

DISEASED BODIES AND RUINED REPUTATIONS: VENEREAL DISEASE AND THE  
CONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN'S RESPECTABILITY IN EARLY 20TH CENTURY  
KANSAS

By  
Nicole Perry

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Chairperson Brian Donovan

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Kelly Chong

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Joane Nagel

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William Staples

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Catherine Batza

Date Defended: December 4, 2015

The Dissertation Committee for Nicole Perry

certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

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## Abstract

In 1917, the state of Kansas passed a state quarantine law, Chapter 205, which allowed authorities to detain people with venereal disease. The law was enforced along lines of gender, race, and class, with poor women being imprisoned at the Women's Industrial Farm (WIF) in Lansing, Kansas throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The WIF thus served as an institution of social control, imprisoning women whose sexual behaviors violated social norms. This research examines three groups of women's involvement with this institution: the elite activist women who lobbied to create the Farm, the professional women who ran the institution, and the inmates detained under Chapter 205. By comparing these groups of women's relationship to the Farm, this research explores the intersection of class, sexuality, gender, race, and respectability in their respective social positions. Contributing to the literature on the intersection of class and sexuality, this research highlights the importance of respectability for all three groups of women and the barriers between each group of women and a respectable status. Social inequalities and privileges informed how respectability functioned at the Farm, allowing the activist and professional women to construct themselves as being respectable through their involvement with the WIF at the same time that they constructed the imprisoned women as being disreputable. These different groups of women's involvement with the Farm deepened social boundaries between groups along existing social hierarchies. This attention to the role of respectability in constructing boundaries is key to understanding inequality and a reminder of the larger cultural work that is accomplished through institutions of social control and discussions of the criminality of groups of people.

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## Table of Contents

CH 1: Introduction .....	1
Defining Boundaries through Respectability.....	4
Chapter Outline.....	16
Conclusion .....	19
CH 2: Methods.....	22
Approach to Sources.....	24
Sources for History Chapter.....	26
Sources for Activist Women’s Chapter.....	27
Sources for Professional Women’s Chapter.....	28
Sources for Imprisoned Women’s Chapter .....	30
Conclusion .....	35
CH 3: World War I, Sexuality, and Venereal Disease Control in Kansas .....	36
Changes in Sexual Culture.....	37
The Origins the Social Hygiene Movement.....	41
WWI and the Fight against Venereal Disease.....	47
The Transition to a Peacetime Venereal Disease Control Policy .....	68
Life at the Women’s Industrial Farm, 1919-1942.....	74
Conclusion .....	113
CH 4: “Anything to Please the Ladies”: the Activist Women who Founded the WIF.....	114
Winning the Vote: Women’s Suffrage & Political Self-Governance (1861-1912).....	117
Creating the Women’s Industrial Farm (1912-1917).....	126
Social Hygiene (1919-1942).....	141
Conclusion .....	155
CH 5: Training Inmates for Respectability: The Professional Women of the WIF .....	158
The Women’s Industrial Farm as Part of the National Women’s Reformatory Movement....	160
The Superintendents of the WIF .....	182
The Matrons and Officers of the WIF.....	193
The Benefits and Constraints of Working at the WIF.....	197
Identity, Competing Demands, and the Philosophy of Reform at the WIF .....	197
Conclusion .....	233
CH 6: Staking a Claim to Respectability: the Inmate Interviews of the Women’s Industrial Farm .....	235
Paths to the Women’s Industrial Farm.....	237

Staking Claims to Respectability .....	275
Conclusion .....	307
CH 7: Conclusion.....	311
Sexuality and Venereal Disease during WWII.....	311
Lessons from the Women’s Industrial Farm .....	313
Respectability and the Women of the WIF .....	315
Symbolic & Social Boundaries—What Have We Learned by Exploring Respectability? .....	324
Women’s Imprisonment and Respectability Today .....	326
References.....	333

## CH 1: Introduction

In December of 1925, 16-year-old Grace Smith<sup>1</sup> was admitted as inmate number 2045 at the Women's Industrial Farm in Lansing, Kansas. She described how she came to be there: "Mrs. Bay, Police Matron came to the place where I was staying, [the home of] W. T. Reynolds, and said that his daughter Nancy Wright and myself had been reported for having disease. Nancy's sister Blanch took us up for examination and I was sent here." She went on to explain: "I have never been with but two men [since] I left my husband [...] I have never got money from either of them we just went out on parties. My mother never knew until I was sent here that I wasn't a virtuous girl" (Inmate 2045;1925). Grace had been convicted for a violation of Chapter 205, a Kansas state law that allowed for the quarantine of those diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases. It was part of a wave of legislation passed during the Progressive Era (1880-1920) and WWI that ushered in a heightened state of surveillance over the nation's sex life (Luker 1998). The Women's Industrial Farm (WIF) served as a regulating institution for women's sexuality in Kansas throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

The Women's Industrial Farm was founded as a regular women's reformatory in 1917, yet it quickly was inundated with women arrested under the state quarantine law as part of the nationwide response to the problem of venereal disease in the armed forces during WWI. Military officials considered several options to control syphilis and gonorrhea in the population of soldiers, including maintaining a regulated system of prostitution and providing condoms to soldiers, yet they settled on a two-part plan: provide moral training for the soldiers through the

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1 Names of inmates at the WIF are pseudonyms.

newly created Commission on Training Camp Activities (CTCA) and imprison women that were suspected of spreading disease to soldiers (Clement 2006:115-117). Nationally, over 18,000 women suspected of having venereal diseases were quarantined in federally-funded facilities during the war (Luker 1998:622); research conducted under the U.S. Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board found that most of the women detained were working class and that 41% were unemployed at the time of arrest (Brandt 1985:90-91). The Kansas legislature passed Chapter 205 in 1917 in response to these national developments, receiving federal political and financial backing.<sup>2</sup> Though Chapter 205 was officially gender-neutral, it was primarily used against women, particularly as it transitioned from a wartime policy to a peacetime public health strategy. Women were “quarantined” alongside regular female prisoners at the WIF throughout the 1920s and 1930s, with women convicted under Chapter 205 averaging 71% of the total inmate population between 1918 and 1942. Their confinement at the WIF was indefinite, with doctors and superintendents deciding when they were physically and morally “cured” enough to reenter society; in practice, women detained under Chapter 205 spent, on average, around four months at the WIF during this period. While at the WIF, inmates received treatment for their diseases and were subjected to a plan of moral reform focusing on the value of hard work and the inculcation of middle class norms for proper feminine behavior. Though the numbers of women imprisoned under Chapter 205 declined in the 1940s, women were quarantined under the law as late as 1956. Altogether, 5,331 were detained at the WIF under Chapter 205 between the years of 1918-1942.<sup>3</sup>

It is within this general context that Grace Smith came to be imprisoned at the Women's

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<sup>2</sup> As part of the \$427,000 that the federal government spent nationally, the hospital at the WIF was built in 1920 with matching funds from the state and federal government (Frazier 1988:5).

<sup>3</sup> All data about the inmates of the Farm come from WIF Biennial reports between 1918 and 1942.



Industrial Farm in 1925. However, Grace's case is not simply a story of state control of sexuality; it is also a story of social class, gender, and respectability. Grace's status as a working-class girl placed her sexuality in the spotlight, both as a target of government control and of discourses about proper female sexuality. Behind the official state policies, there were different groups of women with distinct relationships to the regulation of working-class women's sexuality: elite clubwomen who lobbied for the creation of humane women's prisons and rallied to reform the morality of the nation, middle-class professional women who found employment in the burgeoning new field of social work, and, of course, the working-class women whose families, social lives, and bodies came under the close scrutiny of the state.

This research examines how the state's regulation of working-class women's sexuality contributed to the maintenance of class boundaries. Recent calls for research into the intersection of class and sexuality highlight the need for theories and concepts that allow researchers to analyze the material and cultural dimensions of class while interrogating the role of sexuality (Taylor 2011). The literature on boundary work provides one such avenue for studying the intersection of class and sexuality, as narratives about sexuality serve as a powerful tool for drawing and maintaining boundaries around social groups by assigning moral value to “us” and “them” (Lamont and Molnar 2002; Nagel 2003). While research demonstrates that people use sexuality in various ways to construct and maintain symbolic boundaries (Beisel 1997; Collins 2004; Nagel 2003), the exact mechanisms through which this occurs remains in need of further study. I argue that the pursuit of respectability is a driving force behind the maintenance of class boundaries through discussions of sexuality (Skeggs 1997, 2005). A focus on respectability highlights the relational character of social class, as working-class women become the reference group against which others judge their own respectability. This project

will examine how women at different social class levels engaged in discourses of respectability through their involvement with the WIF and Chapter 205.

These struggles over in-group and out-group identity are particularly visible in times of drastic social changes, such as the huge shifts in dating and sexual behaviors that took place during the sensuous Jazz Age of the 1920s and the hard financial times of the 1930s. As divorce, love-based marriages, and premarital sexual intimacy became more common among young people, politicians, reformers, and a generation of worried parents publicly lamented the crisis in the nation's sexual morality. Central to their discussions was the sexuality of young working-class women. This research will contribute to the historical record by giving voice to the working-class women most affected by state control of sexuality, a voice that is all too often lost in the historical record. It will also follow up on the rich literature about sexuality in the Progressive Era (Blair 2010; Clement 2006; Donovan 2005; Odem 1995; Rosen 1982; Strange 1995) to see how the legacy of state regulation of sexuality was experienced by women in the 1920s and 1930s. The Midwestern focus of this research will provide a much needed counterpart to the research on the history of sexuality, which mainly focuses on major cities on the coasts to the peril of understanding how changes in sexual culture are experienced by everyday Americans (Bailey 1999:4). Understanding state regulation of sexuality during this period will not only provide a window into the relationship between class boundaries, respectability, and sexuality, it will fill gaps in the historical record about working-class women's sexual experiences.

### **Defining Boundaries through Respectability**

#### **Sexuality and Social Control**

Following the initial insights of Humphreys (1970) and Gagnon and Simon (1973), sociologists see sexuality as being socially constructed, meaning that the practices, relationships,

and meanings associated with sexuality will vary depending on the historical and cultural context. Within each historical construction of sexuality, these negotiations over the substance and meaning of sexuality are part of larger struggles over who has power in society (Foucault 1978). The state, the church, and public morality all regulate sexuality, making social control a central aspect of how sexuality is socially organized (Weeks 1986). Indeed, social control has been a major current of research in the sociology of sexuality, as well as in the historical literature about the women's reformatory movement (Freedman 1981; Odem 1995; Pascoe 1990; Rafter 1985).

The WIF is a clear example of formal social control, where the state is directly intervening in women's lives. Because Chapter 205 was almost exclusively applied to women, it also gave official government sanction to the sexual double standard. This connection between the implementation of Chapter 205 and existing social hierarchies provides an opportunity to expand the research questions beyond a simplistic top-down social control story. A comparable analysis comes from Hoppe's (2013) study of public health workers dealing with Michigan's HIV disclosure laws, which revealed the everyday decisions and assumptions that these workers made which impacted who got prosecuted for failure to disclose their HIV status. His attention to the process of implementing the law highlights the ways "that the techniques of social control described and facilitated by public health officials are both informed by and reproduce social stigma" (Hoppe 2013:30). Individuals operating within institutions are influenced by cultural discourses that reinforce social inequalities, and these inevitably influence and are themselves affected by the actions of those individual actors. This research will take a similar approach, seeking to extend our understanding of the motivations of those participating in regimes of social control and the connections between social control and other hierarchical systems of social

organization.

### The Intersection of Class & Sexuality

To understand how the WIF functioned within various social hierarchies, an intersectional approach is needed. While intersectional analyses highlight the importance of various social hierarchies and the ways that these intersect with each other, certain intersections are better studied than others. While much scholarship has focused on the connections between race, gender, and sexuality, the relationship between class and sexuality has not been fully interrogated (Heaphy 2013:306; Plummer 2008; Taylor 2011b). There are several reasons for this gap in the research. First, Queer Theory, which tends to focus on the fluid and unstable nature of sexual categories and identities rather than the way that such categories are embedded in material realities, has set much of the research agenda in sexuality studies (Heaphy 2011; Taylor 2011a:40-41; Taylor 2011b:5). While several scholars have critiqued Queer Theory for its lack of grounding in material realities and power dynamics, its influence in sexuality studies has meant that many sexuality scholars have not made class an important component of their analyses (Hennessy 2000; McDermott 2011a:66; McDermott 2011b:237; Seidman 1996).<sup>4</sup> Second, many sexuality scholars have viewed scholarship on class from a Marxian perspective that privileges class above all other social hierarchies, a view they see as being incompatible with intersectional analysis (Binnie 2011:22; Heaphy 2011:43). This view of class studies ignores the cultural turn in class analysis that might be more compatible with recent research on identities and sexuality (Heaphy 2011; Taylor 2011b:4). Finally, by the 1980s social class ceased to be a

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that some strands of Queer Theory do not acknowledge institutionalized inequalities. As Seidman (2011:37) points out, however, Queer Theory usually points to the institutionalization of heteronormativity and the gender binary rather than economic inequalities.

*central* focus of feminist analyses in the U.S. Materialist feminism has remained important in Britain, however, and it is from here that much of the existing literature on class and sexuality emerges (Seidman 2011:37-38).

Studies that focus on the intersection between class and sexuality tend to focus on the way that sexual identities are mediated through class, with more emphasis on working class and queer identifications (Jackson 2011:12; Taylor 2008; Taylor 2011b).<sup>5</sup> While this focus on certain groups of people is understandable given their general underrepresentation in other fields of scholarship, there is a need to study the intersection of class and sexuality in the lives of heterosexual and middle-class people as well (Jackson 2011:12). As Heaphy (2011) states: “Class is fundamentally relational, and because middle-class identities often represent the 'given' norms against which working-class identities are judged as lacking it is important to explore the former *as* constructed and to investigate how they are legitimized” (47). Just as middle-class values often represent the norms against which others are judged, heterosexuality and whiteness hold this same symbolic power and need to be deconstructed (Carter 2007). We have to examine the “normal” as well as the “deviant” if we are to gain a deeper understanding of the intersection of class and sexuality.

Current studies point to the importance and challenge of theorizing both the material and cultural character of the intersection of class and sexuality (Binnie 2011:23; Taylor 2011b:5). Many studies position class as being solely about the material and sexuality as being solely about the cultural, leading to inadequate attention to the cultural dimensions of social class and the material dimensions of sexuality (Taylor 2011a:38). This association of class with the material

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<sup>5</sup> For examples of research that focuses on working-class LGBTQ identities, see Maskovsky 2002, Boag 2003, and Taylor 2008. For examples of research that also includes middle-and upper-class LGBTQ identities, see Heaphy 2011, 2013. For examples of research that looks at class and heterosexual identities, see Bettie 2003, Hamilton and Armstrong 2009, and Skeggs 1997.

and sexuality with the cultural has also led to these different research agendas conceptualizing inequality differently, with studies of class focusing more on material inequalities between groups and studies of sexuality focusing more on cultural and ideological inequalities (McDermott 2011b:236). These challenges have led to inadequate theorization of the intersection of class and sexuality that fails to add theoretical insight and erases important elements of people's lives (Taylor 2011a:38).

### Boundary Work

Several scholars working in this area have used Bourdieu's framework of an economy of cultural, social, and economic capitals to bridge the material and cultural elements of sexuality and class (Bettie 2003; Binnie 2011:24; Skeggs 1997; Heaphy 2011:46; Johnson 2008; McDermott 2004; McDermott 2011a; McDermott 2011b; Nixon 2011). Bourdieu's model envisions social class as a process rather than an objective status, offering an "understanding of the ways that individuals move through social space, or, conversely, become restricted and fixed, through material inequalities as well as social judgments" (Taylor 2011:5; see also McDermott 2011b:239). While sexuality was not an important component of Bourdieu's original framework, this understanding of class and sexuality as social processes with many moving parts (i.e. capitals) that operate differently in different contexts opens up many possibilities for class and sexuality researchers who want to highlight the material and cultural dimensions of class and sexuality simultaneously.<sup>6</sup> Many of the studies utilizing Bourdieu to analyze the intersection of class and sexuality have utilized interview data, primarily focusing on the ways that different

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<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu (1984) himself does not develop gender as a strong component of his framework either (Lovell 2004:39). However, several feminist scholars have expanded on Bourdieu's theory in order to understand how class, race and gender come together in people's lives (Fowler 2003; Lovell 2000, 2004; McCall 1992; Reay 1998).

capitals influence individuals' narratives of their class- and sexuality-based identities. For example, McDermott (2011a) analyzed the role of habitus in the "coming out" narratives of working-class and middle-class lesbians as they made post-secondary schooling transitions, and Skeggs (1997) utilized the concept of cultural capital to understand working-class heterosexual women's challenges in achieving a "proper" feminine identity. In the following sections I will discuss why a boundaries approach, which builds upon Bourdieu's framework, is particularly well suited to take these insights into identities to a broader level in understanding how class and sexuality operate at the group level to create, maintain, or disrupt boundaries between groups.

The literature on boundaries takes as its premise that social identities, such as those centered around social class, race, gender, or sexuality, are relational, meaning that a large part of how we identify who "we" are is by defining ourselves against "them" (Bourdieu 1984; Lamont and Molnar 2002). Boundaries provide solidarity within a group and justify treating those outside a group in certain ways. Boundary work consists of the actions that people take in order to designate themselves from others; it is the process by which social actors determine who is part of their group and who is not. The social control of sexuality is a type of boundary work, as it assigns differential worth to people based on their ability to conform to standards of "proper" sexuality. Lamont and Molnar (2002) identify two types of boundaries: 1) symbolic boundaries, "the conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space," and 2) social boundaries, the "objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities" (168). In the case of sexuality, people create symbolic boundaries when they use sexuality as a criteria to categorize others as moral or immoral; they create social boundaries when they use these symbolic distinctions to treat people differently based on their

actual or perceived sexual history.

Moral judgments are often central to the formation and maintenance of symbolic boundaries and can become the basis for social exclusion or inclusion (Beisel 1997; Lamont 1992, 2002). Given the importance of sexuality in people's sense of morality, sexuality is a particularly ripe site for the construction of moral boundaries. While the relationship between class, sexuality, and boundaries is rarely the central analytical focus of research, scholars of race and sexuality have been able to utilize this boundaries framework in order to clarify the relationship between discussions of sexuality, racial identity formation, and boundary maintenance in ways that are helpful for understanding class and sexuality. Several researchers have argued that discourses about deviant sexuality serve to reinscribe racial and ethnic boundaries (Collins 2000, 2004; Donovan 2005; Gonzalez and Rolison 2005; Nagel 2000, 2003). Just as with racial "Others," the sexual lives of working-class men and women become a symbol that other classes use to create and maintain moral boundaries: "It has in fact been argued (by Foucault) that the very idea of 'sexuality' is an essentially bourgeois one, which developed as an aspect of the self-definition of a class, both against the decadent aristocracy and the rampant immorality of the lower orders in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (Weeks 1986:37). This research demonstrates that people use sexuality in various ways to construct and maintain symbolic boundaries, but the exact mechanisms through which this occurs remains in need of further study.

### **Respectability**

I argue that respectability is a concept that can be used to bridge the cultural/material divide in the literature and connect individual-level experiences and desires to larger projects of maintaining class boundaries. Though studies of social class often mention how elusive



respectability can be for those at the bottom of the class hierarchy, respectability itself is rarely directly theorized or developed as a concept. With roots in the symbolic-interactionist perspective, respectability itself has no clear definition, as its content and meaning will vary depending on the historical and cultural context (Goodhew 2000; Huppertz 2010). This flexibility allows the concept of respectability to be used throughout different contexts, while certain traits make it well-suited for the questions posed in this research. First, the flexibility of the concept of respectability make it well-suited to intersectional analyses that do not simply seek to “add in” other social hierarchies to their studies, but instead wish to consider the complex ways that different social hierarchies interact with each other and the conditions under which certain facets of identity become more salient than others (Binnie 2011:21; Taylor, Hines, and Casey 2011). While respectability often entails issues of class, gender, sexuality, and race, the conditions under which each of these elements becomes more important than others will vary. Studying these conditions has the potential to build intersectional theory in productive ways. Second, using the concept of respectability gives scholars simple language to discuss multiple social hierarchies at once, something that can be challenging to do in intersectional analyses (McDermott 2011a:66; Taylor 2009). The term “respectability” can become a shorthand for multiple social hierarchies, enabling scholars to move forward in the work of unpacking how these different hierarchies function together rather than getting bogged down in linguistically awkward descriptions.<sup>7</sup> Finally, respectability itself usually entails both cultural and material elements, as people are judged as being respectable based not only on their behavior, but by their physical appearance and their ability to purchase such things as nice clothing. Thus, the concept can also be used as a

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<sup>7</sup> Though respectability has this potential to be used as a shorthand, scholars will need to be careful to be sure that they actually include various social hierarchies seriously in their analysis. With a shorthand also comes the potential to claim that you are studying multiple elements of oppression and then glossing over certain elements in your analysis.

shorthand to include both the material and cultural elements of social class and sexuality.

### *Respectability as Relational*

Respectability is a relational category, both at the individual and societal level. Starting at the level of self-conception, Duneier (1992) defines respectability as “a mode of life conforming to and embodying notions of moral worth” (65). Just as Mead's conception of the self is built upon a person's perception of an audience, the concept of “self-respect” is inherently social because it engages with perceptions of public morality and worth. At the level of interpersonal relationships, respectability is again a relational phenomena. Ball (1970) characterizes respectability as requiring a sense of normality, a sense of morality, and the affirmation of an audience: others have to recognize you as being respectable for that definition of respectability to bring with it material and social benefits (Huppertz 2010). Thus, respectability is a status that is achieved through interactions; it requires “teamwork” between actor and audience and a shared definition of normality and morality (Ball 1970:336). Given that the exact content of “respectability” will vary across societies, as what is considered normal and moral vary, Ball (1970:339) argues that respectability is an inherently problematic status for everyone because an actor can never be sure what definition of morality is being referenced by the audience. While Ball's insight that respectability is sought in interactions by those at all class levels is helpful, we need to pay attention to the ways that respectability is differentially available to people in various social locations.

### *Respectability & Symbolic Boundaries.*

Respectability is an important component of social stratification because it is utilized in the process of forming and maintaining symbolic boundaries, particularly moral boundaries.

Discourses surrounding the deviant sexuality or gender performances of entire groups of people serve to deny that group a respectable status. People employ symbolic boundaries formed around respectability in two ways: 1) to “enforce, maintain, normalize, or rationalize social boundaries” (Lamont and Molnar 2002:186), as when female-dominated professions are paid less than more “respectable” male-dominated occupations (Huppatz 2010), and 2) to “contest and reframe the meaning of social boundaries” (Lamont and Molnar 2002:186), as when African-Americans or South Africans make claims to respectability in a culture that regularly denies them that status (Clement 2006:5; Goodhew 2000; Higginbotham 1993; Wolcott 2001). Thus, respectability has the potential to reinforce or to change social hierarchies, depending on how it is employed by social actors.

### *Respectability, Sexuality, & Gender*

Though the exact definition of respectability will vary depending on the cultural and historical moment, sexuality and gender are often central to people's conceptions of respectability, particularly for women. Being respectable entails exhibiting an appropriate gender performance and abiding by certain accepted rules for sexual behavior. This close connection between respectability and gender is one of the key ways that class boundaries are maintained because the achievement of hegemonic masculinity and femininity is often limited to those in the middle and upper classes.

People achieve respectability differently based on gender. The role of financial provider is often central to the definition of men's respectability. Since working-class men often do not have access to the jobs that provide financial security, their status as “respectable” men is always in question. These men are keenly aware of this judgment about their own worth and sometimes devise alternative moral hierarchies that emphasize those qualities that are accessible to them,

such as authenticity or personal responsibility (Duneier 1992; Lamont 2002). However, working-class men do not have the symbolic power to assert their definition of respectability and are aware that they are judged by criteria that they are unable to meet.

Similarly, respectability mediates the class boundary between women at different social class levels by restricting access to performances of proper femininity and sexuality. While some studies have linked women's access to respectability with selflessness and care work (Huppertz 2010), another important indicator of women's femininity and respectability is their sexuality. Several studies have documented cultural discourses that deny poor women's respectability by explicitly connecting them with out-of-control and licentious sexuality (Lawler 2002; Skeggs 1997). For example, Skeggs's (1997) study of the identity formation of heterosexual working-class women in England found that these women were keenly aware of the heightened scrutiny given to their sexuality and dressed and behaved in such a way that sought to avoid being labeled as too "tarty," though they often lacked the cultural capital needed to accomplish this performance. Discourses that link working-class women with sexual licentiousness, such as discussions of prostitutes or sexually aggressive lesbians, leave a constant accusation of sexual impropriety at the feet of working-class women, making sexual respectability a resource that is differentially available to women based on social class (Freedman 1999; Skeggs 1997, 2005). Associations between overt sexuality and working-class women limit their ability to accomplish a credible feminine performance; respectability is a class-based resource that is needed to claim both a reputable sexual identity and a proper gender performance (Allan 2009; Skeggs 1997).

Parallel discourses have historically linked middle-class women with heterosexuality, chastity, and spirituality (Allan 2009; Carter 2007; Haag 1992), enabling middle-class women to

claim a respectable status while drawing boundaries between their own sexual behavior and the licentious behaviors of “others.” Indeed, the term “classy” itself has the simultaneous meaning of material wealth and sexual restraint (Hamilton and Armstrong 2009:611). Middle-class constructions of normative sexuality pinpoint class-specific images of when female sexuality is appropriate and respectable. For example, research on contemporary heterosexual women has examined the connection between femininity, sexuality, and respectability through the ideology of romantic love, arguing that respectable female sexuality can only take place within the context of a romantic relationship (Crawford and Popp 2003; Holland and Eisenhart 1990; Martin 1996; Ronen 2010; Schalet 2010; Schwartz and Rutter 1998; Simon, Eder, and Evans 1992). However, much of this research discusses romantic love as if it is an ideology that is equally applied to and accessed by all groups of women, when in fact social class mediates the ability to claim a respectable sexuality (for an exception, see Hamilton and Armstrong 2009). Another example comes from popular TV shows, such as *Sex and the City*, that depict elite professional women’s sexuality as modern and glamorous (Jackson 2011:17). The characters in this show are able to be respectable while being sexually active outside the context of monogamous relationships, behaviors that would place working-class women squarely outside the bounds of respectability. Thus, the connection between respectability and sexuality works differently for women at different class levels, with the same behaviors having very different implications for women’s status. These different standards for respectability also work to draw and reinforce moral boundaries between groups. For example, the middle-class girls in Allan's (2009) study distanced themselves from lesbians and working-class peers outside of their school as a way of maintaining a respectable identity and avoiding being labeled as overtly sexual. Discourses of sexuality and respectability thus not only serve to legitimate middle-class women’s sexual

choices, they serve as a resource to create moral distinctions between themselves and working-class women. The symbolic distinctions created through discourses of sexuality create social boundaries that lead to unequal access to the resource of respectability.

### Chapter Outline

This research will compare how elite activists, middle-class professionals, and working-class women engaged with state control of working-class women's sexuality during this period in order to better understand the relationship between respectability, gender, sexuality, and class boundaries. Using the concept of respectability will highlight the relational character of class boundaries, as well as the material and cultural dimensions of the intersection of class and sexuality. Comparing the differing relationships that these three groups of women had to gender, sexuality, and respectability will show the role that sexuality plays in the maintenance of class boundaries.

Chapter 2 provides a description of the methodological approach to this research. It gives an overview of the approach of historical sociology in general, an outline of my approach to the sources used for this project, and a description of the types of sources used for each chapter, along with some thoughts about the strengths and limitations of these sources. This chapter should give the reader a basis for understanding the primary sources used throughout the dissertation.

Chapter 3 provides a broad historical overview of the major trends and events important for understanding the WIF and Chapter 205, as well as details about the implementation and inmate population of the WIF. While the subsequent chapters will each provide more historical details pertaining to their topics, Chapter 3 gives a general picture of changes in sexual culture,

the origins of the social hygiene movement, and the events and social currents taking place during WWI that led to Chapter 205. The second half of the chapter provides details about the implementation of Chapter 205 and demographic characteristics of typical inmates. Detailing the relationship of the WIF to the Kansas Board of Administration and the Kansas Board of Health, as well as the process of implementing Chapter 205, this chapter should provide the reader with a sense of how Chapter 205 operated and fit into the larger institutional structure of the state. Together, these details should provide the context and basic understanding of Chapter 205 needed to delve into the rest of the study.

Chapter 4 gives an account of the elite activist women who lobbied to create the WIF and provides more details about the creation and early years of the Farm. The chapter is divided into three phases of women's activism in Kansas: the campaign for women's suffrage, the campaign to establish the WIF, and efforts to promote "social hygiene" work in the state. Thus, while activist women's involvement with the WIF was brief (they were not intimately involved with the Farm after the original push for the creation of the institution), lobbying for this issue was in line with their overall lobbying efforts and social position as elite white women. As I argue in Chapter 4, elite women's activism surrounding suffrage, the WIF, and social hygiene had some common threads that coalesced around issues of citizenship, eugenics, and respectability.

Chapter 5 gives an account of the professional women who ran the WIF and provides more details about daily life at the Farm. The chapter positions the WIF within national standards for women's reformatories during this period, showing that the physical layout and attitude toward reform were largely consistent with national best practices of the time. The chapter then goes on to give an account of the women who ran the institution, including Julia Perry, who was superintendent of the Farm from its founding in 1917 until her death in 1932.

Exploring the competing demands that were put on the WIF, its limited funding, and the lack of respect given to female professionals, Chapter 5 shows the challenging position that these female professionals found themselves in as they ran the daily life of the Farm. The chapter goes on to explore the attitudes toward reform that these professional women used to guide the WIF and how these philosophies related back to professional women's own contested social position. Overall, this chapter provides many details about the daily life and philosophy of reform guiding the institution, as well as an exploration of professional women's social position and their complicated relationship to respectability.

Finally, Chapter 6 delves into inmate interview data to explore the imprisoned women's lives and how they came to be detained under Chapter 205. The first half of this chapter explores the ways that inmates reported that they were arrested. Whether it was through state agents directly arresting women, someone turning them into authorities as a venereal disease suspect, or women volunteering to go to the Farm in order to access healthcare, the variety of paths that inmates took to get to the Farm complicate the simplistic narrative coming from state documents that they were all prostitutes in dire need of moral reform. The second half of the chapter examines the narratives that women gave about their sexual pasts and the implications that these narratives had for their claims to respectability. Similar to the accounts of how they were arrested, these narratives provide a varied story of women's sexual histories, with some women reporting the types of sexual behaviors of deep concern to moral reformers at the time and other women reporting that they were the victims of men's sexual vices and aggressions. As a whole, the inmate interviews provide a rich source to understand how Chapter 205 was implemented and the sexual experiences of the inmates. The inmates' stories describe a much more varied, and problematic, account of their sexual pasts than the narratives presented in official state



documents about the kinds of women detained under Chapter 205. Though their claim to respectability is the most contested of all of the groups of women examined in this study, many of the inmate interviews stake a claim to respectability despite the women's physical disease and imprisonment by the state.

## Conclusion

The three groups of women central to this study related to and negotiated their relationship with respectability in distinct ways. Though their situations differed, each group of women found that their respectability was in question.

The female activists involved with creating the WIF came from a reform tradition that involved both elite clubwomen and middle-class reformers. They argued that society could benefit from the maternal instincts of women (Blair 1980; Pascoe 1990). Though they were meddling in the public affairs of men, their focus on domestic and moral issues lent them authority based on their status as morally superior "ladies" (Allan 2009). However, we must be careful not to conflate moral influence with social power; female reformers often ran into roadblocks in implementing their reforms (Pascoe 1990: xvi). Elite reformers gained some public recognition and authority from the late 1800s through the Progressive Era, but by the 1920s many of these women were regarded as meddling and sentimental old women from a bygone era (Stearns 1988). Though much of these women's initial activism surrounding issues of sexuality was rooted in a critique of the sexual double-standard, this feminist critique was largely lost as professional social workers, medical doctors, and government bureaucrats took over their causes in the 1910s and 20s, leaving a system of regulation for women's sexuality and little serious challenge to male sexual privilege (Luker 1998; Pascoe 1990). Thus, female activists faced a

crisis in respectability: their charitable work was no longer recognized as being socially valuable, the version of benevolent femininity from which they drew their public authority was dated, and their causes had been co-opted by authorities that did not share their moral vision for society.

The middle-class, professionally-trained social workers that took over many of these charities from female reformers also faced a crisis in respectability. Social workers like those running the WIF were often critical of the sentimental benevolence of the older reformers and sought to gain legitimacy by projecting a rational, professional identity for the emerging field of social work (Stearns 1988; Walkowitz 1990). However, as continues to be the case today, feminized professions such as social work received lower pay and less esteem than male-dominated professions (Huppertz 2010). Additionally, women who worked outside the home faced scrutiny in a time when femininity was so closely associated with domesticity, particularly as the Great Depression set in and government policies and public sentiment criticized working women for taking jobs away from men. While some social workers conceptualized their work as maternal in order to claim this feminine identity, this conflicted with the desire to portray social work as a respected profession (Odem 1995; Stearns 1988). These middle-class professional women faced conflicts as they attempted to both establish a respectable professional identity and fulfill the expectations of femininity.

Working-class women also entered into these public negotiations over sexuality and gender with their respectability at stake. The state's intervention into their sex lives made these women's struggles for respectability the most public and the most consequential. As the power of the state to regulate sexuality grew with the interventions justified by the prevalence of venereal disease during World War I, young working-class women's behavior in public came under heightened scrutiny. New laws broadened the definitions of public disorder and led to

many women being arrested for merely the suspicion of illicit sexual activity (Clement 2006). Throughout the Progressive Era, the state began to take on a more active role in regulating the nation's sexual life, and working-class women faced the brunt of this intervention (Luker 1998). As their lives became wrapped up in the criminal justice system, their own and their families' reputations came under attack.

While the inmates' respectability was most publicly and consequentially challenged, all three groups of women were attempting to claim a respectable status in the midst of cultural currents that questioned the role of women in public. Each group of women's relationship with respectability offers a rich site for investigating the role of respectability in maintaining and reproducing class boundaries. Chapter 205's focus on venereal disease, which involves the physical reality of diseased bodies and the cultural construction of threatening sexuality, creates an opportunity to meaningfully explore both the material and cultural elements of the intersection of class and sexuality. This research explores the concept of respectability as a meaningful tool to use in discussing the intersections of multiple social hierarchies in the hopes that this concept can inform future research.

## CH 2: Methods

To shed light on these questions about respectability, class, gender, and sexuality, this research takes a historical sociological approach. Historical sociology does not simply entail a sociological question that is applied to a historical example, but instead implies a certain theoretical focus and way of understanding social processes. Specifically, historical sociology highlights the contextual nature of social processes and gives particular attention to changes in these processes over time (Skocpol 1984). For example, Reay's (2014) article historicizing contemporary sociological research about "hookup" culture not only gives context to "casual" sex throughout history, but traces the development of sex outside of marriage over time to show that it is not premarital sex, per se, but rather sex without emotional attachment that is relatively new in sexual behavior. Thus, historical sociology's attention to context and change over time can lead to new questions and perspectives that can be productively combined with research using different methods, each with their own theoretical underpinnings and methodological strengths. Historical sociology's focus on context and change over time are reflected in my approach to this project. Though I am arguing that respectability is a key mechanism that regulates the relationship between sexuality, femininity, and social class, I understand these social processes as ones that change over time and examine the historically-specific meanings attached to these throughout the period of this study.

While context is important, there are debates within historical sociology about the balance between providing rich contextual details and doing research that is generalizable and can productively build theory. Though large-scale comparative work is common in historical sociology (i.e. Skocpol 1979), many historical sociologists also take a case-based approach that allows for the fuller exploration of contextual details (i.e. Blee 2008; Staples and Staples 2001).

Some have critiqued idiographic research as being too specific and failing to meaningfully contribute to theory (Kiser and Hechter 1991). Others have maintained that case studies and narrative approaches are needed in order to capture the complexity of social relationships (Calhoun 1998; Gotham and Staples 1996). Historical sociologists must balance the contextual details needed to truly understand a given case with the larger goal of being able to generalize from the research in order to advance our overall understanding of any given topic. For the purposes of this research, this means that, while I go into great detail about the WIF in Kansas, I am constantly comparing it to national trends in women's reformatories, state regulation of sexuality, women's role in public, and larger changes in systems of gender, class, race, and sexuality. I explore the degree to which Chapter 205 and the WIF fit national patterns of regulation of women's sexuality and the degree to which the Kansas case was unique. The goal of this research is thus to not only illuminate a certain period in Kansas history, but also to inform our understanding of broader social changes and processes.

One important factor in making sure that case studies can meaningfully contribute to theoretical conversations is the selection of the right case (Burawoy 1998:16). The social conditions of 1920s and 30s Kansas are a ripe site for the study of respectability, gender, sexuality, and social class. Much of the research on sexuality during this period focuses on either New York City or California (Clement 2006; Odem 1995). This focus on metropolitan centers along the coasts misrepresents the nature of social change: sexual revolutions would not be all that revolutionary if they just took place in big cities (Bailey 1999). As recent work in rural queer theory has pointed out, geography is an important factor in understanding people's experiences and perceptions of sexuality (Keller 2015). Studying sexuality in places like Kansas, which has long represented both the geographic and moral center of the country, allows

us to see the sexual norms of mainstream Americans (Bailey 1999; Nathanson 1991). This study's emphasis on venereal disease is particularly fitting for understanding the cultural and material dimensions of the intersection of social class and sexuality, as this topic involves both the social construction of venereal disease as being emblematic of dangerous sexuality and the concrete, material reality of diseased bodies in need of medical treatment (Brandt 1985:5).

Important social hierarchies were also under increased scrutiny during this time. Gender relations were changing, with Kansas women being among the first to win the vote in 1912. The social class system was also under scrutiny as Kansas moved into the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. Together, these social currents contribute to a time in history where questions of respectability were important, as well as contested, positioning this research to make a meaningful contribution to our understanding of class and sexuality.

### **Approach to Sources**

Following in the tradition of Foucault, recent research on the history of sexuality has maintained a critical stance toward the power relations embedded in the production of knowledge, emphasizing “the political and contingent qualities of evidence and interpretation” (Carter 2005:9). This study relies on a close reading of available sources, including state reports, organizational records, inmate interviews, letters, newspapers, and other relevant documents. Similar to other historical studies of sexuality during this period (Clement 2006; Donovan 2005b; Odem 1995), most of these documents were produced by or for the state, a type of document that Dibble (1963) refers to as “social bookkeeping.” This reliance on official state documents creates concerns that our interpretation of history is rooted in the experiences of elites and may overemphasize social control and minimize the importance and extent of the resistance to official state policies; without the voices of those being detained included in the record, their

agency becomes hidden. Nor can state documents be read as unproblematic “windows” into the sexual lives of everyday Americans of the past: those caught up in the legal system were not representative of the whole population and the documents collected for their prosecution and internment were done so for reasons specific to the bureaucratic and legal structure of the time (Robertson 2005:163). Others counter that by reading official documents “against the grain,” or for purposes other than those for which the documents were originally compiled, researchers can catch glimpses of the lives and voices of those who are rarely included in the historical record (Clement 2006:10; Davis 1987; Iocavetta and Mitchinson 1998:6; Muir and Ruggiero 1994:ix; Strange 1995:12; Terry 1991). For example, Clement (2006:16) argues that reformatory documents, such as the ones used for this study, can be read more for narrative patterns than for objective “truths”; close attention to what is considered contested and what is generally accepted can tell us much about social norms and the boundaries of respectability. While official sources must be read with the power dynamics of their construction in mind, using these sources is preferable to the alternative: “the reproduction of [.....] invisibility, marginality, nonexistence” (Carter 2005:2). This research attempts to minimize the distorting effects of having mostly state records by: 1) understanding the methods and reasons for collecting and presenting information within the context of institutions and the legal system (Dibble 1963:4; Robertson 2005); 2) looking for multiple sources to corroborate information when possible; 3) paying attention to what is not said as well as what is said; 4) “placing [myself] within history” (Burawoy 1998:28) in order to understand the motivations of those involved; and 5) being attuned to the power dynamics taking place at the time that the document was produced. This approach seeks to get the most out of the available sources while keeping claims and generalizations in line with the actual evidence.

### Sources for History Chapter

This research relies on a variety of primary sources, most of which were accessed through the Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS). The historical background presented in Chapter 3 relies on a mix of secondary sources, government documents, and newspaper accounts. As mentioned above, government documents are the most abundant. Many of these documents, such as the biennial reports of the Board of Administration, Board of Health, and the Women's Industrial Farm, were regularly produced for the purpose of governmental reporting. As such, they reflect the institutional needs and legislative priorities of the state. Relevant documents from the Board of Administration were somewhat limited, as their direct role in managing the WIF was minimal given their broad scope of operations. Relevant documents from the Kansas State Board of Health, including biennial reports, the *Board of Health Bulletin*, health pamphlets, and meeting reports, were more plentiful, particularly during WWI when venereal disease was a major priority for the Board of Health. The internal documents give information about the implementation of Chapter 205 and the degree of cooperation the Board received from local communities. The public-facing documents, such as pamphlets about women's reproductive health, provide examples of how the Board of Health presented venereal disease to the public. For this history chapter, the biennial reports of the WIF are read primarily for demographic information about the inmates. While other narrative parts of these WIF reports need to be read with a more critical eye, there would have been little reason to distort this demographic information. The demographic picture of the inmates also relies on a 1918 study by social worker Alice Hill, who completed an in-depth investigation of WIF inmates' social backgrounds as part of a 5-part, federally-funded series of articles published in *Public Health*



*Reports* covering young women interned during WWI in Kansas and Kentucky (Hill 1920).

While the women imprisoned during and after the war differed in some ways, this report gives a much more in-depth look at the women's backgrounds and complements the more general information provided in the WIF Biennial Reports. Finally, this chapter draws on newspaper coverage of the Farm, located either through the Kansas State Historical Society's Clippings files, an examination of Topeka newspapers around key dates (i.e. when Chapter 205 was passed),<sup>8</sup> or a search of keywords in the Chronicling America database of historical newspapers.<sup>9</sup> The newspaper articles used for this study are thus not a comprehensive list of all coverage, but rather a portion of them that were easily identifiable. Together with secondary sources, these primary sources are pieced together in Chapter 3 to provide a broad historical overview of the development and implementation of the WIF.

### Sources for Activist Women's Chapter

The source material for Chapter 4 includes a variety of primary sources to gain insight into the activist women who lobbied to create the WIF. I examined the Kansas State Historical Society's records for the Kansas Council of Women (the umbrella organization for women's clubs that lobbied for the WIF), clippings files for women's clubs, records and publications for the Kansas Federation of Women's Clubs (which included many of the members of the Kansas Council of Women), and some organizational records for individual women's organizations, such as the Kansas chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (KWCTU). Unlike the government documents described above, many of these sources were produced for internal

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<sup>8</sup>Being the capital, Topeka papers were more likely to report on legislative issues in the statehouse; the *Topeka Capital* was the daily morning newspaper, and the *Topeka Journal* was the evening paper.

<sup>9</sup>This database, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Library of Congress, is a digitized collection of newspapers from 1836-1922 that features many small-town newspapers. Thus, articles located through this source are only from the early years of this study.

purposes, either for recordkeeping or for communication within their organizations. As such, they are read more as an account of internal politics and priorities rather than appeals to external audiences. Other sources, such as newspaper articles and the Kansas Federation of Women's Club's magazine, *Federation News*,<sup>10</sup> had a more public audience and are read as reflecting activist women's understanding of what external audiences would find meaningful about their activities. Of particular importance to this chapter are the KSHS's collection of papers from Lucy B. Johnston, a prominent women's activist in the state who was central to the fight for suffrage in Kansas and the effort to establish the WIF. While much of this 7-box collection focuses on Johnston's involvement with the suffrage and traveling library movements, there are a variety of personal letters, newspaper articles, and documents related to her work with the Kansas Council of Women that are relevant to this study. The Johnston papers provide some more candid letters and perspectives than are available in the organizational documents. Together, these documents provide a glimpse into the agendas of activist women in the state, their effectiveness at implementing changes, and the arguments that they advanced in order to exert political influence.

### Sources for Professional Women's Chapter

The primary source for Chapter 5 about the middle-class professional women who ran the WIF are the biennial reports submitted to the State Board of Administration from the WIF between the years of 1918-1942 (n=13). The reports include an introduction written by the superintendent that explains the institution's philosophy toward rehabilitation, a financial survey of funds used and goods produced at the institution, reports from physicians and social workers

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<sup>10</sup> This magazine began publication in 1922, after the bulk of activist women's involvement with the WIF; the magazine's name changed to *Kansas Federation Magazine* in 1925.

providing detailed statistics about the inmates, and occasionally reports from various institutional staff and excerpts from letters from former inmates. These documents were put together in order to justify funding of the WIF, as well as to request additional funds, giving the writers of the report a vested interest in portraying the Farm as a success story and glossing over internal turmoil (Rafter 1985:xvi). These intentions and interests are kept in mind when interpreting these documents. Reports will not be read as direct indicators of middle-class professionals' feelings about state control of sexuality, but will instead be read as providing the arguments and interpretations of working-class women's sexuality that middle-class professional women viewed as appealing to government officials.

The highly constructed nature of these biennial reports and the differing messages that WIF superintendents might have had for different audiences is illustrated in the 1924 biennial report. Included in this report is a speech from Superintendent Julia Perry to the KWCTU in which she harshly criticizes the sexual double standard and presents the inmates of the WIF as victims of male lust, messages that differ greatly from the tone that Perry took in the rest of the report (Farm 1924:9). While this speech, and Perry's strategic choice to include it in the biennial report, is looked at more closely in Chapter 5, I bring it up here to illustrate that the WIF biennial reports cannot be read as direct indicators of professional women's feelings about the institution, but rather as documents produced within a particular bureaucratic context and with a specific purpose.

Besides the biennial reports, two other sources were particularly influential in shaping Chapter 5. The first is a report written by Darlene Doubleday-Newby, a young social worker working for the Kansas Board of Health who went undercover at the WIF in 1918 in order to better understand the causes of delinquency among the inmates. Her interactions with the

inmates and accounts of the daily life at the Farm provide much more detail and nuance than is available from the factual reporting of the WIF biennial reports. While Newby's account comes from a particular social position (she was employed by the state, and tasked with uncovering the cause of sexual "delinquency"), it fills in many of the gaps left by other sources for a fuller understanding of the WIF. The second source that was particularly influential for this chapter was a 1931 book written by Dutch researcher Eugenia Lekkerkerker titled *Reformatories for Women in the United States*. This book, which gives in-depth accounts of many women's reformatories in the country, provided national context to understand consistencies and unique aspects of the WIF. Unlike many of the other sources, such as the WIF biennial reports, this book also provides accounts of the daily lives of the matrons who worked at institutions like the WIF. These women were employed by reformatories, yet their voices were not prominent in institutional documents, so Lekkerkerker's book provides information about an area of institutional life that otherwise we have few details about. While she herself could be considered of a similar social position as the professional women running women's reformatories, she was an outsider to the system and did not have a vested interest in the status quo. Thus, this book is particularly valuable in conjunction with the other sources, such as the WIF biennial reports written by the superintendents and Newby's report, which were all written by professional women who were employed by the state.

### Sources for Imprisoned Women's Chapter

Finally, the primary source for the inmate chapter is a set of intake interviews conducted by WIF staff with the inmates.<sup>11</sup> The Kansas State Historical Society has the interviews for

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<sup>11</sup> The case files for the women at the WIF have been lost for most of this period. A few files still exist for women in the 1930s, but they contain very little information (often just an arrest order).

nearly all of the inmates at the Farm between the years of 1923-1933, with a total of 2,437 interviews for women sentenced under Chapter 205. Most interviews are one page long, following a form that asks for background information, the history of the offense, and the woman's sexual and marital history. The practice of interviewing inmates upon their arrival at the WIF, as well as the types of questions asked, was consistent with national practices at women's reformatories.<sup>12</sup> Lekkerkerker (1931:352-356) describes the intent of these interviews as not only to get basic demographic information, but also to prompt inmates to reflect on their past and create a sense that the institution was invested in their future. Reflecting a medicalized approach to deviancy, reformatories saw intake interviews as a baseline for treatment and the first steps in getting buy-in from inmates for the goals of the institution (Lekkerkerker 1931:352). The interviews themselves can be understood as a form of social control, in particular as a form of health surveillance (French and Smith 2013). Similar to the counseling required of people getting HIV testing in Hoppe's (2013) study, asking inmates to disclose intimate details about their sexual histories, including the number of sexual partners, their marital history, and the "Cause of downfall" (an actual prompt on the form), violated women's privacy. Particularly because the interviews were intended to be part of the overall moral reform mission of the institution and a component of inmates' "treatment," the act of being interviewed entailed a coercive element.

The Kansas interview form also reflected institutional assumptions about the inherited and social causes of delinquency. The interview form reflected eugenic assumptions about the heritability of deviance, asking inmates for the names and offenses of relatives who had been

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<sup>12</sup> One difference between the Kansas interviews and national practices is that the Kansas interviews were relatively short and structured, with only a one-page form with prescribed spaces to fill in information. Lekkerkerker recommends that interviews be more open to allow inmates to freely tell their stories. For an example of a more open interview form used in Massachusetts reformatories, see Lekkerkerker 1931:354.

arrested. The interview form (or rather, how they were filled out) also reflected a concern about the environmental causes of deviancy; the prevalence of phrases like “bad company” next to the “cause of downfall” prompt may reflect more the interviewer’s assumption about the dangers of youth culture than the inmates’ actual feelings.<sup>13</sup>

The interview answers themselves cannot be read as direct representations of inmate’s perceptions of their situations. Given the highly charged situation in which the interviews were conducted, it is likely that many women simply lied to their interviewer. In his account of the influx of venereal disease patients at the Farm during WWI, Board of Health official Samuel Crumbine indicated that the reason he sent social worker Darlene Doubleday-Newby undercover to investigate (see above) was that prison officials did not feel like the inmates were being honest with them (Crumbine 1948:226). In her account of the interview process in women’s reformatories, Lekkerkerker commented: “Of course, very often the women lie, consciously or unconsciously, as naturally they are not always willing to tell about certain facts in their personal lives” (Lekkerkerker 1931:352-3). Besides the more blatant issue of lying, the role of the person doing the interview must also be taken into consideration. The amount of information required to fill out the form would have required a fairly extensive conversation, yet only a few sentences are written down fully as quotations. Thus, the interviewer had to be very selective about which of the inmate’s words were the most important to record on the interview form. Given this fact, these interviews can be seen as co-constructed between what the inmate said and what the interviewer actually typed. For the majority of the period of this study, one WIF employee, E. Beverly, conducted the interviews. The potential bias of the interviewer can be seen during a short period in the late 1920s when Superintendent Julia Perry conducted the interviews. These

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<sup>13</sup> See Rowland (1984:216-217) for a discussion of the understanding of delinquency as being caused by peer groups in the Girls’ and Boys’ Industrial School in Kansas during this period.

interviews conducted by Perry are much more likely to include statements saying that the woman contracted the disease through a philandering husband, and contained more detailed discussions of future plans after leaving the Farm. The role that the interviewer played in constructing the final document is apparent. Thus, between the potential for outright fabrication and the mediating role of the interviewer in conducting and transcribing the interviews, these documents need to be read with caution.

While these interviews cannot be read as unproblematic windows into the lives of the inmates, they do offer a rich source for understanding the types of narratives that inmates understood as helping them to stake a claim to respectability. Given the judgmental character of many of the questions, such as “At what age did you commit your first offense against the law of chastity?,” and the unequal power relationships taking place, the inmates were likely on the defensive, trying to present themselves as respectable in the midst of a situation predicated on the assumption that they were not. As Clement (2006) argues, the justifications and explanations offered in these interviews give us a unique window into working-class women's views about sexuality and their perception of what would qualify as respectable behavior for their middle-class interviewer. These interviews “force their participants to articulate their values and their understandings of community standards and traditions” (Clement 2006:16; see also Cott 1979). For the purposes of this research, these interviews tell us what working-class women thought a “respectable” account of their actions would sound like. For example, when Grace Smith from the opening vignette contends that she “never got money from either” of the men that she slept with, she is articulating her perception that monetary exchange was a key distinction between respectable extramarital sexuality and prostitution. Reading these interviews as articulations of community standards also helps us move from simply making sense of these particular women's

lives to the larger project of understanding the cultural schemas of the working class (Robertson 2005:178). Thus, while the concerns about the power dynamics and structure of the interview outlined above will certainly be kept in mind in analyzing these interviews, there is still a wealth of information in this source.

For this research, I first photographed all of the inmate interviews in the two boxes located at the Kansas State Historical Society, which included interviews for nearly all of the inmates at the Farm between the years of 1923-1933. Of these, a total of 2,437 interviews were for women sentenced under Chapter 205. For this research, I coded every fifth interview (N=488), or 20% of the total.<sup>14</sup> Interviews were coded using NVIVO software for basic demographic information, how they were arrested, and how the women narrated their sexual histories. The first two categories of information are treated as more factual than the latter; the interviewers would have little reason to fabricate this information, and the inmates would have less motivation to be dishonest (though there were some instances where an inmate would have a reason to lie about how she was arrested, examples of which are noted in Chapter 6). Quotes about how women narrated their sexual histories are read as described above, not necessarily as accurate accounts of their sexual pasts, but rather as articulations of what the inmates perceived as being respectable accounts of their sexual histories. Read in this light, these interviews provide a rich source about inmates' experiences and perceptions of respectability.

While this section has laid out the limitations of these inmate interviews, I do not want to overlook their strengths as a historical source. Any kind of document, produced by the state or otherwise, that preserves the perspective of those who are not often included in the historical

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<sup>14</sup> I occasionally looked at additional interviews in order to find sources that corroborated each other. For example, if an inmate mentioned that she was arrested with a friend, I was often able to locate the friend's interview because their prisoner numbers were close together.



record is valuable. The large number of interviews is also a strength. While the shortness of the interview form prevents an in-depth understanding of individual women's stories, the large number of interviews helps us understand general trends in inmates' experiences. For example, the accounts of rape presented in Chapter 6 cannot be investigated as to their accuracy individually, but the fact that so many women reported very similar experiences gives some confidence that such incidents did occur. Particularly because the inmates' accounts of their experiences differ so drastically from the stories told about them by the state and moral reformers, these sources provide a valuable perspective in understanding the WIF.

### **Conclusion**

Together, these texts and documents provide the primary sources upon which this research is based. Secondary sources are also used throughout the text to provide additional context; existing research on the women's suffrage movement, the social hygiene movement, the history of sexuality, and women's prison reform are consulted throughout this research. The documents used for this study have their strengths and their limitations as sources, and these will be kept in mind throughout the text.

### CH 3: World War I, Sexuality, and Venereal Disease Control in Kansas

The story of the Women's Industrial Farm is encompassed in this journalist's account of the charged sexual atmosphere of the war years and the government's attempts to contain its worse effects:

Suddenly, training camps were created, filled with undisciplined, insurgent young male life. Suddenly, as magnet to pole, women gravitated to these camps. Women loosely anchored by home or other ties. These were young women for the most part, many of them pitifully young. These women interfered with the preparation of young men for the battlefield; in fact the camp hospitals were soon cluttered up with thousands of cases of venereal disease.

Suddenly, with almost no warning, the state of Kansas ordered all of these inconvenient women attaches who were diseased sent to the Women's Industrial Farm for internment and treatment. (Sherbon 1931)

This quote illustrates several themes that are important to understanding the context of this study: anxiety about changing sexual mores, the channeling of this anxiety toward repressive measures aimed at young women, the prioritizing of men's sexual health over women's freedom, and the increased role of the local and federal government in regulating the sexual lives of everyday Americans. This chapter will first outline the changing climate surrounding sexuality during the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, followed by a discussion of the origins of the social hygiene movement. It will then discuss the nation's response to venereal disease during WWI and the ways this influenced the development of the WIF in Kansas. Finally, this chapter will give an overview of the implementation of Chapter 205 and a portrait of the number and demographic characteristics of the women imprisoned at the WIF. Together, these details should give the reader the context necessary to understand the formation and operation of the Women's Industrial Farm and its place within larger cultural dialogues about social class, gender, sexuality, and respectability in Kansas.

### Changes in Sexual Culture

The United States witnessed a dramatic shift in sexual culture during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Though we often associate this change with the 1920s, many of these shifts had roots in the changing social and moral conditions between 1900 and WWI. The middle-class Victorian attitudes toward sexuality that emphasized self-control and limited sexual expression found themselves challenged by the drastically changing society of the first two decades of the twentieth century. Many of these changes emanated from the growing immigrant and working-class populations in large urban centers, and the sexual behaviors becoming common in these populations would become the models for changes in middle-class sexual morality in the 1920s (D'Emilio and Freedman 1997:173). As the following section will show, these shifting patterns in sexual behavior were profoundly shaped by social class and changing definitions of respectable sexuality.

Several economic and social factors played an important role in shaping sexual behavior. Women's growing participation in the paid work force led to greater economic independence and social autonomy for young women, particularly in urban areas (D'Emilio and Freedman 1997:173). As they gained greater entry into the public world of paid labor, many young women began to assert control over their personal lives, resisting familial control of their sexuality. Causing much concern on the part of parents, progressive reformers, and journalists, these young, working-class women frequented the thriving commercial amusements in urban areas in search of adventure and fun, which sometimes involved sexual activity (Odem 1995:2). Together with young women's increased independence, this shift in courting to commercial spaces from neighborhood or family settings facilitated sexual experimentation among youth (Clement 2006:15).

This shift can be seen in data about the rates of premarital sex from the period between

1900 and WWI. Thirteen point five percent of young white women reported having sex before marriage in the years between 1900 and 1910. This number nearly doubled to 26% during the nineteen-teens, and doubled again to around 50% in the 1920s (Clement 2006:17). The trend toward having sex before marriage was part of a steady change in sexual behaviors that led to the changed sexual culture of the 1920s. However, these increased rates of premarital sex do not necessarily indicate an acceptance of promiscuous sexuality. Most of the women reported having sex with their fiancés, so for many young women sexuality was still restrained to committed relationships. There were also class-based differences in rates of premarital sex, with working-class women being more likely to report premarital sexual experiences than middle-class or elite women (Clement 2006:17). This reflects a common assumption in many working-class families that engaged couples would have sex before marriage, provided that the couple would marry if a pregnancy occurred (Clement 2006:14). However, as familial control over youth diminished and large urban areas provided less community control, this pressure to marry became difficult to enforce in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

While working-class parents often expected their daughters to restrict sexuality to marriage or engagement, many young women developed very different standards about sexual behavior among their peer groups. Beginning in the 1890s, the practice of “treating” emerged among working-class youth. Desiring to participate in new commercial amusements but lacking disposable income, young women exchanged sexual favors for the cost of a night out on the town, an item of clothing, or some other small gift (Clement 2006:45; Meyerowitz 1988; Peiss 1986). Treating girls, also known as “charity girls,” distinguished themselves from prostitutes in that they did not generally accept money, only “treats.” They developed their own moral codes about the morality and respectability of treating, positioning themselves as modern women just

out for a good time (Clement 2006:47). The practice of treating became more common among the working-class in the nineteen-teens and paved the way for the larger changes in sexual and dating behavior that took place during WWI and in the 1920s.

The disruptive influence of WWI and the booming economic times of the 1920s accelerated these shifts in sexual behavior. Social commentators, politicians, and an older generation steeped in Victorian morality worried about “petting,” divorce, and the extraordinary sexual and social freedom enjoyed by the youth of the sensuous Jazz Age (Brandt 1985:126-128; D'Emilio and Freedman 1997:260; Reay 2014:6). Kinsey's survey of sexual behavior found a 12.2% jump in the rate of women reporting that they had premarital sex with someone that they did not marry between those who had dated in the 1920s and the 1910s. Forty percent of women dating in the 1920s reported having sex with the men that they would marry, 27.2% reported having sex with other men, and 43% reported petting before the age of 16 (Clement 2006:225). Floyd Dell's 1931 article in *Parents' Magazine*, titled “Why They Pet,” sought to reassure parents that some sexual experimentation was a normal and healthy part of adolescent sexual development (Clement 2006:228-229). Amidst all of these changes, one thing was clear: regardless of whether it was considered respectable or not, by the end of the 1930s a whole generation of youth had grown up with substantially more premarital sexual experience than their parents (Reay 2014).

At the same time, ideas about sexuality within marriage were also changing. Male and *female* sexual pleasure came to be seen as an important and respected component of modern “companionate” marriages, indicating a growing acknowledgement of women's sexual desires (Carter 2007; Coontz 2006; D'Emilio and Freedman 1997:265-267; Odem 1995:188-189). While birth control was still quite controversial in the early 1920s, by 1938 a *Ladies Home*

*Journal* poll found that 79% of American women approved of contraceptives (D'Emilio and Freedman 1997:242-248). Overall, this time period saw many patterns of modern sexual behavior become mainstream: a separation of sex from procreation, the principle that sexual pleasure was important for men and women, the centrality of sexuality to identity, and the idea that sexual experimentation in youth was a normal and healthy part of development (D'Emilio and Freedman 1997:241).

