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“I HEAR MUSIC WHEN I LOOK AT YOU”: TEENAGE AGENCY, MASS MEDIA, AND FRANK SINATRA IN WORLD WAR II AMERICA

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The years following World War II have seen a wealth of scholarship dedicated to the topic revealing the undeniably huge impact the war had on people and politics throughout the world. In terms of the United States’ involvement in the war, most scholarship addresses the conflict through the lens of adult experiences and viewpoints, leaving a gap in regards to those experiences of Americans that were too young to contribute to the war in the most emphasized ways, namely by serving in the military or entering the workforce. This dissertation aims to reveal how American youth, and teenage girls in particular, navigated their feelings and understandings of patriotism, self-identity, sexuality, and gender roles during an era defined by uncertainty and fear, primarily through consumption of and participation in popular culture. More specifically, this study will explore the expansive yet close-knit community of teenage female fans of Frank Sinatra during the years of World War II, and how they used Sinatra as a focal point in which to direct these complex feelings.

Central to this investigation is the close study of recently unearthed published fan club newsletters and correspondences, which were authored, printed, and distributed entirely by the primarily female and teenage members of Frank Sinatra fan clubs. These newsletters provide significant insight into how American teenage girls consumed popular culture, how popular culture helped them navigate their wartime lives, and what they valued in entertainment and their lives in general, through their own perspectives. Far from reinforcing stereotypes that these teenage fans were immature and removed from reality, the structures and cultural objects produced by wartime Sinatra fan clubs reveal a community of young Americans that demonstrated considerable levels of creativity, professionalism, and passion.
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INTRODUCTION

During World War II, American newspapers and some magazines created and fueled stereotypes that painted a picture of the typical teenage female Frank Sinatra fan as silly, immature, distracted, obsessed, and out of touch with reality. These teenage girls were generally not portrayed as any kind of positive or influential presence in American culture.

The tendency to dismiss teenagers and their cultural preferences and practices, and even popular fandom in general, has also been apparent in scholarship until very recently. In her work on fan studies, Lisa A. Lewis provides one explanation of why academic fields have either hesitated to acknowledge or simply ignored fandom as worthy of serious study:

For the academy, the answer may reside in its historical propensity to treat media audiences as passive and controlled, its tendency to privilege aesthetic superiority in programming, its reluctance to support consumerism, its belief in media industry manipulation. The popular press, as well, has stigmatized fandom by emphasizing danger, abnormality, and silliness. And the public deny their own fandom, carry on secret lives as fans or risk the stigma that comes from being a fan.¹

If the general attitude of academia towards fandom has been to set it aside in favor of other approaches to studying music and popular culture, it seems the natural question to ask is what can be gained from studying certain historical moments through the lens of popular fandom. Scholars in the fields of musicology and media studies have slowly begun to acknowledge the potential of approaching cultural topics in this way, though professional and formally published types of criticism tend to remain the dominant source for many scholars. Much can be gained from looking outside of professional criticism, however, as Mary Celeste Kearney suggests in her study of teenage reception in later decades of the twentieth century:

... by studying the texts girls themselves produce, we can better understand female adolescents’ practices of consumption, levels of critical engagement with cultural

texts, and, finally, willingness to accept, resist, or subvert the dominant discourses and representational strategies of female adolescence.²

The goal of this dissertation is to use the World War II output and celebrity persona of Frank Sinatra as a case study to examine how fandom provided American teenage girls with a multitude of benefits, including a safe space to discuss politics and social issues with people of the same ages and interests, opportunities for career preparation, and a way to express their creativity, sexuality, and wartime questions and insecurities in an environment that allowed them a much bigger voice than mainstream society did. To demonstrate this broadly stated goal, this dissertation will explore the expansive yet close-knit community of Frank Sinatra fan clubs during the early to mid-1940s and how the teenage female members of these clubs used Sinatra as a focal point in which to direct collective and individual questions and feelings regarding patriotism, sexuality, identity, and expectations of gender roles. Central to this exploration will be the close study of recently unearthed published fan club newsletters and correspondences, which reveal the average club member age to be between thirteen and eighteen, and were authored, printed, and distributed entirely by the members of Sinatra fan clubs.³

The study of these club newsletters will contribute greatly to the field of musicology as well as the burgeoning field of fan studies, in which criticism written by fans, especially female fans, remains notably absent. Current scholarship on fandom tends to rely on professional criticism or psychoanalysis of fan mindsets to attempt to understand why fans behave in certain ways and why they devote themselves to certain cultural objects. By turning directly to materials

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³ An overview of the specific Frank Sinatra fan clubs featured in this study can be found in chapter three (Figure 3.4) or in the bibliography.
produced by fans themselves, much can be discovered about how and why specific fan communities choose to closely engage with specific public figures directly from their own perspectives, bypassing the mediation of outside critics and providing exceptionally clear insight into fan practices.

While this dissertation is primarily concerned with examining a specific American teenage female fan community and their interactions with popular culture, this study will also contribute to the already large field of Sinatra studies. Current scholarship on Frank Sinatra tends to focus on his career beginning in the post-World War II period when his persona transformed into the masculine, womanizing swinger image that he is most remembered for today. This image came about after Sinatra’s seemingly innocent and vulnerable image was upset by the publicity of his extra-marital affairs starting around 1946, and when post-war sentiments of anti-communism and anti-Italianism began to mark Sinatra as a rebel and possible criminal. When scholarship does address the first decade of his career, it is usually in order to compare his musical style and image to that of his seemingly more serious and professional style of the latter fifty years of his career. Sinatra’s early career deserves significantly more attention, however, not only because it is interesting to consider in relation to his later career, but because his similarities and differences to other male singing stars of not only the 1940s, but also 1930s and 1920s, is relevant to consider in the context of World War II.

Sinatra is arguably much more similar to earlier stars such as Rudy Vallée, who in the years surrounding the Great Depression were condemned by society due to their seemingly vulnerable, weak, and effeminate personas. Although Bing Crosby worked to redeem the image of the male singer and transform it into something deemed sufficiently masculine during the war, Frank Sinatra gained stardom with the same vulnerable and effeminate persona that earlier stars
were criticized for. It is important to ask then, why Sinatra was able to appeal so strongly to a specifically teenage female audience during the war while mainstream patriarchal society simultaneously accused him of possessing unmasculine and unpatriotic qualities. This dissertation aims to reveal how Sinatra’s specific celebrity persona was in fact perfectly suited for the desires of America’s teenage girls and how he provided a figure that they could not only pine for, but identify with.

It is hard to know the exact demographics of those American teenage girls who immersed themselves in American popular culture by consuming music, movies, entertainment magazines, and in this case, who devoted a significant portion of their time to Frank Sinatra fan clubs. For example, it would be impossible for any fan magazine publisher to track their exact readership, as one issue of a magazine could be read by just one person, passed around between a group of friends, or picked up by any number of people off the street. In terms of the Frank Sinatra fans featured in this study, fan club newsletters did not typically note a person’s race or economic class when they featured particular club members, instead mentioning such characteristics as age (generally between thirteen and eighteen years old) and personal interests. However, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of teenage girls who participated in the fan community explored here were white and from middle to upper-class families for a variety of reasons, which will be addressed throughout this dissertation. Briefly stated, one can deduce that most of these teenage girls were from middle to upper-class families, in part because Sinatra fan club newsletters often imply that college and extra-curricular educational opportunities such as music lessons, as well as opportunities for employment if desired, were a natural part of members’ lives and futures. Newsletters also reveal that most members could afford to attend movies and
concerts on a regular basis, as well as spend money to enhance their ongoing collection of extensive Sinatra memorabilia.

Racial demographics are also difficult to precisely determine when examining this fan community, not only because race was not specified in fan club newsletter member profiles, but also because in Frank Sinatra fan clubs specifically, members often claimed to champion civil rights and preached racial tolerance, largely because Sinatra publicly did so. We can assume, however, that the majority of these teenage girls were white. First, the suggestions of economic stability and seemingly effortless opportunities for higher education and employment mentioned above suggest most members were white, because African Americans and other racial minorities, and African American women especially, often struggled to attain wartime work and other opportunities due to practices of segregation and severe prejudice. In addition, while some African American teenage girls likely enjoyed reading fan magazines and partaking in popular culture, the reality was that African American women and girls received almost no positive representation, if any representation at all, in the specific popular fan magazines featured in this study, primarily Modern Screen (1930-1985), Screenland (1920-1971), Photoplay (1911-1980), and Radio Mirror (1933-1977). The members of Frank Sinatra fan clubs frequently mention these magazines in their newsletters, consumed them on a regular basis, and often suggested that they could strongly relate to the stories and people featured in these magazines.

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4 See chapter 3 for more on Sinatra’s civil rights work and his fans’ responses.
5 For more information on African American women and war work, see Bitter Fruit: African American Women in World War II, edited by Maureen Honey (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999). Honey writes that, “most black women ran into serious obstacles in their efforts to obtain skilled blue-collar or clerical and other kinds of work. Employers hired them only as a last resort, after white female and black male labor supplies were exhausted, and many war contractors refused to hire them at all.” 35.
The lack of positive African American representation was apparent not just in fan magazines, but throughout Hollywood and popular media. A telling article written by African American composer William Grant Still sheds light on the experiences of African Americans in Hollywood during the 1940s, and the harmful effects of typecasting in Hollywood films:

There may come a day when the Negro will have seen so many other sides of Negro life on the screen that he can afford to condone quaint Negro characters and folky acting. At present he cannot do so for the simple reason that many white people are coming to regard those simple characters as typical of an entire race, and that will not aid in good race relations in America…For the present, we would like to see ridiculous, criminal, superstitious and immoral characterizations eliminated; Negroes cast in other than servant roles; Negroes’ contribution to the war and to American life pictured; Negroes included as extras in background groups…

Still’s call for action makes clear that any sort of variety in representation or respectability for African Americans in Hollywood was notably absent. In addition, Maureen Honey notes that in American print media from 1942-1945, “only sixty-four articles appeared on blacks in national magazines with large circulations.” The overall lack of positive African American representation in popular culture likely would have meant that African American teenage girls would not have experienced the same level of devotion and enjoyment towards the Hollywood films, fan magazines, and radio programs that members of Frank Sinatra fan clubs demonstrated. Again, this is not to say that African American teenage girls never participated in or enjoyed those aspects of popular culture addressed in this study, and it remains quite difficult to determine what percentage of Frank Sinatra fan club members were not white. However, because of the comfortable economic and social prospects of club members as shown in their club

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newsletters as well as the tendency of American popular culture in the 1940s to portray white Americans in a superior light to all others, it is likely that most of these club members were white.9

It is also important to address the use of the terms “teen” and “teenager” in this study, as these titles were relatively new in mainstream American culture during the years of World War II. Rather than labeling the fan community featured here as “girls,” women,” or “adolescents,” the use of the label “teenager” is significant not only because it implied the ages between thirteen and nineteen, but also because it marked this newly recognized social group as distinct from other American ages and groups. Kelly Schrum explains this distinction further:

Separated from the professional term “adolescent,” “teen” and “teenager” were closely tied with high school and most frequently used for girls. These terms were also linked with consumer culture as manufacturers experimented by the early 1930s with “teen,” “teen-age girls,” and “teener” when marketing products for high school girls. Although the spelling varied for decades, the language of a distinct age cohort linked with an educational institution, peer culture, and gender was underway by the 1920s and 1930s.10

The unique attention given to teenage girls by advertisers that Schrum mentions will be a recurring topic throughout this study, as consumerism surrounding teenage girl culture factored heavily into how they engaged with popular culture and music.

Because I aim to reconstruct a specific fan community in order to understand how they interacted with and used popular culture, this dissertation will be heavily influenced by and modeled after key ideas in the field of reception studies. A brief definition of “reception theory” provided by Robert C. Holub suggests “a general shift in concern from the author and the work

9 For more on changing perceptions of whiteness in America in the first half of the twentieth century, especially in regards to European immigrants, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
Initially applied to literature, reception theories have attempted to move away from assumptions that authors and canonic works hold meaning within themselves, and instead suggest that the readers and consumers of such works are in fact crucial for creating meaning out of them. In addition, a work of art will not possess the same meaning for each consumer, and meaning will change through time as people experience different historical events and social environments. This constant change between literature and reader, or music and listener, has proven to be an enlightening and useful tool for scholars who are interested in understanding how works of art and artists themselves were received in specific historical moments. Hans Robert Jauss suggests scholars can achieve this understanding by identifying to what “questions” or challenges a work may have been supplying an “answer” in one specific point in time.\(^\text{12}\)

In this dissertation, I will identify the specific challenges American teenage girls faced during World War II – namely, what they perceived their roles to be in wartime society, how they could express their sexuality, how they could work to create feelings of independence, and how they could use popular culture and mass media to sculpt their senses of individualism and communal identity – and how those who were devoted fans of Frank Sinatra used the star to attempt to navigate these challenges. This specific fan community did not receive serious or positive attention during the years of the war, and continues to be overlooked in modern scholarship in part because of the fans’ ages and gender. Moreover, these teenage girls were


dedicated to a star who was frequently snubbed by adult society in the early years of his career, largely because of his absence in the military and seemingly effeminate personality.

Despite facing political unrest, sexual censorship, criticism for their love of Sinatra, and other societal challenges, these teenage girls managed to produce an enormous volume of creative objects, especially those involved in organized fan clubs, and their work provides a revealing look into the hopes, fears, and pressures that many young Americans experienced during the war.

**Review of Literature**

A review of recent literature will be useful in placing this dissertation in the context of current dialogues not only in the field of musicology and Sinatra studies, but also media, fandom, and gender studies.

**Sinatra Studies**

The field of Sinatra studies is quite a large one and continues to grow as more popular culture topics and methodologies find their way into academic scholarship. The authoritative work of authors such as Keir Keightley, Philip Furia, and John Gennari have worked to establish Sinatra as an important topic within academic scholarship through their discussions of Sinatra in the context of post-World War II notions of masculinity and vulnerability, giving great attention to Sinatra’s identity as an Italian American during the years of the Cold War, his film

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performances after his career-saving role in *From Here to Eternity*, and his reimagined persona
starting in the 1950s as a mature and masculine celebrity with a primarily adult fan following.
These scholars provide good foundations and models for pursuing Sinatra as an academic
subject, though most scholarship tends to focus on his career from the 1950s on, leaving a gap in
terms of the first decade of his career and celebrity identity.

Some authors have given attention to the first decade of Sinatra’s career, such as Janice L.
Booker16 and Rob Jacklosky,17 both of whom discuss Sinatra’s influence over teenage girls,
attributing his success to such factors as the wartime scarcity of eligible young men for teenage
girls to pursue and his persona’s ability to make teenage girls feel as if they could be in a position
of romantic power with him. Both of these authors contribute important food for thought when
considering Sinatra’s wartime fans, yet neither pursues the question of what teenage girls
themselves had to say about Sinatra’s appeal in much detail. My study of Sinatra’s influence
using the circulated newsletters of Sinatra fan clubs will provide a new perspective in the field of
Sinatra reception that will work with existing scholarship to illustrate in much more detail the
practices and preferences of his first fan following.

In terms of Sinatra’s personas on film, the work of Karen McNally is especially relevant
for this dissertation. Though McNally focuses mainly on Sinatra’s film work during the 1950s,
she does provide useful models and ideas about Sinatra’s performance identity that can be used
to examine further Sinatra’s films during World War II. In her book, *When Frankie Went to
Hollywood: Frank Sinatra and American Male Identity*, McNally discusses Sinatra’s

16 Janice L. Booker, “Why the Bobby Soxers?” in *Frank Sinatra: History, Identity, and Italian
American Culture*, 73-82.
17 Rob Jacklosky, “Someone to Watch over Him: Images of Class and Gender Vulnerability in
Early Sinatra,” in *Frank Sinatra: History, Identity, and Italian American Culture*, 91-100.
performance identity in the context of ethnicity, sexuality, and vulnerability.\(^{18}\) Significantly, she suggests that because Sinatra’s physical body was so different from what mainstream white America expected from masculine bodies, his sexual appeal lay solely in his voice, making his body irrelevant and his performance style especially well-suited for radio. While I agree that the disembodied nature of radio was certainly significant for Sinatra’s success, Sinatra’s physical body is far from irrelevant when considering his appeal for teenage girls, as will be seen in their discussions of his body within their fan clubs and their extensive collection of and pride in having physical relics of him such as snapshots.

Also important to this study of Frank Sinatra, though not specifically about Sinatra himself, is the recent work of Allison McCracken. McCracken’s book, \textit{Real Men Don’t Sing: Crooning in American Culture}, delves into the careers of two other famous American male singers, Rudy Vallée and Bing Crosby.\(^{19}\) McCracken examines how Vallée’s celebrity persona during the 1920s and 1930s was met with much of the same accusations as Sinatra’s persona in the 1940s. Namely, that Vallée did not demonstrate adequately masculine qualities and that he had an inappropriate effect on women. McCracken then describes how Bing Crosby managed to redeem the image of the male crooner by sculpting a celebrity identity in the 1930s and 1940s that was defined by such qualities as patriotism, family values, heterosexual relationships, and hard work, qualities that were deemed masculine. This dissertation will contribute further to the recent dialogue regarding American crooners and masculinity by examining how Frank Sinatra, a singer whose 1940s persona was much more similar to Rudy Vallée’s than the sufficiently


masculine persona of Bing Crosby, was able to attain such enormous success amongst teenage girls during the war despite of, or likely because of his differences from other more macho celebrities.

Fan Studies

Scholarship on fandom has received a surge in attention in recent years, the most useful for my study being those authors who engage with fan-produced texts. Mark Duffett’s book, *Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture*, is a good starting place with which to approach fandom as a personal and emotional connection between fans and cultural objects, something that is especially apparent when looking at the relationship between Frank Sinatra and his teenage female fans during World War II. Duffett’s work addresses fan practices in a matter that emphasizes the intimacy a fan may feel with their particular celebrity or genre, which proves relevant for my study. What I aim to challenge in Duffett’s work, however, is a warning he provides to others studying fan culture and practices that focusing too much on fandom through the lens of gender may lead to “a danger that we will think that the ways in which male and female – or for that matter gay and straight – fans pursue their fandom are inherently different.”

For those teenage girls partaking in Sinatra fandom during the war, their gender is an extremely important factor to consider when analyzing how and why Sinatra fandom was such an influential part of their lives. Facing a completely different set of challenges and expectations than American teenage boys, teenage girls were provided with specific pop culture objects to engage with that provided them with both benefits and negative messages.

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specific to their gender. This dissertation will therefore address popular fandom through the lens of gender in great detail.

Henry Jenkins is another author to consider in the realm of fan studies for this dissertation, particularly his work on fan-produced objects such as fanzines. Jenkins provides insight into how fanzines can help sculpt certain fan bases into “alternative social communities,” which are characterized by their own unique practices and interests, an idea that will certainly be suggested in regards to the fan community examined in this dissertation.21 However, like other scholars, Jenkins presents a view of fanzines that characterizes them as being largely produced by just one or two people and representing fan communities that are obscure and off the radar of the general public. The Frank Sinatra fan clubs in the 1940s can neither be described as obscure due to their sheer number, nor can their circulated newsletters be described as fanzines in the way that most scholarship defines them. Rather than the responsibility of newsletter publication falling on one person, club members were heavily encouraged to submit material as often as possible, which led to the formation of a very open and intimate fan community that revealed much about their wartime environments and the societal expectations placed upon them.

Current fan studies that address fans as serious writers and critics tend to do so in terms of male fans, leaving a gap in scholarship that examines the written criticism of female fans. Marcia J. Citron provides one possible explanation for this gap, writing, “Whether it be for teaching or entertainment, or the parlor or the music club, female interpretive communities have typically operated outside the mainstream and beyond the reach of the professional critic.”22

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22 Marcia J. Citron, Gender and the Musical Canon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 188.
Although neither male nor female fans can be labeled as professional critics, it remains that female written criticism is largely absent from studies of fan communities, in part because female fan communities operate outside of mainstream patriarchal norms. Some scholarship has been devoted to female fan communities and sexuality, such as those in reference to the female hysteria surrounding Elvis, the Beatles, and the Twilight movies, but such studies tend to rely on professional criticism and lean towards psychoanalytic analyses of why teenage girls would act in such a way and what historical and social events contributed to such behavior. There is very little in fan scholarship today that takes into account the cultural objects produced by teenage female fans in response to the celebrity they follow. Christopher J. McDonald’s work on fans of the band Rush serves as one example of a study that does take into account fan-produced texts such as online discussion boards. And while McDonald’s study provides an interesting model for fan studies and demonstrates an acknowledgment to the potential benefits of using fan-produced materials, his study still heavily relies on mediated analyses of fans using such objects as surveys he created and distributed to select groups of fans online. In addition, McDonald notes that the fan base he studies is largely comprised of male fans, again leaving a gap in terms of female fan reception. Much can be understood about popular culture as a reflection of societal issues from analyzing topics using the written texts of female fans, however, especially when

those female fans were writing during an era of political and social conflict. This dissertation will introduce and examine the extensive texts produced by the female members of wartime Frank Sinatra fan clubs, contributing a previously underrepresented viewpoint to the current climate of fan studies.

Gender Studies

Because this dissertation is primarily concerned with a female youth culture, I will engage with many scholars in the field of gender and sexuality. Exciting work has been done in terms of teenage female sexuality in America, which informs much the ideas presented in this study. Marilyn E. Hegarty has contributed new insight into female sexuality during World War II in her book, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War II*. In this study, Hegarty takes a revealing look into the contradictory nature of ensuring male servicemen had access to sex during their service, while simultaneously condemning those women who provided it as unfeminine, unclean, and immoral. As Hegarty explains, American women and teenage girls were caught in a “veritable catch-22,” in which advertisers and the government encouraged females to appear sexually attractive for servicemen in order to boost morale, while these same institutions also made clear that American women were expected to return to traditional roles after the war ended, and teenage girls were expected to strive towards marriage and traditional domestic home life, where female sexuality was not to leave the confines of their bedrooms.25

While Hegarty’s study provides a deeply revealing look into the chaotic attempt to regulate female sexuality during the war, I hope to contribute further to this insight by examining

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not only how the government, businesses, and other industries worked to push and pull teenage mindsets in different directions, but more significantly, how teenage girls attempted to navigate this confusing environment for themselves using pop culture objects such as film and popular music. Again, while many scholars have shed light on teenage fan culture and sexuality from the perspective of adult and mainstream society, there remains a gap – especially in terms of female fans – in terms of examining these same topics from the point of view of fans themselves.

Kelly Schrum’s work provides an important base for approaching American teenage girls culture from 1920-1945 through the lens of economic consumption, popular culture participation, and high school. Like Hegarty, Schrum places the development of teenage girl culture in the context of conflicting messages from businesses, families, and the government. Schrum suggests that although popular music often reinforced these conflicting messages, teenage girls could also use music to express themselves and release sexual energy, something I will suggest in regards to Frank Sinatra’s fans. Moving even further than this, however, I will question how consuming popular culture could not only provide fuel for expression, but could also provide opportunities for less emotional yet equally beneficial experiences, such as career preparation and community involvement.

Because Frank Sinatra was developing a film persona alongside his radio and live performance persona during the war, I will engage with texts that address film both in terms of music and gender. Rick Altman’s work on American film musicals will factor heavily into this discussion and provides a jumping-off point for deeper investigations into representations of gender and sexuality in American musicals. In his influential book, The American Film Musical, Altman introduces his model of a dual-focus structure the American film musical follows, in

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26 Schrum, 98.
which the narrative is “built around parallel stars of opposite sex and radically divergent values.” In other words, film musicals adhere to a general pattern that follows a heterosexual couple to the ultimate end goal, marriage. Later on, Altman presented a change to his original dual-focus structure to include “homosexual” couples, which he suggests are often present at the beginning of musicals, but always lead to heterosexual couplings, negating the possibility of a homosexual coupling. While Altman does suggest that there are sometimes exceptions to these rules, he does not explore them in great detail, yet I feel these exceptions are extremely important to consider when examining the film musical’s potential role as a vehicle for expressing and identifying with multiple sexualities. The wartime film musicals of Frank Sinatra have often been dismissed as being unworthy of serious attention when compared to his later films, yet his persona and relationships in these films display performances of gender roles that are sometimes shockingly at odds with what was deemed appropriate by mainstream society in the 1940s. This left room for not only teenage girls, but also viewers who did not identify as heterosexual to gain pleasure from and identify with Sinatra’s film work.

Chapter Outline

Chapter one presents an overview of the societal surroundings that American teenage girls were influenced by, especially in terms of mass media and popular culture. I examine how the American entertainment industry, advertising industry, and U.S. government were strongly intertwined during World War II, and how the connectedness of these institutions worked to create and present images of “ideal” Americans that consumers of mass media were expected to strive to be like. In addition, I look at which stars in Hollywood and radio were most heavily

promoted during the war, and how expectations of American gender roles strongly influenced the cultivation of celebrity personas. While celebrity culture continues to play a large role in American society today, my goal is to illustrate how influential this culture was in American teenage life in the 1940s, when a wartime environment and government propaganda pushed teenage girls in very specific directions that encouraged them to break out of traditional gender roles to help with the war effort. This propaganda is particularly interesting given that the same institutions maintained the expectation that American women were to return to traditional gender-based roles once the war ended.\textsuperscript{29}

Chapter two takes a more detailed look into American teenage girl culture during World War II. It is notable that during the early to mid-1940s, the term “teenager” was fairly new, as was the concept of teenagers as an autonomous social group. The chapter begins by identifying the stereotypes and attitudes surrounding teenage girls from adult society, then moves into the ways these girls viewed themselves and attempted to assert their individualism and independence largely using popular culture. The end of the chapter introduces the world of wartime celebrity fan clubs, which I suggest served four main purposes for American teenage girls. These included providing a feeling of purpose in the war through discussions about politics and patriotism, a strong feeling of power in the entertainment industry, a sense of community between people of the same ages and interests, and preparation for potential careers.

Chapter three introduces Frank Sinatra’s wartime output and celebrity persona, which differed greatly from his later hypermasculine persona characterized by womanizing, drinking, and partying. The second half of the chapter aims to reveal how Sinatra’s young fan community,\textsuperscript{29} D’Ann Campbell, \textit{Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era} (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1984), 8.
and specifically those teenage girls who were involved in fan clubs, used their love of Sinatra in very productive ways. Through examination of the circulated fan club newsletters produced by members of Sinatra fan clubs alongside personal correspondences between club members, it will be seen how fan clubs provided teenage girls with a space to communicate with other fans in America and internationally, practice professional skills that could lead to future jobs, and feel safe expressing their thoughts regarding politics, patriotism, sexuality, and other sensitive topics of the era.

Chapter four examines Frank Sinatra’s film output during World War II. The three films he starred in during the war have generally fallen off the popular radar of his overall film career, perhaps with the exception of Anchors Aweigh (1945), but these films are worth taking a closer look at because of the way they blur the lines between Sinatra’s film character roles and his supposedly “real” celebrity persona. As chapter three explains, Sinatra’s celebrity persona was far from what Hollywood and the U.S. government deemed appropriately masculine, yet girls flocked to see his films and seemed to relish in his differences from other stars. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how Sinatra’s irregular (according to mainstream, white American standards) gender characteristics in his wartime films acted as an effective focal point for teenage girls to direct personal fantasies towards, fantasies that emphasized expressions of sexuality and power that would not have been allowed for them to act on in reality.

The final chapter moves from chapter four’s emphasis on Sinatra’s physical body and filmic image to explore how Sinatra was equally, if not more, effective and popular over the radio as a disembodied voice. After an initial discussion about the affective effects of radio technology in general, I provide an analysis of Sinatra’s specific musical style, typical styles of songs he performed on radio, and his overall radio persona in order to demonstrate how female
listeners were likely able to create personal relationships and fantasies with Sinatra without any visual indications of him.

The overall goal of this dissertation is to create a document rich in new perspectives on one of America’s most recognizable performers, Frank Sinatra. More than that, however, I aim to use Sinatra to shed light on the thousands of American teenage girls who were experiencing a unique period of change in terms of their sexual, social, and economical roles in 1940s America. Growing up with an unprecedented amount of mass media bombardment combined with wartime propaganda and changing societal expectations certainly created challenges for teenage girls, but as the practices and texts produced by members of Frank Sinatra fan clubs demonstrate, they were able to absorb and manipulate the constant stream of visual and aural material in popular culture in a way that suited their personal desires as well as helped them navigate their often difficult and confusing wartime lives.

The fan texts, including club newsletters, correspondences, and fan magazine submissions produced by these teenage girls reveal the power and creativity they possessed in creating individual and communal relationships with Sinatra, who most would likely never even see in person, as well as with each other. And while these relationships remained within the realm of fantasy, it is clear that many teenage girls found them more fulfilling than other relationships they could physically pursue in reality. When Sinatra performed Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein’s “The Song is You,” which begins with the lyrics, “I hear music when I look at you,” it was likely easy for girls to identify with being able to mentally produce sound and fantasies from images and vice versa, because that is exactly what they did with Sinatra’s live, film, and radio performances.
CHAPTER 1: American Entertainment and Identity during World War II

After the Imperial Japanese Navy executed their surprise attack on Pearl Harbor the morning of December 7, 1941, the United States government and its citizens quickly adopted a mindset of collective determination and unity, at least outwardly, that arguably has not been matched in the country’s history since. Responses were immediate, as headlines across the nation proclaimed, “WAR DECLARED SWIFTLY AFTER F.D. SPEAKS,” “NATION MOVES SWIFTLY TO AVENGE WAR LOSSES,” “JAPAN WARS ON U.S. AND BRITAIN; MAKES SUDDEN ATTACK ON HAWAII; HEAVY FIGHTING AT SEA REPORTED.” Americans experienced a drastic shift in mindset overnight, from a general desire to stay out of the war for as long as possible to anger and motivation to take on the Axis powers.

While the majority of newspapers and informative radio broadcasts focused on the changing roles the American government, citizens, and press would face in the upcoming war, the entertainment industry suggested that their role would be no less important. Just two weeks after America’s entry into the war, Billboard magazine (1897-present) stated in the center of page three that entertainers had “A Job To Do,” claiming,

We in the show business have a double duty. Wars are won not only by armies and navies, by tanks and planes and anti-aircraft guns, but, above all, by morale. And the show business is the greatest single force in national life capable of maintaining the morale of the entire nation... We must bring to the people those brief interludes of escape and momentary happiness without which no people can go on; we must provide those strength-giving moments under no matter what conditions may develop. The morale of the nation is, in a large measure, our direct charge. It is a grave, terrible and sacred trust. We have a tremendous job to do, thru what may be long and harrowing years. We can and will do it!2

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2 “A Job To Do,” Billboard, December 20, 1941, 3.
Both the entertainment and advertising industry wasted no time in shifting their output to accommodate themes of war. Just three days after the attacks on Pearl Harbor, *Variety* magazine (1905-present) announced the release of two Tin Pan Alley songs under the headline, “Jivin’ the Japs,” namely “The Sun Will Soon Be Setting for the Land of the Rising Sun” and “You’re a Sap, Mr. Jap.” Though songs like these continued to be written throughout the war, popular songs and films that directly addressed the Axis powers made up a relatively small portion of wartime popular culture. Gossip writer, Gertrude Soeurt, in fact suggested that themes of war in entertainment were quickly becoming disfavored by American audiences, writing,

> We often wonder if producers realize that the filmgoers of the world are tiring of the cycle system of picture making; particularly those dealing with war, espionage and sabotage; that variety is the spice of life; and that some real down-to-earth stories about ordinary people would be appreciated by us all.4

Hollywood and the music industry received the message, and produced an enormous wealth of war-related entertainment – throughout the war and afterwards – in a wide variety of styles and themes that were fueled by star power, advertising, and specific representations of American life.

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3 “Jivin’ the Japs,” *Variety*, December 10, 1941. Sam Lerner, “The Sun Will Soon Be Setting for the Land of the Rising Sun,” Berlin, Inc., December 1941. James Cavanaugh, John Redmond, and Nat Simon, “You’re a Sap, Mr. Jap,” Mills Music, December 1941. Christina S. Jarvis explains that during World War II, portrayals of the Japanese shifted in media and propaganda, because beforehand, Americans tended to view the Japanese as “a weak, ineffectual people.” When this myth was dispelled after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government had to “reinvent” the Japanese in the American mindset, “to explain early U.S. losses in the Pacific and to provide an appropriate foe for America’s fighting manhood.” Jarvis suggests this shift is what caused Japanese people to be portrayed as “subhuman or animalistic” in American media, while Germans were at least portrayed as human. For more, see Christina S. Jarvis, *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity during World War II* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 124-128.

The extreme influence the entertainment industry had over representations of American identity leads to some important questions. First, to what extent did the government and entertainment and advertising industries cooperate with each other to produce a style of propaganda that attempted to define ideals of American identity and duty? How did the style of American propaganda differ between World War I and World War II? Second, which music and film stars were most heavily promoted by these industries and why? How did expectations of American gender roles affect the cultivation of star personas and their reception? The answers to these questions lie in examining the format of government propaganda in entertainment media alongside constructions and personas of wartime American celebrities, which reveal that the potential for individuals to have emotional, intimate, and imaginary relationships with entertainment and advertising media technology – especially radio – worked to deliver wartime propaganda that succeeded not only in encouraging economic and patriotic contributions, but also in sculpting a national identity that would become deeply rooted in the American national imagination. This examination will provide context for further understanding of the specific relationship between American teenage girls and popular culture in the following chapters, and how this relationship shaped their lives and sense of identity during World War II.

1.1 “And look, kids, there just couldn’t be anything more important than War Bonds!”: Popular Culture and War

Just over one year after the United States entered World War II, *Billboard* published a review of the role in the war effort played by the entertainment industry to date. The message feels almost desperate in its attempt to validate the continued consumption of entertainment during wartime, emphasizing over and over its contributions in maintaining the morale of the country, which as the article claims, “turned the nation into a single, vast working-fighting
machine with but one end in view.\textsuperscript{5} In the same month, \textit{Variety} included a similar article, which further emphasized show business’s seemingly single-handed work in preserving the country’s morale, writing,

\begin{quote}
‘Morale’ it is called, from the front line to the home front. Morale means entertainment; entertainment means making a heavy heart lighter – a strained day of work or warfare just a shade brighter. The man at the front is sustained by a song on his lips: the men and women on the home front, ceaselessly twisting bolts and riveting steel, are bolstered by a laugh. To dwell on ‘morale’ may be something akin to corning a cliché, but whatever its label, it’s entertainment – and entertainment is Show Business.\textsuperscript{6}
\end{quote}

Both reviews then list examples of the importance of show business, including radio programs, live entertainment, and films that were all dedicated to the war effort, resulting in an overall convincing argument for readers who may have questioned the necessity of popular culture during these difficult times. Among their lists of contributions, both articles casually state that entertainment also served as a vehicle for government propaganda. The \textit{Billboard} article explains that “Morale angles and government messages are solidly packed in entertainments of every kind,” while \textit{Variety} is even more direct, describing entertainment as “a propaganda medium.” This frankness about the government’s involvement in the entertainment industry leads one to ask just how closely the government worked with popular culture and advertising, what it felt the purpose of show business really was, and why the American public was so willing to accept government messages in their entertainment. The answers lie in identifying the specific ways government messages appeared in print and radio advertisements as well as analyzing the close relationship the American public shared with these forms of advertising media.

\textsuperscript{5} “A Year of War,” \textit{Billboard}, January 2, 1943, 3.
\textsuperscript{6} “Show Business At War,” \textit{Variety}, January 6, 1943, 3.
Government involvement in entertainment during the war was certainly not something unique to the United States. Hitler’s Germany is an obvious example of extreme government interference in cultural consumption in general, but all countries participating in the war regulated cultural output to some degree, especially when it came to radio broadcasts. One notable example was the BBC. In her book, *Victory Through Harmony: The BBC and Popular Music in World War II*, Christina Baade describes the challenges the BBC faced in attempting to maintain its original goal of educating British listeners through “high” art such as classical music and accommodating the actual preferences of the majority of listeners during a time when national unity was a primary goal of the government, just as it was in the United States. In the end, popular music won out over classical, because as Baade explains, “The broadcasting of popular music fell under the rubric of morale maintenance, one of the BBC’s major wartime goals.”

The BBC did not simply begin to broadcast all kinds of popular music around the clock, however. There was in fact a great deal of structure and planning that went into popular music broadcasts in order to reach certain audiences at certain times and to accommodate what the BBC and the British government felt to be suitable for listeners. For example, while BBC programs created specifically for overseas British soldiers were full of the most popular songs and personalities in order to lift soldiers’ spirits and distract them from their realities, the program “Music While You Work” consisted of lyric-less music with upbeat tempos and repetitive, mechanized rhythms meant to increase the productivity of home-front factory workers.

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Radio censoring was just as crucial in the United States, and demonstrated not only the close interaction between the government and show business, but also the advertising industry. While on the surface businesses appeared to include war-themed messages in almost all of their ads out of a sense of patriotism and duty, there were strong financial motives as well. The United States government consistently encouraged businesses to include war messages in their ads, whether or not the product contributed to the war effort, in exchange for such benefits as tax breaks. Michael Sweeney explains how Henry Morgenthau, who acted as Secretary of the Treasury during World War II, “announced in August 1942 that ads focusing on the sale of war bonds, conservation, or other government objectives related to the war would be considered institutional or goodwill advertising of the manufacturer and thus deductible,” which unsurprisingly led to “large increases in war-themed advertisements and ad revenue.”

Significant changes also occurred in radio entertainment programming to accommodate propaganda, sometimes going as far as altering the patterns of entire genres. Gerd Horten describes how during World War II, the narratives of radio soap operas – one of the most widely listened to genres – were changed in a way to encourage wartime service, especially for men. The War Advertising Council (WAC), which worked closely with the Office of War Information (OWI) during the war, encouraged soap opera writers to move away from traditional endings that generally followed a pattern of romantic fulfillment to one that reflected a more realistic picture of how relationships were affected during the war and what the priorities of citizens were expected to be. Horten explains these changes further:

Expendable male characters joined the armed forces, their memories kept alive by the concerns expressed by mothers, wives, and girlfriends they had left behind...

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male characters, on the other hand, usually did not fight in the war. Some, like Superman, would fail the physical exams...No matter what the reason, the circumstances of every male character of draft age had to be explained to listeners.  

This shift in narrative demonstrates how the entertainment industry was expected to change its general practices in order to accommodate government expectations of unquestioning patriotism and service for all Americans, no matter how large or small their jobs were. This expectation was just as prominent, if not even more so, in the advertising industry.  

Advertising and show business worked closely together during the war in a way that delivered desired government messages to citizens, yet ensured there would be no loss in revenue for studios and businesses. This often resulted in borderline ridiculous ads for products that probably did not really support the war effort, but were marketed in ways that attempted to convince buyers, especially female buyers, that purchasing them would help to do their part to win the war. This presented a challenge for advertisers, because women’s roles were no longer as clear-cut as they were before the war, and businesses had to navigate newly varying female economic and social statuses in a way that appealed to the largest audience possible while also adhering to government expectations of propaganda in advertising.  

Looking through any popular fan magazine before, during, and after World War II, it becomes obvious that women were viewed by businesses as the primary consumers and targets for their advertisements. This was not new in the 1940s, but began towards the beginning of the twentieth century, as business and spending continued to grow drastically in the United States, a large part of that spending being done by women for their homes, families, and selves.  

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10 For discussions on the history of marketing and consumerism in America, see *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, edited by Lawrence B. Glickman (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), and *Consuming Modernity: Gendered Behaviour and Consumerism*
Businesses created products and trends specifically for women, convincing them of their necessity through elaborate advertisements on the radio and in women’s and entertainment magazines. During World War II, when rationing was a growing concern and largely the responsibility of domestic housewives, businesses shifted their advertisements in such a way that portrayed their products as essential to the war effort, emphasizing how the companies themselves were manufacturing products in different ways to accommodate material rationing. For example, the August 1943 issue of *Radio Mirror* includes an advertisement for Dura-Gloss nail polish, which explains how painted nails can lift spirits, something consistently emphasized by both the entertainment and advertising industries as essential to victory (Figure 1.1). The brand also claims to include a special ingredient that makes the nail polish stay on longer, “A big help these days because it makes DURA-GLOSS go farther.”

This advertisement is especially effective because it includes not one but two ways in which the product aids the war effort: morale and rationing. Despite this shift in advertising trends, war-era fan magazines did not stray from the path first started in the 1920s of fan magazines working to distance themselves from male readerships and direct themselves primarily to female audiences, which were believed to yield more profits from advertising.\(^\text{11}\)

Anthony Slide explains this consistency and how the war helped to solidify this goal:

> The advent of World War II and the more realistic films that ensued had little impact on the fan magazine reader. She still wanted escapist fare, and the magazines were willing and able to provide it. What the war did accomplish was to reduce further the male readership of the fan magazines. The likes of *Photoplay* and *Modern Screen* were read at the hairdresser or beauty salon, not in an army barracks or aboard a battleship… Where the fan magazines failed in World War II was in providing the troops with photographs of pin-up girls. The cover photographs were incredibly austere, lacking in

Look to Dura-Gloss to help keep things on the bright side. Its glorious colors are a sight for tired eyes. There's a lift in regarding your own pretty fingers so gaily bedecked. So sit down and do your nails with Dura-Gloss. Do it slowly. It goes on so smoothly, each firm stroke is a satisfaction. It will stay on, too — means exceptionally well because there's a special ingredient in it (Chrystatelene) to accomplish this. A big help these days because it makes DURA-GLOSS go further.
sex appeal and the leg shots associated with Betty Grable.\textsuperscript{12}

Encouragement of consumption and advertisements for women’s clothing and cosmetics such as those for Dura-Gloss nail polish continued to appear excessively in fan magazines. And despite the fluctuating roles of women during World War II, with an estimated 14 million of them entering the workforce by December of 1942, a number that only continued to grow as the war progressed,\textsuperscript{13} magazine advertisements continued to emphasize traditional expectations of women, particularly marriage and family life. In light of a combined effort by businesses directed towards women (such as cosmetic companies), government propaganda, and patriarchal society in general, women faced “strong pressures to maintain their femininity through grooming and makeup” even as many of them took on fatiguing working roles originally deemed suitable only for men.\textsuperscript{14} This pressure was in part a result of societal expectations that women should maintain conventionally acceptable levels of outward feminine beauty to be attractive to servicemen. More significantly, these ads reflect a belief that devotion to physical femininity would help ensure that women would not become too comfortable or identify too strongly with “men’s” roles, in turn returning happily to their prewar lives once the war was over as dedicated wives and mothers, allowing American men to return to the jobs women had temporarily taken over.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} Doris Weatherford, \textit{American Women and World War II} (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 2008), 120.
Many magazine ads went as far as including full-page fictional stories about how a certain product helped so-and-so achieve popularity, a marriage proposal, or improvements in her existing marriage. In other words, the kinds of goals American girls and women were expected to strive for. An ad for Hollander fur coats in the January 1945 issue of Modern Screen tells the story of a woman whose husband, Joe, is fighting overseas (Figure 1.2). The woman describes how much she loves and misses Joe, and although she wishes they could be together, his gift of a fur coat was a great comfort to her and proved how much he loved her. “Oh, Joe,” the woman says, “you’ve loved me, cared for me, spoiled me outrageously. Certainly I said (when you asked me) that I’d never had a fur coat, but I’ve never had the sun, moon and stars either!” The woman, who is feeling all of this in the middle of a photo shoot, then addresses her photographer, “Mr. Jennings,” saying, “I’M READY NOW, Mr. Jennings. Please make it your best picture – it’s for my husband overseas. The Hollander Mink-Blended Muskrat is a gift from him ... and I want him to see ... how very much I love it!” The ad seems to attempt to maintain an appropriate level of patriotism by portraying the woman wearing her fur coat while crying and pining for her serving husband, though she looks quite fabulous in her sadness. The bottom left corner of the ad includes another attempt to appeal to patriotic duty with a message that reads, “next to WAR BONDS, the best loved gift...FURS,” in order to accommodate the obligatory mention of the importance of buying war bonds found in most forms of media during the war.

