

## The Important but Ignored Legacy of Teenage Girls in Canada, 1950s to 1970s

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Historians have generally overlooked the phenomenon of teenage girls, as many young women are perceived as a personification of the stereotype that they represent. The teenager was culturally defined in the early twentieth century, and since its emergence, teenage girls have struggled to balance external opinions that perceived them as children, sexual beings, adolescents, or young adults. In the decades that followed World War II, youth culture in Canada went through radical changes as adolescents began to establish their role as teenagers in society. As adolescents struggled to define a demographic somewhere between child and grown-up, adults continuously misunderstood teenage culture and often attempted to stifle acts perceived as teenage rebellion. This paper argues that despite this, teenagers in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s increasingly became legitimate actors in society with political and societal influence, even if adult society was quick to dismiss and deny that teenagers could act as autonomous forces. This essay will first illustrate the cultural evolution that allowed adolescents to redefine themselves as teenagers with a distinct and separate experience from adults, and how their purchasing power cemented their influence in the Canadian economy. Subsequently, it will examine how teenage girls' actions were seen as apolitical as both their age and gender made their activism and conscious influence dismissible in society. Lastly, explores the activism of adolescent feminists to further prove that teenage girls intentionally changed the cultural and political worlds in Canada, but their impact was largely ignored because of the societal exclusion of both teenagers and women as important and conscious change-making actors.

At the turn of the century, new social sciences, with support from medical theorists, proclaimed that adolescence was a unique and unchangeable phase in human growth triggered by the onset of puberty. This unalterable phase was perceived as a scientific 'fact' that everyone endured.<sup>1</sup> In 1964, Jack Batten wrote an article for *Maclean's* magazine titled "The Invention of the Teenager" in which he detailed his experience as a teenager in the 1940s. With the

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<sup>1</sup> Doug Owram, "The Fifties and the Cult of the Teenager," in *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 138-9.

foresight of the future in his favour, he explained how adolescents in the 1940s defined their role in society as teenagers and dropped the pretence that they were simply young people.<sup>2</sup> Although this may seem like a simple change in linguistics, it defined an entire demographic as more than a sub-group of adults and allowed them to create a unique identity for themselves. They created a new cultural and political space. Thus, the 1940s saw the first generation of teenagers define their own unique culture through fashion, music, and heroes that were separate from their parents.<sup>3</sup>

The growth of this emerging culture was limited by the availability of technology, as most families only had one radio. In the 1940s, manufacturing had not yet caught up to the new culture of the teenager, and the commodities that came to define youth culture were not yet produced on a large enough scale to be marketed for them.<sup>4</sup> This continued to limit the growth of teenage culture into the next decade. In 1953, less than a quarter of Canadian households had more than one radio in their home, so young people's access to music was typically defined by what their parents chose to play.<sup>5</sup> Some contemporary scholars have argued that teenage popular culture, specifically music for teenagers, did not emerge until radios and other entertainment technology became more affordable since that allowed radios to relocate from the public living room to the private bedrooms of teenagers.<sup>6</sup> Doug Owrarn stated in "The Fifties: the Cult of the Teenager," that while individual artists like Frank Sinatra were able to gather a teenage audience, their singing and music did not distinguish them from the music produced by artists appealing to adults. Therefore, he concluded, there was no 'teenage' music in the 1950s.<sup>7</sup> This contrasts with Batten's assessment of Sinatra: "the significance of Sinatra was that teenagers had noisily elected a hero for themselves."<sup>8</sup> Batten was correct in his assumption that Sinatra was one of the first and, therefore, most impactful teenage heroes, but his music was not meant to appeal solely to young people. Since most families shared a radio, Owrarn was correct in asserting that Sinatra's music was not made solely for the ears of teenagers; that genre did not exist yet.

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<sup>2</sup> Jack Batten, "The Invention of the Teenager," *Maclean's*, September 5, 1964.

<sup>3</sup> Batten, "The Invention of the Teenager."

<sup>4</sup> Owrarn, "The Fifties and the Cult of the Teenager," 145.

<sup>5</sup> Owrarn, "The Fifties and the Cult of the Teenager," 153.