Class relations profoundly shaped these changes in sexuality. In the 1920s, the working-class practice of treating became a part of the modern dating culture of middle-class youth. It was the fact that white, middle-class youth, steeped in the individualistic consumer culture of 1920s America, embraced this new version of sexuality that was particularly problematic for social commentators at the time (Carter 2007:136-137; D'Emilio and Freedman 1997:233-241). At the same time that sexual behaviors were changing, though, so too were the cultural discourses that linked sexuality, gender, and respectability. While the older ideology of the Victorian “lady” linked chastity, self-restraint, domesticity, and moral superiority with middle-class femininity (Allan 2009), the ideology of romantic love, becoming prominent in the 1920s, offered a discourse that allowed women to be sexual so long as they were in a romantic relationship. These dominant discourses that linked respectability, sexuality, and gender operated in class-specific ways. Haag (1992) argues that middle-class women who were sexually active outside of marriage were still able to claim a respectable status by framing their sexual relationships as being motivated by love. This legitimizing discourse was not readily available to working-class women, who were characterized by journalists and anti-vice activists as being driven by physical desire or commercial interests (Haag 1992). While Clement (2006) found that many working-class couples also used the language of love to justify their sexual

activity, the fact remains that working-class people did not have the symbolic power to determine the public image of working-class sexuality (Clement 2006:224). These discourses linked respectability, sexuality, and gender in ways that allowed only certain groups of women to claim a respectable sexuality.

At the broader level, emerging discourses about love, “normal” sexuality, and civilization served to not only deny certain women access to respectability, but to solidify boundaries between racial and class groups as well. Carter (2007) builds on the prior work of Bederman (1995) to argue that emerging discourses about sexuality between 1880-1940 associated Whiteness with modern sexuality in ways that masked White privilege and characterized the sexuality of minority racial groups as being indicative of their more “primitive” status. Positioning discourses about sexuality within larger cultural discourses about evolution and eugenics, Carter highlights how discussions of sexuality connect with other social boundaries. It is within this context of changing sexual behaviors and definitions of respectable sexuality that Chapter 205 emerged as official state policy in Kansas.

### **The Origins the Social Hygiene Movement**

These changes in sexual culture did not enter into American culture without controversy and concern. Progressive reformers from a variety of backgrounds viewed these changes in sexual culture and behaviors with grave concern. Whether they focused on “white slavery,” anti-prostitution, or the prevalence of venereal disease, progressive reformers viewed the combination of old vices like prostitution with new sexual mores that permitted more sexual experimentation among youth as a dangerous mix.

One such reform mission with implications for the purpose of this study is the Social Hygiene Movement, which focused on controlling venereal disease. Beginning with the activism

of New York physician Prince Morrow in the early 1900s, the movement really gained momentum, and financial backing, with the formation of the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA) in 1913 (D'Emilio and Freedman 1997:204). With generous funding from John D. Rockefeller, Jr., ASHA sought to take a modern, scientific approach to the problem of venereal disease through scientific study and planned social actions (Brandt 1985:38). Two different groups of advocates united in this organization: the female moral purity reformers who railed against the sexual double standard and prostitution, and the male public health professionals who were concerned about fighting venereal disease. For the female reformers, challenging the sexual double standard was a key step in the fight to gain equality between the sexes (Luker 1998:608). For the male medical professionals, controlling prostitution was the most efficient means of reducing the rates of venereal disease. Though their motives differed, in the nineteen-teens these two groups agreed on the strategy of aggressively fighting prostitution and advocating for sex education. Though the movement would not be fully tested until WWI, it was fairly effective in the 1910s. ASHA was successful in making public discussions of sexuality and venereal disease more common, as evidenced by the finding of a 1922 U.S. Bureau of Education study that found that 46.6% of secondary schools offered some type of sex education program (Brandt 1985:30-31). However, this increasingly public presence of sex had mixed results in terms of the sexual morality imagined by social hygienists.

ASHA faced steep resistance to such public discussions of sexuality and venereal disease. When the *Ladies Home Journal* published a series on venereal disease in 1906, they lost 75,000 outraged subscribers (D'Emilio and Freedman 1997:207). Venereal disease was a taboo topic for many in society, including those in the medical profession. Many doctors and hospitals refused to treat people with venereal disease, and some even hid the diagnosis from patients in an effort



to protect their reputation (Brandt 1985:23, 43). On the eve of WWI, many people viewed venereal disease as a just punishment for sexual indiscretions and questioned the legitimacy and moral implications of even treating the diseases. Venereal disease was an aversion to sin, and as such was not something that was a proper matter in which reformers should be trying to intervene (Brandt 1985:46).

## Venereal Disease before WWI

### *Treatment Options*

Though the social hygiene movement pushed for more awareness and treatment of venereal disease, they were in many ways ahead of the science in the area. Particularly because of the stigma associated with researching venereal disease pathology and treatments, medical understanding of venereal disease was still in its rudimentary phases in the first two decades of the twentieth century. To start with, gonorrhea and syphilis were difficult to diagnose given the medical understanding and lab techniques of the period. While German scientists discovered new diagnostic tests for syphilis and gonorrhea between 1905 and 1910, few doctors had access to the types of laboratory facilities that could make good use of these tests (Brandt 1985:40). In the absence of reliable, accessible testing, doctors often relied on “social factors,” such as whether the woman engaged in prostitution, in their diagnoses as well (Brandt 1985:13; Clement 2006:121). In other words, if a woman’s tests came back positive, she was assumed to have venereal disease, but if it came back negative and her lifestyle was not fitting with middle-class notions of respectability, she also might be diagnosed with venereal disease. This subjective nature of venereal disease diagnosis created a challenge for public health officials and social hygiene reformers who sought to raise alarm about the dangers of venereal disease by citing the prevalence of the diseases. This led to wildly varying figures about the rates of venereal

infection, with Prince Morrow claiming that 80% of New York City men had at some point had gonorrhea in 1901 and the Army reporting that 20% of new admissions had a venereal disease in 1909 (Brandt 1985:13). While some of the claims were purposely exaggerated for the point of making publicity, they also reflect the fact that there were no clear-cut ways of diagnosing who did and did not have a disease.

Scientific knowledge about how to treat syphilis and gonorrhea was also inadequate. The general reluctance of many doctors to even treat venereal disease cases and a lack of regulation on popular medicines led to a thriving market in popular remedies for venereal disease sold through magazines (Brandt 1985:23). Generally ineffective, these popular remedies were oftentimes no worse than what the latest medical knowledge could offer patients in the early 1900s. While there was a growing understanding of the pathology of venereal disease, there really were not any effective treatment available. The most common treatment for syphilis during this period was mercury, a cure that was often worse than the disease that could cause sometimes fatal liver and kidney damage (Brandt 1985:10-12; Rafter 1985:218). In 1909, the first effective treatment for syphilis was discovered. Called Salvarsan, “606,” or arsphenamine, the drug was not without its complications. Its high toxicity frequently led to nausea, vomiting, headaches, and open sores around the area of injection; doctors attributed a total of 109 deaths to the drug by 1914. It was also difficult to administer, requiring intravenous injections over a period of a year. Though Salvarsan eventually became the standard of care, mercury remained in common use until the 1920s (Brandt 1985:40-41; Zipf 2012:296). Due to the painful, expensive, and lengthy treatment process, many patients stopped receiving treatments once their physical symptoms were relieved, even though they were still capable of transmitting the disease to others. Many clinics reported that fewer than 10 to 15 percent of their patients were fully cured

and noninfectious at the time of stopping treatment in the early nineteen-teens (Luker 1998:612). This general lack of effectiveness of the medical treatments available during this period was part of the reason that the social hygiene movement was so adamant about fighting immorality and prostitution: since the cure was not guaranteed, prevention was viewed as the best way to fight venereal disease.

### *Making Venereal Disease Respectable: Narratives of Venereal Disease Contraction*

#### *Asexual Contraction of Venereal Disease*

Further indications of the gap between scientific understandings of venereal disease and popular beliefs can be seen through the common narrative that venereal disease could be contracted asexually. Between the late 1800s and the eve of WWI, doctors repeatedly claimed that public drinking cups, towels, public restrooms, and toothbrushes were common means of transmitting venereal infections. Many doctors claimed that they themselves had contracted a venereal disease from a patient. By asserting that people could contract venereal disease non-sexually, these public health officials and doctors offered people with venereal disease a respectable narrative by which they could account for their contraction of the disease. These professionals hoped that this would not only make people more likely to seek treatment for venereal disease, but would also bolster their own public image, since people often blamed doctors who treated venereal disease for condoning immoral behavior (Brandt 1985:20-22). As late as 1922, a Kansas Board of Health bulletin repeated these national claims that venereal diseases could be spread non-sexually:

They may, however, be innocently contracted through kissing or drinking after infected persons, from public toilets, toilet paper, chains or handles of the various types of toilet flush, public towels, etc. This rarely occurs, fortunately, since these germs die very quickly on exposure to light and air. Still everyone should be extremely careful to avoid touching anything which may have recently been contaminated. (Bulletin 1922:10)

While claims of non-sexual contraction served to bolster the respectability of those infected with the disease and those doctors who treated it, they also reflected a growing anxiety among middle-class residents of urban areas about increased rates of interactions with immigrants and poor people. By claiming that diseases could be spread asexually, the danger of venereal disease became a danger to everyone, not only those people who failed to subscribe to middle-class standards of respectable sexual behavior (Brandt 1985:20-21).

### *Prostitutes to Innocent Wives*

Another common narrative of venereal disease contraction before WWI was more grounded in fact, though not without its exaggerations and inherent social agendas. Female reformers and social hygienists traced the spread of venereal disease from prostitutes to philandering husbands, and finally to the innocent wives and children of these supposedly upstanding men. Inherent in this understanding of the spread of venereal disease was a critique of the sexual double standard. Prince Morrow blamed “male unchastity” for the problem of venereal disease in the early 1900s, and female reformers continually pointed to male sexual excess as the source of the spread of disease (D’Emilio and Freedman 1997:204). This critique of the sexual double standards partially came from the diverging sexual experiences of men and women during this period. While middle-class women were more likely to adopt Victorian values of self-restraint concerning sex, men were participating in the thriving prostitution industry (D’Emilio and Freedman 1997:183). This understanding of the spread of venereal disease was also based upon assumptions about the asexuality of “good” women and the strict division between “good” women and “fallen” women. For prostitutes and unfaithful husbands, venereal disease was commonly understood as a just punishment for their sexual indiscretions.

An innocent wife getting infected through no fault of her own, however, was cause for major social concern. Physicians across the country worried about “venereal *insontium*,” or the innocent getting infected, and publicly lamented men’s sexual excesses that led to this condition (Brandt 1985:9). This division between “good” and “bad” women informed the growing understanding of epidemiology as well, completely ignoring the changes in working-class sexual culture and treating that blurred these distinctions (Brandt 1985:31). The assumptions that lay beneath this understanding of venereal disease contagion—the critique of the sexual double standard and the strict division between good and bad women—came into full public view as the nation found itself being plunged into world war.

### **WWI and the Fight against Venereal Disease**

U.S. entrance into World War I catapulted venereal disease into a national, high-stakes issue. No longer just about sexual morality or the sexual double standard, the topic of venereal disease took on the status of a factor in the victory or failure of the American war machine. Even before the US officially declared war on April 2, 1917, military officials and civilian activists worried about the impact of venereal disease on the fighting power of the American military. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, fully 1/3 of lost manpower days in the U.S. military resulted from soldiers being treated for venereal disease (Clement 2006:117). Somewhere between a quarter and a third of all troops came to the military during WWI already infected, reflecting high rates of venereal disease among the civilian population (Clement 2006:124). Other soldiers contracted a disease while serving in the army. Regardless of the source of the disease, military officials increasingly framed the problem of venereal disease as one of military efficiency and national security, not a question of morality.

### **Treating Venereal Disease in the Armed Forces**

Even before the US officially declared war, the military took the problem of venereal disease control seriously, embroiling itself in the debates about sexual morality that infused the Social Hygiene movement in the nineteen-teens. Overall, the military sought to address venereal disease in a rational, systematic way, hoping to skirt the issue of morality and instead focus on the outcome of the war. However, that is not to say debates about morality were absent from the government's campaign: the military refused to hand out condoms to soldiers on a large scale to prevent contraction of disease due to fears about promoting sexual immorality. In fact, when the American Expeditionary Force eventually provided chemical treatments for soldiers *after* they had been exposed to venereal disease, there was a public outcry that the military was enforcing a system of regulated prostitution. Once they had ruled out prevention, the military espoused two primary strategies to combat venereal disease among the troops: education and repression.

### *Educational Measures to Control Venereal Disease*

The military's official campaign against venereal disease kicked off when Secretary of War Newton Baker created the Commission on Training Camp Activities (CTCA) on April 17, 1917. Designed to protect American doughboys from the dual threats of vice and venereal disease, the CTCA sought to create a wholesome experience for troops while training in the US and prepare them to resist temptations, both at home and overseas. Secretary Baker appointed New York anti-vice reformer Raymond Fosdick to head up the CTCA, setting up the organization to take on a truly Progressive tenor. Fosdick drew heavily from the ranks of the American Social Hygiene Association to staff the CTCA, giving reformers official government legitimacy and resources to ramp up their campaign against sexual immorality and venereal disease. Through a program that combined educational campaigns, wholesome distractions, and repressive measures, they hoped to dissuade soldiers from visiting prostitutes (Brandt 1985:59-

66; Clement 2006:117). Through these efforts, the military constructed narratives about gender, venereal disease, and sexuality.

### Constructing Masculinity: Protective Masculinity & Being “Fit to Fight”

The educational campaign launched by the CTCA offered different versions of masculinity in order to convince men of the value of chastity and the virtue in abstaining from sexual relations during the war. In doing so, the CTCA challenged popular assumptions, both within the military and the general public, that men required sexual activity to be healthy. This view was particularly associated with military men, as the virility and strength needed on the battlefield has historically been associated with men’s need for sex. Instead, the CTCA argued that the men in uniform could, and should, lead chaste lives while in the service. This challenge to the sexual double standard in part reflects the influx of female social reformers into the ranks of the CTCA; their arguments about the value of sexual purity for men and women found voice through the CTCA. To make this argument, the CTCA constructed new visions of masculinity: that of the man willing to sacrifice all to fight for his country, and that of the honorable man who would protect the dignity of all (good) women.

The first of these constructions of masculinity portrayed a man’s abstaining from sex as part of his service to his country and a necessary component of his efforts to help his country win the war. Drawing upon the military’s approach to venereal disease that downplayed the morality of sex and highlighted the effect of venereal disease on the fighting power of the US military, this message emphasized a soldier’s responsibility to keep his body clean and ready to engage in battle. For example, this 1918 poster produced by the American Social Hygiene Association frames chastity in terms of military efficiency:

# EFFICIENCY?

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**SECRETARY DANIELS** reported:

"During 1916 (when the Navy was one-fourth its present size) there was in the Navy a daily average of 416 men disabled because of venereal diseases,

"Add to this the number of men necessary to care for them and we have enough men on the non-effective list to man a modern battleship."



*She was Built to FIGHT*  
**Keep Her Fit and Fully Manned**

Figure 1: Source: (Clement 2006:123).



In this poster, the morality of illicit sex is ignored, framing the contraction of venereal disease solely as an issue of military efficiency. The military urged soldiers to be chaste, not only because it was the “right” thing to do, but because it was part of their military service to keep their bodies ready for combat. A 1918 lecture delivered to soldiers across the country stated:

A venereal disease contracted after deliberate exposure through intercourse with a prostitute is as much of a disgrace as showing the white feather...A soldier in the hospital with a venereal disease is a slacker...You lessen the man-power of your company and throw extra burdens on your comrades. You are a moral shirker. (Brandt 1985:66)

Under this framing of the contraction of venereal disease, men were obligated to stay chaste for the sake of the military effort. This logic culminated in the production of a feature-length film titled *Fit to Fight*, in which many of the characters contracted syphilis and gonorrhea and were forced to sit out the war. Along with other lecture materials, this film projected a version of virile, chaste masculinity, modeled along similar lines as popular cultural icon Teddy Roosevelt. A “real” man could be aggressive on the battlefield without being aggressive sexually.

Another argument that the CTCA put forth in its educational materials was that men needed to stay chaste in order to protect the chastity of “pure” women. Creating a clear distinction between “loose” prostitutes and the good women who were soldiers’ sisters and mothers, the military urged men to be chaste in order to protect the “good” women of America. These WWI-era military posters illustrate this effort to appeal to men’s desire to protect the chastity of “good” women:

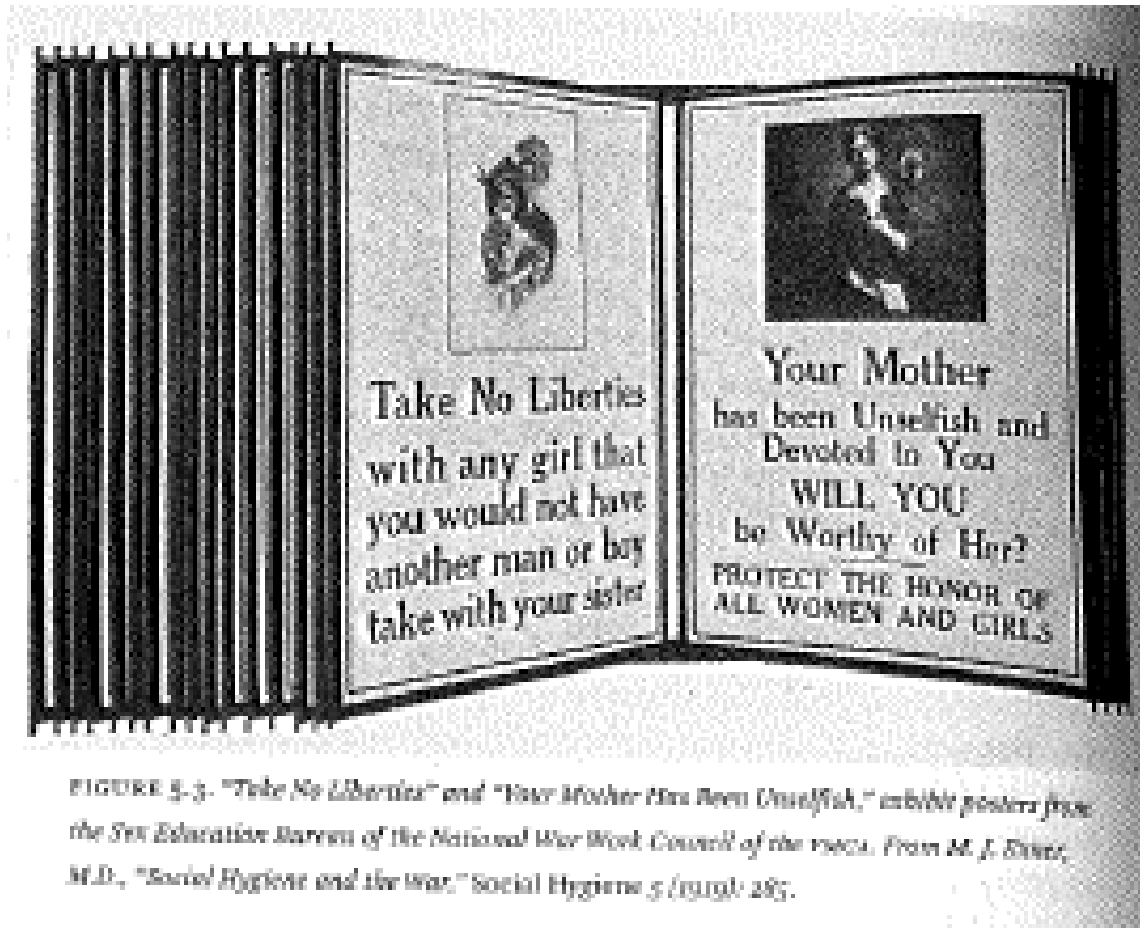


FIGURE 3-3. "Take No Liberties" and "Your Mother Has Been Unselfish," exhibit posters from the Sex Education Bureau of the National War Work Council of the YWCA. From M. J. Davis, M.D., "Social Hygiene and the War," *Social Hygiene* 5 (1919): 285.

Figure 2: Source: (Clement 2006:156).

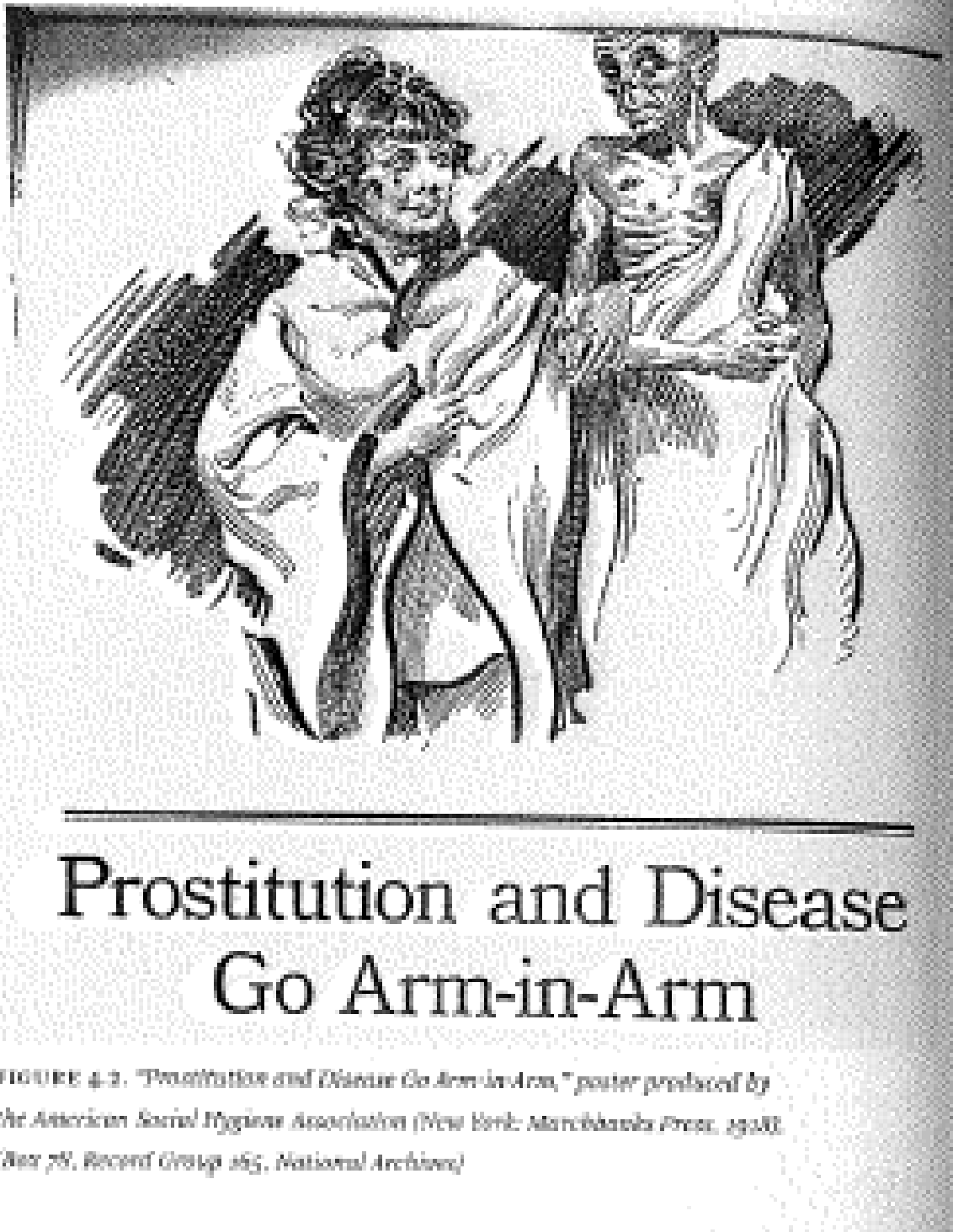
Similar to the message that men should be chaste in order to advance the military efforts, this message about venereal disease urged soldiers to be chaste in order to serve a larger good: protecting the value of female chastity. Lectures delivered to soldiers during the war warned soldiers:

The man who seduces a girl is committing the gravest possible wrong against her. It may be that this act will entail consequences that would make all her friends and her family say,—"better had she been on the ill-fated *Lusitania* and gone down to the depths of the sea than that this fate had befallen her." (Brandt 1985:67)

With such dire warnings about the effect of illicit sex on a woman's reputation, what right-thinking man would want to inflict this harm on someone's sister? The war department asked men to be manly by staying chaste in order to protect the good women in the U.S. (Clement 2006:155).

### Prostitutes as Vectors of Disease

Besides constructing masculinity around notions of national service and protection of innocent women, the military also tried to dissuade soldiers from having sex by warning them about the dangers of prostitutes. The CTCA portrayed prostitutes as an enemy to the war effort and the American home, and a sure-fire way for a soldier to contract a venereal disease (Brandt 1985:67). The CTCA pamphlet *Keeping Fit to Fight* warned soldiers: “WOMEN WHO SOLICIT SOLDIERS FOR IMMORAL PURPOSES ARE USUALLY DISEASE SPREADERS AND FRIENDS OF THE ENEMY” (Brandt 1985:67). Social hygiene activists working through the CTCA highlighted the association between prostitutes and venereal disease, such as in this WWI poster:



*Figure 3: Source: (Clement 2006:124).*

Educational materials claimed extraordinarily high rates of infection among prostitutes, with one pamphlet claiming that as many as 96% of prostitutes carried a disease (Clement 2006:122).

While other sources claimed the rate among prostitutes to be closer to 20%, it is likely that

prostitutes did carry venereal diseases at a higher rate than did the general population.

Despite the reality of higher rates of infection, this emphasis on the disease-spreading capacity of prostitutes carried important symbolic meaning. Prostitutes became the emblem for the spread of venereal disease, envisioned as vectors of disease. Two aspects of this narrative of prostitutes as vectors of disease are important: first, it reinforced the distinction cited above about the difference between “good” women and “bad” women; second, it created a system in which the troops were portrayed as the innocent victims of prostitutes rather than the perpetrators of their contraction of venereal disease. As thousands of young men left their homes for military bases, parents and social reformers worried about the military’s effect on their “boys” moral development. Much of the CTCA’s activities were premised on soldiers’ sexual innocence and susceptibility to negative influences, which largely ignored the high rates of venereal infection among inducted troops that indicated prior sexual experience. Nevertheless, this led to efforts to protect soldiers from prostitutes, with little acknowledgment that men were often the ones seeking out the prostitutes. As Clement (2006) argues,

Constructing narratives about the evils of prostitution, the moral depravity of prostitutes themselves, and the innocence of the “boys” in uniform, middle-class vice reformers employed by the War Department sought to penalize prostitutes while maintaining the virtue of those men who bought their services. (115)

Through this narrative, prostitutes spread immorality and disease throughout the country, and it was through them that the “good” women would contract a disease when their philandering husbands returned from war. At the close of the war, military officials worried about the diseases that soldiers would bring back into American homes as they returned from war in Europe, detaining soldiers with venereal disease overseas until they were deemed noninfectious. This construction of venereal disease highlighted the role of the prostitute, who spread disease to innocent soldiers that she tricked into having sex with her, and through them infected the

innocent wives and children of American homes. Taking away the culpability of the men's actions themselves, this narrative portrayed prostitutes as the ultimate vectors of disease, providing a very gendered view of disease transmission that placed the blame squarely on "loose" women's shoulders (Clement 2006:117).

### *Effects of Educational Campaigns*

Together, these educational campaigns had mixed effects on soldiers' behavior and the spread of venereal disease. On one hand, the overwhelming emphasis on chastity promoted by the military was a radical departure from common understandings of men's sexual needs and directly challenged the sexual double standard. As Luker (1998) points out:

In promoting the single standard to the recruits, the government distributed over a million pamphlets; gave over 775,000 men these approved lectures, complete with film strips and "steromotographs" (automated slide shows); and commissioned a film, "Fit to Fight," seen by 50,000 men. Even assuming that some men were exposed to more than one medium of persuasion, somewhere between one third and two thirds of a total of approximately 2.8 million draftees were exposed to this revolutionary message of sexual equality. (618)

However, just because the government promoted this message does not mean that soldiers were receptive to the idea of a whole-hearted commitment to sexual chastity during the war. High rates of venereal contraction among soldiers and an explosion of prostitution around military bases indicated that many soldiers failed to take the message to heart. The minimal success of educational efforts led to the CTCA's second major approach to tackling venereal disease: repression.

### *Repressive Measures to Control Venereal Disease*

Though the CTCA began with the idea of preventing the soldiers' contraction of venereal disease through education, they soon turned to shutting down red light districts surrounding

military bases and incarcerating women suspected of carrying venereal disease. If they could not convince men to refrain from having sex with women, the next best option seemed to be to remove the women. In designing their campaign to shut down prostitution, however, military officials had to confront a changing sexual landscape that resisted their categorization of women into “good” and “bad.”

The most immediate concern for the military was shutting down the many red light districts across the country that were within easy reach of military bases. With the weight of the federal government behind them, the CTCA got to work closing down red light districts across the country, claiming to have closed 110 such districts by the end of the war (Brandt 1985:77). Instrumental to their efforts were new laws that broadened the legal definition of prostitution and made it easier to incarcerate women suspected of immoral behavior. The ASHA pushed 10 states to adopt their model law against prostitution word for word, and another 32 to adopt it in part.

The law stated:

Prostitution should be defined to include the giving or receiving of the body, for hire, or the giving or receiving of the body for indiscriminate sexual intercourse, without hire. (Luker 1998:614)

Under this very generous definition of prostitution, nearly any person suspected of indecent behavior could be charged, equipping local and federal authorities with unprecedented power to intervene in Americans’ sex lives.

Even more far-reaching than these new prostitution laws were regulations released regarding venereal disease. In early 1918, the Law Enforcement Division of the CTCA adopted a policy of “compulsory physical examination, detention, and quarantine of women suspected of harboring a venereal disease infection” (Odem 1995:124) and began urging states to pass local laws and implement them (Brandt 1985:85). By March 1918, 32 states had enacted similar

measures, including the state of Kansas. Thus, the federal government urged states to detain women who were even *suspected* of having venereal disease, giving local officials broad authority to legally intervene in a variety of scenarios that previously would have been private matters. With the passage of the Chamberlain-Kahn Act on July 9, 1918, which authorized the detention of unaccompanied women surrounding military bases for compulsory physical examinations and provided funding for venereal-disease control programs, this policy gained new legitimacy (Zipf 2012:281). The U.S. Attorney General issued directives justifying the detainment of women for venereal disease and encouraging states to suspend trials until the results from venereal tests came in (Brandt 1985:85-86).

With this federal push to incarcerate women suspected of prostitution or having venereal disease came the obvious quandary of what to do with them. Many states lacked separate facilities for female prisoners, and few had the resources to detain the estimated 30,000 women who were arrested during the 27 months that the US was embroiled in world war. For women detained for venereal disease, the facility problem was even more acute, as only eight states had facilities that could house and properly care for women with venereal disease in 1918 (Brandt 1985:88). Particularly for first-time offenders, this lack of facilities led to probation, but the approximately 18,000 women who were imprisoned posed a serious logistical challenge to state penal systems. Just as they had pushed states to enact these new laws, the federal government provided financial backing to states in order to establish and expand women's correctional facilities. Between April 1918 and July 1920, the federal government gave states a total of \$427,089 for women's prisons, establishing 27 new correctional facilities and reformatories and expanding on another 16 (Freedman 1981:147; Odem 1995:126). Of these interned women, more than two-thirds reported that they had had sex with a sailor or soldier (Brandt 1985:90).



Though women convicted of other offenses (such as prostitution or vagrancy) had varying terms, women detained under venereal disease measures were usually held until deemed non-infectious, averaging around 10 weeks (Brandt 1985:89). While some younger women tried to escape, seasoned prostitutes were generally more aware of the health risks of their diseases and stayed until deemed non-infectious (Brandt 1985:90).

Military officials had hoped that by closing down the red light districts they could halt the spread of venereal disease, but they found that another class of women was having sex with soldiers: the charity girl. The practice of treating became more widespread as the war got underway, bringing with it new levels of publicity. What government officials found particularly problematic about the “girl problem” was that it involved women from respectable middle-class families. Treating was no longer a phenomenon of the poor and working class; it was encroaching on middle-class sexual norms. Seen as being driven by misguided patriotism and a sense of romance about the men in uniform, wartime treating caused great concern for government officials. One CTCA social worker commented:

The peculiar charm and glamour which surrounds the man in uniform causes an unusual type of prostitute to spring up in time of war. Girls idealize the soldier and many really feel that nothing is wrong when done for him. One such girl said she had never sold herself to a civilian but felt she was doing her bit when she had been with eight soldiers in a night. (Brandt 1985:81)

Sometimes called “patriotic prostitutes,” military officials had difficulty categorizing women who were not prostitutes, yet willingly had sex with men outside of marriage. Partially, this reflects the widespread assumption that any premarital sexual activity led women down the road to prostitution. It also reflects the fact that treating was a commercial practice, even if money itself was not exchanged. Whether they understood treating as a form of prostitution or a temporary abnormality caused by the emotions of wartime, the CTCA took the treating girl

seriously and sought to prevent her moral downfall. In 1917, Fosdick created the Committee on Protective Work for Girls, enlisting social workers to convince young girls to direct their patriotic urges in more productive directions. This Committee viewed wartime charity girls as a group of young women who were in need of protection, both from their own lustful urgings and the misguided peer influences that encouraged a different version of sexual morality (Brandt 1985:81). Unlike prostitutes, who were a menace to society, charity girls were basically “good” girls who were swept up in the moment. If they were to avoid the path to prostitution, they needed the government’s help and guidance. However, social workers with the CTCA met with limited success in convincing young women of the value of chastity and the inherent danger of sexual relationships (Clement 2006:170).

### **Venereal Disease Control in Kansas**

These national anxieties about war, morality, and venereal disease found a home in Kansas as well. A report from the Kansas State Board of Administration lamented the changes in Kansas following the disruptions of World War:

The general unsettlement of the habits of life; the false standards of living and the extravagant tastes that have resulted from higher wages and the passion for show; the mistaken notions about work and the mad desire to get something for nothing—these are some of the influences that are leading people to violate the rights of property, the rights of personal virtue, and the rights of human life, which are the three fundamental factors entering into all crime. (Administration 1920: Xxiii)

These perceived changes in culture and morals provided justification for the incarceration of women convicted of no other crime than having a venereal disease. Through a series of legal changes at the state level, the intervention of the national government, and the efforts of local government and public health officials, the Women’s Industrial Farm emerged as one of the premier women’s prisons in the country, with a population consisting mostly of women charged with having a venereal disease.

### *Kansas Legal Changes*

#### **Establishing the Women's Industrial Farm**

The first legal change to impact wartime venereal disease control in Kansas actually had very little to do with the military or venereal disease. On March 8, 1917, the final version of the bill creating the Women's Industrial Farm passed the Kansas Senate following a lobbying campaign from the leading women's groups in the state (for more details, see CH 4) (George 1917:609; Miller 1917). Though the passage of the bill coincided with the United States' entrance into WWI, this was a bill for which the Kansas Council of Women had been lobbying for several years, and the initial motivations were far removed from the worries of war. Rather, these women lobbied for the prison as part of a national progressive reform movement to establish separate women's prison facilities. With the passage of the bill creating the WIF, Kansas became the seventh state in the country to have a separate women's prison (Freedman 1981:144-145). While the Women's Industrial Farm officially opened as a separate institution in the spring of 1917, other legislative changes were brewing that would dramatically increase the population at the Farm (Garrett 1929; Sherbon 1931).



*Figure 4: Inmates sitting outside of one of the original buildings of the WIF, date unknown (between 1916-1930) (Kansas Memory:229150).*

#### Chapter 205

At the same time that the legislation establishing the WIF was being considered in the Kansas legislature, another bill was under consideration that would have huge implications for venereal disease, sexuality, and social control in Kansas in the following decades. Chapter 205 (Senate bill No. 135) was a regulation that allotted the Board of Health broad powers to make rules regarding health policies in the state, including the right to quarantine people considered at risk of spreading disease. The Senate overwhelmingly passed a version of the bill sponsored by

Senator Milligan that gave the Board of Health the authority to determine which diseases were eligible for quarantine on January 31, with 35 senators voting for the measure, zero opposing, and five not voting (George 1917:145). The House first considered a different version of the bill in early February that contained a set list of diseases for which the Board of Health could quarantine people. Local newspapers reported that legislators “laugh[ed the] measure to death” and expressed concern about the effect on personal liberties of such a bill (February 20, 1917:1). However, the Senate’s version of the bill was again taken up in the House on February 20 and was passed, though with considerably more resistance than it faced in the Senate. The *Topeka Capitol* mockingly commented that

Senator Milligan’s board of health measure, allowing the State Board of Health to list contagious and infectious diseases, and make and enforce quarantine regulations for controlling these, was passed by the House on final roll call yesterday morning, in spite of the vociferous protests of Holland, of Russell, who declared his personal liberties were being trampled under foot. This measure gives to the board the power to do what the house a few weeks ago refused to do itself, largely because the members couldn’t pronounce nor understand a long list of medical terms. The bill passed with only a few votes to spare. (February 21, 1917:5)

With 68 votes for, 45 against, and 12 not voting, the measure survived the vehement concerns of a few house members about the broad powers Chapter 205 afforded the Board of Health (Miller 1917:471). Thus, while there was some resistance from the House, Chapter 205 went to Governor Capper for his signature on February 27, 1917, all with little public mention of venereal disease or the impending public health crises of wartime (George 1917:419). Kansas was not alone in passing such legislation during this period: 32 states had laws allowing state health departments to quarantine people suspected of having venereal disease by 1918 (Luker 1998:623).

*The Campaign against Venereal Disease in Kansas*

By the end of WWI, state authorities were utilizing Chapter 205 to quarantine women suspected of having venereal disease across the state. In June of 1917, the state Board of Health issued regulations requiring all cases of venereal disease be reported to state authorities. In September, they created extra cantonment zones around the military bases in the state, including Fort Leavenworth and Fort Riley. On November 2, 1917, the Board of Health issued orders that people found within these cantonment zones with venereal disease be quarantined. In March, 1918, these quarantine orders were extended to the entire state (Health 1920:336).



*Figure 5: An inmate who would have been arrested during the first year of the WIF's opening (KSHS).*

These actions by the State Board of Health were the result of federal pressure to contain the venereal disease problem among the armed forces in Kansas. In the spring of 1918, both the Surgeon General and the War Department assigned staff to the Kansas State Board of Health to assist in venereal disease control during the war (Health 1918:77). Along with the Secretary of the State Board of Health, S.J. Crumbine, Lieutenant Charles Shelton and Captain Millard Knowlton took charge of the Venereal Disease Division of the Board of Health. This group's first priority was to ensure

that the areas immediately surrounding military bases were free of disease. As Crumbine later reported:

In order to get venereal disease under control, we assembled a special detail of reliable

men, pledging the police and county sheriffs as well to our campaign. So we soon rounded up a large number of suspected women and if questioning left little or no doubt that a woman was vicious, she was obliged to submit to examination. If infected, she was quarantined. (Crumbine 1948:222)

These officers used the authority of Chapter 205 to question, detain, and examine any such women suspected of being “vicious.” When released, women in particular “were warned to keep away from soldiers’ camps, under penalty of arrest and a jail sentence for prostitution or vagrancy” (Crumbine 1948:222).

Even after these efforts at cleaning up the areas immediately surrounding the military bases were in full force, military officials found that many soldiers continued to contract venereal disease, prompting the Board of Health to extend its efforts statewide. A medical officer at Camp Funston reported to Crumbine, who was charged by the Army to head a 6-state unit to control venereal disease in addition to his duties with the Kansas State Board of Health, that “soldiers were making their dangerous contact in” Kansas City, Missouri (Crumbine 1948:234). After finding that the police and courts were controlled by notoriously corrupt political boss Tom Pendergast, Crumbine visited “Boss Tom” directly and threatened to deny soldiers leave to Kansas City unless the conditions were improved. According to Crumbine, Pendergast remedied the situation within a week: “Instead of spreading disease among our young men, gilded women, their paint removed, were now crowding the city hospital where they were receiving treatment for venereal infection” (Crumbine 1948:237). This strategy of threatening to boycott soldiers from visiting cities and towns was repeated across the state: the Division of Venereal Disease pressured communities to adopt and enforce strict venereal disease control measures (Health 1920:16, 336).

With the mass arrest of people with venereal disease throughout the state came the obvious problem of where to put them. The number of men arrested was limited, given the

military's main priority of protecting the troops from contracting venereal disease through their associations with women. Those men who were quarantined under Chapter 205 were housed at the prison in Leavenworth. Due to their large number and the few facilities already in existence to house them, however, the large number of women detained by the state posed a much larger logistical issue. Lacking any facilities to house the large number of women they wanted to quarantine, the State Board of Health made arrangements with the Board of Administration to house quarantined women at the WIF (Health 1920:336). However, as of the spring of 1917, the WIF was not equipped to handle such a large number of inmates, particularly a population in need of medical attention. The Farm was temporarily housed in an old, 12-room farmhouse on property owned by the state penitentiary in Lansing until a permanent location could be found (Administration 1918:24; Aug 11, 1917). However, as the Board of Administration reported:

Soon after the establishment of the temporary home the war brought to us a new problem in connection with it. For the protection of the cantonments and against lewd women who flocked in from outside the state, the governmental authorities insisted that we retain the home in its temporary quarters, urging that its proximity to the Penitentiary was itself a deterrent to these women. We have felt that we could not do otherwise than comply with this request of the medical authorities of the government. (Administration 1918:24)

Despite this federal pressure to use the Lansing facility to house quarantined women, the building itself was grossly inadequate to accommodate the 400 women who were quarantined there under Chapter 205 by the end of 1917. In a matter of a few weeks in August, 1917, the population of the Farm went from 18 to more than 200 women (Newby 1921:20). See Figure 6 and Figure 7 for pictures of these early inmates. To accommodate these new inmates, the Board of Administration employed male prison labor to throw up temporary tar-paper shacks constructed from lumber harvested on site (Reed 1920). The federal government committed funds to the project as well, giving \$22,750 to "assist in the maintenance of these women" and



another \$3,000 to begin building a hospital by the end of June, 1918 (Administration 1918:25).<sup>15</sup> In a matter of months, the WIF was thus transformed from a small farmhouse housing fewer than 20 inmates to a full-fledged institution detaining hundreds of women at a time, primarily for the crime of having a sexually transmitted disease (Lekkerkerker 1931:118-119).



*Figure 6: (Kansas Memory:225835)*

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<sup>15</sup> President Wilson earmarked funds for women's reformatories throughout the country, ultimately electing to fund some state efforts to detain women after deciding that federally-funded and -operated women's reformatories would be too expensive (Zipf 2012:281).



*Figure 7: (Kansas Memory:225841)*

### **The Transition to a Peacetime Venereal Disease Control Policy**

The policy of incarcerating women in Kansas for having venereal disease was thus established during wartime, but as the war came to a close these policies continued into peacetime. At both the local and national level, social hygienists and boards of health saw an unprecedented investment in venereal disease control public health measures during the war and wished to carry forward this campaign after the war ended. In a 1920 report by the Kansas State Board of Health, Secretary Crumbine stated:

As formerly indicated, one of the most important gains of the World War was the well-planned and executed campaign against the spread of venereal disease. Inaugurated in the first instance as a measure to preserve the “man power” for war purposes, it has been continued during peace times because of the recognition that the widespread prevalence of venereal disease has attained such magnitude as to make it a race peril. (Health 1920:10)

Crumbine and others insisted that wartime policies “should be vigorously carried forward”

(Health 1920:10) during peacetime; this message also appeared in the small-town newspaper, the

*Baxter Springs News*, in 1919:

The venereal disease problem has been the most important health problem to be met in maintaining the efficiency of the Army. It is now the most important health problem to be solved and promoting the efficiency of civilian workers and protecting the health of women and children. Recognition of the tremendous importance of this problem has so revolutionized the attitude of the people toward it, that subjects heretofore not mentioned in the public prints are now being discusses freely and frankly in a manner undreamed of a few years ago. (1919c)

However, this enthusiasm for continuing the fight against venereal disease was not universal. In

a June 30, 1920 report, Field Agent C.A. Bantleon reported to the State Board of Health that he

had to work hard to convince local officials to do “their part in carrying on an effective and

efficient program” to control venereal disease in the state (Health 1920:349; see also Hill

1920:1505). He lamented,

It was found in the summer of 1919 there was a tendency on the part of the city officials to relax their efforts in combating venereal disease. Most of the officials at that time seemed to be of the opinion that the same efforts in combating venereal disease were not necessary, as the war was at an end and most of the soldiers returned to their homes. (Health 1920:349)

Thus, although there was not as widespread support for efforts to combat venereal disease as

there had been during the war, the state of Kansas continued to detain women under Chapter 205

in high numbers at the Women’s Industrial Farm.

The pattern of enforcing Chapter 205 along gendered lines was established during the

war and continued into peacetime. During the war, men found to be infected with venereal

disease in Kansas faced one of two outcomes: if they were in the military, they received

treatment within military hospitals; if they were not in the military, they faced the possibility of

internment at the State Penitentiary. Although the number of civilian men interned during the

war under Chapter 205 was never as high as the number of women, the State Board of Health did quarantine men in Kansas during the war. For example, the 1920 Biennial Report of the State Board of Health indicates that, in the year leading up to March, 1919, 410 women were quarantined at the WIF under Chapter 205 while 44 men were quarantined at the State Penitentiary (Health 1920:343). Similar to how the law functioned for women (see below), some sources indicate that Chapter 205 was used as a cover to arrest problematic men who were difficult to convict under other state laws. In his autobiography, Crumbine recalled

In dealing with the men who lived off the earnings of prostitutes, if you can call these white slavers men, we found that they were keeping their hold on these women in part by threatening to expose them to the military authorities. Officially, of course, this did not concern us. What did was their health, so when we caught these despicable racketeers, we had them examined. If they were infected, they were quarantined on the penitentiary grounds and treated. (Crumbine 1948:224)

While this quote reveals how Chapter 205 might have been used by pimps to control the women who worked with them, it also reveals that men involved in the sex trade were subject to quarantine under Chapter 205 during the war. However, the application of Chapter 205 to men died off in Kansas as the 1920s got underway. The Board of Administration discontinued the Men's Quarantine Camp at Lansing in August, 1921, influenced by a decline in state and federal funds for venereal disease clinics and the changing legal climate that made the quarantining of men, but not women, problematic (Health 1922:156).

### **Legal Challenges**

With the initial push from the federal government during the war to enact quarantine legislation across the country came a host of legal challenges to these policies. Attorney General T.W. Gregory worked with the CTCA to provide the legal rationale to states that supported mandatory inspections and reporting of venereal disease, as well as the right to suspend *habeas*

*corpus* while awaiting venereal disease test results. However, courts in some states ruled that suspending prosecution until the results of a venereal disease test came back was unconstitutional, effectively making many venereal-disease control laws ineffective (Brandt 1985:85-86; Freedman 1981:130). In other states, like Kansas, the constitutionality of such laws was upheld in the courts. However, the legal basis for these laws was much stronger for detaining women than for men due to new theories of reform and the solidifying of the legal basis to assign different punishments to men and women.

By 1920, the legal basis for separate punishments for men and women was solidifying, particularly due to a 1919 Kansas case, *State v. Heitman*. Building upon earlier court cases, such as the 1908 United States Supreme Court decision in *Muller v. Oregon*, that established the legal precedent that women and men were fundamentally different, the Kansas court endorsed the idea that the state could assign separate sentencing policies for men and women (Freedman 1981:148). Mrs. Heitman had appealed her indeterminate minimum sentence for a liquor violation, claiming that the separate sentencing guidelines for women violated her 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment rights. The court rejected her claims, arguing that

It required no anatomist, or physiologist, or psychologist or psychiatrist, to tell the legislature that women are different from men. [...] It was inevitable that, in the ages during which woman has been bearer of the race, her unique and absolutely personal experiences, from the time of conception to the time when developed offspring attains maturity, should react on personality, and produce what we understand to be embraced by the term womanhood. Woman enters spheres of sensation, perception, emotion, desire, knowledge, and experience, of an intensity and of a kind which man cannot know. Her individualities and peculiarities are fostered by education and by social custom—whether false and artificial or not is of no consequence here—and the result is a feminine type radically difference form the masculine type, which demands special consideration in the study and treatment of nonconformity to law. (Kansas Supreme Court 1919:146-147)

Under this ruling, the court endorsed the idea that women required different treatment under the law than men. Given their distinct personalities, women required longer periods of incarceration

in more benevolent reformatories or work farms than did men, for whom shorter terms in local jails might suffice (Freedman 1981:148; O'Brien 2001:4-5). This legal precedent for extended incarceration of female prisoners provided a stronger legal basis for quarantining women than it did men. The expanded legal regulation of sexuality that was brought about during WWI thus fell primarily on women. Several states struck down laws punishing men for sexuality-related offenses, whereas the centrality of sexuality to ideas of female deviancy and the legal precedent for treating women differently under the law worked together to create an environment where a man would not be routinely punished for the same “crimes against chastity” that a woman might (Luker 1998:624).

### **Critiques of Chapter 205**

Besides legal challenges, newspapers and governmental reviews took issue with the injustices and inefficiencies of incarceration as a means of addressing the venereal disease problem. Most critiques of Chapter 205 blended comments about social justice and the more practical matter of whether this was the most effective way of combatting venereal disease.

These two sentiments can be seen in comments from a 1920 report about the social backgrounds of the inmates of the WIF from 1920:

The man's responsibility for contributing to a girl's delinquency and for the spread of venereal disease should be better recognized, and the man should be punished as well as the girl or woman. It was known that 2 of the inmates of the Kansas State Industrial Farm at the time this study was made had become diseased through the same man, yet the man was allowed to go free. (Treadway, Weldon and Hill 1920b:1595)

Commenting on the fact that men were seldom prosecuted under age of consent laws in connection with cases at the WIF, even though many of the women sent to the Farm were under 18, these scholars were more critical than most of the state's endorsement of the sexual double standard. Dutch scholar Eugenia Lekkerkerker made a similar gender critique in her 1931 study

of women's reformatories in the U.S., commenting that the confusion of penal and medical missions in U.S. institutions was problematic:

As, in practice, such medical examinations in court, and the other measure mentioned here, are almost exclusively applied to women, and not to the men involved in sex offenses, and as, moreover, many feel that these one-sided methods, affecting only a negligible percentage of all persons affected with venereal diseases, are not effective means for venereal disease control, a strong opposition to these provisions and practices felt to be unfair to women, has come from certain quarters, with which we are inclined to agree. (Lekkerkerker 1931:26)

In these comments, Lekkerkerker not only points out the injustice of only incarcerating women for venereal disease, but also the ineffectiveness of this one-sided approach to control disease.

These critiques of the injustice of the situation often hinged on the respectability of the group of women in question. Social worker Darlene Doubleday Newby summarized the types of women being sent to the Farm during the initial influx of women in 1918:

It was war time, and whenever the health and physical fitness of the army were at stake the greatest vigilance prevailed. Giddy young war brides who lingered around camp too long after their husbands went overseas, stupid prostitutes who were not clever enough to stay in hiding, likewise scores of wayward girls whose delinquencies could not be proved in court, were examined, and if found diseased were sent to the Farm for treatment. It was over the quarantining of this latter class of so-called "innocent young girls" that so much furor was raised, and is still being raised. (Newby 1921:21)

In this characterization, Newby explains that people were not as concerned with the unjust imprisonment of "stupid prostitutes," but more with the "innocent young girls." This is consistent with national trends, as federal officials were perplexed about what to do with otherwise respectable middle-class girls who they characterized as getting caught up in "khaki fever" during the war. For these critics, the injustice of Chapter 205 hinged not on the fact that the state was officially endorsing the sexual double standard, but on the respectability of the women in question.

Critiques from fellow prison administrators and government officials focused on whether

Chapter 205 was the best method for addressing the venereal disease problem in the state. A 1938 government report reviewing prison facilities in Kansas was critical of the dual nature of the Farm as a prison and a medical facility, saying that

The result is a sad confusion of a campaign to wipe out venereal disease with incarceration for crime. Some girls are sent to the farm as ‘suspects’ who do not have venereal disease and have never been properly examined. Such a practice, instead of helping to control the disease, might easily help to spread it. (Administration 1938:8)

This report highlights the confused mission of the WIF, particularly emphasizing how the practice of imprisoning women under Chapter 205 failed in the goal of reforming wayward girls. It goes on to say: “Certainly the practice of dumping these problem girls into a state institution for short periods [...] is no solution of their problem” (Ibid:8). A similar critique comes from the 1929 edition of the *American Handbook of Prisons and Reformatories*, which commented:

There is no question that these women should have hospital treatment but it seems equally clear that it might better be done in connection with some state hospital rather than with a correctional institution. (Garrett 1929:366)

Overall, these critiques brought attention to the injustices created by the practice of imprisoning women under Chapter 205, but the major focus was on whether this was the best means of achieving the institution’s goals.

### **Life at the Women’s Industrial Farm, 1919-1942**

It was in this legal climate that the state of Kansas continued to imprison women with venereal disease over the next three decades. The following section will provide an overview of how the WIF was run between the years of 1919-1942. The first section will describe how the WIF fit into the bureaucratic structure of the state of Kansas and detail how Chapter 205 was implemented. The second section will describe the types of women who typically ended up at the WIF under Chapter 205 and the type of medical care they received when they were there.





*Figure 8: View of the WIF grounds, 1936 (Kansas Memory:229179).*

### **Administration of the Women's Industrial Farm**

Though Chapter 205 gave the State Board of Health the authority to quarantine women for having venereal disease, the WIF was administratively run under the State Board of Administration. As this section will show, as funding dried up for venereal disease control following WWI, these two boards failed to coordinate their efforts. The incarceration of women under Chapter 205 became completely disconnected from any larger efforts to control venereal disease through the Board of Health, and the Board of Administration treated this population of

inmates as prisoners rather than patients.

### *Board of Health*

The Kansas State Board of Health emerged from WWI with the approaches of education, treatment, and repression that were endorsed by the federal government during the War.

Administered through the Division of Venereal Diseases of the State Board of Health, which was created in June 1918 at the request of the federal government, Kansas officials sought a multi-faceted approach to controlling syphilis and gonorrhea among Kansans in the first two or three years following WWI (Health 1918:5). The Board of Health sponsored speakers to address high school students and women's groups across the state about sex education and social hygiene, promoting the message that "the responsibility for moral training [should be placed] upon the parent and the home" (Health 1924:76-77; see also Health 1922:153-154). In addition to the treatment given to inmates at the WIF, the Board of Health offered several health clinics across the state to treat patients with venereal disease (see below for more information). The Board of Health also employed social workers to investigate the causes of vice in different communities and do follow-up work with venereal disease patients following initial treatments (Health 1922:153). Though repressive measures, such as Chapter 205, were certainly a part of the Board of Health's approach to containing venereal disease following the war, it was only one of a number of ways that the Board sought to reduce the incidence of disease.

However, as national interest, and funding, for venereal disease control dwindled in the 1920s, these broad efforts to control venereal disease were scaled back. Nationally, the pragmatic approach to alleviate the public health problems caused by venereal disease prompted by the War gave way to more moralistic understandings of the problem. The WWI military film "Fit to Fight" was deemed obscene in some states, and many worried that the government had

gone too far in engaging in public discussions of sexuality. As public interest waned, so did funding. In 1921, Congress did not renew funding for the Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board; yearly federal spending on venereal disease prevention dropped from \$4 million per year in 1920 to \$60,000 in 1926 (Brandt 1985:123-125).

As early as 1919, the Kansas State Board of Health began to feel the pinch of these dwindling federal and state budgets for venereal disease control. The biennial reports of the Board of Health of the early 1920s read like a laundry list of programs discontinued due to lack of funding: in 1919, the lab that processed venereal disease tests in Rosedale was closed for a month and a half due to a lack of funding (Health 1920:348); in 1920, the Board of Health reported that they lacked the funding to provide social workers to assist in tracking down venereal disease cases (Health 1920:347); and in 1921, they reported that the state had cut off all funds for local venereal disease control clinics and that the only way they were able to keep the state lab operating was through funding obtained through the Rockefeller foundation (Crumbine 1922:3; Health 1922:21, 22, 154). By the mid-1920s, the Board of Health's plan to combat venereal disease consisted primarily of providing free medication to clinics and doctors to treat syphilis, including the health clinic at the WIF in Lansing. In fact, the 1932-1934 biennial report of the State Board of Health does not even mention syphilis.

Public health efforts to combat venereal disease found a new champion when President Roosevelt promoted Thomas Parran to Surgeon General in 1936. Parran launched a national campaign against syphilis, arguing that a rational, scientific approach, rather than a moralistic one, was necessary to combat this pressing national problem. In the spring of 1936, Parran published an article titled "The Next Great Plague to Go" in several national magazines outlining his plan to combat syphilis. Despite his critiques of moralistic approaches to venereal disease

control, however, Parran's plan did not advocate the use of condoms to prevent the spread of venereal disease. Nonetheless, the public responded with great enthusiasm. By October, Parran was on the cover of Time magazine and Gallup polls were finding that 90% of Americans supported the federal government's efforts to combat venereal disease and the provision of free clinics for treatment. Riding this newfound enthusiasm for federal responsibility for public health problems, President Roosevelt signed the Venereal Disease Control Act into law on May 24, 1938, allocating significant federal dollars to states for venereal disease prevention programs for the first time since WWI (Brandt 1985:138-158).

This increased federal investment led to an increase in the Kansas State Board of Health's activities related to venereal disease control in the late 1930s and into the eve of WWII. For example, for the fiscal year starting July 1, 1939, the state of Kansas designated \$10,000 for venereal disease control, while the federal government allocated \$58,425 of funds through the Venereal Disease Control Act. Most of this money went toward treatment and diagnostics, such as providing clinics, drugs, and laboratory facilities to identify and treat cases of venereal disease (Health 1940:117-118). However, some funding also went toward educational efforts: Dr. A.D. Gray toured rural areas of Kansas to educate doctors about the best practices for treating syphilis and to survey the availability of treatment in rural areas for the National Health Service (March 13, 1938).

This reliance of state venereal disease control efforts on federal funding is illustrated in the fate of the Division of Venereal Diseases within the Kansas State Board of Health. After its start during WWI, the Division saw decreases in staff and financial support. From 1923 to 1932, the Division became one of the many responsibilities of the Secretary of the Board of Health; it was run under the Division of Communicable Diseases from 1932 until 1936. In July of 1936, as

the federal government's renewed campaign against venereal disease gained steam and federal dollars were again allotted to venereal disease control, the Division of Venereal Disease became its own unit again, with a full-time staff member in charge (Health 1936:79).

What is perhaps most striking about the records of the State Board of Health during this period is the nearly complete absence of any mention of the WIF. In the biennial reports from during WWI, the WIF is mentioned several times as part of the overall strategy of combatting venereal disease. However, these references disappear entirely by the early 1920s. The incarceration of women under Chapter 205 became increasingly removed from the activities of the State Board of Health, to the point that it is not mentioned at all in the Board's descriptions of their activities related to venereal disease control in the state other than an occasional reference to the health clinic at Lansing. By the time the Board was again investing in venereal disease control in the late 1930s, the WIF was not even on their radar as a component of their approach to controlling venereal disease. In 1938, the Board congratulated itself on the "Increased interest in the problem [of venereal disease] and the willingness of the public to consider it frankly" following its educational campaign, failing to even mention the fact that 269 women were incarcerated at the WIF under Chapter 205 in that same biennium (Health 1938:139; Farm 1938).

### *Board of Administration*

The WIF officially fell under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Administration, despite the fact that the majority of its inmates were committed to the institution under Chapter 205, a Board of Health regulation. The Board of Administration itself was established in 1917, the same year as the WIF and Chapter 205, under House bill No. 517 (Rowland 1984:212). The four-member board, consisting of the governor and three other people appointed by the governor,

oversaw a wide-range of government programs, including the state's hospitals, educational institutions, and penal institutions (Administration 1917:1-8). This highly-concentrated form of administration was initially highly praised by newspapers as a cost-saving measure and a model for modern, efficient government (1918; 1919a; 1919b). The Board had the power to appoint the superintendents of the various state institutions under its control, as well as to decide the budgets for the individual institutions. However, the overall budget for the institutions was set by the legislature, so the Board did have to answer to them to justify their decisions.

The Board of Administration treated the WIF as a penal institution, despite the fact that most of its inmates were there under a state quarantine law. For example, Board of Administration documents frequently listed the State Hospital for Epileptics and the State Sanatorium for Tuberculosis under "Charitable Institutions," while the WIF was listed under "Correctional Institutions." Many documents from the Board of Administration indicate that the Board saw the women quarantined under Chapter 205 as guilty of moral crimes beyond their official quarantine sentence. For example, this excerpt from the 1920 biennial report argues for longer sentences for quarantine patients at the WIF:

In too many cases the stay at the Farm is not long enough to make the kind of moral impression upon the patient that must be made if some permanent change in the habits is to be produced. Unless this result is attained in a fair proportion of the cases the state is doing little to combat the prevalence and deadly effect of social evil. These people are a grave menace to the moral and physical health of the community. The temporary cure of the physical ills, unless it also develops habits of decent thinking and living, merely provides a convenient and cheap way station for those who are bent on lives of shame. This is a problem difficult of solution; but the state owes it to its citizens to do all within its power not only to effect a physical cure, but also to reinforce the moral purpose so that those who are treated will not quickly slip back into their former evil ways.  
(Administration 1920:XXvi)

Statements like these indicate the general conflation of a venereal disease diagnosis with sin and immorality among higher-level administrators. However, the administrative costs of

incarcerating so many women was also a factor in the Board of Administration's support of the continued use of the WIF as a venue for quarantining women under Chapter 205. While the Board of Health paid for the medicine administered to patients in Lansing, and at times for the medical staff as well, the cost of detaining hundreds of women a year was absorbed through the Board of Administration. This fact may have led to other comments in the Board of Administration documents that expressed some reservations about the policy, such as this recommended change from the 1924 biennial report:

The policy which is purely police regulation of committing disease women to the State Farm at Lansing, we recommend be discontinued and that each city or county bear full expense of such regulation. As now conducted the policy is confinement only until the Board of Health issues a health certificate. The inmate goes out without reform and without parole supervision. (Administration 1924:6)

However, with so many institutions to oversee, the WIF was not a high priority for the Board of Administration, and little mention was made of this recommendation in future reports. The Board continued to fund the WIF throughout the period of this study and was not intimately involved in the details of its daily operation.

