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BETWEEN WAR AND REVOLUTION: FRENCH WOMEN AND THE SEXUAL
PRACTICES OF EVERYDAY LIFE, 1952-1967

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Between War and Revolution:
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French women of all classes made everyday decisions in the postwar period in an effort to preserve their personal and sexual autonomy. They wrote letters to journals and papers, they read the works of scientists, doctors, and other women like themselves; they formed networks; they fought to free themselves from the bonds of sexual slavery; they found abortionists either clandestinely in France or abroad; and they fought for and obtained the right to family planning and the right to control their own bodies and lives.

This project sheds light on the debates over sex, the activism surrounding sex, and the experiences of sex, all of which remain unexplored in the historiography of the immediate postwar years. Whereas many historians consider the postwar, pre-revolutionary period as one of “silence” regarding sexual and personal freedoms, the sources I have located indicate that women in fact actively created many key debates over fertility, sexuality, and sexual freedom that raged in this postwar environment.

My thesis overturns the traditional view that students were the catalyst provoking revolution in May of 1968, by showing that women’s struggles to control their own bodies and sexualities lay the groundwork for more radical rebellion in a conservative post-war world, in the two decades prior to 1968. This project proposes a paradigm shift that changes the definition and periodization of the “sexual revolution.” Although there occurred a well-documented explosion of conversation and group formation based on

identity politics after 1968 that has been described as a “sexual revolution,” this older definition ignores the actions of women in the two earlier decades. These women’s efforts successfully culminated in the *Loi Neuwirth* of 1967, both legalizing contraception and implementing a program of sexual education in French schools—a full six months before students and workers erupted in protest in May of 1968. French women’s everyday resistances to the conservative and traditional postwar social order paved the road to revolution, however this study will also explore the complications and contradictions inherent in the complex postwar sexual world in which these women lived, loved, and agitated.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page.....	
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Sexual Education in Postwar France.....	26
Chapter Two: Happy Motherhood? French Women and Birth Control after World War II.....	91
Chapter Three: Abortion in the Postwar: Experience and Debate.....	177
Chapter Four: Girls ‘Like That’: Lesbian Agency in Postwar French Society.....	253
Chapter Five: ‘Fallen Women’ or ‘Lazy, Infectious, Imbeciles’? Judgment, Pity, and Prostitute Agency.....	297
Chapter Six: Sexual Containment and the Resistance of Perceived Deviants in Postwar France.....	360
Epilogue.....	395
Bibliography.....	415
Curriculum Vita.....	433

INTRODUCTION

In a letter to *Clair Foyer*, a journal disseminated largely to the Catholic rural population of France, a woman professed that she was forty-two years old and had had eight children, the first born in 1944 and the last (“we hope”) born in 1960. “Thus,” she said, “you can understand simply by looking at the birth date of the eldest that the situation has been terrifying.”¹ She emphasized that she had received little help with her burden and that her early days often stretched far into the night, sometimes until one or two in the morning. She recalled, “When I was thirty, I could not wait until I was fifty, so I would not have to be ‘scared anymore.’ If my period was even slightly late, which happened a lot when I was younger, I could no longer sleep.”² This excerpt portrays just one element of the pervasive fear that permeated French society in the postwar. French women from rural areas experienced more fear than others because of their deep religious convictions and because their lives were circumscribed by a strict gender hierarchy that imposed traditional roles, mandated feminine subordination, and oftentimes elicited a fear of one’s own husband. In fact most individuals in postwar French society were anxious about a wide range of perceived threats and dangers including: the corruption minors; female wantonness and juvenile delinquency; contagious prostitutes threatening the public with disease and immorality; lesbians and male-transvestite prostitutes undermining “French values” in public spaces. Most women were additionally worried, even terrified, over unremitting pregnancies and how these might destroy their families

¹ Anonymous female rural respondent to a 1965 survey on rural life conducted by the journal *Clair Foyer*. Cited in Marie Allauzen, *La Paysanne Française aujourd’hui*, Collection grand format femme (Paris: Société Nouvelle des Éditions Gonthier, 1967), 157.

² Anonymous female rural respondent to a 1965 survey on rural life conducted by the journal *Clair Foyer*. Cited in Marie Allauzen, *La Paysanne Française aujourd’hui*, Collection grand format femme (Paris: Société Nouvelle des Éditions Gonthier, 1967), 157.

and lives. Women in postwar France made everyday choices that created agency in their lives, however taking illegal actions to control their lives and fertility not only made many women feel guilty and shameful, but also left them vulnerable to police apprehension, ill health, or even death.

In the postwar, many French women and other individuals with differing sexualities struggled to maintain control of their fertility and their sexual lives. Both contraception and abortion in France had been made illegal in France by the law of 1920. This law had been passed by a conservative Chamber of Deputies, whose members sought to pacify a nation distraught over the extreme loss of life in World War I. Because of this law, most French women in the postwar period lacked knowledge of, and access to, legal and reliable means of contraception, and therefore many sought illegal abortions to limit the number of pregnancies that they might experience over a lifetime. Other women eschewed the traditional definition of domestic bliss and chose instead to love other women clandestinely. Meanwhile French prostitutes, both male and female, fought to maintain a sense of privacy by resisting the authorities who tried to control and define them. Other prostitutes sought to elicit public sympathy by giving their testimony to abolitionist groups who spread their message to the French public through their publications. Whether based in fear, pride, or a sense of self-preservation, French women of all classes made everyday decisions in the postwar period in an effort to preserve their personal and sexual autonomy.

My thesis overturns the traditional view that students were the catalyst provoking revolution in May of 1968, by showing that women's struggles to control their own bodies and sexualities lay the groundwork for more radical rebellion in a conservative

post-war world, in the two decades prior to 1968. My project questions the commonly-held vision of 1968 being a watershed moment in French society that gave birth to a new sense of openness in light of life, love, and sexual freedom.

Whereas many historians consider the postwar, pre-revolutionary era a period of “silence” regarding sexual and personal freedoms, the sources I have located indicate that women in fact actively created many key debates over fertility, sexuality, and sexual freedom that raged in this postwar environment. This project proposes a Kuhnian paradigm shift that changes the definition and periodization of the “sexual revolution.” Although there occurred a well-documented explosion of conversation and group formation based on identity politics after 1968 that has been described as a “sexual revolution,” this older definition ignores the actions of women in the two earlier decades. These women’s efforts successfully culminated in the *Loi Neuwirth* of 1967, both legalizing contraception and implementing a program of sexual education in French schools—a full six months before students and workers erupted in protest in May of 1968.

This project examines French women’s activism, ideas, and decision-making in the years between 1952 and 1967 in a range of sexual arenas. It sheds light on the debates over sex, the activism surrounding sex, and the experiences of sex, all of which remain unexplored in the historiography of the immediate postwar years. French scholars of sexuality have used either legislative documents or printed primary sources, or have focused on periods prior to the mid-twentieth century. My project combines these approaches, analyzing a mix of manuscript and print materials in order to uncover the hidden voices in the key arenas in which intense and fruitful debate occurred—in government legislation and press debates on sexual education, in the personal

correspondence of women over the right to legal contraception, in the government legislation and police reports regulating “French mores” and prostitution, in the papers and press of anti-prostitution organizations and “moral” societies, in the works of gay-rights authors and activists, and in the interviews and autobiographies of lesbians, prostitutes, and transvestite-prostitutes.

By investigating the post-war arenas in which women’s sexuality was defined, this project will extend the large body of knowledge about women in World War II into the post-war era. There have been recent studies on gender that have focused specifically on youth, young women, and political movements or are survey-level discussions of women in the post-war years, but there remains a lacuna in the historiography as to how the post-war era dealt with female sexuality in both the private and public spheres.³ The major French works that discuss sexuality and “*amour*” (love) are surveys that concentrate on earlier decades and include very little information on women’s sexuality after World War II.⁴ Janine Mossuz-Lavau’s important work embraces different goals than my own, for although she provides extensive coverage of the legislation regarding sexuality passed in France from 1950 through 2002, she does not tell the stories of the women affected by the laws and legislative debates.⁵ My work will enrich this scholarship by comparing and contrasting the legislation passed regarding sexuality to

³ See for instance Richard Jobs, *Riding the New Wave: Youth and the Rejuvenation of France after World War II* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2002); Susan Weiner, *Enfants Terribles: Youth and Femininity in the Mass Media in France, 1945-1968* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Sylvie Chaperon, *Les années Beauvoir (1945-1970)*, (Paris : Librarie Arthème Fayard, 2000); and Claire Duchon, *Women’s Rights and Lives in France, 1944-1968* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁴ Christine Bard, *Les femmes dans la société française au 20e siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2001); Anne-Marie Sohn, *Chrysalides: Femmes dans la vie privée (XIXe-XXe siècles)*, volumes I and II (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996); Maryse Jaspard, *La sexualité en France* (Paris: Éditions de la Découverte, 1997); Anne-Marie Sohn, *Du premier baiser à l’alcove: La sexualité des Français au quotidien (1850-1950)* (Paris: Aubier, 1996).

⁵ Janine Mossuz-Lavau, *Les lois de l’amour: Les Politiques de la sexualité en France (1950-2002)* (Paris: Petite bibliothèque Payot, 2002).

“women’s words” and practices expressed in personal correspondence, journal articles, oral interviews, and works of literature, in an effort to explore the cultural milieus in which the wars over female sexuality were waged.⁶ Although sexuality studies are a well-developed field in the US and in portions of Europe, women’s sexuality in post-World-War-II-Europe has received little attention, and as yet, the primary studies have been in countries other than France (particularly Germany and Holland). This project forges connections with previous sexuality studies in both the US and Europe⁷ and will pave the way for a more informed international analysis of women’s sexualities.

There was, of course, variety in French women’s sexuality at this and other times. The topic of lesbian sexuality has received virtually no attention in current accounts of the post-war era in France. Therefore, this project will be an essential contribution to the expanding field of queer studies in both the US and Europe. Marie-Jo Bonnet’s work explores the lives of lesbian women through the 1920s but covers the period from World War II to the present only in her brief conclusion.⁸ This project will analyze the lives of lesbians in the post-war era by examining women’s writings and films, oral interviews of women in the lesbian press, and also the legislation passed by the government in the post-war era to curb homosexual behavior.

⁶ Mona Ozouf, *Women’s Words: Essay on French Singularity*, trans. by Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997). I have borrowed the term “Women’s Words” from Ozouf’s book, however my interpretation of “women’s words” and my conclusions are far removed from those of Ozouf.

⁷ Lillian Fraderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981); John d’Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988); John d’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeleine B. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁸ Marie-Jo Bonnet, *Les relations amoureuses entre les femmes*, Collection Opus (Paris : Éditions Odile Jacob, 1995).

Additionally, the research on prostitution is crucial because very little has been written on this topic for the recent period since Alain Corbin's work in the 1970s.⁹ Corbin focuses on the government surveillance and regulation of prostitutes stating, "For anyone undertaking a study of venal sex in the home country of regulationism it is logical to allow oneself to be guided by the configuration of male desire, the social fantasy regarding its dark underside, the modalities of social control."¹⁰ He claims that he has paid little attention to the question of "redeeming" the prostitute because this idea played little part in the regulationist system in France that sought to control her. In defense of why he has neglected the views of the prostitutes themselves, he insists that American and British historiographers in a better position to provide this information because the culture surrounding prostitution in those countries allowed for the rise of abolitionist societies and created sources that grant improved and easier access to this facet of the historical record.¹¹ Additionally Corbin only treats the history of prostitution between 1946 and 1969 in six pages at the end of his work as a set-up to the French prostitutes' movement to occupy the churches in 1975. This project augments Corbin's by highlighting this important period in the history of French prostitution. The period from World War II to the uprisings of 1968 encompassed not only the closing of the *maisons de tolérance* (state-sanctioned brothels) in 1946 but also the French adoption of the United Nations' 1949 International Convention on Prostitution in 1960 and the shaky attempts of the French authorities to adhere to this convention throughout the 1960s. Additionally, for the postwar period, I have located the voices of prostitutes that were

⁹ Alain Corbin, *Les filles de nocce: misère sexuelle et prostitution (19^e et 20^e siècles)*, collection historique, edited by Maurice Agulhon and Paul Lemerle (Paris : Aubier Montaigne, 1978).

¹⁰ Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, translated by Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1990), ix.

¹¹ Corbin, ix.

hidden in sources of which Corbin was not aware. This study is not meant to “redeem” French prostitutes but instead attempt to shed light on them as individuals—as wives, mothers, and daughters—just as activists and abolitionists attempted to do in postwar period.

Postwar France was a complex sexual world. There were, in fact, two separate arenas of sexual discourse, one relatively libertine and one largely repressed. On the one hand, there was the sexualized France of the Place Pigalle with its prostitutes, transvestites, sex shows, and the Moulin Rouge. This was the France that foreign tourists visited in order to “walk on the wild side” and see how deviance came to life under the cover of darkness in certain Parisian neighborhoods. For instance, many French lesbians expressed discomfort that the bars they frequented in downtown Paris attracted tourists who came ‘to see the show’. This France gave birth to the erotic drama of Brigitte Bardot as well as the sexually expressive—many would say scandalous—literature of Marguerite Duras, Christiane de Rochefort, Françoise Mallet-Jorris, and Françoise Sagan, young female authors who composed racy works on coming of age in the modern world.

On the other hand, much of French society was in lockdown. The vast majority of women were by no means “sexually liberated” but were instead largely occupied with their concerns about feeding and sheltering their families and raising well-developed and “dignified” children in the adverse postwar conditions. Many individuals had become so fearful that they were no longer able to practice their professions or familial duties freely and efficiently and this fearful behavior impeded the smooth and efficient running of society. In the realm of sexuality French society was strung out over three overarching

factors or trends: the Law of 1920, which criminalized contraception and abortion; the debate over Neo-Malthusianism; and the teachings of the Catholic Church.¹² Those directly involved in the debates or directly-affected by the laws felt the effects the most strongly, but the waves of repression rippled out in wider and wider circles in the half-century after World War I, affecting more and more of French society.

The Law of 1920 and the subsequent modifications to both the Penal Code and the Health Code that were made to support this law alarmed doctors so much that they could no longer properly practice medicine. One of the primary arguments utilized by the proponents of birth control was that there had been global advances in the fields of science and medicine relative to birth control and its uses that French doctors were not able to employ in their practice. The reality that legislation affected their ability to heal their patients was unacceptable to many French doctors. However, most doctors fearfully followed the letter of the law in the realm of contraception and perhaps even more importantly, therapeutic abortion. Doctors were so apprehensive about having their lives and careers threatened by being named an accomplice to abortion that they refused to treat bleeding women, preferring instead to send them directly to the hospital. Doctor Jean Cohen, who was affiliated with the *Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial* (French Movement for Family Planning), or MFPPF, stated that the ideas of contraception and abortion had long been conflated in the medical community because both doctors in France and medical students had been trained to obsess over abortion. He contended that in one's medical career, one could make grave errors or commit other professional

¹² I cover these debates, trends, and factors in detail in my chapters on sexual education, contraception, and abortion.

excesses, but, "...the doctor who performs a 'provoked abortion' will undeniably be condemned by his colleagues."¹³

The media was also affected by the law of 1920 and preferred to skirt the issue of birth control and abortion for over three decades, from the passing of the law until the mid-1950s. Journalists were frightened that if they broke the shameful silence surrounding the reproductive realities of French women, they would be implicated and prosecuted under the statutes that forbade the dissemination of propaganda or information on birth control. Many French women who sought out clandestine abortions or performed them on themselves were terrified not only of dying in a state of mortal sin, but also of being labeled a criminal or a baby-hating non-woman. This apprehension is evident in the terminology that women chose to use regarding abortion. Women called an abortion a "fausse-couche" or miscarriage, whether it was voluntary or accidental, choosing to distance themselves from the very act and any possible legal, social, or moral repercussions by refusing to call a spade a spade.

Next, proponents of birth control were intensely concerned about being labeled "neo-Malthusians," which in postwar France could be considered the equivalent of one of today's "fighting words." The Communist party believed Malthusianism—and "Neo-Malthusianism" in the twentieth century—represented bourgeois plots to undermine a working-class revolution by inhibiting the reproduction of workers. Although some in society might not have minded getting on the wrong side of the Communist party, few wanted to be known for attempting to limit the reproduction of the lower-classes with all of the classist connotations that that entailed. Proponents of birth control for women were

¹³ Doctor Cohen, unedited) *Compte Rendu d'une "Table Ronde" de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 31. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. Dr. Cohen was also the head of the gynecological and obstetrical clinic at the Parisian College of Medicine.

very careful to highlight the justification that birth control would decrease the need for clandestine abortions, which not only risked women's lives, but also jeopardized their fertilities and the possibility that they could have children in the future. Therefore, although some proponents like gynecologist and founder of the MFPF, Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, stressed that birth control was essential to women's health, they also were quick to emphasize that healthy women could bear many healthy children in the future thereby strengthening simultaneously both French families and the nation.

Lastly, Catholic doctrine declared that homosexuality was an abomination and that sexual relations were meant only for married couples and for the express purpose of procreation. Pope Pius XI's 1930 encyclical *Casti connubii*, emphasized that those who deliberately attempted to take away the sexual act's power to create life, "...acted against nature; [and were] performing a shameful and intrinsically dishonest act."¹⁴ Yet, the Catholic Church's pronouncements on sex, paired with women's terror over perpetual pregnancy, caused not only fear, but also a cloud of guilt and shame to descend over sexuality in the postwar years. These malevolent triplets had a blanketing effect on individuals' views and behaviors with regards to sexuality. Adults had never dealt with their own shameful feelings about sexuality and could not help young people to mature in sexually-healthy ways. Parents were too shameful about the topic to properly educate their children. Due to Freudian warnings about their own repressed sexualities, teachers were also frightened to discuss sexuality with students for fear of permanently damaging their fledgling psyches. Young people were so ill-informed that some young women would experience menarche thinking they were dying of a horrible, incurable disease.

¹⁴ Pius XI, « *Casti Connubii* », 31 December 1930. Cited in full in J.-P. Dubois-Dumée, 104-105.

Many women went into marriage knowing little or nothing about the sexual act and few possessed any knowledge about contraception by either “natural” church-approved methods or by any other.

In her work on so-called primitive societies, Mary Douglas emphasized that anthropologists who have delved into the cultures of so-called primitive societies have disproved the myth that individuals in these cultures were so caught up in terror that it blocked the functioning of their minds.¹⁵ Douglas believed that it is more beneficial to analyze rules about hygiene, dirt, and pollution in a given culture, because they provide an excellent route to the inner-workings of a society. Rules about pollution are enacted to control people’s behavior, particularly when political power is held precariously.¹⁶

Douglas explained:

... The ideal order of society is guarded by dangers which threaten transgressors. These danger-beliefs are as much threats which one man uses to coerce another as dangers which he himself fears to incur by his own lapses from righteousness. ... The laws of nature are.... harnessed to men’s attempts to force one another into good citizenship. Thus we find that certain moral values are upheld and certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous contagion.¹⁷

In the case of postwar France where religion played just as large a role as instrumental social control in the establishment of the laws of pathogenic hygiene, Catholicism simply replaced the fear of being struck by lightening or with leprosy for committing political or marital infidelity, with the fear “eternal damnation” for the betrayal of Church doctrine.

However, pollution taboos as methods of social control also played a role in France in the postwar. In France, individuals experienced fear not only of divine censure (such as “dying in mortal sin” for trying to abort oneself), but also of sexual danger,

¹⁵ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966), 1-2.

¹⁶ Douglas, 3.

¹⁷ Douglas, 3.

which Douglas would identify as a fear of disorder or matter out of place. Douglas explains, “Dirt is essentially disorder....Eliminating [dirt] is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment....”¹⁸ And the postwar environment was decidedly “untidy” in the minds of the French. First, French men and women had to deal with the legacy of Vichy and the presence of a latent proto-fascist population that had collaborated freely with the Nazi enemy. Second, the French felt uncomfortably positioned between the Communist and the Western worlds. Although this balancing-act brought with it a semblance of political power, some French feared the Communistic specter that had raised its head in France between the wars and was now dominantly reigning in Eastern Europe. The French were also apprehensive about the threat of Americanization and its bedfellow commercialization, which many felt jeopardized the integrity of French culture and self-determination.¹⁹ They were anxious as well about their eroding colonial empire and the Algerian War and the far-reaching effects of these events on depopulation in, and immigration to, the metropole.

Lastly, during the war, gender roles had been disturbed by the departure of men, either as prisoners of war, as forced laborers in Germany, as German soldiers, or French Resistance fighters. In response, women moved in to positions of power and authority as high-paid workers, heads of households and business, and sole providers for their families.²⁰ When the French men returned after the war, many felt emasculated by women’s new-found power and confidence and sought ways to right the system. One way

¹⁸ Douglas, 2.

¹⁹ Tyler E. Stovall, *France Since the Second World War*, Seminar Studies in History, Edited by Clive Emsley and Gordon Martel (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2002), 19-22.

²⁰ For an analysis of women’s transformed gender roles during the war and a compelling interpretation of women’s response to French men’s postwar return see Sarah Fishman, *We Will Wait: Wives of French Prisoners of War, 1940-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

was by staging public displays of patriarchal power. These performances included shaving the heads of women thought to have collaborated with Germans, as well as staging public trials for transgressive women (abortionists, prostitutes, lesbians), to publicly shame them and to serve as an example to the rest of French women what would happen to those who practiced unruly or “unnatural” behaviors. By indicating that these women who transgressed moral or social boundaries were “morally dirty” the French highlighted the boundaries of the social system. As Douglas highlights, “Dirt then is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt, there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.”²¹ By showing which individuals stood on the outside of the appropriate moral boundaries, the rest of French society could modify their behavior in ways that would keep them within the lines so that they could avoid a similar, humiliating fate.

Another control on women and sexually transgressive individuals in postwar society was through the monitoring and selective dissemination of knowledge. Withholding knowledge was a means by which to guide certain segments of the population into proper conduct. For instance, by keeping women ignorant regarding birth control and by denying them access to safe, reliable means of regulating pregnancies with the law of 1920, the French authorities had the power to manage women’s behavior. Some insisted that fear of pregnancy would stop women from committing adultery. Others argued that women needed to honor their roles as wives and mothers and that

²¹ Douglas, 36.

access to birth control would make them neglect their familial obligations, perhaps spending too much time on their careers, or refusing to have children altogether.

Knowledge could also be used to punish. Many men knew of the hardships women faced on a daily basis because of their inability to control their fertilities. In fact most women confessed their worries and fears first and foremost to the male authority figures in their lives: their husbands, their priests, and their doctors. Many husbands knew as little if not less about birth control than their wives. Some, more deleteriously, refused to discuss the problem, believing that reproductive matters should be left to women. Priests told women that they must live according to Church doctrine, eschewing any non-natural means of controlling procreation. However, this pronouncement neglected the fact that the “natural” methods (withdrawal, the rhythm method, etc.) were far from effective, and that women were forced to undergo regular abortions to terminate unwanted pregnancies. Doctors threw up their hands, suggested going to the pharmacy to buy condoms (which most men refused to wear), or simply indicated that women needed to “make do.” One woman from a rural area near Montpellier asserted, “I am convinced that all rural women have tried to appeal to their doctors telling them, ‘I have had my third child and would very much like to stop there.’ But I have never heard it said that their doctors have given them any sort of useful solution.”²² All of these methods of listening to women’s words and invalidating their complaints by either mocking or ignoring them, were a means of maintaining the power of the dominant group over the subordinate.

²² Anonymous woman from a rural area near Montpellier, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 21 and 22. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

Control of knowledge was also used to manage the lower classes in French society. In the postwar period, the sexual problems of women ran together in a tangled morass. Women who did not have the necessary knowledge or means to control their fertility were forced into regular abortions, and sometimes into prostitution in order to support their families. Communist journalist and author Jacques Derogy argued that there was such a stigma attached to single motherhood that many women preferred to throw themselves in the river or put their heads in the oven rather than give birth to an illegitimate child. He argued that women from the lower classes, whether domestic servants seduced at a Saturday dance, or farm-hands violated during harvest-time, were often obligated to turn to prostitution to support an “illegitimate maternity.”²³ The other solution for these poor women was to risk their health and lives by procuring illegal abortions. On the other hand, wealthier women always had one or two “good addresses” in their purses and the financial means to use them.

Dr. Léon Bizard, who had experience working with prostitutes at the detention center at Saint-Lazare, claimed that more than half the women who were brought there for “care” had at least one child, but that many were raising between three and six. Bizard asserted that few of these women were willing to abandon their children and that they prostituted themselves in order to feed their families.²⁴ In an issue of *Problèmes* (a periodical of the medical students of Paris) specially dedicated to prostitution, author Jean-Paul Clébert wrote that women who had been seduced and abandoned generally found the doors of respectable society closed against them. According to Clébert, this included not only the doors of the haute bourgeoisie for employment as domestics, but

²³ Jacques Derogy, *Des enfants malgré nous: Le drame intime des couples* (Paris : Éditions de minuit, 1956), 70-71.

²⁴ Doctor Bizard, cited in Derogy, 71.

also the doors of low-income housing, of hotels, and of neighbors who all held very severe opinions of “lost women.”²⁵ Although some unwed mothers might have gone into the trade believing that it was a temporary arrangement until their situations improved, most quickly became locked in, as the social world of prostitution sank its hooks into them from within and the threat of prison loomed from without.²⁶ In a sidewalk-interview for *Le Nid*, a prostitution-abolition organization in postwar France, the prostitute Florence recalled that she had worked in a factory after the birth of her daughter. After paying for a three-month stay in a sanitarium, she knew that she could only support herself and her daughter (who was being cared-for by a wet-nurse) by returning to the streets. She insisted that she would rather work the streets than abandon her daughter.²⁷ The plights of these single mothers centered on a lack of choice engendered by having been denied knowledge imperative to their lives. If women had been given both the access to, and knowledge of, birth control or if the government had invested money into the welfare of single and abandoned mothers, many women might have had the opportunity to make a conscious choice when it came to bearing children out of wedlock, or working the streets in order to support their families.

Individuals in both the working and rural classes felt abandoned by the authorities when it came to matters of family-planning. In a round-table discussion on family planning sponsored by the M.F.P.F., rural and working-class couples complained that the problems they experienced because they could not control their fertilities were completely ignored by those with the power to help. Although one rural man intimated

²⁵ Jean-Paul Clébert, Cited in Derogy, 71.

²⁶ Derogy, 72.

²⁷ Florence, (an anonymous prostitute) in an interview for *Le Nid*, “2 filles sur 3 sont des mamans,” *Fêtes et Saisons* 161 (Janvier 1962): 11.

that doctors played important authoritative positions in the rural community and often served as confidants, he criticized them for “NEVER” discussing birth control with those in need.²⁸ His wife complained that the social workers (who were assigned to assist families with many children), doctors, and priests all ignored their needs in non-urban areas.²⁹ The working-class couple participating in the discussion stressed that individuals in their *milieu* (social class) also felt forsaken. An anonymous worker for Nord Aviation emphasized that the social workers assigned to the laborers were generally too overwhelmed to answer their individual questions.³⁰

Engaging in a debate over birth control in the journal *France-Observateur*, wife of a militant worker, Madame Durand, complained that legislators passed laws, judges judged, and the police arrested in order to keep the working classes procreating and this ensured that they would not have time to agitate.³¹ Instead, according to Durand, lower class women spent all of their time caring for the ceaseless parade of children emanating from their wombs or worrying about procuring clandestine abortions that were both dangerous and humiliating. She begged the authorities to give working-class women access to a reliable means of controlling their fertility so that they could finally join their husbands, sharing their lives and fighting for causes they believed in.³²

²⁸ Anonymous man from a rural area near Montpellier, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 21 and 22. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

²⁹ Anonymous rural woman, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 21 and 22. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40

³⁰ Anonymous man from a rural area near Montpellier, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 21 and 22. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

³¹ Madame Durand, “Je suis ni abbé, ni étudiante,” *France-Observateur* (8 Décembre 1955): 13.

³² Madame Durand, “Je suis ni abbé, ni étudiante,” *France-Observateur* (8 Décembre 1955): 13.

Some in the bourgeoisie agreed that the debate over birth control and abortion was a class issue. Participating in the same birth-control debate, André Bazin questioned the French government because it had been incapable of solving the postwar housing shortage and yet still advocated a pro-natalist legislation that would end up throwing families on the street.³³ Experts as well, offered their own criticisms. Psychiatrist Henri Duchêne called the French legislation that “left birth to chance” or worse yet, “favored...accidental births...an incredible barbarism.”³⁴ He explained that giving life to a human being was one of the most beautiful, but also most serious acts in a person’s life and that it was a grave blow to human dignity if a woman could not perform this act “in full consciousness and full acceptance.”³⁵

Although withholding knowledge could be used to control women and individuals of the lower classes, some believed that sharing knowledge in the form of sexual education and re-education was the solution to creating a new French society. Although ultimately unsuccessful, some French authorities had attempted to keep the French population in the dark regarding sexuality since the early-twentieth century because “the experts”—scientists, legislators, judges, and other government authorities—were worried about the big picture of depopulation. But many experts, activists, and lay-people advocated spreading knowledge in order to protect individuals from sexual dangers and a life of vice.

Some advocates in the postwar suggested that sexually educating women would empower them by helping them re-gain control over their bodies and lives. There were

³³ André Bazin, “Il faut lever le tabou,” *France-Observateur* (17 Novembre 1955): 7.

³⁴ Henri Duchêne, *L’Évolution psychiatrique* (Juillet-Septembre 1956), cited in Catherine Valabrègue, *Contrôle des Naissances et Planning Familial* (Paris: Éditions de la Table Ronde, 1966), 222.

³⁵ Henri Duchêne, *L’Évolution psychiatrique* (Juillet-Septembre 1956), cited in Catherine Valabrègue, *Contrôle des Naissances et Planning Familial* (Paris: Éditions de la Table Ronde, 1966), 222.

individuals from every level of French society who believed that it was time to teach women about their rights as well as their responsibilities when it came to their bodies and reproduction. In the round-table discussion on planning sponsored by the M.F.P.F., couples from nearly every social group agreed that if one were to provide young people with the means of controlling pregnancies, one must also ensure that they were prepared for the responsibility. The man from a rural area near Montpellier responded that there was no moral danger inherent in providing young women with birth control as long as one provided them with both information on the chosen method and a sound “formation” or training. He explained, “What I mean by ‘training’ is a taking into account one’s civic responsibilities in life, social responsibilities. One is part of a couple...but one lives in society and I think that [having more or less children] can also have a social and economic influence on the country as a whole.”³⁶ This same man clarified that this education should be founded in the environment in which the individual lived and conducted by the associations and organizations with which the individual was involved. He did not believe that it was appropriate for this education to be provided by a singular individual (say a priest or a doctor) because an individual would be limited in their ability to handle the situation objectively.³⁷ A female teacher agreed, arguing that particularly among the working classes, a sexual education was necessary. However she also stipulated that it must not originate from a single person, “...because the working-class individual has a bit of a complex when it comes to the doctor or the priest who seems to

³⁶ Anonymous man from a rural area near Montpellier, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 17.

³⁷ Anonymous man from a rural area near Montpellier, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 18.

be trying to force some sort of knowledge on him, and this kills... off [the trust] before it can begin.”³⁸

A middle-class employee asserted that not only should young women be educated, but also their families. According to him, familial resistance was the gravest problem facing family planning.³⁹ His wife, an accountant, concurred expressing, “I also believe that this must come from the family, from parents. On my part, I have never heard of problems of a sexual nature being discussed either in my family or in others’.”⁴⁰ When asked by Dr. Cohen whether she regretted that her family never spoke of such things, she stated that if they had, she would have had “much more confidence in them.”⁴¹ The man from a rural area reinforced this point, insisting, “It is imperative in families that one is not scared to speak about these problems, and that things no longer continue as they are today, where, if one off-handedly poses a question [about sexuality]..., one will receive a slap or an explication of ‘cabbages’ or of ‘the baby Jesus’. That is simply idiotic.”⁴² As evidenced by this testimony culled from all levels of the French population, there were those who believed that French society needed to be educated and re-educated as to the rights and responsibilities of individuals facing a new sexual morality. According to these couples this training in moral and civic rights and responsibilities must not only be given to those directly affected at the individual level, but must also seek to inform their

³⁸ Anonymous female teacher (from a working-class couple), (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 19.

³⁹ Anonymous middle-class employee, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 20.

⁴⁰ Anonymous female accountant, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 20.

⁴¹ Anonymous female accountant, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 20.

⁴² Anonymous man from a rural area near Montpellier, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 18. Quite like the use of the « stork » to explain where babies come from in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, in France, children are sometimes told that babies are found in cabbage patches.

surrounding support networks and the larger society as a whole. This education would be provided through local organizations and associations, and if conducted properly, had the potential to change society at every social level, one family at a time.

Many also believed that the spreading of knowledge in the form of a social-sexual re-education could improve the physical and moral health and strength of the larger French society. These individuals hoped to create a climate in which women and those practicing transgressive sexualities would be accepted and understood, giving them a fighting chance to live happy and healthy social and sexual lives. Some experts chose not to ignore women, but to listen to their words and to share them with others so that the larger French society could form well-educated opinions and make informed decisions regarding women's rights and lives in the postwar. Instead of controlling knowledge, some professionals, public personalities, and organizations passed it on to the public. Many of these individuals made this decision because the bulk of their efforts to stir the compassion of those in power (the police, the French medical association, legislators, and judges) fell on deaf ears. The M.F.P.F. believed that the key to enlightening society was through the press. In a press release in 1966, the M.F.P.F. expressed:

If tomorrow sexual education penetrates into our schools, if our legislation is modified in such a way as to no longer forbid birth control, if individuals and couples enter into life with a better chance of success, it will be to the press that we will be beholden. And thus it seems appropriate to give them our gratitude.⁴³

The M.F.P.F. hoped to improve the health of the French nation itself with both a revision of the laws on contraception and a sound sexual education of children. One of the most severe threats to the nation in the eyes of the organization was clandestine

⁴³ M.F.P.F., Service de Presse no. 5, "Un Colloque international sur l'avortement," 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Dossier 347 AVO.

abortion. At an international colloquium held on abortion on January 14, 1966 the participants concluded that although abortion had both social and economic causes, it could not be controlled through repressive measures alone. They noted that only in those countries where family planning had been introduced, such as Denmark, Holland, Switzerland, Yugoslavia, and Great-Britain had authorities been able to reduce this veritable global scourge.⁴⁴ The MFPPF therefore concluded that:

Only a sexual and affective education of adolescents and the instruction of young married couples will permit the development of moral personalities and the responsibility of the couple. In this way, the sexual act will be returned to its rightful place, which is at the same time both a conscious act of procreation as well as an expression of mutual love.⁴⁵

Re-educating French society was not simply about re-educating the general population. In many instances, the experts also needed to be re-trained to view both women and sexually transgressive individuals more humanely. Communist journalist and author Jacques Derogy stressed that the “useful” and “human” response to the plight of French women was “not to condemn, but to understand.”⁴⁶ He begged individuals in society, “...to put yourself in the place of these thousands of women confronting the problem of pregnancy, live their anguish, their worries...”⁴⁷ Gynecologist-obstetrician Pierre Vellay admonished men for presuming to place judgement on women who sought illegal abortions. He pointed out that a man could never understand what it was like to be a pregnant woman in despair, as a man had never, and would never, have the misfortune of experiencing it. He therefore encouraged men in power to read these women’s words,

⁴⁴ M.F.P.F., Service de Presse no. 5, “Un Colloque international sur l’avortement,” 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Dossier 347 AVO.

⁴⁵ M.F.P.F., Service de Presse no. 5, “Un Colloque international sur l’avortement,” 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Dossier 347 AVO.

⁴⁶ Derogy, 20-21.

⁴⁷ Derogy, 20-21.

hear their pleas, and to find some measure of empathy before continuing to morally or legally prosecute that which they did not understand.

Critics such as Weill-Hallé, Derogy, and Vellay urged the French people to listen to and really see French women, rather than immediately vilifying their behavior, ignoring them, or classifying them as transgressive and deviant. They pressured the experts and professionals (scientists, doctors, lawyers, legislators, judges, and law enforcement officials) to see these women as whole, organic beings, instead of categorizing them as objects of study. Organizations such as *Le Nid* did the same. This organization hoped that French society could develop a sense of mercy when it came to prostitutes. When asked what could be done about single mothers who turned to prostitution, the organization stressed that society needed to help the single mothers who found themselves on the streets by giving them understanding and compassion. According to *Le Nid*, these two concessions could lift women out of the most dire of circumstances.⁴⁸ The organization insisted:

. . . parents . . . [must] accept sharing the humiliation of their daughter to save her, . . . employers . . . [must] assist [these women] . . . , their neighbors in apartment complexes, in their neighborhood, and in their village [must] materially and morally protect these young women in difficulty, and we will thus have far fewer women meeting their sad end on the streets.⁴⁹

By classifying, analyzing, and dissecting these women as deviant specimens, the “experts” in French society locked both male and female prostitutes into scientific definitions of deviance from which they had difficulty escaping. Internalizing these definitions of transgression, these individuals began to doubt their ability to live normal lives. Helping individuals to permanently leave a life of prostitution entailed that the

⁴⁸ Le Nid, “2 filles sur 3 sont des mamans,” *Fêtes et Saisons* 161 (Janvier 1962): 11.

⁴⁹ Le Nid, “2 filles sur 3 sont des mamans,” *Fêtes et Saisons* 161 (Janvier 1962): 11.

larger society accepted and embraced the human being behind the image of the prostitute. Society and the prostitute herself needed to accept an almost Romantic definition of herself as a creature of natural beauty and organicity, eschewing the scientific and intellectual pronouncement of her deviance, which foreshadowed her early, lonely demise in the cold, hard streets. Individuals and organizations in the postwar begged French society to take responsibility for educating themselves as to the plight of French women and men in need (whether they were prostitutes, young mothers, or married women with too many children to care for); and to have the compassion to change society in such a way as to make these individuals' lives more livable.

In the end, changing life for the women of France and moving French society forward on a moral and spiritual plane entailed not just the free-flow of knowledge and information, but also a dash of courage. In a recent work compiled by *L'Association pour la vie* (Association for Life), president Bernard Lemettre urged individuals to "dare" in order to "live better together . . . by developing the words that can liberate one from the fear of others and from the imprisonment of one's self."⁵⁰ He quotes Seneca the Younger in saying, "It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare. It is because we do not dare that things are difficult."⁵¹ Although Lemettre highlights the power of words and actions to help people to recreate themselves, honor each other, and live better today, activists spread a similar message in the postwar. French women in the postwar heeded these words. Whether they were acting from necessity or conviction, French women took control of their lives by making everyday choices to improve their existences. When women realized that the men in their lives (their husbands, fathers,

⁵⁰ Bernard Lemettre, "'Oser' pour mieux vivre," *en 2 mots*, 5.

⁵¹ Seneca the Younger, cited in Bernard Lemettre, "'Oser' pour mieux vivre," *en 2 mots*, 4.

doctors, and priests) were not listening to, or were flat-out ignoring their needs and desires, they took action. They wrote letters to journals and papers, they read the works of scientists, doctors, and other women like themselves; they formed networks; they fought to free themselves from the bonds of sexual slavery; they found abortionists either clandestinely in France or abroad; and they fought for and obtained the right to family planning and the right to control their own bodies and lives. French women's everyday resistances to the conservative and traditional postwar social order paved the road to revolution, however this study will also explore the complications and contradictions inherent in the complex postwar sexual world in which these women lived, loved, and agitated.

CHAPTER ONE

Sexual Education in Postwar France

In the 1940s, tenured professor at the *Lycée Chambéry*, Pierre Chambre, took advantage of the time that the Minister of Education had set aside for “general education” to provide a sexual education for his students. Although in 1942-1943, the Minister of Education had envisioned students practicing public speaking, art lessons, or visits to factories or places of historic interest during these afternoon sessions, Chambre had different ideas. This innovative educator initially introduced some words about young girls, puberty, and love into his Mother’s Day speech. Then, eager to ascertain the students’ eagerness to discuss issues of sexuality, Chambre allowed his students to respond anonymously to the following questionnaire: “What were your general impressions of the speech? Has anyone spoken to you about such matters before? Have you any objections, or any suggestions to make? What subjects would you like to hear discussed later? If you have any particular questions to ask, now is your opportunity.” Encouraged by the responses to the enquiry and the trust the students confided in him, Chambre improvised a series of informal lectures from 1943 to 1947 in which he was able to discuss with his students such topics as: the problems of adolescence, marriage and love, and the relationships between boys and girls. These lectures were extremely popular, and established such an atmosphere of confidence and family-like closeness between the students and the professor, that nearly twenty years later, students continued to write to Chambre to commend him for his innovative and inspiring teaching that had

made such an important contribution to their lives.⁵² Although Chambre taught in the early 1940s, his work was reprinted in the 1950s and was highlighted as an example of progressive teaching about sexuality for decades.

Sexual education in France was marked by intensive and anguished debate. This topic laid bare the most fundamental and sometimes contradictory beliefs of each individual involved: their faith or religion; their sentiments regarding sex, sexuality, private life, and gender; their opinions about the efficacy of education in protecting children; and their convictions regarding the role of the parent and child; the rights of children; and the role of the family versus the role of society in the life of an individual. Many facets of French society made sexual education a loaded topic and retarded its development in public schools. First, Catholicism's echoes greatly influenced French society and had both direct and indirect effects on the debates surrounding sexual education. While not considered classic "Catholic Moralists," many of the theorists (doctors, psychiatrists, professors, and educators) who debated the topic in the 1950s and 1960s, had deep Catholic roots which were exposed, even if just slightly, in their 'scientifically-based' works on sex education. Next, there was a tendency, at all levels of French society, to respect the sanctity of the private life of home and family. This reverence of privacy can be traced back to the Napoleonic Code's dedication to the patriarchal family and the father's absolute rights and privileges within that institution. The official and unofficial recognition of the individual's unquestioned right to privacy

⁵² Pierre Chambre, *Les Jeunes devant l'éducation sexuelle, avec les témoignages de centaines d'adolescents* (Paris : Éditions Nérét, 1958), 21-25, 141. A summary of this information is also covered in André Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 80.

deeply influenced the debate on the sexual education of children.⁵³ The story of sexual education in postwar France does not involve only young women, but also the young men of France who were developing into adults in a war-torn postwar world, therefore this chapter pays particular attention to the influence of gender on the sexual education of France's children. In postwar France, shame, fear, and a sense of sexual danger influenced beliefs about sexuality. These emotions, which had their roots in a shared Catholic morality, were passed down from generation to generation of French men and women. However in the 1950s and 1960s, certain teachers, scholars, and doctors fought diligently to protect young people (but particularly young women) through knowledge and to break the generational cycle of shame and fear by "daring" parents to overcome their 'false modesty' in order to help young people develop into happy and sexually healthy adults.

HISTORY AND TRADITION

Alongside the program initiated by Pierre Chambre at the Lycée Chambéry, there were few other efforts made to establish sexual education programs for the children of France. In response to his work, *Les Jeunes devant l'éducation sexuelle*, Pierre Chambre received correspondence detailing two additional efforts at sexual education. One, in the department of the Seine, focused on educating instructors to teach sexual education. Beginning in 1953, the *École des Parents et des éducateurs à Paris* (Parents' and Teachers' school of Paris) organized three lessons on marriage to be given at two schools, which were part of the *Écoles normales d'instituteurs et institutrices de la Seine* (an

⁵³ The official recognition of an individual's right to privacy also leads to the abuse of this privilege, including the high prevalence of unreported and therefore unpunished cases of incest and domestic abuse. This is hinted at in Yvonne Knibiehler, *La Sexualité et l'histoire* (Paris: Odile-Jacob, 2000), 246.

organization of schools which trained future educators). These lessons were crafted with the collaboration of specialists involved with the *Écoles des Parents*, which included Doctors André Berge, Juliette Boutonier, and André Le Gall and were approved by the General Director of technical teaching and the School Board of the Seine.⁵⁴ Additionally, in the mid-1950s the *Lycée Fénelon*, a girls' school in Paris, began offering two optional conferences in sexual education each year to students in their last year of secondary education and those in college-preparatory classes. These classes were organized by the Parents' Association and approved by both the school's administration and the Rectory. The class was offered to over eight hundred young women on the condition that they could provide written authorization from their parents. A high school professor accredited in the natural sciences conducted the first conference, which provided the basic facts on the physiology of reproduction and the female genital organs. The second conference, taught by a doctor and mother of eight children, focused on the medical problems that could arise in sexual life. This segment also contained moral and familial elements. So that families retained some measure of control, parents were encouraged to attend the conferences if they so desired.⁵⁵

In the postwar period, some of the psychiatrists, doctors, and educators who promoted sexual education felt that knowledge was the key to empowering women to protect themselves. Yet these forces fought against the traditional theory that sexual education for women was the gateway to iniquity. This established view held that teaching women about their bodies and the "sexual peril" that awaited them at work and in the streets would introduce impure thoughts into a young woman's mind and lead her

⁵⁴ Chambre, 110.

⁵⁵ Chambre, 109.

to temptation.⁵⁶ From the early 1920s through the 1960s, Doctor Germaine Montreuil-Straus and her colleagues battled against the misconception that providing sexual information to young women would have a demoralizing influence or would stimulate impure thoughts. She strove to recast the relationship between knowledge and sexual innocence by undermining the idea that ignorance was synonymous with sexual purity. Montreuil-Straus said, "...Ignorance, especially in sexual matters, can lead to all kinds of errors, sorrow and moral decay."⁵⁷ In fact, the motto of the *Comité d'éducation féminine* (CEF) or Committee for Female Education, of which Montreuil-Straus was President, was "Ignorance is not synonymous with purity."⁵⁸ Exemplifying the desire to empower and protect young women by granting them access to knowledge, the cover of each CEF pamphlet pictured a female Saint George slaying (and therefore rescuing) the blindfolded maiden of ignorance. Montreuil-Straus believed that knowledge was a tool of power that, in women's hands, could be used to assure their safety and well-being.⁵⁹ Montreuil-Straus argued that all science could stimulate in young people the temptation to abuse it, but that this was no excuse to advocate ignorance. The doctor asserted that in her experience, it was a great relief for young people to hear facts about sex and reproduction,

⁵⁶ Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927*, Women in Culture and Society Series, edited by Catharine R. Stimpson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 1994, 198-202.

⁵⁷ Montreuil-Straus, *Avant la maternité*, xix-xx.

⁵⁸ Roberts, fn 81 and 82 to chapter 7, "We Must Facilitate the Transition to the New World," p. 321-322. As Roberts indicates, the idea that innocence and ignorance were not synonymous had been used before in the debate over sexual education from the early 1900s on. This information can also be found in Christine Bard, *Les filles de Marianne: Histoires des féminismes, 1914-1940* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1995), 225-226.

⁵⁹ Roberts, 199.

previously relegated to the realm shadows if spoken of in simple, objective, and decent terms.⁶⁰

Montreuil-Straus also worked within the conservative *Société Française de Prophylaxie Sanitaire et Morale* (S.F.P.S.M.), or French Society for Sanitary and Moral Prophylactics to undermine the French system of patriarchal medical ethics.⁶¹ Montreuil-Straus was adamant that the sexual ignorance that French society imposed on young, bourgeois women left them in danger of being infected by adulterous husbands without their knowledge. Worse still, many women did not receive adequate treatment for venereal disease because the French medical establishment subscribed to a system that protected male marital infidelity. Male medical practitioners were dedicated to guarding the confidentiality of husbands, even if it jeopardized the health of their wives. Even the S.F.P.S.M.'s founder, Dr. Jean Alfred Fournier, supported this adherence to male privacy, although he promoted other forms of venereal education. Working from within the S.F.P.S.M., Montreuil-Straus argued fervently that young women should insist on venereal testing for their fiancés before marriage to protect both their health and the health of their future children.⁶² Some scholars have faulted Montreuil-Straus for working within the existing power structures to evoke change, but admit that by utilizing these established structures (like the S.F.P.S.M.) the doctor was able to push a fairly radical program that promoted new ideas about women's rights, health, and lives.

⁶⁰ Germaine Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation et sexualité* (Paris : Éditions Jeheber, 1956), 50. In an article written in September 1968, summarizing the works of the CEF in its twenty-five years of service, Montreuil-Straus indicated that from 1925-1960 the Committee had organized 1500 public lectures (movie theatres and university amphitheatres) and private (schools, diverse organizations, and nearly all of the Écoles Normales d'Institutrices) and published and distributed "abundant" documentation in the form of brochures, tracts, journal articles, letters, surveys, and more. Germaine Montreuil-Straus, "La Jeunesse féminine devant la vie sexuelle," *Les Femmes médecins* (September 1968): 181. BMD, Dos Mon.

⁶¹ Roberts, 205-206.

⁶² Roberts, 205.

Montreuil-Straus was able to work within the conservative infrastructure to create positive changes, undermining the patriarchal definitions of female sexuality. It is possible that Montreuil-Straus believed that her message would be less offensive to her traditionalist audience and that she could better validate her legitimacy and medical authority cloaked in the guise of established medical traditions, as a member of the S.F.P.S.M.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MORAL AND SEXUAL EDUCATION

Civic education in France was born in the aftermath of the Revolution, when an education was meant for the children of citizens to teach them proper civic responsibility.⁶³ The intent of this education was to mould free, autonomous, and rational citizens who used reason to participate in politics and thereby contribute to the common good. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Third Republic saw the advance of these ideas with the institution of a free, compulsory, and secular primary education that would be offered to members of the lower and rural classes. Children of the bourgeoisie were expected to receive “moral and civic instruction” in their own homes.⁶⁴ After World War II with the discrediting of the Vichy government, education continued to focus on “civic instruction,” but eschewed the lessons in “morality” and “patriotism” that had been promoted by Vichy during the war years.⁶⁵

In the 1955 edition of *Guide des Parents* (Parents’ Guide), a manual meant to help parents effectively raise their children, Doctor C. Launay, of the Hospitals of Paris,

⁶³ Since the Revolution however, civic education has experienced frequent changes in name and content, and it was debated whether it should be offered to adolescents at all.

⁶⁴ L’équipe de formation collège, « Histoire, géographie, éducation civique : une « discipline » ancienne, mais mouvante,” Jeudi 29 septembre 2005, < http://www.ac-amiens.fr/pedagogie/histoire_geo_ic/article.php3?id_article=406> (February 20, 2006).

⁶⁵ L’équipe de formation collège, < http://www.ac-amiens.fr/pedagogie/histoire_geo_ic/article.php3?id_article=406>.

wrote a section on moral education, which raised many of the same questions that could be raised for sexual education. The two primary questions that stood out in this work were: who would be responsible for this type of education and how would it be carried out? Although he stipulated that the “theoretically abstract training” that was provided in school under the rubric “morality lessons” had little impact on the child, Launay explained that the most important moral lesson the educator could provide was exemplified in his or her own behavior towards the students.⁶⁶ In sum, an instructor who was “just” in the daily interactions that the students and teacher shared would be loved and respected and would provide an important life’s model for his or her students. Much like sexual education, Launay emphasized the importance of the collaboration between the school and home in the field of moral education, particularly with “certain” students (unstable, turbulent, or timid). No matter how important an influence played by the instructor, it could be washed away in a second by the critique of a parent. On the other hand, it was of the utmost importance that the instructor pay heed to the complaints and comments of parents when making his or her decisions regarding the moral education of the children in his or her charge.⁶⁷

In the same *Guide des Parents*, Pediatric psychiatrist, author, and staunch advocate of sexual education, André Berge, pinpointed the intricacies involved in differentiating between sexual and moral education. He surmised that there was something “arbitrary in pretending to separate sexual education from education in general and more particularly from moral and emotional education.” He felt that because sexuality was “so intimately blended with affectivity as a whole,” it would be very

⁶⁶ Launay, 497.

⁶⁷ Launay, 498.

difficult to decipher a solid boundary between these two aspects of the personality even when they seem “entirely distinct” at first glance.⁶⁸

This difficulty became even more slippery when one acknowledged that almost all postwar formulas for sexual education included a moral and social component, including those advocated by Montreuil-Straus, Berge, and Paul Chauchard, director of the *École des Hautes Études* (School of Advanced Studies) and professor at the School of Practicing Psychologists.

Dr. Montreuil-Straus helped to solidify the 1954 definition of sex education that was used by the *Commission de l'Éducation de la Fédération Française des travailleurs sociaux* (F.F.T.S.) or Education Commission of the French Federation of Social Workers, of which she was a presiding member.⁶⁹ The F.F.T.S. definition explained:

Sexual education consists conjointly of a biological education and a social and moral instruction....

The goal of scientific instruction is to convey to the child facts about the transmission of life including biological understandings designed to satisfy his natural and legitimate curiosity, while helping him to understand the functioning of his organs and the respect that one must give to them.....

Moral and social education rests on a formation of character, permitting the child to submit his instincts and impulses to his conscious judgment and to the power of his will and on the acquisition of an ideal, in the service of which he can place his instinctive forces, his sensibility and his intelligence.⁷⁰

Montreuil-Straus questioned the term “*la vie sexuelle*” (sexual life), because like Berge, she rejected the idea that sexuality was a facet of the personality that could be set apart.

⁶⁸ Andre Berge, “L'Éducation sexuelle de l'adolescent et la preparation au mariage,” in *Le Guide des Parents, Les Problèmes médicaux et pédagogiques de l'éducation*, edited by L'École des parents et des éducateurs (Paris : Librairie Larousse, 1955), 583.

⁶⁹ The F.F.T.S. was a blanket association organizing various French groups including: social worker syndicates, teachers' unions, psychiatrists' associations, and government organizations.

⁷⁰ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 46. This information can also be found in “Attitude de la jeunesse actuelle devant la moral sexuelle,” *Travail Social*, no. 4 (1956): 21.

She did not think that sexuality could be detached from the spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual evolution of the individual, quite like, from the social point of view, sexuality was indissolubly linked to the very organization of societies, their traditions, and their mores.⁷¹

In light of this conviction, Montreuil-Straus suggested various methods by which the sexual education curriculum could be set into a larger curriculum as a whole. Paying particular attention to the needs of various socioeconomic groups, Montreuil-Straus stressed that most young French people would leave school by the age of fourteen to find work in factories, workshops, studios, or on farms. She insisted therefore that young people needed to receive a basic sexual education involving biology and hygiene in the primary grades. If young people received this basic education before puberty, then it would be natural for the basic facts about generation and reproduction to be integrated back into courses in natural sciences in the secondary grades.⁷² Montreuil-Straus understood that secondary education served not only to prepare young people for the Bachelor's degree, but assisted young people in preparing for a career and vocation. Since she believed that regardless of chosen vocation, nearly all French youths would one day be either a husband or wife and would raise a family, Montreuil-Straus thought that it was simply logical that young people would be trained for this "vocation" of family life along with their Bachelor's degree, in their secondary schooling.⁷³

Pierre Chambre also emphasized sexual education's integral position in the new educational methods being improvised in French classrooms. Respecting the

⁷¹ Germaine Montreuil-Straus, *La Jeunesse devant la vie sexuelle* (Paris: Les Éditions du Scarabée, 1959), 8.

⁷² Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 67.

⁷³ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 67-68.

development and pace of each child, the “new” educational system was designed to inspire the blossoming of the young person through a “joyous” and “confident” collaboration between the student and the teacher. This novel pedagogical program used guided activity and positive arguments, rather than negative interdictions, to achieve student growth. The experiments in co-education were another important part of this new education. Chambre exposed the impropriety of separating any facet of this education, including sexual instruction, from these larger educational changes as a whole, since each portion played such an important role in forming healthy, happy, and stable youths.⁷⁴ Berge as well did not believe that sexual education should be focused solely on sex and the genitals but instead should address the development of the individual as a whole. Berge felt that teachers who emphasized sex education as “a thing apart” were most likely themselves “ill-educated in this respect and incapable of dealing successfully with their own difficulties.”⁷⁵ In the same way that questions about human sexuality were part of this larger inquisitorial spirit in a developing child, sex education should be nestled “naturally and discreetly into the school curriculum as a whole.”⁷⁶

Organizations like the *Jeunesse agricole catholique féminine* (J.A.C.F.), or Women’s Catholic Agricultural Youth, also advocated providing a sexual education for women that was integrated into each individual’s larger development. In an article written for *L’École des Parents et des Éducateurs* (The Parents’ and Teachers’ School), André Berge published the testimonies of six young men and women, one of whom was twenty-year-old Mademoiselle Isabelle Fristot, representative of the J.A.C.F. Fristot explained that in the rural setting, parents often failed to provide their children with

⁷⁴ Chambre, 140, 144.

⁷⁵ Berge, *Sexual Education*, 12.

⁷⁶ André Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 9-10.

sexual information and that some believed that sex before marriage was acceptable. She felt that the “adolescents” branch of the J.A.C.F. could help make up for these lacunae of parents, particularly since oftentimes girls would rather communicate with an older peer about sexual issues than with their mothers.⁷⁷ The J.A.C.F. hoped to provide a sexual education for young, rural women that was not set apart, but was simply one facet of a young woman’s complete education. This education was meant to, “aid a child, an adolescent, to develop his will, to know how to dominate his own caprices, [and] to take account of others in his actions.”⁷⁸ Ultimately, the primary goal of the J.A.C.F.’s training for young women was to provide them with a “sentimental education” that would prepare them for marriage and motherhood.

MORAL, CIVICS, AND SEX

It is also difficult to narrow the differences between sexual and moral education because both types of education were intended to teach a child how to live as a member of his or her sex. *Morale* lessons designed for girls showed little change from the nineteenth century through World War II and many of the images of women as homemakers, wives, and mothers in textbooks and morale texts continued into the 1970s. In the first half of the twentieth century, pedagogical manuals providing “expert” advice for future teachers indicated that children needed to be taught the value of creating a family and enacting the proper familial roles. They stressed that women were meant to be mothers in the home and that they should exhibit traits of sensitivity and compassion, which would help them to soothe unruly children, and comfort a spouse at the end of a

⁷⁷ Testimony of Isabelle Fristot in André Berge, “Conceptions actuelles de la sexualité et du mariage,” *L’École des Parents* 5 (Mars 1958), 7-8.

⁷⁸ Testimony of Isabelle Fristot in André Berge, “Conceptions,” 7.

long day. Men, on the other hand, needed to be powerful and capable.⁷⁹ These messages regarding woman's place in society were engraved on the French psyche from an early age and continued into the mid-twentieth century.

In a piece on women's civic education written for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) in 1954, *Inspectrice Générale* of national education, Hélène Sourgen founded her conclusions on the assumption that women and men had minds that functioned differently and therefore supported different social roles. Women's minds were better suited to the "concrete" and seldom performed functions on the "metaphysical" plane. According to Sourgen, women did not specialize in personal creativity, but were able to invest "conscientious and methodical" attention to subscribed tasks. Additionally, Sourgen insisted that, "woman's attentiveness to detail and warm, intuitive approach to learning and living made her the ideal 'guardian of life' in the foyer."⁸⁰ Sourgen understood that many married and single women worked outside the home, but she argued that women's civic education should be directed towards life in the foyer and children, rather than political participation, since that is what they most valued.⁸¹

This conventional belief that a woman's place was in the home could also be seen in a 1960 educational encyclopedia published by the *Institut pédagogique national* (National pedagogical institute). A passage on "homemaker training" suggested, "Parents and girls know with certainty today that, whatever girls undertake to earn their living, whatever they can try in the domain of science, arts, commerce, whatever be their

⁷⁹ Clark, 86. Clark cites Ab der Halden and Marguerite Lavaut, *Pour enseigner la morale* (Paris: F. Nathan, 1930), 206-207.

⁸⁰ Clark, 141.

⁸¹ Clark, 141. Clark draws this information from Hélène Sourgen, *L'Éducation civique des femmes, quelques suggestions pratiques* (Paris: UNESCO, 1954), 17-18, 46, 55, 103.

profession, employment, métier (career), it is undeniable that marriage and maternity are their essential vocation.” The author, Henriette Sourgen, criticized feminists for stirring up the desire in women for unattainable situations and misguiding girls as to how one could find true happiness.⁸²

During the Fourth and Fifth Republics, most educators of both sexes promoted the idea that a woman’s primary duty in French society was to serve as the ‘angel of the foyer,’ nurturing her husband and children physically as well as spiritually, and thus helping to create a stronger nation, one household at a time. Despite the fact that most women after World War II worked outside the home for at least a fraction of the day, both teachers and the larger society maintained that a woman’s place was in the home. Girls were taught that even if they were forced to work for a short period, they would cease working when they married and began a family.

Young men’s and women’s education was differentiated in the twentieth-century in that women were given an education in child care (*puériculture*) and homemaker training (*enseignement ménagère*) as part of their officially-endorsed curriculum. In 1923 two compulsory lessons a month on infant and child care were added to science curriculum of all girls from eleven to thirteen years of age.⁸³ Women were not taught how to care for infants to increase their knowledge of, and power over, their lives and bodies, but instead to decrease infant mortality, which was still at an appalling rate throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Many believed that decreasing infant

⁸² The quote is cited from Henriette Sourgen, “L’Enseignement ménagère,” in *Encyclopédie pratique de l’éducation en France* (Paris: Institut pédagogique national, 1960), 802; Clark, 142.

⁸³ Roberts, 207 and Clark, 83. Fears of depopulation were heightened after the losses of WWI, but fears of depopulation predated this period, particularly in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Apprehension about wartime losses and the continuing low birth rate in France also inspired the government in 1920 to ban all publications and brochures supporting women’s rights to contraception and abortion. Clark, 83 and 187 fn.

mortality would increase population and thereby strengthen the French nation.⁸⁴

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century and after World War II, Montreuil-Straus advocated making sexual education part of girls' lessons in *puériculture*. She lobbied for the inclusion of informal lectures about the maternal function, its hygiene, and about risks like abortion and venereal diseases that come with motherhood.⁸⁵ This would add the novel idea to French education that women would not be taught just how to care for infants but also where babies came from, or the science behind reproduction.

“EXPERTS” ENTER THE DEBATE

The debate on sexual education attracted many participants: parents, educators, doctors, psychoanalysts, pediatricians, politicians, religious groups, and the students themselves, all of whom held firmly entrenched ideas on this intense topic. The primary arguments regarding sexual education revolved around who should provide a sexual education for children, when it should be provided, and what the content of this specialized education would be.

A fundamental argument in the sexual education debate involved whether parents or schools should provide a sexual education for children or whether sexual information was conveyed more efficiently through a collaborative effort of the two. Many experts insisted that sexual education was a topic that was ideally best conducted by a child's family. Germaine Montreuil-Straus saw the home as a natural environment to convey information about heredity and contagions because:

The household is more than a refuge, it is an environment that is especially favorable to intellectual and affective development; it creates. . . family ties and sentiments, like love and filial respect that have no equivalent in other species.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Clark, 133-150 and Roberts, 207.

⁸⁵ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 67.

⁸⁶ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 52.

Germaine Montreuil-Straus reasoned that sexual education should be part of a more generalized familial education whose essential element was persuasion by example. She encouraged parents to use the home setting to educate children because regardless of adolescent insubordination, the home, for children, reassures them with its permanence, solidity, and security.⁸⁷

In terms of which parent should teach which subjects in the family setting, Berge contended that pregnancy, childbirth, and sexual relations were subjects that should be discussed with both girls and boys. Pregnancy and childbirth could be discussed by either parent because they were not subjects that needed special caution, but were more adequately covered, calmly and uncomplainingly, by the mother, as she was the more experienced. Sexual relations, however, should be discussed strictly by the parent of the same sex, because “affective maturity comes about more easily through identification with the older person giving the information.”⁸⁸

Yet, ideals did not always mesh with reality when it came to the topic of sexual education in the postwar. Therefore many doctors and teachers promoted a collaborative effort between the schools and families since most French parents were not properly trained and did not have the proper scientific knowledge to provide their children with a sound sexual education. For instance, Montreuil-Straus emphasized that feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and the appreciation of moral values were best handled in the family setting; however, the conveyance of biological information necessitated family-school collaboration.⁸⁹ According to the doctor, questions of morality should not have been left

⁸⁷ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 59.

⁸⁸ Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children*, 53.

⁸⁹ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 53.

solely on the shoulders of parents but could also be introduced to children by religious educators.⁹⁰ André Berge as well, argued that collaboration between schools and parents was essential. The psychiatrist maintained that parents should be responsible for the affective and moral portion of sexual education at home. Later, the schools would provide sexual information of a more scientific and precise variety, introducing students to theories on human reproduction based in physiology and anatomy. Berge stated, “When the family has duly done its work on the individual level....[the child] has already learnt at home the essentials of what he can learn about sex. It now remains for him to bring some order into his knowledge and find a way of integrating it into his social life.”⁹¹ Berge envisioned that the parents and schools could coordinate their activities by attending weekly meetings at which each side could share their questions and concerns.⁹² Montreuil-Straus hoped that the parents of tomorrow that were being educated in schools in the 1950s, would master the scientific information needed to bypass the need for school intervention in the future.⁹³

Modern author, Philippe Brenot, suggested that the debate over who should convey sexual information to children represented a question of legitimacy, or in other words who possessed the most valid claim for the responsibility of teaching children about sex.⁹⁴ However, this subject revolved more precisely around the question of privacy. French society revered the inviolability of private life and many believed that a topic of this sensitivity should be shared in the privacy of the home. In this way, the

⁹⁰ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 53-54.

⁹¹ Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children*, 75-76.

⁹² Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children*, 76.

⁹³ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 51.

⁹⁴ Philippe Brenot, *L'Éducation sexuelle*, Que sais-je? (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1996, 22-27.

sexual information provided could adhere to a family's morals and systems of belief. Since, however, this information was not being provided by children's parents at home (as surveys and questionnaires indicated), French society viewed sexual education in schools as a necessary evil.⁹⁵

Another foundational debate on the topic of sexual education involved the question of timing. A colleague of André Berge's once claimed that sexual education was over at the age of three. Berge found it paradoxical that a child's sexual education could be over at a time when most individuals would consider a child completely "asexual". Berge elucidated, "One cannot help but be struck by the importance of the first impressions and first lived experiences, because they continue to exert a determining influence on the subsequent unfolding of sexual and affective existence of the individual."⁹⁶ This idea that an infant's sexual formation was quintessential for his or her later development showed the still important influence of Freud in the fields of both education and child psychology in the middle of the twentieth century. As Berge pointed out, Freud's ideas could be contrasted with those of French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who was considered revolutionary for advocating the sexual education of children in his work, *Émile*. Rousseau also thought that early the sexual formation of children was essential. He insisted that before a child could speak, he or she could understand and was learning. Although Rousseau did believe that a child's formative years were critical, Berge emphasized that Rousseau never believed that children had a

⁹⁵ This respect for the private life of individuals continues today and makes acquiring government permission to analyze documents on "sensitive" subjects which contain family names nearly impossible to obtain.

⁹⁶ André Berge, *L'Éducation sexuelle chez l'enfant*. Paideia : Bibliothèque pratique de psychologie et de la psychopathologie de l'enfant, series editor Georges Heuyer (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1952), 115.

sexual existence. He believed that they were “born twice, once to the species and once to sex,” which was a far cry from Freud’s theory of infantile sexuality.⁹⁷

Regardless of their core political or ethical beliefs, most participants in the debates over sexual education agreed that children needed to be given this education before the onset of puberty to prepare them for their biological and sexual futures. Berge felt that a sexual education should teach children proper gender roles, as well as prepare adolescents for the hormonal changes that would be occurring in their bodies. Berge felt that girls should be told about their monthly periods before their first menses and that young men should be told in advance about nightly seminal emissions. Berge cautioned parents about neglecting sexual education with stories of young women who were not told about their monthly periods and tried to hide their “mysterious hemorrhages,” thinking that they were dying. Berge asserted too, that if one discussed masturbation with young men before puberty, one might be able to prevent masturbation from becoming a serious habit.⁹⁸

Montreuil-Straus agreed, suggesting that by age twelve or thirteen a student should be familiar with all of the organs of the human body, including those of generation. They should also be introduced to human physiology including: sperm production, ovulation, menstruation, nightly emissions, and female and male gametes.⁹⁹ Montreuil-Straus believed that children had the right to a sexual education to help them with their emotional development and to protect them from the worry, apprehension, or guilt that could arise when young people reached adolescence and were unaware of the effects of puberty on the body. Much like Berge and Chauchard, she argued that young women

⁹⁷ André Berge, *L'Éducation sexuelle chez l'enfant*, 1952, 3.

⁹⁸ Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children*, 57-58.

⁹⁹ Germaine Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation et sexualité* (Paris : Éditions Jeheber, 1956), 51.

needed to be taught the facts about menstruation well-before the experience to avoid shock and terror. Mothers should calmly convey the information to their daughters, indicating that the monthly period was symbolic of the woman's ability to have a child, and as such, should be celebrated. Montreuil-Straus directed mothers to convey the joys of motherhood with "tenderness, confidence, and pride."¹⁰⁰

On the other hand, Montreuil-Straus suggested that young men needed to be informed about seminal emissions and the tendency for boys to masturbate, so that young men would not be disquieted, anxious, or guilty when these situations arose. Fathers needed to explain in simple terms that these activities were natural and simply showed the maturation of the genitals.¹⁰¹ Montreuil-Straus stressed that the discussion of masturbation with young men was delicate, because it was a habit that adolescents tended to hide from adults. Montreuil-Straus advised fathers to emphasize that masturbation was simply a "temporary failing that proves that the young man is still in an infantile stage of sexuality..., which he will certainly be able to rid himself of, when he desires to become a healthy and strong man."¹⁰² Montreuil-Straus was incredibly forward-thinking in arguing from just after World War I until the 1970s that young people had a right to sexual information and that this education was imperative for their development.

Paul Chauchard, on the other hand, advocated a pre-pubescent sexual education that would give young people the strength to fight against their hormonal urges and maintain a state of continence or virginity. For Chauchard, life was a battle against one's urges and the spiritual state of perfection of each human being was to raise oneself above the animalistic sexuality of the lower species. According to Chauchard, "...Continence is

¹⁰⁰ Germaine Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation et sexualité* (Paris : Éditions Jeheber, 1956), 60.

¹⁰¹ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 60-61.

¹⁰² Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 61.

not a technique; it is a knowledge of oneself and one's well-being, a knowledge of the other and their well-being."¹⁰³ Chauchard felt that the individual needed to recognize his or her own standing in the world and behave accordingly. Single individuals needed to safeguard their virginity or practice continence. Married individuals needed to practice a controlled, contained, and modest sexuality. According to Chauchard, sexual education was very much a "physical" education of the adolescent, a self-mastery designed to help one "deactivate" one's organs by employing conditioned reflexes and practicing proper habits.¹⁰⁴ Failure to develop positive habits could make one a slave to sensual desire and make one long to "taste all of the fruits the earth has to offer." For Chauchard, the sexual education of children should ensure an "equilibrated . . . blossoming [of] sexual consciousness that will be pre-adapted to take charge of the genital functions as soon as they make their debut."¹⁰⁵

The third essential debate over sexual education revolved around the issue of content. Berge clarified that there were three types of sexual information children should receive: non-verbal information, intimate verbal information, and scientific information. Non-verbal information was drawn from the scenes of everyday life and included instances such as a child seeing lovers in the street, or knowing that his parents slept in the same bed. Because of the importance of non-verbal communication, it was necessary that the parents shared a healthy emotional and sexual relationship, because a child would learn from everything he or she saw or heard whether or not verbal information was being exchanged.

¹⁰³ Paul Chauchard, *Le Progrès Sexuel, Education du cerveau et sexualité adulte* (Paris : Éditions du Levain, 1961).

¹⁰⁴ Chauchard, *Le Progrès Sexuel*, 47.

¹⁰⁵ Chauchard, *Le Progrès Sexuel*, 25.

Intimate verbal information, on the other hand, was information addressed personally to the child by the parents, who took into account the child's interests and affective needs.¹⁰⁶ When a child began asking questions, the parents needed to commit to answering all questions honestly, even though the questions might put them in an embarrassed or awkward position. Verbal information in response to a child's questions could create a sense of calm and relief, whereas questions denied could lead a child to obsess over sexual issues. Berge explained:

I have seen cases of ... improvement in both character and school work...once these questions had been ...dealt with. ...When curiosity over certain matters is felt to be forbidden, a sort of contagion or generalized condition sets in, which leads to a blockage of all intellectual curiosity.¹⁰⁷

According to Berge, parents should not try to justify the sexual instinct by connecting it solely with the reproductive function of human beings. He believed that that “animalized” sexuality, rather than humanizing it. Instead, the parents should emphasize the significance, value, and universality of the sexual instinct, and most importantly they should stress the element of love that is particular to human beings and can be found no where else in the universe.¹⁰⁸ Berge embraced Catholic imagery in his vision of sexuality, believing that at the moment that each member of a couple had given to the union “the whole of his or herself—physically, affectively, intellectually and morally,” they would both want to celebrate their union and “crown their achievement by passing on life to a new being...the enduring image of their love.”¹⁰⁹ Although Berge's

¹⁰⁶ Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children*, 37-41.

¹⁰⁷ Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children*, 47.

¹⁰⁸ Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children*, 73-74.

¹⁰⁹ Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children*, 74. This idea was drawn straight from Pope Pius XI's 1930 encyclical *Casti connubii*, which stated that the act of marriage was, by its very nature, meant for the generation of children and that those who transgressed nature would be tainted with sin. See chapter II.

vision was simplistic in that he only allowed for only two types of sexual instinct: the love that was shared by a man and a woman which culminated in reproduction and the neuroses of sexually perverted adults who preyed upon children, it would be difficult to place judgment on a man who obviously cared so deeply for the welfare of children and who put so much effort into empowering young people through sexual education.

Berge asserted that after intimate verbal information was initiated at home, a program of scientific information could be initiated at school. According to Berge, the school's primary goal was the systematization, intellectualization, and socialization of knowledge. Therefore, the school should provide each child with a "diaffectivized" education that had three primary goals: to provide accurate biological, anatomical, and physiological information; to instruct the student in genital hygiene at the appropriate moment; and to examine the problems of sociological morality that sexuality engendered.¹¹⁰ Berge promoted the lifting of the "official ban" on teachers discussing reproduction and the reproductive organs, complaining that in 1963 in France, "[the science teacher] has to make it appear as though the body broke clean off above and below a certain line, the two pieces being held together by some mysterious means."¹¹¹

Berge criticized those that argued that the co-education of boys and girls ruled out discussions of sexuality at school. Berge countered that visits from the doctor could provide an excuse for the separation of sexes needed to discuss "these delicate and important subjects" in "mixed" or co-ed schools. After segregation, a specially-trained science teacher or doctor could cover the subject of menstruation for girls and seminal emissions for boys. Younger children would receive a more general counsel on physical

¹¹⁰ Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children*, 79-85.

¹¹¹ Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children*, 83.

hygiene with specific reference to the cleanliness of their organs.¹¹² Berge explained, however, that this separation would serve primarily to alleviate the embarrassment of the professor, since students seemed less bothered than adults by co-ed discussions of sexuality. In fact, Berge was adamant that “advanced communal teaching” was possible, if the information could be conveyed in a scientific and objective way, stripped of all its affectivity.¹¹³

Those who promoted sexual education in the 1950s and 1960s utilized a wide range of justifications for the provision of sexual knowledge to children. Some theorists argued vehemently that students had the right to sexual knowledge. Montreuil-Straus insisted that young people had the fundamental right to sexual information because it provided an “indispensable base from which to liberate one from one’s prejudices, biases and inhibitions, which is one of the goals of education.”¹¹⁴ André Berge also maintained that young people had the right to a complete sexual education. He stated:

...The adolescent has the right to precisely understand ...the physiological mechanisms of both sexes. He has the right... to the truth—that is independent of all moral or pseudo-moral considerations, but that itself possesses an undeniable moral value.”¹¹⁵

Many postwar theorists believed that a sexual education should instruct each child in the biological characteristics and social responsibilities of his or her sex.¹¹⁶ Both Berge and Chauchard felt that the ability to function as a boy or a girl was not innate, but a learned experience, and thus sex education must necessarily play this critical role.

¹¹² Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children*, 84.

¹¹³ Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children*, 87.

¹¹⁴ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 67.

¹¹⁵ Berge, “L’Éducation,” in *Le Guide des Parents*, 587.

¹¹⁶ This theme will be examined more fully in my chapters on lesbianism and deviance.

Berge believed that preparing children for their futures include teaching children how to embrace the sex that they were born with. Berge illustrated:

The chief aim of sexual education is to prepare children for love Sexual education is meaningless unless it is pre-eminently...a ‘sexed’ education—i.e., an education . . . which [gives] to each individual the ideals and virtues befitting his or her nature as a man or woman.¹¹⁷

Berge soundly criticized those parents who had hoped for a child of the opposite sex and coped by dressing their child in clothes or giving the child toys that were more appropriate for a child of a different gender. Berge claimed that this was an error, which would have grievous repercussions on the mental health of the child.¹¹⁸ Doctor Paul Le Moal, Technical Director of the Center for Observation in Chevilly-Larue, also recommended that parents accept a child’s sex, even before its birth, and that after birth, immediately begin initiating the child into his or her sex-specific duties. He insisted that the parents played an integral role in forming a child’s sexual orientation through “the intermediary of mechanisms of identification.”¹¹⁹

Professor of plant and animal physiology, Jules Carles, also believed that the most important facet of sexual education should teach a child about his or her sex.¹²⁰ Carles explained that until prepuberty, the troubles of young boys and girls were almost the same; however at puberty, the two sexes differentiated themselves by their psychology, their visions of the future, their mores, as well as by their hormonal equilibrium. With

¹¹⁷ Berge, *Sexual Education*, 12.

¹¹⁸ Berge, *Sexual Education*, 114-115.

¹¹⁹ Le Moal, 161.

¹²⁰ Carles was also an honorary director of research at the *Centre National des Recherches Scientifiques* (C.N.R.S.), or the National Center for Scientific Research. Carles’ 1953 work, *La Sexualité*, treated gender in black and white; sex, physiology, and psychology were all dependent upon hormones. (p. 6) A small section at the end of the work, however, used the topic of sexual education, the “very controversial question of the day,” to spread his distrust of radical feminists (like Pelletier and later feminists who embraced her ideals) and his personal political agenda regarding gender.

proper guidance young men and women would contour their psychologies, form their personal attitudes, and prepare for their futures according to these fixed gender differences.¹²¹ Carles claimed that this quintessential differentiation between the sexes made a common and identical education impossible. Because the female matured biologically at a faster pace than a male, co-education would cause young men to develop inferiority complexes that they would express through physical aggression. Females, on the other hand would develop attitudes of resignation, seeking out games and activities in which they played martyrs.¹²² Carles then chastised the “arcane and hardly clairvoyant partisans of feminism” who demanded equivalent and identical educations for women so that they would cease being “the second sex.” Carles asked, “Is it necessary to feminize boys and make women more virile so that their cohabitation will be possible?”¹²³ Carles was adamant that biology drew absolute and indisputable conclusions and found too many distinctions between the sexes to make assimilation possible. He then highlighted the paradox that Joan Scott presented in her work, *Only Paradoxes to Offer*, when he insisted that, “By wanting to prove that women were not inferior to men, one finishes by giving the very fixed impression that this needs to be demonstrated.... We must fight in education against anything that could introduce this need for comparison and competition.”¹²⁴ Harkening back to the nineteenth century, Carles finished with the picturesque, yet archaic comment:

...The ideal in education is to follow the line set by modern biology: to make men as masculine, manly as possible and to make women as feminine as possible,

¹²¹ Carles, 197.

¹²² Carles, 197-198.

¹²³ Carles, 198.

¹²⁴ Carles, 199.

so that these complementary beings can spontaneously gush forth this harmony that allows diversity to continue forever.¹²⁵

Theorists in many camps advocated providing a sexual education to young people that would prepare them for adulthood. André Berge argued that a sexual education should “prepare one for one’s destiny” and could not be separated from the shaping of the consciousness in its entirety. Although he did mention the importance of controlling one’s sexual instinct to differentiate human sexuality from that of animals, Berge insisted that the ultimate purpose of sexual education was to provide children with the correct and proper information so that they could develop into emotionally and physically centered human beings.

The *Jeunesse agricole Catholique féminine* (Women’s Catholic Agricultural Youth), or J.A.C.F., put these ideas into action by enacting a sentimental education for young women that would help them forge their own personalities and professional competences and would stimulate interests beyond the kitchen or garden. Isabelle Fristot of the J.A.C.F. criticized the toxic effects of romance novels and women’s magazines, which “destroyed” young women, by “cultivating escapism” and misleading them as to what their future lives would entail. From this escapism rose “insurmountable deceptions” and an “instability in the sentiments,” that tempted women to identify with the heroines and live in dreams, rather than becoming someone themselves.¹²⁶ The education promoted by the J.A.C.F. was meant to show young women that they had rights in love, as well as responsibilities, and to help them prepare for their futures on a daily basis, rather than waiting till their day of marriage for their lives to begin. However,

¹²⁵ Carles, 200.

¹²⁶ Testimony of Isabelle Fristot in André Berge, “Conceptions,” 7-8.

the J.A.C.F. also insisted on the value of homemaking and helping women to become capable managers of their own households. The goals of the J.A.C.F. were ambivalent in that they were educating young women to have their own opinions and professional aspirations, but primarily so that their homes could be happier ones.¹²⁷ Women's independence and a better understanding between the sexes were the "conditions necessary for the blossoming of the home," and for the sound education of children.¹²⁸ In the J.A.C.F. women were taught to be themselves, but primarily so that they could be better wives and mothers and create happy havens for their families.

To prepare young women for their futures, the J.A.C.F. also organized leisure activities that would allow girls exposure to the "masculine psychology" through male testimonies, journals, societies, and co-educational pastimes. According to Isabelle Fristot of the J.A.C.F., these meetings of young people would "transform" the relations between men and women and would reduce the occurrence clandestine liaisons that served no other purpose than to flirt or worse. Instead, young people would assemble for constructive purposes, planning together youth parties, theatre nights, and field trips, or having structured discussions on social or cultural questions like musical initiations or cinema-clubs.¹²⁹ These meetings would not result in establishing a code of conduct but would instead help young people to learn to live together and decide on the proper conduct for themselves. This was an education of one's freedom and responsibility for one's actions (that would mesh with one's religious and moral principles.) By embracing

¹²⁷ Increasing the ambiguity, Mlle Fristot includes a Freudian slip in her testimony, stating that the J.A.C.F. wished to create "girls who will be *less* independent, less slaves to the comportment of men. ([who will] not believe that one needs to speak or think like them to please them, or to yield to them). Testimony of Isabelle Fristot in André Berge, "Conceptions," 8.

¹²⁸ Testimony of Isabelle Fristot in André Berge, "Conceptions," 8.

¹²⁹ Testimony of Isabelle Fristot in André Berge, "Conceptions," 8.

mutual responsibilities while carrying out constructive activities, young people would begin to understand each others' psychologies, which could help them to make positive choices for spouses and could lead to an enrichment of their home lives. Women would learn how to be "less egotistical" by opening their minds to things outside the realm of home and family. In this way, women could learn to support their husbands fully in all of their activities at work and outside the home and not try to selfishly keep their husbands all to themselves. Young men, on the other hand, would explore the "feminine temperament" and begin to take women into account when making important decisions in their daily lives. The J.A.C.F. sought to inspire blissful foyers by promoting a greater understanding between the sexes, just as Montreuil-Straus believed that the mutual appreciation created by these types of activities would undermine the sexual double standard and thereby create healthy families and a strong nation.¹³⁰

In addition to the J.A.C.F., several theorists such as Chauchard, Berge, and Montreuil-Straus also argued that providing a sexual education to young people would help them be more prepared for marriage. Chauchard insisted that the continent shaping of the self and the mastery of one's reflexes should also be supported by an understanding of the psychology of the opposite sex and an appreciation of how to create "conjugal harmony and familial equilibrium."¹³¹ Chauchard fought vehemently against all methods of contraception that he considered "unnatural", although he believed that fecundity in marriage needed to be regulated. Chauchard stressed that men needed to learn "a mastery over their genitals," whereas a young woman needed to have a sound

¹³⁰ Testimony of Isabelle Fristot in André Berge, "Conceptions," 8.

¹³¹ Chauchard, *Le Progrès Sexuel*, 48.

knowledge of her ovarian cycle, control of her thermal curve, and a consciousness of the moment of ovulation. Chauchard encouraged young women to learn the aforementioned skills before marriage, in order to “spiritualize one’s love.”¹³² In his 1955 chapter for the *Guide des Parents*, André Berge also insisted that a successful marriage and family were not instinctive, but required learned skills.

SHAME, FEAR, AND SEXUAL DANGER

Although many supported the idea of sexual education at home and its integration into the core curriculum of French schools, the vast majority of French society was steeped in traditional social mores, which strongly resisted change. A deep sense of sexual shame had been passed down from generation to generation of French men and women. Additionally, postwar French society was blanketed by a pervasive sense of fear and danger. These trends fostered a shared obsession with the idea of sexual danger and its impact on youths. Feelings of shame and fear, and a sense of danger in postwar France served as societal anchors, impeding many progressive attempts at social change. These communal negative emotions had direct implications on the implementation of a uniform sexual education for France’s children.

Surveys of the French populace conducted in a 1956 edition of *Population* indicated that a third of the population supported some form of sexual education at school. However, another study published in 1960 by Dr. Paul le Moal highlighted that approximately eighty percent of all parents believed that a “genital education” should be conducted at home.¹³³ In 1956, Dr. Germaine Montreuil-Straus discussed this on-going

¹³² Chauchard, *Le Progrès Sexuel*, 48.

¹³³ Philippe Brenot, *L’Éducation sexuelle*, Que sais-je? (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1996), 24. After May 1968, these statistics increased dramatically. In 1974 and again in 1988, surveys

reluctance of parents to accept the sexual education of their children in her work, *Éducation et Sexualité* (Education and Sexuality). She pointed out that in 1901 when Professor Fournier, founder of French Society for Sanitary and Moral Prophylactics, took the initiative to include the sexual education of youths in the goals of the society, parents reacted vehemently. She emphasized:

The first reaction of these parents . . . was the condemnation of this incongruous newness that . . . they were incapable of defining, but that clashed with their apathetic indifference filled with prejudices, lack of caring, and false modesty.¹³⁴

Montreuil-Straus viewed these turn-of-the-century parents harshly most likely because their reluctance was the precursor to the same regressive attitude that hindered the integration of sexual education in French schools in the middle of the twentieth-century. Montreuil-Straus believed deeply that parents' "false modesty" that was present at the turn of the century, as well as after World War II hurt children.

According to Montreuil-Straus, the second reaction of parents to Fournier's 1901 transgression was to demand exclusive rights to educate their own children on issues surrounding sexuality.¹³⁵ However, the vast majority of parents were reluctant to speak to their children regarding sexuality. Montreuil-Straus clarified that most parents had not received their own knowledge of sexual biology from scientific, reputable, or healthy sources, and therefore experienced anxious memories of clandestine sexual initiations that were usually erroneous and crude. When faced with the task of initiating their own

conducted by the *Institut Français d'Opinion Publique* (IFOP), or French Institute for Public Opinion, indicated that approval rates for sexual education were at 74% and then 86%.