Advertisements such as these went hand-in-hand with the entertainment industry, as businesses used popular celebrities to sell products just as they do today, and vice-versa. The June 1943 issue of Screenland includes a two-page spread featuring actress Alexis Smith modeling the latest fashion trends (Figure 1.3), encouraging women and girls not to “give up
I thought I had all that out of my system, but I guess these damn gray velvet drapes Mr. Jennings uses set me off again.

You're with me everywhere I go, Joe, darling...we scattered so many memories around in our few short weeks together. You climb the old mill stairs with me when we picnic on Strawberry Hill. You tease poor Miss Barrows at the post office so unmercifully about reading the mail. She blushes at the very sight of you. You share my sodas at the corner drug store, my laughter at the movies, my dreams at night. And here where we had our wedding picture taken, I can almost feel your hand in mine.

Oh, Joe, Joe—you've loved me, cared for me, spoiled me outrageously. Certainly I said (when you asked me) that I'd never had a fur coat, but I've never had the sun, moon and stars either! And when your sister brought it over on Christmas Day with your dear letter...all I could think was a lifetime isn't long enough...to be with someone like you!

*I'M READY NOW, Mr. Jennings. Please make it your best picture—it's for my husband overseas. The Hollander Mink-Blended Muskrat is a gift from him...and I want him to see...how very much I love it?*
Figure 1.3. Fashion ad featuring Alexis Smith in *Screenland*. June 1943.
Figure 1.3 (cont.)
glamor for the duration.” Smith’s latest film, “Thank Your Lucky Stars,” is advertised alongside. Another Screenland ad, this time in the December 1944 issue, features actress Janet Blair in the magazine’s “Guide to Glamor,” (Figure 1.4) which advertises a variety of products all at once under the guise of beauty and hygiene advice. The guide suggests using Odorono deodorant cream for those women who have started working and have “a new standard of grooming,” emphasizing the “streamlined, pre-war designed glass container” which ensures the cream will last a long time. Another ad on the same page, though separate from the “Guide to Glamor,” describes the benefits of using Tampax tampons, also emphasizing the good value one will receive, saying, “A whole month’s supply will go into your purse. Economy box contains 4 months’ supply.”

There are quite literally thousands of similar advertisements in war-era magazines. These few examples serve to reveal just how deeply intertwined the government, entertainment industry, and advertising industry were during World War II.16 And when entertainment publications like Billboard and Variety wrote in frank language of show business’s function as a propaganda tool, it seems natural to ask why American citizens were so willing to accept propaganda messages within their entertainment and commercial consumption. One reason lies in the way mass media was distributed to Americans during the war; in other words, technology.

Although the United States had already experienced a number of wars in its brief history, no other conflict was as ingrained in everyday American life as World War II, at least until the

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Figure 1.4. “Guide to Glamor” featuring Janet Blair in Screenland. December 1944.
advent of television. While the United States participated in World War I, many American citizens felt disconnected from that war effort for a variety of reasons. In comparison to World War II, Americans were not as certain about what their part in the war was. The country remained divided during World War I, with a great many American citizens wishing that the United States would maintain neutrality, believing the war was one between European countries. This attitude changed for some as the war progressed, but the level of national pride and determination that was seen after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 was not as present.17

This feeling of disconnect during World War I when compared to World War II was in part due to both a physical and informational distance from the war. While radio did exist in some American homes during World War I, the quality and sheer number of them was nothing compared to the dominance of radio in the 1940s.18 Americans instead relied on newspapers to follow the progress of the war, which were slow to bring the latest news and sometimes lacking in complete information. The situation was drastically different during World War II primarily because of radio, and more specifically because of a single event - the Munich Crisis of September 1938. As the tense negotiations between Hitler’s Germany and Austria progressed, Americans were able to follow along in an unprecedented way, receiving up-to-the-minute information at all hours of the day. Gerd Horten describes the phenomenon:

The coverage of the eighteen-day standoff in Europe turned into a news event extraordinaire in the United States that allowed Americans to listen to history in the

17 For more on the varying American viewpoints towards World War I, see Antiwar Dissent and Peace Activism in World War I America: A Documentary Reader, edited by Scott H. Bennett and Charles F. Howlett (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), and Ross A. Kennedy, The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America’s Strategy for Peace and Security (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2009).
18 Elena Razlogova writes that by 1940, eighty percent of Americans had radios and listened to them on average at least four hours a day. The number of Americans that had radios only continued to grow throughout the 1940s. The Listener's Voice: Early Radio and the American Public (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 3.
making. The programs were something entirely new, with the suspense and drama of a Hollywood thriller—except that this was for real. The networks spared no expense in covering the event: transmission costs for foreign news reports escalated, and regularly scheduled commercial programs at home were interrupted and even canceled at will. Commentators and reporters in the European capitals and stateside held twenty-four-hour vigils and slept when they could, ever ready to bring the latest news to American audiences. Listeners soon expected multiple live, on-the-scene European reports, as well as news roundups, which took them from New York to Berlin and Paris, Prague and London—all within a few minutes.¹⁹

Even before the United States entered into the war, Americans were more connected and informed of its progress than they ever were during World War I in large part because of the easy and frequent access to news that radio allowed them in addition to other news outlets such as newspapers and newsreels.

The surge in American radio use during World War II opened up new opportunities for advertisers and government propaganda, as their messages were sure to reach a huge, national audience. This brings us to the question of why Americans were relatively tolerant of receiving propaganda messages in their entertainment, especially when Americans tended to be suspicious of government propaganda after World War I. Horten explains how this American “propaganda consciousness” was fueled by former propagandists confessing to fabricating stories during World War I, alongside the many “atrocity” stories and obnoxious and “high-sounding” moral appeals to which Americans were subjected.²⁰ Celia Malone Kingsbury expands on this point by explaining that propaganda during World War I was very often based on rumors that circulated throughout not just the United States, but all the Allied nations. Kingsbury writes, “rumor becomes or parallels propaganda on a very basic level. The First World War often turned rumors

¹⁹ Horten, 22.
²⁰ Ibid., 16.
into atrocity stories, which in many cases found their way into print as ‘eye-witness accounts.’” Kingsbury also describes how World War I propaganda often relied on images of vulnerable women and children to try and remind citizens of what they were supposedly fighting for, namely the preservation of traditional family life. An example of a World War I propaganda poster can be seen in Figure 1.5, which although was made in support of a good cause – the aid of French war orphans – exhibits a very dramatic and excessively emotional illustration that includes grieving children, which alongside the poster’s headline is arguably tapping into American guilt in order to convince citizens to support the war.

By comparison, radio was “untainted by the legacies of earlier propaganda” and did not contain a visual element like World War I propaganda, which helps to explain why Americans did not immediately reject radio propaganda during World War II. In addition, many Americans had already formed personal attachments with their radios and relied on them for some of their favorite ways of spending leisure time. The relationships Americans shared with radio resulted in a stronger willingness to listen to what advertisers and the government had to say, even if they were still suspicious of government messages. Because of the position of radio within Americans’ homes alongside its lack of concrete visual stimulation, listening to the radio provided “experiences that listeners could make their own, respond to emotionally,” and feel “a direct personal connection” to that differed from interactions with other forms of news media, and which listeners could feel they had more emotional control over. Furthermore, it was easy

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22 Horten, 15.
Figure 1.5. WWI poster for the aid of French war orphans. 1917. Adam Matthew databases. Copyright National WWI Museum at Liberty Memorial Archives.
to insert propaganda messages into radio programs and advertisements in a way that made them feel subtle, at least in contrast to the more direct messages Americans received during World War I, which also contributed to listeners’ relative tolerance of such messages.

Just as in magazine advertisements such as those in *Modern Screen* and *Screenland*, almost all radio ads contained some kind of war message. And while war-themed ads were becoming increasingly widespread, advertisers were still conscious of listeners’ general dislike of ads interrupting their radio programs. As a result, advertisers developed a pattern of subtly inserting ads into the narratives of programs. This was sometimes so effective that listeners were unaware they were hearing an ad until it was over. These so-called integrated ads were strategically placed at different points within radio programs, most of which accommodated space for at least three advertisements; one at the beginning, middle, and end. Advertisers believed they were most likely to reach the largest audience in the middle of the program when listeners were most attentive, and this is where the longest integrated ads were generally found.

An example can be heard in a 1944 broadcast of *The Pepsodent Show Starring Bob Hope*, which unsurprisingly includes only ads for Pepsodent toothpaste.²⁴ Hope opens the show with the line, “This is Bob-broadcasting-from-the-Marine-Air corps-base-of-Santa Barbara-Hope, telling all you Marines who took the Solomons to brush your teeth with Pepsodent, and your dentist will never have to take the hollow one,” which receives laughs and applause. Towards the middle of the show a longer ad appears, with a narrator listing all the benefits of Pepsodent followed by “No wonder it’s number one with the men in the service.” And while this time it is obvious to listeners that they are hearing an ad, Bob Hope inserts funny commentary throughout

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in a way that convinces listeners that the ad is not as separate from the actual program as it initially appears.

This method of advertising was common in radio and contributed to the willingness of producers to incorporate such ads in their programming. The differences between drama, propaganda, and advertising were sometimes difficult to distinguish, resulting in major success for businesses\textsuperscript{25} and the government when it came to not only reaching the largest audience possible, but also one that was attentive.

By looking at a sample of the typical kinds of ads found in both radio and Hollywood media, particularly fan magazines, it is easy to see the massive potential that advertisers and the government saw in the entertainment industry. It is also notable that Hollywood studios and radio networks did not act separately. In fact, the two were so interconnected that it may be more accurate to think of them as one titan of the entertainment industry rather than two mediums that advertisers targeted separately. Film studios contributed to the development of radio programming by providing structural and narrative models for the most popular types of broadcasts, such as dramatic serials and variety shows. Radio networks provided Hollywood with free publicity through celebrity gossip programs and adaptations of films.\textsuperscript{26} And both shared

\textsuperscript{25} Kelly Schrum explains that despite wartime rationing and shortages, businesses still enjoyed great financial success. Schrum writes, “After the lean years of the 1930s, the United States economy leaped into wartime production as federal expenditures rose from $8.8 billion in 1939 to almost $100 billion in 1945. Although production of civilian goods had slowed in 1942, supplies remained, and by spring 1944, when shortages were most apparent, the peak of wartime production had passed. Even during shortages, retail sales increased because employment opportunities and real wages rose and translated into consumer buying power for men, women, and children.” “‘Teena Means Business’: Teenage Girls’ Culture and ‘Seventeen’ Magazine, 1944-1950,” in \textit{Delinquents & Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls’ Cultures}, edited by Sherrie A. Inness (New York & London: New York University Press, 1998), 135.

\textsuperscript{26} For more on the interconnectedness of wartime radio and Hollywood, see Michele Hilmes, \textit{Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable} (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990).
the same stars, with many of the biggest celebrities achieving fame thanks to their popularity both over the air and on the big screen.

An analysis of the 1945 *All Star Bond Rally*, a short film produced by Twentieth Century Fox as part of the seventh drive for war loans, illustrates this interconnectivity as well as the hugely significant role the entertainment industry played in America’s war effort. The *All Star Bond Rally* was the ultimate mash-up of Hollywood, radio, and government propaganda. Under the direction of Max Youngstein, coordinator of advertising and publicity for Twentieth Century Fox and head of the publicity department for the War Finance Division, the film was comprised of performances by America’s favorite radio and film stars who alternated between music, dance, and comedy sketches and the ever-present plea to Americans to buy war bonds. It was one of many short films screened in theatres across the country and produced under government direction for the purpose of selling bonds, though previous such films had tended to be educational in nature rather than entertaining. As historian Kathryn Cramer Brownell explains in her book, *Showbiz Politics: Hollywood in American Political Life*, by the time of the Seventh War Loan Drive in the spring of 1945, “the 16mm industry, and the World War II propaganda effort as a whole, had decisively moved from educating to entertaining the American public” when it came to bond drive films.27 As with integrated radio ads and celebrity-centered magazine ads, this method proved far more successful for reaching not only a larger, but a more willing and receptive audience than educational films did.

With Bob Hope serving as host and opening with, “This is Bob-Seventh-War-Loan-Hope, telling you to buy those bonds, get that load off your hips and when the war is over your

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pocketbook will be in the chips,” the film moves through a variety of acts starring Betty Grable (whom Hope describes as “Hollywood’s answer to the fuel shortage”), Harpo Marx, Frank Sinatra, and Bing Crosby. Crosby ends the show with a serious address to viewers about the importance of buying bonds, followed by a performance of the drive’s theme song, “Buy A Bond,” written by Jimmy McHugh and Harold Adamson. Crosby performs the song as if he is one of the soldiers he sings about. He looks directly at the camera and stands still and tall as if at attention. The song itself is almost aggressive in its repetitive insistence to “buy, buy, buy, buy a bond,” which is enhanced by the repetitive melody, textual alliteration, and driving march tempo (Figure 1.6). It is almost impossible not to get the song stuck in your head, which was no doubt the goal of the government and Hollywood producers involved. After hearing the song once, a viewer’s own mind would likely be telling them to “buy, buy, buy, buy a bond” long after the show ended.

Entertainment magazines also contributed to the hype surrounding the All Star Bond Rally by encouraging readers to see it in theatres and by providing reviews. One review of the film in Modern Screen is more of a direct request for readers to buy war bonds rather than an actual review of the quality of the film. Virginia Wilson, author of the review, writes,

Naturally, it takes something pretty special to rate such an assemblage of talent. It is something pretty special – the Seventh War Bond Drive. And look, kids, there just couldn’t be anything more important than War Bonds! Not that white “formal” you saw in the window, or the cute suit with the flirt skirt – or anything. Because the war isn’t over by a long way. There are still the Japs, and the Japs, remember, are the ones responsible for Bataan and Corregidor and the loss of more American boys than we can bear to think about. So buy all the bonds you possible can – please?...Those stars give their services, so it looks as if we’d better repay them by buying more bonds than we ever have before. Okay?

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28 Virginia Wilson, “Movie Reviews: Bond Rally,” Modern Screen, July 1945, 12.
Figure 1.6. Beginning of “Buy A Bond” as sung by Bing Crosby in the *All Star Bond Rally*, 1945. Transcribed by the author.
Just like Bing Crosby’s performance of “Buy A Bond,” this review is far from subtle in pushing the sales of war bonds through entertainment.

Overall, the entire production of the *All Star Bond Rally* and its surrounding press provides a small though deeply revealing glimpse into the close relationship shared between the government, advertisers, and the entertainment industry during World War II, a relationship that worked to sculpt and persuade the American public at a level unprecedented in the history of American propaganda.

1.2 “A good old American good-natured razz”: Representations of American Identity

The American entertainment industry served an additional purpose during World War II beyond acting as a vehicle for government propaganda. Not only did Hollywood and radio encourage Americans to buy certain products alongside war bonds, they encouraged them to act and identify themselves in certain ways. This was achieved largely through promoting certain celebrities – such as Bing Crosby, Glenn Miller, and film stars such as Humphrey Bogart – who were deemed “all-American” in their appearances, actions, and personalities. By suggesting these stars embodied the characteristics of supposedly ideal Americans, the entertainment industry worked to convince the American public to emulate them and strive for a very specific sense of Americanness, one that was defined by strength, patriotism, and mainstream patriarchal values.

Of all the outwardly patriotic celebrities during World War II, it is arguable that none came to define what it meant to be an American in the national imagination as strongly as Bing Crosby. While Crosby did not actively serve in the military (though he registered for the draft, his status as a married man with dependents and his relatively older age of 38 when compared to other draftees resulted in him not being called into service), Crosby’s efforts in boosting morale in soldiers and selling war bonds were featured constantly in the press and entertainment
magazines, and his celebrity persona of a “typical” American with strong moral values and an appropriate sense of humor placed him consistently at the top of both music and film charts. And while Crosby was often perceived by mainstream white America as exhibiting a kind of sameness to those citizens who fit into that category, Crosby’s success, and the success of those like him, can in fact be attributed to differences, both in his portrayal of American identity in general and his own identity as a male singer.

In the May 1944 issue of *Modern Screen*, Bing Crosby was featured as the topic for one of the issue’s main articles, a position he held frequently in the magazine’s history. As was typical in most entertainment publications during the war, *Modern Screen* chose to focus on Crosby’s work in entertaining American troops, both at home and overseas. In this particular article, entitled “Bing on the Beam,” readers were provided with an anecdote about Crosby’s most recent appearance at the San Diego Naval Hospital. The article reports that while performing, Crosby noticed a wounded sailor being brought into the audience in a wheelchair. Crosby reacted by dedicating his next song to the sailor and joking around with him, supposedly saying, “How’d you like to step out and go dancing tonight – hey? Maybe I can line up a couple of babes. What you say we do the clip joints, kick up our heels – hey?” The author of the article, Jack Carson, then wrote,

That was just what the invalid sailor needed. Wrapped up in cold storage, he’d had enough tongue clucking and sympathy. He wanted a good old American good-natured razz, and nobody handed him one. He almost cracked his cast laughing, and Bing climbed down feeling happy as a lark with that laugh ringing for days in his wind-wing ears.29

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Whether or not this exact incident really happened is hard to know, as entertainment magazines tended to fabricate, or at least stretch the truth, about celebrities just as they do today. However, it is notable that the author designates Crosby’s humorous “good-natured razz” as a distinctly American characteristic. This association with humor and light-heartedness as something unique to Americans was in fact a prevalent theme in all forms of popular entertainment during the war. For example, in reference to the wartime choreography of Jerome Robbins in the ballet *Fancy Free* and Gene Kelly’s dancing in MGM’s *Anchors Aweigh*, dance historian Beth Genné writes,

[Robbins and Kelly] use the dancing sailor to represent a very particular American character, a “type” who differs in behavior from his European counterpart. He is a man whose casual manner and relaxed, down-home demeanor mark him as the boy next door, a “citizen soldier” rather than a member of a specially groomed and trained military class.³⁰

In the spirit of portraying an image of unity among all Americans, which many believed to be the key to victory, the entertainment industry emphasized characteristics in stars that matched up with how mainstream America viewed itself in contrast to the Axis powers, particularly in terms of personality, or as Genné writes, America’s “casual manner and relaxed, down-home demeanor.” In this way, certain stars such as Bing Crosby and Gene Kelly came to act as public embodiments of what the United States government and mainstream, white³¹ society attempted

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to cultivate as uniquely and superiorly American qualities. Just as Richard Dyer suggests, “Stars represent typical ways of behaving, feeling and thinking in contemporary society, ways that have been socially, culturally, historically constructed. Much of the ideological investment of the star phenomenon is in the stars seen as individuals, their qualities seen as natural.”\(^{32}\) Looking back to Bing Crosby as an example, it is easy to see how his celebrity identity was discerned by Americans to embody these positive differences between America and everyone else. This was in large part due to how he was treated by the media. In the same *Modern Screen* article that praises Crosby’s “good-natured razz,” Jack Carson continues his description of Crosby by emphasizing his commitment to family, hard work, and patriotism. “He’s made his millions, collected more honors than a dog has fleas. He’s still the jukebox king, radio rajah, box-office champ. But outside of possibly having his own kids, he has never had thrills like he’s collecting these days – bringing tuneful joy to the hearts of Uncle Sam’s soldiers and sailors.”\(^{33}\)

The praise continues as Carson tells another anecdote, this time about Crosby’s dedication to troops of all races. The story describes how Crosby had heard about a nearby camp of “colored soldiers” while waiting for a train in Phoenix. Because he had a few hours to kill, Crosby decided to visit the camp and put on a show, something that particular camp had apparently never experienced. Crosby figured he would sing for maybe one hour, but decided to stay all evening when he arrived. According to Carson, this was because,

\[\ldots\text{when Bing showed up in the camp, he found it gathered round to a man in a little hollow waiting for him, with big white smiles that just ate your heart right out like a watermelon. So, instead of crooning an hour he sang four hours until he couldn’t squeeze}\]


\(^{33}\) Carson, 46-79.
another note out of his limp larynx and until the purple dusk was inky black, and all you could see on the hills were those white smiles.\textsuperscript{34}

Again, it is hard to know if this incident actually happened, but Carson’s writing demonstrates the characteristics audiences looked for in their celebrities, mainly moral values and a dedication to keeping up the morale of servicemen. Carson also attempts to illustrate Crosby’s admirable racial tolerance, even as Carson uses overtly racist language and imagery. The fact that the United States’ armed forces remained almost entirely segregated throughout the war offers further contradictions between the nation’s determination to view itself as an overwhelmingly tolerant nation in contrast to the Axis powers and the reality of U.S. discrimination and inequality.

The theme of difference does not stop with Crosby’s apparent contrasts with the Axis powers, but extends into his relationship with other popular male singers. Crosby was labeled a “crooner” throughout his career, which was historically unfitting if not ironic. The history of the word “croon” in America carried with it both racial and gender specific associations, originally applied to the archetypal black minstrel show character, “mammy,” who would “croon” her children and infant charges to sleep.\textsuperscript{35} By applying the term to white male singers starting around the 1920s, society and entertainment media suggested that there existed a noticeable difference between crooners and the image of an ideal, white American male. This perceived difference was established primarily because of the development of the microphone, which allowed singers to restrain their voices significantly without the fear of not being heard. As a result, male crooners were increasingly viewed as threatening to traditional American society, as the quiet, almost

\textsuperscript{34} Carson, 79.
\textsuperscript{35} Allison McCracken, \textit{Real Men Don't Sing: Crooning in American Culture} (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2015), 16.
whispering quality of their singing combined with sentimental song lyrics produced a feeling of intense intimacy with their audiences, which tended to be comprised mostly of women.36 This intimacy grew to what many felt to be dangerous levels when male crooners invaded domestic spaces over the radio, where women were often listening alone.

Aside from their musical style, the hostility towards male sentimental singers was fueled largely by the Great Depression. Because an unprecedented number of American men were simultaneously recovering from the traumatic experiences of World War I and struggling greatly to secure employment, the typical criteria for defining masculinity in America was thrown into disarray. Sociologist Michael Kimmel summarizes this crisis, writing, “For most men the Depression was emasculating both at work and at home. Unemployed men lost status with their wives and children and saw themselves as impotent patriarchs.”37 In an effort to regain possible markers of masculinity during the Depression, society began to assign new importance to physical appearance. Whiteness and physical fitness could define a man as appropriately masculine in contrast to those who appeared weak or ethnically “other,” and those who did not fit these criteria were met with new levels of hostility.38 This affected the image of the male sentimental singer as accusations increased that they were weak both physically and emotionally.

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38 The connection between physicality and masculinity had already been somewhat present in the American mindset, in part due to Theodore Roosevelt’s famous 1899 speech, “The Strenuous Life.” Americans embraced this ideology during The Depression, as it was one aspect of masculinity that could be controlled while money was uncertain. For more on the interconnectedness of bodies and American masculinity, see Gail Bederman, Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917 (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), George Chauncey, Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940 (New York: BasicBooks,
Rudy Vallée serves as an example of a singer that victim to this accusation because of shifts in perceptions of gender during the Depression. Vallée and other singers like him were often described as having fragile voices that seemed to make them physically strain when reaching higher notes. This weakness in sound and volume coupled with a sense of being physically in pain while singing marked crooners as effeminate in the public eye. Furthermore, crooners tended to perform songs that elevated women to a level above themselves, something generally not present in most popular music before the 1920s. An example of a song that demonstrates the dependent crooner is one of Vallée’s hits from 1930, “If I Had a Girl Like You.” The lyrics describe a depressed man in love who knows he would no longer be depressed if only he had “a girl like you.” The lyrics of the first two ‘A’ sections of the standard AABA song form read as follows:

I’m lonesome and blue but when I look at you,
there’s one thing I know is true,
I wouldn’t be lonesome, I wouldn’t be blue,
if I had a girl like you.

I’ve waited a lifetime I hated the nighttime,
those dark nights have made me blue,
I wouldn’t be waiting, I wouldn’t be hating,
if I had a girl like you.

The song suggests the girl in question maintains a power over Vallée (or whoever is singing) that can either solidify or crush his happiness. Public expressions like this of dependence on a woman were not something to embrace in the 1920s and 1930s, however, but to remedy, and songs such as these were part of the reason that crooners such as Vallée were often condemned by

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mainstream society as effeminate and dangerous to the values of typical American gender roles. One of the most notable attacks on crooners came from Cardinal William Henry O'Connell, archbishop of Boston in the January 30, 1932 issue of Literary Digest. Of crooning, O'Connell wrote,

There is no man who would lower himself to such art as that...It is [a] sensuous, effeminate, luxurious sort of paganism, with which men of your age may not be influenced, but think of the boys and girls who are brought up with that idea of music... If you will listen closely, you will discern the basest appeal to sex emotions in the young. They are not true love songs. They profane the name. They are ribald and revolting to true men. If you will have music, have good music, not this immoral, imbecile slush.40

The affection seemingly effeminate singers received from women was seen as threatening not only to those men who were deemed appropriately masculine by mainstream terms, but also to traditional patriarchal values, in which women were meant to be dependent on one man and display affection to him alone. Gaylyn Studlar suggests that because women were steadily gaining more independence and responsibility in the economic sphere, especially as consumers, they were increasingly thought to be responsible for the success of effeminate male stars. “In their wholesale consumption of popular representations of men, women were thought to be the force behind the creation of fictional ideals of masculinity that, in turn, negatively influenced real-life men.”41 The threat of female power in the entertainment industry and their choice of questionable men was greatly emphasized during the Depression when many American men were already feeling self-conscious about their masculinity. As a result, effeminate and homosexual men entered into a new era of increased persecution, which Kimmel explains further:

40 William Henry O'Connell, quoted in Allison McCracken, Real Men Don't Sing: Crooning in American Culture, 226-227.
41 Gaylyn Studlar, This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 92.
These anxieties about homosexuality and effeminacy quickly and decisively eroded the casual acceptance of the gay male subculture in major American cities. The late 1920s and 1930s witnessed a “pansy craze,” as new fears of gay men were raised. Once, a gay man had been seen as “an effeminate fairy whom one might ridicule but had no reason to fear”; now, though, tabloid newspapers terrified and titillated their readers with stories of degenerate child molesters who committed acts of unspeakable depravity. Gender arrangements were now so fragile, it seems, that “even a glimpse of an alternative might endanger them.” The closet was hastily built, and gay men immediately pushed into it.\footnote{Kimmel, 204.}

This new social climate resulted in a condemning formula in which female reverence and sentimentality in men was equated with effeminacy, which was equated with homosexuality, which was charged as dangerous to traditional American values and gender roles, which were already on the brink of collapse because of the Depression. A clear example of Studlar’s concept of “transformative masculinity,” which she describes as “a paradigm of gender construction that...foregrounds masculinity as a process, a liminal construction, and even a performance.”\footnote{Studlar, 4.} It seems no wonder then that crooners such as Rudy Vallée seemed to move from praise to persecution overnight, and if a male sentimental singer hoped to maintain any level of popularity and respect, he had to separate himself from the stereotypical image of the crooner.

That, in short, is exactly what Crosby accomplished in redeeming the image the male crooner, and he remained popular with both men and women of all ages throughout the 1940s. Media coverage rarely criticized him and generally championed his World War II activity. For example, the May 14, 1945 issue of Broadcasting (1931-present) includes an article about Crosby’s rise to fame, saying, “Bing grew into something more than a voice. He has become an American institution...America is proud of its Bing Crosby...NBC is proud to be the network on which Bing Crosby has become America’s Favorite Troubadour. NBC is proud of the part it has

\footnote{Kimmel, 204.} \footnote{Studlar, 4.}
played in helping to create this living legend of Americanism.” Crosby gained widespread acceptance and popularity both through his carefully cultivated celebrity image, as well as his presence in multiple forms of media.

Part of the threat of earlier crooners was their presence on the radio. The disembodied sound of sentimental, romantic singing in the privacy of American homes meant that listeners, particularly women, were free to construct images in their minds of what they thought their favorite male singers looked like, or what they hoped they looked like. In other words, female listeners could develop romantic mental fantasies based on what they were hearing on the radio, which society saw as inappropriate and dangerous to moral integrity. Crosby was able to escape this accusation in a few ways. First, his style of singing and choice of songs were different from earlier crooners like Rudy Vallée. While Vallée was described alongside other crooners as having a weak voice that seemed to physically pain him when he strained for higher notes, Crosby’s vocal style was deeper in pitch, stronger in volume, and more suggestive of jazz. Rather than emphasizing vibrato and smooth phrasing like Vallée did, Crosby utilized such techniques as scatting and whistling in his singing, marking him as something slightly closer to a jazz singer than a crooner. Crosby also did not sing strictly romantic songs like Vallée. Although his career did include many love songs, Crosby became famous for such hits as “White Christmas,” “Pennies From Heaven,” and “Don't Fence Me In,” which emphasized themes of optimism, family values, and freedom rather than romantic love. This allowed Crosby to

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45 McCracken, 270.
46 Irving Berlin, 1942.
47 Arthur Johnston and Johnny Burke, 1936.
48 Cole Porter and Robert Fletcher, 1934.
construct an image of a family-friendly performer suitable for both men and women, while performers such as Vallée were left with accusations of effeminacy and indecency.

Crosby’s positive image was further strengthened by his career in Hollywood. Because part of the supposed threat of early radio crooners was their disembodied presence on the radio, presenting a visualization of singers on screen could help to ease audience suspicions. This did not always work, however, because some singers like Rudy Vallée were scrutinized even more after appearing in Hollywood films. In Vallée’s case, this was because his onscreen persona in films such as *The Vagabond Lover*\(^49\) mirrored his radio persona in that he appeared vulnerable and sensitive and struggled to gain confidence when in the presence of his female love interests. Hollywood was more successful in naturalizing Bing Crosby for a mainstream audience, because just as with his singing style, Crosby altered the stereotypical characteristics of crooners in his films in a way that presented him as sufficiently masculine. Allison McCracken describes in more detail the ways in which Crosby achieved this masculine image in films:

> Because Crosby’s voice made him more vulnerable to accusations of emasculation than other screen stars, his persona offered a white masculinity that was extreme in its evacuation of emotion or desire, especially when compared with prior romantic crooners. While he pursues the heroine in these films with the intention of marrying her, there is never anything remarkable about her or especially loving in his attachment to her. Indeed his courtship is often marked by anger and violence; high-class women need to be taken down a notch, while working women need to get their priorities straight...He is frequently nonchalant to the point of indifference and coldness, using his singing to romance women without indulging in sincere devotion or reverence.\(^50\)

In addition to his seemingly indifferent attitude towards his on-screen love interests, Crosby’s masculinity was established in his films by placing him in contrast with another less masculine male star. For example, in *The Big Broadcast*, Crosby is paired with an overly emotional Texas

\(^{49}\) *The Vagabond Lover*, directed by Marshall Neilan, RKO Radio Pictures, 1929.

\(^{50}\) McCracken, 299.
oilman (Stuart Erwin), whose excessive pining over his lost love marks him as the stereotypical crooner-type, rather than Crosby.\textsuperscript{51} Therefore, anything Crosby does in contrast appears significantly more masculine and un-crooner like. This type of pairing occurs in other films later on, as we will see in the case of films starring Gene Kelly and Frank Sinatra.

It is not difficult to see how Bing Crosby was able to achieve popularity among both men and women despite his label as a crooner by emphasizing patriotism, moral values, and comedy over romance, especially when compared to some of the more sentimental early crooners such as Rudy Vallée. Leading up to and during World War II, popular stars in all media areas followed suit, and the entertainment industry took pains to emphasize stars who clearly exhibited traditional expectations of gender.

Another example of a popular male presence in the music industry that gained favor with both American men and women was Glenn Miller. Male bandleaders in general were very popular during the war and were generally perceived by audiences as providing an important contribution to the country’s efforts in maintaining morale. This was especially true of Glenn Miller, whose public image was enhanced further by his own service in the war. Miller was frequently placed near the top of music popularity charts, and headlines in magazines such as \textit{Variety} often emphasized his active service as an Army bandleader. Some examples include, “Glenn Miller Upped to Army Majority,” and “Glenn Miller’s Army Orch May Go Overseas.”\textsuperscript{52}

Like Crosby, Miller was able to achieve widespread popularity during the war due to his ability to carefully sculpt an image for himself as a seemingly all-American personality that valued patriotism and mainstream white moral values above all else. Miller did this in part by

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{The Big Broadcast}, directed by Frank Tuttle, Paramount Pictures, 1932. \\
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Variety}, Aug. 30, 1944 and May 31, 1944.
creating a style of music that could not be strictly defined as jazz, swing, or more subtle “sweet” music, but something in between all three. Lewis A. Erenberg describes Miller’s unique sound further:

Miller made swing all-American by merging the two popular music strains of the 1930s—adventurous swing and romantic, more melodic sweet music—into a powerful amalgam... The result was a synthesis: “sweet swing,” a clean-cut version of jive suitable for expansion into the nation’s heartland via jukeboxes and radio... His codification of the major elements of big band performance into a streamlined sweet swing made his musical product appealing to a much wider audience.54

Similar to how Crosby distanced himself from negative stereotypes of male crooners, Miller succeeded in presenting himself not as a musician who was excessively passionate or emotional, but as one who was orderly, patriotic, and sufficiently masculine according to traditional white American standards during the 1940s. Also similar to Crosby, however, this image was of a decidedly white masculinity, and part of Miller’s success came from the fact that he did not allow black musicians in his orchestra, which aligned with military policies. Once Miller entered into service in 1942, these policies ensured that his band would not be turned away from the most exclusive performance venues.55

Just as in the popular music industry, Hollywood emphasized male film stars who tended to stick to traditional white masculine stereotypes during World War II, with actors such as Humphrey Bogart, Clark Gable, Cary Grant, and Van Johnson landing the biggest movie roles.

53 For more on the development and changes in jazz, swing, and sweet music leading up to the years of World War II, see Lewis A. Erenberg, Swingin’ the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), David W. Stowe, Swing Changes: Big Band Jazz in New Deal America (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1994), and Jeffrey Magee, The Uncrowned King of Swing: Fletcher Henderson and Big Band Jazz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
55 Ibid., 189-202.
Fan magazines included movie advertisements and pictures of these stars that usually displayed them at their toughest. For example, the April 1944 issue of *Modern Screen* includes an ad for the film, *Passage to Marseille*, which shows Humphrey Bogart holding a gun in a way that may remind modern readers of Rambo (Figure 1.7). A feature on Richard Jaeckel in the July 1944 issue of *Screenland* includes multiple photographs of the star without his shirt on, displaying his muscular body while emphasizing his recruitment into the Merchant Marines (Figure 1.8). Emphasis on male physical fitness in the media was encouraged by the U.S. government, because it supported their effort “to communicate impressions of national strength to U.S. citizens and to other nations.”56 After the struggles of the Great Depression, propaganda and media hoped to reconstruct the image of a typical American man as a strong, intimidating fighting machine, one that enemy countries should not underestimate.57

If a male star did not exactly possess the body or persona of a “tough-guy,” he could attain a sense of masculinity in the public eye through comedy. Two examples are Bob Hope and Donald O’Connor. Hope remained hugely popular throughout the war and after by combining humor with patriotism, while O’Connor was portrayed in magazines as having an equal amount of humor and energy, even if he was not as physically strong in appearance as stars like Richard Jaeckel. As described earlier in reference to Bing Crosby, humor and light-heartedness were felt to be distinctly American characteristics, in contrast to those found in other nations involved in the war, and many male stars found success with both men and women by taking advantage of their comedic skills.

57 American male bodies will be discussed further in the following chapters, specifically in reference to Frank Sinatra, because while American media may have suggested that American men were overall physically fit and healthy, this was not necessarily true.
Figure 1.7. Ad for Humphrey Bogart in Passage to Marseille in Modern Screen. April 1944.
Figure 1.8. Feature on Richard Jaeckel in *Screenland*. July 1944.
The reinforced emphasis on traditional gender roles and images in the entertainment industry during World War II worked as another form of propaganda to try and convince citizens that the traditional “American Way of Life,” what historian Lawrence R. Samuel describes as “a secular religion, fusing personal aspirations, nationalism, and consumerism,” was worth defending and preserving. And at the same time that the United States government and much of society hoped and instructed that men and women should return to their traditional roles once the war ended, women possessed a great deal of influence not only in their new economic roles as workers and members of the military, but in the entertainment industry itself. The next chapter will be devoted to exploring how one of the most frequently dismissed female age groups during the war, teenage girls, in fact held great power in shaping the wartime entertainment industry, and used it for their own purposes of self-expression, identification, and creativity.

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CHAPTER 2: “Join up, kids, and have fun.”: Community, Purpose, and Power in World War II Fandom

Academic literature as well as popular imagination tends to remember the history of World War II America in terms of how adults felt, served, and ultimately won the war. Countering this dominant narrative, this chapter will look at the roles of those too young to serve in the most common ways, namely teenage girls. Not only were the experiences and expectations of American teenage girls changing in response to the war, but the concept of teenagers as a distinct social group was itself relatively new in the 1940s. True, teens below the age of eighteen did not join the military or work in full-time production jobs like older men and women (though many of them did have smaller part-time jobs). Yet the views and experiences of teenage girls deserves greater attention, on the one hand because the budding of American teenage culture occurred alongside the outbreak of war, causing teenage girls to experience great challenges in navigating their individual ideas of identification, patriotism, and relationships, and on the other hand, because teenage girls played a significant role in the development of America’s wartime entertainment industry.

This chapter will examine the complex relationship between teenage girls and wartime pop culture to reveal how they used fandom to interpret heavily conflicting messages from advertising media in individual ways that often went against the wishes of mainstream adult society. In order to do this, it will first be useful to determine what the social roles and expectations were for wartime teenage girls from the point of view of both teenage and adult print media and adult society in general. Because gender roles shifted drastically during the war, I will also pursue the question of how gender and sexuality fit in with these perceived roles, and how mass media and entertainment both upset and reinforced expectations of female sexuality.
2.1 “Above all, she must never do anything too grown-up”: Conflicting Messages in Advertising Media and the Roles and Expectations of Wartime Teenage Girls

Scholars of American youth culture generally credit an increase in high school attendance as the greatest force in shaping teenage culture, and this increase is largely attributed to the Great Depression. Before the Depression, many adolescents missed out on a high school education by entering the workforce early in their lives. Compulsory education was not mandated at the federal level, and while states began implementing school attendance laws in the early years of the twentieth century, they were generally not strictly enforced and it was common to only require attendance up to about age thirteen or fourteen.\(^1\) Additionally, early attempts to pass child labor laws in 1916 and 1918 were unsuccessful, which meant more children could work more hours during and after any schooling they may receive.\(^2\) In the years leading up to and during the Depression, however, family members between the age of thirteen and eighteen were pushed out of the workplace and into schools to wait out the economic crisis and open up more jobs for adults, increasing the number of high school-educated Americans significantly. Later on, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 proclaimed that children under the age of fourteen were only allowed to work at family-owned businesses or family farms, and children under sixteen were not allowed to work during school hours, meaning they were expected to be in school. Furthermore, all children under the age of eighteen were not permitted to hold certain jobs that were deemed hazardous by the Secretary of Labor.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) The last state to enact a compulsory school attendance law was Mississippi in 1918.


\(^3\) Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938.
Overall, the United States saw high school enrollment grow from 10.6 percent in 1900, to 51.1 percent in 1930, to 71.3 percent by 1940. Grace Palladino describes how this increase in high school attendance and the improving economy worked together to help distinguish teenagers as an autonomous demographic:

As the economy began to recover in the late 1930s (largely due to the outbreak of war in Europe), high school students were developing a public identity that had nothing to do with family life or adult responsibilities. The first teenage generation to send a majority to high school, by 1938 they were making a name for themselves as bobby soxers who lived to dance to the swinging beat of big band music...Although they were not “teenagers” yet in their own or anyone else’s mind, the concept of a separate, teenage generation was beginning to gain ground.

Similarly, Kelly Schrum writes, “High school, based on biological age, transformed the life experiences of young people aged thirteen to eighteen as a period of schooling came to define a stage of life. The dramatic increase in high school attendance proved to be the single most important factor in the development of teenage culture.” During the 1940s and after, pop culture media such as radio, film, and later television, were largely credited for the spread of teenage cultural practices, but the initial catalyst for the formation of American teenage culture was the act of placing increasing amounts of American teenagers in a school environment together for longer periods of time.

While high school attendance steadily increased through the 1930s, the term “teenager,” as applied to both boys and girls, did not achieve widespread use until close to America’s entrance into World War II in 1941. Palladino attributes the development of the term to advertisers, who saw the increasingly independent social group as “an attractive new market in

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6 Schrum, 12.
the making, one that was not necessarily bound by adult standards or tastes." Marketers began targeting America’s younger generation, and especially teenage girls, by advertising products for “teeners,” “teensters,” and by about 1941, “teenagers.”

World War II advertisements directed towards teenage girls were extremely contradictory in their messages regarding beauty, patriotism, and sexuality. This confusing nature is apparent when looking through any war-era fan magazine such as Modern Screen, Screenland, Photoplay, and Radio Mirror, magazines that were primarily directed towards young women and teenage girls. Kathryn H. Fuller explains that in the early 1910s, movie fan magazines were created with both men and women in mind. Starting around 1915, however, fan magazines “began to reposition themselves, and hence their readership, away from special-interest, fan interactive publishing and toward the fast-growing, lucrative category of women’s magazines, which were incidentally attracting far more consumer product advertising than fan or hobbyist journals.”

By the 1920s, fan magazines “were the major promoters of the image of a female-dominated movie audience and fan magazine readership. Thus, as the image of the frivolous female fan magazine reader took hold, it became much harder for popular culture to imagine male movie fans or the possibility of their interest in movie magazines or movie fan culture.” Imagining a male-dominated pop culture following was likely not actually difficult at all for distributors of popular culture, however, as these same distributors very intentionally created cultural objects that were clearly directed towards females, suggesting they would have been able to do the same

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7 Palladino, 52.
9 Palladino, 52.
10 Fuller, 145.
11 Ibid., 148.
for males if they thought they could gain as much profit. Because females were marked as primary consumers, however, fan magazines were overwhelmingly catered to them by the time America entered into World War II.

Virtually every issue of these magazines contains a large number of ads with messages that fall into one of two categories for teenage girls: (1) conservative ads that emphasize a teenager’s future as a domestic and patriotic wife and mother, and (2) ads that promote conventional physical beauty and its benefits, namely a kind of wild side of teenage female culture characterized by dating and fun. The February 1942 issue of Photoplay serves as an example that includes both categories, though most every issue of every fan magazine does the same.

