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# "Sacred duties": how historical constructs of gender and work inform women's involvement in U.S. higher education

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“SACRED DUTIES”:  
HOW HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTS OF GENDER AND WORK  
INFORM WOMEN’S INVOLVEMENT IN U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
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in

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by  
Amber L. Vlasnik  
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Before beginning this process, I always looked upon acknowledgement pages with a measure of suspicion and incredulousness. From my non-thesis perspective, it seemed an unnecessary use of space. However, I feel very differently about the functions of this page after completing my thesis. In short, I had no idea how much work a thesis would be and how many people would contribute to its completion.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how arguments about gender and labor roles have determined women's exclusion from or acceptance to the academy throughout the history of the United States. Race, gender, and class are identified as interlocking identities that shape experiences and women's gendered relationship to labor is demonstrated through the use of a materialist feminist framework. By tracing the distinct eras of colonial and United States history, the thesis illustrates the debates and public mindset of each time period and how they relate to women and higher education. The thesis concludes that popular social conceptions of the female body and women's labor have dictated women's involvement in higher education throughout the centuries, and, to some degree, these ideas still define women in the academy today.

CHAPTER ONE:  
THE INTERLOCKING IMPORTANCE OF GENDER, RACE, AND CLASS

Nora: What do you think are my most sacred duties?  
Helmer: And I have to tell you that! Aren't they your duties to your husband and children?  
Nora: I have other duties equally sacred.  
Helmer: That isn't true! What duties are they?  
Nora: Duties to myself.  
Helmer: Before all else, you're a wife and a mother.  
Nora: I don't believe in that anymore. I believe that, before all else, I'm a human being, no less than you—or anyway, I ought to try to become one. I know the majority thinks you're right, Torvald, and plenty of books agree with you, too. But I can't go on being satisfied with what the majority says, or what's written in books. I have to think over these things myself and try to understand them.  
(Ibsen, 1897/1992, p. 111)

Wife, mother, domestic laborer—for centuries in the United States, the roles of women were clearly and narrowly defined by society as these three occupations. While some women had the social standing, education, and bravery to break out of these prescribed roles, the majority of women in the United States were forced to fulfill only these functions in society. The result was the widespread subjugation of women to the domestic sphere, where they held inferior status, as well as the exclusion of the majority of women from the realms of higher education, politics, public service, and religious leadership.

Arguments for the exclusion of women from education, in particular, have centered on perceptions about the female body and its role in labor. Because of the biological function of the female body as childbearing, women have been traditionally tied to the realm of child-rearing and domestic responsibility. Howard Zinn (2003) explains this phenomenon in our nation's history:

The biological uniqueness of women, like skin color and facial characteristics for [African-Americans], became a basis for treating them as inferiors. True, with women, there was something more practically important in their biology than skin color—their position as childbearers—but this was not enough to account for the general push backward for all of them in society, even those who did not bear children, or those too young or too old for that. It seems that their physical

characteristics became a convenience for men, who could use, exploit, and cherish someone who was at the same time servant, sex mate, companion, and bearer-teacher-warden of his children. (p. 103)

The “traditional” work of women as domestic laborers and childcare providers is therefore linked to an idea that women are biologically distinct from men. As a result, women have been granted or denied educational and social privileges based mainly on conceptions about their biological sex.

When reviewing the history of United States higher education as it relates to the areas of gender, race, and class, a startling theme emerges. Time and again, women were excluded from, provisionally accepted to, or openly embraced by higher education according to the time period’s ideas about wives, mothers, the female body, and women’s roles as laborers. In this sense, women’s participation in American higher education as students, professors, and administrators has been shaped by perceptions and beliefs about the female body—specifically, *male* understandings of the female body—rather than by women’s intellectual capacity.

Through this thesis, I examine how arguments about gender and labor roles have determined women’s exclusion from or acceptance to the academy throughout the history of the United States. In order to do this, I identify race, gender, and class as interlocking identities that shape experiences. I then outline a materialist feminist framework that demonstrates women’s gendered relationship to labor. By tracing the distinct eras of colonial and United States history, I illustrate the debates and public mindset of each time period and how they relate to women and higher education. In the end, I demonstrate that popular social conceptions of the female body and women’s labor have dictated women’s involvement in higher education throughout the centuries, and, to some degree, these ideas still define women in the academy today.

## Conceptual Framework

While society has dictated beliefs about women's roles, not all women have accepted these positions. Indeed, over the centuries in the United States, both women and men have challenged the idea that biology is destiny. However, even as women disputed this message, they also internalized it, so much so that while writing to women, Monique Wittig (1992) states,

We have been compelled in our bodies and in our minds to correspond...with the *idea* of nature that has been established for us...[so that] in the end oppression seems to be a consequence of this "nature" within ourselves (a nature which is only an *idea*). (p. 9)

Women's internalization of messages about their role in society complicates my thesis in that, since women have varying degrees of internalization, they will therefore be unable to agree even among themselves on the role of women in society. This leads to the most important premise of this thesis: *There is no monolithic Woman*. As Gerda Lerner (1997) explains,

Historians of women have long ago come to see that "women" cannot be treated as a unified category any more than "men-as-a-group" can. Women differ by class, race, ethnic and regional affiliation, religion, and any number of other categories. Thus, historians of women have stressed the need for using such categories as tools for analysis. What we mean by that is that whenever we study a group of women, past or present and make generalizations about them, we must take not only the similarities but the differences among them into consideration. We must ask, does this hold true for women of different races? for women of different classes? It simply will no longer do to design a research project or to teach without taking the differences among women into account. (p. 132)

Since this thesis is working from the understanding that women cannot be placed in one category simply because of biology or gender experiences, several complicating differences are explored, discussed, and debated in the chapters that follow. While there are other complicating factors and identities that will be interwoven into this thesis, the intersections of gender, race, and class will be most thoroughly explored, as they intimately inform women's roles in education, the family, and their labor efforts.

First, it is necessary to explore and define these identities, beginning with “gender.” In popular language usage, “sex” and “gender” are often interchanged and assumed to have the same meaning. However, as this thesis draws upon feminist theory to discuss biological sex and gendered roles, distinctions must be drawn. Perhaps most clearly stated by Casey Miller and Kate Swift (1976), “At the risk of oversimplification, sex...is a biological given; gender is a social acquisition” (p. 47). Joyce Jacobsen (1998) defines “*sex characteristics* as attributes of men and women that are created by their biological characteristics, and *gender characteristics* as attributes that are culturally associated with being female and male” (p. 5). Consequently, language throughout the document will reflect these definitions: *Sex is biologically determined, while gender is socially learned or expected.*

In this thesis, I will also explore the factor of class, as the privileges or disadvantages of class fundamentally form people’s experiences. Marx and Engels (1888/1967) define class as a division between the bourgeois and the proletarians. Engels explains in an 1888 note to the English edition of *The Communist Manifesto*,

By bourgeoisie is meant the class of modern Capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour. By proletariat, the class of modern wage-labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live. (p. 79)

Marx and Engels explain that the founding of the English colonies in North America and trade among colonizing nations created this binary. However, this class reality creates obvious tensions, which are described by Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham (1997):

Class objectively links all women, binding the professional to her housekeeper, the boutique shopper to the sweatshop seamstress, the battered wife in Beverly Hills to the murdered sex worker in Bangkok or the Bronx. But class also pits women against each other, dividing those allied with the private and corporate control of wealth and resources from the dispossessed. (p. 3)

Hennesy and Ingraham introduce the complex idea that while women can belong to different classes, they are in fact dependent on each other in the marketplace and can still share experiences. This is not to deny the reality, however, that class divides women into privileged and nonprivileged categories. These class tensions are evident throughout the history of the United States. *Class differences at least partially control women's access to higher education and the social, economic, and political benefits that education provides.*

Furthermore, I will investigate race in my thesis. Lerner (1997) asserts, “No theoretical framework for conceptualizing the situation of women can be constructed without taking race as well as class fully into consideration” (p. 153). Truly, women’s experiences with labor and education—the two topics under examination in this thesis—dramatically differ according to race. In an effort not to place all women of color into a monolithic category—the larger-than-life “Woman of Color”—*I will use this thesis to focus on women of European descent and African and African American women.* I choose these two racial demographics because White and Black women are regularly compared in modern higher education, yet they experienced wide gaps in labor and educational choices for most of United States history due to slavery, racism, and White privilege.

The exploration of African and African American women must be conscientiously undertaken. Trina Grillo and Stephanie Wildman (1997) caution,

Comparing sexism to racism perpetuates patterns of racial dominance by marginalizing and obscuring the different roles that race plays in the lives of people of color and of whites. The comparison minimizes the impact of racism, rendering it an insignificant phenomenon—one of a laundry list of isms or oppressions that society must suffer. (p. 46)

Grillo and Wildman explain that this marginalization can take three forms: removing people of color from the center of the dialogue, perpetuating essentialism so that women of color are made

invisible by both the categories of “women” and “people of color,” and the taking over of the pain of Black people or the denial of its existence. This thesis cannot take any of these paths. For this reason, African American women’s voices take the forefront whenever possible in this paper, allowing their voices to define their own realities and experiences. Also, the category of “women of color” is rejected in favor of more narrowly defining African American women as the focal point; at the same time, this task must be carefully planned so as not to ignore class and other differences among African American women. And finally, as a researcher, I acknowledge the deep pain of all women when denied of access to educational and social experiences, and I do not attempt to mask, deny, or appropriate the pain of any women in my thesis.

### **Implications of Materialist Feminist Theory**

There are four fundamental premises in this thesis. The first is that women have engaged in labor—paid and unpaid, in the home and in the workforce—throughout the history of the United States. The second premise is that this labor has been, and in many ways continues to be, undervalued economically, socially, and politically. Third, because women’s labor has been undervalued in these ways, it has contributed to the perpetuation of male domination in our society. Finally, higher education is a stepping-stone to understanding and contributing to other facets of society and it has the potential to be an equalizing factor that will spread gender equity to all sectors of society. Feminist theory helps provide a framework for understanding these tenets; specifically, I employ materialist feminist theory as an analytical lens through which to recognize and understand the roles of gender and work in determining possibilities for women’s participation in higher education.

Materialist feminist theory is based on Marxist arguments of historical materialism.

Friedrich Engels (1888) explained this concept:

In every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch. (Marx & Engels, 1888/1967, p. 62)

Hence, political reality is shaped by labor and the social constructs that support labor. Since labor dynamics change over time, the political and intellectual debates of each time period are unique.

While based on Marxism and historical materialism, materialist feminism argues that these theories fail to sufficiently question and explain women's oppression under capitalism. Himani Bannerji (1995) argues that a "concrete organization of class is impossible minus historical, cultural, sexual, and political relations. Without these social mediations, formative moments, or converging determinations, the concrete organization of class as a historical and social form would not be possible" (pp. 30-31). Heidi Hartmann (2003) further clarifies this issue:

Though aware of the deplorable situations of women in their time the early marxist [*sic*] failed to focus on the *differences* between men's and women's experiences under capitalism. They did not focus on feminist questions—how and why women are oppressed as women. They did not, therefore, recognize the vested interest men had in women's continued subordination. (p. 208)

Hartmann posits that husbands and fathers benefit from women's work by "personalized services at home" and that they also enjoy greater luxury consumption and leisure time because of their lesser domestic responsibilities (p. 209). Under Hartmann's analysis, men have no incentive to liberate women because they are beneficiaries of women's extra labor in the home. Marxism does not address these inequities and is therefore not a liberating ideology for women; as Hartmann warns, "Women should not trust men to liberate them after the revolution, in part,

because there is no reason to think that they would know how; in part, because there is no necessity for them to do so” (p. 218). Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (1972) agree, stating that “[w]omen have always been forced by the working class parties to put off their own liberation to some hypothetical future, making it dependent on the gains that men... win for ‘themselves’ ” (p. 34). Materialist feminism thus combines Marxist arguments about labor and production with a dedication to understanding and eliminating women’s oppression. In particular, in order to call work by its name and acknowledge its importance in women’s lives, I will use the term *labor* to describe both the public and private work that women do; women will therefore be called *laborers* both in the home and in the workforce in order to reinforce the fact that their work should be measured socially, politically, and economically.

Nancy Harstock (2003) contributes a deeper understanding of the importance of women’s dual roles as domestic laborers and reproducers (mothers) in a capitalist society. She writes,

Women’s activity as institutionalized has a double aspect: their contribution to subsistence and their contribution to childrearing. Whether or not all women do both, women as a sex are institutionally responsible for producing both goods and human beings, and all women are forced to become the kinds of persons who can do both. (pp. 294-295)

As producers of “both goods and human beings,” women hold a unique position under capitalism and contribute to its endurance as an economic, social, and political system. In order to fulfill this position, women are compelled to prepare themselves to be both mothers and laborers in a way that men are not compelled, as men are encouraged to be laborers, not fathers and laborers both. This coercion is the basis for sex inequity under capitalism, and as Hartmann (2003) points out, there is no reason to think that this coercion would disappear under socialism either.