¹³⁴ Germaine Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation et sexualité* (Paris : Éditions Jeheber, 1956), 47.

¹³⁵ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 48 and Chambre, 10. Dr. Le Moal's 1960 study showed that of the 494 people interviewed between the ages of 21 and 60 (197 men and 297 women), only 10 percent of men and 17 percent of women received any sort of sexual information from their parents. Le Moal, 10, 162.

children, these parents were hindered by an unconscious fear inspired by their own improper introduction.¹³⁶

Carles, Le Moal, Chauchard, and Chambre all concurred, recognizing that many parents' reluctance to support the sexual education of their children stemmed primarily from their own lack of sexual education. Many parents shied away from providing both moral and sexual information because they felt that they did not possess the proper vocabulary or the self-confidence to discuss sex and reproduction with their children. Montreuil-Straus expressed that at least ninety percent of children (according to her studies in the 1950s) were educated about sexuality by people other than their parents and she argued:

This lacuna can be explained by the incapacity of parents, hampered by their incompetence and their inhibitions. An instruction that includes succinct facts about anatomy, physiology, and hygiene, notions of heredity and certain contagious diseases demands a certain know-how.”¹³⁷

Scientist Jules Carles agreed that most parents felt that they were unable to fulfill this role, either due to lack of knowledge or because they shared “a foreboding of the difficulty and the delicacy of this intervention.”¹³⁸

Doctor Le Moal's investigation in 1960 indicated that the three primary reasons that parents neglected the sexual education of their children were: modesty (forty-six percent of men and sixty-seven percent of women); a lack of intimacy with their children (twenty percent of fathers versus only five percent of mothers); or a lack of concern regarding the topic (eleven percent of men and three percent of women). Some parents were afraid that they would lose their prestige or authority with their children if they

¹³⁶ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 47-48.

¹³⁷ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 48.

¹³⁸ Carles, 196.

shared with them the origins of their birth. Chambre quoted a parent who explained, “What will [my child] think when he grasps the physical link that unites us, when he knows by what act he was brought into the world. Who would dare teach this to a child? He will no longer look at us, he will be ashamed of us.”¹³⁹ The intense shame of this parent regarding the sexual act could have been inspired by the association of sex with original sin, as one might find in the psyche of an individual who had had a strict religious upbringing. Or, as Chambre argued, this shame might have been perpetuated by the three-hundred-year-old Jansenist doctrine still permeating French society, which condemned all sexuality as shameful.¹⁴⁰ Dr. Le Moal indicated that parents’ self-professed “modesty” could be genuine, but that more often it consisted of a sense of guilt and shame that was the result of personal sexual errors in the present or past. He explained that this modesty could also be experienced by average couples practicing “normal” sexual activities, who remained hobbled by an on-going belief in the impurity of the sexual act.¹⁴¹

In 1963, ordained priest Laurence Bright stressed that Catholics, as a whole, were more likely to run into difficulties in their married lives because they could not maintain, “sound sexual relationships” due to a “fundamentally wrong sexual education.”¹⁴² Bright maintained that an unsound teaching about sexuality allowed individuals to grow up with the wrong information, which in turn, lead to wrong practice. He believed that once these

¹³⁹ Chambre, 57.

¹⁴⁰ For more on this Chambre recommended the work, *La pudeur et ses deformations*,

¹⁴¹ Le Moal, 166.

¹⁴² André Berge’s, *L’Éducation sexuelle chez l’enfant*, had three reprints in France between 1948 and 1964, and was translated into English in 1963. Bright wrote the preface to the English edition.

sexually-faltering Catholics were made aware of the Church's true stance on sexuality, they would be cured.¹⁴³ He clarified:

The Church does not want us to think that sex is . . . not quite nice. She teaches that love between two married people must express itself sexually in order to be perfect. The Church . . . does not insist that sex in marriage is to be used only for procreation On the contrary; she requires wise planning of a family stipulating only that the method used should be moral.¹⁴⁴

Bright dismissed the use psychoanalysis—which he found to be “slow, expensive and not necessarily successful”—to clean up individual psychic disasters resulting from a lack of sexual information, and instead advocated “[removing] the error at its source” by properly educating children about sexuality.¹⁴⁵

This tendency to believe that sexuality was tainted with sin manifested itself frequently in young women of the post-World-War-Two era. Some women expressed that they found sex filthy and disgusting, and although they knew that sex was necessary in marriage, it remained a stain on the institution.¹⁴⁶ One young woman expressed that she had come to her marriage completely ignorant about the “realities of life” and because of this she had “cruelly suffered.” She had vowed that she would not let her own daughter proceed in ignorance to her marriage bed, but when her daughter was eleven and she knew that it was time to initiate her into the ‘mysteries of life,’ the woman was too terrified to find the words. Although she tried time and again, she could not overcome her own mental defenses to share this crucial information with her daughter.¹⁴⁷ Doctor Paul Le Moal found, in fact, that forty percent of men and forty-one percent of women in

¹⁴³ Bright, « Preface », André Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children* (1963), vii.

¹⁴⁴ Bright, « Preface », André Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children* (1963), viii.

¹⁴⁵ Bright, « Preface », André Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children* (1963), x.

¹⁴⁶ Chambre, 59. Chambre uses quotes from Doctor Allendy in this passage. Dr. Allendy and Lobstein, *Le problème sexual à l'école* (Paris: Aubier, 1938).

¹⁴⁷ Chambre, 58. Chambre cites dr. André Arthus' *Un monde inconnu, nos enfants*.

his survey believed that their married lives would have “been more complete” if they had received a more effective “genital education.”¹⁴⁸

In French postwar society, both parents and educators felt pressured and fearful regarding their roles as sexual educators. Concerned adults were met with a barrage of contradicting instructions, warnings, and admonishments which intensified their discomfort over the subject of sexual education. Various theorists attempted to ease parents’ and educators’ stress over sexually educating youths. However, Freudian warnings accosted adults from various sources such as the pages of educational journals meant for parents, making them wary of their ability to psychologically damage youths with the improper presentation of sexual information. Fearful of ruining the sexual futures of the children in their charge, terrified adults in France tiptoed around the idea of sexual education and avoided its actual implementation.

Many theorists tried to counteract parental evasion by providing specific instructions to keep parents on the right path to properly educating their children. Berge maintained that it was of the utmost importance for the parents to deliver verbal sexual information in a “normal” manner. The words chosen to convey this information were very important, because as Berge highlighted: “Words are things of power: they can make the same act appear noble and wonderful or disgusting and repellant—and not only appear, but really be so.”¹⁴⁹ He explained, “Anything that is simple, accurate, and concrete is always less disturbing than something confused, embarrassed and charged

¹⁴⁸ Le Moal, 163.

¹⁴⁹ Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children*, 45.

with emotion Fear is catching, whether it is fear of thunderstorms or fear of sex.”¹⁵⁰

Pierre Chambre warned parents to be ready for questions from children, so that they could react without discomfiture. Too often young people sensed deception and parental defenses surrounding the topic and ended up “choking down” their questions, which sometimes led to unhealthy repressions.¹⁵¹

On the other hand, as many if not more warnings, instructions, and admonishments placed heavy pressure on children’s instructors in school. André Berge stressed the importance of a specialized training for both educators and school doctors who would be expected to teach sexual biology and personal hygiene. According to Berge, the instructor needed to present sexual material to the students in manner free of emotional charge. Berge affirmed, “The object is not to hand out theoretical morality, but to help [students] bring their problems into the open without any hypocritical prudery.”¹⁵² Berge admitted that the educator was faced with a difficult paradox: he or she must permit the child’s sexual instinct to blossom and mature while at the same time, preventing this sexual expression from “flout[ing] the requirements of society.”¹⁵³ With the number of imperatives and sometimes-conflicting suggestions given by the mass of interested doctors, scientists, psychiatrists, professors, and other theorists, it is no wonder that educators felt deeply burdened by the enormous weight of their responsibility.

Many parents and educators might have been reluctant to teach children about sexuality due to a Freudian terror of committing errors and permanently scarring the

¹⁵⁰ Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children*, 52.

¹⁵¹ Chambre, 53-54. Chambre is citing the work of Dr. Richard de Neuchâtel in this section.

¹⁵² Berge, *Sexual Education*, 80.

¹⁵³ Berge, *Sexual Education*, 13-14.

psyche of their children or pupils. The dire warnings of individuals like Priest Laurence Bright did little to ease adult worries. Bright cautioned :

One who [has] been brought up in ignorance or fear of his own sexuality, assimilating the ignorances and fears of his parents, teachers or friends is liable to be warped in ways it will be none too easy to cure.¹⁵⁴

Paul Chauchard also highlighted a multitude of means by which parents could ruin a child's sexual development. According to Chauchard, a child could be permanently scarred if the relationship between the parents was not sexually balanced (which, according to Chauchard, was often the case given the social situation between the sexes in the 1950s). The same danger threatened if parents were too libertarian or puritanical, either over-emphasizing or under-emphasizing sex or if they refused to accept the given sex of their child and educated him or her in a way that was more appropriate for the opposite sex. If parents portrayed sexual relations in marriage as horrific or untenable there could also be deleterious effects. For Chauchard, any of the aforementioned errors in judgment perpetrated by the parents could "forever mutilate the child's adult sexuality" by causing grave psychological disturbances in the child's sexual coming-of-age.¹⁵⁵

André Berge also believed that above all the attitude and comportment of the adults in a child's life was a large determinant of whether a child would grow up with a healthy and balanced sexuality. Berge held that replies from parents and educators that were false or evasive made children feel that they could not trust their parents to talk openly and honestly about sex. Berge argued that when parents lied to their children by telling them that children were found in cabbages, fell from heaven, or were brought by the stork, children wondered why it was that their parents lied about sexuality and would

¹⁵⁴ Bright, « Preface », André Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children* (1963), x.

¹⁵⁵ Chauchard, *Le Progrès Sexuel, Education du cerveau et sexualité adulte*, Paris : Éditions du Levain, 1961, 24.

begin to feel that there must be something “pretty nasty or terrible” about a subject that most adults were too shameful to discuss.¹⁵⁶ Berge maintained that if an adult refused to answer a question, or answered it in such a ridiculous manner that it amounted to a refusal that children would cease asking.¹⁵⁷ Berge insisted that a child who began to evade the subject in its entirety, or refused to understand or see anything associated with sexuality, could suffer “an intellectual mutilation whose psychopathological effects [could] extend to the whole personality.”¹⁵⁸

Berge highlighted the work of Eighteenth-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau who had criticized parents who evaded answering the sometimes embarrassing questions of children, including the ubiquitous “Where do babies come from?” Rousseau insisted that this question, which came to children naturally, should be answered honestly because an “indiscreet or prudent response can sometimes decide a child’s mores and health for their entire lives.”¹⁵⁹ However, unlike Berge, Rousseau focused primarily on a negative sexual education for children. He commended the example of a woman who explained to her son, ‘women piss [babies] out with such great pains that it sometimes costs them their lives.’¹⁶⁰ Berge proposed that this stark explanation cast a “veil of sadness” over the act of giving birth, bringing with it, “...images of the infirmities of human nature, disgusting objects and of human suffering.”¹⁶¹ For Berge, it was not the purpose of sexual education to make adolescents fear the sexual instinct, which, if left unchecked could lead them into untold perversions, “the mental ruin of the individual,

¹⁵⁶ André Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 15-16.

¹⁵⁷ Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children*, 32.

¹⁵⁸ Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children*, 33.

¹⁵⁹ Jean Jacques Rousseau, quoted in André Berge, *L’Éducation sexuelle chez l’enfant*, 1952, 1.

¹⁶⁰ André Berge, *L’Éducation sexuelle chez l’enfant*, 1952, 1.

¹⁶¹ André Berge, *The Sexual Education of Children* (1963), 1.

and the moral ruin of society.”¹⁶² Berge insisted that this would weaken young people and precipitate them towards “catastrophes,” instead of enhancing their ability to avoid them.¹⁶³ Berge held that sexual perversions were more often caused by “obstacles being interposed in the path of normal sexual development than from a lack of constraint.”¹⁶⁴ Berge saw the goal of sexual education as helping an adolescent to accustom himself to his new personality and helping him to organize and discipline the new forces blooming inside himself. He argued that a sexual education that treated the sexual instinct as an enemy to be conquered, could lead to psychic disturbances that could cause “grave and diverse perturbations of one’s psychosexual existence” including: perversions, inversions (homosexuality), weaknesses, and anomalies.¹⁶⁵

The psyches of potential educators were especially called into question.

Montreuil-Straus asserted:

The schoolmasters have, except for the specialized professors, the same incompetences as parents, having never received in a correct and scientific fashion, the required information for this type of teaching. They have the same inhibitions, the same prejudices, with more fear of responsibilities.¹⁶⁶

Montreuil-Straus explained that it was imperative that the schoolteacher be well-balanced and honest. These qualities, combined with a natural, serious, and decent manner of instruction, would give the educator the charitable, non-moralizing demeanor that would be imperative for delivering this type of sensitive material. She insisted that the professor needed to have a very strong self-discipline, had to be able to remain

¹⁶² Berge, *Éducation sexuelle*, 13.

¹⁶³ Andre Berge, “L’Éducation sexuelle de l’adolescent et la preparation au mariage,” in *Le Guide des Parents, Les Problèmes médicaux et pédagogiques de l’éducation*, edited by L’École des parents et des éducateurs (Paris : Librairie Larousse, 1955), 587.

¹⁶⁴ Berge, *Éducation sexuelle*, 12-13.

¹⁶⁵ Andre Berge, “L’Éducation sexuelle de l’adolescent et la preparation au mariage,” in *Le Guide des Parents, Les Problèmes médicaux et pédagogiques de l’éducation*, edited by L’École des parents et des éducateurs (Paris : Librairie Larousse, 1955), 588-589.

¹⁶⁶ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 49.

unperturbed when faced with a classroom of snickering children, and had to be flexible enough to answer students' questions as they arose.¹⁶⁷

In his piece, "*Les Influences des idées de Freud sur l'éducation*" (The Influence of Freud's Ideas on Education), André Berge stressed that even if one claimed that one was "anti-Freudian," it was impossible to raise children after Freud the way that one did before him. In fact, Berge maintained, after Freud, it was difficult to know how to raise children at all.¹⁶⁸ Berge explained that although Freud was not writing with education in mind, in his work he consistently discovered the suffering children that existed in the psyches of sick and neurotic adults.¹⁶⁹ Freud was the first observer to understand that "everything that exists in the adult... has its seed in the child, sexuality included...."¹⁷⁰ Additionally, Berge clarified, people realized after Freud that children had sexual sensibilities and sensualities that were immature but present, much in the same way that the sexual organs were present, but did not yet play a role in reproduction.¹⁷¹ Because of these findings, Berge argued:

The educator is obliged to take account of the fact that... simply by ignorance, by negligence or because he yielded to certain inner-feelings that he could not control . . . he could play a pathogenic role . . .¹⁷²

Berge suggested that the educator needed to get to know each child and taper his or her pedagogy to the child in question.¹⁷³ With a classroom filled with students it would be nearly impossible to personalize the sexual education curriculum to the needs

¹⁶⁷ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 52-53.

¹⁶⁸ André Berge, *André Berge Écrivain, psychanalyste, éducateur*. Formation. (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 1995), 79.

¹⁶⁹ Berge, *André Berge Écrivain*, 80.

¹⁷⁰ Berge, *André Berge Écrivain*, 80-81.

¹⁷¹ Berge, *André Berge Écrivain*, 80-81.

¹⁷² Berge, *André Berge Écrivain*, 81.

¹⁷³ Berge, *André Berge Écrivain*, 82.

of each individual child, so indeed, one could imagine an educator's terror at facing the monumental, if not impossible course of action that Berge suggests. Dr. Paul Le Moal also admitted that rather "exceptional" circumstances needed to occur to create a proper collective sexual education. Le Moal insisted that one needed to find an instructor who was not only well-balanced, but also well-informed, who was accepted by all the parents, and who was familiar with each child in his classroom and the families of all the children.¹⁷⁴

In 1956, the Inspector General of Public Education, André Le Gall, wrote a piece that instructed educators and parents in the different personality types of children and described in detail, how sexual information should be presented to each of these groups. Le Gall described the eight different types of student personalities: the sentimental, the nonchalant, the nervous, the sanguine, the phlegmatic, the apathetic, the exuberantly active, and the passionately reflective. Le Gall insisted that because questions of sexuality were accompanied with a "considerable emotional charge" in certain personality groups, parents and educators needed to approach the subject with great prudence.¹⁷⁵ For instance, he revealed that with the "sentimental" type of student, the emotional power of sexual issues was too overwhelming to manifest itself in his or her consciousness, except in an incomplete, superficial, and troubling form. Instead, it presented itself in a vague and shadowy manner in the child's subconscious. If not brought to light, defined, and mentally processed, the sentimental type's feelings over sexuality could metamorphose into complexes and obsessions.¹⁷⁶ On the other hand,

¹⁷⁴ Le Moal, 169.

¹⁷⁵ André Le Gall, *L'Éducation sexuelle selon les caractères* (Paris : Bibliothèque d'éducation morale et sexuelle, Éditions Nérét, 1956), 7-8.

¹⁷⁶ Le Gall, 8.

according to Le Gall, the sanguine type's natural curiosity engendered useful understandings at an early age, while his open and uncomplicated conscience freed him from anything disquieting in the sexual arena. These traits allowed the sanguine type to view sexuality as clear and simple, like all other areas of his life.¹⁷⁷ If following Le Gall's model, an educator would have had to first divide his or her students based on facial characteristics into one of the eight personality groups. Then the instructor needed to devise and implement a sexual education which took into account the personality quirks of each group in order to avoid shocking or destabilizing any individual student. It is little wonder that educators felt daunted when faced with this gargantuan responsibility of carrying out an implausible task.

The suggestions of these doctors and psychiatrists also called into question the practicality of presenting sexual information in a collective setting, when in the modern classroom it would be nearly impossible to understand intimately the personalities and developmental levels of all children and become familiar with their families. In the postwar, the impossibility of modifying a collective sexual education for each student in the classroom had to be weighed against the damage that could occur from providing sexual information in an improper manner or from leaving children ignorant of sexual matters altogether. If, as Montreuil-Straus, Le Moal, and Pierre Chambre indicated, only five to ten percent of children would actually receive a sexual education from their parents for reasons of ignorance, embarrassment, or lack of proper information, it was necessary to allow the school to fulfill its duty to "free individuals from their

¹⁷⁷ Le Gall, 9.

ignorances,” and permit the imprecise, but necessary, sexual education of children in schools.

Although most postwar theorists emphasized that the mental stability of sexual education instructors was paramount, Berge also admonished the many voices that, without the credentials to do so, criticized educators in the name of psychoanalysis. Berge complained that these charlatans employed themselves by “sowing panic and paralyzing educators,” as to the possible deleterious effects of the educator’s unconscious. According to Berge, these misguided voices inspired a “morbid terror” in educators that they would be the cause of complexes in hundreds of trusting schoolchildren. Also these voices prompted society at large to develop an even greater “complex,” which froze its ability to create acceptable solutions.¹⁷⁸ In conclusion, Berge declared that Freud’s “magnificent ideas” had more to offer education than a blind, paralyzing fear. Berge insisted that it was a tribute to Freud’s work for teachers to overcome their fear and foster the “mental hygiene” of children through sexual education.¹⁷⁹

IMAGINING A WORLD OF SEXUAL DANGER

Postwar French society perceived the world as fraught with sexual danger; however the French were particularly concerned with the types of danger that could threaten youths.¹⁸⁰ With the enemy expelled from France, people began searching for the enemy within: the seedy, unhealthy, and possibly infectious individuals, trends, and behaviors in French society that could undermine “traditional” values. Many personalities

¹⁷⁸ Berge, *André Berge Écrivain*, 82.

¹⁷⁹ Berge, *André Berge Écrivain*, 83.

¹⁸⁰ Two detailed treatments of French youths in the postwar are Richard Jobs, *Riding the New Wave: Youth and the Rejuvenation of France after World War II* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2002) and Susan Weiner, *Enfants Terribles: Youth and Femininity in the Mass Media in France, 1945-1968* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

and organizations emphasized the importance of facilitating young people's access to sexual knowledge for their own protection. However there was an ambiguous boundary between those wishing to imbue young people with knowledge for their protection and those who wanted to control youths 'for their protection' by spreading frightening knowledge.

Montreuil-Straus and many of her colleagues saw postwar French society as a dangerous place, full of hazards waiting to trap adolescents. Montreuil-Straus shared with Berge and Chauchard, the distrust of "*la rue*" or the street, which for youths could be a field of "observation and daily experience, a source of knowledge and a place of distraction and pleasure."¹⁸¹ She explained that in modern towns, the street offered sights and activities that enticed youths with sexual temptations. The diffusion and exposition of sexually alluring activities occurred in posters for "certain" commercial establishments, beauty contests, performances and shows, dance halls, markets, cafés, and kiosks that displayed provocative novels, publications, and illustrations.¹⁸² Montreuil-Straus warned of the grave danger of the "industrialization of sexual solicitation," that could imbue youths with "artificial and premature needs and desires."¹⁸³ Although some argued that sexual solicitation satisfied a demand that already existed, Montreuil-Straus believed that solicitation initiated a vicious circle that stimulated an increase in demand.¹⁸⁴ Pierre Chambre also believed that the postwar world was a treacherous place for youths who, weaker and younger than ever before, were exposed daily to dangerous sights and

¹⁸¹ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 64.

¹⁸² Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 64.

¹⁸³ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 65.

¹⁸⁴ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 65.

contacts.¹⁸⁵ Chambre reminded parents that sexually educating their children was essential because of the “rapid evolution of mores” that had occurred since the Second World War.

However for Montreuil-Straus, Chambre, and others it was not just the street that posed danger for the postwar youths, but also the menace of “*l’invasion du foyer*” or the “home invasion.” In foregone times, the home was thought to be a haven for all its inhabitants from malevolent societal forces. Montreuil-Straus explained that now, media sources, many of which were “manifestations of our aphrodisiac society,” flooded almost all households, and were particularly dangerous for older children and adolescents.¹⁸⁶ Montreuil-Straus condemned the post-war proliferation of romance novels and “*magazines du coeur*,” to which over 5 million people subscribed. She also warned against licentious publications, which were diffused widely in the male population and tended to camouflage pornography with a scientific guise.¹⁸⁷ To exemplify the dangers, Pierre Chambre provided the example of a girls’ high school in which the girls (aged eight to fifteen) awoke early to find a pile of brochures scattered by their school’s front door. Carefully folded with an enormous red question mark on the front, the brochures were particularly alluring to the young girls. When unfolded, the brochures urged young girls to take pleasure in their bodies, with graphic examples of the diverse means one could use to do so.¹⁸⁸ Montreuil-Straus cautioned that the images of sexuality that children acquired from these ubiquitous sources had very little to do with marriage and

¹⁸⁵ Chambre, 142.

¹⁸⁶ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 63.

¹⁸⁷ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 64.

¹⁸⁸ Chambre, 53.

family.¹⁸⁹ Quoting Havelock Ellis, Montreuil-Straus cautioned 1950s society about the dangers of licentious literature expressing, “Almost all imaginative literature has its roots in sexuality.... Modern novels...soil the imagination, falsify reality and deprave one’s sense of taste.”¹⁹⁰ Chambre insisted that one should forewarn youths, providing them with a truthful sexual education to help strengthen their resistance to these dangers in modern society.¹⁹¹

Chambre and Montreuil-Straus also blamed the cinema for exacerbating juvenile delinquency and undermining youth mores. Chambre argued that postwar youths were immersed daily in an environment filled with unhealthy films and shows, and inappropriate conversations with friends. These influences could quickly lure students off-track if their parents had not alerted them to the threat.¹⁹² Montreuil-Straus warned that there were negative consequences to young people’s desire for mental escape from the realities of the postwar. Whereas the cinema could serve positive ends such as “satisfying healthy curiosities and liberating certain complexes,” Montreuil-Straus maintained that the cinema could also do harm by provoking emotional shocks and by giving youths demoralizing or harmful suggestions.¹⁹³

Berge, Chauchard, Chambre, and Montreuil-Straus all promoted an early sexual education to fight against the prurient gossip, sleazy definitions, and mistruths that were bandied about peer circles, passed down from older siblings, or gleaned from pornographic literature. Chauchard described information acquired from the “*milieu*”, or

¹⁸⁹ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 63.

¹⁹⁰ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 64-65.

¹⁹¹ Chambre, 142.

¹⁹² Chambre, 52.

¹⁹³ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 73.

one's environment, as "inaccurate and immoral", while Montreuil-Straus portrayed this influence as "unhealthy,...erroneous,...vicious,...clandestine,...[and] reprehensible."¹⁹⁴ According to Berge, parents should not have been debating whether or not to sexually educate their children, but whether their children would be given the correct sexual information at home and at school, or suffer through the coarse and lewd education provided by the "*milieu*." Pierre Chambre too, argued that parents who refused to provide their children with sexual information were ignoring the reality that their children would learn this information from other, less accurate, and possibly prurient sources. These young men and women (but particularly women), whose heads were filled with "poetry" and "idealism," could suffer a great shock when exposed to information for which they had not yet been prepared. Chambre called this parental denial, "ostrich politics," which remains wonderful symbolism for the reaction of much of the postwar society to the changes in mores brought about by the war.¹⁹⁵

Dr. Paul Le Moal's study on sexual education in France, which he published in his 1960 work, *Pour une authentique éducation sexuelle* (For An Authentic Sexual Education), indicated that in only seventeen percent of girls' cases and in only ten percent of boys' cases did sexual information come from their parents. Of all of the people surveyed, one out of every two people viewed sexuality in an adverse light and approximately eighteen percent of both men and women surveyed thought that sex was shameful. Interestingly, nineteen percent of women thought sex was "disgusting" versus three percent of men, and more men felt guilty about sex than women (thirty-two versus

¹⁹⁴ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 50.

¹⁹⁵ Chambre, 57.

thirteen percent).¹⁹⁶ These statistics were congruent with Berge's analysis that when a child learned about sexuality without his or her parents' assent, the child would not feel entitled to the information because he or she had acquired it "dishonestly" and thereafter, "...all sexual life, even the most legitimate, would ever after be overshadowed in his eyes with a sense of guilt and shame."¹⁹⁷ Berge explained that the school's goal was "...to level out knowledge, turn it into an everyday currency [and] make of it a social thing." But Berge also emphasized that the socialization of knowledge could take place beyond the reach of adults, where it became, "furtive, a kind of opposition movement, tinged at times with sadism and a sense of guilt." He explained, "The more openly... 'socialization' takes place, the less dramatic, the less highly charged with emotion it becomes."¹⁹⁸ Pierre Chambre's series of high-school lectures on sexuality were designed to counter these influences, showing students that subjects others called "scandalous" could be discussed in a healthy manner and without shame. His goal was to create "climate," or foundation of confidence, from which to mount an attack on the "false ideas" that young people may have been receiving from their classmates or from the ubiquitous media sources in postwar French society.¹⁹⁹

For Montreuil-Straus, as with Berge and Chauchard, the dangers of the *milieu* also included the deleterious affects of close contact with young people of the opposite sex, namely in a school setting. Montreuil-Straus worried primarily that the intimate interaction between young people at school could lead to precocious sexual activity. Montreuil-Straus cautioned that one should not ignore the frequency of these furtive

¹⁹⁶ Dr. Paul Le Moal, *Pour une authentique éducation sexuelle*, Le Centre d'Activité Pédagogique (Lyon : Éditions Émanuel Vitte, 1960), 161-163.

¹⁹⁷ Berge, *Éducation sexuelle*, 33.

¹⁹⁸ Berge, *Sexual Education*, 85-86.

¹⁹⁹ Chambre, 24.

practices and should also understand that children could be “contaminated” by other children who bragged or proselytized about their sexual activities.²⁰⁰ “Contaminated” children could be subject to “artificial desires” that could undermine the natural manifestation of maternal and paternal instincts, which should normally precede sexual desire.. Montreuil-Straus insisted that these artificial desires could be activated in the close, mixed-gender settings of school and work and could lead to a collective immorality, particularly if these tendencies were not countered by a moral education in the home and a biological education as part of the school curriculum.²⁰¹

Montreuil-Straus insinuated that greater dangers lay in wait for young people of the lower-classes and held a seemingly conservative vision regarding these groups. First, she intimated that sexual and cultural dalliances amongst youths of the working or rural classes were much more common than amongst youths of the middle classes. She stressed that youths in factories, shipyards, workshops, or on farms had very little stimulation and argued that after leaving school, these young people had stagnant and empty lives that contained no daily struggle for personal or professional betterment. Montreuil-Straus insisted that when puberty entered this setting, working class youths finally saw something that they could struggle and compete for: sexual conquests. According to Montreuil-Straus, young women and men in these settings, who oftentimes could not look back on a happy and healthy home lives, or religious or ethical principles, could not resist the sense of honor they could achieve by surpassing their peers: in virility for the men and in ‘sex-appeal’ for the women.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 64-65.

²⁰¹ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 65-66.

²⁰² Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 70-71.

Additionally, Montreuil-Straus pointed out that although prostitution was not as prevalent in the countryside, there were instead many parties and gatherings accented with “copious libations” that served as aphrodisiacs for rural youths. One anonymous response to a 1956 questionnaire put out by the F.F.T.S. insinuated that most country leisure time inspired debauchery, but that the dances were particularly suspect. The response declared, “The balls of Saint-Jean and of July 14 (in particular) are occasions for liaisons, which translate into an affluence of admissions to the Homes for Young Mothers in March and April of the following year.” Another response described, “The super-heated and stimulating atmosphere and the trips home at midnight create many dangers.”²⁰³ Elsewhere, Montreuil-Straus implied that since rural, youths were closer to nature than their urban counterparts; the young women had a tendency to be as sexually precocious as the men.²⁰⁴ Montreuil-Straus was more forward-thinking than many of her colleagues in addressing class issues and their influence on youths in depth, however, many of her portrayals of rural and working class youths come across as over-simplified and classist stereotypes. It is obvious though, that her concern for, and suggestions regarding, youths of lower socio-economic groups were based in a genuine desire to protect and improve the quality of lives for these young people.

Organizations like the *Jeunesse agricole catholique feminine* (J.A.C.F.) also believed that providing a sexual education for young, rural women could protect them from the dangers of society. Beginning her testimony in Berge’s article, “Today’s conceptions of sexuality and marriage,” Mademoiselle Fristot of the J.A.C.F. declared,

²⁰³ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 92.

²⁰⁴ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 87.

“In general, sexual education is not practiced in the rural setting.”²⁰⁵ She expressed concern that young women often became the victims of their own ignorance, because young people, particularly young men, thought that sexual relations outside of marriage were acceptable as long as the couple could avoid the risk of pregnancy.²⁰⁶ Fristot believed that this was a grave problem because in their future homes, women would hold unbalanced and antagonized positions because they had never learned to say no.

André Berge also fought to protect youths by teaching young people to recognize danger and to make rational, healthy decisions in perilous situations. He held that a sexual education was imperative to protect children from the unwanted attention of adults who were not sexually well-adjusted. Working in the psychiatric profession, Berge realized that children regularly suffered sexual abuses from adults, which included adults exhibiting their sexual organs to a child or attempting to force a child to touch them, or more serious cases of sexual assault, heterosexual for girls and homosexual for boys. He discovered that “...such cases [of sexual molest] were far more numerous than legal statistics would suggest for only a relatively small number of them come to court.”²⁰⁷ He found too, that sexual assaults were horribly traumatizing to children—even more so if they did not dare to talk to their parents about the abuse. Berge elucidated:

All external excitation which does not correspond to the individual's present stage of interior evolution . . . is inevitably disturbing....Any conduct which [requires] him to play an active part before his time cannot fail to have a shattering effect on him. He . . . reacts by a confused emotion made up of fear, fascination, and guilt The experience is likely to lead to...some kind of perversion . . . ²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Testimony of Isabelle Fristot in André Berge, “Conceptions actuelles de la sexualité et du Mariage,” *École des Parents* 5 (mars 1958): 7.

²⁰⁶ Testimony of Isabelle Fristot in André Berge, “Conceptions actuelles de la sexualité et du Mariage,” *École des Parents* 5 (mars 1958): 7.

²⁰⁷ Berge *Éducation sexuelle*, 42-43.

²⁰⁸ Berge *Éducation sexuelle*, 43.

When a child was able to talk about the brutal experience to understanding adults, this allowed the excess emotion to dissipate by way of a timely safety-valve.

Additionally, Berge stood by the expression, ‘forewarned is forearmed’ and maintained that early information about sexual perversions could help children to avert seduction attempts from a neurotic or perverted adults. Berge clarified, “Nothing so paralyses a victim as to be taken by surprise; all the defense reflexes, including the reflex of flight, are inhibited if the danger is not clearly understood.”²⁰⁹ Yet Berge also cautioned that it was difficult to safeguard and warn children without seriously disturbing them. Instead of trying to put a child “on his guard,” it was better to speak to the child in an “impersonal and documentary” way. Berge insisted that in this way the child would recognize an improper situation if it developed, but would otherwise have no other reason to imagine or worry about it.²¹⁰

Some theorists and organizations treaded a fine line between protecting youths through knowledge and using knowledge to frighten young people into cautious behavior. The *Équipes d’Action contre la traite des femmes et des enfants* or *Les Équipes* (Action Teams against the Trade in Women and Children) was one such group. Jean Scelles, the *Équipes* founder and President, and Former Councilor of the French State, printed newsletters that publicized the many dangers to women and youths in postwar society. Scelles’ goal was to distribute information widely on the many ways young people could be drawn in to a life of prostitution and depravity. The newsletters graphically depicted the abduction of girls from shady locations; revealed certain clubs, bars, and hotels that were known for prostitution and other questionable activities; broadcasted the names of

²⁰⁹ Berge *Éducation sexuelle*, 44.

²¹⁰ Berge, *Éducation sexuelle*, 58.

would-be abductors and exploiters of women and children and the venues where they committed their crimes; exposed fictitious advertisements in newspapers and circulars, disclosing their authors' names to alert children, parents, and the appropriate organizations to the threat they posed; and publicized the dangers of the auto-stops, airports, train stations, and ports where women and children were kidnapped, violated, or sexually abused. Although often sensationalist in nature, the *Équipes*' publications had the good intention of providing information on the perils of postwar society in order to protect women and children.²¹¹

Dr. Le Moal also believed in educating young women for their protection against the evils of prostitution. First, Le Moal insisted that one needed warn young girls that in times of great distress, they would be the most vulnerable to the attentions of unknown “consolers” or “protectors” and that they needed to be wary of strangers who offered to “take them in” for a while. The doctor insisted that all young women should understand that any stranger could be a pimp. The doctor emphasized that there were no firm statistics as to the rate of abductions since many women just simply ‘disappeared’, however one should still caution young women that these kidnappings happened most frequently in undesirable establishments like nightclubs, bars, and dance clubs. Le Moal maintained that “young women who know how to avoid imprudent situations” were rarely abducted.²¹² He cautioned however that it was unhealthy to pander to the “mythomaniac” tendencies of young girls by telling them spectacular, non-verifiable

²¹¹ Jean Scelles, a summary of publications produced for the *Équipes d'action contre la traite des femmes et des enfants* (Novembre, 1960-Juin, 1967), CAC 850293/ article 54; and a series of newssheets housed at the *Bibliothèque Nationale (BN)*. The contents of these newssheets will be covered in detail in my chapters on prostitution and deviance.

²¹² Le Moal 187-188.

stories about abductions. Le Moal stressed that as long as girls knew to “categorically refuse” any stranger’s offer to shelter them “for charitable purposes,” they could easily resist being lured into a life of prostitution.²¹³

Waffling between using knowledge to control youths and teaching youths to help themselves, was the F.F.T.S., whose 1956 study on youth and sexuality was presented in the article, “*Attitude de la jeunesse actuelle devant la morale sexuelle*,” (Attitude of today’s youths regarding sexual morality) in the review *Travail Social*. By analyzing youths’ attitudes regarding sexual morality, the Commission for Sexual Education of the F.F.T.S. sought to prove that children needed a sound sexual education to ensure their mental and physical well-being. However, the introduction to the study by Dr. J.A. Huet, President of the F.F.T.S. and former member and President of the General Consul of the Seine, makes one question whether the F.F.T.S. sought to educate youths so that they could make positive and healthy sexual choices in their lives, or whether the organization believed that young people needed to be studied and classified in order to control (from the outside) their possible “dangerous” tendencies.

In a letter to the potential participants in the program, Huet explained that they had decided to conduct the investigation in response to an evolution in the mores of postwar youth.²¹⁴ This evolution of mores had had its roots in several developments in the first half of the twentieth century including: a youth emancipation leading to an increased independence from the family influence; female students receiving similar

²¹³ Le Moal, 188.

²¹⁴ This document references heavily from, Germaine Montreuil-Straus’ *Éducation et Sexualité* (1956) so it is very possible that Montreuil-Straus was the author, but it was signed by Huet to add to its legitimacy.

education as young men in all areas of instruction; and the possibility for women to acquire and practice the jobs of their choice and to achieve subsequent financial independence. According to Huet, the financial independence of women had inspired them to believe in an equality of the sexes. For women, this equality had changed the world, allowing them to express their emotions and sexualities with the same freedom as men. Women felt capable and confident enough to attend co-educational universities and to experience camaraderie at work (in the workshops, studios, offices, and factories) and in their leisure time (outings, youth organizations, summer retreats, sports organizations). This camaraderie, in turn allowed young people of both sexes to establish “a better reciprocal understanding” and a mutual esteem and confidence, but also stimulated early attempts at romance, sensual attractions, and sentimental attachments.²¹⁵

Despite the positive results of these developments, Huet stressed that this evolution might also be dangerous because it forced youths to make adaptations that could be both dramatic and painful. The letter stated that the goal of the F.F.T.S. was to study youth behaviors “to be able to help adolescents resolve problems as they present themselves,” in their lives. And to be able to “help” youths solve problems in their sexual lives, they would use the results of the survey to, “try to become familiar with, and finally, if possible, understand, [the students’] attitude towards sexual morality and to evaluate the advantages and dangers of this attitude [emphasis his].”²¹⁶ Unfortunately, in this attempt to “prove” to society that youths were in need of sexual education, the

²¹⁵ F.F.T.S., Letter from association President J.A. Huet to educational institutions and youth organizations to elicit participation in F.F.T.S. survey on youths and sexual morality, 1, Dos Mon, *Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand* (B.M.D.). This letter is also printed in, *Travail Social*, no. 4 (1956), 4.

²¹⁶ F.F.T.S., Letter from association President J.A. Huet to educational institutions and youth organizations to elicit participation in F.F.T.S. survey on youths and sexual morality, 1, Dos Mon, *Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand* (B.M.D.). This letter is also printed in, *Travail Social*, no. 4 (1956), 4.

F.F.T.S. objectified adolescents as targets of investigation. The F.F.T.S. replaced the desire to provide youths with the power of sexual knowledge with an authoritarian urge to classify and thereby control young people with the knowledge they had acquired in their surveys. The indication that some portions of youths' attitudes regarding sexual morality might be "dangerous" (and therefore might need to be remedied) calls to mind Rickie Solinger's emphasis on the dangers posed by abortionists and their clients to postwar US society. In her article, "Extreme Danger: Women Abortionists and Their Clients before *Roe v. Wade*," Solinger illustrated that in postwar America, abortionists and their clients were considered deviants and vilified, which made them useful for defining postwar normalcy in the United States. They also, however, occupied an "immoral terrain" in which they were likely themselves to encounter danger.²¹⁷ Likewise, youths in postwar France were seen as being in danger and needing protection, as well as being a possible danger to themselves and the surrounding society. The co-mingling of youths, which had the positive effect of undermining the sexual double standard, was seen as suspect by Montreuil-Straus, her colleagues, and a large percentage of participants in the survey, who insisted that young people could not be trusted to act in their own best interest without adult surveillance.

Although Montreuil-Straus had a deep-seated fear of the effects of society on the youths of France, she was able to use this fear to inspire creation. Montreuil-Straus envisioned the formation of a utopian society for youths, which could serve as a bastion against the evil forces waiting to tempt them in the modern world. Montreuil-Straus advocated the construction of a well-rounded society—complete with ciné-clubs and

²¹⁷ Rickie Solinger, "Extreme Danger: Women Abortionists and Their clients before *Roe v. Wade*", in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 335.

bibliobuses, youth organizations, and a sound sexual education for adolescents in order to protect children and help them to create stable and happy homes. Her fear of modern society led her to visualize and to work for a world filled with positive and healthy cultural and social institutions for children of all social classes.²¹⁸

In addition to Montreuil-Straus, there were others who promoted positive change and generated proactive solutions to improve French society's relationship to sexual education. Some doctors and scholars urged parents to concentrate on their own personal growth first, so that they could share healthy ideas about sexuality with their children. Chauchard stressed that parents and educators needed to go beyond their own prejudices and educate themselves about human sexuality before they could give children a healthy education. Doctor Le Moal too, emphasized that in order to discuss "genital information" with young people, one had to first fully accept that the carnal was an important component of human love, and that the pleasure that proceeded from carnality could also be healthy. He suggested that if parents were shameful of their own bodies and could not "banish all embarrassment" surrounding sexuality themselves, then they should find someone more capable to sexually educate their children.²¹⁹

Some educators stressed that children not only had a right to a sexual education, but also that their voices needed to be heard. To underscore this belief, Pierre Chambre compiled and published the testimony of "hundreds of adolescents" to convince parents and educators of the need for sexual education with their words. In order to convince French parents, Chambre shared an anecdote about a large, public meeting held in

²¹⁸ Montreuil-Straus, 71-97.

²¹⁹ Le Moal, 181.

Chambéry after World War Two. The meeting was organized to allow parents and educators to hear the testimony of thirteen young people who had volunteered to speak.²²⁰ The meeting was called “Parents: young people are speaking to you.” One-by-one the youths presented their problems and hopes and the audience seemed convinced, until one adult criticized the patriotism of modern youths. Several of the young people responded by describing in turn, their deception and disgust with the often-incoherent politics of adults. At this point, several combatants of the First World War became incensed and one cried, “This is a scandal! Won’t you silence these young people?”²²¹ Insults were hurled and the meeting would have dissolved in chaos had not the headmaster of the high school and the director of the youth center declared in unison, “Are we not here, like the program says, to listen to these young people speak? It would be inadmissible if we did not know how to listen to them until the end.”²²² Chambre used this vivid example to urge parents to open a dialogue with youths and establish a base of mutual confidence. From this reciprocal confidence could evolve the answers to certain sensitive questions, such as those surrounding the issue of sexual education.

Chambre appealed to his readers:

Parents and Educators: . . . Hear their plea . . . Read this book . . . from which you will hear “THE CRY OF YOUTHS.” . . . They do not dare tell you themselves. Reflect Carefully . . . A solution will not be imposed upon you here. We wish only to help you find your own.²²³

It is still difficult to pinpoint, however, whether Chambre treated these youths as subjects and actors, or as objects. Chambre validated young people by insisting that their

²²⁰ *L’ École des parents* (Parent’s school) was a Catholic coalition of parents, doctors, psychiatrists, and educators who advocated improving education for children. Chambre does not provide the date of this meeting, but relayed the anecdote in his work published in 1958.

²²¹ Chambre, 18-19.

²²² Chambre, 18-19.

²²³ Chambre, frontispiece.

words were important enough to take seriously, but he objectified them by using their testimony only as means to convince parents to a certain end. Perhaps to add legitimacy, he indicated that his compilation of facts, observations, and testimonies was not the work of a young person, but of an adult and head of a family and explained that the intended audience for his work was parents and educators, not students. Chambre also admitted to guiding the narrative claiming, “It [is]...normal for the adult to frequently interject his voice to give his commentary and personal conclusions.”²²⁴ Unfortunately, Chambre’s self-professed role as editor of the young people’s testimony adds another layer of distance between their words and the reader. Chambre’s insistent intervention casts doubt on whether he truly let the students’ words speak for themselves, allowing the adult reader to make his or her own choice, or whether he attempted to persuade his readers with his own interpretation of the testimonies.

Additionally, Chambre’s 1958 work, *Les Jeunes devant l’Education sexuelle*, bemoaned the fact that ten years after the publication and popularity of his first work, *La famille et l’école devant le problème de l’éducation sexuelle* (Families and schools face the problem of sexual education), there had been virtually no coordinated effort made by either schools or families to provide a sexual education for the children of France. Chambre insisted that this “method” of silence caused worry and disquiet in the hearts of young people, and could precipitate them towards adulterous pleasures, egotistical satisfactions of instinct, and games of the heart, which could destroy the mystery and power of love at a very early age.²²⁵ He observed that despite sexual education’s extensive coverage in the public media and the plethora of articles that had appeared in

²²⁴ Chambre, 11.

²²⁵ Chambre, 141.

various pedagogical reviews since the 1940s, parents in France still did not truly “sense” the problem.

According to Chambre, fear often hindered parents’ abilities to discuss sexuality with their children. Although many theorists and prominent members of society portrayed the postwar world as dangerous for young people, many adults in French society also perceived the world of sexuality as a particularly dangerous place. Chambre countered these images of fear with examples of bravery, challenging parents to “dare” to share sexual information with their children. For example, some parents were frightened that even if they wanted to give their children a sexual education, they would not know how when the time came. Chambre agreed with Chauchard and Le Moal that many parents had not dealt with their own embarrassment, fear, and repression surrounding issues of sexuality and therefore continued to be afraid. Chambre persuaded parents to make use of the myriad books, brochures, and conferences available to complete their own sexual education. In this way, they could share the power of this new-found knowledge with their children and help them to lead more stable, healthy, and fruitful lives.²²⁶

Chambre acknowledged the extreme difficulties of parents whose own poor sexual educations, religious backgrounds, or unclear ideas surrounding sexuality led to a paralyzing embarrassment, which greatly hindered their ability to discuss sexuality with their children. Like Chauchard and Le Moal, Chambre stressed that parents needed to resolve the role of the body and sexuality in their own lives and conquer all religious and philosophical hindrances with courage, tranquility, and internal conviction.²²⁷ He urged parents to differentiate between moral and religious responsibilities, and the “false

²²⁶ Chambre 56-57.

²²⁷ Chambre, 57-59.

modesty” imposed by centuries of error and embarrassment surrounding the subject of sexuality in order to fulfill their natural responsibility as educators.²²⁸ Chambre begged parents to “dare” to take a personal stand, bypassing the vicious circle that would pass the suffering and embarrassment they felt to the next generation. Chambre asserted that sexual education was, “...not a luxury, or a fantasy of educators who saw themselves as better than others. It is about the fundamental condition for the harmonious development of [children], in joy and confidence.”²²⁹ Chambre believed that youths had the right to an integral education that included sex education, and pleaded for parents to find the courage and lucidity to give young people their due.²³⁰

For some in French society, the tradition of keeping sexual knowledge from children could be interpreted as a means of effectively lobotomizing young people into unquestioned procreation. By denying young people information about their sexual options, some adults attempted to guarantee the re-creation of a strong labor force and army, shoring up the foundations of the nation by creating stable families.

However, many of the doctors, psychologists, and other theorists (like Berge, Chauchard, and Montreuil-Straus) advocated providing students with sexual information for essentially the same purpose. In their eyes, young people should have been provided the knowledge that would allow them to make responsible and informed choices about their sexual behavior. This information would help them to see the dangers of a double morality which promoted prostitution and led to the spread of venereal disease, would protect them from sexual predators and pornographic solicitation, and would help them to

²²⁸ Chambre, 141.

²²⁹ Chambre, 60.

²³⁰ Chambre, 141.

avoid precocious sexual behavior that could lead to mental disturbances and unplanned pregnancy. These theorists offered students the subjectivity of making their own decisions, yet their goal was essentially the same as those denying youths this information. Informed students would make positive sexual decisions and create thriving families, which could ensure a healthy and powerful nation.

Chambre shared the words of a student describing the evolution within himself when his thoughts turned from those of adolescence into ones of adulthood:

Must we think that our parents are totally unconscious of . . . our aspirations? No, I am sure that they sense in us this agitated state, but they cannot pinpoint it or express it. This unfamiliarity results . . . in *a mutual lack of confidence*: . . . ²³¹

Michel Foucault stressed that the relationship between power and knowledge was not stable, but constantly in flux. The effects of power's domination, Foucault stated, “. . . are attributed not to ‘appropriation’ but to dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, and functionings.”²³² According to Foucault, power is not a privilege that the dominant class “acquires or preserves”, but a “constant battle,” a “network of relations, constantly in tension.” Foucault clarified:

. . . Power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who ‘do not have it’; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them . . . [Power relations] . . . define innumerable points of confrontation . . . each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations.²³³

In the 1950s, Montreuil-Straus addressed the duplicity that abounded in postwar society, suggesting that these incongruences would eventually lead to rebellion. She predicted that children were destined to revolt against the hypocrisy that they experienced

²³¹ Chambre, 19.

²³² Foucault, *Discipline*, 26.

²³³ Foucault, *Discipline*, 26-27.

at home, in the surrounding society, and at school. She explained, “School is made to liberate the child from his ignorances. It is abnormal that in the domain of sexuality, silence is imposed, thus placing school, in the opinion of children, in a hypocritical and disloyal position.”²³⁴ In 1956, long before the May Days of 1968, Montreuil-Straus made the insightful and bold suggestion that much of adolescent insubordination stemmed from:

. . . the disjunction between the...admonishments [and] reminders of moral and religious principles, and the attitude and the conduct of...parents. It is . . . against the hypocrisy of his relatives and the surrounding society that [the student] opposes absolutism [This opposition will] manifest itself in revolt and aggressiveness.²³⁵

In the same piece, Montreuil-Straus indicated that the use of the word “moral” had been voluntarily omitted from the enumerated disciplines because young people were “...hostile to moral maxims” that they considered out-of-touch with the realities of the age. However, just the year before in 1955, a circular distributed by the Minister of Education to all of the academies in France had mandated the implementation of a segment of moral education in schools. It is possible that the lack of agreement between the blind implementation of policy by government officials in the Minister of Education, and the hopes, beliefs, and desires of postwar youths, led to open rebellion a decade later.

Additionally, Montreuil-Straus exposed the fault lines of the sexual double standard, insisting that modern, independent women would refuse to be defined by the

²³⁴ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 51. The advocates of sexual education in the postwar saw only the positive and « liberating » effects of this education, however, theorists such as Michel Foucault have disagreed. Rather than promoting liberation, Foucault argues that immersion in the grid of sexual knowledge imprisons individuals, thereby creating subjected and docile bodies. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I: An Introduction, translated by Robert Hurley (New York : Vintage Books, 1990).

²³⁵ Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation*, 59.

masculinist society of the postwar world. French society had kept women in control by legislating, and thereby defining, what women could be and could learn. Women would be trained in morale courses to be good wives and mothers. They would be instructed in subjects such as home economics and home management so that they could perform effectively as mistresses of the house and home managers. They could learn in *puériculture* classes how to care for their infants in order to decrease infant mortality, but they would not be told how babies were made. It is no wonder, that in the two decades before 1968, women worked to combat a hypocritical society that denied every manifestation of women's forward social momentum, and was completely out of touch with women's post-war realities.

In a 1948 report defining the official position on sexual education, Louis François, Inspector General for Public Instruction, predicted the continued reticence in French society with regards to sexual education. François stated, "Certainly, sexual education in establishments of public instruction is not for today, perhaps not even for tomorrow; but one can envisage it perfectly well for the day after tomorrow, if the competent branches of National Education want, from this point forward, to get to work."²³⁶ François might have had a hard time believing, however, that his "day after tomorrow" would come nearly twenty years later, and that these debates over traditional values, social mores, and sexual education would continue into the modern day. Rather than dismantling tradition, many doctors, educators, psychiatrists, parents, and other concerned adults in the 1950s and 1960s, worked within the system to evoke change. Although seemingly conservative to modern standards, these labors would have been considered radical in the conservative,

²³⁶ Chambre, 9-10.

postwar climate of France. Although the efforts of sexual education advocates would not bear fruit until the late 1960s and French society would still be battling and worrying over implementation well into the 1970s, these early attempts to provide youths with sexual knowledge began weakening the edifice of a patriarchal French society, which, since ancient times, had accommodated a double morality for women and men and had kept youths ignorant of their sexual lives. This enforced silence and neglect of democracy in education were two of the primary complaints that would topple French society into the revolutions of 1968. Although reform-minded theorists like Montreuil-Straus, Berge, Chambre, and Le Moal saw nothing but positive effects in providing a sexual education for French youths, it remained to be seen how these changes would affect young people and French society as a whole.

CHAPTER TWO:

Happy Motherhood? French Women and Birth Control after World War II

Although women in France were familiar with contraceptive techniques for centuries, French legislation after World War I curtailed women's access to contraceptives until 1967. Women in other European countries had access to modern means of birth control long before French legalization.²³⁷ Yet France remained embroiled in turmoil over the idea of providing women with a means to control their pregnancies. Debates raged in the high circles of the parliament, the religious hierarchy, in the medical community, and in the media. However, most of the participants debating about women and their plight blatantly ignored what women needed, felt, or believed. Although women were talking (to their husbands and doctors), few were listening. Fed up with their lot, women reached out with their words to the one association that they thought could bring them hope: *Maternité Heureuse*, or Happy Motherhood. Women's letters to *Maternité Heureuse* were filled with themes of pain, depression, anguish, sickness, and catastrophe. These women begged for the power to control their own fecundity and made plaintive appeals for mercy from the burden of constant childbirth. The women of France had found a responsive audience, one that would care for their suffering and help them to believe that they deserved a dignified existence. A small core of (primarily female) participants in the debates had touched the pulse of the women of

²³⁷ Several countries in Europe and overseas had already established centers for "Family Planning" before the Second World War including Holland in 1882, Denmark in 1905, the United States in 1916, and England in 1921. Additionally, in 1936, the United States, England, and Sweden officially organized the importation and regulation of contraceptive devices. Dr. Pierre Simon, *Le Contrôle des naissances, Histoire, Philosophie, Morale*, Petite Bibliothèque Payot, vol. 91 (Paris : Éditions Payot, 1966), 79-80.

France by serving them in their various professions as doctors and lawyers and by reading their letters. A young gynecologist, Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, fought an initially lonely, but increasingly popular and controversial battle to give women the legal means to control their own fertility. She and her colleagues fought the medical establishment and circumvented the legal system. In establishing and joining organizations like *Maternité Heureuse*, which would later become the *Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial* (The French Movement for Family Planning), or the M.F.P.F., the women of France did not just let others speak for them, but instead participated in the movement for family planning, inspiring both societal and personal transformations. Encouraged by the support and salvation they found in these organizations, some women formed networks and dedicated themselves to disseminating knowledge about the movement to other women in their workplaces and housing projects. Other women participated in the establishment of the M.F.P.F. centers and volunteered in them as hostesses, acting as liaisons between the M.F.P.F. doctors and the clients. Additionally, after placing their hopes and fears in writing in the letters they sent to the organization, French women who joined the M.F.P.F. also found the courage to visit the family-planning centers and talk about their sexual lives, which many had never done before. In voicing their concerns and fears, French women faced their own sexual demons, which had been silenced by repression, all in order to take control of their lives. The desire of French women to control their fertility was not a freedom from the womb, as some opponents suggested, but a freedom to control their wombs and not to let their physical, mental, and sexual lives be dictated by the fear of their next pregnancy. Women like Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé listened to women's words: their stories,

testimonies, confessions, and dreams, and fought with the women of France to resist a conservative social order that kept them bound in lives of endless pregnancy. These women's postwar activism over birth control formed the first waves of dissension that would capsize French society two decades later with the revolutions of 1968.

The issue of contraception raised hackles all over France primarily because, like the sexual education of children, it touched at the hearts of people's beliefs, prejudices, and fears. After World War I, "propaganda" promoting contraception and abortion and the distribution of the means of contraception were strictly sanctioned. The primarily conservative French Chamber of Deputies passed the law of 23 July 1920 in order to placate popular fears of depopulation after a bloody war and to combat the work of the "neo-Malthusians."²³⁸ Articles 1 and 2 of the law concerned abortion, whereas articles 3 and 4 related to contraception, which had not necessarily been criminalized in former laws. Article 3 punished the dissemination of information surrounding birth control and the sale and distributions of remedies, substances, or objects which could impede pregnancies with both fines and imprisonment. Article 4 upheld similar laws passed during the French Revolution that banned dissemination of "secret remedies" even if

²³⁸ Malthusianism was a political doctrine based on the ideas of eighteenth-century philosopher Thomas Malthus, who believed that the population growth would always outpace food supply. For the global population to sustain itself, population growth needed to be hindered by certain "obstacles" like famine, war, and plagues, or preventative measures such as "moral constraint." Malthus' idea of "moral constraint" meant that individuals should refrain from marriage or marry late and that all single people should be celibate. Instead of promoting continence, "Neo-Malthusians" advocated providing birth control for the masses in order to limit births and thereby balance food production with population growth. The Communist party believed Malthusianism—and "Neo-Malthusianism" in the twentieth century—represented Bourgeois plots to undermine a working-class revolution by inhibiting the reproduction of workers. This belief originated in the eighteenth century when Capitalists had been attracted to Malthus' work because it vindicated their entrepreneurial spirits and compassionless behavior with a type of social Darwinism. According to this justification, misery did not stem from an unequal distribution of riches, but an infinitely increasing birth rate. Simon 72-74.

falsely advertised.²³⁹ After the adoption of the law of 1920, a commission known as the *Conseil supérieur d'hygiène publique* (Superior council of public hygiene) specified that, “any devices...meant to impede the spermatozooids access to the neck of the uterus,” would be prohibited.²⁴⁰

After the passing of the law of 1920, the women of France were forbidden from taking advantage of the important scientific improvements in contraception in the 1950s and 1960s. The diaphragm, used with a spermicidal jelly, had been offered in the United States to women who wanted to space their pregnancies since 1838, but was no longer available to women in France after 1920. Neither the *stérilet* (intra-uterine device), nor birth control pills (which were approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration in 1960), were available to French women in the postwar because of this pro-natalist law.²⁴¹

There was a small movement of doctors, professors, lawyers, psychiatrists, and other professionals however that noted the deleterious effect of this law and French society's traditional mores on the lives of French women. The political movement began with Weill-Hallé's attempts to persuade her medical colleagues to push for changes in the legislation over contraception from 1953 to 1955. Then Communist journalist Jacques

²³⁹ Dr. Pierre Simon, *Le Contrôle des naissances, Histoire, Philosophie, Morale*, 91 (Paris : Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 1966), 86-88. The details of the law can also be found in Janine Mossuz-Lavau, *Les lois de l'amour: Les Politiques de la sexualité en France (1950-2002)* (Paris: Petite bibliothèque Payot, 2002), 16-17.

²⁴⁰ Cited in Mossuz-Lavau, 17. Mossuz-Lavau credits Roger-Henri Guerrand's *Le Sexe apprivoisé. Jeanne Humbert et la lutte pour le contrôle des naissances*, 73, with the original citation. Mossuz-Lavau, 16-19.

²⁴¹ Mossuz-Lavau, 19-20. The I.U.D. was originally conceived by a gynecologist in Berlin, but was made more practical and easy to use after trial runs in Japan, Israel, and the United States in the 1950s. Additionally, birth control was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration in 1960 and quickly became the contraceptive of choice for young married couples in the US, with three out of ten couples using this method by 1970. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2d edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 250-251.

Derogy picked up the thread by publishing a series of articles on women and abortion in the publication *Libération* in the fall of 1955. Additionally, Weill-Hallé was contacted by Professor Évelyne Sullerot, who suggested the formation of an association that would fight for a French program for family planning and bring the knowledge of scientific developments in birth control abroad to a French population that had been left intentionally ignorant. These two women, with the assistance of over twenty more, formed the association *Maternité Heureuse* in 1956. These original founders were dedicated to the belief that contraception and a high-birth rate could co-exist; that people should have the right to follow their own religious precepts; and that the freedom of a chosen motherhood would improve both conjugal and familial happiness.²⁴² After forming a section of the movement in Grenoble, gynecologist-obstetrician and Communist party member Henri Fabre decided to put theory into practice and opened a center in Grenoble in June 1961 that would provide women with birth control. Although this move originally elicited the censure of the movement's national leadership (including Weill-Hallé), said leadership opened the second M.F.P.F. center in Paris in October 1961 after Fabre's center received no judicial sanctions.

OPPOSITION TO BIRTH CONTROL

The organization *Maternité Heureuse*, the neo-Malthusians, and others promoting changes in the law of 1920, fought against both natalist groups and the powerful Catholic Church. In 1930, Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Casti connubii*, stated that the act of marriage was, by its very nature, meant for the generation of children and that those who deliberately attempted to take away the sexual act's power to create life, "...acted against

²⁴² Caroline More, "Sexualité et contraception vues à travers l'action du Mouvement Français pour le Planning familial de 1961 à 1967," *Le Mouvement Social* 207, no. 2 (2004): 75-95.

nature; [and were] performing a shameful and intrinsically dishonest act.”²⁴³ Many Catholic scholars, professionals, and “moralists”²⁴⁴ towed the line, insisting upon the immorality of “unnatural” methods of contraception, which included any method besides abstinence, temporary continence, the “Method Ogino-Knaus” and the “temperatures method”.²⁴⁵ Contraceptives were forbidden because the conjugal act, as an expression of mutual love, should never be separated from its primary goal, procreation.

Many theorists stressed that the church would never accept birth control, but instead advocated a program of “Self-Control.”²⁴⁶ For Catholic geneticist Paul Chauchard, embracing the false “progress” of contraceptives mocked the values of virginity, chastity, continence, and fidelity in marriage because one learned “how to enjoy oneself, avoiding procreation with a witty technique” and that by learning gimmicks and “recipes,” one became completely ignorant of “true, human sexual norms.”²⁴⁷ Chauchard’s critics insisted that the fear of pregnancy interfered with the relationship between spouses, often forcing them to live as brother and sister in separate beds. Chauchard insisted however, that true love was not carnal in nature, so to remove

²⁴³ Pius XI, « *Casti Connubii* », 31 December 1930. Cited in full in J.-P. Dubois-Dumée, 104-105.

²⁴⁴ This term was used liberally and consistently in Garreau’s work on love and relationships. Lydie Garreau, *L’amour conjugal sous le joug : Quelques faits et discours moraux Sur la vie intime des français (1956-2000)*, vols. 1 and 2. Sexes, morales et politiques. Collection Questions Contemporaines, edited by J.P. Changnollaud, et al. (Paris : Harmattan, 2002).

²⁴⁵ The Ogino-Knaus method was based on a mathematical calculation of the fertile periods in a woman’s cycle, which had been first published widely by Knaus, but improved and made more precise by the Japanese gynecologist Ogino. This method, although sanctioned by the Pius XII in his address to the Italian midwives, was unfortunately not very effective. When juxtaposing his method with the Temperature method Ogino achieved an 82.6% accord, however since only 75% of women had cycles regular enough to use the Ogino calculations with any level of accuracy, the method turned out to be not very efficient. Dalsace and Raoul, 90-92.

²⁴⁶ In *Va-t-on contrôler les naissances ?* Dubois-Dumée uses the actual English terms in the title of the section of his essay entitled: “Birth Control? Non— Self-control?—Oui. » This is likely paying a negative homage to the fact that birth control was available most readily in Anglo-speaking nations.

²⁴⁷ Chauchard, *Le Progrès Sexuel*, 71. Paul Chauchard was also the director of the *École des Hautes Études* (School of Advanced Studies) and a professor at the School of Practicing Psychologists.

the sexual act from its spiritual context by using contraceptives debased the idea love itself. For Chauchard, denying access to contraceptives would force individuals to learn how to love.²⁴⁸ In Chauchard's prolific works, however, he never makes fully clear how the fear of pregnancy would not undermine the deep, spiritual non-carnal union between spouses, how reveling in spirit would help men control their ejaculations, how controlling ejaculations would deepen the bond between spouses, or why true love is incompatible with carnal pleasure. In the end, Chauchard argued on an intellectual and spiritual plane, denying completely the reality of women's lives. He ignored women's protestations that the fear of becoming pregnant, whether it was based in illness, socio-economic hardship, or plain fatigue, deeply affected the psyches of women and greatly undermined the foundation of intimacy and affection between married partners.

This theme of "control" (of ejaculations, sexual urges, etc.) surfaces consistently in Catholic morality. It is possible that so much Catholic doctrine targets sexuality and the sexual act in order to control these two entities by definition. This palpable disquiet over the possibility of disconnecting sex and procreation seems instead to be a deep-seated fear of losing control over sexuality. In an effort to control it, the Catholic Church set forth a definition, which served to neuter sexuality, revering instead, a sexual love that is devoid of all carnal pleasure. As seen with the sexual education of children, the Catholic faith continued to display a deep fear of sexuality, portraying it as a monstrous entity that if unleashed from the bonds of faith, would rear up and destroy mankind, one couple at a time.

²⁴⁸ Paul Chauchard, *La Dignité sexuelle*, 66.

Other Catholics had a more ambivalent approach to birth control. In an article for *Marie-Claire* in 1956, practicing Catholic Marcelle Auclair, spoke about being haunted by the words of women who had written in to the magazine, relaying their hopes and fears about birth control. Auclair wanted to give these women's words a voice. She said that she was losing sleep over her two callings: her duty to represent clearly these women who had entrusted her with their stories, and her need to be true to her Catholic faith. For instance, she supported a young woman whose mother-in-law was adamant that she and her husband should "take separate bedrooms" after their second child, responding that the church was "...not an evil step-mother. It is troublesome that certain Catholics want to be more Catholic than the pope."²⁴⁹ However, the rest of her advice was culled from the works of Chauchard, Catholic writer Dubois-Dumée, and other Catholic scholars, particularly when she advocated practicing a periodic continence that would prove the couple's "true love, one capable of control and domination over the physical instincts..."²⁵⁰ She explained that this continence would give love its true place, "as one of the most beautiful things in the world," and would free a couple from the shame of loving each other physically.²⁵¹ Auclair's beliefs aside, the most powerful thing she accomplished was publishing these women's words, unedited, so that the French public (more particularly the large female readership that subscribed to *Marie-Claire*) could read their words and come to their own conclusions. Also, in publishing the letters of the women who wrote in, Auclair validated these women's hopes and fears and showed other French women that they were not alone in their apprehension, trials, and tribulations, but also in their hopes for a brighter future.

²⁴⁹ Madame G. Letter to *Marie Claire*, June, 1956. Cited in Marcelle Auclair, 40.

²⁵⁰ Madame G. Letter to *Marie Claire*, June, 1956. Cited in Marcelle Auclair, 40.

²⁵¹ Madame G. Letter to *Marie Claire*, June, 1956. Cited in Marcelle Auclair, 40.

Some Catholic women doubted the efficacy and relevance of what they considered an out-dated doctrine. Although not a priest or Church official, practicing Catholic, Dr. Suzanne Le Sueur-Capelle began to doubt the efficacy of Catholic doctrinal rigidity after treating women for twenty-five years in her work as a gynecologist. After witnessing the difficulties that French women faced in their physical and sexual lives because they lacked access to efficient means of birth control, she spoke out in the mid-1960s in favor of revising the law of 1920. Dr. Le Sueur-Capelle made her views public in an interview for *Le Nouvel Observateur* when she said:

I am a fervent Catholic and I fear, if the Church does not revise its position, it will lose many Catholic families. I wanted to give testimony of my love of God and to attempt to inform the authorities, religious and non-religious . . . [that] the law of 1920 must be revised. Today [this law] is an absurdity . . . ²⁵²

As she was not a religious leader and as she was also particularly intimate with women's sexual lives, it might have been easier for Le Sueur-Capelle to admit the necessity for a change in Catholic doctrine. Church leaders might have feared that a slight chink in the Catholic Church's defenses surrounding the topic of sexuality might cause the entire Catholic doctrine to collapse. Allowing women to use contraception would fatally undermine their insistence on the sanctity of life. However, it seems that the Church only valued life in the abstract, since they doctrinally justified the suffering of the masses (already living) that could not afford economically, physically, or mentally to have more children.

Protestant doctrine, on the other hand, was much more lenient in its stance on birth control, most likely in an effort to differentiate itself from Catholic theology, but

²⁵² Dr. Suzanne Le Sueur-Capelle, *Le Nouvel Observateur* (27 October 1965). Cited in Mossuz-Lavau, 41.

also because its leaders listened to adherents rather than clinging desperately to outdated doctrine. One of the first churches to confront the problem of birth control, the Anglican Church conceded both the principle and the practice of contraception, but looked the other way as to what methods of prevention spouses chose to employ. Some Protestant scholars proclaimed that birth control was the primary means by which one could restore the harmony in a married couple by restoring and transforming the morality, the physical love, and the good intentions of the union.²⁵³ Other Protestant scholars suggested that procreation should not be left to chance, but should be judiciously guided according to the health and material wealth of the parents. This did not mean “limiting” birth amongst the poor, but instead “spacing births” through a form of “planned parenthood,” in order to protect the lives of those in existence.²⁵⁴ This stance indicates an acknowledgment by the Reformed Church of the supplications of their Protestant constituents who pleaded that they wished to remain loyal to their faith, but that their marriages, their health, and their psychological well-beings were threatened by their incapacity to efficiently control their fecundity. By accepting birth control, the Protestant Church showed a certain mercy for their followers who were pleading for control of their lives.

Promoters of birth control in the postwar created both allies and adversaries in the realm of politics. Non-Communist political parties on the left began to push for a change in the laws regarding contraception in the mid-1950s and between 23 February 1956 and 25 May 1956 three leftist groups presented propositions to the French National Assembly

²⁵³ Jacques Grasset, “La limitation des naissances,” in *médecine moderne et respect de la vie*, 114.

²⁵⁴ Jacques Grasset, “La limitation des naissances,” in *médecine moderne et respect de la vie*, 106 and 115.

regarding birth control.²⁵⁵ The two later laws were modeled on the law of 23 February 1956 whose purpose was described as « serving to prevent the multiplication of criminal abortions by conception-preventing prophylactics. »²⁵⁶ The deputies pleaded for the lives of women and children that would be affected by the law maintaining, “The diminution in births that would result would be less important than the loss of human life—from women and children to come—that are provoked each year by these [illegal] abortions.”²⁵⁷ All three propositions were soundly ignored by the powers in office and there were no more proposals of this sort introduced for several years.²⁵⁸

The Communist party took a much different approach to the topic of birth control than their fellow-leftist deputies. Anxious to stay loyal to an outdated doctrine based in party history, the *Parti Communist* (PC) lost sight of protecting its worker-constituents. The PC was fearful that the acceptance of birth control would indicate a weak stance towards Neo-Malthusianism, so it recommended the abrogation of articles 1 and 2 of the law of 1920, thereby allowing legal access to therapeutic abortion, but condemning the use of birth control.²⁵⁹ On 25 May 1956, the Communists’ proposition of law number 1945 elaborated:

²⁵⁵ Dubois-Dumée, 115. Also cited in Mossuz-Lavau, 30-31. Progressive deputies MM. Emmanuel d’Astier de la Vigerie, Dreyfus-Schmidt, and Pierre Ferrand presented proposition number 715 on 23 February 1956, 16 March 1956, proposition of law, number 1252, was prepared by Dr. Pierre Simon, and presented by radical deputies MM. Hernu, Cupfer, Naudet, Soulié, Panier, Châtelain, Hovnanian, and Jean de Lipkowski, and on 25 May 1956 the socialists, MM. Dejean, Juvenal, de Mériconde, Mmes Degroud et Lempereur introduced an identical proposition of law, (number 1963).

²⁵⁶ Dubois-Dumée, 115.

²⁵⁷ MM. Emmanuel d’Astier de la Vigerie, Dreyfus-Schmidt, et Pierre Ferran, « La Proposition de Loi du 23 Février 1956 ». Cited in full in, Dubois-Dumée, 117.

²⁵⁸ Mossuz-Lavau, 31. Many of the deputies associated with these three propositions of law publicly endorsed the work of those involved with *Planning familial* (Family planning) and several became involved with in the direction and management of the organization.

²⁵⁹ The schism between the neo-Malthusians and Communists arose when Paul Robin (1838-1912), a revolutionary who believed in pure obedience to Malthusian principles ended his friendship with Karl Marx over a disagreement on method by which to end the suffering of the proletariat. Robin advocated controlling population growth in the proletariat and Marx steadfastly believed in social

. . . The tenants of neo-Malthusianism seek to mask the responsibilities incumbent on Capitalism when it comes to the difficulties of workers, they try to distract the laboring classes from the fight for social progress [and] for peace”²⁶⁰

The proposition reiterated the PC’s “firm opposition to birth control, while fighting resolutely for the right to motherhood,” and demanded the abrogation of “the repressive laws,” which punished women who have had to resort to abortion and also the amnesty of all women heretofore condemned for this crime.²⁶¹ It is hard to imagine that the PC was actually listening to the women workers in their party, when one thinks of the psychic turmoil and hardship a woman must face when choosing to terminate a pregnancy (a potential life that has been created inside one’s body), versus using a contraceptive method that would avoid having to make such a life-altering decision by preventing pregnancy altogether.

The ideological work of the PC kicked into high-gear at this time in response to the Mouvement Français pour le *Planning Familial* (M.F.P.F.), or French Movement for Family Planning. Communist journalist Jacques Derogy’s work *Des enfants malgré nous* (*Children despite ourselves*) that appeared in January, 1956 was one of the first public demands for the establishment of family-planning centers in France.²⁶² After airing the intense hardships, pain, physical injury (and sometimes death) suffered by women who had undergone illegal abortions, Derogy insisted on the necessity for

revolution. Robin countered Marx saying that “the multiplication of a crowd of idiots would do nothing to aid the proletariat’s cause.” The division came to a head at the 1913 Congress of Berlin when Communist women broke with socialist women for advocating “*la guerre des ventres*,” (or war of the wombs.) Simon, 81-82.

²⁶⁰ *Proposition de loi* no. 1945, 25 May 1956. Cited in part in Mossuz-Lavau, 31.

²⁶¹ *Proposition de loi* no. 1945, 25 May 1956. Cited in part in Mossuz-Lavau, 31-32.

²⁶² Jacques Derogy, *Des enfants malgré nous: Le drame intime des couples* (Paris : Éditions de minuit, 1956). Derogy first published several articles on Family Planning in the periodical *Libération* (where he was a journalist) in the winter of 1955-1956, which he then compiled and augmented in this work, published in January 1956.

liberalized access to methods of contraception. Communist-party-leader Maurice Thorez admonished Derogy stating, “It does not seem superfluous to us to remind you that the path to women’s liberation is achieved through social reforms...and not by abortion clinics.”²⁶³ On 4 May, 1956, Politburo member, Jeannette Vermeersch hosted a conference for the parliamentary group of the PCF in which she insisted that working-class women had never aspired to the life of sin perpetuated by the bourgeoisie and would never wish to enter a world in which the woman was simply a vain and empty-headed doll.²⁶⁴ However, Vermeersch herself was a member of the bourgeois class, as would have been all women in the *Assemblée Nationale*. Vermeersch and fellow-Communist legislators would all have had the money and the resources to travel to Switzerland to obtain an abortion or would have had the connections to acquire various means of birth control from “Anglo-Speaking” countries. One must wonder whether Vermeersch and her colleagues were arguing from a place of compassion, or one of doctrine. Weill-Hallé alluded to this same idea, insisting:

Is it possible that the leaders of the Communist party have strayed so far from the flock that they can no longer hear their cries? For those who pretend to represent the popular class, it is no more than a doctrinal problem to defend solely on the level of doctrine.²⁶⁵

Vermeersch and her Communist colleagues were more concerned with toting the party line than with listening to the pleas of their comrades, the working-class women that they claimed to represent.

The political right, on the other hand, represented primarily by the party *L’Union des démocrates pour la Vème République* (Union of democrats for the Fifth Republic), or

²⁶³ Maurice Thorez, Letter to Jacques Derogy (1 May, 1956). Cited in Mossuz-Lavau, 33.

²⁶⁴ Jeannette Vermeersch, in the supplement to *France Nouvelle*, no. 543 (12 May, 1956): 14-15. Cited in part in Mossuz-Lavau, 33-34.

²⁶⁵ Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, *Le Monde* (16 May, 1956). Cited in Mossuz-Lavau, 35.

l'UD-Vème, were against changing the law to allow women's access to contraceptives for demographic, medical, and moral reasons. Their first argument was classically pro-natalist, claiming that if one offered French women a more efficient means of birth control, then they would have less and less children. This in turn would affect the health of the family and therefore the nation. They also sought to spread the idea that the pill and the I.U.D. represented a grave danger to those who used them and insisted also that hormonal birth control posed a serious threat to the 'hereditary patrimony' of the nation. Lastly, many on the right claimed that the pill would lead to the "denaturing" of the woman.²⁶⁶ One senator emphasized that hormonal contraceptives "brutally attacked" the womanly qualities inherent in the female gender. He argued:

. . . no cycle, no woman, no libido. No more of . . . this chattiness that makes up the feminine charm. Instead, painful breasts that can not be touched with . . . occasional bouts of psychic trouble The first vengeance that nature takes is that her partner separates himself from her I do not necessarily approve of this, but I understand [why they leave].²⁶⁷

Foucault asserts that this type of argumentation calls on a "pseudo-science," which is:

. . . subordinated . . . to the imperatives of a morality whose divisions it reiterates under the guise of the medical norm. Claiming to speak the truth, it stirs up people's fears; to the least oscillations of sexuality, it ascribes an imaginary dynasty of evils destined to be passed on for generations . . . [and] dangerous for the whole society . . .²⁶⁸

The political right argued from a place of fear, conflating the fear of national genetic deterioration and gender-disintegration with the terrorizing thought of women's unbridled sexuality, released by the possibility of sex without procreation. These conservative arguments promoted a traditional morality, which relegated women to the private sphere,

²⁶⁶ Senator M. Henriët (républicain indépendant). Cited in Mossuz-Lavau, 53.

²⁶⁷ Senator M. Henriët (républicain indépendant). Cited in Mossuz-Lavau, 53.

²⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 53-54.

their confinement assured by a series of unremitting pregnancies and their duties to home and family.

The medical community as well, struggled over the concept of birth control, but the large majority of doctors favored maintaining the status quo, regardless of improvements in science or the changing conditions in France. In January of 1962, in response to the creation of Family planning clinics, *L'Ordre des Médecins* (Order of Physicians—the French medical establishment founded in 1940)²⁶⁹ publicly addressed any doctors with ties to the movement. The Order proclaimed that doctors in France had no role or responsibility in the application of contraceptive methods and that no doctor should use his or her expertise to provide counseling or services at family planning clinics.²⁷⁰ French doctors were then cautioned that any thwarting of these decrees would lead to disciplinary sanctions.²⁷¹ However, running counter to the desires of the Order and of the *Organisation Mondiale de la Santé* (O.M.S.), or Global Health Organization (which had publicly denounced the use of birth control in the early 1950s), the *Association Française des femmes médecins* (French Association of Female Physicians)

²⁶⁹ This formalized medical establishment was signed into law on 7 October, 1940. *L'Ordre des Médecins*, “*Texte de loi signé le 7 octobre 1940*”. Document reproduced in Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial, *D'une révolte à une lutte, 25 Ans d'histoire du planning familial* (Paris : Éditions Tiercé, 1982), 283.

²⁷⁰ Setting the precedent for the *Ordre de Medécins*, in 1951 and 1952, the *Organisation Mondiale de la Santé* (O.M.S.), or Global Health Organization had also come out publicly against birth control, declaring that from a medical perspective, the O.M.S. had no hand in demographic problems. The O.M.S. emphasized that overpopulation was an economic problem, not a medical one, and therefore should be dealt with by the local government of each country. Grasset, 104-105.

²⁷¹ Mossuz-Lavau, 39.

had come out in favor of the necessity of contraceptive use and had voted unanimously in 1961 to abrogate articles 3 and 4 of the law of 1920.²⁷²

Many of the combatants in these varied fields of debate, set forth esoteric religious, political, social, and cultural arguments, but never listened to the women and their families who begged for legal access to birth control so that they could improve their physical, emotional, spiritual, and economic lives. Even when some—for instance religious leaders—absorbed the thoughts and feelings of those in need of assistance, they somehow tried to reconcile the supplications with their own faith or moral theology. When this reconciliation failed, they felt a deep sense of guilt or remorse, but could never question their personally-held philosophies in order to help these people. Their steadfast faith and beliefs were fundamental in how they defined themselves as people, so to bring those into question was inconceivable, even if it meant they could help individuals, families, particular socio-economic groups, or society as a whole. The communists as well, battled theoretical windmills, rather than listening to the words of the workers they vowed to care for and represent. To advocate abortion, but refuse to accept birth control based on the esoteric belief that contraception was the battle axe of the bourgeoisie, was irresponsible. However, pressure from within and without would inspire the party to change their political stance a decade later. For reasons of faith, doctrine, or politics, these debate participants came up with utopian schemes for improving the lives of the world's inhabitants. Many opponents of birth control focused on large-scale, long-term changes in French society that would be affected by birth control: population growth or

²⁷² Catherine Valabrègue, *Contrôle des Naissances et Planning Familial*, L'Ordre du Jour (Paris : Éditions de la Table Ronde, 1966), 191.

decline, the aging of French society, the mores of French civilization, what Fernand Braudel might call the great currents or waves in the ocean of change, rather than the frothy-wave-tips that represented the everyday suffering in the lives of individuals. An article in the first issue of *Maternité Heureuse* commented, "...A fraction of the Catholic participants and the demographers have envisaged the problem according to their own viewpoint, without taking into account the essential factor: women."²⁷³ Catherine Valabrègue highlighted a similar trait, claiming that all of the negative reactions she received to a 1960 article on birth control in *Marie-Claire* were from people who "invoked 'grand principles' and general ideas."²⁷⁴ Nobel-Prize-winning Doctors François Jacob, André Lwoff, and Jacques Monod also alluded to birth-control opponents' shortsightedness in their letter accepting of the M.F.P.F. Presidency, writing:

. . . Those that fight you, who feign an ignorance of the harsh reality, . . . the mutilations, and the deaths, carry a heavy responsibility. No one should have the right to sacrifice the happiness, the health and the life of human beings to personal principles . . . that we do not all share²⁷⁵

These advocates and other supporters in the medical, legal, and legislative professions both solicited and considered the opinions of the women whose lives would actually be changed by access to birth control. They read French women's words, listened to their devastating and shocking stories in their offices, and took their supplications to heart, dedicating their lives to writing books and articles in the press that aired their views and

²⁷³ Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, "Raisons d'être de notre association," *La Maternité Heureuse* 1 (spring 1956), 8.

²⁷⁴ Catherine Valabrègue, 19.

²⁷⁵ François Jacob, André Lwoff, and Jacques Monod, Letter to Dr. Lagroua Weill-Hallé, 18 November, 1965. Letter Re-printed in full in : Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, « dix ans de lutte pour le planning familial », *Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial, Dixième Anniversaire*. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand. Dos 614.1 Mou.

the plights of French women, publishing French women's own words, and proposing legislation.

ARGUMENTS FOR BIRTH CONTROL

There were many groups that refused to accept these proclamations from *L'Ordre des Médecins* that they saw as outdated and lacking compassion. There was a small, but growing contingent of physicians, lawyers, and other members of French society, who rallied around the efforts of Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé and the M.F.P.F., fighting for the legalization of birth control. One of the foremost arguments for changing the legislation surrounding birth control was that many countries around the world had already accepted the difference between criminal abortion and contraception and had admitted the benefit and necessity of implementing a regulated system of family planning in their countries. For example, in his piece in *Gynécologie pratique* (Practical gynecology), birth-control supporter, Lord Horder clarified that not only were doctors in Britain expected to counsel a woman fully and accurately for whom pregnancy would be dangerous, but also that this type of counseling had been formally approved for married people by governmental decree in 1949. He also explained that the National Health Service considered this type of counseling to be one of its primary commitments to public health and safety.²⁷⁶ Endorsing the examples of "Planned Parenting" set by Great Britain, Holland, the United States, and others,²⁷⁷ this argument remained tightly linked to the defense of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (I.P.P.F.), an organization that was highly-active in many countries, helping global populations obtain

²⁷⁶ Lord Horder, "Family Planning en Grande-Bretagne," *Gynécologie pratique* Tome VI, no. 6 (1955), 394. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 103.

²⁷⁷ By 1955, the IPPF had established « family planning centers » in : Australia, Ceylon, Great Britain, Holland, Hong-Kong, India, Italie, Pakistan, Puerto-Rico, Singapore, South Africa, Switzerland, The United States, and West Germany.

access to birth control.²⁷⁸ The I.P.P.F.'s professed goal was not the limitation of pregnancies but to create "happy families" globally, caring for the health of mothers and children, and ensuring that the next generation of human beings around the world would have the means to grow and prosper.²⁷⁹ The Federation believed that it was the right of each married couple to have the number of children that they wanted, when they felt the time was right. The I.P.P.F. fought for the universal acceptance of "Family Planning" and "Parental Responsibility" through the dissemination of scientific research and offered sexual education for young couples in anticipation of marriage.²⁸⁰ The organization also emphasized that they not only served the "negative" function of limiting the amount of children coming into the world, but that they played a "positive" role, pioneering studies on sterility and attempting to help couples to conceive who had never before been able to have children.²⁸¹

Some proponents of family planning argued that "Birth Control" was in many ways a misnomer, because it invoked the idea of "controlling" or "limiting" population (a Malthusian idea) versus the idea of "spacing pregnancies." Dr. Conrad van Emde Boas, Vice-president of the I.P.P.F., insisted that an understanding the differences in terminology was essential to understanding the birth control movement because the

²⁷⁸ The Planned Parenthood Federation was founded by Margaret Sanger of the United States, who served as the Federation's first president; however it took until the federation's fourth conference August 1953, in Stockholm, Sweden before it was officially constituted. *La Fédération Internationale de la planned parenthood*, « La Fédération Internationale de la planned parenthood, » *Gynécologie pratique* Tome VI, no. 6 (1955), 391-392. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 103.

²⁷⁹ *La Fédération Internationale de la planned parenthood*, « La Fédération Internationale de la planned parenthood, » *Gynécologie pratique* Tome VI, no. 6 (1955), 391-392. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 103 and Jean Dalsace, "Birth Control," *Gynécologie pratique* Tome VI, no. 6 (1955), 375. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 103.

²⁸⁰ *La Fédération Internationale de la planned parenthood*, « La Fédération Internationale de la planned parenthood, » *Gynécologie pratique* Tome VI, no. 6 (1955), 391-392. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 103.

