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Women as Subject and Audience in World War II Venereal Disease Posters

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Women as Subject and Audience in World War II Venereal Disease Posters

A Thesis
Presented to
The Academic Faculty

By

Kyra Whitton

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
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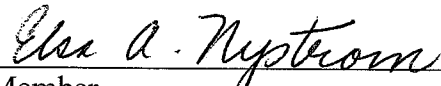
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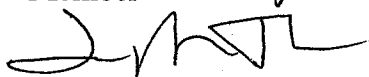
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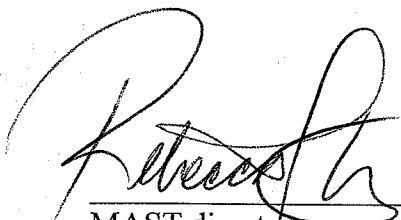
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Introduction

Internationally, venereal disease first became a major health concern during World War I. Venereal diseases were some of the most common infections and led to more hospitalizations among soldiers than wounds or battle-related illness. The Selective Service discovered that almost fifteen percent of those who were eligible for the draft were already infected with a venereal disease, sparking an intense anti-venereal disease campaign across America. Red-light districts were shut down, and American cities sought new laws that would criminalize prostitution to protect young men from contracting a venereal infection.

Though venereal disease rates were still high during World War II, they were drastically lower than those of World War I, and the lowest of any war period since the Civil War. However, the overwhelming presence of venereal diseases during the Great War had made a lasting impression on the American public and the U.S. War Department. Educational initiatives and protective measures were created to reduce the exposure servicemen had to venereal diseases and to help protect servicemen from contracting the infections. Among these educational measures was the creation of posters to “remind” soldiers of the threat and repercussions of contracting a venereal disease.

In the United States, World War II-era venereal disease posters depicting women were created for an overwhelmingly male, military audience. These posters warned men in the Armed Forces away from civilian women, depicting women as the primary carriers and spreaders of venereal diseases. These sentiments were mirrored in the civilian populations as young civilian women were criminalized for engaging in sexual activities.

However, World War II also saw the creation of women's military corps. For the first time, women were able to serve their country, though not in a combat capacity, without serving as a nurse or laundress. In the Women's Army Corps, the female military corps upon which this paper will focus, women were enlisted and commissioned as soldiers and officers in much the same way that the Army enlisted and commissioned men. Women serving in the Armed Forces, however, were absent from venereal disease poster artwork during the World War II era. Their absence from such a basic form of health education provided by the military suggests that women's reproductive health was not of the same importance as men's during this period.

To place venereal disease in the context of American society and culture during World War II, it is important to look at the history of the disease and how it manifested into a disease socially constructed around women. The history of the poster, itself, illustrates how poster images easily reiterated the sentiments of the social constructions around the disease. Furthermore, placing the creation of the Women's Army Corps in context of the social climate surrounding venereal disease during World War II highlights the absence of women in the Armed Forces from venereal disease posters.

Methodology

Initially, I became interested in the sexuality of Army soldiers in the United States, and narrowed my focus to the World War II era and sexually transmitted diseases. I chose to assess poster imagery because, when it is used for sex education, it has a broad audience base that does not focus on a single class, economic background, or gender. Poster media was heavily used for World War II propaganda in the United States. First used in war efforts during the First World War, it gained popularity during the Second World War under the Office of War Information. Posters were not only relatively inexpensive to produce, but they were able to attract the attention of the general population because of their simplicity and directness. Venereal disease posters are far more prolific than the sexual health training films and pamphlets produced by the Armed Forces, and thus offer a wider range of angles to be studied.

However, upon preliminarily viewing venereal disease posters dating from the World War II era in the University of Minnesota's collection, I began to notice some common threads: women were very rarely pictured in American-produced venereal disease posters, the women were never the intended audience of American-produced venereal disease posters, and, while all World War II venereal disease posters had an intended audience of members of the Armed Forces, women serving in the Armed Forces were also absent. It was then that I decided to focus my research on how civilian women and women serving in the Armed Forces were portrayed in venereal disease posters from the World War II era in conjunction with how men were portrayed.

This paper focuses on venereal disease posters from the World War II era. The venereal disease posters used for this study are all housed in the University of Minnesota's electronic database of World War I and World War II posters and postcards entitled "A Summons to

Comradeship.” This particular collection was chosen because it is readily accessible and because it houses such a vast collection of posters from the World War II era including a large number that specifically address sexually transmitted diseases. The collection houses ninety-four posters from the World War II era that fall under the heading of “sexually transmitted diseases,” and of those ninety-four posters, only thirteen American-printed posters depict women. To be included in the study, the poster had to, in some way, mention venereal disease, “VD,” syphilis, gonorrhea, or any of the other three venereal diseases (syphilis and gonorrhea were the only venereal diseases singled out). The poster also had to include the likeness of a woman and fall within the chronological period of 1939-1945.

For the purpose of the paper, the World War II era in the United States is defined as 1939 through 1945. The majority of the posters assessed were, interestingly, products of only two years during this defined period: 1940 and 1944. The reasons why these years are the most represented in the collection are unclear. The posters created in the later year, 1944, were overwhelmingly produced by various military training commands in the Southeastern region of the United States, whereas those produced in 1940 were often printed and distributed by the American Social Health Association.

In addition to analyzing posters that met my criteria to be included in the study, I also took into account venereal disease posters that did not fit the criteria. Most of these posters had an intended serviceman audience, but did not portray women. This allowed me to determine the overall message producers of sexual education material attempted to disseminate over the course of the World War II era.

Other educational material is included in my analysis, such as declassified War Department training films, cartoons, and field manuals. These materials allowed me to place the posters in context with other educational material distributed amongst the Armed Forces. I also studied declassified War Department reviews and reports from the same time period available through the U.S. Army Heritage Collection. These reports and reviews were all published by the War Department, not an individual branch of the military services.

However, it became impossible to classify posters as produced and used only for the education of the Army. Some posters in the designated group pictured not only soldiers, but also pilots and sailors. Others pictured men in uniforms that did not distinguish between any of the services (for example, in several training command posters, the servicemen are pictured wearing jump suits). Also, because many training films, cartoons, field manuals, reports, and reviews were published under the War Department, it is impossible to determine whether they were intended or used by all branches of the military.

Because I wished to determine why women serving the United States in the Armed Forces were absent from venereal disease poster artwork, I found it necessary to research the measures taken to educate women service members about venereal diseases. To research each military branch's individual women's corps would have become unmanageable, so I chose to focus solely on the Women's Army Corps (WAC). By focusing on the WAC, I was able to remain close to my original interest in studying the Army. The major problem I ran into in studying the WAC was that I was unable to find an abundance of declassified reports and reviews of the WAC that included information about venereal disease education, treatment, or policy. However, an extensive declassified report focusing on the WAC in the European Theatre of World War II was available and described policy pertaining to venereal disease treatment and

education in the Women's Army Corps. However, while the lack of information about policy on the home front and in the Pacific Theatre of the war is very limiting, the information published in the European Theater report is sufficient to indicate why women serving in the WAC would not be included in venereal disease educational material.

American Studies as a discipline lacks scholarship focusing on the United States military, itself. The American Studies journal, *American Quarterly*, includes only a handful of articles that mention the military, and even fewer in which the military itself is the primary topic. Sexuality of and/or in the United States military, on the other hand, is entirely absent from *American Quarterly*. Fields relating to American Studies, in contrast, have produced scholarship on similar topics. Historians of sexuality and feminism, as well as women's studies writers, have made connections between venereal disease posters during the time period and blatant sexual double-standards in terms of sexuality. However, these writers tend to focus on the women, using poster artwork to support their claims rather than focusing on the posters themselves. The Women's Army Corps has also been the focus of much historical and women's studies works, and the sexuality of the women who joined the corps has been discussed within those works. Yet, the absence of those women from venereal disease and sexual hygiene discussions has yet to be commented on. Sociological studies have also followed the double standards of women's sexuality during this time, focusing on criminal behavior and social deviance in female populations during the Second World War. And the health science fields produced many publications during the World War II era (1939 to 1945), discussing the ability of venereal diseases to spread through female populations, namely prostitutes and "loose" women. American Studies scholar Christina S. Jarvis's recent publication, *The Male Body at War: American*

*Masculinity During World War II*¹, for example, uses images to substantiate claims about body image and masculinity. This study is perhaps the closest example of the type of study I aim to create.

American Studies is severely lacking in scholarship pertaining to military culture. Academic fields related to the American Studies field have commented heavily on the military, but have yet to do so with an interdisciplinary lens. Scholarship focusing on the U.S. Armed Forces in the American Studies field tends to describe the military as a hegemonic force used as a tool to control populations, rather than a population having a culture of its own. The sexuality of that culture during the World War II era is illustrated in venereal disease posters from that time period, and worthy of academic focus.