<sup>6</sup> Owrarn, "The Fifties and the Cult of the Teenager," 154.

<sup>7</sup> Owrarn, "The Fifties and the Cult of the Teenager," 153.

<sup>8</sup> Batten, "The Invention of the Teenager."

Although Sinatra's music could not be classified as teenage music, he still acted as a hero for teenagers and contributed to their culture. According to Batten, "the date when North American parents first realized that their adolescent children had acquired a separate identity was December 31, 1942:"<sup>9</sup> the night that teenage girls swooned for the first time in history after hearing Frank Sinatra sing at the Paramount Theatre in New York.<sup>10</sup> Clearly, Sinatra had a massive impact on Batten as he remembered this moment decades later. Sinatra had the same effect on many other teenagers, and his role as an adolescent hero came to serve as a defining feature for the generation. He was an icon that teenagers had selected for themselves. More incredible still was that teenagers comprised a significant portion of his fan base and therefore were imperative to his success. Teenage girls founded the teenage icon and elected Frank Sinatra as their first hero. By creating this shared concept, they diversified teenage culture from that of adults and established an essential part of their shared experience that was not present in adult culture.

In 1957, Paul Anka began capturing the hearts of teenage girls across North America. At fifteen years old, Anka became the first Canadian heartthrob with his number one hit "Diana": "fresh from an Ottawa classroom. Paul Anka brashly offered 'Diana' to New York record makers and said he'd sing it himself...Less than a year later, he's grossed \$100,000 and has fan clubs he hasn't even counted."<sup>11</sup> Anka's fans, who were almost exclusively teenage girls, made him a popular sensation almost overnight. "Diana" sold one million records in September 1957, only three months after radio stations played the song. Less than a month later, another million records had already been sold.<sup>12</sup> By 1958, Paul Anka had about fifty registered fan clubs and was performing in rock and roll shows attended by tens of thousands of fans every night.<sup>13</sup> Chapter twenty-six of the Paul Anka Fan Club of Ottawa boasted an impressive 293 members. The dedication of his fans propelled him to life-long fame and altered the future of music. Paul Anka was able to connect with his fans in a way that Frank Sinatra could not. Anka's rock and roll music was written by a teenager, for teenagers; Anka's music was teenage music. It did not attempt to appeal to both adult and adolescent audiences but instead represented teenage society in all of its uniqueness.

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<sup>9</sup> Batten, "The Invention of the Teenager."

<sup>10</sup> Batten, "The Invention of the Teenager."

<sup>11</sup> Paul A Gardner, "What It Takes to Crash Tin Pan Alley at Fifteen," January 4 1958, (Maclean's).

<sup>12</sup> Gardner, "What It Takes to Crash Tin Pan Alley at Fifteen."

<sup>13</sup> Gardner, "What It Takes to Crash Tin Pan Alley at Fifteen."

The emergence of rock and roll in the mid-1950s marked a genre of music that was made exclusively for teenagers. In 1956, Bill Haley and His Comets performed a rock and roll show at Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto that was attended by 12,000 people, most of whom were teenagers.<sup>14</sup> Since rock and roll was enjoyed primarily by teens and concerts were almost exclusively made up of adolescents, its events allowed teenagers to gather without adult supervision. Rock and roll concerts gave young people the freedom to define their unique culture and temporarily free themselves from the confines of adult society. This likely contributed to rock and roll's immense popularity among adolescents. On September 9, 1956, Elvis Presley famously performed for an audience of about sixty million viewers on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. His performance brought in the largest television audience ever at the time and streamlined his status as a rock and roll celebrity.<sup>15</sup> Canadian teenagers could not get enough of Elvis, and in the same year, his hit record "Hound Dog" sold 200,000 copies in Canada.<sup>16</sup> In 1957, Elvis toured parts of Canada for the first and only time. His shows were "an opportunity for adolescents to engage in a shared episode of emotional release and expression."<sup>17</sup> These shows were essential for teenage girls because emotional outbursts or expressions of passionate emotions were seen as sexual delinquency.<sup>18</sup> However, Elvis' concerts faced heavy criticism from the adult community—not because of the rock and roll but because of the effects that rock and roll seemed to have on Canada's daughters.

