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Dissertationsprojekt: „Entering State: Women's College Alumnae as U.S. Diplomats"

Abstract zum Dissertationsprojekt

Was verbindet Madeleine Albright mit Aurelia Brazeal, Barbara Mae Watson und Jeane Kirkpatrick? Sie alle gehören zu den Frauencollege-Absolventinnen unter den ersten US-Diplomatinnen – eine Gruppe, die im Verhältnis zur geringen Zahl dieser Colleges in den USA überproportional groß ist. Das Projekt erforscht die Bedeutung ihrer Ausbildung für die ersten Frauen in den elitären Kreisen der US-Diplomatie des 20. Jahrhunderts. Elitedenken kennzeichnet diese Welt nicht nur auf sozio-ökonomischer und geschlechtsspezifischer Ebene, sondern auch mit Bezug auf *race*. Es gilt also Bildung und diplomatischen Rang entlang dieser Aspekte zu beleuchten und die Hürden nicht-weißer Frauen aufzuzeigen. Das Projekt bietet einen neuen, innovativen Zugang zu Diplomatie- und Hochschulgeschichte, ihren Subjekten und Quellen, indem es den Bildungsweg und die Diplomatin ins Zentrum rückt. Über einen vielseitigen Quellenkorpus, der unter anderem Nachlässe, Interviews und College Archive umfasst, ist das Projekt in der New Diplomatic History und deren breitem Diplomatieverständnis verankert.

Text und Fragestellungen

Der anschließende Text gibt einen Einblick in die frühe Geschichte der sogenannten ‚Seven Sisters', der Gruppe der historischen Frauencolleges im Nordosten der USA. Die Gründungen dieser Institutionen sind eng miteinander verknüpft: sie entstanden zwischen 1865 und 1889 und nahmen aufeinander Bezug. Außerdem nahmen spätere Einrichtungen die Colleges dieser Gruppe häufig zum Vorbild. Heute werden sowohl einzelne Institutionen als auch die Gruppe kollektiv oft als prominente Beispiele für diesen Einrichtungstyp herangezogen – obwohl einige von ihnen mittlerweile koedukativ arbeiten. Insgesamt sind die Seven Sisters von großer Bedeutung für mein Dissertationsprojekt, das sie zahlreiche, hauptsächlich weiße US-Diplomatinnen ausgebildet haben.

Im Gespräch würde ich mich freuen übergeordnete Fragenstellungen zu diskutieren. Der Text gibt einen thematischen Einstieg ins Thema als Hintergrund für die Diskussion.

- Wie lässt sich eine Bildungserfahrung als heuristischer methodisch-analytischer Baustein konzipieren und verarbeiten?
- Wie können Bildungserfahrung an einem speziellen Einrichtungstyp und individuelle Bildungserfahrung im Zusammenhang stehen und in der Analyse einzeln oder in Interaktion nutzbar gemacht werden?
- Welche (methodischen) Möglichkeiten gibt es, eine spezielle Bildungserfahrung mit einem spezifischen Berufsweg in Bezug zu stellen?

Creating the Seven Sisters: Gender Concepts in the Early History of the Elite Northern Women's Colleges in the United States

Stefanie M. Schuster

"Women's colleges and especially the undergraduate 'college woman' were among the most conspicuous and successful features of American higher education between 1880 and 1920"[1] – historian John R. Thelin described the founding era of the group of single-sex colleges that later joined together as the 'Seven Sisters,' Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Smith, Wellesley, Radcliffe, Barnard and Bryn Mawr.[2] Imaginations of these schools and their students soon became the subjects of various media representations at the turn of the twentieth century.[3] Common depictions and images of college women included the so-called "all-around girl," the better known "Gibson Girl," and "New Woman."[4] Sherrie A. Inness, who researched these representations, called the all-around girl "a Progressive Era superwoman" who engaged in many campus activities, excelled academically, had various interests, was a beloved and mindful member of her community, and had a modest and not too feminine appearance.[5] Where the image of the all-around girl combined masculine and feminine styles in her appearance, the New Woman could be said to act in both the male and female social spheres, as she was styled in a variety of roles and as an assertive woman.[6] A college degree, often from one of the Seven Sisters, was "the New Woman's most salient feature."[7]

While the images vary in the degree to which they break contemporary conventions of femininity and agency, all of them are very exclusive.[8] The reductive images of Progressive-Era college women expose real-life social issues along the lines of social class and race, that characterized the elite Seven Sisters and United States history overall. These representations of college women were only "'readable'" for a small group of women in American society, as Inness argued,[9] they are exclusive and relatable to few, in the past, as well the present. New Women were white, middle to upper class and independent – financially and economically independent, often working in the social or medical field or engaged in social activism.[10] The life as a social reformer, as well as the college, commonly Seven Sisters, education of New Women were hardly attainable for most women living in the United States for socioeconomic or racial barriers.[11] Between 1870 and 1920, women who went to college in the United States came predominantly from white, Protestant, middle-class families, especially at private institutions.[12] Women's Colleges, including the Seven Sisters, did not educate a majority of

[1] John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 180.
[2] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 180.
[3] Sherrie A. Inness, *Intimate Communities*: *Representation and Social Transformation in Women's College Fiction, 1895-1910* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1995), 4.
[4] Inness, *Intimate Communities*, 97–98; Inness, *Intimate Communities*, 100.
[5] Inness, *Intimate Communities*, 97.
[6] Inness, *Intimate Communities*, 101; Inness, *Intimate Communities*, 97.
[7] Inness, *Intimate Communities*, 102.
[8] Inness, *Intimate Communities*, 101.
[9] Inness, *Intimate Communities*, 97–98.
[10] Inness, *Intimate Communities*, 102; Inness, *Intimate Communities*, 101.
[11] Inness, *Intimate Communities*, 102; Inness, *Intimate Communities*, 101.
[12] Lynn D. Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 5–6.

college women: the share of college women attending women's colleges reached a peak early in their history at 28.3 percent in the year 1879-1880 and decreased considerably until 1920 (9 percent).[13] One of the reasons is the growth of coeducational opportunities in the United States in this period.[14] Representations of (Women's) Colleges, the Seven Sisters and their students did not reflect the average woman's life or prospects in the United States at the time.[15] These visions as they permeated mass media, constructed a 'normal' college woman and thereby reaffirmed white hegemony.[16]

Indeed, the exclusive representations of college women in the Progressive Era do neither depict the majority of women in higher education, nor do they reflect the diversity of women's roles in society. Inness highlighted the Seven Sisters among the settings or alma maters in these representations.[17] The background of the images of students and settings can be found in the actual exclusivity and lack of diversity in the history of the Seven Sister environments, as we will see. Also, the students at the colleges tested and subverted gender roles on their single-sex campuses that were not built with a feminist gender image in mind.[18] For the buildings, historian Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, who studied the architectural design at these colleges argues, "buildings designed to protect femininity became places where women learned to act as men."[19] – But why? Exactly because of the way gender roles and imaginations were inscribed in them for their preservation. In fact, the contemporary gender imaginations and roles which guided the founding of and the concepts for the Seven Sisters' took on a life of their own and aided the empowerment of its students on campus and beyond.