¹ Christina Jarvis, *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity During World War II* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010).

Literature Review

While an abundance of literature is available about venereal disease, World War II posters, and women serving in the armed forces during the Second World War, research connecting the three is absent. Scholars in fields related to American Studies have connected women to the venereal disease posters during the time, but the primary focus is on sexuality double standards between the sexes. The posters are used as support for the argument; they are not central to the argument itself.

Venereal diseases became a major focus of medical and healthcare professionals after World War I. Extensive research into the causes of venereal diseases was published between the two World Wars, most often in medical and nursing journals, indicating that the diseases were serious health concerns. The two most common venereal disease infections were, and still are, gonorrhea and syphilis; thus they were the main focus of researchers. Of the two, researchers Louis I Dublin and Mary Augusta Clark wrote, shortly after World War I, that syphilis was the more serious, because it is more likely to be fatal.² Gonorrhea, which manifests in a more serious manner in women than it does men, is caused by a microscopic bacterium called gonococcus. The bacterium generally has about a five day incubation period, and manifests in the mucus membranes of the urogenital system. An irritating and contagious discharge forms, which, in men can spread upward, affecting the kidneys, bladder, ureters, and sometimes causing pyelitis. Rarely is the disease fatal, though impotency can be a side effect. In women, complications from the infection can be much more serious. The bacterial infection affects the cervix and, especially in the earlier half of the twentieth century, was the leading cause of “pelvic

² Louis I. Dublin and Mary Augusta Clark, “A Program for the Statistics of Venereal Diseases,” *Public Health Reports (1896-1970)* 36 (December 16, 1921): 3071-3088.

operations.” Women often experienced chills, fever, pain, tenderness, and swelling. Septicemia was often a side-affect if the infection went untreated, and the infection could be passed on to a child during the birthing process when the baby came in contact with the vaginal discharge of the mother. The child’s eyesight could be affected by the bacteria.³ Though not often fatal, the symptoms of gonorrhea affect the ability of the body to be in top form. This becomes especially important when building a fighting force; fighting bodies must be healthy to be ready to fight.

Syphilis has a much longer social history than gonorrhea. First recognized in the fifteenth century, it became a serious epidemic. Like gonorrhea, it is an infectious disease most often passed through sexual intercourse. However, it is possible for a mother to pass the infection on to her child. The organism that causes the infection, the *treponema pallidum*, was first discovered in 1906, and, in 1907, scientists were able to detect syphilis through a blood test. Syphilis progresses naturally through three stages. The first stage is characterized by a small ulcer at the site of infection that appears after about three weeks, which can often go unnoticed. The infection can spread from these sites through an abrasion in the skin or mucous ducts. Marion Potter wrote, in 1930, that often nurses and physicians were infected through cuts in the hands. Potter went on to say that “kissing is dangerous!” because the infection could be passed through sores on the mouth. The second stage of the infection is characterized by headaches, muscular pain, anemia, and weight loss. Hair loss is a typical symptom, as well as pustules. The third stage appears to be the clearing up of the disease, though, in truth, the disease goes dormant while “colonizing” in different parts of the body. The brain can be affected, and at the time of Potter’s article, it was estimated that twenty percent of patients in mental hospitals were there due to syphilis-induced mental conditions. Syphilis also causes deterioration of skin and cartilage, often

³ Marion Craig Potter, “Venereal Diseases: Part II: Gonorrhea,” *The American Journal of Nursing* 30 (March, 1930): 261-265.

outwardly scarring those suffering from the disease. In 1930, it was estimated that about twenty-five thousand people died from syphilis-related illness such as heart and kidney disease, aneurysms, cancers of the mouth, and cirrhosis of the liver.⁴

Widespread venereal disease infections during World War I directly affected the public's view of venereal diseases during the Second World War. Theodore Rosenthal reported in the *American Journal of Nursing's* February of 1944 issue that the highest recorded rate of venereal diseases in the American Armed Forces at the time was lower than the lowest recorded rate of venereal disease in the American military during World War I. Because the Selective Services kept close records of every draftee and volunteer, men aged twenty-one to thirty-five, the military was able to track the rates of the disease among the population that would be fighting the war. Though the highest rate of venereal disease cases was still lower than the lowest rate during World War I, the Selective Services did detect an increase in cases as the war progressed. Other Allied Forces were also reporting increases in syphilis and gonorrhea cases; Great Britain reported that gonorrhea cases had risen between fifty and seventy percent and syphilis cases had increased by one hundred and twenty percent. France recorded five million soldiers with at least one of the two infections.⁵

It is important to note that the rate of infectious diseases of any kind increases during times of war.⁶ During World War I, military hospitals admitted more soldiers for venereal disease than any other disease with the exception of bronchitis, mumps, and tonsillitis. In a 1921 Health Report, Louis I. Dublin and Mary Augusta Clark noted that the majority of the venereal disease cases were seen in enlisted soldiers; commissioned officers were less likely to contract

⁴ Ibid., 155-160.

⁵ Theodore Rosenthal, "Venereal Disease in Wartime," *The American Journal of Nursing* 44 (February, 1944): 104-106.

⁶ Clara E. Councill, "War and Infectious Disease," *Public Health Records (1896-1970)* 56 (March 21, 1941): 547-573.

the infections.⁷ During World War I, thirteen percent of the draftees were infected with either syphilis or gonorrhea, spurring on the most intense “anti-venereal disease campaign in American history.” Although the military did offer programs and campaigns meant to keep soldiers disease-free, the most intense focus was centered on prostitution. Military officials warned men away from prostitutes, and worked with local officials to criminalize prostitutes, thus criminalizing women who had, up until legislation was passed, otherwise been operating under the law. Many cities closed down their red light districts; more than twenty thousand women were quarantined from the rest of society, and others were even incarcerated.⁸ Prostitutes received the brunt of the blame for the spread of venereal diseases, inside the military and out. A 1918 article written by Allan McLaughlin called for a nationwide plan to cut down the venereal diseases found in the general population, not just the military. Though he took a strong stance on the side of education and providing medical clinics, he also called for stricter laws against prostitution.⁹ The Armed Forces took the stance that prostitution was the cause for the spread of disease in troops, not the sexual behaviors of the troops themselves. Allan Brandt argues that the act of making prostitution illegal forfeited many civil liberties for other citizens.¹⁰ By targeting prostitutes as the spreaders of venereal disease, military officials began to propagate the idea that venereal disease was a disease carried by women and inflicted upon men. Brandt’s analysis that civil liberties were forfeited in exchange for criminalizing prostitution in the United States is substantiated by criminal arrest rates of women during World War II. He makes the argument

⁷ Dublin, 3077. It is important to note that Dublin and Clark do not point out that there are far fewer commissioned officers in the U.S. military than are enlisted soldiers, and so, statistically, there would be fewer cases of venereal diseases among them.

⁸ Allan M. Brandt, “The Syphilis Epidemic and its Relation to AIDS,” *Science* 239 (January 22, 1988): 377.

⁹ Allan J. McLaughlin, “A State-Wide Plan for the Prevention of Venereal Disease,” *Public Health Records (1896-1970)* 33 (February 22, 1918): 223-237.

¹⁰ Brandt, 377.

that the reaction to syphilis in women is reminiscent of the public's reaction to AIDS among gay men in the 1980s. In both cases, a minority population was blamed for the spreading of sexually transmitted disease based upon sexuality.¹¹

The policies in the United States during World War I had little effect on the contraction of venereal diseases in the Armed Forces—most U.S. soldiers were shipped to France, where prostitution houses were regulated by the French government. France was unwilling to close down their brothels, leading the Army to officially forbid American soldiers from visiting the French houses. Rather than making latex condoms—which were widely used to prevent the transmission of venereal diseases at the time—available to soldiers, the Army refused to provide condoms for troops because Army officials felt it would encourage soldiers to engage in sexual activities. Instead, the Army offered facilities in which soldiers could be treated after contracting the infections. However, despite these measures, venereal disease rates remained high. The one prevailing difference between World War I venereal disease prevention practice and the practices during World War II is that the War Department provided condoms during World War II.¹²

Between the wars, the League of Nations set up special guidelines to ensure that venereal disease epidemics were not brought from one country to another. Originally, many countries signed agreements that seamen moving from port to port would have to be tested to keep venereal disease from spreading. The United States, because it was not a member of the League of Nations, was not a party to these agreements, though the U.S. did set up a similar requirement for international ships coming in to port.¹³

¹¹ Ibid., 377.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Theodore J. Bauer, "Half a Century of International Control of the Venereal Diseases," *Public Health Reports (1896-1970)* 68 (August, 1953): 779-787.

