and topical.” While he acknowledged that the material in films he labels as academic has undergone significant revision,

²³ Rick Prelinger has collected “ephemeral” films of all varieties for decades, much of his collection has been digitized and added to the Internet Archives sub-collection which bears his name, see “Prelinger Archives: Internet Archive,” accessed April 17, 2017, <https://archive.org/details/prelinger>; Prelinger is also author of guide to sponsored films: see Rick Prelinger, *The Field Guide to Sponsored Films* (San Francisco: National Film Preservation Foundation, 2006); “Library Acquires Rare Films (October 2002) - Library of Congress Information Bulletin,” accessed April 17, 2017, <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/0210/prelinger.html>; “A/V Geeks | Have 25,000 Films. Will Travel,” accessed April 17, 2017, <http://www.avgeeks.com/wp2/>; “The Orphan Film Symposium,” accessed April 17, 2017, <http://www.nyu.edu/orphanfilm/>; Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible, eds., *Learning With the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁴ Geoff Alexander, *Academic Films for the Classroom* (McFarland, 2010) p. 5; Geoff Alexander, *Films You Saw in School: 1,153 Classroom Educational Films, 1958-1985* (McFarland, 2014).

he failed to acknowledge that the culturally constructed forms of knowledge so visible in social guidance films are valuable and worth more than their “camp, kitsch, and socio-historic relevancy.” Both academic films and social guidance films utilized the authority granted to scientific and social-scientific experts at midcentury; producers of both genres worked with outside advisers. The forms of constructed knowledge shown in both kinds of educational films are worthy of scholarly investigation.²⁵

Two recent edited collections have shed more light on the educational film industry and the diverse content of educational films. Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson published *Useful Cinema* in 2011. *Useful Cinema* is divided into three sections: classroom films, civic films (films intended for centers of public learning like museums), and film production. Acland and Wasson coined the term “useful films,” which they defined as films that “perform tasks and serve as instruments in an ongoing struggle for aesthetic, social, and political capital.” This broad definition is valuable in differentiating between films as entertainment and films meant to “do work” or serve a utilitarian purpose. One year later, Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible published *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States*. Consisting of twenty-two chapters, *Learning with the Lights Off* is by far the most comprehensive and diverse scholarly text on educational films. The book does not advance any particular framework, theory, or thesis. Its first chapter, titled “A History of Learning with the Lights Off,” is the most complete general overview of the development of the educational film industry in the United States. In it, the book’s editors trace the social, technological, and industrial development of the industry that the rest of the chapters elucidate. Several constituent essays are chapter-length analyses of individual films, and serve as models for how to read a film

²⁵ Alexander, *Academic Films for the Classroom*, 5.

not only as a historical document, but also in terms of aesthetic qualities, industrial production, and exhibition. Despite the variety of films covered and scholarly approaches in *Useful Cinema* and *Learning with the Lights Off*, neither contain essays that substantially address the social guidance genre.²⁶

Educational films have also been analyzed as part of the development of postwar pedagogy. A recent book by Kelly Ritter, *Reframing the Subject*, examined educational films in light of the history of literacy education and class structure in midcentury America. Ritter, a professor of English, examined how the films constructed messages about the role of education in promoting class mobility. She argued that educational films represented a turning point in the history of American schooling, at which profit-driven educational textbook and technology companies targeted schools with slick (but ultimately ineffective and shallow) media. According to Ritter, this change resulted in a challenge to individual teacher-pupil relationships. Ritter argued that the films represented a form of mass media for mass audience: a streamlined product that lectured dispassionately at students rather than engaging with them.²⁷

While a great deal of the scholarly analysis of educational media has focused on hidden or sublimated messages, some authors have discussed the explicit and intended effects of media on viewers at and around midcentury. Media historian Nicholas Sammond showed that the Walt Disney Corporation utilized the social scientific and popular discourse surrounding film for its own corporate interests. Sammond demonstrated how Disney profited from an interwar discourse that identified film viewing as a potential corruptor of children by positioning its own media

²⁶ The essays in Acland and Wasson focus on a number of non-commercial uses for film, including classroom films, see Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson, eds., *Useful Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); The collection edited by Orgeron *et al* is the most complete work published on the subject of films used in classrooms, Orgeron, Orgeron, and Streible, *Learning With the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States*.

²⁷ Kelly Ritter, *Reframing the Subject: Postwar Instructional Films and Class-Conscious Literacies* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2015).

products as wholesome and didactic. While Sammond considered the role of private media corporations in shaping the discourse around childhood, others have looked explicitly to media as a tool of governance. Anna McCarthy's *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (2010) used Michel Foucault's theory of governmentality ("the ways in which one conducts the conduct of men") to discuss the means by which early adopters of television viewed their role in creating a democratic citizenry. Both works have helped to shape my interpretation of social guidance films as products of governing that made serious claims to social authority.²⁸

A new body of literature is emerging regarding the purpose, use, and ideological characteristics of educational and "useful" cinemas, but no authors have foregrounded the social scientific context of the interwar period in their analyses. By examining the ideas circulating in the interwar years, I provide insight into how social science experts sought to use new technology to regulate the lives of adolescents at midcentury. By grounding my analysis in the history of adolescence, of education, and of the psychological sciences I attempt to interpret the social guidance films within the intellectual context in which they were created. Doing so shows how educators and social science experts hoped to influence a generation of students by applying psychological insights. Namely, these films sought to balance adolescents' individual identities with the needs of those around them in daily living. While the daily living scenarios depicted in these films were mundane, the lessons embedded within them were of vital importance to what educators saw as the establishment of a well-functioning and democratic society.

Sources & Methodology

²⁸ Nicholas Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America*, 5.

To make this argument I examine typical publications of the psychological sciences from the interwar period, advice literature aimed at adolescents, trade journals of the educational film industry, and of course educational films. These rich sources could be read in a wide variety of ways. I look to them individually to infer change over time, and collectively to piece together the perceived value of adjustment as a social imperative at midcentury.

My primary body of evidence is the filmography of Coronet Instructional Films, particularly films produced between 1946 and 1953.²⁹ Coronet produced a wide variety of classroom films targeted at different age groups. Here I am concerned foremost with films intended for adolescents that I classify as “social guidance” films. I have looked to industry literature, particularly the largest industry magazine *The Educational Screen*, to understand how filmmakers and advocates discussed the educational work they were doing. When useful, I consider films produced by competitors of Coronet, such as Encyclopaedia Britannica Films.³⁰ To situate these films in the human sciences I look to typical publications in education, psychology, and the social sciences in the first half of the twentieth century. These works vary considerably in authorship and intended audience, but when read collectively they establish the intellectual groundswell from which educational films emerged.

This thesis is both a history of ideas and a history of their transmission, thus an intellectual and cultural history. Cultural history seeks to explain the ways in which meaning is constructed through language and symbols, and how meaning has functioned and been received

²⁹ I begin in 1946 with the earliest Coronet produced social guidance films and conclude when Coronet tapered off production of this genre in 1953. David A. Smart died at the end of 1952, his death correlated with Coronet’s decision to pursue other kinds of educational films. Coincidentally, the most active years of social guidance film production for Coronet were also the most active years of the Life Adjustment Education movement, which explicitly blended progressive education and psychology. I discuss Life Adjustment Education in the first chapter of this thesis.

³⁰ Other producers, including Encyclopaedia Britannica, had different visual and didactic styles from the filmography of Coronet. Further research should consider the differing pedagogical strategies between competing production companies and their impact on the classroom and beyond.

through time.³¹ Anthropologist Clifford Geertz famously described culture as a metaphorical “web of significance” that is simultaneously spun by and suspends people.³² This thesis is a history of ideas writ large; I do not pay particular attention to how individuals constructed these ideas nor their precise change over time. I sketch broad developments in educational theory and psychology, but pay more attention to how films deployed these ideas and to what ends. While others have written about progressive education, the mental hygiene movement, and the characteristics of postwar democracy, none have examined how these ideas expressed were through the medium of social guidance films. Looking at educational films—a mass medium intended to both educate and entertain—helps reveal the broad influence that social experts and their knowledge commanded at midcentury.

To introduce the cultural work these films performed, I rely on the idea of “governmentality” posited by Michel Foucault. As elaborated by Colin Gordon, Foucault defined government as “‘the conduct of conduct’: that is to say, a form of activity aiming to shape, guide, or affect the conduct of some person or persons.” Like “power,” Foucault located government not in discrete spaces or specific actors, but as diffused through society. Continuing, Gordon wrote, “Political theory attends too much to institutions, and too little to practices.”³³ In other words, the idea of governing—of shaping and regulating behavior—transcends the needs of states and is reproduced as a broader function of society through practices on the individual

³¹ Lynn Hunt, “The Rise and Fall of Cultural Theories,” in *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2014), 13–43.

³² Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 6. Yet cultural history evades definition by its practitioners. In a 2008 collection on the topic James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O’Malley cautioned that “Although we see ourselves as engaged in common analytical problems and source types, none of us would insist upon a fixed or finished method for “doing” cultural history,” let alone settle on a singular definition of “culture.” See, James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O’Malley, eds., *The Cultural Turn in U. S. History: Past, Present, and Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 4.

³³ Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With Two Lectures and an Interview with Michel Foucault* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2, 4.

level. All sectors of society concerned with ensuring proper government or invested in meeting its demands take on the exigencies of governing, rather than a top-down state. As Anna McCarthy demonstrated in her study of 1950s television, governmentality is a particularly useful lens for analyzing American society during the Cold War.³⁴ Anxiety over the role of government, in part as reaction to large government exercise of power during the Second World War and in part as anti-communist ideology, meant that institutions of governing were devolved. Private organizations, technocratic managers, and average citizens all adhered to a similar prescriptive notion of “democracy” at midcentury. They sought to balance individual needs and social obligations in service to a liberal democratic order.

Educational films were documents of governing that reflected the contemporary nationalizing mission of American schools. They defined (and modeled) practices of democratic citizenship. To see educational films in this way, one must read somewhat against the grain of what they depict. These films did not reflect the world that existed at midcentury, but rather the world that filmmakers believed they might create by providing youth with a prescriptive didactic model. These films were both an expression of power and a reflection of power in practice. They defined authority figures as parents, educators, and physicians, who appeared at appropriate moments to advise and guide student protagonists. As often, disembodied omniscient narrators would guide the adjustment process of their adolescent charges. What is key here is that the on-screen student was left with the crucial step of implementing expert advice. While it would have been easier for these films to show students simply “doing as told,” most showed a learning process. In these films, protagonists who improved their lives did so rationally on their own impulse, but with expert guidance. American democracy, as contemporaries envisioned it,

³⁴ McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America*.

required that individuals work towards socially beneficial ends. However, for the maintenance of democracy, individuals could not be coerced to meet these ends; they needed to be persuaded through the use of reason.

I am limited in a number of important ways by my focus on the social scientific scaffolding of social guidance films. In short, I am not comparing what these films depicted to the lived reality of midcentury adolescents, nor am I attempting to determine whether these films were effective in their mission. Future scholars could do a great deal of work at the intersection of class, race, and gender as depicted in educational films. In the case of Coronet's films produced from the late 1940s through the mid-1950s, they exclusively depicted people who were middle-class, white, and abide by gender conventions. Race was a non-issue, not because films depict racial harmony, but because they depict white racial homogeneity. Gender conventions were not challenged on screen; they were reproduced. And true to their era as products of postwar prosperity, these films did not address issues of class in the stories that they depict. Social historians have shown us that, rather than rising out of consensus, these normative categories were forged through conflict and contention. While these observations inform my reading of this filmography, I do not substantially engage with these problems. Future scholars, particularly those who study whiteness and class at midcentury, should consider educational films among other forms of prescriptive literature.

A Note on Film Sources

Like their contemporaries on television or in feature films, Coronet's films contained actors following a script. The classroom and homes depicted in Coronet's films were nothing more than sparsely decorated sets, recycled between films. From what we know, most films from the late 1940s and early 1950s were shot on a soundstage built on the Glenview, Illinois estate of

the founder of Coronet Instructional Films (as well as *Esquire*, *Gentleman's Quarterly*, and *Coronet* magazines), media mogul David A. Smart. Investing time, money, and personal energy into educational films appears to have occupied Smart from the mid-1940s until his death. He and his filmmaking team were prolific, generating at their peak, by some measures, four to five films per week. Smart died in 1952; by the end of 1953 production had declined significantly.³⁵ Unfortunately, because historical interest in educational films has been slow to materialize, we are left with many questions about Coronet and the industry as a whole. The 16mm educational film industry existed largely separate from Hollywood. We have no sense of exactly how many films the industry produced during its height from the late-1940s until the 1980s. Period film catalogs contained many films that are now lost to history, yet archivists routinely recover previously unknown films as they sort through uncatalogued reels. These and countless other details will only be sorted out by additional collaboration between historians, professional archivists, and amateur collectors.³⁶

Until historians more fully investigate film studio records, we will not have a full picture of how production proceeded.³⁷ While Coronet Instructional Films cited an educational collaborator at the start of each film, what exact role these experts played in the content of films is difficult to determine. Anthony Slide asserts that Coronet maintained an active outreach program that engaged in national educational meetings and kept abreast of developments in

³⁵ No substantive biography of Smart exists; merely a single pamphlet-length book published by Smart-family endowed Smart Museum of Art. What exact influence Smart had on the daily operations of Coronet Instructional Films remains to be determined by future research, see David Mazie, *Two Visionary Brothers: David and Alfred Smart* (Chicago: The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, 2003).

³⁶ Orgeron, Orgeron, and Streible, *Learning With the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States*.

³⁷ I do not address the possible conflicts between the self-interest of film producers (most of whom looked to turn a profit on their film products) and the psychological proselytization of film content. The extent to which the capitalist impulses of filmmakers' shaped the production process is difficult to say, though it is certainly a factor future scholars should consider. That Coronet's films up to the mid-1950s appeared less than eager to engage with issues of race, for example, could be indicative of the fact that they were concerned about offending potential customers (including segregated schools). Further, each individual studio probably differed in their priorities and markets.

education texts.³⁸ This vision of an active, engaged outreach division is contradicted by Ken Smith, who asserts:

The partnership between social scientists and Mental Hygiene filmmakers was not much of a partnership. The studio writers would read educational journals, distill the latest social theory into a plucky ten-minute film, then send a copy of the script to the scholar for his/her comments and approval. The scholars were usually happy to grant the filmmakers leeway in exchange for their names appearing on the credits of a film.³⁹

Even if educational filmmakers did not collaborate closely with their content advisers, the influence of actual social scientific ideas on these films is clear.

One set of correspondence between producers at Encyclopaedia Britannica Films and psychologist and collaborator Lawrence K. Frank reveals the possible perils of these partnerships. Encyclopaedia Britannica began planning for a series of films in 1946, but by mid-1948 Frank was venting his frustration with the studio producers. “Needless to say, I was astonished to hear that you are planning to release the three films in their original form,” Frank wrote to one of the producers, “since I had expected you to change them along the lines that we had talked over.” Even though the producers at Encyclopaedia Britannica ignored Frank’s authorial suggestions, their collaboration evidently continued for several years and retained its problematic elements. Regarding another film in 1953, one producer apologized to Frank, “I am really sorry, more than sorry, I am crushed by the number of mis-managed handlings of our relations on this film.”⁴⁰ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider the specific nature of these collaborations, but it appears they may have significantly affected the production process and ultimately the ideas expressed in educational films.

³⁸ Anthony Slide, *Before Video: A History of the Non-Theatrical Film* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 94.

³⁹ Ken Smith, e-mail message to author, September 15, 2016.

⁴⁰ Lawrence K. Frank, Lawrence K. Frank Papers, MS C 280 History of Medicine Division, National Library of Medicine, Box 14. I want to thank Ed Gitre for providing me with this material.

Regardless of the extent or nature of these collaborations, the content of social guidance films make it clear that the ideas of educational theory and adolescent psychology made their way into film production studios, onto film reels, and into classrooms across the country. Before we can analyze the content of these films, we must first look to their origin in the social science discourse that circulated in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.

Chapter I — Personality Instruction, 1920-1950

In late June 1953, *The Los Angeles Times* devoted a few paragraphs to the problem of juvenile delinquency in the city's schools. An anonymous author at the *L.A. Times* reported that Herschel R. Griffin, then president of the Los Angeles' Affiliated Teacher Organizations, had claimed that "more audio-visual aids, expanded counseling and guidance services, personality adjustment clinics and more free time for teachers to help individual pupils" could resolve the increasingly violent and disruptive activities of youthful rebels. Griffin espoused an optimism that technology and psychology could effectively combat widespread delinquent behavior. This nurturing, pupil-centered approach ran counter to the argument of the *Los Angeles Times* reporter on the story, who instead proposed a revival of corporal punishment (enforced by educators and parents), which the reporter claimed had in the past "[done] wonders for the discipline of youthful rebels." While the reporter dismissed the improvement-centered approach with a nostalgic appeal to this "simpler remedy," Griffin's sentiments reflected those of educational professionals across the United States. While progressive education and American psychology began decades earlier as two separate fields, by the late 1940s they enjoyed significant overlap. Educators were optimistic that a pedagogy based on the application of new technology, psychological intervention, and pupil-oriented schooling could rationalize American education, uplift a new generation of students, and defeat the numerous challenges faced by schools—even that of delinquency.⁴¹

This chapter shows that educators in the immediate postwar era believed that media technology, psychology, and progressive pupil-centered education were necessary tools for the effective and efficient socialization of America's youth. This was the culmination of trends from

⁴¹ "The Rod Is Spared, What to Replace It?," *The Los Angeles Time*, June 28, 1953. Griffin is paraphrased in the article, not directly quoted.

earlier in the century, many of which can be traced to progressive educator John Dewey. The postwar progressive discourse about holistic education emerged partly from ideas circulating in the psychological sciences in the early twentieth century. During this time, psychologists and their allies attempted to cement their social authority over human life and by midcentury they had largely succeeded. Psychological experts extended their influence into more and more aspects of human life through the mental hygiene movement and new sub-disciplines such as child psychology and youth guidance. This interventionist approach to child development followed in the spirit of other progressive rationalizing impulses in the early twentieth century. Child guiders and mental hygienists adopted ideas from across the spectrum of psychological science, creating a flexible discourse around personality, habit training, and social adjustment. In the early years of the Cold War, social experts would attempt to implement these ideas in the schools to foster the growth of democratic personalities.

While charting these developments I also look at the rise of a nascent educational film industry and its attempts to legitimize the instructional use of films in the face of a national obsession with entertaining motion pictures. During the first half of the twentieth century, the medium of film was widely believed to have tremendous political, behavioral, and cultural power, and working from this assumption many filmmakers sought to harness the medium's power to effect positive change on the nation's youth. By the mid-1930s educators looked to film in their quest to educate the "whole child." Private educational film studios emerged to meet this growing demand while advocating for the efficacy of their products. By the end of the 1940s, filmmakers had synthesized these parallel trends in psychology and education to create a new genre of educational film called the social guidance film, the nature of which I explore more fully in the next two chapters of this thesis. While social guidance films were products of the

postwar world, one cannot properly understand the messages embedded within them outside of the context of interwar developments in education and social science.

In that 1953 article, Griffin alluded to some of the key truths of the progressive education paradigm, which at midcentury had become a national pedagogical ideal. As educational historian Arthur Zilversmit has argued, progressive education, despite its many (and often contradictory) facets and stilted implementation “led to a belief that the schools’ ultimate task was to prepare people for life and for change.”⁴² Through the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s a class of increasingly professionalized educators and social scientists, influenced by the work of philosopher John Dewey and his followers, and pulling from the latest technological innovations and social research, crafted compelling (and at times competing) pedagogical strategies to do just that. A depressed economy in the 1930s and the sometimes-glacial pace of institutional change frustrated the implementation of their work. However, by the time that the nation emerged from World War II, progressive educators were confident that an energized, reformist, and increasingly universal schooling experience could see their ideas implemented.

In the late 1940s the latest fruit of the progressive tradition was its postwar offspring: Life Adjustment Education, also called Education for Life Adjustment. Harl R. Douglass, director of the College of Education at the University of Colorado, was one of the key champions of this movement. Douglass and his allies pulled from the work of interwar scholars, particularly mental hygienists, to construct a philosophy that argued education “should be consistent with the nature, the needs, and the trends of the society of which it is a part.”⁴³ Yet in Dewey’s original exegeses on the subject he stressed that students should not be educated for the society that

⁴² Arthur Zilversmit, *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 17.

⁴³ Harl R. Douglass, “Education of All Youth for Life Adjustment,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 265, Critical Issues and Trends in American Education. (Sep. 1949), 114.

exists, but rather they should be empowered to adapt to (and improve upon) a constantly changing social reality.⁴⁴ Life Adjustment answered Dewey's call for socially aware education, but it did not resolve old tensions inherent in the progressive paradigm. The key tension for Dewey was between the individual and society, how to balance individual aspiration with social obligations. The various attempts at solving this problem is part of the story of progressive education. By looking to educational literature in the interwar period, we can see how the agenda of child-centered education grappled with these tensions.

Projects of Progressive Education

American progressive education emerged in the first decades of the twentieth century, rooted in the ideas of John Dewey. A prolific scholar, Dewey's career spanned the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as the disciplines of psychology, philosophy, and educational theory, among others. Elaborating the legacy of Dewey's long and multifaceted career, numerous disciples, admirers, and detractors is well beyond the scope of this work, except to stress that Dewey's ideas have remained in circulation long after his passing in 1952. As such, I address progressive education and the role of specific actors only in the broadest terms. As others have stated, Dewey found much to complain about the way his theories were utilized during his own life.⁴⁵ Rather than delve into the minutia of the competing educational theorists, interest groups, and organizations that made up the progressive education movement, here I simply want to sketch the ideological characteristics that foreshadowed its arrival in midcentury Life Adjustment.

⁴⁴ Zilversmit, *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930-1960*, 17.

⁴⁵ Herbert Kliebard in particular is cautious to locate Dewey on any particular side of the debates in progressive education, instead finding that he was "somehow hovering over the struggle rather than belonging to any particular side," see Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), xii; Zilversmit, *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930-1960*, 167-68; David F. Labaree, "Progressivism, Schools and Schools of Education: An American Romance," *Paedagogica Historica* 41, no. 1 & 2 (February 2005): 280.