The first pages of the February 1942 issue of Photoplay are typical of the majority of war-era fan magazine advertising patterns. Commonly, ads for Camay soap appeared early in the magazine, easily recognizable for having a portrait of a woman in bridal attire (Figure 2.1). The ads describe the benefits of going on the “Camay Mild-Soap Diet,” with a caption that names the pictured bride. In this case, it is Mrs. E. C. Thurston Jr., who is described as “charming” and “proof that this thrilling beauty treatment really works for loveliness!” Some Camay ads also included short messages about how women should use the soap frugally, so as to prevent waste and help the war effort. Overall, Camay ads consistently reinforced traditional gender expectations in which teenage girls should strive to become brides, and patriotic brides at that. The U.S. census report states that the median age at first marriage for women in 1940 was 21.5, and 20.5 in 1947, so while many of the readers of fan magazines like Photoplay were not yet married or even engaged, they were often encouraged by advertisers to invest in products that claimed to lead them to that ultimate goal.
allow her honeymoon to interfere with business. Three days after she'd arrived in Miami with bridegroom Fred die Brissun, Rex wired Hollywood about an available part in the "Tales of Manhattan" series. He then wired Hollywood gals just can't keep their minds off business—honeymoon or no honey-

Reginald Gardiner, who is attempting to rekindle the spark with Hedy Lamarr, called on Hedy one evening and discovered her girlfriend Ann Sothern was to be on hand for the evening. For three hours Reggie entertained the ladies with his imitations. As he rose to leave he said, "Next time I'll bring along a boy friend for your girl friend."

Soo, follows, it even happens in Hollywood.

Cal bears Annie Sheridan is seeing less and less of George Brent. After all, a gal can't give the best years of her life to a confirmed non-marriage addict with all the Army, Navy, Air Corps and Marines ready and waiting.

Lili Damita has filed those divorce papers against husband Errol Flynn, alleging great mental and physical anguish, plus suffering and extreme cruelty at the hands of Mr. Flynn, who plays only dashing gallant heroes on the screen.

If this ain't a world!

The cynical Mr. Sanders, who dotes on anecdotes relating to his extreme sinfulness in life, turns out to be a normally happy man, according to latest reports. The bride is said to be Elsie Larson.

Boasting, Georgie, or just wishful thinking?

Ted North and Mary Beth Hughes are the newest romantic pair with that wedding-ring ceremony on their minds.

Wendy Barrie is sporting topez

Beauty plus talent equals a good pose at a Ciro's party: Edgar Bergen, Fay McKenzie, Billy Gilbert

Figure 2.1. Ad for Camay soap in Photoplay. February 1942.
In contrast, a few pages before the Camay ad, there is an ad for Ipana toothpaste, another frequent advertiser in fan magazines of the era, that portrays what appears to be a young woman or teenage girl who is unpopular with men because her teeth are not white enough (Figure 2.2). Ipana ads were always rather harsh in that they addressed “plain” girls, suggesting that a less than perfectly attractive – at least according to the company’s standards – girl’s only hope was to improve her smile. While these ads are similar to the Camay ads in that they are selling a hygiene product, they differ in that the young girls are yearning not necessarily for marriage, but for temporary and multiple male partners to have fun with. The most obvious signifier of this is the illustration that shows the no longer “plain” girl surrounded by not one but five admiring soldiers. The text reads, “Haven’t you noticed that it isn’t always the prettiest girl who is the best-liked, the most popular? Heads turn and hearts surrender to the girl who smiles!” Using the term “popular” suggests popularity with more than one person, and fan magazines often used the term in regards to teenage girls who were skilled at acquiring multiple dates with multiple partners.

In addition, Ipana ads do not include messages of patriotic rationing as many others did. In fact, the ad instructs consumers to “Massage a little extra Ipana onto your gums every time you clean your teeth,” which seems a frivolous instruction when compared to Camay ads and others that emphasize rationing and economical use of their product. And although Ipana ads seem to encourage a more carefree and fun approach to life as a young woman, the company created even more confusion for their target audience in that they produced full-page notices that instructed readers not to buy too many consumer goods and instead to purchase war bonds while simultaneously continuing to publish their normal ads for their toothpaste. In the February 1943 issue of Hollywood, one of these notices is found with the title, “To the girl with a soldier
Figure 2.2. Ad for Ipana toothpaste in *Photoplay*. February 1942.
overseas...How much do you really want him back?” The text shamelessly utilizes guilt in an effort to convince readers to save their money for war bonds, asking,

Just how much do you miss your soldier – far across the ocean?
Do you miss him so much that you’ll pass up that jeweled bracelet you’ve set your heart on?
Do you love him so much that you’ll make your old suit last another spring?
Do you want him back so badly that you’ll walk to the office and to the stores when you could take the bus – and sit home in the evenings when you might go to the movies?
You do? Of course you do!
So start saving, start denying yourself little “extras” and luxuries right now. And buy United States War Bonds with every single cent that you save!

What was a reader of these magazines supposed to think if she was simultaneously being told not to buy unnecessary products or go to the movies, while being bombarded with ads for makeup and jewelry and upcoming films in the very same magazine?

Advertisements in fan magazines such as *Modern Screen* and *Screenland* were not the only publications that attempted to penetrate the minds of teenage girls. Magazines directed towards older women such as *Ladies Home Journal* (1883-2014) and *Parents* (1926-present) often included material written for parents of teenage girls, and sometimes for teenage girls themselves. *Ladies Home Journal*, for example, included a column for teenage girls in every issue beginning in 1928, entitled, “the Sub-Deb.” A sub-deb, or subdebutante, was originally a term used to describe wealthy girls who had not yet “come out” in society, and had gradually evolved to mean teenage girls in general by the time America entered World War II. Kelly Schrum explains how before the 1940s, “the Sub-Deb” column was written with upper-middle-class girls in mind, initially addressing “girls with plans for college, debutante balls, or marriage.”¹² With the addition of a new editor in 1931, Elizabeth Woodward, the column shifted

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¹² Schrum, 15.
in tone and attempted to address teenage girls in general, offering more casual advice on dating, school, and home life.

The column provides a revealing glimpse into how teenage girls were perceived by adult society, and while the column has a generally light-hearted tone, Woodward’s advice can often be interpreted as instructive rather than understanding. In the columns about teenage boys and dating especially, Woodward emphasizes the negative aspects of teenage boys in a way that initially seems to sympathize with girls in their dating quests. In a June 1942 issue, the column lists various “types” of teenage boys girls should avoid, with detailed descriptions of each type’s characteristics (Figure 2.3). It is difficult to know for sure if the slang terms used to describe these different types of boys were actually familiar to or widely used by teenage girls. The detailed definitions provided suggest they were not, as does their absence in fan magazines and the writings of teenage girls that will be discussed further on. However, Woodward’s idea to create slang for teenage girls to potentially use further demonstrates the surface goal of the column to appear relatable to teenage girls, though the message is clearly instructive in that it reveals societal worries about the level of interaction teen girls may have with teen boys and men.

Another “Sub-Deb” column in the October 1943 issue reads as if Woodward were gossiping about boys with her young readers just as they might do with their friends. The title, “Boys are so....,” is followed by a list of exactly what teenage boys are, which according to

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13 I feel it worthwhile to point out the subtle, hand-drawn appearance of the “Kilroy” image underneath the title on this source. The illustration, often accompanied by the phrase “Kilroy was here,” is usually remembered as a symbol between servicemen during World War II to let fellow soldiers know where they have been. Who knows if a soldier scribbled Kilroy on this page as a joke in defense of Woodward’s warnings, or if a girl drew it in tribute or in jest of a boy she knew. Of course, we cannot know exactly who drew this figure or when it was drawn, but it is interesting to see its appearance here nevertheless.
Figure 2.3. “Sub-Deb” column in *Ladies Home Journal*. June 1942. The image of “Kilroy” is very lightly penciled in underneath the title.
Woodward is completely different and inferior to girls in both intellect and emotions (Figure 2.4). While both of these columns seem at first to be sympathetic and understanding to the troubles of teenage girls in their dating lives, it is hard to imagine that these consistently negative portraits of boys were not meant, at least to some degree, to persuade girls not to pursue them at all.

Schrum summarizes this contradiction, explaining,

Advice literature created a complex set of guidelines and mixed messages, telling girls to focus on attracting and pleasing boys but to avoid becoming “boy crazy” or too serious about one boyfriend. Learn to be sexually appealing to boys, magazines counseled, but not too sexy or too sexually active; flirt, but do not flirt too much; be coy, but be yourself.\textsuperscript{14}

Schrum accurately describes the contradictory nature of advice columns towards teenage romance, even as these contradictions extended far beyond print media geared towards teenage girls. Female sexuality in general was a point of confusion and fear for much of American society during the war, which these ads reflect. Scholars such as Doris Weatherford and Marilyn E. Hegarty illustrate how sexual expectations during the war were much different from beforehand and afterwards, and even from today. Weatherford describes the double standard that was felt in many American relationships in which women with husbands or boyfriends overseas were expected to remain faithful while men serving were not condemned for having illicit affairs as a way to cope with their daily military lives. This caused tension not only because male infidelity had to some extent become a norm in American culture, but also because women were given new economic independence in the workforce without any change in how they were expected to behave sexually.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} Schrum, 17.

\textsuperscript{15} Doris Weatherford, \textit{American Women and World War II} (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 2008), 254-255.
Will-o’-the-wisp

You think you know how it’s done when you way him—and
neep, he’s gone. You go with him for years, in all the
good’ns. And then you get the feller off him for
upper in your Aunt Susan’s edelweiss. “Say, are
you looking?” Just like an old stranger. You want
he should help you out the girls in the northern town
place—and of that precise moment he has a date with
the boys. You’re supposed to be friendly, and willing
and able to take in this time most of the model from ochloin at
the drop of his hat. But when you drop your, watch him
flutter of where you can’t catch him, and you try
wander, and watch him flutter around another there?

Set

Hot never nothing it you turn out in seven different
dresses every week. If he has you in that long
you’ll insist that you wear it forever, just try to get him
to go somewhere difficult to eat something he’s not
used to. Like a belle, he’ll dress two feet firmly on
the ground. And you’ll stand up at Mrs.’s as usual
munching the same old snack.

Look at Hope. There’s a sweet girl who’s been in
there for years without getting around with the gang
you know. The easy|pers—|they were smart to take
the plunge. They follow the leader. It wasn’t until
Clipper got all his nerve up and started that Ann
dropped by to see what all the sneaking was about.
That.Rule went along for the ride. And now she’s
dating the whole senior class. After a couple of years
of riding her out.

It’s a wonder courting gets discovered and things
get serious any more. It’s a wonder.

Stuck up

Did you ever see a boy with a pocket mirror and a
polka dot in his pocket. He stride his bath hair
exquisite lo and behold his mirror planes in non
disturbingly as you powered your nail. And then in
a lucky moment you give him the old mirror.

Were you ever in a dance—|with an encore|that
held water? ‘Course, nothing else is as important
ever to keep from being made on time—for
then, if you’re late, Oh, my |way. That’s the
disturbing, essential, necessary. emergency business.
And we would be surprised.

Did you ever get exquisitely stuck as if you impinged your
eyebrows, give bonbons and nonsense? Not yet. You’ve
just a childhood who’s useful for little times, but not
thinking. And you shouldn’t waste his superior time
by clustering up the air with all your childish prattle.

The Sub-Deb

by Elizabeth Woodward

Figure 2.4. “Sub-Deb” column in *Ladies Home Journal*. October 1943.
Further mixed messages were sent to young women and teenagers as the labels of “Victory girls” and “Patriotutes” – terms that were applied to women and teenage girls who made themselves sexually available for servicemen – began to spread. The line that designated one as either a patriotic female citizen or a prostitute became increasingly blurred as the U.S. government worked to encourage sex for servicemen while simultaneously attempting to suppress prostitution near military bases and condemning women who acquired venereal diseases. Government laws such as the Eight Point Agreement and the May Act were put into place during the war which attempted to reduce prostitution near military bases, provide sexual health information for servicemen, and require those prostitutes that were allowed near bases to undergo frequent medical examinations to check for venereal diseases. Marilyn E. Hegarty summarizes this dilemma: “Prostitution was illegal, promiscuity was immoral, female sexuality was dangerous, but sexual labor was essential to the war effort – a veritable catch-22.”16 Because of the discrepancies in not only popular culture messages, but also government messages, American teenage girls were largely left to decide on their own what paths they were going to take in terms of romance and sexuality.

Overall, the constant bombardment of contradictory messages regarding beauty, patriotism, morality, and sexuality that American teenage girls received during World War II – especially from print media directed towards them, such as fan magazines – left them with a significant challenge in terms of navigating their wartime lives and sense of identity. These girls were not completely passive in their consumption of these messages, however. Popular culture objects such as fan magazines, films, and music, while certainly carriers for messages of

propaganda and consumerist advertising, were used by teenage girls in a variety of personal and creative ways to help them identify their own thoughts about their wartime positions and express their independence and ideas.

In reference to early fan magazines of the 1920s, Gaylyn Studlar writes, “…contrary to the expectations of much of contemporary theory, the female subjectivity that is inscribed in fan magazines...is hardly over-identificatory, passive and mindlessly consumerist, but distanced, skeptical, and active as well as being relational, intimate, and empathetic.”¹⁷ This skeptical and intimate relationship with popular culture consumption was even more apparent for teenage girls who engaged with these objects during World War II, and the nature of wartime teenage fandom was characterized by creativity, awareness of the inner-workings of the entertainment industry, and the creation of both physical and imagined intimate communities fueled by popular culture that helped teenage girls navigate and cope with wartime realities.

2.2 Teenage Fandom and Wartime Popular Culture

Advertisers and businesses tended to view wartime teenage consumption of popular culture as a primarily economic phenomenon, which to an extent it was. Many scholars have made the connection between the onset of teenage culture and the way in which businesses successfully realized that this new social group, and especially female members, could lead to huge profits.¹⁸ However, teenage participation in this new popular culture was not a purely economic happening as some academic literature tends to illustrate it. Mark Duffett, whose

studies of the history of pop culture fandom reach back to the 1940s, is one scholar who has suggested that participation in popular culture may have some basis in economic consumption, but the practice in fact moves far beyond that.\footnote{Duffett writes,}

[Fans] are rarely enthusiastic advocates of \textit{economic} consumption per se. They may have discovered their interests through it. They may sometimes accept it as a necessary means of acquiring the experiences, making the connections or providing the benefits of media resource ownership they desire. Yet they do not enact the process for its own sake or enter into it with an innate passion for it alone. Rather, the non-commercial nature of fan culture is, for many fans, one of its key characteristics: they are engaged in a labor of love and if they produce or promote media culture, it is often on a not-for-profit basis. For this reason, several researchers have understood fan exchange as a \textit{gift economy}.\footnote{If popular culture and fandom can be thought of as a “gift economy” as Duffett writes, that suggests that participants receive more out of popular culture than the businesses that profit from it. In the context of teenage girls living in World War II, this begs the question of what exactly these girls were getting out of popular culture and what they were using it for.}

I suggest that teenage girls gained two primary benefits from interacting with wartime popular culture that were generally difficult for them to experience otherwise. Participation in pop culture served as (1) an outlet for feelings of sexuality and basis for romantic fantasy and (2) a way to interact with and create a sense of purpose with each other and the entertainment industry. One might say that American teenage culture, starting around the 1920s and 1930s, has always revolved around these uses and that they are not unique to the World War II era. However, what is unique about teenage culture during World War II is the way in which teenage


\footnote{Mark Duffett, \textit{Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture} (New York & London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 23.}
girls were in a sense cut off from adult society, more so than in other eras,\textsuperscript{21} and how the ambiguity and anxiety surrounding American gender roles during the war made the extent to which teenage girls immersed themselves in popular culture a cause for shock and worry for much of American society. While the remaining three chapters of this dissertation will explore the intense level of devotion many teenage girls demonstrated towards Frank Sinatra in particular, here I will address the two purposes of wartime popular culture for teenage female consumers in general followed by a look into one of the most prominent, organized, and passionate forms of popular culture consumption during the war: the fan club.

As Marilyn E. Hegarty and other authors have described, female sexuality in America during World War II was a topic defined by double standards, confusion, and condemnation. For teenage girls who were adjusting to changes both in their bodies and their social expectations, it was difficult to pinpoint exactly what adult society deemed as appropriate and inappropriate acts of sexuality. As we have seen in advertisements found in print media directed towards women and teenage girls, the levels at which teenage girls were encouraged to be sexually active or not varied drastically. Teenage girls were instructed to simultaneously remain chaste until marriage, yet be available and appealing for servicemen. Similarly, teenage girls interpreted these messages at different levels, with some expressing a desire to hold off on physical intimacy until marriage, while some came to be labeled as “Victory girls,” which Emily Yellin defines as,

\begin{quote}
...females who were not prostitutes but who had sex with young male soldiers. They were described [during the war] as women and girls as young as twelve to their early twenties, but generally they were thought to be from fourteen to seventeen. They hung around military bases and had sex with men “for free.” Their motives were said to be misplaced patriotism, since, the story went, they would not have sex with civilians, only
\end{quote}

military men.\(^{22}\)

It is not hard to see how American teenage girls struggled to understand and define their own sense of sexuality while being subject to such contradictory messages, but participation in popular culture could help teenage girls come to terms with their personal ideas of sex and romance and it acted as one kind of outlet for sexual feelings. Teenage girls could, “release sexual energy”\(^{23}\) through dancing with peers or embrace and develop their feelings towards sex privately through listening to music by themselves or watching movies.

Teenage girls navigated a precarious relationship with popular culture that both allowed them great freedom of expression while nearly always accompanying that freedom with warnings and instructive messages. In terms of sexual activity, this double-sided relationship is clear. For example, teenagers as a whole enjoyed an unprecedented level of unchaperoned dating and opportunities to be physically close to members of the opposite sex, and fan magazines often seemed to encourage this by providing instructions for popular new dances that readers could learn and practice, such as a tutorial for the “Maxixe,” a dance that requires close physical contact and high energy, in the June 1943 issue of *Screenland* (Figure 2.5).\(^{24}\) However, these magazines could also lead teenage girls to feel extremely self-conscious when dancing with teenage boys and men, as can be seen in a Kotex ad in the January 1945 issue of *Radio Mirror* (Figure 2.6). The ad provides an illustration of a young man and woman dancing in a fairly close embrace, yet something seems off in their stance. Kotex encourages rather than condemns


\(^{23}\) Schrum, 98.

Figure 2.5. Dance tutorial in *Screenland*. June 1943.
Figure 2.5 (cont.)
Figure 2.6. Kotex ad in *Radio Mirror*. January 1945.
dancing closely with men, but simultaneously provides readers with a multitude of personal matters they should consider while dancing in order to look as appealing as possible. These include dancing “lightly but not fantastic,” standing “naturally,” and above all, concealing the fact that they might be menstruating. All of these instructions suggested to teenage girls that much was at stake when dancing with males and that whatever a girl’s natural mannerisms or physical appearance may be, it was likely not up to par. Despite these catalysts for extreme self-consciousness, dancing remained a favorite activity for many teenage girls and allowed them a chance to be physically close to another person, which had the possibility of leading to further sexual exploration, but didn’t have to. And for those teenage girls who may not have enjoyed dancing or dating but still desired romance, they could use popular music, movies, and fan magazines to fuel personal fantasy. But again, even fantasies were influenced by contradicting messages in pop culture.

Solitary listening to music through radio and records allowed teenage girls to feel a sense of closeness to a romantic partner who may or may not have existed. Girls could practice a level of romantic agency by constructing fantastical and idealistic romances inside of their heads where they could act however they liked, something that would not be acceptable or likely ever happen in reality. These romantic fantasies were accentuated by the nature of wartime popular songs. B. Lee Cooper suggests that wartime songs fell into two categories: patriotic songs and love songs. Cooper’s discussion of love songs argues that they function in quite the same way as private love letters that were being sent during the war. While there are obvious differences between the two mediums, mainly that love songs were commercially produced for national consumption while letters were not and were meant for individuals, Cooper lists a variety of ways in which they are more similar than different. These include the use of the first person, the
use of “brief texts to communicate highly personalized perspectives on facts and feelings,” the use of texts meant to evoke emotional responses, and the “self-revealing” nature of both formats, which relies “on a combination of personal imagination, common phrasings, and familiar illustrations drawn from popular culture regarding personal heartbreak, pledges of lasting love, pleas for marriage or marital fidelity, and dreams or schemes of future sexual liaisons.”

Cooper also explains how many wartime love songs took the connection to letter writing a step further by referencing the practice directly in the lyrics. The intimate nature of these songs to an unidentified “you” provided teenage girls with a base in which to construct their own romantic scenarios with a romantic partner they may have already had or hoped to have, a celebrity, or a fictional person they could have created for themselves.

One of the most popular songs of the war that demonstrates the connections Cooper makes between love songs and letters was “Don’t Sit Under the Apple Tree (with Anyone Else but Me).” The song was adapted from the nineteenth-century English folk song, “Long, Long, Ago,” the lyrics of which describe nostalgic memories of love, and the hope that former love may be renewed after a long separation. In 1939 the song’s melody was reimagined by Sam H. Stept with lyrics Lew Brown and Charles Tobias to become “Don’t Sit Under the Apple Tree,” and after the United States entered World War II in 1941, the lyrics were modified further to include more war-related lyrics, such as “…till I come marching home” at the end of the chorus. The song was made popular during the war by artists such as Glenn Miller and the Andrews Sisters. During my interviews with people who were teens during the war, this song was

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26 Lyrics written by Thomas Haynes Bayly in 1833.
mentioned by nearly everyone, and on more than one occasion, the participants in the interviews would sing the song together from memory. The music follows typical song patterns of the era with an AABA structure, major key, and quick tempo (Figure 2.7). And while the song was clearly popular among teenagers and described romance and physical intimacy, it also came with a warning directed specifically at the female members of long-distance military relationships. The partner of the military man in this song is instructed not to commit any acts of infidelity, a plea that was common in love letters and popular songs of the time. And as in “Don’t Sit Under the Apple Tree,” it was the woman in most of these songs who was told to remain faithful, which served as an obvious reflection of the romantic “double standard” many American couples were facing.27

Another example of the many “cautionary songs”28 popular during the war was “Stick to your Knittin’, Kitten,” of which the sheet music was provided to the readers of the April 1943 issue of Radio Mirror as part of their “Hit of the Month” feature (Figure 2.8). This particular version of the song includes a note telling readers that the song was featured by a popular radio singer, Mary Small, and written by her husband, Vic Mizzy, who had recently joined the Navy. By suggesting to readers that even celebrity couples respected and were mindful of fidelity was surely a tactic to reiterate sexual expectations to teenage girls and other female readers of the magazine.

The lyrics of “Stick to your Knittin’, Kitten” are even more blunt in their expectation of female fidelity and roles as domestic homemakers than the lyrics of “Don’t Sit Under the Apple

27 Smith, 30.
Figure 2.7. Chorus of “Don’t Sit Under the Apple Tree.” Transcribed by the author.
Figure 2.8. “Stick to Your Knittin', Kitten,” in Radio Mirror. April 1943.

Tree.” The lyrics are clearly written from the point of view of a serviceman who explains he’s “got a job to do,” and to “Stick to your knittin’, kitten / Till all my work is thru.” The warning lyrics of “keep me happy” and “remember what you promised me in your letter,” are emphasized by straight quarter notes on either a repeating pitch or an ascending major arpeggio, which contrasts with the lilting melody of the chorus. In addition, rather than suggesting the woman distract herself from the temptation of other men by going to work, raising money, or engaging in other efforts that were deemed patriotic for women, the speaker advises her to stay home and knit clothes for him instead. This kind of language strongly reinforced the expectation much of
American patriarchal society held that women remain faithful during the war and be ready and willing to return to their “natural” roles as domestic homemakers once the war was over.29

Despite the prevalence of these “songs of faithlessness”30 that included “familiar lists of ‘don’ts’”31 in American popular music during the war, teenage girls were also provided with songs that were extremely well suited for constructing private romantic fantasies, and especially fantasies characterized by long-distance romances with servicemen abroad. The March 1945 Radio Mirror “Hit of the Month,” for example, demonstrates this type of romance. The song “Hands Across the Border,” written by Ned Washington and Hoagy Carmichael, features lyrics that describe a long-distance military romance characterized by dreaming and fantasizing about being back with a romantic partner (Figure 2.9). Again, while some teenage girls listening to or playing this song may have an actual romantic partner in mind, many would have easily been able to create a fictional partner with the aid of the generic “you” address, not to mention this song’s specific emphasis on experiencing romance through dreaming.

Overall, while popular music served as an immensely effective tool both for advertisers and propagandists, it also acted as an equally effective tool for teenage girls to develop fantasies that could include their own unique desires regarding sex, romance and partners. The relationship between music and fantasy will be discussed in greater detail in chapters four and five, but I want to briefly discuss here the ways in which creating romantic fantasies may have

30 Smith, 30.
31 Jones, 261.
been especially important for those teenage girls who did not conform to mainstream expectations of heterosexuality.³²

The experiences of LGBTQ women during World War II was different from that of LGBTQ men for a variety of reasons, but some of the most apparent differences were seen in those who served in the military. Neil Miller explains how, unlike in male branches of the military, “No guidelines were issued for identifying gay women, perhaps because stereotypically lesbian characteristics were precisely those that the military looked for in female recruits.”³³

While it is difficult to pinpoint exactly how both the military and American society in general

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³² Further discussions of representations and experiences of homosexual Americans and possible homoerotic readings of Frank Sinatra’s music and films can be found in chapters three and four.
approached lesbianism and those they suspected of being lesbian – mainly because female homosexuality was publicly discussed even less frequently than male homosexuality – it is clear that American women’s entry into traditionally male working roles and the military led to confusion and suspicion as to how that may affect their sexual roles. Donna B. Knaff writes,

Two issues were at stake [during World War II]: First, many wondered, did doing a man’s job justify allowing women to have sexual autonomy parallel to men’s – in essence, did women assume male freedom and power in terms of dating, courtship, and sex as they took on “men’s” jobs? Second, did doing a man’s job or taking on masculine roles suggest lesbianism or the threat of lesbianism?\textsuperscript{34}

Many Americans morally condemned homosexuality and women who displayed “masculine” traits (Knaff explains that lesbianism during the war was often coded as “manliness”\textsuperscript{35}), not to mention the fact that homosexuality was illegal during the war.\textsuperscript{36} This left many Americans who identified as something other than heterosexual to keep their natural feelings secret. For LGBTQ teenage girls, and LGBTQ Americans in general, fantasy may have been the only way to experience the kind of romance they desired. And with a large number of Americans having access to popular music through records and radio especially, material to help construct such fantasies was often readily available.\textsuperscript{37}

Alongside the more personal and private uses of popular culture and music, teenage girls were able to connect with one another through pop culture objects, a privilege that was important for them even before World War II. In reference to the importance of popular music as a group activity for teenage girls during the years of the Great Depression, Kelly Schrum writes,

Music, increasingly affordable and portable in the 1930s, became even more central in teenage girls’ lives. They alternately loved or hated new forms of music, bands, or songs,

\textsuperscript{34} Donna B. Knaff, \textit{Beyond Rosie the Riveter: Women of World War II in American Popular Graphic Art} (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 82.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{36} Homosexuality in the United States did not become decriminalized nationwide until 2003.
\textsuperscript{37} Further discussion of fantasy and radio can be found in chapter five.
defending their preferences vociferously. They argued with parents over access in the home and with teachers and administrators over access in schools. But music provided an important popular outlet – a forum for group activity, a background for dancing, and a way to express feelings within the realm of popular culture – that could not be suppressed.\textsuperscript{38}

Interacting with people of the same age and interests proved even more important for teenage girls during the war due to the prominent disconnect between teenage and adult culture. While adult men and women devoted themselves to the war effort by serving in the military, workforce, and other organizations, many teenagers, especially those under the age of sixteen who generally were not allowed to take on full-time war jobs, were left to find their own sense of self-purpose and ways of contributing that were continually overshadowed by adult involvement in the war.\textsuperscript{39} Participation in popular culture gave teenage girls a sense of involvement with their idols in Hollywood and the music industry, as well as with each other. Marsha Orgeron emphasizes the social aspect of pop culture participation, especially through fan magazines of this era:

\begin{quote}
The fan magazines certainly possessed a socializing element, on both symbolic and literal levels. They linked women in particular to the public space of movie theaters, to patterns of correspondence and consumption, and to a broad community of fans and spectators. Movie magazines also offered their readers tools with which they could negotiate their own positions in the world. The tenor of the magazines' prevailing discourse – the formation of opinions, the letter writing, the reward seeking, the product buying, the contest entering – all operate within the same framework of empowerment, providing a very tangible, attainable mode of participation for the otherwise potentially disconnected fan.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{38} Schrum, 107.
\textsuperscript{39} Many American teenage girls did have wartime jobs, and some older teens (those age sixteen and above) did work in manufacturing roles. Younger teens who worked generally did so in part-time service or retail roles, roles which were generally not featured in popular imagery of the new working woman such as images of “Rose the Riveter.” Smith, 157.
\textsuperscript{40} Marsha Orgeron, “‘You Are Invited to Participate’: Interactive Fandom in the Age of the Movie Magazine,” \textit{Journal of Film & Video}, Vol. 61, No. 3 (Fall 2009), 8.
One can see how effectively fan magazines convinced readers that their opinions and involvement in pop culture could help move the industry in different directions in the reader write-in sections, where fans could voice their opinions on celebrities, praise a new film or musical performance, or comment on articles and contributions of other fans from previous issues of the magazine. Some magazines even offered incentives for detailed and thoughtful letters. For example, *Screenland* awarded cash prizes for certain letters which were then published in its “Fans’ Forum” section. During the war, the magazine offered prizes in the form of war savings stamps. Instructions indicated what kind of material *Screenland* looked for in a fan letter in order for it to be considered for a prize:

This is how you can turn your fan mail into Victory mail. Write a letter to this Forum telling about your favorite screen star or about a film which you thought highly of; or perhaps you would prefer to write about a star or movie that disappointed you. What you write about doesn’t matter since letters of praise as well as constructive criticism are welcome. If your letter is judged one of the best received during the month, you will be awarded one of the War Savings Stamps prizes which will help you buy more Bonds, and more Bonds mean an earlier Victory – that’s how your fan letter can become a Victory letter!41

This set of instructions suggests to fans that their fan mail is significant in two ways: it can offer “constructive criticism” that may help to convince Hollywood of what viewers like and dislike in films, and it can help with the war effort, because good letters result in money, which can be used to buy war bonds. These types of messages worked to convince teenage girls, the largest audience of such fan magazines as *Screenland*, that their activities within popular culture could be a meaningful way to contribute to the war effort, and the seriousness with which magazines like *Screenland* treated fan opinions and writings allowed these girls to feel as if their

41 *Screenland* (May 1943), 14.
voices were significant within the context of wartime American society, even if Hollywood did not always take their written opinions very seriously.

Magazines also encouraged letters with fun and original writing styles. The second-prize letter in the May 1943 issue of Screenland exemplifies the style of writing the magazine seems to have valued, which is characterized by fun anecdotes, specific details about movies and stars, and overall competence in writing. This letter was written by Marilyn Franz of Manitowoc, Wisconsin and reads as follows:

I should like to submit my letter in your monthly contest. (I’m only fifteen.) After a week of cramming and semester exams, the gang decided that what we needed was a little fun. So – locking Latin and chemistry and Miss Clark in our desks, we voted for a good movie show, and afterwards the Tasty Crispy (our corner drugstore). Anyone who dared to whisper the word “exam” would have to treat the crowd to double chocolate ice cream sodas. But no one even thought of school while watching Seven Sweethearts on the screen.

We were so completely enchanted by pert Kathryn Grayson and handsome Van Heflin that we didn’t even think of the outcome of the history exam. Instead, we hummed the catchy melodies from the film and praised the super performances of the Seven Sweethearts and their friends.

It was such a friendly picture, so charming and gay, that we all felt the need of thanking someone for it. Perhaps this is the best way. However, we would also like to ask that Hollywood give us many more pictures like Seven Sweethearts.42

Franz’s letter demonstrates how teenage girls often felt that their fan writings truly made a difference in the entertainment industry by offering praise and advice and asking for certain things. And to an extent, they did make a difference, since Hollywood and the popular music industry were well aware that one of their largest markets was the teenage population.43

42 Marilyn Franz, fan letter in Screenland (May 1943), 14.
43 Kathleen E.R. Smith writes, “By 1945, RCA, Victor, and Decca were each selling 100 million records annually, and jukeboxes had blossomed into an $80-million-a-year industry, with four hundred thousand of the flashing players in soda shops and diners,” indicating teenagers as the main consumers of these products. In addition, she writes that “Home phonograph equipment became a status symbol essential for a teenager’s social success.” God Bless America: Tin Pan Alley Goes to War, 158. Grace Palladino writes that teenagers spent an estimated $170,000,000 a year on movies. Teenagers: An American History (New York: BasicBooks, 1996), 106.
could describe this community of teenage fans then as an “intimate public,” to use a term of Lauren Berlant. Berlant suggests that an intimate public is a kind of community that “legitimates qualities, ways of being, and entire lives that have otherwise been deemed puny or discarded. It creates situations where those qualities can appear as luminous.” In the context of World War II, we can say the entertainment industry may have acted as the force that “legitimated” the intimate public of teenage girl culture when most other aspects of wartime society considered them to be lesser priorities and contributors.

Overall, popular culture gave teenage girls a focal point in which to express their opinions, fantasies, identities, and sense of community and purpose with one another. Fan participation did not stop with dancing, listening to music, and submitting letters to magazines though. Many teenage girls devoted themselves even further to Hollywood and the music industry through organizing and operating fan clubs, which for many, became one of the most effective ways in which teenage girls could define their sense of identity and purpose during the war.

2.3 “Hooray for the kids of the fan clubs!!”: Wartime Celebrity Fan Club Culture

In the May 1945 issue of Modern Screen, Hollywood’s main authority on gossip, Hedda Hopper, authored an article titled, “To the Fans: God Bless ‘Em!” In the article Hopper makes a strong case in defense of extraordinarily ardent fans, the kinds of fans who seek out certain celebrities at any cost to beg for their autograph, rip off a button from their clothes, or simply to see them firsthand. While many celebrities as well as a large portion of mainstream adult society accused these public fans – who were overwhelmingly of the teenage and female variety – of

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being obsessed and ridiculous, Hopper makes the seemingly obvious statement that “without fans there wouldn’t be any stars.” True, there were and still are today stories of outrageous incidents with celebrity fans that include such acts as breaking into a celebrity’s home, stalking them, kidnapping them, etc. Hopper mentions these types of fans, writing, “Fans can pester the pants off their idols. They can get in their hair, burst into their homes, damage their property, make them very uncomfortable. But are those particular (and fortunately rare) pests true admirers? I wonder.” As Hopper suggests, the dangerous fanatics were the exception not the rule, yet these types of fans received the most media coverage, in turn creating stereotypes that all celebrity fans, especially those who were teenage girls, were generally silly, immature, and often inappropriately separated from societal expectations of gender behavior. In his work regarding media fan culture, Mark Duffett suggests that, “Behind this superior portrayal [of non-fans] is a kind of fear that fans inevitably identify in ways that suggest they experience an alien set of feelings and operate on different assumptions to other people.” Fear of difference is certainly a likely factor in the hostility that pop culture fans often encountered. What this hostility unfortunately covered up, however, was the creativity, organization, business savvy, and social benefits of fandom, qualities that can be seen especially in fan clubs, of which there were abundant numbers during World War II.

The texts and correspondences produced by teenage female members of fan clubs demonstrate that club participation could provide four main benefits for teenage girls outside of those they experienced through following celebrities privately. These included (1) a sense of community with people of the same ages and interests, (2) preparation for careers, (3) a strong

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45 Hedda Hopper, “To the Fans: God Bless ‘Em!” *Modern Screen*, May 1945, 133.
46 Ibid., 137.
47 Duffett, 42-43.
sense of power in the entertainment industry, and (4) a feeling of purpose in the war through discussions about politics and patriotism and club efforts to support wartime causes. The next chapter will explore these benefits in the context of Frank Sinatra fan clubs specifically, but here I will illustrate them along with the general qualities and activities of wartime fan clubs by looking at the published newsletters of clubs in honor of various celebrities such as Nelson Eddy and Jessica Dragonette, as well as clubs dedicated to more general entertainment interests such as The Fan Club League and the Filmland's Fan Club.

Celebrity fan clubs during the 1940s varied in size, organization, and practices, but most had a fairly similar structure. Clubs were usually formed by the fans themselves, and certain members were designated for positions such as president, vice president, treasurer, and editor. Many clubs required applications for membership, though this was mostly for record keeping rather than screening out unwanted members. Members usually paid dues, which generally did not exceed a few dollars per year. Clubs sometimes held regular chapter meetings or planned conventions in major cities, but often club membership spanned great distances and could include hundreds or even thousands of members from all across the United States. Therefore, it was not uncommon for club members to never physically meet one another. This did not mean that members were unable to feel connected with each other, however. One of the staples of fan club practices was the creation and distribution of a regular club newsletter, which members worked together to create and mail out, and through which they could communicate.

Scholarship has begun to give attention to fan publications, or “fanzines,” though this attention is generally directed to fan activity in more recent decades, especially from the 1970s.
The focus has also mainly been geared towards fanzines that have small, obscure followings, with sporadic publication schedules based on funds, interest, and the amount of time an author can spend compiling these documents. Many scholars of fandom have suggested definitions of what fanzines are, usually in contrast to commercial fan publications. Mark Duffett provides one of the clearest:

What was the function of fanzines? They offered a place in which fans could socialize and express their own creativity... In other words, fanzines provided a space in which fandom could be glamorized, made to seem quirky and interesting. Fanzine editors often remained more responsive to their readers because they saw themselves as closer to them than any professional publisher. Fanzines were also a less censored space. Their content could also vary in terms of public acceptability from family-friendly newsletters to twisted commentaries bordering on obscenity.

Most of the characteristics described in Duffett’s definition of fanzines apply to fan club newsletters, but while the two formats are often spoken of as being synonymous, I distinguish those newsletters of celebrity fan clubs in the 1940s from fanzines because of differences in their production, purposes, and the level at which readers are involved. More attention will be given to these differences in the next chapter through exploring the newsletters of Frank Sinatra fan clubs. For now, it will suffice to say that fan club newsletters proved essential for creating a non-physical community that wartime teenage girls could feel validated and active in. Lauren Berlant’s concept of intimate publics is once again useful, as it is a relevant way to view physically separated fan club communities. Berlant writes,

An intimate public operates when a market opens up to a bloc of consumers, claiming to circulate texts and things that express those people’s particular core interests and desires. When this kind of “culture of circulation” takes hold, participants in the intimate public feel as though it expresses what is common among them, a subjective likeness that seems

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49 Duffett, 185.
to emanate from their history and their ongoing attachments and actions.\textsuperscript{50} Wartime teenage fan clubs move even further beyond Berlant’s conception of intimate publics, however, because while Berlant emphasizes a \textit{feeling} of commonality between participants, fan club newsletters proved concrete evidence of this commonality through extensive written submissions and dialogues between members.

One clear example of this textual community can be found in the newsletter of The Fan Club League, which was not dedicated to any one specific celebrity, but to the practice of celebrity fan clubs in general. The League’s newsletter, \textit{El Club Cabana}, includes a section called “Round Table Question,” in which one question is posed to the fan club community and multiple members are invited to submit their responses in writing, simulating a physical roundtable discussion. In the June 1941 issue, the question up for discussion was, “Should club presidents ask for donations toward birthday and Christmas gifts for their honorary stars? If so, should other club presidents be expected to contribute?” The differing responses are then listed, providing food for thought for all fans concerned about such matters in their fan clubs. Louise Thompson of Jackson, Michigan writes, “No, I don’t believe club presidents should ask for contributions toward a gift for their star. If donations are requested I think it a much better idea to give the money to charity.” Marion L. Hesse of Elizabeth, New Jersey has a different opinion, writing, “I think it is all right to ask the members for contributions for a gift for the star. They shouldn’t all be expected to contribute as circumstances sometimes prohibit this. If club presidents don’t contribute, it shouldn’t be held against them.” And Helen Stevens of Hartford, Connecticut writes, “I think that if members want to donate toward a gift, it should be done.

\textsuperscript{50} Berlant, 5.
After all, a star gets as big a kick from gifts as anyone... As for donating the money to charity, this should depend on the star. If they are interested in some special charity, as British stars are, they might prefer it.”

This written exchange demonstrates that while fan clubs in the 1940s could certainly be described as intimate public spheres in that members may have never physically met each other yet still have felt connections with one another, club newsletters in fact provided a very tangible way of creating community that could emulate close physical relationships and interactions.

In addition to creating impressively close-knit communities for huge groups of physically separated people, the fairly constant amount of writing girls did to sustain fan club newsletters served as practice for future careers for many avid fans, especially those who dreamt of working in the entertainment industry. Writing skills could prove useful for a wide variety of jobs, and contributing to the publication of newsletters gave teenage girls a level of professional experience that they could not often find elsewhere. In addition, girls could gain experience in business management, as some of the most essential tasks in running a fan club included collecting dues, setting budgets, and organizing the distribution of materials to club members. A *Modern Screen* article by Hedda Hopper made sure to give credit to the amount of work that goes into running a club. Hopper writes,

> Fan clubs are really a business. Files must be kept, bank accounts coped with, hundreds of letters sent out. People who don't know about fan clubs are apt to think of them as a dozen or so kids sitting around cutting out pictures of their favorite movie star. They do that, too, but believe me, that's only a minor item. The amount of time, money and energy that goes into these clubs gives me gray hairs just thinking about it.

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51 The Fan Club League, “Round Table Question,” *El Club Cabana* (June 1941), 19, Hal Mohr and Evelyn Venable papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, CA (hereafter cited as Mohr and Venable papers).

52 Hedda Hopper, “Join a Fan Club!” *Modern Screen* (September 1945), 108.
Big names in the entertainment industry during World War II such as Hopper recognized club activities as preparation for careers, and club members were encouraged to apply their skills to jobs in entertainment. And for those who fully devoted themselves to fan clubs by serving as presidents, secretaries, treasurers, and editors, those were the types of jobs they craved. In the same article, *Modern Screen* executive editor Al Delacorte gives this advice to fans:

> Join. Pay that nickel [for dues]. Relax. And your life starts looking up. Fan clubs are fun – if fun’s what you want.

> But if your sights are set on the future, that nickel pays even greater dividends. No high school business or journalism course can teach you the practical knowledge you pick up working for a club. You’ll learn to write. You’ll learn publicity. You’ll learn to handle money. And I’m talking from experience. Most of our staff are former fan-clubbers. We’ve come to insist on it. *Modern Screen* is duck soup for kids like that. They speak the language. *Modern Screen's* just another club journal to them – only bigger.

> As for publicity, just ask Frankie [Sinatra] Boy’s manager, George Evans. Ask him what proportion of his staff has had fan club experience. You’ll die when he tells you!

> So you see, fan clubs are fun – nothing but fun, if that’s the way you want it. But for kids with ambition, they are Route One to success in the fields of journalism and publicity. And all for a nickel!\(^{53}\)

How many club members landed a dream job working for a fan magazine, an actual celebrity, or any career at all is hard to know. However, the skill sets developed by those most active in their clubs were undeniably transferable to many jobs, and fan clubs proved to fuel as much ambition to pursue careers, if not more, to those girls involved as the war itself did.

