

# Adolescent Women and Antiabortion Politics in the Reagan Administration

CHARLIE JEFFRIES

Since the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court ruling in 1973 made abortion legal in the United States, it has consistently been subject to attempts to limit its reach, to make abortions harder to access, and thus to restrict their availability or frequency. In recent years, both pro-life and pro-choice groups have been reenergized, through calls to defund Planned Parenthood in Congress in 2015, and the 2016 Supreme Court ruling which prohibited a Texas “clinic-shutdown” law, for obstructing women’s legal access to abortion under *Roe*. An era where this law was particularly contested, however, was the 1980s, which saw the Christian right crystallize and rally together to support the election of Ronald Reagan as President, in the hopes that he would promote their goals. Though extra-governmental pro-life groups and antiabortion individuals within the federal government were not ultimately able to do away with *Roe*, and would eventually become disappointed with Reagan’s efforts in securing this, a series of measures over the course of the administration saw abortion access limited for one group of women in particular: teenage girls. This essay follows these legislative moves over the course of the 1980s, which include the first federal abstinence-only education bill, the Adolescent Family Life Act, a series of laws that allowed states to enact parental notification or consent clauses for minors’ abortions, and a “squel rule” for doctors who treated sexually active teenagers. It analyses the discourse of and around each of these measures in order to understand how young women’s sexual conduct mobilized abortion policy in this era. In doing so, it offers new perspectives on the significance of adolescent female sexuality to Reagan, to the Christian right, and to progressives involved in the heated debates over abortion and related battles of the 1980s culture wars.

There had been doubt among the religious right from the outset of Ronald Reagan’s campaign that he could be an asset to the social and moral demands of their movement; a former Hollywood actor, Reagan had signed the progressive Therapeutic Abortion Act as governor of California in 1967 and spoken out against the 1978 law designed to persecute gay teachers in his state, the Briggs Initiative.<sup>1</sup> Aware of their mistrust of his legislative past,

History Department, University of Cambridge. Email: [cajs1@cam.ac.uk](mailto:cajs1@cam.ac.uk).

<sup>1</sup> The Therapeutic Abortion Act is discussed in Daniel K. Williams, “Reagan’s Religious Right,” in Cheryl Hudson and Gareth Davies eds., *Ronald Reagan and the 1980s: Perceptions, Policies, Legacies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 135–49, 135; and the Briggs Initiative in Robert M. Collins, *Transforming America: Politics and Culture in the Reagan Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 137. See also Matthew

Reagan pointedly leant rhetorical support to the Christian right in their political agenda during his campaign, particularly on the key issue of abortion.<sup>2</sup> From the outset of his presidency, multiple attempts were made by the anti-abortion movement from within and outside the Reagan administration at overturning the zenith of women's liberation legal gains, *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court case that federally legalized abortion.<sup>3</sup> The lack of substantive support from the President, however, who had won the election with the help of these groups, soon began to engender frustration within these circles.<sup>4</sup> It became clear not only that did Reagan not have a personal investment in furthering the antiabortion movement from the White House, but also that he would actively avoid association with socio-moral conservative groups and wedge issues, instead choosing to focus on what he viewed as larger-scale issues like taxation, the economy, and the Cold War.<sup>5</sup> Despite the symbolism of Reagan's electoral victory in 1980, it would not mean a sweeping victory for the pro-life movement, and women's access to abortion would not be substantively curtailed, as the issue of abortion raised a more complex set of debates over the course of the 1980s than had appeared at the outset, with an elaborate set of ethical and moral queries that policymakers could not solve.<sup>6</sup>

There was an exception to this, however, for one group of American women: teenage girls. Through a series of legislative and legal developments

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Avery Sutton, "Reagan, Religion and the Culture Wars of the 1980s," in Andrew L. Johns, ed., *A Companion to Ronald Reagan* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2014), 204–20, 205.

<sup>2</sup> As seen in "Letter from Ronald Reagan to Robert L. Mauro, 11 Oct. 1979," in Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson eds., *Reagan: A Life in Letters* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 197–98. This rhetorical support is also discussed in Williams, 142.

<sup>3</sup> The most notable attempts were the Hatch Amendment, drafted by Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT), a proposed constitutional amendment to mitigate the federal power of *Roe v. Wade*, and the Human Life Bill, a statute advanced by Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) that declared that life started at conception, both of which were put forward to Congress in 1981. See Neil J. Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 212–13; and Matthew C. Moen, *The Christian Right and Congress* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989), 97–98.

<sup>4</sup> The disappointment of the Christian right with Reagan's lack of focus on socio-moral issues has been documented by many historians, including Young, 175 and 212; Williams, 135; and Robert Mason, "Ronald Reagan and the Republican Party," in Hudson and Davies, 151–72, 153; Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 17; and Robert Mason, *The Republican Party and American Politics from Hoover to Reagan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 259.

<sup>5</sup> For more on Reagan's priorities as President see Sutton, 213; Williams, 141–42; Troy, 8, 14; and Mason, *The Republican Party*, 260.

<sup>6</sup> Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (New York: The Guildford Press, 1995), 229.

over the course of the two Reagan administrations, abortions became far harder to procure for women under eighteen. This would therefore become the only battle of the culture wars over abortion that the Christian right could celebrate winning.<sup>7</sup> This paper will argue that the ubiquitousness of opinion on the need to regulate young women's sexual behaviour in the wake of the liberal social movements of the 1960s and 1970s was such that this became the easiest area in which to pass multiple restrictive policies and laws.<sup>8</sup> It provided antiabortion thinkers with strict and sometimes alienating views a less controversial platform: that of governing adolescent sexuality. Simultaneously, it became clear in this decade that the majority of Americans wanted some access to abortion, and that the vocal Christian right movement was matched by a powerful set of liberal organizations and institutions that advocated for abortion rights.<sup>9</sup> However, where proposed abortion regulations pertained to school-aged girls, such debates flattened somewhat, making laws easier to pass, due to ubiquitous and deep-seated notions of "childhood sexual innocence" in this period, and a widespread resistance to advocating otherwise.<sup>10</sup>

These events point to the centrality of teenage female sexuality within the debates on reproductive rights of this period, though this has not yet been fully explored in the vast literature of this period of American history. Historians of women and gender in the United States have brought attention to the ways in which teenage women in America fared the worst in Reagan's welfare cuts, and in antiabortion legislation during his administration, notably in Rickie Solinger's 1998 collection *Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950–2000*, in Leslie J. Reagan's *When Abortion Was a Crime* (1997) and in Linda Gordon's exhaustive history of birth control, *The Moral Property of*

<sup>7</sup> Argued in Marlene Gerber Fried, "Abortion in the United States: Legal but Inaccessible," in Rickie Solinger, ed., *Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950–2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 208–26, 215; Diamond, 235; and Williams, 143. For a wider history of the inception of the "culture wars" in the 1980s see Collins; Sutton; and Donald T. Critchlow, "Mobilizing Women: The 'Social Issues,'" in W. E. Bronlee and H. D. Graham, eds., *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacies* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> For a longer discussion of the impact of these social movements on young women's increased social and sexual freedoms see Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of Teenage Girls* (New York: Random House, 1997); Dagmar Herzog, *Sex in Crisis: The New Sexual Revolution and the Future of American Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2008); and Carol Dyhouse, *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women* (New York: Zed Books, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Gil Troy, "A Historiography of Reagan and the 1980s," in Hudson and Davies, 229–47, 237; and Young, 214.