Women’s role in reproduction cannot be ignored in materialist feminism. Through giving birth, raising children, and instilling values in the upcoming generation, women re-supply

the working population and perpetuate capitalism. By extension then, by giving birth and supplying the next generation of workers, women also perpetuate their own oppression. In arguing for the use of contraception, Margaret Sanger claims, “War, famine, poverty and oppression of the workers will continue while woman makes life cheap. They will cease only when she limits her reproductivity and human life is no longer a thing to be wasted” (1920, p.7). Reproduction also affects women’s ability to participate in educational and other social endeavors, since childrearing activities keep women out of the public arena and tied to domestic concerns. This isolation helps to perpetuate the cycle of reproduction, as strict schedules of feeding and caring for children preclude women’s involvement in society and limit their contact with other women.

Another key aspect of women’s reproduction is the problematic contemporary relationship between reproduction and labor. Sarah Blaffer Hrdy (1999) explains the biological history of mothering and argues that this history is incongruent with today’s realities. She clarifies,

Working mothers are not new. For most of human existence, and for millions of years before that, primate mothers have combined productive lives with reproduction. This combination of work with motherhood has always entailed tradeoffs. Mothers either sustained energetic costs and lost efficiency by toting babies everywhere...or else located an alloparent to take on the task. What is new for modern mothers, though, is the compartmentalization of their productive and reproductive lives. The factories, laboratories, and offices where women in post-industrial societies go to “forage” are even less compatible with childcare than jaguar-infested forests and distant groves of mongongo nuts reached by trekking across desert. (p. 109)

In other words, the modern world is structured so that women must choose between their children and their work, which are often framed as incompatible pressures. However, this social development is both recent and biologically unnatural; therefore, it should be no surprise that women struggle to fulfill both functions.

Women's labor in the home is another important area of study for materialist feminists, who study domestic labor in order to understand its contribution to the economic, political, and social spheres. Women, for the majority of United States history, worked without pay in the home. Because their work was unpaid, materialist feminists argue that women's status was diminished and their contributions to society were uncounted (Donovan, 1992). Dalla Costa and James (1972) explain,

It is often asserted that, within the definition of wage labor, women in domestic labor are not productive. In fact precisely the opposite is true if one thinks of the enormous quantity of social services which capitalist organization transforms into privatized activity, putting them on the backs of housewives. Domestic labor is not essentially "feminine work"; a woman doesn't fulfill herself more or get less exhausted than a man from washing and cleaning. These are social services inasmuch as they serve the reproduction of labor power. (p. 33)

Recognizing the value of women's work in creating our economic, political and social realities, Dalla Costa and James (1972) assert, "The specific form of exploitation represented by domestic work demands a corresponding, specific form of struggle, namely the women's struggle, *within the family*" (p. 35). Dalla Costa and James rightly call attention to the fact that women struggle both outside the home in the labor force, as well as in the labor force within their own homes; barriers to women's freely chosen involvement exist in both places.

How, then, do we undermine the capitalist relationship between women and work? How do we attempt to eliminate the oppression of women? Non-Marxist socialist Charlotte Perkins Gilman contends the following regarding the economic situation of women in her 1898 work *Women and Economics*:

For a certain percentage of persons to serve other persons in order that the ones so served may produce more, is a contribution not to be overlooked. The labor of women in the house, certainly, enables men to produce more wealth than they otherwise could; and in this way women are economic factors in society....[But] whatever the economic value of the domestic industry of women is, they do not get it. The women who do the most work get the least money, and the women

who have the most money do the least work. Their labor is neither given nor taken as a factor in economic exchange. It is held to be their duty as women to do this work; and their economic status bears no relation to their domestic labors, unless an inverse one. (1898/1992, pp. 233, 234)

Gilman believed economic independence was the key to liberating women and thus encouraged women to work outside of the home. By entering the workforce as paid laborers, women could collaborate to alter domestic responsibilities; Gilman advocated community dining and childcare as a way to ensure that labor in the home was more equally distributed.

bell hooks (2000) outlines a similar concern that the feminist movement must give women economic liberation, but she disagrees that work alone can provide this. She writes that there are many angry women who thought that they would find liberation by becoming involved in the workforce but that they have not. On the other hand, there are high-paid women in today's society who may also still be subject to male domination and patriarchy. hooks points out that there is little evidence that women in the workplace have made any strides in changing male domination.

hooks also notes that the women who are the most economically marginalized are often non-White, lower-income citizens and that feminism has not succeeded in challenging male domination sufficiently enough for these women to achieve economic liberation. For this reason, the intersections of race, class, and gender must be examined. Lerner (1997) explains these interconnections when she writes,

Dominant elite, white, upper-class men benefited from all aspects of their dominance—economic and educational privilege, sexual and reproductive control, and higher status. Women of their own class benefited sufficiently from racist and economic privilege so as to mask for them the disadvantages and discrimination that they experienced because of sexism. Whites of the lower classes benefited sufficiently from racism and (in the case of males) from sexism so that they supported the system, even in face of obvious economic and political disadvantages. For those dominated and oppressed by racism, classism and

sexism, all aspects of the oppressive system work to make their emancipation more difficult. (p. 139)

Women of color face multiple oppressions that are unexplored by traditional materialist arguments, yet even among materialist feminists, race is not acknowledged as it should be. In response to Hartmann's warning that men should not be trusted to liberate women (quoted earlier in this section), Gloria Joseph (1997) comments,

Just as women cannot trust men to "liberate" them, Black women cannot trust white women to "liberate" them during or "after the revolution," in part because there is little reason to think that they would know how; and in part because white women's immediate self-interest lies in continued racial oppression. (p. 108)

Clearly, it is impossible to disentangle class from gender and race, as these three interlocking identities shape work and educational opportunities.

Hazel Carby (1997) identifies three areas of materialist feminism that are especially complicated by the lives and realities of Black women: family, patriarchy, and reproduction. First, the Black family can be a source of oppression, but it is also historically a source of resistance; under slavery and colonialism, Black families stood in defiance of racism and authoritarianism by refusing to diminish the importance of familial ties. Second, patriarchy is complicated because Black men have not experienced its benefits as White men have, which means Black women face different forms of gender oppression by Black men. Third, reproduction—defined as both bearing children and providing domestic labor—is also troublesome, as Black women bore children in bondage and provided labor for White families both as slaves and as free women.

Patricia Hill Collins (2004) elaborates on the importance of Black feminist thought when discussing the status and experiences of all women. She writes of Black women's "insider" status because of their service in the homes of White families, as well as their "outsider" status

because they could never truly be part of that world. All in all, she concludes that “accounts of Black domestic workers stress the sense of self-affirmation they experienced at seeing white power demystified—of knowing that it was not the intellect, talent, or humanity of their employers that supported their superior status, but largely just the advantages of racism” (p. 103). Clearly, race complicates materialist feminism because women cannot be placed into one all-encompassing category; rather, the implications of race and racial experience must be considered when speaking about women as women, citizens, and laborers.

Materialist feminism will provide the background for the analysis of the historical realities, arguments, and difficulties of women as wives, mothers, and laborers. This thesis is centrally focused on these concepts as they relate to women’s exclusion, provisional acceptance, and later inclusion in higher education. As the roles of women as wives and mothers have changed over the decades, so has women’s access to higher education.

## CHAPTER TWO: SHIFTING NEEDS, SHIFTING ROLES

The first students in the colleges exclusively for women (like Vassar), or the first women in the coeducational institutions (like Oberlin), betook themselves to those walls because of a passionate eagerness for learning, or because of the necessity of bread-winning.  
(Mathews, 1915, p. 3)

Through exploring women's roles as laborers and examining popular debate about women's educational opportunities, I provide historical evidence that women's participation in higher education strongly correlates to societal concepts about women and work. In Chapter Two, I investigate the arguments about women and higher education throughout the history of the United States, beginning in the colonies and extending through the present day. Gender, race, and class are essential components of this historical analysis, for these identities enable a more critical understanding of women's experiences with work and education.

### **The Colonial Period and the Beginnings of Higher Education**

During colonial times, women's exclusion from almost all formal education was strongly shaped by social and religious beliefs that positioned women in the home. Sarah Evans (1989) writes of the experiences of White women,

Most women in the years preceding the American Revolution continued to experience their lives as their mothers and grandmothers had, shaped most powerfully by the constantly recurring cycles of birth and pregnancy and by the arduous physical labor of housewifery. (p. 42)

As a result, White women and girls in the colonial period received little to no formal education. Those who did were usually educated only until they could read the Bible and sign their names (Collins, 2003; Solomon, 1985). Some young women were bonded as servants to other families

who would teach them to read and tend the house (Evans, 1989). This occurrence constituted one of the few ways in which women of lower economic status could learn to read; yet despite the contractual obligation to teach indentured women to read, Mary Ryan (1983) notes that “the vast majority of females signed colonial documents with a crude mark, indicating a rate of literacy substantially lower than that of men” (p. 57).

Even the most affluent families did not formally educate their daughters. Near the time of the Revolutionary War, Abigail Adams wrote, “Female education in the best families went no farther than writing and arithmetic and in some few rare instances, music and dancing” (quoted in Collins, 2003, p. 60). Instead, mothers and other elder females instructed their daughters inside the home on how to manage the domestic sphere; this preparation was undertaken in order to make daughters more suitable for marriage and the responsibilities of managing a household. Thus, while adolescent girls had little access to formal education, their home education did prepare them for their specific roles in the family structure: wife and mother (Zinn, 2003). This preparation was necessary for survival, as women had so few rights during the colonial period that existence outside the institution of marriage was extremely difficult. However, even married women had no property rights, no control over inheritance or custody, and no right to bring civil suit (Donovan, 1992).

In the colonies, both White and Black women were defined in relationship to White men. Victoria Bynum (1992) writes, “Marriage provided the essential means by which white women fulfilled their societal role, while slavery provided the means for African American women. Whether a white wife or a black slave, the ideal woman was happily nurturing, pious, loyal, and subordinate to her husband or master” (pp. 35-36). While the lives of free and enslaved women

were drastically different, they shared the common element of being controlled in large part by the rules of White men.

Overall, Black women in colonial times had no access to formal education, extremely limited informal educational opportunities, and virtually no legal rights. Until approximately 1740, male slaves outnumbered female slaves, and not until the ratio between the sexes began to approach one to one did African and African American women begin to be viewed as a vital means of perpetuating the institution of slavery: They were able to produce children (White, 1999). Jennifer Morgan (1997) explains, “Whereas English women’s reproductive work took place solely in the domestic economy, African women’s reproductive work could, indeed, embody the developing discourses of extraction and forced labor at the heart of England’s national design for the colonies” (pp. 187-188). Deborah Gray White (1999) further clarifies, “Female slavery had much to do with work [done for Whites], but much of it was concerned with bearing, nourishing, and rearing children whom slaveholders needed for the continual replenishment of their labor force” (p. 69).

Black women became even more valued by men and women slaveholders after 1807, the year that the United States banned the importation of new slaves, as they then became solely responsible through reproduction for the replenishment of the slave population. Jacqueline Jones (1985) writes, “As blacks, slave women were exploited for their skills and physical strength in the production of staple crops; as women, they performed a reproductive function vital to individual slaveholders’ financial interests and to the inherently expansive system of slavery in general” (p. 12). This double oppression created a reality in which the body of the enslaved female indicated her labor role even within the institution of slavery.

Enslaved women's bodies were controlled, in particular, by their owners, who encouraged marriage among the enslaved yet did not grant these unions legal status under the law (Fox-Genovese, 1988); by encouraging marriage, owners arguably attempted to create gender order, strengthen familial ties that would in turn lessen impulses to run away, and also encourage procreation and the increase of their enslaved population. Some slaveholders viewed Black women as their sexual as well as physical property, and their forced sexual relations with Black women produced an enslaved mulatto population as well; in 1860, 10 percent of the enslaved population was registered as "mulatto," though this does not reveal the frequency of forced sexual encounters between White men and enslaved women (Jones, 1985). While the majority of enslaved women were powerless to refuse the advances of their owners, some women fought back against this egregious abuse.

The case of Celia, an enslaved woman in Missouri, demonstrates precisely how Black women were caught in a legal and social structure that did not acknowledge their oppressions and realities. According to Melton McLaurin's 1991 account, Celia was fourteen when she was purchased by Robert Newsom in 1850. From the very beginning of her time on his farm, Newsom sexually assaulted and exploited her, fathering two children over the ensuing years. When Celia was nineteen and pregnant for a third time, she attempted to resist his violent abuse, but one night she was unable to stop his advances and, fearing for her life, Celia killed Newsom and burned his body in her fireplace. When she was discovered, Celia was quickly arrested and put on trial for murder. John Jameson, her court-appointed attorney, took his duties seriously and provided Celia with a significant and radical defense that challenged the legal and social conventions of the time. In the words of McLaurin:

The defense's contention that Newsom's death was justifiable homicide, that even a slave woman could resist unwanted sexual advances with deadly force, and that

the sexual demands of even a master could be legitimately resisted by his human property was as bold as it was brilliant....With its claim that Celia had the legal right to protect her honor, defense counsel raised a multitude of legal questions about ownership of the reproductive capabilities of a female slave. If, for example, a slave could resist her master's advances, had she also the right to refuse a male partner her master selected for her? The issue of who controlled sexual access to female slaves held tremendous economic, as well as social, significance, for the reproductive capabilities of female slaves were clearly viewed by slaveholders as an economic asset over which they had control. (1991, p. 108)

Despite this unprecedented argument, the court proceedings were frustrating accounts of the status quo, in which all questioning of Celia's motives was prohibited and the jury instructions made it virtually impossible for a verdict other than guilty. After delivering a stillborn in jail, Celia was hanged in late 1955, leaving a tangled legacy of brave resister and victim of racial, sexual, and legal oppression for both her contemporaries and the present day.