Prostitution remained at the forefront of venereal disease rhetoric through the World War II era. In “How Fares the Battle Against Prostitution?” a 1942 article in the *Social Science Review*, Jean Pinney argued that prostitution would damage “the health and morale of our armed forces and of workers in industry to an extent affecting the war’s outcome.” It was widely believed and even argued that prostitution and promiscuity were synonymous with venereal disease.¹⁴ In an effort to control and decrease venereal disease rates, the United States War Department worked closely with local governments to control the populations they deemed the most hazardous to the health of their soldiers and sailors: prostitutes.

The military did hold its soldiers somewhat responsible for the spread of venereal disease. Penalties for contracting venereal disease were applied on the basis that “the soldier should not be permitted to render himself unfit for service by activities not connected with military duties.” Soldiers could be court marshaled for not reporting the disease, go with no pay as the disease was treated, and be given an extension of service to make up for the time the soldier was incapacitated.¹⁵ However, servicemen were not criminalized for having the disease or for participating in activities that could improve their chances of contracting the disease. Women were.

The May Act (1941) made not only prostitution, but soliciting sex near a military installation, a federal offense. This act single handedly led to the criminalization and jailing of thousands of women.¹⁶ The May Act was not the first legislation that sought to control the spreading of venereal diseases, however. The 1910 Mann Act prohibited trafficking of women,

¹⁴ Charles P. Taft, “Public Health and the Family in World War II,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 229 (September, 1943): 145-149.

¹⁵ Jean B. Pinney, “How Fares the Battle Against Prostitution?” *The Social Science Review* 16 (June, 1942): 224-246.

¹⁶ Sonya O. Rose, “The Sex Question in Anglo-American Relations in the Second World War,” *The International History Review* 20 (December, 1998): 884-903.

whether that trafficking was interstate or international, for the purpose of prostitution. The Bennet Act similarly called for the deportation of any aliens who entered the United States and engaged in “practices of prostitution.”¹⁷ In 1938, congress passed the National Venereal Disease Control Act, which provided federal funding to hospitals and clinics for the diagnosis and treatment of venereal diseases.¹⁸ But it was the May Act that resulted in the mass quarantine and jailing of women.

The United States War Department quickly found, however, that venereal disease could not be controlled simply by criminalizing the female civilian populations soliciting sex near military installations. As soldiers were deployed to Allied countries such as England, France, and Australia, the U.S. War Department learned that it had no power over local populations outside the borders of the United States. U.S. forces had a hard time enforcing venereal disease preventative measures overseas due to the home country’s laws. In Britain, prophylaxis clinics were not clearly marked for U.S. soldiers stationed in Britain. Also, Britain refused to change laws about prostitution or solicitation—the British felt it was not the place of government to control morality. The U.S. government interpreted this as Britain allowing the “immoral British women [to prey] on American soldiers,” despite being allies.¹⁹

However, although both Britain and the U.S. blamed women for the passing of venereal diseases, the classes of women they blamed were different—United States blamed prostitutes, whereas Britain blamed young women who wanted to have a good time after working long days in the munitions factories and were innocently drawn into having sex. Critics of the May Act did question the definition of “prostitute,” but the U.S. Army contended that prostitutes and the so-

¹⁷ Pinney, 224-246.

¹⁸ Rose, 884-903.

¹⁹ Ibid.. 895.

called “good-time-girls”—girls looking for a bit of fun after a long day’s work—were one in the same. Britain eventually created laws that limited the interactions between American soldiers and British girls, but these laws were generally based on the age of the girl. Australia, on the other hand, came at the situation from a completely different angle. Australians were afraid that their female population would contract venereal disease from General MacArthur’s occupying American force in the South Pacific rather than the women passing the infections off to fighting men. Australia gave police the power to arrest anyone suspected of carrying venereal disease, regardless of nationality or gender.²⁰

Despite focusing on prostitution as the main cause of venereal disease contraction, the United States also targeted “good time girls.” Also called “Khaki-Wackies,” “Good Time Charlottes,” “Victory Girls,” and “Amateurs,” “Good Time Girls” were nothing more than young women looking for adventure and excitement with the financial and social independence they acquired as they moved into the workplace. Emily Yellin, in her book *Our Mother’s War: Americans at Home and on the Front During World War II*, writes that some girls as young as twelve had sex with soldiers—never civilian men—out of a displaced sense of patriotism.²¹ John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freeman argue in *A History of Sexuality in America* that young women began to become more independent and adventurous sexually in the 1920s. The incidence of premarital sex among young women jumped in the 1920s to about 50% and stayed that way through the 1960s. Part of this was due to the emerging college culture that took young people out of their parents’ homes and transplanted them in institutions with high population volumes of others their own age. Co-educational universities especially changed the “heterosexual

²⁰ Marilyn Lake, “The Desire for a Yank: Sexual Relations between Australian Women and American Servicemen during World War II,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2 (April, 1992): 621-633.

²¹ Emily Yellin, *Our Mother’s War: American at Home and on the Front During World War II*, (New York: Free Press, 2005): 316.

socializing” realm. The number of students who attended colleges was still relatively small (thirteen percent of eighteen to twenty-one –year-olds), yet high school offered a similar socializing experience for young people. High school became a “mass experience” with around seventy-five percent of high school-aged youth enrolled. As family cars became more common, young people were able to escape from the watchful eyes of their parents and communities, traveling greater distances for their social gatherings. This not only allowed them a sense of independence from their families, but also allowed them to experiment sexually. Young women did experiment with kissing and petting, but still “restricted coitus to a single partner, the man they expected to marry. ‘Going all the way’ was permissible, but only in the context of love and commitment.”²²

World War II made experimentation for young women all the more easy. Many girls left their rural homes for cities because of opportunities to work in factories for the war effort. This not only displaced them from their families, but allowed them considerable financial independence. D’Emilio and Freedman write that “the war released millions of youth from the social environments that inhibited erotic expression and threw them into circumstances that opened up new sexual possibilities.”²³ These women were most likely in their late teens to early twenties, and many wished to continue helping the war effort by pleasing a member of the Armed Forces.

Because young men had opportunity to experiment with willing women of their own age, background, and social group, the rate of males in their late teens and early twenties visiting prostitutes began to decline. Thus, the rate of prostitution between the two wars was steadily

²² John D. D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988): 256-257.

²³ *Ibid.*, 260.

decreased, a result of the enactment of local laws that rid communities of red light districts. Moral crusaders, D'Emilio and Freeman write, began to shift their attention from prostitution and solicitation to the young and promiscuous.

This shift is illustrated by the work of Darrell Steffenmeier's work in "World War II and Its Effect on the Sex Differential in Arrests: An Empirical Test of the Sex-Role Equality and Crime Proposition." Steffenmeier writes that "as the social roles of the sexes are equalized, sex differences in crime are diminished." In 1940, female arrests were eight-and-a-half percent of all arrests, yet, by 1944, they made up seventeen percent of all arrests. By 1947, they had dropped down to just over ten percent. Some of the data can be attributed to the decreased number of men on the home front during the war period. Changes in law enforcement practice can also be a reason for the growth of female arrests. Prostitution-related arrests for men did increase by nearly twenty-five percent, Steffenmeier found, but men were not as likely to be arrested for sexual deviance because moral codes only condemned women for sexual promiscuity. Females were more likely to be arrested for sex-related behaviors, though these arrests were not always linked to prostitution. Though arrests for prostitution did rise during the World War II era, police became more vigilant of "promiscuous" women, as well, under the guise of protecting soldiers and sailors from venereal diseases. Younger women were more likely to be arrested than those over thirty.²⁴ Arrests for prostitution and/or solicitation only rose by about twenty percent, yet arrests for disorderly conduct rose by over two hundred percent. "Local law enforcement" had to work to "contain the sexual behavior of young women."²⁵ Marilyn E. Hegarty writes that often women were picked up because of mere suspicion that they were engaged in promiscuous

²⁴ Darrell J. Steffensmeier, "World War II and Its Effect on the Sex Differential in Arrests: An Empirical Test of the Sex-Role Equality and Crime Proposition," *The Sociological Quarterly* 21 (Summer, 1980): 403-416.

²⁵ D'Emilio and Friedman, 261.

activity. They were often held without being charged and forced to go through a series of testing and quarantines for venereal diseases.²⁶

Venereal disease posters created during this time period reflected arguments that women were more stigmatized as venereal disease carriers than men, and that they were the prime vectors of such infections. James McNally writes that “poster art had been introduced to an American audience in World War I by the Division of Pictorial Publicity of the United States Committee on Public Information, founded April of 1917.”²⁷ The poster had originally been formed out of the art form lithography when words were added to a work of mass-produced images on paper or cardboard. Jules Cheret, a French lithographer of the nineteenth century, is said to have created the first poster when he added words to his lithographs, though this was an afterthought, write Joseph Ansell and James Thorpe.²⁸ They credit Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Pierre Bonnard with effectively blending the typeface and artwork together to create a unified product.²⁹

Advertising became the most profitable use for posters because they were created to speak to the general public, not to an elite group. This meant that posters were better suited to the general population, most of which would become involved in the war effort. The fighting population was made up of approximately thirteen million men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. Eight-and-a-half percent of the Army and Navy enlisted men were “Negroes.” The national population of African Americans during this period of an age to serve in the military was nine-and-a-half percent. Native Americans were underrepresented in the military, and

²⁶ Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality During World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2008): 106.