John Dewey's diverse body of work led him to become one of the most highly respected public intellectuals of the first half of the twentieth century. He is most frequently remembered as the founder of progressive education, a project he began near the turn of the century with works such as "My Pedagogic Creed" (1897), *The School and Society* (1899), *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902) and continued in later works such as *Democracy and Education* (1916).⁴⁶ At the root of his scholarship was a commitment to pragmatism, naturalism, and democracy. For Dewey, pragmatism meant that there was no separation between the realm of ideas and the realm of action: for philosophy to matter, it had to be actualized in the world. At the same time, he held that education ought to be naturalistic; learning should derive from the natural curiosity of children and keep pace with their development, rather than subvert human nature to artificial and contrived curriculum and procedure. Dewey sought the creation of a democratic community, one that encouraged individual growth and the achievement of human aspirations while challenging class and race hierarchies, and one that he thought would come about through a commitment to education as a transformative process. Dewey believed that reformed education could create a well-functioning social body while also serving individuals; "in the ideal school," he wrote, "we have the reconciliation of the individualistic and the institutional ideals."⁴⁷ In one sense, Dewey was wedded firmly to turn-of-the-century scientific rationalism, yet his writings on education were often imbued with a liberatory utopian and quasi-spiritual vocabulary.⁴⁸

The academic literature on "progressive education," is deeply fraught in part due to the movements own inherent contradictions. Early histories once proclaimed a unified, homogenous

⁴⁶ John Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed," *The School Journal* 54, no. 3 (1897): 77–80; John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1902); John Dewey, *The School and Society*, Fifth Edition (New York: McClure, Phillips & Company, 1905); John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1916).

⁴⁷ Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed."

⁴⁸ Zilversmit, *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930-1960*, 3–11.

movement but later scholars found a movement of competing interest groups. Some have even raised the question of whether any progressive education “movement” ever existed. The first major interpretation of the movement was Lawrence Cremin’s 1962 Bancroft winner *The Transformation of the School*, which was in equal measures lauded and laudatory.⁴⁹ In Cremin’s estimation, progressive education was a radical and sustained (though not uniform) project, decades in the works, which had transformed schooling by the 1950s. Key to Cremin’s thesis was that the success of educational progressives became their own undoing, as their once oppositional ideas and language were adopted by the mainstream but not fully implemented in policy and practice. Cremin remains the most influential interpreter of the movement, but later historians took a more critical approach.⁵⁰ Most notable is Herbert Kliebard, whose 1986 book *The Struggle for the American Curriculum* problematized the notion of “progressive education” as a category altogether. Rather than attempt to unify the ideas of disparate educational reformers, Kliebard instead saw a sustained struggle among educational interest groups.⁵¹ Most subsequent scholars have arrived somewhere in the middle. For example, Arthur Zilversmit attempted to solve this dilemma by closely studying several schools, and, like Dewey himself, found only piecemeal progressive change.⁵²

⁴⁹ Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961).

⁵⁰ Cohen, *Challenging Orthodoxies: Toward a New Cultural History of Education*, 7.

⁵¹ Kliebard identified four primary interest groups, roughly: humanists, child developmentalists, social efficiency educators, and social meliorists. Humanists, he wrote, were “the guardians of an ancient tradition tied to the power of reason and the finest elements of cultural heritage.” Child developmentalists, such as G. Stanley Hall, believed education could be brought into harmony with the scientific understanding of child development. Social efficiency educators, as their name implies, looked to the pragmatic value of education as a tool for “functional... adult life-roles that America’s future citizens would occupy.” The final category saw in the school a place for dramatic social change along reformist and transformative lines. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958*, 27–29.

⁵² Zilversmit, *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930-1960*, 167–68.

Other scholars have looked to the rhetoric of progressive education to demonstrate its proliferation in the schools. Historian Sol Cohen suggested that the wholesale linguistic dominance of progressive rhetoric by midcentury signaled its success. In contrast to the “moral-intellectual” educational rhetoric of “character, will, virtue, discipline, morality, achievement, order, work, [and] effort” which predated the progressives, Cohen identified a progressive rhetoric of “‘stimulation,’ ‘interests,’ ‘attitudes,’ ‘appreciations,’ ‘activities,’ ‘experiences,’ and ‘personality’” as achieving dominance. Looking through a cultural and linguistic lens, Cohen argued that this shift in rhetoric *does* entail a transformation of education, as changing language reflects a changing set of ideologies and ideals. Further, the shifting of the rhetorical center of gravity from one side to another does, to some extent, determine what is possible.⁵³

Yet progressive education was not a monolith, it was a diverse movement rife with tension. In attempting to sort through the contradictions of this movement, David F. Labaree examined loose factions of “pedagogical” and “administrative” progressives, with “the former focused on teaching and learning in the classroom, [and] the latter focused on governance and on the structure and purpose of the curriculum.” Labaree argued that pedagogical progressives won a rhetorical victory, but administrative progressives won an actual victory within the schools.⁵⁴ Rather than divide progressive philosophy into these camps, however, I find it more useful to consider the movement holistically. Throughout his writings, Dewey had recognized that the great challenge of education in (and for) democracy lay in reconciling individual liberty with

⁵³ Cohen, *Challenging Orthodoxies: Toward a New Cultural History of Education*, 117.

⁵⁴ Labaree, “Progressivism, Schools and Schools of Education: An American Romance,” 281.

social responsibility. Even as the progressive education movement reached its height at the middle of the twentieth century, these tensions were never resolved.⁵⁵

Progressive rhetoric did not emerge overnight: it grew gradually as the body of progressive intellectual work borrowed freely from allied fields. Of these, child psychology and the mental hygiene movement were the most significant in shaping educational theory. While Dewey's own intellectual roots in late-nineteenth century psychology clearly imbued the early ideas of progressives with a psychological bent, the growing authority of psychological expertise over the first half of the twentieth century made the melding of mental hygiene psychology and education increasingly vital for both fields.⁵⁶ Educational theorists found that the new psychological understanding of the mind could lead towards a better pedagogy.

The seminal 1918 report *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* is an excellent place to look for the language of school reform in the formative years when progressivism and psychology intermingled. Gathered by the National Education Association and published by the United States Bureau of Education (a predecessor to the modern Department of Education), the *Cardinal Principles* was a brief report designed to provide suggestions for the “reorganization and development” of secondary education. The authors’ of the report stated that, while “society is always in the process of development,” institutions of education “[are] conservative and therefore [tend] to resist modification.” Because of this institutional tendency, the commission argued that educational institutions needed reorganization at irregular intervals to keep pace with society, citing the then-present moment as one such interval. The insistence of the *Cardinal*

⁵⁵ Life Adjustment Education, discussed later in this chapter, attempted to resolve these issues in much the same way as Dewey: by naturalizing “democracy.” Life Adjusters drew from Dewey’s conception of education for democracy and invested in it great significance in light of the Second World War and the Cold War.

⁵⁶ Cohen, *Challenging Orthodoxies: Toward a New Cultural History of Education*, 227–29.

Principles on child-centered schooling over adherence to curricular content shows how Dewey's ideas had begun to spread.⁵⁷

The authors of the 1918 report used potent progressive rhetoric. Using language that members of the Life Adjustment movement would later draw upon, the *Cardinal Principles* called for reform because of a shifting burden of social responsibility to the school, growing school populations, changes in educational theory, and a changing psychological understanding of human development. At the same time, the report tried to sort through the contradictions inherent in progressive educational theory, arguing, “secondary education should be determined by the needs of the society to be served... [and] the *character* of the individuals to be educated.” While arguing that the “character” of the individual should determine the educational approach, the report simultaneously stated that education existed to develop the individual’s “personality” for “the well-being of his fellow members [of society] and of society as a whole.” Further, the report’s authors desired that education function more efficiently in organizing human activities, that is, for their democratic vision to function properly education should help individuals determine where they contribute most effectively. Like Dewey, the *Cardinal Principles* stressed the value of education for democracy, which was why unreformed education posed serious danger.⁵⁸

To address these goals, the report proposed seven objectives for school reform: “1. Health, 2. Command of fundamental processes, 3. Worthy home-membership. 4. Vocation, 5. Civic education, 6. Worthy use of leisure,” and “7. Ethical character.”⁵⁹ The NEA chose these objectives because of their perceived importance in regulating the individual and their

⁵⁷ National Education Association, “Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education” (Department of the Interior: Bureau of Education, 1918), 7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 7–9. Emphasis added.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

relationship to society, particularly in the midst of what it recognized as a moment that tested the mettle of democratic societies (World War I). This tension between developing the individual while also ensuring their adjustment to society was summarized in the report's concluding remarks, which stated that "the secondary school must be equally zealous to develop" both the "distinctive excellences of individuals and groups of individuals," as well as "those common ideas, common ideals, and common modes of thought, feeling, and action," which unified American character (and, in a characteristic wartime statement) America's commitment to world democracy.⁶⁰ In many ways, the Life Adjustment movement that emerged in the late 1940s justified itself in much the same language and contained many of the same internal contradictions.

Life Adjustment Education came about in a tumultuous period for public schooling. By the end of World War II, schools not only began to take in ever-growing numbers of students, but they also took on a vastly expanded social role. The universalizing and activist rhetoric of progressive education to some extent prepared educators for this role. That said, the degree to which the school's resources had become thinly stretched thanks to years of economic turmoil and war could hardly be overstated. Too few teachers, too few classrooms, and too few resources meant that schools could not adapt to an incredible surge in attendance rates.⁶¹ Along with dramatic increases in public school enrollment, a new wave of educational literature rode in with the tide, one that explicitly sought to position the school as the alleviator of the stressors of postwar life. Life Adjustment educators sought to re-tool the school curriculum to prepare

⁶⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁶¹ Zilversmit, *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930-1960*, 90-93; From 1950 to 1960 enrollment increased by 44%, continuing trends which had begun in the immediate aftermath of World War II, see Thomas D. Synder, ed., *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993), 26.

students for modern living; this curriculum was expected to address students' social, psychological, vocational, and material needs. While the roots of Life Adjustment Education were in progressive educational philosophy, it also drew its ideology from the mental hygiene movement.

Mental Hygiene and Adolescence

As Herschel Griffin had suggested to the *L.A. Times*, by the early 1950s high school students could receive behavioral and mental health adjustment from a wide variety of sources. Unlike his detractors, Griffin made no specific mention of the parent in regulating student behavior. Rather, he looked to the growing body of mental health expertise to improve the adjustment—and ultimately the social productivity—of students. While venues such as mental health clinics worked outside of the school, inside the school guidance counsellors and psychiatric professionals, teachers, and classroom supplements provided psychological guidance. By midcentury adolescents lived in a culture of guidance by virtue of participation in the school system, whereas only two decades earlier it had largely been the onus of parents or state authorities to initiate these services. The ideas of guidance changed little, but the scope of their applicability increased broadly. Beyond the home, school, and specialized medical venues, teens also encountered prescriptive behavioral messages in Hollywood films, teen magazines, and advice literature that lined bookshelves. Decades of effort from myriad individuals and organizations disseminated guidance messages, ensuring that they would now be found in school halls and omnipresent pop culture products.

A highly eclectic and flexible discourse of adjustment emerged from these developments in the psychological sciences. By the 1940s, psychologists would routinely speak in terms of personality, a concept that served several functions. Unlike an individual's "character" which

was largely thought of as static, outside forces could more readily shape the “personality.” In pursuit of their corrective social mission, psychological experts sought intervention on the level of individual personality. As one period text put it, individuals that had personality problems might experience “abnormal emotional changes, [be] impulsive, indulge in daydreams, have faulty attitudes, and display inappropriate and unacceptable behavior.” Experts emphasized that “inveterately maladjusted individuals *need guidance* in order to build habits and attitudes,” to overcome their problems.⁶² At the same time, the individual personality could only be judged as properly adjusted if it worked in concert with those around it. Through their specialized psychological knowledge, experts hoped to diagnose problems and formulate solutions for both personal and social ills.

These developments did not emerge in a vacuum. Various historians have charted the growth and change in child psychology in the first half of the twentieth century. Kathleen W. Jones, in her study of a Boston child guidance clinic, found that experts gradually moved away from environment-centered explanations and towards emotion-centered explanations for misbehavior. In particular, she found that psychologists blamed mothers for emotional neglect of their children, which resulted in maladjustment.⁶³ In universalizing the psychological experiences of all children, experts expanded their gaze beyond the inhabitants of the traditional progressive-reformer stomping grounds (impoverished urban ethnic neighborhoods) and towards middle-class white families and children, who they then coded as “normal”. As social scientists built a model of normal childhood, they applied these standards across racial and class lines. As Joseph E. Illick stated, reformers’ attitudes “changed from condescension toward the working-

⁶² Fred McKinney, *Psychology of Personal Adjustment: Students' Introduction to Mental Hygiene* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1941), 547, 542. Emphasis original.

⁶³ Jones, *Taming the Troublesome Child: American Families, Child Guidance, and the Limits of Psychiatric Authority*.

class young, who had been studied as subnormal or deviant, to an assumption that children were generic and, as such, merited analysis without regard to social station.”⁶⁴ Likewise, Nicholas Sammond argued that “[t]his [“normal”] child, modeled on the bodies and behaviors of white, middle-class children of researchers and the communities they served, was a benchmark” for both parents and social reformers.⁶⁵ As psychological understandings of juvenile delinquency and “normal” development gained more ground, experts universalized children and childhood on the basis of experiences and values specific to the middle class, eliminating from their view the unique burdens that befell other children.

Adolescence posed a number of critical problems for social scientists working in mental health and guidance in the interwar period. Beyond the physical and social age-related developments such as sexual maturation and greater levels of personal and economic freedom, social scientists identified the problems of adolescence as the potentially terminal stage of childhood maladjustments. They perceived adolescence as the last chance to adjust problematic behavior before it profoundly shaped the individual’s adult character. As Jessie Taft, a social worker and mental hygiene expert, concluded regarding mental health intervention in 1921, “If we wait until adolescence has begun, we shall have a difficult task.” Problems of childhood, Taft argued, may not manifest themselves fully until adolescence, but their roots were in that earlier stage of life. Nearly a decade later, Ernest R. Groves and Phyllis Blanchard agreed, finding that childhood maladjustments from “unwise types of experience provided by... parents” only became more severe in adolescence.⁶⁶ Working from a psychoanalytic model that focused on unfulfilling family relationships, Taft identified two major areas of concern for adolescent

⁶⁴ Joseph E. Illick, *American Childhoods* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 107.

⁶⁵ Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930-1960*, 82.

⁶⁶ Ernest R. Groves and Phyllis Blanchard, *Introduction to Mental Hygiene* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930), 132.

adjustment: work or play life and social (and ultimately marital) relations. In the former, Taft argued that the inability to actualize desires caused malaise, while in the latter the struggle to form healthy relationships led to immature hedonism and self-loathing.⁶⁷ None of this made for a successful adulthood.

While the early efforts of mental hygienists centered on the prevention and correction of delinquent behavior, as the movement grew so did its ambitions. Once the discipline reached a self-reflective maturity, it hoped to turn its attention towards establishing guidance procedures in American life more generally. The 1930 book *Introduction to Mental Hygiene* anticipated that the movement would concern itself with all parts of life that “have their mental hygiene aspects,” which was no less than the “whole life adjustment of the human individual... education, marriage, parenthood, industry—all the relationships of individuals to each other and to their environment.” As experts increasingly came to seize upon the idea that “childhood... [was] the golden age for mental hygiene,” they sought out ways to expand their reach.⁶⁸ As historian Ellen Herman observed, the institutional tendency of the psychological sciences privileged aggressive intervention in society.⁶⁹

Historians have noted the difficulty in finding a singular organization or program that is definitive of the eclectic mental hygiene movement. Among early initiatives aimed at bringing mental hygiene into the classroom, the Commonwealth Fund, a private philanthropic foundation formed in 1918, was probably the most effective actor. Through various initiatives, the Commonwealth Fund began the important task of “socializing public school teachers... in the

⁶⁷ Jessie Taft, “Mental Hygiene Problems of Normal Adolescence,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 98 (November 1921): 66.

⁶⁸ Groves and Blanchard, *Introduction to Mental Hygiene*, 7-8.

⁶⁹ Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts*, 8.

mental hygiene point of view.”⁷⁰ Prompted in part by the unrest of the Great Depression, other organizations followed suit in the 1930s. Of these, various Rockefeller-related philanthropies were the most important, including the Rockefeller Foundation, the Spelman Fund, and the General Education Board. As educational scholar Theresa Richardson demonstrated, the reform efforts that these organizations sponsored “had significant theoretical input from a psychiatric perspective and were directed toward promoting the mental health and the socialization of youth,” through the school system. While the projects of progressive education and mental hygiene had begun in the first decade of the century, the consequences of economic Depression catalyzed implementation efforts.⁷¹

Schools quickly became the preferred locus of mental hygiene intervention for psychological advocates. Schools were the place where the state and the young citizen most frequently met. They were also increasingly becoming the primary location for peer socialization among young people.⁷² Moreover, the importance of high schools as centers of socialization outside of the family only became more marked: attendance rates rose throughout the course of the twentieth century, particularly during the labor surplus of the Depression years. For all children aged 5 to 19, school attendance rates rose nearly 25% from 1900 to 1940 (from 51 percent to 75 percent).⁷³ Ironically, in the eyes of social experts this growing focus on school-facilitated peer networks made schools both an ideal venue for mental health intervention and a potential cause of maladjustment. As mental hygienists like Groves and Blanchard observed,

⁷⁰ For a more detailed account of the activities of the Commonwealth Fund, see Chapter 8 of *Challenging Orthodoxies*. Cohen, *Challenging Orthodoxies: Toward a New Cultural History of Education*, 199.

⁷¹ Theresa Richardson, “Rethinking Progressive High School Reform in the 1930s: Youth, Mental Hygiene, and General Education,” *American Educational History Journal* 33, no. 1 (2006): 81.

⁷² Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood*, 283–91.

⁷³ Synder, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, 6.

“adolescents [were] faced with larger demands for social adjustment” which made “the signs of poor adaption become more marked at this period of life.”⁷⁴

The tension between the school as both a venue for adjustment and a site of maladjustment was evident in many publications from this period. Psychologist Karl C. Garrison’s *The Psychology of Adolescence* (1934) described how schools were not adapting quickly enough to changing social conditions, leaving adolescents incapable of facing the modern world. These ideas fit the rhetoric of progressive educators. Garrison stated:

[I]t is quite likely that this lack of educational opportunities, along with the failure of the schools to adapt their curricula to changed high-school conditions, is responsible for many of the failures of adolescents to adjust themselves to the increasing complexity of man's social environment.⁷⁵

From the perspective of psychological experts, schools were not meeting the needs of young adults. For schools to foster the creation of well-adjusted adults, the schools themselves needed to be reformed.

Popular subjects in mental hygiene textbooks of the period included the importance of the adolescent’s peer environment, the physical changes of puberty, and an increasingly complex relationship with the family. The 1928 book *Mental Hygiene* by Daniel La Rue found four important changes between childhood and adolescence: “(1) a home environment growing relatively weaker, (2) a social environment growing relatively stronger, (3) a very influential new trait [sexual desire] developing, and (4) new possibilities of understanding and control coming into play.”⁷⁶ Groves and Blanchard’s *Introduction to Mental Hygiene* addressed many of the

⁷⁴ Groves and Blanchard, *Introduction to Mental Hygiene*, 132.

⁷⁵ Written in 1934, Garrison’s text claims to be a summation of the most helpful insights of adolescent psychology published since G. Stanley Hall’s two volume *Adolescence* in 1907. Garrison clearly recognized Hall’s importance, as a portrait of Hall occupied an entire page in the book’s front matter, see Karl C. Garrison, *The Psychology of Adolescence* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1934), 15–16.

⁷⁶ Daniel Wolford La Rue, *Mental Hygiene* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1928), 430.

same concerns in a chapter devoted to adolescence, but with one important addition. To these topics, Groves and Blanchard added the capacity for personality readjustment. They stressed that in coming to some form of inevitable psychological self-realization the adolescent faced risks as well as rewards. In discovering their personal failings, they could respond either by embracing a regimen of self-improvement, or by sinking into further “feelings of inferiority... and discouragement.”⁷⁷ Because strategies of self-improvement were not self-evident, expert guidance was necessary to ensure the development of healthy personalities.

Mental hygiene literature of the 1930s and 1940s fixated on the development of individual adolescent personality. Unlike the earlier constitutionally fixed qualities of “character,” personality was something that outside factors could adjust. One typical text from 1949 discussed the relationship between personality and habit thusly:

...these kinds of behavior are patterns which have become part of the personality of the individual concerned. We speak of them as patterns of behavior because the same conduct is repeated time and time again. It becomes a habit, characterizing the person who uses it. It becomes part of his personality.⁷⁸

Hence the psychological advocacy: personality was malleable, subject either to positive change (becoming a “well-adjusted” personality) or to negative change, presumably leading to delinquency or other serious criminality at adulthood. While Dewey, a true philosophical naturalist with a deep faith in human beings, had little room in his theories of progressive education for deleterious variables, the psychological experts who influenced subsequent educational theory were quite the opposite.⁷⁹ Their experience as social workers and clinicians ensured they encountered maladjusted and antisocial types, which they hoped to correct through their educational advocacy.

⁷⁷ Groves and Blanchard, *Introduction to Mental Hygiene*, 148.

⁷⁸ Helen Shacter, *How Personalities Grow* (Bloomington, Illinois: McKnight & McKnight, 1949), 124.

⁷⁹ Zilversmit, *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930-1960*, 17.

Adolescent psychologists found much in need of correcting within the emergent category of adolescent personality. Groves and Blanchard argued that corrective measures only worked under the model of a “living patient” for whom personality development determined adaptability. Whereas early psychologists studied the maladjusted individual, the next phase of the discipline’s task would be more explicitly interventionist in an attempt to determine and apply “therapeutic and preventative measures.” *The Psychology of Adolescence*, published just four years later, devoted its entire second half to the subject of personality, including topics such as “Mental Disturbances of Adolescents,” “Juvenile Delinquency,” and “Guidance” under its extensive umbrella.⁸⁰ Adolescence had emerged as a period of life that required specialized psychological study and intervention.