The advice given by Al Delacorte was just one of many messages that entertainment media produced that suggested to teenage girls that they had a significant level of power in determining the directions of Hollywood and the popular music industry. Countless articles in fan and entertainment magazines, as well as radio contests and newspaper polls, worked to convince young consumers that their opinions were an integral part of determining which

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\(^{53}\) Al Delacorte, “Join a Fan Club!” *Modern Screen* (September 1945), 113.
directions the entertainment industry took. There was some truth to this, as teenagers spent an enormous amount of money on entertainment, and businesses worked hard to understand what teenagers wanted from movies, music, and stars. Kelly Schrum summarizes this complex relationship between industry and teenage culture:

Did businesses create high school girls as a distinct culture? Or did high school girls drive the development of teenage consumer culture? Some mid-century critics placed the agency squarely with the producers. Others, such as those within the world of production and selling, envisioned high school girls as leaders whose fickle interests and tastes they tried desperately to understand.

Miriam Hansen suggests that fan power was completely mythical, giving full credit to the entertainment industry for the creation and support of stars, specifically during the silent film era:

The promotional activities surrounding the star – fan magazines and clubs, interviews, contests, public appearances – were designed, cynically speaking, to mobilize grassroots support, but these activities were fully orchestrated from above. The very arbitrariness of the cinematic marketplace, the element of chance in the “discovery” of a star, became part of that promotional discourse, essential to the myth that the star was a creation of his or her loving public.

Even though businesses held, and still hold, great power over the teenage mindset and the direction of the entertainment industry, teenagers themselves did maintain some level of power in the entertainment industry because advertisers, radio broadcasters, and Hollywood executives strove to cater to teenage desires in order to gain as much profit as possible. It is unreasonable to think the relationship between teens and popular culture could be completely one-sided in terms

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54 Grace Palladino references *Seventeen* magazine which claimed that during the war, teenage girls spent $170 million a year on movies. In addition, radio stations increased their budgets for teen programs from $600,000 to $7 million a year between 1941 and 1951. *Teenagers: An American History*, 106-110.

55 Schrum, 20.

of power. After all, the entertainment industry paid close attention to teenage interests and preferences, in turn producing cultural objects that catered to those preferences. Early film scholar, Margaret Farrand Thorp, believed that fan activities were in fact quite genuine and developed from fans themselves, as opposed to being placed upon them by Hollywood:

Fan clubs are not engineered by press agents; each springs spontaneously from the heart of some enthusiast. She gets from the star the names of her fans and proceeds to organize them. There are local presidents and national presidents and they work for their honors. The national president collects dues, usually fifty cents a year, and uses them to publish and circulate, weekly or monthly, a little paper about the star. The lady is usually expected to contribute a letter telling about the new picture she is at work on or giving revealing glimpses into the life of an actress. Sometimes there is general cinema news and always there are contributions from the fans, paeans in prose or verse exalting their idol’s charms. When the star visits New York or some other city the local fan club members make it their duty to act as her bodyguard. They follow her about the streets and into shops, attracting as much attention as they can from a populace who might otherwise remain in ignorance of the glory passing through their midst...Fan clubs are useful not only to the established but to the aspiring actor. The enthusiasts for the novice bombard the powers in Hollywood with letters expressing admiration for their idol and entreating that she may be seen more and more often and in better roles.57

The emphasis that celebrities themselves often publicly placed on the important role of teenagers in their industry worked to encourage girls to participate fully in fan culture, which in return gave them the feeling that they were determining their own desires and seeing those desires come into fruition. For example, an interview in the December 1945 issue of Screenland with singer Vivian Blaine discusses the power of teenagers in determining trends in popular entertainment. At one point Blaine says, “You hear prominent musicians say that they introduced jive and started the bobby-sockers on their way; but such talk is all wet. Don’t let anyone fool you about the younger generation. They had their own ideas and they demanded that the bands

and singers give them what they wanted, just as I went out of my way to cater to them.”

Whether or not Vivian Blaine really believed this, or if she even actually said this, is hard to know since fan magazine stories were often heavily edited or completely fabricated by magazine writers. However, the fact that the magazine chose to include this message in the published version of this interview demonstrates their desire to convince readers that fan participation in popular culture was influential in determining the entertainment industry’s actions.

Another *Screenland* article from April 1946 provides a supposedly foolproof formula from actor Robert Cummings on how to write fan letters that will get responses. Cummings gives such tips as to be honest and sincere, address your letter to the studio of a star’s last picture, type or write legibly, don’t be insulting, and don’t ask stars to autograph pieces of their clothing for you. The prospect of receiving a reply to a fan letter directly from a star (or more realistically, a star or movie studio’s employee) suggested to teenage fans that their opinions could reach as far as an actual actor in a movie or a singer on a radio program, which might influence their performances.

Clubs and their members could also feel as if their organization was a legitimate part of the entertainment industry by achieving “official” status. This was done by receiving permission from the celebrity of honor – which again generally meant receiving permission from an employee of the star or movie studio rather than the star themselves – to form their club.

Samantha Barbas describes the importance many clubs placed on achieving this status:

> With permission [to form a club] came a host of benefits. A mark of legitimacy, official status meant that a club was serious rather than frivolous, that it existed to

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help honor a star, rather than to steal money from gullible fans as did a widely publicized ring of illegitimate fan clubs in the 1930s. It also meant that a club promoted the accepted truth about a star, rather than unfounded rumors. So important was official authorization that Movieland magazine, which ran a monthly column on fan clubs, refused to print news from any club that could not furnish proof of celebrity endorsement.60

As the importance Movieland magazine placed on official status reveals, the entertainment industry, and fan magazines especially, suggested to fans that their clubs could move past the image of being a silly group of teenage girls who merely drooled over celebrities to become mature and professional organizations that could build themselves up to become respected members of the entertainment industry.

Messages of power in the entertainment industry extended out of mass media into texts written by teenage girls themselves, especially in fan club newsletters. The “Open Forum” section of the Summer 1943 issue of the Nelson Eddy Notes invited club members to submit letters they had written to various entertainment magazines in support of Nelson Eddy. One of the letters, written by member Marianne Jesse to Photoplay, implores the entertainment industry to give Eddy more film roles:

I don’t believe anyone can give a song such beauty and meaning as [Nelson Eddy] does. His voice is spell-binding, and his enunciation is perfect. There is nothing more to be desired in a singer but, in Mr. Eddy’s case, there’s also a charming personality and a refreshing handsomeness. Concert-goers, more than anyone else, are aware of this because recently pictures haven’t done much for him. It seems a crime that one with Mr. Eddy’s accomplishments should not be given the opportunities he deserves. Concert sell-outs, year after year, prove that he has a huge following. Now, if the motion picture producers would only realize this and give Mr. Eddy a real chance, I’m positive he’d be “top box office” because we’d put him there!61

61 Marianne Jesse, Nelson Eddy Notes (Summer 1943), 13, Paul Henreid papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, CA (hereafter cited as Paul Henreid papers).
One member of The Fan Club League, Elsa Linke, even went so far as to write an article scolding those celebrities who lost interest in the clubs dedicated to them, suggesting that celebrities owe a great deal of their success to their fans:

...the stars who simply ignore their clubs after giving their permission [to form them] are the ones who make miserable the life of their club presidents. What can be done in this connection is a matter that has been in my mind a good deal lately. With the Fan Club League doing such good work in giving advice to clubbers on how to run their clubs efficiently, perhaps, in time, they may be able to figure out some way of acquainting the stars with the idea that their fans, the sincere ones at any rate, really want to help them and chose the medium of a club to do so, but that although stars grant a privilege when they give permission to someone to start a club, they themselves are also under a certain obligation to the president. If they want a club in their honor and sincerely intend to make a go of it, and think it can help them to some extent in their careers, they should give their attention to the club being started only if they intend to continue their interest.62

Requests such as these suggest that many fans felt the entertainment industry was primarily interested in serving their audiences rather than making money. Overall, the constant pleas to teenage fans from both businesses and their own peers to express their opinions provided girls with a strong sense of agency and independence, which they did not necessarily feel in other areas of their lives. Aside from providing members with a feeling of agency in the entertainment industry, fan clubs also provided teenage girls with a safe space to discuss their own ideas about politics and patriotism. They also provided teenage girls with opportunities to become involved in club efforts such as charity work and war bond drives that allowed them to feel involved and purposeful in the war, something that was likely especially important for those girls who were not yet old enough to take on a full-time war job, or who did not work for other reasons.

In 1946 The Sunday News (1866-1975) in New York published an article by Ed Sullivan entitled, “A Tribute to Fan Clubs.” Sullivan wrote the article with the help of Natalie Reiff, an

62 Elsa Linke, “Co-Operation Please!” El Club Cabana (June 1941), 8, Mohr and Venable papers.
employee of the Modern Screen Fan Club Association (MSFCA), which helped to organize clubs, to provide them with information about their favorite stars, and to connect fans who were interested in joining up with club presidents. In the article, Sullivan and Reiff highlight the positive aspects of celebrity fan clubs, especially their dedication to charity work. For example, the article states that one Bing Crosby fan club, “The Bingites,” raised one hundred dollars for the Infantile Paralysis Fund. A Tommy Dix club staged a show, donating the proceeds to the Cancer Drive Fund. A Bette Davis club donated money to send underprivileged children to summer camp. It is no wonder that Sullivan ended the article by exclaiming, “So hooray for the kids of the fan clubs!!” Charitable efforts such as these had been one of the main priorities of wartime fan clubs and served as one major benefit teenage girls could experience by joining a club. Celebrity gossip writer, Gertrude Soeurt, praised these fan club activities, writing, “Fan Clubs give us some mighty grand ideas. One in Hempstead, Long Island, is sponsoring a series of Musicals featuring recordings of its honorary president, Nelson Eddy. The American Red Cross is profiting as a result – the proceeds are turned over to this worthy organization.” Other evidence of these kinds of activities can be found in the published and circulated newsletters produced by fan clubs.

The June 1941 issue of *El Club Cabana*, produced by The Fan Club League, includes two articles that, although were written before the United States’ official entry into the war, encourage club members to assist the British in their war efforts. The first, written in support of the New York branch of the British Allied Relief, which supplied clothing to British citizens,

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tells its readers, “the bombed citizens of England show great courage and fortitude...homeless and clotheless, they need our help.” The second article shows even more zealousness in its appeal, saying,

You say we’re not involved [in the war], as yet? Oh yes we are. We, as a democracy have been involved since England began fighting. ‘Tis true we have not sent our boys over there to fight, yet, but they’ve been drafted. We’re building war materials for the other democracies as well as for ourselves. I definitely believe we are involved, regardless of what might be said to the contrary... So why not begin now with aiding the democracies. There are many ways. One good way I recommend is by starting a relief chapter in every club for the benefit of such brave nations as England, China, Greece and others.

Unsurprisingly, club efforts towards war-related charitable causes increased when America officially entered after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and they were sustained throughout the war. The cause a club would support was often chosen based on the beliefs or primary concerns of the celebrity the clubs were dedicated to. After an extensive review of Nelson Eddy’s latest concert tour and his interactions with audiences, The Nelson Eddy Club member, Helen P. Lasell of Long Island, New York, wrote the following commentary:

After reading this are you not just too, too proud for words of “Our Star?” We always were, but doesn’t this make us realize even more, what a marvelous person we honor, through our club? Not just a Star – a great artist – a great American – “An American Phenomenon.” Yet, at the same time, he is just a likable person. Does it not make us feel more like backing him to the nth degree in his every choice, for everything he does and every song he chooses is done so thoughtfully, with a definite purpose, to help someone, please someone.

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65 The Fan Club League, “Close-Ups,” El Club Cabana (June 1941), 11, Mohr and Venable papers.
66 Mary June Russo, “The Democratic Way of Life,” El Club Cabana (June 1941), 18, Mohr and Venable papers.
Comments like this raise the question of whether fans were genuinely interested in the charitable and social causes they pursued, or if they were primarily guided by whatever their favorite stars preached. This question will be explored in more detail in the next chapter in regard to Frank Sinatra’s fan following, but the short answer for now is that both explanations were in play. Club members seemed to express legitimate pleasure in being able to support charity, and there is no reason to believe otherwise. However, as young citizens during the war who were constantly met with challenges and questions about their sense of identity and purpose in an uncertain era, they were helped by having a public figure with clear and outspoken ideas that fans could easily follow. An example of this well-intended yet slightly unsure mindset can be seen in the president’s letter in the February 1946 issue of the *Jessica Dragonette Club News.*

This club, which, like most, encouraged members to purchase as many war bonds as they could throughout the war, desired to pursue new causes after the war’s end. However, it is clear that the club was not quite sure where they feel their efforts should be directed:

**Dear Club Members:**

I am so delighted most of you are in favor of having a “Charity Fund.” Thanks so much to all who have already sent in for this worthy cause. All who wish to give towards this fund, I shall be glad to receive your donation as soon as you can send it.

In case I might have unintentionally missed someone, I will explain here that we have decided it would be a fine thing if our club gave a gift to charity. I think it would be lovely if we gave to some needy children’s home with the intention it should be used to help educate some child in music, or to some hospital for treatments for some child, or it could be sent to a veterans hospital...I wish each one of you who has not already written would write me what you think concerning this, and your suggestions as to where you think the money should go. If you know of any place where it is greatly needed, I will be glad to know.\(^{68}\)

While the club has already made progress in collecting money for a “Charity Fund,” it is apparent that choosing an actual recipient of this fund will take more thoughtful discussion and

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organization on the part of the club members than the initial decision of the club president to contribute to charity in general did. This kind of challenge, however, proved to be one of the most positive aspects of wartime fan clubs. American teenagers had to struggle with defining their own beliefs and sense of self while the world around them was in chaos, and being able to discuss big issues of the day with people of similar ages and interests in a fan club allowed them to develop feelings of community and purpose among themselves that they may have missed out on if they had not joined a club.

By exercising the right to discuss political beliefs and feelings regarding the war effort with fellow fans, teenage fan club members enjoyed a unique environment during the war, an environment in which they felt their opinions held importance. It should come as no surprise that the opinions of teenage girls were not generally regarded by adult society as worthy of great attention in the realm of politics. The same can be said of today’s political environment. True, teenage girls can participate in political and social activities, but when decisions are made, their voices are ultimately low on the list of priorities. But although the discussions girls were having within the world of wartime fan clubs may not have made their way to the ears of the nation’s leaders, the fact that girls could still express themselves at all to people with very similar interests to themselves in an environment where they were taken seriously was undeniably beneficial for building individual feelings of purpose and confidence. Overall, it is easy to agree with Hedda Hopper when she writes, “I’m sold on the clubs myself, or I wouldn’t be writing this. Join up, kids, and have fun.”

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69 Hopper, “Join a Fan Club!” 113.
CHAPTER 3: Teenage Identity and Expression in Frank Sinatra Fan Clubs

Upon the arrival of Frank Sinatra in Pasadena, California in August of 1943, the following article appeared in the Chicago Daily Tribune, under the headline “Sinatra Is Saved from His Fans”:

A crowd of teen age girls stampeded in ecstasy today in greeting Tenor Frank Sinatra, idol of the nation’s jitterbugs, upon his arrival here.

Several of them fainted. They clawed and bit and pulled each other’s hair. And they all screamed and shrieked as they fought on the station platform to get a closer view and the autograph of the boyishly earnest singer...

The girls in the back, deprived of a close view, began pushing and clawing. Then all semblance of order vanished. The frantic girls plunged thru tightly held police lines in an attempted bee line for their idol. They mauled and fell over each other in a melee that ranged all over the platform.¹

This article typifies the general nature of press coverage surrounding Frank Sinatra during the years of World War II, when his stardom was first developing. To be a Sinatra fan meant that you were part of an enormous national following, yet that following was one often met with criticism, condescension, and confusion.

To most of adult society, teenage devotion to and activities surrounding Sinatra were generally seen as impediments to what were supposed to be the main priorities of all Americans: winning the war in order to preserve traditional American values and family life. What both adults and scholarship have failed to take notice of, however, was how Sinatra fandom allowed thousands of teenage girls to attempt to cope and navigate their stressful and confusing wartime realities. This chapter will delve into the experiences of those teenage fans of Frank Sinatra who devoted much of their time to the organization and activities of fan clubs in his honor. After first illustrating the stereotypes placed on Sinatra fans through mass media and the ways in which mainstream society reacted to them, I will provide a detailed overview of the characteristics of

Sinatra fan clubs using published club newsletters and correspondences in order to illustrate how Sinatra fandom in fact provided girls with a concrete way in which to explore and take part in community involvement, international cooperation, potential career preparation, and personal expression during the uncertain years of World War II.

3.1 “Young Schoolgirls with Foolish Ideas”: Stereotypes and Society’s Treatment of Sinatra Fans

In 1944, Warner Bros. Pictures distributed a short *Looney Tunes* cartoon directed by Frank Tashlin, entitled *Swooner Crooner.* The almost eight-minute long short features Porky Pig as the committed male supervisor of the World War II “Flockheed Eggcraft Factory,“ where chatty hens that are obviously referencing female war workers clock in every day to lay eggs for the war effort. Porky packs up the eggs in boxes labeled “To Britain,“ “To China,“ and “To Russia,” while the hens sit on nests that move on a conveyor belt through the factory. All the hens are working diligently until a disembodied voice floats through the factory windows singing Max Steiner and Kim Gannons’, “It Can’t Be Wrong.” The hens suddenly stop their work and rush outside with cries of, “It's Frankie!” One hen that is in the middle of laying eggs even manages to retract them back inside of her so she can join the other hens.

Once outside we see a comically skinny rooster in the likeness of Frank Sinatra (Figure 3.1), sporting one of his signature oversize floppy bowties, serenading the hens, who are suddenly portrayed not as devoted and mature workers as they were in the beginning of the film, but as the embodiment of most all of the negative stereotypes associated with teenage Sinatra

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Figure 3.1. Caricature of Frank Sinatra in *Swooner Crooner* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1944).
fans. The hens are shown to be swooning, literally melting into puddles, panting, and donning the uniform of teenage Sinatra fans, bobby socks and saddle shoes (Figure 3.2). In a panic, Porky puts out a newspaper advertisement that reads, “Rooster Auditions! Singing Rooster Needed to Keep Hens Producing. Apply Porky Pig.” We then witness the auditions of multiple roosters, which caricature other singing stars of the day, including Nelson Eddy, Al Jolson, Jimmy Durante, and Cab Calloway. Porky finds none of them suitable and starts to lose hope when a rooster in the likeness of Bing Crosby appears and says, “Now look it here, Porky old man. Let the old groaner take a whirl at those slick chicks.” Rooster Crosby then performs Cliff Friend’s “When My Dream Boat Comes Home,” and the fainted hens are revived with excitement to hear “Bing.” This sparks a singing competition between Sinatra and Crosby that results in the hens laying literal mountains of eggs. Even a baby chick who has clearly not reached sexual maturity manages to lay an egg about six times bigger than herself (Figure 3.3). Overwhelmed with the amount of eggs produced, Porky asks the two singers, “How did you ever make them lay all those eggs?” Sinatra and Crosby respond, “It’s very simple, Porky. Like this.” They then sing together and Porky himself, giggling, lays a pile of eggs.

_Swooner Crooner_ encompasses almost all of the typical stereotypes that were applied to teenage female Sinatra fans in the 1940s. Namely, that Sinatra distracted girls from focusing on the war effort and that fans acted crazy in his presence. These stereotypes were cultivated by most areas of media, including newspapers, films such as _Swooner Crooner_, and magazines. A 1943 article in the _Chicago Daily Tribune_, headlined “Girls Sigh,” describes the usual chaos Sinatra encountered on his arrival in a new city. The article’s last paragraph reads, “As Sinatra drove off in a taxicab, audible sighs went up on all sides. ‘Now I have lived,’ breathed one pretty
Figure 3.2. Swooning Hens in *Swooner Crooner* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1944).
Figure 3.3. Prolific Egg Laying in *Swooner Crooner* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1944).
18 year old youngster. She was serious.”\(^3\) Another 1943 article in the *Los Angeles Times* bears the headline, “Thought of Drafting Sinatra Brings Moans From Females.” The article interviews various people on their opinions about Sinatra’s potential military service, with one fourteen-year old asking, “How’s he going to keep up our morale? Me, I’m heartbroken.”\(^4\) These examples show how media tended to illustrate teenage girls as ridiculous and disconnected from real life, especially the war. The article in the *Los Angeles Times* suggests that overall, girls would much prefer Sinatra to stay in America and continue to entertain them rather than serve overseas. And to be accused of such selfish thinking rather than adopting the mindset that every person must do all they can to aid the war effort was cause for severe criticism in World War II America.

The desire to keep Sinatra in America and accusations of being disconnected from the war effort were really just the surface of society’s concerns with teenage admiration of Sinatra. Sinatra’s devoted fans presented a further threat to traditional gender behavior already manifest within wartime American society that women would resist returning to their traditional domestic and appropriately subservient sexualized roles once the war was over. Girls reacted publicly to Sinatra both vocally and bodily in ways that suggested sexual infatuation, mainly through swooning, sighing, screaming, fighting with other girls, etc. Women in general, and young girls especially, were expected to contain their sexuality, expressing it only just enough to attract and keep a husband, and afterwards not letting it outside their domestic lives. The fact that teenage girls were expressing strong levels of infatuation in public towards a very public figure was deeply troubling to much of American society.


\(^4\) “Thought of Drafting Sinatra Brings Moans From Females,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 7, 1943, 22.
Looking again at *Swooner Crooner*, we see this idea of sexual excess in animated form. Before rooster Sinatra begins to sing, the hens’ act of laying eggs is portrayed as an appropriately feminine and matronly way for females to contribute to the war. Most hens lay one egg at a time without any motivation besides their sense of duty. Once Sinatra appears, however, the act of laying eggs becomes suggestive in a very different way. The hens are driven to lay enormous piles of eggs not by their sense of professional duty, but by listening to Sinatra serenade them. While laying eggs in the factory takes effort, the hens do not have to try at all to lay eggs when Sinatra sings, and it is notable that a baby chick, which can be likened to the younger American female population, is driven to lay a massive egg at an age when sexual reproduction is not even possible for a chicken. This not so subtle portrayal of Sinatra’s voice releasing a torrent of reproductive activity provides a clear illustration of what many Americans were afraid of.

Shortly after the war ended, Sinatra and his wife, Nancy, separated. While Sinatra’s persona as a womanizer and collector of wives came to be part of his permanent celebrity image in the decades of his career following the war, fans were not at all used to it in 1946. Multiple women I interviewed specifically remembered news of Sinatra’s affairs and separation from his wife and how those factors effected their opinions of him, despite the separation happening seven decades ago. One person explained to me,

I kind of started disliking Frank Sinatra when his wife, Nancy, stood by him all the lean years and his ego got in the way. He divorced and married Ava Gardner. That was really shameful where the wife stayed home with the kids and she struggled along with him and, well, you probably haven’t had to struggle, but when you’re married and you don’t have much money, and you got a budget, and you can’t buy this or buy that, and it’s hard. There was such a scandal. In that day and age, you believed a different way than people do today.⁵

⁵ Group interview with senior assisted living residents by author, Cantril House, Castle Rock, CO, March 20, 2017.
Not only did Sinatra’s divorce yield criticism in regards to his treatment of traditional marriage values, it also provoked a response that brought the wartime fear of his sexual influence on teenage girls into the foreground.

A stream of letters written to celebrity gossip legend Hedda Hopper reveals what many adults really thought of Sinatra and what their concerns were in regard to children and teenagers that echoes my informant’s views decades later. One letter from a Mrs. J. Rita Farrell reads:

I am not only a fan of yours, but also of Frank Sinatra’s. I feel that his attributes are many and that his voice is only one of many.

I would like you to understand that I am not a young schoolgirl with foolish ideas. I am a young girl of 21 married to an i4-Navy man and very much in love. My husband and I are avid listeners to the Sinatra program but now whenever we hear “Frankie” we think of Nancy Sr., Jr. and Frank Jr…

Mr. Sinatra at least should think of little Nancy who I’m told idolizes him so, not to mention Mrs. Sinatra. She’s a wonderful woman and if I were she I doubt that I should have been able to put up with so much for so long. Pictures of Frank at the [Joe] Louis-[Billy] Conn fight with a blonde in the newsreels etc. etc.

I hope you will excuse my digressions and not think me an utter fool. I’m just happily married and want everyone else to be.⁶

Another letter from Mrs. James McCune takes her frustrations further:

Dear Miss Hopper,
I can’t help writing this letter to you. I have just read your article in today’s paper about Frank Sinatra. Don’t you think it is about time some of these so called stars called it a day with these divorces and separations? The mothers in our apartment house have all gotten together and forbid all our children, little ones and big ones, from going to see any Sinatra pictures or even to listen to his radio show. He is no help to children, he is a very bad example to our high school girls.⁷

Another letter from “A Buffalo fan” issues an even more severe attack on Sinatra:

Regarding Frank Sinatra’s write up I assure you there are many, many of my friends as well as myself and relatives who never thought he could sing in fact our firm convictions were that the publicity men who gave him the build up about the silly

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⁶ Mrs. J. Rital Harrell to Hedda Hopper, October 16, 1946, Hedda Hopper papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, CA (hereafter cited as Hedda Hopper papers).
⁷ Mrs. James McCune to Hedda Hopper, October 17, 1946, Hedda Hopper papers.
bobby sockers being crazy over Sinatra made him popular and absolutely not his voice. I think he sounds in pain every time he utters a sound...

The only reason many of us tolerated him at all was because of his pretense of being a loyal, devoted husband and father...Frank Sinatra (the Human Scare Crow) with a voice like a grunt and groan man has failed in his duties and pledges to God and Man when he left his wife and children.  

Yet another letter from “A Reader of the Times” takes violent stabs not only at Sinatra, but his supposed new love interest, Lana Turner:

I used to listen to [Sinatra] because I thought he was different from the rest of that trash in Hollywood but now I am burned up!

Lana Turner must be proud of herself to break up a nice little family like the Sinatra’s. The public should boycott all the pictures of girls like her, it is a fine example to set for the younger people.

I hope the bobbysoxers will stick together and put him on the skids it would do him good, it was the kids who made him, the older people couldn’t stand him, at least every one I knew felt that way about him.

All that Ballyho about him being such a wonderful husband and father makes me sick... He ought to know Lana Turner will grab the next pair of pants that goes by. Marriage vows mean nothing to people like her, in my estimation it is just glorified legal prostitution. I am sick and tired of the whole mess, and anybody who pays money to see trash like that is a fool, they are no better than common street walkers...Those girls make me think of a bunch of dogs in heat.

The shared tendencies of these authors, at least two of which were married, to condemn Sinatra’s treatment of traditional marriage and family values, express concern about Sinatra’s influence over children and teenagers, and separate themselves from “younger people” and “silly bobby sockers” reveal the attitudes much of adult society felt towards Sinatra and his fans throughout the war and after. These letter writers emphasize their own commitments to heterosexual marriage, domestic and family duties, and contained sexuality through their attacks on Sinatra, and represent the significant portion of Americans who hoped that men and women would return to their traditional prewar roles once the war ended.

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8 “A Buffalo Fan of yours” to Hedda Hopper, October 19, 1946, Hedda Hopper papers.
9 “A Reader of the Times” to Hedda Hopper, October 25, 1946, Hedda Hopper papers.
It should be noted that Sinatra was not the first singer to be accused of affecting women in inappropriate ways, though the concern was a relatively new one beginning in the 1920s. As mentioned in chapter one, Rudy Vallée enjoyed popularity among both men and women in the early to mid-1920s, but fell victim to accusations of effeminacy and indecency as societal shifts caused by technology and immigrant assimilation brought gender and sexuality to the forefront of American consciousness.¹⁰ Vallée provided women with an object to focus their personal desires, both sexual and emotional, which proved problematic for American society as women were encouraged to contain such desires, reserving them for their husbands alone in private.

The redeeming exception to this negative attention towards male singers was Bing Crosby, who despite being labeled as a “crooner” near the beginning of his career, preserved a masculine image by identifying with “traditional tropes of white masculinity (normative gender roles, property ownership, procreation, religious practice, racial supremacy) that conveniently bypassed and erased the urban melting pot and vocal variety of the 1920s.”¹¹ Looking back to *Swooner Crooner*, we see this portrayal of Crosby as a redeeming entertainer devoted to his nation’s values and causes when he succeeds in getting the hens to resume their egg production for the war effort. Because Frank Sinatra was more similar to Rudy Vallée than Crosby, it is easy to see why so many World War II Americans felt his presence to be dangerous, unnatural, and disruptive to the war effort.


There were a rare few instances in mainstream media when Sinatra and his fans were defended, sometimes by public figures. Actress Vivian Blaine, whose interview regarding teenagers was discussed in chapter two, was reported as saying, “When you come down to it, there is nothing wrong with young girls screeching over Frank Sinatra. It’s just a healthy emotional release, and young people have always had a lot of hero worship in their blood.”\(^\text{12}\) An article in *The New York Times* praised the behavior of Sinatra’s fans during a talk he gave about President Roosevelt’s re-election. The first paragraph reads, “Frank Sinatra spoke in President Roosevelt’s behalf before a predominantly bobby socks audience in crowded Carnegie Hall last night – spoke gravely, and was heard with marked respect.”\(^\text{13}\) Another article in *Swing* magazine suggested there was no harm in teenage involvement in Sinatra fan clubs and defended club members to some extent, though the writer remained condescending of teenage girls, implying they were still disconnected from larger society:

The Sinatra fan clubber is not, teenagers will have you know, a silly, swooning drip, who sits around drooling over Sinatra scrapbooks. No bird brain, she can, and does, hold her own in high school and college classrooms...
To fuddy-duddy standards, fan clubs may seem a little zany. In reality, Aunt Suzie, they’re not just added evidence that the squealing bobby-soxers are jitter-bugging to a spiritual downfall. They’re merely a diverting hobby of really nice people who live in a wonderful, exciting world of their own. Remember when you were sixteen?\(^\text{14}\)

While instances such as these attempted to portray fans as normal people rather than societal nuisances, they were greatly overshadowed by more disapproving accounts of Sinatra fandom.

\(^\text{12}\) Vivian Blaine in “Advice to Bobby-sockers from Vivian Blaine,” by Barry Farrar, *Screenland* (December 1945), 83-84.
The following section aims to unearth the writings of a special group of Sinatra fans, whose devotion to the singer evolved past these condemning stereotypes and served as a way to express their desires, worries, and sense of identity during World War II with like-minded people, namely the active members of Frank Sinatra fan clubs. These fans may have felt the sting of media criticism, but that did not stop them from pursuing their interests in highly organized, creative, and passionate ways that in fact reveal high levels of thoughtfulness and professionalism towards their surroundings and each other.

3.2 Frank Sinatra Fan Clubs

In 1946, E.J. Kahn Jr., longtime writer for The New Yorker, published a book about Frank Sinatra’s career entitled The Voice: The Story of an American Phenomenon. This book was compiled from various articles Kahn researched and wrote about Sinatra, and serves as one of the earliest attempts to analyze and document Sinatra’s wartime career from a relatively critical standpoint, at least in comparison to fan magazines and newspapers. In this book, Kahn succeeds in acknowledging the vast fan following Sinatra enjoyed, not only from individual fans, but more notably, organized fan clubs. While Kahn claims to have met Sinatra himself on various occasions in his quest for research, much of his source material comes from George Evans, Sinatra’s wartime press agent, and Marjorie Diven, Sinatra’s official fan club coordinator and liaison. These two contacts provided Kahn with material regarding the scope and environment of Sinatra fan clubs specifically, as opposed to fan magazines which usually discussed fan club participation in general. And while it is hard to know exactly how accurate the information from Sinatra’s press agent may have been, by using the material found in Kahn’s book alongside fan club newsletters, personal correspondences between members, and descriptions of these clubs in other media areas, I have pieced together a detailed picture of this incredible fan community that
has thus far been largely absent from Sinatra scholarship. This picture reveals the structures, customs, and values of these fan communities in the larger context of World War II, especially in terms of female expression and expectations. Figure 3.4 provides an overview of which Frank Sinatra fan clubs I have obtained club newsletters from and will therefore be featured in this study.

According to most accounts, there were over a thousand Sinatra fan clubs in existence during the war, if not more. Kahn writes, “According to George Evans...there are forty million Sinatra fans in the United States. Evans estimates that there are two thousand fan clubs, with an average membership of two hundred, and he has further estimated (by means of logarithms and a press agent’s intuition) that only one per cent of the Sinatra fans have yet bothered to join a club.” Evans likely exaggerated numbers in order to make Sinatra’s fan following appear as expansive as possible, and he probably did not have any sort of actual “logarithm” to determine fan club numbers. But nonetheless, it is clear that there were a large number of Sinatra fan clubs, in part because fan club participation in general continued to increase during the 1940s alongside Hollywood’s popularity and influence, and because one can find evidence of seemingly endless fan club names in a variety of sources. Hedda Hopper’s article in support of fan clubs in the September 1945 issue of *Modern Screen* lists some of the creative and often comical names fans came up with for their Sinatra fan clubs. Such names include, “The Frank Sinatra Solid Sending Swooning Screaming Sirens,” “Grand Guy Frank,” “The Swoonettes,” “The Bobby Sox Brigade,” “The Hotra Sinatra Club,” “The Semper Sinatra Swoonettes, “The Fascinated Fans of

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<th>Newsletter</th>
<th>Newsletter Publication Start Date</th>
<th>President(s)</th>
<th>Member Locations</th>
<th>Dues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Society for Souls Suffering from Sinatritis</td>
<td>BowTie Bugle</td>
<td>c. Autumn 1944</td>
<td>Irene Yourgas Mildred Schultz</td>
<td>Local chapters throughout U.S.</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slaves of Sinatra</td>
<td>The Voice</td>
<td>c. June 1944</td>
<td>Barbara Burns</td>
<td>Throughout U.S.</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Sinatra Music Club</td>
<td>Sinatra Scope</td>
<td>c. June 1946</td>
<td>Jeanne Kennedy Frances Bergstrom</td>
<td>Throughout U.S.</td>
<td>20 cents per month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semper Sinatra Fan Club</td>
<td>Sinatra-ly Yours</td>
<td>c. January 1944</td>
<td>Marion Tead</td>
<td>Local chapters throughout U.S.</td>
<td>15 cents per quarterly journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Guy Frankie Club</td>
<td>The Voices Echo</td>
<td>c. May 1945</td>
<td>Ann (last name unknown)</td>
<td>Throughout U.S.</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankie's United Swooners</td>
<td>The Sinatra Sender</td>
<td>c. January 1945</td>
<td>Elsie Ellovich Elaine Marocco</td>
<td>Throughout U.S.</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sing with the Sinatras Club</td>
<td>T-Jacket Journal</td>
<td>c. November 1944</td>
<td>Juanita Stephens</td>
<td>Throughout U.S.</td>
<td>75 cents per year, later increased to $1.40 per year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.4. Frank Sinatra Fan Clubs

Sinatra fan clubs were largely comprised of middle to upper-class girls between the ages of about thirteen to eighteen. Fan club newsletters reveal this dominant demographic by including sections that profile members and their ages and interests. For example, a section in the June 1946 issue of Sinatra Scope includes a feature about one of the Frank Sinatra Music Club’s co-presidents, Jeanne Kennedy. The feature reads, “Jeanne, whose address is Castanea, P.A., is sixteen. She likes singing, dancing, collecting Frank’s records, pictures of him, news, and ‘anything pertaining to Frank.’” An issue of the BowTie Bugle includes features on three Society for Souls Suffering from Sinatritis members, Judith Newman, Patty Culhane, and Jean Keller. Newman’s feature reads, “Judy is the Vice President of the Cleveland Chapter of the ‘Society’ and an ardent of ‘our boy.’ She is nearly eighteen and admits, to her chagrin, that she doesn’t look a day over twelve...She is a senior at Heights High School, and at the moment hasn’t any particular career in mind. Guess she just hopes to meet ‘that certain one’ soon.” The first issue of The Voices Echo provides descriptions of Our Guy Frankie club members who are interested in writing to new pen pals. Member Estelle Drope of Akron, Ohio “Would like pen-

16 Hedda Hopper, “Join a Fan Club!” Modern Screen (September 1945), 108.
17 Kahn Jr., 75-76.
19 “Thumb-Nail Sketches,” The Society for Souls Suffering from Sinatritis, BowTie Bugle, No. 7 (Spring 1945), 7, Sinatra-ana.
pals between the ages of 14-16,” Ruth Schwoger of Newark, New Jersey is interested in pen pals between “14-15 years of age,” and Rose Giordano from the Bronx, New York “would like her pen-pals between the ages of 13-14.”

Determining the economic classes of club members is more difficult than determining age in these newsletters, yet frequent mentions of club members preparing to go to college, taking private music lessons, and having enough money to frequent movie theatres and collect extensive memorabilia relating to Sinatra suggests that most were middle to upper-class. Race is yet even more difficult to determine, because, as will be discussed further on, Sinatra club members championed Sinatra’s activism for civil rights and claimed within their newsletters that they were tolerant and welcoming of all races. However, it is likely that most club members were white based on their economic prospects and seemingly effortless opportunities for college and additional education. In addition, historian D'Ann Campbell suggests that extensive participation in popular culture was less common among African American teenagers because they had a different set of priorities than white teens, namely coping with racial prejudice and struggling to find acceptance within the American workforce and society in general. Because of this, it is likely that the majority of Sinatra fan club members were relatively privileged white teenagers.

Despite the prevailing, negative stereotypes of “bobby soxers” documented above, fan clubs exhibited strong organization, communication, and writing skills, especially for those members who contributed to club newsletters. These were skills that could prove indispensable for teenage girls hoping to one day pursue professional work, whether or not they desired lasting careers or jobs to hold them over until marriage.

Most Sinatra fan clubs were organized in a similar way. They generally had a president, vice president, secretary or editor, and treasurer. Multiple responsibilities had to be taken care of in order to maintain a publication to freely gush over Sinatra, including collecting dues, budgeting, devising processes for accepting new members, organizing events and contests, and compiling, publishing, and circulating newsletters. As Hedda Hopper said, “Fan clubs are really a business.”

It was not unusual for newsletters to include reminders to members of the importance of sending in their dues on time and to the right person. The opening letter from the co-presidents of the Society for Souls Suffering from Sinatritis in one issue of the BowTie Bugle is firm in its emphasis on dues, saying, “We cannot stress enough how important it is to send your dues in promptly. In order to have a paper published we need money, and the sooner the money comes in the sooner the paper comes out, so please send in your dues as soon as possible. If you belong in a Chapter please send in your dues to your Chapter President immediately so she can send it on to us promptly.”

Another club, The Semper Sinatra Fan Club, was supposedly so successful in managing its financial growth that other smaller clubs were using its name to scam potential members out of money. President Marion Tead warns members in the Summer 1945 issue of Sinatra-ly Yours:

> Our club is not in any way connected with any other club. When and if it is, you and each club member will be notified. If you have donated for gifts or paid dues – believing you were joining this club to any other person other than myself and at my own address, I am indeed sorry but I cannot do anything about it except report it to Frank. Many clubs are trying to cash in on this club because of its huge success. Watch for these people.

Another letter from Frank Sinatra Music Club president Frances Bergstrom reads like a professional memo one might receive at an office: “Hereafter, dues are 20 cents paid on the 20th

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22 Hedda Hopper, “Join a Fan Club!” 108.
23 Mildred Schulz and Irene Yourgas, BowTie Bugle, 1, Sinatra-ana.
24 Marion Tead, Sinatra-ly Yours (Summer 1945), 3, Sinatra-ana.
of each month, but no journal charge. Those who paid months ahead of time will have their money returned as soon as they let us know when they received this journal.”  

And yet another letter from Sing with the Sinatras Club president, Juanita Stephens, explains the necessity to temporarily raise dues in order to pay for a mimeograph machine that will be used to make more professional looking and efficient newsletters:

Finally I scouted around and found out where we could buy a mimeographing machine. Although it took more money than we had in the treasury, I took what we had and added to it and made a down payment. Now we must pay $5 a month for the next three months. Believe me if it was possible to do otherwise I would not ask for contributions to help pay for it, but it was so expensive. So if you care to, will you please contribute something. With the help of this machine the Journal will come out regularly and it will be much better, neater and larger.

Many clubs also organized events and contests for their members, which required those in charge to keep precise records of any financial aspects involved and of who would participate. For example, the Semper Sinatra Fan Club, which had members located all over the world, organized a “club convention” at the former Riverview Park in Chicago. It is hard to know whether or not very many out of state members, let alone international members, were able to make it to the convention, but the president assured members in their fall newsletter that “Out of town members will be met at their incoming stations by Chicago club members.”

Many clubs such as the Semper Sinatra Fan Club had hundreds of members, and those in administrative positions kept records of each individual who sent in a letter or card of application. Keeping exact records was important primarily for collecting dues and so those responsible for distributing newsletters did not deprive any member of a copy. And while Sinatra

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26 Juanita Stephens, *The T-Jacket Journal* (September 1945), 1, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA (hereafter cited as Rose MARBL).
27 Marion Tead, *Sinatra-ly Yours* (Fall 1944), 1, Sinatra-ana.
fan clubs were generally open and inviting to anyone who was enthusiastic about Frank Sinatra, accepting and applying for membership was taken seriously. Many clubs accepted new members based on personal letters of application. One Isabel Borton of Markle, Indiana wrote the following letter to Frances Bergstrom, president of the Frank Sinatra Music Club:

Dear Frances,
I read that you are organizing a Frank Sinatra fan club and I would like to join. I am an ardent fan of Frankie and have been wanting to join a Sinatra fan club... Please write and tell me how I can join your club.

Another letter from L. Madelynn Kelly of Philadelphia, also to Frances Bergstrom, reads:

Dear Frances,
I would like to become a member of your Frank Sinatra Fan Club. I am an 18 year old girl. I have just graduated from high school. Please let me know the ages of some of my fellow club members. Please write to me soon and give me full details. Yours till Frankie sings opera, L. M. Kelly

One new member wrote to Bergstrom to express her feelings about being accepted as a member:

Dear Frances,
Enclosed please find 20 cents in coin for dues of the F. S. Musical Club. It has me very honored to become a member.

Some clubs provided application cards for potential members to fill out, such as the one seen in Figure 3.5 by one of the few male Sinatra enthusiasts to join fan clubs.

Most fan clubs also sent out invitations to celebrities to become honorary members of their clubs. One such letter from the Society for Souls Suffering from Sinatritis is addressed to Hedda Hopper at her Modern Screen office:

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28 Isabel Borton to Frances Bergstrom, December 12, 1945, Sinatra-ana.
29 L. Madelynn Kelly to Frances Bergstrom, Sinatra-ana.
30 Unknown to Frances Bergstrom, January 16, 1945, Sinatra-ana.
Dear Miss Hopper,

As representative of the above mentioned club for Frank Sinatra, we, the club members would like to extend our wish that you become an honorary member of the club.

We have all read the many nice things you have said about "OUR" Frank, and some of the less nice things, and Frank admires you so, he will be pleased [to] no end if you accept this honorary [position] in one of his many clubs.

I’m a writer myself (beginner) and I write for every journal of every club I belong to, and I get such nice letters from the kids, saying how much they like my columns, it is a help for the future of my career.31

Overall, the polite language and emphasis of devotion to Sinatra found in these membership correspondences demonstrates how members of these clubs felt their activity was

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31 Virginia Martin to Hedda Hopper, July 1, 1945, Hedda Hopper papers.
not only fun, but also serious and worthy of structured and professional treatment. Some clubs even provided their members with identification cards to carry with them in order to identify one another and have concrete evidence of their participation in these communities (Figure 3.6).

Furthermore, many club presidents as well as hopeful founders of new clubs communicated with each other in order to find out how the other’s club was being run, what their goals were, and to receive and provide advice. A letter from Gloria Heiskanen of the Semper Sinatra Fan Club (using the official club letterhead) to Frances Bergstrom describes her delight in hearing that Bergstrom received permission from Marjorie Diven to form a club (Figure 3.7). The correspondence seems like it could be between two adult professionals, if it were not for the interjections that gush about Sinatra and the closing paragraph that gives away Heiskanen’s identity as a school-aged girl.