Another key component of slavery is found in the relationships between White and Black women. Gerda Lerner (1997) asserts that White women also benefited economically from female slaves because "they could relieve themselves of child-rearing (and at times even childbearing) responsibilities by using the enforced services of their female slaves [and] they were relieved of doing unpaid domestic labor by using slave labor" (pp. 138-139). The importance of this experience cannot be understated: White women profited from the unpaid labor of Black women during slavery. As many as 20 percent of female slaves labored in the homes of White women; the other 80 percent labored in the fields (Steckel, 1996).

Ignoring these race and class difference among women, access to higher education in the colonial period was restricted to White boys. When discussing these boys, it is important to note that while not all had access to a comprehensive education, overall boys had more opportunities. For example, adolescent boys were much more likely to be literate than girls (Collins, 2003; Evans, 1989), with a literacy rate of approximately 90 percent of the White male population in

1750, contrasted to only 40 percent of White females (Zinn, 2003). Some boys were even privately tutored in preparation for colonial colleges (Brubacher & Rudy, 2003). Freed from the responsibilities of childcare and housework, colonial boys worked and played outdoors and also apprenticed to learn a trade from which they could make a living (Evans, 1989).

It was in this educational context that the first institutions of higher education in the United States were founded. They were modeled on the principles of English universities, which only admitted men and had clergy for leadership. Also like English institutions, colonial universities prepared an elite group of male students for service in colonial churches and public office by providing the classical training and theological instruction that was considered necessary for the vocations at that time (Brubacher & Rudy, 2003).

Harvard was the first institution of higher education founded in colonial America when it opened its doors in 1636 to serve nine students (Harvard University, n.d.). While most college students in colonial America came from families with the financial resources to assist them, some poorer students were able to attend college even the earliest years of higher education (Brubacher & Rudy, 2003). Colonial colleges sought to educate White male adolescents, completely excluding all women and all Black men, a fact that can be explained by an understanding of colonial colleges as “preserving, not reconstructing, the established society” (Brubacher & Rudy, 2003, p. 10). Since White males were prepared for roles as ministers, governors, and other public leaders, it stands to follow that colonial colleges would only admit these men in order to “preserve” society. In fact, men’s intellectual and moral superiority was so taken for granted that no real questions about women’s intellects or roles in society were raised in colonial times (Woody, 1929, Vol. 1). It wasn’t until the social and political upheaval of the

Revolutionary War that more clear arguments for and against women's involvement in higher education became explicitly framed.

Materialist feminist arguments are especially poignant when applied to the colonial era. A re-examination of history clearly illustrates the means by which the gendered and racial division of labor constructed society. White women were barred from formal education, labored in the home for the benefit of White men, and bore children who perpetuated this system. Black women were also barred from formal education, labored as slaves for White men and women, and bore children who perpetuated this system. The structure of colonial society distinctly benefited White males over the interests of all women.

### **White “Republican Women” in the New Nation**

In March of 1776, Abigail Adams wrote to her husband, “...in the new code of laws which I suppose that it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors” (1776/1992, p. 3). These famous words—though they were kept private between husband and wife until years after their deaths (Godineau, 1993)—mark an important and complicated beginning of dialogue about women and their role in society. Adams was not a radical feminist (she dropped her plea for constitutional protection for women after her husband made light of it), but in her early letters she did raise significant issues about marital relationships and the injustice of men's almost complete power over their wives (Gelles, 1992), as well as discuss her objections to slavery. However, Adams's later letters did not have the same fervor, and Pauline Schloesser (2002) describes Adams's intellectual identity as moving from “radical revolutionary to advocate of

racial patriarchy” (p. 115) through her disengagement from the women’s rights debate and her growing complicity with the racial contract, which culminated in the 1790s with the owning of slaves.

Adams’s complicated thoughts and actions exemplify the thorny beginnings of public gender and race discourse in the United States. While Adams does not speak for or symbolize all White women in the early national period, not even she, one of the most privileged White women of her time, could effectively stand up to the status quo. Schloesser aptly comments on how “easy and insidious it was to sign on to the terms of racial patriarchy” (p. 152). From the beginning of our nation’s history, gender and racial oppression were institutionalized in such a way that fighting against them would prove monumentally difficult.

After the debate about and signing of the Declaration of Independence, the newly-formed United States of America faced the monumental task of nation-building. Discussion about women’s contributions to the new nation centered around women’s bodies and labor, as well as their roles as wives and mothers. What was the appropriate sphere for women: public or private? What were women capable of accomplishing physically, morally, and intellectually? How could women contribute to forming the nation?

At that time, White women’s political identities experienced only limited public support. While women were instrumental in the struggle for national sovereignty through the acts of boycotting tea and other imports and learning to spin and make “American” clothing, their political commitment occurred inside the home and within the family (Godineau, 1993). In the end, the struggle regarding female participation and citizenship in the new republic was resolved by granting political meaning to domesticity (Kerber, 1980; Evans, 1989) and in particular to being a wife and mother. In a work widely attributed to Thomas Paine, the author writes from

the point of view of a woman, saying, “Our duties are different from yours, but they are not therefore less difficult to fulfill, or of less consequence to society: They are the fountains of your felicity, and the sweetness of life. We are wives and mothers” (1775/1995, p. 589).

Linda Kerber (1976) coined the term “republican motherhood” when she wrote about the impact of Enlightenment thinking on the newly-founded nation. While some Enlightenment thinkers were sympathetic to women for their undervalued roles as wives and mothers, the philosophers Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Lord Kames openly ridiculed women as intellectually and morally inferior. Not conceptualized as full political participants, women were nonetheless beginning to be thought of as potential contributors to society, though only within their sphere in the home. In a time when women’s virtue was highly valued, Kerber states that “the mother, and not the masses, came to be seen as the custodian of civic morality” (1980, p. 11). Consequently, the idea of “motherhood” in the republic took on new importance since it allowed women to fulfill an important, albeit limited, role in the fledgling United States.

Jan Lewis (1987) disagrees with Kerber and argues that it was the Republican Wife, not the Mother, who “exemplified the strengths and weaknesses of the Revolutionary era’s notion of women’s role and indeed, of republicanism itself” (p. 690). She goes on to argue that while courtship and marriage were instilled with political meaning, women were not given an active voice in creating this new role, nor did the role particularly elevate their station. Lewis states, “republicanism demanded virtue of women, not because it numbered them as citizens but because it recognized how intimately women, in consensual unions, were connected to men” (p. 699). In other words, women were granted a republican role as Wife and Mother only because of their close relation to men, namely their husbands and sons.

Both Kerber's and Lewis's arguments are closely linked to the central tenet of this thesis that women's roles as wives and mothers inform women's labor reality. While Kerber emphasizes the role of motherhood in defining women's political identity, this political reality is arguably tied to women's labor reality because of women's situatedness in the home, which is also her workplace. The same is true of Lewis's argument in that it highlights the primacy of women's roles as wives in determining their political involvement. The reality is that because women's work largely took place in the home, wifehood and motherhood were interwoven identities as inseparable as their political and labor identities. This means that when women's labor was undervalued, so too was their political involvement as republican family members. While republicanism proclaimed to elevate women, few women received actual equity in the home because of their politicized domesticity.

Since the Constitution denied suffrage and public political participation, White women's roles in supporting republican principles became tied their education (Solomon, 1985). Benjamin Rush was perhaps the first to connect the new republican ideals for women with a need for the formal education of women, which he established by articulating that educated women would make better wives and mothers. He specifically argued that female education would be useful in domestic life since there are "few great or good men who have not been blessed with wife [*sic*] and prudent mothers" (1787/1965, p. 37). In the 1790s, Judith Sargent Stevens Murray (who used the pen name "Constantia") noted women's intelligence, imagination, and potential to participate more successfully in society through education (1790/1995). Mary Wollstonecraft seems to concur, asserting the following:

As the rearing of children, that is, the laying a foundation of sound health both of body and mind in the rising generation, has justly been insisted on as the peculiar destination of women, the ignorance that incapacitates them must be contrary to

the order of things. And I contend that their minds can take in much more, and ought to do so, or they will never become sensible mothers. (1792/1996, p. 196)

Motherhood, according to Wollstonecraft, can be given new purpose through the education of women. As educated mothers, women could participate in the building of their nation and serve their country by educating their sons to be better leaders and citizens.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, White women in the new republic began to have greater access to primary school as a result of these republican arguments. Thus, women's literacy doubled between 1780 and 1840 (Zinn, 2003), and the rising numbers of pupils necessitated the granting of teaching certificates to women as well as men. Teaching provided women—particularly those in the middle class—with a limited income and employment that was deemed acceptable by society because it was related to creating better futures for the sons of the nation. An estimate of women's occupations in pre-Civil War Massachusetts, for example, indicates that a quarter of the state's native-born women were current or former schoolteachers (Collins, 2003; Ryan, 1983).

The importance of women beginning to labor outside the home must be emphasized. For the first time women earned wages that contributed to the economy and participated in the institution of education. It is also important to note that White, middle-class women benefited most from this form of labor, another indication that issues of race, gender, and class are closely linked and must be further examined.

Emma Willard, a Connecticut schoolteacher, was one of these White, middle-class working women. She began to publicly call for a women's seminary, which would go beyond primary educational efforts and would teach advanced subjects. Willard wrapped her arguments for women's education around the now-popular sentiments about educated women making superior wives and mothers. In anticipation of arguments against her proposed seminary,

Willard prepared a statement addressing the benefits of a school for women. She wrote in 1812 to the public,

As evidence that this statement does not exaggerate the female influence in society, our sex need but be considered in single relation of mothers. In this character, we have the charge of the whole mass of individuals, who are to compose the succeeding generation...[W]ere the interests of male education alone to be consulted, that of females becomes of sufficient importance to engage the public attention. Would we rear the human plant to its perfection, we must first fertilize the soil which produces it. (no page number)

Her arguments proved successful. In 1821 the New York legislature granted Willard permission to found Troy Female Seminary (Woody, 1929, Vol. 1), 185 years after the founding of Harvard. The Seminary was the first institution of its kind, and in its first year it served ninety students (Encyclopædia Britannica, 1999).<sup>1</sup>

While Willard advocated for female seminaries and institutes that would teach substantial subjects “first, moral and religious; second, literary; third, domestic; and fourth, ornamental” (Woody, 1929, Vol. 1, p. 309), Willard called the idea of a women’s college “absurd,” and did not advocate that women obtain a college education that would be similar to that of men. Thus, Troy Female Seminary and the dozens of other institutions that were founded in its image were heavily criticized by some educational advocates as not progressing far enough towards a college-level education for women. Catherine E. Beecher was one of those leading critics who, while she granted that female seminaries were a step forward, did not see them as colleges. In *True Remedy for the Wrongs of Women* in 1851, she states, “Those female institutions in our land, which are assuming the ambitious name of colleges, have, not one of them, as yet, secured the real features which constitute the chief advantage of such institutions. They are merely high-schools” (in Woody, 1929, Vol. 2, p. 144).

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<sup>1</sup> Still in existence today as the Emma Willard School, a boarding school for high school women, the original buildings of Troy Female Seminary are now part of Russell Sage College, a women’s college (Emma Willard School, n.d.).

With limited choices for a true college-level education, some women turned to Oberlin College, the only coeducational institution that admitted women. In 1837, four White women entered the freshman class. In 1841, the year of their graduation, Mary Hosford wrote to former classmate Mary Kellogg, who had left Oberlin early in order to marry, to reflect on her years at Oberlin:

The trials, perplexities, and discouragements with which we met in our first year, you are quite too well acquainted with. The sophomore year was hardly less difficult. We seemed destined to days and nights even of toil and fatigue. But these last two years have been fraught with comfort and pleasure, and we have succeeded beyond our own expectations. (in Hosford, 1937, pp. 77-78)

Despite this improving environment that Hosford describes for the women of Oberlin, struggle still existed. Lucy Stone, an 1847 Oberlin graduate, was brought before the Ladies' Board of Managers when she publicly addressed male and female students at a celebratory event, but Stone escaped punishment by quoting Scripture and being unwilling to concede fear or embarrassment (Hosford, 1937). Stone also refused to write the commencement address for her class when she found out that she could not read it herself. Perhaps the most telling evidence of women's status as students, their names were left off the Oberlin graduation lists as late as 1850 (Zinn, 2003). While Oberlin attempted to create educational opportunities for women, these examples demonstrate gendered campus privileges that did not permit educational equity.