Just as psychological experts were “discovering” the adolescent personality, they could not agree exactly on the fundamental ways of understanding it. Ada Arlitt, head of the University of Cincinnati’s Department of Child Care and Training, borrowed the behaviorist definition of personality as “the sum of habits we form... and those sets and predispositions [the individual] has inherited both from [his or her]... ancestry.” Others were more cautious about such an exact definition. Garrison deferred, instead offering competing definitions from several other psychologists while noting that each stressed “the totality, unity, or combination of elements that identifies a particular individual,” which, in his estimation, included some greater or lesser measure of heredity.⁸¹ By the end of the 1930s, textbooks had entirely sidelined the language of hereditary personality in favor of a malleable personality. One book typical of the early 1940s described the personality in broad, holistic terms, and as always in the process of change. Its

⁸⁰ Groves and Blanchard, *Introduction to Mental Hygiene*, 42; Garrison, *The Psychology of Adolescence*, xviii-xxi.

⁸¹ Ada Hart Arlitt, *Adolescent Psychology* (New York: American Book Company, 1933), 163; Garrison, *The Psychology of Adolescence*, 183.

author stated that the “growth of the personality in its environment is a process in which what occurred yesterday in the life of the individual influences that which he experiences today,” leaving wide open the possibility for personality intervention.⁸² The discourse of personalities allowed psychological experts to discuss the process of adjustment in terms that non-experts could parse.

Psychological experts attempted to reach lay audiences through the publication of books written in approachable language. In 1941 Fred McKinney, a professor of psychology at the University of Missouri, published *Psychology of Personal Adjustment: Students' Introduction to Mental Hygiene*, a sort of academic self-help guide designed to assist college students adjust to their new environment. The book was predicated wholly on the understanding that college students would want to adjust their personality to positively benefit their solitary and social lives. McKinney specifically addressed college students, but a number of other similar works reached broader audiences. For instance, Helen Shacter published *Understanding Ourselves* in 1940 and reused much of its material in *How Personalities Grow* in 1949. She targeted the former book explicitly at high school students; the latter emphasized that its lessons were appropriate for any age. By the early 1940s, experts in mental hygiene had succeeded in persuading much of the population that deference to psychological expertise could help them become, in McKinney’s words, “motivated, striving, and zestful in a number of directions which are compatible and within the extent of [their] capacities,” to reach the ideal of “optimal adjustment.”⁸³ Optimal

⁸² Caroline B. Zachry and Margaret Lighty, *Emotion and Conduct in Adolescence*, Commission on Secondary School Curriculum (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1940), 7; McKinney, *Psychology of Personal Adjustment: Students' Introduction to Mental Hygiene*.

⁸³ *Psychology of Personal Adjustment* apparently retained its utility across the decades, as it saw republication in 1949 and again in 1961, see McKinney, *Psychology of Personal Adjustment: Students' Introduction to Mental Hygiene*, 544; Helen Shacter, *Understanding Ourselves* (Bloomington, Illinois: McKnight & McKnight, 1940); Shacter, *How Personalities Grow*.

adjustment came not from reaching perfection, but from recognizing personal limitations and developing habits that psychologists characterized as good for mental health.

By inculcating psychologically healthy habits, individuals could meet the challenges of their personal limitations and those posed by interacting with others. McKinney devoted the chapters of *Psychology of Personal Adjustment* to myriad adjustments needed in personal, social, and school life. Stressing the importance of the individual's desire to change, he made the point that "it is fortunate" that change is difficult "for one would be quite unstable if the events of each day made him an entirely new personality."⁸⁴ As a self-help text, *Psychology of Personal Adjustment* also presented matters as simply as possible. In the chapter on "Personality Readjustment," McKinney offered the following program of adjustment:

1. *Understand present symptoms* and alleged problem.
2. *Find the cause* of present behavior, ascertain where it was learned and how it was motivated—analysis.
3. *Reorganize the motivation* or urges which allowed these habits to develop, or find acceptable means for the satisfaction of these motives if they are desirable.
4. *Build personal morale* so that you may undertake the habit formation program with zest.
5. *Find new motivation* or drive for new habits. This may necessitate a change in environment.
6. *Eliminate undesirable habits*. This consists of associating habits with unpleasant or ineffective consequences.
7. *Build other positive habits* and attitudes by specific exercises or trial and error.⁸⁵

Through a logical, self-motivated process, the college student had the capacity to transform their undesirable personality traits and inculcate new, superior traits. This discourse of personality shifted responsibility for adjustment (and hence improvement) onto the individual, though of course with the assistance of psychiatric knowledge.

⁸⁴ McKinney, *Psychology of Personal Adjustment: Students' Introduction to Mental Hygiene*, 48. Emphasis original.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 51. Emphasis original.

While social science experts had been developing ideas about adolescence, personality adjustment, and the school for several decades, it was not until the late 1940s that they coalesced into a singular movement. The Life Adjustment Education movement explicitly merged the discourse surrounding psychological adjustment with the principles of progressive education. “Life Adjusters” believed that schooling should devote itself fully to the goal of creating students who could enter society as well-prepared adults. As the name of the movement (Life “Adjustment”) suggests, much of their discourse was rooted in a psychological understanding of adolescence adapted from the work of mental hygienists. The Life Adjustment paradigm promised to craft optimally adjusted adults that could manage their own personalities and engage productively with others.

Adjusting Life in the Schools

Life Adjustment Education emerged in the late 1940s from the mental hygiene movement and the progressive education movement. Like earlier progressive educators, Life Adjusters attempted to reconcile individual aspiration with the needs of social living. Historical developments that had occurred in the decades since the publication of the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* in 1918 informed their analysis. Of these, they were concerned primarily with the social disruption caused by the Great Depression and the Second World War, and international threats to democracy as seen in the rise of European fascism and (later) communism. Postwar prosperity helped usher in the emergence of an inventive and independent teenage culture, which Life Adjusters (and other social experts) found worrisome. Boosters of Life Adjustment thinking used a psychologically informed lens to view both the legacy of

progressive education and the needs of the then-present moment. Their rhetoric emphasized the need for democratic education in a complex and unstable postwar world.⁸⁶

Educational psychologist Caroline Beaumont Zachry's 1940 publication, *Emotion and Conduct in Adolescence*, provides a link between prewar progressive education and postwar Life Adjustment Education. Completed after years of study begun in the mid-1930s, Zachry published this work on behalf of the Commission on Secondary School Curriculum led by the Progressive Education Association (PEA). Zachry led the Study of Adolescents, a group of social scientists who worked within the PEA. This group synthesized their findings in this book explicitly for their potential utility to educators and curriculum designers. They sought to improve education through understanding the adolescent psyche.⁸⁷ Zachry, like progressive educators and psychological experts before her, found the scientific study of students to be vital to improving their schooling experience.

While Zachry blended the discourse of psychology and progressive education, she also anticipated the language of Life Adjusters. With the entirety of her research completed during the Depression, Zachry looked to schools to pick up the slack of impoverished, disorganized families. In the book's first chapter, she stated that "society expects [the school] to continue, supplement, and, when necessary, even offset the influence of the home and other agencies in the public interest." Zachry rooted the purpose of schools firmly in the interest of the public and cited outside interests (including the family) as potentially deleterious. Schools, then, had a broad

⁸⁶ Here my focus is to describe the general contours of the movement, to establish the intellectual discourse in which educators thought about their obligations to students and to society. Educational historian Herbert M. Kliebard placed the movement firmly within the "social efficiency" camp of educators that he argued was in ascendance following World War II, though he cautioned that the actual impact of life adjustment on curriculum is difficult to determine, see Herbert M. Kliebard, *Changing Course: American Curriculum Reform in the 20th Century*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002), 59 and Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958*, 254.

⁸⁷ Caroline B. Zachry and Margaret Lighty, *Emotion and Conduct in Adolescence*, Commission on Secondary School Curriculum (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1940), v-ix.

mission consistent with the needs of society. To this point, she sidelined the school's academic responsibility, instead arguing, "The chief duty of the school is to give the help young people need in order to make socially constructive adjustments in the course of their growth—that is, the school is mainly concerned with their social development."⁸⁸ Zachry's observations, along with wartime studies, would help set the stage for a renewed postwar push to make schools more applicable to student's social needs.

Harl R. Douglass, then director of the College of Education at the University of Colorado, was the key proponent of Life Adjustment Education. He defined the movement as "an adequate program of secondary education for fairly complete preparation for all the areas of living in which life adjustment must be made, particularly home living, vocational life, civic life, leisure life, and physical and mental health." In various writings, such as the 1950 book *Education for Life Adjustment*, Douglass laid out his goals to make education more applicable to the daily lives of students. His program insisted that education "should be consistent with the nature, the needs, and the trends of the society of which it is a part."⁸⁹ More importantly, Life Adjustment Education promised to "equip all American youth to live democratically with satisfaction to themselves and profit to society as home members, workers, and citizens."⁹⁰ In sum, Douglass sought to fulfill the educational goals of the earliest progressives by reconciling the tension between individual and social needs.

New postwar schools needed a new set of guidelines, so in 1947 Harl Douglass served as the editor and as a contributing author to the nearly 700-page *The High School Curriculum*. In its

⁸⁸ Ibid., 1.

⁸⁹ Harl R. Douglass, "Education of All Youth for Life Adjustment," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 265, Critical Issues and Trends in American Education. (Sep. 1949), 114.

⁹⁰ Harl R. Douglass, ed., *Education for Life Adjustment: Its Meaning and Implementation* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1950), iii.

preface, Douglass laid out his critique of old curriculums that “in the face of doubtful common sense and of the increasing force of modern psychology” continued to teach useless subjects that “impeded efforts to train effectively young people for life in the United States today.” Douglass argued that growing high school attendance rates necessitated a new type of education for society, one that would ensure each individual was prepared for their various roles in adult life as members of families, as workers, as citizens, and as self-managing individuals. To this end, the text included over 31 chapters on incredibly diverse subjects ranging from pedagogy and curriculum planning to family living.⁹¹ Douglass’ writing continued on this path of holistic educational reform through the mid-1950s.

Douglass looked to the past as he charted the future of American education. He opened the preface of *Education for Life Adjustment* by referencing the 1918 *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, which, he argued, had only been partially implemented in the preceding three decades of educational advocacy and reform. “Various movements, reports, statements, commission activities, and investigations,” he wrote, “have come and gone, with no great effect upon the practice of the great mass of secondary schools.” Life Adjustment, Douglass argued, would fulfill the goals of the *Cardinal Principles* and present students with “opportunities for becoming adjusted to, and developing a capacity for adjustment to, life as we find it today.”⁹² Douglass found much about life in his present moment worrisome.

Like the *Cardinal Principles* written some-thirty years earlier, Douglass called for educational reform in the context of what he perceived as dramatic changes to American society. These factors were the extension of trends noticed by the earlier report but exacerbated in the

⁹¹ Harl R. Douglass, ed., *The High School Curriculum* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1947) iii-vii. *The High School Curriculum* was updated and republished in 1956 and again in 1964.

⁹² Douglass, *Education for Life Adjustment: Its Meaning and Implementation*, v-vi.

years of Depression and a Second World War. The first change Douglass noted was the displacement of the home as a “place for social life, [and] as a place for religious and related character education.” Second, he noted changes in adolescent recreation “[resulting] from the development of comic books, movies, radio, television, the automobile, and sophisticated social life.” Third, Douglass saw changing patterns of human interdependence, on both a community and global scale that portended economic destabilization and a need for the individual to adapt to new work demands. Fourth, he cited a concern for the emergence of nuclear weapons and the development of a politically bipolar Cold War world. Douglass concluded that “such changes definitely call for the development of a stabilizing factor through character education.”⁹³ The Life Adjustment movement was designed to address this call through psychologically informed intervention.

Douglass’s ideas circulated in the educational literature of midcentury America, particularly after the publication of his *Education for Life Adjustment: Its Meaning and Implementation* (1950). Devotees continued his advocacy through the mid-1950s. John W. McFarland, a curriculum professor at the University of Texas, for example, suggested that education should focus on “the development of sound citizenship... character education, [and] moral and spiritual values,” while also caring for “the practical, down-to-earth concerns” of children in the process of growth and development.⁹⁴ McFarland explicitly linked Life Adjustment Education to the complete implementation of guidance programs in schools. He justified this reexamination of the school curriculum because students needed “help with specific

⁹³ Douglass, “Education of All Youth for Life Adjustment,” 108. A more full accounting of Douglass’s concerns is visible in his 1950 publication *Education for Life Adjustment*, which cites not less than forty-five developments ranging from the development of radio sponsorship (# 23), the economic impact of a greater national debt (# 42), to an “increased emphasis on upon sex and physical aspects of love,” (# 33). See Harl R. Douglass, ed., *Education for Life Adjustment*, 28-33.

⁹⁴ John W. McFarland, “What About Life Adjustment Education?,” *The High School Journal* 37, no. 8, General Education in the Secondary School (May 1954), 243.

personal problems” due to “the complexities of human relations in 1954.”⁹⁵ Like Douglass several years earlier, and educational reformers in decades past, McFarland saw an ever more complex society—and its potential for producing maladjusted personalities—as the primary motivator for school reform.

Pedagogies of Film

The educational films that emerged in the postwar world responded to these developments in educational theory and psychology, but they were rooted in earlier ways of thinking about film. By World War II, motion pictures were a well-established medium of both entertainment and education.⁹⁶ Like other forms of mass media such as radio, the apparent persuasive power of the motion picture was a source of both fascination and fear by the 1930s.⁹⁷ This fear was particularly evident when it came to the influence of media upon children. The fear went that children, more impressionable than adults, received disproportionate psychological damage from the problematic images and lessons projected in movie theaters. Middle-class reformers, social scientists, and entrepreneurs within the film industry applied pressure in the form of research and reform initiatives to counter the supposed pernicious effects of motion pictures. These initiatives concluded with the promulgation of “age-appropriate” films, motion-picture production codes, and the idea that one could counter “bad” films with “good” films. The educational film industry emerged in part as a response to these concerns. Social guidance films would blend the educational and entertainment potential of the medium in pursuit of psychological intervention.

⁹⁵ McFarland, “What about Life Adjustment Education?,” 245.

⁹⁶ Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible, “A History of Learning With the Lights Off,” in *Learning With the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 15–66.

⁹⁷ This was of particular concern for social scientists when confronted with mass political movements, see Fred Turner, “Where Did All the Fascists Come From?” in *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 15–38.

Early twentieth century motion pictures played in cramped storefronts located in working-class urban neighborhoods. When progressive reformers brought their Bibles, notebooks, and paperwork into working-class slums, the movies were there to greet them. Early theaters were locations of disrepute for the middle class, as they were places where working-class adults and children gathered for leisure.⁹⁸ As the motion picture moved from cramped storefronts into specialized venues, the concerns of social reformers shifted from the sites of film exhibition and class characteristics of audiences to film content. Middle-class reformers found the content of early films disturbing, as many depicted criminal thrills, fantastical escapist imagery, and blatant eroticism. As Nicholas Sammond described, the dominant assimilationist narrative held that the ethnic urban working class could be “Americanized” through the internalization of middle class values, chiefly those of “thrift, hard work, self-denial, and deferred gratification.” While the unnecessary expense and instant gratification of film viewing initially ran counter to this ethic, gradually a discourse emerged that argued films could be used to help assimilate the values of working-class people into the more acceptable standards of the middle class.⁹⁹

As these ideas were coalescing, films became more sophisticated and viewership began to cross class boundaries. Movie-going became a national pastime by the 1920s and subsequently attracted more attention from social experts who were concerned about the potential negative effects of the medium. As psychological models universalized the experiences of all children, replacing their concern over the “typical” delinquent (the immigrant or working-class child) with a concern for the “universal” child (that supposedly crossed racial and class boundaries) concerns regarding the effect of media only grew more intense. Two key developments emerged

⁹⁸ Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, 18–19.

⁹⁹ Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930-1960*, 41–43.

by the end of the 1920s: the academic study of the physical and psychological effects of film viewing, and a call for the regulation of film content. The former was seen in the Payne Fund Studies, the latter in localized ordinances and (most famously) the Motion Picture Production Code of 1930, known as the Hays Code.¹⁰⁰

The Payne Fund Studies were the major scientific initiative by social experts to understand the effects of film viewing upon children during the interwar period. While most scholars agree that the scientific basis of the Payne Fund Studies was problematic even by contemporary standards, the exact importance of the studies remains somewhat contentious.¹⁰¹ The Payne Fund began in 1927 as an outgrowth of the National Committee for the Study of Juvenile Reading, an organization dedicated to studying literature targeted at adolescents and developing socially minded alternatives. The Payne Fund gathered prominent supporters in the social sciences, including Jane Addams, and carried out its research guided by quantitative and qualitative analysis. They sought to measure the reach of films among children as well as determine their psychological and social impact.¹⁰² Regardless of their particular findings, the studies demonstrated that like much else in America, films too were coming under the purview of social experts.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 57–62.

¹⁰¹ Charles R. Acland has argued that “that the Payne Fund Studies are interesting more for the fact that they took place than for actual research findings and impact,” see Charles R. Acland, “Hollywood’s Educators: Mark May and Teaching Film Custodians,” in *Useful Cinema*, ed. Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 60. On the other hand, Nicholas Sammond has argued that the studies were important for three reasons. First, he argues that their “attempt to construct a normal American child... continued to effectively displace the immigrant and working-class child as an object of study” about cinema. Second, he argues that the studies’ reinforced the idea that the “character of motion picture-producers... was directly transmitted to consumers” during the course of film viewing. Third, he argued that the studies’ reinforced the idea that parents should play an active role in monitoring the viewing habits of their children, see Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930-1960*, 72–73.

¹⁰² Lee Grieveson, “Cinema Studies and the Conduct of Conduct,” in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 17–18.

Cinema was highly embedded in American culture by the 1930s. As the dominant narrative surrounding film emphasized its potential persuasive power, those concerned with film content decided to utilize the medium as a possible social good. If problematic films could have a negative effect on children, films that depicted positive lessons and morals would help guide children on the right path. The motion pictures' multiple rolls—as a medium of scientific investigation, an assimilationist tool, and a locus of psychological power—could be used to great effect in educating and engineering audiences. This scientific impulse, bolstered by the Payne Fund Studies, would soon be turned to social-scientific purposes in American classrooms.

Various organizations and industry journals promoted the adoption of audio-visual education in schools, in an attempt to actualize interwar social scientific discourse. The most important (and the longest-lived) industry journal was *The Educational Screen*, published under several different names between 1918 and 1973.¹⁰³ Targeted at educators, advertisements in *The Educational Screen* promoted the newest audio-visual systems, film catalogs, and production companies. The journal featured descriptions of films, news relating to film production companies, information for upcoming conferences, and articles written by individuals in the fields of education and film production. In particular, the journal advocated that films offered new ways to learn, and film boosters argued that the medium's ability to elicit emotional response (marketed as “emotionally derived learning”) made them perfect tools for educating in a psychologically oriented classroom.¹⁰⁴ While this advocacy began following World War I, it did not enjoy much success until after the Second World War.

¹⁰³ Many different organizations and journals existed to promote the educational film industry. To complicate matters, they frequently merged with one-another and changed their names. For a full accounting of these periodicals and advocacy groups, see Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible, “A History of Learning With the Lights Off,” in *Learning With the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 27–28; For an authoritative account of the history of educational technology in the United States, see Paul Saettler, *The Evolution of American Educational Technology* (Informational Age Publishing, 2004).

¹⁰⁴ Smith, *Mental Hygiene*, 20-22; Garrison, “The Teenage Terror in the Schools,” 8.

While educational films—in the form of industrial films, classroom films, and training films—existed before midcentury, they encountered consistent production and distribution issues. They proved to be of severely limited profitability, as film boosters’ attempts to establish networks for distribution to schools repeatedly failed.¹⁰⁵ The Depression and the expenses associated with adopting changing standards and film formats no doubt exacerbated these issues. As such, the emerging industry could not stand on its own. Convinced of the efficacy of technology in the classroom, various Rockefeller-affiliated philanthropies (including the General Education Board and the Humanities Division) stepped in to fill the gap. These Rockefeller-funded initiatives ultimately failed in their specific missions, in part because of the fear that explicitly Rockefeller-funded productions would come across as propagandistic on behalf of their namesake organization.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, the postwar adoption of classroom films has important precedent in the interwar period. Chief among the interwar educational film studios was Electrical Research Products Inc. Classroom Films (ERPI), later acquired by Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, which in turn would become one of the largest producers of educational films by midcentury. Like Encyclopaedia Britannica’s later productions, ERPI films tended towards a more strictly documentary style.¹⁰⁷ Other strategies to bring film into the classroom used less conventional methods. Two film series, *The Secrets of Success Film Series* and the *Human Relations Film Series*, excerpted scenes of great moral drama from theatrical Hollywood films. Predicting the social guidance genre, these films attempted to entertain students while providing potent source

¹⁰⁵ Orgeron, Orgeron, and Streible, “A History of Learning With the Lights Off,” 44–48.

¹⁰⁶ Victoria Cain, “‘An Indirect Influence Upon Industry’: Rockefeller Philanthropies and the Development of Educational Film in the United States, 1935-1953,” in *Learning With the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 230.

¹⁰⁷ Orgeron, Orgeron, and Streible, “A History of Learning With the Lights Off,” 47.

material to facilitate moral education.¹⁰⁸ Postwar social guidance films would benefit from changes brought on from World War II as they attempted to meet these goals.

Ultimately, false starts in private industry and the help of forward-looking philanthropic initiatives could not do for the educational film what its wide scale implementation in World War II did. The film medium came to embody democracy through its ability to spread information rapidly, reach diverse audiences, and boost wartime morale. The United States government deployed educational films (either government-produced or contracted) overseas and at home to explain to both soldier and citizen their duties, expected behaviors, and reasons for engaging in the war (exemplified by Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series, among others).¹⁰⁹ World War II served as a proving ground for the short-format educational film. Their widespread use during the war, and the postwar proliferation of wartime-produced audio-visual equipment, pushed the schools to adopt audio-visual education.¹¹⁰

This boom in production stimulated the struggling educational film industry into a serious force by the late 1940s. Dozens of filmmakers were trained to make short educational features, and cameras and projectors proliferated around branches of the U.S. Armed Forces (the surplus

¹⁰⁸ Craig Kridel, "Educational Film Projects of the 1930s: Secrets of Success and the Human Relations Film Series," in *Learning With the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States*, ed. Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 215–28; Acland, "Hollywood's Educators: Mark May and Teaching Film Custodians."

