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The Way They Were: “Conn Girls” and American Culture in 1959

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ABSTRACT

In the 1950s, American women in general, and female college students in particular, confronted different sets of cultural assumptions, or ideologies, relevant to their aspirations and behaviour. Perhaps the best-known of these was an ideology in which it was assumed that female college students were not interested in their studies and were primarily concerned with finding a husband. An examination of the cohort that entered the Connecticut College for Women in 1959 reveals that some students were indeed concerned with marriage; however, a large minority did not know what they wanted. In addition, many students were keenly interested in their studies, wanted to do well, and aspired to careers. These findings indicate that rather than forming a homogeneous group, the students at Connecticut College did not fit a common 1950s stereotype of female students in American colleges.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans les années 1950, les femmes américaines et les collégiennes, en particulier, furent confrontées à différentes manières de penser ou idéologies ayant trait à leurs aspirations et à leur conduite. Parmi les plus courantes, un préjugé voulait que les collégiennes n'étaient pas intéressées par leurs études, mais plutôt par la recherche d'un mari. Une analyse de la cohorte qui entra au Connecticut College for Women en 1959 révèle que certaines étudiantes étaient, en effet, préoccupées par le mariage ; cependant, une minorité importante ne savait pas ce qu'elle voulait. En outre, plusieurs étudiantes furent vraiment intéressées par leurs études, voulaient réussir et aspiraient à une carrière. Ces résultats indiquent que plutôt que de former un groupe homogène, les élèves du Connecticut College ne répondaient pas au stéréotype des années 1950 concernant les collégiennes américaines.

Introduction

While many women left the American workforce after the Second World War, their overall numbers in the labour market continued to grow throughout the 1950s.¹ During the same period, a view that a woman's place was in the home, particularly if she were middle-class and white, continued to receive popular support² and social scientific legitimation.³ (The less affluent were often denied the option of staying

home with their children.) Consistent with this perspective, many post-secondary institutions created programs that would better prepare "college girls" for their roles as wives and mothers.⁴ Given this context, what were the aspirations and expectations of young women entering colleges and universities?

In the few studies that have focused on this topic, scholars have given two answers. The first answer embodies the idea that, consistent with a dominant "feminine mystique,"⁵ the primary aspiration of female students was to find a suitable mate who could help them fulfill their roles as wives and mothers.⁶ Traits such as physical attractiveness and sociability were assets in this quest. Intellectual growth and its concomitants were of secondary importance.⁷

This view of college as a marriage market is supported by census data analyzed by Claudia Goldin. She wrote of this era, "the ratio of men to women undergraduates was at an all-time peak in the United States, and they married at the highest rate of any college group in the century. Not surprisingly," she adds, "the vast majority met their mates in college and married before or soon after graduation." According to Goldin, "College was far more of a marriage market at that time than during any period before or after."⁸

The second answer is more nuanced. While it recognizes that, consistent with a feminine mystique, marriage might have been important, it was not necessarily the primary motivation of all females who attended college. Some were also interested in intellectual development and possible careers.⁹ Although it is not always clearly stated, this approach assumes a culture in which a dominant feminine mystique co-existed with other cultural elements or ideologies legitimizing educational pursuits and possible careers for women.

Consistent with these cultural possibilities, this article focuses on the aspirations and expectations of 369 students (98 per cent of the total class) who entered the Connecticut College for Women located in New London, Connecticut (in the northeastern United States) in September 1959. In the first week of classes, they completed an inventory called the Mooney Problem Check List. This article, which utilizes, among other sources, the information collected by this checklist, is unique in two ways. First, there are no other rigorous published studies of the aspirations and expectations of American females entering a women's college during the 1950s or early 1960s (or any other era for that matter). Second, few studies of female students from any period have systematic information on 98 per cent of the group under study.

In the article, I will argue that the information collected through the Mooney Problem Check List is in keeping with a view of females that combines different elements of American culture in the post-war era. In other words, in contrast to scholars who have argued that the primary motivation of female undergraduates during the 1950s and early 1960s was to find a suitable mate, consistent with more recent scholarship, I will show that the female students entering Connecticut College for Women in 1959 were a diverse and complex group. While some were concerned with marriage, many were involved in the major intellectual debates of their day, wanted to do well in their studies, and anticipated careers. I will also argue that the culture

of the college was consistent with differing student ambitions and elements present in American culture.

American “College Girls” in the Late 1950s

In 1960, female students comprised 37 per cent of those enrolled in higher education in the United States; however, their distribution was not equal across all institutions. Colleges and universities with the highest prestige had fewer female students than those with the least.¹⁰ At the end of the 1950s, there were 298 traditional women’s colleges in the United States. Of these 206 (69 per cent) were church-affiliated. Seventy-five (25 per cent) were independent non-profit institutions.¹¹

In post-Second World War America, Linda Eisenmann argues, there were four sets of cultural assumptions, or ideologies, that would have influenced female college and university students enrolled in these institutions. The feminine mystique (which she characterizes as a “psychological ideology”) was only one of them. In the “patriotic ideology,” “women were encouraged to defend America through supporting their families.” At the same time, especially after the Soviet Union launched the first satellite to orbit the earth (Sputnik) in 1957, women were encouraged to defend their country by contributing their skills to the labour force.¹² A separate “economic ideology” embodied the idea that, independent of any patriotic consideration, the contribution of women to the labour force was important for national well-being.¹³ Self-actualization through work was consistent with this perspective. A “cultural ideology” emphasized that women should play a supportive role in the family. Within this ideology family support was not necessarily connected to defence of the realm.

While the dividing lines between these ideologies are not always clear, the ideologies are of heuristic value. Eisenmann summarizes:

Taken together, these four ideologies presented a potent set of expectations but did not universally determine women’s opportunities or actual behaviour, especially outside the middle-class. Many women stretched their views of the economic, patriotic, cultural, and psychological expectations to create the balance that worked for themselves personally and for their families.¹⁴

In other words, these ideologies were not airtight. Women could, and did, mix and match different aspects to suit their own circumstances.