While Oberlin struggled with coeducation, the women's movement gained momentum during the 1840s and contributed to public discontent about women's inability to participate in higher education. Women's frustration about being denied entrance to U.S. colleges was listed as one of the grievances in the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, a document that was ratified and signed at the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in July of

1848. It read, “He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education—all colleges being closed against her” (National Park Service, n.d., no page number).

College opportunities for women came to fruition mid-century. However, it is difficult to establish when the first true women’s college was founded. Georgia Female College, chartered in 1836, was the first to claim to offer degrees comparable to colleges and universities (Rudolph, 1962); Georgia Female College was later renamed Wesleyan College, and it is the oldest women’s college still in operation (Harwarth, Maline, & DeBra, 1997). Elmira Female College conferred its first baccalaureate degrees in 1859, and Thomas Woody (1929, Vol. 2) calls Elmira the first institution of higher education for women to offer degrees comparable to those attained by men. John Thelin (2004) optimistically states that between 1800 and 1860 there were at least 14 institutions that granted women college-level degrees and at least 45 institutions overall that enrolled women. This discrepancy in data shows the lack of records, rather than a lack of attempted research, about the enrollment and curriculum of these seminaries, academies, and colleges for women.

While women advanced educationally, these positive steps were often limited by their own promoters. For example, Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz (1984) writes, “[These educational pioneers] courageously claimed a male preserve for women; but having broken with conservative beliefs about women’s minds, they frequently gave in to their fears about the effect of higher learning on women’s character and future prospects” (p. xviii). Founders of women’s colleges fought to balance women’s involvement in higher education with the social responsibilities placed upon White women during the early years of the new republic, and this could be very difficult. Many women worried about balancing their marriage prospects with their public

employment possibilities, as the two did not often coincide. However, all in all, the numbers of women attending college were so small that debate about conflicting roles was minimal at best.

### **Black Women, Labor, and Education in the Antebellum Period**

The republic did little to benefit Black women, who only saw slavery become institutionalized in the Constitution and laws of the newly-created United States. Deborah Gray White (1999) elucidates that while Black men and women both experienced racial oppression,

Within the institution of racial slavery there were two systems, one for women, the other for men. This was due, in part, to the different expectations that slave owners had of male and female slaves. Different expectations gave rise to different responsibilities, and these responsibilities often defined the life chances of the male or female slave. (p. 62)

Gender, then, informed the tasks given to enslaved women by slaveholders and shaped relationships in the Black community. When writing about the period 1750 to 1800, Jacqueline Jones (1994) explains that the labor burdens of a Black woman also differed whether she was born in Africa or in the colonies (or, after 1776, in the United States), as popular ideas about the labor capabilities of these groups of enslaved women created a racial hierarchy that determined their labor.

Pregnancy and childrearing also significantly shaped enslaved women's experiences. Cheryll Ann Cody (1996) rightly calls attention to the fact that when scholars study enslaved women's childbearing, they spotlight the "outcome as measured by the frequency of infant and maternal mortality, not on the process of pregnancy itself, which played such an important role in the lives of plantation women" (p. 61). While scholars can quantify the number of births and deaths by reviewing plantation records, they cannot as easily reconstruct how women's lives

were affected by pregnancy. However, by looking at plantation records concerning the productivity of pregnant enslaved women, scholars have learned that most of them did not have their work reduced until they reached the five month mark, and many worked up until the time that they gave birth (Steckel, 1996). Cody's study (1996) reveals that the late autumn spike in conceptions coincides with the end of the harvest when work responsibilities lessened and that women were consequently delivering babies in the hottest summer months and the time when their labor was most needed in the fields. Many enslaved women's reproduction, it seems, was cruelly controlled by the labor cycle of the plantation.

Childrearing was particularly difficult for enslaved women. Due to slaveholders' tendencies to sell males separately, Black women were often the sole parents of their children (King, 1996). Black infant mortality was twice that of White infants, largely due to "poor prenatal care and diets rich in caloric content but inadequate in nutrients, combined with heavy physical work" (King, 1996, p. 151). Enslaved women faced not only these health difficulties but also the terror of having their children sold away from them and the fear that the slaveholders would punish their children (Stevenson, 1996).

Free Black women experienced pregnancy and motherhood differently than enslaved women, as they exerted more control over their reproductive cycles and their parenting. Nonetheless, free Black women experienced other challenges. Suzanne Lebsack's study of Petersburg, Virginia (1984) reveals important information about free Black women. By reviewing town records, Lebsack learned that in 1860 approximately 9,000 of the town's 18,000 residents were Blacks, 3,000 of which were free. From 1800-1860, more than half of free Black households were headed by women, and more than half of free black children lived in their homes. Ironically, though, for these women, "the high rate of gainful employment, and the high

incidence of female-headed households as well, were badges of oppression. Neither was chosen from a position of strength; both were the products of chronic economic deprivation and of a shortage of men” (p. 102-103). Lebsack continues,

The autonomy experienced by the free black women of Petersburg was relative freedom from day-by-day domination by black men. What we cannot see from this distance is whether the women themselves placed a positive value on their autonomy (or on particular aspects of it) and whether they took deliberate steps to maintain it. (p. 103)

Unfortunately, free women did not leave copious documentation of their lives and thoughts.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1988) explains this as a function of class more than any other factor; upper-class White women were more likely to be literate and to have leisure time, and therefore their journals and letters appear more frequent than those of non-White or working class women. To know about the enslaved and free Black populations, historians rely heavily on the accounts of the aforementioned privileged White women, as well as newspaper articles, censuses, and town records to reconstruct the labor, educational, and life circumstances of Black women.

It is from these latter sources that information is known about the informal education of Black girls. On the plantation, some enslaved girls learned skilled trades such as weaving or cooking, taught either by older Black women or by their White owners. However, the majority of Black girls and women toiled in the fields—usually in higher percentages than boys and men, who were more likely to be trained as skilled workers—and thus did hard manual labor (Morgan, 2004). Jennifer Morgan (2004) comments that the popular image of enslaved women as house servants is largely incorrect, then, especially in the colonial period when few women were “exempted from the field in favor of the house” (p. 145). In reality, only approximately 20% of enslaved women engaged in skilled labor on plantations (Steckel, 1996).

Girls also learned from the enslaved community. On large plantations, when girls reached early adolescence, they were typically assigned to the “trash gang,” a group of pregnant women, nursing mothers, and older slaves who did light work such as raking, pulling weeds, or light hoeing (White, 1999). While there is scant documentation, it is likely that this contact with other women facilitated the passing of knowledge from one generation to the next and that with this group, young girls learned about marriage and sex. Black girls also learned from their mothers. Collins (2000) writes about the historical role of Black mothers: “To ensure their daughters’ physical survival, mothers must teach them to fit into systems of oppression...Despite the dangers, mothers routinely encourage Black daughters to develop skills to confront oppressive conditions” (p. 497). Thus, informal education was possible for Black women in the early national period, but it largely consisted of survival and labor skills.

Regarded as property of White owners, Black women were, of course, largely ineligible for the educational opportunities won for White women during this era. This did not mean, however, that Black women did not defy the law and attempt to secure at least the basics of reading and writing. Susie King Taylor, born into slavery in 1848, explains how she gained an education:

We went everyday [*sic*] with our books wrapped in paper to prevent the police or white persons from seeing them. We went in, one at a time, through the gate into the yard to the kitchen, which was the school room. [A free woman, Mrs. Woodhouse] had 25 or 30 children whom she taught, assisted by her daughter Mary Jane. The neighbors would see us going in some time, but they supposed we were there learning trades, as it was the custom to give children a trade of some kind. (1902/1992, p. 28)

Another story from Natchez, Louisiana, tells of an enslaved woman who taught a “midnight school.” Laura Haviland describes the efforts:

Milla Granson, the teacher, learned to read and write from the children of her indulgent master in her old Kentucky home. Her number of scholars was twelve

at a time, and when she taught these to read and write, she dismissed them, and again took up her apostolic number and brought them up to the extent of her ability, until she had graduated hundreds. A number of them wrote their own passes and started for Canada... (1881/1992, pp. 32-33)

As Haviland describes, in many cases, education created opportunities for subversion and escape from slavery, and this formed the basis for White fear of Black education. After Nat Turner's revolt in 1831, legislation banning the education of slaves and free Black people was enacted across the Southern states with only the exceptions of Maryland and Kentucky (Davis, 1981). For example, in the 1831-1832 legislative session, Virginians made it a criminal offense to teach African Americans to read or write (Lebsock, 1984). Fox-Genovese (1988) attributes these widespread slave codes as the reason for the more than 90% illiteracy rate among enslaved people. In contrast, free African Americans in the North benefited from the efforts of religious organizations to educate in reading and writing.

However, it is important to note the distinctions between the aforementioned literacy activities and higher education, which is the focus of this thesis. Black women had limited opportunities for formal enrollment in higher education, first and foremost, because there were few schools that would admit them. Of these that did, African Americans were small percentages of their student population. For example, African Americans comprised only four to five percent of Oberlin's student population in the 1840s and 1850s (Anderson, 2002). Furthermore, these students were evidently men, as it was not until 1862 that Mary Jane Patterson graduated with a B.A. degree from Oberlin College and became the first Black woman graduate in the United States (Soloman, 1985). While her graduation is encouraging, from 1636-1866—the first 230 years of higher education in the United States—only between fifteen and twenty-eight African American students graduated (in Anderson, 2002). John Brubacher and Willis Rudy (2003) confirm this number at twenty-eight Black graduates before 1860. These

numbers reinforce the widespread power of White control over Black education and the fear that education could challenge the institution of slavery.

Formal educational opportunities were scarce for both free and enslaved Black women in the early national period. While some Black women were able to learn reading and writing, the majority only learned the cycle of the planting season and basic survival skills against the oppression of slavery. Education was an important tool of resistance in this period, as it was identified with freedom and mobility. However, it would not be until after the Civil War that African Americans would benefit from large-scale educational efforts.

### **After the Civil War: “Respectable Spinsterhood” and “Race Uplift”**

Arguments for the higher education of women assumed a different tone after the Civil War. The latter part of the nineteenth century was not spent debating whether women *should* receive a college education but instead focused on *what kind* of education it should be (Brubacher & Rudy, 2003). Much of this debate focused on women’s bodies, as critics debated the strengths and limitations of the female body and how higher education should best accommodate these perceived physiological obstacles. Debates about women as laborers per se also continued to permeate the discourse about women and higher education.

One fact is undeniable: Women were attending college in vastly growing numbers. In 1870, women comprised 21% of all students, numbering at 11,000; by 1880, women were 32% of all students, or 40,000 (Filene, 1998). However, while regard for higher education was rising, the enrollment of Southern White women did not increase as quickly as in the North. Holding on to Southern womanhood, families attempted to keep their daughters closely tied to the home, and

Southern women were channeled into traditional paths of marriage and family instead of the academy (Gordon, 1990). Nonetheless, John Thelin (2004) notes the rising numbers of college women as one of the most distinctive features of U.S. higher education between 1880 and 1920. When the first generation of women college graduates emerged in the years after the Civil War, it marked the beginning of a class of educated, often unmarried, and economically-viable women (Evans, 1989).

This new class of women was desperately needed. The Civil War created hundreds of thousands of widows and altered sex ratios in almost all the states. For example, Alabama was home to 80,000 widows after the Civil War (Farnham, 1994); William Tyler claimed that there were 30,000 more women than men in New England in 1873 (Palmieri, 1997). Many of these widows needed income in order to support themselves, and teaching became a more acceptable profession due to the lack of men and marriage opportunities. While women did not overtake the teaching profession, they contributed valuable numbers to the ranks of teachers. White Southern women were particularly affected by the years of bleak financial and marriage prospects following the Civil War, and teaching became one of the most important means to economic self-sufficiency (Gordon, 1997).

As a result of the war and the changing population and educational trends that followed, “respectable spinsterhood” became the accepted argument for White women’s involvement in higher education (Palmieri, 1997). Again, women’s roles as wives and mothers—and in this case their inability to fulfill these traditional roles due to the low numbers of eligible men—defined their involvement in the labor market and in higher education. In the course of a decade, arguments changed in order to allow women more widespread access to higher education so that they might be able to earn their own livings as teachers in primary schools, finishing schools, and

institutions of higher education. From restricted access to encouraged participation, the reversed command about women's involvement in higher education led to a boom in institutional growth. In 1870, there were 582 institutions of higher education in the United States, 59% for men only and 41% that allowed the admission of women; by 1890, the number of institutions doubled to 1,082, and 63% were open to women either through women's colleges or coeducational institutions (Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1973).<sup>2</sup>

These changing numbers alarmed some members of post-Civil War society, and a new debate began about women's physiology and the capacity of the female body to endure the "rigors" of higher education. Leading the debate was Dr. Edward Clarke, who did not dispute that women should be educated but strongly believed in the separate and different education of women and girls. He attempted to demonstrate that women could not attend and graduate from college and still be healthy. Using the science of the time, Clarke explained this in 1873 about women's unique reproductive organs: "If properly nurtured and cared for, they are a source of strength and power to her. If neglected and mismanaged, they retaliate upon their possessor with weakness and disease, as well of the mind as of the body" (p. 33).