While females made up the vast majority of membership in Sinatra fan clubs, there were at least a few male members, as evidenced in a letter to Bergstrom from an eighteen-year old boy in Honolulu named Woodrow L. Peterson (Figure 3.8). Peterson explains how he saw an article Bergstrom submitted to a magazine about forming a Sinatra club, and asks for more information, because as he says, “We have no Sinatra Club here at Pearl Harbor and would be delighted to know more about it.”32 Peterson then proceeds with a poetic description of the admiration he and his friends, both “boys and girls,” have for Sinatra, and their interest in organizing a club. E.J. Kahn Jr. briefly discusses male fans as well, writing,

Sinatra has male fans, too, including twenty members of the crew of a navy vessel, who, just before their departure for the atom-bomb tests at Bikini, asked him for a photograph to pin up on a bulkhead. For a while, there was a Sinatra fan club whose membership requirements were nearly as exacting as the Union League’s; you not only had to be male and to admire Sinatra, but you also had to be named Frank yourself. His fans are,

32 Woodrow L. Peterson to Frances Bergstrom, August 23, 1945, Sinatra-ana.
Figure 3.6. Fan Club Membership Card. Hoboken Historical Museum.
Musical Club
136 Bedford St. S.E.
Minneapolis 14, Minn.

Dear Frances,

I received your letter today and I was very glad to hear from you. I’m glad you got permission from Marj Diven. Yes, she did mention the "MAFFA." I am writing to several girls in England now, (the result of several clubs I belong to belonging to the MAFFA) and it is very interesting to write to them. Anyway I like it. So I asked Marjorie to send me names of foreign girls for my members.

I am excited..."Anchors Aweigh" is coming here next Sunday...Guess where I will be starting next Sunday except for the time I have to spend in school? At last it is coming here and all the girls I write to all most have seen it and have been telling me about it and I have been feeling so awful cause I haven’t seen it and now.........

Our club won’t have a journal for a while cause it costs so much to have them printed here and we haven’t so much in our treasury yet and we are having snaps of Frank every month and large
pictures of Frank, so we are saving the journal for a later date.

So far I have never found anything wrong with Franks radio show or anything he does. Maybe it is cause I love him sooo and I adore even his bad points. I admit some of his songs could be better but gee, when he is on the air I just am in a daze and for a long time after, usually until he is on again. So that's the way it is with me, it has been for almost four years and will be until........

Well, I will close on account of that stuff called home-work is staring me in the face. You must know what home work is.... It does exist there too?........

Please write soon, until then I will close

Yours and Franks,

Gloria Heiskanen
August 23, 1945

Dear Francis,

While browsing through a magazine entitled "Band Leaders", I came across your little article in regard to the forming of a Frank Sinatra and your request for members.

We have no Sinatra Club here at Pearl Harbor and would be delighted to know more about it. There are a great many boys and girls (Kanes and Wahines, in the Hawaiian language), that would be interested if some attempt is made to organize them.

Of course the peoples here are of many races and creeds, but they are all "SENT" when Frankie sings. The reactions of those boys and girls is deep and sincere.

Their love and devotion to the great "Voice" vows no end. Hearts beat as one, the sheer ecstasy of his heavenly tunes affect all in a heart-touching way. Like the hushed sounds of a lovely Hawaiian night, kissed by the heavenly moonlight, mingling with the sounds of the murmuring surf, tenderly caressing the silvery sands of Waikiki.

We aren't half-way believers, it's "All Or Nothing At All" with us. "You'll Never Know" just how much we care.

So hoping against hope for an early reply, I remain an ardent and devoted follower, Aloha, Nii Loa......

Sinatrally Yours,

Woodrow L. Peterson

P.S. My address is B.Q. 48, Room 9, C.H.A. 3
Honolulu, T.H.

Perhaps you would like a description of myself. I am 18 yrs. of age, blond wavy hair, tall and exceptionally slender (almost skinny), and my hobby is dancing and record playing (all Frankie's).

Figure 3.8. Letter from Woodrow L. Peterson to Frances Bergstrom. Hoboken Historical Museum.
However, overwhelmingly young women.\textsuperscript{33}

Although Kahn is correct in his last statement, and Sinatra’s teenage female fans will remain the focus of this dissertation, the male presence in early Sinatra fandom deserves a brief discussion here and would prove fruitful for another study.

Sinatra’s fan following both during his life and up to the present day has remained strong, and both men and women take great enjoyment from his style of music and star persona, which for most of his career was characterized by womanizing, partying in Las Vegas with Sammy Davis Jr. and Dean Martin, and rumors of mob associations. Sinatra’s appeal from the 1950s on was not nearly as gendered in the public eye as it was in the 1940s, when mainstream notions of masculinity were strongly in opposition to Sinatra’s public personality and appearance. In an era when homosexuality was both illegal and taboo to discuss, a male who showed strong devotion to Sinatra in the same manner as a bobby soxer would likely be viewed suspiciously. However, the nature of the war suggested that this was less true in military life than civilian life. Historian Allan Bérubé explains how during World War II, despite regulations that homosexuals were unfit for service and could be discharged if discovered, many serving homosexuals in fact enjoyed a level of freedom and acceptance that they would not enjoy again after the war, or even as a civilian during the war.\textsuperscript{34} Bérubé attributes this to military organization itself. By creating a society that was almost completely devoid of women while men were frequently facing stressful and traumatic situations, most soldiers turned to each other for comfort and support, whether

\textsuperscript{33} Kahn Jr., 49-50.
\textsuperscript{34} For more discussions on American gay culture both in the military and on the home front in the 1930s and 1940s, see Neil Miller, \textit{Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present} (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), and George Chauncey, \textit{Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940} (New York: BasicBooks, 1994).
emotional, physical, or both. As Bérubé explains, “In such a strange and lonely environment, trainees immediately looked to each other for companionship, pairing up as buddies or forming small cliques in each company…Each new trainee’s primary relationship was with his buddy. He often chose his buddy arbitrarily: He was a bunkmate, came from the same state, or merely stood next to him in line.”35 The tradition of military “buddies” created a new and respectable place for male companionship that was absent in civilian life, whether or not the pairs were homosexual. The result was an environment that blurred the lines between what could be considered queer, in turn creating a unique space of acceptance and understanding between heterosexuals and homosexuals. As Bérubé writes, “Veterans of all kinds describe the love they felt for each other with a passion, romance, and sentimentality that often rivaled gay men’s expressions of their love for other men and made gay affections seem less out of place.”36

In terms of Sinatra fandom in the 1940s, both fan club newsletters and magazines reveal that military men were more open and willing to express their admiration of Sinatra than civilian men, perhaps as a result either of the ambiguous views of sexuality in the military as described above, or because servicemen may have felt more assured of their masculinity because they were part of the military. One notable member of the Semper Sinatra Fan Club sticks out in this regard, Pvt. John Martin. Martin was prolific in his submissions to the club’s newsletter, Sinatra-ly Yours, and his tributes to Sinatra may seem surprisingly blatant in their homoerotic tones to a modern reader. An example can be found in the Summer 1945 issue of Sinatra-ly Yours, where Martin submitted a poem entitled “Our Pin Up Boy”:

You guys can pin up Turner,
And Legs and Hayworth too,

36 Ibid., 186.
But we’ll pin up Sinatra,
To beautify the view.

For us, there is only one,
Who brightens up the room,
And makes it seem just like,
A garden all in bloom.

His presence is like magic,
He fills the air with song,
If your imagination,
Is just a little strong.

He’s dreamy eyed and handsome,
He’s all that we desire,
His flame is growing brighter,
He has the world on fire.

The fire is burning deeper,
Into the hearts of we,
Who like to pin up “Frankie,“
Wherever we may be.37

Martin’s application of the term “pin up” – a term generally associated with pictures of physically attractive women hung up for the pleasure of military men – to Sinatra, alongside his other clear descriptions of his desirable appearance suggests erotic imagery. Given Martin’s military experience, however, it is difficult to know whether he was in fact homosexual, or if he was simply used to a more ambiguous environment when it came to male affection. This is of course not to say that no heterosexual or civilian men were fans of Sinatra. However, it is interesting to note the connection between military involvement and Sinatra’s more extroverted male fans (such as the Navy fan club Kahn Jr. mentions), even if they were still dwarfed by the female bobby soxers in Sinatra fandom.

Sinatra’s fan following also expanded past American teenage girls to reach international fans, and American fan club members were eager to reach out to them. Key to this international relationship was Marjorie Diven, Sinatra’s official fan club coordinator and liaison. Diven’s role was paramount in providing clubs with the sense that they were somehow in direct contact with Sinatra, and she often contributed letters and information to the largest clubs which were then included in their circulated newsletters. Kahn provides an overview of Diven’s relationship to the fan community:

[Sinatra] maintains liaison with most of the Sinatra fans through an energetic woman named Marjorie Diven, who sits in a cluttered cubicle stacked to the ceiling with scrapbooks, photographs, card files, and unanswered fan mail. Many Sinatra fans would consider it a treat to be permitted to help Mrs. Diven paste up clippings and slit envelopes, but ordinarily only fan club presidents enjoy the privilege...Sinatra’s fans have huge respect for Mrs. Diven, and she has been elected to honorary membership in hundreds of their clubs...Marj, who some years ago acted as a buffer between Rudy Vallée and his admirers, has been handling Frank’s fans for George [Evans] since the spring of 1944. Hers is so much a labor of love that she keeps at it nights and weekends. “People think it’s strange that I take this business so seriously,” she says, “but I’ve seen many things it does that go beyond the eye.”

Diven was involved not only with Sinatra’s American fan base, but also made a serious effort to create a connected international following that encouraged young Americans to communicate with fans in other countries, though these attempts at communication were likely restricted to either neutral or Allied nations. In the context of national sentiment and wartime patriotism, this proved to be a particularly broadminded goal, one that encouraged young Americans to make a genuine effort in understanding and forming their own opinions about international relationships and communication.

Kahn acknowledges Diven’s work in connecting international fans with one another and mentions her greatest achievement in that area, the Adopt a Foreign Fan Association:

38 Kahn Jr., 69-71.
Mrs. Diven has organized Sinatra cells in many foreign places, including Ceylon, Nigeria, and the Isles of Wight and of Man. His fans in Argentina, she says, are the most excitable and those in England the most reserved. “Turkey is becoming very Sinatra-conscious,” she announced matter-of-factly one day. She tries to get domestic fans to correspond with ones abroad, and has organized the Adopt a Foreign Fan Association, whose members maintain liaison with each other through an informal international bulletin she gets out, entitled “The Link.”

Despite my efforts to find copies of “The Link,” I have yet to unearth any. However, evidence of the enthusiasm American fans showed for Diven’s Adopt a Foreign Fan Association (AAFFA) can be found in personal letters as well as in fan club newsletters. Diven often contributed letters to fan clubs about the AAFFA to include in their newsletters. One such letter appears in the June 1946 issue of *Sinatra Scope*, published by the Frank Sinatra Music Club. In this letter, Diven explains the goal and structure of the AAFFA:

> I’ll tell you about my plan for bringing the foreign fans and the US fans together. I formed what is called The Adopt A Foreign Fan Association and it is composed of the Fan Club presidents in this country. The presidents need not correspond with one another unless they want to, but I send out a bulletin to the members each month as an easy way to write them all regularly. The point is not so much linking the clubs together, as giving them a chance to get acquainted with Sinatra fans in other countries. I give to each club president as many foreign names as she has members in the club, then she gives just one name to each of her members. The member then takes care of the person whose name she drew, writes, asks her to be a pen pal and now and then sends clippings or snaps. They all love it and I have given out several thousand foreign names.

Another letter in the fifth issue of the *T-Jacket Journal*, which includes a front cover illustration in tribute to the AAFFA (Figure 3.9), describes Diven’s original motivation for starting the AAFFA, revealing her own values and thoughts on international friendship:

> Well, I felt unhappy about these letters [from foreign fans]. Here were countless good fans – they were eager for information and so hopeful. Every time I wrote any of them, a reply came back. Their letters were always so nice. My problem was this: How could I provide them with a regular source of

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39 Kahn Jr., 71-72.
Figure 3.9. Front cover of *The T-Jacket Journal* (1946). Rose MARBL
information as well as with friends they would really love to have. I know that girls in America would get a thrill out of forming friendships all over the world...

So I thought the Frank Sinatra club would enjoy making friends. In time they would discover the thrill of letters with foreign stamps popping up in their mail. They would learn how other people live and think. True, there will be some who do not answer for some reason or another, but a successful friendship will mean a lot, once made.  

Although Diven did not pressure club members into contacting foreign fans if they did not want to, most clubs showed enthusiasm for the program and encouraged their members to participate.

The seventh issue of the *BowTie Bugle*, published by The Society for Souls Suffering from Sinatritis, includes an article about the AAFFA and provides members with tips on what to include in their first letters to their foreign pen pals. The short article reads:

What is the AAFFA? The adopt-a-Foreign Fan Association is a group of Frank’s fan club president’s [*sic*] who are banded together for the purpose of making friends with Frank’s fans in other countries.

You should make your first letter very interesting. Tell her where you live and ask about her home. Tell her about Frank’s appearance at the Paramount and the Waldorf if you’ve been there. The overseas fans do not always express themselves quite as ardently as the girls do over here, so until you find out what your new friends are like, don’t be too “Swoonful” and avoid such words as “drool” and “swoon.”

When you get replies tell your club president, who in turn will tell Marjorie Diven, Frank’s secretary. Frank receives a lot of foreign mail – a letter from Ceylon recently marks the 34th country. There even is a large fan club in Australia. There is plenty of fun in store for you, so let’s go. For names ask Irene Yourgas.  

This advice reveals that while the war was likely often at the forefront of club members’ minds, their interest in other foreign fans was based not in discussing the international conflict at hand, but creating connections rooted in understanding, sensitivity, and friendship. Club members felt great pride in their international connections, as shown in a letter written by the Semper Sinatra Club president, Irene Di Mattia, to Hedda Hopper:

A little while back you mentioned that there were Sinatra fans in England but they didn’t

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41 Marjorie Diven to the Sing with the Sinatras Club, *The T-Jacket Journal*, No. 5 (February-March 1946), 6, Rose MARBL.
42 “AAFFA,” *BowTie Bugle*, No. 7 (Spring 1945), 6, Sinatra-ana.
get much of a chance to see his movies. However, I have had letters from English fans who have seen Anchors Aweigh as much as 25 times. I thought you might be interested in the fact that our fan club has members in Hawaii, Canada, England, Ireland, Palestine, Sweden and South Africa.  

Overall, participation in a Frank Sinatra fan club could provide American teenage girls with the opportunity to pursue international understanding and openness, an opportunity that was often unavailable or discouraged during World War II, especially for civilians. While much of the American population embraced heightened feelings of nationalism and American individuality, many teenaged youth were expanding their social connections to areas all over the world, a practice that was arguably quite mature and broadminded for their era and position in American society. This mindset among Sinatra club members proved to be in direct contrast to the stereotypes usually assigned to them by larger society and the media, namely that most Sinatra fans were out of touch with reality and childish.

3.3 Fan Club Newsletters

Undoubtedly, the largest amount of energy in Sinatra fan clubs was devoted to producing and distributing newsletters. All the biggest clubs had them, and smaller clubs strove to have them. While these newsletters usually included matters of business to relate to members, usually

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43 Irene Di Mattia to Hedda Hopper, April 2, 1947, Hedda Hopper papers.
44 It is notable that international communication between teenage fans did not seem to be reprimanded by the U.S. government, at a time when Americans, especially women, were frequently told that gossip could possibly find its way to the ears of enemy spies and reveal important information. As multiple women I spoke to in assisted living centers remembered, Americans during the war were told, “loose lips sink ships,” and “zip your lip.” This is just another example of how the activities of wartime teenage girls were generally deemed insignificant by the U.S. government, when in fact their activity could have been risky for military security.
45 For more on American nationalism during World War II both in government and military settings and among civilians, see John Fousek, To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism & the Cultural Roots of the Cold War (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
reminders about dues and information about events and contests, the bulk of club newsletters served as a platform for members to express their love of Sinatra in creative ways, including poetry, song writing, storytelling, and illustrating. Kahn provides a colorful description of how these newsletters functioned for fans and the kind of material they usually contained:

Most of Sinatra’s fans are insatiable for information about him and find that the sustenance provided by movie magazines – articles with titles like “That Old Sinatra Magic,” “Sweet Sin-atra,” and “Sinatra – Prophet of Peace?” – is, like chop suey, filling enough but of little nutritive value. Their fan-club publications, mostly mimeographed affairs, which deal exclusively, and often lengthily, with Sinatra, provide more nourishment. Nearly every issue contains sentimental poems and an account of a dream in which the author met the singer. (Any club member who does meet or even see him can be counted on for two thousand words about the experience.) The club papers carry no advertisements, but many of them ask their subscribers to buy products with whose manufacturers Sinatra is or has been professionally associated. The text is usually laced with the slang Sinatra uses. Two recurrent words are “fave” and “natch,” for, respectively, “favorite” and “naturally.” The fans’ fave adjectives are “cute,” “sweet,” and “smooth,” most frequently employed in modification of Sinatra...The club papers contain social notes (“Our president is a very fortunate girl. Her brother-in-law met a soldier who knew Frank”), political notes (“Frankie for President in 1956”), contests (“An 8 x 10 glossy action pose of Frankie for completing the sentence ‘Frank is an average American because...’ in less that fifty words”), and fashion notes (“He was wearing dark gray trousers, white shirt, black sleeveless sweater, a floppy black and white polkadot bow tie, light gray jacket, and a white carnation. Sharp, natch!!”).

Kahn gives an accurate list of typical elements found in club newsletters. Almost any publication from any club would contain sections for poems and songs dedicated to Sinatra, reviews of films, recordings, and radio shows of both Sinatra and other stars, news about Sinatra, and if a member was lucky enough to supply one, a description of a personal encounter with Sinatra. These distinct sections provide both incredibly specific and general portraits of what exactly teenage girls loved about Sinatra, and how they used him to express themselves among like-minded people during the war.

46 Kahn Jr., 77-78.
In chapter two, I referenced Mark Duffett’s ideas on how fan magazines, or “fanzines,” function within fan communities. Duffett suggests fanzines offer fans a space for socialization and creativity that is less censored than, say, large-scale fan magazines or newspapers. And while fanzines and fan club newsletters are often viewed as interchangeable in this regard, I suggest that in terms of Sinatra fan club newsletters of the 1940s, there are a couple key differences between the two. The first difference is in the level of reader involvement in newsletter production. Scholarship on fanzines often emphasizes how, although readers can submit material for fanzines, in many cases, the majority of content as well as production labor is done by just one or two people. Fredric Wertham, whose study of fanzines was published in 1973, claims that fanzines originated among fans of science fiction. In terms of their production, Wertham writes,

Fanzines are often produced entirely or partly at home. Even when the actual printing is done outside, they are home-based, and the editor’s work may require long hours. There is a lot to be done: typing, collating, stapling, corresponding, selecting contributions, coaxing professional interviewees, devising layouts, printing, addressing envelopes, stamping, mailing, bookkeeping, and so on.48

Throughout Wertham’s book, it is suggested that most of the above described work is done by one person and that fanzines are often individualistic in nature, reflecting one fan’s opinions and interpretations. More recent studies by such authors as Duffett and Henry Jenkins suggest a closer relationship between reader and fanzine writer, but still imply that just one or two writers and editors can be credited for most of the published material. Jenkins describes the more current climate of fanzine production, explaining, “Readers typically order zines directly from the

writers and editors or interact with them across a dealer’s table at conventions." This suggests a one-sided approach to fanzine production.

Fan club newsletters, however, especially those from the 1940s, relied heavily on contributions from club members, and while there was often a designated editor to compile the finished product, newsletters were generally a group effort. Fan club presidents, secretaries, editors, and treasurers often provided an opening letter to introduce the latest issue of a newsletter, but the remaining pages were filled with submissions from any member who showed interest. Frank Sinatra club newsletters often contained calls for submissions, encouraging members to send in their creative tributes to Sinatra. Co-presidents Mildred Schultz and Irene Yourgas of The Society for Souls Suffering from Sinatritis remind members in the first sentence of one of their opening letters, “that all suggestions are welcomed,” and editor Jean Keller writes in her “editor’s note,” “each and every one of you will have to pitch in and help me out!” The same issue of the *BowTie Bugle* also makes clear that multiple people are involved when it comes to the logistics of producing the newsletter, with a page reminding members that questions about the club and newsletter should be sent to Irene Yourgas in Pittsburgh, dues should be sent to Mildred Schulz in Miami, newsletter material should be sent to Jean Keller in Cleveland Heights, inquiries about pen pals should be sent to Betty Sherrill in Philadelphia, and votes for the new club pin should be sent to Beverly Cantor in Pittsburgh.

The September 1944 issue of *The Voice*, distributed by the Slaves of Sinatra, stresses even further the importance of member involvement when it comes to producing their newsletter.

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50 The Society for Souls Suffering from Sinatritis, *BowTie Bugle*, edition number 7 (Spring 1945), Sinatra-ana.
The opening letter reads, “Our thanx to those of you who sent in material for The Voice. It was greatly appreciated. And now, what about the rest of you? Those of you who haven’t sent in any material for our paper, what’s the matter, don’t you care? We always thot [sic] Sinatra fans were loaded with talent, so let’s see some of it break out in print.”\(^{51}\) Members were always heavily encouraged to send in anything and everything, and the result was newsletters rich in creative expression from Sinatra’s young fans. For example, one tradition that many clubs practiced was featuring member illustrations as the front cover of their newsletters. The same issue of The Voice features a truly impressive drawing of Sinatra by Betsy Wenninger, who demonstrates skill in the technique of pointillism (Figure 3.10). Another Sinatra portrait appears on the spring 1945 issue of the BowTie Bugle by The Society for Souls Suffering from Sinatritis member, Patty Culhane (Figure 3.11).

The second main difference between fanzines and fan club newsletters is their primary purpose and level of public exposure and distribution. Wertham explains his view of the purpose of fanzines in contrast to the underground press, writing, “The emphasis of the underground press is essentially social-political, that of the fanzines is chiefly literary-artistic. Underground papers have a public distribution, that of fanzines is all private.”\(^{52}\) He also describes fanzines as existing “without any outside interference, without any control from above, without any censorship, without any supervision or manipulation.”\(^{53}\) Similarly, Duffett writes, “For those who made and read fanzines, they mattered as opportunities for creativity and free expression operating outside of the professional, metropolitan media.”\(^{54}\) To some extent, fanzines and

\(^{51}\) Slaves of Sinatra, The Voice, Vol 1, No. 3 (September, 1944), 1, Sinatra-ana.
\(^{52}\) Wertham, 77.
\(^{53}\) Ibid., 71.
\(^{54}\) Duffett, 184.
Figure 3.10. Front cover of *The Voice* drawn by Betsy Wenninger. Hoboken Historical Museum.
Figure 3.11. Front cover of *BowTie Bugle* drawn by Patty Culhane. Hoboken Historical Museum.
Sinatra fan club newsletters share these characteristics. Club newsletters certainly acted as artistic outlets and those who contributed to them enjoyed a larger amount of freedom than they likely would have writing for a public newspaper or magazine. However, largely because of being produced during wartime, these club newsletters also served as a platform for discussing political and social issues. In addition, while the distribution of fan club newsletters was generally reserved for club members, wartime fan club culture blurred the lines between public and private fandom, most notably through such organizations as the Modern Screen Fan Club Association, which encouraged clubs to interact with *Modern Screen* magazine in order to win prizes and receive material on their favorite stars.

With these qualities in mind, I will now address the common components found in most Sinatra fan club newsletters and how they reveal exactly what teenage girls loved about Sinatra, namely his musical style, appearance and persona, and social and political activism. These qualities and his fans’ responses to them reveal why he was so affective as a wartime entertainer, and how his teenage female fans viewed themselves and their roles during the war.

**Sinatra’s Music and Performance Style**

While much of American society claimed they did not understand why the bobby soxers loved Frank Sinatra so much, attributing their devotion to the ridiculous nature of teenage girls, these fans in fact acted as critical music enthusiasts, providing commentary and judgments on the musical styles of both Sinatra and other wartime performers. In Sinatra fan club newsletters, these judgments were generally always positive (these were devoted fans after all), yet they still demonstrated a level of musical understanding and critical listening.

Some club newsletters did include sections for formal reviews of Sinatra’s music, but more often, mentions of his musical style appeared in poems written by ardent fans and in
descriptions of encounters by those lucky few that got to see Sinatra in person. Fans did not always use the most technical terms when describing what they liked about Sinatra’s vocal delivery, but there are certain stylistic traits that distinguished Sinatra from other singers that come across in his fans’ colorful language about him. These traits include long phrasing and breath control, pitch bending, sliding between pitches, and lagging behind the beat more so than other singers of the era. In addition, Sinatra tended to perform songs that directly addressed a lover (“you”). This contrasts with another popular male singer of the war, Bing Crosby, who as described in chapter one, tended to perform songs that expressed sentiments of family values, hard work, and patriotism rather than romance.

In the first issue of *The Voices Echo*, published by the Our Guy Frankie fan club, member Wanda Karoblis provides a review of three recently released Sinatra records. In her review of “I Dream of You” and “Saturday Night,” Karoblis provides such notes as, “Franks [sic] phrasing is especially good on this disc. The orchestrations done by Axel Stordahl are superb.” While Karoblis demonstrates some skill in critical listening, she also includes more emotional responses, such as that in reference to Sinatra’s recordings of “If You Are But a Dream” and “White Christmas,” which reads, “He gives out with his true style of singing, you know; easy and heavenly on the ears.” Another article in the first issue of *Sinatra Scope*, distributed by the Frank Sinatra Music Club, praises Sinatra’s supposed skill in more classical styles of music as well. This notice reads,

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55 Marjorie Goetschius and Edna Osser, 1944.
56 Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn, 1944.
57 Moe Jaffe, Jack Fulton and Nat Bonx, 1942.
58 Irving Berlin, 1942.
There’ll be a new Sinatra album soon, but Frank won’t be singing in it. Alex Wilder composed six modernistic pieces, which Frank liked, for woodwind and string ensemble. Frank puzzled out the score, arranged a Columbia date, and conducted the orchestra.

Records are twelve-inchers, and the album, titled “Conducted by Sinatra,” will be released in the fall. Musicians who played the numbers went away talking about Frank’s feel for music and his ability to lead, despite lack of formal training. They are saying that “The Voice” is equally capable as “The Baton.”

Both of these more formal reviews were unusual, based on the club newsletters I have seen. Many newsletters included a section listing Sinatra’s records so members knew of new releases, but overall, mentions of his musical style appeared in much more emotional areas of newsletters, such as the poetry sections and dramatizations of encounters with Sinatra. In these sections, one common and very interesting way club members described Sinatra’s voice was to try and write out lyrics he sang in a way that reflected his phrasing. For example, in the fall 1944 issue of *Sinatra-ly Yours*, club member Lois Brundage describes her experience of being in the audience for one of Sinatra’s radio shows. Brundage illustrates Sinatra’s performance of “She’s Funny That Way” with this method, writing, “The same old Frank that made them swoon from coast to coast, had us all gasping for breath as he murmured softly, ‘I’m not much to look at – nothing to see – glad that I’m living and sooo lucky to be-e-e I got a woman who’s crazy for me – she’s funny that-t-t wa-ay’!” In the winter 1945 issue of the same newsletter, a similar description of an encounter by Peggy McShane replicates Sinatra’s performances of “Hot Time in the Town of Berlin” and “I Walk Alone”: “He walked masterfully across the stage, smiled a-la-Sinatra and promptly sang ‘There’ll be a hot time in the town of Berliiiiiinnn’...The songs

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61 Neil Moret and Richard Whiting, 1929.
63 Joe Bushkin and John De Vries, 1943.
64 Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn, 1944.
were ‘I Walk Alone.’ ‘Puhleeeeeeese, walk aloo00oo00one’ (don’t worry I will Frankie, we screamed) ‘Till you’re walking beside meeeeee, puhleeeeeeese walk aloo00oo00one.’”

Club members also described Sinatra’s vocal style using poetry and rewritten lyrics. Betts Sexton of the Slaves of Sinatra club composed a poem based on one of Sinatra’s hit songs, “How About You”:

I like Frank’s diamond ring...How About You?  
I think his songs top Bing’s...How About You?  
I like the clothes he wears and his wavy hair,  
And when he sighs a note, soooo softly bends a note,  
I swoon and stare.

Pvt. John Martin depicts Sinatra’s voice in two stanzas of a lengthy poem in the fall 1944 issue of *Sinatra-ly Yours*:

I like the voice that thrills  
It does so much to my heart.  
It sort of gives me chills,  
And it knocks me all apart.

I like those gentle sighs,  
That he puts into a song,  
The way his voice will rise,  
And can hold a note so long.

In both the poetic and exaggerated prose portrayals of Sinatra’s voice, emphasis is usually placed on the length of Sinatra’s phrases and the way he bends and slides between pitches. Sinatra’s long phrases have often been attributed to his time in Tommy Dorsey’s band, where he supposedly learned breath control and circular breathing by emulating Dorsey’s techniques on

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66 Burton Lane and Ralph Freed, 1941.


the trombone. And when listening to recordings of Sinatra from the 1940s, the long stretches of time he can go without breathing really are noticeable, especially when comparing his recordings to other singers of the same songs. Notable examples include Sinatra’s performances of “All or Nothing at All”69 and “Night and Day,”70 two songs for which he was known. In his famous 1939 recording of “All or Nothing at All,” Sinatra sings the first four measures in one continuous breath, while in another recording of the song later in the 1950s, Jimmy Scott breathes after the first word, “All,” which lasts one and a half measures. Sinatra’s 1943 recording of “Night and Day” is a similar example, where he sings another four-measure phrase (“Day and night, night and day”) at a fairly slow tempo (4/4 time signature, about 83 BPM) in one breath. “Night and Day” also serves as an example of Sinatra’s signature pitch bending and sliding. In the same 1943 recording, Sinatra notably slides from a concert A (“You are the...”) up nearly an octave to a G (“one”), and bends the pitch downwards at “longin’ for you” on both the words “longin’” and “for.” While a simple musical gesture, this had great effect on Sinatra’s devoted listeners, as shown in the poems by Pvt. John Martin and Betts Sexton. Sinatra historian Will Friedwald writes, “That use of long notes, which established Sinatra from ‘All or Nothing at All’ onward as the first major pop voice to build something new on Crosby’s foundation, was also what turned the bobby-soxers on so strongly. As [Sinatra] put it, ‘If I did what they call bending a note, if I just kind of looped the note, well, they would wail.’”71 Author Martha Weinman Lear, a self-proclaimed former bobby soxer, similarly describes the effect of Sinatra’s voice in an article about her experience as a Sinatra fan for The New York Times:

The voice had that trick, you know, that funny little sliding, skimming slur that it would

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69 Arthur Altman and Jack Lawrence, 1939.
70 Cole Porter, 1932.
71 Will Friedwald, Sinatra! The Song is You: A Singer’s Art (New York: Scribner, 1995), 126.
do coming off the end of a note. It drove us bonkers. My friend Harold Schonberg, The Times’ music critic, says that it must have been what is called portamento, although he can’t swear to it, because he’s never heard Sinatra sing. Elitist. Anyway, whatever it’s called, it was an invitation to hysteria. He’d give us that little slur – “All...or nothing at aallll...” – and we’d start swooning all over the place, in the aisles, on each others shoulders, in the arms of cops, poor bewildered men in blue. It was like pressing a button. It was pressing a button.72

Even in 1974, when Lear wrote the article, current and former fans still utilized the exaggerated lyric technique as a way to portray Sinatra’s musical style in prose. And no matter how his singing was described, his fans made a direct connection between his voice and their own bodily responses, which was enhanced further by Sinatra’s physical appearance, both in general and while performing.

Appearance

As discussed in chapter one, American masculinity during World War II was in large part defined by physical appearance. Because white men no longer dominated the public sphere at the level they used to starting around the Great Depression, they had to be distinguished in other ways, and physical fitness and whiteness became key in establishing new standards for mainstream white masculinity.73 While many popular celebrities such as Humphrey Bogart exhibited a suitably macho appearance, Frank Sinatra was notably tiny in comparison, which contributed to the constant stream of scrutiny directed towards him by much of society. Interestingly, Sinatra’s “skinniness” was actually reflective of a significant portion of American men, and was much more realistic than the hypermasculine bodies of other celebrities. Christina S. Jarvis explains how America struggled to reinvent itself as a nation of strength, both

72 Martha Weinman Lear, “The Bobby Sox Have Wilted, But the Memory Remains Fresh,” The New York Times (October 13, 1974).
73 See footnote 40 in chapter 1.
figuratively and literally, after the Great Depression, when Americans suffered not only economically, but also physically. Jarvis writes, “While relatively few Americans actually starved to death [during the Depression], sickness and malnutrition increased dramatically, especially among the unemployed.”

It was not always easy for people to recover from physical ailments caused by the Depression, and throughout World War II, Americans were shocked to learn that the Selective Service reported that of the first 1 million men examined, 40 percent were deemed unfit for military service. American media strove to cover up this fact by promoting extremely fit celebrities, and marking those that did not align with such an ideal (such as Sinatra) as either neglectful of their patriotic duty to be strong and healthy, or as good material for comedy. And while many American men had body types similar to Sinatra, his absence from military service (due to receiving 4-F status from a punctured eardrum) – where many men were able to achieve physical transformations – prevented him from receiving much sympathy from other “skinny” men.

Sinatra’s appearance did not offend his teenage female fans, however. On the contrary, rather than detracting from his appeal, Sinatra’s physical appearance proved to be many fans’ favorite thing about him, and they relished in including him in romantic and sexual fantasies. In an era when society gave women opportunities for dramatically new levels of economic freedom while maintaining that sexuality should remain reserved, applying sexual feelings to celebrities like Sinatra could allow young women to find some level of release for their romantic desires.

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75 Ibid., 60.
When looking through member submissions in Sinatra fan club newsletters, it becomes apparent that certain aspects of Sinatra’s appearance excited teenage fans more than others. These aspects are brought to light in poem sections especially, where the most emotional tributes to Sinatra were generally found. Most issues of Sinatra-ly Yours contained multiple poems by Semper Sinatra Fan Club members, many of which describe their favorite parts of his appearance. Member Ann Paul’s poem, entitled “Frankie,” reads,

Our love for you
   Goes on and on.
We love that wiggle
   In every song.
We love your rumpled hair
   Your dotted ties.
We love your dreamy stare
   From two blue eyes.
Your checkered coats, and your wistful smile
To us are lovely, and right in style.\(^76\)

Helen Branan’s poem, also entitled, “Frankie,” mentions similar elements of Sinatra’s appearance:

Who is this guy with the hollow cheeks,
   With the laughing, twinkling eyes?
The fellow who makes swooners,
   Of all us girls and guys.
He’s got curly hair, his face is fair,
   His eyes are a shining blue.
He’s not too short he’s not too tall,
   His cheeks have a rosy hue.\(^77\)

Bonnie Hammons, of the Frankie’s United Swooners club, writes in her “Ode to Frank Sinatra,”

We love your height, your weight and smile
We love your tousled hair,
We love your eyes, and those bow-ties

\(^{77}\) Helen Branan, “Frankie,” in Sinatra-ly Yours (Summer 1945), 7, Sinatra-ana.
And the sport clothes that you wear.\textsuperscript{78}

Teenage girls described Sinatra’s appearance in prose as well, especially those who actually had an opportunity to see Sinatra in person. These accounts of seeing Sinatra were generally extremely detailed, reporting every tiny occurrence leading up to the big event, recounting every aspect of Sinatra’s performance, and ending with descriptions of the blissful feelings fans were typically left with after seeing their idol. Marion Malta’s account in \textit{The Sinatra Sender} describes the anticipated moment when Sinatra finally appeared on stage:

> We paid little or no attention to the [other] stars as the evening progressed. Then finally some girls caught sight of Frank waiting off stage and we all shouted “We want Frankie!” and then the moment I was dreaming of came. Frankie came running out. (Oh, sigh) His beautiful eyes, glittering. He wore a bow-tie and his tousled hair was hanging across his forehead.\textsuperscript{79}

Peggy McShane of the Semper Sinatra Fan Club illustrates her experience seeing Sinatra at the Paramount Theatre in New York: “Then he appeared. The screaming, squealing, fainting, swooning etc., was deafening before but when that hunk of song-man appeared. Oh, brother! Oh, give me credit, I was just as bad, if not worse than the rest of them. He looked so, ohhhh, the word hasn’t been made yet, but anyway that’s how he looked.”\textsuperscript{80}

Physical descriptions appeared not only in club newsletters, but in personal letters between fans as well. One fan, called “Joan,” wrote to Frances Bergstrom about an encounter her friends had with Sinatra that she unfortunately did not witness, but she nevertheless provides very specific details: “Later my girlfriends were standing in the lobby and Frank walked by in a

\textsuperscript{78} Bonnie Hammons, “Ode to Frank Sinatra,” in \textit{The Sinatra Sender}, Vol. 1, No. 3 (June 1945), 2, Sinatra-ana.

\textsuperscript{79} Marion Malta, “I Saw Frankie,” in \textit{The Sinatra Sender}, Vol. 1, No. 3 (June 1945), 1, Sinatra-ana.

light brown plaid jacket, brown pants, a light yellow sweater, and a white shirt open at the neck. They said he was very tan and (hubba-hubba) explains it best [sic].”

These poems and stories demonstrate how among other things, Sinatra’s hair, eyes, trademark oversized suits, and notably his weight were attractive to his teenage female fans. Aside from his musical style, fans took great pleasure in collecting visual relics of Sinatra, and most club newsletters included sections that listed members who were interested in having pen pals to trade “snaps” (snapshots) of Sinatra with.

Outside of his fan communities, these same physical traits were often used to ridicule Sinatra, as these traits emphasized his lack of machismo. In general, Sinatra’s appearance during the war was described as scrawny, undernourished, boyish, vulnerable, cute, and sweet, both by fans and critics. The combination of his rather un-muscular body and performance mannerisms have led many critics, especially those in the 1940s, to claim that young women loved him because he fulfilled certain instincts that were deemed natural in women, namely maternal instincts. The essentialist idea that Sinatra’s skinny physique and vulnerable persona appealed to a female desire to “mother” was a frequent explanation for the Sinatra craze in the 1940s. Kahn Jr. writes, “One of the many psychologists who have attempted to define [Sinatra’s] charm concluded that it boiled down to ‘one of the elemental instincts of womankind – the urge to feed the hungry.’”

Others determined that Sinatra’s success was due to the war itself. Both modern scholars and contemporary critics of Sinatra have said that with so many young American men serving in the military, Sinatra acted as a kind of representation of the absent men in women’s lives that

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81 Joan (Last name unknown) to Frances Bergstrom, June 12, 1946, Sinatra-ana.
82 Kahn Jr., 36.
they could project their maternal and romantic feelings onto. Sinatra himself felt this to be part of his appeal, his daughter Nancy quoting him as saying, “Psychologists tried to go into the reasons [why I appeal to teenage girls] with all sorts of deep theories. I could have told them why. Perfectly simple: it was the war years, and there was a great loneliness. And I was the boy in every corner drugstore, the boy who’d gone off, drafted to the war. That was all.” Still others claim that Sinatra’s success with teenage girls was because he reflected their own feelings of romantic vulnerability, allowing them to relate to him.

I believe Sinatra’s appeal can be credited at some level to a combination of these theories. Sinatra certainly did act as a constant male presence that teenage girls could fantasize about while the availability of actual male suitors close to their age was scarce. And Sinatra’s practice of performing songs that were originally written for female performers, such as “Someone to Watch Over Me,” placed himself within a feminine role to which teen girls could have likely related to. Even more so than these elements, however, I see Sinatra’s success with teenage girls as a product of their own desires for independence and sexual expression fueled by wartime shifts in perceptions of gender roles. Much like Rudy Vallée, Sinatra tended to perform songs that venerated independent women, implying dependence on them rather than the other way around. In addition, teenage girls often wrote of Sinatra’s talent for making each person feel as if he were singing only to them, even while performing for hundreds. Beth Hurwitz, member of the Frank Sinatra Music Club, mentioned this in her article, “Why I Like Frank Sinatra,” writing,

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85 George and Ira Gershwin, 1926.
“There is something about Frank Sinatra that is so pleasingly informal and yet so very different. I like his way of making each girl think he is singing directly to her. There is something in his voice that sounds sincere, as if he really means what he sings.”

Peggy McShane claimed that Sinatra addressed her directly during a performance at the Paramount Theater, saying, “Of course, the stage was two feet directly above my head, and I, and the others slightly resembled ostriches, but it was soooo worth it. He was going to sing a medley of three songs next, he said smiling down at me. Of course, he was smiling at ME. Listen, I know when a person smiles at me and when they don’t.”

Even E.J. Kahn Jr., who considered himself more of a scholar of Sinatra rather than a bobby sox-level fan, acknowledged this aspect of Sinatra’s performance technique: “Sinatra is skilled at giving each of his listeners the impression that she is the particular inspiration of, and target for, the sentiments he is proclaiming. While singing to an audience, he rarely gazes abstractedly into space. Instead, he stares with shattering intensity into the eyes of one trembling disciple after another.”

By giving the impression that he was singing to individuals, a topic that will be explored further in a later discussion about his radio presence, Sinatra was able to cultivate feelings of intimacy with his admirers who may have been lacking actual intimacy, whether emotional or physical, in their everyday lives. Not only that, but teenage girls could in a sense control the level and nature of the intimacy they had with Sinatra, precisely because he was not part of their everyday lives. In other words, Sinatra was an unattainable lover, and his unattainability made it

88 Kahn Jr., 50-51.
safe for both younger and older teens to create any kind of fantasy about him in their minds that they desired, without suffering from real life consequences (disappointment, pressure, criticism, and more tangibly, pregnancy). Ultimately, Sinatra provided an opportunity for teenage girls to claim a high level of independence in terms of their personal preferences and desires that they would likely not get in their actual future professional or romantic lives. It mattered not that the odds of actually meeting Sinatra and having him fall in love with you were virtually non-existent (though many fans certainly dreamed of that). To have him safely within a fantasy, acting exactly as they would want him to was the real excitement for many teenage girls.

Sinatra’s singing and appearance alone were more than enough to satisfy thousands of his fans, but that is not to say that all of them devoted every waking minute to living within their fantasies. There were more concrete aspects of Sinatra’s public persona that teenage girls admired, one of them being his viewpoints and activism in regards to racial and religious tolerance and politics. For many teenage fans, Sinatra served as a source of courage and inspiration to take on these social issues in their own communities, despite the fact that the voices of teenagers, especially teenage girls, were often overlooked in such public matters.

Activism

In the April 11, 1945 issue of *Variety* magazine, a short article recounts a public appearance by Sinatra in Philadelphia. This appearance was not musical, but rather aimed at spreading messages of tolerance to school-aged youth. The article, entitled “Sinatra Continues His Racial Amity Talks,” quotes Sinatra as saying, “I don't want my children to grow up in a
world in which hate against people of other races and creeds exist.” Such was the message Sinatra hoped to spread throughout the war, especially to kids and teenagers.