<sup>10</sup> Jessica Fields, "'Children Having Children': Race, Innocence, and Sexuality Education," *Social Problems*, 52 (Nov. 2005), 549–71, 551.

*Women* (2002).<sup>11</sup> The particular implications of these policies for young black women were explored at length by Patricia Hill Collins, in her writing on welfare in *Black Sexual Politics* in 2004, and in Dorothy Roberts's discussion of the health risks posed to young black women by the promotion of "chastity" in 1980s abstinence education policy, in *Killing the Black Body* in 1997.<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere, historians of American conservatism have documented the disappointment of the Christian right, specifically the antiabortion movement, in Ronald Reagan's presidency. In *Morning in America* (2005), Gil Troy demonstrated the ways that Reagan was a "pragmatist" and not an "ideologue."<sup>13</sup> This was later the subject of much discussion by Troy and others in Cheryl Hudson and Gareth Davies's 2008 collection *Ronald Reagan and the 1980s*, particularly in Daniel K. Williams's contribution, which documents Reagan's economic priorities and the frustration this caused for Christian right campaigners, who thought he might advocate for abortion restriction, school prayer, and other wedge social and moral platforms.<sup>14</sup> In *We Gather Together* (2015), Neil J. Young has contributed a detailed analysis of the various factions of the religious right and their individual disappointments in this outcome.<sup>15</sup> This paper, then, will speak to these literatures by investigating the exceptional power of teenage female sexuality in its ability to foment sufficient support to pass antiabortion legislation, during a period wherein so much of the Christian right moral-political agenda failed to materialize.

One early, symbolic gesture that Reagan would make to the Christian right whose support had helped elect him was in the hiring of a number of vocally antiabortion figures to his administration, in what journalist Sydney Blumenthal called a "containment strategy."<sup>16</sup> Many of these individuals were drafted in to confront a perceived "epidemic" in teenage pregnancy.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See Loretta J. Ross writing on the black family in "African-American Women and Abortion," in Solinger, 161–207, 194; and the antiabortion movement's minor successes in limiting teenage girls' access to abortion in Fried, 215; Leslie J. Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867–1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 248, for a discussion of the particular potency of teenage female sexuality to the Christian Right; and Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 336–50, wherein she explores the implications of Title X Family Planning funding and the Adolescent Family Life Act for teenage women.

<sup>12</sup> See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 78, on young black women and welfare; and Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 118, on the new "chastity" provisions in the 1980s.

<sup>13</sup> Troy, *Morning in America*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, 141–42.

<sup>15</sup> Young, 209.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 209–10.

<sup>17</sup> The actual teenage pregnancy rates behind what was called an epidemic are discussed in Maris A. Vinovskis, *An "Epidemic" of Adolescent Pregnancy? Some Historical and Policy Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 76.

Thus, from the early days of the Reagan administration, discussing socio-moral issues appeared to be less controversial to Reagan when the reproductive rights in question were those of teenagers. One such individual was Marjory Mecklenburg, former president of American Citizens Concerned for Life, who was appointed head of the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs (OAPP).<sup>18</sup> Mecklenburg was brought in to replace Lulu Mae Nix, “one of the few Black Republicans in the Carter administration,” who had hoped to remain as director of the OAPP.<sup>19</sup> Another such figure was Gary E. Crum, who was made director of Title X of the Public Health Service Act in 1985, a family planning funding program, whilst still on the advisory board of the American Life Lobby. His stance on the program he had been brought in to manage was that “it has surely made teen-agers more promiscuous,” and he immediately began to advocate defunding Title X.<sup>20</sup> Reagan also filled some of the administration’s most prestigious roles with pro-life advocates; as surgeon general he appointed Everett Koop, a man who was well known for his advocacy against abortion and for sexual abstinence for youth over the course of his medical career.<sup>21</sup> The Republican control of the Senate meant that many domestic programs came under conservative leadership.<sup>22</sup> Two senators in particular, Jeremiah Denton (R-AL), who was known as the “quintessential representative of the [Christian right] movement’s social values,” and Orrin Hatch (R-UT), were committed to making significant changes to domestic federal policy.<sup>23</sup> Hatch would go as far as putting

<sup>18</sup> “More Teenagers are Pregnant Despite Rise in Contraception,” *New York Times*, 12 March 1981, 1. <sup>19</sup> Vinovskis, 77.

<sup>20</sup> “New Battle at Family Planning Office,” *New York Times*, 13 July 1985, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Moen, *The Christian Right and Congress*, 106. It is worth noting that Koop, despite his outspoken Christian conservatism, would slightly alter his approach to socio-moral issues after the discovery of AIDS, which led him to advocate for sex education for teenagers, albeit a morally conservative sex education. For this story in his own words see C. Everett Koop, *Koop: The Memoirs of America’s Family Doctor* (New York: Random House, 1991), 195–224. <sup>22</sup> Vinovskis, 78–79.