Clarke argued that women's reproductive functions were disrupted by study since the brain would consume more energy than other systems, leading to irregular menstruation and a poisoning of the body through the loss of this important means of waste elimination. Because of this, he insisted that the female body be particularly cared for throughout women's schooling.

Clarke (1873) writes,

It was not Latin, French, German, mathematics, or philosophy that undermined her nerves; nor was it because of any natural inferiority to boys that she failed; nor because she undertook to master what women have no right to learn: she lost

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<sup>2</sup> These numbers do not reflect race as a category of examination; therefore, they do not reveal how women's access varied according to race.

her health simply because she undertook her work in a boy's way and not in a girl's way. (pp. 101-102)

Clarke thus advocated the separate education of women and girls so that the manner of education, which needed to be different from that of boys and men, would not disrupt their ability to bear children. This preoccupation with the potential loss of reproductive capacity confirms materialist feminist arguments about men's control of women's reproduction as a means of maintaining the status quo.

Clarke's propositions stirred a new debate, especially since many women's seminaries and colleges at the time incorporated some form of physical education into their curriculum. Worried about the complete lack of physicality in women's lives, early educational leaders such as Emma Willard and Catherine Beecher had advocated exercise, balanced diet, and proper attire as essential to women's educational success (Woody, 1929, Vols. 1 & 2). Clarke's comments decades later appear to originate in his disdain for women's competitive sports and his concern for their failing health and frayed "nerves." His critique throughout the 1870s elevated the revolutionary spirit of the White women's education movement (Palmieri, 1997), as dissent was so strong against his ideas among many educational reformers that they pushed forward even more strongly than before for women's educational opportunities.

On the other hand, Black women continued to face obstacles to education after the Civil War. Some 2.0 million of the 4.5 million former slaves were female, and their educational opportunities were of course virtually nonexistent throughout years of slavery (Noble, 1956). Even after their "emancipation," however, Black women were not included in the White Victorian ideal of women as "ladies" who worked in the home. As slaves and as free women, Black women worked alongside men, usually in the public sphere, to make a living (Olson, 2001). In the words of Sojourner Truth (1851),

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man – when I could get it – and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman? (no page number)

Truth intended her words as a reminder that in the debate about women, work, and rights, the experiences of Black women could not be subsumed by those of White women; Victorian notions of chivalry and women's place in the labor structure simply did not apply to Black women. The factor of race created a different labor and social reality for Black women, and not only pre- but also post-Civil War society marginalized these experiences.

For Black women after the Civil War, education was not a means to social or political mobility, as it often was for White women, but was instead a means of elevating the status of all Blacks (Perkins, 1997). In order to contribute to “race uplift” and to earn a living, Black women also began to receive training as teachers after the Civil War. The sense that Black education was revolutionary was so strong that Jacqueline Jones (1985) writes that Black women's work as teachers “implicitly involved a commitment to social and political activism” (p. 143). Young, single women were the largest category of Black women teachers; in 1900, 90 percent were 34 years or younger and 72 percent were unmarried (Jones, 1985).<sup>3</sup>

From their beginnings, Black institutions of higher education were largely coeducational, providing evidence that race—not gender—was the primary categorization for Black women (Perkins, 1997); this is unlike White women, who first recognized their gender and many times not their race at all. African American teacher Anna Cooper wrote in 1892 that the Black

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<sup>3</sup> Jones posits that overall census numbers are likely low because Black women often taught for only a few months a year and therefore many listed other occupations as their trade.

woman is “confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both” (1892/1999, p. 71). Arguments for Black education were centered on racial rationale and did not explicitly address issues of gender.

Nonetheless, these claims for Black higher education led to the founding of dozens of Black colleges in the late nineteenth century. The first of these colleges was the Ashman Institute in 1854; Ashman later changed its name to Lincoln University in 1866 to honor President Abraham Lincoln (Lincoln University, n.d.). Lincoln University, like most Black colleges, was coeducational from its inception. However, there were some institutions that recognized a need solely to educate women. In 1881, Spelman Seminary, for example, was founded in Atlanta to train Black women as teachers and missionaries (Noble, 1956). Nine public land-grant universities were also founded between 1870 and 1890, but the majority of Black universities were private liberal arts colleges (Anderson, 1988).

Black institutions of higher education paved a path for coeducation that White institutions seemed reluctant to follow. Instead, at the end of the nineteenth century a new phenomenon began to arise at the leading White U.S. institutions: affiliate campuses for women. Rather than admit women, universities opted to create a separate campus for them, usually geographically connected to the parent institution. One of the first was the Harvard Annex in 1879, which despite its name had no official affiliation with the university; rather, it was started by thirteen Harvard faculty members who agreed to repeat their lectures to groups of female students but had no authority to grant Harvard degrees or honors (Schwager, 2004). However, this distinction was not clearly made to the public, and most regarded the Harvard Annex as an important step for women in higher education, even though Harvard officials had no intention to admit women. In 1894, the Annex was re-chartered by the state and named Radcliffe College, which had

permission to grant degrees to women (Morison, 1936). The college admitted Black women, and in 1898 Alberta V. Scott became Radcliffe's first Black graduate (Titcomb, 1993); regardless, Radcliffe women were still denied a Harvard education and degree. Major universities across the United States began to follow Harvard's lead, and affiliate institutions were often founded, despite the fact that the all-male affiliate institution did not confer its degrees to women.

Without doubt, the years after the Civil War dramatically changed the status of all women in higher education. Women's access to the academy grew substantially, and teaching became a viable means of earning a living for some women; however, in 1870, 50% of all women wage-earners were still domestic servants (Scott, 1993), illustrating gendered responsibilities and class limitations for possible entry to higher education. Nevertheless, between 1890 and 1920 the number of professional women increased 226 percent, indicating the success of higher education in elevating women in the professions (Ryan, 1983). This rise in professional women is explained by the widespread shortage of marriageable men, the relaxation of the rigid roles defining White women as wives and mothers, and the embracing of the idea of "respectable spinsterhood." White and Black women emerged as a new labor force. Concerns about the physical health of women were answered through vigorous debate and the establishment of physical education at women's colleges. Black women after the Civil War saw their first advancements in higher education, paving the way for coeducation through the establishment of Black schools and colleges. Lastly, major universities began to sponsor affiliate campuses in order simultaneously to accommodate women students and keep them separate from men. The outlook for all women was brightening.

## **The Roles of Women's Colleges**

Women's colleges also increased in number and popularity in the years after the Civil War. While few were in operation before the Civil War, by 1900 there were an estimated 150 women's colleges (Rudolph, 1962); in 1960, women's colleges peaked at an estimated 300 institutions (Wolf-Wendel, 2003). This leap in educational opportunity was in part due to increased encouragement for women to earn a college degree. However, women's colleges also benefited from generous donors. In the rising philanthropic atmosphere of higher education in the late 1800s, women's colleges such as Vassar secured founding donations, and many others received sizeable gifts (Thelin, 2004). Westward expansion also accounted for the founding of many women's colleges in the Midwest and West.

The first generation of graduates from women's colleges finished their studies in the 1880s. As undergraduates, they "played aggressive team sports, organized meetings, politicked among classmates, handled budgets, solicited advertisements," all acts that for college men "confirmed patterns of socialization that led to the world of business; for women, learning the routes of power contrasted with feminine upbringing and led to no known future" (Horowitz, 1987, p. 197). As a result of this surprising freedom, many of the women college graduates became activists for social change. Jane Addams, founder of the Hull House in Chicago and Nobel Peace Prize winner, was an 1881 Rockford College graduate. 1880 Vassar graduate Julia Lathrop became Chief of the Children's Bureau at the U.S. Department of Education. Sophonisba Breckinridge, an 1881 Wellesley College alumna, was Vice-President of the National American Woman's Suffrage Association and President of several social workers' organizations. These women and countless others led the first generation of women's college

graduates in fighting for social justice and women's rights (Harwarth, Maline, & DeBra, 1997); but unfortunately, colleges did not keep alumnae records and there are no broad-based surveys about the choices of graduates from 1860-1890 (Gordon, 1990). Nonetheless, it is evident that while subsequent generations of graduates might not have exhibited the same social agenda (Gordon, 1990), this first group of women's college alumnae worked tirelessly to demonstrate the benefits of their education.

The first classes of women graduates, in particular, saw falling marriage rates for college women. From 1880-1900, almost half of all women graduates did not marry, a number in stark contrast to similarly-aged, non-college educated women who averaged a marriage rate of almost 90% (Horowitz, 1987). Higher education created financial opportunities that lessened the economic need for marriage, exactly the intent of society when it pushed women to attend college after the Civil War. Helen Horowitz (1987) illustrates the choice of some college-educated women: "They could enter into the female community of reformers and professional women, a subculture that provided them with companionship and love and respected their choices and achievements" (p. 198). However, some male detractors proclaimed that women's colleges were producing too many spinsters. Patricia Palmieri (1997) explains, "They believed the women's colleges were 'institutions for the promotion of celibacy,' producing a disappearing class of intellectual women who were not marrying and hence were committing race suicide" (p. 177). Arguments about women's roles as reproducers again crept into public debate during the late nineteenth century.

Also important to note is that women's colleges in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century achieved a reputation for educating the privileged elite. While some women from lower-income families and African American women attended women's colleges, the

campuses of women's colleges were largely for economically-privileged White women. Linda Perkins estimates that the Seven Sisters—Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Radcliffe, Smith, Vassar, Wellesley—graduated over 10,000 women overall but only a few hundred African American women before World War II (in Thelin, 2004). While women's colleges encouraged women's higher education opportunities, they primarily benefited White women.

Nonetheless, women's colleges contribute important lessons to the successful higher education of women. Lisa Wolf-Wendel (2003) describes how higher education can benefit from the seven successful actions of women's colleges to “clarify and communicate a mission that puts women at the center;” “believe women can achieve and hold them to high expectations;” “make students feel like they matter;” “provide strong, positive role models;” “provide ample opportunities for women to engage in leadership activities;” “include women in the curriculum;” and “create safe spaces in which women can form a critical mass” (p. 41). Wolf-Wendel argues that women's colleges have a future in higher education because they continue to be effective at creating “structures, policies, practices and curriculum that are attuned to the needs of women” (p. 49), and that coeducational institutions can learn from these successes.

### **Institutional Responses in the Twentieth Century**

When Oberlin College was founded in 1833, it was the first institution of higher education to admit both women and African Americans (Oberlin College, n.d.). Harvard—the first U.S. university and a higher education trendsetter—admitted African American men in 1865 (Titcomb, 1993), but did not admit women until over 100 years later in 1943 (Harvard

University, n.d.) when war made their admission necessity (Mandel, 2004). Affiliate campuses for women had helped to bridge the divide between men's colleges and the admission of women, and it thus became only a matter of time before financial concerns and societal pressure encouraged most institutions to combine their campuses into one. Institutions that did not have women's coordinate campuses began to admit women as well, and women's educational options further expanded. The opportunities for coeducation first took hold in the pioneering American West: in 1872 there were 97 coeducational colleges in the United States, and 67 of them were in the West (Rudolph, 1962). By the early twentieth century, these opportunities were beginning to mainstream: In 1910 only 27% of U.S. institutions of higher education barred women from entering; twenty years later, only 15% barred entrance to women (Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1973).

Coeducation, however, was not without its difficulties. It quickly became apparent that while universities might open their doors to women, this did not necessarily indicate that campus climates were welcoming (Brubacher & Rudy, 2003; Wolf-Wendel, 2003). While women were present on campus in the early 1900s, they were unlikely to achieve leadership positions on campus (Miller-Bernal, 2004), and often were "tracked" into certain academic programs or discouraged from others (Thelin, 2004). Furthermore, coeducational institutions often did not provide equitable resources to women students, such as the housing opportunities, medical care, and physical education facilities that they offered to male students (Nidiffer, 2003). Susan Poulson and Leslie Miller-Bernal (2004) write, "It was as though women were expected to fit into the existing situation without disturbing the status quo" (p. 312). Clearly, then, admission did not mean educational equity. The specific needs of women and their potential experiences

on campus were not taken into account during the transition to coeducation. As a result, women faced a difficult transition into what were formerly men's colleges.

The mass movement to coeducation in the twentieth century also affected previously all-male institutions differently than it affected former women's colleges. According to John Thelin (2004), all-male institutions gained the best and brightest women candidates, who would have otherwise attended women's colleges. Women's colleges that chose to become coeducational lost not only their best women candidates but also experienced male candidates with lower academic qualifications; this phenomenon was widely noted at Vassar (Thelin, 2004), which chose to admit men in 1969 (Vassar, n.d.).