### *Politics of Appointments*

As appointed public boards, both the Board of Administration and the Board of Health were subject to the political maneuverings of state political parties. For example, in 1923 much of the Board of Health, including Crumbine, was replaced or forced to resign for political reasons, ultimately leading to a Kansas Supreme Court battle over which of two competing State Boards of Health was the legitimate one (Health 1924:5; June 2, 1923). These political appointments had the potential to make their way down to the WIF. Governor Henry Allen came under fire from the Ku Klux Klan in 1922 for appointing a Catholic woman to head the Beloit Industrial School (O'Brien 1996:102). In a 1925 scandal about the firing of a member of the

Board of Administration, a board member publicly accused the governor of hiring someone who was incompetent as the superintendent of the Beloit Industrial School in order to force his successor to fire her<sup>16</sup>(Jan 1, 1925). Incidents like this led one democratic candidate for governor, Donald Muir, to make the appointment of superintendents at state institutions a campaign issue. In the June 1926 issue of the *Kansas Federation Magazine*, a publication for women's clubs in the state, Muir's ad proclaimed:

I am in favor of taking the state Reformatory and other institutions where children are kept, out of politics. I believe they should be handled more in line with our school system. They should not be a football to be kicked here and there as changes in the administration might bring about. The employees should not be appointed alone, from a political standpoint, or as a reward to party workers, but should be under civil service regulations. (June, 1926)

The fact that this was enough of a concern to be a campaign issue indicates that there was at least the perception that party politics were at play in appointing the superintendents of state institutions like the WIF. In her 1931 study of women's reformatories during this period, Eugenia Lekkerkerker indicated that political appointments were not as much of a problem in women's reformatories as they were for men's prisons, a fact that she attributed to less competition for the positions among women and the "higher type" of women attracted to reformatory work (Lekkerkerker 1931:112). The long tenure of Julia Perry at the WIF may have protected the WIF from these political arrangements through the 1920s, but the quick turnover of

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<sup>16</sup> Speaking to the press, this recently fired Board of Administration member alleged that the current governor, Jonathan Davis, was trying to sabotage the governor-elect, Benjamin Paulen: "Saturday afternoon a minute was passed by the board making Mrs. Inez Clark of Ottawa, superintendent at Beloit. She is unfit for the place and Mr. Carney and Mrs. Williams and the governor all know it. I protested her appointment. Carney told me that she was a big Klanswoman and that it would put Mr. Paulen in the hole to remove her, which of course, they knew he would have to do" (Jan 1, 1925).



superintendents in the 1930s indicates that politics may have been at work (see Chapter 5 for more details).

### *Implementation of Chapter 205*

The actual legislation for Chapter 205 gave the Board of Health broad powers to quarantine people for a variety of diseases. As the Board of Health developed guidelines about how to implement 205 for venereal disease control during and immediately following WWI, however, a system of regulation emerged that placed women's respectability front and center.

The procedure of implementing Chapter 205 for the control of venereal disease was as follows. Individuals could be reported to the Board of Health through several means. Since the early nineteen-teens, all doctors were required to report cases of venereal disease to the State Board of Health, although compliance with this directive was always an issue (Health 1916:315; Health 1920:345; Health 1922:153). However, doctors only had to report a patient number to the authorities; if the doctor was willing to assume responsibility for the patient's conduct, then he could withhold all personal information about the patient (Health 1920:49). On the other hand, if the doctor felt that the patient was "conducting or about to conduct himself or herself in such manner as to expose other persons to such infection," then he was obligated to report the patient's full information to the local health officer (Health 1920:46). Individuals could also report suspected venereal disease cases directly to the health officer, who would then investigate the case as to its accuracy. Certain individuals, such as pharmacists, were required to report to the health officer any person who was purchasing supplies to treat venereal disease (Health 1920:47). If the health officer determined that a patient was not trustworthy enough to continue treatment and not spread the disease, then she would be sent to the WIF under the quarantine law.

Local health officers were what Lipsky (1980) might call “street-level bureaucrats,” exercising considerable discretion and autonomy during the implementation of Chapter 205 (Lipsky 1980; Portillo and Rudes 2014). Once a health officer was alerted to a potential venereal disease case, he was obligated to investigate the case. If reported by a doctor, the local health officer would confer with the doctor to “get all the information possible as to the character of such infected person and the likelihood that the patient’s conduct may be such as might spread the disease to others” (Health 1920:49). If the health officer questioned the patient’s character, he sent her to the WIF. The health officer also had the power to “make examinations of all persons reasonably suspected of having syphilis in communicable form, gonococcus infection or chancroid. Owing to the prevalence of such diseases among pimps and prostitutes, all such persons may be considered in the above class” (Health 1920:48). Thus, the health officer exercised considerable discretion in determining who should be tested for venereal disease and who, if found infected, could be deemed trustworthy enough to get treatment before spreading the disease further. The Board of Health advised that health officers use restraint in sending women to Lansing in order to contain the high costs of quarantining patients at the WIF. However, certain populations were deemed automatically ineligible for treatment outside of Lansing:

When the persons whose names are reported are known to be prostitutes or pimps, or to be engaged in any way in commercialized vice, it may be assumed that such persons cannot be trusted to protect others from exposure to infection, and it is the duty of the health officer to take immediate steps to quarantine them without waiting to interview either the physician or the patient. In all other cases where quarantine is instituted the health officer will wish to satisfy himself as to the accuracy of the diagnosis. (Health 1920:49)

If the health officer determined that a patient needed to go to Lansing, then he would issue an arrest order that would then be carried out by local law enforcement officers (Health 1920:50).

At all stages of this process, from the initial requirement that someone be tested for venereal disease to the doctor's evaluation of whether the patient's name needed to be reported to the health officer to the final decision by the health officer about whether the patient needed to be quarantined at the WIF, the patient's respectability was a central factor. As a policy in practice, Chapter 205 was not merely a quarantine law to control venereal disease, but a regulation that was selectively used to control the sexual behaviors of women who did not fulfill the requirements of respectability. Speaking of Chapter 205, one Board of Health report makes this clear: "The purpose of the regulation is to require the reporting of persons who were irresponsible and could not be trusted to safeguard others from infection" (Health 1920:337).

This sentiment is again expressed in a 1940 Board of Health report:

This regulation was, and is not, intended to provide a place for indiscriminate quarantine, but rather a place of quarantine for nonco-operative individuals, especially prostitutes or others who do not comply with local health authorities' directions for proper care and treatment, so that the public health is not endangered. (Health 1940:125)

Inherent in these definitions of responsibility are the hallmarks of respectability: sexual propriety, social class, and gender norms. A 1920 Board of Health report commented that "Persons who are treated in clinics and institutions for venereal disease are drawn largely from the lower strata of society. Such people are, for the most part, in need of advice and counsel from someone with a broader point of view and a firmer grasp of the realities of life" (Health 1920:340). Those who did not meet the requirements of respectability needed the influence of respectable people, those with "a broader point of view." These definitions of respectability explicitly drew on ideas of social class. In her study of the initial influx of women quarantined at the WIF, social worker Alice Hill commented that:

Although it is recognized that moral delinquency occurs irrespective of economic status, those girls who constitute a sufficient menace to the community to be placed under restraint usually come from families having small or insufficient incomes. (Hill

1920:1515)

Social class thus entered into the decision-making process about who needed to be quarantined for venereal disease, not just because of economic reasons, but because of the implications of social class status for one's respectability. The group of women quarantined at the WIF was not simply in need of medical care, they needed instruction in respectable behavior. Or, as the Board of Health phrased it: "It is not generally appreciated that something more than drugs is required for the effective treatment of venereal diseases" (Health 1920:339).

### Abuses of System

This system of reporting venereal disease and then deciding who did and did not need to be quarantined at the WIF for treatment was subject to abuse, both on the part of individual citizens and government officials. The low bar for evidence and the general prevalence of venereal disease made Chapter 205 an easy mechanism to detain "problem girls" in the state. Local law enforcement officials could use Chapter 205 to easily detain women who were otherwise a nuisance in their community, but a challenge to convict for another offense. Indeed, it seems that this ability to use Chapter 205 as a catch-all to detain deviant women was part of the original intent of the way that the law was designed to be enforced. Social worker Alice Hill described the efforts of government officials to control venereal disease during WWI:

The camp counties first attempted to cope with the situation by committing girls through the justice courts to the State Industrial Farm for Women at Lansing, the sentence being an indeterminate one of from 30 days to 6 months. This, however did not cover the cases of girls whose delinquencies could not be proved in court, but who were sources of danger, and consequently on March 29, 1918, the Kansas State Board of Health adopted certain rules and regulations whereby such girls might be quarantined. The girls committed through the courts, though arrested on various charges, were all infected with one or more venereal diseases. (Hill 1920:1502)

In Hill's account, Chapter 205 was intentionally used as a mechanism to imprison "problematic"

women without the need for due process. Hill goes on to comment about the women picked up around military bases:

For the most part, the many girls who were committed from other counties in the State had been morally delinquent for years, though now committed for the first time chiefly because of the opportunity afforded the authorities by the new health regulations. (Hill 1920:1502)

Chapter 205 thus opened up the opportunity for state officials to intervene in the sexual lives of young women who were not explicitly breaking any laws. Particularly during WWI, this need to find legal mechanisms to detain “loose” women around military bases had considerable government backing. A report from the Division of Venereal Diseases within the state Board of Health included the statement:

It will be noted that up to the end of March, 1919, 410, or 70 per cent, of the 580 inmates of the Farm had been committed under quarantine, while 87, or 15 percent were sent up after conviction of vagrancy, which is merely another procedure in dealing with this class of people—that is, 85 per cent of the inmate of the Farm had been placed there as a result of the campaign for the prevention of venereal disease. (Health 1920:343)

Whether it was a quarantine or vagrancy charge, these officials were looking for ways to detain women suspected of sexual activity in order to respond to federal pressures to control venereal disease among soldiers. The statement that a vagrancy charge was “merely another procedure in dealing with this class of people” demonstrates a general desire to identify mechanisms to detain women, regardless of their actual offenses. While other states tended to use broadly-defined charges such as “vagrancy” to regulate young women’s sexual behavior, Chapter 205 became the dominant legal mechanism to detain women in Kansas.

The relatively short sentence for quarantine patients may have made this solution less than ideal. However, as the following note from a June 26, 1919 meeting of the State Board of Health indicates, health officers and local law enforcement officers often coordinated their efforts to ensure that “undesirable” women were taken off the streets:

When persons who have previously been quarantined for venereal disease become reinfected it is advisable to have them sent to Lansing under court sentence if the evidence will warrant such procedure, as the period of detention is apt to be longer under court sentence than under quarantine. It is the duty of all health officers to cooperate fully with the courts and with peace officers in the repression of prostitution, which is recognized as the most prolific source of venereal disease. (Health 1920:50)

As this statement indicates, the close association between prostitution and venereal disease led to Chapter 205 being used to control prostitutes in the state, as well as many behaviors seen as bordering on sexual impropriety.

The considerable discretion afforded to local officials in the implementation of the law also led to abuse. A 1933 independent evaluation of the WIF critiqued the broad powers that Chapter 205 gave local authorities to detain women:

There seems to be considerable feeling over the state as well as among certain officers of the prison that occasionally women are sent under the quarantine provisions of the laws simply as an easy way out of some police problem. The less pleasing term "railroading" is usually used in referring to this practice. It is impossible for us to give any statistics in this regard but the results of what investigation has been made justifies the assumption that it does occur. The charge "Hold for Interne" has been used by police powers to detain suspects of other crimes who otherwise might have secured release from jail. This practice, while undoubtedly rendering valuable aid to the police at certain times was scarcely the intent of the law. (Commission 1933:232)

Chapter 205 thus gave state authorities a way to detain women without providing due process, albeit for short sentences.

#### *Other Treatment Options for Venereal Disease*

For those people diagnosed with venereal disease who were deemed trustworthy and respectable enough to be treated as an outpatient, there were some treatment options available. While many doctors during the period refused to treat venereal disease due to its negative associations with illicit sexuality, many patients were able to obtain care through private doctors. A 1927 report prepared by Earle G. Brown, M.D., of the Board of Health found that 42.04% of doctors in Kansas reported having cases of venereal disease under treatment, 47.5% reported no

venereal disease cases under treatment, and 10.1% reported that they did not treat venereal disease (Health 1928:129). Of course, given that the most effective treatment for syphilis at the time, the “606 treatment,” required weekly injections for up to a year, the high cost of treatment meant that this was a relatively small population of people who could actually have afforded to pay for private treatment. The cost of treatment for syphilis from a private physician in the early 1930s averaged from \$305-\$380, but could be as high as \$1,000. At these prices, some health economists at the time estimated that 80% of the U.S. population would not be able to afford treatment (Brandt 1985:131).

For those who were not able to afford treatment through private doctors, the Kansas State Board of Health offered some free clinics during periods where funding was more plentiful for venereal disease control. While the Board of Health provided free medicine for gonorrhea and syphilis treatment throughout the period of this study, funding for free clinics and doctors was intermittent and highly dependent on federal funding. The number of free clinics in the state varied, from a high of eight clinics before all state funding for clinics was cut off in 1921 to a low of four free clinics in 1930 (including the clinic at the WIF in Lansing). The number of free clinics again increased in the late 1930s as more federal funding for venereal disease control became available. During these years, the medical facilities at the Women’s Industrial Farm opened to the public several days a week to treat syphilis and gonorrhea on an outpatient basis (Farm 1940). While free clinics would have provided needed medical services for patients when available, irregular funding and the threat of clinic medical staff reporting patients under Chapter 205 would have prevented this from being an accessible and appealing option to many Kansans with venereal disease.

## The Inmates of the Women's Industrial Farm

### *The Women Imprisoned at the WIF*

The number of women detained under Chapter 205 at the WIF peaked immediately following WWI and slowly declined throughout the period of this study, as seen in the following chart:

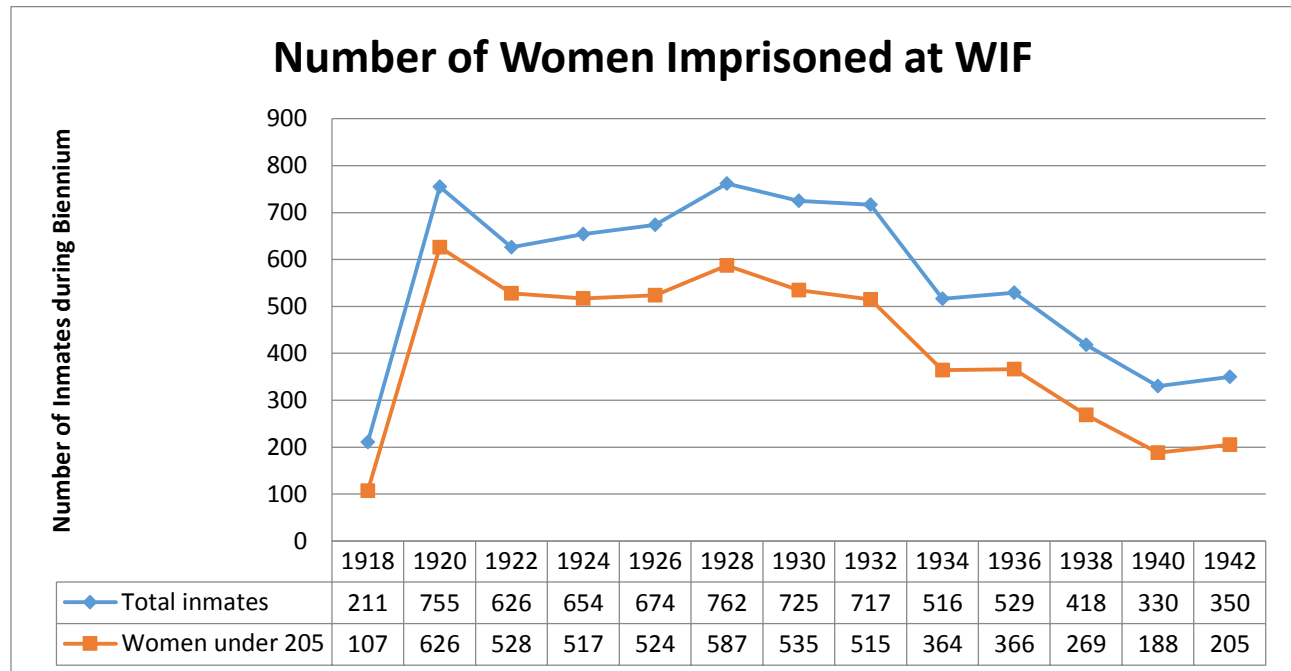


Figure 9

Sources for chart: Farm 1918:14; Farm 1920: 20; Farm 1922:11; Farm 1924:26; Farm 1926:16; Farm 1928:15; Farm 1930:16; Farm 1932:16; Farm 1934:13; Farm 1936:12; Farm 1938:17; Farm 1940:28; Farm 1942:25.

As a percentage of the total inmate population at the WIF, women detained under Chapter 205 made up between 84% (1922) and 51% (1918)<sup>17</sup> of the inmates, with an average of 71% of the total inmate population during the period of this study. Women detained under Chapter 205

<sup>17</sup> The low percentage in 1918 is partially attributed to the fact that many of the women who otherwise would have been detained under Section 205 were instead sentenced under a vagrancy charge: of the 211 total inmates, 107 were there under 205 and 66 were there for vagrancy. The 1920 Board of Health report commented: "It will be noted that up to the end of March, 1919, 410, or 70 per cent, of the 580 inmates of the Farm had been committed under quarantine, while 87, or 15 percent were sent up after conviction of vagrancy, which is merely another procedure in dealing with this class of people—that is, 85 per cent of the inmate of the Farm had been placed there as a result of the campaign for the prevention of venereal disease" (Health 1920:343).



spent, on average, around four months at the WIF during this period (see below for further details). Though they intermingled with the inmates of the Farm who were detained for other charges, such as burglary, liquor violations, and even murder, women quarantined under 205 made up the majority of the population at the Farm. Both the total number of inmates detained at the WIF and the number of women quarantined under 205 dropped off during the Depression of the 1930s, presumably due to state efforts to control government spending in dire economic times.

The women imprisoned under Chapter 205 at the WIF varied in their life experiences, yet as a whole they shared some common features. The following section will give a broad overview of the demographics of the group of inmates at the WIF during this period.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> All of the data below are for the general population of the WIF, including women sent to the Farm for other offenses. Given that women imprisoned under Chapter 205 comprised the majority of the population at the WIF, this is somewhat representative of the population sent there under quarantine law. Any suspected differences between this general data and information about the population quarantined under 205 is noted below.



*Figure 10: Inmates 24 and 25, (Kansas Memory:225836).*

### Age

As a whole, the age of the women imprisoned at the WIF in Lansing was relatively young, as seen in the following chart:

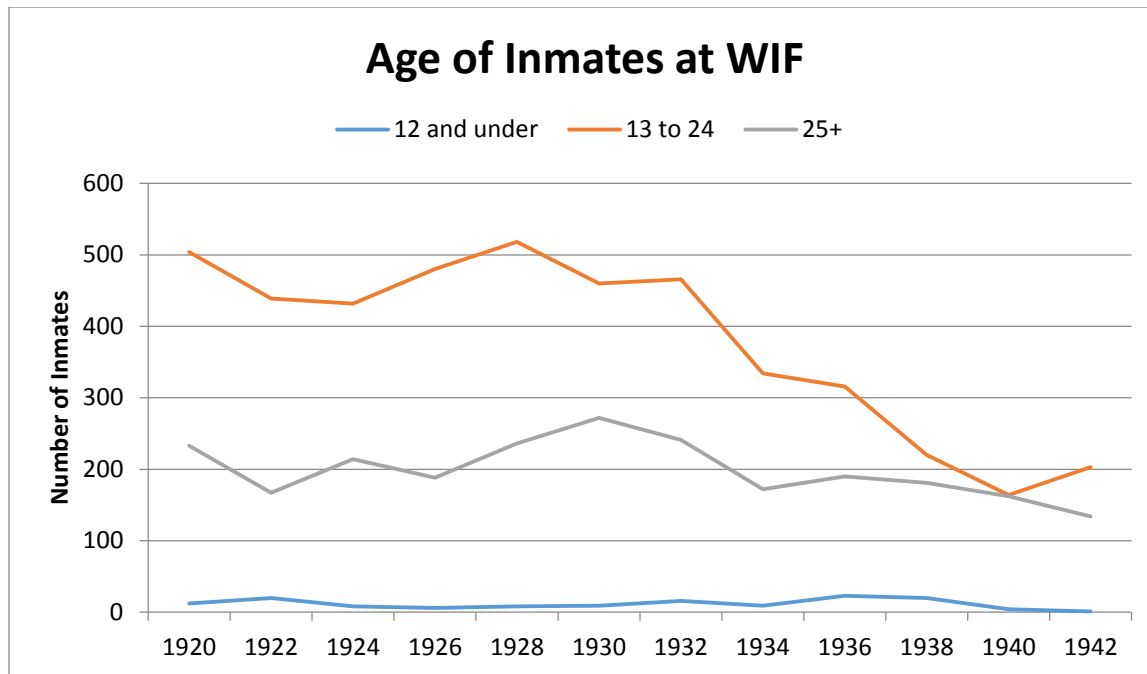


Figure 11

*Note: Age data for 1918 is reported in a different format; the report says that the average age is 24, with a minimum of 15 and a maximum of (Farm 1918:12). 1936 data: the 13-24 age group is actually 13-25, due to how the numbers are recorded in the report.*

Sources for chart: Farm 1920:21; Farm 1922:13; Farm 1924:27; Farm 1926:17; Farm 1928:16; Farm 1930:17; Farm 1932:17; Farm 1934:14; Farm 1936:13; Farm 1938:18; Farm 1940:29; Farm 1942:26.

As this chart shows, most of the women confined at the WIF during this period were between the ages of 13 and 24. This is fitting with the general philosophy of women's reformatories: they were originally designed to reform young women before they could take the path of a hardened criminal. The demographics of the inmate population change over time, however. As the general population of the Farm declined in the 1930s, so did the prevalence of younger women.

The presence of young girls at the Farm was one of the more controversial aspects of the institution. The population of children (under 12 years) remained pretty low throughout the period, with the high being 23 during the biennial period ending in 1936. Female prisoners with children under the age of 3 could keep their children with them, according to the laws setting up the WIF. Older children were often sent to the Farm for treatment of venereal disease, as regular

offenders would have been sent to the Beloit Industrial School instead of the women's prison. A 1933 independent evaluation of the Farm recommended that Beloit develop the capacity to treat diseases to avoid needing to send girls to the Farm in Lansing. The report listed its reasons for concern:

From a social point of view the most serious objections to the present plan of treating venereally diseased young girls at the Industrial Farm for Women are two-fold: (1) In the first place there is no segregation of young girls from the older group. (2) There is no provision for an educational program, yet many of the girls are of compulsory school age. They are made to conform to the adult woman's prison regime which is scarcely suited to the needs of older women to say nothing of young children. Probably more serious than the lack of educational facilities (as well as suitable recreational equipment) the most unfortunate phase of the problem lies in the contacts which these young girls have with the hardened prostitutes and criminals who make up the adult women convicts. (Commission 1933:231)

The report goes on to say that "There is a rather general belief among the professionally trained social workers in the state that the practice of sending young girls infected with venereal disease to the women's prison is fraught with social danger" (Commission 1933:229). Thus, although the numbers of girls at the Farm was always relatively low, this remained one of the more common points of critique of the institution.



*Figure 12: Inmates 26 and 27 (Kansas Memory:225837).*

### Race

The racial makeup of the population at the WIF reflected the overwhelmingly white racial makeup of the state, yet also showed that minority women were more likely to be detained at the Farm than their white counterparts (Rowland 1984:218).<sup>19</sup> Census data from Kansas during this period paints a very white picture, with the white population averaging 96.4%, the “negro” population averaging 3.5%, and the “other” category comprising less than 1% (1940 Census:14). The population at the Farm shows that racial minority women were overrepresented; over the

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<sup>19</sup> Reported racial categories reflect those used in official government documents.

period of this study, white women averaged 78% of the population, negro women 19%, and Mexican or Indian women 1% (Farm 1918:12; Farm 1920:24; Farm 1922:15; Farm 1924:30; Farm 1926:20; Farm 1928:19; Farm 1930:20; Farm 1932:19; Farm 1934:17; Farm 1936:16; Farm 1938:20; Farm 1940:30; Farm 1942:27). Immigration status did not seem to make as much of a difference as race, though this may have more to do with the way that immigration status was reported. Kansas census data from this period indicates that an average of 4.3% of the population were immigrants, while the average number of women listed as being from another country at the WIF during this same period was 1.7% (1940 Census:14).

These overall numbers from the Biennial Reports do not break down the category of “white,” but an examination of the interview sample to be examined in Chapter 6 reveals that a sizeable number of Irish women were at the Farm. Distinctions among groups of whites during this period were more prevalent than today, making some groups that would today be considered “white,” such as Irish, Southern Europeans, or Jews, to be considered distinct racial groups (Carter 2007:33; Jacobson 1998). The following graph gives the reported racial composition of the 488 inmate interviews analyzed in Chapter 6:

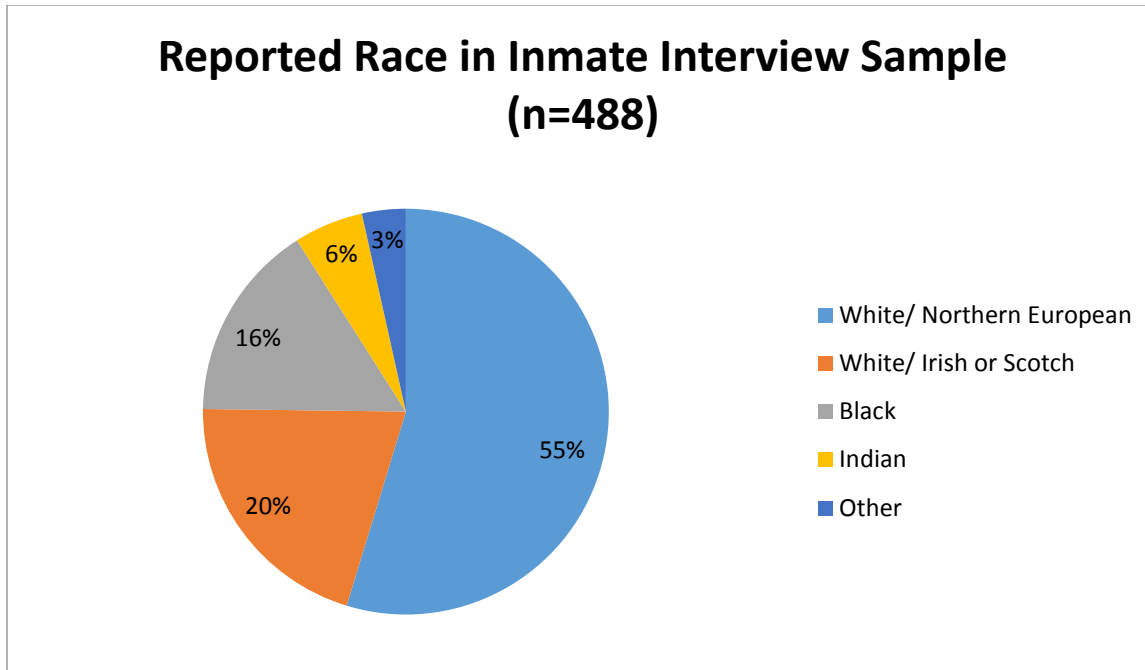


Figure 13

20

This graph shows that there was a relatively large population of women at the Farm who claimed Irish heritage, indicating that there may have been some social distinctions between categories of whiteness at play in determining who would be sent to the WIF.

<sup>20</sup> Though the division between Northern and Southern/Eastern Europeans was socially significant at this time, the interview form did not report very many women as being of Southern or Eastern European descent (only 5 were listed as such; these are included in “other” category above).



*Figure 14: Inmate 28 (Kansas Memory:225839).*

### Social Class

Though scholars disagree about the best measures of social class, particularly for women, common measures include income, education level, and occupation. Data about income is not available for the women interned at the WIF, but several factors point to the conclusion that these women were from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In Alice Hill's (1920) report about the social backgrounds of the initial inmates of the Farm, she reports that of the 63 families that they were able to get data on, 26 had been the recipients of charity (Hill 1920:1517). Information about inmates' level of education and occupation also indicates that many of these women were from the working-class (see also Rowland 1984:218).

A comparison of the education level of women in the state as a whole compared to the



education level of those imprisoned at the WIF reveals that the inmate population was less educated overall, indicating a lower social class status. Of the women imprisoned at the WIF during the period of this study, an average of 75.8% reported that they had 10 years of schooling or less, while 24.3% reported that they had 10 years or more of education, with some having attended college or a business school. (Farm 1918:12; Farm 1920:23; Farm 1922:14; Farm 1924:29; Farm 1926:19; Farm 1928:17; Farm 1930:19; Farm 1932:18; Farm 1934:14; Farm 1936:19; Farm 1938:19; Farm 1940:29; Farm 1942:26). To compare this to the average for the state of Kansas during this period, the 1940 census reports that, of women 25 years and older, 51.2% had an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education or less, while 47.8% had at least some high school education. During the same year, the median years of school attended by women in Kansas was 8.9 (1940 Census:29). While these figures are not directly comparable (the young age at the WIF influences the figure, as does comparing an average over all years versus the 1940 figures and comparing education after 8 years versus after 10), it does indicate that the women interned at the WIF were, overall, less educated than the general female population of the state. However, the variety of education levels at the WIF, with some women reporting college education, indicates that there was some mix of social classes at the institution.

Another indicator of social class, occupation, gives us more insight into the class status of the women imprisoned at the Farm. Whether or not a woman was employed at this time was in itself an indicator of social class, as most families who could afford to have their wives and daughters work in the home chose to do so. A comparison of the inmate population at the WIF with the general population of the state of Kansas reveals that the inmates were significantly more likely to participate in the paid labor force than their female peers outside the institution. In 1920, a year when only 15.3% of the female working-age population was in the paid labor

force in Kansas, close to 85% of the women interned at the WIF reported some form of paid employment (1940 Census:34-37). While the young average age of the inmate population likely affects this number, since many women during this period would work during their teen years before settling down in marriage, it nevertheless reveals that most of these women participated in the paid labor force.<sup>21</sup> The types of occupations listed for interned women also give some indication of their class status. The most common categories of female employment for inmates before coming to the Farm were common occupations for the working class: housework and waitressing. Though many of the inmates changed jobs frequently and might not have had an occupation per se, studies from the time suggested that many female inmates were domestic workers (Lekkerkerker 1931:207). However, though in much lower numbers, there were some professionals interned at the Farm as well: primarily nurses, a few teachers, and a couple of doctors and chiropractors.

Another factor affecting the overall class makeup of the inmate population was the fact that some poor women actually volunteered to come to the WIF (see Chapter 6 for more details). A combination of the high cost of venereal disease treatment and the lack of free clinics made this the only option for many women who sought treatment for their disease. This was particularly the case during the Depression of the 1930s; demand for public health services for venereal disease treatment nationally went up at least 20% between 1929 and 1933 (Brandt 1985:131). An evaluation of the WIF in 1933 commented on the problematic nature of having the only free health care for venereal disease be available at a prison:

Many women are frequently sent to the Industrial Farm for Women Clinic for no other reason than that they are unable to pay for private treatments in localities where no free clinics are in operation. It might be advisable to arrange a schedule of fees to be paid a local physician by the county or state for the treatment of indigent cases in communities

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<sup>21</sup> The higher percentage of racial minority women at the WIF also influences this figure. In 1920, 31.2% of the black women in the state reported working for wages.

where no clinics are located. This would surely be more satisfactory to the patient and probably less expensive to the state. (Commission 1933:232)

The fact that women who could afford private treatment did not opt to volunteer to be quarantined at the WIF meant that the overall class makeup of the institution was lower than it might otherwise have been.



*Figure 15: Inmates 32 and 33 (Kansas Memory:225842).*

### Marital Status

Though newspapers and official state documents often discussed the women at the WIF as either depraved prostitutes or as misguided young patriots, a look at their marital record shows that many of the women at the WIF had been married at some point in their lives. Despite their young age, an average of 32% of the inmate population reported being married, while another

31% reported being either divorced (12%), separated (14%), or widowed (5%). This left only 38% of the population that reported having never been married (Farm 1918:12; Farm 1920:22; Farm 1922:13; Farm 1924:28; Farm 1926:18; Farm 1928:16; Farm 1930:18; Farm 1932:17; Farm 1934:15; Farm 1936:13; Farm 1940:29; Farm 1942:26).<sup>22</sup> According to Hill's (1920) analysis, this rate was much higher than the general population for women in this age group in Kansas; only 38% of the general female population was married, widowed, or divorced by age 20 in 1910, compared to 63% of the WIF inmates that Hill studied in 1918 (Hill 1920:1531). The fact that the majority of the inmate population had at some point been married has significant implications for their perceived respectability: these women had a socially approved route through which they could have had sex, which means that their contraction of venereal disease may have been more the product of their husbands' indiscretions than their own sexual misconduct. As we will see in a later chapter, many women made exactly this claim.

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<sup>22</sup> Averages total more than 100% due to rounding. 1938 data is not included in these averages because the reported numbers this year appear to have an error (they do not add up).



*Figure 16: Inmates 34 and 35 (Kansas Memory:225843).*

### Maternity

Many of the inmates were also mothers. Though the biennial reports of the WIF do not provide information about the women's pregnancies and births,<sup>23</sup> Alice Hill's report includes information about the women she studied in 1918. Of these women, 69% had at some point been pregnant (Hill 1920:1532). While many of these pregnancies had ended in miscarriage or the children had died at young ages, this still left a fairly large number of children whose mothers were sent to the Farm. While the sentence to the WIF surely created childcare issues for many women, the women in Hill's study reported that most of their children were not living with them

<sup>23</sup> The 1918 biennial report is the only one that provides information about maternity, reporting that 35% of the inmates had given birth to children (Farm 1918:14).

in the time leading up to their arrest. Of the 114 children born to the inmates in her sample, only 19 (17%) were living with their mothers. Most were living with other relatives, in foster homes, in state facilities, or with a charity organization (Hill 1920:1534). Though it is not known whether this pattern continued through the rest of the period of this study, it is interesting to note that, though many of the women were mothers, they were not actively involved in their children's lives.



*Figure 17: Inmate 36 (Kansas Memory:225844).*

### *Medical Treatment*

#### False Diagnoses

Though scientific understandings of venereal diseases advanced greatly during the 1920s and 1930s, there were not any major breakthroughs in the diagnosis or treatment of venereal

disease until WWII. In the 1920s, several universities collaborated to study syphilis and greatly increased knowledge of the pathology of the disease. Research results were disseminated through the widely distributed Public Health Service publication, *Venereal Disease Information*. However, a clear laboratory diagnosis for gonorrhea or syphilis was far from a certainty during this period.

Gonorrhea received far less public attention than did syphilis during the 1920s and 30s, in part because it was hard to diagnose and in part because there were few effective treatment options available even if it was accurately diagnosed (Brandt 1985:154). The difficulty of diagnosing gonorrhea was problematic for state officials in Kansas charged with implementing Chapter 205 and providing care for the women quarantined under the law. For the health officer charged with deciding who should be sent to the WIF to begin with, this inaccuracy of diagnosis meant that “social criteria” were often used in diagnosing venereal disease. For example, a woman who was a prostitute might be assumed to have a venereal disease, regardless of her actual lab results. For the physicians charged with treating venereal disease once the women were quarantined at the WIF, the lack of clear diagnosis for gonorrhea posed another set of challenges, as shown in this statement from the WIF physician in 1920:

It is impossible to say what per cent of the women are infected with gonorrhea when received, for we have no positive means of diagnosing gonorrhea; therefore, we are compelled to assume that each woman received is infected with gonorrhea, and she is treated for this ailment for fifteen days before microscopic examination is made. (Farm 1920:17)

Indeed, the physicians at the Farm routinely treated all inmates (whether they were sentenced under Chapter 205 or another offense) for gonorrhea well into the 1930s. The 1942 biennial report states: “Within the last three months we have instituted the use of the culture in the diagnosing our gonorrhea cases” (Farm 1942:9), indicating that this was a new practice. This

inability to accurately diagnose gonorrhea introduced another level of subjectivity into the process of implementing Chapter 205: not only was a woman's respectability an important factor in determining whether she needed to be sent to Lansing for treatment, but it was a factor in whether she was officially "diagnosed" with gonorrhea to begin with.

While testing for syphilis during this period was more reliable than testing for gonorrhea, it was still highly problematic. The most common method used to diagnose syphilis during this period was the Wasserman blood test. Government officials across the country, including in Kansas, relied on Wasserman tests to assess the prevalence of syphilis in the population and to plan for public health programming. At the time, researchers were concerned about the rate of false-positives with this test, projecting that between two and fourteen percent of the results were inaccurate. Modern researchers have since concluded that Wasserman tests were so overly sensitive that as many as 25% of the results were false positives (Brandt 1985:152). In Kansas, this meant that many women were likely sent to the WIF under Chapter 205 who did not in fact have a venereal disease. While Board of Health regulations permitted people to request to have a second test performed, this would have been at the expense of the patient.

Together, the inaccuracy of diagnostic procedures for gonorrhea and syphilis led to the regular use of social criteria in determining who did and did not have venereal disease. This allowed state officials to use a law that was initially related to a specific disease as a broader ordinance to imprison women for short periods who violated the codes of female respectability within the state. The practice of using "social criteria" to determine who had a venereal disease is evidenced by several reports of women being sent to Lansing under Chapter 205 who actually had negative test results for syphilis and gonorrhea. A 1933 independent evaluation of the WIF reported that "certain members of the prison and clinical staff state that occasionally women are



admitted who have negative tests for the disease” (Commission 1933:232). Another indication of the actual rate of venereal disease infection among women sentenced under 205 are the results of the initial Wasserman tests all inmates were given upon admission to the WIF. It is important to note that these results include ALL women admitted to the Farm, not just those admitted under Chapter 205:

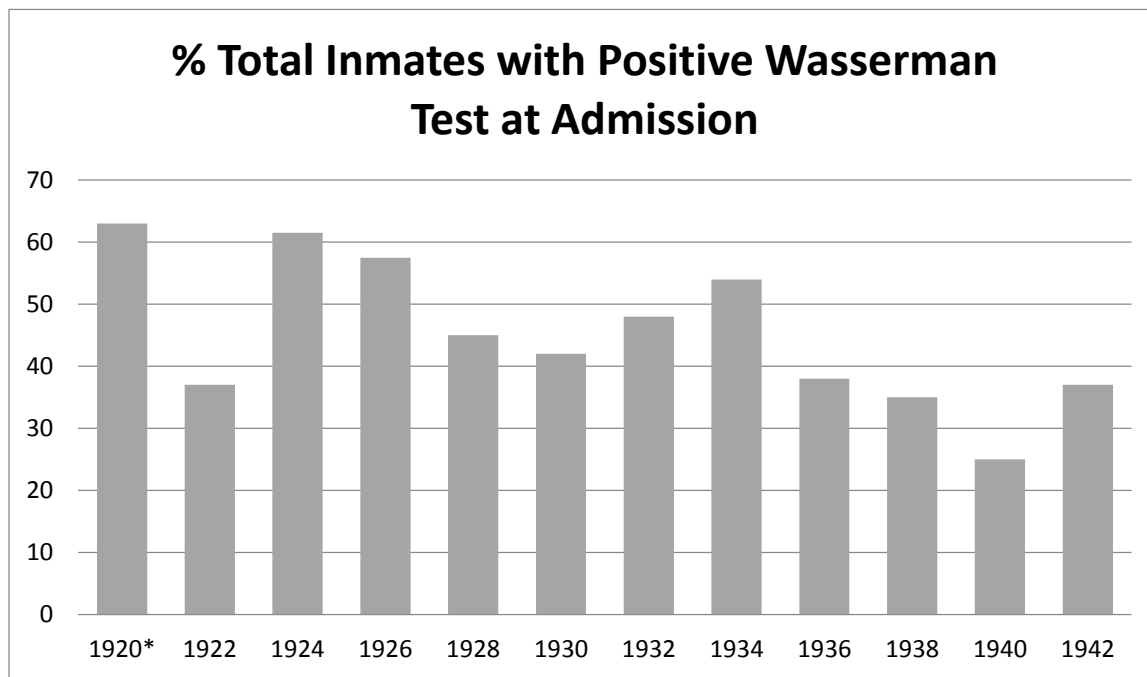


Figure 18

*Note: Comparable 1918 data not available; 1920 data reports the % of positive Wassermans only for those women sent to Lansing under Chapter 205*

Sources for chart: Farm 1920:17; Farm 1922:21; Farm 1924:16; Farm 1926:21; Farm 1928:10; Farm 1930:12; Farm 1932:11; Farm 1934:6; Farm 1936:7; Farm 1938:13; Farm 1940:22; Farm 1942:11.

These data do (and do not) reveal several patterns. First, we have to use caution in interpreting the data as a direct indication to how many women actually had a venereal disease. The grouping of women sent to Lansing under Chapter 205 and the general inmate population makes it hard to determine the exact percentage of women sentenced under 205 who had negative test

results, although several statements about the high rate of venereal disease among the population serving different sentences indicates that the numbers between the two groups may not have been that different (see, for example, Farm 1922:20). The data from 1920 only includes those sentenced under 205, however, and the similarity of this data to other years, combined with the fact that quarantine patients averaged 71% of the inmate population, gives us some degree of confidence that a significant portion of those sentenced under Chapter 205 did not test positive for syphilis. This does not mean these patients were free of disease: they may have been sentenced to the WIF under Chapter 205 for having gonorrhea, although the even more unreliable nature of gonorrhea diagnostics during this period makes this diagnosis somewhat subjective.<sup>24</sup> What we do learn from these numbers is this: there is reason to suspect that many of these women did not have a venereal disease when they were sentenced to Lansing under Chapter 205. The statement of the doctor who took over as medical supervisor at the WIF in the mid-1930s supports this idea: “During my short term as medical supervisor I have noted that several girls committed for treatment have been proved free of any venereal disease. The zealous social worker should make sure of the diagnosis by state laboratory tests before burdening the state with needless expense” (Farm 1936:7).

### Treatments Given

Similar to the scientific uncertainty surrounding diagnosis, the exact dosage and treatment regime for syphilis and gonorrhea were highly contested during the 1920s. Further, whatever scientific consensus did exist was not always communicated to physicians. The stigma associated with venereal disease often prevented this knowledge from reaching doctors, and

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<sup>24</sup> The WIF did not perform initial screenings for gonorrhea, as all inmates were assumed to have gonorrhea and were treated for the disease.

thereby their patients. Medical schools spent minimal amounts of time teaching treatments for venereal disease, and many doctors showed little interest in learning about a disease, nevertheless specializing in it, with such a strong social stigma (Brandt 1985:130-132). Actual patient care was thus far removed from medical knowledge. Although Salvarsan was a fairly effective treatment for syphilis if administered at the right time and for the right duration, only 1 in 10 cases received treatment in the early stages of syphilis, when it could have been cured. Instead, many patients relied on quack remedies and homemade cures for venereal diseases and stopped medical treatments after immediate symptoms were relieved, but while they were still contagious (Brandt 1985:133).



*Figure 19: Women standing outside of the hospital building at the WIF. Date: between 1920-1929 (Kansas Memory:229152).*

The treatment given at the WIF followed this general pattern of actual practice lagging behind the best scientific understandings of the time. Though Salvarsan, or the “606 treatment,” was the most effective treatment for syphilis available at the time, mercury was still commonly used across the country into the 1920s. Doctors at the WIF gave patients Salvarsan, but they also routinely gave them mercury, either intravenously or as a topical rub, into the early 1930s. Doctors treated all women imprisoned at the WIF for gonorrhea, administering local treatments to women several times per week. Given the generally ineffective nature of gonorrhea treatment during this time, however, many patients were never fully cured of the infection. In these cases,

doctors at the WIF would cauterize their cervix, a procedure that may have gotten rid of infected tissue but would have also made the potential for future complications during childbirth more likely. These surgeries were more common in the 1920s, with a high of 137 reported in the 1928 biennial report (Farm 1928:10).

Thus, the treatment women received at Lansing was comparable to what they would have received outside of the institution. Indeed, given the high cost of treatment at this time, it was more than many of these women could have afforded. The WIF sought to provide the best possible care, providing, for example, dental services to all inmates starting in 1934, yet the primary limiting factor to effective treatment for a disease like syphilis was the limited amount of time that women were interned in Lansing. Board of Health regulations stated that women were to be released from quarantine once they were deemed non-infectious. For gonorrhea, this was usually defined as having three negative smears in a row. For syphilis, being non-infectious was defined as not having any open lesions or once the patient had received a specified number of treatments. Given that neither of these diseases had a cure at this time, the exact period of detention was somewhat arbitrary and depended upon definitions of “non-infectious.” In practice, women detained under Chapter 205 served sentences that averaged around four months:

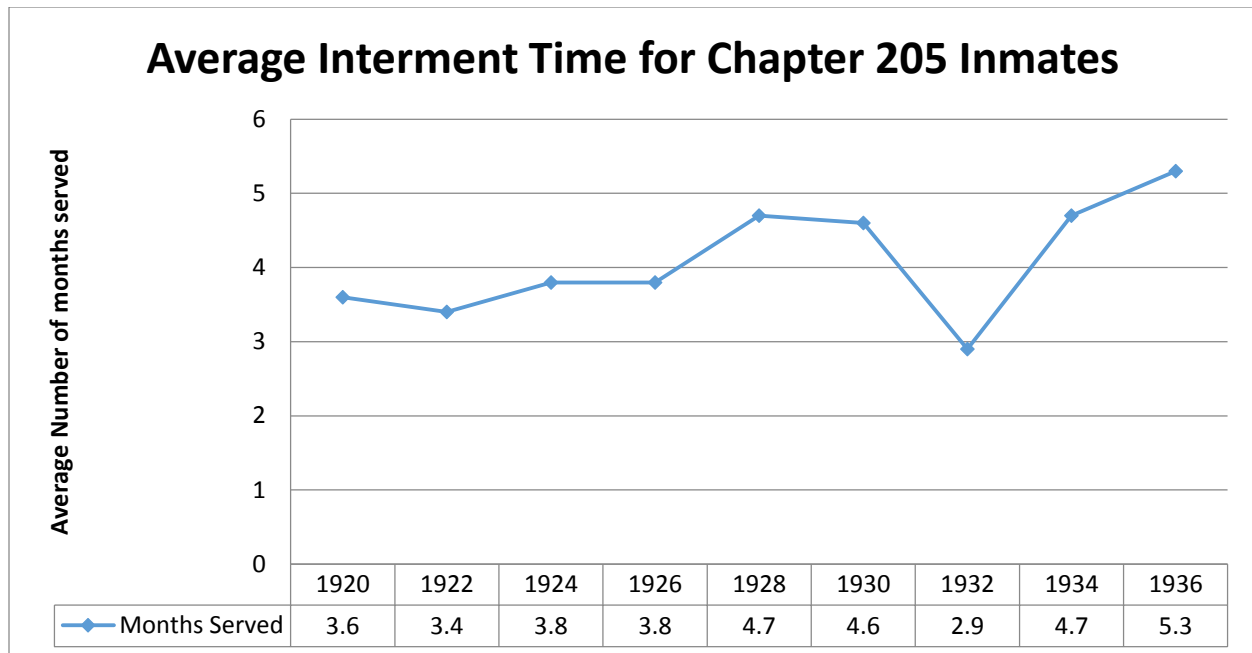


Figure 20

*Note: Data is not reported for 1918 or after the 1936 biennial report.*

Throughout the period of this study, particularly in the 1920s, the medical staff expressed dissatisfaction with the resulting level of “cure” for both gonorrhea and syphilis patients:

The treatment of gonorrhea in women is necessarily both tedious and unsatisfactory. The treatment of syphilis, while more scientific, is equally wrought with difficulties. The fact that it is well-nigh impossible to say when either disease is cured makes the quarantine officer’s position an unenviable one. (Farm 1924:15)

The medical staff recognized the incomplete nature of the treatment given, viewing the care that women received as, ideally, a first step in the treatment process. The physician in charge of medical care in 1938 reported:

These girls are then released and returned to their various localities, where further treatment and checks should be maintained. This is necessary because it is a physical impossibility to keep all the girls with syphilis at your institution until they are cured. It would be a matter of months until your budget would be completely out of balance, and I am afraid that the legislature would not be in sympathy with your requirements. (Farm 1938:12)

Thus, while the treatment offered at the WIF was fairly current with contemporary medical

practices, it was still generally ineffective, in the case of gonorrhoea, or for too short a duration to actually cure the disease, in the case of syphilis.

## Conclusion

This chapter has laid out the general context in which Chapter 205 was born. The various social forces that led to the development of the WIF included changes in sexual culture, the social hygiene movement, and the crisis of venereal disease in the armed forces during WWI. As the policy carried through into the 1920s, a gendered pattern of implementation emerged that provided official state sanction to the sexual double standard and made women's respectability an important factor in determining who would be sent to the WIF and who would be allowed to get private treatment. The following chapter will go into more detail about the initial development of the Women's Industrial Farm and the role of elite activist women in pushing for this reformatory.

## CH 4: “Anything to Please the Ladies”: the Activist Women who Founded the WIF

In 1917, shortly after the successful campaign to establish the WIF, activist Lucy B. Johnston gave a speech to the Kansas chapter of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs celebrating the heightened social influence of Kansas women in politics:

Be not weary in well doing. This was not the first experience as a lobbyist for the federation that your chairman had had and it was very gratifying to realize that the wishes and opinions of club women were being considered and weighed as never before. There is no longer derision or that mock chivalry attitude of “anything to please the ladies” which is even harder for an earnest intelligent woman to bear. In its stead we found not only respectful attention but an honest desire for conference and cooperation with the new voters. The influence of women in the Kansas legislature before and after the year 1912 is in about the same ratio as the oxcart to the automobile. (Johnston 1917:5-6)

This statement highlights the victory that the WIF represented to the activists at the same time that it shows the constraints of their public role. Establishing the WIF was a key legislative agenda for white activist women in Kansas, and the legislative success was one of their first victories after winning full suffrage in Kansas in 1912. The WIF symbolized the type of reform that these suffragettes had been hoping for in fighting for the ballot. At the same time, though, Johnston’s comments reveal how tenuous activist women’s public role was: they were not far away from this attitude of “mock chivalry” on the part of male legislators, and had not yet won the right to vote on the national stage. Despite this political victory, their respectability as public actors was still in question. The nineteen-teens were a key political moment for these women, finally being able to exercise the vote after decades of lobbying for suffrage. Given their political position, a key question to ask about activist women’s involvement with the WIF is: Why did they pick women’s prison reform as one of their first major political issues? This chapter will argue that we cannot understand these activists’ motivations for lobbying to create



the WIF or their status as public actors without understanding their position within racial and class hierarchies.

Eugenicist discourses of race and class shaped Kansas activist women's position as political actors. Between 1870 and 1920, Darwin's theory of evolution became increasingly more influential in scientific and popular understandings of social conditions and the human race (Newman 1999:29). Departing somewhat from Darwin's original theories, a wide range of people, from social scientists to newspaper reporters, began to understand the differences between the races in evolutionary terms. White activist women navigated this eugenicist discourse as they sought to justify their presence as public actors. While women in the late 1800s often drew upon the ideology of the home and separate spheres to justify their involvement in social issues, changing gender ideals meant that this basis for public authority was eroding by the nineteen-teens (Baker 1984).<sup>25</sup> Newman (1999) argues that the loss of public authority based on the image of the home was largely replaced by a new public authority based on an evolutionary conception of white women's role within the progression of civilization. In a sense, white women traded a political role based on their (supposedly racially-neutral) gender position to a political niche based explicitly on their role as white women. As I will show in this chapter, these uncertainties about the respectability of female public actors and the future of the white race were intimately bound up with each other in the lives of white female activists in Kansas.

To unpack the connections between women's place in the public sphere and anxieties

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<sup>25</sup> However, as Newman (1999) points out, Baker's separate spheres thesis does not seriously interrogate the divisions *among* women along lines of race. As Goldberg (1994:30-31) argues in his work about Populism and the suffrage movement in Kansas in the 1890s, this public/private distinction also ignores divisions along the lines of social class and rural vs. urban settings. While distinct public and private spheres may have been prevalent for the urban middle-class in Kansas, most of the population resided in rural areas with more heterosocial leisure, religious, and work patterns than existed in the cities.

about the white race, this chapter will trace three phases of white women's political activism in Kansas: 1. their fight for women's suffrage in the state in the 1900s and 1910s; 2. their campaign to establish the Women's Industrial Farm in the mid-1910s; and 3. their advocacy of "social hygiene" in the 1920s and 1930s. These seemingly disparate activities are actually quite consistent when understood within the evolutionary place of white womanhood during this period. Racial understandings of whiteness and political self-governance informed Kansas women's fight for suffrage and their desire to make their political voice heard once getting the vote. Similarly, the political niche created for white women within eugenicist discourses informed their choice of the WIF as one of their first political projects. Finally, the understanding of sexual self-governance as a property of whiteness explains the easy transition that these women made as the WIF was transformed into an institution to regulate sexuality, allowing white activists to throw their weight behind social hygiene measures in the state. Through these actions, white women incorporated many of the hallmarks of white civilization-- political self-governance, women's unique role in "civilizing the masses," and sexual self-governance—in order to construct a version of white womanhood that made their role in public life respectable.

Together, these different strands come together to answer the central question of this research: what is respectability, and how does it operate in sustaining and creating social divisions? For women during this period, playing a significant public role in itself was a threat to one's respectability. This chapter will argue that activist women in Kansas were able to achieve a respectable role in the public sphere by emphasizing their roles as *white* women within evolutionary understandings of gender and civilization. They chose issues and positions that played upon their racial and class privileges to construct a version of white femininity that not

only tolerated, but expected, white women to play a significant role in the public sphere. Through their espousal of evolutionary understandings of the role of race, class, and civilization, these women were able to carve out a public role for themselves while maintaining their respectability.

### **Winning the Vote: Women's Suffrage & Political Self-Governance (1861-1912)**

The typical biography of the women involved with creating the WIF is illustrated by the life of Lucy B. Johnston. Her story shows the variety of women's organizations active in the state, as well as the importance of the suffrage movement in shaping these women's political identities. Born in Ohio in 1846, Johnston attended the Western Female Seminary in Oxford, Ohio. Following graduation, she taught grade school for four years before marrying an aspiring Kansas lawyer and politician, William A. Johnston. While William served in the Kansas legislature, Lucy settled down in Minneapolis, Kansas with their two children. It was here that Johnston began her involvement with women's clubs and community activism. She was active in several women's clubs, campaigned to gain state funds for a traveling library, lobbied for prohibition in her hometown, and served on the local Board of Education for three terms (1930; Underwood 1984:303). Johnston soon gained leadership experience in state-wide and national organizations, serving as president of the Kansas State Federation of Women's Clubs from 1901 to 1903 and on the board of directors for the General Federation of Women's Clubs starting in 1906. Of particular interest to Johnston was suffrage, an issue that received the active support of her husband, who was now serving as Chief Justice of the Kansas Supreme Court. Active in the statewide campaign of the 1890s, Lucy Johnston took the lead in the 1912 referendum on women's voting rights, serving as president of the Kansas Equal Suffrage Association. Wanting

to capitalize on women's newfound voting rights, Johnston helped organize the Kansas Council of Women and served on its legislative committee, in addition to heading the legislative committee for the Kansas Federation of Women's Clubs, during the period when these groups lobbied for the Women's Industrial Farm (Corbin 1930:9). Johnston remained involved with women's clubs and was consulted for her lobbying expertise until her death in 1937. While Johnston may have had more leadership roles than others on the Kansas Council of Women, several aspects of her life history were typical of the clubwomen who lobbied for the WIF: Johnston was educated, had a well-connected and politically active husband, lived most of her life in cities or large towns, had legislative experience in statewide and nationwide campaigns, and was heavily invested in the type of "civilization work" that aimed to spread the values of white civilization (Sullivan 1978).



*Figure 21: Photo of Lucy B. Johnston from between 1911-1915 (Kansas Memory:208042).*

For Johnston, like many others, the campaigns for suffrage served as an introduction to public life. As the following section will show, white women's arguments for the vote in Kansas drew upon cultural associations between whiteness and civilization. Through their fight for suffrage, these women sought to reinforce the association between whiteness and political self-governance to create a respectable public role for white women.

Drawing on a long history of politically-active women in the state, Kansas women exercised more political power than did women in many other states during this period. Thanks largely to the efforts of Clarina Nichols, the first legislature of Kansas granted women the right to vote in school board elections in 1861, making it only the second state in the country to do so

(Blackwell and Oertel 2010). Women gained the right to vote in municipal elections in 1887, but ballot measures to grant full suffrage to women failed to pass in both 1867 and 1894 (Caldwell 1943:300; Goldberg 1994). These suffrage campaigns were hard-fought and involved many national leaders in the suffrage movement, including Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, and Henry Blackwell (Stansell 2010:87). In a November 26, 1885 letter to Susan B. Anthony, F. G. Adams praised women's clubs in Kansas for the role they played in preparing women for political activism and citizenship; commenting on clubwomen in Kansas, Adams stated: "in the part they take in discussions, they show their capacity to grapple with the political, social, and scientific problems of the day, in such a manner as to demonstrate their ability to perform the highest duties of citizenship" (Stanton et al. 1887:710; quoted in Underwood 1984:302-303). The most powerful women in the state, including those who would later be instrumental to the fight for the WIF, pushed again for full suffrage in 1911. The measure passed the legislature, was signed by the governor, and was then passed by popular vote in 1912 after a long campaign by suffragists in the state (Caldwell 1943:300-301). This made Kansas the 8<sup>th</sup> state to grant women full suffrage.

Nationally, many suffragists drew upon the association between whiteness and civilization in order to argue for a more expansive role for white women in society. Many white female suffragists understood the capacity to participate in a democracy in racial terms, and this understanding informed their activism surrounding the fight for women's suffrage. Their understanding of political self-governance as a trait unique to whiteness was widespread. Jacobson (1998) argues that the capacity for self-governance was central to the definition of whiteness during the period between 1880-1940, and that critiques of such groups of "probationary whites" as the Irish and Italians frequently charged that they lacked the self-

discipline and value on personal sacrifice necessary to be a voting citizen in a democracy (Jacobson 1998). This capacity for reason and self-governance was viewed as a racial trait unique to the white race, a result of generations of evolution and a symbol of the superiority of white civilization (Carter 2007:78). As Bederman (1995) has shown as well, “citizen” and “civilized” were loaded with racial meaning during this period in history in ways that are less visible today.<sup>26</sup>

Just as the abolition movement informed an earlier generation of suffragists, the white women who fought for women’s suffrage between the 1870s and the 1920s drew from eugenicist and imperialist discourses to inform their identities and strategies for getting the vote (Baker 1984:642; Newman 1999:56). This is particularly visible in the struggle over the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment (ratified in 1870) and whether white women should support black men’s right to vote. Causing major divisions within the women’s suffrage movement, this issue was informed by the growing understanding of whites as the most evolved racial group and white women as particularly endowed with the qualities of white civilization (Newman 1999:5). Some post-bellum suffragists drew upon evolutionary discourses to argue for the vote, pointing out the absurdity of denying the ballot to white women while granting voting privileges to the supposedly “less-evolved” men of other races who lacked the self-governance needed to properly participate in a democracy. For example, in 1869 Elizabeth Cady Stanton reasoned: “Think of Patrick and Sambo and Hans and Yung Tung, [...] who do not know the difference between a monarchy and a republic, who cannot read the Declaration of Independence or Webster’s spelling-book, making laws for Lucretia Mott, Ernestine L. Rose and Anna E.

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<sup>26</sup> Carter (2007) argues that the racial meanings of civilization and self-governance are still with us today, but that discourses of “normality” and our inability to see whiteness as a socially constructed category make it much less explicit than during the early 1900s.

Dickinson”(Newman 1999:5). While early scholarship (Kraditor 1965) interpreted the racism in the suffrage movement as an unfortunate tactic used strategically to argue for the vote, more recent scholars have pointed to larger discourses of evolution, citizenship, and whiteness to show how central these beliefs were to white women’s identities and social positions (Cott 1987:7; Newman 1999:19; Sneider 2008:13).

Echoing the racial underpinnings of the national suffrage movement, white women in Kansas based their arguments for women’s suffrage upon evolutionary understandings of citizenship and race. Indeed, some of the racial tensions in the national campaign for suffrage emanated from early campaigns fought in Kansas. During the 1867 Kansas campaign, Anthony and Stanton upset much of the national movement when they allied themselves with George Francis Train, whose smooth talk and racist jokes made him a controversial proponent of suffrage (Stansell 2010:87). Another example comes from a postcard copyrighted in 1893 by Henrietta Briggs-Wall of Hutchinson, Kansas (see Figure 22). Titled “American Woman and her Political Peers,” the postcard features WCTU leader Frances Willard in the middle surrounded by supposedly less “evolved” men:





American Woman and Her Political Peers.

COPYRIGHT, 1893, BY HENRIETTA BRIGGS-WALL.

*Figure 22: "American Woman and Her Political Peers," a painting by Kansan Henrietta Briggs-Wall from 1893 (Kansas Memory:208011).*

The text on the other side of this flier reads: "No one can fail to be impressed with the absurdity of a statutory regulation that places woman in the same legal category with the idiot, the Indian, and the insane person" (Kansas Memory:208011). The juxtaposition of Willard, with her glasses and tidy appearance, as the symbol of white civilization, next to the unkempt and vacant looks of the other men intentionally draws upon these evolutionary discourses to argue for women's right to vote. A member of the Kansas Equal Suffrage Association in the 1890s was quoted as saying: "Our cause represents what is right. It represents moral progress, the forward movement of civilization. It cannot be denied" (Goldberg 1994:33). These examples from the failed 1894 campaign for women's suffrage (in which many women who would later advocate for the WIF were intimately involved) illustrate that the language of racial progress and the inherent capacity for self-governance among whites informed women's understandings of themselves in Kansas.