It may come as a surprise that "the first authentic instance of women being permitted to obtain a college education equivalent to that of men"[20] did not occur at a women's college, but on the coeducational campus of Oberlin College in Ohio: In 1841, three white women received the first authentic bachelor's degrees awarded to women in the United States.[21] Prior this pivot, women had barely any options to receive tertiary-level education, let alone opportunities and degrees equal to men – who had higher education available from 1636.[22] For the Seven Sisters (and other women's colleges that followed), the beginning lies in Mount Holyoke in Massachusetts, which started as a seminary in 1837 founded by Mary Lyon.[23] The title "Seminary" pointed to the training of teachers.[24] In general, colleges were exclusively male,

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[13] Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 6.
[14] Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 6.
[15] See Inness, *Intimate Communities*, 98.
[16] Inness, *Intimate Communities*, 98.
[17] See Inness, *Intimate Communities*, 102.
[18] Paula S. Fass, *Outside in*: *Minorities and the Transformation of American Education* (New York, NY a. o.: Oxford University Press, 1989), accessed January 29, 2021, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ub-lmu/detail.action?docID=430827, 158–59; Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater*: *Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 1984), 169; Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life*: *Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, Univ. of Chicago Press ed. (1988), 17.
[19] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 169.
[20] Mabel Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women* (New York, NY: Harper, 1959), 1.
[21] Melody L. Carter, "Black Females in College," in *Encyclopedia of African American Education*, ed. Kofi Lomotey (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2010), 81; Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 5.
[22] Carter, "Black Females in College," 81.
[23] Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*: *A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 9.
[24] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 28.

seminaries were institutions for women, which often did not award actual academic degrees.[25] Mount Holyoke became a full college by curriculum and name in 1893 and persists as a female institution to this day.[26] Vassar, Wellesley, and Smith Colleges were established based on its model and, along with Bryn Mawr College, soon rose to national prominence and influence within the wider group of four-year women's colleges founded around the Civil War period in the United States.[27]

1 Male Power and Influence

Building Monuments

When the colleges among the Seven Sisters were first conceived, they represented more a way to monumentalize their male founders than emancipatory centers for women. The case of Vassar College serves as a prominent example. Founded in 1865, it presents the first case of a sizeable institution endowed as a women's college.[28] Originally, the wealthy brewer Matthew Vassar had intended to use his fortunes to found a hospital, inspired by his impression of Guy's Hospital on a visit to London.[29] A fellow Baptist, Milo Jewett, convinced Vassar of the novel idea of using his fortune to endow a women's college.[30] Jewett himself had experience with educational institutions for women, as for example, he had established a school in Alabama, for which he had been in touch with Mount Holyoke's founder and educator, Mary Lyon.[31] Vassar was not an educator himself, but "a self-made man's [with a] wish to insure his immortality in a great building," and a college for women gave him that chance, as historian Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz characterized.[32] The sources further show that Jewett assured Vassar that the school would surpass the Pyramids in legacy.[33] In a quite pronounced way, Vassar College's founding history points to the intent to enshrine male influence and power in the form of large construction. Also, the students would live and learn inside the physical testament to male power. The campus and its structures are a deliberate move to display wealth and male influence. Other ways of displaying wealth and influence would have certainly been available; the distinctive appeal of endowing a women's college leads to the history of philanthropy.

The founding of Women's Colleges provided a novel idea and distinction for philanthropic founders following the Protestant Work Ethic. The founding of women's colleges was aided by a changing dynamic in philanthropy in the United States in the later decades of the nineteenth century, when it played an increasing role in higher education, with large donations in varying forms enabling innovation.[34] The fact that individuals, entrepreneurs, accumulated considerable wealth and decided to make donations for public and social causes, was connected to industrial development and its merging with religious values into the so-called 'Protestant Work Ethic.'[35] The idea that hard work and good deeds went hand in hand took hold among the growing group of affluent entrepreneurs,[36] like the Rockefeller or Carnegie families,

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[25] Louise Schutz Boas, *Woman's Education Begins*: *The Rise of the Women's Colleges* (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1935), 11; Boas, *Woman's Education Begins*, 12.
[26] "History," Mount Holyoke College, accessed February 10, 2021, https://www.mtholyoke.edu/about/history.
[27] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 47; Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 47; Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 47-48.
[28] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 48; Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 47.
[29] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 29, 31; Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 48.
[30] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 47.
[31] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 30–31.
[32] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 29, 31.
[33] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 29, 31.
[34] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 100.
[35] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 101.
[36] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 101.

for example. Donors took on the duty to shape education in line with this worldview.[37] Thelin summarizes that colleges for women benefited greatly from this new upturn in philanthropic activity, in many cases because they were not mainstream investments.[38] The idea of education for women was a contested issue at the time, which is why the founding of women's colleges rested on large gifts by individuals.[39] Matthew Vassar is somebody who is said to have enjoyed seeing his donation making an impact.[40] In fact, the relative scarcity and novelty of women's colleges made them suitable targets for philanthropic commitments.[41] Women's colleges stood out against other institutions as special, somewhat original, compared to hospitals, for example, which reinforces the impression that establishing such as college provided its founders with the opportunity to create an image for himself.

Sister institutions of Vassar were founded as philanthropic endeavors in line with the Protestant work ethic, as well. The founders of Vassar, Wellesley, Smith, and Bryn Mawr had religious motivations.[42] The founding of Wellesley by Henry Fowle Durant revealed a deeper connection to the higher education of women and Christian values, but nevertheless stands as another example of philanthropy and display of male power. Durant had actively engaged with Mary Lyon's Mount Holyoke as a lay preacher and later as trustee.[43] In the latter role, Durant, together with his wife Pauline, donated on multiple occasions and prompted the construction of a library, which he joined in overseeing.[44] Inspired by his engagement with the school, Durant dedicated his will to establishing an institution for women modeled after Mount Holyoke.[45] Originally, the family had intended to build an orphanage, but the library, described as a "jewel" by Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, motivated the Durants.[46] Lefkowitz summarized that Durant "wanted to do what Mary Lyon, with her plain style and limited means, could not and would not: he meant to make his female seminary the most beautiful the world had ever seen."[47] Durant thus did not intend to build a college that reflects Christian modesty but instead one that surpasses Mount Holyoke in grandeur.[48] Clearly, the concept of Mount Holyoke appealed to Durant, but he meant for *his* institution to surpass it – which add to the claim that the motivation to build colleges was to portray male influence and power. The architectural design with its impressive setting and decorative Christian references presented a deliberate departure from Mount Holyoke.[49] It catered to the appreciation for grandeur and refined taste ascribed to Durant, which here, he saw as "dedicated to the Service of his Lord and Savior," according to Lefkowitz Horowitz.[50] In addition to devotion, Service can include contributing to God's good work on earth, which builds another connection to the Protestant Work Ethic and philanthropy of the day.

Since Durant also expressed feminist views, and connected them to Faith, Service lay not only in the monumental building, but also in its cause. Lefkowitz Horowitz quoted him

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[37] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 101.
[38] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 100.
[39] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 100.
[40] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 100.
[41] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 100.
[42] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 47.
[43] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 42.
[44] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 44.
[45] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 44.
[46] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 44.
[47] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 42.
[48] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 46.
[49] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 46.
[50] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 46.

claiming that women's higher education was "'the war of Christ.'"[51] In general, Durant expressed feminist views that included the emancipatory meaning of women's higher education with the goal of unfolding and enabling female potential.[52] His views were certainly progressive for the time and he comes across as an ally in women's emancipation and a supporter of higher education for them. Lefkowitz Horowitz highlights both value systems, Christian Faith, and feminism,[53] although she also foreshadowed Wellesley's feminist future – the project, too, stands as a self-promoting philanthropic effort. Even if Durant's feminist convictions were genuine and the founding of Wellesley was primarily motivated by them, the college nevertheless presented an opportunity for Durant to express influence, piety and wealth.