¹⁰⁹ Smoodin, *Regarding Frank Capra: Audience, Celebrity, and American Film Studies, 1930-1960*, 163–65.

¹¹⁰ Orgeron, Orgeron, and Streible, "A History of Learning With the Lights Off," 24, 41; Elena Rossi-Snook, "Continuing ED: Educational Film Collections in Libraries and Archives," in *Learning With the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States*, ed. Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 463–69; Christopher P. Loss, "'The Most Wonderful Thing Has Happened to Me in the Army': Psychology, Citizenship, and American Higher Education in World War II," *The Journal of American History* 92, no. 5 (December 2005): 897; It is well beyond the scope of this paper to trace the developments and meanings of film usage in World War II, suffice to say that scholars have found them broad and long-lasting. For a few places to start, see for instance, Richard Dyer MacCann, *The People's Films: A Political History of U.S. Government Motion Pictures* (New York: Hastings House, 1973); James E. Combs and Sarah T. Combs, *Film Propaganda and American Politics: An Analysis and Filmography*, vol. 4, Garland Filmographies (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994); Eric Smoodin, *Regarding Frank Capra: Audience, Celebrity, and American Film Studies, 1930-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

of which schools happily purchased after the war). However, beyond the numeric factors of widespread production, the medium's true triumph came from its apparent boost to morale. Films were widely cited as effective training tools that also boosted the spirits of fighting men. Soldiers enjoyed watching films and apparently learned a great deal from them. As one recent book stated, "By war's end, a clear consensus existed: motion pictures were not just influential, they could also be effectively used for specific instructional purposes."¹¹¹ The postwar educational film industry, and the schools to which they marketed their products, would take this efficacy as granted.

Coronet Instructional Films exemplified these industry developments. Media entrepreneur David A. Smart founded Coronet in 1934, apparently after a trip to Nazi Germany left him impressed with their usage of film as propaganda.¹¹² Coronet would lay relatively dormant for the rest of the Great Depression. During World War II, however, the United States Navy commandeered Smart's film studio outside of Chicago. In a 1944 interview with *the New York Post*, Smart gloated about his foresight in branching out towards film production. Along with explaining his plans for serving schools after the war, he referred to the industries' wartime success, saying, "[that] this country was able to get ready for war in the limited time it did is due a great deal to sound pictures... Today they can put [a soldier] in a simulated combat ship right

¹¹¹ Orgeron, Orgeron, and Streible, "A History of Learning With the Lights Off," 24.

¹¹² No authoritative biography of Smart nor company history of Coronet Films exists. Different dates are given for the actual founding of Coronet Films. The date and nature of Smart's (who was Jewish) trip to Germany in the early 1930s is unclear. Here I am relying on Geoff Alexander's 2010 book, see Alexander, *Academic Films for the Classroom*, 29–31. According to Smart's obituary in *The Educational Screen*, he was "impressed and disturbed" by Nazi motion pictures targeted at young Germans, and thought to produce "good teaching films" in the U.S. in part to counter this. His obituary cites 1939 as the date of construction for Coronet's Studio. See, "Coronet's David A. Smart Died October 16," *The Educational Screen* 30, no. 9 (November 1952): 404. The booklet authorized by the Smart-family endowed Smart Museum of Art (located at the University of Chicago) places the Germany trip in 1936, see Mazie, *Two Visionary Brothers: David and Alfred Smart*, 27. Antony Slide asserts Coronet Films was founded in 1940, and does not mention a specific trip to Germany, only that Smart looked to Germany for inspiration. It's likely that Slide got his date from the earliest recovered film that bore Coronet's name, *I Want to Be a Secretary*, see Slide, *Before Video: A History of the Non-Theatrical Film*, 94; Coronet Instructional Films, *I Want to Be a Secretary*, 1941, <http://archive.org/details/IWanttoB1941>.

in a studio with all the atmosphere he could find at the front.” Regardless of the veracity of these claims, Smart was an adept businessperson and anticipated the postwar boom in audiovisual equipment.¹¹³ After World War II, the government returned Smart’s studio to independent production. With the help of Ted Peshak, a former director of training-films for the United States military, Smart ramped up production for the educational film circuit, producing films at a clip of over one film per week.¹¹⁴ This rapid production schedule would continue until just after David Smart’s death at the end of 1952.

Conclusion

The melding of progressive education rhetoric, mental hygiene advocacy, and developments in the educational film industry made the emergence of the postwar social guidance film possible. By 1953 Herschel R. Griffin could argue the necessity of guidance education, film technology, and pupil-oriented schooling to the representatives of the *Los Angeles Times* without feeling much need to explain himself.¹¹⁵ Like his fellow educators, Griffin founded his belief that progressive education could balance the needs of the individual with the needs of society, and even redress delinquency, on an eclectic set of educational and psychological ideas that had been formulated during the interwar period. Film technology, which had proven itself vital in disseminating the government’s narrative of national necessity in wartime, found application in spreading the ideas of the Life Adjustment Movement in the postwar period. After the war, the needs of society and the needs of schools were many. Disruption from Depression and war threatened family and economic structures, and a new Cold

¹¹³ Mary Bragguitti, “It Was a ‘Smart’ Idea,” *New York Post*, March 1944.

¹¹⁴ Mazie, *Two Visionary Brothers: David and Alfred Smart*, 29; Adam Bernstein, “Educational-Film Director Ted Peshak Dies,” *The Washington Post*, October 15, 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/14/AR2005101402234.html>; “Ted Peshak,” *IMDb*, June 7, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0675968/>.

¹¹⁵ “The Rod Is Spared, What to Replace It?”

War intensified the pursuit of democratic imperatives. As high school completion rates rose rapidly in the years following the Second World War, technology promised to make education more logical and efficient for a complex democratic society. Film held the potential to educate all students just as it had educated all soldiers, regardless of regional or class origin.

The majority of the films discussed in ensuing chapters were concerned with the routine process of regular adjustment to every-day social scenarios. To this end, filmmakers like David A. Smart looked to the educational and psychological literature that had proliferated in the interwar period, seeking academic legitimacy for their business enterprises. What they found were social-scientific messages that prescribed an ideal of adolescent adjustment, messages that educators enmeshed in Life Adjustment discourse had already become familiar with.

Psychologists had determined that the unadjusted individual had difficulty becoming a self-managing person who could engage productively in society. Yet they also believed that individuals were capable of rationality, and that through the presentation of facts and information they could be persuaded to act towards ends that could be both personally and socially beneficial. To become fully functioning and efficient members of society, educators believed that students needed to adjust their relationship to the self and to the outside world. The social guidance films of Coronet would show them how to do this.

Chapter II — Mastering the Self: Social Guidance Films and the Individual

“This is an age of speed,” the narrator declared, “a nervous age that keeps our emotions stirred. All of us, young or old, schooled or illiterate, are endowed by nature to live a life filled with many kinds of emotions.” So opened Encyclopaedia Britannica’s 1954 film *Personality and Emotions*. Encyclopaedia Britannica produced this film in collaboration with Joseph McVicker Hunt, a pioneering educational psychologist and president of the American Psychological Association for the year of 1952. Running at just over twelve minutes in length, *Personality and Emotions* was a detailed synopsis of the midcentury psychological understanding of child development and habit formation, likely designed for use in psychology courses. Its ominous introduction featured stimulating footage of a bustling street, depicting cars passing just feet in front of the camera and groups of people moving under the glaring lights of storefront marquees. Further elaborating the characteristics of this “nervous age,” the film featured brief vignettes of adolescent life. In a little over one minute, the film interlaced scenes of teens socializing in a convertible automobile, a boy in bed staring forlornly into the camera, an intense confessional conversation, a young woman’s dramatic emotional breakdown, and even a violent street mugging. With the consequences of maladjustment in the modern age sufficiently established, *Personality and Emotions* set about its true task: proselytizing for the psychological sciences.¹¹⁶

Personality and Emotions explained the necessity for psychological intervention by looking to the development of emotional patterns in childhood. The majority of the film’s running time was devoted to explaining the process of emotional learning from infancy to young

¹¹⁶ Like most of Encyclopaedia Britannica’s catalog, *Personality and Emotions* was not a social guidance film. Its aesthetic and narrative qualities owed much more to the documentary style of educational filmmaking. That said, it is one of the most concise and blatant examples of psychological advocacy presented in classroom films from this era, so it serves as a useful counterpoint to the sometimes-sublimated psychological discourse in Coronet films. Its advisor, Hunt, was incorrectly cited as Joseph McVicker[s] Hunt in the film’s title cards. Encyclopedia Britannica Films., *Personality and Emotions*, 1954, http://archive.org/details/personality_and_emotions.

adulthood. Emotions, the film explained, are a natural part of life, but no matter what the individual does with them—whether they let emotions come out in outbursts, through violence, or they repress them entirely—emotions cannot be eliminated. Responding to his foreboding introductory dialog, the narrator continued, “Today people in distress... can find help and council from a new group of specialists: psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and the modern religious councilors.” The professional guiders of emotion, with expert knowledge of the human mind, the film said, could offer viewers a way to negotiate their emotions in the modern world, which in turn would help them find peace in a “nervous age.”¹¹⁷

Habit formation was key to disciplining emotions. As the narrator was clear to mention, this film was concerned “with everyday experiences involving emotions,” not clinically pathological emotions. To this end, the film featured several narrated vignettes of emotional habit formation. One example showed a young child walking with her mother. A chance encounter with a dog triggered the mother’s cynophobia, leaving a lasting impression on the child. Because of this interaction, the film showed, “Whenever [the daughter] comes out,” to play and someone is walking their dog, the daughter sees “a threatening animal on the street. Gradually, she withdraws from playing outside.” These and other examples offered viewers a way to understand human behavior and development that they could apply to their own lives. After establishing a rudimentary understanding of the relationship between habits and emotions, the narrator concluded on an optimistic note: “If we recognize and accept our emotions, if we learn to channel them to useful purposes, they will become the raw materials for the building of healthy personalities capable of feeling—and therefore of living—rich and full lives as useful members of society.” Through self-knowledge and self-mastery aided by psychological

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

expertise, the film argued, the individual could adjust to external pressures by transforming their personality.¹¹⁸

This chapter explores the imperatives of individual personality adjustment that social guidance films communicated to high school students through examining films produced by Coronet Instructional Films from the late 1940s to the early 1950s. American social scientists, including educators and psychologists, had long grappled with the problems that faced individuals as both solitary and social beings. These social experts determined that the individual needed to be highly attuned to both the self and the community, so that individual aspiration and the needs of society could reach a productive balance. Social guidance films borrowed heavily from this discourse. The lessons found in the films explored in this chapter were meant to be implemented on an individual basis; they were concerned primarily with the individual student's relationship to the self. While the explicit subject matter differed across films, each film concerned with self-regulation stressed that the individual student needed to develop habits to create an independent, autonomous, and self-motivated personality. At the same time, students needed to master expectations. Because individual aspiration and growth were subject to limitations, the concept of adjustment featured prominently in these films. Filmmakers showed that for the protagonists of these films, and by extension their adolescent viewing audience, mastery of the self was a vital step in achieving success and happiness in the world around them.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ While we know very little about how individual films were advised, written, and produced, by examining the films we can discern that these ideas did make their way into film content. With titles such as *Your Thrift Habits* (1948), *Cleanliness and Health* (1949), *Understand Your Emotions* (1950), *The Benefits of Looking Ahead* (1950), and *Developing Self-Reliance* (1951), these films addressed a wide range of topics about how individual self-regulation was necessary to personal happiness and success, see Coronet Instructional Films, *Your Thrift Habits*, 1948, <http://archive.org/details/YourThri1948>; Coronet Instructional Films, *Cleanliness and Health*, 1949, http://archive.org/details/4087_Cleanliness_And_Health; Coronet Instructional Films, *Understand Your Emotions*,

Postwar high school students needed to develop self-regulating personalities as citizens in a democracy. The Cold War brought renewed focus towards what earlier social thinkers defined as the constituent parts of American liberal democracy. The citizen was the fundamental unit in a democratic government, yet *citizenship* was not a trait that could be inherited. Rather, one had to be trained for citizenship.¹²⁰ In defining the “democratic personality,” interwar and postwar scholars emphasized certain traits; among them were individualism, rationality, and open-mindedness. Experts defined democratic personalities in opposition to the authoritarian personalities of prewar fascists and postwar communists. Because of their individualism, democratic personalities could work within groups without being fettered to the will of mass movements, unlike authoritarian personalities.¹²¹ Interwar psychologists had determined that teenagers were a group that was uniquely vulnerable to personality maladjustment. When these thinkers confronted the postwar world and saw the wide array of media (films, radio, television, and comic books, among others) targeted towards adolescents, they recalled the propagandistic ends to which enemy nations used these mass media during the war.¹²² To achieve the individualist ethos required for democratic citizenship, students needed to learn emotional control. Emotional control allowed people to act rationally, and in turn, rational individuals could only be persuaded by (expert-defined) facts. Citizens who worked with facts made good democrats. In short, to meet the needs of postwar society, adolescents would have to master the self.

1950, <http://archive.org/details/Understa1950>; Coronet Instructional Films, *The Benefits of Looking Ahead*, 1950, <http://archive.org/details/Benefits1950>; Coronet Instructional Films, *Developing Self-Reliance*.

¹²⁰ McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America*, 21.

¹²¹ Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties*, 3; Cohen-Cole, *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature*, 2.

¹²² Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s*, 4–7.

Educational films explicitly incorporated ideas developed by social scientists in the interwar period, either through direct consultation with those social experts or other exposure to their ideas. Social guidance films dramatized educational and psychological theories in short, accessible films that offered students “real life” situations played out by young actors with whom students were meant to identify. By looking at the messages in these films, we can see how filmmakers and social experts defined the problems that the typical teenager might encounter, as well as how they were supposed to overcome these problems. This chapter traces messages about psychological control over the self in three areas: the body, the mind, and the application of body and mind to productive ends.

Making Adjustment through Film

Between 1947 and 1953 Coronet would produce many dozens of films that addressed a wide variety of topics aimed at different age groups. Yet nearly all of these films tended to follow a similar formula. First, they identified a problem of adjustment; second, they taught strategies to address the problem; and third, they showed successful implementation of those strategies. The stories were dramatic. Characters had names, they had personality traits, and they spoke in an approximation of teen English. Films always featured a child protagonist (either a young child or an adolescent) in need of some form of guidance. The young protagonist usually got help from a trusted authority figure. The advice these adults gave was usually succinct and easy to remember, sometimes presented as a list. The main body of the film would then show the youngster negotiating their social world, guided by this new advice. Occasionally the film would show the protagonist making mistakes, though after consulting the advice once more they would always correct course. At the film’s conclusion, the protagonist was shown successfully handling their initial problem, bringing themselves and/or those around them satisfaction. Films often

concluded with a final call, this time directly to the audience, to embrace the advice and lessons presented within the film.

Social guidance films reflected the views of progressive educators who believed that the psychologically adjusted personality was vital to democracy. Earlier experiments in psychologically informed classroom films predated the productions of Coronet. An article published in *The Educational Screen* in 1944 detailed one such experiment. The article reported the findings of an in-service course for New York School teachers entitled “Moving Pictures in the Program of Personality Adjustment,” that was based around the *Human Relations Series* of films. The authors’ argued that the films in this series “stimulate[d] the observers' feelings, attitudes, [and] memories,” leading to “personalized, individualized reactions” that ideally should be discussed in group settings. By fostering a democratic environment where individuals shared their personal reactions, the authors behind this study hoped to bring the individual and the group to a greater understanding of one-another.¹²³ By blending education and entertainment, filmmakers hoped to capture student interest and educate through emotional stimulation.

Democratic engagement meant fostering empathetic links between the individual and others.

Yet when held to this standard, Coronet’s films about individual adjustment appear limited: most simply prescribed an ideal behavior or attitude. They worked from a psychological and emotional model, but one that contained little rhetorical space for viewers to challenge their

¹²³ This series was an experimental project aimed at creating educational films by excerpting content from feature-length Hollywood films. Esther L. Berg and George S. Levinrow, eds., “The Use of Motion Pictures to Develop Better Human Relations,” *The Educational Screen* 23, no. 3 (March 1944): 112-114. Levinrow was an employee of the Bureau of Child Guidance at New York City Schools. Several other members of this bureau cooperated in the study. For more about the *Human Relations* series, and its relative *The Secrets of Success Film Series*, see Craig Kridel, “Educational Film Projects of the 1930s: Secrets of Success and the Human Relations Film Series,” in *Learning With the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States*, ed. Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 215–28; and Charles R. Acland, “Hollywood’s Educators: Mark May and Teaching Film Custodians,” in *Useful Cinema*, ed. Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 59–80.

ideas. Rather, they expected viewers to understand and master these lessons as they would any other in school. The constant repetition of advice within the films literally served to create habit patterns that could form new personality traits. In films that addressed the individuals' relationship with the self, the personality traits that experts sought to inculcate stressed that in all cases the student needed to be independent, autonomous, and self-motivated. These messages were embedded in a variety of films that addressed different topics, the most straightforward of which were habits of the body.

Adjusting the Body

Progressive educators had long considered the importance of physical health and advocated for physical education as part of the curriculum designed around the “whole child.” As early as 1905, John Dewey discussed the importance of building gymnasiums in schools “to build up the thoroughly sound body as the abode of the sound mind.”¹²⁴ Forty years later, the subject of physical education earned its own chapter in Harl Douglass’s *The High School Curriculum*, which spoke of its importance in grand terms: “We have been deluded by our successes with things, hoping to make a better world to live in without insuring better living in the world. Regardless of what we do with... important aspects of social and economic life, the problem of man and his physique remains.”¹²⁵ Whether in public health initiatives aimed at the working-class poor or in scouting programs that targeted middle class boys, concern with physical health was a broad preoccupation of progressive era reforms.¹²⁶ Maintaining physical

¹²⁴ Dewey, *The School and Society*, 97.

¹²⁵ Douglass, *The High School Curriculum*, 601–2.

¹²⁶ See for instance Daniel Burnstein, *Next to Godliness: Confronting Dirt and Despair in Progressive-Era New York City* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006) and Benjamin René Jordan, *Modern Manhood and the Boy Scouts of America: Citizenship, Race, and the Environment, 1910-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

wellbeing was not to be divorced from developing a healthy personality. When these concerns migrated to the realm of filmed instruction, they were not new.

Physical fitness was a principal concern of educators seeking a more holistic education. In one Coronet film, *Exercise and Health* the narrator described the experiences of three students in a gymnastics club who improved their lives through physical activity. One student cured his sickly constitution through regular exercise, another gained confidence and the ability to make friends, and the third used exercise as a means to relieve the stress of school and a part-time job. Like nearly all Coronet films, *Exercise and Health* emphasized the will of the individual in making these choices, with the narrator declaring, “it’s up to *you* to see that your body gets the activity in needs.” In each of its three examples, the film showed students that exercise was a vital part of rounding out the educational experience and the life of the individual. More importantly, the success of its young characters in overcoming their respective challenges demonstrated to viewers that careful attention to the body was part of the path to personal success.¹²⁷

Rest and Health, released in 1949, the same year as *Exercise and Health*, took the traditional Coronet social guidance approach to storytelling. It told the dramatic story of George, a school athlete whose performance had begun to lag behind that of others. His peers in track and field mocked him, and his coach expressed concern regarding his performance. Student viewers learned through dialog that George’s strenuous schedule of school, track and field, and studying had cut away from his sleep schedule, leaving him only four to five hours of rest every night. Scenes of the deleterious effects of sleep deprivation on George’s running were intercut with scenes that showed him falling asleep at parties and losing focus when working on his

¹²⁷ Coronet Instructional Films, *Exercise and Health*, 1949, <http://archive.org/details/Exercise1949>.

homework. With advice from his coach, however, and attempts to practice forming sleeping habits, George managed to develop a routine that allowed him to get an all-important eight hours of sleep. Moreover, George changed his attitude, having learned to think of exercise as not just another job, but instead a “relaxing change” from his daily load.¹²⁸

The two films offered students a message about the essential relationship between physical regulation and personal success. For student minds to be properly engaged in school, they needed a healthy body in which to house that mind. These films articulated that forming habit patterns of regular sleep and exercise would improve the individual in myriad ways. Most importantly, these habits would shape the personality towards physical self-care and regulation. The idea of adjustment, the balancing of needs and demands, framed George’s story. One night, as he lay in bed, George wondered, “Wait a minute... did I get all my studying done?” Then he remembered his new commitment to developing a good sleep habit and decided, “I can’t worry now, time to sleep! I’ll be fresher in the morning.” Both films informed adolescents that through attention to their physical bodies, they could become both healthy and successful.¹²⁹ The mind had to be housed in a body that was healthy for it to work properly and to make productive adjustments.

Like exercise, hygiene and cleanliness were major concerns of educational film producers and the schools that purchased films. Films that taught hygiene education targeted all school age groups. While a majority of these films, such as *Health: Your Cleanliness*, were addressed to young children, others such as *Body Care and Grooming* were designed specifically for college students. The fact that this concern transcended these age groups suggests the importance that

¹²⁸ Coronet Instructional Films, *Rest and Health* (Coronet Instructional Films, 1949), http://archive.org/details/0160_Rest_and_Health_E01184_02_00_40_00.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

postwar schools placed on personal hygiene.¹³⁰ As has been observed by other scholars, inculcating uniform standards of bodily hygiene and appearance that reflected white middle class values was an important prerogative of both progressive reformers and the industrial concerns that manufactured soap and other products.¹³¹ Educational films replicated these messages.