One particularly striking example of white suffragists' endorsement of eugenics comes from a series of institutional review letters written by Lucy B. Johnston in the midst of the successful 1912 campaign for women's suffrage. Between 1911 and 1913, Johnston worked with another clubwoman to visit the various state-run institutions and write a report on their conditions for the governor. These reports, written by Johnston, averaged only one or two pages in length.<sup>27</sup> These letters repeatedly call for more restrictive marriage laws, emphasizing how the population of "feeble-minded" people drains state resources. In her 1912 letter concerning the state Home for the Insane, Johnston wrote: "Here, as in other institutions, we learn that a very

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<sup>27</sup> In her final report, Johnston indicates that she did not have enough time as she would have liked to inspect these institutions due to the time demands of the campaign for statewide suffrage during this period (Johnston 1913).

large per cent of the patients did not have the chance that every child is entitled to—that of being born well. They have a bad heredity” (Johnston 1912:1). Her report on the State Home for the Feeble Minded argued:

These unfortunate children are in this state home through no fault of their own. Something was wrong with the parents or grandparents of these children that are crowding our public institutions. **THEY ARE ONLY THE RESULTS** of a too careless system. Can not Kansas have control over her degenerate citizens to the end that they may not perpetuate their kind? [...]

If any of our farmers had, upon their estates, a herd of deteriorated, deformed and unhealthy animals that for good reasons he could not get rid of, his first thought would be for the protection of every good animal and, his second, to prevent any increase in the infected herd. Can not Kansas do as much for her citizenship by enacting marriage laws that would require all persons, desiring to enter the marriage relation, to pass an examination as to their moral, mental and physical fitness. We believe such a plan would lessen crime, safeguard society and decrease the numbers that are now crowding our institutions. [...] Perhaps these statements are too plain, but I felt we could not do our duty and be less explicit. (Johnston 1911:1-2)

Of the seven institutions that Johnston evaluated, she mentioned the need for restrictive marriage laws in six of the reports.<sup>28</sup> Johnston’s general feeling about the population housed in Kansas’ state-run institutions can be summed up in her statement that what was really needed was “more prevention, less cure” (Johnston 1913:4). While these letters were not a part of the official campaign for suffrage, Johnston’s position as the president of the Kansas Equal Suffrage Association meant that these were written in the midst of an intense state-wide campaign to win the vote. In these letters, Johnston seeks to highlight the racial similarities between herself and the governor rather than the gender difference between them. As shared members of the advanced white civilization, they shared an obligation to help, and control, the “undesirables” in the state.

Through their fight for suffrage, white women simultaneously won more power in the public

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<sup>28</sup> Johnston mentioned marriage laws in her reports on the State Home for the Blind, the Home for the Feeble-Minded, the State’s Orphan’s Home, the Home for the Insane, the Home for Epileptics, and the Girls’ Industrial School. She did not mention eugenics-related legislation in her letter concerning the Boys’ Industrial School.

sphere for women and reinforced evolutionary ideas about whiteness and political self-governance that boosted their position along racial hierarchies. For the women who would later lobby to create the WIF, the successful campaign for suffrage became central in terms of how they viewed themselves as political actors. As Johnston wrote in 1926, “I’ve always been interested in the betterment of humanity, and this has led me into work along church, school and political lines. Perhaps political I should put first, for I soon learned that the vote was more helpful than argument, so I soon became an advocate of political freedom for women” (Johnston 1926:1). Johnston was later quoted as saying “The suffrage thread has run through all my work” (Corbin 1930:1). Kansas suffragists thus gained not only concrete lobbying skills and active social networks, but also a personal identification with the racially-loaded trait of political self-governance through their campaign. By laying claim to their right to vote, white women in Kansas were also constructing a version of white womanhood where voting was not only respectable for women, but an obligation of their role in advancing the races.

### **Creating the Women’s Industrial Farm (1912-1917)**

#### **The Kansas Council of Women**

After the successful 1912 campaign to win the vote, Kansas women sought to make the vote count. These women wanted to capitalize on their newfound voting rights to advocate for women’s issues in the state. Together, a group of women formed the Kansas Council of Women, an umbrella organization for all of the white women’s clubs in the state that would later spearhead efforts to establish the WIF. The Council was founded in 1911 by women who were interested in turning Kansas women’s newfound access to the vote into concrete social action (Corbin 1930:8). They wanted to unify the actions of state women’s organizations in order to promote the greater good of the community. Of particular interest were public issues related to

the status of women and children in the state. All presidents and past presidents of white Kansas women's clubs were members, as were female representatives from the state universities. The Kansas Council was in many ways a lobbying group that represented state women's clubs. They had committees on education, citizenship, student housing, better films, and public health, just to name a few. The Council also worked to try to get more women appointed to public office, such as the State Board of Regents (1940 report). During the nineteen-teens, the Council usually selected between two and five legislative priorities for the year. Once these goals were established, individual organizations were expected to mobilize in support of these measures (Jan 31, 1917).

Given the breadth of the Council, mobilizing this many women was no small matter. The Kansas Council of Women represented a host of women's groups (a 1915 report counted 29 member organizations), including the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Kansas Native Daughters, and the Kansas chapter of the American Association of University Women (June 31, 1915). Together, these organizations represented approximately 40,000 women, according to a 1917 newspaper account (Jan 31, 1917:124). By 1928, another newspaper reports the membership as being closer to 100,000 (June 10, 1928:180).

The Kansas Council of Women incorporated a variety of white women's organizations from throughout the state. As white women settled in Kansas in the late 1800s, they brought with them patterns of social involvement and knowledge of how to run women's organizations; Kansas women promptly started local clubs that were similar to organizations they had been involved with before moving to the state (Underwood 1984:296). Taking off in the 1870s and 1880s, white women's groups initially focused more on self-education and created spaces for women to read the classics, discuss social issues, and gain practice in public speaking (Scott

1991:113). White women's clubs united under the General Federation of Women's Clubs in 1890, providing them with national leadership and institutional support, though the topics studied by individual clubs remained locally controlled (Baker 1984:640). As white women's clubs transformed from groups focused primarily on self-education to groups centered on social activism in the 1890s, their position within gender discourses shifted. Clubs around the country began to take on such projects as establishing libraries and public parks, passing ordinances for food safety, and raising money for orphanages. This public work placed them at a crossroads in terms of their position within the gender order. They relied on traditional constructions of femininity based around motherhood and domesticity, but their public actions took them far outside the four walls of their homes. Employing the term "social housekeeping," these clubwomen used the language of the home to justify their involvement in areas that otherwise might have been considered off limits for women (Blair 1980:117; Scott 1991:146). This shift from self-education to social activism is reflected in the priorities of the Kansas Council of Women.

While it represented white women from a variety of organizations, it does not appear that the Kansas Council of Women included any black women's clubs, reflecting larger national patterns of women's organizing along lines of race and class.<sup>29</sup> Most women's clubs had a primarily elite and middle-class membership, yet there were also clubs for working-class women, and separate local and national clubs for women of different races (Blair 1980; Giddings 1985).

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<sup>29</sup> None of the records found for the Kansas Council of Women mentioned black women's organizations or the membership of women of color in any of the member organizations. Rules about membership in these organizations were often unstated, however, so there were also not any documents that officially banned black women from these clubs. While the customs of women's organizations during the time indicate that these were all white women's organizations in the Council (Brady 1986:23), there is certainly the possibility that a few of them could have been racially integrated. For the purposes of this research, it is safe to say that the leadership of the Kansas Council of Women was primarily white and the agendas of the organization represented white women's priorities.

Black women in Kansas led a comprehensive and active state-wide organization of black women's clubs that paralleled the activities and priorities of white women's organizations. Importantly, however, these black women's clubs were separate from white women's organizations and lacked the financial and political resources that white women had to effect social change. The lines of racial segregation in women's clubs were often unstated, but clear to everyone involved. Following a controversy about black women wanting to attend the national convention of the all-white General Federation of Women's Clubs meeting in Milwaukee in 1900, a white clubwoman published an article in the *Topeka Daily Capital* praising black women for working within their own race and not attempting to racially integrate the women's organizations in Kansas. A black clubwoman published a response in the black newspaper, *The Plaindealer*, commenting:

In localities where women are estimated by their intelligence, refinement and ability to do good club work, it may be [a] common sight to see a colored woman a member of a white woman's club, but it is not at all likely that we will see such a site as that in Kansas soon. (quoted in Brady 1986:23)

In her comment, this black clubwoman argues for respectability, rather than race, to be used as membership criteria for women's clubs. However, it appears that this vision was far from reality. Black women's clubs in Kansas highlighted the arts, charity, and programs for black youth, taking on fewer social issues than some national black women's organizations (Brady 1986:27; Giddings 1985). They lacked the financial and political resources to mobilize for the types of larger policy changes that the Kansas Council of Women took on.





*Figure 23: A 1940 photo of members of the Kansas Association for Colored Women's Clubs. These women would have generally been excluded from the activities of the Kansas Council of Women (Brady 1986:24).*

Thus, the Kansas Council of Women represented a particular subset of women in the state, those who were advantaged along lines of race and class. Even within the Council, there were important divisions between the leadership and the rank-and-file club women that it represented. The fact that the Council was made up of presidents and past presidents of women's clubs meant that only the most dedicated and career-like women were part of the Council. These were not the women who showed up once a week to discuss Aristotle; these were the women who spent hours and hours organizing statewide campaigns, managing budgets, arranging for speakers, and lobbying legislators. When interviewed in 1928 about why she enjoyed working with the Kansas Council of Women, former president Mrs. C.C. Goddard stated: "Because the women of the Council are all trained workers and I do not have to coax and plead with them to act for they appreciate the big things that are being accomplished and are glad to do their part" (June 10, 1928:181). As "trained workers," these women were much more involved in the



public sphere and more removed from domesticity. They were more fully committed to such social issues as suffrage than some of the rank-and-file members of their organizations.



*Figure 24: Suffragettes in Kansas riding in the automobile of Governor Walter Stubbs in 1912. Many of the women in this photo would later go on to be a part of the Kansas Council of Women and lobby to create the WIF. Pictured in photo (from left to right): Laura Clay, President of Kentucky Equal Rights Association; Lucy B. Johnston; Sarah A. Thurston; Helen Eacker; and Stella H. Stubbs (Kansas Memory:222).*

The women of the Kansas Council of Women fit within a national movement of female activists who lobbied for women’s prison reform. Nationally, agitation for women’s reformatories came primarily from elite and middle-class women. In her 1931 study of U.S. women’s reformatories, Lekkerkerker comments: “all of them have been established as the result of an action of socially-minded women in the community in reaction to bad conditions existing where women were confined in the same penal institutions with men” (Lekkerkerker 1931:112). Starting in the Northeast and other Progressive strongholds, women spearheaded campaigns to lobby state governments to establish separate women’s prisons. The general biography of the women who agitated for prison reform was similar to the women in Kansas: they were active in

club life, well-connected, politically experienced, and had the time, resources, and energy to devote to social change. In some states, these women were more committed to prison reform, taking over as superintendent or serving on the board of directors after the institution was founded. In other states, like Kansas, founding a women's reformatory was one of a series of social issues that the women took on, with the women moving on to other issues after the reformatory was founded. Thus, the choice of lobbying for a women's prison in Kansas was partially a reflection of national patterns: women's prison reform was an issue commonly understood as being within the purview of female reformers (Freedman 1981; Rafter 1985:41-59).

### **Lobbying to Create the WIF**

With a desire to capitalize on their newfound voting rights, the Kansas Council of Women set out to establish a women's reformatory as one of their first legislative priorities. The first record found related to advocating for the creation of the WIF dates from around 1914, when acting President Mrs. J.S. Simmons submitted a report to the Council detailing some potential problems and guidelines for establishing a reformatory for women in Kansas. The clubwomen were initially hesitant about pushing for a women's prison, worrying that the low number of female convicts in the state (there were only 10 to 12 female inmates in Kansas at that time) would make an all-female prison impractical (Simmons). They decided to investigate the issue further before making a decision, and went about systematically investigating the prison conditions in the state and developing a plan for a reformatory. Similar to many other progressives during this time, the Kansas Council of Women wanted to utilize the methods and expertise of social scientists and take a thoroughly modern, "objective," position on this issue. They embarked on what Kansas Council of Women member Mrs. C.C. Goddard later called a

“long study of prison conditions” in the state, systematically collecting data about women’s rate of imprisonment in local jails and state prisons (June 10, 1928:182-184; Graham 1917; Johnston 1917). In a series of letters between Johnston and Frank Blackmar, a Sociology professor at the University of Kansas, Johnston sought Blackmar’s advice about the latest social science recommendations for the name, location, design, and overall philosophy for a women’s reformatory in Kansas (December 27, 1916; Blackmar 1917).

Mostly following Blackmar’s advice, in 1915 the Kansas Council of Women officially declared the creation of the WIF as one of two legislative priorities for the year (June 31, 1915:68-70). They advocated for a farm designed to rehabilitate women, rather than punish them, through hard work and the development of job skills (Johnston). The clubwomen envisioned this reformatory as a place for everyday offenders, not as a place to house sexual deviants, although their assertion that the Farm should be located close to a hospital in 1916 indicates that they were at least aware that the population at the Farm would be in need of specialized medical care (Jan 29, 1916). Unlike earlier female prison reformers, who cited sexual abuse of female prisoners by male guards as a motivation for reform, women in Kansas worked closely and were congenial with male politicians and prison officials (Freedman 1981). For example, in an article published by clubwomen shortly after the passage of the bill funding the WIF, the clubwomen wrote:

The recent legislature was made up of clean-minded, intelligent men from country, town and city districts. There were farmers, doctors, lawyers, business men, ex-county and city officials, sheriffs, county attorneys and others who had a knowledge of Kansas criminology and they realized the need of protecting society from the evil wrought by women criminals who are let at large, passed on to the next town or given a light jail sentence and later paroled. [...] Sometimes it is because of a spirit of chivalry or mistaken kindness on the part of judge or jury [that women are given light prison sentences]. (Graham 1917)

Under this understanding of the prison situation, it is male chivalry, as seen in men’s tendency to

give women light sentences, not outright abuse of male power, which is the problem. This more congenial attitude toward male politicians and prison officials is likely due to clubwomen's close social ties to these men. For example, the husband of a member of the committee to establish the WIF for the Kansas Council of Women, Mrs. J.K. Coddington, was the warden of the state men's penitentiary at Lansing in 1917.

Once committed to establishing a women's prison in Kansas, members of the Kansas Council of Women got to work. According to a 1917 report to the Kansas chapter of the General Federation of Women's Clubs (KGFWC), which was particularly involved with advocating for the Farm, "[t]he club women of the entire state were urged to begin a systematic educational campaign in each county immediately following the Fall election, to the end that no member of the House or Senate could come to the legislature without a definite knowledge of the [...] important measures<sup>30</sup> which the club women wanted passed." They went on to initiate an intense letter-writing campaign, schedule meetings with the Board of Management, consult with an attorney in drafting the legislation, and select Representative A.M. Keene in the House and Senator Charles S. Hoffman in the Senate to introduce their bill. The reformatory bill made it through the Senate with relative ease despite some opposition from newspapers (George 1917:571). After stalling in committee in the House, the bill was finally put to full vote and it passed with only three dissenting votes on March 8, 1917 (Johnston 1917; Miller 1917:806). The final bill, which went into effect April 5, 1917, allotted \$75,000 for a reformatory (1917). Considering the fact that the Farm only had less than twenty inmates when it first opened, this is an impressive expenditure of state resources.

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<sup>30</sup> The other initiatives advanced by the KGFWC in this year were regulations regarding mothers' pensions, movie censorship, cigarettes, and kindergartens (Johnston 1917:2-3).

### The WIF as “Civilization Work”

This successful campaign to establish the WIF came at a crucial time for members of the Kansas Council of Women. The eyes of liquor companies, conservative politicians, and journalists were watching to see what Kansas women would do with the vote, particularly as the national campaign for suffrage became more militant leading into WWI. As one of their first issues, the creation of a women’s prison for such a small number of inmates seems like a high investment of political capital for little gain. Why this issue, and why at this time? It is only once you consider their actions within the context of the evolutionary position of white womanhood that the connections between the WIF and white women’s respectable role as political actors become clear.

### *Taking Care of the “Less Civilized”*

Those involved with the Kansas Council of Women saw themselves as members of the most advanced civilization in history. Given the particular importance evolutionary thinking gave to women in carrying on the cultural legacies of their respective races, white women, even more than men, were responsible for spreading the values of “civilized” whiteness. Through this, these white activists carved out a political niche for white womanhood. The women lobbying to create the WIF repeatedly stated their responsibility to share their values and way of life with those women in the state who had lost their way. In a speech about the WIF, Lucy B. Johnston stated:

This problem of the care of dependent, delinquent and penalized girls and women is as old as humanity. It affects society at its very foundation; it concerns humanity at its birthplace. The need for a solution is admitted. Shall the women of Kansas solve the conundrum? I believe they can if they will. (Johnston:10).

Here, Johnston positions white women as being the natural choice as caretakers of others in

society, particularly of women and girls. In their arguments for the Farm, Kansas women envisioned the establishment of the WIF as “primarily a work of women for women” (Jan 29, 1916), and made specific arguments for why women in particular needed to do this work (see also (Simmons). Activist women continually emphasized female convicts’ need for a feminine, moral influence through female prison officials, carving out a space not only for themselves as activists, but for the professional women who would staff the WIF.

The public reaction to activist women’s efforts to establish the WIF indicates how successful this strategy of “women’s work for women” was for establishing a respectable public role for white women. Newspapers in Kansas widely reported the bill to establish the WIF as the “women’s bill” and credited the establishment of that institution to clubwomen in the years following its passage (see, for example, January 16, 1917; February 28, 1917; November 1, 1917; Sherbon 1931). A 1920 article about the Farm declared: “Kansas women decided that women no longer should be kept in the barred cells behind the high walls of the state penitentiary at Lansing.” The article went on to argue that “the urgent request made by hundreds of Kansas women” was a significant influence in the legislators’ decision to establish the WIF (Reed 1920). Johnston’s report to the Kansas chapter for the General Federation of Women’s Clubs about the 1917 campaign to establish the WIF indicates that clubwomen’s letter-writing campaigns received some degree of attention from lawmakers: “These letters began coming in to the members early and continued to come until the last day. It was not unusual for a member or senator when approached by a friend of the bill to draw a letter out of his pocket and say ‘Yes, I will vote for that bill. The club women of our town are for it’” (Johnston 1917:5). This recognition of the WIF as being within the jurisdiction of white female activists granted a respectable public role for these women to play in public life. Taking care of the “other,”

whether that is other racial groups or their “lost sisters,” was readily understood as a responsibility of white womanhood and a respectable activity for women in public.

*The Threat of Probationary Whites' Sexuality*

Besides creating a clear political niche for white women, advocating for the WIF tied into cultural anxieties about the future of the white race. An evolutionary understanding of race relations differed from earlier conceptions of race because of the possibility, and, indeed, inevitability, of change. Earlier groups of whites may have viewed black people as being “inherently” less intelligent in a similar way as someone in the late 1800s would, but Darwin’s theory posited that blacks had the possibility of evolving. The flip side of this was that the white race also had the possibility of *devolving*, adding a sense of anxiety and angst to the category of Whiteness that was not there before (Newman 1999:31). This anxiety about the category of whiteness can be seen in the way that Kansas activists constructed female inmates as both a moral and biological hazard to the future of the white race.

Activist women articulated cultural anxieties about the moral threat posed by female prisoners in their arguments for creating the WIF through a focus on women’s responsibility for the moral tenor of “their” communities. Just as elite white women were constructed as the “civilizers of the races” and given particular importance in the evolutionary success of the white race, activist women in Kansas viewed poor women as having particular influence and control over “their” race. According to activist women in Kansas, a major reason for establishing the WIF was that, as women, female prisoners held a particularly important role in the morality of their communities. Clubwomen frequently criticized male lawmakers for giving women light sentences, arguing that this did irreparable harm to the community. For example, Lucy B. Johnston critiqued the practice of giving women light sentences by saying:

if the fine and jail sentence are for the punishment of the woman prisoner, little is accomplished, but If the punishment of Society is desired, then much is gained, because the woman victim of this jail sentence comes out with all her pride gone, more degraded, more out of sorts with Society in general, and better equipped to do damage to the moral life of the community. (Johnston:4)

Johnston positions women as being particularly responsible for the “moral life of the community.” This is the logic that gave activist women a more respectable role to play in public, and it is also the reason that poor women were so threatening. As Johnston said in a 1913 report on the Girls’ Industrial School, women had “an influence for weal or woe on the future citizenship of Kansas,” making their ability to exercise sexual and political self-governance particularly important (Johnston 1913:1).

A perceived lack of sexual self-governance on the part of female inmates was a threat not only because of the moral dangers it posed, but because of the possibility of reproduction. The inmate interviews designated the women at the WIF as primarily “white” or in a “probationary” white category, such as Irish (Jacobson 1998). As such, their sexual behaviors were all the more alarming because the threat of reproduction meant that their offspring could blend into the larger category of whiteness in the population, thereby polluting the gene pool and leading to the devolution of the race. Indeed, a major way that activist women articulated this anxiety about poor women’s influence on their communities was through concerns about the reproductive potential of female prisoners. In a newspaper article published shortly after the WIF was established, a group of women from the Kansas Council of Women justified the need for the WIF by stating:

All girls leaving the Beloit school [the girls’ reformatory] at 21 years are not fit for citizenship, so she and the diseased girl are turned back into the community to degrade and pollute our young people, or to marry someone of her own kind and bring more of the unfit into the world, thus refilling our jails, penitentiary, imbecile asylums, insane asylums, reform schools and poor houses. It takes many hundred thousand dollars every year to feed, clothe, house and manage this ever increasing number of unfit. Is it not wise



to cut off the supply by segregating at least those who violate the criminal laws of the state? (Graham 1917:1)

In this quote, these clubwomen make explicit connections between these girls' lack of political and sexual self-governance: they are "not fit for citizenship" at the same time that they actively "degrade and pollute our young people." Their inability to control their own behavior is seen as part of the same general character trait.

What is specifically threatening about female prisoners is their potential to "bring more of the unfit into the world." While the activist women point to the alleged drain on state resources as a reason to fear this, I would add that prisoners' racial similarity to the clubwomen was another factor in why this was so threatening. The clubwomen viewed this group of women as being from a distinct "other" (as indicated by the comment that they would "marry someone of [their] own kind"), yet the boundaries surrounding whiteness were blurry, and there was often very little stopping an average person from thinking that the elite clubwomen from Topeka and the inmate from Lansing were from the same racial stock. As Zipf (2012) notes in her study of North Carolina's efforts to control syphilis, the very presence of promiscuous white women threatened the "foundational association between chastity and whiteness" that informed white activist women's own social status (Zipf 2012:278). Activist women were invested in protecting the purity of whiteness, both in ideological terms as well as at the level of reproduction. Creating a prison to reform these wayward women not only provided an issue around which white activists could respectably lobby, it sought to change the behaviors of those "less civilized" groups that potentially threatened the purity of the white race.

### **Activist Women as Allies for the Farm**

Following the opening of the WIF in 1917 and the sudden influx of women quarantined

under Chapter 205, clubwomen were not intimately involved with the day-to-day functioning of the institution. There are a few references to clubwomen from later years in this study, such as a reference to Mrs. J.K. Coddington (the wife of the warden of the men's prison) giving a sermon at Sunday service to inmates in 1918 (Health 1920:356) or to clubwomen donating books to the library at the Farm in 1940 (Farm 1940), but they were not major players in the day-to-day operations of the Farm. However, there are indications that the professional women who ran the Farm viewed their social connections with these white activists as a resource they could draw on to lobby male legislators. For example, Superintendent Julia Perry gave a speech to the Kansas Chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union urging them to take action to get the state to start enforcing Chapter 205 against men (Farm 1924:6-9; see CH 5 for more details).

Nationally, the political influence of white activist women was recognized in the 1929 *Handbook of American Prisons and Reformatories*, which lamented the lack of resources given to women's prisons and identified clubwomen as the ones that should take up their cause (Garrett 1929:xxxiv). A series of letters between Lucy B. Johnston, attorney H.C. Castor, and Governor Woodring from 1931 about a controversy surrounding staff changes at the Farm mentions that some matrons who were fired from the Farm complained to some clubwomen, who then wrote to the Governor on their behalf (Castor 1931:1). While the details of the matrons' dismissal from the Farm are not clear, Johnston's social influence is: the governor responded to Johnston to reassure her that he fully supported Superintendent Perry's decision to fire the matrons, commenting: "I am happy to know that my attitude in this matter is approved by you" (Woodring 1931:1). Activist women had some level of social influence, and the fact that some professional women from the Farm went to them as sources of political support indicates that this influence was recognized and shaped relations between these groups.

### Social Hygiene (1919-1942)

In the state of Kansas, as well as nationally, women's organizations like the Kansas Council of Women became less active and influential in the 1920s. The decline in women's clubs reflected several trends: the opening up of other professional opportunities for women, the loss of a unifying cause after suffrage was passed, and the growth in government responsibility for many issues that women had originally championed (Blair 1980; Luker 1998; Underwood 1984:305). Though Kansas activist women were less organized and influential in the 1920s and 30s, they remained involved in one issue that related to their prior agitation for creating the WIF: social hygiene work. A more modern version of the social purity movements of the late 1800s, the social hygiene movement sought to fight venereal disease and prostitution through promoting sex education and a scientific approach of government interventions. In the 1920s, the Kansas Council of Women and its member organizations sought to spread the values of whiteness in the state by promoting social hygiene and sexual self-governance. Given their understanding of the inmates of the WIF as lacking sexual self-restraint, activist women made an easy transition from their advocacy for the creation of the WIF to their social hygiene work in the 1920s.

### Social Hygiene as White Women's Work

In the 1920s, many of the organizations that had been involved with founding the WIF turned their attention to social hygiene work. In advocating for sex education and venereal disease control, these women claimed social hygiene work as being a particular responsibility for white women. A 1925 article in the *Federation News* highlighted the need for more clubwomen to advocate for social hygiene in Kansas:

We are told that without the intelligent cooperation of an educated public, the success of the physician and public health worker is practically valueless. Who is going to be the educated public in Kansas? Who indeed if not the club women? [...] Your chairman is optimistic enough to believe that the day is not far off when the club women will meet as

groups to study the problem of social hygiene—which is the problem of creating a new point of view—a new attitude—a new standard. There’s a real job for us, if we wish to serve ‘the younger generation’ instead of passing them up as a bad set! (Newby 1925:5)

This author positions social hygiene work as being within the natural domain of white women’s work in society: women shape the morality of their community, and as white women they had an obligation to teach proper sexual conduct to the younger generation. The degree to which white clubwomen felt ownership over the issue of social hygiene can be seen in the March, 1924 edition of the *Federation News*, which advertised a public health clinic where members of the State Board of Health and leading medical authorities would be available:

This meeting will be in the nature of a clinic where club women may bring their Public Health troubles for diagnosis and suggested treatment. It will offer an opportunity to discuss your local health problems, to hear “boiled down” stories of successes and failures in other towns, and to secure advice and guidance from experts who have been all over the ground and are still looking for the ideal solution. This conference is designated to be helpful to the club women of Kansas. (March, 1924:2)

This quote illustrates the degree to which clubwomen envisioned themselves as having particular responsibilities as white women. Clubwomen brought “their” public health troubles to the conference to receive guidance. At least in their own eyes, clubwomen assumed responsibility for this issue.

Activist women were not the only ones who viewed social hygiene as white women’s work: the Kansas Board of Health treated white clubwomen as a close ally in the fight against venereal disease. In his autobiography, the Board of Health’s monthly newsletter, and public statements made in newspapers, the Secretary of the Kansas State Board of Health, Samuel J. Crumbine, repeatedly asserted his appreciation for the clubwomen in Kansas and his regard for them as an important educational and lobbying force within the state (Crumbine 1913; Crumbine 1948).<sup>31</sup> As state funding for venereal disease work decreased in the early 1920s, Crumbine

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<sup>31</sup> In an undated article (probably from the early nineteen-teens) about clubwomen in the U.S., Crumbine is quoted

sought the political support of clubwomen by sending a letter to be published in the Kansas Federation of Women's Clubs' newsletter. He wrote: "The women of the state can help in the public health work of Kansas during the next biennium in the best way by lending their sympathetic and I might say energetic support, to the end that we have adequate appropriations to carry out the work" (Crumbine 1922:3). Another letter in the same 1922 publication urged women to be involved: "And the small voice is very often STILL—now let's get busy and sell the home folks the idea of HEALTH and learn to howl before a measure is up and lost—howl before, not after, and if we make a convincing noise our brother politicians will know we mean business and meet the idea in a more receptive mood" (Crumbine 1922:3).

Educating clubwomen was an explicit part of the Board of Health's campaign to eradicate venereal disease, as shown in the events and publications that were specifically targeted at clubwomen. A 1922 Board of Health report recounted:

In cooperation with the United States Public Health Service there was held a Lay Woman's conference on Social Hygiene at Kansas City, Kan., on April 11 and 12, 1922. More than 150 women enrolled at this conference, and as a result a study group on social hygiene was organized. Ever one present seemed much interested and felt the conference to be well worth while. (Health 1922:156)

A similar event held in Lawrence on April 25, 1923 reportedly attracted 700 (Health 1924:78).

In a 1924 report, the Board of Health lists the fact that "all of the women's organizations carry some type of social hygiene program" as part of their accomplishments for the biennium (Health 1924:76). Though other documents indicate that these meetings may not have resulted in much

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as saying:

I have every reason to be grateful for the moral support as well as the active co-operation of the Kansas Federation of Club Women. I have never made an appeal to the club women of any town in this state (and my appeals have been numerous during the past three years) but that it has been promptly and generously responded to. The state board of health has a traveling tuberculosis exhibit. In every town in which we go we first get in touch with the local women's clubs. We find without exception that the clubs lend their influence in getting the people out to see the exhibit and to listen to our lectures (Haskin).

concrete action on the part of clubwomen (Newby 1925), the fact that the Board of Health hosted these events and reported them as evidence of progress in their fight against venereal disease indicates how seriously clubwomen were taken.

The educational campaign for clubwomen extended to the written form as well. A pamphlet printed in 1924 reveals the State Board of Health's reliance on clubwomen as agents in the fight against venereal disease.<sup>32</sup> Put together by Buena Burr, the educational director for the division of Venereal Diseases within the State Board of Health, this pamphlet gives credit to the "National League of Women Voters, National Parent-Teachers Association, National Women's Christian Temperance Union, American Social Hygiene Association, [and the] United State Public Health Service" for their assistance with the content (Burr 1924:2). The pamphlet explicitly focuses on venereal disease. It includes a list all of the relevant laws and policies in the state of Kansas, a plan of study for clubwomen, a list of legislative priorities, and a list of things that can be done at the community level to prevent the "social diseases." The primary goal of the document is to educate clubwomen about the current policies of the state of Kansas and enlist their support for future action. What is perhaps most notable about this pamphlet is that it does not even mention the fact that hundreds of Kansas women were being sent to the WIF each year to be quarantined for venereal disease. The pamphlet lists the laws regarding quarantine and the procedures to be followed by health officers in quarantining women, but it does not mention the fact that women, but not men, were being quarantined for venereal disease or the numbers of women detained. This reflects a general lack of coordination between

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<sup>32</sup> This was not the first Board of Health publication aimed specifically at clubwomen. In 1914, the Kansas Board of Health worked with the American Medical Association and a representative from the General Federation of Women's Clubs to develop a "Study Course on Public Health" that included information about venereal disease. They distributed more than 1,500 copies by 1916 (Health 1918:14).

government divisions, with the Board of Administration being in charge of the WIF and the Board of Health in charge of the venereal disease campaign. It also indicates that clubwomen in Kansas may not have been aware of how Chapter 205 was being implemented in the state and the numbers of women being detained. Regardless of the extent to which activist white women were aware of what was happening at the WIF, the fact that the Board of Health produced a document specifically for them indicates the level to which others viewed social hygiene work as being a part of the public role of white women within the state.

The respect that the Board of Health gave clubwomen can be seen in an organizational chart printed in their 1926 biennial report. Under the category of “Public Health Education,” “women’s clubs” are listed alongside such things as films, newspapers, and public speakers (Health 1926:4). The Board of Health saw women’s clubs as being an integral part of their mission to combat venereal disease, giving implicit sanction to their ownership of this social issue.

### **Social Hygiene and the Need for Sexual Self-Governance**

This social hygiene work that Kansas women undertook in the 1920s had clear implications for their positions as white women within eugenicist discourses. Physicians and social hygienists frequently constructed venereal disease as an ailment of the “other,” a disease born of the lack of sexual restraint among minority groups. If immorality was inherited, as many eugenicists claimed, then it would only follow that venereal disease would be more prevalent among “lower” social groups (D’Emilio and Freedman 1997:215). From these poor and working class roots, venereal disease would then find its way into the “respectable” white middle class. This line of thinking was particularly apparent in discussions of the asexual transmission of venereal disease. The concern that venereal disease could be transmitted through shared drinking

cups or restrooms revealed anxieties about the increased social contact between social groups. Ignoring the reality of sexual contact between social classes and extramarital sexuality within the middle class, many social hygienists conceived of the spread of venereal disease as emanating from lower social groups into the respectable white middle class. As gynecologist Howard Kelly stated in 1910:

The personal services of the poor must daily invade our doors and penetrate every nook in our houses; if we care for them in no wise beyond their mere service, woe betide us. Think of these countless currents flowing daily in our cities from the houses of the poorest into those of the richest, and forming a sort of civic circulatory system expressive of the life of the body politic, a circulation which continually tends to equalize the distribution of morality and disease. (quoted in Brandt 1985:23)

In richly metaphorical language, Kelly here constructs venereal disease as emanating from the lower classes and ultimately threatening white families (Brandt 1985:22-23).

This construction of venereal disease as an ailment of the lower classes had several implications for the social position of white women involved with the social hygiene movement. First, this interpretation of the origin of venereal disease made a direct connection between the sexuality of the “other” and white women’s own fertility and capacity to reproduce the white race. As family sizes declined around the turn of the century, politicians and journalists worried about the declining fertility of white women. While some people, such as President Teddy Roosevelt, attributed white women’s declining fertility rates to personal choices, others placed the blame on the menace of venereal disease.<sup>33</sup> Between 1900 and 1920, advocates for sex education, journalists, doctors, and the military all constructed venereal disease as posing a particular threat to the biological capacity of white women to bear children. These “experts” told the tale of venereal disease as originating from “loose” women, being passed on to innocent

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<sup>33</sup> President Teddy Roosevelt accused white women of committing “race suicide” by refusing to take on the responsibilities of motherhood, referring to a woman who avoided having children as “a criminal against the race” (D’Emilio and Freedman 1997:215).



wives through their cheating husbands, and ultimately resulting in infertility, miscarriage, and infantile blindness. Ignoring the use of birth control within middle class families, social hygiene activists such as Prince Morrow argued that venereal disease had resulted in the sterility of its true victims: white middle class women (Brandt 1985:16). The 1918-1920 Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Health warned, “the widespread prevalence of venereal disease has attained such magnitude as to make it a race peril” (Health 1920:10). Social hygienists often framed their arguments for public health measures to control venereal disease in evolutionary terms, stressing the need to protect future generations and innocent (white) wives from the ravages of these diseases. As Carter (2007) argues: “The tale of venereal contagion was a story of the downfall of white civilization” (128). This reasoning provided a direct link between the lives and respectability of activist white women to the sexual lives of the “other.” Because husbands’ fidelity could never fully be trusted, the prevalence of venereal disease became a threat to white women’s own ability to have children and pass on the benefits of white civilization. Constructing venereal disease as a threat to white women’s fertility gave white female activists the motivation and justification to become publicly involved in regulating the sexual lives of the “other,” providing a connection to this social issue that touched on the heart of white women’s own status in a society understood along evolutionary lines: their ability to reproduce (Brandt 1985; Carter 2007).

Second, this construction of venereal disease as emanating from the lower classes and ultimately impacting white, middle-class fertility impacted white female activists in another way: it reinforced the idea that sexual self-governance was a property of whiteness and that white women in particular embodied this trait of advanced civilization. Similar to the view that white people were the only ones capable of political self-governance, Carter (2007) argues that sexual

self-governance was part of the construction of whiteness during this period: “The passion that could destroy the republican experiment were the passions of the bedroom as well as of the marketplace and the ballot box” (35). In the narratives about white women’s fertility described above, white women become the victims of venereal disease. They embodied the sexual self-restraint characteristic of advanced civilizations, restricting their sexuality to heterosexual marriage. The public battle against prostitution and venereal disease did more than just try to control the sexual behaviors of lower social classes: it held up these white female activists as models of sexual self-restraint and reinforced associations between whiteness, purity, and sexual propriety from which white activists gained a sense of respectability.

### Eugenics Legislation

Though educating the public about sexual self-governance was a major tactic of social hygiene work in Kansas, activist women also lobbied for a variety of legislative measures aimed at controlling the racial makeup of the state. Clubwomen’s support for legislation aimed at preserving the white racial heritage of Kansas can be seen through a variety of documents throughout the period of this study, particularly in the late 1920s and 1930s. In 1924, the Kansas Council of Women passed “a resolution stressing the need for selective immigration for the United States” (Jan 29, 1924:151). In that same year, the venereal disease pamphlet published by the State Board of Health for clubwomen urged that the women of the state “[confer] with recognized authorities on eugenics, [read] recommended literature, and [draw] up suitable legislation” (Burr 1924:3). A list of legislative agendas for the Kansas Federation of Women’s Clubs in 1927 included this proclamation: “Legislation aimed to decrease hereditary evils resulting from the mating of the physically or mentally unfit has the support of the Club women

of Kansas” (September, 1927:10). As these statements show, there was support among clubwomen for a eugenics agenda in Kansas. Women’s endorsement of eugenics was not unique to Kansas, as women’s organizations across the country embraced the ideas of eugenics and advocated for stronger state policies (Ziegler 2008).

Some of the context of these discussions can be gleaned from the minutes of the 1935 meeting of the Kansas Council of Women:

Public Health was discussed by Dr. Margaret Bostic, Chairman of this committee. She elaborated on the dire need of public care of the unfit, and the successful use of sterilization for persons unfit for reproduction, as well as emasculation for the criminally unfit, with the idea that compulsory means should be employed to stop reproduction by the subnormal and diseased persons, and to remove the menace of sex crime. Mrs. Doran recommended study of the Oklahoma law on this subject. Mrs. Van Horn called attention to the need of skilled supervision in our boys’ and girls’ industrial schools and orphans’ homes, as the sexual development appears earlier in subnormal children. Mrs. Doran and Mrs. Lillian Mitchner gave shocking illustrations of cases which have come within their personal knowledge. Mrs. J.E. Johntz, Abilene, told that this work could and should begin in the local jails where conditions generally are not the best.

Dean Justin, K.S.C., Manhattan, recommended that this discussion be brought before the members of this organization, its effect, and advantages, and possible organization for practical accomplishment. This was seconded by Mrs. Johntz, and carried. Dean Husband, K.U., Lawrence, suggested the improbability of success in getting a bill through the legislature on emasculation, but felt that the present law on sterilization might be strengthened, and be made obligatory.

A motion was made by Dean Justin that a committee be appointed to secure information on effective laws now in use on sterilization, that the committee confer with the State Board of Administration, and that a bill be prepared, to be presented to the legislature. [...]

Dr. Margaret Bostic further suggested that more restriction be made in the admission of immigrants who bring with them their morals and lower standards of living. (Kull 1935:2-3)

This account reveals several things about the way that eugenics fit into these women’s understanding of the world around them. First, we see how closely sexual danger is associated with those caught up in the corrections system in Kansas, regardless of their offense. The two juvenile corrections facilities are mentioned specifically as threats of sexual misconduct, even though many offenders in these institutions were not imprisoned for sexual crimes. The newly-

formed committee is set to consult with the Board of Administration, which oversees the prison system, not the Board of Health, indicating that these women saw the problem as residing primarily in those who were caught up in the criminal justice system. Second, we see how conversations among these elite women served to “other” this group of sexually threatening people and construct them as a dangerous presence in society. The women point out the strange sexual patterns of “subnormal children,” then quickly go on to share “shocking illustrations of cases” of sexual delinquency. This conversation constructs this “other” as sexually deviant and dangerous to society, providing justification for the subsequent call for obligatory sterilization. Finally, the ease with which these women move between sexual danger, the criminal justice system, and the threat of immigration shows how connected these things were in their minds. Throughout this conversation, it seems that the words convict, sexual deviant, and immigrant could be used interchangeably.

The conflation of inmates with people at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder led to some conflicts between the reformatory ideal that Kansas women had lobbied for at the WIF and their beliefs about inmates’ capacity to be reformed. The reformatory model implied that women were capable of being reformed, but biological understandings of inherited “feeble-mindedness” and “imbecility” led to a belief that some people were not capable of being reformed. The tendency to classify inmates as being biologically inferior and the quandary of what to do them at the Farm can be seen in a 1921 report to the Kansas State Board of Health by Darlene Doubleday Newby. A social worker who did an undercover stint at the WIF to understand the social conditions leading to imprisonment, Newby commented on the change in character of the women interned at the Farm in 1920 compared to during WWI: “The visitor at the Farm in 1920 notes a change in the type of girl. Now there is a predominance of stupid-looking, listless girls,

such as one sees in reformatories and in psychopathic wards of city hospitals” (Newby 1921:22). While the inmates of the Farm during the war years might have been able to be reformed, Newby expressed doubts about these inmates, noting their biological deficiencies that are an indication of their lower racial stock and class status:

some of them formed a part of the little procession that winds its way to the county courthouse and stands outside the door marked “Commissioner of the poor.” They were all part of the group which experts classify as dependent, defective or delinquent children. But no experts ever saw them. They probably grew up in one of our splendid Kansas communities that has no social problems. Some of them are cross-eyed, some of them have adenoids, some of them have been sex offenders since they were six years old. (Newby 1921:22)

In this quote, Newby makes explicit connections between poverty, sexual delinquency, and the physical characteristics that are markers of these women’s status on the evolutionary ladder.

While it is not clear how a six year old could be a “sex offender,” Newby’s assertion that they were is a clear accusation of sexual impropriety on the part of their whole family, as it implies unnatural biological urges for the children and a lack of supervision or an accusation of sexual abuse on the part of the parents. The way that Newby describes these inmates indicates a belief that they were beyond reform. Eugenicists argued that long-term imprisonment was the most realistic method to contain the innate moral depravity of some groups of people, and that sterilizing these inmates was the only solution to prevent them from passing on their propensity for crime and immorality to the next generation (Odem 1995:98).

Clubwomen in Kansas were enthusiastic supporters of stronger sterilization laws in the 1920s and 1930s. This fear of the reproductive capacities of the “other” was consistent with the sentiments clubwomen expressed during the campaign to create the WIF: a woman who lacked sexual self-governance was all the more dangerous because of her capacity to have children and reproduce this undesirable character trait. Activist women’s attitude toward the reproductive

danger of female prisoners is reflected in another quote from Newby's 1921 report. Newby argued that the state needed to intervene earlier in the lives of "wayward" girls before they ended up at the WIF:

The line is sharply drawn between the dangerous lunatic who might cut his own through and the feeble-minded prostitute who gives birth to a child every year. The lunatic is locked up; the promiscuous woman is allowed to roam the streets; if she be in a community where there is an active health officer she eventually finds her way to the Farm. It is a tardy policy that delays apprehending her while she pursues her vicious course practically unhindered, wrecking her health, and landing at last, a shattered piece of humanity, in the only institution in Kansas where a woman without friends and without funds may be treated for venereal disease. (Newby 1921:23)

Here, Newby equates a person who would "cut his own through" with a woman who has children every year. Particularly within the larger context of anxiety about whiteness and the future of the race, this specter of the fertile prostitute seemed particularly dangerous to activist women in the state. Newby went on to comment:

The antisocial conduct of one feeble-minded prostitute will cost the community irreparable damage in diseased young manhood and in a future sickly citizenry. The woman's illegitimate children are likely to become an additional contribution to the criminal population of the state. Thus it will be seen that she is a menace to the future as well as to the present generation. (Newby 1921:34)

Though Newby argued for more preventative measures to keep these "feeble-minded" prostitutes from falling into a life of immorality, many activist women in the 1920s thought that sterilization was a more realistic approach to controlling the fertility of the "other." Clubwomen in Kansas firmly backed state-mandated sterilization, discussing strategies for increasing the use of sterilization in their organizational meetings and officially declaring that stronger sterilization laws were legislative priorities for their organizations.



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*Figure 25: The "Fitter Families" contests, in which families were encouraged to have children that met the highest standards of evolutionary advancement, took off across the nation after debuting at the Kansas State Fair in 1920; this photo is from 1929. (American Philosophical Society:1563); (Association 2010).*

Kansas was a leader in state efforts to sterilize those deemed “unfit” for reproduction. The first records of state-enforced sterilization in Kansas date from 1894, when the superintendent of the Kansas State Asylum for Idiotic and Imbecile Youth sterilized many of the inmates in his institution (Association 2010:3). The Kansas legislature officially passed a sterilization law in 1913 (Rowland 1984:224; Wehmeyer 2003:59). The state Board of

Administration thoroughly endorsed such measures to control reproduction. In its 1920 biennial report, the board listed restricted marriage laws among a series of requests to reduce the population at the state's institutions, commenting that "Kansas has given statistical study to the improvement of its livestock, but has been too busy or too heedless to give thoughtful care to improve its breed of men" (Administration 1920:xvi). The Board of Administration required that wardens of penitentiaries wanting to sterilize its inmates submit a statement to the Board outlining:

that he believes that the mental and physical condition of such inmate or inmates [...] would be improved by a surgical operation for his, her or their sterilization, or that procreation by such named inmate or inmates would be likely to result in defective or feeble-minded children with criminal tendencies, and that the condition of such inmate or inmates is not likely to improve so as to make procreation by such inmate or inmates desirable or beneficial to the state. (Administration July 14, 1928:3)

Once approved by the governor, inmates (or their legal guardians) would be notified before the operation was performed. The constitutionality of this law came before the Kansas Supreme Court in 1928, one year after the United States Supreme Court upheld Virginia's forced sterilization law in *Buck v. Bell*. In the Kansas case, *Smith v. Schaffer*, the court upheld the state's sterilization law, arguing:

Reducing this problem of reconciliation of personal liberty and governmental restraint to its lowest biological terms, the two functions indispensable to the continued existence of human life are nutrition and reproduction. Without nutrition, the individual dies; without reproduction, the race dies. Procreation of defective and feeble-minded children with criminal tendencies does not advantage, but patently disadvantages, the race. Reproduction turns adversary and thwarts the ultimate end and purpose of reproduction. The race may insure its own perpetuation and such progeny may be prevented in the interest of the higher general welfare. (Administration July 14, 1928:14)

Overall, Kansas was one of the leading states performing involuntary sterilizations in the 1920s and 1930s. A 1937 report from the Human Betterment Foundation reported that 1,915 people had been sterilized in Kansas up to January 1, 1938, giving Kansas the third highest number of



involuntary sterilizations in the country (Wehmeyer 2003:58).

In the 1930s, the hospital at the WIF became a central site in the state's efforts to sterilize the "unfit." The eugenicist-minded superintendent of the Beloit Industrial School, Lula Coyner, ordered the forced sterilization of 62 girls (almost half of the number of inmates at the time) in 1935 and 1936 (Frazier 1988; Hollingsworth 2009). Doctors at the hospital at the WIF performed the operations, commenting that "The hospital of the State Industrial Farm for Women has been busier than usual during the past year, due to the employment of the facilities of this hospital for the sterilization of girls from the Beloit Industrial School" (Farm 1936:7). In this same year, doctors reported performing 51 salpingectomies, the surgical removal of the fallopian tubes, a common method of sterilizing women during this period, on WIF inmates (Farm 1936:8). While revelation of the sterilization of the girls at the Beloit Industrial School caused a national media uproar in 1937 and 1938, with such titles as "Sterilization: the Unholy Horror of Lost Motherhood," little public comment could be found about the sterilization of the female inmates of the WIF, and the laws permitting the state of Kansas to sterilize inmates remained on the books until 1965 (1937; Kelliher 1938; Rowland 1984:225).

## Conclusion

Given that so much of our modern popular imagination of women during this period focuses on women in public (flappers, suffragists, labor organizers), it is easy to forget just how controversial women's place in the public sphere was during this period. Merely being a woman in a public space brought one's respectability into question. This dynamic, as well as the explicit connections to sexuality, become clear in a 1920 Kansas Board of Health report about prostitution in the hotel industry. The investigator laments the lax attitude of hotel management towards prostitutes operating out of their buildings: "The management also owes a duty to the

respectable woman who is traveling by herself, that the hotel be conducted in a proper and orderly manner, that suspicion be not thrown on this respectable woman, which in many cases now happens” (Health 1920:352). The report goes on to call for more regulations of hotels “not only on the grounds that they are becoming a menace to the public health from a venereal-disease standpoint, but also for the reason that a public place should be conducted in such a manner that a respectable woman can stop without fear of annoyance or suspicion” (Health 1920:352). When a woman entered public space, her respectability was immediately put into question, regardless of whether she was staying at a hotel or lobbying state legislators for a bill. The activist women who lobbied to create the WIF featured in this chapter were on tenuous ground in terms of their respectability.

This chapter has shown how understanding these women’s public role in light of eugenicist discourses turned this questionable public role into a respectable one. Through their work to gain the vote for women, to establish the Women’s Industrial Farm, and to advocate for social hygiene, white female activists in Kansas found a political niche for white womanhood. A eugenicist understanding of gender roles, racial progress, and the values of civilization tied these seemingly disparate political activities together, providing a respectable public role for the white female activists.

However, these were not just issues around which female activists could lobby: being involved with women’s prison reform and social hygiene work had connections to white activist women’s own sources of social advantage. Part of women’s ability to claim a respectable public role was their status as “ladies,” a status imbued with understandings of their moral purity (Allan 2009). The presence of sexually promiscuous women in society, particularly when they were white, threatened this source of respectability. As Rafter (1985) argues in her discussion of

female prison reformers during this time:

Indeed, if the fallen woman was *not* a victimized “sister” but rather an autonomous, deliberately sexual being, then the *raison d’être* of social feminists—their concept of womanliness and, with it, the justification for their work—was built on air. An unconscious sense of this danger also accounts for the reformers’ fixation on the fallen woman and their desire to remake her in their own image. (Rafter 1985:51)

The inmates of the WIF thus presented a challenge to one source of activist women’s social advantage: their femininity. As this chapter has argued, the inmates of the Farm and sexually active women in general presented another challenge to white activist women’s social position: their racial privilege. Through inmates’ ability to reproduce and the construction of venereal disease as making its way from diseased prostitutes to innocent wives, the purity and future of the white race was put into question. These threats to the sources of white activist women’s social advantages added incentives to their participation in efforts to control inmates and advocate for their reform.

This picture of the role of respectability in the lives of activist women in Kansas helps us to understand their involvement with the WIF. While we might look back and wonder how these women could endorse an institution that so blatantly violated women’s rights, we must be careful not to conflate the interests of women in general with the interests of white, well-off women in particular. Understanding these women’s lives through the lens of eugenicist discourses helps us to see the complex interactions of class, gender, race, and sexuality in the construction of a respectable public role for these women. By constructing political and sexual self-governance as a property of whiteness and creating a political niche for white women’s “civilization work,” white women’s activism became an expected component of the social responsibilities of white womanhood rather than a deviation from women’s “natural” place within the home. Playing a significant public role became something that was fully within the realm of respectability.

## CH 5: Training Inmates for Respectability: The Professional Women of the WIF

On November 23, 1918, social worker Darlene Doubleday Newby went undercover at the WIF in order to try to better understand the causes of moral delinquency among the inmates. She arrived at the Farm in what the inmates referred to as the “hoodlum wagon” along with 14 other women from Junction City (Health 1920:355). The women were quarantined in the “hospital,” which was really a makeshift structure unsuited for medical treatment, for a five-day period in an attempt to avoid spreading the flu epidemic that was sweeping the nation. Though the facilities were basic, with not enough beds for everyone, Newby was impressed with the inmates’ adaptability. When breakfast was brought in and there was not enough room at the table for everyone, several women filled their plates and “sat around the wall, ‘like society dames at a tea,’ one of the girls remarked” (Health 1920:356). The inmates were provided gingham dresses and basic necessities, like drinking cups and soap; the superintendent also sent over some books and magazines, of which Newby commented that “the girls were more interested in the knitting and crochet patterns and in the advertisements than they were in the stories” (Ibid:357). In her interactions with the inmates, Newby evaluates them as a professional, providing comments on their social backgrounds and dispositions that might have led to their moral lapses, yet she also identifies with them as fellow women. She comments:

These women are “just folks.” They like what we like. The rich autumn foliage on the hills beyond; by night, twinkling stars and the clump of yellow chrysanthemums, unmolested by the heavy frost—everything beautiful finds a response in the hearts of these girls, though its expression be only the every-ready, crude, “My Gawd, that’s pretty.” (Health 1920:360)

While the inmates may have been more “crude” in their appreciation of Nature’s beauty, Newby found much common ground with her fellow inmates. Newby was impressed with the level of dedication and influence of the professional women who staffed the Farm:

Mrs. Perry and her matrons put a great deal of their personality into the daily life at the Farms; contact with the girls is close; the results of the association show in many ways. Many of the girls, in a few days after they come to the Farm, feel that these women are genuinely interested in them. Before they leave they are likely to feel that they have made at least one or two friends. They are morally bolstered up in the belief that they have made good with somebody that counts. (Health 1920:360)

In these observations, Newby points to the enormous impact that the WIF staff could have on the inmates of the Farm, due in large part to their ability to show a genuine interest in the inmates and model proper femininity.

Newby's experience going undercover at the Farm not only reveals many of the details of daily life at the Farm, but also raises several questions about the roles of professional women that will be explored in this chapter. How did Newby's own social position inform her descriptions of the inmates and her diagnosis of the causes of their moral downfall? How did the presence of a women's prison, particularly one focused on sexuality-related offenses, create job opportunities and problematic political positions for professional women in the state? How did professional women negotiate respectability within the context of their work at the Farm?

This chapter will address these questions and explore the social position of the superintendents and matrons who ran the WIF. First, the chapter will outline national trends in women's reformatories and how this compared to life at the WIF, showing that the overall philosophy of reform and physical makeup of the Farm were consistent with national norms, yet the WIF differed in its focus on venereal disease. The chapter then goes on to describe the social position of the superintendents who ran the WIF and the matrons who ran the everyday operations. Finally, I discuss some key contradictions in professional women's roles at the Farm, and how the philosophy of reform that they implemented brought some resolution to these contradictions. The professional women who worked at the Women's Industrial Farm faced two contradictions and competing expectations in their social positions: 1. they were supposed to be

the ideal of femininity, yet their own biographies often strayed from the feminine ideal; and 2. the Farm was supposed to be reforming women, yet external conditions, such as the type of inmates sent to the Farm and the money allotted to the institution, made fulfilling the reform ideal a challenge. Thus, while the superintendents and matrons of the Farm gained jobs and some degree of status from their roles at the Farm, their roles were wrought with contradictions that complicated their relationship to respectability. Professional women emphasized two things to reconcile these competing expectations: 1. the reforming power of domesticity; and 2. the physical aspects of respectability and the importance of the body to a program of reform. While these things by no means made respectability unproblematic for professional women, understanding their philosophy of reform in terms of these women's own social position gives a deeper understanding of the complex ways that respectability informed daily life at the WIF.

### **The Women's Industrial Farm as Part of the National Women's Reformatory Movement**

Following the initial founding of women's reformatories in the US in the 1860s, the women's reformatory movement flourished between 1900 and 1935. While only four reformatories were founded between 1870 and 1900, 17 separate women's institutions were established between the years of 1900 and 1935 (Rafter 1985:xxiii). Starting in areas where Progressive ideals were strong, such as the Northeast and Midwest, a standard for women's reformatories soon emerged during the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Rafter 1985:55). Most reformatories, including Kansas, were founded by legislative action and governed by a central board that also supervised other penal institutions in the state (Luker 1998:616). The laws establishing most women's institutions typically gave more direction about the management of the institution than did laws establishing men's institutions, such as statutes that stated a woman should be the superintendent (Lekkerkerker 1931:182). Women's reformatories differed in three

main ways from men's institutions during this period by having: 1. a philosophy of reform, rather than punishment; 2. physical grounds that reflected this different philosophy; and 3. different typical inmates than male prison populations. Of these three defining characteristics, Kansas was pretty consistent with the national model for the first two, but its emphasis on venereal disease set it apart from other women's reformatories in the last regard. The sheer number of inmates going through the Kansas reformatory as a result of Chapter 205 led to some key differences in the degree to which the WIF could achieve the ideal model for reformatories (Garrett 1929:xxxiii).

### **A Mission of Reform, Not Punishment**

The first defining characteristic of women's reformatories, their emphasis on reform rather than punishment, guided multiple aspects of women's reformatories. From sentencing guidelines to the architecture of the buildings, the principle that women's prisons should reform inmates, rather than merely punish them, guided most aspects of the institutions. This philosophy was reflected in the names of the institutions themselves: women's institutions during this period rarely had the word "prison" in the name, instead using the terms "home" or "farm" in combination with "industrial" or "state" (Lekkerkerker 1931:181). The emphasis on reform was part of a general tendency to think of women's reformatories as more similar to schools for delinquent youth than to men's prisons. The women lobbying to create the WIF in Kansas fully endorsed this philosophy of reform in their arguments to establish the Farm. An October, 1917 WCTU report about the reasons for founding the Farm highlighted the "wholesome and healthful work" that would be done at the institution, stating: "It will not be the purpose of this institution to merely deprive women of their liberty, or to see how much the state can punish them, but the purpose will be to furnish an environment where they can be reformed, built up, as it were, and

made ready for citizenship” (Union October, 1917:1). Women’s reformatories took on a much larger task than merely protecting society from criminals; turning female offenders into people “ready for citizenship” took a considerably more demanding and expansive approach (Freedman 1981; Rafter 1985).

Women’s reformatory officials employed a variety of strategies to accomplish this larger task of retraining the character of inmates. One strategy was to advocate for indeterminate sentences for female prisoners. If the point of incarceration was to reform women, rather than merely to punish them, then prison officials needed to be able to keep female inmates in their institutions until they were truly reformed, regardless of the severity of their original offense. The legal precedent for giving women longer sentences than men was set in cases like *State v. Heitman*, and the practice of giving women indeterminate sentences, even for relatively minor offenses, became commonplace in women’s reformatories across the country. The time of incarceration became divorced from the nature of the original offense, investing great authority in the social workers, psychologists, parole boards, and superintendents who made the decision about when an inmate was “reformed” enough to be released into society (Rafter 1985:74). Besides fitting within the larger idea of reform and investing them with a high level of discretion in their jobs, having indeterminate sentences also gave women’s prison officials very practical leverage to use against their inmates in order to maintain discipline. WIF superintendent Daisy Sharp commented in the 1932 biennial report: “While every possible privilege is accorded, at no time are the girls allowed to forget that their future depends upon the rectitude of their own conduct” (Farm 1932:3). The practice of giving indeterminate sentences was thus rooted in the idea of reform, but had far-reaching implications for the justice system and daily life at women’s reformatories.



### *Classifying Inmates*

This desire to reform women was also apparent in the practice of classifying inmates, which became an increasingly popular idea within women's reformatories as the movement took on a more professional tenor in the first few decades of the twentieth century (Rafter 1985:68). Using a variety of psychiatric tests, including intelligence tests and physical exams, psychologists, social workers, and prison officials worked together to group inmates by various criteria to facilitate the most effective plans for reforming their character. The idea of classifying female inmates was brought to its fullest realization through the Bedford Hills Reformatory in New York, whose generous funding from the Rockefeller family allowed it to have a large staff to classify inmates and separate facilities in which to group the different classes of offenders. However, most women's reformatories in the US lacked the psychological staff to systematically diagnose and implement such an individualized, psychological model of reform (Rafter 1985:73). Another barrier to effectively implement a classification system in women's reformatories was the small number of female inmates in most states: while there were usually more than one men's prison in a state that allowed for the classification of inmates, most states only had one female reformatory for the entire state. While superintendents at women's reformatories often tried to classify inmates based on the severity of their crime and their psychological makeup, there was only so much that they could do with limited resources (Lekkerkerker 1931:222). Thus, the idea of classifying inmates to facilitate effective plans for reforming them remained more of an ideal in the women's reformatory movement than a reality (Freedman 1981:153).

This pattern held true for the WIF. Fueled by the urgency of the venereal disease threat during WWI and funded by the Public Health Service and the Children's Bureau, a team of

psychologists and social workers conducted an in-depth study of the psychological well-being and social histories of women detained under Chapter 205 in Kansas from June to October, 1918. Finding 114 of the 206 women studied to be affected with some form of “mental disorder,” the team of researchers proposed different types of treatment for the groups of women diagnosed with various psychoses (Treadway, Weldon and Hill 1920a:1208). In practice, however, the WIF lacked the resources to hire even one psychologist for the institution. The ideal of classification remains apparent in the biennial reports. In 1920, Perry commented: “The classification of individuals in any institution has much to do with the success of the work. Segregation is the first essential, and as we segregate we find three classes: First, those who should never have been sent; second, those who through misfortune or misguided justice need medical care; third, those who should never be released, because of inherent weaknesses, viciousness, depravity and defectiveness” (Farm 1920:6). While Perry’s groupings of women have more to do with their guilt and relative respectability (i.e. those who are innocent, those who are victims, and those who are too mentally ill-adjusted to be safe for society) than with an official psychological evaluation, her emphasis on the need to separate inmates in order to more effectively reform them reflects the prevalence of this ideal in the national movement.