Although they may have been given a different interpretation when written, several sociological studies involving female students in the 1950s and early 1960s can be re-interpreted in ways consistent with Eisenmann’s later characterization of American culture. First, it is true that, in keeping with the feminine mystique, many female American students, even in elite and/or female schools, were concerned with their marriage prospects; however, this concern did not mean that they were disinterested in careers.¹⁵ Second, if it came to a choice, it was probable that marriage would trump a career.¹⁶ Third, there is little indication that snaring a man was the primary concern of *all* female college students.¹⁷ These conclusions are in keeping with the

idea that women in the 1950s were susceptible to the pulls of more than one set of cultural expectations (or ideologies) as embodied in the feminine mystique.

In addition to empirical studies conducted at the time, more recent research also challenges typifications of females as disinterested students. For example, a study of female students enrolled in the liberal arts in America from 1940 to 1960 (like those at the Connecticut College for Women) found that the feminine mystique was a dominant influence on campus; however, some female students were critically engaged in the major political and cultural debates of their time, were interested in careers, questioned conventional gender roles, and sought husbands who would treat their wives as equal partners. Despite the important insights it provides, the most important aspect of the research was primarily based on ten diaries, three published journals, twenty letters, newspapers, yearbooks, scrapbooks, class notes, and term papers—a limitation recognized by the author.¹⁸ As a result, while the study provided valuable insights into changes in students' aspirations and so on over the course of their college years, it is difficult to determine how many students questioned their conventional roles.

Other research confirms that in the 1950s and early 1960s many women abandoned their studies to marry.¹⁹ Others married upon graduation. In many instances, marriage signalled abandonment of prior career aspirations. This, however, was not necessarily a permanent state. Once children attained a modicum of independence, many women completed their education or resumed careers. To this extent, despite initial compliance, over the long term these women did not fulfill the role expectations of the feminine mystique.²⁰

In conclusion, empirical studies conducted in the 1950s and early 1960s, as well as more recent research, indicates that most American female college students may have been concerned with marriage in the 1950s and early 1960s. This commitment did not indicate disinterest in academics and/or possible careers. If female students did marry and/or withdrew from college and/or abandoned their career aspirations, many later resumed where they left off.

Connecticut College for Women and Its Students

Origins²¹

When it opened in 1915 in New London, Connecticut, the site of the new campus, located on a bank of the Thames River, was described in the following way:

About a mile from the New London depot and extending along the Yale-Harvard Boat Course is a picturesque stretch of land a mile or more in length, located on high ground and overlooking the Thames on the east and New London harbour on the south.²²

The objective of the small, non-sectarian college was to provide liberal arts classes along with vocational offerings intended to equip women for newly-emerging possibilities in the fields of nutrition, dietetics, home economics, and teaching.²³ In

the 1950s, the emphasis on vocational courses was reduced and liberal arts options broadened. By 1958, one year before the cohort of interest in this study entered the college, a major in home economics was no longer offered.²⁴

In his history of the college, Paul Marthers suggests that the reason support for home economics was withdrawn by the college had to do with the influence of the academically renowned Seven Sisters colleges. He wrote that “the prevailing opinion within the Seven Sisters was that the field of domestic science was too tied to household skills to be of serious academic worth.”²⁵ It seems that some students at Connecticut College agreed with this assessment. One wrote in the student newspaper, “we are not so sure that we are in favour of vocational courses being offered by the college—it would seem to detract from the purpose of a liberal arts institution, especially when there are many fine vocational schools in the country which can give exclusive attention to those students who wish to learn a trade.”²⁶

In some unpublished writings, Alice Johnson, Dean of Freshmen from 1958 to 1969, also pointed to the influence of the Seven Sisters. She wrote, “the faculty was determined to excel so as to be included with that esoteric female group known as the Seven Sisters. The aspiration to become the eighth sister in this academic galaxy was at times so compelling that it became education by imitation rather than by intellectual persuasion.”²⁷ In view of the desire to emulate the Seven Sisters, it is ironic to note that during the period under discussion historian Livia Baker seriously criticized the Seven Sisters for failing women in their curricular offerings and in their neglect of the study of women and women’s issues.²⁸ While some faculty may have been self-conscious in comparison with the Seven Sisters, Marthers points out, “despite its curricular differences, the requirements for entry to Connecticut College for Women resembled those at the Seven Sisters colleges.”²⁹

In addition to its concern with the development of practical and occupational skills, in its early years the college aspired to make its programs available to a wide cross-section of society. Unfortunately, high tuition costs precluded the realization of this goal. As a result, the college became a preserve of the American middle class.³⁰ In this regard, it was similar to most other American private colleges.

Students in 1959

A middle-class bias in enrolment continued through the 1950s. In 1959, the median income for American families, before taxes, was \$5,400.³¹ In the same year, the cost of an education at Connecticut College was \$2,350 if students lived in campus residences. For those living elsewhere, the cost was \$1,260.³² These fees may have contributed to one student’s comment that “most parents of Connecticut students” are in “the ‘silk stocking’ bracket.”³³

Responses of freshmen to the Mooney Problem Check List in 1959 reinforce the idea that students were predominantly middle-class or higher. On the list, only 5 per cent indicated that they had “too many financial problems;” 8 per cent said that they had “too little money for clothes;” and a mere 6 per cent mentioned that they were “going through school on too little money.” The general financial well-being of students is revealed in the remark of one student: “money has never been a problem with

me before because my father has a good job and I have a good home, nice clothes, vacations and so forth." She added, "my roommates are extremely rich with loads of expensive clothes and luggage."

While a large number of students may have come from financially privileged backgrounds, not all did. Students from less affluent families were often concerned with the sacrifices made by their parents to send them to the college. One student wrote on her list, "my chief problem is money. I don't like the feeling of being dependent on others. I have never liked the idea of owing money [and] I even feel badly that my parents are sacrificing so much for me."

Connecticut College was not insensitive to the needs of the less privileged. Among other measures, it awarded scholarships to the deserving. In 1957–58, for example, a total of \$116,000 in scholarships was dispensed to 141 students.³⁴ On average, each student received \$825.