²⁷ James McNally, “Poster Art of World War II,” *History and Heritage* (May 18, 2008), accessed June 2010, www.army.mil

²⁸ Joseph Ansell and James Thorpe, “The Poster,” *Art Journal* 44 (Spring, 1984): 7-8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Chinese were overrepresented. When war ended, half of the men who had served were still under the age of twenty-six, forty-two-and-a-half percent were between the ages of twenty-six and thirty-seven, and almost eight percent were thirty-eight or older (after five years of war).

Nationally, only twenty-six percent of total male population was under the age of twenty-six. Of the fighting force, most were unmarried. Three million of the thirteen million men were married, which was roughly twenty-eight percent (the national average was almost sixty percent among those in the age group). In the Army, seventy percent of men were single, twenty-five percent were married, two-and-a-half percent were separated and two-and-a-half percent were divorced. A fraction of a percent of soldiers was widowed.³⁰ WWII servicemen had an education level greater than the national average. Just less than sixty percent had completed at least one year of high school. Over twelve percent had completed at least one year of college. The total male population who had completed some college was the same percentage, but the number of those who had completed at least one year of high school was only forty percent. Army officers had to have completed at least a single year of college. Almost fifty percent had completed more and almost an additional fifteen percent had some graduate schooling.³¹ These were the demographics most World War II posters were pinpointing—the male population of a certain age, with varying degrees of education— especially the posters coming out of the United States Office of War Information.

Posters in the United States for World War II came out of the Graphics Division of the United States Office of War Information, which was formed June, 1942. The Office of War Information was formed out of the Office of Facts and Figures which oversaw all propaganda

³⁰ This was in comparison to the national population in which 38.9% were single, 56.3% married, 2.9% separated, 1.1 divorced, and 0.8% widowed.

³¹ Mapheus Smith, "Populational Characteristics of American Servicemen in World War II," *The Scientific Monthly* 65 (September, 1947): 246-252.

campaigns. American posters relied upon inciting emotions. Darlene Mahaney outlines four types of posters found during this time: those with a patriotic message, sentimental message, humorous/caricature, or negative character.³² “The mission...was to link the battlefield with the home front by using powerful images to call upon all American citizens to take their patriotic place in the defense of our country,” writes James McNally. World War II posters were different from World War I posters in that they used the tools of contemporary advertising.³³ Two factions within the Office of War Information clashed; “those who saw posters as ‘war art’ favored stylized images and symbolism” whereas those who hailed from the advertising world “wanted posters to be more like ads.” Admen eventually gained the upper hand and this made the war poster change.³⁴ Whereas WWI posters had a tradition of creating stories to encourage citizens to enlist, “buy war bonds, increase production, protect important information from foreign spies, conserve resources for the war effort, and keep fighting until the war was won,”³⁵ Roosevelt preferred posters that displayed positive imagery “that involved citizens and personalized their war efforts” rather than posters that inspired fear and hatred for the enemy, like those found in WWI.³⁶ A survey conducted in 1941 concluded that “simplicity and directness” in a poster attract the most attention. People also respond best to posters that show them something new and shocking—World War I posters look very different than the posters being produced at the time of the article describing the survey because new images command more attention.³⁷

³² Darlene C. Mahaney, “Propaganda Posters,” *OAH Magazine of History* 16 (Spring, 2002): 41-46

³³ James McNally, “Poster Art of World War II,” *History and Heritage* (May 18, 2008), accessed June 2010, www.army.mil

³⁴ “War Aims Through Art: The U.S. Office of War Information,” *American History: Smithsonian Institute*, Accessed 9 June, 2010. <http://americanhistory.si.edu>

³⁵ McNally.

³⁶ Terrence H. Witowski, “World War II Poster Campaigns: Preaching Frugality to American Consumers,” *Journal of Advertising* 32 (Spring, 2003): 71.

³⁷ “Posters for Defense,” *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 8 (September, 1941), 6.

Some scholarly work has focused directly on venereal disease posters and how women have been portrayed in them. A few scholarly sources have pointed out that women are portrayed almost as an enemy in venereal disease posters, but, interestingly, the scholars that have made those connections are generally working in the science or medical fields. For example, the National Library of Medicine maintains a website that briefly explains the demonization of women in such posters, but goes into none of the social implications or repercussions of doing so. In her book, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945*, Elizabeth Alice Clement notes that most Americans continued to blame prostitutes for venereal disease cases through World War II, despite the much smaller prostitute populations. While, during World War I, most venereal disease campaigns encouraged both men and women to maintain safe sexual practices, during World War II, she argues, a double standard about sexual practices had reemerged.³⁸ The War Department acknowledged that prostitutes were not the sole source of venereal disease contraction, and acknowledged this by “expanding the category of ‘bad women’ who aided the enemy.” Clement makes her point by referring to several venereal disease posters published at the time, and concluding that the posters “proved” that non-prostitutes were a greater threat than prostitutes.³⁹ The posters, she writes, cast any woman who will sleep with a soldier as a “bad” woman. “This new approach to disease naturalized male sexual desires and cast women in the role of potential seducers, disease carriers, and friends of the enemy,” she concludes.⁴⁰

Allen M. Brandt disagrees with Clement’s assessment that much of the public still placed most of the blame upon prostitutes for the spread of venereal disease. Venereal disease posters,

³⁸ Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love For Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 248.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

he argues, worked to replace the prostitute as the carrier of venereal disease in the mind of the American public. Posters and pamphlets distributed by the War Department, he writes, associate the word “cleanliness” with “chastity” and “impurity” with “disease.” “The word ‘promiscuous’ was firmly anchored to ‘girl’—a promiscuous man, was, by definition, an oxymoron.”⁴¹ He points to posters in which women are portrayed as venereal disease itself, a common practice in venereal disease poster-making during the World War II era. In such posters, the woman is “tagged” as the disease and often compared to Hitler, Mussolini, or Hirohito. Sometimes, as he points out, the woman is linked arm and arm with the Axis leaders and is described as being *worse* than an enemy leader.

Margaret E. Hegarty, author of *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality During World War II*, writes that posters targeting non-prostitute women often cast suspicion upon women who were doing no more than waiting for a bus. She also argues that these posters challenged young men in the military to be sexually active with women they did not know well, because, by doing so, they were living dangerously. She also argues that though the military encouraged men to make smart choices about sexual activity, it also encouraged men to be sexually active because it was a “manly” behavior. She cites Navy Captain Joel T. Boone as saying “that our Armed Forces...must be [sexually aggressive] if they are going to be good soldiers and sailors.” The Captain went on to say, she reports, that if a servicemen were to contract a venereal infection despite all of the advice and training he was put through, the military would not punish him any more than they would punish a man for “having thirst or hunger.” He, Hegarty writes, proves the double standard: a woman’s sexual desire is

⁴¹ Allen M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States since 1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 162-168.

denied and she is punished if it is “recognized.”⁴² The double standard, she points out, saw many young women jailed and quarantined. The soldiers and sailors, on the other hand, were often offered rides back to base when caught in a compromising situation and were rarely charged with any misconduct.⁴³ Hegarty’s book takes on a very feminist approach, showing how women’s sexuality was suppressed socially, culturally, and by the political power structures. She places much of the blame for the reiteration of double standards upon the military itself, but she, like the other cited authors, fails to point out the population *not* depicted in venereal disease posters: women in the Armed Forces.

Perhaps the most influential and widely used literature on the history of sexuality is *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality* by John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freeman. The 1988 publication addresses the history of sexuality in the United States beginning with English settlement in the early seventeenth century. The authors are concerned with how sexuality has been regulated, how sexual meanings have changed and been reshaped, and the politics of sexuality in American culture. D’Emilio and Freeman address the changes in politics and culture that led up to the mass sexualization of young, unmarried women during the World War II era. They argue that advances in technology, such as the automobile, after World War I offered young people greater freedom and independence from parents, and led to increased incidence of sexual activity among young people. They, too, note the double standard between men and women in terms of sexuality, noting that prostitution arrests during the war years rose minimally, whereas arrests of young civilian women for disorderly conduct rose nearly two hundred percent.⁴⁴

⁴² Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality During World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 107-109.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁴⁴ D’Emilio and Friedman, 240-272.