²⁸¹ *La Fédération Internationale de la planned parenthood*, 391-392, Lord Horder, 394, and Jean Dalsace, "Birth Control," *Gynécologie pratique* Tome VI, no. 6 (1955), 375. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 103.

various terms including: Birth Control, the limitation of births, regulation of the number of children, neo-Malthusianism, Child-Spacing, Family Planning, and Planned Parenthood were regularly co-opted, debated, and misunderstood not only by those opposed to the movement but also by partisans within the movement itself. Boas noted that governments refused to look at the issue in a scientific manner because these terms had negative connotations, and people became unwilling to take a stance on such a sensitive topic.²⁸² Boas endorsed the Anglo-Saxon term Planned Parenthood, explicating that its goal was to contribute to the complication-free births of children with “healthy bodies and spirits, in the quantity that corresponds to the intellectual and social capacity of the parents.” Planned Parenthood, for Boas, ensured that children would arrive at intervals which would allow for the sound development of each child and which would also allow ample time for mothers to recover both mentally and physically from giving birth.²⁸³

At the time, the political sensitivity over the concept of Malthusianism affected many different political groups, particularly those that saw themselves as fighting for the rights of the worker. Different political groups manipulated terminology in order to steer the course of birth-control debate. Calling one a “Neo-Malthusian” in the 1950s was the equivalent of today’s “fighting words,” unless, of course, you belonged to the “negligibly” small group of 1950s Malthusians who unified under the banner: “The Malthusian, a crusade against overpopulation, hunger and war.”²⁸⁴ By insinuating that supporters of birth control were “Neo-Malthusians,” one would be capable of mobilizing

²⁸² Boas, 380.

²⁸³ Boas, 381.

²⁸⁴ Dr. Conrad van Emde Boas, “Du Néomalthusianisme au Birth Control,” *Gynécologie pratique* Tome VI, no. 6 (1955), 382. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 103.

a large army of diverse groups against them, particularly those who still held malevolent feelings stemming from the intense political debate over depopulation that had been raging since the nineteenth century.

Another reason for the confusion between “limiting” births and “planned parenting” was that the I.P.P.F. had its roots in Malthusianism. The two notions remained intertwined in the 1950s primarily because until the 1920s, the movement to control births was promoted and conducted by neo-Malthusians, who hoped to eliminate social abuses by limiting global reproduction.²⁸⁵ In the 1920s many of these groups from around the world found it imperative to change their names to differentiate themselves from their Malthusian predecessors. In England in 1939, the “National Birth Control Association” (which had stemmed from the original Malthusian League in 1877) became the “Family Planning Association” and in 1946, the Family-Planning organization in the Dutch Republic signaled its separation from the 1881 neo-Malthusian Association by changing its name to the Dutch Association for Sexual Reform (N.V.S.H.) and by redefining its major goals.²⁸⁶ Although there was a mass-exodus from the tenets of Malthusianism in the 1920s, there were still pockets of neo-Malthusians within these organizations. However, their power and influence had been decimated by the novel focus of a new generation on the lives of individual women and families, versus changing society as a whole.²⁸⁷

The differentiation between Family Planning and Malthusianism became even more ambiguous when in the 1950s, some proponents of birth control used Malthusian

²⁸⁵ Boas, 381.

²⁸⁶ Additionally, in the US in 1915, the “Birth Control Movement” became the “Planned Parenthood Federation of America”; in Boas, 381-382.

²⁸⁷ Boas, 381.

arguments in their defense of the practice. For example, Protestant Professor Jacques Grasset interpreted the need for birth control as the need to limit the world's population. Grasset even suggests that overpopulation in under-developed areas could have "fatal" consequences when:

. . . the co-existence of people of many different races, degrees of evolution, and number in one territory, incites dangerous, brutal, and uncontrolled emancipations, and sometimes even military forays and foreign invasions.²⁸⁸

His solution was decidedly Malthusian, advocating not a more equal distribution of wealth, but a limiting of births in the underclass so that the poor would not spiral out of control in response to their destitution.²⁸⁹

On the other hand, many birth-control supporters made great efforts to distance themselves from neo-Malthusianism's focus on limiting births. Appeals-Court lawyer, Germaine Sénéchal, emphasized that "...[Birth control] is not about systematically directing the evolution of the birth rate towards regression or stagnation, which was the strict concern of Malthus, but instead *of ensuring in each particular case, that each birth comes along at an opportune moment...*"²⁹⁰ Other supporters, like Conrad van Emde Boas, highlighted that physicians worldwide supported birth control and that they were not at all concerned with limiting the national or global population, "...but uniquely by the consciousness of the their responsibility for the health of each mother, taken individually, and the lives of their progeny."²⁹¹

Doctors of both sexes found it difficult to emotionally distance themselves from the difficulties suffered by their clients on a daily basis. Unable to be persuaded by grand

²⁸⁸ Grasset, 104.

²⁸⁹ Grasset, 104.

²⁹⁰ Germaine Sénéchal, "Birth Control," *Gynécologie pratique* Tome VI, no. 6 (1955), 424. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 103.

²⁹¹ Boas, 381.

theories about changing French society or the world, these men and women interacted constantly with other men and women whose lives were made physically, emotionally, or economically unbearable because they were unable to control their fecundity. And from this space, these physicians began to fight to make lives easier for many individuals by educating them and providing them with the means to control their pregnancies.

The most ironic aspect of these debates over Malthusianism was the fact that the birth rate in France was affected neither by the political doctrine of Malthusianism, nor by the prohibitory law of 1920, but instead by government subsidies and allocations for families. In a proposition 715 of 23 February, 1956, several progressive deputies explained that although the law of 1920 had been passed in response to worries of depopulation after World War One, the legislation had been unable to achieve its natalist goals.²⁹² The yearly birth rate in France had fallen from 800,000 to 600,000 in the years between 1920 and 1940, and from 21 births per 1,000 inhabitants to 13.²⁹³ This depopulation trend was evident not only in France, but also in most of Western Europe and the United States until the 1940s. The French legislators then pointed out that it was only with the advent of a social politics that favored mothers, which included allocations and bonuses, that the birth rate began rise, which in 1947 overtook the birthrate of 1920.²⁹⁴ The benefits for families that had been established in the early twentieth-century and continued expanding into the mid-1950s included the family wage, the family-allocation system, pre-natal and maternity allocations, social insurances and also the creation of government bodies like the Minister of Public Health and Population and

²⁹² Deputies Emmanuel d'Astier de la Vigerie, Dreyfus-Schmidt, et Pierre Ferrand.

²⁹³ MM. Emmanuel d'Astier de la Vigerie, Dreyfus-Schmidt, et Pierre Ferran, « La Proposition de Loi du 23 Février 1956 ». Cited in full in, Dubois-Dumée, 116.

²⁹⁴ Dubois-Dumée, 115. Also cited in Mossuz-Lavau, 30.

the National Union of Familial Allocations (U.N.A.F.).²⁹⁵ Professor Jacques Grasset agreed that only familial aid had increased the birth rate in France, "...because the tendency of humanity is above all to reproduce when it is economically and socially possible, rather than to limit its descendants."²⁹⁶

Many birth-control advocates also argued that access to birth control would alleviate the need for aborting unwanted children, thereby decreasing abortions in France and the consequent collateral damage that women suffered from their misuse. Doctors and other professionals insisted that desperate women sought illegal abortions when their inefficient means of legal birth control failed them. Jurist Germaine S  n  chal highlighted this truth stating:

Will the impossibility of finding the means to avoid pregnancy make the woman accept an unwanted pregnancy? Certainly not, it seems that it has been demonstrated...that the consequence of the prohibition of preventative methods is a resurgence in abortions.²⁹⁷

Many politicians could deny the landslide of abortions occurring in France after the Second World War, because illegal abortions did not figure into formal statistics. However, doctors who dealt with women and couples on a daily basis realized that repressive legal measures had little effect on the prevalence of abortions. In fact, some gynecologists estimated that in France in 1955 there was at least one abortion per live birth and approximately 500,000 deaths per year from illegal and improperly performed abortions. Doctors like Weill-Hall   argued that sexual education and access to contraception would not only stem the tide of abortions in the present (and all its "nefarious" effects on French women), but that the women who might otherwise have

²⁹⁵ Simon, 272-273.

²⁹⁶ J. Grasset, 122.

²⁹⁷ S  n  chal, 424.

been killed or rendered sterile, would live to procreate in the future (thus satisfying pronatalist concerns).²⁹⁸

Other physicians argued that the stilted and anachronistic logic of the law of 1920 and the French medical establishment, hindered French doctors from counseling patients and prescribing medical treatment according to their conscience. Dr. Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé was one of the first physicians to address her colleagues regarding the difficulties and disadvantages of the law of 1920 on the practices of individual doctors in France. She also focused on the tragedies in the lives of families that were engendered by criminalizing contraception. In her presentation at the 1st International Congress of Medical Morality on 1 October, 1955, Weill-Hallé told the heart-wrenching story of a woman whose life had been devastated by not having access to contraception. 25-year-old Madame F... was diagnosed with a serious heart condition at sixteen years of age. Nevertheless, she.... married at twenty-one, with the warning of her cardiologist to ‘above all, never get pregnant.’ Her first pregnancy was carried to term without complications; however during her second pregnancy she developed serious cardiac anomalies, coughed blood, and the baby was born three weeks early. When she became pregnant the third time, an exam showed her suffering such grave health problems that her doctors could justifiably have advised her to have a therapeutic abortion. However, her cardiologist decided that since she had successfully given birth twice, it was feasible that she could carry another child to term. Although she was bed-ridden from the beginning of the pregnancy, her state worsened dramatically, and in the fourth month she

²⁹⁸ Hilliard Dubrow and Alan Gutemacher, “La Contraception: Contribution au problème de l’avortement, » *Gynécologie pratique* Tome VI, no. 6 (1955), 409. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 103. The information in this section will be covered in much greater detail in my chapter on abortion.

was rushed to the doctor, where she died at twenty-five years of age, leaving two young children.²⁹⁹ Weill-Hallé insisted that the “rational use of contraceptives, like they exist in Anglo-Saxon countries...” would have allowed Madame F... to avoid the successive pregnancies that had been formally pronounced counter to her health, and which ultimately led to her death. Weill-Hallé declared to the Congress, “One can thus conclude in this case, that the physician’s incapacity to prescribe contraceptives to their sick patient and instruct the patient in their usage impeded the doctor’s ability to come to the aid of this woman and left her in mortal danger.”³⁰⁰

There were other doctors as well who struggled with the limitations that the law of 1920 forced upon their practice of medicine. Dr. Jacques Monod, Professor of Sciences in Paris complained that a law that repressed “the diffusion of scientific information” or forbid “physicians from acting according to their knowledge and consciences, would be contrary to the ethics of a modern society as well as the very principles of our law.”³⁰¹ Dr. Henri Fabre illustrated that because of the current law in France, if a woman in France contracted German Measles (in which the offspring was deformed in ninety-five percent of the cases if contracted in the first seven weeks of pregnancy) she would be forced to go abroad to get an abortion, if she had a medical certificate, and if she had the financial means.³⁰² Envisioning a situation in which this patient came to his office for a consultation, Dr. Fabre asked himself:

²⁹⁹ Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, « Du conflit entre la loi et la conscience professionnelle du médecin, », 429. Presented at the 1st International Congress for Medical Morality, 1 October, 1955. Reprinted in full in *Gynécologie pratique* Tome VI, no. 6 (1955), 429-430. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 103.

³⁰⁰ Weill-Hallé, “Du conflit entre la loi,” 430.

³⁰¹ Jacques Monod, “Préface,” in Jean Dalsace and Raoul Palmer, *La Contraception: Problèmes biologiques et psychologiques*, 3rd edition (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), VIII.

³⁰² These figures were presented in 1956 to the Academy of Medicine by Professor Lamy, a prominent genetic scientist. Fabre, 7. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 103.

How could I counsel her to accept this pregnancy carrying a 95% risk of infant deformation, when I would be frightened if I found myself in the same condition? [It is] . . . an inhuman law [that] constrains this woman to cross the border, or resort, in her own country, to an illegal abortion.³⁰³

Dr. Pierre Simon, President of the Medical College of Family Planning and Vice-President of the *Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial* (MFPF), or French Movement for Family Planning, also disagreed with the recalcitrance of the government, *Ordre des Médecins*, and religious establishments, declaring that the inextricable mixing of science, philosophy, and religion in French society had made the acquisition and absorption of new discoveries in science and technology almost impossible.³⁰⁴ He insisted that because abortion had been the sole means of contraception until the modern era, the forces in power had been blinded to the scientific and technological developments which had proven the unmistakable difference between abortion, which ends life, and contraception, which prevents it.³⁰⁵ Pierre explained that by combining the prohibition of contraception and abortion in one law, the law of 1920 had conflated the two ideas. He insisted that France learn from the churches and governments around the world that had already recognized the “well-founded” difference between abortion and contraception, primarily due to the pressure engendered by the global movements for family planning.³⁰⁶

Many supporters of contraception also pushed for a sexual education of young people and adults that would accompany the modification of the law of 1920.

Contraceptive-use demanded a specialized education that was more than the average

³⁰³ Fabre, 8. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 103.

³⁰⁴ Pierre Simon (1966), 7.

³⁰⁵ Pierre Simon (1966), 9.

³⁰⁶ Pierre Simon (1966), 9.

doctor could relay in a one-hour visit. Some doctors promoted birth control consultations specifically for married couples, that would be performed in specialized centers, like those established by the MFPF. Protestant Jacques Grasset, For instance, advocated the creation of “Centers of Special Consultation,” manned by qualified doctors who would be assisted by specially-trained nurses and social workers. At these proposed Centers, clients would receive: medical consultations, health exams, prenatal exams, sterility evaluations, but also evaluations of the practicality and feasibility of future pregnancies.³⁰⁷ Other birth control advocates followed the lead of sexual education advocates like Pierre Chambre, André Berge, and Germaine Montreuil-Straus, in recommending a sexual education that would be conducted in primary and secondary schools and would be part of a larger curriculum, just as sexuality was but a part of life as a whole. Doctors like Jean Dalsace thought it important for young people to understand that although the performance of the sexual act was simply a brief episode in life, it could have repercussions that could last a lifetime.³⁰⁸

DOCTOR MARIE-ANDRÉE LAGROUA WEILL-HALLÉ

Although the topic of contraceptives in France descended into legal and medical obscurity with the law of 1920, one young gynecologist, Dr. Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé felt it incumbent upon her to disrupt this silence in the effort to help French women achieve the means to control their own pregnancies. Dr. Weill-Hallé’s first experience with what she termed the “injustice and hypocrisy that passed for “Morality,”” was during her first internship in surgery, where she witnessed a woman suffering an operation without anesthetics after a faulty attempt to abort herself. When she expressed

³⁰⁷ J. Grasset, 121.

³⁰⁸ Jean Dalsace and Raoul Palmer, *La Contraception: Problèmes biologiques et psychologiques*, 3rd edition (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 4.

her concerns to the emergency-room staff, she was told by a staff member that the patient's memory of the pain would "take away her desire to do it again."³⁰⁹ When she was still distraught, the intern (who later became an eminent obstetrician), explained to Weill-Hallé that her:

. . . pity was badly misplaced, because a woman who tries to give herself an abortion commits . . . a legal, . . . [and] moral crime, because killing an infant was a monstrous refutation of maternity and . . . women could only be impeded from doing it again by the fear of suffering."³¹⁰

After the surgery, the woman laid in the waiting room, streaming with sweat and shaking with violent tears, which she tried to stifle in her pillow. Overcome, Weill-Hallé went to comfort her by holding her head and stroking her hair and after she calmed, she walked silently away "under the reproving eye of the supervisor." Weill-Hallé stated, "It was thus that, for the first time in my life, I was scandalized in the name of the immutable principles of Morality."³¹¹

However Weill-Hallé was also the mother of three, the wife of eminent physician, Dr. Benjamin Weill-Hallé, originator of the *École de Puériculture* (School of Child Care), and a practicing Catholic. In her twenties, she attended conferences for Catholic medical students where she learned that Christian spouses needed to unite without artifice and "accept the fruit of their unions." She also was taught about celibacy, chastity, continence in marriage, and respect for the life of the child from conception, even if the life of the mother was threatened.³¹² She recounted, "The heroism of these principles filled me

³⁰⁹ Weill-Hallé, *La Grand' peur d'aimer, Journal d'une femme médecin*, 16.

³¹⁰ Weill-Hallé, *La Grand' peur d'aimer, Journal d'une femme médecin*, 16.

³¹¹ Weill-Hallé, *La Grand' peur d'aimer, Journal d'une femme médecin*, 16-17.

³¹² Weill-Hallé, *La Grand' peur d'aimer, Journal d'une femme médecin*, 18-19.

with enthusiasm. Nothing seemed to be too big or too difficult to me. I dreamed of spreading such a beautiful doctrine....”³¹³

She and her husband visited America in 1947, where he encouraged her to visit and observe the birth control clinics in the New York, which had been legal for nearly a quarter century. Head of a center in New York, Dr. Stone welcomed Weill-Hallé, explaining to her that the clinics provided couples with medical advice on how to space their births according to their moral, economic, and physical capacities, which he insisted was the ‘best means of fighting against abortion.’³¹⁴ At first, Weill-Hallé had found the idea of using contraception to combat abortions to be “interesting” and “new,” particularly when her medical studies had never approached the problem “in such a rational and constructive manner.”³¹⁵ However, after sitting in on a consultation, Weill-Hallé recounted that because she had been intensely conditioned by her environment and studies, she, “...was internally shocked at the pain taken by the gynecologist to help women in a goal which I saw simply as... the refusal of maternity.”³¹⁶

Although Weill-Hallé embraced heartfelt moral and religious beliefs, she was also a thinking individual, whose level of empathy created in her the capacity to change and adapt her ideas in order to help others. In Weill-Hallé’s gynecological practice, she examined female patients on a daily basis, heard their stories, and lived empathetically through the fear, guilt, exhaustion, and pain they experienced because they were legally impeded from controlling their pregnancies. Weill-Hallé decided that it was imperative that she inform her colleagues about the newest methods of birth control that had been

³¹³ Weill-Hallé, *La Grand’ peur d’aimer, Journal d’une femme médecin*, 19.

³¹⁴ Weill-Hallé, *La Grand’ peur d’aimer, Journal d’une femme médecin*, 20.

³¹⁵ Weill-Hallé, *La Grand’ peur d’aimer, Journal d’une femme médecin*, 20.

³¹⁶ Weill-Hallé, *La Grand’ peur d’aimer, Journal d’une femme médecin*, 20-21.

tested and were already being practiced in foreign countries.³¹⁷ After studying the law of 1920, she wrote an article in 1953 for *La Semaine Médicale* (Medical Week) that was the first chink in the armor of the outdated legal and medical systems. She insisted that these two systems needed to be revamped in order to guarantee the physical and mental health of the women of France and the strength of the nation. Weill-Hallé stressed that families with resources were able to supplement the meager means of contraception available in France with trips abroad to terminate their pregnancies. However, the majority of French families were forced to employ substandard methods of contraception—the Ogino Method, the temperatures method, cold douches, *coitus interruptus*—all of which interfered with conjugal intimacy and none of which worked effectively to impede pregnancy.³¹⁸ She also emphasized that the largest number of clandestine abortions came from women in this group. Weill-Hallé called on the physicians of France to entertain the idea of birth control on both a national and global level. Not one physician in France offered their approval of her proposition.

Weill-Hallé waited to address her colleagues again until 1955, when she was shocked into action by a media story about a young couple who was sentenced to jail for allowing their fourth child to die of starvation while the wife was pregnant with her fifth. At the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences in 1955 Weill-Hallé insisted that the story of this couple was not an isolated case in France, but in fact every day young households fought similar battles. This was the first communication in which she

³¹⁷ Valabrègue, 110-111.

³¹⁸ Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, “Le Contrôle des naissances à l’étranger et la loi Française de 1920,” Extrait de *La Semaine Médicale* 10 (22 March, 1953), 5-6. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue. The lack of statistical efficiency of The Ogino and Temperature method caused some doctors to hypothesize that it was possible for the female body to ovulate more than one time in the month, even when ovulation was not “indicated” by a change in temperature.

addressed the idea of Family Planning centers which young couples could visit to discuss issues of either sterility or fecundity, according to their life-circumstances.³¹⁹ Weill-Hallé reported that in response to this article, her Anglo-Saxon compatriots reacted with “stupefaction” when they discovered that the French were still so backward, and her French colleagues viewed her with “indifference” and “curiosity.”³²⁰ After addressing her colleagues again at the First Congress of Medical Morality in March 1955, Weill-Hallé had to accept that the French medical world remained firmly entrenched behind the moral and social boundaries of postwar French society and therefore she might never gain their support.³²¹

Fully acknowledging the fierce opposition to her efforts staged by the Catholic Church, the French Medical Association, and most parliamentarians, Weill-Hallé tried a different tactic, finding strength in numbers. Under a cloak of secrecy, Weill-Hallé teamed-up with twenty-three like-minded women and formed the association *Maternité Heureuse*, or Happy Maternity.³²² The women who sat on the first administrative council for the association came from many different ideological backgrounds including: political liberals, Freemasons, the unemployed, doctors, jurists, Socialists, and members of the Reformed church. However these women shared two commonalities: they were all from

³¹⁹ Weill-Hallé. Cited in Valabrègue, 11.

³²⁰ Weill-Hallé, *La Grand' peur d'aimer*, *Journal d'une femme médecin*, 24.

³²¹ Despite this vacuum in the medical community, Weill-Hallé's communication ignited a fire-storm in the media, amongst doctors, and in various religious orders. In response, Jacques Derogy also published his articles on *Maternité Libre* (Free Maternity) in the journal *Libération* in October and November 1955.

³²² *Maternité Heureuse* was legally declared an association 8 March 1956. Weill-Hallé stated that it was largely due to her husband's influence in setting forth the attributes of the association and in backing the project that the prefecture of police allowed the project to pass. Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, « dix ans de lutte pour le planning familial », *Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial*, *Dixième Anniversaire*. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand. Dos 614.1 Mou.

the bourgeoisie and they were all wives and mothers.³²³ The association's primary goals were to fight against the obscurity of the couple when it came to decisions regarding birth control and to promote the 'desired child,' conscious maternity, and the happy family.³²⁴

Although the Association had planned for the formation of centers where couples could come to receive counseling on planned parenting, the association had little contact with the French public in its nascent stages. At first the association's members focused on the macro-level of politics, government, and medicine. These determined council members used their professional contacts and resources to travel the globe, researching and garnering statistics on scientific advancements in birth control and their application in countries like Britain, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States. Although there were a few ideological discrepancies, the Association additionally decided to join the International Planned Parenthood Federation because its international ties and connections added a layer of legitimacy and respectability to the formerly nearly-clandestine French organization. The association also sponsored numerous conferences and debates that were meant to serve an educative function, informing the public about the danger of illegal abortions and the promise of contraception. Their conferences struck a welcoming chord in select echelons of society, however, members of the Association was met with hostility in the countryside, where they were bombarded by eggs and accused of advocating the sexual liberation of women.³²⁵

³²³ Mouvement Français pour Le Planning Familial, *Liberté, Sexualités, Féminisme: 50 Ans de Combat du Planning pour Les Droits des Femmes* (Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 2006): 23-25.

³²⁴ Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, « dix ans de lutte pour le planning familial », *Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial, Dixième Anniversaire*. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand. Dos 614.1 Mou. The association was joined rapidly by Catherine Valabrègue and Yvonne Dornes, who were in charge of the association's publication "*Maternité Heureuse*," and also lawyer Anne-Marie Dourlen-Rollier, who served as the juridical counsel for the movement. Simon, 90.

³²⁵ M.F.P.F., *Libertés*, 25-28.

Weill-Hallé also turned to those in society who were stricken the most severely by the discriminatory and hypocritical law of 1920. Weill-Hallé's primary intention had always been to bring relief and hopefully a chance at happiness to the women of France. It had originally been the words of French women, confided to her in her office, and in letters from hundreds of women around the country that she had received even before the formation of *Maternité Heureuse*, which had stimulated in Weill-Hallé the intense desire to change French society into a place more hospitable for women. After initializing the activities of the organization at the broader level of political policy, Weill-Hallé recognized that the words of these women should be heard by both like-minded women and the broader public. She began to publish these women's testimonials in the journal of the Association with the hopes that their stories and plights could inspire debate, persuade politicians and doctors, and educate a wary public. Perhaps more importantly, Weill-Hallé wanted the women of France to see that they were not alone and that only by standing together and supporting each other could they change their lives. Weill-Hallé had listened to the words of mothers, soon-to-be mothers, and potential mothers for years begging for a solution to their burden of constant childbirth. However she had the strength, courage, and audacity to put women's words in print for the world to see. Weill-Hallé declared, "The daily drama of thousands of French women finally emerges from secrecy."³²⁶

LE MOUVEMENT FRANÇAISE POUR LE PLANNING FAMILIAL

After the Association *Maternité Heureuse* metamorphosed into the *Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial*, the organization set forth several formal statutes

³²⁶ Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, *L'enfant accident*, Collection "Mise au point," dirigée par Michel Salomon (Paris: Société des Éditions Modernes, 1961), Cited in Valabrégué, 110.

which included: studying the problems of maternity, natality and their social, familial, and national repercussions; researching scientific information from France and abroad relative to these problems; researching all of the considerations that could improve the conditions of maternity and births, and partaking in a mission of spreading general and sanitary information and education. With regards to this last statute, the National Federation of the M.F.P.F ordered that all personnel—doctors and educators alike—must respect and observe with the most strict objectivity the moral, religious, and philosophical beliefs of the adherents regardless of their own personal beliefs.³²⁷

The M.F.P.F. organization in Grenoble, however, opened a center that provided not only education, but also contraceptives to women and couples. On 10 June, 1961, the first public reception center for the M.F.P.F. was opened in Grenoble by Dr. Henri Fabre, a young obstetrician-gynecologist. Henri Fabre was also an anti-cleric so his support of birth control did not stem from a professed morality but instead was spurred by the devastation of suffering and mutilations that he saw from his work with women and his inability to honestly address the concerns, supplications, and questions addressed to him by his female patients. Excited by the creation of the association *Maternité Heureuse* in Paris and by his discovery of vaginal methods of contraception (through conversations with founders Jacques Derogy and Dr. Weill-Hallé), he immediately joined the association and coordinated meetings with a group in Grenoble who were also members. After two years of debate, this team became tired of “polemic exchanges” and deeply desired “to engage in a more concrete action in favor of ‘conscious maternity.’”³²⁸ Fabre explained that the group in Grenoble had undertaken the “difficult” and back-breaking

³²⁷ Simon, 90.

³²⁸ M.F.P.F., *D’une révolte à une lutte*, 99-101.

work of creating a center because they believed that abortion was a true social illness and that repression of abortions (for instance when the Vichy government guillotined an abortionist in 1943) was completely ineffectual.³²⁹ Instead, the group trusted that the best way to lower the incidence of unwanted pregnancies was to “...instruct couples and to give women the means to protect themselves, without danger and without deceit.”³³⁰ Instructing the public was as important for the group in Grenoble as it was for the National administration in Paris because Fabre and his colleagues had discovered that the “effectiveness” of the methods of contraception the center offered correlated directly with the amount of time they spent educating the woman or the couple on how to use them.

The National administration of the M.F.P.F. disapproved of the project because of the possibility that the Grenoble section’s actions could jeopardize the entire movement. However, Grenoble’s tenacity convinced the Board to accept their actions on the condition that the group in Grenoble took full responsibility for the opening of the center and assumed the sole risk of compromising their careers.³³¹ The team fully expected that the Center might be shut down for endangering public order, particularly if their Catholic opponents staged major demonstrations.³³² The inauguration was kept strictly secret until eight days before the event. Although some important people—like the mayor and prestigious local doctors—regretfully declined to attend, many went out of their way to be present at the inauguration like pastors, superintendents of schools, and the mayor’s

³²⁹ Fabre, 7.

³³⁰ Henri Fabre, “Le Planning Familial : L’Expérience de Grenoble,” Extrait du livre des rapports des journées médicales de France et de l’Union Française, Session de Nancy 28 June- 1 July 1962, 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 103.

³³¹ M.F.P.F., 99-105.

³³² The next year the three founders of the center in Grenoble, H. Fabre, Georges Pascal, and D. Trémaux were ordered to appear before the judge of instruction by the Minister of the Interior. They demonstrated to the judge that the actions undertaken by the M.F.P.F. were performed to fight against illegal abortions. M.F.P.F., 102.

assistant. However the most important personalities to attend were Dr. Weill-Hallé and Jacques Derogy as well as prestigious and powerful members of the I.P.P.F., Joan Rettie and Conrad Van Emde Boas, whose presence indicated an important high-level support of the project by the National and International Federations. Another essential ingredient of the inauguration was the presence of local, regional, and large national newspapers and journals, who, with the exception of Catholic publications, all reported favorably on the center's activities in Grenoble. Although papers on the left—like *France-Observateur* and *L'Express*—were the most glowing in their reports, the most important journalistic presence at the event was *Elle* magazine with its large base of female subscribers. Because advertising the center would risk breaking the 1920 law prohibiting propaganda, the center needed to rely on the press to spread the news of its existence and the readership that they most needed to reach was the women of France.³³³

The Grenoble center included two distinct operations coexisting within the same organization. There was an informational office, which was staffed by a hostess who would welcome clients. There also existed a Medical Studies Committee specializing in eugenics, which comprised twenty-one doctors in the Grenoble area. A nurse represented this committee at the center. The hostess and the nurse received clients, provided them with basic information, and if their case were pressing, would furnish the woman with a list of doctors who were able to prescribe contraceptives. All women who desired contraception were obligated to undergo a careful interview process and a thorough medical evaluation.³³⁴

³³³ M.F.P.F., 102-103.

³³⁴ M.F.P.F., 115-116. At the center in Paris, the hostess would only provide the name of one doctor. Quite similar to the functioning of the French Resistance, this created “cells” that guaranteed that if

Perhaps not surprisingly, only contraception for women was advised at the center. Fabre explained that although twenty million condoms were sold every year in France, (they were promoted to slow the spread of venereal disease), this number was insignificant compared to the number of couples that wished to avoid pregnancy each year. Fabre clarified that although women might accommodate their use (“because they would be delivered from an obsession”—that of getting pregnant), “...the man refuses this barrier that dulls the sensations and gives him an impression of solitude.”³³⁵ A letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* confirmed women’s frustration over men’s reluctance to wear condoms complaining, “Calendars don’t work, men don’t want to condoms... What is one to do?”³³⁶ Protestant psychiatrist, Dr. Micheline Guiton-Vergara noticed a continuation of this idea that avoiding pregnancy was the woman’s responsibility, when she analyzed the high prevalence of tubal ligation versus vasectomies in French postwar society.³³⁷ Although giving women access to vaginal contraception gave women more control over their sexualities and destinies, it is alarming that condoms were not also promoted as another efficient means to control pregnancy simply because their use might hinder a man’s pleasure. The unwillingness of many men to consider a sexual sacrifice and the tendency of the medical profession to support this trend, show that although they had attained the vote after the war, women were still second-class citizens in France,

one doctor was apprehended, the other doctors would still remain free. The individuals working at the centers worried about denunciations, informers, the police, husbands, and fathers.

³³⁵ Henri Fabre, “Le Planning Familial : L’Expérience de Grenoble,” Extrait du livre des rapports des journées médicales de France et de l’Union Française, Session de Nancy 28 June- 1 July 1962, 3. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 103.

³³⁶ Letter to *Maternité Heureuse* from a woman in Grenoble. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

³³⁷ Guiton-Vergara, “Aspects psychologiques du contrôle des naissances,” in *médecine moderne et respect de la vie, Enquête et Conclusions du VIème Congrès Médico-Social Protestant du contrôle des naissances aux limites extrêmes de la vie* (1957), 134.

whose bodies men believed they had the power to control, manipulate, and modify at their whim.

The organization in Grenoble subverted the law of 1920 with a close examination of the law's text. Fabre claimed that at first he believed, with everyone else, that they were doing something completely illegal by providing women with vaginal contraceptives.³³⁸ However, one day Master Eynard,³³⁹ member of the Bar Association of Grenoble and the association's judicial counsel, explained that the use of contraceptives was not mentioned in the law and therefore a doctor could prescribe contraceptives to his patients. Eynard highlighted that the law of 1920 barred propaganda uniquely. He argued that it would be unreasonable to liken the actions of a physician prescribing a contraceptive for a patient to an act of propaganda if the patient had come to him with this intent and of her own accord.³⁴⁰ Maitre Eynard also emphasized that the law neither prohibited the sexual education of women and couples, nor the establishment of a public health facility.³⁴¹ Fabre insisted that the center followed the letter of the law by never providing information to the public, but instead, relaying this information only to people who had demanded admission and had been registered as members of the association.

The contraceptives themselves were hard to obtain. After the examination to determine her size of diaphragm, the association member would order the apparatus from England (where the diaphragms were being manufactured). She would then send an international money order which indicated that she was subscribing to an international

³³⁸ Fabre, 6, BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 103.

³³⁹ *Maitre*, or Master is a title bestowed upon a barrister in France.

³⁴⁰ Madame. Eynard. Cited in Valabrègue, 136.

³⁴¹ Madame. Eynard. Cited in Valabrègue, 136.

journal. The diaphragms were then smuggled into France by the M.F.P.F. along black-market routes through Geneva, by personnel in their handbags or in the hems of their skirts, and later, with the services of a professional smuggler in carts of hay.³⁴² The spermicidal jelly used with the diaphragms was especially susceptible to being confiscated by customs officials on the way into the country. After many false starts, the Center in Grenoble succeeded in manufacturing an effective spermicidal jelly which needed to be used with the diaphragm and could be ordered by each member.³⁴³

After realizing that French women and the M.F.P.F. had succeeded in undermining the archaic legislative, medical, and political systems in France and that contraceptives were now part of the public domain, several groups performed a complete reversal of doctrine, in order to regain power and control. On the legislative front, a political coalition of the center and the right had formed that realized the practicality of supporting a law legalizing contraception. This coalition decided to support the issue primarily because people lost respect for laws and a legal system that people flouted on a daily basis. Insisting that a government could not tolerate this type insubordination, Jean-Marcel Jeanneney, Minister of Social Affairs asserted:

. . . It is always very bad, morally and civically, for a law to exist that . . . is treated like it does not exist...it is the respect of the law and the legislator that is hurt by this One can not supervise or regulate that which is legally forbidden but that everyone tolerates.³⁴⁴

³⁴² M.F.P.F., 104.

³⁴³ M.F.P.F., 104. A woman needed only one diaphragm but would need renewable supplies of spermicidal jelly so the center in Grenoble found it more practical to manufacture the jelly, rather than try to import it.

³⁴⁴ Jean-Marcel Jeanneney, *Journal Officiel* 60 AN (2 July, 1967), 2578. Cited in Mossuz-Lavau, 57.

Jeanneney's profession indicates that the government still believed that women could not be trusted with contraceptive devices. With the centers in operation, women (and many forward-thinking men) were enlightening women and couples with "the forbidden knowledge" of contraceptives and Planned Parenting and were undermining the archaic laws by purchasing contraceptives abroad. In addition to the supplementary revenue that the government might receive from legalized contraceptives, the government was particularly concerned with the control and supervision of women by regulating the production and distribution of contraceptive devices. It would no longer be acceptable for French women to be running amuck and in order to stem the disorder, the government realized that they would have to accept what they had tried to repress for nearly a century.

The Communist Party (PC) also had a complete about face with regards to contraception, spurred by pressures from within the party and from without. Forced by the in-fighting between doctors and between women in the party and also by the popularity and political clout of the campaign for birth control, the PC was forced after a decade to modify its doctrine to satisfy the needs and desires of their members. Although the party's constituents included the workers that the PC professed to represent, the party doctrine was modified for practical and political purposes rather than as a response to the supplications of the working and lower classes for immediate relief. The PC also sensed a change of direction in the political winds and did not want to lose political strength and legitimacy by alienating themselves from a campaign for birth control that was destined to eventually succeed. In addition to the party's long-term goals of providing for the basic needs of workers, they decided in the mid-1960s to accept a program of short-term relief that included contraception as well as abortion to ameliorate the conditions of the

working-class. In January 1965, nearly ten years after denying contraception to the working-classes of France for political and doctrinal purposes, Vermeersch delineated the new party line by explaining that the fear of motherhood stemmed from social and economic difficulties and by emphasizing that the repressive laws of 1920 had neither quelled the tide of illegal abortions, nor created one new house, school, or daycare. She also insisted that the views of the party had now been reconciled as to what caused the fear of maternity, and that therefore the party could stand united to fight for the right to a “*Libre Maternité*.”³⁴⁵ Instead of displaying introspection into the party’s former refusal to accept contraception for working people for over a decade, this speech tried to validate the PC’s on-going support of the worker and attempted to differentiate the PC from all other parties by showing that they were the first political party to introduce a bill that would allow workers access to *both* contraception and abortion. But the final evidence of the PC’s severe bout of self-denial came at the time of Mitterand’s 1965 meeting at the *Mutualité* when Vermeersch declared, “And thank you, François Mitterrand, for having raised the question of Family Planning in your platform. The PC has always supported this issue...”³⁴⁶

After the AN introduced a popular proposition to modify the law of 1920, the Order of Physicians also realized that it would have to adapt, or they would forfeit any authority when it came to the application of the almost-certain future law. On 4 June, 1966, in order to buy some time, professor de Vernejoul, president of the Council of the *Ordre des Médecins* stated, “....The Council...is considering this problem and...the doctor does not have the right to be impartial [to the problem of birth control] if he

³⁴⁵ Mossuz-Lavau, 39-40.

³⁴⁶ Simon, 95.

wishes to promote the comprehensive health and blossoming of the families for which he is medically responsible.”³⁴⁷ Having reached a decision, on June 18 1966 Professor de Vernejoul clarified that the *Ordre des Médecins* was in favor of revising, but not abolishing the law of 1920, because the Order did not want doctors to become “contraception regulators” in cases where the pregnancies were not medically contra-indicated.³⁴⁸ Additionally the Order demanded the immediate discontinuation of all 85 M.F.P.F. centers in France, suggesting that all contraceptive consultations and prescriptions should be entrusted only to physicians who had been university-trained in hygiene. In this way, the *Ordre de Médecins* could regain control over contraceptive information and use, which had been expanding into the public domain. Yet the Order still advocated contraceptive use for medical purposes only, highlighting each physician’s duty to inform potential contraceptive users of the dangers and inconveniences of many modes of contraceptives, particularly if they were motivated ‘by personal convenience.’³⁴⁹ Countering the Order’s denunciation of the M.F.P.F. centers, in June of 1966, the International Planned Parenthood Foundation was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Eminent Dutch psychiatrist Dr. Van Emde Boas excused the behavior of some doctors that were wary of contraceptives stating:

The resistance of doctors is not an isolated fact. One often forgets that the physician is not a magician who rises above the melee. He is, on the contrary, an ordinary man . . . and . . . has been conditioned around sexuality in the same manner as all other men.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁷ Professeur de Vernejoul. Cited in Simon (1966), 292.

³⁴⁸ M.F.P.F., 147.

³⁴⁹ Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial, *D’une révolte à une lutte : 25 ans d’histoire du planning familial* (Paris : Éditions Tierce, 1982), 146-147.

³⁵⁰ Dr. Van Emde Boas, Colloque sur le Planning Familial, Royaumont, may 1963 (Éditions de Maloine). Cited in Valabrègue, 188.

A young clerk in a round-table discussion on Family Planning also bore witness to certain doctors' lack of sexual education when his stunned doctor refused to discuss the use of the diaphragm when he brought it up.³⁵¹ It would be hard to see a doctor like this harboring a "master plan" to keep women in their place. However, analyzing the long-term behavior of the Order (particularly when the Order followed the exact same pattern when it came to formally approving abortion), it is difficult to believe that the Order was simply a group of doctors resisting contraceptives due to their own repressions over sexuality.³⁵² Catherine Valabrègue also suggested that the issue of contraception (just like that of sex education) caused so much divisiveness, irritation, and snickering and led individuals to completely lose their senses, because emotional factors had just as much of effect as rational considerations when it came to this topic. She found that these resistances (which occurred in doctors as well as their patients) often occurred outside of any medical, religious, or social consideration.³⁵³ An instructor and adherent to *Maternité Heureuse* alluded to this tendency when she told the story of her own small-town doctor, who had avoided giving her any specific information about birth control. The author "dared not" go to the young, new doctor who replaced him, "fearing that he would prove himself to be as immovable as the first, since his wife was already pregnant with her third child."³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ Anonymous male clerk from a middle-class background, Anonymous female medical student, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d'une "Table Ronde" de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 4. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

³⁵² Valabrègue, 188.

³⁵³ Valabrègue, 12. Valabrègue also pointed out that these same emotional reactions occurred in Holland where first center for family planning in the world was established in 1878 and birth control was relatively well-known.

³⁵⁴ A female teacher from la Bouilladisse, B.D. Rhône, 4 March, 1961, 1. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 30.

Discussing the medical resistance to contraceptives in a round-table discussion in 1964, a female medical student declared that there was a type of misogyny inherent in the medical profession (and in medical school) which caused a “total lack of compassion with regards to the suffering of women.”³⁵⁵ She expressed that medical students generally came from wealthy backgrounds and were often Catholic with “a very established and immovable morality.” This early conditioning created male medical students who were incapable of thinking of others, but most especially unable to empathize with “women” and their problems. When she brought up the idea of family planning to one male colleague who had complained about his girlfriend, he reacted “very, very violently” with a categorical refusal, forbidding any further discussion. Since this student was an “intellectual” and a militant leftist, she believed that this rejection represented much more than a moral judgment of family planning and slipped instead into the realm of misogyny.

³⁵⁶

In retrospect, it seems that the primary concern of the *Ordre de Médecins* in the matter of contraception was maintaining control of women and their bodies. These doctors realized that if they delayed their approval, they might lose all power when it came to the application of the *Loi Neuwirth*, so they acquiesced to the legislation. However, their insistence on the abolition of Family Planning Centers clearly focuses on the fear of losing control over the activities of women that were being conducted in these centers, seemingly in defiance of both the medical establishment’s prohibitions and French law. This “rider clause” was a last-ditch effort to reign-in all French women, but

³⁵⁵ Anonymous female medical student, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 4. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

³⁵⁶ Anonymous female medical student, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 4. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

inevitably failed due to the efforts of the M.F.P.F.'s doctors who had circumvented the legal and medical establishments. These doctors thwarted the system, believing that their sworn duty as physicians included helping women to control their fertility and to take control of their physical and emotional lives. These turnabouts in the various echelons of the French government and the medical establishment proved that women (and some like-minded men) listening to women, were able to subvert a system that was no longer working for the women and families of France, and by persevering were able to change the postwar-world into a happier and healthier place for French women and their children.

In October of 1965 Jean-Marcel Jeanneney was pressured to organize a committee to study the birth control pill's effect on, and its consequences for, women. The committee did not include any women. The group concluded that the pill did not represent a health hazard to women. Although the results were available largely only to the medical community, French periodical *Paris-Match* published an article on the results in March, 1966 in an article entitled, "Green light for the Pill." This article stimulated a huge public debate in the newspapers, on television, and in the streets, but the law of 1920 persevered.³⁵⁷

In 1966, Gaullist deputy Lucien Neuwirth submitted a proposal to abolish articles 3 and 4 of the law of 1920, which dealt with contraception. The government accepted the proposal, but wanted to wait for the findings of the Committee on Population and the Family. In January, 1967 this committee reported that they acknowledged the need for contraceptives, but only in order to fight against the dangers of illegal abortions.

³⁵⁷ Claire Duchon, *Women's Rights and Lives in France, 1944-1968* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 183.

However, the Committee officially denied the endorsement of contraception in principle, or as a woman's right, and insisted that they did not support the reassessment of gender, or of the social and sexual roles that many believed would be promoted by the use of the pill. The parliamentary debate over the law re-hashed all of the tired arguments of the left, right, and center (licentiousness, changes in gender roles, prostitution, adultery, etc.), however the law was finally passed in December, 1967.³⁵⁸

The *Loi Neuwirth* was a disappointment to the M.F.P.F. because it stated that contraceptives would be made available only through the pharmacy and by prescription. Minors would still need the written consent of their parents and all publicity for contraception was still banned. De Gaulle refused to reimburse the cost of contraception through social security because he believed that the pill's intended use was for pleasure. Weill-Hallé, on the other hand was pleased with the law, because she had always viewed the question in terms of women's health, not as a political question. She disapproved of the M.F.P.F.'s ideological evolution which included fighting for "a woman's right to pleasure" and "a woman's right to choose" and the Federation's attempt to link a woman's right to contraceptives to the right to abortion. In 1967, Weill-Hallé resigned from the M.F.P.F., the organization that she had created, because of irreconcilable ideological differences.³⁵⁹

WOMEN HELPING THEMSELVES

Although women like Weill-Hallé and those that she attracted to her movement acted decisively and artfully to bring contraception to the women of France, the women whose words changed a nation did not simply wait for salvation to come to them. With

³⁵⁸ Duchen, 184-185.

³⁵⁹ Duchen, 185.

the news of the founding of *Maternité Heureuse*, women acted decisively, reaching out for assistance with the burdens, terrors, and traumas of their lives by writing hundreds of letters to the one association that could give them hope in a world of constant childbirth.³⁶⁰ Women's letters to *Maternité Heureuse* contained several recurring themes including: the child-as-catastrophe; the solitude, shame, fear, and mental anguish women experienced surrounding the forbidden topics of sexuality and contraception; the effect of the fear of pregnancy on conjugal relations; women's physical and mental health; the desired child versus the "accidental child"; and the imperative to have children at a later date due to situation, circumstance, or means. Many of the letters also highlighted the differences and unexpected similarities between women in urban and provincial environments on the topic of contraception.

First, many women conveyed a deep sense of desperation in their letters, driven by the belief that the coming of a child was a catastrophic event. Madame C. from Caen stated:

At thirty years old, I am the mother of four children, and since I lost my parents at the age of 15, nothing prepared me for the responsibility that comes with having children . . . I live in . . . anguish because I can not imagine a fifth child, but what is one to do since the "Method Ogino" has proven ineffective?³⁶¹

Another writer, Madame L, and her husband (both devout Catholics from the Haute Savoie) bemoaned the fact that the Ogino Method had broken down completely in their case since she had already had four live births. As a preventative measure, the couple agreed to have sex only at the commencement of her menstrual cycle, but due to an

³⁶⁰ This study focuses on the letters that discuss contraception, however the letters addressed many different aspects of women's sexuality, sexual education, etc. Not all of the letters were positive. Additionally, some letters were from men, usually the husbands of women who were seeking information on birth control.

³⁶¹ Madame C., Letter from Caen to the journal *Maternité Heureuse*, (received) 18 April, 1967. 1-2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

unexpected menstrual anomaly, she became pregnant yet again. Feeling completely defeated, the woman sank into a deep depression. She disclosed that her children were always sick, her house was in disrepair, the finances were perpetually disrupted, she had renounced even the slightest personal pleasure, and she had become, "... a woman who knows nothing more than vomiting and crying," who was beneath any ambition to educate her children, and for whom life had become unlivable.³⁶² She begged the association to help her prevent this from ever happening again. Horrified with herself she exclaimed, "I never read any more, I do not visit anybody, my memory and my reason are paralyzed, I go almost three days without bathing, what is the use?"³⁶³ This passionate letter implored pleaded the organization for help stating that any assistance from them would seem like "an impossible dream."³⁶⁴ One rural woman believed that a new pregnancy would be such a catastrophe, that she "ran away" from her husband and had no intention of ever recommencing sexual relations with him, "at any price." However, the price was high. Her health deteriorated, she fell into a nervous depression, and there was a malevolent air around the house because she and her husband fought constantly about the enforced abstinence. Her outlook on life was bleak when she watched her own daughters growing up and thought that they would soon have to deal with the same ordeal themselves.³⁶⁵ Madame S. from Versailles, declared that although she had been dissuaded by her doctor from having more children after the second, she had been fortunate enough to bring four, gorgeous boys into the world. She grieved that

³⁶² Madame L., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Seyrod, 10 November, 1960, 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

³⁶³ Madame L., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Seyrod, 10 November, 1960, 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

³⁶⁴ Madame L., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Seyrod, 10 November, 1960, 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

³⁶⁵ Anonymous rural woman. Cited in Allauzen, 158-159.

“she lived in anguish because another pregnancy would be catastrophic for her health and would disturb the equilibrium of her home.” Madame S. begged the association to advise her; “to give her the tranquility to be able to live freely, dedicating herself to her family without the constant fear of having it all disintegrate between her fingers.”³⁶⁶ This belief in the child-as-catastrophe haunted French women in the post war, who pleaded in their letters for assistance to the one association that listened to them and offered them the hope for a new life.

Many women spoke of the solitude, shame, and anguish aroused by the silence that surrounded topic of women’s sexuality and contraception in France. Some of this silence around sexuality and birth control had its roots in religion. A woman from Seyrod, in the Haute Savoie described how she was so blown-away by the article by Jacques Derogy that she cried profusely because it “touched on a problem that for her was very painful.”³⁶⁷ Being a devout Catholic, Madame L. had already borne her sixth child in six years of marriage, and she would have had seven if she had not suffered an involuntary miscarriage with her first pregnancy (two weeks after her marriage). Immediately after the birth of her second child, she became pregnant with the third, and was filled with “...despair and disgust since [I] was wounded by my immense portliness (I gained 20 kilos for the third child) and the reduction of my capacities.”³⁶⁸ When she became pregnant with the fourth, she did everything she could to terminate the pregnancy: taking strong doses of quinine and hormonal injections without success. The only reason

³⁶⁶ Madame S., Letter from Versailles to the association *Maternité Heureuse*, 1. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

³⁶⁷ Madame L., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Seyrod, 10 November, 1960, 1. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

³⁶⁸ Madame L., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Seyrod, 10 November, 1960, 1. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

she did not resort to “other methods” was because of her “fear of dying in a state of mortal sin,” her fear of leaving her three small children alone, and lastly her fear of deforming the child without actually causing a miscarriage.³⁶⁹ One must weigh this woman’s struggle to balance her religious beliefs with her desperation not to have children, against the views of other pious Catholics. A twenty-five-year-old wife wrote to the editors of the women’s magazine *Marie-Claire* for marital advice, bemoaning her Catholic mother-in-law’s belief in abstinence as a form of birth control. The mother-in-law had inflicted a life of celibacy on her own husband for over twenty-six years.³⁷⁰ The young wife was frightened to visit her priest because she believed he would likely say the same thing as her mother-in-law. Instead, she begged the editors for assistance, “What should I do with the situation as it is? I would choose my husband whom I love, with whom I am happy and satisfied, without a doubt, but I would live in fear...”³⁷¹

This fear of pregnancy often led women to submit themselves to a life of solitude, wallowing in their own hardship and misery. In some families though, the husband did take part in the stress of the household. One husband appealed to Catherine Valabrègue for help, revealing that he could not sleep at night because his wife had threatened to commit suicide when she became pregnant with her fifth child. This husband might have left for work each day, but he carried with him a bundle of fears. He worried about his wife’s burden, her health (she had undergone a surgery in which one of her lungs was

³⁶⁹ Madame L., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Seyrod, 10 November, 1960, 1. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

³⁷⁰ Anonymous letter cited in Marcelle Auclair, “Le Contrôle des naissances, Le point de vue de l’Église,” 38-41, *Marie-Claire* (June 1956), 40.

³⁷¹ Anonymous letter cited in Marcelle Auclair, “Le Contrôle des naissances, Le point de vue de l’Église,” 38-41, *Marie-Claire* (June 1956), 40.

removed), and her sense of desperation that might lead her to one day carry out her threat and leave his four sons without a mother.³⁷²

Although many different women complained about the fatigue of their lonely vigil, women living in an agricultural setting lived a particularly hard lot, because rural France was very religious and strictly enforced traditional gender roles. A woman from the countryside described her desperation:

At twenty-three I have four children The life that I live is saturated with fatigue and irritation. I can not do it anymore and if I could only be sure to see an end to all of these troubles, to all of this work, where every month there are the same days of anguish when one waits for one's period to arrive, where one becomes scared of a new pregnancy. In these conditions, is life worth living? Me, I cry out no, and what can I do? ³⁷³

Her body temperature affected by influenza, this woman's method of birth control failed again, and she became pregnant for the fourth time. She hid her pregnancy and tried to abort it. She said, "Me, who would have been shamed to even think of such a thing, I had arrived at this."³⁷⁴ Not surprisingly, some women from provincial areas began to regard their situation as analogous to the animals and equipment on the farms they lived on. One woman from the country recounted that she was exhausted most days. Her husband left her in every morning and did not return until evening. She expressed that she felt like a "machine for bringing children into the world." After the woman's doctor "just mocked

³⁷² Anonymous letter to Catherine Valabrègue. Cited in Valabrègue, 146.

³⁷³ Anonymous rural woman. Cited in Allauzen, 155-156.

³⁷⁴ Marie Allauzen, *La Paysanne Française aujourd'hui*, Collection Grand Format Femme, edited by Colette Audry (Paris : Société nouvelle des Éditions Gonthier, 1967), 155-156. Allauzen printed the letters of many woman from rural areas which were included in a survey conducted by Catholic bulletin *Clair Foyer* in 1967 called *3,000 foyers parlent*. Clair foyer had 300,000 subscribers and was read by 1,500,000 readers each month uniquely from the rural setting. The responses from the survey came primarily from Catholics in the most religious areas of France, with the largest majority (39.05%) from cultivators or agricultural employees but also from merchants, bosses, non-agricultural workers, clerks, and liberal professionals. Allauzen noted the bravery of the monthly periodical for tapping into a subject that had been silenced by a climate of "reticence" and "malaise." Allauzen, 149-154

her” when she asked him for advice, she finally had to ask, “To whom should I turn?”³⁷⁵

Another rural woman played on this idea of feeling like a baby-making machine, wishing that she could escape into solitude. She declared:

When the children were so close together and I would go to the stable, I would be jealous of the cows, who, after calving each year, could at least deal with their bitterness without being tormented by the bull, . . . work, worries . . .³⁷⁶

She asked herself if a human being could sink any lower. These women’s “innumerable” and “pain-ridden” voices were culled from a social stratum that was normally reserved and discreet. These women were finally able to put into words the pain, terror, and obsessions that had been haunting them and this was the first step towards healing.

The fear of pregnancy also destroyed all hope of conjugal intimacy, causing deep rifts in the family lives of many of the writers. A letter from a young woman to Marie-Claire expressed fear at having to tell her newly-wed husband that she was pregnant, because they had hoped to spend their first year of marriage, “as lovers.” Although he wanted children later in life, he had told her that he would be jealous if she ever had an infant to care for, so she was frightened at his reaction to her pregnancy after only two months of marriage, exclaiming, “What if he does not love me any more?”³⁷⁷ Marcelle Auclair’s response to this young woman was, “Fear nothing: whatever the circumstances, there is no man that would not be proud at the announcement of his first child.”³⁷⁸ Other cases were more serious. Simone T. wrote to Marie-Claire relating that she was twenty-three years old, married at nineteen, and already the mother of four children. She and her

³⁷⁵ Anonymous rural woman. Cited in Allauzen, 156.

³⁷⁶ Anonymous rural woman. Cited in Allauzen, 157.

³⁷⁷ Anonymous letter to *Marie-Claire* (June, 1956). Cited in Marcelle Auclair, « Le Contrôle des Naissances, Le point de vue de l’Église, » *Marie-Claire* (June, 1956), 38.

³⁷⁸ Auclair, 39.

husband had married for love, “full of courage for life,” and they had a wonderful relationship. He “never hesitated” to give her a helping-hand around the house, helping her with dinner if she had to tend to the children.³⁷⁹ She related:

. . . When I came home from the hospital with my newborn I cried. I was worn out with fatigue When my husband next approached me, I told him, ‘Go elsewhere!’ He was furious . . . and he went to complain to her mother. She reproached me soundly But those who give advice do not have to pay the price”³⁸⁰

Valabrègue told the story of another depressed mother who had had five children and then went on to experience a series of “fausses couches” or “miscarriages,”³⁸¹ which might or might not have been voluntary. Her husband had begun beating her (in front of the terrorized children), because her fear of becoming pregnant had caused her to terminate all sexual relations with him.³⁸² Another horror story depicted by Valabrègue was about a Catholic family in which three children had been born and the woman refused to have any more. Being a devout Catholic, her husband refused any method of contraception and decided instead upon abstinence. A few years later, the woman took a lover who acquiesced to using birth control, and when the husband found out, he committed suicide.³⁸³ One woman from a provincial area emphasized that for her, true love was a thing of the past because she had grown to hate her husband. She blamed him for her continual pregnancies, stating:

³⁷⁹ Simone T., Letter to *Marie-Claire* (June, 1956). Cited in Marcelle Auclair, « Le Contrôle des Naissances, Le point de vûe de l’Église, » *Marie-Claire* (June, 1956), 39.

³⁸⁰ Simone T., Letter to *Marie-Claire* (June, 1956). Cited in Marcelle Auclair, « Le Contrôle des Naissances, Le point de vûe de l’Église, » *Marie-Claire* (June, 1956), 39.

³⁸¹ In the postwar era, “fausse couche” or miscarriage was a term used by many for either a voluntary, or an involuntary termination of pregnancy.

³⁸² Valabrègue (1966), 140-141.

³⁸³ Valabrègue (1966), 141.

Don't talk to me about conjugal relations, it is a real ordeal for me; as soon as I have to have them with my husband, the idea of having another child obliterates all pleasure and any abandon I might experience....³⁸⁴

She tried to avoid sex with her husband when she could, but she claimed that it was impossible to keep a man at bay for too long, particularly her man. She explained:

. . . Every time that I go to bed, I tell myself: if my husband could be sleeping, I would be so happy; it would be a successful evening and perhaps another pregnancy avoided.³⁸⁵

Some husbands also became so distraught by their sexual relations with their wives (or lack thereof) that they wrote in desperation to the association. One man from Rosny-sous-Bois, in the department of the Seine, wrote to the M.F.P.F., bemoaning the fact that the Method Ogino was so ineffectual and that he and his wife were "...so apprehensive about another pregnancy that all normal married life has become impossible."³⁸⁶

Women's health and mental and physical exhaustion were also primary concerns of the letter-writers. Madame M. from Le Havre was a mother of two who was then using an I.U.D. because she did not want a third child. She had learned, however, from the lives of her grandmother who had borne twenty-six children and her mother who had given birth to nine, that women who had large families were not 'living the dream.' She claimed that unless one was a millionaire, large families meant "work, worry, and fatigue and menaced one's health."³⁸⁷ She insisted that it was impossible to raise so many

³⁸⁴ Anonymous rural woman. Cited in Allauzen, 158.

³⁸⁵ Anonymous rural woman. Cited in Allauzen, 158.

³⁸⁶ Letter to the journal *Planning Familial* by a man in Rosny-sous-bois, 30 March, 1961, 1-2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30

³⁸⁷ Madame M., Letter to the journal *Le Planning Familial* by a woman from Le Havre, 22 July, 1967, 3. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

children in the fashion that they deserved, feed them, and give them a good life, because she had witnessed first-hand the difficult lives of the women in her own family.³⁸⁸

In the letters written to *Maternité Heureuse*, some women complained about misinformation and their confusion about conflicting advice on birth control. Madame R., an English-woman living in Fresnes, wrote to the M.F.P.F. complaining about often contradictory rumors about the efficiency contraceptive methods. She revealed the experience of her friend who had been directed by a midwife to “wash-up” after sex in order to prevent pregnancy, but had been given no specific instructions.³⁸⁹ Additionally, Dr. Guiton-Vergara criticized doctors who provided information on the Ogino Method for their patients who could absolutely not have children. She declared:

The ‘Ogino Method’ is a false security I know few cases in which pregnancies could be controlled using this method It is dishonest to recommend this method to a forty-five-year-old woman, who can not at any price, support another pregnancy.³⁹⁰

Madame M. from Le Havre, wrote to steer other readers away from what she considered bad advice that was given in an editorial printed in the journal. This editorial suggested that women “apply the brakes,” as a method of birth control. Madame M. insisted that ‘applying the brakes’ was not a ‘normal’ method of contraception, particularly if one believed that love had its roots in the desire for one’s husband.³⁹¹

Many of the women who wrote to *Maternité Heureuse* and *Planning Familial* did actually want children but believed that their current situation was not appropriate to

³⁸⁸ Madame M., Letter to the journal *Le Planning Familial* by a woman from Le Havre, 22 July, 1967, 3. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

³⁸⁹ Madame R., Letter to the journal *Planning Familial* by a woman from Fresnes, 2 February, 1961, 1. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

³⁹⁰ Guiton-Vergara, “Aspects psychologiques du contrôle des naissances,” in *médecine moderne et respect de la vie, Enquête et Conclusions du VIème Congrès Médico-Social Protestant du contrôle des naissances aux limites extrêmes de la vie* (1957), 133.

³⁹¹ Madame M., Letter to the journal *Planning Familial* by a woman from Le Havre, 22 July, 1967, 2-3. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

welcome a child into the world. Madame F. from the south of France, wrote that she and her husband had been trying to avoid “accidental babies” for five years, “without really knowing how and with much emotional cost,” for her family.³⁹² They had had two children in the first year of their marriage and were fighting at all costs to not have a third. She appealed to *Maternité Heureuse* for assistance, insisting, “I wish with all of my heart for a happy family,” and highlighting that if they could choose the arrival time of a third baby, they might even reconsider their decision not to have more children.³⁹³ In another letter, a twenty-year old student explained that she and her boyfriend planned to get married in two years after they had completed their studies, but had just begun have sexual relations. Mademoiselle A. was “completely ignorant,” and frightened of them doing something really stupid that would force them to marry sooner, or worse, force her to have an abortion that she was completely opposed to. Her friends to whom she appealed for advice, could provide no answers. She asked *Maternité Heureuse* for assistance because although she foresaw marriage and children in the future, she and her boyfriend wanted to broaden their futures by finishing their respective educations.³⁹⁴

Another woman wrote to Marie-Claire in 1956, desperate to avoid becoming pregnant because her husband had just been promoted to a position in the colonial administration that would require him to go abroad. Madame R. had been married ten years and had two children, one seven and one nine. She realized after a false-alarm, that if she became pregnant she would not be able to accompany her husband abroad. During each of her

³⁹² Madame F., Letter to the journal *Planning Familial* from the Gard, 8 August, 1961, 1-2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

³⁹³ Madame F., Letter to the journal *Planning Familial* from the Gard, 8 August, 1961, 1-2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

³⁹⁴ Mlle A. Madame F., Letter to the journal *Planning Familial* from Lorient, 8 June, 1967? 1-2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

births, complications had arisen that could not have been accommodated in a third-world country. She emphasized:

I live in anguish . . . Perhaps I am more wife than mother but I want to accompany my husband. I believe that my place is next to him. And . . . don't they say that children need a normal family life, that they need their father to be there?³⁹⁵

Denise L. also wrote to Marie-Claire explaining that her husband had entered the military and she had subsequently quit her employment, to be a “true woman” and mother, by his side. They wanted to have at least three children, but were not scared to have even four or five if their economic status permitted. However her husband's meager salary was not enough to support the two of them, so she was forced to take a job to help them survive. This aspiring “true woman and mother” exclaimed, “Look at me...still under the spell of my first and only love, trembling at the idea of [my husband's] furlough and the possible child that might result! In the current circumstances it would be a drama. This is not natural!”³⁹⁶ She completed the letter by insisting that if her husband were home for good they would be absolutely delighted to have a child, but for now, she would do anything to prevent bringing a baby into her world.³⁹⁷ One frantic husband wrote the association, begging that they help him and his wife avoid having a second infant “too soon,” because he was going into the military and he had no idea, “or at least a very bad idea,” of how to impede conception. He explained that he and his wife did want more children but they did not want to commit an “act of catastrophic stupidity” by having his wife become pregnant again before he had performed his military service. He maintained, “...We think it is preferable that a mother has all her time to spend on her children and that that

³⁹⁵ Madame R. Letter to the journal Marie-Claire from Boulogne, June, 1956. Cited in Auclair, 39.

³⁹⁶ Denise L. Letter to the journal Marie-Claire, June, 1956. Cited in Auclair, 39.

³⁹⁷ Denise L. Letter to the journal Marie-Claire, June, 1956. Cited in Auclair, 39.

they are raised in a stable family environment....”³⁹⁸ Madame M. from Longuyon also bemoaned that her two children had been brought into a world not quite ready for them. However, she insisted that an improved situation could make all the difference in the world when it came to a happy family life. Madame M. explained that eleven months after her marriage to a teacher (she had an administration job) she had given birth to a very sickly child and was forced to quit her employment to care for him. She fell into a state of fatigue and deep discouragement with the stress of caring for the infant, but three months later, she became pregnant again, with her second child.³⁹⁹ She characterized the marriage that she had dreamed of for so long as a heavy burden. Madame M. depicted herself and her husband as having had their characters completely changed by these two unexpected births, “...We were soured and envisioned the future without enthusiasm.”⁴⁰⁰ “Very happily” for them and their two children, however, their fortunes improved: they found decent housing, their financial situation ameliorated, and their children matured giving them more liberty. Still, they obsessed over whether another pregnancy would jeopardize their new-found confidence and the “moral and physical equilibrium that they had just painstakingly re-established.”⁴⁰¹ Finally, Madame B. from the Seine, described herself as a “woman of faith,” who accepted her fourth pregnancy as “a test,” however, she had fallen into a “stupor” because her newborn would be welcomed into a two-room apartment with her, her husband, and his or her three siblings. Although she was a practicing Catholic, this woman was a partisan of birth control since, “...it would permit

³⁹⁸ Anonymous letter to the journal *Planning Familial*. Cited in Valabrègue, 144-145.

³⁹⁹ Madame M., Letter to Dr. Weill-Hallé from Longuyon, 2 February, 1959?, . Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁴⁰⁰ Madame M., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Longuyon, 2 February, 1959?, 1. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁴⁰¹ Madame M., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Longuyon, 2 February, 1959?, 1-2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

more families to live more relaxed lives, without the fear of their futures.”⁴⁰² For Madame B., a larger living space would help her child be born into an environment better suited to his or her needs, and would relieve her of much “apprehension and fatigue” because her health was “not flourishing.”⁴⁰³ Corroborating the arguments of Weill-Hallé and the other pro-birth-control protagonists, almost all of these couples wanted children, but they wanted children when they had the economic, physical, emotional, and spiritual means to receive them. The idea for these couples was not to prevent pregnancy, but to postpone it, in order to offer themselves and their children a more sound and enjoyable existence.

Whereas in urban areas, there were pockets of silence and denial surrounding the issues of contraception and sexuality, in the country these subjects were strictly taboo. In an M.F.P.F. round-table discussion on birth control, a woman from a rural area, insisted that people in the country knew nothing about “Family Planning” and if they did, they never spoke of it. This rural woman claimed that only the young people in the country “dared” speak of birth control and amongst the older people it was a “taboo” subject that was never discussed. When asked if women discussed birth control with their doctors, the woman from the country elucidated, “No. No one ever talks about it, even after the third birth, one never asks how to avoid a fourth, never.”⁴⁰⁴

In the urban environment, one found traces of the same taboo, perhaps perpetuated by a shared religion. One middle-class couple in the discussion described

⁴⁰² Madame B., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse*, 14 March, 1961, 1-3. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁴⁰³ Madame B., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse*, 14 March, 1961, 2-3. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁴⁰⁴ Anonymous teacher from a rural area, *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement* (unedited), 7 November, 1964, 2. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

how within their families, birth control and sexuality were taboo subjects and “completely ignored.”⁴⁰⁵ However, the middle-class man was lucky enough to have had several friends in medical school, one of whom provided him Dr. Fabre’s book, *Maternité Consciente* (Conscious Maternity). After taking rare opportunities at work to discuss Family Planning, the young man realized that his colleagues knew nothing about birth control, and concluded that only people that “read” kept abreast of the newest methods. He emphasized however, that even among his friends that were familiar with birth control, few of them knew how to practically apply this knowledge and all of them ignored the existence and goals of the M.F.P.F. For his friends, the M.F.P.F. did not yet exist in the public domain.⁴⁰⁶

In factories, the syndicates (or unions) sometimes tackled the subject of birth control in their meetings, however one worker claimed that the unions were generally concerned with “other problems.” The worker from *Nord Aviation* (Northern Aviation) claimed that he had never heard about birth control in the press, but was first introduced to the topic when Madame Valabrègue came to visit the factory.⁴⁰⁷ He emphasized that there were also many “specialized” employees at the factory, from the Vendée and Bretagne, both of which were very religious and conservative areas in France. These workers came from small villages and were not well-adapted to factory and communal

⁴⁰⁵ Anonymous « employee » from a bourgeois background, Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement (unedited), 7 November, 1964, 3. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40.

⁴⁰⁶ Anonymous « employee » from a bourgeois background, Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement (unedited), 7 November, 1964, 3-4. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40.

⁴⁰⁷ Anonymous « worker » at the Nord Aviation Factory, Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement (unedited), 7 November, 1964, 2. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40.

life. Although they were not at all familiar with birth control, they “practiced abortion on a daily basis.”⁴⁰⁸ The Nord Aviation worker elucidated:

[Family Planning] is a taboo subject. One does not speak of it. One does not dare talk of it with one’s doctor, social assistants, or between themselves. The husband might speak of it at the factory,” but in a jocular and ribald manner.⁴⁰⁹

From these discussions one can see that “Family Planning” was making a very slow progress into the public domain, but that in all social classes of French society there continued to be pockets of silence, ignorance, and resistance, and individuals that ignored, were ignorant of, or fought strongly against the idea of contraception.

Many of the women who wrote letters to *Maternité Heureuse* or the M.F.P.F. were so inspired and emboldened by the work of Weill-Hallé and the hope that the association represented, that they made it their mission to throw life-lines to the women around them by spreading the knowledge of Family Planning. French women created networks to pass on information that had been kept from them by the government with the law of 1920 and by the medical establishment, which was bent on maintaining traditional gender roles by keeping women chained to their reproductive functions. A female accountant, whose husband had told her about Family Planning, dedicated herself to sharing the information to her female colleagues at work. She recalled that it was difficult to bring up the subject and that one needed to really know the person one was talking to. She said that she took advantage of propitious occasions, such as when women were about to get married, to ask whether they wanted children right away. Usually the

⁴⁰⁸ Anonymous « worker » at the Nord Aviation Factory, Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement (unedited), 7 November, 1964, 2. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40.

⁴⁰⁹ Anonymous « worker » at the Nord Aviation Factory, Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement (unedited), 7 November, 1964, 3. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40.

women said that they wanted to wait to have children so that they could deal with the costs of setting up a household, and that was when the woman brought up the subject of family planning. This middle-class woman explained, “Then, once I started speaking on the subject, the reactions were very good, I could address it fully, easily, and they were very pleased to hear a solution. It made them happy!”⁴¹⁰ A multitude of letters also expressed the desire to share the information that had changed their lives. After thanking Catherine Valabrègue for the timely appearance of her piece, *Le Contrôle des Naissances*, with its “healthy, just, and constructive conclusions,” a woman from Auchel, in the Pas de Calais, described how she had already passed the book around to her colleagues and how, after a few preparations, she and her colleagues would be holding meetings for mothers to enlist new members.⁴¹¹ Madame C., from Caen in Normandy, took the responsibility of circulating brochures on the organization because, “...rarely do people have the least notion about Planning Familial.”⁴¹² Madame C. recounted how she and her friends bonded together to give each other support and exchange information (even when they knew nothing about birth control). However, after she had come upon the bulletin by chance, she felt guilty and could not rest until she had helped herself and all of the women she knew to escape from lives of unremitting childbirth. Madame C. explained how she had already shared the bulletin with her friends and expressed:

. . . It is a great comfort to us to know that competent people, full of sympathy and courage, are actively seeking to abolish a ‘taboo’ in which so much moral

⁴¹⁰ Anonymous female accountant from a middle-class background, *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement* (unedited), 7 November, 1964, 4. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

⁴¹¹ Madame A. Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* from Auchel, 22 December, 1960, 3. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁴¹² Madame C., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* from Caen, 18 April, 1961, 3. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

distress is subsumed, and to modify an inhumane law, taking into consideration those for whom this unfortunate circumstance must be interpreted as bad luck, fate, or an unavoidable happenstance.⁴¹³

An older widow from Marseille could also not contain her pleasure at having learned of the existence of *Maternité Heureuse* and wrote to the association. She had learned from a television transmission that in 1953, 63,000 women had died of illegal abortions. Having suffered three “tragic and voluntary miscarriages” herself, she celebrated that perhaps “The younger generation is ...saved,” even though she could no longer use Family Planning herself.⁴¹⁴ She thanked the association for its efforts in providing contraception for the women of France, and declared that she would work tirelessly in the service of publicizing their cause.⁴¹⁵ Another postcard that pictured two young children standing on a beach was sent from a teacher living in Laon, in the north of France. Madame D. had heard a radio transmission advocating birth control and she became determined “...to intensify the education of women on this subject.”⁴¹⁶ To this end, she requested brochures to distribute in the mailboxes of her *habitation à loyer modéré* (H.L.M.), or low-rent housing where, “...children are many and mothers are tired.”⁴¹⁷ Madame R. from Bourges wrote that she had seen an interactive television program on birth control, which had left her both dismayed and encouraged. She was unsettled because of the lack of interest shown by the tele-spectators, but happy to find that society was finally starting to move forward on this topic. She was shocked to find out that the association had

⁴¹³ Madame C., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* from Caen, 18 April, 1961, 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁴¹⁴ Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Marseille, 29 October, 1959, 1. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁴¹⁵ Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Marseille, 29 October, 1959, 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁴¹⁶ Madame D., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Laon, 18 November, 1960, 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁴¹⁷ Madame D., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Laon, 18 November, 1960, 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

existed since 1956, and asked whether this social lacuna on the subject of birth control was due to a lack of publicity.⁴¹⁸ In this vein she dedicated herself to publicizing the work of the M.F.P.F. She too lived in an H.L.M., and vowed to distribute flyers to help alleviate the scenes of misery all around her including: a twenty-three-year-old mother of three; a young father with five children; and also a young mother living in a tiny apartment, who had risked her life trying “all sorts of foolish things” to abort her third child...⁴¹⁹ Madame R. insisted, “It is inconceivable that in the Republican country of France, we subordinate ourselves to Roman law,” and she therefore demanded that those in France who were not of the Catholic faith should “have the right to act with liberty.”⁴²⁰ She committed herself to representing *Maternité Heureuse* and spreading the idea of Family Planning to the people of Bourges. Another adherent from Vabre, in the south of France, supported the work of the association, even though she herself had had six children and was happy to have a large family. She was sensitive to the injustices perpetrated on women by a “retrograde legislation” that sought to impose large families on all French women, particularly because she had nearly died giving birth to her sixth child.

Many of the letters to *Maternité Heureuse* additionally mentioned gaining adherents to the association. Gaining adherents did not entail proselytizing and cajoling individuals to share their beliefs, but instead was about empowering women who were suffering from this “grave injustice.” After recounting a tale of the “disastrous

⁴¹⁸ Madame D., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Laon, 18 November, 1960, 1. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁴¹⁹ Madame D., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Laon, 18 November, 1960, 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁴²⁰ Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by an anonymous woman from Bourges, 19 November, 1960, 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

beginnings” of her married life with her husband, Madame M. from Longuyon assured Dr. Weill-Hallé that she could not think of her life, without rebelling against the hardships she had suffered, and the hardships of all the women who still suffered. She knew that having children too closely together made one resent the children and could “destroy a mother.” She decided that she could no longer stand aside and watch women suffering on a daily basis without acting.⁴²¹ She declared:

Your movement receives my full allegiance; . . . I will henceforth...relay this magnificent idea of family planning far and wide I . . . want to become a link in the chain...that quests for the happiness of all by attacking one of the gravest problems of our suffering humanity.⁴²²

Tired of being denied the information on contraception that would change their lives, women in France became links in a chain of solidarity. Circumventing the law of 1920 which forbade the dissemination of contraception propaganda, many French women took the matter into their own hands by joining *Maternité Heureuse* and dedicating their lives to helping their fellow French women by handing out pamphlets, holding meetings, and discussing Planning with their colleagues, friends, families, neighbors, and acquaintances. French women in the postwar successfully rocked the foundations of the legislative, medical, and political systems by spreading information on contraception, which had been formerly controlled and silenced by a “false prudery”⁴²³ as well as by a traditional system that failed to listen to, or understand their problems.

TAKING STEPS TOWARDS CHANGE

⁴²¹ Madame M., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Longuyon, 2 February, 1959?, 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁴²² Madame M., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Longuyon, 2 February, 1959? 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁴²³ This theme was used consistently by both Germaine de Montreuil-Straus and Pierre Chambre regarding the sexual education of children in France. The term was also highlighted in a letter to the journal *Planning Familial*.

When the M.F.P.F. Orientation Centers opened, many French women were no longer content to let others speak for them, but took bold steps to change their own lives. These women discovered a sense of agency that they had not previously known they possessed. First, the women were emboldened by their desperation and inspired to write letters to newspapers, journals, and to the association *Maternité Heureuse*, in order to plead for an end to their suffering. By putting their fears and feelings of shame into words, their apprehensions were no longer taboo and haunting, but instead metamorphosed into tangible problems that could be conquered. Verbalizing their demons allowed them to work-through the anxiety associated with these fears and helped them to start taking control of their lives.

Furthermore, the women that visited the Planning Centers with the hope of obtaining birth control had to be strong enough to overcome years of repressed fears and shame surrounding their bodies and their sexualities. They had an intense fear of speaking of things that were “forbidden.” Hostesses struggled as how to best introduce technical terms such as: contraception, diaphragm, vagina, sexual relations, and speculum, since traditionally women did not talk about “things like that.” Another difficult challenge laid in the fact that in order to help women use vaginal contraception, hostesses needed to help very repressed women to become acquainted with, and claim ownership of their bodies, particularly their female anatomy which they had been told “was dirty.”⁴²⁴ In order for a diaphragm to be used effectively, women not only had to understand their anatomy, but they had to be willing to use their fingers to properly fit the apparatus in the vagina. Some clients resisted this action saying, “It is necessary for me put my fingers all

⁴²⁴ M.F.P.F., *D’une révolte à une lutte*, 111.

the way into my nature? That I will never do—it is forbidden...”⁴²⁵ Women also had to have the nerve to submit to an intense and interactive gynecological exam, which many women had never before experienced. The hostesses had undergone the examination themselves and understood that patients were deeply “troubled” because they would be naked and forced into a humiliating posture during the examination. One hostess detailed the experience that all women had to undergo to obtain contraception:

The gestures of the gynecologist are simple, neat, and precise. But, despite that, one’s spirit remains troubled and one winces when one hears ‘Here is your size diaphragm, try it yourself. The woman is left alone in her discomfort, her shame. Why? She does not know.’⁴²⁶

French women visiting the clinics also struggled over issues of sexuality. Due to fear and repression many women doubted that they even had an individual sexuality, outside that of their husband. One woman coming for a consultation asked:

Do you believe in love? In pleasure? It has been such a long time that I have acted the part just, ‘so he would be happy.’ Am I frigid? Am I normal? You must understand that at our house, this is never discussed.⁴²⁷

Another young mother explained that after the birth of her baby, she received more pleasure from her baby’s tenderness than from her husband’s embrace. She admitted that she would be relieved if he would take care “of that” elsewhere.⁴²⁸ Other women doubted that they had a right to pleasure. One woman explained:

Maybe it takes me too long to become aroused, this irritates my partner. He injured me by saying, ‘if you loved me, you would enjoy it.’ Often to maintain the peace, I get out of bed, wash up, and caress myself without daring to tell him.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁵ M.F.P.F., *D’une révolte à une lutte*, 111.

⁴²⁶ M.F.P.F., *D’une révolte à une lutte*, 111.

⁴²⁷ Anonymous client. M.F.P.F., 112.

⁴²⁸ Anonymous client. M.F.P.F., 112.

⁴²⁹ Anonymous client. M.F.P.F., 112.

When the hostesses understood and conveyed the idea that there was no set answer when it came to contraception and that each case would be judged individually according to each woman's desires and needs, it became necessary for clients to take a solid assessment of their sexual lives in order to represent themselves effectively. However, this was extremely difficult to do for most French women whose sexual lives had long been relegated to silence and obscurity. It is true that French women in 1961 were absolutely desperate to obtain an efficient means of contraception, but these women found the courage and were psychically strong enough to act in their own behalf. They thereby succeeded in conquering situations, fears, and shameful feelings with a tenacity that they had never known that they had.

After the centers opened, they were inundated with clients, lining the halls and waiting for up to two hours. One center in Paris had so many demands when it opened that the hostess had to work three days without resting, breaking only to eat a meal that the concierge was kind enough to bring up. The center in Grenoble had eighty-two adherents June 1961, but over two thousand clients within eight months of opening the center.⁴³⁰ By January of 1963 the M.F.P.F. in France had sixteen thousand members.⁴³¹ Henri Fabre relayed that women who came to the Grenoble center came from all regions of France and were referred by social workers, doctors, and sometimes even their confessors.⁴³²

The women that came into the centers were terrified to speak with a stranger about things they had never before discussed, even with their husbands. The hostesses who were in charge of welcoming visitors were frightened themselves. They hoped

⁴³⁰ Fabre, 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 103.

⁴³¹ Mossuz-Lavau, 26.

⁴³² Fabre, 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 103.

desperately to not to say anything that would alarm the clients even more than they already were upon entering the building. One hostess explained, “We, the hostesses feel all the anguish in the request, and panic overwhelms us when we imagine that if we don’t know how to respond, the woman will become discouraged and will abandon the idea of birth control.”⁴³³ Hostesses in all the centers were also unsure how to approach delicate subjects. One confessed that when the clients arrived “breathless” and “anguished,” the consultants themselves were anguished. The women that first came to the clinics were mothers of large families who were mostly older than the hostesses. The hostess illustrated, “They were scared, relayed little information, but we sensed that they had a vital need to be there. The individuals that arrived at the center were so closed-off that we finally had to tell them if they would prefer a non-denominational hostess, or a catholic, or a protestant, it was possible.”⁴³⁴

The “hostesses” that welcomed women into the clinics, had hoped to enlighten women by sharing the knowledge of contraception, but quickly realized that their most important role would be to soothe and listen.⁴³⁵ They helped distraught women to voice their experiences, problems, and doubts, performing duties well-beyond mere medical consultations. One hostess described her experience in Grenoble where the center was “...big, grey, and sad....” She explained that she had needed to “reassure” herself that she was doing the right thing by reminding herself that she had attained what she had wished for: to help women understand contraception who had been burdened by its illegality. Also, she said that when “the women came in timidly and did not dare to speak, she felt

⁴³³ M.F.P.F., *«D’une révolte à une lutte*, 112.

⁴³⁴ Anonymous testimony of a hostess at the M.F.P.F., Cited in M.F.P.F., *«D’une révolte à une lutte*, 110-111.

⁴³⁵ M.F.P.F., *«D’une révolte à une lutte*, 113.

so moved by them that she overcame her own fears to assure them and put them at ease.”⁴³⁶ Another hostess said that her clients could not have doubted that she was as emotional as they, because when they came in, she “was shaking like a leaf.” She asked them to sit down and fled behind her desk to “take refuge” because having a wood barrier in front of her made her feel stronger. She remarked that she “...did not understand the reciprocal emotion that was evoked by speaking about contraception, about the methods, about the relations of the couple... in brief, about sexuality.”⁴³⁷ After the adherents had joined the association, one hostess was delighted to say:

Your miseries are over; over waiting in anguish every month for your period, having to pretend to have a headache, [having] to count the days; the fear in your belly that says to you, ‘if I have to submit to intercourse this evening, let it not be the wrong night’, all the while running through your head the recommendations: do not even breathe afterwards, sneeze if possible, quickly wash yourself, quickly get it all out!!!⁴³⁸

The centers gave women a place to voice their deeply guarded secrets and validated clients’ fears by assuring them that these terrible and shameful thoughts and behaviors were not particular, to them but instead shared by all French women because of the prohibition of contraception. In the centers these women could find the sense of release and relief that they had been looking for their entire adult lives. The centers generated the hope in these women that they might one day be able to enjoy a healthy and happy sexuality.

The clientele of the centers were not the only ones that were brave enough and introspective enough to make changes in their views of themselves and the world around

⁴³⁶ Anonymous testimony of a hostess at the M.F.P.F., Cited in M.F.P.F., *«D’une révolte à une lutte*, 110.

⁴³⁷ Anonymous testimony of a hostess at the M.F.P.F., Cited in M.F.P.F., *«D’une révolte à une lutte*, 110.

⁴³⁸ Testimony of an anonymous hostess at the M.F.P.F. Cited in M.F.P.F., *«D’une révolte à une lutte*, 110.

them. The organization's leaders originally envisaged pro-bono psychologists welcoming clients to the centers, but the overwhelming flood of clients forced them to depend on the benevolence of volunteers. The volunteers that they found were primarily non-working mothers with families, who had ties to the intellectual left or to the 'socially-engaged bourgeoisie.'⁴³⁹ The centers' headquarters were managed by personalities from the association *Maternité Heureuse* and other women from diverse walks of life, but all of the women there had had their own experience with obsessing over unwanted pregnancies and some had suffered through illegal abortions. All the contributors shared the belief that contraception was "the revelation that it was possible to live 'a happy sexuality.'"⁴⁴⁰ This group of women was also united by courage, dedication, and the willingness to engage in combat for their convictions, particularly when they were practicing illegal activities. Women sacrificed friends, family, and time with their children and husbands in order to work at the clinic. One hostess emphasized that these women were singled out, not only by the illegality of their actions, but also by contradicting the opinions of many people. She stated:

Working at Family Planning was incompatible with the pursuit of relationships with some people—little by little one discovered that the important thing was not belonging to a certain social class, but to a group that shares opinions and common goals.⁴⁴¹

By choosing to participate in a resistance that undermined the established order, these women came to see themselves as 'pioneers.' These women had the courage step out of the barriers and boundaries that held them into their former lives and metamorphose into

⁴³⁹ M.F.P.F., *D'une révolte à une lutte*, 109.

⁴⁴⁰ M.F.P.F., *D'une révolte à une lutte*, 109.

⁴⁴¹ Anonymous hostess, Cited in M.F.P.F., *D'une révolte à une lutte*, 120.

socially evolved beings. One hostess expressed just this idea declaring, “In exceptional situations one can reach beyond the limits of one’s former self.”⁴⁴²

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir argued that women had never had the means to organize themselves into a coherent group that could say “We.” For de Beauvoir, “[Women] have no past, no history, no religion of their own; and they have no such solidarity of work and interest as that of the proletariat...”⁴⁴³ Instead, women were dispersed throughout the population attached only to certain men—husbands, brothers, or fathers—through relations of residence, housework, economic condition, or social standing. When she wrote this passage in 1949, de Beauvoir could not have envisioned that over a decade later, what would make a “we” out of a diverse group of women from all social and economic classes, classes, and levels of education would be their intense desire to control their lives by controlling their fertility, which is, of course, something that she had advocated all along.⁴⁴⁴ Women talking and listening to other women were able to overcome socio-economic and social differences and see themselves as a group that had been so controlled, devalued, and underestimated by traditional French society, that they had become ignorant about life, their bodies, and their sexualities. They also began to understand the full range of social inequalities for women

⁴⁴² M.F.P.F., «D’une révolte à une lutte», 120.

⁴⁴³ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, translated by H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), xxv.