Prior to the presidential election of 1960, students, faculty, and staff were polled on their support for presidential candidates John F. Kennedy (Democrat) and Richard Nixon (Republican). The poll achieved a very high response among students and showed that 69 per cent supported Nixon.³⁵ These findings are in keeping with the fact that five years later, in 1965, three times as many students were members of the campus Young Republicans than were members of the Young Democrats.³⁶

Despite the Republican leanings of the majority of students, many were concerned with social injustice at home and abroad. (There is no way of determining whether these students were supporters of the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, or neither.) For example, in 1960, two students wrote in the student newspaper about their feelings regarding the civil rights movement in the American South. "In one sense," they wrote, "this is a Negro fight and a particularly southern issue; however, as Thurgood Marshall at Yale recently reminded many of us, the hypocrisy of segregation in the north produces many more harmful and lasting effects than does the modified caste system in the south."³⁷ During the four years in which the class of '63 was completing its studies, support for the civil rights movement grew on campus as did concern with issues of increases in student autonomy, curriculum reform, and the prospect of nuclear war.³⁸ There is no way of assessing whether these changes signalled a change in students' support for conventional political parties.

Although information on the race of students when they entered the college in 1959 is unavailable, a general (but possibly fallible) impression of the composition of the student body can be obtained from photographs presented in the yearbook upon their graduation in 1963.³⁹ From these photographs, it appears that of 240 graduating students, 239 were of European origin. The minority of one appears to have had an Asian background. In an era in which about half of male and female students failed to complete their college studies,⁴⁰ it is impressive that those eligible to graduate in 1963 represented 65 per cent of the students who had entered the college in 1959.⁴¹

Overall, the majority of students entering their first year at Connecticut College in 1959 appear to have come from relatively prosperous families, to have been politically conservative, and to have been white. Given these characteristics, it is no

wonder that the former dean, Alice Johnson, referred to the college as a “conservative stronghold.”⁴²

The Mooney Problem Check List

Method for Dealing with the List

The Mooney Problem Check List that the Connecticut College class of '63 completed in September 1959 was developed in the 1940s to assist American educators in providing support for their students.⁴³ The list was usually administered in one of two ways. First, students seeking psychological counselling could be asked to complete it. Their responses could then be used by counsellors to assist students in identifying and dealing with their problems. Second, the list could be completed by large groups of students, such as those entering their first year of studies. At the end of the list, students were asked if they would like to discuss their problems with a professional. With some modifications, the list is still available for use with college students. A modified version is also available for high school students.

The list asks students to indicate if they have encountered any of 330 problems. For example, students are queried if they have found themselves “wondering if I'll ever find a suitable mate,” if they were “having beliefs that differ from my church;” and if they found themselves “doubting the value of a college degree.”

When completing the list, students were asked to proceed in a two-step fashion. First, they were to underline problems that they experienced. Second, they were asked to review their selections and, after reflection, circle those problems that were of most concern. Questions were grouped into eleven areas, including “Courtship, Sex and Marriage,” “Morals and Religion,” and “The Future, Vocational and Educational.” In addition to having the opportunity to identify which of the 330 problems were important, at the end of the list, respondents were provided with the possibility of elaborating on the issues of most importance to them. The average number of problems selected by Connecticut College students (underlined and circled) was twenty-eight. This was similar to the number identified during the post-war period by female first-year students elsewhere.⁴⁴

The information obtained from the Mooney Problem Check List was handled in the following way. First, to ensure accuracy, responses to all 330 potential problems as well as the full text of the comments at the end of the list were converted into an SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) file by the Institute for Social Research at York University. In this process, zero was assigned to questions left blank by students (non-response). One was recorded if a student only underlined an issue. Two was given to responses that were both underlined and circled. Thus, the higher the score for a given issue, the greater the problem it represented for the student.

Second, for this analysis, I identified seven culturally relevant problems for detailed analysis (see below). These and the remaining 323 problems were sorted from most to least frequently mentioned to provide an idea of the overall importance of culturally relevant items.

Third, students' responses to the culturally-relevant items were linked to their responses to the open-ended questions at the end of the list. I did this to see if, in their comments, students elaborated on the ways in which particular problems were manifested in their lives. For example, a student who indicated that for her "wondering if I'll ever find a suitable mate" was a problem might elaborate on why this was the case. Such elaborations were used to contextualize responses to individual questions.

Fourth, a two-step cluster analysis using SPSS was performed on the culturally-relevant questions to determine the potential presence of distinct groups within the student body. To oversimplify greatly, a two-step cluster analysis is a procedure that allows the identification of otherwise unapparent groups in terms of their individual characteristics within a data set.⁴⁵ For example, in the current context, students indicating a problem with "not knowing what I really want" might have more of an affinity with those expressing concern with "wanting to be more popular" than with students for whom knowing what they wanted was not an issue.

Fifth, groups identified through the two-step cluster analysis were assessed in terms of their potential connection to the elements of American culture under discussion.

Culturally-Relevant Problems

As previously noted, during the period under study, research in general, and research on female college students in particular, identified that marriage was highly desirable. Success in finding a spouse was associated with physical attractiveness, popularity, and, for young women, success in dating. However, there are further indications that for many women educational and career success may have been more important than marriage. Additional information points to changes in the goals of female students over the course of their studies and later in life. As a result of these possibilities, even though research in the post-war era indicated consistency in students' values over their college careers,⁴⁶ it is important to recognize the possibility of personal change over the college years and later in life.

Problems from the checklist identified in Table 1 reflect some issues potentially faced by female students that can be linked to ideological possibilities of the period. Note that the issues are ordered in terms of the number being circled. To facilitate discussion, cases in which students did not select the problem have been labelled "no problem." If the issue was underlined but not circled it was given the "some problem" designation. If circled, the issue was considered a "big problem." In the following discussion, numbers in the "some" and "big" categories were combined. The final column, "rank," refers to the standing of the problem out of the total 330 questions in the list. In the table, percentages are based on all 369 students who completed the list.