Also, there are multiple ways in which competition between the founders surfaces. First, in mere construction: Wellesley's College Hall was so closely modeled after Vassar's structure, that it could even give them impression of competition between the two male founders. Also College Hall has been called an imitation of Vassar, generally adhering to its dimensions and construction materials.[54] Also, Durant meant to deliberately outshine Mount Holyoke.[55] Second, financial competition shows in endowment figures. The donations broke records: Vassar gave almost $400,000 Dollars (which would amount to approximately $8 million in 2020), the largest amount the education of women before the founding of Wellesley.[56] Vassar's donation surpassed Sophia Smith's even, [57] who came after him. Durant then gave the most upon founding, an estimated million at the time (almost 20 million in 2020).[58] By the time Wellesley College was founded in 1875, however, Vassar held approximately the same in assets at this college as Durant had donate to found Wellesley.[59] It appears that Durant did not mean to build a legacy that could lag behind Vassar's, even if Wellesley College did not carry Durant's own surname. In sum, despite the presence of Christian and feminist values in conceiving and establishing Wellesley College, Durant, too, sought to carry out a philanthropic project that was not merely altruistic, but possibly served his Christian conscience, embodied, and displayed wealth and influence, and provided competition in a male world.

The only female benefactor in the group was Sophia Smith, whose gift established Smith College – but besides the endowment and the Smith name, she had little influence in the founding of the college.[60] As a woman, Sophia Smith had large sums of money at her disposal through inheritance, which was unforeseen, and she herself had no heirs.[61] A woman of faith herself, she had cultivated the idea of using her fortune for a women's college endowment before but was first stopped and then encouraged by leaders in Massachusetts elite male institutions,[62] for their own reasons, explored further below. Smith sought to collaborate with

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[51] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 44.
[52] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 44.
[53] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 55.
[54] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 46.
[55] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 46.
[56] Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 24. Figures for 2020 calculated with factor for 1870 USD values, based on Aaron O'Neill, "Purchasing Power of One US Dollar (USD) In Every Year from 1635 to 2020," Statista, accessed March 4, 2021, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1032048/value-us-dollar-since-1640/
[57] Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 24.
[58] Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 24; O'Neill, "Purchasing Power of One US Dollar (USD) in Every Year from 1635 to 2020."
[59] Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 24.
[60] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 69.
[61] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 48; Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 100–101.
[62] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 48.

her pastor, John M. Greene, who soon urged her to endow a women's college, swiftly organized allies, and ultimately chose the trustees for the College.[63] Ultimately, it was Green and other trustees who exercised executive leverage in founding Smith.[64]

Bryn Mawr stands as an exception with a more conservative first intent, but the takeover of a woman. The school was established in 1884 as the female parallel to Haverford College, not explicitly modeled after Mount Holyoke but rather with direct inspiration from Smith.[65] First and foremost, Joseph Taylor endowed Bryn Mawr as a conservative Quaker school.[66] An entrepreneur, doctor, and Orthodox Quaker himself, Taylor intended to educate women as teachers, but primarily in the home and to amplify the meaning of the home in their roles as mothers.[67] This concept was soon developed toward an emphasis on rigorous academics and away from "moral distinction," by M. Carey Thomas, a dean and the second College President as Miller Solomon characterized the original vision.[68] Thomas had a powerful hand in the development the physical and academic environment at Bryn Mawr during her long tenure,[69] which took the philanthropic project of the college's male founder toward a concept crafted by a female leader with a wide-range of experience with academic institutions.[70] As "a unique blend of university and women's college" that grew out of this history,[71] the example of Bryn Mawr presents an exception. Even if its history took a different turn, Bryn Mawr, too was a philanthropic project, if not as explicitly for self-promotion via ideals. Regardless, its founding still taps into the male philanthropist 'giving' an institution to women to some degree.

The endowment of large sums to women's colleges as vehicles for distinction, competitiveness, and/or redemption can be read as a display of male power and wealth. In the industrial society women would hardly be able to participate in entrepreneurship and thus would not usually be part of the sphere in which (especially economic) competitive power was wielded. The Colleges can be interpreted as symbols of male wealth and the male business world – after all Sophia Smith received her fortune through inheritance, not business. The religious motivations underscore the idea that the philanthropic projects were motivated in line with the Protestant Work Ethic and served the consciousness of wealthy men before God. Through campus constructions and the handling of college founding as the philanthropic enterprise of men installing and displaying great wealth to women, they built symbols of power. These symbols of male power became the campus for women, who had access to the elaborate facilities exactly because men meant to display their wealth. Ultimately, it was the women who studied, learned, and lived in these constructions, thus in practice gaining the benefit.

The early Seven Sister Colleges Women's colleges were actually set apart by the financial means philanthropy endowed them with. Thelin argues that in general, those colleges that were founded as projects in the Protestant Work Ethic could afford "excellent facilities" upon opening.[72] Vassar's drive to build an impressive college played out positively for the learning experience for students in that they had an elaborate campus at their feet featuring an

[63] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 69–70.
[64] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 70.
[65] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 47; Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 49; Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 105.
[66] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 47.
[67] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 49.
[68] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 49.
[69] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 117.
[70] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 105.
[71] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 105.
[72] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 101.

art gallery, music and science facilities, a library and more.[73] At Vassar, students would now had access to a full college campus, distinct from earlier seminaries such as Mount Holyoke.[74] Overall, the early full Women's Colleges had the advantage over men's institutions that in their founding period, the late nineteenth century, technologically advanced equipment for science laboratories was available.[75] As a result, the facilities at Women's Colleges could easily outrank those at men's colleges.[76] The new Women's Colleges offered classrooms that could spark scientific interest and academic self-discovery. The photograph below shows Wellesley's Physics Laboratory housed in College Hall, providing the space and apparatus for experiments in physics:

Figure 1: Physics Laboratory, College Hall, Wellesley College, 1893[77]

As for disadvantages of the spending on prestigious facilities, Vassar students were charged high tuition. The Vassar experience came at a price: high tuition.Already before opening, barely any of the initial funding was left to meet operating costs – the money had gone into the rising construction costs in Civil War times.[78] Vassar believed students should pay for overhead expenditures.[79] Also, he never intended his college for poor women as he made clear to the trustees at their first meeting: "'It is not my purpose … to make Vassar Female College a charity school.'"[80] Later, he provided financial aid, but in general, he believed it was up to the students to meet the costs of their education.[81] Only very few benefited from the scholarship,

[73] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 33, 35.
[74] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 33, 35.
[75] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 98.
[76] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 98.
[77] Physics Laboratory, 1893, wca00029, Wellesley College Archives.
[78] Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 24.
[79] Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 24.
[80] Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 24; Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 24.
[81] Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 130.

and those who applied came from more rather than less educated families – Vassar College was known as an elite institution for wealthy women,[82] as it appears, intentionally so.

Nevertheless, the students who could afford to attend the elite women's colleges found excellent facilities for their education. In this way, they benefitted from the Protestant Work Ethic, the wealth the male founders had been able to accumulate, their competitive drive, and even from this display of male wealth and power on their campus. If the benefactors had not dedicated the level of funds and efforts to establishing women's colleges, the Seven Sisters could not have offered a full collegiate education to women, but rather the offerings would have likely remained along the lines of seminary schools. Having access to facilities like laboratories would ensure the chance to study a variety of subject properly. It was the base, along with the liberal arts curriculum, for the academic excellence the founders strove for, which ultimately made alumnae competitive with ivy-league college men.

Academic Excellence: Access and Exclusion

Smith, Wellesley, Vassar, and Bryn Mawr Colleges (the non-coordinate colleges among the Seven Sisters) stated an explicit goal to provide women with excellent education, equal to the best academic training available to men.[83] Vassar College, for example, was intended, designed and endowed as a full college that should serve as an Ivy League institution for women.[84] This idea was novel: Only briefly before the Civil War (1861-1865), did women find education closer to the collegiate level at a women's college, beginning with Elmira Female College (1855),[85] to Vassar, the first of the Seven Sisters, Elmira did not compare; "Vassar was something else."[86] By name, women found 'colleges' that may even grant them degrees in the South – from the North's perspective, however, these institutions were largely inferior.[87] Overall, the Southern educational system suffered from the consequences of the Civil War to such an extent that Women's Colleges in the North (Vassar, Smith, and Wellesley) surpassed them in prominence.[88] The top level education was intended and a selling point. The male founders sought to create prestigious elite institutions. The conceptualization of the curriculum in the liberal arts can be interpreted as an equalizer for academic women toward men.