<sup>23</sup> Janice Irvine, *Talk about Sex: The Battle over Sex Education in the United States* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 2002), 91. The success that Senators Denton and Hatch had in introducing the Adolescent Family Life Act is discussed in “Court Backs Plan to Limit Abortion Counseling,” *New York Times*, 26 Oct. 1985, 10. Denton’s role specifically is mentioned in Moen, 106. Other, less successful, antiabortion measures they were involved in putting forward included the Hatch Amendment, proposed by Senator Hatch, which was a bold push for a constitutional amendment that would have given states and Congress the power to form their own abortion laws, circumventing *Roe*. For a discussion of this see Young, 212. Another major antiabortion measure at the federal level was put forward by Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC). Named the Human Life Bill, it would write into law that life began at conception. Reagan refused to take sides and back either of these suggested measures, angering conservatives both inside and outside federal government. He finally agreed to sign whichever was agreed upon by members of the anti-abortion movement within Congress to pursue, and thus whichever measure came to the

forward a constitutional amendment that would override *Roe v. Wade* in handing power to the states and Congress, though this and other sweeping measures proposed within the administration did not get very far.<sup>24</sup>

The influence of young women's sexual conduct on federal policymaking in this era could also be seen in Reagan's willingness to speak to this issue within his opposition to welfare, from early on in his presidency.<sup>25</sup> The intersection of this moral issue with an expedient economic issue made such a discussion possible. What was thought to be an "epidemic" of teenage pregnancy in the United States was only one aspect of a wider set of social fears over the existence of an American "underclass," a term used by conservatives to describe those living in an unending state of poverty and dependency on welfare.<sup>26</sup> American youth were pivotal to these concerns, for their rates of pregnancy and drug use. The First Lady, Nancy Reagan, engaged with the latter when she famously encouraged a group of schoolchildren in Oakland, California in 1984 to "just say no" to drugs, a slogan that soon became synonymous with saying no to all aspects of liberal morality.<sup>27</sup> Reagan himself reacted to the former by vocally dismissing Nixon- and Carter-era welfare provisions under Title X family planning, which offered some assistance to single teenage mothers, lambasting the imagined character of the young, pregnant, African American "welfare queen" on benefits in a 1976 election speech, and introducing welfare cuts in the 1981 budget that allowed states to introduce new work-centred measures, which would pave the way for Clinton's total welfare reform in 1996.<sup>28</sup> In these ways, sexually active teenage girls were emerging as crucial figures in the early days of the culture wars.<sup>29</sup>

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vote first. This ended up being Helms's bill, though it failed to pass in the Senate and Reagan did not rally behind it (Young, 214). The other major push for abortion reform in this period was by Congressman Henry Hyde (R-IL), who believed Hatch's proposal was too extreme as it stripped the Supreme Court of its power. His amendment, entitled the Hyde Amendment, would instead prohibit the use of taxpayer dollars to pay for abortion services (Moen, 87). Reagan did sign this into law, though it had become clear by this point to antiabortion campaigners that the issue was not a priority for the President (Young, 239).<sup>24</sup> See Young, 212.

<sup>25</sup> Collins, *Transforming America*, 129–30.

<sup>26</sup> See Mason, *The Republican Party*, 249, for a discussion of the widespread unpopularity of welfare in this period. For an exploration of the panic around an "epidemic" level of teenage pregnancy levels in the 1980s see Vinovskis, 76. Finally, for more on the emerging idea among conservatives of an "underclass" in American society see Stephen Tuck, "African American Protest," in Hudson and Davies, *Ronald Reagan and the 1980s*, 119–34, 122; and Collins, *Transforming America*, 124.

<sup>27</sup> Peter G. Bourne, "Drug Abuse Policy," in Hudson and Davies, 41–56, 49.

<sup>28</sup> Collins, *Transforming America*, 130. For details of Reagan's campaign speech see "'Welfare Queen' Becomes Issue in Reagan Campaign," *New York Times*, 15 Feb. 1976, 51.

<sup>29</sup> This is discussed in Fields, "Children Having Children," 549–50.

The centrality of teenage female sexuality to socio-moral policymaking was extended exponentially with the signing of the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA) in 1981, a rare advancement of antiabortion legislation that would give the Christian right a sense of moving in the right direction.<sup>30</sup> Senators Denton and Hatch were the major forces behind the introduction and writing of AFLA, and they promoted the Act as a corrective to the existing Title X family planning, which they disdainfully called a “safe-sex program for unmarried adolescents.”<sup>31</sup> AFLA was the first piece of federal legislation to promote teaching young people abstinence from sex until marriage in place of contraceptive education, by offering federal funding to public schools that wished to bring in such a program. The Act posited such education as a preventive solution to the perceived rise in teenage pregnancies, and to the need for abortion. The passage of AFLA is also significant in demonstrating the power of teenage sexuality in moving the President, so notably hesitant in putting his weight behind abortion policy, to support the bill. Crucially, the antiabortion motives of the bill were highly obscured. Though its aim was to reduce the number of abortions performed in America, abortion was not explicitly named in the Act. The Act was primarily devised to:

(1) ... find effective means, within the context of the family, of reaching adolescents before they become sexually active in order to maximize the guidance and support available to adolescents from parents and other family members, and to promote self-discipline and other prudent approaches to the problem of adolescent sexual relations, including teenage pregnancy; (2) to promote adoption as an alternative for adolescent parents.<sup>32</sup>

Within relatively few words, the text of AFLA conveyed the moral stance of its creators Senators Denton and Hatch on both abortion and the appropriateness of sex before marriage. Their proposed approach to reducing teenage pregnancy rates was prevention in the first instance, and adoption as an emergency measure in the case of an unwanted pregnancy, both of which asserted an opposition to abortion as an option for young women. Focussing only on the issue of teenage pregnancy also insured that, whilst maintaining gender-neutral language, the Act emphasized the sexual activity of teenage girls. Though disapproving of abortion does not necessarily denote a disapproval of teenage sexual activity altogether, for the writers of AFLA pregnancy prevention would not include increased access to birth control or comprehensive

<sup>30</sup> Janice Irvine, *Talk about Sex: The Battles over Sex Education in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 91. See also Williams, “Reagan’s Religious Right,” 143; and Moen, 106.

<sup>31</sup> Irvine, 91.  
<sup>32</sup> The Adolescent Family Life Act, Title XX of the Public Health Service Act, 1981 (hereafter AFLA), 580.

sexual education. Denton and Hatch's decision not to advocate for these approaches to preventing teenage pregnancy was emblematic of a newly compounded cultural conservatism in this period. Before the formation of an extensive Christian right in national politics in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it had not been uncommon for conservative antiabortion legislators to also support the need for increased access to birth control, "so as to make abortion unnecessary"; after the groundswell in their organizing activity around the election of Reagan, however, such a position among conservatives vanished, and the antiabortion and pro-abstinence positions became synonymous, despite the efficacy of birth control in preventing pregnancy.<sup>33</sup>

Though AFLA had at its core the desire to limit abortions among teenage women, this was to become evident more in the discussion of the Act in subsequent platforms than within the text of the Act itself, thus making it less contentious for Reagan to put his name to. It is noteworthy that he would celebrate this win publicly, which he did by naming it as a source of personal pride in his essay for the *Human Life Review* in 1983, "Abortion and the Conscience of a Nation."<sup>34</sup> In the article, he celebrated AFLA for allowing "new opportunities for unwed mothers to give their children life."<sup>35</sup> However, while the Christian right were pleased with his uncharacteristic show of support for their movement through the publishing of this piece, it still allowed Reagan to keep a tactical distance, in that it did not require him to appear in person being photographed with the "crazier" pro-life activists.<sup>36</sup>

In press coverage of AFLA, Reagan's staff were hesitant to explicitly name the Act as an antiabortion policy, thus setting themselves apart from the socio-moral contingent of the Senate who pioneered such policy. One member of his administration, speaking anonymously to the *New York Times* in 1982, defined the Act as having "an interest in helping teen-agers place babies for adoption," and not necessarily "having implications for the debate over abortion."<sup>37</sup> In the same article, Donald Underwood, grants management officer of the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs, was reticent to herald the policy as a victory for the pro-life movement. Instead, he also urged the public to see

<sup>33</sup> Annette Lawson, *The Politics of Pregnancy: Adolescent Sexuality and Public Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 285.