Adults perceived the music monopolizing their teenagers' bedrooms to be "dangerous to the adolescent mind."<sup>19</sup> The lyrics were morally questionable and promoted social disruption.<sup>20</sup> The media's depictions of rock and roll icons, such as Elvis, and rock and roll concerts contributed to parents' fears because they focused on how the genre defied societal norms.<sup>21</sup> Elvis' image emulated teenage angst, but it also represented teenage girls' sexuality.<sup>22</sup> His hips and promiscuous dancing were widely criticized by adults who said that he was corrupting young girls' innocence.<sup>23</sup> Doug Owram found that "adult authority condemned the

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<sup>14</sup> Ryan Edwardson, "Lonely Boys and Wild Girls: Rock and Roll in Canada in the 1950s," in *Canuck Rock: A History of Canadian Popular Music* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 35.

<sup>15</sup> Edwardson, "Lonely Boys and Wild Girls," 37.

<sup>16</sup> Owram, "The Fifties and the Cult of the Teenager," 156.

<sup>17</sup> Edwardson, "Lonely Boys and Wild Girls," 38.

<sup>18</sup> Kate Harper, "A Pretty Girl of Sixteen," *Girlhood Studies* 4, no. 1 (2011), 35.

<sup>19</sup> Edwardson, "Lonely Boys and Wild Girls," 34.

<sup>20</sup> Edwardson, "Lonely Boys and Wild Girls," 33.

<sup>21</sup> Edwardson, "Lonely Boys and Wild Girls," 40.

<sup>22</sup> Owram, "The Fifties and the Cult of the Teenager," 146.

<sup>23</sup> Owram, "The Fifties and the Cult of the Teenager," 152.

new music,” as everyone from psychologists to religious leaders found ways to explain how rock and roll music was corrupting teenagers.<sup>24</sup> In Elvis’ 1957 tour, the city of Montreal went as far as to cancel a show at the request of the Catholic clergy; Notre Dame Convent in Ottawa banned their students from attending his show in Canada’s capital.<sup>25</sup> The extreme lengths that adults went to shield their youth from Elvis Presley and his corrupting rock and roll prove that adults feared teenagers, particularly teenage girls, attempts to disrupt societal standards and embrace their natural sexual feelings. More importantly, it proves that teenagers’ support of rock and roll effectively changed the Canadian society that adults were attempting to protect.

In September 1957, John Clare’s “The Scramble for the Teenage Dollar” was published in *Maclean’s* magazine, which articulated what many marketers already knew: the teenager had established an important economic space in Canada. Clare put the facts simply: “today’s teenagers are spending their new wealth in a way that makes them important customers.”<sup>26</sup> It is not surprising that the market recognized the growing power of teenage consumers, given the unprecedented size of the baby boom generation. Still, teenagers asserted their dominance as important shoppers when their domestic spending grew to upwards of one hundred million dollars a year in 1957.<sup>27</sup> The demographic that had once been considered a modest market now influenced everything from advertising to the car their parents bought. Their purchasing power was not to be underestimated. One shampoo company found that their sales noticeably increased after they changed their advertising theme to appeal to teenage girls.<sup>28</sup> Advertising agencies started incorporating teenage idols and Hollywood stars into their campaigns to further appeal to new markets. Manufacturers wanted movie and television stars to wear their products on camera, even if they did not get a direct plug, because they knew that this would increase sales among young people.<sup>29</sup>

Celebrities had an enormous impact on where teenagers chose to spend their money. In 1957, the *New York Times* estimated that the sales of non-music Elvis products had reached

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<sup>24</sup> Owram, “The Fifties and the Cult of the Teenager,” 156.

<sup>25</sup> Edwardson, “Lonely Boys and Wild Girls: Rock and Roll in Canada in the 1950s,” 38.

<sup>26</sup> John Clare, “The Scramble for the Teenage Dollar,” *MacLean’s*, September 14, 1957.

<sup>27</sup> Clare, “The Scramble for the Teenage Dollar.”