Despite the wartime goal of the American government and most of society to try and demonstrate a level of racial and religious tolerance that far outreached that of the Third Reich, immigrants, African Americans, homosexuals, and other minorities still experienced varying levels of prejudice. As described in chapter one, Hollywood and the entertainment industry maintained a preference for celebrities who exhibited traits of traditional white masculinity and femininity, Bing Crosby being a notable example. And while many stars spoke in favor of diversity and tolerance in the entertainment industry, few made extended efforts to bring their beliefs to the public. In general, messages of patriotism, such as buying war bonds and supporting troops, were more present in Hollywood. Frank Sinatra was sometimes accused of being unpatriotic by critics who believed his celebrity status, not his punctured eardrum, allowed him to avoid military service. And although it is true that Sinatra did not promote the sale of war bonds as prolifically as Bing Crosby, he did travel the country promoting his own ideas of patriotism. For Sinatra, who grew up facing prejudice as an Italian American, racial and religious tolerance dominated his views of how Americans should act, and he believed that by truly practicing tolerance, America really could separate itself from the Axis Powers. Because Sinatra’s primary audience was comprised of school-aged kids and young adults, he had an opportunity to influence America’s next adult generation.

Sinatra was known for traveling to schools in order to reach young Americans with his ideas. However, his most public effort came from a short film he made called The House I Live

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89 “Sinatra Continues His Racial Amity Talks,” Variety, April 11, 1945, 36.
In, which included and was inspired by the song of the same name. Nat Schachner, writer for *Real Life Comics* magazine, provides a brief summary of the film’s general narrative:

In the movie [Sinatra] runs into a gang of boys who are calling a little kid names because his religion isn’t the same as theirs. He talks straight from the shoulder to the gang.

“You kids have heard of Colin Kelly, haven’t you?” he demands. Sure they have. “Well, he was Catholic. And maybe you’ve heard of his bombardier, Meyer Levin, the fellow who bombed the Jap battleship?” They all nod. “Well, he was Jewish. And how about Dorie Miller, the messman who manned a Navy gun at Pearl Harbor?” They gulp. Yes, they had heard. “Well, that guy was a Negro. So you see, while you’re persecuting some poor kid of the same faith or color here at home, those fellows were heroes in the war, fighting to save our country!”

The upshot is that the members of the gang get the idea, and end by taking the kid into their group as a pal.90

The film was met with generally positive reviews and won an Honorary Academy Award for its promotion of tolerant ideals.91 Those most loyal fans who were members of Sinatra fan clubs overwhelmingly supported Sinatra’s social messages and took it upon themselves to preach them within their own social circles. Many club newsletters published the film’s narrative in its entirety and provided commentary on what they liked about it and other aspects of Sinatra’s social activism. In the Summer 1945 issue of *Sinatra-ly Yours*, the club includes the following message after quoting the film in full: “This is Frankie’s message! Sure, the kids gather to hear Frankie sing, but they’ll also listen to what Frankie has to say, and the money they spend to see him in *The House I Live In* will help them and their fellow citizens to be better Americans.”92

*The House I Live In*, and Sinatra’s public messages in general, encouraged young Americans to

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91 It is important to note that while Sinatra preached racial tolerance in America, he still spoke hatefully against the Japanese and used the term “Jap.” This behavior aligned with the challenge that the American government and Hollywood felt they must undertake to reconstruct the image of Japan in the American imagination as an evil and barbaric group of people that were not human enough to even consider in discussions about tolerance. Jarvis, 124-128.
92 “America,” *Sinatra-ly Yours* (Summer 1945), 3, Sinatra-ana.
have the courage to vocalize their own thoughts on social relations, even if they were not overly
critical or researched. Beth Hurwitz of the Frank Sinatra Music Club included a paragraph in her
article, “Why I Like Frank Sinatra,” that expressed her own views on tolerance by praising
Sinatra’s, writing, “Another thing that I like about ‘The Voice’ is that he goes to schools and
makes speeches about how wrong it is to be intolerant of someone’s race or religion.” The Sing
with the Sinatras Club tried to include a “Tolerance” page in every issue of their newsletter,
encouraging members to discuss the issue in their own creative ways. President Juanita Stephens,
who members knew enjoyed algebra based on her member profile in another issue of their
newsletter, created a math equation to express her views on tolerance. Stephens writes,

How do you like algebra? I think its fun. You can think of an algebra problem in so many
ways. In view of one of America’s greatest problems let’s think of;

\[ x = \text{Races, religions} \]
\[ z = \text{Peace and happiness} \]
\[ y = \text{fighting and hate} \]
\[ a = \text{Americans} \]

Which shall it be? \( x \) and \( a = z \)

\[ \text{or } x \text{ and } a = y \]

You see, Americans and all people of all races must work and live together, and help
each other if the algebra is to equal “z.”

Some young Americans were inspired to act on their beliefs in a more concrete and public way.

Another article in the same issue Sinatra-Scope describes the opening of a teen canteen in
Decatur, Illinois, called the Illini Youth Association. According to the article, the main goal of
the canteen was “further development of teen canteens thru exchange of ideas among youth

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centers of the state,” and the organization even held discussion panels to explore this mission. In reference to these panels, the author writes,

Keynote of the sessions, which were held in the Decatur-Macon Youth Center, was the outlawing of any racial discrimination in the canteens.
Subject was touched off by a strike among some high school pupils in Gary, Ind., against attending school with Negro youngsters. Strike attracted nation-wide attention, and Frank Sinatra was asked to come to Gary to plead with students for tolerance.95

The school strike in Gary, Indiana made national headlines, and Sinatra was praised by both fans and critics for his efforts in interceding. By standing by Sinatra and promoting his efforts in club newsletters, teenage fans in turn were able to declare their own beliefs regarding tolerance in a relatively public way.

In addition to finding a space to voice their opinions on racial and religious tolerance, teenage female Sinatra fans also used their clubs and newsletters to discuss politics. This provided teenage girls with a chance to become aware of and connected with current events in a way that made them feel heard. Outside of these fan and teenage-specific communities, teenage girls maintained little power or acknowledgment in terms of political opinions.

Sinatra was a public supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt during the 1944 election in which Roosevelt was running for an unprecedented fourth term in office.96 Sinatra's young fans also voiced their support of Roosevelt, despite the fact that many of them were not old enough to vote. It is hard to know for sure if teenage Sinatra fans praised Roosevelt because Sinatra did so, or if they truly believed in Roosevelt’s policies and leadership. Likely there were fans that fell

into both categories. E.J. Kahn Jr. seemed to believe that the bobby soxers were mixed in this way. He suggests,

Sinatra’s evolution, in the past two years, into a crusader for civil liberties and a political orator has delighted his fans. They are impressed by the knowledge that they are pledged to an entertainer of such versatility, and they look down upon the more limited idols of other fans. “Van Johnson,” one Sinatra fan said in disparagement of an actor who has quite a few fans of his own, “hasn’t done a darn thing for anybody except sit around and look cute.” While Sinatra was stumping for Roosevelt in 1944, his fans dutifully put on buttons saying, “Frankie’s for F.D.R. and so are we,” and took to nagging at their parents to vote a straight Sinatra ticket. The Sinatra-fan-club papers run editorials condemning intolerance and urging their readers to cut down on ice-cream sodas so that they can contribute – in Sinatra’s name, of course – to humanitarian causes.97

It is likely that fans were indeed proud in their belief that their favorite star seemed to have more substance than others and felt he supported their own political views, while simultaneously convincing themselves to support FDR primarily because Sinatra did. What is more certain is that whether or not teenage girls were completely sure of their own political beliefs, they had at least a small level of influence in American voting patterns because of their sheer number and influence within their own families, as Kahn suggests. And even if these fans could not convince their parents and older family members to vote for Roosevelt, they at least had strong influence with each other and took part in cultivating a generation of American youth that was aware of its political surroundings both because of the war, and in many cases, because of its participation in popular culture.

It is notable that during World War II, mainstream society, or at least the media, was actually aware of the political influence teenage girls had because of Sinatra. Before the war, teenage girls were all but invisible in the political sphere, and even if they did voice their opinions, it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify any American political event that credits

97 Kahn Jr., 57-58.
teenage girls with contributing to its outcome. I am not suggesting that teenage girls had any sort of largely significant impact on FDR’s re-election during the war, because obviously many of them could not vote and FDR’s popularity was already quite high. Rather, I aim to emphasize the significance that the political beliefs of teenage girls were acknowledged at all, let alone in the media. For example, an article in *The New York Times* describes a speech given by Sinatra in support of FDR that was heavily attended by his teenage female fans:

> Frank Sinatra spoke in President Roosevelt’s behalf before a predominately bobby socks audience in crowded Carnegie Hall last night – spoke gravely, and was heard with marked respect...
>
> In the hall there were brief outbursts of shrill laughter, a period of cadenced hand-clapping because the meeting started a little late, but there was no hysteria, no swooning, which uneasy adults in the hall clearly expected.
>
> There was a brief roar of applause when Sinatra stepped to the microphones, a slender figure in gray, but his first deep-toned words brought complete silence. He told of his meeting with President Roosevelt...98

The article seems as surprised as the adults it writes of that bobby soxers could possibly act in a dignified way in the presence of Sinatra, though the surprise is positive and credited towards a teenage interest in Roosevelt.

> *Variety* magazine also acknowledged the political activities of teenage Sinatra fans. In the October 11, 1944 issue, a front-page article describes Sinatra’s anger when a segment he recorded about his visit with President Roosevelt was cut from a radio broadcast he did for the Jack Benny program. The article ends by noting that “Sinatra is now a hot FDR rooter (he’s going on the air Oct. 26 to stump for him) and his kid fans, even though they’re not old enough to vote, are following suit. They’re all wearing FDR buttons.”99

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99 “‘Voice’ Silenced on FDR Visit Reference As Guest Of Benny; Plenty Burned,” *Variety*, October 11, 1944, 1.
The voice of Sinatra and his young fans was even loud enough to reach the government itself, and officials worked with the entertainment industry to try and capitalize on this newly noticed social group. Another article in *Variety* describes a plan between the government and Hollywood to use Sinatra to sell war bonds to teenagers:

For the first time since Pearl Harbor, the motion picture industry is mulling plans to glamorize War Bond buyers. According to a campaign under consideration by film industry Sixth War Loan campaign committee heads in New York, one of the earliest appeals in the current drive is to be aimed at bobbysoxers throughout the country via a tieup with Frank Sinatra...

Under the proposal, teen-agers will be given ticket numbers with bond purchases, the winner to be made up “studio style” by Eddie Senz in Times Square, N.Y. Sinatra is to make a personal appearance, launch an appeal to his teenage following to buy more War Bonds, congratulate the winning bobbysoxer, and escort the girl, possibly parents also, as his guest at the Waldorf-Astoria hotel, N.Y.

During the drive for bobbysox bond buyers, girls will be encouraged to bring piggy-banks to Times Square and break them open in view of cameramen covering the event. While the bobbysox brigade has been considered primarily a N.Y. product, bond sellers believe that their equivalent is to be found in homes throughout the country.

The Sinatra stunt, it is pointed out, may be staged in large cities wherever there are expert makeup men to “glamorize” the winners and local matinee idols to serve as escorts.100

While the first article places teenage girls in an active role, describing how they support FDR and wear campaign buttons, this one makes it clear that the government and entertainment industry view Sinatra’s fans as easily-manipulated potential money sources, which falls into line with how women and girls were, and still are, seen in much of media and popular culture.

According to this article, government agencies felt it unlikely that teenage girls would buy war bonds because of patriotism or their political beliefs. Rather, they used the promise of a potential makeover, television appearance, and encounter with Sinatra to lure them to a bond rally. If anything, bonds take a backseat in the advertising of the event. Similarly, celebrity gossip

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100 “Sinatra to Sparkplug War Bond Drive to Bobbysoxers; Glamor Pitch,” *Variety*, November 8, 1944, 1-31.
columnist Gertrude Soeurt advertised another publicity stunt aimed at encouraging teenagers to buy bonds in one of her regular columns, “Flickers and Flashes,” writing, “What a splendid way to obtain the genuine signatures of your favorite players! During this Seventh War Loan drive anyone purchasing a bond from the Paramount studio before June 30th is entitled to an autograph, clipped from the star’s own pay check. It is mounted on an attractive folder.”

Despite this commercial view of the potential value of teenage girls, the large effort put into events such as the “Sinatra stunts” worked as an unprecedented acknowledgment of the potential power teenage girls held in terms of the political direction of the country, and even the potential power they had to help win the war. And while many teenage girls likely attended the bond rally primarily to catch a glimpse of Sinatra, their acknowledgments to his beliefs and their own political efforts suggests that Sinatra in fact acted as a central point in which teenage girls could direct their voices in a manner that would gain attention in the public sphere, something that was generally difficult to achieve for their social group. Again, Sinatra fan club newsletters provide insight into just how seriously teenage girls treated the events surrounding their wartime lives. After the death of FDR, one club newsletter published this tribute, devoid of any direct references to Sinatra: “On April 12th, we lost one of our greatest presidents in history – Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He died to preserve the peace of ours and of the other countries of the world. So that he did not die in vain, let’s buy more and more war bonds to guarantee everlasting peace.”

It is true that love for Sinatra and the entertainment he provided held a significant place in the daily lives of many teenage fans. However, both through Sinatra and of their own accord,

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102 *The Sinatra Sender*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (June 1945), 2, Sinatra-ana.
these teen girls proved that their devoted fandom could in fact be used as a gateway into exploring bigger issues and opportunities that may otherwise have been closed to them. Especially for those who worked to maintain and promote Sinatra fan clubs, opportunities for career preparation, international communication, and community involvement presented themselves to Sinatra fans, resulting in the chance to become educated and open-minded young adults in the midst of international conflict.
CHAPTER 4: Female Fantasy and Romantic Agency in Frank Sinatra’s Wartime Films

Moviegoing during the 1940s was undoubtedly a significant part of many Americans’ wartime lives, but was especially popular among teenage girls, who spent an estimated $170,000,000 a year on movies during the war.\(^1\) In my interviews with people who were teenagers during the war about going to the movies, responses tended to be very positive, with outbursts of “Oh ya!,” “Every weekend,” and “Whenever the movie changed.” One woman, who currently lives in Parker, Colorado, remembered, “You could get a bag of popcorn and a Coke for a dollar. And [the theatres] had the girls that sat you. And they had uniforms on. And they had a flashlight and took you to your seat.” Another resident of the same house drew jealous groans from her peers when she said, “I went [to the movies] three times a week because my father ran the projector. So I got in free.”\(^2\) Many residents explained that they attended movies so frequently because aside from radio, it was the most readily available form of entertainment. A woman who lived in Denver, Colorado during the war summed up the opinions of most residents when she said, “We didn’t have TV. You listened to the radio or went to the movies.”\(^3\)

As has already been noted in chapter one, Hollywood’s role in wartime American culture was a very prominent one, and the interactions between filmmakers, stars, the advertising industry, and the United States government resulted in wartime films that portrayed very specific types of American people and forms of patriotism that the government hoped to see in all American citizens. These “ideal” Americans were found in most film genres during the war, but

\(^2\) Group interview with senior assisted living residents by author, Victorian House, Parker, CO, March 21, 2017.
\(^3\) Group interview with senior assisted living residents by author, Cantril House, Castle Rock, CO, March 20, 2017.
were especially prominent in film musicals because of the genre’s tendency to portray fantastical escapes from reality through music. In Rick Altman’s words, “To be somewhere else, someone else, at some other time – these are the fundamental audience desires to which the Hollywood musical so cleverly panders…” While Hollywood film musicals presented idyllic alternate realities through which viewers could fantasize themselves a part of, in the 1940s, these films were simultaneously constructed to represent a specific type of American citizen, one whose positive outlook, pursuit of heterosexual romance and marriage, and devotion to the United States was meant to appeal to and encourage actual American citizens to emulate them. Film musicals such as *For Me and My Gal* (1942), *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), and *Going My Way* (1944) suggested to American audiences both through plot and music that happy endings could be achieved through selfless devotion to their country, marriage, mainstream morals, and adhering to traditional gender roles, even though these happy endings were based in fantasy. This fantasy was enhanced by advertising that the stars who were featured in these films possessed these seemingly ideal qualities in their “real” personalities. This was true of radio stars as well, but the visual aspect of film opened up a massive entertainment network devoted to stars that included not only the films themselves, but visual advertising, fan collection of photographs and other relics, and standards for physical beauty and strength.

The films of Frank Sinatra were heavily attended and admired by teenage girls despite, or possibly because of, his distance from the traditional notions of sufficient masculinity generally portrayed in wartime films. What qualities did Sinatra possess as a screen star who appealed so strongly to teenage girls, and what exactly did his film persona provide them as audiences living during World War II? Through examining the wartime films of Sinatra, including *Higher and

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Higher (1943), Step Lively (1944), and Anchors Aweigh (1945), alongside fan responses to these films, I aim to reveal how Sinatra’s film personas provided teenage girls with an object to direct their fantasies toward and how they differed from most other male films stars of the era in terms of his portrayals of masculinity, treatment of women, and the blurring between his film and “real-life” personality. These characteristics provided material for teenage girls to mentally place themselves in positions of romantic power and agency as well as engage in unrestricted voyeurism, opportunities that were discouraged and limited in the realities of teenage girls in World War II America. In addition, Sinatra’s work in Anchors Aweigh allowed space for alternate interpretations of sexuality, including homosexuality and bisexuality, in a film genre that has previously been argued to exclusively emphasize heterosexual couplings and goals.

4.1 Higher and Higher and the Creation of Stars

In chapter one, I discussed the ways in which male Hollywood stars were portrayed in visual media, especially print media such as fan magazines. Because Sinatra did not possess most of the qualities that tended to mark stars as masculine during the war – namely physical strength, active military service, or exceptional humor – magazines chose to focus instead on portrayals of Sinatra as sweet, lovable, and a devoted father and husband. A feature in the March 1944 issue of Modern Screen entitled, “Swoon Boy” – which is notably followed by a feature on actor Lon McCAllister with multiple pictures of him performing physical activities without a shirt on – describes in detail Sinatra’s supposedly perfect marriage to his childhood sweetheart, Nancy Barbados, and the kindness with which they treat his young fans. The feature also includes a picture of Sinatra at the draft board before he received 4-F status for a damaged

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5 See chapter one, 48-51.
eardrum. Sinatra received a significant amount of criticism during the war from people who believed he was able to avoid active service because of his celebrity status, and fan magazines such as *Modern Screen* consistently included statements by Sinatra, some which may have been true and some which were likely fabricated, that defended him and suggested that he was in fact quite disappointed that he could not serve. For example, the caption below the photograph of Sinatra at the draft board read, “At draft board, before he was 4-F’ed, Frank told press he hoped he’d be allowed to hang around for glimpse of new baby, thought he’d make good soldier, wanted whack at OCS.”

Another *Modern Screen* article entitled “Trio ‘Con Brio’” from October 1944 describes the relationship between Sinatra, Bing Crosby, and Bob Hope, with emphasis on the differences between the three. Crosby and Hope are the focus of the beginning of the article, with details about Hope’s ongoing commitment to entertaining troops overseas, Crosby’s good nature, and the history of their collaborations and old friendship as defined by constant joking around with one another and playing golf. As usual, Crosby and Hope fit in with America’s expectations of masculine celebrities. When Sinatra is introduced as the new member of the “three-ring circus,” however, he is described much differently, serving more as material for Crosby and Hope’s jokes than an equal member of the group. For example, the article describes the supposedly first golf outing of the three performers as an opportunity for Hope and Crosby to haze Sinatra:

[Crosby and Hope] went to work on Frank right away. First off, Bob turned to Bing. “Crosby,” he said, “your caddy can carry the clubs. Mine can carry Sinatra.” When Frank teed off, Bob got him talking while Bing traded a trick ball on the tee. Frank swung and “Bang!” It exploded all over the place. Then Bob had his caddy hand Frank a mammoth gag golf club, complete with rubber handlebars, a flashlight, a compass, a bicycle bell and other gags, gadgets tailored for a dub. And all around the course he and Bing kept up a running patter like this: “Hope, it sure is swell to have new blood in the game.” “Yeah,}

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7 Kinkead, 23.
Bing, did you say ‘no blood’?” (Ever since Bob has called Frankie “No blood.”) Or, “Bob, why do you suppose this Sinatra’s so skinny?” “I don’t know, Bing. Maybe when he was a baby his mother tied his bow tie too tight.” “Yeah, Bob, but not tight enough!” Well – that gives you the general idea. Frankie’s number was really up.8

The emphasis in this story on Sinatra’s physical appearance was typical in media coverage of him, whether positive or negative. His skinny physique – which tended to be emphasized by his oversized suits and floppy bowties – marked him as different from most popular male stars, who were generally expected to be fit if not muscular. As already mentioned, this expectation was reflective of changing attitudes beginning during the Great Depression when perceptions of race, gender, and masculinity were shifting.9

Sinatra did not demonstrate physical strength, muscles, or vigor at this point in his career, which only exacerbated the sentiments of those critics and audience members who already took issue with his very un-masculine and un-Crosby style of singing coupled with his absence in the armed forces.10 Some were less bothered by Sinatra’s physical appearance, as it provided great material for comedy. For example, in the same issue of Modern Screen that includes the hyper-masculine image of Humphrey Bogart in Passage to Marseille, a feature describing Sinatra’s interest in boxing includes photographs of him wearing headgear that clashes with his sweet, boyish grin, while the photo below exaggerates his small size while boxing with Tami Mauriello (Figure 4.1). It is hard not to laugh at the images, which remind one of a little boy trying to follow in the footsteps of an adult man, despite the third image on the page, which shows Sinatra as a father himself.

8 Kirtley Baskette, “Trio ‘Con Brio,’” Modern Screen, October 1944, 125.
9 See footnote 40 of chapter one about shifts in perceptions of American masculinity in the early 1900s.
10 See discussion about Sinatra’s body as actually being reflective of many American men in chapter three, 148.
Figure 4.1. Feature on Frank Sinatra in *Modern Screen*. April 1944.
Again, Sinatra’s seemingly effeminate celebrity image when compared to his contemporaries leads one to ask how he managed to attain such great success during the war. The answer in part lies in the blurring between Sinatra’s film personas and that of his supposed real-life persona as constructed in entertainment media and press. Equating a film star’s supposed actual personality with that of his or her film characters is to some extent still part of the moviegoer’s psyche today. Especially for those actresses and actors who fall into the trap of becoming type casted, it is easy for audiences to feel or assume that stars are well suited for a specific kind of role because some level of the role’s characteristics come naturally to that star. In other words it is because the role is to some extent an expression of the star’s actual personality. This mental blurring between a star’s film and perceived actual personas was especially prominent in the early beginnings of the star system and persisted into the 1940s, when Frank Sinatra made his Hollywood debut. A fascinating study of star culture in the 1930s by Margaret Farrand Thorp, written in 1939, makes clear this audience mindset:

Characters with hidden depths are rich in glamour but only very rarely is it possible to suggest that a star is actually quite different from the people she plays on screen. The whole glamour system depends upon the identity of star and role. To the majority of spectators the stars are not so much actors as alter egos, or at least close personal friends, and to see them behaving out of character is to see one’s universe rock, to feel one’s personality dim, a sensation not unlike going mad.¹¹

The association between a star’s film character and their everyday celebrity image was so strong because the entertainment industry sought to market certain celebrities and profit in all forms of entertainment media, not just through movie ticket sales. Gaylyn Studlar illustrates this marketing web during its development in the 1920s:

The institutional supremacy of stars in Hollywood during the 1920s took place within a

¹¹ Margaret Farrand Thorp, *America at the Movies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), 94.
system that tried to carefully negotiate how actors and actresses were presented, on and off screen. The goal was to create a most intense – and profitable – fascination among the moviegoing public. Myriad film-related mechanisms – including newspaper interviews and film reviews, trade magazine articles and fan magazines, press agent stunts and theater exhibition displays, publicity photographs and advertising for consumable tie-in products – all formed a discourse of stardom that guaranteed the widest possible circulation of a star’s image.12

The stardom system Studlar describes was heavily established by the 1940s, and the onset of World War II added wartime concerns and ideals to the already complex fabric of star identity and presentation.

Frank Sinatra made his Hollywood acting debut in a major role in 1943, co-starring in RKO Pictures’ release, Higher and Higher.13 The film, which was loosely adapted from the 1940 stage show of the same name, follows the attempts of former millionaire Cyrus Drake and his household staff to save themselves from bankruptcy by converting the scullery maid, Millie, into a high society-debutante who poses as Drake’s daughter. The idea is that Millie will acquire a rich husband who will restore the Drake household to its former wealth. Little does the household know that Millie is already in love with Mike O’Brien, the orchestrator of the scheme, and as much as she enjoys acting the part of debutante, she ultimately leaves her wealthy fiancé – who is also broke and posing as wealthy – at the altar. Sinatra’s role in the plot of the film is not as important as that of Michele Morgan’s (Millie) and Jack Haley’s (Mike O’Brien), yet the film ultimately was advertised in various media as “The Sinatra Show,” this headline placed even before the actual title of the film, despite Sinatra being listed as third in the credits. (Figures 4.2 and 4.3). It is likely that Sinatra received special attention in the film not only because

12 Gaylyn Studlar, This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2.
13 Sinatra had previously appeared in Las Vegas Nights (1941), Ship Ahoy (1942), and Reveille with Beverly (1942), but only in minor singing roles, some of which were uncredited.
Figure 4.2. Poster for *Higher and Higher* in *Screenland*. January 1944.
advertisers knew he would be a huge draw for teenage audiences, but also because of his potential to reach stardom not only in the radio and recording industries, but in Hollywood as well. Producers and advertisers saw a “triple threat” in the making (just a couple years later Sinatra would debut his dancing skills), and used their power to assure Sinatra’s success as a multi-media star.

Aside from movie posters and ads for the film in magazines, *Higher and Higher* was promoted through contests, activities, and Sinatra fans themselves. The January 1944 issue of *Modern Screen* includes a crossword puzzle based on the film (not with Michele Morgan’s or
Jack Haley’s face in the center, but Sinatra’s), which readers have the option of sending in to the magazine to win a prize (Figure 4.4). The same issue includes a five-page adaptation of the film’s narrative, the headline reading, “One moment Michele Morgan’s in a bog, the next, she’s whirling higher and higher. It’s love, all right, but strangely enough, its name is not Sinatra,” suggesting the author views Sinatra as the male lead even though Jack Haley holds that position. This kind of media coverage reflects how the entertainment industry, and fan magazines especially, consistently portrayed both Sinatra’s film and “real-life” personas as irresistible to women and teenage girls and acknowledged his popularity among females even when he was cast alongside more conventionally masculine stars.

Sinatra fan club newsletters also included coverage of and opinions on the film. Evelyn Malouf, member of the Semper Sinatra Fan Club, recounts her experience seeing *Higher and Higher*:

> Remember when *Higher and Higher* was playing [in theatres]? My girl friend and I went to see it and when Frank came on the screen everyone started screaming and swooning, my girl friend and I couldn’t understand why they were so crazy about him and why they swoon over him. We still cannot understand it. I like Frank a lot but not that much to scream and swoon. That’s my honest opinion.

Malouf’s admiration of Sinatra is more reserved than that of many of his most ardent fans, but her account of her experience of seeing *Higher and Higher* in theatres reveals the general response from Sinatra’s young fan following when he made his acting debut. Teenage girls were not responding to what they viewed as a fictional film character, they were responding to Sinatra himself, or at least what they perceived to be Sinatra’s actual self. The parallels between Sinatra’s

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Wherever you go folks are asking, “Have you seen Mary Lee?” She’s the most refreshing thing that’s come to the screen in a month of Sundays! How she sings! What a personality! And here, she’s in a perfectly grand picture—gay, romantic and melody-filled!

MARY LEE
Nobody’s Darling

Louis Calhern • Glady's George • Jackie Moran
Lee Patrick • Beulah Bondi
Ross Alexander • Marcy McAvoy

Hear Mary Sing:
How Sweet It Is!
I’m Always Chasing Rainbows—Oh, To Be You—And More!

A Republic Picture

Figure 4.4. Higher and Higher crossword puzzle in Modern Screen. January 1944.
character in *Higher and Higher* and his “real life” celebrity persona are so obvious in the film that the filmmakers did not even bother giving him a fictional name. In fact, Sinatra’s first line in the film is, “Good morning. My name is Frank Sinatra.” And his character’s sweet, quiet, and romantic nature in the film is inseparable from the persona fan magazines constructed for him, which he displayed in live performances. The fictional character of Mickey (Marcy McGuire) in the film is even reflective of Sinatra’s real-life audience.

A young girl referred to by Mike O’Brien as “small, cute, and adolescent,” to which she responds, “I have finished adolescing,” Mickey represents the stereotypical Sinatra fan. She is a teenager, wears bobby socks with her maid’s uniform, and swoons upon meeting Sinatra (Figure 4.5). Marcy McGuire, the actress who plays Mickey, was similarly portrayed as no different from the average American teenage girl. A feature on McGuire in the February 1943 issue of *Hollywood* emphasizes McGuire’s self-consciousness about her looks, something almost all teenage girls could likely relate to. One anecdote from the feature reads,

> When Tim Whelan, the producer-director, saw [McGuire] from a ringside seat at a Chicago night spot, he used that well-worn line – “You ought to be in pictures.” Marcy, who had been reading movie columns and fan magazines, promptly answered: “Don’t kid me, mister. Hollywood is for glamour girls. I, personally, look like Mickey Rooney. Look at me – red-headed, freckled. Boy, I’d break the camera.”16

Whether or not McGuire’s character’s name in *Higher and Higher* was a result of this anecdote is hard to know, but it is clear that McGuire was meant to be seen as someone who the magazine’s readers could identify with. For young Sinatra fans who saw *Higher and Higher*, Mickey also served as an intensification of their own potential fantasies, in which they not only meet Sinatra, but have the confidence and freedom to aggressively pursue him in physical and romantic ways.

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Figure 4.5. Mickey swoons upon meeting Frank Sinatra in *Higher and Higher* (RKO Pictures, 1943).

Because teenage girls were bombarded with contradictory messages about how to express or not express their personal romantic desires, they were left to deal with sexuality in any way that would conceal it from the public sphere. And just as it does today, that often meant confining feelings of sexual and romantic agency to fantasy. Fantasy holds more power than it is often credited with, however, and Sinatra served as an object that was nearly perfectly suited for the fantasies of many American teenage girls. Both on screen and in person, Sinatra exhibited understanding, vulnerability, respect, and reverence toward women and teenage girls, who felt that if given the chance, they would be the ones to take charge in a relationship with him rather than the other way around. This kind of female power is displayed in the character of Mickey, who after swooning upon first sight of Sinatra, proceeds to pursue him in a way that challenges mainstream American patterns of courtship. Mickey exhibits this power during the number, “I Saw You First,”¹⁷ in which Mickey essentially claims Sinatra as her property because she was the first girl in the household to see him. Mickey then initiates a chase and a kiss which Sinatra resists, and becomes noticeably frustrated when he escapes (Figure 4.6). Mickey thus embodies a desire that many Sinatra fans carried; possessing Sinatra. And while their realities did not permit

¹⁷ Harold Adamson and Jimmy McHugh, 1943.
any such behavior (not just towards Sinatra but to any man), they could use entertainment to aid in fulfilling this desire within their own minds. Judith Butler examines further the power of fantasy in coping with censored realities:

Fantasy is part of the articulation of the possible; it moves us beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or the not actualizable [as in the case of young Sinatra fans]...Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality, constituting it as its constitutive outside. The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge to contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home.18

As Butler’s explanation suggests, the fantasies teenage girls constructed using Sinatra were not merely escapes from reality, they were also reflections of the insufficiencies and complexities of their realities, which were aggravated by the social changes World War II fueled.

One of the only semi-public spaces in which fans could express these desires towards Sinatra was in their fan clubs. Miriam Hansen describes film-star fan clubs as a space “in which women not only experienced the misfit of the female spectator in relation to patriarchal positions

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of subjectivity but also developed imaginative strategies in response to it.”

Fan club newsletters can be described as one of these sites for imaginative responses. Especially in the poetry and personal encounter sections of newsletters, teenage girls did not hold back their feelings about Sinatra and used frank language to describe their thoughts and reactions to him. Gloria Heiskanan of Ashtabula, Ohio, who was a member of multiple Sinatra clubs including the Sing With The Sinatras Club, described her suspense and actions when seeing Sinatra live for the first time in Cleveland with some friends, a couple years after *Higher and Higher* was released:

> It was two-thirty on a cold Saturday – Dec. 15. That’s when Margie and I started waiting for our train to Cleveland. How we waited. I was in agony...

> After a while [Sinatra] sang “My Romance” and “White Xmas.” That was when my girl friend and I with other bobbysoxers ran like mad toward the stage. We knew the show was almost over and we took the chance of being kicked out or seeing him closer. We were right under the stage and could see him perfectly. His blue eyes just shone and that smile...It was heavenly and he is not skinny!! I just get dreamy and my eyes get misty every time I think of it...

> When we left the place we knew we would always adore Frank because he has everything anyone could hope for in a man. He’s just for us. He will always have a special place in my heart.20

Another member of the Sing With The Sinatras Club wrote a poem to be sung to the music of “Can’t Help Singing,”21 that not only expresses her bodily reactions to Sinatra, but also Van Johnson:

> Can’t help swooning
> For the song that Frankie’s crooning
> I don’t care what they say
> Frank affects me that way
> And I gotta keep swooning all day.

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21 Jerome Kern and E.Y. Harburg, 1944.
Can’t help drooling  
And it doesn’t affect my schoolin  
I don’t care what they say  
Van affects me that way  
So I just keep drooling all day.  

Both of these newsletter submissions suggest that club members felt perfectly comfortable not only putting their emotional and physical feelings towards Sinatra in writing, but also allowing their peers to read them. Newsletters served as a safe space where teen girls could concretely express their romantic fantasies outside of their imaginations.

Sinatra’s role in *Higher and Higher* served as extremely nutritious material for the construction of fantasies for those who were already fans of him, because the character he played exaggerated every feature that teenage girls already loved about him. As discussed in chapter three, the most prominent of these features were his musical style and physical appearance, which take center stage in *Higher and Higher*.

In terms of Sinatra’s physical body, female viewers were able to stare at him to their hearts’ content without feeling restricted or judged, on the one hand because of how the film displays Sinatra’s body, and on the other, because teenage girls were viewing the film in a darkened theatre setting in which they were meant to be spectators, which as Laura Mulvey suggests, “helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation.”  

As some film scholars have discussed, this kind of relationship between male bodies and female viewers contrasts with the widespread practice of catering towards male pleasure in film, or the “male gaze” as described by Mulvey. In terms of the traditional pattern of placing women in the pleasurable line of sight in

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22 “Can’t Help,” *The T-Jacket Journal*, No. 6 (April-May, 1946), 8, Rose MARBL.
film, Mulvey writes, “Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning.”24

In her work on the films and audiences of Rudolph Valentino, Miriam Hanses challenges the idea that a male body as the object of a female spectator's gaze is merely “accidental,” or an isolated occurrence outside of the fixed idea of the male gaze. Instead, Hansen suggests that, 

...female spectatorship constitutes a collectively significant deviation, a deviation that has its historical basis in the viewers’ experience as women, as a social group differentiated in terms of class, race, ethnicity, and sexual preference. If this collective deviation was articulated and simultaneously appropriated by the discourse of consumption, the agencies of consumer culture also offered women a public horizon in which the social construction(s) of female subjectivity, as inscribed and negotiated in the textual configurations of the films, could be recognized and reflected upon, in which commercially appropriated experience could be interpreted and reclaimed.25

The idea of a “commercially appropriated experience” – in this case, the presentation of Frank Sinatra’s body in his wartime films – being “reclaimed” by a female audience is certainly relevant when considering the teenage female viewers of Sinatra’s wartime films, who made Sinatra’s film performances their own by adapting them, reviewing them, and putting their emotional responses to them down in writing in their fan club newsletters and correspondences. This does not necessarily mean that teenage female viewers of Sinatra’s films managed to simply reverse the male gaze into a female gaze, however, which Mulvey suggests is generally not possible. Rather, these teenage girls were able to claim and alter the “commercially appropriated

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24 Mulvey, 834.
experience” created for them by Hollywood studios into something that reflected their experiences as teenagers, females, Americans, and consumers.

While the notion of a female spectator is strongly at play in this discussion of Sinatra’s female fans, Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze is indeed useful for approaching the ways in which American teenage girls may have responded to viewing Sinatra’s body onscreen. Mulvey does not necessarily suggest that the male gaze is active only when a female body is on screen, though that is certainly relevant to her theory. Rather, it can be said that the male gaze comes into play when a male identifies with what is happening on screen, which often appears in the form of desire, whether for a female body, a feeling, or a situation. Mulvey describes these “two contradictory aspects of the pleasurable structures of looking in the conventional cinematic situation” more fully: “The first, scopophilic, arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. The second, developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen.”

For teenage girls watching Frank Sinatra on film during World War II, these two aspects were not contradictory at all. A significant part of Sinatra’s appeal for teenage female film audiences was his lack of power in romantic relationships, which teen girls likely strongly identified with due to the nature of wartime gender roles and relationships. This identification was key to creating fantasies in which teenage girls themselves could hold romantic power, and without this identification, Sinatra would have been no different from other male films stars of the era and likely would not have been met with the same level of infatuation from America’s teenage girls.

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26 Mulvey, 836-837.
In the case of *Higher and Higher*, teenage female fans were able to enjoy both imagined sexual gratification from and identification with Sinatra, whose body is displayed just as much, if not more, as those of the female characters. At one point in the film, this voyeuristic opportunity to enjoy looking at Sinatra without his knowledge is made quite obvious, as we watch Michele Morgan’s character stare at Sinatra through a window in his home while he unknowingly sings “This is a Lovely Way to Spend an Evening.”27 (Figure 4.7). As the tributes in Sinatra fan club newsletters reveal, teenage girls certainly gained mental and bodily pleasure from these opportunities, and the film did not leave audiences wanting for more shots of Sinatra’s body. During most of his solos in the film, the camera remains in prolonged close-ups of his face and body for the durations of the songs, and the end of the film even places Sinatra’s body within the clouds while he is singing “The Music Stopped,”28 as if to suggest that both his body and voice are unearthly (Figure 4.8).

As Mulvey suggests, desire for and attraction to physical bodies is only one aspect of the male gaze in film, the other aspect being feelings of male identification with characters and situations on screen. Identification is another way in which scholars have analyzed Sinatra’s appeal to teenage female audiences, many of them suggesting Sinatra’s celebrity persona was a reflection of female sentiments during World War II. Both Karen McNally and Rob Jacklosky describe Sinatra as expressing female vulnerability, writing, “Though Sinatra provides a site toward which young women’s sexual desires can be directed, his performances also become an expression of feminine vulnerability in the context of war,”29 and, “The 1940s Sinatra is the

27 Jimmy McHugh and Harold Adamson, 1943.
28 Jimmy McHugh and Harold Adamson, 1943.
unalloyed expression of the male anxiety of rejection and the most fully articulated expression of feminine vulnerability,”

respectively. Because Sinatra sang primarily love songs during the war (as opposed to songs about patriotism and optimism like Bing Crosby did), as well as songs originally composed for female singers and written from a female perspective, such as “Someone to Watch Over Me,”

there is no doubt that young women likely identified with the sentiments he expressed and felt that he understood them. However, this has led some scholars to the conclusion that Sinatra’s appeal lay only in his voice, not his body.

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31 George and Ira Gershwin, 1926.
Karen McNally has made this claim in more than one study of Sinatra’s films, writing, “...female audiences were attracted to [Sinatra] despite, rather than because of, his physical inadequacies, making Sinatra’s body largely irrelevant to his sexual appeal. The sobriquet ‘The Voice’ only underlines the condensation of Sinatra into a bodiless version of male sexuality.”

McNally also suggests that Sinatra’s film work begs the question as to how he continued to enjoy success when entering the most visual form of entertainment media: “The visual medium makes problematic the definition of Sinatra’s self-objectifying sexuality solely around his voice, and additionally emphasizes a physical lack – slim frame and unconventional movie-star looks – which continuously provokes questions around both his sexual appeal and masculine persona.”

True, fans described Sinatra’s disembodied voice as quite sufficient in providing material for fantasy, but because of the value fans also placed not only on Sinatra’s films, but also on visual memorabilia of him, I find it impossible to suggest that Sinatra’s body was irrelevant in his appeal. Mark Duffett emphasizes the importance of visual material for a person’s sense of identity as a fan:

Souvenirs are things that represent their original contexts: artefacts of memorabilia, such as concert set-lists, review clippings or celebrity encounter photographs. They enable the fan to narrate a retrospective notion of his/her biographic self moving through an ongoing process of growth and development. Collectors therefore use book shelves, web pages, photo albums, scrapbooks, diaries and other spaces as containers to help them accumulate a stock of aids to memory. In short, artefacts used as souvenirs express identity as a retrospective construction of a fan’s life lived.

32 McNally, 137.


Far from irrelevant, visual representations of Sinatra’s body were essential for teenage girls both in constructing relationships with Sinatra through fantasy, as well as constructing more concrete relationships with each other. Trading visual relics of Sinatra and even dressing like him were important parts of the Sinatra fan club experience and allowed members to help each other develop collective and individual feelings towards Sinatra.

Fan club newsletters and fan magazines make apparent the seriousness with which fans treated visual representations of Sinatra. Almost all issues of fan club newsletters had a section where members could advertise certain “snaps” (snapshots) they had that they were willing to trade for other things (usually other “snaps”). In this way, photos of Sinatra were almost like currency. Moreover, many teen girls took to adding signature pieces of Sinatra’s style to their own wardrobes, such as bowties. Imitating Sinatra in dress, possessing visual relics of him, acting as the voyeur while watching his films, and relishing in the songs he sang which revered women all worked together to place teenage girls in a position of sexual power, even if this power really only existed in fantasy. The “physical inadequacies” McNally speaks of were not only extremely relevant for Sinatra’s sexual appeal, but indispensable, because fans likely could not as easily visualize themselves possessing sexual power over Sinatra if he displayed the high level of machismo that many other Hollywood stars did. Again, identification with Sinatra’s on-screen romantic and physical self-consciousness and uncertainty was paramount for the construction of teenage female fantasies of power. It would have been far more difficult for teenage girls to imagine themselves dominating a hypermasculine persona that they could not identify with or understand.

Overall, because Sinatra’s established celebrity persona was virtually indistinguishable from his character in *Higher and Higher*, the film provided a visual representation of Sinatra that
added greatly to his fans’ consumption and adoration of him. Sinatra’s body may have been fodder for those members of society who ridiculed his supposed lack of masculinity, but for his teenage female fans, it was perfectly suited for those who fantasized about possessing power and agency in their romantic relationships. Furthermore, the fact that Sinatra sang sentimental love songs exclusively in the film enhanced the quality he already possessed of making individuals feel as if he were singing directly to them, as seen in the fan club newsletters discussed in chapter three. When Sinatra sings to Michele Morgan’s character in Higher and Higher, he almost never takes his eyes off of her, and the camera never takes its eye off of Sinatra (Figure 4.9). This creates the effective illusion that Sinatra may just as easily be singing to an individual watching the film, which is emphasized even further at the end when Sinatra stares directly into the camera while singing (Figure 4.7).

