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GIVING VOICE TO STUDENT AND ALUMNAE OPPOSITION DURING THE
TRANSITION TO COEDUCATION BY A COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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I read this dissertation so many times that I lost my ability to review it for readability and correctness. My "inheritable" daughter, Angela Brooke White, served as my copy editor and proofreader while also pursuing her Ph.D. at the University of Colorado. Her editorial comments, although sometimes tough, helped me produce a better dissertation.

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Abstract

GIVING VOICE TO STUDENT AND ALUMNAE OPPOSITION DURING THE TRANSITION TO COEDUCATION BY A COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

By Rebecca Jean Grandstaff Clarke, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2011.

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This dissertation provides insight into students' and alumnae's experiences during the transition and legal proceedings as their former college for women transitioned to coeducation. Previous research on the transition of single-sex colleges to coeducation has primarily examined the process from an organizational perspective. This study focuses on the participants' personal and intimate involvement in these events.

A phenomenological approach was utilized (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). Data collection was through in-depth interviews with three students who recently graduated from the college and acted as the plaintiffs during the legal challenge and four alumnae who served as leaders of the opposition group funding the legal challenge. Data analyses lead to the development of textural and structural themes which described the essence of the experience.

The results of the study indicated that the admission of men changed the campus and classroom environment at this former women's college. Classroom dynamics changed; campus crime increased; and the students engaged in acts of physical confrontation and intimidation. Aspects of the students' and alumnae's experiences left an indelible impression on their lives. For the students, participating in the student protests over the coeducation decision was a transformative experience, resulting in a stronger sense of social activism. The experience of supporting and funding the legal challenge ultimately caused the alumnae to lose faith in the educational and legal systems.

The study has implications for college boards and administrators considering coeducation, for alumnae considering a legal challenge to a decision by their alma mater to transition to coeducation, and for women interested in enrolling in a college for women.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The higher education of women in America has for centuries been marked by controversy and change (Lucas, 1994; Miller-Bernal, 2000; Solomon, 1985). The first significant controversy centered on whether women were physically, mentally, and emotionally capable of learning at the collegiate level (Clarke, 1875; Newcomer, 1959). A second major controversy in the higher education of women focused on the physical and social environments in which women should earn a college degree, and this remains a subject of debate even today (Clarke, 1875; Horowitz, 1993). Through these controversies and others, the higher education of women has ignited a range of emotions, running the gamut from fascination and admiration to anger and hostility from the public, politicians, educational leaders, parents, alumni, and students.

Women's colleges were a widely available educational option at the beginning of the 20th century. According to Newcomer (1959), there were 70 women-only colleges in the United States in 1870; by 1930, this number had grown to 212. In the early 1960s, this number reached approximately 300 (Women's College Coalition, as cited in Harwarth, Maline, & DeBra, 1997). However, in the 1960s, the number of women's colleges began to drastically decline. Chamberlain (1988) reported that between 1960 and 1980, 55 women's colleges became coeducational, 5 merged with other colleges, and 81 had fates unknown, but they were presumed to have ceased operations. In 1961, Sarah Gibson Blanding, President of Vassar College,

predicted that “no more than ten [women’s colleges] will be functioning in 2061” (Hechinger, 1961, p. 69). Over 50 years later, the number of women’s colleges in the United States has declined to less than one-sixth of the 1960s number. In the year 2005-2006, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2005) listed 53 women’s colleges in the United States.

Since 2005, there has been further decline in the number of colleges for women. Immaculata University and Lesley College became coeducational in 2005. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, H. Sophie Newcomb Memorial College, the women’s college within Tulane University’s coordinate system of education, became an institute within Tulane University in 2006. In 2007, Regis College and Randolph-Macon Woman’s College transitioned to coeducation. Marymount College closed and Douglass College of Rutgers University merged with coeducational Rutgers College (“Women’s Colleges in the United States,” n.d.). At the current rate of demise, Blanding’s prediction may come far sooner than 2061.

Today, coeducation is the most prevalent institutional structure in higher education (Astin, 1977; Miller-Bernal, 2004). Women represent 57.3% of all students enrolled in college; however, only 1.3% of female graduates receive their degrees from a college for women (“Enrollment Highlights,” 2008; Jacobs, 1996). Recent annual surveys of female Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) takers indicate that 3% to 5% are willing to consider attending a women-only college. Today’s college applicants prefer a coeducational environment and perceive a women’s college as outdated (Worden, 2006).

The response to the demise of all-female colleges, particularly for those schools transitioning to coeducation, has been intense and resolute from both students and alumnae. Student response tends to be emotional and collective. Students often sign petitions, stage

protest rallies, boycott classes (Miller-Bernal & Poulson, 2006; Peril, 2006; Thomas, 1991) and in today's world of electronic communication, upload protest videos to YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, or other social networks and websites. Alumnae, with their greater numbers, write letters to influential administrators and board members and like students, sign petitions. Additionally, alumnae, through the power of the purse, have the financial resources to influence decisions of their alma mater (Miller-Bernal & Poulson, 2006; Poulson & Miller-Bernal, 2004; Thomas, 1991). Because of this, students and alumnae often join forces to express their dissent when the decision is made for an all-women's college to become a coeducational institution. One primary example of this is Wells College ("Save Our Sisterhood," 2004; Wogan, 2005). In response to the 2004 announcement to become coeducational, students and alumnae from Wells College took an unprecedented approach to express their opposition. Students, with the financial support of alumnae, parents, and other supporters, used the legal system unsuccessfully as a means to sustain the all-female identity and history of their college.

This current research study focused on another such legal challenge: the recent transition by a private women's college (PWC) to coeducation. The topic was examined from the perspective of students who filed an alumnae-funded lawsuit to prevent the admission of male students until the then freshmen class had graduated.

Overview of the Study and Literature Review

To show relevance and give context to the transition by this college for women, it is important to understand the historical and cultural perception of female-only colleges. Women's colleges have been described as "nunneries, places for wallflowers, schools for rich girls, hotbeds of feminism or radical lesbianism, or institutions of loose women or man haters"

(Peterson, as cited in Miller-Bernal, 2000, p. xv). Early feminists, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, argued that single-sex schools were unnatural (Diamond & Kimmel, 2004). Baker (1976) viewed women's colleges as anachronistic institutions, soon to become obscure, and whose past accomplishments would be remembered only by sentimental alumnae. M. Carey Thomas, first female president of Bryn Mawr, worked passionately to create a highly regarded women's college whose reputation for excellence and mission as an all-women's college continues, although she predicted the college of the future would be coeducational (Thomas, as cited in Baker, 1976, p. 16).

Other researchers (Miller-Bernal, 1989, 1993; Rice & Hemmings, 1988; Smith, 1990; Tidball, 1973, 1985, 1986; Tidball, Smith, Tidball, & Wolf-Wendel, 1999; Whitt, 1994) argue that women's colleges offer a unique and beneficial educational structure, providing women with a supportive learning environment, opportunities to develop leadership skills, encouragement to pursue nontraditional fields of study, and appropriate role models. By reviewing the work of Tidball, a respected researcher in the field of single-sex education for women, Miller-Bernal (2000) "concluded that women who graduate from women's colleges are about twice as likely as graduates of coeducational colleges to become leaders in their fields, to receive their doctorates in science, or to enter medical school" (p. 212). Riordan (1994) found that graduates of female-only colleges earn more income and attain higher occupational prestige than women who attend coeducational institutions.

Coeducation allowed the sexes to interact and develop relationships based on mutual respect and common interests in a structured environment. Since segregation of the sexes did not exist beyond the boundaries of a college campus, it was perceived as unrealistic to create such an

environment during a 4 to 5-year span of a young person's life (Baker, 1976; Clarke, 1875; Horowitz, 1993). Today, as in the past, educators and researchers in the higher education of both sexes assert that men gain more than women from a coeducational learning environment (Miller-Bernal & Poulson, 2004). Men display better behavior, improved morale, and stronger academic performance in the presence of female classmates, and as a result, women students are often overlooked.

Research on the experiences of women in coeducational institutions reported an environment less supportive of their learning experience (Canada & Pringle, 1995; Hall & Sandler, 1982; Krupnick, 1985). Women tend to speak less in class, men often dominate classroom discussions and attract attention from faculty, sexist humor is more prevalent, and there is less interaction with and encouragement of female students by their professors. In contrast, research by Stoecker and Pascarella (1991) and the National Survey of Student Engagement for 2007 (Indiana University, 2007), a nation-wide collegiate survey, reported that coeducation makes no significant difference on learning or outcomes for women students.

Colleges for women, along with all-male colleges, faced their biggest challenge to survival beginning in the 1960s (Harwarth et al., 1997; Miller-Bernal & Poulson, 2004). During this time, a period of social and political unrest gripped the nation. Citizens protested the country's involvement in the Vietnam War and marched against the unjust treatment of Blacks in America. The social and cultural mood of the country called for integration in all forms, a coming together by race and gender. Political movements changed our national character as the United States became a more egalitarian society (Miller-Bernal, 2004). Higher education did not escape these changes. Single-sex institutions were increasingly seen as old-fashioned and

socially unacceptable. Students wanted coeducation. Small, private single-gender educational institutions were most vulnerable to the changes being demanded and they responded in ways to ensure their long-term survival.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, most prestigious men's colleges transitioned to coeducation (Miller-Bernal, 2004; Rice, 1991). Shortly after top-tier schools such as Princeton, Yale, Williams, and Amherst began admitting women, prestigious women's colleges followed their lead and began admitting men. Ironically, Vassar, recognized by many as the first women's college in the country, was at the forefront of the coeducational trend (Miller-Bernal, 2004; Solomon, 1985). Many colleges, both men's and women's, transitioned to coeducation because they saw the change as socially acceptable and politically correct. For many financially strapped single-sex colleges, coeducation was the means to economic survival (Miller-Bernal, 2004). However, clinging to the mantra, "better dead than coed" (Peril, 2006, p. 344), some colleges elected to close their doors rather than change the gender orientation of their educational mission and student body. In the past five decades, men's colleges have become almost extinct and women's colleges can be considered an "endangered species" (Miller-Bernal & Poulson, 2006, p. ix).

Rationale for the Study

A private women's college (PWC) located in the southeastern section of the United States was the site for this study. PWC, a leader in the field of higher education for women in the South, opened its doors on September 14, 1893 with 77 students and 12 faculty members (Cornelius, 1951). The first president of PWC firmly supported the higher education of women and believed that women of the South had been deprived of an appropriate education. More

specifically, he believed the women of PWC should receive the same educational opportunities as those offered the male students at an affiliated college for men in the same state. The prospectus for the opening session stated that the purpose of PWC was to give the women of the state an educational opportunity equal to that offered by the best colleges for men and where women could learn in harmony and attain the highest ideals of womanhood (Cornelius, 1951, p. 31).

During its 115-year history, PWC established itself as one of the first nationally recognized institutions of higher education for women in the South, a strong reputation that continues today. PWC has a long history of cherished traditions and progressive education (Cornelius, 1951). The college now faces one of its greatest challenges as it transitions from a college for women to a coeducational institution.

Although the Board of Trustees (BOT) began considering coeducation in the fall 2005, students and alumnae were not informed of this possibility until August 2006. On September 9, 2006, the BOT announced PWC would transition from a liberal arts college to a “global honors” college and immediately began recruiting men for admission in fall 2007 (Durette, Pope & Moncure, 2006). This announcement by the BOT ignited a firestorm of student protest. Repeated student rallies were staged, many of which are documented electronically on YouTube. Additionally, nine female students took a rare response to the BOT’s decision. On October 6, 2006, this ennead, with representation by a prominent attorney, filed suit in the local Circuit Court on the grounds of breach of contract. These students, now plaintiffs, sought “an injunction to Plaintiffs, enjoining further implementation of the [Plan] for at least three years, until those Plaintiffs who are presently freshmen graduate from [PWC] in 2010” (p. 9). The plaintiffs

asserted: “When [they] accepted PWC’s offers of admission, paid tuition and other fees and registered for classes, a contract was formed between them and the school, which, *inter alia*, included the promise, both express and implied, that if Plaintiffs paid tuition and fees and enrolled at PWC, they would receive a 4-year liberal arts education at a women’s college”

(p. 6). These plaintiffs believed they had been legally promised an education at a women’s college and they intended to hold PWC to its obligation.

In the early stages of their legal challenge, the lower court did not rule in the plaintiffs’ favor; however, these nine young women were not deterred. The plaintiffs appealed the ruling of the lower courts and on September 21, 2007, the state’s Supreme Court announced its decision to hear their appeal. Through their lead attorney, the plaintiffs’ case was argued before the state’s Supreme Court on April 14, 2008. On June 6, 2008, the state’s Supreme Court issued its decision, affirming the judgment of the Circuit Court to allow coeducation.

Since the filing of the lawsuit and throughout the legal process, this ennead has not publicly uttered a word. Every word written and spoken on the subject has been by and through their attorneys. This research study attempted to gain a more thorough understanding of the rationale, motivation, and experiences of these young women to preserve the mission and history of PWC; the changes, if any, in their college environment with the introduction of male students; and the potential impact of the adversarial relationship created by their lawsuit on their interactions with classmates and faculty; and their overall educational experience. This study also examined the experiences of the alumna-leaders, who funded the legal challenge, during their years as a student at PWC and the impact of the lawsuit and coeducation on their subsequent relationship with their alma mater.

Previous research by Miller-Bernal (2000) and with Poulson (2004, 2006) on the transition of single-sex colleges to coeducation has mostly examined the process from an organizational perspective. Little has been written from the perspective of the students enrolled at a college transitioning to coeducation. At most, previous research has included brief quotes by student government or student newspaper representatives on the coeducation process, as if these students were expressing the thoughts and feelings of the entire student body. This research concentrated on the transition to coeducation from the students' perspective and gave voice to a group of young women at PWC and the women who encouraged and supported them.

Since this lawsuit is only the second of its type to be filed in the fight over coeducation, insight into the process from the students' perspective may influence other students considering a similar course of action in the future. College boards and administrators may gain insight into ways to ward off a legal challenge to a coeducation decision. Legal action is a costly, time-consuming, and disruptive course of action that many parties may wish to avoid. In addition, this research illuminates the impact of the transition to coeducation on the educational experience of the students involved in the change. This study may add to the literature by filling a gap in the current research on the transition of a women's college to coeducation by focusing on the students' experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of a group of students before, during, and after their college's transition to coeducation through their personal accounts and recollections. The response of these young women to the announcement that their college was transitioning to coeducation was unusual for this age group considering the limited number

of student-plaintiff lawsuits involving coeducation. Litigation is a highly-structured, logical, and rational presentment of objective arguments. When college students face change with which they strongly disagree, they typically react by signing petitions, staging student rallies, or as a more extreme measure, by shutting down a campus building (Miller-Bernal & Poulson, 2006; Peril, 2006; Thomas, 1991). This ennead undertook a mature, protracted, expensive, and public approach to resolving their opposition to a major decision approved by the BOT. Their ultimate fate rested with the state's Supreme Court and the Court's decision which all parties must abide.

Research Questions

Although their lawsuit alleged breach of contract, this research examined the underlying reasons for their course of action and their experiences during the legal process and the transition to coeducation. Research (Horowitz, 1993; Tidball et al., 1999; Whitt, 1994; Wolf-Wendel, 1998) has shown that women's colleges provide a unique learning environment and that the introduction of men into the environment changes the dynamics of the educational experience (Canada & Pringle, 1995).

The primary research question for the students was: How do students at a private women's college describe the transition from single-sex education to coeducation? A secondary question for the students and alumnae involved in the legal challenge was: How do students and alumnae involved in a legal challenge to coeducation at a private women's college describe their experiences?

This study illuminated the students' perceptions on the environment of PWC and the changes, if any, which occurred as a result of coeducation. In addition, the research examined how the adversarial nature of a lawsuit may have affected the relational aspects of their college

experience. The alumna-leaders were questioned about their experiences, perceptions, and memories of attending a college for women and their relationship with their alma mater considering the legal challenge they funded.

Design and Methodology

An emergent design was utilized in this phenomenological study. Phenomenological studies give meaning to a person's experiences. Even in the legal proceedings, the demise of single-sex schools has been described as a phenomenon. The aim of this research was to determine what the experience of the lawsuit and coeducation meant to the students involved. The research approach addressed the "passionate involvement" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 105) of the students and the alumna-leaders in what they experienced. Data were gathered through open-ended interviews with the young women named as the plaintiffs and with the alumna-leaders who funded the legal challenge. Specific questions were posed to all participants; however, participant answers directed me to other or more exploratory questions. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and inductively analyzed for themes and patterns. My intent was to seek information on the participants' thoughts, feelings, opinions, and actions which would provide both intimate details of the experience and robust information and insight into the phenomenon. Although the names of the plaintiffs and alumna-leaders are a matter of public record, their individual identities will be kept confidential in this study so that specific information shared with the researcher cannot be associated with an individual participant.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

An overview of the history of women's higher education in the United States is central to understanding the religious, political, economic, and social influences on the subject over time. Without this insight, the controversy surrounding the education of women, the demise of women-only colleges, and the legal action by nine students at PWC may lack relevance. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to give context to this research project by examining the historic struggles and challenges that existed for women seeking a college education. This chapter will examine (a) the origins of the struggle for formalized education for women, (b) support for women's education, (c) the history and development of both women's colleges and coeducational institutions, and (d) opposition to the higher education of women. This chapter will conclude by reviewing the literature on the values and benefits of attending a college for women and by discussing the recent challenges that faced PWC.

A History of the Higher Education of Women

The inequality of women's rights to education dates back to ancient times (Stock, 1978). Christian religions pointed to the teachings of Apostle Paul when he wrote, "Let the women learn in silence with all subjection" (1 Timothy 2:11, King James Version) as their argument against educating females. However, despite the subordination of women's education over centuries, certain groups of women throughout the world were often privately taught in the home when

admission to institutions of higher education was not allowed. For example, England's Queen Elizabeth I and Italy's Isabella De Medici were learned women, as were many royal and wealthy women throughout history (Murphy, 2008; Stock, 1978; Whitehead; 1999).

Despite the many obstacles present, some early European women received their education in a formal university setting. Peril (2006) reports that women attended and lectured in subjects, including law, medicine, and philosophy, at Italian universities as early as the 12th century. In the 17th century, over 20,000 spectators witnessed Elena Cornaro Piscopia become the first woman to receive a university degree when she was awarded a degree in philosophy from the University of Padua in June of 1678. Whether the crowd cheered or heckled Piscopia's accomplishment is unknown; however, the size of the crowd attests to the public importance of the event. Yet, over a half-century would pass before a second woman, Laura Bassi, received her university degree from the University of Bologna in 1732 (Maschietto, 1978/2007; Peril, 2006).

In the United States, the documented history of higher education began with the establishment of Harvard in 1636. In this context, higher education was an endeavor reserved for the elite males of society. Colleges and universities educated men for the public sphere as clergy and for the professions of law, medicine, and government service. However, since women were confined to the private sphere, or the home, education beyond basic reading and arithmetic and an understanding of the Bible was deemed unnecessary. Since the founding of America, young girls had received rudimentary education in reading, writing, and arithmetic often at the knees of their mothers. Boas (1935/1971) cites an 1819 article in the *Virginia Evangelical and Literary Magazine* that "home, the sphere of a woman, was of too great

importance to be trusted to the ignorant” (p. 62). Their educational options began to expand as young girls gained admission to primary schools, private academies, and secondary schools. With respect to collegiate education for women, many believed that “women needed to know only chemistry enough to keep the pot boiling and geography enough to know the location of the different rooms in her house” (p. 52).

Support for the Higher Education of Women

The struggle for higher education for women was not without male or public support. For example, in 1793, a senior at Brown titled his commencement address, “A Dissertation in Favor of Female Education” (Boas, 1935/1971). Seven years later, Brown’s Philandrian Society officially debated the benefits of allowing females an education equal to that of males (Boas, 1935/1971). George Foster Pierce, who later became the President of Georgia Female College, believed girls were capable of learning and deserved to be taught (Pierce, as cited in Farnham, 1994, p. 11). Proponents of feminist policies lobbied for a classical education for women. In 1825, one such advocate, Gardiner Spring, lawyer turned noted theologian, lent his support: “I know of nothing which a woman may not study and acquire to advantage. . . I would delight to see her plodding her *steady* course through the departments of classical knowledge. Science, history, philosophy, mathematics, and logic – all these women had shown themselves able to master, and all these should be open to them as to their brothers” (Boas, 1935/1971, p. 63). During the 1830s, sermons, newspapers, magazines, and books echoed sentiments in favor of women’s education. *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, a highly popular magazine among women during this time, was a strong advocate of higher education for women (Farnham, 1994).

The History and Development of Women's Colleges and Coeducational Institutions

With the success of upper-class women who attained a classical education, a formal education became a desirable and sought-after experience for middle-class women as well. Not deterred by those opposed to the higher education of women, a number of women's colleges opened during the 19th century. Because women were denied admission to many established colleges, such as Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Amherst, and the Universities of Virginia, Georgia, and North Carolina, proponents for the higher education of women had no choice but to establish institutions of higher learning exclusively for women.

Educational historians question which institution can be counted as the first American college for women. Solomon (1985) recognizes Vassar College, established in 1865, as the first college for women due to its sizable endowment and academic standards. Other researchers credit Elmira College, founded in 1855, or Ripley Female College, which awarded three B.A. degrees in 1866, with this distinction (Boas, 1935/1971; Harwarth et al., 1997). Yet other educational historians cite Georgia Female Institute (now Wesleyan College) founded in 1839 in Macon, Georgia with 90 students (Farnham, 1994; Newcomer, 1959; Peril, 2006). As it granted its first degrees only one year after its opening, many historians claim that the curriculum of Georgia Female Institute lacked sufficient rigor to qualify as the first college for women. The final contender is Tennessee's Mary Sharp College (formerly the Tennessee and Alabama Female Institute) founded in 1853 which offered a course of study that included Latin, Greek, and higher mathematics, the foundation courses of a classical education. Some historians identify Mary Sharp College as the first women's college in the antebellum period (Farnham, 1994, p. 21). Despite the debate by historians over what was the first college for women, it is

apparent that a number of colleges designed for women appeared in the period prior to the Civil War.

The development of women's colleges often occurred as a response to other unrelated historical events, particularly the Civil War (Baker, 1976; Boas, 1935/1971; Farnham, 1994; Harwarth et al., 1997; Newcomer, 1959; Solomon, 1985). As the movement for the higher education of women was gaining momentum, it quickly became overshadowed by more compelling issues, such as slavery, abolition, and voting rights, as the Civil War demanded the nation's attention. Fortunately, an unexpected consequence of the Civil War was its impact on the higher education of women. Previously all-male colleges and universities began to admit women to fill classrooms vacated by male students fighting in the Union and Confederate armies. The women provided otherwise lost revenue to the schools and proved to college administrators the women's ability to acquire a classical education. Subsequent to the Civil War, many of these institutions continued to admit women.

Another way women's colleges expanded during the Civil War was through federal legislation and state funding (Miller-Bernal, 2004; Newcomer, 1959; Solomon, 1985). Recognizing the need for military leaders during a time of war, Senator Justin Morrill of Vermont reintroduced previously vetoed legislation seeking the establishment of land-grant institutions. The Morrill Act of 1862 called for the creation of land-grant or state colleges whose curriculum would promote the study of agriculture, military tactics, and mechanical arts, but not to the detriment of a liberal or classical education. These colleges would educate the sons and daughters of the industrial classes for a professional life. Congress passed Morrill's bill and President Lincoln signed it into law on July 2, 1862. Within 2 months of its passage, Iowa

became the first state to accept the terms of the Morrill Act and within nine years, 36 states had followed Iowa's lead (Richter, 1962).

The passage of the Morrill Act proved fortuitous for the nation and the South in particular. Husbands, brothers, and fathers killed during the war were no longer able to shelter and support wives, sisters, and daughters. Without family support and with fewer men available as marriage prospects, many women needed to become self-reliant and self-supporting. As land-grant colleges opened throughout the country, women sought admission, realizing that education would give them the means to attract a suitable husband, to earn a living, and to contribute to the rebuilding of the country (Farnham, 1994; Solomon, 1985).

After the Civil War, institutions of higher learning thrived, though they were divided along geographic lines. Coeducational institutions were more prevalent in the West and mid-West where economic pressures for survival were stronger and the population reflected a more egalitarian mind-set (Baker, 1976; Miller-Bernal, 2004). In particular, the Universities of Michigan, Wisconsin, Chicago, and Stanford were among those that admitted students of both sexes. West of the Mississippi River, female-only colleges included Mills (1852), Cottey (1884), Rockford (1847), Stephens (1833), and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods (1840). The Northeast, with its greater financial resources, often held to its traditions of single-sex schools, becoming home to a number of newly-created and well-respected women's colleges, including Vassar (1865), Wellesley (1870), Smith (1871), Bryn Mawr (1885), Mount Holyoke (1887), Radcliffe (1893), and Barnard (1889). The conservative traditions of the South created strong public support for separate educational institutions for men and women (Miller-Bernal, 2004). With the scarce resources of a postwar economy, fewer women's institutions of distinction opened south of the

Mason-Dixon Line. Most notably were Women's College of Baltimore (1885, now Goucher College) and Randolph-Macon Woman's College (1891, now Randolph College), the only two southern women's colleges classified as Division A by the U.S. Department of Education in its 1893-1894 Report. Other southern women's colleges included Sophie Newcomb (1886), Spelman (1881), Converse (1889), Brenau (1878), and Agnes Scott (1889).

Postwar opportunities for the higher education of women abounded through a variety of different ways. The growing public perception was that women could contribute to rebuilding a country devastated by war and participate in the westward expansion of the states. The higher education of women was affected directly through legislation, as well as indirectly, through the nation's changing economy. As a result, more coeducational institutions opened, more women's colleges were established, and more women availed themselves of these educational opportunities. The statistics speak for themselves. In 1870, there existed approximately 70 women's colleges and 170 coeducational institutions, enrolling 11,000 young women. Female students represented 21% of all college students and nearly 60% of them were enrolled in colleges exclusively for women. As the 20th century began, these numbers increased to over 85,000 young women comprising 36.8% of the college student population; however, the percentage enrolled in women-only colleges had decreased to 28.6% although women's colleges numbered approximately 184 (Newcomer, 1959). These statistics on women's colleges at the beginning of the century were a foreshadowing of future trends.

Opposition to the Higher Education of Women

As higher education attracted public interest, many pervasive arguments against the higher education of women existed in the 19th and 20th centuries. Arguments based in personal

values, scientific research, historical writings, and political discourse were the predominant critiques. Although there was strong public opposition to the higher education of women, early arguments against women obtaining a college education were often based on personal beliefs and opinions. There was no scientific evidence to indicate that women were incapable of learning at the collegiate level, or at any level for that matter, or that learning would have debilitating consequences for women. Opponents feared that higher education would emasculate women, making them unladylike, sexless, and loud-talking (Boas, 1935/1971, p. 60). Some critics argued that educated women would not be inclined to marry nor suitable as marriage prospects. Fathers and mothers worried their college-bound daughters were predestined to be old maids. Other critics feared educated mothers would neglect their children and husbands (Boas, 1935/1971). Logan Pearsall Smith, cousin to the first female president of Bryn Mawr, reported that his cousin's desire for a college education "had shaken Baltimore like an earthquake – a determination to devote [herself] to a [life] of ill-repute could hardly have created a greater scandal" (Smith, 1939, p. 90).

In contrast to critics who were opposed to the entirety of women's education, some people, such as Thomas Wentworth Higginson, editor of the *Women's Journal*, opposed instead the creation of separate colleges exclusively for women which he viewed as unnatural environments. Higginson asserted, "So forced and unnatural does the whole policy of separation seem to me, that I would willingly send my daughter into a convent for education, for four years, as in a Protestant palace of celibacy called a college" (Higginson, as cited in Horowitz, 1993, p. 96). Detractors also criticized women's colleges for having inadequate endowments, for paying administration and faculty meager salaries, and for providing an inferior education to

women students; however, similar criticism was not directed at men's colleges facing the same conditions (Farnham, 1994; Horowitz, 1993; Newcomer, 1959).

Opponents of higher education for women found an authoritative voice and source of scientific research in a publication by Edward H. Clarke, M.D. In 1875, Clarke, a member of the Massachusetts Medical Society, a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and late professor of Materia Medica in Harvard College, published *Sex In Education; or, A Fair Chance for Girls*. Clarke's book is viewed as the first empirical and authoritative pronouncement on the subject of the higher education of women. Clarke asserted that while women were as capable of learning as men, the physiological differences between men and women should be strongly considered when designing and establishing educational institutions for women, and that the current pedagogical approach of educating women in a manner identical to men produced disastrous outcomes. Furthermore, Clarke proclaimed that ignoring a woman's bodily functions while taxing her brain with study could lead to menstrual problems, hysteria, and worst of all, sterility. Clarke warned that as more women's schools and colleges ignored the physiological needs of women by adopting the educational methods of men's schools and colleges, a larger number of women's college graduates would manifest these pathologies.

Clarke (1875) was not a proponent of coeducation as practiced at the time, which he described as teaching boys and girls the same subject "at the same time, in the same place, by the same faculty, with the same methods, and under the same regimen" (p. 37). Unlike some critics, Clarke was not overly concerned about inappropriate behavior as a part of coeducation since ungentlemanly and unladylike behavior could occur in any setting. Instead, he criticized the experiment of identical coeducation being offered by some of the country's western colleges,

including Iowa College, Antioch College, and University of Michigan, on the grounds that their presidents ignored the potential physiological ills their female students may suffer. Clarke advocated conducting further research and believed that two or three generations of female college graduates of coeducational institutions must be studied before a sound decision on this educational arrangement could be determined.

While Clarke (1875) was influential at the time and while it is rare to read an article or book on the higher education of women without reference to Clarke's publication, his assertions do not hold up today. Clarke's book includes a chapter of seven case studies (conducted during an era when medical practices included leeching and bloodletting) on female college graduates who suffered from various forms of reproductive dysfunction, all of which Clarke attributed to their collegiate education. Modern-day researchers in the medical profession or in the social sciences would completely discredit Clarke's findings based on contemporary standards for conducting research.

In addition to these medical inaccuracies, educational historians often distort Clarke's (1875) writing, implying that he opposed the higher education of women by citing his assertion that it led to serious physiological ailments of a woman's reproductive organs. Not once did Clarke say that women should not be educated. More accurately, he advocated against coeducation, admonished women for unquestioningly following a masculine course of educational study without considering the strengths and uniqueness of their sex, and questioned women's ability to be properly respected in a double-sexed educational institution. These concerns still resonate within coeducational institutions today.

Women's colleges proliferated during the late 19th and early 20th centuries although opposition to the higher education of women continued. This criticism became political when women's colleges and their graduates were branded as unpatriotic and anti-American since college-educated women give birth to fewer children in comparison to the general Anglo-Saxon female population and immigrant women (Johnson & Stutzmann, 1915; Sprague, 1915). Unlike previous criticisms, these claims against women's colleges were grounded in scientific research, however biased and subjective the research may have been. In fact, these beliefs were so pervasive in the political arena that they led the Vice President of the United States to call women's colleges "enemies of the republic" (Coolidge, 1921, p. 4).

During the late 1800s and the early 1900s, the United States experienced an influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe (Tyack, 1974). Sprague (1915) predicted "race suicide" (p. 158) as the fate of Anglo-Saxon Americans if births to this group continued to decline in comparison to births to immigrant groups. Using three data sets—a selected New England village, information on marriage rates from the Massachusetts Agricultural College, and family demographics from the 1914 freshmen class of Amherst College—Sprague calculated that every married woman needed to bear 3.7 children to perpetuate the race and preserve American society. Sprague continued his research by investigating the marriage and birthrates of women who graduated from four prominent women's colleges: Mount Holyoke, Bryn Mawr, Vassar, and Wellesley. Sprague concluded that in comparison to the general population of American women, graduates of these four women's college married less and produced fewer children. Depending on the college and the period reviewed, marriage rates ranged from 33% to 85%; however, it was particularly the birthrate of these college-educated women that alarmed

Sprague. The married graduates of these four women's college had on average less than two children and when calculating the average based on all graduates of these four colleges, it was less than one child per graduate. Sprague was unable to obtain comparable data from coeducational institutions for comparison purposes, though his claims of the women's colleges functioned as proof alone. Sprague proposed the hiring of able-bodied men and more married instructors of both sexes to the faculties of women's colleges and a curriculum that would "teach race survival as a patriotic duty" (p. 162) by offering classes in family and home life. Sprague was unwilling to conclude that coeducation was the solution because coeducational institutions lacked sufficient data in the areas under investigation; however, he warned that if this course of action was not followed by the women's colleges then "the best blood of the American people becomes dried out of the race" (p. 162).

Further research in this area supported Sprague's (1915) findings. Two months later, Johnson and Stutzmann (1915) published their analysis of Wellesley College's birthrate, further confirming the results of Sprague's research. Johnson and Stutzmann blamed the abnormally low birthrate on three reasons: (a) the women-only educational environment, (b) a curriculum that did not encourage homemaking, and (c) restricted opportunities for a normal social life. Johnson and Stutzmann believed that separate colleges for women were eugenically "an historic blunder" (p. 252) and that coeducational institutions where young women could meet young men were the primary solution. In the absence of coeducation, women's colleges needed to be closely affiliated with men's colleges and offer strong programs in domestic science.

Building on this scientific research, women's colleges faced some of their most public criticism in 1921 when Calvin Coolidge, then Vice President of the United States, published an

article entitled, “Enemies Of The Republic – Are The ‘Reds’ Stalking Our College Women?” Clarifying his position, Coolidge said the article was not an indictment of women’s colleges; however, it was a warning. Coolidge believed that women’s colleges provided a sound education but had introduced radical teachings which did not support the American form of government. Coolidge discussed student publications, course offerings, student clubs, and lecture series from various women’s colleges, such as Barnard, Smith, Wellesley, Byrn Mawr, Radcliffe, and Mount Holyoke, that proselytized antagonism, socialism, or “pro-Bolshevist leaning” (p. 5) and reiterated the public opinion that Radcliffe was a “hotbed of Bolshevism” (p. 67). He condemned faculty for fostering these ideas and promoting these activities while evoking academic freedom as their protection. While Coolidge did not object to the study of radical thought or social and economic theory and movements, he believed these subjects should be studied under competent direction and instruction and feared that if women’s colleges continued to teach radical and hostile ideas that the qualities of manhood and womanhood would suffer, and the foundations of civilization would be destroyed.

Throughout the decades, women’s colleges withstood criticism based in personal opinion, medical research, social studies, and political discourse. No research to date has ever concluded that women’s colleges provide no benefits, no value, or an ineffective form of higher education; however, the criticism that a women’s college is an unnatural environment persists even today. Wolf-Wendel (1998) offers a counter to that argument explaining, “Sometimes putting students in an ‘unnatural’ environment is just what they need to eventually deal successfully with the ‘real world’” (p. 178).

The Environment of Women's College

Since their inception, women's colleges have provided a unique learning and social environment for their students. An understanding of the architectural and social structure, from a historical perspective, gives relevance to this environment that continues to be found at today's colleges for women. Horowitz (1993) argues that by examining these early structures, the underlying relationships and opportunities for students at women's colleges can be discovered. Horowitz goes beyond the bricks and books of women's colleges and examines the individuals living in places steeped in tradition. Through these physical and social structures, it is possible to view colleges as complex societies inhabited by students, faculty, and administrators. The models established by the early women's colleges can still be found in modern-day colleges for women.

Both the physical and social design of early colleges often resembled a home (Horowitz, 1993). Limited financial resources typically meant that all college functions, including instruction, housing, and extracurricular activities, were initially contained within one building. In this building, public rooms, such as the parlor, the dining room, the library, and the president's office, were located on the first floor. A central and often grand stairway, a symbolic barrier to family privacy, led to student rooms and faculty apartments on upper floors. Within this home-like building, the social operations of women's colleges were often described as a family. The president, usually a man, served as the father figure who dealt with business matters and the external world. The dean of students or dormitory matron served as the college mother, responsible for overseeing the students' daily lives and ensuring their religious and moral development. The relationship between these two was one of interdependence. Horowitz writes,

“the President was like a widower with a house of girls and needed a governess to oversee their daily routine” (p. 38).