Though the superintendents of the Farm sought to classify inmates according to their psychological makeup, they did not separate inmates based on race or what would today be thought of as sexual orientation. As can be seen in Figure 26, the WIF was an integrated institution, with women of different races living and working next to each other.



*Figure 26: A photo of the "Field Gang," showing black and white inmates working side by side (Lekkerkerker 1931:337, courtesy of Julia B. Perry).*

In her 1931 newspaper article about the WIF, Florence Sherbon reported that she had visited the Farm in August 1917 and found that “There were several Negroes and Mexicans among the number and all members of the group were living” together (Sherbon 1931). This pattern of racial integration was consistent with women’s reformatories in the North during the period, while reformatories in the South did tend to segregate based on race (Lekkerkerker 1931:234).

Nationally, prison reformers associated racial integration in women’s reformatories with a particular sexual danger: same-sex relationships. In her account of women’s reformatories during this period, Lekkerkerker commented:

Another reason, however, for separating the two races in a woman’s institution is the fact that a peculiar attraction has been found to exist between colored and white women in confinement which intensifies much the danger, always present in an institution, of homosexual involvements. This factor was recognized to be one of the causes of the disciplinary troubles in the New York reformatory at Bedford Hills in the years 1915-1920. (Lekkerkerker 1931:234; see Lekkerkerker pgs. 399-401 for further discussion of same-sex relationships).

The construction of black women's sexuality as out of control extended to inside the prison walls as prison reformers associated black inmates with sexual behaviors that crossed racial and gender lines (Freedman 1999). This concern about lesbianism and racial integration are rarely mentioned in official WIF documents. In her 1931 article, Sherbon mentions "the ever insistent problem of homosexuality" as one of the many disciplinary problems of the institution, yet this is not mentioned in the biennial reports or other statements from the Farm's superintendents (Sherbon 1931). It seems that Julia Perry had a long history of having racially integrated facilities. In a 1913 review of the Beloit Industrial School when Perry was superintendent of that institution, clubwoman Lucy B. Johnston called for the need to provide funding for a new building to allow for racial segregation:

The other building should be a cottage for the negro girls. I have always felt that these girls are being deprived of the justice due them because they are not given an opportunity to rely upon themselves or to show what they could do if given an opportunity by themselves. What the race needs is to overcome its legacy derived from years of servitude, which is a lack of self-reliance, of independence of character, and of race pride, and this can only be gained by attaining and accomplishing of themselves. (Johnston 1913:2).

This desire for racial separation, infused with Johnston's understanding of civilization and eugenics as described in the previous chapter, was apparently not shared by Perry, who went on to lead the WIF as a racially integrated institution. Though the superintendents of the Farm gave little mention of race in the biennial reports, it seems likely that race informed their classification of inmates by mental type.

### *Discipline under a Mission of Reform*

Despite the emphasis on reform in the ideals of women's reformatories, punishment and maintaining discipline were necessary components of managing these institutions. Overall, the disciplinary approach in women's reformatories was one of positive reinforcement, where good

behaviors were praised and often rewarded with added privileges (Rafter 1985:38).

Superintendents of women's reformatories repeatedly discussed the importance of keeping the women busy and structuring the daily life of the institution so as to avoid the potential for

behavior problems as key strategies for avoiding the need for punishment in the institution.

Explicit punishment is rarely mentioned or only mentioned briefly in the official documents of women's reformatories, with the bulk of the commentary focusing on the virtues of appealing to inmates' better natures and the positive effects this has on the development of their character.

Punishment and escape were, in fact, a reality at most institutions, however.

This tension between the desire to reform inmates' character through positive reinforcement and the reality of punishment at institutions is reflected in life at the WIF. The biennial reports from the early days of the institution downplay any direct disciplinary actions toward the inmates. In a speech that Perry gave to the WCTU that is reprinted in the 1924 biennial report, Perry states:

If you have never visited the farm and you have thought of us as behind high walls with armed guards at every post, or in cells with strong bars, you have wrong ideas of us altogether. At present we have sixty sentenced women, sentenced for violation of the same laws, but without walls, cells or bars. Not even a fence shuts them from the great outside world. Under the leafy shade of elm and birch trees they breathe the fresh air of Heaven and bask in the sunlight of God's love. (Farm 1924:10)

Nationally, women's reformatories attempted this strategy of creating a homelike environment by doing things like leaving inmates rooms unlocked at night. Despite the lax security, relatively few women escaped from the WIF: Lekkerkerker (1931) reports that only 23 escaped from the WIF in an eight year period, out of 2960 women committed, even though "there had been no lock between the girls and the free outdoors during the night" during certain periods (Lekkerkerker 1931:290, 302).

Instead of punishment, the biennial reports from the WIF continually discuss the virtues

of positive reinforcement and providing a wholesome, stimulating, and home-like environment at the Farm. In the 1926 biennial report, Perry makes connections between their practices at the WIF and the national (and international) women's reformatory movement by discussing British prison reformer Elizabeth Fry's emphasis on inmates' better natures and the power this has for reforming their character (Farm 1926:4). Several comments in the biennial reports claim that simply by keeping the inmates busy and appealing to their better natures, most need for direct punishment could be avoided:

Such a spirit of contentment prevails among our girls and women that one vies with the other to excel in any given work. Corporal punishment is not known in our correctional work. (Farm 1922:4; Perry writing)

No matter how unpromising, we must see in each the highest possible development of which the individual is capable. (Farm 1924:3; Perry writing)

We try to discover the good in each girl, then emphasize and build on this good in a positive way, with the idea of doing something with the girl instead of something for or to her. (Farm 1942:5: Superintendent Etta Beavers writing)

The Farm sought to provide recreational diversions in order to keep the inmates busy and out of trouble; see Figure 27 for a photo of the WIF baseball team. In a section titled "punishments" in the 1924 biennial report, Perry highlights this idea of reforming character rather than punishing misbehavior:

Everyone is interested to know what method of punishment is employed. Corporal punishment is absolutely forbidden. Scolding and nagging are also strictly forbidden. No matron or employee can afford to fall into a complaining habit on his own account, much less will we permit our girls and women to be placed under one who has formed this habit. [...] Only persons who understand character development should work with our women and girls. Every inmate is a study in herself, and is dealt with according to her individual temperament. An inmate shortens her time of detention, or stays her full time, according as her conduct shows her fit or unfit to leave the institution. (Farm 1924:6)

In this quote we see the varying strategies employed by the institution to reform women's character: indeterminate sentences, the medicalized, individual model for treatment and reform,

and a general disdain for explicit punishment.



*Figure 27: Baseball team at the WIF, 1936 (Kansas Memory:229180).*

Despite all of the language about a “prison without bars,” though, the policy of appealing to inmates’ better nature did not solve all disciplinary problems. The biennial reports of the WIF include more comments about confinement and punishment as the years progress. A 1931 newspaper article describes the shift to the use of more explicit punishment at the Farm after the initial period of limited restraints:

the enormous increase in numbers of inmates, necessarily committed to the care of a minimum number of relatively untrained matrons, made it inevitable that the institution should pass into an era of wire gratings and locks and bolts. [...] Every window now Is

grated, every door has a key and every ward is locked. There are isolation cells in the basement of each residence building which are little better than common jail cells. Under the present management these seldom are used and that only to enable emotionally unstable women to 'cool off' or 'come to' when they 'go berserk.' No inmate ever is deprived of food and no one ever has received any kind of corporal punishment. (Sherbon 1931)

The presence of cells is not mentioned in the biennial reports of the WIF until 1926, when Perry requested funding to build a separate cell house and indicated that the Farm was, at that time, using cells within each cottage (Farm 1926:7; request made again in 1930 report: Farm 1930:6). An independent 1933 evaluation of the WIF noted that the Farm started using locks in 1925, and that "Now all girls are locked in with heavy steel screen covering windows and doors separating corridors and shutting off stairways. Cells were installed recently for punishment by solitary confinement," although talking with matrons was still viewed as the primary means of disciplining inmates (Commission 1933:223). The report goes on to comment:

One is impressed with an inhibiting orderliness or routine. The girls are required to sit by their bed, or by their own room door, during their leisure hours and may not visit except with the girl across the hall. Quarantined girls are rigidly controlled. [...] it is unfortunate that locks and cells were installed for fear of a future need. Institutions of this type, under proper management, seldom need to detain inmates forcibly. (Commission 1933:224; underline in original)

In this report we see a significantly different picture of life at the WIF than is presented in the biennial reports. While the language of the biennial reports emphasizes the effectiveness of one-on-one counseling provided to each inmate by matrons and the general approach of positive reinforcement, these comments about direct punishment show what happened when this strategy failed. The newspaper article comment about women being "committed to the care of a minimum number of relatively untrained matrons" and the 1933 report's comment that institutions rarely need locks and cells if "under proper management" reveal another trend in women's reformatories: they were rarely funded well enough to have the facilities and staff to



actually execute the ideal of reform.

Though it is difficult to determine the extent to which mistreatment of inmates occurred at the WIF, the record of sterilizing inmates from 1936 (see Chapter 4) points to at least one example of this occurring. A comment in the 1940 biennial report praising the new superintendent from Rev. P.H. Delahunty, the Catholic chaplain, also raises suspicions: “The effects of your treatment are now beginning to show. Abuses that continued for long have been eradicated, and a better understanding has been established between officers and inmates” (Farm 1940:9). Exactly what these “abuses” were is not known, but it is safe to say that the ideal of reform was just that: an ideal, that, in practice, was insufficient to maintain the order needed at a large institution.

### **Architecture and Location as Opportunities for Reform**

This overarching ideal of reform that guided women’s reformatories was also reflected in their physical location and the architecture of their buildings. Women’s prison reformers advocated for a different type of architecture that was closer to a home environment than an institutional prison. Thus, the cottage system became a hallmark of women’s reformatories of the period. Under this plan, female inmates were housed in a series of smaller buildings, where they would ideally live with a smaller group of women and a matron and take care of all of the needs of their individual cottages, such as cleaning and cooking. Thus, inmates could recreate the dynamics of a home to facilitate their reform, making the cottage system “an architectural embodiment of the notion that criminal women could be reformed through domestic training” (Rafter 1985:33).

The physical grounds of the WIF in many ways reflected this national ideal. Initially, however, this was far from the case. The location for the Farm was initially meant to be

temporary, but the huge influx of women quarantined under Chapter 205 during the war led to a rapid expansion of the facility. The original small farmhouse was insufficient to house the women, and temporary tents and makeshift buildings were erected almost overnight (see Figure 28 and Figure 29 for buildings constructed during this initial period). As the institution developed in the 1920s and the Lansing location became permanent, more substantial and well thought-out buildings were constructed (see Figure 30 and Figure 31 for examples of more permanent structures). As the institution developed, brick buildings replaced the temporary structures built during WWI, so that by the 1940 biennial report, the grounds were described as including “an administration building, which houses the offices, the chapel and officers’ apartments; the three cottage buildings, Perry, A, and B; the library; the hospital; the laundry; the boiler house; the shop; the dairy barn; the horse barn; the poultry houses; and the waterworks office” (Farm 1940:5).



*Figure 28: "Old Administration Building; Building to the right is the former house of the Prison Farm 'boss', later converted into a hospital. Originally there was a fence around these buildings, but the superintendent had it removed several years ago" (Lekkerkerker 1931:48, courtesy of Julia Perry).*



*Figure 29: "The 'Main Street' of the Farm: The frame buildings on the left were built within a few weeks during the stormy period of 1917/1918, and never finished at the inside: yet they served many years for living purposes" (Lekkerkerker 1931:128, courtesy of Julia Perry).*



*Figure 30: Administration Building, WIF, 1936 (Kansas Memory:229170).*



*Figure 31: The hospital at the WIF, 1936 (Kansas Memory:229176).*

In addition to architectural elements that more closely resembled homes than institutions, women's reformatories were ideally located in a country location, where there was little risk of escape and women could enjoy the rehabilitating effects of outdoor exercise and farm work (Lekkerkerker 1931:288). Rooted in anxieties about modern urban spaces and the poor and racially and ethnically diverse people who lived there, national calls to have female prisoners perform farm work in rural locations drew upon idealized notions of the purity of nature and the construction of a rural, hardworking whiteness (Brandt 1985:90). This rural ideal was reflected in the original legislation that established the WIF, which stated that it should be located at least 75 miles from any city. Though the Farm ended up being quite close to Kansas City, the grounds of the Farm were situated in a country setting, with ample room for the institution to garden and have livestock (see Figure 32 for picture of the grounds of the WIF). Perry described the physical grounds in the 1930 biennial report as such:

The grounds, as well as the buildings, are fitted for human use, convenience and

enjoyment. The buildings are so located as to open to the best views. Buildings are 75 feet apart and oriented to obtain a large amount of sunlight. Each of the buildings is located at a different angle, thus adding beauty to the picture on entering the grounds. [...] There is no broader field of research than nature, and our women need to be taught the lessons that nature holds. The beautiful bluffs that skirt the Missouri river on the east lend strength to the one that studies the view, and as the eye follows the lowlands it must catch a breadth of vision; the beautiful sunrises and sunsets lend so much of beauty in colorings to the one who observes, and thus surrounded these forces of nature are continually working in the great universe about them, lending strength of beauty, happiness and contentment. (Farm 1930:3)

In this description, nature fits neatly within the overall mission of reform of the Farm. Having the institution be physically located in the country had great symbolic power besides its physical distance from the people and modern influences of the city. Nature itself had curative powers, both for the body and the spirit. Descriptions of the Farm from outside sources consistently remarked on the beauty of the grounds, from a 1917 newspaper article about the Farm that was titled “The Biggest Garden in Kansas” to a 1920 Board of Health inspector who described the Farm as having the “appearance of a substantial country home” (Aug 11, 1917; Health 1920:351). This rural setting was in keeping with national ideals for the value of nature and farm work in overall programs of reform.





*Figure 32: View of the WIF grounds, 1936 (Kansas Memory:229168).*



*Figure 33: "The Pergola West of the Old Administration Building" (Lekkerkerker 1931:441, courtesy of Julia Perry).*

### **Typical Inmates of Women's Reformatories**

While the attitude of reform and the physical grounds of the WIF were largely in line with national standards for women's reformatories, the Kansas reformatory differed from the national trend in its focus on venereal disease and the number of inmates that came through its doors. Unlike men's prisons, women's reformatories were not designed for hardened criminals. Instead, the reformers' ideal inmate was someone who was on the brink of diving into a life of crime, but was still capable of being reformed. Thus, reformatory officials preferred younger women convicted of minor offenses. They also tended to prefer white women, as women of color were thought of as being less capable of being reformed and were often sent to regular women's penitentiaries in states like Illinois that were large enough to have both types of



facilities (Dodge 2006:84). Together with increasing state regulation of women's sexuality, the emphasis on minor offenses meant that most of the women sent to women's reformatories were there based on sexuality-related offenses, such as prostitution, or generic convictions, such as vagrancy, that, in practice, were used to convict women guilty of some type of sexual misconduct (Lekkerkerker 1931:195; Rafter 1985:116-117).<sup>34</sup> Though the ideal inmate was a younger woman capable of being reformed, the small number of female convicts in most states meant that, in practice, women's reformatories received all women in the state convicted of a crime, hardened criminal and novice alike. Superintendents of women's reformatories across the country complained that they were unable to realize the ideal of the reformatory model with such a diverse set of inmates. This was the sentiment behind a comment by Perry in the 1920 WIF biennial report saying that women with extreme discipline problems "do not belong in our reformatory class" (Farm 1920:6). Thus, there was a gap between the ideal inmate of women's reformatories from the superintendents' viewpoint and the reality of the types of inmates committed to the institutions.

Like reformatories across the country, the WIF had a particularly high population of young women who were sent to the reformatory as a result of sexual misconduct. Where it differed was the convictions under which women were sent to the institution. The Kansas reformatory was one of only a few across the country, including Nebraska and Wisconsin, which focused almost exclusively on women sentenced under a venereal disease control law (Lekkerkerker 1931:123, 191, 382; Rafter 1985:67). This focus on venereal disease meant that, in some ways, the institution functioned more like a hospital than a prison (Rafter 1985:62). It

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<sup>34</sup> While the general trend in women's reformatories was to focus on minor sexuality-related offenses, this was not universally the case. For example, the Ohio reformatory studied by Rafter (1985:118-119) primarily imprisoned women convicted of childcare or alcohol related offenses. In general, reformatories that did not have the prison space could not afford to imprison women for minor offenses.

also meant that, due to the way Chapter 205 was enforced, there was a fairly high number of inmates going through the WIF. While the average population size was consistent with other reformatories, inmates at the WIF did not serve very long terms, so there was a high turnover rate among inmates. This had enormous implications for the mission of reform of the institution: Perry continually lamented in the biennial reports that she did not have a long enough period of time to truly reform the women sentenced under Chapter 205. Such high numbers of women going through the institution also meant that parole work was nearly impossible, particularly because the WIF did not have the money to hire a parole officer (Lekkerkerker 1931:557).

However, this difference between the WIF and other reformatories should not be overstated, as there were actually few differences between the populations of the reformatories. In terms of race, class, and age of the inmates, as well as the average number of inmates at the institution at a time, Kansas was fairly typical of other reformatories in the country during this time (Lekkerkerker 1931:188). Most women's reformatories routinely gave Wasserman tests to all inmates to test for syphilis, with one conservative estimate showing that 20-30% of inmates at reformatories not explicitly focusing on venereal disease tested positive (Lekkerkerker 1931:389; Rafter 1985:67). Whether they were convicted of violating a law associated with sexual morality or quarantined under a venereal disease control law (such as Chapter 205 in Kansas), inmates of reformatories across the country were coming under the control of state authorities based on their perceived sexual misconduct. The populations of different types of reformatories were actually quite similar, as were the functions performed by the WIF and other women's reformatories. Indeed, there was a general blurring of distinctions between the roles played by private organizations, penal institutions, and medical treatment facilities for women during this period, as commented on by Lekkerkerker in her 1931 study of American women's reformatories

regarding

the situation peculiar to the treatment of female delinquents in the United States in regard to whom penal, reformatory, protective and social hygiene measures blend in such a high degree, and in which there is so little essential difference between the rescue work for neglected girls and women by private organizations and the penal treatment of delinquents by the State, and between the treatment of minor and adult delinquents, because all is dominated by the ideas of protection of women and “social hygiene”. This is the more so, because sexual misconduct constitutes such a large part of women’s criminality in America: there is no province in which the lines drawn between law and morals, between what is to be considered as a public offense or as a private sin, are so vague and vacillating as in the domain of sexual morality, and it is not surprising that this vagueness also blurs the distinction between the measures to be applied. (Lekkerkerker 1931:9)

As this quote illustrates, women’s reformatories, medical facilities, and private organizations performed similar functions: treating physical ailments, reforming character, providing job training, etc. For many social reformers and prison officials, diseased women and sexual delinquents were essentially the same. The same general idea was behind the laws imprisoning women, there was just a different legal mechanism to confine women in Kansas. However, women sentenced under a quarantine law were not necessarily guaranteed due process, and, particularly since the diagnosis of venereal disease was so ambiguous, the burden of proof was often lower for women sentenced under venereal disease laws.

### **The WIF as a Model of the Reformatory Ideal**

Overall, the WIF was consistent with the national women’s reformatory model, both in the philosophy of reform and the basic daily life of the institution. People from across the country visited the institution in order to study the reformatory model (Farm 1920:6; Farm 1922:4; Farm 1934:3; Rowland 1984:212). It differed in its focus on venereal disease, which resulted in a higher number of inmates who stayed for shorter periods of time. This was consistent with national trends in women’s reformatories: institutions in the Northeast came

closest to fulfilling the reformatory ideal, while Midwest reformatories strayed from the ideal more, and institutions in the South even more so (Rafter 1985:62-64).

### The Superintendents of the WIF

Within this model set out by the national women's reformatory movement, the person who came to define the tenor of the institution the most was the superintendent. These women had a complicated relationship to respectability and their claim to a legitimate place in the public sphere. As this next section will show, women's prisons explicitly outlined a unique position for female superintendents, and their position over the inmates gave them a certain level of status. On the other hand, the general lack of respect and resources given to their positions demonstrated



Figure 34: Photo of Julia Perry (Rowland 1984:214).

that they were by no means on equal footing with men in similar positions.

The person who most influenced the WIF during the period of this study was Julia Perry, superintendent of the WIF from its opening in 1917 until her death in 1932. Perry was born in Ohio and moved to Kansas in 1885 to teach school. In 1901, she became superintendent of the Girls Industrial School in Beloit, Kansas, a position she held for 12 years. Perry was in charge of the WIF from the start, guiding it through the turbulent initial years and setting the

tenor for the institution as it became established (Rowland 1984:214). Following Perry's death

in 1932, the WIF went through a series of superintendents in a relatively short period of time. Between the years of 1932 and 1940, at least five different women headed the institution.<sup>35</sup>

Perry's biography illustrates the national ideal for having professionally-trained superintendents of women's reformatories. Unlike many of the female reformers who lobbied to create separate women's prisons, the superintendents who ran the institutions typically had high levels of formal education and professional experience for women during this time. Particularly after 1910, the typical superintendent of a women's reformatory was highly educated and dedicated to a professional life; many of them were single, making identification with the domestic ideal of womanhood problematic (Freedman 1981:110). Among the 20 superintendents that Lekkerkerker was able to gather data on for her 1931 study, nine had college training, two had a doctor of philosophy, five were physicians, and one was a lawyer (Lekkerkerker 1931:269).<sup>36</sup>

As these women's biographies show, professional women's social authority came to be based less on ideas of benevolence and charity and more on Progressive ideas of professionalism and social science as their roles changed going into the 1910s and 1920s (Pascoe 1990:188). This was apparent in the qualifications of superintendents at women's reformatories nationwide, as they increasingly distinguished themselves from their 19<sup>th</sup> century peers through their educational achievements and professional identification (Freedman 1981:109; Rafter 1985:64-65). Progressive ideology infused the philosophy of women's reformatories and was apparent in the language in the biennial reports of the WIF. In the 1918 report, Perry espouses Progressive

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<sup>35</sup> The superintendents were: Daisy Sharp (1932-1933); Mrs. Pennington (only a few weeks, 1933); Ethel K. Pember (1934-1936); Sara Mae Cain (1938); and Etta B. Beavers (1939-1942) (Farm 1932; Farm 1934; Farm 1936; Farm 1938; Farm 1940; Farm 1942).

<sup>36</sup> Though race is not explicitly mentioned in reformatory documents as a qualification for the job, social customs would have dictated that these superintendents were white. It is possible that some of the lower-level matrons were women of color, though it seems unlikely in institutions, like the WIF, that were racially integrated.

ideas about the value of a scientific approach to understanding social issues:

If, as I have before remarked, that back of all wrongdoing there lies a *cause*, our efforts should be to the end that we *work upon the cause*. By removal of this cause the making of a criminal maybe prevented. Every evil that human beings practice or indulge in is the effect of a cause, and it is our business to make the cause subject to our control. (Farm 1918:5)

As superintendents of women's reformatories adopted this more professional tone and Progressive ideology, they shifted their rhetoric and base of authority from one based on gendered ideas of charity to one based on supposedly gender-neutral scientific ideals.

The shift from authority based on charity to one based on professional status had real benefits for educated, middle-class women. The growth of women's reformatories bolstered professional women's social position by creating jobs and giving them clear status over female inmates. Most laws establishing women's reformatories (including the one in Kansas) explicitly stated that a woman should be the superintendent, in part as a method of protecting female inmates from the abuses of male officials, and in part under the assumption that a woman would be better equipped to reform other women's character (1917:437; Brandt 1985:90; Freedman 1981:46, 58; Lekkerkerker 1931:267). The creation of jobs for superintendents of women's reformatories was part of a larger trend in professional women's opportunities during this period, one that was directly related to the authority they derived over the working-class women that they were "helping." As Odem (1995) states in her study of women's sexuality and the criminal justice system in California, "Policing working-class female sexuality thus expanded female authority within the criminal justice system and created new professional opportunities for educated, middle-class women" (Odern 1995:96; see also Clement 2006:7).

As areas of female professional employment like social work grew in the 1910s and 1920s, educated, middle-class women found a respectable public role in their position overseeing

the working-class women that served as their clients (Frankel and Dye 1991:164). The heightened social role that women envisioned through their professional positions can be seen in comments from a speech that Julia Perry gave to a Topeka social worker's conference in 1918:

“Woman is no longer unconscious of latent power, or of ability to win place and competence,” declared Mrs. Perry. “She refuses to content herself with simple ease or luxury; she spurns the idea of dependence and is no longer willing to play the part of a helpless being; but is everywhere recognized as a co-worker with man, and with him has a sphere whose boundaries are unknown. Since these avenues of usefulness are open to the women that are doing things today, we surely cannot afford to neglect the unfortunate women of our state. No work for humanity's sake is small or insignificant. It is up to the thinking women of Kansas whether we will put forth renewed effort to save these women or let them drift with the tide that is bearing them swiftly to destruction.” (Dec 15, 1918)

In this speech, Perry asserts women's public role and equality with men through a discussion of women's roles as professionals. Through their responsibility for the “unfortunate women” of Kansas, the “thinking women of Kansas” gained an opportunity to prove their equality with men. Unlike the earlier generation of female prison reformers, who identified along gendered lines with their “fallen sisters,” the professionally-trained female superintendents of the 1920s established greater social distance between themselves and their clients (Freedman 1981): 155. The growth and institutionalization of professional positions for women clearly benefited educated, middle-class women.

### **The Limits of Superintendents' Social Influence**

Although professional women were increasingly recognized as having a legitimate role to play in professional careers, there were severe limitations to the authority and power within this role. As Pascoe (1990) argues, women's moral authority should not be confused with their social power: women in public roles during this period often found themselves jockeying for power against institutions that were dominated by men. Given that most of the documents used in this chapter (i.e. the WIF biennial reports) are intended for this male audience, it is sometimes

difficult to see the gender imbalances and problems related to gender inequality inherent in the social position of these female professionals. However, there is evidence to suggest that male officials treated female professionals with derision, that WIF superintendents were routinely denied access to the resources needed to truly carry out their vision of the reformatory model, and that female professionals often found themselves implementing the policies of male legislators and officials rather than fully exercising their professional judgment. Professional superintendents' social position was thus bolstered by their role in the reformatory, but they had limited authority, respect, and control outside of a limited realm within the institution (Freedman 1981:155).

### *Lack of Respect*

Though most of the public documents produced by the female social workers and officials associated with the WIF during this period contain very few critiques of men in power, some internal documents indicate that male officials treated female professionals in a condescending manner. In 1913, Julia Perry was forced to resign from her position as superintendent of the Girls' Industrial School at Beloit, an apparent casualty of unrelated political maneuverings in Topeka. In a private letter sent from Perry to Lucy B. Johnston, with whom she had a very friendly professional relationship, Perry wrote:

It is hard after all the years of service I have given the State to have to be attacked in the manner I have been. The great pity is that we do not have men at the helm of State that are able to appreciate good loyal service. [...] The trouble is there is not one there that appreciate women—they tolerate them but would down them any minute if they could. I know whereof I speak. (Perry 1913: 2; underline in original)

In these comments, we can see a concrete illustration of professional women's powerlessness within a political system where they had only had the right to vote for one year, and that only at the state level. Professional women, though the head of women's reformatories across the



country, were by and large reporting to men in positions of power, who determined many things about how they could run their institutions, and whether they could keep their jobs.

Another example of how men in power were in control of and were condescending to professional women comes from the 1948 autobiography of Samuel J. Crumbine, who was head of the Board of Health in Kansas during WWI and headed the state's efforts to combat venereal disease. Though many years after the fact, his account of Darlene Doubleday Newby's decision to go undercover to investigate the social conditions of women being detained at the WIF in 1918 illustrates his paternalistic and condescending attitude toward her. According to Crumbine's account, Newby decided that she should go undercover after she was unable to gain women's trust as a social worker. Crumbine, who describes Newby as "a distinguished social worker who was resourceful and dignified, as well as unostentatious and likable, both in manner and appearance," makes Newby promise that she will ask her parent's permission before going undercover. Apparently sharing Crumbine's concerns about the implications of going undercover with the type of women being imprisoned at the WIF for Newby's reputation, Newby's parents objected, "but they agree[d] that this was for [her] to decide" (Crumbine 1948:226-227). In Crumbine's account, he is the paternal figure looking out for the young, naïve woman's respectability. Regardless of the veracity of this account, it illustrates the degree to which men in power disregarded women's status as professionals.

Though these are just two examples, they illustrate the degree to which professional women in Kansas were in positions where they had to report to and appease male officials who did not always take them seriously. In her article on social service delivery in Kansas between 1916 and 1930, Rowland (1984) notes the gendered power dynamics as the state began to take over many social services. Jobs that men typically filled had more social influence and respect,

while women's positions were usually subservient to men's: "The doctor and the accountant were still more important than the social worker, and they all knew it" (Rowland 1984:225).

### *Limited Resources*

Besides condescending attitudes toward professional women, men also controlled the legislation that influenced the founding and maintenance of the WIF and the funding lines that financed the institution. Female superintendents may have had control over the reformatories themselves, but they had little control over the legal and funding decisions that had a huge impact on their institutions. With separate cottages rather than a central building, high staff-to-inmate ratios, and extensive educational and parole missions, the women's reformatory model was an expensive one to implement (Rafter 1985:77). In practice, women's reformatories rarely had the funding to truly live up to their aspirations. The 1929 *Handbook of Prisons and Reformatories* commented:

The defects of the women's reformatories are not defects of spirit and purpose. They often have too small staffs and too many underpaid and poorly trained minor officials. They often have insufficient appropriations and their interests are subordinated by legislators to those of the state prisons. (Garrett 1929:xxxiv)

As states tightened their belts during the Great Depression of the 1930s, the gap between what women's reformatories needed and what male-controlled legislatures would actually allot widened, resulting in many women's reformatories that lacked any sort of professional or educational training at all (Rafter 1985:182). Besides the lack of financial resources, male-controlled legislatures inadvertently sabotaged the mission of women's reformatories nationally by sending them the "wrong type" of inmate. Women's reformatories were designed for young, impressionable women convicted of minor offenses who were capable of being reformed. In practice, many states, like Kansas, sent all women convicted of any offense to this one

institution, which had enormous implications for the mission of reform (Rafter 1985:74-75). By the early 1930s, felons began to constitute most of the inmate populations at reformatories as states consolidated women's penal institutions (Rafter 1985:81). Thus, female superintendents' power to manage their own institutions was severely undermined by male-controlled government bodies that allocated few resources and controlled which women entered their reformatories.

These national patterns held true in Kansas. Though the initial appropriation of \$75,000 for the creation of the WIF was generous considering that there were only 16 inmates at the time, the huge influx of women into the institution within just a few months of its opening completely overwhelmed the facility (Sherbon 1931). The 1918-1920 report of the state Board of Health praised the way that Perry's institution handled the situation: "The story of how the Farm came into existence reads almost like a fairy tale; it is a story of providing housing facilities and food for an increasing population of infected women without money with which to purchase such necessities" (Health 1920:341). The report goes on to account how Perry arranged with the warden of the men's prison for male laborers to cut down trees and erect makeshift buildings and tents to house inmates and how she made sure that gardens were planted immediately so that inmates would have enough to eat. Despite the Board's assertion that this was "like a fairy tale," the reality of the situation was that the state sentenced several hundred women to an institution and provided no additional financial resources to care for them. How Perry was supposed to accomplish her mission of reform in these conditions is a mystery. Though the WIF received regular funding and appropriations for new buildings throughout the period of this study, it was generally not allotted as much as would have been necessary to truly achieve the reformatory ideal, particularly in terms of the funding to pay well-trained staff (Garrett 1929:366).

### *Limited Control of External Factors*

The degree to which decisions about the WIF were out of the hands of the Kansas superintendents is again illustrated in several comments in the biennial reports regarding the type of inmate sent to the institution and the duration of their sentence. The fact that the majority of the inmates at the Farm were sent for venereal disease was, in and of itself, a decision of enormous impact that was made outside the institution, as indicated in this comment in the 1926 WIF biennial report: “The original plan of the institution was to care for the sentenced women of the state, but, to better protect the public from ravages of infection from exposure to venereal disease, we have received and cared for the interne girls and women”(Farm 1926:3). Activist women founded the WIF with the idea of reforming women, and the superintendents held this same philosophy as well. But external events and decisions made by male legislators meant that the facility soon turned into a short-term medical-care facility for women with venereal disease. Though, by the nature of the source, the biennial reports rarely directly critiqued male officials or the state, they did repeatedly point out that the time of detention for venereal disease cases was incompatible with the ideal of reform and asked for longer sentences for interned women. In the 1922 biennial report, Perry writes:

It is all wrong to send young girls to the Farm merely to be cured, when they need training and direction fully as much as to be cured of disease. As it is, they do not have time enough to catch a new view-point and become established in right living. They may go out with all kinds of good intentions, but temptations await them as they leave the Farm and they have not gathered sufficient courage to resist old companions. I feel it my duty to call you attention to this phase of the work, that you may recommend to the coming legislature an extension of time to the venereal patients sent to the Farm. (Farm 1922:6; see also Farm 1924:5 and Farm 1938:3)

The mission of the institution to reform women was difficult to realize when inmates were only at the Farm for four months.

Though it is difficult to assess the degree to which the superintendents of the WIF were aware of or opposed to the larger decisions about venereal disease control in the state, one biennial report contains an interesting document that mounts a critique against the sexual double standard being enforced in Kansas through the system of implementing Chapter 205. In the 1924 biennial report, Perry included the text from a speech that she gave to the Kansas chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. In this speech, Perry gives a much more pointed critique of the gender dynamics behind the campaign to eradicate venereal disease:

The number of young persons that are becoming infected is alarming and many times they are pursued by married men with families. I took the trouble to notify one such to not send any more correspondence to the institution. His wife received the letter and wrote: "*My dear Mrs. Perry*: In our town there are so many by the same name as ours and when I showed your letter to my husband he said: 'Isn't that a good joke on me that she thought I would mix myself with the likes of those girls.'" (Farm 1924:9)

Here, Perry portrays the young women sent to the WIF as victims of male lust, a sentiment she repeats when she calls on "the splendid womanhood of our state to [...] throw every possible protection around our young girls" (Farm 1924:11). This portrayal of women as victims of male sexual excess stands in contrast to most of the depictions of women in the WIF biennial reports, where they are typically depicted as women capable of making their own sexual decisions who need a "reforming" experience to help them make better choices. In the speech, Perry goes on to explicitly criticize the state's unequal enforcement of Chapter 205: "We are sorry to say that nothing is being done in the way of quarantining the men of Kansas who are afflicted with venereal disease. We surely know that so long as they are permitted to spread infection, that we are failing in wiping out the most deadly diseases that flesh is heir to, and that they continue their nefarious work of wrecking the lives of young girls and enticing them into lives of shame" (Farm 1924:11). This larger political critique of the enforcement of venereal disease control laws was absent in the rest of the WIF biennial reports. Perry goes on to make an appeal to the women of

the KWCTU to organize politically for longer sentences for those interned, arguing:

If Kansas people would demand a law written into their statutes that would carry a definite sentence of not less than a year's time for the first offense and a longer period if repeated, they would begin to see results worth while. [...] These persons need training as well as cure. A law already exists where one can be sent on a charge of vagrancy, lewd and lascivious conduct, adultery, prostitution, that carry a sentence with them of six months' time, and some counties in the state take advantage of this and if the individual's age is such that she can be sent to the Girls' Industrial School where time for training is prolonged." (Farm 1924:13)

Here, Perry goes back to the position that women sentenced under Chapter 205 had sexual agency, and calls on the women in attendance at the speech to take action so true reform might be possible.

This KWCTU speech and Perry's choice to include it in the 1924 biennial report illustrate several important points about WIF superintendents' social position and their ability to control important facets of their own institutions. First, it serves as a reminder that all documents are produced for a certain audience with a specific intent. While the biennial reports were produced by the superintendent as a report to the Board of Administration that had authority over her and the institution, the KWCTU speech was meant for clubwomen, who were potential allies and a lobbying base. In Perry's speech to the clubwomen, she is able to articulate some of the larger political problems with the implementation of Chapter 205 that would be inadvisable in the format of the biennial report. Perry's awareness of these larger problems, and her inability to control external factors that are influencing the WIF, become apparent through the speech. Second, the fact that Perry is appealing to clubwomen to lobby to change these issues, as well as her choice to include the speech in the 1924 biennial report, illustrate that she had little power to directly impact these issues herself. As someone who was part of the government bureaucracy, it is interesting that Perry went to the KWCTU to lobby to change laws and enforcement practices rather than her professional colleagues in state government. Politically, she was not in a position

to directly call out male legislators and administrators on the sexual double standard that was being enforced through Chapter 205. Her choice to include the speech in the 1924 biennial report is a very indirect way of criticizing men in power, showing that Perry herself may have had relatively little power to influence decision-makers in the state.

### **The Matrons and Officers of the WIF**

While the women who served as superintendents were able to gain status over female inmates through their position with the WIF, the women who worked as lower-level matrons and officers of the institution had less physical and social distance between themselves and the female inmates who were their charges. The WIF employed men and women in a variety of positions. A 1933 account reports 29 employees of the institution (10 of whom were men): “the superintendent, a stewardess, physician, nurse, 17 matrons, 1 guard, a chaplain, priest, farm supervisor and 2 engineers” (Commission 1933:225). The largest group of these workers, the matrons, performed and supervised much of the everyday work of the institution, including cleaning, cooking, farm work, and supervising inmates. The 1938 WIF biennial reports begin referring to matrons as “officers,” reflecting a national trend to try to give more professional status to this group of workers and change their job duties to be more like teachers and social workers (Farm 1938; Farm 1940; Lekkerkerker 1931:260). This higher level of responsibility envisioned for “officers” reflected prison reformers’ ideal matron, a woman who was capable of aiding in the mission of reform, rather than merely supervising inmates.

In practice, however, the low pay and poor working conditions for matrons in women’s reformatories meant that superintendents struggled to attract and retain qualified matrons; the ones they did get were typically women with relatively low levels of training (Freedman 1981:71,77). Nationally, the pay was quite low in women’s reformatories. Lekkerkerker’s 1931

survey of institutions reported that the average matron earned \$900 a year, compared to the average superintendent's salary of \$3,430 (Lekkerkerker 1931:275-277). Commenting on this trend, Lekkerkerker states:

the most striking point is that the matrons who come most in contact with the inmates and whose position may, therefore, be such an important one, receive practically everywhere the lowest salaries [...]. This still dates from the time that the work of a matron was considered nothing but supervising housework which almost any woman without any particular education or training could do. [Indiana and Ohio pay only \$40-50 a month,] which is about what a good domestic may earn in the larger cities. Considering the fact that the working conditions are often less attractive than in a private position, one cannot expect to get for such salaries well-educated, capable women who can give intelligent co-operation in the difficult work of adjusting delinquent women. (Lekkerkerker 1931:275)

Consistent with this national trend, a matron's salary in 1933 at the WIF was \$70-75 a month, compared to \$190 a month for the superintendent (Commission 1933:225). Kansas also had a relatively low staff-to-inmate ratio compared to other women's reformatories (Lekkerkerker 1931:255).

This low pay was accompanied by less-than-ideal working conditions. Matrons at many institutions lived in the same buildings and ate their meals with inmates, leaving them little time to themselves or time "off work" (Lekkerkerker 1931:278-279). The WIF had a separate dining room for matrons, but for much of the time period of this study the matrons either lived in the cottages with the inmates or in an older building with few amenities (Farm 1930:6). The isolated locations of most women's reformatories and the need to staff the institutions 24 hours a day meant that matrons worked long hours, with few opportunities to experience life outside their institutions. Lekkerkerker comments: "On the whole, then, the number of hours on duty of this class of workers is high, twelve hours a day not being exceptional, and—what is also important—they are often distributed in a way which is not convenient to the worker" (Lekkerkerker 1931:280). In addition to the low pay and long and irregular hours, matrons faced



a variety of restrictions: “sometimes she cannot receive male callers, or have any relatives live with her, and many other ‘cannot’s’ which do not exist for the outside worker who at least in her free hours can do as she pleases” (Lekkerkerker 1931:280). Besides these physical restrictions, matrons were generally not treated as professionals, despite the image of the ideal worker as being trained in social work. There was little formal training available for matrons at women’s reformatories, and several institutions had policies that forbade matrons from viewing inmates’ files (Lekkerkerker 1931:262, 282). Lekkerkerker criticizes this practice, arguing that

the all too impersonal system is not satisfying to the officers, at least not to those more intelligent social workers who bring to the work a genuine interest in human lives, and a desire to understand and to help. They are not content with attending to the details of their department, they want to know what they are really doing for the adjustment of the women under their charge. This intangible factor is one of the reasons, we believe, why it is often so difficult to interest and to hold the more intelligent social workers in institutional service. (Lekkerkerker 1931:264)

Women’s reformatories provided a workplace that offered low pay, a high level of restrictions, and little respect to the matrons they employed.

Under these conditions, women’s reformatories failed to attract the type of female professionals that would have been best equipped to aid in the reforming mission of the institutions. Lekkerkerker comments that “the work of the cottage matrons should be considered a ‘key-position’ only to be trusted to the best. Unfortunately, rather the opposite meaning seems to prevail in many institutions, if one considers the low salaries of the matrons and the position these officers occupy” (Lekkerkerker 1931:265). Women’s reformatories struggled to adequately staff their institutions, and the education level of the matrons they could retain usually fell below what was considered ideal. Kansas was a good example of this: a 1933 report gives information about the educational background of 10 of the 17 matrons, indicating that one had only an elementary-level education, five had attended high school, and four had some level of

college or teacher training (Commission 1933:225). The report goes on to comment: “It would seem obvious that women with some background in social case work, abnormal psychology, and probation work might be better suited to looking after such women, than the untrained staff who are there” (Commission 1933:225).

Since they could not necessarily require the level of formal education and professional background they wanted, the matron’s respectability became a central qualification for the job. In the 1924 WIF biennial report, Perry comments: “It is a matter of the greatest consequence that the officer, who is the pattern, be a person of the highest type of character” (Farm 1924:3). The 1933 independent evaluation of the Farm lists “Knowledge of human nature; Christian character,” and “moral and spiritual guidance; helping girls to find their better selves” under a column titled “Training, Experience, and Duties” (Commission 1933:225). Matrons were thus required to be not only upright citizens and of good, Christian character, but they also needed to be somewhat knowledgeable about the types of problems inmates might be facing. Lekkerkerker comments:

Generally, reformatory officers should be physically and mentally healthy, well-balanced, even-tempered, socially mature women, with steady moral standards and a cheerful disposition. [...] It is especially important that the officers have a wholesome and objective understanding of and attitude towards sex, for they will often have to deal with sexual problems, and it is almost entirely through the attitudes and reactions of the officers that the inmates have to gain a correct interpretation of sexual questions which many of them so badly need. (Lekkerkerker 1931:273)

Here, we see a more modern version of respectability from the one employed by the activist women in the previous chapter. Echoing larger cultural discourses about sexuality that emphasized a rational, controlled approach to sexual matters, matrons were supposed to be knowledgeable about sex (not piously above it) (Carter 2007).

## **The Benefits and Constraints of Working at the WIF**

Thus, the WIF created opportunities for the women who worked there at the same time that it set up problematic working conditions. The superintendents gained a job and authority over the matrons and inmates that they oversaw, yet they also had little power to control the legislative and administrative decisions that greatly influenced the institution and often derailed their mission of reform. The matrons gained a job and limited authority over inmates, yet the low pay, poor working conditions, and limited respect given to their positions meant that these jobs were less than ideal. Both groups of women gained validation and a bolstering of their respectability, as being respectable was a requirement of their jobs. For the matrons, their respectability was sometimes the only thing that distinguished them from the social position of the inmates at the Farm. The rest of this chapter will analyze the ways that the social position of the superintendents and matrons of the WIF was reflected in the way that they constructed the daily life at the Farm and the philosophy of reform that infused their operations. The women who worked at the WIF faced several contradictions in their social positions that had important consequences for how they constructed daily life at the Farm. Two trends at the WIF, an emphasis on the reforming power of domesticity and the importance of physical health as part of an overall project of reform, reflected the complicated social position of the women who ran the Farm. In some ways, their emphasis on these aspects helped them to reconcile the competing expectations of the institution and bolster their own respectability through the ways they constructed daily life and talked about the inmates of the Farm.

## **Identity, Competing Demands, and the Philosophy of Reform at the WIF**

### **Competing Expectations of the WIF**

The women who staffed the WIF operated within an environment of competing

expectations. The following section will highlight two of these conflicting assumptions about the WIF and the women who worked there: competing images of femininity, and the relative value of reform work versus keeping the institution operating at minimal cost.

### *Competing Visions of Femininity*

One way that professional women's social position was reflected in the way that they ran the WIF was in their complicated relationship to femininity. Though their job descriptions explicitly called for women who embodied Victorian ideals of femininity, many facets of their lives meant that the professional women who worked at the Farm had some disconnects between this older version of femininity and their daily lives. As working women, they epitomized the changing face of femininity at this point in history. Through their emphasis on the inherent "feminine" good nature of inmates and teaching domestic skills, however, these professional women were able to reconcile their complicated relationship to femininity to some degree. Their role at the Farm allowed them to play the role of "mother" and be a model for femininity, bolstering their claims to a respectable public status.

In women's reformatories across the country, women were explicitly hired as superintendents and matrons based on the assumption that their femininity would have a positive influence on the inmates. As Rafter (1985) states, "Officials were selected with an eye to both their administrative abilities and their power to provide examples of 'true womanhood,' models whom inmates might emulate" (xxii). At the same time, however, the superintendents and matrons who worked at these institutions were straddling the transition from a Victorian version of femininity that idealized the "angel in the house" to a more modern conception of the "modern woman" who worked and had a greater level of independence. Many of the superintendents and matrons did not have families of their own, and those that did would have had a non-traditional

living arrangement due to the work requirement of living at the reformatory. Indeed, social commentators at the time often voiced concern about professional women's sexuality, seeing many professional women's lack of interest in heterosexual relationships as a sign of lesbianism or as a sign of an overly-developed sense of Victorian prudery, often called "frigidity" (Simmons 1979:57). Basing their public authority on their embodiment of Victorian femininity was what landed professional women their jobs, yet the conditions of their jobs prevented them from fully realizing this feminine ideal. Female prison administrators increasingly viewed themselves as professionals in the period from 1900-1935, a trend that could be seen in comments from WIF staff who mentioned the "special training" (Farm 1930:4) needed to help the inmates (Rafter 1985:65-67). Reliance on social science methods and a rational, rather than emotional, approach can be seen in comments about matrons needing to "measure carefully the possibilities of the one worked with" (Farm 1922:6), to closely grade and classify inmates (Farm 1930:3), and to conduct a "patient, intelligent study of the individual" (Farm 1924:3). They were moving toward a public legitimacy based on Progressive ideals and a new sense of female professionalism, yet their very job description were based on earlier models of gender (Luker 1998). Thus, this relationship to femininity was something that the employees of the WIF had to negotiate as they decided how to run the institution.

### *Competing Visions of the Role of Work in Reform*

A second contradiction of the WIF was the sometimes competing charges to reform the inmates, but also to keep costs to a minimum and detain them for only short periods of time. There was a great deal of work to be completed at the WIF to feed, house, clothe, and provide medical care for the large number of inmates. The degree to which this work could be accomplished while still staying true to the overall mission of reform was a tension that the

superintendent of the WIF had to manage.

### Economic Arguments for Women's Job Skills

Inherent in this struggle to reform women and complete the necessary work of the institution were ideas about how to properly train inmates so they could accomplish meaningful and gender-appropriate work once they left the WIF. One side of this debate, heavily influenced by Progressive understandings of sexual delinquency and the environmental causes of behavior, was that immorality and prostitution were fundamentally caused by economic conditions (Brandt 1985:90). Middle-class reformers, who often failed to see the distinction between treating and prostitution that was important for many working-class girls, understood many sexual transactions as being the result of women's economic dependence on irresponsible men (Clement 2006). If inmates were to be able to lead a respectable life once leaving women's reformatories, they would need viable job skills and a living wage. This understanding is reflected in Newby's report about her experience undercover at the Farm in 1918 when she states that the positive influence of the Farm "is a step in the direction for helping the girl towards a better solution to her economic problem" (Health 1920:360). It is also apparent in the list of recommendations from the 1920 series of articles in *Public Health Reports* about the WIF and similar institutions, which includes a recommendation that women receive higher wages (Treadway, Weldon and Hill 1920b:1595). However, this same series of reports also stated that economic conditions alone would not generally be enough to push a woman into prostitution:

It is difficult to judge the extent to which economic pressure may be considered the primary cause of early transgression on the part of these girls. Probably very few girls, if any, who are of normal mentality and in whose environment no abnormal condition other than that of a low income exists, would deliberately sell their virtue for consideration. In other words, though it is probable that a number of girls continue in an immoral life because of the resulting addition to their incomes, it is very doubtful if the economic situation alone would be sufficient to break down the barriers of chastity. Rather is their delinquency a manifestation of social maladjustments interrelated as to cause and effect.

(Hill 1920:1525-1526)

Regardless of whether they viewed economic hardship as causing, or merely contributing to, sexual delinquency, this line of thought made an explicit connection between poverty and immorality.

If women's sexual immorality was a product of economic conditions, then this implied that one productive avenue for reforming these women was to equip them with job skills that would enable them to earn enough money to support themselves once leaving the institution. This was the impetus behind Progressive reformers' calls for industrial training at women's reformatories. Nationally, many women's prison reformers advocated for job training that would equip women with skills to earn them jobs that might earn a living wage. However, this type of job training was rarely realized in women's reformatories, as lack of funding and institutional commitments got in the way (Freedman 1981:149; Lekkerkerker 1931:460).



*Figure 35: A group of inmates working in a strawberry field at the WIF, 1936 (Kansas Memory:229168).*

### Teaching Gender-Appropriate Job Skills

The other side of this debate about how to best teach work skills to inmates of women's reformatories was the idea that teaching domestic skills was the best route to both reforming women's character and teaching them viable job skills. Teaching domesticity was much less threatening to the overall gender order than training women for better-paid professions, keeping working-class women in a position of economic dependence on both their husbands and the middle class families that they might work for as domestics. As Lekkerkerker comments in her



1931 study of women's reformatories: "a domestic position offers experience similar to what the woman would meet in her own household so that there is no conflict between the woman's task as wage-earner and as a housewife, which is not true of other positions" (Lekkerkerker 1931:454). Thus, most reformatories, including Kansas (see below), emphasized the teaching of home economics as the primary means of providing inmates with job skills.

### Lack of Funding for Serious Job Skills Training

In many ways, this debate about the best way to reform inmates through teaching job skills was irrelevant because states across the country did not allocate enough money to fund intensive job training programs at women's reformatories. State governments sent inconsistent messages to women's reformatories: their goal should be to reform women and enable them to live respectable lives once leaving the institution, but states tended to send reformatories the wrong type of women (i.e. those who were older and less capable of being reformed) and failed to allocate sufficient resources to provide a serious job training program. Kansas exemplified this national trend. The original legislation establishing the WIF stated that inmates' labor at the Farm should be used to reform character, not for profit (1917:441). At the same time that Kansas pushed this mission of reform on state prisons and reformatories, it also pushed institutions to be as economically self-sufficient as possible. This escalated in 1926, when the state legislature mandated the creation of a budget director position, who asked all state institutions to begin reporting their expenses on a per-client basis. Kansas institutions completed as much of the work of the institutions in-house as possible, with each having farms, laundries, and kitchens staffed by prison labor (Rowland 1984:219). With such tight budgets, there was little room for the WIF superintendent to allot much staff time or resources to anything outside of the basic work that needed to be done to keep the institution solvent.



*Figure 36: The WIF was expected to grow and store most of its own food. In this photo from 1936, inmates pose next to the food storage building (Kansas Memory:229177).*

### **Reconciling Contradictions: Domesticity as a Tool for Reform**

These two contradictions of professional women's social position (their problematic relationship with femininity and the conflicting expectations of reform and efficiency for the WIF) found some resolution in the way that professional women emphasized the home and domesticity in daily life at the WIF. Professional women's complicated relationship to femininity and the mission of reform informed their plan to reform the inmates under their care in two main ways: 1. they tried to construct, through both language and physical buildings, their

institution as a “homelike” environment; and 2. they discussed domestic training as something that could instill proper feminine behavior and reform character through gender-appropriate work. In short, teaching inmates domesticity allowed professional women to address both femininity and work at the same time, both of which were problematic for their own social position.

### *Creating a “Homelike” Atmosphere at the Farm*

Women’s prison reformers as early as the 1870s had called for femininity and domesticity to be used as tools for reforming female inmates. Creating a truly homelike atmosphere in a prison setting was a challenge, but the officials with the WIF, through both words and physical architecture, tried to construct their facility as a home rather than an institution (Freedman 1981:52-57, 67-70). Statements in the WIF biennial reports continually emphasize the value of the home and the officials’ desire to instill this value in inmates. For example, Perry states in the 1930 report that “The great lesson we try to impress upon the minds of our girls and women is the beauty and sanctity of the home” (Farm 1930:4). The 1940 report features comments from two cottage matrons, each emphasizing the value on the home that they seek to instill in their charges:

It is my aim to develop in each girl a sense of pride in her room, as it is the only living quarters she has while in the institution. I try to teach each girl to do her work well and to appreciate the beauty of her surroundings, so that when she leaves the institution she will have been benefitted greatly by her training in homemaking. (Farm 1940:12; Mrs. Katherine Holyfield, officer in charge of Cottage A-1)

The work of bed-making and cleaning can be improved upon, as it seems that some of the women and girls have had very little experience in such work. The girls take much interest in their rooms and try to make them as homelike as possible. They are allowed to use such personal articles as scarfs, doilies, pillows and pictures, to make their rooms attractive. Some of them have bedspreads which they have made themselves. There are very few girls who do not have the home-making instinct. (Farm 1940:12; Mrs. Agnes Lundstrom, officer in charge of Cottage A-2)

In these comments we can see the heightened place that the ideology of the home held for the matrons and superintendents of the institution, and the degree to which they tried to make their facility feel like a home rather than a prison. This analogy of the “prison as home” was taken even further by Perry in this comment from the 1924 biennial report: “The knowledge they gain here will serve as an aid in keeping strong and well themselves and caring for the inmates of their own homes” (Farm 1924:4). By referring to inmates’ future family members as “inmates of their own homes,” Perry seeks to create a parallel between the WIF and the home. This ideal of the “prison as home” can be seen in how the WIF was decorated; Figure 37 shows the library in one of the cottages of the Farm, which is furnished in the manner of a home rather than a prison.



*Figure 37: The library in Cottage A of the WIF, 1936 (Kansas Memory:229176).*

#### Outside Reports of the Farm as “Homelike”

Reporters and chaplains who visited the WIF were receptive to this analogy of the “prison as a home.” A 1920 newspaper article by Mildred Reed, titled “A Prison Without Walls is Women’s Industrial Farm!,” repeatedly commented on the warm atmosphere of the WIF. Reed reports that she was confused when she first arrived at the institution, as the lack of fences made her think that the place was “too attractive to be a penal institution.” After describing a dance

held for the inmates while she was there, she again commented: “They seemed too happy and carefree to be in a penal institution” (Reed 1920). Another reporter visited the Farm in 1931 and reflected on the first few inmates of the prison: “When these first 16 women were moved to the hill they found themselves suddenly transferred from the cheerless, depressing routine of the prison to conditions closely resembling those of normal home life” (Sherbon 1931). These reporters’ sentiments are echoed in comments from the chaplains of the WIF, who were only at the Farm on a part-time basis and thus had more of the perspective of an outsider. The chaplain in 1922 commented that “the spirit of the Industrial Farm [was] unlike that found in a woman’s prison” (Farm 1922:22). In the 1926 biennial report, Chaplain Chas. A. Hatfield comments:

The spirit which permeates the very atmosphere of the place has been a source of wonder to me. Everyone who visits your institution feels this and is at a loss to explain it or define it. Instead of feeling that one is in a prison or a reformatory, it seems to be more of a home where the very best of relations exist.” (Farm 1926:24)

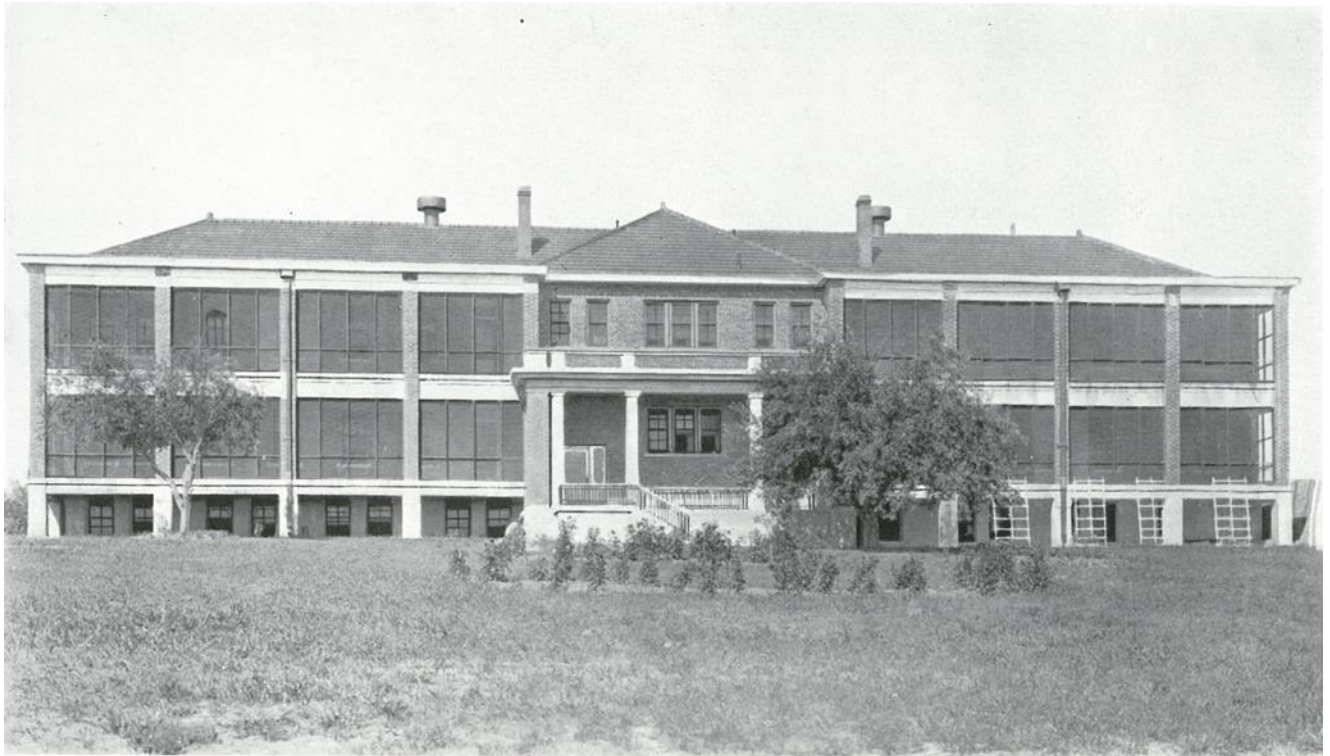
The chaplain in 1940 remarked: “It has been somewhat difficult for me to feel that the Industrial Farm is a prison. The atmosphere is more that of a great inspirational sanatorium. Life is rejuvenated in so many ways” (Farm 1940:8-9). These outsiders’ reports of the WIF as having a feeling of home, rather than a prison, indicate that there was more than just rhetoric behind the superintendents’ statements of creating a homelike atmosphere at the WIF. Though still very much a prison, elements of daily life at the institution sought to replicate the feeling of home.

### The Cottage System

Part of the superintendents’ efforts to make the WIF a “homelike” atmosphere was its use of the cottage system. Striving to meet the national reformatory model, the WIF called each of its housing units a “cottage” and designated a matron to manage each building. The decoration and names of buildings reflected this desire to make the buildings of the Farm as close to a



homelike environment as possible. In Kansas, however, calling the buildings “cottages” was more a name than a reflection of the actual architectural ideal. While the ideal cottage in the national women’s reformatory model would house 25-30 inmates, “cottages” at the WIF housed two to three times that many (Lekkerkerker 1931:294). Kansas also had a centralized dining room, whereas the national cottage model entailed each cottage doing its own cooking in order to replicate typical home life. The degree to which Kansas “cottages” strayed from the national ideal can be seen in the following photograph of Perry Cottage:



*Figure 38: A picture of Perry "cottage," built in the early 1930s. This photo features the four large sleeping porches. (Lekkerkerker 1931:272).*

Built in the early 1930s, Perry “Cottage” was a large building meant to house many inmates. The high number of inmates going through the WIF, combined with the state mandate to be as economically self-sufficient as possible, made the true cottage model a challenge to implement.

The larger buildings and centralized dining facility of the WIF set them apart from the cottage model, yet these were much more economic ways to organize an institution. The WIF superintendents and matrons, however, continued to emphasize the value of home and refer to their buildings as cottages. In the 1938 biennial report, the matron of Perry Cottage, Kathleen M. Mottin, states: “Those who have come to Perry Cottage as housekeepers have been taught the art of keeping a home as it should be kept at all times. As a rule I find them quite willing to take advantage of this opportunity and to appreciate the fact that in learning to do for others they are really improving themselves” (Farm 1938:6). Though housekeeping for a large building like Perry Cottage was far removed from the environment and housekeeping duties that inmates might face in their own homes, officials with the WIF continued to claim that doing this type of work would reform inmates’ character by teaching them the value of the home and the feminine duty of “learning to do for others.”

### *Achieving Reform through Domesticity*

The value of domestic work in reforming character was a major theme in the language of the biennial reports throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The superintendents and matrons of the Farm described domestic work as a central feature of their plan to reform inmates, as it taught both appropriate feminine behavior and the concrete job skills women would need in the outside world.