The most frequently noted problem in Table 1 is "not knowing what I really want." Thirty-three per cent of students identified this issue. It ranked 3 out of the total of 330 problems. The fact that 33 per cent of students identified this issue as a problem suggests that upon entry to college a large minority was uncertain as to its future: neither marriage nor a career automatically came to mind when students were considering their lives. As one student expressed, "I have not found a definite goal in life and I wonder if I ever will. I wonder what my role in life is and whether I am

Table 1
Culturally Relevant Issues

	No problem	Some problem	Big problem	Total	Rank
Not knowing what I really want	67%	20%	13%	100%	3
Wanting to be more popular	76%	19%	6%	101%	35
Wondering if I'll ever get married	84%	11%	5%	100%	48
Not meeting anyone I like to date	85%	11%	3%	99%	66
Needing to decide on an occupation	90%	7%	3%	100%	82
Purpose in going to college not clear	91%	8%	1%	100%	139
Not very attractive physically	91%	7%	2%	100%	98

fulfilling it or not.” One student wrote, “I... would eventually like to realize what life means to me and my purpose in my life.”

Some students linked their lack of direction to the fact that they did not have a clear philosophy. “No philosophy of life,” commented one student, “Wanting something and not knowing what it is. Afraid to decide about [the] future because it might not work out as well as planned, or be as good as I think it will.”

The second most often noted problem was “wanting to be more popular.” This issue ranked 35 out of 330. As embodied in the notion of “other directness” (a cultural condition in which individuals over-rely on cues from others about what to believe and how to behave), popularity and conformity were desirable traits in the 1950s and early 1960s.⁴⁷ That they were also important to some students is evident in their comments.

One student wrote at the end of her list: “Sometimes I am so anxious to become friendly with a girl, that I forget superficial matters are unimportant, and I build up situations almost to the point of lying.” She felt that “I very often think too much of my social life and not enough about my school work.” Another student wrote: “I try to be popular—maybe I try too hard. I try to be friendly and am actually liked but sometimes I push myself too hard on persons. When [*sic*] action only leads to shunning.” One student’s mother told her “always to smile and be friendly to everyone. That’s wonderful,” the student retorted, “if you can do it, but I’m quiet and retiring, by nature, to those I don’t know well.”

The third most important issue in Table 1 was “wondering if I’ll ever get married.” In total, 16 per cent of students identified this problem, which ranked 48 out of 330. There is no way of knowing if the remaining 84 per cent of students did not select this item because they took marriage for granted or because they did not consider the prospect. Likely it was the former.

While few students worried about their futures as brides, the issue received a lot of attention on the written portion of the list. One student categorically stated, “Nearly every girl wishes to marry—therefore the next problem would be finding a suitable mate.” This was not always easy. “I have met many nice boys,” wrote another

student, "but most regard me as a friend—that is the way I have really wanted it." Despite her contentment with the status quo, she was concerned about the prospect that eventually she "will meet one of the opposite sex with whom I would want to spend the rest of my life."

In addition to expressing concern about meeting the right person, some students were worried about the possibility of a happy marriage. To quote one: "whether I will ever marry and if my marriage will be [a] success, are all problems which bother me." Another student expressed similar concerns. She stated: "Marriage distresses me somewhat because I wonder whether or not it will be happy." This student observed that "so many of my friends' parents are unhappy which causes the children to be miserable and greatly troubled."

Without actively dating, it would have been difficult to meet a suitable mate; however, as seen in Table 1, only 14 per cent of students identified "not meeting anyone I like to date" as a problem. Perhaps students at Connecticut College were very attractive to their male peers. This issue ranked 66 out of 330 possible problems.

The problem for one student was not in finding dates. On the contrary, she wrote, "I have dated many boys, none too seriously." Her problem was being "able to tell when I'm really in love." Another student also indicated that it was not getting dates per se that was the issue. It was her (not his) behaviour while on the date. She indicated that "perhaps my biggest problem will be finding some boy who does not expect a fast date bubbling with effervescence." She concluded with the remark, "I must learn to relax more socially." Another student simply stated, "I... worry about finding the right boy, and the problems of dating." Overall, while some students were concerned with getting dates, others focused more on difficulties in ensuring a proper choice of males.

"Needing to decide on an occupation," as seen in Table 1, was a problem for only 10 per cent of students. The overall ranking of this problem was 82 out of 330.

A student who had yet to decide on an occupation commented, "My chief problem right now is that I don't know yet what I want to do after college as a career." As a consequence, this student did not know "what to major in." Someone who was more self-assured simply commented, "I have a very strong desire to make a name for myself."

Quite often discussion of occupations focused not on selecting an occupation, but on fears that occupational goals were out of reach. For example, a student remarked, "I have set my goal as being a doctor of medicine." Her concern was: "I am seriously afraid because I know myself that I will not reach that goal." She does not say why. (Perhaps she was aware that apart from nursing, medicine was a male preserve.) Despite this reservation, she concludes with the remark, "if I keep my interest and if I keep telling myself I will be one I think I can make it."

Other students also expressed reservations. For example, one wrote: "I think that at this point my chief problem, or worry, is that of being a part of my chosen field. I want very much," she continued, "to enter either the diplomatic corps or state department, but I'm a little afraid that by the time I'm out of college the requirements will be too hard."

One student directly addressed the conflict between a career and marriage. She wrote: "I think it is natural for someone my age to worry about marriage. But I don't want to worry about it too much." The reason? "I feel there are more important things for me to do, e.g., to find a means of expression, one that is not through love and having children, but rather through writing or music." Overall, there was no indication in the comments that students made a conscious distinction between "proper" occupational spheres for males and females.

In an era in which questions were often raised as to the desirability of females pursuing higher education (they were going to get married anyway), it is interesting that only 9 per cent indicated their "purpose in going to college not clear." This problem ranked 139 out of 330.

One student who was clearly having difficulty with her decision to attend college wrote, "perhaps my worst problem is justifying a college education." Her reason was that "I have almost no ideas [*sic*] of what I want to do after college and I feel guilty about having so much money spent on an education when I am so undecided." Another student was more optimistic. She wrote, "I am not sure of my purpose in college but hope to realize it as I continue." Most other comments about college focused not on reservations about having made the right decision in going. Instead, they revealed a commitment to work hard and succeed. "I often worry about succeeding in my college career," wrote one student, because that is "my strongest desire."