<sup>34</sup> Williams, 143; and Steven F. Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Conservative Counterrevolution 1980–1989* (New York: Crown Forum, 2009), 278.

<sup>35</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Abortion and the Conscience of a Nation" (1983), reprinted in the *Human Life Review*, 30, 3 (Summer 2004), 58–65, 65.

<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of how the Christian right celebrated "Abortion and the Conscience of a Nation" see Williams, 143; and Hayward, 278. The description of Reagan's propensity for "phoning in" his support for the pro-life movement can be found in Troy, *Morning in America*, 159.

<sup>37</sup> "US Expands Fight on Teenage Pregnancy," *New York Times*, 19 Oct. 1982, 15.

the new program as one that “will emphasize counseling about adoption as an alternative to abortion.” When pressed, he admitted, “Probably none of our money could be used for abortion counseling. Abortion would definitely not be encouraged.”<sup>38</sup> By emphasizing the implications of the bill for pregnant teenagers and avoiding the discussions of abortion, the issue of teenage pregnancy was clearly one which was seen by Reagan and his staff as one with a much wider base of concern, and one with far less political and moral weight, than the issue of abortion.

Though they were aware of the ongoing controversy of debates over abortion, conservatives in Reagan’s administration soon learned that the other major component of AFLA, abstinence education, would also require some tact in the climate of the culture wars. The Act that was initially proposed became known derisively among Democrats in Congress and sexual health advocates outside the government as the “teen chastity program” due to the original wording of the policy, which stated that the primary purpose of the Act was “to promote self-discipline and chastity, and other positive, family-centered approaches to the problems of adolescent promiscuity,” and then later went on to define “promiscuity” as meaning any sexual activity outside wedlock.<sup>39</sup> Due to the uproar this was met with from members of Congress and adolescent sexual health organizations, the text was reworded to the more ambiguous aim: “to promote self-discipline and other prudent approaches to the problem of adolescent sexual relations, including teenage pregnancy.”<sup>40</sup> A closer examination of who protested the inclusion of the word “chastity” and of the implications behind this is illuminating; the shared vexation of many members of the clergy, sexual health advocates such as Planned Parenthood and the Guttmacher Institute, and Democrats in Congress depicts a moment of consensus in opposition to conservative socio-moral policy.<sup>41</sup> Such manoeuvring and editing viscerally demonstrates the way that the culture wars were at play in Congress; though putting forward an abstinence bill was less controversial than other outright abortion policies put forward in the Reagan administration because it dealt with teenage girls, there was a moralistic tone that still ruffled the feathers of more progressive groups and individuals. Though the inherent intent and meaning behind the Act remained the same, the rewording allowed for Christian right

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. <sup>39</sup> Vinovskis, *An “Epidemic” of Adolescent Pregnancy?*, 81. <sup>40</sup> AFLA, 580.

<sup>41</sup> A number of sources reveal the varied sites of opposition to AFLA. On sexual health advocates see Jeffrey Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 215; on the clergy see Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women*, 350; and on Congress see Alesha E. Doan and Jean Calterone Williams, *The Politics of Virginity: Abstinence in Sex Education* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 28.

members of Congress such as Denton and Hatch to put forward a very socially conservative idea of what they considered inappropriate sexual behaviour among young people, or, more specifically, young women.

However, the various groups and individuals that opposed the morality politics of AFLA offered differing critiques of the Act. Planned Parenthood and other such advocacy groups believed that teaching abstinence to young adults in the place of contraception education put young people in unnecessary danger. They were also wary of the presence of the Christian right within the Reagan administration; in 1981, the same year that AFLA was passed in to law, Planned Parenthood were subject to a series of government audits on their use of funds, launched by Senators Denton and Hatch, that accused them of using federal money to “promote abortion as a means of birth control.”<sup>42</sup> This infuriated Faye Wattleton, who had in 1978 been made the youngest and first African American president of Planned Parenthood. She saw these audits as “an abuse of the power and machinery of Government by people philosophically opposed to abortion.”<sup>43</sup> Another strand of opposition to AFLA came from religious groups and from members of Congress who believed that the Act undermined the religious clauses of the First Amendment of the Constitution, in its suggestion that private religious groups would receive funds to enable them to teach chastity to young people. This complaint ultimately resulted in the 1987 legal case *Kendrick v. Bowen*, which made the official claim that the “religious organization” mentioned in AFLA was unconstitutional. Brought forward by “a group of federal taxpayers, clergymen, and the American Jewish Congress,” the decision ruled that while on its face AFLA did not have religious motivations, instead being in place to eliminate “social and economic problems caused by teenage sexuality, pregnancy, and parenthood,” it was held that “Appellees have standing to raise the claim that the AFLA is unconstitutional as applied.”<sup>44</sup> Though groups in opposition to AFLA took issue with various components of the Act, what they demonstrated together was the vocal opposition to the activities of the pro-life movement within and outside the federal government, and the centrality of teenage female sexuality within this aspect of the culture wars. We are also reminded of the incendiary potential of wedge political issues, and of Reagan’s reasons for generally avoiding them.