<sup>28</sup> Clare, “The Scramble for the Teenage Dollar.”

<sup>29</sup> Clare, “The Scramble for the Teenage Dollar.”

approximately twenty million dollars.<sup>30</sup> Here, we can see the legacy of the teenage hero in normative teenage culture. The teenage girls who propelled Frank Sinatra into fame created a space for the commodification of teen celebrities. The people whom they idolized influenced cultural and spending trends. The purchasing power of teenagers, and especially teenage girls, was evident to all Canadian companies.

While the economic power of teenage girls was recognized, this recognition was not extended to the political or societal spheres. Both their age and their gender made them dismissible in Canadian society. Society considered the exit from adolescence as the pass that granted full membership into the adult community.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, teenagers could not be full members of adult society nor access the privileges that came with it. In general, societal perceptions of teenage girls were not positive. In a 1957 *Maclean's* article titled "How to live with a teenage daughter," Robert Thomas (Pops) Allen criticized essentially every aspect of his adolescent daughters' identities:

A teenage daughter is something between a child and a young woman in ten petticoats, bare feet and crooked lipstick. Her main drive in life is to wear spike heels and My Downfall perfume, dress like a \$25,000-a-year fashion model out of Seventeen Magazine, give as much lip as the traffic will bear, stay up till midnight, which she claims every child of normal parents is allowed to do, and avoid all work, which she claims all normal parents do themselves.<sup>32</sup>

He presented teenage girls, the ones he loved no less, as the most vain, selfish, trivial, and dramatic individuals to have ever existed. From his perspective, they contributed nothing to society and asked everything of their parents. Allen's description cast teenage girls as people who did not care about effecting change in their community, engaging in debates beyond the latest trends, or contributing to the world in any way. Simply put, they were a burden to society. Allen's perspective was likely shared by many other adults in Canada, given that *Maclean's* magazine typically represented their public opinion.<sup>33</sup> Allen did not suggest in his article that parents should teach their teenage girls to be better members of society or guide them towards an interest in politics. Instead, he said that there was only one thing to do with teenagers: "wait

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<sup>30</sup> Ryan Edwardson, "Lonely Boys and Wild Girls: Rock and Roll in Canada in the 1950s," in *Canuck Rock: A History of Canadian Popular Music* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 52.

<sup>31</sup> Owram, "The Fifties and the Cult of the Teenager," 137.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Allen, "How to Live with a Teen-Age Daughter," *MacLean's*, August 31, 1957.

<sup>33</sup> Jaymie Heilman, "Offspring as Enemy? How Canada's National Magazine Confronted Youth and Youth Culture in the 1960s," *Past Imperfect* 6 (1997), 76.

till they're twenty."<sup>34</sup> Allen's solution alluded to a societal abandonment; there was literally no hope for them. This shared mindset helps to explain why teenage activism was disregarded and ignored. It did not matter what teenage girls did because it would simply be overlooked by broader adult society. Until they reached twenty, young women were not permitted a voice in Canadian society, culture, or politics.

In 1959, Robert Thomas Allen's daughters, Jane Allen and Mary Allen, responded to their father's article criticizing their demographic. Their article, "How to endure a father," demonstrated their intelligence, wit, and authenticity; It single-handedly disproved the stereotype that Robert Thomas Allen presented.<sup>35</sup> Jane and Mary Allen turned the tables on their father and expressed the double standards that teenage girls endured:

A middle-aged father is someone who thinks you're either too young or too old. You're too young for boys, high heels, a driver's license or to have formed any correct judgment of the world. You are old enough to judge when it's time to go to bed or help set the table, to know when to stop talking and take an interest in things like mortgages. He says you're almost old enough to be out earning your own living, but if you put enough lipstick on to see he stares at you as if you were something in a horror movie.<sup>36</sup>

They articulated the liminal position that young women were stuck in — too young to be taken seriously by adults and too old to remain uncriticized by them. They carried the burden of the responsibilities and expectations of adulthood without the accompanying privileges.