Only 9 per cent of students indicated that they were concerned that they were "not very attractive physically." The ranking of this problem was 98 out of 330. The most commonly-mentioned issue when students were commenting on physical attraction was being overweight. According to one student: "I have always fought a losing battle with my weight and it is a problem that can only be helped by my will power." Some concern was also expressed over posture, complexion, and poor eyesight. By way of example, a student confided that "physically I worry about my poor eyesight, my skin, my posture and being too thin."

Issue Groups

From the foregoing, we see that varying numbers of students expressed concern with different culturally relevant issues. What we do not know is whether the issues discussed were randomly distributed among students or if expressions of concern with one issue indicated concern with others. This possibility can be explored by employing a two-step cluster analysis. In this analysis, responses to each problem were divided into two categories: "no problem," and "some problem" and "big problem" combined.

In Table 2, the first column indicates the problem under consideration. Under "group" we see three options: secure, questioning, and no pattern. These labels are the names I assigned to each of the groups detected in the cluster analysis. The character of the group is defined by responses to the questions identified in column 1. At the bottom of the table are found the percentages of students in each group and the number of the total on which the percentage is based. Note that the no pattern group (outliers) is the largest (39 per cent), followed by the secure group (38 per cent), and the questioning group (23 per cent).

Table 2
Student Groups

	Group			Predictor Importance
	Secure	Questioning	No Pattern	
Not knowing what I really want	0%	100%		1.00
Wanting to be more popular	0%	17%		0.13
Wondering if I'll ever get married	0%	15%		0.10
Not meeting anyone I like to date	0%	11%		0.08
Needing to decide on an occupation	0%	5%		0.04
Purpose in going to college not clear	0%	5%		0.04
Not very attractive physically	0%	2%		0.02
% Students	38%	23%	39%	
# Students	138	82	142	
Note: Average Silhouette Measure of Cohesion and Separation = 0.8				

The nature of the groups is defined by the figures under the name of the group. Those in the secure group are characterized by having no concern with any of the issues listed in the first column. The questioning group is comprised of students who overwhelmingly did not know what they wanted (100 per cent). To a lesser extent, the group is characterized by students: wanting to be more popular (17 per cent), wondering if they would ever get married (15 per cent), not meeting anyone they would like to date (11 per cent), needing to decide on an occupation (5 per cent), whose purpose in going to college was not clear (5 per cent), and who felt that they were not attractive physically (2 per cent). It is important to note that these categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, a student who did not know what she wanted could also want to be more popular and so on. Possibilities such as these establish the nature of the group. No information is found for the no pattern group because it had no consistent defining characteristics.

The importance of each of the issues for group identification is found in the predictor importance column. From this we see that the issue of "not knowing what I really want" is by far the most important predictor of group membership (1.00). The second most important predictor, "wanting to be more popular," has a coefficient of 0.13. Thereafter coefficients decrease in magnitude to a low of .02 for "not being physically attractive."

The average silhouette measure of cohesion and separation is 0.8.⁴⁸ This figure indicates that considerable reliance can be placed on group placement.

In essence, it was not possible to assign 39 per cent of the students to a clearly-defined group. Assignment was possible for the 38 per cent of students placed in

the secure group and the 23 per cent in the questioning group. The former were characterized by having no problems with any of the culturally-relevant issues under consideration, the latter by having a number of problems of decreasing importance for group identification.

What we do not know is why those in the secure group expressed no concern about what they wanted in life; did not worry about their popularity; did not worry if they would get married; expressed no anxiety about dating or choosing a future occupation; did not worry about why they were in college; and expressed no concern about their appearance. There are a number of possible explanations. First, they may have been secure because they accepted an American Dream in which women dated, married, and became mothers. They may have felt that they were on track to realize that dream. Second, they may have been secure in a rejection of this life course and opted for a career. Having made this decision, certain issues on the list were of no consequence to them. (While a logical possibility, this option is unlikely.) Third, they may have been secure in choosing a life course that embodied aspects of both possibilities. We do not know. For current purposes it does not matter; suffice it to say that members of this group experienced no problems with issues that were part of a certain variant of an American Dream.

We can be more certain about the questioning group (23% per cent). At a minimum, their responses to the list, as well as their subsequent comments, indicate that they had not identified a clear life course. Since they had not done so, they had accepted no variant of an American Dream. Of course, it was possible that over the period of their studies this uncertainty would disappear. This possibility is in keeping with prior studies that have shown a change in the goals of female students over their college careers and analyses of identity-formation among young adults.⁴⁹

It is clear from the foregoing that, in keeping with the cultural and the psychological ideologies, students at Connecticut were concerned with marriage; however, consistent with the economic ideology, many were also interested in academic success and future careers. It is equally evident that an identifiable group on campus, contrary to conventional stereotypes of the proper role for women, had no commitment to a particular future, be it one involving marriage, a career, or anything else. These students did not know "what I really want." Another group knew what it wanted out of life and had no concerns with issues like popularity, dating, and marriage. There is no way of telling if this lack of concern reflected a rejection of conventional criteria of success, like marriage, or the fact that marriage was taken for granted.

As seen from the foregoing, there was considerable diversity among students entering the college in 1959. To what extent did the culture of Connecticut College support and/or reflect this diversity?

Campus Culture

The Nature of Culture

At either the societal or institutional level, culture can be viewed as a set of assumptions about the nature of reality and the forms of behaviour that are appropriate in a

human group. These assumptions find expression in social practices and human artifacts. Culture can both structure social interactions and be detected through them.

It is not my intent to conduct a detailed analysis of the culture of Connecticut College for Women. I am only interested in seeing if some specific manifestations of campus culture (including institutional requirements, forms of behaviour, or expressions of values) were consistent with the concerns expressed by students in the Mooney Problem Check List and/or with the four ideologies discussed previously.

Economic Ideology

The goals of Connecticut College in the late 1950s were identified by Patricia Sullivan in a study of Rosemary Park, president of Connecticut College from 1948 to 1962. Sullivan wrote: "The mission of Connecticut College for Women was to provide an academically excellent baccalaureate program of studies, a program paralleling that of the major men's and women's colleges."⁵⁰ This mission was to be achieved through a curriculum requiring "English composition and literature; American history or government; European history; laboratory science; philosophy or religion; foreign language; music or art; a semester of mathematics or logic."⁵¹ In post-Sputnik America, a curriculum of this nature was intended to prepare women for future roles in the economy as well as in the family.