David Brackett describes the power that popular songs have in convincing listeners that the singer feels the sentiments of the song personally: “It is the words and sounds associated with the most prominent voice that are heard to emit the signs of emotion most directly, to ‘speak’ to the listener. It is thereby easiest to conflate the song’s ‘persona’ with at least the voice, and possibly the body, media image, and biography of the lead singer.”35 Similarly, Richard Dyer writes, “Because songs are frequently in the first person, because they mobilize affects beyond discursive consciousness, because they come out of the body, it is common to consider them expressions, even emanations of someone, of the singer, the character, the composer, the lyricist, even the listener or the collective audience.”36 Even if Sinatra’s persona in Higher and Higher

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had been drastically different from his off-screen celebrity image, his musical performance and choice of songs in the film would still have likely affected his listeners in similar ways to his off-screen performances. However, because his character was in fact nearly identical to his off-screen persona, and because the camera focused on his eyes and body while he sang, and because teenage girls had the opportunity to watch him in the perceived isolation of a dark movie theatre, the overall effect provided viewers with an experience that would likely be the closest they would ever get to having Sinatra sing to them alone and in person.

The remainder of this chapter will explore how Sinatra’s personas were characterized in terms of traditional and non-traditional gender roles in the other two films of his wartime career, and how these roles continued to promote feelings of sexual power and independence for his teenage female fans.

4.2 Step Lively and Female Power

The release of Step Lively in 1944 proved to be a monumental event for Sinatra’s teenage female fan following, not because the film as a whole was very memorable, but because it marked the moment Sinatra had his first on-screen kiss. Look magazine paid tribute to the event
with an entire article devoted to it in the May 16, 1944 issue. The article, entitled “Frank Sinatra’s First Kiss,” begins much like an account of an important war or political event might, with minute-to-minute coverage and detailed descriptions of every person involved:

Clocks said 3:30 on Stage 5 at the RKO studios in Hollywood. The day’s shooting was almost over on Sinatra’s new picture, his second film venture. Yet director Tim Whelan, cameramen, electricians were brittle with excitement. Two hundred extras nervously rimmed the set. Grips swore, wardrobe mistresses fluttered.

At 3:32, The Voice entered, accompanied by make-up man, personal attendant, secretary. He was deliberate, unruffled, calmly discussing a future radio show with secretary Jerry O’Shea.

At 3:34, MGM’s Gloria DeHaven walked into the ring with three make-up experts and father Carter DeHaven, veteran stage actor, for support.

The time had come for Sinatra’s first film kiss. LOOK’s Earl Theisen, long waiting with camera and K-rations, walked solemnly forward. On following pages is his record of every step.37

This minute-by-minute account of the moments leading up to Sinatra’s first on-screen kiss may or may not have been fabricated, but it reflects the attitude many of Sinatra’s fans had leading up to the film’s release. A feature on Gloria De Haven, Sinatra’s co-star in Step Lively, in the August 1944 issue of Screenland focuses on Sinatra just as much if not more as on De Haven, and while the article eventually reads as an account of De Haven’s life story, it begins with the upcoming kiss with Sinatra:

At a Frank Sinatra broadcast Gloria De Haven sat among a group of swooning girls. She was to be Sinatra’s leading lady in RKO’s “Step Lively,” and as she had never seen Sinatra she had come for purely professional reasons. But if she could have looked into the future she would have swooned too. For in the picture Frankie was to take her in his arms and kiss her.38

Step Lively provided a visual realization of what teenage girls had only previously fantasized about; physical intimacy with Sinatra. And while the kiss received notice in many fan

37 “Frank Sinatra’s First Kiss,” Look, May 16, 1944, 56.
club newsletters and fan magazines, Sinatra's character in the film provided more than just a kiss for teenage female fantasy. Even more so than in *Higher and Higher*, Sinatra's performance in *Step Lively* marked him as a character that not only reveres women, but finds himself submissive to their power.

The entire plot of *Step Lively* can arguably be summarized as a narrative in which all of the characters, both male and female, find ways to manipulate Sinatra's character. The story follows Broadway producer Gordon Miller (George Murphy) in his efforts to find a patron to support his latest show so he can pay off his many debts, his largest being the bill he has run up at the New York hotel he's been living at. Playwright Glenn Russell (Frank Sinatra) shows up at the hotel to confront Miller about a script he had sent him, along with a large sum of money, in the hopes that Miller would produce his play. Miller has no intention of producing Russell’s play, but when he hears Russell’s singing voice, decides to tell Russell that he will produce his play, when in reality he is planning to manipulate Russell into starring in his current musical production in an effort to boost ticket sales and patronage. Miller enlists the star of the show and his own neglected love interest, Christine Marlowe (Gloria De Haven), to seduce Russell so he will agree to sing in the show. In the end, Marlowe and Russell develop real feelings for each other, Russell agrees to star in the show, and all the characters end up happy and successful.

Throughout the film, Russell proves to be easily maneuvered by the two main female characters especially, Christine Marlowe and Miss Abbott (Anne Jeffreys). At different points in the film, both women assume controlling positions over Russell that in the majority of Hollywood films are usually assigned to men. The interactions between Russell and the two female leads consistently place Russell below the women both physically and in terms of intellect and courage. Very often, in shots of Russell with either woman, Russell is either seated
while the woman stands, or standing on stairs a step or two below the woman (Figure 4.10). At the end of the film, this height displacement is taken to the extreme when Russell and Marlowe perform “Some Other Time”39 on stage. In this scene, Russell stands at the bottom of an invisible staircase while Marlowe descends from the top, the illusion being that she is walking down a beam of light (Figure 4.11). Marlowe’s seeming descent from Heaven while Russell looks up and extends his hand toward her reflects the overarching theme of Russell’s veneration of women in the film. And even though Sinatra’s character has a fictional name in Step Lively, unlike in Higher and Higher, the persona of Russell parallels Sinatra’s own celebrity persona just as much as in his first film. For teenage girls watching the film, this would have made it easy to fantasize that Sinatra himself could worship them as he does Gloria De Haven and Anne Jeffreys, if they could only have the chance to meet him and become romantically involved.

Of course, to be admired and noticed by men was not a fantasy specific to World War II. Margaret Thorp noticed this desire in female film audiences in the 1930s, writing,

One of the things [the female moviegoer] wants is to be appreciated, not just by implication but right out loud. There is social and psychological significance in the fact that 70 per cent of Gary Cooper’s fan mail comes from women who write that their husbands do not appreciate them. Their ideal is still the ideal husband of the Victorian era who told his wife at breakfast every morning how much she meant to him, but that husband is not a type which the postwar American man has any interest in emulating. He prefers to conceal his deeper emotions at breakfast, and during the rest of the day as well. His wife, consequently, has to spend her afternoons at the movies.40

Thorp’s reference to a past ideal aligns with typical patterns of embracing nostalgia, especially during times of war or other societal unrest, in other words, remembering how good things used

39 Music by Jule Styne, lyrics by Sammy Cahn, 1944.
40 Thorp, 5-6.
Figure 4.10. Glenn Russell with Miss Abbott and Christine Marlowe in *Step Lively* (RKO Pictures, 1944).

Figure 4.11. Christine descends an invisible staircase in *Step Lively* (RKO Pictures, 1944).
to be while forgetting unpleasant realities of the past. Thorp suggests that women still pined for an era where men were supposedly more open with their emotions. In this regard, Sinatra’s emotional and vulnerable film personas could be likened to this supposed type of man, which may or may not have really existed, making him a suitable object for those females who felt the kind of nostalgia Thorp describes. In addition, it is arguable that American women and teenage girls living during World War II had to rely on fantasy and nostalgia even more so than those living in other eras when constructing their own romantic ideals, for the practical reason that men were literally not as available. This left many women scrambling to find a romantic partner, and those who could not had no choice but to rely on fantasy. Karen Anderson further explains this conundrum and its unfortunate alignment with shifts in teenage dating culture:

...for many young women men became a scarce and valued commodity. The growing popularity of going steady among middle-class teenagers, the rise in teenage marriages, and the revision of standards of sexual conduct among some younger women were all cultural expressions of this wartime phenomenon. In a marriage-oriented but male-scarce society, getting and retaining male attention and approval became an even greater preoccupation for many girls and women than it had been before the war.41

For younger teen girls who had not yet experienced much dating, this scarcity of men may not have felt as dire as it did for older teenagers and young adult women. However, it likely affected how younger teens imagined dating and what they expected out of their future romantic relationships. With many young men absent overseas, teenage girls often relied on carefully constructed entertainment stars as objects for their fantasies, which would likely not match the realities of their future dating lives when American men returned home.

Frank Sinatra’s celebrity persona not only provided teen girls with an imagined romantic partner, but also served as a public and male reflection of their own wartime sentiments,

sentiments that many contemporary critics and audiences of Sinatra deemed feminine. Namely, these feelings included longing for love, lost love, desire for romance, and vulnerability. Various aspects of *Step Lively* not only make Sinatra relatable to a female audience, but seem to equate him more with the women in the film than the men. An example of this can be seen in certain shots where only male characters are present. Towards the beginning of the film when Glenn Russell first meets Gordon Miller and company, the camera either looks at Russell’s face while the other men’s backs are turned, or looks at the faces of the other men while Russell’s back is turned (Figure 4.12). This suggests that Russell is somehow different from the other men in the film, and as the narrative progresses it becomes clear that this difference comes from Russell’s more prominent similarities to the female characters.

This is especially apparent in one scene where Russell first sees Christine Marlowe perform. At the beginning of the performance, Marlowe’s character aligns with traditional practices of Hollywood cinema in that she is a spectacle to be looked at through the male gaze. Her body and singing voice are on display while a table of men, including Russell, look on in admiration (Figure 4.13). The performance takes an odd turn, however, when Marlowe hears Russell sing and invites him on stage. Now, Russell becomes the spectacle (backed up by the same female dancers that supported Marlowe) who is looked at both by men, and by Marlowe herself (Figure 4.14). This reversal of spectacle and spectator marks Russell as more feminine than masculine, and as scholars such as Margaret Thorp, Richard Dyer, and Gaylyn Studlar suggest, the practice of mentally equating a film character with his or her “real life” persona in turn marked Sinatra himself as effeminate in the eyes of many wartime audience members.
Figure 4.12. Male cast of *Step Lively* (RKO Pictures, 1944).

Figure 4.13. Christine Marlowe performs in *Step Lively* (RKO Pictures, 1944).

Figure 4.14. Christine watches Glenn Russell perform in *Step Lively* (RKO Pictures, 1944).
In the end, while it ultimately fell off the radar in the context of Sinatra’s overall film career, and was not even the most popular of his three wartime films, *Step Lively* provided another example of how Sinatra could be described as the total package for American teenage girls who were navigating romantic feelings and desires that they could not generally express in public. Not only could these girls mentally place themselves with ease in positions of power over Sinatra by watching the characters of Christine Marlowe and Ms. Abbott, but they could relate to Sinatra himself, allowing teen girls to feel connected with him in multiple ways. Namely, teenage girls could identify with Sinatra’s portrayals of romantic uncertainty, physical insecurities, and lack of power in the presence of more masculine characters. In Sinatra’s third and final film produced during World War II, this sense of identification with women is even more apparent.

4.3 *Anchors Aweigh* and Irregular Gender Roles

*Anchors Aweigh* was the most popular film of Sinatra’s wartime career, most likely because of his new establishment as a film actor, the film’s fun and impressive production in Technicolor, and the presence of Gene Kelly, an equally if not more popular entertainer during the war, not to mention an entertainer that was portrayed as decidedly more masculine both physically and emotionally than Sinatra. This pairing of Sinatra and Kelly was the first of a string of films in which they would co-star, and each followed a pattern in which Sinatra played a less masculine character that was in some way reliant on Kelly. As we have seen in *Higher and Higher* and *Step Lively*, Sinatra had fallen victim to being type-casted as a sensitive and timid love interest by the time *Anchors Aweigh* premiered in 1945, and this film was no exception. In fact, Sinatra’s character in *Anchors Aweigh* took not only his character pattern of veneration of women but also his identification with them to a new level, exhibiting different traits that can be
described as maternal, virginal, and homoerotic. More so than in Sinatra’s first two films, *Anchors Aweigh* displayed a kind of sexual and romantic ambiguity between various characters and genders that could provide fodder for fantasy not just for heterosexual teenage girls, but for those who identified as homosexual and bisexual as well.

*Anchors Aweigh* follows the adventures of Joe Brady (Gene Kelly) and Clarence Doolittle (Frank Sinatra), two Navy sailors who receive four days of shore leave in Hollywood for heroic actions. These “heroic actions” had consisted of Clarence falling overboard and Joe rescuing him. This relationship thus already implies that Clarence is in some way reliant on the more masculine Joe. While still onboard the ship, Joe brags to all his fellow sailors that once he gets to Hollywood, he is going to meet up with “Lola,” a supposedly voluptuous and sexually willing love interest who the audience never ends up seeing. Joe’s confidence and boasting have earned him the title of “sea wolf” among the sailors, and he is believed to be the most efficient at picking up women. Once ashore, Joe confronts Clarence who will not stop following him on his way to Lola’s. When asked for an explanation, Clarence replies, “I’ve been in the Navy a year and a half now, every time we hit port and get liberty, all I do is go to the library.” “Alright so you like books, what’s the beef?” Joe asks. “Well I thought it’d be fun to try something different, like going out with girls, but I don’t know how to begin!” Joe, amazed, asks Clarence why he would possibly need Joe’s help in picking up women, to which Clarence explains that he went straight from an all-boys high school to a Catholic church to be the assistant choirmaster, and then directly into the Navy. Apparently, Clarence has had neither the knowledge nor the opportunity to become romantically involved with any girls before. Joe reluctantly agrees to help Clarence, and decides to test out Clarence’s “technique” by pretending to walk down the sidewalk like a “dame,” having Clarence attempt to “pick him up.” Before this, Joe stands back
to look at Clarence’s appearance, saying disappointedly, “Well, we’ll have to work with what we got.” Kelly then struts down the sidewalk with one hand on his hip and the other stuck out, while Clarence fails to impress him with his feeble attempts at flirting. While this is going on, a male passerby gives the pair a concerned look, prompting them to stop their roleplaying and leave (Figure 4.15).

This interaction along with others in the film exhibits homoerotic tendencies that can be discussed in the context both of the film musical as a genre and the war itself. Rick Altman’s influential work on film musicals can be used to address portrayals of homoeroticism from multiple angles. In his 1987 book, *The American Film Musical*, Altman presents his theory of the “dual-focus structure” found in most film musicals. Of this pattern Altman writes,

> Instead of focusing all its interest on a single central character, following the trajectory of her progress, the American film musical has a dual focus, built around parallel stars of opposite sex and radically divergent values. This dual-focus structure requires the viewer to be sensitive not so much to chronology and progression – for the outcome of the male/female match is entirely conventional and thus quite predictable – but to simultaneity and comparison.\(^{42}\)

Altman explains how with few exceptions, almost all American film musicals follow a heterosexual couple on the path to the ultimate goal, marriage. That is true. However, I am interested here in those few exceptions to the rule Altman describes. At one point, Altman even mentions the work of Sinatra and Kelly specifically as an example of a film in which the dual-focus structure is altered. Altman says, “The Kelly-Sinatra musicals for example, provide an opportunity to treat the male principals as a couple as well as to create a second male-female

\(^{42}\) Altman,19.
Altman does not go into much depth on the Kelly-Sinatra relationship, since that is not the main focus of his book. However, it is interesting that twenty-three years later, Altman edits his original dual-focus structure to include same-sex couples in addition to heterosexual couples:

In addition to the musical’s primary heterosexual project, which builds its structures and values around the romantic couples of carefully paired opposite-sex partners, I propose that we recognize in the musical the operation of a carefully targeted homosocial project. When we look closely at the beginnings of musical films, we consistently find that at least one of the young lovers is initially presented in the company of one or more same-sex friends.⁴⁴

Again, Altman is correct in his observation of the relationship patterns found in most film musicals and suggests that film musical narratives do not leave room for any kind homosexual reading in the so-called “homosocial” couples:

...the musical’s insistence on a rite of passage that is specifically marked as progressing from the homosocial to the heterosexual has the effect of implicitly foregrounding the absent homosexual category. Whereas a movement from homosocial to heterosocial describes nothing more than the shift from childhood single-sex groups to mature mixed-sex society, the passage from homosocial to heterosexual specifically negates the alternative possibility of movement from relationships that are only homosocial to fully homosexual bonds.⁴⁵

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⁴³ Altman, 32.
⁴⁵ Ibid., 28.
I am not suggesting that Anchors Aweigh portrays Sinatra and Kelly as being in an obvious or literal homosexual relationship. After all, both characters do end up with females at the end of the film, just as Altman explains typically happens. However, I feel there was much room for heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual audiences to all identify with and/or gain pleasure from the relationships in the film. Brett Farmer discusses the possibility for different interpretations of film musicals in response to similar suggestions by Elizabeth Ellsworth and Al LaValley in regards to other film genres, where audiences may choose not to accept the film’s ending as the final goal of the narrative:

The issue here is not a reading practice that simply ignores the last ten minutes or so of a film. What the particular practice of gay spectatorial reading suggested here entails, rather, is an active reordering of the text that is both a refusal and a redefinition of the preferred meanings of a film’s given clotural scenario. By making certain marginal textual features the organizational pivot of narrative meaning construction, this style of negotiational reading practice produces a radically restructured semiotic economy in which the “earlier” textual features thus privileged come to inflect a text’s clotural scenario in such a way as to undermine its dominant signifying agenda and open it up to alternative interpretations. In the case of the musical, this may mean that, by latching on to certain moments or features that are marginal or oblique vis-à-vis the demands and concerns of the dominant (straight) narrative and making them central to the organization of their own textual engagements, gay spectators can redefine the clotural scenario of idealized heterosexual union promoted by the musical and refashion it to support the articulation of gay-identified fantasies and desires.

This suggests that viewers could choose to place significance on any of the different relationships in Anchor Aweigh, rather than being restricted to the final two heterosexual relationships presented by the film’s ending. One can also approach this concept through the lens of Kristin Thompson’s commentary on “The Concept of Cinematic Excess.” Thompson writes of

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those filmic elements that may appear to have no function within the primary narrative, or are “excessive,” “Probably no one ever watches only these non-diegetic aspects of the image through an entire film. Nevertheless, they are constantly present, a whole ‘film’ existing in some sense alongside the narrative film we tend to think of ourselves as watching.”

This is not to suggest that most audiences would perceive Sinatra and Kelly’s relationship in Anchors Aweigh to be irrelevant to the film’s plot. Rather, it suggests that while many viewers would generally perceive the final heterosexual relationships to be the primary goal of the narrative, there is also room to view Kelly and Sinatra’s relationship as a different primary narrative that could prove equally if not more appealing for viewers of differing sexualities. This is also not to say that heterosexual viewers only gained pleasure from the film’s heterosexual relationships and homosexual viewers only gained pleasure from Sinatra and Kelly’s relationship. The pairing of two attractive male Hollywood stars such as Sinatra and Kelly, for example, likely held its own appeal for many heterosexual American teenage girls, unrelated to the romances both characters shared with women.

The homoerotic and seemingly ambiguous sexual tendencies seen in Anchors Aweigh were not necessarily specific to the films of Sinatra and Kelly, but part of a prominent theme in wartime American military culture in which two male service members, or “buddies,” form a very strong and intimate (either emotionally, physically, or both) relationship with one another while living in a society lacking women. This has already been discussed in chapter three in the context of male fandom towards Sinatra, and the idea of buddies made its way into popular

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49 See chapter 3, 128-131.
music culture before the war, during, and after. For example, the 1922 song, “My Buddy,” with lyrics by Gus Kahn and music by Walter Donaldson, experienced renewed popularity during World War II and was recorded by many stars including Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby. The song’s lyrics read,

Nights are long since you went away,
I think about you all through the day,
My buddy, my buddy
No buddy quite so true.

I miss your voice, the touch of your hand,
Just long to know that you understand,
My buddy, my buddy,
Your buddy misses you.

Though a homoerotic overtone may seem clear in these lyrics to a modern reader, the song reflected a common feeling between servicemen that was not condemned by society, even though homosexuality was illegal during the war. As discussed in chapter three, close male relationships were to be expected in the military for a variety of reasons, the simplest being that there were very few women around and soldiers needed to find comfort with anyone they could to cope with the day-to-day struggles of military life. And as Allan Bérubé explains, “By encouraging men to pair up, the buddy systems gave a respectability to devoted male couples, whether or not they included gay men, that was unusual in civilian life. Even constant companions were protected from harassment by temporarily narrow definitions of deviant relationships.”50 This acceptability and encouragement of male relationships in the military suggests that Kelly and Sinatra’s performance in Anchors Aweigh may not have sparked very much suspicion or criticism in terms of their characters’ relationship, but their roles in fact move

past a straightforward “buddy relationship” into one that further challenges traditional expectations of gender roles and identification.

Clarence and Joe’s “buddy” relationship in Anchors Aweigh exhibits the homoerotic tendencies found in other popular culture portrayals, but takes these tendencies a step further by suggesting that traditional family roles of motherhood and fatherhood are also present within their relationship. This is apparent in scenes that include Joe, Clarence, and Donald, played by a young Dean Stockwell. Donald, who lost both of his parents, lives with his Aunt Susie (Kathryn Grayson). While left with a babysitter one night, Donald climbs out his window and heads for the pier, determined that he is going to join the Navy. When Donald refuses to cooperate with a police officer who tries to explain to him that children cannot join the Navy, the officer enlists the help of Joe and Clarence to persuade Donald to reveal his name and address. Donald quickly becomes attached to Joe, and the two sailors are obligated to take Donald back to his home where they meet Aunt Susie, who serves as both Joe and Clarence’s love interest at different points in the film. A scene follows in which Joe and Clarence put Donald to bed together (without Aunt Susie), exhibiting stereotypical roles of an American mother and father. Joe, the “father,” carries Donald to bed over his shoulder while rough housing and singing a crude rendition of “Anchors Aweigh.” Clarence, the “mother,” lovingly pulls back the sheets and fluffs Donald’s pillows, which are immediately disturbed when Joe quite literally throws Donald onto the bed. Donald then insists on being sung to, and Clarence proceeds to sing an extremely soft and tender version of Brahms’s “Lullaby,” accompanied by a music box (Figure 4.16). Clarence’s voice is so soothing that he not only puts Donald, but also Joe to sleep.

Because American teenage girls in the 1940s were still encouraged to strive towards marriage and motherhood as their ultimate goals in life, Clarence’s seemingly maternal role in
the film arguably worked as a way for teenage female audiences to identify with Sinatra even more so than with the female characters in the film. Kathryn Grayson’s character, Susan, is continuously displayed as someone who is perfect and completely unattainable for Clarence. She is always beautifully dressed, talks eloquently, and is an incredibly talented singer who ultimately gets her big Hollywood break. Overall, Susan is a character that many teenage girls likely admired, but like Clarence, did not have a realistic chance of emulating. Clarence’s lack of confidence in his own sexual abilities and his self-consciousness about his body marked him as much more similar to a young woman or teenager than an idealized “true” man like Gene Kelly’s character. This is demonstrated further through the character of “Brooklyn,” a waitress played by Pamela Britton whose actual name we never learn, but who bonds with Clarence because of their mutual New York origins and who ends up as his romantic partner instead of Susan.

Brooklyn serves as a female character that would have been much easier for teenage female audiences to identify with. Rather than pursuing a Hollywood singing career like Susan, Brooklyn works as a waitress in a Mexican restaurant. We only ever see her in her waitressing uniform until the very end, in contrast with the various glamorous dresses Susan wears. Her
heavy Brooklyn accent marks her as someone less sophisticated than Susan, therefore making it easier for Clarence to converse with her. Brooklyn has to pine for Clarence before he realizes his own feelings, while Susan has two men chasing after her without having to exert any effort.

However, while many teenage girls may have had an easier time identifying with Brooklyn than Susan, it is arguable that it was still easier yet to identify with Clarence, especially because of the emphasis placed on his body as something less than perfect, as well as his almost constant expressions of his own feelings of vulnerability and inadequacy, especially when compared with Kelly’s character, Joe.

I have already discussed Sinatra’s film roles through the lens of active female spectators in conjunction with the traditional male gaze of Hollywood films as described by Laura Mulvey. *Anchors Aweigh* emphasizes male bodies throughout, of both Sinatra and Kelly. Kelly is displayed as a model of ideal physical masculinity. His muscles are easily visible in his fitted sailor’s uniform, and twice in the film his biceps are addressed directly. First, during Kelly and Sinatra’s duet, “I Begged Her,” in which they boast to their fellow sailors about romantic encounters that did not actually happened. Sinatra squeezes Kelly’s bicep and exclaims, “And he’s got muscles too!” in response to Kelly claiming to have threatened a hypothetical woman who almost refused to kiss him (Figure 4.17). Later on, during the famous animated scene in which Kelly dances with Jerry Mouse, Kelly literally propels Jerry into the air just by flexing his biceps (Figure 4.18). Sinatra himself also works to emphasize Kelly’s masculine body just by being placed next to him. In the same performance of “I Begged Her,” Kelly and Sinatra embark

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51 Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn, 1945.
Figure 4.17. Clarence feels Joe’s muscles in Anchors Aweigh (MGM, 1945).

Figure 4.18. Joe dances with Jerry Mouse in Anchors Aweigh (MGM, 1945).
on an energetic dance together, and although Sinatra manages to keep up, it is obvious that his physical abilities are inferior to Kelly’s. Throughout the dance, Kelly consistently raises his arms higher, moves faster, and jumps higher and with more energy than Sinatra (Figure 4.19).

Also notable in the performance of “I Begged Her” are the different points of view sung by Kelly and Sinatra. The song, written by Sinatra’s preferred musical duo Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn, has the following lyrics:

I begged her, I pleaded,
I told her baby, come out of your shell,
I told her maybe, you’ll find that it’s swell.

I argued, I threatened,
I said you can’t send me home, not like this,
Then I finally got my kiss.

Both Sinatra and Kelly sing these lyrics, though when Sinatra sings after Kelly, the subject is shifted, and instead of Sinatra begging his fictional “dame” for romance, she begs him. Sinatra sings,

She begged me, she pleaded,
She said baby, come out of your shell,
She said maybe, you'll find that it's swell.

She argued, she threatened,
She said you can't send me home, not like this,
She finally got that kiss.

Here is another instance in which Sinatra’s character is placed in a role traditionally associated with women; that of the romantically pursued rather than the pursuer. For teenage female fans of Sinatra watching the film, this performance, and Sinatra’s character in the film overall, satisfies two desires. First, Sinatra may remind teenage girls of themselves in the sense that he acts as though romance and dating are brand new to him and reveals his uncertainty and fears about it in
a way that may have resonated with many teenage girls who experienced similar feelings of uncertainty as they embarked on their own romantic and sexual lives. Second, just as in Higher and Higher and Step Lively, Sinatra’s character in Anchors Aweigh is one that is easily dominated by women, and again could provide teen girls with material for fantasies of possessing romantic power, courage, and agency in their own lives, something that many teenage girls to this day do not feel confident in actually expressing, and during World War II, were encouraged not to do on any significant level.

All throughout Sinatra’s wartime film output, teenage female fans of the star were provided with a film persona that was consistent in its ability to allow female viewers to mentally place themselves in an alternate reality in which they were encouraged to stare at and enjoy male bodies and even aggressively pursue men they had a sexual interest in. At the same time, teenage girls could identify with Sinatra’s vulnerable film persona and its expressions of uncertainty while simultaneously desiring him romantically. Overall, Sinatra’s onscreen persona was the total package for wartime teenage girls and arguably created specifically for them. Because of the emphasis on Sinatra’s body in his wartime films and the visual nature of consuming film in
general, it makes sense now to ask how Sinatra was able to elicit equally strong reactions, if not stronger, from teenage girls through non-visual forms of media. In other words, radio.
CHAPTER 5: “The Voice” without a Body: Frank Sinatra on Wartime Radio

As widespread as the practice of moviegoing was, there is no doubt that by far the most dominant form of media during World War II was radio. More Americans had access to radio than any other form of news and entertainment media, and the up-to-the-minute nature and simplicity of using radio made it an indispensable part of most Americans’ daily lives.¹ Radio was also crucial to the survival of American consumerism during the war, and many American businesses thrived surprisingly well in an era defined by rationing and frugality, primarily thanks to the nature and quantity of wartime advertising.² Throughout this dissertation I have explored the power of advertising in most forms of entertainment media, especially over teenage girls. However, just as we have already seen in the context of movies, American teenage girls used wartime radio for their own purposes and were indeed not the completely passive consumers advertisers probably hoped they were. Radio was more than a vehicle for ads and propaganda. It was also a companion and source of comfort for many Americans both on the home front and overseas. For American teenage girls, the radio also provided a stimulant for fantasy and romance, allowing them to come into close contact not with their favorite stars’ physical bodies, but at least with their voices.

This chapter will explore the affective effects of radio technology on American teenage girls, specifically those who were devoted to the radio work of Frank Sinatra. After an investigation into the power of radio as an emotional and personal technological device for

¹ Elena Razlogova writes that by 1940, eighty percent of Americans had radios and listened to them on average at least four hours a day. The number of Americans who had radios only continued to grow throughout the 1940s. The Listener's Voice: Early Radio and the American Public (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 3.
individuals in dialogue with the work of Mark Katz, I will move to a more specific look into the radio style and characteristics of Frank Sinatra, which was significantly different from other male singing radio personalities such as Bing Crosby, and which elicited powerful reactions from his teenage female listeners. Combined with his visual representations in film and print media, Sinatra’s radio persona proved to be uniquely well-suited for the construction of teenage fantasies during World War II that were defined by potential feelings of romantic agency and intimacy, and that served as material to further strengthen the relationships teenage girls not only shared with Sinatra, but with each other and themselves. Unlike other radio studies that rely on network data, professional criticism, or other mass-produced texts, this investigation into radio consumption will be supported by the written responses of teenage girls themselves as found in the products of their Frank Sinatra fan clubs. As a result, we can gain unprecedented insight into the practices of teen girls as radio consumers.

5.1 Affective Effects of Radio Technology

In a revealing study published in the Spring 1948 issue of *Hollywood Quarterly*, Ruth Palter illustrates common radio practices of American housewives based on interviews with a select group of lower middle-class women from Chicago who claimed to listen to their radios for at least three hours a day. In the introduction to this study, Palter explains,

> Although we were using three hours a day as an index to listening, not one of the women interviewed listened less than five hours a day, the mean listening hours a day being slightly more than eight…Most of the homes had more than one radio, that wherever the housewife happened to be, she could listen; where there was only one radio, it was moved about from room to room with the housewife…Women listen to the radio all day; they feel lost without it; they find no adequate substitute for it. It seems clear that the radio is essential to feelings of well-being and contentment.3

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Palter then continues by proposing four primary “psychological reasons for radio attractiveness,” which include radio as a reliever of the monotony of housework, preserver of family unity, reliever of worries, and reliever of loneliness. It is interesting to note the language used to describe radio in Palter’s study, which personifies the radio in a way that suggests personal and emotional relationships with it: “The radio is spoken to, cajoled, scolded with apparently little self-consciousness. It has become so much a part of the household that using it as another person – in fact, speaking of it as ‘company’ and as ‘someone in the house’ – is neither strange nor unexpected.” In addition to being described as an actual person within a household, Palter explains how the housewives interviewed felt radio stars to be better company than actual friends or family members: “Radio people are considered to be more attractive as personal friends than the everyday people one is forced to associate with…Radio people are good, kind, helpful, straightforward, understanding, romantic. They are wholly desirable as friends, and to be envied.” Saying that housewives are “forced” to interact with the people in their everyday lives suggests that radio gives them the power of choice, something 1940s housewives did not always have to a great extent in their lives. While home alone during the day, housewives were free to choose which radio programs they listened to (or at least were free to choose from a selection of programs carefully created for them by radio networks), and free to imagine themselves in whatever kind of relationship they wanted to be in with their favorite radio personalities. And while Palter’s study examines radio use in terms of females who were married and already running their own household, the same benefits and sense of intimacy these housewives shared with their radios was also present in teenage female radio use.

4 Palter, 254.
5 Ibid., 255.
Given the strong potential radio had (and still has) for encouraging fantasy combined with the high level of devotion women and teenage girls felt towards their favorite radio voices, it seems clear that radio technology and use deserves great attention in scholarship. Very few types of technology in the 1940s were able to achieve the level of emotional and personal connection with humans as radio did, film probably being the only close comparison in that sense. Enlightening work has been published on radio and music technology in general in recent years, and the huge potential for any scholar interested in radio to pursue the subject in a number of ways is quite exciting. Within this larger frame, my study will explore how radio served and was used by the teenage female American population during World War II, just as teenage culture was quickly becoming a gigantic and autonomous part of American culture in the midst of extreme social and political upheaval.

This investigation begins with the influential work of Mark Katz, who addresses the various ways sound recording technology has affected music creation and consumption. In his book, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*, Katz suggests that after the onset of recorded sound, more specifically the invention of the phonograph, almost every change in the practice of music making can be defined as a “phonograph effect.” Katz writes, “Simply put, a phonograph effect is any change in musical behavior – whether listening, performing, or composing – that has arisen in response to sound-recording technology. A phonograph effect is, in other words, any observable manifestation of recording’s influence.” Katz suggests there are six main characteristics of recorded sound that are responsible for most phonograph effects. These are tangibility, portability, (in)visibility, repeatability, temporality, and receptivity. I

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cannot help but think of radio and Ruth Palter’s study when I consider these characteristics, even though radio technology itself cannot be described definitively as sound recording technology in the same way a phonograph can (more on radio’s ambiguity will be discussed further on). I associate these characteristics with radio because each seems to be connected with the power of choice that Palter suggests women enjoyed while listening to radio. Listeners could choose how they physically interacted with their radios (tangibility), they could choose where their radios would be located in their homes (portability), they could choose to acknowledge the physical presence of their radios or hide them while listening to promote a stronger sense of fantasy ((in)visibility), they could choose when to listen (temporality), and they could choose various models, volumes, positions, and other factors that would affect how they heard their radios (receptivity).

The fact that each of the above-mentioned characteristics has the potential to allow recorded sound to be a fairly customizable and personal experience for individuals leads me to suggest that one additional characteristic of sound-recording technology be added to Katz’s list of influential qualities, as well as being a phonograph effect itself. That is, intimacy. As Katz has noted, solitary listening as a result of the advent of recording technology was initially considered a strange and sometimes suspect activity. Katz references a telling quote by author Orlo Williams from 1923 that describes a likely reaction to discovering someone listening to recorded music by themselves:

You would think it odd, would you not? You would endeavour to dissemble your surprise: you would look twice to see whether some other person were not hidden in some corner of the room, and if you found no such one would painfully blush, as if you had discovered your friend sniffing cocaine, emptying a bottle of whisky, or plaiting straws in his hair. People, we think, should not do things “to themselves,” however much they may enjoy doing them in company: they may not even talk to themselves without incurring grave suspicion. And I fear that if I were discovered listening to [Beethoven’s]
Fifth Symphony without a chaperon to guarantee my sanity, my friends would fall away with grievous shaking of the head.\textsuperscript{7}

Williams’s commentary suggests the level of private intimacy one could share with music thanks to recording technology was met with similar levels of worry and scorn as such other forbidden acts as sex or excessive alcohol consumption. This was especially true once music began to enter private domestic spaces in greater numbers. In terms of radio, Matthew Murray explains the fear with which many members of society met this new private form of music consumption in more detail:

By elevating the “auditory sense to a new pinnacle of importance,” radio was in many ways considered by moral reformers more threatening than the movies in its potential for detrimental influence on impressionable members of the public. The technological architecture of the medium – its invisible, omnidirectional, and pervasive messages – challenged the listener to re-create an imaginary mental picture from the aural stimulations transmitted.\textsuperscript{8}

In World War II America, authorities did not necessarily condemn radio for its potential to encourage immoral thoughts in American listeners, in part because it was such an indispensable tool for advertising and imparting propaganda to a huge national audience. In addition, radio brought with it an imagined sense of national unity, which the government hoped to encourage in any form possible. Benedict Anderson describes this sense of imagined national unity in terms of language and music, and his idea is certainly applicable to radio listening:

…there is a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests - above all in the form of poetry and songs. Take national anthems, for example, sung on national holidays. No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance… How selfless this unisonance feels! If we are aware that others are singing these songs precisely when and as we are, we have no idea who they may be, or even

\textsuperscript{7} Orlo Williams, quoted in \textit{Capturing Sound}, 20.

where, out of earshot, they are singing. Nothing connects us all but imagined sound.\(^9\)

Despite the potential radio had and still has for influencing a collective national mindset, many Americans, particularly those who experienced oppression in one way or another, certainly recognized the value of radio in creating individualized mental fantasies and scenarios that they would not be allowed to pursue in reality. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore some of the ways in which teenage female fans of Frank Sinatra were able to partake in powerful and individualized although imaginary relationships with the singer through radio, and how they brought these relationships into reality by discussing and sharing them with one another. These teenage girls ultimately used Sinatra’s radio presence as material for constructing private and shared rituals and fantasies which they publicly expressed in their fan clubs through language, visual art, and the exchange of physical relics of Sinatra.

5.2 “And Here is Frank Sinatra!” Sinatra on Wartime Radio

In her book, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination*, Susan Douglas mentions a 1935 study by Hadley Cantril and Gordon W. Allport, entitled, *The Psychology of Radio*.\(^{10}\) In this study, Douglas notes,

Cantril and Allport found that listeners made pretty good guesses about age, occupation, and political preferences, and excellent guesses about personality... “Many features of many personalities can be estimated correctly from voice,” they wrote in italics. More fascinating was this: while listeners might project the wrong characteristics onto a speaker based solely on his voice, these erroneous impressions were shared by large, disparate groups of listeners. Stereotyping through the voice alone was commonplace; listeners felt, quite strongly, that the voice was a clear window into a person’s character.\(^{11}\)

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For an entertainment medium characterized by disembodiment and invisibility, radio in fact puts its stars in incredibly vulnerable positions in front of their audiences. Personality and appearance judgments are made based solely on a listener’s conscious and subconscious ideas of how people should look and act based on the sound of their voice. In Ruth Palter’s 1948 study of the relationship between radio and American housewives, some listeners actually expressed disappointment upon seeing photographs of their favorite radio personalities. One listener explained, “I’ll tell you one thing, it spoils it if they publish their pictures. We got a picture of Ma Perkins as a middle-aged woman, and she’s a young girl. You like to picture an older lady, and that goes and spoils it all.” Palter then poses a legitimate question and answer in response to this:

Spoils what? Spoils the seriousness of the stories, spoils the closeness to the characters, spoils the chances for maintaining the fantasy. Just as having people around sharpens the differences between the desired world and the world as it exists for these women, so do any “true” revelations about the players. Reality must be preserved – the reality of the fantasy – inane, turgid, melodramatic.¹²

This disconnect from a radio character’s actual appearance and personality from that which a listener constructs in their mind leads me to ask how fantasies and relationships with a radio star were affected when a star in fact had a very public visual image alongside their radio work. Frank Sinatra was certainly not hidden from public view, yet his fans continued to loyally cling to his radio programs and express feelings of attachment to him while listening. Sinatra proved to be a case in which his actual appearance could enhance listeners’ sense of closeness to him rather than detract from it. Here I will examine how Sinatra’s on-air persona and musical choices interacted with both his film and supposed real-life personas to create one ideal entertainer, perfectly suited to the desires of America’s teenage girls.

¹² Palter, 255.
Through the duration of World War II, Sinatra made hundreds of radio guest appearances, had four of his own shows, and hosted one of the most popular music programs in America, *Your Hit Parade*. Radio stations all over the country constantly broadcast what came to be known as “Battles of the Baritones,” in which for a specified amount of time, only songs by Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby would be broadcast, culminating in a contest in which listeners would vote for their favorite. Sinatra’s enormous wartime radio presence comes of a bit surprise, however, when his on-air personality and program patterns are compared with those of other male stars of the same era. Many scholars have addressed wartime radio in the context of masculinity, primarily because the vast majority of regular radio personalities were men, and the importance of news radio during the war placed a level of gravitas on the technology that was not deemed feminine. Susan Douglas explains how the war was beneficial in re-establishing radio as a masculine medium after certain genres and personalities seemed to put it at risk of becoming feminine:

The radio war also powerfully reaffirmed middle-class, American masculinity as intrinsic to the nation’s identity and to its geopolitical successes. The manhood that had seemed so provisional, so fragile, so in danger of feminization in the comedy of Ed Wynn, Joe Penner, and Jack Benny was powerfully recuperated by the drama of the war and the men who reported it.\(^\text{13}\)

Outside of the news, many entertainers achieved radio stardom by exhibiting masculine traits in contrast to those earlier personalities described by Douglas, Allison McCracken, and Matthew Murray as acting as feminine threats to radio’s masculinity. Again, I am compelled to bring up Bing Crosby as an example of a redeeming masculine entertainer, who was often presented in direct contrast from Frank Sinatra. An analysis of both Sinatra and Crosby’s wartime radio styles will be useful for further examining why and how Sinatra’s teenage female audience responded

\(^{13}\) Douglas, 197-198.
Sinatra in the personal and passionate ways that they did, more so than with other male entertainers.

Overwhelmingly, Sinatra’s radio programs during the war were characterized by slow, sentimental ballads that emphasized romance and venerated women. As has been discussed in previous chapters, scholars have suggested that Sinatra’s persona was more in tune with American women on the home front than men overseas for a variety of reasons, one of which was that he often performed songs that were originally written for female singers and from female perspectives. By doing so, Sinatra tended to present himself as either equal to women or inferior to them, but almost never above them. Aside from this more obvious identification with a supposed feminine mindset, however, Sinatra’s singing technique, dialogue, and relationship with his accompanying orchestras worked together to create a radio identity that encouraged listeners to feel intimate with him and embrace their own fantasies, to an extent because his persona suggested that he himself enjoyed fanciful romances as well.

Sinatra’s radio performances not only exhibited many of the musical characteristics he was known for as mentioned in chapter three – namely extensive breath control, portamento, and making sudden dynamic changes, such as dropping to pianissimo at exceptionally romantic or intimate lyrics – but also an understanding of and precise use of microphone technology. Throughout the 1940s, Sinatra used an RCA 44 ribbon microphone, which produced sound using a thin, metal ribbon suspended between magnets. Sinatra used this particular microphone for his radio work (as opposed to the dynamic microphones he used for live performances) for a couple reasons. First, the RCA 44 was bidirectional, meaning sound could enter into both the front and back of the microphone, but not into the sides. This was ideal for radio use where Sinatra and his accompanying orchestras could be carefully positioned on either side of the microphone to
achieve the desired sound quality. Using the RCA ribbon microphone allowed for more control than an omnidirectional microphone, in which sound can enter on all sides, would have. Another reason Sinatra preferred to use the RCA 44 for radio broadcasts was because ribbon microphones were more sensitive to the lower pressure used to producer higher frequencies, which some other microphones were less effective in magnifying. This was ideal for when Sinatra would slide up to high notes (portamento) while still maintaining relatively soft dynamics.

In addition to considering what kind of technology would best suit his radio goals, Sinatra was particular about who arranged the orchestral parts that accompanied him. From his beginnings as a solo singer after breaking with Tommy Dorsey’s band in 1942 up until the early 1950s, Sinatra insisted on arranger Axel Stordahl in virtually all of his ventures (including Anchors Aweigh) to provide arrangements that would reflect and enhance the specific musical style Sinatra strove for, and Stordahl’s name was almost always mentioned at the beginning of Sinatra’s radio shows (Figure 5.1). Charles L. Granata comments on this relationship in more detail:

Mutual respect and understanding brought Frank Sinatra and Axel Stordahl together in the 1940s as one of the first true musical partnerships of the pop music era. From the first four solo sides he made for Victor’s Bluebird label in January 1942 to the first Capitol Records session in April 1953, it was Stordahl who faithfully served as Sinatra’s musical director, creating hundreds of orchestrations and musical cues for his seemingly endless flow of commercial recording sessions, radio programs, personal appearances, Hollywood films, and television shows.