Articles in *Maclean's* magazine published in the late 1950s to early 1960s illustrate the conflicting images that were depicted of teenagers. In a 1959 editorial, Sidney Katz wrote, "Is our youth equipped to face the future?"<sup>37</sup> Katz simultaneously presented teenagers as the leaders of the future, trivial juveniles, and right-wing radicals incapable of making responsible choices. He presented statistics from a national poll of Canadian high schoolers' political opinions as "an alarmingly high proportion," or "almost one half."<sup>38</sup> Although this was likely a journalistic choice, he still presented his opinions as facts to all Canadian readers. Therefore, he influenced society to perceive teenagers as radical and untrustworthy decision-makers. He twisted teenagers' words to seem more dramatic so that adults had less trust in their children's 'radical' opinions. Douglas Jung, the MP for Vancouver-Centre in 1959 and president of the

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<sup>34</sup> Robert Allen, "How to Live with a Teen-Age Daughter."

<sup>35</sup> Jane Allen, Mary Allen, and Robert Allen, "How to Endure a Father," *Maclean's*, January 31, 1959.

<sup>36</sup> Jane Allen, Mary Allen, and Robert Allen, "How to Endure a Father."

<sup>37</sup> Sidney Katz, "Is Our Youth Equipped to Face the Future?" *Maclean's*, October 10, 1959.

<sup>38</sup> Katz, "Is Our Youth Equipped to Face the Future?"

Young Progressive Conservative Association, stated that “after dealing with over two hundred political youth groups all over Canada, it is my impression that young people are not interested in politics.”<sup>39</sup> As a trusted politician, Jung’s perception of youth was thus transferred to every reader of the article. In contradiction with Jung’s statement, youth in Canada and North America were actively political, just not in a way that conformed to adults’ perception of appropriate politics. Groups of young people loudly promoted nudity, free love, and sexual freedom.<sup>40</sup> Teenage girls combatted political issues pertinent to their lives, such as birth control and gender equality in high schools.<sup>41</sup> Canada’s youth were active in politics, just not in a way that was acceptable to Jung. Despite this, his statement influenced the minds of Canadians who were not aware of the reality of young people’s interest in politics. Broad and opinionated statements such as this created an image of apolitical, uninfluential, and irresponsible youth that remained in adults’ minds.

While teenage girls exercised widely recognized power as consumers, their impact was not recognized in other parts of Canadian society. The stereotype of the teenage girl overshadowed the realities of young women who were oppressed and manipulated conform to the standards expected of them. They were taught to be submissive and yield to male authority as a daughter and later as a wife and mother. Submissiveness was entrenched in young girls’ minds through specifically manipulated media. Magazines specially made for teenage girls like *Seventeen* and *Miss Chatelaine* emerged in the fifties and sixties, but their content was controlled by adults and promoted adult values.<sup>42</sup> Popular books made for adolescent girls did the same thing. The Nancy Drew series included devices and themes that were intentionally used by cultural producers (who were exclusively white men) “that served to undermine any potential authority or agency that teenage girl protagonists may have had in their respective texts.”<sup>43</sup> These seemingly empowering books re-established the social order of male authority and exposed unknowing readers to patriarchal messages.<sup>44</sup> The Nancy Drew series intentionally promoted a message of obedience and female submission to young girls

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<sup>39</sup> Katz, “Is Our Youth Equipped to Face the Future?”

<sup>40</sup> Heilman, “Offspring as Enemy?” 78.

<sup>41</sup> Kera Lovell, “Girls Are Equal Too: Education, Body Politics, and the Making of Teenage Feminism,” *Gender Issues* 33, no. 2 (2016), 72.

<sup>42</sup> Owsram, “The Fifties and the Cult of the Teenager,” 145.

<sup>43</sup> Diana Belscamper, “The Case of the Paradoxical Teenage Girl: How Nancy Drew, Corliss Archer, and Gidget Pacified Patriarchal Concerns and Appeased American Girls,” *Girlhood Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008), 150.

<sup>44</sup> Belscamper, “The Case of the Paradoxical Teenage Girl,” 150.



that shaped the way they saw themselves and promoted the patriarchy. According to Kate Harper, “Nancy’s spectacular feats and reputation are heavily dependent on her adherence to and upholding of existing social structures.”<sup>45</sup> Although the series was first published in 1930, the first three books continue to be the most widely read in the series to this day.<sup>46</sup> They undoubtedly impacted the minds of teenage girls throughout the twentieth century.