The mother-daughter bond of the home transferred to the student-teacher relationship at college and the natural demands of the home and childrearing were replaced by the order of the clock and rationality at school. Early women’s colleges were concerned not only with the intellectual development of their charges but also with the students’ physical well-being. Because of this, a college physician was often the third position filled when a women’s college was being established. Almost all students participated in calisthenics. Athletic teams in basketball, baseball, and tennis were formed and class competitions were held. Student life was closely monitored. Dining halls served nutritious meals and a curfew system encouraged adequate sleep (Horowitz, 1993). This attention to overall student life and well-being provided a learning environment attractive to many women in which they academically and socially thrived. With certain modifications, women’s colleges have followed this model for decades with great success, and the feeling of family continues to be a characteristic of modern-day women’s colleges. In an unusual approach, women’s colleges perpetuated home and family life while simultaneously shattering the stereotypical notions of femininity. As a result, female college students learned masculine roles of power, cooperation, competition, and leadership (Horowitz, 1993).

Similarities to the historical descriptions of early women’s colleges can be found in current research on all-female institutions of higher education (Tidball et al., 1999; Whitt, 1994). Whitt (1994) conducted a qualitative research study on leadership development at three women’s colleges: Wellesley College, Randolph-Macon Woman’s College, and Westhampton College,

part of the University of Richmond's coordinate system. Interviewing and observing a total of 200 students, faculty, staff, and alumnae, Whitt found that although the three colleges differed in history, selectivity, student demographics, and leadership, they reflected strongly similar institutional missions, philosophies, and practices. Whitt reported that these three women's colleges "were described by their members as educational environments that take women seriously" (p. 201). One faculty member in the study explained, "We consider ourselves to be a community, not an institution. . . . We make decisions the way you would for a family" (p. 201). Furthermore, students described several characteristics related to the leadership style of women. Women leaders employed a consensus approach that valued the input of all involved and showed concern for individual circumstances. Leadership structures were horizontal and provided an egalitarian and participatory form of governance.

In addition to studying institutional leadership, Whitt (1994) also examined the role of student responsibility in modern women's colleges. Whitt reported that these three colleges gave their students responsibility for their lives and education and allowed them to have a significant role in the operation of their institutions. Students served on college committees, including chairing faculty-student committees, enforcing the school's honor code, and devising and monitoring the rules and regulations of dormitory life. As one administrator said, "From 'day one' students are told their voices are important and they're encouraged early on to take a leadership role. . . [they] are empowered. . . and have control over their lives, they feel they can make a difference in the world" (Whitt, 1994, p. 202). Whitt found that students viewed these responsibilities as part of the college's belief in service explaining: "Taking leadership roles and contributing to the quality of life and education at the college were important ways of 'giving

back to a place that has given us so many opportunities,’ and as such, were seen as obligations – important aspects of what it means to be a student at Randolph-Macon, Westhampton, and Wellesley” (p. 202). Based on her research of the three schools studied, Whitt identified five elements that have the greatest impact on leadership development for women students:

- College missions that emphasize the education and development of women;
- High expectations for student achievement;
- Female leaders as role models;
- Extensive opportunities to practice leadership skills; and
- Recognition of social realities and a sense of “giving back” (p. 202).

Although Whitt’s study addressed leadership development at three women’s colleges, the characteristics of a women’s college as intended by their historical design and structure were found in three modern day women’s colleges.

In another study that addressed the environment of women’s colleges, Wolf-Wendel (as cited in Tidball et al., 1999) examined two women’s colleges that have a reputation for and record of graduating successful women, Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania and Bennett College in North Carolina. To approximately 35 administrators, faculty, students, and alumnae at each institution, Wolf-Wendel posed the question, “Why do you think your institution has produced so many successful women graduates?” Consistent with the findings of Whitt (1994), respondents at both institutions used family metaphors to describe the campus environment and the relationship among students, faculty, and administrators.

The family metaphors in Wolf-Wendel’s study (Tidball et al., 1999) were especially strong at Bennett College where administration and faculty discussed their role as surrogate

parents for the students and specific situations where they would badger their students to strive academically, to work diligently, and to achieve success. At Bennett, students related stories of professors coming to their rooms and telling them to “get up and go to class” (p. 89). The students at Bennett described themselves as a “sisterhood” (p. 90), a relational belief that has been ritualized into the campus culture. At the time of Wolf-Wendel’s study, contrary to popular practice, Bennett College continued to practice *in loco parentis* maintaining a curfew and strict rules on smoking and drinking by its students.

The second college in Wolf-Wendel’s study (Tidball et al., 1999), described as the “Harvard for women” (p. 74), Bryn Mawr firmly adhered to the belief that its students are preordained to succeed. M. Cary Thomas, the first woman president of Bryn Mawr, seriously stated, “our failures only marry” (p. 74). The faculty at Bryn Mawr provided a high level of support, care, and encouragement to the students and prided themselves for taking a “fierce personal interest in their students” (p. 82). One professor worried that Bryn Mawr is overly protective of its students and as a result, they are surprised and shocked when they face the harsh realities of life. Bryn Mawr students said they were trusted to act responsibly and were allowed to make their own decisions. The traditions at Bryn Mawr empowered students and afforded them opportunities in the college’s governance. At Bryn Mawr, there was a “sense of a democratic institution where all constituencies ought to be involved in decisions and where students have wisdom and maturity to contribute to decision-making” (Tidball et al., 1999, p. 81).

Throughout the administration and faculty and among the alumnae, there were powerful and successful women role models. Women comprised 50% of the faculty and were seen as role models, and that perception held especially true for women faculty in traditionally male-dominated fields. The faculty at Bryn Mawr, both male and female, held no female stereotypes but instead presented themselves as serious academics.

Wolf-Wendel (Tidball et al., 1999) concluded by listing several characteristics that support an environment for producing women of success at the two schools studied. Those characteristics included a strong mission for educating women that sets high expectations and standards, visible and involved women role models, and a critical mass of motivated women students who are given a voice in decisions affecting their lives.

Both Whitt (1994) whose research focused on leadership development and Wolf-Wendel (Tidball et al., 1999) whose research examined institutional traits that develop successful women discovered a number of commonalities in the collegiate environment for women. From highly selective Bryn Mawr College to Bennett College, one of two colleges in the nation for African-American women, along with Wellesley College, Westhampton College, and Randolph-Macon Woman's College, women's colleges provide a familial setting conducive to a woman's personal development, learning outcomes, and life-long achievement. The early pioneers of women's education would likely be surprised, but pleased that their model for the higher education of women has endured.

An Unwelcome Place for Women: The “Chilly Classroom”

Few colleges had a sincere interest in the higher education of women, and as a result many educational institutions did not welcome women with open arms into the classroom. This

was partly due to the fact that schools founded as land-grant colleges admitted women because federal and state legislation mandated their admission (Gordon, 1990). To circumvent these governmental demands, some states, such as Virginia, established parallel schools for women, rather than admit them to the state's land-grant colleges and universities (Ihle, 2004). Other institutions, such as Oberlin College, the first coeducational institution in the United States, viewed the admission of women as either an additional revenue source or as a means to sustain the college's operations (Ginzberg, 1987; Graham, 1978).

Because of these mandates, women who enrolled in coeducational institutions frequently encountered hostility, ridicule, and neglect. Male faculty often considered women intellectually inferior and opposed their presence. Academically ambitious women were stigmatized as "grinds" (Gordon, 1990, p. 73) or "freaks" (p. 64). Male students would express their displeasure at having a woman in the classroom by banging their shoes or stomping the floor when a woman entered the room. Women faced slammed doors or had to elbow their way through crowds of male classmates who were determined to block their access. At the University of California, which began admitting women in 1870, women students were depicted as arriving pretty and graduating "bespectacled and sour-faced" (p. 73).

Anecdotal stories abound about the differences of men's and women's behavior in the classroom. One prime example is Baker's (1976) story of Mary Mothersill who first taught an all-male class at City College, which has now become City University of New York, and who subsequently joined the faculty at Barnard College, a women-only institution. Mothersill found her City College male students to be aggressive, frank, direct, and sarcastic. Class discussions were often rancorous and the male students had no qualms about challenging Mothersill in class.

If they had an opinion, the male students believed they had a right to voice it. In contrast, at Barnard, Mothersill described her female students as passive and docile. They kept their eyes averted and took copious notes. Direct questions were answered with silence as the women students feared answering incorrectly. Mothersill stated that her women students were easily offended, an impossibility with her male students at City College. Although Mothersill found her first year of teaching at Barnard a difficult change, she continued teaching there for 28 years more.

As more all-male colleges transitioned to coeducation and the number of women enrolling in coeducational institutions increased, researchers began to investigate the classroom environment for women. Hall and Sandler (1982) published their seminal report, “The Classroom Climate: A Chilly One for Women?” for the Project on the Status and Education of Women sponsored by the Association of American Colleges, supported by the Department of Education, and funded by the Carnegie Corporation and The Ford Foundation. Hall and Sandler’s findings were based on a compilation of empirical studies conducted by individual researchers, postsecondary institutions, campus groups, and individual responses to a “Call for Information” issued in conjunction with the project. Based on the growing awareness that women now comprised the majority of undergraduates, Hall and Sandler wanted to ascertain how women’s college experiences may differ from their male counterparts although they attended the same institutions, sat in the same classrooms, and were taught by the same professors. Their study was based on the assumption and concern that some faculty may overtly, or more often, inadvertently, treat men and women differently in similar learning situations; consequently, women would feel isolated or marginalized. Hall and Sandler hypothesized that

this disparate treatment would cause women to gain less confidence in their academic abilities and career ambitions, and as a result, their personal, academic and professional development would suffer.

Hall and Sandler (1982) found their hypothesis to be true. They attributed the differential treatment to pervasive but small, subtle behaviors based on sex, race, or age, called “micro-inequities” (p. 5), a term coined by Mary P. Rowe, Special Assistant to the President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. These micro-inequities are imperceptibly embedded in everyday behaviors and actions and enter the classroom without the full awareness of faculty or students. Hall and Sandler contended that these subtle forms of discrimination, expressed through verbal and nonverbal actions, may have more deleterious effects on women than blatant forms of discrimination. They cited numerous examples of how these appear in the classroom. Blatant discriminatory verbal behavior cited by Hall and Sandler included a professor who referred to a class of women as a “g—damn chicken pen” (p. 6) or other professors who disparaged women’s intellectual ability or academic seriousness by saying, “You girls will not understand this or you are too cute to be a professor” (p. 6). Sandler and Hall also described an example of a professor who used crudely drawn pictures of women’s breasts to explain the effects of a vacuum during a physics lecture.

In total, Hall and Sandler (1982) cited 24 examples of verbal and nonverbal classroom behaviors by faculty that discouraged female students from participating in the classroom. Hall and Sandler reported that professors tended to make more eye contact with male students, were more attentive when male students spoke in class, called on male students by name, and responded more extensively to men’s comments. Professors tended to stand in closer proximity

to male students and often ignored women students even when the women students clearly wanted to participate in class discussions. Female students were more often asked questions requiring factual answers (lower order questions) while male students were asked questions that demanded personal evaluation and critical thinking (higher order questions). Female students were disproportionately interrupted more by the professor and their male classmates. Male students were more often chosen as assistants over women students. An examination of these examples of classroom behavior detrimental to women illustrates their subtleness and supports the assertion that in some cases only a trained observer or highly sensitive student would detect their occurrence in the classroom. Additionally, many of these subtle classroom behaviors were so typical that few would have been discernable or have caused provocation at that time.

Hall and Sandler's (1982) findings validated Mothersill's anecdotal story about the differences of men's and women's styles of communication and behavior in the classroom. Contrary to popular opinion, men talk more than women, especially when in formal groups. Men talk for longer periods, take more turns at speaking, exert more control over the topic of conversation, and their comments carry more weight. Men interrupt women more frequently than women interrupt other women (Zimmerman & West, 1975) and men's interruptions of women often introduce trivial or inappropriate comments that end or redirect what a woman was saying (West, 1982). Men's speech patterns tend to be highly assertive and more competitive, often incorporating devil's advocate interchanges (Thorne, as cited in Hall & Sandler, 1982). Men's communication styles also tend to be more impersonal and abstract. To substantiate these findings about male communication patterns in the classroom, Hall and Sandler included incidents in which female students discussed the extreme difficulty in speaking up in mixed-sex

classrooms or being repeatedly cut-off by a professor while responding to a question which rarely happened when a male student was answering. From these events, the female students developed a tacit understanding that they had nothing to say.

Hall and Sandler (1982) described women's communication patterns as placing them at a disadvantage in the classroom since masculine speech patterns were more highly valued in the academic setting. Women tended to begin speaking with hesitations and false starts and used a higher pitch. They more frequently used tag questions and a questioning intonation when making a statement. Women inserted an excessive use of qualifiers into their speech patterns and their speech patterns tended to be more polite and deferential. Hall and Sandler attributed a woman's way of talking to their subordinate status in society and indicated that this speech pattern can be found in the communication style of other marginalized groups. Although some researchers argue that women should adopt the masculine communication style in the classroom to assure their success, other researchers believe that women's speech patterns contribute to a more equitable classroom that would foster cooperation and not competition. Hall and Sandler concluded their article with a list of over 100 recommendations to facilitate change and warm the classroom setting for women. The recommendations would impact all levels of the academy from the president to deans and department chairs, student affairs personnel, faculty, and women students. Interestingly, Hall and Sandler provided no recommendations to male students.

Whereas Hall and Sandler (1982) examined the classroom environment in general, Krupnick (1985) investigated differences in male and female class participation and the influence of the professor's gender on student participation in the classroom at Harvard College. Over the course of an academic year, Krupnick video-recorded the daily classroom interactions of 24

professors, 12 men and 12 women, whose teaching experience ranged from 8 weeks to 36 years. Based on these observations, Krupnick confirmed many of the findings and statements of Hall and Sandler (1982), including the finding that in all situations studied women students did not talk as much as men students. Additionally, Krupnick found that when females did speak in the classroom, they often spoke in bursts, whereas, male students talked until they were finished. These interruptions became a key focus of Krupnick's study. Once interrupted female students often withdrew from further classroom participation, solidifying the impression that women rarely participated in class discussions. Interestingly, female students were more often interrupted by another woman which contradicts previous findings that attribute interruptions to male students or instructors.

In addition to findings about interruptions, Krupnick (1985) also discovered that the gender of the professor influenced the level of class participation. When the professor was male and the majority of the class was male, male students spoke two and a half times longer than their female classmates. When the professor was female, female students would speak almost three times longer than if the professor was male. Krupnick found no differences in the talkativeness of male and female professors with each speaking for approximately 42% of the class period.

Krupnick (1985) warned that these findings cannot be generalized to the college student population but applied only to male and female students at Harvard College. However, Krupnick cited a study by Welch (1984) on classroom assertiveness by male and female students enrolled at Yale University, Brown University, Wellesley College, and Smith College. Welch reported that the women students at Yale and Brown were less assertive than their male classmates, yet

the women students at Smith and Wellesley were more assertive than both the men and women students at Yale and Brown. Based on Welch's findings, Krupnick posited that women's minority status in the classroom and their unwillingness to compete against their male classmates contributed to less classroom participation. Krupnick concluded by pointing out that active classroom participation is critical to the learning process and that professors, recognizing the influence of their gender on student participation, needed to encourage participation by all students.

Krupnick's (1985) study had examined male and female classroom interactions in a formerly all-male environment that had transitioned to coeducation during the previous decade. Canada and Pringle (1995) examined the social construction of gender differences in classroom interactions during the first 5 years after a formerly all-women's college transitioned to coeducation. The college began admitting men in fall 1987 and the researchers began their data collection in spring semester 1987, prior to the admission of men, and continued data collection each spring for the years 1989 through 1991. From randomly selected introductory-level and upper-level classes, the researchers observed classroom interactions involving a total of 1,282 student participants over the course of their study. The independent or predictor variables were type of school (single or mixed sex), gender of the professor, gender of the student, class size, class level (introductory or upper), and proportion of males in the class. The five dependent variables involving classroom interactions were professors' invitations to interact, professors' call-ons, professors' follow-up, student initiations to the professor, and student follow-up. No data collection on content of interaction occurred.

Canada and Pringle (1995) reported an unequivocal change in everyone's classroom behavior. The female students and both male and female professors altered their classroom behavior with the introduction of males into the classroom. As the proportion of males in the classroom increased, interactions and follow-ups with the professor by female students decreased. Canada and Pringle determined that a class composed of 27% male students was the neutral point for equalizing male-female classroom interactions with the professor. Canada and Pringle also qualified this finding by stating that class size significantly affected student-professor interactions. As class size increased, student-initiated interactions decreased in both single-sex and mixed-sex classes, with female student-initiated interactions declining drastically as class size increased. Student follow-up was also negatively affected by increasing class size. Although class size had an impact on student-initiated interactions and follow-up, the introduction of males into the classroom also affected the classroom dynamics. One unusual observation that Canada and Pringle could not fully explain was that female-initiated interactions with male professors were higher than those for their male classmates before steeply declining as class size increased. Canada and Pringle offered two explanations: unwillingness by female students to relinquish the classroom environment to male domination and an attempt by female students to support the professor's agenda when being challenged by male students.

Canada and Pringle (1995) found that professorial behavior also changed as men entered the classroom. Male and female professors initiated a comparable number of invitations to students in all-female classes, although they behaved differently in mixed-sex classes. The number of professor-initiated interactions for female professors increased in the mixed-sex classrooms, with female professors initiating 63% more invitations than male professors;

however, as class size grew, the greater number of invitations by female professors declined. Class size did not significantly alter the number of professor invitations in classes taught by a male professor. Canada and Pringle believed these findings justified a qualifier to Tidball's findings (1970, 1973, 1980, 1985, 1986; Tidball et al., 1999) that women's colleges provide more female faculty role models and a more positive type of role modeling in the classroom. Canada and Pringle purported that female students benefit when male and female professors model similar behaviors in the classroom, with female professors behaving more male-like and male professors behaving more female-like.

Canada and Pringle (1995), as faculty and researchers at the institution under study, also reported a number of casual observations about the transition to coeducation. Male students entering the college expected and exerted their male privilege. Male students would sit in the back of the classroom with their feet propped up, appearing indifferent to the lecture and occasionally making challenging remarks to the professor. Some professors, particularly those who were sensitive to gender issues and who practiced an egalitarian teaching approach, were disconcerted by this display of male aggression. Nontenured professors feared challenging this type of male behavior since one measure of the success to coeducation was the attraction and retention of male students. Upper class women were offended by the interaction style of their male classmates since their more assertive and competitive style was uncharacteristic of the environment in which the women had previously learned. The male tendency to evaluate female professors and classmates on their attractiveness rather than academic abilities and accomplishments was also noted by Canada and Pringle. Canada and Pringle viewed the findings of their study as indicative of a gender politic and dynamic that pervades higher

education. The researchers concluded that strong consideration for and implementation of practices that foster gender equity in classroom cannot be ignored as coeducational institutions become more the norm.

As a follow-up on the research by Hall and Sandler (1982), Allan and Madden (2006) investigated whether the research method utilized, quantitative or qualitative, affected the findings and conclusions drawn about the chilly climate for women in classrooms and whether the gender enrollment pattern or a predominance of men or women in the field of study influences the perception of the chilly climate. The subjects of Allan and Madden's (2006) study were female undergraduates at the junior and senior level, majoring in six different fields of study. These fields of study were selected for being predominantly male (business and engineering), predominantly female (elementary education and psychology) or gender neutral (physical education and kinesiology, and English and journalism). Both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were used to ascertain female undergraduate students' experiences with both overt and subtle behaviors characteristic of the chilly classroom climate for women.

The intent of Allan and Madden's (2006) quantitative analysis was to develop three scales of student behavior: (a) male classroom behavior, (b) silencing behaviors, and (c) sexually offensive behaviors, and four scales of faculty behavior: (a) stereotyping women, (b) encouraging men more than women, (c) dismissing and demeaning women, and (d) sexually inappropriate behaviors. Through a subsequent qualitative approach, the researchers wanted to confirm or refute previous findings and conclusions on devaluing women's contributions,

defining women by their sexuality, stereotyping women, questioning women's competence, and gender differences in space, time, attention, and peer interactions.

Based on frequency of responses to survey questions, 11 of the 19 student behaviors and one of the 16 faculty behaviors were reported to have occurred sometimes or often by 25% or more of the women responding. When the data were converted to scales representing the constructs of a chilly classroom, the descriptive statistics indicated that women rarely experienced chilly classroom behaviors and a one-way ANOVA further indicated no differences based on gender enrollment patterns in the fields of study for silencing behaviors and sexually offensive behaviors. A higher incidence of male student behaviors that contribute to a chilly climate for their female classmates occurred in male-majority fields of study; however, the four faculty behaviors being examined rarely appeared in male-majority fields of study. An unexpected finding was the higher occurrence of faculty behaviors that stereotype and demean women in female-majority fields of study.

The findings from the qualitative phase of this study were remarkably different from those of the quantitative phase of the study. The qualitative analysis based on focus group discussions indicated that male and faculty behaviors that create a chilly climate for women occurred in all groups irrespective of the enrollment pattern; however, the women in the male-majority disciplines reported the most overt forms of discouragement and discrimination. Women reported feeling invisible and marginalized. Male classmates would dominate the discussion and interrupt their female classmates, especially in small group discussions absent the professor. One woman commented, "I am interrupted all the time and it really bothers me a lot!" (Allan & Madden, 2006, p. 697), and a female civil engineering major complained that her male

classmates “would not let her do crap” (p. 695). Many women believed they had to constantly work hard to prove themselves and viewed their male classmates as unprepared, yet seeing themselves as cool for being able to slide by.

The female students also reported examples of overtly demeaning and discriminating behavior by faculty. A professor used photos of naked women to explain 3D imagery and suggested the women students may not want to look (Allan & Madden, 2006, p. 700). One female student reported barely glancing at the photos, fearing that a prolonged look would label her as a lesbian. In another class, a writing professor asked female students to dance in class and to show off their body piercings. Although many women found these behaviors and requests uncomfortable, some viewed them as a way for the professors to build rapport with students and to be seen as young and hip.

Allan and Madden (2006) reported that not all students reported professorial behavior detrimental to women students, but indicated the worse offenses were isolated to one or two professors. In four of the six focus groups, at least one participant strongly protested against gender bias being prevalent in her field of study. Focus groups are settings where participants are encouraged to speak up, yet group dynamics may introduce bias as recollections of one group member rekindle the memories of another member of the group (Madriz, 2000). Allan and Madden reported that forgotten classroom behaviors were remembered more than once during focus group discussions.

The results of their research study presented a dilemma for Allan and Madden (2006). Conclusions drawn from frequency data indicated that at least 25% of female undergraduates at the institution studied had experienced a chilly classroom, whereas, conclusions drawn from

mean values would indicate that a chilly classroom for women is a rarity at this institution. Additionally, the data collected from focus groups indicates a chilly classroom for women is pervasive and blatant. This study demonstrated the importance of the conceptual framework, analysis, and interpretation in forming conclusions. Allan and Madden were not comfortable concluding that a chilly classroom climate did not exist based on survey data when over 25% of survey respondents reported occurrences of chilling behaviors by both male classmates and faculty in the classroom. Concluding a chilly classroom or not, one participant responded with an opposing but emphatic stance: “I do not feel suppressed as a female student. I really feel that whoever put these questions together needs to stop worrying and fishing for problems. I do not feel there is a problem, and I think people make bigger deals out of a situation than they are worth. People need to stop making themselves victims. Toughen up” (Allan & Madden, 2006, p. 704). Canada and Pringle (1995) demonstrated that the presence of men changes classroom dynamics; however, Allan and Madden’s (2006) study shows the impact of research methodology and interpretation on findings and conclusion about the chilly classroom for women.

The Chilly Classroom: It Is Not the Men

Heller, Puff, and Mills (1985) challenged previous research on the classroom environment for women on the premise that such research often focused on overt behaviors or sexual harassment, and as a result excluded men. Heller et al. tested a two-pronged hypothesis: (a) does faculty behave differently towards women students, and (b) does differential behavior have an effect on how women perceive their abilities, ambitions, and self-esteem. Their research was conducted at Franklin and Marshall College and included 429 voluntary participants drawn

from introductory-level and upper-level classes in various fields of study. Using a Likert-scale survey, the participants responded to questions on whether faculty asked qualitatively different questions based on student gender and the effect of subtle sexism on student confidence, student ambition, and student perception of the college experience.

Based on this data, Heller et al. (1985) found that class level had the greatest influence on the time a student was allowed to respond. Seniors felt they were given ample time to respond to questions, to lead discussions, to be recognized when volunteering, and in being addressed by name. At each class level, students reported a steady increase in time allowed for classroom responses. Students did not perceive that faculty behaved differently towards male and female students, nor did students differ in their perceptions, except for perceptions on the use of sexual humor by faculty. Contrary to the researchers' expectation, male seniors reported that faculty used sexual humor more frequently than female seniors reported. The findings by Heller et al. (1985) on the qualitative nature of faculty questions based on student gender refuted those of Hall and Sandler (1982). Male students were asked more factual (lower-level) questions, whereas women students were asked more analytical (higher-level) questions. Women students believed they were asked the "hard, challenging, and interesting questions reflecting respect for intellectual ability while men believe they were asked 'lower level,' factual questions that implicitly assume a lack of ability to deal with 'high level' concepts" (p. 456).

Heller et al. (1985) found that male and female students showed no significant difference in their level of confidence over preparedness for graduate school or importance of career and academic ambitions. However, there was a gendered difference in the change in confidence level of male and female students during their college years. All students showed an increase in

confidence level from their freshmen year to their senior year; however, freshmen men were significantly more confident than freshmen women. Beginning in their sophomore year, women's confidence levels began to build, and by their senior year, female students felt significantly more confident in their academic ability. Heller et al. found no evidence that college had a detrimental effect on the self-confidence of women students. Only on two questions about student perception of the academic experience did men and women students show a significant difference. Approximately 27% of women and 15% of men responded that they lacked skills in argumentation. Forty-eight percent of freshmen women believed they lacked math skills compared to 22% of freshmen men. For male and female seniors, this question produced no statistical difference.

Heller et al. (1985) concluded that a chilly learning environment, as described by Hall and Sandler (1982), for women did not exist at the institution they studied. They reported that men and women enter college with different levels of self-confidence and math and argumentation skills, but these differences attenuated with class level. The researchers recognized that Franklin and Marshall College is a highly selective liberal arts college with strong preprofessional programs, so women students may not be representative of female students at other institutions. Heller et al. reached the conclusion that the environment in higher education suggested by Hall and Sandler's (1982) review no longer existed. Heller et al. accused Hall and Sandler of "paradoxically, perpetuat[ing] a completely inappropriate image of women college students as meek, unconfident, undereducated, and unchallenged" (p. 459) and further predicted that without sound evidence, faculty programs to implement change will be viewed as "administrative nonsense" (p. 460) and ignored.

Constantinople, Cornelius and Gray (1988) were also critical of Hall and Sandler's (1982) study, saying their research relied on studies of related behaviors and anecdotal evidence from individuals at particular institutions. Constantinople et al. stated that overt discrimination should not be tolerated in the classroom; however, they questioned the adequacy of evidence on subtle forms of discriminatory behavior. The researchers did not believe widespread discrimination existed at their institution, Vassar College, but understood their personal observations and opinions did not constitute empirical evidence. Thus, they decided to assess the extent of difference in male and female student participation in class and the influence of instructor gender on student behavior. They hypothesized that instructor gender and student gender would influence patterns of interaction in the classroom – male faculty would favor male students and female faculty would favor female students. Using students trained as observers, classroom interactions were observed three times during a semester in a sample of introductory-level and intermediate-level classes in various fields of study. The classes observed were taught by male and female, tenured and nontenured professors in a variety of disciplines.

Constantinople et al. (1988) found male students to be more active in class than their female classmates, lending support to certain findings by Hall and Sandler (1982); however, the researchers found that the “effects of student sex on classroom participation are by no means pervasive or robust” (p. 547). Furthermore, division of the curriculum and gender of the professor had an influence on student participation. Both male and female students spoke more in female-taught classes when compared to male-taught classes. In natural science courses, male professors had higher student participation rates than female professors, whereas female professors teaching courses in social sciences and arts had higher participation rates than their

male colleagues. Art course professors were the most involved with their students and natural science professors were the least involved. Social science course participation was more consistent with art course participation if the course was taught by a female professor and more comparable to natural science course participation if male-taught.

Constantinople et al. (1988) found that male and female professors question students differently. Male professors asked 1.2 questions per student per hour and received back 1.7 student interactions. Female professors made .9 inquiries per student per hour and received 2.7 returned interactions, further supporting the higher frequency of student participation in female-taught courses. Male professors demonstrated a consistent rate of student questioning throughout the semester, whereas female professors asked fewer questions as the semester progressed but increasingly used student names. Male professors also tended to teach larger classes than female professors and their classes attracted more male students. Students of both sexes indicated larger classes inhibited their participation; however, male students continued to be more active than female students, even as class size increased. Regardless of the division of the curriculum or the professor's gender, male students had their comments acknowledged and expanded upon or were asked further questions by the professor more often than their female classmates. Constantinople et al. attributed this to male students participating more in class than professors ignoring female students.

Constantinople et al. (1988) concluded that some of Hall and Sandler's (1982) findings were valid. Although male students more actively participate in the classroom, Constantinople et al. offered no evidence that this may have a negative consequence on the classroom experience or learning outcomes for female students. Their findings indicated that class size and professor

gender have a greater impact on class participation than student gender alone. Lastly, they found no support for the claim that the gender of interacting students or professors contributes to the discriminatory behavior towards women described by Hall and Sandler (1982).

Based on previous research that men and women have different educational experiences although they share the same classroom at the same institution, Crawford and MacLeod (1990) conducted research using two hypotheses: (a) women and men behave differently in the classroom, with women participating less and being less assertive, and (b) the gender differences in classroom interaction are partly attributable to professorial behavior that discriminates against women. The researchers adapted, for their purposes, a widely-used self-report measure of classroom interaction that examines perceptions of both professor and student behaviors. The survey was administered at two institutions, a state university and a small liberal arts college. In analyzing data, student perception on classroom behavior was categorized into three aspects: (a) “what the class is like for everybody,” (b) “what the class is like for me,” and (c) “what the instructor does in the class” (p. 109-110).

Crawford and MacLeod (1990) reported their findings by institution. Male and female students at the state university reported a significantly better experience in small, advanced level courses. Both male and female students reported that small, female-taught classes provided the most personalized interaction. Male-taught classes, whether small or large, offered less interaction; however, large classes taught by women offered the least interaction. Class size and student grade-point average (GPA) influenced student participation with students participating more often in smaller classes and better students (as measured by GPA) being more likely to participate in class. Students perceived teachers as being more engaged (using, humor, praise,

and encouragement) in large and lower-level classes. These teaching practices were attributed to teacher efforts to encourage student involvement in large, introductory courses. Class size most strongly affected the three aspects of the classroom environment. Student gender did not show a strong or uniform effect. Gender of the instructor and class size interacted to influence student perception of individualized interactions. Crawford and MacLeod indicated that women and men equally reported themselves as actively engaged participants in their classes. Although male and female instructors behaved differently in class, professorial behaviors are not directed at one gender more than the other and they affected men and women students similarly.

Crawford and MacLeod (1990) discovered similar and dissimilar findings at the liberal arts college. Class interaction was affected by class size, professor gender, academic discipline and expected course grade. The smaller the class size, the higher the level of participation; the larger the class, the lower the level of participation. Female professors teaching small classes were perceived as generating the most student participation. Courses in humanities and arts had the highest level of interaction, followed by social science courses, with courses in the sciences having the least interaction. Students who expected Cs in the class were more likely to complain that the class was not conducive to participation, whereas students who expected an A in the class found the class engaging. Humor was used more often by male teachers than female teachers, upper-level courses included more humor than lower-level courses, and teachers in the social sciences used humor more than teachers in other disciplines.

Female students at the small liberal arts college believed they were less involved in the classroom than their male classmates and male students agreed with this position. Male students indicated they volunteer to speak more often, are more frequently called on, and receive a

positive teacher response to their questions. Female students expressed their classroom experiences in opposite terms. Male students attributed their lack of classroom participation to a failure to complete the assigned work or not wanting to make a comment that might lower their grade. Women cited numerous reasons for not participating in class, such as their not having well developed ideas or having inadequate knowledge of the subject matter. In addition, women were concerned by not appearing as intelligent or not wanting to lose respect of their classmates. These statements are indicative of women students' lack of self-confidence in their intellectual abilities and a fixation for perfection. There was no evidence to suggest that men academically outperformed women and, in fact women had an average GPA that exceeded men's by almost 1.5 points.

When asked why students did not participate in class, female professors were more astutely aware than their male counterparts of the underlying differences for the lack of participation by their male and female students. Male professors recognized few differences by gender in explaining nonparticipation in the classroom. Except for humor which is more often directed to male students, male instructors initiated fewer actions to engage students when compared to their female colleagues.

Crawford and MacLeod (1990) concluded that class size is the most critical variable to student participation, with small classes being the most comfortable learning environment. These researchers concurred with Hall and Sandler's (1982) finding that women are less assertive in the classroom but, unlike Hall and Sandler, did not attribute this behavior to professorial discrimination. The classroom environment at the state university was friendlier to female students than that at the small liberal arts college, which Crawford and MacLeod pointed

out as having a long history as an all-male institution before transitioning to coeducation. The researchers believed female faculty generally created a more comfortable and effective learning environment when compared to their male colleagues. Crawford and MacLeod concluded by suggesting that pedagogical techniques that create a “girl-friendly” (p. 121) classroom are more affable to boys and should be further evaluated for implementation by colleges and universities so all classrooms will be “student-friendly” (p. 121).

Due to the increasing interest and discussion by policymakers, parents, and the mass media on the trend to gender segregation in public elementary and secondary schools, Drew and Work (1998) decided to examine gender in the classroom at the postsecondary level. Drew and Work conceded that many pre-1980s classrooms may have been unwelcoming to female students due to overt and subtle actions by a male-dominated professoriate, but they questioned whether this inhospitable environment continues to exist. To test this, they analyzed data collected in 1994 from 15,960 college students using the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ, 3rd edition) which assesses student relationships with other students, faculty, and administration. A total of 6,078 (38%) male students and 9,882 (62%) female students completed the 8-page questionnaire.

Drew and Work (1998) reported although they “found many cases of statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between mean responses for male and female students for items on the CSEQ, none of the differences could be considered meaningful” (p. 548). The researchers cautioned these results may stem from the large sample size.

Drew and Work (1998) found both male and female students reported participating in class often, with female students reporting that they participate more frequently than their male

classmates. Female students reported a more positive relationship with the faculty than male students, yet male students reported more informal visits to faculty and more frequent work on research projects with faculty than female students. Men and women students reported equal gains in their educational experience in three broad categories: (a) vocational training, (b) preparation for further education, and (c) general education. Women believed they had learned about themselves and others during college, whereas, men believed college had enhanced their analytical skills, and knowledge of science and technology. Women had a slightly more positive feeling about their collegiate experience than men but women and men similarly agreed they would attend the same institution if they had to decide again.

Drew and Work (1998) concluded that a chilly classroom for women is not prevalent in current environment of higher education. The researchers did not refute the work of Hall and Sandler (1982), but pointed out that societal attitudes about women have changed, the number of women faculty and administrators has increased, and more women have enrolled in college. Drew and Work believed their findings are representative of the college student population in the United States; however, they cautioned their data had been previously collected using techniques that were not necessarily random and the demographic profile of their sample may differ from the overall college population.

Historical and anecdotal stories of the educational experience and classroom environment illuminate the difficulties and hostilities women faced as they entered coeducational or formerly all-male institutions of higher education. In 1982, Hall and Sandler named this situation the “chilly” classroom climate and identified a multitude of faculty behaviors and classroom characteristics detrimental to the academic, personal, and professional development of women

students. Subsequent researchers have both confirmed and refuted Hall and Sandler's findings. Hall and Sandler's (1982) methodology has been questioned; however, the means may have justified the end. By their exposure of overt and subtle inappropriate classroom behaviors, Hall and Sandler raised awareness and sensitivity to a disturbing problem and recommended change. Subsequent research has shown that although the problem of the chilly classroom has ameliorated over time, it continues, usually in isolated cases or under certain circumstances. An unintended consequence of researching the chilly classroom has been a greater understanding of characteristics and variables that enhance the learning experience of both male and female students and professorial behavior that heightens student participation and outcomes.