⁴⁴⁴ Within the M.F.P.F. there were power struggles in many different arenas. The original centers linked to the “*creatrices*” (female founders) of the movement discriminated against those centers that opened later, considering somewhat like “servants.” The most vehement debates came between the hostesses and the *Congrès* (Congress) of prescribing physicians over who should initiate the topic of contraception, the hostess or the physician. Also, many teachers, instructors, and professors joined the M.F.P.F. to serve on “think tanks” performing research for the organization. These groups also ignored the hostesses because of their lack of education and professional experience. Eventually when hostesses started working in teams to combat public and internal hostility and these informal meetings uncovered fundamental flaws in the structures and approaches of the M.F.P.F. that the organization’s leaders eventually had to acknowledge and modify. M.F.P.F., *D’une révolte à une lutte*, 112-121.

in French society as they manifested themselves in women's intense distress over unwanted pregnancies, the prevalence of illegal abortion, and the difficulties of women's daily lives.⁴⁴⁵

WORDS AS POWER

The power in the battle over contraception went to those who were able to define terms, control the dialogue, and convincingly vocalize their beliefs and concerns. Additionally, the power differential was affected by who was able to speak, whether they were heard, how their words were interpreted, and whether their words were co-opted to further social, political, or personal goals. One of the most fundamental debates, therefore revolved around who had the right to define the ubiquitous term "*Maternité Heureuse*," or "Happy Motherhood," and whether their definition was known and accepted by the various professional communities and the general population. In 1964, Andrée Michel and Geneviève Texier argued that "*Maternité Heureuse*" was one of several "natalist" myths, which also included: "The myth of the biological excellence of the pregnancy," "The happy family is the large family," and "the demographic myth of numbers," all of which served to subjugate women in French society. Michel and Texier maintained that the natalist myths:

. . . perpetuate the cult of the Mother...and at the same time they exalt the family Behind the scenes, the male is highlighted, who, proud of his generative power, aspires to mold the family into an instrument that will serve his need for domination, in the economic, social, and political realms.⁴⁴⁶

Michel and Texier elaborated by describing the myth of "*Maternité Heureuse*" as a band-aid that was meant to psychologically ameliorate the lives of women, who had been

⁴⁴⁵ M.F.P.F., «D'une révolte à une lutte», 112.

⁴⁴⁶ Andrée Michel and Geneviève Texier, *La Condition de la Française d'aujourd'hui*, vol. 1, « Myths et réalités, » Collection Femme, Colette Audrey, ed. (Genève : Éditions Gonthier, 1964), 38.

bound to lives as “beasts of burden,” bearing innumerable children. They insisted that a myth “that a priori represents a function as excellent, without caring that the repeated exercise of this function leads to the ruin of the organism,” must be “without a doubt” offered to women as a compensation for their inconsolable lot.⁴⁴⁷ Michel and Texier maintain:

Since numerous gestations seem inevitable, since all expression of personality is forbidden to the woman outside of her maternal activities, it is at least necessary that she is persuaded that she could find happiness in the limited sphere to which she is confined.⁴⁴⁸

Although the myth of “Happy Maternity” had traditionally been promoted in French society, it was reinforced in 1961 when the “familial association,” *Fédération des Familles de France* or The Federation of French Families (established by the Minister of Health and Population) affirmed that it was only in the “fecund” families of France that the “full blossoming” of its members (parents and children) could occur.⁴⁴⁹ Paul Chauchard also attempted to co-opt this idea of happy maternity, but in a form modified to suit his moralist agenda. For Chauchard, a balanced family should achieve “an optimum of fecundity,” which would permit each family to adjust to demographic demands, the “dignity of the mother,” and the education of children. He considered “conscientious procreation,” and “voluntary paternity and maternity” to be:

. . . a human and Christian duty, the child should never be the involuntary and dreaded consequence of an uncontrolled reflexive action. To have children is a grave duty. Maternity must be happy.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁷ Michel and Texier (1964), 44.

⁴⁴⁸ Michel and Texier (1964), 44.

⁴⁴⁹ Michel and Texier (1964), 44.

⁴⁵⁰ Paul Chauchard, *Le Progrès sexuel : Education du cerveau et sexualité adulte* (Paris : Éditions du Levain, 1961), 53.

Catholic writer Dubois-Dumée suggested that instead of lessening the world's population with contraceptives, it was necessary to: build homes and schools; recreate a spirit of solidarity and reciprocal support; create a healthy atmosphere; and fight against hunger on a global scale; all of which could be accomplished with a more efficient exploitation of natural resources and a more equitable distribution of wealth. He argued that in this way, "...the world would not appear too small, the number of abortions would diminish, and families would be truly happy."⁴⁵¹

On the other hand, in 1958 Geneviève Texier defined *Maternité Heureuse* as a maternity that was "subordinated" to the health of the mother, desired by both spouses, and compatible with the family's means. Texier highlighted, "... Improvement in the feminine condition is marked by the passing from subjugated maternity to voluntary maternity," which could only happen with a complete social revolution. She concluded that only when this had occurred, would the world know a true human dignity that had been denied to women for millennia.⁴⁵² Jacques Derogy and Weill-Hallé defined *Maternité Heureuse* along the same lines. Derogy insisted that *Maternité Heureuse* was a goal towards which French postwar society must strive, because maternity should be a "source of human joy" and should not reduce women "to animal servitude."⁴⁵³ To overcome accusations of anti-natalism he insisted that *Maternité Heureuse* was not about limiting births, but about making them "happy events," for all women. He stressed too, that Happy Motherhood was not just about women's ability to space their pregnancies,

⁴⁵¹ Dubois-Dumée, 103.

⁴⁵² Geneviève Texier, « La *Maternité Heureuse*, » *Questions féminines* (1958), 93-94.

⁴⁵³ Jacques Derogy, *des enfants MALGRÉ NOUS, Le Drame intime des couples* (Paris : Les Éditions Minuit, 1956), 242.

but also demanded adequate material conditions: food, housing, decent employment, and the stability of peace.⁴⁵⁴

Weill-Hallé and the other like-minded individuals who banded together to change the law of 1920 and change French society formed an association that they tellingly chose to call *Maternité Heureuse*. When outlining the association's goals, Weill-Hallé illustrated too, that the association's support of Family Planning was not propaganda, was not political in nature, and did not seek to limit births but instead sought to give women and couples medical, psychological, and social assistance in order to create happy and harmonious families.⁴⁵⁵

It seems that the answer to creating happy women, happy children, and happy families can be culled from the words of the French mothers themselves who advocated a combination of the arguments of many of the protagonists of this story. Although some participants in the debate advocated providing lodging, jobs, and social assistance to the poor and others stressed that birth control was the answer, the women directly involved insisted that a combination of Family Planning, help obtaining lodging and the means of subsistence, and familial allocations was the best solution. Madame V. from Grenoble wrote to *Maternité Heureuse* insisting that one could make "happy mothers" if they could:

. . . procreate in freedom;" be assisted in attaining the proper lodging for their family size with a garden or courtyard for children; and could receive weekly social services to help with their heavy housework in order to strengthen their "limited physical and nervous resistance."⁴⁵⁶

In another letter to *Maternité Heureuse*, Madame M. highlighted that she agreed with Jeanette Vermeersch that to overcome social injustice, the government needed to provide

⁴⁵⁴ Jacques Derogy, *des enfants*, 242.

⁴⁵⁵ Weill-Hallé, « Raisons d'être de notre association, » *La Maternité Heureuse* 1 (1956), 3.

⁴⁵⁶ Madame V., Letter from a woman in Grenoble to the association *Maternité Heureuse*, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

its citizens with the means to live decently and to raise one's children in the best conditions possible. However, the writer also insisted that to battle injustice one must assure that women have access to birth control as well. She stated, "It is not logical, it is not human to impose pregnancies on those who do not wish them."⁴⁵⁷ Simone de Beauvoir as well stressed that if society provided for the needs of young couples, they would not have to resort to a type of 'forced procreation,' which, instead of increasing population growth, led to a decrease in the health, mental stability, and the potential of society.⁴⁵⁸

In this debate, men often assumed that they knew better than women what women needed, or insinuated that their problems were inconsequential. For example, one rural woman described how her town doctor gave all women in her town who asked for birth control the same answer: "Go to the pharmacy." This meant purchasing "*la capote anglaise*" (English Hood), or condom. He provided this same answer for both her friend who had had three children (the last two twins) and also the author's own sister who also had three children. The rural woman explained that the doctor (an older man without children) would hear no discussion, cutting off their protests with a curt, "Deal with it."⁴⁵⁹

Speaking at the Sixth Protestant Medical-Social Congress in the mid-1950s, psychiatrist Micheline Guiton-Vergara commented on men's resistance to birth control hypothesizing that men resisted granting women access to birth control for several

⁴⁵⁷ Madame M., Letter from a woman in Longuyon to the association *Maternité Heureuse*, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁴⁵⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, preface in *La Grand peur d'aimer*, 11-12.

⁴⁵⁹ Anonymous teacher from a rural area, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d'une "Table Ronde" de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 2. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

reasons, some conscious and some unconscious. Consciously, some men thought that one should obey the law; or they wanted more children so that obstetricians would have clients; or they believed, ‘the more children, the stronger the nation.’. However, some men also came out against birth control for unconscious reasons. According to the doctor, some men were scared of women and their genitalia, believing that a fear of pregnancy might keep their women faithful, or that women’s unleashed sexuality “would crush poor men.” For others it was a denial of accountability, for they thought that pregnancy was a woman’s responsibility, and that women needed to “deal with it themselves.” This denial could also be an unconscious expression of sadism (wanting to get back at women by keeping them pregnant); or a fear of impotence (“the more children I have, the more virile people will think I am”).⁴⁶⁰ The doctor was astounded by men’s lack of compassion for the plight of French women and professed, “...I am stunned that alone, men have the right to give their opinion on this question [of birth control], when they have never had the occasion to be ‘with child.’”⁴⁶¹

Marcelle Auclair also expressed disbelief that French men seemed to have so little understanding or compassion for their partners’ problems. She claimed that the magazine *Marie-Claire* received an enormous volume of letters regarding motherhood and birth control from women who were suffering from nervous or physical exhaustion from repetitive pregnancies that were too-closely-spaced. Auclair was shocked that so many women’s husbands refused to take any precautions before sexual relations, although they agreed that another child would be opportune at that time. When French women expressed their fears over pregnancy, the most common response from French men—

⁴⁶⁰ Micheline Guiton-Vergara, 134-135.

⁴⁶¹ Micheline Guiton-Vergara, 133.

boyfriends, husbands, doctors, psychiatrists, scientists, politicians, religious leaders—was “work it out yourself,” or “deal with it.”⁴⁶²

Rather than men not hearing women’s words, men also might have heard women’s words and chosen consciously to ignore them. As Foucault explains, this power-knowledge relationship has a long history in the West, where the Catholic confessional was used to form a *scientia sexualis*, which was hoped would establish “the truth” of sex. In the confessional relationship, the member of the discourse receiving the confession possesses the power in the dyad. The confessor must unveil and offer his or her private stories, fears, and deepest desires, either voluntarily or under duress, for examination by the Priest. The Priest, “as the interlocutor and authority that requires the confession”, then has the power to ignore, judge, chastise, forgive, console, or punish as he sees fit.⁴⁶³ In the case of French women in the postwar, women voluntarily or involuntarily (forced by the pain and anguish they were suffering from unrelenting childbirth) offered their words, first to their husbands and male doctors and then in writing. The act of confessing engendered a power-knowledge relationship in which the husband or doctor, in his position of power, listened to the words, chose to ignore them, judged the woman for being selfish, non-maternal, or unwomanly, and was then able to command her to, “Deal with it,” without a second thought, following centuries of confessional history. French women’s pain and hardship, which forced them to offer their confessions, worries, and supplications to the men in their life, recalls Foucault’s

⁴⁶² Auclair, « Le Contrôle des naissances, » 40.

⁴⁶³ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 61-62.

insistence that confession has historically gone hand-in-hand with the use of threat, violence, and torture.⁴⁶⁴

Weill-Hallé expressed her own incredulosity that prior to her own efforts, no one (not their husbands, fathers, friends, government representatives, priests, or doctors) had come to the aid of these women who fought blindly “...against a destiny that they judged to be unacceptable.”⁴⁶⁵ From early in her crusade, Weill-Hallé had found the words to describe, but not to explain, the “indifference” and “hostility” that men in France displayed towards their female companions in distress.⁴⁶⁶ She criticized Catholics like Révérend Père Riquet (her former Chaplain) for “being deaf to the women’s screams on the operating-table” and for making easy pronouncements regarding women’s behavior without listening to and “seeing” real women’s plights. After viewing the coldness with which her colleagues judged behaviors that they could not possibly understand, Weill-Hallé realized that leaving French women to bear these hardships in misery and isolation compromised too many social and moral values. Thus, she decided to share these women’s voices, rather than turn her back and let them continue to suffer in silence.

Weill-Hallé believed that women’s words were the focus of this debate, whether they were spoken in her office by her clients or written in letters to the Association *Maternité Heureuse*, or the “Centers of Hope.”⁴⁶⁷ She listened to women, internalizing their desperation, and knew that she was humanly obligated to make the world a better place for women. Dr. Weill-Hallé was also placed in a position of power by listening to

⁴⁶⁴ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 58-59.

⁴⁶⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, preface in *La Grand peur d’aimer*, 10-11.

⁴⁶⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, preface in *La Grand peur d’aimer*, 10.

⁴⁶⁷ M.F.P.F. «D’une révolte à une lutte», 104. “Center of Hope” was how one woman referred to the M.F.P.F. center that opened in Grenoble.

women's confessions, but instead of judging and condemning these women she chose instead to bear witness, defending their honor, dignity, and human rights in her battles against the entrenched powers of Church, State, and the medical establishment.⁴⁶⁸ Weill-Hallé explained that after Pope Pius XII had solidified his pronouncement on conjugal morality in 1951, many countries had begun debating the issues surrounding contraception. However, in France,

. . . a country where abortion rages in all social classes and easily escapes . . . sanctions, the question of birth control is . . . a "Taboo" subject, particularly among physicians, and . . . threatens to . . . discredit . . . those who attack . . . [the problem].⁴⁶⁹

Simone de Beauvoir also found it shocking that the horrible stories of these women had not scandalized public opinion. However, De Beauvoir realized that the explanation for this passivity " . . . was the silence that enshrouded this taboo subject; only a few psychiatrists, . . . doctors, . . . [and] social assistants know the full extent of the damage: and almost no one speaks of it."⁴⁷⁰ Weill-Hallé indicated her belief that women's impeded access to contraception related less to an out-dated and repressive law, than to 'a taboo' that obscured not only the will of the masses, but also that of the officials of the nation. She claimed too, that only a taboo would bathe the problem in shadows so dense that obstetricians and gynecologists dared not speak out, even while witnessing the daily painful dramas of women. She pointed out that the few who had made "courageous early attempts" to address the problem had had "their throats slit" by the "violent" and

⁴⁶⁸ Foucault distrusted any sort of public discourse and thus would not have found Weill-Hallé's transmission of women's words to the greater public liberating for the women concerned.

⁴⁶⁹ Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, "Le Contrôle des naissances à l'étranger et la loi Française de 1920," Extrait de *La Semaine Médicale* 10 (22 March, 1953), 1. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue.

⁴⁷⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, preface in *La Grand peur d'aimer*, 12.

“decisive” stance” taken against contraception by the Catholic physicians.⁴⁷¹ The knowledge of French women’s need gave Weill-Hallé the emotional strength and courage to raise her voice, promoting women’s health through access to contraception.

Not only did Weill-Hallé did speak out for women in many of her works, she also directly transcribed women’s words from her case files, so that the women of France could tell their own stories. Relinquishing her power as confessor, Weill-Hallé set their words free, breaking the silence regarding sexuality and contraception in the postwar. She printed their words in the hope that their stories of terror and horror would impress upon the French public and the world that their stories deserved compassion and action, not judgment, silence, and disdain. She printed the words of women from many different backgrounds: those on the political left, on the right, the rich, the poor, the believing, and the non-believing, as well as the words of ‘engaged’ Catholics. She highlighted that the women’s words that she printed were not for the doctors, lawyers, and reverends who had served as cold judges, but for those who might not know the answer, but were willing to “see.”⁴⁷² Additionally, before printing French women’s words, she conditioned her readers, instructing them in the art of listening. Weill-Hallé explained that in order to engage with these women whose words she shared, the reader needed to create a “blank slate” divesting him or herself of all their moral and social prejudices. And then, one needed to be quiet and listen.⁴⁷³

In the end, one could say that the women in France staged a resistance against a society that chained them to their traditional roles as wives and mothers by demanding

⁴⁷¹ Weill-Hallé, *La Grand peur d’aimer*, 141.

⁴⁷² Weill-Hallé, *La Grand’ peur d’aimer, Journal d’une femme médecin*, 26-27.

⁴⁷³ Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, *La Grand’ peur d’aimer, Journal d’une femme médecin* (Paris : René Julliard, 1960), 28.

control of their reproductive functions. As sociologist Chombart de Lauwe expressed in a 1966 issue of *Le Monde*:

Through contraception, it is the image of the couple, of marriage, of the family, of male and female roles that is questioned . . . Giving a woman the freedom to choose when to have children is to modify relations between the sexes and to permit a true equality which everyone talks about but few men really want.⁴⁷⁴

Women wrote letters, handed out leaflets and brochures describing the activities of the M.F.P.F., and formed women's networks to share information that had been secreted and silenced by a "false morality"—information that they believed all women had the right to know. Women helped establish the Family Planning Centers and then worked as founders, doctors, and hostesses, knowing that at any time they could be arrested. However, they also believed that birth control could offer other French women a chance for a new life and were willing to risk their freedom. The organizational structure of the centers modeled those in the French Resistance, where the hostesses at the clinics served as the "*cheville ouvrière*," or mainspring of the operation. Similarly women had formed the infrastructure of the French Resistance, transferring information, supplies, and weapons disguised by their "frail womanhood," and private sphere gender roles as wives and mothers. As one often finds in resistance networks, the clinic's clients were only given the name of one doctor, so that the integrity of the center would remain even if one doctor was compromised. Women's postwar information networks were also reminiscent of those in the French Resistance where female adherents to the M.F.P.F. carried and shared clandestine information, delivered brochures and booklets, held meetings to relay information, and also clandestinely "imported" diaphragms from England, hidden on

⁴⁷⁴ Chombart de Lauwe, *Le Monde* (13 April, 1966). Cited in Claire Duchén. *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France 1944-1968* (New York, Routledge, 1994), 184.

their persons or in their luggage. Women talking to other women, listening to other women, and publishing the words of women without a public voice mandated change in a repressed postwar world.

By working together, and enlisting the aid of like-minded men, women openly rebelled against the constricted postwar society in France long before the revolutions of 1968. These women's efforts successfully culminated in the passing of the *Loi Neuwirth* in December 1967, which effectively legalized contraception. However, this law did not automatically change French society with its traditionally entrenched moral and social codes. The implementation of the law was resisted by many legislators as well as the medical establishment, which was still largely hostile to the idea of Family Planning.⁴⁷⁵ It would take almost five years for the *Loi Neuwirth* to be completely enacted. Even after the last decrees were finally put into law in 1972, the ban on the publication of information regarding contraception greatly hindered its diffusion to the greater populace. An INED (National Institute for Demographic Studies) survey conducted in 1979 showed that the vast majority of French women had not been using "modern" methods of contraception in the decade following the passing of the law.⁴⁷⁶ In fact, it was not until 1988 that a study showed that 65% of women in France between the ages of eighteen and forty-nine were using an effective means of birth control.⁴⁷⁷ Although French women's activism was able to cause the original fissures in the postwar conservative order well before the revolutions of 1968, those who fought to maintain the

⁴⁷⁵ Duchen, 185.

⁴⁷⁶ Henri Leridon, « Les pratiques contraceptives en France » *Population et sociétés* 120 (Janvier, 1979). Cited in Mossuz-Lavau, 74.

⁴⁷⁷ Mossuz-Lavau, 82.

status quo in French society retained enough power to hinder the full fruition of these women's efforts for over two more decades.

CHAPTER THREE

Abortion in the Postwar: Experience and Debate

“Sir, I will not be able to come in tomorrow: I will be helping my sister-in-law have her miscarriage.”⁴⁷⁸

-Parisian cleaning lady to her employer in the 1950s

“Should women be killed because they don’t want children? This seems contrary to our mores.”⁴⁷⁹

-Professor Piédelièvre

When her intrauterine device failed in the late 1960s, Madame V. was thirty-three and had already had three beautiful children. Her husband reacted “very unfavorably” to the news of her pregnancy claiming his financial difficulty, sickness, and old age made it impossible for their household to support another child. Although Madame V. resisted emotionally, she was eventually convinced to seek out an abortion in a neighboring country where abortion was legal. She recalled that for her, “...it was a great shock; there were many young people there who all seemed indifferent.” She explained, “It gave me the impression of a dirty chain gang. I have an atrocious memory [of the experience].”⁴⁸⁰ She remembered that the worst thing for her was coming home and seeing her children. She recounted, “I had the impression that one of them was missing and I felt even guiltier

⁴⁷⁸ Jacques Derogy, *des enfants MALGRÉ NOUS: Le drame intime des couples* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1956), 19.

⁴⁷⁹ Jacques Derogy, *des enfants MALGRÉ NOUS: Le drame intime des couples* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1956), 123.

⁴⁸⁰ Madame V., Anonymous testimony cited in Pierre Vellay, *Le vécu de l’avortement*, “Pour mieux vivre” series, (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1972), 59.

in front of them.”⁴⁸¹ Since she had accepted her husband’s arguments, she knew she could not incriminate him more than her self, but she knew very well that the relationship between them had changed. She was stricken with such an intense feeling of “personal guilt” and an aggressiveness towards her husband that she became sexually frigid for the first time in her life and she feared it would be difficult, if not impossible to overcome this new condition.⁴⁸² Madame V. experienced such a profound sense of guilt about undergoing an illegal abortion that it ruined her marriage.

In France, the law of 1920 reinforced the repression of abortion, which had been made illegal in 1810 in the Napoleonic Code. The law of 1920 was passed by a conservative chamber of deputies, which sought to pacify a nation distraught over the extreme loss of life in World War I. Yet, as time would show, the law of 1920 did nothing to increase the population of France. In fact, it did just the opposite. For instance, despite Charles de Gaulle’s suggestion that French women needed to create twelve million “bouncing babies” in the decade after World War II, many French women were nervous to bring children into a tumultuous postwar environment. In the 1950s and 1960s, the French nation was still reeling from the effects of the war. First, society had been politically upended by its support of, and participation in, the collaborationist wartime government under Marshall Philippe Pétain and the nation struggled in its attempts to come to terms with the Vichy legacy. Additionally, many in the French nation experienced angst over the colonial rebellions in the French empire in the three decades after the war. The French government and populace struggled to deal with the

⁴⁸¹ Madame V., Anonymous testimony cited in Pierre Vellay, *Le vécu de l’avortement*, “Pour mieux vivre” series, (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1972), 59.

⁴⁸² Madame V., Anonymous testimony cited in Pierre Vellay, *Le vécu de l’avortement*, “Pour mieux vivre” series, (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1972), 59.

political and economic ramifications of these developments as well as their effect on the problem of depopulation in the metropole. Lastly, between 1.7- 1.8 million homes had been lost during the war, causing an extreme lodging crisis in the postwar. Although the French government took “urgent” steps to alleviate this crisis, the budget for reconstruction competed with the funds needed to rebuild factories and revitalize the soil for agriculture so the resolution of this problem took time.⁴⁸³ In this postwar ambiguity, French women were terrified over how unremitting pregnancies might destroy their families and lives. Lacking access to legal and reliable means of contraception, they instead sought illegal abortions to limit the number of pregnancies that they might experience over a lifetime. The state of French society in the postwar led women to choose illegal and often dangerous methods of controlling their fertilities and lives and these actions not only made many women feel guilty and shameful, but also left them vulnerable to police apprehension, ill-health, and death. Although procuring illegal abortions allowed women to practice a tragic type of agency, the guilt, shame, and fear women experienced surrounding the act of abortion in France created a type of Bermuda Triangle, sucking women into a vortex of emotion. These destructive emotions permeated the postwar lives of many French women, influencing their views of sexuality and of themselves.

To decrease the number of abortions, the French government alternated tactics of repression with support for motherhood. In the early twentieth century, prior to World War I, the government passed two laws to encourage population growth and support struggling mothers. The first law passed in 1909 instituted an eight-week maternity leave,

⁴⁸³ Claire Duchon, *Women's Rights and Lives in France, 1944-1968* (London: Routledge, 1994), 29.

without pay, but with a guarantee of job security once the leave had ended, and the second was the 1913 Law Strauss that guaranteed women a relatively insignificant daily allowance during a four-week rehabilitation after giving birth. In a more generous gesture in 1928, the government created a maternity insurance that would compensate women for up to half of their lost earnings for up to twelve weeks after the birth of a child. When the law of 31 July 1920 proved to have little teeth in terms of impeding illegal abortions, the French government defined abortion as a crime in 1923 so that it could be more strictly sanctioned than it had been previously in the French courts. More Draconian measures were adopted on the 29 July 1939 when the French government increased the repression of abortion in the Family Code and began forming “brigades” to hunt down the “*faiseuses des anges*” (angel-makers), or illegal abortionists. During World War II, with the Vichy government’s strict focus on the family as a pivotal unit of a strong French nation, abortion was declared a crime against the French State and two abortionists were guillotined. Although in 1955, therapeutic abortion, performed when the life of the mother was at risk, was made legal, *interruption volontaire de grossesse* (I.V.G), or the voluntary interruption of pregnancy, remained illegal in France until 1975. Despite these alternating periods of support and repression and abortion’s continued criminality, many French women in the postwar sought clandestine abortions to control their fertilities.

ABORTION IN THE POSTWAR

Reliable statistics on the prevalence of clandestine abortions were hard to solidify due to the illegality of the procedure; however abortion’s high prevalence in France led to permanent disability, wide-spread sterility, and even death. As Doctor J. Simon

emphasized, “Who could say the number of abortions? For each that takes place in the bright light of day, thousands more are hidden by the obscurity of private life.”⁴⁸⁴

Doctors Jean Dalsace’s and Raoul Palmer’s statistics drawn from “thousands” of patients from both hospitals and private practices estimated that there were between four hundred thousand and one million abortions in France per year. Their studies (published in 1936) concluded that in private practice they had observed 125 abortions to every 100 live births, and amongst the hospital clientele 60 abortions for every 100 births. Citing individual studies of hospitals and private practices (from which she admitted it was dangerous to generalize) lawyer Anne-Marie Dourlen-Rollier relayed in 1966 that there were between 400,000 and 1,200,000 abortions in France and 150,000 abortions for every 95,000 live births in Paris each year.⁴⁸⁵

Doctors Jean Dalsace and Raoul Palmer admitted, however, that the results of any inquiry into clandestine abortion were “falsified by default” simply because women were reluctant to admit to having provoked an abortion. Dalsace and Palmer noted too that those women who visited hospitals due to an infection or a sense of anxiety over the possible side-effects of their actions were both “less frank” and “less willing to confide” than those who consulted the physicians in private practice.⁴⁸⁶ The Commission on Motherhood, (part of the Minister of Social Affairs’ permanent council of social hygiene) addressed this difficulty in obtaining accurate statistics for the rate of abortions in

⁴⁸⁴ Doctor J. Simon, cited in Anne-Marie Dourlen-Rollier, *La Vérité sur l’Avortement: Deux enquêtes inédites* (Paris: Librairie Maloine S. A., 1963), 60.

⁴⁸⁵ Anne-Marie Dourlen-Rollier, “L’avortement en France,” *Après-Demain* 82, “Le contrôle des naissances” (Mars 1966): 8. This same article was also included in a press release (Service de Presse no. 6) of the Planning Familial. *Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand*, Dos 347 Avo.

⁴⁸⁶ Jean Dalsace and Raoul Palmer, *La Contraception: Problèmes biologiques et psychologiques*, “La Science Vivante,” series ed. Henri Laugie, third edition (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 8.

postwar France in their meeting in December of 1956. A proposition of law concerning the modification of articles 3 and 4 of the law of 1920 (concerning the sale of birth control) was under consideration by the French parliament and the council was deliberating in an attempt to find a more solid basis for statistics on the phenomenon.⁴⁸⁷ In a note to the commission provided for use in their deliberations, Alfred Sauvy, director of the *Institut National des Études Démographiques*, or the National Institute of Demographic Studies (INED), explained, “No reliable statistic on the frequency of provoked or spontaneous abortions exists in France...The numbers provided, could be considered little more than estimations, really just false claims, stripped of their scientific value,” due primarily to the special difficulty of establishing solid statistics in this delicate area.⁴⁸⁸ Sauvy insisted that provoked abortion was a “heterogeneous phenomenon,” whose frequency varied from one generation and social class to another, in urban areas versus rural, from one religion to another, as well as by level of education, all of which made it terribly difficult to establish reliable statistics for a larger population.⁴⁸⁹ Sauvy also stressed that it was difficult to rely on the doctors who seemed like they were in the opportune position to gather dependable data on this phenomenon because the samples upon which they based their figures were often limited by factors beyond their control, such as the homogeneous socioeconomic level of the clientele that frequented their particular service. Additionally, their observations often stemmed

⁴⁸⁷ Minister of Social Affairs, « Compte rendu de la commission de la maternité séance du 14 Décembre 1956 » 6, Centre des Archives Contemporaines (CAC) 850019/ article 5. (Under derogation).

⁴⁸⁸ Alfred Sauvy, « Note sur l'établissement d'une statistique des avortements, » 1, (14 Décembre 1956), Centre des Archives Contemporaines (CAC) 850019/ article 5. (Under derogation). In the postwar era, “fausse couche” or miscarriage was a term used by many for either a voluntary, or an involuntary termination of pregnancy.

⁴⁸⁹ Alfred Sauvy, « Note sur l'établissement d'une statistique des avortements, » 1, (14 Décembre 1956), Centre des Archives Contemporaines (CAC) 850019/ article 5. (Under derogation).

primarily from women who had suffered clinical complications with their pregnancies, thus limiting the sample groups from which they drew their statistics.⁴⁹⁰

Sauvy proposed that the determination of “precise facts” on abortions, as well as their social and demographic signification could best be assured through two means: first, by a novel method of sampling; and second by hospital surveys in circumscribed areas. First, Sauvy suggested that a “random” sampling of two to three thousand women who had past child-bearing years (for instance between 45 and 55 years old) be questioned by their doctors regarding their previous pregnancies, live births, still births, and spontaneous and provoked abortions. Sauvy argued that by utilizing an anonymous questionnaire, this method could provide accurate data as to the percentage of abortions, conceptions, and births for a particular generation of women. According to Sauvy, this type of sampling could also relay important information as to the incidence of sterility in women who had suffered spontaneous or provoked abortions.⁴⁹¹

The second method that Sauvy advocated was to pick a specific geographic location (such as a suburb of Paris, or a town in the countryside that had between one hundred and two hundred thousand people) and take “systematic readings” of the numbers of abortions (both spontaneous and provoked) that were cared for in hospitals and clinics in the area over the course of one year. Sauvy argued that this method of observation, would shed light on the social and demographic significance of the phenomenon. In this way, the researchers could compile relative statistics on the patient,

⁴⁹⁰ Alfred Sauvy, « Note sur l'établissement d'une statistique des avortements, » 1, (14 Décembre 1956), Centre des Archives Contemporaines (CAC) 850019/ article 5. (Under derogation).

⁴⁹¹ Sauvy also cautioned that this method could present “great difficulties” because it would be difficult to choose a representative sampling of doctors and it would be difficult for the doctors themselves to “randomly” select the women to question. He doubted that this method would be successful on a national level. Alfred Sauvy, « Note sur l'établissement d'une statistique des avortements, » 2, (14 Décembre 1956), Centre des Archives Contemporaines (CAC) 850019/ article 5. (Under derogation).

such as age and social condition and also on the “ailment” itself such as the duration of the pregnancy and the treatment, deaths, sterilizations, etc.). One could then compare these statistics to the number of actual births in the area during that same time period. Although Sauvy cautioned that this technique would only cover the abortions that had been treated in hospitals and clinics, he believed that if one conducted inquiries at various locations throughout France and later compiled them as part of a larger study, one could form the most complete picture of abortion for all of France.

In fact, some doctors did attempt to deepen their understanding of the phenomenon by conducting research on abortions at their own practices. For instance, Dr. Weill-Hallé conducted a study that involved 218 women who had come to her clinic for a consultation between July 1957 and July 1959, all of whom completed questionnaires. Weill-Hallé’s findings confirmed that the women who most often sought out advice about family planning were married (seventy-five percent versus twenty percent single) and between the ages of 25-35.⁴⁹² Responding to questions regarding previous experiences with “provoked” miscarriages, 164 married women admitted to a total of 117 miscarriages while 43 single women admitted to fourteen miscarriages making it 71 % of the married women who had provoked an early termination of a pregnancy and 32% of the single women.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹² Dr. Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, “Observations préliminaires sur 218 femmes ayant reçu des conseils médicaux d’orthogénisme technique et prophylaxie mentale,” *Gynécologie Pratique: Revue internationale de gynécologie* 4 (1960), 326. These statistics were also corroborated by the studies of Dr. Darasson in Marseille and by Dr. Sutter on abortion in the department of the Seine in 1946 who found that between 77.8% (Darasson) and 83% (Sutter) of women who had aborted themselves were between the ages of 20 and 35 years of age.

⁴⁹³ Weill-Hallé, “Observations préliminaires sur 218 femmes,” *Gynécologie Pratique: Revue internationale de gynécologie* 4 (1960), 327.

The statistics gleaned from Weill-Hallé's study confirm the findings of others like Doctor Trillat in a two-year study in Lyon and Doctor Sutter in his study on abortion conducted in hospitals and maternity wards in Paris, both of whom concluded that the majority of women who needed hospital care after an abortion were married, middle-class women, not (as most assumed) young girls from "good families" that had had "accidents" in their love lives. (In Lyon 85% of the women and in Paris 62% of the women who sought care after abortions were married women with some measure of financial security.) Sutter in fact discovered that in 69% of the cases, women acted with the full consent of their husband or partner prompting Communist journalist Jacques Derogy to conclude that abortion in the 1950s was a "conjugal phenomenon reflecting the deliberate desire of couples to limit the dimensions of their families."⁴⁹⁴

Sutter's investigation also showed that abortion touched the lives of women of all classes and stations of life, with 40% of the women surveyed working in white-collar professions, 34% from the working-classes, and 20% were domestic servants. Although over 54% of the women described themselves as "poor," 45% considered themselves either moderately well-off or well-off. And although 38% of the women were single, the remaining 62% were married with 92% of those women having had at least one child.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁴ Derogy, 73 and Sutter, "...Avortement dans le région parisienne," 528.

⁴⁹⁵ Jacques Derogy, *des enfants MALGRÉ NOUS: Le drame intime des couples* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1956), 72-73. Derogy did comment on the obvious limitations of Sutter's study because of its limited scope (the clients of the Public Assistance Clinics of the Seine), but owing to dearth of reliable statistics, Derogy felt it important to publicize the virtually only scientific study on the phenomenon up to that point in 1956. This summarized information was published in its original form in Jean Sutter, "Résultats d'une enquête préliminaire sur l'avortement dans la région parisienne," *Population: Revue trimestrielle de l'Institut National d'Études Démographiques* 3 (Juillet-Septembre 1947): 515-532. Sutter also cautions that one must be careful in the interpretation of the statistics he provided because it is unlikely that they represent the Parisian area as a whole. His study consisted of 987 surveys taken of patients having been treated in the Public Assistance Hospitals of Paris and the Department of the Seine throughout the course of 1946 following both spontaneous and provoked abortions. He cautioned that the results needed to be interpreted with "delicacy" because the survey did not include the women who did not

A study of 250 women conducted by the M.F.P.F. between December 1962 and March 1963 showed that abortion was not directly correlated to educational level since women who received a primary education practiced abortion to the same degree as those who had received secondary education and advanced degrees (47.8% and 52.2% respectively).⁴⁹⁶ When Sutter's questionnaire asked the very personal question of whether they "loved their families," 49% of the women who had undergone "voluntary abortions" responded in the affirmative, 4% in the negative, with 47% giving "other responses" whereas 91% of those women who suffered involuntary miscarriages responded that they loved their families (with the remaining 9% giving "other responses.")

The Birth-Health Brigade, organized by the Prefecture of Police of Paris in 1954 compiled similar statistics. In their study of 460 women who were found to have committed the crime of abortion (45 of whom died in the act or from complications), approximately 38% were single and 62% were married. Of the single women, 79% had never had a child, whereas 82% of the married women had one child or more before they underwent an abortion.⁴⁹⁷ Sutter's 1946 study highlighted similar results. Of the 400 women responding, 34% claimed that they could not currently have a child due to economic reasons; 38% for social reasons (for instance they were: in an "irregular situation," unmarried and living with their parents, separated or divorced, or currently

suffer complications from their abortions and were not therefore forced to visit a hospital, nor did it include those who either were too ill after their hospital procedures to answer a long list of questions or those who refused to participate in the survey. His interest in the survey was to broach the possibility of uniting more extensive studies from more diverse regions of France in order to compile a larger picture of the state of abortion in France at the end of the 1940s.

⁴⁹⁶ Geneviève Texier, "Quelques indications sur l'avortement à partir d'une enquête menée par les centres de Planning Familial, in *L'avortement en France: Colloque organisé sous l'égide du mouvement français pour le planning familial*, edited by Anne-Marie Dourlen-Rollier (Paris: Librairie Maloine, 1967), 35.

⁴⁹⁷ Ferdinand Gollety, "L'avortement au point de vue juridique," *Problèmes: Revue de l'association générale des étudiants en médecine de Paris* 33 (mars-avril 1956): 33.

practicing prostitution to survive); 21% gave a psychological or moral justification (they did not want any more children, they did not want children at the moment, or they never wanted children); and 7% gave other motives such as illness or the death of a spouse.⁴⁹⁸

Some participants in the debate over abortion manipulated the unreliability of the statistics in order to steer the debate in directions convenient to their cause. For instance, Catholic writer Dubois-Dumée denounced the statistics put forth by Dr. Netter that pregnancies in France were aborted between fifty to fifty-five percent of the time and called Jacques Derogy's figures of 600,000 abortions per year "absurd." In order to undermine the argument that legalizing access to birth control would reduce the number of illegal abortions in France, Dubois-Dumée also called into question the estimate of some doctors that of all the abortions performed, there were approximately thirty to forty thousand deaths per year and that twenty-five percent of women who had received curettage as part of the process of abortion, ended up permanently sterile.⁴⁹⁹ Dubois-Dumée argued that participants in these political and medical debates "juggled with the numbers" when reporting abortions and subsequent deaths and sterilizations, in order to encourage more impassioned political debate.

Yet, regardless of one's political or religious views, most agreed that abortion in postwar France was a social scourge. Marcelle Auclair, writer for *Marie Claire* magazine, solicited correspondence from women who had either lived through abortions or were close to someone who had. Auclair received 581 letters that discussed 2960 abortions, 2369 of which were completely clandestine in that the women provoking abortions had not suffered complications that required either medical care or a hospital visit. Because

⁴⁹⁸ Sutter, "Avortement dans le région parisienne," 527.

⁴⁹⁹ J.-P. Dubois-Dumée, *Va-t-on contrôler les naissances?* (Paris : Editions du témoignage Chrétien, 1956), 73-75.

such a significant percentage of abortions were “neither seen, nor recognized,” Auclair concluded that this “enormous silence” surrounding abortion validates those that have called abortion a true social plague on French society.⁵⁰⁰ The difference in opinions regarding this terrible phenomenon related more specifically to who was to be blamed for this blight on the face of French society. Nobel-Prize-winning Doctors François Jacob, André Lwoff, and Jacques Monod addressed this concern in their letter accepting their nomination as honorary presidents to the M.F.P.F, stating, “When the ...[M.F.P.F.]...has attained its objectives many tragedies will be avoided... in particular the thousands of illegal abortions, the very existence of which condemns a society.”⁵⁰¹ And whereas these important doctors pinpointed French society for letting women down, various pressure groups and the French government itself tended to lay the blame for the problem on French women themselves, if not on the woman seeking abortions, then more particularly on those who performed them.

Primarily, the laws in France targeted abortionists, not their clients, for the crime of abortion. Abortion was criminalized in 1920 with articles 1 and 2 of the law of 31 July. Article 1 penalized the spreading of information (either in a public venue, by mail, posters, public postings, books, or even in the privacy of a doctor’s office) that might lead to the crime of abortion. Any such dissemination of information could result in both fines and jail time, whether or not the information had led to the act of abortion. Article 2 punished the sale or distribution of remedies, implements, or substances that were

⁵⁰⁰ Marcelle Auclair, *Le Livre Noir de l’avortement* (Paris: Fayard, 1962), 13.

⁵⁰¹ François Jacob, André Lwoff, and Jacques Monod, Letter to Dr. Lagroua Weill-Hallé, 18 November, 1965. Letter Re-printed in full in : Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, « dix ans de lutte pour le planning familial », *Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial, Dixième Anniversaire*. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand. Dos 614.1 Mou. François Jacob, André Lwoff, and Jacques Monod won the 1965 Nobel Prize in Medicine for discovering Messenger RNA, Ribosomes, and the genes controlling the expression of other genes.

knowingly distributed for the purpose of “committing the crime of abortion,” even if the act of abortion was neither attempted, nor consummated. The same penalties applied even if the instruments, objects, or remedies distributed for the purpose of provoking an abortion were not an efficient means of doing so.⁵⁰²

However, the draconian measures enacted in 1920 by a French parliament desperate to re-populate France had virtually no effect on the demographic rate in France. After three decades the Law of 1920 had managed only to submerge the French population in a state of fear. Women who sought to control their fertilities in this repressive climate were targeted as criminals, sinners, baby-hating monsters, or defective not-quite-women who lacked “natural” and God-given maternal instincts. Women in the postwar period continued to act in their own interests in this conservative postwar world, but the social stigma elicited feelings of guilt, shame, and fear. These malevolent triplets intersected in French women’s lives and led them to make desperate choices on “immoral terrain.”⁵⁰³ The sixteenth correctional chamber in Paris was a perfect example of such immoral terrain. Jacques Derogy reenacted the scene he witnessed there. He described the “vast” and “heavy” word ‘abortion’ as it fell from the lips of the magistrate as being charged with terror, opprobrium, and discomforting thoughts of plundered wombs and “bloody shreds of life dislodged at the point of a hair pin.”⁵⁰⁴ Derogy explains that the women being charged practiced a sort of “false complicity” as their personal dramas were dragged out on the public stage for judgment and condemnation. The “unhappily

⁵⁰² Mossuz-Lavau, 88.

⁵⁰³ Rickie Solinger, “Extreme Danger: Women Abortionists and Their Clients before Roe v. Wade,” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, edited by Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 335. Solinger highlights the effectiveness of antiabortion laws in postwar United States that forced abortionists and their clients meet each other and occupy “‘immoral terrain’, a place where human beings are very likely to encounter danger.”

⁵⁰⁴ Derogy, 15.

indicted were conscious of having committed a forbidden act, but according to Derogy, “the shame they feel is not at having done something wrong, but that of humiliation.”⁵⁰⁵ A judiciary columnist present in the correctional chamber recounted, “On their faces, [showed] the fear of condemnation, the atrocious embarrassment of having physiologically intimate incidents being decried publicly, [and these emotions left] marks of confusion that one could quite easily mistake for contrition.”⁵⁰⁶ Although Derogy and the columnist questioned these women’s sense of “guilt” which most others took for granted, the women in this stretch of “immoral terrain” experienced the confluence of emotions that would beset many French women in the postwar, whether they were apprehended and indicted or whether they lived alone with the judge and jury that resided within their own consciences and fostered a self-inflicted condemnation and punishment.

THE ABORTION EXPERIENCE

In her training to become a doctor, Dr. Weill-Hallé experienced the horror of seeing women undergo curettage without anesthesia. The doctor asked herself why these women moaned or screamed throughout the process while few if any “dared” to lodge formal complaints on the hospital surveys given to each patient upon their release from the hospital. Twenty years later, Weill-Hallé came to the conclusion that these women did not report this hideous treatment because they felt guilty.⁵⁰⁷ Although Weill-Hallé claimed in 1960 that curettage without anesthesia was a thing of the past, she insisted that a “cult of culpability” remained linked to the act of abortion that affected both women

⁵⁰⁵ Derogy, 15. A nearly identical passage on the Sixteenth Correctional Facility can be found in Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, *L'enfant accident*, Collection “Mise au point,” dirigée par Michel Salomon (Paris: Société des Éditions Modernes, 1961), 31-33, so it is unclear between Derogy or Weill-Hallé who actually authored this passage.

⁵⁰⁶ Irène Allier, Cited in Derogy, 15-16.

⁵⁰⁷ Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, *La Grand peur d'aimer : journal d'une femme médecin* (Paris : René Julliard, 1960), 15-17.

and the doctors who treated them. Not only did women wait until the most extreme and dire of circumstances arose to visit a doctor after a botched abortion, doctors themselves “did not dare get involved, except as a last resort, when they had no other choice.”⁵⁰⁸ Weill-Hallé proposed, however, that this sense of culpability had finally extended beyond the realm of abortion and now infected the private lives of all couples.

Gynecologist-Obstetrician Pierre Vellay also noted that the attitude and language utilized by women who had provoked abortions usually manifested a “certain discomfort, a certain culpability.”⁵⁰⁹ The women he met would pleaded, “I was forced to do it. I could not have a baby at that time.” These women also expressed feelings of fear and doubt over their decisions, particularly when seeing the doctor to confirm that they could still have children.⁵¹⁰ For instance, Madame C. had had an abortion at seventeen years of age with the acquiescence of her parents “who considered me too young and irresponsible to have a child.” Her abortion was performed in the “best of circumstances” and she believed at the time that her experience had been “rather easy.”⁵¹¹ However, over time, she began to think differently. When she married two years later, she became convinced that she would never be able to have another child and was in a permanent state of agony. Although she visited a series of psychologists in the attempt to reassure herself, her guilt would not be assuaged until she had finally brought a healthy child into the world.⁵¹² One anonymous woman felt so guilty after she visited an illegal abortionist

⁵⁰⁸ Weill-Hallé, *La Grand peur d'aimer*, 17-18.

⁵⁰⁹ Pierre Vellay, *Le vécu de l'avortement*, “Pour mieux vivre” series, (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1972), 15.

⁵¹⁰ Vellay, 15.

⁵¹¹ Madame C. , anonymous testimony cited in Pierre Vellay, *Le vécu de l'avortement*, “Pour mieux vivre” series, (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1972), 54-55.

⁵¹² Madame C. , anonymous testimony cited in Pierre Vellay, *Le vécu de l'avortement*, “Pour mieux vivre” series, (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1972), 55.

that she believed “everyone knew” what she had done, as if it were written on her face.⁵¹³

Madame M., a single mother, experienced such a profound sense of culpability after terminating her second pregnancy that she experienced continual nightmares about accidents, monsters, and deformed children. Madame M. stated that the thought of aborting the child would never have crossed her mind if she had had the means to raise two and concluded, “. . . Our society is not easy for single mothers.”⁵¹⁴

Women who voluntarily terminated their pregnancies felt guilty for a variety of reasons, but primarily for having broken the law and become a criminal, as well as for committing a sin against God and nature. In a letter to the woman’s journal Marie-Claire, one thirty-one year old, happily-married woman shared that she had had four children in twelve years of marriage, but that the only reason that more children had not “seen the light of day” was by her own hand.⁵¹⁵ Conveying that her bond with her husband was as wonderfully physical as spiritual, she worried that “she did not want to impose a family of seven or eight on him” that they would then have difficulty feeding and raising. She begged the journal for answers so that she did not have to commit resort to drastic, illegal measures. She implored, “What can I do to not conceive, and risking my life, commit a crime? Because [the voluntary termination of a pregnancy] is a crime and one of the most horrible.”⁵¹⁶ Another woman, who had aborted a child that she had hoped for because she was single and homeless, recalled that after the abortion she felt, “. . .invaded by a

⁵¹³ Anonymous testimony cited in Pierre Vellay, *Le vécu de l’avortement*, “Pour mieux vivre” series, (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1972), 57.

⁵¹⁴ Madame M. , anonymous testimony cited in Pierre Vellay, *Le vécu de l’avortement*, “Pour mieux vivre” series, (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1972), 58-59.

⁵¹⁵ Anonymous account sent to Marie-Claire in response to Marcelle Auclair’s November 1960 appeal to French women in to write of their experiences with abortion (their own or the experiences of someone to whom they were close) so that she could compile them into a “black book of abortion.” Cited in Marcelle Auclair, *Le Livre Noir de l’avortement* (Paris: Fayard, 1962), 19-20.

⁵¹⁶ Anonymous letter to Marie-Claire in 1960, *Le Livre Noir de l’avortement* (Paris: Fayard, 1962), 20.

sense of treason: [she] had committed treason against a being that she had created and already loved, but that [she] had not had the right to bring to life.”⁵¹⁷ She explained, “Above all it is a question of morality....The moral blow that is sustained [from committing this act] weighs far heavier than the suffering of the body.”⁵¹⁸

Some women experienced a deep sense of culpability because they chose to hide their past from their loved ones. Many women in fact kept their abortions a secret for their entire lives. Doctor Vellay claimed that women were extremely reserved when it came to sharing information on this part of their lived experience and that it was usually not until the doctor and the patient had established a rapport that the woman would let him into her confidence. Vellay stated that oftentimes women who had aborted themselves never told their families (particularly if they were young girls at the time) and never told their husbands, particularly if the abortion had occurred long before the marriage.⁵¹⁹ For example, Madame Z. had undergone an abortion at eighteen years of age after succumbing to the pressure of her family and society. When she married three years later, she felt extremely guilty to have to hide “this dramatic incident” from her husband whom she loved and also scared at having deceived him, since she believed that she might actually be sterile.⁵²⁰ Although she “happily” became pregnant rapidly after her marriage, she had a more difficult time conceiving a second child, whereupon she was confronted with a new wave of dread and guilt, which she tried to alleviate with

⁵¹⁷ Anonymous testimony of a twenty-five year old woman, Cited in Derogy, p. 69.

⁵¹⁸ Anonymous testimony of a twenty-five year old woman, Cited in Derogy, p. 67.

⁵¹⁹ Vellay, 14.

⁵²⁰ Madame Z., Anonymous testimony cited by Doctor Pierre Vellay, 55.

repetitive trips to the gynecologist “ . . . to find in him the comfort and encouragement that I was in constant need of.”⁵²¹

Other women were deeply affected by society’s judgment of them as criminals, sinners, and sometimes worse. Women who arrived bleeding to a hospital suffered social sanctions and were morally condemned, whether or not they had provoked their own miscarriage. Another of Vellay’s patients related that she had always wanted a child but had been told that she was sterile. She separated from her long-term partner due to irreconcilable differences but also because she wanted to spend her life with a partner who already had a child. One day, to her “great surprise” she found herself pregnant at forty years of age. Although she was filled with joy to discover that she was not “damaged,” her partner reacted with “little enthusiasm” to the news of her pregnancy. “It was decided” that she would get an abortion and she found herself with a ticket abroad in her pocket. In the end, she refused to leave since “she had always dreamed of having a child” and she knew that in the end, she would never be able to terminate this pregnancy. She was so convinced that she won over her partner.⁵²² Sadly, a few days later, she began bleeding and was forced to rush to the hospital with the possibility that she was miscarrying. When she arrived at the clinic, she was immediately treated “like a delinquent” and despite her many protestations, she was never able to make the clinic staff believe that she had not tried to abort her own baby.⁵²³ They performed a curettage one her two days later. This woman became very depressed after this episode and expressed that her “only consolation...was to know that she was not sterile and that she

⁵²¹ Madame Z., Anonymous testimony cited by Doctor Pierre Vellay, 55-56.

⁵²² Anonymous testimony of a patient summarized by Dr. Pierre Vellay, 61.

⁵²³ Anonymous testimony of a patient summarized by Dr. Pierre Vellay, 61.

could have children like other women.” She professed, “My one desire is to try again and to this time succeed, but I am not ready to forget this inhumane experience.”⁵²⁴

Additionally, many religious leaders and followers considered abortion murder and this condemnation caused some women a deep sense of guilt and self-loathing, whether they were religious or not. The themes of abortion as murder and abortees as baby-killers had been popularized under Vichy in their focus on national regeneration and repopulation. The *Voix françaises familiales* (The Voices of French Families), an organization that published a supplement in a Catholic, pro-Pétain review, portrayed women who sought abortions as masked female criminals, who had been made ugly by their own vanity. They declared, “You see this young woman who walks down the street? Isn’t she elegant! Admire her blouse, her stylish hat, her painted nails, her plucked brows,...her perfume. You say, Oh, what a beautiful woman! What a mistake! This woman is quite simply an assassin. Under her rice powder, she is a monster. She has done what animals will not do. Animals fight to defend their young. This woman killed her own child . . . the flesh of her flesh.”⁵²⁵

Many religious zealots in the postwar continued these themes in extremely vocal manners, publishing their views in national newspapers. For instance, in a debate that raged for over a month in the periodical *France Observateur* in November and December of 1955, both Paul Chauchard and a group of young Christians from Asnières (in the Seine) wrote in to air their beliefs. Paul Chauchard, who would later head a pro-life

⁵²⁴ Anonymous patient testimony, cited in Vellay, 61.

⁵²⁵ Pierre l’Ermite, “Les femmes qui tuent,” *Voix françaises familiales* (January 1944). Cited in Francine Muel-Dreyfus, *Vichy and the Eternal Feminine: A Contribution to a Political Sociology of Gender*, trans. by Kathleen A Johnson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 282. Solinger also discusses this trend of demonizing unhappily pregnant women who sought abortions in the United States, 346-347.

organization, entitled “*Laissez-Les Vivre*” (Let them live) disagreed with those who considered abortion “from the point of view of the mother and not from the point of view of the infant” or who used the excuse that abortion was considered simply another form of birth control in countries where it was legal. Countering these arguments, Chauchard adamantly proclaimed that “Abortion is the assassination of a child” and an “absolute evil” and he chastised “the many women” who chose to ignore this.⁵²⁶ Similarly, the young Christians wrote that they could never approve of any type of birth control, because it contradicted their beliefs that “the essential goal of love and marriage” was procreation. They also pronounced that outside of any religious consideration they could never accept the act of abortion, no matter what the cause. These young Christians insisted that on the level of simple humanity, “abortion would always remain an assassination.”⁵²⁷

The fact that the social mores of many in society still revolved around Catholic doctrine was soundly criticized in the postwar, but the vast majority of French people were still deeply affected by Christian morals. Participating in the debate in France Observateur, several people blamed the archaic response of French society to birth control on an outdated system of ethics. Mademoiselle Hoden, who worked in Geneva for the United Nations, could not help but join the debate after reading the letters from her fellow Frenchmen for several weeks. She claimed that the reaction of some readers put her in such an indignant state that she felt compelled to share what she believed to be the viewpoint of her entire generation (she was thirty-three at the time), with the possible

⁵²⁶ Paul Chauchard, “Pour une ‘sexualité humaine,’” *France-Observateur* (November 17, 1955): 7.

⁵²⁷ An anonymous group of Christian youths from Asnières, “La procréation, but essentiel de l’amour et mariage,” *France-Observateur* (December 1, 1955): 13.

exception of practicing Catholics. She contended that the problem of birth control was linked directly to the sexual education of youths and to the right of a woman to control her own person.⁵²⁸ Ms. Hoden expressed that not only were the “ancient taboos” (like that of virginity) no longer respected by her generation, but also that “there had been a revolution in mores” and “a new morality had been born.”⁵²⁹ On December first, student Jacques Fressard wrote to the same journal complaining that most of the arguments used by readers to dispute the use of contraception were based not in morality, but instead on Catholic theology. Fressard railed against the “Christian ideal,” which stated that the highest state of spirituality could be found only in continence and whose female saints could only be drawn from those women who (according to Augustine) were virgins, widows, or married, but living with their husbands as brothers and sisters.⁵³⁰ In their work on abortion, Jean Dalsace and lawyer Anne-Marie Dourlen-Rollier observed that the condemnation of abortion stemmed primarily from Christian philosophy and that prior to the advent of Christianity, most societies had not only allowed abortions, but had also integrated the procedure into their laws and social mores.⁵³¹ All three authors stressed that a strict Christian morality left no room for real women, who lived and loved in the real world, and desperately needed to be able to control their own fertilities. These criticisms however, did little to ease the guilt and despair of those marginalized women in French society who would risk anything, including death or imprisonment, to avoid or terminate an unwanted pregnancy.

⁵²⁸ Mademoiselle Hoden, “Une nouvelle morale est née,” *France-Observateur* (December 8, 1955): 13.

⁵²⁹ Mademoiselle Hoden, “Une nouvelle morale est née,” *France-Observateur* (December 8, 1955): 13.

⁵³⁰ Jacques Fressard, “Morale ou théologie,” *France-Observateur* (December 1, 1955): 13.

⁵³¹ Jean Dalsace and Anne-Marie Dourlen-Rollier. Cited in Vellay, 26.

Women who had intentionally initiated abortions felt shameful as well as guilty. The shame these women suffered was sometimes due to the opprobrium of the larger society and sometimes from judgment from within themselves.⁵³² Some individuals in society demonized these women, portraying their behavior as the unforgiveable ultimate act of “feminine selfishness.”⁵³³ As Rickie Solinger described for American women, those who sought abortions in the postwar were not technically on trial. But women who had undergone abortions and were forced to admit it in a court of law were judged and condemned in the minds of the public where they were portrayed as females “of easy virtue” and as “sexualized, but de-feminized not mother[s].”⁵³⁴

The judgment of others in society, but particularly the judgment of men in positions of authority, also caused these women deep shame. These virtually entirely male authority figures: legislators, doctors, and judges, hypocritically condemned these women’s behavior as criminal and immoral both officially and unofficially while their own lovers and wives were able to obtain and utilize contraband birth control and practiced abortion in reputable clinics in Switzerland. One site of shameful interaction with male authority figures was at the hospital. Many women who aborted themselves needed to visit hospitals afterwards to be treated for infection. According to a small study prepared by the Birth-Health Brigade of the Prefecture of Police of Paris, hospitals and private clinics saw up to 79% of women who had tried to abort themselves but had either

⁵³² Freud would have likened this development to the conversion of the death instinct into the superego. After the death instinct had been turned outward towards the larger society by the individual, the instinct was then transformed by the community and by social institutions such as the Catholic Church, and then redirected back inward in each individual as the superego.

⁵³³ Muel-Dreyfus, 282.

⁵³⁴ Solinger, 346.

failed to completely dislodge the fetus, or were suffering complications due to infection or hemorrhaging.⁵³⁵ Although doctors were bound to secrecy by doctor-patient confidentiality and rarely reported these women to the authorities, some doctors chose to indoctrinate the patient into their own moral code by practicing curettage (the scraping of the womb to remove any remaining tissue) without anesthesia. One of the most profoundly unsettling experiences in Dr. Weill-Hallé's career occurred while she was training for surgery in a hospital, where she witnessed just such an act. Passing close to the operating room, Weill-Hallé was overwhelmed by the sound of moaning and screaming emanating from the operating table. There, on the table lay a wide-eyed woman writhing in pain while an extern (supervised by an intern) clumsily wielded a scraper, with which she was attempting to scrape this woman's uterus. The intern continued to "let the extern flounder," inflicting intense pain on the patient, while only taking the instrument "from time to time".⁵³⁶ When Weill-Hallé asked the nurse about what she had witnessed, the nurse explained that the patients were not anesthetized so that "it will alleviate in them the desire to do it again."⁵³⁷ Later, Weill-Hallé expressed her indignation with an extern, who later became an "excellent cardiologist," who laughed and assured her that, "this was the only means by which to correct their behavior."⁵³⁸ Ten years later, as a young doctor, Weill-Hallé was still "tormented by the same question" and asked her bosses why they did not use anesthesia on women who underwent the process of curettage. Her boss complimented Dr. Weill-Hallé on her "tender and compassionate heart" and for being "charming," but explained that if he

⁵³⁵ Ferdinand Gollety, "L'avortement au point de vue juridique," *Problèmes: Revue de l'association générale des étudiants en médecine de Paris* 33 (mars-avril 1956): 33.

⁵³⁶ Weill-Hallé, *La grand peur d'aimer*, 15.

⁵³⁷ Weill-Hallé, *La grand peur d'aimer*, 16.

⁵³⁸ Weill-Hallé, *La grand peur d'aimer*, 16.

provided anesthesia for women who had suffered botched abortions then “all the women in the neighborhood will find out” and the sixty beds in his clinic would be filled within two weeks. He then argued that all the patients with cancer, ovarian cysts, and other diseases would be forced to go elsewhere and he asked, “What would then be left for me to teach my students?”⁵³⁹ Joining the debate over contraception in the December 22, 1955 issue of *France-Observateur*, Madame O. B. from Casablanca gave her own testimony corroborating the evidence provided by Weill-Hallé. She recounted that in the “Hospital of Pity” in Paris in January of 1938, she was forced to undergo three curettages in three days without anesthesia. When the third elicited a serious fever, she had had to undergo a fourth, with only an hour in between, but this time they put her to sleep.⁵⁴⁰ She affirmed that in this era, no anesthesia was used with women who had initiated miscarriages, but that at the same time, these women never had to fear being reported to the authorities.⁵⁴¹

There was also a level of shame engendered in French women because the most private aspects of their lives were being examined by privileged, white males who had the right to decide their fate. In postwar France, a woman could only obtain a therapeutic abortion with the approval of a committee (mostly male) doctors. Subject to a very strict regulation, the law recognized that in certain cases, a pregnancy might have to be terminated, but only if the life of the mother was “gravely threatened” and the abortion

⁵³⁹ Weill-Hallé, *La grand peur d’aimer*, 17.

⁵⁴⁰ Madame O.B. from Casablanca, “Un témoignage,” *France-Observateur* (December 22, 1955): 10.

⁵⁴¹ Madame O.B. from Casablanca, “Un témoignage,” *France-Observateur* (December 22, 1955): 10.

would likely save the mother's life.⁵⁴² According to the law, the doctor or surgeon who believed that a therapeutic abortion was necessary was obligated to obtain the advice of two more consulting physicians, one of whom needed to be a registered "expert" with the civil tribunal, who was not required to have any expertise in either surgery or gynecology.⁵⁴³ These three physicians were expected to examine the patient, discuss the case amongst themselves, and then attest in writing that the mother's life could be saved by no other means than by performing a therapeutic abortion.⁵⁴⁴ So in the end, a woman who might die from childbirth was forced to be examined by three men, who would then decide definitively whether she would live or die in the next nine months, all without the thought of consulting the woman herself. Parisian Madame J. Laganne wrote to *France-Observateur* in December 1955 expressing her view that these types of laws on childbirth reduced French women to a state of "insulting tutelage."⁵⁴⁵ She insisted that women's condition in France mimicked the degraded status of colonial subjects in the French empire, a topic which had received much attention, while the troubles of women were silenced or ignored.⁵⁴⁶

However, most doctors did note that there were exceptions to the rule of moral suffering for women who initiated abortions. Doctors Dalsace and Palmer claimed that there were some women who 'seemed indifferent,' and preferred to undergo repetitive abortions rather than practice the discipline needed to utilize an efficient means of contraception (keeping in mind the fact that all efficient means of birth control were

⁵⁴² Ferdinand Gollety, (Juge d'Instruction au Tribunal de la Seine), "L'avortement au point de vue juridique," *Problèmes* 33 (mars-avril 1956): 32B.

⁵⁴³ Upon reaching a decision, a copy of this consultation then needed to be sent to the president of the Department Council of the Order of Physicians. Valabrègue, 153.

⁵⁴⁴ Gollety, 32B.

⁵⁴⁵ Madame J. Laganne, "Une tutelle insultante," *France Observateur* (December 1, 1944): 13.

⁵⁴⁶ Madame J. Laganne, "Une tutelle insultante," *France Observateur* (December 1, 1944): 13.

illegal at that time). Dalsace and Palmer surmised that these women were afflicted by “an indisputable psychological immaturity” and oftentimes would later “try everything” to have a child, although the damages they had sustained from repetitive curettage made these herculean efforts useless.⁵⁴⁷ Gynecologist-Obstetrician Pierre Vellay, also noted that although they were rare, he had witnessed patients “of a particular sort” who underwent abortions “without the slightest disturbance.” Vellay described these women as “cold,” “disinterested,” and “brutally cynical,” and expressed that they were almost animalistic in the way they approached sex without any apparent emotion or sensitivity.⁵⁴⁸ However, Vellay professed that he often wondered if his was indeed a hasty judgment and that beneath the hardened exterior, these women hid a deep self-loathing that they disguised with their crass language and unfeeling attitude. He explained that the cynicism displayed by these women sometimes hid a great despair, which could be discovered by the doctor who took the time to initiate a dialogue and to listen. Vellay insisted, “A woman is never completely insensitive to that which profoundly touches her flesh.”⁵⁴⁹

FEAR OF ABORTION

Women in postwar France experienced guilt and shame over ending unwanted pregnancies, yet they were also beset by a deep-seated sense of fear. This fear was instigated by a wide variety of factors including: worries about an uncertain future; the fear that one would not be able to support or properly raise a child; the effects of another child on the stability of a marriage or family; the health of the fetus; religious and moral

⁵⁴⁷ Dalsace and Palmer, 7.

⁵⁴⁸ Pierre Vellay, *Le vécu de l'avortement*, “Pour mieux vivre” series, (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1972), 15.

⁵⁴⁹ Vellay, 15-16.

considerations; and the repressive measures enacted by the French authorities to ensure compliance with the law of 1920. The deep sense of fear and desperation experienced by women in the postwar becomes palpable, when one looks at the lengths women would go to to abort an undesired pregnancy. Jacques Derogy reacted with shock and horror over some of the gruesome measures women would take to end a pregnancy that they did not desire. Derogy explained that since many women did not have the information or means to utilize an “angel-maker” (professional abortionist), they were forced to “auto-abort” or subject themselves to what Derogy termed a “suicide-operation.”⁵⁵⁰ He told the story of women and young girls who began the process by taking ineffective drugs, or drinking black teas and mysterious potions, only to find themselves in their third, fourth, or fifth months of pregnancy. The women then became willing to take much more drastic measures to terminate their pregnancies.⁵⁵¹ Citing Doctor Sutter, Derogy explained that there was a “veritable folklore of abortion” and felt it necessary to address the “hybrid list” of auto-abortive methods identified by hospital staffs that equated to little more than a mix of “horror and pain, of reticence and lies, of provoked miscarriages, of unsuccessful miscarriages, of inexperience and of fear.”⁵⁵² The implements used: hairpins, knitting needles, toothpicks, umbrella handles, scissors, tree branches, chicken bones, and forks were enough to inspire revulsion in all individuals with even a shred of compassion. Some women were then “crazy” enough to inject soap, iodine, salt, ether, alcohol, or glycerine into their wombs when the above tools failed them.⁵⁵³ It is very little wonder that many women suffered complications after attempting to induce abortions

⁵⁵⁰ Jacques Derogy, 31.

⁵⁵¹ Derogy, 31-32.

⁵⁵² Derogy, 32-33.

⁵⁵³ Derogy, 33.

and ended up in the hospital. Derogy described these horrible accounts as “distressing” and “disconcerting” but was one of the first to publicize his findings for the general public so that individuals in French society would finally be forced to recognize the moral and physical trauma French women put themselves through on a daily basis in an effort to control their fertilities and lives.

Doctors Dalsace and Palmer claimed that there were many young women and girls who would “remain marked for their entire existence” from undergoing abortions. According to these two doctors, these women often saw their sexual lives ruined by the fear of a subsequent pregnancy and the memories that such a pregnancy could evoke. Dalsace and Palmer believed that this fear was a primary cause of female frigidity and other neuroses.⁵⁵⁴ For example, in an anonymous letter to *Marie Claire*, one woman described how she had had two “miscarriages” before having her son. This woman claimed that she and her husband both subscribed to the belief that a man and wife should remain “lovers” in marriage, but that this philosophy left her in terrible fear of another unplanned pregnancy. She explained, “I thus lived for years terrorized at the end of every month [while she waited for her period].”⁵⁵⁵ After years of worry and consternation, she and her husband experienced a serious decline in the intimacy of their relationship until at the age of forty, her husband became completely impotent. Although she had undergone a tubal ligation at the age of forty-eight, her husband was never able to recover.⁵⁵⁶ Thus,

⁵⁵⁴ Jean Dalsace and Raoul Palmer, *La Contraception: Problèmes biologiques et psychologiques*, “La Science Vivante,” series ed. Henri Laugie, third edition (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 7.

⁵⁵⁵ Anonymous correspondence to the journal *Marie Claire*, cited in Marcelle Auclair, *Le Livre Noir de l’avortement* (Paris: Fayard, 1962), 21.

⁵⁵⁶ Anonymous correspondence to the journal *Marie Claire*, cited in Marcelle Auclair, *Le Livre Noir de l’avortement* (Paris: Fayard, 1962), 21.

in this instance the fear of pregnancy and its possible consequences gravely affected not only this woman, but her husband's physical health as well.

Some women were terrified by the thought of not being able to procure an abortion, particularly if circumstances warranted doubt as to the health of the fetus. In a poignant letter, one anonymous woman explained her desperation to find a doctor who would recommend a therapeutic abortion to terminate a pregnancy that had been compromised by her exposure to Rubella in her seventh week.⁵⁵⁷ This woman recounted:

After certain tests 'they' were not able to assure me that the child would be normal. So 'they' discussed it, ran tests, and in the end decided *in my behalf* that I should keep the child, normal or not; 'they' could do nothing, [because] the law did not authorize [an abortion] based on doubt. Because for them, ending a seven-week-old fetus is a criminal act, more so than deciding for me that I would possibly have a retarded child to raise for its entire life⁵⁵⁸

She complained that "they" told her to have hope, a beautiful word that was easy for them to pronounce since they did not have to live in fear of giving birth to a deformed child. She concluded, "Who are we, us women, but beasts of reproduction;... animals who suffer that they continue to torture."⁵⁵⁹ She resigned herself to saying nothing and living her pregnancy in doubt, since regardless, she would be forced to submit to those

⁵⁵⁷ Rubella is extremely dangerous and damaging to the development of the fetus in the first trimester of a pregnancy. Beginning in 1941 two Australian doctors Gregg and Swann ran studies on the effect of rubella on embryopathologies and published them globally to draw attention to the problem. Some of the common effects of the mother contracting rubella in the first few months of pregnancy were heart deformations, deaf-muteness, grave mental retardation, etc. In France, Professo Lamy and Mlle Seror conducted a study on the frequency of rubella-related deformations of the fetus, finding that of the 48 women who contracted rubella in the four first months of their pregnancy, only 14 gave birth to healthy children, whereas 34 showed various anomalies including 10 abortions or deaths before birth and 24 children with severe deformations, of which 6 children died with the first days or months of life. The researchers found that 95% of the deformations occurred if the mother had contracted rubella in the first seven weeks of pregnancy and that the percentage of deformations declined as the pregnancy progressed. The primary problem lay in the fact that in the 1950s there was still no efficient means of protecting pregnant women from contracting rubella. Anne-Marie Dourlen-Rollier, *La Verité sur l'Avortement: Deux enquêtes inédites* (Paris: Librairie Maloine S. A., 1963), 43-44.

⁵⁵⁸ Anonymous personal correspondence cited in Vellay, 62-63. Emphasis hers.

⁵⁵⁹ Anonymous personal correspondence cited in Vellay, 63.

who presumed to speak for her.⁵⁶⁰ In a later letter to Doctor Vellay she admitted that she was frightened that she was carrying “a monster...in her body.” She stated, “It is terrifying... but the more that I think about it, the more scared and ashamed I become of being so cowardly.”⁵⁶¹ Although she was the mother of two beautiful little girls (of three and four years of age), this woman had become so distraught that she might possibly be “carrying in her flesh” such a grave bastardization of the human race that she believed that life was no longer worth living because it had become so “bitter” and “unjust.”⁵⁶²

Other women who initiated abortions were terrorized by moral considerations. This was particularly true in rural areas, where life was still largely influenced by both the church and by traditional social mores. One rural couple from a village near Montpellier explained that in most cases women acted alone to initiate abortions, rarely relying on anyone for moral or physical support. The rural woman claimed that abortion was practiced “very rarely because...religion holds them back and fear.” Her husband clarified, “[It is a] fear that is tied as much to the uncertainty [of the procedure] as to the success and thus it is done very rarely.”⁵⁶³ However, pious women from the middle-classes also experienced crises of consciousness over aborting unwanted children. Devout Catholics, Madame L. and her husband had been married six years and two months and were expecting their sixth child. Following each birth, Madame L. immediately became pregnant again, allowing her and her husband no respite. Having

⁵⁶⁰ Anonymous personal correspondence cited in Vellay, 63.

⁵⁶¹ Anonymous letter to Doctor Vellay, cited in Vellay, 64. Doctor Vellay had responded to an anonymous letter in an unnamed journal because he was so upset by this woman's letter and this was her reply to Doctor Vellay's words of consolation.

⁵⁶² Anonymous letter to Doctor Vellay, cited in Vellay, 64.

⁵⁶³ Anonymous couple from a rural area near Montpellier, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d'une "Table Ronde" de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 14. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

married to stymie a feeling of “inutility,” she now described herself as “a woman who knew nothing more than vomiting and crying,” whose feelings of uselessness had been replaced by a burgeoning horror at what she had become.⁵⁶⁴ Her desperation was so intense that she ignored her deepest principles and tried frantically to “rid herself” of her fourth pregnancy. After her initial efforts were unsuccessful, Madame L. explained that she “did not dare” employ more serious methods of initiating a “miscarriage” because she was terrified that she would “die in a state of mortal sin,” that she might injure the fetus “without killing it,” or that if she experienced complications, she might leave her three young children motherless.⁵⁶⁵

Still other women were frightened of being prosecuted under the repressive the law of 1920, although women rarely let this stop them from procuring abortions. The law in France was so severe that a woman could be prosecuted for abortion even if she had consumed a “potion” that had no chance of succeeding and even if she were not pregnant at the time (even though she had believed that she was.) Dr. Weill-Hallé insisted, “The threat of the executioner, the fear of policemen, corporal punishment, prison, these are the arms of repression which many societies have used over time to coercively assure the reproduction of their population.”⁵⁶⁶ However, French women’s perception of the law of 1920 and the measures taken by the authorities to enforce this law was relatively ambiguous. The periodical *France-Observateur* published one of the earliest exposés on illegal abortion in France, just after the fifth conference on Planned Parenthood held in Tokyo in November 1955, which proposed that these immensely high figures for

⁵⁶⁴ Madame L., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Seyrod, 10 November, 1960, 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁵⁶⁵ Madame L., Letter to the journal *Maternité Heureuse* by a woman from Seyrod, 10 November, 1960, 2. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁵⁶⁶ Weill-Hallé, *L’Enfant accident*, 29-30.

abortions in France indicated that the repressive measures taken by the government to quell abortions were in fact impotent. The editorial suggested that fear of legal reprisals actually had no effect on women who would risk everything to have an abortion. Yet, the one effect that the legislation did have was to keep women from seeking help in case of infection or other health complications that might come from obtaining abortions in poor and unsanitary conditions. Therefore, the legislation sufficed only to increase the rates of sterility and often mortality for women who sought illegal abortions. Earlier mortality estimates (from the Bulletin of the Legal Medicine Society and the estimates of various physicians) ranged from twenty thousand to sixty thousand deaths per year. Many of these deaths could have been avoided with “early and appropriate treatment” but fear of prosecution prevented many hemorrhaging and infected women from seeking help, since most women were not aware that the doctor-client privilege would protect them from the authorities.⁵⁶⁷ The figures on sterility were even less reliable, but it was estimated that sixty to seventy-five percent of female sterility cases were the result of one or more abortions.⁵⁶⁸

However, like the woman whose husband was gravely affected by the fear of pregnancy that they both brought to their marital bed, women were not alone in fearing the repression that permeated French postwar society. The 1955 article asking whether

⁵⁶⁷ Claude S  n  quel, “600,000 avortements: Valent-ils mieux que le contr  le des naissances?” *France-Observateur* (November 10, 1955): 8.

⁵⁶⁸ S  n  quel, 8 and Jean Dalsace and Raoul Palmer, *La Contraception: Probl  mes biologiques et psychologiques*, “La Science Vivante,” series ed. Henri Laugie, third edition (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 8. In 1966 Doctor Jean Dalsace and Doctor Arlette Fribourg contributed an article on abortion and sterility to a colloquium on abortion conducted by the M.F.P.F. and published by Dourlen-Rollier which argued that between 60-75% of cases of feminine “secondary” sterility were the direct result of previous, illegal abortions. Jean Dalsace and Arlette Fribourg, “Avortement et st  rilit  ,” in *L’avortement en France: Colloque organise sous l’  gide du mouvement fran  ais pour le planning familial*, edited by Anne-Marie Dourlen-Rollier (Paris: Librairie Maloine, 1967), 15.

birth control was better than 600,000 abortions in *France-Observateur* provided an editorial piece that criticized the law of 1920 for having a silencing effect on the French media with regards to issues of contraception. The editorial suggested that although the French press was one of the least “prudish” in the world and journalists were terrified of covering the ‘Fifth International Congress on Family Planning’ that had just taken place in Tokyo in November 1955. The editor of *France-Observateur* complained that the statutes of the law of 1920 that forbid the dissemination of “propaganda” on contraception also had a blanketing effect on objective news coverage in France. This media silence allowed the great majority of French people to simply “ignore” (many through ignorance and lack of information) the fact that, “in their own country for each women that gives birth in normal conditions, another aborts her child.”⁵⁶⁹ The aim of this exposé was to bring to light this grave injustice to women that was passed over daily in silence, “because the fear of procreation [that this silence inspired] destroys in most cases the moral and physical equilibrium of women and of the couple...”⁵⁷⁰ Entering the debate in *France-Observateur* November 17, André Bazin called for the breaking of this “odious and imbecilic silence” that affected not only the press, but “all other authorized and competent agencies” and institutions in French society.⁵⁷¹ By the 1950s, the fear of repression had seeped its way into many different echelons of the French population.

Another of these “authorized and competent” institutions gravely and tragically affected by the blanketing effect of the law of 1920 was the French *Ordre des Médecins* (Order of Physicians). Lawyer for the Court of Appeals Anne-Marie Dourlen-Rollier

⁵⁶⁹ Editorial “600,000 avortements: Valent-ils mieux que le contrôle des naissances?” *France-Observateur* (November 10, 1955): 8.

⁵⁷⁰ Editorial, *France-Observateur* (10 Novembre 1955): 8.

⁵⁷¹ André Bazin, “Il faut lever le tabou,” *France-Observateur* (1 Novembre 1955): 7.

emphasized that the situation regarding abortion was extremely precarious for doctors in France. The then current status of French law made doctors suspect in the eyes of legislators who worried that they would use their privileged position to profit off of women's desperation.⁵⁷² The law indicated that doctors, as well as other third parties could be considered accomplices for even slight involvement with a woman who had tried to give herself, or otherwise acquire an illegal abortion. For instance, the law specified that an accomplice could be someone who had directed a woman to a third party who could either provide an abortion or direct the woman to someone who could; a lover who threatened his mistress with abandonment if she would not have an abortion; someone who accompanied a woman to a facility that provided abortions; an individual who counseled a woman on how to provoke an abortion, showed her which instruments to use, or loaned her the tools which could initiate an abortion; or even someone who offered shelter to a woman who was recovering from an abortive procedure.⁵⁷³ Even the slightest "imprudent counsel" given to a desperate woman could jeopardize a doctor's freedom and future career.⁵⁷⁴ Derogy insisted that many doctors were so terrified of sanctions that they refused to discuss abortion even amongst each other.⁵⁷⁵ Additionally, this fear of prosecution affected doctors' abilities to practice safe medicine. If a woman came bleeding to a private doctor's office, most doctors in postwar France would refuse to treat the woman and would prefer to send her straight to the hospital. Even a brief examination, could leave them vulnerable to being labeled "accomplices." The *Ordre*

⁵⁷² Dourlen-Rollier, *La vérité*, 7.

⁵⁷³ Ferdinand Gollety, "L'avortement au point de vue juridique," *Problèmes: Revue de l'association générale des étudiants en médecine de Paris* 33 (mars-avril 1956): 32b.

⁵⁷⁴ Anne-Marie Dourlen-Rollier, *La Vérité sur l'Avortement: Deux enquêtes inédites* (Paris: Librairie Maloine S. A., 1963), 31.

⁵⁷⁵ Derogy, 19.

des Médecins, which had been forced to sanction thirteen doctors in 1954, warned doctors to be on guard and to take precautions if called to the house of a woman who was losing blood in the middle of the night. These precautions included: never being alone with the patient, never carrying any type of “compromising instrument” in their medical case, and never practicing a “uterine intervention” at the woman’s home.⁵⁷⁶

The French doctors’ fear was so severe that they did not feel comfortable taking advantage of changes in the law that eased restrictions on therapeutic abortion. Professor Piédelièvre defined therapeutic abortion as, “. . . the provoked expulsion of the fetus pre-term, justified by proof of danger to the mother, in which the termination of the pregnancy will alleviate the risk.”⁵⁷⁷ This right was granted by Article L. 161, I of the Public Health code, in the decree of 11 May 1955, which stipulated that the decision must be made by three doctors in tandem, one of whom needed to be affiliated with the Civil Tribunal. However, this bit of legislation was also modified by the Deontology code (in the decree of 28 November 1955), which specified that this intervention must only be taken if the abortion was the sole means of saving the life of the mother.⁵⁷⁸ These limitations did little to ease the fears of French doctors, who continued to refuse women any sort of assistance with abortions, whether therapeutic or not. Some doctors, like those who refused the therapeutic abortion to the women with rubella, apologized for their behavior explaining, “Madame, I can do nothing, the law is against us, you must understand, I have an office, clients, and children at home.”⁵⁷⁹ Other doctors simply lied to their patients. In a heartbreaking letter to *France-Observateur* in February of 1954, Mr.

⁵⁷⁶ Derogy, 130-131.

⁵⁷⁷ Doctor Piedelièvre, cited in Dourlen-Rollier, 31.

⁵⁷⁸ Dourlen-Rollier, 33-34.

⁵⁷⁹ Letter of an anonymous woman to Dr. Vellay, cited in Vellay, 63.

Funck described his experience with a the head physician at a Parisian hospital specializing in difficult pregnancies. Mr. Funck's wife had contracted rubella at the commencement of her pregnancy, which is why they had sought out an expert in the field, but the doctor, " . . . assured [them] that in all of his career, he had never seen a nefarious effect produced by rubella."⁵⁸⁰ Mr. Funck recollected that before such a categorical declaration, he and his wife were reassured and took no further action. Three weeks before the letter was written, his wife had given birth to a child who was blind and had a heart murmur. Having heard of other patients in the same hospital whose children suffered grave deformations based on maternal infection in the first few weeks of pregnancy, Mr. Funck bemoaned the fact that there was no legal recourse in France to sue a physician who "lies to those who come to consult him . . . whether by moral conviction or for other reasons."⁵⁸¹

The situation over therapeutic abortion became so dire that some in positions of authority (for instance doctors and university professors) felt the need to counsel French doctors how to differentiate appropriate cases warranting therapeutic intervention. Two studies conducted on therapeutic abortion in the 1950s (one by Doctor Desmoulins in Lyon and the second by Professor Piedelièvre in the department of the Seine) indicated that the number of therapeutic abortions versus the number of live births in France was extremely "feeble" ranging between 1.5% to 3%.⁵⁸² For instance in the Obstetrical clinic of Lyon between 1949 and 1954, there were only 20 therapeutic abortions compared to 13,000 births. And for the Department of the Seine, there were only 132 therapeutic

⁵⁸⁰ Letter from Mr. Funck to *France-Observateur* 11 Février 1954, cited in Derogy, 134.

⁵⁸¹ Letter from Mr. Funck to *France-Observateur* 11 Février 1954, cited in Derogy, 134.

⁵⁸² Dourlen -Rollier, *La vérité sur l'avortement*, 35-36

abortions to the 279,000 births in the area between July 1947 and July 1950.⁵⁸³ Tenured professor J. Ravina wrote an article for *Problèmes*, the journal of the medical students of Paris, which subtly hinted (but did not state outright) that there were many more patient cases for which the doctors could prescribe therapeutic abortions than those observed in current practice. For example, Doctor Ravina suggested that in cases of patients who needed a certain type of cardiac surgery, it was safer to abort a pregnant patient and then perform the surgery with the expectation that the woman would become pregnant again soon thereafter, with much more hopeful results (although this was rarely done).⁵⁸⁴ Ravina argued that in modern France, even if the law regarding therapeutic abortion had not changed greatly, "...the question of therapeutic abortion had evolved greatly...at least from a medical point of view."⁵⁸⁵ Ravina stressed that the justifications for prescribing therapeutic abortions had vastly expanded and alluded to the idea that French doctors should no longer be frightened to integrate therapeutic abortion into their medical practice.⁵⁸⁶

MOBILIZING FOR AND AGAINST ABORTION

In the postwar, there were many in French society who sought order, either a maintenance of the status quo or a return to a previous state of idealistic "normality" and there were others who sought movement or change. Those who fought to maintain the status quo were often men in positions of authority who sought to impose a moral order on a society that had been upended by its participation in a collaborationist Occupation government. A return to normalcy included a strict control on the behavior of individuals

⁵⁸³ Dourlen-Rollier, *La vérité sur l'avortement*, 35-36.

⁵⁸⁴ J. Ravina, "A propos de l'avortement thérapeutique," *Problèmes: Revue de l'association générale des étudiants en médecine de Paris* 33 (mars-avril 1956): 16-16a.

⁵⁸⁵ Ravina, 17.

⁵⁸⁶ Ravina, 17.

in society (particularly women) and those fearing change believed that they could control women by attempting to deny them control of their bodies and fertilities. These forces looked similar in many postwar societies. For instance, in the postwar United States one male abortionist described the behavior of this reactionary sect as “sadistic” and “misogynistic.”⁵⁸⁷ He expressed:

Society’s present attitude toward women stems from...a hatred of women. Why else would it force them to submit to such terror and degradation in the seeking of an abortion, to endure in most cases the agony of an operation without even a pill to sustain them through shock and pain? Why else would it cause the maiming and death of thousands of women each year? This is love?⁵⁸⁸

This doctor was eventually arrested and imprisoned for criticizing the prevailing cultural beliefs in his conservative postwar world.⁵⁸⁹

In France, some doctors tried to enforce a traditional moral code on their patients by performing curettage without anesthesia, or by modifying their practice of medicine to further a personal agenda. In a letter to *France-Observateur*, hospital extern J.-B. C. verified that although it was rare, she had seen curettages performed without anesthesia with her own eyes. The doctors hoped these painful operations would “teach these women a lesson” and the extern professed that those “indignant individuals” who performed them “practiced them regularly.”⁵⁹⁰ She recalled too, that even more prevalent in these hospitals was the “bad temper” with which many doctors treated the women who were hospitalized for abortion.⁵⁹¹ As Derogy asserted, many doctors “voluntarily” played the role of “moralizers,” and “justices” if the act had already been committed. Derogy gave the example of one doctor, who in response to a young

⁵⁸⁷ Doctor Timanus, cited in Rickie Solinger, 347.