How to Be Well Groomed (1949) was the Coronet film principally concerned with educating teenagers on the subject of maintaining physical appearances as they prepared for the adult world. The film cited the head of the Homemaking Education Department of Mississippi State College as its collaborator. Using an intertwined narrative of two teenaged siblings, Don and Sue—who “look like the kind of people you’d like to know”—the film presented its audience with the daily rituals of “good grooming habits” including “health, posture, cleanliness, and neatness.” The film showed Don and Sue separately mending their clothes, caring for their hair, choosing outfits, getting ready for bed, and taking on numerous other daily activities that contributed to an adolescent’s physical appearance at midcentury. While these were solitary activities, they led to personal and socially beneficial ends. The film concluded with Don and Sue leaving to socialize with dates, and the narrator reminded viewers “their good grooming habits help them in friendships and in business.”¹³² The film attempted to teach individuals that good grooming and attention to gender conventions were important parts of growing up and entering adult society, represented by Don and Sue’s dates at the end of the film.

Filmmakers embedded contemporary gender conventions in the film not just through the representation of the young protagonists, but through the use of specific narrative strategies.

¹³⁰ See for instance, Centron Productions, *Health: Your Cleanliness*, 1953, http://archive.org/details/0589_Health_Your_Cleanliness_E01763_05_14_56_00; Audio Productions, *Body Care and Grooming*, 1948, <http://archive.org/details/BodyCare1948>.

¹³¹ See for instance, Vincent Vinikas, *Soft Soap, Hard Sell: American Hygiene in an Age of Advertisement* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1992).

¹³² Coronet Instructional Films, *How to Be Well Groomed*, 1949, <http://archive.org/details/HowtoBeW1949>.

Unlike most social guidance films, *How to Be Well Groomed* featured two adult narrators, a male and a female voice. There was a clear gender hierarchy between the narrators: the male voice narrated the majority of the film, whereas the female voice occasionally chimed in, and exclusively narrated Sue's routines. The reproduction of gender norms as important social adolescent markers certainly factored into this production decision, with female advice better prescribed from female authority. There was little dramatic conflict in this film, as all dialog came from the narrators, the characters largely did not engage with one another. The parents also served as models for the teenagers in the film. Sue's mother set a good example by keeping "a good appearance, even around the house, for that keeps up her spirits," and both children could look to their father, who "dresses according to his work, relying on cleanliness and neatness as the foundations of his appearance." According to *How to Be Well Groomed*, proper dress served both a social and a personal function: it allowed one to feel comfortable at work and to boost their self-esteem.¹³³

In her 1940 book for the Progressive Education Association, educational psychologist Caroline B. Zachry claimed that "care for physical appearance and attractiveness [had become] increasingly a social concern, a mode whereby the young person expresses feelings about the self—as symbolized by the body."¹³⁴ Throughout her report, Zachry linked outward appearance of dress to a positive or negative relationship with the self. In one example, she described Henry, an intelligent but gawky student, who "is always sloppy in appearance, seldom looks even clean, and hardly ever has his hair combed." Henry's school physician believed that his intellectual, social, and extracurricular achievement were held back by a "depreciative emotional attitude." Zachry represented appearance as not just a signifier of physical wellbeing, but of deeper

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Zachry and Lighty, *Emotion and Conduct in Adolescence*, 65.

emotional and psychological concerns relating to how the individual managed the self.¹³⁵ A sound body could house a sound mind, but it was also possible for an unsound mind to create an unsound body.

Classroom films argued that outward physical appearance as well as inward mental health could affect the physical body. One Coronet film endorsed by two consultants at the American Medical Association's Bureau of Health Education used the problems of the fictional Baker family to explore the intimate link between mental health and physical health. *Attitudes and Health* was a 1949 Coronet production that concerned a teenage boy named Marvin (Marv) Baker, "an average fellow, [who] lives in an average home, in an average town." Marv's problem began when he became despondent after being passed over for participation in a school basketball game. Marv returned home from school to find that his sister, Alice, had fallen direly ill and was under supervision from the family doctor. The doctor explained to Marv that Alice's illness manifested after a stressful day of work, thus linking mental health and physical health.¹³⁶

Attitudes and Health emphasized the importance of regulating one's emotional wellbeing, as well as the relationship between the mind and body. In the course of his conversation with the doctor, Marv incredulously asked, "You mean worrying about failing can actually make you fail, and make you sick?" to which the doctor responded in the affirmative, before re-affirming that illness caused by psychological stress was indeed "real." At this point, the doctor explained to Marv what likely happened to Alice, with his voice narrating scenes of her frantic work habits. The doctor's lesson for Marv (and for student viewers) was that the right "perspective" and "attitude" could prevent the unfortunate fate that befell Alice. The doctor continued, "if Alice

¹³⁵ Ibid., 192–93.

¹³⁶ Coronet Instructional Films, *Attitudes and Health* (Coronet Instructional Films, 1949), http://archive.org/details/0034_Attitudes_and_Health_10_11_45_00.

realized earlier what was happening she could take a much healthier attitude.” Echoing the language of psychological adjustment, he concluded, “She could start by getting the facts. With the facts of her situation, she could make her plans in relation to those facts.” The doctor’s advice culminated with “three steps to a healthy attitude”:

1. Get the Facts about what’s worrying you
2. Make your plan in relation to those facts
3. Carry out your plan

The viewers saw Marv follow these steps and learn to feel emotionally better about his problem with the basketball team, perhaps avoiding his sister’s fate.¹³⁷

The film showed Marv learn to take actions to better himself using this rational, fact-based approach to planning. He began to practice the skills he needed to improve his performance on the basketball court, keeping the doctor’s advice in mind. Speaking to his mother, Marv explained, “Maybe with a little more practice, I’ll make the team. But I can see now what is more important than the game; I have a better—a better perspective.”¹³⁸ With these strategies, the film suggested, Marv could prepare himself adequately for future failures or successes. When Marv tied his emotions to the “facts” of the world around him, he learned to adjust his attitude as needed to remain healthy and productive.¹³⁹

Attitudes and Health focused viewer attention on the physical consequences of psychological maladjustment, and as such, it pulled its messages from the mental hygiene movement. Marv’s problem emerged when he took a “sore” attitude to a routine problem. By explicitly connecting the body and mind, this film connected physical health to a balanced mental constitution. Marv learned how to manage his expectations and how to adjust to a

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

changing reality. In doing so, he developed the habit of emotional self-regulation, a key component to achieving the mastery of self that midcentury educators thought was necessary to create a society of democratically minded individuals.¹⁴⁰

Social guidance films that addressed the student's relationship to their body emphasized that it was the responsibility of the individual to manage their physical health. Good health practices and attention to bodily hygiene was not only key to personal success, it translated to success with others. The body was intimately related to the mind; imbalance in one could affect the other. Social guidance films also addressed the ways in which good mental health was vital to mastering the self.

Adjusting the Mind

While *Attitudes and Health* showed students how bad patterns of thought could affect them physically, other social guidance films focused more specifically on the life of the mind. These films were deeply indebted to the knowledge produced by mental hygienists in the interwar period. Like psychological self-help manuals, they presented material in practical terms to reach a wide audience. Mental health social guidance films illustrate what historian Ellen Herman referred to as the "romance" of American psychology: the belief that routine aggressive psychological intervention held the key to creating a well-functioning individual and a well-functioning society.¹⁴¹ Healthy minds meant healthy personalities, and healthy personalities could be adjusted towards productive ends. Many of these films presented stories where adolescents learn to act rationally by mastering their emotions. In becoming rational individuals, they could then learn to navigate their world informed by facts, bolstering individual productivity and allowing for democratic engagement.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts*.

Two films that addressed emotional self-regulation were *Understand Your Emotions* and *Control Your Emotions*, both produced in 1950 and attributed to the consultation of A. R. Lauer, a professor of psychology at Iowa State University. Both also rested their analysis heavily on behaviorist theories of psychology, down to the idea of psychological conditioning centered on the emotions of rage, fear, and love. The two films had different pedagogical approaches. *Understand Your Emotions* took a relatively clinical approach; it featured named characters, but did not include a dramatic arc or a lesson of adjustment. *Control Your Emotions*, however, applied these same principles to a dramatic story.¹⁴²

Control Your Emotions opened with a metaphor: emotions are like fire. Emotions and fire are both dangerous when left uncontrolled, the film explained, but if harnessed properly they improve human life. The film suggested that by learning the stimulus-response pattern and understanding the principal emotions of rage, fear, and love, one could learn how to master their emotional reactions. Jeff, the film's protagonist, was not guided by interaction with an on-screen mentor, but through the intervention of an off-screen narrator who granted him the ability to redo the mistakes he made through the course of the day. Jeff's troubles started after he made a fool of himself while trying to impress his friends at the soda counter. He reacted with anger (as the film explained, "he feels thwarted") and stormed home. His emotional outburst continued for the rest of the day, causing him to make clumsy mistakes again and again (or as the narrator explained, "Severe emotional distress often decreases efficiency."). Jeff's emotional blowout escalated to the point that he verbally fought with family members. Only just before coming to blows with his younger brother did Jeff realize his errors and stop. "If this sort of flare up is

¹⁴² Coronet Instructional Films, *Understand Your Emotions*; Coronet Instructional Films, *Control Your Emotions*, 1950, <http://archive.org/details/ControlY1950>.

repeated often,” the film warned, “it might lead to a permanently warped personality.”¹⁴³ A personality formed around the habit of anger was inefficient when confronted with daily tasks of living and it could damage intimate relationships. Through adjustment and emotional control, Jeff could learn to improve.

The last third of the film featured a re-imagining of ways that Jeff could have avoided this bad day. It suggested three ways of maintaining emotional self-control in light of upsets, by “eliminate[ing] the stimulus, modify[ing] the stimulus, [or] modify[ing] the response.” The film returned to each moment where Jeff’s anger had previously escalated, with these principals in mind. Through the implementation of stimulus-response techniques, Jeff learned how to manage his emotions and better adjust to the upsets around him. On a second try, his day went very well. The film concluded with a successful social outing between Jeff and his friends, as the narrator, now upbeat, said, “You can control the fire of your emotions. You can balance your emotions and use them so your personality becomes more pleasant.”¹⁴⁴ The film showed students how personality adjustment was within easy reach, and how it promised success both in individual endeavors and as a member of the group.

The use of behaviorist theories of psychology dovetailed well with Coronet’s model of storytelling, which usually offered advice to complex problems in the form of easy-to-remember maxims or lists. While both of the films advised by A. R. Lauer address the ways that unintentional conditioning shaped personalities, they also emphasized the agency of individual students to intervene in their regular emotional lives. The filmmakers thought that by empowering student viewers with the psychological knowledge to understand and interpret their emotions, they could then exercise some measure of self-control. The consequences of failure or

¹⁴³ Coronet Instructional Films, *Control Your Emotions*.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

success in emotional control were played out on the screen to serve as models for the students in the classroom.

Coronet films not only promoted behaviorist models; they were just as eclectic as the psychological literature from which they drew inspiration. Two such films, *Act Your Age (Emotional Maturity)* and *Snap Out of It! (Emotional Balance)*, produced in 1949 and 1951 respectively, followed the classic format of Coronet social guidance films. They featured students with problems who received guidance from an adult authority figure. In the case of these two films, it was Mr. Edmunds, the school principal, who acted as the surrogate psychologist. In both cases, the principal's sound psychological advice allowed both young protagonists to adjust emotionally to the pressures of adolescence.¹⁴⁵

Act Your Age centered on a teenage boy named Jim. While bored in class one day, Jim decided to carve his initials into his desk. Frustrated, his teacher sent him to Mr. Edmunds' office, where at first Jim was admonished. But then the principal confided something in him; Mr. Edmunds explained that all the students in his school had a "serious problem" called "growing up." He went on to link the physical and the mental aspects of maturation, explaining that different parts of the personality grow at different rates, just like parts of the body. Childish behavior, such as Jim's vandalism, or other students' temper tantrums, Mr. Edmunds explained, were "infantile reactions" that needed to be overcome. Mr. Edmunds challenged Jim to change by encouraging him to devise a chart labeled "HOW OLD AM I?" to track his emotional maturity over the next year. Jim proceeded to ask his friends and family to gauge his "emotional age" when prompted with questions such as "How old am I when someone disagrees with me?"

¹⁴⁵ Coronet Instructional Films, *Act Your Age (Emotional Maturity)* (Coronet Instructional Films, 1949), http://archive.org/details/0193_Act_Your_Age_E00002_12_30_45_12; Coronet Instructional Films, *Snap Out of It! (Emotional Balance)*, 1951, <http://archive.org/details/SnapOuto1951>.

By gathering information and tabulating it, Jim was able to come to a better understanding of his own psychological development. In what filmmakers clearly intended to be a post-viewing exercise, the film concluded with the principal looking directly into the camera and asking, “How old are you? Wouldn’t you like to try rating yourself on a sheet like this?”¹⁴⁶ By bridging the lessons seen in the film with a classroom exercise, this film challenged each adolescent viewer, just as Mr. Edmunds challenged Jim, to “grow up.”

Act Your Age used the lure of maturity and adulthood to make its case. The film featured scenes in which adolescents in the process of exhibiting “infantile” behavior were replaced with toddlers comically mimicking their actions. Combining entertaining visual humor with a serious message, the film told students emotional immaturity made them look like foolish children. Adolescence, as psychologists understood it, was a liminal state between childhood and adulthood. The process of growing up—of gaining some measure of independence and respect from adults—involved the elimination of childish habits and their replacement with age-appropriate behavior. By appealing to a pedagogy that could be visualized (the creation of a growth chart) the film told its viewers that they had the power to change, that they had control of their destiny, if they had the willpower to come to self-understanding and self-regulation.¹⁴⁷

Unlike the broad theme of maturation, *Snap Out of It!* was primarily concerned with immediate emotional adjustment to short-term situations. Howard, the film’s teenage protagonist, became despondent after his report card recorded a “B” in history instead of his expected “A.” Several days passed and Howard still refused to get his report card signed by his parents (whom he expected to be upset), so his teacher sent him to Mr. Edmunds office. Again using the language of “infantile reactions,” Mr. Edmunds explained that while “it’s one thing to

¹⁴⁶ Coronet Instructional Films, *Act Your Age (Emotional Maturity)*.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

set high goals for yourself, it's quite another to be emotionally upset each time you miss your goal." After thinking this advice over, Howard asked what he should do instead. Using the metaphor of a basketball game, Mr. Edmunds responded that Howard should not sit on the side of the court but instead should "channel [his] emotional energy into a direct attack on [his] problem." Finally prepared to confront his father, Howard succeeded in getting his report card signed with relatively little fanfare. In fact, his father reinforced Mr. Edmunds lessons of setting reasonable expectations and creating a plan of action. Howard learned how individual aspiration was best when regulated by reasonable expectations, and that emotions require careful monitoring lest they thwart all achievements. The film concluded with Mr. Edmunds happily reporting that Howard was "learning to keep his emotions in balance."¹⁴⁸

Both *Act Your Age* and *Snap Out of It* concluded with lessons that urged students to take practical action towards psychological adjustment. In learning strategies of adjustment, students could master their emotional lives and ensure their energy was expended efficiently. Like all guidance films that were concerned with the mental health of individuals, these films reiterated the individual's capacity to make positive change in their own lives. While at times they offered academic psychological explanations for maladjusted behavior, they always looked to students as rational actors who, when given the proper knowledge, could implement it in ways beneficial to their lives.¹⁴⁹ With habits of body and mind properly in sync, individuals could learn to turn their time towards productive ends.

Managing Time and Resources

¹⁴⁸ Coronet Instructional Films, *Snap Out of It! (Emotional Balance)*.

¹⁴⁹ Coronet Instructional Films, *Act Your Age (Emotional Maturity)*; Coronet Instructional Films, *Snap Out of It! (Emotional Balance)*.

Educational films that advised adolescents on their habits of work, study, and productivity, much like those that addressed their physical and mental life, did so with the belief that viewers could implement these lessons for better living. These films served as examples of what historian Nicholas Sammond describes as “media [intended to be] beneficial to the development of children into socially productive adults.”¹⁵⁰ As one author of guidance literature from the period wrote, “The difference between a truly great personage and ‘just another individual’ is largely the use of time... advantageous employment of time converts these capabilities into a fund of knowledge, understanding, and proficient skills.”¹⁵¹ Self-reliance was a constituent factor of the American democratic personality as envisioned by period social theorists. Developing habits to become efficient, particularly in use of time, was a key task for a student intent on mastering the self. Social guidance films concerned with personal productivity reflected these values on screen.

The earliest Coronet classroom film that addressed personal productivity was probably *How to Study*, produced in 1946. Unlike later Coronet films that would come to adopt scripts and production styles that resembled dramatic feature films, *How to Study* was firmly rooted in an earlier educational filmmaking tradition that borrowed from the documentary style of industrial films. In *How to Study* the narrator simply surveyed a classroom of studying students and explained which strategies were effective or ineffective. There were named characters, and nearly a plot of sorts, but students did not need to become invested in the film’s story to receive its advice. The absence of character dialog, emotion, and drama were perhaps thought to make

¹⁵⁰ Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930-1960*, 2.

¹⁵¹ McKinney, *Psychology of Personal Adjustment: Students’ Introduction to Mental Hygiene*, 152.

this film an efficient teaching tool. Coronet would abandon this strategy as productivity films came to adopt the production styles and screenwriting of social guidance films.¹⁵²

Filmmakers often explained managing time and resources in terms that they knew all teenagers could understand: the school. A typical film that developed this theme was *Developing Self-Reliance*, produced in 1951 in collaboration with the then-president of San Francisco State College J. Paul Leonard. *Developing Self-Reliance* borrowed heavily from the discourse of adolescent development from the first half of the twentieth century. According to much of this literature, adolescents needed expert guidance to transition from childhood dependence to adulthood independence, to (as one 1933 book put it) “overcome [their] own obstacles and grow into a more complete control of [their] own reactions with increasing maturity.”¹⁵³ This discourse had serious implications for how films addressed the individual’s relationship with their body and with their mind. When it came to the more abstract notion of work, responsibility, and efficiency, this discourse was no less prescriptive. *Developing Self-Reliance* used several techniques to appeal to teenage viewers’ sense of growing independence while offering ways to bolster this independence.¹⁵⁴

The opening shot of *Developing Self-Reliance* featured a parent spoon-feeding an infant while the narrator explained that babies are entirely reliant on their parents. While parents were vital to early childhood, the narrator continued, they sometimes thwarted the development of self-reliance by accidently teaching children to become too dependent. “This is an easy way to get by. The trouble is, if you’re not self-reliant, you’ll never do any more than just get by,” the

¹⁵² Further research into Coronet’s film production styles should consider when, why, and how the shift from “documentary” to “dramatic” filmmaking styles occurred within the organization. Coronet Instructional Films, *How to Study*, 1946, http://archive.org/details/0261_How_to_Study_E00470_00_39_40_00.

¹⁵³ Arlitt, *Adolescent Psychology*, 233.

¹⁵⁴ Coronet Instructional Films, *Developing Self-Reliance*.

narrator warned. *Developing Self-Reliance* reflected the psychological discourse that blamed parents for their children's maladjustments. It suggested that adolescence had to break free of parental sway in order to develop successful personalities. Through direct advocacy to adolescents, psychological experts attempted to teach strategies of adjustment that their parents had failed to inculcate.¹⁵⁵

After this introduction, *Developing Self-Reliance* cut to a conversation in a classroom between Alan, a high school student, and his teacher Mr. Carson (revealed as the film's narrator). Alan had come to Mr. Carson with concerns over his "level of accomplishment," to which the teacher espoused the virtue of self-reliance. When asked how to develop self-reliance, Mr. Carson chided that there was no "quick and easy" formula, but he then proceeded to produce a notecard from his desk with the four "Steps to Self-Reliance: 1. Assume responsibility, 2. Be informed, 3. Know where you're going," and "4. Make your own decisions." The film showed Alan consult these steps as he went through his daily activities. Following these steps helped Alan with his homework, with his course selection, and as he prepared for a date. Alan then shared his desire to master self-reliance with his father, who further developed Alan's understanding of this key American value by offering him a copy of "the foundation of our way of life," Ralph Waldo Emerson's 1841 essay *Self-Reliance*. Fully mastering self-reliance, Alan became a natural leader amongst his peers, solving a contentious issue in his school's student government. The film concluded with a final shot of the four "Steps to Self-Reliance" with Mr. Carson, now asking the viewer directly, "Will *you* develop the habit of self-reliance?"¹⁵⁶

Self-reliance is synonymous with self-regulation and is a component of self-mastery. In forming the habit patterns associated with self-reliant individuals, presented as a concise list in

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

this film, adolescents could adjust their personalities to match what mental hygienists and progressive educators saw as the ideal democratic person. *Developing Self-Reliance* reflected these ideals with its explicit nods to both individualist philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson and Alan's engagement in democratic activity in school governance. In a very real way, Alan's quest to become a self-reliant individual transformed him into a symbol of what progressive educators since John Dewey had sought to create: a person who effectively synthesized their own needs with the needs of society.¹⁵⁷ Social experts saw self-reliance as a component of the individualist American democratic character that was under threat from mass culture at home and authoritarianism abroad.

Other films addressed specific problems the individual would encounter en route to self-reliance and self-mastery. For example, the 1948 film *Your Thrift Habits* developed the idea of deferred gratification in the pursuit of larger goals by explaining how teenagers could better save their money. The film featured a teenager named Jack who learned the art of budgeting from his friend. Jack did away with extravagant impulse purchases (in his case, a regular afterschool ice-cream sundae) in an attempt to save up for a camera. When the possibility of unexpected expenditures came his way, the film showed Jack make a rational choice between two alternatives. "[I] can't go to both [the movie showing this week] and the class mixer," Jack thought in one such instance, "Have to choose... more fun at the mixer, that's what it will be! Well, you can't have everything you want." Unusually for most social guidance films, Jack's inspiration for self-improvement came not from an adult authority figure (though the film did show him learn budgeting from his father) but instead from jealousy over his friend's camera.¹⁵⁸ Managing a finite resource, such as money, was a key way for adolescents to learn self-control.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Coronet Instructional Films, *Your Thrift Habits*.

In saving for his camera and making budgeting choices, Jack learned to meet the limitations in his life head on. He, and by extension student viewers, learned the art of balancing immediate desires and long-term goals.