Despite this initial contestation of the language of the Act, AFLA would go on to further multiple points of the Christian right’s political agenda in addition to discouraging abortion. One such area was that of abstinence-only sex education. The federal funding attached to AFLA was offered to schools that

<sup>42</sup> Robert Pear, “Planned Parenthood Groups Investigated on Use of U. S. Funds,” *New York Times*, 6 Dec. 1981, 30. <sup>43</sup> Ibid. <sup>44</sup> *Bowen v. Kendrick*, 487 U.S. 589, 1988.

chose to teach abstinence from sex until marriage in place of educating students about safe sex, including contraception. This meant that in order for a school to receive federal funding at all to teach its students sex education, it must only teach students the virtues of sexual abstinence until marriage.<sup>45</sup> By 1985, this funding had been distributed not only to interested school districts but also to new organizations that were developing abstinence-only curricula and programs for these schools to purchase. Kathleen M. Sullivan, the founder of one such organization, named Project Reality, founded her group because of her concern “for all children ... who might be negatively affected by so called ‘comprehensive’ sex education which many times advocated sexual activity among teens.”<sup>46</sup> AFLA therefore led to a substantive change in the nature of federal funding for sex education. However, the quantity of funding available and the ambiguity of the language of what was to be taught allowed a certain amount of room for manoeuvre from schools who received this funding. Later federal abstinence policies such as that contained in the Clinton administration’s welfare reform bill were far more explicit in what was to be taught, and put forward a far larger sum of money for this task, raising AFLA’s \$4 million of annual funds to \$50 million, which led to a far wider use of abstinence materials in schools in the 1990s.<sup>47</sup>

Another conservative goal that was furthered by the passage of AFLA, of which young women were again at the centre, was marriage promotion. Liberals were aware of the importance of this aim to the religious right. Adolescent sexual health advocates the Guttmacher Institute self-published a study in 1981 entitled *Teenage Sexuality, Pregnancy, and Childbearing*, which sought to debunk the widespread panic over teenage pregnancy rates and to uncover the social concerns that lay beneath these worries. Writing in the Guttmacher Institute’s report, Frank Furstenberg, a professor of sociology and an expert on adolescent sexuality, found that conservatives’ fears

<sup>45</sup> Sinikka Elliot, *Not My Kid: What Parents Believe about the Sex Lives of Teenagers* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 11. For other historical accounts of the development of federal abstinence-education funding see Irvine, *Talk about Sex*, Doan and Williams; Herzog, *Sex in Crisis*; Kristen Luker, *When Sex Goes to School: Warring Views on Sex – and Sex Education – since the Sixties* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006); Christine J. Gardner, *Making Chastity Sexy: The Rhetoric of Evangelical Abstinence Campaigns* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Jonathan Zimmerman, *Too Hot to Handle: A Global History of Sex Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); and Bonnie Nelson Trudell, *Doing Sex Education: Gender Politics and Schooling* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>46</sup> “About Us: History,” *Project Reality: Leader in Abstinence Education since 1985*, at [www.comriva.com](http://www.comriva.com), accessed 13 Jan. 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Written by Marcela Howell, updated by Marilyn O’Keefe, 2007, “The History of Federal Abstinence-Only Funding,” *Advocates for Youth*, July 2007, at [www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/publications-a-z/429-the-history-of-federal-abstinence-only-funding](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/publications-a-z/429-the-history-of-federal-abstinence-only-funding).

about “early childbearing” were indicative of “a more general apprehension about the rise in sexual activity among *unmarried* adolescents.”<sup>48</sup> Furstenberg and others at the Guttmacher Institute concluded in their study that “increases in the premarital sexual activity of young people” would “still cause public concern even if greater use of contraceptives and abortion resulted in a sharp diminution of out-of-wedlock teenage births.” Teenage pregnancy rates, they argued, had therefore “provided an opportunity” for adults to enter into a public discourse on “the sexual mores and sexual instruction of the young.”<sup>49</sup> One individual who used teenage pregnancy rates as a platform from which to discuss sexual mores more widely was the Christian right figurehead Phyllis Schlafly. Writing in a report for her organization, the Eagle Forum, she demonstrated the conservative trend noticed by reproductive-rights advocates in suggesting that marital status was at the heart of what disturbed them about teenage pregnancy. “If a 13-year-old girl can exercise ‘choice’ to ‘control her body’ and get an abortion,” she stated, alluding to the liberal position on how to deal with a teenage pregnancy, “why can’t she have the choice to marry?”<sup>50</sup> Though Schlafly was being deliberately provocative in making this statement, she was serious about promoting the institution of marriage as a way of fixing the societal problem of pregnant teenagers, at least for women in their late teens.<sup>51</sup> Her comments evoked the social, rather than medical, focus of the Christian right’s outrage over teenage pregnancy in the 1980s.<sup>52</sup> They also reiterate the location of teenage women at the nexus of various socio-moral concerns and ambitions of the religious right in the 1980s.

This could be seen, finally, in the way that managing teenage female sexual behaviour was positioned as crucial to the strength of the American family by AFLA, as seen in its suggestion that education about sexuality should ideally take place in the home. In this way, the site of the discussion would reinforce the family-first substance of the conversation. “Services encouraged by the Federal Government should promote the involvement of parents with their adolescent children, and should emphasize the provision of support by other

<sup>48</sup> Frank F. Furstenberg Jr., Richard Lincoln, and Jane Menken, “Overview,” in Furstenberg, Lincoln, and Menken, eds., *Teenage Sexuality, Pregnancy, and Childbearing* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 1–17, 5, emphasis added.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Cited in Donald Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 300.

<sup>51</sup> Schlafly’s pro-marriage stance can be seen across innumerable issues of her long-running newsletter for the Eagle Forum, *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, available at [www.eagleforum.org/publications/psr.html](http://www.eagleforum.org/publications/psr.html). She also elaborates on her belief in the institution of marriage as an answer to many social issues in her book *Feminist Fantasies* (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 2003).

<sup>52</sup> This critique is put forward in Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women*, 348.

family members, religious and charitable organizations,” it read.<sup>53</sup> The text of the Act even suggested a particular family model that inherently encouraged the reproduction of that style of unit, namely one headed by a set of married, heterosexual parents. The inverse of this suggestion was that pregnant teenagers were a societal problem not just in the governmental care they would require as young mothers, but also in the subversive family unit that that mother and baby then formed. Many historians have over the past few decades charted the way that historical efforts to instate “family values” through welfare have inevitably chastised low-income black families.<sup>54</sup> AFLA’s endorsement of one specific kind of family unit implicitly derided family units that did not conform to that model; in particular, families headed by a young, black, unmarried mother.<sup>55</sup> Such young women have consistently found themselves subject to federal intervention and condescension since LBJ’s assistant secretary of labour Daniel Patrick Moynihan penned his damning report, “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action” in 1965.<sup>56</sup> AFLA’s pro-family politics continued the Moynihan Report’s

<sup>53</sup> AFLA, 579.