⁵⁸⁸ Doctor Timanus, cited in Rickie Solinger, 347.

⁵⁸⁹ Rickie Solinger, 347.

⁵⁹⁰ Madame J.-B. C., “Pas d’anesthésie,” *France-Observateur* (Décembre 22, 1955): 10.

⁵⁹¹ Madame J.-B. C., “Pas d’anesthésie,” *France-Observateur* (Décembre 22, 1955): 10.

woman's request for an abortion stated, "My young girl, that which you are asking of me is impossible. I can not help you and it would not do to help you. It would not only be dangerous, but criminal. The child that you carry inside you is living. You do not have the right to end his life."⁵⁹² Derogy criticized the paternalistic and hypocritical attitude of this doctor who made it clear that the life of the child was more important than the life of the pregnant woman. Derogy gave another example of a doctor who called in a priest to perform a baptism on a late-term aborted fetus of a young girl, who not only lost her faith in the Catholic religion, but due to complications with the curettage, lost the ability to have more children which she deeply desired after she married.⁵⁹³ Derogy explained that doctors also used trickery and outright lies to impart moral lessons to young women trying to obtain medical abortions. One doctor pretended to be performing a series of abortive maneuvers on a young woman, which were really medical procedures meant to save the fetus she had threatened by trying to abort herself. Discovering the truth when it was too late to terminate the pregnancy, this young woman drowned herself in the Seine.⁵⁹⁴ Another young woman threw herself out the window of her apartment when her doctor refused to abort a child that she had conceived with someone other than her husband.⁵⁹⁵ Whether by punishing women physically or morally, some doctors in the forces of order felt that it was their responsibility to mete out a type of moral justice on young women who had violated these doctors' sense of propriety or moral order. However, in reality these women were simply trying to control their own fertilities and lives.

⁵⁹² Derogy, 126.

⁵⁹³ Derogy, 128.

⁵⁹⁴ Derogy, 128-129.

⁵⁹⁵ Derogy, 129-130.

Yet, in their defense, even these morally-activist doctors faced their fears by refusing to violate the doctor-client privilege. French law modified article 378 of the Penal Code (which protected the doctor-client privilege) with the Law of 29 July 1939, known as the “Family code,” which relaxed the requirement that doctors observe the doctor-patient privilege in matters of abortion.⁵⁹⁶ Henceforth, doctors would not be penalized for violations of the doctor-client privilege when testifying in abortion cases. According to R. Fontaine, lawyer in the court of Paris, with this law legislators thought that they had gained a valuable ally (the *Ordre des Médecins*) in the repression of abortion. However, Fontaine maintained that this reasoning exemplified an important misunderstanding of the mentality and traditions of the medical profession.⁵⁹⁷ Fontaine argued that the Medical Corps remained bound by the Hippocratic Oath which stated, “The things that I see or hear ...in the practice of my art, or even outside the experience of my craft must not be divulged to others, they will remain privileged information, in the belief that this information has the right to remain in the realm of professional “Mystery.”⁵⁹⁸ Lawmakers had counted on doctors to act “logically,” assuring their own innocence by denouncing young women who sought their medical services in the aftermath of botched abortions, however, most doctors refused to act as pawns for the French parliament and police. Even women like Madame O.B. from Casablanca, who complained about having suffered curettage without anesthesia at the hands of certain doctors could verify that despite this horrific treatment, one never had to fear being

⁵⁹⁶ Dourlen-Rollier, *La vérité sur l'avortement*, 61 and R. Fontaine “Le secret professionnel et l'avortement,” *Problèmes: Revue de l'association générale des étudiants en médecine de Paris* 33 (mars-avril 1956): 36.

⁵⁹⁷ R. Fontaine, 37.

⁵⁹⁸ R. Fontaine, 37.

reported to the authorities.⁵⁹⁹ Parisian extern J.-B. C. corroborated this account stating that she had never seen a violation of the doctor-patient privilege, which would have been “shameful,” although authorized by French law.⁶⁰⁰ Fontaine claimed that most doctors (although possibly not the aforementioned based on the evidence) saw women who were suffering from the complications of abortive maneuvers not as criminals, but as “sick people who had need of their art.”⁶⁰¹ What most likely did affect all doctors, including those against abortion, was the belief that if they were forced to denounce women who came to them suffering from abortive complications, women would no longer seek medical help and would prefer to risk grave illness if not death, in the face of certain prosecution.⁶⁰² As Dourlen-Rollier indicated, the “traditionally inflexible” doctor-patient privilege has no validity unless observed absolutely. That is why; although the law had loosened the strict observation of doctor-patient privilege over two decades before, evidence in 1963 showed that doctors almost never took advantage of changes in the law. As Dourlen-Rollier argued, doctors realized that undermining doctor-client privilege would cause a distancing between them and the distraught women who needed their services, and that they were the people best-suited to counsel these women, who could find the proper arguments that “might divert them from their dramatic project.”⁶⁰³ Therefore, although many doctors punished women based on their own moral code or sense of justice, there was some ambiguity within this punishment. Whether due to a sense of professional pride or independence or due to the belief that they might be able to

⁵⁹⁹ Madame O.B., “Un témoignage,” *France-Observateur* (Décembre 22, 1955): 10.

⁶⁰⁰ Madame J.-B. C., “Pas d’anesthésie,” *France-Observateur* (Décembre 22, 1955): 10.

⁶⁰¹ R. Fontaine, 37.

⁶⁰² R. Fontaine, 37.

⁶⁰³ Dourlen-Rollier, *La vérité sur l’avortement*, 62.

steer women away from abortion, virtually all doctors in the postwar drew the line at reporting these women for prosecution to the respective authorities.

Juxtaposed against those opposed to abortion lay those that identified a weighty problem in French society and moved to change it. These individuals, organizations, or political groups took various actions that were meant to stimulate change in French society. Although the articles and editorials in *France-Observateur* were intended to “break the silence” and stimulate a press debate over the important topics of contraception and abortion, there were journalists (like Jacques Derogy) who were active even before this 1955 exposé and there were those (like Marcelle Auclair) who rose to the task after the topic gained momentum in the mainstream media. These journalists served the very important functions of both listening to the words of women and attempting to transmit these women’s testimony to the larger French public with the hope of motivating public opinion to make greater changes in the conservative postwar world.

Communist journalist Jacques Derogy was one of the strongest advocates of women’s rights in the postwar era. He was the first to publicize the prevalence and danger of clandestine abortion widely in postwar France, whereas Weill-Hallé (for reasons not necessarily based in fear) at first addressed only her medical colleagues from 1953 until 1955. In response to Weill-Hallé’s address at the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences earlier in the year, Derogy published a series of articles in *Libération* in October and November of 1955. These articles addressed the condition of women in France, particularly as this condition related to “provoked abortion” and access to birth control. Derogy then compiled these articles and published them together in a work intended for the larger French public entitled *Des enfants malgré nous* (*Children in spite*

ourselves) that appeared in January, 1956. This piece was one of the first public demands for the establishment of family-planning centers in France.⁶⁰⁴ Not only did Derogy risk the condemnation of the French public, but his work also placed him at the mercy of his political party, since Communist doctrine promoted women's access to abortion, but not birth control because of the perceived ties between contraception and Malthusianism. Derogy addressed Communist-party-leader Maurice Thorez in his dedication, expressing the hope that he might have "contributed modestly to the liberation of women" which he still believed could only be realized in Communism.⁶⁰⁵

This passage instigated a maelstrom beginning with a letter from the secretary general of the French Communist Party (PCF)—which would be published the next day in the French periodical *L'Humanité*. The letter berated Derogy, insisting that his work had neither contributed to the liberation of the woman nor served Communism in any way. It accused Derogy of expressing not a hint of anger at the "barbaric theories of American neo-Malthusianism," and then reiterated the Communist stigmatization of the "repressive laws of the bourgeoisie" that struck the downtrodden most brutally, while at the same time condemning those who would recommend birth control, which all Communists agreed diverts the working class "from their battle for bread and socialism."⁶⁰⁶ The letter ended by accusing Derogy of "propagating the illusions that the Communist Party has never ceased, and will never cease to fight against" (which necessitated Thorez publishing the letter the very next day) and stating, "It does not seem

⁶⁰⁴ Jacques Derogy, *Des enfants malgré nous: Le drame intime des couples* (Paris : Éditions de minuit, 1956). Derogy first published several articles in the periodical *Libération* (where he was a journalist) in the winter of 1955-1956, which he then compiled and augmented in this work, published in January 1956.

⁶⁰⁵ Mossuz-Lavau, 32.

⁶⁰⁶ Maurice Thorez, Letter to Jacques Derogy (1 May, 1956). Cited in Mossuz-Lavau, 32.

superfluous to us to remind you that the path to women's liberation is achieved through social reforms...and not by abortion clinics.”⁶⁰⁷ Whether or not Derogy believed that his very public work was compatible with Communist doctrine, he was chastised soundly by the party leadership for publicizing a path to women's liberation incompatible with the outdated doctrine to which the party still desperately clung. More likely however, Derogy's dedication to Thorez, served as a type of apologetic, for he knew that he might be eliciting the wrath of the party leadership. Regardless, Derogy both served as an example for activism for women's rights and blazed a path for others to follow, believing the cause important enough to risk personal, political, social, and emotional discomfort and ostracization to spread a message that could protect French women in the postwar.

Derogy, was not only the first to expose this issue to the public eye, he also attempted to shift the shame of abortion away from the desperate women who were forced by French law to use this procedure as a means of birth control and onto those authorities in French society who would punish these women for attempting to control their own bodies. Derogy complained that the penal code had succeeded only in “suffocating discussion” on the topic, causing a conceptual, conversational, and procedural “black-out,” while failing entirely to impede the act of abortion itself.⁶⁰⁸ He condemned the policemen, magistrates, and lawyers who “hid themselves away” when asked questions about the practicality of enforcing such an impotent but cruel law, and who preferred instead “to search for an alibi for their guilty consciences in the humiliation of the female abortees” who were paraded through the courtrooms. Derogy criticized doctors as well for entrenching themselves behind the code of professional

⁶⁰⁷ Maurice Thorez, Letter to Jacques Derogy (1 May, 1956). Cited in Mossuz-Lavau, 33.

⁶⁰⁸ Derogy, 19.

secrecy, so that they would not have to discuss the issue with anyone, even amongst their colleagues.⁶⁰⁹ He argued, “To pose the problem in all its terms would lay bare the flagrant contradiction between the law and mores, morality and behavior.”⁶¹⁰ Derogy questioned the fact that most individuals in society had no desire to update the statistics on the number of clandestine abortions, deaths, and sterilities arising from complications from abortive maneuvers because the truth of the issue would only aggravate their sense of guilt and complicity. Instead, asserted Derogy, the government, law enforcement, judges, and doctors “pretend that they have already dealt with this contemporary phenomenon” utilizing “morality, terror, and repression,” rather than taking the time to uncover the underlying psychological and social problems that are the crux of the issue. Derogy used this work to pressure those in power to understand rather than to condemn. He urged those in society to, “Put yourself in the place of these thousands of women who are confronting the problem of pregnancy, live their agonies, their worries.”⁶¹¹ With this work, Derogy attempted to reverse the shame, transferring it from these women who were fearfully and desperately trying to control their fertilities and lives, to those that would judge, condemn, prosecute, and incarcerate them for doing what he believed all human beings should have the right and the power to do.

Journalist Marcelle Auclair also played an important role in disseminating French women’s true stories to the greater French public. As a writer for the woman’s magazine Marie-Claire, Auclair criticized the conspiracy of silence that surrounded the topics of birth control and abortion. She was brave enough to write about them in the journal and also to publish her work in the controversial *Le Livre noir de l’avortement*, or *The black*

⁶⁰⁹ Derogy, 19.

⁶¹⁰ Derogy, 20.

⁶¹¹ Derogy, 20-21.

book of abortion, in 1962. She stated that her work was neither an apology for abortion nor a plea for either therapeutic abortion or the liberal use of contraceptives. Instead she wanted to share women's words with French society in order to break the "silence that kills."⁶¹² However, Auclair did not believe that women had the power or strength to help themselves, so instead her work was intended to sway the views of the "competent men" who made decisions in French society. In fact, in her solicitation for correspondence from women who had either experienced abortion first-hand or through another, she expressed that these letters would not be published in the journal *Marie-Claire*, "but they [would] be brought to the attention of those powerful personalities upon whom your destiny depends."⁶¹³ She hoped that these letters would influence men by personalizing the statistics on abortion and that these omnipotent fellows could then find the compassion to change the laws that punished these "millions of damned [souls]."⁶¹⁴ Exceedingly traditional in her views of gender roles, Auclair believed that women were not capable of helping themselves because they were uneducated and had been trained since primitive times to follow the orders of men. She therefore placed the "heavier" blame for abortion on the "ignorant" men in women's lives who denied all responsibility for procreation by persuading women to have abortions.⁶¹⁵ In fact, women only had agency in Auclair's vision in a negative capacity. Auclair did not have faith that women could or should help other women, because she believed that many women promoted abortion as an easy solution because they saw it as, "neither ...a danger, nor a crime."⁶¹⁶ She advocated instead an education for the couple that taught a mutual respect for each other and the

⁶¹² Marcelle Auclair, *Le Livre Noir de l'avortement* (Paris: Fayard, 1962), 9.

⁶¹³ Marcelle Auclair, *Le Livre Noir de l'avortement* (Paris: Fayard, 1962), 12.

⁶¹⁴ Marcelle Auclair, *Le Livre Noir de l'avortement* (Paris: Fayard, 1962), 9-12.

⁶¹⁵ Marcelle Auclair, *Le Livre Noir de l'avortement* (Paris: Fayard, 1962), 10.

⁶¹⁶ Marcelle Auclair, *Le Livre Noir de l'avortement* (Paris: Fayard, 1962), 10.

idea that love was not just physical, but spiritual as well.⁶¹⁷ Auclair was exceedingly vague on how this education might reduce either abortions or the need for birth control. Yet, although she could propose only vague solutions to a very real problem, Auclair accomplished three essential functions which helped the women of France; she listened to women, felt a compassion for their suffering strong enough to propel her into action, and she worked to publish women's stories, all of which helped opened the conservative minds of postwar French society to the dire state of women's reproductive lives.

Another of the battalions in the ranks of those mobilizing for change were the lawmakers on the political left. In their 1955 piece on contraception and abortion, *France-Observateur* stated that besides motivating the press to break the silence surrounding these issues, they had also desired to prod legislators into taking a stand. A month after the original article printed, several parliamentarians did just that. On December 8th, 1955 the paper published the views of several legislators, four of whom were for revision of the law of 1920, two of whom were against, ("The question of birth control does not apply to France because it is not overpopulated"⁶¹⁸), and one of whom felt that he was not familiar enough with the facts to form a sound opinion.⁶¹⁹ Mostefa Benbahmed, a Socialist politician representing Constantine commented that the sale of contraceptives in Algeria "would be a good thing for the European population and the evolved Muslims. But for the mass of the population, given their state of evolution, it

⁶¹⁷ Marcelle Auclair, *Le Livre Noir de l'avortement* (Paris: Fayard, 1962), 11 and 18.

⁶¹⁸ Dr. Frugier (républicain indépendant, Seine-et-Oise), "Des parlementaires donnent leur opinion," *France-Observateur* (8 Décembre 1955):13.

⁶¹⁹ "Des parlementaires donnent leur opinion," *France-Observateur* (8 Décembre 1955):13.

would change nothing.”⁶²⁰ Monsieur Benbahmed was much more concerned about the severe sanctions for abortion because, as he noted, if a young pregnant girl was publically exposed in the metropole, she could still find institutions to assist her, whereas in Algeria, the same young girl could have her throat cut by her father.⁶²¹ In this article one legislator, M. Emmanuel d’Astier de la Vigerie, also proposed a preliminary summary of a proposition to modify the law of 1920 that he would later present to parliament. On 23 February 1956 three progressive deputies presented proposition number 715 to the French National Assembly.⁶²² MM. Emmanuel d’Astier de la Vigerie, Pierre Dreyfus-Schmidt, et Pierre Ferrand set forth a proposition of law « serving to prevent the multiplication of criminal abortions by conception-preventing prophylactics. »⁶²³ After citing the statistics that one in two pregnancies ended in abortion in postwar France, and that these abortions were practiced most frequently by married women who already had children, the deputies clarified that only the family benefits provided for children by the state had increased the birth rate since World War Two, not the law of 1920. They suggested that the state must not only continue with the allocations and benefits for mothers, but should also combat the grave accidents and sterility engendered by criminal abortions.⁶²⁴ The deputies stressed that countries around the world had already initiated programs to provide birth control to fight against illegal abortion and also that French doctors should have the same opportunities as their colleagues around the world to

⁶²⁰ Monsieur Benbahmed, “Des parlementaires donnent leur opinion,” *France-Observateur* (8 Décembre 1955):13.

⁶²¹ Monsieur Benbahmed, “Des parlementaires donnent leur opinion,” *France-Observateur* (8 Décembre 1955):13.

⁶²² Dubois-Dumée, 115. Also cited in Mossuz-Lavau, 30.

⁶²³ Dubois-Dumée, 115.

⁶²⁴ MM. Emmanuel d’Astier de la Vigerie, Dreyfus-Schmidt, et Pierre Ferran, « La Proposition de Loi du 23 Février 1956 ». Cited in full in, Dubois-Dumée, 116

prescribe contraceptives when their professional conscience dictated that their patients should wait before becoming pregnant.⁶²⁵ Another theme used by the deputies that would later play into the arguments of other political groups, insisted that pharmaceutical regulation had improved so drastically in the last thirty-five years that it would be much easier to guarantee government control of distribution.⁶²⁶ To conclude, the deputies pleaded for the lives of women and children that would be affected by the law maintaining, “The diminution in births that would result would be less important than the loss of human life—from women and children to come—that are provoked each year by these [illegal] abortions.” These deputies then ended with a solitary article, that articles three and four of the law of 31 July 1920 were abrogated.

On 16 March 1956, another proposition of law, number 1252, was prepared by Dr. Pierre Simon, and presented by radical deputies MM. Hernu, Cupfer, Naudet, Soulié, Panier, Châtelain, Hovnanian, and Jean de Lipkowski.⁶²⁷ Dr. Simon was one of the first vocal proponents of birth control, forming a coalition of Freemason doctors from France, Belgium, and Switzerland, whose primary goal was the diffusion of contraceptives. Dr. Simon’s *groupe Littré*, founded in 1953, would end up influencing the views of radical French deputies on the problem of birth control.⁶²⁸ This proposition also demanded the repeal of articles 3 and 4 of the law of 1920 (articles 1 and 2 dealt with abortion) and also regulation of contraceptive sales. On 25 May 1956, the socialists, MM. Dejean, Juvenal, de Mérigonde, Mmes Degroud et Lempereur introduced an identical proposition of law,

⁶²⁵ MM. Emmanuel d’Astier de la Vigerie, Dreyfus-Schmidt, et Pierre Ferran, « La Proposition de Loi du 23 Février 1956 ». Cited in full in, Dubois-Dumée, 116-117.

⁶²⁶ MM. Emmanuel d’Astier de la Vigerie, Dreyfus-Schmidt, et Pierre Ferran, « La Proposition de Loi du 23 Février 1956 ». Cited in full in, Dubois-Dumée, 117.

⁶²⁷ Mossuz-Lavau, 30-31.

⁶²⁸ Mossuz-Lavau, 23. Dr. Simon would also end up allying himself with Dr. Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, in the foundation of the association *Maternité Heureuse* (Happy Maternity) in 1956.

(number 1963).⁶²⁹ All three of these propositions were soundly ignored by the powers in office and there were no more proposals of this sort introduced for several years.⁶³⁰

Having been sown in the barren soil of a postwar conservative climate, their efforts bore little fruit, however these deputies were brave enough to publicly address the issue in an attempt to open the minds of their fellow parliamentarians and thereby the entire postwar society.

DOCTORS REACT

Several doctors in France also faced their fears and acted in ways intended to change the conservative society in which they lived. Unlike Auclair, Dr. Weill-Hallé empowered the women of France themselves by recognizing in them the capacity to educate themselves on the topics of birth control and abortion in order to organize and defend their right to control their own fertilities. In her preface to Derogy's 1956 work, Weill-Hallé encouraged her colleagues to undertake the "painful" task of analyzing a topic that had rested for so long in morally-enforced obscurity. She indicated that Derogy's work needed to be read by doctors, sociologists, philosophers, priests, demographers, and all other authorities in French society who would definitely "learn something." However, she realized that the most important beneficiaries of Derogy's work would be the women of France themselves who would find themselves "delivered."⁶³¹ Weill-Hallé knew that the women of France needed to be "delivered" from the "complex of culpability" which overshadowed their efforts to control their own bodies. Reading Derogy's work, Weill-Hallé explained, would "open their eyes to their

⁶²⁹ Mossuz-Lavau, 31.

⁶³⁰ Mossuz-Lavau, 310. Many of the deputies associated with these three propositions of law publicly endorsed the work of those involved with *Planning familial* (Family planning) and several became involved with in the direction and management of the organization.

⁶³¹ Weill-Hallé, preface to Derogy's, *des enfants MALGRÉ nous*, 8

own distress” and give them “the strength to know themselves better—the force also, why not? to come together to defend themselves, so that for them, for their families, and for a healthy nation, there could finally be created in France the planning centers that we have envisioned since 1953.”⁶³²

Some doctors attempted to force those in power (legislators, the police, other doctors, etc.) to own up to the hypocrisy enshrouding the topics of abortion and birth control in the post-war era. For instance, in the discussion following a speech on the ineffectiveness of the political repression on abortion at the *Société de Médecine légale* (The Society for Legal Medicine) in 1944, Doctor Piédelièvre admonished the room, “There are a certain number of us in this room. How many children do we have? Are we not capable? I think rather that we have taken certain prophylactic measures.... On can not negate the fact that abortion is just one face of the problem; or, more exactly, *one means like any other of limiting births*. Because, all French people limit birth.... You are not...going to put all of adult France in prison!”⁶³³

Other doctors tried to elicit a sense of empathy from these same powerful men by telling the stories of women who suffered under the Draconian law of 1920. In his work, *Le vécu de l'avortement*, Doctor Pierre Vellay attempted to “give voice to those who had lived the experience in their flesh and with all of their being.”⁶³⁴ He suggested that one needed to listen to these women’s “indispensable” voices in an effort to better understand them before forming one’s own conclusion, because if one was a man, one could never know this lived experience except theoretically, through the interrogation of another, or

⁶³² Weill-Hallé, preface to Derogy’s, *des enfants MALGRÉ nous*,” 8.

⁶³³ Dr. Piédelièvre, in a response to the speech by Professor Dérobert, “L’erreur d’une politique purement répressive de l’avortement,” cited in Derogy, 122-123.

⁶³⁴ Vellay, 12.

through one's imagination.⁶³⁵ In the end of his work, Vellay urged all of those with the authority to influence the abortion debate, "...the judge, the doctor, those who... are committed experts in the issue of abortion to never forget that they are men and that the lived experience of a woman accused is just as difficult for her to express as it is for them to grasp."⁶³⁶ Like Auclair, Vellay had great respect for the importance of women's words in the debate on abortion, but believed that in the end, it would be the men in power who decided women's fate.

In her 1961 piece, *L'enfant-accident*, Weill-Hallé describes how she was chastised for providing case studies rather than statistics in her work. Weill-Hallé had been fighting to move her colleagues since 1953 with a combination of hard facts, numbers, and the poignant stories of distressed women, but to no avail. Weill-Hallé justified her reasoning:

I can only describe what I see, and as a doctor, what I have in front of me always is a single woman with all of her complexity, all of her problems...that are different than those of any other In a humane clinic, one well-taken observation is worth as much as long-term statistical studies; on the moral front, each individual problem has an infinite value and merit that one applies oneself to with the tenacity it would take to solve all the problems of society.⁶³⁷

Weill-Hallé actually listened to and saw women. She heard their stories, felt their pain, and experienced compassion for the precarious circumstances in which they found themselves after the war. Although she knew that numbers were important, when Weill-Hallé lost faith in her colleagues to push for the necessary changes in French legislation, she turned instead to the French public. The doctor knew that one of the best ways to create empathy for other human beings was not to make them into numbers and display

⁶³⁵ Vellay, 12-13.

⁶³⁶ Vellay, 173.

⁶³⁷ Dr. Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, *L'enfant accident*, Collection "Mise au point," dirigée par Michel Salomon (Paris: Société des Éditions Modernes, 1961), 8.

them in charts and graphs, but to let them tell their own stories and let their fellow humanity feel their pain. Only in this way would the public be motivated to do what those in power would not, which was to press for changes in an archaic law that kept French women in a state of hopelessness and danger, and let them finally control their own destinies through the control of their fertilities.

WOMEN'S ABORTION POLITICS

Women were the final group in French society to stand up against the law of 1920. One could look at the long list of dangerous and destructive means by which women tried to give themselves abortions and see in these women's behavior a grim determination to take control of their lives. For example, Madame K. from the Rhône recounted that after missing her period on the 15th of February 1961, she had immediately utilized an interuterine injection of water and "liqueur de Daquin," which was a type of weakened bleach solution sold in pharmacies.⁶³⁸ When this failed to initiate an abortion after two days, Madame K. immediately began ingesting a series of six different chemicals that she was able to procure at the pharmacy, which were reported to cause miscarriage. After taking eight capsules a day for a period of three weeks, Madame K. said she had succeeded only in achieving "a sick spirit and a tired heart" and not in aborting her fetus, which she was terrified would suffer grave anomalies if it came to term, due to her attempts to abort it.⁶³⁹ As Derogy noticed, women would stop at nothing once the decision had been made to abort a child. They would risk apprehension and arrest, sickness, and even death in order to terminate a pregnancy that they did not believe was

⁶³⁸ Letter to *Maternité Heureuse* from Madame K., in B.D. Rhône. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

⁶³⁹ Letter to *Maternité Heureuse* from Madame K., in B.D. Rhône. Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand (BMD), Fonds Valabrègue 1 AS 30.

right for them at that particular stage in their lives. Derogy elucidated, “Whether poorly or well-informed regarding the dangers of clandestine abortion, a woman who does not want her child will not retreat before any obstacle;” she will not be deterred by any measure of pain, by the horror of the experience, or by the humiliation that her actions might cost her.⁶⁴⁰ Women may have committed desperate acts in the attempt to control their lives, but they acted with sheer will and determination. They refused to be pawns in the end game of the French state and to see their bodies and their homes simply as “fit vessels” to house the future population of France.⁶⁴¹

Weill-Hallé was particularly interested in the fact that most of the women questioned in her clinic responded with surprise when they were asked if they had suffered crises of consciousness over having aborted a child. Weill-Hallé relayed that they had posed this question to each woman in the study and each had made clear in their responses that for them, the number one concern was the termination of an unwanted pregnancy. All other considerations paled before this “absolute imperative.”⁶⁴² Weill-Hallé and her colleagues had at first found this attitude “terribly disconcerting” since they had believed at the study’s commencement that most of the women having undergone abortions would have suffered a “very grave psychological trauma.” Weill-Hallé found this to be true only with the single women, particularly if they loved their partners or if they had an intense longing for motherhood. However, as long as they were sure of their husbands’ love and had satisfied their desires for motherhood, the married women in this study “almost never” suffered any type of psychological trauma resulting from a

⁶⁴⁰ Derogy.

⁶⁴¹ The behavior of women in France was very much like the behavior documented by Rickie Solinger in postwar America. Solinger, 351.

⁶⁴² Weill-Hallé, “Observations preliminaries sur 218 femmes,” *Gynécologie Pratique: Revue internationale de gynécologie* 4 (1960), 327.

“provoked miscarriage” and if they had, the trauma stemmed primarily from a strict sense of religious morality.⁶⁴³ Sutter’s study confirmed this trend noticed by Weill-Hallé, noting that 95% of women who had voluntarily provoked abortions were “content” with their decision, whereas only 10% of the women who had involuntarily miscarried felt happy about the termination of their pregnancy.⁶⁴⁴

Even though the state attempted to control abortion from above, the realities of abortion remained an affair of women. Sutter’s 1946 study determined that over half (56%) of women requiring a hospital visit after an abortion had acted alone while 44% had elicited the help of another. In the case of an assisted abortion only 30% utilized a doctor, a midwife, or professional abortionist, while a full 61% were assisted simply by a friend or another sympathetic party. This sympathetic party or friend was almost always a woman. Women received help from their husbands, lovers, or family members only 7% of the time.⁶⁴⁵ The survey conducted by the M.F.P.F from 1962-1963 on 250 women revealed similar statistics: 22.5% of the women surveyed had found their own means of provoking an abortion and 33% had solicited the help of a female friend.⁶⁴⁶ These statistics show that in the postwar world, women believed that doctors and other professionals could only be trusted to maintain the status quo and women looked for sympathy and help in their plight not to the men in their lives, but to other women.

Women themselves corroborated these statistics with their personal stories. One woman who had undergone three abortions between 1950 and 1954 and a final one in Switzerland in 1957, explained that she and her husband never discussed birth control or

⁶⁴³ Weill-Hallé, “Observations preliminaries sur 218 femmes,” *Gynécologie Pratique: Revue internationale de gynécologie* 4 (1960), 327.

⁶⁴⁴ Sutter, “...Avortement dans le région parisienne,” 526.

⁶⁴⁵ Sutter, “...Avortement dans le région parisienne,” 526-527.

⁶⁴⁶ Geneviève Texier, “Enquête menée par les centres de Planning Familial,” 36-37.

abortion.⁶⁴⁷ She relayed that her husband refused to occupy himself with the topic of contraception because he viewed the situation “intellectually” rather than emotionally; his mother had used abortion to control her pregnancies and so would his wife.⁶⁴⁸ He believed that reproduction was “her affair,” and therefore he had been absent for each of the births of their three children and had never discussed with her the necessity of procuring abortions. She had decided on her own to have each abortion. This woman mentioned that there was a sense of “modesty” between her and her husband that enforced this weighty silence, but also that she had accepted this responsibility because it had drilled into her at a young age that pregnancy was indeed her problem. Added to this heavy responsibility was the notion of fault. She knew that she must not give her husband a baby at an improper time, because, she said, “I was responsible for the progression of our reproductive lives.”⁶⁴⁹ Another woman from a working-class couple (a teacher whose husband worked for Nord Aviation), agreed with this woman’s rendition, explaining, “...A woman in our social class does not speak to her husband. And if she did, there would be frightening scenes. Too much drama.”⁶⁵⁰

And it was not simply husbands who ignored women’s plight. Many doctors, whether due to fear of sanctions or based in a misguided sense of moral superiority, also chose to disregard women’s suffering in their reproductive lives. The woman whose doctors denied her a therapeutic abortion although her chances were very high of having

⁶⁴⁷ Anonymous testimony provided by the M.F.P.F. Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial, *D’une révolte à une lute: 25 ans d’histoire du planning familial* (Paris : Éditions Tiercé, 1982), 64-67.

⁶⁴⁸ Anonymous testimony provided by the M.F.P.F. Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial, *D’une révolte à une lute*, 68.

⁶⁴⁹ Anonymous testimony provided by the M.F.P.F. Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial, *D’une révolte à une lute*, 68.

⁶⁵⁰ Anonymous female teacher, (unedited) Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement, 7 November, 1964, 10. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

a severely deformed baby thanked doctor Vellay for taking the time to write and offering her the “sincere light of comprehension.”⁶⁵¹ She recalled that those “shady” doctors that had pronounced her life sentence, “had no trouble mocking what she had had to morally endure [as the future mother of a possible monster].”⁶⁵² It is no wonder with responses like these from the men they counted on for support in their lives, that the women of France turned to other women to help them through this traumatic aspect of their existence.

In matters of abortion, women formed networks to assist each other in controlling fertility either by procuring birth control, helping them locate illegal abortionists, or by helping them perform abortions themselves. And this solidarity took place on every level of French society. One woman from a rural area near Montpellier explained that women always performed abortions on themselves (without procuring the assistance of a male abortionist or doctor) and learned the secrets of abortion from other women. This rural woman clarified:

[Women] learn [about abortion] from “female companions” or even from their mothers or grandmothers who have ‘gone through it themselves.’ There are also . . . very young . . . girls of 16 or 17 . . . who go out with women who are older than them . . . who introduce them to men . . . these women are in the know and have been informed by women older than themselves....[This information] is transmitted from generation to generation.⁶⁵³

Women in the middle and upper classes also formed networks to pass information amongst themselves. As both a female medical student and a female accountant explained, they always had “one or two good addresses” in their purses, which they kept

⁶⁵¹ Anonymous woman corresponding with Doctor Vellay, cited in Vellay, 63.

⁶⁵² Anonymous woman corresponding with Doctor Vellay, cited in Vellay, 63.

⁶⁵³ Anonymous woman from a rural area near Montpellier, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 14. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

on hand in case of emergencies and always shared with other women in need.⁶⁵⁴ The accountant divulged, “[Abortion] is not often talked about, but even so one knows to circulate a good address... I have myself given emergency aid to friends [in need].”⁶⁵⁵ In the final analysis, women in France rejected men’s control of their uteruses. Whether out of desperation or determination or a combination of the both, women took action by exercising control of their own bodies, or by finding someone that could help them with this task. This person, the majority of the time was another woman.

SOCIAL SOLUTIONS

In addition to experiencing a wide range of political and economic difficulties , postwar French society was also still firmly wedded to the idea of traditional gender roles stemming from an historical Catholic morality. Occasionally, younger women would complain about women’s lack of rights or the need for a new morality to match the changes in French society, however, a great majority of the French public followed the conservative guidelines of tradition. Therefore, those advocating the liberalization of contraception for women in the postwar argued not that women had the right to bodily self-determination, but that they were protecting French women from the danger of clandestine abortion. For instance, in *L’enfant accident*, Weill-Hallé expressed the belief that a woman has, “...the right to be a mother when she desires.”⁶⁵⁶ However, although Dr. Weill-Hallé flirted with a language of rights for women earlier in her career, by the

⁶⁵⁴ Anonymous female accountant living in Paris and an anonymous female medical student, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 13-14 and 15. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

⁶⁵⁵ Anonymous female accountant living in Paris, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 15. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

⁶⁵⁶ Weill-Hallé, *L’enfant accident*, 8

late 1960s, she dropped this terminology. Weill-Hallé's later arguments centered on the importance of contraception for the health of women, the health of families, and therefore, on the health of the French state. Weill-Hallé had become disturbed by the M.F.P.F.'s extension of the idea of a woman's right to birth control as being a right to control one's own body and therefore that women should have the right not only to contraception but also to free and legal abortion. Weill-Hallé became so uneasy with this new, radical viewpoint taken by the organization, that she retired from the movement that she had created herself in 1956.⁶⁵⁷ Strongly influenced by traditionalism and a firm Catholic morality, Weill-Hallé had begun her medical career believing that birth control (as it was being employed in the United States in the postwar) was simply "a monstrous refusal of maternity."⁶⁵⁸ Her work with women in her practice and her experience of the "false morality" of other doctors who tortured women who sought to control their own fertilities caused Weill-Hallé to change her views. Over time, Weill-Hallé came to believe that contraception was necessary for the women of France. However, when the M.F.P.F. took her vision of protecting women to the next level, Weill-Hallé retreated back into the shelter of her traditional morality and broke her ties with the organization. However, Weill-Hallé never lost her compassion for the women of France and she continued her fight to protect them, using a social political ideology that she could comfortably embrace.

With few focusing on women's rights, the reproductive debate in France centered on social issues. People from all sides of the political spectrum, all professions, and all walks of life could agree that most women in France were frightened or uncomfortable

⁶⁵⁷ Weill-Hallé invited 20 other women to join in the creation of the organization "*La Maternité Heureuse*" in march 1956. This organization became affiliated with the International Planned Parenthood Federation in 1958 and was re-named the *Movement Français pour le Planning Familial* in 1960. M.F.P.F. "D'une révolte...", 81.

⁶⁵⁸ M.F.P.F, *D'une révolte*, 71-72.

with the idea of bringing children into an unstable postwar world. In fact, social considerations weighed far heavier on the minds of French women than any other consideration when deciding about whether to continue a pregnancy. 250 women surveyed by the M.F.P.F. in the 1960s ranked inadequate housing and a lack of resources as the primary reasons why they sought abortions. Then in order of importance, women considered the following justifications as serious reasons to contemplate terminating a pregnancy: the happiness and education of their children; the health of the mother, an insufficient amount of social services available to help working mothers raise healthy families; and single women's fear of societal judgment.⁶⁵⁹ These studies were also supported by the findings of the Birth-Health Brigade, organized by the Prefecture of Police of Paris in 1954. This "Brigade" found that of the 460 women pursued for abortive maneuvers, 55% sought abortions because they believed their lodgings to be insufficient, 33% because they were single or in an "irregular situation" (separated, divorced, etc.), and 13% because they were the sole provider for their families.⁶⁶⁰ It was clear from many separate studies that women in France wanted children, but only at a time when they felt that they could happily and healthily raise them. As Marcelle Auclair found in her inquiry in the early 1960s, very few couples seeking abortions were "egoists who did not want children" (only one out of the 581 letters she received fit this description). Instead, French women and couples wanted children, but recognized their responsibilities

⁶⁵⁹ Geneviève Texier, "Quelques indications sur l'avortement à partir d'une enquête menée par les centres de Planning Familial, in *L'avortement en France: Colloque organisé sous l'égide du mouvement français pour le planning familial*, edited by Anne-Marie Dourlen-Rollier (Paris: Librairie Maloine, 1967), 37. These same justifications were provided by women who were asked why they chose to use birth control with the sole difference that in the case of contraception, women ranked the happiness and education of children first and the lack of adequate housing second.

⁶⁶⁰ Ferdinand Gollety, "L'avortement au point de vue juridique," *Problèmes: Revue de l'association générale des étudiants en médecine de Paris* 33 (mars-avril 1956): 33.

and realized that a child who was not raised in safe and hygienic conditions surrounded by loving affection might not develop to his or her full potential emotionally and physically.⁶⁶¹ These common justifications open the door to a class analysis of abortion in the postwar.

In an inquiry by the M.F.P.F. between 1962 and 1963, when asked whether abortion posed more serious religious, moral, or material problems in their lives, 77% of women responded that material considerations ranked highest in their estimation, whereas moral considerations bothered 31% primarily and religious problems only dramatically affected 17% of the women surveyed.⁶⁶² The material problems cited most often with regards to abortion included: the cost of the operation itself, the lack of information, the lack of safety, and the shock to one's health. However most of these material considerations affected women of the lower classes far more than those of the middle and upper classes. A 1964 round-table discussion sponsored by the M.F.P.F. featuring four couples from four different strata of French society, highlighted that women of all classes sought out abortions to control their fertilities. However, the this discussion underscored the dramatic effect that both class and socio-economic condition had on women's abilities to procure abortions and the conditions in which they obtained them. In the round-table discussion, the medical students and the middle-class employees realized how lucky they were that they had the financial means to procure abortions. The female medical student emphasized that, "...One always had a working addresss. No danger. One has money." When asked whether an abortion was simple to obtain, the

⁶⁶¹ Auclair, 15.

⁶⁶² Geneviève Texier, "Quelques indications sur l'avortement à partir d'une enquête menée par les centres de Planning Familial, in *L'avortement en France: Colloque organize sous l'égide du mouvement français pour le planning familial*, edited by Anne-Marie Dourlen-Rollier (Paris: Librairie Maloine, 1967), 36.

female medical student elucidated, “That’s it! And more than that, this... solution is not like the abortions that others obtain: it is without risk. One goes to a clinic, one stays 24 hours. It does not fall on the shoulders of the woman herself. She has friends to take care of her. It is very different.”⁶⁶³ However, as she noted, “An address represents 150,000 Ancien Francs that one must provide in 15 days, . . . I do not know how people do it . . . but I have given out this address many times to people who have demanded it. My parents are even in on it.”⁶⁶⁴ Her partner (also a medical student) contributed, “If one wanted to give statistics amongst the couples we know . . . out of 30 couples there are 25 that have utilized the practice of abortion, easily, . . . conveniently . . .”⁶⁶⁵ Her partner then brought up the fact that the “artists” he knew, particularly the dancers, used regular abortions as a means of birth control. He recalled that even though this segment of the population “seemed very liberated, very modern” and had a lot of money, they never discussed the topic of birth control and the female dancers used abortion exclusively and extensively (up to three times a year) to control their fertilities.⁶⁶⁶ The female accountant participating in the round-table concurred with the statements of the medical students explaining, “[Abortions] are very frequent, but they are not spoken of very much . . . [Upper-class women] have working addresses. They have more money and there are even women who go to Switzerland. In any case, they always have access to someone

⁶⁶³ Anonymous female medical student, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 13.. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965). To this comment, Dr. Cohen (who presided over the session as the medical expert) said that he did not agree with her opinion at all and that in fact there was no such thing as an abortion “without risk”.

⁶⁶⁴ Anonymous female medical student, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 13.. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40.

⁶⁶⁵ Anonymous male medical student, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 13.. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40.

⁶⁶⁶ Anonymous male medical student, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 13-14.. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40.

competent. They know how to take precautions.”⁶⁶⁷ These examples reveal several interesting trends regarding the use of abortion in the middle and upper classes, namely that the procedure was used frequently and “conveniently” with little worry as to one’s safety. Women shared information regarding abortion freely with one another and had the money to visit low-risk clinics that were both reputable and sanitary.

When a woman in the middle and upper classes could not find a clinic in France, she would often fly to Switzerland where the procedure was legal. A study of 300 cases done by Professor W. Geisendorf of Geneva found that women who visited Switzerland were thirty years of age on average and two thirds of them were married with at least one child (32% with three or more children).⁶⁶⁸ Most of the women who came cited medical and social reasons for seeking abortions and most women carried a “medical certificate” from their doctors in France. These certificates varied widely in form; some described the patient’s situation and demanded a therapeutic abortion, whereas others simply described the medical condition of the patient without forming a conclusion. Some doctors railed on the rigidity of French law, while others gave commentaries on family planning.⁶⁶⁹ The Swiss Commission found that a large percentage of these certificates were falsified, particularly those pronouncing a diagnosis of rubella, but the Swiss doctors found the

⁶⁶⁷ Anonymous female accountant, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 15. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40.

⁶⁶⁸ Professor W. Geisendorf, “Les Françaises que vont en Suisse demander un avortement médical,” in in *L’avortement en France: Colloque organise sous l’égide du mouvement français pour le planning familial*, edited by Anne-Marie Dourlen-Rollier (Paris: Librairie Maloine, 1967), 117-118.

⁶⁶⁹ Professor W. Geisendorf, “Les Françaises que vont en Suisse demander un avortement médical,” in in *L’avortement en France: Colloque organise sous l’égide du mouvement français pour le planning familial*, edited by Anne-Marie Dourlen-Rollier (Paris: Librairie Maloine, 1967), 117-118.

French women's cases so "pitiable" and filled with drama that they had a difficult time prosecuting any of the women that asked for their services.⁶⁷⁰

Not surprisingly, few of the benefits secured by financial ease were available to women of the lower classes. According to a woman from a rural village near Montpellier, couples would have used family planning if anyone had provided them with the information, but instead they were forced to use abortion to control fertility. She and her husband explained however, that this option was used "very rarely" because rural women's lives were circumscribed by both religion and fear (of their husbands and of God).⁶⁷¹ This information was contradicted, however, by the working-class man working at Nord Aviation. This working-class male discussed the "specialized" workers at the factories in Flins who had moved from rural areas in the Vendée and Bretagne. He asserted that these peasants were "little adapted to life at the factory and communal life, coming from the most part from small villages, and practiced abortion on a daily basis [as a means of birth control.]"⁶⁷² He maintained that although some were "vaguely" familiar with the Ogino method, "they didn't believe in it. Their "method" was abortion."⁶⁷³ But he emphasized that the vast majority of these rural workers had never heard of birth control because of their conservative and traditional social origins. He also explained

⁶⁷⁰ Professor W. Geisendorf, "Les Françaises que vont en Suisse demander un avortement médical," in *L'avortement en France: Colloque organisé sous l'égide du mouvement français pour le planning familial*, edited by Anne-Marie Dourlen-Rollier (Paris: Librairie Maloine, 1967), 118.

⁶⁷¹ Anonymous couple from a rural area near Montpellier, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d'une "Table Ronde" de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 14. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

⁶⁷² Anonymous male worker from Nord Aviation, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d'une "Table Ronde" de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 2. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

⁶⁷³ Anonymous male worker from Nord Aviation, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d'une "Table Ronde" de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 3. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

that because abortion was their only method of controlling pregnancy, there was at least one or more deaths per week in the city, where some young women went every month “to the clinic.”⁶⁷⁴

Although the working-class couple (the man from Nord Aviation and his wife the teacher) were better-informed about birth control due to their syndicates’ attempts to educate the workers, most people in their class were also forced to use abortion to handle the very “grave problem” of birth control. The male worker explained, “It is not a question of asking for condoms at the pharmacy Children are gotten rid of. That is the only practical and efficient solution that we have found.”⁶⁷⁵ Although he did not elaborate on why he could not possibly use a condom as a means of birth control, his wife seemed to agree. She stated, “The only solution is abortion. And it is agonizing for the woman, so much so that the equilibrium of the home is gravely menaced, it is frightening!”⁶⁷⁶ The woman described working-class women who lost their teeth and grew old before their time, to which her husband replied that in this instance she was really talking about the true underclasses, the bottom of the barrel. He elaborated that amongst his cohort (of specialized workers), they rarely spoke of the problem (of controlling pregnancy) with each other, to which his wife added that women in their class never spoke to their husbands about it either.⁶⁷⁷ This dialogue involving the working-

⁶⁷⁴ Anonymous male worker from Nord Aviation, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 3. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

⁶⁷⁵ Anonymous male worker from Nord Aviation, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 10. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

⁶⁷⁶ Anonymous female teacher, (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November, 1964, 10. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

⁶⁷⁷ Anonymous working-class couple (male worker from Nord Aviation and female teacher), (unedited) *Compte Rendu d’une “Table Ronde” de 4 couples sur contraception et avortement*, 7 November,

class man and his wife, in which they were both addressing the doctor, yet seemed to be speaking to each other, underscores the reality that women were expected to deal with the problem of contraception and abortion themselves. Their husbands would not discuss it at work, because for them, the problem did not exist or did not concern them; it was their wives' problem and these women would deal with it as best they could, while their husbands did their best to ignore it.

Even those lower-class women who were able to get to Switzerland were forced to endure hardships that middle- and upper-class women were spared because of their contacts and financial means. The “more modern” gynecologist of one French woman seeking a fourth abortion, gave her an address in Geneva. The woman bemoaned the fact that besides having very little money, she also had to figure out who would take care of her children while she was away.⁶⁷⁸ Her husband was not available for this task because he believed controlling pregnancies did not involve him. This woman emphasized that being in the midst of the Algerian war made her task even more difficult because one could not pass over the border with large sums of money and that therefore she was forced to travel with a bare minimum. When she arrived, she visited a couple of old friends to borrow the money, only to receive a “moral lecture” on her behavior. This “welcome” caused her to sink into a deep depression, since she had already made her decision to undergo the procedure.⁶⁷⁹ Eating nothing but croissants for two days (she

1964, 3. BMD, Fonds Valabrègue, 1 AS 40. An edited version of this roundtable discussion was published in the *Nouvel-Observateur* (7 July, 1965).

⁶⁷⁸ Anonymous testimony provided by the M.F.P.F. Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial, *D'une révolte à une lute: 25 ans d'histoire du planning familial* (Paris : Éditions Tiercé, 1982), 66.

⁶⁷⁹ Anonymous testimony provided by the M.F.P.F. Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial, *D'une révolte à une lute: 25 ans d'histoire du planning familial* (Paris : Éditions Tiercé, 1982), 66.

divulged that most women who travel to Switzerland for this procedure remember the croissants), she finally found another couple who would loan her the sum she needed. She also did not have papers from her regular doctor (which most wealthy women obtained illegally). After trying to procure the necessary documents by phone from France, this woman ended up staging “a small attack of nerves” in order to expedite the process. She explained, “A woman who has decided, has decided.”⁶⁸⁰ The breakdown worked and she was finally admitted to the clinic where she underwent the procedure. Although ultimately successful (except that a complication ruined her chances to have future children), many of the problems in this woman’s journey would likely have been avoided if she had had the money to make it so.

Although many French women acknowledged (and tried to accept) that women were made to suffer, in the postwar some women suffered more than others. Without access to reliable birth control and safe and legal methods of abortion, women in the lower classes and in rural areas could look forward to lives of unrelenting childbirth. French law became a policy that tortured women. One woman recounted, “I will be thirty-six in March. Ten years of marriage, five children, six miscarriages, four of which were initiated. Oh the physical and moral suffering! Only those who have walked in my shoes could understand...”⁶⁸¹ Madame O.B. from Casablanca likened the discrepancy in access to birth control and abortion to a type of “class warfare.” She declared, “One only

⁶⁸⁰ Anonymous testimony provided by the M.F.P.F. Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial, *D’une révolte à une lute: 25 ans d’histoire du planning familial* (Paris : Éditions Tiercé, 1982), 67.

⁶⁸¹ Anonymous correspondence to Marcelle Auclair, cited in Auclair, *Le Livre noir de l’avortement*, 23.

has to look at who is for and who is against.”⁶⁸² She complained that those who made the decisions never asked the opinion of those the most concerned: the workers, the people with large families, or prostitutes. According to Madame O.B., “[It is]...those moralizers who are the first to take the necessary precautions [against unplanned pregnancies], who seek to forbid [the use of contraceptives to] the overworked mother, the woman conscious of her responsibility in creating a dignified human being, or ... worried about staying the same woman that her husband married, not perpetually deformed or brutalized.”⁶⁸³ If in the end, the debate revolved around the sanctity of life, the question remained, the sanctity of whose life? In the closer analysis, those in power were certainly not concerned about the working class women who were tortured into daily decisions to abort children that they felt that they could not adequately support in the social conditions of the postwar world. Many doctors did not seem to care about the quality of life of the mothers, only of the fetus. For instance doctors “mocked” the woman who was forced to carry a child for nine months that had a fifty percent chance of being seriously deformed from her exposure to rubella. And although one doctor admitted how “sad” that it was that a woman with otospongiosis (a disease of the bones of the inner ear) became successively more deaf with each pregnancy, her case was not one in which a therapeutic abortion could be prescribed. The doctor explained, “One of my young, elegant clients...lost one quarter of her auditory acuity [with each of her four pregnancies.] She saw herself growing more and more deaf and envisaged with terror the repercussions that

⁶⁸² Madame O.B. from Casablanca, “Un témoignage,” *France-Observateur* (December 22, 1955): 10.

⁶⁸³ Madame O.B. from Casablanca, “Un témoignage,” *France-Observateur* (December 22, 1955): 10.

this deafness would have on the future of her household.”⁶⁸⁴ However, this doctor could do nothing for her, but tell her sad story. Doctor Pierre Vellay highlighted the hypocrisy of those in power who practiced a selective ranking of human preciousness. He accused these same men who argued for the sanctity of the fetus of saying nothing when the German authorities shipped the Jewish children of France off to concentration camps during the Occupation.⁶⁸⁵ He also pointed out that the lives of those select children were only precious to the French state until they turned eighteen and were conscripted to die in war. In the postwar, life was sacred, but only for some, and only until one’s country needed that grown-up child to make the ultimate sacrifice.

In a letter to *France-Observateur* in December 1955, Madame Durand, homemaker, mother of three, and wife of a militant worker in Aubervilliers (in the department of the Seine) criticized those participants in the debate on birth control who, “...pretend to try to discover a solution to the problem while being voluntarily ignorant of the great majority of the population to which the problem applies.”⁶⁸⁶ So Madame Durand recounted her life to educate these participants. She stressed, “We love our children, we raise them ourselves, we have plans and ambitions for them . . . but we also have small salaries, often poor housing conditions . . . Some of us are the wives of militant workers and we would like to be able to...after the kids are grown...participate in movements with our husbands that will give us the sense of being ‘alive’, of ‘creating’, and at the same time renew the love that made us join our lives [long ago] in order to ‘build’ something together.”⁶⁸⁷ She believed that without authorization, she could still

⁶⁸⁴ Ravina, 16B.

⁶⁸⁵ Vellay, 33.

⁶⁸⁶ Madame Durand, “Je suis ni abbé, ni étudiante,” *France-Observateur* (8 Décembre 1955): 13.

⁶⁸⁷ Madame Durand, 13.

speak for the majority of working households, and continued, “We do not want clandestine abortion, it humiliates us and ruins us physically and morally, leaving us with a sense of culpability; but we wish for a system that will alleviate our fear: [to have] two, three, four accepted and desired children, and then after this part of our lives is fulfilled, to turn our focus to other things.”⁶⁸⁸ She mocked politicians who believed that they had “set everything right” by giving women and mothers the vote after the war. She also cast derision on Chauchard (who had written to the paper on November 17th) for promoting the “human dignity of the couple” when women’s state of slavery in postwar France could never be dignified.⁶⁸⁹ This militant worker’s wife was asking, not for a bourgeois lifestyle, or a life of ease, but simply for a life that could blossom, outside the constrictions of unrelenting childbirth. Yet, it is possible that that was the exact intention of those in power: to keep the working classes so overwhelmed with bearing the future population of France that they did not have the time or the energy to develop their own interests, organize, and above all agitate against a conservative postwar moral and social order.

In many ways one can judge the stability and well-being of a society by whether women choose to bring children into the world. As a social issue, many doctors, judges, legislators, and laymen proposed a wide variety of social solutions to the problem of abortion. As Weill-Hallé expressed, “In France, as elsewhere, the remedy for abortion is not police investigations and fear, but an efficient aid for women at the human, social, and economic level that encourages bringing desired children into the world.”⁶⁹⁰ Doctors Toulouse and Couffy agreed that preventive action was always more effective than

⁶⁸⁸ Madame Durand, 13.

⁶⁸⁹ Madame Durand, 13

⁶⁹⁰ Doctor Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, cited in Valabrègue, 151.

repression when it came to abortion. As Couffy stated, “What is essential is not that a woman can not abort, or does not dare to, but instead that she does not want to.”⁶⁹¹

However, as most entrants into the debate indicated, an improvement in material conditions, social services, and access to contraception and abortion would be useless without a proper education. At the League of Mental Hygiene Madame Amado-Levi-Valensi succinctly summarized this viewpoint explaining, “If one grants the permission to obtain abortions without at the same time providing an education in responsibility, one will obtain nothing, and if one provides an education on responsibility without granting the permission to abort, one will also obtain nothing.”⁶⁹² Ferdinand Gollety, Judge of Instruction for the Tribunal of the Seine, also believed that the problem of abortion was too complex to be solved by repression alone. Gollety concluded that education was the solution, but insisted that it was the responsibility of doctors to “. . . orient the woman, to prompt her to face her responsibilities, and to expose her to the dangers of criminal abortion.”⁶⁹³ He even proposed that rural women were less likely to abort because the doctors in provincial areas had retained some measure of authority, whereas doctors in cities had seen their authority eroded by the changes of urban life.⁶⁹⁴ Catherine Valabrègue also proposed solutions which included a general education on the responsibility of the couple. She advocated ameliorating economic and social conditions, which included building adequate housing, as well as providing day cares and homes for mothers. This aid for women would help show them that abortion was not always the

⁶⁹¹ Doctor Couffy, cited in André Toulouse’s preface to Dourlen-Rollier’s *La vérité sur l’avortement*, 7.

⁶⁹² Madame Amado-Levi-Valensi, cited in Valabrègue, 166.

⁶⁹³ Gollety, 33.

⁶⁹⁴ Gollety, 33.

solution for their problems.⁶⁹⁵ To this end, Valabrègue promoted providing French women with access to birth control so that they could prevent pregnancies for which they were not ready or for which their social or economic situation was inadequate. She also advocated providing couples with an education that would teach them their individual and mutual responsibilities and a healthy respect for each other. For Valabrègue the trick was teaching young people in France to balance liberty with responsibility.⁶⁹⁶ The best solution to the abortion conundrum would take into account class as well. Vellay publicized a tentative solution that had been proposed in Switzerland, signed by 50,000 people, and was scheduled to be put on the ballot. This appeal stated, “Abortion is a grave act, one that must be undertaken only after intensive reflection and with the assistance of a medical specialist. But everyone has the free right to decide. The law does not have the right to impose the views of zealots, who place abstract principles above immediate need, on those who do not want a pregnancy. There exists a significant black market of abortion. Morality demands putting an end to it and giving all women the same attention and the same care.”⁶⁹⁷ As Vellay highlighted, a measure such as this in France would bring abortion out of hiding, would put all women on equal footing, and would recognize that all women have the right to health and the right to free choice after deliberate reflection and a taking into account of one’s own responsibility.⁶⁹⁸

CONCLUSION

⁶⁹⁵ Valabrègue, 166.

⁶⁹⁶ Valabrègue, 166. Doctors Sauvy and Netter also agreed that abortion was a social problem that could only be solved through an improvement of social conditions combined with a program of education. *Problèmes*, 43 and 19.

⁶⁹⁷ Vellay, 173.

⁶⁹⁸ Vellay, 173.

Most of the guilt, shame, and fear women in France experienced surrounding abortion stemmed from French society's deep patriarchal roots. In the postwar, French laws and social mores regarding pregnancy were used to shame women into proper behavior. Men could behave as they pleased with few repercussions, but a woman who "erred" bore the evidence on her person. A woman's body became the evidence to her crimes against the social mores of society. Whether a woman was married or single, she was expected to follow prescribed proper behavior for women, and a fear of pregnancy was an important means of forcing compliance in a traditional patriarchal world. This was not an unconscious attempt to control women, but a conscious attempt to use fear of pregnancy as a weapon. In a letter to *France-Observateur*, Mr. Méreau from Fontenay-aux-Roses cautioned that a modification of the law of 1920 against abortion might negatively affect women's behavior. He argued, "It is certain that the risk of childbirth, constitutes, in numerous cases, a brake against the conjugal infidelity of the woman."⁶⁹⁹ Derogy emphasized that for single women, "France was far from having triumphed over its ancient prejudices and patriarchal conventions" surrounding illegitimate motherhood.⁷⁰⁰ Derogy interviewed a twenty-five year old woman, who was currently married, but could no longer have children because of an "accident" she suffered invoking a miscarriage when she was single and homeless at nineteen years of age. She explained that at the time of her abortion, people reacted with shock that she could speak of the unplanned pregnancy "as her greatest desire" and that she had greeted the doctor's news of her pregnancy with "joy and pride" before quickly succumbing to a sense of "agony, responsibility, and revolt" because she was "alone, without work, without

⁶⁹⁹ Mr. Méreau, "L'infidélité conjugale," *France-Observateur* (November 17th, 1955): 7.

⁷⁰⁰ Derogy, 67.

lodging.”⁷⁰¹ She declared that her love of children was so great in fact that she, “...would not accept and would never accept bringing a child into the world for her pleasure” without having the proper means to raise and support him. She tried for half a year to abort the child, finally succeeding in a “partial birth” abortion at six months. This woman complained that many “well-to-do” individuals in society accused women of cowardice for provoking abortions, but she insisted that it was more cowardly, “to sacrifice the life of another, rather than to accept the risk to one’s own life in consciously avoiding the creation of another victim.”⁷⁰² This same woman recounted that she knew that initiating an abortion at six months could kill her, but that, “. . . she did not feel the courage or the right to bring a being into the world, to whom she could not give a father, a home,...or even food, and who, because of the conditions of his birth would be humiliated by a society which, despite its pretenses at being civilized, does not accept illegitimate children.”⁷⁰³ Without an efficient means to control their fertilities through either birth control or abortion, the private lives of all French women, married or single, would be displayed on their bodies for all of French society to see, judge, and condemn.

Catherine Valabrègue, Vice-President for the *Mouvement Français pour le Planning Familial* (French Movement for Family Planning) or MFPPF, noted that she was surprised that women who fought for social justice for women did not first fight for the right to a voluntary maternity. She stressed that there could be no economic improvement vast enough to guarantee a happy maternity for all women and that one could never speak of the emancipation of women unless they had the right to share

⁷⁰¹ Anonymous testimony of a twenty-five year old woman, Cited in Derogy, p. 67-68.

⁷⁰² Anonymous testimony of a twenty-five year old woman, Cited in Derogy, p. 69.

⁷⁰³ Anonymous testimony of a twenty-five year old woman, Cited in Derogy, p. 69-70.

responsibility for their children equally.⁷⁰⁴ Valabrègue insisted that equality between the sexes could never be achieved if one continued to violate the dignity of women by denying them the means to decide when they wanted to become mothers.⁷⁰⁵ The twenty-five-year-old woman cited by Derogy expressed similar thoughts. She believed that she had been betrayed “by a society incapable of allowing a [single] woman to live with dignity—to eat and to work—but above all to be able to love. To love an infant who would also have to be allowed to exist and to love as well.”⁷⁰⁶ She claimed that after the “accident” she had a difficult time not blaming all men for her experience. “Simply stated,” she said, “. . . They are lucky enough to never have to know this torment.”⁷⁰⁷ She asked only, that in return for this lucky break, that men accept that they “never have the right to make love for themselves alone” and that above all, they must “have a care for the consequences that a ‘mistake’ on their part can have for a woman.”⁷⁰⁸ She argued, “An abortion is not an event that one forgets. It marks one’s entire life and a man does not have the right either consciously, or by egoism alone, to place a woman in a situation where she is forced to undergo one. But the respect for women, much like the respect for children is also a question of society.”⁷⁰⁹ It was for this reason that in their 1971 Manifesto, the *Mouvement de liberation de la femme* (Movement for the Liberation of Women) or MLF demanded an end to the scandalous shame and despair of the one million five hundred thousand women who sought abortions every year, five thousand of whom would die trying to attain them by illegal means. They demanded free and

⁷⁰⁴ Catherine Valabrègue, *Contrôle des Naissances et Planning Familial* (Paris: Éditions de la Table Ronde, 1966), 214.

⁷⁰⁵ Valabrègue, 214-215.

⁷⁰⁶ Anonymous testimony of a twenty-five year old woman, Cited in Derogy, p. 69.

⁷⁰⁷ Anonymous testimony of a twenty-five year old woman, Cited in Derogy, p. 70.

⁷⁰⁸ Anonymous testimony of a twenty-five year old woman, Cited in Derogy, p. 70.

⁷⁰⁹ Anonymous testimony of a twenty-five year old woman, Cited in Derogy, p. 70.

accessible abortions so that they could, “Immediately cease being ashamed of their bodies, so that they could be free and proud of their bodies just as those who have always had full control of their corporeal beings,” and so that they would no longer have to be “ashamed to be women” with egos that dissipated bit by bit, each time they were forced to undergo clandestine, illegal, and dangerous abortions.⁷¹⁰ Although the MLF fought vehemently for women’s right to abortion after the revolutions of 1968, the seeds of dissent were overwhelmingly planted by the women of France in the 1950s and 1960s, when they began questioning the legal restrictions that limited their right to control their fertilities and bodies and when they chose to undergo abortions that could threaten their health and their lives.

⁷¹⁰ Mouvement de Libération des Femmes, “Notre ventre nous appartient,” (manifeste du mouvement de liberation de la femme), *Le Nouvel Observateur* (5 avril 1971). Cited in Vellay,

CHAPTER FOUR

Girls ‘Like That’: Lesbian Agency in Postwar French Society

A woman from an eastern European country explained that she had immigrated to France in the postwar because she knew from a young age that she loved women and same-sex love was not possible in her own country. She stressed, “France represented a country that was liberated in terms of its mores.”⁷¹¹ The French are renowned for having invented the art *de l’amour*, however in post-World-War-II France the sexual reality of most individuals was far removed from this image. Strongly influenced by its Catholics roots, many in French society espoused traditional gender roles and shared a very conservative outlook on sexuality. In the interwar era, there was a vitality to the gay experience and gay writers and artists had varied opportunities to publish their works to great acclaim. Some historians have argued that after the World War II, the patriarchal structures and mentalities generated by the war continued into the post-war era and forced “the love that doesn’t dare say its name” to retreat back into hiding.⁷¹² However, in the period between World War II and 1968, French lesbians were thoughtful and active participants on the historical stage. Despite repression, these women acted on their own behalf, making authentic choices to live their sexualities in a manner that validated their experience. Some women—like Simone de Beauvoir, Christiane Rochefort, and Françoise Mallet-Joris—explored the phenomenon of lesbianism through their writing, although not necessarily tying their work to their own lives. Other women—such as

⁷¹¹ “K.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 62.

⁷¹² Marie-Jo Bonnet, *Les relations amoureuses entre les femmes*, Collection Opus (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1995), 325.

Violette Leduc—chose a public unveiling of their sexualities through their autobiographies and works of fiction. Additionally, the majority of French lesbians practiced a type of quiet agency. Refusing to remain alone in the solitude of their experience they sought out other women who loved women. Some women were able to decipher coded glances and signals and to find women in their daily lives: at school, at the retreat, in the barracks, or on the metro. Other women braved public spaces such as the lesbian bars of the postwar world. These bars served were a step in a “lesbian continuity”⁷¹³ that passes from the postwar, through 1968 and into the present day. By coming together in the bars, lesbians in France (as well as in other countries like Canada and the United States), were able to see that they were not alone in their love for women. These women came to understand that they were in fact members of a group of like-minded individuals with whom they formed first couples, then circles, then networks, and then communities. These postwar women crafted chosen families, oftentimes from within the lesbian subculture, but sometimes from without, and these chosen families supported them as they participated in the revolution in women’s sexuality then underway.

In the *Ancien Régime*, individuals caught in the act of sodomy and priests that molested children were sometimes burned alive. However, with the penal code of 1791, the French revolutionaries abolished the legislation that criminalized sodomy.⁷¹⁴ It was not until Vichy that the restrictions against the rights of homosexuals were again set in motion. On 6 August 1942, Maréchal Pétain signed a bill, which effectively criminalized

⁷¹³ Christiane Jouve, “La famille d’amour,” *Lesbia* 65 (October 1988): 3.

⁷¹⁴ Sodomy was decriminalized with the law of 25 septembre-6 octobre, 1791. Janine Mossuz-Lavau, *Les lois de l’amour: Les politiques de la sexualité en France (1950-2002)* (Paris: Petit Bibliothèque Payot, 2002), 283.

any activity leading to the “debauchery” of minors under twenty-one years of age but also specifically forbid sexual activities with a member of one’s own sex. At the Liberation, the provisional government fortified Vichy’s anti-homosexual policies by signing into law on 8 February 1945, an article that punished with a fine and up to three years in jail anyone committing “acts against nature” with members of their own sex under twenty-one years of age.⁷¹⁵ Continuing in this same discriminatory vein, in 1960 the government passed the law of 30 July 1960, which authorized the French government to take specific measures to battle against various ills in society such as alcoholism, prostitution, and tuberculosis but also to “fight against homosexuality.”⁷¹⁶ In 1968, France adopted the classification of the *Organisation Mondiale de la Santé* (OMS), or Global Health Organization, that considered homosexuality a mental illness, along with fetishism, exhibitionism, voyeurism, and necrophilia. By the time that homosexual men and women in France began pressing for legal rights and recognition in the late 1960s, normative heterosexuality had been inscribed in French law for centuries.⁷¹⁷

In addition to legal discrimination, the Catholic Church’s denunciation of homosexuality also influenced popular attitudes in France. Going further than persecuting homosexuality in the guise of protecting minors the Church condemned all homosexual behaviors, even those practiced in private between consenting adults. The bible declared that homosexuality was an act against God and nature and should be punished with death.

⁷¹⁵ Janine Mossuz-Lavau, *Les lois de l’amour: Les politiques de la sexualité en France (1950-2002)* (Paris: Petit Bibliothèque Payot, 2002), 283-285.

⁷¹⁶ Mossuz-Lavau, *Les Lois de l’amour*, 287. The rider clause on homosexuality was introduced to the National Assembly by M. Mirguet, deputy of the UNR from Moselle. Mirguet wanted to add a provision to the various measures which would ensure “all possible measures to fight against homosexuality.” He stressed that he thought it unnecessary to harp too incessantly on the necessity for such a clause since he felt the entire assembly was “...conscious of the gravity of the scourge that is homosexuality, a scourge against which we must protect our children”. Mossuz-Lavau, 287.

⁷¹⁷ Mossuz-Lavau, *Les Lois de l’amour*, 283-288.

Leviticus 20:13 stipulated, “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them shall be put to death for their abominable deed; they have forfeited their lives.”⁷¹⁸ On 15 January, 1976, the Church presented the *persona humana*, which reinforced the belief that sexual relations for any reason outside of “a legitimate marriage” is morally reprehensible. Showing a “merciful” attitude towards homosexuals, the declaration expressed that although homosexuals were themselves at fault for their depraved behavior (as indicated in Leviticus), the Church would, “welcome them with understanding and support in the hope that they will be able to overcome their personal difficulties and social maladaptation.”⁷¹⁹

The Catholic Church’s view of homosexuality as a self-inflicted and abominable behavior had deep repercussions in a French society that was still strongly tied to its Catholic roots.⁷²⁰ Surveys conducted in the 1960s and 1970s by several major journals revealed that a large majority of the French population was in agreement with the government’s decision to view homosexuality as a problem of French society.⁷²¹ In a 1968 poll taken by the IFOP, 32% of the people polled believed that homosexuality,

⁷¹⁸ Leviticus 20: 13, *The New American Bible* (Catholic) (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1970): 147.

⁷¹⁹ *La Documentation catholique* 1691 (1 February 1976): 110. Cited in Mossuz-Lavau, 289.

⁷²⁰ Since the division of Charlemagne’s empire in the ninth century, the primary religious influence in France has been Catholic. After World War Two, ninety-four per cent of French people were baptized Catholic and approximately thirty per cent attended at least Easter mass. However, the level of religious practice varies greatly by region. The most pious regions are in the West, the Eastern borderlands, and the southern edge of the Massif Central. The South, Southwest, and major cities are less religious areas. Another measure of Catholicism’s influence in France is the number of children who are sent to Catholic schools. In 1913, even after the expulsion of the teaching orders, Catholic schools still held thirteen per cent of the boys and twenty-five per cent of the girls of the total population of children in the primary grades (again, highly concentrated in pious regions). In 1965-66 eight Western departments had over thirty-five per cent of their children in Catholic primary school (three with more than fifty per cent) and four more departments on the edge of Massif Central had over twenty-five per cent (with one having more than thirty-five per cent). See Robert Paxton, ‘France: The Church, The Republic, and the Fascist Temptation, 1922-1945’, in Richard J. Wolff and Jörg K Hoensch (eds) *Catholics, The State, and the European Radical Right, 1914-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) p. 87.

⁷²¹ *La Documentation catholique* 1691 (1 February 1976). Cited in Mossuz-Lavau, 289-290.

“...was an alarming problem in France at this time.” In 1975, another survey, taken for the journal *L'Express* showed that 42% believed that homosexuality was a “a sickness that needed to be conquered” and 22% thought it “a sexual perversion that one must combat.” Only 24% of the people surveyed in 1975 believed that homosexuality was “an acceptable manner in which to express one’s sexuality.”⁷²² These surveys also documented that for the majority of French men and women, same-sex relationships were equally reprehensible whether they occurred between women or between men.

LESBIAN LIFE IN THE FIFTIES AND SIXTIES

French lesbians were careful and discreet, living in a society that generally rejected homosexuality. The social and sexual climate of postwar society ensured that many lesbians would remain closeted in order to maintain their privacy. Not unscathed by the social and sexual mores legislated by the government and prescribed by the church, a “traditional” guilt and fear often kept lesbians from telling others their secret. Many lesbians mentioned that they had never told their parents the truth about their lives because some thought their secret might actually kill them (figuratively or literally) while most lesbians knew that it would at least break their hearts. Rachel said that she never told her parents because they were from a different time and would never understand.⁷²³ Geneviève stated, “My family was not at all in the know, my parents were very old, if they knew the slightest bit about it, they would die, it would be horrible, horrible, horrible.”⁷²⁴ Patricia recounted that because she was very feminine and men found her

⁷²² Mossuz-Lavau, 291-292.

⁷²³ Rachel, interviewed by Christiane Jouve, “Elle était tout pour moi,” *Lesbia Magazine* 54 (October 1987): 23.

⁷²⁴ Geneviève, whose remarks were compiled by Christiane Jouve, “C’est comme ça,” *Lesbia Magazine* 54 (October 1987): 13.

attractive, it was not hard to hide her life from her parents, but she always regretted having to “trick” them.⁷²⁵ She explained that in the 1950s:

... The subject was completely taboo, one would not have thought of speaking to one's parents in 95% of the cases. Myself ... I never spoke to my parents and I will never dare it. They are too old and I think that it is too late, I would cause them too much pain and a grief that would surely kill them since they both have heart problems.⁷²⁶

This guilt took other forms as well. “E.,” emphasized that having received a Catholic education, she had had guilt “imprinted” on her at an early age. When she first struck up a romantic relationship with another woman, she felt guilty enough for two. “E.” explained, “I knew that I had damned myself, which was my problem, but I had also damned another.”⁷²⁷ Because of their strong feelings of culpability, she and her lover felt it necessary to stop their sexual relationship. They lived together for months in uncertainty and doubt, until someone she trusted assured “E.” that, “one can do anything with morality.”⁷²⁸

Others were frightened to tell their neighbors dreading rejection or ostracization. Georgette claimed that it was an unhappy society in which she had to pretend that she was in love with a married man from Lyon so that her neighbors would not become suspicious.⁷²⁹ One anonymous lesbian expressed how the secret of her sexuality burned within her, begging for release and that this intense urge created uncertainty and

⁷²⁵ Patricia, interviewed by Christiane Jouve, “Vécu: Le pied à l’Etrier,” *Lesbia Magazine* 20 (September 1984): 24.

⁷²⁶ Patricia, interviewed by Christiane Jouve, “Vécu: Le pied à l’Etrier,” *Lesbia Magazine* 20 (September 1984): 23.

⁷²⁷ “E.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 62.

⁷²⁸ “E.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 62.

⁷²⁹ Georgette, interviewed by Christiane Jouve, “J’ai la haine des hommes,” *Lesbia Magazine* 54 (October 1987): 20.

instability in her personal relationships. She explained, “Sometimes I took the initiative of talking about it...to know if they would accept or if there would be horror in their eyes.... I had a longing for communication, for recognition, more than for justification. I wanted to be recognized in my homosexuality.”⁷³⁰ “K.,” who lived in an eastern European country and moved to France in 1961, remembered, “Since I was very young, I understood that I loved women and at the same time I understood that one must not say this, that this must not be normal. It was perfectly clear that [I] was different than others, and it was necessary to pretend otherwise.”⁷³¹ The stories of these women show that many French lesbians were relegated to a world of silence, which they accepted and navigated simply because they had no choice.⁷³²

Some lesbians fantasized that the dual existence they lived was exciting and stimulating, but knew as well that this positive assessment hid underlying emotional lacunae. One woman stated, “I found it very amusing to have my ‘night places’ that no one knew about. But I was always haunted by the idea of reunifying these two worlds... There was something attractive in my way of life, but in fact I was not as well as I thought.”⁷³³ Christiane Jouve, who had interviewed many lesbians from the 1950s and

⁷³⁰ Anonymous Lesbian, interviewed by Claudie Lesselier in the late 1980s. Claudie Lesselier, “Silenced Resistances and Conflictual Identities,” in *Gay Studies from the French Cultures: Voices from France, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, and the Netherlands*, edited by Rommel Mendès-Leite and Pierre-Olivier de Busscher (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1993): 117.

⁷³¹ “K.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 62.

⁷³² Christiane Jouve referring to French lesbians of the 1950s and 1960s. Jouve, “Vieillir,” *Lesbia Magazine* 54 (October 1987): 11.

⁷³³ Anonymous Lesbian, interviewed by Claudie Lesselier in the late 1980s. Claudie Lesselier, “Silenced Resistances and Conflictual Identities,” in *Gay Studies from the French Cultures: Voices from France, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, and the Netherlands*, edited by Rommel Mendès-Leite and Pierre-Olivier de Busscher (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1993): 117.

1960s, explained that for these women, “To live in the permanent secret is a terrible oppression.”⁷³⁴

Although some lesbians (like Monique Wittig) claimed that lesbians had been silenced prior to the women’s movement springing from 1968, there were those in French society who were not silent and published works exploring the intricacies of lesbian and queer sexuality. The red band with which publishers sealed this literature before purchase prevented tampering by youths and other unauthorized readers, but also served as a symbol of societal censure of many of these works. Contemporary commentators noted that one needed to be brave to venture into this world of judgment, displaying one’s private life on the public stage. In her autobiography, Leduc clarified that an author braved this censure because writing about the lesbian experience was a difficult, but necessary task.⁷³⁵ Wittig, on the other hand, insisted that the theme of lesbianism could not even be considered taboo since it, “has no real existence in the history of literature,” (whereas male homosexual literature had a past and a present).⁷³⁶ Wittig intimated that the whole of lesbian literature (from Sappho through Leduc) could be counted on one hand.

However, this thread of lesbian culture exists and can clearly be traced throughout French history and into the postwar era. Perhaps Wittig’s beliefs stemmed from a struggle occurring within the author herself. Her 1964 work, *L’Opoponax* won the Prix Médicis in France, whereas Leduc’s *La Batarde* was denied the Prix Goncourt for “moral reasons.”⁷³⁷ Wittig’s *L’Opoponax* was a poetic work set in an ethereal all-female world

⁷³⁴ Christiane Jouve referring to French Lesbians of the 1950s and 1960s. Jouve, “Vieillir,” *Lesbia Magazine* 54 (October 1987): 11.

⁷³⁵ Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne,” 109.

⁷³⁶ Monique Wittig, *The Lesbian Body*, translated from the French by David Le Vay (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 9.

⁷³⁷ René de Ceccatty, “Violette Leduc,” *Masques* 11 (Automne 1981): 43.

of young schoolgirls and eschewed direct references to homosexuality. In the end, the fate of her protagonists was left to the imagination. On the other hand, Leduc's *La Batarde*, also published in 1964, described the intimate details of her non-conformist sexuality including her love for women with "persistent sincerity."⁷³⁸ In Wittig's subsequent book, published after the blossoming of the "women's movement" in 1968, she finally "dared" to tell a more dramatic story of "pearl-tressed, two-breasted amazons" who were bright, beautiful, and lethal. These Amazons succeeded in destroying the entire race of man to disprove the notion of male domination.⁷³⁹ Clearly a metamorphosis had transpired within Wittig post-1968. However, Leduc had found the courage to flout traditional social mores prior to the so-called "sexual revolution."

Many "ordinary" French lesbians were also affected by the conventional social and sexual mores of the constrained postwar society. Some lesbians believed that society would never accept the idea of "lesbianism" but that instead, each lesbian woman must make inroads into the minds of society, one individual at a time. For instance Patricia suggested that each lesbian should teach the heterosexual people in her life about homosexuality. According to Patricia, she should explain that homosexuality was not invented but had existed from the beginning of time and try to prove to her entourage that a lesbian was just like every other woman, with the same life and loves.⁷⁴⁰ Patricia emphasized that the "lesbian movement," whose members paraded themselves through the streets was "shameful," "lamentable," and "made one sick."⁷⁴¹ Patricia declared that

⁷³⁸ René de Ceccatty, "Violette Leduc," *Masques* 11 (Automne 1981): 43.

⁷³⁹ Margaret Crosland, "Introduction," in Monique Wittig, *The Lesbian Body*, 5.

⁷⁴⁰ Patricia, "Le Pied," 24-25.

⁷⁴¹ Patricia, "Le Pied," 25.

it was shameful, "...the way they present themselves, the way they yell, many of whom are transvestites," and she bemoaned the fact that, "...of course, the press creates sensationalist stories on the most visible....It makes me shudder with horror."⁷⁴² Instead, Patricia advocated a gradual process of acculturation. She believed that lesbians would be better served by sharing the truth of their lives with those around them "bit-by-bit": at work, in one's social *milieu* (environment), or as she had, by opening a "respectable" bar and restaurant. Patricia idealized her restaurant, boasting that it was a spot where heterosexuals and homosexuals could engage in a positive dialogue, and from this budding dialogue, the two heterogeneous groups could develop both acceptance and understanding.⁷⁴³

The influence of traditional social mores and the pressure to conform to gender stereotypes ensured that lesbians would sometimes discriminate against those members of the lesbian subculture that transgressed customary gender boundaries. Amongst lesbians who were pushing for public acceptance, such as Susan Daniel who wrote for *Arcadie*, there were those who attempted to distance themselves from any thing or anyone that would tarnish their shiny image of respectability. Susan Daniel insisted:

If we want to make society accept a well-founded equality of sexual and social rights, it is indispensable that our moral attitude be unimpeachable. It falls upon us, homosexuals of both sexes, to . . . embody. . . a social and moral dignity that . . . succeed in attracting sympathy."⁷⁴⁴

Patricia, as well, was extremely concerned that the behavior of the more extroverted lesbians would reflect on her. She asserted, "It is necessary above all to conduct oneself

⁷⁴² Patricia, "Le Pied," 25.

⁷⁴³ Patricia, "Le Pied," 24-25.

⁷⁴⁴ Susan Daniel, *Arcadie*, 1954. Cited in Claudie Lesselier, "Formes de résistances et d'expression lesbiennes dans les années 1950 et 1960 en France, in *Homosexualités : expression/répression*, edited by Louis-Georges Tin (Paris : Éditions Stock, 2000), 114, author's translation.

well: women should not dress up like men and men should not dress like crazy women.”⁷⁴⁵ Sometimes it is hard to differentiate between the intense desire for acceptance and respectability, and outright discrimination within this French lesbian subculture in postwar France.

In this lesbian *milieu*, there were many members who judged other members for deviating from whatever standards they felt needed to be maintained. For instance, many lesbians in the postwar felt that lesbians should maintain what they considered proper gender stereotypes. One lesbian nightclub owner disparaged the “*garçonnes*” who came to her establishment, noting, “. . . When they drink, they no longer know how to control themselves and . . . become very aggressive, it is terrible.” She firmly believed that all women should be womanly, including lesbians and said that she was “horrificed” by lesbians in bow-ties.⁷⁴⁶ Parisian “G.” had a difficult time imagining herself in the bars because she was familiar with a few lesbians (in the early 1960s), and she felt that she was “very, very different” from them. According to “G.”, what it meant to be a “lesbian” in the early 1960s was to be “mannish” with a suit, etcetera. “G.” was adamant that she, “...could not see herself in these women and [she] did not want to look like them.”⁷⁴⁷ She recalled that she did not know of other lesbians who did not look like the *garçonnes* at that point because she, “. . . could not see them, . . . could not recognize them.”⁷⁴⁸ In fact, for “G.” the *garçonnes* represented another époque (where different conditions

⁷⁴⁵ Patricia, interviewed by Christiane Jouve, “Vécu: Le pied à l’Etrier,” *Lesbia Magazine* 20 (September 1984): 24.

⁷⁴⁶ Patricia, interviewed by Christiane Jouve, “Vécu: Le pied à l’Etrier,” *Lesbia Magazine* 20 (September 1984): 22.

⁷⁴⁷ “G.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 66.

⁷⁴⁸ “G.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 66.

might have made it acceptable to dress in this fashion) and she finished by emphasizing, “It was not clear, but still...for me, I was not a man and I did not want to be a man.”⁷⁴⁹ Geneviève as well, believed in traditionally gendered behavior recalling that although she was a bit of a tomboy when she was young, “manly” women “always gave her a good laugh because one is either a man or a woman.”⁷⁵⁰ However Geneviève also delighted in dressing up in a suit and tie and becoming “perfectly androgynous” for a night on the town. She insisted that one’s choice of dress did not make one manly and that wearing pants or dress shirts was simply a matter of comfort.⁷⁵¹ Dan also admitted that she had been “bowled over by the masculinity” of the first two “mannish” lesbians she met in her life, and she asserted that their masculinity “had troubled her.”⁷⁵²

Patricia, who passed her own judgment on the “*garçonnes*,” was herself mocked by other lesbians in the 1950s and 1960s, because she was a “pin-up,” an ultra-feminine lesbian who was very blonde and very made-up.⁷⁵³ Being a pin-up was also very different from the mainstream lesbian, who might not dress like a man, but refused to adhere to societal standards for female beauty by using makeup or wearing seductive clothing that would make her sexual appealing to men.⁷⁵⁴ Ambivalent attitudes like those of Geneviève and Patricia show us that even within the lesbian subculture there was not only much differentiation, but also a difficulty of self-definition that led to lesbians

⁷⁴⁹ “G.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 66.

⁷⁵⁰ Geneviève, “C’est comme ça,” 13.

⁷⁵¹ Geneviève, whose remarks were compiled by Christiane Jouve, “C’est comme ça,” *Lesbia Magazine* 54 (October 1987): 13

⁷⁵² Dan Monnel, 21-22.

⁷⁵³ Patricia, “Vécu,” 23.

⁷⁵⁴ Line Chamberland, “Remembering Lesbian Bars: Montreal, 1955-1975,” in *Gay Studies from the French Cultures: Voices from France, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, and the Netherlands*, edited by Rommel Mendès-Leite and Pierre-Olivier de Busscher (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1993): 253-254.

judging others for behaviors they considered unrespectable or that deviated from the norm. However, this ambivalence points again to the multivalence of identity, when one disparages others for gender personification, being a “caricature,” or playing a role, and yet practices the same behavior, simply because one feels more comfortable in slacks than dresses.

Many postwar lesbians exhibited a deep ambivalence towards the “representation of lesbians as a category.”⁷⁵⁵ Some women shied away from the label “lesbian” because it was a label invented by men, which often carried pornographic undertones. One woman described her discomfort with these connotations and attested that she was, “. . . more willing to use a paraphrase, to say I love women. I like this better than a category, because it makes a category apart from others. I distrust separations, I do not feel at ease in naming.”⁷⁵⁶ This refusal to accept the term “lesbian” can be seen as a resistance (even for those who self-identified as lesbian) to the dominant society’s attempt to classify lesbianism as “deviant.” These women were not ashamed of their life’s choices and chose to embrace their lifestyles, but to reject society’s interpretation of them as “sick” and “perverted.” Additionally, the conscious choice to use euphemisms such as, “*comme nous*” (like us) or “*comme ça*” (like that), can be seen as a way to wrench control of these terms away from a society that would use them to judge or condemn. This is quite similar to the choice of modern queer communities to reclaim the word “queer” from

⁷⁵⁵ Lesselier, “Silenced Resistances and Conflictual Identities,” in *Gay Studies from the French Cultures: Voices from France, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, and the Netherlands*, edited by Rommel Mendès-Leite and Pierre-Olivier de Busscher (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1993): 120.