The WAC, which stood for Women's Army Corps, was first founded in May of 1943. It was the first corps of women created, other than the nursing corps, to serve in the United States Army, and, unlike the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs), was actually militarized during World War II.⁴⁵ Leisa D. Meyer writes in her book, *Creating G.I. Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps*, that its creation "crystallized public fear that the mobilization of women for war would undermine the established sex/gender system, and the places of both men and women within it."⁴⁶ It was largely believed that female soldiers were cross-dressers. During World War II, it was alleged that WAC "both attracted and produced mannish women," and that the mannish woman was a cultural symbol of lesbians prior to the war. "During World War II, however, the association of mannish women with the WAC was not focused on the tiny minority of individuals who would assume the identity, but on how the state's encouragement of women to move into a preeminently masculine institution could, in fact, encourage large numbers of women to assume a masculine identity," writes Meyer. Ironically, WAC duties mirrored pre-war sex, race, and class labor forces rather than the wartime labor force (which was flooded with women). Women held positions that were traditionally pre-war female positions and gender-stereotyped jobs so that the masculine power structure was not disrupted.

Also, rather ironically, men holding positions of power within the military wished to see women in the Women's Army Corps, or WACs, perform the same duties male soldiers performed. It was high-ranking women officials that wished to see women in separate jobs and environments especially when it came to public relations and sexual regulations. It was thought that such regulations would protect not only the legitimacy of the Women's Army Corps, but the

⁴⁵ Molly Merryman, *Clipped Wings: The Rise and Fall of the Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II* (New York: NYU Press) 2001.

⁴⁶ Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2.

individual woman, as well. It was the wish of high-ranking women officials in the military to depict WACs as feminine and chaste. The WAC went to great lengths in order to preserve the innocent image they wished to depict. One WAC stationed at Fort Oglethorpe wrote in a letter to her parents that one regulation required them to remove their clothes from drying lines before morning mess. This rule went into effect after male soldiers continually stole WAC underwear from the clotheslines, bragging that they had received the garments under much different circumstances.⁴⁷

Because of the Army's desire to promote the chaste image, women were excluded from receiving the same sexual education men were afforded. In fact, they received none at all. By providing women with birth control information, it was argued, the public would deduce that either the Army was bringing in women to serve as sexual partners for the men or that the Army was encouraging promiscuity.⁴⁸ In an article of the same name published in *Feminist Studies*, Meyer writes that the WAC commanding officer wanted the public to see her girls as not only chaste, but sexless or asexual. She made it clear that WACs could be dismissed from their posts for engaging in any sort of sexual activity, which, I have already shown, was prized in male soldiers.⁴⁹

Meyer is one of the few scholars that uses an interdisciplinary approach when researching women in the Armed Forces. Most writers focus on the history of the women in the primarily male military, especially those writing from an autobiographical perspective. Meyer is also one of the few to draw upon the image of women projected through poster artwork. She makes the argument that WACs were portrayed in juxtaposition between the masculine and feminine ideals

⁴⁷ Aileen Kilgore Henderson, *Stateside Soldier: Life in the Women's Army Corp 1944-1945* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press: 2001), 23.

⁴⁸ Meyer, 33.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 586-587.

of the time; they were always illustrated wearing make-up, but also dressed in uniforms very similar to those of the men.

Mady Weschel Segel has also studied women in the Armed Forces, yet from a sociological perspective. She points out that the roles of women in the military are entirely socially constructed, and her article “Women’s Military Roles Cross-Nationally: Past, Present, and Future” explores why, socially, women’s roles in the military expand and detract. She looks at not only the military and its social structure, but also the culture outside of the military. Though Segel looks at women in the military cross-nationally, she does explore women’s participation in the Armed Forces during World War II. However, though Segel explains why women joined the Armed Forces during World War II, and the forces within American society that made it possible and necessary for women to do so, she does not address how women were portrayed while in the service.⁵⁰

Oscar Torres-Reyna and Robert Y. Shapiro’s article, “Trends: Women and Sexual Orientation in the Military,” is also rather sociological in nature, but delves far less deeply into the social and cultural implications of having women in the Armed Forces. Rather, the article focuses on survey information to illustrate public opinion on allowing women into the military. The article begins with World War II and shows that popular American opinion was, in fact, in favor of allowing women into the military, but only to perform non-combat jobs. This would allow more men to be freed for combat work.⁵¹

While academic literature is available about venereal disease, World War II posters, and women serving in the Armed Forces during the Second World War, research connecting the

⁵⁰ Mady Wechsler Segel, “Women’s Military Roles Cross-Nationally: Past, Present, and Future,” *Gender and Society* 9 (December, 1995): 757-775.

⁵¹ Oscar Torres-Reyna and Robert Y. Shapiro, “Trends: Women and Sexual Orientation in the Military,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 66 (Winter, 2002): 618-632.

three is absent. Scholars of fields related to American Studies have connected women to the venereal disease posters during the time, but the primary focus is on sexuality double standards between the sexes, the posters used as support for the argument, and not central to the argument itself. An interdisciplinary study connecting women, venereal disease, and the military will place these topics well into the American Studies sphere.

Analysis

Venereal Disease posters during the World War II Era, which has been defined as 1939 through 1945, focused heavily on and spoke mainly to men in the armed forces. Most posters depicted a man or men in uniform, if a person was depicted at all, and not only urged men to seek protection from or treatment for venereal disease after sexual relations, but also likened venereal disease to the foreign enemy the U.S. was fighting abroad. The overall message of most of these posters is that by contracting venereal disease, a serviceman is letting down not only his unit, but his country. However, venereal disease posters found in this collection from this era were directed toward men serving in the military. Of the ninety-four posters listed under the sexually transmitted diseases category, only three of the American-created and distributed posters address women. However, thirteen of those posters *depict* women. While the University of Minnesota Library War Library collection of World War I and II Posters and Postcards houses many venereal disease posters that depict women, not all of those posters are American in origin. Many of the posters depicting women in a positive light, for example, as wives and mothers, were actually created and distributed by Great Britain. Instead, the American posters in which women are depicted portray women as an enemy rather than wife and mother.

I. Training Command Posters

Army Air Force training command posters were all very simple sketches. They were signed by the artist, and the acronym of the command, such as G.C.A.A.F.T.C. (Gulf Coast Army Air Force Training Command), A.A.F.S.E.T.C (Army Air Force South East Training

Command), and A.A.F.G.C.T.C. (Army Air Force Gulf Coast Training Command), titled each poster with “Venereal Disease Poster No...” Arthur Henrickson is known to have illustrated “A.A.F.G.C.T.C. Venereal Disease Poster No. 7,” yet the artists of the other training command posters are not listed, though many of the posters are signed, just illegibly so.⁵²

“Venereal Disease Poster No. 17,” distributed by the A.A.F.G.C.T.C, is divided into two scenes. In the top section, five men load an aircraft before takeoff. In an overhead cloud, “In the air, teamwork counts” is scrawled. In the lower half of the poster, two individuals are illustrated. The first, a woman dressed in a mid-thigh length skirt and short-sleeved blouse, leans against a light post with her right shoulder outside the fence of the military installation. She cradles a poster or slip of paper that reads “ok” in her right arm, while her left hand rests upon the curve of her hip. The second figure in that part of the posters is a serviceman in uniform who has just walked past. His head is swiveled behind him to look at the woman. Above him “Don’t be the weak link” is written. The poster is drawn entirely in black and white and the artist signed the piece in the bottom, right-hand corner.⁵³

“Venereal Disease Poster No. 7,” distributed by the G.C.A.A.F.T.C., illustrated by Arthur Henrickson, is also drawn entirely in black and white. Like “Venereal Disease Poster No. 17,” “Venereal Disease Poster No. 7” is broken into two portions. In the top half, an aircraft flies over a body of water. “Bombadiers,” it reads, “If you want to drop bombs to set the rising sun...Don’t be a bum!” Below, in the second half of the poster, a young woman poses against a wall in a very similar manner to the woman posing in “Venereal Disease Poster No. 17.” A piece of paper or poster about the size of a manila folder is pressed to her right side, “ok” written

⁵² Arthur Henrickson, “If you want to drop bombs to the set of the rising sun : don’t be a bum : remember -- 80% of venereal infections were acquired from pickups!: Venereal Disease Poster No. 7/A.A.F.G.C.T.C.” poster, 1944 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota). <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

⁵³ “In the air -- teamwork counts! : don’t be the weak link!: Venereal Disease Poster No. 17/ A.A.F.G.C.T.C.” poster, 1944 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota). <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

across it, and her left hand rests on her hip. She looks to the side toward an oncoming serviceman who wears his dress uniform. To his left is written “Remember--80% of venereal infections were acquired from pick-ups.” Henrickson’s signature is found in the lower left-hand side of the poster.⁵⁴