The biennial reports of the WIF talk at length about the reforming power of domesticity. According to the language used by the superintendents and matrons in the biennial reports, doing domestic work served multiple purposes: instilling the value of the home, teaching femininity, and equipping inmates with needed skills. In the 1920 biennial report, Perry comments:



In general we teach all home work, emphasizing the word home. We try to show to the one taught that in the home is woman's work and that no part of it should be neglected, from fancy sewing and cooking to the cleaning of the kitchen sink and cellar stairs. We try to impress upon the minds of these future home-makers the usefulness, the beauty and the sanctity of the home." (Farm 1920:8)

Similar sentiments can be found in the 1926 biennial report from teacher of the homemaking department, Eleanor Robson:

The object of this [home making] department is, as the name implies, to help the girls to make a home of her residence and not just a place to stay; to learn to live and not just to exist; and to learn that home making is an art not to be despised. When they realize this and the sacredness of the home, they are on the path of uprightness and virtue. (Farm 1926:13)

In these quotes, professional women imbued the daily work of the institution with several layers of meaning. Doing housework taught inmates to be properly feminine ("in the home is woman's work") and to value the home ("the beauty and sanctity of the home"), both of which worked to reform their character so they could lead a respectable life once they left the institution ("the path of uprightness and virtue"). The level to which everyday work was imbued with added meaning is taken to the extreme in another statement from Robson in the 1926 report: "As civilized man cannot live without cooks, and we are striving for higher civilization, we begin our day's work with preparing to feed the inner man. In this we begin by studying the body, its demands for food and the kinds of food necessary to meet these demands" (Farm 1924:19). Here, the power of learning to cook to reform the individual inmates' character is taken to the next level, as Robson connects this everyday work with the larger task of advancing civilization.

The professional women who worked at the WIF not only imbued domestic work with larger meaning, they also positioned domestic work within the language of the home economics movement to give it added legitimacy. The matrons of different departments frequently talked about the lessons they taught through the course of carrying out the work, sometimes referring to

“classes” or a “curriculum” (see, for example, Farm 1924:4). One example comes from Perry’s description of the work carried out in the home-making department from the 1920 biennial report:

Over 100 women have taken training in this department, and the work all through has been highly satisfactory. There are two classes daily, each class having a period of one-half day. [...] In [the Home Economics] division of the work the theory or science has been made as plain and simple as possible. General principles are taught, and the application of these principles is learned by practice. [...] The study of foods by classes is then taken up, together with their nature and composition. Food values and cookery are discussed. Practical work in cookery follows each lesson. (Farm 1920:7)

Here, Perry shows how the staff of the WIF sought to impart general knowledge about housework (i.e. teaching “general principles” and the “study of foods”) in addition to the daily requirement of getting needed work completed. The WIF very explicitly aligned itself with the domestic science movement, as shown in the caption featured in Lekkerkerker’s 1931 book, which says “the Shack in which domestic science is taught”:



*Figure 39: "The Shack in which domestic science is taught [...]. The building is made of raw cottonwood. Girls dressed in white muslin, ready for their period in class" (Lekkerkerker 1931:217, courtesy of Julia Perry).*

There is some evidence that this alignment with home economics was more than just in language. Lekkerkerker states that "Good domestic science courses exist, among other institutions, in the reformatories of Kansas, Bedford Hills, New York and Pennsylvania" (Lekkerkerker 1931:492). Descriptions of the work of the different departments in the WIF biennial reports generally included instruction beyond the basics that would have been required to complete the work. For example, a description of the "laundrying" department included this statement: "Along with this practice work information is given concerning the proper laundrying of cotton, linen and flannel, and the removing of mildew, rust and staining of various kinds" (Farm 1920:8). In the 1926 biennial report, Eleanor Robson describes the work in her homemaking department: "Our forenoons are mostly devoted to classwork. Each girl prepares a notebook for each class. They put forth extra effort to finish these books and wish to take them

home with them, which you so kindly permit” (Farm 1926:14). Comments such as these indicate that the WIF attempted to make the completing of everyday work at the Farm more educational than it would necessarily be otherwise.

The staff at the WIF emphasized how the skills that inmates learned at the Farm would transfer to their lives as homemakers once they left the institution. In the 1938 report, the matrons of the Kitchen and Bakery departments (Birdie Smith and Viola Wolfe), state:

Sometimes the girls are very efficient and capable of going ahead with their work after it has been explained what is expected of them; most of them, however, have to be taught the very smallest duty. We find the majority of the girls willing and eager to learn, as they realize the knowledge gleaned here will be of great benefit to them when they go back to their homes. No girl who applies herself diligently will find it necessary to go back to her former way of living, but can from her experience here better herself one hundred percent in many cases. (Farm 1938:11)

Here, the matrons point out the need for this intensive training in domesticity, in terms of the inmates’ lack of prior knowledge and their investment in learning the material to improve their lot in life after leaving the Farm. Superintendent Perry frequently spoke of the value of having crude facilities at the Farm in order to make the inmates’ work more transferable to their life outside the institution. A 1929 description of the Farm commented: “The industries consist primarily in institutional work which is organized to give training in Home Economics. The equipment as a whole is of a type used in homes rather than in institutions, so that this work has real vocational value” (Garrett 1929:365). Lekkerkerker’s 1931 report emphasizes a similar point in her description of the WIF:

At present the Farm comprises some buildings in addition to the hospital and has taken on a more civilized aspect. Yet, it still has retained some of its pioneer crudeness: sewing is still taught in a barrack building, and homemaking in a primitive one-room shanty; the plainest utensils are used for cooking and serving the food, and all the laundering is still done by hand in old-fashioned wash-tubs. The Farm, however, is rather proud of this; in fact, the superintendent considers it a great asset to develop resourcefulness and practical ability in the inmates, who nearly all are, or will be, the heads of a household. It should be remembered that Kansas is a rural state where the homes with the majority of the Farm

girls will later have to conduct offer few of the modern conveniences. (Lekkerkerker 1931:119)

A strong current of the logic for teaching domestic skills was the idea that inmates of the Farm would go on to be “the heads of a household.” In this way, the Farm served to facilitate middle-class ideals of femininity and the proper place of woman as being within the home.

At the same time, however, many comments from the superintendents and matrons indicated a greater awareness of class differences. In these comments, domesticity is portrayed as an important set of skills that will be required for a woman to be economically self-sufficient once leaving the Farm, quite different from the role that domesticity played in fulfilling middle-class ideals of femininity. Several comments in the biennial reports recognize that many inmates would need to be employed once leaving the Farm. In discussing the sewing department, Perry comments that “A thorough knowledge of this department lays the foundation for a future livelihood to the one who tries to become efficient” (Farm 1930:4). Della B. Downs, the officer in charge of the poultry department, wrote in the 1940 report that: “The knowledge gained and skill developed in working in this department prepare the girls to work advantageously with poultry at home or in commercial undertakings” (Farm 1940:19). Similarly, Daisy Sharp, the superintendent writing the 1932 report, commented: “the institution has been made, not only an industrial farm in name, but a place where the industries pursued may be so competently mastered that a girl or woman going out into active life may have the ability to do her work well and be of service to society as well as to her employer” (Farm 1932:3). Thus, the domestic skills learned at the Farm were not only equipping inmates to have happy home lives themselves, these skills were equipping them to provide for themselves economically.

Unlike the ideal for middle-class women, who were assumed to be economically dependent on their husbands, the professional women who worked at the WIF repeatedly talked

about inmates' need to earn money so they were not an economic burden on the state. Perry gave this sentiment several times in the biennial reports:

To see the individual striving to get hold of herself and becoming more self-reliant and more dependable makes one feel that the work is really worth while. (Farm 1922:4)

During their stay with us we try to impress them with a happy home-life; we see that they are kindly treated and that they have their part to play in creating the home atmosphere. But, at the same time, we try to make them see that it is a greater thing to work themselves out self-respecting, self-supporting, self-dependent citizens than it is to be returned to us and depend upon the state for help. (Farm 1924:3)

Work is essential to the happiness of every individual. For this reason a well-planned line of vocational work is arranged for at the Industrial Farm. Every girl, through the working period, is employed for every minute of time, if she is physically fit. She soon learns the joy that comes from healthful employment. Besides, she fits herself for self-support. It is nothing less than a crime to send girls out into the world without a means of maintenance. (Farm 1928:3)

In these statements, Perry positions the teaching of domestic skills as an important component of making inmates "self-dependent citizens." Overlooking the larger problems of gender pay inequities and childcare that made many women's prison reformers call for other types of job skills training, Perry talks about the teaching of domesticity as something that might resolve some of the contradictions of trying to accomplish the work of the institution and reform inmates. These statements include an emphasis on economic self-sufficiency for the inmates that was not part of middle-class conceptions of the role of domesticity in achieving respectability.

Thus, the professional women who ran the WIF imbued a lot of importance into the teaching of domestic skills. While some reports indicate that they did try to provide an education beyond that entailed in completing the work, the fact remains that, as an institution, the WIF had to complete much of this labor in-house in order to remain financially solvent. In many ways, language about the reforming power of domesticity was just making a virtue of necessity. The way that the professional women used language to elevate domestic work can be seen in the

comparisons of how they talked about homemaking and farm work in the 1922 biennial report.

The report describes work carried out in the homemaking department:

Here the chemistry of bread-making and eatable cookery are taught. They are also taught how to set a table, how to serve a meal, how to manage a home properly, the duties of mistress and maid, the etiquette of entertaining, the neatest way to darn, how to miter corners, and a thousand other things. Their work is made intensely practical. [...] In general, we teach all home work at all times, emphasizing the word *home*. At the same time we distinguish it from housework; that in the home is the woman's work, and no part of it should be considered beneath a woman's notice and knowledge, from fancy sewing and cooking to the cleaning of the kitchen sink and cellar stairs. The great lesson we try to impress upon the minds of these future home-makers is the usefulness, the beauty and sanctity of the home. (Farm 1922:5)

In this description, domestic work teaches women the value of hard work, their proper role within the home, and their proper place within class relations (“the duties of mistress and maid”).

Several layers of meaning are layered on top of the daily work of washing dishes and sewing clothes. Compare to this the description of the work involved with caring for livestock in the next section of the 1922 report:

The past biennium we have raised a thousand chickens. We expect our eggs to entirely supply our institutional needs. Our cattle, our hogs and horses come in for their share of attention. The dairy products, the meat we put away for winter use, both help to place us on a self-supporting basis and reduce our per capita cost. (Farm 1922:6)

The work of caring for animals is presented merely as work that needed to be completed, devoid of the added meaning imbued in work more closely associated with the idea of home. In practice, the inmates involved with caring for the livestock probably learned just as much as the women working in the homemaking departments, despite the lack of language about an intentional educational program for those working with animals. Indeed, a 1933 independent report critiqued the WIF for lacking a serious educational program outside of the basic work that had to be completed at the Farm (Commission 1933:223, 224). A comment from Lovonia M. Donica, an officer in the educational department, in the 1940 biennial report shows this

awareness that the educational value of the work done at the Farm was secondary to getting the work done:

Vocational education has been confined largely to the acquiring of skill in the work done in the various departments, especially the sewing department, the laundry, the bakery and the kitchen. Your plan of the officers making an effort to teach the girls many things about the work as well as getting the work done is resulting in great good in the way of mental development and, followed consistently, is truly vocational education. (Farm 1940:10)

Donica's comment that this was a new initiative to "teach the girls many things about the work as well as getting the work done" indicates that this was not standard practice before. Despite all of the rhetoric about the reforming power of training in domestic science, the WIF was largely in line with national trends in women's reformatories in that it lacked a serious educational and job-training program (Rafter 1985:75).





*Figure 40: Caption reads "Dairy barn and milk maids who do the milking," 1936 (Kansas Memory:229178).*

### **Reform, Domesticity, and Professional Women's Own Social Position**

Regardless of the degree to which the WIF actually did provide an education in home economics, the rhetoric about the reforming power of domesticity resolved some of the contradictions in professional women's social position.

*Professional Women as Models of Femininity*

First, professional women were able to identify with some elements of femininity through their role at the Farm that were lacking in their own personal lives. By emphasizing their role in teaching domesticity and proper feminine behavior, professional women constructed themselves as experts in these areas. In the biennial reports and documents written by outsiders, the staff of the WIF were described as the embodiment of femininity and respectability. Before the WIF was established, Lucy Johnston gave a speech to Kansas clubwomen to convince them of the need for a women's reformatory in Kansas in which she emphasized the need for staff who would model femininity and respectability for the inmates:

First the care and handling of the criminal woman, be she old or young, good or bad, weak or strong, should be in the hands exclusively, of women. A woman Board, a woman superintendent, and woman keepers and teachers; the handling of the woman problem is a woman's job. [...] [When an inmate leaves the institution,] She has not only been trained in right living by skilled and able teachers, but for months and years she followed the leadership of strong, clean and balanced womanhood. Her teachers, keepers, superintendent, and governing board should be the best and strongest women that can be found; they are the models each day for her. [...] There is nothing so potent in the re-moulding of the deficient woman as the leadership of clean and wholesome women. (Johnston:3-7)

Similarly, Physician Sherman L. Axford wrote to Superintendent Perry in the 1918 Board of Administration report: "Ofttimes there are ailments among the inmates at the Farm that neither medical skill nor surgery will reach. In such cases the true-hearted womanhood of yourself and your capable assistants has been invaluable" (Administration 1918:13). Perry continued this idea that the staff served as a model of femininity in the 1924 biennial, where she commented that inmates "must know that we desire the best things for them and our lives must be proof to them of the real joy and pleasure we get out of life from right-doing" (Farm 1924:3). Thus, despite the fact that these professional women were working and often did not have families of their own, this construction of their role at the Farm as providing a model for femininity and respectability

brought some resolution to their claims to femininity.

This resolution of professional women's relationship to femininity was taken even further in several comments that created a parallel between the professional staff/inmate relationship and the mother/daughter relationship. Whether it was referring to the Farm as "a happy family" (Farm 1918:5), the matrons as "housemothers" (Commission 1933:225), the nurse as a "big sister" (Health 1920:362), or the inmates as "girls" (Lekkerkerker 1931:181), the language used in documents related to the WIF continually evoked familial relationships. Perry explicitly made this connection between the role of a mother and the role of the professional staff at the KSFIW in this comment from the 1922 biennial report:

It takes time and patience to show them and make them see how essential work is to happiness and the fundamental qualifications of womanhood, but we certainly feel that we are more than repaid for the effort. [...] It is not more true that 'the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world,' than that the one who works patiently and persistently with those who need help, molds and makes characters that in turn bless the world. (Farm 1922:5)

Here, Perry quite explicitly identifies the role that professional women played at the Farm with ideals of Victorian motherhood and femininity.

Inherent in this construction of professional women as proxy mothers for the inmates was a critique of the inmates' own biological mothers. Similar to social workers and female reformers across the country, staff at the Farm were able to position themselves as "mothers" precisely because they viewed the inmates' biological mothers as inept (Odem 1995:142). The 1920 social worker's report on the social backgrounds of women imprisoned at the Farm comments:

The list of the social characteristics of their parents makes clear the fact that the great majority of the girls included in this study have been handicapped by lack of proper home training and discipline. One mother seemed astonished because the agent assumed that she might know what her children were doing when they were away from the house. Another mother stated that she had never spoken upon sex matters to her daughter until

the latter, illegitimately pregnant, was about to give birth to a child. In general, the parents exercised little control over and exhibited a deplorable lack of proper interest in their children. (Hill 1920:1520)

This critique of inmates' mothers was echoed in the inmate interviews at the Farm, where "Mother" was frequently listed under "cause of downfall." Perry's speech to the WCTU that was included in the 1924 biennial report again blames inmates' mothers:

What about the mothers of these girls? There is something radically wrong when a daughter of fifteen years is beyond the mother's control. [...] One good mother is worth a hundred school masters. A child always imitates what he sees. [...] The factor most potent in the home is the mother. She is the loadstone to all hearts and the loadstar to all eyes. (Farm 1924:9-10)

These critiques of inmates' mothers were rooted in perceptions of their respectability, or lack thereof. The superintendent and matrons of the WIF contrasted their own respectability to that of the inmates' mothers, even if they themselves were not biological mothers.

This critique of inmates' mothers was also embedded in discussions about inmates' lack of training in domesticity. Several superintendents and matrons commented that the domestic training provided at the Farm was filling a gap in the inmates' domestic education. Cora M. Smith, instructor in the Art Department, commented in the 1930 report: "Many of the girls who comes to us cannot use a thimble and do not know the first principles of sewing, and before they leave us are able to do the finest embroidery" (Farm 1930:9; see also Farm 1932:9). These sentiments are echoed in a comment from Kate Hooven, instructor of the Sewing Department, in the 1934 report: "many of the women and girls have never had the opportunity to know home-making in the finer sense, and they come to us not knowing what they are capable of doing" (Farm 1934:9). The idea that inmates had been denied the opportunity to develop proper domestic skills in their lives prior to the institution was a continued theme in the biennial reports; the 1938 report quotes superintendent Sara Mae Cain as saying "that many girls learn their first

lessons in cooking, housekeeping, sewing, laundry work, and gardening” while at the Farm (Farm 1938:3). Inherent in these comments about inmates’ domestic ineptitude was a critique of the inmates’ mothers and the idea that having this domestic training was part of the reason for the woman’s moral downfall. This idea is seen in this quote from Agnes Lundstrom, an officer in Perry Cottage, from the 1942 biennial report:

Many a girl has expressed an appreciation for the chance of self-improvement given her during the time spent here. Many of the girls have never before had the advantage of instruction in any of the arts of homemaking, and a great number are glad to take advantage of this chance seeing that it’s something that will aid them in the future. [...] One often feels if the girls had had the counsel and understanding she duly receives from our Superintendent and officers here prior to her difficulties these same difficulties might have been avoided since so often society at large condemns before hearing. (Farm 1942:14)

These comments echo the logic of reform that ran throughout the WIF’s philosophy for running the Farm. Inmates’ lack of a respectable female role model and proper training in domesticity were the root of their poor choices in life. With the proper training and “mother” figures provided through the Farm, they could be reformed. Thus, the professional women who worked at the Farm were able to rewrite themselves as mothers, reconciling to some degree their problematic relationship with femininity.

### *Reforming Inmates and Controlling Costs*

The second way in which this focus on domestic training helped professional women reconcile contradictions of their position was that it allowed them to, at least in theory, accomplish the sometimes competing calls to reform inmates and keep costs as low as possible. Claiming that domestic work had the power to reform character helped the staff of the WIF answer to both of these competing responsibilities of their institution. This attitude can be seen in a section of Lekkerkerker’s 1931 book about the value of maintaining high domestic standards

at women's reformatories:

The educational value of maintaining high standards of physical care, too, is given great weight in women's reformatories: Many of the women have never learnt what good physical care is, and yet, the great majority of them will be responsible for a household at some time in their lives. To habituate them to good food, cleanliness, hygienic conditions, etc., and to arouse the desire in them to carry through the same standards of care in their own homes, is one of the most important lessons which the reformatory can give them. It is just this factor which makes the great difference between women's and men's institutions in this respect: As cooking, cleaning and other acts of housekeeping have no educational value for men, the tendency in men's prisons is always to do the minimum of this work that is compatible with accepted standards of hygiene. The women's reformatory, however, which attempts to be a school of domestic science for its inmates, cannot afford to give a minimum of physical care only; it will rather have to set an example. (Lekkerkerker 1931:370)

This quote demonstrates how the heads of female reformatories invested domestic work with added meaning. At the same time, the fact that both men's and women's institutions completed similar types of domestic work, but it only had "educational value" for women, shows that the conflation of domestic training with reform was largely a matter of language. In practice, the standards for physical care were likely not that different between the types of institutions.

### **Physical Health as a Component of Respectability**

Besides their emphasis on domesticity, the professional women who worked at the WIF reconciled some of the competing demands of their institution and social position by emphasizing the physical aspects of respectability. While women's reformatories across the country lamented that they were given the "wrong" type of inmates to be reformed, the WIF's focus on venereal disease treatment took this to the next level, as they were primarily providing medical care in an institution intended to provide moral reform. To reconcile these competing missions, the female staff at the Farm constructed respectability and reform in such a way that included physical health.

*Building Up Women Physically So They Can Be Reformed Morally*

The professional women who staffed the WIF continually referenced the need for inmates to be built up physically before they could be reformed morally. In 1918, Julia Perry commented: “suffice it to say that it is absolutely necessary that the individual be built up physically before she can be reached otherwise” (Farm 1918:5). This idea is presented again in the 1920 biennial report, where Perry stated:

Our first thought is to let everyone grow physically well. As they do this their physical development is reinforced by mental development, and then is the time that we make appeals to their moral nature. (Farm 1920:6)

Perry emphasized this idea that physical health was a necessary prerequisite to moral development in the 1924 report:

Not much can be done in moral training until one is built up *physically*. If the mind is kept filled with good thoughts unconsciously, one learns to get joy and pleasure. (Farm 1924:4)

This assertion that physical and moral rehabilitation were part of the same overall process brought together the competing missions of the WIF to treat venereal disease and morally train the inmates. This is stated clearly in the 1938 statement of Superintendent Sara Mae Cain:

We feel that our hospital and dental departments contribute greatly to our work of rehabilitation. Only through a healthy body can we work to create a healthy mental attitude, which is necessary if these women are to become useful citizens. (Farm 1938:3)

In these statements, the superintendents attempted to bring physical care in line with the institution’s overall mission of moral reform.

Similar statements highlight the parallel natures of physical, mental, and moral development:

The general policy of this institution can be best expressed by our program of rehabilitation—which is, strive to improve, physically, mentally and morally. (Farm

1942:5; Superintendent Etta B. Beavers writing)

But my greatest aim is to send our girls out clean. Clean in body, mind and soul. Equipped for higher duties of life. Many have gone out strengthened and helped, and from this I take courage and put forth greater effort. (Farm 1926:14; Teacher of Homemaking Department Eleanor Robson writing)

Statements such as these set up physical care as being part of the same overall project of reform as mental and moral training. The task of the female administrators of the Farm was to facilitate the development of these parallel facets of human development so as to fully develop an inmate's potential. In an oft-repeated statement, Perry comments in the 1918 report that "The delinquent woman is, without contradiction, the product of disproportionate development. In her you discover the lack of parity of growth between the physical, mental, and moral parts of her nature. [...] So the person that develops physically and mentally, but *not morally*, becomes a criminal" (Farm 1918:3). Here, Perry cautions against the dangers of young women who have developed physically (i.e. become sexually mature), yet lack the moral development needed to keep pace. Whether inmates were physically marked with the stigma of venereal disease or were more sexually developed than their morals were prepared to regulate, the professional women at the Farm constructed their bodies as being out of control and an important component of their reform. Further, they constructed their bodies as being out-of-step with other elements (moral and mental) of their development. Through such language as referring to the Farm as a "moral hospital," professional women made explicit parallels between physical care and the moral training that the institution was originally established to accomplish (Farm 1918:3).

### *Teaching Inmates to Embody Respectable Femininity*

The importance of inmates gaining control over their bodies was also emphasized in several comments about the desire to instill the desire for properly feminine bodies. Beginning



in the 1930s, the biennial reports of the WIF frequently mentioned such things as teaching the inmates to take a “sense of pride in [their] personal appearance” (Farm 1942:13) and “encouraging habits of personal care, including beauty culture” (Farm 1940:7; see also Farm 1940:11; Farm 1942:6; Sherbon 1931). As Stewardess Evilo Theilman wrote in the 1938 biennial report:

Much thought has been given to the problem of helping our girls help themselves through their appearance. No woman can build up or keep her self-respect unless she makes the most of herself. We try to encourage each girl to express her individuality as much as possible. (Farm 1938:5)

Thus, the professional women who worked at the WIF sought to not only heal the women of their health problems, but to change inmates’ bodies to visibly reflect middle-class standards for respectable femininity. As Skeggs and others have noted, differences in cultural capital make embodying middle-class femininity a challenge for working-class women; this explicit plan of teaching the inmates of the Farm about “beauty culture” was a direct way of trying to instill in them the values of middle-class versions of respectable physical appearance (Skeggs 1997).

At the same time as they were instilling middle-class notions about feminine bodies, however, a couple of comments from the 1920s indicate a different understanding of respectable female bodies for working-class women. A statement in the 1922 biennial report, which was repeated in the 1930 report (Farm 1930:4), ties physical strength, rather than attractiveness, to conceptions of female bodies:

[The inmates] learn to appreciate the pleasure that comes from strong muscles and a clear brain. It takes time and patience to show them and make them see how essential work is to happiness and the fundamental qualifications of womanhood, but we certainly feel that we are more than repaid for the effort. (Farm 1922:5)

In this quote, Perry constructs female bodies as being more about their capabilities as workers than their physical attractiveness. This may reflect a different understanding of femininity that

was informed by the economic reality of working-class women, particularly in a rural state like Kansas, where “strong muscles” would be particularly needed for farm work. To portray work as one of the “fundamental qualifications of womanhood” is certainly a different conception of femininity than the “angel in the house.” Regardless of whether the WIF staff were trying to instill beauty culture (as in the 1930s) or develop strong bodies as workers (as in the 1920s), they viewed inmates’ bodies as a legitimate avenue for reforming them and helping them to achieve a respectable feminine identity.

### *Quarantined Inmates as Less Respectable Than Regular Inmates*

Tied to these connections between physical bodies and respectability, officials connected with the WIF frequently asserted that the inmates who were sent to the Farm on state charges were of a higher type than the women sent to the Farm under Chapter 205, also called internes. Responding to a report on the Farm that suggested that venereal-disease patients would be better served outside of a penal institution, Perry commented:

Our intern population that you speak of as being better cared for in some hospital on the outside, you must not forget one of the most important things that is necessary in caring for these intern women. The might be cured, but they would not get the training that they get here, and if they go out without training, the world is not any better or the person so treated.

The intern body is kept entirely separate from the sentenced population, although, as a rule, the sentenced women are a much higher type than the intern.

We would be glad if the intern woman could stay with us much longer and get more training than she does. (Garrett 1929:367)

Here, Perry reinforces the connection between physical and moral retraining, insisting that both are necessary for the full rehabilitation of diseased women. Her assertion that the sentenced population is a “much higher type than” the intern population reflects this belief that physical disease is reflective of the person’s overall respectability. Similar sentiments are expressed in

the 1948 autobiography of Samuel J. Crumbine, who was charged with leading the venereal-disease control efforts in Kansas during WWI. Though this quote is quite likely inaccurate (given the time difference and the overall context of the book), it is interesting that Crumbine portrayed state charges as being disdainful of the intern population:

[The infected women] were regarded with loathing by the state prisoners.

The Matron asked one of them, a life prisoner because she had killed her husband, why these state prisoners treated the prostitutes so badly, even rebelling against sharing the dining room with them.

To this question the lifer replied, "I know I killed my husband. However, I did it under great provocation. Anyway, I'm paying for it now. But I have never sold my body and soul for a piece of filthy money, nor interfered with keeping our boys fit to fight for our country! So I despise these vile creatures." (Crumbine 1948:223-224)

Regardless of the accuracy of this particular quote, the fact that several reports noted that state charges were of a "higher" type than the intern population reveals the way that the association between bodies and respectability influenced administrators perceptions of moral worth.

The fact that prison administrators made a distinction between the state charges and the intern population is made more remarkable by the fact that many of the women who were there on state charges also had venereal disease. A 1931 newspaper article commented:

Since many, if not most of the interned women potentially are delinquent in other than sex matters and since many of the criminal women also are venereally diseased on entrance, it might be assumed that the two groups would be similar. On the whole, however, the criminal women are older and of higher grade mentally and socially than are the venereally diseased sex offenders. (Sherbon 1931)

Given the overlap between the two populations, the construction of state charges as being more respectable than the intern population had more to do with the fact that women sentenced under Chapter 205 were explicitly identified with their (diseased) bodies in a way that the state charges were not. While there were surely some behavioral differences between the groups (state charges were, overall, older and would have been at the institution long enough to participate

fully in the daily routine), the designation of one as being more respectable than the other had largely to do with the greater association of intern women with diseased bodies.

Newby's undercover report on the Farm highlighted this distinction between women sentenced on state charges and women sent under Chapter 205. Though noting that "it became increasingly difficult [...] to distinguish between state charges and internes" since there was so much overlap in the populations, Newby highlights both the disdain felt by state charges for the internes and the greater respectability of state charges (Newby 1921:20). Speaking of the initial influx of women sentenced under Chapter 205 to the Farm, Newby comments that "Feeling on the part of the 'state charges' for the incoming diseased women was not friendly. A number of state prisoners, though charged with serious crimes themselves, have a contempt for loose women, and in addition feel a physical fear in associating with diseased prostitutes" (Newby 1921:20). Newby makes a distinction between those women who violate the laws of society in general (state charges) and those who violate the laws of society through their bodies (internes), with the clear implication that the "loose women" were less respectable. She goes on to say:

I was constantly impressed with the characteristics of the state girls (those serving sentences for specific crimes, of whom there were less than twenty) as contrasted with the diseased women sent in for quarantine. In nearly every instance the state girl was cleaner and neater in appearance, more industrious in her habits, more dignified in manner; while the diseased girls, with a few noticeable exceptions, engaged in coarse talk that was so distasteful to the state girls that they were often seen to withdraw in disgust. (Health 1920:359)

This description positions state charges as more respectable: she had better control of her body ("neater in appearance") and had mastered some of the skills in domesticity that the Farm sought to instill ("industrious in her habits"). Newby references different levels of cultural capital ("dignified in manner" and "course talk") in this quote as well. Regardless of whether there were concrete differences in the way state charges and internes presented their bodies and

presented themselves, this indicates a perceived difference in respectability that is centered on how the two groups of inmates managed their bodies.

This perception that state charges were more respectable than internes is particularly apparent in the way Newby describes two inmates at the Farm, one an interne and the other a state charge. In describing the girls with whom she shared a living space, Newby commented that one girl, the one “with the bobbed hair,” seemed to be the leader:

She explained that she had bobbed her hair because it got lousy in the “Junktown” jail. She asked me if I thought it cute. I admitted that I did. She is pretty in a hard sort of way; has a bold manner and a “tough” walk; smokes a great deal, and uses more profanity than do the other girls. (Health 1920:356)

From her bobbed hair to her smoking, this inmate exhibited many of the characteristics of the flapper of the 1920s, a cultural type widely associated with permissive sexuality (Alexander 1998; Zipf 2012:294). Newby’s description of the inmate’s short hair and “tough” walk emphasize her masculine qualities. Compare this to the way she describes one of the state charges:

Before we went to bed, Tillie, a girl from another cottage, came in on an errand. She stopped to ask a question of a new girl about the crocheting she was doing. The new girl’s work was coarse and soiled. Tillie said something in praise of the new girl’s work; then drew from her own pocket a bit of exquisitely made lace which she was finishing. I had been struck with the beauty of Tillie’s voice the first time I heard her speak; now I noted the daintiness of her appearance in the midst of the rather untidy-looking girls in our cottage. Her hair was soft and clean; her skin pink and health-looking; her eyes were clear; her hands beautifully kept. She carried herself with dignity, and while perfectly courteous to us all, there was a certain aloofness. Later I learned that she is what the girls call a state charge; that is, she is serving a sentence. (Health 1920:357)

This description highlights Tillie’s respectability in a very embodied and class-specific way.

Tillie has mastered many elements of domesticity and femininity that the staff of the WIF sought to instill. Her respectability was embodied: her voice was beautiful, her hair was soft, and she “carried herself with dignity.” Her respectability was also very class-specific: she had the

cultural capital to be able to appear “dainty” and her hands were “beautifully kept,” indicating that she did not have to work with them as a woman from the working class might. Overall, Newby’s descriptions of the “girl with the bobbed hair” and Tillie reveal a particular version of respectability that was being constructed through professional women’s discussions of state charges as being more respectable than internes.

Together, this emphasis on the need to build women up physically before they could be reformed morally and the assertion that state charges were more respectable than interns constructed a version of reform and respectability that highlighted the role of the body. Similar to the way that discussions of sexuality and civilization served to associate African-Americans with being primitive (Bederman 1995), this association between bodies and respectability tied women sentenced under Chapter 205 very closely with their bodies. As women whose bodies were physically marked with their (perceived) lack of sexual self-control by their illness, interns at the Farm had their bodies put front and center. As such, the professional women at the Farm constructed the inmates as having bodies that were out of control and in need of the civilizing influences of proper training in respectability. Statements in the biennial reports repeatedly talked about the need for inmates to be able to regulate their bodies and emotions:

The pivotal work of our institution is to have our women *find themselves*—to become self-governing individuals and *fit* themselves for the *school of life*. (Farm 1918:4)

Self-government is the end aimed at and the goal we strive to reach. (Farm 1922:8)

We have the assurance that a large per cent of the ones who have come under the benign influence of the institution have become more able to direct themselves. (Farm 1924:3)

To get correct ideas established, and to teach such ones how to get hold of themselves is a psychological problem of no small moment. (Farm 1928:3)

The one who leads an individual on these voyages of discovery must never rob the one led of her initiative. Freedom of thought and liberty of action, rightly directed, always

develop character. Depriving an individual of the power to do and to be will never develop normal thinking or normal living, and most certainly robs one of the power to govern one's self when thrown on his own resources. To see the individual striving to get hold of herself and becoming a self-reliant, dependable person, makes one feel that the work done at the Farm is really worth while. (Farm 1930:3)

Whether it was talking about teaching inmates "to get control of themselves" (Farm 1922:7) or to strive "for mastery of self" (Farm 1918:4), the professional women who worked at the Farm positioned themselves as being experts in self-governance who could instill this all-important characteristic of civilization in the inmates. Inmates needed to gain control over their emotions and their bodies in order to truly claim a respectable status, and the staff at the Farm constructed these different threads as being part of the same overall project of reform.

## Conclusion

The superintendents and matrons who ran daily life at the WIF gained jobs and some degree of status from their roles at the Farm, yet they lacked control over several elements of the institution that had enormous impact on their ability to carry out their vision for the institution. In Kansas as well as nationally, the ideal of the women's reformatory model was not realized in the everyday operations of these institutions. Superintendents of women's reformatories often did not control the type of inmate being sent to the institution and did not have enough funding to fully implement the reformatory model or provide the type of parole work and psychiatric treatment that they would have liked. Important for the Kansas case, the superintendent also had no control over how men were treated in the criminal justice system and had to sit idly by while the state blatantly endorsed the sexual double standard through gendered enforcement of Chapter 205. While the ideas of the reforming power of domesticity and the physical aspects of respectability may have brought some of these competing expectations for the WIF into line, the

professional women who ran the Farm faced contradictory expectations and values as they sought to implement a plan of moral reform through the daily life of the WIF.

The superintendents and matrons who ran the Farm had a complicated relationship to respectability. The contradictions of their social position illustrate how their jobs were tenuous and bounded by the decisions of men. However, these women had the symbolic power to define inmates' sexuality and what respectability should look like for them. It was through their power over other women that they were able to bring some resolution to their own social position. Professional women's position over other groups of women was a key part of their own ability to claim a respectable status.



## CH 6: Staking a Claim to Respectability: the Inmate Interviews of the Women's Industrial Farm

In 1930, Inmate 4426 was quarantined under Chapter 205 at the WIF. When interviewed, she reported:

I had been running around with this one and that one and mother thought it best for me to come so I come. [...]

I have learned to be a lady and do what is right. (Inmate 4426;1930)<sup>37</sup>

In this young woman's account, we see many of the concerns and hopes of the reformers who lobbied to create the WIF come to life. At age 16, she was working as a waitress at a coffee shop in Topeka, having sexual encounters with multiple men with whom she apparently had little emotional involvement (given that she refers to them as "this one and that one"). The Farm served as a resource for her mother, who might have turned her daughter in to authorities as a way of getting her straightened out before she became a full-time prostitute. This inmate's statement that she has "learned to be a lady and do what is right" is exactly the type of reformatory account that the professional women who ran the Farm would have hoped for. Laden with the class implications of the word "lady" and the moral tenor of doing "what is right," Inmate 4426's story represents what the reformers were aiming for when they lobbied to create the Farm and the goals of the professional women who ran the institution.

In practice, however, the lived experience of the women who were quarantined under Chapter 205 varied greatly, providing a much more complicated story than the one presented by reformers' goals and Inmate 4426's account. Drawing primarily from the inmate interviews, this

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<sup>37</sup> All inmate interviews accessed at the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, Call # 35-07-08-01 to 35-07-08-02.

chapter presents the inmates' accounts of their sexual and personal histories. The first half of the chapter gives inmates' accounts of how they came to be placed under quarantine at the WIF for venereal disease. These accounts demand a more nuanced distinction between sexual behaviors than made possible in the simple angel/whore dichotomy of many social reformers at the time. Women came to be arrested under a variety of circumstances, with many cases illustrating the blatant enforcement of the sexual double standard through Chapter 205. The prevalence of women who volunteered to come to the Farm further complicates an understanding of the Farm as a straightforward example of an institution of social control. The second half of this chapter explores the ways in which inmates narrated their sexual histories and the degree to which these narratives resonated with middle-class ideas of "normal" sexuality, including the ideas of love and "frank reticence." Two narratives of sexuality emerge from the interviews: 1. claims that the inmates had not broken any moral norms; and 2. claims that inmates were led astray by others. Similar to the accounts of how women came to be arrested, these narratives of inmates' sexual histories reveal the variety of experiences of the women who came to be quarantined under Chapter 205.

Together, these two elements of the inmate interviews (how they got arrested and how they narrated their contraction of a venereal disease) illustrate several important points about the operation of respectability within institutions of social control. First, these accounts demonstrate the importance of closely examining how institutions of social control operate on a day-to-day basis. The various paths that women took to get to the Farm illustrate the multitude of ways that social actors could act within the legal mechanism of Chapter 205, as well as the ways in which existing social hierarchies informed people's options. Second, inmates' failed attempt to narrate their sexual histories using middle-class discourses of romantic love and frank reticence illustrate

the critical role of cultural capital in achieving respectability; without the symbolic power to assert their own definitions of respectable sexuality and without the cultural resources to narrate their sexual pasts according to middle-class norms, the inmates struggled to account for their pasts in a way that made them look respectable. Finally, these stories illustrate the interplay of the material and cultural dimensions of respectability; the material/ physical realities of inmates' physical disease and their low income had implications for the cultural context in which their bodies and their narratives of their sexual histories were understood.

### **Paths to the Women's Industrial Farm**

The inmate interviews give the imprisoned women's accounts of how they came to be imprisoned under Chapter 205 at the WIF. These accounts give a very different picture of the women's lives than is presented in activist women's arguments for creating the Farm or in professional women's descriptions of them in the WIF biennial reports. Inmates describe the varying conditions under which they came into contact with law enforcement and reveal their failure to fit neatly into the categories of "good" or "bad" women. Further, these narratives illustrate abuses of the system and the ways that husbands, acquaintances, and law enforcement officials were able to utilize Chapter 205 to discipline women who had crossed them in some way.

The interviewer usually recorded inmates' accounts of how they were arrested next to the prompt "History of offense." The results of the sample were:

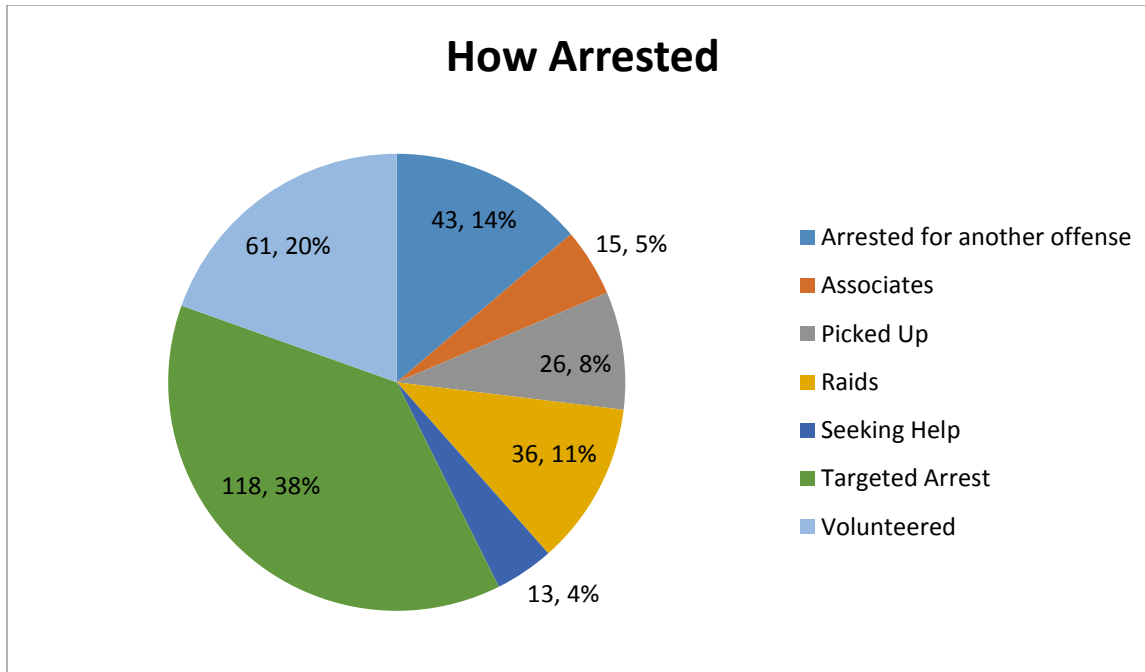


Figure 41

38

### Targeted Arrests

The most common way that women reported being detained under Chapter 205 was through a targeted arrest. Individuals could turn in someone's name to health officers or law enforcement officials as a person suspected of having a venereal disease; the woman would often then be picked up by police and subjected to medical testing for disease.

Several interviews indicate that parents utilized Chapter 205 as a way of gaining control over daughters who would not listen to them. For example, an 18-year-old white<sup>39</sup> woman interviewed in 1931 reported: "I wasn't staying at home, and I was running around and mother

<sup>38</sup> This chart gives information from the 312 interviews that indicated how the woman was arrested. This is less than the total sample size (488) because some interviews did not talk about how the woman came to be arrested.

<sup>39</sup> All racial designations used here repeat the language used on the interview sheet; it is unclear whether these descriptions reflect women's self-reported racial identity or the interviewer's inference based on their appearance. There were two spots on the interview form where race/ethnicity were recorded, the first labeled "Color" (which was usually "White" or "Black"), and the second labeled "Nationality" (which had a variety of responses).

had me picked up” (Inmate 4795;1931).<sup>40</sup> A similar account can be found in the story of Inmate 2388. This 14-year-old girl interviewed in 1925 reported that her mother sought help from a local judge to help locate her after she travelled with a friend to another city and was gone overnight. Reporting that she “got drunk on ‘Corn’ and was not responsible for what happened,” this girl apparently contracted gonorrhea and expected to be sent to the girls’ reformatory at Beloit after leaving the WIF (Inmate 2388;1925). Another inmate, age 15 when interviewed in 1927, had already been married and separated from her husband when her parents turned her in to authorities. She reported that she’d “been intimate with 2 boys since [her] marriage,” which had apparently ended after only 3 months when she “‘trifled’ on him.” Her “parents had [her] sent” to the Farm when they found out she was getting treatment for syphilis (Inmate 3293;1927). Similar to the families in Odem’s (1995) study in California during this period, these parents turned to the state as a way to help them exercise control over their daughter’s sexuality. As Odem argues, the burgeoning set of laws regulating sexuality during this period were not simply used against the working-class as a whole, but were sometimes strategically used in inter-generational conflicts *within* the working-class as a way to exercise parental authority. However, parents had little say in what happened to their daughters once they came under the control of state authorities.

Other women reported that their husbands turned them in to authorities as a way of exercising control over their wives. At times, husbands used Chapter 205 to control their wives’ sexual behavior. Inmate 4832, a white woman who was 42 when interviewed in 1931, reported: “My husband and I had been separated for several months, and I had been going with different men, and I think he was jealous and turned me in” (Inmate 4832;1931). Similarly, other

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<sup>40</sup> All grammar and spelling errors in the inmate interviews are from the original text. Names have been replaced (in brackets) to protect the identity of those involved.

husbands used Chapter 205 as a way to begin divorce proceedings in an era before no-fault divorce laws. Inmate 2335 reported that she was only 13 years old when her mother pressured her into marrying. She was interned at the WIF at age 16 in 1924, by then separated from her husband and the mother of a 17-month old boy. She reported: “Husband was wanting a divorce and the only way for him to get it was to send me here through Dr. Robertson” (Inmate 2335;1924). The statement that her husband had the power to “send [her] here through Dr. Robertson” illustrates at least one inmate’s perception of the power that Chapter 205 gave husbands over their wives. Inmate 2817’s account illustrates how this law might have come into play once a messy divorce was already underway. A 17-year-old white woman working as a saleslady at the Owl Drug Store in downtown Kansas City, this inmate reported that her husband left her after living together one and a half years. She “arrested him for non-support,” and he then “reported [her] as being diseased. He was treated there. [She] was sent” to the Farm. This husband was thus able to use the gendered enforcement of the law to get back at his estranged wife while their divorce was pending. This was particularly consequential in their case because they had a baby, who the husband had taken to his mother’s house while the inmate was at the Farm (Inmate 2817;1926).

While all of these cases illustrate a husband’s ability to control his wife through the law, this is most clearly apparent when Chapter 205 became a means of control in cases of domestic abuse. Inmate 3153 was 31 when interviewed in 1927. Only educated up to the second grade, she first married at age 14 and went on to have seven children between two husbands. She reported: “Husband was so abusive to me-beat me terribly any number of times. I told him I was going to my daughters and he thought I had left and had me arrested.” Similar to Inmate 2335 from above, this inmate’s language that her husband “had [her] arrested” illustrates her

perception of the power that Chapter 205 gave her husband over her (Inmate 3153;1927).

These women's stories illustrate the way that the sexual double standard that was made explicit through Chapter 205 gave men control over the women in their lives. Whether it was domestic abuse, infidelity, or a general disagreement between spouses, husbands were able to use the woman's diseased status as a mechanism to get law enforcement to intervene on his behalf. This is particularly troubling given the fact that many of these same women reported that their husbands were the ones who gave them the disease. Even if the husband never followed through on actually turning his wife over to authorities, men throughout the state would have been able to threaten their wives with doing so as a way to gain control over them. While a husband turning in his wife for venereal disease would have also implicated himself, the unequal enforcement of the law merely meant that he would need to be treated by his home while his wife was imprisoned, as happened in the case of Inmate 2817 above.

Other inmates indicated that various family members and acquaintances turned them in to authorities for having a venereal disease as a particularly vindictive move in an ongoing disagreement. Twenty-year-old Inmate 2042 reported that she had "lived an immoral life several months" and had been going out occasionally with her Aunt "Faye". The inmate reported: Faye's "husband ordered me to not go out with her anymore and I did so he sent [Faye] and I both up here." Her perception that her uncle "sent [Faye] and I both up here" illustrates the power that the gendered enforcement of Chapter 205 gave men. Here, Inmate 2042 got in the middle of an ongoing domestic dispute between her family, her aunt, and her uncle. She explained that her uncle "was arrested once for child desertion on complaint of my grandmother and he became an fry at the whole family." Similar to women's accounts of their husbands turning them in, these stories illustrate the power that Chapter 205 gave men over the women in

their lives that they knew to be diseased. Inmate 5024, a thirty-year-old mother of four who had left her husband after finding out he gave her a venereal disease, had taken treatments from a doctor and found stable employment as a domestic. She reported: “I had been working in Wichita for Alta Woods and she was a respectable woman and they ran three grocery stores and I worked for her.” However, a family member’s knowledge of her disease led to her being sent to the Farm in 1932: “But my brother-in-law was mad at me and he knew my husband gave me this disease so he turned me in to the health officer.” This inmate’s assertion that her brother-in-law was able to send her to the WIF, despite her association with a “respectable” employer, illustrates the power that Chapter 205 gave men who had the dangerous knowledge of women’s diseased status.

The danger of having people know that you had a venereal disease is a continuing theme in the accounts of women who were turned in to the authorities. This can be seen in accounts where a jilted lover turned someone in as being diseased. Inmate 2734 was 17 years old when she was committed to the WIF for the second time in 1926; she’d been committed the previous year under Chapter 205 along with her mother and sister. Given that many members of her family were committed, it may have been general knowledge in her hometown of Hutchinson that she was diseased. This knowledge proved dangerous for this inmate: she was at her “sister’s having [her] wedding clothes made,” as she was engaged to be married to a man who had previously been engaged to another woman. This woman found out about the upcoming marriage and “turned [her] in as diseased.” This inmate’s disease status thus became a weapon that others could use against her (Inmate 2734;1926). A similar dynamic took place with Inmate 4714, a 33-year-old widow when arrested in 1931. She had four children, the first of which was born when she was just 14. This inmate reported:



I dont know how I got this disease. I stayed at home with my children. A man lied on me and told that I gave him a disease, but I had no dealings with him at all. He wanted me to go with him but I wouldnt.

Here, the inmate's disease status became a tool that a rejected lover could use to get back at her (Inmate 4714;1931). These cases illustrate how dangerous it could be for women to let others know that they had a venereal disease.

Chapter 205 could also be used by pimps who wished to exercise control over the women who worked under them. A set of interviews from four black women arrested at the same time in 1924 reveals one way that Chapter 205 might influence the outcomes of a routine encounter with the law. Between the women's accounts, it seems that all four engaged in some form of prostitution, most of them sharing their profits with the man that they all lived with, "Frank Baker." Baker's 18-year-old daughter, "Esther," was one of these women, and gave this account of how she started working as a prostitute: "Father got cut about the head and the length of his right arm by a drunk man. Father was unconscious for two weeks and the only way I knew to help him was to hustle. I provided for father in this way about a year." (Inmate 2182;1924). This group came to the attention of authorities after a dispute one night over the share of their profits that the women would share with Frank. One of the women, a 28-year-old who was most opposed to sharing her earnings with Frank, reported the night as such:

Have lived an immoral life ever since I was grown. I had been living with [Esther Baker's] father about one year. He ordered me to do as the other girls do. I stayed there longer. I refused to do for him as he requested. There was a dance at his house and they had liquor there. I was "full" and told him what I thought of his asking me such a thing. I left his house and went to a neighbors. He sent the law down and found myself and [another woman] with our two men friends and four boys in adjoining room. We were all arrested then I turned his house in. (Inmate 2183;1924).

Another woman, age 30 at the time, corroborated this account, reporting: "I had lived at the [Baker] residence about 3 weeks and during that time I gave Mr. [Baker] a good part of the

money I made. He had asked me for more. [...] He had not worked for a year and he made his money off of us three girls” (Inmate 2184;1924). Chapter 205 led to very different outcomes for the people involved with this incident. Frank Baker called the police on the women, even though it also ended up indicting himself. He was fined \$25 and spent 30 days in jail (Inmate 2183;1924). Because the women could be detained under the venereal disease law in addition to any charges for prostitution, they were subject to another level of scrutiny that Mr. “Baker” was not, and all four of them were sent to the Farm under a disease charge. The gendered enforcement of Chapter 205 gave leverage to Baker to demand more profits from the women who worked under him.

The final group of people that inmates reported had turned them in to state authorities were doctors. A few women reported that doctors used Chapter 205 in a way not intended by the law. Inmate 5214 was a 25-year-old divorced mother of three who was working as a housekeeper in Wichita. The woman she was working for was sick, and the family called Dr. Bierman to tend to her. She reported:

He had also doctored me for my throat and he asked me if I was going to pay him. I told him I was working for my room and board and couldn't. Dr. Hobbs told me after I was picked up that Dr. Bierman had called him and said I refused to be doctored for venereal disease. (Inmate 5214;1932).

According to this woman's account, the doctor turned her in because she could not pay for an unrelated medical treatment, illustrating a clearly coercive use of the law. The more typical scenario involved a woman who was getting treatment for venereal disease and stopped taking those treatments, prompting the doctor to turn her in. For example, Inmate 4819 was quarantined at the WIF under Chapter 205, but was released early because her baby was sick under the condition that she finish her treatments with a doctor outside the institution. After getting some

initial treatments, this 21-year-old married woman indicated that she “failed to report and take 3 of my treatments, so he reported me to the sherriffs office, and they returned me here to finish my treatments” (Inmate 4819;1931). Cases such as this were more in keeping with the intended spirit of the law, as doctors were asked to report any cases where the patient was not complying with treatment. However, some women’s stories illustrate a clear disregard for the women’s health, revealing a general focus on protecting the public *from* these women rather than a genuine desire to improve their physical well-being. For example, Inmate 2485 was arrested under Chapter 205 in 1925 after she failed to report for treatment because she was sick in bed. More educated than most of the women at the Farm, this inmate had gone to college for some time and listed her occupation as “stenographer.” She reported that she contracted this disease from her husband and had sought out treatment from Dr. Cooper, who she had been taking treatments with for 3 ½ months before he turned her in. Once arrested, she reported: “I stayed in jail 12 days without any medical attention. Have an abscess back of left ear caused by car accident” (Inmate 2485;1925). Considering her report that she received no medical attention for 12 days while in jail, in practice this provision seems to have been more about identifying deviant women than about providing them with proper medical care. These stories illustrate the risks that women took when seeking treatment for venereal disease; if they chose to discontinue the lengthy, expensive treatment, they had opened themselves up to arrest by letting a medical authority know about their condition.

### **Arrested for Another Offense**

Rather than being specifically targeted by state authorities as a venereal disease suspect, other women reported that they were arrested for another offense and were then tested for disease. Many of these arrests involved liquor, though there were a variety of circumstances

under which women came to be arrested. Inmate 4972 was a white housekeeper who had served a six-month term under Chapter 205 in 1930 at the age of only 13. Two years later, she was sent to the Farm again under a quarantine charge, this time after she attended a party thrown by her employers. She reported:

I worked for a private family at Kansas City, Kansas. One evening they gave a party and we were not loud or boisterous but it was about 3 o'clock and the neighbors called the police and they took we girls to the police station. They let the boys go. They examined me and gave me a blood test and I was sent here to be treated for my blood. (Inmate 4972;1932)

This situation illustrates how being in a rowdy place could have very different consequences for men and women under the gendered enforcement of Chapter 205. Oftentimes, authorities were able to detain women under Chapter 205 when they had insufficient evidence to convict them under other offenses. Inmate 5170, a 20-year-old black woman, was arrested after her former landlord reported that she and her husband had stolen some sheets from the house. The case was dismissed after the landlord failed to appear at the hearing, but she had been tested for venereal disease and detained under Chapter 205 (Inmate 5170;1932). Another inmate, a 27-year-old white/ French woman, described an encounter with the law charged with racial tensions:

My husband, myself, and [Marie Johnson] and a colored Taxi-driver started to Cherokee. We had a puncture and stopped. There were several special deputies come up, my husband had some booze and a gun on him so he ran leaving us two girls alone with the nigger they charged we two girls with being with the nigger. I never saw him before and dont know his name. (Inmate 2249;1924)<sup>41</sup>

In this situation, the fact that these white women were apparently alone with a black man likely made the police more suspicious of their activities. Authorities did not have a charge to place against this woman, but they were able to detain her under the quarantine law. These accounts of women's arrest highlight the variety of situations under which women might come into contact

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<sup>41</sup> The racial references in this quote were not common in the overall sample. With a few exceptions, the inmates did not specifically talk about race.

with police. In these routine encounters with the law, women found themselves being detained under a quarantine law while their male counterparts were set free.

### Associates

Another group of women reported that they came to be under the control of the law because they were associating with someone who was being pursued by authorities. Inmate 3029 was only 12 years old when she was quarantined under Chapter 205 with a gonorrhea diagnosis.<sup>42</sup> She came under the scrutiny of the law after a friend of hers “ran away from home and her folks thought” this inmate might know the whereabouts of her friend. (Inmate 3029;1926). Several women reported that they were arrested due to their association with a boarding house housing someone who was under suspicion. Inmate 3400 was a 50-year-old, white mother of seven living in Junction City when she was arrested. She reported that a boarder “had liquor on my place (15 Qts.) He was arrested and the liquor confiscated.” Along with another woman who was boarding at the house as well, this inmate was detained during this encounter and tested for disease, resulting in her quarantine after a gonorrhea diagnosis. (Inmate 3400;1927). Another inmate, a 31-year-old black woman, reported that she was arrested after being at the wrong boarding house. She ran a “small confectionary” in Kansas City and took a weekend trip to Topeka with a friend. She reported:

We went to Junction City from there to see some more friends of ours and we stayed at a rooming house which we supposed was a nice place, but one night the proprietor and his wife got into a fight and she called the police. The law took us down for witnesses and they interned us here.

Despite this inmate’s claim that she “had always worked hard” and the fact that she thought the

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<sup>42</sup> This inmate reported: “If I am diseased I got it from my sister [Ida] as we slept together.” Her sister was also being detained under Chapter 205 at the WIF. See below for a discussion on the non-sexual contraction of venereal disease.

rooming house was “a nice place,” she and her friend were tested for disease and quarantined (Inmate 4978;1932). Another inmate reported a much more dramatic encounter with the law that led to her arrest under Chapter 205. A 16-year-old White/Indian-Irish woman, this inmate had already separated from her husband after a 17-month marriage, leaving her 9-month old baby girl with her mother. She was apparently working as a prostitute, reporting that she “had to have something to live on and had to resort to an immoral life.” This inmate came to the attention of the law when they came after a man she was with:

was sitting in the dark in Memorial Hall with "Slim". He was known and could be found so when the "law" flashed light on us he ran. Got shot in right hand. Paid fine and released. I was sent up. (Inmate 3351;1927)

This case again illustrates how the gendered enforcement of Chapter 205 led to very different outcomes for routine encounters with the law for men and women. Even though “Slim” was wanted for a crime and ran from the police, he paid a fine and was released while this inmate was sent up to be interned due to a gonorrhea diagnosis. These stories illustrate the danger of associating with people who might come into contact with law enforcement. Even if the woman herself had committed no offense, but was merely staying at the wrong boarding house (Inmates 3400 and 4978) or was visited in her home by a truant friend (Inmate 3029), they were subjected to medical testing and interned if found diseased.

### *Police Raids*

In a similar vein, women who were taken into custody during police raids, usually for liquor, were detained and tested based on their association with disreputable people and places. Inmate 5226’s account gives a sense of the experience of being in a raid. A 20-year-old White/Irish-Indian woman, this inmate had married at age 16 and had since separated. More educated than most inmates with some high school education, she listed her occupation as a

beauty operator, though she'd been unemployed for three weeks prior to her arrest. This inmate had been staying in a friend's apartment in Wichita, and it was through this friend that she came to be arrested:

One afternoon she took some clothing to her brother that had left her apartment down to where he roomed. Just as we passed thru the hall some one told us to stop, and we soon found they were raiding the place, we were taken down to the jail and interviewed, my girl friend's blood was O.K. but mine wasn't as I had taken treatments before for I got this disease from my husband. (Inmate 5226;1932)

This woman was simply at the wrong place at the wrong time, leading to her arrest and detainment under the quarantine law. The danger of being in a disreputable place is clearly illustrated in Inmate 2547's account. This 24-year-old Black woman, who listed her occupation as "nurse," was a widow with a seven-year-old son who was living with her mother. She reported: "Went to Junction City to see foster sister [...] and the law came in and told me I was would have to go to station as the place I was in is not a goold plac as long as I was in such places I could expect to be arrested" (Inmate 2547;1925). Inmate 4864 also reported being initially arrested for being in the wrong place. This 18-year-old white woman was separated from her husband and living with her sister in Wichita. She contracted a disease from a man while visiting her mother in Arkansas. She reported:

I came back to Wichita and did'nt want my sister to know it [that she'd gotten a disease]. So I got a job in a resturaunt and I had a room above the resturaunt, in a rooming house and it was raided, I did not know it was a disrespectfull place. (Inmate 4864;1931)

This inmate's account illustrates how having a venereal disease might affect a woman's overall prospects of being in a "disrespectful place." Women who wanted to hide their condition from their families, or who were disowned from their families due to their sexual behavior, were more likely to be in the types of locations, such as low-rent boarding houses, commonly subject to police raids. The gendered enforcement of Chapter 205 meant that there were very different

consequences for men and women picked up in police raids. Inmate 2586, for example, reported that her landlady, two men, and four women were picked up in a Wichita hotel raid; the landlady was released on bond, the two men were released, and all four women were sent to the WIF under Chapter 205 (Inmate 2586;1925). The gendered enforcement of Chapter 205 meant that women collected in these raids were vulnerable to being detained under the quarantine law, whereas their male counterparts would be free so long as they were not found guilty of a crime.

### *Picked Up by Police*

Some women's stories indicated the danger of being a woman in public. The women who were picked up by police merely for being in a public place demonstrate the suspicion of prostitution that fell upon all women in public spaces. Inmate 3054, age 14, was on probation from the Girls Industrial School in Beloit when she was picked up by police: "Was standing on street-had been in Wichita three hours--was arrested" (Inmate 3054;1926). Though this woman was on probation, there was no reason for the police to stop and arrest her other than the fact that they were suspicious of a woman being in public on her own. Similarly, Inmate 4134 was arrested merely for being in public space. Age 21 when arrested in 1929, this inmate had graduated high school and listed her occupation as "operator." She reported:

I got this disease when I was in High School quite a while ago. I had gone to Wichita to wait for my Father. One night as I was going from home from a show, the "cops" asked me where I was going. The next day I got news that my father had been hurt, so I went out to take a walk that night the cops stopped me again and took me to the station for a blood test. (Inmate 4134;1929)

These women were apparently not doing anything out of the ordinary besides being in a public space. Inmate 4134's presence on a public street two nights in a row made the police suspect her of prostitution, yet these women do not report doing anything in particular to arouse suspicion. Other women reported being picked up by police after exhibiting non-normative behavior.