In 1959, the instructors responsible for implementing the curriculum at Connecticut College were 55 per cent male and 45 per cent female. At the time, at a national level, only 22 per cent of instructors in colleges and universities were female.⁵² Clearly, the environment at Connecticut College was one in which students had available to them a considerable number of potential female role models.

Implementation of the goals of the institution was not restricted to the formal curriculum. Considerable attention was given to ensuring that outside of the classroom students were exposed to some of the greatest intellectuals and artists of the era; academic successes were publicly celebrated; and students were provided with, and encouraged to pursue, leads on possible careers. On the other hand, in keeping with the psychological and cultural ideologies, the campus celebrated marriage and fashion contests.

Between 1959 and 1963, the student newspaper referenced visits to the campus of prominent intellectuals and virtuosos on a weekly basis. For example, in January 1960, classical guitarist Andres Segovia performed for Connecticut College students.⁵³ Outside of classes, the college provided a rich "high brow" cultural environment for students.

That academic achievement was an important aspect of campus culture was evident in the periodic posting in the college newspaper of students who made the Dean's List. In February 1961, for example, thirty-one students from the class of '63 achieved this form of recognition.⁵⁴ In 1962, the number for this cohort increased to fifty-three.⁵⁵

Recognition was also given to students who achieved in other ways. For example, in 1960, it was announced that Renée Capellini was the recipient of a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. Among the class of '63, Amy Glassner and Anne Accardo were also recipients of Woodrow Wilson Fellowships.⁵⁶

In keeping with an emphasis on intellectual development, achievement, and preparation for a career, during the years under study the Personnel Bureau at the college reported on the vocational engagement of students, broadly advertised job openings, and commented on the activities of students after leaving the college. On a regular basis the bureau also advised students of possible full-time positions for which they could apply. In February 1960, it informed students that recruiters would be on campus from the General Insurance Company, J. Walter Thompson, and New York Life.⁵⁷

On other occasions jobs available were described in ways more in keeping with limited occupational expectations for women. In May 1960, for example, students were advised of openings in US embassies and consulates throughout the world. Potential applicants were informed that “applicants for secretarial and stenographic positions must be proficient in typing and shorthand; applicants for the communications clerk positions must type 45 words a minute; the pouch clerk positions, open to men only, require a typing speed of 35 words a minute.” For the times, salaries were relatively generous, ranging from \$3,730 to \$4,180 per annum.⁵⁸

The limited data available on students’ choices after graduation are in keeping with the economic ideology and the idea that not all aspired only to marriage and motherhood. The Personnel Bureau supplied the best accessible information on students’ immediate plans. It noted that “the fall plans of the class of 1963 vary greatly.” On the one hand, “graduate schools will be enrolling a large section of the class as many will commence work on the M.A.T. at Trinity, Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Yale, and Columbia, while others will enter other graduate fields at Georgetown, Bryn Mawr, Brandeis and Lexington school for the deaf.” In addition, “there will be Connecticut college graduates studying under Woodrow Wilson fellowships and a Fulbright grant in Italy.” Also, “a large number of seniors will be taking teaching positions in such nearby places as Darien and as far away as Germany.” Some “seniors will be... contract writers for John Hancock insurance.” Others would be involved in “training programs with the McGraw-Hill and Doubleday publishing companies.” One would be an “administration assistant at Yale University” while three “seniors will be entering the Peace Corps.”⁵⁹ While these figures suggest clear commitments on the part of some graduates to further study or careers, there is no way of knowing the proportion that chose these routes. That said, as a minimum it seems clear that some of the 1959 cohort did not focus on marriage to the exclusion of other possibilities.

Cultural and Psychological Ideologies

Just as the college culture supported achievement, it also publicly celebrated situations in keeping with the psychological and cultural ideologies. For example, it celebrated marriage. On January 15, 1960, readers of the student paper were told that thirty-four students were engaged to be married. One of these was first-year student Susan McAuley, who was likely one of those who completed the Mooney Problem Check List in 1959. The paper reported that she “became engaged to James Davison Bennett on December 27, 1959.” Readers were told that “James is a senior at Cornell and plans to attend law school.” The couple was to marry on August 13, 1960.⁶⁰

Since James was a senior and planned to attend law school, it is possible that Susan discontinued her studies in order to support him. This possibility was identified by former dean Alice Johnson. She wrote: "In the past, many of the girls who left at the end of the first year to get married were happy to quit college and get any kind of job to help him get through."⁶¹

In order to assist students in their transition to married life, representatives of the Royal Doulton china company periodically made their way onto campus. Dean Johnson pointed out (perhaps with tongue in cheek) that the intent of company representatives was to display "a one-hundred piece dinnerware set and to take orders from the Future Homemakers of America who were busy picking out their sterling silver patterns with service for dinner parties of twelve to twenty-four."⁶² She does not say how many orders were taken on these occasions.

Other events in keeping with the cultural and psychological ideologies included nominations for the best-dressed college girl in the United States. In 1960, nine pictures of Connecticut College students appeared in the college paper. Readers were informed that "it is your privilege to choose the candidate here who will represent Connecticut for the first time in the annual Glamour Magazine contest." The article elaborates that "your winner will be photographed in the formal contest poses and outfits and will present her views on styling, budgeting, and other pertinent topics for evaluation by the national judges." If one of the Connecticut students were to place in the top ten in the US, "she will spend two weeks in New York City as a guest of Glamour Magazine, and will appear as a model in the August issue of that magazine."⁶³ A week later, the newspaper announced that "by open ballot, the Connecticut College campus has selected Toodie Green to represent the student body in this national competition. Toodie is interested in fashion modelling, and as for her personal wardrobe selection, she prefers simple comfortable clothes."⁶⁴

While Toodie did not win, she received honourable mention. The criteria used to earn her this distinction were:

1. Good figure, beautiful posture.
2. Clean, shining, well-kept hair.
3. Imagination in managing a clothes budget.
4. Good grooming, not just neat but impeccable.
5. Appropriate campus look (she's in line with local customs).
6. A clear understanding of her fashion type.
7. Individuality in her use of fashion, color, accessories.
8. A workable wardrobe plan.
9. A neat way with makeup.
10. Appropriate—not rah rah look—for off-campus occasions.⁶⁵

Belinda Breese, one of the 1959 cohort, was more successful. In April 1963 the newspaper announced, "Glamour Magazine has chosen Belinda Breese... as one of the 10 best dressed girls on campus." Belinda was selected "from 250 entrants from college campuses across the country on the basis of her keen sense of fashion." Upon

graduation, Belinda hoped to work for the government.⁶⁶

Overall, consistent with the economic ideology, the culture of Connecticut College for Women was one supportive of intellectual development, academic achievement, and aspirations to occupations and professions. In keeping with the cultural and psychological ideologies, recognition was also given to students who were marriage-bound or involved in fashion contests. (I could find no evidence of the patriotic ideology.) As a result, the campus culture was consistent with a view of women as achievers and potential professionals, as potential wives and mothers, and as a combination of both possibilities.

Conclusion

Although in the 1950s the number of women in the American workforce continued to grow, the expectation for females, particularly if they were middle-class and white, was that they would marry and have families. Career ambitions were secondary to this consideration. Within this climate, the prevalent explanation for the presence of females in higher education was that they were looking for suitable mates. The feminine mystique legitimized this expectation. Sociological studies of female college students conducted in the late 1950s and early 1960s were often interpreted in ways consistent with this expectation.

Despite the prevalence of this belief, other ideologies (particularly the patriotic and economic) legitimized both higher education and careers for women. In keeping with these possibilities, the same sociological studies can be reinterpreted as indicating that while the feminine mystique may have been prevalent on American campuses, not all females were disinterested in careers and snaring a man was not the main concern of all female students. That said, if it came to a choice, many females would have opted for marriage over a career. Later studies indicated that when they entered college, despite the dominance of a feminine mystique, some females were critically engaged in the major political and cultural debates of their time; were interested in careers; questioned conventional gender roles; and sought husbands who would treat their wives as equal partners. Even if they left college for marriage, or married upon graduation, these and many other females may have later completed their degrees and/or returned to the workforce.

Reliable estimates of the number of female college students who upon entry to post-secondary education held views inconsistent with the idea that their proper role was that of wife and mother were previously unavailable. In this study, based on the responses to the Mooney Problem Check List completed by virtually all students entering Connecticut College for Women in 1959, it was possible to identify a group comprising 23 per cent of the entering cohort that expressed views indicating they had not accepted a feminine mystique. As well as having other concerns, they did not know what they wanted out of life. We have no way of knowing if the views of these young women were socialized out of them during their time on campus. Even if they were and if they did get married and had children perhaps, like others of their generation, they later returned to the workforce.

Whatever the case, it is clear that the culture of the campus was consistent with, and supportive of, views of women compatible with the economic ideology. Academic achievement was celebrated and students were exposed to the major intellectuals and virtuosos of the day. At the same time, activities consistent with a feminine mystique and the cultural ideology, such as marriage and concern with fashion, were also given positive recognition.

To what extent was the situation at Connecticut College for Women typical of other traditional women's colleges in the early 1960s? Without knowing the characteristics of these colleges and their students it is not possible to say. Students at small, secular Connecticut College for Women were at least middle-class, white, and high achievers. At best, we might speculate that a similar pattern could be evident where these characteristics were replicated.

Notes

I am grateful to Rebecca Parmer, College Archivist at Connecticut College, for identifying and making accessible important documents for this article. I would also like to thank Richard Myles of the Institute for Social Research at York University for ensuring transcription of information in the Mooney Problem Check List into SPSS.

- 1 Linda Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945–1965* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2006), 3.
- 2 Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic Books, 2011); Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963/1997).
- 3 Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing up Female in the Fifties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
- 4 Some American colleges/universities for women had always offered curricula for women considered appropriate for their lives upon graduation. Lynn Peril, *College Girls: Bluestockings, Sex Kittens, and Coeds, Then and Now* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006). This trend accelerated in the period 1940–1960. Susan Hartman, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Pub., 1982), 111.
- 5 Betty Friedan defines the "feminine mystique" as an ideology in which women define themselves "only in sexual relation to men—man's wife, sex object, mother, housewife—and never as persons defining themselves by their own actions in society." Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 17. Friedan's typification of the American woman had a considerable effect, not always positive, on the scholarship of her era. As explained by Jessica Weiss, "The stifled middle-class housewife completely devoted to family on the surface, bedevilled with discontent deep within, has... become a trope in the history of the revival of feminism." Jessica Weiss, *To Have and to Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 53. As a result, information contrary to Friedan's thesis sometimes received short shrift.
- 6 Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable*; Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*; Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*.
- 7 In 1961, a Smith College faculty member "queried his students on what they dreamed for themselves in 1971. Marriage, they answered; two or three children; travel and cultural activity; a vocation in reserve." Livia Baker, *I'm Radcliffe! Fly Me!: The Seven Sisters and the Failure of Women's Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 164.