⁷⁵⁶ Anonymous lesbian, Lesselier, “Silenced Resistances,” 121.

those who would label homosexuality as strange or abnormal, choosing instead to own and to revel in that difference.

Author Christiane Rochefort's 1963 novel, *Les stances à Sophie*, starred Julia and Celine, two women involved in a loving relationship. In the novel, these women deny that they are lesbians declaring, "Just because one does something special does not mean that one needs to be catalogued... We are not lesbians. We are living a bit of decadence. Period."⁷⁵⁷ For Celine and Julia, their "special" relationship is a type of play, a luxury that they indulge in that contrasts distinctly with the mundane and oppressive relationships that they have with their husbands.⁷⁵⁸ Looking back on her novel in 1979, Rochefort clarified:

Try to put yourself back in this period, the early sixties and you take two married women who are deadened by marriage, completely repressed . . . who meet each other. It's a . . . sudden consciousness of their condition... and they have a living relationship. They are afraid because everywhere they go they run headlong into the label 'lesbian,' thanks to men . . . Scared shitless of the label . . . Seeing it as a label for others, not me . . . They are afraid of being condemned, singled out.⁷⁵⁹

Many lesbians were so frightened to accept the label of "lesbian" that they chose instead to live a heterosexual lifestyle. One woman, "P.," began a "friendship" with a girl her age, in which "many things were left unsaid . . ."⁷⁶⁰ Many years later, after the relationship had evolved into a sexual relationship, her lover began dating a boy simultaneously, most likely because she was frightened of the choice she had made. In an effort to extricate herself from this threesome that displeased her and made her

⁷⁵⁷ Lesselier, "Silenced Resistances," 120.

⁷⁵⁸ Lesselier, "Silenced Resistances," 120.

⁷⁵⁹ Christiane Rochefort, "The Privilege of Consciousness," in *Homosexualities and French Literature*, edited by G. Stambolian and E. Marks (London: Cornell University Press, 1979): 101-113.

⁷⁶⁰ "P.," anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, "Aspects de l'expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968," unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 61.

uncomfortable, “P.” moved to Paris in 1970.⁷⁶¹ In the years 1956-1957, “H.” also found that many of the women with whom she had developed love interests had succumbed to the social pressures to remain heterosexual. She expressed, “. . . I would never have capitulated...but...the women that I loved, who were so great, not just physically, they were intelligent, had been seized by fear at a given moment . . . in spite of my persistence . . . they married. If only they had had the same indifference as I to family storms, to what people would say, to the risks of tomorrow.”⁷⁶² Some women were so upset when their lovers became terrorized and capitulated, that they themselves gave in to the pressure to adhere to the heterosexual normative. “L.” felt forced to not only abandon her sexuality, but also her spiritual beliefs after being abandoned by her lover. She professed:

. . . If you have a female friend who leaves you, who panics, who says it is impossible, I remember having one such...at that moment you literally capsize, and you put yourself together as well as you can. I was completely panic-stricken after the marriage of this friend. . . and dead in my soul, . . . knowing that I was making a ridiculously frightening mistake, I got married.⁷⁶³

“L.” recounted that from the second she said “yes” at the altar, she knew that she would have to leave the church, which she did five years later.⁷⁶⁴ Author Geneviève Pastre recalled that “the drama of her life” began when she was around eighteen or nineteen years old. All of her girlfriends, whom she loved and who loved her as well, “. . . ended up getting scared, by judging [the relationships] as not serious. . . . The last one finally

⁷⁶¹ Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects”, 61.

⁷⁶² “H.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 64.

⁷⁶³ “L.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 65.

⁷⁶⁴ “L.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 65.

got married.”⁷⁶⁵ This was such a “frightening shock” for Pastre that she also attempted to live a heterosexual life (in which she “never believed”), a life which she found frightening on both a moral and spiritual level. Living a heterosexual lifestyle made Pastre feel “like she was going to split at the core of her being.”⁷⁶⁶ Pastre was lucky enough to escape what she considered a travesty of a life by submerging herself in her art, her writing and her poetry, however her former girlfriends were probably not as lucky, ending up leading lives forced on them by their own guilt and by the traditional postwar world.

Another reason why postwar lesbians might have refused to “see themselves” in the *garçonne*, was that they were actively refusing the moral taxonomy of the nineteenth-century sexologists. These sexologists based many of their conclusions regarding lesbianism on studies of women of the working classes, who were much more prone to masculine behavior than were their bourgeois counterparts. Working class women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were more likely to experience the harsh realities of a life of low wages and sexual harassment. For these women, dressing like a man was a matter of survival and increasing one’s opportunities, either to avoid heckling in the factories or on the docks, or to earn enough money to live, or to gain the freedom to travel in a world that limited women’s activities and movement.

The early sexologists in Germany and America conflated the two ideas of masculine masquerade and same-sex love and this bias persists today, with the identification of masculine women with lesbianism in both science and in popular society.

⁷⁶⁵ Geneviève Pastre, “Voyage en Grande Lesbiannie avec Geneviève Pastre,” *Lesbia* 7 (June 1983): 2.

⁷⁶⁶ Geneviève Pastre, “Voyage en Grande Lesbiannie avec Geneviève Pastre,” *Lesbia* 7 (June 1983): 2.

Karl Westphal, a German psychiatrist believed that lesbians were men trapped in women's bodies.⁷⁶⁷ Richard von Krafft-Ebing took this idea even further by portraying these women as "sexual freaks." He described one sexual invert as having, "coarse male features, a rough and rather deep voice and with the exception of the bosom and female contour of the pelvis, looked more like a man in women's clothing than like a woman."⁷⁶⁸ French sexologists, such as Julien Chevalier, also jumped on the taxonomy bandwagon. Chevalier argued that homosexuality was hereditary and that the lesbian was born with "the organic elements" of the male. However he also believed that since women were liberating themselves from their dependence on men by obtaining educations, taking careers, practicing manly sports, and overall "making men of themselves," this "male emulation" was bound to lead to sexual inversion.⁷⁶⁹

Lesbians in postwar France rejected (actively and subconsciously) this arrogance on the part of the sexologists to assume that they could categorize same-sex love between women. Therefore, when some women saw lesbians "performing" in ways that reinforced these stereotypes and erroneous categorizations, they refused to identify with the *garçonne*' behavior. All of these visions of identity were multivalent.⁷⁷⁰ Some bourgeois lesbians faulted working-class lesbians for being enslaved by "traditional" gender roles, whereas other French lesbians faulted them for undermining these same roles because "a man is a man and a woman is a woman." However some of these women playing drag, might also have seen themselves as subverting society's prescribed roles for the female

⁷⁶⁷ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers : A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Penguin, 1991): 41-42.

⁷⁶⁸ Richard von Krafft-Ebing, cited in Faderman, "Odd Girls," 45.

⁷⁶⁹ Julien Chevalier, cited in Faderman, "Odd Girls," 46.

⁷⁷⁰ I thank Marc Stein for his thoughts on the multivalence of certain key aspects of the history of homosexuality, particularly the multivalence of the concepts of visibility and invisibility.

sex. Judith Butler utilizes the performance of Divine, a transvestite in the movie “Female Trouble” to reinforce the idea that his/her, “...impersonation of women implicitly suggests that gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as real.” Butler then asks whether transvestism, is the:

... imitation of gender or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established? Does being female constitute a “natural fact” or a cultural performance, or is “naturalness” constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex?”⁷⁷¹

The *garçonnes* of postwar France might have been drawing into question the actual categories of gender, just as had women who eschewed makeup and flirting because they did not feel that those feminine roles were applicable to their personal identities.

Simone de Beauvoir also attempted to undermine the prevailing social stereotypes about lesbianism by portraying it as a valid life’s choice in *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir stressed that most individuals thought of the lesbian as “wearing a plain felt hat, short hair, and a necktie” and that her “mannish appearance would seem to indicate some abnormality of the hormones.”⁷⁷² She argued instead that there were many lesbians amongst the ranks of prostitutes, harem inmates, and “among most intentionally ‘feminine’ women,” and that in turn, many decidedly masculine women were heterosexual. She highlighted that many psychiatrists, doctors, and sexologists had observed that the lesbian’s, “sexuality is in no way determined by anatomical fate.”⁷⁷³ De Beauvoir also emphasized that lesbianism did not have its roots in a fixation on the clitoris, as some believed happened with heavy childhood masturbation, and also that

⁷⁷¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, thinking Gender Series, edited by Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990): viii.

⁷⁷² Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, translated by H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 404.

⁷⁷³ Simone de Beauvoir, 404.

lesbians did not have “male” and thus ‘superior’ levels of sexual libido, as some had argued. The author also refuted the Freudian belief that lesbians represented women who had not fully matured. According to Freud and his followers, lesbians had not passed from the clitoral to the vaginal stage of sexual development and therefore still remained emotionally attached to their mothers, rather than transferring this affection to their fathers. Rather than seeing homosexuality as “an arrest of development,” de Beauvoir asserted that the evolution of female eroticism was a “psychological process which is influenced by physiological factors but which depends upon the subject’s total attitude towards existence.”⁷⁷⁴ De Beauvoir insisted:

The history of an individual is not a fatalistically determined progression: at each moment the past is re-appraised . . . through a new choice, and the ‘normality’ of the choice gives it no preferred value—it must be evaluated according to its authenticity. Homosexuality can be for a woman a flight from her situation or a way of accepting it.⁷⁷⁵

According to de Beauvoir, the “great mistake” of psychoanalysts was bowing down to the pressure of “moralistic conformity” and regarding homosexuality as “never other than an inauthentic attitude.”⁷⁷⁶ De Beauvoir denied that homosexuality was either “a perversion deliberately indulged in” or a “curse of fate” and stressed instead that it was a choice that was both “motivated” and “freely-adopted.” De Beauvoir emphasized that no one of the possible contributing factors to lesbianism (psychological history, physiological conditions, or social circumstances) was overdetermined and that instead, they all played a role. She observed that lesbianism was simply one of the means by

⁷⁷⁴ De Beauvoir, 405.

⁷⁷⁵ De Beauvoir, 406.

⁷⁷⁶ De Beauvoir, 406.

which women come to terms with their generalized “condition” as women and their “erotic situations.” De Beauvoir declared:

Like all human behavior, homosexuality leads to make-believe, disequilibrium, frustration, lies, or, on the contrary, it becomes the source of rewarding experiences, in accordance with its manner of expression in actual living—whether in bad faith, laziness, and falsity, or in lucidity, generosity, and freedom.⁷⁷⁷

Marie-Jo Bonnet criticized de Beauvoir for placing her chapter dedicated to the lesbian in her section on “formation,” rather than in the section on the “independent woman.” According to Bonnet, this choice portrayed lesbianism as simply a stage that one passed through during puberty, but outgrew when one became an adult. Placing her chapter on the lesbian in the section on the independent woman would have been seen as threatening to the post-war gender order. Bonnet insists that de Beauvoir made this choice because she did not dare transgress the philosophical consensus regarding heterosexuality, however the content of her piece shows that de Beauvoir had already undermined the traditional mores of the era. By debunking the various myths regarding lesbianism, including those of the “experts” (Freudians and sexologists), de Beauvoir helped validate lesbianism as a credible life’s choice for certain individuals.

Many postwar lesbians also refused to either paint their bodies with traditional gender inscriptions or to execute the circumscribed gender performances embraced by most men and women in postwar France. Although they might not have used the language, the interviews with many postwar French lesbians portray these women as embracing a “third sex,” neither classically male nor classically female. As an adolescent,

⁷⁷⁷ De Beauvoir, 424.

“P.” who lived in Province remembered that she felt different than other girls and that she found all of the feminine trappings “repugnant.” She expressed, “All that makes up girls’ adolescence... the flirtation, the seductions, the makeup... I did not want to be a woman like my girlfriends. I did not want to be a boy either, but I thought that there must be a place for an entirely different kind of woman.”⁷⁷⁸ Professional lesbians differentiated themselves from both the *garçonnes*, who they saw as “caricatures,” and whose behavior (they thought) was exaggerated and ridiculous, and the ultra-feminine “femmes,” whose jewelry, sexy dresses, and makeup they believed attracted men and expressed sexual availability. Instead, these professional women chose to resist all gender trappings, refusing to dress like males, but also playing down their femininity to show their indifference to men and as a veiled expression of their lesbian identity.⁷⁷⁹

Monique Wittig supported the views of women like “P” by arguing that lesbians were not women. For Wittig, being a woman entailed a specific social relation to a man, which lesbians escaped by remaining politically, economically, and ideologically independent.⁷⁸⁰ She denied that lesbians existed as a sub-category in the larger class of women and insisted instead that lesbians were in fact neither male, nor female. She highlighted that a lesbian was “something else, a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature, for there is no nature in society.”⁷⁸¹ For Wittig and her fellow-radical lesbian colleagues, being lesbian had both political and universal

⁷⁷⁸ “P.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 61.

⁷⁷⁹ Line Chamberland, “Remembering Lesbian Bars: Montreal, 1955-1975,” in *Gay Studies from the French Cultures: Voices from France, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, and the Netherlands*, edited by Rommel Mendès-Leite and Pierre-Olivier de Busscher (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1993): 253-254.

⁷⁸⁰ Monique Wittig, “One is Not Born a Woman,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, edited by Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 108.

⁷⁸¹ Wittig, “One is Not Born a Woman,” 105.

connotations and the very existence of lesbians called into question traditional systems of gender and sex. According to Wittig, “freedom” for women necessitated “the destruction of heterosexuality as a social system which is based on the oppression of women by men and which produces the doctrine of the difference between the sexes to justify this oppression.”⁷⁸²

Some lesbians, at least in their memories, reveled in the fact that they rejected society’s prescribed postwar gender roles and chose to live in “difference.” “N.” recounted, “I believed that I was normal and that I was content with being different. Because in the end, I had broken off with my family, when everyone else has a family; I rejected marriage, when all women get married; in the end, I was a lesbian when most women love men... I was pretty OK with being different, and that’s that.”⁷⁸³ And some women were more conflicted in their memories. For example, “I.”, who moved to Paris from a neighboring francophone country in 1950, recalled:

It was awful, when I comprehended that others did not like women . . . when I understood that I was alone, that was terrible. For a long time there was just me An oddity. And all the same, I adored this difference. You see, I would never have wanted otherwise. But . . . it was painful all the same that others weren’t the same way. And that I would have to suffer for someone to love me as well.⁷⁸⁴

As Lesselier intuited, some of these women who “adored” the fact that they were “different” from the very beginning might have been glossing-over (or might have repressed) some of the more serious and painful instances of oppression in their lives.

⁷⁸² Monique Wittig, “One is Not Born a Woman,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, edited by Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 108.

⁷⁸³ “N.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 60.

⁷⁸⁴ “I.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 60.

However, some of these women might have also been seeing life in the postwar through the modern “queer eye”, embracing and celebrating their difference in a world that categorized, ignored, or abhorred their way of life.

LESBIAN SPACES

Although many women in postwar France had been socialized into “proper” gender roles, millions, whether by having abortions or through their sexuality did not accept all of the values of the traditional society in which they lived. One important example of resistances staged by women in the postwar was French lesbians’ efforts to define themselves and to live lives of their choosing in a conservative postwar world. Lesbian women in postwar France used their cloak of invisibility and society’s “ostrich politics” to claim spaces for themselves in the postwar world. According to some historians, the lesbian heyday in France was after World War I with the New Woman, her sexual explorations, and her newfound sense of sexual expression. However, the importance of recovering from the German Occupation and recreating a stable society after the war inspired French society to marginalize most types of perceived “deviance.” In this constrained atmosphere many lesbian women chose a world of quiet resistance. Their lifestyle remained a taboo of which they did not speak in most circles, however most women who loved women in postwar France scaled the wall of secrecy in order to find other women “*comme ça*” (“like that”).

Women in the postwar found other women in a multitude of ways. Some found women in their daily lives: at the outdoor market, on the metro, or at the movies. Parisian lesbian Patricia liked to boldly pick up women on the streets of Monmartre⁷⁸⁵, while

⁷⁸⁵ Patricia, “Le Pied à l’Etrier,” *Lesbia* 20 (September 84): 24.

Geneviève (who lived in Province) observed that one could not “troll” for women in cities outside Paris, because it was difficult to “do what one pleased” in the countryside.⁷⁸⁶ Geneviève suggested that if she had moved to the capital, she might have been able to meet more women, perhaps participating in, “adventures without tomorrows,” or perhaps not, but, “...at least [she] would have lived.”⁷⁸⁷ Yet Geneviève used other opportunities in her life to meet women. For instance, she became an ambulance driver and joined the army in the 1950s, meeting the love of her life, Françoise, in the barracks. Geneviève recounted, “The barracks, they were great, no problems! If I had believed in God, I would have been a nun; I love being like that, among women. Truly, one is free in the army...”⁷⁸⁸ Another woman, Marie-Thérèse, saw a lovely lady with “dark blue eyes” on the tram one day when she was living in Bordeaux. Marie-Thérèse recalled, “Everyday I would arrange myself in the tram so that she would jostle me. She was furious, but in the end her fury turned into something else!”⁷⁸⁹ Even though the woman with the dark blue eyes was married, she and Marie-Thérèse began a relationship, with the woman assuring her, “that she had nothing with her husband.”⁷⁹⁰

For women like Dan Monnel, meeting other women seemed to come fairly easily in the everyday world, perhaps because she attracted “*filles comme ça*” (girls ‘like that’) to her, rather than vice-versa. After a failed marriage, Dan moved in with a roommate.

⁷⁸⁶ Geneviève, interviewed by Christiane Jouve for the article, “C’est comme ça,” *Lesbia* 54 (October 1987): 14.

⁷⁸⁷ Geneviève, interviewed by Christiane Jouve for the article, “C’est comme ça,” *Lesbia* 54 (October 1987): 13-14.

⁷⁸⁸ Geneviève, “C’est comme ça,” 13.

⁷⁸⁹ Marie-Thérèse, interviewed by Christiane Jouve, “Je recommencerais tout/,” *Lesbia Magazine* 54 (October 1987): 26-27.

⁷⁹⁰ Marie-Thérèse, interviewed by Christiane Jouve, “Je recommencerais tout/,” *Lesbia Magazine* 54 (October 1987): 27.

When her roommate came home to find that Dan had attempted to kill herself, she tended to her wounds and comforted her “by kissing her on the mouth.” Dan said that they had continued their physical relationship until she had healed enough to re-enter the world.⁷⁹¹ Dan also managed to meet women in the hospital in which she worked. One of her colleagues asked her to come over for a cup of coffee after work one day and greeted her sprawled out on her bed in her underwear. Dan recounted, “Needless to say, I went running out of there before the coffee was served,” because, as she explained, she was still new with relationships with women and she also was not very attracted to the woman in question.⁷⁹² However, there was another young woman who came one day to visit her sick mother at the hospital and brought a friend. At first these women kept giving Dan “interested glances” and Dan confessed that this was when she first started playing with the art of flirtation. In the end, Dan disclosed that she had had brief encounters with each of the two women, one after the other.⁷⁹³ For many however, finding women who loved women in one’s everyday life was difficult because there were few signs or references by which one could tell a homosexual from a heterosexual. Yet, these women and many others like them, refused to submit to France’s postwar sexual and gender norms, choosing instead to resist by living quiet lives of their own making and flying just under the radar of the surrounding society.

Another vital means by which lesbians met other women was through the “*annonces*” or personal announcements.⁷⁹⁴ It is evident that personal ads were an

⁷⁹¹ Dan Monnel in a testimonial for *Lesbia Magazine Magazine*, “de Pigalle à Montparnasse: Itinéraire d’une garçonne ordinaire des années soixante,” *Lesbia Magazine* 228 (October 2003): 21.

⁷⁹² Dan Monnel, “de Pigalle à Montparnasse,” *Lesbia Magazine* 228 (October 2003): 22.

⁷⁹³ Dan Monell, “de Pigalle à Montparnasse,” *Lesbia Magazine* 228 (October 2003): 21-22.

⁷⁹⁴ I have found only a few leads on these announcements from the 1950s and 1960s, the most important being a file at the archives of the prefecture of police of Paris. This file traces the history of one

important means by which women met other women not only by how frequently they were mentioned in oral interviews, but also by the strenuous effort of the *Brigade Mondaine* (a special branch of the police ensuring public morality) to shut these publications down as quickly as they appeared. In 1955 twenty-eight individuals were investigated, apprehended, and underwent public hearings for placing licentious and “perverted” ads in the “Dates” section of the journal *Les Annonces*.⁷⁹⁵ The 1950 report from the *Brigade Mondaine* confirmed that “more and more” lesbians (and male homosexuals) were searching for other lesbians (and “pederasts”) through personal announcements. The report indicated that the “*Sortie*” section of the journal *Les Annonces* “had currently gained the favor of perverts,” and expressed an intense concern that the volume of the announcements had grown from five or six individual ads, to between three and four columns of ads over the space of a few months.⁷⁹⁶ According to the report, homosexual men and women were researching homosexual partners with whom to enjoy nights out, weekend-trips, or holidays. The report stipulated that these “perverse” propositions were hidden behind such benign phrases as: “exchanging ideas, sorties, theatre, vacations, etc...”⁷⁹⁷ However, of all the ads posted in the publication, lesbians were more likely to use the announcements in order to find a female companion than were male homosexuals. Of the twenty-four people apprehended only four were women, however seventy-five percent of the notices by women were for lesbian

publication that was shut down for running ads that violated “good mores.” Many lesbians from the 1950s and 1960s mention these announcements in interviews, and the topic warrants further research.

⁷⁹⁵ Françoise Gicquel, Police Commissioner of the Prefecture of Paris provided me with the statistics for twenty-eight individuals in 2005, although the report of 5 Juillet 1950 states that thirty-two individuals would receive public hearings. The term “perverted” and “perverts” is used throughout the police report. (Under derogation).

⁷⁹⁶ Brigade Mondaine, “Rapport de 4 Juillet, 50 [1950],” Archives de la Préfecture de Paris, PJ Mondaine 36, “Les Annonces,” 2- 3. (Under derogation).

⁷⁹⁷ Brigade Mondaine, “Rapport de 4 Juillet, 50 [1950],” Archives de la Préfecture de Paris, PJ Mondaine 36, “Les Annonces,” 2. (Under derogation).

encounters whereas only two out of twenty-four men (eight percent) were looking for other men for homosexual rendezvous.⁷⁹⁸ Perhaps because women were less likely to “drag” the streets, looking for partners, personal ads became an important way to come into contact with other women. Women professed as well, that the personal ads changed their lives, because they realized that they were no longer alone and also because the ads brought them hope that one day their solitude would be brightened by the dawning of a new relationship.

Other women participated in homosexual networks, some of which were variations on the *annonces*. For instance Rachel, who lived in a small apartment close to Montmartre, saw an advertisement in the mid-1950s for the Mick Michel club in the journal *Cinémonde*, or Cinema World. Rachel knew that Mick Michel was “*comme ça*” because she was familiar with Michel’s genre and because she already had a loyal following of female admirers. Rachel wrote to the club and was visited by a young man who proposed a correspondence with two women who were interested in finding other women, one in Lyon (in the southeast of France) and one in Villers-Cotteret (just northeast of Paris). She chose the woman that was in Villers-Cotteret because she was greatly moved by the letter she had written. When the woman (Michèle) wrote back and said that she too, “felt instant sparks” when reading Rachel’s letter, they agreed to meet. Through many trials and tribulations (including an indictment for public indecency), Rachel was with Michèle for eleven years and never had a lasting relationship after their

⁷⁹⁸ The other ads sought “swingers” or individuals interested in Sado Masochism. Statistics provided by Françoise Gicquel, Police Commissioner of the Prefecture of Police in Paris in 2005. (Under derogation).

tearful breakup.⁷⁹⁹ Women like Rachel were determined enough to perform a bit of detective work to find other women who loved women. They needed to read the codes and the hidden meanings behind what was actually written. For instance, Rachel intuited that joining the Mick Michel club might provide her with access to other lesbians, and in fact joining this club was the doorway to a lesbian (and possibly gay) network, where she met the woman “who meant everything to [her].”⁸⁰⁰

Perhaps the most important venue in which lesbians fashioned their own world was in the clubs and bars for women. There is much ambiguity surrounding these clubs in the memories of French lesbians. Although many women complained about the clubs, or the behavior of les *garçonnes* (in this case, lesbians who transgressed “traditional” gender roles by dressing and acting like men), most lesbians were familiar with these clubs and had visited them, if not frequented them, at some point in their lives. For instance Geneviève recounted that she had visited the bars and clubs of Paris between 1953 and 1960. She said that when she was young (in her thirties) she frequented the bars in the Pigalle like *L’Entre nous*, “from time to time, but not too much.”⁸⁰¹ Patricia, who later owned her own club in Paris, insisted that in the 1960s the clubs were the only place to meet other women, but that at that time they were very limited. Patricia recalled that there were two primary all-woman bars in Paris, *Monocle* and le *Pousse-au-Crime*, and Patricia thought it “terrific” that they did not accept men. She described *Pousse-au-Crime* as a

⁷⁹⁹ Rachel, interviewed by Christiane Jouve, “Elle était tout pour moi,” *Lesbia Magazine* 54 (October 1987): 24.

⁸⁰⁰ Rachel, interviewed by Christiane Jouve, “Elle était tout pour moi,” *Lesbia Magazine* 54 (October 1987): 2

⁸⁰¹ Geneviève, “C’est comme ça,” 13. The Pigalle is a neighborhood in Paris that has long been renowned for the sexually explicit behavior practiced there.

spot where both *garçonnes* and very feminine women passed time together and where she always “felt at home”.⁸⁰²

Some postwar lesbians flouted convention to bring authenticity to their lives. E.,” who was born in 1933, refused both heterosexuality and marriage, dreaming of one day living with a woman, although she believed at that time that this was impossible. Although she had never conceived of sexual relations between women, “E.” knew that she never wanted to sleep with a boy. She recounted, “...As an adolescent, I refused to flirt. And to be left alone, I used the pretext that I was following the moral principles of my family.”⁸⁰³ Then, when her parents tried to force her to marry, she refused and left France to study abroad. For “E.” this choice was a decisive step on the road to a free life.⁸⁰⁴ “E.” made a bold move to circumvent the social mores of the society in which she lived. She refused to marry and crafted a life for herself, far removed from the life-blueprint for women that postwar French society would have imposed on her.

Christiane Jouve, writer for the modern French lesbian journal *Lesbia*, also paid homage to lesbians of the 1950s and 1960s for “creating a life” for themselves. She described how these women were obligated to be silent and to make themselves invisible, however they still “dared the impossible” when they deciphered coded glances in public spaces or created private niches where they could meet women who were “*comme nous*” (like us). For instance, “G.” decided at eighteen years of age that she was a lesbian even

⁸⁰² Patricia, “Le Pied à l’Etrier,” *Lesbia* 20 (September 84): 24.

⁸⁰³ “E.”, anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 62.

⁸⁰⁴ “E.”, anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 62.

though she had never met another woman like herself. She chose to take action one night in Paris. She professed, "It took a lot of nerve to go [to a bar] The first time I went to one, it was very difficult. I was scared, [it was] like a...rite of passage" ⁸⁰⁵ "G." worried about how she would conduct herself, how she would act, and what the experience might be like. She recalled, "Even though I was terrified before I got there, when I found myself in this club, I . . . finally everything went right. It was the moment I walked through the door . . . and came home As soon as I was inside, it was no longer foreign or strange . . . I had imagined so many things" ⁸⁰⁶ "G." was courageous enough to enter into an unknown world to meet women like herself and once she arrived, she knew that she was "home." Patricia, who owned the nightclub "*l'Etrier*" in the 1970s and 1980s, related that although she had gone to the lesbian clubs, most of her trysts were fashioned from her daily life and that she enjoyed "picking up" lovers in the streets. She reminisced, "To be feminine and to love women who were very feminine, it took courage." ⁸⁰⁷ Jouve credits these older lesbians for being more flexible and adventurous than French lesbians in the late 1980s for they were able to meet other women who loved women when there were few linguistic references or gestures to guide them in their search, and many women did not put a name to the life they led. ⁸⁰⁸

Although Lesselier concluded from her interviews that most lesbians had a negative image of the lesbian bar subculture, the fact is that many of the women she

⁸⁰⁵ "G.", anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, "Aspects de l'expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968," unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 65-66.

⁸⁰⁶ "G.", anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, "Aspects de l'expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968," unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 66.

⁸⁰⁷ Patricia, "Au pied," 24.

⁸⁰⁸ Christiane Jouve, "Dossier: Vieillir: Histoires pour notre temps," *Lesbia Magazine* 54 (October 1987): 11.

interviewed did indeed go to the bars, however infrequently. For instance, “C.” insisted that she “did not really like public places [for meeting women],” because they were “more depressing than anything you could imagine.”⁸⁰⁹ She also admitted that she found the bars “frightening,” with their rough lesbian crowds who drank and fought over lovers. But in the end, she admitted that she had “regularly frequented” a club (despite its reputation and the shenanigans that went on there) from 1959 to 1962, when she was single.⁸¹⁰ So although she might not have identified with the bar culture, “C.” knew that this public space was an important place where women could meet. Thus she took the initiative, gritted her teeth, and became an agent in her own life, refusing the life of solitude that could have been her destiny in the traditional postwar world.

The lesbian memory of early lesbian subcultures in France in the 1950s and 1960s, is confounded by a vast array of sexual and class considerations, which not only affect historical interpretation, but also affect the self-definition of the modern queer community. Some women rejected these bars in their memories because they represented the ghettoization of lesbians and lesbian culture. Bars were “the places that they hid” but also where they were sometimes exhibited to a voyeuristic public consisting of men and heterosexual couples who invaded these spaces to observe sexual “deviance” first-hand. These bars, cabarets, and other drinking establishments were part of a larger culture of the sexual underworld and were frequented by not only working-class lesbians, but also

⁸⁰⁹ “C.” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 67.

⁸¹⁰ “C.” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 67.

by heterosexual couples, prostitutes, alcoholics, homosexual men, transvestites, and transsexuals. Women from “the professional” classes sometimes came, but that they rarely returned for a second visit.⁸¹¹ These bars had a reputation for being dangerous and sometimes violent, but these interpretations were culled primarily from lesbians who rarely frequented these establishments. Additionally, these women were much more likely to indicate that they had been scared that they would be treated aggressively, rather than their actually having suffered a violent attack.

Claudie Lesselier commented that many of the French women she interviewed denied their participation in the lesbian bar culture. These women indicated that they had been in lesbian couples or were members of small lesbian communities and therefore did not participate in the “lesbian milieu” and “certainly did not go to the bars and night-clubs called lesbian or homosexual.”⁸¹² Lesselier stressed that these lesbians either denied that they knew about the bars or had a negative impression of them. However, several of the lesbians with whom Lesselier spoke admitted to having visited a bar or nightclub at least once or twice (a number which might have been truncated in retrospect). Additionally, Lesselier interviewed lesbians that she met through her own social network and to whom she was introduced by friends, so it is altogether likely that some of these women were from the same, possibly higher social class, whose members had difficulty acknowledging the importance of these bars in creating a lesbian culture in the postwar.

Another reason why feminists and lesbians (and lesbian-feminists) condemned this early lesbian history was that they believed that the acting out of Butch/Femme roles

⁸¹¹ Line Chamberland, “Remembering Lesbian Bars: Montreal, 1955-1975,” in *Gay Studies from the French Cultures: Voices from France, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, and the Netherlands*, edited by Rommel Mendès-Leite and Pierre-Olivier de Busscher (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1993): 235-236.

⁸¹² Lesselier, “Silenced Resistances,” 120.

that occurred in the bar subculture perpetuated the sexual stereotypes imposed from the outside and sullied the reputation of the majority of lesbians who had never frequented these bars. Other lesbians denigrated the Butch/ Femme stereotypes in the 1950s and 1960s bar culture because these gender impersonations were denounced by the mainstream society.⁸¹³ Working-class lesbians have little recollection of “professional” lesbians because many of these women refused to visit the lesbian bars and thus were invisible to the larger society as well as the working-class. However, “professional” lesbians were frustrated because they were forced to deal with the aggressive attitude and public exposure of their working-class counterparts and so they perpetually sought to distance themselves from this “Butch” segment of the working-class population.⁸¹⁴

Claudie Lesselier built on American sociologist S. Lewis’ notion of ‘making contact with the reality known as lesbianism,’ when she argues that entering the bar scene for the first time is like a ‘rite of passage,’ where one comes in contact with a concept of lesbianism that one did not create themselves. For most of their early lives, these women had defined themselves “in isolation.” Thus, when they first walked into a bar they were struck by an entire social system, an image, which was “theirs” and yet might also contradict the identity that they had previously crafted from themselves.⁸¹⁵ This abrasive rub between self-identity and the identity of the group, made stepping into a bar an agitating step in the evolution of one’s self-definition.

Once they had been embraced in a community of difference however, some women found a sort of synthesis that allowed them to reconcile their contradictory identity issues. “G.” remembered that she let her initial reticence drop once she had been

⁸¹³ Chamberland, 255.

⁸¹⁴ Chamberland, 255.

⁸¹⁵ Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects,” 65.

ensconced in the community. She explained, “. . . I think that if I had felt very badly [at the bars] the questions would have resurfaced; but because I felt at home . . . I did not revisit my classic doubt . . . because I had succeeded at being a lesbian without being like [*the garçottes*]. Thus, I did not have any problems . . . I was at ease When one is well... this sort of questioning ceases.”⁸¹⁶ Once “G.” felt safe in a community of difference, she ceased questioning the importance of difference between members of this lesbian subculture. Also, “G.” was embraced just as she was, with her chosen sexual identity and not knowing the rules. Therefore, she immediately felt enveloped in a culture of belonging, even if the women with whom she interacted did not share the exact sexual identity that she professed. Women like “G.” were the forerunners of the modern queer movement, which unites individuals who do not necessarily have to be similar, but share a community of understanding, compassion, and comradeship in difference.

Even though some women might have initially rejected the lesbian bar subculture, this subculture never rejected them. For example, “G.” arrived at a Parisian bar full of apprehension that she would not know the codes and would not how to behave and therefore greatly embarrass herself. However “G.” was not rejected, even though she committed a few “gaffes” on her first night out. “G.” recalled, “The first time that I went to a dance club...I invited a girl to dance, who, after, told me that it wasn’t appropriate for me to have offered the invitation.”⁸¹⁷ Claudie Lesselier indicates, “G.” broke the rules of engagement by asking a woman to dance (when “G.” was coded as “feminine).

⁸¹⁶ “G.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 66.

⁸¹⁷ “G.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 66.

According to the rules of this culture, she actually should have asked the woman's (more masculine) partner for permission for her hand. However, this misstep did not elicit a refusal (or a fight for that matter). Therefore, even if one were unfamiliar with the codes of conduct and the various "controls" on behavior in the club subculture, lesbians new to the scene could negotiate unfamiliar social interactions without suffering outright condemnation or ostracization from the lesbian community.⁸¹⁸

Line Chamberland argues that the intensity of the inclusion debate as it relates to lesbian bars indicates that this question lays at the juncture of several burning debates in lesbian culture over the definition of same-sex love, sexual practices, the signs of lesbian existence, the battle against homophobia, and the search for social respectability. Yet these class rifts negatively affect any attempts by the modern queer community to find a homogeneous lesbian history, culture, or identity.⁸¹⁹ Perhaps this attempt by postwar lesbians in France to find an essential shared culture is misguided. Judith Butler raises several complementary questions in her work on the ties that bind modern feminist movements. She argues, ". . . t is no longer clear that feminist theory ought to try to settle the questions of primary identity in order to get on with the task of politics," and then she insists:

Instead, we ought to ask, what political possibilities are the consequence of a radical critique of the categories of identity? What new shape of politics emerges when identity as a common ground no longer constrains the discourse on feminist politics? And to what extent does the effort to locate a common identity as the

⁸¹⁸ Claudie Lesslelier, "Aspects," 67.

⁸¹⁹ Line Chamberland, "Remembering Lesbian Bars: Montreal, 1955-1975," in *Gay Studies from the French Cultures: Voices from France, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, and the Netherlands*, edited by Rommel Mendès-Leite and Pierre-Olivier de Busscher (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1993): 255.

foundation for a feminist politics preclude a radical inquiry into the political construction and regulation of identity itself?⁸²⁰

Modern queer communities often consist of greatly divergent groups of individuals who are united in embracing novel ways of living, loving, and being. Opposing the never-ending upward battle for social acceptance, modern queer communities have become chosen families, oftentimes replacing the participants' true families, who have rejected difference to the point of disowning kin. The answer might lie in shared social, familial, and political communities of one's own creation, rather than in a mutual connection to an ethereal and forcibly-concocted common heritage.

Many lesbians in France in the 1950s and 1960s did not share the details of their sexualities with their families. But some also admitted that they wished that they could be accepted in their homosexual identities. An important means by which lesbians made this happen for themselves was by creating chosen families. Although each lesbian might be silent within the home of her birth, she could pick individuals in her life with whom to share her secrets, creating bonds of understanding and love. Indeed, Christiane Jouve, editor of *Lesbia* in the 1980s, called these chosen families, "families of love," without which, so many homosexuals dying of AIDS in the modern era would slip away unloved and unremembered. Jouve insisted as well, that the passing of Marie-Thérèse—who had given a poignant recounting of her life for *Lesbia* when she was eighty-four years old—should not be mourned, because she would live in as one of the ancestors of a historic lesbian subculture. According to Jouve, Marie-Thérèse's history was the history of all

⁸²⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), ix.

modern lesbians who still felt “alone, isolated, and invisible.”⁸²¹ Jouve described the modern French lesbian community of which Marie-Thérèse was the matriarch, as “an elected family, a family of flesh, not blood.”⁸²² Jouve attempted to create a romantic vision of a shared lesbian past that hinged on the history of this chosen matriarch in order to unify and strengthen the modern lesbian community and movement.

Jouve conceived of this family as being composed of women, however, a chosen family for women in the 1950s and 1960s did not have to be composed solely of women. For example, when Rachel’s lover Michèle left her for another woman, she was devastated and sought out the help of her oldest brother. Rachel was ailing and losing weight, so she called her brother David confessing, “. . . You must understand, I do not like men, I like women, I lived with a woman and it is over.”⁸²³ By arguing that he was both “resourceful” and made a lot of money, Rachel was able to convince David to help her find a place to live. However, David did express his reservations declaring, “Rachel, I don’t like these things [that you are telling me], but you are my sister, and I would do anything for you.”⁸²⁴ Although David was a member of Rachel’s “blood family,” Rachel knew who in her life would have mercy on her and would come to her aid in her time of strife, so her brother became a member of her chosen family and community of support. Other French lesbians also highlighted the importance of their chosen families over those of their births. For instance Patricia declared that she had never suffered from the fact that she was a lesbian because she, “. . . was lucky to have always had people who enveloped

⁸²¹ Christiane Jouve, “La famille d’amour,” *Lesbia* 65 (October 1988): 3.

⁸²² Jouve, 3.

⁸²³ Rachel, interviewed by Christiane Jouve, “Elle était tout pour moi,” *Lesbia Magazine* 54 (October 1987): 24.

⁸²⁴ Rachel, interviewed by Christiane Jouve, “Elle était tout pour moi,” *Lesbia Magazine* 54 (October 1987): 24.

her in sympathy and compassion.”⁸²⁵ In creating this supportive circle, Patricia knew how to “read” people and their receptivity, however she had encountered individuals who were extremely narrow-minded and in those cases, she had let the subject drop entirely.⁸²⁶ Patricia explained that she had always known how to talk to people about her homosexuality and that they had ascertained from years of working and “evolving” with her that she “was not more abnormal than anyone else.”⁸²⁷ In addition to the bar culture, these chosen families served as the foundation of a lesbian subculture, which had begun by small groups of individuals “in the know” and grew over time into larger and larger community networks.

Another way that lesbians discovered a sense of comprehension and belonging was through reading. There was an active lesbian authorship not only in the interwar years (works from this period were incredibly popular in the postwar years as well), but also in the 1950s and 1960s. Although the general outlook of society was generally conservative and those who wrote on lesbian themes received much censure by both presses and the public alike, there was still an active and vibrant lesbian culture that thrived in postwar literature. For instance Françoise Mallet-Joris’ *Le rempart des béguines* quickly became a “cult classic” in the postwar years. The reviews of the work were mixed. One critic for *Les Temps modernes* described her piece as “the revelation of the literary year,” however *Le Figaro Littéraire*—a much more accurate depiction of public receptivity—dismissed it entirely. The *Figaro* critic declared:

The author, who is twenty years old, presents the most scabrous of subjects and analyzes it with fearlessness and immodesty—which is surely not the right approach to a worthwhile literary work. One needs a great and decorous talent to

⁸²⁵ Patricia, “Le pied,” 24.

⁸²⁶ Patricia, “Le pied,” 24.

⁸²⁷ Patricia, “Le pied,” 24.

venture into such damned lands. Madame Françoise Mallet-Joris merely employs an unfortunate violence.⁸²⁸

Mallet-Joris claimed that her parents were “not really shocked” by the content of the manuscript, but that they had nonetheless insisted that she take a pseudonym to protect their reputations since her father was a politician and her mother was an author in her own right.⁸²⁹ Her parents said that they did not want people speaking ill of their child,⁸³⁰ but their reputations were foremost in their minds. Despite the negative press, *Le Rempart* had been translated into thirteen languages and had sold over 30,000 copies in two-year’s time.⁸³¹

Mallet-Joris’ piece had quickly become a “reference work” in the lesbian community, but she was criticized by its members as well because many believed that the novel “ended badly.”⁸³² The story revealed the relationship between a fifteen-year old girl and her father’s dominating and cruel mistress and ended with the mistress marrying the girl’s father. Giving up independence for a life of security, the mistress then assumed the girl’s masochistically pleasurable position in her new marriage. The story ended with the girl laughing sardonically at her father’s new relationship indicating not her freedom from dysfunction, but instead her cynical understanding of the couple as a

⁸²⁸ Susan Weiner, *Enfants Terribles: Youth and Femininity in the Mass Media in France, 1945-1968* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 74.

⁸²⁹ Françoise Mallet-Joris, “Promenade dans l’oeuvre de Françoise Mallet-Joris,” *Lesbia* 236 (Juin 2004): 23. Even her editor cautioned her to choose a pseudonym very carefully, stressing that by choosing something extremely common, she would be much less likely to make people angry. When she signed the first edition Françoise Mallet, someone by that name wrote in a letter of protest to the publisher, so Mallet-Joris added the second-most popular name in Flanders “Joris” to the second edition. She maintained this name for her entire career. Françoise Mallet-Joris, “Promenade dans l’oeuvre de Françoise Mallet-Joris,” *Lesbia* 236 (Juin 2004): 23.

⁸³⁰ Françoise Mallet-Joris, “Promenade dans l’oeuvre de Françoise Mallet-Joris,” *Lesbia* 236 (Juin 2004): 23.

⁸³¹ Weiner, 74.

⁸³² Hélène de Monferrand, “Promenade dans l’oeuvre de Françoise Mallet-Joris,” *Lesbia* 236 (Juin 2004): 24.

sadomasochistic unit.⁸³³ Mallet-Joris defended her ending by expressing her belief that relationships between children and adults often ended with the child overcoming the power of the adult and learning to “make do” on their own. She stated, “There are few first loves like that that end well.”⁸³⁴ Mallet-Joris stressed that she “regretted it” each time she wrote a book and sensed that it would not end well but she explained that the novel was a living entity that had a life of its own outside of the author’s sense of self. Remaining true to her work, she saw the ending of *Le Rempart* as a triumph.⁸³⁵

Although Mallet-Joris embraced lesbian themes in three of her novels and her work became exceedingly popular in the lesbian community, she disclaimed any connection to this lesbian enclave. In an interview she asserted, “I love life, I love to cook, to make babies, and to write novels.”⁸³⁶ When asked if she had ever visited the “caricatural” lesbian bars in Anvers of which she wrote, Mallet-Joris denied ever having been to one, leading her interviewer to state, “That confirms my opinion that one can write perfectly about places that one has never seen.”⁸³⁷ Yet, despite any reticence to associate with the community that she was helping to build through her work, Mallet-Joris braved private and public opprobrium to discuss themes that appealed to her artistic senses and to a wider lesbian audience.

On the other hand, Violette Leduc published avowedly autobiographical works on the lesbian experience that also became important links in the chain uniting the postwar

⁸³³ Weiner, 90-92.

⁸³⁴ Françoise Mallet-Joris, “Promenade dans l’oeuvre de Françoise Mallet-Joris,” *Lesbia* 236 (Juin 2004): 24.

⁸³⁵ Françoise Mallet-Joris, “Promenade dans l’oeuvre de Françoise Mallet-Joris,” *Lesbia* 236 (Juin 2004): 24.

⁸³⁶ Françoise Mallet-Joris, cited in Weiner, 74.

⁸³⁷ Hélène de Monferrand, “Promenade dans l’oeuvre de Françoise Mallet-Joris,” *Lesbia* 236 (Juin 2004): 24. Weiner interprets Mallet-Joris’ portrayal of these bars as “caricatural.” Weiner, 91.

lesbian community. The early years of Leduc's life and the fluidity of her sexuality trace their way through her first few novels. At eighteen-years of age, Leduc met Isabelle at a college in Douai where they were both pensioners. The two women developed an intensely passionate affair. However, their union was brief since Isabelle left the school a few months after their relationship began. Leduc's artfully woven metaphors uncover a deeply sensual relationship between the two women. She recalled, "It was in the pulp of a fruit that we embraced each other, tasted each other."⁸³⁸ Isabelle helped Leduc find the love that her cold and affectionless mother had denied her as a child. Leduc's mother had seen her as evidence of her own failings because Violette was the illegitimate child of a wealthy man for whom her mother had worked as a domestic.⁸³⁹ After Isabelle's departure from the school, Leduc developed another passionate relationship with a school supervisor, Denise Hertgès, who was four years her senior and a student in the conservatory of music. This relationship lasted almost a decade. Both Isabelle and Denise were characters in several of Leduc's works from the 1950s and 1960s. For instance, Denise became Cécile in *Ravages* and Hermine in *La Bâtarde*. Despite her lyrical use of metaphor to veil the deep eroticism of her work, Leduc experienced heavy censure. Her publisher edited out her intimate relationship with Isabelle in her 1955 work *Ravages*. Although this edited segment made an appearance in her autobiography *La Bâtarde* in 1964 and was published more completely in her 1966 work *Thérèse and Isabelle*, biographers of Leduc have claimed that she best expressed the restorative nature

⁸³⁸ Violette Leduc, unedited version of *Ravages*, cited in Françoise Armengaud, "Un écrivain gai raconte Violette Leduc," *Lesbia* 186 (Novembre 1999): 37.

⁸³⁹ Françoise Armengaud, "Un écrivain gai raconte Violette Leduc," *Lesbia* 186 (Novembre 1999): 36-37 and Catherine Viollet, "Violette Leduc (1907-1972)," *Lesbia* 183 (Juin 1999): 18.

of her relationship with Isabelle in *Ravages*' initial, unedited form.⁸⁴⁰ Despite the publisher's tampering with her earlier writings, Leduc's work played an important role in the formation of a lesbian community that strengthened its cohesion through reading.

As Claudie Lesselier highlighted, the tropes in these postwar novels often involved expressions of invisibility, negation, or the obliteration of lesbian memory.⁸⁴¹ However these novels' bold treatment of the trends apparent in postwar society served as a type of resistance, not only of the authors, but also of the women who read these works. Some women read the works of these authors to better understand their own experiences. Author Roland Aurivel recounted that she had read "almost everything one could possibly read" on the subject of lesbianism and used these works to assess her own relationships.⁸⁴² Other postwar lesbians embraced a nascent identity as members of an oppressed group and emerged from lives of secrecy or semi-invisibility to connect with other women. When lesbian women entered bars or found other women in the spaces of their daily lives, they were tightening their connections with these 'imagined communities.' By becoming avid readers of the postwar lesbian literary genre, lesbians were introduced to the worlds of women whose lives and experiences were similar to their own. This identification and association helped postwar women to both craft and familiarize themselves with their own intricate and imaginative lives and sexualities.

CONCLUSION

By refusing to acknowledge a connectedness with older lesbians, the early communities they built, and the spaces that they shared, the modern lesbian community

⁸⁴⁰ Françoise Armengaud, "Un écrivain gai raconte Violette Leduc," *Lesbia* 186 (Novembre 1999): 36-37.

⁸⁴¹ Claudie Lesselier, "Aspects de l'expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968," unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 111-113.

⁸⁴² Roland Aurivel, "Portrait: Rolande Aurivel: L'amour vainqueur," *Lesbia* 61 (Mai 1988): 29.

misses out on an essential facet of lesbian history. Early French lesbian and feminist leaflets protested the bars calling them, “ghettos,” “the places where we hide,” and “the places we are exhibited,” but these lesbian spaces can be read in more than one way. Lesbians were not “hiding” themselves away from the rest of the world, but were instead claiming space for themselves in a world that chose to ignore, deny, or openly fight against their existence. Lesbians were creating networks, subcultures, and families of choice. Perhaps most importantly, this stage was a quintessential step in the consciousness-building of the lesbian movement as a whole. Marx, speaking about the working-classes, intimated that once they were brought together in factories, the members of the proletariat began to see themselves as a class, with needs that were separate and sometimes opposed to those of the bourgeoisie. Like the working-classes, lesbians needed to come together, spreading the consciousness that each woman was a link in a communal chain that she had never known existed.

Most of the postwar lesbians interviewed described their childhoods as ones of solitude and separateness. Public spaces where women could meet were necessary for lesbians to know that they were not alone and that there were many others who felt as they did. The only lesbian interviewed who truly celebrated the bar culture was one who at twenty-five, had moved to France from a terribly “austere” eastern European country. “K.” had excitedly researched lesbian spaces as soon as she had arrived, and when she first took herself to a bar she recalled, “I was enchanted, I found this fantastic,” that women in France could legally claim space and reserve it solely for women who loved

women.⁸⁴³ “K.” understood that many women in Europe did not have the opportunity to establish lesbian cultures and that this chance should not be taken for granted. However negative its reception in some social circles, the lesbian bar culture allowed French lesbians to evolve through the process of realization (that there were those like them), identification (with a chosen community of like minded individuals), and representation (making themselves visible to the greater society in the on-going quest for acceptance.)

Despite the repression inherent in postwar society, French lesbians lived active and thoughtful sexual lives that validated their individual experiences. Authors wrote works documenting the complexity of their sexual lives. Ordinary women in French society made everyday choices to live authentic lesbian existences. Refusing to live lives of solitude, they found other women “like them” in the public spaces of their daily lives and formed loving bonds with individuals of their own choosing. These daily private and public resistances to the dominant culture helped to undermine the conservative postwar order and to buttress the foundation of the sexual revolution already underway in France in the two decades before 1968.

⁸⁴³ “K.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 62.

CHAPTER FIVE

‘Fallen Women’ or ‘Lazy, Infectious Imbeciles’? Judgment, Pity, and Prostitute Agency

A plethora of opinions on prostitutes and prostitution circulated across French society in the 1950s and 1960s. Some involved in the debates focused on the adage that prostitution was ‘the oldest profession in the world’, seeing in this phrase the justification for allowing prostitution, for banning the trade, for prosecuting pimps and hotel-owners, for the need to reform and re-educate prostitutes, or for the re-opening of the *maisons de tolérances* or government-sanctioned brothels. However, those arguing about the fate of women on the street and the trade rarely considered the actual women who were selling themselves regularly for money. Most saw these women as “types,” perpetrators or victims. However, there were a few individuals involved with the Ministry of Public Health and Population as well as private organizations (religious and secular) who saw these women as acting in their own behalf. Most importantly, these individuals and organizations acknowledged and listened to the prostitutes themselves. The majority having been the victims of broken families and emotional or sexual abuse, prostitutes subjected themselves regularly to a type of consensual molestation as they sold their bodies time and again for the pleasure of others. Whether they were trying to replace their families’ affection, to (unsuccessfully) reclaim their violated sexualities, or to simply earn money by prostituting themselves, their efforts seemed to produce only feelings of shame, culpability, and further degradation. For many prostitutes, their sense of complicity in these (solicited) sexual violations was turned inward and manifested itself in destructive behaviors and addictions (to one’s pimp, to alcohol, or to drugs).

However, within their experience lay the seeds of agency. Prostitutes in the postwar staged daily physical and emotional resistances to society's efforts to control or define them. They set personal boundaries to protect their privacy from clients, researchers, and the authorities. Additionally, by breaking the silence of the *milieu* (the underworld culture of prostitution) and by divesting themselves of their psychic burdens through their own testimony⁸⁴⁴, prostitutes were able to condition their minds and bodies to receive the assistance and re-education needed to begin a new life free from the bonds of prostitution. Despite the work of social workers, abolitionist organizations, and the prostitutes themselves, the success rate for the readaptation of prostitutes was relatively low. However many prostitutes in the postwar managed preserve a degree of agency whether they managed to escape the trade or by simply protecting their privacy and individuality while practicing prostitution as a means to support themselves and their dependents.

⁸⁴⁴ It is important to note that one must read the testimony of prostitutes against the grain, because it is highly likely that prostitutes when speaking to interviewers, psychiatrists, social workers, police, etc. had an agenda. Prostitutes often said what the interviewer wanted to hear; lied to either receive attention, preferential treatment, or to escape punishment; or withheld information to maintain their privacy. (Le Moal, 26-39) Researcher René Delpêche admitted that he encountered great resistance when attempted to interview women in the streets. René Delpêche, *L'Hydre de mille têtes: Un document sur la prostitution à Paris et en France* (Paris: Éditions Karolus, 1961), 85-99. The purpose of Claude Maillard's 1975 project, *Prostituées: Ce qu'elles disent quand elles parlent à une femme*, is quite literally to see if the stories of prostitutes change based on the sex of their interlocutor.

The prostitute voices used in this project have been culled from a wide variety of sources: autobiographies, the projects of abolitionist organizations like *Le Nid* (The Nest), doctors reports, psychological studies, interviews in the press, and media articles. By employing the widest range of sources possible for this study and by searching for commonalities, this project attempts to overcome some of the general problems of using testimony in historical writing. However, quite like Roger Chartier's conclusions on the meaning of the text, when analyzing testimony, one must recognize that there are many layers of meaning, interpretation, and agenda, which affect any attempt at direct translation and comprehension. According to Chartier, the text's meaning passes through the intentions of the author, to the author's skill at guiding the reader to the 'proper' reading, to the goals of the editor and publisher who have their own agendas, down to the history and sense of perspective of the reader his or herself. (Roger Chartier, "Texts, Printing, Reading," in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 154-175.) Likewise, a historian must acknowledge that there are many unknowns with prostitute testimony: from the intention of the prostitute herself, to the objectives and expectations of the interviewers, to the goals of the editors of various media sources, and so on. I thank Michelle Rhoades for presenting this question in her comments on our panel at the 2007 annual meeting of the Society of French Historical Studies.

CONSENSUAL MOLESTATION

Prostitution was undertaken for many reasons, but the primary reason women sold their bodies was to provide subsistence for themselves and their dependants. In lieu of other employment many women turned to prostitution due to deep underlying psychical disturbances in their early lives. One volunteer at *Le Regain* [Second Growth], a Christian shelter for adult prostitutes, explained in 1963 that when these women spoke, their histories "...[rose] again out of the roots of childhood [and] were always heart-rending."⁸⁴⁵ Oftentimes women came from poor families and were the victims of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, which haunted them as they matured. As Marie-Paule, volunteer at *Le Regain* recounted, "We have seen everything, all of the loneliness, ... the abandonments, ... the blackmails, and ... the threats. But the only thing common to all of these diverse lives...is...an atrocious childhood."⁸⁴⁶ Victims of such abuse might have solicited sexual encounters (for money) because they sought affection that they had never received as a child, a dose of "love," that lasted twenty minutes at a time. Other women searched for "love," but had never learned the healthy emotional boundaries that separated love and sex, and thus conflated the two states into one. Often having been abused by their fathers, their God-fathers, and their neighbors, these women's personalities had been gravely injured and their image of man, father, and spouse had "been extremely perturbed, if not completely falsified."⁸⁴⁷ One can better understand the frigidity, fantasies of vengeance, and the prostitutional activities of these

⁸⁴⁵ Anonymous volunteer at Le Regain, quoted in Christiane Fournier, *Ces Filles Perdues* (Paris : Editions du Centurion, 1963) : 19.

⁸⁴⁶ Marie-Paule, quoted in Fournier, 27.

⁸⁴⁷ Colette Villey, « Le Trottoir, » Mémoire pour le degré en Sociologie, École des Hautes Études 1979, reprinted in *Femmes et Mondes: Revue du Mouvement du Nid* 65 (avril, mai, juin 1984): 23.

women based on their “falsified” images of the men in their lives.⁸⁴⁸ Many of these abused women believed that they could reclaim their violated sexualities by initiating sexual encounters in which they were in control, only to find that the act itself required a de-corporalization that invited victimization rather than agency.

Prostitutes in the postwar period used a language of sexual violation when discussing their lives. “D” described her prostitution, “Every time I go up with a client I feel like I have been violated....[It] is a dramatic experience. Everything in my being rebels. [It is] a refusal of both my spirit and my body.” “D” also explained that because the heart and spirit of a prostitute were elsewhere during their sexual performance, it would have been nearly impossible to enjoy sex with a client.⁸⁴⁹ Another prostitute, “L” explained:

They accuse “les filles” of being aggressive and mean. If we hurry a client it is because we are disgusted.... No “girl” can get used to being violated.....Because at our very core, everything revolts and refuses.....In prostitution one is stricken to the very core of one’s self, in one’s feminine self, in one’s heart, in our emotions.⁸⁵⁰

Quite like molestation, prostitutes often turn this aggressiveness and meanness inward and practice destructive behaviors like risk-taking, dependence on drugs or alcohol, or attempts at suicide. As “M” disclosed, “How can I communicate with others when one is incapable of communicating with oneself? I speak of love and I end up hating myself. I feel a-sexual and aggressive.”⁸⁵¹ Studies conducted on adult survivors of sexual

⁸⁴⁸ Colette Villey, « Le Trottoir, » Mémoire pour le degré en Sociologie, École des Hautes Études 1979, reprinted in *Femmes et Mondes: Revue du Mouvement du Nid* 65 (avril, mai, juin 1984): 23.

⁸⁴⁹ Testimony of “D,” Interview conducted by Colette Villey for her mémoire (Thesis) entitled “Le Trottoir” (The Sidewalk), completed in 1979 at the École des Hautes Études for her degree in Sociology, reprinted in *Femmes et Mondes: Revue du Mouvement du Nid* 65 (avril, mai, juin 1984): 23.

⁸⁵⁰ Testimony of “L,” Interview by Colette Villey pour sa Mémoire, 1979, reprinted in *Femmes et Mondes: Revue du Mouvement du Nid* 65 (avril, mai, juin 1984): 23.

⁸⁵¹ Testimony of “M,” Interview by Colette Villey pour sa Mémoire, 1979, reprinted in *Femmes et Mondes: Revue du Mouvement du Nid* 65 (avril, mai, juin 1984): 22.

molestation indicated a similar association between childhood sexual assault and difficulty in psychological and social adjustment in adulthood. Mirroring the symptomology displayed by many prostitutes, adult survivors experienced depression, anxiety disorders, anti-social behaviors, substance-abuse, eating disorders, increased rate of suicide or self-damaging behaviors, post-traumatic stress disorder, and sexual dysfunction.⁸⁵²

Prostitutes in postwar France attested to feelings of numbness or disembodiment when sleeping with a client, just as acts of sexual molestation cause many children to disassociate from their bodies. This disassociation represents an attempt to protect one's interior self when one's exterior self is being violated. One prostitute "D" described:

I lived under a permanent anesthesia....totally ignoring my soul and my body....I had negated my self. I got to a place where I would watch from beyond myself as I went upstairs with clients. I was completely split in two. There was she, in flesh and bone who was selling herself, and I, something immaterial that assisted in the sacrifice.⁸⁵³

Victims of molestation often manifest many of these same dissociative characteristics. During sexual abuse, a child will dissociate their mind and body which can lead to a numbness in the portion of the body that is being assaulted and often leads the child to forget or psychically "block" the assault.⁸⁵⁴ Some victims imagine that they are witnessing the abuse from a distance, a bystander watching their body being violated

⁸⁵² David M. Fergusson and Paul E. Mullen, *Childhood Sexual Abuse: An Evidence Based Perspective, Development Clinical Psychology and Psychiatry*, vol. 40 (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 1999), 67-68. Fergusson and Mullen stress that statistical association does not necessarily indicate a causal relationship, but add that from their perspective, when a wide variety of scientific studies, employing a vast range of methodologies, all point to a common relationship regarding Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA), one can presume that a causal influence has been established.

⁸⁵³ Testimony of "D," Interview conducted by Colette Villey for her mémoire (Thesis) entitled "Le Trottoir" (The Sidewalk), completed in 1979 at the École des Hautes Études for her degree in Sociology, reprinted in *Femmes et Mondes: Revue du Mouvement du Nid* 65 (avril, mai, juin 1984): 25.

⁸⁵⁴ Jean Renvoize, *Innocence Destroyed: A Study of Child Sexual Abuse* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 145.

from high-above or standing to the side. Many prostitutes experienced this same splitting of mind and body. As Michèle described:

That which is most disagreeable [about prostituting oneself], is to arrive, progressively, at no longer feeling anything physically. The spirit separates itself from the body and after a few months of practice, one becomes very good at examining oneself . . . in full serenity, during the act. Arms, legs, stomach . . . even the expressions of one's face, all packaged perfectly.⁸⁵⁵

This dissociation has been linked in some studies to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), in which the victim's "accommodation" of the stress of the molestation causes a wide range of dissociative phenomenon and can cause "radical discontinuities in conscious memories of the trauma."⁸⁵⁶ Additionally, individuals who have dissociated earlier in life report a physical and emotional numbness in their later lives which makes communicating and interacting with other people difficult and many choose to avoid interaction altogether.⁸⁵⁷ Abuse of drugs or alcohol, by which victims hope to relieve their anxiety and stress, can aggravate the splitting or fragmenting of the victim's personality that occurred during the sexual abuse.⁸⁵⁸ This fragmentation can be seen in the testimony of prostitutes in postwar period as well as in the testimony of survivors of childhood molestation.

As members of the "*milieu*," prostitutes generally shaped their comportment and language to conform to a prostitutional model. The goal of this model was to create a unified force dedicated to carnal pleasures and the accumulation of money.⁸⁵⁹ Prostitutes often embraced an alter-ego as part of this society, and also adopted stage-names while

⁸⁵⁵ Michèle, cited in Dallayrac, 207.

⁸⁵⁶ Fergusson and Mullen, 87. This study (by Spiegel and Cardèna, 1991) has been challenged for not providing an account of the 'intervening processes' which transform the experience of the molest into psychiatric symptoms.

⁸⁵⁷ Renvoize, 145-146.

⁸⁵⁸ Renvoize, 150.

⁸⁵⁹ Colette Villey, « Un corps qui désire vivre, » *Moissons Nouvelles* 65, 25.

“performing” in the streets. This identity then became an “other” from whom they could distance themselves when they returned home at night. Some prostitutes tried to protect their personal, interior lives and individualism by creating these dual existences. One anonymous prostitute described how she possessed both male and female friends (outside the *milieu*) who knew that she “turfed” or prostituted herself, but never brought it up.

The prostitute emphasized:

When I am with them I forget the rest: I have the impression of being completely changed: even in my mode of dressing, speaking, the way I conduct myself, the way I walk. As soon as I get back on the sidewalk, I become a bit like a salesgirl who dresses her window: she seeks to sell her shoddy merchandise and...I do the same thing she does, except my shoddy merchandise is myself.⁸⁶⁰

This act of creating a dual existence allowed women to cope with an activity that displeased them, yet they felt trapped into. M.F. Chalet, an activist at Le Nid explained, “It is not only their faces that they make-up but their whole being!”⁸⁶¹ And Dr. “S.” concurred, insisting that although one often spoke about “...’the prostitute mentality’...it is very rarely observed amongst prostitutes. As soon as they have taken off their work clothes, they leave behind their ‘work-mentality,’ at the very same time.”⁸⁶² By creating a personal life that could be separated from the life of the woman who prostituted herself, these women could resist becoming “prostitutes” and simply be women, who sometimes sold their bodies for survival.

⁸⁶⁰ Anonymous prostitute, “On ne connaît pas la raison,” cited in Dominique Dallayrac, *Dossier Prostitution* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 1966), 135.

⁸⁶¹ M.F. Chalet, “Prostitution et Mentalité,” cited in Dallayrac, 141.

⁸⁶² Dr. “S.” cited in Dallayrac, *Dossier Prostitution*, 141.

Like survivors of molestation, prostitutes also experienced what one psychiatrist called “stigmatization,” or a negative self-image caused by the sexual assault.⁸⁶³ Having-
 been bribed for sexual favors or having utilized deviousness in order to survive an
 unstable childhood, prostitutes often manifested an attraction to corruption early in life,
 and as they grew older some began acting out these internalized images of baseness,
 degradation, and worthlessness. “Servicing people as they [had] been taught to do,” girls
 (and boys) sometimes fell into the trap of prostitution, justifying the activity with the
 thought that they were now being paid for a “service” that they had been forced to
 perform for free.⁸⁶⁴ For instance Sonia, a prostitute interviewed for *Le Nid*, recounted
 that when she was fifteen, her mother’s second husband “kept looking at her” and ended
 up forcing himself on her when she was alone in the house. The next time he raped her
 however, her mother was home. At seventeen Sonia moved out so that she would “not
 cause any trouble.”⁸⁶⁵ Although she believed that her mother likely “suspected”
 something, her mother chose her new husband over her daughter and cut Sonia off from
 the family emotionally and financially. Losing her familial support, Sonia could not
 afford to pay her rent and when a man offered to pay her for sex, she thought, “After all,
 it is not the first time and at least I will get something out of it this time.”⁸⁶⁶ Like self-
 destructive behaviors such as “cutting” (when victims of abuse cut their flesh hoping to
 ease their inner pain) the prostitute simply treated her body on the outside as badly as she

⁸⁶³ Fergusson and Mullen, 88. This study by Finkelhor in 1988, claims that stigmatization is one of four processes resulting from CSA (with traumatized sexuality, betrayal, and powerlessness), that cause survivors to have difficulties adjusting in adulthood.

⁸⁶⁴ Renvoize, 150. Renvoize cites child-abuse expert Hank Giarretto with the quote.

⁸⁶⁵ Testimony of Sonia, cited in *Des “Filles” vous parlent*, Special Edition of *Moissons Nouvelles* 14 and 15, (circa 1956), 13.

⁸⁶⁶ Testimony of Sonia, cited in *Des “Filles” vous parlent*, Special Edition of *Moissons Nouvelles* 14 and 15, (1956), 13.

felt on the inside. As Abbé Talvas, founder of *Le Nid* (The Nest) stressed, “You must understand, the street, it is a type of suicide.”⁸⁶⁷

This stigmatization and lack of self-esteem could also cause prostitutes to internalize the derogatory labels placed on them by a judgmental society. A prostitute interviewed by *Le Nid* (*The Nest*), a private religious organization dedicated to the re-classification of prostitutes, explained that people referred to prostitutes with a wide variety of names that “could never be spoken in a well-bred family.” Some of these nicknames included: ‘women of pleasure’, ‘public women,’ and ‘public sinners,’ but many individuals simply regarded prostitutes as the embodiment ‘of sin itself’.⁸⁶⁸ Even in government “prevention services” there were “rigid” social workers who thought it useless to become involved with “girls like that.”⁸⁶⁹ After years of being analyzed and judged by the police, the government, and the greater society, it is no wonder that prostitutes started to believe that their physical bodies represented the darkness and immorality these names indicated.

In fact, women were assessed and labeled before ever selling their bodies for money. In a report by the Department of Population and Social action of the Seine, a group of fifteen social workers expressed how they had never worked with “real prostitutes” but instead with “prostitutes” in training: women who lived with a “succession” of male “friends,” single mothers, and married women who turned a trick

⁸⁶⁷ Abbé Talvas, cited in Etienne Mathiot, “Fear controlled us...” Documents sur la prostitution, *Christianisme social* 5-6 (Mai-Juin 1960), 387. *Le Nid* is a private religious organization dedicated to the re-classification of prostitutes.

⁸⁶⁸ Testimony of “Georgette,” *Des “Filles” vous parlent*, Special Edition of *Moissons Nouvelles* 14 and 15, (circa 1956), 9.

⁸⁶⁹ R. Dresse, Departmental Director of Population and Social Action, « Rapport sur l’activité du service social spécialisé de la direction départementale de la population et de l’action sociale, 12 mars, 1964, » 12. *Centre des Archives Contemporaines* (CAC) 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

from time to time to complement their family's income.⁸⁷⁰ Such women were labeled as "para-prostitutes" or "potentials" long-before they ever entertained the thought of selling their bodies for another's pleasure and this action of labeling was the first step in sealing the fate of these women's futures.

In his 1965 study on juvenile prostitutes, psychiatrist and Technical Director of the Observation center at Chevilly-Larue, Dr. Paul Le Moal, found that cases of incest and the "corruption of minors" (in the case of sexual violations perpetrated by a step-father), played an important role in these young prostitutes' early lives.⁸⁷¹ Many young prostitutes also lacked proper role models in their formative years. In an interview for *Le Nid*, Mariette recalled how her father had made love to their mother in front of her and her brother in their one-room apartment and how her brother "had done the same to her" in the bed they shared.⁸⁷² Meanwhile, Rolande recounted how her father had slept with her cousin in same bed as her mother. Her father then "terrorized" his wife into masturbating during the act. Rolande's father also "rented a hotel room" for this type of behavior and demanded that she bring her friends to participate in these activities.⁸⁷³ Jeanne, on the other hand, discovered from a malicious classmate that she "had no father and that her mother was a whore."⁸⁷⁴ Although she was cared for by her grandparents, when they died she was left alone with the rest of the family that resented the

⁸⁷⁰ R. Dresse, Departmental Director of Population and Social Action, « Rapport sur l'activité du service social spécialisé de la direction départementale de la population et de l'action sociale, 12 mars, 1964, » 2. *Centre des Archives Contemporaines* (CAC) 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

⁸⁷¹ Dr. Paul Le Moal, *Étude sur la prostitution des mineures: Problèmes sociaux, psychologiques, et psychiatriques observés auprès de cent prostituées mineures* (Paris : Les Éditions sociales Françaises, 1965), 73-74.

⁸⁷² Mariette, interviewed by Marie-Thérèse Boutin for a special edition of *Moissons Nouvelles*, cited in Dallayrac, 103.

⁸⁷³ Rolande, interviewed by Marie-Thérèse Boutin for a special edition of *Moissons Nouvelles*, cited in Dallayrac, 103.

⁸⁷⁴ Jeanne, interviewed by Marie-Thérèse Boutin for a special edition of *Moissons Nouvelles*, cited in Dallayrac, 103.

circumstances of her birth. Jeanne, who was “badly prepared for life,” left for Paris where she went to work as a domestic. Lacking appropriate boundaries, Jeanne fell victim to the first man who “filled her head with lies.” Three months later, she became pregnant and was thrown out in the street.⁸⁷⁵ Numerous studies on childhood sexual abuse indicate that like Mariette, Rolande, and Jeanne, women who have been mentally or physically abused as children are at heightened risk for early-onset of consensual sexual intercourse, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, multiple sexual partnerships, sexual revictimization, and prostitution.⁸⁷⁶

Much of the French post-war public saw prostitutes as either perpetrators or victims. There were many individuals in the government, private societies, or the French public who saw these women as miscreants, criminals, corrupting or contagious, or simply as “*putains*” or whores. One underlying reason for condemning the prostitute stemmed from the ancient belief that any woman’s presence in the public space was automatically a sexual presence. By selling her “wares” in public, the prostitute was immediately culpable. In postwar France, when women were pressured to return to the home after their wartime participation, prostitutes were on the front line of women who became suspect simply by occupying public space. Some in society cast similar aspersions on so-called “respectable” women, such as those who promoted or used

⁸⁷⁵ Jeanne, interviewed by Marie-Thérèse Boutin for a special edition of *Moissons Nouvelles*, cited in Dallayrac, 103.

⁸⁷⁶ Fergusson and Mullen, 78-79. Sexual promiscuity is one of two paths of sexual dysfunction survivors of CSA are prone to. Other difficulties in sexual function and interpersonal relationships that molest survivors experience is difficulty with sexual adjustment in adolescence and adulthood and problems with sexual satisfaction.

contraception to control their fertilities so that they could lead careers and lives outside the confines of hearth and home.⁸⁷⁷

Many in the government and society believed that some women were “born prostitutes.”⁸⁷⁸ A volunteer at *Le Nid* recalled one out of “hundreds” of negative opinions regarding prostitutes she had heard over the years. This particular individual stated, “The ‘girls,’ they are a race apart. You can do nothing with them. Segregation...segregation! You might say to me that there is racism in my method, but it is the only one possible. They are a race apart...and are best left to themselves.”⁸⁷⁹ An anonymous “John” expressed a similar opinion stating:

One can not put oneself in the place of these women. There are many women who have financial difficulties, who have trouble feeding their husbands and kids at the end of the month. Why do they not walk the streets? It takes a certain character, a special something to....demand [coin] for spreading one’s legs...⁸⁸⁰

The same disquieting attitude was portrayed by an educator in Paris, when he stated, “They have found their calling: it brings in money and it pleases them.”⁸⁸¹ Although some women criticized the society in which they lived for forcing women into prostitution, many also felt that there were deeply-depraved women who existed to fulfill

⁸⁷⁷ Maurice Georges, *Journal officiel* 60, Assemblée Nationale (2 Juillet 1967) : 2569. Cited in Janine Mossuz-Lavau, *Les Lois de l’amour : Les politiques de la sexualité en France (1950-2002)*, 54. For example some legislators from the political right involved in the contraception debate warned against women who “might want to avoid the costs of a pregnancy before satisfying other desires that appear more urgent to them,” and that they might try to fool doctors into giving them birth control. To defend society against these deceptive women, some legislators advocated involving more than one doctor in the decision so that these vixens could not trick their trusting family doctors into prescribing contraception so that they could live public lives and fulfill roles beyond those of wife and mother.

⁸⁷⁸ Docteur Paumelle, “La prostitution, est-elle un ‘mal nécessaire’ : Aspects psychiatriques, » *La Santé de L’Homme* 123 (Nov.-Dec. 1961), 18. This belief has its roots in the work of nineteenth-century Italian scientist Cesare Lombroso.

⁸⁷⁹ Anonymous commentator, cited in Marie-Josèphe Segulier, « Comment Sauver ? L’Expérience du Nid » in *Problèmes sociaux : La Prostitution, l’Alcoolisme, le Logement*, Recherches et Débats du Centre Catholique des Intellectuels Français 9, 58. (1954)

⁸⁸⁰ Anonymous client cited in Jean Feschet, *A seize ans au trottoir : Piégées par le système* (Paris : Les Éditions Ouvrières, 1975), 51. A « John » is English slang for the client of a prostitute.

⁸⁸¹ Anonymous client cited in Jean Feschet, 51.

this function.⁸⁸² The deep ignorance shared by members of postwar French society on the subject of prostitution perpetuated the trade. This ignorance enabled individuals to turn their backs on these women whom they had been led to believe either liked the “life of leisure and wealth” that they were leading or were poor, helpless creatures that could not be saved because they were “like that,” inherently built for the profession.

An anonymous prostitute interviewed for *Le Nid* regretted that most of society believed that prostitutes “had it under their skin...in their blood.” She exclaimed that it was in no way true, that indeed nine out of ten prostitutes had never experienced pleasure with a stranger off the street. Suspecting that people would not believe the word of a prostitute, she cited Dr. Le Moal’s studies, which proved that only six to eight percent of women were drawn to the trade for sexual reasons, while the rest resorted to prostitution for social or economic reasons.⁸⁸³

A prostitute named Georgette mocked the “honorable gentlemen” of post-war society, who were aghast at the women walking the streets, and who proclaimed that the spectacle embodied, ‘Our country’s shame,’ ‘A public incitation to debauchery,’ ‘A danger for our youths,’ or a call “to sanitize our towns and clean up our streets.”⁸⁸⁴ According to Georgette, these “honorable gentlemen” (judges, deputies, policemen, and doctors) believed that prostitution had always existed and would always exist (because there would always be “debilitated” women selling themselves for money, as well as the “irrepressible demand” of their clientele). The best solution in the eyes of these individuals was “to save public morality” by concealing this unfortunate reality behind

⁸⁸² Feschet, 51.

⁸⁸³ Anonymous prostitute,” *Des “Filles” vous parlent*, Special Edition of *Moissons Nouvelles* 14 and 15, (circa 1956), 9-10.

⁸⁸⁴ Testimony of Georgette, *Des “Filles” vous parlent*, Special Edition of *Moissons Nouvelles* 14 and 15, (circa 1956), 15.

the closed doors of a sanctioned brothel.⁸⁸⁵ By locking independent prostitutes who “incited debauchery” in public spaces into state-monitored brothels with regular venereal examinations, one could put these women “back in their place,” trapped in a private “home” where they would be constantly available to satisfy the “[irrepressible]” desire of a male clientele.

The police as well, had a particularly negative interpretation of prostitutes. Marie-Thérèse, a prostitute interviewed by Marguerite Duras in December 1963, professed, “The cops are abominable with us. For them, we are exactly like dogs.”⁸⁸⁶ Participating in a commission to discuss the social aspects of the fight against prostitution, Mr. Marquette, Controller-General of National Security and of the urban police force, claimed that prostitutes’ problems stemmed from their “inherent defects.” He insisted that prostitutes were “liars, mentally debilitated, and lazy⁸⁸⁷” and that their rehabilitation was all the more difficult because they refused to « spontaneously present themselves to the qualified social services. »⁸⁸⁸ It is little wonder that prostitutes in the postwar years

⁸⁸⁵ Docteur Paumelle, “La prostitution, est-elle un ‘mal nécessaire’ : Aspects psychiatriques, » *La Santé de L’Homme* 123 (Nov.-Dec. 1961), 18.

⁸⁸⁶ Marie-Thérèse, “Enfer Libre,” Interview with Marguerite Duras, *France-Observateur* (19 December 1963). Printed as an annex to the autobiography of Marie-Thérèse, *Histoire d’une prostituée*, Collection femme, dir. Colette Audry (Paris: Éditions Gonthier S.A., 1964), 119.

⁸⁸⁷ Some prostitutes themselves admitted that part of the reason that they stayed in the trade was due to laziness. Prostitute Marie-Thérèse explained that one could either become a prostitute by being seduced by a pimp or on one’s own, but for the most part if one fell into the trade by oneself it was because of laziness. Marie-Thérèse, “Enfer Libre,” Interview with Marguerite Duras, *France-Observateur* (19 December 1963). Printed as an annex to the autobiography of Marie-Thérèse, *Histoire d’une prostituée*, Collection femme, dir. Colette Audry (Paris: Éditions Gonthier S.A., 1964), 112. One prostitute accosted by René Delpêche insisted that she would like nothing more than to change her profession, but that she had developed many “bad habits” and doubted there was any legitimate profession that could provide her with fifteen to twenty thousand Francs (anciens) a day. Another prostitute he interrogated, “Gina l’Édentée” Another prostitute he interrogated, “Gina l’Édentée” (“Toothless Gina”) admitted that “she had never liked working” and fell into prostitution later in life after leaving the man she had lived with as husband and wife admitted that “she had never liked working” and fell into prostitution later in life after leaving the man she had lived with as husband and wife.

⁸⁸⁸ Administration of Social Aid and Childhood, « Procès-verbal de la séance du 3 Juin, 1964 » 4. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.) It is possible that the hostility that the police displayed towards prostitutes was a different sort of class struggle. If the average policeman was primarily culled

distrusted the police. Prostitutes complained that the police had little understanding of their plight and even less mercy. When prostitutes appealed to the police for protection from their pimps, the police would often insinuate that if they were still in the trade, it was because they had chosen to be there.⁸⁸⁹ In fact, The Minister of Public Health and Population had a difficult time enforcing the measures dictated by the ordinance of 25 November 1960, which was meant to assist in the re-adaptation of prostitutes and to ensure their human dignity. Many police forces refused to cease with the “raffle” (raid or round-up) that fell under the rubric of “exceptional conditions of surveillance” and interrogation, both of which had been declared violations of human rights by the United Nations in 1949. When questioned on their continued restraint of prostitutes, the Prefects indicated that they based their detainment of prostitutes on the policy of prostitute acquiescence. French Assistant District Attorney, M. François Pignier insisted that due to a lack of reputable information, “profound ignorance” still lurked in the spirits of the French public (as well as the police). According to Pignier, this shared ignorance made individuals skeptical of measures meant to help prostitutes and “paralyzed their application.”⁸⁹⁰

Some social workers employed in state prevention services displayed similar negative attitudes towards prostitutes. They indicated that in the social realms from which prostitutes hailed, one found most often: “physiological misery, mental debility, and alcoholism (said a report from the Loire); or “idleness, excessively-loose behavior, a

from the working-classes, then it is possible that after watching their mothers and sisters work hard to make an “honest” living, they resented these women who they felt cheated their way into easy money.

⁸⁸⁹ Etienne Mathiot, “Fear controlled us...” Documents sur la prostitution, *Christianisme social* 5-6 (Mai-Juin 1960), 386.

⁸⁹⁰ M. François Pignier, “Ignorances et Préjugés en Matière de Prostitution, » Union Française contre le Trafic des Femmes, Communication à l’Assemblée générale du 27 octobre 1961, 2.

complete lack of education, and an absence of vocational training,” all of which led young people to be propelled towards prostitution. According to these social workers, while these youths waited for work that might or might not come, they engaged in, “salacious distractions, adventure, and laziness” (said a report from the Haut-Rhin), or they developed “a taste for luxury or distraction” that engendered the same result.⁸⁹¹

When it came to older prostitutes, the social workers’ reports were even less complimentary, accusing them of being unstable “dim-wits” that were “abnormally lazy, poorly-attired, and incapable of providing for their own needs with regular work.” The social workers in question did however admit that most of these traits stemmed from the lack of well-paid employment and from the dearth of centers for professional formation.⁸⁹² This idea that some prostitutes were “lost causes” even colored the views of some abolitionist organizations such as *Le Nid*, whose shelter in Marseille was accused of turning away prostitutes that were judged to be “too sick or too difficult,” or because they believed some prostitutes’ “mental state” would make it difficult for them to “integrate with ‘the group.’”⁸⁹³

However, those who passed judgment on prostitutes failed to ask whether these prostitutes were “born” mentally debilitated, whether this mental illness stemmed from the original emotional, physical, or sexual abuse many of these women suffered, or whether the act of prostitution led these women to the brink of insanity. Many prostitutes bore witness to the fact that over time, a psychical malaise, mental numbness, and sense

⁸⁹¹ Minister of Public Health and Population, “Application de L’article 185-1 du Code de la Famille et de l’Aide Sociale, » 2 Juin, 1964, 5. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

⁸⁹² Minister of Public Health and Population, “Application de L’article 185-1 du Code de la Famille et de l’Aide Sociale, » 2 Juin, 1964, 5. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

⁸⁹³ Madame Bernard (Social Worker), “Letter to the director of the Sanitary and Social Action department of Marseille, 25 avril, 1968,” 1. CAC 850293/ article 54. (Under derogation.)

of debasement permeated their souls after years of offering their flesh for another's pleasure. "S" admonished, "How could you expect us to not come unhinged with all that we live through?"⁸⁹⁴ Another prostitute, "I," claimed that she continually fought off the feelings of insanity engendered by looking at the state her life. She explained that when she thought that she might go crazy, she consoled herself with the sheer refusal to sink into the abyss.⁸⁹⁵

As the social workers in the 1964 inquiry into prostitution indicated, prostitutes did often stem from the "lower classes," from unstable and dysfunctional families that oftentimes fought for their very survival. Hearing of *Moissons Nouvelles* [New Harvests] project to educate the public about the lives of prostitutes, "Jeannine" was compelled to write a letter to clarify how she and many other young women ended up in a life of prostitution.⁸⁹⁶ She described her upbringing in a large, poor family in a small village in the south of France where she (being the oldest daughter) and her mother and father worked everyday (she in the factory, her mother in the fields, and her father in the mines) to survive. Her dad fell ill and drank away all the family's savings and her mother abandoned the family for several months due to exhaustion. One day, Jeannine met a young man who promised to marry her and take her away where "she would be very happy." When they arrived at a hotel in Toulon, her "friend" told her that she would have to prostitute herself to pay for her lodging. She said that she "would never do that"

⁸⁹⁴ Testimony of « S, » Interview by Colette Villey pour sa Mémoire, 1979, reprinted in *Femmes et Mondes: Revue du Mouvement du Nid* 65 (avril, mai, juin 1984): 23.

⁸⁹⁵ Testimony of « I, » Interview by Colette Villey pour sa Mémoire, 1979, reprinted in *Femmes et Mondes: Revue du Mouvement du Nid* 65 (avril, mai, juin 1984): 23

⁸⁹⁶ This project was novel in 1956 and remained one of the only sources prostitute testimony for over a decade. Prostitute testimony from this source was used to support the work of many advocates (social workers, scientists, government officials) in the 1960s including: Lydie DolceRocca, Dominique Dallayrac, and this testimony can also be found in many articles in newspapers and journal articles from the 1950s through the 1960s.

and took a job waiting tables. However, pressured by her “friend” and others in the *milieu*, she ended up selling herself for money after her shift. She said that the first time that she was with another she “was sick all night...” One day when she was ill, and her “friend” was pressuring her to solicit clients (because of his “obsession with money”) she realized the depth of her degradation. She was “sickened” by her continual humiliation under the gaze of passers-by. That was when she found the help of *Le Nid*.⁸⁹⁷

Other individuals in post-war France believed that prostitutes were dangerous for the welfare of society, because they were contagious in both their diseased bodies and their questionable morality. A regional and technical consultant specializing in the fight against Venereal Disease (VD) reported in the mid-1960s that even though a debasement of mores contributed to venereal contamination, the primary source was prostitution. He criticized the changes in law that demanded the destruction of the *fichier sanitaire* (sanitary files) and the prostitutes’ registration cards, and also brought an end to the systematic and enforced examinations of those he sarcastically dubbed “the honorable prostitutes.” The doctor was especially miffed that all of these changes had been implemented without consulting “those specializing in venereal science”.⁸⁹⁸ The report admitted that although pimps were “the true cause of prostitution,” the women (and men) who plied their trade, threatened society with the risk of disease and that this danger lurked everywhere: in certain “hot” neighborhoods, clandestine brothels, bars, dances,

⁸⁹⁷ « Jeannine, » « Mais elles sont des femmes, » *Moissons Nouvelles* 63 (Juillet-Septembre 1967) : 8.