For a concept, founders directly resorted to Mount Holyoke, Mary Lyon's seminary became the most influential template for the first prominent Women's Colleges.[89] In Lyon's vision, women from modest, small farmer families, would find an education equal to men and enable them to participate more in (reforming) U.S. society.[90] At Mount Holyoke, students had to participate in domestic chores to keep costs low.[91] Notably, these domestic tasks, unlike at

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[82] Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 130.
[83] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 29; "Smith History," Smith College, accessed February 9, 2021, https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/smith-history; Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 48.-49
[84] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 29.
[85] Carter, "Black Females in College," 81; Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 29.
[86] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 29.
[87] Boas, *Woman's Education Begins*, 11; Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 29; Andrea Lindsay Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College: Religion, Class, and Curriculum in the Educational Visions of Catharine Beecher and Mary Lyon," *History of Education Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (2010): 138, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40648056.
[88] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 138.
[89] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 157.
[90] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 139; Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 133.
[91] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 148.

Catharine Beecher's Hartford Female Seminary, were not part of the students' curriculum.[92] Instead, the classroom was reserved for the liberal arts, much like at men's colleges, such as nearby Amherst College, but what separated Mount Holyoke from a college at the time, was the missing emphasis on classics, particularly Greek.[93] The prominent Eastern Women's Colleges ultimately adopted as their model "an unintentional hybrid of the two reformers' [Lyon and Beecher] visions" as they offered the pure liberal arts program but catered to more affluent women, who, according to Beecher were more influential in society.[94] It was striking though, that women received a liberal arts education at the new Women's Colleges, that would be equal to that offered to men. A degree from these Colleges would certify the same academic work and qualification to women, giving them the leverage to assert themselves as academics.

Access meant being able to receive a high-level training for female students, even the preparation for it if needed, and to well-equipped learning facilities. At the same time, only very few students actually shred in access, and the fortunate few who did, could face exclusion from within. Overall, the education in the liberal arts was beneficial for those who received it, enabling alumnae to approach the separate gender spheres after graduation. The intent to offer women excellent training was shaped simultaneously by access and exclusion. In preserving male power and influence, academic excellence can be read in two dimensions: for the independently founded Seven Sisters[95] providing excellent training to women can be connected to the goal of distinction and prestige. Second, especially for the coordinate colleges, offering rigorous academic training maintained the gendered separate spheres for elite institutions, and kept the centers of learning and power male: women could go to Radcliffe not Harvard and to Barnard not Columbia.

To meet the goal of academic excellence and teach women on the collegiate level, Women's Colleges overall also had to prepare women for its academic programs in dedicated preparatory departments, which empowered students in a system that had not been designed to support women toward collegiate education. Recognizing the larger ineptitudes among the first prospective students, Vassar and Wellesley put preparatory departments into place upon founding.[96] Offering secondary education via the preparatory department was a necessity and remained in operation at Vassar for seventeen years, until 1888,[97] Wellesley's was first transferred then separated from the college in 1880.[98] Smith College and Bryn Mawr faced a struggle to uphold the high academic standards they treasured because they did not establish preparatory departments.[99] Greek proficiency was required at Smith, as it was for men at leading institutions.[100] Students were rarely ready for higher education because of the level of training at many secondary schools and the inconsistency in admission standards.[101] The preparation of students and financing the operation of colleges, was a concern for men's colleges, as well.[102]

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[92] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 139; Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 148.
[93] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 154; Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 11; Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 28.
[94] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 134; Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 139, 141.
[95] An exception could be Bryn Mawr, where the explicit goal and action to equal education can be traced back rather to M. Carey Thomas's imitative; See Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 49.
96 Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 49.
[97] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 40–41; Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 22.
[98] Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 22.
[99] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 49.
[100] Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 22.
[101] Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 21.
[102] Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 21.

The difference between male and female institutions was often in cost for reputation: Women's Colleges had lower numbers in college-level admission – upon opening at Wellesley (1875), for example, only one in ten entering students was prepared for college training.[103] The educational system (had) served men specifically and was designed to train them all the way to top educational opportunities and leadership in society, whereas that priority was not extended to anyone else yet. It was thus decisive that women's college stepped in for the secondary educational system and trained women so they could participate in academic learning. Making elite academia a priority for the reputation of men's college projects benefited womn in getting access to even the preparation for rigorous training.

The contradiction of access and exclusion in the strive for ivy-league excellence at Women's Colleges is poignantly visible in the so-called coordinate colleges. Other than for the aforementioned Women's Colleges, female initiative led to the creation of these colleges and women's annexes to male (Ivy League) universities. Radcliffe College grew out of the wish of women to attain a Harvard education.[104] The efforts of women's organizations and a local couple of Cambridge, Massachusetts, led to teaching at the 'Harvard Annex' and its membership in the Society of for the Collegiate Instruction of Women in the year 1882.[105] The Annex received its charter in 1894 and the right to grant Harvard-equivalent degrees thanks to the efforts of Elizabeth Cary Agassiz, Radcliffe's president, donors in a fundraising campaign and Agassiz' allies at Harvard.[106] Barnard College provides the parallel case at Columbia University: both coordinate colleges gained their academic status from ties to male elite universities.[107] In response to the push for women's admission, Columbia, like Harvard, offered women access to exams but not lectures, before Columbia trustees approved an annex.[108] Teaching was taken on by Columbia faculty and started in 1899.[109] Unlike Radcliffe, Barnard achieved autonomy in hiring faculty.[110] The stories of coordinate colleges look like success stories at first glance: they gave more women access to excellent education, closer, literally, to some male elite educational centers. At the same time, these women's colleges were also a clear signal of exclusion from the male Ivy League, against coeducation.[111] The argument against coeducation drives the history of Smith College, as well: The other Women's Colleges stated an explicit intent to provide women with excellent, equal education,[112] prestigious Amherst College was firmly against admitting women and its graduates' dedication to Smith can be read as a service to preserve Amherst as all-male.[113] From the 1870s on, coeducation generally became the prevalent model in public and private institutions in the United States[114] – some distinguished male institutions remained exceptions for a long time, however.

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[103] Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 21.
[104] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 54; Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 55.
[105] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 54.
[106] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 54–55.
[107] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 55.
[108] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 55.
[109] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 55.
[110] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 55.
[111] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 55–56; Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 184.. It would in turn take until 1965 for Radcliffe women to receive Harvard A.B. degrees and until 1983 that women were admitted as undergraduates at Columbia. See Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 55
[112] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 29; Smith College, "Smith History"; Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 48.
[113] Boas, *Woman's Education Begins*, 236; Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 71.
[114] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 47.

The distinct conceptualization of the Seven Sisters as academically excellent elite institutions meant that they did not provide universal access. In fact, in creating an elite environment, the idea of prestige carried over to shaping the student body. Colleges made active decisions of who should and could be their elite via practices of restriction and discouragement.

A variety of restrictive practices were in place that actively excluded aspiring students based on ethnicity, race, and faith. There are no records of policies against Jewish and Roman Catholics, and class years had very few students with their background in the late nineteenth century.[115] Anti-Semitism characterized the interactions of Jewish students with their peers at this time, if not the admissions process.[116] Similar to elite male institutions, Women's Colleges were suspicious of the emergence of a Jewish presence on campus in the early twentieth century and sought to manage the number of Jewish students.[117] For the lack of designated Jewish colleges, applicants looked to the larger pool of public and private institutions.[118] Later, further into the twentieth century, college administrators referred to the growing volume of suitable applications as "the 'Jewish problem'" in private.[119] Here, the general attitude toward Jewish applicants shines through; they were not generally considered the target group. Ultimately, the Colleges admitted students based on arbitrary policies that were oriented after the proportion of other applications.[120] Catholic students, as well, sought entry into the larger higher education landscape depending on regional opportunities and, despite the availability of sectarian institutions.[121] Among those populations that gradually began to enter the predominantly white Protestant realm of higher education in the twentieth century, Barbra Miller Solomon argued that Catholics "now became the most acceptable" in spite of former bias against the denomination.[122] This research highlights that who was 'acceptable' in the view of the colleges shaped admission processes. By restricting access for some groups, the colleges sought to shape and reproduce what it considers as "elite" – many examples show, this was not only an elite based on merit or potential.