<sup>54</sup> Most recently, this is being researched by Sam Klug, a Harvard graduate student, who explored this idea in “The Moynihan Report Resurrected,” *Dissent*, Winter 2016, 48–55. Klug’s work follows in a long tradition of American welfare historians, including Linda Gordon, *Women, the State, and Welfare* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Politics Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992); Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); and James T. Patterson, *America’s Struggle against Poverty in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>55</sup> There are a number of important scholarly works on the ways that adolescent African American women have been blamed and punished through federal policy for bearing children out of wedlock. See Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*; Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*; Fields, “Children Having Children?”; Doan and Williams, *The Politics of Virginity*; Annette Lawson and Deborah L. Rhode, *The Politics of Pregnancy: Adolescent Sexuality and Public Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Nancy Kendall, *The Sex Education Debates* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013); Cris Mayo, “Gagged and Bound: Sex Education, Secondary Virginity, and the Welfare Reform Act,” *Philosophy of Education* (1998), 309–17; and Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women’s Struggles against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>56</sup> For more on the Moynihan Report and its legacy see Klug, “The Moynihan Report,” Lee Rainwater, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967); Carl Ginsburg, *Race and Media: The Enduring Life of the Moynihan Report* (New York: Institute for Media Analysis, 1989); James T. Patterson, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Moynihan Report and America’s Struggle over Black Family Life from LBJ to Obama* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Daniel Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights: The Moynihan Report and Its Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania press, 2015); and Susan D. Greenbaum, *Blaming the Poor: The Long Shadow of the Moynihan Report on Cruel Images about Poverty* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015).

scapegoating of sexually active black teenage girls for a long list of social woes, blaming them for perpetually raising children without fathers. “In a high proportion of cases,” the opening statement of AFLA reads, “the pregnant adolescent is herself the product of an unmarried parenthood during adolescence and is continuing the pattern in her own lifestyle.”<sup>57</sup> By chiding the low-income young women and families that Title X family planning funding was originally crafted to provide for when it was written in 1970, AFLA constituted a significant refiguring of federal public-health provision, and set a precedent for future welfare reform which would continue to punish particular young women for their sexual and reproductive choices. It also suggests why Reagan was able to put his name to this Act over other pro-family, antiabortion policies, in that it had implications for welfare and thus the economy, a priority of his from the outset.

The connection between adolescent sexual activity and the strength of the American family was reflected in the actions and writings of various extra-governmental conservative thinkers in the years following the introduction of AFLA. In the introduction to his 1981 pamphlet *What's Wrong with Sex Education*, the conservative psychoanalytic doctor and writer Melvin Anchell dedicated the booklet to “decent people-loving people in our nation,” who he believed “exemplify the life sustaining nature of human sexuality” by teaching their children through example “the wonder of sexually fulfilled man/woman monogamous love – the meaning of life itself.”<sup>58</sup> As in the text of AFLA, Anchell’s propagandistic material suggested that sustaining a successful heterosexual monogamous marriage would serve as a replacement for sex education, merely by setting an example of how to live.

As the 1980s progressed, parents of teenage girls would play an increasingly important role for the Christian right. In 1985, Judie A. Brown, president of the American Life Lobby, stated in a speech that Title X funding had created “a lot of promiscuity” among adolescents, which had in turn “divorce[d] them from parental authority.”<sup>59</sup> This reemphasized the role of the parent that was espoused in the Moynihan Report, which positioned a child’s promiscuous sexual behaviour and pregnancy before marriage as indicative of a substandard moral example set by the parents.<sup>60</sup> The Adolescent Family Life Act had been seen by Congressional conservatives as an attempt to control the problem of

<sup>57</sup> AFLA, 578.

<sup>58</sup> Melvin Anchell, *What's Wrong with Sex Education?* (Selma, AL: Hoffman Center for the Family, 1991).

<sup>59</sup> “New Battle at Family Planning Office,” *New York Times*, 13 July 1985, 59.

<sup>60</sup> For more on the responsibility of the parental role that the Moynihan Report emphasized see the texts listed under footnotes 54–56, notably Gordon, *Women, the State, and Welfare*; Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*; and Patterson, *Freedom Is Not Enough*.

teenagers behaving outside parental control, and this effort was reified by a series of Supreme Court cases which expanded the rights of a parent to control their child's access to an abortion. Like AFLA, the escalation of parental notification and consent laws for minors' abortions during this period made teenage female sexuality the central issue in order to put forward anti-abortion and pro-family legislation.<sup>61</sup> The three major cases that allowed states to require parental notification or consent from parents for minors' abortions were *H. L. v. Matheson* in 1981, *Planned Parenthood of Kansas City v. Ashcroft* in 1983, and *Planned Parenthood of S. E. Pennsylvania v. Casey* in 1992. These cases were preceded by *Bellotti v. Baird* in 1979, which struck down a Massachusetts statute that required parental consent for minors' abortions as unconstitutional.<sup>62</sup> These three cases, then, demonstrated an increasing acceptance, in this period, of sexually active young women as unable to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health, which reinforced the idea that they were children in need of care. That these were signed into law, over restrictions for abortions for adult women, shows how unifying teenage sexual misconduct was for conservatives of all stripes, inside and outside the Reagan administration. However, they also demonstrate a building sense of parental obligation in controlling adolescent sexual behaviour following on from Reagan's welfare cuts and from the introduction of AFLA.

The stringency of these Supreme Court decisions increased with each case, each one reinforcing the expectation that parents were responsible for their daughters' sexual behaviour, and in turn that they should refuse them the right to obtain an abortion. In 1981, *H. L. v. Matheson* upheld that requiring parental consent for a minor to obtain an abortion was unconstitutional, but maintained that requiring the minor to notify their parent was not. The statute confirmed that a state could require "a physician to 'notify, if possible,' the parents or guardian of a minor upon whom an abortion is to be performed."<sup>63</sup> The Court's Chief Justice Warren E. Burger delivered the decision, going on to state that the statute was not believed to be "unconstitutionally restricting a minor's right of privacy to obtain an abortion or enter into a doctor-patient relationship."<sup>64</sup> Maintaining "family integrity" was mentioned in the *Matheson* decision as an important rationalization in allowing states to introduce parental notification laws, corroborating the effectiveness of invoking teenage female sexuality in uniting antiabortion, pro-marriage, and anti-welfare sentiment during this period.<sup>65</sup> By 1983, the *Planned Parenthood of Kansas City v. Ashcroft* decision reflected the growing impact of pro-family

<sup>61</sup> Gordon, *Moral Property*, 310; and Vinovskis, *An "Epidemic" of Adolescent Pregnancy?*, 87.

<sup>62</sup> *Bellotti v. Baird*, 443 U.S. 622, 1979.