In *You and Your Work* (1948) it was the guidance counsellor who brought order to the protagonist's life. The plot of the film concerned a student named Frank, who sought help from his guidance counsellor after being fired from a part-time job at the neighborhood shoe store. Frank's boss fired him after noticing that Frank had become disinterested and frustrated by the monotony of the work. When the guidance counsellor determined that Frank's "grades... personality and aptitude tests, [and] teachers," all concluded that the shoe store job should have fit him perfectly, Frank became upset. The counsellor suggested that Frank re-think work, offering that work could be either exciting or dull "depending on your mental attitude." Once Frank learned that all jobs contribute to society and that "personal satisfaction" was more important than money, he eventually graduated to manager of the shoe store. Frank's reconsideration of the value of work ensured that he would become "more valuable to [his boss], to his customers, and of course to [himself]." Frank learned habits to make his work more interesting by considering it in a different way. Seeing his individual contribution as a retail worker as actually contributing to his community, he found that the work was in fact very meaningful.¹⁵⁹

Better Use of Leisure Time tied the elements of these various films together. Released in 1950 by Coronet and advised by Paul H. Landis, a sociology professor at the State College of Washington, *Better Use of Leisure Time* emphasized efficiency in all things. The film told the story of a teenager named Ken who spent "most of his leisure time just moping." In an unusually

¹⁵⁹ Coronet Instructional Films, *You and Your Work* (Coronet, 1948), http://archive.org/details/you_and_your_work.

creative moment for a Coronet-produced film, Ken engaged in back-and-forth conversation with the film's omniscient narrator. Ken claimed that, unlike his peers, he had nothing to do during his substantial free time. The narrator, in an *It's A Wonderful Life*-esque moment, turned back time to show Ken what his life would have been like a century, and then half a century before. Ken learned that he was comparatively lucky: his ancestors worked much longer hours and expected much more of their children. With Ken now aware of the benefits of living in more prosperous, productive times, he was prepared to embrace the ethic of productivity.¹⁶⁰ Ken was spurred to action when his own lack of personal productivity was contrasted with the great material progress of American capitalism over the decades.

The narrator proceeded to show Ken what his peers did during their “free time.” Rather than remain idle, as Ken did, they engaged in a variety of activities: part-time work, bird watching, sewing, practicing music, and athletics. Ken learned that productive leisure time “[1] should give you a change, [2] it should help you learn things and... [3] it should have a long range goal in mind.” As the film concluded, Ken decided that he would take up photography during his leisure time, with the hope of maybe making it a career. To symbolize the finite nature of time, the narrator addressed viewers over the sound of a loudly ticking timepiece, “Well what about it? Will photography give Ken a change? Can he learn while doing it? And perhaps prepare himself for better living? Will he have a long-range goal to give him satisfaction? And, what might be some good uses for *your* leisure time? Will you let time slip away from you or will you use it well?”¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Coronet Instructional Films, *Better Use of Leisure Time* (Coronet Instructional Films, 1950), <https://archive.org/details/BetterUs1950>.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

The lesson in *Better Use of Leisure Time* served several functions. Ken's mental reorientation came from a change in perspective towards his leisure time. Instead of seeing it as time to "mope around," he learned to see it as an unexpended resource that he was lucky to have as an American teenager in 1951. With examples from his peers, Ken learned that there were many ways he could keep his time occupied towards personally and socially productive ends. Turning Ken's (and therefore the audiences') proclivities towards productive ends also served to keep Ken's moping from morphing into antisocial delinquency. All of these were concerns that occupied social thinkers at midcentury. While the growth of the middle class during the first half of the twentieth century allowed for greater leisure time, free time also posed a threat. Adolescents in particular needed to spend their time actively developing skills and habits, either to shape their personalities towards future healthy ends, or to prepare themselves for entrance into American capitalist society (or, more likely, both). Like Alan in *Developing Self-Reliance*, Ken needed to inculcate an individualist, productive, and self-motivated personality to bring himself happiness.¹⁶²

Individuals could develop these traits through careful planning. Harl Douglass, the most vocal proponent of Life Adjustment Education, served as the educational collaborator for Coronet's 1950 film *The Benefits of Looking Ahead*.¹⁶³ The film told the story of Nick Baxter, an aimless high school student who learned how to plan for the future. It began with a shot of the school newspaper which featured an article on the students who were voted most likely to succeed. The narrator, directing his question toward the viewing audience, asked of the students

¹⁶² Ibid.; Coronet Instructional Films, *Developing Self-Reliance*.

¹⁶³ Douglass's ideas are more fully discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. He was the author of several works that detailed plans to revise education at midcentury, see Douglass, *The High School Curriculum*; Harl R. Douglass, "Education of All Youth For Life Adjustment," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 265, no. Critical Issues and Trends in American Education (1949): 108–14; Douglass, *Education for Life Adjustment: Its Meaning and Implementation*.

featured in the article, “Who are the people who are most likely to succeed? What is the secret of their success?” Pondering this question, Nick wondered aloud, “What have these kids got that I haven’t got anyway?” Thankfully, Nick’s classmate was the article’s author, and he could help explain. In a series of vignettes, the film showed some of the personality traits of the students voted most likely to succeed. They worked hard “to be somebody.” They planned to make the most of their spare time. And they learned how to get along with other people. As Nick’s friend explained, “they were all saying pretty much the same thing: to succeed in something, you have to have a purpose. And make plans for reaching it. And work at it all the time.” These lessons of self-regulation and self-mastery, learned by watching others model behavior, would help Nick transform into a successful person.¹⁶⁴

But before Nick could get there he had to determine what was wrong. Nick realized that he had never made plans: he had no plans for the next week, next month, next semester, nor for after high school graduation. His friend chimed in, “Judging by the way you’re going I’d vote you least likely to succeed... you’re liable to end up just being a drifter. Maybe even a bum.” The film then showed Nick imagining himself as a bum, sitting alone in a stripped-out bedroom, his face covered with dirt and his sweater shredded at the sleeves, subsisting off a diet of cigarettes and bread. “That *could* be me!” Nick realized in shock. *The Benefits of Looking Ahead* effectively charted two paths for the high school student and future adult: one of isolation, poverty, and debasement, and another of successful adjustment and happiness.¹⁶⁵

The film then showed how Nick corrected his course. Using the table he had been constructing in woodworking class as a metaphor, Nick learned that his life was a lot like making a table. “When I saw how I wanted it to look,” he thought, “I made plans for building it... that’s

¹⁶⁴ Coronet Instructional Films, *The Benefits of Looking Ahead*.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

what I've got to do with my own future." Nick visualized the future he wanted: to be happy, to have a good job, to have friends, a house, and a family. "If that's my purpose, how do I reach it?" he wondered. By making a plan, just as he did for his table in woodworking class, Nick learned to feel better about his future and actively pursue his goals. The next time the film showed Nick, he had filled his day with studying and club meetings. The narrator concluded the film by reiterating Nick's capacity to plan for his own future, and calling for the audience to do the same.¹⁶⁶ Nick learned that the only barrier to success was himself. As a rational individual in postwar America, Nick had to learn to take responsibility for his own choices. Failure to become a productive member of society lay at the individual level, not the social level.

Nick, like the high school students that Harl Douglass envisioned when propagating Life Adjustment Education, was ultimately responsible for his own fate. Progressive educators like Douglass invested vast authority in the school as a site for life training, but transformation needed to occur both within the school and within the student mind. Through guidance presented in the schools (including in social guidance films), students were offered the right set of behaviors and attitudes they needed to become socially productive individuals. Yet the individual had to make these choices. Nick had to learn what his desires were before realizing that he had the capacity to plan for them. Social guidance films, informed by psychological knowledge, helped to explicitly lay out these connections for classroom audiences.

Conclusion

In place of reading guidance literature or undergoing individualized clinical sessions, the students viewing social guidance films got advice for living in the form of an entertaining fictional story. Surrogates for expert knowledge appeared in films, usually in the guise of trusted

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

adults such as teachers and principals. Through their advocacy, these experts (on and off the screen) argued that routine intervention was necessary in life to ensure that individuals made proper decisions for better living.

These were democratic values espoused by midcentury social theorists. To master the self the individual had to learn to master the body, the mind, and the productive use of resources. At the same time, self-mastery meant accepting one's limitations and adjusting behavior accordingly. Only then could adolescent personalities adjust towards individually and socially beneficial ends. As experts defined well-adjusted individuals as capable of rational action, the process of adjustment would itself lead individuals to seek further expert guidance. By inculcating values of independence, autonomy, and self-motivation, these experts hoped to reproduce the democratic personalities that were vital for American stability in the Cold War. By adjusting their personalities thusly, adolescents could become independent adults ready to take their place as citizens in a democracy.

Social guidance films also recognized that individuals could not function on their own. Even a person who exercised the skills of self-mastery had to develop other skills to aid them in interaction with other people. In the next chapter, I explore how social guidance films envisioned the individuals' relationship and obligations to those around them. These films hoped to teach students how to master cooperation by paying careful attention to the needs of others and working within democratic models of engagement,

Chapter III — Mastering Cooperation: Social Guidance Films and Relationships with Others

As social guidance films attempted to teach their adolescent audience how to master their own fate, they also emphasized the importance of living with others. Reconciling these two goals was part of educational theory, mental hygiene activism, and the broader project of American progressivism during the first half of the twentieth century. These concerns reached a new severity at midcentury. In the eyes of social reformers, the disorganization exacerbated by over fifteen years of economic depression and total war seemed to threaten the orderly relationship between people, the fundamental pillar of society. Having grown up in an extraordinary period when conventional social relations had been interrupted and even overturned, adolescents threatened to manifest this destabilization through maladjustment.¹⁶⁷ Attempts to counter this destabilization spurred serious activism in the schools, the location where the state and young citizen most frequently met. Educational experts believed that schools exerted serious power over their charges. In particular, they saw the school's function in American society as central to the creation and reproduction of citizens who embodied democratic values. John Dewey began this refrain at the dawn of progressivism, it was continued by the National Education Association at the height of World War I, carried forward by various educational scholars and interest groups during the interwar period, and then reinforced in the aftermath of World War II. When Life Adjustment advocates spoke in terms of democracy in the postwar world, they not only spoke in terms of their own Cold War context, they engaged in a deep tradition that linked democratic values to the role of education in serving American societal needs.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s*, 24–25.

¹⁶⁸ Dewey, *The School and Society*; Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*; National Education Association, "Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education"; Harvard University,

Social experts in the first half of the twentieth century saw individuals as independent and autonomous actors, but they also recognized that individuals were part of a larger social reality. While some social guidance films focused primarily on adjusting individual behavior towards individual ends, most in some way discussed how this proper adjustment would benefit the individual's relationship with others. For example in *Exercise and Health* (1949), a teenage protagonist named Jean used exercise to overcome her feelings of lethargy and awkwardness as well as to make friends. Like films about individual psychological adjustment, social guidance films about living with others were steeped in knowledge created over the first half of the twentieth century. They combined the progressive ideals of social efficiency, which experts thought was vital for democratic education, with psychological knowledge that explained harmonious group living. The problems encountered in social guidance films that addressed relationships with others required that the film protagonists make individual adjustments directed towards socially productive ends. Protagonists in these films learned that happiness came with being included in the group. For society to function correctly, these films argued, students had to manage their desires in relation to the needs of others. This was a process of habit formation, one that concluded in the development of a proper social personality. These films all contained messages that for proper adjustment to the social world around them adolescents had to work within socially defined constraints of behavior, including gender and class norms.¹⁶⁹

General Education in a Free Society (Harvard University Press, 1945); Douglass, *Education for Life Adjustment: Its Meaning and Implementation*.

¹⁶⁹ I described the pedagogical strategies and visual characteristics of social guidance films in the second chapter of this thesis. Many films dealt exclusively with social relationships, from peer relationships in *Shy Guy* (1947) and *Are You Popular?* (1950), to relationships with family members in *Family Life* (1949) and *You and Your Parents* (1950). Still other films addressed the broad question of the adolescents' relationship to the values of democratic society, such as in *Laws and Social Controls* (1949) and *How to Get Cooperation* (1950) Coronet Instructional Films, *Exercise and Health*; Coronet Instructional Films, *Shy Guy* (Coronet Instructional Films, 1947), <https://archive.org/details/ShyGuy1947>; Coronet Instructional Films, *Are You Popular?*, 1947, <http://archive.org/details/AreYouPo1947>; Coronet Instructional Films, *Family Life*, 1949, <http://archive.org/details/FamilyLi1949>; Coronet Instructional Films, *You and Your Parents* (Coronet Instructional

Postwar high school students needed to develop personalities that could work in group settings to become citizens in a democracy. While American democracy required individuals to manage the self, they also had to be sensitive to the needs of others. The second half of the democratic personality stressed the ability to cooperate with others toward socially productive ends. Authoritarian personalities also worked in groups, but they became completely subjected to the will of the group, unlike democratic personalities. Social experts believed that authoritarian personalities inevitably led to fascism, communism, or other dangerous mass movements.¹⁷⁰ At the same time, social experts saw the rise of complex and unknowable youth cultures facilitated by mass mediums. They responded by constructing regimes of control centered on adult-approved culture and behavior that was intended to reproduce democratic values.¹⁷¹ To work effectively in group settings, adolescents needed to learn democratic values. These values stressed that when dealing with groups, the individual needed to be actively engaged, consensus oriented, and attuned to the needs of others. By developing these democratic traits, adolescents could meet the needs of postwar society by mastering cooperation.

Education for Democratic Living

American educational theorists since John Dewey had linked schooling to democracy. In their mission to educate individuals, schools also served society. Progressive educational discourse contained an inherent tension between promoting individual success and creating a functioning social body. As schooling changed across the first half of the twentieth century, these

Films, 1950), http://archive.org/details/0489_You_and_Your_Parents_E01758_01_31_52_16; Coronet Instructional Films, *Law and Social Controls* (Coronet Instructional Films, 1949), http://archive.org/details/1956_Law_and_Social_Controls_E00584_01_12_03_00; Coronet Instructional Films, *How to Get Cooperation*, 1950, <http://archive.org/details/HowToGetCooperation>.

¹⁷⁰ Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties*, 3; Cohen-Cole, *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature*, 2.

¹⁷¹ Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s*, 4–7; Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era*, 7–8.

tensions increased. Most fundamentally, more students began to attend and graduate from high schools. Educators had to find some way of serving the needs of greater numbers of pupils, many of whom they thought incapable of meeting the academic rigor of traditional curriculums.¹⁷² At the same time, a wide variety of social experts, including mental hygiene advocates, came to see the school as an ideal venue for shaping the adolescent mind. Schools grew both in size and in their commitment to society.¹⁷³

Schools were places where individuals with no familial connection to one another congregated and interacted. Historian William Graebner found that in the early twentieth century social experts located democratic participation within the concept of “the group.” While “groups” existed before the turn of the century, this period witnessed a new appreciation for the influence of group processes. Those who turned their social inquiry towards the study of “the group” saw it as amorphous, ranging anywhere in size from a few individuals to an entire nation. Social experts came to recognize that profound individual adjustments occurred (for good or ill) through the processes of group interaction.¹⁷⁴ Early twentieth century educators wrestled with these ideas. They came to believe that their role was to create an environment that prepared individuals for democratic life.

Part of the school’s new role was to educate for democratic citizenship. The ideal of democracy, as envisioned by the 1918 report of the National Education Association was:

that the individual and society may find fulfillment each in the other... [that education should develop in] each individual the knowledge, interests, ideals, habits, and powers whereby he will find his place and use that place to shape both himself and society toward ever nobler ends.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² The Harvard Committee in particular cited these concerns. Their “General Education” curriculum justified itself as serving the needs of all students. In their words “general education at high school is like the palm of a hand, the five fingers of which are as many kinds of special interest mathematics and science, literature and language, society and social studies, the arts, the vocations,” see Harvard University, *General Education in a Free Society*, 102.

¹⁷³ These developments are discussed at length in the first chapter of this thesis.

¹⁷⁴ Graebner, *The Engineering of Consent: Democracy and Authority in Twentieth-Century America*, 18–19, 21–23.

¹⁷⁵ National Education Association, “Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education,” 9.

While the core of this rhetoric changed little over the next three decades, what did change was its immediate cultural justification. For democratic order to prevail in the decade before and after World War II, the personalities of citizens themselves needed to become democratic.

Communications scholar Fred Turner identified the threat of fascism in the 1930s as catalyzing an intellectual discourse on democracy, a discourse that carried over into the Cold War battle against communism. Interwar scholars identified two kinds of political personalities, a “democratic” personality and an “authoritarian” personality, and set out on a broad mission to encourage the development of the former.¹⁷⁶ Critics of American youth culture also spoke in terms of democracy and fascism. One of the most notable examples was the 1944 book *Rebel Without a Cause*, written by psychologist Robert Lindner. Lindner described wartime juvenile delinquents as fascists-in-training.¹⁷⁷ No matter where social experts looked, they encountered troubling signs that redoubled their commitment to crafting education for democracy.

Schools served as excellent venues for the dissemination of this information. Schools came to function as “state-building projects”; they were where the young citizen most readily encountered the state and learned the requirements for participation in society.¹⁷⁸ Away from home, under expert supervision, and around peers their age, schools came to serve as the primary location of socialization for greater numbers of children.

The most important wartime initiative to reform education came through the Harvard Committee. This committee gathered at the height of the Second World War and they cast the

¹⁷⁶ Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties*, 3.

¹⁷⁷ *Rebel Without a Cause* is better remembered today for the film that borrowed its name, if not its exact ideas. Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s*, 40–41; Robert Mitchell Lindner, *Rebel Without a Cause: The Hypnoanalysis of a Criminal Psychopath* (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1944).

¹⁷⁸ Steffes, *School, Society, and State: A New Education to Govern Modern America, 1890-1940*, 3.

stakes of educational reform as a grand patriotic initiative: their own effort to secure the future of democracy. For democracy to function, they argued, education needed to provide for “an informed responsible life in our society” by teaching towards “common standards and common purposes.” Informed by the fight against fascism abroad and the potential for social disruption at home, they wrote that “the deepest root of democracy” came from “that fellow feeling between human being and human being.”¹⁷⁹ They cast democracy as a natural extension of human empathy. When social disruption in the form of changing social and cultural patterns threatened human empathy, it by extension threatened democracy.

The discourse surrounding the role of the group in perpetuating democracy underpinned the work of educational filmmakers. Many of the films they made addressed these concerns, if not directly, than through coded language borrowed from discourse developed in the interwar period. This discourse appeared in the leading industry magazine *The Educational Screen*. Particularly in the years immediately following World War II, *The Educational Screen* was full of references to films that purported to teach either the tenets of political democracy or the values of democratic engagement. One such article written in 1946 described making films about democracy as the “greatest challenge and opportunity that producers of audio-visual materials for instruction have ever had.” Its author went on to say that “if the motion picture [has] the great power that we attribute to [it] philosophically, then surely more can be done than has been done... to make more real and more meaningful the abstraction [of] ‘democracy.’”¹⁸⁰ Another author succinctly described the educational film as “Democracy’s Weapon for Today.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Harvard University, *General Education in a Free Society*, 4, 9.

¹⁸⁰ Paul C. Reed, “Visualizing Democracy,” *The Educational Screen* 25, no. 8 (October 1946): 443–44.

¹⁸¹ Gordan B. Halstead, “Let’s Face Facts!,” *The Educational Screen* 27, no. 2 (February 1948): 69–71.

This chapter explores how social guidance films addressed the individual's relationship to the group. The majority of the messages contained in these films came from knowledge created in the interwar period by psychologists and other social experts. Social experts assigned this knowledge new urgency in light of the challenges that faced American society in the postwar period. These films represented adult attempts to reshape youth culture in a more recognizable and productive direction, establishing behavioral norms and boundaries for age, class, and gender. I divide these films into four categories, Etiquette, Family, Peers, and Society, with each successive section dealing with a more complex social relationship than the one preceding it.¹⁸²

To master cooperation with others, adolescents needed to adjust to the world around them, they needed to be actively engaged, democratic, and attuned to the needs of others

Etiquette

¹⁸² While I try to discuss gender conventions in my analysis of this filmography, I purposefully exclude from this chapter films exclusively about romance, dating, sexual education, and marriage. While in some sense romantic partnerships involve the individual coming to psychological adjustment with the needs of others, they also represent much more, including culturally embedded understandings of gender and power. There is a rich literature on the history of courtship in America, including adolescent dating rituals at midcentury that draws heavily from important work done in gender history. While educational films about courtship and marriage were also designed to reproduce socially beneficial social structures, that literature would not be done justice in service to my arguments that are concerned principally with psychology and education. Educational films about dating and marriage—and there are plenty of them—deserve their own separate filmic analysis that uses gender theory as a guiding lens. For preliminary takes on romance as represented in educational films, readers should consult specific chapters in Green, Jr., “Innovation, Imitation, and Resisting Manipulation: The First Twenty Years of the American Teenager”; Boule, “Hot Rods, Shy Guys, and Sex Kittens: Social Guidance Films and the American High School 1947-1957”; and Eberwein, *Sex Ed: Film, Video, and the Framework of Desire*; For films that address these issues, see among others Simmel-Meservey, *Junior Prom*, 1946, <http://archive.org/details/JuniorPr1946>; Coronet Instructional Films, *Asking For A Date*, 1949, <http://archive.org/details/CEP502>; Coronet Instructional Films, *Dating: Do's and Don'ts* (Coronet Instructional Films, 1949), <https://archive.org/details/DatingDo1949>; Coronet Instructional Films, *Are You Ready for Marriage?*, 1950, <http://archive.org/details/AreYouRe1950>; Coronet Instructional Films, *How Do You Know It's Love?* (Coronet Instructional Films, 1950), http://archive.org/details/0145_How_Do_You_Know_Its_Love_E00432_06_42_04_00; Coronet Instructional Films, *What to Do on a Date* (Coronet Instructional Films, 1950), http://archive.org/details/0248_What_to_Do_on_a_Date_E01668_19_40_42_00; Coronet Instructional Films, *Going Steady?*, 1951, <http://archive.org/details/GoingSte1951>; Inc Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, *Beginning to Date*, 1953, <http://archive.org/details/Beginnin1953>.