- 8 Claudia Goldin, "The Meaning of College in the Lives of American Women: The Past One-Hundred Years," Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper No. 4099, June 1992: 26.
- 9 Despite its limitations, one of the most convincing examinations of this possibility is: Babette Faehmel, *College Women in the Nuclear Age* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012). In addition, the results of some sociological studies conducted in the period can be interpreted in a way supportive of this position. Astin Alexander and Robert C. Nichols, "Life Goals and Vocational Choice," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 48, no. 1 (1964): 50–58; Alberta Siegel and Elizabeth A. Curtis, "Familial Correlates of Orientation toward Future Employment among College Women," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 54, no. 1 (1963): 33–37; Robert C. Wyer and Glenn Terrell, "Social Role and Academic Achievement," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 2, no. 1 (1965): 117–121.
- 10 David Karen, "The Politics of Class, Race, and Gender: Access to Higher Education in the United States, 1960–1986," *American Journal of Education* 99, no. 2 (1991): 213.
- 11 Baker, *I'm Radcliffe! Fly Me!*, 17.
- 12 Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945–1965*, 19.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 19–27.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 42.
- 15 Alexander and Nichols, "Life Goals and Vocational Choice"; Wyer and Terrell, "Social Role and Academic Achievement."
- 16 Siegel and Curtis, "Familial Correlates of Orientation toward Future Employment among College Women."
- 17 Alexander and Nichols, "Life Goals and Vocational Choice"; Siegel and Curtis, "Familial Correlates of Orientation toward Future Employment among College Women."
- 18 Faehmel, *College Women in the Nuclear Age*, 8–9.
- 19 Goldin, "The Meaning of College in the Lives of American Women."
- 20 Weiss, *To Have and to Hold*.
- 21 I could find no studies focusing on Connecticut College students; however, there are a number of institutional histories available. They include the following: Paul P. Marthers, *Eighth Sister No More: The Origins and Evolution of Connecticut College* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011); Gertrude E. Noyes, *A History of Connecticut College* (New London: Connecticut College, 1982); Irene Nye, *Chapters in the History of Connecticut College* (New York: J. J. Little, 1943); Oakes Ames, "Connecticut College: Contributing to a Changing Society," ed. The Necomen Society of the United States (New York: Princeton University Press, 1986); Patricia Anne Sullivan, "Rosemary Park: A Study of Educational Leadership During the Revolutionary Decades" (PhD dissertation, Boston College, 1982).
- 22 Noyes, *A History of Connecticut College*, 10.
- 23 Marthers, *Eighth Sister No More*, 61.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 103.
- 26 "This Week," *Conn Census*, February 8, 1962, 3.
- 27 Alice Johnson, "Chapter 2: Last Days of Genteel World: The Caretakers or Whose [*sic*] in Charge?," The College Archives, Connecticut College, 1998, 33.
- 28 Baker, *I'm Radcliffe! Fly Me!*
- 29 Marthers, *Eighth Sister No More*, 67.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 74.

- 31 US Department of Commerce, "Current Population Reports Consumer Income," January 5, 1961, 1.
- 32 "Bulletin of Connecticut College," Connecticut College, 1959: 141.
- 33 "Urge Personal Care in Decisions on Naming Candidates," *Conn Census*, October 6, 1960, 2.
- 34 "Bulletin of Connecticut College," Connecticut College, 1962: 159.
- 35 Anonymous, "Nixon Wins College Election," *Conn Census*, November 3, 1960, 1.
- 36 "Koiné," Connecticut College, 1965: 209.
- 37 "Letter to the Editor," *Conn Census*, April 14, 1960, 4.
- 38 This impression is based on a reading of the student newspaper from 1959 to 1963. In addition, summaries can be found in: Alice Johnson, "Chapter 4: Student Activism Is Off and Running," The College Archives, Connecticut College, 1998; Noyes, *A History of Connecticut College*, 181.
- 39 "Koiné," Connecticut College, 1963.
- 40 Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945–1965*, 69.
- 41 The yearbook for 1963 (Koiné) specifies that in 1959, 369 students entered the college (p. 146). The graduation pictures of 239 students appeared in the same yearbook. Obviously, if the pictures of some students did not appear in the yearbook, the retention rate would even be higher than 65 per cent.
- 42 Alice Johnson, "Chapter 4: The New Student: 1960 Cracks Begin to Show," The College Archives, Connecticut College, 78.
- 43 The data were collected by Dr. D. Appley. Until 1960, Dr. D. Appley had been on faculty at Connecticut College for Women. After a brief period at Southern Illinois University, in 1963 she was recruited by Glendon College, York University, in Toronto. The unanalyzed responses to the Mooney Problem Check List completed by Connecticut students are currently in York's archives.
- 44 Mildred C. Klohr, "Personal Problems of College Students," *Journal of Home Economics* 40 (1948): 447–448; Earl A. Koile and Dorothy J. Bird, "Preferences for Counselor Help on Freshman Problems," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 3, no. 2 (1956): 97–106; B. L. Bennett, "Improving College Health Teaching," *American Association of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation* 23 (1952): 24–26.
- 45 Peter Tryfos, "Cluster Analysis," (2001), <http://www.yorku.ca/ptryfos/f1500.pdf>.
- 46 Philip E. Jacob, *Changing Values in College* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1957).
- 47 David Reisman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1950).
- 48 The values of the average silhouette measure of cohesion can range from -1 to 1. The higher the value, the greater the match between an observation and the cluster in which it is placed. A value of 0.8 indicates a high match.
- 49 Jane Kroger, *Identity Development: Adolescence through Adulthood* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007).
- 50 Sullivan, "Rosemary Park: A Study of Educational Leadership During the Revolutionary Decades," 43.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 52 Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945–1965*, 22.
- 53 *Conn Census*, January 15, 1960, 2.
- 54 *Conn Census*, February 9, 1961, 4.
- 55 *Conn Census*, February 22, 1962, 6.
- 56 Anonymous, "Two Conn. Students Receive Woodrow Wilson Fellowships," *Conn Census*, March 14, 1963, 1.
- 57 "Personnel Plans Interviews," *Conn Census*, February 25, 1960, 6.
- 58 "Overseas Employment Offered in Embassies and Consulates," *Conn Census*, May 12, 1960, 5.

- 59 "Graduates Choose Diverse Positions," *Conn Census*, May 16, 1963, 1.
- 60 "Love Is a Many Splendored Thing," *Conn Census*, January 15, 1960, 3.
- 61 Alice Johnson, "Some Comments on the Class of '65 as Well as Stray Thoughts Connected with Same," The College Archives, Connecticut College, 1962, 2.
- 62 Johnson, "Chapter 2: Last Days of Genteel World," 51.
- 63 Anonymous, "Best Dressed Ballot," *Conn Census*, February 18, 1960, 7.
- 64 "Toodie Green Represents Conn in Glamour College Contest," *Conn Census*, February 25, 1960, 4.
- 65 "Glamour Awards Toodie Green Honorable Mention Placement," *Conn Census*, April 14, 1960, 1.
- 66 "Glamour Chooses Belinda Breese '63 in Fashion Contest," *Conn Census*, April 11, 1963, 1.