Another completely black and white poster, “Venereal Disease Poster No. 12,” distributed by the A.A.F.G.C.T.C, is drawn in the same style, however, it is broken up into three separate frames. In the top frame, seven planes fly through the sky. The top, left-hand corner of the poster reads “If you want to slap the Japs!” Thick clouds of black smoke circling from crashing aircraft connect the top frame with a smaller frame in the lower, left-hand side. The two planes spiral downward towards a rocky island. In the third, and final, frame in the bottom right corner, a serviceman looks over his shoulder towards a young blonde woman leaning beside a thick pole. She wears a dress that hits just above the knee, and in her left arm, as in the other training command posters, the woman holds a poster or piece of paper with “ok” written in the top corner. Her right hand rests upon her hip. The poster is signed on the bottom left corner.⁵⁵

A 1944 poster distributed by the A.A.F.S.E.T.C, is the only training command poster in the collection that is not broken into at least two separate frames, though it is similar in that it is drawn entirely in black and white. In the poster, a woman sits cross-legged, her weight shifted to the right of the poster and balanced upon her left arm. Her right hand is held close to her face and a cigarette balances between her fingers. She wears a simple dress and her hair is pulled back in a style representative of the 1940s. The artist was sure to draw in the lines of her stockings, something the other three training command poster women lacked. In large script, the text of the

⁵⁴ Arthur Henrickson, “If you want to drop bombs to the set of the rising sun : don;t be a bum : remember -- 80% of venereal infections were acquired from pickups!: Venereal Disease Poster No. 7/A.A.F.G.C.T.C.” poster, 1944 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota) <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

⁵⁵ “If you want to slap the Japs! : don't take chances without a ‘pro: Venereal Disease Poster No. 12/A.A.F.G.C.T.C.’” poster, 1944 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota). <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

poster reads “You may think she’s your ‘gal’ but she may be everyone’s pal.” In a dark band across the bottom of the poster, “Prophylaxis prevents venereal disease” is written.⁵⁶

An A.A.F.S.E.T.C. poster titled “Men who know say no!” and published in 1944 shows two servicemen walking along a street. They look towards a pair of women standing outside a brick building, smoking. Above the door to the building, there is a room that boasts “rooms.” The title of the poster is scrawled across the entire right-hand side, and at one time, the poster was stamped “restricted,” signifying that the material was for military personnel only.⁵⁷

II. American Social Health Association Posters

A poster distributed by the American Social Health Association, drawn by Clarence Daniel Batchelor, takes a different approach. The poster, which is drawn in blue on a cream-colored background, shows a young woman lounging in an armchair. “Venereal Disease” is written just under the collar of her dress near her left shoulder and above her, three portraits of servicemen hang. One depicts a soldier, another a sailor, and the third a pilot. Across the top of the poster reads “Don’t be HER pin-up boy.”⁵⁸

Another American Social Health Association poster published in 1944 also labels the women illustrated in it. The poster is another two-toned sketch, but this one shows two women. They lean against a wall below a sign that reads “U.S. Navy Yard, U.S. Army Cantonment,” with arrows pointing in the direction of both. The woman on the left stares straight ahead and “gonorrhoea” is printed across the hem of her skirt. Her companion smokes a cigarette and peers

⁵⁶ “You may think she's just your "gal" " she may be everyone's pal: prophylaxis prevents venereal disease: A.A.F.S.E.T.C.” poster, 1944 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota). <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

⁵⁷ “Men who know say no.” A.A.F.S.E.T.C. poster, 1944. <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

⁵⁸ Clarence Daniel Batchelor, “Don’t Be Her Pin-Up Boy.” American Social Health Association, poster, 1940 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota). <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

around the corner of the building towards the military installations. Her skirt reads “syphilis.” The top of the poster reads “Warning: These enemies are still lurking around.”⁵⁹

A 1940 American Social Health Association poster is sketched in the same tradition. In this poster, a soldier stands at base of a long, curving staircase. He is dressed in uniform, and across the bottom of his jacket are the words “The young, the brave, the strong.” A woman stands on the last step above him, leaning over his shoulder. She is dressed in a floor length, formal gown, the words “prostitution” on the skirt. Above her is a speech bubble that reads “Two girls I want you to meet in the worst way.” The other women are descending the stairs about halfway up, however, their faces are drawn to look like skulls. They are dressed formally, much as the young woman leaning over the soldier. The first is labeled as gonorrhoea, the second syphilis.⁶⁰

Another 1940 American Social Health Association poster follows the same informally sketched pattern. In this poster, a woman waits at the corner of a brick building as a sailor approaches. Across the label of her fur stole is written “venereal carrier” and the bottom of the poster simply reads “saboteuse.”

III. Unaffiliated Posters

A full-color poster also published in 1940 is broken up into two frames, much as the training command posters. In the top frame, the portrait of a wholesome-looking young woman looks out towards her audience from the right side of the poster. To the left are three much

⁵⁹ “Warning: These enemies are still lurking around.” American Social Health Association, poster, 1940 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota). <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

⁶⁰ “Two girls I know want to meet you in the worst way.” American Social Health Association, poster, 1940 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota). <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

smaller images of men, their backs to the onlooker, each in uniform. Slanting diagonally between the woman's portrait and the three standing men is written "She may look clean—but." The block letters are all in blue with the exception of "but" which is printed in a bright red. Below, in the second frame, which is a solid blue background, reads "Pick-ups, 'Good Time' Girls, Prostitutes spread syphilis and gonorrhea" in white. Below, red font reads "You can't beat the Axis if you get VD."⁶¹

Another full-color poster shows two soldiers sitting at a table in a bar. The soldier on the right holds a drink in his hand, his elbow leaning against the crimson tablecloth. An ashtray is situated next to his elbow and the rank of private is visible on the shoulder of his uniform jacket. He is turned away from the audience, who gets barely a glimpse of his profile. The audience is given a better look at his companion, who holds a cigarette in one hand and gazes up at a woman leaning over their table provocatively. Her hip is cocked to one side and she looks into the eyes of the second soldier. Her navy blue dress is low-cut and shows off the swells of her breasts. Above her, in white font, is stamped "Booby Trap." Across the bottom of the poster are the words "syphilis and gonorrhea."

"She may be a bag of trouble: syphilis-gonorrhea" is all that is written across one 1940 venereal disease poster. The predominant color of the poster is the red of a coat and matching beret worn by a brunette woman. She is only seen from the shoulder blades up as she looks over her shoulder towards the audience. A cigarette dangles from her brightly painted red lips, and her long, dark lashes shield her eyes from onlookers.⁶²

⁶¹ "She may look clean but... pick ups "good time" girls prostitutes spread syphilis and gonorrhea" poster, 1940 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota). <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

⁶² "She May Be a Bag of Trouble... Syphilis and Gonorrhea" poster, 1940 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota). <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

A poster with a very similarly-illustrated woman asks that readers “learn to protect yourself now” in white. The woman in the posters is shown from the knees up. She stands before a large, blue illustration of the earth, one hand in her hair, the other resting on her cocked hip. She wears a red skirt-suit, white, wrist-length gloves, and a matching red beret on her brunette hair. Across the top of the poster reads “venereal disease covers the earth.”⁶³

⁶³ “Venereal Disease Covers the Earth... Learn to Protect Yourself Now” poster, 1940 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota). <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

Discussion

The series of posters distributed by various Army and Air Force Commands (for example, the Army Air Force Gulf Coast Training Command, or A.A.F.G.C.T.C) encourages servicemen to avoid women in order to ensure the success of the mission. These posters encourage servicemen to avoid social and sexual contact with women in order to preserve the mission, and thus the greater good of the country. These posters suggest that the mission will be in jeopardy if a diseased serviceman is unable to do his part because he has contracted a venereal disease.

Another theme found in posters in the collection insinuates that even the girl a serviceman left at home could be a venereal disease carrier. The wording of those posters works against the visual interpretation. In “She may be your gal,” and “she may look clean...,” the women portrayed show no characteristics of prostitution or promiscuity as women in other posters do. They are not shown waiting on street corners or propositioning young men. Yet, the wording of the posters insinuates that even the cleanest, most wholesome looking of women—even a young woman that is known personally by the serviceman—could be promiscuous, could be a carrier of venereal disease, and could pass infection on, even to someone with whom she has entered a committed relationship.⁶⁴

Some of these posters promoted the idea that venereal disease itself was female. This was evident by the posters that labeled the women depicted as “venereal disease,” “syphilis,” and “gonorrhoea.” By labeling women as such diseases, the creator of the poster goes one step further

⁶⁴ “She may look clean but... pick ups "good time" girls prostitutes spread syphilis and gonorrhoea” poster, 1940 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota). <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>; “You may think she's just your "gal" " she may be everyone's pal. : prophylaxis prevents venereal disease: A.A.F.S.E.T.C..” poster, 1944 (University of Minnesota, Minneapolis). <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

in identifying women as the problem. When labeled, men, however, were categorized as young, brave, and strong until they come in contact with females. Contact with the opposite sex then compromised a man's masculinity and weakened him to a state that made him unfit for military service. This rhetoric is especially prominent in venereal disease posters in which women are not present.