An understanding of the chilly classroom and research on the classroom environment, professorial behavior, and pedagogical practices gives context to the academic environment at female-only colleges. Throughout their history, women's colleges have provided what some people have perceived as a beneficial learning environment – small classes, a large number of female faculty, an atmosphere of encouragement and support, and a lack of competition from male students. PWC provided this environment until September 2007.

Women's Colleges: Producing Women Achievers

Since their inception, women's colleges were often viewed as second-rate educational institutions offering a second-rate educational experience (Baker, 1976; Boas, 1935/1971; Farnham, 1994). Women's colleges vehemently countered this criticism by pointing to successful alumnae. Jane Addams, a graduate of Rockford College, was the first American woman to receive the Nobel Prize for peace. Frances Perkins, the first woman to hold a Cabinet position as Secretary of Labor during Franklin Roosevelt's administration, graduated from

Mount Holyoke College. The first female President of Harvard University, Drew Gilpin Faust, is an alumna of Bryn Mawr College. Advice on gourmet meals and tastefully decorated homes comes from two graduates of women's colleges. Julia Child graduated from Smith College and Martha Stewart hails from Barnard College. Fiona S. Buck, the first woman to win the Nobel Prize for literature, was an alumna of Randolph-Macon Woman's College. Spelman College claims Marin Wright Edelman, Founder and President of the Children's Defense Fund, as an alumna. Women's college graduates have also made their mark on contemporary American politics. Geraldine Ferraro, a Marymount College graduate, was the first woman nominated by a major political party as its vice-presidential candidate. Two recent Secretaries of State are alumnae of Wellesley College, Madeleine Albright and Hilary Rodham Clinton. The first female Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, graduated from Trinity College in Washington, D.C. Wendy Gramm, a Wellesley College alumna, who presided over the Commodities Futures Trading Commission, has been identified as orchestrating a massive deregulation of derivatives which contributed to the financial crisis currently plaguing the United States (Partnoy, 2009).

As coeducation became the dominant trend in higher education in the late 1960s and early 1970s, debate grew about the value of women's colleges and the impact of gender on the educational experience. One of the first researchers in this area was M. Elizabeth Tidball, whose initial work published in 1970, was based on research examining the baccalaureate origins of successful women. Tidball's inaugural work led to a new field of research known as "the social psychology of higher education of women" (Tidball et al., 1999, p. 168). In 1968 as a recently appointed trustee to Mount Holyoke College, Tidball was interested in gathering information on

the topic of single-sex schools transitioning to coeducation; however, to her dismay, no such data existed. As a scholar and social scientist, Tidball developed a research agenda to gather the information she sought. Her overarching research question was: “What are the relative rates of post-baccalaureate accomplishment for graduates of women’s colleges in comparison to women graduates of coeducational institutions?” (p. 168). The primary focus of Tidball’s baccalaureate origins study was the institution and not the individual. Tidball was using “baccalaureate origins of achieving students as a marker for institutional productivity. . .to gain information about commonalities among climates that are conducive to achievement” (p. 34). Through the study of achieving women, Tidball gave women-only colleges empirical evidence to prove their value.

Tidball (1970) randomly selected five samples of 100 names from each of the three latest editions of *Who’s Who of American Women* and categorized the 1,500 names by college graduate or not, the type of institution from which graduated, and current marital status. College graduates comprised 76% of the sample and of the college graduates, 22% had graduated from a college for women. Fifty-nine percent of the women’s college graduates were married and 56% of women who graduated from coeducational institutions were married. Tidball found that graduates of women’s colleges were 2.3 times more likely to be recognized for career or volunteer achievement than female graduates of coeducational institutions. For married graduates of women’s colleges, the achievement rate was three times greater than the rate for their coeducational peers. Looking at divorce rates among the sample, Tidball further asserted that “women’s college graduates who are making significant contributions to society are not adding measurably to the country’s divorce statistics” (p. 178). Tidball concluded by stressing that women’s colleges remain a viable choice within higher education.

Tidball (1973) continued her research on the institutional productivity of achieving women by women's and coeducational institutions and reported that women's colleges had a twofold achievement rate when compared to coeducational schools. Tidball explained this difference in two ways: (a) women students at coeducational institutions subordinate their abilities and ambitions due to the influence of male students, and (b) women's colleges have more women faculty members to serve as role models than coeducational institutions. Tidball believed the presence of female faculty and administration played a vital role in the psychological and social development of college-aged women. Her research showed no statistical correlation of male faculty and women achievers. Tidball also reported an inverse relationship between the number of male students and female achievers. Male students and female faculty emerged as primary determinants of the number of women achievers. Women's colleges had none of the former and more of the latter which explained why women's colleges produced a greater number of female achievers than coeducational schools. Tidball's findings were considered highly controversial at a time when scores of colleges and universities were transitioning to coeducation. After struggling to find a publisher, Tidball's research was eventually published minus tables, figures, and details.

Tidball persevered in researching the institutional productivity of colleges and universities in various areas. Tidball and Kistiakowsky (1976) investigated the baccalaureate origins of American scientists and scholars from 1920 to 1973 using the Doctorate Record File, a database that provided a complete and continuous list of doctoral recipients showing gender, baccalaureate institution, year of baccalaureate, doctoral institution, and doctoral field of study. Tidball and Kistiakowsky found noticeable differences in the baccalaureate origins of men and

women who have earned a doctorate and attributed these differences to several characteristics specific to women's colleges: (a) the enrollment of a large number of women students, (b) a long and continuous history of graduating women who subsequently earned a doctorate, and (c) a favorable climate for academic pursuits in several areas for intellectually motivated and capable women. By number of graduates, seven of the top 25 undergraduate institutions whose graduates earned a doctoral degree were women's colleges: Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Radcliffe, Vassar, Smith, and Wellesley. When calculated by percentage of graduates, the list stayed relatively similar though Smith dropped from the list. When delineating the graduates by field of study, women's colleges repeatedly ranked among the top 25 institutions, except in the field of education. Nine institutions, of which seven were women's colleges, stood out as major contributors of women doctorates: Barnard, Bryn Mawr, University of Chicago, Cornell, Mount Holyoke, Radcliffe, Smith, Vassar, and Wellesley.

Tidball (1985) examined the baccalaureate origins of medical students in light of two major changes in higher education and the medical profession: (a) the number of formerly single-sex colleges that had transitioned to coeducation, and (b) the increasing number of women pursuing a career in medicine. The study had four purposes:

1. To identify institutions that produced a large number of medical school entrants;
2. To establish a national database for women to serve as a benchmark for future research;
3. To compare and contrast major institutions of male medical school entrants for the years 1950-1959 and 1975-78; and

4. To compare and contrast baccalaureate origins of male and female medical school entrants to identify institutional characteristics that effectively prepare men and women as future physicians. Using information from the Public Health Service and National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education, Tidball generated a sample of 35,102 male and 11,220 female medical school entrants. During this study, Tidball introduced the terms, women's change college and men's change college, to designate formerly single-sex institutions that had transitioned to coeducation and to further explain her findings.

Tidball's (1985) initial findings were female medical school entrants had increased three-fold from the 1950s to the 1970s and women's colleges and universities with affiliated medical schools were the predominant sources of medical students. The national entry rate of 1.5% for women from women's colleges was almost double the rate of women from coeducational institutions. Women's entry rates from women's change colleges were considerably less than those from women's colleges, further confirming research assertions that women's academic success and professional ambition declines in the presence of male students. As in previous baccalaureate origins studies, women's colleges appeared in the list of significant producers of medical school entrants, with Wellesley, Mount Holyoke, Smith, Barnard, and Bryn Mawr among the top producers of women entering medical school. Tidball reiterated that it was the educational environment at women's colleges that contributed to these findings. The high number of female faculty members created a focus on women's issues and allowed female students to comfortably and frequently interact with women role models, thereby building self-confidence, gaining experience in academic and extracurricular activities, and encouraging professional ambitions.

The baccalaureate origins of recent natural science doctorates were the focus of Tidball's (1986) next research study. Melding information from NCES and the Doctorate Records File of the National Research Center, Tiball examined natural science doctorates awarded between 1970 and 1979. Among the top 51 institutions that contributed at least 1% of female graduates who received natural science doctorates were Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Smith, Vassar, Wellesley, Wells, Goucher, Swarthmore, and Randolph-Macon Woman's College. Women's colleges continued to be highly productive, producing 44 female science doctorates per 10,000 graduates as compared to 21 per 10,000 graduates for coeducational institutions. Women's change colleges reflected lower levels of productivity when compared to women's colleges which caused Tidball to question the impact of men on the institutional productivity of aspiring women. Tidball reaffirmed the importance of female faculty as role models, pointing out that women, on average, represented 11.4% of the faculty at coeducational institutions and 45.5% at women's colleges.

Tidball's (1973) initial and controversial research was not without its critics. Oates and Williamson (1978) and Rice and Hemmings (1988) replicated Tidball's research and reached conclusions different from those of Tidball. Oates and Williamson concluded that a distinct group of women's colleges was overrepresented when examining institutional productivity of achieving women. Rice and Hemmings (1988) found that recent demographic changes in institutional type and student enrollment impacted findings on the production of achieving women.

Of Tidball's critics, Oates and Williamson (1978, 1980) have been two of the most critical. During 1980, these two researchers, along with Tidball, engaged in a scholarly feud

over each other's research methodology and findings. More specifically, considering the number of previously all-male institutions opening their doors to women, Oates and Williamson (1978) questioned if women's colleges were "more of a function of tradition than need" (p. 796). Oates and Williamson replicated, with modifications, Tidball's (1973) research on the institutional productivity of female achievers. Believing that men's and women's success should be measured using the same criteria, Oates and Williamson used the 38th edition, 1974-1975 of *Who's Who in America*. Three thousand women were listed; however, after exclusions for various reasons, the final sample consisted of 1,735 women, of which 61% were graduates of coeducational institutions and 39% graduated from women's colleges. The two researchers concentrated on the decade of the 1930s because it was the decade with the highest representation of achievers. For women's colleges, there were 26 achievers per 10,000 graduates and for coeducational institutions, the rate was 14 achievers per 10,000 graduates. Women's colleges produced at a rate of 1.9 times greater than the rate for coeducational institutions, even when controlling for institutional size. Closer examination revealed that seven women's colleges were highly productive when compared to other women's colleges. These colleges, known as the "Seven Sisters" were Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Radcliffe, Smith, Vassar, and Wellesley. Oates and Williamson argued that the institutions under review should be divided into three categories: (a) Seven Sisters (SS), (b) non-Seven Sisters (NSS), and (c) coeducational colleges (CC). During the decade under review, the SS produced 61 achievers per 10,000 graduates, whereas, the NSS and CC produced 18 achievers per 10,000 graduates. The SS produced 21.8% of the 1,735 women sampled. Oates and Williamson examined occupational groups, such as arts, business, public service, and professions, in which the achieving women

worked and found no differences between alumnae of women's colleges and coeducational institutions. Examining job positions within the broad occupational groups produced differences. Achievers who had graduated from coeducational institutions held positions as government officials, deans of professional schools, teachers of professional subjects, and librarians. The deans' positions were typically in schools of home economics, library science, nursing, and education. Alumnae of women's colleges were more often found in positions as curators, college presidents, editors, and civic workers. Women holding college president positions were most often found at Catholic colleges where membership in a religious order was a job requirement. Oates and Williamson reported that a large number of women achievers graduate from a small group of seven colleges with highly selective admissions. The two researchers posited that family socioeconomic status may be a more critical predictor of achievement, even more so than admissions selectivity. Oates and Williamson indicated their findings did not support the assertion that women's colleges prepare their graduates for more diverse careers, especially careers in nontraditional fields. Oates and Williamson suggested that more research on the impact of the socioeconomic status of students was warranted and further decadal analysis was justified considering the recent changes in higher education and the American job market.

A decade after Oates and Williamson's (1978) article, Rice and Hemmings (1988) authored an update on women's colleges and women achievers and criticized Tidball's (1973) previous research. Rice and Hemming outlined the "unanticipated deleterious effects" (p. 548) using Vassar's transition to coeducation as an illustrative example. Upon admission of men, more males were appointed to key administrative positions and the percentage of full-time

faculty women and women departmental chairpersons declined. As more males filled faculty positions, an increasing number of women were appointed to instructor, lecturer, and nontenure positions. The researchers found that male students dominated classroom discussions and assumed control of student government and student publications. These researchers believed that admissions selectivity and students' socioeconomic status played a key role in academic and occupational achievements. Rice and Hemmings believed it was naïve to assume, as Tidball (1973) had, a causal relationship between women students' career accomplishments and their exposure to women faculty at women's colleges.

Rice and Hemmings (1988) replicated Tidball's study using the 1979-1980, 1980-1981, and 1983-1984 editions of *Who's Who of American Women*. They hypothesized there would be no difference in the number of women achievers from women's colleges and coeducational institutions due to recent changes in higher education. During these times, there were fewer women's colleges in operation, more selective formerly all-male institutions had begun admitting women, and women's colleges had become more ethnically diverse. Their sample consisted of 1,307 women who had graduated from college between 1940 and 1979 from 72 women's colleges and 438 coeducational colleges. As in previous studies, decadal analysis was performed. In the decades of the 1940s and 1950s, women's colleges produced a significantly greater number of achievers to number of graduates than did coeducational schools; however, in the two more recent decades, there were no statistical differences in achiever rates by institutional type. For 1960-1969, women's colleges produced 97 achievers per 10,000 graduates compared to 93 achievers per 10,000 graduates for coeducational institutions. For the decade of the 1970s, the rates were 48 achievers for women's colleges and 32 achievers for

coeducational schools. The researchers attributed the lower rate of achievers to the shorter time span for career accomplishments. Rice and Hemmings found the overall rate of achiever production for women's colleges was 1.55 times the rate for coeducational institutions which was consistent with Tidball's (1973) previous findings.

Furthermore, graduates of the Seven Sisters represented a consistent 30% to 40% per decade of women achievers confirming Oates and Williamson's (1978) conclusion on the prevalence of women achievers graduating from a small group of highly selective colleges. Rice and Hemmings (1988) took exception to Tidball's (1973) assertion about women role models at women's colleges, arguing that the increasing visibility of senior women faculty and administrators at coeducational institutions will produce similar results for women students at these schools. Rice and Hemmings explained: "One cannot assume that women faculty, simply because they are women [and thus, according to Tidball, more concerned with issues related to women than are male faculty], will actively mentor their students or be regarded by their students as role models. . . .The character of an individual teacher, rather than her gender, may be the key factor in her influence on students, their overall experience of college, and their career accomplishments" (p. 558). Surprisingly, based on their findings, Rice and Hemmings concluded with, "Women's colleges offer 'a room of one's own,' a supportive garden in which to grow and be nurtured, and as such they provide a singular experience for women students and a unique alternative to women seeking higher education" (p. 559).

Almost 30 years after Tidball began her research in institutional productivity and 20 years after Oates and Williamson published their article questioning or qualifying Tidball's findings, Wolf-Wendel (1998) replicated these previous research studies with the idea that many

institutions had transitioned to coeducation during recent decades. Wolf-Wendel measured success by examining women graduates who had earned a doctorate between 1975 and 1991 or by being listed in one of three reference books, *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who Among Black Americans*, and *Who's Who Among Hispanic Americans*. Differences in institutional productivity were differentiated by race/ethnicity.

In Wolf-Wendel's (1998) findings, for European American women earning doctorates, women's colleges and women's change colleges were overrepresented among the top 10 institutions. Of the top 10 institutional producers, 6 were women's colleges and 3 were women's change colleges. Only one coeducational institution, Swathmore College, appeared on the list. Women's colleges were 3.8 times more productive in graduating successful women achievers than historically coeducational institutions. The top three producers were Bryn Mawr, Wellesley, and Barnard. For African American women, Spelman College and Bennett College, both women-only colleges, were joined by Fisk University as the top doctorate producers. Three women's change colleges were among the top producers of Latina women earning a doctorate. For European-American women listed in *Who's Who in America*, women's colleges produced 6.9 times as many achievers as did historically coeducational institutions; however, women's change colleges were the leading producers, accounting for six of the top 10 institutions. Bennett, Spelman, and Fisk were the top producers of African American women earning recognition in *Who's Who Among Black Americans*. Two women's change colleges, Our Lady of the Lake and Incarnate Word, along with New Mexico Highlands College, a coeducational school, produced the most women achievers listed in *Who's Who Among Hispanic Americans*. For European American women from less selective institutions who were listed in *Who's Who in*

America, 50% were from women's colleges, 19% were from women's change colleges, 31% were from coeducational schools.

Through this research, Wolf-Wendel (1998) expanded and updated previous studies and qualified previous research that concluded predominantly white women's colleges as the most productive institutions for achieving women. Her study showed that conclusions must be differentiated by race and ethnicity and that criticisms of the time periods studied are no longer applicable since many all-male institutions are now admitting women. Wolf-Wendel drew this conclusion: “ [that] different institutions and different institutional types may attract unique types of students is, in part, beyond the control of this study. . . .There is no way to ascertain whether other, more qualitative differences exist between those who attend a special focus institution and those who enroll in more mainstream institutions. Maybe there is something inherent in women who choose to attend special focus institutions that predispose them to be successful. For example, maybe women who attend women's colleges are more dedicated to academic achievement than women who opt for coeducational institutions” (p. 174-175). Wolf-Wendel concluded by saying that women are not a “monolithic category” and that special focus institutions serve a purpose and need to continue as an educational option.

Rice (1991) published an article that contradicted her previous support for women's colleges. Rice reiterated the findings of her previous research showing the high institutional productivity of women's colleges in earlier but not in recent decades. Rice predicted that the increased diversity of students by ethnicity and socioeconomic status, including minority and disadvantaged women, may result in fewer achievers from women's colleges in the future because of social class. Furthermore, Rice hypothesized that selection and admission have

confounding effects on the reported differences in achievement rates for women's colleges and coeducational institutions. Rice did not dispute that discriminatory behavior occurs in the classroom, but believed the chilly classroom climate is based more on anecdotal information instead of empirical evidence. To spotlight these inequities and to provide more insight into the chilly classroom, Rice called for more direct observation studies of class interactions by faculty and students. Rice asserted that "retreat to an all-female sanctuary" (p. 10) was not a realistic solution to gender inequities found in society "not only for pragmatic and economic reasons, but for philosophic, ethical, and social-political considerations" (p. 11). Rice argued that gender segregation in higher education should not occur because the goal of offering equal educational opportunities to both genders would not be realized until men are included in the solution and both women's and men's education changes.

Two other critics, Stoecker and Pascarella (1991) found Tidball's (1973, 1985, 1986) work impressive, but questioned if her findings were the result of recruitment factors and not environmental factors. They hypothesized that student precollege traits, such as, high school academic achievement, socioeconomic status, and academic and career goals, may be more salient influences on achievement than institutional traits, such as, size, selectivity, and faculty composition and compensation. To test their hypothesis, Stoecker and Pascarella developed a causal model of women's attainment that considered students' precollege traits, institutional characteristics, students' college experience and major, and marital status on women's success. Their postexclusion sample, drawn from the 1979-1980 Cooperative Institutional Research Program, consisted of 2,485 women who had attended a 4-year institution. Of the sample, approximately 10% had graduated from a women's college. When attainment was examined in

1980, a sample of 1,741 women was identified as working full-time and of these, 192 had attended a college for women.

Based on this data, Stoecker and Pascarella (1991) found that after controlling for students' precollege traits, institutional characteristics, students' experiences while in college, and marital status, institutional type had insignificant and minimal influence on women's postcollege educational, occupational, and economic attainment. In contrast to Tidball's (1973, 1985, 1986) assertions, Stoecker and Pascarella found that career attainment was related to differences in student recruitment rather than a distinctive educational environment. Although Tidball's data made it impossible to control for individual student recruitment, Stoecker and Pascarella did not entirely refute Tidball's findings saying Tidball's research focused on specific measures of career success where their research study focused on general measures. Instead, Stoecker and Pascarella suggested women's colleges may enhance their graduates' self-confidence, career ambition, and prominence in certain professions, such as medicine and scientific research and women's college graduates may attain success later in their careers. In conclusion, the two researchers recommended more research on women at coeducational institutions since most women college students are enrolled at this type of school.

Women's Colleges versus Coeducational Institutions

Shortly after Tidball (1970, 1973) published her early research on the institutional productivity of women's colleges, Astin (1977) published his influential work, *Four Critical Years*, which investigated the impact of college attendance based on a multitude of student and institutional variables. For example, Astin identified 52 student characteristics and divided colleges and universities into 15 types. His data were drawn from Cooperative Institutional

Research Program, which contained longitudinal data on over 200,000 students from 300 postsecondary institutions. Although Astin's sole focus was not women's colleges, he identified a number of findings pertinent to colleges for women. Astin found that students at women's colleges had:

- Greater than expected increases in intellectual self-esteem, enhanced by high academic expectations and low rates of cheating, both of which characterize women's colleges.
- Higher levels of academic involvement.
- Higher levels of student-faculty interaction.
- Greater participation on student-faculty committees.
- Greater opportunity for students to seek and attain positions of leadership.
- Stronger perceptions of the college environment as being cooperative, collaborative, and supportive.
- Increased liberalism and sense of altruism by students.
- Higher levels of overall satisfaction with the college experience by students.
- Higher levels of dissatisfaction with social life.
- Higher levels of verbal aggressiveness in class.
- Heightened artistic interests among students.
- Less participation in athletics.
- Greater persistence to finish college.
- Greater probability to enter graduate or professional schools.

From his findings on the positive outcomes of attending single-sex colleges, particularly those of women-only colleges, Astin briefly discussed the 10-year trend of single-sex colleges transitioning to coeducation for mainly economic reasons. He cautioned that educational consequences to students will likely be negative and that undesirable changes in student behavior and attitudes may occur.

Numerous researchers from a variety of perspectives have developed studies in attempts to determine if there is a difference between women's colleges and coeducational colleges. Among these are Smith (1990) who examined student satisfaction, degree attainment, and student perception. Riordan (1992) investigated educational, occupational and marital outcomes for female students at single- and mixed-gender colleges. Miller-Bernal (1989, 1993) has researched the female student experience at various institutional types. Kim and Alvarez (1995) examined student perception of self-confidence and preparation for advanced study in their comparison of women-only and coeducational institutions. Kim (2001) also compared the social and civic development of female students at women-only and coeducational institutions. Tidball et al. (1999) described and discussed the positive institutional characteristics of women's colleges based on 30 years of research on the subject.

Smith (1990) investigated the ways in which attending a women's college or a coeducational school related to student satisfaction, student perception of institutional goals, degree attainment, and educational aspirations, while controlling for student background characteristics. Using data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, Smith surveyed a sample of students in fall 1982 and again in spring 1986. After exclusions, the sample consisted of 705 women who attended coeducational schools and 175 women from

female-only colleges. Smith found that attendance at a college for women contributed to student satisfaction in all areas, except social life, confirming Astin's (1977) earlier findings. Students who attended women's colleges were slightly more satisfied with their overall quality of instruction, their interaction with faculty and administration, housing, career counseling and advising, campus rules, and certain types of on-campus cultural activities when compared to their counterparts at coeducational institutions. Women at the coeducational schools reported similar feelings of satisfaction in these areas, in addition to the areas of social life and computer facilities. Women who attended a women's college showed a high level of acceptance for diverse beliefs. Students from the women's colleges reported a stronger perception that their institution had allowed them to develop both critical and creative thinking, to engage in self-directed learning, to become responsible citizens, and to gain the necessary tools for living. Women students at the two types of institutions reported no differences in their perceptions that they had mastered their field of study, developed research knowledge and skills, were adequately prepared for graduate school, employment or family living, and had gained insight into their moral character and religious convictions. Smith reported degree attainment as 65% for women's colleges compared to 50% for the coeducational schools.

Riordan (1992) examined the educational, attitudinal, occupational and marital outcomes of single- and mixed-gender colleges, while controlling for student background and selection bias variables. From the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class for the academic years 1972-1973 to 1978-1979, a small sample was extracted after applying exclusion criteria. Riordan found that students who attended a women's college for at least two years had a graduation rate of 90% compared to a graduation rate of 50% for women who attended a mixed-

gender school. Students from women's colleges, as did their spouses, achieved higher occupational status than did their counterparts at mixed-sex colleges. The women's college graduates experienced happy marriages and less divorce and reported having a higher sense of control over their environment; however, Riordan qualified these findings as spurious correlations. Riordan found that women college graduates reflected stronger views towards equal gender roles in society. Riordan discovered an unexpected finding: The ultimate educational attainment of women's college graduates was slightly lower than that of women at mixed-sex schools in that graduates of women's colleges were less likely to pursue an advanced degree. Although women's college graduates attained less education, they were more likely to obtain higher prestige jobs. In addition, women's college graduates were less likely to enter the job market or work full-time upon graduation; however, after a number of years, graduates of both types of institutions were equally employed in the workforce. The finding related to less advanced study by women's college graduates contradicts Tidball's (1973, 1985, 1986) previous findings, but Riordan emphasized that graduates of the Seven Sisters were not overrepresented in her sample.

Riordan (1994) continued her research on colleges for women by investigating the "linear effect of attending a women's college" (p. 492). She hypothesized: "It is not graduation from women's college per se that makes a difference, rather, it is the number of years a student spends in this social environment. Theoretically, a woman who attends for one year has an opportunity to obtain some fraction of the benefits of attending four or more years" (p. 492). To study this, data were collected in a manner similar to that followed in Riordan's (1992) previous research and a sample of 1,832 women from coeducational schools and 125 women from women's

colleges was drawn. In her findings, Riordan reported that “attending a women’s college does not lead to greater educational attainment, except for those women who only attend for one year and then go to coeducational institutions,” (p. 497) but cautioned this finding was based on a very small sample, yet “the effect was so large that something does appear to be going on here” (p. 497). Riordan concluded that students who transfer from women’s colleges to coeducational schools have “observed successful classroom participation and unfettered female academic success in women’s colleges would find it easier to achieve in a coeducational school. . .[and] the implications for the present research are that a single year of women’s college schooling may provide an expectancy advantage that will facilitate success in a coeducational setting” (p. 498). For occupational and income attainment, one year of attendance at a women’s college increased occupational prestige by 2.69 units, an effect which continued to increase for each year of attendance. Furthermore, women who completed four years at a women’s college, on average, earned \$700 more per year than women who never attended a college for women. Based on these findings, research showed that although graduates from women’s colleges obtained no more education than their counterparts at coeducational institutions, they gained greater occupational status and personal income.

Rather than examining the institution as the unit of analysis, Miller-Bernal (1989) was interested in the college experiences of female students. Miller-Bernal was also curious about students prior to their enrolling in college to determine the self-selection effects of women who attended women’s colleges and women who attended coeducational institutions. Theorizing that women’s colleges provided an environment more favorable to women’s achievement than comparable coeducational schools, Miller-Bernal replicated a 1977 study by Vanfossen. The

focus of Miller-Bernal's research was two small, private, liberal arts colleges in central New York State. One was a college for women and the other a coordinate college, which was considered similar to a coeducational college. Although the coordinate college had its own admission staff and dean of students and the women students had their own athletic programs and student government, the college was coeducational in all other aspects. A coordinate system has the negative aspect of male students dominating the classroom environment and the positive aspect of providing leadership opportunities for women. A student survey generated 244 responses from the women's college and 222 responses from the coordinate college, and sought information on the college experience through participation in activities, peer relationships, relationships with male and female faculty, and also measured students' sex-role attitudes.

In her findings, Miller-Bernal (1989) reported the overall climate at women's colleges was more favorable when compared to its coordinate counterpart; however, the findings were not unqualified. Students at the women's college reported more frequent and favorable interactions with faculty and found faculty to be encouraging and supportive of their academic interests and studies throughout their four years of college. The female students at the coordinate college also viewed faculty relations and support positively, but indicated that faculty tended to be more supportive of seniors. The women students at the coordinate college reported having an active social life as very important, whereas, a slightly greater proportion of students at the women's colleges reported academics as very important. These findings suggested that women take their studies more seriously without the distraction of men.

In examining the relationship between academic goals and participation in activities, the students at the two institutions differed. At the coordinate school, there was no relationship in

the two areas with students tending to participate in activities regardless of their academic goals. At the women's college, academic goals and participation levels were related, so that women planning on earning a doctorate participated in activities the most. Miller-Bernal (1989) stated that women at the coordinate college, where men were present, received less reward and respect for ambition and had less opportunity to develop leadership skills for later use in life which may explain the greater prominence of alumnae of women's colleges.

Miller-Bernal (1993) continued her research study on the college experience of female students by surveying 260 women from four schools: (a) Wells College, an all-female college; (b) William Smith College, a coordinate college; (c) Middlebury College, a long-time coeducational institution; and (d) Hamilton College, a formerly all-male college that had recently transitioned to coeducation. The longitudinal survey sought information on the college environment and students' experiences, but also information on faculty role models. In contrast to previous studies that claimed women's colleges attracted students from affluent backgrounds, the Wells students came from less affluent backgrounds than students at the other three schools. Miller-Bernal found that the students at Wells and William Smith reported more favorable college experiences, confirming previous research on the benefits of single-sex education for women. Wells students reported having received more leadership training than their counterparts at the other three schools; however, the William Smith students reported taking more classes on women's issues. Students from the four institutions reflected no differences in athletic involvement, class participation, or faculty praise. The Wells students perceived the faculty to be more supportive of their needs, and along with the William Smith students indicated they were more likely to have women faculty as role models. The findings of Miller-Bernal's study

supported the recruiting and marketing claims of William Smith that the college was more like a women's college than a coeducational college. Miller-Bernal (1993) reached one unusual and contradictory finding: "The college experience that has the strongest effect on seniors' career goals, however, is taking courses with women faculty. Those students who have taken the fewest courses with women faculty are the most likely to have nontraditional career goals. This finding has obvious interpretation: those students who are entering nontraditional fields, for example, engineering, are more likely to be taking courses in which few women teach" (p. 46) Miller-Bernal concluded that her study supported the view that women's and coordinate colleges differ from coeducational institutions in ways that contribute to the success and achievement of their alumnae.

As the trend to coeducation progressed, researchers continued to examine the differences in the collegiate experiences of women attending all-female or coeducational institutions. Smith, Wolf and Morrison (1995) developed a causal model that controlled for background characteristics of students and institutions and extracted a sample from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program for 1986 and 1990. They found that women attending women's colleges expressed higher goals for learning and success and were more academically involved than their coeducational counterparts. Students at women's colleges believed their institutions cared about student learning, encouraged civic involvement, and promoted multiculturalism more than the women at coeducational schools did. The students at the women's colleges reported more overall satisfaction with their college experience, except for social life, than did women students at the coeducational schools. The researchers concluded that women's colleges

provided a more “student-centered” (p. 264) environment that proved to be a strong predictor of academic and extracurricular involvement.

Concerned by the declining number of women’s colleges, Kim and Alvarez (1995) and Kim (2001) continued research on the differences in institutional type on the college experiences of women and the positive effects of women’s colleges. Kim and Alvarez (1995) investigated the educational efficacy by institutional type on three measures: (a) academic development, (b) social skills development, and (c) career preparation. Using a conceptual framework of input-environment-outcome developed by Astin in 1991, extracting a sample from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, the Student Information Form, the College Student Survey and Higher Education Research Institute, and controlling for confounding variables such as institutional size, Kim and Alvarez tested for differences between women-only and coeducational institutions.

Kim and Alvarez (1995) found that women who attended women-only colleges entered college with a higher level of self-confidence and showed greater gains in self-confidence and academic ability during college than their coeducational counterparts did. Among the highest 10% in academic ability, women’s colleges students reported a 7.5% increase, whereas, women at coeducational institutions showed a 1.1% decrease. For social confidence, the increase was 7.5% for women’s college students and 5.4% for women who attended coeducational schools. Kim and Alvarez attributed the lower levels among women at coeducational schools to fewer opportunities to gain leadership experience. The difference in perception on academic ability related to students at women’s colleges being surrounded by peers having high academic

self-esteem. These two findings confirmed that institutional type matters. Female students' social self-confidence was positively affected by participation in student organizations, athletics, leadership classes, and even campus demonstrations; however, women's colleges ceased being a predictor when involvement in student organizations and election to student offices were controlled. Parental income was also positively associated with social self-confidence.

Furthermore, contrary to Tidball's findings (1973), a high proportion of women faculty was not a significant predictor of women students' self-reported academic ability. Faculty interest, encouragement, and support proved to be strong influences on student-reported academic ability. Kim and Alvarez (1995) found no differences in preparation for graduate or professional school between women students at the two types of institutions; however, women at the coeducational institutions appeared to have acquired better job skills than their women-only school counterparts. Kim and Alvarez concluded by advising public policy makers to continue to support women-only colleges.

Pointing to the number of visible and influential women working in the public sector who are alumnae of women-only colleges and the number of alumnae of women-only colleges involved in civic and professional organizations, Kim (2001) investigated whether women-only colleges more effectively promote civic virtues and encourage political involvement to effect societal change than do coeducational institutions. Using a research approach similar to the one she and Alvarez (1995) followed in their previous research and gathering extensive student background demographics and institutional characteristics, Kim found that coeducational institutions tended to have larger enrollments, higher student-faculty ratios, higher average faculty salaries, and a higher percentage of expenditure for academic purposes than women's

colleges; however, the differences in selectivity and expenditures for student services were negligible. Women's colleges tended to have a more diverse faculty and to foster liberalism and social activism when compared to coeducational institutions. Freshmen at the two types of institutions showed no significant difference in their desire to influence societal change. By their senior year, 49% of students at women's colleges had increased their desire to affect social changes compared to 40% of students at the coeducational school. Peer social activism and altruism were positively correlated with women's colleges which partially explains the preponderance of women politicians and influential leaders among alumnae of women's colleges.

Tidball et al. (1999) compiled and synthesized 30 years of research on the higher education of women and brought "together history, social theory, statistical analysis, and case studies to illuminate just what it is about women's colleges that continues to produce graduates whose career achievement is significantly higher than that of peers educated in coeducational institutions" (p. xi). They authored their book to inform academic administrators, trustees, parents, and students. The researchers identified a number of institutional characteristics that create a favorable learning environment for women and promote institutional productivity, including: (a) a women's college or institution with a long history of successfully educating women; (b) a relatively small institutional size; (c) the presence of a large number of adult women, but relatively few male students in the environment; and (d) a wide variety of academic fields of study.

Tidball et al. (1999) asserted that institutional purpose and composition of the student body were vital components of the plan. The focused and dedicated mission of educating

women pervaded the daily life of the students, faculty, and administration through the institution's architectural design, history, traditions, symbols, rituals, curriculum, publications, and decision making. A strong commitment to gender-specific issues warranted no apology for political incorrectness. Women's colleges provided extensive and diverse opportunities for women to gain experience in a variety of areas. Women hold all officer positions in student organizations. Women work the light and sound systems in theatrical productions and female athletes are the recipients of the entire athletic budget. Women serve as research assistants to faculty and are overall held to high expectations by faculty and administration. Female students collaborate and compete in reaching their goals. They develop a sense of community and form friendships which serve as mutual support systems during college and alumnae networks after graduation. Women students are instilled with an awareness of the history and commitment to the future of their institution. Tidball et al. attributed the success of women's colleges to a holistic approach that incorporated a number of factors and not one specific characteristic.

Decades of research have investigated women's colleges from numerous angles and have shown that women who attend women colleges, even for only one year, derive a number of benefits, such as:

1. Greater academic involvement during their college years (Kim & Alvarez, 1995; Miller-Bernal, 1993; Smith et al., 1995).
2. Higher level of faculty-student interaction in the classroom, by serving as research assistants, or by serving on faculty-student committees (Astin, 1977; Miller-Bernal 1989).
3. Greater persistence to finish college (Astin, 1977; Riordan, 1992; Smith, 1990).

4. Higher level of overall satisfaction with the college experience (Astin, 1977; Miller-Bernal, 1993; Smith, 1990; Smith et al., 1995).