<sup>63</sup> *H. L. v. Matheson*, 450 U.S. 398, 1981.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

politics at the national, federal level. Expanding the ability of states to require parental notification from *Matheson*, it ruled that a state wishing to require “parental consent or consent from the Juvenile Court for an abortion” was constitutional.<sup>66</sup> This was reinforced by the 1992 ruling in *Planned Parenthood of S. E. Pennsylvania v. Casey*, that upheld state parental-consent laws as entirely constitutional. In the plurality opinion put forward by Supreme Court Justices O’Connor, Kennedy, and Souter, the *Casey* decision reiterated the importance of such laws in fortifying the roles of both parents and children: “It is reasonably designed to further the State’s important and legitimate interest in the welfare of its young citizens, whose immaturity, inexperience, and lack of judgment may sometimes impair their ability to exercise their rights wisely.”<sup>67</sup>

This renewed focus on the parents’ role in the sexual and reproductive decisions of their teenage children reached far wider than conservative lawmakers, demonstrating again the saliency of teenage pregnancy in this period even to those who might not usually rally around socio-moral issues. Some culture war progressives also thought that encouraging discussions about sex to occur more frequently between parents and their children could potentially help to lower teenage pregnancy rates. The substantive difference in the arguments put forward was that liberals, including reproductive-health advocates or those in liberal think tanks such as the Family Impact Seminar, did not feel that federal policy should dictate this. In Kristin Moore and Martha Burt’s 1982 study *Private Crisis, Public Cost*, they found that “intervention is easier and less costly earlier in the decision-making process and closer to the individuals involved – for example, before pregnancy and within the family or local community, rather than after pregnancy or at the national level.”<sup>68</sup> Contrary to the writers of AFLA or the Supreme Court Justices involved in the abortion notification and consent cases, Moore and Burt saw federal policy and community or family involvement as mutually exclusive approaches. Moore and Burt’s study also made claims that differed from those of the creators of the Adolescent Family Life Act in that they saw frank conversations in the home as being important *in addition* to sex education at school, and did not see these two approaches as ideologically opposed. “Sex education in conjunction with contraceptive services and follow-up appears to be a particularly effective approach,” they wrote.<sup>69</sup> This issue, like other matters of reproductive and sexual health, presented an anomaly in the

<sup>66</sup> *Planned Parenthood v. Ashcroft*, 462 U. S. 476, 1983.

<sup>67</sup> *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U. S. 833, 1992.

<sup>68</sup> Kristin A. Moore and Martha R. Burt, *Private Crisis, Public Cost* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press, 1982), 130.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

traditions of classically conservative and liberal American thought, in that those on the right uncharacteristically advocated for more extensive government control, and those on the left found themselves advocating for less government involvement in private lives. The Democratic Congressman for California, Henry Waxman, demonstrated this paradigm in his comments on the parental notification laws in 1984. “Suddenly, the most private decisions are a public controversy,” he complained.<sup>70</sup>

A number of studies and publications accumulated over the course of the 1980s that demonstrated the importance of parental involvement in teenagers’ sexual lives to adults across the political spectrum, and how widespread societal concern for young women had become in the age of AIDS, a post-sexual-liberation society, and perceived spikes in teenage pregnancy rates.<sup>71</sup> In a parenting guide published in 1980, *The Parent’s Guide to Teenage Sex and Pregnancy*, progressive writers Howard and Martha E. Lewis argued that increased parental involvement in the lives of teenagers could reduce the potential risks of youthful sex. “Innumerable books purport to teach youngsters about sex,” they explained, whilst noting that “none are genuinely helpful to mothers and fathers, the forgotten figures in the crises of sexual maturing.”<sup>72</sup> They went on to encourage parents to see themselves as “an essential source of sexual knowledge and guidance for your children.”<sup>73</sup> In a study for the liberal think tank the Family Impact Seminar in 1981, policy analyst Theodora Ooms also concluded that “policy discussions and research about teenage sex and fertility have almost totally neglected the adolescent’s family,” and that this should be rectified.<sup>74</sup> One key difference between liberal advocacy for increased parental involvement and that of conservatives is that in liberal writing it was acknowledged that being frank with teenagers about sex may potentially be awkward and uncomfortable. Ooms wrote on this topic in the Family Impact Seminar study, noting that it was often hard for parents to begin such conversations with their teenage children “because an individual’s sexual behavior is generally considered to be a private, personal area of life in which the intrusion of others, even family members, is inappropriate.”<sup>75</sup>

<sup>70</sup> “Family Planning Programs,” *New York Times*, 4 April 1984, 15.

<sup>71</sup> Gil Troy examines these widespread societal fears in *Morning in America*, 17: “In many ways, Bill Clinton’s rollicking, hedonistic 1990s became what many social critics feared Ronald Reagan’s 1980s would be.”

<sup>72</sup> Howard R. Lewis and Martha E. Lewis, *The Parents Guide to Teenage Sex and Pregnancy* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1980), ix. <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>74</sup> Theodora Ooms, “Introduction,” in Ooms, ed., *Teenage Pregnancy in a Family Context* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 9–48, 10. <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Ultimately, however, when it came to enshrining in law the necessity of a parent to be notified or to give consent for their child to have an abortion, even those liberals who agreed parents should be more involved drew a line, revealing that while teenage sexual activity emerged as important to adults on both sides of the culture wars in this period, it had particular salience for social conservatives. As the parental notification and consent laws became increasingly restrictive, it became clear that Christian right sentiments within the federal government and judicial system did not reflect mainstream views on this topic. *New York Times* staffer Nadine Brozan laid out the central concerns of many Americans in a 1982 op-ed piece. “Do parents have the right to know that contraceptive drugs or devices have been prescribed for their adolescent children?” she asked doubtfully. “Or do teen-agers have the right to obtain birth control without the knowledge – and possible disapproval – of their parents?”<sup>76</sup> There was a sense of consensus across the national press that the notification requirements had potentially dangerous implications for the sexual and reproductive health of young women.<sup>77</sup> Reagan appeared to be aware of the building backlash against these rulings at the time, and, speaking to a convention of evangelical Christians in 1983, stated,

The fight against parental notification is ... one example of many attempts to water down traditional values and even abrogate the original terms of American democracy ... is all of Judeo-Christian tradition wrong? Are we to believe that something so sacred can be looked upon as a purely physical thing with no potential for emotional and psychological harm?<sup>78</sup>

Here, teenage female sexual behaviour offered a convenient vehicle through which Reagan could connect with a Christian right that was suspicious of his loyalty to their causes. Laws that necessitated parental notification or consent for an abortion propagated the idea that sexually active young women were incapable of acting with agency over their own bodies, and that they needed adult intervention to make any decisions regarding their sexual or reproductive lives.<sup>79</sup> Whether or not Reagan himself felt particularly impassioned by this cause, he was able to employ a “Judeo-Christian” moral

<sup>76</sup> Nadine Brozan, “Adolescents, Parents, and Birth Control,” *New York Times*, 8 March 1982, 6.