Many of the training command posters published and housed in the collection do not depict women at all. In those posters, the importance of health to the mission is the strongest message. In "Venereal Disease Poster No. 11," published by the A.A.F.G.C.T.C. and drawn by Arthur Henrickson in 1944, four men are shown standing shoulder-to-shoulder. Each is labeled with "pilot," "navigator," "bombardier," and "gunner." A plane soars above them and across the top is written "All for one, one for all." Across the bottom of the poster reads "Don't let your team down. Don't let V.D. put you on the sidelines."⁶⁵ An A.A.F.S.E.T.C. poster produces much the same message. The poster shows three men working on a plane. The serviceman closest to the audience is shown only as only a dotted outline, whereas the other two men are fully drawn and shaded in. Across the top of the poster is written "The man who wasn't there," and across the bottom reads "He let his buddies down by getting a venereal disease." "Prophylaxis prevents venereal disease" is written in subtext.⁶⁶ While this is a common thread throughout most of the venereal disease posters, it is not the only one. Often, posters also likened catching venereal disease to working for the enemy. Hitler is portrayed in more than one poster pinning a medal of honor on the lapel of an American soldier.⁶⁷ In one poster released in 1944, a bank check from

⁶⁵ Arthur Henrickson, "Venereal Disease Poster No. 11" A.A.F.G.C.T.C. poster. 1944.

⁶⁶ "The Man Who Wasn't There: he let his buddies down by getting a venereal disease: prophylaxis prevents venereal disease." A.A.F.S.E.T.C. poster. 1944.

⁶⁷ "Infamous honor for distinguished service to the Reich!: Venereal Disease Poster Number 6" poster, 1944 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota). <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

the United States government is pictured, signed to Hirohito, Mussolini, and Hitler for the “equivalent of 4794 lost days” of service due to venereal disease.⁶⁸

These posters point to women as the primary carriers of sexually-transmitted disease, the aggressors, and even the enemy. The women depicted in these posters are purposefully seeking out “young, brave, strong” servicemen to infect in order to sabotage the war effort. In none of the ninety-four posters in the collection is a man pictured as the one purposefully sabotaging the mission of the United States military. Not one of the posters illustrates a serviceman standing on a street corner or near a military installation waiting for a woman to pass by that he can “pick up.” Instead, the women are portrayed as the sexual aggressors seeking out the men. The posters produced by the Army Air Force Gulf Coast Training Command are prime examples of this. In each, a young woman waits outside a military installation as servicemen pass by. Men, on the other hand, are merely portrayed as the casualties of sexually transmitted diseases, even though their actions were careless. Women, in contrast, are not charged with carelessness, but, rather, intentional sabotage.

Five of the venereal disease posters found in the “A Summons to Comradeship” collection make use of color, most notably red, white, and blue. Venereal disease posters depicting women in which color is used, use that color as a form of rhetoric. The strong use of these three colors in the posters that include color could point towards a theme of patriotism. However, these posters could also have also been illustrated in an attempt conjure up other well-recognized color associations. In two of the three posters in which color is used, red is worn by the women. The poster “she may look clean,” shows only a white collar and no other garment, and “Booby Trap” pictures a woman wearing blue. Red is commonly associated with

⁶⁸ “Adolph, Musso, and Hiroshito: Venereal Disease Poster No. 10/A.A.F.G.C.T.C.” poster, 1944 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota). <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

promiscuity and prostitution in western society, thus labeling the women wearing red in the posters as either promiscuous, prostitutes, or, perhaps, both.

The venereal disease posters in the “A Summons to Comradeship Collection” may not hold a complete repertoire of World War II venereal disease posters created between 1939 and 1940, however, those that are housed in the collection share some very common themes. The posters do inform the observer of some very important sexual health issues and risks, and their intent was to protect the health and well-being of United States servicemen. In each poster, the woman or women pictured is illustrated to have one goal in mind: to have sex with a serviceman. The combination of text and artwork informs the audience that women, whether prostitutes, promiscuous civilian women, or girlfriends, are sexual beings. Any other identity those women may assume—factory worker, neighbor, student, mother—is irrelevant to the audience. Though the posters’ intended message is to keep servicemen safe from disease, the underlying message is that women not only carry venereal disease, but women are actively looking for a sexual partner to whom they can pass that disease. The portrayal of women in these posters as enemies, as primary carriers, and as “loose” distorts the fact that venereal disease was not disease exclusively transmitted by women. Because blame for venereal disease appears to be placed upon women, men assume less blame for the spread of venereal diseases.

However, what is most interesting about the collection of venereal disease posters is the group that is left out. The collection also houses a number of posters created for the purpose of recruiting women to the armed services, as well. Twenty-eight posters in the collection were created to encourage women to join the armed forces in some capacity or another. Nearly half of those posters—thirteen—were dedicated to recruiting Army nurses. Four call for the enlistment of Navy WAVES, three for the Marine Corps Women’s Reserve, three for the Coast Guard

SPARS, two for the WAC, and an additional three that asked women to enlist in any of the above services. Yet, not one of these groups of women is included in venereal disease posters in the collection.

The absence of women in the armed forces from venereal disease educational information is not unique to posters. Other media used to warn soldiers against venereal disease, such as cartoons and training films, also neglect to educate women of the risks of having unprotected sexual relations. In fact, other forms of venereal disease educational material, such as training manuals, also perpetuate the ideas found in venereal disease posters depicting women: that women are the primary carriers and spreaders, and that men are mere victims of promiscuous women.

Service Information films and comics also encouraged servicemen to avoid women to keep themselves free of venereal diseases. Comics typically reinforced the messages already displayed across World War II venereal disease posters. In a 1944 comic strip distributed by the U.S. Navy, two sailors travel from Australia to Italy to France. One sailor samples the female fare in each country and returns home suffering from venereal disease. The other, on the other hand, waits to return home before socializing with any women, insinuating that American women are the safest in the world.⁶⁹ (Fig. 14) Another, titled “Let There be Light,” ends when a young sailor learns the woman he just slept with carried venereal disease. He is then relegated to the ship and is unable to leave.⁷⁰ (Fig. 15)

A 1944 propaganda film created by the U.S. Public Health Service warns servicemen against venereal disease by playing on the theme of patriotism. The film opens with a bomber

⁶⁹ “There’s No Place...” United States Navy, comic strip, 1944 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota). <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

⁷⁰ “Let there be light.” United States Navy, comic strip, 1944 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota). <http://digital.lib.umn.edu/warposters/>

crew discussing the fact that they will be unable to fly with the other planes due to their pilot “[picking] up some germ.” The other flight crews lament about all the hard work that was wasted getting the bomber ready for the mission and want to know what “germ” could “knock out a flying fortress.” The other bombers take off into the sky, leaving the pilot-less plane on the runway. The rest of the film informs watchers about how venereal diseases can be treated and avoided, and how venereal disease affects the war effort.⁷¹ War Department Training Film No. 8-1238 opens up with “If our country is to successfully defend our right to live the American way, it needs every one of you, and requires you in best possible condition. Any soldier who...fails to maintain his body in this condition is a ‘shirker’ who is throwing an extra burden on his comrades by requiring them to do his work as well as their own.”⁷²

The declassified 1945 War Department Field Manual 21-10 entitled *Military Sanitation* explains the War Department’s stance on venereal disease education. The unit command was placed entirely in charge of controlling venereal disease among troops, and the command was required to initiate and maintain a program for venereal disease education. However, the individual soldier was “responsible for carrying out measures designed to protect his own health and in turn that of his unit.” The War Department maintained that “the venereal disease rate of a unit is therefore a fair index of its discipline, training, and administration.”⁷³

Five venereal diseases were recognized: gonorrhea, syphilis, chancroid, lymphogranuloma, and granuloma inguinale; however, syphilis and gonorrhea were of the highest concern to the military. The manual reads that ““With rare exceptions, all of these diseases are acquired through sexual intercourse. The number of cases of venereal disease in any unit depends on two factors: the number of sex contacts with infected women and the number of

⁷¹ Edmund L. Hartmann, “To The People of the United States.” United State Public Health Service, film, 1944.