5. Increased level of self-confidence (Kim & Alvarez, 1995; Tidball, 1985);

6. Greater acceptance for diversity (Smith, 1990; Smith et al., 1995).

7. Greater likelihood of civic or political involvement (Kim, 2001; Tidball et al., 1999; Whitt, 1994).

8. Greater likelihood to earn a Ph.D, M.D. or doctorate in a natural science (Tidball, 1985, 1986; Tidball & Kistiakowsky, 1976; Wolf-Wendel, 1998).

9. Greater likelihood to be recognized for career achievement (Oates & Williamson, 1978; Rice & Hemmings, 1988; Riordan, 1992; Tidball, 1970; Wolf-Wendel, 1998).

10. Higher occupational prestige and earning power (Riordan, 1994).

11. Lower divorce rate and happier marriages (Riordan, 1994; Tidball, 1970).

As Whitt's (1994) research indicated and subsequent narrative describing PWC will present, a number of these characteristics or outcomes of a women's college could be found at PWC.

However, the admission of men in fall 2007 had the potential to alter this environment.

A Changing Environment: Demise of Women's Colleges, Student Protests, and Legal Challenges to Coeducation

Just as the Civil War changed the environment for the higher education of women, World War II also brought changes to women's collegiate education (Harwarth et al., 1997; Jacobs, 1996). As male students and faculty enlisted in the war, female faculty and students filled the void at many institutions, though not at the most prestigious all-male schools. To meet the demands of a war economy, women were recruited into traditionally male-dominated science

fields at coeducational institutions and women's colleges expanded their course offerings in these areas of study. From 1941-1945, a record number of women gained admission to professional schools to study law, medicine, architecture, and science and were hired into positions from which they had been previously excluded (Harwarth et al., 1997). Government funding after the war for veterans also increased the preponderance of women in college. In 1944, Congress passed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, known colloquially as the "GI Bill," which provided funding for 2.2 million war veterans, including 60,000 female veterans, to receive a college education (Kiestner, 1994).

After World War II, however, these advances declined. Returning to their civilian lives, men reclaimed their positions in the classroom as students and faculty and as primary wage earners in the labor force. Similarly, women faced societal pressure to settle into a life of domesticity. The career opportunities available during the war quickly disappeared after the war. The rapid influx of veterans returning to college campuses caused an expansion in infrastructure and programs. Female veterans mostly attended coeducational institutions; however, women's colleges continued to provide a viable option for the higher education of women, especially in traditionally masculine fields of study (Harwarth et al., 1997; Kiestner, 1994).

In the 1960s, society changed again as America confronted the Civil Rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War protests, the sexual revolution, the feminist movement, and the beginnings of the gay liberation and environmental movements. The United States became more egalitarian as the societal mood called for integration of the races and the sexes. During this time, a growing counter culture questioned social and political conventions, and higher education did not escape this scrutiny. Single-sex colleges were seen as outdated institutions. Students wanted

coeducation. Administrators of single-sex schools worried their enrollments and financial resources would decline as students chose coeducational institutions over single-sex schools and for some single-sex schools, this situation had already become a reality. Seeking a way to adapt to these changes, administrators at previously all-male or all-female schools realized that coeducation would double their applicant pool and for all-male schools also raise their academic standards (Miller-Bernal, 2004). Thus, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, many prestigious all-male or all-female colleges, including Princeton, Yale, Amherst, Williams, Vassar, Skidmore, Elmira, and Connecticut College, transitioned to coeducation; others, such as Ladycliff College, closed their doors (Harwarth et al., 1997). The phenomenon of coeducation had begun.

Also during this period, all-male colleges almost disappeared. Today, only four all-male liberal arts colleges remain: Morehouse College in Georgia, Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia, Wabash College in Indiana, and Deep Springs College, a 2-year school located in California (Miller-Bernal, 2004). The number of women's colleges also drastically declined. In 1960, there were 233 women's colleges, yet by 1986 only 90 remained (Chamberlain, 1988). The decline of women's colleges was particularly prevalent during the summer and early fall of 1968. Rice (1991) reported that in the 1968 period of June to October alone, 64 women's colleges went coeducational or closed. In 1969, Wells College President John Wilson predicted, "If the present preoccupation with co-education continues for very long, it may well close off the possibility of sustaining a first-class, single-sex undergraduate college" and praised the unique characteristics of women's colleges (Wilson, as cited in Miller-Bernal, 2000, p. 171). Although the opportunity for attending an all-women's college remains a viable option today, the choices have been greatly reduced over the past five decades.

“If the resistance to change is a prominent feature of academe in general, its prominence is multiplied in the women’s colleges” (Baker, 1976, p. 111). Across the course of its history, the transition to coeducation has often met vehement resistance from students and alumnae in typical and unique ways. Students have reacted with petitions, protests, strikes, and administrative building takeovers. The 20,000 alumnae of Vassar College united in opposition to merger talks with Yale College; however, one Vassar alumna took a highly unusual approach in expressing her sentiments. During a 1967 round-the-world trip, it is rumored that this alumna visited a Buddhist shrine and “prayed that Alan Simpson [Vassar’s president] be struck down” (p. 27). Alan Simpson lived to old age, but the Vassar-Yale merger negotiations failed.

In 1969, the fight over coeducation expanded beyond the walls of the academic ivory tower and into the legal realm. Four young women brought suit against the University of Virginia (UVA), the last single-sex flagship state institution in the nation to deny admission to women (Ihle, 2004). The four plaintiffs, acting for themselves and others facing similar situations, claimed their constitutional rights of equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment were being violated if women could not be admitted to UVA. Shortly after the first hearing and with the encouragement of the court, UVA’s Board of Visitors adopted a plan of implementation for the admission of women beginning in the fall semester of 1970. This plan was presented before the Eastern Division of the U.S. District Court in Richmond, VA on December 17, 1969. In its February 1970 decision, the court approved the plan for coeducation, held no public officials liable, and dismissed the plaintiffs’ case as moot based on the new plan for coeducation (*Kirstein v. Rector and Visitors of University of Virginia*, 1970). Today, women comprise about 60% of incoming students at UVA (Ihle, 2004).

Not only does Virginia hold the distinction of being the last state to admit women to its flagship university, it is also home to a state-supported school, Virginia Military Institute (VMI), whose protracted battle against coeducation reached the U.S. Supreme Court. On June 14, 1991, the U.S. Department of Justice, acting on behalf of an unnamed female high school student who wanted to enroll at VMI, filed a lawsuit alleging that VMI's refusal to admit women, regardless of their qualifications, was a violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Along with the Commonwealth of Virginia, defendants included Governor Lawrence Douglas Wilder, VMI, its president, superintendent, and members of the board of visitors. VMI argued that although it discriminated against women in its admission policy, "the discrimination was not invidious but rather to promote a legitimate state interest – diversity in education" (*United States of America, Plaintiff, v. Commonwealth of Virginia, et al., Defendants*, 1991, p. 3). Major General Josiah Bunting, who would later serve as superintendent at VMI, violently opposed the admission of women, branding them "a toxic kind of virus" that "would destroy the military institute" (Diamond & Kimmel, 2004, p. 267). After six years of legal battles and an expenditure of \$5 million in legal fees by VMI, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that VMI's all-male admissions policy was unconstitutional (Diamond & Kimmel, 2004). Female cadets joined the "Rat Line" at VMI in fall 1997 and gave the expression "Brother Rat" new meaning.

Opposition to coeducation was not directed solely at keeping women out of long-standing male institutions. Female students vigorously objected to the admission of men into their women-only institutions and intervention by the courts also sealed their fate. In 1979, Joe Hogan, a nursing supervisor in a Columbus, Mississippi medical center, applied for admission to

the School of Nursing at Mississippi University for Women (MUW). Although Mr. Hogan was a registered nurse, it was his desire to earn a baccalaureate degree in nursing and MUW was the closest educational institution to his home and workplace to do so. Other than his sex, Mr. Hogan was qualified for admission to MUW; however, university officials advised Mr. Hogan that he could audit courses, but he could not enroll for credit. Using the same legal justification as women who sued for admission to all-male institutions, Mr. Hogan sued, claiming that the single-sex policy at MUW violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. However, unlike earlier litigation that ruled in favor of desegregating male-only schools, in this case, the district ruled that the state had a legitimate interest in providing educational opportunities for its female students in a single-sex environment that affords unique benefits to students (*Mississippi University for Women et al. v. Hogan*, 1982).

Mr. Hogan appealed the district's court decision and the case eventually reached the U.S. Supreme Court. On July 1, 1982, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor issued the court's opinion striking down MUW's prohibition of allowing male students to enroll in credit courses. Justice O'Connor explained that the university's policy violated the Fourteenth Amendment and perpetuated the stereotyped view of nursing as an occupation for women (*Mississippi University for Women et al. v. Hogan*, 1982). The Court also found that MUW did not show that women are "adversely affected by the presence of men in the classroom" (*Mississippi University for Women et al. v. Hogan*, 1982, p. 4). Justices Burger, Blackmun, and Powell, in their dissenting opinion, wrote that Mr. Hogan's constitutional complaint was based in the proximity of MUW and his not wanting to travel to other nursing schools open to him, citing there is "no constitutional right to attend a state-supported university in one's home town" (*Mississippi*

University for Women et al. v. Hogan, 1982, p. 14). Revealing their modern-day acceptance of this decision, MUW's trademarked logo now advertises itself as offering, "a tradition of excellence for women and men."

Over the years, other single-sex state institutions, such as the Texas Women's University and The Citadel, accepted court-mandated coeducation. Lengthy and costly legal challenges by schools such as VMI and MUW showed that the judicial system found admissions policies in which admission was denied based on gender an unconstitutional violation of students' rights and that waging a battle through the courts would prove futile.

With the coeducation of MUW and Texas Women's University, attending a women-only public institution was no longer an option in the United States. A number of private colleges and universities for women existed and because of their private status, the legal claim of a violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment was not applicable. However, these schools were not immune to societal and financial pressures of desegregation. Some of these institutions faced declining enrollments and decreased revenue, both of which were often seen as more daunting issues than a legal challenge to the constitutionality of their admissions policy. Faced with the possibility of closure or mergers with other institutions, boards of trustees at many of these institutions voted to admit men. In response, student rebellion erupted and legal challenges to enjoin the admission of men and coeducation became a course of action.

One of the more notable cases of student protest and subsequent legal challenge followed the 2004 announcement of Wells College to admit men in the academic year of 2005-2006. Like other women-only colleges at the time, Wells' decision was based largely on financial reasons. Lisa Marsh Ryerson, President of Wells College, had reported that tuition revenue covered only

22% of the current budget. It costs Wells \$11,000 to recruit a student and \$40,000 a year to educate each student, yet the average tuition revenue from a student amounted to \$7,800. Wells' then enrollment of less than 400 students would not guarantee long-term financial viability or sustain the existence of the college (Ryerson, 2004). Faced with losing \$5 million each year due to declining enrollment and increasing costs, the college had made its last resort decision to admit men ("Court denies injunction," 2005).

As a result of this decision, student demonstrations commenced within moments of the official announcement. To express their immediate anger and disagreement, students walked out of the meeting and nearly 200 students took over the lobby of the college's administration building, barricading off the president's office and admissions department. Later, students chanted and picketed; petitions were circulated; and solidarity movements were held at other women's institutions. The most visually powerful act of protest occurred on October 5, 2004 when 50 students "sat gagged with black cloth in complete silence to represent their voices being stifled by the administration, and how coeducation silences women in the classroom" (Burks, 2005). Following threats by the administration of expulsion and arrest, the protests waned; however, two students, sophomore Jennifer LaBarbera and freshman Lauren Searle-Lebel, filed a lawsuit against Wells College for fraud and breach of contract (Wogan, 2005).

In their November 29, 2004 filing, these two students, now plaintiffs, asked the court to grant a preliminary injunction to bar men from enrolling at Wells until fall 2008. A special term of the Supreme Court of the State of New York was held on December 16, 2004. On December 22, 2004, Justice Corning issued the court's decision, denying the plaintiffs' motion for a preliminary injunction, under the rationale that with an annual operating deficit of \$5 million, the

Board of Trustees had the obligation and responsibility to ensure the ongoing success of the college, even if it meant going coed (*Searle-Lebel & LaBarbera v. Wells College*, 2004). The court found no evidence of misrepresentation, deceit, dishonesty, or of the hiding of facts on the part of Wells College, as alleged by the plaintiffs, and the court ruled that the contractual relationship between the college and a student existed for one semester since tuition was paid on a semester basis. Furthermore, the court ruled the plaintiffs had not suffered irreplaceable harm, but an inconvenience, and if they still wanted an education at an all-women's college, they could transfer. Justice Corning's opinion seemed to express empathy with the plaintiffs' desire to maintain the status quo at their college, but explained, "Change is going to happen, nobody wants change but either you change or you get run over by the railroad tracks" (*Searle-Lebel & LaBarbera v. Wells College*, 2004, p. 5). With the admission of men to Wells College, the number of women-only colleges in the United States became one less.

When the Wells College students began their demonstrations, they followed the example set 14 years earlier by previous Mills College students in May 1990 when the college's President, Mary Metz, and the Chair of the Board of Trustees, Warren Hellman, announced that Mills College would transition to coeducation in the fall of 1991. The Board had overwhelmingly voted for the admission of men to ensure the future financial sustainability of the college. The Mills students erupted with screams, shouts, and jeers, making it impossible to hear the speakers. Within hours of the official announcement to admit men, hundreds of Mills students had mobilized to plan a student strike and campus-wide takeover. Students boycotted classes, blockaded administrative offices, and plastered the campus with banners proclaiming their solidarity. They demanded that the Board reverse its decision on coeducation and vowed to

keep the campus shut down until the Board met their demands. In protest, students taped their mouths shut and shaved their heads. They hung “Warren-Go-to-Hell” in effigy (Peril, 2006; Sheldon, 2006; Thomas, 1991).

The students’ defiance attracted the attention of the national news media. *The New York Times* shared the students’ sorrow but a San Diego newspaper called the student protesters “a bunch of spoiled brats” (Peril, 2006, p. 345). Some members of the media wrote of the hypocrisy of condemning all-male Virginia Military Institute while supporting female-only Mills College. However, on May 17th, the Mills students ended their strike and one day later, Warren Hellman stood on the steps of the College Tea Shop holding a banner that read, “Mills for Women Again.” The Mills College Board of Trustees officially rescinded its decision to admit men on May 18, 1990. The Board enacted a number of strategic goals in the areas of enrollment, endowment, financial aid, and faculty-student ratios to bolster the college’s viability. Almost two decades later, Mills College remains all-female (Peril, 2006; Sheldon, 2006).

Although students at other women’s colleges that have transitioned to coeducation, including PWC, have utilized some of the protest tactics of Mills College students, their acts of dissention did not succeed. For those students who have sought legal means to preserve the gender-identity of their college, the courts have not ruled in their favor.

History and Philosophy of PWC

Private Women’s College (PWC), the central focus of this study, is considered to be one of the earlier institutions of academic excellence in the higher education of women and a leader in educating women of the South (Cornelius, 1951). The history and strength of PWC is closely linked with an affiliated male-only college which had its beginnings in 1830. As early as 1883

and at the urging of the college's president and the faculty, the Board of Trustees (BOT) began discussing the idea of establishing a women's college, but decided it was not practical at that time. Seven years later in 1890, the Board began definitive plans for establishing a college for women.

Much of the early foundation of the women's college can be credited to the president of the men's college, who was an ardent proponent for the higher education of women. The president believed that women had been deprived of appropriate educational opportunities and early in his presidential tenure recommended to the Board that the ladies of the local community be admitted to the college upon the same terms as the male students ("Proceedings of the Trustees, 1893-1905," as cited in Cornelius, 1951, p. 20). However, his request was denied. Despite his early failure, the president did not give up. Friends of the president recall him taking every opportunity to engage in convincing conversations about the founding of a college for women (Cornelius, 1951). The community leaders of another city within the state enthusiastically endorsed the plan for a women's college in their city and a fundraising campaign commenced. The liberally written charter of the men's college gave the Board of Trustees the authority to establish a women's college without seeking a new charter from the state legislature. Founded in 1891, PWC opened on September 14, 1893 with 36 boarding students, an ample number of day students, an endowment of \$100,000, and total assets valued at \$227,000 (Cornelius, 1951). The statement of purpose in the prospectus for PWC read: "We wish to establish in [the state] a college where our young women may obtain an education equal to that given in the best college for young men, and under environments in harmony with the highest ideals of womanhood; where dignity and strength of fully developed faculties and the charm of

the highest literary culture may be acquired by our daughters without loss to woman's crowning glory – her gentleness and grace” (Cornelius, 1951, p. 31). The college's curriculum would focus on humanities and mathematics; English studies would be given the equivalent emphasis as Latin and Greek; and physical education would be included.

Philosophically, the administration at PWC firmly believed that students and faculty were active partners in the college's success. Faculty and students enjoyed a positive interaction, making teaching and learning a productive and pleasant experience. Students were described as enthusiastic and persistent in their studies. From the beginning, PWC women were known for their self-reliant and mature behavior. They were serious college women who also exhibited a youthful and fun-loving side.

Initial student publications stated that students would be “treated as daughters of equal maturity in a well-regulated Christian family” (Cornelius, 1951, p. 81) where they would be protected from interruptions and distractions. The responsibility for good behavior rested with the students and was not enforced through demerits and penalties. A student committee, elected by their respective classes, was responsible for devising and enforcing the necessary measures to protect the health and well-being of the students and to encourage good conduct and study habits with the intention of preserving the reputation of the student body. This plan of student government was progressive for its time. Since its founding, PWC has treated its students as mature and responsible adults, involving them as full partners in the activities and governance of the college.

When the idea was conceived of establishing in the state a college for women comparable to the best colleges for men, there was not a women's college in the South with national

recognition. The goal was to build a nationally-recognized women's college offering exemplary educational standards. In an effort to demonstrate the intellectual capability of its female entrants, PWC followed the same admission requirements as its affiliated male college. From its opening, PWC offered a strong program in literature, composition, and history of modern languages. The college expected incoming students to demonstrate adequate preparation in Latin, and the study of Latin was a graduation requirement. PWC was strong in the sciences, and the science courses of physics, chemistry, geology, and biology required laboratory work. Dr. Nicholas Knight, an independent researcher at Syracuse University, described PWC's departmental laboratory "as one of the finest and most complete chemical laboratories south of Harvard" (Knight, as cited in Cornelius, 1951, p. 68). The psychology department was progressive from its inception. PWC was one of the early colleges to advance the new field of experimental psychology and was believed to be the first southern college to have a psychology laboratory.

Based on these program strengths, PWC quickly earned a reputation for providing quality education and for being a progressive educational institution. In the *Report of the United States Commissioner of Education for 1893-1894*, PWC was listed as one of 16 schools given an A rating. In 1903, PWC became the first college for women accepted into the membership of the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Southern States, later called the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. With its reputation for academic excellence, PWC was no longer solely attracting women students from the local community or from within the state. PWC earned a nationally-recognized reputation for academic excellence and this reputation continues.

Current Challenges at PWC

A comparison of the history of the founding and philosophy of PWC with recent research on the benefit and value of attending an all-female college finds remarkable similarities. Many alumnae would say that PWC's national reputation and philosophy on the education of women held true until September 9, 2006 when the BOT announced its decisions to transition PWC to coeducation.

When coeducation at PWC was announced the college enrolled approximately 700 students. PWC attracted students with high academic qualifications. For the class that entered in fall 2004, 36% ranked in the top 10% of their high school graduating class and 63% ranked in the top 20%. Students represented 44 states and 40 countries and territories. Twenty-seven percent of the students were international or non-White. With such a diverse student body, PWC was a member of the International 50, a select group of U.S. colleges and universities recognized for their international programs and global awareness ("Admissions FAQs," n.d.; "Fast Facts," n.d.; "National Rankings," n.d.).

In addition to its recruits, PWC was proud of its graduates, many of whom could be considered high-achievers. PWC ranked in the top 10% of baccalaureate-granting institutions nationwide in the percentage of students who go on to earn a Ph.D. Over the past eight years, the percentage of PWC students accepted into medical school is nearly 29% higher than the national average. Sixty-eight percent of alumnae attend graduate school within five years of graduation. For students who go on to earn their Ph.D., PWC ranks second among the state's public and private institutions ("Admission FAQs," n.d.; "Fast Facts," n.d.; "National Rankings," n.d.).

As it did in the past, PWC continued to receive national recognition. The National Survey of Student Engagement indicated that PWC “scored consistently and substantially higher than both the national average and the majority of liberal arts schools nationwide” (“National Rankings,” n.d.). The 2006 edition of the *Fiske Guide to Colleges* praised PWC for the rigor of its academic programs. The *Princeton Review’s* Best 357 Colleges, 2005 edition, recognized PWC for its diverse student body, great computer and laboratory facilities, and palatial-like dorms. *Seventeen Magazine* named PWC as the fifth best small college in America (“National Rankings,” n.d.).

Even with these strong accolades, the enrollment at PWC has declined over the past 40 years, beginning about the time that an increased number of colleges and universities were transitioning to coeducation. In the 1960s and early 1970s, PWC’s enrollment totaled about 900 students; for the past 10 years, it has hovered around 700 full-time students. Due to its decreased enrollment, net tuition revenue, the college’s primary revenue source, has not been meeting the college’s financial needs. For the fiscal year 2005-2006, PWC ended the year with a \$4.5 million operating deficit. The college unsuccessfully tried to control this financial situation through salary caps, hiring freezes, department eliminations, and other budget cuts.

As of June 30, 2006, the PWC had an endowment of \$140 million, one of the largest among private colleges in the state. Although PWC recently completed a \$100 million capital campaign, 36% amounts to planned gifts that are not currently available for use and 7% are pledges that have not been collected. As of June 20, 2006, actual funds available from the capital campaign totaled \$58 million. Almost half of this amount has been spent on current operations (scholarships, salaries, libraries, etc.). Seven million dollars has been earmarked for

capital improvements and the balance was added to the endowment. PWC's operating expenses for fiscal year 2005-2006 totaled \$26.3 million against total revenue of \$21.8 million (Burnley, n.d.). PWC's interim president in discussing the financial crisis facing the college, described the situation by explaining, "If 'crisis' is interpreted to mean the College is ready to close its doors, then we are not in a crisis. However, we are at a crucial turning point. . . .Our financial model demonstrates that we would deplete our expendable endowment within 10-12 years" (Worden, 2006). Although the president's annual reports for fiscal years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 had hinted at financial concerns, the president's report for 2006 clearly reported the college's precarious financial position. PWC's financial situation gained more public attention on December 11, 2006 when the Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) placed the college on warning for 12 months for failing to have a sound financial stability and adequate physical resources to support the institution's mission, programs, and services ("Disclosure Statement," 2007). With the warning by SACS in December 2006, PWC now faced an uncertain future academically, in addition to its tenuous financial future. On December 12, 2007, it was reported that SACS had lifted its warning; however, SACS continued to monitor the college's financial situation over the next 12 months for continuing progress (Desrets, 2007). The website of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools currently lists the college as accredited.

The Board of Trustees of PWC was not oblivious of the financial challenges facing the college in the current environment of higher education. In the President's Report 2005, PWC's former president described higher education as being in "an era in which the vast majority of students are looking for large, public, co-educational, and professionally oriented institutions,

often in or near large metropolitan areas. . . .Those of you with daughters, granddaughters, or nieces understand this trend toward co-education very well. It is very difficult to persuade a 17-year old to seriously consider a women's college" (Bowman, 2005, p. 3). Having recognized this change in higher education, PWC's Board created a Strategic Planning Steering Committee (SPSC) in October 2003 to "develop strategic initiatives that will ensure the future of PWC as an academically excellent woman's college and a financially sustainable enterprise and present those initiatives to the Board of Trustees for discussion and action. . .[and to] explore seriously any options that would sustain an institution of high quality and financial viability ("Strategic Plan," n.d.).

In August 2004, the BOT hired one of the nation's leading consulting firms in the field of higher education to conduct external market research. Over a 9-month period, the consulting firm conducted various forms of market research, such as meetings, interviews, blind telephone surveys, and telephone surveys, involving 500 alumnae, 300 current students, 380 inquirers, 125 admitted applicants and a dozen or so withdrawn students. As a result of this research, the consulting firm, working with the SPSC, developed four platforms for preserving the college's academic distinction while maintaining its single-sex status. The four platforms included a *Global College*, which emphasized foreign language immersion and international travel; an *Exploration College* that studied a common theme across disciplines; an *Honors College* in which student-faculty collaboration produced individual goal planning and achievement; and a *Leadership College* in which students acquired the skills and knowledge for bringing about change ("Results from 2004-2005 Market Research," n.d., p. 1). The consulting firm also considered other options, such as, enrolling more international or ethnically diverse students;

expanding preprofessional course offerings; increasing the number of graduate students; emphasizing hands-on learning through travel, internships, and community service; and becoming coed.

The consulting firm presented four scenarios the college could pursue for a future direction. The first of these was the “Single Gender, Incremental Changes” plan. In this plan, PWC would make incremental changes such as “new majors, offering flexible evening adult and graduate courses, funding more social events, partnering with an urban campus, and increasing fund raising with alumnae” (“Results from 2004-2005 Market Research,” n.d., p. 1). The consulting firm did not recommend this option since deficit spending would continue and demand for women’s colleges would decline further. The second plan was the “Single Gender, Radical Change Scenario.” The consulting firm had learned through its research that the social life on campus and in the local community was seen as a negative. In this second scenario, massive amounts of unrestricted endowment would be raised and the local community would be transformed into a social center similar to a nearby college community (“Results from 2004-2005 Market Research,” n.d.) and the Honors College approach would be implemented. The consulting firm did not see this scenario as realistic since it depended on constituents (alumnae and the local community) beyond the college’s control. Third was the “Coed Plus a Distinctive Appeal Scenario.” Although the consulting firm was not specifically hired to study coeducation, its research indicated that coeducation would have a significant positive impact on the college. However, the consulting firm indicated there were certain risks in transitioning to coeducation and recommended that further study be conducted. The fourth and final plan was to “Merge or Relocate with Another Woman’s College.” This was considered the most extreme

option and the ultimate sacrifice by PWC with no assurance that preserving a college for women would be guaranteed. The BOT continued the consulting firm's services and directed that further study of the third option, coeducation, be conducted.

From January to June 2006, research continued with a primary focus on transitioning PWC to coeducation. The consulting firm completed a qualitative, interview-based study with 39 individuals who had a history of making sizable contributions to the college. These individuals had fond memories and strong praise for their alma mater, but pragmatically recognized that times had changed. Almost all 39 said they would continue to support PWC if it went coed; however, their preference would be that the college remains all female. Overwhelmingly, they responded that maintaining high academic standards was the most important consideration. The consulting firm conducted 1,000 blind telephone surveys with three types of prospective students: (a) qualified students who had inquired to PWC, (b) qualified female noninquirers, and (c) qualified male noninquirers. The results indicated none of the female inquirers and female noninquirers had considered only women's colleges. For female inquirers, only 9% said they preferred a women-only college, whereas, only 1% of the noninquirers preferred a college for women. Ninety-six percent of the men polled said they would consider a coed school that had been previously an all-women's college ("Summary of Market Research," 2006).

Throughout this time period, members of the BOT and college officials hosted informational forums for alumnae in 14 cities throughout the country where large concentrations of alumnae lived and where alumnae chapters were strong. On March 29, 2006, the SPSC held an open meeting on campus for students and on June 2, 2006, alumnae were given an update by

the PWC Board of Trustees and SPSC during their annual reunions. The consulting firm presented the findings of its spring research to the BOT, faculty, and staff at a meeting in early June 2006. Board members and members of the SPSC held a number of meetings over a 6-week period to discuss the results of the consulting firm's spring research and the findings of an internal study on women's colleges. On July 14, 2006, the consulting firm made its final report to the SPSC, faculty, and staff, recommending that the "college would best enhance its ability to attract a robust student population with a global honors program emphasizing experiential education within a coed environment" ("Summary of Market Research," 2006). Over the next 2 weeks, the SPSC developed a plan for the college's future. The BOT held a meeting for open discussion on July 31, 2006, and the following day they reviewed the plan for the future and voted to forward the plan to senior administration and faculty for consideration. On August 4, 2006, the plan was presented to the Alumnae Association Board by members of the BOT. For the next two weeks, faculty, staff, and alumnae had the option to submit their written comments about the plan to the SPSC. The SPSC finalized the plan and presented it to the Board for consideration and vote at its Board meeting scheduled for September 8-9, 2006 ("Strategic Plan," n.d.).

On September 9, 2006, the president of the BOT, who was also an alumna, stood with the interim president, also an alumna, and announced that the BOT had approved a strategic plan for the College that "invites young men to become part of our community" ("Announcement Transcript," 2006). Amid tears and shouts of traitor directed at the interim president, PWC's legacy as a women's college ended. PWC, with a 115-year history of educating women, had succumbed to social, political and economic changes resulting in the demise of another women's

college. Immediately, a firestorm of protest occurred – e-mails, letters to local and state newspapers, and campus protest rallies broadcast throughout the world on YouTube – all reactions typical of college students confronted with major change at their school. However, nine students pursued a different course of action.

On October 6, 2006, nine students became plaintiffs in a lawsuit against PWC when they filed a complaint in the city's Circuit Court seeking "an injunction to the Plaintiffs, enjoining further implementation of the Strategic Plan for at least three years, until those Plaintiffs who were presently freshmen graduated from [PWC] in 2010, so the Plaintiffs can receive the benefit of the contract for which they bargained" (Durette et al., 2006, p. 9). The trustees of PWC were named as defendants. Represented by a prominent law firm, the students alleged a breach of contract to their contract with the college that guaranteed them a single-sex education throughout their years at the college. A similar legal assertion had been made by the plaintiffs in their unsuccessful case against Wells College.

In their complaint, the plaintiffs said they chose PWC as a 4-year liberal arts college with a single-sex environment, known for its traditions and community established during its 115-year history as a liberal arts college for women. The plaintiffs indicated that PWC made statements, both orally and in writing, touting benefits of single-sex education compared to benefits of coeducation. The plaintiffs also cited college publications in which assertions were made that women's college graduates outperform women who attend coeducational institutions. The plaintiffs further alleged that at no time did any representative or publication of the college inform them that the BOT was considering the transition to coeducation. The plaintiffs also alleged that a contract was formed between them and the college when they received the

acceptance letter, accepted the offer, paid tuition and other fees, and registered for classes. The college's transition will deny them the terms of their contract, "an education fully and completely directed toward women" (Durette et al., p. 3). The plaintiffs were not seeking compensatory or punitive damages from the defendant but a legal resolution since they were being denied what was contracted. They indicated that transferring to another woman's college was not a viable option since it may add an additional semester or year to their educational process due to residency or credit transfer requirements.

The attorneys for the defendants conceded the plaintiffs' disappointment in the college's transition to coeducation, but argued there was no basis for a breach of contract claim. The defense stated the college made no promise to provide the plaintiffs four years of a liberal arts education in an all-women's college. The defense further argued that the contract theory fails due to a lack of mutuality and citing earlier legal cases that if a contract did indeed exist, its term was for no period longer than a semester. The defense contended that the documents offered as evidence of the plaintiff's position, admission letters, promotional materials, college catalogs and handbooks, and even the college's honor code, did not support the formation of a contract (Fuhr, 2006). At the January 23, 2007 hearing, the defense asked the court to dismiss the plaintiff's complaint and on February 2, 2007, the court dismissed the case.

The plaintiffs were not deterred. On February 19, 2007, the plaintiffs appealed to the state's Supreme Court, which the court granted on September 19, 2007. On April 14, 2008, the state's Supreme Court heard their case. On June 6, 2008, the court held that plaintiffs had failed to demonstrate the existence of a contract requiring PWC to continue operation as a college for women during the plaintiffs' tenure as students and thus ruled against the nine women students

(Dodge *et al.* v. Trustees of [R-MWC], 2008). Male students would be admitted to the college and currently 60 male students represent 34% of the Class of 2011, the first coeducational class at the college (“Fast Facts,” n.d.).

Definition of Terms

Within the context of this study, the following terms provide understanding to the higher education of women:

Chilly climate. “A psychological climate in which students of one sex are valued differently and therefore treated differently than are students of the opposite sex” (Serex & Townsend, 1999, p. 528).

Coed. The word was coined around the time of the Civil War and was derogatorily used to describe women students. In later years, the word had sexual connotations (Miller-Bernal & Poulson, 2004). It can now mean a male student in a formerly all-female college.

COED College. The pseudonym given to the newly-named coeducational college beginning in fall 2007.

Coeducation. *The Encarta Dictionary* defines coeducation as education for both sexes. Miller-Bernal and Poulson (2004) write that “otherness is reflected in the very word ‘coeducation’. ‘Co-’ is defined as ‘with, together, joint, or jointly,’ which theoretically implies that either men or women could be ‘coeds’” (p. x).

Gender enrollment pattern. A field of study at the collegiate level in which the students are majority male, majority female, or gender neutral (Allan & Madden, 2006). For example, engineering is a male-majority field of study; education is a female-majority field of study; and English is considered a gender-neutral field of study.

Men's change college. A formerly all men's college that began admitting women (Tidball et al., 1999).

Private Woman's College (PWC). The pseudonym given to the college for women which was the focus of this research study.

Single-sex college. A college that admitted students of only one sex.

Student-plaintiff. A term to describe a student who participates in a lawsuit against the college in which she is enrolled.

Women's change college. A formerly all women's college that began admitting men (Tidball et al., 1999).

Women's Education Defended (WEC). The pseudonym given to the non-profit organization established by the alumna-leaders to legally challenge the coeducation decision made by PWC.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Numerous books, journal articles, and newspaper accounts have been written on the subject of former single-sex schools transitioning to coeducation from the perspective of the institution. Newspapers are generally the source of information on students' reaction to a coeducation announcement by college officials. Little has been written about the change to coeducation from the perspective of the student's lived experiences. A review of the literature produced no information written from the viewpoint of students who oppose their college's decision to go coeducational and legally challenge the decision, or the alumnae groups who provide financial support and encouragement for these student actions. With only two transitions to coeducation by a private college for women having reached the judicial system for resolution, these events have given the students and alumnae a rare experience in the history of higher education for women. This research study proposed to explore this experience from the perspective of various participants opposed to the transition to coeducation and their involvement in the legal challenge using phenomenological methods of inquiry.

Phenomenological Research

During the legal proceedings, the attorney for the college described the demise of single-sex schools as a phenomenon (*Dodge et al. v. Trustees of [PWC]*, 2007). A phenomenon can be defined as an experience, an observable occurrence or fact, often something out of the ordinary that attracts people's interest and curiosity (Encarta Dictionary). This women's college

transition to coeducation lends itself to a phenomenological approach since the primary objective of this research is to develop a thorough understanding of experience by the study participants.

Sokolowski (2000) describes phenomenology as the study of human experience and how the events of the experience are perceived by the participants. Understanding the structure and essence of an experience or phenomenon for the people involved is the focus of phenomenological inquiry according to Patton (1990). Moustakas (1994) writes that gathering information of the person's thoughts, feelings, ideas, and actions leads to discovering the essence of the experience for the person who had the experience and produces a comprehensive description of the occurrence.

Rooted in philosophy, phenomenology sees phenomena as the foundation of human science and the source for all knowledge, with any phenomenon being the starting point for inquiry (Sokolowski, 2000). Phenomenology studies and gathers information on human experiences in ways that are not discernable through quantitative research methods. Descriptions of experiences are an integral component of phenomenology. Descriptions give life to a phenomenon by highlighting the occurrence, identifying its underlying meanings, and providing long-term remembrance of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). By focusing on the appearance of actions and events and by examining these actions or events from various perspectives, a comprehensive view of the essence of a phenomenon or experience is developed. Phenomenological research utilizes questions that evoke vivid and accurate terms that account for the passionate involvement with whatever was experienced and leads to meanings and themes.

Giorgi (1985) outlines a two-level process for conducting empirical phenomenological study. In Level I, naïve descriptions derived from open-ended questions and discussions serve as the initial or original data. In Level II, the researcher reflectively analyzes and interprets the research participant's account of the event and identifies the structures of the experience. The end product should be a comprehensive narrative of the experience from the perspective of the people involved. From these individual descriptions, the essences or structures of the experience are depicted and general or universal meanings may be derived (Moustakas, 1994).