For race, in particular, the exclusion practice was rampant, if not on open display: discouragement stands out as a way to control the make-up of the student population even seeking entry. In the cases of Vassar and Bryn Mawr, for example, the colleges, Northerners, opted for the appeasement of Southerners over justice and equality for African Americans by pointing to Southern students as the reason not to admit Black students.[123] Bryn Mawr recommended, as it claimed, for the sake of the Black student and the campus life, that they should seek out alternate institutions because Southern students were attending the school.[124] This presents a more or less concealed way to prevent African Americans from applying, without an official campus policy. The message was that Black students were not welcome; and that if sincere or not, the interest of the white student was protected and preferred. The strategy essentially seeks to control the racial set-up of the population and it reflected that African Americans were not considered part of the target group for admission.

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[115] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 155.
[116] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 173.
[117] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 143.
[118] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 143.
[119] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 143.
[120] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 143.
[121] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 143.
[122] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 143.
[123] Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*: *Feminist Values and Social Activism, 1875-1915* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 7. Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 155
[124] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 155.

The issue of racial conflict, among white Southerners and students of color is not furnished; in fact, it did exist at the Seven Sisters. Access for White Southern students could mean exclusion and racism for Black students also for the racist views of Southerners. White Southern Women were admitted to the Seven Sisters, by the early classes of the 1910s, proportionately, they constituted between eleven and fourteen percent at Smith, Vassar, and Wellesley.[125] Southern women felt a need to advocate for their identity and to defend the entire region for its racism and then only recently abolished system of slavery.[126] Research into Southern women at the Seven Sisters Colleges and the way they negotiated their identities, shows how the so-called 'Lost Cause' permeated everyday lives of Southerners.[127] It also indicates the power of the ideology, as it was active in academic settings and even when its followers were in the minority. In 1913, for example, a white student from the South protested rooming with Carrie Lee, an African American student who had been admitted without the college's knowledge of her racial background.[128] As a result, Lee had to go through a variety of degrading experiences and was ultimately housed off campus with a Smith professor.[129] The student Lee roomed with at first was likely one of the women from the South who transferred internalized practices of racism and segregation into the college setting. Southern students acting on their convictions could have far reaching consequences, as Lee's example shows, as by making her live off campus,[130] the college catered to the white Southern student. Conflicts thus existed between students, and they were used to discourage African Americans. In the argument lies the complacency with racist views of Southerners the preference of them as part of the student body and the elite image.

The practice of discouragement proved 'effective,' as the attendance patterns of African American students at the Seven Sisters show. First, overall, very few Black women attended the Seven Sisters: In the period between 1890 and 1960, all Seven Sisters graduated merely about five hundred students.[131] In handling the issue of race, these Colleges practiced different strategies.[132] Especially housing practices were problematic for African American women there; either campus dormitories were off limits or segregated for them.[133] Only Wellesley affirmed that Black students had the right to join meals at commons and to live on campus, although segregated in 1913, for example.[134] Wellesley thus confronted Southern students with their biases by admitting African Americans[135] to some extent. The three sister institutions in Massachusetts, Radcliffe, Smith and Wellesley Colleges, lead with their history of continuously admitting a small number of Black students since the middle of the 1880s.[136] Among them, Radcliffe achieved admission numbers of four Black students by the 1920s, twenty years earlier than some of the other colleges, and Radcliffe alumnae outnumbered others considerably.[137]

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[125] Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*, 9.
[126] Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*, 7.
[127] Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*, 7.
[128] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 155; Linda M. Perkins, "The African American Female Elite: The Early History of African American Women in the Seven Sister Colleges, 1880-1960," *Harvard Educational Review* 67, no. 4 (1997): 729–30, accessed February 18, 2021, https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.67.4.136788875582630j.
[129] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 155; Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 729–30.
[130] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 729–30.
[131] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 722. Oberlin College alone, in comparison, had over 400 Black students between 1833 and 1910.
[132] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 744.
[133] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 228; Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 744.
[134] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 228; Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 726.
[135] Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*, 7.
[136] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 722–23.
[137] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 729.

Second, Black women were aware of how welcoming individual schools were to them and seem to have chosen accordingly: Among Black women, Linda M. Perkins suggests, Smith and Wellesley appeared a preferable, for their more positive reputation with regard to housing and scholarships, and their alumnae organizations were said to have been more open toward Black women.[138] The fact that Smith and Wellesley were among the leaders in admitting Black students from the 1880s,[139] underscores the connection of reputation and attendance. In reverse, those colleges that seemed particularly discouraging to African Americans, showed less attendance. For example, the tenure of President of M. Carey Thomas (1893-1922) did not see one Black student.[140] Perkins argues the reason is Thomas' racist views of African Americans as inferior.[141] The example of Thomas personally going out of her way to exclude an African American student support the argument.[142] Formally, Black students were accepted at Bryn Mawr from 1927, but the history of exclusion had created a reputation for the school, as Perkins argued, so not many Black students attended even after they could effectively be admitted.[143] The select examples of discrimination against Black students created reputations and guided their attendance. Discouragement operated as de facto exclusion at most of the Seven Sisters. It was a strategy through which colleges could shape and select the student body and its racial background according to a respective vision of the elite. Overall, the elite schools did not seem to envision a student body with many Black students.

The strive for excellence and for an elite reputation intersected with the student body; elite was constructed around whiteness, and Discouragement and encouragement operated through reputation. The profile of the students at these schools is reflected by the deliberate preference of White students and their worldviews. Creating a reputation against African Americans also implied that they were not part of the elite vision and in turn that the elite students were constructed and selected as white. At Vassar, the story of Anita Florence Hemmings (a black student from the class of 1897) who 'passed' for white received considerable attention across the region: only shortly before her graduation did the college discover that she was of African American descent and, according to press coverage, debated whether to award her her degree.[144] The concern was that Vassar's image as "an institution for the aristocratic and genteel woman" was threatened.[145] Even though Vassar eventually graduated Hemmings,[146] the fact that the college may have considered withholding her degree after she had almost completed it, speaks to how much race alone had to with being worthy of being an alumna of Vassar in 1897. Again, this is not a merit-based concern. In fact, Hemmings engaged in extra-curriculars at Vassar, and had worked hard to pass the college's entry examination.[147] As a child, she was described as very intelligent and a white woman sponsored her schooling.[148] Hemmings' example shows that Vassar had a vision of the elite it meant to train, which was determined by skin color, as well. The goal of constructing an elite institution thus included the student body and had real-life effect on students of color. The elite college and college woman in the vision of Vassar, was constructed around whiteness. Creating elite

[138] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 746.
[139] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 722–23.
[140] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 734.
[141] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 733.
[142] See for example, Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 733.
[143] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 736.
[144] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 737–38.
[145] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 737–38.
[146] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 737.
[147] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 737.
[148] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 737.

student population was shaped by racist views about elites, the ideas varied among schools as can be drawn from the practice of discouragement in the other colleges, too.

An education at a Women's College was only accessible for a fortunate few. Overall, despite progress in women's education, women struggled against nineteenth-century conventions – going to college meant having to defy gender imaginations and parents' expectations, all in addition to paying high tuition fees.[149] For those who could attend the Seven Sisters, the education proved valuable. The colleges provided access to excellent education and its benefits. Overall, opportunities after college had to be sought and constructed by students, but alumnae built them for themselves, as some group case studies show.