Coeducation also had the unintended effect of creating class differences among college women in the first part of the twentieth century. Perhaps for the first time, women differentiated among themselves, creating categories relative to their male classmates:

Undergraduates sorted themselves out into different types: swells and all-around girls, corresponding to college men; and grinds and freaks, to outsiders. The swells came from the wealthier strata, oriented to society. Increasingly they built a conventional life for themselves, one that prepared them to become gracious hostesses and guests. The grinds in their commitment to study either resisted this world or were barred from it by humble origins. Freaks, whose derogatory label underscored their class or racial difference, suffered from ostracism as great as any male outsider. (Horowitz, 1987, p. 197)

This internal classification of women students created some of the first divisions among college women, resulting in a lack of cohesion and group activism. Universities therefore continued to offer lesser levels of services to women, as there was no consensus even among the ranks of women about their needs.

However, by the mid-twentieth century, college women began to assert themselves on campus, vocalizing their discontent with university climates and services. Consequently in the 1950s university administrators began to realize that they needed to adapt some of their support

services in order to accommodate women. Interestingly, the services altered or added were largely in relation to realities or conceptions about women's bodies. Examples include providing doctors in student health centers to treat women patients, designating or building separate housing facilities for women, and adding policies such as dress codes and visitation hours in residence halls for all students. In the most recent decades, child care centers have been founded on campus for student parents, and more campuses have sponsored sexual assault services for victims of crime. In all these instances, universities have shown an acute interest in accommodating the real or perceived ideas about the female body and women's roles as wives and mothers.

The first university office created specifically to serve women was that of the Dean of Students. The position of Dean of Students began in 1890 when Harvard split the responsibilities of the dean into two positions: the academic Dean and the Dean of Students (Brubacher & Rudy, 2003). When women began to enter the academy, the Dean of Students position further divided into the Dean of Men and the Dean of Women, segregating the supposed needs of students by gender. In its early years, the administration largely viewed the Dean of Women as disciplinarian and watchperson, but the position evolved to demand the Dean's responsibility for meeting women's educational and college-related needs (Brooks, 1988; Nidiffer, 2003). The first Deans of Women were focused professionals committed to doing their best for women on campus. Robert Schwartz (1997) explains,

Far from "spinsterly battle axes," the first deans were well-respected academic women who had committed themselves to their disciplines. While they were determined to provide counsel and support to young women, they also focused on the prerequisites of scholarship as the road to respect in academe. Accordingly, the early deans wrote books, conducted research, published articles, and established professional associations. In turn, the associations developed journals and held annual conferences for the further dissemination of knowledge and the advancement of the profession. (p. 509)

After years of debate, the positions “Dean of Men” and “Dean of Women” were recombined in the 1950s. Schwartz (1997) claims that “in many respects, coeducation was successful because of the work of the deans of women” (p. 518), illustrating the importance of their roles on campus.

Just as the position of Dean of Women was fading into the annals of higher education, women’s centers were beginning to be founded on college campuses. Women’s centers began to be established in the 1960s as a result of the women’s movement and the continued problems with the incorporation of women into previously all-male institutions of higher education (Clevenger, 1988). As women found that admission to higher education did not necessarily mean that their experiences or opportunities were equitable to those of their male counterparts, women’s centers were founded with the goal of promoting educational and workplace improvements for women. Many of the issues that women’s centers first tackled dealt related to women’s bodies and perceived gender roles. M. Peg Lonquist and Loraine Reesor (1987) describe a model for women’s centers that includes addressing sexual harassment, discrimination and abuse on campus, and a program list that includes the sample topics of “sexism, assertiveness...body image...rape and violence...changing roles of women and men, dual careers, single parenting, and healthy relationships” (pp. 138-139). There are approximately 500 campus women’s centers across the nation today and new centers are founded annually (Gribi, 2004). The majority of these continue to address, among other issues, women’s bodies, their roles in the family, and their transition to the workplace.

While the twentieth century saw advances for women, these advances differed by race. Black higher education was slowed by decades of indifference and institutionalized racism. While private Black colleges were growing in number, only Alabama, Maryland, North Carolina,

and Virginia had established institutions funded with tax dollars for African Americans prior to 1900; sadly, these institutions were “colleges” and “universities” in name only, as their curricula and facilities did not measure up to White institutions of higher education (Anderson, 2002). Legislation meant to open higher education opportunities for African Americans, such as the GI Bill, actually did little to help African Americans who served in the Armed Forces: The bill made no provisions for nondiscrimination, and African American veterans (some of who were, presumably, women) were not granted access to White public institutions (Thelin, 2004).

It wasn't until the 1954 *Brown v. the Board of Education* decision that there was a legal foundation for equal higher education according to race. The majority opinion of the Court reads,

We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. (*Brown v. the Board of Education*, 1954)

This important case heralded a new direction for public education, but it wasn't until the Supreme Court remanded *Hawkins v. Board of Control* to the Florida Supreme Court in 1956 that the Brown decision was applied to higher education. *Hawkins* addressed the complaints of African American students who applied to the University of Florida Law School and were denied admission based on race; the Florida ruling stipulated that qualified candidates, regardless of race, must be admitted to the program (*Hawkins v. Board of Control*, 1956). These two cases laid the legal groundwork for the integration of all public educational institutions.

However, it was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that finally made the dream of higher education at public institutions a reality for African American students (Teddlie & Freeman, 2002). The Civil Rights Act provided for the enforcement of these rulings, and African

American enrollment increased dramatically in the years that followed. Nonetheless, Allen and Jewell's 1968 study noted that 80% of all African American undergraduates still received degrees from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) (in Anderson, 2002). While advances were made for African Americans, Black men benefited disproportionately from these cases; Black women still faced sex discrimination.

In 1972, Title IX of the Education Amendments took effect, and women benefited from a stronger commitment to gender equity. Title IX states, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance..." (Education Amendments, 1972). While Title IX is most famous for its application in the area of collegiate sports, the act was not created merely to facilitate women's movement onto the court, green, or field or into the pool; rather, Title IX intended to remove barriers to women's participation in all aspects of federally funded programs and events. This highly-contested legislation is still in place today and greatly enhanced the opportunities of women in higher education.

Women in the twentieth century faced many challenges when entering the academy. Struggling to fit into previously all-male institutions of higher education, women found that coeducation did not always provide equal opportunity. In the words of Susan Poulson and Leslie Miller-Bernal (2004), "prevailing notions about gender are taught in the classroom and transmitted through campus culture. Coeducation alone, without a transformation in consciousness, does not bring gender equity" (p. 314). Indeed, the initial attempts to serve women who were students as "women students" reflect the tension between the presence of women and their actual inclusion on campus. As both women and men struggled to adapt to

coeducation, the conventional understandings of women as domestic laborers was also being challenged.

### **“Working Women” and the Academy**

While women have always worked, the term “working women” took on new meaning in the twentieth century. These social changes regarding women and work informed the continuing debate about women’s participation in higher education. This section highlights major changes regarding women, labor, and family, as well as discusses how the identities of “working women” shaped further women’s experiences in the academy.

Women’s efforts to enter more areas of the workforce were challenged by fresh debate about women’s bodies and their roles as wives and mothers in the twentieth century. Changing ideas about family size were important to the debate. Between 1800 and 1900, the average number of children born to White women fell from 7 to 3.5 thanks to advances in birth control methods over the course of the century (Cott, 1994). In the early 1900s, contraceptive options were enlarged by the work of Margaret Sanger. A nurse, sexual health advocate, and birth control pioneer, Sanger advocated medical research about contraceptives and promoted their usage among women. In 1920 she wrote, “Millions of women are asserting their right to voluntary motherhood. They are determined to decide for themselves whether they shall become mothers, under what conditions and when” (p. 5). Despite a general sense that lowering marital fertility was acceptable, the use of birth control itself was highly controversial (Cott, 1994), and Sanger was censored, arrested, and fined for her teachings.

However, Sanger's radical medical and social arguments for birth control were taking hold, and college campuses reflected the changes in sexual attitudes and expectations. John Thelin (2004) writes that the "college woman" between the two World Wars was considered to be in the same category of misbehaving, promiscuous women as the flapper and the "new woman." Helen Horowitz (1987) explains, "According to [the canons of conventional coeds] they could enjoy sexual activity—to a point—along with certain symbols of the new freedom: bobbed hair, short skirts, cigarettes, jazz, and automobiles" (p. 208). Nevertheless, the general public mistrusted these symbols, and college women were often deemed dangerous women.

Working women also fell into the category of "dangerous women." Working women were "trying to have it all" by having husbands and children but also working outside the home. Society was highly suspicious of these women, as they did not fit the traditional mold of women as wives, mothers, and domestic laborers. Regardless, women began to move in significant numbers out of the private home and into the public workforce in the twentieth century. The numbers started small, with the U.S. Census reporting in 1930 that less than 12% of married women worked for pay outside the home (Cott, 1994); overall, just 23.6% of all women were working for wages. These numbers do not reveal whether women worked fulltime or part-time or if they had children, but regardless, women were making their mark as laborers.

World War II had a profound effect on women's work opportunities. Joyce Jacobsen (1998) explains that women moved into manufacturing positions "as men were conscripted and production of war-related goods increased...both to fill the slack in labor supply left by the men and as a response to both reduced income and reduced nonmarket work responsibilities" (p. 439). World War II demanded that 2.5 million women enter the workforce for the first time, 1.3 million of whom were hired by war industries (in Jacobsen, 1998). Black women, in particular,

benefited from wartime labor opportunities, experiencing a rise in remuneration for their efforts as they shifted from overrepresentation in domestic work to factory jobs (Matthews, 1992).

However, when the war ended and men returned to civilian life, they were often able to reclaim their previous jobs from women because of pre-existing union agreements or because employers felt inclined to hire veterans because of their service to the country (Blau, Ferber & Winkler, 1998). Women's participation in the labor market therefore suffered, as they were either laid off to make room for returning soldiers or lost their jobs due to decreasing production of wartime supplies. Just two years after the war ended, the number of working women dropped from 35.8% in 1945—the highest number yet seen for women—to 31.5% in 1947 (U.S. Census figures, cited in Blau, Ferber & Winkler, 1998); again these numbers do not tell us if women worked fulltime or part-time.

Materialist feminist arguments are helpful in understanding this phenomenon. Women were accepted and actually praised as workers in the labor market during the war years, but as soon as men returned to the labor market, traditional arguments about women and work resurfaced. The media largely contributed to this shift in social messages, as during the War, women were encouraged to emulate the government's propaganda icon Rosie the Riveter, whose rallying cry "We can do it!" ushered women into the factories; however, after World War II, popular films and television shows from *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) to *I Love Lucy* (1951) to *Leave it to Beaver* (1957), presented images of White women in the roles of wife, mother, and domestic laborer. This returning debate was augmented by soaring marriage rates after World War II, accompanied by a lowering of women's ages at the time of their first marriage and a rise in fertility (Jacobsen, 1998). Men encouraged women to return to the home to engage in

domestic labor and childrearing after World War II ended, and many women acquiesced to this request.

Veterans also displaced women on college campuses after returning from World War II. Overall, women comprised 40% of undergraduate enrollment in 1939-1940 but by 1950 composed just 32% of enrollment, which reveals how the GI Bill worked to “masculinize the postwar campus” (Thelin, 2004, p. 267) and made higher education, even on coeducational campuses, “a man’s world once again” (Schwartz, 1997, p. 517). After veterans came to campus, “it took a certain independence of mind for a college woman to envision a future career” (Horowitz, 1987, p. 216).

Yet some women—married and unmarried, college-educated and non-college-educated—did enter the workforce. Labor force participation rates reveal that 34.5% of White women and 46.1% of Black women worked in 1955 (in Blau, Ferber & Winkler, 1998), again demonstrating the longstanding trend that more Black women worked outside their homes than White women (Davis, 1981). However, Sara Evans (1989) points out that 1950s society feared that women would abandon their “natural” roles; in order to counter this argument, working women were quick to declare the “primacy of marriage and family in professional women’s lives” (p. 262). Just one example of the emphasis on family and home life made at that time by working women is a 1956 *Fortune* magazine study of women executives in which all participants valued family above work yet believed that they could satisfactorily complete the demands of both “if they want to badly enough” (quoted in Evans, 1989, p. 262).

Despite these proclamations by working women about the importance of family, they were constantly responding to sharp criticism. In 1955, journalist Elizabeth Pope wrote in *McCall’s* magazine:

Working women have been blamed for everything from juvenile delinquency to divorce. They have been charged with neglecting their babies, bulldozing their husbands, neglecting their homes. It's hard to think of a social problem ranging from inadequate breakfasts to world unrest which someone at some time or another hasn't dumped into their laps. (1955/1999, p. 231)

Clearly, then, 1950s women faced incredible challenges in becoming "working women."