Sokolowski (2000) directs the researcher to develop a phenomenological attitude by becoming a detached observer or onlooker. The first step in a phenomenological approach requires the researcher to bracket or set aside previous judgments, perceptions, beliefs, opinions, or notions about the phenomenon being investigated. By bracketing preconceptions, the researcher does not introduce personal experiences or hypotheses into the study. This state of the open mind is called epoché. Having reached epoché, the researcher is free from suppositions and refrains from making judgments until the evidence is clear. Through this mental state, the researcher is able to listen freely and receptively and hear the research participants describe their experience (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Sokolowski, 2000). The process of bracketing to reach epoché precedes the process termed phenomenological reduction, a process similar to data analysis in other qualitative research methodologies.

Although I followed a phenomenological approach, my study, like many qualitative research studies, allowed for an emergent design. Maxwell (2005) advises there is no strict outline for doing qualitative research but suggests that the researcher have a tentative plan with some aspects outlined in sufficient detail, but recognize that revisions may be necessary. New

selection plans, different kinds of data, and different analytic strategies should be considered as research progresses. Bilken and Casella (2007), Rubin and Rubin (1995), and Seidman (2006) recommend that qualitative research remain an emerging and flexible process. Toward that end, I had to modify the number, the time length, and the manner in which participant interviews were conducted. In addition, I utilized alternative approaches to participant recruitment beyond those originally planned. Throughout the research process, I was open to alternative ways of thinking about my research design as emergent and as a result, I was able to gain access to the lived experiences of the participants in this study.

The Research Topic and Questions

As the time to identify a dissertation topic approached, I struggled with finding a topic in which I could become passionately engaged. I found my topic when reading an article in the local newspaper about a women's college decision to become coeducational and a subsequent article about students filing a lawsuit against the college to stop the transition to coeducation until students who were then freshmen had graduated in May 2010. A quick Google search revealed that a number of students opposed this decision based on the contents of videos uploaded to various Internet sites.

The primary research question for the students was: How do students at a private women's college describe the transition from single-sex education to coeducation. A secondary question for the students and alumnae involved in the legal challenge was: How do students and alumnae involved in a legal challenge to coeducation at private women's college describe their experiences?

Participant Selection Process

Since their lawsuit was a matter of public record, I was able to gain identifying information on the student-plaintiffs who were among the following class levels at the time of the lawsuit: (a) four freshmen, (b) one sophomore, and (c) four juniors. By the time research commenced all of the student-plaintiffs had graduated from PWC.

Prior to initiating the study, I explored the possibility with lead legal counsel that the student-plaintiffs might be interested in participating in a study of their legal challenge (see Appendix A). An associate of the plaintiff's lead legal counsel acknowledged my exploratory inquiry and suggested I make a similar inquiry to the alumnae group funding the legal challenge (see Appendix B). These were undertaken to ascertain the feasibility of the potential study only.

This approach to participant selection represents purposeful sampling. In purposeful sampling, the researcher selects participants who can provide rich information and in-depth study of the topic (McMillan, 2004). Creswell (1998) suggests a more specific form of purposeful sampling for phenomenological research, criterion sampling. Since phenomenological methodology mandates that the participants have experienced the phenomenon being studied, criterion sampling ensures that "all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 1998, p. 118). The student-plaintiffs and alumna-leaders who opposed the college's transition to coeducation have directly experienced the phenomenon under study.

The primary candidates among the alumnae sought for the study were the alumna-leaders of a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization founded to oppose the strategic plan of the trustees of the

college to make the college coeducational and alter the college's curricular focus ("Announcements," 2007). This group provided alumnae who graduated over a span of decades.

Initial contact with the student-plaintiffs was by letter sent by U.S. mail to their addresses listed in the legal documents (Appendix C). Initial contact with the alumna-leaders who funded the lawsuit was by e-mail since this contact information was available on the group's website. This recruitment approach did not generate the responses for which I hoped and as a result, I utilized other means of locating participants. Through Google, an Internet search engine, and Facebook, a social networking site on the Internet, I was able to locate additional participants. In addition, I asked participants to contact potential participants on my behalf and with the assistance of one participant, two more participants agreed to participate in my study.

Creswell (1998) considers 10 subjects as a reasonable sample size, but reports that as few as 1 participant and as many as 325 participants have been included in phenomenological research. Moustakas (1994) cites phenomenological studies that include 10-15 participants. Creswell (1998) points out that the objective is to describe the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspective of a small group of individuals who have lived the experience.

My target population consisted of 14 possible participants, among the student-plaintiffs and alumna-leaders. While my aim was to have 8-10 participants in my research study, I was able to reach data saturation with seven participants, three student-plaintiffs and four alumna-leaders.

Confidentiality is a primary tenet of empirical research, whether qualitative or quantitative in approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; McMillan & Schumacher, 1997; Mitchell & Jolley, 2007; Seidman, 2006). Many of the participants in this research have been identified in

court documents, news reports, or on websites. The student-plaintiffs have had not only have their names reported, but also their address and class level. The alumna-leaders associated with the organization formed to oppose the transition to coeducation and fund the legal challenge have had their graduation date, professional degrees, and place of employment listed. I ensured that my research did not include any identifying information, such as year of graduation, identifying extracurricular activities, place of residence, or occupation of the participants. Each was identified with a pseudonym.

Data Collection

In some respects, interest for this study began when I read the first article in a local newspaper about the transition to coeducation at PWC. Realizing the potential of this event as a dissertation topic, I read Cornelius's (1951) history of the college and became diligently watchful for any articles on the transition of the college to coeducation. In addition, I signed up for e-mail updates on the legal proceedings and alumnae activities from the website of the alumnae opposition group. I also viewed a number of protest videos uploaded by students of the college onto YouTube.com, a user-broadcast and social website. Based on the writings of a number of phenomenological researchers, Creswell (1998) posits this type of information collection allows the researcher to be more informed on the subject and also allows the researcher to develop a plan of study suited to the phenomenon under review. This information gathering process follows Seidman's (2006) recommendation that the researcher "read enough to be thoughtful and intelligent about the context and history of the topic" (p. 38).

First-person reports of life experiences gathered from long interviews with the participants serve as evidence or data in phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological interview should be a relaxed and interactive process during which open-ended questions and comments are posed based on a topical interview guide that may be revised as the participant recounts the story of the experience. Although the interview approach is essentially open-ended, Seidman (2006) cautions that preparation, planning and structure are necessary for successful interviews. Seidman warns that without a plan, a purpose and a structure, the researcher has no basis for the instantaneous changes in the questions or direction during the interview. Both Moustakas (1994) and Seidman (2006) hold the researcher responsible for developing a positive environment in which participants feel comfortable talking about their experiences and which provides an atmosphere of respect and fairness. Seidman believes that a series of three interviews builds rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee and gives each a better understanding of the context of the experience. Seidman warns that a single meeting with the participant-interviewee may provide data lacking true substance. With a three-interview series, the context of the experience can be gathered during the first interview and the details of the experience can be obtained during the second interview. During the third interview, the participant-interviewee has an opportunity to reflect on the experience and its meanings.

To establish a plan and provide a general structure for the interviews, I developed an interview guide for each category of participants (Appendix D for student-plaintiffs and Appendix E for alumna-leaders). Prior to its utilization, the interview guide was reviewed by and refined with the input of an expert panel comprised of my dissertation committee. To foster

a positive and comfortable interview environment, I allowed the participants to select the interview location. As a result, interviews were conducted in a participant's home, in an apartment building lobby, in the reception area of a health facility, in the participant's office, in my home, in the hotel room where I was staying, and in an airport terminal. Telephone and Skype interviews were conducted from my home office with the participant at her home.

Following Seidman's (2006) recommendation, I originally planned on conducting three interviews with each participant and developed an interview guide to follow this approach; however, due to time constraints and logistics, three interviews were not conducted with all participants. For the student-participants, the first interview established the context of the study, explained the consent form and obtained the participant's signature on the form, and focused on the participant's experiences at PWC before the transition to coeducation. The second interview focused on the participant's experiences from the time of the coeducation announcement through the admission of male students to PWC and until the participant's graduation from PWC. The third interview examined how the lawsuit impacted the participant's collegiate relationships and included retrospective questions. For the student-participant with whom one interview was conducted, the focus of the three interviews was delineated as phases of the one interview.

Although none of the alumna-leaders participated in three face-to-face interviews, the information gathered during their interview(s) followed a similar format. The first interview or first phase of the interview covered the context of the study, obtained the signed consent form, and addressed the alumna's experiences as a student at PWC. The second interview or phase focused on the initiation of and involvement in the lawsuit. The final interview or phase

examined the alumna's subsequent relationship with her alma mater and allowed for reflective comments and thoughts. The participant interview process is summarized in Table 1.

At the conclusion of the interview process, I wrote a thank-you note to each participant, which included a \$25.00 VISA gift card as a token of appreciation for participating in my dissertation research.

To prevent technical mishaps, two digital recorders were used to record the interviews. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state data recording provides fidelity or the ability to exactly reproduce the data collected by the investigator in the field. In addition, recorded data allows the researcher to review the material as often as necessary and to review for nonverbal cues such as pauses, raised voices, or emotional outbursts.

I conformed to one of the essential ethical principles of human subject research by having the participants sign an informed consent form (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006). Informed consent is more than requisite paperwork, but an ongoing process that ensures respect for the participants and allows participants to voluntarily decide to participate or not in the study or to continue participation. The Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) mandates that an informed consent form contain certain elements as required by federal regulations. I complied with these requirements by including in the informed consent form a statement about the study's purpose, a description of the procedures, foreseeable risks, discomforts, and benefits, procedures for maintaining confidentiality, and contact information for obtaining answers to pertinent questions. The informed consent form also advised that participation was voluntary and that there was no

Table 1

Participant Interview Process

Participant's Pseudonym	Status	Interview Approach	Total Interview Time (min.)
Agatha	Student-Plaintiff	2 Face-to-Face; 1 Skype	189
Beatrice	Student-Plaintiff	3 Face to Face	159
Charlotte	Student-Plaintiff	Telephone	147
Deidre	Alumna-Leader	2 Face-to-Face; Email	185
Edith	Alumna-Leader	2 Face-to-Face	181
Fiona	Alumna-Leader	1 Face-to-Face	103
Grace	Alumna-Leader	1 Face-to-Face; 1 Telephone	142

penalty for withdrawing from the study (VCU IRB, 2008; 2009). The informed consent form I developed, attached as Appendix F, was included in the documentation submitted to VCU's IRB for approval. The informed consent form was given to and discussed with each participant at the beginning of the first interview and a copy of the signed form was subsequently mailed to the participant.

Each interview was transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. I provided each participant with an electronic copy of the transcribed interview(s) for her review. This review process is described as member checking and serves to enhance the integrity and reliability of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I asked the participant to identify statements that may be inaccurate or that may make her feel vulnerable; however, I retained the right to author the final report, as recommended by Seidman (2006). Only one participant identified portions of her interviews that she did not want referenced or quoted in my dissertation. This information was not included in my narrative and was not essential to meaning being conveyed.

To ensure data security and data redundancy, all digital recordings, printed transcriptions, and electronically stored data and materials were duplicated and stored securely in a separate geographical location in the event of a disaster or other loss. Upon completion of this dissertation, all data collected from the study participants, such as the interview transcriptions, were placed in a bank safe-deposit box where they will be stored for one year after which they will be destroyed (Seidman, 2006). Where possible, electronic data have been deleted. Electronic data that cannot be deleted will be stored until technological advances make the stored data obsolete.

Data Analysis

According to Moustakas (1994), the first step in phenomenological data analysis involves the epoché process. This step requires the researcher to develop an attitudinal shift by bracketing or becoming aware of and eliminating prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions about the phenomenon under investigation. During this step, the researcher introspectively identifies personal bias and involvement in the subject matter and as a result, is able to see the phenomenon in an objective manner (Patton, 1990). Moustakas (1994) asserts that the process and state of epoché allows a researcher to consciously and deliberately listen to participants while also attending to meanings inherent within the phenomenon. He calls this phenomenological reduction. In attempting to embrace this state of understanding, I recorded my thoughts and feelings in my field note journal. By putting my presuppositions and bias on paper, I was more effectively able to identify them and ensure they did not influence my findings.

The next step involved the horizontalization of data, which is similar to coding of data in other qualitative methodologies. Following the approach outlined by Moustakas (1994), I read the participant interviews, weighing every statement equally and identifying significant statements or horizons about the experience. Since horizons are unlimited and change as our consciousness reconsiders the experience, I read the participant interviews multiple times, varying the time of day and location of the reading. This variation contributed to my ability to analyze the data objectively and thoroughly. I eliminated vague horizons or statements, leaving the statements that were necessary and sufficient to understand the participants' experiences. According to Moustakas, the horizons that remain become the invariant constituents of the

experience. I gave thematic labels to the related invariant constituents and from these labeled constituents, core themes of the experience were developed. As further outlined by Moustakas, I organized these themes into a textural description of the phenomenon.

According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological reduction is followed by imaginative variation, a step that seeks possible meanings by using varying frames of reference, divergent perspectives, and imagination. Patton (1990) equates this process to walking around piece of artwork, so the object can be seen from different angles or viewpoints. To accomplish imaginative variation, I gave myself an opportunity to relax, so my mind would be fresh as I began this process. I expanded my reading on PWC to include recently published articles and books. I also drew on my undergraduate studies in Sociology and had free-flowing conversations with an objective listener or sounding board. Through the steps of imaginative variation, I developed textural descriptions which describe the what of the experience and structural descriptions that describe the how of the experience according to both student-plaintiffs and alumnae (Creswell, 1998).

By synthesizing the textural and structural descriptions, I produced a unified statement of the essence of the experience of the phenomenon of the transition to coeducation as seen through the lens of both student and alumnae participants. This is the final step of phenomenological research according to Moustakas (1994). From these detailed descriptions of the phenomenon, the reader is able to recognize shared characteristics and transfer the information to other settings (Creswell, 1998; Seidman, 2006).

Although I had intended to use specialized software to facilitate data analysis, this approach was not utilized. Data analysis was both manually and electronically performed using

color-coded, cut and paste sections of Word documents. I developed and used this approach to accommodate my visual learning style.

Trustworthiness of the Research Study

Creswell (1998) advises that phenomenological study may be challenging because the researcher must carefully select participants who have experienced the phenomenon and must decide the manner and extent to which personal experience will be introduced into the study. Creswell further cautions the researcher may have difficulty bracketing personal experiences. I do not believe that I had difficulty bracketing my personal experiences related to this research topic. I graduated from a college for women over 30 years ago, so my memories of my collegiate experiences are not vivid. Although I remain connected to my alma mater, my involvement is limited to a few areas of interest. During the interviews, I was able to relate to each participant in various ways. For example, Deidre married after her sophomore year of college, and so did I. Charlotte's parents were not involved in her college experience and neither were my parents. This sharing of common experiences during our college years helped build rapport with the participants; however, it did not influence my objectivity.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that the terms related to the conventional research paradigm have evolved to apply to qualitative research approaches. Quantitative terms, such as, internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity are not applicable to the naturalistic research paradigm. As a result, the terms, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were substituted. Lincoln and Guba argue that these procedures and processes of naturalistic research refute criticisms that qualitative research is overly subjective and undisciplined.

Creswell (1998) discussed a number of measures for enhancing the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study. Triangulation or the use of multiple and different data sources provides corroborating evidence. Member checks give the study participants an opportunity to review data collected ensuring its accuracy and credibility. Negative case analysis encourages the researcher to refine working hypotheses as the study proceeds and as negative or disconfirming evidence is discovered. Creswell suggests that the researcher clarify bias by commenting on past experiences, prejudices, or viewpoints that may influence the study. The final report should include rich, thick descriptions and detailed writing so the reader can identify shared characteristics and determine transferability to her situation. Creswell also recommends external audits during which an outside and informed consultant examines the process and outcomes for accuracy and as a means to substantiate credibility and dependability.

Creswell (1998) recommends that researchers apply at least two of these measures in any qualitative study, with triangulation, member checking, and writing in thick descriptions being the most popular and cost effective procedures. I incorporated three of the techniques recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Creswell (1998) into this study. Throughout this research study, I maintained a reflexive journal (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). My reflexive journal captured my thoughts and feelings on the process and documented the decision points in the methodology, schedule, and logistics of the study. In addition, I recorded my researcher bias, such as the gender structure of my undergraduate alma mater and my involvement in a lawsuit. I commented on situations which arose and in which I knowingly harbored any presuppositions. Member checking was accomplished by giving the participants a copy of their transcribed interviews and requesting

their feedback and comments to ensure the accuracy of data collected. Triangulation was performed through document analysis using court records and documents, news articles, websites, recent publications about PWC, and U.S. Department of Education crime statistic reports. These measures allowed me to document the research process, support the emergent design of this qualitative study, and contribute to the rigor and trustworthiness of the project.

Delimitations

The data and results of this research study involved students and alumnae at PWC who opposed their college's decision to become a coeducational institution, and therefore, may not be applicable to other women's institutions transitioning to coeducation. This event occurred in a specific time and place which situates its context. Other settings and contexts may afford very different experiences for women in an institution undergoing such change.

Limitations

Creswell (1998) and Patton (1990) state that experiences, assumptions, and biases of the researcher influence the conduct of a research study and the interpretation of results. As a graduate of a women's college within a coordinate system, I developed a strong personal understanding of the value and benefits of attending a college for women. In addition, I have been involved in a lengthy and costly legal challenge, not as a plaintiff, but as a defendant, which colors my view of the course of action followed by the participants of this study. I acknowledge each of these is a limitation to the study and is also an aspect of my own experiences that I attempted to bracket as part of the phenomenological inquiry.

The study focuses on students and alumnae who opposed PWC's transition to coeducation, and therefore, it does not attempt to present a balanced viewpoint. Approximately

four years has lapsed since men were admitted to PWC, providing time for memories to be less vivid. Different responses may have been obtained if this research had been conducted at various stages throughout the transition to coeducation and the lawsuit.

CHAPTER 4. DECISION MAKING IN EMERGENT DESIGN

Qualitative research design is a dynamic process that requires adjustment as events occur within course of the research study. This chapter describes the decisions that were made and how they affected the conduct of the research study.

Participant Selection Process

Upon deciding to make the coeducational transition of PWC as the subject of my doctoral research, my initial intent was to focus on the nine students who were named as plaintiffs in a breach of contract lawsuit filed against PWC. Through discussions with my dissertation committee, I decided to expand my participant sample to include the alumna-leaders of the nonprofit organization established to fund the legal challenge. This group of participants, students and alumna-leaders, met the definition of criterion sampling since all had experienced the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 1998). Also, by including the alumna-leaders, the phenomenon could be examined from two perspectives.

In compliance with the protocol approved by the IRB of VCU, initial contact with the student-plaintiffs was by letter (Appendix C) sent by U.S. mail to the addresses listed in the legal documents. Initial contact with the alumna-leaders was by e-mail (Appendix B) since this contact information was available on the group's website. Included in the letter to the student-plaintiffs was a form on which they could mark their interest in the study, along with contact information, such as mailing address, email address and telephone number, so I could

follow up with them, and a self-addressed, stamped return envelope. These two methods of contacting potential study participants did not produce the desired results. Of the nine letters mailed to student-plaintiffs, only two responded positively to my request by letter. One student-plaintiff responded that she was not willing to participate, but wished me luck with my research. By the time my research actually commenced, one of the participants who had initially agreed to participate decided not to participate. I was, therefore, concerned about the limited number of student-plaintiffs who might be willing to join the study.

Contacting alumna-leaders through the website established for the nonprofit organization they created to legally challenge the coeducation decision also did not result in the number of anticipated responses. An Internet search using Google produced the name, address, email address, and telephone number of two alumna-leaders' places of employment. Through email, I contacted these two alumnae. One alumna responded and agreed to participate in my study. The email address of the other alumna was no longer active. Through Facebook, a social networking site, I was able to locate five of the potential student-participants and one potential alumna-participant, the alumna whose previous email address was inactive. Two student-participants and the alumna-participant contacted through Facebook responded affirmatively to my message seeking their participation in the study. At this point, I had three student-plaintiffs and two alumna-leaders as participants for my study successfully recruited, but desired to have a few more to enhance the quality and amount of data to be gathered.

Recognizing that more participants were needed, I began asking those who had agreed to be participants at the conclusion of their interviews if they would be willing to contact additional women, who were either PWC students during the lawsuit and transition to coeducation or

alumnae active in the lawsuit, to see if they were interested in taking part in the study and if they were willing to be contacted by me. Through this snowball approach, I was able to locate two more alumna-participants for my study. Ultimately, I had seven participants, three students and four alumnae. This change in method for recruitment was necessary to obtain a sufficient sample for my study, and was part of nature of emergent design.

Data Collection

The initial research design of three face-to-face interviews was modified as my research progressed. Under my original design, the focus of the first interview would be the participant's experience as a student at PWC. The second interview would focus on the lawsuit and also the transition to coeducation by PWC for the students. The third interview would examine the relationship that the participant had with her alma mater. Three face-to-face interviews, as planned, did not always occur as planned for several reasons.

By the time my research commenced, all of the student-plaintiffs had graduated from PWC and were beginning new careers. The alumna-leaders who participated worked in demanding professional positions. Due to their personal and professional commitments, it was difficult to schedule multiple face-to-face interviews, especially with my need to make advance travel arrangements as many lived out-of-state. After some discussion with the co-chairs of my dissertation committee, we agreed that Skype, a software application that allows voice and video calls through the Internet, would be an acceptable approach to conduct an interview since it would permit face-to-face viewing and allow for easy recording of the interviews.

The first meeting with one alumna-participant was at large international airport on the evening of December 23, 2009; however, the level of background noise made recording this

interview impossible. I did not consider this a wasted effort since the meeting allowed me to obtain the participant's signature on the informed consent form (Appendix F) and to build rapport with the participant. We concluded our interview-conversation with the participant giving me a hug and agreeing to conduct the interview using Skype at a later date. On the agreed-upon-date, however, the participant was unable to connect to Skype. We quickly agreed that I would call her on a landline telephone using the speaker feature that would allow me to record the interview. Similar scheduling and technical difficulties with another participant resulted in a second interview recorded via speaker phone.

The time commitment of three, 90-minute interviews was also an issue with a number of participants. One wanted to see how much could be covered in a single interview before committing to a second interview, and another participant gave such expansive answers to my questions by the end of the second interview, I had no new questions that needed to be asked. A third alumna-participant who provided expansive answers during the first two interviews, responded to two additional questions by email. Therefore, my plans for three, 90-minute interviews, following Seidman (2006) were modified according to the situation and needs of the participants. However, I do not believe that these different, and in some cases, unplanned data collection methods, compromised the collection process. Prior to each interview I had established contact with the participant which allowed us to develop rapport. The alternate interview methods were conducted for the interviewee's convenience and comfort, thereby creating an environment in which the interviewee was willing to talk freely and resulted in robust data for the study.

Data Analysis

Initially, I had planned to utilize specialized software to code my data; however, I discovered this was unnecessary as I developed a manual system that allowed me to cluster my horizontalized (coded) data through the search and find function in Microsoft Word. The horizontalized data from each participant was color-coded and clustered. The color-coded clusters were cut and pasted onto flip-chart sheets. From these color-coded clusters, themes were developed, enabling me to describe my findings effectively. As a visual learner, this approach was highly productive since it forced me to work more closely with my data. As a result, I read, reviewed, and reflected on my data more intently through this approach. I believe this approach yielded robust data analysis and decided that use of qualitative software would not provide additional advantages.

Summary

The adjustments to the original research design as outlined above demonstrate the emergent nature of qualitative research. Qualitative research may begin with a purpose and plan; however, flexibility is warranted throughout the process. Changes, sometimes instantaneous, in participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis ensured completion of these steps of dissertation research, but more importantly, ensured that the integrity of the research process was met.

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS

This chapter illuminates the experiences of the participants as their college transitioned to coeducation and their involvement in a legal challenge to delay the transition. Their stories were gathered through personal interviews. The interviews were informative, interesting, amusing, and sometimes shocking and disturbing. Parts of interviews were emotionally sensitive for some participants and more than one participant shed tears during an interview.

Overarching the interview process with the student-participants was the primary research question was: How do students at a private women's college describe the transition from single-sex education to coeducation? A secondary question for the students and alumnae involved in the legal challenge was: How do students and alumnae involved in a legal challenge to coeducation at a private women's college describe their experiences?

The findings in this chapter are presented in a similar format. The first section focuses on the experience of attending PWC as a college for women. The second section discusses the coeducational transition. The third section covers the lawsuit and presents the outcomes these experiences had on the participants' lives, including their relationship with their alma mater. Subsections within each section address the themes discovered as data were reviewed and analyzed. The legal technicalities of the lawsuit were not a topic for research and are only discussed, where necessary, to give the participants' experiences context. By the time this dissertation research began, all participants were alumnae of the college. For purposes of

reporting findings in this chapter, student-participants were enrolled as students at PWC when the coeducation decision was announced and remained at the college until their graduation. Alumna-participants had attended and graduated from PWC prior to the coeducation announcement.

PWC as a College for Women

The findings reported in this section describe the phenomenon of interest from the perspective of the participants as students at PWC. This section conveys the collegiate experiences of the participants and illuminates the characteristics of PWC they cherished and wished to preserve through the legal challenge to delay the admission of men. For the alumna-participants, Deidre, Edith, Fiona, and Grace, their experiences at PWC made an indelible impact on their lives. Agatha, Beatrice, and Charlotte, the student-participants in this study, will carry their experiences at PWC as they move forward in life pursuits.

PWC as the College of Choice

Agatha fell in love with PWC before she ever set foot on the campus. Through a summer camp friend who was enrolled at PWC, Agatha heard stories about the college and its traditions and her interest was kindled. She was able to visit PWC several times during her senior year of high school and as she said, “I fell in love with this special tradition called [Watermelon Walk, a celebration in which seniors in their caps and gowns parade about campus carrying a watermelon carved by a sophomore student].” Agatha wanted a career in public service and through her own research on colleges, learned that a significant percentage of the female members of Congress had attended a college for women. Agatha’s mother was not supportive of Agatha’s college choice, believing that employers would be more likely to hire someone from a coed school

because the work environment was also coed. Although Agatha's mother had accompanied her to PWC's Watermelon Walk during Agatha's senior year of high school, her mother still was not convinced of the rightness of her daughter's college choice. Agatha had made up her mind, but she needed her mother's blessing. Agatha said her father just wanted her to be happy and Agatha's mother finally consented when the financial aid package from PWC was more generous than that of another school to which Agatha had applied. Agatha happily enrolled at PWC.

Like Agatha, Grace wanted to attend a college for women. As she said, "I had my heart set on going to Vassar in Poughkeepsie, New York. I had seen Vassar as a child in the sixth grade and just thought it would be ideal place for me. I had my heart and mind set on Vassar." Grace viewed attending Vassar as socially acceptable and a means of raising her station in life. As Grace said, "It was a cool thing to go to a women's college in those days." Grace applied to Vassar early decision during her senior year of high school and was accepted; however, she was "chagrined to learn there was no scholarship money" since her family did not have the financial resources to pay for college. A family friend suggested that Grace look into PWC, which she did, and learned that PWC had an outstanding academic reputation. Grace applied to PWC, was accepted, and received a generous scholarship package. For Grace, PWC was her only option.

The other participants had never considered applying to a college for women and by coincidence, fluke, or semi-bribe ended up visiting, applying to, and subsequently enrolling at PWC. Beatrice discovered PWC at a college fair and thought "it just looked really cool." She requested additional information from PWC, was inundated with literature from the college, and decided to visit the campus. Beatrice's mother had repeatedly advised her daughter that if she

wanted “a really good education and wanted to be tops in her field, then she should go to a women’s college.” Beatrice regretted that she did not apply to more colleges for women since there are a number of great women’s colleges, which are not in danger of going coed.

Edith and her mother visited PWC to fill a time void as they traveled between two other colleges in the area. Unexpected as the visit was, Edith experienced an initial emotional connection with the college that was shared by several of the participants in this study:

I stepped onto the campus and it just, for whatever reason, at a very visceral level, felt like the right place to be even though it wasn’t the sort of school I was looking at in other places. There was just something about it that was indescribable, that just felt like it was the right place to be. My mother felt it, too.

Deidre’s grandmother, an alumna of PWC, told Deidre that she would “help pay for my college education but only on the condition that I go see her college first, that she wouldn’t require me to go there but that I did have to visit it.” So Deidre visited her grandmother’s alma mater, describing a similar, almost bodily response to the experience of the campus and its environment:

A glorious experience. . .from a visceral, you know, perspective of the beauty of the environment. It was lovely. . . .After I visited the college, it just got into my blood. It was one of those things where you just know, from the minute you step there that its part of your life and I never, ever considered going anywhere else after I came there.

Through an Internet search of colleges in the state in which PWC was located, Charlotte saw the college’s name and thought it sounded “prestigious.” She realized that PWC was a college for women but decided “why not give it a shot?” Charlotte was late applying to college

during her senior year of high school; however, once she contacted PWC, the college expedited her application. Charlotte and her grandparents visited the college and Charlotte, too, experienced an instant connection with PWC. “As soon as we drove up, I fell in love with the campus.” Charlotte toured the campus with an admissions counselor and was attracted by the freedom with which she would be able to take classes at this small, liberal arts college. The generous financial aid package offered to Charlotte solidified her decision to enroll at PWC and she never applied to any other colleges.

Fiona, whose sister lived on the West Coast, dreamed of attending Stanford or the University of California at Berkeley. Fiona had never heard of PWC until she began receiving correspondence from the college after taking the PSAT during her junior year of high school. Fiona was impressed with the information she received from PWC. She and her mother decided to visit PWC during spring break of her junior year of high school. At the end of her admissions visit, the counselor handed Fiona an application for admission in the upcoming fall semester. Fiona was shocked! Fiona had already completed all the course requirements for admission to PWC. The admissions counselor encouraged Fiona to enroll at PWC rather than returning to high school for her senior year. Although her mother was strongly opposed to this suggestion, Fiona was enthralled with the idea. Fiona, a self-described academic geek, entered PWC, having never graduated from high school.

Except for Agatha, PWC was not the anticipated first choice college for any of the women in this study; however, after visiting the campus, these women chose PWC over Stanford, University of California at Berkeley, Yale, Swarthmore, Vassar, and the flagship universities in their home states.

Edith, an outstanding student in high school, faced personal and medical challenges during her first year at PWC and as a result, her grades suffered. “So my third semester, I actually failed out,” lamented Edith. She left PWC, returned to her hometown, worked in various jobs, married, and took classes at the state university located near her home. Many years later, Edith accompanied a former classmate on a visit to PWC. Edith shared the impact of this visit:

And again, when I stepped on the campus, I just had this really visceral reaction to it again, like I almost started crying. I realized or I thought I realized that I really had a lot of unfinished business there. This whole failing out of school thing was just so not in my makeup. So now it was meant to be, it was just one of these weird things that happen. I realized that it had really been emotionally holding me back or mentally, like it just wasn’t right, and I needed to fix it. I just really wanted to go back there and finish.

Edith returned to PWC, lived in housing for nontraditional students, began a long-distance marriage, but she eventually and proudly graduated from PWC.

Deidre also interrupted her studies at PWC. As one of the top students in her high school class, Deidre thought she was well-prepared for college, but she was shocked to learn that in comparison to some of her PWC classmates, she was not. After finishing her freshman year with a mid-C average, she questioned her ability to academically succeed at PWC. Deidre thought “maybe this is too hard for me; maybe I am not smart enough to do this.” She seriously considered transferring to a college in her home state; however, faculty and friends convinced her to remain at PWC. Deidre returned to PWC for the next academic session; however, she encountered a serious academic distraction. She met a young man who had attended a local

college and fell deeply in love. After her second year at PWC, Deidre withdrew from college and married her sweetheart. After two years of working in a business environment and taking classes at the local community college, Deidre's husband encouraged her to return to PWC and complete her degree. She followed his suggestion, and with her husband and infant child at her side, Deidre graduated from PWC with honors.

Grace found PWC a rude cultural awakening, describing living with southern women as both perplexing and frustrating. At PWC, Grace felt she was not the academic star that she had been in her high school, leading her to develop feelings of unworthiness. While she was far from home and very lonely, she never thought about transferring from PWC. "It was a mark of failure in my mind and I don't fail. That's just me. So come hell or high water, I was going to make it through these four years." Grace persevered and graduated as an honor student. Reflecting back on her years at PWC, Grace said, "It was a growth experience and all growth experiences are not positive."

All of the participants were attracted to PWC for various reasons. For some participants, their attraction to PWC was a visceral response that they cannot fully explain. For others, their experiences at PWC were unpleasant and potentially life-altering, but all of them remained enrolled at PWC or returned to PWC after a hiatus of a few years. Deidre described this attraction when she said, "The school gets into your blood and from the minute you step on campus, PWC becomes a part of your life and you never consider going anywhere else."

At Home With Family

"PWC just seemed like home to me. . .it was nice to have a place that I would feel at home, supported. . .that had an interest in my well-being," said Beatrice. All the participants

echoed similar sentiments about PWC and related experiences and impressions that contributed to their feeling of being at home and part of a family. Grace recalled driving through the portico and seeing “the beautiful, really stunning campus.” When she went to lunch the first day, she was “astonished at the sit down meals and the delicious food.” She described her first meal at PWC as being southern, genteel, and very nice. Fiona marveled that PWC had a “real kitchen. . . with real cooks. We baked our own bread. . .the women in the kitchen baked their own bread. They actually cooked all of this. . .desserts and everything were always homemade.” She related how meals were served family style in silver chafing dishes. “That kind of blew me away the first time.” Fiona also talked about the barbeques that the kitchen staff would set up in the Quad, a beautiful, green space near the dining hall. “It was just a picnic and people would enjoy that.”

For Agatha, the historical nature of the red brick buildings contributed to her sense of belonging. Agatha lived in the oldest and largest residence hall which she considered a “piece of history” because it was the first building constructed on the campus. True to its original architectural plan, the building contained administrative offices and classrooms on the first floor and housed students on the upper three floors. Similar to a family’s home, the rooms where family and friends gather were found on the first floor and bedrooms were located upstairs.

PWC, in a cooperative program with local families, arranged host families for students whose homes were far away or who wanted a stronger connection to the local community. Deidre said this arrangement gave her a place to retreat when she needed to get away from campus. She was invited to family dinners and celebrations, attended church with her host family, joined the choir at their church, and was even married in her host family’s church.

Deidre reminisced on her interaction with her host family as a loving relationship, which she will never forget.

Deidre shared various personal experiences that made her feel a part of the PWC family, such as the annual dinner that the president hosted for the PWC students who hailed from his home state. Deidre had a campus job and when she married, her co-workers gave her a wedding shower. “You know, they became like a family to me, the whole administration of the college by that time had just gotten so under my skin.” Deidre recalled receiving a hug from the college president as he presented her diploma to her at graduation.

Each of the participants spoke of the friendliness of the staff and students at PWC. Beatrice recalled arriving on campus for her admissions visit and seeing her name and home state on a welcome sign visible to the entire school. This prompted a PWC student from Beatrice’s home state to seek out Beatrice, to welcome her to PWC, and to encourage her to apply. Beatrice and her family were impressed by the hospitality. “When I was doing the tour of the campus, it was just like everybody that I passed made an effort to smile at me and hold doors open and just seemed really interested and very welcoming. I think that was probably a big difference that I saw from the other places.” Beatrice felt anonymous when she visited other schools.

Charlotte admits to being a shy person but says she felt welcomed at PWC. She said she had no problem talking to everyone she met. Charlotte enjoyed finding out where everyone was from and even made several new friends her first day on campus. Charlotte described PWC as being not only a college campus, but feeling “more like a family.”

All of the participants have maintained friendships with their PWC classmates. For some participants, these have been decades-long friendships. After having been absent from the college for many years, Edith returned to PWC to complete her degree at the urging of a former classmate and friend. Grace treasures the cards and letters she receives from her sophomore-year roommate and friend. Both Deidre and Agatha have a group of friends from their class year with whom they enjoy social activities several times a year. All the participants admitted to staying electronically connected to their PWC friends. The students that Deidre roomed with on her overnight admissions visit remain friends through Facebook.