Women were previously not allowed into colleges because these institutions trained in the professions of law, medicine, and theology – areas in which women were not allowed to practice.[150] Demanding access to the professions had to precede arguing for access to colleges.[151]The early graduates of Women's Colleges did not encounter many career opportunities with their novel degrees. First, with the high-level education women received at elite Women's Colleges had "a less clearly articulated purpose" than the training offered at the seminaries by Mary Lyon or Catherine Beecher, as Andrea Turpin argued.[152] Catharine Beecher's approach included the formal training in domestic work, which she considered distinctly female and intended to establish professionally, and thus work toward an elevation of women and their teaching, domestic and care work in society.[153] Lyon also saw the priority to educate women as teachers, but motivated by missionary goals in the evangelical New Divinity community.[154] The Colleges generally offered a liberal arts curriculum that did not include domestic topics at all.[155] Combined with the shift from Lyon's religious views with the goal of conversion toward Beecher's that saw women as nurturers,[156] the prospects and purpose for an educated woman must indeed have appeared confusing for early graduates, to amplify Turpin's argument.[157] Especially so, when women graduates had received a universal education that traditionally prepared men for positions of leadership – women in these positions were unthinkable earlier in the nineteenth century.[158]

Second, the social reality did not include a professional role for college-educated women yet. The fact that women received the same training as men did not change the limited choices most of them had as alumnae: viable options were still only as teachers or for single women, homemakers."[159] The nineteenth-century political and economic context had encouraged women's education so far as that they should serve society as educators in the home under the concept of 'Republican Motherhood' or as the rising middle class in a developing market economy looked to educate young women in a competitive and unpredictable environment.[160] Arguably, a women's college education went beyond the education necessary to raise children in the democratic spirt – options after college did not match the training of alumnae. In part, this lack was on the Women's Colleges themselves as by excluding domestic topics from the

[149] Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women*, 24–25.
[150] Boas, *Woman's Education Begins*, 9.
[151] Boas, *Woman's Education Begins*, 11.
[152] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 158.
[153] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 139–41.
[154] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 142.
[155] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 157.
[156] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 157.
[157] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 158.
[158] Boas, *Woman's Education Begins*, 9.
[159] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 158.
[160] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 135.

curriculum, they did not add to the prestige of traditional occupations.[161] At the same time, they did not commit to advocacy for women in all professions.[162] The liberal arts education women had received, was thus temporarily "a new form ornamental education," as Turpin argues, because it did not fulfill the vision of social and professional mobility for women – the former also because it was mostly available to wealthy women.[163]

The lack of a clear purpose and prospect of a Women's College education presumably had positive implications in the long run, however, exactly because it did not mean automatic confinement to certain tasks or even social spheres. The void prompted many alumnae to become leaders in pioneering women's professional opportunities.[164] The access to the elite liberal arts education and the professional opportunities graduates won would be limited to less wealthy women for years,[165] but the fact that the lack of professional opportunities meant an imperative to early alumnae is strikingly important.

A Seven Sister education could mean additional leverage for entry into spaces of white power for Black women. The few Black students who attended the Seven Sisters until the 1960s were part of a small Black social and economic elite, which had developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century North.[166] Members of these communities lived an exclusive life completely different from Black communities in the South, who constituted the majority of African Americans at the end of the nineteenth century and suffered the far-reaching consequences of Segregation.[167] Education was of central value in the community and the Seven Sisters presented an opportunity for young Black women[168] – the opportunity to grow intellectually and to step "into a world of White power and privilege."[169] In addition, through their education, they approached white female privilege, and as they received the same education as the white elite, they had leverage in arguing for their equality and aptitude. Also, they joined a community whose education could compete with a feature of white male privilege: an elite education. Negative experiences during college seemed to ultimately not have discouraged Black women since as a group, they performed outstandingly well in postgraduate work and careers as professionals.[170] On campus and in American society, these women worked to claim their place.

Women found access to an elite education that they could basically not find elsewhere, based on curriculum and the campus facilities, as shown above. The Colleges were attractive for example, to white Southern women, who benefited from their transformative college experience in the North. While opportunities to work toward bachelor's degrees for women were expanding in this period, the Northern Women's Colleges remained the top institutions for women in the country – the best education was not found in the South.[171] The reputation of excellence and as the leading Women's Colleges attracted about one thousand white students

[161] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 157; Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 158.
[162] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 158.
[163] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 158.
[164] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 158.
[165] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 158.
[166] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 720-722.
[167] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 720-722.
[168] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 720-722.
[169] Perkins, "The African American Female Elite," 722.
[170] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 228.
[171] Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*, 7.

from the South before the First World War.[172] Also, as Joan Marie Johnson found, "in the South a diploma from a college in the North was an even more significant indicator of achievement than a local degree."[173] Southern women, too, found distinction and leverage in their degrees. Also, the entire experience aided Southern women. During their studies, they experienced their intellectuality and that of other women on campus, they learned about the contributions they could make in the public sphere and professional life, the fulfillment these contributions could bring, and that they can be alternative to marriage and motherhood.[174] Also, they learned that as women they were worthy of political participation and citizenship.[175] As the examples of racism have shown, Southern women made this experience as part of the general group in power, though. Going to college in the North presented a transformative experience for women and by putting into practice the confidence they learned, for example, by volunteering, they acted as New Women in the South after graduation around the turn of the century.[176] The examples show that the Seven Sisters experience and education powerfully changed women who had been socialized in more conservative environments. A benefit of this change lies in the expansion of their understanding of gender roles and their own paths.

The fact that founders sought excellence as part of the distinction of the new colleges they endowed, excluded many women but it benefited the actual students on multiple levels. At these colleges, they got access to excellent facilities and secondary-level preparatory training, the chance to explore their academic interests and pursue them to their potential. Also, the reputation of excellence attracted students to campus – with access and exclusion very closely connected, as 'elite' was also the grounds on which racist practices were justified and carried out. In general, their liberal arts preparation equal to men, made women competitive in the professional sphere, even if the opportunities were scarce at first and even though the colleges did not do much to support them or their career or augment professions. Studying at one of the Seven Sisters included a rich social and cultural life, which was conceptualized and constructed by founders in a way that, too, had opposite effects of its intent.

2 Femininity and Domesticity

Campus Locations and Structures

Concerns for imaginations of femininity led the founders of the first prominent Women's Colleges to choices that would redirect student experience in an empowering direction. Vassar's location, for example, was intended to shelter women from what would be perceived as moral corruption, enabled athletic life and culture on campus.[177] The setting was chosen in a rural environment to keep women away from improper urban distractions and instead house them in quiet, harmonious and beautiful nature.[178] Thanks to the location outside of the city (New York City), the campus grounds were suitable for what was called "'play grounds,'" physical and athletic education, walking and gardening, to name a few, which was intended.[179] The "play grounds" could have been fields for sports, but certainly not 'unfeminine' activities. The intention behind providing for athletics was likely at odds with the

[172] Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*, 3; Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*, 7.
[173] Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*, 3.
[174] Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*, 4–5.
[175] Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*, 4–5.
[176] Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*, 4; Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*, 6.
[177] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 32–33.
[178] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 32–33.
[179] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 32–33.

enthusiasm and student culture that developed when women's colleges became early sites of women's athletics.[180]