Married men now benefited not only from their wives' wages but also from women's continued work in the home. As a result, men have been often seen as having careers, which Ellen Appel-Bronstein (2003) defines as a "series of job changes within the same profession, each job a stepping-stone to the next, with net gain in rank, prestige, power, experience, or income" (p. 387), while women have been often seen to have mere "jobs," with little hope of retirement assistance or savings.

College-educated women in particular faced dismal dual responsibilities with little hope for the reward of a career or domestic assistance in the home by their partners. Working women graduates often felt the need to assert their domesticity even more strongly than those who did not attend college in order to assure society that the privilege of higher education had not altered their commitment to home and family. In a seeming effort to prove that family was more important, more and more women did not finish college. By the mid-1950s, 60% of college women were dropping out in order to marry or to improve their chances for marriage (Friedan, 1963).

Despite this backlash against college-educated working women, marriage ages increased and birthrates began to fall beginning in 1957. The 1960 FDA approval of the birth control pill created the possibility of recreational sex without the risk of pregnancy (Evans, 1989). Sanger, in the words of Sonya Michel and Robyn Muncy (1999), "participated in creating the modern, sexualized woman, a new gender identity altogether, and one that made women seem more like

men than before” (p. 119). Helen Gurley Brown’s 1962 how-to book *Sex and the Single Girl* demonstrates the emergence of this modern, sexually-liberated woman:

Theoretically a “nice” single woman has no sex life. What nonsense! She has a better sex life than most of her married friends. She need never be bored with one man per lifetime. Her choice in partners is endless and they seek *her*. They never come to her bed duty-bound. Her married friends refer to her pursuers as wolves, but actually many of them turn out to be lambs—to be shorn and worn by her. (Brown, 1962/2003, p. 7)

This book and many other publications created a new identity for single women, who for the first time could choose to postpone or reject their reproductive capacity.

In 1963 married women received a new message as well: Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, and millions of housewives realized that they were not alone in their feelings of loneliness, dissatisfaction, and restlessness. Arguing that the “happy housewife” was a myth created by society and a mask for the underlying social problem of sexism, Friedan writes, “In the fifteen years after World War II, this mystique of feminine fulfillment became the cherished and self-perpetuating core of contemporary American culture” (p. 14). Friedan called attention to women’s disillusion with housewifery and their complex, unpaid labor in the home.

Arguments about women, work, and family continued to dominate the latter part of the twentieth century. Once again, debate occurred about women’s capabilities and responsibilities, as well as their educational, work, and familial opportunities. The difference between past arguments and those in the late twentieth century is that women were more able to exercise choice in their own futures. No longer completely at the mercy of male family members, social convention, and economic realities, women were more likely to exercise control over their life paths. Work in the labor market as wage earners created greater possibilities for women. It is important to note, however, that not all women experienced this increase in autonomous

decision-making equally or fully: Race and class have continued to play significant roles in determining options and interests for women.

Materialist feminist arguments are helpful in understanding the debate, confusion, and difficulty of women transferring from domestic labor to labor in the market. For the first time, enough women worked in the market for their labor to make economic impact. By gaining employment outside the home, women earned wages that were counted and valued in the economy. In fact, Arlie Russell Hochschild and Anne Machung (2003) implicate women's transition to the workforce as the means by which the heterosexual family could adapt to deindustrialization and declining men's wages.

It is also important to understand the objections to working women. There was an outcry that working women were abandoning their "natural roles" as wives and mothers. However, it is more accurate to say that women were changing their labor role from domestic laborer to market laborer plus domestic laborer and that this shift undermined the economic, political, and social structure that had been in place for centuries. Materialist feminist arguments tell us that men had the most to lose in this situation, as they were accustomed to benefiting from the unpaid labor of women in the home. From a materialist feminist standpoint, protest of working women is founded in men's fear that they would lose their economic dominance and gender privilege. Continued resistance to women's full labor force participation has impeded the transformation of the labor market and obstructed the creation of equitable labor conditions as they relate to gender. Rather, working women have been forced to labor even more strenuously, often completing one shift of paid labor in the market and one shift of unpaid labor in the home.

## CHAPTER THREE THE FUTURE OF WOMEN IN U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION

But there are still parents who say, “There is no need that my daughter should teach; then why should she go to college?” I will not reply that college training is a life insurance for a girl, a pledge that she possesses the disciplined ability to earn a living for herself and others in case of need, for I prefer to insist on the importance of giving every girl, no matter what her present circumstances, a special training in some one thing by which she can render society service, not of amateur but of expert sort, and service too for which it will be willing to pay a price. (Palmer, 1908, pp. 364-365)<sup>4</sup>

The previous chapter explores the history of women’s involvement in higher education and demonstrates that arguments about women’s roles as mothers and laborers either precluded, invited, or demanded their participation in higher education. The historical evidence in Chapter Two also lays the foundation for understanding the current situation of women in higher education. In short, U.S. higher education was created by men, for men, and reinforced a social order that privileged men over women; it is not surprising, therefore, that women’s involvement in higher education was not widely encouraged until 300 years later. Women struggled during the beginning years of coeducation to fit into campus structures that were not designed to accommodate them and to interact with men who were not accustomed to women’s presence.

In Chapter Three I explore the current challenges and opportunities of women studying at and working in the academy. I also discuss the implications of this research and how this thesis contributes to a more critical understanding of women’s current situation in the academy. This chapter continues to explore the intersections of gender, race, and class.

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<sup>4</sup> Alice Freeman Palmer was “by most accounts, the first significant appointment of a woman to be a dean of women” (Schwartz, 1997, p. 506). She became the Dean of Women at the University of Chicago in 1892 after negotiating an arrangement in which she would work part-time and commute between Chicago and Boston. Her rationale was likely to strike a balance between work and family, as she had just married Harvard professor George Herbert Palmer and he refused to move with her to Chicago (Schwartz, 1997).

## **Serving the Majority: Women College Students**

Women are no longer the minority of undergraduate students, as their participation grew in the late twentieth century. By 1970, women were 41% of all students in higher education and by 1980 women accounted for 52% of enrollment (Filene, 1998). Today women comprise 56.3% of students in higher education (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2004).<sup>5</sup> While White women still outnumber Black women in sheer numbers, 6.1% of all Black women in the United States are enrolled in higher education, which is actually slightly higher than the 6.046% of all White women in the United States who are enrolled (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2004; U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).<sup>6</sup> While it might be tempting to proclaim that education parity among Black and White women has been met, this number does not reveal whether involvement is spread evenly over all levels of higher education or whether experiences in higher education are substantially different among Black and White women. Nonetheless, women students have claimed their place in higher education, and that place is the majority.

As many institutions excluded women for almost 300 years, this transition to coeducation and more full participation of women has been difficult. In the words of Margaret Wilkerson (1989),

On one hand, colleges and universities, unprepared for this radical change [majority women], have felt beleaguered by a staggering range of new demands, from curriculum reform to child care, while on the other hand, women—claiming

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<sup>5</sup> Statistic generated by the author. I divided the total number of women in higher education (8,967,200) by the total number of students in higher education (15,928,000). This percentage represents women at all levels of higher education, including 2- and 4-year colleges as well as graduate and professional programs.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics generated by the author. I divided the number of Black women in higher education (1,178,000) by the total number of Black women in the U.S. population (19,301,000). Similarly, I divided the number of White women in higher education (6,012,200) by the total number of White women in the U.S. population (99,436,000). While the Chronicle of Higher Education's enrollment numbers are from Fall 2001 and the U.S. Census Bureau population numbers are from March 2002, I propose that the raw numbers may be used together because they are from the same academic year.

a subtle form of gender apartheid—often find themselves treated as a minority, despite their greater numbers. (p. 27)

Since women are “latecomers” to higher education, there is considerable debate among students, scholars, and administrators about how best to serve their academic and nonacademic needs.

What guidelines should be used? What are women’s needs on campus?

In 1990, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) made a critical step by publishing the document “Standards and Guidelines for Women Student Programs and Services.” This manuscript directs campus units, particularly those in the division of Student Life/Services, on how to serve women students through setting appropriate missions, programs, and multicultural programs. It states, “The mission of women student programs and services is to promote unrestricted access and full involvement of women students in all aspects of the college or university experience...and must help these students benefit from the institution’s total educational process” (p. 33). The CAS model for women’s programs also makes recommendations about institutional organization, funding, facilities, ethics, and legal responsibilities. While not all institutions employ the CAS model for their campuses, it can be a useful tool for all units that are considering how to best serve women.

While the CAS model is important for its potentially widespread implementation, one of the more compelling arguments about the needs of women is found in Charlotte Kunkel’s work. In 1994, Kunkel identified five areas in which women needed special attention and services on campus: safety; education and awareness; support and advocacy; equity; and community. More than a decade later, these five areas remain areas problematic for women, and many campuses also include leadership, internationalization, and technology as additional foci for their programs and services (Davie, 2002). Both Kunkel and Sharon Davie propose that these areas of concentration represent the most pressing needs of women currently in higher education, and I

argue that all of them relate in some way to the previously-discussed “sacred duties” of wife and mother and to society’s notions about women and labor. For the remainder of this section, then, I will examine the continuing needs of women on campus and how these needs are rooted in the historical realities discussed in Chapter Two.

*Safety* is the first area of need, and Kunkel (1994, 2002) defines safety as both “freedom from danger” and “the freedom to act” (1994, p. 16). This area largely centers around the security of women’s bodies. To address this need, university offices may provide self-defense classes, offer sexual assault counseling and services, sponsor campus lighting walks to expose and fix dark areas of campus, and host safety forums—all attempts to make women free from danger and grant them the freedom to act without fear of violence or aggression.

However, safety issues, particularly preventing sexual assault, are in actuality difficult to address. A 2000 Department of Justice study shows that on campuses with 10,000 female students, as many as 350 sexual assaults are attempted or completed each year (Fisher, Cullen & Turner). However, only 3,750 rapes were reported nationwide in 2002 under the Clery Act, which measures crime on college campuses (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). These numbers reveal that college women are at serious risk for assault and that the reporting remains far below the projected levels of those crimes, indicating that women are not coming forward to receive crucial medical and psychological assistance. Harassment and stalking are also growing areas of concern on college campuses, and the rise of technology has created new challenges for higher education administrators who must adapt policy and education strategies to cover cyber-stalking.

Women’s bodily safety has been an area of critical concern throughout the history of the United States. Black women were often victims of sexual abuse under slavery, and White

women could be abused within their marriages. Also, for most of our country's history, property and marriage rights shielded men from prosecution for sexual crimes. While contemporary women possess greater control over their bodies' reproductive and physical integrity and the law now frowns more upon nonconsensual sexual contact, women are still taught to fear sexual assault by the highly-gendered messages transmitted on college campuses and in our society. For example, women are told not to walk alone at night, to dress appealingly but not to tease, to be friendly to their fellow classmates but also wary (Allen, 2001); men, on the other hand, are rarely advised about where and when they travel, what they wear, or whether they should physically fear the women they meet. This contributes to a college experience in which men may enjoy not only a greater sense of freedom but also increased access to campus resources because they are not told under what conditions they may utilize them. So that women may more fully participate in campus life, women's safety from danger and their freedom to act are of the utmost concern.

Universities should also work to advance *education and awareness* about women's achievements in scholarship and history, the second area Kunkel (1994, 2002) identifies. The United States has largely undervalued women's work because it largely occurred in the domestic sphere and therefore could not be measured economically (Zinn, 2003). The importance of women's roles as wives, mothers, and domestic laborers throughout U.S. history is currently being explored and reclaimed by the academic discipline of Women's Studies. Just as my thesis explores women's involvement in labor and education, *all* areas of women's lives must be examined and incorporated into the curricula so as to create a more accurate understanding of the history of the United States.

*Support and advocacy* is another facet of how universities across the nation can address women's needs on campus (Kunkel, 1994, 2002). Many campus units now sponsor peer counseling, advocacy in harassment cases, and referrals to campus and community health and advocacy organizations. While men, too, certainly need support and advocacy throughout their college careers, women often face unique situations in which their bodies and perceived roles play distinct parts in determining the course of their campus lives. An example of this is sexual harassment, in which women's bodies are framed as either inhibitors or unwanted assistance in their educational pursuits; clearly, women need advocacy and support to overcome obstacles like sexual harassment, and fortunately an increasing number of universities are offering this help.

Universities also confront a lack of women's *community*, a situation that can lead to the isolation of female faculty, staff, administrators, and students (Kunkel, 1994, 2002). Especially in the case of full-time female employees, many of whom face conflicting responsibilities as partners and mothers, this sense of isolation can affect work performance and morale. Black women also can face tokenism in their departments, classes, and workplaces. The multiple familial and professional tensions that weigh on women employees can no longer be ignored; when women are supported by the university, however, "A community of women who might not otherwise cross paths can provide empowerment and strength to go on" (Kunkel, 1994, p. 19). However, the creation of a women's community on campus must be done with careful attention to race, class, and other interlocking identities so as to create a women's community that truly includes all women.