⁷² “Official Training Film No. 8-1238.” War Department, film, 1943

⁷³ War Department, *FM 21-10: Military Sanitation* (July, 1945), 22.

exposures that are unprotected by adequate prophylaxis.” The armed forces sought to cut down on venereal disease rates by asking soldier to avoid “promiscuous sexual intercourse altogether. Avoidance of sex relations is not harmful to the soldier’s health or well-being,” it continued.⁷⁴

Officers were assigned the task of reducing the rate of venereal disease within their units by seeking to decrease the opportunities soldiers could be exposed to situations in which sexual relations could result. Among the suggestions were: to offer activities on the military post or facility “such as athletics and wholesome recreation of other kinds;” limiting the ability of prostitutes to have access to soldiers by collaborating with local law enforcement; and making prostitution establishments “off-limit” areas. The War Department also recommended that the unit have a prophylaxis program, which was to include: mechanical prophylaxis (condoms—provided free through medical supply units or purchased at the exchange), chemical prophylaxis (drugs for destroying venereal diseases). Medications were available in “PRO-KITs”, provided at prophylaxis stations or free through medical supply units, and stocked at the exchange), reduction of sources of infection (information about where and how diseases can be picked was to be distributed to soldiers), and encouragement for civilian health and facilities to treat and quarantine girls who carry the diseases.⁷⁵

The manual also calls for a single officer in a unit to be put in charge of venereal disease education, monitoring, and control. The officer serving in that capacity was faced with the task of analyzing rates of venereal diseases, determining areas in which servicemen were most likely to contract the infections, supervising the detection and treatment of venereal disease cases within a unit, and promoting an adequate education program, which was to include the cooperation of non-commissioned offices within the unit. The manual expressly mentions that

⁷⁴ War Department, 22-23.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 22-25

training films, cartoons, and charts should be used when educating servicemen about venereal disease, and posters should be used as “reminders.”⁷⁶

And, despite the amount of emphasis placed upon the well-being of the unit to ensure the success of the mission—which is found in the materials suggested by the War Department for the education of servicemen on the subject of venereal disease—there was very little risk of punishment for participating in promiscuous behavior and contracting a venereal infection. The training manual reads that “no disciplinary action is authorized for failure to take a prophylaxis or for having contracted a venereal disease.” However, a commander did have the authority to court martial a serviceman who was aware of or suspected he carried a case of venereal disease and did not seek treatment.⁷⁷

The absence of women in the armed forces in posters, training films, and comics is startling because they are as much a part of the military as the men. Though the contribution made by women was much smaller due to the sheer number of men serving in comparison, they did act in a capacity that affected the war effort. If men being unable to fulfill their duty could be seen as helpful or supportive of the enemy, as argued in many venereal disease posters, the same should be true of women with venereal disease. Nonetheless, women’s sexual and reproductive health appears—through absence—to be of little consequence.

The Women’s Army Corps’s absence is particularly noticeable because the Army kept records that pertained to the sexual health of women serving in their branch of the War Department. The Women’s Army Corps (WAC), which was originally the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). The WAAC was formed in July of 1942, but was renamed in September, 1943. At the time, the corps boasted 55,200 personnel, but with the reorganization,

⁷⁶ Ibid., 26

⁷⁷ Ibid., 27

only 41,177 reenlisted to continue their duty—the remaining 14,023 returned to the civilian sector. The peak of WAC enlistment came in 1945, when the corps boasted 99,288 women. 5,746 of those women served as commissioned officers and warrant officers. Most of the corps remained stateside, however, some eighteen percent of the corps served overseas, mostly in Europe.⁷⁸

The Reports of the General Board released three reports of the Women's Army Corps operations in the European theatre over the course of their existence. All three volumes report on the number of cases of venereal disease in Europe, as well as outline procedure for the treatment of venereal disease infections, as well as the measures taken to protect women serving with the Army and Army Air Force.

According to the first volume of the report, WAC orientation included a “medical lecture” that was given to WAC personnel only. The lecture covered health problems, preventions, and a “discussion of venereal disease.”⁷⁹ The details of the discussion were not disclosed in the report, but documentation found in the second volume would indicate that the discussion was very limited. *Circular 172, 2 May 1944, Section IV*, written by Ann W. Wilson, LT-Col, WAC, the WAC staff director, reads:

“It is contrary to War Department Policy either to provide instruction in venereal disease prophylaxis for female personnel of the Army of the United States or to issue venereal disease prophylaxis materials to such personnel. The provisions of the Army regulations and directives concerning these matters are intended for male personnel only, and are not applicable to female personnel.”

⁷⁸ Headquarters, Army Service Forces, Statistics Branch, Control Division, *Statistical Review of World War II: A Summary of ASF Activities*, War Department (1946), 60.

⁷⁹ United States Forces, European Theatre, *Report of the General Board, No. 11, Vol. III: Study of Women's Army Corps in the European Theater of Operations*, War Department (1943), 36.

The circular goes on to read that “In presentation of instructions...questions may arise in regard to venereal disease prophylaxis since it is related to the general subject of sex hygiene. Such questions should be appropriately handled but should not be included as part of planned lectures.”⁸⁰

However, venereal disease cases among WACs, according to these reports, were relatively rare. The General Board reports that venereal disease among the female Army personnel serving in Europe was “conspicuous by its almost total absence.” By June 1944, the rate was only 2.92 cases per thousand personnel, and the rate several months following June 1944 was slightly lower.⁸¹ Rates did vary significantly between different areas of the theatre, with London reporting the highest rate of venereal disease cases for American female service members. Between January and July of 1944, the rate of venereal disease in WAC serving in London was 4.08 per 1000 personnel. The rate for the entire theater was 26.5 cases per 1000 personnel, male and female, for the same time period.⁸²

Yet, European Theatre commanders for the Army were alarmed by the rate of venereal disease in women personnel in London when, in 1944, two cases of venereal disease among the WAC were reported in the same week. Two cases in a single week made the rate of contraction among men appear much higher than in women, statistically. However, WAC commanders reported that one of the two cases occurred three weeks after the WAC member married a male soldier also serving in the area—insinuating that their personnel member was only infected because of her husband—and the other case was a recurring condition that had been in existence prior to the WAC member’s enlistment.⁸³

⁸⁰ *Report of the General Board, No.11, Vol. III, Figure 55, 2.*

⁸¹ *Report of the General Board, No.11, Vol. II, Figure 121, 5.*

⁸² *Report of the General Board, No.11, Vol. III, Figure 118.*

⁸³ *Ibid., Figure 114, 4.*

Treatment for venereal disease in women was strictly confined to a hospital setting.⁸⁴ All WAC venereal disease cases were treated in a military hospital as an in-patient status. Cases that were not able to be treated adequately at European Theater military hospitals were sent back to the United States unless specifically authorized by the Theater Chief Surgeon.⁸⁵ Captain Loizeaux wrote in a directorate titled “Policy on Disposition of Cases of Venereal Disease in WAC”, dated 24 February, 1944, that:

“Members of WAC who contract venereal disease will be treated primarily in hospital.

This policy differs from that of men in that gonorrhoea in women is treated in hospital and not in a dispensary and not on a duty status. Gonorrhoea in women is not a simple disease and is usually a gynecological problem. It is also unwise to allow such a case to remain in billet where isolation is impossible. It is felt that this policy can be carried out through the professional discretion of the unit medical offices...”⁸⁶

The Report found that “[Venereal disease]... has not proved to be a major problem when the overall picture is viewed... The attitude has always been, in this office, that any individual case of venereal disease in the female is a problem in itself.”

⁸⁴, *Report of the General Board, No.11, Vol. III*, Figure 115, 3.

⁸⁵ *Report of the General Board, No.11, Vol. I*, 121.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

Conclusion

Venereal disease posters in the University of Minnesota collection illustrate a concern for the sexual health and well-being of only the male serviceman. This was a natural concern of the Armed Forces, as only men were allowed to serve in combat positions. To make this point, women in such posters are often demonized and characterized as promiscuous, whether they are illustrated as prostitutes or not. Though it would seem natural to educate the female population about venereal diseases and reproductive health as a means to reduce the amount of exposure the male fighting force would receive, the Armed Forces did not take such an approach.

Though the War Department did not forbid men from participating in sexual activities with the opposite sex and actively supported means of protection and prevention from venereal diseases, many of the posters depicting women sought to dissuade servicemen from entering into sexual activity with women at all. The importance of the mission was seen to be endangered due to the possibility of soldiers being unable to fight if they contracted venereal disease.

The absence of venereal disease posters aimed at a female audience does not necessarily imply that the venereal health of women in the armed forces was unimportant or absent from War Department discussion. This becomes apparent if the declassified documents found in the three volumes of the Report of the General's Board are studied. Though the focus of the documents was on the European Theater, which included less than twenty percent of the total WAC numbers at any given time, the documents did speak to the rules and regulations placed on women when venereal disease was concerned. However, venereal disease education for women was undoubtedly a low priority. A combination of a small female population in the Women's Army Corps and a low percentage of venereal disease cases among those women made sexual education unnecessary. War Department policy, according to the declassified information

included in the General Board reports, forbade the teaching of venereal disease prevention and protection to women. The Army took venereal disease in women very seriously—this is evident in the policy requiring all WAC venereal disease cases to be treated in hospital, only—though educational material and lectures were absent.

Venereal disease posters were created with the express purpose of being “reminders” and supplemental material for the venereal disease education soldiers had already undergone, as was outlined in *FM 21-10: Military Sanitation*. As members of the WAC were not afforded venereal disease education, there was no need to produce supplemental educational tools directed towards a female audience.

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