Athletics was an activity in the context of which students transgressed boundaries of gender imaginations, breaking with those of femineity exactly because they were in an location that was supposed to preserve gender images. A prominent example is women's basketball at Smith College. In 1892, Senda Berenson joined Smith as a physical educator, after the so-called Alumnae Gymnasium, a physical education and administration center, described by the college as "one of the largest, most well-equipped gymnasiums in the country" based on contemporary standards, opened.[181] Again, the quest for excellence surfaces here, two decades after Smith's founding. Berenson encountered the rules for (male) basketball in a magazine,[182] and by the Spring of 1896 had her students play matches and involved them in adopting the rules for their student teams.[183] At the end of the decade Berenson had formally established the game for women through her work.[184] After Berenson had introduced the game to her students, other physical education classes soon adopted it across the United States.[185] The introduction of basketball impacted not only physical education class, but campus culture and gender habitus and image. The new game sparked immense enthusiasm and excitement among students, as their letters and photos of the campus championship reveal.[186] The photograph below shows the class team of 1895 and highlights the new behavior the team sports introduced: some students played in loose-fitting, casual attire and had rolled up their sleeves. Their poses show both comradery, physical confidence, and a sense power, as for example, the arm gestures display. The team members rest their arms on each other's bodies or cross their arms in front of their chest, making fierce eye contact with the camera. The gender image in the photo is not one that is customary, rather, women took on poses that would be commonly associated with power and manliness, especially at the time. In addition, even though the rules for basketball were adopted, students engaged in a sport that was still faced-paced contact sports and played in competitive settings. The women players thus broke imaginations of women as fragile, weak, or passive and display to themselves and the campus community physical capability and confidence. It is further likely, that the sport impacted organizational structures in the extracurricular or physical education realms, by introducing a team sport with rule sets. Lefkowitz Horowitz argued that through "aggressive sport," students experienced teamplay and winning.[187] The new gender images and experiences from basketball were important in their novelty, but also because they played an important role on women's college campuses overall. Lefkowitz Horowitz summarized the culture around basketball around the turn of the century: "College women played rough, competed keenly, and cheered passionately."[188]

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[180] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 47; Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 47.
[181] Janet Woolum, "Senda Berenson (Basketball Innovator)," in *Outstanding Women Athletes: Who They Are and How They Influenced Sports in America*, ed. Janet Woolum (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1998), 87; Kate Lee, *A Smith First*: *The New Game of Basketball* (2010), accessed March 2, 2021, https://www.smith.edu/video/smith-first-new-game-basketball.
[182] Woolum, "Senda Berenson (basketball innovator)," 87.
[183] Woolum, "Senda Berenson (basketball innovator)," 87.
[184] Woolum, "Senda Berenson (basketball innovator)," 87., Berenson's work included publications and multiple publications and chair of the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education (AAAPE)'s Committee on Basketball for Girls.
[185] Woolum, "Senda Berenson (basketball innovator)," 86.
[186] Lee, *A Smith First*.
[187] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 163.
[188] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 159.

Figure 2: „Class of 1895 Basketball team on floor, Smith College, 1893." Smith College Archives.[189]

The example shows the intent behind the campus location to shelter women, to preserve gender images, and to provide spaces for physical activity at the same time[190] was impossible to come true simultaneously as athletics a campus culture that broke gender images and disseminated them.

The provisions for domesticity made in residential life at Smith College became the catalyst for student social culture. Residential concepts also actively expressed traditional gender roles and family structures with the intent of protecting femininity at Smith, as Lefkowitz Hororwitz' research shows: The founders of Smith College were able to draw on the experience of Vassar and the emergence of student culture, also at Western Massachusetts male colleges, such as Amherst.[191] This culture seemed like an aspect they tried to avoid. Smith students were supposed to be feminine and protected and still within the reach of the patriarchy.[192] The founders opted for a city-adjacent campus and a building system of multiple "cottages" and thereby deliberate departures from Mount Holyoke's rural setting and central

[189] Unknown, Class of 1895 Basketball team on floor, Smith College, 1893., 1893, Record ID 1344, Smith College Archives.
[190] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 32–33.
[191] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 68.
[192] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 68.

building structure to socialize students.[193] The women were to be living in familial settings embedded in the contemporary patriarchal context in these cottages as part of the town of Northampton.[194] They would thus – founders expected – not inclined to develop distinct female campus cultures, strong-mindedness, emotional connections, and potentially radical ideas.[195] In practice, for their leisure time, Smith students enjoyed considerable freedom as they ventured into the town and exercised around campus.[196] They were roaming in what historian Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz called "heterosocial culture of village life," however.[197] The cottage system in practice gave students ways to organize and form social groups – in contrast to its intent. Residential life in the cottages soon developed a culture removed from the idea of domesticity, family structures, and from the image Smith sought to portray to the public.[198] Student admissions exceeded the room available in on-campus housing.[199] Unlike Vassar and Wellesley, whose students lived in the local communities, Smith kept the cottage structure and housed students in rooming houses off campus – at the turn of the century as much as half the student population.[200] The college oversaw off-campus houses, but housing was inconsistent.[201] Even students operated houses, which were de facto sorority houses, even if they did not carry the name.[202] Although the social structures created by students in housing could mean exclusion,[203] it seems that overall, the cottages gave students a way to organize. In this way, the "domestic vision of cottages linked to town and church"[204] was inverted by its very structure.

Contrary to the physical structures, the display of separate spheres, gendered hierarchies and roles on campus provided a real barrier. In the early years, students often experienced gender disparities in institutional leadership at these colleges, a perpetuation of female domesticity and passivity. On the administrative side, college president positions were held by men at Vassar and Smith – for the latter, it took a century before a woman would preside over the college.[205] Lady principals at Vassar and heads of houses at Smith were a female presence[206] but not at the top of the hierarchical structure. Exceptionally, Durant appointed Ada L. Howard for (first) president of Wellesley College (1875), but wielded most of the power himself.[207] On the academic side, Smith's male president Clark L. Seelye impacted the standing of female faculty: male and female faculty were hired, but his tenure left female faculty relatively weaker than male.[208] At Vassar, men received all but one significant professorships and female faculty (except for three women) had lower status, were limited by their duties for student oversight and as examples shows, in their personal liberties.[209] The first generations of students at

[193] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 70–71.
[194] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 70–71.
[195] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 75; Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 70–71; Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 70–71.
[196] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 80.
[197] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 80.
[198] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 153.
[199] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 153.
[200] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 153.
[201] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 153.
[202] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 154.
[203] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 155.
[204] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 153.
[205] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 48; Boas, *Woman's Education Begins*, 228–29.
[206] Boas, *Woman's Education Begins*, 228–29.
[207] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 48; Boas, *Woman's Education Begins*, 228–29; Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 47.
[208] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 71-72, 213.
[209] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 40.

Women's Colleges thus were still often exposed to male-dominated. Their role in shaping women's paths in academia would soon change course, however.

Some notable concepts actually opposed the traditional gender images of female domesticity and separate spheres. Matthew Vassar had been aware of the importance of women in the faculty; he ultimately decided to offer professorships for women, so as to give students objectives for their future as educated women.[210] Durant at Wellesley built a fully female world, mirroring Mount Holyoke's community in its composition and the professor's presence in residential settings, while giving them more prestige which built their status for the future.[211] By the early twentieth century, Women's Colleges played an important role for women faculty, compensating some needs left unfulfilled at large coeducational universities.[212] The Colleges earned reputations for specialized areas such as astronomy at Vassar, mathematics and geology at Bryn Mawr and chemistry and zoology at Mount Holyoke.[213]At the beginning of the century, female domesticity had been challenged within the faculty, but in this case, founders and founding gender likely had only a small impact. Filling positions of power with men means reinforcement of feminine domesticity, despite the wins on the academic side in the early 1900s, it provides the exception among the other examples presented before in that they have often developed closer to their intent with regard to gender images and roles. In sum, the concepts to preserve and construct female domesticity in campus location and structures generally followed the trend of preserving the separate spheres of men and women. The implementation of gendered concepts in location and structures provoked the development of their defiance. In addition to campus structures and locations, this was the case for extracurriculars, as well.