Inmate 4453 was a 27-year-old white woman who had been married for nine years when she was arrested in 1930. She reported: “I was picked up because I was wandering about town alone and dressed up as a man. I was given a blood test and sent up here for treatment.” While her behavior did not necessarily break any laws, Chapter 205 gave authorities a reason to detain this woman. This inmate got the message, reporting: “This has learned me to dress as a woman and not as a man.” (Inmate 4453;1930). Here, the law became a means to enforce gender conformity.

### Seeking Help

A small group of women reported being detained under Chapter 205 after they had initially reached out to police or charity organizations for help. Inmate 3893 was divorced with two children, age five and three, when she was quarantined in 1929 at the age of 21. She reported: “I came to Kansas City, Ks. looking for an Uncle and I went to the Welfare Board for help and they had me sent here” (Inmate 3893;1929). Reporting that she contracted gonorrhea from her ex-husband, this inmate’s disease status was completely irrelevant to the context in which she contacted the Welfare Board, yet became a means to detain someone they may have viewed as a vagrant. Inmate 4944 and 4945’s interactions with police demonstrate a similar application of Chapter 205. Age 20 and 17, respectively, these cousins were visiting relatives in Kansas. Inmate 4944 recounted:

So we girls started to hitch hike back to Collinsville, Oklahoma, where we lived. We got as far as El Dorado, Kansas, and it was about 1100 O’Clock so we stopped to ask a man which way to go on, and he said we better stay all night. So he got an Officer who sent us to the Hotel for the nite, and the next morning he took us up to the jail and gave us a blood test, and we were sent here. (Inmate 4944;1931)

This story illustrates a mix of good intentions and coercive measures by the police. Inmate 4945 noted that the Sherriff had “said we hadent better go that nite, as it was dangerous,” illustrating a concern for the girls’ welfare (Inmate 4945;1931). This tendency to see young women as

needing protection was the same logic behind the original creation of reformatories for young women, and certainly factored into the police department's decision to test the girls for disease the next morning. Other women's stories illustrated cases in which Chapter 205 was used to detain women who came to the police for help in situations of domestic violence. Inmate 3543 had married at age 13 and separated from her husband after seven years. A white/French-English woman, she was 21 when arrested in 1928. She reported that she originally called in the police for their help:

I and [Frank Johnson] were out riding and we got into an argument. We fought and I called a policeman. He took me to the City Hall. They examined me and sent me to the Industrial Farm. (Inmate 3543;1928)

Though we do not know the nature of this woman's relationship with "Frank Johnson," it's clear that she was reaching out to the police for help when she found her own respectability in question. Similarly, Inmate 3471 reported being detained after the police intervened in a domestic dispute: "Was arrested after beating husband gave me. Was not just straight, but no women are that way. Sent up for cure. Did not know I was diseased." (Inmate 3471;1926). This 25-year-old black/negro-Indian woman was quarantined under a gonorrhea charge while her abusive husband was likely set free.<sup>43</sup> Whether it was domestic abuse, trying to find a lost relative, or needing directions, these women were in vulnerable situations and sought help from people in authority positions. Instead, they found their own respectability and health under question and ended up being detained under Chapter 205.

### **Confusion over Charges**

These various ways that women came to be detained under Chapter 205 led to some confusion on the part of inmates about the charge under which they were officially detained.

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<sup>43</sup> This inmate reported that she was "Going back to husband" after leaving the Farm (Inmate 3471;1926).

Under the “history of offense” section of the form, several women’s comments indicate that they were under the impression that they were sentenced to the Farm with something other than the Chapter 205 charge indicated on their record. Inmate 3081, a 35-year-old black/Negro-Indian woman, reported: “About 1/2 pint of liquor was found in the house. I was sent up for it” (Inmate 3081;1926). Inmate 5006, a 24-year-old white/Irish woman, was under the impression that she was sent to the Farm for writing bad checks (Inmate 5006;1932). Given that women were often initially detained under one charge before they were quarantined under Chapter 205, it is not surprising that some women would be confused about the reason for their imprisonment. The dual nature of the WIF as both a prison and a medical treatment facility also led to confusion. Inmate 3346, age 46, had been arrested for soliciting several times in California, and was again picked up for prostitution after she solicited a man in Wichita. This man failed to appear in court to testify against her, but she was quarantined under Chapter 205 for gonorrhea. She reported: “Did not know they were in favor of sending me to Lansing. Thought it a state hospital.” (Inmate 3346;1927). Whether it was due to the nature of the charge or the institution itself, the fact that some inmates were unaware of the actual charge under which they were imprisoned is highly problematic.

### **Abuses of System**

As Inmate 3346’s case above illustrates, prosecutors often used Chapter 205 to imprison women that they could not charge with a more serious crime. While Chapter 3 gave examples of outside critiques of this abuse of power through Chapter 205, there were also several examples from the inmate interviews that indicated that people in positions of power utilized Chapter 205 in ways not intended by the quarantine law. Some interviews indicate that police used Chapter

205 to detain women who they considered to be a public nuisance. Inmate 2019, a 26-year-old black woman, had been interned at the WIF twice before and reported that she'd previously been addicted to drugs. She was arrested again in 1923: "[Sadie Thomas] and a bunch had been at my house and put on a wild party. I was not using drugs but the police thought if they sent me up here they could keep me from using them" (Inmate 2019;1923). This inmate's previous history at the WIF might have resulted in police being aware of her disease, making them wary of her presence in the community. Another inmate, a 24-year-old white/Irish-Indian woman, reported repeated encounters with police:

I have always drank quite a lot and have been arrested for speeding, and being drunk several times, but always made Bond, and was released. I have been running a rooming house, and I had 4 girls and several, men that rooms at my place, and one day the law came down and was looking for a girl, and thought she roomed at my place but she did not. I got into an argument with the officers, and talked smart to them. So they said "[Maxine] you come along with us" So they sent me up here. (Inmate 5018;1932)

This woman, who had been arrested several times and was hostile with police officers, was clearly a nuisance to the police. Chapter 205 became a mechanism for local police to rid themselves of this nuisance, even without enough evidence to convict her of another offense.

Another woman's story indicates that police may have also used Chapter 205 to intervene in "problematic" family situations. Inmate 5215 was a 29-year-old white/Scotch-Irish mother of eight living in Manhattan, Kansas. She reported:

I have been married 12 years, and last December before my last baby was born my husband left me for another woman. Since that time I have been working and trying to take care of the children. Two months ago I went to Leonardville to take care of an elderly lady. Oct 3rd the Sherriff from Manhattan come out to where I was working, and said he had a warrant to pick me up for a blood test. I could not go then but went a week later. My tests came back negative, and they had no charge to place against me, but I heard the office force say all they could place against me was an infection charge, and that is what I was sent here on. (Inmate 5215;1932)

This woman was trying to raise eight children on her own and had to leave her home for

extended periods to work as a traveling nurse. Though we cannot know the police officers' intentions, it is quite possible that they used Chapter 205 as a way of intervening in this family because they were concerned about the welfare of the children. The inmate's comment that her "tests came back negative" and "all they could place against [her] was an infection charge" could mean several things. It seems likely that her blood test for syphilis came back negative, and the officers claimed that she had gonorrhea, which was much more subjectively diagnosed (see CH 3 for more details about inaccurate and subjective diagnoses of diseases). Regardless of which disease she was actually charged with Chapter 205 under, her description of the police officers' comments show her impression that they were looking for an excuse to detain her, and Chapter 205 provided that legal mechanism.

### **Prostitution, Treating, and the Inmates of the Farm**

As the accounts of how these women were arrested show, categorizing women as either angels or whores failed to capture the diversity of ways that women contracted a venereal disease and then came to be under arrest. Understanding whether or not these women were prostitutes is equally complicated. One obstacle in understanding the nature of these sexual relationships is the different categorizations of sexual behavior used by professional social workers and working-class women themselves. Similar to the professionals in Clement's (2006) study of sexuality, treating, and prostitution in New York during this period, professional social workers in Kansas often did not understand the distinctions between prostitution and treating that were important for working-class women. Alice Hill's 1920 investigation into the backgrounds of inmates of the WIF published in *Public Health Reports* stated that "Of the 58 girls for whom the information was secured, 49 were reported as having been paid either in money or gifts, and 9 were definitely reported as having never been immoral for gain"(Hill 1920:1508). The distinction between

receiving money (prostitution) and receiving gifts (treating) was likely an important one for the inmates, yet Hill glosses over the difference in her categorization.

Though little direct mention is made of treating in the inmate interviews, it appears that many women at the Farm occasionally participated in some type of commercial sexual exchange. One woman who directly referred to the practice of treating was Inmate 2072, a black 15-year-old girl interviewed in 1924:

Have lived an immoral life about a year. All I ever got was a pair of hose (silk) from [Joe Parker] at Plattsburg, Missouri. Have been intimate with [Joe] only. He is 19 years old. (Inmate 2072;1924)

Through the phrase “all I ever got,” this inmate positions herself against women who accepted money in exchange for sex. This articulation of the category of treating was not common in the interviews, however, indicating that this either was not as common of a moral category in Kansas as it was in places like New York City, or that the interviewer simply failed to record these types of comments because she did not see them as being significant. Another complicating factor in understanding the commercial nature of these sexual relationships is that many of the women likely engaged in sexual activities on the side, occasionally participating in the practice of treating but not making their living from having sex. A statement from Newby’s 1918 report indicates that many inmates did not think of themselves as prostitutes. Describing one inmate of the Farm who was troublesome and bossy, Newby reports that the other inmates did not like her and “declared that she was ‘lots worse than any of them—a regular prostitute, crooked in her mode of living and dishonest in all her relations’” (Health 1920:359). The fact that these women did not see themselves as “regular prostitutes” shows the different categorizations of sexual behaviors used by working-class women during this time that were sometimes overlooked by moral reformers and professional social workers.

In the interviews themselves, a few women did identify themselves as prostitutes. Next to “cause of downfall” on the interview form, seven women replied “needed money.” A few women explicitly stated that they received money for having sex. Inmate 2274 was 33 when arrested in 1924. Following her third marriage (twice divorced, once a war widow), this inmate ran a boarding house in Wichita when arrested. She reported: “Have not always lived a straight life but havent been too bad. Got money when I did have a friend” (Inmate 2272;1924). Similarly, Inmate 2269 reported receiving money in exchange for sex. This 20-year-old white/Irish-English woman was under her second sentence under Chapter 205 when she reported: “Lived an immoral life about 3 years when I was out for the money I never got less than \$3.00” (Inmate 2269;1924).<sup>44</sup> Inmate 2924, a 38-year-old married mother of two, discussed the financial pressures pushing her into prostitution:

My husband took the children and went to Ill. There was not money enough for me to go. So I stayed behind and was to work and go too. But could not get work of any kind and had to resort to what ever I could do. I'll never do it again. (Inmate 2924;1926)

These accounts confirm that at least some of the women sentenced under Chapter 205 were prostitutes. Given the situation under which these interviews were conducted, it is not surprising that few women admitted to prostitution, since this would have amounted to confessing to a different crime than the one for which they were sentenced.

### **Volunteers to Go to the Farm**

Unlike the women listed above, a sizeable portion of the women in the sample (61, or 20% of those who reported how they came to be at the Farm) actually volunteered to go to the WIF. While it is unclear whether these volunteers were aware that they were not free to leave

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<sup>44</sup> This price seems consistent with other historical accounts. Clement (2006:99) reports that \$2 was the going rate in New York City before WWI.

the Farm at their choosing, these women's need to access healthcare treatment for their diseases motivated their actions. Unlike the rhetoric about moral reform coming from the activist and professional women involved with the WIF, the accounts of women who volunteered to go to the WIF bring us back to the core purpose of Chapter 205 in the first place: treating disease. While reformers often lamented the lack of personal responsibility that made these women unable to carry through on a course of treatment, the inmates who volunteered to come to the Farm often went to great lengths to access treatment. Their quest for medical treatment demonstrated the kind of personal responsibility that is a hallmark of respectability. Although there was no legitimate reason why these women could not have been treated on an outpatient basis that respected their civil liberties, the reality of their physical disease and their desire to get treatment are reminders that venereal disease during this period was a serious health issue.

Inmates' accounts of their choice to volunteer to come to the Farm illustrate their desire to improve their health. These inmates narrate their arrival at the Farm in such a way that illustrates their agency and their desire to take responsibility for their health and treat their condition. Inmate 2630 was a 33-year-old divorced mother of three who reported: "Was in bad condition and volunteered to come to Lansing for treatment, so came to Leavenworth and was sent out" (Inmate 2620;1926). Though this inmate did not indicate how she knew about the Farm, other inmates indicated various ways of learning that they could get treatment for their diseases in Lansing. Inmate 2964, age 20, reported: "I had been here before and as I was needing medical attention I volunteered" (Inmate 2964;1926). Other inmates reported that a friend told them about the Farm. Inmate 3536 was a 25-year-old white/Irish woman who divorced her husband due to "other women and liquor." She reported:

Volunteered. [Grace Harper] advised me to come here. I had to have blood tests. Also worked in homes, and knew my condition was not proper in caring for children. Had to



do something so came here. (Inmate 3536;1928)

Through such language as “had to do something so came here,” this inmate accounts for her choice to volunteer to come to the Farm as a way of accessing the treatment she needed for her disease. Similarly, inmate 5209 discussed a long quest to find treatment for her disease and her view of the Farm as a way to access much-needed healthcare. A 26-year-old white/German-Irish woman, this inmate reported that she had a disease despite never having “broken the laws of chastity”:

I have had this disease for about six years, however, I did not know it until about a month ago I have been sick more or less the greater part of my life; I had been working in Wichita, Kansas for the year and a half, and two months ago I took sick and was taken to the hospital, the Doctor there said I had a disease, my sister came and got me, and after going back to Independence, Kansas, my sister found out I could come here for treatment. (Inmate 5209;1932)

This inmate’s statement that her sister “found out [she] could come here for treatment” illustrate that she wanted to come to the Farm and was seeking any means available to cure her disease.

The language in these quotes illustrates that, for some women, access to medical care was so important that they were willing to give up their freedom to come to the WIF.

Indeed, among all the language of moral reform in the biennial reports of the WIF, it is easy to forget that venereal disease could be a very serious health condition during this period.

The 1926 Biennial Report for the WIF includes this description of a patient from the head nurse:

A girl of eighteen years was received. She could not walk. She had a stiff knee and it was very much enlarged from gonorrhoea rheumatism.

For three months there was very little change in her condition and very little hope for her recovery. Much of this time she was not moved from her bed; could not turn over without intense pain and assistance. She was unconscious much of the time, and was as helpless as a child. She was given nourishment with feeding tube for weeks. She recovered, walked out of the hospital, well and happy and very grateful to us all. We hear from her, and she is in good health. (Farm 1926:12)

This inmate had some very serious health problems, and clearly benefited from the care she received at the WIF. Though it's hard to evaluate the accuracy of this nurse's account, the idea that a former inmate would stay in touch with WIF staff after leaving indicates a level of appreciation that you might not initially think of for an institution of social control.

Several of the inmates who volunteered described very severe health problems in their interviews. Inmate 3014 was a 45-year-old white/Dutch-Irish mother of seven who volunteered to go to the Farm in 1926 after beginning treatment with another doctor.<sup>45</sup> As evidenced by her photo (see Figure 42), this woman had advanced-stage syphilis with severe facial deformities.

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<sup>45</sup> This inmate reported: "Volunteered to come here for syphilis for treatment for my face. Took seven-606 and face is healing and eye is better." (Inmate 3014;1926)



*Figure 42: Inmate 3014;1926*

Another woman's story illustrates both the seriousness of syphilis during this time and the inefficiencies of the Kansas system in adequately caring for patients. Inmate 3115 was a 21-year-old black maid who volunteered to go to the Farm after hearing about it from a friend. She reported: "Was suffering, terribly. Heard of Lansing and begged to come here" (Inmate 3115;1927). She was having serious health problems; the stenographer's note at the bottom of the report (which was rarely included in these interviews) stated:

[Opal] came to the institution in a terrible condition--Having corrupted syphiletic sores all over her body, face and hands. One limb a mass of raw, running sores. Too odorous to be in room with other patients.

Clearly, this inmate was in dire need of medical care and the Farm filled that need for her. Yet this inmate also reported that it took law enforcement officials five days to bring her to the Farm. For other patients, the medical care received at the Farm came too late. Inmate 3528 was a 30-year-old black woman who volunteered to come to the Farm after finding out about it from a friend. The stenographer's note at the bottom of the interview reported:

[Elizabeth Case] was received at the institution in a very bad condition. In fact had to drive car very slowly. Said she had tumors on liver and womb. Died two days after being received. (Inmate 3528;1928)

Though this inmate's tumors were not necessarily related to gonorrhea (the disease she was committed to the institution under), her story illustrates her dire need for medical treatment and her desperation to find it.<sup>46</sup>

### *Physician Incompetence & Access to Care*

Given the potential seriousness of venereal diseases during this period, it is understandable that many women would go to great lengths to get treatment. The women who volunteered to go to the Farm tell a story of complicated relationships with the medical profession, one that involved a genuine desire for treatment that was often frustrated by poor treatment options and lack of training. Many women reported that they volunteered to come to the Farm because a doctor recommended that they could get better care there. Inmate 5030 had married at age 15, but divorced her husband after two years because he “run around with other women.” She reported: “He gave me this disease and I went to the doctor at Smith center and he doctored me for awhile and then said I had better come here for treatment” (Inmate 5030;1932).

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<sup>46</sup> Though the small number of interviews indicating very serious health problems prevents too much generalization, the fact that inmate 3528 and 3115 were black illustrates how race might have combined with class in determining women's access to healthcare. The Farm became a last resort for those seeking medical treatment for venereal disease, and existing social hierarchies shaped who had other recourse for getting treatment.

Similarly, Inmate 5047 reported that her doctor recommended she go to the Farm to get better treatment. She had also married young (at age 16) and was separated from her husband when she volunteered to go to the Farm in 1932. At age 22, she was raising her two small children (age two and four) and trying to get treatment for her family: “I had been taking treatments of a doctor in Winfield, Kansas, but he suggested that I bring myself, 2 children and come here for treatment as they were also diseased” (Inmate 5047;1932). Given the poor or nonexistent training that most doctors received in treating venereal disease (see Chapter 3), it is not surprising that they felt unprepared to effectively treat these women’s diseases. Some doctors explicitly stated that they refused to treat venereal disease cases. Inmate 5137, a 23-year-old white/French-Indian woman, reported:

After I divorced my husband I went with first one and then another and I got this disease three years ago; I began taking treatments right away and took treatments, and a year later I took another course, but I did not seem to get much better. I came to Wichita, Kansas as I learned they had a free clinic there. The next morning after I got to Wichita I felt so bad that the lady at the hotel called a doctor and when he found I had a disease he said he did not doctor such cases. So he turned me over to Doctor Hobbs and he sent me here for treatment. (Inmate 5137;1932)

This inmate’s account shows several attempts to get treatment for her disease, ultimately ending up at the Farm after Dr. Hobbs told her “he did not doctor such cases.” These cases illustrate the ways that having a medical workforce poorly trained in venereal disease treatment interacted with institutions of social control: doctors were pushed to send their patients to institutional treatment centers when they could not provide the treatment themselves, prompting unnecessary imprisonment for patients who otherwise would have complied with treatment regimens outside an institution.

Unlike the “Targeted Arrest” quotes from above where inmates reported that the doctor turned them in to law enforcement to have them arrested after the inmate failed to show up for

treatment, many women's accounts show their doctors as helping them navigate the treatment options available to them and helping make arrangements so they could come to the Farm. Inmate 2599 was a 23-year-old white married woman who volunteered to go to the Farm in 1925. She reported: "I treated with Dr. Everhart for several days. Then he told me I had Shankers and told me of this place and arranged with Dr. Axford so I could come here" (Inmate 2599;1925). This woman portrays her doctor as an ally who tried to help her find the best way to access treatment for her disease. Similarly, Inmate 5199 narrated her path to the Farm in a way that highlighted her agency and portrayed her doctor as an ally. This 21-year-old white/Irish-English woman reported that she had "been using dope for almost two years off and on." She sought her doctor's help when she began having health problems:

About a month ago I went to our family doctor and told him I had been having such fevers every night and I thought my blood was bad; So he took a blood test and it came back 4-plus; I asked him if I might come down here for treatment, and he said for me to go to the Sherriff and ask him to make out a committment for me to enter the institution. (Inmate 5199;1932)

These cases illustrate that doctors often helped women navigate a healthcare system that provided very few qualified doctors and few affordable options for treating venereal disease. Rather than seeing doctors as part of a coercive state-regulated system to control women's sexuality, these accounts show doctors trying to help their patients get the best care available within a healthcare system that offered few options.

Several accounts indicate that many of the inmates quarantined under Chapter 205 had already received some treatment for their venereal disease before being committed to the WIF. Darlene Doubleday Newby's 1918 undercover report at the Farm included the observation:

The girls were interested at all times in getting information concerning the process of medical treatment; the examinations; the reports on positives and negatives. The new girls plied the old ones with questions until they had become entirely familiar with the vernacular, if indeed they had not already known it before they came to the Farm. As

time passed I was convinced that nearly every girl had had treatments at some previous time. (Health 1920:357-358)

The inmate interviews confirmed this observation. Several inmates reported that they had been taking treatment for their disease for some time before coming to the Farm. Inmate 2101 was a 27-year-old white woman who reported that she had contracted a venereal disease from her husband. She reported a long history of treatment for her disease:

I was taking treatments from Dr. Post at Lawrence for about a week and they sent me up here for treatment. I had taken treatments 3 years for same trouble. (Inmate 2101;1924)

Though going to the Farm would have been a considerable disruption to her life (her four children stayed with her husband and his mother in her absence), she was probably able to access much better health care at the Farm. Inmate 2417 also had a history of treatment before coming to the Farm. A 35-year-old white/Cherokee-Irish mother of three, this woman reported that her husband was “mentally deranged from Syphilis.” She stated:

Volunteered to come up for treatment after I heard of this place and knew I was diseased. [...] Dr. Moore of Eureka doctored me, 7 mercury and 7,600, Dr. McDonald wanted me to come. (Inmate 2417;1925)

As these quotes show, inmates used language in their interviews, such as having “four plus” blood or taking the “606 treatment,” that showed their familiarity with venereal disease treatment. Inmate 2632, an 18-year-old Italian immigrant, reported that she had received treatments at the Geneva training school in Illinois prior to coming to Kansas, and was clearly familiar with treatment: “I took 54 shots of 606 and my blood is now 4 plus” (Inmate 2632;1925).<sup>47</sup> Given the expense and difficulty of carrying out the fully recommended treatment for venereal diseases at this time (see Chapter 3), this is not surprising that women may have

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<sup>47</sup> This inmate had a 14-month old girl who was born out of wedlock. She then married another man, only to have that marriage annulled after she cheated on him with one of his friends. This woman reported that she had lived in quite a few places: she was born in Rome, Italy, her family lived in Illinois, she was married in Oklahoma, and six months later was living in Leavenworth, Kansas.

taken some treatments without following through on the full course of treatment. Even if women had followed through on the full course of treatment, they still would have had the disease since these treatments mitigated the effects of the diseases rather than curing them. Several inmates' comments that doctors had proclaimed them "cured" of their disease (see, for example, inmates 2113, 3796, and 5084) reflect either their doctors' misunderstanding of the diseases, a miscommunication between doctor and patient, or some combination of the two. The fact that so many women had previously taken treatments shows that, for many women, the problem with their medical care was not necessarily women's failure to take responsibility for their health, but rather the ineffective and cumbersome treatment options that were available at the time.

While some women surely did not comply with the treatment regimens recommended to them by their doctors, other inmates reported that their doctors misdiagnosed their condition or that they were unhappy with the treatment they received. Thus, what the State Board of Health and many female reformers took to be these women's failure to take responsibility for their healthcare was, in some cases, an example of them trying to do so and being thwarted by incompetent doctors. Inmate 2576 was a 26-year-old mother of two whose husband had died in the flu epidemic of 1919. She reported that she "Doctored with Dr. Moore of Eureka, Kansas since February 1925 and was not satisfied with my condition so I slipped away and came to Lansing" (Inmate 2576;1925). While this inmate took action to get better treatment when she was unhappy with her medical care, other women did not realize that there were problems in their medical care until after the fact. Several women reported that a doctor had erroneously said that they did not have a venereal disease when they really did. Inmate 5231 was a 23-year-old white/Dutch woman who was applying for a divorce when she volunteered to go to the Farm in 1932. She reported:



I had been taking treatment for four months before I came here and the doctor gave a slip or certificate saying I was free from venereal disease, but I went to another doctor and he said I needed treatments, but I did not have the money so I came here for treatment as had been here before. (Inmate 5231;1932)

This inmate had been to the Farm twice before on a quarantine charge, making her more aware of the treatment options; this may have led to greater skepticism of her first doctor, but the fact remains that an incompetent doctor told her she was cured of a disease when she was not.

Another woman's account illustrates how a doctor's misdiagnosis might lead to the spreading of disease. Inmate 2231 had married at the age of 15, only to have her husband leave after 14 months to go look for work in California. Suspecting that she might have a disease, she sought medical care: "I went to a doctor but he said I was alright. I have been out with several men since my husband and I separated but have never been intimate with them" (Inmate 2231;1924). Though this inmate says that she was not "intimate" with any of the men she went out with, this scenario could easily have resulted in her spreading disease.

Other women had ongoing health problems that their doctors did not recognize as being symptoms of venereal disease. These cases illustrate the dangers of having a medical profession uneducated in recognizing and treating venereal diseases: not only were these women at risk for spreading the disease for extended periods of time, but they suffered unnecessarily from their conditions. Inmate 2375 had been married three times by the time she came to the Farm in 1924 to get treatment for syphilis. She reported that a doctor had pronounced one of her husbands "cured" before they were married, possibly leading to her getting the disease in the first place. A stenographer's note on the bottom of her interview sheet noted: "[the inmate] is badly scared and broken out but her doctor said it was kidney and her face poisoned from cold cream" (Inmate 2375;1924). For this woman, two doctors' misunderstanding of syphilis led to her deteriorating health. Inmate 2259 also reported a series of doctors who failed to diagnose her with syphilis.

This 52-year-old woman had been married twice (one divorced and once widowed), and had trouble getting an accurate diagnosis as to why a wound would not heal:

Was hurt in a cyclone at Helena Arkansas. we made a run to a storm cellar when something with nails in it struck me in the head. It never healed fast and last summer I made it bleed with a comb and then it seemed to be festered. I went to Dr. Coffey at Independence and he thought it was T.B. I went to several Doctors after that but they all thought the same finally Dr. Wickersham took a blood test and I found out what was the trouble. (Inmate 2259;1924)

A stenographer's note at the bottom of her interview noted: "Sells crams and lotions never was a bad woman and dont know where she got disease. Slipped on sidewalk in April and broke leg in two places if that hadn't happened she would not have known what was the matter with her head." This note, which showed obvious sympathy for the woman, highlighted this woman's struggle to get her condition accurately diagnosed. These cases illustrate that medical incompetence on the part of many doctors was a significant factor in women gaining access to treatment for their diseases.

### *Poverty & Access to Care*

Patients interacting with the medical system faced another challenge besides lack of medical knowledge or physician's incompetence: money. With an average year of treatment for syphilis being outside the price range of 80% of the U.S. population, most Kansas women would have been unable to pay for treatment on their own (Brandt 1985:131; see also Chapter 3). Many women's lack of ability to pay for treatment was a direct factor in them going to the Farm. Inmate 5187 reported that her employment status was an important consideration in her path to the Farm. At age 21, she was living with her parents after a recent divorce and had just been laid off from her job at "Mrs. Stone's Bungalow Candy factory." She reported:

I went to the Bell Memorial Hospital and had a blood test made and it was four plus. So I started to take treatments and had taken three when the police matron came out to the house and talked to me and said it would be for the best to come here for treatment as I was'nt working. (Inmate 5187;1932)

Though this inmate was taking care of her treatment outside of the institution, she was advised to come to the Farm because of her financial situation. Several women indicated that a doctor turned them in once they disclosed that they would not be able to afford private treatment.

Inmate 4230 was an 18-year-old white waitress who reported contracting a disease from another man after separating from her husband. She reported: "I went to a Doctor and he turned me over to the officers. He aske me if I had enough money to pay for a treatment and when I told him I had not he turned me in" (Inmate 4230;1929). Similarly, Inmate 5250 reported that her inability to pay for treatment led her doctor to turn her in to authorities. This 20-year-old white/Irish-Dutch woman discovered she had a disease after she failed to heal properly after an operation. She reported that the doctor: "asked if I had the money to take treatments here, but I did not have so he turned my case over to the health authorities and they sent me here" (Inmate 5250;1932).

These women's accounts illustrate the power that doctors had over patients diagnosed with venereal disease. Although these doctors' actions were fitting with the spirit of the law (i.e. these women would not have been able to get treatment on their own), they were also punishing women who were not in a position to pay for their very expensive services.

Other women narrated their story as if they had more agency, saying that they volunteered to go to the WIF after realizing they could not afford private treatment for their disease. Inmate 3957 had been married just three months before coming to the Farm in 1929. Age 18, she reported that she had contracted gonorrhoea from her husband and had "turned [herself] in because [they] didn't have the money to pay doctor bills to be cured" (Inmate 3957;1929). While this woman did not work for pay outside the home, other women reported

that they had jobs and were still unable to afford treatment. Inmate 4611 was a 22-year-old white woman who worked as a maid for an officer at Fort Riley; she reported that she contracted a disease from her husband. She spoke of her choice to volunteer to come to the Farm as a calculated decision: "I volunteered to come for treatment when I found I couldn't earn enough for treatment" (Inmate 4611;1931). Similarly, Inmate 5236 stated that she volunteered to go to the Farm when she realized she could not pay for treatment on her own. A 21-year-old black woman, this inmate had been married for a year before volunteering to go to the Farm. She reported:

For almost a year I had worked as an apprentice for Mrs. Lottie White, who has an exclusive beauty shop, learning beauty culture. In order for me to be a beauty operator it was necessary for me to pass an examination by the State Board of Health, when my tests came back it was positive. I did not have the money to pay for the treatment, so I found out I could volunteer and come here for treatment.<sup>48</sup> (Inmate 5236;1932)

Without the financial resources to pay for private treatment, these women saw the WIF as their only chance for getting treatment and volunteered to come to the institution. Though these interviews only go part way into 1933, the data from this sample indicate that the Depression accelerated this pattern of poor women needing to submit themselves to imprisonment in order to access medical treatment. While the other full years in the sample averaged 5.75 women volunteering to go to the Farm per year, 14 women in the sample volunteered in 1932. Had more free public clinics been available in Kansas during this time, this would have been a much better option for these women, who desired to be responsible and take care of their condition, but merely lacked the financial resources to do so.

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<sup>48</sup> Beauty operators were one of a small group of professions that were required to be tested for venereal diseases for state licensing in Kansas. This was one of the few interviews in the sample that indicated that the inmate found out she had the disease through this mandatory testing. This particular inmate had graduated high school, and her apprenticeship with a beauty operator would have been one of few promising career options for black women during this period.

## Racial Differences in Arrest

These patterns of arrest varied by race. The following chart shows the over- and under-representation of racial groups in each arrest category. The blue bars on the left shows the racial group's overall percentage of the women who reported how they were arrested; the rest of the bars reflect that racial group's percentage of women among that arrest category. Comparing the "overall sample" bar with the other bars in that category reveals which arrest categories were over- or under-represented for that racial group:

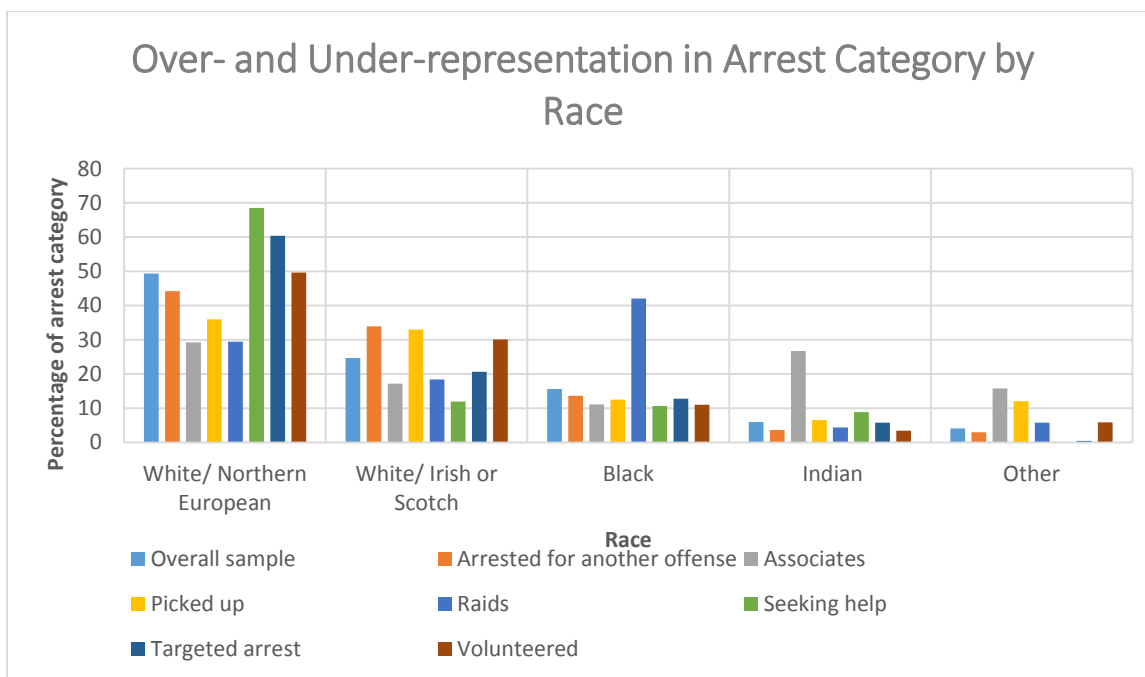


Figure 43

Looking at the four largest arrest categories (the ones that the most women reported), there are racial differences for the "targeted arrest" and "raids" category, but only small differences for the "another offense" and "volunteered" categories. The category that the most women reported was "targeted arrest," and an examination of the racial makeup of that category reveals that

White/Northern European women were more likely to report being arrested in this way.

White/Northern European women made up 49.4% of the overall arrest sample, yet they made up 60.4% of the women who reported being arrested through a targeted arrest. The other racial groups were slightly underrepresented in the targeted arrest category. Under this category, there were a variety of people who might turn a woman in to authorities, so there could be several factors informing this trend. One pattern of interest is that White/ Northern European inmates were more likely to report that their parents turned them in. Of the 17 inmates who reported that their parents turned them in to a local health officer, 14 were White/Northern European. Given historical patterns of systemic racism, it is not surprising that Black and Native American parents would be less likely to view the state as a resource in helping to control an out-of-control daughter.

The other arrest category that showed clear racial differences was “raids.” Black women reported being arrested in police raids at much higher rates than the other groups. Black women made up 15.6% of the overall arrest sample, yet they made up 42.1% of the women who reported being arrested during a police raid. White/Northern European women were underrepresented in this arrest category, making up only 29.5% of the women arrested in raids (compared to being 49.4% of the overall arrest sample). One explanation for this trend is that police may have been more likely to raid Black establishments, or may have been more likely to arrest everyone present than they did when raiding white hotels or parties. Combined with the trend in targeted arrests, this suggests a more targeted approach for white women detained under Chapter 205 and a tendency to arrest Black women in groups. The general idea behind reformatories was to identify at-risk young women before they went all the way down the road to prostitution, so it would make sense that local health officers might focus their attention on white women, who

they might have viewed as being more capable of being reformed. More details are needed about the process of arrest to understand the causes of these trends, but this opens up interesting questions for future research.

The other two categories with the largest numbers of women were “arrested for another offense” and “volunteered.” These categories do not show large differences across racial groups. White/Irish or Scotch women were slightly overrepresented in the “arrested for another offense” category, making up 34% of that arrest category compared to 24.7% of the overall arrest sample. The “volunteered” category shows few differences across racial groups. In some ways, this is surprising. A history of problematic relationships with state authorities would lead me to think that women of color would be less likely to seek help from the state. On the other hand, these women had fewer resources to draw on outside of the institution, so many of them would have had few other options.

For the other three arrest categories, “picked up,” “associates,” and “seeking help,” the low numbers of women in these categories prevents any generalizations. For example, Indian women appear to be overrepresented in the “associates” category in Figure 43, with 27% of women in this category being Indian compared to only 6% of the overall arrest sample. However, there were only 15 women in the “associates” category, meaning that this represents only four Indian women’s experiences.

### **Care & Control: Inmate Feelings about the Farm**

Overall, these women came to the WIF under a variety of circumstances, some voluntarily but most against their will. Many lamented their fate, as did this woman from Newby’s 1918 undercover report:

In the evening one of the girls (H 435) had “the blues.” She was a bride of only six weeks. She didn’t believe that any man would be faithful to an absent wife, and she begged to be allowed to return to her “little man,” saying her home would be wrecked unless she were permitted to go back to him. (Health 1920:357)

As this woman’s story illustrates, being forcibly removed from your home for months at a time could cause serious disruptions in these women’s lives, from marital relationships to employment to childcare. At the same time as the policy was disruptive and unjust, it also provided some concrete benefits to women. Similar to the women in Pascoe’s (1990:75) study of voluntary homes for wayward women, many women at the Farm appreciated the concrete services and practical help that they received. Particularly for the women who volunteered to go to the Farm, the medical treatment provided was very much appreciated. Inmate 2852, a 19-year-old mother of three, stated “I am glad to get cured and more than glad to be in Lansing” (Inmate 2852;1926).<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Inmate 4902, a 22-year-old woman who reported that she contracted a disease from her husband, reported “I certainly appreciate what is being done for me here, and I will do anything I can in the way of work” (Inmate 4902;1931). Newby’s report described the inmates’ feelings toward the Farm: “The majority of the women, while restless under restraint and eager to get out as soon as possible, seem grateful for the medical treatment given them at the Farm” (Health 1920:360). These stories push us to understand the Farm not only as an institution of social control, but also as a resource that poor women could utilize to gain access to needed healthcare services. While this is most clearly apparent in the case of the women who volunteered to go to the Farm, many inmates likely appreciated the access to medical treatment and the regular food and shelter, particularly as the Depression took hold of Dust-Bowl stricken Kansas. As an institution of social control, the WIF was coercive at the same

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<sup>49</sup> This inmate also indicated that she married at the age of 13 because she “got in bad with Mr. [Stafford] and had to get married.” She complained that her “husband ran with negro women and everything,” a rare mention of interracial sex in the interviews.



time that it provided concrete benefits, making it what Staples (1990) might term an institution of “care and control.” Inmates gained access to resources through the Farm, but this access obtained at the price of their freedom and was not chosen by most of the women. These inmates had a complicated relationship to the Farm, appreciating some basic services while also resenting the unnecessary restrictions to their freedom.

### **Staking Claims to Respectability**

These women came to the Farm under a variety of circumstances. Once there, they were all interviewed and asked to account for how they had contracted a venereal disease. The women found themselves in a highly charged situation: they were detained under an indefinite sentence, so they had every incentive to present themselves as respectable women and make a good impression on the person interviewing them. Yet they were also asked very personal questions about who they had sex with and why. In their answers, the women constructed several narratives about their sexual histories that tried to stake a claim to respectability. These narratives attempted to manage the stigma associated with them based on their disease (Goffman 1963). Yet, as Roschelle and Kaufman (2004:26) point out, stigma management strategies do not always result in more social acceptance, particularly when people lack the cultural capital to achieve middle-class standards of behavior.

The rest of this chapter will explore the degree to which these inmates’ narratives of their sexual pasts allowed them to claim a respectable status. First, I will discuss the dominant middle-class legitimizing discourses of romantic love and frank reticence. Though the nature of the interviews challenges any simple interpretation, the interviews suggest that these inmates did not have the cultural capital to articulate their sexual pasts using middle-class discourses of

respectable sexuality. Second, I will discuss two claims to respectability that were clearly articulated in the interviews: 1) inmates emphasized how they had not broken dominant sexual norms; and 2) inmates emphasized that they had been led astray by bad company and were thus not responsible for breaking dominant sexual norms. Together, a close analysis of these narratives leads us to a better understanding of the degree to which these inmates had the cultural resources needed to narrate their sexual pasts in a respectable way.

### Appeals to “Normal” Sexuality

As sexual behaviors changed over the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the way that a woman talked about her sexual history became increasingly important to her respectability. Sexual morality came to be based less on the idea of physical chastity—whether or not someone was a virgin when married—and more on the context and emotions in which someone had sex. In this context, how people narrated their sexual pasts was a key determinant in whether their actions would be perceived as respectable or not (Haag 1992:551). Two key components of a respectable narrative of one’s sexual history were love and what Julian Carter (2007) terms “frank reticence.”

Advice columnists during this period gave women more leniency if they accounted for their sexual histories as being motivated by love rather than physical pleasure (Haag 1992:556). Dating advice writer Juliet Farnham urged women to learn the distinction between “promiscuity (that is, petting for petting’s sake) and slight romantic lapses” (Farnham 1943:130; quoted in Haag 1992:574). The status of the relationship still mattered: marital sexuality was still the ideal, and within certain communities the longtime practice of engaged couples having sex before marriage was still condoned (Clement 2006:19; D’Emilio and Freedman 1997; Reay

2014:3). However, love gained cultural importance as the thing that distinguished casual sex from more respectable expressions of emotional connection with a partner. It was key to a respectable narration of your sexual past.

The second component of a legitimizing narration of one's sexual history was using an approach toward talking about sex that Carter (2007) terms "frank reticence." Exemplified in sex education materials and dating advice manuals in the 1910s and 1920s, this approach to talking about sex entailed taking a "modern" attitude of publicly talking and giving the facts about sex, but doing so in a way that avoided directly mentioning sexual pleasure and too many details (Carter 2007:122). "Frank reticence" was the land of metaphor, and it was how respectable and modern people talked about sexuality. From the "birds and the bees" to the interview form at the WIF that asked for the "Cause of moral downfall," polite people did not shy away from talking about sex, but they also did not talk about it too directly. As Carter (2007) argues, this approach to talking about sex was loaded with racial meanings, as sex education materials associated the physical and vulgar with less civilized races and the "birds and the bees" with a modern, white approach to sexuality (125). Thus, a woman narrating her sexual history had to keep this dynamic in mind if she wished to pull off a respectable performance: she needed to be modern and talk about sex, but to do so indirectly.

Social class and race were central components of how these legitimizing discourses about sexuality operated. Middle-class women narrated their own sexual histories in opposition to widely shared perceptions of out-of-control working-class and black sexuality. Movies, sex education materials, and newspaper columnists associated working-class sexuality as being motivated not by love, but by money or physical pleasure (Carter 2007; Haag 1992; Reay 2014). The emotional responsiveness, sensitivity, and self-control needed to have both partners orgasm

simultaneously, which was frequently promoted in marriage advice materials, was viewed as something that working-class and more “primitive” races would be incapable of (Carter 2007:153). Similarly, movies frequently portrayed working-class women who used coarse language and were far too explicit about sexuality: they lacked the “frank reticence” required of respectable sexuality. While lower-status women might have the physical desire for sex, popular portrayals of them did not tie this desire to love and marriage in the same way that it did for middle-class, white companionate marriages. Thus, these tools for narrating one’s sexual history in a way that made it respectable (love and frank reticence) were available to middle-class women while being constructed against ideas of working-class and black women.

#### *Love & Frank Reticence at the WIF*

These elements of a respectable narrative of sexuality, love and frank reticence, appear through the general philosophy of the WIF. Two particular examples highlight the various ways that these narratives informed the daily practices and understanding of reform that took place at the Farm: one from a psychologist’s assessment of the inmates’ mental health and another from an account of Superintendent Julia Perry interacting with the inmates.

The first example comes from the in-depth study of the inmates of the Farm undertaken by a team of social workers, public health workers, and psychologists that was published in *Public Health Reports* in 1920. In part four of the five-part series, psychologist Walter L. Treadway evaluated 206 cases for signs of mental abnormalities, finding a mere 19.9% to have “a normal personal make-up” (Treadway 1920:1592). Though Treadway describes several types of mental “abnormalities,” some of which seem to be genuine mental health issues and others which seem to be cases of pathologizing deviant behavior, one trait common to several mental “types” is that they failed to establish emotional connections with their sexual partners. He

reports that inmates in the “egoistic personality” category were mostly prostitutes, and that “As a group, none of the women had genuine love affairs that went very deeply or made any great impression” (Treadway 1920:1577). Of a group he identified as being allied with the egoistic personality, but somewhat different from it, Treadway commented: “As a rule their love affairs were very perfunctory, as they did not show the tenderness, self-sacrifice, and self-subordination that one would naturally expect in a genuinely deep love” (Treadway 1920:1582). In these statements, Treadway reinforces romantic love as a legitimizing discourse for premarital sexual activity. Casual sex, on the other hand, was not only against the moral order of society, but was medicalized as a psychiatric disorder. The proclivity to have sex without love stood out as one of the commonalities among the mental “types” that Treadway describes. While he urged educators to be proactive in intervening early in girls’ lives to prevent them from going the wrong way, he viewed this desire to have sex outside of love as being a character trait that was not as mutable: “it was observed in these 150 cases that there was a lack of tenderness and regard for their paramours; that the sensual feelings were well developed, but there was no tenderness combined with these, a necessary requisite for the instinctive biological demands of mating” (Treadway 1920:1592). In this example, the ideology of romantic love and frank reticence informed Treadway’s assessment of the inmates’ mental health. They failed to articulate love as a motivating factor for their sexual behaviors, losing out on the legitimizing discourse of romantic love. Treadway’s comment that the women’s “sensual feelings were well developed, but there was no tenderness combined with these” is a critique of the inmates’ failure to embody “modern” sexuality: they were supposed to have a proper balance of sensual feelings, love, and self-control. Overall, Treadway’s study demonstrates one way in which love and frank reticence informed daily practice at the WIF. Their failure to articulate these elements of modern love led

to their diagnosis as mentally ill. However, the lack of resources at the Farm for psychological staff and services meant that this diagnosis had little impact on the daily life of the inmates.

While this understanding certainly factored into the logic of their imprisonment, the WIF simply lacked the resources to implement a full-scale psychological program to “treat” the women.

The second example comes from an observation of Superintendent Julia Perry interacting with inmates, and gives a better indication of how the ideas of love and frank reticence might have impacted the daily life of the institution. This example comes from the undercover report of social worker Darlene Doubleday Newby in 1918; she gives an account of Perry interacting with a group of inmates shortly after they arrived at the Farm. Perry reportedly said to the inmates:

“Now that you are here, we are going to see that you have good treatment, good medical treatment, and in addition to that the best care in every way that kindness and love can give. Most of you have known love at some time; you have all been loved by some one, and you have all loved some one. That is one reason why you are here. Women are not always wise in their affections; they are not always fair to themselves; that’s why some of you are here.” At this point many of the girls nodded in agreement. [...] In the days that followed the girls commented frequently on this talk of Mrs. Perry’s. They agreed that “she is an awful good woman,” and the new girls were hearing constantly from the old girls that Mrs. Perry was “kind and square.” (Health 1920:358)

In this interaction, Perry offers the inmates a respectable way to narrate their sexual histories. By telling inmates that they were “not always wise in their affections,” Perry gives the inmates a way of talking about sex indirectly (frank reticence) and emphasizing the emotional connections (romantic love) of their relationships. In this case, these discourses of respectable sexuality are used not to pathologize women’s behaviors, but to offer them a way of understanding and narrating their behavior in a way that fit with middle-class norms for sexual propriety. While certainly still coercive in nature, this interaction shows a more benevolent intent, one that was apparently appreciated by the inmates, as indicated by their approving comments about

Superintendent Perry.

*Love & Frank Reticence in the Inmate Interviews*

Though the nature of the WIF inmate interviews as being co-constructed by the woman being interviewed and the WIF employee recording the interview prevents simple generalizations, the interviews as a whole suggest that the inmates were unable to fully articulate these middle-class discourses of respectable sexuality. Given how central ideas of respectability were to the process of deciding who needed to be sent to the WIF, it was likely that this inability to articulate their sexual histories in a respectable way contributed to them being classified as “disreputable” and in need of incarceration in the first place.

As a whole, the interviews do not articulate love as being an important component of the inmates’ narratives of their sexual pasts. Of the 488 interviews in the sample, only 10 listed “love” next to the prompt “cause of moral downfall.” Very few interviews included the word love in the text or talked about emotional connections between the woman and her partner. Even those that did mention love often did so next to other comments indicating that they had had sex with multiple partners. For example, the interview for 18-year-old Inmate 3382 (1927) had “Do not know (Love)” recorded next to “cause of downfall,” yet it also stated that she “Led an immoral life last few years. Got discouraged when first sweetheart turned me down.” Thus, even those who did use the word “love” did so next to other comments indicating that they had multiple sexual partners. In their stories, love did not emerge as a major narrative device used to legitimize their sexual pasts.

There were aspects of the “love” narrative that women articulated, but they tended to do so in ways that did not quite achieve the legitimizing discourse of middle-class dominant culture. Two elements of the love narrative that arise in the interviews are the ideas that women should

not have very many sexual partners and that they should have sex within committed relationships. Many women in the sample emphasized the fact that they had not had very many sexual partners. Only 59 women in the sample indicated how many sexual partners they had; of those, 22 (37%) said that they only had one partner and 13 (22%) said that they only had two partners. Thus, the women who did indicate how many partners they had often did so in order to emphasize that they had not had sex with very many people. Many women used language that also emphasized this point, saying things such as “Have been intimate with only 1 man” (Inmate 2126;1924) or “He is the only man that I have been with” (Inmate 3182;1927).<sup>50</sup> However, other women emphasized that they had not had very many sexual partners in relation to casual sex, utilizing this element of the narrative in a way that was very much at odds with the ideal of romantic love. Inmate 2748 was 14 when she went to the Farm in 1926. She reported her only sexual encounter from the previous year (at the age of 13): “Was intimate with 1 man 1 time, [Paul Carpenter] of a Carnival that stopped near our home” (Inmate 2748;1926). Inmate 3492 recounted her only sexual encounter as a similarly casual affair. This 21-year-old waitress reported: “was with one man, one time. Know nothing about him now” (Inmate 3492;1927). These women’s stories illustrate that they did not quite understand how to utilize the narrative of romantic love correctly: they emphasized that they had few partners, but at the same time admitted to having sex without the emotional connections that were the key element of romantic love.

The second element of the romantic love narrative evident in the inmate interviews, that sex should take place within a committed relationship, was also used in ways that did not exactly

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<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, this inmate (3182) appeared to be using this phrase, “only man I have been with,” only in reference to having sex outside of marriage, indicating her understanding that the interviewer was only asking about disreputable sexuality. At age 45, she had been married twice before. The man who she was having a relationship with had hidden liquor in her basement, which led to their arrest (Inmate 3182;1927).



fulfill the ideal of romantic love. While these women clearly state that they were engaged or in a committed relationship when they had sex, the interviews do so in a factual way that does not emphasize the emotional connection between the women and their partners. Several women indicated that they were in a long-term or committed relationship when they had sex. For example, Inmate 2295 (1924) stated that she was “engaged to marry,” Inmate 4766 (1931) reported having sex with a man “with whom [she] had been going for some time,” and Inmate 4334 (1930) reported that she “got this disease from a boy that [she] had gone with for about four or five months.” While these women all stated that they were in relationships when they had sex, the interviews do not record any discussion of the emotional connection they felt for their partners. It may have been the case that these women did discuss emotional connections with their partners and the person transcribing the interviews chose only to record the “facts” of the situation rather than anything extraneous. With this in mind, it is unclear whether the inmates were unable to fully articulate this element of romantic love or whether the interviewer essentially denied them this legitimizing narrative by only recording the “facts.” As an example, the interview for Inmate 5156 recounts some emotionally-charged situations in very factual language:

I have been keeping house for my Father in Wichita, Kansas and about three months ago he and my Brother went to work in the Sugar Beet fields. So I went to stay with and keep house for my Uncle. I had been going with a young for about six month, with whom I was intimate and I became pregnant and he left me. I had not been feeling well so I called the City Doctor and he must have turned me in to Dr. Hobbs because the law came down and got me the next day. (Inmate 5156;1932)

The interview for this 23-year-old Mexican woman fails to indicate any emotional distress, even though she was pregnant when her partner left her. If it was the case that this lack of emotion in the interviews came from the inmates (rather than the interview process), it may be that these women were trying to stake a claim to respectability by drawing on older traditions of premarital

sex within the context of engagement, a long tradition within working class communities in the US (D'Emilio and Freedman 1997). However, even this mechanism of legitimating premarital sexual activity was changing within the context of middle-class notions of romantic love, as the narration of love between the partners became an important element even between engaged couples (Clement 2006:19). Regardless of the inmates' intent and what was actually said, the overall effect of these interviews is to present these inmates as being rather cold and without the emotional connections key to modern discourses of respectable premarital sexuality.

Whether talking about the number of partners or the status of the relationship, the inmate interviews failed to articulate the most important element of the romantic love narrative: emotions. Other women more starkly violated sexual norms in their narratives. For example, Inmate 2177 was an 18-year-old White/Indian woman who reported: "Have been intimate with about 12 men. I usually had steadies. Was intimate with other men while I lived with my husband" (Inmate 2177;1924).<sup>51</sup> This inmate's report that she "usually had steadies" could be read as an attempt to claim respectability because sex was within the context of a relationship, yet the high number of sexual partners and the fact that she had sex outside of her marriage would have violated social norms. A few women indicated that they had casual sex, not making any attempts to disguise the fact that they were not in a committed relationship with their sexual partner. Inmate 4181, a 14-year-old girl who was turned into authorities by her sister, reported: "I got this disease from a man that I went with once but I do not know his name" (Inmate 4181;1929). Inmate 2954, age 16 when interned in 1926, reported:

Lived an immoral life since 14 years. Was intimate with [Bob Carter] for about years. We fussed. He married another girl for "spite". I ran with any & everyone until I was

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<sup>51</sup> This inmate also indicates in the interview that she left home at age 16 to work for the man that she would later marry. Her mother apparently knew that her daughter "was living with Mr. [Baker] as his wife," but did not say anything. They lived together five months before marrying. This was apparently an abusive relationship, as the inmate reports that "Mr. [Baker] carries a long knife and has threatened me with it and also choked me."

arrested. Been intimate with about 10 or 12. Just out for a good time. (Inmate 2954;1926)

Not knowing the name of your sexual partner was a stark contrast to the ideal of romantic love, as was the idea that you would just be “out for a good time.” Indeed, social commentators at the time frequently associated working class women with being motivated by sexual pleasure, not love. Though sexual pleasure is not often explicitly mentioned in the interviews, phrases such as the one above about being “out for a good time” hint at it. Another example of a woman narrating her sexual experiences as being motivated by her own desires comes from 19-year-old Inmate 3394, who stated: “Living wrong 2 months, last summer. Knew better. Just wanted to have a ‘fling’” (Inmate 3394;1927).<sup>52</sup> Wanting to “have a fling” implies no emotional connection with the partner and a general desire to have sex for the pleasure of it rather than for what it might imply about the relationship with a partner. These women could hardly claim that they had, in the words of Juliet Farnham, a “slight romantic lapse,” given that they did not articulate emotional connections at all.

The extent to which inmates utilized frank reticence as a tool in narrating their sexual histories is perhaps even more challenging to assess due to the nature of how the interviews were recorded. There is very little direct mention of sexual pleasure in the interviews, but it is unclear whether this is because the inmates did not talk about it or the person recording the interview found it to be in bad taste to write down those types of statements. In other words, we cannot know whether we are seeing the interviewers’ “frank reticence” or that of the inmates. However, some of the narratives presented below can be read as examples of frank reticence.

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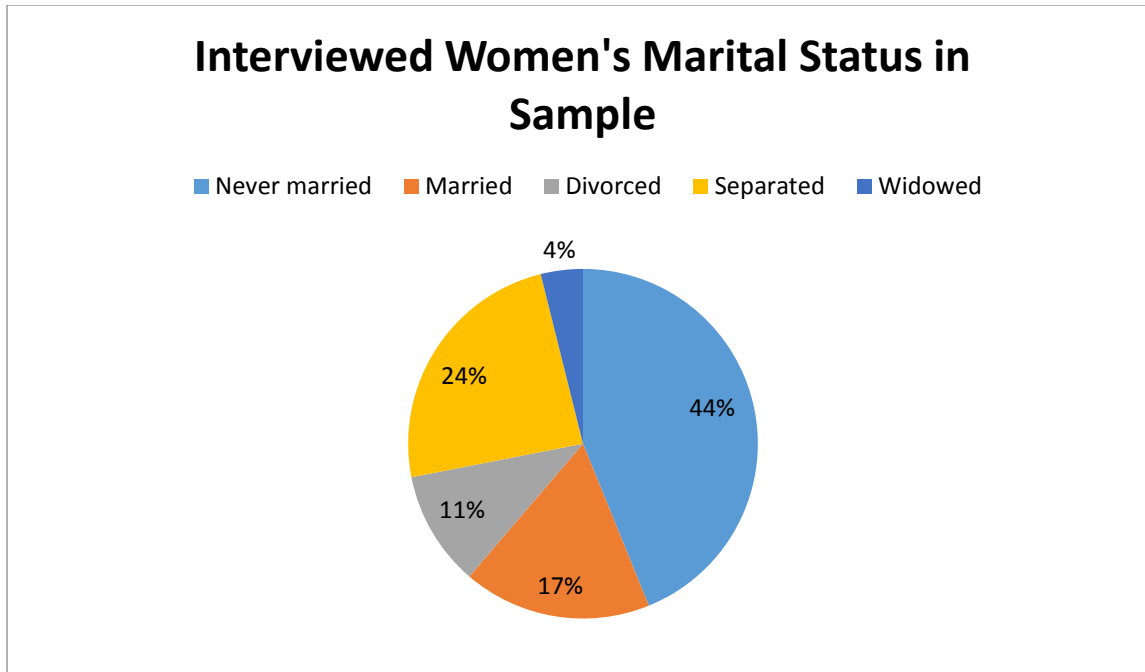
<sup>52</sup> This inmate reported that she had two years of college education, indicating that she may have been from a higher social class than many other inmates. Perhaps it was her lack of ability to employ middle class narratives of respectable sexuality that led her to being sent to the Farm despite this class background.

### **Narrative 1: Abiding by Dominant Rules of Sexuality**

Though the inmate interviews do not provide a clear narrative of love or frank reticence, two narratives do emerge from the interviews that stake a claim to these inmates' respectability. In the first narrative, women asserted that they had not broken any moral norms. In stark contrast to the tales told about them, these women claimed that they ended up with a venereal disease despite their adherence to middle-class norms of sexuality. Though they varied on how they narrated the contraction of their disease, all of the women in this group asserted respectability through recognizing the validity of dominant sexual mores and claiming that they abided by those rules. Their stories give a glaring indictment of the men in their lives, and shift the responsibility for the women's disease onto men.

#### *The Victims of Husbands' Vice*

The most common form that this argument took was through women claiming that they contracted a venereal disease through their husband. Engaging with wider cultural narratives of the transmission of venereal disease from prostitutes to wives through their husbands, many of the women at the WIF claimed that they were the innocent wives in this scenario, not the loose prostitutes. Indeed, despite their young age, the majority of the women in this sample had been married at some point before being interned at the WIF (see Figure 44):



*Figure 44*

A comparison of age by marital status reveals the rapidly shifting family dynamics of many of these young women. Of the 15-year-olds in the sample, 72% had never married at the time of their interview, 8% were married, and 19% were separated or divorced.<sup>53</sup> Of the 20-year-old women in the sample, 40% had never married, 10% were married, and 50% were either divorced or separated. By the age of 20, many of these women were already on their second marriage. The fact that the majority of the women at the WIF had at some point been married has important implications for their respectability: it was quite possible that they had contracted the disease through no moral “lapse” of their own, but rather through their husbands’ sexual misdeeds.

In their interviews, many women claimed that their husbands had given them a disease. For example, Inmate 2311 was a 17-year-old woman who reported that her husband, an actor that she had only lived with for two weeks, had given her syphilis (Inmate 2311;1924; see Figure 45). Of the 128 women in the sample who reported where they contracted their disease (about 1/3 of

<sup>53</sup> Numbers do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

the women), 51% claimed that they contracted venereal disease through their husbands. Thus, many of those who were willing to specify who they contracted the disease from did so in order to position themselves as abiding by rules of “normal” sexuality. Many women asserted their own sexual propriety while stating that they got the disease from their husbands. Inmate 2000 was a 21-year-old Black woman who had married at the age of 13. She reported: “I have always been a good girl never had anything to do with any man but my husband” (Inmate 2000;1923).<sup>54</sup> Inmate 4744 also asserted her sexual propriety, stating: “I got this disease from my Husband. I have gone to dances and different place with a crowd since my husband and I separated but I have never led an immoral life” (Inmate 4744;1931).<sup>55</sup> In asserting their sexual propriety and explicitly stating that they had not had sex outside of marriage, these women positioned themselves as the victims of their husbands’ sexual misdeeds. Inmate 3198, a white/German-Indian woman who was the mother of a four-year-old child, made this same accusation, stating: “Husband brought disease home to me” (Inmate 3198;1927). This inmate draws on the innocence and purity of the image of the home to deny any wrongdoing on her part. These women’s stories are a glaring indictment of the idyllic Victorian image of the home, echoing the arguments of female prohibitionists that the purity and sanctity of the home often fell victim to male vices. Inmate 4550 had married at the age of 16, had two children, and then divorced.

Now 22, she reported:

My husband is to balme. [...] husband not good to me, drank so much I couldnt live with him. I've learned that my daughters will not marry as young as I. (Inmate 4550;1930).