These PWC women see themselves as more than friends or classmates. As if to reinforce their belief in family, several participants referred to their fellow students as sisters. Agatha discussed the bonding she felt with her sisters in a college environment for women. Agatha and Beatrice described how class rivalries and traditions fostered these bonds. Beatrice and Agatha said the coeducational transition helped bring the PWC students together because the experience made them feel more like family. Agatha contemplated “how great and how strong a sisterhood we would have if we made it through and kept [PWC] from going coed.” Charlotte indicated that a number of secret societies resisted admitting men into their organizations out of respect for their sisters from previous years.

For Edith, the relationships formed at PWC were more than being friends or sisters. “Part of going to PWC was you'd be part of this old girls' network for lack of a better description of women who were ambassadors or they were in politics or they were big in business. It was that kind of feeling and that's kind of what you were buying into.”

Every participant described the PWC faculty with superlative terms. The faculty was described as amazing, friendly, caring, welcoming, engaging, lovely, challenging, demanding, and supportive. Agatha was amazed that her professors would often list their home telephone numbers on the class syllabus. Charlotte felt that her professors genuinely cared about her as a student and did not view her as a number. Charlotte recalled taking a difficult class during which the professor would conduct study groups outside of class to assist the students in preparing for tests and exams. She remembers professors inviting students to their homes for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner when the students were unable to return to their own homes.

Grace and her history professor “hit it off famously. He was quite a ham, wonderful man, everyone loved him, but I would visit with him after hours and just chat about the theater world.” Deidre recalls her English professor bringing recordings of Lawrence Olivier doing Shakespeare to class. His love for English “infected” her and as a result, she never missed a class. Her math teacher “made calculus seem like a walk through the park.”

All participants agreed that the faculty held the students to high academic expectations. The professors wanted the students to learn and encouraged the belief that the “sky was the limit.” Charlotte described her professors as being understanding and flexible, but unwilling to accept excuses. Typical of a college student, Edith decided to sleep late and skip a class one day. She was mortified when the professor sent a classmate to get her out of bed. In another example, Fiona, too sick to go to class, was awakened by a classmate who said their professor wanted to know why she was not in class. Later in the day, the professor followed up with Fiona to see if she was feeling better or needed to visit the infirmary. Edith described the typical professorial relationship as that of a mentor or taskmaster and not that of a parent. Professors knew when to

be supportive or when to demand more. Unlike many parents, professors never coddled their students, nor were they strict disciplinarians.

PWC made an indelible impression on the participants as being a home away from home. They were welcomed into a caring and supportive environment that challenged them to learn and to succeed. These women made friends, formed a sisterhood, and joined an old girls' network. Their memories of this environment were recalled with fondness, humor, and sometimes tears.

Academic Rigor, Academic Refuge

Although the participants were attracted to PWC for various reasons, PWC's strongest appeal was its academic reputation and rigor. All participants had been outstanding students in high school. Most had graduated in the top 10% of their class and several were ranked among the top 10 students of their graduating class. These women wanted to pursue their collegiate studies without the social pressure they had encountered in high school.

Deidre chuckled that she did not have to "do squat" to get decent grades in high school. "I did my homework on the school bus. . .I was in every club. . .I was a cheerleader. . .I was doing everything, constantly busy. . .In high school, I felt a whole lot of pressure to be liked by the guys. . .I didn't want that at college at all." Grace described her high school years as being involved in all the right social activities. She was Junior Prom Queen and secretary of her senior class. Grace professed to being a very self-sufficient and headstrong young woman. She believed that in her high school years there was a tendency for female students to be quiet in class to allow the boys to answer questions. "I didn't like that. . .it was very uncomfortable for me. . .I needed college to develop my brain." When Charlotte's family teased her about enrolling at a college for women, Charlotte firmly replied to their good-natured taunts with, "I

am going to get a good education [there] because I'm going to be focused on my education and I am not going to be worried about boys."

Agatha ranked PWC's academic rigor as comparable to Harvard. Other participants compared the academic standards at PWC to those at Smith or Wellesley, two other prestigious women's colleges. Deidre summarized the participants' beliefs about PWC's academic rigor with, "We always understood that we were at a very selective woman's college that was very hard to get into and that the smart girls were here and everyone else went to another college."

Every participant described an environment in which class attendance and class assignments were the primary focus during the week. "There was a weekly study environment and the weekend was social," said Edith. "We study and we do the grind during the week and then party on the weekend." Beatrice echoed that she followed this approach to studying and partying:

Most of my socializations during the week were study parties. We would sit around together, like if we all had the same chemistry class. We were a homework group, we would do the homework or we would sit in communal areas. We had a place called the Sewing Circle and that was a really good place where everybody could gather and do their work. I definitely spent a lot of time doing homework during the week because a lot of times you wanted to try to do it before the weekend because on the weekends everybody wanted to party.

Agatha and Grace also participated in study groups. Agatha believed the study groups were especially helpful for students who had procrastinated on an assignment since coming together in the same room helped motivate each other. Edith described a learning environment in which

“everyone was trying to perform. No one was slacking off. It seemed like we were lifting everybody up. . .even the girls who were not academically inclined would be working really hard to perform.”

Since academics were the focus for these women, appearance was not. Several participants laughingly shared that they had gone to classes in their pajamas. If they were running late because they had spent all night studying or had unintentionally overslept, these participants believed that getting to class on time was their priority. Fiona swore she never wore pajamas to class but did confess to going to class in clothes that “were not particularly clean.” Edith admitted that on a few occasions she went to class in boxer shorts and a sweatshirt. Agatha said she never wore her pajamas to class, but she wore her pajamas to breakfast just as she did at home. Beatrice’s comments further demonstrated that appearance in the classroom was not important. “I definitely never dress up for class. I never took time to do my hair, makeup, or shave my legs.” Deidre summarized the academic environment at PWC by saying:

PWC was in essence a refuge for my intelligence. I was able to move away from that part of me that felt like it always had to please or cater to the males around me in the expected ways, you know, to try to be pretty, to try to be dumb, to not outsmart them. . .I was able really to focus on my education in the way where I was fully able to realize the potential to do well at PWC.

Living Behind the Red Brick Wall

Surrounded by the beauty of the campus, the participants comfortably settled into their collegiate environment. Agatha immediately fell in love with the buildings and the atmosphere at PWC. She realized the city in which PWC was located did not compare to a thriving

metropolis, but she still found the life of a college town exciting. The local city fit Deidre's visualization of a college town and her predisposition for a collegiate environment conducive to learning.

The participants felt free from harm at PWC. Beatrice expressed her feelings about campus safety by saying:

I felt extremely safe. It was like you had a house with a really big fenced-in yard with all this security and you could do whatever you wanted. You wouldn't have to fear anybody coming in, you wouldn't have to worry about anybody trying to hurt you, you could walk around campus no matter what time of night and would feel really, really safe.

Charlotte echoed Beatrice's feelings. "I worked nights [on campus], so I would have to walk to my dorm at night and I felt completely safe. No problems." Agatha and Charlotte said they and many other students left their mailbox open, left personal items in the bathroom, and even left their dorm room doors unlocked.

The students at PWC were territorial and protective of their campus. Charlotte explained that the students always knew who was on their campus:

If you brought a man on campus, first off, the first question is, is that her brother? Is that her boyfriend? Or is that just a friend? And you know, most of the time, if you brought someone on campus within five minutes it's going to get around that you have a guy with you and you're going to find out who it is. So we always knew who was on our campus. If you saw a man or a woman that you didn't know, your immediate reaction was to walk up to them and say, 'Who are you? Who are you with?'"

Beatrice's comments reinforced the students' approach to campus visitors:

Random guys coming on campus was a problem, even random girls. We were kind of a very insular community in that if you didn't know somebody on campus, if somebody didn't own you, then why are you here? We didn't really approve of [nearby men's college] guys just coming to campus on a weekend unless they were invited by somebody. . . . Even like people from the town, if there were townies on campus, people got freaked out. It was like, we're behind the red brick wall, this is our own little world, you don't belong here unless we invite you.

Charlotte was more accepting of people from the community visiting the campus, but only if they were "regulars." She did not consider the man who came daily to walk his German Shepherd on campus a stranger.

If the week days and nights were a time to study, the weekends were a time to party. Within close proximity to PWC were a military college, a college for men, and a men's college that transitioned to coeducation after a long history of being a men-only college. Many PWC students departed their safe and pristine campus on weekends for socializing with men at these nearby colleges. Taking a cross-the-mountain road trip was part of the social culture at PWC; however, it was a matter of individual preference. There was no stigma placed on the students who chose to remain on campus for the weekend. Most of the participants in this study elected to socialize on campus.

For the students staying on campus, socializing was described as "low-key" or "laid-back" and mostly confined to student rooms. Beatrice described these parties as fun but not occasions for wild behavior:

The most fun and would be a little more wild but not bad. . .[they] were always the kind of spur-of-the-moment parties that started in somebody's room with people just hanging out and then just kind of expanded. . .dance parties, or something like that.

None of the participants denied that alcohol consumption did not occur, but all emphatically said that drinking was not a problem on the campus at PWC. Charlotte stated that alcohol consumption during the week was almost nonexistent. People would occasionally drink a glass of wine or a beer to relax. As Agatha said, "It is a college campus." Both Agatha and Beatrice recalled a few large parties where large quantities of alcohol were consumed, but neither recalled seeing any of their classmates throwing up or passed out. Deidre recalled a trashcan full of Planter's Punch that had been made with grain alcohol. However, large parties were often associated with campus-wide tradition events, such as Ring Night. Beatrice said we played beer pong, a popular drinking game. However, Beatrice was unable to respond to my question on binge drinking since she was unfamiliar with the term. Beatrice and Edith said they never recalled seeing a keg on campus; however, Beatrice acknowledged that among the many secret societies at PWC, two were drinking societies.

In response to my question about drugs at PWC, the words rare and never were heard most often. All of the participants indicated that drug use was limited to a few students whom Grace labeled as "hippies." On the rare occasions that one of the participants became aware of drug use, it was usually marijuana. All participants stated that drugs were not part of the social scene at PWC.

PWC had a long history of traditions that promoted social life on campus and encouraged the family-sisterhood relationship among the students. Interest and participation in these

traditions varied among the participants. Agatha loved the traditions that allowed her to form sister bonds with her fellow students. Her favorite tradition was Watermelon Walk, which fostered a relationship between sophomores and seniors. Beatrice thought “traditions are what make PWC so special.” She considered Ring Week, which paired freshmen and juniors in gift-giving and a scavenger hunt for the juniors’ rings, as one of the great traditions. Although she was not a “traditional kind of person,” Charlotte enjoyed the Even-Odd tradition, a rivalry between classes based on whether the year of graduation was odd- or even-dated and also participated in Watermelon Walk. Fiona said that traditions did not appeal to her but she did participate in Ring Week. Edith recounted that an explanation of PWC traditions was a “bit part of the admissions spiel. . .you got that sense of belonging to something that had history and a sense of continuity. It appealed to me.” Edith remembered participating in Watermelon Walk and Ring Week. Edith believes the traditions comprise part of the PWC experience and give “shared touch points” to PWC alumnae.

Secret societies are another aspect of social life at PWC. As Beatrice explained, “There is a secret society for everyone.” However, not everyone I interviewed belonged to a secret society. Some participants ridiculed the secret societies and others coveted membership in one. The participants offered only vague generalities about the secret societies at PWC, but indicated that secret societies were a “big deal.”

Although men ventured behind the red brick wall to visit women at PWC, a rare man or two was found in the classroom. PWC participated in an educational consortium that allowed male students from nearby colleges and universities to enroll in a class that was not offered at their school. Edith and Fiona recalled having male students in a foreign language class. Edith

said the men did not dominate the class. In fact, they sat in the corner and were “pretty quiet.” Fiona laughed at the men who had been in her foreign language class saying they were not very bright. She recalled that her professor “wasn’t mean to them, but she wasn’t necessarily nice.” Charlotte confirmed the appropriate demeanor for men when she spoke of a male student from PWC’s master’s program being in one of her classes:

He was the only male in there and he knew where he was. He was at an all woman's college. He knew to respect certain, I mean, in any social interaction, there are certain things that you know are right and wrong to do and he’d been there long enough to know not to cross certain lines, you know, don’t dominate the conversation, don’t assert yourself as a man and portray yourself as sexist in a classroom full of women.

The occasional man who enrolled in a class at PWC could be described as an invisible man. He was relegated to the corner of the classroom and almost instinctively knew to mind his manners.

PWC Women

“We have always had very strong and independent women [at PWC],” commented Agatha. “The third word in the college’s [name] is woman’s. . .because it really focuses on how strong and independent you can be as you develop throughout the four years at college.” Charlotte echoed this sentiment, “I got the impression they were very strong-headed women that I went to school with.” Through their professors, PWC students were encouraged to be independent thinkers who questioned the rules and did not blindly follow the crowd. Beatrice believed the students at PWC were educated to question their peaceful existence, to be mentally present, and to demand things they thought they deserved. Edith concurred that PWC women had no fear of voicing their opinions:

[There was a] culture of expressing dissatisfaction with something or not liking a change or something. I can definitely see that. That rings true to me. You wouldn't hesitate to let the administration know or let a professor know that something was an issue and expect change or at least expect to be heard.

Agatha spoke proudly of PWC's history of protest, especially during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. She shared an article from the college's alumni magazine about a group of PWC students who were jailed during a civil rights protest during that time. Fiona also recalled traveling with other PWC students to the nation's capital to participate in various protest rallies. Protests at PWC were not solely historical events, but also recent activities. In the academic year prior to the coeducation decision, students and alumnae had protested the decision to close a study-abroad campus, which the Board of Trustees asserted was needed as a cost-savings measure. The protesters prevailed and the Board reversed its decision.

Within the confines of their historic and landscaped campus, these women developed a culture of social activism. They saw themselves as strong and independent women who willing to stand up for their beliefs.

Hearing the News

When the news came about the transition to coeducation, PWC students and alumnae were surprised and shocked, even though the students had received a little forewarning in a letter that reached them about a month before the semester started. Beatrice described the letter as “a big hit in the face.” She had chosen PWC for the educational experience at a college for women and now PWC was considering coeducation. Faced with the decision of not attending college for a semester or hurriedly finding another college that would admit her, neither of the two options

appealed to her. Agatha was away from home for the summer and therefore, did not receive the letter from PWC. She learned that PWC was considering coeducation in a chance encounter when the parent of a friend noticed the PWC baseball cap that Agatha was wearing. She was “really caught off guard.”

Among the alumnae, Deidre, Edith, and Fiona had heard rumors that PWC was studying coeducation, but believed the alumnae association and faculty who assured that PWC was safe as a college for women. PWC had recently and successfully completed a \$100 million fundraising campaign, so students and alumnae believed PWC was financially sound, having one of the largest endowments among private schools in the state.

PWC made its decision official on September 9, 2006 when it announced that the school would be admitting men the following academic year. Deidre heard the news by email. Fiona and Edith attempted to view the announcement through video streaming, but the broadcast had technical difficulties. Agatha was representing PWC at an off-campus activity, so she viewed a video of the announcement on the college’s website later that day. Charlotte was visiting a friend out-of-town when she received a telephone call from a classmate about the announcement. Charlotte said, “I immediately packed up and came home” meaning back to PWC.

None of the participants ranked the PWC coeducation announcement as life-defining like the JFK assassination or 9-11 news broadcast; however, they experienced similar emotional responses to the announcement. The participants described their initial reaction as anger, shock, disappointment, sadness, bitterness, outrage, upset, disbelief, astonishment, betrayal, and surprise. The students believed that the admissions office had been less than honest to their inquiries about the future of PWC as a college for women and as a result, became distrusting of

the administration. Beatrice said the students felt “helpless” because [PWC] “chose not to listen to us. . .they didn’t even give us a chance to let our voices be heard on the matter.” For the alumnae, this was a decision “that needed to be fought.”

Do I Stay or Do I Go?

Edith said that if she had had a daughter at PWC, then “I would have told her to transfer. . .because the school is going to be in an uproar.” Agatha said that many of the returning students were angry about the decision and she sensed the transition was going to be “very tough” due to the hostile feelings among the PWC women. Beatrice said she talked to “some of the older students and realized how traumatic it was going to be. . .but [it] brought us together. So that helped us to feel like a family, too.” Sensing that the environment at PWC had become more tense and stressful, each of the students in this study seriously considered transferring.

Agatha seriously thought about a number of colleges. She told her family and friends that she was 90% certain she was going to transfer. She spent hours on the computer looking at different women’s colleges, talking to admissions personnel, and gathering on-line applications. “I would stare at the application on the computer screen. . .for 30 minutes just sitting there. . .but leaving my sisters behind made me feel too guilty. . .I never hit the submit button.” Ironically, Agatha’s mother, who had been initially opposed Agatha attending a college for women, was strongly encouraging her daughter to transfer to another women’s college. At Thanksgiving, Agatha told her mother, “to stop pressuring me. It is my decision and I am going to stay. I told my friends and they were very happy that I had been able to finally stop the nagging and make my own decision.”

Shortly after the coed announcement, Beatrice applied to five other women's colleges, but eventually changed her mind and decided to stay at PWC. She had begun to build relationships with her professors. She was enjoying the social atmosphere and traditions. She was starting "to become somebody on campus" and she "wasn't ready to give that up, especially without knowing what it was going to be like as a coed institution." Beatrice was "cautiously optimistic" that the school "was not going to change" as the faculty and administration assured the students. Worried about not having a support system as a transfer student even if she enrolled at a women's college, Beatrice decided not to transfer.

Charlotte and a classmate visited another college for women. After receiving assurances from an admissions counselor that the college had no future designs for coeducation, Charlotte and her friend began a serious evaluation of the school's academic rigor but were dismayed by the basic education requirements and the lack of rigorous upper-level classes. They perceived the campus environment as "cold" and "very strict" and not like what they loved about PWC:

I decided, it was a really hard decision, but I decided to stay, both of us decided to stay. We believed that we came to this school [PWC] for a reason and we loved it for what it was. We were not going to let it change. We thought if we left we would be giving up on our school. We didn't want to give up on our school. We believed that we needed to be there so that we could teach the men that were coming in our traditions and how our culture was.

In retrospect, all the students were glad they did not desert PWC.

From PWC to COED College – The Transition to Coeducation

Although PWC's administration and faculty assured the students that little would change with the admission of men, their assurances did not prove to be accurate. The PWC students immediately perceived differences in the incoming females and males of the first class of COED College. The PWC students saw the COED College students as less academically-inclined and more interested in athletics and the social life of college. These incoming freshmen exhibited behaviors, in the classroom and in the dorms, the PWC women considered unacceptable. As a result, divisiveness settled across the campus as the PWC and COED students asserted their positions.

A Campus Divided

Beatrice estimated that 90% of the PWC women were anti-coed. Those students who welcomed coeducation remained "pretty quiet" because they faced ostracism. By Agatha's assessment, 25% of the PWC women supported coeducation, 50% wanted to ignore their male classmates, and 25% were willing to take extreme actions against men to maintain the social and cultural status quo as a college for women. Beatrice also mentioned the extreme behavior of some upper-class women. "It was frightening thinking about all the drama that was about to happen. . . It was a rough year because the upper-class women were kind of extreme in some ways." Both Agatha and Beatrice recalled physical incidents between male students and upper-class women. Nothing serious, just some pushing, shoving, kicking, and spitting when the upper-class women wanted to prevent men from accessing certain areas of campus, such as senior dormitories. Agatha expressed reservations about the physical incidents. "I did not agree

with that because it is not really the male students' fault and I don't think physical confrontation is the best way to make things better."

Agatha had described her PWC classmates as sisters; however, this familial relationship did not automatically extend to the male and female students of COED College. "I called them more my cousins than my sisters because there is definitely a different attitude about them," said Agatha in describing the female students at COED College. Agatha conceded that she "might consider some of them" as sisters because they displayed the same strong and independent personality as PWC women; however, she made no mention of the male students as being part of the family, not even as distant cousins.

Charlotte indicated she was willing to interact with her fellow male students and decided to reside in a coed dormitory. She did not hold the male students accountable for the coeducational decision. Charlotte rationalized that "it was my school's fault for bringing [men] in. Unless they were complete jerks or assholes to me, I had no reason to hate an individual because they had a penis." Beatrice described her roommate as being "more moderate" and therefore, more willing to participate in a successful transition to coeducation.

Beatrice described the coeducational transition as "really tough first semester." Even, orientation week proved to be a difficult time. One of the annual events scheduled for orientation was a skit that included a discrimination scene. In previous years, the discrimination had been directed at an African-American student; however, the skit for the transition year involved discrimination towards a male student. "It was really awful," stated Beatrice. She elaborated further by saying, "A lot of disrespect going on in terms of incoming students being very disrespectful, chauvinistic towards the women who were on campus as orientation leaders."

Beatrice contended that the administration was not prepared for this type of behavior because PWC had been a women's college and "none of that had ever been a big deal." Beatrice indicated that the administration hastily held a "tolerance talk" for new students during orientation week. Agatha believed that all students, and not incoming students only, would have benefited from the discrimination skit. This activity could have been the beginning of ongoing discussions about the transition to coeducation.

Charlotte may have been willing to reside in a coed dormitory; however, classroom interaction was a different matter. "I purposely would not sit next to a male," said Charlotte. She had a fear that if she sat next to a male classmate, she would be intimidated by his presence and would be less likely to speak up in class. Beatrice expressed similar concerns about speaking up in class:

I felt less comfortable being as open and involved. I felt like the men in the class or the COED College women in the class were going to be judgmental of me if I was perceived as like a know-it-all or teacher's pet or something so class discussions weren't as participatory. . . .I didn't want to look like an overachiever I think is what it was, whereas before you were expected to be an overachiever.

Charlotte, Beatrice, and Agatha professed to generally avoiding men in the classroom.

Avoidance was not the only course of action. Charlotte and Beatrice related stories in which men were intimidated by their PWC classmates. Charlotte had a class in which only one male enrolled. She chuckled when she described how he attended the first class and did not return, hinting at her suspicion that he was intimidated that the entire class was women. Not all intimidation by the PWC students was subtle or unintentional, however. Charlotte stated that

class discussions involving “touchy subjects,” such as “something about feminism” got “a little violent at times” when there was one male in the class who was trying to assert his opinion.

“There were times when a male would try to give his perspective and a female would [verbally] attack him. . . just rip apart his idea.”

Beatrice shared a story about a class she was taking in which there were six students, three PWC women and three COED College students. “There was a big sense of competition.” We [the PWC students] sat on the front row and they [the COED College students] sat on the back row. They tried to intimidate us,” grinned Beatrice, but “we won.” Beatrice believed that intimidation was a tactic used by a number of upper-class women “to make them [COED College men] to respect us. Like make them, force them to respect us.” Although Beatrice did not agree with severe intimidation tactics, she admitted, “I was kind of mean about it in that I thought they needed to earn it. They needed to earn my respect and you know, a good portion of them did. Some of them earned my respect.” Beatrice indicated that some of COED College men later lost her respect when they engaged in rude or chauvinistic behavior.

Although Agatha and Beatrice were not supportive of physical confrontation between the PWC women and male students or harsh intimidation tactics by upper-class women, they practiced self-segregation from many of the male students. Beatrice indicated that in the dining hall she sat with her friends, but not at table near male students. She and her friends would talk about the male students; however, talking to them was frowned upon. Beatrice did not agree with the manner in which many men on campus behaved. The male students introduced sexist behavior to the campus and their catcalls and taunts to women disturbed her. “I did not like the way they conducted their life. I didn’t respect them. . . I didn’t think they deserved to have me

talk to them.” Agatha engaged in similar behavior. “I just stayed on my hall and we formed study groups because my hall was all-women. . . .There were a lot of us, that sort of, just wanted to ignore the male students and we were able to do that just fine.”

With its 115-year history, PWC was steeped in traditions that the students embraced. Ring Week, Odd-Even rivalry, Watermelon Walk, and Daisy Chain were a few of the traditions that PWC students cherished. The PWC women asserted that these traditions helped foster the sense of family and sisterhood among the students and alumnae. They were concerned that the incoming COED College students, especially the male students, would ignore these traditions and cause their eventual demise.

Beatrice referred to the incoming students as “COED collegites” and said they were less interested in and respectful of the college’s past traditions. “We knew it was going to happen,” lamented Beatrice. The COED Collegites thought it “was not cool to participate in traditions, especially the guys, who feel it’s effeminate.” Beatrice directed her strongest criticism at the male athletes. She believed the athletes lived in “their own little secluded bubble on campus” and didn’t know anything about the traditions or social life at PWC.

Ridicule of traditions increased and interest in traditions declined. Both Beatrice and Agatha indicated that participation in traditions, such as Watermelon Walk and Daisy Chain, declined during their years at PWC. Agatha returned to the campus after her graduation to observe Watermelon Walk, her favorite tradition. She was sad to observe that the number of watermelons had fallen off. Agatha and Beatrice saw the participation in Daisy Chain dwindle and feared that this tradition would soon be eliminated because “not many guys want to be

associated with something called Daisy Chain.” Beatrice lamented that she “did not want to give up on the traditions...that I loved.”

Not all male students ignored the traditions. Beatrice was excited that a male student in her class participated in Watermelon Walk. “He earned my respect because he participated in Watermelon Walk sophomore year. I loved that and that was great. He was very enthusiastic about it.”

As an alumna, Edith took a more pragmatic approach to traditions, although she had participated in a number of traditions as a student at PWC and the traditions had given her a sense of belonging. “Traditions change. . .clearly we don’t have May Court and haven’t had May Court forever, whereas, it was a huge component back in the 40s and 50s. . . I can’t imagine that [men are] going to wear white dresses and carry a [watermelon].”

Looking Good for the Guys

The girls coming into COED College were different according to Beatrice. “There was definitely a different attitude with the first year females [after the transition to coeducation when compared to] the upper-class women,” echoed Agatha. The incoming women were more concerned with their appearance, dressing nicely and wearing make-up to class. Beatrice observed that the PWC women who had supported coeducation also changed. “They definitely spiffed themselves up a little more for class after it went coed.” Beatrice and Agatha attributed the difference to the presence of men.

Appearance took precedent over academics. Agatha emphatically indicated that the COED women never showed up for class in their pajamas. “I actually remember going to the bathroom in the morning and they would be putting on makeup,” chuckled Agatha. Charlotte

and her friends had a bet going to see how long the freshmen women could keep up with their appearance-enhancing efforts. According to Charlotte, the reason for going to class in your pajamas was because you had been up all night studying and you were tired, but getting to class on time remained a priority. Charlotte laughed about seeing “them running to class in their little messed up ponytail. . .[with] makeup running down their face because they had been up all night studying.” Why these women bothered with makeup was beyond Charlotte’s logic.

Back to High School

Agatha had several observations on the interaction between the COED College men and women. Agatha had frequently used the computer laboratory in her dormitory but became disgusted with the behavior of the new students. “I got fed up with all of the new first year girls spending their time focusing on the guys. If a guy entered the computer lab, they would be chitchatting and goo goo gaga over the guys. It was just not the academic rigor that I had been used to in previous years.” Agatha believed a “large majority of the [COED women] did focus on trying to get the guy’s attention. . . .It was definitely like high school all over again with the incoming students.”

Charlotte experienced similar feelings of being in high school again. She had few classes in which male students dominated the classroom; however, in those classes where males did dominate, Charlotte described it as “feeling like I was in high school.” She elaborated by saying the male students were “immature, talking, texting on their cell phones, interrupting the professor, and being late to class” and commented that COED women engaged in this behavior, too.

Beatrice recalled a language class of five students of which three were men. Beatrice found her male classmates to be competitive and judgmental. They would sometimes laugh or make fun of another student's accent when speaking. Beatrice thought her male classmates did not intend to be rude, but possibly felt awkward themselves. The class did not provide the supportive environment to which she was accustomed.

The classroom behavior of some male students appalled Agatha. She recalled seeing a male classmate sleeping in class with his arms spread out across his desk and remembered a male classmate crumpling his examination, tossing it into the trash can, and storming out of the classroom after about five minutes had lapsed. Agatha found these behaviors "astonishing" and "disrespectful to the professor."

Agatha, Beatrice, and Charlotte concurred that the attitude and classroom behavior of the COED students differed dramatically from that of the PWC students. Agatha explained this was one reason she referred to the COED women as cousins, rather than sisters. All of them were thankful that their classroom interaction with their male classmates was limited to a few classes since they were upper-level students at the time PWC became COED College.

Athletics and Academics

Edith and Fiona, as alumnae, questioned the logic and expense of building a new soccer field and worried that the focus on athletics at PWC was changing. PWC had supported and encouraged athletic programs and team sports almost since its inception, but the emphasis had always been academics over athletics. The sport programs were competitive; however, for many PWC students, athletics were an outlet to the academic demands and for some students, fun.

The PWC students confirmed that Edith and Fiona's worries were justified. Men arrived on campus and attitudes changed. Some coaches welcomed coeducation because they thought recruiting would be easier. Beatrice estimated that over half of the new students were recruited for athletics and these student-athletes exhibited a different attitude from that held by PWC women. They were less interested in the social community and traditions and appeared to be less academically-focused. They would "blow off school more" and would come to class and "just kind of sit there because they had to be there." Charlotte used high school terms to describe the regressed state of the situation, "You've got jocks with people who are [academic] nerds and it doesn't work. It doesn't!" Charlotte said the male athletes arrived thinking they "were going to show these women"; however, Beatrice indicated that the male athletes "didn't feel the power that they expected to feel being that they were the leaders of the sports teams." This contributed to the mounting tension between PWC students and COED College students.

Beatrice, Agatha, and Charlotte believed that the emphasis on athletics affected academics in the classroom. Charlotte believed that student-athletes were allowed "to coast" through their classes due to their status as a student-athlete. Agatha stated some professors never lowered academic expectations, whereas "other professors might have lowered the expectations a bit once men entered the classroom." Beatrice believed that academic expectations were "definitely beginning to be lowered." Beatrice also observed that professors seemed to have to work more diligently in class to engage the COED College students. Charlotte believed that academics changed drastically and offered several examples. Professors were more willing to extend due dates on assignments. Tests became easier since professors began giving multiple-choice tests rather than short answer or essay questions. Charlotte stated the Writing Lab was so

overwhelmed with COED College students that it was almost impossible for PWC seniors to obtain an appointment to have their senior papers reviewed. As self-described academically-oriented nerds and geeks, these students were disturbed by these changes.

Crime and Punishment

The three student-participants unequivocally stated that campus crime increased with the transition to coeducation. Living behind the red brick wall was not as safe after male students matriculated. Beatrice, Agatha, and Charlotte agreed they felt less safe walking about their campus. More random visitors from other colleges began to appear as the social environment changed.

While parties may have continued to be held in student rooms, they were no longer low-key, laid-back events. Beatrice described the new party scene as juvenile and out of control:

I think the incoming coed classes, their alcohol consumption was a different sort of level. It was more...juvenile. It was just a little more wild and sloppy. Maybe there was more alcohol poisonings, more parties that were busted by the Res Life because they were loud and out of control. Stupid things that we never did like having beer pong competitions that were week long. You know, who can stay drunk for a full week? And then they were loud about it, you know? They talked about it.

Charlotte concurred. "Oh, yes, beer pong. There was beer everywhere. More incidents of COED girls being taken away [by ambulance to the hospital] because they had alcohol poisoning."

Beatrice and Agatha stated that vandalism increased which Beatrice believed were often acts of drunkenness. Beatrice cited examples where students had their cars bashed or had eggs

thrown at them. Graffiti appeared on buildings. The predominantly coed dorm, where most of the male students lived, experienced problems with students urinating in recycling bins, on stairwells, and in elevators. Charlotte who lived in the coed dorm watched a male student spray a fire extinguisher down the hallway and subsequently cause the fire alarm to activate. She did not see this behavior as a harmless prank but as a criminal act. Agatha personally experienced a destructive and criminal act against her personal property; unfortunately, no arrests were made in her case.

Drugs were no longer a rarity and Charlotte, Beatrice, and Agatha had their first actual exposure to drugs on their campus. Beatrice considered a number of her COED classmates as being regular pot users. Charlotte suspected that a male student living in her coed dorm of being involved in several campus crimes, including dealing drugs from his dorm room, an act that eventually involved the police. Charlotte indicated this student left campus but he “wreaked much havoc” before his departure.

Like Agatha, Charlotte was also the victim of criminal activity when she was physically assaulted by an intoxicated male dorm mate who was attempting to gain access into her room. Although campus security was called to the scene, Charlotte believed their response was rather nonchalant. Since the offending male student was also a friend, Charlotte decided not to press charges. College administration deferred to Charlotte’s decision and punished the student by having him write Charlotte an apology letter, perform community service, and agreeing to stay away from her in the future. Charlotte found his apology letter to be lacking in sincerity even though she heard from a mutual friend that he feels guilty about what he did.

Although random visitors to the campus may have increased under coeducation, the territorial feelings about the campus held by PWC students were adopted by the male students of COED College. Beatrice indicated that COED College men did not welcome campus visits by students from a nearby men's college and shared a story about a confrontation that took place between a PWC friend, the friend's boyfriend from the nearby men's college, and a group of COED College men. As Beatrice said, "[The COED men] did not want him in their space."

The students' assertions about the increase in crime were a finding that could be substantiated through official sources. In 1990, Congress enacted the Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act, which was later amended and renamed the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security and Policy and Campus Crime Statistics in memory of a student who was slain in her dorm room in 1986. The Clery Act mandates the collection and dissemination of information on campus crime and safety. This report records crime reported during the previous calendar year and must be submitted to the U.S. Department of Education by October 1 of each year (Westat, Ward, & Lee, 2005).

A review of the most recent report submitted to the U.S. Department of Education by COED College, as shown in Table 2, confirms that campus crime and arrests and on-campus disciplinary actions related to alcohol consumption increased substantially during the transition to coeducation. The report included a caveat stating that increased number of disciplinary actions for liquor law violations relates to a change in the referral and adjudication process by COED College.

Table 2

On-Campus Criminal Offenses, Arrests, and Disciplinary Actions

	2006	2007	2008	2009
<u>Criminal Offenses:</u>				
Murder/Non-negligent manslaughter	0	0	0	0
Negligent manslaughter	0	0	0	0
Sexual offenses - forcible	0	0	1	0
Sexual offenses - nonforcible	0	0	0	0
Robbery	0	0	0	0
Aggravated assault	0	1	0	1
Burglary	0	2	1	1
Motor vehicle theft	0	1	0	0
Arson	0	0	1	0
<u>Arrests:</u>				
Weapons: carrying, possessing, etc.	0	0	0	0
Drug abuse violations	0	1	1	1
Liquor law violations	0	0	0	0
<u>Disciplinary Actions:</u>				
Weapons: carrying, possessing, etc.	0	0	0	0
Drug abuse violations	0	1	0	0
Liquor law violations	0	0	27	59

Source: <http://ope.ed.gov/security>

Secret Societies and the Women in Black

Beatrice and Charlotte provided insight into the prevalence of secret societies at PWC, as did the alumna-participants who also discussed the role of secret societies. Beatrice explained the multiple roles that secret societies served at PWC:

Secret societies are the backbone of PWC, like they are the biggest tradition that makes PWC what it is. They're the tradition that keeps the other traditions alive. So I think they also help to ingratiate you with your upper classmen. They help to make, to form friendships and bonds, and they help the family feel. I never felt really threatened by secret societies.

Charlotte and Beatrice agreed that there was strong conflict between PWC students and COED College students due to misunderstandings about secret societies. As a result, COED students, especially males, would taunt women they suspected of being members of secret societies.

The conflict reached a crescendo one night when a group of black hooded and robed women made late-night visits to the rooms of several COED College students. As Charlotte explained,

“These boys had harassed a secret society. . .and a group of girls, whether they were a secret society or not, decided to teach these boys a lesson. . . .It terrorized the hell out of them. Scared the bejezus out of them.” Beatrice viewed the action as misguided, saying that “Even most of us who were anti-coed didn’t support what they [the robed and hooded women] did. It gave us a bad name.” Beatrice and Charlotte stated that the administration conducted an investigation into the event; however, the identities of the women involved were never determined.

A Turning Point

Without hesitation, Charlotte, Agatha, and Beatrice admitted they felt anger and bitterness when they heard that PWC was transitioning to coeducation. The three students were resentful towards the college's administration because they believed the college had promised them a single-sex education and except for Charlotte, they also resented the incoming male students. Agatha, Beatrice, and Charlotte were not necessarily resentful towards the incoming women students; however, they viewed the incoming women as being different from PWC women. When possible, Charlotte, Beatrice, and Agatha limited their interaction with the COED College students unless the incoming students were judged to be worthy and respectful.