<sup>77</sup> Demonstrated in Vinovskis, *An “Epidemic” of Adolescent Pregnancy?*, 118.

<sup>78</sup> From Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of the Evangelicals,” 8 March 1983, cited in “Administration Presses Court on Teen-age Contraceptive Rule,” *New York Times*, 10 May 1983, 21; and explored further in Donald T. Critchlow and Nancy Maclean, *Debating the American Conservative Movement: 1945 to the Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

<sup>79</sup> Argued in Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, 248.

approach to unmarried teenage sex as a less controversial platform from which to placate the Christian right in their fight against legalized abortion.

However, while many moral and social conservatives might have been satisfied with these limited successes, many liberals were not won over, and their reactions revealed the limitations of relying on teenage female sexual behaviour as a less controversial approach to divisive social policies.<sup>80</sup> Because of the increasing opposition to parental notification laws, the most stringent parental notification measure failed to pass into law. In 1983, members of Reagan's administration put forward a "squeal rule" that would have enforced all medical professionals to notify parents whenever their unmarried minors sought contraceptive services or advice from them. While the parental-consent cases triggered debate, this sparked outrage. There were multiple layers to the critique it received. The policy was struck down in the same year that it was written, in the case *State of New York v. Heckler*. In delivering the decision, the presiding judge, Henry F. Werker, determined that it was unviable because "the deterrent effect of the regulations will cause increased adolescent pregnancies" that were "fraught with dangers to the health of both the young mother and her child."<sup>81</sup> In their support for the squeal rule, moral conservatives within the Reagan administration again demonstrated that at the core of their concern over the rate of teenage pregnancy in the US was a moral opposition to childbearing out of wedlock, rather than the medical danger of childbirth before full physical development. Beyond the belief that this policy would actually serve to increase the number of teenage pregnancies, opponents saw the potential for this policy to harm those most in need of government-funded sexual-health services.<sup>82</sup> Kathleen Carscallen, director of the Buffalo General Hospital Family Planning Program, noted that the desire of conservatives to "bring the teen and parent back together again" was redundant in family planning, as "a good number of young women already involve their parents," and that the squeal rule would therefore "hit those most in need of confidential services, those from troubled homes."<sup>83</sup> Planned Parenthood President Faye Wattleton even claimed that if the squeal rule was to pass, they would

<sup>80</sup> The limited successes of the antiabortion movement in the realm of restricting adolescent access to abortion is discussed in Williams, "Reagan's Religious Right," 143; and Hayward, *The Age of Reagan*, 277.

<sup>81</sup> *State of New York v. Heckler*, 719 F. 2d 1191, 1983.  
<sup>82</sup> Discussed in Nadine Brozan, "Birth Control Rule: Clinics Ponder Effects," *New York Times*, 29 Jan. 1983. Opposition to the "squeal rule" is also discussed in Brumberg, *The Body Project*, 172; and Lucy Rollin, *Twentieth-Century Teen Culture by the Decades* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 290.

<sup>83</sup> First quotation from Brozan, "Adolescents, Parents"; the second from Brozan, "Birth Control Rule."

“look for other ways to fund the programs” so that they would not have to comply in alerting parents of young people who sought help from them.<sup>84</sup> Many doctors also found themselves opposing the squeal rule and supporting the rights of teenage girls to privacy, even when they disagreed with the sexual conduct of the young women in question, due to an increasing move towards confidentiality within the medical profession.<sup>85</sup> As information and misinformation about the AIDS virus spread, this trend of conservative medical practitioners making exceptions to their beliefs in order to ensure medical safety was widespread. This trend was even demonstrated by the surgeon general, the antiabortion Christian conservative Everett Koop, who would stand his ground in resistance to those on the Christian right who stood in the way of providing information to teenagers. Though his proposed sex education plan was blocked in Congress, he insisted that education about sex, though from a conservative moral standpoint, of course, was medically prudent in the age of AIDS.<sup>86</sup>

Ultimately, the issue of teenage female sexuality, as viewed through the social panic over perceived rising teenage pregnancy rates in the 1980s, provides a lens through which to expand the current state of knowledge on the work of the antiabortion movement in the US. Antiabortion activists were only able to celebrate minor policy successes in this decade, in comparison with their ambitious plans for constitutional amendments and foetal-personhood laws. Ronald Reagan, despite the hope the Christian right put in him during his election, was hesitant to align himself with niche social and moral movements, instead wanting to leave his legacy as President in the realm of economic affairs and global relations. For this reason, it is hugely significant that those “small legislative victories” for the Christian right, the policies and laws which gained enough momentum and support from within the administration and which Reagan chose to endorse publicly, were those abortion laws which pertained to the sexual lives of teenage girls.<sup>87</sup> The interactions of liberals with these policy developments also revealed the extent of the relevance of teenage female sexuality to varying political agendas in this decade of heated social and moral debate, indicating that the sexuality of young women was pertinent not only within conservative arguments, but to the wider culture wars as they emerged over the course of the Reagan administration. The sexuality of young women had come to inhabit a place of political importance in the 1980s in which it would remain for decades to come.

<sup>84</sup> Brozan, “Birth Control Rule.”

<sup>85</sup> Brumberg, 172.

<sup>86</sup> Koop, *Koop*, 195–224.

<sup>87</sup> See Williams, “Reagan’s Religious Right,” 143; and Hayward, 277.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Charlie Jeffries is a fourth-year PhD Candidate in History at the University of Cambridge, and a Fox International Fellow at Yale University. This article is adapted from a chapter of my doctoral thesis at the University of Cambridge; I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Andrew Preston for his crucial feedback on early drafts of this paper. I presented a version of this piece to the Gender and History in the Americas Seminar at the Institute of Historical Research, Senate House Library, University of London, and I would very much like to thank attendees and organizers of the event for the feedback I received. I would also like to thank the Society for the History of Women in the Americas (SHAW) writing workshop, and the members of the American History Graduate Workshop at Cambridge, who also read and contributed useful guidance on this paper, and the *Journal of American Studies* reviewers whose suggestions for this article were incredibly useful. Finally, I am grateful for the advice given by my friend and colleague at Cambridge, Will Riddington, on navigating the secondary literature of the Reagan administration, and on important figures within the antiabortion movement.