Because girls were subjected to patriarchal messaging that enforced their femininity and compliance with male authority, young female activists would have had to work even harder than their male peers to seek political and societal change as it would have directly opposed their ideas of femininity. Women in the twentieth century in Canada were not afforded the same privileges as men and in many ways, femininity itself is tied to the ability to satisfy male needs. Female activism defied patriarchal norms, and thus, in many ways, defied femininity itself.<sup>47</sup> This gendered confinement of the role women had in Canadian society contradicted women’s ability to be seen as activists. In this context, many teenage girls used feminism as a tool to challenge the rigidly defined narrative that was projected onto them.

As teenage girls entered womanhood, their bodies and their dress were increasingly policed by adults. As they matured, the shorter pants and skirts that girls wore as children became unacceptable, and schools began recognizing the power that firm, gendered dress codes had in controlling teenage rebellion.<sup>48</sup> According to Kera Lovell, “regulating dresses contained girls (and therefore boys) sexually and trained soon-to-be women to conform socially, while also controlling teenage girls politically.”<sup>49</sup> Dress codes allowed schools to control how teenage girls’ bodies were displayed, therefore suggesting that their appearance was primarily meant to appeal to others. It also directly implied that to be upstanding members of society, girls had to present themselves according to male preferences, who had complete control over even the smallest choices that they made. Dress codes made teenage girls sexual objects first and students second.

Dress codes also forced girls to endure humiliation and sexual harassment. Schools that required skirts often used the “kneeling test,” in which girls were made to submissively

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<sup>45</sup> Harper, “A Pretty Girl of Sixteen,” 45.

<sup>46</sup> Harper, “A Pretty Girl of Sixteen,” 35.

<sup>47</sup> For further reading on this subject, I would recommend: Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs* 5, no. 4 (1980).

<sup>48</sup> Lovell, “Girls Are Equal Too: Education, Body Politics, and the Making of Teenage Feminism,” 77.

<sup>49</sup> Lovell, “Girls Are Equal Too,” 77.

kneel in front of the class to make sure that their skirts reached the floor.<sup>50</sup> Skirts also forced young women to constantly be aware of how they were sitting and standing to ensure that boys were not violating their privacy and looking at their undergarments. Dress codes contributed to the objectification of underage teenage girls and barred girls from feeling safe at school, learning comfortably, and being free to move and participate in activities.<sup>51</sup> Near the end of the 1960s, teenage girls began protesting dress codes by organizing specific days where all women wore pants to school; sit-ins in principal offices and other places where school legislation was discussed; and wearing pant-like bottoms such as culotte slips, petti pants, and pant slips underneath their clothes, or jumpsuits and culottes for which they were often sent home.<sup>52</sup>

In a massive protest in Massachusetts, upwards of one hundred students protested their school's rigid dress codes. Protesting girls wore pants to school while boys wore jeans (which were not allowed at most schools). The students were suspended for their participation, and the protest evolved into a march around the school. Eight girls were subsequently arrested for their involvement.<sup>53</sup> Although this did not take place in Canada, it represents the experience shared by many teenage girls in North America who fought for their rights despite their depiction as apolitical citizens. The arrest of these young women proves that teenage girls were active in politics. When young feminists' work finally paid off, and dress codes were altered, their male peers and even faculty criticized women's decision to wear pants. They saw it as "a strong symbolic resistance to traditional gender roles."<sup>54</sup> Although their efforts and political acts were recognized in the passing moment, their activism was formally dismissed as schools began claiming that girls could wear pants to protect them from the cold.<sup>55</sup> Teenage girls across North America protested skirt regulations for decades, yet their achievements were "rarely identified by schools as a measure of gender equality with life-long impact."<sup>56</sup> By re-establishing the right to wear pants as non-political, schools dismissed the activism of young women and their ability to create legitimate change in society, which contributed to the notion that teenage girls did not influence societal and political change.