Unexpected events transpired that helped Agatha and Beatrice change some of their opinions. A PWC student who was a friend of Agatha's was dating a male classmate. Although Agatha viewed this male student as one of the good guys, she did not get to know him well. When he was killed in a car accident during the school year, the event was a catalyst for Agatha to revisit her feelings:

That was sort of a turning point with the bitterness and some of the anger. I realized that a lot of male students are good people and they're strong academically. They have a good heart. We shouldn't take it out on everybody and miss out on the opportunity to get to know these people.

Agatha said the bitterness and anger left her with that event but was replaced with "a sad realization that the college was dying and it's a different place now."

Beatrice became apathetic about the back stabbing and bad talking between PWC women and COED students, about students being disrespectful in the classroom, and about the dwindling interest in PWC traditions. As a result, she acclimated to living in a fractured community. She regretted becoming apathetic and said that as, “I look back and I think I could have done more to bridge the gap. I could have been more open and more ready to talk it out and listen more to their positions.” Beatrice indicated that the conflict and tensions between the two groups of students declined as time passed. “I think we got to know each other. I think the miscommunication eased up a little bit as people started making friends. . .in different social groups and classes.” Beatrice’s anger and bitterness dissipated substantially and like Agatha, she became sad about PWC though.

The Legal Challenge and Its Aftermath

On September 9, 2006, the president of the PWC’s Board of Trustees announced that PWC would become a coeducational institution in the following academic year. A firestorm of protest erupted. Even in the age before Facebook became the most popular form of social communication, information raced around the Internet. Websites quickly developed and Yahoo LIST SERVs rapidly formed. Within days, online petitions to PWC generated thousands of signatures. Students took advantage of electronic communication and uploaded protest videos to YouTube.

That year, PWC had successfully completed a \$100 million capital campaign, so PWC’s assertion of financial distress surprised and alarmed alumnae. The response from many was to offer their expertise and time to help their alma mater return to financial health rather than open the doors to coeducation. “We’ve got a group of women that are willing to set aside and work

for the college, that are marketing experts, experts in finance, or experts in these various areas that are willing to dedicate many hours to helping,” stated Edith. However, the Board of Trustees was not interested in volunteer assistance from alumnae. As more information surfaced about the college’s situation, alumnae became distrustful of information disseminated by the Board.

An Abused Spouse and a “Hell-Bent” Board

The alumnae were aware that the Board had been preparing a strategic plan but were unaware that coeducation was a serious consideration. “Certainly going coed was not breathed about, like it wasn’t, it just wasn’t up for discussion as far as I understood it when I was still on campus,” asserted Edith. Grace also believed the Board had not communicated appropriately about PWC’s plans and had not been transparent in their actions:

I think they marketed as opposed to telling the truth about numbers. And so that sort of platform of distrust, can’t believe the numbers, can’t believe what you’re telling us, then you know, how long has this been going on, this mission, this quest to become coeducational? And they hadn’t, the Board, had not communicated any of the strategic planning that they had said they were doing. When we looked at the strategic plans, they were less than convincing, but they’d convinced the Board, or the Board had, you know, it’s one of those plans that had been conceived in advance and knew what the outcome was going to be in advance.

Alumnae Fiona and Edith also voiced opinions similar to Grace’s. They wondered if the Board’s lack of transparency meant the Board was “hiding something.” “Why not share information?” “Did [the college] run out of money?”

The students also perceived the college's administration as being less than open and honest. Charlotte said, "I was very, very, hurt [by the coed decision] and felt major distrust against the people who had control of the school." Agatha recalled attending a question and answer session for students held by the administration and leaving the session feeling dissatisfied with the administration's lack of responsiveness:

I remember us asking questions and of course, the administration would not actually answer the questions. They were just sort of tap-danced around the issue. Basically they had what I would say was more like a stump speech if you're in politics of an answer that's not really an answer to the question.

The three students expressed dismay and anger over the administration's unwillingness to share information with or to accept input from students. The administration's refusal to communicate and interact with students was contrary to the previous environment to which the students were accustomed.

All participants mentioned the haste with which the Board proceeded. "They were hell-bent to make this decision," said Deidre. Edith offered a similar opinion. "It was like their minds had been made up, that there was no delaying the decision, there was no extending the time frame. It was like, no, this is what we doing." Beatrice indicated that the Board made it sound like they had no other choice.

Deidre offered an explanation for the Board's "foxhole mentality" as Edith described it. In the year prior to the coeducation announcement, the Board had reversed its decision to close the foreign study campus after alumnae and student protested upon hearing the news. The effect of acquiescing to student and alumnae opinions taught the Board that once a decision is reached

and announced, they had to hold firm to decisions and not succumb to popular opinion. The alumna-leaders suspected that the consultants working with the Board had advised the Board to expect dissension and protest over the coeducation decision, but not to reverse their course and had led the Board to believe the situation would “blow over within a few weeks” if the Board held firm. As a result, the alumna-leaders believed the Board refused to listen to legitimate concerns and arguments presented by students and alumnae.

The alumna-participants stated the Board believed coeducation was the only option to save the college and that ideas for addressing deficiencies in academics, admissions, finances, or marketing were not viable and would not be considered. However, the alumnae believed that until other concerns about the college could be resolved, coeducation was not an informed or sound decision. Edith compared PWC’s situation to being in a bad and broken relationship:

I thought of the campus as an abused spouse that had been in this bad relationship for many years, and it needed to get over that relationship and become healthy again before it started considering radical changes. So much was broken, I didn't think it was rational to say single sex isn't working or is working because the institution was so not working.

Petitions and Protests

Beatrice indicated that student protest was no surprise to the administration and in fact, she believed they expected the protest. The faculty had taught students to think independently, to question authority, and to stand up for their beliefs. “I think [the administration] was a little surprised at the passion, maybe, the anger and the hurt with which we protested,” surmised Beatrice. When the president of PWC, who was also an alumna, spoke to students, she mentioned “how she expected this and she wouldn’t want it any other way because she wanted

PWC women to still feel they could protest,” said Beatrice. Agatha’s view of the president was more skeptical:

She’s an interesting character because she was an alum, so she sympathized with us, but then you know, it’s kind of hard to tell if she’s actually sympathizing with us or just putting on a show to try to please people. Basically it was hard to tell what her motivations were for going out there. I think she probably just wanted to please people by coming out and quote unquote showing her support of us.

Agatha and Charlotte indicated that many of their professors were supportive of the student protests that began immediately following the coeducation announcement. During the student protests, professors waived class attendance policies and conducted off-campus classes for students so they would not fall behind in their studies. To reciprocate their professors’ cooperation and support for their protests, the students carried their books to protest activities, an act that demonstrated their continued commitment to academics. On the day of silent protest, Agatha recalled seeing most students sitting quietly with their books in the center of campus. Protesting was important to the students, but equally important was maintaining their academic responsibilities and standing. Not all faculty supported the student protests, however. Agatha said that she had one professor who adamantly opposed the student protests. When he refused to waive his class attendance policy, Agatha immediately withdrew from his class.

Other groups also supported the students during their protests. Alumnae sent food or money for purchasing food to serve the protesting students. Some alumnae joined the ranks of the protesters. Some members of the local community supported the students. Agatha recalled marching along the sidewalk next to the red brick wall and passers-by in cars would toot their

horns in support and shout words of encouragement from their car windows. However, Charlotte remembers other passers-by yelling “mean things” to us as they drove past. The students hung banners throughout the campus which the administration left hanging. Unfortunately, some banners were later destroyed and Agatha guessed they were destroyed by local teenagers engaging in mischievous pranks.

The alumna-participants in this study had their own reactions to the events taking place on campus. Fiona sent money to purchase food for the student protesters and thought the student protesting was great. Although the alumna-participants were supportive of the students’ protests, some expressed criticism towards the approach taken by the students. Deidre was perturbed by the students’ fixation on maintaining their grades during the protest:

The students started their protest. . .they were all worried about their grade point average. I said, ‘To hell with your grade point average, you're saving your college. If they can’t get past that, do your work, turn it in, whatever, but if you have to stay out of class to preserve what’s right, you do that, you do what’s right. You don’t whine about whether you're following the little rule about going to class every day.’ And I can understand some of that. . . .”

Deidre believed “there needed to be a leadership coalition [among] the students who were willing to stand firm” and initially believed the students “were doing well with that.”

Edith believed that “at least half and ideally more like three-quarters” of the student body needed to participate for the protests to make an impact. She also thought that “adults” such as “alums, staff, faculty, and retired faculty” needed to be included since the Board would pay more attention to these constituent groups. Edith believed the Board did not pay attention to the

students as it should have. Edith said, “It shouldn’t be a student protest, it should be a community protest.” Edith further explained that in order for a protest to be effective that the entire community needs to react when there is a threat to the community; otherwise, it appears that “one or two outliers are driving the effort. . .and. . .the community does not object.” Edith expressed some reservations about the protest leaders. She was concerned that the protest leaders were not properly communicating protest objectives and activities or effectively motivating other students to join the cause. Her concern was that without a strong and passionate group of leaders, the protest efforts could not be sustained. Speaking about the student protests at PWC, Edith concluded, “There were a lot of protests around coeducation and yet those protests folded almost like a house of cards when some of the leaders of the protest defected, so to speak, to the other side.” Edith offered a final critique of the student-organized effort at PWC by saying the students did not effectively use the press, believing that some Board members would have responded to a community-wide uproar, but others were not likely to have relented. She speculated, however, that “CNN is a concern” that often gets the attention of all Board members.

Upper-class students, mainly seniors from the Class of 2007, formed the leadership team for student protests. Nightly, the group met to decide the specifics of the next day’s protest and then disseminated the information to the student body. The student protest began strong, but waned within a week. Agatha estimated that the protesting lasted from Saturday, the day of the coed announcement, to the following Thursday night. She recalled that no protest activities were planned for Friday, so many students returned to class.

Beatrice recollected a similar timeframe for the student protests. She thought the protests could have been better organized and better advertised. Beatrice also thought that more people could have participated and wondered if people had been scared off by certain protest tactics:

I think people were sometimes a little scared off by the maybe like rebellious or a little bit extreme nature of some of the people leading the protests. Like the Redshirts, they were pretty extreme I think, how they like refused to eat and stuff, that's kind of pointless. I don't know, it just, it seemed extreme and it didn't seem to really do anything.

So that scared people off.

Agatha also wished more students had participated. With a student body of about 700 students and excluding students who supported coeducation, students who did not want to get involved, and first-year students who were hesitant to participate, the numbers protesting may not have represented the majority of the student enrollment.

For Charlotte, the protest was a “big deal.” With the academic expectations of PWC and the financial necessity of having to work while in college, finding time to protest was extremely challenging. Charlotte described being a part of the protests as “one of the biggest things that has happened to me in my life”:

It was something I had never done before. Yeah, I was in high school, I did a couple of petitions for things, but I never have protested. And it made me feel a part of something because I came from, like I said, a community where a woman was probably best by being by her husband's side and the best she could do was marry someone. And I go to a school that empowers me to be more, and I'm already a Type A personality, I just needed

that extra push. And to see those women believing so strongly in something empowered me to be more, it empowered me to be a stronger woman myself.

When I asked Charlotte if the protest had more of an impact on her than being a plaintiff in the lawsuit, she replied, “Yes. I felt like I was doing something when I was in the protest. I felt like my presence there, I was actively doing something.”

Charlotte, Agatha, and Beatrice believed that the protests were necessary and effective. For Beatrice, the protests were “a big way of showing the college that you are all together in not wanting this change.” Charlotte believed the protests “got our point across that we weren’t going to give up and we weren’t going to just let people change our school.” All student-participants said the protests were a learning experience for them and as a result, they will be more likely to protest or demonstrate for social rights in the future. More than one of them mused that they now consider themselves to be “social activists.”

When asked if students at another school faced with a similar situation should protest, all participants responded unequivocally yes. Agatha offered these thoughts on the benefits of participating in a protest:

I would definitely say that it makes you a stronger person, a stronger individual. It definitely teaches you not to let your voice be silenced, not give in and just be part of the bandwagon, things like that. It releases something in you that you didn't know was there. It might not help the situation, but it makes you feel stronger inside for knowing that you actually took action and did something as opposed to just sitting there and letting the change happen, even though the change might not be good change.

Suing Your Mother

During the summer of 2006, when rumors of an impending coeducation decision surfaced, Deidre advised that a group of about 16-20 people comprised of PWC alumnae who were attorneys and attorney-parents of students began discussing, primarily through emails and Yahoo LIST SERVs, legal options should PWC decide to admit men. However, litigation was not the group's first course of action. As Deidre said, "The group, at that point, believed we were dealing with people [the Board] who would listen to reason" since the group had hired an attorney and raised money. The group believed the Board would "listen because we're serious." Deidre explained the message the group hoped to send the Board:

We believed that showing them the mistakes in their own reasoning would, that they were thinking, smart people, and that they would be able to appreciate that we had a point, and that by hiring a lawyer to help us but not suing them immediately they would get the message that we wanted to work with them.

Deidre suspected that the consultants had advised the Board on how they should respond to the actions by the opposition group:

Basically don't give an inch, don't give an inch, don't give an inch, don't back up, just keep moving forward, you've made the vote, start making the changes. And that's what they did. And so we went forward. . . while continuing to try to talk with them, meet with them, negotiate with them.

Edith concurred that litigation was not the group's initial intent and resulted from the Board's refusal to communicate and negotiate in good faith. The group hoped to convince the Board to consider the impact of coeducation on the students and the long-term ramifications on the PWC.

“The intent certainly was not to have a major lawsuit that took years and went to the [State] Supreme Court,” stated Edith. Those who had been discussing legal options believed that proceeding with legal action would ensure that the Board acted in a legally appropriate manner.

Shortly thereafter, Women’s Education Defended (WED), a nonprofit corporation, was legally established to spearhead the legal challenge to the coeducation decision by PWC. Comprised of students, alumnae, faculty, parents, and other interested parties, WED’s mission was to preserve the option to choose a college exclusively for women. As a separate corporation, WED could serve as the client for the attorneys; however, they needed plaintiffs with legal standing. The process to file a lawsuit against PWC had begun. With her sarcastic wit, Edith described the experience as “like suing your mother.”

WED encountered a number of obstacles as the litigation process began. Recognizing that legal expenses could amount to thousands of dollars, the group attempted to obtain pro bono representation by a nationally-recognized law firm. Shortly after finding a powerhouse firm, a conflict of interest situation within the firm arose and the firm withdrew its representation. The group could not pursue litigation without a plaintiff who had legal standing. The strongest plaintiff would have been a Board member who was willing to challenge the Board’s decision. The group found a dissenter on the Board; however, the Board member was unwilling to serve as a plaintiff. Also in reviewing their legal arguments, the group could not ascertain one that would allow them to file the litigation in federal court where they believed justice would be blind.

Since no Board member was willing to be named as a plaintiff, students became the next choice for acting as plaintiffs in the legal challenge, so WED set about finding potential student-plaintiffs from each class year, except for seniors. Members of WED quietly mentioned to a few

students that their group was willing to fund litigation against the college and was looking for students to act as plaintiffs. WED assured interested students that they would bear no personal legal expenses. As students came forward, they were interviewed to ascertain their reasons for attending PWC. WED wanted to determine that PWC was not a choice of convenience. WED recruited 10-12 students willing to act as plaintiffs in the legal challenge; however, some students dropped out, eventually leaving nine student-plaintiffs.

The students had a somewhat different recollection of the events leading up to their becoming plaintiffs in the legal challenge against PWC. Agatha gave the most detailed explanation of how she became a plaintiff:

There was a meeting held by some lawyers, some of them might have been alums, I think, at a nearby restaurant just off of campus. I can't remember how they sent out the word that they were going to have this meeting. I think I just found out by word of mouth. One of my best friends, her mom was also an alum so she might have found out and that's how I got to the meeting, I think. So they talked about the possibility of joining the lawsuits and what the lawsuits would be and we would not have to pay anything.

[WED] would take care of the funding, things like that. So some of us that attended the meeting decided to join on the lawsuits.

Agatha recalled that her mother accompanied her and thinks that her father may have been with them, too. Agatha smiled when she related that her mother donated to WED a dollar amount that represented the number of years that PWC had been a college for women. Agatha's mother took off from work on the days that Agatha and the other plaintiffs appeared in court. Agatha was proud that her mother was "very, very supportive of letting my voice be heard."

Beatrice had less recollection of how she became involved in the legal challenge. She thought it was through a friend who mentioned the lawsuit was going on and convinced her to get involved because there was a chance that it would prevent the college from going coed. When Beatrice's mother heard her daughter was going to be a plaintiff in a lawsuit against PWC, her response was "almost like, you go, girl!" Beatrice said her father believed that the college's decision was wrong but he worried that she was getting herself "into just a lot of hassle." Beatrice chuckled that her father does not like lawyers but stated her parents "really didn't have a whole lot to say about it."

From her childhood, Charlotte had unpleasant memories of lawyers, judges, and courtrooms having been the center of custody hearings after her parents' divorce. Through friends, Charlotte heard that an organization was seeking volunteers for a lawsuit against PWC, so she sent an email to the person whose name her friends had mentioned. "And a lawyer contacted me and that's pretty much how I got involved," advised Charlotte. Although Charlotte harbored bad feelings about the judicial system, she was still willing to join the legal challenge:

Because I felt strongly that I had been done wrong, that my fellow classmates had been wronged, and I felt like yes, I had had a bad experience as a child, but I knew that the lawyers that were involved in my life as a child were good and got what needed to be done even though I had to be in the courtroom a lot, and I felt like I was a strong enough individual to endure that and I had had that experience so I would do that for my fellow classmates.

Charlotte said her family and friends from home did not talk to her about the lawsuit. Charlotte's grandparents had been actively involved in Charlotte's upbringing and Charlotte remembered that her grandmother spoke her mind on the matter:

My grandmother kind of fussed at me like you're being impulsive, you shouldn't be doing this. You have no idea what repercussions it could have for you. It could ruin your reputation. She's very old Southern. I mean, all you have is your reputation, you know, what people see. And she was very concerned about that.

Even though her grandmother initially rebuked Charlotte for getting involved in the lawsuit, ultimately, she supported Charlotte and offered words of encouragement throughout the process.

For the students, the demands of being a plaintiff were not too overwhelming or too stressful. However, one of the more demanding aspects was locating among stacks of paperwork at home and in their dorm rooms, all letters, brochures, handbooks that they had received from PWC touting the history of the college and the benefits of attending a college for women which the attorneys requested they compile. The attorneys also directed them to find all electronic communications on the subject. Charlotte, Agatha, and Beatrice stated they were inundated with correspondence, typed and mailed or electronic, from the attorneys. All three admitted that their studies remained their first priority and as a result, they would scan the legal documents and sign where the attorneys had designated. Beatrice explained how she handled correspondence from the attorneys:

Our lawyers and their office sent us all the documents and some emails about what was going on but you know, read this, sign here. I was very caught up with school work and so it was not really my top priority to puzzle through the legalese of the documents. I did

skim them and then you know, signed where I needed to and that sort of thing. And the emails were easier to read from the lawyers, it was just a little overwhelming for me and I didn't really have to do anything. So I guess they just kind of took care of it in our names and I guess we did do one court appearance but it was just in [the local circuit court], it was very miniscule.

Like Agatha and Charlotte, Beatrice found the experience draining, but more so mentally draining than emotionally draining. Beatrice summarized the legal process by saying, “The lawyers were really good about making it very easy for me to participate but not to have to participate a whole lot.”

Any repercussions that worried Charlotte’s grandmother did not surface on the PWC campus. Beatrice offered an explanation on how the other students viewed her participation in the lawsuit and her comments were echoed by Agatha and Charlotte:

It was not a big deal on campus. People didn't talk a little bit about it really that much, a little bit. So I had sort of the support network in like my friends that were the other plaintiffs and my friends in general were supportive if I was emotionally down because of it being coed, they were there to talk to about it and vent with me. But in terms of being part of the lawsuit, I don't know if I ever really needed the support network because of the lawsuit. . .the COED Collegites like you know, the kids that applied to COED College, they knew that I was anti-coed and anti-men in my school so sometimes you could feel the tension because of that but not because of being a plaintiff.

The three students indicated that the lawsuit was not a topic of discussion by their professors, either. Beatrice thought “the people in the administration definitely knew who I was because of

it, but I was never treated any differently.” Agatha recalled attending a function at the president’s home and feeling “awkward because I don't think I was allowed to talk to her since I was a plaintiff.” The student-plaintiffs agreed that for the most part, life as a student at PWC was not altered due to their participation in the lawsuit.

Life may not have changed for the students; however, the same cannot be said about all alumna-leaders. Deidre had been involved in the group’s discussions as soon as serious rumors of coeducation by PWC surfaced. Deidre said, “I woke up that morning and I said, ‘No, we can’t work this way.’” After weeks of agonizing over the events that had transpired, Deidre had an epiphany on the direction that the legal action needed to take. WED was formed, legal counsel was hired, plaintiffs were located, and legal proceedings were begun. Edith said she became involved with WED because she is the “queen of Excel and Microsoft Office.” Edith had been working with the students in their opposition efforts when her friend, Fiona, contacted her and asked Edith to help WED with a spreadsheet. “I don’t even know how it happened, it just kind of naturally unfolded. . .they started to form WED and they asked me to be a part of it, and it just happened. Fiona recalls a slightly different story, saying Edith got her involved. Grace was a LIST SERV recipient and had been following the events as they unfolded. Also, she had been examining PWC’s financial statements since she did not trust the college’s claim of financial distress. Grace indicated it was a natural progression for her to become involved with WED since she had expertise needed by the organization.

These PWC alumnae who had been communicating for months by telephone and email met for the first time in January 2007. “It was an interesting experience because we were no longer dealing on the phone. We just formed some kind of chemical relationship among us. It

was an interesting time,” recalled Grace. Although these women were the organizers and leaders of WED, their level of involvement and its impact on their lives varied greatly. They attributed the disparity to their personalities and work styles, but agreed they were equally passionate about preserving PWC.

Fiona indicated she spent about 10-20 hours weekly on reviewing documents which she often did on weekends. There was some disruption to her life since conference calls among WED leaders were often held in the evenings. Grace recalls devoting about 20 hours a week to WED responsibilities over a two-year period. Grace said she constantly reminded herself that “this is not a job.” Grace did not view her involvement with WED as a disruption to her life. As she said, “You just find the time for it. I don’t think anyone suffered. I still made dinner.”

Edith estimated that she spent 100 hours a week for two years working with WED. Working from her home office, she responded to telephone calls and emails, drafted correspondence for WED, and maintained various types of electronic records. Deidre’s time commitment equaled that of Edith. Deidre’s career and employer gave her flexibility; however, she recalled having to work for her employer for a month with no pay to offset the time she spent on WED matters while in the office.

While the students responded that the physical and emotional demands of the lawsuit had not been too demanding or draining, some of the alumnae responded that the lawsuit had been extremely time-consuming and difficult.

Fifteen Minutes of Fame

During the course of my interviews, I asked participants whether participating in the lawsuit had anything to do with having “15 minutes of fame.” They answered with a categorical

“No!” Beatrice responded, “There was no fame to be had.” Most student-participants stated they avoided the media and if the media approached them for an interview, they declined. However, Agatha was pleased that the student protests received news coverage and one student, Charlotte, did seek out an unusual form of media coverage in a letter written to TV star, Oprah Winfrey:

I wrote to Oprah. I didn’t even get a response. I was so sad. I wrote to Oprah and gave her this heartfelt thing because she’s this idol that all women have about your rights and being independent. I was like maybe if I write to her, if we get her to support us, they won’t go coed.

Mail, Money, Rings, and Resumes

The change to coeducation by PWC had a profound and lasting impact on the relationship of the participants with their alma mater. In addition, the change in the college’s name that accompanied the transition to coeducation further affected their feelings. As a result, the participants have manifested changes in the various ways they show loyalty to their alma mater.

Due to a similarity in its name with another college, PWC could not simply drop the word, woman’s, from its legal name. The Board of Trustees allowed students and alumnae to submit their suggestions for a new name. When the new name for the college was announced, all participants disliked it. Charlotte said the new name “doesn’t sound prestigious.” Edith was more critical saying, “It’s a dumb name.” During my interviews, some participants refused to say the college’s new name and instead used the expression “that college.”

Coeducation and the college’s name change have influenced the way in which the participants handle mailings from COED College. Beatrice says that mailings go to her home

address where she no longer lives. On her last visit home, Beatrice said she glanced at the alumni magazine for information on her friends and to “look at things that remind me of why I disapprove of COED College and if see if things are getting better.” Like Beatrice, Charlotte has mailings sent to her father’s address because she knows her father will throw them in the trash. Almost guiltily, Scarlet admitted that she “sneaked a peak at the alumni magazine. I’m glad I get it. I read the old years.” However, Grace throws other mail in the trash without even opening it. Recently, Grace’s child who is a senior in high school began receiving recruitment solicitations. A recent postcard from an admissions counselor at COED College infuriated Grace. “My [child] laughed at it, and if I had a sense of humor about it, I would probably laugh as well.” Grace said that she is “repulsed” by the thought of her child being a student at COED College. Fiona had COED College remove her name from their mailing list, but not Edith. Although she trashes all mailings without opening them, she leaves her name on the mailing list “because it costs them money to send it to me.” Agatha has mail from COED College sent to her current address and still enjoys reading the alumni magazine.

The participants have altered their views on displaying the symbols typically used by alumnae to demonstrate their loyalty to their alma mater. Agatha still proudly wears her PWC apparel and displays PWC memorabilia in her home. Fiona and Edith no longer wear their PWC rings, saying they are shamed that their alma mater has lost its distinctiveness. When an alumni of COED College seeking career advice contacts Edith through a social networking site, Edith said, “I just ignore them. . . I have no commonality with them and I have no interest in furthering their careers because they’re strangers. Whereas, if it was still PWC, I probably would help them.”

When the student-participants graduated, they were given the option of receiving a PWC diploma, a COED College diploma, or both. All chose the PWC diploma. Agatha said had COED College forced her to accept their diploma, she would have burned it. Agatha's resume reflects PWC as her educational background. Beatrice has PWC on her resume with COED College in parentheses. Charlotte lists COED College on her resume but adds "formerly known as PWC so people will still see that I actually went to a good school. I don't want them to see that I went to some sell out school. Because COED College may have the accreditation, but it does not have the reputation."

As a result of coeducation, the participants re-evaluated their monetary contributions to their alma mater. All alumna-participants had faithfully donated to PWC over the years. During her senior class fundraising campaign, Edith was proud to have given the largest donation of the class, an amount of several hundred dollars, which was a sizable sum of money for a senior in college. Agatha was equally proud of her refusal to give even one dollar to her senior class fund drive since it meant the class would not achieve 100% class participation. Recognizing the value of the education she received at PWC, Grace repaid her student loans far faster than required and has "contributed mightily over the years. I was thrilled to read that the capital campaign had been a success." None of the participants make donations to their alma mater now. The alumna-participants have stopped giving and the student-participants refuse to start giving.

Of all the recent graduates, Agatha has returned to campus the most often since her graduation, helping friends move into their dorms and observing Watermelon Walk. "It felt awkward. It was definitely a different atmosphere." Now that all her friends have graduated, Agatha predicts her visits will be far less often. Charlotte, also commented on her return to

campus in fall 2010, stating that the visit left an indelible impression on her as she reflected on the loss of the campus atmosphere she had previously known:

What I saw made me very sad....I don't want to go back there and see what I saw ever again. I was amazed, I was shocked how, I mean, from my freshman year to my senior year the culture has changed so much, but it was even more so. I mean, it was like we had been forgotten. . . .I got there on a Friday night and it was just amazing how much it had changed. Because yes, it was a Friday night and most of the time college students they like to party, but I mean, windows are open, you can smell marijuana, you can see someone playing beer pong, I mean, it's just changed so much.

Most of the participants have no interest in returning to campus; however, some participants have attended off-campus reunions that have been enjoyable events. Every participant voiced sadness over the end of their relationship with their alma mater. Deidre expressed her feelings with the strongest emotion when she said, "I feel like they've ripped my whole family away. I mean, it's a piece of my heart that's just never going to heal."

Career Changes, Internet Searches, and No Regrets

Being involved in a legal challenge to the coeducation decision by PWC affected the student-participants and the alumna-participants differently. For the students, other than compiling paperwork for their attorneys, being a plaintiff was "no big deal" to use Beatrice's words. As a result, they did not regret becoming a plaintiff in the legal challenge against PWC; however, Charlotte and Beatrice were hesitant to say they would want to do so again.

For the students, participating in the protests and being a student as their college transitioned to coeducation had a greater impact than being involved in the lawsuit. If the lawsuit was “no big deal,” the protests and the coeducation transition were described as “life-changing” by Beatrice. Agatha said the experience was “one of the defining moments in my life. . . a milestone so to speak that really changed me as a person.”

Each student described the protest experience as making her a stronger person. “It definitely made me a stronger person. It taught me lessons that I think I will use in my future as a public servant,” related Agatha. “The change to go coed helped me further to deal with conflict, to be stronger, less sensitive, more assertive, and I guess in a way more aware of how I should be treated,” said Beatrice. Charlotte echoed similar feelings about the experience, explaining the importance of fighting for what is right in life:

Coeducation made me realize that when you believe strongly for something, you should fight for it, even though you may not get what you want in the end. All that matters is that you're fighting for it and you don't give up. It made me a stronger person because I've never really had to fight for anything like that before and it made me see, okay, for instance, African-Americans having to fight for their rights. Immigrants who have had to come in and fight for their rights. I was fighting for my rights and it made me see that, you know, it's not as easy as it looks.

As a consequence of their experiences in the transition to coeducation at PWC, the students said they would not shy away from joining social or political protests for causes in which they believe.

Although they endured change, conflict, and stress, the students saw their college years as a positive learning experience. Beatrice initially indicated that college “was more a negative experience” but as she continued to talk her opinion changed. Beatrice said she did not regret remaining at COED College and indicated that overall she enjoyed her collegiate experience. She concluded by saying, “I would have enjoyed it if it was all women and it would have been a lot more peaceful.” Beatrice stated that she prefers to downplay the negative aspects of life and focus on the good things that happen. Beatrice advised that her experiences at PWC and COED College will influence her evaluation of potential graduate schools:

I think when I look at graduate schools now I'm going to look for schools that are more at peace between the faculty and students and the administration. I'm definitely not going to go into another environment like that, you know, I'm not going into another place that is promoting athletics because they have financial problems. I'm not going to choose a school that is so big on athletics that they shortchange the academics financially. And I would like to go to an institution that puts a big emphasis on gender equality and issues in women's studies and promotes feminism.

Charlotte expressed strong dismay over an unexpected consequence of being a plaintiff in the lawsuit. Whenever Charlotte's name is searched using the Internet, the lawsuit appears. “For the rest of my life that's going to be there. . . .It makes me mad because if somebody types in my name, now it's like, oh, she's in the lawsuit.” Charlotte stated that she had not encountered any problems with this during a recent employment investigation; however, she worries about the future. Agatha expressed minor concern with this issue since she wants a career in public service, but reported no problems to date.

Although less concerned than Charlotte, Edith said that when people discover she was involved in a lawsuit against her all-women's college because it decided to become coed, she has to "explain that I don't hate men because then it's like well why didn't you want men to go to the school. People so easily misunderstand that as the key issue." Being involved with the alumnae opposition group and the lawsuit made a life-changing impact on Edith because she gave up her plans to attend graduate school:

I'm sure if this lawsuit had not happened, if I hadn't spent the two years working on it, I would have gone to graduate school and I'd probably be getting my Ph.D. around this point and be very happy about it probably. So it definitely had a profound effect on my life and the direction that my life took.

After her involvement in the legal challenge, Edith changed her perspective on the legal system. Although Edith had been tangentially involved in other court cases as a witness, she had not participated in a court case to the level or degree of this case against PWC. Edith understood that legal challenges were costly; however, she was astounded at the total legal expense:

I was shocked at how expensive it is, like I knew attorneys were expensive, but to think about all the money that was spent on the lawsuits on both sides, it's staggering. Millions of dollars, I'm sure were spent when you add it all up across both sides and all the cases. And to what purpose, you know? It just feels like I'm not sure that anything was really accomplished except a lot of lawyers making a lot of money."

Edith concluded by saying, "In general, I wouldn't recommend lawsuits because I think they're just a big waste of money and time. But I mean desperate people do desperate things."

Not only did the experience “sour the legal system” for Edith, it changed her previously held perceptions of boards of trustees. She had held the belief that boards were comprised of altruistic people who acted in the best interest of the institution. The experience of interacting with the PWC’s Board changed her opinion about a person’s motivation for serving on a board:

It's just somebody else doing their volunteer work because they want the prestige of being on a board, or they want to make a little bit of money, you get paid sometimes to be on some boards. And that was just really disappointing because it's just another one of those illusions that got, you know, the veil has been lifted from my eyes, now I get it.

Edith felt that her involvement in the lawsuit was “like an exercise in failure to some extent” and questioned whether the time and effort would have produced a more positive result had she been working on another cause. However, Edith believed that WED gave alumnae a worthwhile outlet to express their concerns and from that perspective, she does not regret her involvement.

Fiona advised that she had no regrets about WED bringing the lawsuit; however, she would have chosen different legal counsel had it been her decision. WED and the lawsuit gave her an opportunity to meet and interact with a group of women she otherwise would have never known and for that she is grateful. Fiona finalized by saying that the lawsuit “showed that PWC women don’t just sit by and take it up the you know what. We’re not passive people. And I think that it showed what a good education we had gotten.”

Grace viewed her involvement with WED and the lawsuit as a tremendous learning experience and given the opportunity would become involved again. However, she was critical of herself and certain actions followed by WED. Grace wished she had been more directive, especially in interacting with the group’s attorneys. Although she asked the attorneys to provide

a budget, they never complied with her request. “Our lawyers chewed through our money” and “were never corralled to get where we needed to be,” stated Grace. She believed that WED would have been effective if the group had established more clearly delineated goals, objectives, and responsibilities that were periodically measured and evaluated. In addition, regularly-scheduled face-to-face meetings or video-conferencing through Skype would have improved WED’s effectiveness. Although Grace voiced some criticisms of the group’s operational approach, she, like Edith and Fiona, enjoyed the friendships she made among the group.

Like Edith, Deidre said that she “almost lost faith in the whole [judicial] system because of how dreadful it has been from start to finish.” Deidre has continued to agonize over the experience. She wished that the WED and the alumnae had had more time to organize and effectively fight the college’s coeducation decision. She regretted that the case had to be tried within the state court system and not the federal courts. She also questioned the course of action followed by the attorneys in some situations. Deidre advised that she still has mounds of paperwork to be cataloged, filed, and stored.

Advice to Other Alumnae Groups

When asked what advice they would give to another college for women facing coeducation, all participants said protest, protest, and protest. They saw protesting as the most effective means for letting their collective voices be heard even if the outcome was not all that was hoped for or anticipated. Protesting needed to be a sustained effort, lasting more than a few days and involving multiple constituent groups. “Persistence is key,” said Agatha. “Persistence and pressure on the administration.”

The leaders of WED agreed that filing the lawsuit on behalf of the students is an appropriate course of action for another women's college facing a coeducation decision. However, Fiona suggested that a thorough investigation of legal basis of the lawsuit and other factors, such as the college's charter and by-laws, its endowment, and its financial structure, should be examined before beginning a costly and complicated legal battle. Grace and Deidre suggested that social and political environment of the jurisdiction in which a lawsuit will be heard should also be a consideration. Grace also saw a lawsuit as “. . .one route. It is a route that you do in parallel so that your opposition understands that you are taking it seriously. Oh, an all volunteer group without the formality of litigation is just simply an annoyance. . .you need to bring some sense of seriousness to this and that's what the law does.” Grace's other advice for an alumnae group pursuing a legal challenge was be prepared for a long and difficult period requiring focus, concentration, and commitment by those involved. Grace's final advice was to obtain the best professional firms and resources available that understand the objective and support the cause.