Etiquette, as a form of social knowledge, long predated the social-scientific knowledge that increasingly came to regulate life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁸³ Social scientists across the first half of the twentieth century recognized the importance of traditional notions of proper behavior and attention to social mores when they studied groups of individuals. They privileged the mores of white middle-class Americans, increasingly coded as “normal” by social scientific experts.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, when the Harvard Committee critiqued American education they made sure to mention how it lacked connection to “the wisdom of the ages” or “our cultural pattern.”¹⁸⁵ As the high schools dealt with more students who were outside of traditional attendance demographics, educators found it imperative for schools to teach middle class cultural mores.¹⁸⁶ This assimilationist ethos, under the guise of progressive “betterment,” was one way to ensure a smoothly operating social body.

Despite its apparent rewards, meeting middle class adult norms could be challenging for young adults. A typical guidance book targeted at college freshmen published in 1941 argued that despite “The fearsome collection of rules which make up the usual etiquette book,” the term etiquette simply meant “*good sense plus good taste, plus a generous admixture of kindness.*” In other words, it defined rules of etiquette as “rules of our culture [that] represent a common language.”¹⁸⁷ Social experts thought that for students to navigate their social world successfully,

¹⁸³ See John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990).

¹⁸⁴ Illick, *American Childhoods*, 107.

¹⁸⁵ *General Education in a Free Society: Report of the Harvard Committee*, viii.

¹⁸⁶ Media historian Nicholas Sammond writes, “the study of childhood [by middle class elites] ensured that certain fundamental assumptions about the inherent nature of the child and its environment... would find their way into baseline descriptions of normal childhood. These assumptions were then linked to a larger progressive program through which immigrants and the working class were to be assimilated into American culture through exposure to and involvement in naturalized middle-class habits.” Nicholas Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 6–7.

¹⁸⁷ McKinney, *Psychology of Personal Adjustment: Students' Introduction to Mental Hygiene*, 262–63. Emphasis original.

they would have to master the spelling, grammar, and syntax of etiquette. As another book put it, by mastering etiquette adolescents could gain “power over social situations.”¹⁸⁸ In order for society to take adolescents seriously as a group (and to expedite their arrival in adulthood), adolescents first needed to conform to the expectations of the adult world. This discourse hid uneven social obligations behind its own language of empowerment.

Etiquette films, like other educational films, made viewers aware of the expertise of their consultants. One early etiquette film entitled *How Do You Do?* (1946) cited Eleanor Boykin, popular author of (among other books) *This Way, Please: A Book of Manners*. The producers of another film entitled *Table Manners* collaborated with—and featured prominently—the famous etiquette expert Emily Post.¹⁸⁹ But increasingly etiquette films came to cite the usual conveyers of midcentury expertise: university professors and social science experts.

The earliest etiquette guidance film from Coronet was *Everyday Courtesy* (1948). Taking a straightforward approach, the film contained little character-driven dialogue. Instead, it relied on a narrator to explain the events of the film. The film’s premise was that a junior high class had turned their classroom into a living exhibit on courtesy. “Guests,” the student’s parents, visited the classroom to see the exhibit. The students had to act as hosts to their parents and display their mastery of etiquette all while explaining its constituent parts. One part of the exhibit were handmade posters that covered the classroom’s, illustrating lessons such as walking softly, deference to the elderly, and tipping of the hat. As the film continued, the narrator chimed in with increasingly complex rules for how to handle social situations. The classroom exhibits were lessons for the viewing audience, showing, for example, the correct way to write a proper social

¹⁸⁸ Arlitt, *Adolescent Psychology*, 42.

¹⁸⁹ Young America Films, *How Do You Do?*, 1946, <http://archive.org/details/HowDoYou1946>; Eleanor Boykin, *This Way, Please: A Book of Manners* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1940); Inc Christy Associates, *Table Manners*, 1947, <http://archive.org/details/TableMan1947>.

letter and the correct way to hold a conversation over the telephone. The film assumed that students might have found these etiquette lessons daunting, and towards its conclusion the narrator reassured, “it’s the simple things: being friendly, thinking of the other person, and showing respect.”¹⁹⁰ *Everyday Courtesy* linked consideration for those around you, in this case parents and the parents of peers, to mutual respectful treatment. For children to enter adult society, they would need to actively embrace middle class adult patterns of behavior.

While all etiquette films emphasized procedure, not all were as wedded to formal social convention as *Everyday Courtesy*. *Ways to Better Conversation* (1950) used the metaphor of team sports to explain how the ideal conversation should operate. The film opened with students playing volleyball. Each strike of the ball represented another part of the conversation. When one student served the ball the narrator announced, “someone gets an idea.” When a student on the other side of the net returned it, the narrator added “someone else comments on it.” Good conversation, like a good game of volleyball, required some measure of sportsmanship. “So it goes,” the narrator added, “everyone keeping his eye on the ball, following the topic, joining in, and passing it around.” Moving past the sports metaphor, the film showed several model conversations between a group of teenagers, presented for the audience to analyze. *Ways to Better Conversation* warned of the social consequences of impolite behavior. In one modeled conversation, a participant continued to drone on, oblivious to the frustration and boredom of his peers. The film then showed how a good conversation should work, “one that is spontaneous, inclusive, pleasant and profitable.”¹⁹¹ By establishing the rules for proper verbal communication, this film hoped to get students in the habit of speaking to one-another like adults as preparation

¹⁹⁰ Coronet Instructional Films, *Everyday Courtesy*, 1948, <http://archive.org/details/Everyday1948>.

¹⁹¹ Coronet Instructional Films, *Ways To Better Conversation*, 1950, <http://archive.org/details/WaysToBetterConversation>.

for entrance into adult society. It also taught them to listen to the opinions of others, to be open-minded in a way that facilitated democratic engagement.

Professors of home economics often advised films on etiquette, bringing their expert knowledge about society to high school classrooms. For example, Mary E. Weathersby, the head of the Homemaking Education Department at Mississippi State College served as the collaborator on *Social Courtesy* (1951). Like most Coronet social guidance films, *Social Courtesy* told a dramatic story. This story concerned Bill, a teenager the audience first encountered as he pouted in front of his mirror. Bill was upset because he had to attend a party that night. “I don’t have any fun at parties,” Bill complained to himself, “kids just aren’t friendly!” An omniscient narrator chimed in with advice: “Oh Bill? That might be your fault... Maybe it’s just that you don’t know how to use social courtesy.” When Bill complained that courtesy was “old fashioned,” the narrator quickly countered by asking, “what’s old fashioned about having fun at parties?”¹⁹² With the help of advice from the narrator, Bill proceeded to learn that his rejection of “old fashioned” social courtesy was what prevented him from having fun at parties.

The film contained some unique elements of visual pedagogy that are worth describing. For example, with the help of the film’s omniscient and omnipotent narrator, Bill was able to rewind time. In the course of the film, he made use of this ability several times, each time learning a new habit of etiquette. In one instance at the party, the host’s mother attempted to carry out a conversation with Bill, who remained seated, slouching and disinterested. The host’s mother quickly left, offended. The narrator then remarked, “You’re supposed to rise when an adult speaks to you – everybody knows that!” before presenting Bill the opportunity to complete

¹⁹² Coronet Instructional Films, *Social Courtesy*, 1951, <http://archive.org/details/SocialCo1951>.

the encounter over again. By the film's conclusion, the once impolite and offensive Bill had blossomed into a well-adjusted courteous young man. Each successful encounter allowed him to build more habits of etiquette, therefore showing student viewers how following the social rules could benefit them. The party featured in the film was themed around the "Hard Times" of the Depression, with the student guests ironically sporting tattered clothes. A sign adorned the walls reading "HOBO JUNGLE."¹⁹³ In what was perhaps sublimated social commentary, the film combined these ironic visuals with the etiquette of the postwar middle-class. In doing so, it suggested that this form of etiquette was timeless and classless: a value to be promoted in economically diverse school-age populations.

That these films were made at all suggests a widespread anxiety regarding the changing nature of social relationships in the postwar period. If we consider the historic specificity of the high school at midcentury (crowded with first generation students) and the function of the school to impart common ideals on diverse minds, the reasons why seemingly mundane films like *Ways to Better Conversation* were produced are more apparent. Informed by social science experts, these films showed how their protagonists' patterns of behavior, and ultimately their personalities, were shaped by the repetition of beneficial habits of social living. Viewers were supposed to watch these films carefully, learning the rules of basic social engagement. With basic courtesy mastered, individuals were one step closer to becoming successful social beings.

Family

In the interwar and postwar periods, families were a site of serious contradiction. Social scientific experts held up the family as an impenetrable fortress of love and support, while also believing that they were under siege by the pressures of modern living. They invested great

¹⁹³ Ibid.

importance in properly functioning families as the first line of defense against social problems. Experts imbued the nuclear family with broad symbolic meaning as a site of small-scale governance and stable cultural reproduction.¹⁹⁴ At the same time, they encountered scores of young people with maladjusted personalities, and looked specifically to negative experiences in family life as the cause. Delinquency scares in World War II and the early 1950s only exacerbated these concerns.¹⁹⁵ Social guidance filmmakers reconciled this contradiction by depicting strategies for creating satisfying family relationships in their films. These visualized models also attempted to equip adolescents with the ability to re-shape the family from within using expert knowledge. As a period of human development subject to unique stressors (many of which centered on relationships with the family) adolescence marked an important moment for guidance intervention. Social guidance films both taught adolescents their proper role as junior members of the family unit and described familial models for which to aspire to in adulthood.

The drama of adolescence was addressed directly in *You and Your Parents*, a Coronet film released in 1950. The film told the story of Dick, a teenager who planned to run away from home. Before skipping town entirely, Dick arrived at the doorstep of Mr. Martin, a close family friend, to say goodbye. Sensing Dick's unease about running away from home, Mr. Martin invited him inside and offered him a bed for the night. When the film cut to the following morning, Dick and Mr. Martin were shown deep in conversation about the strains that growing up placed on both children and parents. The rest of the film depicted Mr. Martin acting as a sort of counselor to Dick, offering him sympathy and understanding but also trying to explain the situation from the perspective of Dick's parents. Parents and adolescents, Mr. Martin explained,

¹⁹⁴ May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*.

¹⁹⁵ Jones, *Taming the Troublesome Child: American Families, Child Guidance, and the Limits of Psychiatric Authority*; Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s*.

“have the same problem, the same readjustment period,” as their children grow up and become more independent.¹⁹⁶ Both parties would need to learn to accommodate the other in order to restore balance to the family.

As the conversation continued, Dick revealed that his conflict with his father came primarily from his tendency to stay out too late. Mr. Martin explained that Dick would need to earn the trust of his parents by showing them that he had grown beyond the behavior of a child. The film gave Dick, and the adolescent viewer who may have related to his story, the task of taking the first step in solving familial problems. The film concluded with Mr. Martin narrating Dick’s return to his family, and their successful readjustment and reconciliation. After showing his parents respect and learning to work with them, “[Dick’s] relationship with his parents changed. He was no longer a child controlled completely by his parents; he was becoming more of an adult with the place of an adult in the family.”¹⁹⁷ Dick was able to negotiate his parents and his own contradictory needs by first determining how they clashed and then making a compromise. Dick would come home on time and in exchange, his parents would begin to allow him additional freedoms. *You and Your Parents* showed that sensitivity to the needs of others (particularly those in a position of authority) was a key component to achieving one’s own personal goals.

The organization of home life was another way in which the needs of family members clashed. Both 1949 films, *Sharing the Work at Home* and *Family Life*, featured disorganized unhappy families. Through timely intervention, these families learned new strategies of home organization that were sensitive to the needs of all. Once the family properly balanced everyone’s needs and desires, they could function as an efficient and happy governing unit. The

¹⁹⁶ Coronet Instructional Films, *You and Your Parents*.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

small family governments depicted in these films operated on democratic principles: respectful engagement between members, seeking consensus before action, and the fair delegation of tasks.¹⁹⁸

In *Family Life*, the overwhelmed mother served as the transformative figure in the family's fate. The film opened with a happy family leaving for a weekend outing, while neighbors gossiped, "How are the Millers managing to have so much fun as a family? Is it money, or is it magic?" Taking the narrative back a few months, the film showed how the Millers behaved "before they got wise to themselves." A melodramatic scene unfolded, where Mrs. Miller, late making dinner, imperiled her daughter's timely arrival for a date. Further, her son Harold discovered he had no pressed pants to wear for his own evening outing nor any money to spend. "If this family were a business, we'd go bankrupt but fast!" Harold complained, slamming the door. That night Mrs. Miller considered her son's words and decided to treat the family like a business. The next day Mrs. Miller called a family meeting where she produced a "Guide to Home Management." This guide was a simple list:

1. Schedule
2. Responsibilities
3. Privileges
4. Finances

Working from this short guide, and through regularly planned meetings, the family began to make organizational changes. These changes allowed the Miller's to reach the domestic bliss referenced in the film's establishing shots.¹⁹⁹

The Millers learned to operate more like a democratic government than a business. For instance, while looking over his wife's list Mr. Miller observed, "responsibilities and privileges

¹⁹⁸ Coronet Instructional Films, *Sharing Work At Home*, 1949, <http://archive.org/details/SharingW1949>; Coronet Instructional Films, *Family Life*.

¹⁹⁹ Coronet Instructional Films, *Family Life*.

always go together.” Through a process of group planning centered around democratic principles, the family restored order to their house and to their lives. Further cementing the connection between families as a model for democratic governance, the narrator remarked, “Although the strength of the family lies in unity, each member has individual rights.” As seen in *Family Life*, one of these key individual rights was the ability to engage democratically and make one’s voice heard. The family gatherings shown in the film proceeded peacefully, as each member of the family attuned themselves to the needs of each other member.²⁰⁰ This offered a model for how adolescents could form their own families as centers of democratic reproduction.

In contrast, in *Sharing Work at Home* it was Martha, the family’s teenage daughter, who reformed the home. The film opened with a father and son lining their living room with new wallpaper, while Martha and the mother brought them refreshments. “Whoever thought we’d manage to redecorate this room and do all the work ourselves?” asked the mother. The narrative flashed back to some months prior, before the family had reorganized itself. The film showed Martha speaking over the telephone with one of her mother’s friends. Martha’s mother, the audience learned, was in bed ill, too “run down” to take the call herself. “We’re having simply a terrible time,” Martha explained to the caller “very disorganized and trying to do all the work, dad, Howard and I.” Once the phone call concluded, Martha decided to look to her Home Economics textbook for advice. Instantly, she began to learn some of the rudimentary strategies of keeping an orderly home, which she then shared with her family. Things quickly turned around in their home. Awed at the ongoing transformation in their lives, the family gathered around the living room to discuss their new roles in sharing work. With the family gathered together as one decision-making unit, they learned how they each had obligations for

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

maintaining the household. They then decided to undertake the large project of redecorating the living room seen at the film's start, itself a metaphor for the transformation of the family.²⁰¹

The family in *Sharing Work at Home* learned from the adolescent, via expert knowledge, how unique individual obligations played a role in the success of the group. While everyone in the family had different obligations to meet, their precise nature was defined in a democratic family meeting that consulted Martha's home economics textbook. At one point during the family meeting, Martha's father chimed in "We better assign jobs on a better basis: who has the time and the ability rather than whether it's a man's job or a woman's job!" While this statement seemingly elevated efficiency above strict gender roles, the film reinforced those very gender roles when it fell within the "ability" of the women in the family to fetch refreshments for the wallpaper-plastering men.²⁰² By naturalizing familial democracy, realms of gendered influence, and the social definition of individual obligations, the film showed adolescent viewers that an ideal home life emerged naturally through sincere interaction with members of the family. Through attention to democratic values, the film told its viewers, they had the capacity to make dramatic changes in their families of birth. Further, equipped with this knowledge adolescents could properly order the families they would one day form.

Both of these films depicted families in crisis that saw rescue through thoughtful engagement, consideration of the needs of all, and democratic governance. Given its explicit reference to a Home Economics textbook, *Sharing Work at Home* likely paired with a home economics class aimed at teenage girls. While the film depicted members of a family coming together to establish democratic organization of their obligations, they did so under the influence of social science expertise. In this film, the power of social science experts was so potent that it

²⁰¹ Coronet Instructional Films, *Sharing Work At Home*.

²⁰² Ibid.

exerted itself through the text of the book and transformed the family's life.²⁰³ This social scientific knowledge proved crucial in perpetuating democratic values through the family.

Films that addressed family life did so by tackling two main conflicts. The first was the proper organization of home life. Because these films focused on the domestic realm, educators may have paired them with courses in home economics or otherwise targeted them towards female students. These films offered their adolescent viewers practical homemaking advice for when they came of age as well as showed them steps they could take to become fully engaged members of their families. Other films addressed the adolescent's changing relationship to their family members. These films demonstrated that adolescence did not have to be an entirely disruptive process if the family re-adjusted their relationships to account for change. Both sets of films showed that, through democratic planning centered on the family as a group, home life could function efficiently, because each member of the family attuned themselves to the needs of each other member. It is important to note that these films advised the junior members of the family, whom they thought of as capable of exercising some measure of power within the family. At the same time, the agency of teenagers was limited by deference to parental authority and to gendered norms.²⁰⁴

Peers

Social science experts were well aware of the importance of peer groups as well as families in shaping the culture, behavior, and values of young people. Typical psychology texts from the interwar period recognized that children at adolescence began to move further away

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Kathleen W. Jones similarly describes how psychological intervention that occurred at the level of the adolescent challenged certain familial norms. Jones, *Taming the Troublesome Child: American Families, Child Guidance, and the Limits of Psychiatric Authority*.

from the influences of their family in lieu of forming social bonds with people their own age.²⁰⁵ Likewise, educators came to recognize that the school increasingly served as a locus of peer socialization.²⁰⁶ Both groups recognized the importance of the formation of interpersonal relationships between adolescents, as a sort of rehearsal for connections that would be made in adult life. Educational filmmakers in touch with both these intellectual strains designed films to address problems of peer culture. Social guidance films that addressed the individual student's relationship with their peers focused on issues such as popularity, friendship, and social exclusion. In mastering skills needed to make friends, adolescents would be further prepared for adulthood. These films showed that making friends required the reconciliation of individual needs with the needs of others through the practice of empathy. Ultimately, they argued that maintaining the social body against (internal or external) threats required concerted effort towards building relationships with those around you.

The 1947 Coronet film *Shy Guy* was one of the earliest educational films to address the topic of peer groups. The titular shy guy in the film was Phil, a new arrival in town who found himself “standing on the outside looking in” while others made friends. Phil's father was the adult authority figure who noticed Phil's problem of adjustment. The film showed Phil as he spent his afternoons building a radio in the basement instead of socializing with his classmates. Noticing his son's isolation, Phil's father advised him “maybe school is like your radio. This oscillator will do its work well... but you still have to fit it in so it will work with all the other parts.” After Phil demurred, his father decided to press him for more information. Phil revealed

²⁰⁵ See for instance La Rue, *Mental Hygiene*, 430; Groves and Blanchard, *Introduction to Mental Hygiene*, 146; Caroline B. Zachry, “Customary Stresses and Strains of Adolescence,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 236 (November 1944): 137.

²⁰⁶ Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 283–91; See also William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

that he felt self-conscious about his clothes, so his father suggested a wardrobe change. However, Phil continued to remain wary, unsure of how to connect, so his father offered additional advice: “Pick out the most popular boys and girls in school and keep an eye on them... try to figure out why people like them.”²⁰⁷ Phil had been set on a task of studying others to improve himself.