⁸⁹⁸ « Questions d’actualité concernant l’aspect actuel de la lutte antivénérienne, circa 1965, » 5. CAC 840166/ article 1.

cafés, and even possibly in the automobile next to yours (or your husband's) on the street.⁸⁹⁹

Besides simply spreading disease, many in French society felt that prostitutes spread a moral filth and incited debauchery by flaunting their wares in public “so that all could see.” Older prostitutes were considered particularly suspect and beyond the reach of any sort of intervention. Marquette advocated the creation of a specialized corps of female assistants working for the police who would work with minors in danger of falling into prostitution. However, Marquette did not believe that it was worthwhile for the corps to work with the “*Anciennes*,” those who had been enmeshed in prostitution for years or for their whole lives. In the “welcome centers” of shelters like St. Lazare, Marquette also suggested that there be a separate section for minors to reduce their contact with older prostitutes who he believed could morally contaminate the young women's pliant minds.⁹⁰⁰ Ironically, however, A 1964 report by the Minister of Public Health and Population expressed regret that due to a lack of specialized centers for juvenile prostitutes they were placed “Children's Homes,” where they were likely to “contaminate” other juveniles.⁹⁰¹ One volunteer at *Le Regain* shed light on the prostitutes' plight saying, “The law assists minors, at least officially. But when they [are older than] twenty-one years, there is no longer anyone to take care of them, to defend them....They are still filled with feelings of fear and social inadequacy. And

⁸⁹⁹ « Questions d'actualité concernant l'aspect actuel de la lutte antivénérienne, circa 1965, » 5. CAC 840166/ article 1.

⁹⁰⁰ Administration of Social Aid and Childhood, « Procès-verbal de la séance du 3 Juin, 1964 » 4. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

⁹⁰¹ Administration of Social Aid and Childhood, Report on the “Application de L'article 185-1 du Code de la Famille et de l'Aide Sociale, 2 Juin, 1964,” 7-8. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

psychologically, they are still minors.”⁹⁰² Shelters like *Le Regain*, recognized this deep prejudice against older prostitutes and responded by providing voluntary refuges for these women often overlooked and ignored by both the legal system and services of re-adaptation.

Rarely did the French media help enlighten the public as to the true plight of prostitutes, because articles generally focused on the sensational, or played into male fantasy and female fears of prostitutes. For instance, Henri Borjot, the author of a 1957 article in the French journal *Noir et Blanc*, conducted interviews solely with the police for his story of the prostitutes of Paris, and therefore his piece displays many of the same prejudices espoused by the French police. The primary photo for the piece shows an elegant blonde woman in a high-class area and the caption reads, “Prostitution is not always a career of misery: the *filles de luxe* (high-class prostitutes) ‘earn’ 300,000 francs par mois.”⁹⁰³ His widely-disseminated, sarcastic comments regarding prostitutes “earning” a salary display the popular prejudice that allowing people to have sex with you for money is an “easy” way to make a living. His article also shows a blatant disregard for what the lives of prostitutes might be like. When he asked one prostitute about her profession he stressed that she “naively” stated that prostitutes were like soldiers. She said, “We do a brutal job, but it allows us to eat.” Brojot responded in the article, “And they eat well,” pointing out that the “call-girls” working in nicer areas made huge salaries, so large in fact that one young woman decided to quit her job as a secretary to lead “the good life” as a high-class prostitute. Brojot does manage to explain that most prostitutes hope to escape from the trade quickly and while they still have their looks, but

⁹⁰² Anonymous volunteer at Le Regain, quoted in Christiane Fournier, *Ces Filles Perdues* (Paris : Editions du Centurion, 1963) : 19.

⁹⁰³ Borjot, Fonds Marcelle LeGrand-Falco, Carton IV/ Dossier IV-3.

that nearly ninety-percent of prostitutes never succeed in freeing themselves from a life of prostitution. This insight might have elicited some pity in the postwar public, however Brojot undermines this relatively small gesture by arguing that many prostitutes are “oblivious”, “lazy”, “depressives” and that all prostitutes are women who “want to earn a fortune quickly, without putting themselves out.”⁹⁰⁴ Articles like these, which spit out sensational bile to excite an eager audience; whose authors did limited research and refused to recognize bias in their sources, infected the public with distrust of and malevolence towards prostitutes in the postwar era.

Other individuals in the French government and society felt a deep sense of pity for prostitutes for having been victims of poverty, broken homes, violence, emotional or sexual abuse, or of villains and fellow-‘asocial’ individuals who gained either money or sexual pleasure from these women’s sexualities. The individuals that saw prostitutes as victims diverged in their beliefs about how to best help prostitutes escape the trade. Some wanted to “save” prostitutes by affecting public opinion, enacting legislation, or by striking at those who profited off of prostitution and thus furthered the trade. Yet another segment of this population believed that one should help prostitutes to help themselves.

First, there were many participants in the debate who recognized that in order to change French society, one needed to influence public opinion in support of prostitutes who wanted to escape the trade. Marie-Josèphe Segurier, speaking for *Le Nid*, explained that many in postwar French society held resolute judgments about prostitutes regardless of how much they understood the trade. Those with strong opinions included: women

⁹⁰⁴ Brojot, Fonds Marcelle LeGrand-Falco, Carton IV/ Dossier IV-3.

who were sure of their partners, but distrusted '*les filles*' anyway; women who doubted the fidelity of their husbands and therefore hated and were scared of prostitutes; puritans who would rather "beat their head against the wall" than look at a prostitute; clients who profited sexually from these women; clients who hoped to pull these women from the trade; and those in society whose inconsistent views changed with the tide and the company they kept.⁹⁰⁵

In a report presented to the General Assembly of the *Union Française Contre le Trafic des Femmes* (UFCTF), or French Union against the Traffic in Women in October of 1961, Assistant District Attorney Pignier stressed that the reason so few people had "objective and disinterested" attitudes about the subject of prostitution was that there had been a complete breakdown in the customary means by which the public (at every level) was educated on this topic. Pignier emphasized that one could not rely on the media because they rarely told the straight facts, and they were also being influenced by interest groups, unwilling to frighten or offend their readers, or portrayed prostitution in an anecdotal or sensational fashion. He denounced the cinema as well for "using easy themes that [blended] fiction and eroticism," and for offering alluring, scantily-clad beauties for the spectator's gaze, giving the spectator the impression that prostitution was either "pleasant or romantic."⁹⁰⁶ And although he pointed out that there were plenty of reputable, well-researched studies published by various interest-groups and researchers, these sources remained accessible only to an elite few, and rarely made their way into the hands of the general public due to a lack of adequate funding.

⁹⁰⁵ Marie-Josèphe Segulier, « Comment Sauver ? L'Expérience du Nid » in *Problèmes sociaux : La Prostitution, l'Alcoolisme, le Logement*, Recherches et Débats du Centre Catholique des Intellectuels Français 9, 58.

⁹⁰⁶ M. François Pignier, "Ignorances et Préjugés en Matière de Prostitution," *Union Française contre le Trafic des Femmes*, Communication à l'Assemblée générale du 27 octobre 1961, 1-2.

Another problem, Pignier insisted, was that the public had a hard time defining prostitution. He surmised that this occurred primarily because reputable sources (like the dictionary) defined prostitution simply as the act of prostituting or debasing oneself, and that therefore the public often conflated the ideas of prostitution and sexual license. Pignier clarified that prostitution needed to be regarded as a profession and a commercial transaction: the prostitute made a commerce of “her charms,” offering herself to anyone that could pay the fee. The habitual action and the lack of choice were the two things that separated prostitution from “loose relations” even if those relations were remunerated.⁹⁰⁷

Pignier suggested that the public was additionally ignorant of the human being that lived behind the mask of the prostitute. He claimed that the great majority of his contemporaries believed that prostitutes were “libertines,” lazy individuals that simply needed to work like everyone else in society to avoid becoming or remaining prostitutes.⁹⁰⁸ M. Pignier highlighted that in most cases, prostitutes began their lives and their “careers” in prostitution as victims of economic, familial, moral, and emotional deficiencies. He explained that over fifty percent of prostitutes had fallen into the trade after pimps had seduced (and often impregnated) them, showering them with promises of love and devotion and forcing them to sever their contacts with the world outside the *milieu*.⁹⁰⁹ Pignier explained that once ensconced in the world of prostitution, these women quickly became “maladapted.” On top of their original psychic and physical ailments, these women often became neurotic in response to the betrayal and subsequent

⁹⁰⁷ M. François Pignier, “Ignorances et Préjugés en Matière de Prostitution, » Union Française contre le Trafic des Femmes, *Communication à l'Assemblée générale du 27 octobre 1961*, 2. In his study of juvenile prostitutes, Doctor Le Moal's definition of prostitution had three necessary facets ; it needed to be a habitual, remunerated action in which the woman had no choice of partners. Le Moal, 11.

⁹⁰⁸ M. François Pignier, “Ignorances et Préjugés en Matière de Prostitution, » Union Française contre le Trafic des Femmes, *Communication à l'Assemblée générale du 27 octobre 1961*, 2.

⁹⁰⁹ Pignier, 3.

cruelty of their pimps and the comportment of the clientele.⁹¹⁰ But Pignier additionally relayed a glimpse of hope, insisting that behind the rough exterior of the prostitute, there was actually a woman “capable of reclaiming her rightful place in society.” And Pignier also claimed that rehabilitation centers and shelters like *Bienvenue* (Protestant) and *Le Nid* (Catholic) had proven that what these women needed to surface from the underworld of prostitution was the desire, a separation from their pimps, and the “aid and affection” of a caring third party.⁹¹¹

Psychiatrist Dr. Paumelle also found it imperative to disabuse the public of these myths that supported prostitution or inspired people to ignore the problem altogether. Two of the myths he targeted were: the idea that prostitution maintained social order by acting as a safety-valve that kept asocial men from sexually violating “proper women” in French society, and also that prostitution kept married men from developing commitments with mistresses, or from coming home with diseases from “non-controlled” women.⁹¹² He stressed that the primary reason that women prostituted themselves was that they had had disrupted homes in infancy (death, divorce, abandonment, or abuse) and he hoped to increase public empathy by showing who these women really were, what it was like to prostitute oneself, and what these women’s chances were for reclassification.⁹¹³

Dr. Paumelle referred to recent “biographical” studies (circa 1961), which showed that amongst sixty-one prostitute cases examined in the offices of an anti-venereal service, forty-one prostitutes had experienced “very perturbed” familial circumstances before they

⁹¹⁰ Pignier, 3.

⁹¹¹ Pignier, 2.

⁹¹² Paumelle, 17.

⁹¹³ Paumelle, 17-19.

had reached the age of fifteen. These included young women who had never known their fathers (six women); women whose fathers were dead or left when they were young (ten women); a mother who had died or left when they were young (six women); orphans who knew neither father nor mother (sixteen women); and families that were divorced or separated (three women). Twenty of the women came from homes that were “apparently normal.”⁹¹⁴ To illustrate these statistics, Paumelle chose to publish the stories of various ‘filles’ whose shocking lives were meant to arouse the sympathy of the coldest hearts. He wrote about a girl who was kept in the dog-house by her step-father until she ran away with the first admiring male she found, a young woman who had found her long-lost mother in Paris, only to be sold to a man with a bordello in Algeria, and a thirteen-year-old girl who bore her drunken father’s stillborn child before she slipped into the trade.⁹¹⁵ Paumelle felt that if the public knew the stories of these individual women, French society would realize that these women needed compassion and assistance rather than judgment and incarceration.

Abolitionist organizations as well, found it imperative to educate the public about the sad beginnings of most prostitutes lives. “Social apostle,” Abbé Talvas, founder of *Le Nid* declared that after fifteen years, he had never seen a woman drawn to the trade by vice or laziness, but that instead over ninety-five percent of these women had had “abnormal childhoods.” He claimed that the same percentage had never known their real fathers.⁹¹⁶ On a radio emission for Radio-Lausanne in January 1960, “Lucette,” a young prostitute underscored the sad reality of prostitutes’ lives testifying:

⁹¹⁴ Paumelle, 18.

⁹¹⁵ Three anonymous prostitutes, quoted in Fournier, 28-29.

⁹¹⁶ Abbé Talvas, cited in Etienne Mathiot, “Fear controlled us...” Documents sur la prostitution, *Christianisme social* 5-6 (Mai-Juin 1960), 386.

No one ever loved me. Never once in my childhood did someone hug me. I never knew who my father was and my mother was a prostitute. I was a bother for everyone. Everyone hoped...[that I would] die when I was young. Never having been loved by anyone, I wanted to kill myself. I ended up on the street.⁹¹⁷

An anonymous prostitute in the same broadcast explained, “I had an alcoholic father. To escape from the frightening climate of my brutal family I simply accepted a way out... and here we are with a different type of Hell... and new sources of shame.”⁹¹⁸

Other leaders in the fight to inform the public and influence the legislature were Jean Scelles, president of the *Équipes d'action contre la traite des femmes et des enfants* (*Équipes*), or the Action teams against the trade in women and children, and the affiliated *Cartel d'action morale et sociale* (*Cartel*), or Cartel of moral and social action.⁹¹⁹ These two organizations sought to focus the blame for prostitution not on the prostitute, but instead on those who perpetuated or profited off of the trade in any way. One article published in a 1962 issue of the *Cartel*, stressed the culpability of clients in the trade, trying to shame men into responsibility for their actions. The article stressed that men who frequented prostitutes needed to realize that by conducting these simple “monetary transactions” they were contributing to the perpetuation of the slave trade and degrading the lives of the young women upon whom they were experiencing their momentary pleasures. Another Cartel publication in 1960 highlighted the effects of article 334 of the French penal code, which stiffened penalties for pimps who were known to associate with prostitutes, but could not legally substantiate their financial means or who attempted to

⁹¹⁷ Testimony of Lucette, cited in Etienne Mathiot, “Fear controlled us...” Documents sur la prostitution, *Christianisme social* 5-6 (Mai-Juin 1960), 387.

⁹¹⁸ Anonymous prostitute cited in Mathiot, 387.

⁹¹⁹ The *Équipes* and the Cartel were closely aligned, sharing many members and providing each other with articles and information. For instance the presidents of the two organizations were best friends and M. Scelles (President of the *Équipes*) was the vice-president of the Cartel for many years.

thwart the efforts of the prevention services of rehabilitating and re-educating prostitutes in their care. The Cartel underscored that the effects of this article in the penal code meant also that pimps that had sent their “*filles*” abroad would have not only their passports and driver’s licenses revoked, but would have to pay the costs of repatriating the girls that they had sent abroad to prostitute themselves to a foreign clientele.⁹²⁰

This same publication detailed article 335 of the French penal code which stipulated that the same penalties would henceforth be dealt to keepers of public establishments that allowed prostitution or solicitation on their premises. These comparable fines validated the fact that pimps and hotel and bar keepers worked together to further the trade, profiting off of the misery of prostitutes in pursuit of their own selfish monetary gains.⁹²¹

Mademoiselle Lydie DolceRocca, Head Social Worker for the Prefecture of Police of Paris, also found it imperative to tell the public the truth, “as faithfully as possible,” in order to burst the bubble of lies and hypocrisy that surrounded the topic of prostitution.⁹²² DolceRocca felt that though “the truth would be hard to hear,” it was imperative that the public understood the plight of prostitutes including: who they were, what prostitution was really like, and who actually profited off of the trade. She chronicled the early lives of many prostitutes, exposing that these women were led to the profession due to both long-term and short-term causes such as: abusive parents, a dysfunctional family environment, heredity (alcoholism, etc), spotty educations, truancy, a lack of training for a true profession, unemployment, low salaries, and homelessness. If

⁹²⁰ Cartel d’ Action Morale et Sociale, *Cartel-Informations* 7-8 (October-November, 1960) : 3.

⁹²¹ Cartel d’ Action Morale et Sociale, *Cartel-Informations* 7-8 (October-November, 1960) : 3-4.

⁹²² Lydie DolceRocca, “La prostitution est-elle un problème insoluble?” *Pages Documentaires: L’Évolution Criminologique: Les idées et les faits* 4 (Avril-Mai 1960): 256.

mothers, they had often been seduced, abandoned and left to wallow in “material and moral misery: hungry, thirsty, and cold in both their bodies and in their souls.”⁹²³

DolceRocca argued that because they lived lives of complete insecurity, these women became vulnerable to temptations, bad advice, and “illusion.” She pointed out that the primary reason that women slipped into prostitution was due to financial necessity.

However, she was adamant that although these women were promised quick, lucrative salaries; the profits from prostitution were seen primarily by the pimps and hotel-owners who took their fees from the women, leaving them with just enough to survive and continue their morally-degrading servitude.⁹²⁴

Like DolceRocca, an essential piece of knowledge that nearly all of these advocates and associations wanted to share with the French public was that a great majority of these women on the streets were mothers. *Moissons-Nouvelles*, the mouthpiece of *Le Nid* claimed that in fact two out of every three prostitutes had at least one child in someone else’s charge, sometimes two or three. Marcel Puzin, Vice-president of the Superior Court of the Seine, emphasized that at least forty percent of young prostitutes (between fifteen and sixteen years of age) were mothers.⁹²⁵ An anonymous prostitute interviewed by René Delpêche explained that her husband “jilted” her after the birth of their daughter when she was twenty-three and that her salary had not been enough for her “to live and to support her child.” To feed the two of them she had at first “accepted the advances of a merchant, and after, of other men.” She claimed that her

⁹²³ DolceRocca, *Pages Documentaires* 4, 257.

⁹²⁴ DolceRocca, *Pages Documentaires* 4, 256

⁹²⁵ Marcel Puzin, « L’assistance éducative aux jeunes prostituées dans le cadre judiciaire, » *La Santé de l’homme* 119 (mars-avril 1961), 21. Musée social, Fonds Marcelle LeGrand-Falco Carton IV/ Dossier IV-3.

twenty-year-old daughter still had no idea how she had supported them and what she still did for a living in Paris.⁹²⁶

In a bulletin publicizing the need for a home for mothers in Nice, the Association “Accueil, Loisirs, Cultures” (Reception, Leisure, and Culture) published a proposed budget for a single mother for the year 1964-1965. The estimated budget exposed that the expenses for a wet nurse or caretaker, room and board, food, and other necessities would be over 300 new francs more expensive each month than the single mother’s salary could cover, even with state benefits included.⁹²⁷ Prostitutes themselves came to the same conclusion. One prostitute recounted, “...I am twenty-seven years old and I have a ten-year-old kid to raise. I worked until last year. But with thirty-three thousand francs (ancien) per month, how do you expect one to make ends meet?”⁹²⁸ With regards to single mothers, there was an ambiguous line between arguments for social assistance to the poor and abolitionist ideals. If single women in France could not afford to raise their children, then they would be forced to turn to prostitution. To fight prostitution, one had to strike at the heart of the problem and work to support the poor.

Nearly all “filles” who had children could not keep their children with them, but instead were forced to leave them with foster families who could protect them and shelter them from “the truth” about their mothers. Describing the agony of this separation, one prostitute exclaimed that worse than the nightmares and the haunting remembrance of her baby’s first cry, were the thoughts that ran over and over in her mind that someone else

⁹²⁶ Anonymous prostitute, cited in René Delpêche, *l'hydre aux milles têtes: un document sur la prostitution à Paris et en France* (Paris: Éditions PIC, 1961), 98-99.

⁹²⁷ L'Association Accueil, Loisirs, Culture, “Budget Mensuel d'Une Mère Célibataire” (Nice: Accueil, Loisirs, Cultures). Reprinted in full in Dominique Dallayrac, *Dossier Prostitution* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1966): 275.

⁹²⁸ Anonymous prostitute, cited in René Delpêche, *l'hydre aux milles têtes: un document sur la prostitution à Paris et en France* (Paris: Éditions PIC, 1961), 100.

was caring for her child. She painfully recounted this psychic dialogue, saying, “Another has devoted herself to his needs, another is alarmed and worried by his tears, another suffers for him. And [my child] is dependent on this person and calls her “maman.”⁹²⁹ These necessary wet-nurses and caretakers could not be paid with a menial worker’s salary however, and therefore many women felt obligated to continue a life of prostitution to support their children. Although the organization *Le Nid* rejoiced that so many prostitutes insisted on having their children rather than aborting or abandoning them, the volunteers understood that by keeping their children, these women had been forced to accept a profession that disgusted them. Therefore organizations like *Le Nid* realized the importance of helping these women care for their children and welcomed both adult prostitutes and their children into their shelters.⁹³⁰

Other times, these women’s motherhood kept them locked in the trade because they were scared for their children’s welfare. Gaby, a prostitute interviewed by *Le Nid* explained that she had come to Paris to work for the family of an engineer. However, the work was extremely difficult and when she met a man who promised her love and happiness, she was quickly seduced by his promises for the future. This man that she thought was her “friend” ended up impregnating her and after the birth of the baby, forced her to prostitute herself by threatening to throw her and her infant out in the street.⁹³¹

⁹²⁹ Anonymous prostitute, Letter extract from *L’Anneau d’Or* 53. Reprinted in *Moissons-Nouvelles* 34 (avril-juin 1960): 3.

⁹³⁰ Claire Bernard, « Un Foyer maternel vite... Très Vite ! » *Moissons Nouvelles* 5 (octobre-décembre 1952),

⁹³¹ Testimony of Gaby, ,” *Des “Filles” vous parlent*, Special Edition of *Moissons Nouvelles* 14 and 15, (circa 1956), 11.

Those who promoted the image of prostitutes as mothers hoped that this vision would undermine the Madonna-whore dichotomy that forced women into one of two categories in the male imagination. A male client needed to ignore any sense of humanity in the woman with whom he was having sex, for a complete objectification of the prostitute was necessary for most clients to experience shameless, blameless, and forgettable pleasure with complete strangers. “D” revealed, “All that counts for the client is *“le sexe”* (genitals). Ours. And theirs. Outside of that, nothing else holds any importance. One could say that we are nothing more than our *sexe*.”⁹³² Worse than being thought of only as a set of genitals, “T” exposed, “...Our clients don’t want us living. On the contrary. They want our degradation. Our death. That is why we feel nothing with them. But in fact we do feel something. We feel like we are dying.”⁹³³ Seeing prostitutes as mothers would make them irreparably human and grant them some semblance of the “respectability” that was afforded to the postwar wife and mother who returned to the home after her public service during the war. Men did not want to have sex with respectable “mothers,” but instead with those they perceived as faceless, “hypersexualized” dolls. Clients forced themselves to believe that these women walked the streets because they were so greedy for money that they would stop at nothing to acquire it, including selling their bodies. Clients rarely wanted to see the reality behind the mask of the prostitute. Both religion-based abolitionist organizations and secular advocates (such as Lydie DolceRocca,) widely promoted these women’s motherhood, hoping that if prostitutes were seen as mothers, their humanity would be assured in the

⁹³² Testimony of “D,” Interview by Colette Villey pour sa Mémoire, 1979, reprinted in *Femmes et Mondes: Revue du Mouvement du Nid* 65 (avril, mai, juin 1984): 22.

⁹³³ Testimony of “T,” Interview by Colette Villey pour sa Mémoire, 1979, reprinted in *Femmes et Mondes: Revue du Mouvement du Nid* 65 (avril, mai, juin 1984): 23

eyes of postwar society. An informed French society would then bear the responsibility to acknowledge the physical and material circumstances that facilitated women's "fall" into prostitution and to pressure the authorities and legislators to make changes that could help these women recreate their lives.

The "clients" harbored many justifications for soliciting random sex with prostitutes, however most consisted of smokescreens of deception, which lessened their guilt at their own involvement. One client, a marine, claimed that French girls in their teens were thankless, thinking that they were omniscient and that in the end, that was how they got "trapped." He said that the fact that these girls think that they know everything, their love of money, and their "feelings of desire", inspires the girls to "turn [their] first trick[s]," and fall into the life.⁹³⁴ Another client added up the amount that he paid each prostitute and concluded, "If I were in this profession...[I would be smart about it]. I would turn twenty to thirty tricks per day and put some money aside [for my future]"!

⁹³⁵ This "John" had no idea, and did not care to know, that these women were exploited by both their pimps and hotel-owners, who collected most of their earnings in the form of fees and fines. Instead of saving up the hundreds of thousands of dollars that this client had estimated, these women were often in debt, which bound them even more tightly to the trade. No matter what reasoning they used to justify sleeping with prostitutes, almost every client admitted that they really could not "understand" or "define" prostitutes, their mentalities, behaviors, or their lives.⁹³⁶

⁹³⁴ Anonymous client cited in Jean Feschet, *A seize ans au trottoir : Piégées par le système* (Paris : Les Éditions Ouvrières, 1975), 50.

⁹³⁵ Anonymous client cited in Feschet, 50.

⁹³⁶ Feschet, 50-51.

One of the oldest and most destructive myths about prostitution that still circulated in French postwar society was that prostitution was a “necessary evil” and that it was essential in order to satisfy an uncontrollable male desire. Most advocates for prostitutes took aim at this myth, knowing that this idea kept women locked into lives of prostitution, from which there was little hope of assistance at either the public or private level. Pignier tried to undermine this prevalent notion, by insisting that the sexual instinct was not a necessity for life (like food, water, or shelter) and that indeed, no one had ever died from abstinence.⁹³⁷ He attempted to prove this by showing that at the end of the month there were far fewer clients that visited prostitutes because they had less money: therefore prostitution was not a true necessity. Pignier also promoted the intimacy of conjugal love and the importance of both partners experiencing pleasure over the impersonalized “love” practiced while visiting prostitutes in order to dissuade the “regulationists”. Lastly, he cautioned those middle and upper-class sons who might be tempted to visit prostitutes to gain experience that men who learned “brutality” through sex with prostitutes, often applied this method in the marriage bed. According to Pignier, this brutality translated into spousal frigidity and marital problems, which in turn stimulated the “need” to visit prostitutes, and the cycle became a veritable catch-22.⁹³⁸

Whereas Pignier played the moral card, advocate Jean Feschet sought to publicize the realities of prostitution to shed light on the dysfunctional sense of sexuality and unhealthy relations between men and women in postwar French society. Feschet hoped to expose the hypocrisy of a society that considered prostitution a necessary evil rather than

⁹³⁷ Pignier, 4.

⁹³⁸ Pignier 4-5.

the “frightful insult to the dignity of women” that it was.⁹³⁹ Likewise, Dr. Paul Le Moal, who had written a well-known study on juvenile prostitutes, declared that anyone with a “spiritualist conception of man” should be “horried” at the prostitution of women and that this horror should be “maximized” when one thought of the women who entered the trade at thirteen years of age. Le Moal clarified that for him and others like him, prostitution could never be seen as a “necessary evil,” but simply as an “evil.” He insisted that prostitution was one of the most shameful global scourges because it leached the humanity out of women. He disparaged the “honest people” who thought that it was a “necessary evil,” who “...wanted other people’s daughters to be delivered to the appetites of rutting men or to be dominated by their perversions, but not their daughter ...who was... ‘of a different kind’.”⁹⁴⁰ Le Moal stressed that he found prostitution to be “indefensible” morally, sexually, socially, and for the sake of humanity.⁹⁴¹

This myth of prostitution as a “necessary evil,” also buttressed French men’s postwar quest to regain their manhood and virility after their emasculating performance in the war. While many French men had been imprisoned, forced to work in Germany or serve in the German army, French women filled their roles in the public sphere as

⁹³⁹ Feschet, frontispiece.

⁹⁴⁰ Doctor Le Moal drew his conclusions from an analysis of the case histories and evaluations of the young women by social workers working for the Specialized Social Services for the Protection of Children and Adolescents, police inquiries, and the medical-psychological dossiers of the women created at the observation center, which contained medical-psychological evaluations; motor, scholastic, and intelligence tests; as well as tests of their character, emotional well-being, and professional orientation. The files also contain interviews with the women themselves. The young prostitutes served as the experimental group which was then compared to the case-studies of young “vagabonds” who were not prostitutes who served as the control group. The study’s purpose was to determine what circumstances might cause a young vagabond to become a prostitute. Dr. Paul Le Moal, *Étude sur la prostitution des mineures: Problèmes sociaux, psychologiques, et psychiatriques observés auprès de cent prostituées mineures* (Paris : Les Éditions sociales Françaises, 1965), 12-13.

⁹⁴¹ Le Moal, 12.

primary breadwinners, heads-of-household, and by serving in the French Resistance to the German Occupation. Part of the postwar return to “normalcy” was to stabilize gender roles after the men’s return, which included pressuring women to retake their former docile, domestic roles as wives and mothers who worked in the home and not in the public sphere. Symbolically and physically, prostitution allowed men to dominate women who by profession, were forced to submit to their advances. All of the derogatory attitudes towards prostitutes that were perpetuated in the public and private sectors of post-war France highlighted that patriarchy was alive and well in the postwar. As Germaine Montreuil-Straus highlighted, the fact that women were being offered-up for the pleasure of married men, adolescents, deviants, and sadists, represented the sexual double standard of the “masculinist” postwar society, which guaranteed the French male’s “millenarian privileges and sexual immunities.”⁹⁴²

Jean Scelles also spent his entire life after World War Two attempting to educate the public as to the plight of prostitutes, to the villainy of those who preyed off of young, desperate women, and to influencing the legislature to prosecute those who profited from prostitution. All of his publications instructed the reader to, “Diffuse widely, please” so that as many people as possible could be affected by his news of danger and debauchery. For instance his pamphlet of November 1960 portrayed the plight of several prostitutes in the clutches of “Roger le Grec,” a notorious pimp who falsely advertised jobs for high-paid dancers in the hopes of luring young women into a life of prostitution. If these women were suspected of wanting to escape, Roger held them captive without food and

⁹⁴² Germaine Montreuil-Straus, *Éducation et sexualité* (Paris : Paris : Éditions Jeheber, 1956), 80-94.

beat them with a belt to ensure submission.⁹⁴³ In another publication in October 1957, Scelles unified five major abolitionist organizations into a coalition that he hoped would convince certain lawmakers to support measures to help prostitutes. Scelles focused particularly on placing the blame where blame was due, pressuring the public to indict pimps and hotel-owners who acquired great wealth through the misery of the prostitutes in their charge. Typical of Scelles' style, his flyer of October 1964 "warned" hotel-owners against those who might try to ply the trade in their establishments, but also served as a clear warning to those who condoned this practice to cease and desist. Scelles suggested that hotel-owners place the following clause in each of their leases, "This lease is consented to under the following...conditions....It is forbidden... to give prostitutes or women with bad morals access to the hotel and the hotel must always conform to good mores... and by no means can the hotel serve as a meeting-place..." for sexual liaisons.⁹⁴⁴ Scelles advised that even if the landlord forgot (or neglected) to put this clause in a lease, the landlord (or a neighbor) could still easily obtain the quick cancellation of a lease if a renter "welcomed a prostiutional clientele" on the premises.⁹⁴⁵ Scelles concluded by kindly reminding hotel-owners that if they neglected to terminate the lease of a pimp themselves, then they would be subject to "heavy fines" and could witness the confiscation of their property, which would subsequently be used to house the indigent, for the duration of the penalty.⁹⁴⁶

⁹⁴³ Jean Scelles, « Document Social, nov, 1960 ». Bibliothèque Nationale (BN).

⁹⁴⁴ Jean Scelles, "Aux propriétaires d'immuebles à usage d'hôtel," *Documentation des Équipes d'Action* (October 1964).

⁹⁴⁵ Jean Scelles, "Aux propriétaires d'immuebles à usage d'hôtel," *Documentation des Équipes d'Action* (October 1964).

⁹⁴⁶⁹⁴⁶ Jean Scelles, "Aux propriétaires d'immuebles à usage d'hôtel," *Documentation des Équipes d'Action* (October 1964). There were some, however, like the Préfect de Police, Maurice Grimaud, who held a more cynical outlook, believing that the hotel-owners who had been hit were only licking their wounds, studying new ways to exploit the trade and that prostitutes who had worked exclusively in the

However, Scelles' portrayal of prostitutes was ambiguous. He vehemently defended prostitutes' image and human dignity, claiming that they were not responsible for the trade. He also stressed in his publications that these women were the victims of pimps, kidnappers, hotel-owners, bar-owners, and madams who exploited them for personal gain. Scelles never focused on helping prostitutes to help themselves, but instead turned his attention to using his governmental connections to influence legislators and Ministers to prosecute those who preyed on young women and children. He felt that through legislation that would fine and imprison the parasites that preyed on the innocent he could "free" young women from their life of bondage in prostitution. In fact, Scelles was adamant that prostitutes needed their "Lincoln" and described himself and the member of the *Équipes* as three thousand "Lincolns," who would rise to the task of breaking the chains that bound these women to a life of misery.⁹⁴⁷ In the end, Scelles affected both public opinion and legislation, hoping that he could free these women "from above," with the effects eventually "trickling-down" to help prostitutes in need, however he left the second essential facet of this struggle to the care of others.

Scelles' actions would have satisfied some in the "*milieu*" however, such as the prostitute Georgette, who also referred to her fellow-prostitutes as victims: of misery; of pimps and others who profited off of their desperation; and of the judges, policemen and doctors who debated how they could best prostitute themselves for the good of society rather than devising ways to "save" prostitutes, or to protect young people from falling

hotels that had been closed were "right at that moment" researching new hotels or new ways to prostitute themselves that could escape the "repressive action of the police." Maurice Grimaud, Letter to the Minister of the Interior 29 February, 1968, 1. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

⁹⁴⁷ Interview with Jean Scelles, 1971. Cahier 10, 15. CRIDES.

into traps set by the “*milieu*.”⁹⁴⁸ Georgette would have been pleased by Scelles’ efforts to educate youths so that they would have the information needed to defend themselves against individuals who would prey on their innocence and drag them into lives of depravity. For instance, in 1963 the *Équipes* conducted a survey of 135 women in Paris who were making their living from prostitution and found that over two-thirds of these women were those who had been uprooted from the provinces or from foreign soil, and that most had been raised in rural settings. Scelles used this information to stress the importance of warning young women and their families of the dangers that could beset girls who were estranged from their homes and families and found themselves in unfamiliar surroundings.⁹⁴⁹ However, Scelles’ belief in youthful agency, namely his belief that with the right information, young people could make the right choices, underscores his reluctance to put the same trust into women who had already fallen into the trade. Although Georgette would have approved of Scelles’ focus on education, she pushed for more. She insisted that the men arguing about the fate of prostitutes should instead have been focusing on providing women the proper tools to help themselves through re-education and on granting women the same opportunities for rehabilitation that they offered to male convicts guilty of theft, rape, and murder.⁹⁵⁰

Despite the authorities’ attempts to classify and control their behavior, prostitutes resisted their efforts on a daily basis. Prostitutes rebelled against social containment both

⁹⁴⁸ Testimony of “Georgette”, *Des “Filles” vous parlent*, Special Edition of *Moissons Nouvelles* 14 and 15, (circa 1956), 15.

⁹⁴⁹ *Équipes d’Action contre la traite des femmes et des enfants*, “La Prostitution à Paris,” *Sondage*, (Paris: *Équipes d’Action contre la traite des femmes et des enfants*, 1963). Reprinted in Dallayrac, 271.

⁹⁵⁰ Georgette, « *Des “Filles” vous parlent*, » Special Edition of *Moissons Nouvelles* 14 and 15, (circa 1956), 6.

physically and mentally. Prostitutes set mental, physical, and emotional boundaries to protect their privacy from the violation or meddling of outsiders (whether they were clients, researchers, or missionaries). On a very tangible level, prostitutes also rebelled against the laws that sought to control their behavior. For instance, in response to the changes in the penal code in 1946 which made active solicitation illegal, prostitutes found new, creative means of attracting their clientele. Forbidden by law from gesturing, speaking or writing in order to attract clients, some prostitutes (known as *chandelles*, or candles) henceforth remained completely motionless, positioned most often in front of a hotel dedicated to prostitutional activities.⁹⁵¹ As Mancini described, “They lined up along the pavements like statues, their only movement being that of lighting a cigarette, a gesture which is not soliciting.”⁹⁵² Frustrated, the police tried to argue that these women’s very presence on the pavement “constituted an unequivocal offer” but the courts refused to convict this behavior.⁹⁵³ In the 1960s, these tactics became even more expansive and the public language used to describe and codify the behavior grew apace. Some women (known as “walkers” or “rollers”) took to strolling down the Champs-Élysées, pretending to be window shopping, when they were in fact soliciting clients. The “bucoliques” practiced in the public parks and in the woods, the “amazones” used cars to solicit, the “*caravels*,” or sailing ships, located their clients in airports or in hotels near autoroutes, while the “sitters” attracted men while perched on barstools.⁹⁵⁴ In

⁹⁵¹ Corbin, 351.

⁹⁵² Mancini, 63.

⁹⁵³ Jean-Gabriel Mancini, *Prostitutes and their Parasites*, translated by D.G. Thomas, (London: Elek Books, 1963), 63. First published as Jean-Gabriel Mancini, *Prostitution et Proxénétisme*, Que Sais-Je? (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962).

⁹⁵⁴ Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, translated by Alan Sheridan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 354-355. This information is gone into in more detail in Dallayrac, 87-97 and Jean-Paul Clébert, “Les types de prostituées,” *Problèmes: Revue de l’association générale des étudiants en médecine de Paris* (mars-avril 1955): 19-21.

response to the authorities' attempts to control them, prostitutes used their intuition and imagination, finding new ways to practice their profession and to behave as they chose, while thwarting the efforts of those who sought to curb their activities.

Prostitutes hindered the authorities' efforts to apprehend, detain, and arrest them as well. Most prostitutes considered the constant police raids an infringement of their individual rights. One anonymous prostitute working in the neighborhood of Montmartre argued, "To get rounded up three days out of four is not regulation; it is a violation of our personal liberty."⁹⁵⁵ In order to escape these raids many women simply ran. The women would then seek refuge in apartment complexes, stores, or even doctors' offices of the neighborhood, where they would beseech the occupants to shield them from police pursuit. Journalist René Delpêche told of one prostitute, "Quick Nina," who was able to avoid most round-ups by, "charging off" at top speed as soon as she saw the police van pull up. In her haste, she would cross against the lights and risk "being crushed by a car at any moment."⁹⁵⁶ Hoping to have escaped her pursuers on one such occasion, Nina dashed into an apartment complex on the rue de Clignancourt, but two inspectors had seen her enter the building. After harassing the concierge (who was already under suspicion for protecting prostitutes) and forcing their way into her private residence, the policeman found Nina hiding in bed with the concierge's sleeping son.⁹⁵⁷ As portrayed in this episode, prostitutes often counted on the assistance and compassion of others to escape police prosecution. Oftentimes concierges or salesclerks could be allies, whether due to the accomplice's sense of empathy or because the prostitute was somehow affiliated with, or a client of, the apartment complex, store, or office in question.

⁹⁵⁵ Anonymous prostitute interviewed by Delpêche, cited in Delpêche, 94.

⁹⁵⁶ Delpêche, 95.

⁹⁵⁷ Delpêche, 95-96.

In addition to these physical acts of resistance, prostitutes staged an even more profound psychological opposition to society's efforts to control them. Some prostitutes resented the derogatory labels that society attached to them. One prostitute criticized the "cops, social workers, and curious people..." who examined them and tried to explain their behavior with "big words."⁹⁵⁸ She explained that the authorities "hid behind" words like "misery, family life, deception, and character flaws"—and that these labels only meant something to those who sat in judgement, but meant very little to the women themselves.⁹⁵⁹

Other prostitutes resented the meddling and controlling demeanor of the French authorities and chose to protect their privacy and interior lives through a practiced artifice. The police interrogators corroborated this "extraordinary" capacity of prostitutes to fabricate existences of their choosing depending on whom they were addressing. Judge Sacotte recounted, "The same girl telling three different people—a social worker, a doctor and a judge—the conditions of her fall will most often have three totally different accounts: looking for pity from the first, to scandalize the second," and presenting herself at her best for the third. The judge concluded, "This deregulated imagination, the inability to discern between the truth and lies, this romantic sensibility creates a veritable thirst for adventure in prostitutes."⁹⁶⁰ However it is highly likely that prostitutes knew very well the difference between reality and fiction and simply chose to resist the French authorities' efforts to define and control them by keeping their personal, interior lives

⁹⁵⁸ Anonymous prostitute, cited in Dallayrac, 135.

⁹⁵⁹ Anonymous prostitute, cited in Dominique Dallayrac, *Dossier Prostitution* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1966), 135.

⁹⁶⁰ Judge Sacotte, cited in Dallayrac, *Dossier Prostitution*, 124.

hidden and private. This behavior stemmed much more likely from a woman's conscious choice to rebel through a creative re-invention of self, than from a loose grip on reality.

Prostitutes additionally used deception as a defense against pimps' efforts to control their lives. Doctor "S." recalled the story of one prostitute who "had built a solid reputation as a 'loafer' in the *milieu*. The doctor described her as a woman who was not inherently bad, but who had simply fallen into the clutches of a pimp. Doctor "S." explained that from one day to the next she fell prey to "periodic illnesses" that made it impossible for her to work. Having developed a reputation for laziness, she was sold from pimp to pimp, for an ever-more paltry sum, until finally her last pimp "gave her her freedom" and no one else wanted her. The doctor stated that this woman now worked independently out of her own apartment and he had "lost her as a client: she was never sick again."⁹⁶¹ As Dallayrac concluded, the guile that it would take to escape from the "milieu" could not be conjured by an imbecile.⁹⁶²

Prostitutes also escaped the control of pimps by teaming up and giving each other moral and financial support as well as protection. "Janine," who worked in the Bois de Vincennes, had avoided the "protection" of a pimp by making intelligent choices in her own self-interest. The daughter of a judiciary expert in the Seine Maritime, she turned to prostitution after receiving her diploma. She paired up with another young prostitute Jacqueline and the two shared an apartment owned by Janine near the Gare de Lyon. Instead of seeking the "guardianship" of a pimp, Janine instead offered a sense of security to her young charge, who in turn helped her with living expenses. This

⁹⁶¹ Dr. "S." cited in Dallayrac, *Dossier Prostitution*, 129.

⁹⁶² Dallayrac, *Dossier Prostitution*, 129.

symbiotic relationship satisfied both women and helped them to avoid the domination of a procurer.⁹⁶³

Prostitutes sought to protect their inner, personal lives from infiltration and violation as well, by establishing rules of conduct and setting up physical, mental, and emotional boundaries between themselves and their clients. Seventeen-year-old Irene claimed that she “didn’t think about it much” when she was with a client, but she pointed out that she was less happy about sleeping with some clients than others (for instance men who were dirty, mean, or old, because they made her feel like she was sleeping with her father.) She expressed, “[Being with someone who is clean and nice] is less crappy than if his feet smell.”⁹⁶⁴ But even if women like Irene were sometimes obliged to have sexual relations with men that made them uncomfortable, they were able to set the ground rules for those engagements. Irene complained about the simpleminded clients who “drooled on you from above and wanted more than anything to kiss you on the mouth.” When asked if she let them kiss her, she exclaimed, “What, kiss me? Of course not!” When asked why, Irene made a disgusted face and said, “Because, because . . . It’s dirty!”⁹⁶⁵ Irene was able to create a certain distance between herself and her clients by refusing certain types of contact (like kissing) that she felt violated her privacy and sense of personal space.

Most prostitutes created physical and emotional boundaries between themselves and their clients by refusing to experience pleasure during their physical encounters. Paulette asserted, “It is rare that a girl will have a crush on a John. . . It has happened to me before when it was a handsome fellow. I have to say that that’s bad, that it serves no

⁹⁶³ Delpêche, 84-85.

⁹⁶⁴ Testimony of “Irene,” cited in Dallayrac, 207-208.

⁹⁶⁵ Testimony of “Irene,” cited in Dallayrac, 208.

purpose. I try to think of other things! So if I feel like I am going to let myself go, I recite my prayers!”⁹⁶⁶ Olga agreed, insisting, “Even if it were the most beautiful man in the world I could not experience pleasure with him, for the simple fact that he is my client.”⁹⁶⁷

Prostitutes also employed various psychological resistances to protect their private lives from outsiders. Some women utilized hostility, lies, or recalcitrance to keep annoying interviewers or others who attempted to meddle in their lives at bay. One journalist that prostitutes found particularly annoying was René Delpêche. Delpêche described many of the women he interviewed in sexist and derogatory terms. (For instance, he claimed that one “large” girl he interviewed did not have the figure for the trade and that her attitude would not incite anyone to debauchery.) He also published nicknames for them that he had either discovered or made up (e.g. “Toothless Gina,” whose “mouth did not invite kisses”).⁹⁶⁸ When many of the women he “chased down” in the street refused to talk to him, he called them names. Women protecting their privacy were, for Delpêche, “wretched,” “distrusting, and unintelligent.”⁹⁶⁹ Needless to say, many of the prostitutes resented his presence in their environment and rebelled against his efforts to ply them for personal information. When he accosted several “incorrigible” women on the back stairs of a bar they brought his presence to the attention of the bar’s owner, who “distrusting his intentions” tried to expel him from the establishment.⁹⁷⁰ Other women used hostility to shake off the irritating interrogator. After speaking with Delpêche for a few minutes, Janine suddenly and angrily cut short their “interview”

⁹⁶⁶ Testimony of “Paulette,” cited in Dallayrac, 208.

⁹⁶⁷ Testimony of “Olga,” cited in Dallayrac, 208.

⁹⁶⁸ Delpêche, 94 and 99.

⁹⁶⁹ Delpêche, 98-99.

⁹⁷⁰ Delpêche, 98-99.

adding, “By blocking my path you have effectively wasted my time.”⁹⁷¹ She preferred to be out looking for clients and earning her living rather than conversing with a journalist whose presence she found intensely grating.

Prostitutes additionally rebelled against society’s attempts to control and “reform” them by speaking out. In the 1950s and 1960s, many women agreed to provide testimony for the abolitionist publication *Moissons-Nouvelles*, (New Harvests) whose goal was to influence public opinion in favor of assisting, rather than condemning prostitutes. In their interviews, many prostitutes denounced the institutions that were established in order to assist in their “rehabilitation.” Many expectant mothers seeking shelter at *Le Nid* expressed concerns about what they would do after they gave birth because they were “scared” of the mothers’ homes. The associations like *Accueil, Loisirs, Cultures* (Orientation, Leisure, and Culture) that promoted the formation of mothers’ homes and touted their efficiency advertised that “maternal hotels” offered many benefits including: allowing a single mother to “joyously” see her children every night after work; having a room with a kitchenette; being independent, but not isolated; being counseled, assisted, and loved; having her baby cared for while she was out; and having her fees determined by her salary and circumstance.⁹⁷² The prostitutes interviewed by *Le Nid* strongly disagreed with this assessment. Marie-Claude of *Le Nid* professed that “nearly all” of the young mothers staying in their shelter were fearful of the future because:

They know too well the climate of the mothers’ homes to want to spend their post-partum recovery there. Could one be surprised when one understands that one hundred girls from fourteen to thirty years of age, from all walks of life, find

⁹⁷¹ Janine, cited in Delpêche, 85.

⁹⁷² L’Association Accueil, Loisirs, Culture, “Budget Mensuel d’Une Mère Célibataire” (Nice: Accueil, Loisirs, Cultures). Reprinted in full in Dominique Dallayrac, *Dossier Prostitution* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1966): 275.

themselves brought together to live horribly, left to their own devices without any moral support.⁹⁷³

Marie-Claude instead appealed to the readers to open their own homes to these women (and if possible their children), “helping the girls to once again find a family, to believe in the [idea of] family and their fellow-man.”⁹⁷⁴ Marie Claude urged that there were many ways that a foyer could contribute from welcoming young mothers with their infants for a few weeks after they gave birth, to simply offering a few days of shelter and rest to a woman who might need to escape either the fetid air of the city or the threats of their home environment or neighborhood.⁹⁷⁵ Marie Claude explained that these women required more than just “bread and water” and that once they chose to leave Paris, they needed to find a positive environment filled with friendship and understanding or they might quickly become discouraged and fall back into a life of prostitution.⁹⁷⁶

Another anonymous prostitute, “X.X.X.” criticized her treatment in the hospitals, where she went into rehabilitation for her alcohol addiction. She emphasized that in order to detoxify someone, one needed to do more than give shots. She expressed, “One must first get to know someone, letting them speak about their deepest problems. How can you detoxify someone if you do not know the motives that drive them to drink?”⁹⁷⁷ This

⁹⁷³ Marie-Claude, “‘Après mon accouchement, que faire? La maison maternelle me fait peur!’” *Moissons-Nouvelles* 28 (Octobre-Décembre 1958): 3. Musée Social, Fonds Legrand-Falco, Carton IV, Periodiques, Coupures de Presse/ Dossier IV, III, Presse 1944-1966.

⁹⁷⁴ Marie-Claude, “‘Après mon accouchement, que faire? La maison maternelle me fait peur!’” *Moissons-Nouvelles* 28 (Octobre-Décembre 1958): 8. Musée Social, Fonds Legrand-Falco, Carton IV, Periodiques, Coupures de Presse/ Dossier IV, III, Presse 1944-1966.

⁹⁷⁵ Marie-Claude, “‘Après mon accouchement, que faire? La maison maternelle me fait peur!’” *Moissons-Nouvelles* 28 (Octobre-Décembre 1958): 8. Musée Social, Fonds Legrand-Falco, Carton IV, Periodiques, Coupures de Presse/ Dossier IV, III, Presse 1944-1966.

⁹⁷⁶ Marie-Claude, “‘Après mon accouchement, que faire? La maison maternelle me fait peur!’” *Moissons-Nouvelles* 28 (Octobre-Décembre 1958): 3 and 8. Musée Social, Fonds Legrand-Falco, Carton IV, Periodiques, Coupures de Presse/ Dossier iv, III, Presse 1944-1966.

⁹⁷⁷ Anonymous prostitute X.X.X. in an interview for *Le Nid*, “Ça ne suffit pas de leur faire la morale: ‘J’en ai eu des cures de désintoxication!’” *Moissons-Nouvelles* 30 (Avril-Juin 1959): 8. Musée

woman recalled that she began drinking again two days after her detoxification. She insisted that this was not "...surprising when you know how one is treated in the hospitals, everyone mocks you...even the patients and the doctors...everyone...or worse yet, they given you lessons in morality....It is more than one can stand."⁹⁷⁸ She praised one individual who had cautioned her that she would still experience cravings, because she was then ready for them when they came and was able to overcome her temptation. She also stressed that the worst thing a doctor could do was to suggest that a patient would likely begin drinking again (even if he firmly believed that she would).⁹⁷⁹ In the end, she recommended that the hospitals listen to their patients, letting them speak of their difficulties, and helping them to believe in the treatment.⁹⁸⁰

Additionally, writer and occasional prostitute Albertine Sarrazin cast a wide net of aspersions on the "orientation centers." She called them a "sham," and "a thin veneer" that could never really help women escape the trade.⁹⁸¹ Sarrazin promised herself that she would not let herself be taken again to the centers because in the end, it all came back

Social, Fonds Legrand-Falco, Carton IV, Periodiques, Coupures de Presse/ Dossier iv, III, Presse 1944-1965.

⁹⁷⁸ Anonymous prostitute X.X.X. in an interview for *Le Nid*, "Ça ne suffit pas de leur faire la morale: 'J'en ai eu des cures de désintoxication!'" *Moissons-Nouvelles* 30 (Avril-Juin 1959): 8. Musée Social, Fonds Legrand-Falco, Carton IV, Periodiques, Coupures de Presse/ Dossier iv, III, Presse 1944-1965.

⁹⁷⁹ Anonymous prostitute X.X.X. in an interview for *Le Nid*, "Ça ne suffit pas de leur faire la morale: 'J'en ai eu des cures de désintoxication!'" *Moissons-Nouvelles* 30 (Avril-Juin 1959): 8. Musée Social, Fonds Legrand-Falco, Carton IV, Periodiques, Coupures de Presse/ Dossier iv, III, Presse 1944-1965.

⁹⁸⁰ Anonymous prostitute X.X.X. in an interview for *Le Nid*, "Ça ne suffit pas de leur faire la morale: 'J'en ai eu des cures de désintoxication!'" *Moissons-Nouvelles* 30 (Avril-Juin 1959): 8. Musée Social, Fonds Legrand-Falco, Carton IV, Periodiques, Coupures de Presse/ Dossier IV, III, Presse 1944-1965.

⁹⁸¹ In 1968, an issue of *Moissons Nouvelles* commemorated the life of Albertine Sarrazin, a popular writer who was honored as the "face of the year" after dying in 1967. Albertine Sarrazin, cited in Georges Yvetot, "Albertine Sarrazin visage de l'année," *Moissons Nouvelles* 65, « Femmes et Mondes : Dossier du divorce » (Janvier, Février, Mars, 1968) : 4.

to resources, not the state's temporary and faulty attempts at "assistance."⁹⁸² Sarrazin declared:

I know too well what it comes down to: if one does not have a family made of gold...nor personal support, nor a solid nest egg, one will find oneself on the sidewalk again with two possibilities: running . . . or. . . accepting the semi-liberty, semi-prison of the dormitories . . . the repugnant hovels, the salary of a work-horse, the stamps on one's "client card," the scorn, the tongue-lashings.⁹⁸³

All of these women realized that by speaking out against their poor treatment, they might be able to influence public opinion and thereby inspire individuals to make social and legislative changes that could make the lives and rehabilitations of all prostitutes safer and more successful.

There were many in the ministries of government, in abolitionist organizations, and in the greater society that believed that prostitutes could escape the trade through their own strength and volition if they were given the right tools and treated in a manner that would assist in their recovery. A member of the prevention services in the Haut-Rhin stressed that all of these women in moral danger shared an "emotional disequilibrium that rendered them unstable, [and] distrustful" and that regardless of the preventative plan or rehabilitation strategy enacted, what these women needed above all was "to find a climate of security and understanding." She insisted that a successful rehabilitation necessitated human contact, which alone could ensure a positive intervention for these young women and minors who were "trapped in cages of their own

⁹⁸² Albertine Sarrazin, cited in Georges Yvetot, "Albertine Sarrazin visage de l'année," *Moissons Nouvelles* 65, « Femmes et Mondes : Dossier du divorce » (Janvier, Février, Mars, 1968) : 4.

⁹⁸³ Albertine Sarrazin, cited in Georges Yvetot, "Albertine Sarrazin visage de l'année," *Moissons Nouvelles* 65, « Femmes et Mondes : Dossier du divorce » (Janvier, Février, Mars, 1968) : 4.

making.”⁹⁸⁴ Some social workers realized the importance of recognizing the women who appeared at the shelters looking for help as individuals. These social workers understood that “an enormous patience” would be necessary to encourage these women to accept the offer of assistance from a specialized social worker freely and voluntarily.⁹⁸⁵ It was no wonder that prostitutes were recalcitrant and distrustful when they appeared at the shelters, when in a report by the Ministry, the social workers for several departmental prevention services were described as belonging to two camps. In one camp, there were those social workers that had a balanced outlook and a fervent desire to collaborate with the complementary social services. Those in the other camp “were more skeptical, presenting objections, but declaring themselves ready, nevertheless to adhere to the best of their abilities to the research undertaken by the Departmental Administration of Population.”⁹⁸⁶ A woman arriving scared and vulnerable to a shelter, who was forced to face the reluctance and skepticism of a social worker in the latter camp would be hard-pressed to give enough of herself to ensure a successful intervention.

In a 1964 report for the Minister of Public Health and Population, several social workers acknowledged their formative deficiencies and asked for the assistance of “specialized services” to work with prostitutes who were considered “difficult cases.” By so doing they acknowledged that working with prostitutes was more of a psychological intervention than “social work in the traditional sense,” and that this intervention would

⁹⁸⁴ R. Dresse, Departmental Director of Population and Social Action, « Rapport sur l’activité du service social spécialisé de la direction départementale de la population et de l’action sociale, 12 mars, 1964, » 9. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

⁹⁸⁵ R. Dresse, Departmental Director of Population and Social Action, « Rapport sur l’activité du service social spécialisé de la direction départementale de la population et de l’action sociale, 12 mars, 1964, » 10. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

⁹⁸⁶ R. Dresse, Departmental Director of Population and Social Action, « Rapport sur l’activité du service social spécialisé de la direction départementale de la population et de l’action sociale, 12 mars, 1964, » 12. *Centre des Archives Contemporaines* (CAC) 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

require a rigorous training on part of the social worker, as well as a great investment of time in order to be affective.⁹⁸⁷ But many social workers simply chose easier assignments or took on work with prostitutes with extreme reservation or misgivings. It is likely also that social workers avoided working with prostitutes because the work was extremely demanding with a very low rate of success. This outlook however, initiated a vicious cycle of action and reaction. The social workers did not believe in the efficiency of rehabilitating prostitutes or in the process itself and the prostitutes then read this reluctance and disdain towards adult prostitutes during their interactions, which caused the prostitutes to distrust both the interrogators and the readaptation process itself. If the prostitute could neither experience the intimacy of a positive communication with a willing listener, nor experience the sharing of her innermost self in a non-judgmental “family” or community, then the prostitute would never accept the process of rehabilitation, which was the first, mandatory step in the healing process. By acting according to their assumptions, the social workers then confirmed their a priori hypotheses that prostitutes were a thankless lot that had no hope for a future beyond the “milieu.”

The first and possibly most important step in helping these women was to allow them the opportunity to give voice to their experiences and to bear witness for those who were still embroiled in the trade. Writing for “*Le Nid*,” Georgette explained that in French society, very few were willing to testify for prostitutes and instead instantly distrusted, judged, and condemned them. She insisted that this instantaneous condemnation and the refusal in society to acknowledge the woman behind the mask of the prostitute served as

⁹⁸⁷ R. Dresse, Departmental Director of Population and Social Action, « Rapport sur l’activité du service social spécialisé de la direction départementale de la population et de l’action sociale, 12 mars, 1964, » 3. *Centre des Archives Contemporaines* (CAC) 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

heavy chains, tying these women to a life of slavery.⁹⁸⁸ Psychiatrist Guy Maury emphasized the importance of the spoken word for prostitutes because the *milieu* had imposed upon them a culture of silence. The *milieu* had its own code of “honor” and sense of duty because the members of this particular group had oftentimes never known the love of a family or had never been part of a larger community. Although the *milieu* was a depraved environment dedicated to carnality and exploitation, prostitutes often felt a deep sense of loyalty to this group that embraced them, albeit in an embrace that enslaved. Prostitutes displayed their loyalty by refusing to betray the “trust” of the *milieu* or to testify against its members to the police or to social workers. Prostitutes realized that the police and social workers rarely understood them. They considered these two groups at best, outsiders, and at worst, enemies. By keeping silent, prostitutes protected themselves and the *milieu*, but their silence made them complicit in prostitution’s underworld. By talking, these women marked a desire to break with this underworld and begin a new life.⁹⁸⁹ As Georgette explained, the women who spoke for the work, *Les ‘filles’ vous parlent*, (*The ‘girls’ are talking to you*)⁹⁹⁰ could only contribute their voices because they had already “. . . escaped from slavery and shame.” They had (“just yesterday”) achieved their dream of, “. . . [becoming] real women again, like the others.”⁹⁹¹ These women’s voices bore witness for those still on the street, for they knew exactly what thoughts were hidden behind each prostitute’s practiced smile. Georgette declared, “It is our duty to speak for them. If we are quiet, that would make us the

⁹⁸⁸ Georgette, « *Des “Filles” vous parlent*, » Special Edition of *Moissons Nouvelles* 14 and 15, (circa 1956), 9.

⁹⁸⁹ Guy Maury, “L’importance de la parole rendue,” LIR 66 (September 1992), 11.

⁹⁹⁰ “Filles” or “girls” is a common way to address prostitutes of all ages.

⁹⁹¹ Georgette, « *Des “Filles” vous parlent*, » Special Edition of *Moissons Nouvelles* 14 and 15, (circa 1956), 6 and 7.

accomplices of all who exploit them, of all those innumerable individuals who, by their silence and distrust, rivet them to their bed of drudgery.”⁹⁹² These women proclaimed that if they said nothing, their silence would strangle them.

Because those in positions of authority had long labeled and classified prostitutes but ignored the actual words of the women in question, the next essential step for social workers was not to judge or to analyze, but simply to listen. Georgette explained that while the old men tried to decide their fate, prostitutes simply shrugged their shoulders wondering why the men never asked them how they felt. She said, “If they had ventured to ask the opinion of the “girls,” ninety-five percent of them would scream, ‘We want out. We want end to this career of slavery.’”⁹⁹³ Some advocates suggested that prostitutes needed share their histories in the presence of professionals in order to deal with any emotional difficulties that could arise during their rehabilitation. However, as indicated by the testimony of the social workers in Mlle Deltaglia’s report of 1964, the belief was widespread that prostitutes were difficult to help and that their fates were determined by the poor economic and social environments in which they were raised. Alain Corbin explained that he did not seek to “redeem” the prostitute in his work *Women for Hire*. He clarified that the “Regulationist” sources he analyzed did not allow women to speak for themselves but instead illustrated the world of prostitution through the lens of the male-gaze, through the eyes of the administrator, the judge, the policeman, and the doctor.⁹⁹⁴

⁹⁹² Anonymous prostitute, « *Des “Filles” vous parlent*, » Special Edition of *Moissons Nouvelles* 14 and 15, (circa 1956), 6.

⁹⁹³ Georgette, « *Des “Filles” vous parlent*, » Special Edition of *Moissons Nouvelles* 14 and 15, (circa 1956), 6.

⁹⁹⁴ Alain Corbin, *Women for hire : Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1990), viii-ix. Corbin reinforces this belief in his « Preface to the English-Language Edition, ». He explained that ten years after he originally published *Les Filles de Noce*, he was even more convinced than ever that, « The history of male desire, of male fantasies and anxieties, dominates that of the venal woman, registered or unregistered, in the France of

Corbin suggests that the history of regulationist France is ordered by male anxieties and male desire,⁹⁹⁵ which also sheds light on why prostitutes might have been so maligned, having been continually subjected to the judgment of the male gaze.

On 25 November 1960 France passed an ordinance putting into action the State's ratification of the United Nations' 1949 Convention on the repression of the slave trade and the exploitation of the prostitution of others. This ordinance (in the spirit of the international convention) displayed France's commitment to reinforce its fight against prostitution, but also to take measures to ensure the human dignity of prostitutes and help in their re-adaptation and re-classification.⁹⁹⁶ However, a report from the Minister of the Public Health and the Population in June 1964 highlighted that there were still great difficulties in fulfilling the second portion of this commitment. According to the Ministry, the French government was providing ample funds to ameliorate the services established to help prostitutes to escape the trade and to create new shelters orientation centers, however these funds were not being spent. The reports from the assorted Prefects of police (on which the Minister's report was based) indicated that the funds and the subsequent measures taken had made little impact because of the difficulty of recruiting trained social workers and their "inability to penetrate into the *milieu* of prostitution."⁹⁹⁷ Additionally, the report indicated that the "specialized services of prevention" (now mandated by law) that had been created in each department often remained "passive,"

regulationism." xiv. Corbin asked questions regarding male desire and male anxieties in the story of prostitution, however by analyzing the journals, publications, and correspondence of abolitionist organizations in this period and by asking different questions, it is now possible to create a gendered rather than male-centered history of this period.

⁹⁹⁵ Corbin, viii.

⁹⁹⁶ Minister of Public Health and Population, "Application de L'article 185-1 du Code de la Famille et de l'Aide Sociale, » 2 Juin, 1964, 4. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

⁹⁹⁷ Minister of Public Health and Population, "Application de L'article 185-1 du Code de la Famille et de l'Aide Sociale, » 2 Juin, 1964, 4. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

waiting for prostitutes to come to them and that the measures that had been taken to help in the rehabilitation of prostitutes overwhelmingly favored minors over majors.⁹⁹⁸ This complacency and disregard when it came to the re-adaptation of prostitutes illustrates a generalized prejudice and distrust of prostitutes in particular and of the lower-classes more generally.

This idea that it was hopeless to try to help the lower classes, particularly when it came to psychological re-conditioning was not new. Both Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer indicated in their work with hysterics that not only was a heightened intelligence generally part of the makeup of hysteric women, but that it took an advanced aptitude to be able to follow the suggestions of the psychoanalyst and gain the insight needed to find resolution for one's psychic problems. Freud stressed that psychotherapy necessitated a genuine concern for and liking of the patient. He explained, "I cannot imagine bringing myself to delve into the psychical mechanism of hysteria in anyone who struck me as low-minded and repellant and who, on closer acquaintance, would not be capable of arousing human sympathy."⁹⁹⁹ Some have indicated that this cautious statement was novel in its time and was the first attention paid to the critical importance of the patient-therapist rapport in psychotherapy. However this statement also highlights a classism that questioned the capacity of members of the working classes to heal. In fact in Freud's writings, he greatly emphasized the "high moral character" of his patients stressing, "...Hysteria of the severest type can exist in conjunction with gifts of the

⁹⁹⁸ Minister of Public Health and Population, "Application de L'article 185-1 du Code de la Famille et de l'Aide Sociale, » 2 Juin, 1964, 4-5. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

⁹⁹⁹ Sigmund Freud, quoted in Irvin D. Yalom's introduction to Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, xii.

richest...kind, ...with an unblemished character and a well-governed mode of life.”¹⁰⁰⁰

Freud consistently reinforced this point because he hoped to modify the widely-held lay and medical views that neurotics were degenerates and “loose” women. Of course, only wealthy, bourgeois women could afford the time and the money to work with psychoanalysts like Freud or Breuer, while the working class woman (who most likely felt just as trapped and restricted as her bourgeois counterpart) would have been turned away for her “base” roots and character, as well as her lack of intellect and means. Freud claimed that he was trying to reverse the public and professional worlds’ condemnation of neurotics, but in reality he wished only to arouse sympathy for the neurotics of the middle- and upper-classes, not the poor women of the lower classes who suffered as much, if not more, than the *bourgeoises*.¹⁰⁰¹

Lydie DolceRocca, head social assistant for the Prefecture of Police of the Seine, emphasized that it was the duty of society to help prostitutes primarily because they were from the lowest of classes, the members of which paid the heaviest price to the scourge of prostitution. She expressed, “We do not have the right to remain indifferent before this scourge that is so easily accepted by other social classes who would never accept it if the victims were from their own families.”¹⁰⁰² DolceRocca denied that certain women from the underclasses shared physiological and psychological makeup that condemned them to a life of slavery. She vehemently defended prostitutes against the social prejudice that

¹⁰⁰⁰ Sigmund Freud, « Frau Emmy von N. » *Studies on Hysteria*, 103.

¹⁰⁰¹ Prostitutes sensed this classism and responded in kind. When asked by Marguerite Duras who prostitutes distrusted the most in French society, Marie-Thérèse declared that prostitutes did not distrust the intellectuals or the very rich, but instead they hated the bourgeoisie, the “merchant” class, because of the “black looks [they give us] in the street.” Marie-Thérèse, “Enfer Libre,” Interview with Marguerite Duras, *France-Observateur* (19 December 1963). Printed as an annex to the autobiography of Marie-Thérèse, *Histoire d’une prostituée*, Collection femme, dir. Colette Audry (Paris: Éditions Gonthier S.A., 1964), 119.

¹⁰⁰² Mlle DolceRocca, « L’Évolution Criminologique: Les idées et faits, » *Pages Documentaires* 4 (April-May 1960) : 257.

insisted that these women all shared a “fatal destiny” to fall into the trade and that “it was useless to attempt to help them.” She attempted to sway her readers away from the “fashionable” belief that these women were hopeless by stressing that there had been experiments performed in the “silence of the laboratory” that were proving that, “NO, the prostitute is not obligatorily a ‘*fille perdue*’ [lost girl].”¹⁰⁰³

Le Nid as well, acknowledged this rampant classism in French Society. *Le Nid*’s founding principles stressed that even though their centers focused on the rehabilitation of prostitutes and alcoholics, they truly welcomed every member of the underclass, those who were consistently rejected by every segment of French society. *Le Nid* received every woman who came to their door, repudiating entirely any trace of the “vague philanthropic sentimentalism” so common in many abolitionist organizations.¹⁰⁰⁴

In the end, however, it did not necessarily matter if a prostitute could find a professional who eschewed preconceived notions about her profession and could provide her with non-biased advice. Regardless of whether the words were shared with a professional or a caring listener, the act of talking itself had a cathartic affect on these women. As Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer discovered in their work with hysterics in the nineteenth-century, if memories (either of an emotional, physical, or sexual violation in childhood or of continually offering one’s body for monetary remuneration) were repressed from the conscious mind, their affective charge, or the psychical, emotional energy attached to these ideas could cause destructive behaviors or seemingly unrelated physical symptoms. These memories were not in fact, available to the patient’s conscious

¹⁰⁰³ Mlle DolceRocca, « L’Évolution Criminologique: Les idées et faits,” *Pages Documentaires* 4 (April-May 1960).

¹⁰⁰⁴ Seguiet, 62.

memory, but had to be accessed through a process of free-association, where the patient was encouraged to say anything that came into their heads, exploring in particular his or her day-dreams, fantasies, fears, and desires. The analyst could use free-association as a tool to break the “energy barrier” erected by the patient to protect against the recollection of a “dynamically” (or actively) repressed memory.¹⁰⁰⁵ Freud and Breuer had come upon this technique with their breakthrough hysteric patient Anna O. (Berthe Pappenheim) who had referred to this treatment as “the talking cure” or jokingly as “chimney-sweeping. In order to clear or “abreact” the emotional charge attached to a repressed memory, the patient needed to bring, “. . . to light the memory of the event by which [the patient’s symptoms were] provoked, and . . . [arouse] its accompanying affect, and when the patient had described that event in the greatest possible detail and had put the affect into words,” the patient would be free of their psychic disturbance.¹⁰⁰⁶ By allowing the patient to free-associate and helping the patient to understand the underlying cause for their psychic and physical symptoms, the analyst could help a patient achieve resolution.¹⁰⁰⁷ According to Breuer and Freud, a patient’s ideas that had become pathological retained the “freshness and affective strength” needed to continue to cause psychic and sometimes physical ailments because oftentimes the victims of trauma (whether molestation, sexual violations, or a trapped spirit in a bourgeois world) chose to willfully repress these painful ideas. Additionally, these ideas could retain their affective

¹⁰⁰⁵ At first Freud and Breuer used hypnosis, but they realized through Anna O. and her “absences” or periods of self-hypnosis, that abreacting the psychical affects through free-association worked just as well. Discovering that patients often spoke of their dreams during periods of free-association, Freud then began to analyze dreams as the door to his patients’ “unfulfilled wishes,” which he believed caused their psychic trauma. Irvin D. Yalom discusses repression, energy, and dynamism in his introduction to *Studies on Hysteria*, x.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, “On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication (1893),” in Breuer and Freud, *Studies on Hysteria* (Basic Books, 2000).

¹⁰⁰⁷ Irvin D. Yalom, introduction to *Studies on Hysteria*, 3.

charge because the psychical trauma the patient experienced had produced an abnormal state, which made reaction impossible. For instance, if a child dissociated from his or her body due to the paralyzing fear engendered by a violation, they would have no possibility to react affectively. Likewise, a prostitute who left her body each time she submitted to the consensual molestation inherent in the act of prostitution would have created what Freud and Breuer referred to as a double conscience. It would not be until she could unite these two consciences by verbalizing her pain and experiencing all the feelings of hate, rage, fear, guilt, and self-loathing that would have been present at each solicited sexual violation that the prostitute would be able to heal and welcome in the hope for a new life.¹⁰⁰⁸

For many of the reasons explained by Freud and Breuer, talking and listening were also critical and essential steps in the treatment of children who have been molested as children. In cases of sexual molestation many children feel guilty because they were not able “to defend their physical integrity.”¹⁰⁰⁹ Victims sometimes attempted to repress these feelings of culpability and self-loathing or to bury the flashes of memory of the aggression that made them feel uncomfortable, dirty, or unlovable. This also applies to prostitutes whose corporeal integrity has been decimated by continual “consensual” assaults, who learn to leave their bodies during sexual performance to hide and guard their “selves” from the aggressor, or client. Victims of childhood sexual molest often wait years before putting speaking for the first time about the violence they suffered when

¹⁰⁰⁸ Details on Breuer and Freud’s theory and methodology can be found in Breuer and Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, 3-47. Although publishing the information slowly and sparingly to accommodate the delicate “sensibilities” of the nineteenth-century public, Freud realized through his work with hysterics, that many of these maladies had a strong sexual element, stemming frequently from repressed fantasies, sexual abuse, or incest. Yalom, Foreward for *Studies on Hysteria*, xi-xii.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Christine Laouénan, « Responsabilité/ Culpabilité, » *en 2 mots : Pour vivre autrement* (Douriez-Bataille, 2004), 59.

they were young. After years of conscious or unconscious repression, these victims whether victims of molest, or victims of prostitution often break their “guilty” silence, feeling the imperious need to bring the secret to light. The survivor’s verbal acknowledgment of the memory’s presence and power drains the remembrance of its destructive affective charge by according it the right to exist outside of themselves.¹⁰¹⁰ Therapists are cautioned to avoid negating the experiences and memories of the abused child by adamantly assuring them of their innocence in the abuse and smothering their protestations to the contrary. As with assisting prostitutes in finding the road to recovery, the therapist first needed to encourage the child to let out the words, the secrets, and confessions of guilt that they had been harboring and that were eating away at their insides. And then, as with the consensually-violated prostitute, the therapist needed to listen. By “[putting] the evil into words,” the survivor (whether of molest or prostitution) began the process of healing as “the author of his or her own reconstruction.”¹⁰¹¹

Marie-Josèphe Segulier of *Le Nid* stressed that there was no absolute “prostitute type” and therefore no set formula for interacting with the prostitutes who came voluntarily to their doors for help. She indicated therefore, that it was essential that each woman be recognized as an individual. Rather than diplomas or mental or professional competencies, the very first qualification for a “team member” of *Le Nid* was the sense of communion with these women. Segulier stressed that a volunteer at *Le Nid* had to be able to look these women in the eye and say:

I see you and I love you like you are I would like to see in you a human being. I would like to help you get better, to fill any lacunae, and to help you to hope for a full and true life. You practice gestures of love, and yet you do not love.

¹⁰¹⁰ Christine Laouénan, *en 2 mots*, 59.

¹⁰¹¹ Christine Laouénan, *en 2 mots*, 41.

Perhaps you have arrived there because you were...never loved. I want you . . . to impose yourself upon me, so that you may become the Being that you either clearly or confusedly want to be.¹⁰¹²

Seguier recognized that after years in the trade most of these women had reverted back to an almost “animalistic” state with “profound infantile tendencies,” however, she believed that with love these women could overcome their engrained sense of fatality and anonymity to feel like they were again human beings and authentic members of the society in which they lived. Strictly eschewing historical strategies of punishment and ideas of repentance, “team-members” at *Le Nid* sought instead to become familiar with each woman as a singular being, in order to create a customized program of “progressive re-adaptation,” that would be tapered to each woman’s needs.¹⁰¹³ *Le Nid* sought to implement a “mystical action” that could change with the organization, but that underscored the “eminent dignity of the woman and of the Christian” and sought to reclaim this dignity for each “girl of the streets.”¹⁰¹⁴ Through a series of successive trainings, the center helped each woman to find herself and to satisfy the mental, physical, and emotional deficiencies that these women had been living with their entire lives. But most importantly, the trainings at *Le Nid* were intended to show these women the immense possibilities that the world could offer them, to help them discover talents that they did not know that they had, and to give them a new outlook on life.¹⁰¹⁵

¹⁰¹² Seguier, 59.

¹⁰¹³ Seguier, 62-63.

¹⁰¹⁴ Seguier, 62.

¹⁰¹⁵ Seguier, 63. From 1949 through 1952 *Le Nid* reported that 74% of the women who came to *Le Nid*, accepted their services and were re-educated and rehabilitated. *Le Nid* believed that the results would be falsified if compiled on a yearly basis because young women sometimes had to come two or three times to succeed with their reclassification. *Le Nid* estimated that each year nearly two-thirds of the women that came to the shelter were “stabilized.” Seguier, 66-67.

Many prostitutes had also been told both directly and indirectly that their words were dangerous to others. Many individuals in the State, in the police, and in private organizations had indicated by their reluctance to shelter adult prostitutes with younger women and minors that these women's words were actually diseased, sick, and could contaminate the innocent. Therefore, there was hidden power for these women in the act of speaking. Although prostitutes recognized that they had oftentimes been victims of miserable circumstances, of those who had profited off of their desperation, and of legislators who condoned the trade, some realized that by voicing their fears, guilt, and shame, they could uncover their repressed emotions and work towards becoming whole again. Their words could also serve as a lifeline to other women who sought physical, moral, and emotional support in their efforts to escape a life of prostitution. At first these women's words were about basic needs: food, shelter, and employment. But when they shared their stories with social workers, with support groups in the shelters, or with colleagues in their new jobs, they began to formulate a history of their re-insertion and their new lives became real to themselves and to others.¹⁰¹⁶ By communicating with others, these women embraced a nascent sense of their own authenticity.

In many of the shelters, prostitutes were also introduced to a supportive community that often played a vital role in their healing. The volunteers at *Le Regain*, a Christian shelter for adult prostitutes, stressed that their shelter was a "home" for women who had never had one in their childhood and when each arrived they would say, "Come in, you are home."¹⁰¹⁷ Women who arrived at *Le Regain* immediately found "a sister"

¹⁰¹⁶ Guy Maury, "L' importance de la parole rendue," LIR 66 (September 1992), 11-12.

¹⁰¹⁷ Marie-Paule, quoted in Christiane Fournier, 31.

(one of the team of volunteers) who would sit and listen to her story. A volunteer stressed that *Le Regain* offered older prostitutes:

A climate of fraternity, the establishment of a family life, the chance to learn a career that is not just working elbow to elbow in a workshop, but with companions. A means of getting out: hope. And there is nothing more that needs to be done to . . . help them discover their female dignity.¹⁰¹⁸

Prostitutes found community not only with the volunteers in these shelters, but also with fellow-prostitutes seeking to escape a life of prostitution. These women could give them both moral support and a deeper understanding of the difficulties they faced in creating new lives. Many in postwar French society recognized the dire plight of these women but doubted their ability to heal. Sexual molestation and violence (even consensual) could take decades of therapy to conquer and many believed that these women were hopeless. Many in society felt that these women were condemned to lives on the street because they would never receive the resources and therapy needed to overcome their fear, internalized anger, and self-destructive tendencies. However, there were some in postwar France who had the capacity to understand the pain of sexual abuse, whether past or present, whether contested or consensual, and created spaces where prostitutes could find communities of understanding. This sense of community was an essential step in these women's quest for mental, physical, and spiritual health.

There was a key importance in the fact that organizations (like *Le Nid*) and various authors and doctors published the testimony of prostitutes. This act proclaimed that not only did these women have the right to speak and had valid voices, but also that their words were powerful and could influence a society that disparaged prostitutes and prostitution. These women's words also inspired fellow-prostitutes to find the courage to

¹⁰¹⁸ Volunteer at *Le Regain*, quoted in Fournier, 19.

free themselves from the trade. Overcoming great obstacles, prostitutes in the postwar rebelled against the authorities' efforts to define and control them and made everyday choices that gave them agency in a life shadowed by victimization. Although individuals like Jean Scelles and organizations like the *Cartel d'action morale et sociale* assisted prostitutes in many ways, the true rehabilitation of "*les pauvres filles*" (the poor girls) could not be superimposed from above. Instead, prostitutes needed to participate in their own healing by giving their testimony, forming communities with other prostitutes working to escape the trade, and by accepting the help of those who would assist them in recreating their lives. The success rate for the "rehabilitation" of prostitutes remained low because most prostitutes lacked adequate vocational training and could not often find employment that supported themselves and their dependents as well as the trade. Additionally, once embroiled in the culture of prostitution, many prostitutes had difficulty escaping the intense pressure from the *milieu* to continue prostituting themselves. Yet many women who employed themselves through prostitution attempted to maintain a sense of personal agency by thwarting the attempts of others to classify them and to control the behaviors they practiced. In 1975, French prostitutes would resort to militant action and occupy churches, protesting changes in the structure of prostitution that curtailed their opportunities to support themselves adequately in their profession. However the roots of this rebellion germinated in the fertile soil of the postwar period where prostitutes staged daily battles to protect their privacy and sense of self-esteem from the intrusion of clients, the authorities, and those who would "assist" them in ways they found either patronizing or degrading.

CHAPTER SIX:

Sexual Containment and the Resistance of Perceived Deviants

Postwar France attempted to come to terms with changes wrought by the war through social and sexual containment. French society felt threatened by numerous sexual and social dangers and implemented, as well as continued, systems of surveillance, classification, segregation, hospitalization, incarceration, and sometimes rehabilitation to control subversive elements that the authorities felt put society at risk. The social transgressors upon whom this system was enacted were prostitutes, lesbians, abortionists, and transvestites, all of whom were lumped together as purveyors of sexual danger and contagion. In this postwar environment, male-transvestite prostitutes were considered particularly suspect. Many believed that these individuals undermined the foundations of the traditional gender hierarchy and felt that they might influence impressionable young people into improper behavior. In addition, threats to the social order from the inside, for instance the presence of proto-fascist collaborators within the French government and society or from the outside (the recently-expelled German Occupation forces), made many in French society feel betrayed and vulnerable. Doubt stirred a call to action against what many perceived as transgressive elements within their own society. As anthropologist Mary Douglas insists:

Society does not exist in a neutral, uncharged vacuum. It is subject to external pressures; that which is not with it, part of it and subject to its laws, is potentially against it...Ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, about and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created.¹⁰¹⁹

¹⁰¹⁹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1966), 4.

Authority figures in postwar France addressed the perceived “deviance” in the postwar period by controlling the sexualities of all French people. They sought to manage deviance by segregating those thought to be out of control through hospitalization or incarceration. Additionally, the “experts” suppressed through classification; thinking that that which can be defined can be understood and thereby controlled. However, despite the authorities’ efforts to subdue those defined as social transgressors, many individuals in French society fought the authorities’ attempts to define and restrain them. On one hand, some individuals who were labeled as “deviant”,¹⁰²⁰ ended up internalizing the greater society’s classification systems and discriminating against those who “transgressed” within their own communities. On the other hand, many individuals were able to resist society’s efforts to classify, define, and control them, by reclaiming terminology and vindicating their own social and sexual choices and behaviors in order to live their lives and to experience their sexualities openly and freely. In so doing, these individuals defined and demarcated a liberated space for themselves in the conservative and controlled postwar world.

CONTAINING THE SEXUAL THREAT

Postwar French citizens viewed their world as fraught with sexual danger. In France entire organizations and societies sprang up whose missions were to ferret out and report deviant behaviors to the authorities as well as to warn the French public of immanent danger. One such group was the *Cartel d’Action Morale et Sociale* (Cartel of Moral and Social Action), or simply “the Cartel” that published short exposés on all sorts

¹⁰²⁰ The terms “deviance,” “deviant,” and “deviants” should always be bracketed by quotes, since I am using it as it was defined and understood in the postwar. However, for the sake of convenience, I have omitted the quotes which still exist conceptually around the term each time it is utilized.

of perceived social ills—homosexuality, prostitution, venereal diseases, abortion, pornography, abductions—in its monthly newsletter. For instance, its newsletter of September 1959 contained stories on: a street in Paris where the police had apprehended sixty-six prostitutes and brought them in for questioning and a visit to the “clinic”; an attempted kidnapping, in which the perpetrator fled after being startled by a passerby dropping a chloroform-soaked cotton rag on the sidewalk in his haste; and a brief review of the debate on the effectiveness of fines administered to prostitutes for “passive solicitation” that had been occurring in the press.¹⁰²¹ As the Cartel stated in their newsletters, their function was to influence the legislative and political debates in France, urging the authorities to implement a “rigorous” repression of the social scourges besetting French society. In a call to arms, the Cartel “expressly invited,” “...all honest individuals...to collaborate in this task of social and moral cleansing.”¹⁰²² Additionally, the *Équipes d’Action contre la Traite des Femmes et des Enfants* (Action Teams against the Trade in Women and Children), or *Équipes*, also spread information to the public on the possible dangers of abductions, on dangerous spaces such as airports, docks, and automotive rest-stops, and on the perils of prostitution. Although often sensational in nature, groups such as the Cartel and the *Équipes* kept the French public abreast of possible dangers to themselves and their children.

In the postwar period, the Anglo-Saxon countries tended to conflate political and sexual deviance and tied the threat of homosexuality to the Cold War terror of political sabotage and Communistic infiltration. However these beliefs also had an influence on France. In the postwar era, the French authorities made a special effort to investigate

¹⁰²¹ *Cartel d’Action Morale et Sociale, Cartel—Informations* 1 (Septembre 1959): 4-7

¹⁰²² *Cartel d’Action Morale et Sociale, “A Nos Lectures,” Cartel—Informations* 7-8 (Octobre-Novembre 1960): 2.

homosexual behavior in the armed forces and some officials focused on the homosexual infiltration of the government. Deputy Raymond Dronne went so far as to ask François Mitterand (who was the Minister of the Interior in 1954) what steps he was taking to deal with the civil servants whose dossiers indicated that they were homosexual.¹⁰²³ De Gaulle's post-Liberation government also endorsed Pétain's wartime decree against pederasty.¹⁰²⁴

There were those in French society who believed that the postwar sexual dangers threatened the “innocents” in French society, particularly the children. For instance, when Gaullist Deputy Paul Mirguet condemned homosexuality as a social scourge in July 1960 he stated:

. . . You are all aware of the gravity of the scourge of homosexuality, a scourge against which we all have a duty to protect our children. At a time when our civilization, so dangerously a minority in such a rapidly changing world, is becoming so vulnerable, we must struggle against everything that could lower its prestige. In this sphere, as in others, France must show an example.¹⁰²⁵

Addressing the perceived threat, French authorities moved to contain those who practiced behaviors perceived as deviant in the postwar including lesbians, abortionists, and transvestite prostitutes. The preferred tactics utilized by the authorities to change, modify, and contain “unsavory” behaviors were surveillance, detainment, examination, segregation, pecuniary punishment, and incarceration.

TARGETING TRANVESTITES

The individuals who were considered the most dangerous to postwar society were the male transvestite prostitutes. In the mid-1960s, the police and various social agencies

¹⁰²³ Antony Copley, *Sexual Moralities in France 1780-1980: New Ideas on the Family, Divorce, and Homosexuality* (London: Routledge, 1989), 215.

¹⁰²⁴ Copley, 216.

¹⁰²⁵ Paul Mirguet, 19 July 1960, cited in Copley, 216.

began to focus their attention on male prostitutes, with a demeanor bordering on panic.¹⁰²⁶ In the case of male prostitutes, the goal was less about re-adaptation than incarceration and surveillance. Although they gave lip-service to identifying those who could possibly be re-adapted, the primary emphasis when it came to male transvestites was segregation and examination. For French postwar society, it was essential that these individuals be kept off of the “voie publique” (or public thoroughfares) so that they could not contaminate French children or incite others to debauchery. Additionally, the authorities stressed the imperative nature of incarceration for these individuals so that they could become the objects of intense study. It was imperative for the scientists and experts to understand ‘what had gone wrong’ with these individuals and how they could prevent future occurrences of what they considered a grave violation of human nature.