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<sup>54</sup> This inmate reported that she and her husband were arrested in a raid where she was apparently mistaken for a prostitute: “They raided the place where we were staying and found my husband and I in bed. They asked us for our license, but we didn’t have them so they arrested us. We sent a telegram to our people and proved we were married but they interned us on our blood” (Inmate 2000;1923). This couple’s race undoubtedly played a role in this assumption that they were unmarried; the mention that her husband was interned as well (“they interned us”) is a rare mention of a man being interned under Chapter 205.

<sup>55</sup> This inmate, age 20 when interviewed, reported that she had married at age 16 and then had two children. Her husband reportedly “ran around with other women and wouldn’t work,” causing their separation. She reported: “I have heard that he was bumming his way to California and got Killed” (Inmate 4744;1931).

By asserting that they contracted the disease from their husbands, these women sought to establish a respectable presence for themselves by denying any sexual misconduct. These inmates positioned themselves as the victims of philandering husbands, rather than the loose women that others made them out to be. If they contracted the disease through normal marital sexuality, the fact that they had a venereal disease did not necessarily imply their loss of respectability.



*Figure 45: Inmate 2311, who volunteered to go to the Farm and claimed that she contracted a disease through her husband (Inmate 2311;1924).*

In claiming that they contracted their disease from their husbands, these women were

drawing on cultural discourses about the transmission of venereal disease from “fallen” prostitutes to philandering husbands to innocent wives. As discussed in Chapter 3, the idea that innocent wives might be infected through their husbands was a cause of major social concern, drawing on notions of “good” and “bad” women and a critique of the sexual double standard. At times, the Kansas State Board of Health promoted this interpretation of wives’ contraction of venereal disease. A 1922 pamphlet addressed to “all Mothers and Mothers-to-be” about women’s healthcare needs stated that venereal diseases “are usually contracted, directly or indirectly, through sexual intercourse with a prostitute” (Bulletin 1922:10). The text goes on to say that “Gonorrhoea is very often transmitted from the husband to the new wife” (Ibid).

However, the forced detention and treatment of the inmates at the WIF shows that the state did not view these women as the innocent wives in this scenario. The conflicting messages sent through the state (i.e. the Board of Health promoting the idea that wives might get the disease through their husbands and the criminal justice system then imprisoning those same women and subjecting them to moral reform) is partially indicative of the uncoordinated and poorly designed efforts to control venereal disease in the state. Yet it also speaks to state authorities’ tendency to classify women as either “good” or “bad” women, and their assumption that the inmates, by virtue of their being at the Farm, fell into the latter category. Thus, the inmates’ claim that they were the innocent wives in this narrative of venereal disease transmission was counter to many of the assumptions made about them.

#### *Asexual Contraction of Venereal Disease*

Another way in which women narrated the contraction of venereal disease in such a way that reinforced dominant cultural norms about sexuality was through claiming that they contracted the disease asexually. Though it was not commonly articulated, several women in the



sample claimed that they contracted venereal disease through non-sexual means. Of the third of the sample who specified where they contracted the disease, about 13% (n=17) claimed that they contracted the disease through non-sexual contact.<sup>56</sup> Some of these stories involve the transfer of bodily fluid, making non-sexual contraction of venereal disease a distinct possibility. Inmate 2234 was a 19-year-old white woman who gave such an account:

[Lucy Baker] was sick and I was taking care of her. I didnt know what was the matter with her. One day I had cramps so she told me to use her syringe which I did. I later found out she was diseased. I was told to go see Dr. Carter and I went and was examined and was sent here. Have never lived an immoral life. (Inmate 2234;1924)

Though it is entirely possible that this woman contracted a disease through sharing a syringe, it is also interesting to note that she just as easily could have contracted the disease from her estranged husband.<sup>57</sup> The attribution of her disease to non-sexual means is a way to distance herself from the kind of disreputable sexuality that was so commonly blamed for venereal disease. Other women claimed that they contracted a disease from roommates. Inmate 3029 was only 12 years old when she was interned at the Farm in 1926. She reported: “If I am diseased I got it from sister Kathern as we slept together” (Inmate 3029;1926). Similarly, Inmate 4286, a 21-year-old white woman, reported: “I do not know how I got this disease as I have never done any thing wrong. I think I may have gotten it at the place where I worked. I also roomed at a house where there had been girls who was wrong and I think I got it from them in the room” (Inmate 4286;1930). Claims to non-sexual contraction were particularly common for young women (such as the 12-year-old girl quoted above) and among women who reported “never” when asked about the age that they “first broke the law of chastity.”

Other statements indicate that doctors and husbands employed narratives of non-sexual

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<sup>56</sup> These numbers exclude those who claimed that they inherited the disease.

<sup>57</sup> This inmate also indicated that her husband had left her after a four month marriage, while she was “sick with my baby girl.” The daughter was living with the inmate’s mother at the time of her quarantine (Inmate 2234;1924).

contraction as they discussed these diseases with the interned women. Inmate 2369, a 28-year-old woman who was interned at the WIF along with her baby in 1924, reported: “Husband told me got disease from toilet seats” (Inmate 2369;1924). Whether this woman believed her husband’s story about how he contracted venereal disease or not, the narrative of non-sexual contraction allowed her to keep her own respectability, and that of her husband’s, intact. Another young woman, age 15 when interned in 1930, illustrated how this narrative might have surfaced in doctor/ patient interactions: “Dr. Beach said he thought that I got this disease from drinking out of some body cup” (Inmate 4326;1930). By telling his patient that she probably contracted the disease through non-sexual means, this doctor gave backing to her claim that she had “never broken the laws of chastity” and offered her a way to present her disease to others in a respectable way. When these inmates claimed that they contracted venereal disease through non-sexual means, they distanced themselves from sexuality. They were also able to explain their presence at the WIF through no admission of moral fault on their own part, all while upholding dominant cultural norms about respectable sexual behavior.

Similar to national discourses about innocent wives contracting venereal disease, inmates claiming that they contracted a venereal disease asexually drew upon larger cultural narratives. Though it was not likely to happen very often, some doctors in the early 1930s tried to publicize cases of asexual contraction of syphilis and gonorrhea in an attempt to strip venereal disease of its moral stigma (Brandt 1985:135-137). These national attempts to redefine venereal disease can be seen in a speech that Superintendent Julia Perry gave to the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and then printed in the 1924 Biennial Report of the WIF:

I am just now trying to shut out of my mind a girl of fifteen with a diseased spine, a face and neck disfigured with horrible sores. Another picture that bothers me is a rather vigorous young woman standing by her bedside with an ugly sore on her lip—the result of a sweetheart’s kiss. In the same ward I see a young girl that drank out of the same

glass that had been used by some one else, and infection set it. The most pitiful sight was that of a gray-haired, gentle, old lady whose face was swathed in bandages, who had contracted the disease from her son.

A great majority of cases are congenital. But each person or case I have mentioned was a victim of infection and each sufferer was a silent argument in favor of a widespread knowledge of danger of infection to innocent victims. The public at large do not realize the danger abroad in the land and when venereal diseases are mentioned too many have the idea that the health officer is an alarmist and would be out of a job if he failed to emphasize the need of care being exercised in the spread of these two diseases that are doing more toward undermining the health of our young people than all other contagious, infectious or communicable diseases. (Farm 1924:9)

In these statements, Perry makes a case for not only the pressing social danger of venereal disease, but also for many of the inmates' respectability. By asserting that many cases are either inherited (see below) or acquired innocently, Perry downplays many of the inmates' sexual experiences. Though these statements were part of a larger argument to raise alarm about venereal disease and justify the existence of the WIF, they also indicate a certain level of buy-in for the inmates' claims that they contracted the disease asexually.

### *Inheritance of Venereal Disease*

In a similar vein, several women and girls at the WIF claimed that they inherited the disease, thus distancing their disease from sexuality. Claiming that they inherited syphilis or gonorrhea allowed these women to account for their disease without questioning dominant cultural norms about appropriate sexual behavior. The claim that the disease was inherited was most frequently seen among the 20 inmates in the sample aged 13 or younger (though some of these girls reported sexual abuse, see below). For example, an 11-year-old inmate interned in 1924 reported: "I inherited bad blood from my mother" (Inmate 2288;1924; see Figure 46).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> This girl reported how she came to find out that she had the disease: "My eyes were bad so I went to the Doctor and was examined and was found syphilitic." Her grandparents, whom she lived with, were unable to pay for treatment "so Dr. Maddox advised them to send me to Lansing." This family lived on a farm, and the girl reported doing various chores: "I help mow hay and put it away. I work in the field too. We have about 100 acres of land. I do some housework too." (Inmate 2288;1924).



*Figure 46: Inmate 2288;1924.*

Given their age, the claim that they inherited the disease was fairly likely. The fact that children's presence at the WIF was one of the most publicly debated aspects of the WIF indicates that many people viewed them as innocent victims of the disease (see, for example, Commission 1933:229-231). As children, their sexuality was not as much in question. However, several older women with sexual experience also claimed that they inherited the disease. For example, Inmate 4722, a white-Indian woman who was married with two children, reported: "To my knowledge I inherited this disease" (Inmate 4722;1931). By attributing her disease to her parents rather than her sexual relationship with her husband (her only reported sexual partner), this

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woman distanced her own sexual behavior from the contraction of a venereal disease.

### *Rape & Sexual Abuse*

The most disturbing narrative of contracting a venereal disease involved women claiming to be raped or sexually abused as children. Though the stigma of being a victim of rape certainly would have affected their respectability, this narrative also allowed women to explain their contraction of a venereal disease while recognizing the legitimacy of moral norms that limited sexual behavior to marriage. While not particularly common among this sample (only around 2% of the total sample reported rape or sexual abuse), these women's stories illustrate some of the fears that policy makers and social activists harbored about the effects of changing family structures and sexual culture on the safety and sexual purity of young women. Of the women who claimed to have been raped or sexually abused, almost all of them were under the age of 20. Older women did not mention sexual abuse or rape, either because it did not happen with as great of frequency for them or because they attributed their contraction of the disease to other causes. Women between the ages of 14 and 19 were most likely to report that they had been sexually abused or raped.

Perhaps the most disturbing of these stories are those told by young girls about sexual abuse by family members or guardians. These stories described the broken homes and unsteady family relationships about which so many social commentators worried. Two sisters, age 9 and 15, were sent to the Farm in 1927. The younger girl reported:

My mother whipped me and made me do wrong with men. Had dates with 5 men, made by mother. When they gave me money I gave it to mother to get something to eat with. Been doing this way since early last summer. Mother & Stepfather separated about 15 times. Sometimes we would all go into a room, other times down around a creek. Just any place. (Inmate 3417;1927)

The 15-year-old sister corroborated this account in her interview, stating: “[Joe Parker],

Columbus Jail, 43 years old was in bed with [the 9-year-old sister] when arrested” (Inmate 3416;1927). This older sister indicated that her mother had also made arrangements for her to have sex with men in exchange for money, commenting that she “Would rather be here than with my Mother” (Inmate 3416;1927). Though their comments indicate that the man who was with the younger girl was arrested (by saying that he was in “Columbus Jail”), it is unclear whether the mother was punished in any way other than having her children taken away from her.

Similarly, there seemed to be few repercussions for the perpetrators of sexual violence against Inmate 2613, who was 14 when interned at the Farm for gonorrhea. Her mother had died when she was just nine days old, and her father had married several different times before the courts removed her from his care at the age of eight; she was then placed with various aunts to care for her. She reported:

My father forced me one time at 8 years of age and then my uncle [Bill Walters] forced me on July 1925. These two times are the only two times. I have ever been bothered. Don't know where I got diseased unless from Father or Uncle. My Uncle told me that I had let boys and said that he could tell if I would show him. I did because he said he would not keep me any longer. He then misused me. (Inmate 2613;1925)

Though it is not entirely clear, it seems that she was taken from her father after he raped her at age eight (although no mention is made of any criminal charges against her father). It does not seem that her uncle was imprisoned either. Inmate 3411, age 15 when sent to the Farm in 1927, did see some legal action as a result of her case, though it did not end in a conviction. She reported:

Father is cause of my downfall. First time I had intercourse with anyone was with him. Four times one night. When I was 13 years of age. Case was brought to court, but for some unknown reason was dismissed. All jurors were friends of my father and were Catholics as was my father. (Inmate 3411;1927)

Though charges were pressed against her father, there did not appear to be any long-term consequences for this inmate’s father. While this young woman left the house after this incident,

she reported that she had five siblings still living with her parents. Together, these accounts show the vulnerabilities of children to sexual abuse and the lack of accountability for perpetrators of sexual abuse.

These girls' disturbing stories have mixed meanings in terms of their claims to respectability. Their accounts certainly illustrate their lack of choice about having sex, allowing them to subscribe to dominant moral codes about sexuality. However, their stories also reveal sexual conduct in their families that deeply violated social norms. Given the prevalence of beliefs about the heritability of sexual immorality and the sexually deviant patterns of "undesirable" genetic pools in the US during this time, their stories condemned them as members of a group at the same time that they exonerated them as individuals. As evidenced by the fact that the interview form prompts the interviewer to ask women about other family members who had been imprisoned, the respectability of a person's family had direct implications for that person's own respectability in the age of eugenics.

Among the women in their teens who reported being raped, what is particularly striking is the prevalence of the automobile in their accounts. Indeed, the growing mobility and freedom that personal cars afforded American youth was a cause of concern for parents and social commentators across the country. No longer restricted to supervised visits on the family's front porch, parents worried about the safety and sexual purity of their daughters as they negotiated a new sexual culture (Bailey 1989; Donovan 2005b). In many ways, the stories of the young women in this sample who reported that they were raped confirmed this generation of worried parents' worst fears. One example comes from the accounts of Inmates 4789 and 4790. These two friends, age 17 and 19, were hitchhiking from Oklahoma City to St. Joe. Inmate 4789 reported: "Just outside of Independence, two men came along in a car. They stopped and made

us get in the car. [Blanche] jumped out of the car. They Raped us before she got away” (Inmate 4789;1931). Inmate 4790 gave a similar account, adding that one man “hit [her] with his fist” (Inmate 4790;1931). At some point during this attack, “Blanche” got away from the perpetrators, “went to a filling station and called the law”; she reported that “both men were caught—one is in jail now in Fredonia, the other out on bond” (Inmate 4790;1931). Though the men involved in this case faced some legal repercussions, so did their victims. Another account of rape comes from Inmate 3143, a 17-year-old who volunteered to go to the Farm (see Figure 47). The automobile is also a prominent feature in her account:

[George Blackwell] of Wichita, Kansas, North Washington is responsible for my condition. He forced me. He is only man I was ever intimate with. He tried to force me to be registered in at a Hutchinson Hotel. I refused to comply with his request. He then drove me miles from the city and after several hours of quarreling, pleading and struggling he overpowered me after I had got away from him and ran about 3/4 of a mile. (Inmate 3143;1927)





*Figure 47: Inmate 3143;1927.*

This young woman’s story echoes some themes from the previous account: there was direct physical violence (being punched or “over powered”) and cars allowed men to take women to isolated spaces.

Other accounts of rape lacked the physical violence described above. Inmate 2563 was a 19-year-old white/Irish woman sentenced to the Farm under a gonorrhea diagnosis. She reported:

I became diseased through [Sam Parkinson]; I was intimate with him just one time. He took me out 53 miles from home and would have made me walk home if I did not give up to him. (Inmate 2563;1925)

Inmate 2937, age 16, reported a very similar situation. After attending a dance in Elk Falls, Kansas with one female friend and two male companions, she reported: “On our way back we

were forced to do wrong or walk. I did not know waht to do” (Inmate 2937;1926). While these are certainly cases of rape, the language used in the interviews indicates that the lack of direct physical force led to some confusion about the experience on the part of inmates. The three women quoted in the previous paragraph all listed “raped” next to the prompt, “Cause of downfall.” These two women, however, had “Influenced” (Inmate 2563) and “Walk or ‘else’ ---“ (Inmate 2937) recorded next to this prompt. The inmates also used language that indicated that they felt like they had at least partially participated in a decision to have sex, such as when Inmate 2563 said that she had to “give up to him” (indicating some agency on her part) or when Inmate 2937 said that she “did not know waht to do.” Then and now, the lack of physical force in cases of rape led to some confusion about how to understand the event, particularly in a time before “date rape” was a culturally understood category.

Whether physically violent or not, these cases of rape were one way that inmates narrated their sexual pasts in a way that denied their active choice to have sex outside of marriage. These inmates’ accounts not only speak to their claims to respectability, they also present an important element of the history of sexual violence that is not currently well recorded in the literature. The scenario of a man driving a woman out to a remote location and refusing to take her home unless she had sex with him showed up in several different women’s stories. This pattern of sexual coercion may be something specific to rural locations during this period. Indeed, it may be that, while urban parents worried about centers of commercialized vice, such as skating rinks and amusement parks, it was the act of getting to those locations across long distances that posed the real sexual danger for young women in rural areas.

Whether they claimed to have contracted a disease through their husbands or through sexual abuse, many girls and women in this sample narrated their personal histories in such a

way that accepted dominant moral codes about respectable sexual behavior. These women told the stories of their lives in such a way that distanced their venereal disease from immoral sexual behavior. Husbands, parents, and male acquaintances were guilty of sexual misconduct, not the women themselves. Because these women claimed to have contracted their disease in a situation where they were not violating dominant rules about proper sexuality, the fact that they had a venereal disease made them victims of others' misconduct rather than the perpetrators of their own fate. They staked a claim to respectability by claiming innocence.

### **Narrative 2: Led Astray by Others**

A second common type of narrative given by the women in this sample was that they were led astray or influenced by someone else to break sexual norms. Like the previous group of narratives, these women accepted dominant moral codes for sexual behavior. Unlike the previous group, however, these women admitted that they had broken dominant sexual mores and accounted for their error by saying that they were negatively influenced by others. Thus, they recognized that their behavior violated dominant moral codes about sexuality without taking full responsibility for their actions.

### *The Dangers of "Bad Company"*

Many women in the sample mentioned that they were negatively influenced by someone else, be that a wild friend or a romantic interest who led them astray. Seventy-five percent of the interviews (n=364) recorded an answer next to the prompt "Cause of downfall." The responses are broken down in the following chart:

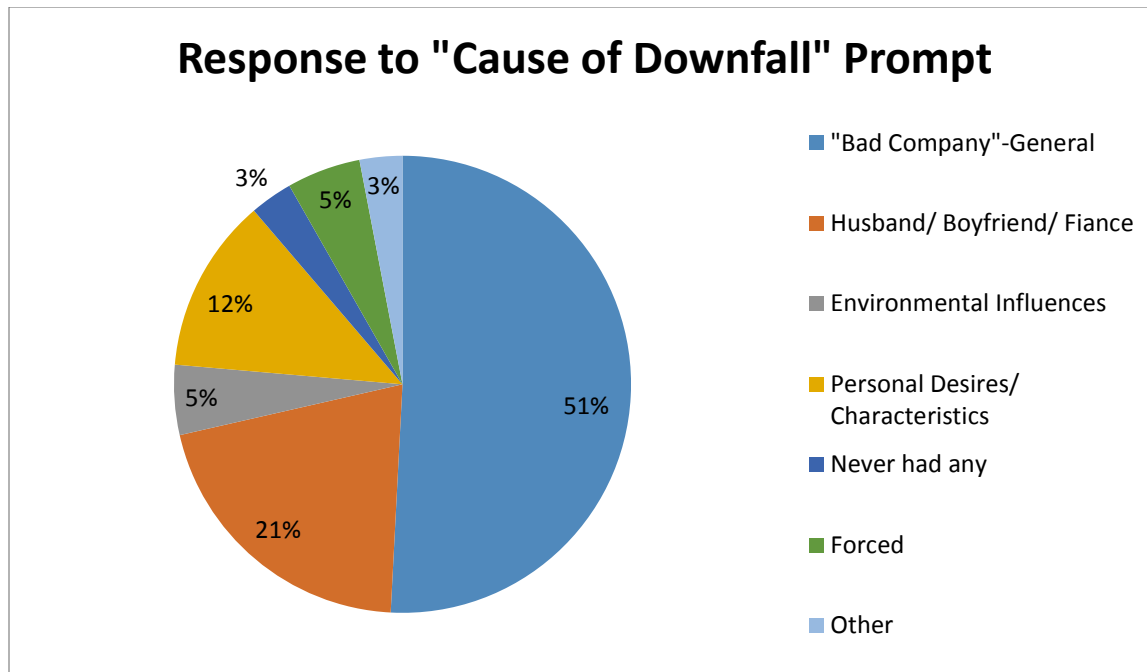


Figure 48

59

Though this chart reveals a very clear pattern toward women claiming that they were influenced by others, this data should be read with caution. The phrase “bad company” was recorded with such regularity as to indicate that the person doing the interview was using this phrase rather than the women themselves. There are certain time periods, such as in the late 1920s, when a particular interviewer would write down “bad company” for nearly every woman interviewed. Keeping this in mind, the answers to this prompt still reveal some important information about how the women accounted for their sexual histories. Combining the categories of “bad company”, those who listed a husband, boyfriend, or fiancé, and those who claimed that an environmental influence (such as having bad parents) caused their “downfall”, you find that a

<sup>59</sup> Responses to this question on the form were usually one or two words. “Bad company” was the most frequently used phrase in response to this question. Sample responses for some of the other categories included: “Environmental Influences”: bad parents, wasn’t taught morals, lack of education, etc.; “Personal desires/ characteristics”: wanted to have fun, didn’t listen to parents, lack of will power, etc.; “Other”: needed money, alcohol or drugs, etc.

total of 77% of the women who responded to this prompt claimed that they were negatively influenced by others. While we cannot know the exact percentage of women making this claim, it is safe to say that a majority of the women claimed that their “downfall” was not entirely their own fault.

More evidence for this can be found in women’s descriptions found elsewhere in the interviews. In addition to the women who claimed to contract the disease through their husbands mentioned above, there were several women who talked about how a boyfriend or fiancé persuaded them to have sex. Inmate 2903 was a 17-year-old White/Irish woman who claimed “Was intimate with 1 man several times. The first time I went with him he made me drink” (Inmate 2903;1926). Another inmate, a 15-year-old White woman, reported: “I got the disease from a boy I was engaged to. [...] I have found it does not pay to keep bad company, and am going to remember that” (Inmate 4052;1929). By emphasizing how they were talked into having sex, these women positioned themselves as being basically respectable people who were negatively influenced by an ill-intentioned lover.

While some women, such as those above, specified who it was that gave them the disease and talked about specific men who led them astray, it was more common for women to discuss a general group of friends or a lifestyle as being the cause of their “downfall.” For example, Inmate 4539 was a 16-year-old White woman who blamed “bad company” for her being at the Farm: “Running around with bad company but my sister got me into it. [...] Learned that bad company hasn't gotten me anywhere, but into trouble” (Inmate 4539;1930). These women gave accounts of their sexual histories in such a way as to give more responsibility for their actions to their companions than to their own personal choices. Another example comes from Inmate 4827, a 16-year-old interned in 1931:

My folks are poor, and I had no one to chum with but the [Bellview] girls. and one evening I went out with them and some boys. The boy I was with took advantage of me and gave me this disease. [...] I will obey all rules and when I go home I am going to school and I certainly will be careful of the company I keep. (Inmate 4827;1931)

As the age of these respondents indicates, the young average age of women imprisoned at the WIF is part of the reason that this explanation was so common: the inexperience of youth made them susceptible to the negative influence of others. However, as the statements of Inmate 4248, age 35, reveal, older women also made claims to being influenced by others:

I got in with a girl who was wrong, about six weeks before coming here. I always lived the right kind of life. [...] I would not gone wrong if this other women had not talked me into it. But I was old enough to have known better. I am going to try and do better. (Inmate 4248;1930)

While this inmate took some responsibility for her actions (by saying “I was old enough to have known better”), this general pattern of talking about “bad company” was a continued theme in the interviews.

This narrative of being led astray helped these women divert attention away from their sexuality and onto their companions. For example, one of the few women who admitted to receiving money in exchange for sex told her story as being almost completely driven by her persuasive friend. Inmate 2065 was a 17-year-old Indian woman who was separated from her husband:

I got to running around with [Betsy] and she led me astray. I got to going to dances & running back and forth from Iola to Chanute in cars at night & [Betsy] forced me to be intimate with a stranger for \$5.00, I did not want to and was in his company for about 7 hours before I could make myself give up to him. [...] Have bee living immorally about 6 weeks. Needed money and [Betsy] convinced me to get it "easy". (Inmate 2065;1923)<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> “Betsy,” who was arrested along with Inmate 2065, confirmed in her interview that she had influenced this woman: “[She] & I went car riding & went out together a number of times to skating rinks and dance & nearly always had dates. It is a fact that I influenced [her] to make her first wrong step. I called her ‘piker’ & such & told her the price for her first date. She didn’t want to, but finally gave in” (Inmate 2064;1923).

This woman's narrative about how she ended up having sex in exchange for money places the blame on her friend. She downplays her own agency in this situation and makes it seem as if she had very little choice in the matter, such as when she says that Betsy "forced" her to be intimate with someone. Altogether, talking about their acquisition of venereal disease in terms of hanging out with "bad company" allowed these women to answer the interviewer's question without directly talking about sex. As such, this strategy is a classic example of frank reticence. For example, Inmate 3603, a 16-year-old White woman, reported: "I had been running around with people that were wrong and became infected" (Inmate 3603;1928). This statement skirts the issue of sexuality altogether, allowing the woman to answer the interviewer's question without talking about the details of having sex. Speaking about their disease in terms of the people they associated with allowed them to acknowledge their wrongdoing as choosing bad companions, not actively choosing to have sex.

### *The Dangers of Youth Culture*

Another common way that inmates claimed that they were led astray was by talking about skating rinks, dances, and "car riding" as being the cause of their downfall. Similar to how they talked about being influenced by "bad company," these women talked about these activities as being intimately bound up in their sexual choices. For example, in response to the prompt "Cause of downfall," several women responded with phrases such as "ignorance and dances" (Inmate 2530;1925), "Going to dances with bad company" (Inmate 4539;1930), "wanted car rides" (Inmate 2472;1925), or "Not going to school and going car riding" (Inmate 3063;1926). Inmates spoke of car riding, dances, and sexual misconduct in the same breath, reflecting wider cultural associations between these new forms of recreation and disreputable sexuality (Hunt 2002; Wagner 1997). Even when the women were denying that they had had sex outside of a

marital relationship, their denials reflected a close association of dances with illicit sexuality. Inmate 2091, a 19-year-old who was separated from her husband, stated “Before I was married I was intimate with two or three. I went to dances or shows but always came home early” (Inmate 2091;1924). Similarly, Inmate 4744, a 20-year-old White woman, said “I got this disease from my Husband. I have gone to dances and different place with a crowd since my husband and I separated but I have never led an immoral life” (Inmate 4744;1931). These statements reveal the close associations that many of these women made between participating in the youth culture of dances, car rides, and skating rinks and extramarital sexuality. This is another example of frank reticence: confirming their participation in this youth culture offered an explanation for the inmates’ sexual past without actually requiring the women to openly discuss sexuality.

These associations between illicit sexuality and commercial spaces was consistent with the concerns of anti-vice activists and state health officials in Kansas at the time. Several documents from the State Board of Health reflect this concern about sexuality in dance halls and commercial spaces. In times where the state was allocating more money to the Division of Venereal Diseases in the early 1920s, the Division employed social workers to investigate the origins of vice within communities. One such social worker charged with investigating the sources of venereal disease around Wichita in 1919 inspected 16 public dances as part of her investigation. In discussing the various sources of prostitution, another agent of the Board of Health listed hotels, rooming houses, and dance halls in a 1920 report. He lamented the lack of supervision of dances in some smaller communities in Kansas, where dance halls were used “as a meeting place for immoral women and men. There was no supervision whatsoever in some communities, and little girls with short dresses and braids down their backs were allowed to frequent these places until a late hour” (Health 1920:352-353). This agent’s description of the



“little girls” at the dances stresses the innocence and vulnerability of the young women attending the dances. In this sense, the inmates’ accounts of their sexual misdeeds as being caused by commercial spaces drew upon common cultural understandings of the causes of immorality. For example, a reporter visiting the Farm in 1920 reported on a dance held to entertain the inmates: “I noticed that the dancing was exceptionally graceful and that nearly all of the girls danced, which was not surprising when one remembers that many of them were habitués of dance halls before their sentence to the farm”(Reed 1920). This reporter reinforces this connection between dance halls and sexual immorality. The degree to which the inmates’ respectability was salvaged by them appealing to this association between commercial spaces and sexual immorality hinged on the degree to which the listener viewed the inmates as the innocent victims of these places of vice or the “wild” ones who were causing these places to be immoral.

This second narrative strategy of talking about the negative influences of other people or places had mixed meanings in terms of the inmates’ claims to respectability. Claims of being influenced by “bad company” or dance halls can be read as examples of frank reticence. Talking about companions and dances as being the cause of their having a venereal disease was an indirect way for inmates to talk about sex: not shying away from it necessarily, but also not talking about it too directly. However, by associating oneself with the types of people and places that were culturally understood as being the sources of vice, the inmates risked their respectability as well. While the listener could have interpreted these women as the victims of these circumstances, they just as easily could have interpreted them as being just the type of immoral woman in need of the Farm’s corrective moral training.

## Conclusion

The inmate interviews from the Women's Industrial Farm provide a very different picture of the inmates than is presented in official state documents. Some of their accounts, such as women who reported that they contracted a disease from their husbands or were victims of rape, indict the men in their lives and show Chapter 205 as a mechanism for enforcing the sexual double standard. These accounts have important implications for our understanding of the WIF as an institution of social control. Women took different paths to the Farm, with some being directly arrested by state authorities, others being turned in by family members, and still others volunteering to go to the Farm in order to access healthcare. These paths illustrate the importance of closely examining how institutions of social control operate on a day-to-day basis; doing so brings to light the different ways that social actors can interact with a legal mechanism like Chapter 205 to achieve varying ends. The fact that 20% of the sample actually volunteered to go to the Farm also has important implications for our understanding of the institution: while the WIF was certainly a place of formal social control, with the state directly intervening to control women's behaviors, it also provided much-needed medical care. Together, the different paths that women took to get to the Farm illustrate the ways that existing social hierarchies informed the implementation of Chapter 205: gender hierarchies were upheld when a husband turned in his wife for venereal disease, just as class hierarchies became more stark when some women had to volunteer to go to the Farm while others could afford private treatment from the comfort of their hometowns. Looking at Chapter 205 from the perspective of the individual actors who operated within this context, the influence of inequality in the implementation of social control becomes apparent in ways that are both obvious and more subtle.

A close examination of the narratives these women told about their sexual histories also has implications for our understanding of respectability. As Haag (1992:569) points out, the

consequences of a woman's ability to narrate her sexual past in a respectable way became more serious as the state increased its interventions in the sex lives of everyday Americans during this period in history; women's narratives became important in court cases, just as their accounts were important in health officers' decisions about committing the women under Chapter 205 in Kansas. Some of the narratives of venereal disease contraction presented in the inmate interviews, such as the claim that a woman had only had sex with her husband and had gotten the disease from him, clearly provide a claim to respectability. However, the interviews as a whole fail to clearly articulate middle-class discourses of romantic love and frank reticence. Though the nature of the interviews as being co-constructed by the inmate and the interviewer prevents easy generalizations, this pattern hints at the critical role of cultural capital in achieving respectability. The inmates lacked the cultural resources to narrate their sexual pasts according to middle-class norms. Indeed, it is likely this lack of ability to narrate their sexual pasts in a legitimizing way that led to their incarceration in the first place: they lacked the cultural resources needed to be respectable.

Finally, the inmate interviews shed light on the interplay of the material and cultural dimensions of respectability. Though the way that an inmate narrated her sexual past was certainly important, in some ways it did not matter. The physical reality of a woman's diseased body was the defining factor for her sentence under Chapter 205, and this material reality gave the context in which her narrative and her body were understood at the moment when she was being interviewed. While states across the country during this period were enforcing legislation that controlled young women's sexuality, the state of Kansas used the legal mechanism of a quarantine charge (as opposed to something like a vagrancy charge), placing primacy on the body and its physical respectability. The material elements of respectability were also important

in the clear difference that social class made in the enforcement of the law; the women who volunteered to come to the Farm because they could not afford private care could not afford the luxury of keeping their disease a secret. While the cultural elements of respectability mattered for these women, the way that Chapter 205 was enforced meant that the physical reality of their diseases came to define them.

## CH 7: Conclusion

### Sexuality and Venereal Disease during WWII

World War II changed venereal disease control efforts in the U.S. as a new treatment, penicillin, turned syphilis and gonorrhea into easily curable diseases. With the passage of the War Relocation Authority Act in July of 1941, the government's approach to controlling venereal disease paralleled its actions during WWI: they cracked down on prostitution around military bases, warned troops to stay away from "loose women" who might carry dangerous diseases, and set up camps to house the women being tested and interned for venereal disease (Brandt 1985:165). While the emphasis shifted from prostitutes to the "victory girls" who misplaced their patriotism by having sex with soldiers, the blame for the spread of venereal disease remained largely on the shoulders of women (Clement 2006:243; D'Emilio and Freedman 1997:261). There were also significant differences between the world wars, however. The government relented on its expectation that troops remain chaste, distributing as many as 50 million condoms per month during the war and repealing its policy that men would lose pay if missing service for treatment of venereal disease (Brandt 1985:164, 169; Clement 2006:248-249). The scare tactics employed to dissuade soldiers from having sex during WWI were even less effective during WWII, particularly after the US Public Health Service began distributing penicillin in 1943. This new drug was remarkably effective in treating both syphilis and gonorrhea, with cure rates as high as 90-97% (Brandt 1985): 170-171. With such an easy and effective treatment available, the health dangers of illicit sexuality decreased dramatically. One military study estimated that between 53 and 63% of soldiers had sex during the war (Brandt 1985:165).

In Kansas, the venereal disease-control policies of the 1930s continued into wartime. Attempting to keep the same "nonpolitical, nondictatorial and business-like and scientific" tone of the federal campaigns against venereal disease of the 1930s, the Board of Health stepped up

efforts to enforce Chapter 205 and increase the availability of free clinics across the state during the war (Health 1940:128). Most of the funding for clinics (in 1942, there were 15 such clinics in Kansas) and venereal disease education came from the federal government, with state officials being in charge of local implementation of venereal disease control policies (Health 1942:143). For example, in the fiscal year ending June 30, 1942, the federal government provided \$100,100 in funding for venereal disease control, while the state offered just \$15,160 (Health 1942:135). While the Kansas Board of Health worried about the initial rates of venereal infection among incoming soldiers, which among the first 14,311 drafted in Kansas averaged at 27.1 out of every 1,000 men, rates of venereal disease among Kansans was consistent with national averages of 48 infections out of every 1,000 men (Nov 1, 1941:64; Brandt 1985:169).

The implementation of Chapter 205 in Kansas continued during the war, with rates of internment spiking up in the war years, particularly from the areas surrounding military bases. However, the availability of penicillin drastically changed the landscape of public health work related to venereal disease, and the quick, inexpensive, and effective treatment of administering antibiotics to treat venereal disease was preferable to the expense of detaining women for extended periods of time at the WIF.

There are records of women being quarantined under Chapter 205 in Kansas as late as 1956, but the number of women detained decreased steadily following WWII (Society). Nationally, the women's reformatory model lost prominence, and women's institutions became more like regular prisons. The Women's Industrial Farm itself remained in operation as a women's correctional facility until 1980, when it became co-correctional (Society 2008). The ultimate consequences of imprisonment for the women who were interned under Chapter 205 during the period of this study are not clear. The lack of parole work for women who left the

institution leaves us unsure as to the number of repeat offenders at the Farm or what happened to the women immediately following their release. The biennial reports of the WIF contain a few letters from former inmates indicating that the Farm turned their life around, providing them with an opportunity to start their life anew. This was certainly the case for some inmates, but for others the disruptive impact of being imprisoned for several months surely had negative consequences.

### **Lessons from the Women's Industrial Farm**

Altogether, the state of Kansas detained 5,331 women and girls under Chapter 205 between the years of 1918-1942. The incarceration of such a large number of women for venereal disease involved a range of people: elite activists who lobbied to create the Farm, professional women who ran its day-to-day operations, male legislators and government officials who oversaw and funded the operation, and a complacent citizenry who let it all happen. Through the gendered enforcement of Chapter 205, the state of Kansas officially sanctioned the sexual double standard, imprisoning women for having venereal disease while letting their sexual partners go free. As an example of the social control of sexuality and government-sanctioned gender inequality, Chapter 205 is an important part of the history of Kansas and our overall understanding of women's sexuality in the US.

This examination of the implementation of Chapter 205 in Kansas contributes to the historical record in several ways. First, it illustrates the long-term effects of government interventions in sexuality that were originally implemented during WWI. While it is fairly well documented in the historical literature that state and federal governments cracked down on prostitution and venereal disease during WWI (Brandt 1985; Bristow 1996), it is less well-known how these policies carried over into peacetime. The WIF shows how policies that were

developed during the crisis of wartime became the new normal as Chapter 205 continued to be implemented in the 1920s. However, without federal financial backing, the campaign against venereal disease in Kansas was ill-coordinated and under-funded. The public health element of the original campaign against venereal disease became increasingly distant, and the punitive element of the enforcement of Chapter 205 became more prominent. For most of the period of this study, the women detained under Chapter 205 were prisoners first and patients second. Chapter 205 was part of a broader growth in government's intrusion into citizens' sex lives in the U.S., particularly for women, racial minorities, and the poor.

Second, this research deepens our understanding of the implications of female activists' involvement in social issues for their own respectability and social position during this period in history. Involvement with the WIF gave the activists who created it and the professional women who worked there a cause to lobby for and a way to position themselves as the ideal of proper femininity. Pascoe's (1990) term "relations of rescue" is fitting here: the WIF was a site where different social groups met, each taking distinct paths to get there and each having unique implications of their involvement with the Farm for their own respectability. The differences between the activist and professional women in this study illustrate the transition from female public authority based on ideas of women's innate moral superiority to authority based on women's roles as professionals within state-run organizations (Luker 1998). However, there was overlap and intermingling between the two groups, such as when activist women drew on ideas of social science to argue for the Farm and when professional women used their social connections with the activist women to argue for political changes. Understanding these groups of women in relation to each other deepens our understanding of the power dynamics taking place within various social hierarchies through institutions like the WIF.



Finally, the inmate interviews provide a rich source for understanding how policies like Chapter 205 were implemented. The paths that women took to the Farm illustrate the variety of ways that women came to be detained under the growing state intervention into sexuality. The 20% of the sample who volunteered to go to the Farm highlight that individual actors have some level of agency, even within social systems that are extremely unjust. Inmate accounts of their sexual histories also add an important piece to our historical understanding, particularly accounts of rape in rural settings. Stories like those of inmates who reported that men drove them out to remote locations and threatened to leave them there unless they had sex are not well documented, suggesting patterns of sexual violence unique to rural locations that merit further study.

### **Respectability and the Women of the WIF**

This research has examined how three groups of women's involvement with the WIF related to their own respectability and their position along hierarchies of class, race, and gender. A close examination of how the relationship to respectability operated for each of these groups of women reveals three important factors: 1. differing levels of respectability that were assumed in women's interactions with others; 2. differing rights to the privacy of one's sexuality; and 3. the interplay of the material and cultural elements of respectability. Together, these factors show how respectability created and maintained social and symbolic boundaries between these groups of women.

### The Presumption of Respectability

The desire to be perceived as respectable was important for all three groups of women in this study. The activist women who lobbied to create the WIF were seeking to carve out a public political space for white women at a time when women's right to the vote was highly contested. The issue of the WIF in the 1910s and social hygiene work in the 1920s provided these women with issues that they could claim as "women's work for women," helping them to carve out a political niche for themselves. Similarly, the professional women who ran the WIF sought respectability by trying to establish a respected professional role for themselves. Though conflicting missions and stringent budgets constrained their autonomy and ability to execute their vision for the WIF, professional women exercised control over the institution itself and the women detained there. Finally, the women detained under Chapter 205 had their respectability directly challenged by their imprisonment and their association with venereal disease. In their interviews, these inmates attempted to account for their sexual pasts in ways that preserved their respectability. Despite vast differences between these women, each group had their respectability questioned in some way.

However, the degree to which women's respectability was challenged varied greatly based on their social position, with elite women being assumed to be respectable and poor women not. If respectability is something that is achieved in interactions, then we must think about the obstacles between each group of women and their audience's perception that they are respectable. Various social hierarchies inform this path to respectability, including class, race, gender, and sexuality.

The social advantages of the elite activist women who lobbied to create the Farm and the professional women who staffed it (their white skin, social class, presumed heterosexuality) led to the presumption that they were basically respectable. While male legislators at times were condescending to both groups of women, overall these women were able to navigate life with the presumption that other people would treat them as respectable in their interactions. The barriers between these two groups of women and respectability were minimal. They were assumed to be respectable unless proven otherwise.

For the imprisoned women at the Farm, on the other hand, social inequalities created much larger barriers along this path to respectability. In the interactions between these women and state officials charged with enforcing Chapter 205 and the overall plan of moral reform enacted at the Farm, the basic assumption was that these inmates were *not* respectable. The overrepresentation of women of color at the Farm and the fact that poor women had to submit themselves to imprisonment in order to access healthcare both demonstrate the ways that social inequalities directed who was committed under Chapter 205. The way that Chapter 205 was implemented hinged on the importance of respectability—if you were deemed respectable in that initial interaction between the local health officer and the venereal disease patient, she would be able to be treated in the privacy of her hometown. For the inmates of the WIF, their path to respectability was riddled with assumptions about them and their sexuality that were based on their class position and race. The activist and professional women were never asked to account for their “cause of downfall” or their sexual histories like the inmates were in their interviews, reflecting the presumptions about respectability that people took going into their interactions with these different groups of women. The WIF assumed that inmates were disreputable until proven otherwise.

### Sexual Privacy

Talking about the sexuality of others was a type of boundary work for the activist and professional women in Kansas, creating distinctions between themselves and the inmates and bolstering their own respectability. When the activist and professional women talked about sexuality, they were talking about the sexuality of others. They lamented the “immorality” and “self-discipline” that were lacking in poor women and communities of color, drawing moral boundaries between themselves and these other groups that they constructed as being sexually out-of-control. These dialogues about the sexuality of others had little relation to actual sexual behavior, even when that evidence was collected. Though Julia Perry at times acknowledged that some women were sent to the Farm under Chapter 205 through no moral lapse of their own, her language about moral reform in the biennial reports of the WIF implied a broad lack of sexual restraint among the inmates. The diverse backgrounds and stories emerging from the inmate interviews, which Perry should have had access to, were not referenced. These discussions of inmates’ sexuality were a type of boundary work that highlighted and publicly scrutinized poor women’s sexuality while leaving the sexuality of activist and professional women unexamined.

The activist and professional women were never asked to talk about their own sexuality. Many of the activist women were married, as were some of the professional women, and many of them had children. In terms of their actual sexual backgrounds, some of these women were likely not all that different from the inmates who reported that they had contracted a disease from their husbands. For the unmarried professional women of the Farm, their sexuality was not openly discussed, either because they were assumed to be asexual, their job responsibilities

prevented them from participating in traditional heterosexual family life, or because heteronormative assumptions prevented questions about same-sex relationships. The presumption of their respectability prevented anyone from asking the activist and professional women about their “cause of moral downfall” or needing to construct a narrative about their sexual histories. They were allowed the luxury of privacy.

The very act of asking the inmates to narrate their sexual pasts had important implications for their respectability. The inmates were asked to justify their sexual pasts in ways that the other two groups of women in this study were not. Since social norms around sexuality dictate that it is something that happens in private, forcing the inmates to talk about their sexual pasts required them to bring that which is supposed to be private into the public view. Through their imprisonment under Chapter 205 and the subsequent interview process, inmates were forced to make their sexuality more public than the rules of respectable sexuality would normally allow for.

Sexuality is a particularly ripe site for boundary work that involves the construction of symbolic boundaries between groups (Collins 2004; Donovan 2005a; Nagel 2003). Strong social stigmas and norms exist surrounding sexuality, yet at the same time sex is something that happens in private. Thus, with sexuality there is a high potential to have wide gulfs between perceptions and reality. While there are differences between how groups are constructed and how they actually are within all social hierarchies, the privacy of sexuality heightens the potential for discourses about sexuality to be widely divergent from reality. You might encounter individuals on a daily basis that break gender or racial stereotypes, but what people do in the bedroom usually stays there. In the case of the WIF, the inmate interviews provide a more nuanced picture of the sexual behaviors of the group of women detained under Chapter 205, so

we are able to see a little more clearly what was happening in private. For the activist and professional women involved with the WIF, though, the privilege of sexual privacy that they enjoyed in their lifetime continues in the historical record; we know little about their sexual behaviors or their own rates of venereal disease infection. This aspect of sexuality, its privacy, makes it a particularly powerful force in the construction of boundaries between groups precisely because ideas about sexuality are so susceptible to being completely divorced from reality.

### **Material & Cultural Elements of Respectability**

Respectability has material and cultural dimensions. This intersection of the material and cultural aspects of respectability can be seen in two distinct ways in the case of the WIF: 1. the structural influences of who had the symbolic power to define the inmates' sexuality; and 2. the respectability of women's bodies and the ways that bodies are constructed.

#### *The Symbolic Power to Define Sexuality*

The ways that structural inequalities inform who has the symbolic power to shape cultural discourses is illustrated in the way that activist and professional women were able to define inmates' sexuality. Respectability shapes who has the symbolic power to define legitimate sexuality. During their lobbying efforts to establish the WIF, activist women were able to define the female inmate problem in the state, as newspaper articles and male politicians alike referred to the Farm as the "women's issue." The superintendents of the Farm had the symbolic power to define inmates' sexuality once the Farm opened; newspaper articles and external reviews of the Farm almost always interviewed the superintendent (and never the

inmates themselves), and the biennial reports provide extended discussions of the sources of inmates' "vices." The lower-level matrons who worked at the Farm also had more symbolic power than the inmates themselves, sometimes having their accounts included in the biennial reports. This is not to say that working-class women were completely defined by others. The inmates of the Farm may have had their own moral categories for treating versus prostitution, or for what level of emotional connection might justify premarital sex. The point here is that, in situations where the state is enforcing moral standards about sexuality, these in-group understandings of proper sexuality have little importance for the inmates' fate. The version of sexuality that is officially endorsed by the state carries with it real-life consequences in situations like Chapter 205, and the people informing the "official" state version of sexuality are the ones who are considered respectable. Social hierarchies like class and race placed Lucy Johnston and Julia Perry in the position to define what respectable female sexuality looked like.

While respectability informed who had the symbolic power to define sexuality, what happened at the WIF was not simply a top-down, coordinated effort to change the sexual behaviors of the working-class. The historical record reveals a much messier and reactive chain of events, with individuals and institutions operating within changing circumstances, incomplete information, and a lack of time to reflect on or integrate what information they did have. The elite women who lobbied for the Farm did not plan on it becoming an institution to house venereal disease patients, but World War I changed the purpose of the institution nonetheless. Just as is the case today, historical actors made decisions and statements without necessarily having an intentional or reflective approach to a situation. The messiness of the construction of inmates' sexuality can be seen in the degree to which these constructions were divorced from the reality of inmates' sexual experiences. As superintendent of the WIF, Julia Perry was well-aware

of inmates who were the victims of sexual abuse or who reported that they contracted a disease through their husbands. While she tries to account for these cases in a few public statements that discuss how some women should never have been sent to the Farm, the overall narrative of the inmates' sexuality is that they are in need of moral reform.

The contradictions between lived experience and narratives of sexuality show the extent to which discussions of working-class sexuality had to do with the cultural work needed to construct moral boundaries between groups. While I do not want to imply a coordinated attempt to control poor women's sexuality, an interesting constant in the activist and professional women's discussion of poor women's sexuality is that poor women are portrayed as essentially not respectable people. Regardless of their actual sexual behaviors, these women were in need of moral reform. It was not sexuality per se, but rather a general perceived lack of respectability that merited sending these women to prison. This explains the easy transition that activist women made as the institution quickly transitioned from housing criminal offenders to sexual offenders (this was the same group of people in their minds), as well as the lack of concern about integrating medical patients and criminal offenders in the daily life of the Farm. Understanding Chapter 205 more as a part of larger symbolic projects to maintain boundaries between groups of people, rather than simply an ordinance to control sexuality, helps bring together some of the inconsistencies of people's behavior into a larger picture that makes sense. The elite and professional women had more symbolic power to not only define inmates' sexuality, but also notions about respectability in general.

The symbolic power of the activist and professional women in this case needs to be understood as particular to this historical moment in gender relations and women's role in public. The changes in women's symbolic power over time can be seen in the differences between the



activist women's experiences and those of the superintendents of the Farm. In the 1910s, male politicians and state officials gave activist women a pretty extensive level of prestige and control, considering that their only qualifications were that they were rich, well-connected, white women. Lucy B. Johnston toured state institutions in 1912 to give a report to the governor about their conditions, and the Board of Health listed clubwomen in the organizational chart of their outreach efforts. As Luker (1998) argues, however, this type of symbolic power over a defined set of "women's issues" changed as the government began to take over many of clubwomen's causes in the 1920s and a growing class of professional women, like the superintendents of the Farm, came to be in charge. While the superintendents of the Farm had control over the messages about inmate sexuality, they had more limited control over their day-to-day working conditions and the funding of their institution. Compared to the activist women, the superintendents had less autonomy—they were part of a bureaucratic structure in which they had some level of control, but were ultimately reporting to men and dependent on them for their jobs. Thus, the activist women who lobbied for the Farm and the superintendents who led the institution had some symbolic power to define inmates' sexuality, yet this power was mediated through men, and under the general context of a state policy that officially endorsed the sexual double standard. The biennial report where Julia Perry included a speech to the WCTU critiquing the sexual double standard illustrates the limits of professional women's voice: they had the symbolic power to define working-class women's sexuality because it fell under their jurisdiction, but questioning the premise behind the institution or larger gender inequalities required a veiled critique. Thus, structural inequalities informed who had the symbolic power to define respectable sexuality; privileges of race and class benefited the activist and professional women, yet they were limited by gender inequality.

### *The Respectability of Women's Bodies*

The material and cultural elements of respectability can also be seen in the respectability of women's bodies themselves. Respectability is something that is achieved in interactions, but it is also something that is read into people's bodies. We can see this interplay of the material and cultural in how women's physical bodies (the material) were constructed and perceived (the cultural). The inmates sentenced under Chapter 205 are a case in point: in their initial interactions with a local health officer, they failed the test of respectability (i.e. they could not be "trusted") and were sent to the Farm. Once there, the physical disease of their bodies came to be their defining characteristic. Important here is that women who came to the attention of the health officer and *were* able to convince him of their respectability did not have to go to the Farm and did not have to be so closely associated with their diseased bodies. The physical reality of diseased bodies factored into a woman's respectability, but cultural ideas about who was respectable and who was not also played into how important those diseased bodies were in defining that particular woman. Things like race and class influence this initial perception of respectability; cultural capital shapes how women present their bodies (clothing, makeup, etc.), and perceptions of different groups of people's ability to be in control of their bodies play important parts in shaping symbolic boundaries between groups. Thus, we can think of bodies as important sites for the construction of respectability.

### **Symbolic & Social Boundaries—What Have We Learned by Exploring Respectability?**

This research is based on the idea that the concept of respectability can be developed to explore the intersection of class and sexuality in order to better understand boundaries between

groups. So, what have we learned about the ways that respectability informs symbolic and social boundaries? For the activist and superintendent women in this study, respectability became a way to capitalize on the social advantages they had, such as those afforded to them by race and class. In the symbolic work they did to construct inmates as in need of moral reform and themselves as models of respectability, these women constructed symbolic boundaries between themselves and poor women and women of color. In the implementation of Chapter 205, which was heavily informed by ideas of whether venereal disease suspects were considered respectable or not, these symbolic boundaries turned into concrete social boundaries. The combination of cultural discourses defining them as not being respectable and the physical reality of having syphilis or gonorrhea meant that inmates experienced very real social consequences for their perceived lack of respectability. They were denied their freedom, taken from their homes, and forced to talk about their sexual histories and undergo medical treatment. As Dodge (2006) notes in her study of the history of female imprisonment in Illinois, “Whatever the nature of their legal transgressions, it was others’ estimate of [female inmates’] character and moral standing that most often determined their fate within the criminal justice system” (Dodge 2006:261). The inmates’ respectability was not only highly questioned in their interactions with others, it was also highly consequential.

The second way we can see respectability informing symbolic and social boundaries is in the relations between all three groups of women and men. While the activist and professional women were in the position to construct working-class women’s sexuality, they had limited influence on symbolic boundaries between men and women, particularly those boundaries that directly challenged men’s privileges. The activist women in Kansas had fought for equal political rights for women, successfully challenging the symbolic boundaries that only associated

women with the home and the social boundaries that denied them the ballot. Yet their efforts to establish the WIF illustrate their limited social power: they had to convince male legislators to pass the legislation and allocate funding for the institution, and they had little influence on the Farm once it was established. By responding to activists' pleas to establish the Farm and putting a woman in charge of the institution, male legislators gave activist and professional women the symbolic power to define poor women's sexuality. Yet this power was ultimately men's to give within the gendered structure of power in 1910s and 1920s Kansas, and was limited to areas that contained little challenge to male privilege. Julia Perry and the other superintendents might have been able to exercise control over the Farm, but they had no authority to question the fact that only women were detained under Chapter 205. At the level of symbolic boundaries between men and women, Chapter 205 reinforced the idea that women should be chaste and "boys will be boys." These symbolic boundaries translated into concrete social boundaries as the state detained wives who contracted diseases from their husbands and victims of rape, leaving men's sexual behaviors, intentions, and diseased bodies outside the purview of state control. Thus, while the activist and professional women enjoyed many benefits of their class position, all three groups of women operated within a gender system that limited their ability to challenge male privilege.

### **Women's Imprisonment and Respectability Today**

While the state of Kansas no longer detains women under Chapter 205, modern examples of the abuse of female prisoners are not difficult to find. The explosion of the prison population in the U.S. since the period of this research has amplified the scope and reach of the prison system in the lives of everyday Americans. The war on drugs and mandatory minimum

sentencing laws have contributed to a massive increase in the number of Americans in federal prisons, local jails, and on parole (Statistics 2013). As of July 2015, the United States imprisoned more women than any other country in the world; with over 200,000 female inmates, women constitute 9.3% of the total prison population (up from 3.1% in 1970) (Dodge 2006:259; Research 2015). Most female inmates are convicted for non-violent offenses, reflecting the state's increasing willingness to imprison women for crimes like drug possession. As was true during the time of the WIF, female prisoners are disproportionately poor and marginalized. African American and Latina women are more likely to be imprisoned, and the poor and unemployed are more likely to be imprisoned than those that are better off (Dodge 2006:259). The growth of the prison population has happened along lines of gender, race, and class, amplifying the boundaries enforced through the prison system that have been explored in this research.

Among this general rise in incarceration in the United States, two examples in particular highlight parallels between historical patterns and modern-day conditions for female prisoners. The first example comes from the California prison system, where nearly 150 female inmates were sterilized without proper authorization between 2006 and 2010 (Johnson 2013). The attitude toward their sexuality and fertility echo the eugenicist arguments that informed concerns about poor women's sexuality in the era of the WIF. California inmates reported being coerced to have a tubal ligation, sometimes repeatedly being offered the procedure or urged to have one while in labor (Johnson 2013). While some inmates willingly agreed, others reported feeling coerced to have the procedure, and none of the surgeries went before the California state committee that was responsible for approving the surgeries according to state laws. It seems that administrative systems simply failed, with several officials failing to realize that the practice was

morally problematic. Dr. Ricki Barnett, who leads the Health Care Review Committee that should have been notified of the intent to perform these operations, commented:

“When we heard about the tubal ligations, it made us all feel slightly queasy,” Barnett said. “It wasn’t so much that people were conspiratorial or coercive or sloppy. It concerns me that people never took a step back to project what they would feel if they were in the inmate’s shoes and what the inmate’s future might hold should they do this.” (Johnson 2013)

The doctors and administrators at the two prisons where the surgeries were performed failed to see the problem with asking inmates repeatedly to have a tubal ligation. James Heinrich, the doctor who performed the operations, justified the nearly \$150,000 that the state paid for the surgeries by saying: "Over a 10-year period, that isn't a huge amount of money [...] compared to what you save in welfare paying for these unwanted children — as they procreated more" (Johnson 2013). Echoing the sentiments of the activist women who lobbied to create the WIF, these prison officials framed their concern about the fertility of prisoners in terms of economic efficiency for the state.

The California case illustrates some continued themes that, as a society, we would like to think that we have moved past since the time of eugenics. Though the regulation of poor women's sexuality is not always as direct as in the California case, the sexuality of the poorest women in society is under constant scrutiny. The specter of teen pregnancies, welfare moms, and fertile immigrants continually portray working-class women and women of color as hyper-sexual and irresponsible. These women and their children are routinely denied basic social services, such as a living wage or health care, due in part to the moral distinctions drawn by debates over their sexuality. After all, only the “respectable” working-class deserves government assistance, and discourses about sexuality make respectability a scarce resource for the nation's

poor. The ease with which California officials disregarded inmates' rights and questioned their right to have children was a case of degree, not of kind, of the type of scrutiny given to poor women and women of color every day.

The second example comes from the institution that has replaced the WIF as the sole prison for women in Kansas since 2001, the Topeka Correctional Facility (TCF). In 2009, the *Topeka Capital-Journal* ran a series of articles documenting accusations of sexual abuse at the prison, both between inmates and between prison staff and inmates. The accounts illustrate the concerns of the original female reformers who advocated for separate women's prisons in the early 1900s. In 2014, TCF prison official Bryon Dixon was charged with unlawful sexual relations after forcing an inmate to perform oral sex on him in a closet in the prison; the inmate was serving a 22-month sentence for a drug-related charge (Sweeney 2014). Another inmate became pregnant after being raped by TCF plumbing instructor Ananstacio Gallardo, who was later convicted for the crime (Bush 2015). In a disturbing parallel to inmate accounts of rape from the 1920s and 30s, another TCF employee, Nathan Vandyke, was accused of driving female inmates to remote locations to rape them (Carpenter 2009). One of his victims received a \$30,000 settlement from the state (Bush 2015). The pattern of sexual abuse at TCF led to several investigations, resulting in a 2012 U.S. Department of Justice report that condemned the widespread culture of sexual violence at the prison and the state's inadequate response to the situation (Carpenter 2012). In January 2015, the Department of Justice and the state of Kansas announced an agreement to address some of the issues at TCF, including independent monitoring, increased staffing, use of video monitoring, more training about sexual assault, and clear reporting mechanisms, to bring the facility into accord with the federally mandated Prison Rape Elimination National Standards (Bush 2015). Among the recommendations was to

increase the number of female officials at the prison.

Comparing the Women's Industrial Farm to its modern-day equivalent raises important questions about what has changed, and what has stayed the same, about female incarceration in the state of Kansas. Conspicuously absent from the current concern about the conditions of female prisoners is the presence of women in higher social positions to advocate for them. In 1910s Kansas, the wife of the governor (Stella Stubbs) and the wife of the chief justice of the Kansas Supreme Court (Lucy B. Johnston) saw the conditions of female prisoners as a "women's issue" and advocated for their proper care. The vision that they created for inmates' moral reform was at times problematic, and the practice of interning women for venereal disease was unwarranted, yet underlying many of their efforts was a basic recognition of their common connection as human beings and women. In today's political climate, where the political points gained through being "tough on crime" are high and the dangers of being associated with people who are not "respectable" can damage a political campaign, the governor's wife is not in the business of highlighting the similarities between herself and the inmates at the Topeka Correctional Facility.

The conditions at TCF are exactly the type of scenario that female reformers of the early 1900s worried about. Luker's (1998) argument that the original social critique offered by women's organizations was lost as male-dominated government bureaucracies took over their causes during the Progressive Era is clearly illustrated: the critique of male sexual violence and of the sexual double-standard in general, as well as the belief in the inherent dignity of the inmate and her ability to be reformed that the WIF espoused, have been lost. The WIF was not a perfect institution: it unnecessarily imprisoned women for venereal disease, imposed visions of moral reform on women who did not necessarily view themselves as in need of "reform," and, at



its worst, sterilized inmates. Yet next to those bars on the windows there were also doilies on couches. There were discussions of ways to bring out inmates' "better natures," baseball teams, and dances. Perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this study, there was some sense of connection between women across lines of class and race. The motivations of the activist and professional women involved with the WIF were not perfect, but they took responsibility for the welfare of the inmates in ways that similarly-positioned groups of women are not doing today. The current inmates of TCF could use some allies.

This research sheds light on our own political moment and the social inequalities that inform our current prison system. Many people react to hearing about Chapter 205 with a sense of surprise that the state of Kansas imprisoned women, but not men, for having venereal disease. With the perspective that comes with time, people look back at Chapter 205 as a clear example of injustice and a false sense of relief that we have come so far as a society. The myth of societal progress takes over, and people often fail to make the connection between the injustices of the past and the injustices of today. From the perspective of understanding the symbolic boundaries that inform people's understanding of society, what is perhaps most interesting about our current moment is the general population's complacency about imprisoning such large numbers of our citizens, particularly when the patterns of racial injustice are so clear. Why can people look back at the case of the WIF and see injustice, but fail to see it in our current moment? While the answer to this question is complicated, part of the answer involves the same questions that motivate this research: how do conceptions of respectability inform the way people construct differences between "us" and "them"? How do these symbolic boundaries inform state policies? While people's reactions to mass incarceration in the US today involve myriad factors, including

ignorance, apathy, and a lack of a sense of political efficacy, one important piece of understanding this has to do with the boundary work that takes place through discussions of the criminality of certain groups of people. Respectability informed the implementation of Chapter 205 in Kansas, just as it informs our implementation of drug laws today. People's sense of the injustice of imprisonment depends on their interpretation of the respectability of the person being detained. The sooner we can see the connections between these cases and the larger cultural work that takes place in discussions of respectability, the sooner we can take steps toward a more just society.

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