Phil took his father’s advice to heart and came to find that through careful observation of socially successful individuals, he could determine the ingredients for popularity. The next day at school Phil had replaced his suit with a sweater, and closely watched his fellow classmates. Observing their behavior, he noticed how popular students actively listened to one-another. “Still,” Phil said, “there must be more to getting along with people than wearing a sweater and just listening.” Phil’s self-deprecating inner monologue continued to guide him through several other failed social interactions, where after missing several opportunities to aid his fellow classmates he bitterly reflected, “You’re alone bud, alone in the crowd.” Later that day, Phil reported to his father that he had learned the “people who get along best with other people are, well, the people that think about the other guy. They make a point of listening to what others have to say and watching for ways to do things for them, being polite toward them.” Phil tried this strategy at the class mixer, jumping in to a conversation to explain how to build a radio for a curious classmate. This strategy seemed to work for Phil, as people gathered to listen to the conversation. The narrator chimed in, “they are interested in that shy guy, they know he’s alive now. And strangely enough he’s just discovered that they are alive.” Once Phil broke this initial barrier, he quickly became a member of the gang. As the film concluded, the narrator reminded viewers that “[Phil will] still have his moments of doubt, of hesitation, of fear that he might do

²⁰⁷ Coronet Instructional Films, *Shy Guy*.

something wrong, but he can face these problems now.” In practicing thought and action, Phil developed the skills needed to make friends and overcome loneliness.²⁰⁸

Shy Guy suggested that the individual made friendships most easily after a process of individual adjustment. Phil was not content to remain in his isolated social reality, so he developed a plan. To fix his problem he had to exercise empathy and take cues from those around him, he had to “discover that they [were] alive” just as he was. He made himself more comfortable in his social environment by switching into a new outfit. He engaged in the empathetic work of observing the lives and problems of those around him. Emphasizing that adjustment took time, Phil remained a “shy guy” up until the final moments of the film. Through Phil’s active process of self-regulation, he learned strategies for interacting with the group, namely by keeping engaged with others, being considerate of their needs, and being willing to offer help. The film suggested that its viewers emulate this behavior as a technique for figuring out how to make their own social connections.²⁰⁹

Are You Popular?(1947) also addressed the issues of popularity. The film opened by asking the questions, “Popularity: what is it made of? How does a person get to be popular with lots of people, and have a few close friends too?” The film primarily recounted the dating life of a small group of teenagers, tying their strategies for romantic success to the same strategies they would need in establishing friendships. The film explained how the behavior of popular students differed from that of unpopular students by modeling each. Unlike *Shy Guy*, *Are You Popular?* made use of an active narrator who interpreted the scenes before and after they occurred. In this

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

way, the film was particularly explicit about the lessons that the viewing audience should take away.²¹⁰

The primary plot of the film dealt with Caroline, a new girl in town who had already started to become popular. The film contrasted Caroline's behavior with that of another girl, Jenny. The narrator explained that Jenny believed she was popular because she was always "parking in cars with boys at night," though when she met some of these boys in school the next day they did not invite her to join them for lunch. "When Jerry brags about taking Jenny out, he learns that she dates all the boys," the narrator explained, "and he feels less important." Caroline, however, was sensitive to the feelings of others. She made sure to engage each member of the group, unlike Jenny who spoke exclusively to the boys. The film explained Caroline's popularity in terms of "considering other's feelings." Though the film did not explicitly frame it in this language, considering other's feelings meant not subverting their expectations of social and sexual roles assigned to each gender.²¹¹

The film then showed the results of two different date invitations. In the first, Wally successfully planned a date with Caroline by phoning her in advance, thinking his invitation through, and presenting her different options for their date activity. Next, the film showed Jerry's failed attempt at asking Caroline out. He called her the day of, left all the decision making to her, and was terse in his invitation. Like in the earlier example, the popularity of these boys was linked to their performance of gender roles. Jerry took on responsibility, coded as masculine, in making plans and calling Caroline well in advance of the date. His masculine behavior was sensitive to the behavior that Caroline expected when being asked on a date.²¹²

²¹⁰ Coronet Instructional Films, *Are You Popular?*

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

By depicting teenage dating practices, this film naturalized a complex idea like “popularity” through social rituals that it assumed its viewing audience understood and practiced. The film concluded with Wally and Caroline departing for their date, while the narrator explained that Wally “is proud to be with Caroline because she looks well, is friendly with everyone, and is considerate of [other’s] feelings,” and that she felt the same way about him. The film tied popularity to meeting social expectations and not making one’s peers feel uncomfortable by subverting well-established social and gender conventions.²¹³

Feeling Left Out: Social Adjustment (1951) explained what to do when confronted with others who refused to engage democratically. Like Phil in *Shy Guy*, *Feeling Left Out*’s protagonist, Mike, had trouble making friends. He wanted to join one of the cliques at his high school, as the narrator explained, “to belong to that particular gang, to speak their language.” After repeated efforts, each of which ended in failure, Mike began to withdraw from making friendships with other peers entirely. After ignoring his other peers, in a doomed pursuit of breaking into this particular clique, others eventually gave up on making friends with Mike as well. Mike’s attempt to make friends ended up with him becoming more isolated.²¹⁴

Luckily, Mike’s gym teacher could offer some helpful advice. The gym teacher pulled Mike aside one day after he became particularly sullen at yet another failed attempt at breaking into the clique. Consoling Mike, the teacher explained that this was a relatively common problem. “A lot of folks do the same thing,” the teacher said, “a lot of teenagers especially... a rather immature reaction, but it’s typical.” The teacher then offered Mike several ways he could attempt to solve this problem. He could pursue the ultimately unproductive strategies of (1) forcing his way into the group, (2) forming a more exclusive social group of his own, (3) giving

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Coronet Instructional Films, *Feeling Left Out: Social Adjustment*, 1951, <http://archive.org/details/FeelingLeftOut>.

up entirely on making friends, or (4) dressing and acting in an exaggerated manner as a means of seeking attention. The solution that the gym teacher proposed, and the one that the film suggested all adolescents emulate, was to make friends with individuals on a one-on-one basis. In becoming “no longer concerned about the gang,” but instead “concentrated on individuals” Mike could learn to make many friends without falling into the socially limited trap of cliques.²¹⁵

Mike’s story offered viewers two important lessons. First, they learned that individual empathy was the key to making social connections. By adjusting his social expectations and finding a way that he could develop a social life, Mike learned to feel good about himself. Second, student viewers learned that cliques were anathema to healthy democratic engagement. After making new friends, Mike had to take special care not to form his own social clique; rather he learned to nurture all of the potential relationships around him. In developing the habit of attuning himself to others, Mike formed a sociable personality that he was pleased with. *Feeling Left Out* indirectly made the case that a model adult society ought to be organized along similar principals; membership-restrictive social groups did not serve the purpose of nurturing a healthy social body were all members felt included.²¹⁶

Social guidance films about making friends emphasized how individual adjustment was necessary for the teenager to make rewarding personal connections with other people. Each of these films depicted the adolescents’ natural inclination as peer-oriented, that is, none of the protagonists in these films questioned that their rightful place was within the social body. In striving to make meaningful contributions to this social body, they had to engage in empathetic work that placed the needs of others before themselves. Social guidance films that addressed the individual’s relationship to larger social systems most directly addressed these themes.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

Society

Social guidance films that addressed etiquette, the individual's relationship with the family, and the individual's relationship with peers emphasized that to achieve proper adjustment to social situations and to act along democratic lines, adolescents needed to remain actively engaged, ready to meet consensus, and attuned to the needs of others. This final group of films dealt with the most nebulous topic of social adjustment: the individual in relation to society. By examining films that addressed empathetic engagement, democratic engagement, and the necessity of obeying social controls, we can see how social experts believed the individual should operate in relation to the visible and invisible rules of American democratic culture in midcentury. In so doing, these films made direct connections between ideals of self-mastery and the mastery of cooperation.

The Fun of Being Thoughtful addressed the titular practice of thoughtfulness, and showed how its implementation could lead to a synthesis of individual and social happiness. The film was advised by Ernest M. Ligon, then director of the Character Research Project at Union College and author of psychological advice books such as *A Greater Generation* and *Dimensions of Character*.²¹⁷ The film opened with brief vignettes of individual adolescents speaking directly into the camera. In the first, a teenage boy pondered thoughtfulness, saying, "I'd like to be more thoughtful, if I only knew what it meant." The second scene featured a slightly older adolescent who complained that thoughtfulness would get him nowhere because society was "every man for himself." In the final vignette, a teenage girl asked the question that prompted the plot of the film, "How do you go about being thoughtful? What do you do? [...] Is there some particular

²¹⁷ Ernest M. Ligon, *A Greater Generation*, 2nd ed. (New York: MacMillan Company, 1948); Ernest M. Ligon, *Dimensions of Character* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1956).

method of being thoughtful that works every time?”²¹⁸ The film would proceed to show how thoughtfulness was both a course of action and a frame of mind.

The main plot of the film concerned the Procter family, a nuclear family with two teenage children. The Procters, the narrator announced, were a family that practiced thoughtfulness, and viewers could learn it from them by watching carefully. The two teenage Procter children returned home from school to an empty house and immediately set about surprising their parents by cooking dinner and cleaning up. The brother and sister engaged in a litany of thoughtful behavior, including showing sympathy to one-another about the various problems they had in their day. The sister exercised thoughtfulness in deciding to cook dinner for her parents who were late getting home. When the parents arrived home, they too had shown thoughtfulness by bringing the sister a gift: the new dress that she had wanted. The Procter brother learned to be thoughtful by asking the new girl in town out as a date for that weekend’s party. Talking over his decision with his dad, he learned that the best way to judge whether an action was thoughtful was to “put yourself in the other person’s place.”²¹⁹ By remaining vigilant to the needs of others, the Procters demonstrated that individual empathy combined with individual action led to personal and interpersonal happiness.

The relationships that the Procter family modeled for their high school viewership were highly reciprocal. Each member of the family helped the other, either through taking actions that would lessen their work burdens, advising one another, or through paying attention to other’s needs and attempting to satisfy them. With this healthy relationship modeled at home, the Procter brother was then equipped to step outside the confines of his family and show his understanding

²¹⁸ Coronet Instructional Films, *The Fun of Being Thoughtful*, 1950, <http://archive.org/details/FunofBei1950>.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

of thoughtfulness to a potential romantic partner. This family showed viewers that when made into a habit, vigilant empathy offered a means of making everyone happy.²²⁰

Exercising empathy was one means to creating a well-functioning social body, but other issues of group living remained. *How to Get Cooperation* (1950) showed viewers how to get groups of people organized through the application of persuasion. It emphasized that democratic cooperative action was both efficient as a strategy of problem solving and intimately tied to the natural order. The film opened with a visual linguistic breakdown of the word “CO OPERATE,” to ensure students knew its meaning. The narrator then asked, “do we really understand cooperation? Do we know how to get others to cooperate with us?” As the film shifted to a classroom scene, the narrator was revealed to be Mr. Baldwin, the high school physics teacher and A/V Club sponsor.²²¹ Mr. Baldwin would proceed to use his knowledge of physics to explain the principles of democratic action.

The main plot of the film concerned Ed, the student leader of the newly formed A/V Club, and his attempt to recruit club members. On his first attempt, he told, rather than asked, another classmate to give up his study hall hour to devote to the club. When this strategy failed, Mr. Baldwin stepped in to explain persuasion by demonstrating a physics experiment. He asked Ed to try his hardest to move an iron weight suspended by rope. Ed’s first impulse was to strike the weight with a hammer, but he found this both ineffective and physically painful. Mr. Baldwin stepped in to show how slight application of pressure at the rope’s fulcrum would get the weight swinging. “Oh, I get it,” Ed realized, “You mean I’ve been using ‘sledgehammer methods’ about the [projector] operator’s club!” As another example, Mr. Baldwin explained how a local townsman could effect change through cooperation. The town had recently added a new

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Coronet Instructional Films, *How to Get Cooperation*.

housing development, but its roads remained unpaved. The film then switched to the activities of this townsman as he attempted to organize his neighbors into getting the road paved. As Mr. Baldwin explained, “Each person can gain directly from the paving, but individual efforts are seldom effective.” The townsman’s real task in gaining cooperation was actually “convincing other people that they want to help.”²²² By comparing the action needed to secure group effort in democracy to the natural principles of physics (soft pressure at a fulcrum), the film told viewers that democratic action was a natural part of the world rather than a historicized political development. If people worked together as a democratic unit, they would all gain.

Ed began the process of implementing Mr. Baldwin’s advice. He used techniques of persuasion such as appealing to differing desires of his individual classmates. Some were interested in the club for its school service component, whereas others were interested in the technical operation of film projectors. Even among those who had no interest in joining Ed’s A/V Club, they listened as he attempted to recruit them “because they respected him as a person.” Eventually Ed managed to pull the club together “in the same direction.” The first educational film projected by the club happened to be a film about physics. In this physics film there was a diagram that featured two people pulling a weight together with separate ropes. Through cooperative action, the film-within-a-film explained, both individuals were able to apply more pressure than they could on their own. Amused at the coincidence, Ed remarked, “it’s amazing how often physics applies to cooperation and people!”²²³

How to Get Cooperation grounded democratic principles of group action in naturally observable phenomena. In doing so, it made the case that social needs were best met through democratic principles rather than through coercion or brute force. Speaking in the language of

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

natural laws, *How to Get Cooperation* showed that when two or more individuals exert force “in the same general direction” they produced the effect of “a single force somewhere between them.” When Ed appealed to the desires of his individual classmates in convincing them to join the A/V Club, he demonstrated that individual needs and desires could be turned to mutually beneficial ends. Like in the physics experiment, democracy was supposed to reach some natural consensus or middle ground that pleased all participants.²²⁴

Democratic society also restricted the individual in service to the needs of the group. In *Law and Social Controls* (1949) students in an afterschool clubhouse learned to work within the social controls of their community. Near the film’s opening, the narrator explained that law was necessary to the maintenance of social harmony. The film defined law as consisting of three forms of social controls that regulate human life. According to the film, the three forms of law were “Custom: what we *usually* do. Moral code: what we *should* do. And [legal] law: what we *must* do.” To demonstrate how each of these three social controls affected human life, the film showed a case study of the town’s “Teen Canteen.” The adolescent operators of the clubhouse had a problem: the members who were assigned to clean up duty when the club closed at 11:00 p.m. were shirking their responsibilities to head home early.²²⁵ In resolving this problem, the teenage protagonists of the film would have to come to a better understanding of how social controls operated.

The teenage governing body of the canteen quickly learned why people had been leaving early. Most of them, it turned out, had parents who required them to be home soon after 11:00 p.m. Their individual needs conflicted with the group needs of operating the clubhouse. The

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ The sole digital copy of this film seems to come from a damaged reel; the film begins partway through the narrator’s dialog. It is unclear who the advisor was for this film, or exactly how the subjects presented in this film were first introduced. Coronet Instructional Films, *Law and Social Controls*.

group then tried to come to some sort of democratic decision to solve this problem, with the leading proposal being that the club close thirty minutes earlier so that people had time to clean up. In coming to this decision, the democratic government of the Teen Canteen consulted two experts: a member of the town's civic association and a local town lawyer, who helped reveal the social controls at work in this decision making process. The member of the civic association explained that it was "custom" for places in the town to close at 10:30 p.m. rather than 11:00 p.m. Here, two students disagreed. One argued from the position of moral code, citing how it was morally improper for teenagers to stay out too late. The other student argued individuals could choose to leave the clubhouse whenever they liked, even if it stayed open until 11:00 p.m. or later. The students then consulted their second expert, a lawyer, to explain how laws worked. "Whatever the community decides is best for itself," the lawyer explained, "usually becomes law." The lawyer warned that the town had been considering a law to force the clubhouse to close earlier in the night, and that "it would be better for the community and you, if the canteen were to pass its own law." While the teenage operators were also part of the community and therefore had certain rights as a group, the needs of the community as a whole prevailed. Through threat of legal coercion (the possibility of a town-wide curfew law), the Teen Canteen had another reason to consider changing its closing time. Together, the three forms of social control had made their influence felt on the operating hours of the Teen Canteen. In the end, the adolescent governing board of the clubhouse voted to change the closing time to 10:30 p.m.²²⁶

The film concluded with a reminder of the purpose of law in a society. Law, the film defined, "is a whole body of rules for our conduct, made by representatives of the people, and enforced by established means" such as police and jails. The film showed that these laws came in

²²⁶ Ibid.

two forms. Some laws told people what not to do, the film explained while using images ranging from the familiar to the sensational. Stop signs and “no hunting” signs were clear legal “don’ts,” but then the film showed newspaper headlines, one reporting prison sentences for murder and the other reading “US COURT DOOMS TRAITOR.” The other kind of laws “[direct] what is agreed to be right” the narrator explained, “[they] require you to go to school so that you and society will benefit.” The film concluded by saying that laws in democratic governments were the responsibility of citizens to make, change, and understand.²²⁷

In *Law and Social Controls*, students learned the ways in which society curtailed their behavior towards socially productive ends. The film relied on the unchallenged principal of democratic organization to justify these laws. Regulations on individual behavior, it argued, could not be wrong if reached by the consensus of a properly functioning democratic society. When individual desires conflicted with social needs, society expected individuals to adjust their behavior in favor of the legally defined social good. The film’s “Teen Canteen” had to bring itself to abide by the laws of its community, preferably through self-governance. If it refused, a higher social and political authority could step in and reassert order for the preservation of democratically agreed community standards. As the film indicated on its outset, disavowal of law threatened social harmony.²²⁸

Conclusion

Progressive educators and social experts expressed great concern about adolescent adjustment to the social world around them. They recognized that adolescence brought unique challenges to the individual. At the same time, new postwar youth cultures threatened to exacerbate these naturally occurring developments. For the preservation of properly functioning

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

social order, adolescents were educated on how to interact as members of groups as small as the family or as large as national communities. These films tried to teach their viewers that engaging with others was emotional work, but if done correctly it was rewarding for everybody. Principles of democratic social management worked to meld the interests of the individual with the interests of the group.

At the same time, these films were very limited in their application of prescriptive behavior. While they championed individual agency and democratic values, they did so in ways that reinforced historically specific middle class understandings of gender, etiquette, and behavior. The absence of race in Coronet Films adds another layer of complexity, one which future scholarly investigation would do well to explore.²²⁹ While these films attempted to create what social scientists saw as the values necessary for a well-functioning social body, they did so by smoothing over these and other highly contested categories. The ideology at work in these films showed that becoming a democratically attuned person came not from challenging social boundaries, but by leveraging individual power to engage with groups. These individuals and groups would then act within socially defined constraints. Mastering cooperation meant balancing the desires of the individual with the needs of the group for happiness and efficiency.

²²⁹ The absence of race in Coronet films may be because Coronet wanted to create films that would sell in all parts of the United States, including the segregated south. Some other social guidance film producers did address issues of race, see for example *Skipper Learns A Lesson* (Sid Davis Productions, 1952), http://archive.org/details/skipper_learns_a_lesson; Centron Corporation, and *What About Prejudice?* (McGraw-Hill Textbook Co., Inc., 1959), http://archive.org/details/3177_What_About_Prejudice_E01646_02_29_30_00.

Conclusion

David A. Smart, founder of *Esquire Magazine*, *Coronet Magazine*, *Gentleman's Quarterly*, and Coronet Instructional Films, died October 16, 1952. His death foretold the end of an era for Coronet, and in the educational film market generally. Business fell to his younger brother, the rapid clip of production at Coronet's private Chicago studio slowed, and the classic age of the social guidance film came to an end. Other production companies, notably Centron Films based in Lawrence, Kansas, breathed fresh life into the genre in the mid-1950s.²³⁰ But by the end of the decade the educational film market largely abandoned the genre to keep pace with new developments in education.²³¹

In the mid-1950s, the progressive education paradigm, represented by the proponents of Life Adjustment education, came under sustained assault from a variety of directions. As many historians have discussed, a revived interest in the natural sciences emerged in part due to the contingencies of the Cold War. If the United States were to keep pace with the Soviet Union, it needed a nation of scientists. Deweyism, and particularly its social-reformist roots, looked suspiciously "red" to the eyes of hardened Cold Warriors.²³² On the academic side of the debate,

²³⁰ Centron social guidance films tended leave the principal conflicts of the film unresolved, as a prompt for classroom discussion. They also tended to be much livelier than their visually static and formulaic Coronet predecessors were. See, for instance Centron Productions, *What About Drinking?* (Young America Films, 1954), http://archive.org/details/0549_What_About_Drinking_E01645_15_12_44_21; Centron Productions, *What About Juvenile Delinquency?*, 1955, <http://archive.org/details/WhatAbout1955>; Centron Corporation, *What About Prejudice?* (McGraw-Hill Textbook Co., Inc., 1959), http://archive.org/details/3177_What_About_Prejudice_E01646_02_29_30_00; For a memoir recounting Centron's history, see Russell A. Mosser, *Centron Remembered, 1947-1981*, ed. Arthur H. Wolf (Self-published, 1999).

²³¹ Coronet's production slowed, but continued into the 1980s before the 16mm film format was largely abandoned in schools. "Coronet's David A. Smart Died October 16"; Mazie, *Two Visionary Brothers: David and Alfred Smart*, 29–32; Green, Jr., "Innovation, Imitation, and Resisting Manipulation: The First Twenty Years of the American Teenager," 50–51. Coronet's Glenview, Illinois studio closed a few years after Smart's death (either in 1954 or 1955), apparently in response their employees attempting to form a union. Subsequent Coronet productions would be filmed on location, rather than in the studio, see Smith, *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films, 1945-1970*, 98; Alexander, *Academic Films for the Classroom*, 30.

²³² JoAnne Brown, "'A Is for Atom, B Is for Bomb': Civil Defense in American Public Education, 1948-1963.," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 73; Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958*, 258–70.

Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., professor of history at the University of Illinois, derided modern schooling as anti-intellectual in his well-known 1953 book *Educational Wastelands*. “In the writings of the ‘life-adjustment’ school,” Bestor complained in one pointed article, “democratic education is identified with intellectual mediocrity.” Education for the rights and needs of a democratic society should consist of “training in history, political science, economics, and the other kinds of disciplined thinking,” not the vague and “pompous formulations” of intellectual conmen, Bestor thought.²³³

American progressive education in the aftermath of the Second World War responded to contemporary problems while drawing on an earlier legacy. Earlier in the century, educators had applied the groundbreaking work of philosopher John Dewey in an attempt to construct a curriculum that would reconcile the needs of the individual and the needs of society. Increasingly, these educators came to be informed by the work of psychological experts who offered potent scientific ways of understanding and adjusting the individual toward productive ends. Educators and psychologists were both interested in the transformation of the adolescent into a functioning adult. With the fight against European fascism, the threat of Soviet communism, and the potential danger of youth cultures at home, these two groups saw it as their social duty to become aggressive advocates for intervention. In attempting to construct an individual that could master the self and master cooperation with others, educators and social scientists sought to reinforce and reproduce the American democratic personality in what they identified as a period of intense disruption.

²³³ Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., “‘Life Adjustment’ Education: A Critique,” *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* 38, no. 3 (Autumn 1952): 441, 418–19; Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1953).

Social guidance films were one of the ways that educators and social scientists cooperated. Looking to film technology, which had proven itself vital in achieving the American government's goals during the war, experts saw a medium that could be harnessed for social good. The educational film industry also saw this as an opportune moment. Educators, social scientists, and filmmakers collaborated to produce many dozens of films meant to guide adolescents through problems encountered in daily living. These films were complex. The objectives of progressive education informed their goals and the psychological understanding of the adjustable individual undergirded their advocacy. At the same time, social guidance films served the needs of an American society that was emerging from national and international tumult. They offered a means of constructing democratic citizens for a new postwar world.

Unless viewed as a collective filmography, these films risk appearing as individual documents that addressed particular topics. It has been the work of this thesis to show that through viewing these films as a unified body we can discern the broad prescriptions embedded in their content. Yet there is much more to be done with these important sources. By locating and exploring studio records, and the records of film collaborators, the forces that shaped educational film content could be greatly elucidated. Future scholars should also consider how these films depicted (or did not depict) issues of class, race, and gender; categories that were anything but stable in the postwar world. Additionally, any way that future scholars could access how students responded to these films might have serious implications for studies of how postwar adolescents reacted to claims of expert authority.

Social guidance films were products of governing, an exercise in soft power designed to persuade individuals to act towards socially beneficial ends. These films showed both the widespread concern over adolescence in midcentury as well as how experts attempted to redress

these concerns. These films demonstrated that adolescents needed to become independent and self-reliant to meet the needs of an individuated American society. By bringing these individuals into productive unity with one another, these films showed how American democracy could benefit the individual as well as the community. The content of midcentury social guidance films reveals a prescriptive ideal whereby adolescents were supposed to become autonomous democratic citizens of an American republic striving for stability, order, and perfection.

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