In a letter to the Director of the Judiciary Police, Pierre Ottavioli (The Chief Commissioner of the Prefecture of Paris) explained the rise in transvestism as a phenomenon. Ottavioli stated that since 22 January 1907, there had been a prefectural ordinance in effect that forbade appearing in public “masked, disguised, or dressed as the opposite sex,” with the exception of certain holidays surrounding Lent and Carnival.¹⁰²⁷ The Commissioner stressed that infractions of this ordinance had been rare, until the mid-1950s when the phenomenon of transvestite cabarets began to increase in popularity. He explained that there were certain transvestite « celebrities » who had undergone surgical

¹⁰²⁶ Interestingly, there were some authorities who believed that homosexual prostitution posed very little risk to postwar society. Vice President of the General Council of the Seine, Robert-André Vivien, declared that homosexual prostitution “did not constitute a problem” and did not represent a threat to the moral health of the nation. He clarified that the problem was much less prevalent in France than in “other countries” and that even though certain streets in Paris were “regrettably” frequented by male prostitutes, the problem had neither intensified in the postwar years, nor been aggravated by the closing of the *maisons de tolérances*. Robert-André Vivien, *Solution au Problème de la Prostitution* (Lille: L. Daniel, 1960), xxiv.

¹⁰²⁷ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, “Les travesties,” 20 Octobre 1966, 1. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

treatments to enhance their feminine attributes, giving them « prominent breasts » and long hair. These features made them the “objects of curiosity” to passersby when they began leaving their performances still dressed as women.¹⁰²⁸ Ottavioli reported that when these individuals were apprehended and brought into the police facilities, they were not allowed to leave unless they were dressed as men, but he emphasized that sometimes their, “...anatomy had undergone such transformations that these men were just as scandalously noticeable in the normal garb of their sex as in their transvestism.”¹⁰²⁹

In terms of numbers, Ottavioli asserted there were 120 registered transvestite artists in Paris who worked at one of two specialized clubs, “The Carousel” and “Madam Arthur’s Place” and he insisted that the majority of these individuals made their living honestly without otherwise attracting the attention of the authorities. According to Ottavioli, some of these men had also undergone more extensive surgical procedures to change their sexual organs, services which at that time could be obtained primarily in Morocco. Ottavioli confirmed that some of these “changed” individuals had successfully applied to the have their civil-status modified with the state Tribunals, while others waited in vain for the approval of their applications. Ottavioli recounted that “Coccinelle,” the “star” of these transvestites, had already married twice as a woman after having her status changed.¹⁰³⁰ Ottavioli also acknowledged the existence of those individuals who chose to cross-dress simply as a matter of taste and had no other professional reason for doing so (whether artistic or in the hopes of practicing a ‘gallant

¹⁰²⁸ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, “Les travesties,” 20 Octobre 1966, 2. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰²⁹ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, “Les travesties,” 20 Octobre 1966, 1. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰³⁰ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, “Les travesties,” 20 Octobre 1966, 1-2. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

activity,' as prostitution was called), but he felt that these individuals numbered too few to deserve much attention.¹⁰³¹

Yet the primary problem as identified by Ottavioli, was not with these artists, but instead with the rash of young men who earned their living off of prostitution and had begun to dress as women in the early 1960s. Ottavioli was perplexed as to “what interest transvestism [brought] to their activities, because [their] clientele disapproves of all that is feminine.”¹⁰³² He surmised that the majority of those who had sexual relations with transvestite prostitutes were either “libertines” or simply “curious.”¹⁰³³ Ottavioli argued that transvestism acted as a sort of camouflage for some clients as well, who desired to sleep with an individual of the same sex, but found it easier to register at a hotel with a transvestite than with someone who was evidently a young man.¹⁰³⁴ According to the Commissioner, certain transvestite prostitutes who had not “lost all of their virility, dispensed to their clients that which their feminine allure made them destined to receive.”¹⁰³⁵ And lastly, Ottavioli estimated that a certain percentage of clients “went upstairs” with transvestites completely convinced that they were about to have relations with a woman, and that the transvestites, “using trickery,” did not disabuse them of this notion.¹⁰³⁶

¹⁰³¹ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, “Les travesties,” 20 Octobre 1966, 4. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰³² Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, “Les travesties,” 20 Octobre 1966, 2. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰³³ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, “Les travesties,” 20 Octobre 1966, 2. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰³⁴ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, “Les travesties,” 20 Octobre 1966, 2. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰³⁵ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, “Les travesties,” 20 Octobre 1966, 2. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰³⁶ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, “Les travesties,” 20 Octobre 1966, 2. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

The Chief Commissioner declared that in the five years since 1961, 250 transvestite prostitutes had been identified in France. The figure given by the male prostitutes themselves was far higher. In an article in the abolitionist journal *Moissons Nouvelles*, male prostitute Christian estimated that there were at least three thousand male prostitutes “of all ages and from all social classes” on the streets of Paris (with the transvestites included in this figure).¹⁰³⁷ Christian insisted that there were at least 150 bars that the male prostitutes frequented in their trade and the neighborhoods that they worked in were the same as those of the female prostitutes.¹⁰³⁸ In Paris, from January to October of 1966, 80 male prostitutes had been detained for questioning and Ottavioli estimated that this was the “normal contingent” for the Parisian area. He claimed however that this population was exceedingly “unstable” and only approximately a dozen transvestite prostitutes could be located on any one evening in the city. According to Ottavioli, this was most likely because these individuals divided their time between “the Capital” and the *Côte d’Azur*, where the Commissioner professed that they could exercise their trade in relative “tranquility.”¹⁰³⁹ Christian clarified that the trade itself was unstable and that therefore both male and female prostitutes were often forced to relocate. In the summer months Marseille, Menton, Nice, and Cannes became prostitutional hubs and in the winter months certain ski resorts became very popular as well.¹⁰⁴⁰ The good news, according to the Commissioner, was that of these 80 individuals brought in

¹⁰³⁷ Christian, male transvestite prostitute interviewed for an article by *Le Nid*, “Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les trottoirs de Paris,” *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

¹⁰³⁸ Christian, male transvestite prostitute interviewed for an article by *Le Nid*, “Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les trottoirs de Paris,” *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

¹⁰³⁹ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, “Les travesties,” 20 Octobre 1966, 3. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰⁴⁰ Christian, male transvestite prostitute interviewed for an article by *Le Nid*, “Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les trottoirs de Paris,” *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

for questioning in the first ten months of 1966, there were only twelve minors who were then reported to the Juvenile Tribunal for processing, whereas in prior years that number had reached upwards of thirty juveniles.¹⁰⁴¹

Both Ottavioli and the male prostitutes themselves confirmed that male and female prostitution was often organized in roughly the same manner, with the trade being controlled by pimps. Ottavioli explained that there had been both inquiries into, and arrests made of those who made their living off of the prostitution of men.¹⁰⁴² Male prostitute, Jacques B. recalled that just like female prostitutes, he had been “sold” three times in a month and a half, from a Moroccan pimp, to a Senegalese pimp, and then to another Moroccan pimp.¹⁰⁴³ Male prostitute “B” reported that his last pimp had given him absolutely no freedom, fearing that he would escape. “B” relayed that he was forced to provide his pimp with a fixed sum every day or he would be beaten. “B” remembered that when his pimp started losing money on his investment, he decided to sell “B” to a pimp in Casablanca, but at the last minute, he had been able to escape this exchange.¹⁰⁴⁴

In the past, this type of prostitution had openly transpired on the outskirts of the Place Blanche on the Boulevard de Clichy in the ninth arrondissement of Paris. Ottavioli recalled, “...One could see them strolling down the divider or taking their rest in certain cafés, causing a permanent scandal.”¹⁰⁴⁵ However, Ottavioli boasted that after many police operations in that area, it was “practically deserted” by the transvestites. He

¹⁰⁴¹ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, “Les travesties,” 20 Octobre 1966, 3. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰⁴² Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, “Les travesties,” 20 Octobre 1966, 4. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰⁴³ Jacques B., male transvestite prostitute interviewed for an article by Le Nid, “Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les trottoirs de Paris,” *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

¹⁰⁴⁴ “B”., male transvestite prostitute interviewed for an article by Le Nid, “Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les trottoirs de Paris,” *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, “Les travesties,” 20 Octobre 1966, 2. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

explained that those still practicing the trade in Paris were centered primarily in Montmartre, having taken to “more discreet streets” neighboring the Place Pigalle.¹⁰⁴⁶ These prostitutes sought out their clients in the street and generally only entered bars for a “quick drink,” for most of the bar owners did not want this type of activity in their establishments. When a transvestite seemed desirous of establishing a more permanent residence in a neighborhood bar, the police would warn the bar owner that they were risking both an “administrative closure” and an eventual charge for profiting off of the trade of prostitution, which generally served to “eliminate this type of undesirable clientele.”¹⁰⁴⁷

There was, in fact, a conflation between the ideas of homosexuality, male prostitution, and transvestism in postwar society. Jacky, a transvestite prostitute said that she found it “amusing” that for the majority of individuals the word transvestite immediately implied prostitution. She insisted that these same individuals most likely interacted with transvestites on a daily basis (for instance their neighborhood grocery clerk, sales girl, or doctor’s assistant) without ever knowing it.¹⁰⁴⁸ Debates over the dangerousness of homosexual contact and its connection to disease were often linked to debates over male prostitution. In the late 1950s, doctors involved with the fight against the spread of venereal diseases in Algeria had also noticed a rise in the prevalence of contaminations through homosexual contact. Although venereal contaminations through both registered and clandestine prostitutes had declined between 1954 and 1956, the

¹⁰⁴⁶ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, “Les travesties,” 20 Octobre 1966, 3. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰⁴⁷ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, “Les travesties,” 20 Octobre 1966, 3. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰⁴⁸ Jacky, “Jacky Travesti nous raconte,” cited in Judith Belladonna, *folles femmes de leurs corps. La prostitution* (Fontenay-sous-Bois: Recherches, 1977), 197.

number of transmissions stemming from male prostitution were steadily increasing with 3 cases in 1954, 6 in 1955, and 9 in 1956.¹⁰⁴⁹ The fact that more individuals in Algeria had contracted syphilis from homosexual activity (9 cases) than from either registered prostitutes (2 cases) or clandestine prostitutes (seven cases) in 1956, forced Dr. Colonieu contend that, “Unfortunately, the sanitary authority is fairly disarmed when it comes to the question of male prostitution.”¹⁰⁵⁰

In a 1963 interview, Professors Degos and Touraine had shown that there had been a resurgence in syphilis infections in France between 1952 (1,156 declared infections) and 1962 (4,554 declared infections). The professors discredited the popular belief that the increase stemmed from the increased flow of immigrants from North Africa and clarified that there were three primary causes: prostitution, “liberal rapports,” and homosexuality.¹⁰⁵¹ Degos and Touraine argued that homosexuality had become, “...more frequent, more visible...and more diffuse,” in the two decades after the war and that this increased same-sex sexual activity had precipitated several “small Parisian and departmental epidemics.” However, the professors stipulated that they believed that homosexuality was only responsible for approximately 10% of syphilis contaminations and therefore did not represent an important causative factor.¹⁰⁵² On the other hand, Doctors Guy and Jean Godlewski countered this opinion, granting homosexuality a

¹⁰⁴⁹ Dr. Colonieu, cited in Th. de Félice, “Algérie,” *Revue Abolitionniste* 170 (Mai-Juin 1958): 45.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Dr. Colonieu, cited in Th. de Félice, “Algérie,” *Revue Abolitionniste* 170 (Mai-Juin 1958): 45.

¹⁰⁵¹ Professor Degos and Professor Touraine, cited in L.-L. G., “Entretiens de Bichat: Les Cas de Syphilis Quadruplés en moins de dix ans en dépit de l’existence de traitements efficaces!” *Le Figaro* (30 Septembre 1963). Musée Social, Fonds Legrand-Falco, Carton IV, Periodiques, Coupures de Presse/ Dossier iv, III, Presse 1944-1966.

¹⁰⁵² Professor Degos and Professor Touraine, cited in L.-L. G., “Entretiens de Bichat: Les Cas de Syphilis Quadruplés en moins de dix ans en dépit de l’existence de traitements efficaces!” *Le Figaro* (30 Septembre 1963). Musée Social, Fonds Legrand-Falco, Carton IV, Periodiques, Coupures de Presse/ Dossier iv, III, Presse 1944-1966.

primary importance when it came to syphilis infections. These individuals insisted that homosexuality was responsible for nearly 30% of all syphilis infections.¹⁰⁵³

One of the solutions to the problem of transvestite prostitutes proposed by the prefecture of police and related authorities was a type of weakly-disguised incarceration. In a 1965 letter to the Social and Child Services department of the Minister of Public Health and Population, a commission organized by the Prefect of the Seine specifically addressed the problem of male transvestite prostitutes. The letter stated that the representatives of the Prefecture were very worried about the worsening of the problem and they believed that, "it was necessary to institute, as rapidly as possible," a specialized center dedicated to prostitute readaptation that would "welcome" boys who prostituted themselves.¹⁰⁵⁴ The president of the children's tribunal recognized that there were dispensaries in the hospitals that could minister to adult male prostitutes, however, he "strongly recommended" that a special center be equipped for male prostitutes who were still minors. He also suggested that new laws be enacted that would reprimand the act of transvestism, "because it provoked such a scandal."¹⁰⁵⁵ The commission backed this

¹⁰⁵³ Doctors Guy and Jean Godlewski, cited in L.-L. G., "Entretiens de Bichat: Les Cas de Syphilis Quadruplés en moins de dix ans en dépit de l'existence de traitements efficaces!" *Le Figaro* (30 Septembre 1963). Musée Social, Fonds Legrand-Falco, Carton IV, Periodiques, Coupures de Presse/ Dossier iv, III, Presse 1944-1966.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Préfet de la Seine, « Lutte contre la prostitution et le proxénétisme, » 16 Juillet 1965, 7-8. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.) This letter was part of an on-going dialogue between the Préfecture of Police and the Minister of Public Health and Population. The department of Social and Child Services had written the Préfet several letters (dated 9 Décembre 1964, 14 Janvier 1965, and 4 Février 1965) in which the Ministry had expressed the desire to « intensify social action in favor of victims of prostitution », indicating in particular the hope that the prefecture could work more closely with existing social services and the juvenile tribunal and also that the prefecture could look more closely into the creation of more orientation centers and shelters. In response, the prefecture assembled a commission compiled of representatives from the Minister of Justice, the Prefecture of Police, the Administration o Public Assistance, and Mademoiselle Dolce-Rocca, the Social worker assigned to the Center at Saint-Lazarre. The recommendations of this commission itemized in this letter were included in several reports over a year's time including one to the Minister of Justice.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Préfet de la Seine, « Lutte contre la prostitution et le proxénétisme, » 16 Juillet 1965, 2-3. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

estimation in its recommendations, suggesting that the more “highly visible” forms of this type of prostitution (such as wearing women’s clothing) be severely sanctioned.¹⁰⁵⁶

On 4 November, 1966 the Cabinet of the Prefecture renewed its request that the laws surrounding transvestism be fortified in order to deter this activity. In a letter to the Minister of Justice, the prefect of police complained that the only ordinance by which the police could apprehend transvestites in public spaces was that of 22 January 1907, and that this ordinance only allowed for “minimal” penalties for violations. The Prefect therefore pressured the Minister to hurry the vote on a new law (article 335-8) proposed by Mr. Gerthoffer (Government Counsel for Judiciary Affairs and President of the Minister of Justice’s Commission to fight procuring). This new legislation would have made transvestism in public spaces “with the view of inciting debauchery” a crime punishable by two months in prison, a fine, and the seizure and confiscation of all of the offender’s feminine attire and accessories.¹⁰⁵⁷ The prefect insisted that this new law would be “a much more efficient weapon” that the police services could use to fight against the ever-increasing numbers of individuals practicing a behavior, “...contrary to decency, good morals, and public order.”¹⁰⁵⁸ Transvestism was considered particularly dangerous because it was believed to disturb the social order by destabilizing proper gender roles. The authorities also worried that this behavior risked confusing the young, impressionable minds of children in French society.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Préfet de la Seine, « Lutte contre la prostitution et le proxénétisme, » 16 Juillet 1965, 6. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰⁵⁷ Le Préfet de Police, Unsigned letter to the Garde des Sceaux “Les travesties,” 4 Novembre 1966, 1-2. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰⁵⁸ Le Préfet de Police, Unsigned letter to the Garde des Sceaux “Les travesties,” 4 Novembre 1966, 1-2. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

However, the magistrates and representatives of the prefecture of police had clearly misunderstood the intent of the Minister of Population's suggestion that steps be taken to "intensify the social action in favor of the victims of prostitution," because they still advocated policies which forced individuals into re-adaptation. The prefect made it clear to the department of social services that it was "indispensable" that the boys be held in a "closed center" (one in which they were not at liberty to leave) for an approximate three-week detainment "so that an effective intervention can be performed."¹⁰⁵⁹ The Prefect stressed that a three-week "visit," "...would allow the doctors, psychologists, and educators to give an authoritative opinion as to their degree of reeducability; [and] if it [were] possible for the minors to immediately regain their liberty, there [would] be no possibility of rehabilitation."¹⁰⁶⁰ The prefect and the other authorities saddled with the responsibility for stemming the flow of prostitution on a daily basis had a very difficult time accepting and adhering to the International Convention guaranteeing the human rights of prostitutes both male and female. Their idea of rehabilitation always included some element of force. Prostitutes should be forced to visit venereal services because it was in their own best interest. Young male prostitutes should be imprisoned and examined in specialized centers until the experts were certain whether or not they had any hope of leading a "normal existence" in postwar society. The police and various other authorities still viewed the prostitute as the bad-guy, the perpetrator, the law-breaker that needed to be detained and contained, not as an individual that suffered from social and environmental ailments that caused him or her to choose a life on the streets. Rather than

¹⁰⁵⁹ Préfet de la Seine, « Lutte contre la prostitution et le proxénétisme, » 16 Juillet 1965, 3. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰⁶⁰ Préfet de la Seine, « Lutte contre la prostitution et le proxénétisme, » 16 Juillet 1965, 3. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

convincing prostitutes to change their lives, many authorities continued to believe that these women and men could not be counted on to help themselves and thus needed to be prodded, poked, and punished into proper behavior.

SOCIAL CONTAINMENT

The severe treatment of so-called “deviants” in postwar society could either be used to control the behavior of the transgressors themselves, or to control the rest of society by example. Sociologist Kai Erikson suggested that deviance should be seen as the actual definer of norms in a given culture. The deviant’s behavior and person, as well as the authorities’ and society’s reaction to him or her, serve as lessons for the rest of society of the fate that they will suffer if they fail to stay within the prescribed boundaries of the ‘normal.’ The deviant stands as the ‘other’ against which all other cultural norms and standards are measured.¹⁰⁶¹ As Kai Erikson insists:

The ‘visible deviant’ is a reminder of the forces that threaten a group’s security. As a trespasser against the group norms, he represents those forces which lie outside the group’s boundaries: he informs us... what shapes the devil can assume.... Thus deviance cannot be dismissed simply as behavior which *disrupts* stability in society, but may itself be, in controlled quantities, an important condition for *preserving* stability.¹⁰⁶²

One way that French postwar society attempted to control individual behavior was through the ritualistic public punishment of social transgressors. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault analyzes the metamorphosis of the “economy of punishment” that took place in Europe and the United States between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Foucault concludes that the transition from publicly-punishing the body of the criminal to a focus on private incarceration and rehabilitation, was due not to

¹⁰⁶¹ Penn, 360.

¹⁰⁶² Kai Erikson, “Notes on the Sociology of Deviance,” in *The Other Side: Perspectives on Deviance*, edited by Howard S. Becker (New York: Free Press, 1964), 15. Cited in Penn, 360.

“humanistic” trends in the legal and justice systems, but instead to the new “corrective character” of penalties.¹⁰⁶³ After the shift, the body of the prisoner was no longer marked to shame him and his family. In fact, the entire object of the punitive operation had changed. Now the punishment was no longer on the body, but acted instead on the thoughts, will, inclination, and heart of the criminal, striking the soul and not the body.¹⁰⁶⁴ Foucault briefly notes that after the change, the role of spectacle and publicity was transferred to the trial of the criminal as opposed to the public execution of the wrong-doer, but he spends much more energy analyzing the shifts in the private segregation, examination, incarceration, and rehabilitation of the criminal than on the very important public spectacle of the trial.¹⁰⁶⁵ In postwar France, the rehabilitation of the prisoner was still a primary focus of judges, magistrates, and doctors, however the spectacle of the trial taught another very important lesson to the rest of society. Whether or not the criminal could be “saved,” the public humiliation of a trial was meant to serve as a warning and temper the behavior of those who observed. Many believed that the souls of individuals who had committed sexual crimes (such as procuring or conducting abortions or having sexual relations with someone of the same sex) were already lost, but felt that the public humiliation of the criminal might stop others from making the same negative and morally suspect choices in life.

CONTROLLING DEFINITIONS:

¹⁰⁶³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 7-8.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 16.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 9, 7-19.

The scorn and distrust that the postwar society focused on deviants weighed so heavily on some individuals that they turned this negative energy inward and sabotaged any chance they might have had at rehabilitation or simply a life of self-acceptance. Considered by far the most dangerous “subversive” element in postwar society, male transvestite prostitutes had an incredibly difficult time finding any compassion or understanding from the surrounding society. Even within their families, these young men were both distrusted and shunned. For instance, Rita, who had been prostituting himself since he was twelve years old in the Saint Germain neighborhood of Paris, was forced to leave his “bourgeois” parents’ home at fifteen because his prostitutional activities had become “a dishonor to the family.”¹⁰⁶⁶ Other male prostitutes also described both estrangements from their families and a sense of isolation. Although “B.” spent a short time with his family when he was trying to escape from his pimp, space constrictions sent him back out on the street. He again found himself, “...alone, absolutely alone.” “B.” asked himself if he would ever be able to escape the trade without assistance.¹⁰⁶⁷ “X.” as well, was forced to distance himself from what he described as a “good family” that did not “understand” him, and began prostituting himself at sixteen years of age. “X.” said that he “suffered terribly” from missing his family and although he had a “profound desire” and had tried many times to leave the trade, he lacked the emotional wherewithal. Therefore “X.” was still “despairingly” walking the streets.¹⁰⁶⁸

¹⁰⁶⁶ Le Nid, “Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les trottoirs de Paris,” *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

¹⁰⁶⁷ “B.”, male transvestite prostitute interviewed for an article by Le Nid, “Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les trottoirs de Paris,” *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

¹⁰⁶⁸ “X.”, male transvestite prostitute interviewed for an article by Le Nid, “Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les trottoirs de Paris,” *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

Rita's estrangement from his family bothered him greatly and he tried several times to find gainful employment (sometimes as a hairdresser, other times doing odd jobs), so that he could be re-united with them. But in his life, Rita found few sources of "moral support" and became very "discouraged," making him fall prey to the traps of the *milieu*. Because no one in his life seemed to understand or support him, Rita kept returning to the streets, at the insistence of his fellow male prostitutes.¹⁰⁶⁹ Although it was a type of destructive agency, Rita found a source of community amongst his fellow prostitutes, because he could find it no where else in postwar society. However, this sense of finally "belonging" (when the rest of the world ostracized them as dangerous freaks), led transvestites into dangerous behaviors. To escape his pain, Rita began to do drugs, and was drinking up to a liter of ether a day. After participating in a detoxification program at a nearby hospital, Rita hoped to begin his life anew, but quickly fell back into old patterns, under the influence of his "friends" in the *milieu*.¹⁰⁷⁰ Male prostitutes like Rita could not help but internalize the shame that came from being judged, condemned, and shunned by the entire postwar society, including their families, whose love they had hoped would be unconditional. In the end, the only means that Rita saw to end his misery was to end his life. One could look at that act as the ultimate acquiescence to the judgment of society (he was acting out his own capital punishment for crimes committed) or conversely as a last-ditch resistance, a final refusal of the humiliating and shameful definitions society used to describe his life and his sexuality.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Le Nid, "Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les trottoirs de Paris," *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Le Nid, "Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les trottoirs de Paris," *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

Lacking familial support, these young men also fell prey to other forces in the *milieu* (besides their peers) that locked them into the prostitutional world. For instance, “B.” described a “Center of Moroccans” that was reported to assist young men who did not have a place to stay. However, once ensconced, this organization forced the young men to prostitute themselves in order to pay for their shelter.¹⁰⁷¹ This organization “rented” the boys out at certain “chic hotels” in the quartier Pigalle (such as Hotel “A.”), however the boys often ended up being shipped from these hotels to unspecified locations in Morocco.¹⁰⁷² The fact that these young men were rejected by their families and by the greater society left them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. By defining their behavior as deviant and dangerous, French postwar society locked these young men into lives of prostitution. These young men described themselves as “alone” and looked for community in the milieu, the only group in which they could find a semblance of acceptance. However, these individuals’ contacts with the milieu assured that it would be difficult to regain the moral and physical strength needed to escape their lives of prostitutional slavery.

Certain postwar deviants found it mentally easier to focus this “internalized” aggression outwards to members of their own communities. Some individuals placed judgement for judgement’s sake, most likely so that they would not have to analyze their own behavior or feelings. For instance Jacky, a transvestite prostitute, labeled three-quarters of his fellow-transvestites “as stupid as their feet.”¹⁰⁷³ Other deviant groups

¹⁰⁷¹ Le Nid, “Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les trottoirs de Paris,” *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

¹⁰⁷² Le Nid, “Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les trottoirs de Paris,” *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

¹⁰⁷³ Jacky, “Jacky Travesti nous raconte,” cited in Judith Belladonna, *folles femmes de leurs corps. La prostitution* (Fontenay-sous-Bois: Recherches, 1977), 197.

focused their energy on perceived super-deviants within their own communities in the effort of self-preservation, or to gain the acceptance of the surrounding society. For instance, to ensure what they considered their moral impeccability, the writers for the homosexual journal *Arcadie* stressed that they needed to locate and banish members of their community who were morally suspect and if warranted, report them to the authorities. The rules for the *Club Littéraire et Scientifique des Pays Latin* (The Literary and Scientific Club of Latin Countries), which published the actual review, specifically targeted proper “bathroom” behavior, insisting that anyone perpetrating “incorrect, indecent attitudes” in said locations, would be “immediately and definitively excluded from the Club and from *Arcadie*.”¹⁰⁷⁴ Additionally, the rules warned that any “Arcadien” whose behavior was “vulgar, indelicate, dishonest, or worse still (prostitutes...singers)” would be rapidly investigated and excluded and a report would be filed at the Prefecture of police on their transgressions.¹⁰⁷⁵ The rules stressed that “everyone understood the importance” of censuring improper behavior¹⁰⁷⁶ and this intense focus on morality and proper conduct was undoubtedly applicable (albeit terribly discriminatory) in the conservative postwar climate in which *Arcadie* was born.

One of the primary groups that the *Arcadiens* condemned was the transvestites within their community. In a 1957 article for *Arcadie* Lucien Farre declared, “Transvestism is one of the most criticizable attributes of homosexuality, one of the most

¹⁰⁷⁴ Pierre Fontanié, “*Arcadie* ou la préhistoire du mouvement gai,” *Masques: revue des homosexualités* 15 (Automne 1982): 88.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Pierre Fontanié, “*Arcadie* ou la préhistoire du mouvement gai,” *Masques: revue des homosexualités* 15 (Automne 1982): 88.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Pierre Fontanié, “*Arcadie* ou la préhistoire du mouvement gai,” *Masques: revue des homosexualités* 15 (Automne 1982): 88.

surprising,...the most ridiculous, the least explainable.”¹⁰⁷⁷ Farre emphasized that if one defined homosexuality as the attraction for an individual of the same sex, then it is incomprehensible why one of the two would transform himself into a member of the opposite sex. He asked, “If one of the two partners has all the appearances of a woman, where then is the homosexuality?”¹⁰⁷⁸ He then concluded that the transvestite homosexual was actually an “imitation of a woman, a product of replacement that has lost all of its virile qualities... and [at the same time has] gained no feminine qualities.”¹⁰⁷⁹ Farre had as difficult a time understanding the behavior of transvestite prostitutes as the greater society had in understanding homosexuals in general.

Likewise, lesbians in postwar society complained about members of their community whom they believed reinforced prevailing gender stereotypes by acting out “butch” and “femme” gender roles. It is striking that after having long been victims of discrimination by French society as a whole, that many in the gay community practiced the same intolerance against members of their own kind, whom they felt lived “*hors norms*,” or outside the boundaries of moral respectability. Perhaps these homosexual individuals felt that by ‘cleaning-house,’ clearing out, and ostracizing the fringe members of their own communities they might be able to gain the respect of their fellow French men, but in the conservative and hyper-sensitized postwar climate, this was a utopian dream.

As displayed in a self-conscious editorial by *Arcadie*’s founder André Baudry, the publication itself was fighting for its life. Baudry had sent out a questionnaire to his fellow *Arcadiens* in the early 1960s trying to assess if they were happy with the review

¹⁰⁷⁷ Lucien Farre, “Travestissement et Sexualité,” *Arcadie* 40 (Avril 1957): 41.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Farre, 41.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Farre, 41.

and what they might like to see changed if possible. He wrote a heart-felt defense to the criticism the review had received a few months later. He explained that since the legislature had pronounced in 1960 that homosexuality was a social scourge and that society needed to take special steps to eradicate the menace, the publication needed to be very conservative and judicious regarding its content.¹⁰⁸⁰ Baudry complained that since this legislative mandate, the review was obligated to publish “complicated” and “lengthy” scientific articles that were hard to assimilate and that only truly appealed to approximately 10% of the publication’s readership for fear of censorship and possible closure. *Arcadie*’s administration was forced to accentuate the scientific character of the review because those in power found a greater redeeming value in science than in a purely literary publication.¹⁰⁸¹ And Baudry was correct in his assessment. There were indeed several gay publications that came out in this postwar period, and of them, only *Arcadie* survived.¹⁰⁸²

In addition to the “ostrich politics” (if one does not see it, it does not exist) to which most of the gay publications fell victim, another means by which postwar society sought to contain threats to public safety was through the compression of deviance. Different aspects of deviance became conceptual blocks that the authorities and various organizations could utilize interchangeably to discuss postwar social and moral

¹⁰⁸⁰ André Baudry, “Réponse à une questionnaire,” *Arcadie* 96 (Décembre 1961): 615.

¹⁰⁸¹ André Baudry, “Réponse,” 615.

¹⁰⁸² I researched several publications (*Juventus, Futur, Les Annonces*) and only *Arcadie* was spared closure by the authorities. *Der Kreis* was also available, however this publication was not produced in France.

danger.¹⁰⁸³ This trend was especially evident in publications such as *Cartel Informations*, whose monthly exposés conflated various social ills such as abortion, homosexuality, pornography, the white slave trade, and *le strip-tease*, in an effort to elicit public support in the fight against deviant behavior in postwar society. This mutual association of all types of deviant behavior made the task of eradicating these social ills seem less daunting and altogether attainable. By containing all deviant behaviors into a conceptually compact unit, the authorities and various organizations convinced themselves that social and sexual containment was possible.

Another by-product of this association however, was that many individuals who had been so-labeled began to identify with their fellow-deviants at both conscious and subconscious levels. Some individuals began to frequent deviant spaces and associate with individuals with whom they would never normally have associated. For instance, although they expressed a grave discomfort over the fact, many lesbians in the postwar visited questionable bars in order to meet women like themselves. “C.” emphasized that she “really didn’t like public spots” but that she visited one bar quite often between 1959 and 1962 when she was single. She recalled, “It was alcohol, tobacco, completely lost women, full of romantic disappointments.... Truly it was frightening... and then those who made trouble, there were those who fought because they were jealous...An

¹⁰⁸³ This same conflation of deviance (in the form of homosexuality, idolatry, and general depravity) can be seen the Catholic Church’s call for the blood of homosexual transgressors in Leviticus 20: 13 (although some scholars have noted that the Church is much less rigorous in its condemnation of homosexuals today). Mossuz-Lavau, 288-289. This trend was evident in other countries after the war as well, for instance the United States where the word “pervert” was employed to describe a wide-range of individuals from adults who participated in consensual same-sex relations to people who raped and murdered children. Elaine Tyler May, 82.

atmosphere!”¹⁰⁸⁴ But the fact was, although “C.” had misgivings and regretted her involvement, she still kept returning to this community of ostracization. “M.” on the other hand, embraced her local community of outsiders, feeling that she belonged. After “discovering” her homosexuality, “M” went on a quest to locate places where homosexuals could interact and to find a social enclave in which she belonged. She found a particular bar in the Midi, in the south of France that she described as “abominable, sordid.” But, she explained, “...It did not bother me. I found myself once again among sisters and brothers that shared the same margin... I always felt like we occupied the margins.”¹⁰⁸⁵ Later, “M.” reported, she had opened her own bar that had had a very different atmosphere, but that that was in the late 1960s. She recollected, “In the fifties, one had the idea that that was the way it was, one did not believe that things could be different.”¹⁰⁸⁶ Marie-Thérèse felt similarly. She stressed that when she had moved to Biarritz after a difficult break up she had not known anyone and “she was alone with her pain.”¹⁰⁸⁷ She noted that most of the lesbians in Biarritz frequented this bar, but that it was “non-specialized” since its clientele consisted of all “marginal” types, such as blackmarketeers, or anyone who practiced behaviors considered not quite “normal.”¹⁰⁸⁸ Visiting this marginal community did not seem to make Marie-Thérèse too concerned

¹⁰⁸⁴ “C.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 67.

¹⁰⁸⁵ “M.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 67-68.

¹⁰⁸⁶ “M.,” anonymous lesbian interviewed by Claudie Lesselier between 1986 and 1988, Claudie Lesselier, “Aspects de l’expérience lesbienne en France 1930-1968,” unpublished mémoire pour le DEA en sociologie, Université Paris III (November 1987), 68.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Marie-Thérèse, interviewed by Christiane Jouve, “Je recommencerais tout/,” *Lesbia Magazine* 54 (October 1987): 27.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Marie-Thérèse, interviewed by Christiane Jouve, “Je recommencerais tout/,” *Lesbia Magazine* 54 (October 1987): 27.

however, after her initial trepidation. Simone, a young transsexual in Paris in the 1960s, claimed that she spent more and more of her adolescent days in a small quarter in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés, where she passed time with young homosexual prostitutes and transvestites. She recounted, “Even though I did not feel exactly like them, I knew instinctively that they were closer to the universe to which I had a vague sense of belonging.”¹⁰⁸⁹ One could view this tendency to congregate with other perceived “miscreants” as an internalization of the deviant labels ascribed to them by the dominant society. However, one could also interpret the search for a community of acceptance as an act of resistance and an attempt to find recognition and comradeship in a cold, judgmental, and frightened postwar world.

RESISTANCE

Individuals in postwar France resisted the government’s and the authorities’ attempts to contain their behavior, sexualities, and individualities in a number of ways. Transvestite prostitutes resisted efforts to classify and detain them. Additionally, they sought to undermine the authorities’ attempts to make transvestism a serious crime, punishable by fines and imprisonment. When the police began practicing raids on certain areas of Paris in an effort to eradicate male prostitution, prostitutes moved their business elsewhere and implemented new methods of attracting clients. In the late 1960s, the male prostitutes began to utilize the method “in vogue” with Parisian prostitutes at the time, which was to search out clients while driving. Transvestite prostitutes would traverse the

¹⁰⁸⁹ Simone, in her biography by Mireille Dumas, *Simone par Simone* (Paris : M.D. Éditions/Éditions du Rocher, 1997), 24.

avenues of the Champs-Élysées behind the wheels of their vehicles in an effort to carry on their trade without being molested by the Parisian police.¹⁰⁹⁰

Transvestites of all types also resisted the authorities' attempts to control their behavior by joining the association "*l'Aide aux Malades Hormonaux*," (Aid to the Hormonally Ill) or "A. Ma. Ho." This association was founded by a doctor and a lawyer whose professed goal was to provide medical and judicial assistance to transvestites. The association's ultimate objective was to acquire for transvestites the right to dress in public according to their tastes.¹⁰⁹¹ The organization publicly denied "welcoming prostitutes into their bosom," however the Chief Commissioner of the Prefecture of Police of Paris, Pierre Ottavioli, insisted that transvestite prostitutes made up the majority of their adherents based on subscriptions to the association. The Association did try to re-classify prostitutes, but had thus far only been able to procure employment for them as domestics.¹⁰⁹² The Chief Commissioner insisted that it was doubtful that house-cleaning would appeal to young individuals that "had feminine tastes." Additionally, because the adherents to the association were limited, Ottavioli did not believe that they could rely on its work to remove these "caricatures...of women" from the sidewalks of Paris.¹⁰⁹³ Despite its limited influence, associations like the A. Ma. Ho. gave individuals that cross-dressed a support network that fought for their rights in a spirit of mutual acceptance.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, "Les travesties," 20 Octobre 1966, 3. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰⁹¹ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, "Les travesties," 20 Octobre 1966, 4. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰⁹² Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, "Les travesties," 20 Octobre 1966, 4. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹⁰⁹³ Pierre Ottavioli, Letter to The Director of the Judiciary Police, "Les travesties," 20 Octobre 1966, 4. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

Joining an organization like A. Ma. Ho. represented an act of resistance for individuals fighting to live and love freely in postwar France.

Transvestite prostitutes also accepted the aid of other groups like the “*Volontaires de l’Amitié*,” which sought to identify male prostitutes and give them the assistance and understanding they needed in order to escape the trade. The “*Volontaires*” were described as a team of activists “who formed links of friendship” with many of these young men on the streets.¹⁰⁹⁴ According to the group, “...This friendship helps the [the male prostitutes] to discover the degree of stress that is being experienced by others in the trade; the depth of desire that is born in their hearts to escape their predicament; [and] the difficulties that each of them battle in their attempts at resurrection...”¹⁰⁹⁵ These militants also pressured the abolitionist organization *Le Nid* to publish the stories of these boys and men in order to create a feeling of sympathy amongst the general populace. Nearly all of the young men who turned to lives of prostitution came from families who rejected them and it was quite clear that even at the level of the family, French society was far from accepting individuals with differing sexualities.

The transvestite prostitutes themselves, also recognized the need to spread their stories to a wider audience. Most members of French society were either unaware of the existence of male prostitutes or made so uncomfortable by them that they chose to ignore the fact that they existed. The organization *Le Nid* expressed that simply writing the article on male prostitution was an eye-opening experience for them, because this was an

¹⁰⁹⁴ Le Nid, “Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les trottoirs de Paris,” *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Le Nid, “Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les trottoirs de Paris,” *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

aspect of prostitution that was seldom discussed, “but that existed nonetheless.”¹⁰⁹⁶ As one male prostitute, Jacky, expressed, “It is essential that people know. It must be said. Something must be written...”¹⁰⁹⁷ Reacting strongly to the death of one of their own, a community of transvestite prostitutes took action and participated by giving testimony for an article for the prostitute abolition publication *Moissons Nouvelles*. By relaying the story of their fallen comrade Rita, who had finally committed suicide after a life of rejection and misunderstanding, these male prostitutes had come face to face with their own misery and suffering.¹⁰⁹⁸ They realized in the end that one of the most important facets of their own salvation necessitated at the very least a modicum of understanding and empathy from the surrounding society. Speaking for all of his peers, male prostitute Christian stressed, “All we expect of people...is above all, to understand us. We are rejected and distrusted by everyone. As soon as one sets eyes on us, we are beaten down.”¹⁰⁹⁹ Yet, even if these men were never to receive the acceptance and compassion that they hoped for, the act of putting their stories into words helped them to find the strength to work towards improving their own existences.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the 1960s there was an intensifying tug-of-war between those who wanted to acknowledge the human rights of so-called deviants and those who sought to contain them using force, judgement, condemnation, and punishment. The vociferous

¹⁰⁹⁶ Le Nid, “Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les trottoirs de Paris,” *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Jacky, male transvestite prostitute interviewed by the abolitionist organization Le Nid, “Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les Trottoirs de Paris,” *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Le Nid, “Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les trottoirs de Paris,” *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Christian, male transvestite prostitute interviewed by the abolitionist organization Le Nid, “Le Saviez-Vous? Près de 3,000 garçons sur les Trottoirs de Paris,” *Moissons Nouvelles* 58 (avril 1966): 2.

and virulent debates that were staged over the threat of prostitutes, homosexuals, and transvestites exemplify this struggle. For instance, French police in the postwar fought for the right to force prostitutes into what they considered appropriate behavior. Meanwhile, those working for the Minister of Social Affairs needed to consistently remind the police that these women and men had civil and human rights that needed to be respected. For instance, in a letter to the Social and Child Services section of the Ministry of Health and Population, the Prefect of the Seine bemoaned the fact that “certain contaminated women can escape the venereal services that function at Saint-Lazare,” where they were brought in for questioning and orientation if they were apprehended.¹¹⁰⁰ The Prefect therefore urged that it was essential to permit the orientation center and the social prevention services “...to force prostitutes to present themselves to venereal services,” if the authorities believed that such a consultation was required.¹¹⁰¹ In response, Bernard Guitton with the Readaptation and Social Aid office of the Minister of Social Affairs, cautioned the prefect, emphasizing that the request to force prostitutes of both sexes to submit to venereal exams at the express demand of the employees of the specialized orientation services did not adhere to “the spirit... of the international convention of 2 December 1949, in that it was meant to eliminate any discrimination [against] prostitutes.”¹¹⁰² Mr. Guitton did assure the Prefect however, that his department was

¹¹⁰⁰ Préfet de la Seine, « Lutte contre la prostitution et le proxénétisme, » 16 Juillet 1965, 6. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹¹⁰¹ Préfet de la Seine, « Lutte contre la prostitution et le proxénétisme, » 16 Juillet 1965, 6. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹¹⁰² Bernard Guitton, « Lutte contre le proxénétisme et la prostitution, » 14 Mars 1967, 2. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

nevertheless researching means by which “...to facilitate to the extent possible” the exams that the Prefect wanted the prostitutes to undergo.¹¹⁰³

Mr. Guitton’s assessment was confirmed by the Medical-Social Services department of the Minister of Social Affairs, when Director-General of Public Health, Dr. Pierre Boulenger, made it clear that one could not modify the legislation surrounding this particular topic (of forced exams) without incurring the denunciation of said international convention. Dr. Boulenger stressed that by no means could individuals being sheltered in the orientation centers be forced to undergo medical examinations at the Center for Venereal Services and that in fact only when an individual has been identified as an “agent of contamination” can one make “her” obligatorily the object of a medical exam and treatment.¹¹⁰⁴ The fact that this debate had spanned two years and involved various experts and authorities from many departments and law-enforcement agencies testifies to its importance in understanding perceptions of deviance in postwar France.

This on-going debate over the termination of the *fichier sanitaire* (sanitary file) and the application of the international convention on prostitution was not limited to the French Ministries and the Prefecture of police, but also played out in the popular press. In 1962, a Christian publication, *Fêtes et Saisons* (Holidays and Seasons) sought to disabuse the notion that the suppression of the sanitary file had caused a recurrence in venereal diseases. The review stressed that in fact after the closure of the *maisons de tolérance* there had been a dramatic decrease in the level of venereal contamination in France, particularly with the addition of an efficient application of antibiotic

¹¹⁰³ Bernard Guitton, « Lutte contre le proxénétisme et la prostitution, » 14 Mars 1967, 2. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

¹¹⁰⁴ Dr. Pierre Boulenger, « Lutte contre la prostitution et le proxénétisme », 29 Mai 1967, 1-2. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

treatments.¹¹⁰⁵ Additionally, the publication stressed that the sanitary file had been both “unsteady” in its application and “derisory” towards prostitutes, because it targeted only prostitutes and not their infected clients.¹¹⁰⁶ It was this publication’s professed purpose to inspire a “Christian understanding” of prostitutes (giving the example of Jesus’ acceptance of Mary of Magdalene), placing blame instead on society and on “the monstrous system” of prostitution, which locked these women into a world that they had not chosen.¹¹⁰⁷ By spreading information to enlighten the public and clear up misinformation about the trade, and about the women themselves, this magazine sought to create change in a fear-driven society.

Yet, in an interview in the publication *Le Figaro* approximately a year later, Doctors Degos and Touraine spread the opposite message, concluding that the ordinance of 25 November 1960, which suppressed the sanitary file and forbid the obligatory venereal examination of prostitutes, made possible the re-emergence of all of the conditions that were integral in causing a true epidemic.¹¹⁰⁸ They argued that syphilis contaminations were actually on the rise and that prostitutes were responsible for approximately forty percent of said contaminations, citing “small outbreaks in the provinces, like that in the town of Chateauroux” as proof of their hypothesis.¹¹⁰⁹ Both

¹¹⁰⁵ “Les nouvelles lois contre la prostitution, sont-elles puritaines, moralisantes et anti-hygiéniques?” *Fêtes et Saisons* (Janvier 1962): 20.

¹¹⁰⁶ “Les nouvelles lois contre la prostitution, sont-elles puritaines, moralisantes et anti-hygiéniques?” *Fêtes et Saisons* (Janvier 1962): 20.

¹¹⁰⁷ “Il y aurait Pharisaisme à se taire,” *Fêtes et Saisons* (Janvier 1962): 3.

¹¹⁰⁸ Professor Degos and Professor Touraine, cited in L.-L. G., “Entretiens de Bichat: Les Cas de Syphilis Quadruplés en moins de dix ans en dépit de l’existence de traitements efficaces!” *Le Figaro* (30 Septembre 1963). Musée Social, Fonds Legrand-Falco, Carton IV, Periodiques, Coupures de Presse/ Dossier iv, III, Presse 1944-1966.

¹¹⁰⁹ Professor Degos and Professor Touraine, cited in L.-L. G., “Entretiens de Bichat: Les Cas de Syphilis Quadruplés en moins de dix ans en dépit de l’existence de traitements efficaces!” *Le Figaro* (30 Septembre 1963). Musée Social, Fonds Legrand-Falco, Carton IV, Periodiques, Coupures de Presse/ Dossier iv, III, Presse 1944-1966.

articles were based on figures gleaned from scientific studies, but there were so few reliable studies on deviant groups during these years, that authors and experts were often forced to generalize from small, specialized studies to the French population as a whole. Only within the debate on abortion, did the experts (like Doctor Sauvy or Sutter) and journalists (like Jacques Derogy) acknowledge the limitations of the contemporary research. The doctors concerned with abortion also devised strategies for making sound scientific inquiries that came closer to creating an accurate picture of abortion in France. This dearth of reliable information makes it as hard to generalize now as it was then, however it is clear from the intensity of the debates that fears of deviance and sexual danger consumed the French postwar society and propelled the efforts of some to contain the threats, while motivating others to defend the human rights of those individuals who were the targets of these efforts.

There were many in the postwar that recognized that the difficulty that France was experiencing in applying ordinance 60-1246 of 25 November 1960—which forbade the classification and discriminatory treatment of prostitutes—was due to the negative public and political perception of these individuals and the trade itself. Therefore, it became the goal of several activists and organizations to start campaigns to improve public opinion on the topic of prostitution. Jean Scelles fought against those in “occidental society” who tolerated prostitution either because they thought it was a “necessary evil” or an expression of one’s right to live as one pleased.¹¹¹⁰ Scelles’ weapon of choice against these individuals was knowledge. He concurred with Pope Pius XII who had denounced the “indifference of opinion” in occidental society regarding

¹¹¹⁰ Jean Scelles, “Organiser la défense contre l’esclavage,” *Cartel Informations* 26 (été-automne 1964): 3.

prostitution and Scelles claimed that this indifference was the principal obstacle to change that needed to be vanquished in French society. To this end, Scelles encouraged the formation and mobilization of an army of volunteers on both a local and national level, who would “inform public opinion and organize the defense against slavery.”¹¹¹¹ In 1964, Scelles claimed that the publicity campaigns organized by his *Équipes* had already scored several victories by swaying public opinion, by improving the legislation regarding prostitution, and by winning several court battles in the tribunals.¹¹¹² It is indeed quite likely that Scelles’ efforts and those of the *Équipes* helped expiate the laws and ordinance of 1960, adopting the international convention of 1949 and thereby protecting the rights of prostitutes. Even the often conservative *Association Nationale de Réadaptation Sociale* (National Association of Social Readaptation), or A.N.R.S., advocated the commencement of a propaganda campaign beginning in 1962 that would illuminate the actions of procurers and other individuals and organizations that profited off of prostitution. In so doing, the A.N.R.S. hoped to “profoundly [modify] public opinion,” against the true villains of the trade.¹¹¹³

These postwar debates over deviance took place not only between individuals and organizations, but could also transpire within a particular individual. After his derogatory comments about transvestite homosexuals in *Arcadie* in April 1957, Lucien Farre wrote a “correction” to his article in the July issue, clarifying his earlier declarations that

¹¹¹¹ Jean Scelles, “Organiser la défense contre l’esclavage,” *Cartel Informations* 26 (été-automne 1964): 3.

¹¹¹² Jean Scelles, “Organiser la défense contre l’esclavage,” *Cartel Informations* 26 (été-automne 1964): 3.

¹¹¹³ Mademoiselle Picquenard, Administration of Social Aid and Childhood, « Note sur l’Association Nationale de Réadaptation Sociale,» 19-1-62, 5. CAC 850293/ article 53. (Under derogation.)

transvestism was “ridiculous” and “inexplicable”.¹¹¹⁴ Farre now insisted that in reality, all homophiles sought their “alter-ego” and that therefore that all homophiles were really heterophiles “in one manner or another.”¹¹¹⁵ According to Farre, the fact that many homosexuals preferred partners who were “different” whether by age, race, social class, or personal fortune only reinforced this argument, and showed that although sex was an important element in seeking one’s partner, this factor was regularly trumped by the aforementioned qualifications.¹¹¹⁶ In addition, Farre now claimed that “sexuality” (or gender in this instance) was relative, and that there were many layers of sexual differentiation in modern society. In light of this, Farre argued that it was no more abnormal for a feminine man to be married to a manly woman than it was for an effeminate man to live with a “true” man.¹¹¹⁷ It is quite possible that Farre received such a barrage of criticism in response to his earlier pronouncements, that he felt pressured to change his assessment of the level of “deviance” inherent in the act of transvestism. However, the fact that he was willing to step back and re-consider his conclusions just a few months later, showed a flexibility not regularly present in postwar society.

The on-going battle between those who fought for the respect of human rights and those who sought to segregate and punish those considered deviant, epitomizes the climate in postwar France. The heated debates over the homosexual connection to syphilis, and the moral threat of transvestism illustrate France’s attempts to find some level of normalcy in what they perceived to be an up-ended postwar world. Many wanted to

¹¹¹⁴ Lucien Farre, “Travestissement et Sexualité,” *Arcadie* 40 (Avril 1957): 41.

¹¹¹⁵ Lucien Farre, “Corrections à travestissement et sexualité,” *Arcadie* 43-44 (Juillet-Août 1957): 66.

¹¹¹⁶ Lucien Farre, “Corrections à travestissement et sexualité,” *Arcadie* 43-44 (Juillet-Août 1957): 66.

¹¹¹⁷ Lucien Farre, “Corrections,” 66.

“clean” the streets making them safer for women and children, but many others wanted France to join the “civilized” countries that had signed the international convention against prostitution. They felt that by ratifying the convention a nation could prove that they cared for and respected the human rights of their citizens. The trick lay in helping individuals to respect and help themselves and the first step of this process was grasped by those who chose the human rights side of the debate. The ordinance of 25 November 1960 acknowledged this connection by recognizing that classifying prostitutes (and other deviants), “...[could] be an obstacle to social reclassification...because the persistence of discriminatory measures taken against them does little more than convince them that they are definitively marked for the activity that they perform.”¹¹¹⁸ Only by debunking the myths surrounding the so-called deviants in postwar society, could targeted individuals free themselves of the definitions that controlled them and change their lives for the better by either taking steps to improve their conditions or by accepting the individuality that defined their lives.

¹¹¹⁸ Ordonnance no. 60-1246 du 25 Novembre 1960, “Rapport au Président de la République,” cited in Dominique Dallayrac, *Dossier Prostitution* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1966): 289.

EPILOGUE

Many individuals in postwar France were apprehensive about a wide range of perceived threats and dangers including: the undermining of traditional gender roles, sexual promiscuity, the corruption minors; venal sexuality; and those practicing “deviant” sexualities—lesbians, transvestites, male prostitutes—on the fringes of society. Many women also experienced deep anxiety over their inability to efficiently control their pregnancies and the effect of this on their health and on the physical and emotional well-being of their families. Inhabitants of postwar France were not blinded by their fear however, and struggled to find their own sense of agency. Both men and women were able to overcome their “false modesty” in order to discuss candidly the difficulties that individuals faced in their emotional, sexual, and personal lives. Although women might have been led by desperation to voice their fears and to take action in their daily lives, these actions formed within them a sense of subjecthood and purpose. By voicing their fears and desires, which had been silenced by a traditionally conservative society, French women were able to fight for a new world. In realizing that women had the power to shape the definitions of their own lives, they realized that they had the power to change other aspects of society that hypocritically created conceptual, theoretical, social, and moral barriers that hindered women’s personal and professional development. French women in the postwar did not stage an open rebellion, but instead practiced daily resistances in the 1950s and 1960s, which created the original fissures in the foundation of a conservative French society that would topple into revolution in 1968.

The daily resistances of individuals in postwar society successfully changed many lives. In a letter to internationally-renowned gynecologist and birth-control advocate Dr.

Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, Madame C. thanked the doctor for the knowledge of birth control that she had shared with her. Madame C. was the wife of a glass blower in the north of France who had had four healthy children, but had also suffered through fifteen “miscarriages” that might or might not have been voluntary. She explained that she had been following Dr. Weill-Hallé’s counsel for over a year and “had had no trouble.”¹¹¹⁹ She declared, “I can say that you have saved my life and kept me here for my four children, I believe that I could never thank you enough.”¹¹²⁰ Catherine Valabrègue also shared stories of women whose lives had been changed completely with their access to methods of contraception. One woman recounted her life before birth control in which she and her husband had tried valiantly to prevent a third pregnancy. Throughout the process, no doctor would give them advice. She took her temperature every day for two years, but this method proved to be unsuccessful because her cycles were unpredictable. She and her husband also never had sex without a condom, however, this solution was disappointing for both of them because, “men take badly to this type of discipline.”¹¹²¹ However, the woman’s introduction to Planned Parenthood and her use of the diaphragm as a method of birth control had “radically changed her family and conjugal life.”¹¹²² The woman related that her use of the diaphragm had so drastically changed her psychologically that she was “blown away” by the act of making love, “as much on the physical plane as with the act of communion with another. We can love each

¹¹¹⁹ Madame C., Letter to Dr. Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, re-printed in Dr. Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, “Observations préliminaires sur 218 femmes ayant reçu des conseils médicaux d’orthogénisme technique et prophylaxie mentale,” *Gynécologie Pratique: Revue internationale de gynécologie* 4 (1960), 350.

¹¹²⁰ Madame C., Letter to Dr. Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, re-printed in Dr. Marie-Andrée Lagroua Weill-Hallé, “Observations préliminaires sur 218 femmes ayant reçu des conseils médicaux d’orthogénisme technique et prophylaxie mentale,” *Gynécologie Pratique: Revue internationale de gynécologie* 4 (1960), 350.

¹¹²¹ Anonymous letter by a woman to Planning Familial. Cited in Valabrègue, 148.

¹¹²² Anonymous letter by a woman to Planning Familial. Cited in Valabrègue, 148.

other without forethought and I believe that this is essential for the profound union of two beings.”¹¹²³ She also highlighted that the “other phase of this liberation” was being able to have children when one wanted,” which was a “capital progress that led naturally from the former.”¹¹²⁴ Another female writer to Planning Familial also thanked the association for changing her life. She claimed that the spirit of her household had been in jeopardy and professed:

I have found a joy of living again that I had lost because of my obsession to prevent a third pregnancy. In fourteen months of marriage I already had two children...with all that entails physically and mentally. I could not handle the shock of a new pregnancy...¹¹²⁵

She also thanked the association for allowing her to relate intimate problems which she had never before “dared” to express. *Maternité Heureuse* and the later Planning Familial allowed husbands and wives to attain a new level of intimacy that had always evaded them due to a fear of pregnancy. Access to these organizations caused a metamorphosis in women who learned to sense, express, and come to understand their sexualities, which had been buried under centuries of legal and moral restrictions.

However, the passing of the *Loi Neuwirth* did not automatically change French society with its traditionally entrenched moral and social codes. Casting a shadow on the law’s validity, the Prime Minister Georges Pompidou resisted countersigning the proposition into law. Secondly, the conservative medical establishment was still largely hostile to the idea of Family Planning¹¹²⁶ (most likely because it was an idea promoted and realized by female doctors and the women of France). An INED survey conducted in 1979 showed that the vast majority of French women had not been using “modern”

¹¹²³ Anonymous letter by a woman to Planning Familial. Cited in Valabrègue, 148-149.

¹¹²⁴ Anonymous letter by a woman to Planning Familial. Cited in Valabrègue, 148-149.

¹¹²⁵ Anonymous letter by a woman to Planning Familial. Cited in Valabrègue, 149-150.

¹¹²⁶ Duchon, 185.

methods of contraception in the decade following the passing of the law and these statistics coincided with a still-elevated rate of abortions in France in the early 1970s. But these statistics also reflected the reluctance of certain factions of the government to put the law into action. Some theorists claimed that the retardation of public administration regulations regarding contraception reflected a certain malaise that was felt by a majority of the legislators that enacting these measures would disappoint their largely Catholic constituencies.¹¹²⁷ After much legislative debate, the law of 4 December, 1974 was adopted. This law stipulated that family planning and sexual education centers could provide contraceptive medicines, products, or objects free of charge, to minors “who wished to protect their secret,” as well as to individuals who did not receive medical compensation. The new law also explicitly stated that minors would no longer need parental permission and indicated that all centers of maternal and infantile protection would now need to have a center of family planning and familial sexual education. It could be said that the law of 4 December, 1974 finally made efficient methods of controlling births available to French women.

The education campaign on birth control began slowly in 1967 but picked up speed in the 1970s seeking to align public mores to the opportunities allowed by law. Surveys conducted in the years after 1974 showed that French women’s use of efficient and “modern” contraceptives began to augment, particularly among youths, after the passage of the law allowing minor “secrecy.”¹¹²⁸ However surveys indicated that as late as 1978, only 37% of women between twenty and forty-four years of age were “efficiently contracepted,” using “modern” means of birth control (the birth control pill,

¹¹²⁷ Jeanne Pages, *Le Contrôle des naissances en France et à l'étranger*, 227. Cited in Mossuz-Lavau, 68-69.

¹¹²⁸ Mossuz-Lavau, 80-81.

or the I.U.D.). Of the rest of women in this age-group: 18% practiced the withdrawal method, 5% used condoms, 6% employed periodic abstinence, 2% used other methods, and a full 33% did not use any means of contraception (6% because they were pregnant, 4% because they had had surgery, 10% because they did not have a sexual partner, 7% because they wanted a child, and only 3% had sexual relations without taking precautions although they did not want to become pregnant.)¹¹²⁹ It was not until the late 1980s that 65% of women in France between the ages of eighteen and forty-nine were using an effective means of birth control.¹¹³⁰ This retardation of public opinion and morality reflects the tight control of information by the French authorities, as well as a deeply-ingrained sense of tradition that stemmed from conservative politics and the Catholic faith.

Addressing the problem of society's restricted access to sexual information, a 1973 document from the Minister of Health included a set of instructions on the application the 1967 law regarding birth control. The Minister explained that French society had become preoccupied with family planning due to the evolution of mores and ideas and the examples set by other countries, but that this fixation had solidified with the law of 28 December, 1967. The publishing and dissemination of the legislative debates over the topic had, "crystallized this development by diffusing these concepts in the consciousness of the greater public."¹¹³¹ However, the Minister also stipulated that he believed that for a great part of the French population, the right to use birth control had preceded the knowledge needed to make educated choices in this area. He suggested that

¹¹²⁹ Janine Mossuz-Lavau, *Les lois de l'amour: Les Politiques de la sexualité en France (1950-2002)*, (Paris: Petite bibliothèque Payot, 2002), 81.

¹¹³⁰ Mossuz-Lavau, 82.

¹¹³¹ Le Ministre de Santé, "Instruction générale relative à l'application de la loi du 28 décembre 1967 sur la regulation des naissances (n.d.)" 1, CAC 850019/ article 16. (Under derogation.)

a great part of the population “is familiar with the problems posed by the birth control, but has an imprecise and often deformed understanding.”¹¹³² The instructions emphasized that the primary objective of the 1967 law proposed by Lucien Neuwirth,¹¹³³ which demanded the establishment of a *Conseil supérieur de l’information sexuelle* (Higher Council on Sexual Information) was to establish the idea that educating the population on “the problems of life” was a national responsibility.¹¹³⁴ The *Journal Officiel* of 2 December 1972, published two November decrees, one declaring the establishment of family planning centers and another on the creation of centers of information, consultation, and family counseling. Yet the Minister’s document, published just after this *Journal Officiel*, took such an enormously conservative stance, one might think that French society had regressed twenty years, or even further to the First World War, when concerns over population were paramount. The Minister of Health wrote:

The organization of a complete program of familial information, which integrates sexual education is delicate in a country already impregnated with a traditional moral system elaborated over the course of many centuries...and little prepared for its diffusion. A poor introduction could instigate grave traumas in youths....The information, diffusion, and implementation of contraceptive methods are problems of immense gravity. They have a direct influence on demographic politics, whose orientation will affect the future and the economic development of society.¹¹³⁵

This document also brings to light the difficulties encountered by those attempting to integrate a program of sexual education into the French school system and the close

¹¹³² Le Ministre de Santé, “Instruction générale relative à l’application de la loi du 28 décembre 1967 sur la régulation des naissances (n.d.)” 1, CAC 850019/ article 16. (Under derogation.)

¹¹³³ The 1967 loi Neuwirth had not yet passed in the Senate.

¹¹³⁴ Le Ministre de Santé, “Instruction générale relative à l’application de la loi du 28 décembre 1967 sur la régulation des naissances,” 2, CAC 850019/ article 16. (Under derogation.)

¹¹³⁵ Le Ministre de la Santé, “Instruction générale relative à l’application de la loi du 28 décembre 1967 sur la régulation des naissances”, 2-3, CAC 850019/ article 16. (Under derogation.) Impregnated is a striking choice of terminology when the decree promotes educating women about the use of birth control and really exemplifies the conservatism of the document.

conceptual connection between legalized contraception and the sexual education of French youths. Although the *Loi Neuwirth* legalized sexual education in French schools, the actual application of this law was spotty and took many years to be formally implemented.

In 1958, Montreuil-Straus acknowledged that the postwar era embodied a period of such rapid evolution (presumably moral and social) that her conclusions in *La Jeunesse devant la vie sexuelle*, would not only be dated, but would most likely be completely obsolete in twenty years time. She could not know that in fifteen years, when the government would actually try to implement an approved program of sexual education for the schools, these very issues would again be hotly debated.¹¹³⁶ There were some early attempts to grant children access to sexual information in school, after the passing of the *Loi Neuwirth* (Neuwirth Law) in 1967. These efforts, however, were piecemeal, having been initiated on a school-by-school basis. Classroom observations conducted in 1971 in the Academy of Toulouse, described two educators who made important attempts to share sexual information to their female students, one in the course of training upper-level technicians in the skills of cooking and cleanliness, and one in classes designed for students in their final year of secondary education. In an inspection report, Regional Pedagogical Inspector, Mademoiselle (Mlle) D. Ricard evaluated the work of the former, a female teacher at the Marie Curie high school for women in Tarbes, in the southwest of France. This instructor taught a class of fourteen young women, who had chosen a class in “Sexual Information” out of the various themes available to them in the subject of “sanitary education.” Drawing on the exemplary work of Pierre Chambre

¹¹³⁶ Montreuil-Straus, *La Jeunesse*, 8.

nearly fifteen years earlier, this teacher chose to, “avoid the discomfort created in the beginning of the session by a subject longtime taboo,” by distributing slips of paper on which the students could anonymously record the sexual questions that had caused them the most embarrassment.¹¹³⁷ After holding another, short interrogation with the class regarding physiology, this “competent, devoted, and enthusiastic” teacher, sifted through the responses to establish the primary preoccupations of the students and to expose the areas in which the students had either insufficient knowledge or no knowledge at all. The educator subsequently planned sessions that would address the main themes inspired by the students themselves, the first of which was a class on the female genitals and the menstrual cycle.¹¹³⁸ This competent effort served as an example of a school, which despite the explosiveness of the topic, subscribed to the belief that youths had the right to sexual information to ensure their mental and physical well-being and to secure happy and healthy futures. Unfortunately these efforts before 1973 were few and far between.

After the establishment of co-education in French primary and secondary schools in the 1960s and the societal upheavals of the May days of 1968, the Minister of National Education made attempts to catch French schools up with the rapid evolution of mores in French society.¹¹³⁹ The “*Circulaire Fontanet*” of 23 Juillet, 1973, named after the Minister of National Education, Joseph Fontanet, gave concrete directives to rectors, Academy inspectors, and heads of schools regarding the execution of a sexual education curriculum. An early draft of this document bemoaned the fact that young people had

¹¹³⁷ Mlle D. Ricard, «Rapport d’inspection, LEF Marie Curie, Académie de Toulouse, 20 avril, 1971, » 1, CAC 960046/ article 3.

¹¹³⁸ Mlle D. Ricard, «Rapport d’inspection, LEF Marie Curie, Académie de Toulouse, 20 avril, 1971, » 1-2, CAC 960046/ article 3.

¹¹³⁹ Yvonne Knibiehler, *La Sexualité et l’histoire* (Paris: Odile-Jacob, 2000), 42 and Nicole Mosconi, *La Mixité dans l’enseignement secondaire, un faux semblant?* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989).

been kept in a state of relative darkness: children having been told false stories about the origins of their brothers and sisters and silence having been used as a tactic to deal with the questions of adolescents. Additionally, educators had had to avoid any mention of “adult questions” with students, particularly those dealing with sexuality. But, the document continued, due to the: “psychological evolution” of society, the new relations between adults and adolescents (presumably post-1968), the development of “new modes of life”, and the mixed recruitment of school establishments, this method of dealing with adolescents with regards to sexuality had developed many serious disadvantages.¹¹⁴⁰ The circular clarified that it was now necessary to replace a system of education that was falsely protective with “a new form of education that rests on the mastery of information and the awakening of responsibility.”¹¹⁴¹ It is startling that in 1973, the “*Circulaire Fontanet*” re-hashed the same 1950s debates, regarding adult control over, and young people’s access to, knowledge.

Born out of the 1967 *Loi Neuwirth*, the *Conseil supérieur de l’information sexuelle* (C.S.I.S.) became a reality in 1973, assembling a wide variety of personalities from all professions including doctors and leaders of concerned associations. The C.S.I.S. held many conferences and debates and produced a wide variety of publications, however they had a hard time translating these activities into tangible results. R.P.R. deputy Hélène Missoffe valiantly attempted to find solutions, by organizing multiple round tables, which connected associations of students’ parents with representatives from the teachers’ unions. However, as late as 1979, she admitted that it was still impossible to

¹¹⁴⁰ Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale, “Projet: 8 mai 1973,” 1, *Centre des Archives Contemporaines* (CAC) 960046/ article 3.

¹¹⁴¹ Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale, “Projet: 8 mai 1973,” 1, CAC 960046/ article 3.

come to an agreement as to the roles and responsibilities of the families and the schools when it came to sexual education.¹¹⁴²

When an organized, state-supported program for sexual education was finally implemented with the *Circulaire Fontanet* in July of 1973, the state compromised in the school-versus-parent debate, by ensuring the legality of courses in sexual education, but stipulating that these meetings should be held outside of the regularly-scheduled school day so that parents could decide for themselves whether their children should attend. The primary accomplishment of this document was to establish a legal basis for the presentation of sexual information at school. The circular specified that children would receive a progressive access to sexual education and information. In the primary grades students would learn about the transmission of life and in the first two years of secondary education the student would be taught about the reproductive function, sexual characteristics, and procreation. In the third and fourth years of secondary education, students would learn about the human body, and in the final year of secondary education (at approximately seventeen years of age) the student would learn about sexual physiology.¹¹⁴³ While acceding to the fact that children needed to be given access to sexual information at school due to the fact that only a very small percentage of students received this information at home, the circular still granted families and the private life contained therein, the greatest respect by indicating that under no circumstances could a school attempt to influence a students' conscience in a way that might counter a family's system of beliefs. Although the circular claimed that schools had the right to provide a sexual education for children, it also forbid schools from influencing student morals. This

¹¹⁴² Knibiehler, *La Sexualité*, 47.

¹¹⁴³ Brenot, 19.

prohibition raised new questions as to what was considered sexual information (biological and physiological facts) versus sexual education (moral and social implications of sexuality) and as to what type of education the schools were permitted and expected to provide. The *Circulaire Fontanet* was followed in February 1976 by a decree setting aside four hours a year to provide students in their fourth year of secondary education with specific information regarding the reproductive function, motherhood, the principles of conception, the anatomy and functioning of the generative organs, and information on venereal diseases. It was noted within the document, however, that with only four hours to work, science teachers would only be able to provide a broad outline of the main ideas.¹¹⁴⁴ It seems that nearly fifty years after she first began lobbying for this information to be provided to students in public education, Montreuil-Straus' vision had finally been realized.

Although individuals' daily resistances created agency in their postwar lives, some individuals turned to militant action after the rebellions of 1968. Women protested the perpetuation of traditional gender roles throughout the postwar era and after 1968. The sixties in France saw the founding and rapid growth of major feminist organizations including: the *Mouvement Démocratique Féminine* (MDF), or Feminine Democratic Movement in 1964 and the more radical *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes* (MLF), or Women's Liberation Movement in 1970. A primary critique of many feminists was the role of the school in promoting sexism. In the wake of the student revolutions of May 1968, Suzanne Mollo's *École et la société* (School and society), found fault with school

¹¹⁴⁴ Brenot, 20.

institutions for failing to modify their pedagogy to reflect the modern world in an effort to maintain their own traditions and ideals. As a part of this larger study, Mollo illustrated the continuing disparity between the majority of French women's daily activities in the workplace and the textbook portrayals of happy homemakers liberated from financial concerns by their provider-husbands. Mollo indicated that there was a gap of at least two generations between the life depicted in textbooks and the modern world. She discovered that the textbooks in use in contemporary French classrooms were twice as likely to show women in the foyer as in the workplace, and three times as likely to depict bucolic rural scenes than urban environments.¹¹⁴⁵

In 1974, Françoise Giroud was appointed secretary of state of the “*condition féminine*” a new government post created to study the feminine condition and make recommendations for improvements. Giroud called for an end to different educations for boys and girls and publicized the issue by commissioning a study to investigate the continuing disparity of women's and men's images in textbooks. At her request, the *Institut national de recherché et documentation pédagogiques* (I.N.R.D.P.) examined feminine images in over seventy primary school textbooks and found that in the three most-popular textbooks, men were depicted performing twice as many occupations (29) as women (15), and women's careers were generally more humble than men's. Displaying a tendency to classism as well as sexism, there were six male doctors portrayed in these books, but not one male factory worker. There were absolutely no female doctors or high-status professionals, but nine women in the classically female

¹¹⁴⁵ Clark, 156.

professions of teaching (7) and nursing (2).¹¹⁴⁶ Many of the books highlighted the traditional view of a strong, good-looking, and successful husband who provided protection and sustenance for his submissive and amiable wife.¹¹⁴⁷ Two particularly offensive textbook characterizations of the female personality were: a woman who wept because her husband criticized her cooking and cleaning, and another woman who terrorized her male passenger with her incompetent driving. The I.N.R.D.P.'s report criticized a large percentage of the examined texts for perpetuating an unrealistic view of the lives of the workingwomen of France and for impeding the amelioration of the feminine condition by portraying a socially unbalanced society of powerful men and frail women.¹¹⁴⁸ The discrepancy between what was being taught in schools and the reality of French life, alerted women, students, and the working classes to the hypocrisy of rules that attempted to chain them to a traditional world that no longer existed.

Building on two decades of resistance, some French women also led society in radical sexual protest after 1968. A substantial group of homosexual men decided to affiliate themselves with the journal *Partisan* on 18 February 1971. One month later a united front of militant women and men interrupted a meeting in Paris entitled, "Homosexuality, this painful problem." With this militant protest, the *Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire* (FHAR), or Homosexual Front of Revolutionary Action, was born. The individual feminist and gay movements that together composed the FHAR saw

¹¹⁴⁶ Clark, 157.

¹¹⁴⁷ Clark, 157-158.

¹¹⁴⁸ Clark, 157-158.

themselves in a unified struggle against patriarchy and the traditional bourgeois morality.¹¹⁴⁹

Despite the militant action of groups such as the FHAR, it would take many more years to make inroads into the traditional mores of French society. Surveys conducted by several major journals in the 1960s and 1970s revealed that a large majority of the French population was in agreement with the government's decision to view homosexuality as a scourge of French society. A majority also believed that homosexuality was either "a sickness that needed to be conquered" or "a sexual perversion that one must combat." These surveys also documented that for the majority of French men and women, same-sex relationships were equally reprehensible whether they occurred between women or between men.¹¹⁵⁰ It was not until 1986 that a survey conducted by the *l'Institut Français d'Opinion Publique* (French Institute for Public Opinion) for the *Nouvel Observateur* found that a majority of French citizens (54%) believed that living a homosexual lifestyle was just one way out of many to express one's sexuality, rather than a sickness that needed to be cured (25%), a perversion that needed to be eliminated (16%), or a social ill that needed to be scourged.¹¹⁵¹

After gaining legalized access to birth control with the *Loi Neuwirth* of 1967, many French women additionally began to question the legal limitations on their right to

¹¹⁴⁹ Antony Copley, *Sexual Moralities in France 1780-1980: New Ideas on the Family, Divorce, and Homosexuality* (London: Routledge, 1989), 225.

¹¹⁵⁰ Janine Mossuz-Lavau, *Les lois de l'amour: Les Politiques de la sexualité en France (1950-2002)*, (Paris: Petite bibliothèque Payot, 2002), 291-294.

¹¹⁵¹ Janine Mossuz-Lavau, *Les lois de l'amour: Les Politiques de la sexualité en France (1950-2002)*, (Paris: Petite bibliothèque Payot, 2002), 293. This survey was done by IFOP for the *Nouvel Observateur* and involved 812 individuals of eighteen years or older. Even six years before (1980) a survey asking similar questions conducted by SOFRES for the *Nouvel Observateur* found that 34% of French society still believed that homosexuality was « a social ill that needed to be cured » ; 26% thought it was a sexual perversion against which society must battle, and only 27% believed that it was a manner like any other in which one could live one's sexuality (with 15% abstaining).

obtain free and safe abortions. Described as a “clap of thunder,” the *Nouvel Observateur* published the declaration of 343 women who admitted to have undergone illegal abortions on the 5 April 1971. Edited by Simone de Beauvoir, this manifesto used a few simple sentences to foment a militant rebellion. The manifesto stated:

A million women have abortions each year in dangerous conditions due to the secrecy to which they are condemned, when this operation, practiced in controlled medical conditions is one of the most simple [to perform]. One imposes silence on these millions of women. I declare that I am one of them. I declare that I have had an abortion. In the same way that we demand free access to contraceptive methods, we demand the right to abortion.¹¹⁵²

This appeal was signed primarily by famous personalities on the left including writers—Simone de Beauvoir, Françoise Sagan, and Violette Leduc—actresses—Catherine Deneuve, Jeanne Moreau, and Delphine Seyrig—as well as politicians, journalists, militant feminists, and one lawyer—Gisèle Halimi. Françoise Sagan explained that although not all of the female signatories had undergone abortions, they all recognized that a large percentage of women of their generation had “gone through it.” Therefore, all 343 women accused themselves of the crime to “unmask the social hypocrisy.”¹¹⁵³ When faced with the decision of whether or not to prosecute these women, the authorities decided to do nothing. It would have caused even more of a scandal to prosecute so many women, particularly when the bulk of them were celebrities.¹¹⁵⁴ However it was not simply celebrities involved in this struggle. Ordinary women joined the feminist organizations that formed after 1968 like the MLF and the *Mouvement pour la liberté de l’avortement* (Movement for the Freedom of Abortion), or MLA. After the publication of the manifesto of 343, French women also staged the first protest for abortion rights in

¹¹⁵² “Un appel de 343 femmes,” *Le Nouvel Observateur* (5 avril 1971), cited in *Le Monde* 2 39 (13 novembre 2004): 80.

¹¹⁵³ Françoise Sagan, cited in *Le Monde* 2 39 (13 novembre 2004): 80.

¹¹⁵⁴ *Le Monde* 2 39 (13 novembre 2004): 80.

Paris on 20 November 1971, which drew over four thousand women. The *Nouvel Observateur* published the piece as a political act, hoping to break the “conspiracy of silence” surrounding the act of abortion, but in fact, women had been active in heated debates over abortion for decades. It simply took the pressure of 343 famous women to force French politicians to take a stand. Abortion would not be legalized in France until November 1974, with the passing of the *Loi Veil* (named after Simone Veil, the Minister of Health). The *Loi Veil* was promulgated on the 17 January 1975.

Prostitutes as well turned to militant action after 1968 to protest their eroding social, economic, and political position within the prostitutional trade. Alain Corbin suggests that there occurred a transition to a new type of “*femme galante*” between 1957 and 1969 because “mature men” found their “sexual desires stimulated” by the “eroticization of everyday life” and the revolution of mores taking place amongst youths. Corbin suggests that the growth of the pornography industry in the form of magazines and movies, the increasing popularity of the works of sexologists, and the constant visual reinforcement of “miniskirts, leather boots, and bare breasts all helped to stimulate fantasy.” According to Corbin, another reason why mature men sought a new type of prostitute was because of the irresistible everyday influence in their lives of “sexy” secretaries, receptionists, models, and beauticians for men whose “suggestive politeness often implied soliciting.” Therefore, in the late 1960s, these sexually unsatisfied men between forty and sixty (the young people were sleeping with each other, not prostitutes) demanded a prostitute that could satisfy their dreams as well as their sexual appetites. They were no longer interested in the conveyor-belt type sex that had been found in the *maisons d’abattage* during the wars, but instead wanted prostitutes to play the role of

confidante and show an “understanding heart,” which would help them to cope with the frustrations inherent to their married lives.¹¹⁵⁵

However, the ultimate control of this new prostitutional milieu in the late 1960s still lay with the procurers. Pimps no longer used a combination of seduction and force to pressure women to obey their demands, but instead initiated profits by controlling the locations and processes essential to the exercise of the trade. This new kind of procuring charged the prostitute more and more for the services that were indispensable to her such as the rooms where the sex occurred and the saunas, studios, bars, and shops where the prostitute met her client.¹¹⁵⁶

Prostitutes partook in militant action after 1968 to protest the changes in the institutional structure of prostitution, the intensification in the repression of prostitution by the authorities, and their position and status in the larger society. The spark that ignited the rebellion was the severe laws implemented by the authorities in Lyons in 1973 to fight prostitution. These repressive tactics included exorbitant fines, increased surveillance of the *hôtels de passe*, and laws prohibiting prostitutes from leasing apartments together. The prostitutes believed that these laws jeopardized their safety (particularly after a series of violent crimes against prostitutes in the city). In the spring of 1975, the authorities attempted to apply for the first time a law that would punish second-time offenders for prostitution with imprisonment. In response, prostitutes in Lyons occupied the small parish church of Saint-Nizier, where the priest turned out to be cooperative. The women held long meetings in the church square to try to change the

¹¹⁵⁵ Corbin, 355-356. Some contemporary male authors argued that prostitutes grew to appreciate this new role as sympathetic partner so much that playing this part, “has become a real need.” Corbin, 356, citing G. Richard-Molard, *Avec les prostituées*, (Lyons: Chalet, 1976), 60.

¹¹⁵⁶ Corbin, 356-357.

attitude of the people of Lyons towards prostitutes and the act of prostitution. The Mayor agreed to a meeting and the Archbishop met the leader of the prostitutes in private. The women wrote an open address to the public and a letter to the President of the Republic and the event was covered by journalists from around the world.¹¹⁵⁷

The church movement grew quickly. Prostitutes from Montpellier, Saint-Etienne, Grenoble, and Paris sent delegates to Lyons and prostitutes occupied churches in Marseilles, Grenoble, Montpellier, and Paris. Although the French authorities expelled the women from most of the churches (some forcefully, some peacefully), the movement lived on. On June 30, 1975 an Estates General of Prostitution was held at the Lyons Labor Exchange. The meeting welcomed three hundred prostitutes from all over France and over 1,500 sympathizers. The movement came to an end with a national convention in Paris in November 1975. The movement collapsed when the Estates General and the National Convention revealed divisions of interests between the prostitutes and their supporters that proved to be irreconcilable.¹¹⁵⁸

In the end, the movement failed to meet the prostitutes' ultimate goals. The movement was unable to halt the passing of the law of 11 July 1975, which made it possible to prosecute prostitutes who lived together for mutual procuring. Additionally, the Minister for the Condition of Women, François Giroud refused to make any comment regarding the movement or the prostitute's status in French society.¹¹⁵⁹ The prostitutes were also unable to make any drastic changes in the sexual mores of the traditional society in which they lived. The public soon lost interest in the plight of the prostitutes

¹¹⁵⁷ Corbin, 359-361.

¹¹⁵⁸ Corbin, 361-362.

¹¹⁵⁹ Corbin, 363.

and surveys taken in the Lyons region in 1975 indicated that forty-two percent of those polled disapproved of the church movement.¹¹⁶⁰

According to Corbin, the most important success of the movement was to establish a dialogue in which prostitutes were the key participants. Instead of having doctors, lawyers, and psychiatrists speak for them, the prostitutes' own words took precedence in this blossoming discourse. In reality however, prostitutes had been sharing their testimony in interviews and autobiographies for nearly two decades before they occupied the churches, it simply took the church movement to showcase their words on the global stage.

Modern specialist in economic and social sciences, Lydie Garreau faulted both the civil and religious participants in the centuries-long debate on sexual morality, who espoused Catholic ideals and pressured society to subscribe to their view of the appropriate moral order. These individuals would have included professors, psychiatrists, and doctors like Chauchard, Berge, and Montreuil-Straus who promoted a vision of a proper sexuality that could only exist in a monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Garreau argued that this limitation placed on human sexuality was the source of much unhappiness and caused psychological disturbances or insanity in those who believed it was doctrinal and therefore modified their sexuality and their lives.¹¹⁶¹ Despite their limited vision of the boundaries of acceptable human sexuality, theorists like Berge and Montreuil-Straus fought to empower young people through knowledge, preparing them

¹¹⁶⁰ Corbin, fn 442-443.

¹¹⁶¹ Lydie Garreau, *L'amour conjugal sous le joug : Quelques faits et discours moraux Sur la vie intime des français (1956-2000)*, vol. 1, Sexes, morales et politiques. Collection Questions Contemporaines, edited by J.P. Changnollaud, et al. (Paris : Harmattan, 2002), 9-15.

for the changes that would take place in their own biology, protecting them from people that might abuse them and the dangers of the street, and preparing them for their lives as husbands and wives. Although their vision of sexuality was conservatively limited, it would be anachronistic to look back to the postwar era and judge individuals for not being more open-minded. Even post-1968, when students, workers, women, and sexual minorities had fought for their rights as human beings to live, learn, and love in the ways that they chose, French society had a difficult time embracing the new. A conservative bastion in French society consistently fought to maintain eroding traditions. The experts—doctors like Montreuil-Straus, Berge, and Weill-Hallé and lawyers like Dourlen-Rollier—proposed simple changes that appeared radical in the conservative postwar order in the attempt to make society a safer place for young people and women. However ordinary individuals in French society made the most significant inroads to change. In postwar France, women and other individuals made everyday decisions that initiated movement in the otherwise static sexual mores of a repressed society. They wrote to family planning journals, gave their testimony to doctors and lawyers, procured clandestine abortions, and found other women to love in the spaces of their daily lives. These individuals did not stage militant demonstrations in the postwar years but instead practiced daily resistances that supported a budding sexual revolution.

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- 1990-1991 **Université de Grenoble,** Grenoble, France.
Institut des Études Politiques. Education Abroad. UCSD.
- 1995-1997 **San Francisco State University.** January, 1997.
California Clear Credential in Social Science, French Language.
- 2000-2002 **University of California, Riverside.** Riverside, California.
Master of Arts in European, Women's and Comparative World
History, awarded June 2002.
- 2002-2008 **Rutgers University,** New Brunswick, New Jersey.
Doctor of Philosophy, May 2008.
Modern European and Women's and Gender History.
Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Bonnie Smith.
Dissertation title: "Between War and Revolution: French Women
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EMPLOYMENT

- 2008 **Adjunct Professor. Rutgers, Newark, NJ.** Spring semester.
The History of Western Civilization, II.
- 2008 **Assistant Coordinator. Society for French Historical Studies
Conference,** Rutgers. April 3-5, 2008.
- 2007-2008 **Adjunct Professor. The College of New Jersey, Ewing, NJ.**
Fall semester. European Social History.
- 2007 **Adjunct Professor. Rutgers University, New Jersey.** Fall
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- 2007 **Adjunct Professor. Rutgers University, New Jersey,** Summer

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- 2007 **Adjunct Professor. Rutgers University, New Jersey.** Spring Semester. Development of Europe II.
- 2006 **Adjunct Professor. Rutgers University, New Jersey.** Summer Session. Nineteenth-century European history.
- 2005-2006 **Tutor. Rutgers Athletic Program,** French language.
- 2004 **Adjunct Professor. Rutgers University, New Jersey.** Summer Session. Development of Europe II: Modern European History.
- 2003-2004 **Research Assistant. Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc.,** Rutgers University.
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- 2002-2007 **Research Assistant. History Department, Rutgers University, New Jersey.** Photographic and content research for Dr. Bonnie Smith.
- 2003-2005 **Graduate Assistant. The Language Institute, Rutgers University, New Jersey.** French Language Assistant.
- 2003-2004 **Tutor. Rutgers University, New Jersey.** English Writing Program.
- 2002 **Teaching Assistant. University of California, Riverside.** Religious Studies Department. Science and Religion, Spring semester.
- 2002 **Teaching Assistant. University of California, Riverside.** Religious Studies Department. Modern Christianities and World Cultures, Winter semester.
- 2001 **Research Assistant. University of California Berkeley.** UC Berkeley Labor Center. Summer session.

- 2001 **Teaching Assistant. University of California, Riverside. Women's Studies Department.** *Gender and Sexuality*, Fall semester.
- 1997-2000 **Tenured Teacher. Mission San Jose High School**, Fremont, CA. World History, US History, Government, Economics.
- 1997 **Teacher. Novato High School**, Novato Unified School District, Novato, CA. French Language, Levels I-IV. Spring semester.

PUBLICATIONS

- "Sexual Knowledge, Lesbian Spaces, and Happy Maternity: Women's Initiative and the Sexual Mores of Postwar Europe."** *Women in Postwar Europe*. Forthcoming.
- "Unruly, Adulterous, and Diseased: The Biblical Echoes of Head-shaving in Second-World-War France."**
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- "Marguerite Duras," "Olympe de Gouges," "Edith Cresson," "Marguerite Boucicaut," "Sigrid Undset," and "Kpojito Hwanjile."**
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