Extracurriculars

To preserve and promote traditional gender images and roles, some colleges in the Seven Sisters group were founded with a rich extra curriculum, for a feminine balance to the traditionally male liberal arts.[214] The conceptualization of the extracurriculars lay the foundation for a rich student culture, through which students defied gender norms and images and found empowerment.

The background to the conceptualization lies, again, in earlier curricular debates involving Mount Holyoke. Its combination of a curriculum close to the training of men for the professions and the extracurriculars as a feminine element provided an acceptable model for women's academic training.[215] Lyon, with the help of fellow educator Zilpah Grant, raised considerable funds from their own rural, in today's understanding, lower-middle class milieu and offered education to their female community in exchange for participation in domestic chores to keep overhead costs low.[216] Notably, these domestic tasks were not part of the students' curriculum.[217] The curriculum, according to Lyon, would educate women to teach *and* keep house; the latter informed by the discipline the women would learn.[218] Outside the

[210] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 37–38.
[211] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 55.
[212] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 144.
[213] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 144.
[214] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 153–54.
[215] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 153–54.
[216] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 20; Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 19; Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 143; Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 148.
[217] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 139; Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 148.
[218] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 154.

classroom, students would engage in what was considered feminine activity, catering to early nineteenth-century New England visions of womanhood.[219] The balance provided by these distinctly female extra-curricular activities disproved anxieties over women's collegiate education and thus legitimized the larger enterprise in society.[220] Anxieties stemmed women potentially leaving the sphere of the home to enter learning for the professions that would ultimately lead to positions of power in society.[221] Mount Holyoke was successful as an institution and inspired Women's Colleges in the East that could adopt a rigorous curriculum and "safely" leave feminine activities outside coursework.[222]

In the early history of the Seven Sisters, it was the extracurriculars that did exactly not preserve traditional womanhood. Instead, they provided the settings in which students learned, embodied and tested different roles that often broke with gendered conventions. Among those extracurricular organizations and activities that decisively shaped life on campus, such as activities as drama and athletics,[223] two avenues of inverting gender images stand out: leadership in organizations and role play on campus. The groups that engaged in extracurricular activities such as literary societies along with debate and drama clubs grew into larger organizations that shaped campus life, yet with often exclusive and divisive structures.[224] Here, the all-around girl reappeared: On the real-life college campus, this group was dominant in organizations, to which they dedicated much of their time.[225] They also served their class, "the college as a whole," and "set the public tone of student life."[226] In the general social life of the college they were competitors to the most prominent, what may today be referred to as 'popular' students, in the early history of the women's colleges called 'swells."[227] The organizations taught all-around girls, and certainly other student participants, too, leadership skills, service, organizational skills, gave them public roles, budgets to manage and more while creating ties of loyalty.[228] By having and learning executive responsibilities, students took on roles and thus also behaviors that were usually ascribed to men in their society – "the 'all-around girl' of the women's college learned how to act as a man."[229] Participation in organizations was one way that the intent of preserving separate male and female spheres and images was entirely inverted from the original intent of extra-curriculars by women taking on leadership roles.

Another type of experience in which women left traditional gender images in the extracurriculars was through role play. The extra-curriculars overall gave women a chance to wear different attire depending on the activity.[230] Drama club activities were something all almost all students participated in in some way: Performances became so crowded that attendance had to be regulated, at Smith for example.[231] At these plays, student audiences would view actresses who embodied different genders in their roles.[232] Here, both images of gender were reversed, changed, embodied, and viewed. Role play was even transferred to social life in

[219] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 140.
[220] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 153–54; Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 154.
[221] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 153–54.
[222] Turpin, "The Ideological Origins of the Women's College," 157.
[223] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 159.
[224] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 152–53.
[225] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 156.
[226] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 156.
[227] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 156.
[228] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 159.
[229] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 163.
[230] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 162.
[231] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 162.
[232] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 162.

events and social interaction, sometimes with sensual tendencies.[233] Overall, power dynamics characterized social relationships up to sexual encounters. [234] The breaking of gender conventions via role play thus took different embodied forms up to what could be its most heightened form: homo-erotic settings. Role playing, enabled and encouraged through extracurriculars, thus adds very much to the inversion of gender images and norms that were originally intended by the extracurricular and overall college concept.

This experience is important in that it is not only unintended[235] but also unique. The on-campus experience at Women's Colleges was exclusive to the all-female campus, as the sharp contrast of the coeducational setting shows. While the broader introduction of coeducation was an important step toward access for women in higher education, it also meant inequality for women in coeducational institutions.[236] The larger public enthusiasm for women's admission stands in sharp contrast to their on-campus experience which was marked by pressure to pursue certain classes and programs and to disregard entire fields.[237] Not only was their intellectual freedom and development hindered, but women would also have difficulties to join the campus community as full members. [238] In reaction, women built their own extracurricular structure, with both formal and informal activities thereby defying the male-dominant college organization.[239] This defiance of the coeducational, male system is significant, as it is a display of determination and organizational skills that women developed in discouraging environments. Nevertheless, the early coeducational experience was hardly one in which women could develop their full talent and potential, and it highlights that access is a prerequisite but does not guarantee a fulfilling education; it highlights the importance of experience.

Extra-curriculars stand out in Lefkowitz Horowitz's work for students to break sexual, social and visual gender conventions and learn leadership and organizational skills, as well as self-confidence.[240] It is striking that these activities, conceptualized specifically to keep students engaged in feminine gendered activities amongst themselves actually brought out the opposite. Lefkowitz Horowitz found that college life is different from the intention in the building structure and design.[241] I have argued that it is the entire conceptualization of the early women's colleges that actually caused an inversion of the gender images constructed and formulated into it.

Historian John R. Thelin argued for the hostile environment of coeducation, women students or faculty then built their own on-campus in despite being treated badly, not as a result.[242] My argument for the early history of the Seven Sisters operates in reverse: The contrary direction that gender imaginations and roles took happened *because* of the ways the concepts were laid out. Gender imaginations and roles of male power and influence, their leadership in public and economic life and domestic visions for women were supposed to be preserved by deliberate choices – ultimately, the vision was inverted for most cases. This inversion meant a new female image, confidence, academic aptitude. It grew out of and was

[233] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 162-163.
[234] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 167.
[235] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 167.
[236] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 182.
[237] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 97–98.
[238] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 97–98.
[239] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 97–98.
[240] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 163.
[241] Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 167.
[242] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 182–83.

enabled by the founding provisions that were supposed to preserve domestic femininity and male power.

Outlook: A Glance at the Seven Sisters and their Provisions throughout the Twentieth Century

There are many more ways to explore the turns the founding and early history of the Seven Sisters took and whom and what it inspired. Throughout the twentieth century, a lot of examples of how students have stepped out of gendered roles even after college or fought for emancipation come to mind. Even if not always in favor at first, students of Women's Colleges in the Seven Sisters group organized for suffrage activism (for example at Vassar) and from 1913 on marched in suffrage parades in the prominent East Coast cities, holding up banners that read the names of their schools.[243] Further, the liberal arts as a general model have persisted and stood up to test of ensuring the equality of women's education, for example in mid-century debates surrounding the purpose of women's education and the idea to adopt curricula for women that include specific preparation for domestic tasks.[244] Today, most of the Seven Sister Colleges have retained their all-female campuses, standing out to women who seek the distinct women's college experience.[245] Overall, the founding ideas that inspired the conceptualization of the Seven Sisters were not least the foundation and inspiration for feminist outcomes.

[243] Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 112–13.
[244] See chapter "The Female Paradox: Higher Education for Women, 1945—63," in Fass, *Outside In*, 156–88.
[245] Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 346-347 Thelin gives Vassar as the example of a Women's College who adopted coeducation and thus a strategy that proved less successful than retaining the all-female model.

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