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<sup>50</sup> Lovell, "Girls Are Equal Too," 77.

<sup>51</sup> Lovell, "Girls Are Equal Too," 78.

<sup>52</sup> Lovell, "Girls Are Equal Too," 77-8.

<sup>53</sup> Lovell, "Girls Are Equal Too," 78.

<sup>54</sup> Lovell, "Girls Are Equal Too," 79.

<sup>55</sup> Lovell, "Girls Are Equal Too," 79.

<sup>56</sup> Lovell, "Girls Are Equal Too," 79.

While there is no doubt in my mind that teenage girls affected change in Canadian society in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, the scholarly sources on the topic could lead some to believe otherwise. There is almost no research on teenage girls from this period in Canada, let alone the world. For this reason, much of my research has relied on primary sources. Numerous pieces of academic literature outline aspects of teenage life in Canada, but even these seem to focus on a male-dominated experience or teenage girls' lives in relation to their male peers. For example, in "Lonely Boys and Wild Girls: Rock and Roll in Canada in the 1950s," Ryan Edwardson stated that "the baby boom generation had dialled into a new music outlet for emotional and physical expression as well as social and gender identity negotiation and cohesion. This was particularly true for teenage boys, who had limited peer status opportunities outside of sports at this time."<sup>57</sup> While the first part of his statement accurately describes the cultural changes that teenagers were facing during this time, the second part is problematic. Edwardson blatantly excluded the oppression that teenage girls faced because of their gender and discounted young women's struggles to belong in society. Edwardson goes on to talk about how rock and roll provided an opportunity apart from athletics for teenage boys to climb the social ladder and 'get' girls.<sup>58</sup> Edwardson noted that although girls were excluded from performing at this time, they could dance to rock and roll.<sup>59</sup> While the chapter illustrated the social opportunities that rock and roll provided for teenage boys, he failed to include parallel experiences for their female peers. It is shocking that he was able to discuss how rock and roll was used by young men to attract girls but fails to actually discuss girls. This is not an isolated example of teenage girls being discussed only in relation to boys. Most of the sources I examined did the same. The historiography of teenagers in Canada in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s contributes to the dismissal of teenage girls as important changemakers in Canada. For this reason, some American examples were used in this essay as they represent a shared North American experience as the culture in Canada and the United States has always been closely linked.

The oppression and dismissal that teenage girls faced is a part of the history of oppression in Canada. Other barriers such as socioeconomic status, race, sexual orientation and immigration status impacted adolescent Canadians' ability to engage in activism and

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<sup>57</sup> Edwardson, "Lonely Boys and Wild Girls: Rock and Roll in Canada in the 1950s," 36.

<sup>58</sup> Edwardson, "Lonely Boys and Wild Girls," 36.

<sup>59</sup> Edwardson, "Lonely Boys and Wild Girls," 36.

teenage culture. This essay analyzes how teenage girls as a broad category impacted Canadian society, but there are more conversations to be had about how marginalization communities engaged and helped to define adolescence and girlhood in Canada. As Mythili Rajiva has noted, there is minimal research on how age “as a relation to power intersect[s] with race, gender, class or ethnicity to produce certain kinds of racialized subjectivities.”<sup>60</sup> It is imperative that historians continue to explore, research, and share the experiences of marginalized groups as well as the intersection between these groups to ensure that history is told in the most accurate way possible.

Teenage girls significantly impacted the cultural and political worlds in Canada in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, but their impact was ignored, mainly because of the societal exclusion of both teenagers and women as impactful political and cultural actors. The emergence and refinement of teenage culture that was distinct and separate from adults emphasized young people’s exclusion from normative society. While teenage girls were able to define their power as a generation in the economy, they were unable to convince adults that they were capable of activism that inspired real change. When they were able to disrupt society, their role was often dismissed. The legacies of this can be felt today as teenage girls struggle to be seen by adults as capable people and not just a personification of the stereotypical teenage girl.

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<sup>60</sup> Mythili Rajiva, “Brown Girls, White Worlds: Adolescence and the Making of Racialized Selves,” *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne De Sociologie* 43, no. 2 (2006), 166.

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