*Equity* (Kunkel, 1994, 2002) is perhaps the most complex of the focus areas. Equitable opportunity, pay, promotion, and treatment in the classroom are areas of concern when considering women students, especially since more and more often, the current job market

requires higher education for jobs that offer a living wage. Therefore, women's full and equitable participation in higher education must occur in order for women to survive and flourish as laborers in the wage market.

However, arguments about equity are fraught with difficulty. Over the years, even feminists have disagreed over whether to demand equity or to promote difference. Joan Scott (1990) explains,

Those [feminists] who argue that sexual difference ought to be an irrelevant consideration in schools, employment, the courts, and the legislature are put into the equality category. Those who insist that appeals on behalf of women ought to be made in terms of the needs, interests, and characteristics common to women as a group are placed in the difference category. (p. 139)

That debate centrally relates to this thesis, as advocates for women on campus are forced to decide whether to call for equal opportunity regardless of sex or for special accommodations for women so that they may succeed in relation to men.

While equality may be the eventual goal for higher education, so that participants' choices and efforts alone will determine their opportunities and positioning in the academy, this reality has not yet come to pass. This thesis lays out both historical and contemporary examples of how equity has not yet been achieved in the academy, despite centuries of dialogue and action. However, difference has not worked either, for as this thesis demonstrates, it is impossible to put all women into one category; there are simply too many differences among women for this simplistic thinking. I therefore agree with Scott when she writes,

Feminists cannot give up "difference"; it has been our most creative analytic tool. We cannot give up equality, at least as long as we want to speak to the principles and values of our political system. But it makes no sense for the feminist movement to let its arguments be forced into preexisting categories and its political disputes to be characterized by a dichotomy we did not invent. (1990, p. 142)

Rather than choosing between equality and difference as if they were competing approaches, Scott proposes “an equality that rests on differences” (p. 146), rejecting the idea that equality demands sameness among women and men. Instead, equality fully explores and affirms the idea that women, both among themselves and in relation to men, possess differences that render them unique contributors to society.

This nuanced argument is crucial to my exploration of what equality means for women in higher education. In Chapter Two I explore the history of United States higher education as it relates to gender, race, and class, exposing differences among groups of women as well as between women and men, when discussing labor and educational opportunities. In this chapter I call for women’s equitable status in the academy by outlining how women must be specially accommodated. While this may appear to be a “flip-flop” in approaches, I argue that I employ Scott’s “equality that rests on differences” idea by calling for equity in higher education that is informed by a critical understanding of the historical barriers that have thus far prevented women’s full and equal involvement in the academy. In other words, without a historical awareness of what makes women different both among themselves and in relation to men when discussing higher education, the needs of women students in contemporary higher education cannot be meaningfully addressed.

### **A Rising Force: Women Working in the Academy**

The twentieth century also witnessed a rise of women working in the academy as faculty, staff, and administrators. From the President of the university to the resident hall housekeeper, women have moved into higher education as laborers. However, women face particular issues as

laborers in higher education. While many of these challenges fall outside the scope of my thesis, the friction between full-time work at the university and potentially unequal responsibility for work in the home will be briefly explored in this section, as well as single women in the academy.

Arlie Russell Hochschild and Anne Machung's book *The Second Shift* (2003) exposes the ongoing reality of the majority of working women, not just those in higher education. The women in their study contributed a full day's work at the office and then arrived home to cook, clean, and care for their children. Hochschild and Machung argue that this work at home constitutes another full shift of labor. Responding to the dual demands of work and home, the "Super-Mom" was born. This phenomenon, which became expected by society and is performed by individual women, insists that women be successful at work as well as home. Just as working women in the 1950s and 1960s faced critique about their ability to work and be successful parents, women still face this criticism today.

This social disapproval is exacerbated by the fact that women workers in higher education have more opportunities than ever to partake in higher education; these education opportunities are often viewed as additional pressures that channel women's energy and time away from both work and the family. The growing phenomenon of tuition waivers and reimbursement for employees creates opportunities for women to attend college, perhaps for the first time. However, the pressures of home, work, and school produce difficulties for women laborers, as they find their time stretched between multiple responsibilities. Unfortunately, because tuition benefits vary according to institution, there is no widely collected data that quantifies the women utilizing this educational opportunity; similarly, no data qualifies their experiences either.

Because of the tensions between work, classes, and home, child-rearing becomes perhaps the most complicating factor of family life. Susan Maushart (1999) writes, “Maternity continues to be the great leveler among women and the great disequilibrating factor between the sexes” (p. 178). Maushart cites startling research. For example, several sets of her data concur that men work the same number of hours in the home whether their partners are working women or homemakers, and a study of men’s “nontraditional” involvement—doing work that has traditionally been performed by women, such as laundry and cooking—shows that only one in five men participate in housework across gender lines. Even studies that shadow couples with self-described “equal partnerships” show that couples in the third trimester of pregnancy already anticipate the unequal distribution of childcare, expecting that women will bear the primary responsibilities for the child’s welfare (Maushart, 1999).

These realities are important when discussing women laborers in the academy. In particular, women faculty and administrators uniquely feel the weight of domestic labor and reproduction in their lives. New research shows that not only are women thinking about *when* they should have their babies, but also *where* they should do so in order to ensure maximum institutional support (Thornton, 2004). Policy issues of maternity and adoption leave, as well as paternity leave, are consequently gaining notice on college campuses. Even when these policies are available, though, women often do not feel able to utilize them with pay and without penalty during the tenure process (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2003).

These issues are vitally important, as women earned more Ph.D.s than men for the first time in 2001-2002 (Wilson, 2004b), indicating that women have the potential to become the majority of professors. Yet, despite the rising numbers of women with Ph.D.s, women only comprised 28% of teaching faculty in 2000-2001 (Wilson, 2004b). Especially in the sciences,

there appears to be a “leaky pipeline” of women earning Ph.D.s and then not continuing on in professorial positions. In 1998, for example, women received 31% of chemistry Ph.D.s, but women were only 15% of tenure-track chemistry faculty in 2000 (Appel-Bronstein, 2003). Clearly women are exiting the job pool prior to assuming professorships. To date, there is no conclusive study that explores women’s choices after earning a Ph.D. to discover whether, where, and why they seek employment.

Another reality in higher education is the growing number of unmarried women workers. In this thesis I explore the social messages present throughout the history of the United States that first encouraged women to be satisfied with children and familial responsibilities before the Civil War, then to work and perhaps not have a family the early twentieth century, and then to balance both after the 1960s. Not surprisingly, marriage rates have fluctuated greatly in the twentieth century. In 1960, 74.5 percent of households in the United States were married couples living with children; by 1995, only 54.5 percent of the 99 million total households fit this description (Jacobsen, 1998). Clearly, women and men are making new choices about family, work, and education.

However, these changing choices about marriage and children seem not to have translated to the academy. In 2001, while 57 percent of the U.S. public was married, 76 percent of all faculty members at two and four-year institutions were married, indicating that “academe remains a very coupled universe” (Wilson, 2004a, no page number). This higher rate of married workers created workforce difficulties for some single faculty members. Wilson (2004a) writes, “It is married professors with children who reap the biggest benefits: health insurance for their families, paid leave after giving birth, subsidized day care, and tuition discounts for their kids” (no page number). Single faculty members also face job-searching difficulties as more

universities offer official or unofficial spousal hire policies, electing to hire faculty pairs instead of single faculty; recent figures reveal that approximately 40 percent of married professors are partnered with other academics (Wilson, 2004a). While some higher education laborers do not have the time restrictions and financial burdens of a partner or children, it is clear that universities are not necessarily identifying and serving the needs of single faculty and staff in the same way that they serve academic families.

Undoubtedly, women workers in higher education face a unique set of labor issues. Social ideas about women's bodies and their work still inform their experiences as wage earners at the university. Women still face friction between full-time work at the university and potentially unequal responsibility for work in the home, and if they are single, can expect other labor-related difficulties in the academy.

## **Conclusion**

Women today are no longer solely defined as wives, mothers, and domestic laborers as they were for most of United States history. Now, in addition to being partners, caregivers, and roommates, twenty-first century women are professionals, politicians, and ministers. They are married, partnered, and single, and they have many definitions of family. These advances show changing sentiment about women's economic, political, and social roles, as well as their evolving educational opportunities. Colonial women had almost no access to formal education, but women today are achieving the highest levels of educational attainment. Women's involvement in higher education has undeniably expanded over the course of the nation's history.

Women's labor opportunities have also evolved and changed during the centuries. Black and White women in the United States have moved from a forced reality of slavery or domestic work to having more opportunities for free choice of occupation. While class barriers, racism, and other forms of discrimination still limit some women, overall the situation has improved. Today, more women are in the labor market than ever before, and their labor is both noticed and counted. Perhaps one of the most outstanding advances for all women is the recent rise in the number of cleaning services, housekeepers, and nannies employed. Clearly, these occupations can be problematic: class tensions can arise from women employing other women to manage their homes and employers can take advantage of immigrant and poor workers by paying them "off the books" and thus denying them benefits and a green card, to name a few. However, these services in the home also provide work to women and men and place an actual price on cooking, cleaning, and childrearing. As a result, women who work in their own homes fulltime or part-time are more likely to be recognized as providing valuable labor, as their labor can now be quantified in the market and they can know what it would cost for someone else to do the work.

In Chapter I, I assert that higher education has the potential to change the undervaluing of women's labor. Already, higher education has partially fulfilled this promise. As a result of educational opportunities over the centuries, women have slowly become a more specialized group of workers. While all women contribute something important to their communities, women who earn a two or four-year college degree enjoy a wider variety of labor opportunities and tend to earn higher wages for their work. Nonetheless, while higher education can be an equalizing factor, spreading gender equity to all sectors of society, education alone does not erase the gendered wage gap even at the most educated levels. However, as more women earn degrees, women are moving into previously underrepresented labor fields—such as politics and

engineering, for example— and are asserting their value as wage laborers in these areas. Higher education is therefore the stepping-stone for women's involvement in these fields, allowing them to understand and contribute to new facets of society, and these areas are undoubtedly benefiting from women's ideas and perspectives.

Nevertheless, more research must be done in order to understand the current status of college women. I do not claim that this thesis is an exhaustive account of this status, but rather that this thesis is intended to investigate the historic constructs of labor and how these notions inform women's involvement in higher education. Through tracing the distinct eras of colonial and United States history and illustrating the debates and public mindset of each time period, I explore how women's access to higher education has changed over the past four centuries. While I have chosen the interlocking identities of gender, race, and class for this thesis, I encourage a more thorough investigation of how other identities inform women's labor realities and access to higher education. Examples of potential identities to be researched include women of other ethnicities such as American Indian, Hispanic and Asian; immigrant women; women with disabilities; women of different religious affiliations; and women of different ages. Another potential important identity to explore is that of sexual orientation, which undermines the heterosexist constructs of marriage and family as well as the traditionally gendered nature of work in intimate relationships. A meaningful discussion of lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered women would greatly enrich the dialogue about gender, work, and education laid out in this thesis.

The implications of this thesis are multifaceted. First, to my knowledge, the history of women's higher education has not been investigated through the lens of materialist feminist theory. By analyzing how gender and work inform women's involvement in U.S. higher

education, I hope to contribute a more critical understanding of women in the academy. The issues facing women in the academy often surprise students, scholars, and administrators—men and women. Through this thesis, I seek to dispel this sense of surprise at how the current conditions of higher education were created.

Another implication of this thesis is that I seek to explore how race and class have complicated women's involvement in higher education. Through examining the labor and educational prospects of these identities, the historical institutional resistance to the participation of Black and all economically disadvantaged women is made clearer. In other words, this thesis reveals how higher education came to be the sum of its parts.

This thesis does not intend to solve the issues of higher education as they relate to women, but rather to offer a new perspective from which higher education practitioners can implement change on their campuses. Certainly, not all women will fit neatly into the findings of this thesis. Not all women choose to have a life partner or children, and not all women want to attend higher education or work outside the home. It is true that this thesis does not hold as many direct understandings for the lives of these women. However, this thesis is still valuable to them for three reasons. First, everyone can benefit from a fuller understanding of history and the constraints that women have experienced in our national history. Second, this thesis outlines how many women came to occupy their current situations and how our current structure of higher education has not always involved all women; even readers who do not find their realities written in these pages can benefit from learning how their colleagues and community members may be affected by institutions of higher education and labor demands. Third, even while some women readers may not have experienced the pressures and problems outlined in this thesis, the materialist feminist arguments outlined in Chapter I remind the reader that all women—whether

they have children or not, whether they work outside or inside the home—are compelled to prepare the role of mother and domestic laborer whether they wish it or not.

Overall, this thesis demonstrates that while many women have shed the primary roles of wives, mothers, and domestic laborers, these historical roles still exert a sizeable impact on their experiences in higher education. The difficulties of reconciling domestic responsibilities with labor and educational goals inhibit women of all races and classes from participating in higher education meaningfully and completely. While women in the twentieth century have clearly made great strides, there is still distance to travel before women's participation is fully valued and their experiences are equitable across their differences.

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