Better Dead Than Coed

During my second interview with Deidre, she mentioned the phrase, “better dead than coed” in relation to the phrase that Mills College in California used to protest their coeducation decision in 1990. “We didn't want to use that phrase because we believed that coed would mean dead,” stated Deidre. When asked to consider the expression “better dead than coed” in relation to seeing PWC close in 10-15 years due to financial reasons or seeing PWC go coed and remain open, each participant, in some way, responded that to her PWC was closed or dead.

After reflecting on my question, Agatha replied, “It has closed because it is no longer the same college. . . .who knows if it will be in existence in 5 or 10 years down the road. . . .I don't really see much of a future for the college.” Beatrice pondered my question, saying it was a hard question because in her mind PWC was already closed. She indicated that she would rather the college be dead than coed, but qualified her answer saying, “There are still good people at COED College and I don’t want them to lose their jobs.” For Charlotte, the college is already dead. “PWC died the day I graduated.”

For Edith and Fiona, their alma mater is dead and they firmly believe that COED College is going to fail since there is nothing distinctive about the college now. Grace provided the most insightful response related to PWC eventually closing or going coeducational:

I think I would rather have seen it close. There's nothing worse than taking something that is well conceived, beautifully executed. . . .PWC had a beautiful conception. It was part of history. It was not an economic creation. It was a sociological creation for women, to benefit women. And to change it to keep it alive as an economic institution denigrated its mission. . . .It is the circle of life that some things are no longer relevant and they die. . . .It was not to keep PWC, a college, it was to educate young women.

Each of the participants has accepted the sad realization that the college they attended no longer exists.

Summary of the Essence of the Transition to Coeducation

This chapter recounts the experiences of three students as their former college for women transitioned to coeducation. In addition, it presents the experience of participating in a lawsuit to challenge the coeducation decision in which the students acted as plaintiffs. The lawsuit was

supported and funded by an alumnae opposition group and this chapter also illuminates the experiences of the alumnae who served as leaders of this group.

Although the student-participants and alumna-participants attended PWC over five different decades, they shared similar impressions of and experiences at PWC. Upon arriving on campus, each participant described an idyllic environment in which they felt physically safe and academically challenged. PWC offered a supportive and collaborative learning environment in which the faculty and administration encouraged students to become strong and independent women. While some of the participants faced personal challenges that affected their collegiate experience, none of the participants wavered in their attachment to PWC. These women viewed their PWC classmates as sisters and each participant, in her own way, embraced the history and traditions of PWC that promoted the familial bonding.

When the PWC's Board of Trustees announced that the college would become a coeducational institution in fall 2007, a firestorm of protest followed. Students uploaded protest videos to the Internet; alumnae submitted online petitions to the administration in which they voiced their opposition to the coeducational decision; and a small group of alumnae began seriously discussing legal options to counter the coeducation of their alma mater. After finding nine PWC students who were willing to act as plaintiffs, WED, an alumnae formed and funded opposition group, initiated a legal challenge to the coeducational decision.

The transition to coeducation and the ensuing legal challenge proved to be a difficult and stressful experience for the participants; however, the experience affected the participants in different ways. For the student-participants, the lawsuit was almost a nonevent that had little impact on their lives. The legal challenge proved to be a time-consuming and costly endeavor

for the alumna-participants. In addition, the experience of participating in the lawsuit caused some alumna-participants to change certain long-held beliefs, such as a loss of faith in the legal system.

The admission of men to PWC and the coeducational transition of the newly-named COED College radically altered the students' collegiate experience. They no longer felt safe on campus as they witnessed campus crime increase with two student-participants being victims of crime. Determined to maintain dominance of the college, the PWC women engaged in acts of physical confrontation and verbal aggression with male students. In addition, the PWC students self-segregated themselves from their male classmates and many of the women who entered in the first class of COED College. In hindsight, some of the student-participants wished they had acted differently in order that the transition to coeducation would have been less stressful.

The essence of the coeducation transition was an altered relationship between the study participants and their alma mater. None make financial contributions to the college, although the alumna-participants had done so in the past. Some participants refuse to display any symbols of their college alliance, whereas, others still proudly wear their PWC apparel. Some of the participants toss all correspondence from the college into the garbage while others scan the alumni magazine. Although the student-participants have returned for campus visits, they were disappointed in and disturbed by the changes they observed and predicted they will be less likely to visit the campus in the future. With feelings of sad resignation, the participants say their alma mater is dead and predict that COED College will eventually fail.

Through this chapter, the feelings and lived experiences of a women's college in transition to coeducation were presented from the perspective of students and alumnae involved in the process.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND IDEAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research focused on the recent coeducation transition of PWC, a small liberal arts college for women, from the perspective of students involved in a legal challenge to the college's decision to become a coeducational institution. The topic of interest was the students' experiences, on the campus and in the classroom, during the coeducation transition and not legal tactics, organizational changes, or financial costs as the college transitioned to coeducation. Any information on these areas was presented to provide context for the students' experiences. A secondary focus examined the experience of participating in a lawsuit to challenge the coeducation decision by PWC from the perspective of the students named as plaintiffs in the lawsuit and the alumnae who led the opposition group to fund the students' legal challenge. The research questions guiding this study were:

- How do students at a private women's college describe the transition from single-sex education to coeducation?
- How do students and alumnae involved in a legal challenge to coeducation at a private women's college describe their experiences?

Answers to these questions were gathered through interviews with students and alumnae and illuminate their intimate involvement in these experiences.

This chapter will outline the conclusions and implications drawn from findings ascertained during these interviews. The information will fill a gap in the current literature since little has been written about students' experience during a transition to coeducation.

Conclusions

None of the participants in this study survived the transition to coeducation at PWC and ensuing legal challenge without consequences to either their personal or professional lives. The experience of participating in a lawsuit to challenge the coeducation decision and the subsequent transition to coeducation by PWC left an indelible impression on each one, but in different ways. The conclusions presented here outline the similar and dissimilar outcomes for those who shared the experience of a lawsuit and in the case of the students, the transition to coeducation.

Protesting as the Transformative Experience

Throughout its history, PWC had empowered its students to be active participants in the governance of the college and to voice their opinions or dissatisfaction with issues. The students were educated to be strong and independent women. The students in this study demonstrated those characteristics.

According to the students, protesting PWC's decision to become a coeducational college was a transformative experience. None had previously participated in a student protest although PWC students and alumnae had protested during the previous academic year the Board of Trustee's announcement to close the foreign study campus. Two students described their participation in the protest as one of the most important happenings in their lives, while another student ranked her participation in the protests as one of top milestones in her life. For each of the students, the protests were the best means of voicing their dissatisfaction and disagreement

with the coeducation decision since the Board of Trustees refused to consider previous forms of input from the students.

The students believed that the administration was not surprised by the student protest considering that the school promoted an environment where women were groomed to be strong and independent and willing to voice their opinions. For the students, the protests were an exercise in leadership that had been cultivated in them at PWC.

The students believed that the protests were necessary and effective. Protesting was the channel for giving the students a strong and collective voice. Protesting was seen as a proactive stance by the students, giving them a sense of control during a situation in which they felt ignored and helpless. For the students, protesting was seen as making them stronger individuals who were willing to stand firm in their beliefs. The three students indicated that participating in the protests at PWC had given them a stronger sense of social activism and as a result, they would be more willing to participate in future movements to protect the rights of others.

The impact of the students' participation in the protest is consistent with previous research. Studies on women's colleges and student protest support the transformative nature of the protest experience. Kim (2001) found that women's colleges tended to foster liberalism and social activism among their students. Sax (2008) cited participation in organized demonstrations as one component of leadership development in students.

The Impact of Participating in the Legal Challenge

Although the lawsuit was a time-consuming experience for both the students and the alumnae, the impact of participating in the legal challenge had more ramifications for the alumnae than for the students. All agreed that the alumnae and attorneys sheltered the

student-plaintiffs and this, along with their youth and inexperience, may have affected their perspective on participating in the legal challenge.

For the students, the experience of being a plaintiff in the legal challenge to PWC's coeducation decision was almost a nonevent. The students indicated that the legal correspondence from their attorneys was relentless; however, they did not allow their focus or lives to be consumed by the legal proceedings. Their academic pursuits remained the primary concern for the students. The students handled their participation in the lawsuit in a similar manner. They scanned the legal documents they received and signed where their lawyers directed. They saw their lawyers as competent and capable and as pursuing the best interests of the students acting as plaintiffs. The students were often not required to make court appearances, so they did not, and were annoyed when the legal proceedings interfered with their academic responsibilities. The lawsuit was not a topic of discussion among their friends or by the faculty. The students felt not the slightest retaliatory action by the administration. The students' strong stance against coeducation through their self-segregation generated more attention than their participation in the breach-of-contract lawsuit.

One student-participant worried about an unexpected consequence of participating in the lawsuit, the fact that her name and the lawsuit are forever linked when her name is searched on the Internet. This also presented some concern to another student-participant since she aspires to a career in public service. Although the students were hesitant to say they would act as plaintiffs in another lawsuit, they did not rule out that possibility.

Serving as a plaintiff in a lawsuit against PWC may have been a nonevent for the students, but no so for the alumnae who led the opposition group. These alumnae tackled a

monumental task—forming a nonprofit organization that conformed to federal, state, and Internal Revenue Service guidelines, spearheading a legal challenge, raising a million dollars to pay legal and other expenses, pleading their cause in the realm of public opinion by writing numerous articles and editorials for publication, giving speech after speech to various constituent groups, and maintaining a website to communicate their activities to interested parties.

The demands of serving as leaders of the opposition group far exceeded the demands placed on the student-plaintiffs. Two alumna-leaders estimated that they spent about 20 hours a week fulfilling their WED responsibilities; however, WED responsibilities consumed the lives of the other alumna-leaders. The experience of participating in the lawsuit to challenge the transition to coeducation caused the alumnae to lose faith in the legal system. They also lost trust in the educational system as their alma mater forged ahead with coeducation plans although alumnae voiced their opposition and presented alternative solutions to resolve the issues facing the college.

None of the alumna-participants had any regrets about participating in the lawsuit to challenge the transition to coeducation by PWC and all agreed they would follow the same course of action, only they would be smarter in their approach. They would have exerted more control over the attorneys' actions and costs and they would have developed a more effective operational plan within their own group.

The Emotional Death of a College

Early in the interview process, two participants used the expressions “dead” or “die” when talking about PWC and the coeducation transition. As the interviews progressed with other participants, I heard these words more often to describe PWC. All participants preferred to

the see PWC close rather than become a coeducational institution; however, one student qualified her answer by saying she would hate for people to lose their jobs.

The participants see their college as dead. An alumna-leader described COED College as being kept alive as an economic institution, an analogy of a person being kept by life support systems. She believed that all entities have a life cycle and eventually become irrelevant and as a result of the belief, she would have preferred that PWC die with dignity.

As I reflected on the participants' comments about the death of PWC, I realized that the participants in my research study had experienced the stages of death and dying as reported by Kübler-Ross (1969). Kübler-Ross's research examined the stages of death and dying through the eyes of terminally-ill patients. For these participants, PWC was a part of their identity. Several participants had a visceral response to PWC, saying the college had gotten under their skin. For these participants, a part of them was dying and as a result, they experienced the emotions of impending death.

Kübler-Ross (1969) defined seven emotional stages that occur over time as a person approaches death. The first stage is shock and disbelief, which is the typical human reaction to bad news, not just the news of a terminal illness. Denial of the news follows and this stage may last from a few seconds to many months. Anger and rage occur next. When the environment tolerates the expression of anger and rage in an impersonal manner, a temporary stage of bargaining appears. Depression follows bargaining and serves as the stepping-stone to the final stage of acceptance. In the Kübler-Ross model, the stages are sequential with one stage replacing another, but they also exist next to each other and at times overlap. Overarching these six emotional stages is some form of hope that often lasts almost to the end.

The actions of the participants following the announcement to coeducation and the subsequent transition to coeducation correspond to emotions and actions of dying and death as described by Kübler-Ross (1969). All participants registered shock and disbelief when they heard that PWC was transitioning to coeducation. The college had repeatedly told the students about the benefits of attending a college for women and the college had recently completed a \$100 million capital campaign to which the alumna-participants had contributed. The participants said the coeducation decision was unbelievable. Upon hearing the news, the participants acted with anger which the students manifested by immediately protesting. The administration made no overt efforts to prohibit the student protests. Anti-coeducation banners were not removed from campus and most professors waived class attendance policies. Alumnae expressed their anger through online petitions and letters to the administration. During this time, alumnae bargained with the administration by volunteering to provide expert services to the college. The alumna-leaders also employed legal counsel to send a letter to the administration threatening legal action. When these forms of negotiation failed, the alumna-leaders and student-plaintiffs turned to the judicial system as the final bargaining tool. The student-participants manifested various forms of depression. One student became apathetic and two students segregated themselves from the COED College students. All three students considered transferring from PWC, but guilt about leaving their PWC sisters paralyzed them. Throughout this time, none of the participants gave up hope. The alumna-leaders hoped the lawsuit would buy them time to convince the administration to reverse its decision. The student-plaintiffs hoped they would win in court. One student sought hope from an unusual resource by writing

Oprah Winfrey hoping Oprah would telecast their cause, lend her support, and ultimately persuade the board to reverse its decision.

Although my interviews with the participants led to me conclude that they experienced the stages of dying and death as researched by Kübler-Ross (1969), I do not believe that all participants in my study have reached the final stage of acceptance. Some participants have moved on with their lives. For others, the experience still produces raw emotions, which were evident during their interviews. Since the stages of dying and death rest on a time continuum, hopefully all study participants will reach acceptance as time passes.

The Impact of Coeducation on the Collegiate Experience and Relational Changes With Their Alma Mater

Although the administration had assured the students and alumnae that the college would not change with the admission of men, the participants in my study described major and highly noticeable changes on the campus and in the classroom. The campus became a less safe and secure environment. More uninvited guests began to appear on campus, which at times led to conflict between the male students of COED College and the uninvited male guests. Campus crime increased as the consumption of alcohol and marijuana became more prevalent.

Academics, which had been the primary focus of PWC students, was not considered to be the main concern of incoming COED College students. The female students who entered COED College were viewed as having a different attitude, being more concerned about looking pretty than performing academically. The supportive and collaborative learning environment of the PWC classroom was replaced with sense of competition and judgment among the COED College

students. In addition, more emphasis was placed on athletics as new athletic facilities were constructed and more athletes were recruited to the college.

These changes in their collegiate environment caused stress and tension for the students in this study. The students indicated that living and learning within a fractured community made their college years difficult, but agreed that it had been a learning experience that made them stronger, more assertive, and better able to cope with conflict.

As a result of the changes that occurred at PWC as the college transitioned to coeducation, the students advised that they have no interest in having a long-term relationship with their alma mater. They are not inclined to visit the campus in the future and are adamant in their refusal to contribute financially to their alma mater. The alumna-participants echoed these same sentiments. All of the participants predict that COED College will eventually fail.

Implications

Educational institutions are comprised a number of constituent groups, administration, faculty, staff, alumnae, parents, and students. The broader community in which a college or university is located is also a constituent group. Actions by an educational institution often impact multiple constituencies. This section will outline implications for several of these constituencies as a college considers or makes the transition to coeducation.

Implications for Boards and Administration in Communicating and Interacting with Students and Alumnae

Throughout the interviews, the participants were highly critical of PWC's Board of Trustees and administration in their failure to communicate, in their opinion, honestly and appropriately about the circumstances surrounding the coeducation decision. The students

complained that the admissions office had not been forthright when responding to inquiries about the future of

single-sex education at PWC. Later, the students stated the administration “tap-danced” in answering their questions about the coeducation decision. The alumnae voiced similar concerns.

The participants in my study argued that the decision-making process by the Board was flawed and lacked transparency.

The PWC President’s Annual Report for previous years indicated that the college was financially secure, but warned that the marketplace and economic situation in higher education for private liberal arts colleges was changing rapidly. The Board of Trustees cited these broad changes in higher education as the impetus for examining coeducation. In June 2006, PWC successfully completed a \$100 million capital campaign, yet three months later, an interim president stood before students and alumnae and advised that coeducation was the only alternative for saving the financially-distressed college long-term. The conflicting information about the financial status of PWC caused immediate distrust to spread among alumnae and students.

The lack of communication and cooperation by the Board of Trustees and the college’s administration thoroughly angered the students and alumnae. During the interviews, the alumnae indicated that their requests for copies of various reports compiled during the Board’s study of coeducation were refused. Even, the technical difficulties encountered during PWC’s video streaming of the coeducation announcement compounded the alumnae’s anger and frustration.

Throughout my interviews, the participants indicated that no concessions were made by the Board or PWC’s administration to satisfy requests by students and alumnae. The students

stated that they asked that no male students be allowed to transfer into the upper classes and the college accepted men into the upper classes. Some students and alumnae would have preferred that the college's new name be legally changed to a derivative of the college's former name that constituent groups had historically used; however, the Board ignored this request. The students and alumnae believed they had everything to lose and nothing to gain. As a result, they became more resolute in their efforts to resist the transition to coeducation. Allowing the students and alumnae some short-term gains may have lessened their fight.

Women's colleges transitioning to coeducation in the future would be well advised to consider the human component of a change initiative and not solely rely on rational and researched financial models as the basis for implementing change. Boards and the administration should consider the findings and advice of experts in the fields of organizational development and change to ensure a more successful transition to coeducation and to diffuse the animosity of those groups opposed to coeducation. Kotter (2006) posits that a successful transition begins with establishing a sense of urgency by identifying a crisis or potential crisis and assembling an influential group of people to lead the change. This guiding coalition would be charged with creating a vision or strategy for the transition and using all possible means to communicate their message. Empowering others to participate in the transition and to demonstrate short-term gains during the process are two other factors that promote an effective transition. Throughout a transition, new projects and themes require reinvigoration and lastly, new approaches have to be institutionalized. Sales (2006) suggests several other approaches to affect a robust transformation, including forming productive partnerships and identifying

valuable enemies, as suggested by the saying, “Keep your friends close but keep your enemies closer.”

Although this study was not focused on the PWC as an organization during change, the participants cited numerous examples where PWC’s Board and administration failed to incorporate effective measures for a successful transition. Other boards and administrations might be well served to consider established practices for introducing and sustaining major organizational change before introducing a radical shift in the college’s mission with little advance warning.

Implications for Alumnae Considering a Legal Challenge to Coeducation

Although the alumna-leaders had no regrets about legally challenging PWC’s decision to become a coeducational institution, they cautioned that a legal challenge is not a course of action that should be pursued without serious consideration. As alumnae of another college for women consider a legal challenge against their alma mater, they should evaluate the economic and political climate of the jurisdiction in which the case will be heard. The alumna-leaders would have preferred their case against PWC be tried in federal court; however, they could not identify a legal position against coeducation that fell within the purview of federal law. The alumna-leaders also believed that a trial by jury would have more objectively decided their legal claim; however, the circuit court’s rulings in the early stages of the legal proceedings precluded this option. In addition, previous legal challenges directed at private women’s colleges transitioning to coeducation have not been successful, so legal precedents established by court decisions favor the position of the educational institution.

Pursuing a legal challenge, without pro bono representation and extending over a long period of time, is a costly endeavor. Professional fees to the attorneys, a public relations firm, and other consultants had to be paid. WED conducted a fundraising campaign during a 2-year period and over a million dollars was raised to cover these costs. The alumna-leaders of WED were successful professionals with expertise in various fields; however, the political and business environment in which they were functioning was outside their realm of familiarity.

As Grace advised, becoming involved as an alumna-leader in a legal challenge against your alma mater requires time, focus, commitment, goals and objectives, accountability, and financial resources. Any group considering a legal challenge must evaluate these demands and potential obstacles before pursuing this course of action.

Implications for Students Enrolling in a College for Women

Women enrolling in a college for women should be fully aware that their college environment is subject to change, including a radical change to coeducation. Rulings in previous legal challenges to coeducation by colleges for women have stated that change is inevitable, whether students want it or not, and either the students accept change or face uncomfortable consequences (*Searle-Legel & LaBarbera v. Wells College, 2004*). In previous cases and in the PWC case, the courts ruled that students entering a college for women are not guaranteed a 4-year education at a college exclusively for women and that any commitment by a college is on a semester-by-semester basis since tuition is paid on this basis.

Women interested in attending a college for women should not shy away from these institutions over fear of coeducation, but should recognize that a part of the collegiate experience is learning to adapt in a changing world. Research (Astin, 1977; Sax, 2008) has shown that

college is a period of growth and development during which students encounter various situations to which they cope, adapt, and move forward in their lives.

Ideas for Future Research

Based on the information shared during the student interviews, the intensity of the conflict over coeducation between the PWC women and the COED College students was surprising. Physical confrontations between the students, self-segregation from members of the opposite sex, and acts of blatant intimidation are not typical forms of interaction among students on college campuses, but possibly this behavior can become a norm during a period of coeducation transition. An area of future research would involve surveying former students of women's colleges that transitioned to coeducation during a recent period of time to determine the types of student behavior during the transition. Analyzing these data from various perspectives, such as geographic location of the college, size of the college, any religious affiliation of the college, may provide information on the types of behavior that may be anticipated during a coeducation transition. Having these data, college administrators may be in a better position to encourage positive behavior and prevent negative behavior among their students.

This study examined the experiences of three female students opposed to a coeducation transition by the all-women's college at which they were enrolled, a topic on which little has been written. Less research has examined the experiences of the first males entering former women's colleges transitioning to coeducation. Future research in this area could examine these men's motivations for enrolling in a college with a history of educating women, their interactions in dealing with female classmates, and their overall collegiate experience. This information

would not only fill a knowledge gap, but also assist college administrators in designing programs to welcome the opposite sex to campus.

Another perspective from which a transition to coeducation could be examined is from that of the faculty. The students in this study talked about the faculty's expectations and interactions prior to coeducation and briefly commented on the faculty's involvement during the student protests. The students also observed that the faculty changed their teaching approach after the admission of men. Gathering insight from the faculty directly about how a transition to coeducation affected them would be beneficial to other faculty facing such a change.

Whereas this study examined the transition to coeducation from a retrospective analysis, a longitudinal study beginning with the coeducation decision and following a group of students until they graduated would provide in-depth and on-going information on their experiences. Gathering information throughout the transition and their college years would generate more vivid information and provide insight into the effect of time on their experiences.

With coeducation seen as the universal form for higher education and the ongoing decline in the number of women's colleges in the United States, the interest in further research related to women's colleges may be waning. Throughout the decades, women's colleges have been a valuable component in the higher education of women. Continued research on the benefits and advantages of an all women's colleges may help preserve women's college as an educational choice.

Limitations

Since the results of this phenomenological study should not be generalized to a larger population, the reader may extract parts of this study applicable to similar situations. This study

on the experiences of three students involved in their college's transition to coeducation and the experience of participating in an alumnae-funded lawsuit illuminates a topic on which little research has been previously conducted. It is not the intent of this study to purport that all students at PWC or alumnae of PWC shared the same experience. The accounts here provide a window on the experiences of a few individuals who were deeply affected by the transition to coeducation and its effect upon their personal and professional lives during this period of dramatic change for the students and alumnae alike. In addition, the findings of this research study are contextually-bound to this particular college at a particular time.

Summary

Baker (1976) stated that women's colleges are "doomed to obscurity" (p. 1) to be remembered by sentimental alumnae. This study has shown that students and alumnae have feelings towards their college that are far stronger than sentimentality. The participants in my study had a visceral response to the college the moment they stepped onto the campus. They saw themselves as part of a family, their classmates became sisters, and the campus became a home. When the college became a coeducational institution, these women did not see their alma mater as changing but as dying.

For the alumnae, the coeducational transition was lived out in their minds, but for the students, the transition was a day-to-day reality. Campus safety declined, classroom dynamics changed, and students clashed physically, at least for the early time period covered by their recollections of the experience. None of this behavior contributes to a positive environment, but amazingly the students viewed their college years as a positive time. Living in a fractured

community made them stronger individuals by being better equipped to handle conflict and stress.

When the college announced its decision to transition to coeducation, the students asked the college to delay its decision until the students who had enrolled in a college for women graduated. Due to myriad and complex reasons, the college proceeded with the transition. My hope in conducting this research was to demonstrate the impact a coeducation transition has on students' collegiate experience. Recognizing the impact on students' experiences, college administrators may give pause before making a coeducational decision and pursuing a course of action that may profoundly affect its students and alumnae.

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LIST OF REFERENCES

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Appendix A

Letter to Student-Plaintiffs' Legal Counsel

Return Address

Date

Attorney's Name
Address

Dear Mr. [Name]:

I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. During the course of my doctoral studies, I have focused on women's education, and more specifically, the higher education of women.

This semester I have been following and researching the transition of [PWC] to coeducation. At the appropriate time and with the approval of Virginia Commonwealth University and my dissertation committee, I wish to make this transition of an all-female college to coeducation the subject of my dissertation research. Mary Hermann, J.D., Ph.D. and Teresa J. Carter, Ph.D. will co-chair my dissertation committee.

Others have written on this subject; however, I wish to pursue a unique approach by making the nine plaintiffs in the breach of contract suit the focus of my research. Previous research has examined the organizational transition with little attention to student concerns and experiences. This study will give voice to these nine young women in their legal challenge to preserve the female history and character of [PWC].

I recognize the plaintiffs are involved in active litigation which may preclude them from being interviewed at this time. Based on the timing of my dissertation research, it is likely that I will not be in a position to interview them until Spring 2010.

As dissertation research, I will be required by the policies of Virginia Commonwealth University to conduct and report this research in a scholarly manner, including maintaining the confidentiality of the participants.

As their attorney, I am asking if you would be willing to share with the nine plaintiffs my interest in having them as the focus of my dissertation research and advise me on how to proceed.

My home telephone number is [#] and my e-mail address is [e-mail address]. I will contact you next week to discuss the contents of this letter.

I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

Rebecca (Becky) Clarke

Appendix B

Letter to Executive Director of Alumnae Opposition Group

bgclarke

Thursday, January 24, 2008 7:08 PM

Student Breach of Contract Suit as a Dissertation Topic

Dear Ms. [Name]:

Earlier, I contacted [Name of Attorney] as the plaintiff's attorney in the [PWC] Student Breach of Contract Suit. [Attorney's name], his associate, followed up on my letter and recommended that I contact you.

I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. During the course of my doctoral studies, I have focused on women's education, and more specifically, the higher education of women.

This semester I have been following and researching the transition of [PWC] to coeducation. At the appropriate time and with the approval of Virginia Commonwealth University and my dissertation committee, I wish to make this transition of an all-female college to coeducation the subject of my dissertation research. Mary Hermann, J.D., Ph.D. and Teresa J. Carter, Ph.D. will co-chair my dissertation committee.

Others have written on this subject; however, I wish to pursue a unique approach by making the nine (now seven) plaintiffs in the breach of contract suit the focus of my research. Previous research has examined the organizational transition with little attention to student concerns and experiences. This study will give voice to these nine young women in their legal challenge to preserve the female history and character of [PWC].

I recognize the plaintiffs are involved in active litigation which may preclude them from being interviewed at this time. Based on the timing of my dissertation research, it is likely that I will not be in a position to interview them until Spring 2010.

As dissertation research, I will be required by the policies of Virginia Commonwealth University to conduct and report this research in a scholarly manner, including maintaining the confidentiality of the participants.

As Executive Director of [WED], I am asking if you would be willing to share with the original nine plaintiffs my interest in having them as the focus of my dissertation research and advise me on how to proceed.

I will contact you next week to discuss the contents of this letter. Should you wish to reach me, my contact information is as follows: home telephone number is [#], cell telephone number is [#], mailing address is [address], and e-mail address is [e-mail address].

I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,
Becky Clarke

Appendix C

Letter to Student-Plaintiffs

Return Address

Date

Student-Plaintiff's Name

Street Address

City, State Zip

Dear Name:

I am writing you to determine if you would be willing to participate in my dissertation research at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) on the transition of a woman's college to education. Previous research has mainly examined the organizational transition to coeducation with little attention to student concerns and experiences in their opposition to the transition to coeducation. This research study will give voice to you and other students and alumnae in your legal challenge to preserve the all woman's history and character of [PWC].

As a doctoral student at VCU, I have focused on women's education, and more specifically, the higher education of women. Since September 2006 when the Board of Trustees of [PWC] announced its decision to become a coeducational institution and the breach of contract lawsuit filed in November 2006 to reverse the Board's vote, I have been monitoring the issues and events surrounding this action.

I will be required by the policies of VCU to conduct and report this research in a scholarly manner, including maintaining the confidentiality of the participants. Although you have been identified in court documents and some of these court documents have been incorporated into my dissertation, your individual identity will not be disclosed. You will be identified by a pseudonym with no other descriptors, such as, home address, year of graduation, college major, or extracurricular activities, attached to your pseudonym. Hopefully, my research will be the first published scholarly work on [PWC's] transition to coeducation, and especially from the perspective of students and alumnae opposed to the transition. Mary Hermann Garcia, J.D., Ph.D. and Teresa J. Carter, Ed.D. will co-chair my dissertation committee.

Your participation in this study will involve three interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes. I will travel to a location of your choice to conduct the interviews. I have enclosed a self-addressed, stamped envelope for your convenience in responding to this letter. This response letter allows you to indicate your willingness to participate and provide current contact information.

If you wish to contact me, my home telephone number is [#], my cell number is [#] and my e-mail address is [e-mail address].

I hope you will consider my request as I think it represents a unique opportunity for the scholarly research community to learn more about the nature of the transition to coeducation at a school such as PWC.

Sincerely,

Becky Clarke

Date: _____

With respect to the dissertation research of Becky Clarke on the transition of [PWC] to coeducation and the breach of contract lawsuit filed by nine students, I am

_____ Willing to participate

_____ Decline to participate

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Appendix D

Interview Guide for Student-Plaintiffs

Interview #1 – “Before” Questions

1. When you were selecting a college to attend, what factor/criteria/characteristics of a college were important to you?
2. What made you select PWC as your college of choice?
3. How were your parents involved in your selection of a school?
4. What were your first impressions of PWC when you arrived on campus?
5. How would you describe the environment at PWC both in and out of the classroom prior to the admission of men?

Interview #2 – “During” Questions

1. When/how did you first learn that PWC was going coed?
2. When you heard the announcement that PWC was going coed, what was your initial response at both the emotional, cognitive, and physical level?
3. How did you become involved as a plaintiff in a lawsuit against in the college you are attending? Can you describe the experience fully for me?
4. Did you ever consider transferring to another women’s college? Why or why not?
5. It is public knowledge that you were a plaintiff, at least in the court records. What was the reaction of your fellow students after they learned that you had filed legal action against PWC? How about your professors? How about the administration?
6. How did your parents react to the news that you were joining in the lawsuit as a plaintiff?
7. What actions could the administration taken to make the transition to coeducation more palatable?

8. You may have heard the term “a defining moment in life.” Would you consider the experience of being a plaintiff in the coeducation lawsuit a defining moment in your life? Why or why not?

Interview #3 – “After” Questions

1. Your lawsuit wanted to prevent PWC from admitting men until the Class of 2010 graduates. How did the introduction of men change the campus environment at PWC?
2. How has the experience of coeducation affected you and your relationship with PWC as your alma mater?
3. How has the experience of the lawsuit affected you and your relationship with PWC as your alma mater?
4. Knowing what you know now, would you follow this course of action again and engage in a lawsuit of this nature again?
5. What advice would you give to other students who making be thinking about legally challenging a decision by their college to become coeducational?
6. Tell me how you have changed as a result of this experience.
7. Although I have asked of a number of questions, is there anything that you would like to be me about this experience?

Appendix E

Interview Guide for Alumna-Leaders

1. How did you come to enroll at PWC?
2. How would you describe your life as a college student at PWC?
3. When you first heard that PWC was going to admit men, what was your initial reaction?
4. What concerns did you have about the decision to admit men?
5. What made you decide to support and fund a legal challenge to the coeducation decision?
6. How did you choose the nine students named as the plaintiffs in the lawsuit?
7. What type of support and encouragement did you give the plaintiffs during the legal process?
8. What was your reaction when you heard the decision of the state's Supreme Court?
9. What advice would you give students and alumnae considering a legal challenge to their college's decision to become coed?
10. How has PWC's change from a college for women to a coed school affected your relationship with your alma mater?

Appendix F

Research Subject Information And Consent Form

TITLE: Giving Voice to Student and Alumnae Opposition During the Transition to Coeducation by a College for Women

VCU IRB NO.: HM 13021

If this consent form contains information or wording that you do not understand, please ask me to explain it to you. I am providing a copy of this consent form to you for your review so that you may think about it or discuss your participation with family or friends before you make a decision. I will review the form with you thoroughly at our first meeting to answer any questions you may have or clarify your understanding of what it means to participate in a research study such as this one.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore in depth the transition to coeducation by a college for women from the perspective of students and alumnae involved in a lawsuit against the college to stop the coeducational transition to then current students had graduated in spring 2010. You are being asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as an individual opposing the transition to coeducation.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT

If you decide to be in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form after you have had all your questions answered and understand what will happen to you. This study involves the participation in a personal interview(s) that will last approximately 60-90 minutes. The interview will address topics associated with your collegiate experiences and relationships before, during, and after the admission of male students to your undergraduate institution which is identified as a private women's college (PWC). This study will also address the experience of being involved in a lawsuit against the college in which you were enrolled and/or graduated from. With your permission the interview will be recorded, but no names will be recorded. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed and participants will be asked to review the transcript to ensure accuracy. It is anticipated that 8-10 individuals will participate in the study.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Talking about the experiences of the transition to coeducation by PWC and the lawsuit filed against the college may cause some psychological or emotional discomfort although it is expected that this will be minimal. You do not have to talk about any subjects you do not want to talk about, and you may end the interview at any time. If you become upset, the study staff will give you names of counselors to contact so you can get help in dealing with these issues.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS

You may not get any direct benefit from this study, but, the information we learn from the study will be helpful to institutions considering coeducation and to students in their response to the transition to coeducation.

COSTS

There are no costs for participating in this study other than your time in participating in the interview.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will receive a \$25.00 VISA gift card as a token of appreciation for your participation in the study. Participants will receive the gift card at the completion of the third interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Potentially identifiable information about you will consist of the interview recordings, and interview notes. Data is being collected only for research purposes. Your data will be identified by a pseudonym and will be stored separately from any contact information you provided to schedule the interview. Other records including the digital recordings, audio tapes, interview transcriptions, and contact information will be kept in a bank safe deposit box for one year after the study ends and will be destroyed at that time. Electronic files of the interviews will be kept indefinitely or until technology makes access to the electronic files obsolete. Access to all data will be limited to study personnel.

We will tell not anyone the information you provide; however, information from this study and the consent form signed by you may be looked at or copied for research or legal purposes by Virginia Commonwealth University.

What we find from this study will be presented in a dissertation and may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name will not ever be used in these presentation papers.

The interview sessions will be digitally recorded and audio taped, but no names will be recorded. At the beginning of the session, all members will be provided a pseudonym only so that no names are recorded.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

QUESTIONS

In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, contact:

Mary A. Hermann, J.D., Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Counselor Education
Virginia Commonwealth University
1015 W. Main Street, Room 3070
P.O. Box 842020
Richmond, VA 23284
(804) 827-2626 (office phone)
(804) 828-1326 (fax)
mahermann@vcu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Office for Research
Virginia Commonwealth University
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 113
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, VA 23298
Telephone: 804-827-2157

You may also contact this number for general questions, concerns or complaints about the research. Please call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to talk to someone else. Additional information about participation in research studies can be found at <http://www.research.vcu.edu/irb/volunteers.htm>.

CONSENT

I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of the consent form once I have agreed to participate.

Participant name printed	Participant signature	Date
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Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion / Witness	Date
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Principal Investigator Signature (if different from above)	Date
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VITA

Rebecca (Becky) Clarke was born in Richmond, Virginia on November 29, 1953. Becky holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Richmond. She earned a Master of Arts in Education and Human Development from The George Washington University. Becky also received a Post-Baccalaureate in Accounting from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Becky spent over 25 years working in corporate America, serving as a Director of Administration for the Capital Region Airport Commission and Director of Human Resources at Wella Manufacturing of Virginia, Inc.

She holds professional designations of Certified Public Accountant, Chartered Bank Auditor, and Certified Fraud Examiner.

Becky is married to John B. Clarke, also a Certified Public Accountant.