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15 Ibid., 34.
Stordahl’s arrangements often imitated Sinatra’s vocal style, utilizing the same techniques (particularly pitch bending and sliding and sudden dynamic changes) as Sinatra. Sinatra’s radio orchestras also rarely included loud brass sections, which would have sounded out of place in comparison with Sinatra’s crooning style. When there were audible brass sections, they were reserved and avoided loud interjections, instead attempting to enter and leave subtly just as Sinatra did with his phrases. Sinatra’s radio orchestras instead were usually characterized by full string sections and woodwinds, and both he and his songs were often introduced by ascending scales on a harp, a not so subtle suggestion that listeners were about to hear something ethereal.
and angelic. As Granata writes, “Stordahl’s luxurious string arrangements for [Sinatra] became synonymous with his suave, romantic image as the premier crooner of the 1940s.” It is notable that Sinatra’s teenage female fans were also aware of Sinatra’s close partnership with Stordahl, and Stordahl’s name was often found in fan club newsletters. The Summer 1945 issue of *Sinatra-ly Yours*, published by the Semper Sinatra Fan Club, includes a feature entitled “Meet Axel Stordahl,” which describes Sinatra and Stordahl’s friendship as well as their supposed rehearsal routines:

Before rehearsing any song with the full complement of the band, Axel and Frank carefully go over all arrangements together and work out the kinks. And then Stordahl’s men, who adore him, play it over gently once. After that Frank takes over and pulls the mike close. Everyone works in perfect harmony.

The Frankie’s United Swooners club even dedicated one issue of their newsletter, *The Sinatra Sender*, to Stordahl, writing, “We’d like to dedicate the third issue of the “Sinatra Sender” to Axel Stordahl, Frank’s musical arranger and close friend. His music and Frank’s singing make it a perfect combination.”

Looking now to actual radio broadcasts from World War II, one example that exhibits most of the typical musical and stylistic characteristics of Sinatra as discussed above was broadcast in 1942 on CBS’s program, *Reflections*. In this broadcast, Sinatra performs a medley that includes “I’ll String Along with You” and “As Time Goes By” with Lyn Murray & his Orchestra. The orchestra includes minimal brass sections and mostly consists of clarinets and

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16 Granata, 34.
17 “Meet Axel Stordahl,” in *Sinatra-ly Yours* (Summer 1945), 4, Sinatra-ana.
20 Harry Warren and Al Dubin, 1934.
21 Herman Hupfeld, 1931.
strings. At the transition into “As Time Goes By,” Sinatra instructs Lyn Murray to play the tune “smooth as silk.” Whereas most singers tend to take a breath between, “the fundamental things apply,” and “as times goes by,” Sinatra connects the two phrases and sings them in one breath, nearly four measures at between 75 and 80 BPM. Soon after, he sings, “and when two lovers woo, they still say I love you,” suddenly dropping to pianissimo at “I love you,” as if he is addressing his own lover.

In contrast, the radio style of Bing Crosby in the 1940s was characterized by song programming and arrangements that were decidedly different from Sinatra’s. As the host of Kraft Music Hall from 1936 to 1946, Crosby was true to his image as “the relaxed, neighborly, decent, straight-shooting, genial host.” While Crosby did occasionally sing love songs on the show, they were almost never programmed as the opening song, which overwhelmingly fell into one of two categories during the years of World War II: songs about having an optimistic attitude, or patriotic songs. For the majority of Crosby’s tenure on the show, his orchestral arrangements were created by John Scott Trotter, who, like Axel Stordahl, arranged pieces that reflected the image his respective crooner hoped to portray. In Crosby’s case, that image was of someone who defined himself as family oriented, optimistic, humorous, and above all, patriotic. Unlike Stordahl’s arrangements, John Scott Trotter generally wrote for a full dance band orchestra and did not avoid brass instruments or loud interjections. Trotter’s arrangements also reflected typical dance band styles in that they had quick, driving tempos and were more heavily swung than Stordahl’s arrangements. Gary Giddins also notes that Trotter had perfected a “vibratoless staccato style,” which Johnny Mercer described as a “‘typewriter’ attack, clipped and orderly.”

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23 Ibid., 425.
This reflected Crosby’s singing style, which in comparison to Sinatra, was louder, faster, and less legato.24

An example that demonstrates the main elements of Crosby’s radio style can be heard on the January 14, 1943 broadcast of Kraft Music Hall, in which Crosby opens with the song, “Hip, Hip, Hooray,” written by Henry Nemo and Milt Ebbins.25 The song aligns with Crosby’s tendency to open with patriotic and uplifting songs, with lyrics that read, “Hip, Hip, Hooray! / we’re livin’ in the USA / come on you Yanks and holler thanks / hip, hip, hooray!” Trotter’s arrangement of this song includes a full dance band and is written at a fast, swung, tempo, about 200 BPM. Crosby maintains a strong dynamic throughout the song and begins many of his phrases with hard accents, and even some improvisation that resembles scatting (at 1 minute and 17 seconds in, Crosby exclaims “hippityhiphip,” instead of “hip, hip”). This performance style differed strongly from Sinatra’s, who emphasized smoothness, connectivity, and fluctuating dynamics.

While Crosby’s radio persona – along with his film persona – was marketed as suitable for Americans of all ages and genders, Sinatra’s radio presence was unsurprisingly met with criticism for the same reasons he was scrutinized in his films and live appearances: namely his effect on teenage girls, his scrawny and fragile appearance, and his absence from the military. As Matthew Murray suggests though, radio was thought to have the potential to be even more dangerous to impressionable minds than film and live performances because of its lack of a concrete visual aspect, leaving room for individualized fantasy. This was especially true during

24 For more on the differences between Bing Crosby’s singing style and that of other American male crooners, see chapter one, 45.
the war when governments and propagandists maintained the goal of influencing public mindsets in very specific ways, leaving some to take drastic action against unsuitable radio content. For example, in Britain, the BBC went as far as placing an outright ban on male crooners and sentimental songs in 1942 because “Crooners’ excessive emotionality raised fears of indecency for women and unmanliness for men.”26 Under the leadership of composer Arthur Bliss, “The ‘crooner ban’ represented an effort to codify the borders of acceptability in terms of sexuality, gender, class, and emotional expression, for a nation at war.”27 While American radio stations did not take such extreme action against sentimental singers, it was still obvious that more normalized performers like Crosby experienced wider acceptance than Sinatra, who maintained a distinctly sentimental radio persona throughout the war.

It is easy to think about radio as a strictly invisible medium, aside from the artefact itself. However, the reality is that radio broadcasting is often full of cues that suggest something visible or tangible. Even if the listener cannot see that something, they can imagine they see it. For teenage female fans of Sinatra, his radio broadcasts were full of these cues, particularly in the form of actual fans who were lucky enough to attend one of Sinatra’s live broadcasts. In a 1943 broadcast of CBS’s Your Hit Parade, Sinatra sings “Moonlight Mood”28 in what initially seems like the same way he would sing any other song.29 However, the listener becomes aware of some sort of action happening in the live performance of the broadcast when there is a sudden outburst of girls screaming in unison when Sinatra sings, “there comes the same old moon.” What

27 Ibid., 134.
28 Harold Adamson and Peter De Rose, 1942.
happened? What made those girls scream? Unless you could speak to one of the lucky few who witnessed the physical performance, or if an announcer addressed the incident afterwards, it would be impossible to know exactly what Sinatra physically did to elicit such a response. That may not matter though. Because Sinatra’s radio stardom existed alongside stardom in film and other visual mediums, listeners could easily imagine a number of physical actions that could have elicited such a reaction from the in-studio audience.

Listeners often did not have to work very hard to imagine Sinatra in visual or physical scenarios while listening to him on the radio, because his body was frequently a topic of discussion, usually in a derogatory way, when other radio personalities joined him on air. One notable instance of this happened in a 1945 broadcast of The Frank Sinatra Show, in which Rudy Vallée guest stars.\(^\text{30}\) The script of this show portrays Vallée giving Sinatra a hard time about his appearance, which is ironic since Vallée himself was accused of being effeminate and overly sentimental in the 1930s. Sinatra introduces Vallée, saying, “Rudy it’s very nice to see you,” to which Vallée responds, “Thank you, Frank, and it’s nice to almost see you too.” Later on, Sinatra says to the listeners, “Did you know this guy used to sing through an ordinary megaphone?” Vallée responds with, “You would too if you could lift one.” In a 1944 broadcast of The Frank Sinatra Program, Sinatra and guest star, W.C. Fields, discuss Sinatra’s interest in boxing, with Fields joking that Sinatra participates in the “paperweight division.”\(^\text{31}\) Just as in his films, however, the near constant on-air jokes about Sinatra’s body (which generally came from male stars) written into radio scripts did not affect his attraction to teenage girls. If anything, they

\(^{30}\) Frank Sinatra and Rudy Vallée, January 3, 1945, The Frank Sinatra Show, on CBS, Paley Center Collections, Paley Center for Media, New York, NY (hereafter cited as Paley Center Collections) cassette tape.

\(^{31}\) Frank Sinatra and W.C. Fields, February 9, 1944, The Frank Sinatra Program, on CBS, Paley Center Collections, cassette tape.
enhanced his attraction for many of the same reasons that his seemingly inadequate body and personality appealed to teenage girls in his wartime films. Namely, the idea that he displayed a persona that likely reflected teenage girls’ own feelings of vulnerability and bodily inadequacy.

Although the on-air discussions of Sinatra’s body were reflected in his film roles, his radio persona included elements that were quite different from his film personas, primarily in his portrayals of confidence around women. Looking back to the previous chapter, we saw that Sinatra’s wartime film roles were defined by awkwardness around women, and he was more often the pursued than the pursuer in his onscreen romances. This allowed teenage female viewers to easily place themselves in imaginary positions where they could hold power over Sinatra and take control of their fantasies that involved him. On the radio, however, Sinatra remained soft spoken and sensitive, but used language that suggested he was not frightened of approaching women. Instead, his language and song choices suggested that he enjoyed the pursuit of romance, while simultaneously allowing female listeners to maintain the fantasy that if Sinatra succeeded in wooing them, he would not only venerate them, but actively nurture their romance to ensure it would never fizzle.

One interesting broadcast of *The Frank Sinatra Show* in 1945 makes the contrast between Sinatra’s film and radio personas quite clear. Sinatra advertises his new film, *Anchors Aweigh*, twice in the broadcast, and performs songs from the film. We will remember that in the film, Sinatra and Gene Kelly perform, “I Begged Her,” from two different points of view. Kelly begs the woman, while the woman begs Sinatra. In this radio broadcast, however, Sinatra changes his point of view from the film, and sings that he in fact “begged her.”32 In a 1943 broadcast of

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32 Frank Sinatra, *The Frank Sinatra Show*, March 14, 1945, on CBS, Paley Center Collections, cassette tape.
*Songs by Sinatra*, Sinatra introduces a newly released song, “If Loveliness Were Music,” with a dialogue about how many singers have a “bashful boy at the party attitude” when it comes to performing new songs that have not yet become hits, meaning they are hesitant to sing them. Sinatra explains that brand new songs are generally only sung by “those strong, un-silent men known behind every bandstand as the song plugger.” He claims that he has the confidence to sing new songs, however, and equates them with women, saying, “But when you love to sing as much as I do, you’re willing to take chances and be apt to grab a new song deb at the party, and take her out on the floor and cut one up. Which is what is about to happen right now.” Sinatra’s claim that he is willing to “grab” a song/woman when nobody else is demonstrates a confidence, authority and a sense of entitlement to women that is certainly not present in his film roles. Listeners need not be frightened of his assertiveness though, as he makes clear by following this dialogue with a performance of “If Loveliness Were Music” that aligns with the typical patterns of his radio performances – particularly his warm singing style with appropriately subdued orchestral accompaniment and his choice of a song that idolizes women – as opposed to other radio personalities like Bing Crosby, whose radio singing style was more forceful and assertive.

Because Sinatra’s radio persona proved to be exceedingly popular among America’s teenage girls and young women, as we shall see, it comes as no surprise that his radio sponsors did not hold back when it came to advertising products targeted towards this demographic. In addition to trying to sell their own products, these companies were also under pressure from the OWI to address women in such a way that, frankly, used guilt to persuade them to aid the war.

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33 Mickey Stoner and Bert Reisfeld, 1943.
effort in ways that the government deemed suitable and necessary. Michele Hilmes describes this so-called “Womanpower” campaign further:

…by bringing the tensions between private domesticity and public presence into wide circulations, often in a way that made domesticity now a choice that might even be selfish and unpatriotic in certain situations, wartime media succeeded in recasting the identity of the audience to whom they appealed. The OWI’s major approach to this topic was its “Womanpower” campaign of 1942.\(^{35}\)

One broadcast of *The Frank Sinatra Program* includes a message directly from the “Manpower Commission” that demonstrates the frank language ads and propaganda used to suggest that women were just as responsible as men, if not more responsible, for winning the war. The message urges women to take jobs, warning, “If you don’t, the war will last longer, casualties will be greater, the number of men returning will be fewer…Remember, the more women at war, the sooner we’ll win.”\(^{36}\) This is definitely one of the more blunt radio messages I have heard in regards to the Womanpower campaign, but advertisers were by no means subtle in suggesting that women and teenage girls had certain responsibilities they were expected to maintain, which as discussed in previous chapters, included beauty and a willingness to act however a husband or soldier may wish.

In the same broadcast of *The Frank Sinatra Program* that includes W.C. Fields making fun of Sinatra’s weight, an ad for Vimms Vitamins, the sponsor of the show, describes a woman who is feeling too ill to go dancing. The ad claims, “Now that’s the sort of thing that makes a man bury himself in a newspaper.” According to Vimms Vitamins, “Vitamins will help wives have energy and do wifely duties.” The ad makes clear that absolutely nothing should prevent a

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\(^{36}\) Manpower Commission message, *The Frank Sinatra Program*, May 24, 1944, on CBS, Paley Center Collections, cassette tape.
wife from partaking in whatever activities her husband or boyfriend desires, and if he begins acting distant and displeased because she had the nerve to get sick, that was her fault. She should have taken Vimms Vitamins. Max Factor, which sponsored *The Frank Sinatra Show*, emphasized the importance of women and teenage girls maintaining a certain level of beauty, which is unsurprising given that they were and still are a cosmetics company. The Max Factor ads generally suggested that using their makeup would help teenage girls to look like Hollywood stars and get more dates, and it was a safe bet that if these teen girls were listening to and enjoying the romance and sentimentality that Sinatra imparted in his programs, they were probably excited to experience some romance of their own, or at least get a date for Friday night.

I will now explore how teenage girls interacted with and received Sinatra’s radio performances according to their own perspectives, by once again turning to the circulated newsletters of the many wartime Sinatra fan clubs. These newsletter reveal how teenage girls interacted with their radios and what their radio preferences were, and provide further insight into why Sinatra proved to be uniquely suited to the desires of America’s teenage girls.

5.3 “Put your dreams away for another day, and I will take their place in your heart”: Teenage Girls and Radio Fantasies

As discussed earlier, Frank Sinatra fan clubs during the 1940s provided teenage girls with a unique space in which they could freely express their ideas and feelings not only about Frank Sinatra, but also the war, politics, aspirations, and relationships. It is clear that teenage girls felt they could safely express themselves in these clubs in part based on the often extremely personal material they published in their club newsletters. Just as club members submitted material about Sinatra’s films, activism, politics, and other topics, his radio work was a popular point of interest for discussion, and these newsletters provide great insight into how little Sinatra’s fans needed
concrete visual aspects of his performances to create and express fantasies that included the star, in turn revealing their own hopes and tastes.

In keeping with their demonstrated professionalism in reporting Sinatra’s artistic output, fan club newsletters often included tidbits about Sinatra’s radio work that were primarily informative rather than emotional. The Slaves of Sinatra club’s 1944 issue of *The Voice*, for example, includes a list of all of Sinatra’s upcoming radio broadcasts, informing readers of the date, time, and program. “Ginnie,” the author of the list, also lets members know that she keeps a detailed record of Sinatra’s radio appearances, and to contact her if a member should need a particular piece of information about any of his broadcasts. Once again, the notice sounds like a business letter:

Frank can be heard on the radio on Wed., CBS, 6:00 W.T. 8:00 C.T.; and 9:00 E.T. Also Sat. nite [sic], CBS, on the *Hit Parade*, same time as above. He can be heard sometimes on *Hollywood Star Time*, Mon. thru Fri., 12:15 W.T., 2:15 C.T., and 3:15 E.T.,...Kids! I listen to every program Frankie is on (try to). I have kept a list of every song he has sung on his own program since he started last Jan. 5\textsuperscript{th}, so if you want a list of songs, guest stars, where program came from, etc., write c/o the president, Barbara Burns for my address and I will be glad to send it. Please include a stamp. Thanx. I also have a list of the Hit Parade songs he and others have sung.\footnote{Ginnie (Last name unknown), Slaves of Sinatra, *The Voice*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (September, 1944), 3, Sinatra-ana Collection, Hoboken Historical Museum, Hoboken, NJ (hereafter cited as Sinatra-ana).}

A member of the Our Guy Frankie Fan Club submitted a brief memo to members in the May 1945 issue of *The Voices Echo*, which read, “I would like all the members to write to: Max Factor, 1666 North Highland Ave., Hollywood, California and thank them for sponsoring the new Frank Sinatra Show.”\footnote{Our Guy Frankie Fan Club, *The Voices Echo*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (May 1945), 4, Sinatra-ana.} Again, the message suggests the tone of a circulated office memo instructing employees to complete a mundane task. However, these business-like notices about Sinatra’s radio appearances, while common in club newsletters, were greatly overshadowed by
the submissions members sent in that expressed far more emotional and intimate information about Sinatra’s radio work, why they liked it, and how they consumed it.

The following are excerpts from poems and articles submitted by fan club members that either directly reference listening to Sinatra on the radio, or describe his voice separate from his body:

He is a top singer, a number 1,
His voice is from heaven, strictly over the sun,
Just sit there and listen, give him a try,
And shortly you will be heaving a mighty sigh!³⁹

- Sophie Tsoule, The Society for Souls Suffering from Sinatritis

The Needham Junior High School girls,
Are bats about a guy,
Who sends them in a flying whirl,
Yet no one knows just why.
The girls can’t even study right,
He puts them in a daze.
They listen to him Wednesday nite [sic],
And come to school ablaze.⁴⁰

- Linda Pomilla, Semper Sinatra Fan Club

Two years ago, while listening to the radio, I heard a voice that really thrilled me. Not knowing who it was, I became interested in finding out to whom the voice belonged. It was Frank Sinatra, then an unknown. I followed his rise to fame fascinated by the quality and personality of his voice.⁴¹

- Harriet Gainsboro, Frankie’s United Swooners

I Love You so much Frankie,
I could listen to you Night and Day.
I’ll cry Sunday, Monday, or Always,
And I’ll Miss You if you go away…

I never say I’m Getting Tired So I can Sleep.
When you are on the air.
I’d listen to the radio Every Day of My Life,
If I was sure that you’d be there…

³⁹ Sophie Tsoule, BowTie Bugle, No. 7 (Spring 1945), 5, Sinatra-ana.
If you are on the air,
For no matter how many hours long,
I’ll hear your program All or Nothing at All,
Or I’ll be Without a Song.

I want you on the air Forever and a Day,
No matter what others say or do.
‘Cause I know How Sweet you Are,
And I Can’t Stand Losing You.42

- Clara Di Maria, Slaves of Sinatra (underlines appear in original to indicate names of popular songs)

Dear Mr. Sinatra,
You don’t know what you’re doing to me.
Ev’ry time that I hear you on my radio,
Your vision I see.

Dear Mr. Sinatra,
You’re an angel from out of the blue.
Ev’ry note that you sing makes me tingle with joy,
I’m mad about you.

Life has taken on a new complexion,
Since the day I heard you croon,
When you whisper little words of affection,
Darling, oh how I swoon!

Dear Mr. Sinatra,
You’re so tender and sweet and so fine,
Oh, my life would be just like a beautiful song,
If you were only mine.43

- Unknown, Our Guy Frankie Fan Club

These excerpts demonstrate that teenage girls did not feel like they had to hold back anything when expressing their devotion and admiration of Sinatra’s voice. It is likely that fan clubs were the only semi-public space where teen girls could describe their bodily and mental reactions to

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Sinatra’s voice without fear of ridicule or discipline, in turn strengthening the connection Sinatra fan clubs allowed members to share with one another.

What is even more notable about these excerpts, however, is that they reveal how effective Sinatra was on the radio at eliciting both bodily and mental reactions from his listeners, as well as demonstrating just how vivid and emotional fantasies based on his voice could be. Sinatra’s voice is said to “thrill” one listener, while another explicitly says that she sees his “vision” when hearing him on radio. The cover illustration of the September 1945 issue of the *T-Jacket Journal* even provides a concretely visual piece of evidence that Sinatra’s voice over the radio conjured images both mentally and on paper for listeners (Figure 5.2). These kinds of responses could provide ample material for a lengthy study about the relationship between music and sight, one that is outside the scope of this dissertation. It is worth at least a brief discussion though to look into how vision, hearing, and fantasy worked in conjunction with one another to provide Sinatra’s fans with rich mental material for coping with external realities.

Richard Leppert’s influential study about the interactions of music and bodies in European music between 1600 and 1900 is worth noting here. In the introduction, Leppert states, “Precisely because musical sound is abstract, intangible, and ethereal – lost as soon as it is gained – the visual experience of its production is crucial to both musicians and audience alike for locating and communicating the place of music and musical sound within society and culture.”

Further on in the book, he writes, “When we consume music, we also consume a sight – embodied, active, and situated, all qualities that mediate musical meanings. The result is the consumption and simultaneous production of identity.” I agree with Leppert that sight is a

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45 Ibid., 68.
Figure 5.2. Front cover of *The T-Jacket Journal* (September 1945). Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.
frequently overlooked yet crucial component that should be considered in discussions of musical
mediation, creation, and reception. I also believe that radio cannot be considered a truly invisible
medium for music. The fact that radio personalities are often described as “appearing” on radio
supports this idea. However, we may ask how the ambiguity of radio’s “sights” may change how
music is interpreted when compared to hearing music in a live performance or in a film. Here the
sight lies within the listener’s imagination and interpretation and is more individualized and
intimate than music experiences that incorporate a concrete visual element. Fantasy involves the
sense of sight after all, as shown by the connections fans make between Sinatra’s voice and his
body even when they are not presented simultaneously.

In his study of early sound reproduction technology, Jonathan Sterne describes how early
ads for radio communication suggested that romantic relationships over the air were in fact more
meaningful than relationships shared by people in the same physical space:

The message was clear: the ether was a fertile medium in which to culture the intensity
of romantic love, and this intensity could be felt by listening alone together…It suggests
that the ethereal love enabled by radio is a spiritual connection. Those who would
confuse this deeper intimacy with physical attraction between human bodies should
stay away.46

The description of early radio listening as something spiritual suggests that even at the very
beginning of its widespread use, listener imagination was a defining feature of the radio
experience. At this point, it is worth mentioning the work of Janice A. Radway, who discusses
female fantasy and imagination in the context of romance novels. In her book, Reading the
Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature, Radway makes a strong case for
applying reader-response criticism when analyzing romance novels, explaining,

In treating reading as a temporally evolving act by an individual who attributes sense to

textual signifiers encountered on a page, I am thus accepting the fundamental premise of reader-response criticism that literary meaning is not something to be found in a text. It is, rather, an entity produced by a reader in conjunction with the text’s verbal structure. The production process is itself governed by reading strategies and interpretive conventions that the reader has learned to apply as a member of a particular interpretive community.\textsuperscript{47}

In other words, the effectiveness of romance novels relies on a reader’s ability to construct fantasies around it, which as Radway suggests, is one of the primary appeals of reading such novels for women. Just as I have been arguing throughout this dissertation that popular culture, and Frank Sinatra in particular, worked as an outlet for teenage girls experiencing stressful and oppressive realities, Radway says of romance novels, “Romance fiction, as [female readers] experience it, is \textit{compensatory literature}. It supplies them with an important emotional release that is proscribed in daily life because the social role with which they identify themselves leaves little room for guiltless, self-interested pursuit of individual pleasure.”\textsuperscript{48} There are many similarities between radio listening and romance reading in terms of their purpose and how they are used, but there is one significant difference between the two mediums, especially in the context of Frank Sinatra’s radio work.

Radway says this about one of the fundamental characteristics of being a romance reader:

Passivity \textit{is} at the heart of the romance experience in the sense that the final goal of each narrative is the creation of that perfect union where the ideal male, who is masculine and strong yet nurturant too, finally recognizes the intrinsic worth of the heroine. Thereafter, she is required to do nothing more than \textit{exist} as the center of this paragon’s attention... It is a figurative journey to a utopian state of total receptiveness where the reader, as a result of her identification with the heroine, feels herself the \textit{object} of someone else’s attention and solicitude.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 95-96.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 97.
In contrast, not only was Sinatra’s wartime celebrity identity decidedly not “masculine and strong” like the heroes of romance novels, but he performed as one who always had and always would revere women. Teenage girls need not have worried about him recognizing their worth. Most importantly though, teenage female listeners of Sinatra’s radio appearances could certainly not be described as passive. Sinatra’s radio performances, while full of romance in his singing style and song choices, did not provide listeners with actual narratives or romantic endings with him that they could easily imagine themselves in. Listeners were left to create such narratives on their own, which they were happy to do as the fan club newsletters show. But while Sinatra’s radio shows, as well others that were dedicated to music, did not follow any sort of literary format like radio serials did, listeners did not have to strictly rely on their imaginations to create stories from broadcasts if they did not want to. The connection between radio, sight, and fantasy becomes quite clear if one only opens an issue of Radio Mirror magazine from the 1940s.

Radio Mirror: The Magazine of Radio Romances, was a magazine that had the sole purpose of taking recent radio broadcasts that were somehow romantic in nature and adapting them to create publishable narratives. In other words, the magazine made broadcasts into visible, tangible, portable, and repeatable objects, characteristics that Mark Katz applies to sound recording technology which led to phonograph effects. This is not to say that the magazine was a form of sound recording technology, but it provided some of the same benefits of sound recording that are generally absent from radio. It must have been a fairly straightforward process for the magazine to convert broadcasts that had already included some kind of narrative, namely radio soap operas, into written literature, but that did not prevent writers from creating fictional stories out of non-narrative broadcasts as well. Even more notable about Radio Mirror stories was how many of them would have likely been deemed quite scandalous and risqué to much of
American society in the 1940s, especially in terms of how teenage girls acted. Themes of infidelity, teenage premarital sex, and rebellion from parents were prominent in the magazine, and while these stories often ended with morals that aligned with mainstream American values, they were also undoubtedly effective in providing material for fantasies that teenage girls would be condemned for if acted on in reality.

One story in the January 1945 issue of *Radio Mirror*, entitled “Emily’s Husband,” was adapted from the story, “Soldier’s Farewell,” by Anne Ray, first heard on CBS’s *Stars Over Hollywood*. The story follows a teenage girl, Laurie, who falls in love with her older sister’s husband, Carter. Laurie revels in the few physical moments she shares with Carter, using language that would have likely alarmed many members of adult society. For example, after experiencing a frightening thunderstorm, Laurie recollects, “He came over to the bed and put his arm around me. Through the thin silk of my nightgown, I felt his hand warm against my shoulder. Suddenly I longed with everything in me to be in his arms, to feel his lips against mine. I moved closer to him, and it was no longer fright that made my heart thud.”

Laurie also expresses extreme frustration throughout the story about how Carter does not see her as a woman, but a child. “I lay back in bed,” she says. “Poor child. That’s the way he thought of me – a child, a little sister to be protected and loved but never seen as a woman. He hadn’t even noticed my sudden, instinctive movement toward him; his touch had remained as impersonal as ever. If only Emily had not interrupted.” The theme of teenage desire and frustration at not being taken seriously is common in the magazine. In the same issue, another story entitled,

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51 Ibid., 54.
“Sixteen,” describes the struggles of a teenage girl, Joyce, whose mother is too strict. In reference to her mother’s many rules about dating and socializing, Joyce laments,

They sound like little things, don’t they? Petty little restrictions that you laugh at when you’re grown up. But they’re important – terribly important, especially when you get to be sixteen and a junior in high school, and find yourself completely cut off from the crowd, without a share in the interests of other people of your own age, without, actually any friends.52

When she finally gains the courage to date a boy, Tommy, behind her mother’s back, Joyce finds her life instantly improved and more exciting. The story was likely not authored by an actual teenager, but the magazine indicates that the plot was “Suggested by a true problem presented on John J. Anthony’s Good Will Hour, heard Sundays at 10:00 P.M., EWT, on Mutual.” And while the story is fictional, it demonstrates that the editors of the magazine strove to be accessible and relatable to teenage girls. However, it is also obvious that the editors of the magazine continued to slip messages of how mainstream society in the 1940s thought teenage girls should act within their narratives.

In the same story, Joyce is physically assaulted by a grown and inebriated man in a bar when she is out with Tommy. The story presents the following as Joyce’s reaction:

I didn’t say anything. I was still too frightened and too revolted to care to talk. I still felt the heavy hands pawing at me. But I knew that it wasn’t Tommy’s fault that we’d gone to the Oaks, even though he’d suggested it. It was mine – because all the while I’d been lying to my parents, I’d been lying to Tommy, too in a way...We drove back to the Athena Club. I didn’t want to go; I wanted only to be home, hiding from my shame and revulsion.53

The story clearly suggests that this incident is somehow Joyce’s fault, in turn warning teenage girls to avoid situations such as those that Joyce finds herself in, because men cannot be held

53 Ibid., 74.
responsible for their actions. The blame on women continues, when Joyce’s mother finds out about the assault. “Don’t Joyce,” she says to her distraught daughter. “It wasn’t your fault, nor Tommy’s. It was mine. Your father made me see that.” Joyce’s father apparently told her mother that she was too strict on Joyce, which caused her to rebel, and therefore the blame is not on him, or the boy who took her to the sleazy club, or even on the drunk man who assaulted her, but on her mother first, and Joyce second.

The July 1943 issue of Radio Mirror includes another example of a story that simultaneously encouraged seemingly immoral yet exciting teenage female fantasies while also issuing warnings about consequences women may face if they do not adhere to the characteristics of conventionally proper American women. In “Must We Say Goodbye,” adapted from a radio drama entitled, “The Little Things,” by Edward Jurist, first heard on Manhattan at Midnight on The Blue Network, a single mother, Mary, forms an intimate yet forbidden relationship with her married neighbor, Blaine. The relationship is characterized by exciting sexual tension and romantic longing, but the story also supplies a warning in the character of Bernice, Blaine’s wife. Bernice is made the clear villain because of her apparently disturbing behavior. Mary explains,

Such little things, they were, that revealed Bernice Edwards to me. Each unimportant alone, but adding up to a woman tortured by herself. A desire to have everything in her house shining and clean and just so... a loneliness during the day while her husband was at work... a sudden decision to attend a movie, and a telephone call when my house was only a few steps away. And later, as one day took its place beside another in the orderly procession of time, other things...55

54 “Sixteen,” 75.
Frankly, Bernice seems much more relatable than Mary does. She desires to keep a clean house and refuses to remain indifferent towards the obvious affair her husband is having. But in the story, she is clearly cast as the villain for inconveniencing her husband and his lover with her negative emotions and personal flaws. In the end, Bernice conveniently dies by slipping in the kitchen and hitting her head on the table, and Mary recollects, “The picture of Bernice lying there will stay long in my mind, and longer still in Blaine’s. But it will fade in time, and so will Blaine’s recollections of her jealousy, her thousand little pettish unkindnesses, her nagging – all the memories of that poor woman who was entangled in the skiens of her own neurotic imaginings.” Just like the character of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, Bernice is treated not as someone who herself is in need of kindness and may even be suffering from mental illness, but as an unwelcome and unfeminine obstacle to a traditional and therefore appropriate coupling.

Although the authors of *Radio Mirror* included these kinds of warnings to young women within their written fantasies, they did also suggest to readers that they were aware of the unnaturalness many women felt when attempting to conform to mainstream standards of female behavior during the war. In the same issue of *Radio Mirror* that condemns and kills Bernice, another story describes one woman’s struggle to address her own emotions while still keeping in line with expectations of her as an American woman during World War II. In “I’ll Love You More Tomorrow,” adapted from a radio drama, entitled, “My Heart Has Wings,” by Paul Pierce, first broadcast on the *Stars Over Hollywood* program, Elizabeth’s fiancé, Jeff, an Air Force pilot who was severely injured in a plane crash, has lost all confidence in his masculinity because of his injuries. Elizabeth has to rouse it again by pretending to flirt with his best friend, which

56 “Must We Say Goodbye?” 66.
generates a sufficient level of jealousy to restore Jeff’s proper manliness. The story suggests that
the plane crash was Elizabeth’s fault in the first place, however, because she broke down and
cried in front of Jeff shortly before he left, which distracted him from his duty. At the end of the
story, Elizabeth expresses sentiments many women were feeling and reveals broader
expectations of American women:

I learned a lot during that half hour when I acted a part in that hospital room. Sparky
was right. “No guy’s going to do his best flying – or fighting or whatever he’s doing –
if he thinks the girl back home is crying her eyes out for fear of what might happen to
him.” We wives and mothers and sweethearts have to learn to act – all of us. And not just
for a moment, but all the time. Because it’s part of the victory, just like the fighting and
the flying is. We have to act. We have to learn to smile when we kiss them goodbye.58

That must have been Bernice’s problem in “Must We Say Goodbye.” She had completely natural
feelings, but could not, or would not, hide them by acting a different part.

Frank Sinatra himself was the subject of a Radio Mirror story that further emphasized
mainstream expectations of American women. The story, found in the August 1943, entitled
“She Loved Him Enough,” was about Frank’s relationship with his wife, Nancy. While the story
included factual tidbits about their history, the plot was fictional. The story follows Sinatra’s rise
to fame and suggests that his success was largely due to Nancy’s selfless devotion to his career
and happiness, and paints a picture of the two as soulmates, passionately in love with one
another. The end of the story, which reads, “Maybe Frank is right – Maybe miraculous good
fortune is only what should be expected...especially when, like Frank, you meet and marry a girl
who loves you enough,”59 suggested to teenage girls the same message that society in general

Romances, August 1943, 69.
tended to impart to them; women generally won’t achieve fame or career success, but they can
find happiness by helping a man do so. And while this story is not necessarily risqué in nature as
many others were, teenage girls would no doubt have gained mental pleasure from the thought of
being in any sort of relationship with Sinatra.

In the end, although *Radio Mirror* provided readers with many enjoyable stories that
could fuel fantasy and enhance their radio experiences in tangible and creative ways, it was still
limited and influenced by the reality of America’s social and political climate. And while teenage
girls, along with every other American, were of course also influenced by their societal
surroundings, they maintained the power to create extremely intimate and individualized
fantasies for themselves when listening to radio without the aid of magazine adaptations. As this
chapter has demonstrated, the combination of Frank Sinatra’s radio persona and broadcast
formats was near perfectly suited for teenage female fantasy, and he and his producers were well
aware of that. It hardly seems a coincidence that the theme song Sinatra sang at the end of every
one of his broadcasts, and which notably stayed the same throughout all of his different wartime
radio shows, consists of lyrics that equate himself with dreams. At the end of each show,
listeners were instructed by Sinatra to, “Put your dreams away for another day, and I will take
their place in your heart.”60 And for many of those remaining fans who were devoted to Sinatra
during the war, that is where he remains to this day.

CONCLUSION

December 12, 2015 marked the 100th anniversary of Frank Sinatra’s birth, and the numerous celebrations, tributes, and texts produced to mark the occasion demonstrated the powerful effect Sinatra left on popular culture, one that is still felt today. Seventeen years after his death in 1998, American media, scholars, and fans clearly felt compelled to acknowledge Sinatra’s influence on their lives and American culture in general, and I took great interest in observing the various ways he was celebrated, as well as the specific time periods and characteristics of his career that general popular memory chose to focus on. For example, a travelling exhibit called *Sinatra: An American Icon*, which was organized by the GRAMMY Museum, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and the Sinatra family, displayed memorabilia that provided insight into Sinatra’s career, including items from the beginning of his career in the late 1930s and 1940s. Although these early items proved interesting and fun to look at, the exhibit focused more on Sinatra’s later career and persona, somewhat dismissing his earlier work. For example, in reference to Sinatra’s work on film, the exhibit stated, “[Sinatra’s] early films were fun and fluffy, but gradually he learned the art of acting and in 1953, he was cast as Private Angelo Maggio in *From Here to Eternity*, based on the popular novel of the same name by James Jones.”

This suggests the creators of the exhibit did not consider Sinatra’s wartime films to be demonstrative of good acting or worth significant recognition.

Other acknowledgments of Sinatra in 2015 included a televised tribute concert entitled “Sinatra 100 – An All-Star GRAMMY Concert,” which aired December 6 on CBS, in which

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stars such as Harry Connick Jr., Celine Dion, Tony Bennett, Lady Gaga, and others performed Sinatra’s most recognizable hits using original arrangements that were written for him by Don Costa, Gordon Jenkins, Quincy Jones, and Nelson Riddle. Perhaps the most memorable part of this production was Lady Gaga’s finale performance of “New York, New York,” in which she seemingly attempted to embody Sinatra’s celebrity persona by donning a tuxedo and fedora while flirting with the female backup dancers. Most of the performers of the night similarly chose to pay tribute to the swinging, womanizing, and overall “masculine” aspects of Sinatra’s work and persona. Just as in the GRAMMY exhibit, however, there was a lack of acknowledgment to Sinatra’s career and musical style before about 1953, as well as an absence of arrangements by Axel Stordahl. Five of the six decades of Sinatra’s public life were undoubtedly defined by the characteristics most of these tributes emphasized, and it is unsurprising that he is largely remembered in this way. However, the first full decade of his career, the 1940s, deserves significantly more attention than it has thus far received, especially in scholarship, precisely because Sinatra’s celebrity persona was remarkably different from what it would become in the next fifty years and was largely influenced by World War II notions of American identity and gender roles, as this dissertation has shown.

Another aspect of Sinatra’s celebrity image that heavily influences how he has been remembered in popular imagination, yet is somewhat absent in this study, is the matter of his identity as an Italian American. This identity played much more into his image in the years following World War II, as rumors of mob dealings, accusations of communism, and back-and-forth banter about Italian experiences and stereotypes with fellow Italian American, Dean

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Martin, came to define Sinatra’s image. And while this study is primarily concerned with the experiences of Sinatra’s wartime fans rather than his personal experiences as an Italian American, this identity was not irrelevant to his wartime image. Sinatra did express that he had experienced anti-Italian prejudice as a boy growing up in Hoboken, New Jersey, which he claimed led to his desire to be a public voice for racial and religious tolerance, something his wartime fans admired about him. It is also notable that Sinatra chose to publicly embrace his Italian identity rather than downplay it during the war (Sinatra supposedly refused the wish of bandleader Harry James that he change his name to “Frankie Satin” in order to appear less Italian), while relations between America and Italy were tense. And although some scholars such as Karen McNally have suggested that “The air of inclusiveness circulating in World War II” brought “Sinatra’s ethnic identity under the cover of American unity,” it is likely that some of the criticism he received from wartime adult society was in reaction to anti-Italian sentiments. Once again, it is useful here to compare Sinatra’s wartime image not with his own in the postwar years, but with stars from earlier decades.

Miriam Hansen’s work on Rudolph Valentino is relevant to consider when negotiating Sinatra’s ethnic identity during World War II. As Hansen suggests, part of the threat of Valentino’s appeal to American women in the early twentieth century was his ethnic “otherness,” Valentino being Italian, though people often labeled him the “Latin lover.” In response to this threat, Hansen suggests society portrayed Valentino as effeminate “as a strategy to domesticate the threat of his ethnic-racial otherness.” Though there is research that remains to be done on

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this topic, it seems reasonable to consider that similar factors were at play in the portrayal of Sinatra as an effeminate and vulnerable star during World War II as an attempt to reduce the danger of the seemingly uncontrollable torrent of affection teenage girls displayed towards him. Aside from this effeminate image when compared to other male wartime stars as well as his absence in the military, much of the fear and criticism directed towards Sinatra during the war likely came from parents and other adults who found his Italian identity as threatening. This aspect of Sinatra's wartime identity would prove to be a beneficial future study for Sinatra scholarship, which currently addresses his Italian identity primarily in the context of the postwar years.5

This dissertation provides a base for other future studies as well that have the potential to move the field of both fan studies and Sinatra studies in exciting new directions. The existence of the Modern Screen Fan Club Association, for example, provokes many questions about wartime fan club culture. Questions such as, what were the true goals of the association from the perspective of advertisers and executives of Modern Screen in the context of war? Did other fan magazines have similar associations? How can we negotiate the unprofessional written criticisms of fans in the context of their interactions with professional publications such as Modern Screen? This dissertation has addressed this final question in terms of Frank Sinatra fan clubs specifically, but there remains much scholarship that can be done on the relationship between professional fan magazines and fan clubs in general that would certainly prove revealing for fan studies.

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Another future direction this study can take is to explore further Sinatra’s international fan community during World War II. If more materials produced from Marjorie Diven’s Adopt a Foreign Fan Association, “The Link,” for example, could be unearthed, the opportunity to see the written viewpoints not only of American Sinatra fans, but international fans from Anglophone countries would almost certainly provide unprecedented insight into the ways in which American teenage girls specifically approached American nationalism during the war and how their perspectives of international relations were similar or different to that of adult society. Such materials would also reveal how different nationalities likely perceived and criticized Sinatra’s celebrity persona in different ways.

As with any study, there are certain limitations in terms of reconstructing a truly complete understanding of certain communities and topics worth considering that remain outside the scope or possibilities of this dissertation. For example, as revealing as the fan materials produced by Frank Sinatra fan club members are, they do not represent the entire female teenage population in America during World War II. The fact remains that most of the teenage girls who participated in the fan clubs explored here were white and from relatively privileged middle to upper-class families. Because of this, it is difficult to know exactly how the relationships between American teenage girls from lower-class families or different ethnicities and American pop culture were similar and/or different to those of the active members of Sinatra fan clubs during the 1940s. Some important work remains to be done in that area and I hope that materials written by wartime teenage girls of differing demographics will start to be uncovered in order to help us paint a more complete picture of how teenage audiences interacted with popular culture, and in turn, with each other.
While the fan-made materials used in this study have some limits, they nevertheless provide an unprecedented level of insight into the world of 1940s Frank Sinatra fandom from the viewpoint of fans themselves. The work of these fans moves further than simply revealing the characteristics of Frank Sinatra that his overwhelmingly teenage and female fan following liked about him, however. What we see beyond that is a community of American teenage girls who despite living in a place and era defined by contradictions, censorship, sadness, and fear, used their love of Sinatra and popular culture in general to connect with one another and express surprising levels of creativity, professionalism, and passion for what they enjoyed most.
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<th>Club</th>
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<td>Semper Sinatra Fan Club</td>
<td><em>Sinatra-ly Yours</em></td>
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<td>Our Guy Frankie Club</td>
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<td>75 cents per year, later increased to $1.40 per year</td>
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Frank Sinatra fan clubs featured in this study